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SAN JACINTO — A TREMENDOUS VICTORY

by Priscilla Myers Benham

The Texas Revolution, which began on October 2, 1835 with the battle at Gonzales, was ended with the defeat of the Mexican army and capture of President Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna at the Battle of San Jacinto, April 21, 1836. When the Texas colonists first resisted the Mexican government's oppression, they did not have independence in mind. They wanted the restoration of the Constitution of 1824 which Santa Anna had abandoned. In the winter of 1835-1836 it became apparent that Santa Anna meant to disarm and drive the colonists from the state. While the Alamo was being besieged by Santa Anna's forces, the Convention at Washington-on-the-Brazos proclaimed the independence of Texas. The Battle of San Jacinto sustained this bold declaration and firmly established the Republic of Texas.

The San Jacinto Campaign lasted only forty-one days, extending from Sam Houston's assumption of military command at Gonzales, March 11, 1836, to the victory at San Jacinto, April 21, 1836. On March 4th, after the Convention at Washington re-elected Sam Houston as Commander-in-Chief of the Army, he immediately left the Convention for Gonzales.¹ Knowing that the force of 374 men at Gonzales was too small and possessed little ammunition, he ordered James W. Fannin, Jr., at Goliad, to move his five hundred men to Gonzales so that together they could help the Alamo.² Upon arriving at Gonzales, he heard that Santa Anna had subjugated the Alamo. Consequently, he instructed Fannin to destroy Goliad and retreat to Victoria. To ascertain if the Alamo had been actually defeated, Houston sent out Erastus (Deaf) Smith, Henry Karnes, and R. E. Handy. On the way to Gonzales, they met the lone survivors of the Alamo, Mrs. Almeron Dickinson with her young child and William B. Travis' Negro servant. Mrs. Dickinson reported that the victorious Mexican army was moving eastward with a force of three thousand men. Thirty-two men from Gonzales died at the Alamo; the grief of Gonzales citizens was intense.

While at Gonzales the First Texas Regiment organized, electing Edward Burleson as colonel, Sidney Sherman as lieutenant-colonel, and Alexander Somervell as a major.³ Houston did not have time to drill them into a disciplined army, as he could only spare two days there. It was imperative that the army move at once.

Houston's plan from Gonzales to San Jacinto was to stay clear of the Mexican army. He reasoned that it would be a mistake to shut the army in forts, where they could not easily receive reinforcements or supplies.⁴ Since the Mexican army was much stronger than the Texas army both in regard to men and munitions, Houston ordered a retreat to the Colorado River to await reinforcements. He hoped that he could hold the Mexicans at the Colorado River long enough that they would run out of supplies and be forced to withdraw.

The hasty retreat from Gonzales began at night on March 13th. Three of the army's four baggage wagons were given to help evacuate the widows who took only necessities. Due to the lack of teams and the muddy prairie, Houston destroyed his only artillery, two cannons, by throwing them into the Guadalupe River.⁵ Gonzales was reduced to ashes to prevent the enemy from using it. Captain John Sharpe, one of the picket-guards left behind, told Handy and Karnes that Houston had ordered the town burned. However, Houston later denied the charge.⁶

Ms. Benham is from Houston, Texas.

Reaching the Colorado River on March 17th, they encamped at Burnham's on the east bank to give all the civilians time to cross. Houston's force by this time had increased to about six hundred men. Since it rained almost daily, they took a position at Beason's Crossing (near the present town of Columbus) where they remained through March 26th. The camp was extremely muddy and disagreeable, making Houston's attempts to drill his men a nearly vain effort. While at Beason's Crossing the army would reach its peak strength of between 1,000 and 1,500.

When both armies began to move eastward, the flight of the people west of the river developed into the tragic "Runaway Scrape." Houston blamed the unfortunate episode on the exaggerated accounts of enemy forces by twenty deserters. Besides creating fear in the minds of the people west of the Colorado, it caused people in the east to stay home instead of supporting the little army where they were desperately needed.⁷ President David G. Burnet and Colonel Thomas J. Rusk, Secretary of War, issued strong appeals to the citizens east of the Brazos to go to the defense of their country. However, as the government was retreating to Harrisburg, this appeal failed to encourage many to join the army. Houston was quite annoyed with this move, feeling that it only increased the panic.⁸

While encamped at Beason's Crossing, William T. Austin was sent to Velasco to procure two cannon and ammunition, but he could not get these supplies. Therefore, Houston was without artillery until he crossed the Brazos.

