

Charles Hanson

(- 20 Aug 1847)

Heitman: Born D.C. 2d Lt. 7th Infantry, Sept. 6, 1838; 1st Lt. March 16, 1844; Capt. Feb. 16, 1847; killed August 20, 1847 at the battle of Contreras, Mexico.

The National Intelligencer, September 29, 1847

Capt. Charles Hanson

Among the gallant officers who fell in the late battles we observe, with deep regret, the name of Captain Charles Hanson, of the 7th Infantry. At the beginning of the Mexican contest we were favored with several interesting and well written sketches from his hand, but discovering the existence of the army order prohibiting correspondence by officers of the army, before it was announced by the Secretary, he apprised us of the fact, and with the nice sense of honor and a soldier's duty, which ever marked the man, laid aside his pen. At the bombardment of Fort Brown his coolness and intrepidity were conspicuous. His gallantry in the storming-division of Worth at Monterey won for him a captaincy. At Vera Cruz he fully shared the glories and dangers of his brethren in arms; and at Cerro Gordo his daring valor won the highest encomiums from his commanding officers--the Colonel stating in his report that he was one of the first who placed his feet within the frowning Gibraltar which rested on the summit of that almost inaccessible mountain. A braver, a truer, and more generous spirit never breathed. In one of his last letters to his relatives, instead of dwelling upon his own participation in the recent battle of Cerro Gordo, his mind seemed occupied with the sufferings of his wounded men, and the pleasure which he derived from seeing their happiness at some extra comforts which he had been enabled to provide for them. Capt. Hanson was one of the most accomplished gentlemen as well as one of the most chivalrous officers in the service; and, better than this, amid the temptations of the camp and the excitement of the field, maintained to the last an exalted Christian character, which commanded the love and respect even of those who usually regard religion with aversion and ridicule. Most sincerely do we sympathize with his afflicted father, Mr. I.K. Hanson, of Washington, who has lost in him one of the remaining props of his old age—having already given another gallant son to his country, (Capt. W.K. Hanson,) who died from disease contracted in a glorious career in the Florida war.

Thus pass away, in the morning of their youth, the good, the generous, and the brave. These are the victims of war; these, and broken hearts, and desolated homes, it wretched trophies.--Richmond Republican.

The National Intelligencer, September 29, 1847

The Late Battles in Mexico

From a private letter, written by a gentleman of the army after the battles near Mexico of the 19th and 20th August, the Missouri Republican has been permitted to make the following interesting extracts which will enable the reader more vividly to conceive the sanguinary character of those engagements, and the immense sacrifice of men which this war has brought upon us. This letter is dated at San Augustine on the 25th of August:

"Our arms are again victorious, but at a fearful cost of life and blood. We have lost one thousand in killed and wounded, and among the killed are the best officers of the army. Captain Capron and Captain Burke are with the buried, having been killed dead at the storming of Churubusco, where we lost in three hours seven hundred officers and men.

"On the 19th our division advanced upon the enemy in position at Contreros, their first work, defended by ten thousand men, with twenty-two pieces of artillery, and admirably entrenched.

"The advanced guard was commanded by Capt. Roberts and Capt. Porter, and by then the attack was commenced. Capt. Roberts deployed in front of their battery, about one thousand yards from their lines, and advanced steadily under the fire of shells, round, grape, and canister shot, driving in all their pickets and skirmishers, and took his position under shelter of a cover of rocks and a deep ravine, about two hundred yards from their first line of batteries and breastworks, where he remained until the rest of the division and Gen. Quitman's supporting command had come up to join the attack. It was found impossible, in consequence of the nature of the ground, considered impassable by the Mexicans, to form the order of battle and assault the works until morning, our men having made a long march, and having labored for hours in making roads and hauling artillery and ammunition. The whole army took cover within musket range of the enemy, who poured upon us all the time their fire from ten thousand muskets, and slept on our arms during the night.

