

The Battle of Salado Creek, the Dawson Expedition, and the Mier Expedition

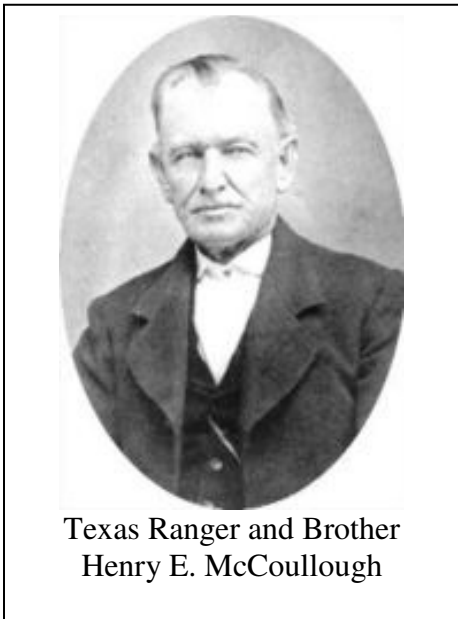
After the defeat of Antonio López de Santa Anna at the Battle of San Jacinto in 1836, the Mexicans signed the Treaties of Velasco, and it didn't take long for Santa Anna to regroup and invade Texas again. This time, however, he was not going to risk being captured. Instead of leading the army himself, he sent General Adrian Woll, a Frenchman who had served under Napoleon.

On September 11, 1842, as the thick dawn fog lifted, shocked San Antonio citizens awoke to see hundreds of Mexican troops standing at parade rest in Alamo Plaza. General Adrian Woll gleamed with pride at his success: the most important city in Texas was under his complete control.

In Gonzales, Masonic Brother and Colonel Matthew "Old Paint" Caldwell gathered his men and started for Seguin. Masonic Brother Alfred Sturgis Thurmond was town marshal at Victoria, and joined his friend and Masonic Brother Ewen Cameron's ranger company. They united with Masonic Brother John "Coffee" Hay's ranger company and Masonic Brother A.C. Horton's ranger company from Matagorda, and others, and headed to San Antonio.

Battle of Salado Creek

When the Texans arrived at San Antonio, they were over 200 strong, but were outnumbered over 8 to 1 by Woll's forces. Col. Caldwell (commanding) reasoned that if

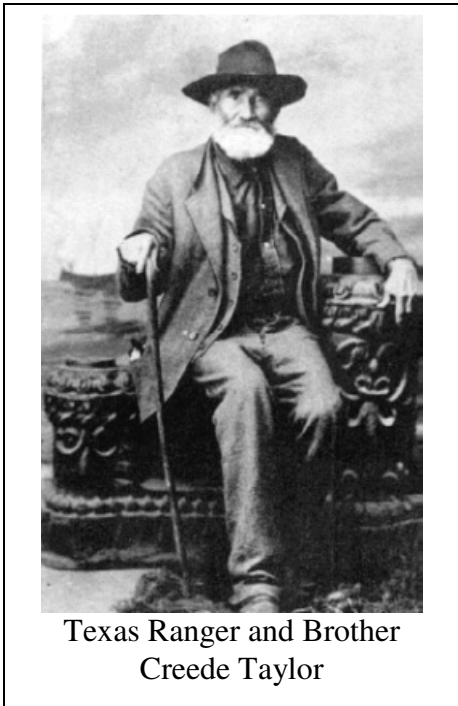


Woll could be lured into the open prairie, the outnumbered Texans could give a good account of themselves from their fine defensive position in the bed of Salado Creek. Only thirty-eight horses in the Texan camp were fit for duty, thus only thirty-eight men could go in as decoys.

Texas Rangers John "Coffee" Hays and Henry McCulloch, taking six men with them, boldly ventured to within half a mile of the Alamo, taunting the Mexican cavalry to come out and fight. Hays had expected to be pursued by about forty or fifty Mexicans. Instead, Woll's entire force of about 500 mounted cavalry was already in the saddle, and immediately gave chase.

