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**TO DEFEND THE SACRED SOIL OF TEXAS:
TOM GREEN AND THE TEXAS CAVALRY
IN THE RED RIVER CAMPAIGN**

by Gary Joiner

In March 1864, Union forces began their fifth attempt to invade Texas in less than fifteen months. The commander of the Union Department of the Gulf, based in New Orleans, was Major General Nathaniel Prentiss Banks. With aspirations for the presidency, Banks was at that time arguably more popular than Abraham Lincoln. He needed a stunning, or at least a well publicized, victory to vault him into office. The Union Navy had failed at Galveston Bay on New Year's Day, 1863.¹ Banks' 19th Corps commander, Major General William Buel Franklin, had failed miserably at Sabine Pass on September 8, 1863 and² again in October and November during the Texas Overland Expedition.³ The fourth attempt at least landed troops on Texas soil, this time on the barrier islands along the coast and at Brownsville during November 1863, but no meaningful attempt was made to strike inland.⁴ The fifth expedition was the Red River Campaign, resulting in the largest combined arms operation west of the Mississippi River during the Civil War. All of these events convinced Texans that they were high on the priority list for Union invasion, and they were not mistaken.

Most Texans at the time believed, and rightly so, that the battle to save Texas should be fought in Louisiana. Once the war came to the Pelican State in 1862, Texas became the obvious target of Union aspirations. In 1863 John E. Hart of the 4th Texas Cavalry wrote, "The battles of Texas will be fought in Louisiana ... And there it behooves us to strike for our homes."⁵ This need to protect Texas from invaders outside its borders perhaps strikes at the core of the Texas psyche during the nineteenth century and in some deep-seated ways still exists today. Texas was, of course, annexed as an independent nation. That fact has never strayed far from the center of Texan social and political thought, if there ever was something akin to a consensus on such matters. As one Texas cavalryman wrote after the war, "To us, Texas was the 'nation': to her alone we owed allegiance. We were *allied* with other Southern States, not indissolubly *joined*."⁶

The vast size of Texas and the relatively large distances between towns spawned the need for cavalry units. Although some famous infantry units served far from home during the Civil War, such as John Bell Hood's magnificent Texas Brigade, in the Army of Northern Virginia, the state produced more cavalry regiments than any other Southern state. Most of these served in the Trans-Mississippi Department, primarily in Louisiana, Texas, and Indian Territory. The remainder served in the southeastern states of Tennessee, Mississippi, Georgia, and the Carolinas.⁷ It became difficult to obtain and train mounts as the war progressed and at least one third of these units were dismounted, though they retained their cavalry unit status. During the Red River

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Campaign, the majority of forces arrayed against the Union invaders were Texans. Some, such as Major General John G. Walker's First, or Texas, Division of the Army of Western Louisiana, were already deployed in Louisiana.⁸

Most of the cavalry units were held in Texas by the district commander, Major General John Bankhead Magruder. Magruder did not want to release his highly mobile force until he was absolutely certain that the invasion up the Red River was not an elaborate feint to draw attention away from the major assault, which he thought might be Galveston or Matagorda Bay.⁹ When requested to release the cavalry for use by Major General Richard Taylor, the District Commander for Western Louisiana, Magruder sent them, but the bulk of the cavalry were positioned so far south, around Hempstead, west of Houston, that they almost arrived too late to stem the tide of the Union forces.

Leading the cavalry was Major General Tom Green, already famous and something of a national hero in Texas. Green was a graduate of the University of Tennessee and of Princeton. Following graduation he had moved to Texas and practiced law. During the Texas war for independence Green acted as a gunner, manning one of the famous "Twin Sisters" cannons at the Battle of San Jacinto. He also was the hero who had repulsed Union forces at Galveston. Fearless, intrepid, sometimes reckless and hard driving, Green was one of Richard Taylor's favorite officers.¹⁰ He was fearless, loved, and admired by his men. Green asked much from them and they responded in kind.

