CHAPTER IV
THE ALAMO AND GOLIAD

At this time in the history of Texas the Mexican and American factions were constantly in discord. Several empresarios had been appointed to settle colonies and had brought immigrants, who pitched their tents or built their crude log cabins and started a civilization entirely foreign to that of the Indians and Mexicans.

Unfortunately Stephen F. Austin could not always control the problem, to whom a grant of land should be given. He made an effort to, and the pages of history rarely record a finer character than this Father of Texas, but many unprincipled adventurers came and many things were done that should have been left undone. On the other hand, some of these adventurous spirits were men of the highest type, men whose names will be ever linked in history with the destiny of the Land of the Tejas. We are concerned only with those men who had been educated in the profession of medicine. Some of these were John Sutherland, an Alamo scout, Joseph Barnard, a hero of Goliad, Ashbel Smith, empire builder, and many soldiers who fought in the battle of San Jacinto.

DR. JOHN SUTHERLAND

Dr. John Sutherland, one of the heroes of the Alamo, was born in Virginia in 1792. He moved, with his father, to Tennessee in 1802. In 1835 he came to Texas, arriving in San Felipe in December of that year. He declared allegiance to the cause of the provisional government and joined a party going to the Alamo, where he arrived January 18, 1836.

In Bexar, Dr. Sutherland lived in the home of Lieutenant Dickinson, who, with his wife and child, were also heroes of the Alamo. Dr. Sutherland brought with him a small quantity of medicine which was badly needed as there was much sickness in the garrison. Dr. Pollard, the sur-
geon in command, had exhausted his supply. Dr. Sutherland says that he succeeded in relieving most of the patients, but that Colonel Bowie’s disease being of a peculiar nature was not to be cured by an ordinary course of treatment.

Food, as well as medicine, was very scarce. Bread made from corn raised nearby and beef from the large herds on the prairie was the chief diet. Dr. James F. Grant and Colonel F. W. Johnson on their “rampage westward across the Nueces had taken practically all the sugar, coffee and salt from the garrison.” There were no regular quarters for the soldiers; they slept and ate when they could.

The recent defeat of General Cos and the expedition of Grant and Johnson gave the Texans a false sense of security for a short while. Indeed so many ungrounded rumors of an advance from this or that point on the Rio Grande had gained circulation and floated about that the Texans had become incredulous and careless, resting in fancied security without pickets, outposts or scouting service.

One man in the place, though, Colonel Juan N. Seguin, the Mayor and Alcalde, scented danger and kept on the alert. Not only were the noble Seguin’s sympathies with the Texans, but he gave them active co-operation. Quietly he dispatched his nephew, Blar Herrera, to Laredo to spy and watch the movements of the enemy. About the middle of February, 1836, Seguin’s spy hastily returned, reporting that Mexican troops in large force were crossing to the north side of the Rio Grande and marching for the interior of Texas.

Colonel W. B. Travis, then in command, received Herrera’s report—vouched for fully by Seguin—but few of the Texans believed his statements, declaring them “more Mexican lies and another false alarm.”

Time passed. The first incident to alarm them was the unusual stir and excitement observed among the Mexican population early on the morning of the 23rd of February. People hurried to and fro along the streets and plazas, carts were loaded with household and kitchen belongings and moved out on the different roads plainly indicating a general exodus. When asked the reason for such unusual
activity, the Mexicans declared they were simply moving into the country to begin farming operations.

Now it was that the Texans grew apprehensive and adopted some measures to prevent surprise. A sentry was placed in the belfry of the San Fernando Church with instructions to keep a vigilant watch to the west, and at the first sight of Mexican troops or a cavalcade, to ring the bell. The suspense was not long, for on the heights beyond the Alazan, the sentry, with unobstructed view, soon sighted the forms of moving men on horses, whose glittering spear points pronounced them at once to be the Mexican cavalry, and who, at the first sound of the vigorously ringing bell, dashed back over the hills and concealed themselves from view.

The enemy thus out of sight and not immediately coming to view again, the sentry was accused of giving a false alarm. But his report was only too true. During the previous night Almonte had marched his cavalry forces up and stationed them on the overlooking heights to the west.

The sentry disbelieved; a state of uncertainty prevailed.

To make sure how matters stood, Dr. Sutherland, who had his horse in town, proposed to Travis that if he could find a companion with a mount the two would ride out as scouts and ascertain the truth. John W. Smith happened to be present with his horse and readily volunteered for the service; and, after arranging and agreeing that should the sentry in the belfry see them returning at a run he would at once ring the bell and thus notify Travis of the actual presence of the enemy, they rode west, following the Laredo road. Reaching the crest of a hill some one and one-half miles out, the two scouts came in full view of the Mexican cavalry formed in line of battle, their commander riding up and down in front, waving his sword.

