

Savage Frontier

Volume III

1840–1841

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Savage Frontier

Volume III
1840–1841

*Rangers, Riflemen, and
Indian Wars in Texas*

Stephen L. Moore

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH TEXAS PRESS
DENTON, TEXAS

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PO Box 311336
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Printed Library Materials, Z39.48.1984.



Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Moore, Stephen L.

Savage frontier III: rangers, riflemen, and Indian wars in Texas/
Stephen L. Moore.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN-10: 1-57441-228-0 (cloth:alk. paper)

ISBN-13: 978-1-57441-228-4 (cloth: alk. paper)

ISBN-10: 1-57441-229-9 (pbk: alk. paper)

ISBN-13: 978-1-57441-229-1 (pbk. alk. paper)

1. Indians of North America—Wars—Texas. 2. Indians of North
America—Texas—Government relations. 3. Texas Rangers—
History. 4. Frontier and pioneer life—Texas—History. 5. Texas—
Politics and government—1836–1846. I. Title

E78.T4 M675 2006

976.4—dc21

2002000480

*Cover design by Lindsay B. Behrens, based on Alan McCuller's Vol. I
creation. Layout and typesetting by Stephen L. Moore.*

Prologue

The first two volumes of *Savage Frontier* traced the evolution of the Texas Rangers during the revolution and in the post-revolutionary period, during which ranging companies began to operate within formal militia brigades. Other military forces on the Texas frontiers during the period of 1835–1839 included army, militiamen, mounted volunteers, and even allied Indian scouts and rangers.

Spurred by President Mirabeau Lamar's ethnic cleansing policy, the year 1839 was a record year for Texas Indian battles and for casualties. Thirty-three Texans had been killed and another fifty were wounded in conflicts with the Indians. In return, they claimed to have killed several times as many Native Americans. Texas military forces managed to drive most Shawnees and Cherokees across the Red River borders out of Texas—in line with Lamar's objective of ridding the country of Indians.

Kelsey Douglass, Edward Burleson, and Thomas Rusk were key leaders during 1838 and 1839. In 1840, command of the Texas Militia passed from Rusk—a veteran frontiersman—to Felix Huston, who had never been in an Indian fight.

By the end of 1839, only three companies of Texas Rangers remained in service. The Texas Militia would continue to be called up as needed, but the largest force in operation was the army's Frontier Regiment, or First Regiment of Infantry. Headed by Colonel Edward Burleson—and later Colonel William Cooke—the Frontier Regiment would be involved in much of the frontier action in 1841. The army also worked to negotiate the release of civilian hostages held by the Comanches and other Indian tribes.

One such attempt to release prisoners turned violent in San Antonio on March 19, 1840. Twelve Comanche chiefs and eighteen other Indians were killed at an old courthouse that became known as the Council House.

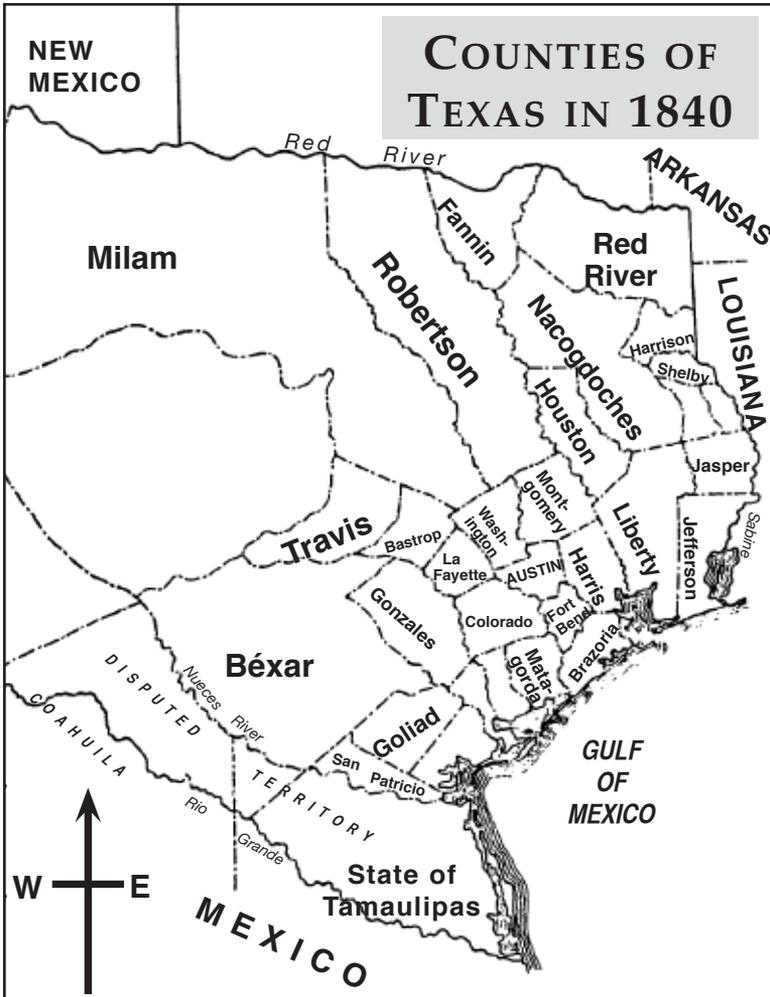
Later that summer—after acquiring more weapons—the Comanches made a retaliatory raid to the coast of Texas, killing, stealing cattle, and burning buildings in their path. Neophyte militia general Huston had his first big battle when these Comanches were engaged at Plum Creek in August 1840 during their retreat northward. Some of the more seasoned frontiersmen believed that Huston's inexperience prevented a crushing defeat of the Comanches.