Green's cavalymen and mounted infantry were famous for their individuality and the variety of their weapons and gear. Some were disciplined cavalry troopers but many were not. Most brought their own weapons and some had to be given guns when they arrived in Louisiana. Most had *bandalero* belts crossed over their chests and carried bowie knives for close fighting. Many wore *sombreros* and sported long, drooping, handlebar mustaches. They rode with abandon and could be compared to Russian Cossacks.¹¹

Green's Cavalry Corps was divided into divisions. The first was actually a brigade led by Brigadier General Hamilton P. Bee. This was composed of the 1st Texas Cavalry led by Colonel Augustus C. Buchel; the 26th Texas Cavalry led by Colonel Xavier B. Debray; and Terrell's Texas Cavalry, led by Colonel Alexander W. Terrell.

The other component was Major's Division, led by Brigadier General James P. Major. This division consisted of two brigades. Lane's Brigade was led by Colonel Walter P. Lane. It was comprised of the 1st Texas Partisan Rangers, led by Lieutenant Colonel R.P. Crump; the 2nd Texas Partisan Rangers, led by Colonel Isham Chisum; the 2nd Regiment, Arizona Brigade, led by Colonel George W. Baker, and the 3rd Regiment, Arizona Brigade, led by Lieutenant Colonel George T. Madison. The second brigade was that led by Colonel Arthur P. Bagby. This brigade was composed of the 4th Texas Cavalry, led by Colonel William P. Hardeman; the 5th Texas Cavalry, led by Major Hugh A. McPhaill, the 7th Texas Cavalry, led by Lieutenant Colonel Philemon T. Herbert, Jr., and the 13th Texas Cavalry Battalion, led by Lieutenant Colonel Edward Waller, Jr.¹²

Perhaps the most unusual of these commanders was Colonel August Buchel, late of the Prussian army. He commanded a regiment of cavalry raised from the Texas Hill Country town of New Braunfels. Because the German immigrants believed that they were fighting for their new homeland, they were particularly enthusiastic. Their presence made Abraham Lincoln's hope of a German-Texas counterrevolution ring hollow.

Before the campaign, rumors were intensifying of the anticipated Union threat. Magruder repositioned forces to counter a threat from the east or the south. He gathered his forces in areas where they might be deployed as rapidly as possible. Some of the units originally were stationed along the Gulf Coast, such as Company E of J.B. Likens' 35th Texas Cavalry Regiment, part of Brigadier General Hamilton Bee's Brigade. The remainder of the 35th Texas Cavalry was deployed nearby, in Matagorda County, countering a perceived threat to Matagorda Bay.¹³ The regiment was sent to the Hempstead area on March 1, eleven days before the Union Navy opened the campaign by entering the Red River. The distance was so great that the regiment did not reach the fighting until after the battles of Mansfield and Pleasant Hill, but did participate in the Battle of Blair's Landing and subsequent actions.¹⁴

The majority of the cavalry corps was encamped in and around Hempstead. This provided access to Louisiana via the three branches of the Texas Trail. When Banks launched the Texas Overland Expedition in 1863, Magruder took the extraordinary step of ordering outer defenses constructed just inside Louisiana along the Texas Trail fords across the Sabine. The southernmost was located at Niblett's Bluff near Vinton in Calcasieu Parish. Next was Burr's Ferry works in Vernon Parish, almost due west of Alexandria. The northernmost were to be located at Logansport in DeSoto Parish, but these were apparently never constructed. All three were designed to be *têtes de pont*, or heads of bridges.¹⁵ Magruder believed that his cavalry would best be positioned at Hempstead to make a dash into Louisiana at Niblett's Bluff or, more likely, at Burr's Ferry.¹⁶ On March 6, upon request from Kirby Smith, Magruder ordered the Texas Cavalry Corps under Major General Tom Green to Alexandria. He was to proceed from Hempstead, "via Montgomery, Woodville, Burkeville, Huddleston, and Hurston, La. to Alexandria, La."¹⁷ This was the Burr's Ferry route. The Union Navy moved so quickly in taking Alexandria on March 15 that Green was diverted north to Hemphill, and from there into Louisiana at Logan's Ferry (Logansport). This diversion forced a hard ride through downpour-soaked roads as Green and his men moved around the Sabine River swamp to link up with Richard Taylor. Taylor, always high-strung, was worried that his cavalry would not meet him in time to stop the Union advance before it could spread out on more than one road. That point was the town of Mansfield in DeSoto Parish, only forty miles south of Shreveport. Green rode his men hard, crossing the Sabine River into Louisiana at Logansport on April 6. After a short rest they joined Taylor at Pleasant Hill and then rode ahead to find the location and activities of the Union forces.