As Hays, McCulloch, and their half dozen companions, with over 500 Mexicans in chase, approached the rest of the group of about 30 Rangers who were hiding in ambush, Hays yelled orders to them to mount and fall back. (Editor's note: I suspect he did not have to say it twice!) The rangers fell back across the mesquite-covered prairie toward Caldwell's position.

For the first four miles of the chase, the Texans had the advantage of a lead of about half a mile. Too soon, however, the fresh horses captured by Woll began to gain on the somewhat jaded mounts of the rangers. As the Mexicans gained ground, the Texans threw off blankets, hats, and raincoats in an attempt to lighten their horses' loads. "The race," wrote Masonic Brother and Reverend Z. N. Morrell, "was an earnest one."



Texas Ranger and Brother
Creede Taylor

The Mexicans made a desperate effort to cut off Hays by passing his right flank. McCulloch and his men kept between

Hays and the Mexicans, sending couriers every half mile or so to cause Hays' men to peel off and head for the timber. Finally, when the timberline was reached, Brother McCulloch had only one man left with him, Masonic Brother and Texas Ranger Creed Taylor. These two had been targets of the entire Mexican force for the last half mile, at a range of 150 to 200 yards, and it was estimated that the Mexicans fired over 200 rounds at them. Neither man, however, was hit by a single musket ball.

By the time the battle lines were drawn between the Texans in the Salado Creek bed and the Mexican troops, over 1,100 Mexican troops would be involved in the fight against just a few more than 200 Texans.

Masonic Brother Rufus Burleson wrote: "Their grand old leader, Col. Caldwell, in a few words of burning eloquence, said, "Boys we can never surrender; we must all die fighting; and although they outnumber us eight to one we can whip them as we did at San Jacinto." He called on Elder Z. N. Morrell, who was equally gallant in the use of the musket as in wielding the sword of the spirit, to encourage the boys. The old hero cried aloud, "Boys, we are going into battle against fearful odds, eight to one, but their cannon can't hurt us entrenched as we are. Keep cool. Don't fire till you see the whites of their eyes. Shoot every man who wears an officer's cap or sword, and before God we can whip them." Just at that moment the cannon roared and the shot rattled among the tops of the trees and cut down the limbs."

Mexican cannon fire, though well directed, shot harmlessly over the creek and the Texans, while the devastating return fire of the Texan sharpshooters withered the resolve of the experienced but outwitted Mexicans.

Texas Ranger and Brother
John "Coffee" Hays



Only one Texan died along the Salado in the nearly five hours of the battle. On the Mexican side, the toll was difficult to confirm. Eyewitnesses at the scene claimed over 60 had died and at least 200 wounded. By 6.00 p.m., Gen. Woll realized that his situation along the Salado was untenable, and that other Texan reinforcements would turn the tide of battle against him. Cutting his losses, Woll ordered the playing of victory call by the buglers, and gathering up some of the bodies of his fallen soldiers, marched "with great fanfare and celebration" back into San Antonio. By Monday evening, Woll was marching southwest out of the city, with Texans giving chase. Harassed by snipers, the Mexicans nevertheless reached the Rio Grande and crossed into Mexico.

Dawson Massacre

Another company of Texans at this battle were not as successful. A separate company of 54 Texans, mostly from Fayette County, under the command of Nicholas Mosby Dawson, arrived at the battlefield and began advancing on the rear of the Mexican Army. The Mexican commander Woll, afraid of being surrounded, sent between 400 and 500 of his soldiers and one or two cannon to attack the group. The Texans were able to hold their own against the Mexican rifles, but once the cannon got range the Texan fatalities mounted quickly.

Dawson realized the situation was hopeless and raised a white flag of surrender. Both sides continued to fire, however, and Dawson was killed. Within an hour, thirty-six Texans were killed, fifteen were captured and three escaped.