John Henry Moore, who had led ranger expeditions in 1835 and 1839, led another ad hoc ranger expedition in the fall of 1840. This time, he surprised a large Comanche village on the Colorado River and killed most of its inhabitants. These deadly clashes in 1840 insured that the Comanches would remain stirred up against Texas settlers for many years.

The Texas Militia had little serious effect on the state of the Texas frontiers throughout the rest of the year. The army's Frontier Regiment's largest contribution was the building of a military road from the Austin area up to the Red River border—a road which roughly parallels the modern Interstate 35. This advancement helped to further open up settlements, but also further stirred relations with the Indians of northern Texas.

Militia leaders James Smith and Edward Tarrant—the namesakes of Texas counties—made new expeditions in 1841 into the areas of the Cross Timbers and the modern Dallas-Fort Worth areas to attack the Indians who had settled there. Another county namesake—Captain John Denton—was killed on one of these offensives in the area of the present Dallas—Fort Worth metroplex.

Ranging companies under John T. Price, Antonio Perez, and Jack Hays operated during the early months of 1841, but these units soon gave way to a new frontier force. Twenty special county “minuteman” companies were authorized for 1841. Traditional Texas Ranger companies during the previous six years had been commissioned to serve from three to twelve months in the field. In contrast, the newly authorized county minuteman companies could not stay in the field longer than fifteen consecutive days and their men could not serve more than four months



total. Fifteen of the twenty county companies are known to have formed, while three companies were never formed. If the other two counties did organize minuteman companies, the records of their existence have not been found.

Some of these units found conflict with frontier Indian tribes from the Red River area down to the southern coastal areas of Texas. Other units served less reputedly, preying on traders and rustling cattle in the southwest. Famed Texas Ranger leader Jack Hays led the Bexar County Minutemen after his ranging unit was

disbanded. Early rangers historian Walter Prescott Webb wrote in 1935 of Hays that “under his leadership the best tradition of the Texas Rangers was established.” More recently, Robert Utley wrote in his ranger history, “John Coffee Hays resonated through history as the ideal Texas Ranger, the one above all others every Ranger strove to emulate.”¹

Volume III of *Savage Frontier* seeks to straighten out the record on the early service of legendary Texas Ranger Jack Hays. His own 1840s written testimony later helped create much confusion for historians. He did not hold a formal ranger command in 1840, as one of his biographers has written. Use of his muster rolls, ranger pay rolls, and official reports helped to straighten out the true dates of his frontier battles. The much-debated battle at Enchanted Rock is also explored.

The introduction of the Colt repeating pistol in several engagements during these two years marked a major change in frontier warfare. The war of extermination of the Texas Indians did not end with President Lamar’s administration. The so-called “savages” of the Texas frontier had become the hunted in many cases, and deadly raids on their villages became more frequent. As with the previous volumes of *Savage Frontier*, Volume III does not seek to justify the persecutions or prejudices that prevailed in this time. My own ancestry includes militiamen, Texas Rangers, and also a Cherokee great-great-great grandmother.

For the continuation of the *Savage Frontier* series, I thank Ron Chrisman and his staff at the University of North Texas Press for their confidence. For his unwavering support, research assistance, and advice, Donaly Brice of the Texas State Archives deserves many kudos. Donaly was also kind enough to share some of his illustrations and research from his excellent book, *The Great Comanche Raid*. Special thanks are due to James Haley for his critical review of an early draft of the manuscript. Byron Johnson, Director of the Texas Ranger Hall of Fame and Museum in Waco, granted permission for inclusion of several key images for this volume. Finally, thank you to Patrick Lemelle of the University of Texas Institute of Texan Cultures at San Antonio and Jane Boyd of the University of Texas at Austin’s Center for American History for their work in providing several key illustrations.

CHAPTER 1

The Comanches

January–February 1840

Four unknown riders made their approach to the outskirts of San Antonio as the sun set low into the afternoon sky. Three wore the accoutrements of Comanche Indians—breechclout, leggings, moccasins, and buffalo skin robes to ward off the cool winter air. The fourth horse bore a small young captive, secured to his horse to prevent his escape.

The four riders were hailed by San Antonio citizens as they neared the edge of town. The Comanches cried out loudly for “Colonel Karnes,” demanding to speak with him.

The Indians were told to wait with their prisoner while someone was sent to fetch Karnes. The three Comanches who had thus entered San Antonio on January 9, 1840, sought to speak to a man familiar to their people from previous peace negotiations.

Although known to the Indians to seek peace, Colonel Henry Wax Karnes had also led several campaigns against the Comanches and other warlike Texas Indian tribes. A hero of the Texas Revolution, twenty-eight-year-old Karnes had consistently served as a leader of cavalry forces in and around the San Antonio area in the years following the battle of San Jacinto.

These Comanches were part of the Penateka (“Honey Eaters”) tribe, one of twelve regional bands of Comanche. Also known as the Wasps, the Penatekas survived largely on bison meat, and had migrated to the North Texas plains around 1700. As many as 40,000 Comanches had inhabited Texas soil in the peace of the

1780s, but epidemics that included cholera reduced their number to around 12,000 by the late 1830s.¹

San Antonio was heavily populated with Tejanos, Texas natives of Mexican ancestry. The old Alamo mission still stood—the compound whose fall had inspired the “remember the Alamo” rallying cry of the Texas Revolution. At times during the years following, various army troops had used the grounds for a fortress. The city itself was now an epicenter of activity in the growing Republic of Texas. To the west, traders moved toward the Rio Grande to ferry goods to and from Mexico. In the Hill Country north of San Antonio, the Comanches ranged over miles of unsettled land. They were accused, sometimes unjustly, of preying upon helpless travelers or plundering the traders who became more numerous each year. San Antonio was the largest community in close proximity to villages of the Penateka Comanches, who desired many of the items traded in that town.

