

THE ROAD TO GLORIETA



**GENERAL
THOMAS GREEN**



"Tom Green and his cavalry have been through almost every battle-field west of the Mississippi River, and whenever his banner floated, down went the enemy's" - Sharp Whitley

If Colonel James Reily was admired and well-liked by the men of the Sibley Brigade, then Colonel Thomas Green was idolized and loved. "His troops had unbounded confidence in him, and believed whatever he did was right, and that is everything." Not a natural orator like Reily or William Scurry, Green used words with economy. "His 'general orders' were few," noted one of his men, "but when they came, like a two-edged sword, they cut both ways, and were always obeyed without a murmur on the part of the men under him." "If sent on any expedition no matter how hazardous or apparently useless, their only reply was, 'Well, boys, if old Tom said so, it's all right.'" Green stood nearly six-feet tall and was slightly stooped shouldered. His face was "rather rounding" and, during service in Louisiana, he sported "a short grizzly beard." He was a ferocious warrior, but at the same time cherished all the men who served under him. He never asked his men to shoulder any burden, that he was unwilling to carry himself. In return, they were devoted to him. "Upright, modest," General Taylor said; Tom Green had "the simplicity of a child." "Danger seemed to be his element," wrote Taylor, "and he rejoiced in combat. His men adored him, and would follow wherever he led; but they did not fear him, for, though he scolded at them in action, he was too kind-hearted to punish breaches of discipline. In truth, he had no conception of the value of discipline in war, believing that all must be actuated by his own devotion to duty." (1)

Serving in Louisiana Green was hailed as the hero of the engagement at Bisland and Franklin. Commanding General Richard Taylor's rear guard, he proved himself equal to every emergency. Time and again his retreating command turned on the advancing Federals and held them in their tracks. Without his speed, vigilance, and daring, there is little chance that General Taylor could have extricated his army from its perilous position (See Epilogues for The Confederate Army of New Mexico and Henry Hopkins Sibley). Afterwards Taylor wrote of Green; "In truth, he was the

Ney of our retreat, and the shield and buckler of our little force." Brigadier Alfred Mouton also praised the Colonel saying; "To the military knowledge, intrepidity, and undaunted bravery of Col. Thomas Green I am greatly indebted for the successful check of the advance of the enemy. From our entrenchments to Opelousas he brought up the rear, faced the enemy at every step, and exhibited energy, zeal, and courage unsurpassable by that of any officer in the service." (2)

Tom Green came to Louisiana as a colonel, but because of his conspicuous services, Taylor recommended him for promotion to brigadier general and eventually major general. Supplanting General Sibley as commander of the brigade, "Daddy" Green led his Texans into action after action. "Like the Irishman at Donnybrook, Green's rule was to strike an enemy whenever he saw him." In the year following the fight at Bisland, he engaged the enemy at Vermilion Bayou, Brashear City, Fort Butler, Lafourche, Fordoche, Bourbeau, Mansfield, and Pleasant Hill. So effective were Green's troops, that after they stormed and captured Brashear City, General Nathaniel Banks, the Federal commander, placed their strength at "nine to twelve thousand." At the time, all Confederate forces in the area numbered "less than three thousands of all arms." Remembering these days, one of Green's men later wrote; "Tom Green and his cavalry have been through almost every battle-field west of the Mississippi River, and whenever his banner floated, down went the enemy's" (3)

On April 10, 1864, the Red River was falling. Two days earlier, the Confederates had routed the Union army at Mansfield Crossroads. The next day, the Federals struck back at Pleasant Hill. Lieutenant General Taylor's army took a pounding in the second action, but the end result was that the Federals under Banks retreated. Pushing slowly up the Red River, Rear Admiral David D. Porter, in command of a flotilla of Union gunboats and troop transports, learned of Bank's reversal. With insufficient infantry support to make a landing on his own, Porter turned his fleet around and headed back down river. General Taylor decided that the Union boats were a prize that he couldn't let slip away. Accordingly, at daylight on the 11th, he ordered Arthur Pendleton Bagby, now a brigadier and the immediate commander of Sibley's old brigade, to hurry to Grand Bayou landing and engage Porter's fleet. (4)

