

## Marshals

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Territorial Governor - *Jake Paladin*

Safety Marshal - *Elroy Rogers*

Protest Marshal - *Schuetzum Phast*

Stage Marshal - *Boon Doggle*

Long-Range Marshal - *Wild Hog*

Administrative Marshal - *Long Juan*

Medical Marshal - *Jake Paladin*

Raffle Marshal - *True Blue Cachoo*

Costume Marshal - *Lorelei Longshot*

Entertainment Marshal - *Old Bill Dick*

Special Events Marshal - *Belle Fire*

Side Match Marshal - *Texas Sarge*

Editor, Agarita Gazette - *Long Juan*

## **The Battle of Plum Creek**

### **LONG JUAN Here!!**

There will be no Plum Creek Shooting Society match the first weekend in October. On the third weekend of October 2011 (10/14-16), we will host **The Battle of Plum Creek**, a cowboy action shooting match at the Agarita Ranch near Lockhart, Texas. I had heard of the Battle of Plum Creek and read about it some in the past, but did not know many details. I decided to investigate. What appears below is the result of what I found. I have noted approximately where each stage of the match occurs and hope the story will make the match more fun for everyone.

## **THE STORY BEHIND THE BATTLE OF PLUM CREEK**

### **INTRODUCTION**

In early August of 1840, under the light of a bright full moon, referred to by early Texas settlers as a Comanche moon, a war party of more than 600 Comanche and Kiowa warriors swept out of the Comancheria and rode for the heart of the Republic of Texas. The massive raid was launched in retaliation for what the Comanche perceived to be the unprovoked killing of twelve Penateka Comanche war chiefs and many Comanche women and children at the Council House peace talks in San Antonio the preceding March. The Battle of Plum Creek occurred just south of present-day Lockhart, along wooded banks of the creek. A small group of volunteers, militia and Texas Rangers, aided by Tonkawa Indians, defeated the Comanche and Kiowa warriors who had participated in the Great Comanche Raid of 1840.

A Texas historical marker in Lockhart's Lions Park reads as follows:



*The harsh anti-Indian policies of President Mirabeau B. Lamar and Mexican efforts to weaken the Republic of Texas stirred Indian hostilities. Hatred increased after the Council House Fight in San Antonio, March 19, 1840, where 12 Comanche chiefs were killed. After regrouping and making plans for revenge, 600 Comanches and Kiowas, including women and children, moved across central Texas in early August. They raided Victoria and Linnville (120 mi. SE), a prosperous seaport. About 200 Texans met at Good's Crossing on*

*Plum Creek under Major-General Felix Huston (1800-1857) to stop the Indians. Adorned with their plunder from Linnville, the war party stretched for miles across the prairie. The Battle of Plum Creek, August 12, 1840, began on Comanche Flats (5.5 mi. SE) and proceeded to Kelley springs (2.5 mi. SW), with skirmishes as far as present San Marcos and Kyle. Mathew Caldwell (1798-1842), for whom Caldwell County was named, was injured in the Council House fight but took part in this battle. Volunteers under Edward Burleson (1793-1851) included 13 Tonkawa Indians, marked as Texan allies by white armbands. Texan casualties were light while the Indians lost over 80 chiefs and warriors. This battle ended the Comanche penetration of settled portions of Texas.*

## THE COUNCIL HOUSE FIGHT (Stages 1-3)

In March 1840, Texas officials and a Comanche peace delegation met under truce in an effort to negotiate peace after two years of war. The Comanche sought to obtain recognition of the Comancheria as the sovereign land of the Comanche. The Texans wanted the release of white captives held by the Comanche. The Comanche brought only two prisoners to the talks, one Mexican boy and a young white girl, who had been horribly tortured and mutilated. The Texans moved to hold the chiefs hostage until the return of other prisoners held by the Indians. The Comanche attempted to escape and the result was predictable. Twelve Comanche chiefs were shot dead in the Council House. Twenty-three more Indians, including women and children, were killed in the streets of San Antonio and the remaining 30 were taken captive. Six Texans, including the Bexar sheriff, were killed and 10 more were wounded. The incident became known as the Council House Fight. It ended any chance for peace and led to years of hostility and war.



