

ABSTRACT

JAMES W. FANNIN JR.: A BIOGRAPHY

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This thesis is a biography of Colonel James W. Fannin Jr., a pivotal and controversial but often marginalized figure in the Texas Revolution. Showing brilliant potential in the 1835 campaign, he was later caught up in the midst of a constitutional crisis in the Texas Provisional Government. He struggled to reckon with conflicting duties and unrealistic expectations in the face of the rapidly advancing Mexican Army. Fannin did not live to see the outcome of the Revolution, meeting his death in a bloody episode known commonly to Texas historiography as the Goliad Massacre. This study makes use of Fannin's own frank, often introspective correspondence, accounts from the survivors of his command, and even more heretofore unutilized sources, and endeavors to describe Fannin in his rightful historical context: as an American, Southerner, and Texian.

APPROVED BY DIRECTOR OF HONORS THESIS

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JAMES W. FANNIN JR.: A BIOGRAPHY

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of
Baylor University
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Honors Program

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Waco, Texas

May 2015

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DEDICATION

To the memories of

Jeffrey Dane

and

Newton Warzecha

INTRODUCTION

J.W. Fannin Jr., as he signed himself, sought a place in this world and a way to leave a lasting mark. He looked for it in the context of his time and in the extraordinary opportunities that presented themselves with an ardent determination. Identity is a recurring theme in Fannin's life, and what makes him especially interesting is that in many instances, he chose it himself. It could even be deemed careless to state that one *James W. Fannin Jr.* was born sometime late in 1804 or early 1805: an illegitimate son, he went by Walker, his maternal family's last name, until the mid-1820s. Born without a clearly defined station, his decisions about his family, social, regional, and national identities are critical to understanding him.

In the first stage of the Texas Revolution, thirty-one year old James W. Fannin Jr. would show charismatic leadership and military talent as a company commander and recruiter. In January of 1836, the General Council appointed him to the command of the Matamoros Expedition. It would be both the pinnacle of his career and the beginning of his downfall. It pushed him into the middle of the resulting strife between Governor Smith and the Council that confounded the chain-of-command and split the Texian forces. Fannin attempted to reconcile his conflicting roles as military agent of the Council, a colonel in the regular army under General Houston and an elected commander of a volunteer force. Fannin had talent and potential, but he was put out of his depth in a situation of military and political anarchy and insufficient resources or support. The Matamoros Expedition, its repercussions and collapse which culminated in the Battle of

Coleto and Goliad Massacre make Fannin of critical importance to the study of the Texas Revolution.

In 1893, fifty-seven years after the death of James W. Fannin Jr. in the Goliad Massacre, his last remaining daughter Minerva died, and her subsequent interment in the state cemetery seems to have ignited renewed interest in her father's life. The *Austin Weekly Statesman* ran a long segment about her from the Daughters of the Republic of Texas, brimming with florid, patriotic language. She was the last of Fannin's immediate family, and her death was a reminder that the memory of the Texas Revolution was fast disappearing and had to be preserved. On the same page, the reader finds news of a socialist riot in Vienna and anarchists in London. The juxtaposition is a striking testament to the changing world and its effect on the perception of an increasingly—and to many, alarmingly—distant past. The article pleads with the reader, “Miss Fannin is entitled to more than passing notice...Colonel Fannin was a grand and noble hero, one of Texas' most brave and illustrious soldiers of the revolution. Let us not forget the debt of gratitude we owe his memory, nor be unmindful of our obligations.”¹

Perhaps spurred by Minerva's passing, in December of the same year a notice appeared in *The Houston Daily Post* headed “After Information.” It read:

The friends of Colonel Fannin, who sacrificed his life at the Goliad massacre, are making the most strenuous efforts to learn what was the maiden name of his wife.

¹*The Austin Weekly Statesman*. (Austin, Tex.), Vol. 23, Ed. 1 Thursday, November 9, 1893, Newspaper, November 9, 1893; digital images, (<http://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metapth278670/> : accessed April 29, 2014), University of North Texas Libraries, The Portal to Texas History, <http://texashistory.unt.edu>; crediting UNT Libraries, Denton, Texas.

Colonel Fannin himself was from Georgia, and the disclosure of his wife's surname seems to have some historical significance just at this time.²

This little advertisement indicates that at least some people were beginning to take interest in James Fannin as a person and in his life before the Texas Revolution. Not that interest in Fannin had been lacking, but what was known—or valued—of Fannin primarily encompassed his role in the Texas Revolution. For instance, among the biographical sketches in Homer Thrall's *Pictorial History of Texas*, James Fannin's at over four pages is relatively long. Other than his being a Georgian and having gone to West Point, Thrall gives no glimpse of Fannin's life before his arrival in Texas in 1834.³ Since this time especially, Fannin has occupied a conspicuous place in the archived notes and research materials of numerous professional and amateur historians, regardless of whether or not they published much relating to him.

Clarence Wharton made the first serious biographical inquiry when he included a biographical sketch of Fannin, primarily dealing with his life before the Goliad Campaign, in his book *Remember Goliad*. He drew on heretofore unknown or underappreciated sources, such as the memoirs of a cousin who knew Fannin during his

²*The Houston Daily Post (Houston, Tex.)*, Vol. NINTH YEAR, No. 267, Ed. 1, Friday, December 29, 1893, Newspaper, December 29, 1893; digital images, (<http://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metapth82780/> : accessed April 29, 2014), University of North Texas Libraries, The Portal to Texas History, <http://texashistory.unt.edu>; crediting UNT Libraries, Denton, Texas.

³Thrall, Homer S., d. 1894.. A pictorial history of Texas, from the earliest visits of European adventurers, to A.D. 1879. Embracing the periods of missions, colonization, the revolution the republic, and the state; also, a topographical description of the country ... together with its Indian tribes and their wars, and biographical sketches of hundreds of its leading historical characters. Also, a list of the countries, with historical and topical notes, and descriptions of the public institutions of the state. By Homer S. Thrall., Map, 1879; digital image, (<http://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metapth20803/> : accessed May 01, 2014), University of North Texas Libraries, The Portal to Texas History, <http://texashistory.unt.edu>; crediting UNT Libraries, Denton, Texas, 534-39.

time at West Point (he even included her portrait as an illustration) and Fannin's own letters to his half-sister Eliza. Surely drawing upon his skills as a corporate lawyer, Wharton pieced together some of Fannin's financial life from his estate papers, which even revealed some of his involvement in the international slave trade.⁴

Wharton's attitude toward Fannin is sympathetic, stating that "though he may have erred in his military judgment, he left a name which is kindly remembered with the passing years."⁵ Making it easier to overlook any bad judgments, in Wharton's view, Fannin's military error was common to the rash, younger commanders but he concludes that "the rare combination of their rashness and his [Houston's] caution won the revolution."⁶

The first and only full biography of Colonel Fannin came in 2000 from Gary Brown. In conversation with him at the 2014 Goliad Massacre reenactment, he explained that while conducting research for his previous book about the New Orleans Greys, he could find very little written about Colonel Fannin, and thus took on the project himself. Entitled *Hesitant Martyr in the Texas Revolution: James Walker Fannin*, it reflected the harsh historiographical climate surrounding Fannin. Brown argued that a great deal of criticism has been unwarranted, especially in light of Fannin's drastically difficult circumstances.⁷ Not surprisingly considering the title, Brown devotes the majority of the book to James W. Fannin, Texian revolutionary. Still, he does attempt to build a picture

⁴Clarence Wharton, *Remember Goliad*, 1931 (Glorieta, NM: Rio Grande Press, 1968), 21-8.

⁵Wharton, 21.

⁶*Ibid*, 27.

⁷Gary Brown, *Hesitant Martyr in the Texas Revolution: James Walker Fannin*, (Plano: Republic of Texas Press, 2000), v-vi.

of Fannin's earlier life, albeit greatly dependent on the earlier work of Clarence Wharton, Ruby Cumby Smith, Harbert Davenport's unpublished study of Fannin's command, and various twentieth century newspaper articles of an antiquarian nature. The strongest segment in *Hesitant Martyr* is that on the Goliad Campaign, where Brown drew heavily from Fannin's official correspondence and various accounts or letters from members of his command.

Fannin has also attracted the attention of genealogists, due in part to the biographical efforts of Wharton and Brown. Most significant is the short study of Fannin's early life (to roughly 1827) by Robert Burns in the *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*. In what can justly be considered groundbreaking research on Fannin, Burns casts doubt on the popular family legend that Colonel Fannin's grandfather dropped the g from "Fanning" to disassociate himself from a Tory brother. He also points out that in no extant documents does Fannin spell out his middle name, thus we cannot be so sure that the W. stood for "Walker." Utilizing documents from Fannin's uncle James W. Fannin Sr. and his father Isham Fannin's estate, Burns is able to piece together a surprising amount about the young man's relationship with his father's family.⁸

Simply due to the paucity of extant sources for his life before coming to Texas and the relative preponderance of sources from the Texas Revolution, is hard not to view him through the prism of the 1835-1836. He was a Georgian, a Southerner, and an American long before he was a Texian. In many ways, it is easy to see how his past informed his decisions and behavior in Texas—a situation that should prove of interest to both Southernists and Texas historians. Nevertheless, a biography of him should not be

⁸Robert A. Burns, "Identity Crisis: Just Who Did James W. Fannin Jr. Think He Was?" *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 105 (January 2002): 453-463.

pursued solely as an etiology for his often controversial actions during the last few months of his life.

For my own biography of Fannin, I look forward to not only illuminating Texas history, but the history of Georgia, the South, and the United States, which claimed Fannin for twenty-nine of his thirty-one years of life. Thus, my thesis will endeavor to situate Col. Fannin in his rightful historical context. Accordingly, Chapter One will give as full as possible an overview of his life as the illegitimate planter's son, his few semesters at West Point under the reforming leadership of Superintendent Sylvanus Thayer, his post-West Point life in Georgia, including his part in the nullification debates of the early 1830s, his arrival in Texas and his reasons for emigration. Chapter Two will deal with the early stages of the Texas Revolution and give special emphasis to Fannin's rise to prominence at Concepción and military apprenticeship under Austin and Bowie. Chapter Three will encompass the period from his appointment to command of the Matamoros Expedition to his abandonment of the Expedition and withdrawal to Goliad. This chapter will give special attention to Fannin's military decisions in the context of Texas' volatile political situation, and the personal toll his command exacted on him. Chapter Four will cover Fannin's time at Goliad up to the point at which General Houston returns to command and orders Fannin to retreat. The tumultuous final weeks of Fannin's life embracing his retreat, the battle of Coleto, and Goliad Massacre will be covered by Chapter Five.

CHAPTER ONE

From Georgia to Texas, 1805-1834

James F. Walker, the illegitimate son of a planter named Isham Saffold Fannin, was born around January 1, 1805 in Georgia's Morgan County, situated slightly to the north and east in the central part of the state. Isham never married the mother, of whom nothing definitive is known except her last name, though it has been suggested that she was an overseer or employee's daughter on a nearby plantation. James by his own account was adopted by his maternal grandfather, from whom he took the last name he would use into adulthood.¹ Due to lack of extant records, further details about this family can only be guessed. There were Walkers in the neighboring counties. A large group in Pulaski County came, like the Fannins, from Ireland in the mid-18th century and may have had business dealings with them.² There were Walkers in adjoining Jasper County, in which Isham Fannin might have had connections as well.³

The Fannins were a prominent and wealthy family that had emigrated from Ireland to South Carolina and thence to Georgia in the middle of the 18th century. The memories of James's cousin Martha Low Fannin Fort, although her account of family history was taken down late in life and has been proved to be unreliable in some

¹Robert Burns, "Identity Crisis: Just Who Did James W. Fannin Jr. Think He Was?" *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 105 (January 2002): 454, 457-58.; Gary Brown, *Hesitant Martyr in the Texas Revolution: James Walker Fannin* (Plano: Republic of Texas Press, 2000), 3-5; Fannin to Belton, August 27, 1835, in John H. Jenkins, ed., *Papers of the Texas Revolution*, vol. 1, 373.

²Burns, 459-60.

³Notices from Jasper County, *Georgia Journal*, April 26, 1815. Georgia Historic Newspapers, presented by the Digital Library of Georgia.

particulars, are tellingly full of colorful anecdotes and proud references to the eminence and quality of the Georgia Fannins. “Grandfather Fannin,” (both hers and James’s) she recalled,

was a man of means, he gave his children every advantage that the country afforded, they were well educated. The daughters were noble women and famous for their beauty, while the sons were honorable, chivalrous, full of humor and strikingly handsome. They were of a pure blond type. My uncles stood high in the communities in which they lived, several of them repeatedly representing their counties in the legislature.⁴

Even allowing for hyperbole on Martha’s part, an examination of Georgia newspapers confirms the Fannins’ social standing. In 1810, Isham Fannin held the office of Morgan County clerk⁵ and in 1813 had been elected to represent Morgan County in the Georgia State Senate.⁶ He served in the War of 1812 as well, volunteering his services as a major of the second class of the militia in General Scott’s brigade.⁷

Isham Fannin died when James was twelve years old.⁸ He had not forgotten about his son, and James was present at his father’s deathbed along with his young half-sister

⁴Kate Haynes Fort, comp. and ed., *Memoirs of the Fort and Fannin Families* (Chattanooga: McGowan and Cooke, 1903),16.

⁵Morgan County notice in *Georgia Journal*, September 12, 1810, p. 3. Georgia Historic Newspapers, presented in the Digital Library of Georgia.

⁶“Members: Elected to serve in the next General Assembly of this state,” *Georgia Journal*, October 13, 1813, p. 3. Georgia Historic Newspapers, presented by the Digital Library of Georgia; Georgia General Assembly, *Journal of the Senate of the State of Georgia* (Milledgeville: S. & F. Grantland, 1813), 3.

⁷Advertisement in *Georgia Journal*, November 9, 1814, p. 3. Georgia Historic Newspapers, presented in the Digital Library of Georgia.

⁸Burns, 454, 457-458, 460.

Eliza. Something about their relationship touched a chord with him, and in adulthood, James Fannin consistently spoke of his father with affection, despite the fact that he was reared by his grandfather instead.⁹ His recollection of his father's death, written in a letter to Eliza years later, is well worth quoting:

Can I (remember my peculiar situation) ever occur to the never to be forgotten 26th April, 1817, and see that common parent of ours, struggling in the last death struggle and then—Yes! even then calling for each of us—and you—his helpless infant unconscious of your loss, held in his dying arms. Can I, who know a fathers anxiety and witnessed this scene, but faintly described, remember this, and what he done for me (which but few fathers would have done), not feel some solicitude for the object nearest his heart—The answer is too palpable—the full overflowing heart of a true Fannin, responds in feelings of the deepest gratitude—in love the most lasting and indelible.¹⁰

In addition to a favorable memory of his father, this letter bespeaks an almost paternal affection for Eliza as that object dear to his father's heart. As for what Isham Fannin had done for his son, he in fact had made provision for James in his will, leaving him \$1,000.00 and allowance for four years' worth of education.¹¹ Not much more is known about his early life or schooling; he did attended school locally alongside the future Georgia governor George Washington Towns, and the two had been friends since early childhood. Towns, however, did not specify at what level or ages they had been in

⁹Burns, 454, 462.

¹⁰Typescript of J. W. Fannin, Jr. to Eliza S. Fannin, May 20, 1832, Samuel E. Asbury Papers, The Daughters of the Republic of Texas Library.

¹¹Burns, 454.

school together.¹² Just before his entrance into West Point, Walker had studied at the University of Athens and was under the guardianship of an uncle, Abraham B. Fannin. During his time at West Point, his cousin Martha Low Fannin was attending school in Philadelphia. Walker was close to the same age and occasionally travelled the almost 150 mile distance to visit her. She remembered of him, “He was a gallant handsome lad, whom I loved dearly, we were almost like brother and sister.”¹³

It is noteworthy that neither Martha Fannin Fort, nor George Washington Towns make any mention of Fannin’s use of the name Walker, let alone of his illegitimacy. This leads to the conclusion that if his illegitimacy burdened him, James W. Fannin did a great job of hiding it. His relationships with his paternal relatives look to have been free and natural, even loving. His 1835 letter to Francis Belton, only a recent acquaintance, is perfectly matter-of-fact about his adoption by the Walkers, although the reason why is left to Belton’s imagination.¹⁴ As is the case with Towns, he kept in touch with friends he had made before he took the Fannin last name. In addition, it would be a mistake to assume that such references to being a “true Fannin” as he made in his previously-quoted account of his father’s death are linked to a sense of insecurity in his identity due to his illegitimacy. Those sentiments could have been echoed by any sentimental Southerner of his time reflecting on his obligation to uphold his family honor. After all, Martha, whose

¹²“Speech of Mr. Towns of Georgia,” *The Southern Banner*, July 2, 1836. Georgia Historic Newspapers, presented in the Digital Library of Georgia. The reference to Fannin came embedded in the middle of a speech Towns gave in the House of Representatives on the subject of a fortification bill. During the course of the debate Representative Mason of Ohio had made some disparaging remarks about the Texian revolutionaries. Towns took the time to disagree, partially due to his friendship with Fannin.

¹³Fort, 26.

¹⁴Fannin to Belton, August 27, 1835, in John H. Jenkins, ed., *Papers of the Texas Revolution*, vol. 1, 373.

legitimacy has never been in question, used similar expressions.¹⁵ What illegitimacy likely imparted to young James was an extra measure of stimulus. The desire to fit in and live up to the family standard was conventional,¹⁶ but the circumstances of his birth put him at a material disadvantage. While Isham did provide for his son's education and gave him some monetary inheritance, James stood to inherit neither large tracts of land nor large numbers of slaves. From the further distance he had to pull himself up; all the more fire would have been lit underneath him. This manifested itself throughout his life as a sometimes reckless ambition which he might have lacked had he inherited a comfortable fortune. Indeed, he was willing to take various and sometimes dangerous routes to establishing his place within the class that his family inhabited. The first avenue tried would be the military.

James F. Walker was appointed to the United States Military Academy in 1819 at the age of 14 years and six months.¹⁷ Two years earlier, Major Sylvanus Thayer had become superintendent and instituted numerous reforms of the once-languishing academy, including the reorganization of the student body into two battalions, the institution of summer encampments in place of vacation, the institution of bi-annual exams, the reorganization of the curriculum and addition of Ethics, History, and Geography. Thayer was also a strict disciplinarian. He kept a close watch on the cadets'

¹⁵Fort, 16. She used the term "real Fannins" In describing the appearance of some cousins, daughters of Edmund Fanning, whom she had met quite by accident through the mutual friendship of her teachers. The relationship may not be positive, however. The genealogist Robert Burns has all but debunked Martha's etiology of the dropped g off the end of Fanning as a way to disassociate their branch of the family from the Tory Edmund's.

¹⁶Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), 43-45, 118-26.

¹⁷Burns, 461.

activities, making a point to know each of them individually.¹⁸ A Swedish baron visiting in 1820 described curriculum as consisting of sciences, including artillery, fortification, and surveying; French; drawing; law; history, ethics, and geography; and having a particular emphasis on mathematics. The baron observed the morning and evening parades of the cadets, noting “all their movements very rapid and executed with the utmost perfection and precision.”¹⁹

Cadet Walker’s record at West Point is less than spectacular, riddled as it is with unexcused absences and various other infractions. He passed Fourth Class year in the bottom half of his class in June of 1820 and would have received some field training in that summer’s encampment. The Third Class courses must have proven more difficult. He failed French in the January examinations and was sent back to the Fourth Class.²⁰ One reason for his relatively poor grades may have been the nature of his preparation. The Southern idea of education placed a premium on the classics and classical languages that took precedence over the more technical, mathematical knowledge that the West Point curriculum was built around.²¹

Walker resigned from the Academy in the fall of 1821. It was not likely for academic reasons, as his performance had begun improving; neither is there any substantiation for accounts of dueling. The evidence points instead to occurrences back in Georgia. One of his resignation letters (for he had written two) gave “the ill health of

¹⁸Ibid; George W. Cullum, *Biographical Register of the Officers and Graduates of the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, N.Y.*, Vol. 1. 3rd ed. (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1891), 83-86.

¹⁹Franklin D. Scott, “A Swedish View of West Point in 1820: A Letter from Baron Axel Klinkowstrom,” *New York History* 33 (July 1952): 317-320.

²⁰Brown, 5-6.

²¹Wyatt-Brown, 92-95.

one of my parents conjointly with other family circumstances” as his reason. As his father had died two years before Walker’s entrance to West Point, the sick parent he refers to must have been his mother.²² This is significant because it is Walker’s only extant direct reference to his mother and is quite possibly a reflection of their relationship. As for the “other family circumstances, according to a letter from a cousin, his grandparents were actually dying.²³ Given the role of his grandfather as a father figure, it would have added a strong motivation to resign and return home. If such is the case, it is useless to speak of his dropping out as an indicator of future failure. Rather, it makes sense that he would resign on account of his mother and grandparents: as his letters demonstrate, Walker was a young man of strong familial attachments. His resignation from West Point became final on November 20, 1821.²⁴ Regardless of Walker’s incompleteness, West Point certainly made an impact on him. The world James Walker was immersed in at West Point affected James Fannin’s expectations, attitudes, and actions when he came to positions of leadership in Texas. His faith in the quality of the graduates would be most prominently reflected in his plan to create a West Pointer officer corps in Texas.

After leaving the USMA, James F. Walker seems to disappear from the historical record for a while. By 1826, he began using the name James W. Fannin Jr. The precise reasons he changed his name can only be conjectured from his historical context in the antebellum South and some very scanty documentary evidence. Although the W is often understood to stand for Walker, genealogist Robert Burns argues that it is not necessarily

²²Ibid; Burns, 461.

²³Brown, 7.

²⁴Ibid.

a safe assumption. In no extant documents does Fannin spell out his middle name, so it could theoretically stand for something different. The suffix of Jr. differentiated him from his uncle, another James W. Fannin. The decision to change his name could have been partly due to his uncle's influence, because the two did have documented interaction. James W. Fannin Sr.'s middle name, however, was Werter.²⁵ Nevertheless, the fact that he kept the pocket watch inscribed by his grandfather throughout his life²⁶ testifies to his filial loyalty; therefore it would not be surprising that he would keep the name Walker in some form. Southern society at the time would have given James several reasons to use his father's last name, most fundamental of which would simply be to attach himself to his kin. Being kinless would have been a handicap,²⁷ and since his mother and grandparents were in severely ill health at the time of his resignation from West Point, by 1826 he was probably nearly so on his maternal side.

Very fortunately, his father's family was welcoming and accepting; he responded in kind, wholeheartedly identifying as a Fannin and involving himself with the family. The change would have been both psychologically and socially significant to the newly-minted James W. Fannin. As Bertram Wyatt-Brown observed, the paternal lineage was of paramount importance; conferring both prestige and the responsibility to live up to illustrious forbears.²⁸

²⁵Burns, 454, 462; Morgan county sheriff's sales, *Georgia Journal*, February 28, 1826, p. 4, Georgia Historic Newspapers, presented by the Digital Library of Georgia. J W. Fannin Sr. provided his nephew with legal assistance. The notice in the *Georgia Journal* reads "Six bags on, ginned cotton, levied on the property of Richard Garner to satisfy a fi fa [fieri facias] in favor of James W. Fannin, ex'or, &c. for the use of James Fannin Jr. vs Richard Gray and Richard Garner."

²⁶Linda Harsdorff, "Fannin's Watch Returns," *The Victoria Advocate*, April 10, 1988, p. 1.

²⁷Wyatt-Brown, 44-45.

²⁸Wyatt-Brown, 118-126.

He may have found employment as a schoolteacher, as he later remarked that he had once had a cousin—“a very smart and pretty girl”—in school in Hancock County for eighteen months.²⁹ A January 1827 letter corroborates his residence in Hancock County, not too far from his native Morgan County. More importantly, it indicates that Fannin began acquiring property in slaves. He wrote that A. R. S. Hunter’s “boy Oliver has been after me to buy him as I have his wife.” According to Oliver, his price was \$500.00. Fannin had recently bought “young fellows” for \$450.00, and expense which had pretty well exhausted his financial resources. He was not inclined to use credit. He was travelling to Augusta and planned on stopping in Powelton on his way. Fannin proposed meeting Hunter there and then taking Oliver along with him, promising to “do the best I can for you.” From that remark, it seems likely that Fannin was involved in the domestic slave trade as well.³⁰

On April 24, 1828, he married Minerva Fort in Powelton, Hancock County, Georgia.³¹ The new couple promptly moved to Columbus, Georgia (of which Fannin was already given as a resident in the marriage announcement.) Columbus was practically brand new: In late 1827, the Georgia State Legislature authorized the selection of a site for a trading town near the Coweta Falls, along the Chattahoochee River, to be the seat of Muscogee County. The commissioners chose a spot where navigation was promising year-round. The landscape was wildly beautiful, with heavily forested

²⁹Typescript of J. W. Fannin, Jr. to Eliza S. Fannin, October 27, 1830, Samuel E. Asbury Papers, The Daughters of the Republic of Texas Library.

³⁰ Fannin to Hunter, January 14, 1827, Star of the Republic Museum.

