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**Sul Ross' Texas Hold'em**

Colonel Lawrence Sullivan Ross was born on September 27, 1838 in Bentonsport, Iowa. Anxious for a warmer climate, his family migrated to the Republic of Texas. They later founded present day Waco where he attended Baylor University and later Florence Wesleyan University in Northern Alabama. The Ross family found warmer weather, cheaper land, and the dreaded Comanches.

After he graduated, he joined the Texas Rangers. In 1860, at the Battle of Pease River, he captured Cynthia Ann Parker, the white mother of famed Comanche war chief, Quanah Parker. Ross also gunned down Parker’s Comanche father, Peta Nocona. His reputation as an Indian fighter soared afterwards.
Leading a company of Indian scouts for the U.S. Cavalry, Ross encountered a Comanche encampment near present day Rush Springs, Oklahoma. The Comanche chief, Buffalo Hump, had led a number of devastating raids into Texas and was a prime target for reprisal. In the ensuing fight, Ross was hit in the shoulder by an arrow and shot in the chest with a carbine. He had to be carried from the battle site on a mule drawn litter. Riddled with infection, he survived but would suffer from the effects for the rest of his life.

After Texas seceded, he joined the Confederate Army and became a major in the 6th Texas Cavalry. Impressed with Ross’ Indian fighter skills, former Texas Ranger General Benjamin McCulloch sent him on several scouting missions within the Union lines near Springfield, Missouri.

At the Battle of Pea Ridge, the 6th Texas served under the incompetent hand of Major General Earl Van Dorn. The poorly coordinated battle was a disaster for Confederate aspirations west of the Mississippi. To his credit, Van Dorn gave one of the more artful excuses for losing a battle. “I was not defeated, but only foiled in my intentions.” An accomplished skirt chaser (he was called “the terror of ugly husbands”), he was later shot in the back of the head by Dr. James Peters; his hot young wife Jesse was having an affair with Van Dorn.

In full retreat and destitute, Ross was forced to send his regiment's horses back to Texas for lack of forage. The 6th Texas Cavalry was now an infantry regiment on foot. Van Dorn took his ill-fated army across the Mississippi River but just missed the Battle of Shiloh.

To assist the Confederate Army of Tennessee while it invaded Kentucky, Van Dorn was charged with keeping the Union Army of the Tennessee occupied in Northern Mississippi. Joining forces with Sterling Price’s Missourians, he decided to attack the heavily fortified railroad junction of Corinth. Met with heavy artillery fire and stout fortifications, Van Dorn failed to dislodge the Union defenders. At Battery Robinett, the 2nd Texas Brigade was decimated along with its commander, Colonel William P. Rodgers, who wore an immense iron vest that failed to protect him from the hail of bullets. Sul Ross almost met the same fate as Rodgers but lost his horse instead.

Van Dorn ordered a retreat west to Ripley, Mississippi; a route that would take his army across the Hatchie River. The Union commander, General Ulysses S. Grant, sent troops under Stephen Hurlbut from Bolivar, Tennessee to cut off Van Dorn’s retreat. From the East, General Rosecrans was ordered to pursue him from Corinth. Fortunately for Van Dorn, Rosecrans was slow in taking up the pursuit. Nevertheless, Grant was confident he had his man in the bag.

The bag had an opening, but it depended on how fast Van Dorn could get across the Hatchie. As elements of Van Dorn’s command crossed the Davis Bridge, they encountered Hurlbut’s troops. Colonel Wirt Adams’ Mississippi cavalry managed to delay the Union attack for a short time. Union General Edward Ord (My God! Who was this guy's barber?) arrived on the scene and assumed command of Hurlbut’s forces. Sensing a decisive victory, Ord’s blood was up and he pressed his troops hard to attack; he even struck one officer with the flat of his sword for falling back to realign his men.
Illinois troops crossed the narrow bridge where they became pinned down between the bridge and Ross’ position on the ridge. Ord himself became a casualty after canister shot hit him in the leg, knocking him from his horse.

Things got worse as more and more Union troops crossed the bridge. Ord's command became a tangled blue mass as they filed into the confined and overcrowded area at the base of the ridge; they were sitting ducks. Texas and Arkansas troops mowed them down with brutal efficiency. One Union sergeant assumed command of his company after all the officers were killed and he buckled on his dead captain's sword belt. “We would allow them to approach until we could see the white of their eyes,” recalled Colonel Ras Stirman. “Then without exposing ourselves in the least, we would pour volley after volley into them, cutting them down like grass. I never saw such slaughter in my life.”

For six hours, a Union force four times the size of their opponent’s was held back; Van Dorn made his escape further downriver at Crum’s Bridge. Ross lost only 7 killed and 22 wounded. Ord lost 570.

Ross survived the war and fathered eight children. Undoubtedly the most popular man in Texas during the late 1800’s, he later became the Sheriff of McLennan County, a state senator, the first Commander of the Texas Division of the United Confederate Veterans, and a two term Governor of Texas.

Ross' most notable achievements came during his tenure as the first President of Texas A&M University. Because of his extreme popularity and Confederate veteran support, A&M's enrollment soared. Like a doting father, Ross made himself accessible to his students and would personally discuss their performance with each of them. Many of the Aggie traditions we are familiar with today were started while he was president. Here are just a few:
· The highly acclaimed Marching Texas Aggie Band.

· The Aggie Ring.

· The first football game between Texas A&M and the University of Texas.

· The school newspaper “The Battalion.”

· The first Silver Taps Ceremony was held for Ross after his death.

After his death in 1891, the entire Texas A&M student body accompanied his body back to Waco. A bronze statue of him was erected on campus. To this day students place pennies at the base for good luck during exams. In 1920, Ross was honored by having a college at the Big Bend town of Alpine (Sul Ross State University) named after him. Gig Em!