

# GILES L. B.

TERRY'S TEXAS RANGERS

L. Giles

**Terry's Texas Rangers**

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# Содержание

INTRODUCTION	5
CHAPTER I	8
CHAPTER II	11
CHAPTER III	13
CHAPTER IV	14
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	15

# Leonidas B. Giles

## Terry's Texas Rangers

### INTRODUCTION

It is but natural that man should desire to leave some record of his achievements for the information of succeeding generations. This desire was manifested in the infancy of the race, and is shown in monuments and chiseled stone, and in writings on skins and reeds.

Here in the South, when the great war of the '60s had terminated and the various actors in the great drama had time to look about them, the desire was universal that the record made by Southern manhood should be perpetuated. The regiment of Texas cavalry known as the "Terry Rangers" shared that feeling; and when the survivors began to meet in annual reunion this desire became manifest. Two propositions appealed to them: one for a history which should tell of their campaigns, their marches, battles, hardships, sufferings; one for a monument which should contain the name of every man who served in the regiment. For reasons which I need not discuss here the plan for the history failed. All funds raised for either purpose were combined into one and placed in control of the monument committee. The equestrian statue which now stands in the grounds of the State Capitol in Austin is the result.

The desire for a narrative still survived, however, discoverable in many personal sketches of events, some taking the form of memoirs, written by various members of the command. I have long contemplated such a work but have felt the lack of ability. It is now perhaps too late to attempt anything like a complete history of the regiment, as the necessary data can hardly be procured. Yet, when my former comrade, D. S. Combs, appealed to me to write something that would supply his children and grandchildren with some knowledge, however imperfect, of the part borne by the Rangers in the great war, I unhesitatingly promised to try it and do the best I could. I wish with all my heart I could make my story as complete as it ought to be, for I firmly believe that a well written narrative of the regiment's wonderful career would be the most entertaining book in the literature of war.

As a first step toward the accomplishment of the task I had undertaken, I wrote to Comrade Combs asking him for such data as he might have or such as his personal recollections might supply; also as to the scope and form of the work as he wished it to appear. His answer is so kind and trusting that I here insert it and, as the lawyers say, make it a part of the record. His letter, written from his home in San Antonio, is dated January 5th:

"My Dear Lee:

"Yours of the 26th of December came duly to hand, and I should have replied sooner but I have been strictly on the go for the last ten days, and I have neglected many things that should have had attention.

"Now, Lee, I wish to state with all the sincerity of my heart, that all I want is plain statements of facts; and while I give you a brief outline of my movements, from the day I was sworn into the service of the Confederate States to the close of the war, I simply do this that you may know where D.S. Combs was, and it is a matter of indifference to me whether my name is mentioned a single time in your story of the doings of the regiment, and, more especially, of the part old Company D played in that drama.

"I was very fearful that the war would be over before I saw a live Yankee. So Charley McGehee and I went fifty miles from home to join a company, and joined

Ferrell's company between Bastrop and La Grange. According to my recollection this was in the latter part of August, '61.

“From that day to the day I left the regiment, I was not away from Company D more than ten or twelve days, and then on account of sickness; once at Shelbyville for five or six days; at another time near Nolensville for about the same length of time.

“My initiation was at Woodsonville, and the last of the chapter was at Mossy Creek, Dandridge, and the brick house where N. J. Allen was killed and the artillery duel where Captain Littlefield was wounded. This, I think, was early in January, '64. Here I drew a furlough, and in company with Ike Jones, Bill Fisher and Jeff Burleson, I struck out for home. On my arrival at home my parents and sisters insisted that I ask for assignment to duty on this side of the Mississippi. I had lost one brother by sickness at Searcy, Arkansas, one had been killed at the battle of Chickamauga, one badly wounded at Port Hudson, and another desperately wounded at Mansfield, Louisiana.

“Accordingly, I applied to General E. Kirby Smith for such assignment, and he gave me orders to report to General Magruder at Galveston for assignment to duty in any cavalry command I might select. I chose Colonel J. S. Ford's command on the Rio Grande. I was attached to Captain Carrington's company in Major Cater's battalion, and was with that command in the last fight of the war. This was between Brownsville and the mouth of the Rio Grande, and was about two weeks after General Smith had surrendered the Trans-Mississippi department, but the word had not reached us. I am glad to say that in this last fight of the war the Confederate arms were victorious. A few days after this we got word that the war was over. So we folded our tents and quietly and sadly turned our faces homeward. As a company or battalion we never surrendered. We simply laid down our arms and tried to forget the past and all its disappointments.

