



From "Uniforms of the Republic of Texas" with kind permission from Bruce Marshall

# R.H. WILLIAMS

## *The English Texas Ranger*

*By Tony Mandara*

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### THE ENGLISH ADVENTURER

At the mouth of the River Thames, on the Essex side at East Tilbury, stands Colehouse Fort, designed by General Gordon of Khartoum fame. It is a typical coastal defensive work of the Victorian era looking very similar to Fort Pulaski and other fortifications around the United States prior to the Civil War. However, it is not just the architecture of Colehouse Fort which makes the area of interest to

American Civil War students, for within a pistol shot of it's walls lies the grave of a fascinating English participant in that war. In the grounds of nearby St Margaret's church stands a cross marking the last resting place of Robert Hamilton Williams, sailor, "Border Ruffian", Texas Ranger, Confederate partisan, Indian fighter, rancher and cattle drover. Yet, whilst the grave is slightly more imposing than those around it, there is nothing to indicate his extraordinary life, including the participation (albeit innocently) in one of the Civil War's worst atrocities in Texas.

Robert Hamilton Williams, his middle name being adopted from some distant family connection with Lord Nelson's mistress Lady Hamilton, was born in the summer of 1831, the eldest of nine sons and daughters of the priest of St Peters Church, Dorchester (later to become Dean of Wells Cathedral). Receiving a good classical education his family intended that he should follow in his father's footsteps and enter the church but Robert, who had an adventurous and somewhat rebellious spirit, had other ideas.

Shortly before his 17th birthday he chose to go to sea as a middy aboard the *Madagascar*, an East Indiaman. After his first voyage he shipped as an ordinary seaman on a Liverpool barque bound for Callao to load guano. Unfortunately, the skipper was a brutal man and Williams deserted ship at Callao where he later managed to get a position as mate on a small coasting brig. The following year, hearing of the California gold rush, he decided to try his luck but was unable to get a berth because everyone else was trying to get there. Instead, he shipped as an able-bodied seaman on a 600-ton barque bound for Dundee with a cargo of guano, an horrendous voyage which took nearly six months. When discharged at Cork he had a dislocated shoulder and scurvy.

Recovering his health, he sailed as third officer aboard *Andromache*, an emigrant ship bound for Adelaide. Having completed one trip he returned to his home for a short leave during which time his family persuaded him to give up the sea - which was just as well as the *Andromache* foundered with all hands on it's next voyage.

Williams, probably at the urging of his parents, next tried his hand at farming, coming an apprentice to one of his father's vicarage tenants. But once again he was unable to settle and decided to seek his fortune in America. In February 1852, accompanied by a setter dog called "Major", a gift from friends, and provided with the not inconsiderable sum of 400£ raised by his anxious father, Robert Hamilton Williams set sail from Liverpool aboard the barque *Sudej*, for the six-week voyage to City Point, Virginia. To conserve his money, he travelled steerage with a party of emigrants who intended to settle in western Virginia. They had been lured by the glowing promises of an unscrupulous land agent in London and Williams was tempted to join them.

On arrival in Richmond the partners of a merchant firm, to whom he had letters of credit, tried to persuade him to remain there rather than go to the more remote and less advantageous area of western Virginia. But Williams was determined to proceed with his plan to purchase a piece of farmland and headed west to explore the area with the emigrants he had met on his voyage from England.

They travelled first by passenger canal boat up the James River to Buchanan, about sixty miles above Lynchburg which was the great centre of the tobacco trade and second largest slave market in the United States at that time. The boat, towed by two horses, moved so slowly that the passengers could walk alongside on the riverbank for exercise. Washing was carried out in two pewter basins beside which hung three or four towels, brushes and combs, plus a communal toothbrush, which everybody shared !

Arriving at Buchanan the party proceeded on foot through the mountains to West Virginia, completing the last 120 miles of the journey in just five days. At Brush Creek, Mercer County, the party was met by State Senator French whose land they had come to settle - which was another 60 miles away on foot. Having made the final stage of the journey it quickly became apparent that the land on offer was totally unsuitable for settlement being heavily timbered and impossible to farm. The few settlers who had been duped into buying a plot were desperately struggling just to survive (shades of Charles Dickens' Martin Chuzzlewit) and Williams quickly made up his mind not to invest.

He left the emigrant band and headed back 40 miles to Princeton, Mercer County, where he purchased a farm for 1,500\$ (about 300£), selling it a year later for 2,000\$ and taking three slaves, 16-year-old Ann and her two brothers, Shad 14 yrs and Pete 12 yrs, in part payment. In later years Williams came to realise the evils of slavery and believe wholeheartedly in the abolition of the trade. However, at that time, he saw no wrong in owning another human being.

It was about this time that he made a "declaration of intention" to become an American Citizen and in due course became naturalized, later voting for Jefferson Davis to become President of the Confederacy.

