Mexicans Win the Battles but Lose the War

After the Alamo and the defeat of another garrison at Goliad on March 20, 1836, southeast of San Antonio, Mexican troops under General José Urrea defeated troops under James W. Fannin, who surrendered to Urrea. On March 27 on the orders of Santa Anna, 342 prisoners were executed at Goliad, an act that most Mexican commanders condemned. Santa Anna was in full control; defiantly cries went up, "Remember Goliad." The Mexican army ran Sam Houston out of the territory northwest of the San Jacinto River and then camped an army of about 1,100 men near San Jacinto. There, Santa Anna skirmished with Houston
on April 20, 1836, but did not follow up his advantage. Predicting that Houston would attack on April 22, Santa Anna and his troops settled down and rested for the anticipated battle. The filibusters, however, attacked during the siesta hour on April 21. Santa Anna knew that Houston had an army of 1,000, yet the surprise attack caught him totally off guard. Shouts of “Remember the Alamo! Remember Goliad!” filled the air. Houston’s men captured Santa Anna, who signed the territory away. The Mexican Congress rejected the treaty; however, it did not have the resources to pursue its claim because sending more troops to Texas would have surely brought the full force of the U.S. army into the war. Meanwhile, Houston was elected president of the Republic of Texas.38

Houston’s men took few Mexican prisoners at the battle of San Jacinto. Those who surrendered “were clubbed and stabbed, some on their knees. The slaughter . . . became methodical: the Texan riflemen knelt and poured a steady fire into the packed, jostling ranks.” The final count of the dead was 630 Mexicans but only 2 Texans.39

The victory paved the way for the Mexican-American War. Officially, the United States did not take sides, but men, money, and supplies poured into Texas to aid fellow Euro-Americans. U.S. citizens participated in the invasion of Texas with the open support of their government. According to Lota M. Spell, Manuel Eduardo Gorostiza, Mexico’s minister to the United States, protested the “arming and shipment of troops and supplies to territory that was part of Mexico, and the dispatch of United States troops into territory clearly defined by treaty as Mexican territory.” President Andrew Jackson sent General Edmund P. Gaines, Southwest commander, into western Louisiana on January 23, 1836; shortly thereafter he crossed into Texas, which Mexicans interpreted as U.S. support for the filibusters. In and out of Texas, U.S. citizens loudly applauded Jackson’s actions. The Mexican minister resigned his post in protest.40