



## Shadows of a Mighty Presence

### Remembering the Alamo and the Texas Revolution

Poems by K. Lee Lerner  
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Author's Note: This compilation of selected poems about the Alamo and Texas Revolution contains original photos and poems written in the traditional three-line (5-7-5) form of Haiku, five line (5-7-5-7-7) Tanka form of Haiku, and other forms of verse. Unless otherwise noted, all photos and content are © K. Lee Lerner /LMG. All rights reserved. For additional information, contact K. Lee Lerner at [kleeelerner@alumni.harvard.edu](mailto:kleeelerner@alumni.harvard.edu)

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### Death at the Alamo



When the firing stopped,  
a handful of men captured  
were executed  
It matters not to honor  
They died at the Alamo

Those who stood their post,  
braving thirteen days of siege,  
deserve their glory  
Captured, they asked no quarter  
Santa Anna offered none

Death still earned honor  
along the Bataan Death March  
at Hill 303,  
Palawan, or Malmedy.  
So too at the Alamo

---- K. Lee Lerner

Whether Crockett was among the captured executed is still debated by historians, Even disputed sources, however, say the captured died bravely: "They tortured them before they killed them, and these miserable ones died moaning, but without humbling themselves before their executioners." -- Excerpts from the field diary and subsequent memoirs of Lt. Col. José Enrique de la Peña.

Depictions of William B. Travis (1809-1836), Davy Crockett (1786-1836), and others on the Alamo cenotaph, also called the Spirit of Sacrifice, erected to memorialize the defenders of the Alamo during the siege and fall of the Alamo February 23, 1836 to March 6, 1836. Commissioned by the State of Texas and designed by architect Pompeo Coppini, the monument -- dedicated on Veteran's Day in 1940 -- stands in Alamo Plaza, in what was a central part of the Alamo compound on the day of the battle. Alamo Plaza. San Antonio, Texas. ca 2022. (c) K. Lee Lerner / LMG

## For the life of Texas

On the first day of the siege of the Alamo,  
Santa Anna's red banner let defenders know  
no quarter nor mercies would the dictator show.  
For the life of Texas, they must fight with backbone

---- K. Lee Lerner

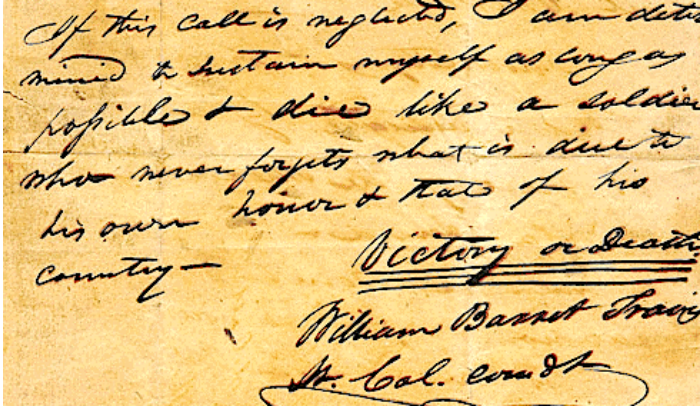


Photo (above): Texas flag flying on a hill above Lajitas, Texas. Located in the Big Bend, Lajitas is a small resort town on edge of Big Bend Ranch State Park along the stunningly beautiful, twisting, and adventurous "River Road" between the ghost town of Terlingua and border crossing town of Presidio.



Photo (left): Officially Scenic Highway 170, the road parallels the Rio Grande by winding through step cliffs along the Texas side of the border.

## History and Myth



History and myth  
combine to paint a canvas  
brushed with heroes' blood  
o'er thirteen days of glory  
at the siege of Alamo  
Of the defenders,  
only six are Texas born  
Others find just cause  
Travis, Crockett, and Bowie  
Texians and Tejanos  
Time and tales obscure,  
what is real from symbolic  
Victory or Death!  
Travis' words drew a line  
without his sword parting sand  
Against hopeless odds,  
valiant men to be consumed  
cross a line of death

---- K. Lee Lerner

## Honor Sacrifice

Honor sacrifice  
Lives lost so Texas may live  
Honor defiance  
A stand against tyranny  
Remember the Alamo

Honor heroes  
Flawed men redeemed in glory  
Honor duty's call  
Lines of victory or death  
Remember the Alamo

--- K. Lee Lerner





## Massacre at Goliad



Prisoners of War  
Fannin's men at Goliad  
brutally murdered  
Remember Goliad and  
Remember the Alamo!

