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My Men Are All Frontiersmen

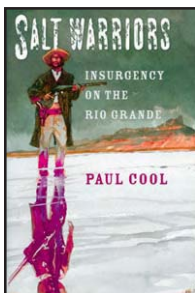
*El Paso's Tejano Texas Rangers
in the 1870s*

Paul Cool



Adapted from *Salt Warriors: Insurgency on the Rio Grande*

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During the 1870s, El Paso County was marked by wholesale political corruption and vicious, even violent, political rivalries. But while politicians and capitalists concentrated on schemes of riches and ruination, other El Pasoans contended with a land of lawlessness and barbarity that lay in all directions beyond the Pass. Texas Rangers like Gregorio Garcia, Telesforo Montes, Francisco Barela, and Sisto Salcido knew little of luxury and a great deal about searing heat, bitter cold, the taste of dust, the lack of water, and the precariousness of life. The grassy bolsons, shrub-pocked limestone mountains, and dry heat of the Chihuahuan Desert shaped and toughened such men. Keeping their eyes open, their wits sharp, their horses fed and watered, their canteens filled, and their guns clean, loaded, and within easy reach, they learned how to stay alive and, on occasion, dish out death. For these “knights” of the Trans-Pecos, the land beyond the valley was a training ground, a military academy turning out the soldiers who answered the selfish personal squabbles of El Paso’s politicians with a full scale war. These Tejano Rangers were inheritors of a nearly century-long line of citizen soldiers.

¹ Manuela Cárdenas-Oellermann translated the correspondence of Telesforo Montes and Miguel Garcia from the original Spanish.



In *The Magnificent Seven*, John Sturges's translation of Akira Kurasawa's *Seven Samurai* to the Western film genre, peaceful Mexican farmers rise up to save their village from a small army of bandits. Roused from instinctive and comfortable docility, they hire professional gunmen from north of the border who teach them which end of a gun to shoot and how to find their courage. Unlike these movie farmers, the Mexican Americans of El Paso County, called Paseños, were anything but docile. Whereas Sturges's cinematic village had but one old man who knew how to fight, the real villages of San Elizario, Socorro, and Ysleta, Texas counted hundreds. It is the old man of *The Magnificent Seven*, not his frightened neighbors, who reflect the reality of the Paseño towns.

What Mexican revolutionary historian Rubén Osorio writes about the State of Chihuahua applies specifically to the Pass of the North: "The peasant class had come into being under very special conditions during the colonial period, as settler-soldiers, or literally as an armed peasantry living in presidios constructed by the Spanish government against the 'barbarous Indians.'" Ysleta and Socorro were organized around missions, but San Elizario began in 1789 as such a presidio, or fort, the town growing up around it. Presidio soldiers campaigned against Indians and regularly escorted caravans to the provincial capital in Santa Fe. Its troops also contributed to the wider defense of the Mexican Republic. After the garrison was permanently reassigned to Santa Fe in 1843, San Elizario became a farming center. Its residents tore down the old presidio's adobe walls and buildings to construct their own homes and pens. But since Apache depredations continued, these farmers, ex-soldiers and descendants of settler-soldiers, became citizen warriors frequently defending their homes against Apaches or taking the fight to their enemy's lair.²

In the years between the Mexican-American War and the coming of the railroad in 1881, El Pasoans were entirely dependent on grass-and grain-fed animals for travel and trade. Travelers, animals, and vehicles made attractive targets. Anything could happen during the long journey along the long miles from San Antonio or the stretch south from Santa Fe. The Federal Government's unwillingness to adequately fund either its Indian reservations or its Army encouraged renegade bands and whole tribes to periodically strike out in search of adequate food, the dignity of independence, and blood revenge. According to W.W. Mills, in 1858 "The Americans and Mexicans were secure only near the military posts, or villages, or large settlements, and when they traveled from place to place, they traveled in companies strong enough for defense, or at night and by stealth, trusting to Providence, or luck, each according to his faith." The garrison at Fort Bliss seldom included sufficient mounted troops to effectively counter the Indians. To bolster them, Paseños willingly joined the soldiers as guides and auxiliaries.

