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## **The Blood of Heroes: The 13-Day Struggle for the Alamo--and the Sacrifice That Forged a Nation** James Donovan

The gripping and definitive chronicle of the iconic battle that inspired a nation--a sweeping saga of 200 brave Americans who stood tall against an overwhelmingly superior Mexican force.

On February 23, 1836, a Mexican army thousands of soldiers strong attacked a group of roughly 200 Americans holed up in an abandoned mission just east of San Antonio, Texas. For nearly two weeks, the massive force lay siege to the makeshift fort, spraying its occupants with unremitting waves of musket and cannon fire. Then, on March 6th, at 5:30 am, the Mexican troops unleashed a final devastating assault: divided into four columns, they rushed into the Alamo and commenced a deadly hand-to-hand fight. The Americans, despite being hugely outnumbered, fought valiantly--for themselves and for a division of an independent Texas. In the end, they were all slaughtered.

Drawing upon newly available primary sources, THE BLOOD OF HEROES is the definitive account of this epic battle. Populated by larger-than-life characters--including Davy Crockett, James Bowie, and William Barret Travis--it is a dynamic story of courage, sacrifice, and redemption.

## **The Blood of Heroes: The 13-Day Struggle for the Alamo--and the Sacrifice That Forged a Nation Details**

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# **From Reader Review The Blood of Heroes: The 13-Day Struggle for the Alamo--and the Sacrifice That Forged a Nation for online ebook**

## **Tom Darrow says**

More a book about the totality of the Texas Revolution than one just about the battle at the Alamo. This book traces the origins of the conflict back 30+ years before it started and covers the backgrounds of the major players, like Santa Ana, Travis, Bowie and Crockett, and their reasons for going to Texas in the first place. These characters, and others of lesser renown and importance, are all illustrated quite well. The book also covers the importance of San Antonio throughout the whole period... the battle (actually several battles) were fought there for a reason. The buildup to the battle is well done, but the coverage of the battle is short, which makes sense since 1) it was a relatively short battle and 2) there are hardly any primary source accounts of the fighting, since the defenders were all killed.

Scholarly speaking, the majority of this book doesn't break much new ground. Donovan claims that the battle at the Alamo was an important one in Texan and American history, and that kind of goes without saying. This is written more like a story than a scholarly book, although there is quite a bit of research included. The sources are noted in the back of the book, but they are not footnoted, so a person intending to use this book for research purposes might be a little annoyed, but the lack of footnotes on each page makes for a much easier read.

One area where Donovan does break some new scholarly ground is in his final chapter where he discusses the historiography and accuracy of the story of Col. Travis drawing the line in the dirt with his sword. Donovan traces the origins of this account and how it was added on to, edited and forgotten over time. He ultimately reaches the conclusion that the story is about as accurate as anything we know about the Alamo, given the lack of primary accounts.

Overall, this was a very enjoyable book. Entertaining, educational and a fast, easy read.

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## **Kyle says**

As I have mentioned before, I am a history enthusiast. What I may not have mentioned is that I grew and lived in Texas. After serving in the military for 20 years, I got a job with the government and lo and behold, I was back in Texas. I know Texas history. You can't help it if you grow up there, as when I was child, Texas history was the only history of the world.

With this in mind, there are not many from Texas who don't know about the Alamo. But after reading this book, I learned a lot more about the battle of the Alamo, about the events that both preceded and transpired after and because of the Alamo, the key point being; because of the Alamo. I was reintroduced to Travis, Crockett, Houston, Deaf Smith, Fannin, and others, who were all part of or effected by the Alamo.

The author (researcher) did an outstanding job of bringing these characters to life and revealing to the reader, based upon in-depth research, letters, interviews in papers from the time, etc., who these people really were and what this battle was all about.