## THE GREAT COMANCHE RAID OF 1840

For many months after the Council House Fight, the region around San Antonio lived in terror. Militia men stood ready to ride at the sounding of the San Fernando Cathedral bell. No white traveler on roads surrounding San Antonio was safe. The settlers expected Comanche retaliation, but no major blow fell. By midsummer, it appeared the Indians were gone. Wrong! The dreaded horse warriors had simply retired deep into Comancheria to gather forces and to plot their course of revenge. Under the Comanche moon of August 1840, Buffalo Hump, one of the few surviving Comanche war chiefs, moved south with a massive war party.

**Editor's Note:** **Buffalo Hump** (Po-Cha-Na-Quar-Hip), born *circa* 1800, was a war chief of the Penateka band of the Comanche Indians. His name had phallic significance and is reported to have meant, "erection that won't go down." He came to prominence after the Council House Fight when he led the Comanche on the Great Raid of 1840. In 1846, Buffalo Hump signed a treaty with the United States at Council Springs, Texas. Ferdinand Roemer, a noted German scientist, who was traveling in America, attended

the council between the chiefs and white representatives. Roemer characterized Buffalo Hump vividly as:

*The pure unadulterated picture of a North American Indian, who, unlike the rest of his tribe, scorned every form of European dress. His body naked, a buffalo robe around his loins, brass rings on his arms, a string of beads around his neck, and with his long, coarse black hair hanging down, he sat there with the serious facial expression of the North American Indian which seems to be apathetic to the European. He attracted our special attention because he had distinguished himself through great daring and bravery in expeditions against the Texas frontier which he had engaged in times past.*



Eric Schweig  
as Buffalo Hump  
in *Dead Man's Walk*

Buffalo Hump led the Comanche to the Brazos River reservation in 1856 and, in 1859, to the Fort Cobb reservation in Oklahoma, where he died in 1870.

Before the *Lonesome Dove* series, Buffalo Hump was largely forgotten in history. The Great Raid of 1840 was remembered only in Texas history classes. Buffalo Hump was resurrected by Larry McMurtry in his books, *Dead Man's Walk* and *Comanche Moon*, the first two books in the *Lonesome Dove* series. Buffalo Hump is also mentioned in a scene from the movie, *The Outlaw Josey Wales*, when Lone Watie tells Josie that he and Buffalo Hump were among a delegation that was sent to Washington, D.C. to meet with government officials during Lincoln's administration.

Buffalo Hump and the Comanche passed undetected east of San Antonio, near Gonzalez. They cut a swath of destruction and penetrated deep into the Guadalupe River Valley. They plundered, stole horses and killed many settlers. The war party reached Victoria late the afternoon of August 6, 1840. There, the Comanche did something completely out of character. They attacked and overran the settlement. **(Stage 4)** Most of the citizens saved themselves by banding together and barricading themselves in the south part of town, but fifteen people lost their lives and their scalps. Before the smoke from the fight in Victoria cleared, the Comanche were on the move southeast, driving a herd of nearly two thousand stolen horses. Proceeding down the Guadalupe bottomlands, the unhindered band burned and killed as the opportunity arose. As word of the raid spread, scattered militia companies and volunteers responded. They were, however, few and far between and were able to do little more than bury the dead.

## THE SACK OF LINNVILLE

On the morning of August 8, 1840, the war party neared Linnville on Lavaca Bay about 50 miles from Victoria. Linnville, now a ghost town located about 3½ miles northeast of present-day Port Lavaca, was then a quiet little seaport town that served as the port-of-entry for San Antonio. As Buffalo Hump formed the warriors into a huge half-moon arc around the little town, a few of the town's citizens spotted the Comanche from a distance. Unfortunately, they mistook the warriors for Mexican traders until the Indians began their screaming attack. There was little the residents of Linnville could do except to row for their lives in small boats for the safety of larger craft anchored in the Lavaca Bay. Some found refuge. Others were cut down and scalped before they reached safety.

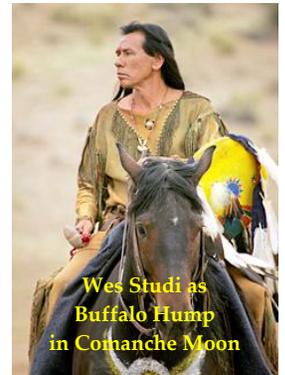
Those who managed to escape could only watch as their homes and businesses were looted and burned.

