

William Barret Travis was the leader of regular-army rebels defending the Alamo in February of 1836. At that time, San Antonio was known as Bejar and Texas was not-yet independent.

The Alamo was besieged by General Santa Anna and his army. Their plan was to force the rebels to give up - or to kill them.

Inside the Alamo, James Bowie headed up the volunteers. Both Travis and Bowie knew they could not defend the Alamo without help.

On the 24th of February, 1836, Travis sent a letter - addressed to "the people of Texas and all Americans" - urgently requesting reinforcements. This is the first page of that letter. It states:

*Commandancy of the Alamo—
Bejar, Fby. 24th 1836—*

*To the People of Texas &
all Americans in the world—*

*Fellow citizens & compatriots—
I am besieged, by a thousand
or more of the Mexicans under
Santa Anna—I have sustained
a continual Bombardment &
cannonade for 24 hours & have
not lost a man—The enemy
has demanded a surrender at
discretion, otherwise, the garrison
are to be put to the sword, if
the fort is taken—I have answered
the demand with a cannon
shot, & our flag still waves
proudly from the walls—I
shall never surrender or retreat
Then, I call on you in the
name of Liberty, of patriotism &
& every thing dear to the American
character, to come to our aid,*

The Texas State Library & Archives Commission provides more detail about the letter (and why it was written and dispatched):

At the Alamo in San Antonio, then called Bejar, 150 Texas rebels led by William Barret Travis made their stand against Santa Anna's vastly superior Mexican army. On the second day of the siege, February 24, 1836, Travis called for reinforcements with this heroic message:

I shall never surrender or retreat. Then, I call on you in the name of Liberty, of patriotism, and everything dear to the American character, to come to our aid with all dispatch. ...VICTORY OR DEATH.

Little help came. Santa Anna's troops broke through on March 6. All of the defenders of the Alamo died.

This historic letter was carried from the Alamo by 30-year-old Captain Albert Martin of Gonzales, a native of Rhode Island. The next day, en route to his hometown, Martin heard the distant rumble of artillery fire. At the first opportunity he stopped and added a postscript:

Since the above was written I heard a very heavy Cannonade during the whole day. think there must have been an attack made upon the alamo. We were short of Ammunition when I left Hurry on all the men you can in haste...

When I left there was but 150 determined to do or die tomorrow I leave for Bejar with what men I can raise & will be there Monday [a?] at all events - -

Col Almonte is there the troops are under the Command of Gen. Seisma.

Martin arrived at Gonzales on the afternoon of the 25th. He passed the dispatch to Lancelot Smither, who had arrived from the Alamo the day before with an estimate of Mexican troop strength. Smither felt obliged to add his own emphatic note to the back of Travis' letter:

N. [B ?] I hope Every One will Rendevu at gonzales as soon as poseble as the Brave Solders are suffereing do not deglect the powder. is very scarce and should not be delad one moment

There is evidence that Smither extracted the essence of the letter and deposited this copy with Judge Andrew Ponton before he departed Gonzales. Ponton prepared other copies and forwarded these to Nacogdoches and other population centers in the province. One such copy existed in the C.H. Raguet Papers in Marshall and was reproduced in full by Amelia Williams in her "Critical Study of the Siege of the Alamo."

Smither left that evening, heeding the admonition to forward the dispatch to San Felipe "by express day and night." Fighting an icy north wind, he covered the distance in less than 40 hours and delivered the appeal to the citizens' committee in that town. The proceedings of the citizens' meeting and a reasonably accurate printing of Travis' message are preserved in a broadsheet printed by Joseph Baker and Gail and Thomas Borden entitled "MEETING OF THE CITIZENS OF SAN FELIPE."

Two hundred copies of this broadsheet were printed order of the committee, and at least three other pre-productions of the letter were completed by Baker and Borden. One was a separate printing of the letter exhibiting further variations from the original holograph, another printing of 200 copies with "THE LATEST NEWS" appended, and a third printing of 300 copies with a proclamation of Provisional Governor Henry Smith. Although there were five distinct printings of the Travis letter by Baker and Borden, there were only two versions, and neither provided an accurate transcription of the famous appeal.

The Texas Republican was the first newspaper to carry Travis' letter in the March 2 issue; the Telegraph & Texas Register printed the letter on March 5. Both of these printings drew on the variant copies produced by Baker and Borden, not the original letter. The same is true of a dozen or more reproductions of the Travis message appearing in various Texas histories, published between 1836 and 1891. This supports the contention that the original holograph was returned to the Travis family shortly after the Revolution.

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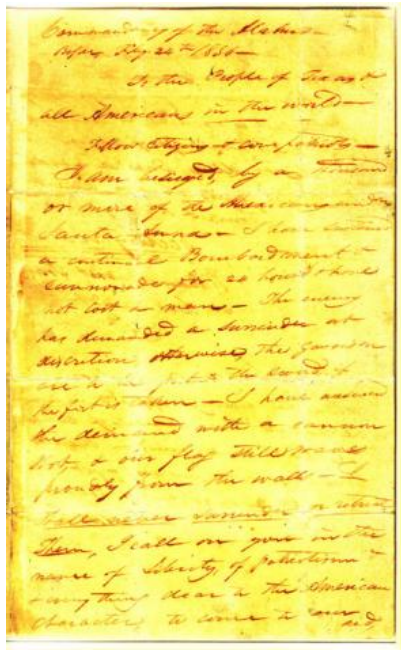
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William Travis Letter - Alamo

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