Revisiting The Nueces Massacre

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Abstract

A monument sits in the small Texas Hill Country town of Comfort. While it is nestled out of the way, just off the main street of the town, it tells quite a tragic and heroic tale. The Treue der Union moment, inscribed in German and made of Texas limestone, preserves the little-known memory of a group of immigrants who were slain while standing up to insurmountable odds to defy an authority they disagreed with. This paper examines the events of the Nueces Massacre, the people who were involved, the monument made in tribute to it, and places the Nueces Massacre into the broader context of the Civil War in Texas.

On August 10, 1862, on the outskirts of what was then Comancheria, near the Texas-Mexico Border, a military engagement took place between Texans overlooking the Nueces River. This conflict, far away from the front lines of the American Civil War, would go on to become one of the most controversial military engagements in the state's history. There, a group of Confederate troops alongside Texas state forces attacked a small group of German Texans, making their way toward Mexico. The resulting carnage left a stain on the history of the Texas Hill Country. Once seen as traitors to the Confederacy and to the state of Texas, it has become necessary to reevaluate the events that occurred at the Nueces that day and to correctly identify that what happened was a massacre and that the men who died that day were not traitors. Instead, they were heroes who exemplified all of the qualities that Texans choose to glorify.

The Background

The Texas of the Civil War was very different from the Texas of today. Colonization of the State mainly focused on the eastern half, leaving the flat, open, and arid Plains to the west to the native peoples. The region was sparsely populated, except for the Comanche. Western Texas served as the last bastion of the Plains indigenous groups in the South. The Texas Hill Country, a region characterized by its quasi-mountainous and hilly terrain, and the Balcones Escarpment, a raised plateau, served as a border between Anglo-East Texas and Comanche-controlled Western Texas. In this borderland, settlers from what would eventually become Germany settled. German settlement along the Balcones Escarpment started in 1847, though this was in a much smaller number than would arrive afterwards. These early settlers would face conflict with the Comanches, though at times would attempt to make peace where possible.[1] The Germans

[1] Otto W. Tetzlaff, "The Fisher-Miller Land Grant and the Meusebach-Comanche Treaty." Texas State Historical Association. Accessed June 1, 2025. https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/meusebach-comanche-treaty.

arriving in Texas in 1848 were different from those who had arrived before. These Germans were refugees. Many of them were either the perpetrators of the 1848 revolutions in Central Europe or the descendants of those who had participated in them. Texas – and, by extension, the rest of the United States - served as a safe haven for these families to move to, where their ideas about liberty and freedom were celebrated rather than oppressed, as opposed to what was happening in the aftermath of the failed revolutions in Europe.[2] The Germans who migrated to Texas, numbering approximately 20,000 in total, founded these towns on the edge of the Hill Country.[3] The isolated towns served as a buffer between Anglo and Comanche territories. The isolated settlements allowed the German language to flourish and, most importantly, preserve their political beliefs.[4]

The Germans had different philosophical beliefs than the Anglo settlers to the east. They were veterans of the democratic revolutions in Europe. Many of them were thinkers, writers, highly educated, or had a valuable trade. Most importantly for the tensions that would arise, most of the Germans in the area were *Freidenkers*. The *Freidenkers*, German for Freethinkers, were Germans who advocated for democracy, religious tolerance, and universal rights. They staunchly believed in equal rights for all, freedom of speech, and, most importantly, for the issue at hand, they rejected secession from the Union and were staunch abolitionists.[5] Other Germans who were deeply religious and were also abolitionists settled farther north in Fredericksburg.[6]

[2] Stanley S. McGowen, "Battle or Massacre?: The Incident on the Nueces, August 10, 1862", *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly* vol.104, no.1 (2000): 66, http://www.jstor.org/stable/30241669.
[3] Terry G. Jordan, "The German Influence in Texas: History and Cultural Impact." Texas State Historical Association. Accessed June 2, 2025. https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/germans.
[4] Walter L. Buenger, "Secession and the Texas German Community: Editor Lindheimer vs. Editor Flake." *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 82, no. 4 (1979): 380. http://www.jstor.org/stable/30236864.
[5] Glen E. Lich, "Understanding Freethinkers in 19th Century Germany and Texas." Texas State Historical Association. Accessed May 24, 2025. https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/freethinkers.
[6] McGowen, "Battle or Massacre?", 66.

