

THE ALAMO: HEROES AND GHOSTS

“Thermopylae had its messengers of death, but the Alamo had none.” These were the words with which a United States senator referred to one of the most resolute and effective fights ever waged by brave men against overwhelming odds in the face of certain death.

In the early 1800’s, Americans began to move west into the rich, sparsely populated territory of Texas, which was then a portion of Mexico. At first these immigrants were well-received, but conflicts soon arose. Mexico had abolished slavery, but most of the American settlers were from the South and had brought their slaves with them. The settlers were also upset that Mexico had yet to install any public education system in Texas and Mexico’s government did not allow for the right to bear arms and trial by jury. When Mexico’s President Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna centralized power in 1836, American settlers signed the Texas Declaration of Independence and declared themselves the Republic of Texas.

HEROES

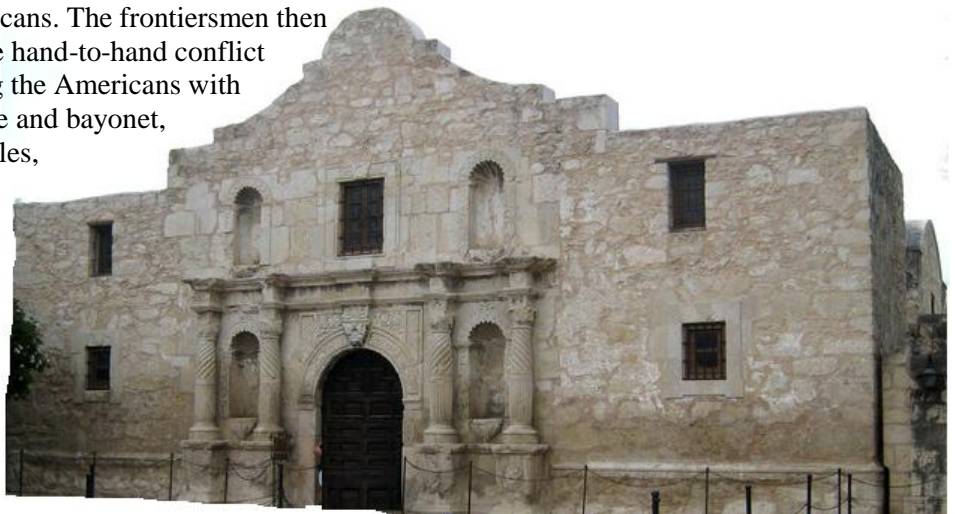
In the United States there was great enthusiasm for the struggling Texans, and many bold backwoodsmen and Indian-fighters swarmed to their help. The most famous was Davy Crockett. He was born soon after the Revolutionary War and fought under Jackson in the campaigns against the Creeks and gone to Congress as a Whig; but he had quarreled with Jackson, and been beaten for Congress, and in his disgust he left the Tennessee, famously saying, “You can all go to hell. I’m going to Texas!”

Crockett journeyed south to where the Mexican army was marching toward San Antonio. Near the town was an old Spanish fort, the Alamo, in which 150 American defenders had gathered.

Santa Anna had 4,000 troops with him. The Alamo was a mere shell, utterly unable to withstand either a bombardment or a regular assault. It was evident, therefore, that those within it would be in the utmost jeopardy if the place was assaulted, but old Crockett never wavered. He was fearless and resolute and managed to slip through the Mexican lines and join the defenders within the walls. The bravest, hardiest, and most reckless men of the border were there; among them were Colonel Travis, the commander of the fort, and Jim Bowie, the inventor of the famous bowie-knife. They were a wild and ill-disciplined band, little used to restraint or control, but were men of iron courage and great bodily powers, skilled in the use of their weapons, and ready to meet whatever doom fate might have in store for them.

