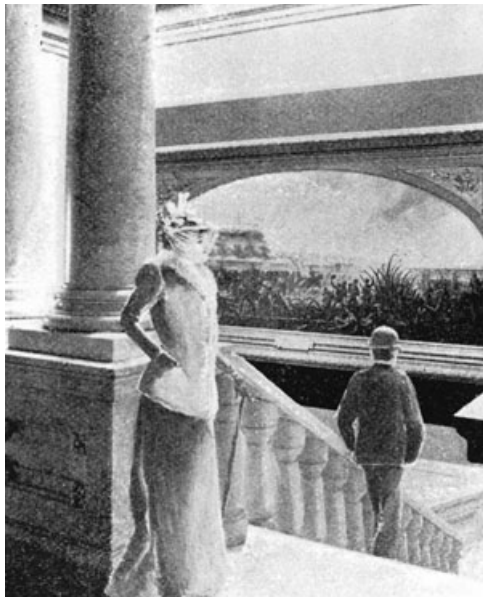


The Battle of Chapultepec

(September 13, 1847)

Toward the end of the Mexican War (1846–48), U.S. forces marched into the interior of Mexico, intent upon capturing the capital city. The western approach to Mexico City was protected by Chapultepec, a fortified hill that rose some 200 feet above the city plain.

Atop this rocky bluff stood the fortress of Chapultepec, once a palace, but now used as the Mexican military academy. On the morning of September 13, 1847, after a day's bombardment, General Winfield Scott ordered American troops to storm the fortification. By mid-morning, General Nicolás Bravo and his Mexican troops remaining in the citadel, including the cadets of the academy, capitulated. Six of the teenage cadets, who chose death rather than surrender, are honored for their courage to this day in Mexico as the *Niños Héroes* (boy heroes). Mexico City fell on September 14, and the war soon ended. U.S. Marines still wear a red stripe on the trousers of their dress uniform to commemorate the Battle of Chapultepec.



This 1892 engraving shows *The Battle of Chapultepec* as it hung in the west grand staircase in the Senate wing until 1961.

(Reprinted from Barksdall, *A Hand-book of Washington*. Philadelphia: Allen, Lane & Scott, 1892)

In 1857, as part of Captain Montgomery C. Meigs's program to decorate rooms in the newly constructed Capitol extension, James Walker was commissioned to recount in oil on canvas the American capture of the Mexican fortress at Chapultepec. The commission's execution was briefly delayed when Congress passed a bill requiring that all works of art for the extension be selected by a commission of three distinguished artists and approved by the Joint Committee on the Library. The project proceeded, however, and the painting was delivered to the Capitol in 1862. Walker received \$6,137.37 for his work. Evidence suggests that the picture was originally commissioned for use in the meeting room of the House Military Affairs Committee. However, with the decision to engage Seth Eastman to create the series of fort pictures for that space, *The Battle of Chapultepec* was relocated to the west staircase of the Senate wing. In 1982 the painting was loaned to the Marine Corps Museum at the Washington Navy Yard in Washington, D.C.

Born in England, artist James Walker spent most of his life in New York City but was living in Mexico City at the outbreak of the Mexican War. He was forced into hiding for six weeks until he eventually made his way behind American lines. Walker subsequently served as an interpreter for U.S. troops and was present at the storming of Chapultepec. Therefore, he was uniquely qualified to undertake this commission. His composition shows the consultation between General John Anthony Quitman, who led the storming of Chapultepec, and the officers of his advanced division prior to the attack. Walker's treatment of details, including military uniforms, is highly accurate. His other military history paintings include *The Battle of Lookout Mountain* and *The Battle of Gettysburg*.



The Battle of Chapultepec (Storming of Chapultepec)

James Walker (1819-1889)

Oil on canvas, 1858

93 ½ x 210 inches (canvas) (237.5 x 533.4 cm)

Signed and dated (lower left): James Walker 1858

Commissioned with funds appropriated for the extension of the United States Capitol, 1857

Accepted by the U.S. government, 1862

Cat. no. 33.00010