The three Comanche riders were brought into town before Colonel Karnes on January 9 with their prisoner. In a letter written the next day, Karnes related the demands of the Indians.

On being introduced into my presence, the most distinguished amongst them—who appeared to be a priest—stated that he was deputed by his nation to solicit a peace. He further states, that eighteen days since, his tribe, in a general council, elected a distinguished Chief to treat with the Texians, who will visit the settlements on his return, should his report be favorable to him. He says that the nation will accept of peace on any terms, being sensible of their inability to contend with the Texian forces.²

Although encouraged by the desires of the Comanche nation to request a peace agreement, Henry Karnes was certainly at least a little wary. The Comanches were not afraid of Texas forces, as they had yet to incur any serious losses from fights with Texas frontiersmen or rangers.

The Comanches also stated to Karnes that they had rejected presents from the Cherokees, and also from the Centralist Mexican military command, who had sent emissaries among their people. Both parties sought to use the Comanches to stir up a general war against Texas settlers. Again, the word that the

Comanches had rebuffed the two opportunities to rise up against the Texans was taken with a grain of salt by Karnes.

“These statements may be true, but their known treachery and duplicity induces me to put but little faith in them,” wrote Karnes. The Indians left their captive behind, a young boy later identified as John Horn. His family had been attacked in April 1836, in the Nueces River valley. Thirteen men were killed, leaving two women and their young children to be taken prisoners by the Comanches. Mrs. Horn was ransomed in 1839 by traders, but her young son had been a prisoner so long that he had lost most of his ability to use the English language. He was at first believed to be a young Mexican man because of his appearance.³

Karnes decided not to hold the three Comanches as hostages. In good faith, he would send them back to their nation with the word that he was willing to treat with them. As was the usual custom, he presented the Indians with gifts of peace offerings to show his good intention. Henry Karnes had proved to be a man of his word in previous negotiations.

This time, he made his demands clear to the Comanches. “I told them that the Government would not enter into any treaty without the release of the American captives, and the restoration of all stolen property.”⁴

The Comanche priest took the message that Colonel Karnes desired to treat with the “principal chiefs” of their nation. The Indians promised Karnes that they would indeed gather their leaders and would return to San Antonio “in twenty or thirty days.” The following day, January 10, Colonel Karnes wrote to Texas Secretary of War Albert Sidney Johnston of his meeting with the Comanches. He was, at the very least, skeptical of their true desire for peace and the promise that they would bring in all of their white prisoners.

Karnes suggested that Johnston should immediately select “one or two commissioners to meet them here.” His own “indispensable business” required Karnes to make an immediate trip to New Orleans. In his absence, he requested that the commissioners treat with the Comanches in San Antonio.

Karnes further felt that the commissioners should be “accompanied by a force sufficient to justify our seizing and retaining those who may come in as hostages, for the delivery of such American captives as may at this time be among them.”

This statement showed the determination of Karnes to bring about an end to the depredations and kidnappings. If the Comanches failed to bring in the promised American prisoners, he advocated that all of their chiefs be held as hostages. It was a plan that set a new precedent in Indian negotiations, and one that led to great bloodshed.

Although it would be days before Karnes' letter made it into the hands of Secretary Johnston in Austin, its message would be taken to heart. In Karnes' defense, he was hoping to use the Republic's Frontier Regiment to recover Anglo captives without a fight. The Penateka Comanches, however, would rather die than surrender and be held publicly as prisoners.



State of the Texas Frontier System: January 1840

On the day that the Comanches rode into San Antonio, Colonel Edward Bureson was leading the Texas Army back toward Austin. At age forty-two, Colonel Bureson was already something of a legend in Texas. He had led militia forces in Missouri and Tennessee years before coming to Texas in 1830, where he had soon become lieutenant colonel of the militia in Stephen F. Austin's municipality. A hero of the Texas Revolution and the battle of San Jacinto, Bureson was also respected as a fearless Indian fighter.

His Frontier Regiment of Texas had been created in early 1839 to build frontier outposts and to protect the outlying settlements of Texas from Indian depredations. Consisting of a First Regiment of Infantry, a First Regiment of Cavalry, and an artillery division, Bureson's Frontier Regiment had been successful thus far in carrying out President Lamar's objective of driving out Indian tribes deemed to be hostile to Anglo Texian settlers. Bureson's men had fought with the Texas Militia and Texas Rangers during the Cherokee War of 1839, driving most of the Cherokees and Shawnees across the Texas borders. His army companies had also constructed and manned several frontier outposts during 1839.

Recruiting had continued during late 1839, until the Frontier Regiment numbered a little under 450 men by the start of 1840, which was about half of its designated strength. Colonel Bureson