“Now to go back and come over the story as it actually occurred, I will simply say that I was never wounded during the war, but particularly unfortunate with my mounts. I had three noble animals killed under me, two at Murfreesboro, one at College Hill, opposite Knoxville, also one wounded at Mt. Washington, near Louisville, Kentucky.

“I was with you at Farmington and at Nolensville, where Ferg Kyle led his line of dismounted men, deployed as skirmishers, up against a solid line of blue, a regiment of infantry, who poured a galling fire into our ranks and caused us to reel and stagger like a drunken man.

“I was with you at Woodsonville, Shiloh, Murfreesboro, Bardstown, Perryville and Chickamauga. Also at Murfreesboro when Forrest with his little band swooped down on the two camps and took them in out of the damp.

“Again, Lee, I will say that I wish you to handle the story in your own way, and I will be perfectly satisfied. What we want is the doings of the *company* and *regiment*. I care not for individual mention. If you and I are satisfied I care not whether others are or not.

“I wish to emphasize this statement. I appreciate more than you know your willingness to undertake this for me, and will gladly remunerate you as far as it is in my power to do for the time you put in on the work.

“Mrs. Combs and I wish to thank you and your daughter for the kind hospitality to us during the reunion, and hope you may both find it convenient to visit us in the near future. Wishing you both a pleasant and prosperous New Year, I am,

*“Always yours,*

*“D. S. Combs.”*

If I had regretted my promise or had wavered in the slightest from my intention, this letter would have renewed in me the purpose to do my best. Yet I do not see why anyone who writes as well as Comrade Combs should desire another to write for him. I would not, with intention, do injustice to anyone; I know I can not do justice to many deserving the highest praise; but I must say that the regiment had no better soldier than D. S. Combs.

Since this work was well under way Comrade A. B. Briscoe of Company K has kindly placed at my service a large lot of MS. of his personal memoirs. I have used this in several instances, of which due credit is given in the proper places.

Austin, May, 1911.

# CHAPTER I

## ASSEMBLY AND ORGANIZATION OF THE REGIMENT

When in 1861 it became evident that war between the sections was inevitable and imminent, B. F. Terry, a sugar planter of Fort Bend county, and Thomas S. Lubbock, of Houston, determined to be in the fight from the start, hurried to Virginia, at their own expense, where they participated in the first battle of Manassas, rendering distinguished services as scouts before the action and in pursuit of the routed enemy afterward. Later the War Department gave them authority to recruit a regiment of Texans for mounted service in Virginia. Returning to Texas they at once issued a call for volunteers.

The conditions were exacting. Each man must furnish his own arms and equipment – a gun of some sort, Colt's repeating pistol, a saddle, bridle and blanket. Notwithstanding these requirements, the response was so prompt that in less than thirty days the ten companies were on their way to the rendezvous at Houston. Some of the companies had the full complement of one hundred men, rank and file, and in a few more days all would have been full. Probably two or more regiments could have been raised at that time if the call had been made.

The personnel was of the very highest. Sons of leading families, many of them college graduates, professional men, merchants, stockmen, and farmers, served in the ranks as privates, all young, in their teens and early twenties. Rank was scarcely considered. The supreme desire was to get into the war in a crack cavalry regiment.

Since I write without data and from memory only, I must necessarily deal more particularly with the company of which I was a member, known as Company D in the regimental organization. It was recruited largely from Bastrop, with contingents from Hays, Travis and Burleson counties. This organization, full at the beginning, always one of the largest for duty, sustained the greatest loss in killed of all the companies of the regiment. The first officers elected were:

- Captain, Stephen C. Ferrell.
- First Lieutenant, Charles L. Morgan.
- Second Lieutenant, Jesse W. Burdett.
- Second Lieutenant, William R. Doak.

The assembly for the company was to be in the town of Bastrop, and notice was given that on a certain morning the march would begin. The men from the adjoining counties reached Bastrop the night before.

It was a bright, sunny August morning. The people, *en masse*, turned out to bid us good-by. Men, women, children, with tears in their eyes, said, "God bless you!" when they clasped our hands as we stood in line. This painful ordeal over, we mounted and rode away on what we believed was a few months' adventure.

Alleyton, sixty miles away, then the terminus of the railroad, was reached without any very exciting adventures. We sent our horses back home and took the train for Houston. The trains were then run to Harrisburg, but we were dumped off in the prairie at Pierce Junction to await a train from Columbia. The hours passed, and the night. We slept little on account of the mosquitoes, which were more numerous and voracious than any I ever met elsewhere. Next morning, as there was still no train, we walked into Houston, a distance of nine miles, pushing by hand the freight car with our saddles and baggage. Here we went into camp in an old warehouse and met some of the other companies.