In November 1854, he chose to move himself and his "property" to Kansas, remarking in his autobiography "... *strange as it may seem to those whose ideas of slaves and slave owners have been formed by abolition literature, my young slaves went with me cheerfully and willingly, and were as much excited at the prospect of a*

*new life in the West as I was myself. What their ideas on the subject were, or what they expected to find when they reached the goal I know not ... A complete change from the past and new conditions of life we all look forward to I suppose”.*

They travelled to Richmond, part of the journey being by train where only two types of ticket were available - 1st for whites and 2nd for dogs and blacks! At first Williams, as a young Englishman with three slaves, was treated with suspicion that he might be an abolitionist engaged in helping runaways to escape to freedom. From Richmond the party travelled through part of Pennsylvania which, being a free state opposed to slavery, necessitated him getting a special permit to take his “property” with him.

They then went by steamboat to Cincinnati and crossed the Ohio River to Covington, Kentucky. It was here that he noticed a change in social customs. Williams found that he was now regarded with deference and respect, *“I might be as ragged and unkempt as a tramp without a dollar in my pocket, yet the fact of my possessing slaves would have raised me to at least the fringe of aristocracy. So it was throughout the South in those days”.*

Moving westward towards Kansas he spent the winter at St Louis where the Mississippi was frozen solid, and a constant flow of wagons was able to cross from one side to the other. There were miles of Mississippi steamboats stuck in the ice and, when the river did eventually melt, a wall of ice some 100 ft high swept down destroying all of the boats and causing some 3 million dollars damage. At St Louis Williams met a “Colonel” Howard who, once a year, drove 1,000 turkeys 250 miles from Missouri to market in the South.

Still seeking a business opportunity, Williams proceeded to Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, on the Missouri. As no boats were running because of the big freeze, he made the journey by horse, covering the 450 miles at a rate of 35 miles a day. At Independence he witnessed the fatal shooting of a slave who was trying to escape - no action was taken against the killer as the action was considered to be perfectly legal. In 1855, Leavenworth “City” was a frontier town illegally built on the Delaware Indian reserve. The US Government had warned all squatters that they faced heavy penalties if they did not vacate the Indian lands but, as these penalties were never enforced, the illegal settlers remained. The following year the land was opened up to whites for settlement and the Indians thrown off their reserve. Williams acquired several of these claims as a property speculation. He also hired out his slaves, Ann at 20\$ per month and her two brothers at 25\$ the pair, then established a wagon line to transport goods throughout the area. Not wishing to risk his money to possible bandit attack while on the trail, he once entrusted his entire savings of over 2,000\$ to the safe keeping of his slave Ann because there were no banks in the territory, and she was the only honest person in the place ! She did not betray his trust.

This was a time of great unrest in Kansas and Missouri as squatters tried to ensure that the territories would be adopted as slave states within the Union, while “Free Soilers” from the North tried to prevent this. The area was flooded with men and weapons and a state of anarchy prevailed. Leavenworth was the only easily accessible port of entry into Kansas and southern sympathizers formed a “minute company” to inspect all cargoes to prevent arms reaching anti-slavery elements within the territory. Williams joined the company and assisted in the capture of a number of weapons.

When the situation boiled over into fighting, he joined a company of mounted rangers, known as Border Ruffians, being raised by A.B. Miller, a professional

gambler. Elected orderly sergeant, Williams together with 800 other volunteers, was stationed at Salt Creek under the overall command of "General" Davy Atchison, an ex-US Senator for Missouri.

Life in camp was pleasant enough because "... *our 'General' didn't go in for much drill, possibly because he did not know much about it himself*". Their principal duty was to stop all passing steamboats on the river and search for "Free Soilers" and weapons that were pouring into the territory at the connivance of the New England Emigrants' Aid Society. Any vessel that refused to stop was promptly fired upon by a field battery posted to command the river passage.

Reinforced to 1,500 strong and supported by two 6 pdr field pieces the unit moved on Lawrence, the headquarters of the "Free Soilers" which was protected by considerable earthworks and held by 2,500 men under the Free-State Governor Charles Robinson. On arrival before the town the garrison surrendered without a fight and, although the prisoners were spared, the town was sacked when Atchison's men got drunk and ran amuck.

The Border Ruffians spent considerable time marching and countermarching but, although a general engagement seemed imminent on several occasions, it never came to a pitched battle. Williams said that the many lives that were lost in that miserable border fighting were killed in small affairs between scouting parties and outposts. Many men on both sides were murdered simply to pay off old scores and to gratify private spite or revenge.

An example of how cheaply life was held is demonstrated by a dispute between Mike Murphy who took more than his share of corn for his horse and when his senior officer, Lieutenant Kelly, ordered him to hand some back tried to kill him but was shot by the Lieutenant instead. Although not punished for killing one of his own men, Kelly chose to resign his position and Williams was unanimously elected as 2nd Lieutenant to fill his place.

