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CONFEDERATE HERO AT VAL VERDE

By ODIE B. FAULK*

THERE are many men who in their own time were widely known and performed great deeds, yet who are almost entirely forgotten by present-day historians. Such a neglected figure is Major General Tom Green, a Confederate hero often confused with one of his contemporaries, Thomas Jefferson Green. Both played important roles during the days of the Republic of Texas, but T. J. Green left Texas in 1845 and was in no way connected with the Confederate invasion of New Mexico.

Born July 8, 1814, in Buckingham County, Virginia, Green moved with his parents to Tennessee in 1817 and settled on a farm near Winchester.¹ There he spent his youth at work and in school, graduating in 1834 from the University of Tennessee. He studied law for over a year, but was restless and longed for excitement.² In the fall of 1835 like many other Southern youths, he decided his destiny lay west of the Sabine River where the Texans were fighting the tyranny and usurpations of Santa Anna. Green arrived in Nacogdoches on Christmas Day, 1835, enlisted as a private in the regular Texan army, and participated in the San Jacinto campaign as one of the artillerymen who manned the Twin Sisters. Although he was promoted to the rank of major and aide-de-camp to General Thomas J. Rusk shortly after the battle, Green decided he did not want an army career. He resigned on May 30, 1836, and returned to Tennessee for further law study.³

* Library 318. The University of Arizona, Tucson, Ariz.

1. Tom Green's tombstone, Oakwood Cemetery, Austin; *Biographical Encyclopedia of Texas* (New York: Southern Publication Company, 1880), 121; Joseph D. Sayers, "To Tom Green," *Dallas Morning News*, February 23, 1909, p. 8.

2. Elizabeth LeNoir Jennett, ed., *Biographical Directory of Texan Conventions and Congresses* (Austin: The State of Texas, 1941), 90; Sayers, "To Tom Green."

3. Louis W. Kemp, San Jacinto Roll (Mss, Archives, Texas State Library, Austin); Sam H. Dixon and Louis W. Kemp, *The Heroes of San Jacinto* (Houston: The Anson Jones Press, 1932), 78-79.

The same restless urge still moved in his blood, however. In the spring of 1837, apparently without ever taking the bar exam, Green returned to the Lone Star Republic where he secured the post of engrossing clerk in the Second Session of the First Texan Congress, a position he held in the Second, Third, and Fifth Congresses.⁴ He was a member of the House of Representatives in the Fourth Congress and secretary of the Senate in the Sixth and Eighth Congresses. In 1841 he became clerk of the Supreme Court, a post he honorably held until the outbreak of the Civil War.⁵ He accepted his land bonus and his headright certificate and claimed a total of 2,756 acres, most of which was located in Fayette County, southeast of Austin. He made his home, when not at the capital, at LaGrange, the county seat of Fayette County.⁶

In addition to his other activities, Green found time to participate in nine Indian and Mexican campaigns during the hectic years of the republic. The most outstanding expeditions of which he was a member were the John H. Moore campaign against the Comanches in 1841 and the Mier Expedition of 1842. Green narrowly missed capture at Mier; the scouting company of which he was a part was allowed to return home the day before the fighting occurred for all appeared peaceful at that time.⁷

During the Mexican War Green served as a ranger captain under John C. Hayes and distinguished himself for bravery during the battle for Monterrey. After his discharge in the fall of 1846, he returned to Texas and the following

4. Of all the biographical sketches of Green, only Jennett, *Biographical Directory*, 90, states that he took the bar exam. There is good reason for doubt, however. Mrs. Z. T. Fulmore, "Tom Green," *Confederate Veteran*, XV (February 1907), 79; for his appointments in the House of Representatives, see the appropriate *House Journals*.

5. For Green's activities in the Fourth Congress, see the *House Journal* for that year; see the *Senate Journals* for his activities in that body; for his appointment in the Supreme Court, see "Minutes of the Supreme Court of Texas, 1841-1849" (Office of the Supreme Court, Austin).

6. Kemp, San Jacinto Roll.

7. Sterling B. Hendricks, "The Somervell Expedition to the Rio Grande," *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, XXIII (October 1919), 115-135; *Biographical Encyclopedia*, 122.

