



**Figure 1.** Thomas Jefferson Green, from *Samuel H. Walker's Account of the Mier Expedition*.

# General Thomas Jefferson Green and His Rifle

William H. Guthman

This article, which I have divided into two parts, is about a Texas soldier and his rifle. Part I is about General Thomas Jefferson Green (Figure 1) and some of the military exploits he detailed in his book, *Journal of the Texian Expedition Against Mier*, published in 1845 by Harper Brothers (Figure 2). Part II deals with Green's personal rifle, which was the inspiration for the research that led to this paper.

Green was born in Warren County, North Carolina, in 1802, scion of a Tidewater planter. He participated in a number of speculative business ventures before moving to Texas, where he hoped to make his fortune and a name for himself in politics and the military. His preparation for the latter was several months' training at West Point. Green had energy and ambition, but he was an extremely controversial personality.<sup>1</sup>

After moving to the Southwest, Green served as a brigadier general of volunteers in the war of Texas independence. The basis for his book is an incident that occurred between 1843 and 1844 when Green participated in an ill-fated expedition against Mexico. During the expedition he was captured, endured an ordeal as a prisoner, and finally escaped. He later moved to California, served in the California state senate, and was a major general in the California militia. When the Civil War began, he entered the Confederate army and participated in the early Virginia campaigns. He then returned to North Carolina, where he died at age 62 in December of 1863. How his rifle survived is a mystery.

When I acquired it in 1995, just before the Baltimore gun show, there was no provenance except for the gold-star inlay with Green's name and the word "TEXAS." Along with the rifle came the published version of Green's journal, which he had written at the urging of Branch T. Archer, whom he described as "the Father of the Texas Revolution," and David G. Burnet, former president of the Republic of Texas.<sup>2</sup>

I read Green's book twice. During the first reading I completely accepted everything he said and did, and I greatly admired his exploits. During the second reading, a year and a half later, when I was preparing for this talk, I was somewhat more skeptical and questioned some of his narrative.

My wife suggested reading other books on the same subject and a friend of mine, Jim Kochan, a student of early



Texas history, sent me titles. After some difficulty, I found a book dealer in Blanco, Texas, who was able to locate them. Among them was *Samuel H. Walker's Account of the Mier Expedition*, edited by Marilyn McAdams Sibley and published in 1978 by the Texas State Historical Association. This is an edited reprint of Walker's journal with background material by Ms. Sibley. Walker's journal was discovered among the Green papers and, according to Ms. Sibley, was the nucleus of Green's book. Walker (Figure 3), who later became a Texas legend as a Mexican War hero and namesake of Sam Colt's most famous revolver, was a private in the Mier expedition. Walker was captured and afterward, Ms. Sibley states, he "handed the journal to Green after both men had returned to Texas. Green used it as a nucleus to which he added his own recollections, correspondence, and a great deal of editorial comment, but he published the book in 1845 without a line of credit to Walker and only scant mention of him. Green was a pompous, self important snob, giving little consideration to those who could not further his own ends."<sup>3</sup>

Two other books, *Attack and Counter-Attack* and *After San Jacinto*, by Joseph Milton Nance (University of Texas Press, 1964 and 1963, respectively), state that Green was usually defiant of constituted authority.<sup>4</sup> According to Nance, Green was a troublemaker and had little respect for authority, as well as considering himself above being commanded by his superiors.<sup>5</sup> After reading these books, comparing them with Green's *Journal*, and comparing Green's account with Walker's, I find that the historians take more credit from Green than they give him. In my opinion, although Green was clearly a self-promoter, a self-server, and much motivated

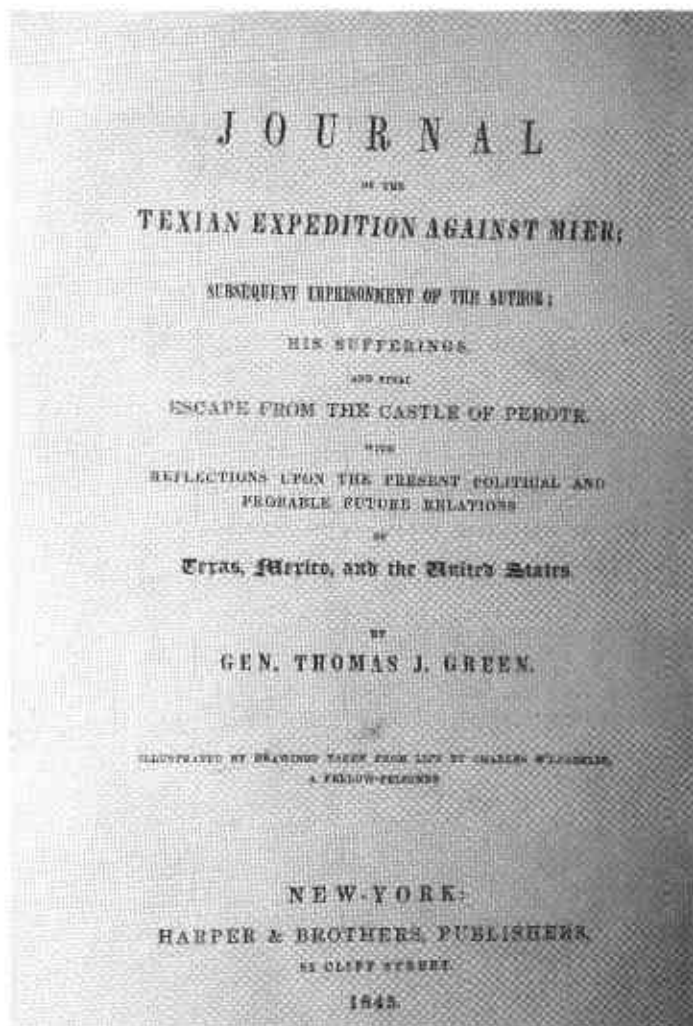


Figure 2. Title Page from Gen. Green's *Texian Expedition Against Mier*.

by the hope of personal gain, he was also brave and able to instill confidence in the men he commanded. He was, as well, a talented chronicler of the historical events in which he was involved.

Both Green and Walker despised Sam Houston and blamed him for abandoning the Texans who participated in the Mier Expedition. (To be fair, it should be pointed out that Green was also bitter about an earlier business venture with Houston that had fallen through.) Historians point out that the Mier Expedition was unauthorized and that the participants were lawless looters. I believe the expedition came about as a result of widespread outrage at the exploits of the marauding Mexican army and that most participants joined for patriotic reasons. Only a few joined for the purpose of taking booty, although Green's patriotic motive was admittedly tinged by his hope of advancing his political reputation.