Soon Santa Anna approached with his army, took possession of the town, and besieged the fort. The defenders knew there was scarcely a chance of rescue, and that it was hopeless to expect that 150 men, behind defenses so weak, could beat off 4,000 trained soldiers, well armed and provided with heavy artillery; but they had no idea of flinching, and made a desperate defense. The days went by, and no help came, while Santa Anna got ready his lines, and began a furious cannonade. The American riflemen however crept forward under cover, and picked off the artillerymen. The walls of the Alamo eventually were battered and riddled; and when they had been breached so as to afford no obstacle to the rush of his soldiers, Santa Anna commanded that they be stormed.

The storm took place on March 6, 1836. The Mexican troops broke through the outer defenses at every point, for the lines were too long to be manned by the few Americans. The frontiersmen then retreated to the inner building, and a desperate hand-to-hand conflict followed, the Mexicans thronging in, shooting the Americans with their muskets, and thrusting at them with lance and bayonet, while the Americans, after firing their long rifles, clubbed them, and fought desperately, one against many; and they also used their bowie-knives and revolvers with deadly effect. The fight reeled to and fro between the shattered walls, each American the center of a group of foes; but, for all their strength and their wild fighting courage, the defenders were too few, and the struggle could have but one end.



One by one the riflemen succumbed, after repeated thrusts with bayonet until but three or four were left. Colonel Travis, the commander, was among them; and so was Bowie, who was sick and weak from disease, but who rallied all his strength to die fighting, and who, in the final struggle, slew several Mexicans with his revolver, and with his knife of the kind to which he had given his name. Then these fell too, and the last man stood at bay. It was old Davy Crockett.

Wounded in a dozen places, he faced his foes with his back to the wall, ringed around by the bodies of the men he had slain. So desperate was the fight he waged, that the Mexicans who thronged round about him were beaten back for the moment, and no one dared to run in upon him. Accordingly, while the lancers held him where he was, for, weakened by wounds and loss of blood, he could not break through, the musketeers loaded and shot him down. Not a single American was left alive. Afterwards, Santa Anna ordered their bodies burned and thrown in a mass grave. Yet they died well avenged, for four times their number fell at their hands in the battle.

Santa Anna had but a short while in which to exult over his bloody and hard-won victory. A rider from the Texas plains, going north through the Indian Territory, had told Sam Houston that the Texans were up fighting for their liberty. Houston was a former governor of Tennessee but in a fit of moody longing for the life of the wilderness, he gave up his governorship and crossed the Mississippi, to join the Cherokees in Arkansas. Here he dressed, lived, fought, hunted, and drank precisely like any Indian, becoming one of the chiefs.

At once in Houston's mind there kindled a longing to return to men in their time of their need. Mounting his horse, he rode south by night and day, and was hailed by the Texans as a heaven-sent leader. He took command of their forces, 1100 riflemen, and at the Battle of San Jacinto, he and his men charged the Mexican hosts with the cry of "Remember the Alamo!" Almost immediately, the Mexicans were overthrown with terrible slaughter; Santa Anna himself was captured, and the freedom of Texas was won at a blow.

GHOSTS

The first reported sighting of ghostly activity happened only weeks after the Battle. After the Battle of San Jacinto, Santa Anna sent troops to destroy Alamo. When the Mexican troops neared the church with flaming torches, six fully formed flaming spirits suddenly appeared before the front doors of the mission, their bodies on fire and yelling, "Do not touch the Alamo, do not touch these walls!" The Mexicans fled in fear and would not be persuaded to return.