I did not know that it was followed and the front page of most American papers. The author points out that before the battle of the Alamo, approximately 75 percent of the people fighting for Texas independence before the Alamo, were Texicans. After the fall of the Alamo and at the battle of San Jacinto, (which won Texas its independence from Mexico for all of you not from Texas), that percentage changed to 75% fighting

for Texas independence were Americans. The since of freedom and liberty was powerful and a strong fabric of America, which still had veterans from the revolutionary war. Many who fought and died at the Alamo, had fathers who fought in the revolutionary war. Freedom and liberty, were not meaningless words to them. Those words were what everyone believed in and anyone who interfered with those unalienable rights was a tyrant, like Santa Anna.

This was an insightful and interesting book, well researched and well written. History and the study of history can be dry, but Mr. Donovan, brings these real people to life, reveals them to you on a personal basis, in which you get to know them as ordinary people in extraordinary times.

If you are a history enthusiast or are interested in the factual account of the battle of the Alamo, I would strongly recommend this book.

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### **Zach Goldman says**

It's trite to say that a non-fiction book "reads like a novel," but this one seemed to have all the characteristics: It had the villain in Santa Anna who was ruthless in giving no quarter to prisoners, the brave heroes of The Alamo who knew they were going to fight to the death, the climactic scene when the Mexican army storms the mission, and the happy ending when Sam Houston's army realizes revenge against Santa Anna at The Battle of San Jacinto. I couldn't put it down, and I even enjoyed the Afterword where Donovan describes his research in trying to differentiate between fact and fiction in the days leading up to the battle, considering a paucity of witness testimony inside the mission (a familiar problem for those who've read about The Battle of the Little Bighorn). Thanks to this book, I will have tremendous appreciation and respect for The Alamo when I come down and visit.

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### **Kelley says**

I recently read "A Terrible Glory" (Custer and the Little Big Horn) by James Donovan and was so impressed with it that I immediately went out and bought "The Blood of Heroes". I found it to be an excellent read. I knew the basics of the story of the Alamo, but Donovan's in-depth research and telling the story from the perspective of both the Texians and the Mexicans really brought this struggle to life. As with his Custer book, Donovan manages to build suspense, even though the reader already knows how the story ends. Donovan does not end the narrative with the massacre at the Alamo, but goes on to include the Massacre at Goliad (which I was not familiar with) and the Battle of San Jacinto, which contrasts nicely the willingness of the rebels to die for a free Texas with the unwillingness of Santa Ana to die for a retained Texas. Donovan adds an epilogue telling what happened to key persons following the siege and the War of Texas Independence. Donovan also devotes an entire chapter to the issue of whether Travis actually drew a line in the sand and asked those willing to stand with him to step across it. Donovan presents a somewhat convincing argument that this event actually did occur, though other historians disagree. If it didn't, it should of. An excellent history, in my opinion.

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### **Ed Arnold says**

As a recent transplant to San Antonio, it was a real pleasure to get a broader perspective on the Battle of the Alamo. Though the book is owed beautifully, it can still be a bit difficult to imagine the distances and positions of the various actors in the story. As the author admits - and is the case in nearly all narrative non-

fiction - it's near impossible to create a perfectly accurate portrait of events, but for those of us needing a deep but graspable understanding of the Alamo and it's place in U.S. history, this is a solid book.

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## **Rich Fein says**

Is hard to locate someone who hasn't heard of the Alamo and some version, usually limited to widely accepted events related to it. The author has done an unusually thorough job of piecing together the varied pieces of information about the event and beyond. The context of the actions taken by the principals are so well set out you almost feel you are reading a detailed first hand account published by an accurate reporter on the scene of each. I asked myself at the start, why did so many corral themselves in that structure to face almost certain death. They were clearly outnumbered and facing a strong experienced military leadership with strong motivation and far superior force. The needed support was slow in coming and too limited to help. The author by laying out the then recent history of the Revolutionary War easily displayed the motivating parallels. It didn't take until the end of the book to accept that motivation of a time so far removed from today. The future of the country relied on those heroes. Worth the time it takes to complete. Well written and documented.