³¹“May 5, 1828,” *Macon Telegraph*. From georgiagenealogy.com/hancock2/news1820-1829.html (accessed 2 December 2013)

lowlands, good soil, albeit with some swamps and marshes. There was already a small, nearby population of around 300 that ran a hotel and a few stores, primarily catering to the Creek Indians who lived in a 60 mile-wide territory on the Alabama side of the river. The Creeks came to be regarded by the residents of early Columbus as a more-or-less harmless nuisance, allowed in town (often in great numbers) during the day, but required by law to go back to Alabama at night.³² Fannin set himself up as a merchant by late May, selling such commodities as coffee, sugar, candles, a variety of spirits, nails, china, and gunpowder.³³ Just below his advertisement in the *Columbus Enquirer* of May 29 is a hint of financial stress: a notice from Fannin headed “‘PAY WHAT YE OWE’ – St. Paul” urging his debtors to pay up on their obligations. He continued, humor mingled with a touch of desperation, “If this appeal is not duly attended to before next Court, the undersigned will be compelled to ‘try what virtue there is in stones,’ and will most certainly bring them (unfortunate weights) before Messrs. Justices Kelgore and Tarver.”³⁴ Fannin must not have been a merchant for long, however. The unavailability of issues of the *Columbus Enquirer* for most of 1828 to 1831 makes it hard to determine exactly when he changed his livelihood, but no further advertisements appear in that paper. Information in the 1830 census suggests that Fannin attempted to follow the pattern of many other ambitious Southerners and younger sons, using his profession not as a career but as a stepping stone on his way into the planter class. According to the census, Fannin

³²John H. Martin, ed., *Columbus, Geo., from Its Selection as a “Trading Town” in 1827, to Its Partial Destruction by Wilson’s Raid, in 1865*. (Easley, S.C: Georgia Genealogical Reprints, 1972), 5–10.

³³Advertisement, *Columbus Enquirer*, May 29, 1828, p. 3, Georgia Historic Newspapers, presented in the Digital Library of Georgia.

³⁴Requesting payment of debt, *Columbus Enquirer*, May 29, 1828, p. 3, Georgia Historic Newspapers, presented in the Digital Library of Georgia.

owned nineteen slaves: eleven were males and one female aged ten to twenty-four, four were males aged 24-36; two were males aged 36-55, and one girl under ten.³⁵ This number, especially of men in the ideal age range for agricultural labor, would have represented a tremendous investment. It is difficult to believe, though one might suppose not impossible, that Fannin in two years as a merchant managed to amass that kind of capital. He almost certainly went into debt: after Fannin's death, claims dating to 1828 were filed with the administrator of his estate.³⁶ In addition, he might have had some help from an uncle or a business partner, especially since it was common for members of the planter class to back each other's debts.³⁷

Despite whatever financial liabilities he may have had, Fannin bought a house on Jackson Street with "eight large rooms and as many fireplaces," attached to three and a half acres of land.³⁸ The decision to buy a house apparently came at the cost of the family's mobility: by Fannin's own calculation, he would not be able to afford a carriage until after 1831. Still, the family seemed settled in by October of 1830 when James invited Eliza and various cousins to visit Columbus. Their first daughter, Missouri Pinckney, had been born in 1829, and he playfully used her to lobby for Eliza's visit, "To praise our little daughter would be useless. If you all wish to see or know any thing of her, come and see her." This letter does reveal that Fannin was feeling the tension

³⁵1830 United States Census, s.v. "James W. Fannin," Columbus, Muscogee County, Georgia, accessed through www.heritagequestonline.com; Wyatt-Brown, 180-82.

³⁶Clarence Wharton, *Remember Goliad*, (1931; repr., Glorieta, NM: Rio Grande Press, 1968), 26.

³⁷Anthony Gene Carey, Historic Chattahoochee Commission, and Troup County Historical Society, *Sold down the River: Slavery in the Lower Chattahoochee Valley of Alabama and Georgia* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2011), 61.

³⁸"House for sale or rent," *Columbus Enquirer*, August 3, 1833, p. 4, Georgia Historic Newspapers, presented by the Digital Library of Georgia.

between his social aspirations and his financial reality. In it, he confessed his inability to afford a carriage for his family, and thus that he could yet not bring his family to visit friends and family further east. He somewhat defensively concluded “tho we do reside near the Indian borders, we still have some pride.” He also felt compelled to reassure Eliza that he had “rooms and provisions enough for you all, and hope you will feel no delicacy on the subject.” The guests, however, would be a worthwhile expense. After two years in Columbus, Minerva Fannin was especially homesick. “Show the girls this,” he instructed, “...I don’t care how many girls I have about me, as I like them all, and am so much from home, Minerva wants company.”³⁹

James’ and Minerva’s second daughter was born in 1832, named Minerva like her mother and nicknamed Eliza. She, unfortunately, had an unknown mental or emotional condition, and suggestions range from retardation to the stress brought on by the family’s experience in the Texas Revolution.⁴⁰ Since it is not known when she first manifested any symptoms, the latter theory is practically impossible to put to the test, and nowhere in her father’s letters can be found any reference to any ailment of the sort.

Fannin was active both in the Masonic Lodge and held the militia rank of major.⁴¹ (This explains why several friends in Texas addressed him as “Major Fannin” at a period

³⁹Typescript of J. W. Fannin Jr., to Eliza S. Fannin, October 27, 1830, Samuel E. Asbury Papers, Daughters of the Republic of Texas Library; Brown, 10-12.

⁴⁰Wharton, 22; Brown 12-13; “Minerva Fannin: Brief Sketch of her Sorrowfully Benighted Life...,” *The Austin Weekly Statesman*, November 9, 1893, p. 3, digital images, (<http://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metapht278670/> : accessed October 12, 2013), University of North Texas Libraries, The Portal to Texas History, <http://texashistory.unt.edu>; crediting UNT Libraries, Denton, Texas.

⁴¹“Masonic,” *Columbus Enquirer*, January 14, 1832, p. 1, Georgia Historic Newspapers, presented by the Digital Library of Georgia; “List of Letters,” *Columbus Enquirer*, January 18, 1834, p. 4, Georgia Historic Newspapers, presented by the Digital Library of Georgia.

during the revolution when he actually held the rank of captain.) He was even made Marshall of the Day for the celebration of George Washington's centennial birthday.⁴²

In politics, Fannin was an ardent supporter of nullification. His name, along with those of other prominent men, appears on heated letters in the *Columbus Enquirer*, condemning the tariff and Henry Clay's whole "American System." He served on a committee to organize a large public meeting and dinner that would be attended by several political luminaries from not only Georgia, but South Carolina and Alabama as well.⁴³ In addition, he and Mirabeau B. Lamar were members of the Free Trade and State Rights Association of Muscogee.⁴⁴ Politics was an arena in which Fannin's dramatic tendency came through. On one occasion, some opponents of nullification decided to hold a meeting and invited all the area's "friends of the Union." Saying that they too were "friends of the Union," nullifiers showed up en masse, only to be informed that they were not invited. Nevertheless, business proceeded. Someone proposed resolutions, another offered substitute resolutions, and then Fannin offered substitutes of his own. As the admittedly partisan *Columbus Enquirer* reported it, the chairman of the meeting refused to consider Fannin's resolutions because he "believed that the nullifiers had not been invited." The meeting almost became violent; the *Enquirer* reports that a few of the anti-nullifiers drew weapons, and then "charged upon, and assaulted the table with vengeance—but spilt no blood. It still remains firm and unshaken with sound legs

⁴²"Centennial Anniversary," *Columbus Enquirer*, February 25, 1832, p. 3, Georgia Historic Newspapers, presented by the Digital Library of Georgia.

⁴³"To the Anti-Tariff Men of Georgia, S. Carolina and Alabama" *Columbus Enquirer*, September 1, 1832, p. 3, Georgia Historic Newspapers, presented by the Digital Library of Georgia.

⁴⁴"According to a previous notice...," *Columbus Enquirer*, October 27, 1832, p.2, Georgia Historic Newspapers, presented by the Digital Library of Georgia.

and a broad back.”⁴⁵ Not only was Fannin an organizer and agitator, he possessed ambitions for public office as well. He had been elected Justice of the Peace for Muscogee County in 1830 but was barred from taking office because of a duel he had fought in Alabama. Exceptions were relatively commonplace, but Fannin’s appeal came to naught, suggesting that he must not yet have had enough status or connections.⁴⁶

Despite a growing prominence in his social life, Fannin’s personal finances were crumbling. On July 20, 1833, he announced that he was going to be out of the state for a prolonged period. He appointed Major Alfred Iverson as his agent and even put his house up for rent or sale, citing the necessity of being away from his family so often.⁴⁷ One would presume that his wife and daughters would be staying with relatives during his absence. In the meantime, however, several creditors sued for outstanding debt and won. As of October 5, 1833, the *Columbus Enquirer* ran this notice:

MAYORS COURT SALE Will be sold on the first Tuesday in November next between the lawful hours of sale before the court house door in the Town of Columbus the following property to-wit: Four half acre Lots forming a square lying between Jackson and Troup streets in the town of Columbus with an excellent Dwelling House thereon and other out houses all of which are enclosed,

⁴⁵“The following account of the proceedings...,” *Columbus Enquirer*, September 8, 1832, p. 3, Georgia Historic Newspapers, presented by the Digital Library of Georgia. This is written in response to the account of this particular meeting in a different newspaper.

⁴⁶Burns, 461; Jack K. Williams, *Dueling in the Old South: Vignettes of Social History*, (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1980), 67-68. An interesting aside: Henry Stuart Foote, a future historian of Texas and admirer of Fannin, had obtained an exemption for dueling from his state of Mississippi.

⁴⁷“Notice,” *Columbus Enquirer*, August 3, 1833, front page, Georgia Historic Newspapers, presented by the Digital Library of Georgia; “For Sale or Rent,” *Columbus Enquirer*, August 3, 1833, p. 4, Georgia Historic Newspapers, presented by the Digital Library of Georgia. It is noted that both the notice and advertisement had been running since July 20, 1833.

and occupied at this time by Wm. Hays, and formerly by James W. Fannin. Levied on as the property of James W. Fannin jr. to satisfy sundry fi fas [fieri facias] from the Mayor's Court of the Town of Columbus in favor of Thomas Penny James Harrison and others, vs James W. Fannin jr. Also one negro boy named Chapman about ten or twelve years of age. Levied on the property of James W. Fannin jr. to satisfy the above stated fi fas and others.⁴⁸

It seems as though Fannin knew what was coming, and tried to either sell the house or rent it in hopes of making some money from it. Slaves were the form of property that a planter could dispose of most easily and profitably,⁴⁹ and Fannin may have discreetly sold off the majority of his slaves beforehand. His absence would have made a convenient smokescreen for the family's abandonment of the house. Fannin was in dire financial straits, and those were surely not all of his creditors: numerous claims from Georgia were filed with his estate after death eight years later.⁵⁰ Although such collapses were not uncommon, especially in the Chattahoochee Valley,⁵¹ it had to have been devastating and humiliating. In one fell swoop, he had lost his house, land, and slaves. In short, he had lost everything dearly necessary to an ambitious Southerner.

As for the cause of his long absences, Fannin had become involved with the illegal African slave trade. It was a death-penalty offence under United States law, but

⁴⁸"Mayors Court Sale," *Columbus Enquirer*, October 19, 1833, p. 4, Georgia Historic Newspapers, presented by the Digital Library of Georgia.

⁴⁹Carey, 61.

⁵⁰Wharton, 26.

⁵¹Carey, 61.

Fannin was desperate.⁵² Because the domestic slave trade was highly competitive, professional traders already established in the Chattahoochee Valley, and the rest of the demand was fulfilled by private sales and various types of public auctions, Fannin would have been hard-pressed to make a profit in that industry when a little extra daring and fewer scruples could render a substantial profit.⁵³ A voyage in the spring of 1832 took him from Charleston, South Carolina to Havana, Cuba. He wrote to Eliza from both places, but as would be expected in writing to a fifteen-year-old girl, he makes only passing mention of his business. In his first, he says that he was “waiting here for a packet to sail to Havannah, where I am bound, I suppose for my health.”⁵⁴ In the letter from Havana, he reported that he had bought some goods and would pick up a shipment of sugar in Matanras before returning to the U.S. For the long term he “expected to keep a vessel in the trade after this summer.” From this letter and because the islands of the West Indies were major hubs for the African slave trade, Clarence Wharton plausibly implies that this trip to Cuba was the first of his slave trading voyages. Given his intention to go to New York in August, it is likely that he was engaged in some legitimate trade as well. He wanted to be back in Columbus within three weeks after departing Matanras, so whatever slaves he had purchased were probably sold along the U.S. coast, although it is difficult to guess what and where his market was.⁵⁵

⁵²Brown, 22.

⁵³Carey, 51-61.

⁵⁴Typescript of J. W. Fannin, Jr. to Eliza S. Fannin, April 23, 1832, Samuel E. Asbury Papers, The Daughters of the Republic of Texas Library.

⁵⁵Wharton, 25; Typescript of J. W. Fannin, Jr. to Eliza S. Fannin, May 20, 1832, Samuel E. Alsbury Papers, The Daughters of the Republic of Texas Library.

This initial voyage reveals other facets of his character and personality as well. In his letters to Eliza, Fannin displayed both love of home and a penchant for adventure. He wrote from Charleston “I sail tomorrow for the Island of Cuba. By the time this reaches your study, I will be sniffing the spicy breezes of the Indies [sic]—Think of me—think of your absent sister and little nieces—and of your absent sister and little nieces—and after awhile, with us again.” He also told her that he would visit her in New Haven, Connecticut, where she was in school, while on a trip to New York that summer.⁵⁶

His involvement in the international slave trade first brought James W. Fannin to Texas. He had obtained a letter of introduction to Stephen F. Austin’s secretary, Samuel May Williams, in August of 1833 from Edward Hanrick that indicates three things. First, Fannin was financially ruined, in Hanrick’s words, “he has nothing to lose and all to gain.” Second, the letter is addressed from Montgomery, another proof that Fannin had been traveling widely since 1832. Third, and perhaps most importantly, it means he is bound for Texas: it had not taken him long to find that Texas was a favorable market for his human merchandise, and Hanrick even identified him as a slave trader. In June of 1834, Fannin brought a ship with sixteen “free negroes,” as he attested to the U.S. Consul, from Havana to a port at the mouth of the Brazos.⁵⁷

Although in 1831, armed clashes had occurred over the enforcement of Mexican tariffs in Brazoria that could have easily recalled images of the nullification controversy, James Fannin arrived in Texas during a period of relative calm. The prohibition of immigration from the United States under the law of April 6, 1830 had been repealed, the

⁵⁶Wharton, 24-25.

⁵⁷Brown, 21-22; Wharton, 26.

state government of Coahuila y Texas was kindly inclined, and the economy was healthy. In addition, a number of concessions were made to Texas in 1834. These included judicial reforms, an increase in the number of representatives to the state legislature, and a political department formed at San Felipe which gave Anglo settlers still more autonomy.⁵⁸ Fannin's own impressions of Texas appear in the *Columbus Enquirer* of October 11, 1834. It announced, "Our readers will find in this day's paper an interesting communication from our late fellow-citizen, Col. J. W. Fannin, with regard to the province of Texas...Its length should deter no man from reading it." This correspondence was dated September 21 in Mobile, Alabama. Fannin wrote it for the sake of several friends, including the previous owner of the paper: none other than Mirabeau Lamar. The editors were right about the length—Fannin's glowing account claimed three and a half columns of newsprint. His remarks were drawn from a journal he kept on two trips to Texas, one in the dry and the other in the rainy season. He described in detail the geography of Texas, especially regarding the agricultural promise of various regions, his comments touching the soil, timber, rivers, weather, and even the quality of the well water. He went on to give descriptions of the population of Texas, its legal and political government, and the process of applying for a land grant. While he admitted that a number of fugitives inhabited the northeastern borders of Texas, he observed that "touching the society of the interior of Texas, I solemnly declare to you that I have never yet seen as good in any new and frontier settlement in the United States," and estimated that in "intelligence, respectability of character and untiring enterprise" Stephen F. Austin's colony was comparable to Fannin's own Muscogee county. In

⁵⁸Paul D. Lack, *The Texas Revolutionary Experience: A Political and Social History, 1835-1836*. (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1992), 6-8.

refutation of what he claimed was the prevailing assumption in the United States, he asserted that Anglos overwhelmingly outnumbered “Spaniards” everywhere but in Bexar, and were far removed from the direct influence of the Mexican central government and Catholic Church. Fannin was thoroughly enchanted with Texas, and ended his letter by inviting his fellow Georgians to immigrate en masse. He himself was becoming a Texian. He closed, “I am forming a settlement near Col. Coles, and will be happy to welcome such of my friends to the country as can trust themselves beyond the shadows of their own pine forest.”⁵⁹

Fannin gave no indication in this letter that he expected conflict with the Mexican authorities, let alone the revolt that would break out in a little over a year. However, Fannin neglects to mention that Stephen F. Austin, who had taken an appeal for Texas’ separate statehood to the national government in 1833, had been arrested and had only been released from prison in the same month Fannin wrote this letter from Mobile.⁶⁰ One could reasonably assume that, for all Fannin knew, Austin was still in prison. To think that Fannin was ignorant of Texas’ fight for statehood and Austin’s detention strains one’s credulity. More likely, Fannin is exercising his talent for salesmanship, presenting Texas’ situation in the rosiest possible light to potential settlers. His letter should accordingly be thought of as partly promotional literature. As such, the letter exerted a palpable influence. The *Richmond Enquirer* carried an abridged version, which omitted much of Fannin’s lengthy description of the agricultural advantages of different regions

⁵⁹“Texas,” *Columbus Enquirer*, October 11, 1834, p 2-3, Georgia Historic Newspapers, presented by the Digital Library of Georgia. The editors seem to have picked up on Fannin’s exuberant tone. Just under the title “Texas” the subheading reads “God said let there be light, and there was light.”

⁶⁰ Lack, 53.

but included his comments on the land grant process, society, and government—including those regarding Texas' far removal from Mexican influence.⁶¹ The 1835 *Guide to Texas Emigrants* used Fannin's account as a source, quoting him on the quality of Texas society.⁶² The influence Fannin's words had eludes quantification, but no matter their impact, his marketing brings to light something of his state of mind at the time he immigrated. Exposing his commitment to his new community, Fannin had already enlisted his talents on behalf of Texas.

In Texas, Fannin formed a partnership with Brazoria planter Joseph Mims in which Fannin would be responsible for providing smuggled slaves. There was enough demand on the part of the planters; complacent approval from most of the settlers, but Fannin's business was by no means universally welcomed. John Wharton, David Burnet, and S. Rhoads Fisher, for example, condemned the trafficking as inhuman and compared it to piracy.⁶³ A more pragmatic objection was that newly arrived African slaves were an unpredictable and possibly incendiary element in the Texas slave population; Texas planters were on already on edge after Col. Juan Almonte had indirectly let word of Mexican law prohibiting slavery reach Texas slaves.⁶⁴

⁶¹ "Texas," *Richmond Enquirer*, November 7, 1834, p. 4, *America's Historical Newspapers*. Fannin's letter was clipped from the *Columbus Enquirer*. There is no evidence that he was a correspondent for other newspapers.

⁶² David Woodman Jr., *Guide to Texas Emigrants*, Book, 1835; (<http://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metaph27723/> : accessed November 09, 2014), University of North Texas Libraries, The Portal to Texas History, <http://texashistory.unt.edu>; crediting Dallas Public Library, Dallas, Texas.

⁶³ Paul D. Lack, "Slavery and the Texas Revolution," *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 89 (October 1985):186; Fisher to Public, in vol. 4 of *Papers of the Texas Revolution*, 222-23.

⁶⁴Lack, 12-13.

The spring of 1835 was occupied by another slave trading voyage, this time with 152 slaves; and business travel. Fannin was imprisoned for debt in New Orleans until an unknown someone paid his bail.⁶⁵

It is not certain whether or not Fannin moved his wife and children to Texas at this time; however, it is highly unlikely. A letter written in late February of 1836 states his desire for a reunion “if my family get in” and refers mournfully to his almost “eighteen months’ absence” from them, which despite Fannin’s multiple voyages would have been virtually impossible had they been in Texas.⁶⁶ A letter from Columbus resident General Bethune written in February of 1836 indicated that Minerva and her daughters did not arrive in Texas prior to that year.⁶⁷

⁶⁵Wharton, 26-27.

⁶⁶Fannin to Robinson, February 22, 1836, in Jenkins, *Papers of the Texas Revolution*, vol. 4, 399.

⁶⁷“Massacre of the Georgia Battalion,” *Southern Recorder*, April 26, 1836, p 3, Georgia Historic Newspapers, presented by the Digital Library of Georgia.

CHAPTER TWO

The Coming of War and Military Apprenticeship, August 1835 to January 1836

In early August, the Texas political jurisdiction of Columbia, including Fannin and his business partner Joseph Mims, came out strongly in favor of calling a convention to discuss Texas' future.¹ On August 20, the Columbia jurisdiction Committee of Safety and Correspondence appointed James Fannin a "confidential agent" with instructions to lobby Wyly Martin, and anyone else he might sway, for the calling of a convention.² Regrettably, it is not known what level of influence Fannin had on Martin—although Martin did subsequently serve on the committee to administer the election of the jurisdiction's delegates.³ Fannin did attempt to use his influence on a friend whom he had made in Mobile in the winter of 1834, U.S. Army Major Francis Belton stationed at Mobile Point. They had discussed a potential war in Texas, and Fannin had made some remarks on the necessity of obtaining good officers for the Texian forces. After describing the state of affairs in Texas, Fannin asked Belton for permission to suggest his name to the upcoming convention as a candidate for a command position. This is Fannin's first recorded statement of his idea to populate Texas' officer corps with West Pointers.⁴ Belton offered to serve as a provisions and stores inspector if he could

¹ "Meeting (of August 15, 1835.)," Brazoria, Broadside Collection, Austin Papers, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin, Box BC DB 1835.

² Archer to Fannin, Velasco, August 20, 1835, in vol. 1 of *Papers of the Texas Revolution*, 358-59.

³ Ruby C. Smith, 81.

⁴ Fannin to Belton, Velasco, August 27, 1835, in vol. 1 of *Papers of the Texas Revolution* 371-73.

arrange to be transferred to duty in New Orleans, giving no direct answer to Fannin's main question about using Belton's name at the convention, but suggestively explaining that there were enough bureaucracy and paperwork involved in arranging a furlough to dissuade many a good officer.⁵ At first glance, it seems like this obvious problem would have already occurred to Fannin. When Fannin was at West Point, however, the number of vacancies in the officer corps was relatively low; the government had no problem freely granting discharge. It was a common thing for a young graduate to resign almost immediately for a more promising civilian career in engineering or surveying.⁶ Nevertheless, Fannin still cherished the idea of attracting professional officers to the service of Texas, and forwarded Belton's reply to the Consultation with the sly observation "You will see that he does *not decline* the nomination, and, I am satisfied, if tendered him by your body, he would accept."⁷

Fannin assumed a very public presence and whether he meant to or not, established himself as a leader. He attended a supper given for Stephen F. Austin by the citizens of Brazoria on September 8, 1835. Since Austin was in prison at the time Fannin emigrated, this was most likely the first time the two met. The proceedings of the banquet are recorded in *The Texas Republican*. Austin delivered an address in which he related his mission to Mexico City in 1833 to petition for Texas' separate statehood from Coahuila, his arrest and imprisonment, and the subsequent political developments in the national government. Austin developed his argument in terms of state rights and state

⁵ Belton to Fannin, September 23, 1835, in Jenkins, *Papers of the Texas Revolution*, vol. 1, 480-84.

⁶ Scott, 318-19.

⁷ Fannin to President, November 6, 1835, Headquarters of the Army of Texas, 2 miles above Bexar, in Jenkins, *Papers of the Texas Revolution*, vol. 2, 336-38.

sovereignty—a language Fannin certainly understood. He warned that Santa Anna’s government in the interior aimed to overthrow the Constitution of 1824, which still held the promise of Texas’ eventual separate statehood. He continued, that a centralist government would be substituted in which the status of the Mexican states reduced to that of Provinces. Still careful and moderate in his language, Austin urged the calling of a Consultation of the people but did not go so far as to dictate what its proper response would be. However, he suggestively stated that he had informed Mexican officials that sending troops to Texas or warships to the coasts would inevitably provoke a war. Leaving that ominous note, he again called for a Consultation and unity of action. In the flurry of toasts that followed, Fannin himself gave one, embellishing the cooperative mood of the evening with a historical allusion: “Union; may the people of Texas unite Roses red and white, and their only emulation be who shall, who will do the most for the public good.”⁸

In mid-September Fannin learned from the residents of Copano of the arrival of the *Veracruzana*, loaded with weapons and ammunition, and the anticipation of two more ships transporting the troops of General Martin Perfecto de Cos. Fannin, in turn, sent word to the settlers on the Brazos and gave orders for couriers to carry confidential messages to the settlements calling for volunteers for an expedition to capture the anchored ship.⁹ It is evident that Fannin shared Austin’s opinion that the landing of

⁸ *The Texas Republican*. (Brazoria, Tex.), Vol. 1, No. 53, Ed. 1, Saturday, September 19, 1835, p. 2-3, Newspaper, (<http://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metaph80271/> : accessed November 30, 2014), University of North Texas Libraries, The Portal to Texas History, <http://texashistory.unt.edu>; crediting Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, Austin, Texas.

⁹ Fannin to Mills, Cana Creek, September 18, 1835, in Jenkins, *Papers of the Texas Revolution*, vol. 1, 457; Andrews to Fannin, Brazoria, September 18, 1835, in Jenkins, *Papers of the Texas Revolution*, vol. 1, 455; Ruby C. Smith, 83.

troops meant outright war, and Austin, acting in his capacity as chair of the San Felipe Committee of Safety, endorsed the plan. Fannin and a number of others pledged five hundred dollars apiece to buy arms.¹⁰ However, Colonel Domingo Ugartechea's demand that the citizens of Gonzales surrender their small cannon, their subsequent refusal and appeal for aid caused the dissolution of the proposed expedition, but Fannin was comforted by his confidence that the Schooner *Caledonia* and Steamboat *Laura* would be more than a match for the Veracruzana.