Houston used his spies to keep him in touch with the civil government and to give him information about the movements of the enemy. He learned that General Joaquin Ramirez y Sesma was across the river about two miles upstream and was waiting for the main column to come up. Up to the very day of his retreat Houston had planned to attack Sesma since their forces were about equal. "On the Colorado I made my stand," he wrote.⁹ But he changed his mind when he heard that Fannin had been overpowered by General José Urrea. Knowing that Sesma could be reinforced with troops from Urrea and General Antonio Gaona, who was in the Bastrop area, Houston again decided to withdraw to safer quarters.¹⁰ Still, he did not have a disciplined army or artillery. His troops clamored for action against Sesma and were near mutiny because of this second retreat.¹¹

After the fall of the Alamo and Goliad, Santa Anna supposed that the war was over and that he could leave his subordinates to take possession of the rest of Texas. General Vicente Filisola, second in command to Santa Anna, disagreed but could not get the President to listen to him. Knowing that Santa Anna paid great respect to any ideas that Colonel Juan Almonte had, he convinced Almonte that Santa Anna should remain until they had beaten the main body of the Texas army. With this advice and a letter from Sesma regarding the strength of Houston's army, believed to be about 1,200, Santa Anna decided to stay in Texas.¹²

Santa Anna planned a three-pronged sweep of Texas with Gaona swinging his force of eight hundred men from San Antonio to Bastrop and on to Nacogdoches, Sesma moving his eight hundred men in advance of the main drive toward Gonzales and San Felipe de Austin. Santa Anna, Filisola, and General Eugenio Tolsa, who had six hundred men, would join Sesma at the Colorado River. Urrea's army of two thousand, the third prong, would move along the coast toward Galveston. If all went according to schedule, Santa Anna would have over three thousand troops at the Brazos River by the end of March. But his scheme did not work as planned due to heavy spring rains which flooded the rivers, causing men and cannon to continually bog down in mud.¹³

Arriving at Gonzales on April 2nd, Santa Anna decided to move in advance of the main body of his army since the swollen river made crossing a slow process. Accompanied by his staff and a pick of cavalry, Santa Anna reached the Atascosito crossing of the Colorado River on the 5th and was able to join Sesma and Tolsa on the 6th.¹⁴ Very early in the morning of the 7th, he left with a small force of 280 men for a surprise attack on San Felipe. Even though he did not surprise the Texas guards at the crossing, he succeeded in capturing one who told him that there were about eight hundred Texans on the Brazos River at Groce's Plantation. This information caused Santa Anna to name San Felipe as the new command post and call all forces to converge there.¹⁵

Houston's arbitrary removal to the Brazos River on March 26th caused about two hundred men to ask for furloughs, and some simply left to take their families out of the war zone. Thinking it was useless to join the army, many reinforcements fled with their families beyond the Sabine River. The second "Runaway Scrape" was worse than the first because of the hardships imposed by the spring rains, which seemed unusually heavy that year. By the time Houston reached the Brazos River and made camp a short distance from San Felipe, his forces were reduced to about six hundred men. On the 29th they marched six miles up the river in a driving rain and camped on Mill Creek, where Houston wrote to Rusk: "On my arrival on the Brazos, had I consulted the wishes of all, I should have been like the ass between two stacks of hay. Many wished me to go below, others above. I consulted none—I held no councils of war. If I err, the blame is mine."¹⁶

There was more dissatisfaction in the ranks when they discovered the next day that they were moving farther northward. When Wiley Martin and Mosely Baker refused to follow the General to Groce's plantation (now Hempstead), Houston wisely "ordered" Baker to guard San Felipe and sent Martin downstream to protect the crossing at Fort Bend (now Richmond).¹⁷

