

# Ghostly Bugles

*A Novel of the  
Alamo*

MAX L. KNIGHT



Wild Lark Books

# Note to the Reader

*Ghostly Bugles* is a work of historical fiction. All well-known persons, events, and locales (both historic and contemporary) that appear in the book are a matter of public record. Any spoken or written passages derived from these records have been quoted to ensure both accuracy and context. The story, however, is entirely the product of the author's imagination. Characterizations and events should be viewed in the context of the narrative. Fictional constructs, such as attributing dialogue and emotions to famous persons, fanciful descriptions of time and place, or adding a person or persons that are not a part of the historical record, are intended to evoke thoughts and images not wholly perceived, or at least different from popular or traditional conception.

This Book is Dedicated to

Sally Koch

A Dear Friend, Colleague, and Alamo Mentor

# Contents

<i>Epigraph</i>	xvii
<i>Foreward</i>	xix

## PART ONE

### A WALK AMONG THE RUINS

One	Privilege and a Curse	2
Two	The Spirit of Sacrifice	8
Three	Bone Fragments and Ashes	24
Four	Inconsolable Grief	30
Five	Grit and Determination	36
Six	By the Grace of God	46
Seven	Luck, Guile, and Divine Intervention	51

## PART TWO

### THIRTEEN DAYS

Eight	Overwhelming Odds	64
Nine	Letters, Couriers, and False Hope	67
Ten	Earthen Barricades and Trenches	82
Eleven	Exhibits and Artifacts	87

*xiv ~ Contents*

Twelve	Enmity and Collaboration	92
Thirteen	Absolute Power	99
Fourteen	Probing the Defenses	105
Fifteen	Growing Despondency	108
Sixteen	Hardships Endured	116
Seventeen	All Glory Is Fleeting	121
PART THREE		
BLOOD AND REMEMBRANCE		
Eighteen	Playing By His Own Rules	132
Nineteen	Nightmares and Phantoms	135
Twenty	The Breakout	138
Twenty-One	The Beginning of the End	142
Twenty-Two	Interrogations	146
Twenty-Three	Ghosts and Disembodied Voices	151
Twenty-Four	Unheralded Valor	155
Twenty-Five	Eyewitness to History	158
Twenty-Six	Hallowed Ground	163
Twenty-Seven	Looking to the Future	176
	<i>Afterword</i>	181
	<i>Acknowledgements</i>	183
	<i>About the Author</i>	187

# Epigraph

One equal temper of  
heroic hearts,  
Made weak by time  
and fate, but strong in will  
To strive, to seek, to  
find, and not to yield.

ULYSSES by Lord Alfred Tennyson  
*Published in 1842*

# Foreward

THE BUGLES WERE silent now. Their loud shrill notes had pierced the predawn darkness rousing those inside the Alamo from their slumber, sending them running to defend the mission's walls. Their assailants, anticipating the signal to begin the attack, raced toward the fortifications seeking to breach the defenses. Less than ninety minutes later the buglers on both sides had ceased their bugle calls. The Alamo had fallen.

The noise level diminished in the aftermath of the battle. Verbal commands, which previously could not be heard above the clamor of musket fire and cannon shot, were now audible. Orders were being issued both inside and outside the mission walls to stifle the cries of the wounded and dying. Mexican soldiers fanned out to give succor to their fallen comrades while also ensuring that there were no survivors among the Alamo defenders. *Generalissimo* Antonio López de Santa Anna had been very clear. Any of the *piratas* found alive were to be executed. There would be no mercy.

...

MATEO ESCOBEDO had been one of the Mexican buglers. Assigned to the *Cazadores de Matamoros* battalion, his sole responsibility had been to sound the charge when the order was given. But Mateo had never experienced combat; he was only eighteen, a frightened boy not a veteran. He had been so scared that his mouth was too dry to get any kind of sound to emit from the instrument in his hand, much less a series of notes with specific meaning to the men in his unit. Each battalion had someone expressly trained to communicate across the battlefield; the bugle able to rise above the chaos and confusion and convey orders without the need for speech.

Mateo tried to get his saliva to flow. At best he was able to wet his lips, but only a little. His mouth was dry, his throat parched. He took a sip of water from his canteen, but it did nothing to quench his thirst or help him assuage the dread that he felt about the impending battle. Like the soldiers around him awaiting the order to charge, he lay on the hard ground shivering from the cold, the dampness, anticipation, and the surge of adrenaline now coursing through his body.

*¡Adelante!* (Forward!) *¡A la carga!* (Charge!) *¡Asalto!* (Assault!) *¡Ataque!* (Attack!) These commands sent the assailants rushing forward toward the mission walls. The orders were issued at about 5:00 AM, but only after shouts of *¡Viva Santa Anna!* *¡Viva la Republica!* broke the silence first. Santa Anna had been positioning himself to observe the coming battle from the high ground opposite the north wall when the Mexican soldiers saw him and broke into cheers. The surprise spoiled; there was no recourse but to order the attack. Other buglers sounded the charge, but Mateo's bugle remained silent.

...

INSIDE THE MISSION, men still drowsy from the sleep they had been denied for days were unsure of what was happening. They heard the call to action, but it took several moments for them to realize that the long-awaited attack had begun.



PART ONE

A Walk Among  
the Ruins

## Chapter One

# Privilege and a Curse

IT WAS A beautiful fall day. The morning air was crisp and clean. There was hardly a cloud in the sky. It was the kind of day that brought locals and tourists alike to downtown San Antonio to see the sights, meander the hiking and bike trails along the San Antonio River or dine along its banks, shop at the Rivercenter Mall or one of the many boutique stores fronting the river, visit the art galleries and shops in the little village of La Villita, and take a tour of Texas' most revered historic site – the Alamo.

The old man walked across Alamo Plaza lost in thought. He'd covered these grounds multiple times; each visit held special memories. On this occasion he found himself staring up at the Cenotaph, the empty tomb that lay just outside of what remained of the Alamo.

For a time, the location of the 1836 battle had been allowed to languish in obscurity until Adina de Zavala and the De Zavala Chapter of the Daughters of the Republic of

Texas (DRT) stepped in to preserve landmarks important to Texas' history, including the Spanish missions that had all fallen into disrepair. Their initial efforts focused on the Alamo.

The Alamo chapel had been acquired by the State in 1883 with the City of San Antonio granted custody. However, no improvements to the structure had been made and ownership did not include the *Convento* or Long Barrack. Grocer Gustav Schmeltzer had the rights to that building and intended to sell it to developers. Adina de Zavala obtained the "right of first refusal" on the sale of the property from Gustav Schmeltzer and convinced Clara Driscoll, a ranching heiress and fellow member of the DRT, to purchase the property. Unfortunately, the two completely differed on its disposition after the purchase, with Adina de Zavala wanting to retain and restore the two-story building and Clara Driscoll advocating its destruction to be replaced by a park dedicated to the fallen.

The rift between the two women would result in a split within the DRT, and though a compromise between the two chapters was eventually reached calling for arbitration in the matter, it came only after Adina de Zavala chained herself to the Long Barrack, fasted, and refused to vacate the premises for three days. An outpouring of public support for her actions earned Adina the title "Angel of the Alamo," but the dispute over restoration would drag on for years. It remained unresolved when Clara Driscoll passed away in 1945, followed ten years later by the death of Adina de Zavala.

THE DAUGHTERS OF the Republic of Texas were no longer the Alamo's custodians. After 110 years of stewardship the Texas General Land Office had wrested control from the organization in 2015, citing negligence and mismanagement. Ever since the -Alamo Plan- to restore the mission to its original footprint and further elevate the status of the world-renowned landmark had languished because of political infighting over how to proceed.

...

THE OLD MAN'S thoughts were not focused on the politics that continued to inhibit progress. He had long thought the garish tourist businesses that fronted the church and Long Barrack anathema to the memory of those who had died here. Like many supporters of the new vision, he was excited about the possibility of a more honest and thorough understanding of the courage and sacrifice that characterized both Alamo defender and Mexican soldier on that fateful day. A more balanced portrayal would finally recognize Anglos, Tejanos (Mexicans born in Texas), and Mexicans, but the proposed changes aroused both passions and controversy.

The old man hoped that local and State planners could resolve their differences and indeed bring the dream to fruition, but the way forward was likely to take time, more time than the old man had. Still, unlike many who were unimpressed after visiting the Alamo because of the urban sprawl surrounding it and the few remaining buildings still in existence, the old man had never been disappointed.

He remembered fondly the exuberance of youth coming here for the first time with his dad in 1955. Like countless

other boys his age, he had been caught up in the Davy Crockett craze created by Walt Disney with the Disneyland TV series that ran on ABC from 1954 to 1955 and had gone with his granddad to see the theatrical film -Davy Crockett: King of the Wild Frontier- when it was released in the summer of 1955. Emulating the actor Fess Parker and his characterization of the frontier hero, he had donned a coonskin cap, worn a buckskin jacket, and carried a replica flintlock rifle accompanied by powder horn and a rubber "Bowie" knife. At age nine, he had acted out the part of the famous frontiersman on the small hill that sloped down from his family home. King of the Hill, a game often played with neighborhood friends, was replaced by reenactments of the battle. On most days he envisioned himself swinging -Old Betsy from the ramparts dying a glorious death as Mexican forces overwhelmed the Alamo defenders. On others, he ceded the part to friends and charged up the hill to take the life of the famous frontiersman. He didn't particularly like playing the part of a Mexican soldier; none of the boys did. They were the bad guys. But it was always fun to tumble down the hill, and then charge back up the slope over and over again before finally capturing the play fort constructed from cardboard boxes which sat at its summit.

That the Disney version was hardly rooted in historical fact hadn't mattered at that age. It, along with subsequent Hollywood film portrayals as well as multiple books about the battle, had led to a lifelong relationship with the Shrine to Texas Liberty that brought the old man back multiple times throughout the years and set in motion a hunger to understand what really happened here.

...

THE OLD MAN'S gait was hardly that of a boy of six. He walked tenuously with the help of a cane retracing steps that he had taken previously, each time learning something new or experiencing emotions unique to the focus of his thoughts on a particular visit. Perhaps it was his advanced age that now brought on moments of clarity that he couldn't possibly explain. Clarity...were he to share his experiences with anyone, he doubted they would classify his dreams, his intuitions, his feelings, his visions in the same manner. They would be seen as the delusions of an imaginative if not senile old man. He didn't mind, really. He rather preferred keeping these intuitive moments to himself. What he was experiencing was more than just a close bond forged over years of visits, historical research, reactions to fictional books and movies on the subject, and even working for a time as a docent under the tutelage of the curator and head of the educational department. He intimately sensed the presence of souls long deceased; he envisioned the circumstances under which they lived and died, he even felt their pain at the moment of their demise. Rather than dispel these ghosts, he reached out to them. His own earthly existence would be coming to an end soon enough. Would he, in turn, haunt someone else's thoughts and dreams? No, he lived a solitary existence, one of the consequences of living to a ripe old age. You saw your friends and family pass away as you continued to witness the years go by. He remembered his dad once saying, "It's hell to get old." His dad hadn't been referring to his aches and pains or the deterioration of both physical and mental

capacity that occurs over time. He had meant the loss of all those that he had loved.

The old man cherished the memory of every person that had been a part of his life, but even those memories were fading as his age-related dementia worsened. But this was different. He was being allowed a glimpse into the past that was beyond his own experience. He was literally being transported to a time and place that had sparked his imagination, had drawn him irrevocably and repeatedly onto the very ground where for thirteen days men and women had holed up inside a crumbling Spanish mission challenging Mexican authority.

By all rights Santa Anna was putting down a rebellion. At least Mexico perceived the defiance at the Alamo as an insurrection that had to be quelled to maintain sovereignty over its territory. The Anglos and Tejanos saw the issue differently, a fight for individual freedom against tyrannical rule. The old man felt himself engaged by both sides, given insights into their individual hopes, aspirations, and fears - a window into the souls of each participant in this historic confrontation.

Over 186 years after the fall of the Alamo historians, academics, novelists, and politicians still studied, interpreted, and argued over its significance while visitors from all over the world were drawn to the mission inspired by the mythological heights to which the story had risen over this span. But to be given the gift of sight into the actual event, to sense the presence of the deceased, to be visited by their ghosts and haunted in your sleep by their personal experiences was both exhilarating and frightening. It was definitely both a privilege and a curse.

## Chapter Two

# The Spirit of Sacrifice

THOUGH HE ATTEMPTED to put events, people, and his thoughts into context, there was no chronological order to the visceral sights, smells, emotions, physical pain or even dialogue that he experienced. Nor were his visions focused on any one person, race, or gender. It was as if all the souls of the dead and the few that had survived the siege and battle were reaching out to him. Sometimes these entreaties were profound; at other times they were lost in the ambient noise that engulfed downtown San Antonio and the Plaza, or jumbled and fragmented in dreams that, when he awoke often drenched in sweat from their intensity, he could not piece back together or remember.

When he was at the mission he sometimes participated in the regularly scheduled talks and presentations offered to the public at large regarding the battle or progress towards reimagining the Alamo. But he much preferred to be alone and focus on distant voices; echoes from the past that only



he perceived. Neither did he visit the Shrine, the Long Barrack, the Convento Courtyard, or the Cavalry Courtyard in any particular order. Sometimes he just meandered through the grounds; on other days he might visit only one of the locations.

Today the old man was one of several visitors at the Cenotaph located in the northwest section of the Plaza. The monument, *The Spirit of Sacrifice*, created by the sculptor Pompeo Coppini, had been completed in 1939 and formally dedicated in 1940. Its physical location marked the spot where many believed (at the time) that the Alamo defenders' bodies had been burned. That contention was no longer believed to be factual, and there had even been discussion on moving the monument. But the proposed move was controversial, and it had held up the Alamo Plan well past the city's 300<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2018. At least now, a decision had finally been made to leave the monument where it was, allowing the plan to move forward. As the old man gazed upward at the marble columns depicting the Alamo defenders, he fervently hoped that restoration of Coppini's work could finally be accomplished. The marble was crumbling, and the monument's structural integrity was severely compromised leaving the 60-foot-high monument on the verge of collapse.

The old man had always found the sculpture a moving tribute to the defenders. Certainly, the depictions of Travis, Crockett, Bowie, Bonham and those around them were mere caricatures of the men who were therein immortalized. Coppini had also failed to correctly etch or even include many of the Alamo defenders' names onto the structure, and there was no Tejano representation at all. Nonetheless the memorial continued to inspire him.

In particular, one side of the sculpture always held the old man's attention. A naked male figure ascending from the flames with his arms outstretched to the heavens adorned the south panel. Various civilizations and cultures had for millennia paid homage to their dead by burning their physical bodies and releasing their souls amidst the rising flames and smoke, symbolically allowing them to ascend towards their gods or God. The custom was common in ancient Greece (where the word pyre meant fire.) The practice was adopted by the Romans, and the Vikings believed the funeral rite allowed their deceased to enter Valhalla. The service, the burning of the corpse, was a means of venerating the individual and honoring his or her memory. It was not remotely what occurred after the fall of the Alamo.

...

ON THE MORNING of March 6<sup>th</sup> in the aftermath of the battle, Santa Anna entered the smoldering ruins of the mission. He approached on horseback and then entered via the opening in the north wall. The major breach in the defenses had occurred here. Under the command of *Teniente Coronel* Pedro Ampudia, the Mexican artillery had pounded the walls, moving the guns continuously throughout the course of the siege in order to find and exploit a weak point where ground forces could concentrate and penetrate when the final assault came. That vulnerability had proved to be the north wall. Despite efforts to shore up the breach with dirt and lumber; despite heroic efforts to repulse their attackers, the mass of humanity on the third attempt that morning at a breakthrough had finally overwhelmed the

defenders at this location. Once inside the walls, the outcome had been certain.

The Mexican soldiers that had participated in the assault gave way to Santa Anna and his entourage. The commander and his personal staff had not directly participated in the battle, Santa Anna preferring to watch its progress from the high ground north of the mission. But those that had fought their way into the Alamo were battle weary. Their uniforms were torn, encrusted with blood, and covered in dirt. Their countenance was haggard, hollow eyes staring out of recessed sockets from faces smeared with gunpowder residue from the discharge of their personal weapons and exploding ordnance. They were not the same men that in the early dawn had forfeited the element of total surprise by their exuberant cries of *¡Viva Santa Anna!* as His Excellency had maneuvered toward his viewing position. There were no cheers now. The price of victory had been too high.

At the breach in the north wall Santa Anna dismounted from his horse, handing the reins to the outstretched hands of one of the shell-shocked troops that had fought courageously and, by some miracle, had somehow survived. His entourage, made up of members of his staff and local civic leaders, followed suit.

The group included *Coronel* Juan María Bringas, *Teniente Coronel* José Enrique de la Peña, several junior officers, the *alcalde* (mayor) of San Antonio, Francisco Antonio Ruiz, and at least two other city officials who were charged with rendering aid to the Mexican wounded and carting off the dead. Santa Anna was most interested in identifying the corpses belonging to the three key leaders of the Texian and Tejano defenders: Colonel William Barrett Travis, David

Crockett, and Jim Bowie.

...

THE INITIAL IDENTIFICATION was soon accomplished. At the breach in the north wall was the body of Travis. He was found in a sitting position with his torso and head slumped over as if he were resting. However, the backside of his head displayed a gaping hole where most of the skull and brain matter had exploded outwards from the single musket ball that had entered his forehead. A shotgun lay beside the body, and it appeared that he had been attempting to fire it when he had himself been hit.

One of the major drawbacks for the defenders of the Alamo was the nature of the walls themselves. The mission had been fortified, of course, but it was a place of peace, originally constructed to house the Franciscan friars and their Coahuiltecan Indian converts to the Catholic faith. The thickness of the walls had been intended to ward off occasional Apache raids. Arrows and lances couldn't penetrate them, but concentrated musket or cannon fire was another matter entirely. There were also no portals on the outer walls from which a weapon could be fired. The defenders literally had to lean out over the three-foot-thick barriers to shoot down into their attackers. There was no other recourse but doing so exposed them to enemy fire.

...

OTHER THAN THE wound to his head, Travis' body was intact, which made the identification easy. The wavy

red hair was unkempt. Because of the suddenness of the Mexican assault, he had not had the opportunity to worry about his personal appearance before rushing to his battle position. And his deep blue eyes were open, frozen at the moment of his death, staring out at his onlookers as if trying to discern why they were gathered around him.

“Are you sure this is Travis?” Santa Anna asked of the alcalde.

“Yes, Your Excellency. The face has not been damaged and the military uniform is unmistakable. It is he.”

Santa Anna stared down at the corpse with contempt. Travis had come to Santa Anna’s attention long before he ever assumed command of the Alamo. The previous year he had aligned himself with the colonists and ascended to leadership of the -War Party- which favored fighting for independence from Mexico. He had led the separatists in an attack against the Mexican garrison in Anahuac capturing the post and its commander, *Capitan* Antonio Tenorio. Angered, Santa Anna had branded Travis a traitor. He now took particular satisfaction in his death.

“Let us move on,” said Santa Anna as he cast one last disdainful glance at the body.

...

THE CARNAGE WAS horrific and the stench overwhelming as Santa Anna’s party walked through the Alamo grounds. Though it was still early in the morning and decay of the bodies had not yet commenced, the sickly smell of blood combined with the nauseating odor of human entrails and feces permeated the air.

Francisco Ruiz became physically ill, unable to keep the bile from rising in his throat. He fell to his knees and vomited.

“Get up, *Señor* Ruiz,” said Santa Anna in disgust. “What did you expect to see in the aftermath of a battle? All wars, all battles are horrific. That is the nature of war. But, of course, you’ve never had to fight for your life, have you? You’ve never seen the results of men engaged in life-or-death struggles. How pathetic you are! Get up off your knees and proceed with the task at hand. You still have two more identifications to make.”

Making their way to the Long Barrack, the site of the most intense fighting, they encountered smoking rubble, bodies ripped apart, exposed entrails and body parts everywhere. The dead inside the building were stacked two, three, and four deep. Many were locked together in a grotesque last embrace with knife, sword, or hatchet embedded in their adversary’s torso. Others were riddled with musket balls or torn to pieces by shrapnel and cannon ball.

The defenders of the Long Barrack had reinforced all the entry points to the building by constructing barricades made from wood, rawhide, and stone, but these barriers had been blown apart by artillery fire that sent crushing rock and debris into the structure’s interior. Fighting positions, dug into the floor’s surface to position the Long Barrack defenders below the line of sight of the advancing Mexican troops and better shield them from enemy fire, instead became their graves.

...

THE INTENT OF the ditches was to cause those assaulting the position to stumble forward as they rushed in, unwittingly falling into the pits where they could be quickly dispatched by the defenders. But the ditches proved to be only partially effective and not for very long. As the Alamo's outer walls fell and men ran to their fallback positions in the Long Barrack to make a last stand, there was no time to destroy abandoned artillery pieces. The cannon remained fully functional and Mexican soldiers immediately recognized their usefulness. They turned the cannon against the Long Barrack to devastating effect.

The attacking Mexican force also quickly realized what was happening to the first wave of soldiers entering the building and adjusted their fire down onto those still holding out. It was absolute chaos inside with the pre-dawn darkness, dust, and black powder smoke obstructing vision. Both sides struggled to identify their adversary and the hand-to-hand fighting was intense. The fighting lasted for what seemed like an eternity (perhaps thirty to forty-five minutes). Finally, the few remaining defenders attempted to surrender, desperately waving a white flag. But their entreaties were for naught; elsewhere the fighting continued unabated which only incensed the Mexicans advancing on the Long Barrack. Moving room to room the Mexican soldiers dispatched the remaining resistance, even going up to the second floor and systematically killing the wounded, the injured, and the sick that were housed in the hospital ward.

...

SANTA ANNA viewed the butchery with indifference. His commanders had cautioned patience precisely to avoid heavy casualties, asking him to postpone the final assault a few more days to allow the large siege guns to finally arrive in San Antonio de Béxar. Those would have wreaked havoc and facilitated the Mexican Army's taking of the fortifications with fewer casualties. But the "Napoleon of the West" had scoffed at such timidity. There was no honor without sacrifice, and he valued the lives of his soldiers no more than *gallinas* (fighting cocks) in the blood sport that he enjoyed so much. He valued the lives of the Alamo defenders not at all. He looked upon the grotesque scene inside the Long Barrack with no show of remorse, no empathy for the deceased and total indifference to the loss of lives.

"*Señor Ruiz*, are either of the other two leaders amongst the dead?"

"*No, General.*"

"You do know that if you fail to properly identify their bodies, you will join them in death. Your sympathy lay with these interlopers. That is why you were placed under house arrest. You now have a chance to correct the error of your ways by pointing out these men. Do this and you will live. Fail me, and you will die."

"*General*, I assure you neither Bowie nor Crockett are here. I'm sure we will find them if we continue on," *Ruiz* responded in a quaking voice.

"*Coronel Bringas*," Santa Anna called the Mexican officer to his side.

"*Si, mi General.*"

"Have the ox carts brought inside the walls. Begin separating our fallen soldiers from among the dead. Make sure there is no error in the identification. There were many



traitors of Mexican heritage who fought with the Anglos. I want no mistakes.”

“*Entiendo.*” (I understand.) It will be done immediately, *General.*”

...

THE SOUTH WALL had been the location of the Low Barrack and main gate to the Alamo, and the entourage now made its way there. Jim Bowie’s body was found in a room just to the left of the gate.

Bowie had been too ill to continue his shared command with Travis and had relinquished his jurisdiction over the volunteer irregular forces inside the mission. When Colonel James Clinton O’Neill had left San Antonio de Béxar to attend to a family matter, he had turned over command to the twenty-six-year-old Travis. But there had been open dissension between the irregular volunteer forces under Bowie and Travis’ regular troops. Bowie’s men had demanded that a vote of confidence decide the matter and called for an election. The tally of votes resulted in a split decision with each faction endorsing Travis or Bowie in accordance with the existing rift between the two sides. With neither willing to concede the outcome, the two leaders settled into an uneasy agreement sharing the responsibility of command. However, Bowie had hardly entered the mission before his deteriorating health intervened to alter their arrangement.

It mattered not whether he or his men liked Travis; Bowie respected the young man’s commitment to fight for Texas independence and knew that he would be better able to render sound decisions on behalf of the beleaguered garrison. Travis would be able to lead by example, whereas

in his weakened condition Bowie would be bedridden and ineffective.

In fact, on the day of the final assault Bowie had been too weak to even resist his own death at the hands of the Mexican soldiers. Armed with the knife that bore his name and two pistols provided to him by Crockett the night before, it appeared that he had not even had the strength to lift his arms to fire the pistols or reach for the knife. No one will ever know for certain, but he very well may have been unconscious as the Mexican soldiers entered his room.

