

In Their Own Words: Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna

After his capture at San Jacinto, General Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna was held for a time by the Texan army. After the negotiations for the Treaty of Velasco were concluded, Santa Anna was due to be returned to Mexico on June 1, 1836. With General Sam Houston in New Orleans receiving medical attention for wounds sustained at San Jacinto, however, many Texans were questioning the decision to free Santa Anna. In the following account, Santa Anna recounts his experiences from June 1st through his eventual return to Mexico in August 1836.

Consequently, on the 1st of June, with all tranquility and in full view of the town of Velasco, I embarked on the *Invincible*, which was to take me to Veracruz, having first taken care to address a farewell to the people, whose publication produced the desired effect.

Two days after I had gone on board, the captain of the ship, J. Brown, notified me that *he had orders to take me back ashore*. I immediately protested in writing but he replied verbally by saying that *he was disposed to use force for the execution of his orders*. This action was occasioned by the arrival of 130 volunteers from new Orleans on that day, the 4th, under the command of the so-called General Green, who with threats and violence demanded that I be delivered into their hands.

I immediately wrote to Mr. Burnet an official communication which I concluded by saying *that I was determined not to leave the ship alive*. Several persons came on board with his reply, who assured me *that my confinement would last only a few days, and that my person would be respected*.

I was taken ashore and shown as a spectacle to those who had demanded my disembarkation, after which I was turned over to the military and thrown into prison. Captain William Patton, who had come from Victoria specially for the purpose, took charge of me and conducted me to a small house in the outskirts of Columbia, where I was kept for a month and a half.

Irritated by such treatment, I protested against the failure of the Texans to observe the terms of the agreements. Consequently, and without taking into account the duress that determined all my acts after my imprisonment, the agreements were nullified by their conduct and I was left at the mercy of fate.

The exaltation that caused my being brought ashore continued to increase to such an extent that every private felt himself called to assassinate me. On the 27th of June a pistol was fired at me through a window near my bed and almost caused the death of Colonels Almonte and

Nuñez. Finally, on the 30th of June, orders were issued for our removal from Columbia to Goliad where we were to be executed in the place that Fannin and his men had been shot. A prominent colonist, Stephen F. Austin, whom I had befriended in Mexico, moved by my unfortunate condition, wanting to return the favor, told me that *if I would write a letter to General Jackson flattering the hopes of the Texans, even if I only used courteous phrases, the very name of the official, from whom the Texans expected so much and whom they heard with the greatest respect, would restrain popular fury and facilitate my salvation.* I did not believe the loss of my life was indispensable to the welfare of my country. The army, who even the enemy agreed should try to save me, did nothing for me, and I lost all hope of being saved. I signed the letter couched in the terms that Austin himself suggested and the reply to it is known. Public sentiment being appeased by the reports circulated about my favorable disposition towards the Texans, Houston was able to follow his kind plan with regard to my person. He arranged for me to go by way of Washington, accompanied by three Texan officers, in order to keep the hot-headed from becoming suspicious and reenacting the scenes of June 4th. Although the journey, in the middle of the winter, was very painful to me, I had to be satisfied as there was no other way out of the danger.

I had been taken to Orazimba before, where, as the result of the denunciation of *a plan to escape from prison* by my clerk, Don Ramón Caro - as I was afterwards informed - a heavy ball and chain was placed on me the 17th of August, and on Colonel Almonte on the 18th. We wore them for fifty-two days.

It is easily seen that the reply of General Jackson, when compared with my letter, is founded on a misinterpretation. I only asked him to use his influence with the Texans to secure the fulfillment, on their part, of the promise to set me free, in view of the fact that I had complied with my part of the agreements and was willing to observe the clause that still remained pending if called upon to do so. but his negative reply put a definite end to this matter; and my freedom was not due either to his reply nor to the agreements of May 14th, but rather to the spontaneous free will of the said Houston. If, in view of the news about my country, Houston thought that my presence there might be the cause of a new revolution favorable to the Texans, he neither told me so, nor did he express any other motive for his actions than a generous impulse for which I am grateful, and nothing more.

There were three powerful reasons for my journey to Washington, two of which were, as a matter of fact, essential, while the third was one of public convenience. It was necessary not to alarm the Texans but rather to try to confirm the opinion of my willingness to favor their plans. It was neither safe nor prudent to go to New Orleans where I would expose myself to being subjected to new insults, since that port has been the center of activity for the rebellious colonists. I could not return directly to Veracruz because there was no communication between that port and the rest of Texas. Lastly, it was very expedient that I should approach the cabinet at Washington to observe at close range its real attitude towards Texas and towards us.

The six days of my stay there were used for this purpose. General Jackson expressed to me his desire of continuing the friendly relations that bind the two nations, and very kindly furnished me transportation in a war vessel. We spoke very little, and that by mere accident, about the correspondence sustained while I was a prisoner. He told me that he had given copies both of his letter and mine to Señor Manuel E. Gorostiza. I arrived at the port of Veracruz in the above mentioned war vessel, communicating this fact to Your Excellency at the time.

The haste with which I have had to prepare this report, the difficulties entailed by the disorder of my papers as a result of my journey and attendant circumstances, and the poor state of my health may have resulted in some errors, which I shall correct if pointed out. I must state to Your Excellency that I do not attach the documents covering our movements from the time I left Thompson's to the 21st because all my belongings fell into the hands of the enemy and were lost

In closing the long narrative I cannot but, in all justice, commend to the graces of the supreme government the very worthy Colonel D. Juan Nepomuceno Almonte for the good behavior observed throughout the campaign and the propriety with which he conducted himself while a prisoner. Furthermore, he was a most faithful companion during my bitter days and served me as an interpreter whenever I needed him.

Personally, I have endured privations, suffering, insults and calumny. Posterity and my country, whom I have served as the duties of a citizen demand, will doubtless render me justice. I expect no less of the supreme government.

SOURCE: Archival Report by General Santa Anna of Defeat and Capture at San Jacinto, 11 Mar 1837. Attachment no. 9 to General Santa Anna's *Manifesto* in *The Mexican Side of the Texan Revolution*, edited by Carols E, Castañeda. (Dallas: P.L. Turner Co., 1928)