Houston explained that he was going to Jared Groce's place because food supplies were there and the steamboat, the *Yellowstone*, which was loading bales of cotton, could be used in the fight against the Mexicans. A soldier in the Texas army, J.H. Kuykendall, described the march:

Ere the army had crossed this stream (Mill Creek) it began to rain in torrents. As we floundered through mud and water, pelted by the storm, General Houston rode slowly close to my company. He wore a black cloth dress coat, somewhat threadbare. He complained of having no blanket. He said that he'd had a good one but some scoundrel had stolen it. He then said: "My friends, I am told that evilly disposed persons have told you I am going to march you to the Redlands (Nacogdoches area). This is false. I'm going to lead you into the Brazos bottom near Groce's to a position where you can whip the enemy even if he comes ten to one, where we can get an abundant supply of corn."¹⁸

These reasons are similar to the ones Houston gave to Rusk. However, Major George Bernard Erath and Captain R.J. Calder thought it was for discipline purposes.¹⁹

Arriving at Groce's Plantation on the 31st, they camped for two weeks on a small rise on the west bank of the Brazos River. As the rain continued unabated, the bivouac area became an island which some of the veterans remember as being similar to camping in a lake.²⁰ Kuykendall recalled that in addition to the miserable weather, one out of ten contracted measles.²¹ Dr. N.D. Labadie noted in his journal that the men also became ill from bad food and water. He recorded: "It was here that the Medical Staff was organized, April 6. To Dr. Phelps was assigned the hospital, which, for some weeks before, had been kept on Groce's

plantation, where a few sick had been sent. Dr. Ewing received the appointment of surgeon-general, and by him Dr. Bomer and the writer, [Dr. Labadie] were appointed surgeons of the first regiment of Regulars."²²

Even though all the officers except Baker and Martin had retreated with him to Groce's, Houston continued to be the object of dissatisfaction. The government showed its displeasure through a note Burnet addressed to Houston saying that Houston had become the laughing stock of the enemy and that the salvation of Texas depended upon his fighting.²³ The non-aggressive policy of the commander led many to think that he intended to retreat towards the Sabine River. The presence of United States troops under General E.P. Gaines at Natchitoches, Louisiana, seemed to be the basis of this belief. Laconic Houston never said or wrote anything to indicate such a move.²⁴

At Groce's they could hear clearly the fighting between Baker and Santa Anna at San Felipe. When Houston made no move, the men began to openly talk of electing a new leader.²⁵ The cabinet sent Secretary of War Rusk to confer with the Commander-in-Chief just after he retreated from the Colorado to the Brazos. According to Burnet, Rusk was unable at that time to persuade Houston to check the enemy's advance.²⁶

Aware of the discontent of the troops and the government, Houston continued the delay in order to organize the army since there never had been sufficient time before. Sidney Sherman was named commander of a new regiment; numerous promotions were made and an effective scout and spy company was formed with Henry Karnes as commander. Because Groce's plantation had well-equipped shops, the time was well spent in repairing weapons.²⁷

Even though it seemed that the whole Republic was dissatisfied with Houston's management of the campaign, the reinforcements continued to arrive and the size of the army increased to about eight hundred. Among the fresh volunteers was Mirabeau B. Lamar who wanted to take three hundred men with him on the *Yellowstone* and make raids on the Mexicans. Sherman was another who wanted to be the Commander-in-Chief. According to Dr. Labadie, Houston "caused notices to be written and struck on the trees with wooden pegs, to the effect that the first man who should beat for volunteers should be courtmartialled and shot."²⁸ Rusk arrived on April 4th, and in the face of his obvious support of Houston, rumblings for a new commander stopped.