...

SANTA ANNA and his entourage were met by *Coronel* Juan N. Almonte and ushered inside the room that had housed Bowie. His Excellency had to step over and around bodies just outside the entrance to the room, but inside there was no sign that the Mexicans had encountered any resistance. The pistols were still lying by Bowie's side and his knife lay on the nightstand beside the bed upon which rested his lifeless body.

Bowie's body was riddled with musket balls and contained multiple bayonet wounds; his blood covered the linens and floor. The lacerations and puncture wounds were so severe that Almonte explained to Santa Anna that his soldiers had been so filled with blood lust at this point in the battle that they literally tried to raise his skewered body off the bed with their bayonets. They had temporarily succeeded in holding it aloft until he ordered them to desist.

Santa Anna picked up Bowie's knife from the nightstand. He twirled it in his hands, smirked at Almonte's description of Bowie's final moments, and then let it fall to the floor.

“So much for the great knife fighter, the esteemed hero of the Sandbar Fight, there is little need for any confirmation from you, *Señor Ruiz*.”

*Coronel* Almonte joined the others as they exited the room, and Santa Anna and his entourage proceeded towards the church.

...

OUTSIDE THE CHURCH, adjacent to the palisade that connected it to the south wall, Santa Anna was greeted by the spectacle of seven defenders on their knees with their hands bound behind their backs, under the guard of Mexican soldiers supervised by *General* Manuel Francisco Castrillon, his aide-de-camp.

“Allow me to explain,” began Castrillon.

He was cut off by Santa Anna in mid-sentence. The general’s face was crimson, and his tone of voice was harsh.

“Why are these men alive? Did I not say that there would not be any prisoners? Were they not warned there would be no quarter given?”

“Yes, Excellency. But I thought...”

Once again Santa Anna cut him off.

“I don’t give a damn what you thought. When I issue an order, I expect it to be obeyed!”

“Your Excellency, we are not butchers. These men fought valiantly and deserve clemency. The rules of warfare demand...”

“Enough! The rules of warfare be damned. I demand their deaths. *¡Maten ellos!* (Kill them!) *¡Ahora!* (Now!)”

Ironically the Mexican soldiers who had participated in the battle remained immobile in total disbelief. The general’s

personal staff, however, moved quickly to carry out his orders. All the prisoners were bayoneted or hacked to death with swords. Some died from repeated stab wounds, others from blows to their bodies that nearly cleaved them in half.

“Do not ever question my orders again, *General* Castrillon. Now, *Señor* Ruiz, you have one more body to locate and identify. Let us continue.”

Ruiz was shaken by what he had just witnessed, but answered in a quavering voice, “You just executed him, Your Excellency. Crockett was one of the prisoners.”

Santa Anna looked back at those just slain. “Which one?”

Ruiz pointed to Crockett’s lifeless body.

“This was the legendary frontiersman and Congressman? Humph, indeed.” Santa Anna gazed upon Crockett’s corpse. So much had been made of his exploits, even in Mexico. Yet what he saw was a middle-aged man who hadn’t lived up to that legend. He hadn’t fought to the very end. He’d been captured. How could that be possible? Did he ask for mercy? Santa Anna hadn’t witnessed any of the prisoners begging for their lives. That spoke well of him; all of them, actually. But how could this possibly be the man for whom plays had been written? There was nothing remarkable about him, nothing that would have identified him as the famed Davy Crockett; the killer of bears when he was but a small boy growing up in Tennessee, the great Indian fighter, sharpshooter, illustrious congressman, smooth-spoken humorist and orator, the subject of tall tales and stage productions. Why hadn’t he identified himself to his captors and entreated with them for his life? Santa Anna grudgingly admired the fact that he had not separated himself from the other captives, but the thought was only momentary. Like all the dead that had dared to defy him, Crockett had

sealed his own fate. He would not receive special treatment or recognition. His body would join with those of his compatriots.

Santa Anna turned to *General* Castrillon. "Collect the bodies, all the bodies. Coordinate with *Coronel* Bringas. Our soldiers are to be buried in the *Campo Santo*, but I want no trace of the piratas to remain. Strip them of anything of value and burn their remains."

...

AS ORDERED, the bodies of the Alamo defenders were unceremoniously stripped and hauled to the funeral pyres, dragged behind horses with ropes tied to their feet or stacked in ox carts, the bodies thrown one on top the other. There were several funeral pyres but except for the two lit in the *Alameda* their exact locations have been lost to history.

The work began around 3:00 PM and was concluded by 5:00 PM. Mexican officers supervised the gruesome task, but civilian laborers from the town were forced to handle the bodies as penance for their prior support of the defenders. The dead were stacked between layers of wood, with kindling and tallow added to ensure their total consumption by the flames. The pyres would burn for two days.

...

THERE WERE TEARS streaming down the old man's cheeks and the nauseating sweet smell of burning human flesh combined with the acrid stench of burning hair seemed to permeate the air and fill his nostrils. However, no

one else visiting the Cenotaph discerned anything amiss. Vendors sold *raspas* (shaved ice) in the Plaza, a born again Christian thumped his Bible and loudly proclaimed the second coming of Christ to anyone willing to listen, couples strolled arm-in-arm, children ran and played, and tourists checked their visitors guide to decide whether to enter the Shrine or buy tickets to the multiple entertainment attractions on Alamo Plaza: Ripley's Believe it or Not, Ripley's Haunted Adventure, Tomb Rider 3D, the Guinness World Records Museum, or Louis Tussaud's Waxworks.

One young couple did happen to notice the old man and the wife encouraged her reluctant husband to approach him.

"Are you alright, Sir? Do you require any assistance?"

At first the old man didn't answer. It took him a moment to come out of his trance and reply.

"No, thank you. I'll be OK."

"Are you sure? My wife is worried that you're in some kind of distress. Let me get one of the Texas Rangers at the Shrine's entrance to help you. Do you need medical care?"

"No, please. That isn't necessary. It's very kind of you, but I'm fine, really. I just had a moment lost in thought. I'm sorry that I alarmed your wife. Again, thank you for your consideration."

The woman's husband certainly didn't care to pursue the matter further. He turned his back to the old man retracing his steps to his wife. He shook his head in the negative and shrugged his shoulders, yet she persisted in her intent to ensure the old man's well-being. The woman pointed him out to a Texas Ranger and described the reason for her concern.

“There’s definitely something amiss with that old man standing next to the Cenotaph. He was just staring up at the monument and crying. He seemed oblivious to everyone and everything going on around him. Would you please check on his welfare? He may be in some kind of distress.”

“I’ll check Ma’am.”

...

THE OLD MAN saw that the woman had not let the matter drop. However, before the Ranger could respond and head towards him, he wiped the tears away with the sleeve of his shirt, gathered his composure, and taking one last glance at the monument, turned and headed towards Commerce Street.

## Chapter Three

# Bone Fragments and Ashes

THE OLD MAN was again lost in thought when he came upon the marker at the intersection of Commerce and Rusk that some said demarcated the approximate location of the two funeral pyres. The two pyres had been situated on opposite sides of what is now East Commerce Street, and the old man was aware that the marker was there. Most people, however, passed it by without ever realizing its presence.

Here had been the Alameda, a cluster of cottonwood trees that stretched along Commerce Street between the Alamo *acequia* (canal) and the *Acequia Madre de Valero* (series of canals that provided water to the mission and the town.) Bone fragments and ashes had been confirmed there in April 1836. But it would take another year, February 25<sup>th</sup>, 1837, before Colonel Juan Seguín returned to the city, had the remains exhumed, and honored them as those of the Alamo defenders at a military funeral and eulogy.



Supposedly, after the ceremony, the ashes and bone fragments were returned to their original location and re-interred. However, the area was not cordoned off or otherwise preserved in the ensuing years, and construction of commercial buildings at the location further ensured its anonymity.

In 1917 the De Zavala Chapter of the Texas Landmarks Association finally placed a historical marker on the M. Halff & Bros. building that occupied one of the sites. The marker read

*On this spot bodies of heroes slain at the Alamo were burned on a funeral pyre. Fragments of the bodies were afterwards buried here. This tablet is the gift of relatives of Green B. Jameson and of other friends.*

(Green B. Jameson was the chief engineer at the Alamo. He was killed during the battle.)

...

THE M. HALFF & BROS. building was torn down in 1968 to allow for further expansion of the *Paseo del Rio* (River Walk,) and while the plaque was removed and preserved, it wasn't replaced until 1995. As a result, though the location was far more likely than the site of the Cenotaph to be where the Alamo defenders' bodies had been burned and buried, it remained in relative obscurity. It neither elicited the interest nor the emotional impact that it deserved even amongst those who knew it was there.

The old man contemplated this irony and wondered to himself... had time and urban sprawl so clouded the issue of where the pyres had been that the actual locations were

no longer relevant? Why didn't he experience the same emotions and sensations at the Alameda that had caused him such anguish in the Plaza? The incident at the Cenotaph had unconsciously led him here...but, why? He didn't have any answers to these questions, and he was troubled by that.

...

WHENEVER THE old man had questions and was troubled by the inability to answer them, he sought solace and divine guidance in his faith. At a church, quiet contemplation and prayer might not always provide the answers he sought, but they always helped calm his spirit. He could be the only worshiper inside the sanctuary, but he never felt alone. His burdens were always lifted and the ghosts that haunted him dispersed, even if only temporarily.

The old man was not a Catholic, but his desire for comfort and solace led him this day to the doors of San Fernando Cathedral on Soledad Street. The cathedral was the seat of the Catholic Archdiocese in San Antonio and was the oldest cathedral in Texas. In 1836 it constituted the local parish.

The Cathedral's ties to the battle were well documented. The Mexican Army's approach towards the town had been observed by a Texian lookout stationed in the church tower. His alarm barely allowed enough time for the Alamo defenders to cross the river and take refuge inside the mission. The tower had also been used on that fateful day to signal Santa Anna's intentions toward those inside the Alamo. He ordered a blood red flag to be hoisted and flown in full view of those now huddled within the makeshift garrison.

The flag's significance was not lost on anyone watching the Mexican Army's occupation of the town they had just vacated. There would be no quarter, no mercy granted. All would be put to death.

The cathedral also purported to be the final resting place of the Alamo defenders. A plaque at the door reads:

*The remains of the Alamo heroes are  
entombed in the chapel at the left hand  
side of the entrance to the cathedral.*

These remains had been found on the grounds of the cathedral in 1936 and placed in the marble ossuary that now greeted visitors and parishioners; they were supposedly the same ashes and bone fragments that Juan Seguín had commemorated in 1837. Yet, if the original wooden coffin unearthed there was the same as that used for the military funeral nearly a hundred years earlier, how did the confusion over the final resting place occur? Were the remains at the Alameda or were they here?

Since their discovery in 1936 the Catholic Church had vouched for their authenticity. Yet, it was common practice for the remains of Catholic priests to be buried on-site. Were these the vestiges of unknown Franciscan friars, or were these the remains of the Alamo defenders? The old man didn't know. But, once again, he felt that some force, some power beyond reason had led him here.

...

THE OLD MAN entered the cathedral and gazed upon the marble crypt that had replaced the decayed wooden coffin. Chiseled into the marble were the names of Crockett, Travis and Bowie. Common sense told him to be skeptical. If

the bodies were burned beyond recognition how could the Catholic Church or anyone for that matter, be sure they belonged to the famous triumvirate? If Juan Seguín returned the ashes to the Alameda after the military ceremony in 1837, when and how did they wind up inside the church? Such an assertion defied credibility, yet the faithful and visitors to cathedral were asked to believe that this was indeed the final resting place for those immolated at the Alamo.

Kneeling in prayer, the old man's thoughts drifted. He'd been focused on the disposition of the ashes from the funeral pyres, but there had also been burials after the historic clash. What of these men?

...

THE ALCALDE OF San Antonio had also been tasked by Santa Anna to accomplish the burial of the Mexican soldiers killed in the battle. The logical location was the Catholic cemetery that lay west of the town's center. The size of the Campo Santo, however, was inadequate to the numbers of soldiers killed. There were no firm estimates of casualties, but most historians put the number between 200 and 600, dead and wounded. At least a third of those comprised the number that could be accommodated within the cemetery grounds.

The dilemma was what to do with those who couldn't be buried there. Some maintained that those unfortunate souls had been cast aside into the San Antonio River. These thoughts conjured images of bloated carcasses being fed upon by vultures. The stench of burning flesh and decomposing bodies had brought hundreds of them circling over the battle site, the funeral pyres, and the Campo Santo.

That much was certain. But whether the images that now plagued the old man were real or were just products of his imagination, he couldn't be certain. Fabricated or not, however, these men mattered. For as long as he could recall, only the Texian defenders' fate resonated within the public's conscience. That was now changing. There was more consideration being given to the collective memory of all those who had died at the Alamo...Texians, Tejanos, and Mexican soldiers. The former had fought against perceived oppression. The latter fought out of duty to their country. But all their souls cried out for remembrance.

## Chapter Four

# Inconsolable Grief

SANTA ANNA had shown callous indifference to the fate of his own soldiers and had disrespected the men he referred to as pirates and interlopers. So, it was surprising that he showed compassion towards Francisco Esparza, allowing him to search the battlegrounds for the corpse of his brother, Gregorio, one of the Alamo defenders.

José Maria Esparza, otherwise known as Gregorio, had been the last man to enter the compound on February 23<sup>rd</sup>. Accompanying him had been his wife, Ana, his stepdaughter Maria, and his three sons Enrique, Manuel, and Francisco. All would be present during the entire thirteen-day siege, and while his wife and children would survive, Gregorio would die alongside Almeron Dickinson manning the cannon at the rear of the church.

Santa Anna had been approached by Francisco Esparza after the final assault on March 6<sup>th</sup>. The *generalissimo* had already conducted his personal tour of the carnage, satisfying himself that the leaders of the rebellion were indeed dead. He was now resting in his tent dressed only in a cotton

muslin nightshift when informed by *Coronel* Almonte that a member of the *Leal Presidios Compania*, a local defense unit of the Mexican Army, was requesting an audience. Surprisingly, Santa Anna acquiesced to the petition.

Francisco Esparza rendered a crisp salute as he stood before Santa Anna. His heart was lodged firmly in his throat, and his knees trembled as he awaited recognition and permission to speak.

“You have something you wish to discuss with me?”

“If I may, Your Excellency.”

“I’m told by *Coronel* Almonte that you are a member of the local defense unit, and you previously served under *General* Cos. You had orders to be ready in case you were needed in these last days. Let us hope that this time you contributed to our glorious victory, instead of losing as you did under his command.”

“I was never called upon to participate, Excellency.”

“Humph, then what is your purpose here?”

Francisco Esparza’s voice faltered as he tried to articulate his reason for being there.

“Speak up!” ordered Santa Anna.

“I’ve come to plead for mercy, Your Excellency.”

“Mercy? What have you done? I’ve received no reports of improper conduct.”

“I’m here to plead on behalf of my brother. He was killed in the battle, and I wish that he receive a Christian burial.”

“I’ve already issued instructions for disposition of the bodies. Their removal from the compound is already underway. The soldiers who perished in the fight are to be buried in the Campo Santo. You are wasting my time. Go and speak with the *alcalde* of San Antonio... *Coronel* Almonte!”

“*Si, General.*” *Coronel* Almonte answered as he stepped forward.

“Remove this man from my presence. He does not need to consult with me about burial arrangements.”

“*Con su permiso*, (with you permission), *General*, he does. His brother was one of the defenders in the mission.”

There was a prolonged silence in the tent, and anger showed in Santa Anna’s face. The silence was finally broken by Francisco Esparza.

“*General*, I know that you have ordered the defenders’ bodies burned to remove all trace of their rebellion and to serve as a cautionary statement to the living. In no way do I wish to undermine those orders. I’m pleading for your clemency in this one instance on behalf of my family. We are Catholics. My brothers and I wish to have a Christian burial for Gregorio because of our faith. We are not asking that his grave be marked or otherwise identified; we alone will know of its location. We are not petitioning for his participation in the resistance to be in any way commemorated, only that his body be blessed and cleansed of its sins by a priest. He paid for his defiance with his life, but you have the power to grant him eternal life through absolution. Please, Your Excellency, show compassion for the living who have remained loyal to you. Let me search for his body and bury it according to my religion. I do not agree with what he did, but he was blood of my blood. He was my brother.”

After finishing his petition, Francisco prostrated himself at the feet of Santa Anna.

“You may not have participated in the recent battle, but it took courage for you to consider much less make such a request of me,” answered Santa Anna. “I have no compassion for anyone who defies me, yet I’m not a monster,”



he continued. "Your petition is granted. *Coronel* Almonte, see to it."

Before rising to his feet Francisco asked the general for one more favor. He asked to intercede on behalf of his brother's family members if they had indeed survived the battle.

"You are testing my patience," responded Santa Anna. I intend to personally interrogate any survivors. If, after questioning, they pose no further threat to the Republic of Mexico, they will be released. Otherwise, they will be held accountable for their treason. Now go before I change my mind."

...

THE REMOVAL OF the dead was ongoing as Francisco along with his brothers, Antonio and Victor, began their search. They started by viewing the bodies already stacked in the carts or tossed in piles outside the walls. Gregorio Esparza was not among them.

Inside the Alamo church, the last site they searched and the one remaining location where the bodies had not yet been recovered, they found their brother. His body lay by the cannon in the back of the structure alongside other crew members. He had been shot in the chest and stabbed.

Despite their political differences, it was impossible for the Esparza brothers to be unmoved by the sight of their dead sibling. Francisco cradled Gregorio's lifeless body in his arms as if he were holding a child and succumbed to uncontrolled sobbing and tears. Antonio and Victor tried to remain stalwart, but also found themselves crying.

They remained in a state of inconsolable grief even after the burial. Families might be split apart by allegiances. They might argue the virtues of one versus the other. They might contest amongst themselves the rightness or wrongness of their respective positions. But even when circumstance and ideology pitted brother against brother on opposite sides, the death of one or the other still evoked thoughts of childhood, of shared experiences and memories, of a love whose bond was stronger than any other consideration.

They buried their brother on the west side of San Pedro Creek near the San Fernando Cathedral. As stipulated, the grave was unmarked and lost to history.

...

THE OLD MAN grieved for all those whose lives were ended or shattered by the Battle of the Alamo. To venerate only one group and negate the memory of the others was a disservice to the individuals that died there. They had all fought and perished for what they believed in, whether that was the establishment of an independent Texas or preservation of Mexican sovereignty. He wasn't alone in these thoughts, nor did they diminish his or others regard for the defenders of the Alamo. They just recognized the individual motivation and sacrifice of all those who died. He was aware that in past years such thoughts would have been considered blasphemy, but he hoped that a more enlightened view of the battle was emerging; one that recognized the sacrifice of the Alamo defenders, but one that also recognized the bravery of all participants.

Courage and valor are not the purview of one side or the other. Certainly, the right or wrong of a particular cause

can be debated, but even men who respond and fight for an unjust cause display both attributes. The common soldier thrown into the fray is just trying to survive, just wants the war to end so he can go home to friends and family, and in the moment fights not for ideology or national aspirations but for his buddies, the men next to him who share the same hopes and fears, the same hardships or deprivations, the same desire for the end to all conflicts.

Going into the fight most individuals have no idea how they will react under fire. Will they stand? Will they run? Courage is defined by doing extraordinary things under extraordinary circumstances. Valor is the willingness to sacrifice one's own life for someone else. Neither is determined by a national flag.

## Chapter Five

# Grit and Determination

WHEN THE OLD MAN reflected on his own health, his thoughts turned to the medical care and procedures that had existed in 1836. At best, they were rudimentary. Diagnosis of disease and treatments were subjective, medicines sparse and sanitary conditions almost non-existent. Bowie had been stricken by pneumonia, tuberculosis, or typhus; the uncertainty of his exact illness limited any attempts by physicians to render proper aid.

Dysentery was a common malaise within the garrison. It was frequently treated with nothing more than broth made from tree bark.

“My God, Doc... what the hell is this? I can’t drink that. It’s nothing but dirty foul-smelling water.”

“Just hold your nose and get it down. It’ll settle your stomach and keep you from runnin’ to the privy constantly. That ditch is all but full already and it stinks a hell of a lot worse than the cure.”

“Doc, if it weren’t for the fact that I’m likely to soil my britches before ever reaching the ditch, and this is the only pair I got, I’d pass on your elixir. Guess I ain’t got much choice though so... over the lips and over the gums, look out, tummy, here it comes!”

The humorous saying aside, the vile tasting liquid did help to ease associated stomach cramping. However, it did nothing to fight the pathogens causing the condition. Liquid feces overflowed the chamber pots, slop buckets and trenches dug to hold the human waste.

...

LIKEWISE, INJURIES and wounds, without proper sanitation or the administration of antibiotics, festered and putrefied. Surgeries were performed without the benefit of anesthesia. Whiskey or other spirits, when available, were given to dull the senses or otherwise cause the patient to pass out. When non-existent or in short supply, individuals had a leather bit fitted between their teeth to keep them from biting off their tongue as musket balls were extracted, cuts were sutured, broken bones were set, or limbs were removed. The fortunate were those that lost consciousness.

The Alamo hospital, such as it was, existed on the second floor of the Long Barrack (the structure that exists today is a one-story building, the northern end containing an exhibit representative of the medical devices and surgical instruments available to the five physicians and chief surgeon, Amos Pollard, who treated upwards of perhaps sixty to seventy-five patients during the thirteen-day siege). Their ministrations, in addition to the maladies already mentioned, were also directed at malnutrition and

dehydration; the lack of food and water factored into the grim reality of day-to-day existence inside the mission.

...

THE LACK OF food resulted from the unanticipated arrival of the Mexican Army. There had been no time to adequately provision the garrison. The sighting of Mexican forces approaching the town had caught the Texians totally unprepared; only the night before they had been celebrating George Washington's Birthday at a festive *fandango* (dance.)

It wasn't that the Mexican government's response was unexpected. There had been no illusion that Santa Anna would not march on San Antonio de Béxar to put down the rebellion, but no one had expected him to assemble an army as rapidly as he did, much less mount a forced march at that time of year. To move a large army and accompanying livestock (horses, oxen and cattle), it was assumed that Santa Anna would have to wait for the spring grass.

*General* Martin Perfecto de Cos had surrendered San Antonio de Béxar on December 9, 1835; no one believed that Santa Anna could react to his brother-in-law's capitulation quickly. However, he defied expectations by assembling and equipping his army less than a month later at San Luis Potosí, moving to Saltillo on January 7<sup>th</sup> and commencing his march towards San Antonio de Béxar on January 26<sup>th</sup>.

The Mexican Army would cross the Rio Grande on February 16<sup>th</sup>. Were it not for a swollen Medina River which halted progress just eight miles outside of San Antonio de Béxar, it likely would have captured the town with little to no resistance. As it was the army had to wait until the river receded delaying their arrival until February 23<sup>rd</sup>.

Nonetheless, Santa Anna and the vanguard of his army had traversed a distance of 365 miles in just twenty-nine days.

...

IMITATING NAPOLEON'S march on Russia, Santa Anna's army would surmount an unexpected blizzard (as they traveled through the barren country of northern Mexico), hunger and thirst (the scarcity of water and food for both men and livestock en route,) constant harassment along the way (Indian attacks), and inhospitable terrain (traversing both desert and mountain topography). The feat was a stroke of military genius, grit and determination; its accomplishment all but lost within the context of the Alamo story. It wasn't appreciated in its own time, and it is only now that historians recognize Santa Anna's audacity and the sacrifices of his army to bring it about. An estimated 400 to 700 Mexican soldiers, mostly conscripts of Mayan descent that had never before experienced any environment beyond the tropics, died en route, far more than perished in the actual battle.

...

TRAVIS ACKNOWLEDGED the initial scarcity of food within the Alamo in a postscript to his famous petition for succor dated February 24<sup>th</sup>:

*The Lord is on our side -  
When the enemy appeared in sight  
we had not three bushels of corn -  
We have since found in deserted  
houses 80 or 90 bushels & got into*

*the walls 20 or 30 head of Beeves.*

The food would have to sustain the garrison (approximately 250 defenders) for the duration of the siege.

...

THE OTHER SCARCITY that would adversely affect everyone even more than food was the lack of potable water. The acequias providing this precious commodity to the mission had their source external to the walls and Santa Anna quickly moved to cut off the flow from the San Antonio River. While the human body can endure starvation for a prolonged period, water was absolutely essential. The one existing well couldn't possibly sustain that many individuals, and though additional wells were dug within the compound in the hopes of meeting the necessity for more water, digging down into the caliche was arduous work, especially to a depth where water might exist. What little was found under the sedimentary rock and clay was inadequate to requirements and everyone inside the Alamo suffered.

...

