

UNCONVENTIONAL WARFARE IN THE HILL COUNTRY: INSURGENCY AND COUNTER INSURGENCY¹

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In 1862, General H.P. Bee, commander of all Confederate forces in South Texas, declared Gillespie, Kerr, Kendall, Medina, and Bexar Counties - where the German protests were the strongest - to be "in open rebellion" and, in effect, declared war on them. Robert G. Schulz, Jr. wrote an unpublished article "The Nueces Massacre, also known as the Battle of the Nueces" describing the events preceding and following that terrible outrage.

That same year, Gen. Philemon T. Herbert imposed martial law on Central Texas, and the notorious Confederate irregular James Duff was put in charge of Gillespie and Kerr counties. Duff served as commander of an irregular Texas Confederate military unit, Duff's Partisan Rangers². He declared martial law in several precincts of Kerr and Gillespie counties and began what many Hill Country people regarded as a reign of unjustified terror. Among the many local camps, from which Duff's troops operated, were Camp Pedernales (30°13.036'N-99°0.706'W) at Morris Ranch and [Camp Davis](#) (30°11.702'N-99°7.177'W). (Underwood, 2000)



Photo 1. Confederate General H. P. Bee, commander of South Texas forces.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hamilton_P._Bee

¹ Note this is a rough draft provided by Academia and the references are incomplete or missing.

² <https://tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/fdu06>

On 24 June 1862, James M. Starkey was appointed as Provost Marshall of Kerr County. He maintained a registry book listing all male citizens of Kerr County who were subject to Conscription for service in the **Confederate Army**. The 130 names in the registry included many Unionists from the German communities (Bennett, 1956).

Duff declared himself provost, then stated in a letter, "The God damn Dutchmen are Unionists to a man...I will hang all I suspect of being anti-Confederates" (Schultz, nd). Hangings were, in fact, frequent. Letters from German residents of Fredericksburg attest that many of them would leave their homes at sundown and hide in the surrounding woods in fear of raiding Anglo "guerrillas," or *Hangebund* (or *Die Haengerbaende* -- "the hanging band"), who rode up in the night, snatched young men from their beds, hanged their parents, and burned their homes for avoiding conscription. Persecution of neutral and pro-Union Germans drove hundreds from their homes - some, all the way to Union states, Mexico, or even back to Germany. The Latin Colony at Sisterdale disintegrated; many of Comfort's "Free Thinkers," and the remainder of "The Forty," left Texas for good for states west and north. Joe Baulch, of Schreiner University, has written an excellent article on this whole sad affair - [The Dogs of War Unleashed: The Devil Concealed in Men Unchained.](#)" (Baluch, 1997)

Guido Ransleben's 1954 book - *A Hundred Years of Comfort in Texas* - (Ransleben, 1954) includes a letter written in 1908 from Howard Henderson to J. W. Sansom that says, in part, "I know that J. W. Duff and his company of murderers killed many of my neighbors and friends. My uncle and cousins, Schram Henderson, my wife's father and brother, Turknette, were murdered; my neighbors, Hiram Nelson, Frank Scott and his father, Parson Johnson and old man Scott were all butchered by Duff and his gang. Rocks were tied to their feet and they were thrown into Spring Creek" (p. 119). These men, who were beaten and hung, were tossed into nearby Spring Creek in Gillespie County. Their womenfolk and children buried the victims there. A grim reminder of the incident is a granite monument erected at the mass grave. The spot is known locally as [Dead Men's Hole](#) (30°18.196'N-99°3.443'W).

Also among those hung in this incident was Gus Tegener, brother of Fritz Tegener. They were millers and had built and operated a mill near the confluence of

Tegener Creek and the Guadalupe River ([30°3.96'N-99°19.149'W](#)), just below what is now Schumacher's Crossing. The third Tegener brother, William, had been hung by unknown "bandits" in 1857 and his body was thrown over a 50-75 foot bluff into the river below. (Schwethelm, 1924)

Their crime was failure to come in and pledge loyalty within three days. After a rough interrogation at Camp Davis, the men were ordered held at [Fort Mason](#); the women and children were sent to a stockade at Fort Martin Scott. During this period in 1862, the Confederate Army at Fort Mason held 215 men prisoner, mostly civilians accused of being Union sympathizers. (Schwethelm, 1924)

The partisan troops despoiled the region. Farm houses were ransacked, movable property stolen, families imprisoned, and houses burned. In a scene described by one of Duff's troopers, first, the wife and children of a suspected Unionist were taken prisoner, then the crops were "trampled and destroyed," the bee-hives in front of the cabin overturned, the living room furniture wrecked, and the loom in the kitchen smashed. After burning to the ground the home of Brandon Turknette near Johnson Creek, Hama Turknette was reported to have told Duff that he must have little to do to have deprived her and her children of their only shelter against the weather. Duff responded that he was leaving to her the spring, whereupon she yelled defiantly, "If you had known how to destroy it, you would have done that too" (Ransleben, 1954).

