

Victoria, Texas, Units that Served in the Civil War

Charles D. Spurlin

On the eve of the Civil War, Victoria was a prosperous, thriving commercial center with visions of becoming even more affluent. Since the 1840s steamboats laden with goods for the western trade plied the Guadalupe River and made regular visits to the town. By 1861, the San Antonio and Mexican Gulf Railway was established between Victoria and Port Lavaca, the first link in a commercial chain that the owners of the railroad intended to link the Alamo City with the coastal shipping trade.

Politically, Victoria was an avid supporter of the States' rights doctrine. Victorians who saw commercial opportunities were reluctant to accept any protective trade laws emanating out of the central government. Furthermore, the county's slave owners firmly stood against any northern opposition restricting bondsmen from the territories. However, most disturbing at the moment was the belief the newly elected president Abraham Lincoln, considered to be a Black Republican, would push for the abolishment of slavery. Consequently, local residents, be they slave owners or not, strongly supported the States' rights doctrine. Many present day Victorians find little difficulty in relating to their predecessors views on States' rights.

As the war clouds began to thicken after South Carolina seceded from the Union in late 1860, Victorians assumed considerable interest in the national news and speculated as to how the community would be affected. Some of the citizens quickly concluded that should Texas secede they would be prepared to defend their country.

As the political events unfolded, a Secession Convention convened, and on February 1, 1861, the delegates voted 174 to 7 to secede. The Victoria district

representatives, State District Judge Fielding Jones of Victoria and William R. Scurry from DeWitt County, cast their ballots with the majority. Afterwards, Victoria County with about a forty percent voter turnout accepted the Ordinance of Secession 313 to 88.

Victor Rose, a Victoria County resident, newspaperman, and historian, in an assessment of the community's attitude wrote in his *History of Victoria County* that Victorians were as enthusiastic for war. . ."as if years of oppression had driven them to the stern necessity." He added that if the residents were asked why they were so zealous for war, the reply was "To whip the Yankees." Rose pointed out that resistance in the county to war, where it could be found, came from the older naturalized residents who possessed strong feelings for their oath of allegiance to the United States. In a personal assessment of the unfolding event he stated, "Folly was toppling a great State into needless, ruinous, rebellion. We repudiated the counsels of Sam Houston, Jack Hamilton, J. W. Throckmorton; John Hancock, and other Texans, to follow the magpie chattering of South Carolina's pigmy so-called statesmen. . . .There was never a more causeless war,—and a fearful responsibility for its consequences rests on the Yankee abolitionists. It seemed that some devil,—he must have been a South Carolina devil,—concealed from view, manipulated events upon the Southern chess board to suit his own malign purpose." Despite Rose's misgivings to the war, he served with distinction in Ross' Texas Brigade.

Soon after Texas entered the Confederacy on March 2, 1861, the Victoria Cavalry Company, Twenty-fourth Texas Cavalry Brigade, was organized for local defense purposes. The commander of the unit was James E. Ferguson, a Methodist minister who had lived in the county since 1857. He was the father of future governor James E.

“Farmer Jim” Ferguson. Composed primarily of married men who claimed regular service would interfere with their personal affairs, the company drilled four times a week so as to be prepared to defend the area from federal forces.

By the end of May, a second company was formed under the guidance of Victoria County Sheriff George J. Hampton. Originally the unit was known as the “Victoria Blues,” probably because some of men possessed blue uniforms acquired from the federal government.

After Gen. Henry H. Sibley, a former U. S. Army officer now serving in the Confederate service, arrived at San Antonio in the summer of 1861 and began organizing a brigade, Hampton and his comrades officially joined Sibley’s unit on September 11, 1861, as Company C, Fourth Regiment Texas Mounted Volunteers. Meanwhile, the Victorians renamed the company “Victoria Invincible.”

In October 1861, Company C left San Antonio and marched to New Mexico. The first significant engagement the Victorians experienced was at Valverde, New Mexico, in February 1862. Lt. Col. William Scurry, regimental commander in the absence of Col. James Reily who was on a diplomatic mission in Mexico, encouraged the men, as reported by Lt. Charles C. Linn, a member of Company C and the son of Victoria’s first mayor John. J. “Juan” Linn, by yelling “Come on, My Boys. Come On, My Ragged Texians.” Although they were intensely involved in the fight, only eight Victorians, Hampton included, were wounded, none mortally.

After the Battle of Valverde, the Texans moved northward to Albuquerque and Santa Fe. On March 26, 1862, at Apache Canyon, the opposing forces collided in combat. The next day, the Victorians arrived at the scene of action as reinforcements.

By March 28, the fighting shifted to Glorieta Pass. After a fierce struggle in which a high percentage of officers of the Fourth Texas Cavalry Regiment were killed or wounded, the Confederates retreated. The Victoria Company's losses were three killed and three wounded. Because of his heroic deeds at the battles of Valverde and Glorieta, Hampton was promoted to major. Before the war ended, the former Victoria County sheriff became a colonel and commanded the Fourth Texas Cavalry Regiment.

