

GOLIAD MASSACRE

A Tragedy of the Texas Revolution



Jakie L. Pruett

Everett B. Cole, Sr.



had a large herd of horses belonging to the Mexican government. Quite possibly they could round up some of them.

After more discussion, Johnson and Grant came to an agreement. Johnson turned back toward San Patricio with thirty-four men and one hundred horses, planning to wait in that settlement until Grant joined him with his sixty men and whatever additional horses they might be able to catch.

Probably Grant had no intention of having further dealings with Fannin. He may have been fearful that his group would simply be absorbed into the larger force and he, Dr. James Grant, would be relegated to a subordinate position, a most repugnant prospect. But whatever his true thoughts may have been, it is doubtful that he would have fully communi- cated them to Johnson.

A good many of the San Patricio residents had gone to Mexico, leaving their houses vacant. Colonel Johnson, Daniel J. Toler, John H. Love, James M. Miller and an unnamed Frenchman moved into one of the houses. Most of the other men chose to stay in a larger blockhouse.

The norther had not yet fully abated and it was near freezing. None of the men were dressed for cold weather and sentry duty would be highly uncomfortable. Besides, Dr. Grant's force was in a position to protect their rear and they felt reasonably secure. They dispensed with sentinels for the night and turned in, only to be awakened by heavy gunfire. The firing slack- ed off, then there was loud beating at the front door.

Ehrenberg heard the accounts of the Texan survivors who returned to Goliad. He related that the men in the blockhouse found themselves surrounded and under fire. Then they were offered a free pardon if they would surrender. Despite warn- ings by Captain Pearson that this was no more than a trap, several of the men stepped outside, only to be immediately fired upon. One was killed and some others wounded. The rest made it back inside. They were hopelessly outnumbered and eventually all but two, who somehow managed to escape, were captured or killed.¹³

Johnson and his four companions were more fortunate. Their small house was surrounded by Mexican troops who de- manded that they make a light. Toler, who had been Dr. Grant's partner in Mexico, kept talking to the ones in front of the house, stalling them. Then firing started again and the

men at the rear came to the front, whereupon Johnson and his companions sneaked out the back door. It was very dark and four of them managed to make their way to safety. The French- man hid for a time, then surrendered when the excitement had died down. He had lived for some years in Matamoros and knew several of the officers, who treated him humanely.¹⁴

De la Pena states that twenty of Johnson's men were killed and thirty-two others were captured. He makes no men- tion, however, of the eventual fate of those captured. His report also introduces some confusion as to how many people may have been with Johnson. One account says that thirty-four men came back to San Patricio after separating from Grant, while de la Pena's account would imply a force of about fifty- nine, if we include those known to have escaped.

Abel Morgan, who went to Matamoros as a prisoner and later wrote a brief memoir, wrote that he met some of the sur- vivors from Johnson's troop there. They told him that after their capture, they were to have been shot but that Ureia went to the priest to ask him where the execution should be held. The priest advised him that if the men were executed, he would never say another mass in that town and Ureia sent the pris- oners to Matamoros to be shot. There, they were finally placed at hard labor instead of being executed.¹⁵ According to Mor- gan's account, there were fourteen of these men, which would tally more closely with other reports of the number of John- son's men than does de la Pena's.

Ureia backtracked to hunt down Grant and on March 2, there was a second confrontation on Agua Dulce Creek. There were seven known Texan survivors of this encounter: Captain Placido Benevides, Randolph de Spain, William J. Gatlin, David Moses, Reuben Brown, James Reed and William Scurlock.

Accounts of Grant's fate vary. Reuben Brown who was with Major Morris, Captain Benevides and Grant in advance of the main party gave an eyewitness account in which he said that Major Morris was killed early in the encounter. Grant or- dered Captain Benevides to try to escape and carry the news back to Fannin, which Benevides did. Then, after shooting a soldier who had wounded Brown with a lance, Grant was him- self wounded by several lances and fell from his horse. Brown said he then saw several Mexican officers run Grant through with their swords.

Brown was taken out to be shot. However, a priest and a Mexican woman named Alvarez interposed in his favor and he was spared. The woman named Alvarez later became known as

"The Angel of Goliad," due to her efforts in behalf of the Texan prisoners, both at Copano and at Goliad.¹⁶ It may be that Brown was included in the group saved at San Patricio, to be marched down to Matamoros for disposition.

According to de la Pena's account, which differs from Brown's, Urea felt that as a prominent and well-known figure in Coahuila, Dr. Grant might be of greater value as a prisoner and he therefore said that every effort should be made to take the doctor alive. But one of the officers, attracted by his weapons, jewelry and saddle, murdered the doctor to get this loot. By the de la Pena account, Urea was greatly upset by Grant's death.¹⁷

Actually these two accounts aren't mutually exclusive. The "running through" described by Brown, who was probably in shock due to his own wound, may have been vengeful jabs, designed to inflict pain, rather than to kill. Yoakum's account could then be reconciled with the other two, as an extension of both.

