

BILL ANALYSIS

Senate Research Center
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S.C.R. 33
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Veteran Affairs & Military Installations
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AUTHOR'S / SPONSOR'S STATEMENT OF INTENT

S.C.R. 33 designates September 8 as Major Jefferson Van Horne Day in the State of Texas.

Major Van Horne, a graduate of West Point, arrived in present-day El Paso on September 8, 1849, with a contingent of U.S. Army troops to establish a military post. That post would become present-day Fort Bliss, currently the Army's second-largest installation. Major Van Horne's original founding of a military base in El Paso began a long and close association between the people of El Paso and the United States military, and his contributions to the defense of this nation, and to the history of this state should be recognized by the State of Texas.

Consistent with Section 391.004 (Designating Days, Weeks, or Months for Recognition), Government Code, the designation of September 8 as Major Van Horne Day expires on the 10th anniversary of the date the legislature passes this resolution.

On September 8, 1849, Major Jefferson Van Horne and a contingent of U.S. Army troops arrived in the vicinity of present-day El Paso to establish a post on the Rio Grande, the first American military encampment in an area that has hosted U.S. armed forces now for more than a century and a half.

A native of Bucks County, Pennsylvania, Jefferson Van Horne was born to Dorothy Johns Marple Van Horne and General Isaac Van Horne, a veteran of the American Revolution; following the family tradition of military service, he graduated from the United States Military Academy at West Point in 1827 and upheld its motto of "Duty, Honor, Country" throughout his life.

His early assignments included frontier duty at Jefferson Barracks in Missouri and a tour at Fort Smith, Arkansas; from 1846 to 1848, he served his country in the Mexican War, and his distinguished efforts earned him promotion to the rank of major.

While on leave in his hometown of Zanesville, Ohio, Jefferson Van Horne met Mary Gilbert, and after exchanging romantic letters for two years, the couple were married on November 28, 1850; they had one son, Lewis Cass Van Horne.

In May 1849, Major Van Horne was instructed to establish a military post on the north bank of the Rio Grande, opposite what is now Ciudad Juárez, for the purpose of protecting both settlers in the area and travelers bound for California from Indian attack; he departed Camp Salado, on the outskirts of San Antonio, on June 1, commanding regimental staff, six companies of the Third Infantry, and a howitzer battery; his party of nearly 260 soldiers was accompanied by some 100 civilians who played a supporting role.

With 275 wagons, the expedition represented the longest wagon train to embark westward across Texas; after 100 days and a 643-mile overland march, Major Van Horne and his men reached their destination on September 8, 1849; Major Van Horne subsequently quartered four companies at Coon's Rancho, where downtown El Paso now stands, and sent two companies to garrison the old Spanish presidio at San Elizario, 20 miles to the southeast.

In September 1851, the War Department closed both the post at Coon's Rancho and the presidio and ordered Major Van Horne and most of his troops to Fort Fillmore, 40 miles north of El Paso, near Mesilla, New Mexico; Major Van Horne had recruiting duty from 1852 to 1854, and

between 1855 and 1857 he served at Fort Stanton, New Mexico, and at the Post of Albuquerque. He died in Albuquerque on September 26, 1857.

A new army post was established on the site of present-day El Paso in January 1854, and in March of that year it was named Fort Bliss after Lieutenant Colonel William Bliss, a career army officer and an accomplished scholar who was also the son-in-law of President Zachary Taylor; the fort acquired a permanent location in El Paso in 1893.

The post that Major Jefferson Van Horne established at the site of present-day El Paso served to protect a vital route for a dynamic and burgeoning nation pushing westward and marked the beginning of a long and close association between the United States military and the people of El Paso, and it is indeed fitting that the anniversary of his arrival at the Pass of the North be commemorated.

RESOLVED

That the 84th Legislature of the State of Texas hereby designate September 8 as Major Jefferson Van Horne Day in the State of Texas.

That, in accordance with the provisions of Section 391.004(d) (providing that a designation of a day, week, or month for recognition expires on the 10th anniversary of the date the legislature finally passes the resolution making the designation), Government Code, this designation remain in effect until the 10th anniversary of the date this resolution is finally passed by the legislature.