"At two o'clock in the morning, under cover of darkness and rain, our positions were taken, and at seven the assault was made. The works were all carried by the bayonet in less than an hour, and the ten thousand Mexicans put to perfect rout. The scene cannot be described; eight hundred and fifty Mexicans were dead upon the field, between three and four hundred were wounded, and fifteen hundred taken prisoner: and their twenty-two pieces of artillery, and great quantities of ammunition and other material of war, captured. Our loss in killed and wounded here was less than two hundred. Captain Hanson, of the 7th infantry, and Lieut. Johnson, of the 1st artillery, were the only officers killed.

"We pushed forward to this place in pursuit of the retreating enemy, when the Lancers made a stand, and continued to fire upon us through the roads and fields up to Churubusco, where the most terrible battle ever fought on this continent took place. This assault by the bayonet has redeemed the impeached valor of the Mexican army. Gen. Twigg's, Gen. Worth's, and Gen. Pillow's divisions were all concentrated here, and for two hours and a half every man was brought under the fire of the works. The strength of this position can hardly be conceived. We had but one approach, water surrounding it on all sides but one. This approach was defended by twenty-five thousand men, behind the most approved field-works, of great strength, and seemingly impregnable. Of course they were carried, but the fields and works, covered with between three and four thousand killed and wounded on both sides, showed the terrible cost. Fifty of our officers were killed and wounded.

"Before Gen. Worth had joined our division in this attack, he had stormed and carried the works at San Antonio, with no little loss. You may well imagine that our division was too much exhausted and cut to pieces to push on further. We had been fighting some eight hours, and had marched nearly eight miles, all were worn out with hunger, thirst, and fatigue. As for myself, I had eaten nothing but the half of a hard biscuit for forty-eight hours. Gen. Worth's division, more fresh, pushed on, and stormed and carried another strong fort before dark, within one mile of the city gates. Captain Phil. Kearny lost an arm here, but he is doing well, and is in no danger. He was greatly distinguished, and has covered himself with glory.

"The 20th of August, 1847, will be a day never to be forgotten. Its history is written in blood, and the halo of glory that it wreathes upon the arms of our country is too deeply ensanguined with the blood of Americans, to rejoice the army that has covered itself with imperishable renown. Our camp is filled with mourning, and the reflection that the greater grief is yet to be carried to the hearths and homes of those who have fallen is too sad for utterance. What a carnage for a single day! The sun that rose on the 20th shed its glad light upon seven thousand men, full of life and hope, who strewed the battle field with their scattered limbs and corpses when night closed in! The day was tumultuous, revengeful, and bloody: the night gloomy, fearful, and dark-the stillness only broken by the groans of the wounded and the dying.

"Of course, all the ordnance of the four positions that were assaulted were captured, and with them ammunition and stores of every kind. We have three thousand prisoners (among them ex-President Annays) the commanding general of the army, (Rincon,) and ten other general officers. We hardly know what to do with our prisoners and stores. Some forty deserters from our army are among the prisoners, who will be hanged, so soon as we can have a military commission convened for their trial. Several Mexican officers, paroled at Cerro Gordo, are also prisoners—they will swing with the deserters.

"You will now ask, what is to be the result of all this: A question I am not able to answer. The Mexicans agreed to a truce, with a view to appoint commissioners to negotiate a peace. An armistice was yesterday agreed upon for that purpose, and I trust in God that peace will follow immediately. Having destroyed the main approaches to and defenses of the city, it will be an easy matter to march into it, should hostilities be renewed.

"Major Mills was killed, his horse having run off with him and carried him into the enemy's works, where he was lanced after he had surrendered his sword."

Under date of the 27th, it is said: "The prospect of peace brightens; I shall be at home in January, I believe."