The Germans who migrated to the United States and Texas after 1848 were primarily concerned with preserving the Union.[7]

When the referendum on succession happened in Texas, the Germans in the Hill Country voted overwhelmingly to stay part of the Union.[8] In contrast, the communities with Anglo majorities further to the east and in the coastal plains voted to secede.[9] The Hill Country Germans were morally against the institution of slavery. They wanted, above all else, to remain loyal to the Union, which they saw as preserving the rights that they fled Europe to gain.[10] When the session vote ended with Texas leaving the Union, the path toward conflict had been paved.

The Massacre

When the vote for secession passed the Texas legislature and won the popular vote, the men in the Hill Country began to organize themselves in anti-Confederate militias. The efforts to create a force capable of defending the region against feared Confederate incursion were coordinated by the Union League. The Union League was a society of thinkers who strived to stay loyal to the Union above all else by encouraging anti-slavery and pro-democracy forces in the region. The league had been formed in opposition to the Knights of the Golden Circle, a secret society formed in 1852 to encourage the expansion of slavery into countries to the south of the United States.[11] Initially, the two societies tolerated each other, but by 1861, the issue of secession had polarized the two so profoundly that they both began calling for hostilities. With

[7] Rodman L. Underwood, *Death on the Nueces: German Texans, Treue Der Union*. (Austin: Eakin Press, 2002), 16.
[8] Ralph A. Wooster, "The Impact of the Civil War on Texas: Social, Economic, and Political Changes." Texas State Historical Association. Accessed June 23, 2025. https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/civil-war
[9] Walter D. Kamphoefner, "New Perspectives on Texas Germans and the Confederacy", *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 102, no 4 (1999): 442-444. https://www.jstor.org/stable/30242540.
[10] Vivian Elizabeth Smyrl, "Kendall County, Texas: History, Geography, and Economy." Texas State Historical Association. Accessed on June 8, 2025. https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/kendall-county.
[11] Underwood, *Death on the Nueces*, 22.

secessionists in complete control of the new Confederate government, the Knights of the Golden Circle exerted significant influence over military policy. Weary of the Union League, the issue was raised regarding potential rebellion.[12] Indeed, by 1862, the surrounding communities had assembled a force of three companies, comprising approximately 500 men. Before the war, many of these men had served in small units to fight off raids from the Comanches. They were well-armed and supplied, and they were ready to resist any perceived Confederate aggression.[13] That same year, the Confederacy passed the Enrollment Act, requiring all white men between 18-35 to join the Confederate army.[14] The German Texans, who wanted no part in the war, began to resist efforts by the Texas government to conscript them into the Confederate military, particularly by joining or supporting the previously mentioned Union League.[15] While morally against the war, the German Texans were by no means peaceful. As previously mentioned, they had already created small militia groups, with the job before the war being to defend the isolated settlements from Comanche raids.[16] These militia companies, while small, were battle-tested and quite capable.

A few months before the massacre, local newspapers in San Antonio began to publish anti-German rhetoric, urging them to leave the country and calling them traitors to the Confederacy.[17] These initial publications became increasingly politically charged, with each side publishing harsher rhetoric about the other. At the time, San Antonio was a hub for German, Anglo, and Hispanic Texans in the southern part of the state. In 1861, papers in San Antonio

[12] Underwood, *Death on the Nueces*, 22-24.
[13] McGowen, "Battle or Massacre?", 67-68.
[14] Underwood, *Death on the Nueces*, 23-24.
[15] Wooster, "Impact of the Civil War on Texas."
[16] McGowen, "Battle or Massacre?", 68.
[17] Underwood, *Death on the Nueces*, 24-26.

would run headlines about how German abolitionists were running and winning city council seats in St. Louis. This caused alarm to spread about Germans potentially gaining political power in San Antonio.[18] San Antonio papers would call on the Germans in the Hill Country to support the Confederate cause and take up arms, arguing that not to do so would be traitorous and anti- Texan.[19] Things would finally spill over when, in the Spring of 1862, Germans representing the settlements of the Hill Country that were part of the Union League officially declared their intent to form and lead militias. Although they had already established and were operating, this was the official declaration. When the declaration became known, the population of San Antonio began to feel alarmed, mainly because the meeting had taken place in their metaphorical backyard.[20]

