

TEXAS IN THE WAR FOR SOUTHERN INDEPENDENCE

TEXAS VALOR

painting by Andrew Harris

One of the first regiments from Texas to win recognition and fame in the war was the 1st Texas Infantry Regiment often called the Ragged Old First. This Texas regiment was first formed in Virginia in August 1861. It was made up of ten companies of mostly East Texas men from Houston, Tyler, Anderson, Cass, Polk, Marion, Harrison, St. Augustine, Nacogdoches and Newton counties. Galveston and Trinity County troops were added later.

This Regiment was part of Hood's Texas Brigade and served under commanders General John Bell Hood, General J.B. Robinson, and General John Gregg. The regiment fought with the Army of Northern Virginia from Seven Pines to Cold Harbor except when it was detached, and served with General James Longstreet at Suffolk, Chickamauga, and Knoxville. It also was involved in the siege of Petersburg and later in the Appomattox Campaign. In April of '62 the regiment had 477 effectives and of the 226 engaged at the battle of Sharpsburg/Antietam lost 186. This staggering casualty rate was over 82 percent and though this was not the highest number of casualties of any unit, it was the highest percentage of any regiment in the Confederacy or the Union in a single day, during the entire conflict. The Texans lost their battle flag during this battle. It was picked up by the Federal troops when they reoccupied the corn field.

The Ragged Old First Regiment was active from August 1861 until April 1865 when the war ended. They had fought in the Seven Days Battles of Virginia, Battle of Sharpsburg, battle of Fredericksburg, Battle of Gettysburg, Battle of Chickamauga, Battle of Knoxville, Battle of the Wilderness, Battle of Spotsylvania Court House, Battle of Cold Harbor, The Siege of Petersburg and the final Campaign of Appomattox Court House.



Photo courtesy Texas State Library

WALKER'S TEXAS DIVISION BATTLE FLAG

Texans fought under many flags during the War for Southern Independence. One of the few that have been preserved is this flag of an unknown regiment, Walker's Division. Many times battle flags were inscribed with the battles in which they were carried by the troops. So it is with this flag. Its battle honors displayed on the flag include Mansfield, (April 8, 1864) and Pleasant Hill (April 9, 1864).

Very little actual fighting occurred on Texas soil. One major reason was the men who fought under this flag. Union General Nathaniel Banks launched an expedition to invade Texas by bringing his forces up the Mississippi and thence up Red River with the conquest of East Texas as his objective.

General Richard Taylor, son of President Zachary Taylor was commander of the Confederate army in western Louisiana. The Texans who flew this flag were part of this command. General Taylor's forces intercepted the Union troops at Mansfield, and again at Pleasant Hill, Louisiana. Two savagely fought battles ensued in which the Union troops were soundly defeated and sent back down the rivers. Banks' grand plan for the conquering of Texas was smashed. General Banks was recalled by Union General U.S. Grant and sent to other fields and the invasion of Texas was forgotten.

This flag, one of only two so-called Taylor battle flags still in existence is located at the Texas State Library. The Taylor flags are unusual because the colors are reversed. The Saint Andrews cross is red with white stars and the field is blue.

Walker's Texas Division troops were engaged in other battles and skirmishes but to Texans, none were more important than these. The chief reason that Texas did not become a wasted land like many other southern states was because these Texas troops, along with Louisiana troops, defeated the Union troops before they arrived at the eastern border.

When the war began, Texas was only partially settled and was still very much a frontier state. Even so, Texas' participation in the conflict was one of which any Texan of that generation and all future generations can be proud.

Texans entered the war to a degree unprecedented in American history. Before the war ended, more than ninety percent of all white males of the state between the age of sixteen and sixty eventually served in some capacity of the Confederate military. The population of the state was only 510,000 citizens plus approximately 180,000 slaves and a significant portion of its men had to be retained to defend against Indian depredations. Even so, Texas sent more 75,000 of her sons to serve in the armies of the Confederacy.

Among these men, 135 were officers with the rank of colonel or above. The highest ranking officer chosen to command the armies of the western part of the Confederacy was a Texan, General Albert Sidney Johnston. Johnston resigned his position in the Federal army to join the Confederate forces. As President Jefferson Davis looked over his officers, he said of A.S. Johnston, "I knew I had one general." He also said of him, "He is the greatest soldier, the ablest man, civil or military, Confederate or Federal then living."

General Johnston, a full general, was killed in the bloody battle of Shiloh Church in April 1862.