Inquisition by Duff often was savage. To obtain information, his soldiers infrequently resorted to bullwhips; other times they would hang a person by the neck and then release their victim just before strangulation, repeating the process until either the examination had been completed or the would-be respondent was dead. Duff is credited with killing between twenty and fifty men during his second foray into the Hill Country. Some 2,000 local residents took to the hills to escape Duff's reign of terror (Baluch, 1997).

Camp Davis was also the headquarters for Major James M. Hunter who commanded the "Minutemen" irregulars whose mission was the security of the Hill County. Captain Duff also operated out of Camp Davis. It is notable that this camp was located on Henderson Branch Road, which runs directly from the Henderson site on Johnson Creek ([30°5.951'N-99°15.671'W](#)), northeast along Henderson Branch Creek to Camp Davis and then to the Spring Creek site.

Exacerbating the situation, a squad of men arrived at Camp Davis from [William Quantrill](#)'s command, fresh from Kansas atrocities. Led by Bill Paul, Quantrill's men were on a horse and cattle buying assignment. They soon made contact with James P. Waltrip, a farmer from northeast Gillespie County, who, emboldened by the Quantrill men, organized his friends and the Quantrill men into what became known locally as the *hangerbande* (hanging gang).

On July 4, 1862, the [Union Loyal League](#) met on Bear Creek. (Schwethelm, 1924) This time, it was not 18 but 500 members who took part in the rally. They raised three companies of "supposed" Confederate volunteers under the orders of [Jacob Kuechler](#), E. Kramer and Henry Hartman. Fritz Tegener of Kerr County was elected major and took command of the battalion. They named their battalion the "Hill County Militia" (Underwood, 2000)

The same day, the officers and some civilian notables set up a consultative council. They voted to leave Texas to join the Federal Army. As tensions increased during July of 1862, Kerr and other counties were declared to be in rebellion against the state of Texas. Confederate forces were ordered to take measures to suppress the rebellion. Texas Confederates dealt harshly with those attempting to assist the enemy.

On August 1, 1862, sixty-eight men - sixty-three Germans, one Mexican, and four Anglos - heeded the call and gathered at the appointed place and time. The group comprised mostly older men and a few young boys from Mason, Kendall, Kerr, and Gillespie Counties, but all of them were targeted conscripts. They elected Kerr County's Fritz Tegener (some sources refer to him as "Maj. Tegener") as their commander; serving as Tegener's second-in-command was his Fredericksburg neighbor, Henry Joseph Schwethelm, who later documented his account of the whole episode (Schwethelm, 1924). Kuechler also joined the company. Some sources argue that the group's aim was just to get to Mexico, to avoid conscription and fighting altogether.

Major Fritz Tegener is an intriguing character. Not much has been written about this Unionist leader. The three Tegener brothers, Fritz, Gus and William, established a sawmill near Tegener Creek-Guadalupe River confluence ([30°3.96'N-99°19.149'W](#)) in Western Kerr County. Later, Sherman's Mill was built near to this site at Kelly Creek - close by Waltonia. Perhaps Fritz Tegener's activist

role was due to the terrorist murder of his brother, William Tegener who was hung by unknown "bandits" in 1857 and his body thrown over a 50-75 foot bluff into Johnson Creek. In 1861, his other brother, Gus Tegener, was hung by Duff's men operating out of Camp Davis on White Oak Creek (Schwethelm, 1924).

Under the command of Major Fritz Tegener, this Unionist band rendezvoused on upper Turtle Creek in Kerr County. They headed west, up Turtle Creek, riding for sanctuary in Mexico. [John W. Sansom](#) was the scout (Sansom, 1905). Paul Burrier has field mapped this route (Burrier, 1998) and there is a copy of it in Underwood's book, *Death on the Nueces* (Underwood, 2000, pp. 6-7). The trail was from the Upper Turtle Creek, moving west by north, until they struck the South Fork of the Guadalupe River near present day Camp Mystic ($30^{\circ}0.114'N-99^{\circ}23.031'W$

The Confederate forces sortied out of Camp Davis and rode up the south fork of the Guadalupe River, now Highway 39. Near the intersection of highways 39 and 83 ($29^{\circ}56.658'N-99^{\circ}41.673'W$), the trails of the Unionists and Confederates converged and continued on west to the Nueces River where the battle ensued.

The Unionists had at least a three-day head start on any pursuit, they were mounted on horseback, and they had no wagons or carts to encumber them. However, by the evening of August 9, 1862, they had traveled only about ninety miles to the southwest and had encamped near some cedar brakes on the West Fork of the Nueces River, in Kinney County ($29^{\circ}34.708'N-100^{\circ}18.367'W$) (Schultz, nd) (Underwood, 2000, pp. 6-7).

Lt. Colin D. McRae was at Camp Pedernales (Morris Ranch) when he received orders from Captain Duff to scout and break up any armed encampments in the area. McRae's command included 94 men who were detached from Captain John Donnelson's Company of the 2nd Texas Mounted Rifles, Duff's Company of Texas Partisan Rangers, Captain Henry D. Davis' Company of Texas State Troops, and Taylor's 8th Texas Cavalry Battalion (Underwood, 2000, pp. 43-44).