Tensions truly began to boil over once the Confederate government realized that the Northern states had established contact with the Unionists. Confederate spies had learned that the Lincoln administration was considering using the militias as a means of attacking Austin or San Antonio. At the same time, the Union fleet made a naval demonstration off the Texas coast near Galveston.[21] The Confederate government also received word of a proposed plan for the militia to free captured federal troops that were being held in a nearby detention facility. They then hoped for the group to join and make an advance on Austin or San Antonio.[22] It is not a far-fetched idea to say that this plan, alongside the proposal from the Lincoln administration, was connected. Indeed, the assumption by the Confederate government that something was going to happen became even more real with the failed Confederate expedition into New Mexico, federal capture of New Orleans on May 1, the capture of Baton Rouge on May 15, and a naval

[18] J. Y. Dashiell & A. E. McLeod, "Municapal Election in St. Louis", *The Daily Ledger and Texan*, Ma, 8, 1861, 2.
[19] J. Y. Dashiell & A. E. McLeod, "Distinctions among the People", *The Daily Ledger and Texan*, June 8, 1861, 2.
[20] Underwood, *Death on the Nueces*, 26.
[21] Underwood, *Death on the Nueces*, 26.
[22] McGowen, "Battle or Massacre?", 72-73.

demonstration off the coast of Galveston also on May 15, 1862.[23] The Texas government could see itself being boxed in. Feeling that a Union advance into Texas was inevitable, the Confederate government ordered a military expedition to end the threat of rebellion in the Hill Country for good.

Captain James M. Duff was dispatched from San Antonio with a combined force of state militia and Confederate cavalry to head northwest and assess the situation, to gain control.[24] Importantly, Duff, like many officers during and after the Civil War, had a public image that did not portray him as who he truly was. Duff was an immigrant from Scotland. He was a member of the Knights of the Golden Circle and had served in the Texas militia for an extended period. He had gained the trust of the people he had served under, and in May of 1862, he had taken a command as a captain in the Confederate army in Texas. A month later, in mid-June, he had ridden north to Fredericksburg and arrested 3 German men who had violated the conscription act.[25] In the aftermath of this, Duff was nicknamed "The Butcher of Fredericksburg". When the news reached the local German towns that Duff was marching north, a widespread panic began to take shape. Things grew even worse when Duff declared martial law over all of Gillespie County, where Fredericksburg was. He then arrested citizens of Gillespie County whom he accused of pro-union activities and executed them, thereby officially earning his nickname.[26] It should be noted that while the intelligence of guerrilla force mobilization and secret plans to work with the Union were accurate, it was also true that the German militias were not actively pursuing them at the time of Duff's departure. Furthermore, it was the arrival of Duff's men and

[23] Underwood, *Death on the Nueces*, 26.
[24] McGowen, 'Battle or Massacre?", 73-75.
[25] McGowen, "Battle or Massacre?", 74.
[26] McGowen, "Battle or Massacre?", 75 – 76.

his actions that caused the impending upheaval that would lead to the massacre – they were the match that was thrown into a powder keg.

Having had enough and fearing for his community's safety, Fritz Tegener, a county treasurer from the town of Comfort, Texas, just south of Fredericksburg, gathered a group of eighty men. Of this group, 65, including Tegener, had decided to leave Texas. They hatched a plan to flee to Mexico and board a ship that would take them to the port of New Orleans, now occupied by the Union, where they would enlist in the Union Army and fight against the Confederates.[27] The men had assembled on Turtle Creek, just west of Fredericksburg, and on August 2, began their march westward to the town of Del Rio, which sat on the Rio Grande, directly across from the Mexican border. As they started their march, they were eventually joined by four more men, Anglo-Texans who sympathized with the Union. The party, now sitting at 69 men, slowly made its way to the border.[28] They reached the small town of Uvalde, about halfway between Del Rio and Fredericksburg.[29] They stopped to replenish their food supplies and, most importantly for the events that followed, their water. At the time, there was a water drought in the Hill Country, and so the party moved slowly and methodically, following what streams and rivers they could find. This led them to the Nueces River, where they made camp on August 10, 1862.[30] What they did not know was that the entire time they were moving west, they were being pursued.

When Duff had reached the area around Gillespie County, he declared that all the people in the surrounding region should proclaim their loyalty to the Confederacy or face punishment.

[27] Richard Parker & Emily Boyd, "Massacre on the Nueces", *The New York Times*, August 11, 2012. https://archive.nytimes.com/opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/08/11/massacre-on-the-nueces/.
[28] Underwood, *Death on the Nueces*, 28.
[29] Parker & Boyd, "Massacre on the Nueces".
[30] Underwood, *Death on the Nueces*, 38.

