

Evidence: Document 1

Joe's Firsthand Account

Joe was an enslaved man owned by William B. Travis who fought in the Battle of the Alamo. After surviving the battle, Joe traveled east with other Alamo survivors where he shared his account with the provisional Texas government. His narrative remains the only surviving firsthand account of a combatant fighting for Texas during the battle. Below is an excerpt from the journal of William Fairfax Gray in which he retells Joe's account.

"The garrison was much exhausted by incessant watching and hard labor. They had all worked until a late hour on Saturday night, and when the attack was sentinels and all were asleep, except one man, Capt. ----, who gave the alarm.

There were three picket guards without the fort, but they, too, it is supposed were asleep, and were run upon and bayonnetted, for they gave no alarm. Joe was sleeping in the room with his master when the alarm was given. Travis sprang up, seized his rifle and sword, and called to Joe to follow him. Joe took his gun and followed. Travis ran across the Alamo and mounted the wall, and called out to his men, "Come on, boys, the Mexicans are upon us, and we'll give them *Hell*." He discharged his gun; so did Joe. In an instant Travis was shot down. He fell within the wall, on the sloping ground, and sat up.

The enemy twice applied their scaling ladders to the walls, and were twice beaten back. But this Joe did not well understand, for when his master fell he ran and ensconced himself in a house, from which he says he fired on them several times, after they got in. On the third attempt they succeeded in mounting the walls, and then poured over like sheep."

Evidence: Document 2

Juan Almonte's Firsthand Account

Juan Almonte was a Mexican diplomat and military officer who documented his experiences in revolutionary Texas. He toured Texas and wrote an accompanying report of the conditions there in 1834. Almonte served in the military under Santa Anna and was present at the Alamo during the 12-day siege and subsequent battle. Below is an excerpt from Almonte's personal journal he kept during the Texas Revolution.

"Saturday, March 5th. -- The day commenced very moderate – thermometer 50° – weather clear. A brisk fire was commenced from our north battery against the enemy, which was not answered, except now and then. At mid-day the thermometer rose to 68°. -- The President determined to make the assault; and it was agreed that the four columns of attack were to be commanded by Generals Cós, Duque, Romero, and Morales, and second in command, Generals Castrillon, Amador, and Miñon. For this purpose the points of attack were examined by the commanding officers, and they came to the conclusion that they should muster at 12 o'clock tonight, and at 4 o'clock to morrow morning (Sunday, 6th) the attack should be made.

Sunday, 6th.--At 5 A.M. the columns were posted at their respective stations, and at half past 5 the attack or assault was made, and continued until 6 A.M. when the enemy attempted in vain to fly, but they were overtaken and put to the sword, and only five women, one Mexican soldier (prisoner,) and a black slave escaped from instant death."

Evidence: Document 3

José Enrique de la Peña's Firsthand Account

José Enrique de la Peña was a lieutenant in the Mexican army and fought in the Battle of the Alamo. De la Peña kept a detailed diary of his time in Texas during the revolution, and afterwards, wrote a 400-page narrative of the Texas Revolution – giving much needed insight into Mexican operations during the war. Below is an excerpt from this narrative describing his experiences in the Battle of the Alamo.

“Four columns were chosen for the attack. The first, under command of General Cós... was to move against the western front, which faced the city. The second, under Colonel Duque ... was entrusted with a like mission against the front facing the north, which had two mounted batteries at each end of its walls. The third, under Colonel Romero ... was to attack the east front... The fourth column under command of Colonel Morales ... was entrusted with taking the entrance to the fort and the entrenchments defending it.

...

Beginning at one o'clock in the morning of the 6th, the columns were set in motion, and at three they silently advanced toward the river ... The moon was up, but the density of clouds that covered it allowed only an opaque light in our direction, seeming thus to contribute to our designs.

...

The columns, bravely storming the fort in the midst of a terrible shower of bullets and cannon-fire, had reached the base of the walls, with the exception of the third, which had ... changed its course to the right angle of the north front. The few poor ladders that we were bringing had not arrived, because their bearers had either perished on the way or had escaped. Only one was seen of all those that were planned... Fortunately the wall reinforcement on this front was of the lumber, its excavation was hardly begun, and the height of the parapet was eight or nine feet; there was therefore a starting point, and it could be climbed, though with some difficulty.

...

According to the documents found among these men and to subsequent information, the force within the Alamo consisted of 182 men; but according to the number counted by us it was 253. Doubtless the total did not exceed either of these two, and in any case the number is less than that referred to by the commander in chief in his communique, which contends that in the excavations and the trenches alone more than 600 bodies had been buried.”