Not even the large towns were safe havens. The people and livestock of *la Isla*, the occasional island on the Rio Grande holding El Paso County's ethnic Mexican towns, presented prime targets for the Mescalero Apache. On one occasion in early 1859, word reached Fort Bliss that Apaches

2 For a history of Mexican-Apache relations in Chihuahua, see William B. Griffen, *Utmost Good Faith* (University of New Mexico Press, Albuquerque, 1988). See also Rubén Osorio, "Villismo: Nationalism and Popular Mobilization in Northern Mexico," *Rural Revolt in Mexico* (Duke University Press, 1998), 97; Rick Hendricks and W.H. Timmons, *San Elizario: Spanish Presidio to Texas County Seat* (Texas Western Press, 1998), 51-61; C. L. Sonnichsen, *Mescalero Apaches* (University of Oklahoma Press, 1958, 1973 reprint), 62; Frank Louis Halla Jr., "El Paso, Texas and Juarez, Mexico: A Study of a Bi-ethnic Community 1846-1881" (Ph.D. dissertation, UT Austin, 1978), 47.



had stolen cattle, horses, and mules from San Elizario. First Lieutenant Henry M. Lazelle and thirty mounted rifleman pursued. They first stopped at San Elizario, where the officer added several citizens to augment and guide his command. Among these was Gregorio Nacianceno Garcia I. The chase stretched for 160 winding miles to New Mexico's Sacramento Mountains. On February 8, Lazelle's thirsty men passed through towering cliffs into rock strewn and cactus-choked Dog Cañon. Here thirty Apaches greeted the soldiers under a white flag. After a fruitless discussion, the shooting began. The soldiers were soon flanked, prompting their withdrawal. In a fighting retreat to the canyon's mouth, the pursuit party lost three men killed and six wounded, including Lazelle, shot twice through the lungs. The army's official report of the action failed to mention the Paseño role, but George Baylor later wrote that, "Garcia, with some citizens of San Elizario, prevented the massacre of the United States troops in Dog Cañon by his skill and courage." The survivors returned without the stolen livestock. The defeat illustrated both the difficulty of waging war on Apaches and the martial qualities of Paseño citizen soldiers.³

* * *

Raiders struck the valley nearly every month in the years immediately following the American Civil War. March 1866 was the worst month. In two days, the citizens of *la Isla*, most of whom lived their lives on a thin margin, lost over \$5,000 in livestock and other property and twenty-three relatives and neighbors killed. Between March 1865 and January 1867, the people of *la Isla* reported the loss of more than 1,200 animals, plus wagons and equipment, a staggering loss. Even worse, thirty-five Paseños were reported to have lost their lives in Indian depredations in that time.⁴

To counter continuing Indian depredations, in the spring of 1870, Governor Edmund J. Davis signed the Frontier Force bill. El Paso County was allotted a sixty-man Ranger company (soon reduced to fifty). Its payroll promised \$3,000 per month in wages to a poor county (worth more than 100 times that amount in unskilled wages for 2006). El Paso's Company N was mustered into service on August 12. Its captain was an obvious choice, Gregorio N. Garcia I. The veteran Indian campaigner was trained in the soldier's craft by Captain Jose Ignacio Ronquillo, commandant of the Presidio after 1830 and the foremost Paseño soldier of the Mexican era. That officer ranged over large tracts of land in pursuit of Comanche, Kiowa and Apache war parties. He scored several notable victories, earning promotion and a sizeable land grant in what is now west Texas. Garcia, drafted for military service in his fifteenth year, learned from Ronquillo how to track and fight Indians. Garcia served in Mexico's army against the Americans, probably in the debacle at Brazitos on Christmas Day, 1846. In the 1850s he solidified his reputation as an Indian fighter. In 1862, Union Brigadier General James Carleton chose Garcia to command twenty Paseño scouts who would guide a column of cavalry deep into Mescalero territory. Fifty-eight Paseños plus Civil War veterans Caleb Miller and Charles Kerber (company clerk) completed the ranger roster. Though many in Garcia's company were related by blood and marriage, the presence of

3 W[illiam] W[allace] Mills, *Forty Years in El Paso* (Carl Hertzog, 1962), 22; *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, March 3, 1859; Richard Wadsworth, *Forgotten Fortress* (Yucca Tree Press, 1962), 261-262; George W. Baylor, *Into the Far Wild Country*, Jerry Thompson, ed. (Texas Western Press, 1996), p. 276.

