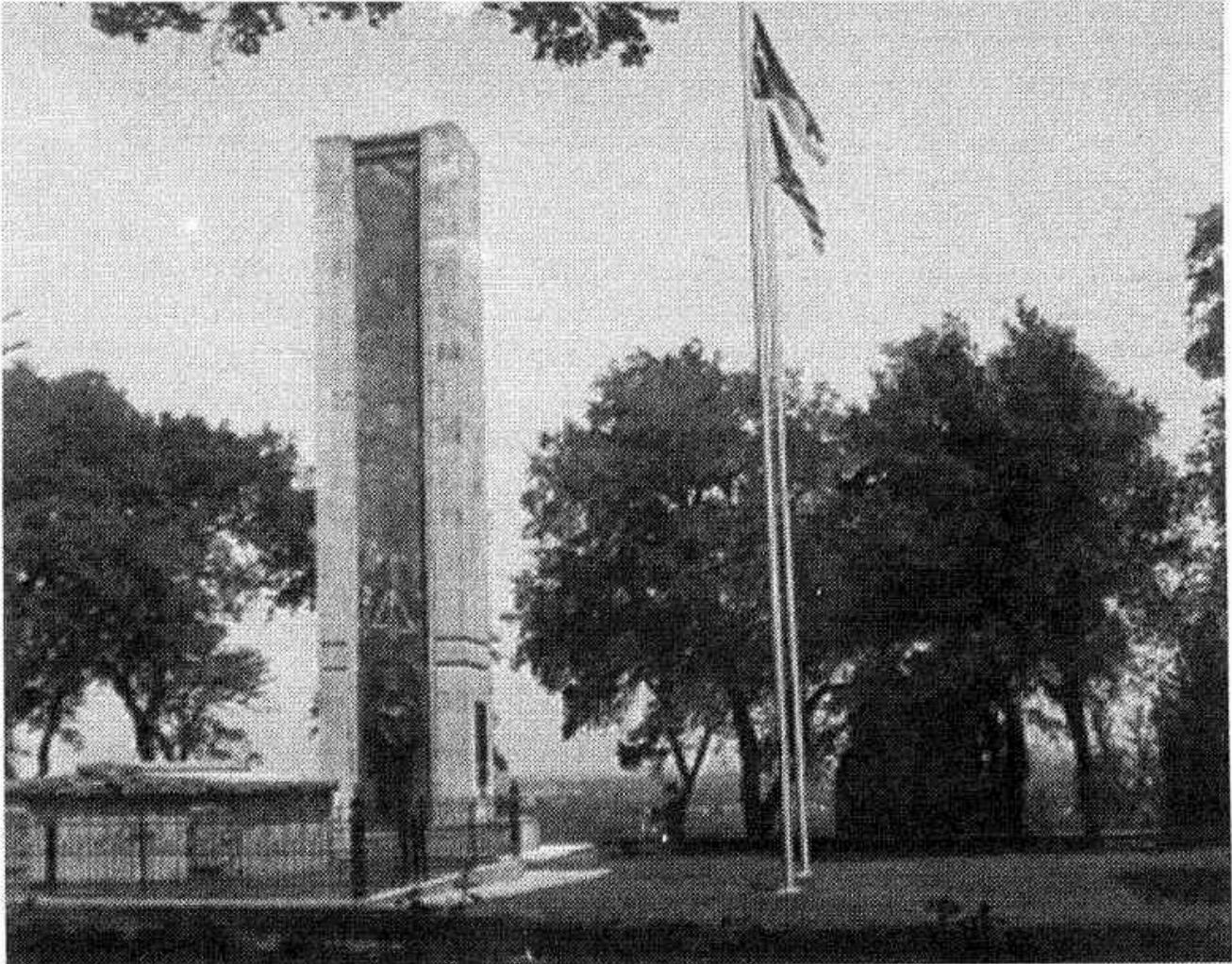


TURNBULL'S THROUGH TIME

THE DAWSON AND MIER EXPEDITIONS

THE RETURN OF HEROES

On September 19, 1998, the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department hosted a ceremony titled "The Return of Heroes" commemorating the 150th anniversary of the return of the mortal remains of the members of the Dawson and Mier Expeditions and their reburial at Monument Hill, La Grange, Texas. In this ceremony, three of our clansmen were honored. William James Trimble, Edward Trimble and James Turnbull.



