

Chapter 17

The Santa Fe Expedition

D*on* Juan, who should have been hailed as the hero who had driven the invaders from San Antonio, inexplicably came under attack for having allowed Vásquez and his army to enter the city in the first place. Rumors easily traced back to Colorado Smith suggested that *don* Juan was actually sympathetic to Mexican interests and had been conspiring all along to return Texas to Mexican domination.

In times of crisis, people are easily deceived. The need to blame someone for the danger they find themselves in makes fools of many, and mean-spirited manipulators with their own agenda seem always to know how best to use people's fears against them.

Within days, *don* Juan's situation became utterly untenable, and he was forced to flee Texas. The night he left San Antonio, he barely escaped a lynch mob. I gave him my fastest horse, and he turned his face to Mexico, where he meant to assume a false identity and hide out amongst his enemies.

I worried that he would find it as impossible to be incognito as Santa Anna had found it, for he too was well-known. Nevertheless, I wished him luck, and because he was unarmed, I gave him a rifle and one of my revolvers.

"Do me one more favor, Kóshkeya," he begged. "Ride to Floresville and warn my father. Those with a grudge against me might decide to take it out on my family."

"Of course," I said. "I'll leave immediately."

Don Erasmo elected to remain in Texas and take his chances. Thanks be to God, no harm befell him.

In Mexico, the unthinkable occurred. *Don* Juan was captured and offered the choice of being shot for a traitor or enlisting in the army against which he had fought so valiantly. I imagine that men like Travis, Fannin, Bowie, and Bonham would have chosen to die rather than to serve the enemy. *Don* Juan chose, instead, to go on living, as I should have done in the same predicament.

He was made a staff officer under General Adrián Woll. Happily, his duties did not include bearing arms.

On the eleventh of September, General Woll's army marched on San Antonio and was met by fierce but futile resistance. The battle to take the city lasted only two hours. A hundred fifty prisoners were taken, amongst them Sam Maverick and James W Robinson. I barely escaped being one of them myself. Curiously, General Woll had no intention of trying to hold the city. Having scored a *coup*, he merely turned his army around and began the return march to Mexico.

Old Paint, who had but days earlier returned to Texas following his imprisonment in Mexico, called up the Gonzales-and-Seguin Ranging Company and sent word for others to join him in pursuit of the retreating Mexican Army. Captain Nicholas Mosby Dawson started out from La Grange with fifty-three militiamen, but was ambushed and lost more than half of his command. With ten former Rangers, who had served beside me under Henry, I joined the Caldwell command at Seguin. The next day Captain John Coffee Hays, whom, my Lipan relatives now referred to as *Bravo Too Much*, caught up with us at Salado Creek. Jack had with him fourteen Rangers, including William "Big Foot" Wallace and Samuel Walker, both of whom have since become quite famous.

Here we waited for the enemy and inflicted heavy casualties, losing only one of our own men. We could not stop them, of course, and we could not defeat them. All we could do was punish them. We should have liked to free the prisoners, and we certainly did make the effort, but that particular objective turned out to be unachievable. Amongst the enemy dead was found the body of Vicente Córdova, former *alcalde* of Nacogdoches and instigator of the Córdova Rebellion.

We circled wide and got ahead of the retreating army. At Arroyo Hondo we took up good positions and ambushed them again, once more inflicting heavy losses whilst suffering but four wounded ourselves, none killed. We managed to capture an entire battery of cannons, but when the Texas Army did not advance, we had no choice but to abandon the lot. In order to

deny those guns to the enemy, we toppled them into the waters of nearby Quahi Creek. The date was the twenty-second of September, 1842.

This was the last military action I ever engaged in. When I got back to the inn in early October, I put away forever my weapons and buckskins in favor of feminine attire. Both my grandparents were in poor health and unable to be much help in running the inn. That left only Carmen, Luz, and me to do everything. It would be extremely irresponsible of me to continue neglecting my familial duties in order to keep playing soldier. This I decided on my own, even before my grandfather pointed it out for me.