Green's arrival was critically important to Taylor. The aggressive Texas cavalrymen would perform the true task of cavalry – reconnaissance and

intimidation. Without them, Taylor had little chance of slowing the Union column until he was prepared to meet it. He could not readily identify which units he would be fighting without the cavalry's assistance. Green's cavalry confirmed that Banks was using only one line of approach and that he had hindered his own cavalry by forcing it to stay with its train. Advance parties of the cavalry had first encountered the Union column near Crump's Corners (modern day Bellemont). They then retrograded, only annoying the Union cavalry. On April 7, the Union 19th Corps Cavalry Division ran into four regiments of Green's cavalry at Wilson's farm, three miles north of Pleasant Hill.⁸ Green chose to change his tactics and charged the Union cavalry. The Union cavalry commander, Brigadier General Albert Lindley Lee, could not estimate Green's numbers. He formed his men on both sides of the road and set up his howitzers to provide support.

Green's charge forced the Union right back several yards, the Confederates attacking with their customary Rebel yell. The first brigade of Union infantry fired a volley into the Confederate ranks, which then fell back into the field. Trees on Lee's right still contained an unknown number of Rebels keeping up a withering fire. There was no way to charge them in the dense woods. The Confederates fell back and Lee had held his ground.¹⁹ Union casualties were seventy killed and wounded in an action that lasted half an hour.²⁰ While the fight unfolded, the Federal column ground to a halt. Although the battle was small compared to other actions during the campaign, it was important to the Confederates. Green forced the Union cavalry into a new mindset. From this point on, Lee was leery of every rise of ground and turn in the road. The Union cavalry was much more cautious. Green effectively slowed the Union column to a crawl, giving Taylor enough time to prepare his forces for the next day. He identified which Union units were in the lead of the column and how they would fight. While gaining this information he intimidated his opponents, making them apprehensive.

The Union cavalry slowly rode another four miles to Carroll's Mill. As Lee's cavalry neared the mill, Green's Texans again made a demonstration, which forced them to come into battle order. After a brief skirmish in the diminishing twilight, the Rebels melted into the woods. Lee posted pickets and finally halted for the night.²¹

With constant skirmishing, a frustrated Lee pushed the Confederate cavalry screen back six miles on the morning of April 8. Green's mission was not to bring on a full-scale battle but to buy Taylor time. He did this well. Sometime between noon and 1:00 p.m., Lee and his men emerged from a thick wood and found themselves at an intersection of the road on which they were traveling and one that went to the Texas line at Logansport. The intersection was called Sabine Crossroads. The Confederate cavalry that had been a constant menace for the last two days seemed to disappear.

Green divided his force to protect the wings of Taylor's army, which had formed into an "L" configuration about three miles long from tip to tip. During the Battle of Mansfield, or Sabine Crossroads, Green's men effectively forced

the Union line to roll back upon itself rather than extending their own positions outward. The force of the attack by the Louisiana and Texas divisions and the pressure placed upon the Union flanks destroyed the Union position in less than an hour. Confederate infantry and cavalry pursued the Union soldiers to their fallback position at the crossroads and it, too, collapsed in less than twenty minutes of fighting. The fighting ended with the Confederates controlling the only water near the battlefield, but unable to drive the Federal forces from a ridge after a pursuit of three miles.

At 1:30 a.m. the next day, Taylor ordered Major General John G. Walker to send Green and his cavalry to Blair's Landing in an attempt to cut off the Union Navy. Later that day at the Battle of Pleasant Hill, Green and his men held the Confederate left flank and eventually cut off an escape route between Banks' army and the fleet. As Banks evacuated his men from a bloody stalemate at Pleasant Hill, Green and about 2,500 cavalrymen rode to Blair's Landing on the Red River. The Union flotilla was moving downstream after receiving word of Banks' defeat at Mansfield. Early on the morning of April 12, they sorted out their convoy, repaired several damaged vessels and headed down river.