January married Mary Wallace Chambers. In addition to their own six children, Green and his wife raised another half dozen who were the orphaned brothers and sisters of his wife.⁸

With the outbreak of the Civil War, young men and old in both North and South hurried to the standards of their respective loyalties. Green cast his lot with Texas and the South. At that time he was forty-seven years old; since the age of twenty-one he had been engaged in numerous battles against the Indians and Mexicans and had gained valuable experience in warfare. During the summer of 1861 he saw a notice that Brig. Gen. H. H. Sibley was recruiting "Volunteer Cavalry" in San Antonio for an expedition to conquer New Mexico from the Yankees. Green accepted a commission as colonel and commander of the Fifth Regiment in the Sibley Brigade.⁹

Poorly armed and ill-prepared for the wintry cold of New Mexico, the men left San Antonio on October 26, 1861, full of high spirits and expectations of victory. As the troops proudly filed past Sibley's reviewing stand, one company failed to hear an order to turn and marched straight ahead, soon passing out of sight over a nearby hill. "Gone to Hell," grunted Sibley, unaware that he was accurately forecasting the outcome of his entire New Mexican venture.¹⁰

Traveling in small detachments because of the scarcity of water and grass along the San Antonio-El Paso road, the Brigade members suffered from Apache attacks, food shortages, and inept leadership. Sibley was unaffectionately dubbed the "Walking Whiskey Keg" by the troops, and it was

8. Samuel C. Reid, Jr., *The Scouting Expeditions of McCulloch's Texas Rangers* (Philadelphia: J. W. Bradley, 1860), 152-204; *Biographical Encyclopedia*, 123; Diary of Sarah Glenn Riddell, Tom Green Scrapbook (Mss, Archives, Texas State Library, Austin).

9. Gertrude Harris, *A Tale of Men Who Knew Not Fear* (San Antonio: Alamo Printing Co., 1935), 22-25.

10. W. T. Wroe, *New Mexico Campaign in 1861-62* (Mss, n.d., Confederate Museum, Austin); W. W. Heartsill, *Fourteen Hundred and 91 Days in the Confederate Army* (Jackson, Tenn.: McCowat-Mercer Press, 1954; facsimile reprint of 1876 original), 49. For the details of this entire campaign see William I. Waldrip, "New Mexico During the Civil War," *NEW MEXICO HISTORICAL REVIEW*, XXVIII (July 1953), 163-182, and XXVIII (October 1953), 251-290.

noted that he always remained well in the rear as they entered enemy territory.¹¹ Fortunately for the Texans there were three able leaders among them: Tom Green, "Dirty Shirt" Bill Scurry, and A. P. Bagby. To these men, all of whom later became generals in the Confederate Army, the men turned for leadership.

The Brigade reunited at Fort Quitman on the Rio Grande some eighty miles south of El Paso and moved toward Fort Craig, New Mexico, where Col. Edward Richard Canby, Sibley's brother-in-law, waited with an estimated five to eight thousand Federal troops. On the evening of February 20, 1862, the Confederates camped three miles east of the Fort, which was located on the west bank of the Rio Grande.¹²

During the night a Federal captain, James Graydon, conceived a daring plan to cause panic among the Confederate force. Receiving permission from Canby for his enterprise, Graydon and a scouting company loaded twelve twenty-four pound howitzer shells into two wooden boxes, cut the fuses very short, lashed the boxes on the backs of two mules, and stealthily crossed the river, intending to lead the mules within sight of the Texans' horses, light the fuses, and turn the mules loose, assuming that they would head for the nearby animals. All worked as planned until the mules were released. Instead of walking into the Texan's camp, the stubborn animals turned and followed the retreating Federals. When the first shells exploded, the Texans grabbed their weapons and hurried forth to drive away the enemy, but there was no need. The mules were doing the job for them very nicely.¹³

There was nothing humorous about the next day, however. At 9 A.M. the battle commenced on the east bank of the

11. Theophilus Noel, *Autobiography and Reminiscences* (Chicago: Theo Noel Establishment, 1904), 61-62.

12. Theo Noel, *A Campaign From Santa Fe to the Mississippi of the Old Sibley Brigade* (Shreveport, La.: Shreveport News Printing Establishment, 1865), 12; Harris, *A Tale of Men Who Knew Not Fear*, 31-32. For the story of the Battle of Val Verde see Colonel M. L. Crimmins, contributor, "The Battle of Val Verde," *NEW MEXICO HISTORICAL REVIEW*, VII (October 1932), 348-352.

