

Sample Commemorative Speech: The Alamo

There are moments in time of incredible bravery and heroism. There are moments in history when a few brave men and women stand up to be counted. Here they draw the line and say they will stand and fight. Their stand may be small in comparison to the great battles in which thousands perish. Yet perhaps they achieve even more through their spirit, courage and determination. When principles hold fast against huge and overwhelming odds no matter what the outcome, victory is theirs. The Alamo in San Antonio, Texas on the 6th March 1836, was one such moment in time.

The battle of the Alamo was a desperate fight that probably only lasted a few short hours at the most. Every moment must have seemed a lifetime for those inside the beleaguered fort. Here, less than two hundred men and women held out against overwhelming odds and firepower for as long as they could. In the end every fighting man was killed. Their bravery and heroism has endured to this day.

Perhaps they believed, at first, that help would come. Most likely those who fell, knew in those final hours that they would die. Among them were novices, soldiers and volunteers. Side by side heroes and characters from the great frontiers prepared to make their defence. Among them were Jim Bowie and Davy Crockett, the 'king of the wild frontier' and a former congressman for Tennessee. They were commanded by Colonel William B. Travis, a career soldier of only 26 years of age. None of them would survive the battle of those last desperate hours. Their sacrifice, bravery and heroism would be remembered forever. Here in their last few hours, were the actions by which history would judge them. Yet those few could hardly have known the importance of what they were about to do. Nor would they ever know the victory that would one day be theirs.

The history of Texas is as big and dramatic as the state itself. It is impossible to think of the United States today without thinking of Texas as an integral part of it. Yet before the battle of the Alamo, Texas had been a bitterly fought over territory. On an epic scale it had been subject to Spanish occupation and then Mexican Independence. In its mountains the fierce and feared Comanche Indians raided and killed settlers with impunity and cruelty.

The Alamo itself was originally a Spanish mission named Mission San Antonio de Valero. For 70 years it had been home to missionaries and Indian converts. In 1821 Mexico achieved independence from Spain, establishing a republic. Within a few years the government issued an invitation to US citizens through generous land grants, to encourage the settling of the territory. They also hoped the settlers would put a buffer zone between themselves and the troublesome Comanche.

Settlers poured in in their thousands, while a desperately poor and unstable fledgling Mexican democracy in its infancy tried to cope. Behind the scenes was a cruel military despot, who despised the influx of settlers and sought to establish a dictatorship. His name was General Santa Anna. With US immigration out of control, the Mexican government tried to put an end to it and to clamp down. An impatient Santa Anna seized control in 1833 advocating the removal of all foreigners. The settlers had ideas of their own. They rose against their Mexican rulers in San Antonio. At the siege of Bexar, only a few hundred metres from the Alamo in December 1835, a Texan Militia drove the Mexican commander and his forces out of San Antonio. The Mexican forces had been humiliated. Santa Anna was furious.

Santa Anna swore revenge. Militarily, the Alamo, now an extended fort like settlement of some three acres, was of little importance. Objectively the Mexican General could have by passed it with ease, ignoring the Texan rebels. However with zeal and great effort he drove his forces as harshly and as quickly as he could towards San Antonio. He desperately wanted to avenge the humiliation of Bexar.

Every rational reason points to the fact the Alamo in itself was not worth defending. Yet some strange force seems to dictate that a stand here was inevitable. Before the republic of Texas was even declared, the compound was filling up with a mixed crew of soldiers and settlers. There were not even two hundred, with women and children among them. Jim Bowie had even been sent to organise a withdrawal. The valuable cannon, however, could not be moved. So they set about reinforcing the fortifications. The volunteers and the soldiers, under the commands of Bowie and Travis respectively, prepared for a showdown. The speed and arrival of Santa Anna and his forces seems to have surprised the occupants. Thousands of Mexican troops poured into San Antonio as the rebels and their families and even servants, barricaded themselves into the Alamo's compound.

For 13 days from the 23 February Santa Anna and his forces surrounded and besieged the tiny compound. We can only surmise what the thoughts and prayers of those inside were as they were bombarded. We do know that Travis was able to get word out through couriers. They braved the Mexican lines to get pleas for help out to any possible source. One of his famous letters, survives the siege. His words should be in the heart of every American.

"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 and our flag still waves proudly from the walls. I shall never surrender nor retreat."

After two weeks of refusing to surrender, the numbers inside the fort had swelled slightly to nearly two hundred. Two and half thousand Mexican troops awaited Santa

Anna's orders. Before the final battle, Travis had reputedly drawn a line in the dirt. He asked any man who was willing to stay and fight, to step over it. All but one did. Before day break on the 6th March, the first of three assaults began. The first two were repelled, but the third was too much for the exhausted Texans. They bravely fought to the last man as the overwhelming forces swept into the compound.

Fighting was vicious and hand to hand. More than a thousand Mexicans perished and every fighting man inside the fort was slain. Bowie himself reputedly fired his pistols from his sick bed before he was bayoneted. Santa Anna showed little mercy in his victory. As a final insult to the 'Tejano' defenders and Texan rebels, he piled up their mutilated bodies and burned them on a pyre.

To this day the Alamo and those who died fighting have become enshrined in history. Their names are synonymous with true heroes who made the ultimate stand and sacrifice. Their courage and fortitude paved the way for a Texas that stood tall, proud and independent. Santa Anna himself was defeated with his forces in the Battle of San Jaento on April 21 1836. The sacrifice of the Alamo's heroes ultimately added a million square miles of territory to the American Nation. Their stance against tyranny and their bravery will never be forgotten.