On another occasion Williams discovered the bodies of two civilians who had been shot in the head by members of his own unit. When he made objections to his commanding officer, saying that he would not be a party to such actions, preferring to quit the company rather than fight alongside murderers, Miller made light of the affair saying that the other side had done the same thing and for his part he did not intend to ask for, or give, quarter.

Violence and atrocities became so rife Washington eventually sent two regiments of US cavalry under Colonel Sumner to put an end to the lawlessness in Kansas with orders to march against either side, which disregarded the proclamation to disperse. An uneasy peace was enforced, and the Border Ruffians disbanded.

In 1855, the Delaware Indians were forced off their reservation and their lands sold by auction. The squatters, including Williams, who had previously seized the best lands, banded together to pack the auction and intimidate any "Free Soilers" or speculators to refrain from bidding. As a result, they were able to get their plots at bargain prices. Williams paid just 200\$ for his claim adjoining Leavenworth City and almost immediately re-sold it for 1,500\$ - that same plot of land 50 years later was worth 500,000\$.

An event now occurred which would have repercussions on Williams' later fortunes. While attempting to assist a Leavenworth constable arrest a man named Cline for horse stealing, Williams shot and seriously wounded him. Cline was a "Free Soiler" who had once tried to hang him, so Williams had a score to settle. For three weeks Williams became a saloon owner when he took the premises in payment of a

debt. Although a very lucrative establishment he declared, *"I had to admit the business had its drawbacks and wasn't quite one that a nervous man would choose; my customers were too ready with their six shooters for that"*. He quickly sold the bar.

He next became one of the first to stake land claims on the Kansas River where the Shawnee Indians had been forced by the Government to move from their reservation. Although only permitted to make one claim per person, he together with four companions, made numerous claims by putting them in the names of nominees.

While waiting to recoup the profits from these new speculations and not wishing to eat into his savings, Williams took employment as a wagon master for the freight company of Major & Russell. Owning 20,000 working cattle and 2,000 wagons this company operated all freighting west of the Missouri River to the military posts in Indian Territory. On his first trip, from St Joe to the Big Blue, Williams was responsible for a train of 75 wagons, each drawn by eight yokes of oxen with a driver to each team plus twelve additional men. Each schooner was about 20 ft long and carried four to five tons of goods. The whole train occupied a length of almost two miles.

This was a dangerous occupation where journeys could take several weeks through Indian Territory. The Sioux and Cheyenne were on the warpath and had recently killed every man of a previous freight train. The Indians were not the only danger, a tornado left a path of devastation four miles wide by 43 miles long and uprooting every tree, destroying a town and killing a child. Two of Williams' schooners were scattered in pieces over three miles. On another occasion his camp was almost engulfed by tens of thousands of buffalo on the move. *"Their trampling was like the distant, dull roar of surf on the sea beach"*. The freight corral just managed to split the herd by shooting and yelling so that it went past on either side for several hours. When daylight came, they had killed several dozen of them.

Returning to his claim on the Kansas River he found that it had been jumped by squatters but, with the aid of friends, Williams managed to force them off and burn their cabin. The man, Nash, later filed a claim on this same site, although Williams had been the first on the land and had built a home there. In spite of having powerful friends in the Free State Party, who swore on his behalf in Court, Nash lost his case.

At about this time Williams, accompanied by a friend called Walker, were fired upon for no apparent reason by two men called Miliner and McDougal. Being unarmed they could not fight back, and Walker was killed. McDougal was quickly arrested, and Williams joined the posse, which pursued and captured Miliner and later gave evidence at the killer's trial. However, the trial was halted by an amnesty granted by Act of the State Legislature for all criminal offences committed up to that date. The Act had been introduced to preserve from prosecution all those involved in the late border war, but in this case, it allowed two murderers to escape justice.

In spring 1859, the man Cline returned to Leavenworth from New York where he had fled after being shot by Williams. As the Free State party was now in the ascendant, Cline was elected Sheriff and began threatening that he would shoot Williams on sight. Fearing Cline would get a warrant against him, Williams prepared to sell up and leave. His departure was hastened when he received a message from the Sheriff of Johnson County, who happened to be a friend, that he held a warrant from Cline for Williams' arrest and that he should leave immediately. Within hours Williams had packed his belongings and set off full gallop for Kansas City where he settled his financial affairs, en route for England.

The journey home entailed travelling by riverboat along the Missouri River to St Louis. During the voyage Williams encountered a demonstration of just how easily a free black person could be kidnapped and made a slave. A Northern man had come aboard with a black woman and her two children who he entered on the ship's books as his slaves. The woman told one of the passengers that she was in fact a free woman and had met the man in Kansas City where he had persuaded her that he would provide her with a good home in one of the Free States. However, she now felt that he intended to take her to New Orleans to sell into slavery and begged for help. Fortunately, her story was believed and she was taken to the captain and, so well did she present her claim, he called a meeting of the passengers to determine what should be done. The supposed owner was hauled before this impromptu court where, having proved to their own satisfaction that he was lying and his papers to be forgeries, he confessed his guilt. Of all crimes in the South, stealing slaves was the most heinous and the verdict was death, sentence to be carried out at the next landing place. The captain however, would not agree to a lynching but, instead, left the culprit standing on a sandbank in the middle of the river to take his chances to either swim or drown. Williams had no idea what became of the man.