Having failed to conquer New Mexico, Sibley ordered the brigade to return to Texas. During the summer of 1862, the men staggered into San Antonio. The journey from El Paso to the Alamo City was extremely hard, even for the toughest Victorian. When the Texans commenced the trek, their food supplies and clothing were inadequate for a long journey as they were to embark upon. Pete Fagan, a member of the "Victoria Invincible," remarked, "The men were suffering terribly from the heat, very many of are a-foot, and scarcely able to travel from blistered feet. They were subsisting on bread and water, both officers and men; many of them sick, many ragged, and all hungry; but we did not see a gloomy face—not one." By the middle of July, the company reached San Antonio, and a couple of weeks later arrived in Victoria to await assignment.

In the fall of 1862, Company C was ordered to the Trans-Mississippi Department and became a part of Gen. Thomas Green's Cavalry Brigade. As an element in Green's Brigade, the Victorians actively served in the battlefield operations of western Louisiana. Occasionally, however, the brigade, or portions of it, spent time in eastern Texas.

When news reached the Fourth Texas Cavalry Regiment that the military structure east of the Mississippi was collapsing, its members, Victorians included, defiantly adopted on April 27, 1865, at Independence, Texas, a resolution vowing to fight

to the end and invited all Confederate troops outside the state to join with them. But, whether the Texans liked it or not, there was to be no further fighting for the Fourth Texas Cavalry Regiment.

Also organized for Confederate service at Victoria in 1861 was Company B, Sixth Texas Infantry Regiment, commanded by Capt. Jacob A. Rupley, a local businessman and a former resident of Pennsylvania. Company B was the only Victoria unit to serve east of the Mississippi River. Before leaving the state, the regiment trained for eight months at Camp Henry E. McCulloch, four miles north of Victoria. During its encampment in the community, the Male Academy was paid fifty dollars a month by the city to serve as the regimental hospital.

One of the recruits who trained at Camp McCulloch was R. R. Gilbert, a former newspaperman. Under the name of “High Private”, he applied his journalistic abilities by writing a series of satirical letters to the *Victoria Advocate* describing camp life. In a January 16, 1862, article, Gilbert gave the location of the encampment as a central one where “you can start from it and go to any part of the world—with a furlough.” His version of the Confederate oath was, “Do you solemnly swear that you will stay in the army as long as the war lasts, and fight to the best of your ability; that you will not growl at your rations, and be content with eleven dollars a month, whether you get them or not, so help you God?” The “High Private” also had a few choice comments about army regulations. He wrote, “army regulations require that every soldier shall keep his hair cut short. This cost 25 cents a month. Again, every one who acts irreverently, while the chaplain is officiating, has a Yankee shilling, or 16 2/3 cents, deducted from his pay, and he who swears an oath is mulcted in the sum of 16 2/3 cents for each swear. During the

first month, I smiled once in meeting, and my liver being out of order, the number of swears for that month aggregated two each day.

“The result: High Private to the Southern Confederacy...:

“For Barber’s Bill, one month, 25 cents.

“For one ‘irreverently,’ 16 $\frac{2}{3}$ cents.

“For 62 swears at 16 $\frac{2}{3}$ cents each, \$10.34.

“For Laundress, 50 cents per week, \$2.00.

“For Company Cook, 25 cents.

“The total is \$13.00 $\frac{2}{3}$ cents. Less one month’s pay, \$11, leaving balance due the Confederate States of America, \$2.00 $\frac{2}{3}$ cents.

“As eternal vigilance is the price of liberty, I immediately commenced reforming and engaged an enterprising individual to do my swearing at an enormous discount, left off going to church, and made arrangements to do my own cooking and washing.”

While training progressed at Camp McCulloch, Col. Garland asked a group of Victoria ladies to design and make an appropriate flag for the regiment. The women on the grounds they lacked the necessary materials declined, but Mrs. Richard Owens, the wife of a local merchant, with the help of her daughters assumed the challenge. The finished product was made of red merino with a border of white silk fringe. A blue shield, 28 by 36 inches, containing thirteen white stars was situated in the middle. Twelve of the stars were arranged along the border of the shield, six on each side, and a large star, to symbolize the Lone Star State, dominated the center. Stitched at the bottom of the flag with white silk was “Sixth Texas Infantry Regiment. Before Mrs. Owens completed the flag, the regiment broke camp and marched to Arkansas. It was delivered

to Garland while the regiment was at Arkansas Post. Unfortunately, the flag was taken as war booty by federal troops when the Confederates surrendered the fort in January 1863.

After the capitulation of Arkansas Post, the Confederate prisoners of war were transferred up the Mississippi by steamboat to military prisons at Camp Butler, Illinois, Camp Chase, Ohio, and Camp Douglas, Illinois. During the spring of 1863, a prisoner exchange was made. In May 1863, The Sixth, Tenth, and Fifteenth Texas Regiments were consolidated. However, later in the war the Tenth Texas Infantry Regiment again became an independent unit. During the following month, the consolidated unit was assigned to Gen. Patrick R. Cleburne's Division in the Army of Tennessee. As a part of the division, the consolidated regiment participated in the engagements at Chickamauga in September 1863.

