Remembering the Alamo

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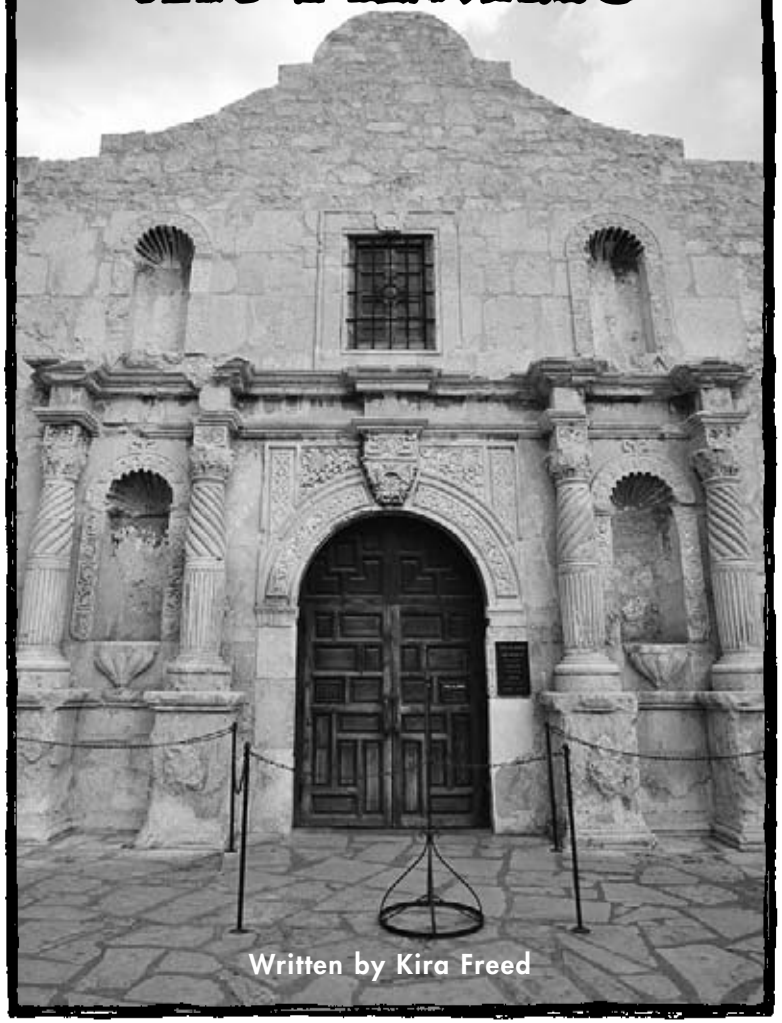


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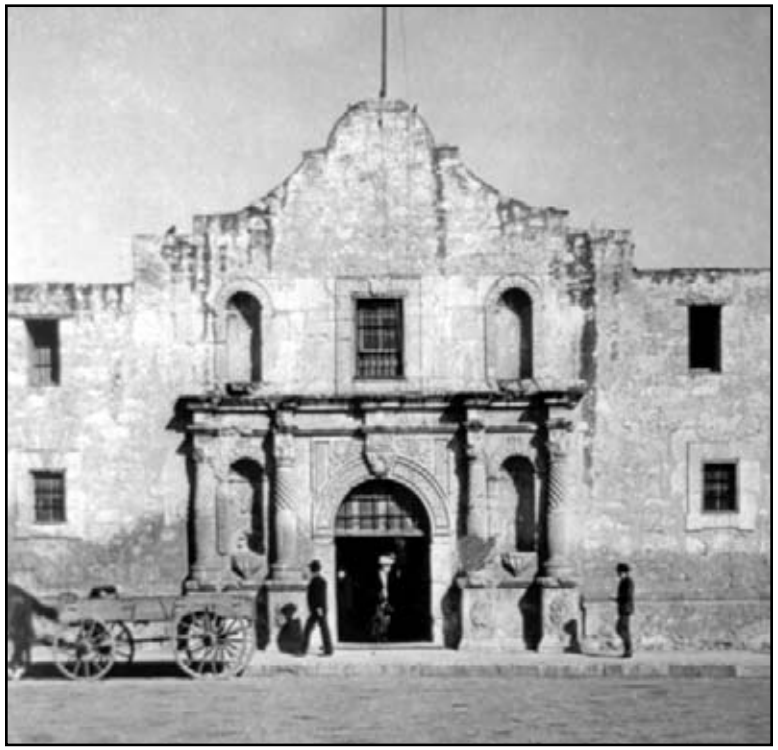
Remembering ★the Alamo★