Ultimately, Cos marched his four hundred men to Bexar unopposed. Fannin's initiative and efficiency are nonetheless impressive, especially when one considers that the inchoate rebellion in Texas was still directed by local committees of safety and lacked central leadership.¹¹ Still, his decision to scuttle the expedition in favor of going to the aid of the citizens of Gonzales might have been symptomatic of a tendency to let emotional, humanitarian appeals compromise his strategic vision, a tendency which showed itself several times later in his career. The disunited nature of the Texian forces must have influenced Fannin's decision. For all his confident initiative, and even with Austin's backing, he was simply not in charge of the men who would have composed the expedition. Historian William Binkley, who considered the planned expedition reckless in the first place, observed that the disorder in the Texian forces rendered them easily distracted.¹² He risked looking ridiculous and losing the appearance of authority if he had continued impotently giving orders to intercept Cos when all eyes were turned

¹⁰ Ruby C. Smith, I, 83.

¹¹ Ruby C. Smith, I, 83-84; Brown, 34-35; Lack, 34-35.

¹² Binkley, 68-71.

toward Gonzales. He may well have been optimistic that the Texian ships were up for the task, but there was little else he could have said.

Fannin raised a company he called the “Brazos Guards” and marched for Gonzales, but could not have reached there in time for the Revolution’s opening skirmish of October 2.¹³ He and a number of others signed a communication dated at 11 o’clock at night on October 2 from the “Camp of the Volunteers.” The postscript gave highly erroneous information about an engagement having been fought at Gonzales, so this encampment was probably situated a distance away from the action.¹⁴ Fannin must have arrived very shortly thereafter because Noah Smithwick recalled that Fannin and the Brazos Guards were already in Gonzales when he arrived on October 3.¹⁵ On October 6 he was one of eight men, including Peter W. Grayson, Amos Pollard, John J. Linn, and Patrick Jack, to address a letter to Stephen F. Austin pleading for him to come with reinforcements, gunpowder, and lead in the face of a rumored new effort by Ugartechea and Cos take the cannon.¹⁶

Events moved in rapid succession. The little victory at Gonzales was followed up with another on October 9, when a separate Texian force bloodlessly captured the Presidio La Bahia at Goliad. The force gathering at Gonzales, deemed “The Army of the People” by the San Felipe Committee of Safety elected Austin commander-and-chief on

¹³ Ruby C. Smith, I, 84; Brown, 39.

¹⁴ David Randon, et al to Citizens, Camp of the Volunteers, October 2, 1835, in “Freemen of Texas To Arms!!! To Arms!!!!” Broadside Collection, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin, Box BC OB 1830-1835.

¹⁵ Noah Smithwick, *The Evolution of a State, or Recollections of Old Texas Days*, comp. Nanna Smithwick Donaldson (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1983).

¹⁶ Grayson et al to Austin, Gonzales, October 6, 1835, in vol. 2 of *Papers of the Texas Revolution*, 59.

October 11. The army began a slow march on the 13th and arrived at Salado Creek between the 20th and the 24th, initiating the Siege of Bexar.¹⁷ As a company captain, Fannin participated in Austin's initial councils of war during the march to Bexar. He witnessed firsthand the inner workings of a volunteer army, no doubt, although the unanimity and seeming good feeling would have given him little warning of the trouble with subordinate officers to come later in the campaign.¹⁸

James Fannin was beginning what could be called his military apprenticeship, operating under General Stephen F. Austin and James Bowie. As of October 9, Bowie had attached himself to the Brazos Guards as a private, resigning a previous appointment from Austin.¹⁹ The fact that Bowie, almost a decade Fannin's senior and possessing far more practical military experience,²⁰ had elected to enlist in Fannin's company speaks well of the Brazos Guards and its captain. The two would continue to be associated, even after Bowie took command of a four-company strong division and became "volunteer aid" to General Austin.²¹

¹⁷ Ruby C. Smith, I, 84-85; Lack, 112; Binkley, 73; Moses Austin Bryan, [transcript of report], October 13, [1835]; digital images, (<http://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metaph218084/> : accessed July 31, 2014), University of North Texas Libraries, The Portal to Texas History, <http://texashistory.unt.edu>; crediting Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, Austin, Texas.

¹⁸ Austin Council of War, Head Quarters Camp Sevolo, October 18, 1835 in vol. 2 of *Papers of the Texas Revolution*, 151; Austin Council of War, Head Quarters Camp Sivolo, October 19, 1835 in vol. 2 of *Papers of the Texas Revolution*, 162.

¹⁹ Bowie to Austin, Camp above San Antonio, October 9, 1835, in vol. 2 of *Papers of the Texas Revolution*, 73.

²⁰ Hardin, 29.

²¹ Lack, 112-13; Austin to Bowie, Head Quarters Mission Espada, October 27, 1835, in vol. 2 of *Papers of the Texas Revolution*, 230.

On October 22, shortly after the main body of the Army of the People encamped on the Salado Creek, Capt. Fannin went on his first assignment with Col. Bowie. Austin issued two orders to Bowie regarding the reconnaissance. In the first, he ordered him to take the First Division to survey Missions San Juan, Espada, and San José to determine the sympathies of the locals, take stock of the stores of food, and if possible, to secure one of the missions in which to keep provisions. In the other order, Austin provided more specific instructions about the intelligence he wanted, but most intriguingly he took time to define Bowie and Fannin's working relationship. Colonel Bowie would still be in charge, but Austin seemed to have in mind a situation whereby Fannin was basically second in command. Bowie was to "proceed with Capt. Fannin's Division." Austin closed, "You and Capt. Fannin will however use your discretion as to retaining possession at this time."²²

The mystery in this situation is determining the amount of authority Fannin actually shared with Bowie; how thoroughly he participated in decision making. This is especially of interest in regard to the victory at Concepción that so dramatically and fatefully propelled him toward high command. There is a tendency in the historiography to guess that Fannin's role was minimal and that Bowie did most, if not all, of the decision making. Fannin's biographer Gary Brown calls him a "co-commander on paper," and claims that he only had a "minor role as a company commander" at Concepción.²³ However, the bulk of the justification for this thesis seems to be

²² Austin to Bowie [both orders], Head Quarters Camp Salado, October 22, 1835, in Jenkins, *Papers of the Texas Revolution*, vol. 2, 187-88. The order mentioning Fannin's role is also signed by Austin's adjutant W.D.C. Hall, leading me to suspect that this was the order was the only one of the two actually sent to Bowie.

²³ Hardin, 30-35; Brown, 54.

inductive: aimed at providing an etiology for Fannin's mistakes during the Goliad Campaign. Dr. Stephen Hardin and Gary Brown both hold that Bowie made some equivocal tactical decisions, but his decisive, strong leadership and good luck overcame them. Brown argues that Fannin, on the other hand, learned all the wrong lessons from the battle—lessons that would work against him at the Battle of Coleto.²⁴ Historian J.R. Edmondson also holds the opinion that Bowie was *the* decision maker at Concepción, and uses that premise to help explain what he sees as Fannin's inability to make decisions when he had his own independent command.²⁵

I do not question that Fannin's role in these reconnaissances was subordinate to Bowie, but I think that he shared substantively in decision-making and command responsibilities. First, it is enough to notice that although other company commanders were present on these missions,²⁶ Fannin is the only one that signs the official reports. As appropriate for co-commanders, the reports sent back to Austin were signed by both Bowie and Fannin, with Bowie's signature always appearing above Fannin's. An appropriate task to delegate to a subaltern, it seems as though Fannin had the responsibility for writing the reports to General Austin. It is likely that he materially authored most, if not all, of them. Not only is the style of the reports similar to Fannin's other writings, a report of October 24 explicitly acknowledges his authorship, "...will

²⁴ Ibid, 53-55.

²⁵ J.R. Edmondson, *The Alamo Story: From Early History to Current Conflicts*, (New York: Republic of Texas Press, 2000), 281.

²⁶ Hardin, 28-29.

you allow (me) (Fannin) to suggest the names of..."²⁷ Nevertheless, it goes without saying that Bowie contributed to the intellectual authorship. Co-authorship would of course have been necessary to give Austin a full picture of events, such as the after action report on the battle of Concepción, but the opportunity to gain experience quickly synthesizing that information would be beneficial for a young officer.

Bowie and Fannin reported that they secured Mission Espada on the evening of October 22, their approach scaring off the meager five-man guard. Their position at Espada gave them a good view of the city and its fortifications. They reported that some protected positions of unburnt brick had been grafted onto houses, eight cannon had been mounted, and the church being used as an armory had been had been fortified with a filled palisade and ditch. They observed that the defenses were still porous enough to allow for couriers from the mission to enter San Antonio and make contact with the owners of the corn crop that was still in the field. They announced that the area residents were friendly and cooperative. Many of them were residents of Bexar proper that were "laying out" to keep from being drafted by General Cos for "the most servile duties." Bowie and Fannin relayed some encouraging news about the state of Mexican preparations. He heard that the Mexican Army had not yet brought in provisions and found the corn not yet harvested. If couriers could make it into the city, the owners might make a deal with the army, but the renters in residence at the mission would only sell on a small scale for cash. Their postscript reveals—asking Austin to send the companies

²⁷ Bowie and Fannin to Austin, Mission of Espada, 24 October 1835, in Jenkins, *Papers of the Texas Revolution*, vol. 2, 210.

and baggage that had been left behind—that they had not brought the whole of the First Division.²⁸

Fannin and Bowie scouted Missions San Juan and San José the following day. San Juan had a defensible position, a number of sympathetic families, and corn in the fields. San José was indefensible, far from water, and an irrigation incident had ruined the corn crop. The party was back at Mission spade that evening. The commanders were apprehensive about rumors of several parties of Mexican reinforcements, but found that only General Barragan and thirty men had slipped into Bexar. They faced a more immediate problem in provisioning their troops. The men had almost exhausted whatever supplies they had brought, “complaining that corn and other provisions are not furnished them,” and cash was scarce. Bowie and Fannin appealed to Austin to send provisions, but in the meantime decided to buy corn and beef with their private funds. They knew the necessity of staving off hunger and thus discontent in a volunteer army, “You know the materials we have—they will fight—and fight desperately; but must *Eat*.”²⁹ Austin replied the next day that he had been unable to raise enough cash to send them for supplies, but he and several others volunteered their own credit. If no deal could be made this way, Austin authorized them to give a precise accounting to the adjutant and requisition what they need.³⁰ Bowie and Fannin would give no indication that they had to resort to commandeering supplies, however.

²⁸ Bowie and Fannin to Austin, Mission of Espada, October 22, 1835, in Jenkins, *Papers of the Texas Revolution*, vol. 2, 190-92.

²⁹ Bowie and Fannin to Austin, Mission of Espada, October 23, 1835, in Jenkins, *Papers of the Texas Revolution*, vol. 2, 202-203.

³⁰ Austin to Bowie and Fannin, Head Quarters Camp Salado, October 24, 1835, in Jenkins, *Papers of the Texas Revolution*, vol. 2, 206.

Bowie and Fannin had planned to make advance to a timbered position just under three-fourths of a mile from the city limits. Early in the morning of the 24th, they skirmished with a party of about fifty, which retreated almost immediately. The commanders considered this a “feint” to discover the Texians’ numbers, and wary of an attack by a stronger party, decided to remain at Mission Espada until further instruction. They requested that Austin send at least fifty men (preferably one hundred and fifty), as they did not have enough men to cover the roads and other missions in addition to their position at Espada.³¹ Despite their difficulties on this reconnaissance, Bowie and Fannin were supportive of prosecuting the siege, confident that if theirs and Austin’s wings of the army worked in concert they could “*shut in the enemy*, and either starve them out, whip them out, or dishearten and beat them in small parties.”³²

Bowie and Fannin’s reconnaissance proved influential—Austin decided to move the main army up to Espada.³³ On October 27, Bowie received an order to make another reconnaissance with Fannin and the First Division, this time to locate a position along the river for the army to encamp closer to Bexar. If time allowed, Austin also wanted the outskirts of the town scouted for the best approaches and the state of the fortifications. He wanted the army in its new position by nightfall and therefore ordered Bowie and Fannin to make a speedy report.³⁴ Passing over San Juan and San José, Bowie and Fannin

³¹ Bowie and Fannin to Austin, Mission of Espadas [sic], October 24, 1835 in Jenkins, *Papers of the Texas Revolution*, vol. 2, 209; Bowie and Fannin to Austin, Mission of Espada, October 24, 1835, 210.

³² Bowie and Fannin to Austin, Mission of Espada, 7:00 a.m. October 24, 1835 in Jenkins, *Papers of the Texas Revolution*, vol. 2, 209.

³³ Ruby C. Smith, I, 85.

³⁴ Austin to Bowie, Head Quarters Mission Espada, October 27, 1835, in Jenkins, *Papers of the Texas Revolution*, vol. 2, 230.

chose a spot near Mission Concepción, even though it was too far away for Austin's army to remove to that same day. Bowie and Fannin themselves decided to encamp there for the night and sent a courier to Austin, informing him of their decision.

The next morning in a dense fog, Mexican scouts happened upon the Texian position and by 8:00 soon brought to bear on the Texians about three hundred cavalry, one hundred infantry, and at least one piece of artillery under the command of Colonel Ugartechea. The Texians fell back to the cover of the well-timbered riverbank; Fannin and his company occupying the south side of the bend and Bowie with the rest of the men occupying the north side. The attack was heaviest on Fannin's side, and Bowie sent one of his companies to reinforce Fannin. After making three futile charges, the Mexican force retreated, leaving behind their brass six-pounder. Arriving within the hour after the battle had ended, General Austin was at first quite upset that they had gone farther than his orders permitted, but the victory nevertheless impressed him.³⁵ Austin proposed that the entire army should take advantage of the momentary disorganization of the Mexican army and attack Bexar immediately. Bowie, Fannin, and Briscoe (company captain of the volunteers from Liberty) disagreed, and the army simply continued the siege,³⁶ awaiting the arrival of siege artillery. Fannin could sympathize with Austin's aggressive impulse, however, reflecting that they could have attacked successfully had the main body arrived sooner.³⁷

³⁵ Brown, 51-53; Ruby C. Smith, 85-86; Austin to Convention, Head Quarters, Mission of Conception, October 28, 1835, in Jenkins, *Papers of the Texas Revolution*, vol. 2, 242-43.

³⁶ Hardin, 33-34, 29.

³⁷ "In Camp, before Bexar," *Columbus Enquirer*, January 15, 1836, p. 2. Georgia Historic Newspapers, presented by the Digital Library of Georgia. I do not think that Fannin's remark about the army not being up contains any hostility to Austin for not arriving sooner considering their subsequent

Fannin wrote his own personal account of the battle for the *Columbus Enquirer*. The numbers Fannin gave agree with Dr. Hardin's reckoning, and in the case of the number of Mexican dead, are slightly lower.³⁸ His clarity of mind during the battle is evidenced by his close observation of the number of times the Mexican cannon had been fired and cleaned. His enthusiastic delivery demonstrates that his first battle did not shatter his romanticism. Fannin related that when the fog cleared around 8:00 a.m., the Mexican infantry came within one hundred and twenty yards of Fannin's right flank. He dramatically described his volley in response: "Each man awaited the word, 'fire,' with his 'rifle ready cocked,'—it was soon given, when the clear, deadly crack was heard from one end of the line to the other, and with great effect." His relation of the capture of the cannon is equally vivid: "The action was general and warm for about half an hour, the enemy having brought up a splendid piece of Artillery, (double fortified six pounder,) and opened fire on us at the distance of only 80 yards, from my right flank. They only fired it five times, (and ere that much was done, it had been cleaned three times,) before a disorderly retreat was ordered, with the loss of their Cannon and 67 killed and forty odd wounded."³⁹

This piece in the *Columbus Enquirer* provides a revealing glimpse of how Fannin viewed his role in these reconnaissances with Bowie. He wrote, "The command in line of a small division of 92 men had been assigned me; and had been actively employed..." At Concepción, he certainly thought he played a more important role than that which

good relationship—especially since he and Bowie had encamped much farther away than Austin had authorized.

³⁸ Ibid.; Hardin, 29-34.

³⁹ "In Camp, before Bexar," *Columbus Enquirer*, January 15, 1836, p. 2. Georgia Historic Newspapers, presented by the Digital Library of Georgia.

historians have accorded him, writing, “I was ordered off, in connection with Col. James Bouie [sic]” whom he described only as Austin’s aide-de-camp. [emphasis mine]

Writing back home, this is where allowance might need to be taken for exaggeration.

Especially given his bad fortunes Columbus, Fannin’s pride would have given him incentive to stress his own role. Determining from Fannin’s letter who was commanding in fact as well as title is murkier, as Fannin himself told the story a bit ambiguously. In some places, his use of the first person plural and passive voice implies a co-command, such as “We performed the duty,” and “It [the order to fire] was soon given.”⁴⁰

Regardless of how much Fannin was actually in command, his view received affirmation from the press. The *Telegraph and Texas Register* credited him with command during the battle,⁴¹ referring to him as the commandant of First Division.⁴²

With regard to Fannin’s career, the Battle of Concepción was the most important occurrence of the 1835 campaign. A segment from the *Mobile Transcript* printed in the *Columbus Enquirer* even credits Fannin himself for the capture of the six pounder, “the Major having killed a soldier of the famous Morelos Battalion, while in the very act of spiking the gun—by a weapon which was sent to him by Mr. Toby of your city.”⁴³

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ “Victory! Victory!!” *Telegraph and Texas Register*,” October 31, 1835, p. 4, digital images, (<http://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metpth47881/> : accessed April 1, 2013), University of North Texas Libraries, The Portal to Texas History, <http://texashistory.unt.edu>; crediting Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, Austin, Texas.

⁴² “Official Account of the action of the 28th ult., at the mission of Conception, near Bejar,” November 14, 1835, p. 2, digital images, (<http://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metpth47888/> : accessed April 1, 2013), University of North Texas Libraries, The Portal to Texas History, <http://texashistory.unt.edu>; crediting Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, Austin, Texas.

⁴³ “Four hundred men from the garrison of Bexar...,” *Columbus Enquirer*, December 18, 1835, p. 2, Georgia Historic Newspapers, presented by the Digital Library of Georgia.

Unfortunately, this episode is not corroborated anywhere else, but it at least goes to show the profound effect that the engagement had on Fannin's rising star. Aside from the very brief skirmish at Mission Espada, this had been Fannin's first real experience in combat and he had proven himself. Concepción solidified his reputation as a brave, effective officer and candidate for high command, and Captain Fannin would go on to prove his skill as a company commander during the coming months.⁴⁴

In addition to accolades from General Austin, General Houston tendered Fannin the office of Inspector General in the newly authorized Regular Army. Fannin replied to Houston's offer equivocally—he was flattered, but seemed less than thrilled about accepting what would be, in essence, a desk job. With supreme self-confidence, Fannin asked Houston to use his influence to obtain for him a Brigadier General's command instead.⁴⁵ In the meantime, Fannin remained with the Army of the People besieging Bexar.

Bowie and Fannin continued their activities together. Austin had received intelligence that a company of Mexican cavalry was ready to desert and only awaited a good opportunity to make their escape. Accordingly, Austin ordered Bowie and Fannin's division to create a diversion. Austin hoped that the defecting company would be deployed against them and would give themselves up.⁴⁶ Advancing from Concepción to a position across the San Antonio River within 800 yards from the town, Bowie and

⁴⁴ Ruby C. Smith, I, 86.

⁴⁵ Fannin to Houston, In Camp before Bejar, November 18, 1835, in Jenkins, *Papers of the Texas Revolution*, vol. 2, 457-59.

⁴⁶ Austin to Bowie and Fannin, Head Quarters on the Canal above Bexar, October 31, 1835, in Jenkins, *Papers of the Texas Revolution*, vol. 2, 271-72.

Fannin “made all display possible with our little small Division,” but no deserters arrived and Fannin saw no reason that any would be forthcoming. Bowie and Fannin decided to attempt to hold their admittedly vulnerable position as long as practicable; and asked Austin for his approval and reinforcements. They moved their baggage up from their camp at Concepción and built a makeshift bridge across the river so they could control both banks.⁴⁷

Bowie and Fannin’s audacious, if unchallenged, sortie is noteworthy in itself, but their report to Austin is significant for other reasons. It demonstrates that even Bowie and Fannin, with their combined authority, still had to consider the disposition and wishes of the volunteers under their command. The opinions of the volunteers had influenced their decision to encamp at their new position. Nevertheless, Fannin in the postscript pressed Austin that the men would not be content unless reinforced.⁴⁸ In the report of November 1st, unlike any previous communications, Fannin’s signature appears above Bowie’s and Fannin alone signs the postscript. On November 2nd, a palpably frustrated Bowie resigned what he called his “nominal command.” The postscript to Bowie’s resignation raises the possibility that Fannin underestimated or understated the restiveness of the troops in their division. He wrote, “Great dissatisfaction now exists in the division and unless counteracted by the measure suggested [reuniting the division with the main army] I seriously apprehend a dissolution of it.” He promised to explain

⁴⁷ Bowie and Fannin to Austin, Camp below Bexar, November 1, 1835, in Jenkins, *Papers of the Texas Revolution*, vol. 2, 290.

⁴⁸ Ibid. As for the volunteers influencing the decision to hold the new position, the exact wording is “Such an effect was produced [in Bexar; referring to the diversion] and the men being all well pleased with their situation about 800 yards below Town, that we determined to occupy it...”

the reasons for the division's condition and his own resignation to Austin in person.⁴⁹ Combined with the irregular signatures of the November 1st report, Bowie's sudden and mysterious resignation makes one wonder if he and Fannin had experienced a significant disagreement or falling out. However, none of the parties involved mentioned anything of the sort, and one is left to speculate on Bowie's reasons. He certainly had enough cause for concern without a conflict with his second in command. It must be remembered that how and if the army planned on conducting the siege of Bexar was still unsettled, and Austin himself doubted whether the army could be held together until siege artillery arrived.⁵⁰ The questions about the army's course of action—whether to besiege or storm, whether to unite the army in one position, how to cut off supplies and reinforcements—were being debated within the division.⁵¹ On the same day as Bowie's resignation, Fannin acted as chairman at a council of war that voted overwhelmingly against storming the town and for uniting with the main army. The minutes of the council quite conscientiously describe their division as “under the command of Coln. Bowie.” Nevertheless, Bowie was probably already gone. It was Fannin who wrote the letter to Austin accompanying the council minutes, stating quite unilaterally, “I have ordered everything packed up, and hold myself ready to march to you forthwith.”⁵²

⁴⁹ Bowie to Austin, Camp below Bexar, November 2, 1835, in Jenkins, *Papers of the Texas Revolution*, vol. 2, 497.

⁵⁰ Austin to Dimmit, Head Quarters, November 2, 1835, in Jenkins, *Papers of the Texas Revolution*, vol. 2, 297-98.

⁵¹ Austin to Bowie and Fannin, Head Quarters on the Canal above Bexar, October 31, 1835; Austin to Bowie and Fannin, Headquarters above Bexar, November 2, 1835, Fannin to Austin, below Bexar, November 2, 1835, in Jenkins, *Papers of the Texas Revolution*, vol. 2, 271-72, 294-95, 300-302.

⁵² Fannin to Austin, below Bexar, November 2, 1835, in Jenkins, *Papers of the Texas Revolution*, vol. 2, 300-302.

On November 21, having been appointed a commissioner to the United States, and facing the possibility of the dissolution of the siege of Bexar, General Austin gave positive orders to prepare for the storming of Bexar at dawn the next day. The roster of the Brazos Guards that Fannin drew up in preparation for the attack consisted of 68 men, and even William Travis attached himself to Fannin's company for the occasion.⁵³ However, by 1:00 a.m., Lt. Col. Philip Sublett informed Austin that his division was not willing to undertake the attack. Upon further inquiry, Edward Burleson's division was found to contain a substantial number who were opposed to the measure as well, and the planned assault was scuttled.⁵⁴ Captain Fannin resigned within twenty-four hours. Austin, writing the discharge letter, expressed his satisfaction with Fannin's conduct "as a soldier and as an officer."⁵⁵ Fannin did not leave immediately, but stayed at least another day to finish up some business with his company including writing a receipt for a Lieutenant's horse killed at Concepción.⁵⁶ Austin himself left the army soon thereafter, travelling to the United States to negotiate loans and foster support for Texas. Austin performed his final review of the Army of the People on the 24th.⁵⁷ I find it difficult to

⁵³ "Transcript of roster for Brazos Guards, November 21, 1835," Text, November 21, 1835; digital images, <http://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metapht216938/> University of North Texas Libraries, The Portal to Texas History, crediting Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, Austin, Texas, (accessed October 28, 2013)

⁵⁴ Cantrell, 327.

⁵⁵ Austin to Fannin, Head Quarters before Bexar, November 22, 1835, in Jenkins, *Papers of the Texas Revolution*, vol. 2, 486.

⁵⁶ "James W. Fannin Jr. Autograph Signed Appraisal for Horse Killed during the Battle of Concepcion," Camp at the Mills above Bejar, November 23, 1835, in Heritage Signature Auction #6028: Texana and Western Americana Books & Manuscripts, November 21, 2009, Dallas, Texas.

⁵⁷ Gregg Cantrell, *Stephen F. Austin: Empresario of Texas*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 326-28.

imagine that Fannin, with his penchant for both drama and sentiment, would not have stayed one more day to parade the Brazos Guards for this occasion.

The possibility that Fannin's resignation was linked to the abortive assault is supported by a pseudonymous account published in 1873 in the newspaper *The Four Counties*, in which the writer identified himself as one of the "Brazos Guards" and gave his recollection of the almost-assault. He wrote, "when every preparation had been made by our own company, our captain returned to us in high dudgeon." He told them about the cancellation of the attack, fuming over how a subordinate had been able to derail the execution of a direct order. Unfortunately, the newspaper is creased over the next line, and it is impossible to learn from the scan whether or not that incident was the direct cause of Fannin's resignation.⁵⁸

However frustrating his exit from the Army of the People had been, Fannin emerged with confidence, experience, and strong opinions on matters of policy. Fannin took up his pen to advocate for a larger regular army and professional officer corps. In a letter to Governor Smith dated November 31, he estimated based on intercepted correspondence that Santa Anna intended to raise an army of 8,000 to 10,000 to reinforce Cos in San Antonio. Certainly hyperbolic in characterizing it "the largest army, ever mustered into the service, and in the shortest time," Fannin appreciated the seriousness of the threat posed by a potential Centralist campaign in Texas. He thus proposed a regular army of at least two brigades, whereas Smith had previously authorized only one.