The Battle of San Jacinto did not end the hostilities between The Republic of Texas and Mexico. Texas recognized the Rio Grande River as the boundary between the two countries, and Mexico recognized the Nueces River. There were numerous raids and incursions by both Texans and Mexicans in the disputed areas. These incidents led to the following series of events.

THE DAWSON MASSACRE

On September 10, 1842, spies reported to Texans at San Antonio that a force under General Adrian Woll was approaching the town. The next day, Woll's army of about 960 succeeded in capturing the town after a brief skirmish, which left one Mexican dead and 23 wounded. Two Texans were wounded. Three days later, 52 Texans who had taken up arms against the invaders were taken prisoner and marched to Mexico. Meanwhile, on September 12, news of the capture of San Antonio reached Gonzales, and Mathew Caldwell, only recently returned from imprisonment in Mexico for his part in the Santa Fe Expedition, gathered a group of Texans to march to San Antonio by way of Seguin. At about 3 a.m., September 14, the news reached La Grange. A public meeting was called, and volunteers were asked to meet at Blackjack Springs, approximately 10 miles southwest of La Grange, at noon the following day.

On the 18th, Caldwell's 225 men were camped about 20 miles from San Antonio. John R. Baker, Ewen Cameron and William Alexander Anderson "Big Foot" Wallace, later of the Mier expedition, were part of this force. Woll was planning to start evacuating San Antonio that morning. Not knowing this, however, Caldwell ordered John C. Hays to organize a small group of rangers who would draw Woll's forces out of the city towards Caldwell's camp, where the Texans would wait for the expected attack on a battlefield of their choosing. The maneuver went as planned, and by 1 p.m., on the 18th, a Mexican force of about 850 men was engaged. During the course of the battle Woll learned that a small group of Texans was advancing upon his rear at a distance of about two miles. Realizing that his forces would be in grave danger if the Texans made a united attack upon his front and rear, Woll sent out a force of about 400 men and one piece of artillery to crush the newly discovered Texans.

This latter force of Texan volunteers had left Blackjack Springs on the 15th and was joined by others en route to San Antonio. On the 17th, at Nash Creek, the men, numbering 54 and mostly from Fayette County, elected Nicholas Mosby Dawson captain. **In this group of men were William James Trimble and Edward Trimble** having arrived in Fayette county from Sullivan County, Indiana only a year or two before. They were the sons of James and Sarah Trimble who came to Texas with William James' wife and children. Late that afternoon, shortly after beginning their first genuine rest since leaving home, they were met by John Wilson, a courier from Caldwell's group, who urged them forward for the attack scheduled for the next day. Immediately, the company resumed its march, camping on the Guadalupe near the town of Seguin the following morning. There, Dawson dispatched Alsey S. Miller and Nathaniel W. Faison to determine Caldwell's exact location. About seven miles east of the Salado, Dawson's company met the returning spies, who reported that the battle was already taking place and about 200 Mexicans were apparently being held in reserve. Realizing that he had only a small force, Dawson suggested falling back to join other Texan forces en route. A debate ensued and an address by Joseph Shaw apparently swayed the men towards voting to advance. Between 3 p.m. and 4 p.m., on the 18th, they discovered a small body of enemy cavalry between Caldwell and their position. As they moved forward, they could make out what seemed to be two groups of troops, and the spies mistakenly declared one of the groups to be Caldwell's. It was not until the distance between the two groups had shortened to about one-half mile that Dawson's men realized that both approaching groups of troops were Mexican. At this point, it was too late to retreat. Dawson quickly tried to prepare his men for the coming attack in a sparse mesquite thicket covering about two acres, near the present site of Fort Sam Houston.

Within a few minutes after the Texans had dismounted they were surrounded. At first, outnumbered 8 to 1, the men were able to keep the enemy at bay with their rifles; however, once the Mexican cannon began to open fire and get range, Dawson's force quickly began to be slaughtered. Wounded and realizing the desperate situation of his men, Dawson raised a white flag, trying to surrender. In the confusion of the battle both sides continued to fire. Dawson was killed and Alsey S. Miller recovered and raised the flag, but the firing continued. After a little more than one hour, the battle ended with 36 Texans killed, 15 taken prisoner and three escaped. **Edward Trimble died on the battlefield September 18, 1842. William James was taken prisoner and after enduring more than 15 months in captivity, died in Perote prison near Mexico City on January 5, 1844.** William James probably died of Typhus, as there was an epidemic caused by the louse infested walls of Perote prison. After the battle, the Texan prisoners were marched to San Antonio. Meanwhile, Caldwell's group had successfully beaten back several Mexican charges upon their position and had forced Woll's troops, which had sustained heavy losses, to retreat to San Antonio.