Written by Kira Freed

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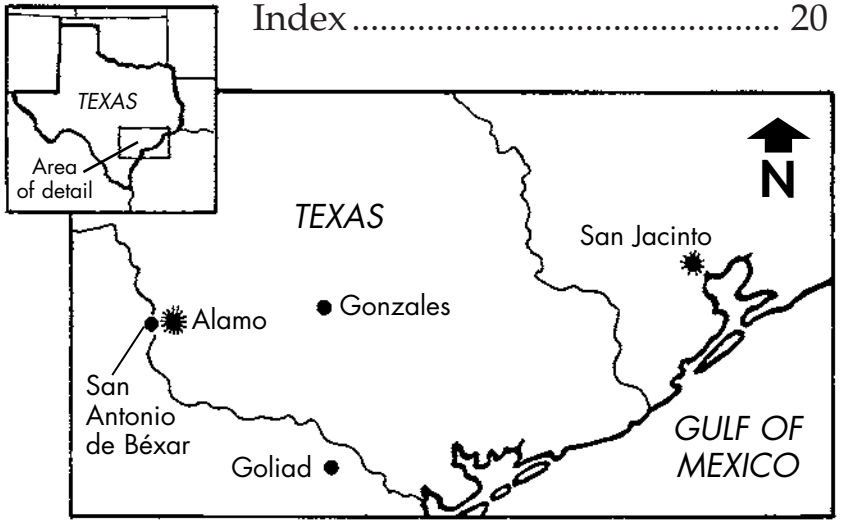
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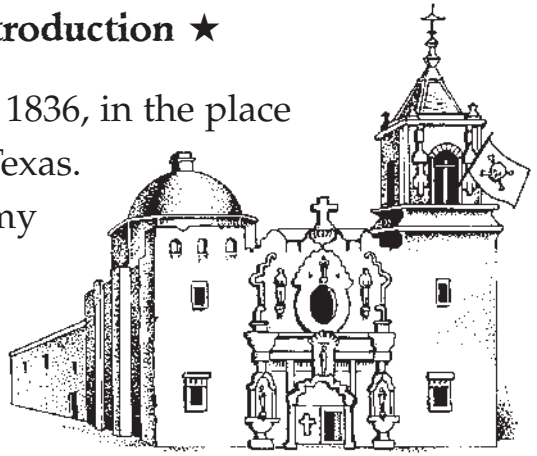
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★ Introduction ★



San Fernando church and mission in Béxar

The year was 1836, in the place now known as Texas. The Mexican army held the Alamo under **siege**. Mexican troops flew a red flag from the church in the town of Béxar—a message to Texans inside the Alamo to expect no mercy.

For twelve days, Texan rebels held off Mexican soldiers, who greatly outnumbered them. Colonel William B. Travis sent urgent requests for more troops, but few came. Travis knew he and his men were likely to die defending the Alamo.

Do You Know?

Legend has it that on March 5, Travis told his men that the situation at the Alamo was hopeless. He drew a line in the dirt with his sword. He told the men to step over it and join him if they were willing to stay and fight the Mexican army, even to the death. Every man but one stayed and fought.

About 3:00 a.m. on March 6, Mexican soldiers silently took their positions around the Alamo. Just before dawn, the attack began. A few hours later, almost every person inside the Alamo had been killed.

During the siege and battle at the Alamo, about 200 Texans and 400 to 500 Mexican soldiers died. Many bigger conflicts have taken place over the years, yet the battle of the Alamo occupies an important place in United States history. Let's go back in time to learn why.