The Germans did quickly proclaim their allegiance to the country, and things seemed to have calmed down. The Germans, faced with the Confederacy's military power, had backed down.[31] Duff also chose to put the houses of suspected union sympathizers under surveillance. One of these houses was none other than Fritz Tegener's. What Duff did not know quite yet was that Tegener had already left for the Turtle Creek rally point.[32] A few days after arriving in Gillespie County, Duff received a report on Tegener's plan. Not quite being sure of its authenticity, Duff dispatched 96 cavalry under the command of Lieutenant Colin McRae with orders to head west and scout ahead in case there was a militia present. McRae had orders to scout the enemy and arrest them, if possible, but was authorized to use force if necessary. On August 3, McRae left the camp with his men and began to pursue Tegener.[33] Over the next week, McRae began to find the remnants of camps, and by the evening of August 9, his advance guard had located Tegener and his men, who were camped on the banks of the Nueces River.[34]

That evening, McRae drew up his battle plan, splitting his forces into two, aiming to attack the encampment from two sides. McRae would shoot his pistol, and that would signal the start of the attack.[35] Later that night, though, German sentries stumbled into the Confederates, and they opened fire without McRae's signal. The surprise attack threw everything into chaos. Some of the Germans began to flee to more defensible terrain, while others, including Tegener, chose to stay and fight at their camp. Including casualties and those who fled, the main German force had dwindled to about 30 unwounded men, who were now facing off against McRae's 90. With a final assault, McRae drove out the remaining Germans, leaving only the wounded in the

[31] Underwood, *Death on the Nueces*, 35.
[32] Underwood, *Death on the Nueces*, 39.
[33] Underwood, *Death on the Nueces*, 43.
[34] Underwood, *Death on the Nueces*, 43-44.
[35] McGowen, "Battle or Massacre?", p.77-78.

camp. By this point, 19 men lay dead in the camp, with another 11 injured. McRae's men then took the wounded men to a cluster of nearby trees and shot them all in the head. While McRae took his wounded and dead to be treated and buried, he left the corpses of the dead Germans out in the open to rot. McRae's participation in the massacre of the wounded prisoners is up for debate. McRae was wounded in the fight and, therefore, was likely not directly controlling these men in the aftermath. He also did not report the widespread murder of prisoners in his after-action report. What he did say, however, was that it was a stunning victory for his men.[36] Yet, there is evidence that it was junior Lt. Edwin Lilly who presided over the killings. Interestingly enough, Lilly was not the next in command; this fell to two other men in McRae's party, the first lieutenants Homsley and Bigham.[37] We also know, based on military tradition, that the more grisly tasks were usually assigned to junior officers.[38] So this means that McRae was so incapacitated that he could not tend to the needs of his troops, leading to either Homsley or Bigham authorizing the mass killings of wounded men, that McRae authorized the killings and just forgot about it in the report, or, finally, that McRae knew that it would look bad on his legacy had it been known that he authorized the killings.

To add even more confusion to what exactly happened that day on the Nueces, there are disputes as to how many precisely were executed by McRae's men. The general agreed-upon number is 9, yet there is also evidence to show that these 9 men were confused with the 9 survivors of the skirmish who were later caught and executed by Confederate authorities.[39] Later, in 1865, when the bodies of the men who were slain were recovered, there were skeletons found

[36] McGowen, "Battle or Massacre?", p.79-83.
[37] McGowen, "Battle or Massacre?", 82.
[38] Underwood, *Death on the Nueces*,78.
[39] Underwood, *Death on the Nueces*, 79.

away from the main site that had confirmed bullet wounds in their skulls. While this only numbered at 3, this means there is at least evidence to suggest that some people were executed by being shot in the skull.[40] Regardless, the agreed-upon final death count sat at 28. Later, a group of the survivors will once again attempt to cross the Rio Grande to enter Mexico. The 15 men will fight the Confederates sent after them and will have eight of their number killed. While this event happened 2 months after the Nueces Massacre, the losses are grouped into the remembrance of the event, given that these men were survivors of the initial engagement.[41] Following the conclusion of these hostilities, Duff stayed in the region for a few more months, pacifying the area. By spring 1863, the German unionists had grown more passive and no longer looked to fight against the Confederacy outright. Duff had achieved his goal through brutal tactics.[42]