Mier Expedition

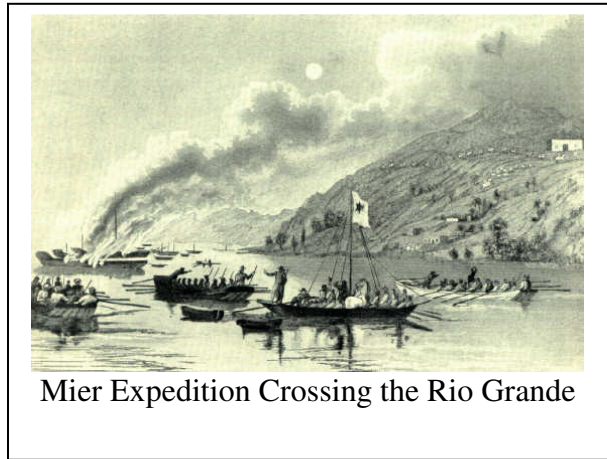
Less than a month later, on October 3rd, Masonic Brother Sam Houston ordered a punitive strike against Mexico in retaliation for the raids on San Antonio. After a general call, nearly 700 eager volunteers streamed into San Antonio to participate in the affair.

The expedition, known as the Sommervell Expedition, departed San Antonio on November 25. It captured Laredo on December 8, and then headed south along the Rio Grande and soon afterward took the town of Guerezo.

Brother Houston's instructions to General Somervell were to continue the invasion only if circumstances assured a reasonable chance for success. Because almost one-third of the participants returned home soon after the capture of Laredo, Somervell determined that the remaining force was not strong enough, nor did they have the supplies and equipment to successfully sustain further penetration into Mexico. He therefore ordered his men to disband and return to home.

A large number of the Texans, however, felt betrayed by the order, and decided to ignore Somervell and continue the raid into Mexico. They elected Masonic Brother William S. Fisher as their leader, and over 300 of them continued in to Mexico.

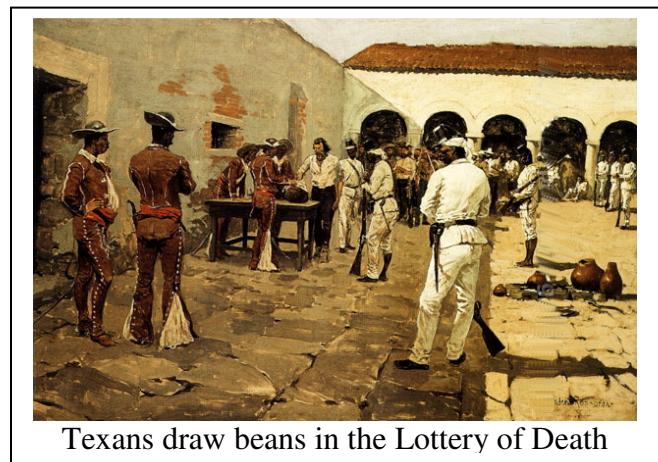
On December 23, 1842, Fisher and his men crossed the Rio Grande and entered the town of Mier, where they met no resistance. They demanded supplies from the town, which the town's alcalde promised to deliver. The troops withdrew and waited. In the meantime, a large detachment of Mexican troops arrived in the town. On December 25, the two sides engaged in a bloody battle that lasted almost 24 hours. The Texans sustained thirty casualties and ran out of food, water, and ammunition. More than 200 Texans surrendered to Mexican forces, unaware that they had mauled the Mexican troops to an almost unbelievable degree, inflicting an astounding 800 casualties, and likely could have prevailed had the battle continued. During the battle... "The fearless Cameron, whose company garrisoned the back yard of one of the houses, being charged by an imposing force of the enemy, after emptying his rifles into their lines, fought off the foe until he could reload with the loose stones in the court."



Mier Expedition Crossing the Rio Grande

As far as the Mexicans were concerned, the captured Texans were privateers on an unauthorized raid and entitled to no consideration as military prisoners of war. They were initially sentenced to death, and then ordered on a forced march to Mexico City. Brother Fisher was separated from the group, and the men selected Brother Ewen Cameron as their commander. Along the march into Mexico, Cameron led most of the prisoners in an escape attempt. The Texans overpowered their guards and tried to make a run back for the border, but they hadn't bargained on the harsh and dry conditions in the Mexican mountains. All but three were recaptured and returned to the town of Salado.