Evidence: Document 4

Susanna Dickinson's Firsthand Account

Susanna Dickinson came to Texas in 1830 with her husband Almeron Dickinson, settling near present day San Marcos. Almeron fought for Texas in the Siege and Battle of Bexar, and Susanna joined him in San Antonio around December 1835. When the Alamo Siege began, Almeron, Susanna, and their daughter Angelina entered the Alamo fort. The excerpt below is from a testimony given by Susanna to writer James Morphis, published in 1874.

“Under the cover of darkness they approached the fortifications, and planting their scaling ladders against our walls just as light was approaching, they climbed up to the tops of our walls and jumped down within, many of them to immediate death.

As fast as the front ranks were slain, they were filled up again by fresh troops. The Mexicans numbered several thousands while there were only one hundred and eighty-two Texans.

The struggle lasted more than two hours when my husband rushed into the church where I was with my child, and exclaimed: ‘Great God, Sue, the Mexicans are inside our walls! All is lost! If they spare you, save my child.’

Then, with a parting kiss, he drew his sword and plunged into the strife, then raging in different portions of the fortifications.

Soon after he left me, three unarmed gunners who abandoned their then useless guns came into the church where I was, and were shot down by my side. One of them was from Nacogdoches and named Walker. He spoke to me several times during the siege about his wife and four children with anxious tenderness. I saw four Mexicans toss him up in the air (as you would a bundle of fodder) with their bayonets, and then shoot him. At this moment a Mexican officer came into the room, and, addressing me in English asked: ‘Are you Mrs. Dickinson?’ I answered ‘Yes.’ He said he, ‘If you wish to save your life, follow me.’ I followed him, and although shot at and wounded, was spared.

As we passed through the enclosed ground in front of the church, I saw heaps of dead and dying. The Texans on average killed between eight and nine Mexicans each – 182 and 1,600 Mexicans were killed.

I recognized Col. Crockett lying dead and mutilated between the church and the two story barrack building, and even remember seeing his peculiar cap lying by his side.”

Evidence: Document 5

Juana Navarro Alsbury's Firsthand Account

Juana Navarro Alsbury, born into a prominent Tejano family, was raised in San Antonio de Béxar by her aunt and uncle. Still living in San Antonio de Béxar at the beginning of the Alamo Siege, Juana entered the Alamo with her son and sister likely under the protection of Jim Bowie, her brother-in-law. Below is an excerpt from an interview by John S. Ford in which Juana's account is retold in his memoirs.

"Mrs. Alsbury and her sister were in a building not far from where the residence of Colonel Sam Maverick was afterwards erected. It was considered quite a safe locality. They saw very little of the fighting. While the final struggle was progressing she peeped out and saw the surging columns of Santa Anna assaulting the Alamo on every side, as she believed. She could hear the noise of the conflict -- the roar of the artillery, the rattle of the small arms, the shouts of the combatants, the groans of the dying, and the moans of the wounded.

The firing approximated where she was and she realized the fact that the brave Texians had been overwhelmed by numbers. She asked her sister to go to the door and request the Mexican soldiers not to fire into the room, as it contained women only. Señorita Gertrudis opened the door, she was greeted in offensive language by the soldiers. Her shawl was torn from her shoulders and she rushed back into the room. During this period Mrs. Alsbury was standing with her one-year-old son strained to her bosom, supposing he would be motherless soon. The soldiers then demanded of Señorita Gertrudis: "Your money or your husband." She replied: "I have neither money nor husband." About this time a sick man ran up to Mrs. Alsbury and attempted to protect her. The soldiers bayoneted him at her side. She thinks his name was Mitchell.

After this tragic event a young Mexican, hotly pursued by soldiers, seized her by the arm and endeavored to keep her between himself and his assailants. His grasp was broken and four or five bayonets plunged into his body and nearly as many balls went through his lifeless corpse. The soldiers broke open her trunk and took her money and clothes, also the watch of Colonel Travis and other officers.

A Mexican officer appeared on the scene. He excitedly inquired, "How did you come here?" "What are you doing here any how?" "Where is the entrance to the fort?" He made her pass out of the room over a cannon standing nearby the door. He told her to remain there, and he would have her sent to President Santa Anna. Another officer came up and asked: "What are you doing here?" She replied: "An officer ordered us to remain here, and he would have us sent to the President." -- "President! the devil. Don't you see they are about to fire that cannon? Leave." They were moving when they heard a voice calling -- "Sister." To my great relief Don Manuel Perez came to us. He said: -- "Don't you know your own brother-in-law?" I answered: "I am so excited and distressed that I scarcely know anything." Don Manuel placed them in charge of a colored woman belonging to Col. Bowie and the party reached the house of Don Angel Navarro in safety.