Halting on the crest long enough to note that the force before them numbered twelve hundred to fifteen hundred men, the scouts wheeled their horses and dashed back toward the city.

Seeing them in a fast run, the sentry rang the bell, and knowing now that there could be no mistake, Travis
ordered the volunteers, then congregated on the main plaza, into the Alamo. In moving down what is now Commerce Street, they ran across twenty or thirty head of cattle which they quickly rounded up and drove within the walls of the Alamo. They also had the fortune to find a lot of corn in a deserted jacal nearby—the corn and the cattle being their sole supply of provisions for the siege.

A fine, drizzling rain was falling that morning, and the ground was slippery and wet. A hundred yards or so from the crest of the hill Sutherland’s horse, being unshod, slipped, and, falling flat on the ground, caught the doctor’s right leg under its body. Stunned by the violence of the fall, the animal made no effort to rise.

Dismounting, Smith got the horse on its feet, and assisted Sutherland, who had been lamed in the knee by the accident, to remount. Reaching the city and learning that all the Texans had retired to the Alamo, they proceeded thither—crossing the river at the ford.

Met on the inside of the enclosure by Travis, Davy Crockett and a few others—most of the men were then busily engaged in planting cannons along the walls and making other dispositions for defense—they made their report. All were now active and ready for orders.

“Here am I, Colonel,” said Crockett to Travis. “Assign me to some place and I and my twelve Tennesseans will try and defend it.”

“All right, Colonel Crockett,” replied Travis, “all right, Sir. I want you to take charge of the space between the church and these barracks.”

Smith and Sutherland immediately offered their services, expressing their willingness to take any position or duty that might be assigned. But as Sutherland dismounted and as his crippled leg reached the ground he fell, unable to stand.

On making inquiry and learning that the doctor’s knee “was too badly injured to enable him to walk,” Travis expressed his desire to send a messenger to Gonzales and asked Sutherland if he thought he could stand the ride. Sutherland thought he could.

“I want you to go to Gonzales as quickly as you can and rally the people to my support,” said Travis. “I
intend to hold this place at all hazards, and I need all the reinforcements I can get.” As Travis concluded, Smith spoke up, saying: “I will go with the doctor.”

Promising to rally and bring every man they could to the relief, and bidding Travis, Crockett and others of the doomed garrison farewell, the two started out eastward. Lest they be seen and pursued by the Mexican cavalry, then entering the city on the west side, they rode back and forth across the road until past the site of the old Powder House. When they had proceeded about a mile and a half, they heard the roar of a single cannon—Travis’s defiant answer to Almonte’s demand of surrender.

A short distance farther on they met Bonham on his foaming steed, hastening in. He had met Johnson, the messenger to Fannin, and hearing the ominous roar of cannon, he had put spurs to his horse, anxious to reach and join his countrymen and friends in the defense. A hurried explanation of the situation by Sutherland and Smith only served to increase his anxiety and, with a farewell salute, he dashed ahead and into the Alamo—like the rest of the heroic band gathered there, never to leave it alive.

On the evening of the next day Sutherland and Smith reached Gonzales. The news they brought spread like wildfire through the settlement and in a day or two thirty-two men, piloted by Smith, hastened toward Bexar and made their way into the Alamo. By the time Smith returned to Gonzales another party was ready to start, and was conducted forward by Sutherland and Smith. After hard riding, they reached the Cibolo and encamped for the night, their horses being too weary to proceed farther without food and rest.

The gloomiest foreboding filled the hearts of the little band and though much fatigued, they slept but little. Travis had promised Sutherland and Smith that so long as he held the Alamo he would fire an eighteen-pounder cannon which he had, at sunrise, noon and at sunset. The gun was silent that day—the Alamo had fallen!

Early next morning the party moved forward, hopeful but fearful of the fate of the garrison and their friends. Halfway between the Cibolo and the city, they came upon
the advance of Santa Anna's army moving eastward, and were pursued by a detachment, but fortunately not overtaken.

Hurrying back to Gonzales, they found General Houston and his little army there on their way to the relief of Travis and his compatriots. A day or two later Mrs. Dickinson and child and Travis's negro servant arrived—as quasi messengers from Santa Anna to General Houston. They confirmed the fearful suspicions that the Alamo had fallen and that its defenders had been brutally butchered.

General Houston at once fell back east of the Colorado River, sending Dr. Sutherland on to Harrisburg with dispatches for President Burnet.

DR. JOSEPH H. BARNARD,
December, 1835, to March, 1836.

One of the most thrilling accounts of the early struggles for Texas independence is the journal of Dr. J. H. Barnard. It is published in book form and is well worth reading by anyone interested in Texas history.