The Monument and Memory

As previously mentioned, it wasn't until after the war in 1865 that a group of Germans from Comfort arrived at the site of the massacre to gather the now decomposed bodies of those who were killed on that day. They brought whatever was left of the men back home and commissioned a monument to remember them, which was completed in August of 1866.[43] The monument, titled Treue der Union, meaning "loyalty to the union" in German, stands in a city park in Comfort, Texas, and is made of 35,700 pounds of Hill Country limestone.[44] The obelisk

[40] Underwood, *Death on the Nueces*, 78.
[41] Underwood, *Death on the Nueces*, 89-91.
[42] Robert W. Shook, "The Battle of the Nueces, August 10, 1862." *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 66, no. 1 (1962): 41-42. https://www.jstor.org/stable/30236222 .
[43] Underwood, *Death on the Nueces*, 77-78.
[44] Richard E, Miller, "Treue der Union Monument Historical Marker." Historical Marker. Accessed June 17, 2025. https://www.hmdb.org/m.asp?m=34985

in the center stands at 20 feet tall. Adjoining it stands a lone 36-star American flag, meant to symbolize the 36 states that were part of the Union when it was finished.[45] The flag permanently flies at half-staff. The whole monument acts as a mass grave for those who died, with the names of the men written in German. The Treue der Union monument was one of the first Civil War monuments to be erected, having been completed slightly more than a year after the conflict's conclusion.[46] But why build the monument in Comfort as opposed to Kerrville, Fredericksburg, or Boerne, the three largest towns in the region? As opposed to the latter three settlements, Comfort had nearly its entire youth population wiped out by the Nueces massacre. For this town, the events that took place at the Nueces were cataclysmic and deeply traumatizing.[47]

Perhaps one could argue that the Germans are to blame just as much as the Confederates for the engagement. After all, the Germans were well armed – they had prepared for a fight. The Confederates, too, had sound reasoning for going up into the Hill Country. Their intelligence apparatus had pointed towards a possible rebellion and collusion between the Lincoln administration and the borderland settlements, and there is evidence to support the notion that contact existed between the two. Yet, when Duff arrived and demanded the swearing of allegiance, the overwhelming majority of the inhabitants did. In all actuality, it appears that the military action taken by the Germans was more of a response to Confederate hostility rather than loyalty to the Union. The companies of militia men were created as a way of defending towns from Confederate incursions, and they were formed when the Confederate press in San Antonio was actively promoting anti-German propaganda. The irony of the entire situation is that the German Texans, who wanted to stay loyal to the country that they swore an oath to and loved,

[45] Frank Wilson Kiel, "Treue der Union: Myths, Misrepresentations and Misinterpretations", *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 115, no 3 (2012): 290-291. https://www.jstor.org/stable/41617001.
[46] Underwood, *Death on the Nueces*, 146-147.
[47] Underwood, *Death on the Nueces,* 82-83.

were called traitors by the very people who betrayed their country. Had the Confederates never chosen to engage in vilifying the Hill Country Germans, the actions taken by the latter would not have happened.

American history and Texas history are both fields of study where historians are tasked with distinguishing between myth and fact. Oftentimes, the two can become so intertwined that they can become inseparable. It can furthermore become even harder to decipher what happened at a particular moment in time when considering that two separate groups of people can experience the same event and draw two different conclusions from it. The Nueces Massacre is an excellent example of this dynamic in action, particularly because specific details remain unclear. Contemporary historians know that there was a military engagement between Confederate forces under the command of Lieutenant Colin McRae and Union loyalists under the command of Fritz Tegener. We know that after the events that transpired, a group of soldiers were executed, but the exact number is unknown. This later point has caused great debate in the historical community as to whether the event should be reclassified as a massacre rather than a battle. To the people of Comfort and the Hill Country, the events that transpired that day are remembered as a massacre. Other events during and after the Civil War, such as the Sand Creek massacre, have had their names and remembrances altered due to the reevaluation of their historical context. Give all the evidence that is at hand and is available to us, by all accounts, what happened at the Nueces was a massacre.

What distinguishes a battle from a massacre? A battle refers to any form of organized military engagement between opposing forces. A massacre, by contrast, involves the deliberate and indiscriminate killing of individuals, often those who are unarmed, wounded, or otherwise incapable of resistance. While these events can occur independently, they may also overlap under

certain conditions. One might argue that when a battle becomes overwhelmingly one-sided, such that one force entirely overruns the other, it can culminate in what may be termed a "battlefield massacre." The events at the Nueces serve as a clear example: disarmed and wounded prisoners of war were systematically executed. By any standard definition, this constitutes a massacre.