What ensued is known in history as the [Battle of the Nueces](#). This is a notable Civil War battle within Texas and the Hill Country (Hoffman, 1929) (Glenn, 1991, pp. 18-21) (Williams, 1907).

Thirty-five of the Unionists were killed, and several others were wounded in the Battle of the Nueces. The wounded who did not escape were hung or shot out



of hand. Six more were killed trying to escape across the Rio Grande. Of the twenty or so escapees who managed to flee for Mexico, seven or eight were killed by yet another patrolling Confederate force in October as they tried to cross the Rio Grande, and nine more were captured at various locations and executed forthwith (lending credence to the alleged hangings at Spring Creek). (Underwood, 2000) (Schellhase, 1913) (Biggers, 1983) (Sansom, 1905).

The German dead at the Nueces campsite were never buried, and Confederate troops prohibited anyone from recovering remains until the Civil War ended. Schwethelm escaped and evaded into the interior to Monterrey and then caught a ship from Veracruz to New Orleans where he enlisted in the Union Army. After Southern General Robert E. Lee's final surrender, Schwethelm returned to Comfort. On August 10, 1865, exactly three years after the Battle of the Nueces, he led a group from Comfort to the battle site to retrieve the bones of his fallen comrades. They brought the bones back to Comfort, and buried them in a mass grave (29°58.204'N-98°54.813'W). Next to the grave, the residents of Comfort erected a tall limestone obelisk as a monument to the German men and boys killed during the battle. Inscribed on the east face of the monument are the words, *Treue der Union* ("TROY-der-OON-yen," or "Loyal to the Union"). The west face of the obelisk lists those believed to have died at the Nueces battle site (*Gefallen am 10 August 1862*), the south face honors those killed at the Rio Grande (*Gefallen am 18 Oct. 1862*), and the north faces lists those allegedly hanged (*Gefangen, genommen, und ermordet -- "Captured, taken prisoner, and murdered"*). The monument lists thirty-five names, but the exact number killed, and the manner of their deaths, obviously will never be known. (Bennett, 1956) (Schultz, nd).

Among those killed was Aime Schreiner, brother of Charles Armand Schreiner of Kerrville. The "Treue der Union" Monument in Comfort lists the following casualties:

West Side: Killed in Battle at Nueces, Aug. 10, 1862 -- Leopold Bauer, F. Behrens, Ernst Boerner, Albert Bruns, Hugo Degener, Fritz Vater, Hilmar Degener, Pablo Dias, Adolph Vater, Johann Geo. Kalenberg, Heinrich Markwart, Christian Schaefer, Louis Schierholz, Heinrich Steves, Amrey Schreiner, Wilhelm Telgmann, Michael Weirich, Heinrich Weyerhaeuser.

North Side: Captured (or taken prisoner) and murdered -- Wilhelm Boerner, Theodore Buckisch, Conrad Bock, F. Tays, Heinrich Stieler, Herman Flick, August Luckenbach, Louis Ruebsamen, Adolph Ruebseman.

South Side: Killed at Rio Grande, October 18, 1862 -- Joseph Elster, Ernst Felsing, Peter Bonnet, Franz Weiss, H. Hermann, Valentine Hohmann, Moritz Weiss.

This unique Civil War battle - the Battle of the Nueces - still continues to be controversial, It appears that several "true" accounts of the battle have been written, some by men who there and who were eye-witnesses, To this day, some decry the myths that surround this epic event (Van Winkle, 2008).

William "Paul" Burrier is the author of an unpublished manuscript *A Perfect Reign of Terror: Insurgency in the Texas Hill Country* and is a scholar of this topic - making many presentations and papers on the topic. (Burrier, 1998)

The counter-insurgency tactics continued after the Nueces affair. Forty suspected Unionists in Confederate Texas were hanged at [Gainesville](#) in October 1862. Two others were shot as they tried to escape. Texas newspapers generally applauded the hangings, disparaged the Unionists as traitors and common thieves, and insisted they had material support from Kansas abolitionists and the Lincoln administration. The state government condoned the affair. Gov. Francis Richard Lubbock, an ardent Confederate, praised Hudson for his actions, and the legislature paid the expenses of the troops in Gainesville (McCaslin, 1997).

Confederate troops from Camp Verde pursued a group of men fleeing to Mexico to avoid conscription. Major Alexander of Camp Verde led a detachment of 25 troops. The party headed for Mexico was made up of of eight men and a boy. They passed through Bandera on their way south, spending a day or so resting their horses and buying supplies. They were captured near Hondo and were promised a fair and impartial trial by courts martial. Without benefit of trial, the men were all

executed on 26 July 1863. They were hanged one at a time at Julian Creek, some two miles east of Bandera. After the war, the men responsible for this atrocity were indicated but had long since disappeared (Hunter, 1953)

The names of the men murdered were:

- C.J. Sawyer
- M.W. Sawyer
- George Thayer
- William Schumake
- Jack Whitmire
- Jack Kyle
- John Smart
- Mr. Van Winkle

To read more about these events see: Joe Luther, 2013, and 2013 below.

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