

= Battle of Gonzales =

The Battle of Gonzales was the first military engagement of the Texas Revolution . It was fought near Gonzales , Texas , on October 2 , 1835 , between rebellious Texian settlers and a detachment of Mexican army troops .

In 1831 , Mexican authorities gave the settlers of Gonzales a small cannon to help protect them from frequent Comanche raids . Over the next four years , the political situation in Mexico deteriorated , and in 1835 several states revolted . As the unrest spread , Colonel Domingo de Ugartechea , the commander of all Mexican troops in Texas , felt it unwise to leave the residents of Gonzales with a weapon and requested the retrieval of the cannon .

When the initial request was refused , Ugartechea sent 100 dragoons to retrieve the cannon . The soldiers neared Gonzales on September 29 , but the colonists used a variety of excuses to keep them from the town , while secretly sending messengers to request assistance from nearby communities . Within two days , up to 140 Texians gathered in Gonzales , all determined not to give up the cannon . On October 1 , settlers voted to initiate a fight . Mexican soldiers opened fire as Texians approached their camp in the early hours of October 2 . After several hours of desultory firing , the Mexican soldiers withdrew .

Although the skirmish had little military significance , it marked a clear break between the colonists and the Mexican government and is considered to have been the start of the Texas Revolution . News of the skirmish spread throughout the United States , where it was often referred to as the " Lexington of Texas " . The cannon 's fate is disputed . It may have been buried and rediscovered in 1936 , or it may have been seized by Mexican troops after the Battle of the Alamo .

= = Background = =

The Mexican Constitution of 1824 liberalized the country 's immigration policies , allowing foreigners to settle in border regions such as Mexican Texas . In 1825 , American Green DeWitt received permission to settle 400 families in Texas near the confluence of the San Marcos and Guadalupe Rivers . The DeWitt Colony quickly became a favorite raiding target of local Karankawa , Tonkawa , and Comanche tribes , and in July 1826 they destroyed the capital city , Gonzales . The town was rebuilt the following year , after DeWitt negotiated peace treaties with the Karankawa and Tonkawa . The Comanche continued to stage periodic raids of the settlement over the next few years . Unable to spare military troops to protect the town , in 1831 the region 's political chief instead sent the settlers of Gonzales a six @-@ pounder cannon , described by historian Timothy Todish as " a small bored gun , good for little more than starting horse races " .

During the 1830s , the Mexican government wavered between federalist and centralist policies . As the pendulum swung sharply towards centralism in 1835 , several Mexican states revolted . In June , a small group of settlers in Texas used the political unrest as an excuse to rebel against customs duties , in an incident known as the Anahuac Disturbances . The federal government responded by sending more troops to Texas . Public opinion was sharply divided . Some communities supported the rebellion for a variety of reasons . Others , including Gonzales , declared their loyalty to Mexican President Antonio López de Santa Anna 's centralist government . Local leaders began calling for a Consultation to determine whether a majority of settlers favored independence , a return to federalism , or the status quo . Although some leaders worried that Mexican officials would see this type of gathering as a step toward revolution , by the end of August most communities had agreed to send delegates to the Consultation , scheduled for October 15 . In the interim , many communities formed militias to protect themselves from a potential attack by military forces .

On September 10 , a Mexican soldier bludgeoned a Gonzales resident , which led to widespread outrage and public protests . Mexican authorities felt it unwise to leave the settlers with a weapon . Colonel Domingo de Ugartechea , commander of all Mexican troops in Texas , sent a corporal and five enlisted men to retrieve the cannon that had been given to the colonists . Many of the settlers believed Mexican authorities were manufacturing an excuse to attack the town and eliminate the militia . In a town meeting , three citizens voted to hand over the gun to forestall an attack ; the

remainder , including alcalde Andrew Ponton , voted to stand their ground . According to historian Stephen Hardin , " the cannon became a point of honor and an unlikely rallying symbol . Gonzales citizens had no intention of handing over the weapon at a time of growing tension . " The soldiers were escorted from town without the cannon .

