



The Tejano Tiger: Col. Santos Benavides, Confederate States of Army

By Norman Dasinger, April 7, 2020

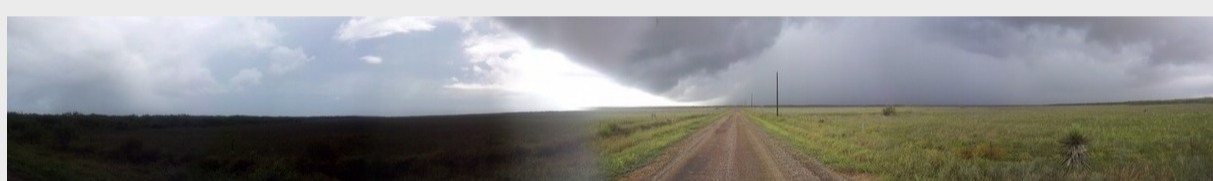
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Col. Santos Benavides | Wikipedia

In 1971 the Public School System of Laredo, Texas, built a new elementary school. They named it after a Confederate officer. Not Lee, not Jackson—but Col. Santos Benavides. Today, that school still is in existence and still named for the highest ranking Mexican-American who served in the Confederate Army.

Santos Benavides, nicknamed the “Merchant Prince of the Rio Grande,” was from Laredo and born in 1823. Earlier, his family had established that town and by 1856 Santos was elected its mayor. When the Civil War began, he was a Webb County judge and entered Confederate service, eventually serving in the 33rd Texas Cavalry, which later was renamed Benavides Regiment. Rising to the rank of colonel, Santos would become the highest ranking Tejano of the over 12,000 that served the Confederacy. One of his assigned duties was to maintain a safe route whereby cotton and other goods could be transported from Texas across the Rio Grande into Mexico for sale. Federal armies stationed in and around modern-day Brownsville continually attacked soldiers and merchants guarding this passageway, but for the most part were unsuccessful in eliminating it from use by the Confederate government.



Palmito Ranch battlefield | Wikipedia

Benavides had, perhaps, his finest day on March 19, 1864, when 42 of his men defended Laredo against over 200 Federals under the command of Col. Edmund Davis. The Yankees had been ordered to destroy 5,000 bales of cotton being held in the San Augustin Plaza in anticipation of shipment into Mexico. On May 24, 1864, the Texas State legislature formally thanked Benavides and his men for successfully defending Laredo on that date.

Benavides was involved in over 100 engagements and never lost. His most famous battle was at Palmito Ranch, Texas. The last battle of the Civil War, it was fought May 12-13, 1865—over a month after Lee surrendered to Grant at Appomattox.



World Cotton Centennial, 1884, New Orleans | Wikipedia

After the war, Benavides served three terms in the Texas State Legislature and would serve as a delegate to the World Cotton Exposition/World’s Fair held in New Orleans in 1884. He died in 1891 and is buried in Laredo.

Because he and many of his neighbors served the Confederacy, they became targets of Reconstruction retaliation after the Civil War. Santos and his family did not hide from this issue and became leaders of a resistance movement to this regional violence.

Santos believed in local control, but also knew that his isolated area of Texas had to be active in state and national politics in order to prosper. He never did, however, lose his sense of local independence.



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