---- K. Lee Lerner

## Only Freedom Lived



At the Alamo  
it was victory or death  
Only freedom lived

--- K. Lee Lerner

The north and south sides of the Alamo cenotaph, also called the Spirit of Sacrifice, erected to memorialize the defenders of the Alamo whose bodies were burned following the fall of the Alamo on March 6, 1836. Commissioned by the State of Texas and designed by architect Pompeo Coppini, the monument -- dedicated on Veteran's Day in 1940 -- stands in Alamo Plaza, in what was a central part of the Alamo compound on the day of the battle. Alamo Plaza. San Antonio, Texas. ca 2022. (c) K. Lee Lerner / LMG

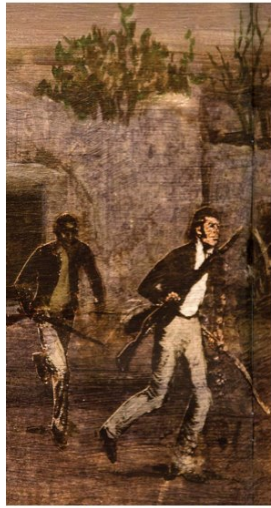
## Redeemed by Sacrifice

Valor and courage  
mark thirteen days of glory  
Mortal men with flaws  
redeemed by their sacrifice  
Remember the Alamo

---- K. Lee Lerner



## Remember!



William B. Travis and his slave, Joe, Alamo, San Antonio

Courtesy Texas Historical Commission

It is right that we remember the Alamo  
It is right that we remember heroes  
It is right that we remember valor, sacrifice, and honor  
It is right that we remember the cost of independence  
Remember!

--- K. Lee Lerner

Contrary to common understanding and historical portrayals, however, not all the defenders died to the strains of El Degüello on morning of the final battle. At least one defender of the Alamo survived, an enslaved man named Joe.

It is right to remember heroes, but it is wrong that too many of us overlook how those tales of heroism came to us. The heroic dead needed voice, and Joe, lived to tell the tale with force, clarity, and authenticity. Joe's witness preserved heroism that would otherwise have been lost to history.

By his own contemporaneous recounting, Joe endured the siege and he -- along with Travis -- ran from their shared barracks to the ramparts on the north wall of the Alamo compound at the start of the battle on the morning of March 6th, 1836. According to Joe, Travis was killed early in the battle, but until then Joe fought by Travis' side, firing at the Mexican forces and, in the process, weathering the onslaught of fire that killed Travis. Only after Travis fell did Joe seek shelter.

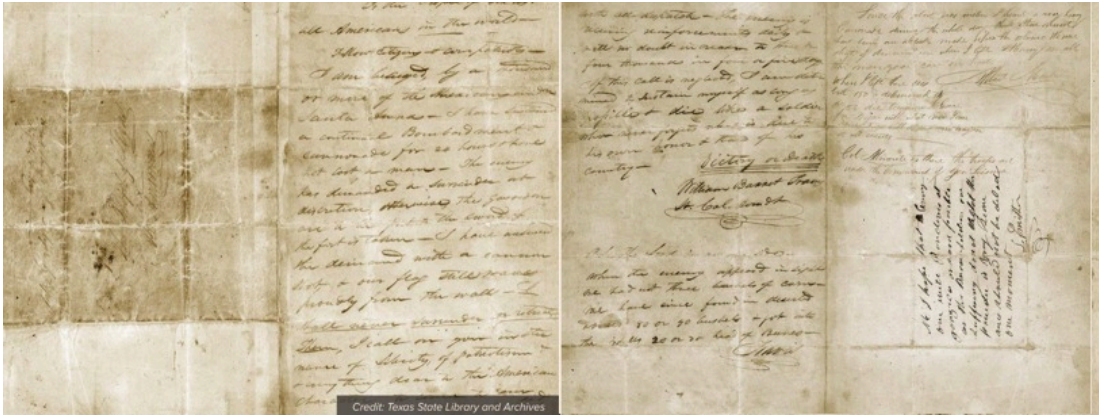
It is right then that we also remember Joe as a defender of the Alamo. Alas, he is currently not listed on many rolls of Alamo defenders

Joe was also wounded when captured. He was ultimately interrogated and released by Santa Anna and subsequently gave accounts the siege and battle -- limited to the time before he shuttered himself following Travis' death -- to representatives of the Texas government.

Unfathomably, Joe's actions did not win him his freedom. Moreover, the executor of the Travis estate published a notice of reward for the capture and return of Joe after he escaped from slavery a year later. While little is known about Joe thereafter, some historians claim that he traveled to Travis' home near Brewton, Alabama, and perhaps resided near there for the remainder of his life. The location of his grave remains uncertain.