The Comanche spent the entire day pillaging and burning Linnville. They had ridden out for blood. In Linnville, they encountered an unexpected windfall. Warehouses were packed with goods destined for shipment to San Antonio. The warriors dressed themselves in top hats and fancy frockcoats. Some paraded with parasols, wearing women's dresses and petticoats. They braided their ponies' tails with entire bolts of colorful cloth that streamed out behind as they galloped back and forth through town. **(Stage 5)** Other warriors spent the day slaughtering the town's livestock, lancing the animals for sport and roaring with savage delight as the animals died.

One Linnville resident, Judge John Hays, was so distraught and angry over the ransacking and destruction that he grabbed an old muzzle-loading shotgun and waded ashore waving the shotgun above his head and bravely challenging the Indians to meet him in combat. The warriors rode around him, acting as if he did not exist, sparing him probably because they thought he was crazy for facing them as he did. Judge Hays finally gave up and waded back out to his boat, later discovering that he had waded ashore to face nearly a thousand Indians with an unloaded shotgun. Another resident, Major Hugh Watts, collector of customs, was less fortunate. He was killed between the shore and the boats. His young bride was captured. The Indians ripped off her dress, but were baffled by her sturdy whalebone corset. In frustration, they tied her on a horse in her underclothes, taking her with them as a prisoner.



Satisfied the Comanche blood spilled at the Council House Fight had been avenged, Buffalo Hump called for a return to the high plateaus of the Comancheria. **(Stage 6)** Normal practice would have been to turn and ride hard and fast for many hours, choosing a route through the least populated country, resting only when pursuit was far outdistanced. Normal practice would also have been to split the large war party into many small bands, each taking a divergent trail to baffle and confuse pursuers. The mule-loads of loot, many prisoners, and a herd of 2,000-3,000 stolen horses prevented Buffalo Hump from exercising "normal practice." The pack mules and herd were slow and unwieldy. The horses had to be driven and guarded by many warriors, spread throughout herd. Even with their plunder and horses, had Buffalo Hump and his band turned south and retreated back to the plains by a route that passed south of San Antonio, they likely would have eluded all pursuit because most of the settlements in the region lay north of the Guadalupe River. But Buffalo Hump, perhaps arrogant in victory, turned north, choosing to march homeward by the most direct route. The trail would prove treacherous. As the Comanche moved slowly to the north, accompanied by towering clouds of dust from the horses' hoofs, they were headed straight into the arms of waiting Texans.

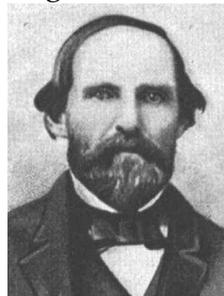




## THE BATTLE OF PLUM CREEK

The Texans knew the Comanche were trying to avoid a fight in order to protect their plunder. No one needed a map to visualize their intended route. The Texans knew the country and knew the Indians would have to cross the Big Prairie near Plum Creek, a small tributary of the San Marcos River.

Ben McCulloch, one of the captains leading the pursuing Texans, ordered a small group of the most exhausted riders to continue following the and the rest of his volunteers rode for the settlements short-cutting the enemy. Messengers raced across the the settlers and urging every able-bodied man to muster nightfall on August 10<sup>th</sup>, every Texan old enough to a gun had set out from Gonzales, Victoria, Lavaca, smaller, scattered villages in the mad dash to intercept Comanche.



Ben McCulloch

Comanche column. He higher on the Colorado, coastal prairies, alerting at Plum Creek. By mount a horse and wield Cuero, and a score of and punish the escaping

The volunteers gathered near Good's Crossing on Plum Creek about 5 miles southeast of present-day Lockhart, near what is now referred to as Comanche Flats. They were led by ranging and militia captains Matthew "Old Paint" Caldwell, Ed Burleson, Big Foot Wallace and others. Caldwell was nicknamed "Old Paint" because of white spots in his hair, beard and on his breast like a paint horse. In the four short years since Texas independence, Old Paint and the other ranging company captains had become expert Indian fighters. They anticipated the Comanche moves and prepared for a showdown. At one point, Old Paint gave a short speech.

