

33. Departure

While busily writing *The War in Nicaragua* in New Orleans, Walker sent Captain C.I. Fayssoux to New York, after the Captain had been acquitted at the Philadelphia expedition trial, to settle accounts with Marshal O. Roberts, the owner of the vessel, and to make arrangements for another expedition. In New York, Fayssoux carried on his mission with the help of Wall street merchant Francis Morris and Vanderbilt's agent-lawyer John Thomas Doyle. He settled the Philadelphia's bills of lading on Walker's terms, having pressed Roberts and threatened him with public exposure. But he returned to New Orleans, in December, without an agreement for another expedition.

On finishing his manuscript, upon arriving at New York, Walker approached his friends and promptly wrote to Fayssoux that Morris appeared desirous of going forward "with our work": Morris would take care of sending men to Aspinwall, and Walker thought he could devise means for getting them from Aspinwall to San Juan del Norte.

In successive letters to Fayssoux, Walker apprised him of the tentative arrangements. On March 12, Walker had finalized his arrangements with Morris and told Fayssoux that he wished to see Captain J.S. West as soon as possible in New Orleans: West was the best man to open a farm on the San Juan river, and Walker would then send "laborers" out to him. They would go "with the necessary implements by tens or fifteens every two weeks."

However, England's forthcoming restitution of the Bay Islands to Honduras made Walker change his plans. About the middle of March, Mr. Elwyn, a British resident of Ruatan, visited Fayssoux in New Orleans, to request from Walker fifty or more men to be sent to the islands in small parties by the several vessels trading in Ruatan fruit. The immigrants should arrive before the transfer, expected to take place on May 28th, "to assist in preserving the liberties and protecting the property of the islanders in any collision that might occur between them and the Hondureños." Walker or the immigrants themselves would defray their travel expenses, but Elwyn and his friends would attend to their wants on the islands, and would afterwards collaborate with Walker on his Nicaragua venture.

When on April 10 Walker arrived in New Orleans from New York, and Fayssoux apprised him of Elwyn's proposal, he discarded his Aspinwall plan. On April 20 he sent Charles Allen and four others to Ruatan on board the schooner Wm. Abbott. Three men followed on the Isaac Toucey on April 23d, two on the Dew Drop on the 25th,

Captain J.S. West and two others on the John A. Taylor on May 5, eleven more on the Clifton on May 18, and twenty on the Isaac Toucey on June 2d, for a total of forty-four filibusters who travelled to Ruatan as peaceful immigrants.

Towards the end of April, Walker went to Mobile, Montgomery and Selma, hoping to collect funds to pay for the fares to Ruatan. His trip was "to some extent successful": At Mobile, Major H.G. Humphries gave him \$180; at Selma, he was "more fortunate."

On June 5, Walker named Fayssoux "General Agent" to remain at New Orleans and act in his behalf in all matters pertaining to the affairs of Nicaragua and Central America. He then boarded the John A. Taylor for Ruatan, accompanied by Col. Thomas Henry, Major Thomas Dolan, and two others. Before leaving, he urged Fayssoux to inform Major Humphries of his lack of money and the urgent necessity to get more.

Although Walker travelled incognito, modestly booked as Mr. Williams in the schooner's passenger list, the press immediately announced his departure from New Orleans for Central America. And when he arrived at Port McDonald, Ruatan on the morning of June 16th, he encountered more problems.

The people of the Islands, mostly blacks, were generally opposed to Americans, for they believed that Americans would make slaves of them. From the beginning, the blacks had not welcomed the newcomers, specially after one of the early arrivals told several islanders that he had been with Walker in Nicaragua. The British authorities soon detected the filibusters presence, learned of Elwyn's doings, and reacted accordingly.

Shortly before Walker's arrival at Port McDonald, the English mail steamer from Belize had brought over Superintendent Thomas Price along with a body of troops and the Judge, who intended to try Mr. Elwyn for treason. Not finding Elwyn, who had gone with some of Walker's men to another island, both the Superintendent and the Judge returned to Belize, leaving some fifty soldiers with a rocket battery at Port McDonald.