Mrs. Alsbury says to the best of her remembrance she heard firing at the Alamo till twelve o'clock that day."

Evidence: Document 6

Rámon Martínez Caro's Firsthand Account

Rámon Martínez Caro served as secretary to General Santa Anna during the Texas Revolution. Following the end of the war, Caro's memoir was published as Verdadera Idea de la Primera Campaña de Texas y Sucesos Occurridos Después de la Acción de San Jacinto. In this, he recounts the events during and following the Texas Revolution. Below is an excerpt regarding the events of the Battle of the Alamo.

“Early in the morning of the 6th the four attacking columns as well as the reserve took up their respective positions as assigned by the general order of the 5th, a copy of which was transmitted to the supreme government. From this it will be seen that our force numbered 1,400 men in all. At daybreak and at the agreed signal our whole force moved forward to the attack. The first charge was met with a deadly fire of shot and shell from the enemy, the brave colonel of the Toluca Battalion, Francisco Duque, being among the first who fell wounded. His column wavered as a result of his fall, while the other three columns were held in check on the other fronts; His Excellency, seeing the charge waver, gave orders for the reserve to advance. The brave General Juan Valentín Amador, General Pedro Ampudia, Colonel Esteban Mora, and Lieutenant-Colonel Marcial Aguirre succeeded in gaining a foothold on the north side where the strife was bitterest, which encouraged the soldiers in their advance and resulted in their capture of the enemy's artillery on that side. The enemy immediately took refuge in the inside rooms of the fortress, the walls of which had been previously bored to enable them to fire through the holes. Generals Amador and Ampudia trained the guns upon the interior of the fort to demolish it as the only means of putting an end to the strife.

On the opposite side, where there was another entrance to the enemy's stronghold, the resistance was equally stubborn, but Colonels Juan Morales and José Miñón, commanding the attacking column, succeeded in overcoming it.”

Evidence: Document 7

Francisco Antonio Ruiz's Firsthand Account

Francisco Antonio Ruiz was born in San Antonio de Béxar in the early 1800s. At the time of the Siege and Battle of the Alamo, he was the alcalde of San Antonio, a position similar to mayor. When the Mexican army reached San Antonio in February 1836, Ruiz was placed on house arrest until the end of the battle. Below is an excerpt from Ruiz's account, which was published in the Texas Almanac in 1860.

"When the Mexican army had succeeded in entering the walls, I, with the Political Chief, Don Ramón Músquiz, and other members of the Corporation, accompanied the Curate, Don Refugio de la Garza, who, by Santa Anna's orders, had assembled during the night at a temporary fortification erected in Potrero street, with the object of attending the wounded, etc. As soon as the storming commenced, we crossed the bridge on Commerce street with this object in view, and about 100 yards from the same a party of Mexican dragoons fired upon us and compelled us to fall back on the river and place we occupied before. Half an hour had elapsed when Santa Anna sent one of his aid-de-camps with an order for us to come before him. He directed me to call on some of the neighbors to come up with carts to carry the dead to the Cemetery, and also to accompany him, as he was desirous to have Col. Travis, Bowie, and Crockett shown to him.

On the north battery of the fortress lay the lifeless body of Col. Travis on the gun-carriage, shot only in the forehead. Toward the west, and in the small fort opposite the city, we found the body of Col. Crockett. Col. Bowie was found dead in his bed, in one of the rooms on the south side.

Santa Anna, after the Mexicans were taken out, ordered wood to be brought to burn the bodies of the Texians. He sent a company of 3 dragoons with me to bring wood and dry branches from the neighboring forest. About 3 o'clock in the afternoon they commenced laying wood and dry branches, upon which a file of dead bodies was placed; more wood was piled on them, and another file brought, and in this manner they were all arranged in layers. Kindling wood was distributed through a pile, and about 5 o'clock in the evening it was lighted.

The dead Mexicans of Santa Anna were taken to the graveyard, but not having sufficient room for them, I ordered some of them to be thrown in the river, which was done on the same day.

Santa Anna's loss was estimated at 1600 men. These were the flower of his army.

...

