

# The battle of the alamo history essay



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The Alamo today still resides in the hearts of many as one of the greatest struggles for independence in the United States short history. Americans and Tejanos including others in the Texan revolution against all odds proved that the fight for liberty under tyranny or unjust rule will live on forever no matter the oppressor. Common phrases such as “ Remember the Alamo!” and “ Death to Santa Anna!” cried out by Texan defenders during the siege live on in society today through books and movies. The idea that the little man can stand up to the tremendous opposition gives inspiration and hope to all; precisely what the Texans at the Alamo did, writing themselves into history in just 13 short days. The Alamo showed to everyone in the world that freedom and liberties would never die and that if people could band together they could get what the people want.

In the early 1700's, the Spanish had laid claim to parts of the current day New Mexico and Texas area in the Adams Onís Treaty of 1819 when America acquired Florida. In 1716, the Spaniards began settling and forming small missions and settlements in Texas. One of these early settlements became the famous Alamo close to a century later. As greedy Americans looking for land slowly traveled west, they gradually dispersed throughout Texas. The Spanish had always had the idea of loyal subjects living on this mostly empty land, but Mexico winning their independence from Spain thwarted their opportunity. Americans were flocking to Texas for cheap land, and the thirst of adventure. For just 30 dollars, each settler received 4, 428 acres and only had to follow a few rules. Settlers that moved into Mexico had to be of the Catholic faith, and willing to be Mexicanized. The Mexican government wanted the settling Americans to swear allegiance to Mexico, but most

settlers disregarded the idea of integration and the idea of embracing Mexican society. American settlers had the idea that they could do whatever they wanted, simply because they were American. The little Mexican presence in Texas also encouraged Texans to do as they pleased. Texas was in an almost laissez faire state as more and more Americans settled into Texas, but not by their choice. By 1835, Texan Americans numbered in the thirty-thousands counting for most of the population. The amount of Mexican influence in Texas besides the few soldiers made Americans feel free; Americans saw Texas as a free land where they could do what they pleased. As Mexico attempted to enforce its power in Texas the Americans residing there were not happy. Issues over slavery, immigration and local rights became serious topics of discussion. The debate over slavery was most controversial because Mexico emancipated all slaves in 1830, and prohibited any slavery in Texas and the bringing of slaves into the territory. American Texans did not abide by these laws and did not free their slaves and continued to bring slaves into the territory with no regard for the law. The Mexican Constitution adopted in 1284 had some elements resembling U. S constitution, but also included vast influences from the Spanish Constitution of 1812. The constitution in time made the Texans extremely angry because the federal government of Mexico chose representatives and the Anglo-American presence in Texas had no representation. Alcaldes or more commonly known as local mayors who ran each town appointed by the governor held the representation; the Anglo-American population had no influence in anything political. The Mexican government was fearful their culture would be obliterated by the extreme influx of Anglo-Saxon Americans, so they felt this was a good way to keep their culture alive. Then

in 1830 the Mexican government passed a law banning us citizens from settling anywhere in Mexican territory. Texan American boldly defied laws for years, but eventually Mexico was ready to assert its dominance.

In 1835, the then dictator-like Mexican president Antonio López de Santa Anna took away all local rights of Texans, and began raising an army to put down the Texan disobedience. The following year Texas declared their independence and raised their lone star flag. The rule of Santa Anna commonly known as “ The Age of Santa Anna” quickly turned into a dictatorship in 1835. He then suspended the constitution of 1824, and the settlers felt abandoned and betrayed by the Mexican government. The mostly American presence in Mexico became extremely angered by the switch away from federalist policies, causing many to revolt. With their individual rights in question, Texan Americans prepared to fight for their liberty, even die for it.

The Texan revolution officially began in October of 1835 when Americans in Gonzales refused to return cannon given to them by Mexicans to protect themselves from Indians. Texan Americans fought off nearly 100 cavalymen, greatly increasing the confidence of anyone questioning the rebellion against Mexico. Texans then began systematically clearing the Texas region of Mexican soldiers. An army formed called The Army of the People, made up of colonists and anyone willing to support their cause of independence. As the army of Texans, Americans, and Tejanos grew they needed leadership. At one point almost 600 soldiers devoted to the cause of Texan independence fought in the Army of the People. Stephen F. Austin was placed in control of the volunteer army of Texas, and swept through Texas