THE OLD MAN acutely experienced the misery of the women and children. In particular, he heard the entreaties of the very young who cried out for want of food and water. "Momma, I'm hungry...Momma, I'm thirsty." He also heard the wailing of the children too young to speak. The babies seemed to cry both night and day and their pitiful squalling affected him deeply. He also felt for their mothers and their inability to do much to comfort them. Rocking the



babies back and forth or holding the toddlers did nothing to change their situation.

The meager rations of ground corn meal, salt pork and limited beef provided some sustenance but were insufficient and poor substitutes for the more balanced and nutritional diet that the children needed. The lack of water exacerbated their plight. Deficient liquid intake resulted in dehydration as well as digestive disorders. Mothers did the best they could, depriving themselves to nourish their children. They wiped away their tears and held their little bodies to their bosoms, promising relief when in their hearts they knew that no such respite was likely forthcoming.

The men with families also sacrificed to give to their wives and children all that they had. As a result, their strength diminished, which opened them up to sickness and lessened their ability to fight effectively.

...

BAD WEATHER ONLY added to their suffering. A strong blue norther blew in on February 25<sup>th</sup> lowering temperatures precipitously, changing the dynamic from unseasonal oppressive heat one day to near freezing cold the next. Few had winter clothing and everyone with access to a blanket huddled under it in a futile attempt to get warm. The front also brought steady rainfall which added to their wretchedness. It doused the fires from their dwindling supply of firewood producing more smoke than heat.

Conditions inside the Alamo became increasingly intolerable.

...

UNQUESTIONABLY THE Mexican forces faced deprivations of their own. However, they had the advantage of being able to forage for food and their water supply was plentiful. And, though the cold affected everyone, the enlisted men who bivouacked outdoors had ample access to firewood while their officers lodged in San Antonio de Béxar and the little village of La Villita enjoying the comforts afforded them in local housing.

...

MATEO ESCOBEDO sat by the fire embracing its warmth and reflecting on just how he had come to this moment. He had been a goat herder before being conscripted into the army. It had happened suddenly. Mounted soldiers had approached him as he was tending to the animals.

Mateo greeted them, wary of their intentions or purpose. “*Hola Señores*. I do not often see *soldados* passing this way.”

“We are on our way to San Antonio de Béxar, and we are scouting for new recruits on behalf of His Excellency Antonio López de Santa Anna.”

Mateo had an uneasy feeling in the pit of his stomach.

“I know nothing of soldiering, *Señores*. I tend to my goats and my grandfather with whom I live in the village nearby.”

“Just the two of you?”

“*Si*. When cholera swept through this area I lost my mother, father, and grandmother. So, it is just the two of us now.”

“A pity. Your grandfather will miss you.”

“¿Perdon?” Mateo knew exactly what the implication of the soldier’s remark meant, but he still couldn’t believe his ears.

“You are as of this moment a Mexican soldier, and you will return with us to our camp where you will begin your training. If you resist, you still will not be going home, and your goats... let us just say they will be bleating over your bones. Do I make myself clear?”

Mateo had only been able to nod his head in acknowledgement. As he left his former life behind him, he wondered what would happen to his grandfather when he didn’t return home. Would the villagers learn of his “recruitment”? Would the women of his village care for his grandfather? Would the men tend to the goats? He doubted that he would ever know.

...

IT WAS FORTUNATE for Mateo that when the soldiers took him, he had been wearing an old bugle which he had found rusting in the hills above his village. He had removed it from a skeleton that he chanced upon one day while herding his goats. The bones were still clothed in a Mexican soldier’s uniform now tattered and torn. An arrow protruded from the rib cage; more than likely the result of a skirmish with the Apache which had occurred sometime long ago.

It was somewhat astounding that a lone soldier’s body was the only one that Mateo found. If victorious, the army normally carried off its dead and wounded, and if defeated the Apache would usually strip the dead of any valuables. It was surprising that they had not taken the bugle.

After obtaining a bugle the Apache were known to use it to fool their enemies. The subterfuge of withdrawing against a well-armed adversary or well-defended position (whether settler or military) tricked their enemy into believing that a relief column was on the way by imitating its bugle calls. The Apache would only pretend to flee, all the while waiting for the unsuspecting individuals to let their guard down and expose themselves before swooping in for the kill.

...

MATEO HAD NEVER played any kind of instrument, and at first the sounds that he coaxed from the old trumpet were hardly notes of any kind. Yet he persisted, eventually able to at least make loud noises that deterred predators endangering his goats. Now he would be given proper instruction as a Mexican bugler. It was his only consolation as he considered life's unexpected twists and turns.

Buglers were highly regarded in the Mexican Army and Mateo soon learned the notes that caused men to turn right or left, to go to prayer or to dinner, to charge or retreat. Because of this uncanny ability to quickly master the instrument he was issued a uniform and boots instead of the cotton clothing and sandals that he had previously worn. The uniforms were discards, surplus clothing from Napoleon's army. The heavy wool cloth was ill-suited for the climate in Mexico and Texas, but on the march towards the Alamo they proved to be life-saving garments.

The blizzard that struck the Mexican Army as it crossed the desert and mountainous terrain of northern Mexico was deadly. Bitterly cold wind, rain and snow turned the ground

into mud. Men and pack animals froze to death. Mateo was one of the fortunate who survived.

## Chapter Six

# By the Grace of God

IN SPITE OF the harsh conditions inside the Alamo, only a single woman opted to accept Santa Anna's offer of safe passage to women and children of Mexican descent. Concepción Losoya and her son, Juan Trinidad Saucedo, left during a three-day armistice that began on February 29<sup>th</sup>.

Such decisions did not come easily. In the approaching encounter, it was highly likely that women and children would also be wounded and killed. The fog of war and the confusion of battle rendered it almost a certainty. And if they left the mission, they did so with the certain knowledge that their husbands would not survive. All combatants were to be put to the sword.

Toribio Losoya watched his family leave through the south gate. He and Concepción had tearfully bid each other farewell, embracing for the last time. Toribio had also held his son close, looking into his eyes and saying a prayer for his future.

As the wagon exited and the gate closed, Concepción did not look back. She knew that she would never see Toribio again.

...

SUSANNAH DICKINSON cradled the youngest child within the Alamo, fifteen-month-old Angelina Elizabeth, in her arms. The child was sleeping at the moment, a situation that would not last when the Mexican cannon began their bombardment yet again. The temporary truce had allowed a lull in the shelling, and Almeron Dickinson sat by his wife's side entreating her to leave for the sake of their daughter.

"Sue, you've got to go. Angelina's whole life is ahead of her. We can't risk that. Anything might happen to her, or you when the final attack comes."

"I'm not leaving you!"

"I know you love me, Sue, but my fate is sealed. Yours is not. Why risk injury or death for either of you? Go while you can."

"What kind of wife would I be if left now? We've faced everything together up to this moment. Our deaths are no different. I'm not leaving."

"Sue, you're not deserting me. You'll be in my thoughts and prayers come what may, but I need to know that you'll be OK. There is no guarantee if you stay."

"Almeron, there are no guarantees no matter what I do, and I've made up my mind. I'm not leaving!"

"Lord you are one hardheaded woman, but I love you for it. Promise me, at least, that you'll stay hidden within the sacristy when the time comes. That's the safest place for you. We'll defend the church, but the side rooms should

shelter you until the fighting in the main hall is over. By then, my hope is that the Mexicans will realize there are no other combatants in those rooms.”

At that moment William Travis interrupted their talk.

“It’s now or never. The truce won’t hold much longer.”

“I can’t get her to go, Colonel. You can try but I doubt it’ll do any good.”

“Captain Dickinson, it’s not my place to force my will on anyone. This is between you and your wife. However, were I to advise you Madam; I would tell you to take your child to safety.”

Travis then removed a cat’s-eye ring from his finger, placed it on a string, and put it around the sleeping child’s neck.

“I’d give this to my son were he here and send him away. In his absence, I’d like your daughter to have it. Whether you leave or stay is up to you but, whatever you decide, keep her safe.”

...

UNLIKE CONCEPCION LOSOYA, Susannah Dickinson would see her husband one last time on March 6<sup>th</sup>. Just before he was killed, he burst into the sacristy. His final words to her were:

*Great God, Sue! The Mexicans are  
inside our walls! All is lost!  
If they spare you, love our child.*

...



GREGORIO ESPARZA'S wife, Ana, had four children to consider, but like Susannah Dickinson decided to stay. Gregorio served as a private under the command of Almeron Dickinson; the cannon crew provided the last bulwark of defense inside the church.

On the final day, when the barricades were blown away and the Mexican soldiers poured into the church, both women and their children gathered together inside the sacristy could not help but hear the screams of the wounded and dying. And because no roof had ever been completed on any of the rooms within the structure, they may have even witnessed the fighting and the deaths of their husbands.

...

IT WAS ONLY by the grace of God that any of the women and children were spared. Blood lust is hard to contain, and indiscriminate deaths were bound to happen. The old man visualized at least one woman being killed while attempting to escape the bloodbath inside the chapel, and he also saw one young man shot trying to place a blanket over his head, the sudden movement resulting in the musket volley that caused his death.

No names were attributed to the two victims; however, there were many inside the Alamo whose names were never recorded on the rolls. These individuals preferred anonymity to ensure that no retribution could be taken against living relatives should the Alamo fall.

...

OF THE 189 known defenders who died at the Alamo, only the names of nine Tejanos have been recorded:

Juan Abamillo  
Juan Antonio Badillo  
Carlos Espalier  
Gregorio Esparza  
Antonio Fuentes  
José Maria Guerrero  
Damacio Jimenez  
José Toribio Losoya  
Andrés Nava

There were undoubtedly many more that perished in the battle.

## Chapter Seven

# Luck, Guile, and Divine Intervention

THE OLD MAN was in the final stages of congestive heart failure and knew that he was subject to a heart attack or stroke at any time. Yet he remained philosophical about his condition. He had lived longer than he expected. He had survived wars and the death of his wife and only child. If it was his time, so be it. He had no regrets.

He'd experienced the emotional toll of surviving while brothers-in-arms and loved ones died. While serving in the military he'd shared the same fox holes with buddies killed in battle, questioning why he'd survived, and they had not. He'd endured the pain of watching his wife slowly succumb to cervical cancer; the surgeries, radiation and chemo treatments wasting away her body but failing to cure the disease. He'd railed against God when his only son had been killed in an automobile accident, questioning why he could not have been taken in his place. So, he firmly believed that

his heart condition was as much the result of emotional damage as organ failure.

The old man also understood that survival required the will to go on despite the circumstance; and sometimes it was just sheer luck, guile, or divine intervention that determined one's fate.

There were several survivors of the battle of the Alamo. Each owed their continued existence to one of these factors.

...

DIVINE INTERVENTION in the guise of a Mexican officer stopped further deaths among the non-combatants inside the church. The soldiers were understandably on edge, the lighting was poor, and the black gun smoke further diminished visibility. After overcoming fierce resistance that had seen countless dead and wounded within their ranks, those that fought their way into the last fortified position could hardly be faulted for shooting at anything that moved.

The carnage could easily have been much worse. At least two (perhaps more) were killed before the screams and cries of women and children could be discerned and the order to stop firing issued.

The Mexican soldiers responsible for those deaths were not heartless cruel villains indifferent to the loss of innocent lives. The fog of war didn't inure them from the consequences of their actions. Several were stunned by the realization of what they had done. One fell to his knees crying out; "*Dios mio, Dios mio.*" (My God, My God.) "*Perdoname.*" (Forgive me.) Another dropped his weapon and tenderly took the body of a woman killed by the indiscriminate

fire into his arms, smoothing her hair back, and caressing her face as he wept uncontrollably.

...

SUSANNA DICKINSON is the most well-known of all the survivors; at one point she was incorrectly cited as the sole survivor. However, the Veramendis counted numerous family members and household servants among those that outlived the battle - Juana Navarro Alsbury and her eighteen-month-old son Alijo Perez, her fifteen-year-old sister, Gertrudis Navarro, and the family's slaves, Charlie and Bettie.

Others included Gregorio Esparza's wife and their four children, Juana Francisca Melton, the wife of the Alamo quartermaster, Lieutenant Eliel Melton, Victoria de Salinas, a friend of the Esparza family (along with her three young daughters,) Petra Gonzales, an elderly relation to the Esparza family, and Trinidad Saucedo, a companion to *Doña* Petra.

In the aftermath of the battle each of the adults would be interrogated, but none possessed information of any military value. They had been sequestered during the fighting and most, if not all of them, were traumatized and in shock. Upon their release they would each receive a blanket and two dollars to sustain them as they made their way back to their homes or travelled to other parts of Texas.

...

LUCK PLAYED a role in Henry Warnell's escape after the battle. Badly wounded, he nonetheless crawled out of

the wreckage, avoided detection, and willed himself onward eventually receiving assistance and transport to Port Lavaca, 137 miles southeast of San Antonio on the Texas Gulf Coast. Despite his grave condition, he lingered in and out of consciousness, eventually succumbing to his injuries in June 1836.

...

GUILE WAS THE major factor in Brigido Guerrero's experience. A deserter from the Mexican Army who joined the Alamo defenders, he avoided certain death by claiming to have been a Texian prisoner. His tale was viewed with skepticism, but he gave a convincing performance bolstered by the fact that he had locked himself into a cell within the Alamo and was unarmed when found by Mexican soldiers.

It took a moment for the soldiers to determine that Brigido Guerrero was unarmed, and in that moment one of the soldiers fired his weapon hitting him in the side. Fortunately, the musket ball went clean through without hitting vital organs or bone.

Guerrero cried out; "I am a prisoner, not an adversary. Don't kill me!"

Confused, the soldiers ceased firing, and called for an officer or senior non-commissioned officer to decide his fate. A grizzled sergeant answered their call.

"Why are you in this holding cell, *Señor*? Why should your life be spared? Are you not one of the conspirators?"

"I'm no conspirator. I got caught up in the melee of folks escaping the town and found myself inside the mission. They locked me up in here because I refused to take up

arms in support of their cause. I'm not one of them! Please, I need medical attention."

The sergeant wasn't totally convinced, but because of Brigido Guerrero's fluency in Spanish gave him the benefit of the doubt.

"Get someone to attend to this man's wound. Keep him in this cell until ordered otherwise."

While other male survivors were rounded up and summarily executed after the battle, Brigido Guerrero was eventually set free.

...

SOME WOULD ARGUE that cowardice had spared Amos Moses Rose's life. Rose was the only Alamo defender to disappear over the walls after Travis had allowed each man to defer to his own conscience in electing to stay or attempt an escape.

Rose had been a French soldier in Napoleon's army that marched against Moscow. He remembered all too clearly the trek through Russia during the dead of winter, the unrelenting cold and snow that saw comrades die of frostbite and starvation in addition to the countless deaths incurred in battle. How he'd survived, he had no idea. But he had survived; against all odds he had lived and immigrated to Texas where he was now being asked to forfeit his life, a life that should have ended in the frozen wastelands of Russia along with Napoleon's dream of conquest. The men within these walls also had dreams of a Texas republic free from Mexican oppression. Was their dream now worth sacrificing his own life? He'd been given a second chance. He'd walked

away when so many others had not. Should he now waste that miracle on a cause that only offered certain death to those in the Alamo? Rose wrestled with the decision, but ultimately concluded that having cheated death once, he now very much wanted to live.

Neither animosity nor recriminations were on the minds of those who watched him ease over the walls in the dark of night. With all their hearts they prayed for his successful escape. One after another had stopped by in the moments before his departure to shake his hand, clap him on the back, or silently nod their understanding.

While some might consider Rose's action cowardice, the men inside the Alamo did not. Neither did the old man.

...

THERE WERE OTHERS whom divine intervention saved on the morning of March 6<sup>th</sup>. People of color like Charlie and Bettie, Joe, and possibly Sam probably owed their lives to their race. The institution of slavery had been abolished by the Mexican government in 1829 but had been allowed to exist in Texas under the rubric of indentured servitude. The Veramendis and men like Travis and Bowie brought their property with them into the Alamo. In this instance, however, the color of their skin had not condemned blacks but had actually protected them and their lives were spared.

...

TRAVIS' SLAVE JOE would live to tell his story after the battle. Joe had responded to his master's rallying cry as the Mexican attack began:



*The Mexicans are upon us boys.*

*Let's give them hell!*

Accompanying Travis to the north wall, he had been prepared to fight and die alongside him; but with the suddenness of his owner's death in the early moments of the battle, Joe had instead dropped his weapon and retreated to the relative safety of one of the rooms inside the west wall. There he cowered and awaited his fate. Fortunately, providence smiled on him.

...

SAM WAS JIM Bowie's slave. He felt no particular allegiance to his master, who simply regarded Sam as his property and had traded and sold countless slaves without taking into consideration the benevolence or depravity of the buyers, or any attempt on their part to maintain family integrity. Bowie had profited over their sale without any consideration of their fate or their humanity.

Whether Sam was even at the Alamo, however, is a matter of conjecture. He is known to have accompanied Bowie on slave-trading trips but whether he was with him in San Antonio de Béxar is speculative. The old man had found no credible account of his disposition in historical records.

...

CHARLIE AND BETTIE made it through. Charlie had performed household tasks for the Veramendis, and Bettie had been their cook. But two other former slaves would be counted among the dead. John, a freedman, had died in the battle as had a woman named Sarah. Having fled

Louisiana to escape slavery, she is said to have perished at the 18-pounder alongside Patrick Henry Herndon.

...

IN THE OLD MAN'S dreams each of the slaves had considered their lot just prior to the battle. Sam was not only present in his visions but had called all the slaves and former slaves together to give voice to their intentions before the final assault came.

"Each of you might consider learnin' a little Meskin. Might just save your life," Sam began.

"It doesn't seem like there's much need. They can see that we're black," replied Joe. "Slavery in Mexico has been abolished."

"Hell, you intend to be right next to Mr. Travis in the thick of things. What you think? Just cuz you be black, they ain't gonna shoot you dead, specially if you shootin' at em too! Wastin' my time even talkin' to you, but just the same you might just change your mind when you see all those Meskins coming over the walls and not wanna die along with your Master. Best learn to say don't shoot... *No dispare!* Goes for the rest of you too. Ain't likely we gonna walk away to see another day, but I don't intend to die if I can help it."

"What are you going to do after?" asked Charlie and Bettie. "That's if you survive. Where are you going to go? How are you going feed yourself, find work, find shelter or clothing? Are you thinking of going to Mexico?"

"Ain't made up my mind yet," responded Sam.

"Well, we're going to be staying with Miss Navarro. She has been kind to us. Got a roof over our head in the big

house, vittles, clothes, a doctor's care when we're sick. Our place remains with the Veramendi family."

"What 'bout you, John? asked Sam. You a freed man, but Texas ain't gonna be free for the likes of you. Texians ain't gonna pay no never mind to those papers you carry should some miracle happen and you survive. You black, you still a slave in their eyes."

"Thought about it. Won't be easy. But freedom doesn't mean anything if a Mexican ruler can take it away from you. I'm standing with all those willing to fight for what they got - white, black, brown... no matter the outcome."

"And you, Miss Sarah. You was a slave, but don't appear that's what you got goin' on with Mister Herndon. Most folks don't bat an eye if a white man takes what he wants from a black woman. His right as master they reckon, but that's not what's happenin' between you two. There ain't no happy ever after in any future you might think you have with him. So don't be stupid," said Sam.

"My relationship with Mr. Herndon is no business of yours Sam. I'm not hiding it and we'll deal with come what may. Likely that's our deaths, but I'm not leaving his side. Loving someone isn't stupid, no matter what folks may think about the rightness or wrongness of it. I'll be with him in this life or the next."

"Well then, guess we best all get back to our places. Best of luck to each of you. You gonna need it. Remember... *No dispare!*"

...

FOLLOWING HIS DREAM, the old man considered the role of slavery in his thoughts on the Shrine to Texas

Liberty. There was no denying that slaves were essential to the cotton industry, and the industry would be essential to the economic prosperity of any future independent Texas. While the Alamo defenders certainly echoed the revolutionary ideals that in 1776 led the colonies to separate from Great Britain and establish the United States of America, like their forefathers they interpreted passages written into the Constitution and Bill of Rights to apply to white men only. "Self-evident truths" that spoke to equality did not apply to slaves.

The institution of slavery would continue in Texas long after the Battle of the Alamo. Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation wouldn't be issued until January 1, 1863, and the announcement proclaiming freedom for all slaves within the State wouldn't come until June 19, 1865, well after the end of America's Civil War and almost thirty years after the fall of the Alamo.

The legacy of slavery in Texas and the country did trouble the old man. Racism hadn't ended with either proclamation. Discrimination on the basis of skin color, heinous acts carried out because of ignorance and bigotry, the advancement of one sector of society at the expense of another... all of these were still ongoing. Progress towards true equality was slow and painful, and so much more needed to be done. But just as the old man did not believe that the country was inherently racist, neither could he justify citing slavery as the main cause for the 1836 battle. To make slavery the central issue of why Texians fought at the Alamo, as was currently being argued, was to negate or deny totally any other rationale or influence. That broad brush, in his opinion, was a disservice to the dead. Those that fought and died at the Alamo did so for many reasons: patriotism,

adventure, land, opportunity and slavery. There was no “one size fits all” that applied to every person.



## PART TWO

# Thirteen Days

## Chapter Eight

# Overwhelming Odds

IN THE OLD MAN'S dreams, he often envisioned soaring over the Alamo fortifications as they existed in 1836. He felt himself lifted up and carried skyward giving him a bird's-eye view of the compound. The mission covered over three acres of land.

The west wall, which fronted the San Antonio River and the town, and the north wall, which looked out upon rolling hills, had initially served as living quarters for the Coahuiltecan Indians. Having accepted the Spanish friars' message of salvation in Jesus Christ, the tribal members had moved into the mission for protection from other warring indigenous peoples.

Of course, Spain had long since abandoned the Alamo and the other missions built along the San Antonio River, resulting in their secularization and militarization. Mexican soldiers had occupied these same spaces following independence from Spain, and Texians had taken it from



them following the siege of Béxar. Here is where Travis set up his headquarters and where the defenders' families were housed before necessity required their transfer to the church.

Fortified stock pens occupied most of the east wall which extended to and connected with the church. The terrain outside the wall consisted mainly of open grassland, scrub brush, and some mesquite trees.

The palisade and south walls also looked out upon open ground with the exception of a few *jacales* (wooden-framed mud and straw huts) and out-buildings, the village of La Villita, and a cluster of cottonwood trees to the southeast. The palisade connected the front left corner of the church to the Low Barrack, filling in a 114-foot gap between the church and south wall. An abatis constructed of felled trees added to the defenses. Artillery emplacements were distributed around the compound. There was a total of twenty-one cannon of varying sizes from the 18-pounder down to 16, 12, 8, 6, and 4-pound guns.

Only eighteen of the cannon would be manned during the siege and battle; the problem involved the manpower needed to physically load, fire, swab, and reposition a piece after each engagement. Usually, a six-to-eight-man crew was required, but Travis simply didn't have sufficient personnel to assign that many men to each gun without jeopardizing troop dispersion along the mission walls to cover all four cardinal directions at the same time. As it was, by reducing the gun crews to four men each, he only had sufficient numbers to position one rifleman about every four to five feet without leaving even wider gaps between the defenders.

The 18-pound cannon was located at the southwest corner covering the major avenue of approach from the town, and Travis would signal the garrison's defiance by firing it on day one. Two more cannon were centered on the west wall, while another occupied the northwest corner. There were three guns on the north wall, one in the cattle pen and two in the horse corral facing east, with three more in the chapel on the back ramp. Another was positioned in the center of the palisade, and two guarded the main gate at the redoubt outside the south wall (with one facing due south and another providing overlapping fire with the palisade,) while two more occupied the lunette that fronted the gate from the inside.

...

SANTA ANNA'S campaign at the Alamo mirrored military tactics of the day. To force a fortified position, stronghold or city to capitulate meant cutting off outside support, whether that amounted to supplies or reinforcements. The old mission sat astride *El Camino Real*, a major highway and line of communication south into old Mexico and north into Texas' central settlements. The road was a possible lifeline along which support might reach the beleaguered forces now inside the Alamo, and Santa Anna's intent from the moment his vanguard arrived in San Antonio de Béxar was to close it and all other gateways off from anyone attempting to reach them.

## Chapter Nine

# Letters, Couriers, and False Hope

IT WOULD TAKE time to completely encircle the compound and close all existing loopholes, and Travis took advantage of gaps in the Mexican lines surrounding the Alamo to send out couriers beseeching aid. The messages showed defiance in the face of overwhelming odds, but also acknowledged the futility of their position if succor were not forthcoming. The tone of these petitions would gradually reflect both greater despair and reproach as Travis faced the realization that help would not arrive in time. Several riders ferried messages on behalf of the garrison. They would play prominent roles in the siege and its aftermath.