The Texas spies were finally certain that Santa Anna was leading the Mexican forces because Mrs. Elizabeth Powell of Fort Bend had been his hostess on the 10th. From her son, Joseph, Houston and Rusk learned that Santa Anna planned to capture the cabinet at Harrisburg. They decided to go to Harrisburg without telling anyone for fear that Santa Anna would hear of it. Suspecting that Santa Anna was ahead of his main army, Houston hoped to isolate the Mexican president and defeat him before Filisola could come to his aid.²⁹

Using the *Yellowstone* and a yawl, they crossed the Brazos. The presence of ten wagons, ox-teams, and about two hundred horses, along with troops and baggage, rendered the operation a difficult two-day move. Scouting and guard-duty detachments and forces of Baker and Martin were ordered to rejoin the army at Donaho's a few miles from Groce's, which they did by the 15th.³⁰ Still convinced that Houston was retreating, Captain Martin refused to fall in line. As a result, he was removed from his command and sent to Robbins' Ferry on the Trinity River to protect the families who were fleeing from the Indians.³¹

Citizens of Cincinnati, Ohio sent two six-pounders, known as the "Twin-Sisters," and since it was illegal to ship arms from the United States, they labeled them "hollow ware." Arriving at Harrisburg on April 11th, they

were hauled to Groce's where Lieutenant-Colonel James C. Neill was placed in command of the artillery corps.³²

On the way to Harrisburg on the morning of the 16th, the army approached a major crossroads—north to Nacogdoches, south the Harrisburg. Since Houston had not announced his plans to his troops, the army developed an ugly mood. If Houston had attempted to lead them to the Trinity River, they would have deposed him.³³ Dr. Labadie told about the crossroads decision:

As many were unwilling to go that road [to Nacogdoches], a halt was expected to be made at Roberts' [where the road forked], and as we neared that point (17th April), the writer, with three or four others, galloped to near the advance guard, the captain of which told us he had received no orders, but would go between the two roads. As Gen. Houston was now coming up, several of us desired Mr. Roberts, who was standing on his gate, to point out to all—the road to Harrisburg. Gen. Houston was then close by, when Roberts raised his hand, and elevating his voice, cried out: "That right hand road will carry you to Harrisburg just as straight as a compass." A shout was then raised: "To the right, boys, to the right." The whole line was fast closing up as the music had stopped; but upon hearing the shout from the men, the music proceeded to the right. The advance guard . . . wheeled also to the right; and then loud and joyous shouts followed in succession.³⁴

Kuykendall and Houston agreed that no orders were given to take the Harrisburg road.³⁵

Shortly after the army turned right, Mrs. Pamela Mann demanded her oxen which she had loaned to pull the cannon. Private Robert H. Hunter, a very poor speller, described the disagreement:

She rode up to the general, & said, general you tole me a d-m lie, you said that was going on the Nacogdoches road. Sir I want my oxen. Well, Mr. Mann we cant spaire them. We cant git our cannon a long without them. I dont care a d-m for your cannon, I want my oxen. She had a pare of holster pictols on her saddle pummel & a very large knife on her saddle. She turned a round to the oxen, & jumpt down with knife & cut the raw hide tug that the chane was tide with. The log chane hook was broke & it was tide with raw hide. No body said a word. She jumpt on her horse with whip in hand, & away she went in a lope with her oxen. Capt Rover [the wagon master] rope up to general Houston, & said general we cant git a long with out them oxen, the cannon is don boged down. Well we have to get a long the best we can, the general said. Well general I will go and bring them back . . . The Capt got a hundred yard or so, & the general rased up in his saddle, & hollowed, Capt Rover that woman will fite . . . About 9 or 10 oclock Capt Rover came in to camp, & he did not bring any oxen.³⁶

Meanwhile, the Mexican armies under Santa Anna and Sesma met Baker's company at San Felipe on the 29th. From the east bank of the river, Baker had prevented the Mexicans from crossing the Brazos at that point. He also burned the town according to Houston's written order, though Houston always denied this.³⁷ In a letter to Rusk, March 31, 1836, Houston wrote: "Two nights since, when it was reported that the enemy were on this side of the Colorado, the citizens of San Felipe reduced it to ashes. There was no order from me for it. I am glad of it, should the enemy march there."³⁸

Since the Texans had carefully hidden all boats and rafts in the vicinity, Santa Anna had to construct his own flat-boats. Being impatient, he set out

down the river with 550 men. After three days searching, he captured the ferry at Fort Bend in spite of resistance from Martin's small force.³⁹ Sesma joined him on April 13th and Filisola, Gaona, and Urrea were also ordered to combine forces there.