Early Texas history is rife with political rivalries, greed, and ruthlessness. The hate that Green and Walker felt for Sam Houston brought them briefly together, and it was at this point that Walker handed Green his account of the expedi-



Figure 3. Samuel H. Walker, from *Walker's Account of the Mier Expedition*.

tion. Walker believed that Green could use it against Houston, because Green's rank gave him the greater leverage. Although I'm certain that Green did use small portions of Walker's work without giving him credit, I do not believe that he used Walker's account as a nucleus for his own published journal.

Since Walker was a prisoner when the major battle for Mier took place, and since Walker and Green were placed in different prisons after the battle, I don't believe Green could have used Walker's journal as more than a reference to incidents they both saw take place. Also, Green was privy to more information about events as they took place than Walker was. Comparing Green's and Walker's journals side by side, it becomes apparent that Green's has a great deal more detail and is, as a record of a historical event, a much more important document. Green's accounts of Texas's border skirmishes with Mexico before the outbreak of open warfare and his revealing characterizations of the personalities involved resulted in what is probably the best existing account of the Meir Expedition. Despite Green's biases and

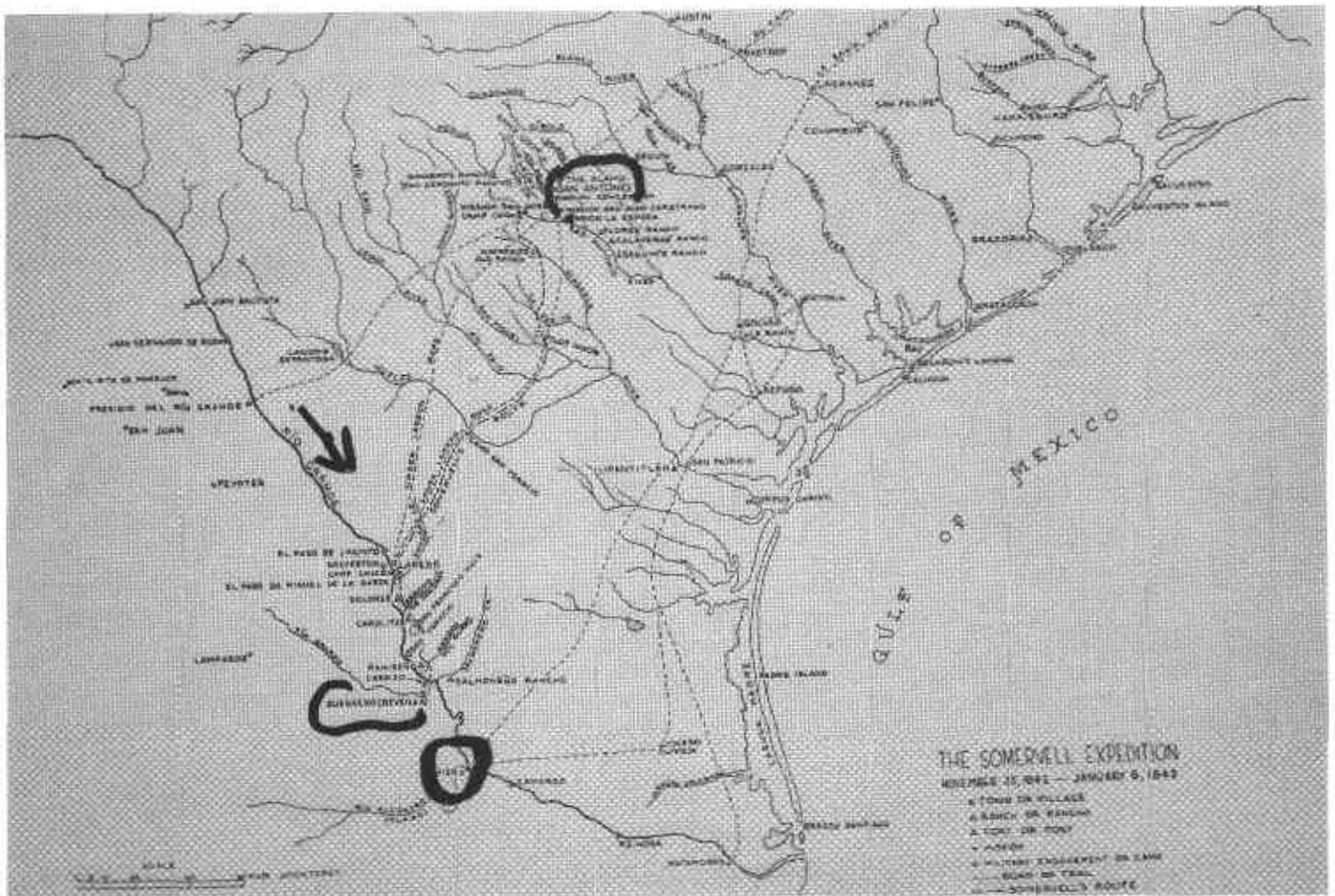


Figure 4. "The Somervell Expedition," from *Attack and Counter Attack*, Nance.

unnecessary embellishments, many later writings have been based on his *Journal*.

In his *Journal*, Green writes admiringly of Walker. After Walker was captured, for example, Green relates that

... a courier arrived from Captain Baker stating that two of his most efficient spies had been captured, Samuel H. Walker of Galveston, and Patrick Lusk, of Washington.

Later on, Green states that "Walker had proved himself a daring and efficient spy when Woll occupied Bexar." Green goes on to tell about Walker's interrogation by the Mexican general, who warned him not to lie. Walker responded, Green says, that "It is neither our habit or nationality to lie." When Walker told the general the effective Texan force was inferior to the Mexican force, the general exclaimed "they surely have not the audacity to attack me in town," and Walker replied, "you need not have any doubts upon that point; they will pursue and attack you."<sup>6</sup>

Green was ambitious, boastful, vengeful, and undoubtedly embellished his writings, but he was brave, had strong convictions as to who the good guys and the bad guys were, and was highly motivated to avenge the Mexican army's incursions into Texas towns. What follows is a brief summary

of Green's journal of the Mier expedition presented from Green's point of view.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

In 1836, Sam Houston was elected president of Texas as the war candidate, defeating the more temporizing and pacific Stephen Austin. Houston's first official act was to visit Santa Anna, the captive president of Mexico, and smuggle him out of the country after he promised to complete the peace treaty. Once out of the country, the Mexican president laughed at his promise.