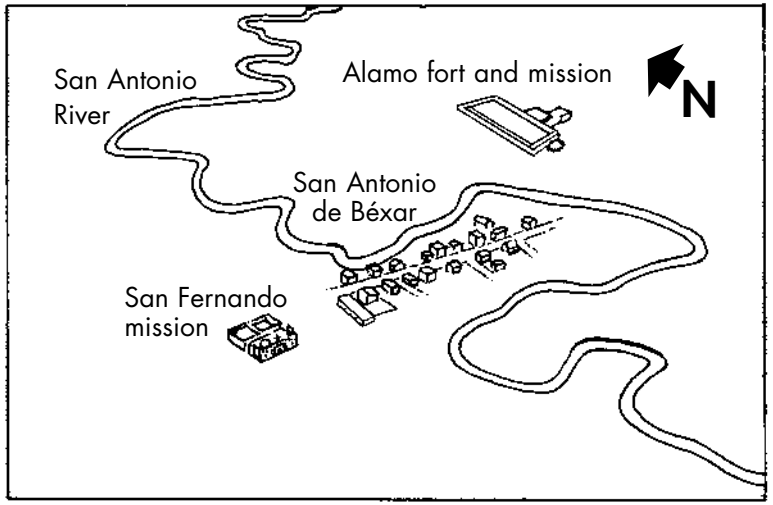


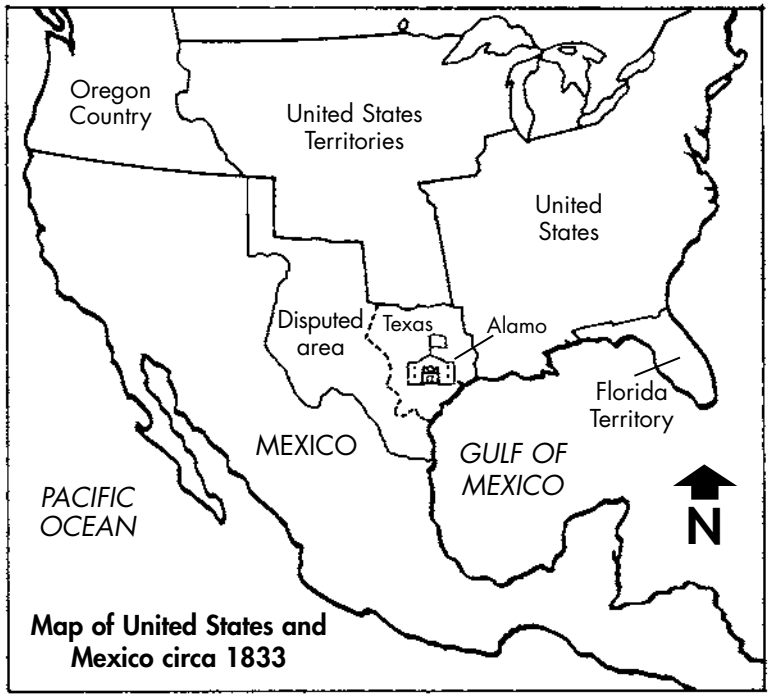
Battle of the Alamo

★ History ★

Mexico's original people were native tribes who had occupied the area for thousands of years. The Spanish arrived in the early 1500s in search of gold. They made Mexico a **colony** and worked to convert the natives to Christianity. Beginning in the late 1600s, they set up **missions** across the area now known as Mexico and the southwestern United States.

In 1718, the Spanish established a fort and a mission on opposite banks of the San Antonio River. Spanish settlers founded the town of San Antonio de Béxar across the river from the mission in 1731.





Map of United States and Mexico circa 1833

In 1801, the Spanish military started using the former mission at Béxar as a fort. The fort's name was changed to the Alamo, which is Spanish for "cottonwood tree."

In 1821, the first group of U.S. settlers came to Texas led by Stephen F. Austin, and then many more families followed. Texas was a wide-open **frontier** with rich land for farming and ranching. U.S. leaders dreamed of expanding their country all the way to the Pacific Ocean.

Do You Know?

Mexico revolted against Spanish rule and became an independent country in 1821. This made Texas part of Mexico instead of Spain. Mexico set up a republic in 1824 and adopted a constitution similar to the U.S. Constitution.

Mexico's flag



Most of the people living in Texas were **Anglo** settlers from the United States. There also were some Tejanos—Mexican-born settlers. Most of the Anglos were farmers who had become Mexican citizens. They were loyal to Mexico and grateful for the opportunity to settle there.

By 1830, the number of Anglos in Texas had grown to at least 20,000. The Mexican government became concerned that it was losing control of Texas and passed a law to stop more Anglos from moving there. The Mexican government also outlawed slavery, which angered Anglo settlers who wanted to have **plantations** and keep slaves.

★ The Fight for Independence Begins ★

When Mexico passed these laws, some Texans decided that Texas should become part of the United States. Others wanted Texas to become an independent country, and still others wanted Texas to become a separate state within Mexico.

