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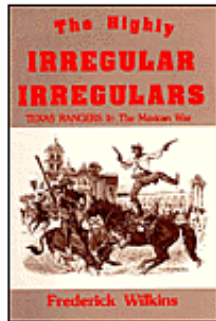
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The Highly Irregular Irregulars: Texas Rangers In The Mexican War.

by By Frederick Wilkins

Austin, Texas: Eakin Press, 1990. Bibliography, index, pp. i-ix, 1-227.

After a closely contested election in 1844, James K. Polk and the Democrats emerged victorious. Polk was elected, in part, on a platform that called for the annexation of the Republic of Texas and the acquisition of the Oregon Country. President John Tyler, who had been trying to annex Texas, took Polk's election as a mandate by the American people to do just that. This was accomplished by a joint resolution of Congress, and Tyler invited Texas to enter the Union as a state. President Polk approved what Tyler had done. This led Mexico to break diplomatic relations with the United States, preparatory to war.

Polk tried to negotiate with Mexico over the California question, the debts Mexico owed Americans, and the Rio Grande as the southern boundary of Texas and thus of the United States. But Mexico would not negotiate. Instead, General Mariano Paredes overthrew the Mexican government and came into power, dedicated to fighting the United States. In the meantime, Polk sent General Zachary Taylor to the Neuces River, the edge of the disputed territory, and later ordered him to the Rio Grande.

Mexico declared war on the United States, crossed to the north of the Rio Grande, and killed and captured some American soldiers. Polk now asked Congress for a declaration of war, and soon the Mexican War was under way. This conflict started in May 1846 and was ended by the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in February of 1848.

The Highly Irregular Irregulars by Frederick Wilkins is the story of the mounted riflemen from Texas - the Rangers. It did not take General Taylor long to drive the Mexican Army back to the south of the Rio Grande. Involved in the fighting was a company of Rangers that was recruited from men at Corpus Christi and Point Isabel. They were commanded by Sam Walker, who had a long service record with the Rangers before Texas became part of the Union. Taylor won the Battle of Palo Alto and shortly forced General Mariano Arista to recross the Rio Grande. Sam Walker became one of the first heroes of the war in this action.

Ultimately, the First Regiment, Texas Mounted Rifles, was formed. Jack Hays was colonel; Sam Walker, lieutenant colonel; and Michael Chevallie, major. All were experienced Rangers from before the war. This would be the most famous of the Ranger units. It and other Ranger units would be with Taylor through the capture of Monterey and the Battle of Buena Vista, both hard-fought victories against great odds.

The Rangers were good for scout duty, wagon escort, and courier service. They also participated in pitched battle, such as the Battle for Monterey. These Ranger outfits were a sight to see. They furnished their own horses and most of their own weapons, and they wore no uniforms. There was great informality between officers and men. This informality had nothing to do with discipline. A captain might use a man's first name when he told him to do something. The man would obey the order, using the captain's first name in reply. Informality was not insubordination, no matter what the regulars might have thought. What really counted was how the Rangers gathered intelligence and fought. They proved their worth in every situation worth mentioning.

After Buena Vista, the center of war shifted to the south, where General Winfield Scott was marching inland for Mexico City, after taking Vera Cruz. However, there was still guerrilla activity in the north, and Taylor still had the service of some Ranger outfits. Sam Walker fought in Scott's epic campaign against Mexico City. Another Ranger outfit, the Second Texas, also commanded by Colonel Jack Hays, did get to Central Mexico. They landed at Vera Cruz and were occupied fighting guerrilla bands in Scott's rear areas. In one action, Sam Walker was killed.

Colonel Hays received orders to move to Mexico City, a move that was accompanied by a great deal of fighting. The Texans entered Mexico City on December 6, 1847. Until the Rangers arrived, there was little control in the city. The people who doubted the reputation of the Rangers were in for a terrible time, because the Texans brought a great deal of law and order to the city.

The Rangers also fought guerrilla bands in south central Mexico until the war was ended by a treaty of peace. Two of these bands were led by General Paredes and an ex-priest, Celedonia de Juarata. They caused the Rangers a great deal of trouble, but they paid a very high price for doing so. General Joseph Lane, who commanded the cavalry brigade, had high praise for the Rangers, mentioning Hays and Alfred Truett by name. In an earlier report, he had also praised the Rangers and singled out Major Chevallie for special mention.

The Highly Irregular Irregulars: Texas Rangers In The Mexican War by Frederick Wilkins is a very interesting and well-documented account of the voluntary cavalry units from the Lone Star State. They served gallantly in the north under Taylor and in Central Mexico under Scott. Their service was to a lesser extent in Central Mexico because the war was almost over by the time they reached Scott. This book is highly recommended for the scholar as well as military history buffs.

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