Later on the 12th the fleet approached Blair's Landing, which was due west of Pleasant Hill and approximately forty-five miles north of Grand Ecore. Tom Green's cavalry had taken up positions on the western bank to harass, and if possible, halt the progress of the fleet. Porter's fleet, transports and armed vessels alike, passed the landing under cannon and small-arms fire.²² Some naval personnel were wounded and the vessels received damage from the Confederate artillery, which was well placed and concealed. Bringing up the rear of the flotilla were the timber clad *Lexington* and the monitor *Osage*. Strapped to the *Osage* was the transport *Black Hawk*. In making the tight turn above the landing, the *Osage* slowed and ran aground. Green and his 2,500 men were near the bank at this time, so they dismounted, tied their horses, formed into three ranks and poured fire into the three boats. Banks' *Black Hawk* took such devastating fire that forty soldiers on her decks had to be evacuated into the safe confines of the cramped metal hull of the *Osage*. All hands aboard followed. Later Porter stated upon examination of the *Black Hawk* " ... that there was not a place six inches square not perforated by a bullet."²³

Porter was fortunate that the unprotected wooden transports had passed the landing earlier. If Green and his 2,500 men had had more artillery, the result would have been much worse. Thomas O. Selfridge, Jr., commanding *Osage*, wrote to Admiral Porter some sixteen years later, recounting it as " ... one of the most curious fights of the war, 2,500 infantry against a gunboat aground."²⁴

The *Osage* and the *Black Hawk* strapped together were still aground, with the wooden surfaces of the *Black Hawk* riddled like Swiss cheese from musket and artillery fire. The vessels were forced to work the monitor off the bar and allow the *Lexington* to carry on the fight. After an intense engagement of over an hour with no hint of the Confederates' lessening the strength of their

attack, the *Lexington* finally silenced Green's four-gun artillery battery with her eight-inch guns.²⁵ Shortly before this duel, the *Osage* managed to move from the bar on which she was grounded. She cut the lines to the *Black Hawk* and Selfridge let the current move the boat close to the Confederates without her engines running. Selfridge brought one of his eleven-inch guns to bear on the troops and, at a distance of only twenty yards, fired a load of grape shot and canister directly at the officer on horseback who had been urging his men on with fiery passion. This blast decapitated the unfortunate man, General Green himself.²⁶ The Confederates broke ranks and moved away from the riverbank.²⁷ There had been few casualties, but Green's loss was catastrophic for Taylor. Although Union estimates of Confederate casualties were 200 to 500 killed or wounded, Confederate losses were quite low, perhaps less than ten. Union losses were also negligible.²⁸

One of the cavalrymen present with Green was W.T. Shaw. Shaw wrote to a fellow veteran in 1913, "I was present at Blair's Landing charging the enemies Gunboats near where Gen. Tom Green was killed. One half of his skull was taken off by a shell. As our Brigade retreated from that Engagement generally known as the Gunboat fight, Gen Green's body was carried out on horse back held on by two comrades."²⁹

The loss of Tom Green was impossible to overcome. Texas cavalry fought at the Battle of Monett's Ferry as part of the Arizona Brigade. Unfortunately for the Rebels, Kirby Smith had decided to seek glory in Arkansas and removed three divisions from Taylor's command; among those sent north was Walker's Greyhounds. Taylor had only his mauled Louisiana Division under the Prince de Polignac – some of which was made of Texas troops – and the Texas Cavalry Corps, then under General Major. There were inadequate resources to trap either the Union Army or Navy, and thus the Federal forces fled to Alexandria and, after dams were constructed by Colonel Joseph Bailey, escaped, fighting engagements at Mansura and Yellow Bayou.

Tom Green served as a martyr to keep the invaders from the Sacred Soil of Texas. What is the legacy? Texas and Louisiana troops could honestly say that they had protected their homeland. They had driven out the Yankees, who never made another attempt at invasion for the remainder of the war. When the South was defeated and her armies shattered, they alone could claim this final victory.

NOTES

¹Edward T. Cotham, *Battle on the Bay: The Civil War Struggle for Galveston* (Austin, Texas, 1998).

²Edward T. Cotham, *Sabine Pass: The Confederacy's Thermopylae* (Austin, 2004), Brian Sayers, *On Valor's Side: Tom Green and the Battles for Early Texas* (Hemphill, Texas, 1999), pp. 131-133.

³Richard Lowe, *The Texas Overland Expedition of 1863* (Fort Worth, Texas, 1996).