The morning after Dawson's fight, Caldwell's men located and inspected Dawson's battleground. The bodies of their fellow citizens had been stripped of every article of clothing, and many wounds had apparently been inflicted after death. After Caldwell's troops had surveyed the scene, the Dawson men were buried on the site in shallow graves. Visitors to the scene a few weeks later reported finding several body parts protruding from the ground. The Mexicans were not buried, and many of their bones were still on the field one year after the Battle.

THE MIER EXPEDITION

Learning of Woll's invasion of San Antonio, President Houston, on September 16, 1842, called for the assembly of militia's to join forces in San Antonio and repel the invaders. He authorized them to pursue the enemy "into any point in the Republic, or in Mexico, and chastise the marauders for their audacity" if certain conditions - adequate food, clothing and munitions, and proper discipline - were met. Captain William S. Fisher was chosen to command the Texans and assumed the role of colonel. The group was divided into six companies, led by Captains Claudius Buster, Ewen Cameron, William Eastland, John Pierson, Charles Keller Reese and William Ryon. They began to march towards the Mexican town of Mier on December 20, reaching it on the morning of the 23rd. Upon entering the town, Colonel Fisher was informed that General Antonio Canales was in the vicinity with 700 troops, but these alleged troops were not encountered by the Texan scouts. Fisher demanded five days supply of sugar, coffee and other necessities, enough for 120 men, from the local officials. He then moved the Texans out of town, taking the alcalde as a hostage. At 10:00 a.m., on the 25th, the Texans camped at the point designated for the surrender of the requested articles from Mier, but no supplies were delivered. A Mexican captured nearby stated that General Pedro de Ampudia had stopped the delivery of the requested supplies. He further claimed that General Ampudia was at Mier with 350 men and two pieces of artillery. Hearing this, Fisher decided to attack Mier to obtain the supplies that were needed by his troops. **The Texans were unaware that the Mexican troops actually numbered about 3,000.** The Texans would be attacking a force that outnumbered them almost 12 to 1.

John R. Baker was sent in advance with ten or twelve men. After a brief skirmish, two of this group (Patrick H. Lusk and Samuel H. Walker) were captured. Learning of this incident Fisher ordered his troops to move forward, and by 7:00 p. m., the Texans halted just outside of Mier on the opposite side of the Rio Alamo. That evening, the Texans, with the exception of 42 men who were left behind to guard the rear, crossed the river. Those who crossed the river were immediately but unsuccessfully attacked. While crossing, Joseph Berry fell and broke his thigh. Dr. John J. Sinnickson and a guard of seven men were left with Berry nearby in an abandoned hut. The Texan force went into town and, though they were met with immediate and steady resistance by Ampudia's forces, managed to maneuver themselves from house to house to gain advantage. Mexican artillery fire continued throughout the night, but the Texans, conserving ammunition, did not commence firing in earnest until the morning of the 26th. Between 9:00 a.m. and 12:00 noon, the battle was at its peak. At one point, while reloading their rifles, Captain Cameron and his men were in danger of being overrun by Mexicans. The Texans, however, were able to beat back the Mexican charge upon their position by throwing loose stones from the street at them.

About 1:00 p.m., the Mexicans ceased firing and sent in a flag of truce. Expecting to hear terms for a Mexican surrender, Colonel Fisher was surprised to be told that the Mexicans had 1,700 troops in the city and 800 fresh troops nearby and unless the Texans surrendered, every Texan should be put to the sword. The Texans were given one hour to decide. During this time Fisher met with Ampudia, and the Mexican terms were reiterated to him. When he returned to his men, Fisher informed them that if they tried to fight their way out of town it would be very likely that at least two thirds of them would be killed. Some of the Texans still wished to fight but eventually decided with the majority to surrender. During the truce, two Texans went into hiding and escaped from Mier without surrendering. After an hour of consideration Fisher agreed to surrender under the terms that the prisoners would be "treated with consideration which is in accordance with the magnanimous Mexican Nation." It was further stipulated that the prisoners should be retained on the frontier rather than marched to the interior. About 3:00 p.m., the surrender took place. It was not until the following day that the Texans learned that due to the large number of Mexican casualties, Ampudia would have retreated if the Texans had not surrendered. The official Mexican report of their casualties listed 650 dead and 200 wounded. Of the 261 Texans who marched on Mier, 243 were captured, 16 were killed (or soon died of their wounds) and two escaped. The next day the Mexican officers held a court-martial upon the lives of their prisoners. The Texans were spared by one vote.

