

None But Texians: A History of Terry's Texas Rangers

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Prelude to War **(1860-1861)**

"Has it so soon come to this?" – Robert E. Lee

The story of Terry's Texas Rangers is a story of friends, acquaintances and neighbors who in the call of liberty and preservation of a way of life came to the aid of their state and compatriots.

As events of 1843 suggested that the Republic of Texas would soon be annexed to the United States, people began moving there from the United States and other nations. Among the immigrants was a young, small, temperamental Baptist lawyer from Monroe County, Mississippi, named Thomas Harrison. The young lawyer brought his wife and children with him to the new nation. He hoped he could make a life for himself with family members who had already moved to Texas. Harrison entered the law office of his brother-in-law, a Texas veteran and former secretary of state, William Houston Jack, and they set up their law office in Brazoria County.

Brazoria County was a center of national activity at the time. Many of the Republic's notables resided in and around the county, among them the Terry and Johnston families. The two families were friends of each other. Albert Sidney Johnston, former secretary of war of the new nation, had recently returned to Texas remarried with his new bride, Eliza Griffin. The Johnston family settled at China Grove in Brazoria County. Ben Fort Smith, a veteran of the Battle of New Orleans and the War for Texas Independence, had raised the sons of his sister, Sarah Terry, on his plantation, since their mother died in the 1830s. One of the sons was Benjamin Franklin Terry. It was here, in Brazoria County that Thomas Harrison, Benjamin Franklin Terry and Albert Johnston began associations forever changing their lives.

When the possibility of war with Mexico arose in 1846, a call for volunteers went out. A young, outspoken congressman from Mississippi who staunchly defended states' rights was organizing a state militia unit from his home state. This promising young congressman was Jefferson Davis. Although Thomas Harrison was now a "Texian," he returned to his native Mississippi to volunteer for service in the state militia unit known as the "Mississippi Rifles." Like Harrison, Albert Sidney Johnston also left Texas to serve in the Mexican War. While in the volunteer regiment, Harrison discovered there were other Texians present. There among fellow volunteers, he met fellow Texan, W. P. Rogers.

The Mississippi Rifles fought bravely in several military engagements. The regiment distinguished itself in the Mexican War and brought recognition to its commander, Colonel Davis. When military officials offered Davis a Federal commission, he refused, citing that the Federal government did not have jurisdiction over state militia regiments.

After the Mexican War, Harrison returned to Texas. Initially, he practiced law in Houston. After a brief period in Houston, he moved to Marlin, and then moved his office to Waco. His brother, James E. Harrison, moved from Mississippi to join him in Waco. There Tom Harrison settled down and proceeded to raise his family.

With the cessation of hostilities with Mexico, the period from 1850 to 1860 was productive. In many portions of Texas this period was one of growth and economic expansion. One family benefiting from the growth at this time was the Terry family. Although raised by their uncle, the young men established themselves as prominent citizens in the community. The Terry sons were Benjamin Franklin Terry and his brothers, Clinton, Nathaniel and David.

Before leaving for the final formation and mustering of his unit, and before the war, Benjamin Franklin Terry dressed himself in a new Confederate uniform. After dressing, he attached his Uncle Ben Fort Smith's sword. The sword that hung at his waist was previously carried into battle at New Orleans and San Jacinto. He left the home with his oldest son, David, and then visited the older slaves at his plantation. He paid his respects to them and exchanged personal farewells, and instructed them to take care of "Miss Mary" and the children. As he was about to leave, an older black woman brought out his youngest son, five-year-old Kyle, who had been crying at his father's departure. After comforting Kyle, Frank rode off with David Terry and a servant. At Houston, David would rejoin his companions in John Holt's company.

In Bastrop County, Stephen Ferrell designated Bastrop as the organization center for the company. The night before muster day, potential recruits entered town, drinking and celebrating. On the morning of muster day, citizens gathered to watch the departure ceremonies. Women, old men, and children mingled with the recruits. They prayed, cried, and asked for blessings on the recruits for the patriotism and heroism. After securing blessings and wiping away the tears, the company rode out of town. Such emotional departures were common at ceremonies in nearby counties as men left in defense of their country. Ferrell's company arrived at Houston on Saturday, September 7, and was joined by five other companies.

Less than twenty days after the call for volunteers went out, the unit officially formed at Houston on Monday, September 9, 1861. The muster center consisted of a warehouse serving as makeshift headquarters on the outskirts of the city. At the appointed time, the men lined up on three sides of an open square. When Lt.

