

# Biographies

[Send to Kindle](#)

## Zachary Taylor

Chicago Historical  
Society


## General Zachary Taylor

General Zachary Taylor was a native of Virginia but an adopted Kentuckian. Born in 1784, he had risen to some national prominence as an army officer in the War of 1812 and in campaigns against Seminole Indians in the 1830s. President James K. Polk ordered the 62-year-old brigadier general to lead a 3,500-man army into Texas to secure that newly annexed state, and as tensions between the United States and Mexico mounted, ordered him to establish a fortified base near the mouth of the Rio Grande River. Hostilities broke out in late April and early May, and Taylor drove Mexican forces from the region in a series of well-fought battles that earned him promotion to Major General. Taylor slowly pursued the defeated Mexican troops toward Monterrey, Mexico, and captured that important city in September 1846.

When Mexico refused American peace overtures, President Polk ordered Taylor to hold his position in northern Mexico while General Winfield Scott took most of Taylor's army and more than 10,000 reinforcements on a campaign to capture Mexico City by way of a landing at Vera Cruz. Taylor, left with an army of fewer than 5,000 mostly untried volunteers, faced a savage attack from Mexican President Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna and 20,000 regulars, militia, and conscripts at the cataclysmic Battle of Buena Vista in February 1847. The fight, although a narrow U.S. victory, brought Zachary Taylor to the forefront of the American imagination. This acclaim carried him to the White House in 1848. As president, Taylor faced a host of challenges regarding the expansion of slavery into the territory captured from Mexico.

After a life of rigorous service, Taylor died in office in 1850.

# Biographies

 Send to Kindle

**John C. Frémont**

## Captian John C. Frémont

John C. Frémont, one of the United States' leading western explorers in the 1830s and 1840s, was born in Savannah, Georgia in 1813. He joined the U.S. Topographical Engineers in 1838 and earned a national reputation for his reports on the American West. In early 1846, Captain Frémont and a small mapping expedition arrived along the border of Mexican California.


Whether by accident or design, Frémont soon plunged into local political intrigue. After several dustups with locals, Frémont encountered a force of Anglo immigrants and disgruntled *Californios* who advocated a Texas style insurgency to force California into American hands. These agitators declared California as the Bear Flag Republic in June 1846 and Frémont declared himself the U.S. commander in California and led the insurgents and his regulars in a campaign to neutralize all Mexican resistance. The arrival of U.S. Commodore John D. Sloat and a naval expedition added momentum to the campaign, and, by the end of the summer, all of California had fallen to U.S. forces.

Frémont then declared himself military governor of the conquered province. When Brigadier General Stephen Watts Kearny arrived later in the year, the men feuded and Kearny had Frémont arrested and hauled before a court martial. The sensational trial made an even greater celebrity out of Frémont, but he resigned his commission in the army in protest.

After the U.S-Mexican War, Frémont served as U.S. senator from California and, in 1856, became the first Republican candidate for president of the United States. He served in the Union army during the Civil War, and afterward was territorial governor of Arizona. He died in New York City in 1890, one of the most celebrated personalities of the Nineteenth Century.



# Biographies

 Send to Kindle

**Stephen W. Kearny**

## Colonel Stephen W. Kearny

New Jersey native Stephen W. Kearny was born in 1794, joined the army during the War of 1812, and served in a variety of frontier duties in the decades after that war. By 1846, he was colonel in command of the 1st United States Dragoon Regiment. When war broke out between the United States and Mexico, Kearny was promoted to Brigadier General, with orders to gather an army of volunteers around his unit and head down the Santa Fe Trail to seize the Mexican province of New Mexico.


His campaign was swift and bloodless. He captured Santa Fe on August 18, 1846, and promptly established a territorial government in the province, over the protest of Texas officials who claimed the region as their own. He then led the bulk of his army of down the Rio Grande and then west toward California. Believing that organized resistance there had ceased, Kearny sent most of his command off to other posts and arrived near Los Angeles, just in time to help suppress a severe revolt against U.S. control. Kearny was slightly wounded at the Mexican victory of San Pascual, but was able to restore U.S. control by the middle of January 1847.

With peace restored, Kearny ordered Captain John C. Frémont to relinquish command of California to him, sparking an enormous contest between the two officers, which ended with Frémont's court martial and resignation from the army. Kearny served as military governor until the summer of 1847, when he traveled to Washington D.C., hailed as the conqueror of California. Kearney received brevet promotion to major general and reassignment to command the garrison at Vera Cruz. After contracting malaria, Kearny returned to the U.S. and died in St. Louis in 1848.

---

[http://www.pbs.org/kerawar/biographies/stephen\\_kearny.html](http://www.pbs.org/kerawar/biographies/stephen_kearny.html)

# Biographies

 Send to Kindle

**Winfield Scott**

## General Winfield Scott

General Winfield Scott was among the most celebrated American soldiers of his day. Born in Virginia in 1786, he received appointment as a captain of light artillery in 1808 with assignment to New Orleans. In the War of 1812, officers assigned Scott to the Niagara Frontier, where he distinguished himself in combat on numerous occasions. By the end of the war he had risen to brevet Major General and had received a Congressional gold medal and a reputation for discipline, earning him the nickname “Old Fuss and Feathers.”

In the following decades, Scott served against Indians in the Southeast and authored the army’s drill manual. President John Tyler elevated him to commander of all U.S. forces in 1841. An outspoken Whig, he opposed President James K. Polk’s policies toward Mexico, a move that cost him the primary field command in the ensuing U.S.-Mexican War. When General Zachary Taylor’s campaign bogged down at Monterrey, Scott proposed a bold plan to land an army at Vera Cruz and to march overland to capture Mexico City. Polk grudgingly agreed, and Scott’s campaign succeeded brilliantly and won the war.

Scott’s battlefield successes did not translate into political success. Two of his subordinates, Zachary Taylor and Franklin Pierce, rode their Mexican War reputations into the White House. Even so, Secretary of War Jefferson Davis, also a war hero, promoted Scott to brevet Lieutenant General in 1857.

Scott’s last great service to his country came in 1861 when he became the architect of Union war planning. Scott authored the “Anaconda Plan”, by which the North would strangle the South with a blockade and capture of the Mississippi River. He resigned from his post in late 1862 and retired to West Point, where he died in 1866.