Not deeming it prudent to remain in Ruatan under the circumstances, Walker gathered all his men aboard the Taylor and on June 21st sailed northward for Cozumel Island, off Yucatan, to wait there for reinforcements from New Orleans. Walker's entire force—forty-nine filibusters—landed at the southern tip of Cozumel on June 23d, taking undisputed possession of two huts and a flock of goats that a lone Indian family left behind, fleeing on the Americans' approach.

The Taylor went on to New Orleans. Its skipper, Captain Leonard Lombard, carried a Walker letter to Fayssoux explaining occurrences and requesting more men and supplies, in order to proceed immediately to Nicaragua. Without any possibility of success, Walker's only thought was to land in Nicaragua. Moreover, as explained in another letter to Fayssoux: "In all events I am determined not to return to the United

States, unless by overwhelming necessity.” In other words, the Hero’s departure was at hand.

Fayssoux forwarded additional men and supplies. Eighteen filibusters left New Orleans on the Dew Drop on June 13th; Col. A.F. Rudler headed twenty-five on the Clifton on June 23d, and nine left on the next trip of the Taylor, on July 5th, furnishing a grant total of 101 men, Walker included, for his descent on Nicaragua.

Meanwhile, upon the formal exchange of the treaty ratifications at Comayagua, on April 18, 1860, the actual transfer of the Bay Islands had been scheduled to take place at the end of July; and when the British authorities at Jamaica learned of the filibusters’ presence in Ruatan, the sloop-of-war Icarus was sent to Belize. Towards the end of June, Superintendent Price, at Belize, sent the Icarus off in search of Walker, who was reported to be at the Swan Islands. During the next two weeks, the Icarus visited and examined various harbors and coves, without finding Walker.

On July 16th, the Clifton entered the harbor at Belize to deliver freight from New Orleans before proceeding to Ruatan. When ready to depart, on the 18th, a Customs House officer came on board, opened several boxes manifested as merchandise for Ruatan, and seized twenty-seven contraband crates found to contain munitions of war. The captain hauled down his flag and surrendered his vessel. He then chartered another schooner and took Colonel Rudler and his men to Ruatan, minus the valuable war supplies.

On July 23d, Superintendent Price went on the Icarus to Truxillo, to urge the authorities to be on the alert and place the port in the best possible state of defense, since he believed that Walker’s expedition was in fact serious and of great proportions. After attending a ball, on the 24th, Price continued on the Icarus to Ruatan on July 25th.

Walker remained at Cozumel until the evening of July 16th, when he sailed on the Dew Drop for the Island of Guanaja [Bonacca], where Captain Lombard had agreed to meet him with the Taylor. He then waited on the Dew Drop off Guanaja until the morning of the 24th, when becoming uneasy over the Taylor’s absence, he sailed for Ruatan for news. On approaching the coast, one of his friends on the Island boarded the Dew Drop and told him that Lombard was still at Port McDonald, that the Clifton had not arrived, and that the Icarus was in pursuit of his vessel. Walker immediately sent a letter to Lombard telling him to meet him off the northwest point of Ruatan as soon as possible.

On the 25th, when Superintendent Price arrived on the Icarus at Port McDonald, the filibusters from the Clifton told him that Walker had returned to New Orleans and that the expedition was abandoned. They at once went through the motions of chartering from Captain Lombard the schooner John A. Taylor to take them up to New Orleans.

They went on board, the schooner sailed in the direction of New Orleans, and Superintendent Price went back to Belize on the *Icarus*.

When a few miles out of sight, Lombard turned his vessel around and met the *Dew Drop* at the appointed spot on the morning of the 27th, bringing on board the Taylor the Clifton filibusters detained at Belize. Taking stock, Walker then found that he had very little meat aboard the *Dew Drop* and the *Taylor*, and nothing of consequence in the way of supplies. Moreover, he learned from the *Taylor* that the Islands were to be certainly given up to Honduras on the 30th of July, notices to that effect having been posted at Coxen Hole by the Presiding Magistrate.

But behind the scenes the transfer had been postponed. On July 7, the British Consul at Comayagua, Edward Hall, had apprised the Honduran government of Walker's presence in the area. President Guardiola's foreign minister, Cresencio Gomes, had immediately requested Governor Darling at Jamaica to delay the transfer of the Bay Islands to Honduras. Darling agreed.