Bayou Pierre, 300 feet wide and too deep to ford, leaves the Red River a few miles below Shreveport. After a long meandering course, it dumps back into its parent river three miles above Grand Encore. To reach Grand Bayou, or any of the other landings along the Red River, roads from the interior crossed the Pierre by means of ferries. Bagby and the men of the brigade made good

time, but upon reaching the Pierre they discovered, that the only means of crossing was one small flat boat. With no other options at hand, General Bagby immediately proceeded to throw his men across. The effort was in vain. The bayou proved such a bottleneck that it was midnight before the brigade reached the river. At the landing, Bagby learned that the Federal flotilla passed by many hours earlier at 10 a.m. Determined to overtake them, the Texans headed down the river road, pushing toward the next access point at Blair's landing. (5)

Meanwhile, Tom Green was also headed for Blair's landing. He was directing Taylor's advance cavalry operations at Pleasant Hill, when the Lieutenant General sent orders that he too should try to intercept the Federal flotilla. All available cavalry were pushed down to Green, and Taylor impressed on him "the importance of reaching Blair's Landing in advance of the fleet." "Green with his usual energy marched from Pleasant Hill for Blair's Landing at 6 p.m. of the 11th." His command consisted of Wood's and Gould's regiments and portions of Mosby M. Parson's brigade. In all, he led about 750 horse and two batteries of artillery. (6)

Reaching Bayou Pierre, General Green faced the same difficulty that had delayed Bagby's passage. After much hard work on morning of the 12th, he managed to cross only three of his cannon and a portion of his horse. When word arrived, that the fleet was approaching the landing, Green decided, he could wait no longer. In characteristic style, he attacked at once. Rushing down to the river, the Confederates immediately opened fire. Lieutenant George M. Bache, U.S. Navy, commanding the gunboat "Lexington," reported that Green's men "came boldly up to the edge of the bank, yelling and waving their side arms, so close that as a portion of the bank caved in from our fire, one of the rebels tumbled down within a few feet of the vessel." The Union's other gunboat, the monitor Osage, opened on the Confederates with "a heavy fire of shrapnel and canister." Refusing to be driven back Green's dismounted cavalry "fought with unusual pertinacity." Thomas O. Selfridge, commanding the Osage, stated in his after action report, the barrage from the shore was "the heaviest and most concentrated fire of musketry that I have ever witnessed." "The loss inflicted upon the crowded transports of the enemy was terrible. Several times the transports raised the white flag, but the gun-boats, protected by their plating, kept up their fire." "Many times," the Confederate "sharpshooters forced the gun-boats to close their port-holes." Still the flotilla managed to return a destructive fire. The battle had raged for almost an hour, when General Green was suddenly struck down. Personally leading a regimental charge, he was hit in the forehead by a discharge of grape from the Osage. Decapitated by the blast, he died instantly. (7)

Deprived of Green's leadership, his men soon fell back and the Federal fleet escaped towards Grand Encore. Initially, both sides in the engagement believed they had imposed huge losses on their enemy. Rear-Admiral Porter, reported that his fleet, "mowed down" the attackers. Lieutenant Commander Selfridge felt sure that the Confederate loss was "not less than 200." For their part, the Confederates reported that the Union decks were "awash with blood." The reality was that seven Federals lost their lives on the gun-boats and another fifty on the transports. The Confederates suffered "scarcely a casualty except the death of General Green, an irreparable one." (8)

On the morning of the 13th, the men of the old Sibley brigade were crossing back to the mainland when they learned that Tom Green was dead. At first some refused to believe the report. Before long, however, it was fully confirmed. When the sad news was accepted, many a hardened veteran shed tears of sorrow. "This was our dark day," wrote Theophilus Noel, "None felt the loss of him so keenly as did his old Brigade." (9)

General Green's "death was a public calamity, and mourned as such by the people of Texas and Louisiana." Lamenting the loss of his friend, Major General Taylor wrote; "Throughout broad Texas, throughout desolate Louisiana, mourning will sadden every hearth. Great is the loss to family and friends; much greater is the loss to this army and to me." In memory of the heroic commander, Taylor ordered the colors of his cavalry corps be draped for thirty days. (10)

