

FYI on Texas History by Bob Heinonen

A Free E-Mail Newsletter from Texas Heroes Issue 24 November 15, 2004



*Bob Heinonen as
Charles Goodnight*

INDEPENDENCE DAY

March 2nd of each year is a special day in Texas because that is the day that Texas declared its independence for Mexico back in 1836. The site of that declaration of independence was Washington-on-the-Brazos.

Each year, the official Texas Independence Day celebration is held at the Washington-on-the-Brazos State Park on the weekend closest to March 2nd. This year the celebration is the weekend of March 5-6. **Texas Heroes** will be performing again this year. Although the schedule has not been established, in past years we have performed several times in the theater of the Star of the Republic Museum on Saturday and Sunday.

*Life is too short
not to live it as a
Texan!*

Come on over to Washington-on-the-Brazos this coming Independence Day and help us celebrate. It is a truly unique event in a unique environment.

LEGENDS OF TEXAS

Legend: Texas was united in its fight for independence against Santa Anna

That line of thinking is about as far from the facts as you can get. Texians were split about four ways. First you had those Texians that said we should become a state within the Republic of Mexico under the Constitution of 1824 that Santa Anna had thrown out. This faction included Lieutenant Governor James Robinson supported by Colonel James Fannin and his men at Goliad.

Second you had those that wanted independence from Mexico so that Texas could join the United States; this faction included Governor Henry Smith and Sam Houston supported by William Barret Travis and the men at The Alamo.

Third were James Grant and F. W. Johnson who wanted to join with the Mexicans in northeast Mexico to form a new republic. They were supported by the men that had stormed San Antonio de Bexar in December, 1835.

Finally there were those people that wanted things to stay as they were.

In January 1836, William Barret Travis wrote to Governor Smith his summation of what was going on based on his trying to find men to join him to reinforce The Alamo: "The people are cold & indifferent. They are worn down & exhausted with the war, & in

Continued on page two

*Texas Heroes
574 Altwein Road
Blanco, TX 78606
(830) 833-0809
bob.heinonen@texasheroes.net
www.texasheroes.net*

(continued from page one)

consequence of dissensions between contending rival chieftains, they have lost all confidence in our own govt. & officers. You have no idea of exhausted state of the country - volunteers can no longer be had or relied upon. A speedy organization, classification & draft of the Militia is all that can save us now.”

Each group was making independent decisions about what to do. It is amazing anything constructive got done.

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF RIP FORD

Part 24: The Cortinas Wars – The Early Years
Copyright by Bob Heinonen of Texas Heroes in 2002
bob.heinonen@texasheroes.net

Incursions in Texas... there was to be a fight but who would know this fight would go on for 17 years. And who would be right in the middle of it from start to finish? Who else but Old Rip Ford.

After Cortinas' capture of Brownsville in September, 1859, "Several affairs occurred that were disastrous to the Texians. An expedition under Captain Thompson, sent out to engage Cortina [who had withdrawn from Brownsville], was defeated and lost two small pieces of artillery. This mishap inspired the Mexicans greatly. The arrival of a volunteer company under Captain Tobin gave confidence to the Americans. This disappeared when the Texians attacked General Cortina in his camp about ten miles above Brownsville, but he rode away without giving fight. In truth we lost in all the fights with that desperado until Major Samuel P. Heintzelman's regular troops appeared on the theatre of action. The legislature of Texas convened in November. A rumor reached Austin that Cortina had taken and burned Corpus Christi. The writer [Old Rip Ford] went in search of General Forbes Britton and found him on Congress Avenue, near where the Raymond House now stands [in the 1890's]. General Britton lived in Corpus Christi, and the rumor was calculated to make him extremely uneasy, if nothing more. Ford endeavored to convince him the report was unfounded, and thought he had succeeded. Meantime, Governor H. R. Runnels passed along. General Britton accosted him, portrayed the condition of things at Corpus Christi: the town sacked by a dissolute crowd of barbarous marauders, the houses burned to the ground, his family depending for the necessities of life upon the charities of a cold world. The general's eyes danced wildly in their sockets, his chin trembled, and his voice quivered with emotion.

"Governor Runnels was deeply moved, and exclaimed: 'Ford you must go; you must start tonight, and move swiftly.' The governor was assured his order would be obeyed as soon as a horse could be obtained to ride."¹ By the first of December, 1859, Ford and 53 well armed men were in the field near Brownsville.

Cortinas now decided to avoid confrontation with the forces against him – U. S. Army troops under Major Heintzelman and Texas Ranger units under Captain Tobin and Major Ford. Cortinas pillaged and burned as he escaped up the Rio Grande. The combined forces finally caught up with Cortinas at Rio Grande City and soundly defeated him. "After the defeat and dispersion of Cortina's forces at Rio Grande City, the bandit crossed into Mexico, near Guerrero. A large detachment of his men were driven across just below Mier. They were well received by the Mexican people."²

"Though the Cortinas War was at an end, its evil consequences lived after it. Fifteen Americans and eighty friendly Mexicans had lost their lives; Cortinas was supposed to have lost one hundred and fifty-one men. The valley was laid waste, damage claims by American citizens alone aggregating \$336,826.21. Cortinas was still at large, well on his way to fame and fortune. He became a brigadier general of the Mexican army and later governor of Tamaulipas. He amassed a fortune estimated at half a million, and continued to sponsor depredations in Texas until the end of his long life."³

(continued on next page)

(Continued from previous page)

The official “war” was over but Cortinas was still alive and well...and so was Old Rip Ford.

Next Month – *Part 25: The Cortinas Wars – The End*

¹ *Rip Ford's Texas* by John Salmon Ford edited by Stephen B. Oates, University of Texas Press, Austin, TX 1963, pp 265

² *Rip Ford's Texas* by John Salmon Ford edited by Stephen B. Oates, University of Texas Press, Austin, TX 1963, pp 274

³ *The Texas Rangers A Century of Frontier Defense* by Walter Prescott Webb, University of Texas Press, Austin, TX 1935, pp 193