Houston then disbanded the Texas army and ignored Congress' orders to build two sloops of war and two schooners. General Lamar was elected the next president of Texas; he built up the navy, beat back the Indians, and extended the frontier, but he did not strike against Mexico. In the next election, Houston regained the presidency. Green said that Houston then repudiated documents of public faith and issued secret orders to commence civil war against Texas citizens who opposed him.

More Mexican raids and murders occurred, and Green wrote that Houston was waging war through threats that



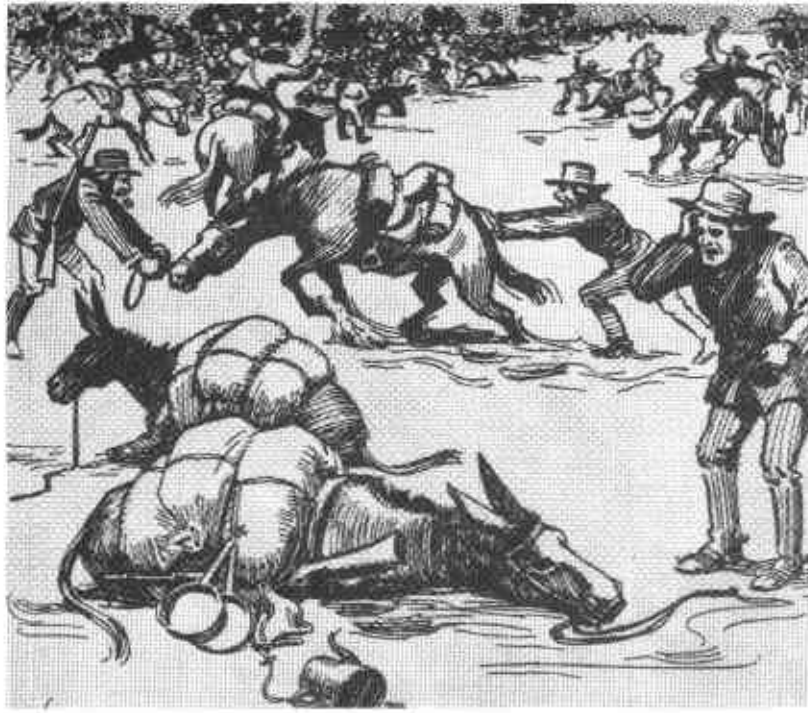


Figure 5. "Somervell's Army in the Bogs," *Attack and Counter Attack*, Nance.

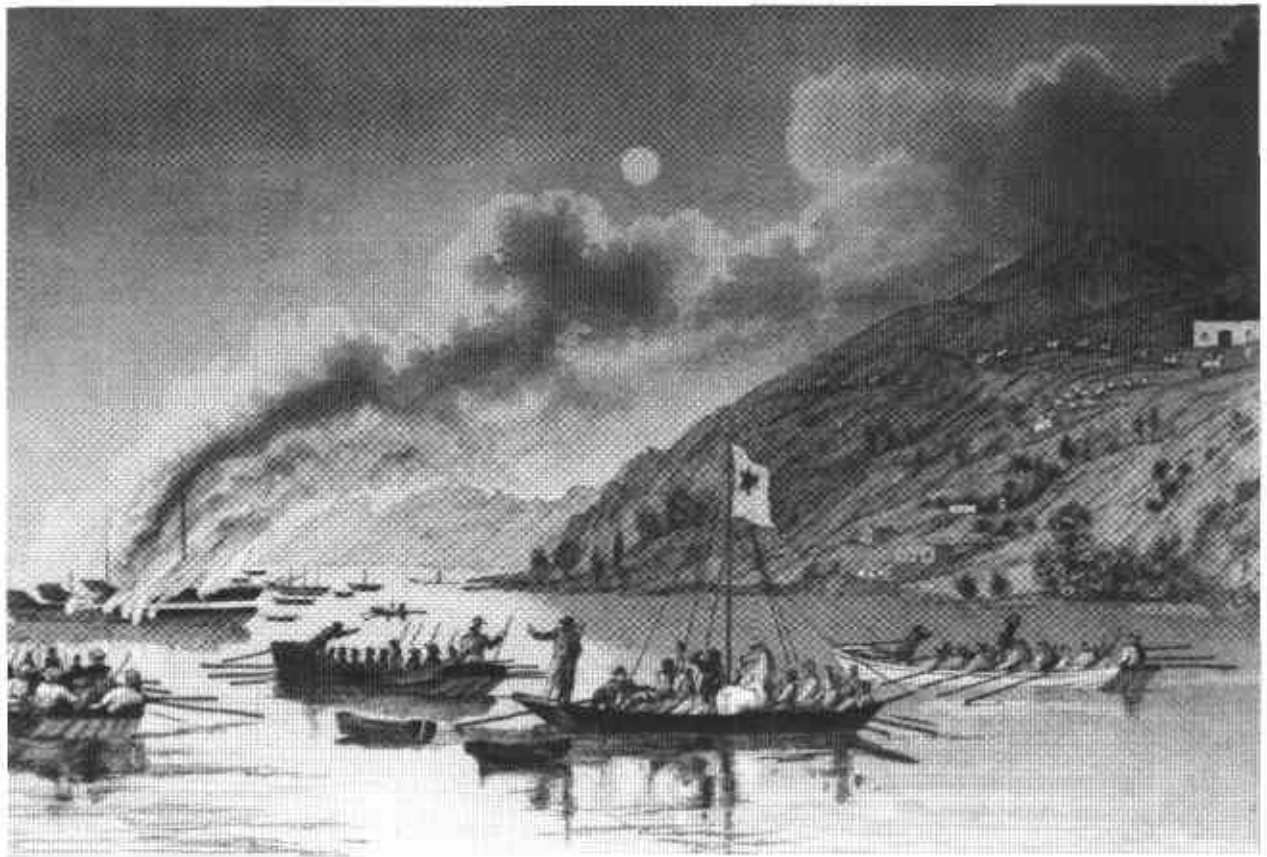


Figure 6. Mier Expedition Descending the Rio Grande. The small force of slightly over 300 men under Col. Fisher, after separating from Gen. Somervell's command to pursue the Mexican Army, descending the river, burning boats, on their way to Mier, with Gen. Green commanding the flotilla. From Green's Journal, drawn by Charles M'Laughlin, "a fellow prisoner."