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## **Matt says**

**Prince Geoffrey: My you chivalric fool. As if the way one fell down mattered.**

**Prince Richard: When the fall is all there is – it matters...**

-- John Castle and Anthony Hopkins in *The Lion in Winter*

The first time I ever saw the Alamo, I had just consumed a 46 ounce margarita at *The Republic of Texas Restaurant* on the Riverwalk.

My wife and I had made it to San Antonio earlier in the evening, having started out in Baton Rouge, Louisiana (and with a side-trip to the environs of Houston to see the San Jacinto Battlefield). After dropping off our stuff, we'd walked to the Riverwalk to find something to eat. Since I have very little patience for standing in lines, combined with a strong affinity for souvenir glasses, we took our seats at *The Republic of Texas Restaurant*, and ordered up 92 total ounces of tequila, triple sec, and lime juice.

Then we walked to the Alamo.

To back up: I have always loved the Alamo. Since I was five and my parents put *Davy Crockett: King of the Wild Frontier* into the VCR. I've watched every Alamo movie; read every Alamo book I could get my hands on; and even managed to have a recurring series of disturbing Alamo dreams. But I'd never gone to see the Alamo for myself, mainly because I was scared of Texas.

That had finally changed.

I'd been told that the Alamo was smaller than you'd expect. So when I walked up to it (and you can walk right up to it at any time – it's *right* there), the only thing that surprised me was the vast power of its

diminutiveness. Often we are awed by size and spectacle, by things the mind can almost not conceive. I got the same feeling from the Alamo as I would from the Grand Canyon, but for the opposite reason. The Alamo's scale was finite and human and conceivable; the size of the old Spanish chapel spoke profoundly of the close, intimate violence that occurred there in the early morning hours of March 6, 1836.

(To be clear, the Alamo has been reduced to one low building and the famous Alamo chapel; 90 percent of the walls and buildings have been demolished. For instance, the western wall, assailed by General Cos, has been replaced by a row of garish entertainments, including a wax museum and a *Ripley's Believe It or Not*).

The Alamo has a grip on my imagination, so when I saw James Donovan's *The Blood of Heroes*, I was powerless to avoid purchasing it.

It helped that Donovan's last book, *A Terrible Glory*, had done a fine job of updating and retelling the Battle of the Little Bighorn. In many ways, *Heroes* is a lot like that previous book. Both are written as popular histories and aimed at the general public; however, both are also researched well enough to hold the interest of Alamo fanatics.

(Interestingly, both the Alamo and Custer's Last Stand have birthed sizeable communities of amateur historians and obsessives who've devoted sizeable portions of their lives to the minutiae of these battles. I know this because I am a lurker on their message boards).

Donovan chooses to tell his version of the Alamo as a narrative. By this, I mean that he presents the siege and battle as a mostly-seamless story, following the tried-and-true method of "this happened and then this happened and then this happened." There is very little hemming and hawing or quibbling over the facts; instead, Donovan chooses the version of history he believes, and delivers that version without academic discussion within the body of the text.

This is the prototype for a popular history. Rather than confusing the uninitiated or repelling the newcomer, Donovan opens the subject to the most casual of readers. *The Blood of Heroes*, despite its narrowing subtitle, is actually an extremely accessible overview of the Texas War of Independence. It spends many pages setting the context of the siege and battle, including the First Battle of the Alamo, when the Texans forced General Cos to surrender the garrison. Also covered – albeit briefly – is the massacre at Goliad and the slaughter at San Jacinto.

I was absorbed by this book, as I cannot help but be absorbed by the fascinating, morally ambiguous struggle waged between Santa Anna's Mexican army and the rebel forces comprised of Texans, Americans, and Tejanos.

Still, I was disappointed with Donovan's decision to give the Alamo the narrative treatment. I say this for two reasons.