At least at the company level, Fannin seemed personally well-adjusted to accommodating the spirit of a volunteer force. His 1835 letters do not express the

⁵⁸ Brazoria (pseud.), "Recollections of a Veteran No. VIII," *The Four Counties*, p.2, digital images, <http://texashitory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metaph181360/> (accessed October 12, 2013)

aggravation and disillusionment Fannin would come to feel commanding a volunteer army of several hundred in the campaigns of 1836. Fannin credited the Brazos Guards' success to their discipline,⁵⁹ and the proud solicitude with which Fannin refers to the Brazos Guards before and after the 1835 campaign demonstrates that they had lived up to his idea of what a military unit should be. Nevertheless, Fannin never felt compelled to oppose the wishes of his volunteers, and he typically voted with the majority in councils of war. Referring to West Point in 1820, Baron Klinkowstrom had astutely observed: "An institution like this, where perfect subordination and obedience has to prevail, is not always in accordance with the American spirit of liberty and independence...."⁶⁰ Fannin would learn this the hard way in the coming months, as he found himself in positions where he had to oppose directly the wishes of the volunteers.

A Texian force led by Ben Milam and Frank Johnson successfully stormed Bexar in a battle lasting from December 5 through December 9, ultimately forcing General Cos' surrender and retreat from Texas. At some time or another during the winter of 1835 and early 1836, almost every Texian leader thought that an expedition to the rich commercial city of Matamoros, Tamaulipas would answer well for the crisis. It would keep hostilities away from Texas settlements; it would provide direction for the attention and energies of the volunteers the army relied upon, and more and more of whom came directly from the United States; and it would provide the means to join forces with the federalist states of

⁵⁹ Fannin to Officers of the Georgia Battalion, Velasco, December 25, 1835, quoted in Henry Stuart Foote, *Texas and the Texans; or, Advance of the Anglo-Americans to the South-West*, Vol. 2., Book, 1841; (<http://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metaph33002/> : accessed February 14, 2015), University of North Texas Libraries, The Portal to Texas History, <http://texashistory.unt.edu>; crediting Star of the Republic Museum, Washington, Texas, 190-91.

⁶⁰ Scott, 320.

Northern Mexico in resisting Santa Anna. The expedition raised thorny questions regarding Texas' objectives—whether the preservation of the Constitution of 1824 or outright independence. However, the coming disastrous rift in the Texian political and military leadership found its genesis in questions concerning *how* and *by whom* this expedition would be carried out.⁶¹

⁶¹ Roy W. Smith, "The Quarrel Between Governor Smith and the Council of the Provisional Government of the Republic," *Quarterly of the Texas State Historical Association* 5 (April 1902): 312-15; Ruby C. Smith, "James W. Fannin, Jr., In the Texas Revolution: Fannin and the Matamoros Expedition," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 23 (April 1920): 171-74.

CHAPTER THREE

Agent of the Provisional Government: The Matamoros Expedition

The Provisional Government of Texas was established in November 1835 under a plan of government called the Organic Law, and consisted of the Governor, Henry Smith; the Lieutenant Governor, James Robinson; and General Council.¹ Governor Smith ordered Major General Sam Houston to prepare an expedition to Matamoros, who in turn gave command of the expedition to James Bowie. Houston's orders, although they were sent on 17 December 1835, did not reach Bowie until much later, and the Provisional Government's first attempt on Matamoros fizzled.²

Meanwhile, the General Council, confident of its own power to authorize an expedition, passed resolutions requesting the Governor "by his proper officers" to make the necessary preparations. General Houston hesitated, believing that it would be more appropriate for the commander-in-chief of the army to maintain a central headquarters in Texas. Therefore, he suggested to Governor Smith that the field command of the expedition go to a designated subaltern. Besides, with the public mind becoming more and more in favor of a declaration of independence, Houston started seeing less and less good that could come of an attack on Matamoros.

The Council took action without him, and by resolutions passed over Governor Smith's veto, gave its approval to an expedition under Colonel Francis White Johnson.

¹ Smith, 282-83.

² Ruby Smith, 174.

Unnerved by the Governor's adamant opposition, Johnson resigned almost immediately from command of the expedition. In his place, the Council unanimously passed a resolution on January 7th appointing Colonel James W. Fannin Jr., as the agent of the Provisional Government with full authority to assemble men and materiel for the expedition, appoint his own agents, borrow up to \$3,000 on the credit of Texas, and finally to "make a descent upon Matamoros" at the time he thought it practicable. Accepting the Matamoros commission was the pivotal decision of Fannin's military career, and one he would eventually come to regret. For the time being, however, Fannin embraced his new role enthusiastically. He published a broadside on the 8th calling for volunteers to assemble at San Patricio and prepare to "aid in keeping the war out of Texas, and at the same time crippling the enemy in their resources at home."³

The same day, he appointed Brazos Guards veterans John R. Foster and E. C. Pettus sub-agents and ordered them to obtain teams and carts in Goliad and have them at Copano by January 25th. Fannin displayed a high sense of urgency in this letter. He authorized Pettus and Foster to impress the teams if necessary, and closed with the exhortation "It is expected you will *lose no time* – Dispatch is important – and *punctuality* and the strictest obedience to orders, is expected of you." This distinct awareness of a very small window of opportunity for the expedition's success was consistent with his decision to abandon it in February and greatly belies accusations of indecision. Perhaps more importantly, Fannin instructed his sub-agents to forward his original letter to the force leaving Bexar under James Grant, terming that party an

³ Smith, 315-19; Ruby C. Smith, 175-77; Resolution of the General Council, 7 January 1836. In John Henry Brown, *History of Texas From 1685-1892* (1892; repr., Austin: Jenkins Publishing, 1970), 486-87.

“advance guard.” Grant, however, acted independently and titled himself “Acting Commander-in-Chief of the Federal Volunteer Army of Texas.” Fannin obviously considering himself in ultimate command of the expedition, was making an audacious attempt to consolidate his authority by forwarding his communications to Grant.⁴

Regarding the Texian political situation, James W. Fannin’s commission to lead the Matamoros Expedition was one of the most controversial actions of the Provisional Government and became the turning point in the split between Governor Smith and the General Council. A few days later, upon hearing a report from the commandant of the small garrison in San Antonio that Dr. James Grant plundered its stores in order to supply the Matamoros Expedition, Governor Smith, who was already highly offended at the council for not submitting the decision to appoint Fannin over the Matamoros Expedition to him for approval, had reached his breaking point. He threatened to dissolve the Council; the Council in turn removed and impeached Governor Smith, and appointed Lieutenant Governor Robinson as acting Governor. The Provisional Government had rushed headlong into a constitutional crisis in which both branches of government had tried to remove the other. The result was two rival governments: General Houston continued to recognize Governor Smith as the legitimate governing authority while Fannin and Johnson (who had changed his mind about going to Matamoros and was given a commission independent of Colonel Fannin’s) recognized acting Governor Robinson and the Council.⁵

⁴ “Two Letters from J.W. Fannin Jr.” *Austin Genealogical Society Quarterly* 30, no. 3 (1989): 127-28; Roell, 49-54.

⁵ Smith, 322-35.

Fannin's acceptance of the Matamoros commission made him a personal enemy of Sam Houston, who felt his own authority impinged upon. Houston railed against the Council, arguing that it possessed no authority over the organization and size of the regular military, let alone power "to create *army agents* to supersede the commander-in-chief." He emphatically accused Fannin of insubordination for accepting an assignment that conflicted with his duty as a regular officer under Houston's command. The scope of Fannin's commission, likewise, attracted Houston's ire. Specifically, he complained that Fannin's authority to appoint an unlimited number of sub-agents constituted a more extensive power than either the governor or the Council possessed. The fact that Fannin was required only to "report" to the Council disturbed him, as did Fannin's idea of using spoils of the campaign to finance the war. Houston caustically wrote that the authority granted to Fannin was "as much at variance with the organic law and the decrees of the General Council, as the decrees of the General Congress of Mexico are at variance with the Federal constitution of 1824, and really delegate to J.W. Fannin, Jr., as extensive powers as those conferred by that Congress upon Santa Anna."⁶

Campaigning among the men gathered at Goliad and making speeches in Refugio on the 20th, Houston was successful in persuading about 200 volunteers to abandon Johnson's and Grant's parties, leaving them with only around 70 men. Houston, nevertheless, felt unsatisfied with this victory as he was unable to win over Ward's crucial Georgia Battalion: it was still at Velasco with Fannin. While he was still at Goliad, Houston learned of Fannin's Matamoros commission and Smith's impeachment.

⁶ Houston to Smith, Washington on the Brazos, January 30, 1836, quoted in John Henry Brown, *History of Texas from 1685-1892* (1892; repr., Austin: Jenkins Publishing, 1970), 502-16.

In light of these developments, he decided that he would go personally to report to Smith rather than stay with the army and risk association with its potentially disastrous actions.⁷

Fannin had assembled about 250 men at Velasco and Captain Shackelford's force of about 100 waiting for him at Matagorda Pass. He had engaged the services of two schooners and made arrangements for the acquisition of carts and teams. He only waited on fair weather to make the passage to Copano, and he held an optimistic outlook on this account. Fannin revealed that he was aware of possible conflict between him and General Houston, reassuring the Council that he would do nothing to precipitate any trouble. Fannin professed his willingness to serve under Houston, should Houston decide to obey the Council's orders and take command of the expedition. Fannin and the Council clearly considered Houston to have neglected to follow through on his initial appointment to lead an expedition against Matamoros, thus disobeying the government's orders. Fannin qualified his acquiescence to a Houston-led expedition with the condition that his volunteers approve of it. This caveat could be interpreted as ambition or reluctance to fill a subordinate role, however, it could also reflect the pragmatization of Fannin's strategy. In this same letter, he remarked on the "folly" of counting on regular troops, estimating that the regular army would not reach 1,000 strong by the month of May.

He seemed to be coming to terms with the nature of a volunteer force; letting go of some of his previous dreams of a regular army. Moreover, Fannin's caveat brings to light an underlying difference in his and Houston's conceptions of the relationship between civil and military authority. In contrast with Houston's strenuous assertions that the Council had no authority over the organization of the army, Fannin saw the civil

⁷ Ibid; Roell, 62; Ruby C. Smith, II, 181.

authority as having a much more absolute sway over the military. The Council's orders trumped the Major General's, so he would have seen no contradiction in his being a regular officer and accepting an assignment from the Council that placed him outside of Houston's authority. While he regretted the polarized state of Texian politics, he wrote "one cause of complaint is this very expedition, and that it is intended to displace general Houston. Not, one member of your body, or any man living, can impute to me such motives by any past act or word; and I am resolved, that no future one shall be so intended. But rest assured of one thing, I will go where you have sent me, and will do what you have ordered me, if possible."⁸

The split between the Governor and Council caused problems for Fannin within his own command as well. Very shortly after arriving in Texas, Ward had gone to San Felipe on business and become acquainted and favorably impressed with Governor Smith, who was at that point still in power. While there, he made a tender of service for himself and his men to the Governor, for which Smith thanked him in writing in a letter dated December 31, 1835.⁹ Ward received another letter from Smith written after his deposal. Colonel Fannin repeatedly begged Ward to let him look at the letter, allegedly promising confidentiality, and Ward eventually acquiesced. Fannin was highly offended by the contents, not only regarding politics, but also by its disparaging remarks about the old Army of the People. He copied selections of it from memory in a letter to the Council with the intention of helping defend its case against Smith, reasoning that "the

⁸ Fannin to Robinson, Velasco, January 21, 1836, in Jenkins, *The Papers of the Texas Revolution*, v. 4, 103-106.

⁹ Ward to Committee, Goliad, February 20, 1836, in Jenkins, *The Papers of the Texas Revolution*, v. 4, 388; Smith to Ward, San Felipe, December 31, 1835, in Jenkins, *PTR*, v. 3, 384.

people of Texas should be fully apprised of the acts and doings of their public agents.”

Fannin miscalculated on two points. First, he underestimated Ward’s connection to Smith, and even seems (or pretends to be) unaware of their having met. Second, he underestimated Ward’s intractability.¹⁰ When the Council in turn demanded the original from Ward, he considered himself a good friend to Governor Smith and indignantly refused to relinquish it.¹¹

The Georgia Battalion had arrived in Texas just in time to be wrapped up in the split between the Governor and Council. As a large, unified force they were valuable, and there is evidence to show that the Smith-Houston faction had been vying with Fannin and the Council for their loyalty. Fannin tried to present an apolitical front. In Fannin’s Christmas Day message to the Georgia Battalion, he had warned the officers to stay out of Texas politics at least until they established their citizenship and to “mistrust anyone who attempts, by *whatever means*, to draw you into the vortex of political discussion.” Calling for the battalion to avoid aligning with a party and focus on the “common cause,” he appealed to their common political experience as Georgians: “You all have seen, and must have had cause to regret the effects of party feelings in our native state.”¹² Georgia

¹⁰ Fannin to Robinson, Velasco, January 21, 1836, in Jenkins, *The Papers of the Texas Revolution*, v. 4, 103-106.

¹¹ Ward to Committee, Goliad, February 20, 1836, in Jenkins, *The Papers of the Texas Revolution*, v. 4, 389.

¹² Fannin to Officers of the Georgia Battalion, Velasco, December 25, 1835, quoted in Henry Stuart Foote, *Texas and the Texans*, 191; Richard E. Ellis, *The Union at Risk: Jacksonian Democracy, States’ Rights, and the Nullification Crisis* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 102–06; E. Merton Coulter, “The Nullification Movement in Georgia” *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 5, no. 1 (March 1921): 8–13. This statement is almost certainly references the contentious divide between Troup and Clark factions in Georgia, but considering Fannin’s involvement in Georgia politics, he could also be thinking of the lingering grudges toward South Carolina that had hindered cooperation and helped stall the nullification movement.

Battalion adjutant John S. Brooks' remarks in a letter home that they "have yet received no accurate intelligence of the cause" of the quarrel between the Governor and Council, apparently Fannin was reluctant to share his political opinions—possibly even the news—with his men.¹³ It was likewise imperative that Smith not let Ward's men fall under the sway of the Council's Matamoros-bound agents. Houston wrote to Smith on January 17th that "the Matamoros rage is up so high that I must see Colonel Ward's men."¹⁴ One of Houston's staff officers, George W. Poe, wrote more directly, reporting to Houston that he had "requested a statement of the force under the Command of Major Ward...I beg leave to report that unless some measures are taken to reduce both officers and men to obedience that the whole will degenerate into 'Independent Volunteers'."¹⁵ Smith and Houston might have had a decent chance of winning them over, especially since the men of the Georgia Battalion were solidly in favor of Texas independence.¹⁶

All of this combined to form a serious threat to Fannin's own authority, and he had good reason to be wary of a correspondence between his second in command and Smith. Fannin's position should be considered. Henry Smith constituted a rival government that Fannin did not consider himself beholden to, and Smith for his part did not recognize the authority under which Fannin was acting. Naturally, Fannin believed

¹³ John Sowers Brooks to Absalom Brooks, Camp Fannin (Velasco), January 20, 1836, John Sowers Brooks Letters, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin.

¹⁴ Houston to Smith, Goliad, January 17, 1836, in Jenkins, *The Papers of the Texas Revolution*, v. 4, 46-47.

¹⁵ Poe to Houston, Columbia, February 2, 1836, in Jenkins, *The Papers of the Texas Revolution*, v. 4, 242.

¹⁶ Georgia Battalion officers to Editors," *Federal Union*, March 4, 1836, p. 1, Georgia Historic Newspapers, presented by Georgia Digital Library.

that Smith was trying to undermine his authority, and the problems that could cause would be enormous. Not only was Ward the second in command, but also Ward had the loyalty of the Georgia Battalion. If Smith succeeded in winning him over, almost half of Fannin's troops could conceivably walk out on him. Worse, they could call another election for regimental officers—and Fannin's chances might not be so good. If such possibilities were running through Fannin's mind, it would go a long way toward explaining his actions.

Fannin and Ward apparently maintained a working relationship—to what degree of effectiveness it is impossible to know—but their personal relationship was certainly strained. It is obvious from Ward's reply to the Council that he felt betrayed.¹⁷ Perhaps connected with this estrangement, when both Ward's and Fannin's men were prisoners, Ward was given the opportunity to stay in separate quarters with Fannin and Chadwick, but he refused. Herman Ehrenberg, however, described this simply as Ward's decision to share the lot of his men.¹⁸ It is remarkable, and perhaps a testimony to their professionalism, that no survivors recall any tension between Fannin and Ward. Fannin trusted Ward enough to send him to the rescue of King's men at Refugio and felt duty-bound to delay his retreat for the sake of Ward's Georgia Battalion.

Returning to the progress of the expedition, Fannin began conveying men and materiel from Velasco to Copano by the 22nd, when he wrote out an official order for Captain Appleton of the Schooner *Flora* to take the companies of Captains Guerra and Ticknor to Copano by way of Aransas. Dramatic and spirited as ever, Fannin closed his

¹⁷ Ward to Committee, February 20, 1836.

¹⁸ Ehrenberg, 194.

order with the admonition “Hereof fail not.”¹⁹ Artillery figured into Fannin’s preparations as well: two days later, he purchased forty-six six pound cannonballs from the firm McKinney and Williams in Quintana.²⁰ Shortly afterwards the winds stopped cooperating, and Fannin addressed his next letter to Robinson from aboard the Schooner *Invincible* in Aransas Bay on January 28th. He had 200 men with him and anticipated at least 80 more men, supplies, and ammunition from Matagorda. Far more important than the logistical bustle, this letter marks a shift in Fannin’s strategic thinking. Corroborating what he was hearing from the New Orleans rumor mill, Fannin had received a letter from federalist General José Antonio Mexía saying that Santa Anna was in Matamoros. Fannin was reluctant to state outright any conclusions about the wisdom of continuing the expedition, but he was troubled by the news: “I will not give an opinion—but simply suggest that if it be correct we may expect a vigorous onset--&speedily.”

Fannin went on to outline his suggestions for the defense of Texas. He recommended concentrating troops primarily at Bexar, Goliad, and on the Nueces River; smaller detachments at Galveston and Matagorda would also be necessary. Unless these precautions were taken, he predicted that the commanders might well be forced to retreat if they were not overwhelmed. One of his remarks might hint that he was beginning to have second thoughts about continuing to Matamoros: “Do your duty as you have done, and you need not fear the consequences—‘Westward—Ho,’ should not be the order of

¹⁹ Fannin to Appleton, Velasco, January 22, 1836, in Jenkins, *The Papers of the Texas Revolution*, v. 4, 114. Fannin misspells both company commanders’ names as “Gurrea” and “Tickner.”

²⁰ “James W. Fannin Autograph Receipt Signed,” Quintana, January 24, 1836, in Heritage Signature Auction #6059: Texana, March 12, 2011, Dallas, Texas.

the day—and watchword by night.”²¹ Fannin was right to be concerned. Although not Santa Anna, the formidable General José Urrea and his army occupied Matamoros around this time.²² The simple fact that rumors were constantly fluctuating would have tempered the impact of Mexia’s intelligence. As Adjutant John Sowers Brooks of the Georgia Battalion wrote, “Various rumors have reached us with regard to the state or preparation in Metamoros [sic]. It is said that the city is well fortified, and garrisoned with 4,000 abregulars. Another rumor leaves it almost defenseless, and a third fixes its garrison at 1,100 men.”²³

Finally arriving in Copano by the first of February, Colonel Fannin energetically made preparations for the expedition despite any misgivings. Fannin impressed large quantities of flour, potatoes, bread, rice, corn, and even 70 gallons of brandy from the Schooner *Flora* for use of the army.²⁴ Fannin paid Capt. Appleman of the *Flora* for transportation of his men with a draft on the Provisional Government’s treasury. He paid the freight on the impressed goods out of his own pocket.²⁵

Fannin then sent his troops to the Mission Refugio while he remained behind at Copano to secure carts and teams for their supplies. On February 4th, Fannin received an

²¹ Fannin to Robinson, Aransas Bay, January 28, 1836, in Jenkins, *The Papers of the Texas Revolution*, v. 4, 165.

²² Roell, 63.

²³ John Sowers Brooks to Absalom Brooks, Camp Fannin (Velasco), January 20, 1836, John Sowers Brooks Letters, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin.

²⁴ Fannin to Appleton, Port of Copano, February 1, 1836, in Jenkins, *The Papers of the Texas Revolution*, v. 4, 232; Fannin Receipt to Foley, Port of Copano, February 1, 1836, in Jenkins, *PTR*, v. 4, 232-33; Fannin Receipt to Horton & Clements, Port of Copano, February 1, 1836, in Jenkins, *PTR*, v. 4, 233.

²⁵ Fannin Receipt to Horton & Clements, Port of Copano, February 1, 1836, in Jenkins, *The Papers of the Texas Revolution*, v. 4, 233; Appleman Receipt, Copano, February 3, 1836, in Jenkins, *PTR*, v. 4, 245.

optimistic report from Johnson that seemed to dispel any doubt about going forward to Matamoros. He reported, allegedly from sources in Monterrey, that Santa Anna was not in Matamoros, but in Saltillo, where his arrival so far into the federalist North had sparked a wave of resistance. Santa Anna's army was supposedly demoralized, plagued by desertion. Johnson calculated on joining with a known federalist force of almost 700 before crossing, not to mention the federalists rising in Tamaulipas and Nuevo Leon. In all likelihood, the coalition could take Matamoros bloodlessly. The only thing Johnson saw that could undermine the expedition's success would be if a hasty Declaration of Independence drove a wedge between Texians and their federalist counterparts in Tamaulipas. Colonel Fannin chose to trust Johnson's report. He planned on meeting Johnson's column in San Patricio, from whence they would march overland to Matamoros. He expected their force to arrive sometime between the 20th and 28th and requested cooperation from Texas' small navy during that time.²⁶

While at Refugio, Fannin billeted himself at the home of Ira Westover and set to work at the frustrating task of organizing his army. For one, it took longer than planned. Westover wrote, "Col. Fannin is at my house and has been a number of days endeavoring to obtain an organization of the Army which is not likely to take place."²⁷ An officers' meeting on the 6th, despite what Westover considered frivolous speechmaking, had

²⁶ Fannin to Robinson, Copano, February 4, 1836, in Jenkins, *The Papers of the Texas Revolution*, v. 4, 255-57.

²⁷ Westover to Houston, Refugio, February 7, 1836, in Jenkins, *The Papers of the Texas Revolution*, v. 4, 284. It seems that not all Houston-Smith partisans saw Fannin's agency as an explicit threat to Houston's authority. Nothing in Westover's letter suggests that Fannin's command was illegitimate. Another of Westover's comments seems complimentary of Fannin. He apparently concurred with Fannin on his ideas for military organization, writing, "the newly created officer called an Agent for the expedition to Matamoros has correct views as to the organisation of the troops if he has the command there shall be no independant volunteers recognized by him."

decided to elect a colonel and lieutenant colonel the next day. According to Fannin, the men voted almost unanimously for himself and Ward to fill the respective positions. Although he was making substantial progress hammering his 350-man force into a regiment, the process of forging disparate volunteer units into a functioning whole exasperated him. He begged Robinson, regarding a future militia call-up, “Spare us, in God’s name, from elections in camp; organize at home, and march forward in order, and good may result from it.”²⁸

By the evening of February 7th, Fannin received new, more definitive intelligence that would decisively alter his military strategy. Major Robert Morris commanded a quasi-independent company that had aligned with Grant’s arm of the Matamoros Expedition, and he wrote Fannin from San Patricio with unsettling news. The federalist command Johnson had planned to link up with had dissolved, the garrison at Matamoros had been reinforced with 600 men and expected more, and the ardor of the local federalists had been all but crushed. Even more disturbingly, Morris’ source, Don Placido Benavides, reported that Santa Anna wished to take advantage of the Matamoros Expedition, cutting north into the colonies while the Texian forces were engaged in Tamaulipas. Observing two concentrations of troops, one of which was led by General Cos, Morris suspected that Santa Anna’s aim was to coordinate simultaneous attacks on Bexar and Goliad. These columns were reported as close as the Frio River and the Rio Grande, meaning a Centralist army could threaten the settlements far sooner than early April, as had been generally accepted.²⁹ Morris ended his letter with a horrifying

²⁸ Ibid; Fannin to Robinson, Refugio, February 7-8, 1836, in Jenkins, *The Papers of the Texas Revolution*, v. 4, 280.