Capt. Roberts' Rangers: September 16, 1839–March 16, 1840

<u>Captain:</u>	Jesse Kuykendall ²
Mark R. Roberts	Peter Maroney
<u>First Lieutenant:</u>	Jackson McFarland
Daniel R. Jackson	Charles McManus
<u>Second Lieutenant:</u>	Jackson Morrison
William E. Wiley	H. Morse
<u>First Sergeant:</u>	Samuel Moss
James Martin	David Mouser
<u>Second Sergeant:</u>	Henry Mouser
Gibson May	David Pettit
<u>Third Sergeant:</u>	William C. Rice
Alexander McKinney	E. C. Rogers
<u>Fourth Sergeant:</u>	James Rutland
Charles Quillen ¹	John L. Scantling
<u>First Corporal:</u>	James Seymore
Santiago Eusses	John Seymore
	William H. Stark
<u>Privates:</u>	John Stephen Sr.
John Anderson	John Stephens Jr. ³
Reed Anderson	Joseph Strickland
Jonathan Anthony	J. P. Thruston
Spencer Asberry	William C. Twitty
Carter Bean	William Tyler
Carter Bourland	John Van Dine
Nicholas Cantu	Whitfield Viles
William R. Caruthers	William Winlock
Jesse Case	
Thomas Cousins	
Jesse Cox	¹ Substitute for company's original second sergeant, William Bailey.
John Davis	² Substitute for William W. Boone.
William Dillingham	³ Substitute for R. Beck.
Jesse Francis	Source: Texas State Archives.
Thomas F. Gilbert	
Isaac Houston	
Samuel Johnson	

had led a little more than 200 of his troops out from Austin in December 1839 in company with Lipan scouts, under Chief Castro, and Tonkawa scouts under Chief Plácido. They fought a band of Comanches on Christmas Day and made their way back to Camp Caldwell near Austin by January 12, 1840.

Aside from this regular army, Texas was patrolled at the beginning of 1840 by only three companies of true Texas Rangers.

Capt. Black's Mounted Rangers: October 22, 1839–Jan. 29, 1840

<u>Captain:</u>	Benjamin P. C. Harrill
George K. Black	Peter W. Holmes ²
<u>First Lieutenant:</u>	Willis D. Howell ¹
Henry Rodgers	Benjamin A. James
<u>Quartermaster:</u>	Joshua Leach
James S. Gillett	Samuel A. McNutt ¹
<u>First Sergeant:</u>	Marcus P. Mead ¹
John S. Thompson	J. H. Moore ¹
<u>Second Lieutenant:</u>	Abraham Myers ²
William James	Nathaniel Newman ²
<u>Surgeon:</u>	David O'Kelly
John L. Douglass	N. S. Outlaw
	F. D. Pickens ²
<u>Privates:</u>	Richard Pollard
John Arnold	Stephenson Ramsey
Leonard A. Ashmore	John Henninger Reagan ²
Thomas Avon ¹	John Rowan
Edward Burns ¹	Milton Rowan
A. G. Conner	Jose Silvia
Uriah Conner	French Smith
David Cook ¹	Conrad Snider
Elihu D. Cook ¹	Miles Stacey
Joseph Thomas Cook Sr. ¹	Benjamin F. Ward
Joseph Thomas Cook Jr. ¹	George Washington Welsh ²
Joseph Dickerson ²	Samuel W. Wilds
George S. Downs	
William L. Dupree ¹	¹ Enlisted into company on Dec. 1, 1839.
Solomon K. Flynn	² Enlisted January 10, 1840.
George N. Gibson ¹	Source: Texas State Archives.

They were commanded by captains Mark R. Roberts, George K. Black, and John William Lane. Roberts, who had settled along the Red River shortly after his arrival in Texas in March 1836, had taken command in September 1839. His fifty-two-man company operated out of Camp Warren in Fannin County.

Captain Black's Nacogdoches County Mounted Rangers of the Third Militia Brigade were mustered into service on October 22, 1839. Black had served on General Thomas Rusk's 1838 expedition into the Cherokee Nation and had been first lieutenant of Captain Peter Tipps' company during the 1839 Cherokee War. His ranger company had twenty-six rangers at its formation, with another dozen joining on December 1.

Capt. Lane's Mounted Rangers: August 15, 1839–Feb. 16, 1840*Captain:*

John William Lane

Joseph Moore

Josephus Moore

A. Joseph L. Page

Privates:

T. H. Anthony

Elias Page ¹Albert E. Ray ¹

Francis C. Baker

Henry Reel

William H. Bobo

Jacob Taylor ²

Henry Bull

M. H. Ussery

Hulett H. Farmer

Isaac Walters ¹John Ferguson ¹E. Frazier ¹¹ Served from Sept. 23–Dec. 24, 1839.

Gabriel Frazier

² Served from Aug. 15, 1839–February 16, 1840.

Hezekiah George

L. M. Grace ¹

J. G. Hayes

Source: F. C. Baker PD, R 135, F 36–71;
William Lane PD, R 167, F 250–73.Henry B. Kelsey ¹Partial roster created via search of
Republic era records.Daniel Minor ¹

While in service, Captain Black's rangers constructed Cook's Fort in the former Cherokee territory where Chief Bowles' tribe had recently been ejected. The company ranged the areas of present Houston and Nacogdoches counties while they built Cook's Fort during the winter of 1839–1840. The site was about three miles northwest of the present town of Rusk, located in Cherokee County. It was named for Joseph Thomas Cook Sr., a member of Captain Black's company. Cook, who lived in the community of Douglass outside of Nacogdoches, had also served in Captain Michael Costley's 1836 ranger company which had worked on Fort Houston.⁵

An additional seven men enlisted under Captain Black on January 10, 1840, likely to participate in a scout or expedition that moved out. Black's rangers were back in Nacogdoches on January 29 and—having completed their three-month enlistment with a week to spare—his unit was disbanded.

The third Texas Ranger unit still in existence at the turn of the year served in the Fourth Militia Brigade under Captain John William Lane. His men had been organized on August 15, 1839, in the wake of the Cherokee War. Some of his unit completed three months of service on Christmas Eve 1839 and were discharged. At least seven of his company continued to serve into

February of 1840, however, and were the only rangers in service in North Texas at the time.