13. Harris, *A Tale of Men Who Knew Not Fear*, 31-32.

Rio Grande. Sibley confessed in his official report that he had been "sick" for several days previously, but that he took to his saddle to direct the engagement personally. During the morning and early afternoon it appeared that the Federals would win, and the Confederate commander decided he was too "exhausted" to continue. About 1:30 P.M. he retired from the scene, leaving Tom Green in charge of the Confederate forces.¹⁴ Two hours later Canby saw that the tide of battle was in his favor and ordered six pieces of artillery across the river to hasten the end of fighting. When these opened fire, he directed a concentrated movement against both ends of the Texans' line. Several volunteer companies of New Mexico militia refused to obey the command, however, and Green took advantage of the weakened right wing of the Federal force by ordering a charge. The Rebels advanced on the Northerners with such fury that the tide of battle changed. The artillerymen fled in retreat toward the safety of the walls of Fort Craig, and the Union infantry joined them. Shortly after this maneuver had succeeded, Sibley felt well enough to reassume command. His first order was to cease pursuit of the Federals and break off the engagement.¹⁵ During the day's engagement, the Confederates suffered 36 killed, 150 wounded, and 1 missing; the Northerners reported 68 killed, 160 wounded, and 35 missing.¹⁶

Instead of attacking Fort Craig, Sibley continued the march northward. Green and a force of four hundred hurried ahead of the others and captured Albuquerque, and

14. H. H. Sibley to General S. Cooper [Confederate Adjutant and Inspector General], Headquarters Army of New Mexico, Fort Bliss, Texas, May 4, 1862, *Official Records The War of the Rebellion* (70 vols., Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1880-1902), Series I, Vol. IX, 507.

15. T. B. Collins, Undated broadside used in J. D. Sayer's campaign for the office of governor of Texas (Sayers Papers, University of Texas Archives, Austin); Tom Green, Report of the Battle of Val Verde, February 22, 1862, quoted in *The War of the Rebellion*, Series I, Vol. IX, 522.

16. Confederate losses are reported in Tom Green, Report of the Battle of Val Verde; Union losses are reported in Ed. R. S. Canby to the Adjutant-General of the Army, Headquarters Department of New Mexico, Fort Craig, N. Mex., March 1, 1862, quoted in *The War of the Rebellion* Series I, Vol. IX, 493.

Santa Fe was taken with no resistance a few days later. Sibley paused to rest in the capital, but he knew that he had to take Fort Union to secure his position. He sent a detachment under the command of Col. Scurry to do the job, but they met unexpected resistance at Glorieta Pass. A desperate battle ensued in which the Yankees were forced to retreat, but the Southerners lost their equipment and many lives and were likewise forced to pull back to Albuquerque.¹⁷

Before Sibley's force could begin another thrust, word reached the Confederate leaders that a large body of Federal troops were advancing toward New Mexico from Missouri, while from the South Canby, aware that reinforcements were coming, was moving toward Albuquerque with his reorganized army. Sibley convened a council of war to consider the alternatives: defeat, surrender, or retreat. Since the Southern cause was far from lost in the spring of 1862, the council made the logical choice of returning to Texas where the men of the Brigade could be employed in other battles. On April 12 the Texans began the long trek home.¹⁸

The retreat was a series of indescribable horrors. An outbreak of smallpox decimated the ranks, supplies were nonexistent, and water was scarce. Sibley on April 30 abandoned the Brigade and hurried to Fort Bliss and safety, leaving Tom Green to command the men on the long homeward march. Green succeeded despite Indians, loss of horses, disease and discouragement. During June and July, 1862, the once-proud army straggled into San Antonio.¹⁹

17. W. R. Scurry to Maj. A. M. Jackson [Assistant Adjutant-General, Army of New Mexico], Santa Fe, N. Mex., March 31, 1862, *The War of the Rebellion*, Series I, Vol. IX, 542-545. For the accounts of this battle see "Confederate Reminiscences," *NEW MEXICO HISTORICAL REVIEW*, V (July 1930), 315-324, and J. F. Santee, "The Battle of La Glorieta Pass," *NEW MEXICO HISTORICAL REVIEW*, VI (January 1931), 66-75.