= = Prelude = =

Ponton anticipated that Ugartechea would send more troops to force the handover of the cannon . As soon as the first group of soldiers left Gonzales , Ponton sent a messenger to the closest town , Mina , to request help . Word quickly spread that up to 300 soldiers were expected to march on Gonzales . Stephen F. Austin , one of the most respected men in Texas and the de facto leader of the settlers , sent messengers to inform surrounding communities of the situation . Austin cautioned Texians to remain on the defensive , as any unprovoked attacks against Mexican forces could limit the support Texians might receive from the United States if war officially began .

On September 27 , 1835 , a detachment of 100 dragoons , led by Francisco de Castañeda , left San Antonio de Béxar , carrying an official order for Ponton to surrender the cannon . Castañeda had been instructed to avoid using force if possible . When the troops neared Gonzales on September 29 , they found that the settlers had removed the ferry and all other boats from the Guadalupe River . On the other side of the swiftly moving river waited eighteen Texians . Albert Martin , captain of the Gonzales militia , informed the soldiers that Ponton was out of town , and until his return the army must remain on the west side of the river .

With no easy way to cross the river , Castañeda and his men made camp at the highest ground in the area , about 300 yards (300 meters) from the river . Three Texians hurried to bury the cannon , while others traveled to nearby communities to ask for assistance . By the end of the day , more than 80 men had arrived from Fayette and Columbus . Texian militias generally elected their own leaders , and the men now gathered in Gonzales invoked their right to choose their own captain rather than report to Martin . John Henry Moore of Fayette was elected leader , with Joseph Washington Elliot Wallace and Edward Burleson , both of Columbus , respectively elected second and third in command .

On September 30 , Castañeda reiterated his request for the cannon and was again rebuffed . Texians insisted on discussing the matter directly with Ugartechea . According to their spokesman , until this was possible " the only answer I can therefore give you is that I cannot now [and] will not deliver to you the cannon " . Castañeda reported to Ugartechea that the Texians were stalling , likely to give reinforcements time to gather .

In San Antonio de Béxar , Ugartechea asked Dr. Launcelot Smither , a Gonzales resident in town on personal business , to help Castañeda convince the settlers to follow orders . When Smither arrived on October 1 , he met with militia captain Mathew Caldwell to explain that the soldiers meant no harm if the settlers would peacefully relinquish the cannon . Caldwell instructed Smither to bring Castañeda to the town the following morning to discuss the matter . At roughly the same time , Moore called a war council , which quickly voted to initiate a fight . It is unclear whether the war council was aware that Caldwell had promised Castañeda safe passage to Gonzales the next morning .

Texians dug up the cannon and mounted it on cart wheels . In the absence of cannonballs , they gathered metal scraps to fill the cannon . James C. Neill , who had served in an artillery company during the War of 1812 , was given command of the cannon . He gathered several men , including Almaron Dickinson , together to form the first artillery company of Texians . A local Methodist minister , W. P. Smith , blessed their activities in a sermon which made frequent reference to the American Revolution .

As the Texians made plans for an attack , Castañeda learned from a Coushatta Indian that about 140 men were gathered in Gonzales , with more expected . The Mexican soldiers began searching for a safe place to cross the river . At nightfall on October 1 they stopped to make camp , 7 miles (11 km) upriver from their previous spot .

= = Battle = =

Texians began crossing the river at about 7 pm . Less than half of the men were mounted , slowing their progress as they tracked the Mexican soldiers . A thick fog rolled in around midnight , further delaying them . At around 3 am , Texians reached the new Mexican camp . A dog barked at their approach , alerting the Mexican soldiers , who began to fire . The noise caused one of the Texian horses to panic and throw his rider , who suffered a bloody nose . Moore and his men hid in the thick trees until dawn . As they waited , some of the Texians raided a nearby field and snacked on watermelon .

With the darkness and fog , Mexican soldiers could not estimate how many men had surrounded them . They withdrew 300 yards (meters) to a nearby bluff . At about 6 am , Texians emerged from the trees and began firing at the Mexican soldiers . Lieutenant Gregorio Pérez counterattacked with 40 mounted soldiers . The Texians fell back to the trees and fired a volley , injuring a Mexican private . According to some accounts , the cannon fell out of the wagon upon the shot . Unable to safely maneuver among the trees , the Mexican horsemen returned to the bluff .