²⁹ Roell, 66-67.

depiction of life under Cos' occupation. Reportedly, even upper-class women were forced to grind corn, prominent citizens were murdered and their wives and daughters raped.³⁰

Fannin had no doubts about the veracity of the report. He reacted strongly to the news, and promptly forwarded Morris' report to Robinson and the Council. This letter is written in two parts. Dated February 7th at 10:00 p.m., it appears that he composed the first part immediately after receiving the express from Morris. This segment ended quite abruptly and the second part picks up at 7:00 a.m. the next morning. Fannin's first section recorded a visceral, emotional reaction; his alarm blending with anger, determination, and overtly racist rhetoric. Morris' depictions of Centralist troops abusing civilians, particularly women, were fresh on Fannin's mind when he began his letter to Robinson. His horror mingled with frustration and disillusionment with Texians for their slackness in the war effort after their success at Bexar. "Not the least doubt should any longer be entertained, by any friend of Texas, of the design of Santa Anna to overrun the country, and expel or exterminate every white man within its borders," he wrote, going on to quote the prophet Elijah:

'Why halt ye between two opinions?' Your soil is again to be polluted by the footsteps of the hirelings of an unprincipled Despot! Will the freemen of Texas calmly fold their arms, and await until the approach of their deadly enemy compels them to protect their own firesides? Can it really be possible that they—that any American—can so far forget the honour of their mothers, wives, and

³⁰ Linn, 300; Morris to Fannin, San Patricio, February 6, 1836, in Jenkins, *The Papers of the Texas Revolution*, v. 4, 274-76.

daughters, as not to fly to their rifles, and march to meet the Tyrant, and avenge the insults and wrongs inflicted on his own country-women on the Rio Grande? What can be expected for the *Fair daughters* of chaste *white women*, when their own country-women are prostituted by a licensed soldiery, as an inducement to push forward into the Colonies, where they may find *fairer game*?³¹

Fannin's frantic, racially charged rhetoric paralleled that of other Anglo-Texians who perceived themselves as superior to the "Indian" Mexicans; his anxiety over the sexual integrity of white women likewise reflected typically Southern fears.³² He was serious about the lack of a settler presence in the army; an accounting of the 400 men poised to march for Matamoros found at best a dozen actual Texians. He posed the question, "does not this fact bespeak an indifference, and criminal apathy, truly alarming?" Fannin felt gravely disappointed with the "old settlers and owners of the soil," who thought the war was at its end and took for granted the services of abundant American volunteers. As he saw it, their unwillingness to share in the defense of Texas looked even worse in light of the myriad privations the volunteers were suffering. Many had been with the army since November of 1835 without pay, their clothing and shoes fast deteriorating. On this account, Fannin spared no scorn towards the Provisional Government, which he charged with "total neglect."³³

The only hope for making a successful defense of the colonies lay in a massive

³¹ Fannin to Robinson, Refugio, February 7-8, 1836, in Jenkins, *The Papers of the Texas Revolution*, v. 4, 280.

³² Lack, 240; Wyatt-Brown, 312-24. Fannin's references to Mexican "country-women," however, indicate that perhaps racial difference did not entirely preclude bonds of common citizenship. At the very least, he acknowledged a degree of Texas' connectedness to Mexico unique for someone who emigrated as late as 1834.

³³ Fannin to Robinson, Refugio, February 7-8, 1836, in Jenkins, *PTR*, v. 4, 279-80.

mobilization of men and resources. Fannin would not countenance the idea of Texas ultimately losing the war, but he feared that the settlements might be ravaged in the process if the government and citizens failed to move quickly. With almost eerie foresight, he predicted, “If ever Santa Anna crosses the Guadalupe with 5,000 men, we have to fight east of the Brazos, if not the Trinity!” Fannin accordingly recommended publicizing the news of the Mexican army’s approach and ordering the militia to the field “*in mass*”—a draft, essentially— calling on Texians to “Evince your determination to live free or perish in the ditch.”³⁴ Fannin knew that Texas was ill-prepared for a defensive campaign and felt positive that Santa Anna knew this as well, but he calmed down as he continued the exposition of his strategy. He recommended the appointment of contractors, establishment of logistical routes and depots, and stationing reserves on the Colorado River between Bastrop and Gonzales as well as on the Navidad River. Fannin abruptly put down his pen for the night after a short grouse about the tendency of cavalymen to make fraudulent claims on the government for lost property. He picked up the next morning in something of a better mood. He had given some thought to managing river crossings, feeling optimistic that “the patriotic citizens, who have remained at home, will turn out and readily perform the work” of constructing boats or pontoon bridges; he asked for clothing, shoes, powder, and lead for his army. He began taking steps to concentrate his men at Goliad, even attempting to order Johnson’s men to do the same. Communicating with the reserves in the colonies, Goliad and Bexar would form a defensive line. It was on these two posts that Fannin intended to concentrate his men and attention.

³⁴ Fannin to Robinson, Refugio, February 7-8, 1836, in Jenkins, *PTR*, v. 4, 279-81.

Fannin also perceived a change in the nature of his own authority coming with the abandonment of the expedition. He did not sign his letter to Robinson as agent of the Provisional Government, probably because the purpose of the agency granted him had disappeared. Instead, Fannin signed as “Col., Com’t.” Although he had apparently relinquished his power as an agent, he assumed de facto authority well beyond his own volunteer regiment. Regarding his recommendation to remove non-essential artillery pieces from Bexar, he wrote, “Such orders have already been issued to Colonel Neil, or rather such recommendations [from Houston], provided he could procure the necessary teams. I now feel authorized to give orders to that effect, and shall forward an express to him this day.”³⁵

Fannin had seen the approaching danger and realized that time was of the essence. Refusing to wait for orders from Houston or anyone else, he had, for better or for worse, taken the initiative in changing the strategy of the war. The collapse of the Matamoros Expedition had shaken him, but he recovered. His letter of February 7th and 8th bespoke a grim but ardent decisiveness and confidence in his authority and abilities, and an implicit assurance that the people of Texas and the Provisional Government would not let him down.

³⁵ Fannin to Robinson, Refugio, February 7-8, 1836, in Jenkins, *PTR*, v. 4, 281-83; Ruby C. Smith, II, 186-88.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Friction and Fog of War: At Goliad, February-March 1836

In accordance with the defensive plan he had formulated, Colonel Fannin made his headquarters at Goliad and began fortifying the Spanish Presidio La Bahia.¹ The immediate reaction of his men was mixed, but the change in plans could not have taken them completely by surprise. Samuel Brown, writing over a year later, treated the move to Goliad indifferently.² Some surely felt indignant. Herman Ehrenberg's antipathy toward Fannin is extreme among survivor accounts, but taken with a grain of salt, his might be considered reflective of the opinions of at least the most aggressive and radical of the regiment. Ehrenberg held the retreat to Goliad against Fannin. He alleged—with no substantiation—that Fannin's pride and ambition had made him unwilling to share credit with Grant; thus, he refused to go along to Matamoros with him altogether.³ On the other end of the spectrum, aide-de-camp John Sowers Brooks seemed convinced with Fannin's logic, citing strategic necessity and the importance of Goliad as a depot commanding the coast.⁴

Fannin continued consolidating and structuring his regiment at Goliad. He soon gained several volunteer companies, including a unit of volunteers from Refugio and a

¹ Ruby C. Smith, II, 186-88.

² S.T. Brown to Thomas Ward, Esq. Livingston, Alabama, November 1, 1837. *Albany Patriot*, April 23, 1852, p. 2, Georgia Historic Newspapers, presented in Digital Library of Georgia.

³ Ehrenberg, 137-38.

⁴ John Sowers Brooks to Mary Ann Brooks, Fort Defiance, Goliad, Texas, February 25, 1836. John Sowers Brooks Letters, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin.

large company from North Alabama called the “Red Rovers,” led by the outspoken Dr. Jack Shackelford.⁵ Interestingly enough, the Red Rovers received—and recognized—orders from Acting Governor Robinson to join Fannin’s command. Fannin appears to have kept in contact with this group, and had relayed to them the news of the Mexican advance.⁶ This news was probably circulated among several volunteer groups coming up from the coast or East Texas. He found other units already at Goliad. Before Fannin arrived, they suffered from lack of food, clothing, and shoes, but he was impressed at their desire to fight.⁷

Not all went smoothly within the coalescing regiment. Col. Fannin could be almost ruthless in his methods toward the units that would not join his command so readily. The company of Greys to which Ehrenberg belonged had originally left Bexar with Grant, and they intended to march back to Bexar and join the comrades they had left in Bexar. Fannin, however, refused to supply them for the march. The Greys would not have otherwise consented to remain at Goliad, which Ehrenberg deemed an inhospitable environment for the “liberty-loving Greys.” Fannin had won their manpower but poisoned his relationship with the Greys, who became his vocal critics to the bitter end.⁸ Col. Fannin organized his new companies into a second battalion which he named the Lafayette Battalion, headed by Major Benjamin C. Wallace.⁹ The organization of Fannin’s staff reflected his claim to the position of acting commander-in-chief while

⁵ Davenport, *Unfinished Study*, 1; 8-11.

⁶ Barnard, 5-6.

⁷ Fannin to Robinson, Goliad, [later] February 14, 1836, in Foote, *Texas and the Texans*, 207-208.

⁸ Ehrenberg, 142-43; Brown, 119.

⁹ Davenport, *Unfinished Study*, 9.

Houston was on furlough. He supplied himself with a staff befitting that rank: including an Acting Adjutant General and Acting Quartermaster General.¹⁰

On February 22nd, he rechristened the presidio as “Fort Defiance,” after a lottery in which “Milam” and “Independence” were the two other possibilities. Fannin had clearly favored “Defiance.” Ever concerned with preserving civilian control of Texas’ political destiny, he pointed out that a Fort named Independence “would look like army dictation.”¹¹ In accordance with his overall defensive strategy, Fannin set to work preparing the fort to withstand a protracted siege. He had the remainder of his artillery brought to Goliad,¹² gathered provisions and draft animals,¹³ and set his men to work on the fortifications. His plans included a system of two ditches, one of which was picketed and included artillery emplacements. Existing blockhouses were to be renovated, another was to be built. Brooks designed a masked battery and an “infernal machine” of sixty-eight to one hundred old muskets that could be fired simultaneously with one match. Although archaeological evidence suggests it was not completed, Fannin proudly described his plans for a “new sally-port to water, and a ditch from it to a natural ravine, into which I can back the water, and have my men entirely covered from the walls to the water, which *never can be cut off.*” Fannin initially estimated that these improvements

¹⁰ Davenport, *Unfinished Study*, 12-13.

¹¹ Fannin to Robinson, February 22, 1836, in Jenkins, *Papers of the Texas Revolution*, vol. 4, p. 398. The objections he gives to Milam and Independence are admittedly listed in the passive voice, but I feel confident that they reflect Fannin’s own opinions.

¹² Fannin to Robinson, February 16, 1836, in Jenkins, *Papers of the Texas Revolution*, vol. 4, p. 351.

¹³ Linn, 125-26.

would be realized by “the Ides of March.”¹⁴ Things apparently went better than expected, for Fannin’s next letter pushed up the anticipated date of completion to March 3rd. He reported being so busy that he did not have time to copy his correspondence. He relied heavily on hardworking officers and glowingly recommended several to Robinson’s attention as the best and most qualified young officers he knew. All of them had prior military experience or a military education. Despite being assisted by Adjutant Chadwick and a couple of Polish engineers, Brooks described his duties as “arduous in the extreme.” In addition to being Fannin’s aide-de-camp, he performed the offices of chief engineer, ordinance chief, and drill instructor.¹⁵ Fannin had some difficulty getting his men on board. “I have been greatly troubled to get my militia to work or do any kind of garrison duty,” he wrote, “but I am now happy to say, that I have got them quite well satisfied, and being well-*disciplined*, and doing *good work*.”¹⁶

“Well-disciplined,” of course, was a subjective term. Brooks, reflecting his recent experience in the U.S. Marines, categorized the men as “undisciplined in a great measure” on February 25th.¹⁷ The alcalde of the nearby settlement of Victoria, John J. Linn, described Fannin’s men as insubordinate and completely uncontrollable.¹⁸ One of

¹⁴ Fannin to Robinson, Goliad, February 21, 1836, in Jenkins, *Papers of the Texas Revolution*, vol. 4, p. 391-92; O’Connor, 124-26; Davenport, “Men of Goliad,” 18-19.

¹⁵ John Sowers Brooks to Mary Ann Brooks, Fort Defiance, Goliad, Texas, February 25, 1836. John Sowers Brooks letters, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, University of Texas at Austin; Ehrenberg, 143; Davenport, “Men of Goliad,” 18-19.

¹⁶ Fannin to Robinson, Goliad, February 22, 1836, in Jenkins, *Papers of the Texas Revolution*, vol. 4, p. 398.

¹⁷ John Sowers Brooks to Absalom H. Brooks, Fort Defiance, Goliad, Texas, February 25, 1836. John Sowers Brooks letters, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, University of Texas at Austin.

¹⁸ Linn, 125.

the Georgia volunteers, Benjamin Hughes, remembered the garrison as a “confused mob,” saying that Fannin was unable to enforce the necessary discipline.¹⁹ Given those dismal assessments, it is entirely likely that Fannin exaggerated his control of the situation to Robinson, but he was far from making it up. The men were becoming identified with the work they were doing. Ehrenberg expressed considerable pride in Fort Defiance’s impenetrability.²⁰ Fannin’s overall relations with the Greys must have improved, as he included Captains Cook and Brister of the New Orleans Greys in the list of officers he recommended to Robinson. Loyalties seem to have been negotiated at the unit level, and perhaps Fannin dealt more with company officers than their irascible men—leading to his comparatively optimistic view of their state of discipline. Harbert Davenport, although he criticizes Fannin for attending to the fortifications to the detriment of his men’s much-needed training, admits that by the standards of the Texian army in general, Fannin’s men were comparatively well-drilled.²¹

Colonel Fannin inherited a troublesome relationship with the citizens of Goliad. Following the lead of the prominent de la Garza family, many Tejanos of the region leaned to the Centralist side. Phillip Dimmit, the first commander of the Texian forces at Goliad, was an aggressive proponent of independence. As such, he alienated even the Federalists by refusing to cooperate with the local government and snubbing the exiled governor of Coahuila y Texas. Worse, he allowed his men to requisition whatever they wished, including corn, cattle, carts, tools, and even servants’ labor. When the residents

¹⁹ Bradle, 151.

²⁰ Davenport, “Men of Goliad,” 19; Ehrenberg, 143.

²¹ Davenport, “Men of Goliad,” 18.

protested, he declared martial law. It should come as no surprise that his actions poisoned relations with the local population. More harmfully, Dimmit contributed to the racialization of the Texas Revolution as a war that pitted Anglo against Mexican. Most of the Tejanos retreated to the outlying ranchos, where they provided vital intelligence for General Urrea's advancing army.²² For Fannin, Dimmit's legacy meant that he had to contend with a hostile populace and a proliferation of spies. "There is more danger from these spies," Fannin wrote, "who are so intimately acquainted with the country, than from twenty times the number of armed soldiers." He had the local priest, his nephew, and several others involved in a Centralist spy ring arrested and sent to San Felipe.²³ In some respects not having to appease locals simplified matters. Meeting the populace as enemies, he had no incentive to court their favor. Besides arresting a popular curate, he razed with impunity the residences outside the walls that blocked his line of fire and threatened to provide cover for attackers in case of a siege.²⁴

Despite the commanding aura his actions projected, Colonel Fannin began to have severe doubts about his course of action, the nature of his authority, and even his own abilities. These feelings came to a head in two letters of February 14th to Robinson and the Council, only a few days after arriving at Goliad. Multiple factors served to bring him to an intense personal nadir. The reality that he had made a dramatic alteration to his strategy on solely his own initiative seems to have finally sunk in. Also, as exemplified

²² Lack, "Occupied Texas: Bexar and Goliad, 1835-1836," 40-43.

²³ Fannin to Robinson, Goliad, February 21, 1836, in Jenkins, *Papers of the Texas Revolution*, vol. 4, p. 391-92. Fannin had something of an impish sense of humor and could even joke about his problems with spies. Tacked, like an afterthought, to the end of his postscript is the quip, "I will send you *the Padre*, to officiate as your chaplain, during the Convention."

²⁴ Ehrenberg, 143.

by the situation with the Greys, Fannin found it necessary to lead against the wishes of many volunteers for the first time in his career. Moreover, the vacuum created by Houston's furlough put an immense amount of pressure on his shoulders to defend Texas against a formidable enemy force. The shift to a defensive strategy effectively nullified his Matamoros commission, under which he enjoyed defined operational objectives and clear authority. Fannin now felt quite adrift—without guidance from the government or Houston—and he asked Robinson for an honest assessment, painfully admitting, “I am not, *practically*, an experienced commander, and may, and in all human probability have, erred.” Perhaps feeling guilty about abandoning the expedition that the Council had ordered, he later requested Robinson to “Correct me, if wrong.”²⁵ At the time he wrote this first letter, Fannin felt worse than inexperienced or possibly mistaken; he felt incapable.

I feel, I know, if you and the Council do not, that I am incompetent. Fortune, and brave soldiers, may favour me and save the State, and establish for me a reputation far beyond my deserts. I do not covet, and I do most earnestly ask of you, and any *real friend*, to relieve me and make a selection of one possessing all the requisites of a commander.²⁶

He had never been opposed to serving under General Houston, at least in principle, but now he earnestly expressed his hopes that Houston would return and take the responsibility of command. Seeming aware that partisan feelings still ran high in the Council, he introduced the subject rather gingerly, “If General Houston will give up all

²⁵ Fannin to Robinson, Goliad, February 14, in Foote, *Texas and the Texans*, 206-207.

²⁶ Fannin to Robinson, Goliad, February 14, in Foote, *Texas and the Texans*, 206.

other considerations, and devote himself to the military, I honestly believe he will answer the present emergency.” He immediately followed up with the sad but self-respecting qualifier, “I would probably fill the post your kindness conferred on me, and might not disgrace your arms.” He did not consider himself incompetent for the Matamoros command, but the situation had changed and he was afraid that he was unsuited for it. Indeed, he wrote that he had never wanted the position of acting commander-in-chief and spoke of it as a “burden imposed” on him. To top it all off, he desperately missed his family. Fannin spoke of retiring from the service. He hoped that he would pass from the scene of action along with the Provisional Government and asked that he not be nominated to the coming Convention for any future command.²⁷

In a similar pattern as his letter of February 7th and 8th, Fannin appeared to make something of a rebound after giving written expression to his troubles. His anxieties were no passing fancy, and he would continue to yearn for release from command, but they never reappeared in his official correspondence as strongly as they did in the first letter of the 14th. Later on, even within that first letter, Fannin showed a determination to persevere until relieved. He demanded “*men, provisions, and ammunition*” as well as oxen and wagons as soon as possible. He desired frequent communications almost as much; not only directives, but news from Texas and beyond, reports of the loan commissioners in the United States. His appeal for regular correspondence makes sense: he had thrived under General Austin, who had been excellent at keeping in touch with Fannin, even when he let Fannin have considerable decision-making latitude. Seemingly

²⁷ Ibid.

out of place in the midst of his demands, he exhorted Robinson, “*Kick at the moon, whether we hit the mark or not.*”²⁸

Fannin claimed a legitimate command based on his election as colonel of volunteers and his seniority as a regular officer in Houston’s absence, but he explained that the de facto nature of his authority troubled him. “I am delicately situated,” he wrote, “not having received any orders from him, or from your Excellency. I am well aware, that during the Generals’ furlough, the command naturally, and of right, devolves upon me; but the fact has not been communicated to me *officially*, either by the General or the Governor.” He defended his actions as “those of prudence, and for defence [sic], and would be allowable as Colonel of volunteers, &c.” He reiterated his desire for orders and frequent communications, and as if to underscore his need for them, promised grimly “*I will obey orders, if I am sacrificed* in the discharge of them.”²⁹

Fannin’s next letter dealt with more material concerns. It revealed that he had received a shipment of supplies, some of which he planned on forwarding to Bexar. That was certainly a cheering circumstance, but other things still weighed on Fannin’s mind and came out in this somewhat rambling dispatch. The slow reaction of the settlers especially aggravated him at such a vulnerable, dangerous time. Many, he hypothesized, mistakenly believed that the war was over. Fannin’s volunteers shared his exasperation with the people of Texas, but Fannin pointedly informed Robinson that he had vouched for the Texians to his volunteers, expressing confidence that the people would indeed turn out to defend their threatened rights. Robinson and the Council also became the targets of Fannin’s entreaties, “You see their [Mexicans’] preparations, and I only ask of you,

²⁸ Ibid, 206-207.

²⁹ Fannin to Robinson, Goliad, [later] February 14, 1836, in Foote, *Texas and the Texans*, 209-10.

my countrymen, not to undervalue the danger, and prepare to meet it *at the threshold.*” He reasoned, “Is it wise to lay at home, and do nothing to improve the advantage already miraculously obtained?” He asserted that all the achievements of the 1835 campaign could easily be erased in a day by Santa Anna, whom he grudgingly acknowledged to be a “bold and skillful general.” The Mexican force approaching Texas was anticipated to be twice the size of the force used to put down the rebellion in Zacatecas, and he also hypothesized that the rank and file would be of a higher quality and training than those defeated at Bexar. Musing on the possibilities, Santa Anna might just decide to take advantage of the disorganization in Texas and leave the Alamo and Goliad in his rear, cutting between them and pushing into the settlements where they would provoke widespread panic. This possibility, Fannin argued, could be prevented by having a Corps of Reserve that could hold out long enough for the detachments left in the rear to come to their aid.³⁰

Colonel Fannin’s popularity with his men had taken a turn for the worse shortly after retiring to Goliad. The Greys, of course, were bitter about both the abandonment of the Matamoros Expedition and Fannin’s refusal to supply them for a return to Bexar.³¹ Most of all, his men had expected action, and wanted a commander who would lead them to it. Especially in context of the disappointment over the expedition, garrison duty took on all the more odium. Dr. Barnard, the garrison surgeon, wrote that that “the restraints of discipline, now more necessary than ever in their enforcement, produced discontent

³⁰ Fannin to Robinson, Goliad, [later] February 14, 1836, in Foote, *Texas and the Texans*, 209-10.

³¹ Ehrenberg, 137-38.

and murmurs and a loss of confidence in their commander.”³² Fannin faced resistance from his men, particularly in regard to working on fortifications and daily drill, the latter task of which J.C. Duval termed his “detestation” and sought any way in which to avoid it.³³ Worse, Fannin lost the trust of his second in command: his falling out with Ward over the letter from Governor Smith occurred around this time.³⁴

This shift in the opinion of his men profoundly affected Colonel Fannin. If he had succeeded in keeping his initial doubts under wraps, his dejection was now becoming visible—at least to his a few. Fannin was keenly aware of his men’s opinions of him, and his command surgeon Dr. Barnard wrote that the realization caused “a corresponding depression of his mind.”³⁵ Alcalde Linn sympathetically remarked that the garrison’s disobedience and resistance to discipline “must have been excruciatingly galling to the high and sensitive spirit of the gallant Fannin.”³⁶ It is easy to see why Fannin would take it hard. After all, he had fallen very quickly from a height. He must have been accustomed to the popularity he had earned in the 1835 campaign and had enjoyed as commander of the Matamoros Expedition. The volunteers, especially the Georgia Battalion, had initially adored Fannin. They had reported to the editors of the Milledgeville, Georgia paper *The Federal Union*, that Fannin had been the “most active

³² Barnard, 14.

³³ Duval, 1.

³⁴ Ward to Committee, Goliad, February 20, 1836, in Jenkins, *Papers of the Texas Revolution*, vol. 4, p. 388-91.

³⁵ Barnard, 14.

³⁶ Linn, 125.

and efficient” Texian officer and deserved the position of commander-and-chief.³⁷ Even cynical Herman Ehrenberg admitted that he had once admired Fannin.³⁸ Not all the volunteers disliked their commander, however. Survivor J.C.P Kennymore, for one, did not doubt either Fannin’s or Ward’s military talents.³⁹

Fannin’s comparative unpopularity was only one part of a larger dissatisfaction. As the situation became more confused, Fannin’s men lost confidence in the way the war was being conducted: they doubted the effectiveness of depending on forts and lost confidence that the citizens of Texas would aid their own revolution. Added to that, the once-abundant food supply was beginning to taper off.⁴⁰ Provisions were at the very least, irregular, and the mood of the men fluctuated with the supply of provisions. After going two days without beef, Shackelford wrote to his young son, “the boys all look’d mighty sour & when they got aplenty to eat you never see fellows in such good humor in your life.”⁴¹ Adding to the list of stressors for Fannin’s men, mail from the United States could not be depended on to reach Goliad.⁴²

³⁷“Georgia Battalion officers to Editors,” *Federal Union*, March 4, 1836, p. 1, Georgia Historic Newspapers, presented by Digital Library of Georgia.

³⁸ Ehrenberg, 180.

³⁹ D. W. C. Baker, *comp*, *A Texas Scrapbook. Made up of the History, Biography, and Miscellany of Texas and Its People*, (New York: Barnes and Co., 1875), 242-43. Kennymore was a member of Wadsworth’s company of volunteers from Columbus, Georgia, and quite possibly could have known Fannin before the war.

⁴⁰ Barnard, 14; Duval to Duval, Goliad, March 9, 1836, in Jenkins, *Papers of the Texas Revolution*, vol. 5, p. 33-34.

⁴¹ Jack Shackelford to Edward Shackelford, Goliad, Texas, March 9, 1836. Jack Shackelford Papers, 1836-1938, Alabama Department of Archives and History. Shackelford also revealed that the one staple the garrison was not short of was sugar, and that his men enjoyed eating fat beef and sugar together “like bread & meat.”

⁴² Jack Shackelford to Maria E. Shackelford, Goliad, Texas, March 9, 1836. Jack Shackelford Papers, 1836-1938, Alabama Department of Archives and History; John Sowers Brooks to Mother, Fort

Unfortunately, the Robinson's government had all but disintegrated. Members had drifted off until the Council had lost its quorum. In its place, Robinson attempted to govern with the aid of a much smaller "advisory committee." He did send orders for Fannin on the 13th and arrived just as Fannin felt the need for them most keenly. Robinson and his committee acknowledged receipt of Fannin's dispatch including Morris' report, and accordingly approved of Fannin's course of action. They promised to relay news of the Mexican advance and Texas' urgent need for troops to the United States, call up the militia and send one-third of the men his way. These were big promises for a government that could not even muster a quorum, let alone funds.⁴³ Laden as they are with conditional statements, these orders conferred upon Fannin almost as much unwonted latitude as guidance. Robinson authorized Fannin to engage the enemy—provided there was a limited risk to his own force. He officially annulled all previous orders "as to render it compatible to now obey any orders you may deem Expedient [sic]." Nevertheless, these orders confirmed the defensive strategy Fannin had already begun to implement, and he would latch onto that legitimation like a drowning man. Robinson ordered him to defend any positions "as you may in your opinion deem most advantageous," but especially recommended fortifying Gonzales, Refugio, and Copano and arming each post with a couple of "spare" cannon. Most importantly, he wrote, "Fortify and defend Goliad And Baxer [Bexar] if any opportunity fairly offers."⁴⁴

Defiance, Goliad, Texas, March 2, 1836. John Sowers Brooks Letters, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin. Both Shackelford and Brooks were troubled at not having received letters from home.