This young doctor from Chicago answered the call, so dramatically made by Dr. Archer, Stephen F. Austin, and others, and came to the help of those fighting for the freedom of Texas. Dr. Barnard in his diary tells day by day his experiences, first in a stage, then by wagon to St. Louis, then by boat down the Mississippi and across the Gulf to Matagorda. The taking of San Antonio and the death of Milam had just been dramatized, and during a brief stop in New Orleans he saw this tragedy acted on the stage. He also met the Commissioners from Texas, General Austin, Dr. Branch T. Archer, and William Wharton, who encouraged him to proceed to Texas. He naively tells of his feelings as he approached the Texas coast, looking for the enemy in the offing, and being rather disappointed that what he though was the enemy's ships, in the distance, proved to be only houses on the shore. He was also disappointed to find no organized army awaiting him, but rather "a stagnation in all military affairs."

There was a scheme on foot for inroads into the Mexican territory beyond the Rio Grande and the capture of Matamoros, which he considered ill-advised and refused to
He went on to Texana, where he joined the Red Rovers, a company of volunteers. Dr. Shackelford, of Courtland, Alabama, was their Captain. He was a physician of high standing and brilliant education, who had formed his company of friends and neighbors, all men and boys of wealth, education and prominence.

Dr. Barnard describes most graphically their experiences on the march to La Bahia (Goliad) where they encamped for some time.

El Presidio de la Bahia del Espiritu Santo, or the Fort of the Bay of the Holy Ghost, was an old stone structure erected by the Spanish, in which to protect themselves from the Indians. Here the little company of three hundred made their stand. They used stones from the banks of the San Antonio river near by to reinforce their stronghold. Colonel J. W. Fannin was in command. Many rumors of Santa Anna and the invasions of his army were brought to the Fort.

Austin’s Colony, now known as Texas, had appointed a Provisional Government, consisting of a Governor and Council. General Sam Houston was selected as Commander in Chief of the Army. His policy was cautious rather than venturesome. Mexico had a population of eight million, while Texas had about twenty thousand. There were many Mexican families who were friendly to the American Colonists, some of whom lived around Fort La Bahia.

About this time some of the Texans grew restless under General Houston’s defensive rather than offensive policy, and a disgraceful quarrel occurred between Governor Smith and his Council. The Council “encouraged and promoted the attempts of sundry persons to make military excursions into Mexico, to harass that country and if possible capture some of the towns on the Rio Grande.”

Dr. James M. Grant, with Colonel F. W. Johnson, made one of these fatal excursions. Dr. Grant was a native Scotchman, a naturalized citizen of Mexico. He, in company with Dr. J. C. Beales, had in 1833 obtained an impresario’s contract and settled eight hundred families between the Nueces and Rio Grande rivers. Dr. Grant’s activities as a physician are not mentioned in any of our records, but he had enormous holdings of land, which he had obtained
very cheaply. He owned a beautiful hacienda and vineyard and was building a large factory for the manufacture of woolen goods. He had been a member of the Congress of the State of Coahuila and Texas. He had, in command of forty men, assisted Milam in the capture of the city of San Antonio; but Dr. Grant opposed the declaration of Texas independence.

These notes on Dr. Grant are given not because he was a graduate physician, but because his expedition into Mexico, with the assent of the Council but against the advice of President Smith and General Houston, was undoubtedly one of the causes of the advance of the Mexicans on the small, weak outposts of the Texas Army. Dr. Grant’s expedition was not successful and he was killed. Many small battles followed, the Mexicans outnumbering the Texans and being much better equipped.

Dr. Barnard’s account of the massacre at Goliad is most vivid. He, as a physician and surgeon, was spared but required, always, to treat the wounded of the Mexican army before he could attend his own captive friends. Dr. Shackelford, his Captain, was also a captive and suffered the same indignities. Their surgical instruments were taken from them at first but later restored.

Dr. Barnard also tells most interestingly of his journey to San Antonio where the tragedy of the Alamo had just been enacted. While en route his party killed a wild goose and broiled it over live embers for their breakfast. In a campfire one night they inadvertently broiled three huge rattlesnakes. He said the odor was most savory, but that they did not partake of the delicacy.

In San Antonio the doctor and his companion, Dr. Shackelford, were quartered in the home of Mexicans and were free to come and go in their attention to the sick and wounded. They were promised their release and safe conduct to the United States as soon as the wounded could get on without their services.