As the fog lifted , Castañeda sent Smither to request a meeting between the two commanders . Smither was promptly arrested by the Texians , who were suspicious of his presence among the Mexican soldiers . Nevertheless , Moore agreed to meet Castañeda . Moore explained that his followers no longer recognized the centralist government of Santa Anna and instead remained faithful to the Constitution of 1824 , which Santa Anna had repudiated . Castañeda revealed that he shared their federalist leanings , but that he was honor @-@ bound to follow orders .

As Moore returned to camp , the Texians raised a homemade white banner with an image of the cannon painted in black in the center , over the words " Come and Take It " . The makeshift flag evoked the American Revolutionary @-@ era slogan " Don 't Tread on Me " . Texians then fired their cannon at the Mexican camp . Realizing that he was outnumbered and outgunned , Castañeda led his troops back to San Antonio de Béxar . The troops were gone before the Texians finished reloading . In his report to Ugartechea , Castañeda wrote " since the orders from your Lordship were for me to withdraw without compromising the honor of Mexican arms , I did so " .

= = Aftermath = =

Two Mexican soldiers were killed in the attack . The only Texian casualty was the bloody nose suffered by the man bucked off his horse . Although the event was , as characterized by Davis , " an inconsequential skirmish in which one side did not try to fight " , Texians soon declared it a victory over Mexican troops . Despite its minimal military impact , Hardin asserts that the skirmish 's " political significance was immeasurable " . A large number of Texians had taken an armed stand against the Mexican army , and they had no intention of returning to their neutral stance towards Santa Anna 's government . Two days after the battle , Austin wrote to the San Felipe de Austin Committee of Public Safety , " War is declared ? public opinion has proclaimed it against a Military despotism ? The campaign has commenced " . News of the skirmish , originally called " the fight at Williams ' place " , spread throughout the United States , encouraging many adventurers to come to Texas and assist in the fight against Mexico . Newspapers referred to the conflict as the " Lexington of Texas " ; as the Battles of Lexington and Concord began the American Revolution , the Gonzales skirmish launched the Texas Revolution .

Before fighting had officially erupted , Santa Anna had realized that stronger measures were needed to ensure calm in Texas . He ordered his brother @-@ in @-@ law , General Martín Perfecto de Cos to bring approximately 500 soldiers to Texas . Cos and his men arrived in Goliad on October 2 . Three days later , after learning of the events at Gonzales , the soldiers left for San Antonio de Béxar .

Gonzales became a rallying point for Texians opposed to Santa Anna 's policies . On October 11 , they unanimously elected Austin their commander , despite his lack of military training . The following day , Austin led the men on a march towards San Antonio de Béxar to lay siege to Cos 's troops . By the end of the year , the Texians had driven all Mexican troops from Texas .

The cannon 's fate is disputed . According to the memoirs (written in the 1890s) of Gonzales blacksmith Noah Smithwick , the cannon was abandoned after the cart 's axles began to smoke during a march to San Antonio de Béxar to assist in Austin 's siege . Smithwick reported that the cannon was buried near a creek not far from Gonzales . A small iron cannon was exposed during a June 1936 flood near Gonzales . In 1979 , this cannon was purchased by Dr. Patrick Wagner , who believed it matched Smithwick 's descriptions of the cannon used in the battle . The Curator of Military History at the Smithsonian Institution verified that Wagner 's cannon was a type of small swivel gun used in America through 1836 . The Conservation Laboratory at the University of Texas confirmed that Wagner 's cannon had been buried in moist ground for an extended time period .

Writing in the Handbook of Texas , historian Thomas Ricks Lindley maintains that the Wagner cannon does not match the Smithwick account . The Wagner gun is made of iron and is smaller than a six @-@ pounder . Historians such as Lindley think it more likely that the Gonzales cannon was taken to San Antonio de Béxar , where it was used during the Battle of the Alamo and captured by Mexican troops in March 1836 . It was likely melted down with many of the other cannons when the Mexican army retreated .

The battle is re @-@ enacted during the Come and Take It celebration in Gonzales every October . In and around Gonzales are nine Texas historical markers which commemorate various locations used in the prelude to the battle .