

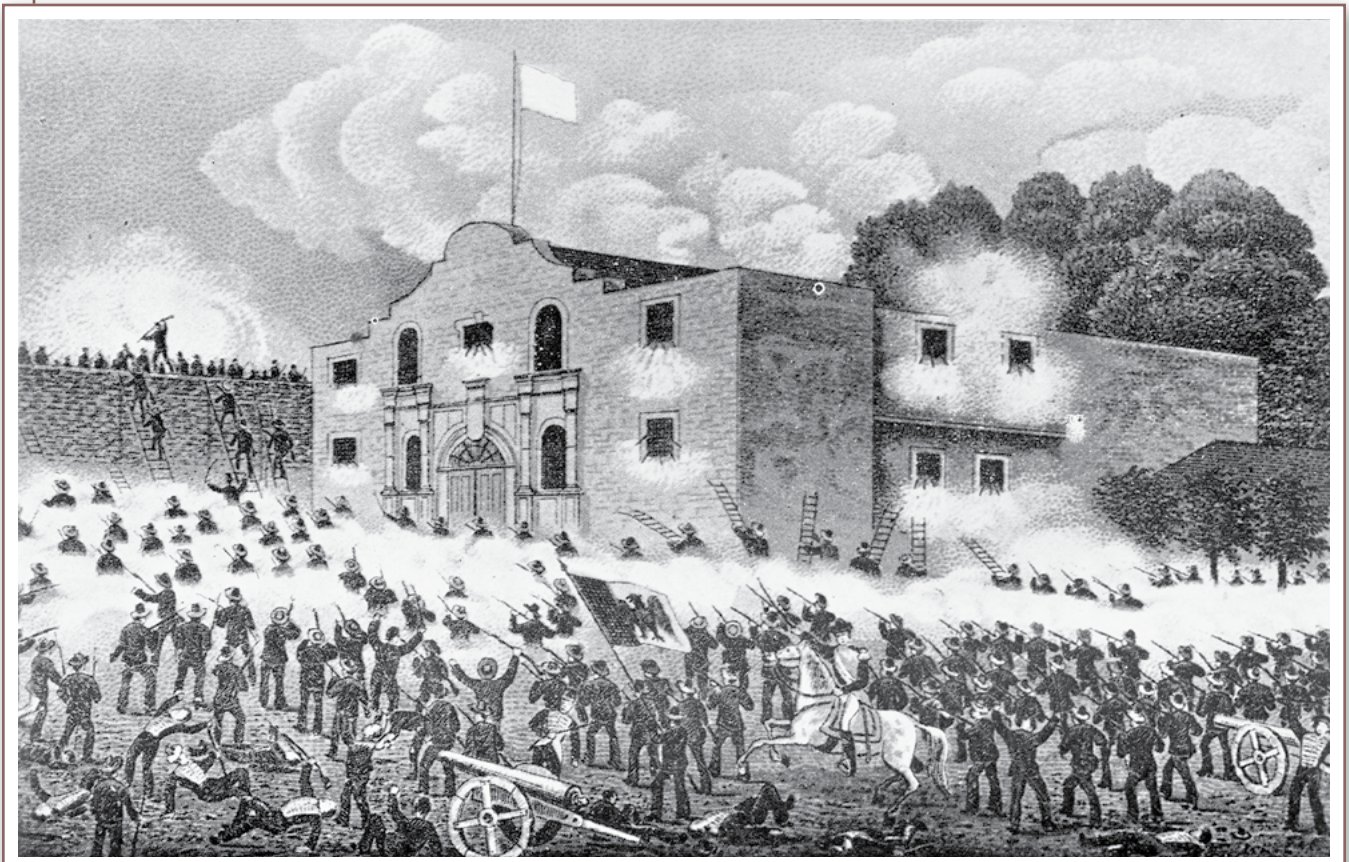
# Eyewitness at the Alamo

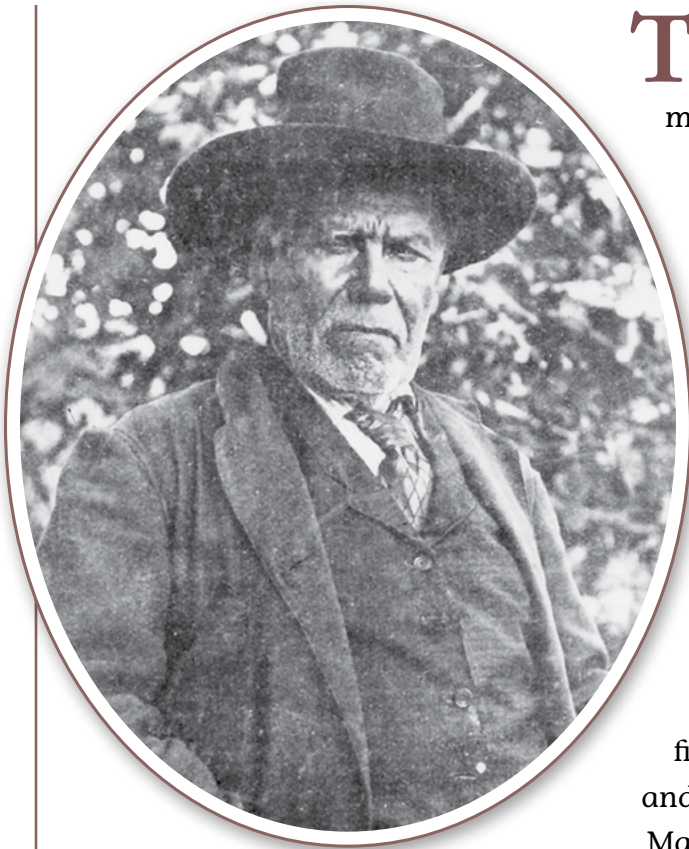
**W**hen Mexican soldiers massacred the defenders of the Alamo, they spared the lives of a few people. One of those people was Enrique Esparza, a 12-year-old Mexican boy. Enrique's father had brought his family into the Alamo for protection at the start of the siege, and had died alongside the Texans opposing General Santa Anna.