While Dr. Grant was in San Patricio, curing his own wound, and carefully ministering to the wants of the wounded of the enemy, he was promised that, so soon as he recovered, and those under his care were convalescent, he should have a passport to leave the country without molestation. The captain left in command of the town, after the departure of Urea, secretly despatched eight men in search of a wild horse. The animal was captured about three weeks after the battle of the 2d of March. Grant was now brought forth, and, by order of the captain, his feet were strongly bound to those of the horse, and his hands to the tail. "Now," said the captain, "you have your passport—go." At the same moment the cords by which the *mustang* was tied were severed. The fierce animal, finding his limbs unfettered, sprang away with great violence, leaving behind him, in a short distance, the mangled remains of poor Grant!¹⁸

After the Agua Dulce encounter, Urea sent an account of his victories to Santa Anna at San Antonio, where it was enthusiastically received by the troops besieging the Alamo.

In the meantime, Urea continued his advance toward his next objective at Goliad. His line of march took him to Refugio, where his division was met and aided by a number of partisans.

CHAPTER IV

In Garrison at Goliad

Most of the people of Goliad were of Mexican descent. Some of them were ex-members of the garrison at Presidio la Bahia who had taken up residence after completing their military service. Others were descendants of former soldiers who had settled in the area. Still others were colonists who had come from Mexico in the past, or their descendants. There were, to be sure, a few Anglo colonists who had come in to take up land, but the old-Mexican families merely tolerated them. Their customs, their habits, everything about them was so foreign. Certainly, they were hard-working people, who improved their land and raised their cattle, but the Mexicans simply didn't feel they quite fit in. They were—well, different.

With few exceptions, the Mexican colonists regarded the controversy between the Anglos of Texas and Santa Anna with mixed feelings. They had, for the most part, disapproved of the dictatorial establishment of Santa Anna's centralist government, and would much have preferred that the government adhere to the Constitution of 1824. They had been disturbed by the various upheavals in the interior of old Mexico, but they

circumventing this prohibition were soon found and an active black market sprang up. Those who had money or something of value to trade could get some food this way, but as in most black markets, the prices were exorbitant.

"I saw them give four bits for a tortilla, a little corn cake not larger than the top of a saucer, and not as thick as a knife blade. A hungry man would have eaten a dozen of them and then not have had enough," wrote Morgan.⁶

The sale of food went on, however, at a rapid rate. Soon, the Mexicans were in possession of clothing, blankets, money, and anything else of value that could be extracted from their "customers."

The church became a hospital for the wounded. At first, fifty-five American wounded were housed there, then the Mexican wounded were brought in and it became apparent that the church lacked sufficient space. Morgan says that the American wounded were placed on one side of the church and fifty-seven of the Mexican wounded on the other. The rest of the Mexican wounded, he thought, were housed outside the fort. Barnard, who was treating both American and Mexican wounded, wrote that when the Mexican wounded were brought in, the American wounded were moved to *cuartels* along the west wall. In his entry of March 24, the doctor wrote:

We had been politely requested by the Mexican officers as a favor, that we should attend to their wounded, and their surgeons had not yet arrived, which we not to be outdone by them in politeness, told them we would with the greatest pleasure. We however found that we were not permitted to visit our own wounded until we had attended to all of theirs. We remonstrated against their arrangement but to no purpose. A Mexican surgeon had at length arrived, but we had no assistance from him. It took us nearly the whole day to get through with the Mexicans before we could be allowed to see our own men; and then we had so little time that we could only dress some of the severest wounds, and leave the rest altogether; some of them up to this time had not had the first dressing. We resolved to refuse attendance altogether on the Mexicans, at all risks, unless we could be allowed time enough to properly attend to our own men, at least once a day. But at this time, Major Miller, with seventy men who had come from Nashville Tennessee, and who had landed at Copano, were brought in; Major Miller immediately tendered

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services to us as medical aid, as did some of his men, by which our labor was much lightened.⁷

Major William C. Miller and his men had come in at Copano Bay on the seventeenth and had been compelled to surrender even before they had all come ashore. Since their arms and ammunition were never so much as unloaded from the ship by them, the Mexicans placed them in a different category from Fannin's force. Even so, they had been held at Copano for some days, tightly bound and without food until Panchita Alvarez — the same woman who had interceded to save Ruben Brown from execution — had persuaded the Mexican officers to loosen their captives' bonds and to allow them a little food. Major Miller's party were marched to Goliad and housed outside the fort, being allowed a certain amount of liberty.