⁴³ Robinson to Fannin, Executive Department of Texas, San Felipe de Austin, February 13, 1836, in Jenkins, *Papers of the Texas Revolution*, vol. 4, p. 325-26.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

That litany of positions in need of defense indicates the enduring belief in Fannin's authority over all military forces in Texas. In this the Council expected far more than Fannin would be able to deliver. Although Lt. Col. Neill had early on shown some willingness to work with the Council, his successors in command of Bexar, Bowie and Travis, both took their orders from Smith and their obedience to Fannin would be unlikely.⁴⁵

In his relationship with the Provisional Government, the specter of the Matamoros Expedition still lingered to complicate matters for Colonel Fannin. Shortly after Fannin forwarded Morris' intelligence, Johnson sent a report to Robinson "to prevent any undue alarm from an express forwarded to you by Col. Fanning." Robinson does not specify whether it was Johnson's or not, but he soon received a report that made him question the likelihood of an advance against Bexar or Goliad. Instead, he predicted that Santa Anna would try to reinforce Matamoros. Because of this, he asked Fannin to keep a close eye on the city and "dash upon it as soon as it is prudent to do so in your opinion."⁴⁶ Unfortunately for Robinson's hopes, Jonathan Kuykendall and one Mr. Pantallion were in Matamoros only five days earlier, and their arrival and report at Goliad on February 16th confirmed Fannin's previous information regarding Santa Anna's advance. For Colonel Fannin, the opportunity for taking Matamoros had passed.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Hardin, 109, 117; Travis and Bowie to Smith, Commandancy of Bexar, February 14, 1836, in Jenkins, *Papers of the Texas Revolution*, vol. 4, p. 339.

⁴⁶ Robinson to Fannin, San Felipe de Austin, February 13, 1836, in Jenkins, *Papers of the Texas Revolution*, vol. 4, p. 326.

⁴⁷ Fannin to Robinson, Head Quarters, Army of Texas, Fort Goliad, February 16, 1836, in Jenkins, *Papers of the Texas Revolution*, vol. 4, p. 350-51. Fannin did encourage a naval blockade of the city. Having lost faith in the cooperation of the Mexican federalists, Fannin would have had no qualms about making life there as uncomfortable as possible.

It turned out that the Advisory Committee favored continuing the expedition more than Robinson did. They were convinced that reports of Mexican troop movements were exaggerated and that the abandonment of the expedition had been unnecessary. Besides, they argued, the garrison at Bexar had increased to a defensible size, and they felt confident that the rest of the frontier would soon be protected by Texian militiamen. The Committee asked Robinson to order Fannin to wait at Copano or San Patricio until “certain information” could be gathered about Mexican troop movements. Then, if circumstances allowed, he was to proceed with the expedition. They somewhat callously suggested that their resolution be attached to Robinson’s orders. The Committee’s assertion that “the advices from the Interior are not of so certain and definite a character, as to require a retrograde movement on the part of Col Fannin” meaning that he had overreacted to Morris’ report, would have stung Fannin deeply. They meant to prod him into renewing the offensive by tying it to his honor.⁴⁸ To his credit, Robinson sent no such definitive orders, although he did approve a proposal by Committee Chairman D.C. Barrett and J.D. Clements to appoint a council member named Malone to recruit volunteers for the expedition among the “Southern Municipalities.”⁴⁹ Interestingly enough, it was Barrett and Clements who had strongly encouraged Fannin to accept the Matamoros Commission back in January.⁵⁰ Robinson, and the Council even more so,

⁴⁸ Barrett et al to Robinson, Council Hall, San Felipe de Austin, February 15, 1836, in Jenkins, *Papers of the Texas Revolution*, vol. 4, p. 340-41.

⁴⁹ Barrett and Clements to Robinson, San Felipe de Austin, February 15, 1836, in Jenkins, *Papers of the Texas Revolution*, vol. 4, p. 341-42.

⁵⁰ Fannin to Robinson, February 22, 1836, in Jenkins, *Papers of the Texas Revolution*, vol. 4, p. 398.

stubbornly clung to January's strategic vision despite the changing circumstances that Colonel Fannin clearly recognized.

Even without receiving the Committee's quietly caustic accusations, Fannin seemed to have sensed an undercurrent of reproach tied to his abandonment of the Matamoros Expedition. This helped make retreat the last thing he wanted to do. Writing to Robinson on the 21st, he had expressed doubt that the people of Texas would enlist in large numbers until the armies already in the field suffered defeat or were "forced to make a retrograde movement." In the next sentence, however, he defensively assured Robinson, "Do not believe, for a moment, that I have any such idea at present, or ever had."⁵¹ He wrote to General Mexia, "circumstances unexpected and over which I had no control, have placed me, where I cannot retreat, but in disgrace."⁵² The possibility of falling back—again—became clearly out of the question for Fannin.

Fannin grew more and more uncomfortable in the role of acting commander-in-chief. In the early days of his occupation of Goliad, Colonel Fannin continued to think of himself as such during Houston's absence and acted accordingly, if not always gladly. Fannin felt secure enough in his authority to have sent supplies and orders to the garrison at Bexar, instructing them on defensive preparations. Fannin had no clear idea of Houston's intentions and questioned whether Houston would resume the office of commander-in-chief after his furlough was up. If Houston did not, Fannin proposed to Robinson the possibility of headquartering himself in Bexar or being reassigned to the

⁵¹Fannin to Robinson, Goliad, February 21, 1836, in Jenkins, *Papers of the Texas Revolution*, vol. 4, p. 391.

⁵² Fannin to Mexia, Head Quarters Army of Texas, Ft. Defiance (Goliad), March 11, 1836, in Jenkins, *Papers of the Texas Revolution*, vol. 5, p. 47.

reserve army on the Colorado. In qualifying his hypothetical movements with Houston's plans, Fannin indicates that he saw his strategic latitude as limited by the temporary nature of his position as effective commander of Texas' military forces.⁵³

Fannin defended his ad hoc assumption of the responsibility on grounds that he acted in the public interest. He contended that he had stepped up to fill a vacuum that no one else in Texas was qualified to fill. Besides the furloughed Houston, Fannin recognized no other potential commanders-in-chiefs. If there were, "their talents have not been developed." He suggested recruiting an experienced, professional commander from the United States. As for himself, he was unsure:

I am a better judge of my military abilities than others, and if I am *qualified* to command an *Army*, *I have not found it out*. I well know that I am a better *company* officer than most men *now* in Texas, and *might do with Regulars &c.*, for a *Regiment*. But this does not constitute me a commander.

This introspective self-assessment shows a remarkable degree of development since his painful admission of incompetence on February 14th. His analysis distinguishes between the tactical, operational, and strategic levels of command. Fannin felt perfectly confident at the tactical level, reasonably sure of himself at the operational level, but he was at a loss to predict his performance on the strategic level—particularly with a volunteer army. That uncertainty ate at him, but it also inspired in him a grim and desperate determination. By reserving to himself alone the license to judge his military

⁵³ Fannin to Robinson, February 16, 1836, in Jenkins, *Papers of the Texas Revolution*, vol. 4, p. 350-51. Fannin's suggestion is not so much an example of indecision—of taking up a plan and dropping it—as it is sounding out a course of action.

skills, he asserted that he would try his utmost to fulfill the office in which he found himself. James W. Fannin really was, as he put it, “critically situated.”⁵⁴

The staff and men interpreted their Colonel’s claim to the position of acting commander-in-chief in a variety of ways. Aide-de-camp John S. Brooks accepted Fannin’s station without comment. He described Fannin to his family as “Commander in chief,” “Commanding Officer, in the field,” and even mistakenly gave his rank as General.⁵⁵ He acknowledged that the men held strong political positions of their own; his assessment of their value echoed his commander’s perspective. He wrote a friend and sometimes creditor in New York, “Indeed, it is impossible within the compass of a single letter, to give you any idea of the manner in which our little army has been influenced by the policies of the Country; though most of them are strangers to it, and consequently unable to realize the motives, which actuate the different parties.”⁵⁶ A number of Fannin’s troops criticized him for what they saw as an ambitious attempt to supplant Houston. This sentiment appears to have been spread across various units. Ferguson from the Red Rovers noted that many of the men objected to Fannin on the grounds of his ambition.⁵⁷ Zachariah S. Brooks, also of the Red Rovers, suspected a powerful “disinclination on the part of Fanning to be commanded by Houston.” The Georgia

⁵⁴ Fannin to Robinson, Goliad, February 22, 1836, in Jenkins, *Papers of the Texas Revolution*, vol. 4, p. 398.

⁵⁵ John Sowers Brooks to Mary Ann Brooks, Fort Defiance, Goliad, Texas, February 25, 1836. John Sowers Brooks Letters, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin.

⁵⁶ John Sowers Brooks to James Hagarty, Fort Defiance, Goliad, Texas, March 9, 1836. John Sowers Brooks Letters, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin.

⁵⁷ J.G. Ferguson to A.J. Ferguson, Goliad, March 2, 1836, in Kathryn O’Connor, *Presidio La Bahia*, 163-64.

Battalion must have seemed to share this opinion, too.⁵⁸ Ehrenberg of the Greys often attributes Fannin's desire for independent command to his questionable decisions.⁵⁹ From February 14th to 24th, Fannin busily managed the internal dynamics of his regiment, their provisioning, training, and the improvements on the newly-christened Fort Defiance. A courier from Bexar fatefully interrupted his preparations. On February 23rd, the first divisions of a Mexican Army personally commanded by Santa Anna invested San Antonio de Bexar and besieged the Texian garrison in the Alamo. Co-commanders Travis and Bowie quickly dispatched a courier with a letter for Fannin, who reached Fort Defiance on February 25th. Their message explained that they were defending the Alamo with 146 men and few provisions. They expected Fannin to come quickly with "all the men you can spare." Due to the defenders' reported dearth of food, Fannin's men would need to bring both their own provisions and for the garrison. Finally, they ended with an appeal to personal honor: "We deem it unnecessary to repeat to a brave officer, who knows his duty, that we call on him for assistance."⁶⁰

As biographer Gary Brown has observed, Fannin's response to this plea from the Alamo was immediate and characteristic—he never let an appeal for aid go unanswered.⁶¹ The garrison wholeheartedly supported the decision to go to the relief of Bexar. The Greys, of course, had many comrades there. Several days earlier—the day

⁵⁸ "The Massacre of Goliad: A Narrative," *Daily National Intelligencer*, June 10, 1836, p. 1, America's Historical Newspapers.

⁵⁹ Ehrenberg, 137, 153-54, 172-73.

⁶⁰ Brown, 157; Travis and Bowie to Fannin, Bexar, February 23, 1836, in Jenkins, *Papers of the Texas Revolution*, vol. 4, p. 419.

⁶¹ Brown, 159.

after his quarrel with Fannin, in fact—Ward had expressed the wish that a contingent be sent to reinforce the vulnerable garrison in San Antonio.⁶²

Fannin knew that he was letting his heart, and those of his volunteers, override his head. As he hurriedly explained to Robinson, “I am well-aware that my present movement toward Bexar is anything but a military one. The appeal of Cols. Travis & Bowie cannot however pass unnoticed—particularly by the troops now on the field—Sanguine, chivalrous Volunteers—Much must be risked to relieve the besieged.” Fannin took the risk seriously; it seems that he did not take his survival of the attempt for granted. Before the expedition left, he took care to send his account of expenditures, receipts, and any other official financial business. The above-quoted message was appended to the end of the cover letter for those records. Travis and Bowie did not give a very encouraging picture of their situation, so it should come as no surprise that Fannin feared the Alamo should fall before he reached it. Predictably, if that happened to be the case, he would return to his work on Fort Defiance and prepare his front for the coming assault. He could not conscionably plan on leaving Fort Defiance defenseless, however. A remnant of 80-100—Fannin’s only company of regulars—manned the fort and he expected Goliad to be reinforced via Matagorda.⁶³

John Brooks had even stronger misgivings about the expedition than his commander. Where Fannin expected, Brooks only hoped for reinforcements to their bare-bones garrison. Brooks described the expedition as “Quixotic” and tried to prepare for its—and his own—inevitable, bloody end. He predicted that even if their party made

⁶² R.C. Smith, 199.

⁶³ Fannin to Robinson, Head Quarters Army of Texas, Fort Defiance, Goliad, February 25, 1836, in Jenkins, *Papers of the Texas Revolution*, vol. 4, p. 429-30; Barnard, 10-12.

it to Bexar, successfully cutting through Mexican lines would be impossible without more manpower from the colonies. However, like his commander, he felt that there was nothing else to do but try. It might not have been a militarily sound move, but their duty required it. Brooks closed his assessment with the words, “However, we will do our best, and if we perish, Texas and our friends will remember that we have done our duty.”⁶⁴

The relief expedition consisted of 320 men, two six-pounders and two four-pounders. The march had barely begun when a wagon broke down just outside of Goliad. Each piece of artillery took up a yoke of oxen; another hauled the ammunition. Getting the individual cannon across the river involved hitching a double team and then re-hitching the borrowed oxen to their original load. By the time the column made it across the river, it was time to encamp for the night. It seems that the infeasibility of their attempt sunk in during the night. According to Fannin, the next morning a group of officers requested a “Council of War on the subject of the expedition to Bexar,” which he approved. The meeting assessed their logistical situation. Having no spare draft animals to take their own foodstuffs, they had been banking on getting provisions at the Seguin rancho seventy miles away. Their pace threatened to make marching that distance without food an untenable proposition, particularly if they were intercepted by a Mexican force. Fannin had received new information about the proximity of General Urrea’s army to Goliad, and doubts about the reliability of quick reinforcements from Matagorda surfaced among the officers. The journey itself, not simply the question of cutting through the Mexican lines, made continuing the expedition impossible.

⁶⁴ John Sowers Brooks to Absalom H. Brooks, Fort Defiance, Goliad, Texas, February 25, 1836. John Sowers Brooks Letters, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin.

Colonel Fannin issued the orders to return to Fort Defiance. In his report to Robinson, Fannin pointedly specified that the decision to abandon the march to Bexar had been made unanimously by the commissioned officers of his command. The men, however, directed their frustration primarily at their colonel.⁶⁵

The fate of the Alamo defenders weighed as heavily on Fannin's mind as it did on his men. He wanted in some way to convey his regrets to the garrison and asked to have a coded message relayed to Bexar, "I would risk life and all for our brave men in the Alamo, but circumstanced as I was and even now am I could not, do otherwise. If you can communicate this to them and adopt the following cipher..."⁶⁶ His most scathing criticisms of Texian apathy come out of this context as well. If the siege of the Alamo could not shock them out of their torpor, there was no way Fannin could expect aid from them himself—it boded poorly for the Texian cause.⁶⁷

After the failure of the march to Bexar, Colonel Fannin suffered another sharp decline in popularity. Henry Ripley wrote to his father that, even after the abortive relief attempt, the men wanted desperately to try again and accused Fannin of indecision on the issue. Assessing Fannin's unpopularity, Ripley thought it probable that he would resign command.⁶⁸ Not knowing that the Alamo had fallen five days earlier, Ripley's letter was dated March 11th. Until they heard news of the fall of the Alamo, the men of Goliad held

⁶⁵ Fannin to Robinson, Goliad, February 26, 1836, in Jenkins, *Papers of the Texas Revolution*, vol. 4, p. 443-44; Barnard, 10-12; Ehrenberg, 154-55.

⁶⁶ Fannin to Desauque and Chenworth [sic. Chenoweth], Head Quarters Army of Texas, March 1, 1836, in Jenkins, *Papers of the Texas Revolution*, vol. 4, p. 477-78.

⁶⁷ Fannin to Robinson, Head Quarters Army of Texas, February 28, 1836, in Jenkins, *Papers of the Texas Revolution*, vol. 4, p. 455-56.

⁶⁸ Excerpt from Henry Ripley to Gen. Ripley, Goliad, March 11, 1836, *The Pittsfield Sun*, July 7, 1836, America's Historical Newspapers. (Accessed November 12, 2013).

out hope of reaching the defenders. Fourteen days had passed since the failed relief attempt, and that meant fourteen days of agitation for another march. Probably to his detriment, Fannin at one point entertained the idea. This attempt would be composed of only 200 men, carrying provisions for a forced march and two six pounders. However, the plan was contingent first on finding fresh oxen, but more importantly on *something* slowing down Urrea's advance toward Goliad. For this, Fannin's best hope was Comanche raids on the Mexican column, a factor completely out of the Texians' control.⁶⁹ Captain Shackelford of the Red Rovers proposed yet another attempt on March 8th after having received a plea from John Sutherland, who was with a gathering reinforcement at Gonzales. Shackelford asked for 250 men and two pieces of artillery. He presented his proposal only to have it thwarted by a council of war, citing the garrison's constant plague: the scarcity of oxen to haul the artillery and provisions.⁷⁰ Half-way giving in to the garrison's demands by considering another march might have been a worse decision than ignoring them, as Fannin now looked indecisive, like he was grasping at straws for viable options, an image that Ripley's assessment reflects. In the end, nothing came of a second relief attempt except damage to Fannin's already suffering reputation with his men.

Burr Duval, commander of the Kentucky Mustangs, was convinced that—if he so desired—he could take over command. He wrote: “As I anticipated, much dissention prevails among the Volunteers, Col. Fannin, now in command (Genl. Houston being

⁶⁹ John Sowers Brooks to Mary Ann Brooks, Fort Defiance, Goliad, Texas, March 2, 1836. John Sowers Brooks Letters, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin.

⁷⁰ Jack Shackelford to Maria E. Shackelford, Goliad, Texas, March 9, 1836. Jack Shackelford Papers, 1836-1938, Alabama Department of Archives and History.

absent), is unpopular—and nothing but the certainty of hard fighting could have kept us together so long--. I am popular with the army, and strange as you may think it could lead them or the majority of them where I choose.” This is not to say that Duval envied Fannin’s job. From what he knew of Texian politics, he wanted no higher office than that of company commander.⁷¹ J.G. Ferguson, one of Shackelford’s Red Rovers, viewed Fannin more sympathetically, if most of his peers did not. He wrote his brother, “Our Commander is Colonel Fannin, and I am sorry to say, the majority of the soldiers do not like him, for what causes I do not know, without [whether?] it is because they think he has not the interest of the country at heart, or that he wishes to become great without taking the proper steps to attain greatness.”⁷² Herman Ehrenberg reported that couriers from the Alamo directly lobbied the volunteers to come to their comrades’ aid, which certainly further exacerbated the volunteers’ dismay at staying in Fort Defiance.⁷³ If such was the case, it is a wonder no instances of mutiny were recorded.

In the midst of that turmoil, the situation on Fannin’s front escalated. Two days after abandoning the march to Bexar, a rider from Refugio brought the news of that a Mexican army had overwhelmed Frank Johnson’s party at San Patricio. Horrifying to Fannin, several of Johnson’s men had been killed after attempting to surrender. Johnson

⁷¹ Duval to Duval, Goliad, March 9, 1836, in Jenkins, *Papers of the Texas Revolution*, vol. 5, p. 33-34.

⁷² J.G. Ferguson to A.J. Ferguson, Goliad, March 2, 1836, in Kathryn O’Connor, *Presidio La Bahia*, 163-64.

⁷³ Ehrenberg, 154-55.

and several others had escaped, finding shelter at the Refugio mission or outlying ranchos before arriving at Goliad on February 29th.⁷⁴

Although Fannin weathered the Bexar controversy with his command intact, he suffered a significant blow to his confidence. Fannin's outlook, as revealed in his letters, wavered on the edge between hope and despair. The shifting ground of his own authority, the worsening military situation, the continued delinquency of the people of Texas, and the separation from his family all contributed to his gloomy state of mind. He felt abandoned and betrayed by the settlers and admitted to his business partner Joseph Mims that considerations of honor alone kept him from resigning his commission. However, wanting out of Texian service did not mean giving up, and Fannin responded as usual with a burst of grim resolve, "But I must now play a bold game—I will go the whole hog. If I am lost, be the censure on the right head, and may my wife & children and children's children curse the sluggards for ever."⁷⁵

Fannin spoke of losing his life with morose resignation. He mentioned the possibility four times in his comparatively short letter to Mims, asking him to make sure and secure his estate for his family's welfare. Neither did he wish to conceal the danger of his situation from Minerva, as he had asked Mims to forward this letter to her. To José Antonio Mexia he wrote that he preferred "death in any shape" to dishonor. Still, Fannin's depression was often lined with a stubborn note of optimism for a Texian victory. If he was to die, he would not countenance dying in vain. Whatever ills he

⁷⁴ Fannin to Robinson, Head Quarters Army of Texas, Fort Defiance, Goliad, February 28, 1836, in Jenkins, *Papers of the Texas Revolution*, vol. 4, p. 455-56;

⁷⁵ Fannin to Mims, Goliad, February 28, 1836, in Jenkins, *Papers of the Texas Revolution*, vol. 4, p. 454; Fannin to Robinson, Goliad, [March 1, 1836], in Jenkins, *Papers of the Texas Revolution*, vol. 4, 400-401.

predicted, the results would only go so far as to prolong the struggle and intensify Texian suffering. He wrote Mims, "I hope to see all Texas in arms soon, if not, we lose our homes, and must go east of the Trinity for awhile." He closed his letter to Mims on a dark note, "Hoping for the best, being prepared for the worst, I am in a devil of a bad humor."⁷⁶

The de facto nature of his position still vexed him, and he began trying in earnest to shift out from under the title of acting commander-in-chief. He had received no explicit orders to assume such responsibility, and he decided that "in a military point of view," he could not technically be called the acting commander in chief. Suggesting that if he could not be supplied and reinforced, he wanted orders to "fall back to the Provisions" and unite with the rest of the army. For the time being, he ominously reiterated to Robinson that he felt obligated to adhere to the Council's orders precluding a retreat and await further instruction "let the consequence be what it may."⁷⁷ It is worth noting that Fannin wrote this letter on the day the Convention met. The Convention was meant to replace the Provisional Government, and this threatened to leave Fannin without the auspices under which he had claimed a legitimate command. As unhelpful as Robinson and the Council might have been in providing supplies, reinforcements, and directions, Fannin had trusted them enough to be quite frank with them about his doubts and concerns. The Convention was an unknown quantity. He would be forced to reckon with Houston, too, as his furlough to treat with the Cherokee was up, and he would

⁷⁶ Ibid; Fannin to Mexia, Head Quarters Army of Texas, Fort Defiance, March 11, 1836, in Jenkins, *Papers of the Texas Revolution*, vol. 5, p. 47-48.

⁷⁷ Fannin to Robinson, Goliad, [March 1, 1836], in Jenkins, *Papers of the Texas Revolution*, vol. 4, 400-401.

presumably be returning to command. Indeed, on March 4th the Convention re-appointed Houston commander-in-chief. At Houston's insistence, they made sure to specify that his command extended over both regulars and volunteer forces.⁷⁸ Davenport claims, with some justice, that apart from taking comfort in addressing known and friendly authorities, Fannin had "small excuse" for writing Robinson instead of the Convention.⁷⁹ Fannin might have simply communicated with the Convention by other means. It appears that the Council passed information from Fannin to the Convention;⁸⁰ Frank Johnson addressed a letter to the Convention with news and his opinions, apologizing at the end "for not making this communication in proper person as well as delivering those of Col. Fannin."⁸¹

Receiving Fannin's March 1st letter, Robinson and his advisory committee issued new instructions. Unfortunately, these were even more equivocal than his previous set: they authorized him to retreat or remain at his discretion. Those were grossly insufficient orders to give a commander who possessed only vague information—he could not positively identify the Mexican column that defeated Johnson—about the enemy he faced.⁸² They explained that they still believed themselves to be legitimately in power until the Convention had put a constitutional government in place. Robinson also revealed to Fannin the disturbing fact that "the very letters addressed to us by you are

⁷⁸ Hardin, 161-62.

⁷⁹ Davenport, "Men of Goliad," 21-22.

⁸⁰ Menard to -----, Washington, March 7, 1836, in Jenkins, *Papers of the Texas Revolution*, vol. 5, p. 19.

⁸¹ Johnson to Convention, Lacey's Colorado, March 8, 1836, in Jenkins, *Papers of the Texas Revolution*, vol. 5, p. 27-28.

⁸² Fannin to Robinson, Goliad, [March 1, 1836], in Jenkins, *Papers of the Texas Revolution*, vol. 4, 400-401.

siezed by others and Read and comented upon before we are permitted to see them.” Most importantly, however, they informed Fannin of Houston’s appointment as commander-in-chief. Thus, they wrote Fannin’s instructions with a caveat: “unless you shall be instructed otherwise by Genl. Houston.” Robinson and the Advisory Committee were at a loss to guess what the new commander-in-chief’s plan of action would be.⁸³

Several reasons informed Fannin’s decision to await General Houston’s orders while preparing Fort Defiance for the likelihood of siege. His self-acknowledged inexperience at the strategic level made him wary of discretionary orders. His logistical handicaps and poor reconnaissance capabilities made troop movements hazardous. Besides, the work on Fort Defiance had continued after the abandonment of the Alamo relief mission, and by March he described his fortifications as “nearly completed.”⁸⁴

Certainly the stigma attached to a self-motivated retreat, no matter how well-justified in a strictly military sense, deterred him from leaving Fort Defiance. That sense of honor was not atypical of his time and place. Henry Ripley expressed sentiments similar to those of his commander, telling his father “Times look squally and dangerous in Texas. In all probability the men now in the field *will die at their posts. For myself I have that opinion.* It would be dishonorable for me to leave Texas now.”⁸⁵

⁸³ Robinson to Fannin, Washington, March 6, 1836, in Jenkins, *Papers of the Texas Revolution*, vol. 5, p. 10-11.