From McLennan and adjoining counties Captain Thos. Harrison led a company which became Company A. Captain John A. Wharton had a full company raised chiefly in Brazoria and Matagorda counties. It became Company B in the organization and continued the largest in enlistment.

Companies C, commanded by Mark Evans; E, by L. N. Rayburn; and I, led by J. G. Jones, were recruited in Gonzales and surrounding counties. Many of these were stockmen and expert horsemen. Company F was from Fayette and commanded by Louis M. Strobel. Company G was from Bexar and Goliad counties. Its first captain was W. Y. Houston. Company H was from Fort Bend county chiefly, and commanded by John T. Holt. Company K, Captain John G. Walker, was from Harris and Montgomery counties, and was full. The word “chiefly” ought to be used in telling where the companies were recruited, for all of them had men from several counties. Here, too, on the 9th of September we were “mustered in,” swearing to serve “so long as this war shall last.”

From Houston to Beaumont, over a newly constructed railroad, it took nearly all day to make eighty miles. From Beaumont, by steamboat, down the Neches and up the Sabine to Niblett’s Bluff; thence a hundred miles on foot, through water much of the way; thence forty miles in carts. It is easy to remember this cart ride. The wheels were six or seven feet high. Motive power, oxen, two pairs to each cart. Engineers, little bow-legged Creoles, each armed with a long, sharp-pointed pole. The vehicles had no springs. As there were no seats, the six or eight passengers in each conveyance had to stand on their feet. At New Iberia, on Bayou Teche, we were transferred to boats, and went down between the beautiful banks of that stream to Brashear, now Morgan City. From there we went through an almost continuous sugar farm to New Orleans. The trip from Houston to New Orleans took over a week. It is now made in less than twelve hours, in a palace car.

In New Orleans we learned that our destination was not Virginia, but Bowling Green, Kentucky, where General A. Sidney Johnston was trying to assemble an army for the defense of that frontier. This was pleasing to us, as General Johnston was a Texan, and personally known to many of us.

The box cars in which we left New Orleans had been used for shipping cattle, and were not overly clean. Our seats were rough planks without backs. In this luxurious fashion we rode for twenty hours until we reached Nashville. There we encamped in the fair grounds. Ladies in great numbers visited us, and for their entertainment our most expert horsemen gave the first really-truly “wild-west” entertainment ever seen east of the Mississippi.

At Nashville our first death occurred, Thomas Hart, whose loss saddened us greatly. He was a promising young man, not personally well known to me.

We had expected to receive our horses here and go on horseback to Bowling Green, but one night Colonel Terry received orders to bring on his regiment “at once.” At 1 o’clock in the morning we marched to the station and waited till 2 p. m. for our train. That same afternoon we reached Bowling Green. Our horses were driven through from Nashville by a detail sent back after them. We now received tents, camp utensils and wagons. Here, too, the companies were formally organized into a regiment by the election of the following field officers:

- Colonel, B. F. Terry.
- Lieutenant Colonel, Thomas S. Lubbock.
- Major, Thomas Harrison.

The following staff officers were appointed:

- Adjutant, M. H. Royston.
- Quartermaster, B. H. Botts.
- Commissary, Robert D. Simmons.
- Chaplain, R. F. Bunting.
- Surgeon, Dr. John M. Weston.
- Assistant Surgeon, Dr. Robert E. Hill.
- Sergeant Major, W. B. Sayers.

Terry was a native of Kentucky, about 40 years old, of great force of character, firm and self-reliant. His appearance was commanding, and in all ways he was fitted for high rank.

Lubbock was some years older than Terry. He was a native of South Carolina. He was small of stature, pleasant and affable, and made a favorable impression on us. At that time he was in poor health, soon had to go to Nashville for treatment, and we never saw him more.

Harrison was a native of Mississippi. He was a lawyer by profession. A small, nervous, irascible man, who proved to be a fine soldier, became a brigadier general of cavalry, and distinguished himself on many fields.

Winter was now at hand, and the climate was trying on young men raised, as we had been, in the far South. Many fell ill of measles, mumps, pneumonia, and other diseases peculiar to raw levees. Scores went to the hospital, and not a few under the sod. Still the spirits of all, from the youngest private to the resolute colonel, were of the highest, and all were anxious to meet the foe. Such as were able drilled daily, mounted guard, and performed other duties incident to camp life in time of war.

