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## John Salmon "Rip" Ford

by Robert Nieman

Certainly few Texas Rangers can claim such a varied career as Hall of Fame Senior Ranger Captain John Salmon Ford. "Rip" Ford was born on May 26, 1815, near Greenville, South Carolina, but like many early Texans he was raised in Tennessee. When he was only two years old,

Ford's father moved his family to Lincoln County, Tennessee. Unlike many Americans at that time, Ford's father was financially able to provide his son with an education. At age nineteen, young Ford moved to nearby Bedford County [1] (Shelbyville) to study medicine under a local doctor, James Barksdale.

Like many Tennesseans when the Texas War of Independence started in 1835, Ford began recruiting a company of volunteers to aid Texas in her fight against Santa Anna. By the spring of 1836 he had recruited about forty men, but by then news had reached Tennessee that Texas had won her freedom at the Battle of San Jacinto on April 21. That made no difference to Ford; Texas Fever had infected him. Shortly thereafter he, like hundreds of others, would tack "GTT" (Gone To Texas) on his front door. Arriving in Texas, he settled near San Augustine.

In Texas Ford found that the services of a doctor were in great demand, but his interests-as they would throughout his amazing life-ventured beyond the field of medicine. It was not long before he found himself working as a surveyor's assistant helping survey what is now Harrison County. In retrospect, it was inevitable that he would soon become involved in community affairs and politics. All during his life he was instrumental in helping develop many organizations and activities that would help better not only his local community, but also the whole state. He helped organize or served in one capacity or other in Sunday schools; a thespian troop and several newspapers, including being the editor of the *Texas National Register*. He was also superintendent of the Deaf and Dumb Institution in Austin, Superintendent of Conscripts for the Confederacy's Department of Texas, and was instrumental in the creation the State Historical Society.

His political record in various offices would be enviable to many modern

politicians. A short list would include being elected in 1844 as a representative to the 9th Congress of the Republic of Texas and in 1852 as a state senator to fill the vacancy created by the death of former Ranger Ed Burleson. In 1874 he served as the mayor of Brownsville. In 1875, he also served as a delegate of the State Constitutional Convention.

But for all these accomplishments, it is as a Texas Ranger that Rip Ford is most famous. The future first Senior Ranger Captain did not start out the Mexican War as a combatant. Instead he found himself once again serving in the medical field under the immortal Captain Jack Hays. Though largely forgotten today, the Mexican War in terms of soldiers involved was the most deadly war in American history. John Eisenhower writes in his book on the Mexican War, *So Far From God*, that thirteen percent of all soldiers involved died. Like most wars before the twentieth century, the overwhelming majority died from disease-mainly the black vomit, or vomito (yellow fever). Being a doctor, it was Ford's unpleasant duty to write to the deceased soldier's loved ones that he had died. Ford soon found the volume of letters he was having to write so vast that he shortened the closing to "Rest In Peace," which he later shortened even more to "RIP." Forever after Ford would no longer be John Ford-he would be known as Rip Ford and in later life, Old Rip.

Space does not permit us to even begin to cover Ford's activities during his remarkable service as a Ranger during the Mexican and Indian Wars; his election into the Texas Ranger Hall of Fame speaks to that. But two dates do deserve special mention: February 25, 1848, and May 13, 1865. Both are ironic dates in Ford's history. On February 25, 1848, Ford and his fellow Texas Rangers under the command of General Joe Lane defeated Mexican guerrillas at the Battle of Sequaltepan, the last battle of the Mexican War. On May 13, 1865, Confederate forces under the command of Rip Ford defeated Union forces at the Battle of Palmito Ranch, the last battle of the Civil War.

On November 3, 1897, John Salmon "Rip" Ford, died. Gone was not only one of the greatest Texas Rangers in its glorious history, but also a truly great Texan.

#### NOTES

[1] Bedford County was also the home of Nathan Bedford Forrest, the great Confederate Civil War general.