⁸⁴ Fannin to Robinson, Goliad, [March 1, 1836], in Jenkins, *Papers of the Texas Revolution*, vol. 4, 400-401.

⁸⁵ Excerpt from Henry Ripley to Gen. Ripley, Goliad, March 11, 1836, *The Pittsfield Sun*, July 7, 1836, America’s Historical Newspapers. (Accessed November 12, 2013).

CHAPTER FIVE

The Final Campaign: March 1836

At Fort Defiance, Fannin and his men lived in constant expectation of attack. The volunteers eagerly anticipated a fight, and the promise of combat lent a spike in morale to his army.¹ Many were confident of victory—one E. Thomas, inspired by heavily embroidered accounts of the carnage the Alamo defenders had been able to wreak on Santa Anna, assumed that all Mexican soldiers were “old convicts Presd to fight” and estimated “it takes 12 mexicans to whip 1 American.”² Col. Fannin, for all his grim predictions, had also been inspired by the staying power of the Alamo defenders, but the reports of a widespread Texian turnout to raise the siege encouraged him the most.³

Although Fannin and Brooks held out for official notification, news that the Convention had declared Texas Independence reached Goliad by March 8 and fired the troops’ ardor still more.⁴ Not wishing to fight for secession, a handful of Tejano artillerymen under Captain Luis Guerra decided to resign, and Fannin sympathetically discharged them. Guerra proceeded to New Orleans with his men, carrying a letter from

¹ Duval to Duval, Goliad, March 9, 1836, in Jenkins, *Papers of the Texas Revolution*, vol. 5, p. 33-34.

² Thomas to Thomas, Goliad, March 10, 1836, in Jenkins, *Papers of the Texas Revolution*, vol. 5, p. 45.

³ Fannin to Mexia, Head Quarters Army of Texas, Fort Defiance, March 11, 1836, in Jenkins, *Papers of the Texas Revolution*, vol. 5, p. 47.

⁴ Barnard, 15-16; John Sowers Brooks to Absalom H. Brooks, Fort Defiance, Goliad, Texas, March 10, 1836. John Sowers Brooks Letters, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin; Ehrenberg, 165.

Fannin for the erstwhile federalist General Mexia. In the letter, Fannin introduced Guerra as a “soldier of 1824,” and briefly explained his company’s situation,

I am pleased to say of him and his men, that since they have been under my command, each and every one has done his duty—and owing to his and their peculiar situation, and political aspect of this newborn nation, so widely different from what it was when they entered its service; I have this day given them an Honorable discharge, with permission and passport to proceed to N. Orleans, &c.⁵

Fannin’s use of the term “peculiar situation” might be coincidence, but writing to his sister Eliza, he had used that very phrase in reference to himself, hinting at the matter of his illegitimacy. He knew what it was like to be on the margin of something: a family in his case, a revolution in theirs, and his sympathy seems genuine.

Around this time, Fannin received his first communication from Houston—an order to march to the relief of the Alamo. Noting the widespread belief that Fannin defied Houston’s later order to retreat to Victoria, Ruby C. Smith unraveled a sticky point in Texas historiography in her study on Fannin’s military career. She contended that the conflation of these two separate orders led to a considerable amount of confusion.⁶ Her theory explains why different accounts give such disparate dates for the receipt of Houston’s orders. Dr. Barnard, for one, reported that orders from Houston had come while he was out on a scouting mission around the 11th. He commented, with palpable frustration, that this order was the “first and only communication had from Gen. Houston, while he [Fannin] was at Goliad. In fact it was the first intimation we had of his

⁵ Fannin to Mexia, Head Quarters Army of Texas, Fort Defiance, March 11, 1836, in Jenkins, *Papers of the Texas Revolution*, vol. 5, p. 47.

⁶ R.C. Smith, 273.

whereabouts.”⁷ According to Zachariah S. Brooks, Fannin received Houston’s directives for the “blowing up and evacuation” of Fort Defiance on March 11th, the day Fannin actually received the orders to march to Bexar. Brooks seemed to have conflated the two sets, assuming that the set of the 11th had ordered the permanent evacuation of Goliad and rendezvous with Houston’s forces. He wrote that it took five days for Fannin to make any preparations for the retreat. Interestingly, that puts his first preparations around the 15th, right after receiving the actual orders to retreat.⁸ General Houston would later claim that Fannin sent a written response refusing to leave Fort Defiance. Smith argued that he too was confused, taking Fannin’s possible response to the first order to be in response to the second. Colonel Fannin indeed in no position to attempt the march to Bexar. The most current rumors had Santa Anna dispatching 1,000 men from the force besieging San Antonio to Goliad. It would have been madness to rush into it unprotected. Besides, Fannin had already tried to make the march, in a sense anticipating Houston’s command. Thus must have felt justified in not attempting the march anew.⁹

To account for some of the confusion between the two directives, Fannin must have discussed the orders only within his councils of war and with officers, rather than announcing them for the garrison. The men might only have known that a courier had arrived; assumptions and memory did the rest. From there, the rest of the garrison seems to have been spottily informed by either Fannin or their company officers about the specifics of Houston’s orders. Whether this was due to the closed-doors nature of the

⁷ Barnard, 16-17.

⁸ R.C. Smith, 273-74; “The Massacre of Goliad: A Narrative,” *Daily National Intelligencer*, June 10, 1836, p. 1, America’s Historical Newspapers.

⁹ R.C. Smith, 273-74.

officers' meetings or individual company commanders' decisions, the respective accounts of officers and men show a significant, if not unexpected, discrepancy. Jack Shackelford, for example, would staunchly defend Fannin against charges of insubordination, yet the aforementioned ill-informed Zachariah Brooks was one of his Red Rovers.¹⁰ John C. Duval's account is an even better example of the information disconnect, "About this time a courier arrived bringing a dispatch from Gen. Houston to Col. Fannin, and it was rumored in camp that the purport of this dispatch was that Col. Fannin should evacuate Goliad and fall back without delay towards the settlements on the Colorado. But as to the truth of this I cannot speak positively."¹¹

Lewis Ayers, a resident of Refugio and acting Assistant Quartermaster General on the staff,¹² threw a decisive complication into Fannin's lap. While most of the area's settlers had already evacuated the area in the face of the Mexican advance, Ayers' family and a few others had lingered. Now fearful of the proximity of the Mexican army, he appealed to Colonel Fannin for assistance and a military escort with which to remove his family. Fannin agreed, and on March 11th or 12th, dispatched Captain Amon King and his company to bring off the Ayers family. According to Dr. Barnard, "Fannin felt it his duty to afford all the protection in his power" to the area's civilians; and Shackelford admits that Fannin was "actuated by the best feelings" when he made that decision. However, this is where Shackelford—and later historians—saw a fatal mistake.

¹⁰ Davenport, *Unfinished Study*, 58.

¹¹ John C. Duval, "Battle of Coleto, Capitulation and Survival of the Goliad Massacre as told by John C. Duval," *Sons of DeWitt Colony Texas*, <http://www.tamu.edu/faculty/ccbn/dewitt/goliadduval.htm> (accessed April 11, 2015)

¹² Davenport, *Unfinished Study*, 43.

Shackelford thought that Ayers should have used earlier opportunities for escape; Barnard thought the straggling settlers very inconsiderate, though he withheld a specific judgment in Ayers' case.¹³ It must be remembered that Fannin had long believed Santa Anna's campaign to be a war of extermination against "every white man" in Texas, not to mention the danger a "licensed soldiery" posed to white women's sexual honor.¹⁴ According to one survivor, Ayers had indeed claimed that the Mexicans in the area were "bearing themselves with special insolence toward the women."¹⁵ Especially considering his racialized and distrustful set of expectations for the Mexican Army's behavior, Fannin would not possibly overlook the plight of a white family in occupied territory.

King's men, anxious for a fight, decide to detour on their way back to attack a group of hostile rancheros, but ended up engaging regular Mexican cavalry. The party took up a defensive position in the Refugio mission and managed to get a messenger back to Fannin. In turn, Fannin dispatched Col. Ward and the rest of the Georgia Battalion to cut through and rescue King's party.¹⁶ For the Georgia Battalion, this represented a coveted opportunity to prove themselves in battle. Captain Brooks even volunteered to go as Fannin's official representative.¹⁷ From the experience of Johnson's men, Fannin would have known that, especially with a small detachment, no quarter could be expected

¹³ Jack Shackelford, "Some Notes Upon a Part of the Texan War," in Foote, *Texas and the Texans*, vol. 2, p. 228; Barnard, 13; 15-16.

¹⁴ Fannin to Robinson, Mission of Refugio, February 7, 1836, in Jenkins, *Papers of the Texas Revolution*, vol. 4, p. 279-80.

¹⁵ Andrew Boyle, "Reminisces of the Texas Revolution," *Texas State Historical Association Quarterly* 13, no. 4 (April 1910): 286.

¹⁶ Hardin, 164.

¹⁷ Joseph Field to Absalom H. Brooks, New York, November 7, 1836, in John E. Roller, "Capt. John Sowers Brooks," *The Quarterly of the Texas State Historical Association* 9, no.3 (January 1906): 199.

should they surrender. Even when it meant dividing his forces in the face of the enemy, Fannin refused to leave King to a similar fate.

In a case of incredibly bad timing, the second order from General Houston arrived around the 14th. He ordered Fannin to destroy Fort Defiance and fall back to Victoria, taking “the necessary measures” for its defense. From there, Fannin would send one-third of his army to the main body under Houston. He directed Fannin to take whatever artillery he could manage and sink the remainder in the river.¹⁸ Houston’s orders might have arrived before the expedition to Refugio—had Houston himself taken the military situation more seriously. Houston had been appointed commander-in-chief of the Texas Army on March 4th at Washington-on-the-Brazos, but he dragged out the journey from there to Gonzales, where the rest of the army was mustering over a week, claiming that Fannin and Travis were lying about the Mexican forces coming against them to score political points. Houston finally arrived in Gonzales to take command of the army on March 11th, and on the same day issued his orders to Fannin.¹⁹

Both Barnard and Shackelford were adamant that Colonel Fannin intended from the start to obey Houston’s orders. Barnard recalled, “So far from Col. Fannin wishing to disobey the order, I know from his own lips that he intended to conform to it, as soon as the Georgia battalion should return.”²⁰ Shackelford remembered that Fannin took measures in compliance immediately after receiving the order. He forwarded news of these orders to Ward, urging him to extricate King and return with all possible haste. He

¹⁸ Houston to Fannin, Headquarters, Gonzales, March 11, 1836, in Jenkins, *Papers of the Texas Revolution*, vol. 5, p. 51-52.

¹⁹ Hardin, 162-63.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

sent out parties of men to impress the necessary carts, and dismounted and buried some of the cannon he did not want to take with him. Shackelford questioned Fannin's military wisdom but not his obedience to orders. He stated positively that Fannin delayed the retreat to Victoria on sole account of his "great anxiety" for his missing men.²¹

Receiving no word from Ward or King, Fannin sent out couriers. When they did not return, he sent others the next day. Anxiety in the fort escalated. One courier started on his way to Refugio, but lost his nerve and turned back. At this juncture Captain Frazer, commander of the militia from Refugio, volunteered to ride out and contact King and Ward. He asked for a good horse, and promised in turn to return within twenty-four hours.²²

While waiting for the return, or at least news, of King and Ward, Colonel Fannin tried to balance between making preparations to retreat and maintaining readiness to resist a potential attack. A company of much-needed horsemen under Colonel Albert C. Horton arrived at Goliad around the 15th to help with the retreat.²³ That Horton was a Matagorda resident—a Texian—must have cheered Fannin's heart. In accordance with Fannin's request, they brought a few oxen to help transport supplies. Colonel Fannin's correspondence with Horton further confirms his intention to "march to Victoria in compliance with the orders of General Houston." Fannin closed his message in high style, exhorting Horton "Our war cry is Texas and liberty: death or victory: Travis and his rescue." Needless to say, that last statement indicates that Fannin and his men believed

²¹ Shackelford, in Foote, vol. 2, p. 229

²² Barnard, 17-18.

²³ Ibid, 230; Barnard, 16-17. The date of March 15 is estimated, putting it between Barnard's 13th and Shackelford's 16th. A.C. Horton would later serve on the Board of Trustees of Baylor University.

that the Alamo defenders might yet be alive, and hints that Fannin still cherished the hope of marching to Bexar.²⁴ Fannin sent parties of infantry alongside his new detachment of cavalry in response to Mexican scouting parties spotted within a few miles of the fort. Not much, however, seems to have come of these sorties, except perhaps for a welcome break in routine.²⁵

By the 17th, the garrison knew that something had gone terribly wrong, “convinced that some calamity had befallen them.” Just as he had promised, Frazer returned around 4:00 p.m. with devastating news from King and Ward.²⁶ Ward was successful in running off the smaller Mexican force surrounding King in the mission. The two quarreled, however. King had refused to accept Ward’s authority, and their commands parted ways; although they ended up cooperating when General Urrea’s main army laid siege to the mission. Urrea had no problem persuading the area loyalists to pursue and capture King’s smaller detachment. Urrea ordered their execution. The Georgia Battalion, on the other hand, managed to escape from the mission in the middle of the night and were presumably headed to Victoria.²⁷

Unfortunately, there is no extant record of Fannin’s personal reaction to the news. With King killed and Ward cut off, his duty towards them had been fulfilled, but his duty

²⁴ Fannin to Horton, Fort Defiance, March 14, 1836, in Jenkins, *Papers of the Texas Revolution*, vol. 5, p. 74-75; R.C. Smith, 274. The first quotation is Smith’s translation from Spanish. This message was intercepted by General Urrea and published in Spanish, in his account of the Texas campaign.

²⁵ John Sowers Brooks to Absalom H. Brooks, Fort Defiance, Goliad, Texas, March 10, 1836. John Sowers Brooks Letters, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin; Joseph Field to Absalom H. Brooks, New York, November 7, 1836, in John E. Roller, “Capt. John Sowers Brooks,” 199.

²⁶ Barnard, 17.

²⁷ Hardin, 165.

to obey Houston's orders still remained. He certainly did not lose time in mourning, and immediately convened a council of war in his quarters. Accounts differ as to how the meeting went. According to Dr. Barnard, the officers made quick work of a decision to retreat "early the next morning."²⁸ A guest at the council remembered it differently, although it ended with the same decision. One of Horton's men, Nicholas Eastland, was an old West Point friend of Fannin's and attended the meeting. He described a longer, more contentious process. Eastland and several other officers proposed to evacuate that very night under cover of darkness, but the majority voted in favor of moving out in the morning.²⁹ That evening, Fannin walked about the fort, obviously troubled about the coming retreat. He knew the dangers inherent in the march and that he would be withdrawing with his enemy in close proximity. At this point, it might have been safer to stay in the fort,³⁰ but Fannin's sense of duty won out in the end.

Coinciding with the dispatch of Frazer, Fannin sent Horton on a more thorough scout of the surrounding area. Furthermore on the 17th, Horton reported a large and well-ordered, if slow-moving, body of troops advancing towards Goliad. In response, Colonel Fannin ordered the buried cannon dug up and remounted and guards doubled in readiness for the anticipated attack. He would not allow the fort to be taken by surprise.³¹

Fannin had intended to leave Fort Defiance on March 18th; however, a body of Mexican reconnoitering party appeared in the vicinity, just across the San Antonio River.

²⁸ Barnard, 18-19.

²⁹ "On Nicholas W. Eastland and Capt. Horton's Troop," *Sons of DeWitt Colony Texas*, <http://www.tamu.edu/faculty/ccbn/dewitt/goliaddiverse2.htm#eastland> (accessed 11 April, 2015) Eastland's account is second-hand, compiled from interviews with John Holland Jenkins.

³⁰ Nance, 211.

³¹ Shackelford, in Foote, vol. 2, p.230.

Fannin sent Horton's cavalry to engage them, and the resulting cavalry battle incidentally created a distracting spectacle for the rest of the regiment watching from the ramparts. After obtaining Fannin's blessing, the Red Rovers and Captain Brooks marched out to support Horton; the artillerymen remounted one of their pieces and fired an ineffective round in the direction of the Mexicans (without Fannin's orders.) Fannin wisely recalled his troops shortly after the Mexican force took up the dilapidated but defensible ruins of the Spanish mission across the river.³²

The skirmish of the 18th hurt Fannin's chances of a successful retreat on a number of levels. First and foremost, it forced Fannin to postpone the retreat until the next day. Second, his only horses would have been tired, and would be hard pressed to deliver as spectacular a performance the next day. Third, his distracted men had left the oxen yoked, unfed and un-watered, all day; they too would be tired even before starting the next morning.³³ As much as one might question Fannin's judgment in permitting the skirmish, beginning a march in full view of an enemy reconnaissance party could not have been a much better option.

Neither was the skirmish completely without salutary effects. No one had been hurt on the Texian side. Aside from an officer's spyglass that had been shot out of an officer's hand by a sharp-eyed Red Rover, no one appeared to have been hurt on the Mexican side either. The men of Goliad had suffered the shock of the news of fall of the Alamo, which followed shortly after Houston's second set of orders, and even more

³² Boyle, 286; Barnard, 19-20; Shackelford, in Foote, vol. 2, p.230-31; Joseph Field to Absalom H. Brooks, New York, November 7, 1836, in John E. Roller, "Capt. John Sowers Brooks," 199; Nance, 211.

³³ Brown, 185-86.

acutely from the killing of King's men.³⁴ The skirmish was probably cathartic. Tensions had been eased; morale improved. Barnard remembered, "The events of the day had animated us all, and good humor and cheerfulness for a while prevailed."³⁵

Fannin ordered his men to prepare and carry provisions "sufficient for several days," and ready themselves to march by sunrise.³⁶ Fannin selected ten cannon to take on the retreat—six pounders, four pounders, swivel guns, and one mortar.³⁷ Although the difficulty of transporting artillery made would compromise the column's speed, Fannin's decision to include them is not illogical. Houston had authorized bringing however many cannon Fannin could practically carry. The infantry needed protection on the march, especially since Urrea possessed vastly superior cavalry. On a more strategic level, Colonel Fannin had long known that Santa Anna had brought an impressive train of artillery to Texas, and whatever Fannin could manage to bring from Goliad would be critical for Texian chances of success.³⁸ Aside from the stockpiled provisions, Fannin planned on taking practically all of the garrison's materiel. Dr. Barnard explained the mentality behind this decision, "Although fully determined from the necessity of the case, on retreating, we were by no means disposed to run. We confidently counted on our ability to take ourselves and all our baggage in safety to Victoria."³⁹

³⁴ Ehrenberg, 165-66.

³⁵ Barnard, 19-20; Shackelford, in Foote, vol.2, p. 230-31.

³⁶ Boyle, 287.

³⁷ Duval, *Sons of DeWitt Colony Texas*; "The Massacre of Goliad: A Narrative," *Daily National Intelligencer*, June 10, 1836, p. 1, America's Historical Newspapers.

³⁸ Fannin to Robinson, Head Quarters, Army of Texas, Fort Goliad, February 16, 1836, in Jenkins, *Papers of the Texas Revolution*, vol. 4, p. 350-51.

³⁹ Barnard, 20.

A close reading of survivor accounts shows that Col. Fannin, although some of his decisions were certainly controversial, conducted the retreat with a measure of care rarely attributed to him. Early in the foggy morning of March 19th, Fannin sent Horton and his men to scout the road he would be taking before their departure. They reported the way to be safe. Final preparations for the retreat took a little longer than Fannin had hoped when he issued the orders to be ready for a dawn march, and his regiment left Fort Defiance around 8:30 that morning. That departure time still lived up to the expectations of some of the officers: Barnard maintained that they left “as early as possible.”⁴⁰ In Shackelford’s even more positive terms, the regiment evacuated Goliad “very early.”⁴¹

As they left, Fannin’s men set fire to the wooden ramparts and stockpiled provisions.⁴² Like the attempted march to Bexar, logistical problems afflicted Fannin’s retreat, but individual accounts vary regarding just how badly they were plagued. The variations seem to be rooted in the writers’ personality, expectations, and patience level. Shackelford seems to have adjusted his expectations to account for the natural pace of oxen rather than draft horses, saying that the march went “briskly and in good order” after crossing the San Antonio River.⁴³ The naturally slower pace of the oxen irritated others.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ Barnard, 20-21.

⁴¹ Shackelford, in Foote, vol. 2, 231.

⁴² “The Massacre of Goliad: A Narrative,” *Daily National Intelligencer*, June 10, 1836, p. 1, *America’s Historical Newspapers*; Ehrenberg, 169.

⁴³ Shackelford, in Foote, vol. 2, p. 231.

⁴⁴ Nance, 211; Boyle, 287; Ehrenberg, 169-70.

Fannin and his men succeeded in crossing the San Antonio River. Fannin knew that they would be particularly vulnerable to attack at this point, and thus chose the safer lower ford. It was a laborious and time-consuming process, especially in getting the large cannon across, but otherwise the crossing went smoothly. They saw no signs of the Mexican army, but after his army had crossed, Fannin had Horton's men conduct another scout of the surrounding area.⁴⁵

The previous day's neglect of the oxen also came back to haunt the Texian column. Colonel Fannin made his most contentious decision of the retreat when he ordered a halt to rest the oxen and men shortly after passing Manahuilla Creek; a journey of several miles from the San Antonio River. By Abel Morgan's account, the oxen had grown "wild and contrary," and really did require a stop for grazing.⁴⁶ The drivers had their hands full, to be sure. The oxen were ill trained, and since they had been impressed from Tejano owners, did not respond to English commands.⁴⁷ Fannin—or rather the oxen, depending on how deterministically one wants to read the situation—chose a stopping place with lush growth of young grass.⁴⁸ Captain Shackelford, Burr Duval, and several other officers thought Fannin's decision was foolhardy. They firmly protested the stop and advocated pushing forward two or three miles to the protective cover of the trees

⁴⁵ Boyle, 287; Barnard, 17; Shackelford, in Foote, vol. 2, p. 231; Nance, 211; Barnard, 21.

⁴⁶ Nance, 211.

⁴⁷ Joseph Field, "Dr. Joseph Field's Account of the Events at Goliad," *Sons of DeWitt Colony Texas*, <http://www.tamu.edu/faculty/ccbn/dewitt/goliadframe.htm> (accessed April 12, 2015)

⁴⁸ Barnard, 21.

lining Coleta Creek. They, of course, believed it could be done: Shackelford described the oxen only as “somewhat weary.”⁴⁹

Fannin might have logically questioned whether the drivers could have succeeded in pushing them the remainder the distance to the tree line. He did not feel compelled to force them. Their surroundings gave no visual suggestion of danger; their scouts had found no sign of pursuit.⁵⁰ Colonel Fannin exuded an aura of brash confidence in his quality forces complemented by an equal air of disdain for the Mexican forces. Doubtless Fannin projected this image, although it does not square entirely with the warnings Fannin had expressed in his previous letters about the experience, skill, and equipage of the approaching Mexican forces. Doubtless he did feel some superiority: the Mexican army had not followed them; therefore they must not dare to face the Texian force. Colonel Fannin was probably playing to his audience as well. By his own account, Shackelford “remonstrated warmly” against the stop. He also did so very visibly.⁵¹ These protests were not limited to the officers. Some of Fannin’s men, the Greys in particular, threatened to mutiny and march off on their own. Nothing came of their threats, as Fannin responded with an equal intractability.⁵²

Fannin’s pride did not like being so addressed, but more importantly; he risked undermining his authority over the volunteers if he was seen backing down from outspoken company commanders, let alone factions within the rank and file. He did not

⁴⁹ Shackelford, in Foote, vol. 2, 231; Duval, *Sons of DeWitt Colony Texas*.

⁵⁰ Barnard, 21.

⁵¹ Shackelford, in Foote, vol. 2, p. 231-32.

⁵² Ehrenberg, 172-73; “The Massacre of Goliad: A Narrative,” *Daily National Intelligencer*, June 10, 1836, p. 1, America’s Historical Newspapers.

completely neglect to take precautions, appointing a four-man rearguard to supplement the scouting of Horton's men in the front.⁵³ Most of his men and company commanders appear to have shared his confidence—as evidenced quite clearly by the many amused looks Shackelford received by those who felt his anxiety for getting to the timber resulted from his desire to “take care of number one.”⁵⁴

Colonel Fannin moved his column forward again after an hour's rest. It had not been long when they saw a combined force of Mexican cavalry and infantry coming out from the tree line to their left. The rearguard proved ineffective—Barnard accused them of falling asleep—and of the four, only Herman Ehrenberg came back to the main body. The other three deserted, riding off in the direction of Victoria. Fannin ordered a halt, had one of the six-pounders unlimbered, and fired several rounds at them. He had his men resume the march, slow enough to keep the oxen from bridling. Colonel Fannin encouraged his men to keep calm, assuring them that the shots fired had alerted Col. Horton to their situation, and that he would return. He told his men that the cavalry were only skirmishers out to scare them into abandoning their equipment. If they kept in good order, they would handily deter their attackers. The Mexican attack turned out to be much more. However, Fannin's men proved their worth as a unit. The long hours of drill paid off. An impressive accomplishment for a volunteer force, his men had the discipline to move in a square formation to defend against cavalry.⁵⁵ As for Colonel Fannin, his tactical decisions leading up to the engagement might have been questionable, but his battlefield leadership and exemplary courage at the Battle of Coleta were second to none.

⁵³ Barnard, 21.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Barnard, 21-22; Shackelford, in Foote, vol. 2, 231-32; Ehrenberg, 171.

