

**Title:** Measure Of A Man

**Author:** Scribblesinink

**Rating:** General

**Characters:** Beck, Mack (OC)

**Warnings/labels:** None

**Word count:** 1,799

**Author notes:** Thanks to Tanaqui for the beta. Branches off from around midway through [Home Brew](http://jericho.scribblesinink.com/2009/05/23/home-brew/). Mack Davies is a Colonel in the Independent Republic of Texas' army, whom Jake brought to Jericho to serve as a liaison.

**Summary:** Beck's right to lead his troops is challenged by the arrival of a liaison from the Texan government who outranks him.

## Measure Of A Man By Scribblesinink

After Jake had stormed out the front door of City Hall, Beck headed back up the stairs to the mayor's office, not quite able to bring himself to meet Heather's eye as she followed him. He didn't deserve her concern. She'd tried to tell him he was wrong a number of times, and each time he'd refused to hear her. Now he knew she'd been right, on each and every count; she'd even forgiven him—or at least, afforded him a second chance to prove he wasn't the brute he'd been acting. He doubted Jake would ever give him that much.

Re-entering Gray's office, he pushed the thought of Jake Green from his mind. The mayor, Eric and Trish were in deep discussion with the Texan colonel, apparently talking about what looked like an inventory for the army truck Beck had seen parked outside. Beck wasn't sure yet why the colonel was here—Texas couldn't be wanting to consolidate this far into Cheyenne-held territory—but any supplies he'd brought would be welcome.

Gray glanced up as Beck entered with Heather close on his heels. "Ah, Major." Beck found Gray easier to get along with than almost anyone else: he'd left town before everything had gone to hell and, not having experienced first-hand what Beck had done, he wasn't as wary of Beck's intentions as the rest of them. "Colonel Davies has brought several things that should make you happy."

Beck raised an eyebrow inquiringly, at the same time realizing that not only did he have no idea what the Texan wanted, he also felt a bit at a loss about how to deal with the colonel. Up until six months ago, when they served in the same army under the same president, it would've been simple. But now they were... allies? Beck decided his best course would be to treat the colonel with the respect befitting his higher rank, but he wasn't about to start taking orders from the man. He might still have no clue whom he *should* take orders from, but it definitely wasn't from the Republic of Texas.

"Reckoned secure comms would be one of your first priorities," Davies expanded on Gray's declaration. Beck, who'd positioned himself next to Davies, discovered he had to crick his

neck, almost rest his head on his shoulder to meet the colonel's gaze. "We brought radios, guaranteed against Cheyenne intercepting anything."

Beck dipped his head to convey his thanks. That would help; all their equipment had been supplied by the ASA and he'd been reluctant to use it. However, he couldn't help asking suspiciously, "And what about Texas?"

Davies shrugged and smirked, apparently not in the least offended that Beck thought he was there to spy on them. "Does it matter?"

Beck regarded him for a minute. Well, he supposed, it *didn't* really matter whether Texas could listen in on their radio traffic, did it? As long as they were on the same side, at least. "Any fuel?"

The colonel's bushy mustache drooped a little as he shook his head. "Sorry. Only managed a dozen or so jerry cans."

Beck nodded in understanding. Important as gas was, from the upside-down glimpse he'd managed so far of the list spread out on the mayor's desk, it seemed Davies had brought other provisions that were just as vital, and there was only so much a single truck could carry. "We'll make do."

The meeting lasted for a while longer until, finally, everyone had had their say. They'd exchanged all the bits of information they'd collected during the day; made plans on how to survive through the next one; and decided how to split the supplies Jake and the colonel had trucked in from Texas. While the town would get the food and medicine, most of the fuel and ammo would go to Beck's troops.

With the meeting concluded, everyone started filing out of the room.

"Major, a word, please?"

Beck stopped on the threshold at the Texan's drawl calling him back, only now realizing Davies had stayed behind as the group broke up. "Colonel?" He stepped back into the room, out of the way of Gray who'd been following him out, not missing the look the mayor exchanged with the colonel as he left. As Gray pulled the door closed behind him, Beck caught a glimpse of Heather's concerned face beyond him. Beck offered her a barely perceptible nod of reassurance before turning to face the colonel.

Davies stood easily in front of Gray's desk, his hands clasped behind his back. He scrutinized Beck for a moment. "*Major Beck. 10<sup>th</sup> Mountain Division.*"

Beck didn't miss the slight stress on his rank before the Texan went on to sum up the battalion's recent deployments, letting Beck know how well he'd done his homework.

"Several tours in the Middle-East. Tasked specifically with pacifying hotspots in the mountains near Kandahar. Three years ago, your brigade received the Meritorious Unit Commendation for service in Afghanistan."