Over time, more Texans did not want to be part of Mexico, and the Mexican government did not want to give up Texas. After allowing thousands of Anglos to settle within its borders, Mexico saw the settlers get angrier, and the government became concerned that the United States might use force to take control of Texas. Mexico sent soldiers and weapons to stop that from happening.

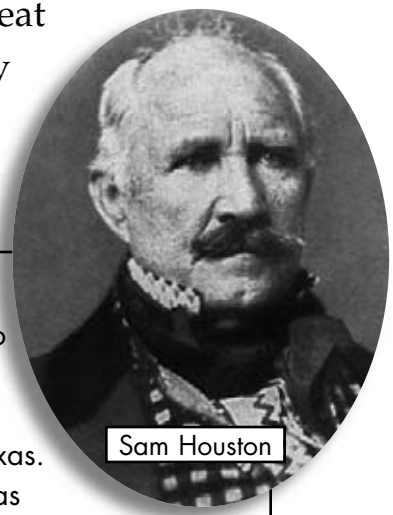
In 1833, General Santa Anna became Mexico's president. The next year, he turned Mexico's democracy into a **dictatorship**. This made Texans even more determined to get out from under Mexican rule.



Santa Anna

In early October 1835, the first battle of the fight for Texas independence took place in the town of Gonzales. When the Texans won, their hope for independence grew. Others joined the rebels, mostly volunteers from the United States. They surrounded the Alamo in late October 1835, holding Mexican troops inside the fort under siege.

The Texans finally attacked on December 5, 1835. Even though they were outnumbered three to one by Mexican troops, they took the fort from Mexican General Cós after four days of fighting. Santa Anna was enraged after learning of Cós's defeat and prepared a large army to attack the Texan rebels now inside the Alamo.



Sam Houston

Do You Know?

While Texans had the Alamo surrounded, a group of Texan leaders met in the town of San Felipe to discuss the future of Texas. They set up an independent Texas government, choosing Henry Smith as governor and Sam Houston as leader of the rebel army.

After the Texan victory, many troops left the Alamo to fight elsewhere in Mexico. Only about 100 men stayed at the Alamo under the command of Colonel James C. Neill. Winter was coming, and the men were running out of food and supplies. Neill wrote to General Sam Houston asking for more troops and supplies.

Houston did not believe that the Alamo could be defended. He sent Jim Bowie and 30 troops to move the men out and destroy the Alamo so that it could not be used by Mexican troops. But Neill convinced Bowie that the Alamo was valuable and should be defended.

Bowie wrote to Texas Governor Henry Smith, who agreed to send more troops and weapons. Colonel William Travis arrived with 30 soldiers. Davy Crockett, a former U.S. soldier, arrived soon after with a group of volunteer riflemen.



Davy Crockett

Do You Know?

Soon after Davy Crockett arrived, Colonel Neill left because his wife was ill. He chose Travis to lead the troops, but the volunteers chose Bowie as their commander. The Alamo's two leaders often did not get along, but they both tried to strengthen the Alamo's defenses and kept asking Texan leaders for help.

Determined to take back the Alamo, Santa Anna and several hundred Mexican soldiers arrived on February 23. When Santa Anna raised a red flag from the church in town, the Texans responded with a **defiant** blast from their cannon. Santa Anna's troops surrounded and shelled the Alamo for 12 days while the Mexican army grew to 2,000 men.

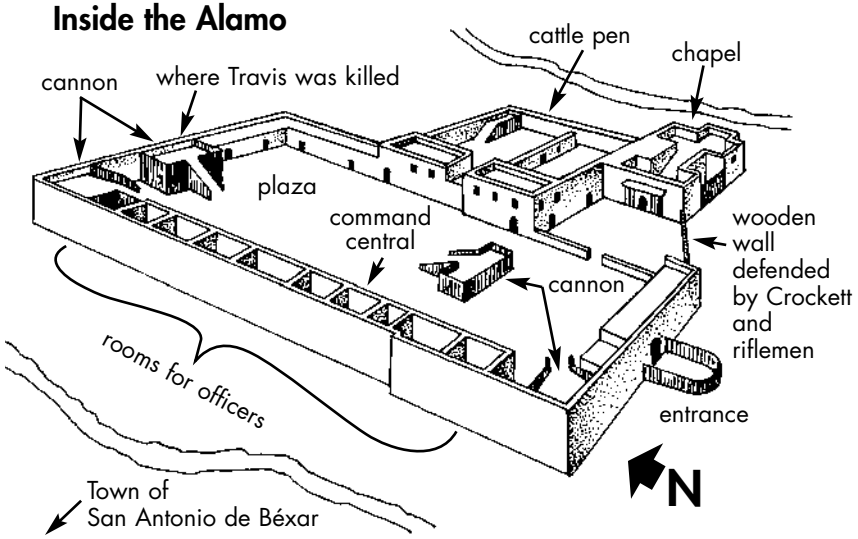
Even though Santa Anna had the Alamo surrounded, Texans were able to slip through holes in his lines, and Travis continued to send messages asking for help. One week after Santa Anna's siege began, at least 32 men arrived to help the Texans. The men inside the Alamo now numbered between 180 and 260, but they were still greatly outnumbered.