Walker waited for the transfer of the Islands on the 30th, and when it failed to take place, he waited a day longer, and another, until August 3d. It then became evident to him that the transfer would not take place soon; and it was impossible with his short supplies and the prevailing winds to reach Nicaragua in a reasonable time. Consequently, he decided to invade Honduras. On the night of August 5th he landed his entire force—92 men—on the beach, three miles below Truxillo.

34. Truxillo

Sources differ on the size of the garrison under Commandant Don Norberto Martínez at the old Spanish fort in Truxillo when Walker attacked on August 6, 1860. Some reports speak of seventy or eighty soldiers; the New Orleans Delta chronicle placed Honduran forces at 400 strong; Commandant Martínez said he had only forty men.

Walker's ninety-two filibusters landed some three miles away at two o'clock in the morning, and it was nearly daylight when all were on shore, marching on the beach of sinking sand. A Carib Indian who saw their boats told a sentinel at the main entrance to the fort. The big gun instantly boomed out the alarm. A squad of soldiers went out to meet the invaders: They waited in ambush and fired a volley, but were quickly dispersed as the Americans rushed up the hill towards the fortress and took possession after a short fight.

At the sound of the gun, the inhabitants of Truxillo, numbering a thousand or more, filled the plaza, some of the men armed with knives, old firearms, sticks and machetes. But they all fled on the approach of the Americans to that part of town, leaving Truxillo deserted. The British Consul, Mr. Morrice, promptly left for Ruatan, deputing Mr. William Melhado to act as Consular Agent during his absence. U.S. Consular Agent Mr. Edward Prudot sailed for Ruatan, too, leaving American interests in town under Walker's care.

Walker had captured the city at the cost of only four wounded. A filibuster chronicler reported that Honduran losses were considerable, although impossible to correctly estimate because the enemy had carried off their casualties with them as they fled. Another filibuster source fixed Honduran losses at twelve killed and eighteen wounded, while Consular Agent Prudot informed the State Department that two defenders had been killed and three wounded.

Setting up headquarters at the fort, Walker wrote a long letter to Fayssoux on August 6th, giving him a hasty sketch of events culminating with his capture of Truxillo that morning. On the 7th, Walker issued a Proclamation to the people of Honduras, avowing his presence in Truxillo to be a preliminary step for regaining possession of Nicaragua. His object was to overthrow the Guardiola government—first, for the sake of the poor and injured Bay Islanders, and then for himself and his fellow filibusters to “secure a return to their adopted country.”

For any attempt to overthrow Guardiola, Walker needed native allies, of which he had

none. Worse still, he ignored who was who in the country. In his first letter from Truxillo, he confided to Fayssoux that he was looking in Ruatan for a person familiar with Honduras and the prominent people in the interior, who hopefully would help him establish friendly relations with those who might assist him. And, of course, he again urged Fayssoux to send him more men and supplies from New Orleans. Walker hoped that "the news of our landing in Central America will bring men and I hope it will draw out the necessary contributions from the Southern people." To that end, his propaganda mill was then working in earnest, under the direction of his "Aid and Secretary" Mr. Charles Allen (the New York Herald correspondent of the Susan expedition), setting afloat fantastic stories about a Walker alliance with former Honduran President Trinidad Cabañas.

Cabañas was then living in retirement in El Salvador, where, upon hearing the yarn of a Cabañas alliance with Walker, the press commented that perhaps Walker propagated such a story in order to popularize and strengthen his cause, but that no person possessing common sense, and who knew Cabañas, would believe it.

Walker himself, on August 16th, warned Fayssoux not to believe the rumors concerning Cabañas. In fact, during his stay in Truxillo Walker failed to find a single Honduran to collaborate with his cause. That the Gray-Eyed Man of Destiny had no friends in Central America in 1860 was obvious to all in the region, and was clearly expressed by an American resident in Honduras in a Letter to the Editor of the New York Herald: "It is a mistake [to believe] that Walker has friends in Central America. He is universally hated and abhorred, and if again captured his fate is sealed."