18. George H. Pettis, "The Confederate Invasion of New Mexico and Arizona," quoted in Horn and Wallace, eds., *Union Army Operations in the Southwest* (Albuquerque, N.M.: Horn and Wallace Publishers, 1961), 139.

19. Noel, *Campaign*, 33; Noel, *Autobiography*, 63-64. Perhaps this treatment of Sibley is rather harsh, for in his younger days Sibley had been a good man and a brave soldier. By 1861-1862, however, he seems to have taken to drink heavily. After the New Mexican fiasco, Sibley was given a staff position under E. Kirby Smith and Dick Taylor in the Confederate Army of the Trans-Mississippi West.

In November 1862 the "Texas Volunteer Cavalry," as the Sibley Brigade was rechristened, united at Hempstead, Texas, after a long furlough. Sibley himself did not return, and wags in the unit spread the rumor that the general had crawled into a jug of whiskey and pulled the stopper in behind him. Their new commander was Colonel James Reily.²⁰

Before the Brigade could be sent to Louisiana where it was desperately needed, Galveston was occupied by the Northerners as part of the Federal strategy to blockade the South. Gen. J. B. Magruder, Confederate commander of the District of Texas, determined to retake the town. He secured two small channel steamers, the *Neptune* and the *Bayou City*, and lined their sides with bales of cotton for protection from small arms fire. A call for volunteers to man the craft was fruitless in Houston, whereupon Tom Green offered to command them if his own men from his regiment could go with him. Magruder gratefully accepted the offer, and a plan of action was arranged.²¹

On December 31 all was ready. At Harrisburg Green and his men boarded the small vessels and set out down the channel. The battle for Galveston commenced the following morning, January 1, 1863, at 4:30 A.M. with an attack by Magruder's land force. Under cover of darkness and the protection of the guns of the nearby Federal fleet, the Northern troops had the best of the fight. Toward dawn Magruder was considering a withdrawal when a cry arose from the attacking Texans, "Green's coming! The fleet's in sight!"²²

The Union naval commanders turned their attention to the approaching steamers and opened fire. The *Neptune* was hit amidship, broke in half, and quickly sank, but the water was so shallow that when the boat settled to the bottom of the bay the Texans aboard it could stand on deck and not get wet. Green, in personal command of the other Confederate steamer, the *Bayou City*, ordered the equivalent of a charge.

20. Noel, *Autobiography*, 99.

21. Noel, *Campaign*, 41.

22. Spencer Ford, "Oration delivered by Hon. Spencer Ford, in the Capitol, at the Funeral Ceremonies, over the Remains of Maj. Gen. Tom Green," *Tom Green Scrapbook*.

His ship rammed the *Harriet Lane*, a large Federal gunboat, and at their commander's order the Texans stormed aboard. Green himself, pistol in hand, was one of the first members of the boarding party. Some thoughtful Texan cut the *Harriet Lane's* netting, the sails fell, and in a moment the gunboat surrendered. Green thereupon ordered the ship's guns turned on the other Federal craft in the harbor, which the Texans willingly did with good results. One Union ship was sunk by the fire and another, filled with supplies, captured. The others quickly sailed away. The Massachusetts troops ashore, seeing their naval support gone, quickly surrendered, and Galveston was once again in Confederate hands.²³

The Brigade returned to Hempstead shortly thereafter, and a month later marched for Louisiana where Union General Nathaniel P. Banks was vigorously pursuing the Southern points. On April 7, 1863, at Berwick Bay the Texans united with the retreating Confederate troops commanded by Maj. Gen. Dick Taylor, son of Zachary Taylor of Mexican War fame. A series of engagements followed in which the Brigade acquitted itself bravely and slowed the retreat. Col. Reily was killed in the skirmish at Camp Bisland, and Green as surviving senior officer assumed command. His action was officially confirmed by an order of April 13 and his force renamed the First Cavalry Brigade, but unofficially it was known as Green's Division.²⁴

A newspaperman, writing about Green's efforts during Taylor's retreat, stated that the hero of Val Verde was "fighting the enemy from dawn till dark, watching from dark till the ensuing morn, disputing every foot of ground, burning every bridge (himself the last to cross); in sight and in range of the enemy's guns, he and his men were constantly on duty, often forty-eight hours without either rest

23. Philip C. Tucker, "United States Gunboat *Harriet Lane*," *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, XXI (April 1913), 366; Richard B. Irwin, "The Capture of Port Hudson," *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War* (4 vols., New York: The Century Co., 1884), III, 586-587.