4 Dorman H. Winfrey and James M. Day, eds., *Indian Papers of Texas and the Southwest 1825-1916* (Texas State Historical Association, 1995), 4:169-172.



forty-two Mexicano surnames on the rolls testified to a community-wide response to the needs for soldiers *and* income.⁵

Putting Texas Rangers into the field, armed, equipped, and mounted required money. When the Army reneged on its agreement to provide the Rangers with weapons and supplies, Garcia was forced to campaign with “brought [sic] carbines and shoulder guns.” Garcia stressed his need for arms, ammunition and equipment “so I am able to chastise Indians,” but did not wait to take the field. On December 6, he received word that Apaches had stolen cattle at a ranch some twenty miles southeast of San Elizario. A sergeant and ten men pursued, but the Indians escaped. An unexpected call for help came from El Paso on the night of December 7. Albert French, at that time the local State Police chief, requested the Rangers’ help to ensure order following the killings of Judge Gaylord Clarke and disgruntled office seeker Benjamin Franklin Williams. Garcia and his men saddled up at once, riding “25 miles in 2 hours and 15 minutes” from San Elizario to El Paso. The town remained quiet, and Garcia’s men returned to camp two days later.⁶

In February 1871, Garcia’s command cooperated in a winter campaign with four companies of the Ninth Cavalry under Major Albert P. Morrow. The Rangers still lacked arms, ammunition, and sufficient pack mules, but the experienced Garcia still hoped to “make good record for myself and Company.” The formations linked at Independence Spring, near the Guadalupe Pass. Here Morrow lent the Rangers mules and armed them with Springfield needle guns. Though the ammunition was “quite unserviceable, not over half of them giving fire,” at least the men were on campaign. While the cavalry scouted the center and east side of the Guadalupe and Sacramento Mountains, the Rangers scouted the west side. Garcia spotted the trail of a dozen or so Indians estimated to be eight days old. The Rangers followed the tracks as far as Dog Cañon. Here the trail split in two, some Indians going to San Andres, and others headed to the safety of Fort Stanton. Finding no more signs, the Rangers returned to Independence Spring, “having marched an average of 26 miles per day over rocky and steep mountains, with scarcity of water, being 78 full hours without a drop of water for man or beast, also under very cold weather.” Another seven-day patrol east to the Pecos river country also failed to turn up Indians. Garcia made the best of his obvious disappointment. “The reports of the murdering of 8 Americans & one white lady about 90 miles west of the Rio Grande, also of the many murders in New Mexico and Arizona makes all believe that the Indians are aware of our large command or fled to other parts.”⁷

5 The captain was to be paid \$100 per month, the lieutenant \$80, the three sergeants \$54, the four corporals \$52, and the fifty privates \$50 each. Frederick Wilkins, *The Law Comes to Texas* (State House Press, 1999), 6. See “How Much Is That?” website for the inflation in unskilled wages. <http://www.measuringworth.com/uscompare/>. Bill Lockhart, “San Elizario Presidio History,” *San Elizario Plaza*, John A. Peterson, Timothy B. Graves, and David V. Hill, eds., (UT El Paso, 2002), 58; Hendricks/Timmons, *San Elizario*, 84, 115; Griffen, *Utmost Good Faith*, 30-32, 56-57; “Ronquillo Land Grant,” *Handbook of Texas Online* (hereinafter “HTO”), <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/RR/mnr1.html>.

6 Wilkins, 7; Garcia to Adjutant General (AG), December 3, 1870; Garcia to A.G., December 6, 1870; Return of Company N, Texas Frontier Forces, December 1870, AG Records, Texas State Archives and Library Commission (All correspondence and other records related to the El Paso Texas Ranger companies of 1870-71 and 1874-76 are from the AG Correspondence or other AG Records, TSALC, unless otherwise noted).