From captured civilians, Santa Anna learned that the rebel government was unprotected at Harrisburg, only thirty miles away. Apparently, he was abandoning his original plan of attacking the army because he thought the cabinet was closer. Leaving Sesma at Fort Bend with part of his division and with sealed instructions for Filisola, Santa Anna arrived at Harrisburg in a day and a half on April 15th with about one thousand men.⁴⁰ He was disappointed to find that the cabinet had been warned and the town empty except for three printers who were busy printing Texas' only newspaper, *The Telegraph and Texas Register*. These printers, not withholding any strategic information, told him the size and location of Houston's army and that the cabinet had left at noon for Galveston.⁴¹ After setting fire to the town and throwing the presses into the bayou, Almonte and fifty dragoons pursued Burnet and his cabinet while the rest of the army following to New Washington (now Morgan's Point).

Almonte came within a few feet of capturing Burnet and his party as they were frantically rowing away from the shore. Since Mrs. Burnet was with the cabinet, Almonte would not let his men fire on the group.⁴² However, the trip to New Washington was useful in another way; the well-stocked Morgan warehouse was captured. When Santa Anna arrived on the 18th, Almonte was also able to report that settlers in the area believed that Houston was retreating across the San Jacinto River at Lynchburg.⁴³

On April 18th, Houston's army encamped at White Oak Bayou, opposite Harrisburg. From a Mexican courier and a guard, captured by Deaf Smith, Houston learned of the destruction of the town and that Santa Anna had crossed Vince's Bridge on his way to Lynchburg.⁴⁴ Knowing that Santa Anna was in advance of the main body of troops, he felt now was the time for the Texans to attack.

The most disciplined of Houston's troops and the only men with uniforms were two companies of "deserters" from the United States army stationed in Louisiana. Also included in the Texas army was a small band composed of three fifers—John Beebe, Luke Bust, and Frederick Lemsky—and one drummer, Dick, a free Negro from New Orleans.⁴⁵

Juan N. Seguin commanded the only company of the Texas army made up of native Texans and these were of Spanish descent. Of the nine hundred men only 171 were landowners in Texas. Most had lived in the United States before 1836. Why had they come? They came to fight for Texas liberty, to forget lost loves, to escape debtor's prison, but mostly for land.⁴⁶ Wherever Texans or their friends recruited in the United States, they always mentioned land as a reward for service. All those in service as of March 14, 1836 would receive 1,280 acres from the Texas government. If they had been in service six months, each would receive 640 acres. For a period of not less than three months, the reward was 320 acres.⁴⁷

Before the Texans left Harrisburg on April 19th, fresh cases of children's diseases broke out among them, leaving the fighting force at less than eight hundred.⁴⁸ Major McNutt with a company of seventy-five men remained behind to protect about two hundred sick and the army's baggage. Houston took time to write Henry Raquet of Nacogdoches: "This morning we are in preparation to meet Santa Anna. It is the only chance of saving Texas. . . . We go to conquer. . . . No previous occasion would justify it. The troops are in fine spirits, and now is the time for action."⁴⁹ To the soldiers, both Houston and Rusk made animated

speeches, admonishing them to remember the Alamo and Goliad as they went to meet the enemy.⁵⁰ Houston was retreating no longer.

After an all night march with only two brief stops, troops and equipment had to be conveyed across the swollen Buffalo Bayou in the only available craft—a leaky boat. The Texans had stopped in a grove of trees about a half-mile from Lynch's Ferry at the junction of the San Jacinto River and Buffalo Bayou.⁵¹ Their position gave them both protection as well as command of the ferry and a good view of the San Jacinto prairie to their right.⁵²

The Texas army, made up of poorly armed farmers and adventurers, faced a general who had never known defeat, commanding veteran troops with plenty of arms, munitions, and one twelve pound cannon. According to Houston's report to Burnet, the Mexicans on April 21st numbered about 1,500 while the Texans had a fighting force of only 783. From Mexican sources, Santa Anna's army numbered closer to 1,200.⁵³

