

ESP CAS - 1810

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1200 FIRST NATIONAL BANK BUILDING
EL PASO, TEXAS

Main 6600

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Capt. William Bliss, For Whom Fort Was Named, Served As Aide To General Taylor

William W. S. Bliss, for whom it has been established that Fort Bliss is named, was the alter ego of Gen. Zachary Taylor of Indian and Mexican wars fame, according to a new and reliable biography, "Zachary Taylor," by Holman Hamilton, editorial writer of the Fort Wayne (Indiana) Journal - Gazette. The book, its first edition published this year, is available at the El Paso Public Library.

The author's first reference to Bliss is when as a brevet captain, United States Army, in 1842, the young officer accompanied "Old Rough and Ready" to a "Grand Council," called to assemble on the Deep Fork of the Canadian River in Oklahoma, to promote good-will between the "civilized" Indians and their savage neighbors.

Quoting from Hamilton's account — "The General's burdens were lightened by Captain Bliss, the engaging young officer who had served him as aide-de-camp at the Grand Council. Courty, polished, master of six languages, and credited with a reading knowledge of 13, Bliss was one of the most brilliant scholars ever to grace the American Army.

FINISHED WEST POINT AT 17

He had entered the Military Academy at West Point as a lad of 13, had been graduated at 17, and already his amazing range of information incorporated the philosophy of Kant and the poetry of Goethe, as well as technicalities of military strategy and a first-hand study of the habits of the Cherokees (Indians).

The captain was less than 30 years of age when he became General Taylor's assistant adjutant general, yet the commander's confidence was not misplaced. With Bliss at his elbow, Taylor could count on "trustworthy information, honest and competent advice, a friendly hand to supplement or subtract, and a skillful pen to report, explain and, if necessary, discreetly color the facts. 'Perfect Bliss' was the nickname given the man who was destined to become Zachary Taylor's alter ego."

just as effectively.

On Feb. 25, 1847, the "indefatigable" Bliss was sent to the enemy's camp at Agua Nueva to discuss an exchange of prisoners and care of the wounded, according to the "Zachary Taylor" biography.

BLISS STAYED WITH ZACHARY TAYLOR

Upon arriving in New Orleans on a leave of absence, Taylor was given a grand ovation, and after being well wined and dined he returned to his hotel. "The hotel (S. Charles) was still illuminated when the General returned. . . . In front of the ladies' parlor was a transparency of the General, in the old brown coat, with the motto — 'A little more grape, Captain Bragg.' In front of the gentlemen's parlor was another transparency of the General, with the words—I have no more reinforcements to give you, but Major Bliss and I will sustain you.'" Wherever "Old Zach" was, there was Bliss:

BLISS MARRIED PRESIDENT'S DAUGHTER

Bliss came out of the war with Mexico a brevet Lieutenant Colonel

and went to the Whitehouse as Private Secretary to General-President Taylor. He married Taylor's fifth daughter, Margaret Smith Taylor. As a major in the Regular Army, after the death of his father-in-law, he became adjutant general of the Western Division, which office he held until his own sudden death in 1853, at the age of 33 years.

Thus passed an extraordinary man, distinguished as soldier, scholar and scientist. The great El Paso Army post may well feel proud of the personality that inspired its present name.

CAPT. BLISS WAS ON TAYLOR'S STAFF

In 1846, when Taylor began the march from Corpus Christi (Texas) to the Rio Grande, his personal staff included Bliss. It is interesting to note that Brevet Major Samuel Ringgold commanded the "light artillery"; Lieutenant Colonel James S. McIntosh commanded the second brigade of infantry; while Major Jacob Brown was left at Fort Texas (Brownsville) with some infantry and artillery with orders to "hold on as long as you can." All three of these offices gave their names to Army posts on the lower Rio Grande which have since been distinguished as headquarters of units of the First Cavalry Division, Fort Bliss.

BLISS KNEW WHERE TO FIND ENEMY

Prior to the beginning of the Battle of Palo Alto, General Taylor followed "the advice of Bliss, Ringgold and Duncan" and relied on his artillery to shatter the Mexican opposition.

In the fighting near the Resaca de la Palma that quickly followed the Palo Alto action, General Taylor and his staff, "including Brevet Captain Bliss," are described in Mr. Hamilton's biography as occupying an exposed position "where the balls were falling like hailstones." It was Bliss who knew exactly where to find the enemy!

At Buena Vista, the Mexican General Santa Ana addressed a message to General Taylor, demanding surrender of the American forces, "to save you from a catastrophe," to which Taylor's unofficial reply is said to have been characteristically "forceful" and required toning down. Bliss prepared a more formal note, signed by the General, that declined the Mexican request

*Old Church in
Francis met
about 1880 - no
wires; no cables*