The first, lesser reason is that Donovan doesn't bring much flair to the story. If you are going to go the novelistic, narrative route, it helps if you have some of the prose talent or vigor of a Shelby Foote. Donovan's writing is just there. Serviceable, workmanlike, and clear, yet it lays heavily on the page, refusing to do more.

Critiquing prose is a difficult thing. I might as well sit here and attempt to explain love or faith. The best I can do is provide a comparison to another book: T.R. Fehrenbach's *Lone Star*. Of Travis, Fehrenbach wrote:

The greatest measure of his ability was not the bravery he had shown in inciting the Texas rebellion, or his citation under fire at San Antonio...It was revealed when Bowie's health failed as the Mexicans approached, and Travis took command of the men, and held them...The true measure of this man, with his soldier's cap, his sword, his exalted ideas of honor, and his florid rhetoric, was that he captured these violent frontiersmen and bent them to his purpose...Buck Travis was one of those most fortunate of men; on the grim stone walls of the Alamo he had found his time and place. He was between twenty-five and twenty-seven years of age.

In this one paragraph, amid a relatively short chapter on the Alamo and the Texas Revolution, Fehrenbach breathes more life into Travis than Donovan manages in all his chapters. Fehrenbach's word choices – how Travis “bent” men to his will; the “grim walls” of the Alamo; even the refusal to give Travis's exact age, which is known – bestirs the imagination, conjures up an image in the mind's eye. Travis becomes flesh and blood. In Donovan's hands, with his unadorned Joe-Friday-just-the-facts approach, Travis remains as lifeless as his stone image in the Alamo cenotaph.

Of course, this is a question of highly subjective taste (within the already-subjective realm of book reviewing). Suffice it to say, I noticed on the cover that someone had compared Donovan's work to Walter Lord's classic *A Time to Stand*. In terms of narrative verve, Donovan does not come close to Lord.

My other, larger criticism of Donovan's choice of the narrative form is that the Alamo does not lend itself to a narrative. Simply put, there is too much unknown about the battle, and what is known is hotly debated. Every day of the siege must be reconstructed from primary accounts that often dramatically conflict.

Take, for example, the battle of Gettysburg. One hundred thousand participants, tens of thousands of survivors, thousands of literate witnesses, intact command structures, surviving reports and orders. We can say with something close to certainty what happened at Gettysburg. Certainly, we can argue at the margins about small details, motivations, or whether someone really said what they said, but the main thrust of the battle has been revealed by dozens or hundreds or thousands of corroborating witnesses. Accordingly, Gettysburg is the perfect battle to place into a narrative.

The Alamo is not like that. We have precious few primary sources. Many of the primary sources are of dubious value. One of the best sources – de la Pena – has been alleged to be a fraud. The only Anglo adult to survive the Alamo, Susanna Dickinson (or Dickenson, or Dickerson) was illiterate, so all of her words come to us secondhand, from the pen of another. You can't take a step in Alamo studies without fierce debates.

My worry – if that's the right word – is that Alamo newcomers will read this story and think it's just that cut-and-dried. To be fair, at some points, Donovan does explain in the text that his version of history is controversial. This is most evident in his quirky (among modern historians) belief that Travis *did* draw a line in the sand, and that Louis Rose, “the man from the Alamo,” *did* climb over the walls and escape the doomed garrison. Mostly, though, these discussions take place in the footnotes, leaving the reader with a straightforward story of an event that is not straightforward.

Moreover, it is the unknown that makes the Alamo fascinating. Though Gettysburg is the most important battle in American history, it has precious few fanatics. The Alamo, though, has legions of devotees. And the reason is that it is a mystery. It requires study, and digging, and close parsing of sources, and maybe a visit to an old courthouse to see some land records, and when you've done all that work, you get to fill the interstices with your imagination, and no matter how much work you do, it's still guesswork; no one can ever be right;

and the whole wheel keeps turning.