## CHAPTER II

### WOODSONVILLE

Terry, anxious to be doing something, was ordered to lead the regiment to the front on picket and scouting duty. On the 17th of December, Brigadier General Hindman led an expedition to Greene river. When he reached that stream he found the north bank in possession of the enemy's outposts. He deployed some infantry skirmishers, who engaged the enemy at long range but with little effect. Called himself from the immediate front, he left Colonel Terry in charge with instructions to decoy the enemy up the hill and away from support to a point where our infantry and artillery could be used to better advantage.

The enemy allowed themselves to be decoyed, and came across in large numbers. Terry, however, was not the man to invite visitors and then leave someone else to entertain them. Sending Ferrell with about seventy-five men against their left, he led the rest against their right. We charged, yelling, each man riding as fast as his horse could go. Terry fell, dying almost instantly.

Ferrell led his force into an open field against a body of the enemy, who rallied behind a straw stack and such fences as they could find, pouring a galling fire into us. On our part it was a furious but disorderly charge of comparatively undrilled men into one of the best drilled regiments of the Federal army. This was the Thirty-second Indiana Infantry. The officers and men were Germans, who had probably learned their tactics in the old country. They were ignorant of the English language. They were brave fellows, and stood like veterans till shot down.

In view of the great disparity of the forces engaged and the losses sustained, this was one of the most remarkable of all the conflicts of this very remarkable war. One of the very few actions where mounted men engaged infantry on their own ground. It also shows of what stuff the Southern volunteer was made. In support of these statements I invite attention to the official reports. The first is by Colonel Willich. Omitting some unimportant details, it is as follows:

“But now ensued the most earnest and bloody part of the struggle. With lightning speed, under infernal yelling, great numbers of Texas Rangers rushed upon our whole force. They advanced to fifteen or twenty yards of our lines, some of them even between them, and opened fire with rifles and revolvers. Our skirmishers took the thing very coolly, and permitted them to approach very close, when they opened a destructive fire on them. They were repulsed with severe loss, but only after Lieutenant Sachs, who left his covered position with one platoon, was surrounded by about fifty Rangers, several of them demanding of him three times to give up his sword, and let his men lay down their arms. He firmly refused, and defended himself till he fell, with three of his men, before the attack was repulsed.

“Lieutenant Colonel Von Trebra now led on another advance of the center and left flank, when he drew down upon his forces a second attack of the Rangers in large numbers, charging into the very ranks, some dashing through to the rear, which might have proved disastrous.

“In the fight participated three field officers, one staff and sixteen officers of the line, twenty-three sergeants and 375 men. Our loss is one officer and ten men dead, twenty-two wounded and five missing. According to reports of our surgeons several of the wounded are beyond hope of recovery.”

I have omitted from the foregoing interesting and more or less instructive details of the parts played by Lieutenant Colonel Von Trebra, Major Snachenberg, Captain Wilchbilling, Adjutant Schmidt, Lieutenant Mank and other heroes whose names are hard to spell and harder to pronounce. Valiant men all, and all doubtless recommended for promotion. As will be seen hereafter, to fight with the Rangers was to be in line of advancement in this world or the next.

I now give General Hindman's report from the Confederate side:

"The firing ceased for about half an hour, and I went in person to select a suitable place for camp, leaving Colonel Terry in command, with instructions to decoy the enemy up the hill, where I could use my infantry and artillery with effect, and be out of the range of the enemy's batteries.

"Before returning to the column the fire from the skirmishers recommenced. The enemy appeared in force on my right and center. Colonel Terry, at the head of seventy-five Rangers, charged about 300 of the enemy, routed and drove them back, but fell mortally wounded. A body of the enemy about the same size attacked the Rangers under Captain Ferrell on the right of the turnpike, and were repulsed with heavy loss.<sup>1</sup>

"My loss in this affair was as follows: Killed, Colonel Terry and three men of his regiment; dangerously wounded, Lieutenant Morris and three men of the Texas Rangers; slightly wounded, Captain Walker and three men of the Texas Rangers and two men of the First Arkansas battalion."

From General Hindman's report it will be seen that the Rangers had 150 men in the fight, seventy-five with Terry, seventy-five with Ferrell; there being, in fact, two charges. Our loss was twelve altogether. Colonel Willich reported that he had, officers and men, 418 engaged. He had eleven killed, twenty-two wounded and reported five missing, a total of thirty-eight; his missing being prisoners in our hands. Thus 150 men charged 418, inflicting a loss of thirty-eight, sustaining a loss of twelve. Of this number Company D lost five: W. W. Beal and Frank Loftin killed, L. L. Giles mortally wounded, L. B. Giles and John R. Henry slightly wounded.