Because Thomas Green was not a West Point graduate, President Jefferson Davis was slow to approve his appointment to Major General. At the repeated urgings of Taylor, he had finally acted. As fate would have it, the papers authorizing Green's increase in rank and also a "beautiful new uniform of a Major General, which was a present from his men, came too late." Dressed in the new uniform and escorted by regimental musicians, Green's body was carried back to Austin, Texas. He was buried at the state capital in the Oakland Cemetery beside members of his family. (11)

Twenty-four years after General Green's death, a small Texas newspaper wrote, "There are men who are soldiers by inspiration, Green is one. West Point may mold officers, and instruct them in the rudiments of war; but it could not infuse into many the spirit and military genius of Tom Green." (12)

Footnotes (See *The Road to Glorieta* for bibliography)

1. Davidson, "Reminiscences of the Old Brigade," August 23, 1888, Whitley; Noel, Campaign from Santa Fe, p.p88; Taylor, Destruction and Reconstruction, p.178.
2. OR,I,XV,p.395, Report of Maj. Gen. Richard Taylor; OR,I,XV,p.399, Report of Brig. Gen. Alfred Mouton.

3. Taylor, Destruction and Reconstruction, pp.144 & 146; Davidson, "Reminiscences of the Old Brigade," August 23, 1888, Whitley.
4. OR,I,XXXIV,p.570, Report of R. Taylor, Lieutenant General; Taylor, Destruction and Reconstruction, p.177.
5. Captain Giescke states that Bagby's men laid down to sleep before starting for Blair's landing, but that they did so without taking the saddles off their horses. He also states that, on the 12th, they overtook part of the flotilla. General Bagby "seemed to think it not advisable to attack," and allowed the boats to pass down unmolested. At first Captain Giescke was circumspect about why Bagby chose not to attack, writing in his diary; "The reason for this I had better not give away." The next day, however, an entry reads; "It seems as if there was some lack of courage to do any certain thing." OR,I,XXXIV,p.570, Report of R. Taylor, Lieutenant General; Taylor, Destruction and Reconstruction, p.177; Haas, "The Diary of Giesecke, Julius," April 11, 1864.
6. OR,I,XXXIV,p.570, Report of R. Taylor, Lieutenant General; Taylor, Destruction and Reconstruction, p.177.
7. Some sources say that the Union gunboat, which killed Tom Green, was the "Black Hawk." The Black Hawk was a transport so it is much more likely the deadly blast came from the Osage. Lieutenant George M. Bache, U.S.N., wrote in his after action report that the Osage and the Lexington were the only gunboats involved in the engagement. Although Green's force numbered about 750, they fought so ferociously that officers on the Union boats placed their number at 2,500. Bache reported that his vessel alone "fired 76 rounds of canister and shrapnel." The courage of the Rebels under fire was so outrageous and their assaults so furious, that Admiral Porter, unable to account for their reckless bravery, afterwards claimed that they were "all drunk." Official Records ORN,I,XXVI,p.49, Report of Lieutenant Commander Thomas O. Selfridge, U.S. Navy commanding U.S.S. Osage; Official Records ORN,I,XXVI,p.50, Report of Lieutenant George M. Bache, U.S. Navy commanding U.S.S. Lexington; OR,I,XXXIV,p.570, Report of R. Taylor, Lieutenant General; Noel, Campaign from Santa Fe, p.122 & Editor's introduction, p.XX; Taylor, Destruction and Reconstruction, p.177; Texas Historical Foundation, "Red River Campaign," p.13.
8. Official Records ORN,I,XXVI,p.49, Report of Lieutenant Commander Thomas O. Selfridge, U.S. Navy commanding U.S.S. Osage; Official Records ORN,I,XXVI,pp.50-54, Report of Rear Admiral David D. Porter; Taylor, Destruction and Reconstruction, p.178.
9. Noel, Campaign from Santa Fe, p.122.
10. Taylor, Destruction and Reconstruction, p.178; Noel, Campaign from Santa Fe, p.122.
11. One of the musicians who accompanied Green's body was a young German named, Fritz Riebe. Riebe marched to New Mexico as part of Company E, 5th Texas Mounted Volunteers. Harris, "A Tale of Men Who Knew Not Fear, p.69.
12. Davidson, "Reminiscences of the Old Brigade," August 23, 1888.



The Road to Glorieta; A Confederate Army Marches through New Mexico



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