eliminating Mexican presence. The Army swept up missions along the San Antonio River gaining tremendous momentum and confidence. As the army arrived at the city of San Antonio and the Alamo they surrounded the Mexican army, ready to force them out. The Mexican army had about 20 cannons poised for battle, so the Texan army hatched a plan to guarantee victory. For a month, they surrounded the city and Alamo while soldiers arrived and left as they pleased. On December 5th 300 men of the Army of the People began the siege on both the city of San Antonio and the Alamo. When the Texans finally succeeded, they had effectively eliminated the last significant Mexican stronghold in Texas. On December the 8th, the Texans had control of San Antonio, and on the 9th the Mexicans inside the Alamo surrendered. The surrendering Mexicans claimed they would never fight again against the constitution of 1824 and promised to leave Texas immediately. Santa Anna that day had arrived 700 miles south the day the siege began of San Antonio, and was forming an army to rid Texas of the foreign pirates. He was ready to assert his dominance, and make the Texans pay for revolting against the mighty Antonio López de Santa Anna.

In late December Santa Anna was marching north towards Texas with a force of over 6, 000 men. Santa Anna modeled his strategies after the French napoleon Bonaparte, but compared to the great Napoleon, Santa Anna had only few of his exceptional leadership abilities. Santa Anna counted on the Texans thinking he would not march in late winter, planning to catch the enemy by surprise. The plan worked perfectly in favor of Santa Anna. The Texans thought there was no way that anyone would make a march so long during winter. The Texan army that was defending the city had figured they

could wait to fortify the city and the Alamo, but Santa Anna's move caught them by surprise. The march in the winter made by Santa Anna and his near 6, 000 men caused hundreds of the Mexican soldiers to die, and hundreds to desert at the fear of death. Santa Anna also had a serious problem to face because close to none of his men had proper training, or were ready for a combat situation. The mass of soldiers assembled by Santa Anna were either forced to join or usually extremely inexperienced. The Mexican General relied considerably on the strength of numbers, but what he had in numbers, he lacked in experience. Santa Anna stated in a meeting with his generals "What are the lives of soldiers than so many chickens?" The Mexican general understood that his army might sustain extreme casualties to put down this uprising, but wanted to show his dominance in doing it with speed and efficiency. Santa Anna being a young lieutenant in the early 1800's had already been apart of putting down one attempted Texan rebellion in 1813. The Mexican armies showing complete power and no mercy when every survivor faced execution and their bodies were hanged from trees. Santa Anna believed firmly in no quartering for these pirates that had swept into Texas. Santa Anna had coincidentally struck at a perfect time while there was division in the Texan army. The division in the Texan leadership and army significantly hindered their attempts of defending the Alamo, splitting the army effectively in half. The Texan army stationed in San Antonio and the Alamo was beginning to suffer terrible internal conflicts. Half of the Texan leadership believed that they should launch an attack in the heart of Mexico the state of Tamaulipas. The other half of leadership thought they should stay where they were for an attack on Mexico was foolish and idiotic. At first leaders such as Governor Smith and Sam Houston thought it would

be a good idea to invade Mexico, but then changed their minds pondering the possible consequences. The Texan council thought otherwise and promoted a man by the name of James Grant to raise an army to attack the Mexican city of Matamoros in Tamaulipas Mexico. Frank Johnson at the time in control of the garrison of the Alamo decided to venture with Grant on their plan to attack Mexico. They took over two thirds of the entire garrison, along with crucial supplies that the garrison at the Alamo would need later. The soldiers at the Alamo and San Antonio had to endure a terrible winter. They had to survive with almost no supplies or men coming in to relieve them due to half of the garrison leaving with crucial supplies. This internal conflict split the Texan army in two and considerably weakened the defenses at the Alamo and San Antonio. The Alamo and San Antonio left poorly defended and supplied was desperate for help. James Neill, recently acquiring command of the garrison at the Alamo, sent a letter to Governor Smith insulting the council and Johnson and Grant for leaving them with next to nothing. This letter sealed the deal and split Texas into two armies and governments. Johnson and grant who took orders from the council being one part, and General Houston and the men defending the Alamo taking orders from Governor Smith the other half. General Houston knowing he had to take matters into his own hands rode to cut off the army marching towards Matamoros, desperately trying to get them to re-think their campaign. As he delivered his speech he received a letter that wrote that 1, 000 Mexican soldiers were advancing on San Antonio, and 2, 000 on Metamoros. He urged the 200 volunteers to go back to the Alamo to help defend, but only 30 agreed to come back. Most men moving to attack Matamoros were American arrivals only interested in the possible riches in Mexico and did not

particularly care for the fate of Texas. With so few men defending San Antonio and the Alamo and so many advancing, the idea of any possible victory was fading quickly.