It's fun! Trust me. It is a lot of fun.

That was my wish for this book. That Donovan, an author and historian I admire, would've written a certain kind of book: the one that weighs and balances all the competing stories and theories and controversies. I would've liked to see Donovan spend more time on the breakouts, since as many as a third of the Alamo defenders attempted to escape (there is barely a paragraph on this momentous occurrence). I would've liked an entire chapter devoted to Crockett's demise, rather than an extended discussion in the endnotes. I would've liked Donovan to have removed the cursory chapters on San Jacinto and Goliad and replace them with an expansion of his thoughtful comments on the veracity of the de la Pena manuscript.

That this book did not fulfill my wishes is of small matter. It did not set out to please me, but others. In that respect, with regards to its target audience, it succeeds.

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### **Derrick Jeter says**

Legend and myth shroud the thirteen day standoff at Mission San Antonio de Valero, better known as the Alamo. For many popular historians and movie makers the famous line from John Ford's 1962 movie, *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*, serves as a guiding light when it comes to the Alamo: "When the legend becomes fact, print the legend."

Legend and myth has grown thick around the siege and battle that took place in the small Texas village of San Antonio de Béxar, on the distant edge of civilization. And like the prickly pear cactus that grows thick in the hills outside of San Antonio, the truth of exactly what transpired during those thirteen days at the Alamo is not easy to grasp. But James Donovan attempts just that in the most comprehensive account in recent memory.

Donovan's *The Blood of Heroes: The 13-Day Struggle for the Alamo—and the Sacrifice that Forged a Nation* is a narrative history that covers more than just thirteen days in February/March 1836. Donovan's book is really a history of the Texas Revolution, with the Alamo playing the starring role. ...

To read the rest of my review, visit: <http://derrickjeter.com/2014/03/20/bl...>

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### **Shawn says**

"*The Blood of Heroes; the 13-Day Struggle for the Alamo – And the Sacrifice that Forged a Nation*" is the second James Donovan book that I have read. His first, "*A Terrible Glory*", dealt with Custer and the Battle of the Little Bighorn and I was not terribly impressed. It was very well written and up to date, but not particularly in-depth or eloquent. I rated "*A Terrible Glory*" highly however, because I felt that I had been unfairly comparing it to Evan S Connell's "*Son of the Morning Star*", perhaps the most magnificent nonfiction work ever written about the American West.

I enjoyed his second book, "*The Blood of Heroes*" much better than "*A Terrible Glory*", perhaps because I knew less about the engagement and the politics of the Texas Revolution. Once again, there is very little



stirring language; it does not tempt one to ponder on many of the mysteries of the confrontation at San Antonio de Bexar, but it is an easy read. I feel that I understand a great deal more about the motivations of the Texas, Tejanos and the Americans who joined the rebellion.

The author chose the contested theories and interpretations of events that he agreed with and laid the story out in a simple chronological order. I found this educational and effective, but I was disappointed he did not explore many of the controversies in the text. What actually was said during the alleged line in the sand speech? How did Crockett die? How many Texans fled their posts? I feel the author missed an opportunity addressing these controversies within the notes. With this in mind the book is an excellent introductory work to the Alamo and the personalities of the Texas Revolution.

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## **Joe says**

I was looking for a historical book on the Alamo prior to a visit to San Antonio. Overall the book was interesting, though I wouldn't say it was so compelling that I just couldn't stop reading. The writing style is pretty straight-forward, but could be a bit dry reading at times. I did really appreciate the background and context leading up to the seige at the Alamo and the follow-on battle at San Jacinto. It seemed like the right amount of detail to set the stage and also finish the story.

The book was very interesting to me in terms of dispelling the mythology of the 'great stand at the Alamo' mythology one picks up as a kid. The writing seemed to be reasonably objective in terms of providing both Mexican and Texan perspectives, both the valiant and bad actions of each. I also appreciated the background on David Crockett, Jim Bowie and William Travis, and how Travis and Bowie, who have been held up as heroes, also had some seriously sketchy backgrounds. Overall a good read for those interested in more background on the Alamo within the context of the war for Texas' independence.