The Generals who, under Santa Anna, participated in the storming of the Alamo, were Juan Amador, Castrillon, Ramirez, Sesma, and Andrade.

The men burn numbered 182. I was an eye-witness, for as *Alcalde* of San Antonio, I was with some of the neighbors collecting the dead bodies and placing them on the funeral pyre."

Evidence: Document 8

José Juan Sánchez-Navarro's Firsthand Account

José Juan Sánchez-Navarro was an officer in the Mexican Army during the Texas Revolution who served as an Adjutant Inspector. He was present in San Antonio de Béxar for both the Battle of Béxar in 1835, and the Battle of the Alamo in 1836. Sánchez-Navarro kept many records, including a drawn plan depicting the Alamo. Below is an excerpt from his account of the Siege and Battle of the Alamo.

“At five o’clock this morning, the assault was made in four columns commanded by the senores General Cós and Colonels Duque, Romero, and Morales. His Excellency the Sr. President commanded the reserves. The firing lasted about half an hour. Our commanders, officers, and troops, as if by magic, topped the walls at the same time and rushed in, where hand-to-hand fighting ensued. By 6 in the morning, no enemy was left alive. I saw with envy deed of heroic valor. Some cruelties horrified me, among others, the death of an old man they called Cocran and that of a boy about 14 years old. The women and children were spared. Travis, the commander of the Alamo, died a brave man. Buy [Bowie], the braggart son-in-law of Beramendí, like a coward. The troops were permitted to loot. A strong post has been taken from the enemy, 21 [artillery] pieces of various calibers, [and] many weapons and munitions. 257 [enemy] were killed, whose bodies I have seen and counted, but I can feel no joy, because we have lost 11 of our officers, with 19 wounded, among them the valiant Duque and Gonzales. Among the troops [we suffered] 247 wounded and 110 dead. Well could I say, with another victory such as this, the Devil will take us.”

Evidence: Document 9

Enrique Esparza's Firsthand Account

Enrique Esparza was a child living in San Antonio with his family when Santa Anna and the Mexican Army entered San Antonio on February 23, 1836. Along with his mother Ana, his father Gregorio, and his siblings, Enrique moved into the Alamo fort when the siege began. Below is an excerpt from an article published in the San Antonio Express in 1902, in which Enrique recounts his time at the Alamo.

"On the last night my father was not out, but he and my mother were sleeping together in headquarters. About 2 o'clock in the morning there was a great shooting and firing at the northwest corner of the fort, and I heard my mother say:

"Gregorio, the soldiers have jumped the wall. The fight's begun."

He got up and picked up his arms and went into the fight. I never saw him again. My uncle told me afterwards that Santa Anna gave him permission to get my father's body and that he found it where the thick of the fight had been.

We could hear the Mexican officers shouting to the men to jump over, and the men were fighting so close that we could hear them strike each other. It was so dark that we couldn't see anything, and the families that were in the quarters just huddled up in the corners. My mother's children were near her. Finally they began shooting through the dark into the room where we were. A boy who was wrapped in a blanket in one corner was hit and killed. The Mexicans fired into the room for at least fifteen minutes. It was a miracle, but none of us children were touched.

By daybreak the firing had almost stopped, and through the window we could see shadows of men moving around inside the fort."

Evidence: Document 10

Vicente Filísola's Firsthand Account

Vicente Filísola, a general in the Mexican Army, served as Santa Anna's second in command during the Texas Revolution. During this time, Filísola kept detailed records, which were later published as memoirs. Below is an excerpt from his memoirs regarding the Battle of the Alamo.

“... To the South, Colonels Jose Vicente Miñon and Juan Morales with their columns skillfully took advantage offered by some small *jacales* with walls of stone and mud which were next to the angle corresponding to the West. By a daring move they seized the cannon which was placed on a platform, as were all the others in the enclosure. They made their way into the fortified area of the quarters, assisting the efforts of General Amador. He had made use of the enemy's own artillery and turned them towards the doors of the small inner rooms in which the rebels had taken cover. From there they opened fire on the troops who were coming down from the parapet to the patio or plaza of the aforesaid enclosure so that all were finally killed by shrapnel, bullets, and bayonets.

...

All of the enemy perished with only one old woman and a [...] slave left alive. The soldiers spared them out of compassion and because it was supposed that only by force had they been kept in such danger. Of the enemy dead there were 150 volunteers, 32 people from the Town of Gonzalez who under cover of darkness joined the group two days before the attack on the fort, and some twenty people and tradesmen of the city of Béxar itself.”