

# SAN JACINTO RIVER AUTHORITY KIDS PAGE



## Some Weird but True Texas Rainmaking Stories...

All of us have heard the old saying attributed to Mark Twain: “Everyone talks about the weather but no one does anything about it.” That may be true in the rest of the country, but not in Texas. In fact, we have quite a history of trying to modify or change the weather with schemes to make it rain...going all the way back to rain-dancing Native Americans who were here long before we were.

### Rain on the Plains?

After the U.S. Civil War, a retired General and civil engineer named **Edward Powers** observed that rainstorms often occurred where and when major battles were fought. His studies of wartime clouds suggested that all the smoke, dust and other particulate matter that rose into the air during battle often triggered rain. His book, “*War and the Weather, or the Artificial Production of Rain*” was published in 1871. Two decades later, coinciding with a severe and prolonged drought in west Texas, his book was reprinted.

It was about this time that another “General” was climbing on the rainmaking bandwagon. According to an article in Texas Monthly (S. C. Gwynne, August 2003), **General R. G. Dyrenforth** “subscribed to the theory, successfully field tested by countless twelve year old boys, that there is nothing wrong with the world that a little gunpowder won’t fix.” Dyrenforth was a “concussionist” -- he believed that rainfall followed major warfare so it stood to reason that a lot of gunfire, cannons, and military-style bombs could produce rain -- on command, anywhere. In drought-plagued west Texas, many people wanted desperately to believe him. This prompts a bizarre experiment in 1891, bankrolled by the federal government, to make it rain by “blowing things up.”

Dyrenforth was authorized -- as an agent of the U.S. Department of Agriculture -- to “charm” rain from the skies of El Paso, Midland and other Texas cities. He traveled to west Texas with boxcars loaded with gunpowder and dynamite and other incendiary devices along with some giant kites and balloons. People across the country cheered this flamboyant entrepreneur and the media fueled the frenzy with stories of his exciting rainmaking attempts. After several months of shooting at the heavens, it did rain (it was already forecast), and he claimed success.

After 15 months, his fame disappeared. His experiments had mostly fizzled, earning him the nick-

name “Dryhenceforth”. He wasn’t who he said he was, anyway. He wasn’t a General, he had no meteorological training, and he knew nothing of explosives beyond what he had been exposed to during military service (as a Major) during the Civil War. But he was clever enough to capitalize on his personal charisma and some well-placed contacts to launch his rainmaking career!



### Corn Flakes and Rainstorms...

Entrepreneur and inventor Charles W. Post came from Illinois. Post was considered brilliant but “peculiar” and did, in fact, suffer some serious mental problems. During one “visit” to a sanitarium, he met a doctor -- John H. Kellogg -- who ultimately became his competitor in the cereal business. Post was the creator of Grape-Nuts and Post Toasties.

Post moved his family to the Lubbock area in hopes that the dry climate would improve his health. Post, Texas (today, the county seat of Garza County) was named for him.

He soon discovered that the area had two major problems -- the weather and water. Post figured that if he could make it rain at will he would go down in history as the greatest inventor of all time. He, too, had heard about a “connection” between battles and rainfall, and tried his hand at rainmaking by attaching two pounds of dynamite to a kite, sending it skyward, and igniting it. He quickly figured that method was too dangerous, so instead he placed a series of 14-pound bundles of dynamite on the ground and set them off. He told the story that after one of his “battles” involving 3,000 pounds of dynamite, rain fell almost immediately.

Post continued to try to influence the weather until 1913 when the dry spell ended. He reportedly spent more than \$50,000 of his own money on these efforts. Post’s critics insisted that the only rain that fell after any of his “battles” was during the “rainy” time of year and was likely to fall anyway. 💧