On the twenty-fifth, the remaining men from Colonel Ward's Georgia Battalion were brought to Goliad. After leaving Refugio, Colonel Ward and his men had made their way up the coast, managing to evade pursuit. They had passed within earshot of the battle of the Coleta on the twentieth, but had been unable to get through to join Fannin. They had continued east, had crossed the Guadalupe River on the twenty-first and finally had reached the prairie near Victoria. There, however, they had been confronted by a body of Mexican cavalry but had managed to escape into the timber. They used up virtually all that remained of their slender supply of ammunition.

They then made their way toward Dimmitt's Landing and waited in a stand of timber while a couple of scouts went into the town, where they were captured by Urrea's troops. The Mexican force then surrounded the wood, and (using the scouts) told the Texans of the situation and called on Ward to surrender.

Ward, with Major Mitchell and Captain Ticknor, talked with General Urrea then came back to advise the troops that Urrea had offered terms — essentially the same worthless promises he had given Fannin. If they surrendered as prisoners of war, they would be marched to Copano and either sent from there to New Orleans, held as prisoners of war, or would be exchanged.

Colonel Ward was suspicious of the offer. In speaking to his men, he said that these were the same people they had

not daring to move or speak, and at night started on their uncertain journey. . . .³

Among others who escaped was Isaac Hamilton, a member of Shackelford's Red Rovers. During his run for freedom, he was twice wounded, once in the right leg by a gunshot, once in the left leg by a bayonet thrust. He somehow managed to retain strength enough to jump a hedge fence and run to cover in the tall prairie grass, where he remained until the searching Mexican troops gave him up, after having killed others who had dashed away. When his wounds stiffened, he found it impossible to walk but three of his comrades found him and two of them shoulder-carried him for mile after mile, traveling at night and hiding during the day for day after day until, after continual urging by the fourth member of the group and after Hamilton's consent, they left him.

Suffering from the pain of his infected wounds and delirious for much of the time, Hamilton made slow progress toward the coast, subsisting on a near starvation diet of wild onions, elm buds and grass, along with a single dove he managed to kill with a stick. At last, he arrived at a town from which Utrera's troops had just departed. There, he found the remains of some slaughtered beeves, from which he chewed off a few mouthfuls of meat. He managed to catch a fish, which helped nourish him. He also found a hidden canoe, in which he proceeded to the coast.

There he met with misfortune. Although Don Placido Benvides, who met him at Dimitt's Point, tried to help him reach concealment, the attempt was unsuccessful and Hamilton was retaken by the Mexican army.

It was only by the intervention of the "Angel of Goliad," Panchita Alvarez, that he escaped prompt torture, then execution. However, Panchita's captain had been placed in command of the post at Victoria and she persuaded him to defer any execution. Hamilton was given hard labor until the defeat of Santa Anna became known, when the "Angel" aided him in an escape from the vengeful Mexican troops.⁴

There were a number of the Texan troops who, for one reason or another, were not killed on Palm Sunday but were retained to perform various services for the Mexican troops. Major Miller's entire company of about eighty men was also

spared from the massacre, though their fate was precariously uncertain for a while. In his "Diary," published some time after the massacre, Lieutenant Colonel J. N. Portilla described his impressions as commander of the Goliad post,

March 27. — At daybreak I came to a determination to fill the orders of his excellency the commander-in-chief, considering him as the superior I ought to obey. I gave orders for the whole garrison to form, and awaken the prisoners (four hundred and forty-five in number), who were still asleep. (I ordered the eighty of the class who had come from Copano, to be separated from the rest, inasmuch as their fate demanded consideration because, when invading our territory, they were not taken with arms in their hands). We formed ourselves into three divisions — the first under the orders of the first adjutant Don Augustin Alcerria; the second under those of Captain Luis Balderas; and the third, of Captain Antonio Ramirez. To these officers I intrusted the execution of the order of the supreme government, and of the general-in-chief. *It was executed.* A great struggle of feelings among the officers and soldiers — a profound silence! Sad at heart, I wrote to General Utrera, expressing my regret at having been concerned in so painful an affair. I also sent an official account of what I had done, to the general-in-chief. The eighty prisoners of Copano are still alive, and I asked for instructions from the general-in-chief as to what was to be done with them.⁵

Though Portilla makes no mention of it, there is a report that he called a conference with his officers after receipt of Santa Anna's order and the decision to give Miller's people separate consideration passed by a single vote. Several days later, Santa Anna sent an order to execute Miller and his men, but he rescinded it the next day. This reprieve arrived in time and Miller's small battalion was spared.

Yoakum noted that the diaries of both Portilla and Utrera were "manufactured after the civilized world had pronounced upon the atrocity of these assassinations."⁶ The comments of several survivors would seem to bear out the theory that these diaries, as well as Santa Anna's Manifesto contained some fabrication. If Portilla had finally come to the decision to carry through the execution on that Sunday morning, the spreading of rumors among the prisoners mentioned by various survivors would have been unbelievably rapid. Also, there are various