

Colonel Pedro Delgado's Account of the Battle of San Jacinto

On the 14th of April, 1836, His Excellency the President [Santa Anna] ordered his Staff to prepare to march, with only one skiff, and leaving his own and the officers' baggage with General Ramirez y Sesma, who was instructed to remain at the crossing of the Brazos, . . . started for Harrisburg, with the force above mentioned. . . .

On the 15th, ... at about noon, we reached a plantation abundantly supplied with corn, meal, sheep and hogs; it had a good garden and a fine cotton-gin. We halted to refresh men and beasts.

At 3 o'clock P. M., after having set fire to the dwelling and gin-houses, we resumed our march. Here, His Excellency started ahead with his Staff and escort, leaving General Castrillon in command of the infantry. We travelled, at a brisk trot, at least ten leagues, without halting, until we reached the vicinity of Harrisburg, at about 11 o'clock at night. His Excellency, with an Adjutant and fifteen dragoons, . . . succeeded in capturing two Americans, who stated that Zavala and other members of the so-called Government of Texas, had left the morning before for Galveston. . . .

On the 16th, we remained at Harrisburg, to await our broken-down stragglers, who kept dropping in till 2 or 3 o'clock P. M.

On the opposite side of the bayou, we found two or three houses well supplied with wearing apparel, mainly for women's use, fine furniture, an excellent piano, jars of preserves, chocolate, fruit, &c., all of which were appropriated for the benefit of His Excellency and his attendants. I and others obtained only what they could not use. After the houses had been sacked and burnt down, a party of Americans fired upon our men from the woods; it is wonderful that some of us ... were not killed. . . .

On the 17th, at about 3 o'clock P. M., His Excellency, after having instructed me to burn the town, started for New Washington with the troops. It was nearly dark when we had finished crossing the bayou. . . .

At noon [the 18th], we reached New Washington, where we found flour, soap, tobacco, and other articles, which were issued to the men. His Excellency instructed me to mount one of his horses, and, with a small party of dragoons, to gather beeves for the use of the troops. In a short time I drove in more than one hundred head of cattle, so abundant are they in that country. . . .

On the 19th, His Excellency ordered Captain Barragan to start with a detachment of dragoons to reconnoiter Houston's movements. We halted at that place, all being quiet.

On the 20th, [we] . . . had burnt a fine warehouse on the wharf, and all the houses in the town, when Captain Barragan rushed in, at full speed, reporting that Houston was close on our rear, and that his troops had captured some of our stragglers, and had disarmed and dispatched them.

...

It was two o'clock P. M. when we descried Houston's pickets at the edge of a large wood, in which he concealed his main force. Our skirmishers commenced firing; they were answered by the enemy, who fell back in the woods. His Excellency reached the ground with our main body, with the intention, as I understood, of attacking at once; but they kept hidden, which prevented him from ascertaining their position. He, therefore, changed his dispositions, and ordered the company of Toluca to deploy as skirmishers in the direction of the woods. . . .

Then His Excellency went to look for a camping ground, and established his whole force along the shore of San Jacinto Bay, at least one mile from the place where I had been left. About one hour later, I received orders, through Colonel Bringas, to come into camp immediately with the ordnance stores and the piece of artillery. . . .

At length, at 5 o'clock P. M., my duty was performed, and, as I entered the camp with the last load, I was closely followed by the enemy's cavalry. His Excellency, noticing it, ... commanded our cavalry, to face the enemy, without gaining ground. This movement checked the enemy for a

few moments; but, soon after, they dashed upon our dragoons, and were close enough to engage them with the sword without, however, any material result. Then, His Excellency, deploying several companies as skirmishers, forced the enemy back to his camp, on which he retired sluggishly and in disorder.

This last engagement took place after sun-down.

At daybreak on the 21st, His Excellency ordered a breastwork to be erected for the cannon. It was constructed with pack-saddles, sacks of hard bread, baggage, etc. A trifling barricade of branches ran along its front and right. . . .

At 9 o'clock a. m. General Cos came in with a reinforcement of about 500 men. His arrival was greeted with the roll of drums and with joyful shouts. As it was represented to His Excellency that these men had not slept the night before, he instructed them to stack their arms, to remove their accoutrements, and to go to sleep quietly in the adjoining grove.

No important incident took place until 4:30 p. m. At this fatal moment, the bugler on our right signaled the advance of the enemy upon that wing. His Excellency and staff were asleep; the greater number of the men were also sleeping; of the rest, some were eating, others were scattered in the woods in search of boughs to prepare shelter. Our line was composed of musket stacks. Our cavalry were riding, bareback, to and from water.

I stepped upon some ammunition boxes, the better to observe the movements of the enemy. I saw that their formation was a mere line in one rank, and very extended. In their center was the Texas flag; on both wings, they had two light cannons, well manned. Their cavalry was opposite our front, overlapping our left.

In this disposition, yelling furiously, with a brisk fire of grape, muskets, and rifles, they advanced resolutely upon our camp. There the utmost confusion prevailed. General Castrillon shouted on one side; on another, Colonel Almonte was giving orders; some cried out to commence firing; others, to lie down to avoid grape shots. Among the latter was His Excellency.

