Bios – Men at the Alamo

Directions: Read the biographies on the leaders at the Alamo and answer the questions below.

William Travis

1. What profession did William Travis practice?

2. Why was Travis left in charge of the Alamo?

3. When did the Battle of the Alamo take place?

James Bowie

1. What is Jim Bowie best known for?

2. What was Bowie doing in Texas?

3. What was Bowie in charge of at the Alamo?

4. Why was Bowie unable to fight during the battle at the Alamo?

Davy Crockett

1. Why did Davy Crockett run away from home?

2. What state did Crockett represent in Congress?

3. What was the name of his rifle?

4. What is Crockett best known for?
William Barret Travis
(1809-1836)

Born in South Carolina on 9 August 1809, William Barret Travis will always be remembered as the Texas commander at the Battle of the Alamo. He spent his childhood in Saluda Co., SC, which was also the home of James Butler Bonham, another Alamo defender.

Travis studied law and became a practicing attorney for a brief time before marrying Rosanna Cato at the age of nineteen. Within a year, when Travis was barely twenty years old, they had a son, Charles Edward Travis. Remaining in the area, Travis began publication of a newspaper, became a Mason, and joined the militia. The marriage soon failed, however. Travis abandoned his wife, son, and an unborn daughter, and headed for Texas.

After arriving in Texas in early 1831, Travis obtained land from Stephen F. Austin. He set up to practice law first in the town of Anahuac, and afterwards at San Felipe.

When friction developed between Texas and Mexico, Travis was one of the first to join the Texas forces. When Mexican General Martin Perfecto de Cos demanded the surrender of the Texan's cannon that resulted in the Battle of Gonzales, Travis was one of hundreds to come to the its defense. He arrived too late, however, to take part in the action.

On orders from Provisional Governor Henry Smith in January of 1836, Travis entered the Alamo with about 30 men. Within a few days, he found himself in command, when then commander James C. Neill took leave to care for his family.

Travis commanded the Texas defenders during the Siege and Battle of the Alamo. His Appeal from the Alamo for reinforcements has become an American symbol of unyielding courage and heroism. Although a few reinforcements arrived before the Alamo fell, Travis and over 180 defenders gave their lives for Texas independence on 6 March 1836.

Remarkably, Travis was only twenty-six years of age at the time of his death.
Known for his famous "Bowie knife" and a sometimes reckless adventurer, Jim Bowie is now immortalized as one of the true folk heroes in early Texas.

Bowie was born in Kentucky in 1796. While still very young, he moved with his family, first to Missouri, then in 1802 to Louisiana, where he spent most of his youth. It was there that he first acquired a reputation for his bold and fearless disposition.

In 1827, Bowie participated in a bloody brawl near Natchez, Mississippi, where several men were killed and Bowie was wounded. After recovering the following year, he moved to Texas.

Before the revolution in Texas, Bowie took part in many adventures. He spent considerable time cultivating friendships with Indians in his search for elusive silver and gold reported to be hidden in the interior of Texas. By some accounts, he is said to have found the fabled San Saba mines, also known as the Bowie mines, near the geographic center of present day Texas.

In the Texas Revolution, Bowie was a leading participant at the Battle of Concepcion and in the Grass Fight near San Antonio. He was in command of a volunteer force in San Antonio when William Travis arrived with regular army troops. The two men shared authority during much of the Siege of the Alamo, which caused some personal friction. But pneumonia disabled Bowie, and he was confined to his cot at the time of his death on March 6, 1836 at the Battle of the Alamo.
DAVY CROCKETT

"Be always sure you are right, then go ahead."

Davy Crockett, the celebrated hero, warrior and backwoods statesman, was born August 17, 1786 in a small cabin on the banks of the romantic Nolichucky River, near the mouth of Limestone Creek, which today lies about three and a half miles off 11-E Highway near Limestone, Tennessee.

David "Davy" Crockett was the fifth of nine children and the fifth son born to John and Rebecca Hawkins Crockett. The Crocketts were a self-sufficient, independent family.

Davy Crockett stands for the Spirit of the American Frontier. As a young man he was a crafty Indian fighter and hunter. When he was forty-nine years old, he died a hero's death at the Alamo, helping Texas win independence from Mexico. For many years he was nationally known as a political representative of the frontier.

The elder Davy Crockett, Davy's grandfather, left the settled lands of North Carolina and crossed the mountains into present-day East Tennessee, in search of fresh territory to settle. While his older sons were away with the Revolutionary army at King's Mountain in 1777, the grandfather and his wife, were two of a dozen or so settlers living near present-day Rogersville who were massacred by Creek and Cherokee Indians.