These questions point towards the much deeper issue at hand – how can we quantify suffering? What level of suffering qualifies an event to be moved from warfare to a massacre? Perhaps the most tragic thing of all is the need to attempt to rationalize the horrors that people elect to do to one another. Grief and tragedy are not feelings that can easily be described, and yet it is events like the Nueces Massacre that force us to suspend our humanity and choose to attach a measurable quality to something that cannot be adequately measured. It is not the number of people killed that day that makes it tragic, although the death count on the German side was quite large. What matters is that there were wounded men needlessly killed. What matters is that a group of men were ambushed and gunned down for simply choosing to stand for what they believed in – the end of slavery. What matters is that a small town lost nearly the entire youth population. There were men, sons, and fathers who never returned home when they could have. In the case of what happened at the Nueces River, it has become important to reclassify the event from a battle to what it truly was – a massacre. A massacre of men, a massacre of morals, and a massacre of what it means to be human. A massacre whose scars are burned into the scorched Hill Country limestone.

Today, the men buried at the Treue der Union monument rest peacefully. The grounds are well-kept, and Comfort is a thriving small town. Their memory and what they stood for is still contested. On the one hand, the story of these men was often vilified through the lens of the Lost Cause myth. For a long time after the war, the men who died at the Nueces were seen as

to their state and the antebellum South. They were seen as backstabbers and, oftentimes, viewed as not truly Texan. In the aftermath of the war, the South continued to portray itself as a chivalric and honorable society. A society that was forced with its back against the wall to fight a conflict for its very survival as a culture. A society that found itself doomed to lose an unwinnable war, and yet they fought it anyway, bound together by their shared identities as Southerners. They fought and died honorably for Dixie, and in their shared sacrifice, the idealized memory of the South would live on. In this narrative, the Nueces was a battle between the honorable men of the Confederacy, fighting and thoroughly defeating the dishonorable and traitorous German immigrants. They were disloyal to their new homeland and therefore deserved to face the consequences of their treachery. In this telling, one that has long been the prevailing narrative in the state, there is no mention of the Confederate propaganda meant to "other" the German immigrants in the Hill Country. There is no mention of the countless people who were forced to pledge their allegiance to the Confederacy under threat of execution. There is no mention of the mass execution of men, and later, the potential military cover-up. There is no mention of bodies left to rot and bones left to decay and become bleached by the West Texas sun. The reason for all of this being left out is that the Nueces massacre was not glamorous. It was not a resounding victory for the Confederacy. It was, in truth, an indictment of the Confederate cause. The Confederacy liked to portray itself as a defender of the rights of men in the face of tyranny. Yet, it condemned German immigrants to a massacre over their belief that it was immoral to hold other human beings in bondage. In no world is that standing up for the rights of men. Why is it that we should remember the Alamo and remember Goliad, and not the Nueces? Because the Nueces does not fit the standard mythological narrative of Texas history.

But were they traitors? A simple reframing of the argument can provide an answer to this question. The men who ventured into the West Texas countryside came to their homeland in search of a place to practice their beliefs. Their European governments had scored them for choosing to stand for liberty. They were consistently demonized with Confederate propaganda in the newspapers. They were called anti-Texan for voting against succession, and for wanting to see slavery abolished. They felt threatened by the government that was meant to support them and guarantee their safety, so they formed units to guard themselves against attack. Their government sent a military detachment to force them to pledge loyalty to their government, which they did not recognize. Many men then decided to flee west to join the fight against the Confederacy by pledging their service to the recognized government of the United States, the country they came to and called home. They chose to stand up for what they believed in rather than submit themselves to serving a power that they found morally repugnant. They were then massacred for their beliefs. The story of these men and the monument that they call their final resting place today stands as a poignant reminder about what it truly means to serve and die for one's country.

The men who were massacred that day at the Nueces were heroic: in the face of an overwhelming hostile government, they stood up for liberty, stayed loyal to their country, and, most of all, for the abolition of slavery, even if it meant they would sacrifice their lives. This is the view that cannot and should not be allowed to be forgotten. The men who rest at the Treue der Union monument demonstrated every trait that the Lone Star claims to symbolize. These men were the very best of their generation. They were neither traitors nor heroes, but Texans who lived and died, leaving behind a legacy of honor, loyalty, and an unwavering devotion to the causes of liberty and freedom.