Then, already, I saw our men flying in small groups, terrified, and sheltering themselves behind large trees. I endeavored to force some of them to fight, but all efforts were in vain — the evil was beyond remedy; they were a bewildered and panic stricken herd. . . .

Then I saw His Excellency running about in the utmost excitement, wringing his hands, and unable to give an order. General Castrillon was stretched on the ground, wounded in the leg. Colonel Trevino was killed, and Colonel Marcial Aguirre was severely injured. I saw also the enemy reaching the ordnance train, and killing a corporal and two gunners who had been detailed to repair cartridges which had been damaged on the previous evening.

Everything being lost, I went — leading my horse, which I could not mount, because the firing had rendered him restless and fractious — to join our men, still hoping that we might be able to defend ourselves, or to retire under the shelter of night. This, however, could not be done. It is a known fact that Mexican soldiers, once demoralized, can not be controlled, unless they are thoroughly inured to war.

On the left, and about a musket-shot distance from our camp, was a small grove on the bay shore. Our disbanded herd rushed for it, to obtain shelter from the horrid slaughter carried on all over the prairie by the blood-thirsty usurpers. Unfortunately, we met on our way an obstacle difficult to overcome. It was a bayou, not very wide, but rather deep. The men, on reaching it, would helplessly crowd together, and were shot down by the enemy, who was close enough not to miss his aim. It was there that the greatest carnage took place.

Upon reaching that spot, I saw Colonel Almonte swimming across the bayou with his left hand, and holding up his right, which grasped his sword.

I stated before that I was leading my horse, but, in this critical situation, I vaulted on him, and, with two leaps, he landed me on the opposite bank of the bayou. To my sorrow I had to leave the noble animal, mired, at that place, and to part with him, probably forever. As I dismounted, I sank in the mire waist deep, and I had the greatest trouble to get out of it, by taking hold of the grass. Both my shoes remained in the bayou. I made an effort to recover them, but I soon came to the conclusion that, did I tarry there, a rifle shot would certainly make an outlet for my soul, as had happened to many a poor fellow around me. Thus I made for the grove, barefooted.

There I met a number of other officers, with whom I wandered at random, buried in gloomy thoughts upon our tragic disaster. We still entertained a hope of rallying some of our men, but it was impossible.

The enemy's cavalry surrounded the grove, while his infantry penetrated it, pursuing us with fierce and blood-thirsty feelings. . . .

Thence they marched us to their camp. I was barefooted; the prairie had recently been burnt up, and the blades of grass, hardened by fire, penetrated like needles the soles of my feet, so that I could hardly walk. . . .

After having kept us sitting in camp about an hour and a half, they marched us into the woods, where we saw an immense fire, ... I and several of my companions were silly enough to believe that we were about to be burnt alive, in retaliation for those who had been burnt in the Alamo. We should have considered it an act of mercy to be shot first. Oh! the bitter and cruel moment! However, we felt considerably relieved when they placed us around the fire to warm ourselves and to dry our wet clothes. We were surrounded by twenty-five or thirty sentinels. You should have seen those men, or, rather, phantoms, converted into moving armories. Some wore two, three, and even four brace of pistols; a cloth bag of very respectable size filled with bullets, a powder horn, a sabre or a bowie knife, besides a rifle, musket, or carbine. Everyone of them had in his hand a burning candle. . . . Was this display intended to prevent us from attempting to escape? The fools! Where could we go in that vast country, unknown to us, intersected by large rivers and forests, where wild beasts and hunger, and where they themselves would destroy us?

...

At 2 o'clock P. M. [the 22d] His Excellency the General-in-Chief, Don Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna, arrived, under the charge of a mounted soldier. He wore linen trousers, a blue cotton jacket, a cap, and red worsted slippers. His leader did not know him, but, noticing a motion of curiosity amongst us as he approached, he became satisfied that he was conducting no common officer, and reported at once with him to General Houston. The latter sent two of his Adjutants to inquire of us whether Santa Anna had lost any teeth; some answered that they did not know, but others, with more candor, or, perhaps, less discretion, said: "Yes, gentlemen; and you may, further say to your General, that the person just brought before him is President Santa Anna himself." The news spread over the whole camp, and the inquisitive fellows who surrounded us ran to strike up an acquaintance with His Excellency. Some of them proposed to fire salutes, and to make other demonstrations to celebrate the capture of so lofty a person. But Houston courteously forbade it. From this time we were left alone. His Excellency having become the centre of attraction.

On the 23d, seventy or eighty loads of ordnance stores had already been brought in, and deposited, together with piles of loaded muskets and of cartridge-boxes, in close proximity to our camp. . . .

On the 24th, ... a steamboat arrived, having on board the Texan President, Vice-President Zavala, and other members of the administration. . . .

From "Mexican Account of the Battle of San Jacinto," *Texas Almanac* (Galveston, 1870), 41-53. The following account, written in 1837 by Pedro Delgado who was a colonel on Santa Anna's staff, is the *most* vivid description of the Battle of San Jacinto by a Mexican participant.

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