



Texian Iliad: A Military History of the Texas Revolution, 1835-1836

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Hardly were the last shots fired at the Alamo before the Texas Revolution entered the realm of myth and controversy. French visitor Frederic Gaillardet called it a "Texian Iliad" in 1839, while American Theodore Sedgwick pronounced the war and its resulting legends "almost burlesque." In this new, highly readable history, Stephen L. Hardin discovers more than a little truth in both of those views. Drawing on many original Texan and Mexican sources and on-site inspections of almost every battlefield, he offers the first complete military history of the Revolution. From the war's opening in the "Come and Take It" incident at Gonzales to the capture of General Santa Anna at San Jacinto, Hardin clearly describes the strategy and tactics of each side. His research yields new knowledge of the actions of famous Texan and Mexican leaders, as well as fascinating descriptions of battle and camp life from the ordinary soldier's point of view. This in-depth coverage reveals the gallantry displayed by individuals on both sides of the conflict, as well as the atrocities of war. Most of all, it provides a balanced view of the Revolution that fairly assesses the conduct of both Texans and Mexicans. Texian Iliad belongs on the bookshelf of everyone interested in Texas or military history, as well as of general readers who want the facts behind the legends.

Texian Iliad: A Military History of the Texas Revolution, 1835-1836 Details

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From Reader Review *Texian Iliad: A Military History of the Texas Revolution, 1835-1836* for online ebook

Carol Lea says

Great book about the Texas Revolution. Well written and dispels stereotypes.

Christopher says

Tremendous. Scrupulously fair, exhaustively researched, direct and unsparing in its critical appraisals, and utterly lacking in Anglo chauvinism or self-justifying triumphalism. At times I disagreed with the emphasis given to the significance of certain tactical factors (e.g. all Anglo victories coming in close terrain that benefitted sharp-shooting riflemen, etc.), but this is a very minor quibble. This book is the definitive military account of the Texas Revolution.

Juan says

Puts the reader on the ground to bring into focus the complexities of the fascinating history of Texas and those that played vital roles. The forces and circumstances that brought forth a republic are eye opening and they all seem to swell from the ridiculous and seemingly pompous ass Santa Ana and his Napoleon of the west thrifty methods of warfare and engagement. For his suspect military prowess, Santa Anna lacked the imagination to understand the disadvantage posed by the Kentucky long rifles and the antiquated Mexican muskets. So much information and appreciation to both sides of the conflict. A very worthy historical read. Wanted more.

Matt says

“My doom has come upon me; let me not then die ingloriously and without a struggle, but let me first do some great thing that shall be told among men hereafter.”

- Homer, *The Iliad*

“Mexicans charged through the shattered openings to finish the work begun by the captured cannon. In the darkened rooms of the long barracks, the adversaries grappled with Bowie knife and bayonet. Having seen their men shot down after flags of truce had been raised, the *soldados* took no prisoners, slaughtering even the wounded. A few Texians sought to escape by bounding over the east wall and running for cover, but the lancers made short work of them. The butchering was repeated in the rooms along the south wall; even the delirious Bowie, too weak to rise from his sickbed, found no mercy. But then, neither would he have asked for it...”

- Stephen Hardin, describing the Battle of the Alamo, in *Texian Iliad*.

For many of us, the Texas Revolution is like any other historical event. It's something that happened in the past. Maybe we know about it, maybe we don't. Maybe we're interested, maybe we aren't.

For Texans, the Texas Revolution is a bit more. Think of it as a combination of the creation of the world, the birth of Jesus, and the invention of rock & roll. It is a singular historical moment. More than that, it is a battle that never ends. San Jacinto concluded hostilities between insurgent Texians and Mexican troopers in April 1836. The war over what that meant, whether it was a heroic fight for liberty or a greedy land grab by illegal immigrants, continues to this day.

Stephen Hardin's *Texian Iliad* neatly sidesteps the many attendant controversies of the Texas Revolution by focusing only on the actual conflict itself, not the politics and policies. This is a military history, concerned with weaponry, tactics, and casualties. Those looking for the underlying causes and the complicated progression of events that began with Mexico seceding from Spain and ended with America annexing Texas will have to look elsewhere. For those who are satisfied with a rousing story of men at arms, however, this is hard to top. *Texian Iliad* is an acknowledged classic, and it lives up to its reputation.