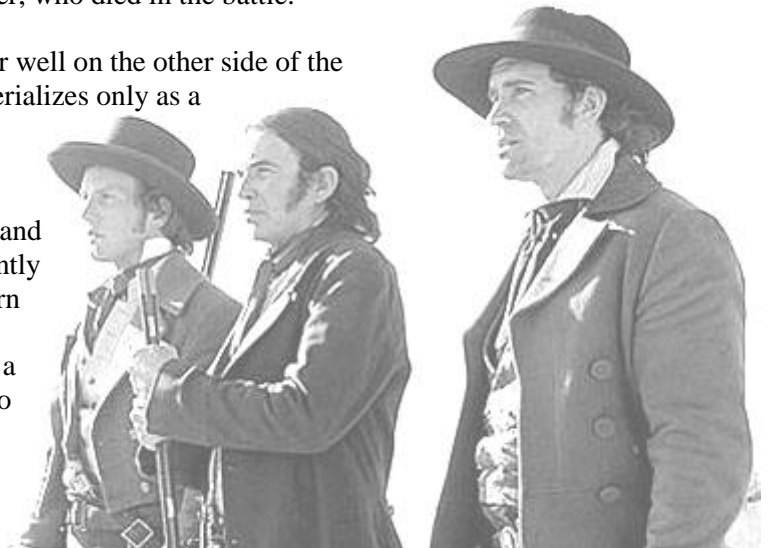
Today, there are countless ghost sightings at the Alamo. Often spotted in the gardens next to the mission appears the fully formed spirit of cowboy, complete with black duster and cowboy hat. Dripping wet, he is described as looking like he has ridden through a severe thunder storm. Many Texas historians theorize that the spirit may have been one of 22 dispatch riders that William Travis sent seeking assistance.

A second entity that makes his presence known is that of an Alamo defender who is often reported to stick his head and shoulders out of the large rectangular window over the double doors at the front of the church. After leaning out and scoping the area, he then leans back and disappears.

One of the most often sighted ghosts is that of a small blonde-haired boy that is most often seen in the left upstairs window which houses the gift shop today. Appearing almost always during the first few weeks of February, the forlorn looking boy has also been seen wandering the grounds of the complex. Some believe that the boy was evacuated during the siege and returns annually to search for his long lost father, who died in the battle.

A woman is also reported to have been seen next to the water well on the other side of the church. Appearing only at night, reports allege that she materializes only as a vaporous torso-like spirit. No one knows who this restless apparition might have been.

In an area of the mission, which is today utilized for storage and meetings, staff have often encountered a tall Indian who silently creeps up behind them. After having felt a presence, they turn to see the broad-chested Native American who suddenly disappears or walks back through a solid wall that once held a tunnel doorway to the Menger Hotel across the street. Due to these many sightings, staff often report being afraid to enter the basement.



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1. Which adjective best describes Davy Crockett?
 - a. Gutless
 - b. Stubborn
 - c. Considerate
 - d. Inept

2. All were conflicts between settlers and the Mexican government, *except*:
 - a. Slavery
 - b. The right to bear arms
 - c. Right to a trial by jury
 - d. Religion

3. Why did Davy Crockett most likely join the Alamo defenders?
 - a. He wanted to win reelection in Tennessee.
 - b. He supported Mexico's control of Texas.
 - c. He was always in search of personal fame and fortune.
 - d. He supported the Texans cause.

4. Santa Anna's army defeated the Texan defenders because of:
 - a. Their heart and desire.
 - b. Their superior numbers and weaponry.
 - c. The Texans surrendered.
 - d. Santa Anna's personal leadership.

5. When the American settlers signed the Texas Declaration of Independence, Texas became:
 - a. Independent
 - b. Part of America
 - c. Part of Mexico
 - d. A member of Central America

6. What is the best possible explanation for why the first ghosts seen were "flaming spirits" with their bodies on fire?
 - a. Because of their burning passion for liberty.
 - b. Because of the Alamo's original use.
 - c. Because of what Santa Anna did to their bodies.
 - d. Because of what the ghosts did to the Alamo.

7. Which of the ghosts is probably one of the defenders of the fort?
 - a. The blonde-haired boy.
 - b. The one looking out the window over the double doors.
 - c. The broad-chested Native American.
 - d. The vaporous torso-like spirit.

8. What might be a good explanation as to why there are so many ghost stories about the Alamo?
 - a. It used to be a church.
 - b. San Antonio is a famous ghost town.
 - c. Santa Anna is buried there.
 - d. A large number of people died there.

9. Select **one** of the following adjectives and explain how it could be used to describe one of the Alamo's defenders. Use details and information from the passage to support your answer--

Daring

Brave

Reckless

Courageous

READ
THINK
EXPLAIN