Lieutenant-general John Bell Hood, who organized the famous "Hood's Texas Brigade", was from Texas. He and his command figured prominently in many of the major battles such as Gaines' Mill, Sharpsburg/Antietam Creek, Gettysburg and a number of others. He continued to serve after having lost a leg and the use of one arm from battle wounds.

Three major-generals were all Texas men: Tom Green, who was killed at Blair's Landing in April of 1864; John H. Wharton, who served as commander of the famous Terry's Texas Rangers, and Samuel B. Maxwell. Texas also produced 32 Brigadier Generals, 97 colonels and hundreds of lower grade officers.

These officers were obviously men of courage and uncommon valor. Statisticians say that their casualty rate was five times as high as a common soldier--evidence that they almost always led from the front of their commands, not at the rear as was the custom of Federal officers.

The fact that many of these officers were promoted during their service is a tribute to the Texas soldiers, since the exploits of their brave men had much to do with the advancement of the officers. The Texas fighting men were feared and respected by their enemies and often praised by the leaders of the Confederate armies.

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Texas troops took part in all the major battles of the War for Southern Independence including, but not limited to the following: Gaines' Mill, Malvern Hill, Mechanicsville, Seven Pines, First and Second Manassas, Shiloh Church, Fredericksburg, Fort Donelson, Corinth, Sharpsburg/Antietam, Chickamauga, First and Second Battle of the Wilderness, Kennesaw, the Atlanta Campaign, Gettysburg, Petersburg, and Appomattox Court House.

Texas men also fought in smaller battles and skirmishes such as: Adams Hill, Arkansas Post, Pea Ridge, the Red River Campaign, Glorieta Pass, Sabine Pass, Sibley Campaign, Battle of Galveston, Cotton Plant, and the final battle of the war--the Battle of Palmito Ranch. The Texas troops were defeated in a number of these conflicts, but their determination, courage and valor were never questioned by any who fought with or against them.

A. Dale Roberts



GENERAL JOHN GREGG

Among the general officers furnished by the state of Texas was General John Gregg. General Gregg was born on September 28, 1828, and grew to manhood in Lawrence County, Alabama. After graduation from college and a few years of teaching, he became interested in law. In 1856 he moved to Fairfield, Texas and shortly afterward was elected district judge in Freestone County, serving in this office until 1860.

After his first wife, Mollie Winston, died, John returned to Alabama and married Mary Frances Garth, the daughter of one of the wealthiest plantation owners in Alabama. His father-in-law was a strong Unionist who was willing to give up his hundreds of slaves to save the Union. His political views put him at odds with his son-in-law, definitely not a Unionist. Most likely this was a factor in John's returning to Texas with his new bride. They soon had two children.

Gregg practiced law for a few years and in a partnership with Morris Reagan, a brother of John H. Reagan of Palestine, Texas, started the first newspaper in Freestone County, the Freestone County Pioneer. He also owned a farm and other property.

When Texas began to consider secession, John, at the age of 24, became a member of the Texas Secession Convention, which he had helped to form. Gregg was one of six men elected by the secession convention to go to the Provisional Congress of the newly established Southern Confederacy which was meeting in Montgomery, Alabama. He went with the Congress when it moved to Richmond, Virginia.

Immediately after the battle of First Manassas, Gregg resigned his seat in Congress and upon receiving a commission of colonel, returned to Texas to recruit and organize the 7th Texas Infantry in Marshall, Texas. This hard fighting regiment was made up mostly of men from East Texas counties, and it would see much service throughout the war. Colonel Gregg led this unit in a number of battles and he was captured at Fort Donelson in February 1862. After he was released in a prisoner exchange, he was promoted to brigadier general in August of 1862 and sent to Mississippi.

His command included the 3rd, 10th, 30th, 41st and 50th Tennessee, the 1st Tennessee Battalion and his old 7th Texas regiment. He led this 3,000 man brigade in the battle of Raymond against a Union force of 12,000 troops. A fierce six-hour battle followed in which the Confederates were forced to retreat. Shortly thereafter, they were again at Jackson and again forced to give way to the overwhelming numbers.

General Gregg also fought in and was wounded at the Battle of Chickamauga, Georgia. When he recovered, he was transferred to Virginia. There he was placed in command of the famed Hood's Texas Brigade. Gregg participated in most of the battles of the Army of Northern Virginia and was mortally wounded in the battle of New Market Road near Richmond on October 7th, 1864.

The efforts of his widow Mary to claim her husband's body is a saga in itself. With courage and determination she braved the battle lines and brought his body home.

Mary Gregg is included among the women who began the Memorial Day observance which continues to this day. General Gregg and his wife are buried at Aberdeen, Mississippi.

Gregg County, Texas, organized in 1873, is named in his honor.