Dispensing with a long set up, Hardin jumps into the War for Texas Independence immediately. He begins his tale at Gonzalez, where Mexican troops arrived to take possession of a mostly-useless cannon that had been gifted to the town to scare off Indians. At the so-called "Lexington of the Texas Revolution," the townspeople hoisted a "Come and Take It" flag, and sparked a rebellion. Six months later, after the Battle of Conception, the Texian Siege of Bexar, the Mexican Siege and assault of the Alamo, the coldblooded massacre of surrendered Texians at Goliad, and the bloody, merciless slaughter of Santa Anna's troops at San Jacinto, the rebellion symbolically ended with Texians triumphant. (Border squabbles continued for decades after. They continue, in point of fact, to this day).

This is a big, epic drama that is artfully compressed into 250 pages of text, many of those pages devoted to illustrations. Hardin's narration moves quickly without dispensing with substance. By knowing exactly what story he wants to tell (the military side), he is able to pare things down to the most pertinent details. Hardin is a meticulous researcher and a noted scholar of Texas history. He is also, happily, an excellent writer, and his battle-scenes are exciting and cordite-pungent without drifting into hyperbole or hero-worship. His chapter on the Alamo is excellent, as is his unblinking portrayal of San Jacinto, which does a sobering job demonstrating the price of vengeance:

The actual battle lasted no more than eighteen minutes, but the slaughter continued much longer. Determined to avenge the loss of those killed at the Alamo and Goliad, the bloodthirsty rebels committed atrocities at least as beastly as those the Mexicans had committed. Sergeant Moses Bryan came across a Mexican drummer boy with both legs broken. The frightened child had grabbed a Texian soldier around the legs, all the while screaming, "*Ave Maria purissima! Por Dios, salva mi vida!*" Bryan begged the man to spare the youth, but the pitiless brute, in a threatening gesture, placed a hand on his belt pistol. Bryan backed away and watched in horror as the man "blew out the boy's brains."

Hardin does a fantastic job with the battles. He is equally as good with the tactics and equipage of both the Texian and Mexican Armies. He goes beyond the stereotype and received wisdom (e.g., the Texians were all sharpshooters with Kentucky rifles; the Mexicans were a mob army) to separate the strengths and weaknesses of both sides. Sure, many of the Americans fighting for Texas had accurate long-rifles, good for fighting at a distance; once Mexican troops began pouring over the Alamo's walls, though, those long-rifles became a liability, as it took longer to load them. Similarly, many of the Mexican troops *were* ragged and unruly or, even worse, had been pressed into service. But their cavalry outclassed the Texians by a wide measure, an ace they played many times during the Revolution. (Including, though Hardin doesn't dwell on

it, at the Alamo. Significant numbers of men attempted to escape in the darkness. It cannot be proven that any made it through the cordon of lancers).

Texian Iliad is a book that comes with a tremendous amount of added value. Specifically, it is illustrated by Gary Zaboly. If you're unfamiliar with Texas history, Zaboly is a bit of a legend in those circles. His detailed ink drawings literally give us a view of the past before photography became widespread. He has conjured lost images by doing enormous amounts of research on extant objects, so that uniforms, belt buckles, shoes, weaponry, and so forth, are all accurately presented. He also did some maps and diagrams, including the three phases of the Alamo's demise that clearly portrays how the battle flowed (or at least, a reasonable guess as to how it flowed). I don't usually judge a book based on its illustrations. Heck, I seldom even mention it. Here, I would've been halfway to happy with *Texian Iliad* based on Zaboly's contributions alone.

In his epilogue, Hardin provides a thoughtful little essay on the Texas Revolution, and what it has meant for people on both sides of the border. However, he doesn't spend a lot of time worrying over the bigger meaning of the event. He leaves that for others, because that's not his focus. Rather, he knows that there is real value to be had simply in presenting an incredible story in an entertaining fashion. That's his goal, which he accomplishes. To compare the Texas Revolution to a Homeric saga, as Hardin does with his very title, is quite a claim. But it's a claim that he proves convincingly.