John, Davy's father, soon moved to Greene County where Davy was born. While Davy was still in dresses, his father moved the family to Cove Creek in Greene County, Tennessee, where he built a mill in partnership with Thomas Galbreath. When Davy was eight years old, the mill was washed away with his home. After this disaster John Crockett removed his family to Jefferson County where he built and operated a log-cabin tavern on the Knoxville-Abingdon Road. (This cabin has been restored and is now located at Morristown, 30 miles Southwest of Greeneville.) The young Davy no doubt heard tales told by many a westbound traveler - tales which must have sparked his own desire for adventure in the great western territories. In his dealings with his father's customers, Davy must also have learned much about human nature and so refined his natural skills as a leader. While Davy lived there he spent four days at the school of Benjamin Kitchen. He had a fight with a boy at school and left home to escape a "licking" from his dad.

He got a job helping to drive cattle to Virginia. In Virginia, he worked for farmers, wagoners and hatmaker. After two and a half years, he returned home. Davy was now fifteen years old and approaching six feet in height. In those days a boy either worked for his father or turned over his pay if he worked for others. Upon promise of his freedom from this obligation, Davy worked a year for men to whom his father owed money. After working off these debts of his father's he continued with his last employer. He often borrowed his employer's rifle and soon became an expert marksman. From his wages he bought new clothes, a horse and a rifle of his own. He began to take part in the local shooting contests. At these contests the prices often were quarters of beef. A contestant would pay twenty-five cents for a single shot at the target and the best shot won the
quarter of beef. Davy's aim became so good that more than once, he won all four quarters of beef.

The son of Davy's employer conducted a school near-by, to which, for six months, Davy went four days a week and worked two. Except for the four days he had attended school when he was twelve, this was all the schooling Davy ever had.

Davy Crockett was licensed to marry Margaret Elder in 1805, but this license was never used. However, he was married to Polly Finlay in 1806, just after his twentieth birthday. They lived for the next few years in a small cabin near the Crockett family, where their two sons, John Wesley and William, were born. After Polly Finlay's death in 1815 he married Elizabeth Patton, a widow.

He was commander of a battalion in the Creek Indian War in 1813-1814. He was a member of the Tennessee legislature in 1821-1822 and again in 1823-1824, and of the twentieth Congress of the United States in the years 1827-1829, in the twenty-first Congress, 1829-1831 and again, in the twenty-third Congress, 1833-1835. To be a representative in the Tennessee legislature and then serve honorably as a member of Congress of the United States, was quite a feat for one with less than six months schooling. His motto was, "Be always sure you are right, then go ahead."

While he was a member of the legislature in 1821, the Governor had invited the entire legislature to dinner. A death had occurred and to receive the guests became the duty of the Governor and his twelve year old daughter. The members of the legislature had arranged to arrive as early as possible at the Governor's mansion to witness the arrival of Col. Davy Crockett. The eccentric backwoodsman, or bear hunter, as they called him, came promptly. Having arrived, the Governor presented his daughter to Col. Crockett. He took her by the hand and remarked to the Governor, "When I like a man, I always love his children," and kneeling down, he kissed her, saying, "God bless you my child". He arose no more the backwoodsman or bear hunter, but the most amiable, independent and courageous man in the Tennessee legislature, and such he proved himself to be.

His first, or original, gun is in Jefferson County and has been since 1806. His rifle "Betsy", presented by the Whigs of Philadelphia in 1834, is at Nashville, Tennessee. The tomahawk, or hatchet, presented in 1834 with a rifle, is in the Smithsonian Institute in Washington, D.C.

In March, 1836, Davy Crockett, with 139 others, was massacred at the Alamo. Usually, in battles, someone is left to tell the story, but the Alamo had no one. One hundred and eighty-seven men for eleven days withstood the Mexican army of the despot, Santa Anna. When the battle was done, all of the one hundred eighty-seven brave Americans, including Davy Crockett, lay dead on the ground; but with them also lay over two thousand Mexicans, who had died at their hands.

Yes, Davy Crockett of Tennessee, went far in his day by his own effort and achievement, and rose high in the esteem of his fellow men - from the humblest of beginnings, as is attested by the rough-hewn native limestone slab, still to be seen at the site of his birth in upper Greene County, near Limestone, in East Tennessee. His tombstone reads: "Davy Crockett, Pioneer, Patriot, Soldier, Trapper, Explorer, State Legislator, Congressman, Martyred at The Alamo. 1786 - 1836"

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Courtesy Davy Crockett Birthplace
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