The life of a ranger in 1840 was not for everyone. Former New Yorker Nelson Lee spent his early years at sea before coming to Texas in 1840. He became involved with various ranger companies and scouting expeditions shortly after his arrival. In his 1859 memoirs, he describes the characteristics of the early Texas Rangers.

The condition of affairs necessarily resulted in bringing into existence the Texas Rangers, a military order as peculiar as it has become famous. The extensive frontier exposed to hostile inroads, together with the extremely sparse population of the country, rendered any other force of comparatively small avail. The qualifications necessary in a genuine Ranger were not, in many respects, such as are required in the ordinary soldier. Discipline, in the common acceptance of the term, was not regarded as absolutely essential. A fleet horse, an eye that could detect the trail, a power of endurance that defied fatigue, and the faculty of "looking through the double sights of his rifle with a steady arm,"—these distinguished the Ranger, rather than any special knowledge of tactics.⁶

With these three ranger companies, Colonel Bureson's Frontier Regiment was left to defend all of the frontier of Texas in early 1840. Two days after his regiment had reached Camp Caldwell, Bureson went on into Austin on January 14. Since becoming the Republic's capital, Austin boasted a population in January 1840 of 711 men, women, and children, plus another 145 slaves.⁷

Upon his arrival, Bureson learned of an uproar within Congress concerning his most recent Northwestern Campaign. From John Bowles' camp, he had retrieved the military hat of the late Chief Bowles, who had been killed in the 1839 Cherokee War campaign in present Van Zandt County. With some of the plunder, Bureson sent along the "cocked hat of the distinguished friend of General Sam Houston, Colonel Bowles."

Colonel Bureson sent Bowles' hat to Colonel Hugh McLeod, the adjutant general, with a special note. Since the hat had origi-

nated from Houston, "I especially request you to present it to him from me as a compliment."

Sam Houston was insulted and called for the dismissal of Hugh McLeod from office. The debate raged for some time, but Houston eventually withdrew his resolution when no member of the House would agree to vote for it. In the protest, it was revealed that Chief Bowles had been given a vest and sword by Sam Houston, but that the hat was a gift from an agent of the Mexican government.⁸

Burleson's Northwestern Campaign and the recent ventures out against the Comanches by Henry Karnes and John Neill's forces had somewhat calmed the central Texas frontier. Such strong showings of force had convinced frontier hostiles that raids on the inadequately defended Mexican settlements further south were more desirous.

Upon his return to Austin, Colonel Burleson decided that the frontier was in "a prosperous condition" and that his services were no longer necessary as supreme commander of the Frontier Regiment. Writing to President Mirabeau Lamar on January 29, Burleson tendered his resignation to spend time with his wife and children. He remained in Austin several more days to assist in the transfer of command to his number two man, Lieutenant Colonel William Fisher.⁹

As events unfolded, Burleson's resignation would be short-lived. Increased depredations by the Comanches and several major happenings with the Indians during the upcoming weeks would cause him to reconsider his resignation.

President Lamar's administration continued to support the frontier Indian wars into 1840. Although the value of the Republic's currency was rapidly declining, the Fourth Congress held the hope that they might be able to secure a foreign loan. To support Texas military forces in 1840, the Congress appropriated \$1,620,169 on February 3, 1840. Fisher's army was allowed \$1,056,369, only slightly less than the 1839 appropriation—which had not been fully spent.¹⁰

The appropriations were clearly broken down by infantry, cavalry, and for all army expenses that could be incurred. The funding provided for twelve infantry companies of up to 494 private soldiers and seven cavalry companies of up to 392 mounted cavalymen each.

These military appropriations were given in spite of the fact that the Republic of Texas' currency value was on a steady decline. The recently elected Fourth Congress had seen progress with the new army's organization and with the Indian offensives that Lamar's forces had carried out on the frontier in late 1839. There was a rising tide of voters, however, who were not happy with other aspects of President Lamar's administration.

Mexico had never fully recognized Texas' independence and the Mexicans had hinted that they would again try to establish sovereignty over Texas. Lamar had tried in vain to obtain a five-million-dollar loan to control the rising inflation and financial insecurity in Texas, but had come up empty handed.¹¹

In spite of these political failures, President Lamar's military policies remained largely supported going into 1840, allowing his army and ranger forces to continue their frontier war.



Johnston orders Fisher to San Antonio

From Austin, Secretary of War Albert Sidney Johnston issued orders on January 30 to Lieutenant Colonel William Fisher, the First Regiment's new commander. A native of Virginia, Fisher had fought with the Texas Army during the Texas Revolution. He then served a year as secretary of war before receiving his latest commission in January 1839, to serve as the number two man in charge of the Texas Army. With Colonel Burleson's temporary resignation in place, Fisher was responsible for carrying out Secretary Johnston's orders.

Johnston gave details of the Comanches' visit with Henry Karnes in San Antonio earlier that month. He instructed Fisher to take command of the pending peace negotiations with the Comanches, who had promised to return to San Antonio within thirty days with their principal chiefs. "You will designate, and take command of three companies of the 1st Regiment, who will be immediately marched to San Antonio."¹²

If the Comanches came in with the requested prisoners and delivered them, this act was to be "regarded as an evidence of their sincere desire for peace." The Comanches were to then be treated "with kindness and be permitted to depart without molestation." Before allowing them to leave, Fisher was to warn them

about molesting the settlements any further and against attacking surveyors. “Their own happiness depends on their good or bad conduct toward our citizens,” wrote Johnston.

Should the Comanches *not* bring in prisoners with them, Fisher was ordered to arrest the Indians and hold them hostage. In this case, “some of their number will be dispatched as messengers to the tribe to inform them that those retained will be held as hostages until the prisoners are delivered up, when the hostages will be released.” A further instruction was: “It has been usual, heretofore, to give presents. For the future such custom will be dispensed with.”