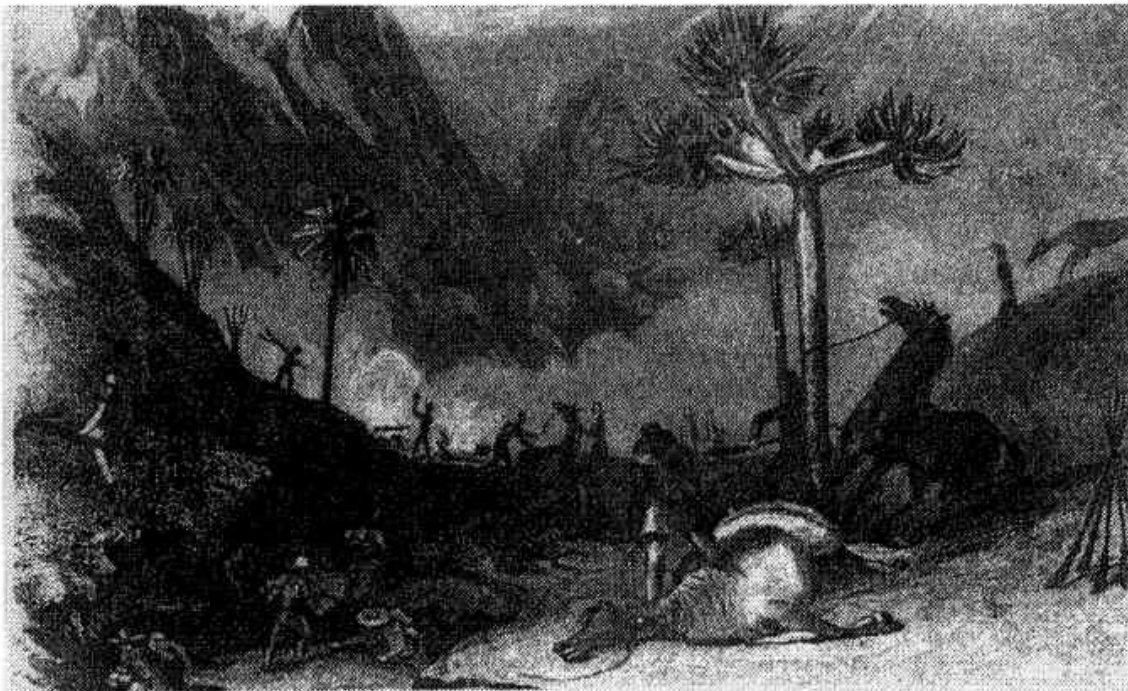
On December 31, the prisoners, with the exception of those too wounded to travel, were started on a march to Matamoros, poorly clothed and without adequate blankets to keep them warm at night. They reached Matamoros on January 9, 1843. Despite the terms of their capitulation, stating that the Texan prisoners would be held on the border, the Mexicans made plans to march them to the interior. On January 14, the main group of prisoners started to march towards Mexico City under the command of General Canales.

THE BLACK BEAN EPISODE

Leaving Matamoros on January 14, 1843, the main body of prisoners arrived near Camargo a few days later. There the Texans planned an escape. Captain Ewen Cameron was to give a prearranged signal when the Mexicans brought in dinner. Just prior to the meal's arrival, a group from Cameron's company convinced him that the escape would not be successful. When the time came, Cameron did not give the signal, and the escape attempt was aborted.

Arriving in Monterey on January 29, Canales turned over command to Colonel Baragan. The Mexican infantry guard was also changed. The new guard consisted primarily of Mexicans taken from the prisons of Monterey, thus, increasing the feeling amongst the Texans that an escape attempt would be successful. Before leaving Monterey on February 2, sandals were issued to those prisoners who needed them. Additionally, each Texas received 61/4 cents per diem to purchase food from local merchants. This payment was supposed to be issued to the prisoners on a regular basis, however, it was generally withheld. As a result, the Texans could not purchase needed supplies and suffered greatly. When the Texans reached Rinconada, another escape was planned. As the Mexicans seemed to be unusually vigilant and organized at daybreak, it was determined that they had somehow received advanced warning and the Texan escape was again aborted.

