Exceptional Mexican War Letter

City of Mexico
24th October 1847

Dear Isbell

For the first time since our leaving Vera Cruz (in June last) a train goes back to the coast in a few days affording a general opportunity for sending letters and although it will be late I will give you a few items concerning our late Glorious Battles in this Valley. We left Vera Cruz June 18th & arrived at Puebla July 8th after undergoing the usual vicissitudes of such a march being attacked at divers times and generally by an unseen foe on our route - We remained at Puebla until Aug 7th the Twiggs's Division (2nd) Started for this Valley followed by Quitman's (Volunteers) on the 8th - by Worth (1st) on the 9th & Pillow's (3rd - composed of new Regiments) on the 10th - The evening of the 13th found the Army Division followed Twiggs at Ayotla in front of El Peñon on the main route to the City - Quitman at the Hacienda of Buena Vista - Worth in Chalco - & Pillow two miles S.W. of Chalco this Division having marched this day about 30 miles an extraordinary march for an Army - It was found upon reconnoissance that the Enemy had a line of fortified Posts extending from Lake Texcuco Southwardly to the great mountain chain bounding the Valley about ten or twelve miles in extent the furthest being about the same distance from the City - These fortifications covered all the practicable routes to the City the only approaches (for miles distant) being by Causeways or turnpikes with wide ditches filled of water lined with an almost impenetrable hedge of the Pulque plant - These roads of themselves afford a first rate breast work - The fortifications at El Peñon were found upon examination to be very strong the Engineers reported that they could be carried with a loss of 4500 men but as we had only about 10,000 although an old Chief thought he could spare as many - So he commenced a movement

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(hitherto deemed impracticable for Waggons by the Mexicans
by our left flank along the foot of the mountains (by a road
South of Lake Chalco - on the 18th our Army moved
centralized at San Augustine (or Kalham) about four
miles from the Enemy's fortifications on the heights
of Contreras (alias Padierna alias San Angeles (Holy Angels)
Hamacho enemy Work moved in front of San Augustine
Gen Another portion Hacienda S. E. of Padierna - on
the 19th after indefatigable exertions the Divisions
of Pillow & Twiggs effected under the Guns of Gen.
Lewis Twiggs succeeded in bringing up a few light
pieces of Artillery which were immediately placed
in Battery before the Enemy's position - Smith's & Riley's
Brigades of Twiggs - & Pierce's Brigade (excepting the 15th
Regt.) of Pillows Division were directed in front
to ascertain the practicability of an assault while
Cadwallader's Brigade (Pillows Div) and the 15th moved
by the right across the "Pedregal" (you have learned
the meaning of the word before this time) & check
to prevent reinforcements from the City and to
reconnoitre in that direction - Whilst Generals
Riley & Smith moved down under the banks of
the creek and took up a position with Cadwallader
Gen between the Foot & City - This for nothing had
been effected but gaining a knowledge of the
Enemy's exact position although we had had
some severe skirmishing and remained under
the fire of the Enemy's Cannon all the afternoon
- just before sundown a large force appeared on
the hills between us and the City their Banners
displayed and music sounding - I then thought
this was the Packing of war - at sundown they brought
forward two pieces of Artillery to play upon us but
after a few shot suspended calculating as we
supposed to recommence in the morning - we lay
on our Arms during the night and were con-
siderably drenched with rain - during the night
the New York & South Carolina Regts. were sent us
to join us - at 3 in the morning (mud knee deep) we formed quietly
and moved round to the rear of the Enemy's

one of Pierce's Brigade & Pillow's Division - the Enemy had three (it is now pretty well ascertained) at least 30,000 while we numbered between 7 & 8000 the Enemy in a position he had been six weeks in strengthening

(Note "A" see Sub. Account)

The 15th" marked at the head of this column and first opened. The Ball at this point (instead of wounding the Regiments to engineer with some short interval between (other) each other only the 15th & two others. The N.Y. 9 & 6 Regts. had taken ground at a Barn (Page) before we had formed about twelve thousand infantry advanced to charge us in front while a large body of Cavalry advanced from the Marinda of Portales on our left flank and actually gained our rear - but a few rounds drove them back 1st" & pushed them into the most dense impenetrable thicket that ever been known - the main line then began to advance deliberately - I felt quite proud of them - Our loss in this Battle was one being in killed and wounded about one third of the number we carried into action - killed - and wounded - Nothing remarkable occurred to myself during the fight - I got grazed by balls in several places but received no serious injury - Sam received a shot against his gun barrel which glanced off though it saved his life - he was one of the Color Guard - the Color bearer was shot down & U.S. took the colors which became completely riddled with balls - during the rest of the fight I was standing immediately in front of a Pillar and seeing a Bracket pass it close by one of the Enemy's balls the thought of other days and other boards rushed to mind - the memory of those with whom I used to gather flowers and the companionship of friendship I — was before me and I shrunk (but for an instant)

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City of Mexico 24th October 1847

Dear Isbell

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and as soon as Riley's Brigade had entered the works they retreated & left the right ( ) to follow the left Division in pursuit of the enemy who retreated through San Angel to Churnbusco, those who were fortunate enough to escape. I enlose a letter of Valencia on the evening of the I9th showing what he thought of himself at that time. We pursued the Enemy almost at a run to Coyoacen a short distance from Churnbusco when we halted a few minutes to and there commenced the great Battle of Churnbusco- the greatest considering the numbers engaged- the obstinacy of the conflict & the consequences involved that has ever been fought by civilized belligerents on the continent. North who had invested x San Antonio prolamed the enemy who abandoned that position to prevent being attakked in rear as soon as Contreras fell to Churnbusco. I enclose a newspaper account of this Battle which is correct in the main though containing some few inascuracies on e or two of which I will note, this will save me some writing. Recollect as you proceed that we (I5th Infantry) are of Pierce's Brigade & Pillow's Division- the enemy had there (it is now pretty well ascertained) at least 30,000 while we numbered between 7 & 8000 the enemy in a position he had been six weeks in strengthening.

Note A see pub. account

The I5th marched at the head of this column and first opened the Ball at this point (instead of secondly) the Regiments arrived with some short x interval between each other and when only the I5th & two other, the N.Y. & S.C. Regts had taken ground at a Barn (Zaje) and before we had formed about twelve thousand infantry advanced to charge us in foont while a large body of Lancers advanded from the Hacienda of Portalis on our left flank and actually gained our rear, but a few rounds drove them back. Ist I suppose there was the most severe musqetry fire here that has ever been known, the noise resembled that of some great water fall...I feel quite proud of them. Our loss in the Battle was severe being in killed and wounded about one third of the number we carried into action. Nothing remarkable occurred to myself during this fight. I got scraped by balls in several places but recd. no serious injuery. Sanoman recd a shot against his gun barrel which got spoiled though it saved his life, he was one of the Color Guard, the color beared was knocked down & S. took the colors which became comepletely riddled with balls. During the heat of the fight I was standing immediately in fornt of a P Pillar and seeing a rose cut from its stem by one of the enemy's balls, the thought of other days and other rushed to mind, the memory of those with whome I used to gather flowers amid the sunshine of friendship & __ rose before me and I stooped (twas but an instant)...rest missing ....other comments written in red ink over the black.