★ The Battle of the Alamo ★

Just after midnight on March 6, 1836, Santa Anna ordered his soldiers to take their positions around the Alamo. They moved silently into place and waited until just before dawn. Then the **call to arms** was sounded, and the attack began.

The Mexican soldiers caught the Texans by surprise. When the Texans heard a yell near the northeast corner, they fired their cannons in that direction and killed many Mexican soldiers. Return fire from the Mexican army killed Travis.

Inside the Alamo





Battle inside the Alamo

Santa Anna sent more soldiers, but **sharpshooters** inside the Alamo killed many. The Mexican troops retreated from the Alamo in order to regroup. When Santa Anna ordered them back to the Alamo, they scaled the walls and **swarmed** the compound.

The Texans were now fighting hand to hand, their rifles useless. They fought bravely even though they knew it was hopeless. Sometime between 6:30 and 9:00 a.m., the battle was over. Almost every Texan male was killed, and the few left alive were executed soon after.

Do You Know?

No one knows for sure how many men died at the Alamo. It is believed that between 190 and 260 Texans and between 400 and 500 Mexican soldiers died. The few women, female children, and two slaves were **spared**.

★ After the Battle ★

Santa Anna didn't give up at the Alamo. He was determined to end the Texas fight for independence. After the Mexican army won another battle at Goliad, Santa Anna believed he had stopped the rebellion. Promising to drive every Anglo out of Texas, he ordered his army to move across Texas, destroying Anglo settlements along the way.

Sympathy for Texans grew in the United States as news spread about the Alamo battle. Many Anglo Texans and U.S. citizens wanted revenge for the deaths of the men killed by Santa Anna's troops. On April 21, 1836, Houston's army surprised Mexican troops at San Jacinto. As they charged, the Texans shouted, "Remember the Alamo!" The battle lasted only 18 minutes. More than 600 Mexican soldiers were killed, and many others were wounded or taken prisoner. The Texas army lost only nine men.



Santa Anna was captured the next day. Texans wanted him killed, but Houston spared his life on the condition that he recognize Texas independence and take all his troops out of Texas. He agreed to do both.

Later, the Mexican government refused to accept Texas independence, but Texans didn't care. They considered themselves free and elected Sam Houston president of the Republic of Texas. Texas applied for U.S. statehood right away, but first it had to form a stable government of its own. Until it gained statehood in December 1845, it was considered an independent nation by the United States and by many countries in Europe.





The Alamo as it looks today

★ Conclusion ★

Texans and U.S. citizens had many reasons for fighting at the Alamo. Some fought to become rich landowners, others fought to keep slaves, and most believed they were fighting for freedom. Whether Anglo or Tejano, most people living in Texas wanted independence from Mexico's dictatorship.

In the United States, the battle of the Alamo is remembered as a symbol of heroism in the struggle for freedom. In Mexico, it is seen as part of a campaign to steal Mexican land. History is rarely as simple as right and wrong. Only by learning all viewpoints can we understand what truly happened at the Alamo.

