

Primary Documents Travis's Letters

TEKS 7.3C; 7.21A-E; 7.22A-D

LESSON ACTIVITY

Compare and contrast the letters written by William Barret Travis while the Alamo was under siege. Between February 23th and March 3rd, 1836, how did Travis's tone change?

To Andrew Ponton, Judge and Citizens of Gonzales February 23, 1836

COMMANDANCY OF BEXAR, 3 o'clock p.m.: The enemy in large force are in sight. We want men and provisions. Send them to us. We have 150 men and are determined to defend the Alamo to the last. Give us assistance.

P.S. Send an express to San Felipe with news night and day.

From W.B. Travis and James Bowie To James W. Fannin (at Goliad) February 23, 1836

COMMANDANCY OF BEXAR: We have removed all the men to the Alamo where we make such resistance as is due our honor, and that of a country, until we can get assistance from you, which we expect you to forward immediately. In this extremity, we hope you will send us all the men you can spare promptly. We have one hundred and forty six men, who are determined never to retreat. We have but little provisions, but enough to serve us till you and your men arrive. We deem it unnecessary to repeat to a brave officer, who knows his duty, that we call on him for assistance.

To The People of Texas and All Americans In The World -- February 24, 1836

Fellow citizens & compatriots --

I am beseiged, 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, & everything dear to the American character, to come to our aid, with all dispatch -- The enemy is receiving reinforcements daily & will no doubt increase to three or four thousand

in four or five days. If this call is neglected, I am determined to sustain myself as long as possible & die like a soldier who never forgets what is due to his own honor & that of his country --

VICTORY OR DEATH

William Barret Travis

Lt. Col. Comdt.

P.S. The Lord is on our side -- When the enemy appeared in sight we had not three bushels of corn -- We have since found in deserted houses 80 or 90 bushels & got into the walls 20 or 30 head of Beeves --

Travis

To Major-General Sam Houston

February 25, 1836

HEADQUARTERS, FORT OF THE ALAMO: Sir; On the 23rd of Feb., the enemy in large force entered the city of Bexar, which could not be prevented, as I had not sufficient force to occupy both positions. Col. Bartes, the Adjutant-Major of the President-General Santa Anna, demanded a surrender at discretion, calling us foreign rebels. I answered them with a cannon shot, upon which the enemy commenced a bombardment with a five inch howitzer, which together with a heavy cannonade, has been kept up incessantly ever since. I instantly sent express to Col. Fannin, at Goliad, and to the people of Gonzales and San Felipe. Today at 10 o'clock a.m. some two or three hundred Mexicans crossed the river below and came up under cover of the houses until they arrived within virtual point blank shot, when we opened a heavy discharge of grape and canister on them, together with a well directed fire from small arms which forced them to halt and take shelter in the houses about 90 or 100 yards from our batteries. The action continued to rage about two hours, when the enemy retreated in confusion, dragging many of their dead and wounded.

During the action, the enemy kept up a constant bombardment and discharge of balls, grape, and canister. We know from actual observation that many of the enemy were wounded -- while we, on our part, have not lost a man. Two or three of our men have been slightly scratched by pieces of rock, but have not been disabled. I take great pleasure in stating that both officers and men conducted themselves with firmness and bravery. Lieutenant Simmons of cavalry acting as infantry, and Captains Carey, Dickinson and Blair of the artillery, rendered essential service, and Charles Despallier and Robert Brown gallantly sallied out and set fire to houses which afforded the enemy shelter, in the face of enemy fire. Indeed, the whole of the men who were brought into action conducted themselves with such heroism that it would be injustice to discriminate. The Hon. David Crockett was seen at all points, animating the men to do their duty. Our numbers are few and the enemy still continues to approximate his works to ours. I have every reason to apprehend an attack from his whole force very soon; but I shall hold out to the last extremity, hoping to secure reinforcements in a day or two. Do hasten on aid to me as rapidly as possible, as from the superior number of the enemy, it will be impossible for us to keep them out much longer. If they overpower us, we fall a sacrifice at the shrine of our country, and we hope prosperity and our country will do our memory justice. Give me help, oh my country! Victory or Death!

W. Barret Travis
Lt. Col. Com

To the President of the Convention

March 3, 1836

COMMANDANCY OF THE ALAMO, BEJAR: In the present confusion of the political authorities of the country, and in the absence of the commander-in-chief, I beg leave to communicate to you the situation of this garrison. You have doubtless already seen my official report of the action of the 25th ult. made on that day to General Sam Houston, together with the various communications heretofore sent by express. I shall, therefore, confine myself to what has transpired since that date.

