

THE ATHENIAN WHO DIED IN THE ALAMO

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Someone from our city, Athens, Georgia, died in the Alamo on March 6, 1836, fighting for freedom and the cause of Texas Independence. An Athenian was one of the outnumbered, brave men who died heroically defending the Alamo in the famous battle that brought them eternal glory and brought infamy to Mexican Gen. Santa Anna, who ordered every defender of the Alamo slain.

I recently discovered this when rereading Walter Lord's classic book on the Alamo, A Time to Stand, published in 1961. According to Lord, among the 183 Alamo defenders from 18 states who were killed were five Georgians: Albert Calvin Grimes, William Wells, Manson Shied, Edwin T. Mitchell, and William T. Malone. Lord's book does not reveal the hometowns of the first four of these men, but it does state that William T. Malone was a native of Athens.

Few people in Georgia have ever heard of William T. Malone. Who was he? How did it happen that he ended up fighting and dying in the Alamo?

Although Bill Malone may be forgotten in the state of his birth, he is, along with the Alamo's other defenders, a hero in Texas. There is even a 3-page article about him, published in the Texas State Historical Association Quarterly in 1912. It is principally from facts contained in that article that I base the following account of the life and death of Malone.

In 1835 Bill Malone was the eldest son of a planter living near Athens. He was 18 years of age, with dark hair and a dark complexion; as a result of some unknown accident or incident his little finger on his left hand was missing. He was a wild and wayward young man and greatly enjoyed drinking alcoholic beverages. One night in the fall or winter of 1835 Malone went on what has been described as a "drinking spree" with friends. The next day, fearing the wrath of his father ("a man of strict habits," it is said, who frowned on dissipation), Malone fled Athens and journeyed to New Orleans.

Bill Malone's father then traveled to New Orleans to tell his son that all was forgiven and to beg him to return home. However, by the time he arrived, Bill Malone had already left on a boat bound for Texas.

In deciding to go to Texas, Bill Malone was typical of hundreds, perhaps thousands, of young men all over the United States who, itching for adventure and seeking their fortune, left home and headed for the wide spaces of Texas in the 1830's.

By late 1835 Malone had joined the army of Texas. A muster roll for November of that year shows that Malone was a member of an artillery company stationed in San Antonio.

The Mexican army under the command of Gen. Santa Anna began the siege of the Alamo in San Antonio on Feb. 23, 1836. There can be no doubt that Bill Malone was then one of the defenders of the Alamo stationed within its walls. Ben Highsmith was a member of the Alamo garrison who was sent away at the beginning of the siege in a vain effort to obtain reinforcements before the Mexican attack; he survived because he was unable to return to the Alamo prior to the attack. Highsmith later stated that when he left the Alamo one of its defenders was Bill Malone. A black slave in the Alamo who was not killed by the Mexicans also stated that Bill Malone had been one of the defenders inside the Alamo.

There can also be no doubt that Bill Malone perished while defending the Alamo. Mrs. Susannah Dickinson, the wife of one of the soldiers defending the Alamo, was inside the Alamo during the attack and was one of the handful of women, children, and black slaves not slain by the Mexicans. Mrs. Dickinson, an important source of information concerning the last days of the Alamo's defenders, later stated that she had seen Bill Malone killed in combat, "fighting bravely to the last." In addition, official documents issued by the State of Texas have formally declared that Malone was killed in defense of the Alamo.

After the independence of Texas was secured in 1836, Bill Malone's family sent an agent to Texas to ascertain his fate; the family was heartbroken at the news of Bill Malone's death. It is said that the one letter Bill Malone had mailed to Athens from Texas was treasured by his sorrowful mother and constantly carried about by her until it was worn out.

Perhaps the best way to end this brief story of 18-year old Bill Malone, the Athenian who died in the Alamo, is to repeat the last sentence of the 1912 article about him: "Let not the name of the wayward but heroic young man be

forgotten."