

This Day in History... October 2, 1835

Battle of Gonzales

On October 2, 1835, a dispute over a small cannon brought armed Texian settlers and Mexican soldiers into conflict near Gonzales. The brief Battle of Gonzales caused few casualties, but it marked the open break that became the Texas Revolution.

The conflict had roots in Texas's changing political status. Spain controlled Texas when the United States completed the Louisiana Purchase in 1803, although the purchase's western boundary remained disputed. Texas became part of Mexico after Mexico won independence from Spain in 1821. Mexican leaders hoped to strengthen the lightly populated province of Coahuila y Tejas by encouraging immigration.



The Texas State Flag was designed in 1838 when it was still a republic.

Moses Austin, a Missouri businessman, received Spanish permission in 1820 to bring Anglo-American families into Texas. He died before the colony could be established. His son, Stephen F. Austin, secured Mexican approval and led the first settlers into Texas in 1821. Under Mexico's empresario system, Austin and other contractors received land grants in return for bringing in approved families.

The population grew quickly. By 1835, Texas had roughly 30,000 residents. Many were Anglo-American immigrants, but the population also included Tejanos—Texans of Mexican descent—enslaved people, and members of several Indigenous nations. Mexico became concerned that so many newcomers had ties to the United States. In 1830, the government barred further immigration from the United States and imposed other restrictions. Many settlers resented those measures.

Political unrest also spread across Mexico. Antonio López de Santa Anna was elected president in 1833. At first, he supported the federal Constitution of 1824, which gave Mexican states considerable authority. By 1834 and 1835, however, he concentrated power in his own government and moved toward a centralized system. His actions angered federalists in several parts of Mexico, including Texas. Many Texas colonists initially claimed they were defending the Constitution of 1824 rather than seeking independence.

The immediate issue at Gonzales was a cannon. In 1831, Mexican officials had given the settlement a small bronze six-pounder to help defend against raids by Comanche and Tonkawa groups. The cannon was lent to the colonists, not permanently given to them. By 1835, Colonel Domingo de Ugartechea, the Mexican military commander at San Antonio de Béxar, worried that the weapon might be used against his troops. He ordered it returned.

On September 29, about 100 Mexican dragoons under Lieutenant Francisco de Castañeda arrived near Gonzales. The settlers refused to surrender the cannon. They delayed the soldiers from entering town while sending riders to nearby communities for help. Within days, about 140 armed Texians had gathered. John Henry Moore, a veteran of the War of 1812, became their leader.

On October 1, the Texians voted to attack Castañeda's camp across the Guadalupe River. They crossed during the night, moving through darkness and heavy fog. A barking dog alerted the Mexican soldiers to their approach. Before dawn on October 2, Mexican troops opened fire. The Texians returned fire after daylight. The exchange was scattered and limited. The settlers brought the disputed cannon into action, reportedly loading it with scrap metal because they lacked suitable cannonballs.

After several hours, Castañeda withdrew to higher ground. He met with Moore and asked again for the cannon. Moore refused. Castañeda reportedly said that he personally supported the Constitution of 1824, but he had orders to carry out. He then led his men back toward San Antonio without the weapon.

The battle was a small skirmish. Mexican losses are generally given as two killed and one wounded. No Texians were killed. Yet its political effect was larger than its military result. Settlers from several communities had organized, armed themselves, and fired on Mexican troops. News spread rapidly through Texas and the United States. Newspapers soon called Gonzales the "Lexington of Texas," comparing it with the opening clash of the American Revolution.

Near the end of the fighting, Texians displayed a homemade banner showing a cannon above the words "Come and Take It." The familiar version is a later replica, not a confirmed surviving battlefield flag, but its message became closely linked with Gonzales. The conflict continued through the fall and winter. Texian forces captured San Antonio in December, suffered defeat at the Alamo in March 1836, and won a decisive victory over Santa Anna at San Jacinto on April 21. Texas then declared independence and became the Republic of Texas.



Stamp issued for the 100th anniversary of Texas statehood.



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Texas centennial stamp issued in Gonzales.



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Greetings from Texas stamp pictures the Alamo.

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