

Excerpt from Noah Smithwick, *Evolution of a State: or Recollections of Old Texas Days*. Austin, Texas: Gammel Book Company, 1900. Pgs. 112-117.

Without further incident worthy of mention we reached the San Antonio river at the old San Jose Mission, eight miles below Bexar. Here the main body halted while Col. Bowie with the companies of Fannin and Coleman went on up to reconnoitre and select a position from which to direct operations against the garrison. Being a personal friend of Bowie's, the writer was permitted to accompany the expedition. The only opposition we encountered was from a party of Mexican soldiers who came up and fired on us at long range. We returned the compliment and they retired, leaving the road clear. We went on up, made our observations, and camped in a bend of the river on the east side, about a quarter of a mile above the old mission of Concepcion and distant some two miles from San Antonio, expecting the main army to follow right on, but for some reason Colonel Austin did not do so. Just about sundown we were startled by a dull boom and, ere we had time to frame a question as to its import, a cannon ball, shot from a gun mounted in the church tower two miles away, shrieked through the air overhead and buried itself in the earth a few rods beyond our camp. With a horrible hiss that no language can describe, another, and another followed, to the number of half a dozen ; then, all was still. At dawn we were roused by the discharge of musketry, and directly our pickets came running in. One man had his powder horn shot away. Another fell as soon as we got into camp, and we thought he was killed ; but, on examination, found that his only injury consisted in a sick stomach caused by a bullet striking and breaking a large Bowie knife which he carried stuck under the waistband of his pantaloons directly in front. The knife saved his life, but he was incapacitated from taking part in the fight. The dense fog masked the strength of the enemy. They crossed the river, which was very low, down at the mission and moved up on the

open plain fronting our camp. We got our horses down out of range and, drawing close under the bank, which was five or six feet high, took up positions on both arms of the bend so as to get in a cross fire; Fannin's company occupying the lower arm and Cole man's the upper. When the fog lifted we found ourselves pretty well surrounded; though the bluff and heavy timber on the west side of the river secured us against attack in the rear. In front was a field piece flanked by several companies of infantry; and across the river, to cut off re treat, were two companies of cavalry — but retreat formed no part of our programme. The Mexicans now opened on us with cannon, but we lay low and their grape and canister crashed through the pecan trees overhead, raining a shower of ripe nuts down on us, and I saw men picking them up and eating them with as little apparent concern as if they were being shaken down by a norther. Bowie was a born leader; never needlessly spending a bullet or imperiling a life. His voice is still ringing in my deaf old ears as he repeatedly admonished us, "Keep under cover, boys, and reserve your fire; we haven't a man to spare;" and, had he been obeyed, not a man would we have lost. The Mexicans moved up till they came within range of Fannin's men, when, upon the Texans opening fire, they halted and begun forming for a charge. Seeing this, Bowie ordered Coleman to the support of Fannin, and, in executing the movement, the foolhardiness of some of our men caused the only casualty of the engagement. We scarcely waited, really, for orders, but broke for Fannin's position. Excited and eager to get a shot, some of the boys mounted the bank and cut across, exposed to the fire of the whole Mexican army. They got there before we did, who went around, but the first man I saw as I came around was Dick Andrews, lying as he had fallen, great drops of sweat already gathering on his white, drawn face, and the life blood gushing from a hole in the left side, just below the ribs. I ran to him and attempted to raise him. "Dick," I cried, "are you hurt?" "Yes, Smith," he replied, "I'm killed; lay me down." I laid him down and put something under his head. It was the last time I saw him alive. There was no time for sentiment. There was the enemy, outnumbering us four to one, charging our position, so I

picked up my gun and joined my comrades. "Fire !" rang out the steady voice of our leader, and we responded with a will. Our long rifles — and I thought I never heard rifles crack so keen, after the dull roar of the cannon — mowed down the Mexicans at a rate that might well have made braver hearts than those encased in their shriveled little bodies recoil. Three times they charged, but there was a platoon ready to receive them. Three times we picked off their gunners, the last one with a lighted match in his hand; then a panic seized them, and they broke. They jumped on the mules attached to the caisson, two or three on a mule, without even taking time to cut them loose, and struck out for the fort, leaving the loaded gun on the field. With a ringing cheer we mounted the bank and gave chase. We turned their cannon on them, adding wings to their flight. They dropped their muskets, and, splashing through the shallow water of the river, fled helter skelter as if pursued by all the furies. Our pickets, who had been stationed at the old mission and cut off, now climbed upon the roof and gave them a parting volley as they ran past. I don't think it was ten minutes after we opened fire till the last Mexican who was able to run was across the river. The cavalry took no part in the fight, but joined the wild race for the fort, and, no doubt, came down the homestretch in the lead. They left about sixty killed and a number wounded, while our casualties were one mortally wounded and one slightly wounded; less than usually results from a bicycle race, or a football game. Having no knowledge of civilized warfare, the poor wounded wretches thought they were to be summarily dispatched, and it was pitiful to hear them begging for the miserable lives that one thought of taking. We had no means of relieving them, even if we had had an opportunity. We knew not what turn affairs at the fort might take, and where Austin was we had no idea. The utmost we could do was to give water to those who asked for it, which no one was brute enough to refuse. How our humanity was repaid, let Goliad and the Alamo testify. About an hour after it was all over, Austin came up with the main body. Had their arrival been a little more timely, our most sanguine expectations might have been more than realized; for the

whole force of the garrison was out, and, being mostly infantry, while our men were all mounted, the enemy might have been cut off and well nigh annihilated. As it was, we who were in the fight were satisfied, but the other boys were loud and bitter in their denunciation of the course that had deprived them of a share in the glory. Soon the padre came out with a train of carts and attendants, and, after a parley with Austin, carted the dead and wounded Mexicans away to San Antonio, leaving us in undisputed possession of the field. Poor Dick Andrews lived long enough to know that the fight was won. He recklessly, foolishly threw away his life, but his was the first freeman's life blood that wet the soil where the germ of the young republic was just bursting into life. We buried him at the foot of a pecan tree on the battlefield, where his bones were left to mingle with the silent dust, "With not a stone to mark the spot." The tree has no doubt long since gone to decay, the battlefield been converted into a cotton field, whose snowy fleece bears no trace of the crimson tide which that day soaked its sod. Thus the first gun, the first flag and the first martyr have all gone down to oblivion together.