24. Ford, "Funeral Oration;" Noel, *Campaign*, 127.

or food.”²⁵ Taylor gave credit where it was due; he called Green the “Ney—the Shield and Buckler” of his army and recommended the Texan for promotion. On May 4, 1863, Green received the coveted star of a brigadier general.²⁶

When Banks grew tired of pursuing Taylor’s force, both Federals and Confederates encamped to rest. Green and his Texans, however, began a series of hard-hitting, fast-moving guerilla raids which lasted six months and brought hope to many discouraged Southerners in the Louisiana area. Riding mules because of their greater endurance, the Texans would strike, ride scores of miles without resting, and unexpectedly strike again. Soon Green’s exploits made his name a household word throughout Louisiana and Texas, and his fame spread across the victory-starved South. Green’s Division gained victory after victory, and a steady stream of prisoners and captured supplies flowed into Taylor’s headquarters. At Brashear City on June 23, Green and his cavalry surprised a numerically superior foe, defeated them decisively, took 1,800 prisoners, recaptured two to three thousand Negro slaves who had been employed in work parties by the Federals, and dispatched three million dollars worth of badly needed commissary and quartermaster supplies, along with twelve pieces of artillery, to Taylor. The Texans in this engagement suffered only three killed and twenty-one wounded, a tribute to Green’s careful planning and daring execution of the raid.²⁷

Similar exploits at LaFourche, Morgan’s Ferry, and Borbeaux followed. Green, although almost fifty years old, amazed his men by his powers of endurance and the cheerfulness with which he submitted to the hardships and privations they suffered; he inspired his troops with the same spirit and spurred them on to greater exertions.²⁸

Gen. Banks, tiring of his losses in Louisiana, decided to

25. E. H. Cushing, unidentified newspaper clipping, *Tom Green Scrapbook*.

26. *Ibid.*

27. Green, official “Report,” quoted in Noel, *Campaign*, 51-53.

28. Pendleton Murrah, “Oration Delivered by Gov. P. Murrah, in the Capitol, at the Funeral Ceremonies over the Remains of Maj. Gen. Tom Green,” *Tom Green Scrapbook*.

attack the Rebels at a different point: the Lower Rio Grande Valley. Magruder sent urgent pleas from Texas to his superiors for additional troops to aid in expelling the intruders, and Green's Division was ordered home in December. They arrived in Houston from Louisiana on Christmas Day, 1863, and Green was named commander of Galveston Island. When it became apparent that no attack would come at that point, the Division moved to Hempstead once again and encamped. It was there on February 18, 1864, that the men were cheered by news that Taylor had recommended Green for promotion to major general.²⁹

Gen. Banks was not resting, however. In Louisiana he was assembling a force of 27,000 men with the intention of moving up the Red River and capturing the fertile East Texas farm area and the factories at Marshall and Henderson. To counter this threat, Confederate strategists ordered Taylor to move against the Federals. Green's Division on March 5, 1864, took a hasty farewell of family, friends, and home and set out for Louisiana to aid in the counterthrust. They joined Taylor on April 5 at Mansfield.³⁰

As the Federals advanced, the overconfident Banks had stretched his army the length of a day's march along a narrow road running through a pine forest. Taylor was aware of the exposed position of the Yankees and deployed his troops accordingly. Four miles from Mansfield eleven thousand Rebels concealed themselves on April 8 along the edge of the trees facing the road. Green and part of his division spent the morning harassing the Union advance in order to give Taylor time to properly locate his men. Then, when all was ready, the Texans withdrew to the ambush site and joined their comrades.³¹

29. Ford, "Funeral Oration," Noel, *Campaign*, 74, 130; Ezra J. Warner, *Generals in Gray* (Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University Press, 1959), 117, 376. Warner comments that Green was referred to as a major general in the *Official Records of the War of the Rebellion*, but that no record of his promotion to that rank has ever been found.