After Chickamauga, the regiment was assigned to Col. Hiram B. Granbury's Brigade and fought in the Chattanooga Campaign. Although the fighting ended in a defeat for the Southern forces, the one bright spot for the Confederates was the manner in which the Texans held its position at Missionary Ridge under intense Union pressure. The unit was eventually forced to retreat when the federals broke through other Confederate entrenchments and left the Texans' flanks exposed.

The Army of Tennessee withdrew to Georgia. In the spring and summer of 1864, it engaged in the Battle of Atlanta. In this campaign, the Sixth Texas, now known as the "Bloody Sixth," was a vital cog in the Confederate defenses around the city. Despite heavy casualties to the regiment, the men fought stubbornly to halt the federal advance. Fighting was so intense at times; the unit was commanded by five different men in a two day period. On May 29, Capt. B. R. Tyus was wounded and Capt. Rhodes Fisher

assumed command. The next day Fisher was wounded and forced to relinquish command to Capt. M. M. Houston who lasted only ten minutes before being killed. Capt. R. R. Rice took charge and shortly afterwards became a casualty whereupon 1st Lieut. T. S. Flynt became the regimental commander.

During the fighting in Georgia and Tennessee, Victorian Jacob Fox won the distinction of being the most wounded soldier in Company B. On July 21, he either received shrapnel or a bullet but remained on active duty. On September 1, Fox was hit again. He, nevertheless, continued to be an effective member of the company. Later, on November 30, he lost a forefinger at Franklin, Tennessee, but shortly afterwards returned to duty.

After the Georgia Campaign, the Army of Tennessee moved into Tennessee and fought at Franklin and Nashville. At Nashville, the Confederate army was routed and retreated to Mississippi where Gen. Joseph E. Johnston assumed command from Gen. John B. Hood. Afterwards, the army intermittently marched to North Carolina. In the Carolina Campaign of 1865, Johnston's strategy was essentially one of retreat, hold, and retreat. Because the ranks of the Army of Tennessee were continually depleted from its encounters with the federals, it was restructured. Under the reorganization setup, the Sixth, Seventh, Tenth, and Fifteenth Texas Infantry Regiments were consolidated with the Seventeenth, Eighteenth, Twenty-fourth, and Twenty-fifth Texas Dismounted Cavalry Regiments. The new command was designated the First Texas Infantry Regiment and assigned to Gen. D. C. Govan's Brigade, Gen. John C. Brown's Division.

On April 26, 1865, Johnston, his army in rags with little food and military supplies, formally surrendered to Gen. William T. Sherman. Confederate officer Maj.

Gen. John C. Breckinridge, an 1860 Democratic presidential candidate, was present at the meeting between Johnston and Sherman. All three men were old acquaintances. A bottle of liquor was acquired for social drinks. The more the men drank the more elegant Breckinridge's comments became on the surrender terms. Finally, Sherman stated, "Hold on Breckinridge. If you get one more drink inside you, you'll talk me into surrendering to Johnston."

In the spring of 1862 on the Garcitas Creek east of Victoria, a third Victoria company was formed to serve in the Confederate army under the command of Dr. James B. P. January, a local physician. Within a year, he resigned and Reed N. Weisiger, a member of a prominent Victoria family, became the company commander. When the unit entered Confederate service on April 18, its members affectionately referred to it as the "Jim Scott Rangers," but officially it was Company A, Thirteenth Texas Cavalry Battalion. Maj. Edwin Waller Jr., the son of the first mayor of Austin, was the battalion commander.

After the company was organized, it moved to Hempstead and united with the other companies in the battalion. In July, the unit broke camp and moved toward western Louisiana, reaching its destination in the latter part of August. Except for two companies of Louisiana infantry, Waller's Battalion was the only Confederate force in the western sector of the state in the closing months of 1862.

In the early part of 1863, Green's Brigade, after the ill-fated New Mexico campaign, arrived in Louisiana. Waller's Battalion was attached to it and remained, except for occasional detached duty, as an integral part of the brigade until shortly before the war ended. While stationed in Louisiana, the Victoria company performed numerous

guerrilla raids against the federal army. By far the most significant Louisiana engagements Company A participated in were the Battles of Mansfield and Pleasant Hill. In the early spring of 1864, Gen. Nathaniel P. Banks, commander of the Union forces in Louisiana, began his Red River Campaign that was designed to invade Texas.

On April 8, at Sabine Cross-Roads, near Mansfield, Confederate Gen. Richard Taylor's forces engaged the advancing federal army. During the battle, Waller's Battalion was attached to Gen. James P. Major's Brigade and fought as dismounted cavalry. Following the struggle at Mansfield, the fighting continued at Pleasant Hill. Both engagements resulted in Banks aborting his attempt to invade Texas.

With the conclusion of the Red River Campaign, Company A resumed its customary small encounters with the enemy until the latter part of November when it returned to Texas. In the final stages of the war, the company traversed the eastern part of the state without experiencing any action.

In early 1865, the battalion was elevated to regimental status. On March 30, it was integrated into Gen. Walter P. Lane's Brigade, Gen. William Steele's Division. Two months later, on May 20, Waller's Regiment was disbanded.

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