When that letter was published, on August 25th, Walker's fate was indeed about to be sealed. Both the John A. Taylor and the Dew Drop had sailed for New Orleans with their cargoes of Ruatan fruit after Walker had used them for capturing Truxillo, when on the evening of August 19th the sloop-of-war Icarus entered the harbor. The following morning at daylight, Captain Norvell Salmon anchored at a good position abreast of the fort and then landed to assess the situation.

He found Walker with about 90 men, in charge of the fort, but flying Honduran colors, while the town was entirely deserted, with the exception of Mr. Melhado, who had kept the British Flag flying. The Acting Consular Agent informed him that the Customs receipts of the Port of Truxillo were mortgaged to the British Crown in payment of a debt; that on August 6th the Treasure chest containing the receipts of the Customs had fallen into Walker's hands; and that Walker had thus possessed himself of the sum of \$3,855, which was put aside to defray part of the said claim.

Salmon requested Melhado to obtain confirmation of his assertion from the

Commandant of the Port, Don Norberto Martínez, who was encamped in the neighborhood. Upon receipt of a letter from Martínez, confirming the statement of Melhado, Salmon on August 21st sent a peremptory "request" to Walker, imposing the following terms: that he and his followers be prepared to lay down their arms and re-embark; that they deliver all arms and military stores belonging to the expedition to the recognized Honduran authorities; and that they also deliver to the proper authorities the Custom house money and Government paper they had taken. Salmon pledged to Walker and his men that "upon these terms being complied with, safety for person, and private property will be guaranteed by the English Flag."

In his reply, of the same date, Walker told Salmon that he didn't regard it dishonorable to lay down his arms to an officer of the British Crown; that in regard to re-embarking, he wished to know on what vessel and whose expense the re-embarking was to take place; that concerning the money and papers, they never came into his possession, and therefore it was impossible for him to deliver them up.

And he improved on the occasion, explaining to the English captain his reasons for filibustering: "... my presence here at this time is due entirely to the engagement which I considered I had in honor contracted with a people desirous of living in Central America, under the ancient laws and customs of the English realm; claiming with their common interests under institutions derived from the Code of Alfred, I thought it no wrong to assist them in the maintenance of rights they had lawfully acquired."

Salmon's instant rejoinder reminded Walker that neither the government nor the people of Honduras wished the Code of Alfred introduced into the country in the manner that he proposed; that he and his followers must provide their own transportation but there were schooners in port ready to assist him for that purpose; that whether he or any of his followers took the Custom House money made no difference, for in any case Walker was responsible for the loss; and, finally:

"I must also inform you with reference to a clause in your letter, that my instructions do not permit me to recognize the right of any private individual to make war on a recognized Government, and must confess, do not see what rights, 'a people desirous of living in Central America', can have lawfully acquired. I must again repeat my demand of this morning, and request you will inform me when your arrangements for re-embarkation are complete, feeling sure you will comply, knowing what must result from a refusal."

On receiving Salmon's second letter, Walker requested permission to postpone his answer till the following morning by which time his arrangements would be complete. Salmon consented, knowing that Walker had been communicating with the captains of

a couple of schooners in the harbor. Next morning (the 22d) not seeing anyone moving in the fort, Salmon sent an officer on shore to examine it, and on his return learned that Walker had marched out with his followers before midnight, each man carrying his rifle and about 120 rounds of ammunition.

Walker left behind him in the fort all his spare arms, military stores, and provisions, in addition to his entire hospital consisting of three wounded, three sick, his army surgeon, and an orderly. Salmon evacuated them to Ruatan, except one, who died and was quietly buried in Truxillo on August 26th.

Truxillans began to return to their homes, and Martínez sent eighty men in pursuit of Walker, who had marched eastward down the coast. On reaching the Roman river, unable to ford it at its mouth, Walker followed along its left bank, and on the morning of the 24th camped at a place called Cotton Tree, about thirty miles from the ocean. In the afternoon, with the filibusters resting and lying under the trees, without the slightest suspicion of an enemy being near, the Hondurans attacked, firing upon them from the thickets. In the ensuing skirmish, one filibuster was killed and about a dozen wounded, among them, Walker. As chronicled in the *New Orleans Delta* by Major T. Dolan and Captain C. H. West:

"... He [Walker] quickly collected his little band together, and forming them into two companies, ordered them to charge in different directions, one up and the other down the river. Major Dolan, with company B, charged the principal party with great impetuosity, but General Walker, having got a little ahead of his party, was fired at by a Honduran at a distance of two paces, who wounded him in the face. The General, however, quickly brought down his assailant with his ten shooter, and the rest of the Hondurans fled in great confusion, leaving their killed and wounded behind. Of this party of one hundred and forty, but thirty got back to Truxillo. When it is considered that Walker's men were all veterans, and were armed with Minie muskets, this loss is not at all an improbable one."

