

TAMING OF THE TEXAS COAST



**THE EXCITING HISTORY
OF THE TEXAS COASTAL BEND**

by **Vernon Smylie**

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plicated. The mission was Nuestra Senora de la Bahía del Espíritu Santo de Zuniga. The first part means Our Lady of the Bay of the Holy Spirit. The Zuniga name was added as a tribute to Baltasar de Zuniga, viceroy of New Spain. The garrison was Nuestra Senora de Loreto Presidio. Actually, it is the chapel at the garrison that is referred to most frequently as La Bahía.

The name Goliad was formed by shaking up the letters in the name Hidalgo and dropping the H. Francisco Hidalgo was the patriot priest who shook up Mexico by launching the movement for independence in 1810 with a cry of SORTOW.

Sortow stalked Goliad during the Texas Revolution. Even prior to full-scale hostilities, the mission and garrison were, for years, pawns of battle. The Gutierrez-Magee Expedition in 1812 occupied La Bahía. Henry Perry's forces made an attempt to do the same thing in 1817. James Long stopped there in 1821. Then, in 1835, as the rumble of the revolution grew louder, a force of settlers led by George Collinsworth and Ben Milam drove out the established forces and took charge. It was then that Philip Dimit assumed command and sounded a ringing call for Texas independence.

James W. Fannin Jr., a West Pointer, became Goliad's commander as Santa Anna's legions stormed northward. Santa Anna headed toward the Alamo in San Antonio. General Jose Urrea, with a fighting force estimated at 1000 men, turned his attention to Goliad. As William B. Travis called for help at the Alamo, Fannin started toward San Antonio. Misfortune stopped him. There was a call for help from the settlers at Refugio. Fannin answered it by dispatching a force under the command of Amos King. When King failed to return, Fannin sent still more men under William Ward. King's forces were captured. He and several of his men were shot. Ward barely escaped, moving toward Victoria rather than returning to Goliad.

San Patricio fell. Other Texans died at Agua Dulce. Fannin, meanwhile, waited. The days passed. The enemy came closer. Movement, with the stock of arms to be moved from Goliad, was slow. Finally Fannin's forces—some 400 men—began to retreat. They started for Victoria. The move came too late. They were overtaken on open prairie near Coletto Creek. Encircled and isolated by a superior force, they surrendered. Fannin was led to believe his men would be spared and released. It was a false assumption. The captives were returned to Goliad and, on orders from Santa Anna, most of them were marched out in groups and shot to death. Some 350 men, including Fannin, were executed.

A few were spared. Dr. Jack Shackelford, who led a band of battlers known as the Red Rovers, was allowed to live because of his usefulness as a physician. The Red Rovers were so named because they wore red jeans. Later, Shackelford escaped. Most of the other Texans who survived the Goliad massacre owed their lives to Francisca Alvarez, the wife of one of Urrea's officers. While the massacre was taking place, she hid several Texans and succeeded in getting some of the Mexican officers to help in her mission of mercy. Mrs. Alvarez is remembered as the Angel of Goliad.

Goliad, like the Alamo, became a rallying cry for Texas independence. At San Jacinto, Sam Houston's tiny army turned on Santa Anna's oncoming hordes