⁴U.S. War Department, *War of the Rebellion: The Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (Washington, D.C., 1890-1901), Vol. 26: pp. 20-21. 128 vols. Hereinafter cited as *O.R.* All references to the *O.R.* are to Series I and part i of the specific volume unless otherwise identified. The abbreviation *pt* indicates the part number.

¹Donald S. Frazier, "The Battles of Texas Will Be Fought in Louisiana": The Assault of Fort Butler, June 28, 1863." *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 104 (2001), p. 333.

²Anne J. Bailey, *Texans in the Confederate Cavalry* (Fort Worth, Texas, 1995), p. 14.

³Bailey, *Texans in the Confederate Cavalry*, pp. 16-17.

⁴Richard Lowe, *Walker's Texas Division, C.S.A.: Greyhounds of the Trans-Mississippi* (Baton Rouge, Louisiana, 2004); J.P. Blessington, *The Campaigns of Walker's Texas Division* (State House Press: Austin, Texas, 1994).

⁵Paul D. Casdorph, *Prince John Magruder: His Life and Campaigns* (New York, New York, 1996), p. 265.

⁶Richard Taylor, *Destruction and Reconstruction: Personal Experiences in the Civil War* (New York, New York, 1890), p. 178; Francis R. Lubbock, *Six Decades in Texas* (Austin, Texas, 1900), p. 536.

⁷Taylor, *Destruction and Reconstruction*, p. 158; *O.R.* Vol. 34, pt. 2, p. 1029, p. 369; Lubbock, *Six Decades in Texas*, pp. 534-536; Robert U. Johnson and Clarence C. Buel, eds., *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War*, (Secaucus, New Jersey, 1986), Vol. 4, p. 369.

⁸Taylor, *Destruction and Reconstruction*, p. 158; *O.R.* Vol. 34, pt. ii, p. 1029; Gary D. Joiner, "The Red River Campaign of 1864 in the American Civil War," dissertation, St. Martin's College, Lancaster University, United Kingdom, 2004, Appendix 2: Order of Battle of the Red River Campaign.

⁹Jefferson Morgan to Amanda Ann Sportsman Morgan. Letter in the collection of Ms Ann Turk.

¹⁰Jefferson Morgan to Amanda Morgan, and subsequent letters in the same collection.

¹¹Burr's Ferry nomination for inclusion into the list of National Historic Places, 2004.

¹²Magruder's Special Order 66, March 6, 1864; *O.R.* Vol. 34, p. 1027.

¹³Magruder's Special Order 66.

¹⁴U.S. Congress. Report on the Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War, 1863-1866. Vol. 11, *Red River Expedition* (Millwood, New York, 1977), p. 185 (hereafter cited as *JCCW*).

¹⁵*O.R.* Vol. 34, p. 450, pp. 616-617; *JCCW*, p. 58.

¹⁶*JCCW*, p. 194.

¹⁷*JCCW*, p. 194.

¹⁸Richard Taylor, Walker Letter, John G. Walker Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill; *O.R.* Vol. 34, pp. 570-571; Anne J. Bailey, "Chasing Banks Out of Louisiana: Parsons' Texas Cavalry in the Red River Campaign." *Civil War Regiments* 2, no.3, pp. 219.

¹⁹Porter, *Naval History of the Civil War* (Secaucus, New Jersey, 1984), p. 512.

²⁰Thomas O. Selfridge, *What Finer Tradition: The Memoirs of Thomas O. Selfridge, Jr., Rear Admiral U.S.N.* (Columbia, South Carolina, 1987), p. 102; U.S. War Department, *War of the Rebellion: The Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies*. 128 vols. Washington, 1890-1901. Vol. 26, p. 49 (hereafter cited as *O.R.N.*).

²¹Porter, *Naval History*, pp. 512-513.

²²Selfridge, *What Finer Tradition*, p. 102.

²³Selfridge, *What Finer Tradition*, p. 102.

²⁴*O.R.N.* Vol. 26, p. 49, p. 55; *O.R.* Vol. 34, pp. 172-204, p. 571, p. 633.

²⁵Letter from W.T. Shaw in the collection of Ms Molly Wiggins, Tom Green's great great granddaughter, Covington, Louisiana.