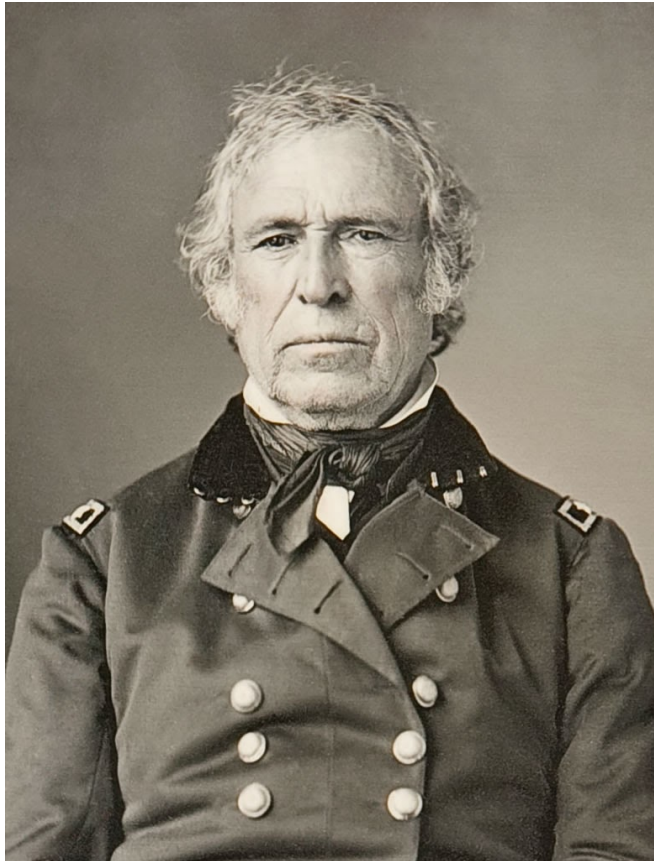


Zachary Taylor's Military Career

A summary of Old Rough and Ready's military career from the Texas State Historical Association and the National Park Service:



--Photo Courtesy of Texas State Historical Association

"TAYLOR, ZACHARY (1784-1850).

Zachary Taylor, United States Army general and president of the United States, was born in Orange County, Virginia, on **November 24, 1784**, to Richard and Sarah Dabney (Strother) Taylor; he grew up in Louisville, Kentucky. "In his **late teens**, he joined the Kentucky militia, and in **1808** entered the Regular Army and served as an infantry lieutenant at New Orleans...Next based at Forts Knox and Harrison, in Indiana Territory, Taylor took part in William Henry Harrison's campaign against the Indians and moved up to brevet major. During the War of **1812**, he served mainly in the same area, though he spent a few months in present-day Iowa and

Illinois, and became a major. In **1815**, irked by a peacetime reduction in rank to captain, he resigned from the Army, but the next year he was reappointed as a major.”¹

Taylor then “returned to fill a series of frontier assignments that lasted for the next thirty years.”² Long years of garrison duty followed. For some time he was stationed principally in the Mississippi Valley at posts scattered from Minnesota to the Gulf of Mexico.³ He saw action in the Black Hawk War in **1832** and in Florida in **1837-40** during the Seminole War. During his last two years in Florida he commanded the forces pursuing the elusive [American] Indians. His unpretentious manner and appearance led troops there to nickname him ‘Old Rough and Ready.’⁴

“From **1840 to 1844**, while headquartered at Baton Rouge, La., near which he purchased property, he served for a time at Fort Smith, Ark., and Fort Gibson, Okla.; established Fort Washita, Okla.; and then assumed command of Fort Jesup, La. In **1845** while Taylor was commanding the First Department of the Army at the latter fort, President Polk ordered him to prepare to defend Texas against a possible Mexican invasion, and he concentrated an army at Corpus Christi.”⁵

“In 1845 Taylor became commander of the force ordered to Texas after annexation. He established his base camp at Corpus Christi; by the spring of **1846** it housed nearly half of the United States Army. In March, on orders from Washington, Taylor moved his force to the north bank of the Rio Grande and established Fort Brown opposite the Mexican town of Matamoros, a move that Mexico considered an invasion of her territory. In May the Mexicans ambushed one of Taylor’s dragoon patrols, an attack that President James K. Polk used as the basis for his request for a declaration of war on May 13. Meanwhile, Taylor overwhelmed the northern Mexican army in the battles of Palo Alto (May 8, 1846) and Resaca de la Palma (May 9, 1846), victories for which he was promoted to major general. Although progress was hampered by logistic problems, Taylor crossed the Rio Grande and in September seized the key Mexican city of Monterrey. A change in American strategy left him with a small force in northern Mexico, while the main army under Maj. Gen. Winfield Scott struck at Mexico City from Veracruz. On February 22-23, 1846, Taylor’s depleted force turned back a Mexican offensive in the battle of Buena Vista.

“The victories in Texas and Mexico set off a Taylor presidential boom, especially when it became clear that he was a Whig. In **1848** he received the Whig nomination and won the presidency. Although he was a southerner and a slaverowner, as president he disdained support from the moderate Whig leadership and increasingly allied himself with the antislavery faction of the

¹ Author unknown. *Zachary Taylor, Twelfth President, 1849-50.” *The National Park Service Presidents of the United States*, Google, Accessed July 13, 2021, https://www.nps.gov/parkhistory/online_books/presidents/bio12.htm#:~:text=In%20his%20late%20teens%2C%20he,he%20married%20Margaret%20Mackall%20Smith.

² Bauer, K. Jack. “Taylor, Zachary, 1784-1850”. *Texas State Historical Association*, Google, Accessed July 13, 2021, <https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/taylor-zachary>

³ National Park Service.

⁴ Bauer.

⁵ National Park Service.

party. He opposed the expansion of slavery into the territories and resisted the Texas claims to the region around Santa Fe, going so far as to insist he would personally lead the army to prevent any expansion of Texas authority.”⁶

He married Margaret Mackall Smith in 1810 and had six children, one of whom, Richard Tahlor, was a lieutenant general in the Confederate States Army. Taylor died on July 9, **1850** while still in office. “His death removed a major obstacle for the adoption of the Compromise of 1850 which sat the western and northern borders of Texas.”⁷

⁶ Bauer.

⁷ *Ibid.*