Boys, the Indians number about 1,000. They have our women and children captives. We are only 87 strong, but I believe we can whip Hell out of 'em. What shall we do boys; shall we fight?

The volunteers answered, "Yes! Yes! Fight!!"



Setting up camp near Good's Crossing on the 11<sup>th</sup>, men and horses continued to arrive. Late that afternoon, Captain Jack Hays joined the gathering volunteers with a company of Rangers from San Antonio. The presence of these hardened veterans lifted the volunteers' spirits and bolstered their confidence. General Felix Huston rode in from Austin to take command. He was virtually unknown and had little experience fighting Indians. The Texans wanted "Old Paint" Caldwell to lead them. He was a familiar figure on the frontier and a veteran of countless engagements with the Comanche. The Texans knew and trusted him. Caldwell nevertheless felt Huston was entitled to take command. The men reluctantly accepted his decision.

Fourteen Tonkawa warriors under their chief, Placido, arrived at Huston's headquarters. They had no horses and their chests were heaving from running thirty miles to join the Texans against the hated Comanche. Huston realized the "Tonks" were splendid scouts. He ordered them to tie white rags to their arms to identify themselves as allies and gave them the most arduous and dangerous task of the day - to scout the Comanche column on foot and bring him continuous reports.

The heterogeneous, buckskin-clad army had assembled none too soon. The Texans trailing the Comanche column maintained so much pressure that some of the Indian's pack-mules tired and were shot. The trail was strewn with abandoned loot. But the Comanche still clung to the bulk of their plunder and the vast herd of stolen horses. Warriors were scattered throughout the column with the herd. Only a handful were stationed as outriders along the flanks, as the Comanche slowly approached Big Prairie on the morning of August 12<sup>th</sup>, trailed by a rolling cloud of dust. (Stage 7)

Informed about enemy dispositions by accurate reports from the inexhaustible and valiant Tonks, the volunteers, militia and Rangers saddled up and forded Plum Creek at Good's crossing. More scouts were sent out. The sky in the east was beginning to pale with the coming of dawn when the scouts returned and reported the Comanche were heading northwest on a collision course. General Huston was in nominal command. Real command lay with Burleson, Caldwell, and the other captains. At "Old Paint's" suggestion, General Huston dismounted the Texans and ordered them to take cover in the trees and heavy brush that grew along the creek. The Comanche, never suspecting danger, made their appearance, driving ahead of them the huge herd of stolen horses. The Texans formed two long parallel lines that enclosed and converged on the Comanche.



When the Comanche drew near the Texans' positions, Caldwell urged Huston to attack. The General delayed, wanting to wait for McCullough and nearly a hundred more men from Bastrop. The men grumbled their displeasure, but grudgingly accepted the General's decision. By the time McCullough and his men arrived, only the rear guard of the huge Indian war party remained. Caldwell again urged General Huston to attack. After some delay, the general finally agreed. When the volunteers, now numbering approximately 200 men, emerged from the trees along Plum Creek and struck the surprised war party, a running skirmish developed. The Comanche fought a series of delaying actions until they reached Kelley Springs, west of present-day Lockhart and near the Lockhart State Park and Agarita Ranch.

After sending the younger warriors west with the loot and the stolen horses, the rest of the Comanche formed a battle line facing the Texans. The Comanche presented quite a spectacle, dressed as many of them were in the fancy clothing stolen from the Linnville warehouses. The fierce horse warriors began to gallop back and forth between the lines. General Huston was content to sit and watch, but the experienced Indian fighters like Caldwell realized the Comanche were simply delaying the fight to give the younger warriors time to drive the huge herd further northwest out of the Texans' reach. Caldwell insisted it was time to press the attack home. General Huston hesitated.