From the 25th to the present date, the enemy have kept up a bombardment from two howitzers (one a five and a half inch, and the other an eight inch) and a heavy cannonade from two long nine-pounders, mounted on a battery on the opposite side of the river, at a distance of four hundred yards from our walls. During this period the enemy has been busily employed in encircling us with entrenchments on all sides, at the following distance, to wit -- in Bexar, four hundred yards west; in Lavilleta, three hundred yards south; at the powder-house, one thousand yards east by south; on the ditch, eight hundred yards north. Notwithstanding all this, a company of thirty-two men from Gonzales, made their way into us on the morning of the 1st inst, at three o'clock, and Col. J.B. Bonham (a courier from Gonzales) got in this morning at eleven o'clock without molestation. I have so fortified this place, that the walls are generally proof against cannon-balls; and I shall continue to entrench on the inside, and strengthen the walls by throwing up dirt. At least two hundred shells have fallen inside our works without having injured a single man; indeed, we have been so fortunate as not to lose a man from any cause, and we have killed many of the enemy. The spirits of my men are still high, although they have had much to depress them. We have contended for ten days against an enemy whose numbers are variously estimated at from fifteen hundred to six thousand, with Gen. Ramirez Sesma and Col. Bartres, the aid-de-camp of Santa Anna, at their head. A report was circulated that Santa Anna himself was with the enemy, but I think it was false. A reinforcement of one thousand men is now entering Bexar from the west, and I think it more than probable that Santa Anna is now in town, from the rejoicing we hear. Col. Fannin is said to be on the march to this place with reinforcements; but I fear it is not true, as I have repeatedly sent to him for aid without receiving any. Col. Bonham, my special messenger, arrived at Labahia fourteen days ago, with a request for aid; and on the arrival of the enemy in Bexar ten days ago, I sent an express to Col. F. which arrived at Goliad on the next day, urging him to send us reinforcements -- none have arrived. I look to the colonies alone for aid; unless it arrives soon, I shall have to fight the enemy on his own terms. I will, however, do the best I can under the circumstances, and I feel confident that the determined valour and desperate courage, heretofore evinced by my men, will not fail them in the last struggle, and although they may be sacrificed to the vengeance of a Gothic enemy, the victory will cost the enemy so dear, that it will be worse for him than a defeat. I hope your honorable body will hasten on reinforcements, ammunition, and provisions to our aid, as soon as possible. We have provisions for twenty days for the men we have; our supply of ammunition is limited. At least five hundred pounds of cannon powder, and two hundred rounds of six, nine,

twelve, and eighteen pound balls -- ten kegs of rifle powder, and a supply of lead, should be sent to this place without delay, under a sufficient guard.

If these things are promptly sent, and large reinforcements are hastened to this frontier, this neighborhood will be the great and decisive battle ground. The power of Santa Anna is to be met here or in the colonies; we had better meet them here, than to suffer a war of desolation to rage our settlements. A blood-red banner waves from the church of Bexar, and in the camp above us, in token that the war is one of vengeance against rebels; they have declared us as such, and demanded that we should surrender at discretion or this garrison should be put to the sword. Their threats have had no influence on me or my men, but to make all fight with desperation, and that high-souled courage which characterizes the patriot, who is willing to die in defense of his country's liberty and his own honour.

The citizens of this municipality are all our enemies except those who have joined us heretofore; we have but three Mexicans now in the fort; those who have not joined us in this extremity, should be declared public enemies, and their property should aid in paying the expenses of the war.

*The bearer of this will give you your honorable body, a statement more in detail, should he escape through the enemy's lines. God and Texas! --
Victory or Death!!*

P.S. The enemy's troops are still arriving, and the reinforcements will probably amount to two or three thousand.

**To Jesse Grimes
March 3, 1836**

Do me the favor to send the enclosed to its proper destination instantly. I am still here, in fine spirits and well to do, with 145 men. I have held this place for ten days against a force variously estimated from 1,500 to 6,000, and shall continue to hold it till I get relief from my country or I will perish in its defense. We have had a shower of bombs and cannon balls continually falling among us the whole time, yet none of us has fallen. We have been miraculously preserved. You have no doubt seen my official report of the action of the 24th ult. in which we repulsed the enemy with considerable loss; on the night of the 25th they made another attempt to charge us in the rear of the fort, but we received them gallantly by a discharge of grape shot and musquetry, and they took to their scrapers immediately. They are now encamped in entrenchments on all sides of us.

All our couriers have gotten out without being caught and a company of 32 men from Gonzales got in two nights ago, and Colonel Bonham got in today by coming between the powder house and the enemy's upper encampment....Let the convention go on and make a declaration of independence, and we will then understand, and the world will understand, what we are fighting for. If independence is not declared, I shall lay down my arms, and so will the men under my command. But under the flag of independence, we are ready to peril our lives a hundred times a day, and to drive away the monster who is fighting us under a blood-red flag, threatening to murder all prisoners and make Texas a waste desert. I shall have to fight the enemy on his own terms, yet I am ready to do it, and if my countrymen do not rally to my relief, I am determined to perish in the defense of this place, and my bones shall reproach my country for her neglect. With

500 men more, I will drive Sesma beyond the Rio Grande, and I will visit vengeance on the enemy fighting against us. Let the government declare them public enemies, otherwise she is acting a suicidal part. I shall treat them as such, unless I have superior orders to the contrary. My respects to all friends, confusion to all enemies. God Bless you.

To David Ayers

March 3, 1836

Take care of my little boy. If the country should be saved, I may make for him a splendid fortune; but if the country be lost and I should perish, he will have nothing but the proud recollection that he is the son of a man who died for his country.