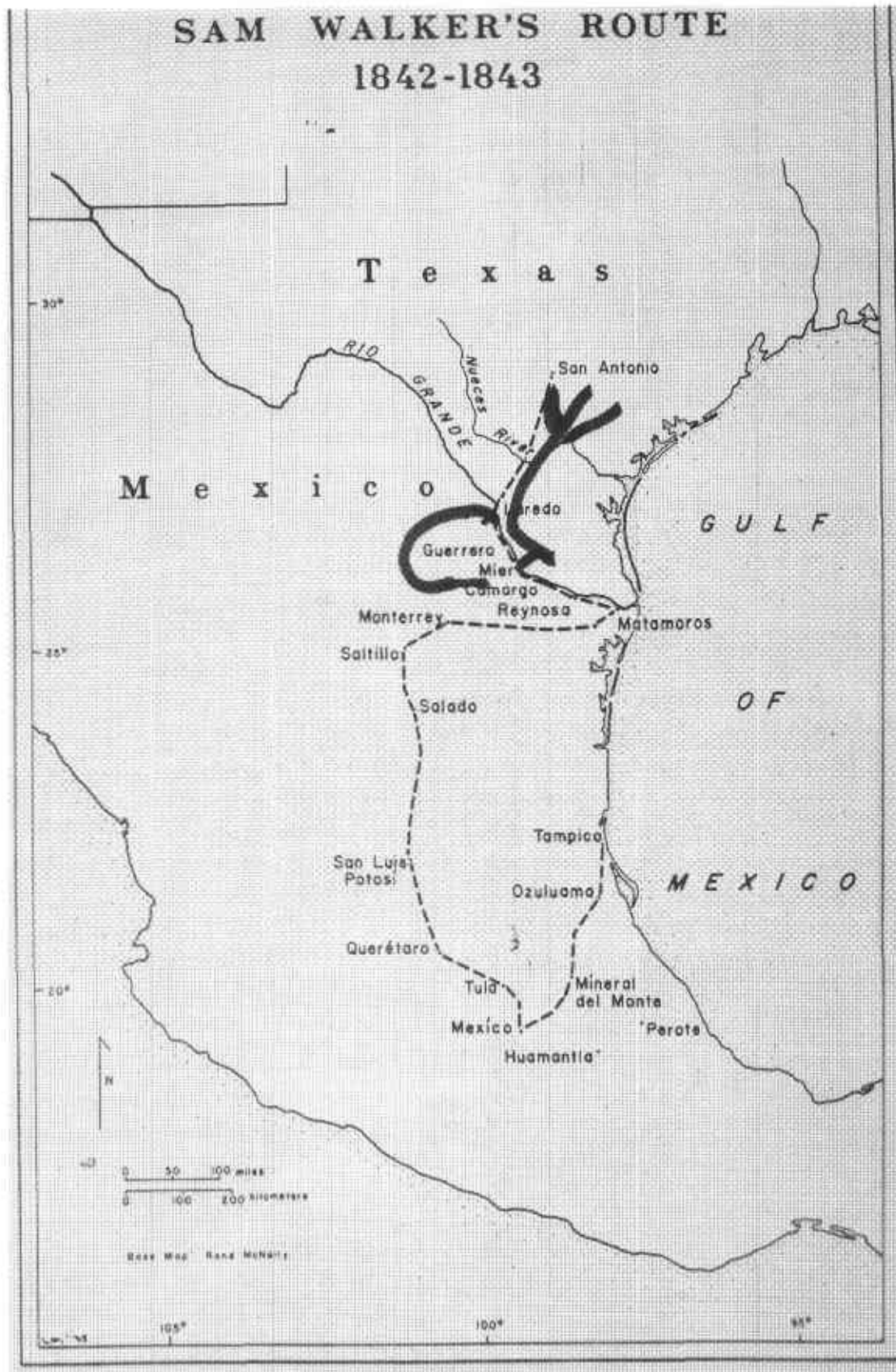


Figure 7. Sam Walker's Route, 1842-1843, *Walker's Account of the Mier Expedition*.

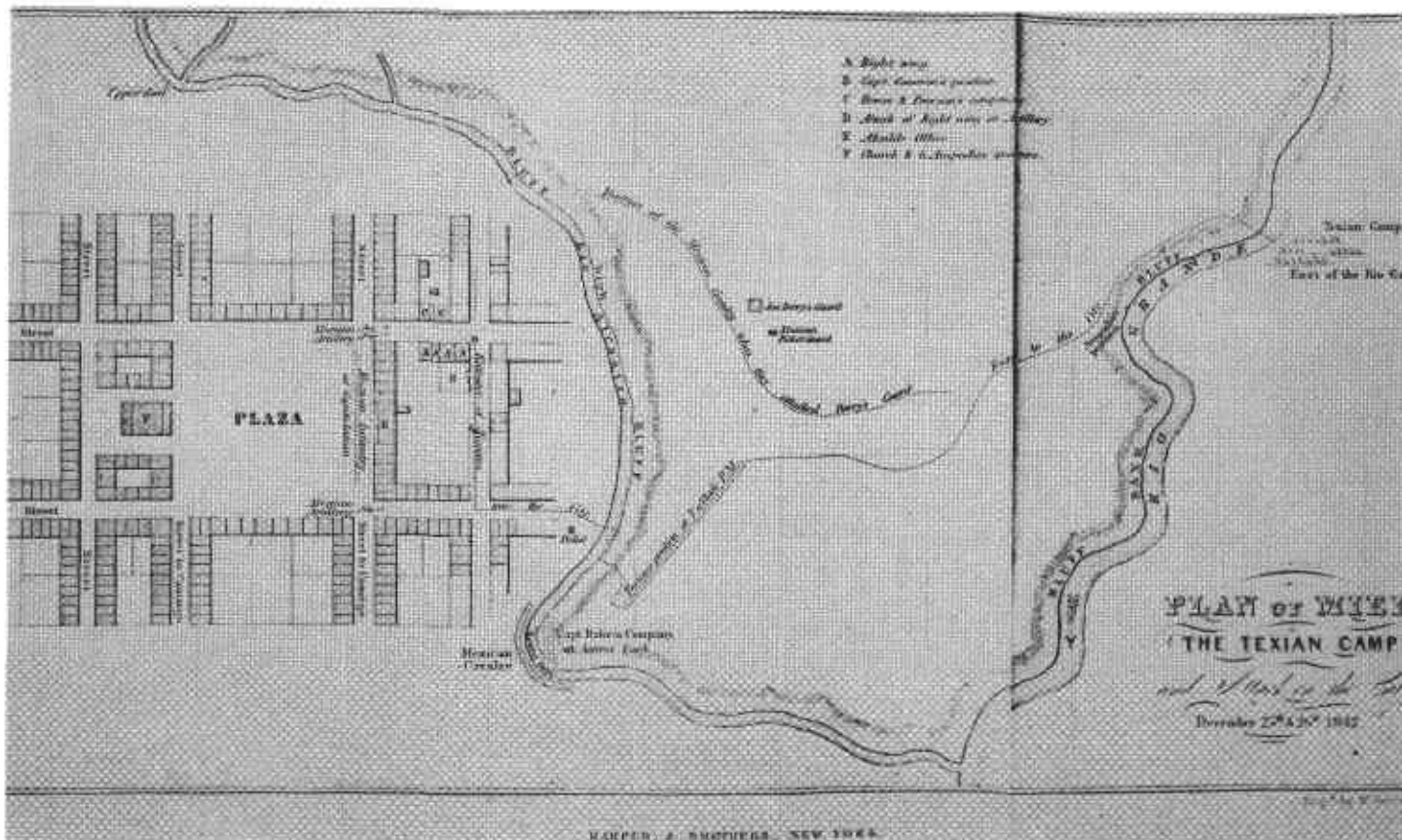


Figure 8. Plan of the town of Mier, *Texian Expedition Against Mier, Green*.