In the midst of the confusion, a Comanche war chief wearing a magnificent feathered headdress trotted his pony out of the ranks and challenged the Texas leaders to individual combat. A shot rang out. The impact of a heavy rifle ball knocked the chief off his pony. The Comanche were distressed by this sign of "bad medicine." "Now, General, is your time to charge!" Caldwell shouted. Without waiting for a response from General Huston, the Texans spurred their horses forward. The Comanche battle line quickly dissolved and the Texans began to pick them off one at a time. The struggle was close and cruel, as a running fight ensued. **(Stage 8)** The day quickly became a massacre rather than a battle. Abandoning the loot that had spelled their doom, the Indians recovered as many dead and wounded warriors as possible and fled for their lives. The remainder of the battle was a hunt that eventually covered 15 miles. Before the fighting was over, more than eighty Comanche lay dead, strewn along a fifteen-mile battlefield. Only one Texan was killed in the fighting.

The white prisoners were not as lucky. As the fight dissolved into flight and pursuit, there were many scenes of bloody horror along the trampled trail. The Comanche began killing the prisoners they had tied to horses. Some of the prisoners were tied to trees and filled with arrows, either as an act of defiance or in hope of delaying pursuit. A granddaughter of Daniel Boone was killed. Only one white captive survived, Juliet Watts, the widow of Major Watts from Linnville. Her captors tied her to a tree and shot an arrow into her breast. The same whalebone corset that had protected her chastity in Linnville blunted the arrow's force and saved her life. She was found unharmed, except for painful sunburn in places that had never before seen the sun. Mrs. Watts told the rescuing Texans that she had been required to read books stolen in Linnville out loud to amuse Indians along the trail. There was lust for blood on both sides. One Ranger came across a wounded Comanche woman lying in the trail. He dismounted, kicked the dying woman and then pinned her to the earth with a discarded Comanche lance.

After the smoke had cleared, 87 of the Comanche raiders lay dead. In addition to one dead Texan, seven were wounded. Buffalo Hump's great war party had lost all its loot and perhaps one-quarter of its effective men. The Penatekas had been punished severely. The "battle" was really more of a running gun fight, as the Comanche tried to get back to the Llano Estacado. The heavy losses suffered by the Comanche severely crippled their fighting ability. The Great Raid of 1840 was the largest and last great raid by the Indians on white cities in the history of what is now the United States—then the Republic of Texas. Never again would the Comanche attack in such force or raid so deep into Texas territory. Never again would they attack a town. The Texans hoped their victory at Plum Creek would put a stop to Indian raids on Texas settlements. It was not to be. Instead, the war with the tenacious Comanche would continue for several decades, as the Comanche resumed hit and run guerrilla tactics.

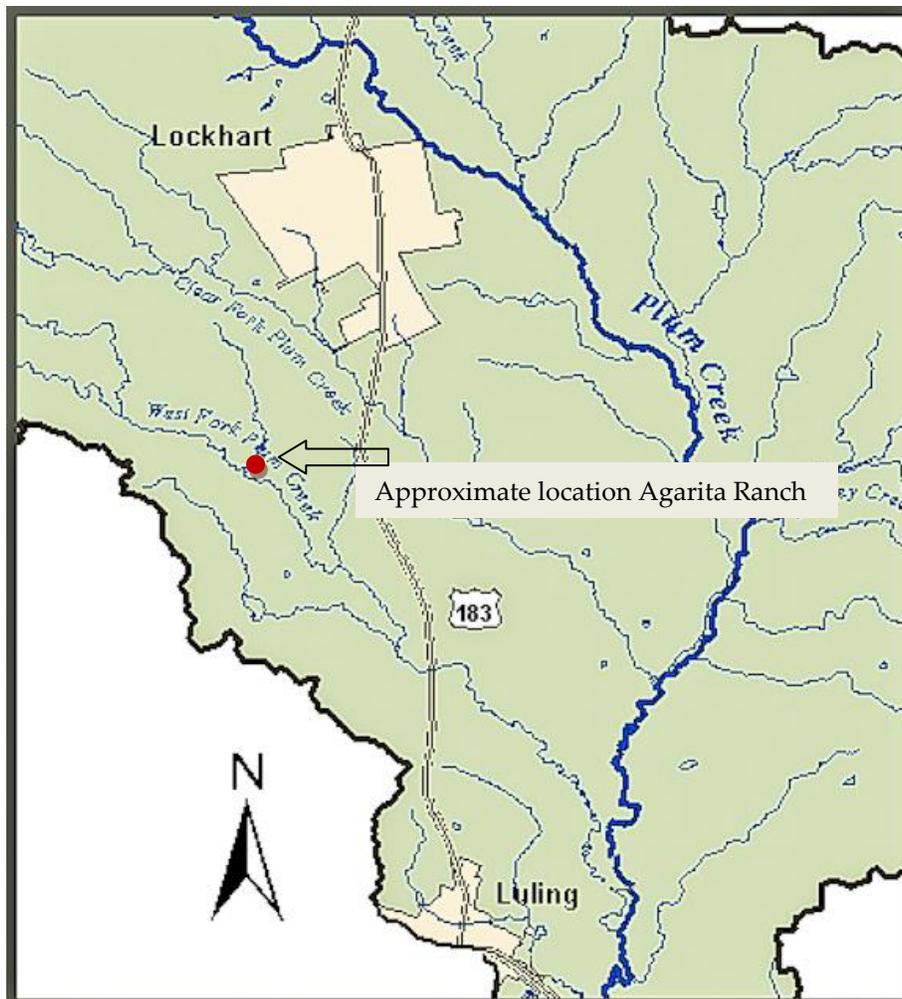
When the battle at Plum Creek ended and the loot was divided, the Texan army simply melted away. The 14 Tonkawa allies held the only victory celebration. While the moon rose over Big Prairie, they danced about their fire and boasted to each other. They closed the ceremony by roasting and ritually devouring several butchered Comanche arms and legs. (Stages 9 & 10)