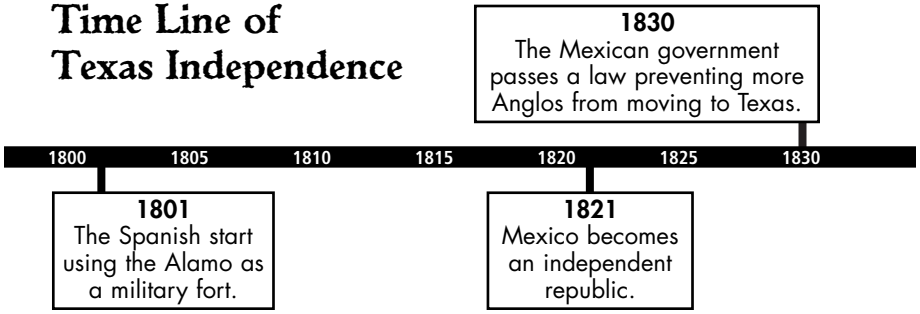
Who's Who

★ Stephen F. Austin (1793–1836) ★
Stephen Austin led a group of U.S. settlers to Texas in 1821. He commanded the rebel Texas army for a short time before leaving to seek the U.S. government's help for Texas independence. After Texas became independent, Austin served as secretary of state until his death later that year.

★ Jim Bowie (circa 1796–1836) ★
Jim Bowie was best known as a fearless street fighter. He made money from dishonest land deals and slave trading. Bowie moved to Texas in the late 1820s, became a Mexican citizen, and married the daughter of a prominent Mexican family. Following the 1833 deaths of his wife and in-laws from disease, he joined the fight for Texas independence and died at the Alamo.

★ Davy Crockett (1786–1836) ★
Davy Crockett learned at an early age to survive in the wild. After joining the U.S. Army at age 25, he earned a reputation for bravery and skill with a rifle. He served in Tennessee's state government and later in the U.S. Senate. In 1835, he lost his seat in Congress and went to Texas in search of land and money. He arrived at the Alamo just weeks before Santa Anna's siege and joined the fight for Texas independence, dying at the Alamo.

Time Line of Texas Independence

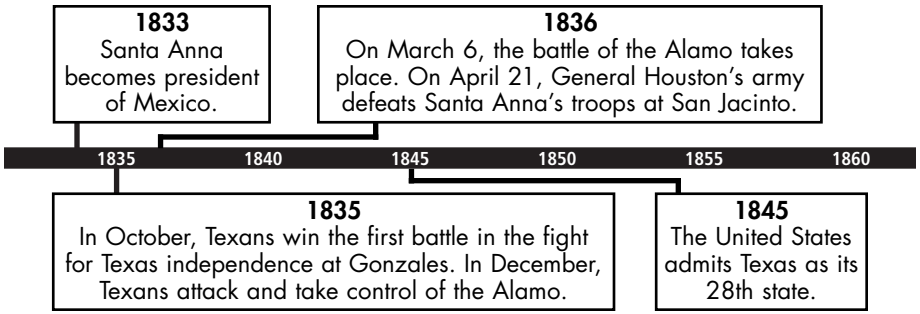


at the Alamo

★ Sam Houston (1793–1863) ★
Sam Houston fought in the War of 1812. He served in the U.S. Congress and as governor of Tennessee before moving to Texas in 1832. He wanted Texas to become part of the United States. Houston was commander in chief of the Texas army and defeated Santa Anna at San Jacinto. After Texas gained its independence, Houston was elected president of Texas. When Texas joined the United States, he became a Texas senator, and later the governor.

★ Antonio López de Santa Anna (1794–1876) ★
In the 1820s, Santa Anna was a hero of Mexico's struggle for independence from Spain. However, after he became president in 1833, he became a dictator. He fought fiercely against Texas gaining independence from Mexico. After losing that fight, he was forced to resign. He was president of Mexico again from 1841–45 and 1853–55.

★ William Barret Travis (1809–1836) ★
William Travis left Alabama to escape debt and an unhappy marriage. When he arrived in Texas, he quickly joined a group of men who wanted Texas to become a U.S. state. He became a colonel in the Texas army and was in command during the siege and battle at the Alamo. He was one of the first Texans to die at the Alamo.



★ Glossary ★

Anglo	a person of white European descent (p. 8)
call to arms	signal sounded by a bugle (p. 13)
colony	land controlled by another country (p. 6)
defiant	boldly resisting an enemy (p. 12)
dictatorship	a government ruled by a leader who takes total control without approval from the people (p. 9)
frontier	a wilderness area at the edge of a country's official border (p. 7)
missions	centers built by the Spanish in the New World to convert Native Americans to Christianity (p. 6)
plantations	areas of land for growing crops that require many workers (p. 8)
sharpshooters	people very skilled in using a gun (p. 14)
siege	surrounding and often attacking an enemy for a long period of time while preventing them from getting food and other supplies (p. 4)
spared	saved from death; didn't kill (p. 14)
swarmed	moved in great numbers (p. 14)

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