

ALAMO MASSACRE

1836

----- *Andrea Castañón Villanueva* -----

Seeking independence from Mexico, a volunteer army of United States settlers drove Mexican forces out of San Antonio, Texas, in December 1835. Three months later, thousands of Mexican soldiers retaliated in an attack on Fort Alamo. Approximately 185 Texan men, women and children were inside the fort at the time of the attack. Survivors included noncombatants (women and children, and an African-American slave) and one Texan soldier. Andrea Castañón Villanueva, born in 1803, was among those to survive. Villanueva gained additional fame later in life as the last survivor of the Alamo. In this article from the *San Antonio Light*, Villanueva describes the battle she saw inside the fort.

THINK THROUGH HISTORY : Recognizing Bias

Can you tell which side (if any) Villanueva supported in the battle she describes? What clues did you use in reaching your conclusion?

...We all knew that we were doomed, but not one was in favor of surrendering. A small herd of cattle had been driven inside of the walls and we had found a small quantity of corn that had been stored by the priests. The great front door had been piled full of sand bags and there was a bare hope that we might hold out until General Houston sent a reinforcement.

There was just 177 men inside of the Alamo and up to this time no one had been killed, though cannon had thundered against us and several assaults had been made. Colonel Travis was the first man killed. He fell on the southeast side near where the Menger Hotel stands. The Mexican infantry charged across the plaza many times and rained musket balls against the walls, but they were always made to recoil. Up to the morning of the 6th of March, the cannon had done us little damage, though the batteries never ceased firing. Colonel Crockett frequently came into the room and said a few encouraging words to Bowie. This man came to San Antonio only a few days before the invasion. The Americans extended him a warm welcome. They made bonfires in the streets and Colonel Crockett must have made a great speech, for I never heard so much cheering and hurrahing in all my life. They had supper at my hotel and there was lots of singing, story telling and some drinking. Crockett played the fiddle and he played well if I am any judge of music. He was one of the strangest looking men I ever saw....I could not regard him as a hero until I saw him die.

He looked grand and terrible standing in the door and fighting a whole column of Mexican infantry. He had fired his last shot and had no time to reload. The cannon had knocked away the sand bags and the infantry was pouring through the breach. Crockett stood there swinging something bright over his head. The place was full of smoke and I could not tell whether he was using a gun or a sword. A heap of dead was piled at his feet and the Mexicans were lunging at him with bayonets, but he would not retreat an inch. Poor Bowie could see it all, but he could not raise up from his cot. Crockett fell and the Mexicans poured into the Alamo.

On the morning of the 6th of March 1836, General Santa Anna prepared to hurl his whole force against the doomed fort. The degüello [bugle call signifying no quarter] was sounded and Madam Candelaria says that they all very well understood what it meant and every man prepared to sell his life as dearly as possible.

I sat by Bowie's side...and tried to keep him as composed as possible. He had a high fever and was seized with a fit of coughing every few moments. Colonel Crockett loaded Bowie's rifle and a pair of pistols and laid them by his side. The Mexicans ran a battery of several guns out on the plaza and instantly began to rain balls against the sand bags. It was easy to see that they would soon clear every barricade from the front door, but Crockett assured Bowie that he could stop a whole regiment from entering. I peeped through the window and saw long lines of infantry, followed by dragoons, filing into the plaza, and I notified Colonel Crockett of the fact. 'All right,' said he. 'Boys, aim well.' The words had hardly died on his lips before a storm of bullets rained against the walls and the very earth seemed to tremble beneath the tread of Santa Anna's yelling legions. The Texans made every shot tell and the plaza was covered with dead bodies. The assaulting columns recoiled and I thought we had beaten them, but hosts of officers could be seen waving their swords and rallying the hesitating and broken columns.

They charged again and at one time, when within a dozen steps of the door, it looked as if they were about to be driven back, so terrible was the fire of the Texans. Those immediately in front of the great door were certainly in the act of retiring when a column that had come obliquely across the plaza reached the southwest corner of the Alamo and, bending their bodies, they ran under the shelter of the wall to the door. It looked as if a hundred bayonets were thrust into the door at the same time and a sheet of flame lit up the Alamo. Every man at the door fell but Crockett. I could see him struggling with the head of the column and Bowie raised up and fired his rifle. I saw Crockett fall backwards. The enraged Mexicans then streamed into the building firing and yelling like madmen. The place was full of smoke and the death screams of the dying, mingled with the exultant shouts of the victors, made it a veritable hell. A dozen or more Mexicans sprang into the room occupied by Colonel Bowie. He emptied his pistols in their faces and killed two of them. As they lunged towards

him with their muskets I threw myself in front of them and received two of their bayonets in my body. One passed through my arm and the other through the flesh of my chin....I implored them not to murder a sick man, but they thrust me out of the way and butchered my friend before my eyes. All was silent now. The massacre had ended. One hundred and seventy-six of the bravest men that the world ever saw had fallen and not one had asked for mercy. I walked out of the cell and when I stepped upon the floor of the Alamo the blood ran into my shoes.

Source: "Alamo Massacre," in *San Antonio Light*, 19 February 1899. Reprinted in *The Alamo Remembered*, edited by Timothy M. Matovina (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995), pp. 58–62.

THINK THROUGH HISTORY : ANSWER

Students may answer that Villanueva supported the Texans in the battle of the Alamo. Some may cite as evidence her assertion in the beginning of the account that she and those she was with were trying to “hold out until General Houston sent a reinforcement.” Others may cite her description of Colonel Crockett’s heroism fighting the Mexicans, her assistance to Bowie (including pleading for his life), and her sad conclusion that “one hundred and seventy-six of the bravest men that the world ever saw had fallen” in reference to the fallen Texans. Also of note is her use of “we” when describing the Texans.