

## PROFILES OF TEXAS

by Jack Maguire

# The Ragtag Army

Outfitted with tomahawks, Bowie knives and muzzle-loading rifles, the Texas Army manages to stay out of step with the rest of the world's elite military forces.

**I**t is time that the world — at least, the United Nations — got the message. The Texas Army is on the march again.

Not that the organization of world diplomats can object. Under the treaty of annexation, Texas is the only U.S. state that has the right to maintain its own army and navy. Texas has reactivated both.

The navy has been reduced to four ceremonial vessels, including the great battleship "Texas" which is moored at San Jacinto Battleground and is a prime tourist attraction. But the Texas Army is another matter. It has 62 muzzle-loading rifles at the ready, and they're all in working order.

"Colonel" Cliff Zearfoss of Bastrop (every recruit is a colonel) recalls that Gov. Preston Smith officially reactivated the Texas Army on June 24, 1969. Three weeks later, one of its recruits (sans his trusty rifle) became the first man to walk on the moon. He was Neil Armstrong, who doubles as an astronaut.

He also spoke the first word ever broadcast from the moon. Naturally, it was "Houston." No matter that he was calling "Houston Control" at the Space Center. To his fellow officers in the Texas Army, he was honoring none other than Gen. Sam Houston himself, who commanded the first Texas Army and beat the daylights out of a superior Mexican force at San Jacinto in 1836. And make no mistake about it — Gen. Houston and the Battle of San Jacinto still are the inspiration that has made the modern Texas Army the unique force that it is.

It's unique for many reasons.

Unlike most military outfits, the Texas Army won't accept volunteers; never conducts drills and will dismiss any recruit caught marching in step. Colonels have to furnish their own uniforms (just as they did in 1836), and they can't be store-bought. Most prefer buckskins that they've tanned and sewed themselves, although some (like the company's physician) prefer a black frock coat and a top hat. He also carries a good supply of whiskey in a side bag, since that was about the only effective drug available to Houston and his men.

Naturally, an outfit like the Texas Army has to be commanded by a leader in the mode of old Sam. They chose Carroll A. Lewis Jr. of Houston and gave him a six-star rank. He was given six stars for a reason; they enable him to outrank any military leader in the world. Thus if "General" Lewis is ever asked to sit in with the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff or any other gathering of the world's top-ranking fighting men, his rank guarantees that he'll be seated at the head of the table.

The Texas Army is a ragtag outfit and proud of it. "I want us to have no military bearing at all," Gen. Lewis exhorts his men. "Every colonel is on his own. Our only goal is to be a rank organization. And believe me, when we're marching in our buckskins in the heat of summer, we are the rankest bunch you ever saw."

Getting into the Texas Army isn't easy. Since volunteers are routinely turned down, new recruits aren't even considered unless they can prove that

they are efficient in the use of Bowie knives, tomahawks and flintlock rifles. Then they may be accepted if they're willing to produce an acceptable uniform and promise to show up, at their own expense, at functions in which the Texas Army is invited to participate.

There are always more such invitations than the army can accept. They have marched in the inaugural parade of every Texas governor since 1970, and they're already planning to be in Austin in January 1979 to help install either Democrat John Hill or Republican William Clements. "We're for the Governor, regardless of party," is the way Gen. Lewis explains it.

Each April 21, the Texas Army assembles at San Jacinto Battleground, regardless of any other duty they may have. In the nine years since they were first mustered by Gov. Smith, they have fired memorial salutes at the battleground, had a role in ceremonies aboard the Battleship "Texas" and, on one occasion, actually reenacted the famous battle on the site where it took place.

One year they formed a skirmish line and traced the exact line of march Houston and his men followed in the battle. Another time they cut down a pine tree and erected a "Liberty pole" at Allen's Landing, thus recreating an event that emulated the first celebration of San Jacinto Day in 1837.

Like the original Texas Army, the new contingent hasn't limited itself to San Jacinto, however. At one time or another, they have reenacted the 1835 Battle of Anahuac aboard sail-

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ing vessels in Buffalo Bayou and the skirmish that same year in Gonzales that really started the Texas war for independence from Mexico. When folks wanted to reenact the famous Indian massacre that occurred at old Fort Parker in 1836, they asked the Texas Army to do it. 62

The colonels — all 62 of them <sup>AT THAT TIME</sup> were also on hand when a San Antonio television station decided to stage the Battle of the Alamo for its cameras. The Texas Army looked slight (Travis had 184 defenders in the Alamo), but the film turned out so well that it is now shown continuously both at the Alamo and at the Texas pavilion of the Houston Museum of Natural Science.

It was in 1976, the nation's bicentennial year, that the Texas Army really came into its own. It was the only group in the nation to recreate the firing of "the shot heard 'round the world," when it staged a Texas version of the Battle of Concord, N.H. — the incident that started America on its fight for independence from Britain. That event was so successful that the Texas Army went on to reenact the midnight ride of Paul Revere, to stage a "Boston Tea Party" in Houston's Buffalo Bayou and even attempt to duplicate the encampment of Gen. George Washington's Continental Army at Valley Forge.

When the Freedom Train arrived in the state for its bicentennial tour, it was the Texas Army that formally opened the visit with a cannon volley. And when Houston celebrated the nation's 200th birthday with a bell ringing at Sam Houston Park on July 4, 1976, the Texas Army was there to raise the flag.

Like the original army commanded by Sam Houston, the modern version is made up of ordinary citizens. Gen. Lewis is a former land developer who now writes about Texas history as a hobby. The colonels are lawyers, doctors, butchers and bakers in their workaday lives. All give their time, talents and the considerable expense that service in the Texas Army costs them because they believe in preserving the past.

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either. Colonels are always ready to lecture on Texas history at schools, churches and before civic groups. They help dedicate historical markers, served as models for an article on hunting game with muzzle-loading rifles for a magazine and demonstrated the art of throwing a tomahawk for the Saudi Arabian ambassador to the United States.

Except for their tomahawks, Bowie knives and rifles, the artillery available to the Texas Army is minimal. It consists only of replicas of the "Twin Sisters," the two cannon which helped Sam Houston win the Battle of San Jacinto. The colonels carefully researched the guns and had their replicas cast to the exact specifications of the originals. The guns are capable of lobbing live shells, but the army, in deference to the public health and the lack of artillery expertise on the part of the colonels, limits the ammunition used to blanks.

If the Texas Army is called upon to defend the state against an enemy, it can call on reinforcements. The Texas National Guard has a crack unit called the Guard of the Republic headquartered in Austin. Its members are all commissioned army and air guardsmen who also wear the uniforms of the Republic of Texas. They also own replicas of the "Twin Sisters" and transport the guns around the state and fire them on special occasions.

While the Guard of the Republic limits its activities to those occasions sanctioned by the military establishment, the Texas Army will take on almost any assignment that is fun. When the owner of a Montgomery County farmhouse complained that two ghosts of veterans of Sam Houston's force were haunting the place, the Texas Army descended on the farm. Armed with tape recorders and cameras, they spent 24 hours waiting for the wraiths to appear. They didn't show, but the exorcism apparently worked. The farm has been tranquil since.

If the ghosts do reappear, Gen. Lewis says his men will be on call. Whatever the need, the Texas Army plans to be ready — just as it was in 1836.

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