For about an hour on the afternoon of April 20th, Santa Anna fired his twelve pound cannon at the Texans, wounding cannoneer Neill. The Twin-Sisters returned the fire very effectively, forcing the Mexican infantry to abandon the cannon while retiring to the timber behind them. Sherman insisted on being allowed to capture the cannon even though it would break the Texan's defensive position. Reluctantly Houston agreed to the engagement in which Lamar boldly rescued two wounded Texans. Lamar's conspicuous bravery led to his promotion to commander of the cavalry.⁵⁴

Bolstering Santa Anna's forces, General Martín Perfecto de Cos arrived with four hundred men on the morning of the 21st. Some in the Texas army feared that Houston would again try to avoid a battle. Walter Lane said Houston wanted to wait for reinforcements "but the men sent up their officers, demanding a fight. So fight it was." From Labadie's account: "Every man was eager for it [the battle], but all feared another disappointment, as the commander still showed no inclination whatever to lead the men out . . . Up to noon nothing could be decided; yet the desire of the men only increased the more, until, finally, Houston said to Wharton, 'Fight, and be damned!'"⁵⁵ Naturally, Houston had a different view of who wanted to attack. Besides the facts that the Texans defeated the Mexican army and there was no rain, everything about the battle of San Jacinto is controversial. Since most accounts were written with a political bias, it is hard to know for certain what happened.

Another example of controversy concerns the destruction of Vince's Bridge. W.J.E. Heard claimed Deaf Smith said to Houston: "I want you to let me go and burn Vince's bridge. Houston objected, . . . [however], after a good deal of altercation, [he] consented."⁵⁶ Houston said that in order to prevent additional Mexican reinforcements, he ordered Smith to destroy the bridge.⁵⁷

At noon, Houston, Burleson, Sherman, Lysander Wells, Wharton, Lamar, Somerville, Rusk, Bennett, and Millard met the only council of war held in the San Jacinto campaign. "Only two . . . voted for attacking the enemy. The balance voted in favor of awaiting the attack upon us. They said that we had no bayonets to charge with, and that it was through an open prairie; that our position was strong, and in it we could whip all Mexico," said Joseph L. Bennett, second-in-command of the Second Regiment.⁵⁸ Again, keeping his own counsel, Houston dismissed the group and later submitted his plan to Rusk, who agreed to it. The commanders put the question of an immediate attack to their men. Since the men had been wanting to attack all morning, the order to parade was given.⁵⁹ It was three o'clock in the afternoon; the Mexicans were enjoying their siesta without the benefit of lookouts.

Moving out first was the Texas cavalry on the right flank, followed by

Millard's regulars, then the artillery company with the Twin-Sisters. On the left was Burleson's First Regiment, somewhat to the center, and Sherman's Second Regiment on the far left. The Texas battle line was strung out for almost nine hundred yards as it advanced across the prairie, usually two men deep. Marching silently they were within two hundred yards of the enemy before they were seen by the Mexicans. Since many of the Mexican officers were asleep, their effort to resist was confused. Houston's order to "Halt! Fire! Charge!" when they were about seventy yards from the enemy was accompanied by the fifes and drum playing "Won't You Come to My Bower," though some accounts claim that they played "Yankee Doodle."⁶⁰

Screaming "Remember the Alamo!" and "Remember Goliad!" the Texas army went over the barricade and pursued the enemy until the Mexican line broke and fled in panic. Houston had two horses shot out from under him; the second ball also wounded his ankle. The battle was over in less than twenty minutes, but the slaughter continued until nightfall though Houston gave orders not to kill any more, but to take prisoners. Robert Hunter quoted Captain Eastland as saying "Boys take prisoners, you know how to take prisoners, take them with the but of yore guns, club guns, and said remember the Alamo and remember Laberde [La Bahía de Goliad] & club guns, right & left, &nock their brains out."⁶¹ Some of the Mexicans tried to escape through the swamp in their rear, others towards Vince's bridge, but the majority through the timber along the bayou. In spite of the pitiful protests, "Me no Alamo—Me no Goliad," the revengeful Texans continued the carnage. Alfonso Steele, bleeding at the nose and mouth, was being aided by a fellow Texan when two Mexicans surrendered to them. The other Texan would not shoot them since they surrendered, but Alfonso said, "I don't want any more prisoners; hand me my gun and I will shoot one of them." He handed me my gun and I shot one of them down; the other one ran off."⁶² Six hundred Mexicans were killed, at least two hundred were wounded, and seven hundred thirty taken prisoner. Thirty Texans were wounded and only nine were killed.⁶³