On the night of the 24th, Walker crossed the Roman river and continued eastward to the recently abandoned mahogany works at Limas, where he sent two men in a canoe to Ruatan for provisions. He then passed through Indian villages where, according to Dolan and West, Walker's party was kindly received by the native Caribs, although they were occasionally fired at by some prowling Hondurans.

On August 27th, Walker reached Black river and encamped at the trading post of an Englishman named Dickens, two and a half miles from the sea coast. Meanwhile, on the 26th, General Mariano Alvarez had arrived at Olanchito with 200 men from the interior. On the 31st, they embarked at Truxillo on the schooner *Correo* for Black river,

accompanied by Captain Salmon on the Icarus.

Hampered by light winds, Salmon got up steam and the Icarus arrived at the mouth of Black river on September 2d, ahead of the schooner. He arrived just in time to seize a small sloop laden with plantains from Ruatan for Walker, and to take as prisoners all who were aboard.

Upon reconnoitering, Salmon learned that Walker was then occupying and strengthening Mr. Dicken's house on the tongue of land between the two forks of the river. He also learned that Walker had fever and that a number of his men were wounded; many of the remainder were ill from fever and privation of every description.

On the 3d, at 3 p.m., Captain Salmon proceeded up the river in his own gig, accompanied by General Alvarez and with the boats of the Icarus fully manned and armed. As told in his official report:

"On landing I walked into Mr. Dicken's house, where Mr. Walker had taken up his quarters, demanding that he should immediately surrender unconditionally, and desired that he would fall his men in, and lay down his arms, which he did. I immediately had the arms put into the boats and returned on board, leaving Lieut. Cox, with all the marines, in charge of the prisoners. I found that the account I had received of their wretched condition, had not been at all exaggerated; that out of the whole number (73) ten were wounded, and 21 sick in hospital, and of the rest not more than 20 could have walked a mile; though although they had always been able to procure beef, they had gone for many days, without bread or vegetables of any description."

Fearing an attempt to escape on the part of Walker and his second in command Colonel Rudler, Lieut. Cox sent them on board the Icarus the same evening, while General Alvarez hurried back to Truxillo on the Correo to prepare for their reception. The following morning (September 4th), the remaining filibusters embarked, and the Icarus returned under steam to Truxillo, where it arrived about midnight.

On September 5th, at Truxillo, Captain Norvell Salmon signed a formal agreement, witnessed by British Acting Consular Agent William Melhado and American Consular Agent Edward Prudot, pledging to deliver up unconditionally to General Alvarez the persons of Walker and Rudler, to be dealt with according to Law, although their followers (70 in number), would be allowed to return to the United States, providing they swore not to serve in any future expedition against any of the Central American States. The American Consular agent would furnish their passages.

A New York Herald correspondent visited the filibusters on board the Icarus at Truxillo as the news of the agreement became public immediately. He found them all in bad health and filthy as possible. He interviewed Walker, who handed him the original

correspondence which had passed on August 21st between himself and Salmon, which he said he would like to have published. He also requested the reporter to write out, at his dictation, a brief protest against his surrender to the Honduras authorities. Walker's dictation was calm and deliberate, giving the journalist ample opportunity to write down every word before pronouncing the next:

"PROTEST OF GENERAL WALKER.

"I hereby protest, before the civilized world, that when I surrendered to the captain of her Majesty's steamer *Icarus*, that officer expressly received my sword and pistol, as well as the arms of Colonel Rudler; and the surrender was expressly and in so many words to him, as the representative of Her Britannic Majesty.