Returning to England Williams spent two months before getting restless again. In October 1859, he re-crossed the Atlantic and headed once more for Kansas but, at St Louis, heard that Cline had obtained a judgment against him in the Civil Court for substantial damages plus there was a criminal warrant out for him. Realizing he was unlikely to receive a fair trial in Kansas under the existing Free State regime he sold his ranch and decided to try settling in Canada. He was accompanied by an Englishman called Thompson as his partner. However, after three months looking for an opportunity, they abandoned the idea and instead moved to Texas.

On board ship from New Orleans to Galveston, Williams met Sam Houston who advised him about business opportunities in Texas. The coastal cotton growing area required a larger capital investment than Williams and Thompson could afford while Galveston, Indianola and other coastal towns offered good commercial openings, but the climate was unhealthy and Yellow Jack (fever) a frequent visitor. Western Texas seemed to provide the best chance for cattle ranching with excellent and unlimited pasture lands available. The only drawbacks were the distance from markets and the Comanche Indians - *"it was definitely not a country for a timid man or one who was nervous about his scalp"*.

In August 1860 they travelled by stage to Victoria where they began to search for a suitable ranch. They spent the next month or so riding the area and one morning found that their horses had strayed. In searching for them, Williams discovered the bodies of two men, torn and mangled by the buzzards, hanging from a tree. Walking back to San Antonio they learned that the two dead men were horse thieves who had been caught by the Vigilance Committee the week before.

In San Antonio they were introduced to a little dried-up Mexican vaquero who agreed to find the missing horses for 10\$ on a "no cure no pay" basis. He brought in the lost property the following evening. The partners eventually purchased a 1,000-acre ranch at Medio Creek on the El Paso road for the sum of 1\$ per acre.

Prior to the outbreak of the Civil War, Colonel Robert E. Lee held command of US forces at San Antonio and Williams met him once briefly after an Episcopal Church Service held in the Masonic Hall (remember Williams was the son of a vicar and well educated so was quite at ease in the company of gentlemen). He described Lee thus, *"Tall, somewhat spare in figure, with a soldierly bearing that revealed his*

*profession at a glance, he looked, what indeed he was, every inch a gentleman. Courteous and dignified in manner, but without the slightest assumption, he was beloved by all who came within the charm of his personal influence. At this time he was about fifty three years of age, but his dark hair was untinged with grey and his blue eyes were bright and undimmed beneath his black eyebrows". Williams also met General Hood, who was a US Lieutenant at the time, and had dinner and played cards with him on several occasions. After the war they met again in New Orleans where Hood was then keeping a store.*

## THE WAR YEARS

Williams joined the San Antonio lodge of the Knights of the Golden Circle, which had lodges all over the South, ostensibly to protect Southern Rights, but in reality, to bring about secession. His partner, Thompson, did not join because, unlike Williams, he had not taken American citizenship and did not wish to be involved in the Country's internal quarrels. His stance was respected by their neighbours, and he was not subject to any ill feeling for not actively supporting the Confederacy.

In early March 1861, although Texas had not yet formally joined the Confederacy, the newly established State Government determined to capture the munitions and stores held at the US fort at San Antonio. The "Committee of Safety" called for volunteers from all lodges of the Knights of the Golden Circle. Ben McCulloch, who had been commissioned as Commander in Chief of State forces moved with 2,000 mostly mounted men to within a few miles of San Antonio where he was reinforced by 500 volunteers from the K.G.C., Williams among them. Although this force could not boast much discipline, they were well mounted, and most were expert shots. Neither were they encumbered with any supply train for each man was his own commissariat department and carried his own rations.

The night Williams' party arrived at San Antonio orders were issued that they were to parade, dismounted, at 11 p.m. to march the three miles for an attack on the fort just west of the town. The position was a strong one and should have been easily defended. Its commander General Twiggs, who had succeeded Robert E. Lee, had a regiment of infantry plus three batteries of artillery and a company of cavalry at his disposal. Opposition was also expected from the Germans who made up about half the population of the town and were almost all loyal to the Union.

Marching in complete silence, McCulloch's men entered the town without encountering even a picket guard. Occupying every commanding position as they advanced, Williams' company, eighty strong, was ordered to take post on the flat roofs of those Mexican houses, which commanded the whole of the Alamo Plaza. There they stood for four hours expecting that firing would begin at any moment. Then at 7 a.m. Twiggs surrendered without firing a shot and the entire garrison of 1,100 troops, plus artillery and 3 million \$ worth of stores were captured.

