

# A Mexican Views the War



**ABOUT THE READING** Mexico and the United States were at war from 1846 to 1848. The war caused many changes in Mexico. José Fernandez Ramirez wrote several letters that looked at these changes. This excerpt is from a letter dated April 25, 1847. Ramirez describes the fear the Mexican soldiers felt as the Americans advanced. He compares those attacks with the Spanish conquest of Mexico led by Hernan Cortés in the 1500s. At the end of the letter, Ramirez refers to possible conflicts between regions of Mexico as it faces defeat.



*As you read try think about the reasons Ramirez gives for the failure of the Mexican army.*

When a nation gets to such a point of financial distress it does it no good to have a large army or to have a patriotism great enough to build an army if there were no means to support it... Yet this is precisely the wretched condition we are in. Strictly speaking, the army does not exist. What today bears the name is only a mass of men without training and without weapons. The men assembled at San Luis have disappeared as if by magic, thanks to the **scandalous** desertions... How then can we get out of our predicament? The Government has at last put all its hopes in a plan that is supposed to save the country... This is the one calling for **guerrilla warfare**, the last hope of peoples overwhelmed by superior forces... Unfortunately, it has only produced excitement without making any progress...

Government spies and private communications bring us news that depresses us and makes us feel the shame of it all. Here is the **gist** of it.

Source: Excerpt from *Mexico During the War with the United States* by José Fernando Ramírez, edited by Walter V. Scholes, translated by Elliott B. Scherr. Copyright 1950 by the Curators of the University of Missouri. Reprinted by permission of University of Missouri Press.

## VOCABULARY

**scandalous** disgraceful

**gist** main idea

**confiscated** taken

**sue** ask

**anarchy** lawless confusion

**It does a country no good to have a large army if there is no money to support it.**

**Guerrillas** are members of small defensive forces that are not part of the regular army. They typically conduct surprise attacks behind the lines of an invading army.

**A Mexican Views the War, continued****Primary Source**

The Yankees have at their disposal some 7,000 men and an immense artillery train. . . They have 2,000,000 pesos in their coffers and pay cash for their subsistence and transport, threatening dire punishment for anyone who refuses to sell his produce to them. In contrast . . . our troops . . . have nothing and use force in obtaining what they need. . .

**The Americans have a huge amount of money, so they can buy anything the army needs. They force people to sell them food.**

Groups of soldiers like those of Cortés inflict terrible punishment for the death of any Yankee. The mayor of a town is made responsible, and his own private property is **confiscated** if it can be proved that such an act occurred with his knowledge. Our guerrilla troops have been denied the benefits of human rights and have been declared highwaymen. Their accomplishments, however, do not give cause for high hopes. They take up their positions in the woods and after firing their muskets, they run away. Up to now they have been able to seize only one wagon. . .

**The resistance fighters are called bandits. They are not treated with the respect given to regular soldiers.**

The wounded in Jalapa are suffering the greatest privations and misery. Impelled by the urgency of the situation, they leave the hospitals and perish in the open country, where the ground is strewn with corpses and cast-off war equipment. . .

**It is too dangerous for the wounded to stay in the hospitals. They die in the fields that are covered with dead bodies and debris.**

The troops have come back very much depressed. The leaders and officers declare that the Yankees are **invincible**, and the soldiers are telling terrible tales that bring to mind the Conquest. Some say that the enemy soldiers are such huge, strong men that they can cut an opponent in two with a single sweep of their swords. It is also said that their horses are gigantic and very fast and that their muskets discharge shots which, once they leave the gun, divide into fifty pieces, each one fatal and well-aimed. Let us say nothing about their artillery, which has inspired fear and terror in all our troops and is undeniable proof of our backwardness in military art.

**The Americans' cannons terrify the Mexicans and show them that their weapons are inferior and out of date.**

The question of the war has assumed a frightening aspect. If we go on fighting we shall surely be conquered, and if we sue for peace we cannot expect any good from the people of the interior of the country. . . . And what shall we do about the anarchy and disorder. . . ?

**WHAT DID YOU LEARN?**

- 1.** Why is the Mexican army in such a desperate state?

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- 2.** Why do the Americans remind the Mexicans of Cortés?

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- 3.** How would you describe Ramirez's attitude about the war with the United States?

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