30. Thomas O. Selfridge, "The Navy in the Red River," *Battles and Leaders*, IV, 369; Richard B. Irwin, "The Red River Campaign," *Battles and Leaders*, IV, 352.

31. Irwin, "The Red River Campaign," 352; Ford, "Funeral Oration;" Murrah, "Funeral Oration."

To the tune of Dixie, played by an improvised band, the battle commenced about four in the afternoon. The Confederates poured a withering fire into the enemy ranks, and the Northern troops in confusion turned and fled down the road along which they had been advancing. Union teamsters abandoned the supply wagons and joined in the retreat, compounding the chaos and hampering the desperate Federal officers as they tried to restore order. Shortly before dark the Northerners attempted to make use of their artillery, but Green ordered a charge that overran the guns, captured them, and set the Yankees to flight once more. During the decisive battle at Mansfield, the Union army suffered 1,500 killed or wounded, 2,000 more were captured, and the Confederates took twenty pieces of artillery, two hundred wagons loaded with supplies, and thousands of small arms.³²

On the night of April 9, the Confederate leaders decided to leave Green and his division to watch and harass Banks' withdrawal, while the main body of Taylor's troops hastened northward to aid in blocking a threatened invasion of North Texas from Arkansas by Union Maj. Gen. Frederick Steele and 17,000 Yankees.³³

On the morning of April 12 Green's scouts reported that a Union gunboat, the *Osage*, had run aground in the nearby Red River. Arriving at Blair's Landing, the Texan commander found the gunboat had freed itself and had been joined by two other boats. He posted three pieces of artillery on a nearby hill and planned his attack. Then loosing a withering fire of musketry at a distance of one hundred yards, the Texans commenced the battle. The Union gunboats countered with grape and canister shot with telling effect. Green saw that the unequal contest could not long continue without serious Confederate losses and decided to take a desperate gamble. He called for a charge. Placing himself at the head of his men, he told them he would show them how to fight and called on them to follow him. The Texans

32. Irwin, "The Red River Campaign," 354; Harry M. Henderson, *Texas in the Confederacy* (San Antonio: The Naylor Company, 1955), 59-60; Collins, *Campaign Broadside*.

33. Irwin, "The Red River Campaign," 355-356.

jumped into their saddles and with Rebel yells set out. Some forty yards from the *Osage* a cannon shell struck Gen. Green in the forehead, tearing away the upper portion of his skull and killing him instantly. Shortly thereafter the Texans ceased their attack and withdrew, but they had succeeded in carrying out their assignment. Banks' scheme to capture East Texas had failed.³⁴

Green's body was returned to Austin where it lay in state in the chamber of the Hall of Representatives for three days. On May 2 he was interred in his family burial plot in Oakwood Cemetery in Austin. The great men of the state gathered to pay homage to the departed hero in one of the largest funeral ceremonies ever accorded a Texan.³⁵

Tom Green lived under four of the six flags of Texas and fought under three of them. He personally participated in almost every major event which transpired in the Lone Star State between 1835 and 1864, doing his duty to his family, state, and nation. His name is inseparably linked with the past of Texas, a past he helped create and direct.

Yet Green possessed a strange temperament for a military hero. During times of peace he was content to farm at LaGrange and to sit quietly copying documents as clerk of the Supreme Court. He was well-educated, quiet and sober, and moved in the best circles of early Texas society. In war, however, he was as brave and daring as the most fool-hardy. He would lay aside his pen and his quiet ways and hasten to participate in the battle, always at the forefront of the struggle. In an age of roughnecks—and many of the heroes of early Texas were rough and unpolished—Green assumed the leadership and commanded the respect and loyalty of the frontiersmen as much by the force of his personality as by his bravery. Tom Green the quiet law clerk and Tom Green the daring military figure were two very different men, but both were successful and respected.

34. *Ibid.*, 356-357; Selfridge, "The Navy in the Red River," 363-364; "Account of the Battle of Blair's Landing," unidentified newspaper clipping, *Tom Green Scrapbook*.

35. "Funeral Obsequis of Gen. Tom Green," unidentified newspaper clipping, *Tom Green Scrapbook*.