WILLIAM WALKER.
*On board the steamer Icarus,
September 5, 1860."*

Reaction to Walker's protest was predictable. On the one hand, Bennett, in the *New York Herald*, commented that Walker "surrendered to Commander Salmon, as the representative of her Britannic Majesty, and that officer, in giving him up to the weak and blood-thirsty local authorities for execution, has cast a stain upon British honor and the British flag which no repentance on the part of Commander Salmon can ever wash out." On the other hand, Salmon's superior officer at Jamaica, Captain Samuel Morrish, reported to the Admiralty in London: "In my opinion Commander Salmon has acted most promptly and judiciously in crushing the nest of vipers and thus averting the troubles that would have accrued had Walker and his associates been permitted to go ahead."

Walker and his associates landed for the last time, in Truxillo, on September 6th, 1860. Three large barges brought the filibusters on shore, guarded by the marines of the *Icarus*. On disembarking the English force formed line in front, while the prisoners walked down between two ranks of Honduran soldiers. According to eyewitness accounts published by the *Diario de la Marina* in Havana, most of the filibusters looked like so many corpses, and some were on the verge of dying.

The march on entering was slow and solemn. Walker, at the head of his men, dressed with much simplicity, marched, keeping time to the beat of the drum, and was the object upon which every eye was fixed. As soon as he entered the prison, he was placed in heavy irons and asked if he needed anything, replying laconically — "water."

Soon afterwards he sent for the chaplain of this port, and, declaring his faith as a Roman Catholic, knelt at the feet of the priest, in front of a small altar, on which the glimmering light of some candles faintly revealed an image of Christ. He told that chaplain: "I am resigned to die; my political career is finished."

Don Norberto Martínez, Commandant of Truxillo, lost no time in instituting a summary court for the trial of Walker and Rudler, separately interrogating them as soon as they arrived in prison. Walker answered all questions in Spanish, but for Rudler an interpreter was needed. On learning that Walker was a Catholic, Adela Prudot de Martínez, wife of Don Norberto, sent him a statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary which Walker kept in his cell, in solitary confinement, during his last days on earth.

To the question of who had helped him in his last expedition, Walker answered that several persons in the United States who belonged to a "Southern States' Rights" political party with a membership of several hundred thousands. Its aims, generally speaking, were the same as those listed in the preamble of a book the authorities had found in his possession, styled, "Constitution and Bye Laws of the Supreme Grand Lodge of the League of the Red Star, of the United States."

Martínez continued interrogating the prisoners on the succeeding days and examining witnesses to establish the facts of the case. Thereupon, he charged Walker and Rudler with having committed "piracy and filibusterism," and on September 9 sent the proceedings to General Mariano Alvarez for sentence.

Walker, in his defense, alleged that "Piracy" is an offence well defined by law and consists in robbery on the high seas. The crime cannot be committed on the land, and therefore it was impossible for me to have been guilty of it when attacking the garrison of Trujillo on the morning of the 6th of August last. Besides, the idea of robbery or intent to rob is inseparable from that of piracy. Now, all persons in Trujillo during the time I occupied the place can bear witness that far from robbing or permitting others to rob, I did all I could to maintain order and make property and persons safe and secure. As to "Filibusterism", the word has no legal signification, and it is therefore impossible for me to know with what I am charged when accused of "Filibusterism."

All defense was futile. On September 11, General Alvarez found Walker guilty as charged, sentencing Walker to death and Rudler to four years imprisonment. At seven o'clock in the evening, the Secretary of the Court notified the Gray-Eyed Man of Destiny of his death sentence; Walker replied that he didn't consider it just. He then asked at what hour he would be executed, and if he would have time to write.

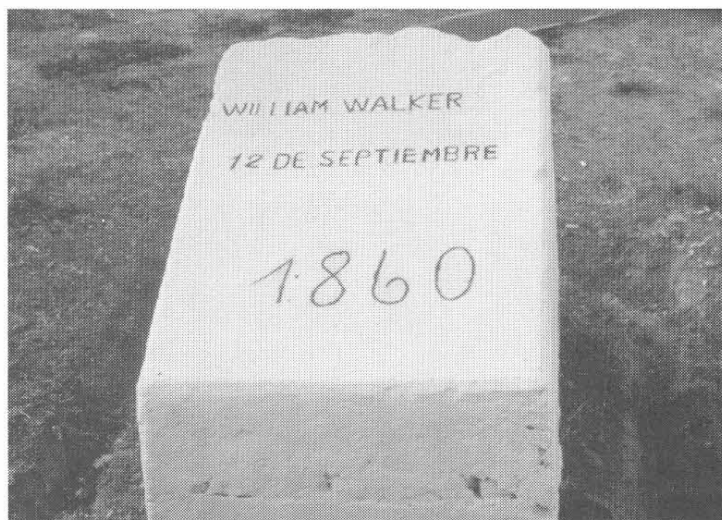
That night, Walker wrote several letters to family and friends in the United States, which he gave to General Alvarez, who forwarded them sealed to their destination.