If a complete record could be obtained I believe a similar disparity of losses would appear in nearly all the engagements in which we bore a part. The splendid horsemanship of our men, and their skill with firearms, made them easily superior to any foe they went against. In this fight our loss was irreparable in the death of our gallant leader. Had he lived he would, without doubt, have reached the highest rank and would have achieved a fame second to none. We had other brave leaders, but none like the matchless Terry.

In the election of officers which followed the death of Terry, Lieutenant Colonel Lubbock was advanced to the command of the regiment, and Captain John G. Walker became lieutenant colonel. Lubbock, who was at that time in bad health, died a few days later. Captain John A. Wharton was chosen to fill his place.

Wharton was a man of ability, of a distinguished family, liberally educated, a lawyer and a captivating public speaker. Enterprising and ambitious, he never forgot during a wakeful moment that the soldier who survived the war would be a voter. He distinguished himself on many fields and became, successively, brigadier general and major general.

About this time Lieutenant Morgan of Company D resigned and Fergus Kyle was elected first lieutenant. Kyle was subsequently promoted to captain, and made a very efficient officer, distinguishing himself on many fields.

The regiment now resumed its duty of guarding the front. The weather was cold, varied with rain, sleet and snow. The men suffered greatly. Some suffering, as to the weather, I escaped, having received a slight wound. I was sent to the hospital at Nashville, Tennessee, where I stayed two days, going from there to the home of a relative, where I spent nearly seven weeks. In the care of my kindred I had all the comforts and some of the luxuries of life. I reported for duty just before the retreat from Bowling Green.

The burial squad informed me that my poor horse, who received some of the lead intended for his master, and yet had no personal interest in the row, had five bullet wounds. He fell under me near the straw stacks. I rode off the field behind John B. Rector, who halted in a shower of bullets and kindly assisted me to mount.

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<sup>1</sup> Attack was really made by Ferrell on the enemy, advancing under command of Von Trebra, as Colonel Willich reports. – G.

## CHAPTER III

### RETREAT

The word is not reassuring to seasoned soldiers. To new troops it is very depressing. Johnston's line was broken on the right at Fishing Creek, and was threatened on the left at Donelson. Bowling Green was, therefore, untenable, and now we must fall back behind the Cumberland.

The Rangers must cover the retreat. It was snowing the morning we left, and the enemy were throwing shells into the place. Our march to Nashville was without incident. We crossed the Cumberland in the night and camped just outside the city. We now learned that Donelson had fallen, and the retreat must be continued. We were ordered down toward Donelson to guard in that direction, and to afford succor to such as had escaped the surrender and might be making their way south.

Returning, we found the army at Murfreesboro, but it moved on by Shelbyville, Huntsville and Decatur to Corinth, Mississippi, the Rangers guarding the rear. The weather was bad and the progress slow, but the enemy did not press us. We crossed the Tennessee river on the railroad bridge, which had been floored for the purpose. When we went into camp rations of bacon and flour were issued to us. Our wagons and camp equipment being somewhere else, we were confronted with the problem of preparing this flour for the immediate consumption of the chronically hungry soldier. If necessity is the mother of invention, hunger is a most capable handmaid of the good dame. An oilcloth is spread on the ground, and on this the flour is kneaded, but how to bake it was the question. Some rolled the dough around a stake or ramrod, which they stuck in the ground by the fire, but the stuff would slip down. Some of us tried a flat rail, and that answered very well. First heating the rail thoroughly, we stuck our biscuits on it, set them before the fire, and watched them brown, our appetites growing keener all the while. The treatment of the bacon was easy. We broiled it on a stick held before the fire or above the coals, and that is the best way it was ever cooked.

At Corinth we had a few days' rest. Absentees came in, and the *morale* improved.

Buell did not follow our line of march, but moved by the more direct route through Franklin, Columbus and Pulaski, intending to unite with Grant at Pittsburg Landing.

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **SHILOH**

Johnston planned to attack Grant before the arrival of Buell, and had brought together the largest army ever before assembled in the Confederacy. He had the force under General Hardee from Bowling Green, the remnant of Zollicoffer's army, Bragg from Pensacola with a fine corps of well drilled and well equipped troops, and Polk from Columbus with a light force, altogether nearly 40,000 men. They were to attack an army of veterans flushed with the victory at Donelson.

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