The prisoners arrived in Saltillo on February 5, where they were joined by several of the Dawson and San Antonio prisoners who were captured by Adrian Woll in September 1842. The Texans left Saltillo on February 7, and arrived at "El Rancho Salado" (the Salt Ranch or the Salt Farm), about 80 miles from Saltillo, on the evening of February 10. That night, with Ewen Cameron as their leader, a portion of the Texans planned another escape. There was some feeling among the prisoners that the Mexicans were again warned of the escape attempt, because when the Texans awoke on the 11th, they found that their guard had been doubled. Nevertheless, on February 11, 1843, as breakfast was about to be served, Cameron gave the prearranged signal by throwing his hat about his head. The Texans rushed the guards around them and quickly succeeded in capturing the Mexican muskets. They rushed for the exit from the courtyard in which they had been held. Dr. Richard Fox, Brenham and John Lyons were the first through the portal and received the full volley of musket fire from the Mexicans who, hearing the commotion, had prepared for the Texan onslaught. Before the Mexicans could reload, the other Texans had a chance to rush out of the passageway and overtake them. Five or six Mexicans were killed. Five Texans were killed, and three were wounded. The Mexican casualties were low because Cameron had instructed his men to kill only when absolutely necessary. Though there were approximately 200 Texan prisoners at the Rancho, it is reported that only about one-third of them took an active part in the escape against 400 armed Mexicans.



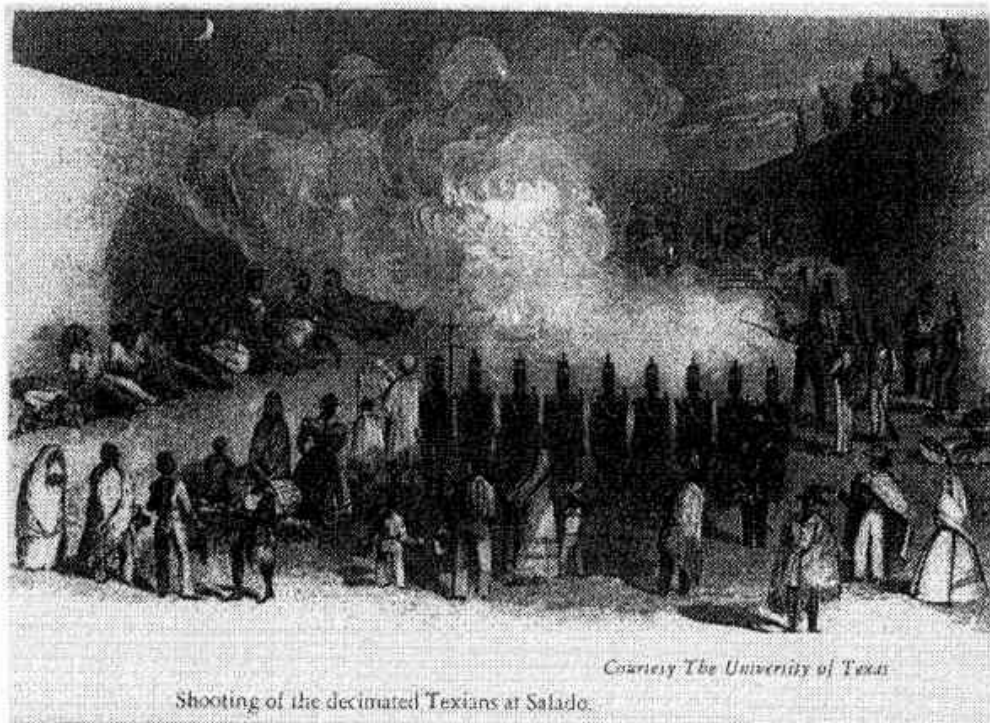
Courtesy The University of Texas

Texians killing their horses in the mountains for sustenance.