were reported in the newspapers but in reality was trying to appease Santa Anna. On March 6, 1842, the Mexican army plundered San Antonio. By the first of April, 5,000 Texans had gone to the rescue, and the Mexican army fled 150 miles across the Rio Grande. Houston continued his newspaper threats against Santa Anna.

On September 11, 1842, the Mexican army again took possession of San Antonio. Fifty-three Texans held off 1,200 Mexicans, killing 12 and wounding 29; no Texans were hurt. Then, on September 16, 210 Texans under Colonel Caldwell killed 60 Mexicans with their rifles and wounded many more; only 1 Texan was killed and 9 were wounded. Fifty-three Texans were advancing from the rear, attacking with their rifles, when Mexican artillery opened up and the men were forced to surrender. After surrendering, 36 were slaughtered and 15 more were butchered by the Mexicans with swords and lances.

On that same day, Houston issued a proclamation calling on all the first-class militia of the counties west of Trinity to pursue the enemy into Mexico and chastise him for his wrongs. The men were to rendezvous at Bexar and choose their own commander. Twelve hundred volunteers were raised, and the men chose General Burelson to lead them. Houston overrode their selection and appointed General Somervell, whom the men disliked and did not respect.

The troops assembled at Bexar waited for 2 weeks while General Somervell was winced and dined by officials who had previously been loyal to Santa Anna (Figure 4). In the meantime, the men were suffering from a lack of blankets and inadequate rations. Somervell continued to let time go by, not pursuing the enemy and squandering the opportunity to catch them. Green felt that Houston had instructed Somervell to delay any attack, stating that the country had no means to prosecute a war.

Finally, General Somervell decided to attack the defenseless town of Laredo instead of pursuing the Mexican army. In the process of doing this, he led his troops into a “post bog,” where the ground looked firm but was not (Figure 5). Green wrote that anyone who knew the country would never travel into this terrain, especially after a heavy rain. It took 2 days to travel 5 miles—760 men, horses, and packs were scattered over the prairie, with animals floundering and plunging, stuck so thoroughly that their legs were out of sight. The “surprise march against Laredo” took 17 days instead of the usual 7. In the end, instead of meeting the enemy, they met women and children. The army was ordered to camp a mile outside Laredo instead of crossing the river into Mexico.

However, Green and five men did cross the river to the small town of Galveston, planted the Texas flag, discovered



Figure 9. "Texians Charge upon the guards and Victory of Salado." The Mier prisoners overpowering their guards at Salado & gaining momentary freedom, *Texian Expedition*, Green, M'Laughlin.

Figure 10. "Texians killing their horses in the mountains for sustenance." After escaping, some of the Mier prisoners fled into the mountains; without food they had to slaughter their horses to stay alive. They were soon recaptured. *Texian Expedition*, Green, M'Laughlin.

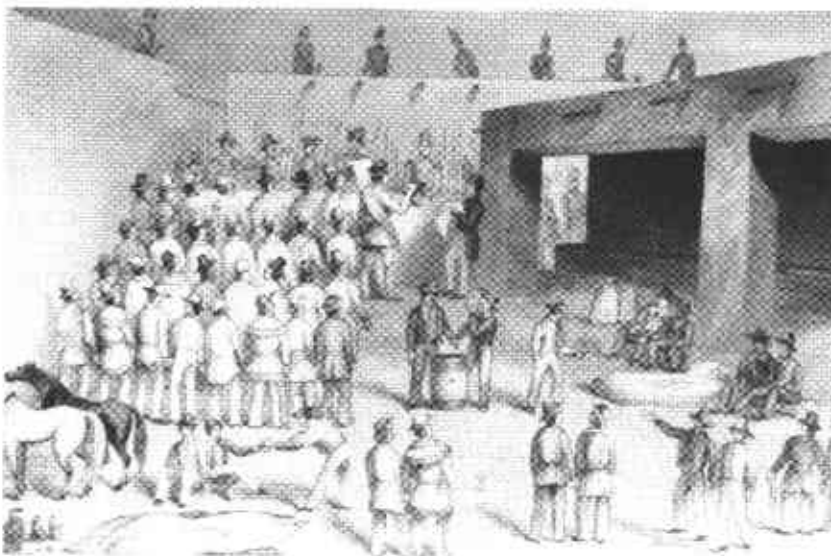


Figure 11. "Texians drawing the Black Beans at Salado." After being recaptured the Mier prisoners were placed in irons, assembled in a court yard and, as punishment for the escape attempt, one out of ten was to be executed. The Mexicans placed 159 white beans and 17 black beans in a small earthen mug. The white signified exemption and the black, *death*. Green said "they all drew their beans with manly dignity." *Texian Expedition*, Green, M'Laughlin.



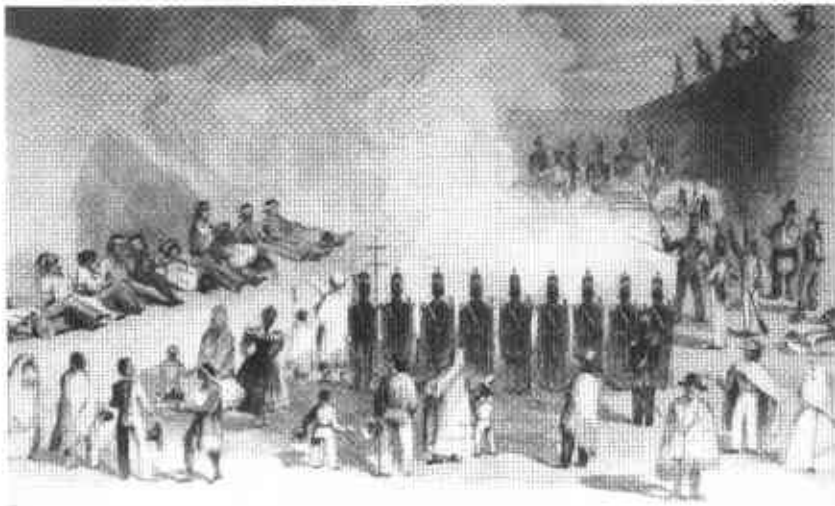


Figure 12. "Shooting the decimated Texians." On March 25, 1843, the 17 prisoners who drew the black beans were executed as punishment for the attempted escape 6 weeks prior. *Texian Expedition*, Green, M'Laughlin.