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## **Taylor says**

Donovan's work should be required reading. For everyone. Students, teachers, historians, old, young, green, yellow, purple, what have you.

I love nonfiction. The majority of what I read is nonfiction, so I've experienced a pretty wide variety of writing styles when it comes to retelling history. James Donovan is hands and feet above literally everyone, ever. He writes clearly and expressively, but with very little personal commentary. Events are linear but multi-faceted. He provides a wealth of different points of view and gives you the background you need to understand the significance of what happened. Most importantly, he tells it in a way that makes it feel vital to the reader. I was there, I knew these people, I could smell the gunpowder and hear the roar of chaos.

Do yourself a favor. Read this book. It's actually a teleportation device that will transport you to Texas and teach you something new even if you're well-versed in Texas history. As a born and bred Texan, I have never learned about the Alamo the way Donovan illustrates it here.

And then when you're done, read his other book, A Terrible Glory, which is about Custer and his infamous last stand.

And then email Donovan and tell him to write more books because frankly I don't know what I'll do now that I'm done.

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### **Patty says**

I have stated before in reviews of book on American history that my knowledge is weak on my own country's history. I have always been far more fascinated with Europe's history. I have, though been making an effort to learn more about the events that formed the United States. Most school children know the battle cry, "Remember the Alamo" but how many of them know what went on AT the Alamo? In all honesty no one REALLY knows but Mr. Donovan writes a fascinating and well researched book taking us on the journey from shortly before that fateful battle to its immediate aftermath.

Many of the people involved are ingrained in American history; Jim Bowie, Davy Crockey, William Travis and then there is Santa Anna, the Mexican General who was going to win at all costs. His story is included as he is as much a part of the story of the Alamo as the others.

The book builds slowly to the defining day, discussing the politics of Mexico, the U.S. and Texas as it was looking to be independent from Mexico and be its own country. Many of the "heroes" had very interesting back stories of which I was completely unaware. The details included made the book move right along like a novel and I am now further educated on another piece of this country's history without feeling like I had to slog through a history lesson. It was a fascinating read.

As no one in command on the Texian side survived the battle most of the written historical sources are Mexican. A recent find has given new clues but Mr. Donovan and others do not completely believe its veracity. As with anything in history the story is written by the victors and the reality is mostly lost. This new book presents an even handed telling of a seminal event in the formation of Texas.

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### **Robert Melnyk says**

Excellent book on the Battle of The Alamo. I was always a huge Davy Crockett fan growing up as a kid, so this book looked interesting to me :-). Although the book certainly talked about Davy Crockett, it really focused much more on the many other characters involved in this historical event. It also spent a good deal of time explaining the history of what led up to the battle, as well as what happened after the battle. Definite good read for those into American History, especially during that time frame.

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### **Anthony Whitt says**

Donovan does an outstanding job covering the complex and fluid situation in the battle for Texas independence. It's a page turner that takes the reader through multiple perspectives leading up to the climatic battle and its aftermath giving birth to a new nation. An excellent read.

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## **Kerry says**

I very rarely read non-fiction that is not relevant to my profession, but after visiting The Alamo, I really wanted to learn more about that epic battle, and "The Blood of Heroes" was highly rated. I was a bit lost in the beginning, because there were so many people to try and keep straight, but once I got into it, I had a really hard time putting it down. My poor husband (who knows a lot about this era) was constantly being interrupted with, "Did you know this?" or "Oh my gosh! Listen to this!". This book was thoroughly researched and highly readable. I finished it two days ago, and still have that empty feeling you get when you still want to be reading it. I now feel like I need to return to the Alamo to see it with new eyes and a greater appreciation for what happened there and why.

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