Following this military order—according to Colonel Karnes’ suggestion—President Lamar sent Colonel McLeod, the adjutant general, and Colonel William G. Cooke, the First Regiment’s quartermaster general, to act as commissioners to treat with the Comanches when they appeared. These men moved to San Antonio to await events.

During February, Lieutenant Colonel Fisher communicated with the Comanches. He told them not to come in to San Antonio without bringing all of their prisoners. The Comanches promised to arrive at the appointed time.¹³

On February 18, 1840, President Lamar ordered the Frontier Regiment to move its artillery, small arms, ammunition, and other military stores from Houston to Austin, the new capital. Everything was shipped from Galveston to Linn’s Landing on Lavaca Bay, where it would be transported north to Austin over land. This ordnance did not reach Austin until May, and it would be more months before proper new workshops were built out.¹⁴

William Fisher had about 450 able men between his nine infantry companies as of February 1840. He opted to send more than 175 soldiers into San Antonio for the Comanche meeting: Captain William Davis Redd’s Company A, Captain Mark Lewis’ Company E, and Captain George Thomas Howard’s Company I.

Company I was commanded by Captain Benjamin Y. Gillen through the end of February, before Captain Howard received transfer orders to take over. Gillen’s men had departed Camp McLeod near Austin on February 3 and arrived at the Mission San José on February 12. By month’s end, his company was down to fifty-three men, having lost four to desertion during February.

Redd's forty-eight-man company had reached Mission San José by February 29 and taken up station. They joined Captain John Kennymore's fifty-man Company C at the Mission San José near San Antonio. Captain Lewis' seventy-man Company E would not reach San Antonio until the second week of March.

Redd's company had seen its share of difficulties during the month. After arriving at Mission San José on February 10, privates William Andrew and Calvin Post had deserted on the night of February 20. On February 14, he had sent a small group of soldiers from the three companies at the post to Gonzales to fetch supplies for the post. On their return from Gonzales on February 28, the small party was attacked by Indians at a point only two and a half miles from San Antonio. Two privates—Henry Douglass of Company A and Richard L'Estrange of Company I—were killed. Private C. A. Root of Company A was wounded by a shot in the small of the back. Root's fellow soldier William Kelly also survived, as did Private Augustus Kemper of Company C. This trio returned to Mission San José the following day.¹⁵

Lieutenant Colonel Fisher's other five companies remained stationed on the frontier. Captain Mark Blake Skerrett's Company H—recruited in late 1839 in Galveston—was sent from Camp Lamar near Austin in early 1840 to the Cherokee Nation in East Texas. Skerrett's number two man was First Lieutenant John S. Sutton, a Delaware native who had recently left the United States Military Academy. Their unit was smaller, numbering fewer than thirty men.¹⁶

Skerrett took over Fort Scott from Second Lieutenant Abram H. Scott, who was commanding the post with a small detachment of Company E upon Skerrett's arrival in February 1840. Fort Scott was the old Fort Lamar in Smith County, which had been built during the 1839 Cherokee War by Captain Clendenin's First Infantry company. The original post was hastily assembled in July 1839 around the homestead of Elisha DeBard. Lieutenant Scott had been stationed at the Neches Saline with a detachment of troops in early 1840 in present Smith County.

Lieutenant Scott purchased pork for his troops and corn and forage for their horses from Benjamin Vansickle on February 25, while encamped on the Neches. He bought additional food and supplies for improving the old Fort Lamar from John Durst's company, including axes, and a cross cut saw. By March 25, Fort

Lamar had been renamed Fort Scott, as evidenced by a claim for tobacco, clothing, and food furnished by Durst to Company H's troops. This claim was signed by both Scott and Captain Skerrett.¹⁷

Sometime after April 30, 1840, Fort Scott was renamed Fort Skerrett in honor of its new commander. It was located in southwestern Smith County, about five miles southwest of the present town of Flint. Skerrett's company would remain on operation in East Texas until July 1840.

By the end of February, Company B's thirty-seven men were under acting command of Second Lieutenant Collier Hornsby on the San Gabriel River. Captain Adam Clendenin had been given a temporary furlough on February 7. Captain John Holliday, commanding the fifty-two-man Company D, remained stationed at Fort Burleson as of the end of February. Holliday had endured five soldiers—Corporal Hugh Vance and Privates James Hall, John Herron, William Sweener, and John W. Scott—deserting his post on February 4. A sixth man, Private M. R. Alderman, skipped out on February 18.

The winter of 1840 was tough on the men of the First Regiment of Infantry. On the night of February 21, a number of men of Company G deserted their post at the old Little River Fort, a camp north of the city of Austin. Some of these men were captured within days near the town of Nashville on the Brazos River by three citizens. Those captured were Corporal Jacob McMindus, Sergeant Oliver P. Gale, Private Charles Ladoucer, Private Josiah R. Edgar, and Private James W. Brown, the acting corporal of the guard that night.¹⁸

Also at the post with Company G was Captain James January's sixty-three-man Company F, recently returned from the turn-of-the-year Northwestern Campaign under Colonel Burleson. They reached the Little River Fort on January 13, but deserted the post on February 10 "on account of the failure of subsistence stores." Of all the First Regiment companies, January's unit suffered the most from lack of provisions and had the highest desertion rate. Between January 20 and February 17, forty-two enlisted men—two-thirds of his unit—had deserted. With a splintering command, January marched back to the Little River Fort on February 20 to organize the remnants of the two companies. By the following day, only fifteen had been apprehended and returned to their companies.¹⁹

Company E—a forty-three-man unit under the charge of Lieutenant William Dunnington—was called up from Camp Caldwell on February 22 to help deal with the situation. Dunnington's own company had lost two of its number on February 12, when Privates John Connolly and Amos Donaldson deserted from Camp Caldwell. Company E moved first to Nashville and then on to Camp Cazneau on Onion Creek near Austin, arriving on March 5.