Soon after the capture of San Antonio the "Committee of Safety" called for mounted riflemen to volunteer for three months' service. Adventurous as ever, Williams promptly joined a company being mustered by a man called Paul who had previously held a commission in the Texas Navy ! Paul was in reality a frontiersman and Indian fighter. Williams was appointed orderly sergeant and with his company, 40 strong, went into camp on the Medina River at an old Mormon Settlement which had been vacated when the Mormons moved to Salt Lake City.

Sent to attack a detachment of US cavalry based at Val Verde, Paul and Williams approached the post under a white flag to demand its surrender. Unbeknown to them the officer in charge, Lieutenant Hill, had already received orders to retire but now made a great show of intending to fight in order to negotiate better surrender terms. Offered the opportunity for his officers and men to march out with their horses, arms and personal property he agreed to surrender. On entering the post, the Texans found themselves in possession of stores, ammunition, 12 mules and 80 camels plus two Egyptian drivers ! For which Williams, as orderly sergeant, had to give a written receipt.

With the advent of the Civil War, US army posts, which had been protecting the frontier from Indian attack, were abandoned and the troops withdrawn. The Comanches, always troublesome, took the opportunity to increase their attacks on outlying ranches murdering men, women and children. Williams spent much of the war engaged in trying to stop these depredations.

Three weeks after the capture of Val Verde Williams' company was called upon to pursue a group of marauding Comanches in the Guadalupe District. Riding they reached a lonely cabin where two men had been scalped. Two women had survived the attack, (the elder woman was wife to one of the victims and mother of the other, the younger woman was her daughter-in-law). They described how their men had left the cabin two nights before to investigate noises in the stock corral. The women had found their bodies the next morning with the stock gone. After hastily burying the dead men and leaving the women to be cared for by a following relief party, the Texans set out after the Indians. They passed three more ranches where all the white people had been massacred.

Catching lightly clad Indians was almost impossible but, when they were encumbered with stock and plunder, the Texans knew that there was a good chance of overtaking them. Accordingly, after four days pursuit, they located a large camp of Comanches. Their surprise night attack, however, was ruined when one man shot a tree thinking it was an Indian sentry. In the fight that followed most of the Indians, including a few of their wounded, escaped. They left behind 3 dead plus 15 horses, plunder from the ranches and five fresh scalps.

Two weeks after this brush with the Comanches, Williams, in command of 20 men, was sent to the El Paso road to observe the movements of US troops who were marching from the Mexican border to attack San Antonio. Locating the party he discovered it consisted of approximately 700 infantry, two cannon, eight wagons and a number of servants and led horses. As they travelled at only 15 miles a day Williams' party was easily able to track them unobserved for almost 250 miles. Nearing San Lucas Springs, a few miles from San Antonio, Williams sent a message to Colonel Van Dorn<sup>1</sup> in charge of the Texan defenders. His scouting party then raced ahead of the US troops to meet the San Antonio volunteers at his own ranch.

Van Dorn had a force of 2,000 volunteer infantry armed with a variety of weapons plus about 500 mounted men. He posted his infantry in three ranks, with his mounted men on the flanks, across the road along which the US troops were advancing. Williams, still acting as scout, reported that the Yankees had drawn up in a line on a slight rise with their artillery in the centre giving every indication that they meant to fight. After an hour a Federal officer approached the Texan lines and surrendered, much to the relief of the San Antonio volunteers who were not eager for

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<sup>1</sup> *In his autobiography Williams refers to Van Dorn but it is almost certain that he meant Van Dom. The error probably occurred when his diaries were being edited for publication by his younger brother.*



a fight. Indeed, some of the Texans had sloped off to Williams' ranch where they were being sold whisky by his partner Thompson. The Federals were paroled but not before Thompson, ever the businessman, had secretly purchased a number of items which they chose to sell rather than hand over to the Texas authorities. These included three ponies, twenty US blankets and six colt revolvers all which he bought for a mere pittance.

It was not only Federal troops and Comanches that Texas had to contend with, but also opportunist raids from Mexican bandits from Nuevo Leon who frequently took the opportunity to cross the Rio Grande to steal horses. On one of these occasions Williams led a party in pursuit of a gang who had stolen twenty horses (six of them being his own). They managed to catch four of the raiders and, as was the way with all horse stealers, they immediately hung three of them and shot the fourth because he begged not to be hung.

His three months service now at an end, Williams was mustered out and given a "certificate of service" which he later cashed for 60\$. Not long after returning home his ranch was visited by four men of the Vigilance Committee together with a prisoner accused of stealing a horse who had then enlisted in the Confederate cavalry at Fort Clark. They had brought the man some 250 miles back to San Antonio but confessed to Williams that they intended to lynch him before reaching town. Williams did his best to persuade them otherwise but was unable to interfere directly for fear of raising the enmity of the Vigilance Committee who might kill him as well or, at the very least, force him out of the State. He spoke to the prisoner and discovered that he knew the man, having served with him in Kansas. The prisoner claimed that he was innocent of the charge having purchased the horse from a Mexican and would be able to prove this at his trial, being unaware that he was about to be murdered. Williams gave the poor man a drink of whisky before he was taken away and the next morning followed their trail to find the victim hanging from a tree about three miles away. He reported the affair to the City Marshall in San Antonio who sent some Mexicans to bury the body but refused to take further action because no one dared interfere with the all-powerful Vigilance Committee.