General Houston believed that defending the Alamo would be impossible with the impending forces of Santa Anna arriving, and ordered for the fortifications of San Antonio and the Alamo to be destroyed and all cannons removed. James Bowie arrived to find a decent garrison, but found that only 80 men were in fighting shape. Green B. Jameson a military engineer then suggested they could fortify the Alamo to defend from some attacks, but after all it was just a Spanish mission. Governor Smith rejected the idea of destroying the fortifications and removing the cannons and ordered them to defend the Alamo. Grant and Edwards had taken most of their labor animals such as mules and horses on the Journey to invade the Mexican city of Matamoros. The Texans at the Alamo because of the lack of animals to remove the cannons had no way to follow orders from Sam Houston. As the Alamo was desperate for defenders due to the great number of Mexican soldiers under Santa Anna, leaders inside the Alamo looked to others for support. James Bowie wrote a plea to Governor Smith for men, desperate for reinforcements. Smith had already ordered William. B Travis to raise a small group of cavalrymen, but only succeeded in acquiring 30 men. The fact that Texan army divided into two armies and political parties tremendously decreased the chances of getting reinforcements at the Alamo. People of different viewpoints were reluctant to help out and offer themselves or their services, hurting the Texan cause as a whole greatly. At a time when help of any kind no matter how small was crucial, a famous man then arrived at the



Alamo with around a dozen men to help defend. David Crockett was a Tennessee congressman and esteemed writer, and his arrival though small in size boosted the moral of the men already in the Alamo greatly. The struggle finding willing volunteers was mostly because of the division between Texans forgetting what they were fighting for, and splitting off to invade Mexico. The Alamo had remarkably few defenders, and with almost no more reinforcements to come the outcome of the Alamo looked bleak. The heart of the men in the Alamo was a true testament to the American view of liberty or death.

Information came on the night of February 10th that Santa Anna's force of 6,000 men spread out along the Rio Grande, were headed straight for the Alamo. Santa Anna had taken extreme interest in taking down the Alamo personally because his spies informed him that some revolution leaders such as James Bowie, William Travis, David Crockett, and others. The day after information of Santa Anna's advancing forces came the current leader James Neill had to leave the Alamo. The engineering mind who had mastered in improving the defenses of the Alamo had to leave due to illness in the family. His leadership was going to be immensely missed in his departure, but replacements with equally strong if not stronger leadership then took control. The power being passed down to William Travis, and James Bowie fell into qualified hands. As the men prepared for the inevitable thousands of Mexican forces coming closer and closer each day they fortified the Alamo even more, they dug ditches, strengthened walls and properly set up cannons. The Texans defending the Alamo were fortunate to have acquired all the supplies deserted by the Mexican General Cos. The Mexicans left

behind hundreds of muskets, cartridges and most importantly 18 cannons behind. The surplus of weapons and ammunition allowed defenders to have multiple guns loaded at once, which was a slight advantage considering the reload time of 1 rifle. Without the supplies left behind by the Mexicans, the Alamo would not have been an event in history to remember. The troops in the Alamo were extremely lucky to acquire the supplies they did. William Travis tried repeatedly to get help from anyone willing to no avail. On February 23, the Tejanos in the city of San Antonio began to leave. They were afraid of fighting alongside Americans, knowing of the hatred Santa Anna possessed for Americans. No one wanted to be subject to the wrath that Santa Anna's army was bringing, but the small garrison in the Alamo stood ready to fight for what they believed in.