The prisoners were guarded and huge bonfires were used to light the area. Prisoner Delgado said, "I and several of my companions were silly enough to believe that we were about to be burnt alive, in retaliation for those who had been burnt in the Alamo . . . However, we felt considerably relieved when they placed us around the fire to warm ourselves and to dry our wet clothes."⁶⁴

All during the next day, the roundup of prisoners continued. In the late afternoon, as he neared a bridge, Sergeant James A. Sylvester found Santa Anna. Karnes, who had cornered about fifty Mexicans in the tall grass near the bayou, called on Burleson and fifty volunteers to help him bring them in alive. Splitting up into small search parties, Sylvester, Sion Bostick, Alfred Miles, Charles Thompson, Joseph Vermillion and Joel Robison found Santa Anna lying down with his face covered with a blanket. Robison, the only one who knew Spanish, was questioned by the Mexican about the location of General Houston and was told that he was in camp. The Mexican claimed to be a private soldier but when Robison pointed out his fine shirt and studs, he pretended to be an aid to Santa Anna and burst into tears.⁶⁵ Miles let the prisoner ride with him until they got out of the tall grass where Miles ordered him to dismount. To make him trot, Miles abused him with his lance until Santa Anna finally fell, begging Miles to let him ride again. Disgusted with his whining, Miles wanted to kill him, but Robison said, "My compassion for the prisoner moved me to mount him behind me." Vermillion and Sylvester went in another direction, while the others took the prisoner to camp. Robison was surprised "to hear the prisoners exclaiming 'El Presidente! El Presidente!' by which we were made aware that we had unwittingly captured the 'Napoleon of the West.'"⁶⁶

After being conducted to Houston, Santa Anna introduced himself, "I am General Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna, and a prisoner-of-war at your disposition."⁶⁷ When he proposed negotiation for his liberation, Houston refused saying that it was the job of the civil government to make treaties, though an armistice was arranged between Houston and him until a permanent peace treaty could be arranged. Most of the army clamored for the death of Santa Anna, but Houston prevented it because Santa Anna would serve as a hostage to deter another Mexican invasion. Hence, his life was preserved to guarantee peace for Texas.⁶⁸

In the instructions from Santa Anna, delivered by Deaf Smith on the 23rd, Filisola, the second-in-command, was to fall back to San Antonio, Gaona was to join him there, and Urrea was to retreat to Victoria. On the 25th Houston found time to send a battle report to Burnet in Galveston.

A detail of men was ordered to bury the Mexican dead, but they did not relish the job and returned without doing it. John J. Linn, who had arrived with supplies from Galveston, suggested that several hundred prisoners under strong guard bury their dead. Linn said, "Houston communicated the suggestion to Santa Anna, who replied that he was wholly indifferent and cared not what disposition was made of the bodies. He also volunteered the information that . . . he generally found incineration a ready solution for similar problems."⁶⁹

The owner of the battlefield, Mrs. Peggy McCormick, demanded that Houston take "them stinking Mexicans" off her land. Houston replied "with mock seriousness: 'Madam, your land will be famed in history as the classic spot upon which the glorious victory of San Jacinto was gained!' . . . 'To the devil with your glorious history!' " she replied.⁷⁰ On May 1st, the stench of the decaying Mexicans was so terrible that the army moved four miles away (now Deer Park).

When President Burnet and the cabinet arrived on May 1st, Houston resigned as commander of the army and on May 5th left for New Orleans so he could receive better treatment for his shattered ankle.