7 “Needle guns” were cartridge conversions of the muzzle loading Springfield musket. Garcia to AG, January 7, 1871; Return of Company N, February, 1871; Garcia to AG, March 31, 1871.



In April, nearly eight months after they were mustered in, Company D finally received arms, Winchester carbines instead of the promised rifles. Garcia also received 15,000 rounds of Winchester ammunition and 5,000 rounds of ammunition for pistols, but no pistols. Unfortunately, the Frontier Force was disbanded in June 1871. Captain Garcia's final report eloquently expressed his pride in the company's service as well as his many frustrations. Though his men had not met the Indians in battle, Garcia was confident the unit had performed a great service to Texas. "[T]housands of miles have been traveled by my Company under great wants of water and great cold so we could make drive [sic] the Indians for Arizona and Mexico. We succeeded in that." His boast was not idle. As Texas Ranger historian Frederick Wilkins noted, "Indians tended to avoid regions in which they observed the tracks of shod horses, and there is little doubt that Indian raids decreased in the districts patrolled by the Rangers." Indeed, the Apaches resumed their raids along the river once his unit disbanded.⁸

The company was discharged without having received any pay. Garcia advised the Adjutant General, "the majority of the Company are poor men and heads of families; for most their horses and pistols I myself had to go security with the promise to pay them at the first payday." Garcia's warning that the Democratic Party would make hay with this non-payment of sixty *Paseños* at the next election had its effect. The Rangers finally received their full back pay, a small fortune for some. For others, perhaps even more valuable was the military experience gained.⁹

* * *

In the spring of 1874, the state government raised special companies of Texas Rangers called "Frontier Men" or "Minute Men" to meet emergencies on the frontier. El Paso's company included one officer and twenty-four enlisted men, all but one of them a *Paseno*. In the years since Garcia's company was disbanded, local politicians had learned the value of controlling an armed force on election day. In 1872 they had battled for control of El Paso's State Police unit. Now, local politician Louis Cardis endorsed the appointment of Albert French as Captain of the company. Instead, the commanding officer, a lieutenant this time, was selected by vote of the new recruits. The election went to Telesforo Montes, a leader in the community's opposition to a recent Texas school law, an experienced Apache fighter, and one of Captain Garcia's sergeants in 1870-1871. Rangers who later figured prominently in the Salt War included Sergeant Tomas Garcia, Corporal Francisco Barela, and Private Sisto Salcido, another veteran of Garcia's company. The outfit was something of a family affair. In addition to Tomas Garcia, Montes commanded son-in-law Carlos Garcia, their brother Secundio, and the lieutenant's own sons, Jesus and Severo, a fact that later caused complaint.¹⁰

Again, the El Paso Rangers lacked sufficient arms and ammunition. Echoing Garcia's earlier pleas, Montes prodded Adjutant General William Steele, "The Company are all anxious to go on a scout to prevent depredations from these marauding Indians, & to drive them from the Country

8 Garcia to AG to April 17, 1871; AG's Abstract of Articles transferred to Frontier Force, May 31, 1871; Garcia to AG, June 16, 1871; Wilkins, *Law Comes to Texas*, 16; Montes to AG, September 13-14, 1871; Indian Papers, 4:384.

9 Garcia to A.G. March 31, 1871; Garcia to A.G., June 16, 1871; Garcia and Montes Payment Vouchers.

10 Cardis to AG Steele, March 30, 1874, endorsing Letter of A.H. French, March 7, 1874, State Police Corr., AG Corr.; *Mesilla News*, March 7, 1874; Muster and Pay Roll of Company of Frontier Men, El Paso County, May 27, 1874.



or secure their capture....” Montes’s Frontier Men did not wait long. In July the Rangers received twenty Sharps rifles. Texas was stingier with ammunition, furnishing only two boxes of a thousand rounds each. Supply snafus were repeated. The pistol cartridges were unsuitable for the Rangers’ old Colt revolvers. Promised cartridge belts and boxes never arrived, prompting Montes to hire a local saddler to make them.¹¹

