

Interpretive Guide to:

THE MONUMENT

The San Jacinto Monument, rising 570 feet above the battleground, stands as a memorial to the men who fought for Texas independence. Built to commemorate the centennial of the battle, it is the tallest masonry structure in the world. The San Jacinto Museum of History is at the base of the tower. Its exhibits provide an overview of 400 years of Texas history.



The restored tall grass prairie with hardwood forest tree line is similar to the view the Texan and Mexican armies saw as the battle unfolded.

FURTHER READING

James L. Haley, *Sam Houston*. University of Oklahoma Press, 2002.

James W. Pohl, *Battle of San Jacinto*. Texas State Historical Association, 1989.

Private Partners at San Jacinto Battleground include: Battleship *Texas* Foundation, San Jacinto Historical Advisory Board and the San Jacinto Museum of History Association.

San Jacinto Battleground State Historic Site
3523 Battleground Road, La Porte, Texas 77571
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www.tpwd.state.tx.us/sanjacintobattleground/



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SAN JACINTO BATTLEGROUND STATE HISTORIC SITE



SAN JACINTO MUSEUM OF HISTORY

ON THIS STRIP OF COASTAL PRAIRIE IN 1836 A VOLUNTEER ARMY OF ANGLO AMERICAN SETTLERS AND TEJANOS DECISIVELY DEFEATED A LARGER MEXICAN ARMY AND WON TEXAS INDEPENDENCE. THIS 1,100-ACRE HISTORIC SITE AND MONUMENT COMMEMORATE THEIR STRUGGLE AND ACHIEVEMENT.



A NATURAL AND HISTORIC BATTLEGROUND

By preserving the San Jacinto Battleground, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department has also preserved a portion of the natural heritage of coastal prairie, forests and marsh lands. Nevertheless, the site of one of the most significant conflicts in American history does not look like it did when General Sam Houston's troops defeated the Mexican army under General Santa Anna.

Houston's 900 men, screened by a grove of large hardwood trees, camped along Buffalo Bayou for several hundred yards, just south of where the battleship *Texas* is now berthed. The large open area near the San Jacinto Monument and reflecting pool was part of a long mile-wide prairie covered in grasses growing waist high. The highest ground, on which the Monument now stands, shielded the Texan army from Santa Anna's forces.

The 1,200 Mexican troops set up defenses near what is now the overlook at Santa Anna's Bayou, a quarter-mile east from the present-day San Jacinto Monument. When the Texans under Sam Houston approached the Mexican camp, they were protected by the tall grass and the low ridge that separated the two armies. When the Texans under Sidney Sherman charged the Mexican right flank, they came out of a grove of trees that lined the low bluff on the north. Most of the hardwoods are long gone, cut down for construction or fuel for early steamboats. But on April 21, 1836, these hardwood forests, bayous, marshes and rivers combined to create a deadly trap for the Mexican army and its leader. Houston used the natural landscape to his advantage in planning his attack. The landscape and topography were a deciding factor in the outcome of the battle.

Above: Illustration of *The Surrender of Santa Anna*, by Charles Shaw. Sam Houston's ankle was shattered by a musket ball. Captured the day after the battle and wearing a private's uniform, Santa Anna's men gave away his disguise by calling him "Your Excellency."

WINNING TEXAS INDEPENDENCE

The battle of San Jacinto is considered to be one of the decisive battles in American history. Texas won its independence and eventually became the 28th state in the American union. Annexation led to the Mexican War of 1846-1848 which resulted in the acquisition by the United States of California, Arizona, New Mexico and parts of Nevada, Colorado and Utah.

By the fall of 1835 many Anglo Americans and Tejanos in Texas had despaired of receiving just and equitable treatment from the regime of President Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna. Santa Anna had abolished the liberal Constitution of 1824 and established a dictatorship. Texans resisted and

by December 1835 armed revolutionaries had driven the Mexican army from Texas soil.

Undaunted, General Santa Anna marched his 6,000-man army north. His strategy was to attack and destroy the rebels' strongholds, treating them as pirates who deserved no mercy. By mid-March he seemed close to success. The Alamo fell on March 6; Texas troops at Goliad surrendered two weeks later. The Texas army under General Sam Houston retreated before the Mexican army's advance.

A confident Santa Anna divided his troops into three columns to pursue Houston's army and the Texas government, which was in flight toward Galveston. Near present-day Houston the Texan leader saw an opportunity to attack the divided Mexican army. Houston chose a point of land where Buffalo Bayou met the San Jacinto River as a place to make his attack. He and his troops arrived on April 20, just hours before Santa Anna.



THE BATTLE

Early on April 21, Mexican General Martin Perfecto de Cos arrived with 500 troops to join his leader. To prevent more Mexican reinforcements, Houston ordered his chief scout Erastus "Deaf" Smith to destroy the bridge Cos had used. Both armies were now isolated. The battle to come would be fought and won or lost by those soldiers facing one another across that mile-wide tall grass prairie.

After a mid-day council of war Houston decided to attack that afternoon. At 3:30 he gave the order and the Texans advanced, screened by trees and the rising ground between the two armies. Most of the Texans charged across the prairie, while Colonel Sidney Sherman's regiment advanced through the trees lining the marsh near Santa Anna's northern flank.

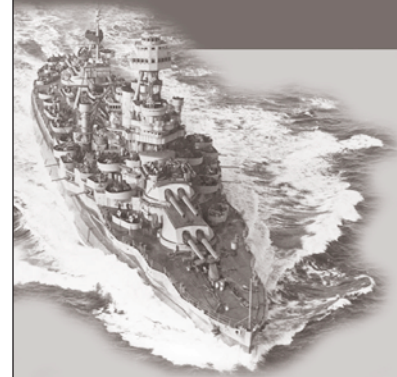
The Mexican soldiers had been told to expect an attack the next day. They posted no sentries and were unaware of the assault until it was too late. At about 4:30 Texan infantry, supported by artillery and cavalry, swarmed into the Mexican camp. Sherman's men came out of the woods screaming, "Remember the Alamo" and "Remember Goliad."

In the confusing skirmish the Mexican army was unable to implement its battle plan. The fight was over in less than 20 minutes. The Texans killed over 600 Mexican troops and captured most of the rest. Nine Texans died in the battle. General Santa Anna was captured the next day and forced to sign a treaty that recognized Texas independence and opened the gateways for America's continuing westward expansion.



Illustration of Sherman's Men Attack by Charles Shaw.

THE BATTLESHIP



The Battleship Texas is the only surviving battleship to have fought in both world wars. She is maintained as a monument to the American sailors who fought through two world wars in defense of liberty.

At the time she was commissioned in 1914, Texas was lauded as the most powerful weapon in the world. Her 14-inch guns could dominate any other ship afloat. At the beginning of World War II she was designated the flagship of the U.S. Atlantic Fleet. She supported the invasions of North Africa in 1942, and Normandy in June 1944. In 1945, Texas participated in the American invasions of the Japanese fortress islands of Iwo Jima and Okinawa in the Pacific theater.

By war's end, with the arrival of the larger, more modern Iowa class battleships, and the Navy's increasing reliance on aircraft carriers, the Texas was a relic of the past. In 1948 Texas was commissioned as the flagship of the Texas Navy and is permanently moored at San Jacinto. She is a designated National Historic Landmark and a National Engineering Landmark.