Mike says

I purchased this book in San Antonio after visiting the Alamo and other historic sites. It appears to be a good book for the military historian, but is not a compelling novel. The author reports that: 1. the separation of Texas, the southwest, from Mexico did not end Mexico's intent to recapture these lands, 2. the risk of invasion from Mexico did not end until the US's "War with Mexico" and the US occupation of Mexico City, 3. the heroism and sacrifice were real, and 4. the rebels won in spite of themselves and with the help of Santa Ana's ineptitude. Another interesting tidbit is that several hundred US Army troops served with the rebel army. All in all, I prefer the movies.

George Nap says

Engaging book, read it in a day and a half. Giving it 3.5 stars, but have to pick whole numbers, rounding it up to 4 on the strength of the author's prose.

An episodic treatment of the Texas Revolution, with vignettes covering the participant armies and their uniforms starting each chapter.

After research, I sought this volume out after identifying it from reviews as the least slanted of books covering this conflict. I found it to be more factual and academic than I had expected. While not engaging in myth-making or extension, it does offer conclusions concerning the pantheon of Texans - and General Urrea - involved, rather than allowing the reader to reach their own conclusion. I prefer to find my own way, a good author is more a presenter than a guide in my estimation.

The book is still written from the Texian point of view, I was looking for something even less shaded to any side. (Hence only four stars). I had hoped to hear more about the soldados. There are numerous nods toward

the Mexican soldiers, but their stories are less well developed and are more of asides than the stories of their opponents.

It is engaging, which is why I read it eagerly and quickly. In the end, I did not find what I was looking for, 3.5 stars.

Lee Preiss says

A really well researched historical account. I enjoyed the point of view that didn't so much destroy the myths as make them more human. They fought and died for their beliefs and dreams.

Hayden says

Very good narrative of the military history of the Texas Revolution all the way from Gonzales to San Jacinto. Gives multiple perspectives and tells the story in an objective way to undo some of the myths surrounding this conflict.

Jason says

The book is a little redundant if the reader already knows a lot of Texas revolutionary history, but it does provide details and focus on the military, which many other books do not. It's a quick read for any Texan, and I would recommend it.

Kenneth Barber says

This is an interesting book on the the Texas Revolution of 1835-36. It's not the typical glorification of the Texans. He discusses how disorganized the Texas population was concerning the revolution. Victory was achieved more on blunders by Santa Anna than Texian efforts. The Mexican policy of no prisoners led to atrocities at the Alamo and Goliad. These atrocities were repaid at San Jacinto. Interesting look at the Texas Revolution.

Joseph says

This book dashes some "texas/texan" stereotypes to the ground and firmly confirms others. The author did an excellent job of presenting the military history of the events surrounding the Alamo in a highly entertaining, unbiased, and informational manner while adding just enough "color" (from actual accounts of those involved in the incidents) to keep it all rolling.

Gary Klein says

Outstanding book on the Texas Revolution from its beginnings in Gonzales, TX to the aftermath of the Battle of San Jacinto. This book does a great job weaving in the lives of Stephen F. Austin, Sam Houston, David "Davy" Crockett, and a host of other less known Texian and Mexican characters. The Republic of Texas faced repeated setbacks to Mexican General Santa Anna yet ultimately won the war. Mexico's over-extended lines of communication and Santa Anna's hubris towards the Texian Army made significant contributions towards the final outcome.

Fredrick Danysh says

An interesting history of the events regarding the war for independence of Texas from Mexico. Addresses the fact that the war was over the Mexican dictator, Santa Anna de Lopez failing to abide by the Mexican Constitution of 1824. It also emphasizes that many hispanic Texicans sided with the revolutionary forces.

tea_for_two says

A solid, well-written account of the Texas Revolution, primarily from the military angle. At times, especially in the beginning, I felt like I had been dropped into an on-going narrative, and I think the book would have benefited from a bit more context and attention to the cultural and political situations. However, Hardin does state in the introduction that Texan Iliad is specifically a military history and gives a recommendation for a political history of the Texas Revolution. While Hardin is a professor of Texas history and is telling a uniquely Texan story, he takes pains to take multiple perspectives into account, and doesn't gloss over the atrocities committed by both sides. Overall, an excellent and accessible account of the Texas Revolution.

Brendan Steinhauser says

A concise military history of the Texas Revolution of 1835-36. A good book that raises interesting questions about the most famous battles of Texas history, but also describes the skirmishes and other small battles that led to Texas independence from Mexico. Well worth the read.