Captain Mark Lewis was named acting commander of Company E on February 26. Twenty-one former members of Company G were moved into Captain Lewis' command. At least two others—Privates John Stein and Jacob Mushback—deserted from Camp Cazneau on February 27 before a court martial board could be convened.²⁰

By order of Adjutant General Hugh McLeod, a court martial board was held on February 29 at Camp Cazneau, near the city of Austin. The board was assembled at the camp of Company E at 11:00 a.m. President of the board was commissary general of subsistence Colonel William Cazneau. The other board members were Colonel Jacob Snively, Captain George Howard, Captain Lewis, and Lieutenant A. C. Holmes of Company E. Lieutenant Dunnington of Company E was appointed to act as special judge advocate.²¹

The court martial board found the men guilty of desertion and the five were sentenced to be shot to death. President Cazneau, in reading the defenses of the prisoners, felt himself

compelled to admit, that the temporary want of supplies, and the extreme difficulties attending the transportation when procured, added to the inclemency of the winter, at times when the troops were suffering; though offering no justification of the crime, affords some apology for the exercise of the prerogative of mercy. The prisoners urge as their only hope, and the President admits it, contrary to the stern, but just arbitration of the law; because he believes that as the alleged cause of their desertion are now removed, they will fulfill their pledge to the court, and by their future fidelity redeem themselves from the odium of their past conduct.²²

Cazneau later addressed the army troops and gave them an admonition about such desertion. Sergeant Gale was demoted to private and was transferred with Private Brown into Company B. The other prisoners from the former Company G were pardoned, released from their arrest, and were returned to duty in Company E of the First Regiment. It would be several months before a new Company G could be organized from new recruits at Galveston.



Greer's Rangers and the Travis Guards

The three remaining Texas Ranger companies from 1839 were discharged during early 1840 and new companies were formed as needed. The first new ranging company to be formed under the authority of the War Department was that of Captain Thomas N. B. Greer. A Tennessee native and a veteran of San Jacinto, Greer had emigrated to Texas in 1835 with his brother, Andrew Greer. By request of President Lamar, he organized his "Boggy and Trinity Rangers" on February 22, 1840.²³

Captain Greer mustered his company into service under the Third Militia Brigade of General James Smith the following day. His Boggy and Trinity Rangers engaged themselves in the building of a new frontier outpost. The two-story blockhouse was similar to Fort Houston, with the upper floor extending over and beyond the lower floor's walls. This enabled sharpshooters on the second floor to shoot anyone approaching the first floor walls. Captain Greer's rangers built "Fort Boggy" on the north bank of Boggy Creek, about two and one-half miles north of present Leona, and five miles south of Centerville, in present Leon County. A state historical marker now locates the spot.²⁴

Captain Greer's rangers served three months, being discharged on May 23 by General Smith, but were not paid. In 1842, Captain Greer was still trying to collect on a compensation claim from the Texas government. President Houston, however, chose to return the bill to the House of Representatives without his signature. Thomas Greer never collected his money. He was killed by Indians in June 1842 on the Trinity River, near the settlement of Alabama in Houston County.²⁵

While Greer's men found no Indians to contest, attacks on settlers were more prevalent farther west in the Hill Country

Capt. Greer's Boggy & Trinity Rangers: Feb. 23–May 23, 1840

Captain:

Thomas N. B. Greer

First Lieutenant:

Thomas Robbins

Second Lieutenant:

Elisha H. Whitton

Orderly Sergeant:

John Byrnes

Second Sergeant:

A. G. Rogers

Privates:

James C. Bloodworth

James Bozeman

Thomas B. Bozeman

James Byrnes

Harvey Capps

William B. Capps

John R. Chatham

James W. Easton

Alexander R. Erwin

George M. C. Erwin

James Erwin

James L. Erwin

John Erwin

William H. Howell

Jefferson Y. Jones

John Karner

R. B. King

James Marshall

Benoni Middleton

Thomas J. Middleton

William B. Middleton

James P. Philpot

William Robbins

Robert Rogers Sr.

Robert Rogers Jr.

Stephen N. Rogers

William Surles

Partial muster roll constructed by author's research of Republic of Texas audited military claims and pension papers.

area. Most depredations during the early month of 1840 involved the stealing of horses or settlers' property. The *Brazos Courier* reported in its March 3, 1840, issue that the friendly Tonkawas were believed to have killed a man named Kaughman, who was hunting on Williamson Creek near Austin.²⁶

Wayne Barton and a friend discovered Kaughman's body and reported plenty of Indian signs, the trails leading eastward toward Webber's Prairie. On the same night that Kaughman was killed, four horses were stolen from William Barton at Barton Springs.