John Sparks stepped forward, the assembly of the men quieted themselves. Lieutenant Sparks then addressed the men and led them in the oath of service. The oath made them official soldiers of the Confederate States. Sparks himself had recently resigned from the U.S. Army. The enrolling officer then stood and asked them, "Do you wish to be sworn into service for twelve months or for three years or for the duration of the war?" In a loud, unanimous shout, the men proclaimed: "For the war! For the war!"

After being sworn into service, the men celebrated with demonstrations of horsemanship along Congress Avenue. They practiced such skills as dismounting and remounting at a full gallop, and picking up objects on the run. Thomas Harrison met with his nephew, Thomas McKinney Jack, who had joined Wharton's company.

The new regiment consisted of ten companies of 100 men each. The total manpower strength of the regiment was 1,170, which was larger than many other regiments formed in Texas. Terry and Lubbock shared command. Terry refused the title of colonel, until his men elected him to that office.

The regiment split into separate groups for travel. Terry led the first group, accompanied by Francis R. Lubbock, the newly elected governor of Texas. This group departed Houston on September 10. Francis Lubbock's brother, Tom, served as the officer in charge of the second group. While waiting to move out, some of the men remaining in Houston occupied their time by showing off their skills and horsemanship to citizens. The men formed into small groups and practiced cavalry charges down city streets. They also broke wild horses on streets where the public viewed them in amazement. These activities led to write-ups in the local papers regarding their excellent skills. Morale was high, and the men wanted to fight.

In one of the first engagements of 1862, Confederate Gen. Felix Zollicoffer attacked Union forces under George Thomas at Mill Springs, Kentucky. General Zollicoffer hoped the fog would aid his efforts; however, Federals halted Zollicoffer's attack and defeated the Confederate offensive. Among the casualties was General Zollicoffer. This defeat at Mill Springs (also referred to as Fishing Creek) and the loss of General Zollicoffer started the year with discouragement regarding the Confederacy's new independence.

On January 31, a detachment of Rangers joined the party sent to recover General Zollicoffer's body from Union lines. While on this assignment, the forty Rangers dressed as Indians and Mexicans, adorning themselves with Buffalo robes and sombreros. While retrieving the body, the Union and Confederate soldiers exchanged verbal barbs. One Ranger commented to the Union troops that "he hoped to return the favor" to them.

In a brief break from the monotony of camp life, Thomas Harrison and sixty Rangers left camp February 7 to visit Mammoth Cave. While there, the Rangers relieved the cave's pro-Union owner of some supplies. Since there were not many known caves in Texas at that time, they decided to explore the cave. They traveled the cave on foot by candlelight. On their journey, they saw the register chamber, lover's leap, fat man's misery, star chamber and the giant's coffin. After their exploration, they returned to camp.

Two days later, on February 9, the Rangers withdrew from the Green River area of Kentucky and moved to Bowling Green. Muddy roads from an earlier snowfall slowed progress of the withdrawal. Along the way, further bad news arrived for General Albert S. Johnston: the Confederates had lost Fort Henry.

The Texas Ranger War Song
(Sung to the tune of "Bonnie Blue Flag")

We are a band of brothers from home and kindred fair,
The glory of old Texas in Southern border war,
For like a fiery billow we dash upon the foe,
And well the music of our carbines the Yankee troopers know.

Chorus

Through the blinding smoke of battle, like a red hot glare of flame,
Our star-crossed banner flashes, bearing Terry's name,
Leading us to our first battle, at Woodsonville he fell,
But since on many a field we have avenged him well.

Chorus

The banner is our glory, 'tis sacred in our eyes,
And we guard it like an Amulet on every field it flies,
Like a light from home 'twas sent us by our noble Texas girls,
And we seem to feel their eyes upon us when Count its stars unfurls.

Chorus

All Mississippi's borders are teeming with our fame,
On the hills of Alabama they love the Rangers' name,
In fettered land of Boone we unlinked the Despot's Chain,
And roused to life and energy her chivalry again.

Chorus

But the State, boy, of all others, this side of home we know
Where they give us hearty welcome and cheer us when we go,

With her spirited fair daughters, is proud old Tennessee,
And while a Yankee pollutes her soil, her Champions we shall be.

Chorus

Then let us throw our Kisses to the girls who hold us dear
With their fairy hands they beckon us in glory's dear career
True to our Southern honor – the Texian hearts we bear
We'll brighten still the star of our hopes – the proud old "Texas Star."

Chorus

Away! Away! To the battle front away,
Away! To the Enemy's lines,
We lead the fight to day.

(From the Batchelor-Turner letters)

For ordering information or to schedule an author visit, go to
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