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NNR 70.373 Aug 15, 1846 Account of the Heroine of Fort Brown

THE HEROINE OF FORT BROWN. The N. Orleans Picayune has a letter from Matamoros which furnishes some interesting particulars respecting the heroine of Fort Brown, who is generally known in the army of the south as "The Great Western."- The writer says: -

"She was first brought to the notice of the public in a few remarks by Lieut. Bragg, at the collation given by the army to the Louisiana delegation at Gen. Arista's headquarters in Matamoros. He mentioned her gallant conduct and noble bearing during the whole of the bombardment. A few of the incidents of the life of this extraordinary woman, which I have been able to pick up in camp, will be read with some interest; they prove that the sex has not been unrepresented in the soul-stirring and bloody scenes on the Rio Grande.

The Great Western belong to a class known and recognized in the organization of the army as "Laundresses,"three of whom are allowed to draw rations in each company, and are required to wash for the soldiers thereof, at a price regulated by a council of officers. She arrived at Corpus Christi last autumn with the 7th infantry, to one of the companies of which her husband was attached. Up to the time the army marched for the Rio Grande, she performed all her appropriate duties, and in addition, kept a "mess"for the young officers of the regiment.

When the army took up its line of march for the Rio Grande, the women, with a few rare exceptions, were left behind to come by sea. A very few procured ponies and followed thier husbands on their tedious and arduous march. Not so with "The Great Western." Her husband was sent by water, whether on duty or for disability I am unable to learn; but she, true to her character, declaring that "the boys"(young officers of her mess) "must have somebody to take care of them,"purchased a mule and a cart, packed her luggage, cooking utensils, and supplies, mounted behind her donkey, with whip in hand, and displayed upon the whole route qualities and attainments which the best teamster in the train might have envied. During the whole journey she kept up the "mess,"a relief from the burdens of which is the greatest boon to an officer on the march. The brigade to which she was attached arrived upon the banks of the Sal Colorado as Gen. Taylor was preparing to cross with the dragoons and the 1st brigade of infantry. The Mexicans upon the opposite bank were making great demonstrations by blowing bugles, &c., &c. After calmly surveying the scene from her cart, she remarked, with great coolness and determination, that "if the general would give her a good strong pair of tongs, she would wade that river, and whip every scoundrel that dare show himself!" It may be imagined that the men were not backward in crossing after that.

When Gen. Taylor marched to Point Isabel with his army, on the 1st May, the 7th infantry, and of course, The Great Western, remained to garrison Fort Brown. How that noble regiment and the two companies of artillery left in this work sustained themselves, is already known, but nothing will more gratify them than to have justice done their gallant heroine, of whom they speak in the warmest terms. She, with all the other women left behind, some eight or ten, moved into the fort, where her mess was soon put in operation, the position of her tent and fire being near the centre of the fort. The enemy's fire opened on the 3d, just as she was commenceing her arrangements for the "boys" breakfast. Every security that could possibly be provided was offered to the women, to whom the gallant soldier always gives his first attention. The magazines were the only "bomb proofs"in the fort, and as the government had sent no amuninition to fill them, the next most inflammable material - the women - found perfect security in them.

These women, however, be it said to the honor of the sex, were not idle. - Most nobly did they ply the needle in preparing sand bags out of the officers' and soldiers' tents, wherewith to strengthen the work, and protect the artillerymen when serving their guns. The Great Western, true to herself again, declined participating in this protection of sewing, and continued her labors at the fire, in the open air. From the firing of the first gun all hands were at their posts, Lowd's and Bragg's artillery speaking in tones of thunder the indignation they felt at being thus saluted on a bright May morining.

When the hour arrived for breakfast, but few expected the luxury which awaited them. The mess was as well attended to as if nothing but a morning drill with blank cartridges had come off, and in addition a large supply of delicious hot coffee was awaiting the thristy, who had but to call and partake, without distinction of rank. To some of the artillerymen, who were unable to leave thier guns, the beverage was carried by this 'ministering angel,' and, as may readily be believed, no belle of Orleans, as much as she might be admired and beloved, ever met a more gracious reception. The fire of the artillery was kept up almost incessantly until dinner hour - a soldier's dinner hour is 1 o'clock - when the good and generous woman again provided for those who were almost utterly exhausted and worn out, a delicious dish of bean soup - this bean soup is

declared by the Mexicans to be the foundation of that invincible spirit which they have seen so strikingly displayed by the Yankee soldiers. This she distributed again, without money and without price. Thus did she continue to discharge her duties during the seven days that the enemy kept up an incessant cannonade and bombardment. She was ever to be found at her post; her meals were always ready at the hour, "and always of the best the market afforded."

When the despatches were made up for General Taylor on the evening of the 4th, a

number of officers and others had written to their friends at Point Isabel, and among them "The Great Western"had found time to communicate with her husband; and I have frequently heard it said by those who saw her letter, for it was loudly called for and made public, that her description, if not the most accurate, was certainly the most grapic which was given of the events of the 3d and 4th May. She expressed her full confidence in the ability of the garrison to sustain itself, and only regretted the absence of her husband. To supply his place, however, I am told that she applied, early in the action, for a musket

and ammunition, which she received and put in a secure place, expressing her

determination to have full satisfaction whenever the enemy should dare approach

within range of her piece. This they never did, and our heroine must rest contented with the refelction that she nobly performed her own duty and will long be remembered by the besieged garrison of Fort Brown.

She is probably as celebrated for her personal appearance as she is for her deeds. With an erect and majestic carriage, she glories in a height - six feet - which fully entitles her to a place in the grenadier, any soldier of which might well envy her athletic but graceful form. But her reputation, the dearest of all things to a woman, is what she prides herself on. The tongue of slander has never yet dared to attack her well earned and well sustained character. With virtue as a basis, and such heroic coduct to build with, she never need fear the necessity of exercising her extraordinary physical ability in defence of that

reputation. But if attacked, the gallant defenders of Fort Brown will, I doubt not, be found pressing forward in her defence, and woe be to the dastard who receives a discharge of artillery from such gunners." [LA]

**NNR 70.274 July 4, 1846 toast to the Heroine of Fort Brown**

“Among the toasts offered at the entertainment which was given at Matamoros by

Gen. Taylor to the committee of the Louisiana legislature, was the following, by

Lieut. Bragg, of the artillery: The Heroine of Fort Brown. In offering this toast he said that “during the whole of the bombardment the wife of one of the soldiers, whose husband was ordered with the army to Point Isabel, remained in the fort, and though the shot and shells were constantly flying on every side, she disdained to seek shelter in the bomb-proofs, but labored the whole time cooking and taking care of the soldiers, without the least regard to her own safety. Her bravery was the admiration of all who were in the fort, and she has thus acquired the name of “The Great Western.”

Heroine of Fort Brown