In mid-September the Montes company rescued an eight-year-old boy. The Rangers first scouted to the Guadalupe Mountains, then struck a trail headed back toward the river. The Rangers came upon their quarry on the third day out, camped in a canyon inaccessible to horses. It was a party of seven, one of whom was the captive boy. Montes dismounted his men, left half with the horses, and took twelve with him into the canyon. The Rangers attacked, killing two men, scalping one. The boy, unharmed in the action, had been stolen from his parents near Presidio del Norte eight months earlier. The Rangers also captured five horses, gunpowder, lead, saddles, and “camp paraphernalia,” all “divided among the men.” Evidence of the Apache band’s recent success was found in a pile of “dry goods, such as muslin, calico & evidently recently acquired which had not been unfolded.” The captured horses were in poor condition, but one was in better shape than Montes’s “exhausted” mount. With General Steele’s permission, Montes later exchanged his horse for the captured animal.¹²

Just as it proved its worth, the El Paso company was ordered to disband. Montes warned that Indian raids would increase, leaving citizens defenseless. Opting to reinforce success, Steele kept the company in force for two more months. Unfortunately, the Rangers failed to catch the Indian parties they tracked to the Sierra Blanca Mountains in late October and to the Guadalupe Mountains in November.¹³

Budget cutbacks forced the disbandment of the emergency Ranger companies that winter. The Apaches thereupon resumed their attacks upon travelers and ranchers, raiding as far as *la Isla* in relative safety and with some success. The renewed depredations prompted Judge Charles Howard, a Democratic Party leader, to beg the governor in July 1875 to call the company back into service. But the judge had another motive: laying low his political rival, Louis Cardis, who had promised Ranger slots to political allies. As Howard laid bare to Governor Richard Coke, “As to matters political, both this and the San Antonio Senatorial Dist seem to have gone for the enemy. I can reclaim El Paso County if I can have the filling of the company that we talked of.... If you will let us have a company, and *let me name men and officers* (italics added), it will do more to break down Cardis, than any other one thing. The people will then see that he has lied to them.”¹⁴

While the judge looked for political advantage, Sheriff Charles Kerber was motivated by a palpable dread of armed “Mexicans.” The sheriff warned Coke that Cardis was already organizing

11 In 1862, Steele led the Confederate rear guard in its retreat through El Paso following the debacle at Glorieta Pass. During their passage, his men engaged in several skirmishes with Paseños angry over “contraband” stolen from the population. See Paul Cool, *Salt Warriors: Insurgency on the Rio Grande* (Texas A&M University Press, 2008), 29-30; Montes to A.G. William Steele, May 31, 1874; S. Schutz & Bro. voucher, June 15, 1874, Frontier Force records; Montes to Steele, August 5, 1874.

12 Montes to Steele, September 27, 1874.

13 Montes to Steele, September 27, October 20, October 28, and November 27, 1874.

14 Howard to Coke, July 2, 1875, August 16, 1875, August 19, 1875, Register of Letters Received, Governor Richard Coke Corr., TSALC (hereinafter Coke Corr.)



a company of rangers “among his Mexican friends” in fulfillment of a campaign pledge. This was, against the peace — & dangerous for all white men of this County, which he threatens to punish personally for not voting for him. Even in his speeches to the Mexican population he... advises the latter to drive all Americans from this country or make use of the Lynch Law. Four years ago Cardis in company with a fanatic catholic priest had organized a company to drive all Americans, not his friends, from the Country or to kill them.... The same priest though now removed to Mexico still supports Cardis & helps him at every election by having nightly meetings on this side of the river. That’s where Cardis’ influence amongst the ignorant Mexican population lays! ... every white man, not Cardis’ friends, has to expect to be assassinated.¹⁵