Figure 13. "The shooting of Capt. Cameron." Considered a ring leader of the escape, Santa Anna sent orders to have the beloved Capt. Ewen Cameron executed. He refused a blind fold, stating he could look death in the face, and opened his hunting shirt, baring his chest, and *HE* gave the order to FIRE. Green, M'Laughlin.

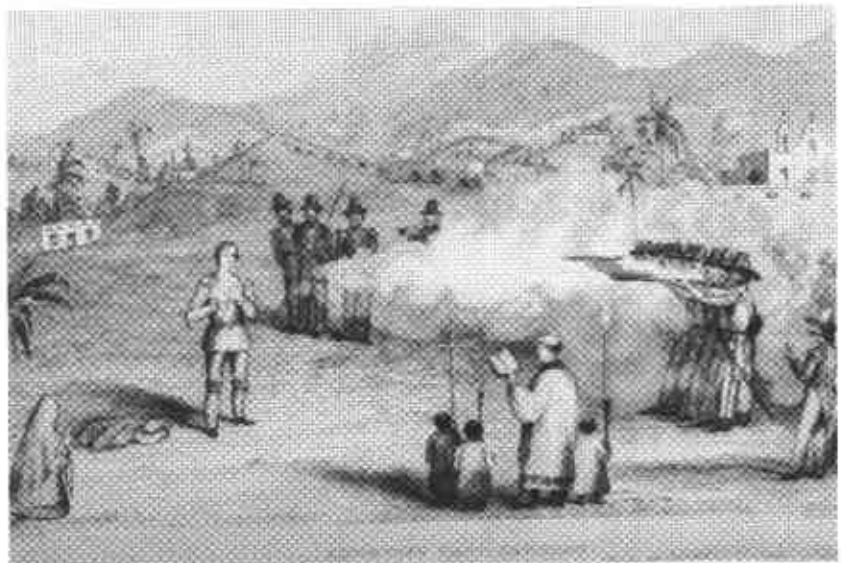


Figure 14. "Texians paving the street at the Archbishop's palace." Forced into labor, Mier prisoners were paving the road leading to Santa Anna's suburban estate. Green, M'Laughlin.



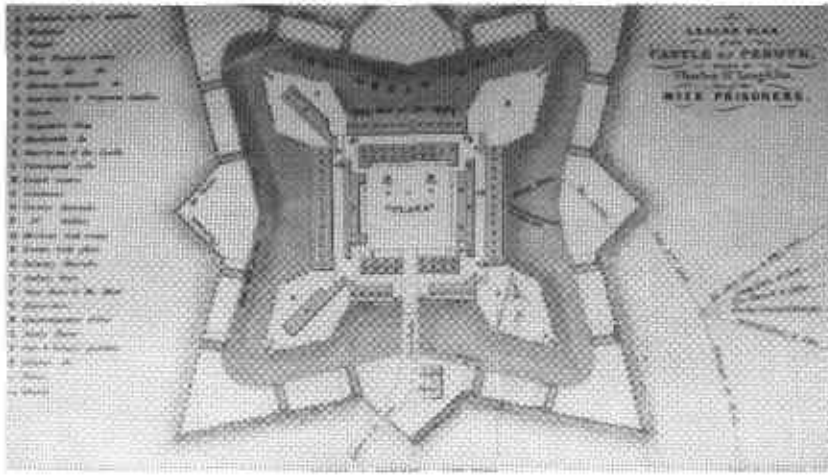


Figure 15. "Ground plan of the castle of Perote drawn by Charles McLaughlin, one of the prisoners." Some of the Mier prisoners, including Green, were imprisoned at the CASTLE OF PEROTE. Green, M'Laughlin.

Figure 16. "Escape from the Castle of Perote." July 2, 1843, 16 Texians, including Green, escaped from Perote. Green, M'Laughlin.



Figure 17. "Separation after escape." Green and 8 others made their escape successful. Eight others, of the 16, were re-captured. Green, M'Laughlin.



Figure 18. "Narrow escape from the cavalry officer at the town of Antigua." One of Green's guides distracts the officer of the Mexican cavalry as Green and his companions escape by arranged boat to Vera Cruz. Green, M'Laughlin.

Mexican troops in the town, and returned, reporting to General Somervell, who did nothing.

The next day, having insufficient rations and being discouraged by General Somervell's lack of action, 300 men went back to Laredo and looted food and supplies. Although Green did not approve of their action, he understood the men's frustration; after being away from September to December, and not chasing but evading the enemy, lacking supplies, the men saw their 3 months' toil come to naught.

A council of war was held, and 200 men elected to return home. Somervell agreed to lead the remainder against the enemy if the men returned the articles they had taken at Laredo. They agreed, and the articles were returned to the town. Then, instead of leading them across the river, General Somervell led them away from it through rough country, as if avoiding confrontation with the enemy.

The expedition finally reached the river at Guerrero, crossed, took sight of the enemy, and then crossed back to Texas. General Somervell ordered the barges that had been built for the Mexican invasion to be burnt, but the men hid them downriver instead.

Somervell returned home with 200 disgusted men, reporting that he had been on the Rio Grande for 11 days and thought it prudent to return because the enemy might concentrate his forces. Green wrote that rumor had it that Somervell was under orders from President Houston, and he posed the question as to what General Somervell had been doing from September 11, when the Mexican army entered Bexar, until mid-December when he left his men on the Rio Grande.

Of the 1,200 men who had been at Bexar to fend off the plundering Mexicans 1 month previously, just 304 remained. Colonel William S. Fisher was then elected commander because he knew the country best. General Green was in charge of the barges, six large and several small tenders, to carry the troops down the Rio Grande (Figure 6). The flotilla proceeded downriver, capturing or burning between 40 and 50 boats. After several nights, the land forces and river forces encamped together about 7 miles from Mier. A Mexican army of 700 men and two field pieces had taken possession of the town in anticipation of the Texan attack. Green found a suitable waist-deep place to cross and led the men down steep bluffs to the riverbank, where they crossed in silent darkness (Figure 7). A company of Texans downriver kept up continuous firing across the river to divert the Mexicans as Green's troops crossed.

