# Telegraph and Texas Register newspaper prints copy of William Barret Travis’s last surviving letter (written on March 3, 1836) from the Alamo, March 24, 1836

## SUMMARY:

*Telegraph and Texas Register* (a newspaper in San Felipe, Texas) prints a copy of William Barret Travis’s last surviving letter from the Alamo, describing conditions within the Alamo, urging the convention at Washington-on-the-Brazos to declare independence for Texas, and appealing for reinforcements.

## HISTORICAL CONTEXT:

As commander of the Alamo, Travis regularly sent out urgent letters asking for reinforcements from the Anglo-American colonies in eastern Texas. Receiving reinforcements was, indeed, the primary strategy of the Alamo defenders as they held out against Santa Anna’s forces. Travis estimates that Santa Anna had “1500 to 6000 soldiers” in San Antonio by early March 1836, though scholars today believe it was around 2,000.

Travis described several attacks that Santa Anna made on the Alamo during the 13-day siege (the first on February 25 and another on March 2), which were intended by Santa Anna to test the defenses of the Alamo in preparation for the full assault that came on March 6, 1836. Travis mentions the 32 men from Gonzales who arrived in the Alamo in the predawn of March 1, 1836, and would prove to be the only known reinforcements that the Alamo ever received.

In the letter, Travis was particularly interested in the convention he knew was meeting in the village of Washington-on-the-Brazos, which he wanted to declare Texas independent from Mexico. Although Travis could not know it, the convention had already declared independence on March 2, 1836, and ordered General Sam Houston to raise forces to ride to the defense of the Alamo.

The Alamo fell three days after Travis’s letter, before Houston could reach them. Travis’s letter was then reprinted in the *Telegraph and Texas Register* (a newspaper based in the village of San Felipe de Austin) on March 24, 1836, after news of the fall of the Alamo had reached the Anglo colonies and just a few days after the massacre of Texas troops at Goliad. At the time the letter appeared in the *Telegraph*, widespread panic had gripped most of Texas as Sam Houston’s small army began a strategic retreat in the face of Santa Anna’s army marching eastward toward the Anglo-American colonies.

## PRIMARY SOURCE TEXT:

Of a letter written by Col. Travis to a friend, dated from the Alamo, March 3d.

Dear Sir-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 140 men I have held this place 10 days against a force variously estimated from 1500 to 6000, and I shall continue to hold it till I get relief from my countrymen, or I will perish in its defence. We have had a shower of bombs and cannon balls continually falling among us the whole time, yet none of us have fallen. We have been miraculously preserved. You have no doubt seen my official report of the action of the 25th ult. In which we repulsed the enemy with considerable loss: on the night of the 2th they made another attempt to charge us in the rear of the fort; but we received them gallantly, by a discharge of grapeshot and musketry, and they took to their scrapers immediately. They are now encamped under 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 Col. Bonham got in to-day 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 dare the monster who is fighting us under a blood-red flag, threatening to murder all prisoners and to 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 defence 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 enemies of Texas, whether invaders or resident Mexican enemies. All the citizens that have not joined us, are with 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, and confusion to all enemies. God bless you.

Your friend, W. BARRET TRAVIS.”

**SOURCE:** Letter of William Barret Travis (March 3, 1836), printed in *Telegraph and Texas Register* (San Felipe de Austin, Texas) Vol. 1, No. 21, Ed. 1, March 24, 1836. <https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metapth47891>