BATTLE OF PLUM CREEK.

**Editor's Note: [What and where is Plum Creek?](#)**

We are, of course, the Plum Creek Shooting Society. That suggests Plum Creek must be somewhere nearby. I am pretty sure I cross Plum Creek on 183 just north of Lockhart when I am driving to Agarita Ranch. I have also heard Delta Raider talk about Plum Creek being near the ranch. Again, I decided to investigate. I discovered that Plum Creek originates in Hays County north of Kyle and runs south through Caldwell County, passing Lockhart and Luling. It eventually joins the San Marcos River where they converge on the Caldwell-Gonzales County line. The main "stem" of Plum Creek is a 52 river mile segment. It runs east of Lockhart. That is what I cross driving south on 183 north of Lockhart. Good's Crossing, where the Battle of Plum Creek began, is on the main "stem", about 5 miles southeast of present-day Lockhart, in an area now referred to appropriately as Comanche Flats. Major tributaries to the main "stem" of Plum Creek include: Clear Fork of Plum Creek, West Fork of Plum Creek and other creeks and branches. The Agarita Ranch is just east of the West Fork and lies between the West Fork and the Clear Fork of Plum Creek. Kelley Springs, now lost in history, was likely located on or near Agarita Ranch, which Delta Raider tells me was previously Kelley (or Kelly) land.



## SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

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*Lone Star: A History of Texas and the Texans*, T.R. Fehrenbach

*Texas: A Historical Atlas*, Ray Stephens & Carol Zuber-Mallison

*The Buckskin Line*, Elmer Kelton

**Editor's Note:** I enjoyed thoroughly researching this article. There are many books and online sources of information about the Battle of Plum Creek. I have listed only my favorite. Gwynne's book is the best non-fiction history of the Comanche Indians ever written. If you have not read it, you should! If you have not read anything written by Elmer Kelton, you have missed reading books by one of the greatest western fiction writers ever. Many of Kelton's books are historical fiction; all are set in Texas. *The Buckskin Line* begins the fictional story of Rusty Shannon, who was captured by the Comanche during the Great Raid of 1840 and was rescued at the Battle of Plum Creek. *The Buckskin Line* is the first of several volumes that follow Rusty through his life as a Texas Ranger on the Texas frontier. It is one of three volumes included in the trilogy, *Lone Star Rising*, which is followed by a second trilogy, *Ranger's Law*. Both volumes are a great read, as are other volumes in the Texas Rangers series and everything that was written by Kelton before he died in 2009.

### Captain John "Long Juan" Soule

SASS Life #84671

GAF #737

NCOWS #3322

September 28, 2011



COME AND TAKE IT