The escapees headed for the Rio Grande, about 200 miles away. About one half mile from the Rancho, the escapees were intercepted by Colonel Baragan, from whom they had just escaped, and a small Mexican troop he had rallied. Colonel Baragan, after requesting and being granted permission to approach, remonstrated against the madness of the escape attempt and offered clemency to all the Texans who would surrender. The Texans all refused and rode on. Baragan followed them for several days, periodically lighting fires to signal his position.

Later the Texans met an Englishman (or American) who told them that the countryside had been alerted to their escape and that their best chance was to travel quickly and stay on the road until they were beyond the Pass of Venado. That night, the 13th, after some debate and against the advice of Cameron, the group left the road in favor of traveling through the mountains. On the 15th, they located a water hole and being in need of food, killed their horses for meat. After this, no more water was found as the Texans progressed through a disorienting maze of canyons and mountains. The trails they followed, made by animals, crossed and recrossed each other. Lost and desperate for water, the escapees dispersed into increasingly smaller groups. Some became too weak to travel and were left behind to fend for themselves. On February 18th, Cameron and 40 of his men mistook a Mexican cavalry troop's campfire for a signal from their companions that water had been found. The Texans approached and, desperate for water and food, decided to surrender. The following day, the recaptured Texans were marched about 12 miles to the Pass of Venado (believed to be northwest of Saltillo). By February 25, approximately 150 Texans had been recaptured at the pass. In all, 176 Texans were recaptured. Of the remaining escapees, seven died in the mountains and five successfully returned to Texas.

On March 2, the recaptured Texans arrived in Saltillo. There they learned that President Santa Anna had ordered General Francisco Mejia to execute every one of them. Mejia, however, refused to obey the order and was arrested, removed from his office and replaced by Colonel Domingo Huerta. The prisoners were then marched from Saltillo on the 22nd, and arrived at El Rancho Salado on the 25th, where they were met with an order from Santa Anna that one-tenth of them be shot. To carry out the order, Huerta had 176 beans put in an earthen pot, of which 159 beans were white and 17 were black. The Texans, chained together in pairs, were blindfolded and ordered to draw beans. **Those who drew black beans were** John L. Cash, James D. Cocke, Robert Holmes Dunham, William Mosby Eastland, Edward E. Este, Robert Harris, Thomas L. Jones, Patrick Maher, James Masterson Ogden, Christopher Roberts, William H. Rowan, James L. Shepherd, Joseph N. M. Thompson, James N. Torrey, **James Turnbull**, Henry Whalen and Martin Carroll Wing. These men were immediately separated from their companions and given a chance to write home. Thereafter, at about 6:30, on the evening of March 25, 1843; nine of the condemned group were bound together, set upon a log and shot within hearing of their companions. The remaining eight were then executed in the same manner. In all, the firing continued for about ten to twelve minutes, lacerating and mangling most of the bodies. Henry Whalen did not die and continued to curse his executioners until they put a gun to his head and shot him at point-blank range.



On March 26, the remaining Texans left El Rancho Salado and were marched to San Luis Potosi, arriving on April 5. From there they traveled towards Mexico City, arriving at Huehuetaco on the 24th. There as a result of a petition from Colonel Antonio Canales to Santa Anna, Ewen Cameron, the leader of the Texan escape from El Rancho Salado was also to be executed. Cameron was taken from his companions at midnight and shot on the morning of April 25, several hours after his Texan comrades had departed.

THE TEXANS IN PRISON AND THEIR SUBSEQUENT RELEASE

On April 26, 1843, the prisoners arrived in Mexico City. From Mexico City the Texans were marched to Tacubaya, a small village about four miles from Mexico City in which the President's Palace was located. The prisoners were told that they would get new clothes if they would work on constructing a road. The Texans at first refused the new clothes, but later agreed to take them when they were informed that the clothes would be forced upon them at the point of bayonets if not "willfully" accepted. The Texans worked as slowly and unprofitably on the road as their captors would allow.

Sixteen Texans escaped from Perote prison with 9 reaching safety, and 7 recaptured. On September 12, 1844, Santa Anna issued an order for the release of all Texans.

This article was excerpted from the following publications:

The Dawson and Mier Expeditions and
Their Place in Texas History
By – Mark Abolafia-Rosenzweig

Soldiers of Misfortune
The Somervell and Mier Expeditions
By – Sam W. Haynes

Samual H. Walker's Account of the Mier Expedition
Edited By – Marilyn McAdams Sibley

It seems Turnbull's have difficulty restraining themselves from being involved in Border conflicts.