Colonel McLeod wrote to Edward Burleson—recently retired from leading the Frontier Regiment—on March 7. McLeod knew of the special relationship Burleson had with Chief Plácido of the Tonkawas. He asked Burleson to immediately meet with this tribe and bring them in to Austin to answer charges that the Tonkawas had been conducting raids and murders. According to McLeod, Burleson's presence was "required by the President" for this meeting.²⁷

Plácido—whose name meant “Can’t Kill Him”—was the son of a Tonkawa warrior and a Comanche woman whom his father had taken captive. He and his Tonkawas had been loyal to Texas settlers since first participating in James Long’s 1819 expedition to help fight the Spanish Army. Plácido became chief of the Tonkawas in 1823 and had since scouted for the Texas Rangers and militiamen when requested. Tonkawas were enemies with the Comanches and their associated bands, and were known to remove scalps from their enemies after a battle.²⁸

Edward Burleson considered Plácido and his Tonkawas his friends and chose not to believe the charges against them. Gathering Chief Plácido and his Indians, Burleson was bound with them for Austin when word arrived of another depredation. On the night of Friday, March 13, a butcher named Ward and an English yardman named Headley were murdered within the city limits of Austin, this time by the Comanches without any doubt. The Tonkawas were thus cleared of the guilt and remained on friendly terms with the Texans.

As a result of this depredation, a stockade was built around the capitol building in Austin to protect the government officials. Burleson then gathered a small party of volunteers and rode out from Austin to search for the Comanche attackers. He followed their trail toward Brushy Creek and the San Gabriel River, where he picked up another very fresh trail.

This trail led him to the Colorado River and back to within about eight miles of Austin. The *Austin City Gazette* of March 18 included a report from Burleson in which he stated that the Comanches at this point “appeared to have scattered.” Burleson’s volunteers soon returned to Austin without any encounters. During his time out, however, the Comanches had moved up to San Antonio for their peace talks with the Texas commissioners.

Perhaps in response to these fresh depredations, a new company was formed in Austin on March 1, 1840, called the Travis Guards in honor of the Alamo’s fallen hero William B. Travis. Like the former Milam Guards of Houston, the Travis Guards helped protect local citizens, the capital city’s government, and the president from attack. The company was uniformed, issued rifles and swords by the government, and operated in the same fashion as volunteer militia.

Capt. Woodhouse's Travis Guards: March 1, 1840 Original Roll

Captain:M. H. Nicholson ¹

George W. Evans

Thomas Gales Forster

First Lieutenant:Matthew P. Woodhouse ²

Alexander T. Gayle

Joseph Harrell

Second Lieutenant:

Alfred W. Luckett

James C. Harrellson

Bird Holland

First Sergeant:

Alexander S. Patterson

Thomas H. Hord

William S. Hotchkiss

Second Sergeant:

A. G. Johnson

William H. Hunt

P. J. Hunter

Third Sergeant:

John W. Hann

Archibald C. Hyde

Henry J. Jewett

Fourth Sergeant:

C. R. Sossaman

James F. Johnson

William Henry H. Johnston

First Corporal:

Thomas Bryson

Albert G. Kimbell

Alexander C. MacFarlane

Second Corporal:

Allen E. Brown

Louis F. Marguerat

James D. Martin

Third Corporal:

M. H. Beaty

William H. Murrah

Shadrach W. Pipkin

Secretary:

J. Y. Burney

William Renney

William H. Sandusky

Treasurer:

John H. Yerby

H. P. Savery

John M. Shreve

Surgeon:

Richard F. Brenham

John F. Smith

William K. Smith

John Milton Swisher

James Underwood

Lorenzo Walker

Charles J. Webb

Privates:

Charles J. Babcock

William B. Billingsley

George W. Bonnell

John Henry Brown

Samuel Browning

William Clark

D. S. Dickinson

George J. Durham

Jacob Eberly

James F. Edrington

¹ Resigned.² Elected captain. Served until later replaced by Captain Joseph Daniels.

Source: *Constitution and By-Laws of the Travis Guards: Adopted March First, 1840*. Austin: Cruger and Bonnell's Print, 1840, 15–6. From the collections in the Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin.

In its bylaws, the Travis Guards professed themselves to be in service for “establishing protection, insuring domestic tranquility, and providing for the common defense and general prosperity of our city.” Unlike Texas Rangers, this company would not stay in the field continually, but would operate more as militiamen, being called out as needed.²⁹

The Travis Guards were unique in that they held regular meetings and drills. The company had its own secretary and a treasurer. Members paid a hefty five-dollar initiation fee to join and a three-dollar tax at the expiration of every quarter. When not in the field, the company met on the last Monday of each month and held parade on the first Saturday of every month. Members of the Travis Guards who were called to duty with the Texas Navy or Army would still be considered honorary members.

When the company passed its original constitution and bylaws on March 1, 1840, Captain M. H. Nicholson was voted into command by his companions. The men then proceeded to elect their other officers by ballot. Among the company was George Washington Bonnell, who had been major of the volunteer battalion in which the Milam Guards had once served. Another Travis Guard, Jacob Eberly, had commanded a company during the Texas Revolution. Private Alexander C. MacFarlane would be elected Travis County’s sheriff during 1840.

The *Austin City Gazette*’s Wednesday, March 4, issue announced that “a number of the young men of this city have enrolled themselves as a volunteer military company.” They had already framed their constitution and planned to meet that Friday evening to complete their officer organization. Captain Nicholson soon resigned his command of the Austin company, and Captain Matthew Woodhouse was elected to succeed him. Woodhouse had served as a first lieutenant in the First Regiment of Infantry of the Texas Army in 1837 and as first lieutenant of Captain James Ownby’s rangers during the 1839 Cherokee War.

The *Gazette* also gave a pretty fair summary of what Captain Woodhouse’s Travis Guards would mean as full-time security for Austin’s residents.

A company of this kind has long been wanted at this place, and, under the direction of efficient officers, cannot fail of rendering essential service to this section of

the country. It cannot otherwise than prove the means of inspiring confidence among our citizens as guaranteeing that, in case the hour of danger should again arrive, there will always be a well-organized and disciplined body, on the spot, as a nucleus round which all may rally for mutual protection and defense.