...

CAPTAIN ALBERT MARTIN carried the most famous “Victory or Death” dispatch on day two, February 24<sup>th</sup>, to Gonzales, some seventy miles away. His efforts would yield

the only meager reinforcements to reach the Alamo before its fall; thirty-two men, comprising the Gonzales Raiding Company, arrived on March 1<sup>st</sup>. Martin was among them.

Although only a young man, Martin had been active in the revolutionary movement from its outset, one of eighteen men that defended the cannon at Gonzales with the early rallying cry, "Come and Take It!" He'd participated in the campaign against *General* Cos in 1835, and he'd also been one of the emissaries to the Mexican forces after their arrival in San Antonio de Béxar. Bowie had sent him and Jameson without Travis' permission to seek terms for the garrison from *Coronel* Almonte. There would be no terms and Travis would signal his defiance with a cannon shot.

Martin could have remained in Gonzales after delivering Travis' letter "To the People of Texas & all Americans in the world." In fact, his father, Joseph S. Martin, who resided in Gonzales and ran the general store, beseeched him not to return.

"Please, son, don't go back. For all you know the Alamo may have already fallen. Even if it has not, it can't possibly hold out against the forces described by Travis in his letter and confirmed by your own observations. You rode through the Mexican lines and by the grace of God came through. Who says you can safely circumvent them again? You'll likely be killed in the attempt, and if not, if you make it back inside the walls, you will have only postponed the inevitable. Those walls will crumble, and everyone will be put to the sword. Stay here and live."

"Pa, I love you, but you know I've got to go back. Those are my friends, and they are in need of every man that they can muster. I've got to lead the men now assembling

outside otherwise they'll surely fail to get through. Besides, what kind of man would I be to petition their help and then watch them ride out of Gonzales while I remain behind? Whatever my fate, I couldn't live with myself if I made that decision. No, I'll go no matter the outcome."

"Guess I raised you right but saying goodbye to your son when you know you'll never see him again ain't easy."

"Then don't say it, Pa. Just wish me Godspeed."

Hugging his son for the last time, Joseph Martin whispered into his ear; "I love you and I'm proud of you, Albert. Go with God."

...

ALBERT MARTIN WAS not the only son to argue with his father about joining the relief column. William Philip King was only fifteen years old, but when he heard that his dad was going to leave his family and volunteer to ride to the Alamo with the other men from Gonzales, Philip was determined to take his place.

"Pa, you can't go. You're needed here with Ma and the family. I can go in your place. I've spoken with Captain Kimble and he's amenable."

John King couldn't believe his ears. "You don't know a thing about war, boy. You ain't even sprouted whiskers yet and you want to go fight and likely die. There is no way. Your Momma would never forgive me. Put it out of your mind!"

"Pa, listen. I gotta do a man's work and go. I can't replace you here, but I can shoulder a gun as good as anybody. Ma has needs, the little ones will want their Pa. The land is way

more than I can handle, but I can fight. Captain Kimble says he'll put me with someone that knows the ropes and will look after me. You gotta let me go."

"You ain't never shot at nobody. You ever think about what it takes to kill another man? It's no turkey shoot. He'll be aimin' to kill you, and it won't be just one Meskin, it'll be hundreds... thousands! You're askin' me to send you to your death."

"I'm asking you to treat me like a man grown. Travis needs help, but not you specifically. It's a one-on-one swap in the ranks. We can't both go. That's out of the question. But Captain Kimble will be commanding whatever force is assembled and he must think enough of me to let me go in your place. Please think on it. There's not a lot of time before they head out. When they mount up to ride to San Antonio, I want to be among them, and I want to leave knowing I have your blessing."

"Your Ma will take it hard if I consent to this, but I'll sleep on it. I'll give you my answer in the morning."

On March 1<sup>st</sup> William was among the Immortal 32 that rode into the Alamo. He would be the youngest defender to die in the battle.

...

GORDON C. JENNINGS at age fifty-six was the oldest defender inside the garrison. With the rank of Corporal, he belonged to an artillery company known as "The Invincibles."

"I want you to take this boy under your wing," asked Kimble of the veteran from Connecticut. "He's green but

he's got spunk and under your tutelage should learn the mechanics of firing a cannon in no time."

Jennings eyed the fifteen-year-old a moment before answering, "Best we get to it then."

...

THE GUN EMPLACEMENT was on the west wall, and William was put through his paces by the older man knowing full well that there was little time to train him.

"You ever been on a gun crew before?"

"No, Sir."

"We're short-handed, so I can sure use you. They'll be four of us. Usually we'd be at least six, but there just aren't enough men to man the walls, so each man has to do his part and do it well. Can we rely on you to do that?" asked Jennings.

"Yes, Sir. Just tell me what I'm to do and I'll do it."

"There are several steps involved and each is important. See those canvas bags? Each is loaded with gunpowder. The first step is to ram the charge down the muzzle of the cannon. Next, we elevate the barrel so the ball slides down against the charge and then we add wadding to ensure that the cannon ball fits tightly in the barrel. See that touch hole on top? We put a rod down it to puncture the canvas bag so the gunpowder will ignite. Then we aim the gun and put a burning match to it to send that cannon ball barreling towards the enemy. Don't be standing behind it when it goes off because there's going to be a hell of a recoil. Finally, a wet sponge has to be put down the barrel to clean it out. Any burning residue not extinguished is likely to blow us

all to hell, so this is critical. And then we repeat everything, reposition the gun... that's why it takes at least four men, and fire it again. You got all that?"

William nodded his head in the affirmative. "Sounds straightforward and easy enough."

Gordon Jennings placed his hand on the young man's shoulder. "You'll be under fire the whole time. You've never experienced that before. Men react differently their first time. It's one thing to know what to do and another to actually do it in the heat of battle. One misstep due to fear will not only get you killed, but it will endanger the entire crew. I'm counting on you, William. They'll be counting on you. Don't let us down."

...

THERE WAS ANOTHER danger that sometimes got crews killed in spite of their efficiency working together or calm in the face of the enemy. If the artillery piece was miscast during manufacturing, it could explode without warning.

Gordon Jennings' crew had fired two rounds at the charging Mexican soldiers and was launching a third cannon ball when the explosion occurred. The burst sent debris and shrapnel flying. Jennings and two of the men were killed instantly. William King wasn't mortally wounded, but his lower jaw had been disconnected from his skull and he was in a state of shock. He was holding his lower teeth in his hands when the enemy breached the walls. Moments later he was dead, never realizing what hit him when musket balls tore through his body.

...



JUAN SEGUÍN was conflicted about Travis' order to get a message through to General Houston. He had led thirty-seven men into the Alamo, all Tejanos. He had no illusions about their fate if he did not return with reinforcements, so how could he leave them behind and ride north without any guarantee that he could or would return in time to fight alongside them? He was their leader. He had channeled their resentment of the Centrist Mexican government by encouraging them to form a militia to fight against it. That encouragement had led them here inside these walls. He had a commitment to these men. They were his responsibility. He was resolute. He wouldn't abandon them.

Travis was just as adamant that he go, arguing that without reinforcements the garrison most certainly could not hold out and everyone would be killed including those under Seguin's command.

"Juan, if you can get Houston to send more men, we've got a good chance of holding out. If I thought otherwise, I would not ask any of them to needlessly sacrifice their lives. I'm not suicidal or seeking martyrdom. I am, however, seeking an independent Texas and I'm willing to fight on toward that end. If my countrymen fail to come to our aid, my bones and those of every man here will reproach them for their intransigence. But if we never communicate our situation, if we never ask for help, it is we that will have failed, not them. I'm asking you to attempt to reach Houston because you are familiar with the terrain, you're a good horseman, and should you be stopped or questioned, your Mexican heritage and fluency in the Spanish language just might allow you to talk your way out of it. Deliver my message, then return. I and your men will be here waiting

for you. The essence is speed, but you're the man that can get the job done."

Juan Seguín would carry Travis' letter, departing the Alamo on February 25<sup>th</sup>. He would return, not to fight alongside his fellow Tejanos – they perished on March 6<sup>th</sup> just as he had feared – but to bury their ashes and accept the final surrender of Mexican forces in San Antonio de B́exar following Santa Anna's defeat at San Jacinto. Both the reunion with the Alamo defenders burned remains and the surrender of the meager occupying Mexican force on June 4<sup>th</sup>, 1836 were bittersweet. Seguín had already revenged his comrade's deaths by participating in the defeat of Santa Anna's army at San Jacinto on April 21<sup>st</sup>. This final act in San Antonio brought closure but did nothing to assuage the guilt he felt for not being inside the mission alongside them when the end came.

...

LIEUTENANT JAMES Butler Bonham, second cousin to Travis, would carry a message to Goliad on behalf of the Alamo's commander asking Colonel James Fannin for help. Fannin commanded the garrison at Presidio La Bahia, otherwise known as "Fort Defiance." This was by far the largest contingent of soldiers and militia within proximity to San Antonio, some 350 men that would significantly bolster the beleaguered defenders' chances to hold out against Santa Ana's army at the Alamo.

This particular message constituted the second such appeal to Fannin at Goliad. An urgent appeal had already reached him on February 25<sup>th</sup> wherein Travis had stated:

*We will make such resistance as due our honour, and that of our country, until we can get assistance from you, which we expect you to forward immediately.*

In fact, Fannin had marched towards San Antonio on the 26<sup>th</sup>, only to have one of his wagons break down and to encounter a swollen San Antonio River. Though he was able to get his artillery across the river, he feared losing his ammunition in the raging waters, and left them on the far bank until the waters receded. How long this might take, he didn't know.

Yet another impediment to his progress occurred when his oxen scattered during the night; another whole day would be wasted trying to round them up. In and of themselves, these two incidents were but nuisances and not the deciding factor in his decision to turn back. Certainly, losing two days and only getting about a mile out of Presidio La Bahia was discouraging and weighed heavily on his mind, but it was the news that supplies had arrived at Matagorda Bay that caused him to reconsider his course. It was imperative that he secure those supplies. He had no reliable information on the whereabouts of *General* José Urrea and his army. Fannin knew that Urrea had crossed the Rio Grande on February 16<sup>th</sup> and was moving up the coast towards the eastern settlements, but where exactly was he now? He didn't know, and this uncertainty coupled with his recent setbacks mitigated towards returning to Goliad. He turned his men around.

This decision seemed the proper course when Fannin received word on February 29<sup>th</sup> that *General* Urrea had progressed as far as San Patricio where he had engaged and defeated a Texian force two days before. That put Urrea's

army less than fifty miles from his current location. He was now convinced that his responsibility was the protection of Goliad and the eastern Texas settlements.

None of this, of course, was apparent to James Butler Bonham who departed the Alamo on the same day as Urrea's victory at San Patricio; it would take him two days hard riding to reach Goliad, and by then Fannin's course was not yet set, but he had determined that he would not be reinforcing the Alamo.

Morale within the ranks was low and Fannin remained indecisive on his next move. He had now received orders from Houston to abandon Goliad and link up with other forces in East Texas, but he feared being caught out in the open. What should he do, comply with his orders or fight from his current position? Fannin was neither a coward nor incompetent, but he was conflicted over not going to Travis' aid and paralyzed with indecision on whether to stay or go. As Fannin weighed this decision, he found himself trying to articulate his dilemma to Bonham.

"I'd meant to re-supply and reinforce the Alamo," explained a demoralized Fannin, "but that intent has been overshadowed by the Mexican Army approaching under the command of Urrea. I know Travis can't hold out without help, but what am I to do? Santa Anna isn't just going to allow me to waltz in there. The garrison is probably totally encircled by now and he likely has positioned troops to block our approach (in fact *General* Ramirez y Sesma had been dispatched to intercept and destroy Fannin's command en route), and even if we could fight our way through, casualties might be heavy. Wounded men aren't going to help your cause. Besides, who's to say we wouldn't be

caught between two armies, with Urrea attacking us from the rear? We would be slaughtered.”

“Colonel, you’re talking about what might be, what might happen. Without reinforcements there is no doubt about the Alamo’s fate. It will fall. I beseech you, come to our aid!”

“Lieutenant, I can’t. I’ve received orders from Houston to evacuate and link up with forces further north to defend the eastern approach. The Alamo is on its own. My advice to you is to join us.”

Bonham’s reply was:

*I will report the result of my mission  
to Travis or die in the attempt.*

James Butler Bonham would, in fact, succeed in racing through the enemy lines on March 3<sup>rd</sup> to deliver the news that Fannin wasn’t coming. However, all the news he carried wasn’t dire. He carried a letter from Robert M. Williamson assuring Travis that help was on the way. The letter encouraged the defenders to hold out. They did for two more days. At dawn on the third day after Bonham’s return, the Alamo fell.

...

BEFORE TRAVIS ORDERED the evacuation of San Antonio de Béxar to the more secure Alamo garrison, he needed to confirm the sighting of the Mexican Army’s approach. The sentry had sounded the alarm, but upon rushing to the bell tower, Travis had seen no signs of their presence on the horizon.

“Are you sure you saw Mexican soldiers?” Travis asked of the soldier.

“Can’t say that I saw troops, but the sun was definitely glinting off a sizeable body on the move. Their dragoons are known for their polished helmets, so I thought it highly likely that’s what caused the flashes in the distance.”

Rumors of an approaching force had already reached Travis, but he’d been skeptical. Nonetheless, he’d sent riders to scout the location of the Mexican Army if indeed it was on the march towards the city. However, those riders had not returned, and he needed confirmation of the sentry’s report. John W. Smith and Dr. John Sutherland were soon mounted and sent in the direction of the sighting.

“Best be cautious. Use the terrain to our advantage so we won’t be spotted,” said John Smith. “Don’t know for certain that we’ll find anything, but I don’t aim to get killed before the real fighting even begins!”

“I don’t want to accidentally come upon Mexican soldiers either. Hopefully we won’t encounter any, but if we do, I sure don’t want them knowing it. We’ll be in no position to do anything but run for our lives,” replied Sutherland.

Out of caution and due to heavy rains the night before, the going was slow. However, it wasn’t long before the two observed elements of the Mexican cavalry within about a mile and a half of the town. Both men turned their horses around and raced back to give Travis the news. Their rush to spread the word was Sutherland’s undoing; his horse lost its footing and both rider and mount went down hard. Unable to free himself from the saddle before hitting the ground, Sutherland’s leg was temporarily pinned underneath. The extent of his injury or that of the horse weren’t immediately apparent, but both came up limping.

“You able to ride?” queried John Smith. “Doesn’t look like your horse can continue, but mine can carry the both of us. Get on up behind me!”

...

SMITH’S HORSE WAS lathered in sweat from carrying the two men and covering the remaining distance back to town at a gallop. The men were equally soaked, more so from fear than hard riding.

“They’re coming!” shouted John Smith. “There’s no time to waste. We’ve got to move quickly if we’re to have any chance of making it to the Alamo before they’re upon us.”

Travis issued the orders but told both men to get fresh mounts. He needed them to get word to Gonzales immediately. For now, it would have to be a verbal appeal for help. He would follow it up in written form, but his focus at the moment was organizing a defense.

Sutherland and Smith initially headed south to avoid the approaching Mexican Army before turning due east towards Gonzales. The increasing pain in Sutherland’s leg slowed their travel, but they finally arrived in Gonzales on February 24<sup>th</sup> to spread the news and help raise the small contingent of volunteers that would eventually make its way to the beleaguered garrison on March 1<sup>st</sup>. Sutherland’s broken leg would keep him in Gonzales, but John Smith would be among those riding to the aid of the Alamo.

...

THERE WOULD BE a total of sixteen messengers that sallied forth carrying Travis’ appeals. John Smith and Dr.

John Sutherland would be the first. The last would be James L. Allen who rode out on March 5<sup>th</sup> with a final appeal to Fannin at Goliad.

At this late date, getting past the Mexican pickets required not only a fast horse, but luck. By now the cordon around the Alamo had tightened so completely that there were no longer any gaps in the enemy lines that could be exploited. James Allen would have to break through.

“Stay low on your mount and don’t look back,” had been Travis’ only advice. “Once we open the gate, ride like the devil himself is on your tail.”

Allen fanned his horse from a distance away from the gate so that by the time it was flung open he was already at a gallop. Surprise and speed were the only things separating him from certain death.

Shots rang out almost immediately, but by then he was past the pickets and in the race of his life. Mexican cavalry gave chase. The head start had given him a little distance from his pursuers. It wasn’t much.

Cheers rang out from the Alamo’s walls encouraging Allen onward. The separation widened though he wouldn’t realize it until much later. Heeding Travis’ admonition, he didn’t look over his shoulder until he no longer heard anything other than his own heart beating and the sound of his horse’s hooves. The Mexican guns had gone silent. They were no longer firing at him. Miraculously neither he nor the horse had been hit. He slowed down to a canter and then a trot. He had a long distance to cover and would do no one any good if the horse faltered before he reached Goliad.

...



THREE DAYS LATER, on March 8<sup>th</sup>, Allen finally met with Colonel Fannin. He received the same denial that had greeted previous Alamo couriers, "No!" Wasting no time, he continued on to Gonzales. Exhausted, hungry, and plainly worried that he might be too late, his worst fears were confirmed. The Alamo had fallen. It was March 11<sup>th</sup>, five days after the battle.

"Were there any survivors?" a shaken James Allen asked.

"Some women and children... maybe some of the darkies; all the combatants were put to the sword."

"Oh my God!"

...

THE DEFENSE OF the Alamo had always been contingent on a large number of reinforcements coming to its aid. Only a few had answered the call; they would be remembered as the "Immortal 32."

## Chapter Ten

# Earthen Barricades and Trenches

THE OLD MAN sat by the San Antonio River enjoying an enchilada plate and a frozen margarita at the Texas Republic Restaurant. The hell with his heart condition; he intended to live out his remaining days enjoying life, not preparing for his death.

He usually enjoyed lunch here along the banks of the river at mid-week when pedestrian traffic was less and the likelihood of getting a table outside was greater. Sitting under a “Lone Star” canopy umbrella at the Texas Republic Restaurant, he found the irony of the restaurant’s name and décor striking. Had the Texians lost, there would be no Texas Republic and no flag bearing the single star in a field of blue, with an upper white stripe to denote the sky and a lower red stripe to denote the blood that it took to achieve independence from Mexico. The blood that was shed for that cause at the Alamo would have been remembered not in the context of a heroic stand by the defenders of the

old Spanish mission, but as the sacrifice of loyal Mexican soldiers putting down an insurrection. Indeed, if the Battle of the Alamo was remembered at all, it would be as a minor footnote in Mexican history, a small part of a campaign to maintain the integrity of a sovereign nation.

Instead, the battle had achieved mythic status in the lexicon of places where men had sacrificed themselves for the cause of liberty, known not just to Texans but to people throughout the world. Just as the Greeks had their Thermopylae and Leonidas, Texas had the Alamo and the triumvirate of Travis, Crockett, and Bowie. The old man dwelt momentarily on the comparison. The Spartans had stood up to a Persian invasion of the Greek mainland, whereas the Texians had fought to break away from Mexico. Santa Anna had not been an invader; a dictator, a despot yes, but he was not the outsider seeking to conquer or overthrow an established government. He was the established government acting to quell a movement to break away from his rule. That was another irony lost in the telling of the Alamo story, at least until recently. The Mexican Army had always been seen as villains, not as professional soldiers fighting for their homeland. Of course, such was the nature of history. The victors framed the context of the conversation. Santa Anna prevailed at the Alamo but lost the war little more than a month later. In exchange for his life, he was forced to cede Texas its independence. Had he been victorious April 21<sup>st</sup>, 1836, at San Jacinto, Mexico would have decided the Alamo's place in history, and instead of being forever placed in the pantheon of famous battles and mythical heroes, in all likelihood it would have been but a footnote to history, if indeed it was remembered at all.

The fall of the Alamo is remembered today because of its symbolism as a touchstone of courage and sacrifice in the name of freedom. Houston was able to use the battle as a catalyst to overcome the discord and dissension within his own forces, to galvanize and focus their anger, to rally them with the cry of "Remember the Alamo," to achieve not only revenge but the birth of an independent republic.

...

AS THE OLD MAN fed some ducks the remnants of his meal, he tried to visualize the two sides facing one another across the San Antonio River. The natural divide separated the mission from the town now occupied by Santa Anna's army. This was, of course, not all the Mexican forces. It would take time for the full complement of soldiers to arrive; they were strung out for miles. Nor had Santa Anna yet devised a plan to take the garrison. He needed intelligence on the number of combatants inside its walls, he needed to know how well armed the defenders were, and he needed to know if there were any weaknesses in the fortifications that could be exploited. Only after all his forces arrived and he had answers to all these questions would he formulate his battle plan. In the meantime, he would harass those in the mission with artillery fire. Available guns would fire into the walls to test their thickness and, with any luck, inflict casualties at the same time.

The Mexican cannon would initially begin bombardment of the garrison on day two from positions on the west bank of the river. Santa Ana's artillery had enjoyed a clear line of sight in 1836; that was not the case today - multiple buildings obstructed the view of the Shrine.

The old man couldn't help but conjure images from the various Alamo films that depicted rows of Mexican cannon firing one after another at the Texian fortifications. In reality, the difficulty of hauling heavy ordnance up from San Luis Potosí to San Antonio de Béxar had limited the size and number of artillery pieces at Santa Anna's disposal. The Alamo defenders possessed more cannon than did the Mexican Army, the twenty-one guns taken from *General Cos* following his defeat at the Battle of Béxar. The problem was the lack of sufficient manpower to form crews for all of them, and the inability to easily move them from fixed positions along the walls. The Mexican Army had no such restrictions. Two new batteries would be added and moved to within 300 yards of the mission on February 25<sup>th</sup>, and all cannon would be continually moved and advanced throughout the thirteen-day siege.

...

THE MOVEMENT OF men and artillery towards the Alamo would be both methodical and cautious. Kentucky long rifles wielded by sharpshooters such as David Crockett could pick off Mexican soldiers at 200 yards, and targets of opportunity were in fact shot from long distance whenever they presented themselves.

To protect the crews manning the Mexican guns, earthen barricades were thrown up and firing positions set up behind them. Trenches were also employed to advance troops closer and closer to the walls. Muskets did not have the range or the accuracy of hunting rifles. Their effective range was about fifty yards and was further affected by the

quality of Mexican gunpowder. Nonetheless, shots fired towards the mission walls kept the defenders pinned down.

Of necessity, siege warfare was slow. But it had the advantage of limiting casualties within the attacking force while subjecting the besieged to potential starvation and despondency the longer the siege endured. Inside the Alamo walls the defenders witnessed the sight of the opposing force increasing in size daily, its encirclement of the garrison, and its inexorable progress toward the walls, all while enduring a constant bombardment that ensured their inability to rest or sleep. It was a strategy intended to isolate, to intimidate, and to weaken the physical and mental capacity of the defenders to hold out. It was cruel psychological warfare.

Solid round shot was the main ordnance fired by the Mexican artillery during this period. If a human were so unlucky as to be in line with the cannon ball it could certainly eviscerate flesh and bone, but the primary purpose was to batter the walls. Hollowed out round shot filled with gunpowder was occasionally fired over the mission walls, the lit fuses cut to lengths that allowed the projectile to explode in the air, or land on the ground and detonate. Few casualties resulted. However, these rounds ensured that terror reigned inside the Alamo.

## Chapter Eleven

# Exhibits and Artifacts

TIME WAS DEFINITELY not on the side of the defenders, nor did the old man believe time to be on his side. He very much wanted to be on hand for the completion of the master design that promised to re-envision the Alamo grounds and story. The Master Plan Management Committee that included the General Land Office of Texas, the city of San Antonio, and a non-profit entity, the Alamo Endowment, recognized that any revised representation had to not only pay homage to the battle, but to the hundreds of years of history before and after it. It had to embrace the emotional context in which it was viewed by thousands of Alamophiles and tourists from all over the world while staying true to facts versus conjecture, objectivity versus sentimentality, perspective versus narrow focus, actuality versus mythology. Such an effort would take years.

...

HAVING FINISHED HIS meal, the old man ascended the bridge at Commerce Street and walked towards the Shops at Rivercenter and the old Joske's Department Store. The building had been renovated as part of ongoing urban renewal projects in the downtown area and reopened, not as a standalone venue, but as a multipurpose structure housing several commercial enterprises including for a short time the attraction, "Battle for Texas - The Experience."

The attraction opened in April 2016 and claimed to offer visitors a visceral interactive emotional experience and a glimpse into the sounds, smell, and feel of the Battle of the Alamo.

