



Letter to a Nation

Kyle – U.S. History

On February 24, 1836, the day after the Mexican Army under the command of General Santa Anna arrived in San Antonio, William B. Travis wrote a letter asking for help and reinforcements. He had written other requests for aid, but this was different since the enemy had arrived and it was important for reinforcements to come quickly.

This letter made its way to newspapers all across America and, although it was published in many *after* the battle had taken place, the inspiring appeal helped to rally the support of the American people around the Texas cause.

In this letter, the punctuation and words are as Travis wrote with the following exception. The words “victory or death” were not capitalized, but were underlined three times for emphasis.

**Commandancy of the Alamo-
Bejar, Feby. 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 & 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 and got into the walls 20 or 30 head of Beeves.

VOCABULARY

Commandancy – a reference to the office of the commander

compatriots – a fellow countryman

besieged – to surround and entrap with armed forces

bombardment – an attack with artillery

cannonade – a direct reference to a bombardment with cannon

discretion – a free choice within certain legal boundaries

garrison – a military post and the troops stationed at that post

Beeves – presumably a general reference to a head of cattle (that is, a “beef”)

1. Describe the *patriotic* traits that are exhibited in Travis’ letter. Why do you think the words in this letter have become part of the Alamo legend?
2. Why do you think Travis ends his letter with the words “victory or death”? What were the defenders of the Alamo fighting for that was worth dying for?

The last letter Travis wrote to the world outside of the Alamo compound was a letter to his son composed on March 1, 1836. The boy had recently arrived in Texas from Alabama and was staying with friends of the family. It was written to David Ayers on a scrap of paper, and is one of the famous messages from the Alamo. Here is the text of the letter.

Take care of my little boy. If the country should be saved, I may make him a splendid fortune; but if the country should 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.

3. The defenders of the Alamo were overrun by the Mexican Army. William B. Travis, as well as the garrison under his command, were all killed. The Americans lost! Why do we, as Americans, still view the Alamo as a national symbol? How might this event be considered an example of patriotism? Explain why this is an event Americans would “proud(ly) recollect”.