The governor assured Kerber that “no authority has been granted anybody to raise a military company in El Paso Co.” The sheriff’s fear that Cardis would use the unit to kill “Americans” was baseless, but he was not entirely mistaken in the danger posed by a military unit composed of *Pasenos*. A number of Montes’s Rangers joined the insurrection of 1877, including two of its leaders, Corporal Francisco Barela and Private Sisto Salcido. It cannot be discounted that the Rangers’ organized forays against the Apache enemy gave them a chance to develop and demonstrate martial qualities to their countrymen and to themselves.¹⁶

* * *

Meanwhile, the citizens of *la Isla* were hit in mid-September 1875 by Indians who ran off four horses from San Elizario and then attacked a salt train, capturing six mules. Alerting General Steele to the newest depredations, Montes asserted, “The U.S. troops don’t understand the character of these Indians, nor are they acquainted with the character of the country. My men are all frontiersmen, thoroughly acquainted [with] this whole country and we [are] well versed in Apache tricks and tactics.”¹⁷

In response to the pleas from El Paso, the Rangers were mustered back in on September 27, 1875. Again, they were indifferently armed (apparently at least some of the Sharps rifles used in 1874 were no longer available, though the correspondence is silent on this fact), and ammunition was again a problem. A raiding party hit Socorro on November 11, taking nine horses. The Rangers followed the tracks southeast until they reached the Eagle Mountains, where they came upon a campsite with the fires still burning. Montes followed a new trail south, though the Ranger horses “were jaded for want of water.” Six hours later, the Frontier Men spotted three Indians on horseback fleeing up canyon walls. The Rangers wounded one warrior, but his comrades carried him to safety. The Indians left behind most of the stolen horses and three ponies. Montes felt that “Great praise is due to the men under my command, in the manner they behaved, being without food or water for 36 hours.”¹⁸

The State’s tight budget forced the company to again cease campaigning at the end of 1875. The unit entered the State’s service one last time on March 25, 1876. By now there was bitter dissension between Montes and one private. The first flare up occurred during a nine-day, 215-mile scout launched on April 1. The company marched from San Elizario to the Guadalupe Salt

15 Kerber to Coke, August 18, 1875, Coke Corr.

16 Coke to Kerber, September 4, 1875, Coke Corr.

17 Montes to Steele, September 18, 1875.

18 Montes to Steele, October 21, November 1, and November 20, 1875; Montes to Steele, January 11, 1876.



Lakes, where they found the first water in two days. From there they rode eighty miles to the Rio Grande and then back to camp, without having spotted Indians. Private Miguel Garcia (a cousin of the Captain's family) sent his own report to General Steele, complaining that men and horses had been mistreated by Montes's manner of marching them for hours on end without food or water. "All of us knew that the expedition was bad, but none of us could say anything." Garcia was particularly critical of one militarily useless excursion. At one point Montes "ordered the soldiers to climb a hill and cut Sabina (a Juniper bush), which was loaded on the pack mules and brought down, to help celebrate Palm Sunday at church." Finally, Garcia noted, "most" of the company were members of Montes's family, "and that's why he has lasted this long as a Lieutenant."¹⁹

The next patrol caused an even greater tempest. On the night of April 16, Indians stole some mares from San Elizario and cattle from the tableland above Socorro. Montes had the company on the road at dawn on the 17th. Upon reaching the Hueco Tanks, the Rangers discovered the remains of two butchered steers. Montes watered the horses, filled the canteens, and pushed on in pursuit of the Apaches, only two of whom were mounted. Miguel Garcia told a different and troubling story. Having reached the Hueco Mountains, where the *tinaja* [i.e. natural basin] was "so big the water lasts all year long," Montes took the company in search of another pool, "but he did not find any, got lost, and finally found his way back to the same *tinaja* in Cerro Hueco. We were unable to overtake the Indians that day." Garcia complained that the Rangers did not leave the Tanks until the following day "at mid-day."²⁰