On the 12th, at eight o'clock in the morning, Walker was marched to the Plaza de Armas, the place of execution. He went with a crucifix in his hand, upon which he concentrated his attention, listening piously to the psalms which the priest recited in his ear. Walker entered the square, where, at the place of execution, the troops were drawn

up, and there, full of resignation, gave his last speech:

"I am a Roman Catholic. The war which I made on Honduras, at the suggestion of certain people at Ruatan, was unjust. Those who accompanied me are not to blame. I alone am guilty. I ask pardon of the people. I receive death with resignation. Would that it were one for the good of society."

Walker sat down, and died with extraordinary coolness as a file of ten soldiers advanced and fired. His remains were decently buried that afternoon, at the Truxillo cemetery, with the usual rites of the Catholic church. The coffin, paid by the American Consular Agent, cost the U.S. Government ten dollars and twenty five cents.



WILLIAM WALKER
Truxillo, Honduras, September 12, 1860

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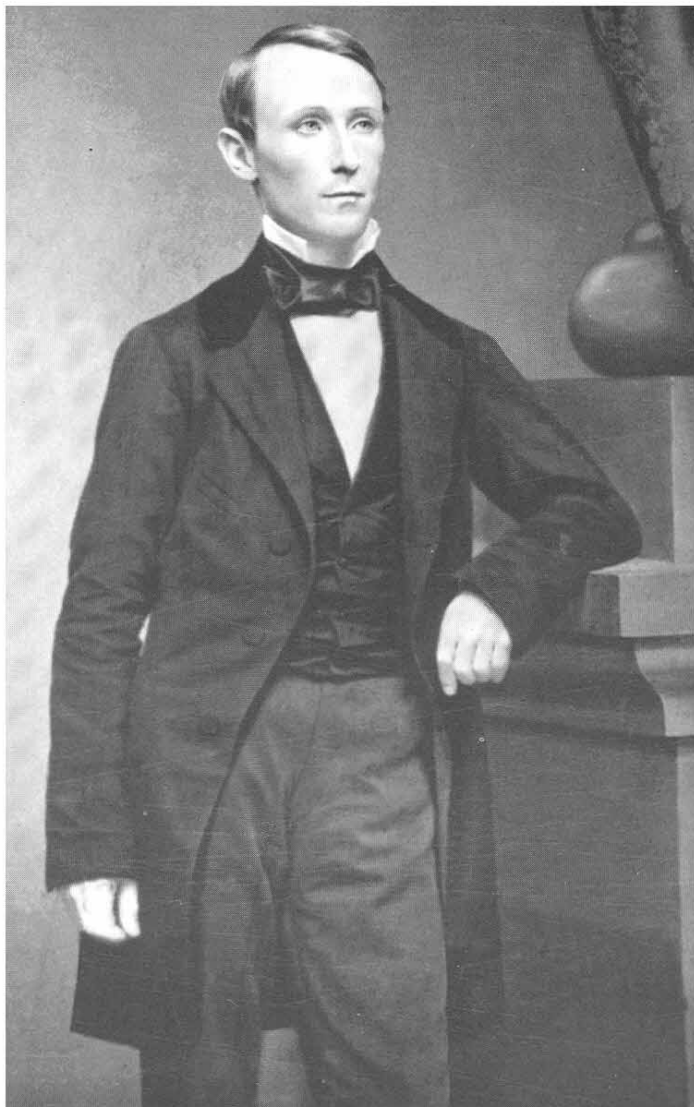
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*I feel not ashamed to say
that I am favored of the gods.*
WILLIAM WALKER.