Hoping to make it at least to the prairie's "commanding eminence" from which to make their defense, the ammunition wagon broke down in what was perhaps the plain's lowest point. Fannin directed his men to prepare for battle. They formed their square three ranks deep around the broken artillery wagon, hospital wagon, and deployed their artillery at the corners of the square. A number of the oxen became uncontrollable and ran off in the direction of the Mexican forces. This unfortunate mutiny further anchored the Texians to their position.⁵⁶ They found that they had no time for a council of war. Colonel Fannin took up a "commanding position, directly in the rear of the right flank" as the Mexican cavalry dismounted and advanced. "In a calm and decided manner," he ordered his men to hold their fire until point blank range, where they were sure their shots would count. The Mexican dragoons fired the first volley, which passed over the heads of Fannin's men. Their second volley had come much closer, and Captain Shackelford ordered the Red Rovers to sit down, and other company commanders followed suit. Only Colonel Fannin and the artillerymen remained on their feet. The third volley wounded several Texians; the rifle Fannin was holding had been hit twice, breaking off the lock. Shackelford described him in this moment as "still standing erect, a conspicuous mark, giving orders, 'not to fire yet' in a calm and decided manner."⁵⁷

Fannin's men finally opened fire, cannon and all, after the dragoons halted one hundred yards in the Texians' front for their fourth volley. Fannin was wounded in the midst of this exchange with a musket ball in his thigh. Shackelford, in his professional opinion, found the wound severe, although the bullet thankfully missed the femur.⁵⁸ The

⁵⁶ Shackelford, in Foote, vol. 2, 232-33; Nance, 287.

⁵⁷ Shackelford, in Foote, vol. 2, 231-33; Barnard, 22.

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, 233.

ball had hit the clasp of a bead purse he had in his overcoat and carried a silk handkerchief into the wound with it. Remarkably, the ball had not broken through the handkerchief, and when Fannin tugged on the ends of the handkerchief, it came out of the wound as well.⁵⁹ His wound did not disable him immediately, and Boyle described Fannin as only “slightly wounded” on the night of the 19th.⁶⁰ Abel Morgan remembered that Fannin “did not give up for it but kept about most of the time.”⁶¹

The Texians’ conduct had impressed General Urrea, who wrote “Though our soldiers showed resolution, the enemy was likewise unflinching.” Furthermore, Fannin’s men showed themselves to be well drilled, and their movements well-managed and directed. He continued, “Thus, without being intimidated by our impetuous charge, it manoeuvred in order to meet it; and, assuming a hammer formation on the right, they quickly placed three pieces of artillery on this side, pouring a deadly shower of shot upon my reduced column. A similar movement was executed on the left, while our front attack was met with the same courage and coolness.”⁶² This complimentary assessment is a testament to Fannin and his officers. Fannin’s army acted *in concert, as a whole*—a situation that reflects particularly well on their commander.

In order to catch up with Fannin, the force Urrea attacked with consisted only of cavalry and infantry. Fannin’s army brought a vast artillery superiority early on in the engagement. Being cut off from water supply of Coleta Creek, however, this advantage

⁵⁹ Joseph Spohn, “The Massacre of Fannin’s Command,” July 23, 1836, *Troy Daily Whig*, fultonhistory.com (accessed 12 May 2014)

⁶⁰ Boyle, 288.

⁶¹ Nance, 214.

⁶² Urrea, 224.

played itself out relatively soon.⁶³ The engagement ground to a contest of infantry, with Urrea's men resorting to a more "guerilla" style: lying on the ground, concealed by the tall grass, and only exposing themselves in order to fire. In John C. Duval's words, fighting "continued in a desultory kind of way" until sunset.⁶⁴ At the end of the day, Fannin's men suffered nine men killed and fifty-one wounded out of 275 effectives. They had inflicted fifty deaths on the Mexican army, and 140 more wounded.⁶⁵

Colonel Fannin's army had a trying night ahead of it. They were out of food and water, the wounded suffering even more intensely and begging pitifully for water. Fannin had taken a gamble. His refusal to abandon the artillery and baggage would put his army in a difficult defensive position, cut off from water and cover at a low point in the middle of the prairie.⁶⁶ The subject of making a break for the tree line again came up again that night in council, although every account of the decision is different. John C. Duval recalled that Fannin himself brought up the subject, proposing to retreat to the timber under cover of darkness if a majority of the men so desired. By Dr. Joseph Field's account, when Colonel Fannin had proposed the break-out, neither he nor anyone else had yet taken stock of conditions within the square. Fannin apparently did not know that the number of seriously wounded had been so high, and that since the draft animals had run away or been killed, the wounded could not be evacuated. Knowing this

⁶³ Shackelford, in Foote, vol. 2, p. 234.

⁶⁴ Urrea, 225; Duval, *Sons of DeWitt Colony Texas*.

⁶⁵ Hardin, 171; Shackelford, in Foote, vol. 2, p. 234.

⁶⁶ The alternative of making a break for the woods has been sweetened by hindsight, though it too would have been far from ideal. Even if they succeeded in beating back a Mexican attack from the shelter of the tree line, they would have faced the remainder of the march to Victoria without artillery and handicapped by a limited supply of ammunition.

predicament, “Our Commander said he would not leave them, but was resolved to share with them a common fate.”⁶⁷

Fannin put the question to the volunteers and their companies. It seems that a majority of the men shared Fannin’s determination to remain with the wounded.⁶⁸ The Greys still importuned Colonel Fannin to make an attempt at reaching the woods. Fannin’s firm refusal confounded them. They debated with him a while until Fannin addressed them with all the eloquence he could muster, entreating the Greys to remain with the army in their positions until morning:

Listen to the cries of pain of our stricken brothers whom the skilled hand of a surgeon might save from death. Can we abandon these defenseless friends to the torturing death which a barbarous foe has sworn to inflict on them? Are the Greys of New Orleans, the first company who took up the arms for the defense of liberty and justice, capable of such a desertion? Comrades, in the name of your patriotism and humanity, I implore you not to leave behind those who are helpless.⁶⁹

Fannin, negotiating a little, told them if no reinforcements were coming, he would reconsider a breakout attempt. In broad daylight, however, it would be more the choice of an honorable death than an earnest attempt to reach the cover of the trees.⁷⁰ Fannin, despite his thigh wound, was still mobile and could have participated in a break-out

⁶⁷ Field, in *Sons of DeWitt Colony Texas*.

⁶⁸ Duval, in *Sons of DeWitt Colony Texas*; Nance, 214.

⁶⁹ Ehrenberg, 178.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

attempt. Throughout this discussion, Fannin never seems to categorize himself as wounded. None of the survivors' accounts comment on the irony of a wounded man refusing to leave his wounded men; nor do they ever accuse him of self-interest in his concern for the wounded. Of course, to his men, Fannin had only sustained minor injuries, and he kept up a spirited demeanor. Andrew Boyle had been rather badly wounded in the leg and remembered lying close to Fannin, who "good naturedly" offered "his 'good leg for a pillow.'"⁷¹

With the determination to stay together in their positions, and hoping earnestly for reinforcements from Victoria, Colonel Fannin put his already miserable men to work throughout the night. Most were engaged in digging trenches and building earthworks supplemented by dead animals, knapsacks, and trunks. Others dug for water, but to no avail. Zachariah S. Brooks, who saw a dash for the woods as the army's only possible recourse, resented that Fannin had made them work in what he perceived to be a hopeless cause. Thirst made exertion torture, but the cold weather made inaction unbearable. Urrea did his best to make any rest impossible and had his buglers play the call "Sentinel Alerto" intermittently throughout the night to keep Fannin's men in expectation of another attack.⁷²

By the morning of the 20th, Urrea's artillery had arrived, and greeted the Texians with several shots that passed over their heads. During the night, his force had also accreted several hundred fresh infantrymen, which Urrea displayed in full view of the Texians. Colonel Fannin and his officers held a council of war. Their enemy had been

⁷¹ Boyle, 288.

⁷² Boyle, 268; Nance, 214; Barnard, 24; "The Massacre of Goliad: A Narrative," *Daily National Intelligencer*, June 10, 1836, p. 1, America's Historical Newspapers.

reinforced and resupplied, while the Texians had lost faith that reinforcements from Victoria could come to their aid. The majority of the officers still considered any action that required abandoning the wounded out of the question. When they first broached the topic of capitulation, Fannin responded strongly in the negative, protesting “We whipped them off yesterday, and we can do so again to-day.” Letting their true circumstances sink in, Fannin soon came around to the idea. If they could manage to obtain a *capitulation* rather than a surrender at discretion, it would avoid the fate of King’s and Johnson’s parties, killed after their surrender. Crucially, it would save the lives of their wounded men. The question had been referred by the company commanders to their men, and Fannin asked if his command was unanimous in its decision. Of course, there were holdouts among the Greys, but most of his men were willing to accept a capitulation.⁷³

Colonel Fannin had a white flag raised. He dispatched Major Wallace and another one or two of his command’s Spanish speaker to parley with the officers sent by General Urrea. Urrea’s memoirs are self-consciously careful to mention that he made it clear to Fannin’s officers that he could only accept a surrender at discretion. A number of messages crossed between the lines, but eventually the two commanders met in person. According to Urrea, he rode into to the Texian camp; according to Shackelford, Fannin went out over the breastworks despite the worsening condition of his leg wound. Before meeting with Urrea, Fannin assured the anxious Shackelford that he would accept no surrender except an honorable capitulation.⁷⁴ Dr. Field recalled that when the two men met, General Urrea “embraced Col. Fannin and said, ‘Yesterday we fought; but

⁷³ Barnard, 25-26; Shackelford, in Foote, vol. 2, p. 238; Ehrenberg, 182-83.

⁷⁴ Shackelford, in Foote, vol. 2, p. 238; Urrea, 228.

today we are friends.”⁷⁵ The exact nature of the agreement they reached has been a bone of contention in Texas historiography ever since participants began to write their accounts of the revolution. The typical Texian description of the terms has been one of clear guarantees to Texian lives and private property.⁷⁶

Urrea admitted to granting nothing more than a surrender at discretion and agreeing to write to Santa Anna on the prisoners’ behalf. The original Spanish language copy of the surrender agreement squared with the text given in Mexican accounts, leading some subsequent historians to argue that Fannin had agreed to an unconditional surrender and lied to his men about obtaining a capitulation. If Fannin had indeed lied, then the other signers—Major Wallace, Adjutant Chadwick, would have been complicit in the deception as well. However, the language of the agreement is equivocal enough for both sides to interpret it differently. The decisive third article stated that “The whole detachment shall be treated as prisoners of war and subject [or placed at] to the disposition of the supreme government.”⁷⁷

From the Texian point of view, it would be easy to interpret subjection to the “disposition of the supreme government” as something perfectly compatible with treatment as prisoners of war, perhaps involving no more than the anticipated use of their labor to rebuild Goliad. For General Urrea, it preserved the power of the Mexican government over the lives and deaths of the prisoners and stayed defensibly within the

⁷⁵ Field, in *Sons of DeWitt Colony Texas*.

⁷⁶ Shackelford, in Foote, vol. 2, 238-39; Barnard, 27.

⁷⁷ “Colonel Fannin’s Capitulation on the Coletto,” in *The Mexican Side of the Texan Revolution*, 2nd ed., (Austin: Graphic Ideas, 1970), 60-61.

limits of his legal authority.⁷⁸ Urrea knew that Fannin expected much more than an unconditional surrender could give, writing, “They doubtlessly surrendered confident that Mexican generosity would not make their surrender useless, for under any other circumstances they would have sold their lives dearly, fighting to the last.”⁷⁹ The informal agreement stipulated that officers and men alike would be paroled to New Orleans as soon as possible, and Urrea was confident in his ability to make those arrangements. The officer overseeing the laying down of arms and other surrender proceedings, a German-born colonel of engineers named Holzinger, even announced to the prisoners, “Well, gentlemen, in ten days, liberty and home.”⁸⁰

It is difficult to determine what Fannin’s experience as a prisoner of war was like. Barnard reveals that Col. Fannin did not march back to Goliad with his men, but instead remained on the battlefield among the wounded until carts could be procured for their transportation.⁸¹ One vague hint at his state of mind can be found in a passage from Dr. Field’s account. On the morning of the 21st, “Colonel Halsinger [Holzinger], who was left in command of the guard, inquired of the Colonel which was his best surgeon. As I was standing near, he pointed towards me, and said he believed I was as good as any.” Field does not expand any further on this exchange; however, Fannin’s answer comes across as uncharacteristically listless if his previous correspondence can be taken as a predictor of his reaction. He had warned Robinson and the Council of the possibility that

⁷⁸ Urrea, 235.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Barnard, 27; Field, in *Sons of DeWitt Colony Texas*. According to Field, Holzinger promised eight days rather than ten.

⁸¹ Barnard, 28.

disaster would meet the troops on the Texian frontier, including his own force. The worst had happened, but to some small extent he had seen it coming. He had been hard on himself after the abandonment of the Matamoros Expedition, and the thoughts that turned inward on him at this juncture may well have been the most barbed and unforgiving of his life. He worried for his men, particularly the dangerously wounded Captain Brooks, whose thigh had been shattered near his hip by a musket ball. Fannin had become attached to his young aide-de-camp, and during their captivity took a nearly paternal interest in his well-being. Hoping to ensure the best care possible, Fannin managed to pull some strings and have Brooks placed in a house with several wounded Mexican officers.⁸²

Colonel Fannin and most of the wounded returned to Goliad about the 22nd, under the personal charge of Colonel Holzinger. Adjutant Chadwick stayed with his commander, and a Louisiana Creole named Joseph Spohn served as their interpreter. They were kept in separate quarters, evidently rather isolated from the goings-on in the fort with the rest of the prisoners.⁸³ His interactions with Drs. Barnard and Shackelford seem to confirm this impression. Now that Fannin was back, Dr. Barnard's "first effort was to see Col. Fannin, and if, by any possibility through him, get hold of some of our surgical instruments and hospital dressings, for wounded, we having been robbed of everything of the kind." Barnard asked Fannin to write to the commandant claiming these items as his men's private property under the terms of surrender, necessary for the treatment of both sides' wounded men. One would assume that Fannin was indignant at

⁸² Shackelford to Norborne C. Brooks, Courttako, Alabama, August 5, 1836, in Roller, "Capt. John Sowers Brooks," 196-97.

⁸³ Ehrenberg, 193.

this breach of the surrender agreement, but Barnard does not comment on Fannin's reaction, except that he did write a note to the commandant, Lieutenant Colonel Portilla.⁸⁴

Dr. Shackelford also visited Colonel Fannin to report poor treatment of the prisoners. The surgeons were being forced to prioritize the Mexican wounded at the expense of their own comrades; the men were kept in overcrowded and unhygienic conditions; they were poorly fed and provided with little water. Upon hearing Shackelford's report, he immediately wrote to General Urrea "adverting to the terms of the Capitulation, and to our treatment." Fannin explained to Shackelford, "He told me a promise was given him, that every comfort in their power should be provided for us in future."⁸⁵ Fannin's apparent surprise is revealing of several things. First and most obviously, it is a testament to the isolation and insulation of his surroundings. The privacy was certainly in deference to his rank. Although Urrea and Portilla were politically astute enough not to legitimize his title by addressing him as colonel, they respected a degree of privilege accompanying his status as commander. Second, it reveals the faith he possessed in General Urrea and in their agreement. Barnard and Shackelford picked up on this when they cited Fannin's appeals to Portilla and Urrea as evidence that there had been an honorable capitulation.⁸⁶

On March 24th, Lieutenant Colonel Portilla began setting the prisoners to work repairing the barracks, in accordance with orders from Urrea. Portilla invited Fannin to

⁸⁴ Barnard, 29.

⁸⁵ Shackelford, in Foote, vol. 2, p. 240.

⁸⁶ Ibid; Barnard, 29.

dine with him. If they had any discussion of regarding the treatment of his men or the surrender agreement, Portilla does not record it. He does note that Fannin courteously drank to the health of General Urrea. Portilla thanked him, but responded pointedly with a toast to “The Country of the Mexicans.”⁸⁷ At some point, they must have talked about obtaining passage for his troops’ parole to New Orleans, because Fannin and Chadwick left for Copano with Col. Holzinger to contract a ship for that purpose. By the time they arrived, however, the intended vessel had left. They returned to Goliad on the evening of Saturday, March 26th.⁸⁸

Both Drs. Barnard and Shackelford noticed an uptick in Colonel Fannin’s mood. He returned markedly cheerful, hopefully anticipating the impending release and parole of himself and his men. The trip to Copano might not have been productive as far as contracting a ship, but the very attempt seemed to demonstrate the seriousness of the Mexican officers about following through with the plans for paroling their prisoners. It was a concrete step homeward. He was still touched by how kindly Col. Holzinger had treated Chadwick and himself, and now his surroundings gave him a further reason to hope. He billeted that night with the medical staff in a small room on the side of the Presidio’s church. This room sheltered not only the surgeons and their aides but supplies—bandages, medicine, equipment—items whose dearth had distressed Dr. Barnard a few days earlier. It looked to Fannin and Chadwick like conditions were beginning to improve. They were talkative, too, the conversation centering on their future

⁸⁷ “Mexico and Texas,” *The United States Magazine and Democratic Review* 3, no. 10 (October 1838): 144. Major Miller’s command of eighty men, recent arrivals from the United States, were brought as prisoners that day. They had been surprised and captured while unarmed, and a number of them were put to work as hospital aides. Ward’s men, captured shortly after Fannin, arrived at Goliad the next day.

⁸⁸ Shackelford, in Foote, vol. 2, p. 240; Barnard, 29-30.

parole to the United States. Barnard recalled that Fannin's imagination already took him back to his home and family, "Fannin asked me to dress his wound, and then talked about his wife and children, with much fondness, until a late hour." Their attitude was contagious, and Barnard too "laid down to rest this evening with more pleasure and happier anticipations than I had before allowed myself to indulge in."⁸⁹

By all indications, Colonel Fannin's surrender agreement had managed to save the lives of his men, but everything would change by morning. A courier arrived from Santa Anna, contradicting the orders from Urrea regarding the prisoners' treatment. It mandated the immediate execution of the Fannin's men, classifying them as pirates in accordance with official government policy and thus outside the law. Portilla did not come to the decision easily, but he concluded to obey the distasteful orders. The next morning was Palm Sunday, March 27th. Mexican officers formed Fannin's men into several columns and marched them out of the fort in several different directions. Each column heard a different explanation for the movement. As the columns came to a halt not too far from town, the officers ordered the guards to fire on the prisoners. A number escaped, but most were either killed in the initial volley or finished off by bayonet and lance.⁹⁰

The medical staff had been called away—spared, as it were, by a Mexican officer early that morning. There was no further mention of Chadwick, so it is probable that he had marched and been killed with one of the columns of prisoners. Interpreter Joseph Spohn had been working in the hospital. An officer had told him to have the hospital aides carry the wounded out of the church and laid down on the ground. The officer told

⁸⁹ Shackelford, in Foote, vol. 2, p 240; Barnard, 31.

⁹⁰ Hardin, 173; "Mexico and Texas," 144.

them that carts were coming to take them to Copano, and thence to the United States. However, Spohn reported, “their hopes were cruelly blasted when they heard a sudden continued roar of musketry on the outside of the fort.”

Colonel Fannin, alone behind the thick stone walls of his room, heard the volleys as well, and came out of his room. A captain of the Tres Villas Battalion told Spohn to bring Fannin to a spot in the North West corner of the fort. When Spohn had come near, Fannin asked him “What was that firing?” Spohn told Fannin what had happened, and that he too was going to be shot. The effects of neither statement could be read on Fannin’s face, which “appeared resolute and firm.” It almost surely included a great measure of shock, but his stoicism is remarkable. During this short conversation, the detail of unfortunate soldiers assigned this duty were taking the wounded men to the gate two by two and executing them. His wound had made him “very lame” by this time, but with his arm on Spohn’s shoulder, he “firmly walked” to his place of execution. At the captain’s request, Spohn interpreted the sentence: “That for having come with an armed band to commit depredations and revolutionize Texas, the Mexican government was about to chastise him.” Fannin immediately asked to see Portilla, and the captain asked his reasons. Fannin took a gold watch from his pocket. He said it belonged to his wife, and that he wished to present it to Portilla. The only other extant eyewitness account of the execution, from a hospital attendant named Coy, read this exchange to mean Fannin wanted it *returned* to his wife.⁹¹ Nevertheless, Fannin relented, and offered it to the captain on the condition that his body be properly buried. He wished also to be shot in the heart rather than his head. Possibly hoping to forestall an ignominious search of his

⁹¹ S.T. Brown to Thos. Ward, Esq., Livingston Alabama, November 1, 1837, *Albany Patriot*, p. 2., Georgia Historic Newspapers, presented by Digital Library of Georgia. Coy’s account is second-hand,

body, he added to the bargain the cash he had in his pocket and the “small bead purse, containing doubloons” with the bent clasp. With a note of sentimentality, bitterness, or both, he credited the clasp with saving his life by slowing the bullet that wounded him. For a blindfold, he gave Spohn the handkerchief that the bullet had carried into the wound. Spohn’s hands were trembling and he folded it badly. The captain impatiently took and folded it. After ordering Fannin to sit down in a nearby chair, he tied the handkerchief over his eyes, and asked “good, good?” Fannin responded “yes, yes.” As he heard the firing squad making their preparations, Fannin made the last minute request that the soldiers stand far enough away to avoid burning him with their gunpowder. The captain instead brought his men within two feet of Fannin and gave the order to fire. Colonel Fannin fell, dead, on his right side.⁹² His body was stripped and left in the prairie with those of his wounded men.⁹³

In Texas memory, Fannin’s death quickly became illustrative of the massacre as a whole, and no traditionalist retelling of the Massacre is complete without it. Told with its full pathos, it didactically contrasts courage and perfidiousness; good faith and broken promises. Heightening the theme of contrast, the story quickly became racialized, with Fannin as the exemplar of the Anglo-Texan martyr; his executioners as exemplars of Mexican faithlessness and cruelty. The account of Fannin’s death also accreted touching embroideries, even from those critical of his decisions in life. Duval had Fannin declaring that he “had no desire to live after the cold-blooded, cowardly murder of his

⁹² Joseph Spohn, “The Massacre of Fannin’s Command,” July 23, 1836, *Troy Daily Whig*, fultonhistory.com (accessed 12 May 2014)

⁹³ Shackelford, in Foote, vol. 2, p. 242-43; Barnard, 33.

men.” Shackelford added that Fannin tied his own blindfold; that he bravely “opened his bosom” as a target.⁹⁴

Colonel James W. Fannin has since played a complicated role in Texas memory. In attempting to break the Texians’ will with overwhelming force, Santa Anna’s orders had only created martyrs and cost him the moral high ground he had claimed in fighting filibusters for Mexico’s territorial integrity. The deaths of Fannin and his men now required revenge, and thus they were invoked as battle cries at San Jacinto. In the years immediately following the war, Fannin was revered as a hero, the subject of innumerable toasts, the namesake of Georgia and Texas counties, and even a trading schooner.⁹⁵ In the midst of the debate over Texas annexation in 1844, Secretary of State John C. Calhoun excoriated Mexico for the deaths of the “heroic Fannin, and his brave associates.”⁹⁶

Nevertheless, there has also been a side of Texan memory that wanted to forget the entire Goliad campaign; indeed, the entire Matamoros Expedition and breakdown in the Provisional Government. Harbert Davenport certainly read as much in the Texans of both 1836 and 1936. Davenport downplayed Fannin’s popularity in the immediate aftermath of the Revolution, but he had a good point: the events leading up to the loss of

⁹⁴ Duval, in *Sons of DeWitt Colony Texas*; Shackelford, in Foote, vol. 2, p. 242-43.

⁹⁵ O’Connor, 157-61; For a good example of toasts to Fannin’s memory, see the July 23, 1836 issue of the *Southern Banner*, Georgia Historic Newspapers, presented by Digital Library of Georgia; For mention of the schooner, see “Transcript of letter from James F. Perry to John a Merle and Co., January 28, 1837,” digital images, <http://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metapth217066/> (accessed March 1, 2013), University of North Texas Libraries, The Portal to Texas History, <http://texashistory.unt.edu>; crediting Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, Austin, Texas.

⁹⁶ “Diplomatic Correspondence: Mr. Calhoun to Mr. Shannon,” *Troy Daily Whig*, December 14, 1844, fultonhistory.com (accessed 12 May 2014)

Fannin and his men did not reflect very well on the Texians, and they sensed this.⁹⁷

Mary Austin Holley, whose history of Texas comes across as frankly propagandistic, completely neglected to mention the Goliad campaign or the chaos that caused it.⁹⁸

Henry Stuart Foote, who praised Fannin extravagantly, still cut the political turmoil almost completely out of the story to avoid giving offence to the living, but hinted at his hope that some future historian would take it up.⁹⁹

Historians cannot deal with Fannin in a vacuum; nor should they deal with the Texas Revolution without Fannin, without Goliad, and without Matamoros. The thread of James W. Fannin's short career is inextricably woven into the history of the Texas Revolution, playing a defining role in the strategic and political shifts that the war took. As a man, his life had involved so much more; twenty-nine of his thirty-one years had been spent as a Georgian, a Southerner, and an American.

The circumstances of his birth and family life gave him expectations of his place in the world, but limited means of getting there. The intense ambition, loyalty to family, and sectional identity fostered in that environment carried throughout his life. He wanted to leave a lasting mark on the world, and James W. Fannin Jr. pursued that goal within the day-to-day context of his time and place, and throughout the extraordinary opportunities that presented themselves.

⁹⁷ Davenport, "Men of Goliad," 1-3.

⁹⁸ Mary Austin Holley. *Texas*. (1836; repr.; Austin: Texas State Historical Association, 1990), 348-64.

⁹⁹ Foote, vol. 2, 261-63.

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