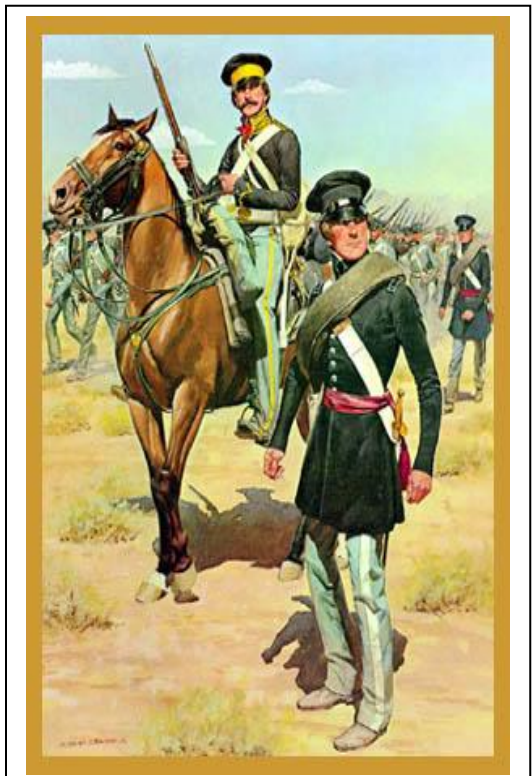# Imagine That... You Were a Soldier in the War with Mexico

Imagine that the year is 1846 and you have joined the United States Army because you want to participate in the Mexican-American War. Texas has joined the United States, much to the disliking of Mexico, who still considers the area as a part of its country. You are assigned to duty to **Fort Leavenworth** (located in modern day Kansas). You are under the command of **Zachary Taylor** (future 12th President) who has just told you that President **James K. Polk** has given the orders to march to Mexico. You will march nearly 2,000 miles to fight against the Mexican Army under the command of Mexican Dictator **General Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna**.

A soldier's life during the Mexican-American War was difficult. Daily marches were long, weather was unpredictable, and soldiers were forced to carry all of their personal belongings with them. What a soldier chose to carry with them was often a compromise between what they needed and how much their back and shoulders could carry.

The Army has issued you one uniform in which you will wear. The Army requires each soldier to carry a musket, bayonet, ammunition, and a canteen of water. This totaled about 18 lbs. **Your assignment is to use the list of personal items below to decide what else you will take with you as you march to Mexico.** Remember, you will be gone for several months, so you want to pack wisely – but not too heavy that you will break your back!

Item	Weight	x	Quantity	=	Total Weight (lbs)
Required Items	18 lbs.		1		18
Pants	1 lb.		_____		_____
Brimmed Cap	1/2 lb.		_____		_____
Shirt	1/2 lb.		_____		_____
Jacket	3 lbs.		_____		_____
Socks	1/2 lb.		_____		_____
Shoes	2 lb.		_____		_____
Cup	1/4 lb.		_____		_____
Utensils	1/4 lb.		_____		_____
Cooking Pan	1 lb.		_____		_____
Extra Canteen	4 lbs. (full)		_____		_____
Soap	1/4 lb.		_____		_____
Shaving Razor	1/4 lb.		_____		_____
Comb	1/8 lb.		_____		_____
Dice	1/8 lb.		_____		_____
Blanket	3 lbs.		_____		_____
Candle	1/4 lbs.		_____		_____
Playing Cards	1/8 lbs.		_____		_____
Pocket Bible	1/2 lb.		_____		_____
Small Book	1/2 lb.		_____		_____
Stationery	1/4 lb.		_____		_____
Pencils	1/8 lb.		_____		_____
Lantern	3 lb.		_____		_____
Knife	1/4 lb.		_____		_____
Heavy Coat	4 lbs.		_____		_____
Candle Holder	2 lbs.		_____		_____

Specially trained soldiers that were called Dragoons were the only ones besides Officers to ride horses. Most soldiers had to march to Mexico.

Totals

Reflection Questions: Answer each question in **<u>complete sentences</u>**.

1. How many **total items** will you be carrying with you as you march to battle in Mexico?

2. What was the **total weight** of all items you will be carrying on your march to Mexico?

3. Do you believe that your total weight would be similar to the weight of what soldiers carried in the Mexican-American War? <u>Why or why not</u>?

4. Defend your decision to not to pack a certain item from the list. (Why did you not pack it?)

5. What is one item you packed multiple quantities of? <u>Why</u>?

6. If another soldier asked you to trade items, what would be the <u>first</u> item you would consider giving up? Explain your decision.

7. If another soldier asked you to trade items, what would be the very <u>last</u> item you would be willing to give up? Explain your decision.

8. Is there anything that was not on the list that you would have liked to pack (that would have been around in 1846)? If so, what is it?

9. In 1846 when soldiers were marching to Mexico, how many miles a day do you believe the average soldier had to march? (Take your best guess! Use some mental math.)

10. Many of the officers during the Mexican-American War became leading Generals in the Civil War, nearly fifteen years later. Why was their experience in the war significant to their future?