The pursuit resumed. Following the first night, the men found "a little bit of water" by digging for it. Garcia charged that Montes' horse was given "six big glasses of water and after that, water was also given to the horses of the two sergeants who are his sons in-laws. Water was also given to the horses of the corporals, the water was [then] gone and none was left, not even to fill one canteen." Nevertheless, the chase continued until the men reached a small gorge, where they again found a small amount of water. The command then rode on to the familiar Dog Cañon. The Rangers moved into the steep gorge to water the horses and rest. According to Montes, within moments they were struck by a ragged volley from above. The Rangers "looked up and saw the mountains thick with Indians shooting from all sides." Garcia said they camped "without any precautions," an assessment implicit in Montes' own report. Garcia obtained permission to scout the canyon. He, a corporal (possibly Francisco Barela), and five others scouted deep into the canyon, when they were met by the report of a dozen guns. According to Garcia, "they were coming towards us and I told them to stop, but they did not pay me heed. They took some of my companions. [Montes mentions no casualties.] One was coming after me, but could not get me because I give him a terrible blow." Garcia reached the main party, where he found the Rangers had saddled their horses under fire. Montes judged that two hundred or more Indians were shooting at them, armed with needle guns and pistols. Collecting the horses as quickly as possible, the Rangers raced out of the canyon. From the opening they challenged the Apaches "to come out where we was and fight and they said for us to come in there and get the horses if we wanted them."²¹

At dark, Montes and his Rangers retraced their steps and then cut toward the San Augustine

19 Montes to Steele, April 21, 1876; Miguel Garcia to Steele, April 9, 1876.

20 Montes to Steele, April 21, 1876; Miguel Garcia to Steele, April 21, 1876.

21 Miguel Garcia to Steele, April 21, 1876; Montes to Steele, April 21, 1876.



Pass over the Organ Mountains. The bedraggled column—they had not eaten in twenty-four hours and some men had not had time to fill their canteens—reached the Shedd Ranch, notorious as “a known and welcoming haven for every horse and cattle thief in southern New Mexico...” There Montes bought a cow for his men to eat. They may have paid Warren Shedd’s standard rate of one dollar for a bucket of water, a bargain for thirsty men. After four days on the trail, the company reached home on the morning of April 21.²²

A month later, Juan N. Garcia wrote his own letter to General Steele in support of Miguel (who may have been his older brother). Miguel’s reports, said Juan, were “the unvarnished truth.” Juan Garcia gibed, “The battalion of Senor Montes is not solely made of his family because he does not have enough sons to... make 25 that are needed.” Montes, he added, was motivated by his “vile interest” in making money off the government. As to Montes’ soldiering, “one can say that he does not know even one military tactic to guide his soldiers. Pure favoritism alone has made him lieutenant.”²³

Perhaps coming to his point, Garcia added, “There are men here that are more skilled in every way than he.” Who were these men? Garcia noted that both former police captain French and local politician Louis Cardis would back up his charges. (Cardis had previously lobbied to secure the lieutenantcy for French.) Juan Garcia claimed not to want the job for himself, but he coyly begged Steele “to permit me become one of your servants. Obediently fighting... under your orders.”²⁴

Montes’s report of the last patrol, though vague on details, appears to support the conclusion that his company failed to exercise ordinary caution entering Dog Cañon. While they could not have known that scores, even hundreds of Apaches were lying in wait for them along the canyon walls, the lieutenant should have anticipated some trap might be set in this place. While the charges leveled by the Garcias indict Montes as inept (on this occasion), they may simply provide evidence that the Paseño community was divided internally by party politics, personal jealousies, and strong opinions about how things should be done.

Indian raids increased after the Rangers stood down. People were murdered, cattle stolen, wagon trains attacked. The army could do nothing. The only troops close to the settlements were a few companies of the slow-moving Twenty-Fifth Infantry posted to Fort Bliss. Even their regimental history described their ten year record in Texas as largely devoid of contact with Indians, except for “a few unimportant skirmishes.”²⁵

The Texas Rangers of the El Paso Salt War are often described as a motley crew led by an officer, John B. Tays, who was no better than a handyman. The unit’s surrender to a howling “mob” is regarded as a black day in Ranger history. In truth, the Tays’s Texas Rangers, although