A division developed in the cabinet as to the best manner of handling Santa Anna; some agreeing with Houston that Santa Anna would help secure recognition of Texas independence.⁷¹ Lamar, recently named Secretary of War, and Secretary of the Navy Robert Potter opposed any treaty with Santa Anna and insisted that he be treated like a common murderer.⁷² During the discussion they moved all the prisoners to Velasco. Santa Anna asked for two treaties, signed on May 14, 1836, one public and the other secret, in order to comply with the demands of the Texas government.⁷³ In the public treaty, Santa Anna declared the invasion of Texas at an end. There would be restoration of property taken by the Mexicans and the Texas army should not advance nearer the retreating Mexican army than five leagues. The secret treaty stipulated that in return for his freedom, Santa Anna would work for the recognition of Texas' independence from Mexico, as well as the Rio Grande boundary line.

Filisola ratified the public agreement on May 26th and abandoned Texas. However, the secret treaty was never fulfilled because the unruly army delayed Santa Anna's release, thus preventing him from using his influence in the Mexican Senate to ratify the treaty. The newly elected President of the Republic, Sam Houston, furloughed the army and sent Santa Anna to Washington, D.C. under the protection of the United States government.⁷⁴ In March, 1837, the United States recognized Texas independence.

The Texas army lost every battle but the last one. In the minds of Texans, the Battle of San Jacinto gave them their independence, thus establishing the

Republic of Texas. Mexico was never again able to impose its authority on Texas. The battle also paved the way to the Pacific Ocean since the eventual annexation of Texas to the United States brought on the Mexican War which gave Americans land west to the ocean and north to Oregon.

A brief battle won by a small republic vastly shaped the destiny of the United States as a world power.

NOTES

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³Eugene C. Barker, "The San Jacinto Campaign—Kuykendall's Recollections of the Campaign," *Texas Historical Association Quarterly*, IV (April, 1901), 293. Hereafter cited as Kuykendall's Recollections.

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⁶Henry Stuart Foote, *Texas and the Texans* (Philadelphia, 1841), 268; Houston's Speech in the United States Senate, February 28, 1859, Williams and Barker (eds.), *Writings*, VII, 312.

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⁸Yoakum, *History of Texas*, II, 111; Frank X. Tolbert, *The Day of San Jacinto* (New York, 1959), 85; David G. Burnet to the People of East Texas, March 18, 1836, Binkley (ed.), *Official Correspondence*, I, 515.

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¹³Richard G. Santos, *Santa Anna's Campaign Against Texas, 1835-1836* (Waco, 1968), 92; Tolbert, *The Day of San Jacinto*, 23-24.

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Jacinto, Together with Mr. Steele's Account of the Campaign and Fight (Mexia, Texas, 1906), 4.

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²³Barker, "The San Jacinto Campaign," 249.

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²⁵*Ibid.*, 249.

²⁶*The Telegraph and Texas Register*, September 6, 1836.

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⁴¹Tolbert, *The Day of San Jacinto*, 70.

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⁴⁹Houston to Henry Raquet, April 19, 1836, Williams and Barker (eds.), *Writings*, I, 413.

⁵⁰Barker, "The San Jacinto Campaign," 255.

- ⁵¹Houx, *Biography of Private Alfonso Steele*, 5.
- ⁵²Connor, "The Battle of San Jacinto," 68.
- ⁵³Houston to Burnet, April 25, 1836, Williams and Barker (eds.), *Writings*, I, 418; Castañeda, *The Mexican Side of the Texas Revolution*, 1836, 120-121; Filisola, *Evacuation of Texas*, 12.
- ⁵⁴Yoakum, *History of Texas*, II, 139.
- ⁵⁵Walter P. Lane, *The Adventures of Recollections of General W.P. Lane (Marshall, 1928)*, 14; Courtney, *After the Alamo-San Jacinto*, 61.
- ⁵⁶Barker, "The San Jacinto Campaign—Burnet's Narrative of the Campaign," 333.
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- ⁶²Houx, *Biography of Private Alfonso Steele*, 6-7.
- ⁶³Houston to Burnet, April 25, 1836, Williams and Barker (eds.), *Writings*, I, 418; Dixon and Kemp, *The Heroes of San Jacinto*, 13-14.
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