Another instance of vigilante violence was witnessed by Williams when a drunken young Ranger broke up a Mexican card game by jumping over their table. The man was brought to court where his case was dismissed with a caution but, as he left the court, a mob lynched him. The Ranger's comrades were prevented from exacting revenge by their commanding officer. It transpired that the real reason for the murder was that he had threatened to shoot the men who had hanged his brother two years before. The perpetrators responsible for that deed and of his lynching were two leaders of the Vigilance Committee, Solomon Chiswell and Asa Minshul. Minshul was a prosperous local businessman about 50 years old and a leading Wesleyan, often preaching and praying at the church. He was reputed to keep a noosed rope within his hat.

Williams and Thompson sold their ranch to an immigrant family from Arkansas and with the proceeds as a down payment purchased a larger one of almost 2,000 acres on the River Frio, about 60 miles from San Antonio. That Williams was highly regarded by his compatriots is shown by the fact that in summer 1861 he was offered a Captain's commission in the Partisan Rangers then being raised for service in Tennessee. He turned down the position because of the demands of the new ranch.

In May 1862, Williams enlisted for three years or the duration of the war and became a Partisan Ranger in a new company being raised by a man called Duff<sup>2</sup>. Any hopes that Williams might have of saving his country under Lee or Jackson were soon dashed and his belief in the cause disillusioned. Local Texas authorities were swift to exploit patriotism for their own selfish ends. Williams wrote, *“In times of convulsion and strife ... in the outlying districts the scum of the population rises to the surface, and their corruption and self-seeking are rife. In Texas loud-tongued local nobodies talked themselves into power and position and used them to rob their suffering country and to defraud the soldiers fighting her battles. Captain Duff was one of the worst in his own small way and a cold-blooded murderer. On foot he resembled a bullfrog, and on horse back Sancho Panza”*.

Immediately after enlistment Williams was sent to join his camp two miles outside San Antonio. There his horse was valued and paid for in Confederate notes and he spent the next ten days being taught drill by instructors who knew little more about it than the new recruits.

On June 19, 1862, the Partisan Rangers were sent to Fredericksburg, 80 miles north of San Antonio, when it was reported that 1,500 “Bushwhackers”, mostly Germans, were attacking the ranches of Southern loyalists. Captain Duff was appointed Provost Marshall and given full powers to deal with the situation. On reaching the area they found all was quiet although a number of Germans had taken to the mountains on route to join the Federals. The remainder of the population of nearly 800 people were almost all Germans and pro-Unionists. Martial law was declared, and the inhabitants of the county given three days to take an oath of allegiance to the Confederacy, or be treated as traitors. Williams was not happy about what he regarded as the bullying and hanging of a few inoffensive Germans especially when he learned that Duff had given orders to a select number of his men that no prisoners were to be taken.

Those who opposed Duff’s intentions were rarely sent out on patrol, only his henchmen were sent out and they never came back with any male prisoners, only women and children who were brought in after their homes had been destroyed. Williams said that the murdered men were fathers of families, and some were old men. They had not been taken with arms in their hands, there was no enemy force in the region and there were no similar acts by local Yankees to avenge. Furthermore, martial law was in force and summary justice could have been imposed on any real offenders by legal methods. There was no excuse for the murders of more than twenty men around Fredericksburg. Williams became ashamed at the actions of his companions.

Eventually one hundred men, including Williams, were sent into the mountains, to find the supposed “Bushwhackers” and attack them. The Partisan Rangers were led by Lieutenant Cole McCree of Davis’s company. Under him was Lieutenant Harbour of the same company who was a *“good sort of fellow and a number-one Indian fighter”*. Williams’ own company of twenty men was commanded by Lieutenant Luck, a Yankee by birth. Williams described him as an uneducated and ignorant man who, till sometime after Secession, had been a strong Unionist but once it appeared that the Confederacy might be winning the war changed his allegiance.

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<sup>2</sup> In his autobiography Williams first refers to Duff by that name then later as Dunn. However, as Duff is the correct name one must presume that the error occurred when the book was edited for publication.

The Germans, estimated by Williams to be 150 in number (other sources say only 60 strong) were mostly young men from the best families in Western Texas. They intended to make their way to New Orleans by way of Mexico and join the Federal army. On the night of 9th August, they encamped on the edge of a cedar brake, on the Nueces River. They had moved with such secrecy that they felt no apprehension of danger, but they were betrayed by one of their party who, captured by the Rangers, was forced to betray his friends in order to save his own life.