22 Montes to Steele, April 21, 1876; Frederick Nolan, “San Augustine Ranch,” *True West*, June 1999, 44.

23 Juan N. Garcia to Steele, May 22, 1876.

24 Juan N. Garcia to Steele, May 22, 1876.

25 Relations of the United States with Mexico, including Texas Frontier Troubles (House of Representatives Executive Document No. 701, 45th Congress, 1878), 105; Letters of Ernst Kohlberg (Texas Western Press, 1973), 40, 44; Theo F. Rodenbough and William L. Haskin, *The Army of the United States: Historical Sketches...* (Maynard, Merrill & Co., 1896), 697.



hastily thrown together and lacking *esprit de corps*, included a number of brave and stalwart frontiersmen. When they surrendered, through subterfuge and an error by Tays, it was not to a mob but to a small, organized, and well-led army, one that included at least ten veterans of Garcia's and Montes's Texas Ranger companies—and probably many more.

The insurgent army's commanders included ex-Texas Rangers Sisto Salcido and Corporal Francisco "Chico" Barela. The latter, the insurgents' chief general, displayed considerable innate military skill in the Salt War. About 50 years old in 1877, a family man with property, Barela had much to defend and to lose, as others did when they chose to campaign against Apaches. His enemies later made a great deal of his illiteracy, but he nonetheless was considered "a leader of great fire and talent."²⁶ We can be certain Barela valued military intelligence and would have used it. When campaigning against Apaches, he learned that knowledge of that enemy's whereabouts, strength, and intentions was all the more precious for its rarity. In the Salt War, on more than one occasion he used misinformation to mislead, divide and weaken his opponents. Barela's successful effort to divert Captain Thomas Blair from San Elizario is evidence that he knew the importance of keeping the U.S. Army out of the fight. His stratagem of tricking the Salt War Rangers into surrendering might be seen as perfidy, but was simply one more effective military deception. Paseño campaigns against Apaches had also taught Barela, Salcido, and their companions the value of organization, discipline, and tactics, among other facets of war.

It would be two years following the dissolution of the Montes company before Texas Rangers based in El Paso would again take the field against hostile Indians. When that happened, they would be different Rangers. Instead of Paseños, who provided 78 of the 81 men identified in Captain Garcia's and Lieutenant Montes's units, the El Paso Rangers of 1877 and for years afterward would be almost entirely Anglos. The Salt War served as the dividing line, the event that made it impossible for the county's Anglo power structure to trust its fate, or its guns, to "Mexicans." But if the Salt War interrupted the tradition of Paseño Rangers in the service of Texas, it also added a new chapter in the history of Paseño military service. As Barela, Salcido and others assaulted Texas Ranger positions over four days in 1877, Miguel Garcia, once more a Texas Ranger, defended them, as did private citizen Gregorio Garcia and his sons, again defending their community against a perceived threat to its present and future.²⁷

Oddly enough, the last chapter of El Paso's *Tejano* Rangers may have been written in Mexico. In December 1879, Lieutenant George W. Baylor's Texas Rangers joined a hundred Mexican citizens in pursuit of Victorio south of the border. Among the Mexican citizen-soldiers, the Rangers discovered another veteran Apache fighter in their midst, "Old Chico Barela," as well as "many others" wanted for murder in the Salt War. Baylor "gave the old fellow to understand we were now fighting a common enemy and should act in harmony together," an arrangement he was glad to make in view of Barela's personally saving the Rangers from execution two years before.²⁸

²⁶ Francisco Barela, *1870 U.S. Census, Ysleta, El Paso County, Texas, 2; Sonnichsen, Pass of the North* (Texas Western Press, 1968), 206.

²⁷ Besides Barela and Salcido, the Texas Rangers indicted for murder in the Salt War were Gabino Arias, Sisto Castillo, Lino Guerra, and Pedro Sierra (all Garcia's company), plus Dionisio Guerra, José Hernandez, Pomposo Paz, and Ysidro Sierra (all Montes's company). See Muster Rolls for Company N, 1870-1871, and El Paso Company, *Frontier Men, 1874*; El Paso County Criminal Case No. 282, El Paso County Archives (UT El Paso).

²⁸ Baylor, *Into the Far Wild Country*, 287.