Green's men fired about 100 rounds into the Mexicans, and the enemy did not return the fire. Green then fired nine rapid shots into the enemy as his men entered the town (Figure 8). They proceeded to the square where the enemy artillery had been placed. Slipping down a side street, they crept out to the main street leading to the square, fired their rifles with deadly effect, and then slipped back into a side street to avoid artillery fire. The Texans took possession of stone houses on both sides of the main street, opening ports for their rifles to pour deadly shot on the enemy artillery. The crossfire of the rifles from the stone houses killed 55 of 60 men manning the big guns and soon silenced the artillery.

The Mexicans then took to the rooftops, pouring many thousands of musket shot into the houses the Texans

occupied, killing and wounding a few. Riflemen then made holes in the rooftops, crawled through, and began clearing the Mexicans off the roofs. Most of the enemy were shot in the head or chest, the only parts of them exposed.

Colonel Fisher was wounded in leading a charge, and General Green assumed command. Skirmishing continued, and there were casualties on both sides. The battle, which took place December 24 and 25, appeared to have been won by the Texans. Green's estimate was that of the 261 Texans engaged in the battle, 10 were killed and 23 badly wounded. Of the 2,300 Mexicans, 800 were killed or wounded. According to Green, the official Mexican report was 430 Mexicans killed and 230 wounded. However, using deception, the Mexicans turned their defeat into victory.

A Texas surgeon who had earlier been made prisoner and was not witness to the battle was told by his Mexican captors that there were 1,700 Mexican troops in the city and 800 more on their way as reinforcements. They said that if the Texans surrendered they would be treated with all the honor and consideration of prisoners of war. The men would be kept on the frontier to be exchanged and not sent to prison in Mexico.

Not knowing the actual results of the battle and thinking the Mexican army had an overwhelming advantage, the surgeon allowed his captors to escort him with a white flag of truce to council with the wounded Colonel Fisher. While the flag was being carried to the colonel, a column of Mexican troops gained an advantageous position over the Texans, who were honoring the flag. The wounded Colonel Fisher believed his men were in danger of annihilation after talking to the surgeon and agreed to the surrender terms. Green and the men were furious, believing that in his wounded condition Colonel Fisher was reacting in an abnormal manner. Green's fellow prisoner, William Preston Stapp, stated in his book, *The Prisoners of Perote*, that Green didn't want to surrender "and shattered his rifle to the ground."<sup>7</sup> Before surrendering to the Mexicans, a move that he violently opposed, Green said, "I fired two shots, killing two more and, to my recollection, these were the last two shots fired, and certainly, *the last two which my faithful gun fired.*"<sup>8</sup>

The journal goes on to relate the hardships, tragedies, and disappointments, as well as the triumphs, that Green and his fellow prisoners experienced. As the events that illustrate Green's *Journal* occurred, Charles McLaughlin, one of the Mier prisoners, executed 12 of the drawings that accompany this article (Figures 2, 6, and 9-18). Green recalled that McLaughlin had "participated in all the dangers and suffering of the expedition" along with everyone else. We now leave the Mier Expedition to discuss General Green's double rifle.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

"It is said a Texian is born with a rifle in his hand," states Green in his journal, and throughout the book he continues to make reference to "Texians and their rifles." A few of Green's other observations are: "Shoot out one's eyes at 300 yards with our big rifles"; "True and faithful rifles"; "The Texian made the name of his rifle and death synonymous terms throughout Mexico"; "Never touch his double trigger until his double sights are right"; and "the lacerating effect of the rifle ball is far more dangerous than the smooth bore."

Green often referred to his "double barreled rifle" (Figure 19). His iron-mounted side-by-side has a .52 caliber heavy-walled rifled right barrel and a .50 caliber heavy-walled smooth left barrel. The barrels are 35¼ inches long, each with a front and rear sight; the rib in between has an inlaid rectangular gold cartouche engraved "S. DAY'S PATENT N.Y." (Figure 20). Both barrels and the rib have engraved decoration on one third of the barrel length. There is a 34-inch-long triangular sliding bayonet (now lacking the catch) in the recessed groove where the ramrod usually was fitted. The bayonet is ⅜ inch wide at the base and gradually tapers to a point.

Day's patent, possibly No. 1,461, applies to the removable self-contained reloadable cartridges with nipples attached (Figure 21) and a notched lever to remove them from, or secure them into, the breech (Figure 22). Green could fill his pouch with several dozen of these cartridges, place percussion caps on the nipples, and have what he termed a "repeater." The engraved iron frame extends forward from the end of the back action locks for 1¾ inches to the checkered burl-walnut receiver, which extends 11 inches (coinciding with the engraving) and has an engraved fore-end cap. The two back action locks are 4¼ inches long and are engraved, as are the hammers.

The frame extends back from the breech 6¾ inches. It is 1¾ inches wide at the breech and has two 1¾-inch-long grooves, wide enough and deep enough to accommodate the 1½-inch-long and ¼-inch-wide cartridges, which enter the chambers or are removed from the chambers by twisting the levers on the cartridges up or down and either withdrawing them or placing them into the breech.

There is a heavy 1¼-inch-wide and 1-inch-high wrought-iron thumbpiece ¾ inch behind the grooves (Figure 23), which allows the user to balance and put a lot of force on the piece when using the sliding bayonet (Figure 24). This thumbpiece is an integral part of the frame, which tapers to ¼ inch width until it ends 4 inches from the thumbpiece, ending at the base of the comb on the stock. Both the



thumbpiece and the tang of the frame are engraved. The double triggers are housed in an engraved-iron trigger guard, two pieces, 7 inches long.

The burl-walnut wrist and butt are 15 inches long, checkered at the wrist, with an engraved-iron butt plate. There is an inlaid, engraved gold American eagle on the raised cheek piece (Figure 25), now missing a portion of one wing and both feet. A gold star of Texas is inlaid on the right side of the butt, engraved with the words "GEN THOS GREEN/

TEXAS" (Figure 26). There is a hole halfway between the trigger guard and the butt plate and another at the trigger guard finial that at one time probably held swivels for a carrying strap. The overall length of the rifle is 51½ inches long.

This rifle represents an important piece of history from the days of the Republic of Texas. Its acquisition opened up for me a previously unknown facet of a fascinating pre-Mexican War American drama.



Figure 19. Over-all view of Green's double barrel rifle with the sliding bayonet partially extended. Hammers are at half cock.