In 1907, when he was 84 years old, Enrique's eyewitness account appeared in the *San Antonio Express* newspaper. The facts in his story were the same as those in the story told right after the battle in 1836 by Susanna Dickinson, another Alamo survivor. The account given below is based on the story that appeared in the *Express*. Some of the facts differ from those found elsewhere because Enrique Esparza was describing what he could remember, and not what historians believe to be true.

General Cos, the Mexican general mentioned in the account, was the brother-in-law of General Santa Anna. He had led Mexican troops in an unsuccessful effort to crush the Texas revolution in 1835.

**American artist  
William H. Booker  
painted this scene  
of Mexican troops  
storming the Alamo  
on March 6, 1836.**





**Enrique Esparza**  
as he looked when he  
gave his eyewitness  
account in 1907.

**T**he Esparza family have lived in San Antonio for many generations. In the winter of 1835, my father's brother was drafted to serve in the army of the dictator-general, Santa Anna. He wanted my father, Gregorio, to join him, but Papa had been friends with the Texians living in San Antonio for a long time. He had worked with them and helped them drive out the soldiers led by General Cos. He did not plan to leave his home and family.

We were well aware that Santa Anna would return soon to seek revenge for the defeat of the Mexican forces in the Alamo in December. He was furious at General Cos for surrendering and promising to leave Texas and fight no more. He gathered a huge trained army and forced General Cos to return with him.

Mama was worried about leaving her home, but determined to go with Papa wherever he went. He sent word that a wagon would come for us. He was busy taking our cattle to the Alamo for food for the barracks.

I went across town to see if I could spot the army coming. To my surprise, as I ran across the Main Plaza, I saw a splendid sight. A large army was coming toward me on horseback and on foot. They wore red coats and blue trousers with white bands crossed over their chests. Pennants were flying and swords sparkling in the bright winter sun. Riding in front was Santa Anna, *El Presidente!* This man was every inch a leader. All the officers dismounted, but only the general tossed his reins to an aide with a flourish. I was very impressed.

Slipping away unnoticed, I ran to tell my parents that the army had arrived. No one had expected a forced march to cross the cold, arid plains of South Texas in winter. Santa Anna had done just that at the cost of the lives of a great many men and livestock. He intended to avenge the insult to his pride without a thought of the price.

At home, my family decided not to wait for the wagon. We gathered up a few clothes and bags of food. As dusk fell, we arrived at the gate to find it bolted. Furious, Mama pounded on the gate and



demanded that it be opened. When the sentries recognized Papa as being of one of their best Mexican soldiers, they called him to a small side window. The soldiers pulled us up through the little window one by one and Papa handed in our bundles.

We heard that a messenger arrived from Santa Anna shortly after the window was closed behind us. He demanded unconditional surrender from the few men in the big, indefensible compound. Knowing that they could expect no mercy from the cruel general, the men in the Alamo replied with a shot from the cannon on the roof of the building where we had taken refuge. Santa Anna's answer was many cannon balls striking the walls of the church and convent. The exchange of shots, cheers, and jeers from men on both sides went on all night. The siege had begun. The date was February 23, 1836.

We slept little for the next twelve nights. Only 188 men, several slaves, seven women, and nine children had the hopeless task of delaying the Mexican army until Texians everywhere could rally to their aid.

Santa Anna's troops numbered nearly 5,000 and were camped all around the Alamo. The military bands played almost constantly. The bugles sounded the *Deguello*, the hymn of death without mercy.

**The chapel of the Alamo Mission is known as the "Shrine of Texas Liberty."**



The Lyda Hill Texas Collection of Photographs in Carol M. Highsmith's America Project, Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division.

The red flag symbolizing “no quarter” flew from the belfry of the church in the Military Plaza. It meant death to every man within the Alamo who had so defied Santa Anna.

The Mexican soldiers had been drafted to fight, forced to march in freezing winds for four hundred miles. They needed a foe on whom to vent their anger and frustration.

Cannon balls pounded the fort for days with little effect. Texian sharpshooters were picking off Mexican soldiers with disconcerting regularity.

At last came a night of quiet and the exhausted men fell into a deep sleep. At dawn, the Mexican forces attacked. The infantry were forced to advance over the bodies of their own dead and wounded by the swords of the mounted cavalry at their backs. They found weak places and poured over the walls like sheep, regardless of the horrendous losses.

The noise and confusion prevented men from telling friend from foe. Soldiers swarmed over us in hand-to-hand fighting. After emptying their guns, they used them as clubs or killed with knives and bayonets. Two small boys and an older American boy beside me were killed, although unarmed. My father’s body fell from the high cannon he was firing to the ground at my feet. My mother fell to her knees beside him, holding my baby sister in her arms. My brothers and I crowded behind her, clinging to her skirts in fright. Some soldiers grouped the women and children together and herded them to the front of the chapel where there were others.

Gathered at the front, the Mexican soldiers continued firing into the bodies and walls for a long time, until lanterns were brought to check for survivors. The last I saw of my father was when a lantern was held over his body and the bodies of the dead all about the cannon he had tended.

After the dreadful ninety-minute slaughter, the Texians were piled on stacks of wood to be burned. My uncle asked for permission to locate his brother’s body. He alone was permitted a Christian burial because the family were “good Mexicans.” My mother told me to forget the horror of all that I had seen, but to remember that no one who had been in the battle had had one thing to gain, and only the Texians who died were even remembered.

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