

Worse than the Alamo?

Posted by [Robert Marshall](#) on Jan 23, 2013 in [Blog Entry](#) | [2 comments](#)

Everyone is familiar with the story of the Alamo. Well, almost everyone. The 13 day siege, the bravery displayed by Travis, Bowie, Crockett, and the others in the face of overwhelming odds, 187 men defiantly holding their ground against a force of more than 5,000, Sam Houston's men shouting "Remember the Alamo!" as they charged to victory across the grassy fields at San Jacinto. It's the stuff great movies are made of. Just think John Wayne.



Santa Anna's blood red flag that read "Death to Traitors" and the slaughter of every single one of the fort's defenders has been well documented, but I always attempt to get students to ponder what I consider a serious question. Was another event during the Texas Revolution an even more sinister act by Santa Anna's troops? Is it possible that another moment during the War for Texas' Independence might be more noteworthy?

We remember the Alamo because it is a still-standing structure. We can see photos of it, visit it, walk the grounds and gardens there, and even get very informative tours from knowledgeable guides (if you are there at the right time). Heck, you can even sit and watch a nice video recreating the events for a mere \$9.65. Most Americans can even name the historical legends that lost their lives there—if not Will Travis and Jim Bowie, they can at least name Davy Crockett.

But, what about that other event I have spoken of. Why does no one remember it? Where did it occur?

Well, there is no magnificent, photogenic structure there. Just a sign and a nice, somber historical marker made of stone. There were no famous men killed there. There was just Colonel James Fannin and his 342 men.

Twelve days after the Battle of the Alamo, a group of 300 Texans found themselves surrounded and cut off by a force of more than 1,000 of Santa Anna's soldiers. The Texans flipped over their wagons to construct a makeshift fort before fighting bravely for two days, inflicting more than 250 casualties on the Mexican Army in the process.

The following day, the attacking wing of Santa Anna's army received a large number of reinforcements as well as heavy artillery. Realizing the futility of their situation, the Texans offered to surrender, under the agreement that they would be disarmed and later returned to the United States. It was an offer that the Mexican commander did not have the authority to give.

Upon surrender, the men were marched back to their former fort in Goliad, which now served as their prison, along with several other small groups of Texans who had been captured.

All of these Texans believed they would be set free in the near future. General Urrea, the highest ranking Mexican officer on site, departed Goliad, leaving command to Colonel José Nicolás de la Portilla. Urrea wrote to Santa Anna to ask for clemency for the prisoners (the Mexican Congress had issued a decree that any armed foreigners taken in combat were to be treated as pirates and executed).

Santa Anna responded by repeatedly ordering Urrea to comply with the law and execute the “pirates”. On March 26, 1836, Portilla decided it was his duty to comply, despite receiving a countermanding order from Urrea later that same day.

The following morning, Palm Sunday, Colonel Portilla had 303 Texans marched out of Fort Defiance into three columns along Bexar, San Patricio, and Victoria Roads. Each group of Texans had a row of Mexican soldiers on either side. Suddenly, and without warning, the Mexican soldiers stopped before ordering the Texans to halt. Moments later, the Texans were shot down at point-blank range. Any survivors were then brutally clubbed, bayoneted, or knifed to death.

Forty Texans, who had been unable to walk, were killed in similar fashion back in Goliad. Colonel Fannin, who had been wounded in the fighting near Goliad, was the last to be killed (after being forced to witness the execution of his men).

Fannin was taken into the courtyard in front of the chapel, blindfolded, and seated in a chair. Before his execution, he asked that his personal possessions be sent back to his family. He then requested not to be shot in the face and stated that he hoped to be given a proper Christian burial. The soldiers robbed him of his belongings, purposefully shot him in the face, and then burned his body along with the others.

Virtually all of those who had been captured with weapons had been killed, aside from twenty-eight men who escaped by feigning death and falling into the San Antonio River. A small number of others also made it out of the war alive due to possessing skills that Mexican officers saw as being useful, such as being bilingual or doctors or blacksmiths. Each of these men were given white arm bands to note that fact.

Following the executions, the Texans’ charred remains were left in the open, unburied, and exposed to coyotes, vultures, and other scavengers. Nearly one month later, word reached Goliad that Santa Anna had surrendered to Houston. Mexican soldiers returned to the funeral pyres and gathered the visible remains of the bodies and re-burned them.

The massive number of Texans executed during the Goliad Campaign and the “take-no-prisoners” attitude of Santa Anna led to Goliad being called a Massacre.

That history has all but forgotten this event is a mystery. I have no other explanations than the ones offered above. The Alamo is a still-standing structure and three fairly famous men lost their lives there. But that the Alamo is revered and Goliad is nothing more than a mere footnote remains baffling. Do we “Remember the Alamo” for what happened there? Do we remember it because of a John Wayne movie, or a popular song about Davy Crockett released in the 1950s?

Perhaps it is because Americans love those who die with their face to the enemy. Those who die a valiant and heroic death. Those who stand up and fight and die for what they believe.

I readily admit—the Alamo is a much better story. But history shouldn’t just be relegated to what is a great story while what is not is discarded. The facts of the two events are as follows: Nearly twice as many

Texans lost their lives in the massacre at Goliad. By all verifiable accounts, 181 Texans died, with weapons in hand, resisting Santa Anna at the Alamo. Six were bayoneted after surrendering. At Goliad, 343 were killed after surrendering, all the while believing they were either taking part in an escorted march to freedom or that the release would soon take place.

History might have forgotten about the men butchered at Goliad, but one thing is fairly certain. Sam Houston's men, while charging to an 18 minute thrashing of Santa Anna's forces in April of 1836, did not forget. In fact, as the Texans rushed across the plains at San Jacinto, most weren't shouting, "Remember the Alamo," as Hollywood leads us to believe. They shouted, "Remember the Alamo! Remember Goliad!"