Figure 20. Rectangular gold inlay on rib of Green's rifle with engraving "S. DAY'S PATENT N.Y."

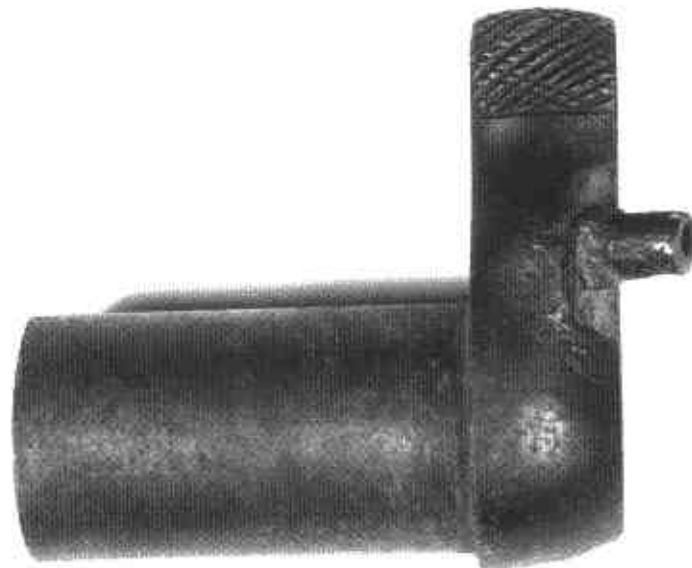


Figure 21. Close-up of the reloadable cartridge.



Figure 22. Close-up of right side of Green's rifle showing one of the cartridges removed and the thumb-piece.

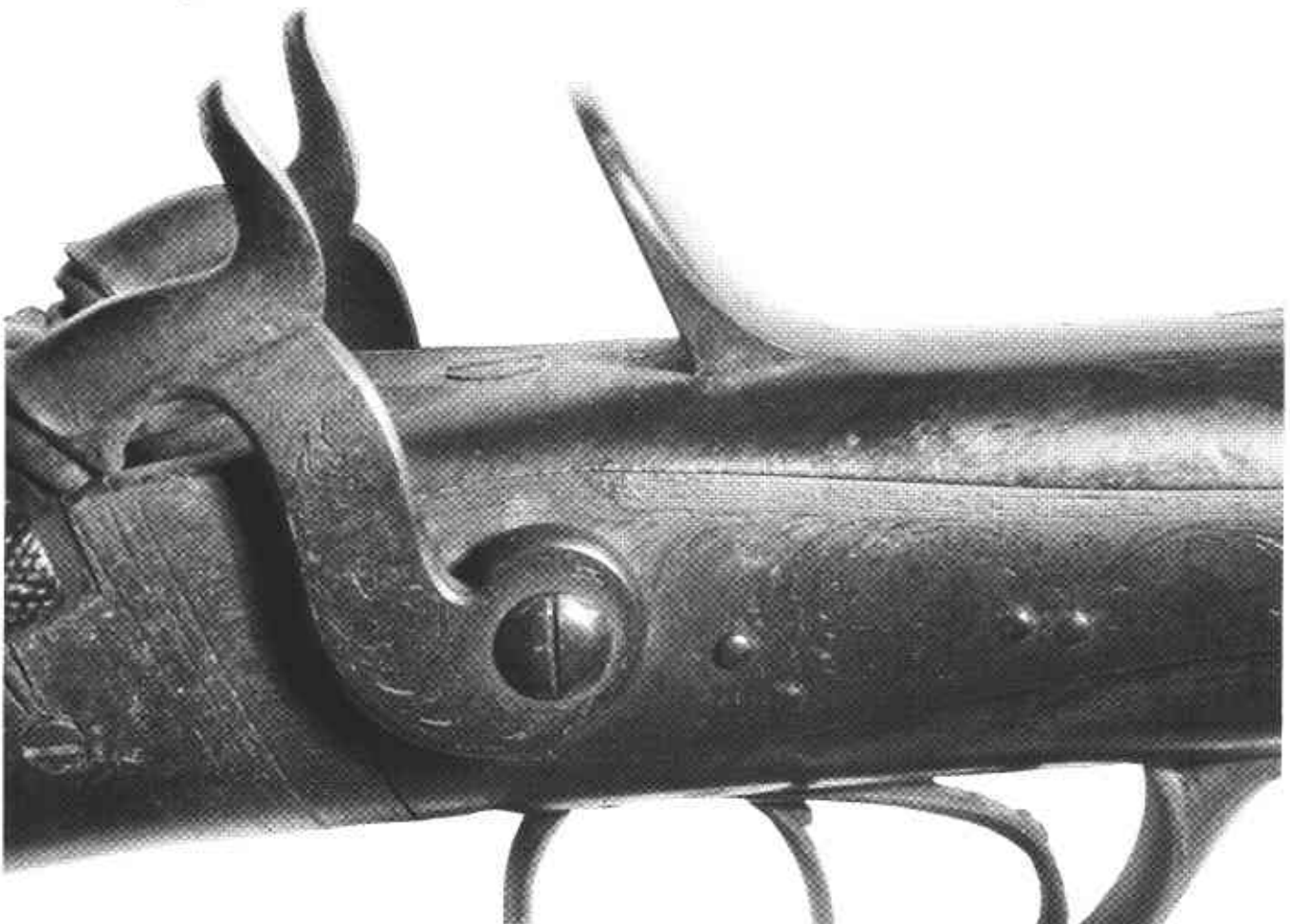


Figure 23. View of one of the back action locks in relation to the thumb piece.



**Figure 24.** Close-up of the thumb piece for use with the sliding bayonet.



**Figure 25.** Gold eagle inlay on the cheek piece of Green's rifle (missing feet & part of wing).



**Figure 26.** Gold star inlay on right side of butt engraved "GEN. THOS GREEN/TEXAS"

#### NOTES

1. Sam W. Haynes, ed., *Journal of the Texian Expedition Against Mier*, "Introduction," p. vii (Austin, TX: W. Thomas Taylor Press, 1993).
2. Green, *Journal*, pp. 480-482.
3. Walker, *Account of the Mier Expedition*, pp. 3-5.

4. Nance, *Attack and Counter-Attack*, p. 157.
5. Nance, *Attack and Counter-Attack*, pp. 517-518.
6. Green, *Journal*, pp. 79-80.
7. William Preston Stapp, *The Prisoners of Perote Containing a Journal Kept by the Author* (Philadelphia: G. B. Zieber & Co., 1845), p. 36.
8. Green, *Journal*, p. 97.