Remembering, the old man at the time had thought *"What the hell, I've experienced every other possible representation of the battle from movies to the movie sets like the one at Brackettville where John Wayne filmed his 1960s epic and the set just outside of Austin, Texas where John Lee Hancock's movie was shot in 2004, as well as the historical reenactments on the Alamo grounds. I've visited the diorama located in the gift shop at the Alamo complex and admired the detail put into the miniature sculpted figures and realistic display. And I've examined the unique selection of Alamo lead figurines sold at the specialty shop, -Kings X Toy Soldiers - at the Menger Hotel, even purchasing the whole set for my own collection of Alamo memorabilia. Why not check out this venue?"*

...

THE ATTRACTION WAS said to provide historical context (the events leading up to the battle), coverage of the



thirteen-day siege, and a rare collection of artifacts. The artifacts were what most piqued his interest. So many were in the hands of private collectors or were stored within vaults on the Alamo grounds beyond the view of the general public. Today there were steps being taken to change this situation. Private collectors like Phil Collins, the musician, were returning items and a 24,000-square foot exhibit hall was under construction on the Alamo grounds, while a 100,000-square foot museum and visitor center was also in the planning stages. The fate of the Woolworth and Palace buildings along with the commercial venues on South Alamo Street needed to be resolved to the satisfaction of all parties before that part of the plan could be realized, but the old man wasn't sure he'd ever see either project completed in his lifetime.

...

THE WEAPONRY and munitions were the main items that interested him at the "Battle for Texas" exhibit. The multi-media exhibition included quite a collection of rifles, pistols, swords, knives, bayonets, cannon and ball on display, and these captured the savagery of combat in the early nineteenth century. These weapons produced gaping holes, shattered bone, severed limbs, caused vicious lacerations and penetrations of human flesh - mangling bodies, tearing them apart in the most brutal and severe manner.

The Mexican uniforms were also resplendent in their bold blues and reds, gold lapels and braid, silver metal helmets, black leather boots, equipment webbing and hats. They were pretentious, grandiose, flamboyant, brazen... yet reflective of garb worn by a professional army versus the

more modest buckskins, cotton shirts and pants, vests, scarves, ties, tri-corner hats, animal skin and floppy headwear worn by the mixed collaboration of farmers, ranchers, lawyers, doctors, and politicians that dared to defy it inside the Alamo.

The exhibition walkthrough contained a lot of background information that clarified events, explained motives, and introduced key individuals in an interactive trek that culminated in the fall of the Alamo. At the very end individuals in period attire re-enacted the final moments when the walls were breached; these vignettes were set against the backdrop of video footage accompanied by the sounds of battle. Reportedly smells were a part of the experience, though the old man didn't really notice them. He did, however, notice the enthusiasm of the children creating and raising their own flags over the Alamo walls, straining to pull cannon into firing position, and watching with rapt attention as Texians and Mexicans engaged in mortal combat. This enthusiasm reminded him of his own sense of awe and wonder as a boy before he lost the innocence of his childhood. Adults expected realism. Yet realism could not possibly be made known without bringing to life the horrors that no child (or adult for that matter) should ever experience.

All in all, the old man had found the "Battle for Texas – The Experience" worth his money and time. He wasn't sure that he learned anything new, but for the vast majority of visitors who like him purchased tickets before its closure, it was certainly both informative and fun. Unfortunately, it closed due to a lack of interest in history and the ever-changing nature of the Rivercenter Mall. Tourist interests

and demands evolved and new attractions soon took its place.

...

THE OLD MAN remembered spending upwards of an hour, maybe longer, walking through the attraction. He really hadn't kept track of the time. Others probably just looked at their time there as something to do while in the downtown area. But for the old man it was so much more. Though it was just another commercial enterprise profiting from its association with the Alamo, he had experienced all thirteen fateful days... the agonizing build-up to the final assault, the ninety minute battle, and the final desperate moments before the garrison's capitulation. He could neither explain nor comprehend why he always internalized any and all forms of information and representations of the 1836 battle, but the Alamo was and always would be personal for him.

## Chapter Twelve

# Enmity and Collaboration

IN 2019 SIX bronze sculptures were added in the Cavalry Courtyard. Depicted were the famous triumvirate of Travis, Crockett, and Bowie, along with Susannah Dickinson, John William Smith and José Antonio Navarro.

Of those, only John Smith and José Navarro had not been present in the Alamo when it fell. Smith had again ridden out with a final appeal to Houston at Washington on the Brazos on March 3<sup>rd</sup>, and José Navarro had been one of three Tejano delegates at the convention. He would go on to sign the Declaration for Texas Independence and help draft its constitution.

Both would be influential in early Texas politics. John Smith would become San Antonio's first mayor, and José Antonio Navarro would advocate for Tejano rights as a Senator in the Texas State Legislature.

...

THE OLD MAN admired each work. The artists had been commissioned to create lasting impressions of these figures from the Texas Revolution, and the sculptures had more than accomplished that task. Rendered in life-like poses, the three-dimensional images captured the imagination of onlookers, providing a visual reference to these individuals that went well beyond the historical record.

Two years later, in April 2021, the opening of the 18-pounder exhibition at the Alamo also provided the general public and tourists a better appreciation for the actual footprint of the Alamo as well a visual reference for the height of the mission walls and sheer size of the famous cannon.

...

OVER THE YEARS the shot fired from the gun toward the Mexican forces on day one of the thirteen-day siege had come to symbolize defiance and courage in the face of overwhelming odds. Actually, two shots were fired from the iconic gun on February 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1836; the first ordered by Travis, the second jointly agreed upon by Travis and Bowie.

The old man visualized the two commanders standing together at the southwest corner of the Alamo compound accompanied by Crockett and the gun crew. They were watching Santa Anna's Vanguard Brigade and First Division, the lead elements of his army, entering San Antonio de Béxar.

...

CROCKETT WAS THE first to comment. "Ain't much at math but appears to me that we're outgunned and outmanned by at least five to one."

"Yeah, and these are just their forward elements," replied Bowie, who was sweating profusely and looked to have gotten progressively worse in just the last few days. His pallor had gone from flushed to an ashen gray and yellow, and it was evident that he was having difficulty remaining upright without leaning against the wall.

"You look a might peaked, Jim. Maybe you should be lying down," said Crockett. "Reckon there won't be any fireworks today. Those boys are just settlin' in."

"I'll manage, David. Need to see if Santa Anna aims to parley or if the die is already cast."

Travis hadn't spoken but now pointed to the San Fernando Cathedral where a blood red flag had been hoisted in the bell tower. "There's your answer gentlemen."

"I understand its significance," said Bowie. "But it appears that an envoy is approaching the bridge under the protection of a white flag."

"Fire the cannon," ordered Travis.

The gun belched fire and smoke drowning out Bowie's shout of "No!"

Bowie was livid. "Why the hell did you do that, Travis? You have no idea what message they were conveying. Your haste to start this damn war has probably ensured the fate of every man and woman inside these walls. You're a damned hothead and a fool."

The two men now stood inches apart. The enmity between them was palpable.

"I'm not going to stand here and debate my actions with you, Bowie. I'm going to my headquarters to draft petitions

to Houston, Fannin, and anyone else I think can send reinforcements. I need to get couriers out as soon as possible before the Mexicans consolidate their forces and cut off our ability to get messages through.” With that Travis turned and descended the rampart.

Bowie was about to lunge after him when Crockett intervened. “Whoa, Jim. We’re gonna have plenty of folks to fight without fightin’ one another. And the men are watching. If they’re divided over loyalty to you or Travis, we don’t stand a chance. You gotta put the fight for Texas above your personal feelings... at least for now.”

“David, it’s likely that a fight is coming. But you don’t start one when you can’t win it, not if you can help it. My men will fight if it comes to that, even under Travis’ command if I can’t continue to lead them. But when the odds are stacked against you, exploring every avenue, option, and outcome short of conflict makes a lot more sense.”

“Seems reasonable, Jim. You might want to convey your thoughts to Travis rather than butt heads. He didn’t want to show weakness, so he fired the gun. Not sure I agree, but that flag flyin’ out yonder sure seems to indicate Santa Anna’s intentions. Maybe the time for talking is past.”

“Well, I still intend to find out.”

...

BOWIE DRAFTED the following missive to “the Commander of the invading forces of Béxar -

*Due to the fact that a cannon was shot from this fort at the time a red flag was hoisted above the tower and shortly I was advised that your army was granting a truce which was not heard before firing the aforementioned*

*cannon shot, I want to know, if in effect you called a truce, in which case I send my second in command, Benito Jameson under the guarantee of a white flag which I believe you and your forces will respect.*

...

JAMES B. JAMESON was unsure of what fate awaited him as he rode out from the Alamo under a white flag. Bowie had assured him that the Mexican forces would not fire upon him, but he harbored deep doubts about their reaction to the cannon shot fired just moments earlier. The Mexican Army had immediately responded with cannon fire of its own but fortunately there were no casualties on either side, at least none that were apparent, which gave some assurance that they might yet be willing to talk. Jameson proceeded cautiously, expecting any minute to hear the retort of muskets seconds before the balls tore into his body.

...

“SORRY TO DISTURB you, Buck.” Very few people called Travis by his nickname, so when he looked up from his desk and found his adjutant, John Baugh, standing there, he knew instinctively that his news was important.

“What’s up, John?”

“Looks like Bowie has sent out a rider to meet with the Mexicans.”

“Damn that man and his impudence! Send Captain Martin after him immediately. I won’t allow Bowie’s messenger, whoever it is, to speak for this command. I want to know



exactly what is said or exchanged between the two parties. Go!”

...

*CORONEL JUAN ALMONTE* and *Coronel* José Batres acted as emissaries sent by Santa Anna to convey his terms of surrender. Jameson and Martin (who caught up with him at the bridge) represented the garrison’s two co-commanders.

Jameson spoke for Bowie, instructed to request an honorable surrender from the Mexican Commander. The Alamo would agree to submit only after the promise of certain conditions, specifically the survival of the Texian and Tejano defenders. Albert Martin, unsure of exactly what was expected of him, essentially acted as witness to the proceedings. Like Jameson, he half expected to be shot at any moment, in which case he wouldn’t need to report the substance of the meeting to Colonel Travis. Their lifeless bodies would be testament to Santa Anna’s intentions.

*Coronel* Batres read aloud Bowie’s letter. He smiled while doing so. His answer was unequivocal. His Excellency, Antonio López de Santa Anna, would broker no agreement with “rebellious foreigners.” His terms were not negotiable: unconditional surrender with no guarantee of clemency, or the garrison would be put to the sword.

...

IT WAS NIGHTFALL when Jameson and Martin returned to the Alamo. Travis was still smoldering over Bowie’s unilateral overtures toward the enemy but held his temper in check awaiting the two men’s report.

Bowie was far more philosophical and composed as Jameson recounted the outcome of the parley and Martin nodded his head in agreement.

“Pretty much what I expected but guess they’re waiting on us to give ‘em an answer,” mused Bowie out loud, adding for everyone to hear - “Now would be a good time to fire that cannon Travis, because we’re damn sure not going to unconditionally yield to the mercy of Santa Anna.”

Travis was somewhat taken aback. “Earlier today you were against my order. Now you want me to repeat it?”

“Gotta play the hand we’ve been dealt, Travis. Before I wasn’t sure what cards we were holding. The flag indicated what we now know for certain, but at the time those envoys made me wonder why Santa Anna wanted his officers to meet with us. Had to be sure.”

“So, your volunteers will fight to the last man if necessary?”

“Hoping it won’t come to that. I’m likely to die within these walls from whatever this is that ails me, but I’m not aiming to commit suicide. Those letters you’re writing asking for help better be good ones. We’re gonna need every last man here and a lot more. We’ve got time. Not much, but some. Fire the cannon, Travis. Then get those petitions written and on their way. Riders will stand a better chance of avoiding Mexican patrols if we can send them out under the cover of darkness. Time’s a-wasting.”

Travis turned toward the gun crew and the 18-pounder belched fire and smoke for the second time that day.

## Chapter Thirteen

# Absolute Power

THE TWO ADVERSARIES counted minutes, hours and days very differently. For the Alamo defenders the first few days were spent organizing the mission's defense; allocating personnel to cannon crews or assigning them individual responsibilities, inventorying food supplies and ammunition, setting up the infirmary, digging latrines, reinforcing the walls, and preparing letters (both official and personal). For the Mexican Army it was occupying and securing the town, consolidating forces, establishing encampments, moving battalions into positions in and around the mission, constructing earthen works and ladders, digging trenches, moving cannon, advancing troops forward, continuously bombarding the objective, and resting troops for the final assault if and when it was ordered.

...

OF IMMEDIATE CONCERN to William Barret Travis was drafting the missives to go out by courier describing their

current situation and pleading for help. Travis was good at the written word and confident that they would result in the desired reinforcements. He had no problem putting his thoughts on paper.

Of greater concern was consolidating his command now that James Bowie's health was deteriorating. If Bowie could no longer exercise joint control of the Alamo defenders, Travis would need Bowie's volunteers to follow his orders. The two men had publicly expressed their differences - Travis finding the famous knife fighter and his militia undisciplined, and Bowie believing the young officer to be brash and in search of fame. Bowie's heavy drinking had only exacerbated the friction between the two, as Travis seldom if ever drank spirits. But whatever the divide between them, both had agreed to fire the second cannon shot. Any lingering animosity now had to be put aside if there was to be any cohesive defense of the garrison.

...

TRAVIS FOUND Bowie in the infirmary.

"I need the full cooperation of your men, Colonel Bowie. I'm aware that they will only follow my orders with your concurrence, and I'm here to ask for your support."

Bowie's symptoms had only worsened, and he was now sweating profusely and coughing up blood as he replied. "Travis, I've already put the word out to my men that we've put our differences to one side in the interest of unifying under a common cause. Texas is far more important than you or I rubbing each other the wrong way. You came here with no enthusiasm for a posting at a broken-down old church in the middle of nowhere. You're young and

ambitious and the Alamo was hardly your preferred assignment. You're no teetotaler as some might think, but you disapprove of heavy drinking and its consequences. OK. I can accept that. But such righteous indignation on your part especially at your age comes across to men accustomed to hard drink and a hard life as elitist and unnecessarily judgmental. My men will follow you if show them some deference and respect. They might not be polished soldiers, but they're fighters and you'll need every man Jack of them before this is over with. You might not have wanted this assignment, but you've come around to thinking as I do. This crossroad is important. I came here with orders to destroy these ramparts but quickly concluded that the fight needed to be made here. May not have come across that way before, and I don't know that I'll have much fight in me when the battle comes, but if there is a man that will wage the good fight; I know that man is you. Even before your arrival in San Antonio de Béxar, I wrote to Governor Smith and told him:

*We will rather die in these ditches  
than give it up to the enemy.*

At the time I was just speaking on behalf of myself and my men. When I wrote 'we,' it didn't mean you and me. It does now. My men didn't come here to die, but if the cost of our cause is their deaths, they'll bear that price and not complain. They'll look to you to set the example, and I trust you to do just that. Rouse in them the kind of spirit that leads to victory; if not here at the Alamo, then in the cause that we all hold dear. Rouse that kind of spirit in every man within these walls and the Mexicans will pay dearly for every life they take."

Another coughing fit wracked Bowie before he could say anything more. There was, however, no need.

...

UNLIKE TRAVIS, Santa Anna had no need to consolidate his authority. His power was absolute. He did, however, require the collusion and assistance of his aide de camp to secure the favors of a young *señorita* that had captured his fancy as he entered San Antonio de Béxar. The lady in question had been impressed by the pomp and ceremony of his Excellency's entourage as it entered the town square and hadn't hidden her excitement as she peered out over the balcony of one of the more affluent residences. Santa Ana was married but did not let this impediment divert his intentions or restrict his carnal desires. Rank had its privileges, and one of them was the naïve adoration of the young Spanish ladies. Wherever and whenever he could, *El Presidente* used his position to gain sexual favors.

Of course, Spanish society's ideas of decency and decorum had to be circumvented to actually get the women into his bed. Reputations and the appearance of propriety were necessary considerations unless the person happened to be a whore or was known to be loose with her affections and unconcerned about such social stigmas. Certainly, those types of women were readily available to satisfy Santa Anna's lust, but he much preferred to deflower young maidens. It stroked his ego to take their virginity, another conquest to his credit.

"*Coronel* Almonte, I want you to make the arrangements."

"Your Excellency, the young lady comes from a family of substance. You cannot just expect her to come to your bed

simply because you so order it. Such a summons would be rebuffed and your audacity, if I may speak frankly, would be both scandalous and condemned. Her family's honor would not allow it; her standing, her character would forever be tarnished. She would be ruined."

"The young lady knows nothing of me except as the *general* in charge of this army and the leader of my country. Neither does her family. So, use that to our advantage. Flatter them by my interest in their daughter. Wine them, dine them; whatever it takes. Make them believe that I am so stricken by her beauty that I cannot live without her and want to marry her. The wife to the president of Mexico - such an overture will soften any resistance by the father and mother or the young lady."

"But your real wife; the Catholic Church? Are you not concerned of their condemnation?"

"*Coronel* Almonte, the illusions of propriety will satisfy the local clergy and the family. As to my wife, she need never find out. Find a defrocked priest or dress the part yourself if that is what it takes. If a marriage is what is required, then arrange a sham ceremony. It isn't as if this is the first time. I will have what I want, and I care not for anyone's feelings or reputation once I move on. Do you understand me?"

"Yes, Excellency."

"Good. I don't want to be disappointed."

...

THE STARK DIFFERENCES between the two commanders were self-evident - Travis, young, principled, defiant, hopeful, passionately committed to Texas independence -

Santa Anna, seasoned, unscrupulous, threatening, certain, determined to maintain Mexico's sovereignty. The former honor bound to hold out against all odds. The latter determined to use any and all means to achieve victory on the battlefield and in the boudoir.



## Chapter Fourteen

# Probing the Defenses

THE FIRST REAL advance of Mexican troops against the Alamo came on day three and was directed at the south wall. Santa Anna invested few soldiers in the foray. This was a probe to measure the reaction of the Alamo defenders, an exploratory venture designed to ascertain numbers and fire power. Those inside the walls had no way to know this and responded to the shouts of sentries with a flurry of men rushing in the direction of the loud cries and gunshots.

With numbers weighted against the assault, the resulting barrage of weapons firing at the attacking force was withering. Men fell, killed outright, mortally wounded or incapacitated by injuries to their persons that required their retreat from the field. Travis quickly realized the intent of the brief exchange of gunfire when no reinforcing element came to their aid.

“They’re trying to gauge our strength. Hold your fire! If you’ve been assigned positions elsewhere on the walls,

move to those positions now. This may be a ruse to focus our attention here while they attack from another direction. Be vigilant!”

It was over almost as quickly as it had begun. Mexican bodies littered the terrain, while the garrison sustained no casualties. The mood was euphoric, and cheers resounded as their assailants used the cover of nearby jacales to retire behind their lines. Both Travis and Crockett immediately recognized the need to destroy those huts before they could again be used as cover.

A small party cautiously ventured outside the south gate. No one was sure if Mexican forces were hidden within the jacales or if more soldiers waited beyond them ready to counterattack once the Alamo defenders sallied forth from their secure walls. The men carried torches to ignite the straw thatch that covered the roofs of the huts. Their rudimentary construction would ensure quick engulfment in flames. Reaching them, however, was precarious. The bodies littering the field could still pose a threat. Anyone of them might just be wounded and capable yet of taking a life.

Each soldier was prodded by the end of a musket or the toe of a boot before being searched for weapons, shot, and powder. What struck those doing the searches was the age of their adversaries; each was young. These were not seasoned troops but inexperienced recruits. Fear or surprise registered in their eyes; their life force snuffed out in an instant. One moment they had years ahead of them, in the next that vivacity was taken from them before they had even the chance to experience life. The euphoria that had existed just moments before when the attack had been thwarted was now replaced by repulsion for the callousness in which these young men had been sent to be slaughtered.

Santa Anna had not intended the attack to succeed. He had sent an insufficient force made up of conscripts he could afford to lose to elicit a response that might give him insight into strength and firepower inside the Alamo's walls. He'd sacrificed lives to gain a tactical advantage. In so doing, he had clearly spoken not only to the disregard he felt for his own soldiers, but ultimately for his utter contempt of those opposing him. If there had been any lingering doubt, there was none now. If Santa Anna's army breached these walls, all their lives would be forfeit.

## Chapter Fifteen

# Growing Despondency

COLD RAINY WEATHER, the constant need to shore up the walls battered the night before, the Mexican drummers and buglers incessantly playing the tune *El Deguello* (“slit throat”) nightly as a prelude to the cannons opening up, the mounting suspense over when an attack might follow, the disappointment that no reinforcements had come to their aid, the lack of adequate clothing, food and medicine, and the lack of sleep slowly but surely took their toll. Under the unbearable strain, men shouted out, “Come on damn you! Get it over with!” They were nearing the end of their endurance; their nerves were shot.

...

CARLOS ESPALIER, a young Tejano under the care and protection of James Bowie, was frightened like everyone else. The fear was palpable. Only those who held leadership

positions tried not to outwardly show that fear. Because of public perception and the responsibilities of command they attempted to always show stoicism. Few succeeded.

Carlos didn't show his true feelings, at least not where they could be witnessed by those around him. He tried to display the same bravado as his mentor; Bowie had taken him under his wing empathizing with the boy's plight. He had tried to give Carlos both strength and purpose in his life, but alone at night Carlos cried and longed for his mother. He hadn't known his biological father, and like so many others had lost his mother to cholera.

More than once as the *Deguello* sounded and the cannon opened up, Carlos had soiled himself and hidden it from everyone around him. He cowered in the shadows praying that there was some way out. He didn't want to die. Like those dead Mexican soldiers at the jacales he hadn't really lived yet. He'd not been with a girl in the carnal sense. He'd stolen a kiss once but had never slept with anyone nor even fondled a breast or ventured further. He was disgusted with himself for even thinking such thoughts, but even more disgusted when he imagined such liaisons as he gave in to the need to explore his own body. He watched as couples stole a moment together, aware that they weren't alone but so in need of human contact that it didn't matter. Carlos had not let on that he heard or saw anything, but it was painful; he had no such release other than by his own manipulation.

He often stared up at the vast sky above him wondering if God was watching or if God even existed. The stars and galaxies attested to some divine power. They were limitless and constant. And yet, he wondered if their brightness forever went dark when someone died.

“Was this the end? Please, God. Let there be something more.”

Like everyone else, the uncertainty weighed heavily on his mind. He heard some of the men talk about an afterlife. For many they couldn't reconcile themselves to acceptance of a heaven or their admission into paradise. Given the hard lives they had lived, the lives they'd taken or were about to take, and their sins imagined or real, they couldn't imagine a forgiving God or Saint Peter allowing them entrance. Others harbored no such doubts. Their Creator and Savior would welcome them, forgiving all transgressions because of their firm belief in Christ Jesus.

At seventeen, Carlos had difficulty coming to grips with such philosophical questions. He didn't want to ask or consider them, much less grapple with their answers. He just wanted to live, to walk out the gates and keep walking away from death, notions of heroism, right versus wrong, tyranny versus freedom. He was too young. All he wanted was a chance at growing up.

Carlos shivered. A norther had blown in, but his trembling had nothing to do with the weather. He saw ghosts... not apparitions, but physical threats not yet manifested. He saw those Mexican soldiers not at a distance but coming over the walls. He saw them pouring into the compound heading straight to his stepfather's room. Body tremors aside, he would muster the courage to confront them. Could he stop them? No. But he would not abandon the man who had taken him under his wing. He resolved that he would die trying to protect Jim Bowie.

The old man woke from his dream. In this case he sensed everything that Carlos Espalier felt. Somewhere back in his

mind he remembered the youthful exuberance of his first sexual encounter. Carlos would never have that experience.

...

DAVID CROCKETT was no less afraid than young Carlos Espalier. Men idolized him, yet he told them repeatedly, "I'm with you, not above you." If he had his way, he would fight in the open, not cooped up inside the Alamo's walls. But there was the persona he had to uphold, the legend he had to live up to – Davy Crockett would protect the weakest defensive position within the mission, the palisade, a slapped-together wooden structure connecting the church to the south wall. He would defend it because he could ride lightning bolts, wrestle grizzlies, stare down the meanest wildcat, and catch cannon balls with his bare hands.

David Crockett very much wanted to escape over the walls. He had come to Texas when he thought all the fighting had ended. This new land was to be a new beginning, a new political opportunity perhaps. But David Crockett was far too aware of his celebrity and influence, the adulation of the other defenders. His alter ego, Davy Crockett, would stay and fight.

...

