

DRT Celebrates Gonzales Day

October 2 is Gonzales Day, which marks the Battle of Gonzales and the beginning of the Texas Revolution. It is one of twelve Texas Honor Days designated by The Daughters of the Republic of Texas to commemorate important events and people in Texas history. Across the state, DRT will fly the Texas flag to honor the memory and spirit of Texas pioneers who stood and fought for the principles of freedom that we enjoy today. Significant are the pioneers who fought in the Battle of Gonzales, which took place on October 2, 1835, because Texian colonists refused to return a small cannon to the Mexican army. Known as the "Come and Take It" cannon, this little cannon fired the first shot for Texas independence.

The fall of 1835 was tense and uncertain for Texian colonists. Texas was a province of Mexico, and relations between the Texian colonists and the government in Mexico City were strained. Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna had become president in 1833 and was quickly proving to be a ruthless dictator. In July 1833, Stephen F. Austin had traveled to Mexico City on behalf of the Texian colonists with appeals for independent statehood, the extension of tariff exemptions, and the repeal of immigration restrictions. Only one of the requests was acted upon: the repeal of immigration restrictions. To make matters worse, Stephen F. Austin was arrested on his way home and held prisoner in Mexico City until July 1835. Santa Anna had dissolved legislatures and ordered the re-organization of military posts. He had arbitrarily issued a disarmament decree and ordered military forces to confiscate Texian arms. It wouldn't take much to set off the Texians and on October 2, 1835, the spark was ignited.

When the citizens of Gonzales learned in late September 1835, that a small cannon in their possession must be returned to the Mexican military, they refused. The cannon, probably a six-pound caliber, had been given to the Gonzales colonists in 1831 for protection against hostile Indians. General Domingo de Ugartechea, commander of the military forces in Texas, had sent six soldiers to Gonzales requesting the return of the cannon. The alcalde of Gonzales, Andrew Ponton, refused the request and stalled for time. Upon learning of their refusal, Ugartechea next sent Lieutenant Francisco de Castañeda and one hundred troops to retrieve the cannon. The citizens of Gonzales called for help from other Texian settlers. Castañeda and his men reached the swollen Guadalupe River on September 29, but were stopped by a group of eighteen Gonzales citizens. By September 30, the number of Texian volunteers had grown to about one hundred fifty men. On October 1, the Mexican force moved up the river to a more advantageous spot for crossing and camped. The Texians wasted no time. Led by John Henry Moore, they mounted the little cannon on a pair of wooden wagon wheels and gathered all the loose metal they could find. With horseshoes and chains, they made shrapnel and stuffed the barrel of the cannon. Sarah DeWitt and her daughter Evaline made a battle flag, the fabric said to have come from the wedding dress of the DeWitt's daughter, Naomi. The flag depicted the barrel of the cannon, with a single star above, and the words "Come and Take It" below.

On the morning of October 2, 1835, the Texians surprised the Mexican troops and attacked. At one point, Texian leader Moore met with Castañeda, who requested the return of the cannon. In response, the Texians pointed to the cannon, which they had positioned at the rear of the Mexican troops, and said, "There it is--come and take it." The little cannon was fired, and after a few rifle volleys, the short fight ended and the Mexican troops

withdrew. Though the Battle of Gonzales lasted only a few minutes, and the shot of the cannon was harmless, it provided the catalyst for Texans to realize that there was no turning back. The Texas Revolution had begun!

Each year in Gonzales, a cannon firing ceremony is held on October 2 to mark the date of the battle. A "Come and Take It Festival" is held on the first full weekend in October and the battle is re-enacted on Saturday at the Gonzales Pioneer Village and Living History Center. This year's dates are October 5, 6, and 7. For more information, call 888-672-1095.

The Daughters of the Republic of Texas is dedicated to the preservation and education of Texas history. For more information on Texas Honor Days and the work of the DRT, please visit the website at www.drinfo.org