In the afternoon of February the 23, a watchman stationed high above in a bell tower in the city to warn of the approaching Mexican force had spotted the enemy. To confirm what the watchman saw for sure, two Americans rode out to scout the force themselves, and saw 1, 500 soldiers poised and ready for battle. It then quickly became a mad dash to get in the safety of the Alamo, along with any possessions of value owned. Citizens and injured soldiers from the earlier conquest of San Antonio hobbled, limped, and carried into the mission on their beds. Citizens grabbed anything that could come in handy in the mission such as blankets, food, weapons, and ammunition. Anyone left in the city scrambled into the fort hoping to find safe shelter there. With such little food and resources, the troops in the Alamo under Jim Bowie ventured out into a nearby shantytown luckily finding 30 cattle and 90 bushels of corn, enough to feed the garrison. The Mexican

General extremely fed up with these pirates prepared to end them once and for all in a gruesome fashion. Santa Anna signaled a red flag of no quarter, meaning no mercy, prisoners, or parole. Santa Anna was here to end the uprising once and for all, and he meant business. Two notes sent to the Mexican general requesting a meeting and requesting to know the terms of the siege were declined. The garrison in the Alamo knew exactly what they were up against, and all the men who stayed were prepared to meet their fate honorably fighting for freedom they hold so dear.

James Bowie fell gravely ill on only the second day of the siege, and in turn passed all his power along to William Travis. That day William Travis wrote the single most influential and famous letter of the Texan revolution. The letter titled “ To the People of Texas and All Americans in the world” was Travis writing one last plea, begging for the aid of his fellow Americans, and stated he would fight to death and die like a real soldier with no surrender. The famous slogan “ Victory or Death!” written in this letter shows how powerful human will is. This letter printed nearly 200 times and distributed, had been too late. The reinforcements would never make it in time to save their Texan brothers. The Mexican army then encircled and fortified their positions around the mission. On March 1st a group of 32 men came to aid the small garrison in the defense of the Alamo against the siege of the Mexican army. Tejanos had also begun to leave the Alamo due to a promise made by Santa Anna for pardon, but that was not the case. Texas had gotten official declaration of independence from Mexico on March 3rd, unaware to those in the Alamo due to the lack of efficient communication.

Santa Anna ordered an official attack on the morning of March 6th. His generals had advised him against attacking with their largest cannons still in route to the Alamo, but his patience for the Texans ran out. Over a thousand Mexican soldiers were ordered to rush the Alamo and scale the walls with ladders, and penetrate the gate. Santa Anna had no regard or care for the lives of his soldiers. He felt that the Alamo must fall at all costs, no matter how many of his men died. Added onto the siege force 400 men would wait as reserve if needed, and 300 cavalymen waited to the south of the Alamo for any escapees or deserters and kill them. Mexican soldiers awoke at midnight and proceeded to their positions at around 1 a. m. The soldiers received the order to attack at 5: 30 A. M. and following the plan divided into four columns. The first would go to the northwest, the second to the north wall, the third to the east wall, and the fourth to the south end. The all out siege of the Alamo by Santa Anna and his now nearing 2, 000 men had begun. An officer on duty in the Alamo luckily heard the Mexicans coming with crying yelps of “ Viva Mexico!” and “ Viva Santa Anna!”, and warned his Texan brothers. The Texans then were awoken and scrambled to their positions to defend the Alamo, and that is precisely what they did. Cannon fire pounded the mission for days on end, ripping defenses and buildings to pieces. Texan defenders forced to work late into the night as cannon fire ceased to repair crumbling defenses, and dig larger trenches became extremely weak. After days of endless cannon fire and jeers from the enemy keeping the defenders sleepless, the Texans lacked sufficient energy to hold off the monstrous force knocking on their door. Travis gathered all his men together and gave them the option, stay and fight to the death; or leave the Alamo by free will. Only one man left the Alamo that day while the rest

stayed and fought to the death. Fewer than 100 men resided in the Alamo after the desertion of the Tejanos; the few men remaining fought with the might of a force ten times their numbers. Travis fired the largest cannon in the Alamo the morning before the great siege, signaling that they would not give up, and that hope lived on in the Alamo. The defenders inside the Alamo were ready to die for what they believed in. Texan cannons repelled wave after wave of attackers with devastating losses to the Mexicans. The cannons had repelled all the Mexican forces to a full out frontal assault on the northern side of the mission. On the northern wall, wave after wave of Mexican soldiers pried at the gate with crow bars, axes, and any tool they could get their hands in an attempt to break through the gate to quickly end the battle. Mexican soldiers attempted to climb ladders and most were repelled at the top by fierce Texan American fighters pushing them backwards. Colonel Travis rallying his men with screams and shouts as they kept the Mexicans at bay on the northern side of the mission slumped over dead. Travis had been shot in the head and died. Santa Anna seeing the failure and carnage of his first wave of men ordered the 400 reserves men to attack the mission. Mexican soldiers began to scale the walls on the north, east, and south walls. With the intensity of animals in close quarter combat situations, the Texan Americans fought to the death. The Mexicans swarmed in from all sides, forcing open the main gate as more Mexican soldiers poured into the mission, outnumbering the defenders ten to one. The famous James Bowie, who was sick and could not move, waited in his bed for the Mexicans to storm through the door. With a pistol in each hand, he shot and killed two Mexican soldiers in his last moments of life. Bowie then was rushed and killed by Mexican bayonets. The confusion once fighting begun