On his first visit to the wounded, in company with a Mexican surgeon, Dr. Barnard remarks: “A pretty piece of work Travis and his faithful few have made of them.” He further writes: “We have taken one ward in the hospital under our charge. Their surgical department is
shockingly conducted, not an amputation performed before we arrived, although there are several cases even now that should have been operated upon at the first; and how many have died from the want of operation is impossible to tell, though it is a fair inference that there has not been a few. There has scarcely a ball been cut out as yet, almost every patient carrying the lead he received that morning. In the course of the week after we came to town, a party of Comanches were here. They brought in hams and things to trade to the Mexicans, who made much of them and treated them with a great deal of deference. They are large and very muscular.” Still later he writes: “This evening a family of Rancheros coming into town with a cart were attacked two or three miles out by Tawacana Indians (as they say, but I strongly suspect the Comanches who left two or three days ago). Two or three men and women were killed, one woman dangerously wounded in the stomach, one woman slightly wounded in the back and scalped and one girl severely wounded. We have taken them in our care and dressed their wounds. I am told that the Indians frequently kill people within a few miles of town.

“We get on very comfortably here. These people show us much respect and courtesy. We meet with much simple and unaffected kindness of heart from the citizens, particularly the females; we are also well treated by the officers. It is evident they have a high opinion of our skill and if the surgeons that I have seen among them are a fair sample of their medical talent in the nation, I can safely say without the least spark of vanity, they have reason to think well of us.

“The surgeon of the garrison came for me the other day to visit his wife who was in the greatest distress and he did not know what to do for her. On going to his house I found that she had the toothache. He amputated a leg the day we arrived and the man died the next. We have as yet amputated but one and that patient is doing well. About a half dozen men should have been operated on, but now they will die anyway.”

A short while after this, news began to come in by various ways of the Battle of San Jacinto. The doctors dared not
believe such good news and Dr. Barnard said the rumors forcibly recalled the following quotation from Byron—
“It was whispered in Heaven and muttered in Hell and echo caught softly the sound as it fell.”

The news was shortly confirmed, and the doctors witnessed the hurried packing and departure of the Mexican sympathizers from San Antonio. Many of the high class remained and cast their lot with the Americans.

Dr. Barnard tells, with a feeling of emotion, of his visit to the Alamo, where flowers were blooming in the garden, the mulberries were ripening, and the fig trees showing their early fruit. Nature was attempting to hide the scene of the tragedy enacted there so short a while before.

In a few days this scene was again changed, as the Mexicans set fire to and burned all that was inflammable about this historic spot.

Passports soon came for the doctor, and he left to join the Texas army near Goliad.

One of the most touching parts of Dr. Barnard’s Journal is the beautiful tribute he pays to Senora Alivez, the wife of a Mexican officer, who had come to Texas with the belief that the enemy were not only rebels but heretics. Her acts of kindness and mercy were too numerous to mention. Dr. Barnard and his fellow surgeons were saved at Goliad by her tact and mercy. He says: “Her name deserves to be recorded in letters of gold among the angels who have from time to time been commissioned by an overruling and beneficent Power to relieve the sorrows and cheer the hearts of man and who have for that purpose assumed the forms of helpless women, that the benefits of the boon might be enhanced by the strong and touching contrast of aggravated evils worked by fiends in human shape, and balm poured on the wounds they made by a feeling and pitying woman.”

Mention has been made by Dr. Barnard of the dissen­sion between Governor Smith and his council, a serious situation at a serious time, but many of the Governor’s friends and supporters were standing by with encouragement and advice. This message from Dr. Pollard is apropos at this time.
Hospital Bejar Feb. 13th, 1836.

Excellent Sir:

I am glad to learn that you are in good health and spirits—Be assured Sir that the country will sustain you.—We are unanimous in your favor here and determined to have nothing to do with that corrupt council.—It is my duty to inform you that my department is nearly destitute of medicine and in the event of a siege I can be of very little use to the sick under such circumstances.—I have plenty of instruments with the exception of a trephining-case, some catheters and an injection syringe which would complete this station.—I write you this because I suppose the Surgeon general not to be in the country and we are threatened with a large invading army.—Four Mexicans are to represent this Jurisdiction in the convention although we might with great ease have sent the same number of Americans, had it not have been that a few of our people through Mexican policy perfectly hoodwinked headquarters, making them believe that it was unjust to attempt to send any other than Mexicans, thereby exerting all that influence to the same end.—Perhaps I have said enough. However, I intend that those representatives shall distinctly understand, previous to their leaving, that if they vote against independence, they will have to be very careful on returning here. I wish Gen. Houston was now on the frontier to help us to crush at once both our external and internal enemies.—Let us show them how republicans can and will fight.

I am your obt. servt.

Amos Pollard, M. D. Surgeon

P. S. Some method should be devised to neutralize Fannin’s influence.—A. P.

Addressed: To His Excellency Henry Smith, Governor of Texas.

Endorsed: Amos Pollard to Govr. Smith, Feby. 13th, 1836.
The faces in this famous picture by Huddle are reproduced from old paintings or daguerrotypes. There is no picture of Dr. Alexander Ewing in existence, therefore his back is turned to the observer.