## Victory or Death!



At the Alamo  
a torch was passed that still burns  
Victory or Death!

---- K. Lee Lerner

On February 24, the second day of siege at the Alamo, its commander, Lt. Col. William Barret Travis penned one of the great letters in human history.

"I am determined to sustain myself as long as possible & die like a soldier who never forgets what is due to his own honor & that of his country - Victory or Death."

Historians still labor over whether near the end of the siege -- with hope for reinforcements all but vanished and the fate of the defenders sealed by their lack of number and ammunition -- Travis literally drew a line in the sand with his sword to divide the garrison into those willing to die for freedom and those who wished to escape.

Scholarly sentiment has swayed back and forth over the years as what components of this act were myth and which were facts inferred or substantiated by witness accounts (e.g., Susanna Dickenson). Accounts vary, for example, as to which side of the line the alleged one defender who chose to attempt escape ultimately took.

The truth is that we will never know for sure, but I argue that it does not materially matter because Travis essentially drew a more important, and equally dramatic, metaphorical line in the sand for the men under his command with his triple underscoring of 'Victory or Death' in his letter of February 24th.

## About the work

Shadows of a Mighty Presence: Remembering the Alamo and the Texas Revolution (Poems).Part of a larger collection of work:

Lerner K. Lee. "[Remember the Alamo and the Texas Revolution: Both the Heroic Sacrifice and Historical Uncertainties.](https://scholar.harvard.edu/kleelerner/papers/remember-alamo-and-texas-revolution)" [Scholars at Harvard](https://scholar.harvard.edu/kleelerner/papers/remember-alamo-and-texas-revolution) (Open Scholar). Originally published online: March 6, 2012. Last revised: March 6, 2024. Available online at <https://scholar.harvard.edu/kleelerner/papers/remember-alamo-and-texas-revolution> and via [Academia](https://www.academia.edu/27193976) at <https://www.academia.edu/27193976>.

See also: Lerner K. Lee. [San Antonio, Texas --- Remember the Alamo and the Texas Revolution: Both the Heroic Sacrifice and Historical Uncertainties. \(Revised\)](https://scholar.harvard.edu/kleelerner/essays/taking-bearings-remember-alamo-and-texas-revolution-revised). Taking Bearings. [Scholars at Harvard](https://scholar.harvard.edu/kleelerner/essays/taking-bearings-remember-alamo-and-texas-revolution-revised) (OpenScholar). Originally published online at Harvard Blogs hosted by the Berkman Klein Center For Internet & Society at Harvard University and Harvard Law School, March 6, 2023. Last revised: March 6, 2024. Available online at [Scholars at Harvard https://scholar.harvard.edu/kleelerner/essays/taking-bearings-remember-alamo-and-texas-revolution-revised](https://scholar.harvard.edu/kleelerner/essays/taking-bearings-remember-alamo-and-texas-revolution-revised) and via [Academia](https://www.academia.edu/98049638/) at <https://www.academia.edu/98049638/>

## About the Author

"Recognized for his use of language, accuracy, and balanced presentation, K. Lee Lerner's portfolio covering science and global issues has garnered respected writing, book and media awards. His dossier spans every continent, includes two global circumnavigations, and features coverage from areas suffering civil war, violent protests, drought, famine, and disease outbreaks. That experience, built on a scholarly foundation in science, allows his evidence-based writing to bring clarity to chaotic and complex issues.

Contributing editor of more than 40 academic books and writer and/or producer for more than two dozen major media projects, for more than three decades — across print, broadcast media, and digital platforms -- Lerner's 'Taking Bearings,' essays have ranged across the human intellectual enterprise.

Originally hosted by the Berkman Klein Center For Internet & Society and Harvard Law School, many of Lerner's Taking Bearings essays published after 2003 are part of the Harvard Blogs collection permanently maintained online by Berkman Klein Center at Harvard in an effort to keep this important piece of the internet history available to scholars and the general public.

[ <https://archive.blogs.harvard.edu/kleelerner/index/> ]

Lerner has served on the board of advisors for the venerable American Men and Women of Science since 2003 and his Academia site [ <https://harvard.academia.edu/kleelerner> ] consistently ranks among those most frequently accessed by students, scholars, and decision makers from around the world." — National Press Club biography.

Additional information is available at [scholar.harvard.edu/kleelerner](https://scholar.harvard.edu/kleelerner)

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Profile Photo: K. Lee Lerner at the helm of Bellissima (Bella). Gulf of Mexico. June 2018.

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