inside the Alamo was so wide spread that no one could tell fellow companions from enemies; some soldiers even shot at their comrades unknowingly. Dead bodies of the Texans strewn everywhere in the mission were left to the Mexican soldiers stealing any jewelry, and anything of worth off of the dead Texan Americans. The few Texans remaining defended building after building, fighting for their independence and rights furiously. Largely outnumbered they retreated to the barracks and any houses defending them room by room. The last building held by Texan Americans was the church. Their cannon turned on them by Mexican soldiers blasted the entryway for the Mexican soldiers into the last Texan building and with that the Texans had nowhere else to run. The Texans stood their ground and fiercely fought with anything at hand as the Mexicans filed in through into the church until all of the resistance in the Alamo had been killed or taken prisoner, the church being the Texans last stand at the Alamo. The whole battle lasted anywhere from 30 to 90 minutes, a miraculous feat for the small garrison defending from a giant force. Some Texans attempted fleeing, and Mexican Calvary cut them down; only 7 Texans were taken prisoner. The fact that the army even took prisoners infuriated Santa Anna, because he believed in no quartering of the pirates, and keeping true to his word he showed no quarter, and ordered all 7 of the prisoners executed. Less than 10 women and children were spared after the carnage of the fighting stopped. Susanna Dickerson was summoned before Santa Anna and ordered her along with one of his servants to take the news of American defeat to the in route Texan reinforcements. Santa Anna had taken control of the Alamo with extreme force, but also extreme casualties for the amount of defenders the Alamo possessed.

Santa Anna reported to the Mexican government their victory but altered the shocking numbers. He knew people would not want to see such staggering Mexican losses by so few Texan American defenders, so he described the Alamo as having 600 defenders. Santa Anna ordered the defenders bodies to be burned, in total 182 bodies burned in the early evening. The fact that such a small force could inflict such enormous damage on such a large force as Santa Anna's army shocked his generals. They praised their dedication and devotion to their cause. As news of the defeat reached Sam Houston and others preparing an army an immense sadness ensued, they had been too late in their re-enforce their Texan brothers. The news of the death of over 180 Texan Americans swept across America like wild fire fueling hatred for the general president Santa Anna. The Texan Americans soon had their swift revenge a short 6 weeks later at San Jacinto, eliminating Mexican presence in Texas.

After the Alamo fell Santa Anna began to sweep through Texas attempting to eliminate all Texan opposition in his path. In one battle, 342 prisoners captured were executed on orders from Santa Anna himself. Then on April 21, a force of 900 Texan soldiers under the command of Sam Houston attacked 1,400 Mexican soldiers under Santa Anna at the San Jacinto River. Santa Anna made a fatal mistake in taking an afternoon siesta posting no sentries. The Texans under Houston took advantage of this and swarmed the camp taking control in under 20 short minutes. The Texans attacking the camp remembered their fallen comrades with yelps of "Remember the Alamo!" and "Remember the Goliad!" Over 600 Mexican soldiers were slain in the battle, along with 700 captured and 200 wounded all because of Santa

Anna's foolish mistake. The Texan army of 900 had decimated their opponents and rightfully honored their fallen Texan brothers at the Alamo. Santa Anna was caught the next day attempting to pose as an ordinary soldier. Sam Houston made the smart decision in letting him live, but forcing him immediately to remove all Mexican troops in Texas.

Texas then remained independent for 9 years, later annexed into the union as a state in 1845. Mexico refusing to recognize Texan independence led to the Mexican war in 1846. As the Mexican-American war ended Mexico lost over half of its land. Mexico had lost Texas, California, Utah, Nevada, Arizona, and some parts of Colorado and Wyoming. The United States had finally expanded all the way west, the dominant super power of the now not so new world.