The National Intelligencer, March 20, 1848

Funeral of Captain Hanson

War Department

Adjutant General's Office

Washington, March 18, 1848

The remains of the estimable and gallant Captain Charles Hanson, late of the 7th U.S. Infantry, who fell in the battle of Contreras, having reached this city, the officers of the Army, Navy, and Marine Corps are respectfully invited to attend (in uniform) his funeral from Trinity Church at 12 o'clock on Monday, the 20th instant.

R. Jones, Adj. Gen.

The Committee of Arrangements announce to their fellow-citizens that the remains of Captain Charles K. Hanson have arrived in this city. On Monday next, at 12 o'clock, they will be carried to Trinity Church, where the funeral services will be performed, and thence they will be escorted to the Congressional Burial Ground.

Citizens owning carriages are requested; if they do not attend themselves, to send them, and put them at the disposal of the Marshals appointed for the occasion.

From two o'clock today (Saturday) the remains will rest in the Council Chamber at the City Hall, under a guard detailed for that purpose, and the room will be open for visitors.

Program of the Procession

1. Military Escort
2. Clergy
3. Bearers Funeral Car Bearers
4. Committee of Arrangements
5. The President of the United States (Polk)
6. Heads of Departments
7. Members of the two Houses of Congress
8. Officers of the Army
9. Officers of the Navy and Marine Corps
10. Corporate Authorities of Washington
11. Citizens at large.

The procession will move from the corner of Fifth street and Louisiana avenue to the intersection of Seventh street and Pennsylvania avenue; thence, by the south side of the Capitol to the Burial Ground.

Messrs. B.B. French and James Scott will act as Assistant Marshals.

Jos. H. Bradley, Marshal.

The National Intelligencer, March 21, 1848

Funeral Obsequies

The remains of the gallant Captain Hanson were deposited yesterday in their final resting place at Congress cemetery. They were followed to the grave by a numerous body of our citizens, and were preceded by a military escort, consisting of the Washington Light Infantry, commanded by Capt. Tate, and the National Blues, commanded by Lieut. Bacon, the Marine Band accompanying the volunteer companies, playing a solemn dirge. The corpse was borne from the City Hall to Trinity Church by a party of United States soldiers, the Rev. Mr. Butler and the Rev. Mr. French preceding the remains to the church, and the corpse passing into it through a line of the military with presented arms. The municipal authorities and a number of military and naval officers were in the line of the procession, which was formed under the direction of Joseph H. Bradley, Esq., the chief marshal, assisted by Messrs. French and Scott. The impressive burial service of the Episcopal Church was read by the Rev. Mr. Butler and the Rev. Mr. French. At the close of the prescribed ritual service, the Rev. Mr. Butler delivered a solemn and appropriate address, in which he expatiated on the professional and private virtues of the Christian soldier, who died in the service of his country deeply mourned by his surviving relatives and universally regretted by his fellow citizens who had united to pay him public honors.

After the funeral service at the church the procession proceeded to Congress cemetery in the order laid down in the program published by the committee of arrangements.

The coffin of the deceased was covered with dark blue velvet, and edged with silver lace. Two eagles of silver were on each side of it. The silver breastplate bore the following inscription:

Captain Charles Hanson, 7th Infantry
Born March 16th, 1818
Killed on the 19th day of August 1847, at Contreras, Mexico.
In the language of the Commander-in-Chief,
He was "not more distinguished for his gallantry than for
modesty, morals, and piety."

The corpse was placed upon a superb funeral car, manufactured by Mr. J.F. Harvey, under the superintendence of Mr. H.W. Winter, one of the committee of arrangements. The funeral car was canopied and covered with black velvet. On the canopy was a spread eagle shrouded with crape. The American flag was gracefully folded on each side of the car.

The funeral procession, except the military escort, moved to the grave yard in carriages, of which no less than fifty formed the mournful train. The services at the burial ground were conducted with an impressive prayer by the Rev. Mr. Butler. Three volleys were then fired over the grave of the Christian soldier, and then the funeral ceremonies were at as end.