CROCKETT WAS also very aware of the growing despondency within the ranks, and he moved continuously from position to position within the walls, appearing seemingly everywhere at once, bolstering the courage and determination of the men. He exuded confidence, whether or not he

felt it himself, he recounted tall tales, and he played his fiddle. The string instrument added harmony to the now reviled *Deguello*, and he challenged John McGregor of Scotland to contests of fiddle and bagpipes. Harmonizing with a Highland piper was next to impossible, but the two of them sparred verbally and dueled with their instruments to lift the spirits of the Alamo garrison.

“Ye be a might off there, Crockett,” remarked McGregor with a grin. “Can ye no keep up?”

“Keep up? I’m playing both the melody and the harmony while you spew blood-curdling noise out of that wind bag. Sounds like a cat tied up in a flour sack trying to get out!”

“Cats and wind bags, is it? I’ll have ye know that when your wee fiddle is drowned out by cannon and musket shot and the battle cries of those buggers out there in those fancy uniforms, my pipes will still be sounding loud and clear. It may no be your idea of sweet-sounding notes, but it is music to my ears and it has rallied many a clansman in battle throughout the years.”

“Humph... maybe if we all had a dram of your Scots whiskey to drink, or even some good Tennessee sour mash it might help. A little libation improves most music. But, since we don’t, I hope your pipes curdle the blood of those Mexicans and keep them on their side of these walls. Play on, John, and I’ll do my best to keep up.”

...

THE LACK OF a good whiskey led to an attempt by the two men to distill their own version of spirits.

“What do ye call this concoction, Crockett?” asked John McGregor. “It’s no single malt, that’s for sure.”



“It’s corn liquor, sometimes referred to as moonshine, John. If not the refined taste you’re accustomed to, it will at least warm your belly.”

“Oh, aye. The devil’s brew is likely to eat out the lining of me innards. The mashed corn we’re using was already molding and mixing it with molasses hasn’t improved its aroma. It smells like shite! This is akin to something the Irish might throw together and call whiskey, but you need good, malted barley, a fine oak cask, and time for the mixture to mature before ye can drink it.”

“Well, John, we’re not exactly in the Highlands of Scotland, are we? And we certainly don’t have ten to twelve years to distill it, do we?”

“Nay, you’re right about that, Crockett. We may not have ten to twelve days. So how much time are ye giving this nasty-smelling blend of water, corn, and molasses to produce something that ye can actually drink?”

“I’d estimate that another hour or two should do it.”

“The Saints preserve us!”

“Oh, you’ll be preserved all right, John.”

...

CROCKETT OUTWARDLY maintained his sense of humor when conversing with the other Alamo defenders, but privately agonized over his stature and influence. His best friend, Micajah Autry, would not be here had it not been for him. In fact, none of the Tennessee volunteers would be in the Alamo were it not for him. He’d aligned himself with the Texas cause out of his animosity towards Andrew Jackson. The President’s harsh Indian policies had led to the break between the two men, and Crockett being voted out of

office. Bottom line, Jackson supported Houston, Sam Houston advocated destroying the Alamo, Travis, like Bowie, defied those orders, and Crockett had aligned himself with Bowie and Travis. Still, it was one thing to align oneself with a cause that might end in your own death, it was quite another to condemn your followers to the same fate.

“Micajah, I’m sorry I got you into this mess. It’s not really your fight. I committed you to this course without asking you or the boys what your druthers might be.”

“Well, David. It’s a might late for second guessing yourself. But just so you know, had you given us a choice, I don’t think anyone would have ridden away. We’ve come through many a scrape together, and if this is to be the last one, well... we wouldn’t have it any other way. Friends aren’t really friends unless they’re at your side in good times and bad. Hopefully, you realized long ago that I’m your friend, and now you know these men consider themselves your friends too. The bond may not be as close as ours, but it’s there, nonetheless. We’re not going anywhere, David; not because we can’t, but because we choose not to.”

...

IN ADDITION TO his official letters requesting aid, William Barret Travis also drafted a personal note to David Ayres, the man with whom he had entrusted the care of his son:

*Take care of my little boy. If the country should  
be saved, I may make him a splendid fortune;  
but if the country should be lost, and I should perish,  
he will have nothing but the proud recollection  
that he is the son of a man who died for his country.*

Travis stared at the words. They didn't convey the love he felt for his son, only the hope that they have a future together or, should he be killed, that he would be remembered as a man of principle. Honor, or more importantly the public perception of honorable conduct, was important to Travis. In his mind, it was how a man was measured. He could succumb to emotion and reach out to his son with a more intimate expression of a father's affection, but that wasn't who he was. He didn't seek a glorious death, but if that was his destiny, he wanted it known that he had faced his fate with unwavering resolve. Better that his final words to his son convey strength versus weakness, steadfastness versus sentimentality, courage versus cowardice. These attributes would secure a better future for his son than sentimentality.

## Chapter Sixteen

# Hardships Endured

THE BLUE NORTHER abated, bringing relief from the cold, but though temperatures rose, huge clouds darkened the sky and a steady rain ensued. Everyone was soon soaked and chilled to the bone.

To distill a whiskey of sorts, the dried corn supply had been pilfered. The corn was the main staple of the defenders' diet, but daily rations were cut so that the corn could be ground up and used to produce the liquor. It certainly wasn't Scottish or Tennessee whiskey, nothing even approximating these spirits. It was raw; drunk not for its pleasing taste or aromatic properties, but for the warmth it spread throughout the body. The rudimentary still produced just enough for a swallow or two for each person, but the fiery liquid was just what was needed to temporarily defray the chill and ward off the ague. Hardly a man or woman inside the Alamo was immune from alternating hot and cold sweats, fevers and shivering fits. Even the young were affected and prescribed a dose for medicinal purposes, their

resistance to its ingestion overcome by holding their noses and forcing the vile fluid down their throats.

The relentless downpours hindered the efforts to distill the fiery concoction, dousing fires no matter how hard those inside the Alamo tried to keep them burning. Without the fires, whatever heat they generated was also lost which, given the scarcity of wood, wasn't much to begin with. Moreover, the smoldering wood fouled the air and added to the stench of unwashed bodies and clothing.

Hygiene was never paramount; many avoided bathing in the belief that it brought on sickness. But for those who did wash on occasion, the shortage of water within the Alamo tempered that activity. Drinking water was far more precious than someone smelling bad. As a result, when dry, men, women and children stank of smoke, sweat and excrement. When wet, their clothes clung to their bodies and caked with mud; the rain showers turned the interior grounds into a quagmire. The rain did, however, provide much needed drinking water, and every pot or receptacle was utilized to catch the rainwater.

A concerted effort was made to keep some of the fires going so coffee could be brewed and hot water made available to the doctors for whatever sanitation it provided in the infirmary. Coffee and sugar were abundant and doled out in sufficient quantities to help with the rain and cold, and to somewhat offer relief to exhausted bodies. The coffee imparted warmth, the sugar provided energy.

The other rations, however, proved woefully insufficient to their needs. Most of the provisions, medicine, and ammunition had been confiscated to support the ill-fated Matamoros expedition, leaving the Alamo in dire need.

In addition to coffee and sugar, the food supplies included corn, flour, salt, pepper, vinegar, and cured pork and beef. With this limited inventory, there wasn't much that could be done to vary their day-to-day diet. After all, there were only so many ways that dried corn could be prepared; most of the time it was made into a mush seasoned with salt and pepper. The flour was full of weevils but could at least be sifted and baked into flat bread. The Tejano women would gladly have made flour or corn tortillas, but there was no lard. The salt pork was rancid and unpalatable. Some tried to use the vinegar to hide the smell, but those that ate it out of desperation succumbed to horrible cramping and dysentery, their condition worsened by dehydration as no matter how much water was captured or found it was never enough. The salt beef was OK, but could only be stretched so far, and the numbers of live cattle dwindled with the need to butcher them to help feed the garrison.

...

THE MATAMOROS expedition had not only denied the Alamo much needed provisions, medical supplies and ammunition, but had significantly depleted its manpower. The aftermath of the December 1835 Battle of B exar had seen the end to the volunteer commitments of the irregular forces, with restlessness prompting many to consider returning to their homesteads. The undertaking into northern Mexico offered the opportunity to extend their service.

The value of such an enterprise was hotly debated between Sam Houston, Governor Smith, and the general council, with each advocating support and then altering their positions as circumstances changed. The controversy and

divisiveness resulted from arguments in favor of supporting the Constitution of 1824 or declaring Texas' independence from Mexico. Houston ultimately tried to dissuade support for a campaign to take Matamoros knowing that he would need every man to engage Santa Anna's army after it entered the territory of Texas, but Frank Johnson and James Grant had already organized the volunteers in Béxar independent of Houston with the intent of taking the fight into the enemy's country. The general council, the majority of whom were insurrectionists, supported the incursion and, despite not having the lawful authority to do so, ignored Smith's power as governor and Houston's mandate as commander-in-chief of all Texas land forces not to invade Mexico.

It was a gross violation of the chain of command and a terrible miscalculation of the situation. Too much faith was put in rumors of large numbers of volunteers from the United States rallying to their cause, as well as a total misreading of the anticipated support by Mexican Federalists rising against Santa Anna's Centrist government. Neither materialized.

Aware of the divisions within Texas, Santa Anna used Matamoros as a trap. *General* Urrea surrounded and defeated Johnson's forces at San Patricio on February 27<sup>th</sup>, and engaged and defeated Grant and his volunteers on March 2<sup>nd</sup> at the Battle of Agua Dulce. Later Fannin's doubts about what course of action to pursue would also lead to the surrender of his command completing the senseless loss of men who would otherwise have been available; sixteen killed, twenty-one captured at San Patricio; fifteen killed, six captured at Agua Dulce; and the massacre at Goliad accounting for 425 to 450 men, all summarily executed on

the orders of Santa Anna. As a result, Houston was left scrambling to regroup a demoralized army and restore order to the chaos that followed the fall of the Alamo.



## Chapter Seventeen

# All Glory Is Fleeting

“REIMAGINE THE ALAMO,” an archaeological dig in the city’s Alamo Plaza, supported the long-term plan for the mission. There were three sites that were excavated: the southwest corner of the plaza where investigators hoped to find remnants of the original west wall, across Alamo Street where the south wall and main gate were located, and the corner of Alamo and Houston streets to pinpoint the northern most section of the west wall.

The old man often visited the diggings over the four weeks that the PDP (Preservation Design Partnership) supervised the effort. Expectations were fourfold: the location of remnants of the original adobe walls, the unearthing of artifacts related to the mission’s history, the cleaning, sorting, and analysis of items discovered, and the following of protocols for any human remains found. Every day at 10:30 AM the latest updates were reported to the public, and the old man followed closely the progress of the excavations.

For many there was an assumption that everything to know about the site was already known. But no single book, publication, movie or representation had ever been comprehensive or complete. It was hoped that the excavations would reveal remnants of the original walls as well as artifacts that might shed further light on the mission period and the 1836 battle and finally realize the 300-year history of the Alamo in its entirety. It was a massive undertaking whose research and discovery might well have far-reaching implications. Certainly, it would factor into the master planning efforts that continued to frustrate the old man due to the delays.

The old man was excited about the pottery fragments and utensils that had been found and were now being cleaned, sorted, and analyzed. But what most stirred his imagination and interest, once again bringing vivid images to mind and eliciting inexplicable memories and emotions, was the discovery of what the archaeologists believed were remnants of the original walls marking the western boundary of the Alamo fortifications.

...

IN HIS DREAMS the room on the west wall that functioned as Travis' headquarters was dimly lit by candlelight. It consisted of little more than a chair, writing table, and a bed with the few personal items that he possessed lying on top. The flickering candlelight cast his shadow on the walls along with that of Captain John J. Baugh, whom he had summoned to read the letter he had just written to "The People of Texas and all Americans in the World."

Baugh perused the letter in which Travis had boldly proclaimed:

*I shall never surrender or retreat.  
Victory or Death!*

“A little dramatic, don’t you think, Buck?”

“They need to understand our resolve and our desperate need for help,” Travis responded.

“You’ve conveyed that all right; your determination to hold onto this old mission is definitely an act of desperation. The only victory I see is by way of those Mexican soldiers continuing to pour into San Antonio de Béxar. We’ve only seen the vanguard so far. By the time Santa Anna’s entire army gets here, we’re going to be outnumbered by at least ten to one.”

“There are different kinds of victories, John. Without reinforcements we most certainly will die within these walls, but the cause for which we’re fighting will not.”

“I’m as committed as you are to an independent Texas, but I sure do hope that your words aren’t prophetic and that somebody will come to our aid. We’ve got a little time while Santa Anna builds up his strength, but help needs to arrive soon.”

“I’m sending out a rider first thing in the morning. With luck he’ll get through the Mexican lines. Who do you think has the best chance? We need someone with excellent horsemanship and the nerve to take the risk.”

“There’s a lot of men here that fit that description, and you’re going to need them all at some point to go out in all directions to make the case for aid. The man I’d pick right off the top of my head is Albert Martin. He knows the lay of the land and he’s definitely got sand. He stood with the

-Old Eighteen- at Gonzales when the Mexicans demanded the cannon, he fought in the Battle of B exar, and you and I trusted him earlier to represent you at that parley on the bridge. If you're thinkin' of someone that can actually deliver your letter to Gonzales, he'd be the man I'd choose."

"Fetch him for me, John. I need his pledge that he'll convey that letter to Gonzales. Lancelot Smither left yesterday as soon as Santa Anna's forces were sighted to spread the word that our timetable for his expected arrival in Texas was wrong, and that we had holed up here in the Alamo rather than surrender it to the enemy. If he can locate Smither, between the two of them they can petition Gonzales, San Felipe, and surrounding towns to muster and dispatch reinforcements."

...

"YOU CALLED FOR me, Sir?"

"I need to get a letter to Gonzales as fast as a man can ride. I'm told that you're the man for the job."

"Based on what I'm seeing out there, I think you're going to need every man you got right here," responded Albert Martin.

"Every man plus a whole lot more. The letter you'll carry is a plea for help. We need reinforcements and time is of the essence. I'm asking you for your pledge that you'll not only deliver that plea but return with all the volunteers you can muster to come to our aid. What say you? Can I count on you?"

Albert Martin did not hesitate. "Colonel Travis, you have my word. On my honor I'll deliver your letter or die trying."

...

DAILY SKIRMISHES continued as Alamo defenders encountered Mexican troops when they attempted to obtain firewood and water. These encounters were brief but did successfully manage to restrict gathering of wood and water from the limited areas in and around the acequias. On day five, February 27<sup>th</sup>, as the Mexican forces drew within musket shot of the walls, such efforts were completely cut off as was the flow of water to the canals.

Three days later, feeling all but helpless, with conditions inside the garrison worsening day by day, minute by minute, Travis ordered the 12-pounders on the west wall to fire at what was believed to be Santa Anna's headquarters in the town's main plaza. It was a long shot brought on by desperation, but two rounds were fired, with one actually hitting the structure. The explosions caused damage but no casualties, and Santa Anna was not in the building at the time.

This was the only time that a direct effort had been made on the Mexican ruler's life. Legend and movie portrayals always depicted Crockett taking a shot with his Kentucky long rifle, clipping the *general's* uniform but missing the only chance at possibly killing him. It was but one of the many myths that surrounded the famous frontiersman.

...

TRAVIS NEVER showed his disillusion or disappointment in front of the men, but privately he gave in to despondency. What good were his words if they failed to arouse fellow Texians and countrymen to come to the Alamo's

aid? Hunched over his writing desk with quill in hand he pondered the many requests for help that had gone unanswered. Albert Martin, James Butler Bonham, Juan Seguín and countless others had ridden out with requests for help. To what purpose? The Mexican forces continued to close in, and there was no sign of relief. Giving in to his frustration, Travis penned the following:

*If my countrymen do not rally to my relief  
I am determined to perish in defense of this place,  
and my bones shall reproach my country for her neglect.*

...

TRAVIS COULD no longer converse with Jim Bowie; most of the time he was either delirious or sleeping. Sleep was a blessing.

In his delirium Bowie was wracked by mental anguish and hallucinations. He had sent his wife Ursula and two children to Monclova, Coahuila de Zaragoza in 1833 to avoid the cholera epidemic that was sweeping through Mexico. He thought the higher elevations and fresh air would shield them from the disease. He was wrong; she along with both their children and her parents, died a horrible death.

Nicknamed “blue death” because the person’s skin turned bluish gray from extreme loss of bodily fluids, cholera was thought to be caused by bad air. It was actually a bacterial intestinal infection spread through contaminated water or food grown in water containing human waste. The malady caused acute diarrhea. In the 1880s poor sanitation and the lack of proper medical treatment led to death within hours of ingesting the tainted water.

Bowie's dreams were haunted by images of his dead wife and his two children. She had only been nineteen when they married in 1831, passing away at twenty-one. The children had been infants, Marie Elvie eighteen months old, and James Veramendi Bowie barely three months old. Their specters were ghoulish, barely recognizable, wasted away by the disease, bluish-gray in appearance. Bowie tossed and turned in his sleep, but there was no escaping their presence. He would carry those images with him until the Mexican soldiers broke into his room on the south wall.

...

TRAVIS DID, however, locate and hail David Crockett just outside the church. "A word, Crockett!"

"Only one? Might take a minute to come up with the right one."

Crockett saw the scowl on Travis' face and quickly added, "you're not one for funnin', are you?"

"I don't see any humor in our current situation, Travis responded.

"Depends on how you look at it. When I was voted out of office, I told my constituents that they could all go to hell, and I'd go to Texas. Well, I'm here, but I gotta feelin' looking out at all those Mexicans, I'm going to see hell sooner than they will."

"You're famous, Crockett. That fame may well spare you. Santa Anna will want to leverage your life for concessions from Houston."

"Gotta admit I don't know much about this Santa Anna fella, but seems to me that he means what he says when he

says that no quarter will be given to any combatant inside the Alamo, and fame doesn't amount to much when you're staring death in the face."

"Then he can't be allowed to breach these walls. You and your Tennesseans need to keep the Mexican forces from overrunning the palisade. It's the weakest position and they'll likely concentrate forces against it. Can you hold?"

"You know the answer to that as well as I do, Travis. We'll make them pay dearly. The price of admission inside these walls won't come cheap, but if Santa Anna commits the entirety of his army when the final assault comes, we don't have a chance in hell of keeping them at bay. Without reinforcements the Alamo will fall."

"I'm determined to hold out as long as I can," responded Travis

"Figured as much. That 'I'm' you speak of sure does encompass a lot of folks. You're a learned man, Travis. Do you recall the slaves in ancient Rome that stood behind their masters in chariot processions as they triumphantly returned to the Eternal City? They were said to have whispered in their ears - 'All glory is fleeting.' I know you seek glory Travis. Just keep in mind that ancient Rome fell and whatever glory Caesar or his generals enjoyed died along with it. None of us are going to make it out of this. Let's just hope that our deaths will be remembered, and they will not have been lost in vain."

...

TRAVIS WEIGHED Crockett's words when he returned to his quarters. Even after twelve days he still could surrender the garrison, but to what end? If they laid down their



arms, what guarantee did he have that Santa Anna would not have them all executed anyway? He was conscious of his ambitions, his perception as cool and removed from the men he was now sentencing to certain death. But more than anything he was committed to the birth of an independent republic. He believed firmly in that which did not yet exist, separation from Mexico and establishment of an idea that would become the Republic of Texas. For that he was willing to sacrifice all and let future generations decide whether this was vanity or something more.



PART THREE

Blood and  
Remembrance

## Chapter Eighteen

# Playing By His Own Rules

ON THE NIGHT of March 5<sup>th</sup> Travis asked for volunteers to act as sentries outside the mission walls. He had no precise information that Santa Anna's forces were preparing to attack, but over the past several days he had witnessed the Mexican forces constructing scaling ladders, and tonight when the drummers and buglers did not play the *Deguello* and the guns fell silent, Travis knew in his gut that the end was nigh.

The three volunteers were positioned in the redoubts outside the south, west, and north entrances to the Alamo. Those earthworks provided enough cover that should the Mexican Army begin their advance, the men should theoretically have sufficient time to raise the alarm and retreat back inside the garrison.

The men understood the risks. It was imperative that they stay awake and alert for the sake of their own lives and those of the men, women, and children that now counted on

them. Those precious few moments before Mexican soldiers reached the walls might... just might make a difference.

That task, however, proved to be beyond the limits of their now diminished endurance. Santa Anna had correctly surmised that the defenders would be unable to resist drifting off to sleep after almost two weeks without respite from the incessant cannonade and music. Those men would die in place without ever even awakening to see their killers.

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SANTA ANNA would brook no further discussion or argument from his commanders about his decision to attack the Alamo at dawn. The attack was unnecessary, and they had tried in vain to persuade him from proceeding with his plan. But to Santa Anna life was a game that he played by his own rules. He had neither the patience to wait any longer nor the inclination to curb his need for excitement. The young señorita that had been lured to his bed no longer aroused him sexually. Even at the height of their love-making she failed to fulfill his hunger for new thrills. Now he would send many of his own soldiers to their deaths simply to feed his appetite for self-gratification. They were expendable just as she had been. He had no interest in anyone if they could not satisfy his appetite for sex and power.

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“GENERAL COS, you will attack from the north, *Coronel* Duque from the northeast. The combination of forces should be able to break through their weakened positions giving relief to *Coronel* Romero’s forces who will conduct a

frontal assault on the west wall. *Coronel* Morales, you will approach from the south. There is a cluster of cottonwood trees opposite the palisade that should give you cover until you are in position. *Coronel* Alameda, you will command the reserves, and *Coronel* Sesma, you will position your cavalry to the east to intercept any deserters from within our own ranks or any of the Alamo defenders who attempt a breakout. That is the most likely direction for any such attempt. As you know, I abhor cowardice in any man, and your mission will be to hunt them down and kill whoever turns tail and runs. Everyone be in place at least two hours before first light. Maintain strict silence and do not advance until I give the signal. You have your orders, gentlemen.” With that Santa Anna ended their meeting.

The Mexican staff officers and commanders present in the room were momentarily silent after Santa Anna exited; leaving them to implement the orders they had just received. *General* Manuel Fernandez Castrillon broke the hush, commending the men to their duties and offering a prayer for their safety in the ensuing fight. “When the battle is won, I hope to see each of you again in its aftermath. Godspeed.” For *Coronel* Francisco Duque the prayer would go unanswered. Wounded early in the assault on the north wall, he would fall and be trampled to death by his own men.

## Chapter Nineteen

# Nightmares and Phantoms

THE OLD MAN sat bolt upright in bed grabbing his chest. Once again, his body and bedding were soaked in sweat. Most of his dreams were about others involved in the Alamo story, but he had one recurring nightmare that never failed to so shock him that he awoke startled, gasping for air, and needing to make sure that he was still among the living. In this dream he was one of the sentinels outside the walls sleeping soundly when he felt the cold steel of a Mexican bayonet pierce his chest.

In the dream sequence the old man saw a face looking down upon him. The glimpse was fleeting, never really coming into focus. Then everything would go black. He was neither in the realm of the living or the dead. He was somewhere in between; a place devoid of all light, sound, or physical dimension. Though he struggled to escape the void, nothing he did allowed him to do so. He was sure that he was screaming, but no one could hear his screams. It was

as if he was suspended in time, caught within a nightmare from which there was no deliverance.

Each time was as disconcerting as the last. It took him awhile to calm his breathing and realize that he was in his own bed and that the excruciating pain that he'd experienced was but a phantom memory. He still had to take stock of his surroundings and his body just to assure himself that it hadn't been real. He always came to that realization, but he was never able to go back to sleep regardless of the time. He knew that he would revisit the dream again and again and he dreaded its coming.

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MATEO ESCOBEDO still had not had the presence of mind to blow his bugle, even after hearing the shouting and the command to charge. He watched as men on either side of him rose off the ground and rushed toward the mission walls. He joined them hoping to reach the relative safety afforded the attackers once they got beneath the defenders' field of fire.

The remaining distance was approximately 100 yards, yet with each stride the length to traverse the ground seemed to extend. Men were falling all around him, large swaths opened in the ranks because of grapeshot fired from the cannons and the precise marksmanship coming from the Alamo defenders.

His bugle hung from a strap across his chest. Mateo had forgotten that it was even there. In his hand he carried a musket, one that he had never fired before. He'd grabbed it off a fallen soldier but hadn't taken the time to see if it was loaded or even to grab the man's powder horn and pouch



containing the musket balls, both of which he needed were he to have the presence of mind to actually fire it. His sole focus was getting to the walls.

The first slug tore into his upper torso, spinning him around so that he was now facing away from the fortifications. The next shot hit him in the back, followed by the fatal shot that tore into the back of his left knee, severing the femoral artery. He went face first into the dirt, the musket and bugle forgotten.

As he lay on the ground bleeding out, Mateo's thoughts returned to his home. He had been right. He would never know what became of his grandfather or his goats.