Approaching the German camp at night an over excited Ranger fired at a sentry before everything was ready. Although the untrained Germans were outnumbered and poorly armed, they put up a spirited defence and inflicted a number of casualties but suffered severely trying to fight in close formation from the centre of their camp, while the Confederates were spread out and sniping from under cover all around them. Two thirds of their number were killed or wounded while the rest fled towards the Rio Grande. Some escaped, and others were captured. The Confederates at first did all they could to ease the suffering of the wounded Germans.

The following morning Williams assisted in rounding up the Germans' horses and when he returned to camp, he found that the wounded prisoners were missing. He was told that they had been moved to a more sheltered place nearby then, while getting water for one of his own wounded comrades, he heard firing. He first thought that the dead were being buried with honours of war, but the shots did not sound right and, fearing that it might be an attack, he grabbed his gun and ran towards the firing. On the way he met a man coming towards him who, when he saw Williams running, said, "*You needn't be in a hurry, it's all done; they've shot the poor devils and finished them off*".

The wounded Germans had been asked if they would like to be moved into better shade, to which they had willingly agreed and even thanked their murderers for their kindness. On reaching the spot they were killed in cold blood. Williams claims that Lt. Luck<sup>3</sup>, acting under Duff's influence, was responsible for the murders. The Rangers commander, Lieutenant Cole McCree had been wounded in the fight and was unaware of the incident.

Burying their own dead, the Rangers left the enemy as prey for the buzzards. After the War measures were taken to collect the remains of the slain and bury them at Comfort, about fifty miles northwest of San Antonio, where a monument was erected to their memory. The Confederate wounded were placed on hand litters, each carried by four men from Williams' company, and the party set out for Fort Clark at the head of the Los Moros. The journey was over difficult country, and the mounted men soon left the stretcher party far behind without water or supplies.

Williams believed that this was an act of vindictiveness for having told Lieutenant Luck that he was a coward and a murderer. Williams had been backed by his men, which prevented Luck from trying to kill him. But Luck had his revenge by leaving the men to stagger 30 miles before they eventually met some wagons, which carried the wounded to the fort. Five of the eight wounded Confederates later died of their wounds.

On return to San Antonio, Williams tried to stir up feelings in the command against Duff and called for Duff's resignation, but he braved it out and cajoled or threatened most of the men to drop their demands. Williams was now in a difficult

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<sup>3</sup> *Another source says it was a Lt Lilley who was in charge and ordered the killings, but Williams was there and he makes no mention of Lt. Lilley being present, so one must presume that his version is correct*

position and his only hope was to get out of the command. He therefore applied to General Wasp for permission to quit the company and join Hood's Texan Brigade but was refused.

Williams was promised a Captain's commission if he could raise enough men to join a battalion being raised for Confederate service by Major Copwood, but he was unsuccessful because most men favoured State service rather than fighting with Lee in Virginia. Instead of being sent to the front, Williams and his comrades were kept in Texas and spent months arresting supposed Unionists or chasing imaginary enemy express riders who only existed in the minds of local leaders. This was a dreadful waste of a useful body of irregular cavalry all of whom were frontiersman and skilled Indian fighters.

He once caught four Mexican deserters from Confederate service who were trying to escape to Mexico and, knowing that the Vigilance Committee would lynch them had he took them to San Antonio, he let them go free.

In January 1863, two companies of Rangers were ordered to Brownsville on the lower Rio Grande opposite Matamoras, there to join forces under General Wasp. Ostensibly they were to hold the post against a threatened attack but in reality, to assist in illegal cotton speculation.

The Confederate Government paid blockade-runners in cotton or certificates for cotton (Confederate paper dollars had little or no value to blockade-runners). Early in the war cotton had been plentiful and paper money was about par in value. However, it soon began to depreciate so that holders of cotton would only accept it at ever-increasing discount. General Wasp then declared martial law in western Texas and made paper money legal tender at par (supposedly for the benefit of the Confederate Government). He then established a system of permits allowing cotton to be taken into Mexico on the undertaking that the holder would exchange his cotton for goods to be brought back into Texas. However, permits were only given to Wasp's agents who, having bought the cotton with worthless paper, were able to sell it for gold or Yankee dollars in Mexico, which they then pocketed with a heavy percentage for Wasp.

This policy caused many holders to refuse to sell their cotton at such poor prices. According to Williams, at one stage there were some seventy vessels waiting at the mouth of the Rio Grande for a cotton cargo. The Confederate Government appointed an agent with extraordinary powers to break the logjam and collect the cotton at a fixed price payable in paper. Unfortunately, the man chosen, Warter, was himself a speculator and gambler who used the position to carry out his own illicit trade.

In autumn 1863, an unsubstantiated report came to Brownsville that a large Union force had landed at Boca del Rio and were marching on the town. Without checking the report, orders were given to evacuate the town and burn the barracks, stores and cotton. This allowed Wasp and company to hide their frauds from the Confederate Government - what they could not account for they claimed had been destroyed to save it falling into Union hands. In the last days of the war before Texas came once again under Federal rule, all of these speculators escaped with their profits into Mexico.

