

## "We Spied the Abs Coming"

by Charles Bennett

Elias R. Boles was a nineteen-year-old third corporal in Company D of the 4th Regiment Texas Mounted Volunteers when he fought in the Battle of Valverde, the first major Civil War engagement in the Southwest.

Boles's company, originally called The San Andres Light Horse Company, was raised in Milam County, Texas, by Charles Marion Lesueur, who became a captain of the company. The unit, composed of men from Milam County as well as neighboring Williamson County, was enrolled on September 7, 1861, in Milam County. It was mustered into Confederate service for the war nine days later at Camp Sibley, near San Antonio, as Company D, 4th Regiment Texas Mounted Volunteers. Company D took part in the battles of Valverde and Glorieta and the skirmish at Peralta. Of the eighty-nine men on the company roll, three were medically discharged, two joined the Regimental Artillery, and one who transferred in was promoted to regimental sergeant major prior to the march to New Mexico. One trooper was left behind sick at Fort Bliss and later died, leaving eighty-two soldiers in the company for the invasion. During the campaign, one man died of disease, eight were killed (three at Valverde and five at Glorieta), eight were wounded (two at Valverde and six at Glorieta), and eleven were taken prisoner, including four of those wounded at Glorieta. Two men died of disease at the end of the campaign. With the return of the two men from the Regimental Artillery, Company D arrived back in San Antonio following the New Mexico campaign with sixty-two men fit for duty. Elias Boles was one of these.

Boles's letter to his parents, written shortly after the Battle of Valverde, contains the thoughts of a Texas farm boy turned temporary soldier who is in the midst of the greatest adventure of his life, so far. His youthful excitement over the battle and his enthusiasm in relating its details to his parents are touching.

Charles Bennett, assistant director and curator of collections, Palace of the Governors, transcribed Boles's letter, which is in the collection of the History Library at the Palace of the Governors. The letter has been edited for spelling,

grammar, and ease in reading. The information in parentheses was added by the editor.

*New Mexico Territory, Feb. 28, 1862*

*Dear Mother and Father,*

*It is the greatest pleasure that I embrace the present opportunity of writing to you. I have some very good news ... We have had a very hard battle. It was called the Battle of Valverde, which by being interpreted, is Green Valley. It is situated five miles above Ft. Craig on the Rio Grande.*

*On Sunday the 16th, we were to march up the Rio Grande from 12 miles below Ft. Craig. We had marched within three miles of the fort when a large force of cavalry and infantry came to meet us. We only had a few men, I suppose about 1,000 ... The Abs (Abolitionists) came toward us and we showed fight to them and they backed off, we suppose to try to get us to follow them to the fort, but we was a little too bold for them. We did not return and started off and they charged (Lieutenant Colonel John R.) Baylor's men and fired on them but did no harm. The boys returned the compliment and killed one man and wounded one.*

*We all went back 1/2 miles and camped and stayed. The next day and the next we crossed the river and camped on the other side ... The next day we traveled about 4 miles, and about sundown, we spied the Abs acoming ... We run and formed ourselves on the hill fronting them and commenced firing on them with our artillery. We killed two men and (the Federal troops) fought back to their whole.*

*We then camped, and next morning we started on ... About 8 o'clock they attacked us ... The first regiment was in advance and was exposed to the fire of the Yanks sometime before we got any help. Then Col. (Thomas Jefferson) Green came to our assistance. Our company was on the right wing with 3 others. We were in a very strong natural position with that noble man (Lieutenant Colonel William R.) Scurry in command. We lay there with our horses exposed to the fire of the*

cannon. We held that position for 1 hour when we were ordered to the left wing to the relief of Maj. (Samuel A.) Lockridge. We then mounted our horses and proceeded, and just as we got there we were ordered to take a position in a gully that gave us great shelter from the fire of their cannon and small arms.

We were under a heavy fire for 4 hours, but you must recollect that we were doing some shooting too. Col. Green was the commanding officer; he was whipped at the time, but the men of the first regiment told him that they was not whipped and then feel faulted. His artillery (was) right in front of our company. He said he wanted to be where there was men that would stand up to (them) and he would give (the Federals) some hard pills to swallow, so we commenced firing.

Then the Yankees planted their battery 600 yards from us; there were three 12 pounders, one 8 pounder and two 6 pounders. We stood there 15 minutes and a charge was ordered. Then our company went in front of the battery and 4 companies (were) on the left. We five companies took the cannon, all six pieces, and turned them on the Yankees. Good gracious the Abs does run...

We gained a complete victory, run the Yankees and kept the field. There was 4,500 Yankees on the field and 1,500 of us. We killed and mortally wounded 400 men. We lost, killed or mortally wounded between 40 (and) 50; 120 (were) slightly wounded. There were two killed in our company. There was Daniel Gilleland and Jim Slaughter. There was very many wounded. They were killed dead in the charge on the battery. They died as brave as Caesar. Jack Gove says, and John Sadler, and (John M.) Strader and James Stephens, and all the boys say they want you to tell their folks that they are well and that they did not get hurt in the Battle.

I have not got time to write any more of importance. My candle is glimmering. I have not told you half I could but we have to send our letters through the mountains for we are 40 miles above Craig and the Yankees

*are there and our mails cannot get below. We will starve them out after  
awhile. Write soon.*

*Your son,*

*E.R. Boles*

*PS.: The battle lasted 9 hours.*

*E.R.B*