## Chapter Twenty

# The Breakout

CARLOS ESPALIER was determined to acquit himself well in the eyes of his fellow defenders, especially his mentor James Bowie, but fear was a powerful emotion. That fear and his resolve withered as he faced the imminent likelihood of death. And the fear only intensified as he witnessed others succumb to its lure.

As countless Mexican soldiers poured into the mission through the gap in the north wall, steadfastness gave way to the urge to escape. It only took one or two men running away from certain death to convince others to abandon their fighting positions. Panic spreads quickly in battle and self-preservation often overwhelms all other considerations.

Carlos felt himself caught up in the hysteria and ran. The convergence of Mexican soldiers at the north wall had come about when the force attacking from the east had twice been driven back, but somehow regrouped and were joined by reinforcements that Santa Anna ordered into the fight. The addition of fresh troops had bolstered their courage and numbers, resulting in the breach that now all but

assured the Alamo's fall. However, it also allowed a momentary opportunity for possible escape to the east.

...

UPWARDS OF perhaps fifty to seventy desperate defenders now raced towards what they hoped might be their salvation. It wasn't a coordinated effort. There was no leadership or plan. Each individual attempted the breakout on his own, and Carlos was all but oblivious to the others making their way out onto the open terrain.

"I can make it," he thought to himself. "Don't look back. Don't think about those still inside the Alamo. Don't think about Bowie. He's dying anyway. You're young. Your whole life lies ahead of you. Just run!"

...

THE PANIC SPREAD not only to humans, but to the horses in the corral. With the constant bombardment throughout the siege, it had been difficult but not impossible to control the herd, but the cacophony of cannon booms, rifle fire, bugles blaring, and the screams of men in the throes of battle had them totally spooked. Adding to the mayhem, Mexican artillery rounds were now being lobbed over the east wall, landing inside the horse corral and killing or maiming several of the animals. The smell of blood panicked them; fear showed in their eyes and could be heard in their snorts and neighs. Some galloped inside the fencing, going round and round, going nowhere. Others kicked at the corral or rammed into it to create a way to get out, suffering gashes in their hides as well as broken limbs.

The stallions reared and bit at the other horses that came too close. It was absolute chaos.

Some of the men trying to escape tried to catch a mount as the horses broke through their enclosure. Those that did stood no chance of breaking their stride and were trampled beneath their hooves. Soon the riderless horses were running alongside the men exiting the Alamo.

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WITH EACH STRIDE that Carlos made outside the mission walls he believed more strongly that he had left the carnage behind him. It was only when he heard sporadic gunfire and the screams of men dying around him that he came out of his own reverie and took in the scenes happening all around him. Men in Mexican uniforms mounted on horseback armed with lances were systematically chasing down the escapees.

The open terrain afforded no real cover. Undulating ground and scrub brush were all that offered any hope of survival. Carlos fell to the ground at the first opportunity to avoid being noticed by the lancers. There was no way to outrun their horses and those that continued to run were swiftly overcome and dispatched.

Carlos' heart was pounding in his chest as he curled up into a fetal position and prayed. Like the others, however, his situation was hopeless. A lancer had seen him and was fast approaching. It's funny where your mind goes when you're about to die. Carlos' final thoughts were of home and his mother. As the rider closed the remaining distance between them, his lance lowered to end a life not yet lived, Carlos closed his eyes and pictured himself in his mother's

embrace. As the lance skewered him to the ground - ground that had failed to protect him - Carlos uttered his final word - "Mama!"

## Chapter Twenty-One

# The Beginning of the End

CROCKETT WAS one of the few remaining defenders still alive outside the walls of the church. Once the north wall was breached, Mexican forces quickly made inroads: on the west wall via scaling ladders, on the south wall by breaking through the gate with axes and swords, and penetrating the palisade with both infantry and mounted cavalry. They made quick work of the men caught in the open, and systematically went room to room along the outer walls seeking out anyone taking refuge inside.

Those that were either stationed in the Long Barrack or who made it inside as the tidal wave of Mexican soldiers swept through the compound were in a deadly struggle whose outcome was certain. Soon both the tri-color flag, with two stars (representing Coahuila and Texas), that flew in the center of the mission, and the New Orleans Gray's flag atop the Long Barrack were pulled down and replaced

by Mexico's flag. The eagle, snake, and cactus emblems were witness to the ongoing slaughter.

The few remaining men alongside Crockett had thrown up a makeshift barrier outside the church, but their efforts were futile. Crockett recognized Robert Evans as he raced toward the powder magazines with torch in hand. The garrison's Master of Ordnance had been tasked with igniting them when it became apparent that all was lost. Multiple musket balls ripped into his body before he could reach his objective. Crockett watched him fall, but still the Irishman tried to crawl forward. Another hail of musket fire ended his life and the attempt.

At this point there was no time to reload and fire weapons. Crockett raised his rifle above his head to swing at his assailants, but he was engulfed in a sea of Mexican soldiers. He literally could not move his arms. Soldiers surrounded him on all sides, their numbers and proximity so great that they became tightly packed together in what the famed frontiersman was certain was a deadly embrace. He could barely breathe.

Miraculously Crockett was not shot or stabbed. Had he fallen he most certainly would have been crushed under the mass of humanity. Instead, he felt Mexican soldiers pulling at his arms and hands, disarming him, and eventually pummeling him into unconsciousness. When he awoke, he was bound and lying on the ground. He had little to no ability to upright himself but was finally able to get to his knees. Several other men were similarly bound and lying next to him in various stages of distress. Some had wounds, while fear showed on the faces of all of them. Crockett had no

illusions about their chances for survival. Their fate now rested with Antonio López de Santa Anna.

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THE CHURCH WAS the last building to fall. As the Mexican soldiers finally broke through the doors to the chapel, the defenders fired the cannon fronting the entrance one last time. A large swath of bodies was riddled by musket balls and scrap metal as grapeshot tore into the front ranks. A huge billow of smoke issued from the cannon's barrel and briefly obscured visibility. The few remaining defenders braced themselves for the end and it came quickly. The Mexican soldiers surged inside, firing blindly at first in response to shots striking flesh and bone, ricocheting off the stone walls, and thudding into the wooden doors. The return volley in the relative darkness accounted for several of the defenders and innocent non-combatants as well. Then the Mexican muskets with bayonets attached dispatched the remaining resistance at the rear of the church. Women and children screamed, but the killing finally ended.

...

WHEN THE FIGHTING ended, the wives, children, and their servants who had hidden in the sacristy and the adjoining room were escorted to the Musquiz home in town to await interrogation by none other than his Excellency, Santa Anna. Many of the children were mercifully too young to comprehend or even realize what had happened, while the older adolescents were traumatized and frightened. The adults tried to be reassuring, but carnage was all



around them as they walked out of the chapel under armed guard. They tried to shield the children's eyes from the horror of mutilated bodies, especially diverting their gaze from the dead who just ninety minutes before had been people that they knew and loved. The military escort was respectful and understanding, but even they looked on with blank stares and haunted eyes for the fallen. Recognition of their fellow soldiers was no less devastating. Grief was a universal emotion.

## Chapter Twenty-Two

# Interrogations

THE TEXAS STATE ARCHIVES portrait of Susanna Dickinson shows a middle-aged heavy-set woman with a downward turn of the mouth at the corners, a dour countenance, and eyes that reflect the many hardships she faced during her life. But in 1836 at age twenty-two she had been a striking beauty with long raven black hair and a face and body that highlighted her sexuality and allure.

Santa Anna was immediately smitten by the young woman when she was escorted into his presence by *Coronel* Almonte in the aftermath of the battle.

*“General, quiero presentarle a la Señora Dickinson.”*

Santa Anna didn't respond to the introduction immediately. He eyed the young woman from top to bottom. She was holding onto her daughter, Angelina, but the *general* was not interested in the child. The bundle in her arms was conspicuous by its presence but might just as well have been a worthless object easily discarded. He was only focused on the woman in front of him.

“Where are my manners, *Señora*? Please sit. *Coronel* Almonte, you may leave us.”

*Coronel* Almonte noted the look in Santa Anna’s eye, but did as he was ordered, taking up a position just outside the door.

Susanna Dickinson remained standing as the aide left the room. Despite the pain she felt being in Santa Anna’s presence, she held her head high and fought back tears as she replied to the Mexican commander.

“I want no courtesy from you, no considerations beyond that given to all the other survivors from the Alamo that you’ve interrogated.”

“In this instance I would prefer a polite conversation, perhaps over a glass of wine. We do not need to be adversaries. Please, sit, Mrs. Dickinson.”

“You just murdered my husband along with countless others that were my friends, relatives, and compatriots, and now you expect me to be cordial? You also add insult to injury by bringing me here to the Musquiz home where I lived with my husband. I’m holding his child, a daughter who will never know her father. I’m a widow with an uncertain future. You hold the power to do whatever you want with me, and there’s nothing I can do to stop you. But if you expect me to just acquiesce to your charm, you’re delusional!

“Your defiance is admirable, *Señora*. In fact, it’s quite titillating.”

“You’re a monster!”

“No *Señora*. Were I a monster I would have the child taken away, and I would have my way with you until I grew tired of you. Then I would give you over to my men for their pleasure. Eventually you would be so degraded that

you would either continue to prostitute yourself for shelter and food, or you would take your own life. Instead, for 'certain favors' you and the child will be taken care of; a fate certainly better than that which I just described, wouldn't you agree?"

"You threaten me with my child. Have you no decency?"

Santa Anna poured himself a glass of wine, took a large swallow, wiped his mouth and answered in a voice now filled with venom.

"Your husband was killed for his insolence and alignment with the rebels. All of the Alamo defenders met a similar end for their antagonism to my rule and defiance of Mexico's laws and sovereignty. None of them were murdered as you suggest. They died in battle as did my own soldiers."

Sequestered inside the sacristy, Susannah Dickinson had not witnessed the executions outside the church. The lie came easily to Santa Anna.

Continuing, he said, "The few Alamo survivors - the other non-combatant survivors, that is (he smirked as he recalled the moment he ordered the brutal dispatch of the prisoners) - were interrogated and found to be of no further value to me. They were released with sufficient funds and provisions to make their way home or to whatever destination they chose. There were no restrictions on their movement. I do confess a certain attraction to you, and I hoped you would choose a better future for yourself and your child. You needn't have experienced any hardship; quite the contrary. However, you've made it very clear what you think of me. Yet, despite my anger and inclination to carry through with my previous expression of intent towards you, I'm not the animal you believe me to be."

“*Coronel* Almonte, get in here! I want *Señora* Dickinson to carry a message to Houston. All those who defy me, all interlopers, will meet a similar end to their lives as did Travis, Bowie, Crockett, and *Señor* Dickinson.”

Turning once again to Susanna Dickinson, he continued, “This threat I will carry out, *Señora*. Texas will experience the beast. The interlopers can decide to surrender, pledge to uphold Mexico’s laws and sovereignty, or die!”

“*Coronel* Almonte, arrange for transport. Find a driver capable of handling a team of horses or oxen to pull a cart or wagon, whatever you can find. That should allow *Señora* Dickinson to focus on care for her child en route. After all, I am not a monster.”

...

SANTA ANNA might not have been a monster, but when his anger was aroused, he was ruthless. Still smoldering from his meeting with Susannah Dickinson, he began formulating plans for his pursuit of Houston and the punishment of anyone continuing to defy him. He also chose to re-fortify the old mission in case of an attack by the Texians. The officer chosen to complete the task, as well as handle the care and feeding of wounded Mexican troops was *General* Juan José Andrade, the commander of the Mexican cavalry brigade.

His Excellency would remain in San Antonio to the end of the month. During that time, he continued dalliances with the town’s young women. They bore the brunt of his rejection by Susannah Dickinson. Never satiated, Santa Anna moved from one to another. There was no pretense

now of gentlemanly behavior. He used them and tossed them aside.

## Chapter Twenty-Three

# Ghosts and Disembodied Voices

NEWS OF Santa Anna's defeat and capture at San Jacinto reached *General* Andrade on May 6<sup>th</sup>. It was followed two weeks later by orders from *General* Vicente Filisola, second in command of all Mexican forces now tasked with withdrawing them from Texas, to destroy the Alamo and quit the town.

Andrade ordered his men to tear down all the work they had heretofore accomplished to re-build the fortifications. Lower walls were demolished, trenches were filled in, and anything that could be burned was set on fire. The thickness of the outer walls, the Long Barrack, and the church prevented total destruction, but the Alamo mission was just a shell when the Mexican forces under Andrade's command began their march south.

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ACCORDING TO LEGEND the acts of destruction carried out by Andrade's cavalry were hindered by spirits of the fallen Alamo defenders. *Diablos* were said to have guarded what remained of the old mission church, holding burning swords aloft to keep Mexican soldiers at bay. At the Long Barrack a lone ghost reportedly held a fireball in his hands to thwart any effort to raze the building. According to several terrorized soldiers, apparitions of marching Alamo defenders circled around the complex walls protecting the site. Their petitions to *General* Andrade to simply quit the area as soon as possible went unheeded, and despite their fear, the destruction orders were carried out.

As the years sped by specific ghosts were spotted by excavators, archaeologists, security personnel, Alamo employees, and docents alike. Most frequently mentioned was an unnamed child searching the site for his parents who presumably died during the battle. Some visitors to the shrine reported seeing a father and son jumping from the parapets to their deaths. And both tourists and locals alike claimed to have seen *General* Castrillon's ghost lamenting the deaths of Crockett and the other combatant survivors executed on Santa Anna's orders. The old man was skeptical of these reports. He'd never witnessed anything like that but couldn't dismiss them out of hand. However, he did wonder why Manuel Fernandez Castrillon's ghost would haunt the Alamo when he had been killed at the Battle of San Jacinto.

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OVER THE YEARS the Alamo became regarded one of the most haunted venues in all of San Antonio. Even the old man, skeptical as he was, would have sworn to hearing disembodied voices and phantom footsteps while working within the Long Barrack the night of the 2004 premiere of "The Alamo." And he wasn't entirely sure that he hadn't experienced an actual visitation from the spirit world. A lone female of Mexican descent had come inside the building after the screening of the film at the Majestic Theatre, and he still questioned whether she had been a real person or not. He had certainly been startled by her abrupt appearance. Most of the invitees to the world premiere were mingling with cast members outside on the Alamo grounds enjoying food and drink at the VIP after-viewing party.

The lady in question appeared to be in her late twenties or early thirties and was dressed entirely in black; the gown she was wearing could easily have been from a bygone era or made especially for this special occasion. Her beauty was stunning. Her hair was tied back into a knot at the nape of her neck and kept in place by an ornate comb with inlaid pearl featuring a floral design. Two ringlets of hair hung just above either eyebrow showcasing huge brown eyes and sensuous lips. She was perhaps five foot five or six inches tall, and her skin was an alluring shade of brown with a figure that he couldn't help but admire. She lingered only momentarily asking a few questions in Spanish about the dead, which the old man - having been raised in a bilingual household - answered in kind as best he could. Then she disappeared just as suddenly as she had appeared, leaving him somewhat shaken by the encounter. One moment she was there, the next she was gone. He didn't recall her departing. It was as if she just suddenly vanished.

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THE OLD MAN had not experienced any other paranormal phenomena at any time since, almost twenty years ago now. Outside of his dreams no grisly apparitions or beautiful specter had ever appeared before him. During his many visits to the Alamo, he'd experienced no "cold spots," no unexplained movement of objects or strange sounds, no other haunting of any kind. Of course, he was never again in a position to be inside the Alamo at night as he had been for the movie premiere. Were hauntings limited to the hours of darkness? That seemed to be the conventional wisdom or interpretation by those who believed in such things. Other than that one time, however, he had nothing else to go by. His experience was different. He definitely felt the presence of countless souls reaching out to him, and in his mind's eye he experienced the conviction of travel through time and space that led him to a specific moment, individual, emotion, or action. That feeling and that certainty were as real to him as the lady that had visited him in the Long Barrack. In the quiet solitude of that evening had he conjured her, or had she been flesh and blood? It was a question that he couldn't answer.

## Chapter Twenty-Four

# Unheralded Valor

TORIBIO LOSOYA had been a private in the Mexican Army, assigned to the *Alamo de Parras* company stationed in San Antonio de Béxar. He had deserted and joined Juan Seguín's company of Tejanos opposed to Santa Anna's rule. In the aftermath of the battle, his body was found inside the chapel.

The statue of the Tejano was dedicated in 1986 to commemorate the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the battle. Situated across Losoya Street on the *Paseo del Alamo*, about a two-minute walk from the shrine, the bronze sculpture depicts the Alamo defender in a defiant stance with a flintlock pistol in his right hand and what appears to be a *serape* or cape in his left. Chiseled onto the granite base is his name. Passers-by have little knowledge of the importance of the piece or its connection to the Alamo story.

The old man lamented the anonymity of Toribio and the other Tejanos who had participated in the struggle for Texas Independence. He knew of and appreciated their contributions that for far too long had been overlooked and

gone unheralded. It was gratifying that the story arc of what actually occurred in 1836 was finally emerging from the dust bin of history and efforts were being made to recognize facts versus myths.

...

TORIBIO LOSOYA, Gregorio Esparza, and Almeron Dickinson stood together at the top of the ramp towards the rear of the church. Tear stains were evident on the powder-stained face of Almeron Dickinson who had just raced back to his position alongside the two men after briefly talking to his wife. He had given her the worst news possible: that only a few minutes remained before the enemy would burst through the church doors.

It is one thing to realize that your death is imminent, quite another to prepare yourself for the moment. Almeron had already reconciled himself to the fate that awaited him but used the precious time remaining to address Toribio and Gregorio.

“Listen to me, both of you. I know that your loyalty has been questioned. I know you have received insults because of your race, your language, your clothing, any number of pretexts to question your heritage and why you didn’t side with Santa Anna. I’ve heard the talk. I’ve seen how you’ve been treated, and I should have spoken up sooner. I apologize for all those inappropriate remarks and want to thank you for being here in this moment. Choosing to fight alongside men like me for a Texas we’ll never get to see was no easy decision. You should have been given respect, not derision. Just know that. It’s because of men like you and

all of your Tejano brothers that independence from Mexico will come. God bless.”

The doors burst open. They fired the cannon. Smoke temporarily obscured the three defenders. However, a hail of musket balls made its way through the dense black smoke, ending Dickinson’s remarks and the lives of all three men.

...

TORIBIO AND HIS family had lived in a two-room home near the southwest corner of the mission, and excavations in the late ‘70s and early ‘80s had unearthed remnants of the stone building. Yet besides models and visual representations, which showed where the southwest corner of the fortifications had been, the actual Alamo footprint remained difficult to conceptualize. It wasn’t until the current 18-pound cannon and Losoya House Exhibit opened that visitors began to realize the size of the mission and the significance of the Toribio Losoya statue.

## Chapter Twenty-Five

# Eyewitness to History

*TENIENTE* JOSÉ ENRIQUE de la Peña was a naval officer who found himself acting as an aide to *Coronel* Francisco Duque, the Commander of the Toluca Battalion, at the Battle of the Alamo. He arrived in San Antonio de Béxar only days before the final assault, yet it would be his account of what occurred on March 6<sup>th</sup>, 1836, that would be hotly debated by historians and the public at large and remain controversial to this day.

...

DE LA PEÑA had been in route to Veracruz when he first encountered Santa Anna in 1828; well before the eleven-time ruler of Mexico came to power. But it was this meeting that would result in de la Peña being diverted from a posting to the major port city and likely sea duty and remaining in

the capital city of Jalapa along with Mexican ground forces. He would participate in the Battle of Tampico the following year and the Battle of the Alamo in 1836 and receive several combat citations for his bravery under fire. Yet, José Enrique de la Peña had a tumultuous career, promoted and demoted multiple times because of his outspoken criticism of various leaders in both the Navy and the Army. The publication of those comments and his eventual participation in an uprising to oust Santa Anna as Mexico's President in favor of a federalist government would result in his imprisonment in 1838.

The conditions under which de la Peña was incarcerated varied as he was moved repeatedly among a series of Mexican prisons over a two-year period. None were conducive to good health in the long term; the lack of sanitation, limited diet, dampness within the cell blocks, exposure to changing environments and climate conditions, and isolation... all contributed to a decline in his physical wellbeing.

Yet, even in prison, de la Peña continued consolidating and publishing notes and personal observations about the Mexican campaign in Texas that he had jotted down in a diary. His account offers details that no other record contains.

"What are you writing about today, *Señor?*" The guards found it interesting that an officer imprisoned for publishing remarks denigrating his superiors was still being allowed to do so. There were those that couldn't read, having never received an education of any kind, but the guards that could read had talked about his articles with them, especially his criticism of *General Vicente Filisola*, the officer charged with supervising the retreat of Mexican forces from

Texas after Santa Anna's defeat at San Jacinto, as well as his later endorsement of *General* José de Urrea, and his ill-fated attempt to oust Santa Anna from power.

In response to the guard, de la Peña responded, "I'm fleshing out my thoughts on what I observed at the Alamo. My experiences were randomly entered into a diary at the time, but now I'm attempting to put them into a more coherent memoir which I hope to get published."

"I vaguely remember a mention of your diary in the articles you wrote about *General* Filisola," responded the prison guard.

"*General* Filisola was a coward. He left Texas to that rabble army – if you can even call it that – when we were the experienced professional armed forces and far outnumbered them, even after suffering defeat at San Jacinto. There was no cause for Santa Anna to agree to abandon territory that rightfully belonged to Mexico. He did so to save his own life, not for the life of our country, and Filisola should never have complied with those orders!"

Many of the prison guards privately were of the same opinion yet would never voice such thoughts aloud except among themselves. To do so would see them behind bars in conditions far worse than an officer's imprisonment; either that, or they would more likely face execution.

"But didn't *General* Urrea also follow those orders?" asked the jailor. "You did not criticize him at the time. You even joined him in insurrection. Now you are both behind bars; you are here, and he sits in Perote Prison."

"The general was... is an honorable man. He was also opposed to the withdrawal of Mexican forces from Texas, but Filisola was his superior officer, and he reluctantly followed his orders. I backed *General* Urrea's attempt to restore



honor to Mexico. It failed, and yes, now both of us are in prison. But enough of your questions; I have more to write that one day will see the light of day despite Santa Anna's dictatorship."

"As you wish, *Señor*. Maybe your words will, as you say, see the light of day, but you are likely to spend the rest of your life in this very cell or one just like it. I leave you to your labors and to your memories."

...

SANTA ANNA received word of political prisoners periodically and was informed that de la Peña's health was rapidly deteriorating. He ordered his release in 1840.

The prison warden read the order to José Enrique de la Peña. "You are also being demoted in rank and discharged from the Army. You will receive no pension or further consideration by the government, but you are as of this day a free man."

"Such consideration," replied de la Peña. "I suppose I should be grateful."

The warden smirked and handed over the order to the prisoner. In addition to Santa Anna's signature on the document, there was a handwritten note which read - "I am, after all, not a monster."

...

THE DE LA PEÑA diary was published in 1955 under the title, "*Rebellion de Texas*." The English translation, "Santa Anna in Texas: A Personal Narrative of the Revolution," was released in 1975. The latter caused a huge stir in the United

States due to its assertion that Crockett had been captured and executed after the Battle of the Alamo. Was the diary a forgery or fact? That question continues to be debated to this day.

Upon his release from prison, Enrique de la Peña disappears from the historical record. It is presumed that he died shortly afterwards.

...

THE OLD MAN had no reservations in accepting the diary at face value. The level of detail about the Mexican Army's campaign had convinced him that the document was genuine even before he began having his visions and visitations by the Alamo dead. He'd "witnessed" the executions firsthand and had been shattered by the experience. The argument that they somehow lessened the courage and valor of the slain fell on deaf ears.

## Chapter Twenty-Six

# Hallowed Ground

THE OLD MAN returned to the Alamo grounds to visit the newly completed palisade exhibit, a partial reconstruction of the wooden defensive position at the south corner of the church. The entire wall had been the weakest point in the fortifications, and the single row of cedar posts, though not extending the entire length of the original, visually allowed visitors to understand how difficult it would have been to defend the area against a concerted Mexican attack.

Several things struck the old man as he looked upon the exhibit. In his mind's eye he had conjured a double row of logs embedded in the ground, each row separated by a few feet of rock and dirt, the filler added in between the two rows to better protect Crockett and the thirty-one Tennesseans that had been positioned by Travis to man the barricade.

In a letter to Sam Houston the Alamo Commander had written:

*If this is the weakest point of the fortress  
let's put the man there who's going to buoy*

*the spirits of those who are behind the walls.*

The old man admired Crockett's skill at motivating the Tennesseans and their tenacity in defending the position for as long as they could. Looking upon the exhibit, he didn't just see the latest addition to the ongoing efforts to reimagine the battle. He actually visualized the desperate struggle by Crockett and his men to fulfill the responsibility that had been entrusted to them, knowing all the while that their efforts were futile.