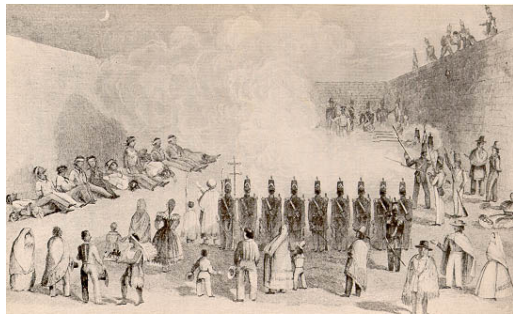
The escape precipitated the "Black Bean Incident" in which every tenth man of 170 was executed by the draw of a black bean. As the men drew from the "lottery of death", those with black beans were separated from the others and chained together. They were given a few hours to write last letters, and at dusk were placed against a wall of the compound.



Texans draw beans in the Lottery of Death

Brother Rufus C. Burleson wrote: "Before being shot they called on Mr. Robert Dunham, one of their number, a pious Methodist, to pray for them. Mr. Dunham knelt down and offered a most earnest prayer for them, and himself, when they were blindfolded and shot."

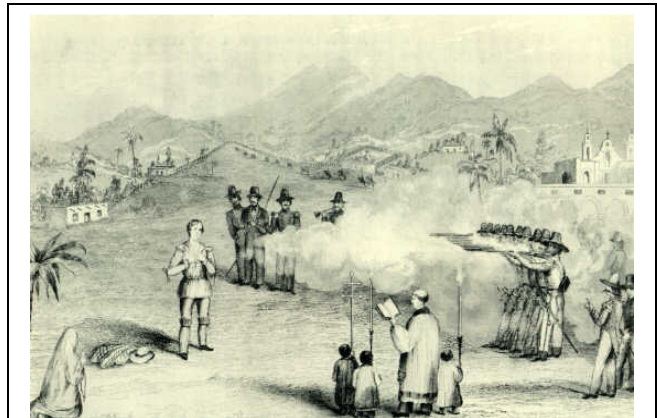
The Texan's interpreter, Brother Alfred Sturgis Thurmond, who had drawn a white bean, was required to remain with them to the last as the sole prisoner witness of the execution. He wrote: "Fifteen times they wounded that iron-nerved soul, Henry Whaling; and it would seem that Providence had a special care in prolonging his existence, that he might demonstrate to his enemies the national character they had to contend with; for he gritted



Execution of the 17 at Rancho Salado

his teeth at and defied them in terms of withering reproach, until they placed a gun to his head and blew his brains against the wall. Such was the effect of this horrible massacre upon their own soldiers, who were stationed as a guard upon the wall above, that one of them fainted, and came near falling over, but was caught by his comrades.”

Brother Thurmond was also forced to witness the execution of Brother Cameron. Although Cameron had drawn a white bean, Santa Anna was fearful of his leadership, and issued a direct order to shoot him. From the book “Soldiers of Misfortune –The Mier Expedition” by Sam Haynes : ”In the middle of the night an express rider arrived from the capital. Ewen Cameron and Alfred Thurmond were ushered into an adjoining room, where Thurmond was given another grim order to translate.



Brother Ewen Cameron bravely faces Mexican firing squad

Ewen Cameron was to be shot the next morning. A heavy guard was placed on him to prevent any communication with his men. At dawn the Mexican escort pushed the Texans quickly onward, leaving Cameron and Thurmond with a contingent of cavalry. A short time after their departure Cameron was taken out behind the building made to stand against a stone wall. The dismounted cavalry primed the escopetas and took aim at close range. As Thurmond later told the story after rejoining the others, Cameron refused to accept a blindfold.” Brave Brother Cameron instead ripped open his hunting shirt, baring his breast to his executioners, and yelled the order “FUEGO”. He was struck by eight musket balls and died instantly.” Bro. Thurmond reported.

The remainder of the Texans were marched into Mexico City. During the months of June, July, and August 1843, the Texans did road work near Mexico City. In September they were transferred to the Perote Prison where the San Antonio (Dawson) prisoners whom they had set out to liberate were being held. A few of the Mier men escaped while doing the road work in the vicinity of Mexico City, and others tunneled out of Perote. Most were recaptured, and many of them died in captivity from wounds, disease, and starvation. From time to time a few of the prisoners were released at the request of certain officials in the United States and others at the request of foreign governments. The last of the Mier men, including Brother Alfred Sturgis, were released by Santa Anna on September 16, 1844.