In April 1863, Williams was a member of an expedition sent by General Wasp to cross the Rio Grande into Mexico and attack a group of deserters and renegades who were being recruited to serve in the Union army. This attack was highly irregular because they were invading a neutral country that had been friendly towards the Confederacy. Under cover of night, Major Samson with 150 Rangers crossed the river and captured a customhouse with about thirty Mexican guards whom they kept prisoner until after the raid. Marching two miles to the Unionists camp they attacked the sleeping

men, killing and wounding several and taking five prisoners including their commander Colonel Davis. By dawn they were back on their own side of the Rio Grande but not before they had lynched three of their prisoners. Williams as sergeant was placed in charge of twelve reliable men to guard and protect the remaining two prisoners, including Davis, and take them in secret to General Magruder's headquarters where he handed them over to the provost for safety.

The Mexican Governor of Nueve Leon in whose jurisdiction the raid had been made, furious at the insult to his country, demanded a full apology and the instant release of the prisoners. Magruder at once complied while Wasp denied all knowledge of the raid.

When a vacancy for Lieutenant occurred in Williams' company he was persuaded to stand for the post and, although he received a clear majority of the vote, Duff's nominee demanded a recount, which was manipulated for him to win.

The Partisan Rangers were eventually converted into the 33rd regiment of Texas Cavalry in the Confederate service. Williams was delighted as this offered him a way out of Duff's power, either by promotion, transfer or by hiring a substitute to take his place. Partisan units had no such procedures.

It was at this time that Williams' friend Thompson died, and he needed time to make arrangements for the future of their ranch. He acquired the services of an English sailor called Osborne as a substitute for 150\$ and was accordingly released from service.

In October 1863, the State Legislature passed an ordinance requiring all able-bodied men over 25 years to serve in either the Confederate Army or with State troops. Williams received an order from Governor Pendleton Murrah to enrol a company for the protection of the frontier and upper Rio Grande, with it was a commission as Civil Magistrate for the district. He soon recruited the required eighty men, each supplying his own horse and weapons that were paid for by the State. Williams was appointed Captain and, as his unit was not attached to any regiment, he had no ranking officer and was in effect the sole authority, civil or military, in a wide district.

Their first service was to assist Colonel Benavides who was holding Lorado against a threatened attack from Unionists and Mexican guerrillas. The unit completed a 200-mile journey in five days, but the enemy retreated without a fight. A week later, they mobilized against a large raiding party of Comanches but again without success. From then on they spent considerable time fruitlessly chasing various Indian raiding parties.

Then, in early 1864, Williams was placed second in command of an expedition, led by Major Hunter, to Fort Lancaster in the south-west of the State where some 400 Californians were assuming a threatening attitude and attracting a number of Confederate deserters. Desertion was becoming rife with men going off in bands from a dozen to two hundred at a time. Many joined the Federals while most escaped into Mexico.

The expedition of some five hundred strong attacked the enemy camp and killed 35, wounded 20 and captured 250 horses. The rest of the enemy escaped over the river into Mexico where many of them were killed by local ranchers who had previously been plundered by them.

There were several other alarms with all frontier regiments being summoned to repel renegade attacks. One such group encountered a force under Captain Minshul, son of Asa Minshul the leader of the Vigilance Committee. Captain Minshul surprised

the renegades and captured a number of them - promptly hanging about thirty of them and so proving himself a chip off the old block.

As the Confederacy began to collapse the Rangers were kept busier than ever chasing the Indians who were becoming even bolder in their outrages. In April 1865, Williams fought his last encounter with the Comanches and, although outnumbered three to one, killed or wounded nineteen of them. Sadly, his first lieutenant and four other men were killed.

In the dying days of the war, in April, a further atrocity was committed when ten Germans, who had been placed in a lightly guarded prison, were grabbed by a mob and lynched. After the Federal occupation two men were tried and shot in San Antonio for this crime, but the chief culprit Major Roberts escaped to Mexico.

After the war Williams was almost impoverished because all he had was worthless Confederate money and the ranch, which had been neglected after Thompson's death. He therefore decided to run his cattle to New Orleans, a drive of 700 miles to the Chafalaya River and then a three-day boat trip. He started with 102 steers and was later joined by another drive of 118 cattle. In spite of suffering a stampede during a storm he only lost 30 heads and was able to sell the remainder for 4,875\$. He then invested the proceeds in a venture to sell hogs but lost 2,500\$ and, once he had settled all his debts, was no better off than when he started out, after five months hard work.

Eventually he took a small herd to Mexico where he made a small profit which enabled him to return to England in June 1866. While at home Williams married his childhood sweetheart and instead of returning to America, he sold his ranch and they settled at Tilbury in Essex, where he became a large land and property owner. Although he came to realise the evils of slavery and the benefits to America of being a united nation, he remained a proud Confederate and "good old rebel" to the end. Williams died on the 3rd of August 1904, aged 73, and his wife on 16 January 1906 aged 72. They had one son.

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