

General Gaines Guards the Border

By: Dr. Bruce Winders, Alamo Historian & Curator

San Jacinto had been fought and won and the Mexican Army had retreated to Matamoros. Nevertheless, the situation in Texas remained uncertain. Reports from the south indicated that General José Urrea was on the verge of returning to Texas to finish the job started by Santa Anna. Additionally, Texans feared an attack on Nacogdoches by disgruntled Cherokees, Caddos and other allied tribes. Across the border in the United States, General Edmund P. Gaines of the United States Army gazed on the new republic with concern.

Born in Virginia in 1777, Gaines entered the army in 1801 as a lieutenant. He was assigned duty in the Old Southwest, present day Mississippi and Alabama. He made national news in 1807 as a member of the detachment that arrested former Vice President Aaron Burr at Wakefield, Alabama, who had been charged with treason against the U.S. Like many officers his age, the War of 1812 proved to be a boon to his career. When the war ended, Gaines was a Brevet Major General. In 1828, Jacob Brown, the Commanding General of the Army died, opening the path for advancement.

Gaines' contentious dispute with Winfield Scott over rank, however, convinced President Andrew Jackson to give the post to Alexander McComb, an officer junior to both the top contenders. Gaines commanded the military district that included the Texas-Louisiana border during the Texas Revolution. The December 28, 1835 massacre of Dade's command at the start of the Second Seminole War in Florida necessitated a trip to Florida that winter. By spring Gaines was back at his headquarters at Fort Jesup, Louisiana.



Engraving of Edmund P. Gaines by T. Doney. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, D.C. 20540 USA



Army Kitchen at Fort Jesup State Historical Site.
By Pat Austin
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A string of letters and visitors arrived at Fort Jesup warning of an imminent Indian uprising along the Louisiana-Texas border. He moved troops in his district closer to the border and established a temporary encampment named Camp Sabine along the river. Gaines used his authority as district commander to call on the governors of several states for volunteers to augment his small force of regulars. The following letter was written to Alexander B. Bradford, a Tennessee militia officer. It reveals the unsettled state of affairs in Texas in June 1836.

Head quarters, western department, Camp Sabine,

June 28, 1836

My Dear General: The cavalry of Mexico are flying to the rescue of their president. A letter received from gen. T. J. Rusk, dated 'Head quarters, army of Texas, Guadalupe Victoria, 18th June, 1836,' informs me that the enemy were rapidly advancing towards his position from Matamoros—that the motto was, 'extermination to the Sabine, or death,' and that the motto of the Texas army was, 'Liberty or death.' These mottos taken in connexion with the bloody scenes of the Alamo, Goliad, and San Jacinto, indicate hard fighting. But the above intelligence was preceded by an account of Indian hostilities on the Navisota, 120 miles west of Nacogdoches. These facts, added to others hitherto published, of devided indications of hostilities on the part of the many tribes of Indians near and upon the disputed territory, have prompted me to request of your excellent governor Cannon, a regiment of mounted gunman to join me as speedily as possible, by companies, or in a body, as it may be deemed most convenient. I have also desired

a similar corps from the governor of Kentucky, another from the governor of Mississippi, and another from gov. White of Louisiana. If you can come, come quickly; and say so to all my young friends near you. I am resolved, in case the Mexicans or Texans employ the Indians against the people of either side of the imaginary line [yet to be surveyed international border], to inflict on the defenders summary and severe punishment.

E. P. Gaines

To Gen. A. B. Bradford, Tennessee Volunteers

John H. Jenkins, (ed), *Papers of the Texas Revolution* (10 Vols.; Austin: Presidial Press, 1973), 7:301.