The other thought that struck the old man was regarding all the construction, digging, barriers, and street closures that surrounded Alamo Plaza. It was all necessary, of course, to achieve the improvements envisioned by the project team, but it detracted from the reverence that the Alamo deserved.

The irony of looking upon the Alamo as hallowed ground was that following the battle it would lie in ruin for a time before it was occupied and used for many different purposes - as a U.S. Army quartermaster's depot, an armory, and a mercantile store/warehouse. Efforts to perpetuate the memory of those who fought and died at the Alamo wouldn't even begin before the State of Texas purchased the chapel in 1883 from the Catholic Church, and subsequently received title to the Long Barrack from the DRT after it acquired the building in 1904 from the Hugo & Schmeltzer Company. The State would reimburse Clara Driscoll and then award custodianship back to the DRT charging them with the responsibility for maintenance of the chapel, Convento and grounds, which they did from 1905 to 2015.

The old man had been proud of his association with the DRT. He had only worked as docent for a year, but the organization had recognized him for his limited time with them.

Now local leaders and the Alamo Trust Committee were responsible for bringing to fruition the plan for the future. The old man knew he'd never see the completion of the museum and visitor center or the various efforts to restore the Alamo's original footprint, but that didn't lessen his enthusiasm for the project. He kept up with all the updates published in the newspaper, attended public meetings, and had joined "Friends of the Alamo" to support the Remember the Alamo Foundation.

...

AFTER VISITING the palisade exhibit the old man had thought to get a drink at the historic Menger Hotel bar but decided instead to head over to Shilo's German Delicatessen on East Commerce Street. Billed as the oldest restaurant in San Antonio, the deli held a special place in his heart. As a little boy his dad had brought him here whenever they were in downtown San Antonio, usually following a stop at the Alamo.

Upon arrival, he was quickly seated in a booth. There weren't a lot of patrons at the moment. Like many restaurants, Shilo's staffing and patronage had been affected by the pandemic, and the recent surge in infections due to the Omicron variant hadn't helped business.

A waitress that he recognized from past visits approached to take his order.

"What can I get for you, Sir?"

"Well, I'm not really hungry, but I would like to get a frosty mug of your homemade root beer. In fact, can you make that a 'black cow' instead?"

The old man saw her initial reaction to his order and thought that she was puzzled by the use of the name for a root beer and vanilla ice cream float. He was about to clarify his request when he saw a smile come to her face.

“I haven’t heard it called that in ages. It brings back nostalgic memories of diners, soda fountains, and special treats!”

Now it was the old man’s turn to smile. “Exactly,” he said. I was just thinking of my dad when it came to mind. We used to enjoy one every time we came in here. It wasn’t all that often, so it was a treat that I savored to the last drop of root beer and the last bite of ice cream.”

“Well then,” responded the waitress, “a ‘black cow’ coming right up.”

...

IT’S FUNNY HOW something as simple as a root beer float can bring back long suppressed memories. As he drank it the old man found himself lost in thought. He was still seated in the booth at Shilo’s Delicatessen, but his mind had gone back to Christmas morning 1955.

He had barely slept the night before in anticipation of what he might find under the tree. He had asked Santa for the official Davy Crockett at the Alamo play set based on the popular Disney television and movie character. His parents had cautioned him not get his hopes up. The Marx Company toy was the hottest thing on the market and every little boy his age wanted it; of course, explaining supply and demand to a child his age hadn’t registered. He’d personally handwritten his letter to Santa and mailed it to the North Pole with his dad’s help. The presence of the play set on

Christmas morning would be because Santa had delivered it, not because his parents had gone out and bought it at the toy store! He'd put his heart and soul into that letter to Santa. Surely such an appeal wouldn't go unanswered.

...

HIS PARENTS SAW the disappointment on his face when it wasn't the first or even second present handed to him to open. Those had been from mom and dad or relatives, and he barely took notice of their contents. Only when he came across a large rectangular box hiding at the back of the Christmas tree with no name on it did his disappointment turn into expectation. "Who's this for, daddy?" he asked hopefully.

"Well, there's only one way to find out," had been his dad's response. And he recalled that his mom had taken his dad's hand in hers in that moment, saying, "Go ahead and open it. Let's see what it is."

Expectation turned into sheer exhilaration when he tore off the wrapping paper. "I got it! I got it! Look, mom and dad! I got it!"

It had been the most joyous Christmas that he remembered growing up, and tears came to the old man's eyes as he recalled the smiles and love on his parents' faces that he'd seen that morning. It would be several more years before he realized that the jolly old elf in a red suit from the North Pole had been "assisted" by his parents, and that the magic of Christmas happened because of the love, caring, and devotion of parents like his. At the time that realization had been the furthest thing from his mind. His excitement, all his thoughts, were focused on the Alamo play set.

...

THE OLD MAN had spent countless hours as a boy assembling the tin litho Alamo, carefully positioning the defenders on the ramparts, enclosing the horses and cattle inside the stock pen, positioning the 1836 flag inside the compound next to the church, encircling the garrison with the Mexican soldiers, deciding where to put the assortment of other pieces that included a well, trees and cactus, powder kegs, scaling ladders and cannon. He would reenact the battle over and over and over again, actually firing the cannons at the toy figurines to knock them over. Yes, the cannon had a coiled spring at the rear that when pulled back launched the tiny plastic projectiles. When he thought of those shells, he couldn't help but wonder what the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission would have to say today about the hazards they presented to children that age and younger.

The old man had no recollection of what had happened to the play set. Try as he might, he couldn't remember. Likely it had gone the way of all toys, replaced by another or put away as interests and pursuits changed the older he got. The fact that this memory had come out of nowhere was in and of itself remarkable. His long- and short-term cognitive abilities weren't what they used to be. When memories surfaced it was because they popped into his head, not because he consciously had attempted to recall them.

...



THE OLD MAN'S thoughts were interrupted by the waitress' return. "Is there anything else I can get you?"

He wiped away the tears before looking up; "Just the check, please."

She handed the invoice to him. "I can take care of that whenever you're ready."

The old man immediately returned it to her with a large denomination bill that more than paid for the tab plus a generous tip.

"Keep the change," he said.

"Thank you, Sir. That's very kind of you." As she was about to walk away, she asked; "Was the root beer float as good as you remembered? Not many people ask for 'black cows' anymore."

Tears welled up again in the old man's eyes as he responded. "Better than anything I've had in a very long time."

...

THE OLD MAN was tired when he returned home. He wasn't feeling particularly well but was elated to read the day's newspaper which contained an article announcing that the tenants under Phillips Entertainment currently occupying the historic Woolworth and Palace buildings - Tomb Rider 3D, the Guinness World Records Museum, and Ripley's Haunted Adventure - had agreed to an early termination of their leases, allowing the plans for the Alamo Museum and Visitors Center to move forward. Coming on the eve of the annual commemoration of the Battle of the Alamo, the agreement would remove the final impediment to realization of the full footprint of the 1836 mission.

The old man was also thankful that another era of historical importance to San Antonio had been recognized and preserved. In 1960, beginning in South Carolina, lunch counters in Woolworth buildings had been at the epicenter of protests against segregated dining. The San Antonio site had joined other stores in desegregating their establishments. This landmark decision would now become a lasting civil rights legacy as the building would be preserved and reconstituted as the Alamo Museum.

...

THE OLD MAN planned on attending some of the scheduled commemoration events and had already bought a ticket to "An Evening with Heroes," a reenactment of the night before the battle. He was curious to see how the portrayal would compare to the visions he'd experienced of those final moments.

In his dreams the mood inside the Alamo that night had been somber, even fatalistic. There wasn't a lot of conversation. The defenders were too exhausted for talk. Those that managed to stay awake stared off into the darkness, focusing on nothing, just staring. It is one thing to acknowledge that death eventually comes to everyone. It is quite another to know with certainty that you will die a violent death in a matter of hours.

Some of the Alamo defenders wrote letters home to parents, wives, and sweethearts. They were addressed to places like Kentucky, South Carolina, Tennessee, Pennsylvania and Virginia. Others were addressed to their folks in the old countries: England, Ireland, Germany, Wales and Scotland. None of them would ever be delivered. In some cases, they

were thrown into the fires upon completion. In most cases, however, they were neatly folded and placed in the pockets of those that had penned them. The few that didn't know how to write or couldn't find a scrap of paper upon which to put down their thoughts simply visualized what they would have said.

None of the messages, written or not, projected gloom and doom. They all reflected optimism, belying the realities they would face come the dawn.

"Texas is exactly as I pictured it to be, a land of milk and honey with endless possibilities. You needn't worry about me. I'm surrounded by friends."

...

THE MEXICAN SOLDIERS moving into their battle positions knew that death was a very real possibility, even a probability for those in the front ranks, but it wasn't a certainty. That made a huge difference to their state of mind as they moved towards their battle positions. They had little time to reflect on their fate but prayed for God in His mercy to spare their lives. Some sought out a Catholic priest to perform last rites in case they fell in the ensuing attack. The prayers asked for absolution from their past sins and from those they were about to commit... killing their fellow man.

...

THE OLD MAN thought to lie down for a while. He didn't think that he would sleep. This had been one of the best days he'd experienced in quite a while; he was exuberant, and he so looked forward to the upcoming period of

commemoration and celebration. He had no way of knowing that he wouldn't be around to participate. This day would be his last.

He soon dozed off and the recurring nightmare where he found himself outside the Alamo walls returned as soon as he did. He again felt cold steel entering his chest accompanied by severe pain resulting from the bayonet thrust. The old man was jolted awake, but the pain did not subside. He hadn't imagined it after all, and the excruciating pain rapidly spread to his left side and made its way down his arm, turning it to stone.

The old man clutched at his left arm in a vain attempt to stop the pain. He realized the futility of his efforts yet kept fighting for what felt like an eternity. However, in a matter of just a few minutes, he succumbed to the heart attack. His last spoken words were "No! No! Please God, not yet!"

...

THE DARKNESS and the menacing figure that had always hovered over him in his dreams vanished. In their place was the sense that he was being welcomed into another level of existence. He wasn't greeted by familiar faces or outstretched arms; there was a definite distinction between the physical world that he had just left behind and the spiritual world into which his soul had entered. There was no corporal presence that he could discern. He no longer resembled the person that moments before had passed over into this otherworldly realm. He existed, but not in any way recognizable or similar to the living.

The old man found himself joining countless other souls in a kind of time/space continuum. Here time had no

relevance; it was as if it was suspended or didn't exist at all, at least not in the manner in which it was perceived in life. Here all existence was eternal, with no beginning or end. Light engulfed him; not the bright dazzling light that was sometimes described by those that underwent a near death experience, but illumination that enveloped him in an endless everlastingness. There were no words that adequately conveyed his new existence. It could best be described as pure love.

The old man felt the love of his Creator, his parents, his wife, his son, everyone else with whom he had an emotional bond or connection during his lifetime, and everything that had ever mattered to him. It was a love so all-encompassing that it had allowed him to step back and forth in time to perceive and have contact with people from an era he could not possibly have known. They were with him now, all of those that had died that day at the Alamo. There was no substance to their presence, yet he sensed their eternal essence, their be-all and end-all. They were a part of him, and he was a part of them. He'd actually been at the Alamo siege and battle, transported there through a portal that had allowed him access to a time and place that few would ever discern as he had. The memories, mental impressions, dreams, out of body experiences, and visitations by the spirits of the deceased had been crystal clear to him in life because somehow, some way, he had been there. There was a bridge between this world and the next, a continuity of past and present that was beyond all understanding, yet it existed. The old man felt no more pain; he was beyond distress of any kind, totally safe, secure and at peace. The feeling hearkened back to a state that he had known only once before, preceding even his birth and entry into the world;

the peace and serenity of a mother's womb. His death was not the end of everything. It was a new kind of existence that transcended human mortality.

...

WITH NO KNOWN living relatives or friends to claim his remains or offer a eulogy at his funeral, the old man was buried at the Ft. Sam Houston National Cemetery along with other "unaccompanied veterans." The Patriot Guard Riders were on hand to show respect for all those who had served in the Armed Forces regardless of branch of service, their accomplishments or rank. An Army Chaplain read passages from the Bible over the flag-draped caskets, and a contingent from the Fort Sam Houston Memorial Services Detachment rendered military honors including rifle volleys and the playing of "Taps" by a live bugler.

There are twenty-four notes to the bugle arrangement; each note has a beautiful yet mournful quality to it that lingers in the air long after the bugler finishes this final tribute to the departed. The ensuing silence after the last note was a reminder that the deceased were not alone even in the absence of close family and friends.

...

THE OLD MAN'S name and those of the other unaccompanied veterans would be chiseled onto white marble headstones, each eventually joining thousands of similar markers at the national cemetery. Visitors looking for the name of a family member or friend might not recognize any of their names as they read the inscriptions on the

headstones, but they would still recognize the significance of the markers. The veterans would always be respected for their military service, perceived as belonging here among fellow brothers and sisters-in-arms. On occasions such as Memorial Day and Veterans Day the old man, along with every other person so interred on this hallowed ground, would receive special recognition with the placement of a flag or a wreath by a volunteer acting on behalf of an organization, or by a civic or national leader. That act of remembrance was both symbolic and important, recognition that all these lives mattered regardless of time's passage. They would continue to be venerated in perpetuity.

...

MANY OF THOSE who died at the Alamo never received that recognition. Although 189 names of the Alamo defenders are a matter of record, there was no final muster roll call that recorded the actual number or names of those inside the mission on the last day. Identifying the Mexican soldiers that perished in the battle is even more difficult. While the strength of each participating battalion is a matter of record, the disposition of the dead in the aftermath of the battle left many unnamed and forgotten.

## Chapter Twenty-Seven

# Looking to the Future

THE OLD MAN'S experiences had had no set pattern. There had been no sequencing of events; they had been totally random. Yet most accounts, written or cinematic, chronicled the Alamo story in the order in which it was believed or documented to have happened. The difference was that the old man's insights had been revealed to him alone, never intended for anyone else. His connection to the dead and his emotional response to their revelations had been a very private matter.

Public understanding of the siege and battle, however, requires a more straightforward narrative. Books and films by necessity must present a coherent plot and visitors to the site also require context.

...



EACH YEAR THE Alamo pays homage to the fallen on the calendar dates in which they occurred. Historical reenactments and special observances are held from February 23<sup>rd</sup> to March 6<sup>th</sup> culminating in “Dawn at the Alamo” on the anniversary of the final assault on the mission.

Over the decades there has been a growing recognition that focusing on just a few famous names - Travis, Crockett, Bowie, Santa Anna - hasn't done justice to either side. It has led to stereotypes, myths, and egregious inaccuracies. Thankfully this is changing. The wreath-laying ceremonies at the church entrance, the speeches by attending dignitaries, the representation by various organizations (including living historians in period garb) now pay homage to everyone involved. All the known participants are honored - Texian, Tejano, and Mexican.

...

AS THE ALAMO re-imagined project moves forward, a fuller understanding of the siege and battle will undoubtedly unfold, as will the entire 300-year history of the mission. And, as new historical evidence is discovered and included in the retelling of the Alamo story, perhaps more names will be added to the record. Those identifications and details will be important. They'll give voice to the forgotten, honor their sacrifice, and finally give them the recognition so long denied.

Most recently, when Philips Entertainment agreed to early termination of leases on Alamo Plaza, the Alamo Plan and construction of the visitors' center and museum were given the green light to proceed. The reverence that was

once denied to this hallowed ground will as a result one day be fully restored. When the visitors' center opens its doors and the artifacts are all stored and displayed in the new museum, once the reconstruction of the battlements is completed and the original footprint restored, as ongoing research reveals more secrets about the siege and battle and more stories come to light, future generations of visitors to the Shrine may yet see all the Alamo dead take their rightful place alongside the likes of Travis, Crockett, Bowie, and Santa Anna.

...

ALMOST 200 YEARS after the fall of the Alamo the bugle notes that once called men to action are being sounded again. Today, if you listen closely, you'll hear the faint echoes of those "ghostly bugles" as well as the collective voices of all those who remain unidentified crying out for remembrance and recognition of their sacrifice. The old man had heard them, responding to their call over the years and to the phantasms that haunted his dreams. Towards the end of his life the souls of the dead had entered his consciousness, raising the human element of the Alamo story above the legend and myth. The "Thirteen Days of Glory" became more intimate, the bugle notes and voices growing louder as the forgotten and the marginalized reached out to him.

Only after new identifications are made and their personal stories revealed can a fuller appreciation of the historic event be realized. Only after they are added to the legendary names and narrative will the Alamo achieve the hallowed status it has long claimed. The old man had venerated the Alamo story his entire life. His hope from

beyond the grave was that in the fullness of time his vision of full disclosure and inclusion would cause those “ghostly bugles” to loudly sound out to everyone. For too long the legacy of the Alamo had been limited to a select few. In the future when the roll call was sounded everyone would answer, anonymous and forgotten no more.

# Afterword

HISTORY IS NOT static. The same interpretation or conceptualization of individuals and events doesn't pass the test of time. Our thoughts on a topic or person and our understanding of them changes as we evolve as a society.

The danger to that, of course, is that we judge the past based on current morals, decorums, and proprieties. When we discover individual character flaws or motivations that had an impact on historical events, the tendency is to denigrate past heroes and cast doubt on why we should even celebrate or remember them.

The landmark milepost that for generations has drawn us to the Alamo is one of those historical events now being reevaluated. Our current cancel culture is quick to point out flaws in our ancestors without recognizing flaws in ourselves. When we look at them today, we taint the memory of historical persons and events by assigning rationale that argues a particular point of view popular in the moment; in doing so we diminish their importance as well as their place in history.

All human beings are flawed, and certainly that applies to the triumvirate of Travis, Bowie, and Crockett. Travis abandoned his wife and child, Bowie was involved in land speculation and slave trading, and Crockett looked to reinvigorate a failed political career. Yet each man in this instance rose above his imperfections to fight for Texas. The concept of what Texas was or might be was certainly different for each of them but, to the man, they were willing to fight and die for it.

The Mexican commander Santa Anna was also a flawed individual. His cruelty overshadowed all other considerations including his desire to maintain sovereignty over Texas. Had he not been indifferent to the loss of life, had he shown mercy to the handful of Alamo defenders

after the battle, had he not ordered that the bodies be burned, had he not also ordered the massacre at Goliad, his legacy would not be that of a tyrant and he would not be remembered today for ceding Texas to Sam Houston after his defeat at San Jacinto.

...

THAT BRINGS ME to the assertion that the Alamo story is nothing but lies and that slavery was the root cause of the conflict. Clearly there is no doubt that slavery factored into the equation by those that pinned their futures on the cotton industry in Texas. But to say that this heinous institution - the brutal inhumane treatment of a particular race used as chattel for the sole purpose of providing forced labor to financially profit their white owners - ascribes the single motive for every man, woman, and child inside the Alamo, not only begs credulity but is a disservice to their collective memory.

The 1836 siege and battle serve as the linchpin that attracts millions of visitors to San Antonio. It deserves to be at the center of any future interpretation of its 300-year history. Tell it in its entirety. Don't leave out anything. Include all considerations personal or cultural and do so from the perspective of all participants in the famous battle. There is certainly context both before and after, from its beginnings as a Spanish mission to its current status as a shrine, and the entire history should be told. However, what makes this mission unique from the other Spanish missions along the San Antonio River (all World Heritage Sites) are the thirteen days in 1836.

I write all my books and my blog from the perspective –

**LIFE IS HISTORY**

**OUR PAST IS PROLOGUE**

We need to learn from our history to avoid repeating the mistakes of the past, but the worst thing we can do is attempt to recast or erase everything that is hurtful or unpleasant. It is our history after all. Embrace it. "Remember the Alamo!"

# Acknowledgements

IT WAS AN honor to be chosen as the first docent at the Alamo when that program was established some twenty years ago. I worked under the tutelage of Dr. Richard Bruce Winders and Mrs. Sally Koch; Dr. Winders headed the curatorial and education departments at that time and Sally was my direct supervisor. I learned a great deal from them both as well as from the permanent staff and history interpreters, my colleagues for the short time that I was there. They took me in and treated me like family.

Millions of visitors pass through the Long Barrack and Shrine every year, and during my tenure I interacted with people from all over the world. They make the trip to the Alamo because of its renown, curious to find out more than just what they've heard, read, or seen regarding the famous siege and battle. To have the chance to converse with many of them and answer their questions highlighted the wonderful experience I had those many years ago.

...

LIKE THE OLD MAN in my novel, I've always been fascinated by the 1836 siege and battle. However, I never thought that I'd have the opportunity to actually work at the Alamo in any capacity, much less summon the temerity to write my own book about it. As a student of history, I need to acknowledge the many historians, journalists, authors, and film makers who have contributed to the enduring and ever-evolving Alamo story. Obviously, they all had an influence on my work.

...

HOPEFULLY YOU'VE enjoyed my take on this iconic, historic, and cultural landmark. If you're wondering where the book's title came from, it had its origins in the 1960 John Wayne film, "The Alamo." Although the movie was not a critical success at the time, over the decades the film has become more widely appreciated due in no small part to its epic scope and the accompanying musical score. The music was written by the famous Hollywood film score composer Dimitri Tiomkin, who also wrote the lyrics to the 1960 song "Ballad of the Alamo," which was sung by recording artist Marty Robbins. The score and the song greatly added to the action taking place on screen, and even though I was only eleven years old when the movie was released, to this day I still listen to the music and remember all the words to the ballad. The ballad, a song that tells a story in narrative style, may no longer be a genre in vogue with today's audiences, but it captured my imagination as a child and stuck with me long after the film's closing credits. All these years later it inspired the title to my book.

...

I'M CERTAINLY aware of the historical inaccuracies in the movie. However, I believe that its homage to courage and sacrifice still resonates, and it remains an entertaining film that has achieved "classic movie" status. The more recent film by director John Hancock is much truer to the actual events but, possibly because it does adhere more closely to historical facts, didn't elicit the emotional response from the viewing audience that the older version does. On my behalf, I'm sure that's partially because I have always been a huge John Wayne fan. I've written before of my love of the old westerns, and "the Duke" was unquestionably one of the biggest western stars of that era.

...

I ALSO WANT to thank Kristine Hall, the owner and publisher of Lone Star Literary Life, for her support of my writing efforts and her promotion of Texas books and authors. With hundreds of new book titles saturating the market on a daily basis, Kristine and LSL provide a trusted forum from which readers can discover information about the latest Texas publications, read book reviews, and follow the

calendar of literary events occurring throughout the Lone Star State. Authors like me can take advantage of LSSL's book blog tours that offer exposure as well as marketing resources that reach out across the State's entire reading and writing community.

...

I AGAIN NEED to thank my son Sean for his critique of my book before it went to publication. Sean writes movie reviews for [screenfellows.com](http://screenfellows.com) and is very thorough in his evaluations. His comments led me to expand on sections of the book that were in the draft manuscript when I sent it to him, and to add others that I had not previously included.

...

LAST BUT NOT least, I especially want to thank my wife Gray for her support while working on *Ghostly Bugles*. She indulges my efforts to author something meaningful and lasting with her patience and love, and she is indispensable to the success of my books and, more importantly, my life.





MAX L. KNIGHT was born in Panama and grew up in the Canal Zone and in San Antonio, Texas where he and his wife Janet “Gray” currently reside. They have three grown children; Lisa, Brian, and Sean. Two of their other children, Max Lee and Brad, are deceased.

Max is a graduate of Texas A&M University where he earned a Bachelor’s degree in English. He also holds a Master of Science degree in Government from Campbell University.

Max served twenty-four years in the United States Army (1973-1997) retiring with the rank of Lieutenant Colonel. Afterwards, he spent five years (1998-2002) working at RCI Technologies in San Antonio, where he became the Director of Internal Operations. He became the first Alamo Docent in 2004, but the tragic events of 9/11 had already compelled him to reactivate his security clearance and, when the approval finally came through, he returned to work in support of U.S Counterintelligence operations (2005-2013.) A stage IV throat cancer diagnosis in 2014 abruptly ended that phase of his life, and he turned to writing to

help him get through the chemo, radiation, and surgeries. Max is currently cancer free.

His first book, *Silver Taps*, a personal memoir of his relationship with his dad and his struggle to come to grips with his father's death from Alzheimer's disease, was published by Outskirts Press in 2015. His subsequent works, *Palo Duro*, a novel of the Plains Indian Wars, and *Tarnished Brass*, a novella about U.S. involvement in El Salvador's Civil War, were published by Page Publishing in 2016 and 2019. Max has also written book reviews for Lone Star Literary Life, a weekly publication dedicated to Texas authors and events. *Ghostly Bugles* is his first collaboration with Wild Lark Books.