Beck kept silent; he'd been in the army long enough to know a reply wasn't expected. And Davies would come to the point eventually.

He wasn't wrong.

"You happened to be on a training mission in Alaska, getting ready for redeployment to Iraq, when the attacks happened. After providing humanitarian aid in California, your brigade was sent to secure the roads in Colorado and Nebraska. You were put in charge of 2nd battalion when Lt-Colonel Gianni was killed during operations along I-80." Davies sought Beck's gaze and held it. "Must've rankled to have all the responsibility, but not the pay grade, and no sign of Hoffman pushing through the paperwork on that for you."

Beck opened his mouth to reply, then snapped it shut without saying anything. He had no clue what he could say. Had it rankled? Maybe a little, but he'd also understood Hoffman's reasons and the need to follow the rules. A week ago, he'd have uttered some platitude about serving at his commanding officer's pleasure. But having learned what he had about Hoffman's superiors, about the false government he'd worked for, he really had no idea any more how to respond. Admit he wanted the promotion? He had, of course: any career soldier would. But it would've been as invalid as the government that gave it to him, wouldn't it? Not to mention a reward for doing a job he rather wished he hadn't.

No matter what he said, he'd be damned if he did, and damned if he didn't. His gaze shifted to the eagle centered on Davies' fatigues that signified his rank, wondering why the Texan had brought it up in the first place. Perhaps this was a power play? Davies' way to not so subtly let Beck know he outranked him, and planned to take command of the battalion? Beck thought he probably should've expected something like this, if perhaps not so soon.

But if he was right, if Davies was gearing up to take over command, Beck had best disabuse him of the notion right away. No matter that six months ago Davies would've outranked Beck by two promotions: Texas had since seceded from the United States. Davies no longer served in the same army Beck did, and as such, had no say over Beck's troops.

He was still trying to decide how to best tackle the subject without antagonizing Davies unduly when the colonel spoke again. "It's been a long, boring drive here from Texas." Davies leaned back against Gray's desk, looking deceptively unconcerned.

Caught off guard by the non-sequitur, Beck nearly blurted a puzzled, "Sir?", old habits dying hard. Swallowing the word down at the last instant, he settled for quirking an eyebrow.

Davies rested his hands on the desk on either side of him, his fingers curling around the edge. "Very little traffic on the roads. Not much to distract one's attention. Gives men time to think. Time to catch up the news. On events from back home." The way he said it seemed to hold meaning beyond the mere words.

Abruptly, Beck caught on to where the colonel was going with his seemingly rambling reminiscences. He inhaled involuntarily. "Jake told you."

"Yes." Davies' face was hard and Beck realized his blue eyes no longer held the easy humor of before. "Geneva Convention mean anything to you, Major?"

Beck swallowed, his stomach tight. The Convention did mean something—a lot—and he still wasn't quite sure how he'd ended up doing what he'd done. He raised his head, every instinct urging him to look away from those piercing blue eyes, and forced himself to meet Davies' stare head-on as he said, "What I did... to Jake, to this town.... It is inexcusable." The colonel's expression remained guardedly neutral, and Beck had no idea what he was thinking. He continued, "And I will gladly be held accountable for it."

Davies nodded, and pushed away from the desk. "Good. I—."

Beck interrupted him before he could continue. "But not by you, Colonel."

Davies' brows rose, though he looked more taken aback than anything else.

"I shall answer to a court constituted under the authority of the legitimate President of the United States." Beck recalled he'd said something similar to Heather, when she'd first come to find out what his intentions were after he'd discovered the truth and informed the town he was no longer taking orders from Cheyenne. "Whomever that may be. Any orders you give me or my troops, however, would be no more legitimate than Colonel Hoffman's were. With all due respect, I do not answer to you. Nor will I relinquish command of the battalion."

Davies was silent for a moment, staring at Beck. Then, to Beck's surprise, he burst out laughing. "Well said, Major." But Davies' momentary mirth faded quickly and his expression turned more serious. "I wasn't plannin' to undercut your command, Major. You're correct: at this point, we serve separate masters, and it would only disrupt things even more. But—," he loomed over Beck, using his height to full advantage, "I will *not* stand by if you decide to ride roughshod all over this town again."

"That won't happen." Beck pulled himself up stiffly. "I've learned my lesson."

Davies held Beck's gaze for a long minute before he puffed up his cheeks and blew out a breath. "Alright." He gave a curt nod. "In that case, Major, I believe we have work to do."

"Yes sir." This time, when the courtesy came to his lips, Beck didn't try to hold it back. They might be working under different authorities, but he and Davies were striving toward the same goal: to dispose of the false government in Cheyenne. *And keep Jericho safe*, Beck added silently as he followed Davies out the door. It was the least he could do to make amends.

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