

Section

3

The Siege of the Alamo

Main Ideas

1. In early 1836 Mexican forces marched into Texas, while the Texas army was disorganized.
2. The Texan army chose to make a stand against the Mexican army at the Alamo mission in San Antonio.
3. The defenders of the Alamo gave their lives in a desperate effort to hold back the Mexican army.

Why It Matters Today

The battle at the Alamo became a rallying point for Texas troops throughout the Texas Revolution. Use current events sources to learn how important battles are remembered today.



TEKS: 1B, 3B, 3C,
8A, 18A, 21A, 21B,
21C, 22D

myNotebook

Use the annotation tools in your eBook to take notes on the siege of the Alamo.



VIDEO

Davy Crockett:
American
Frontier Legend

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Key Terms and People

- Davy Crockett
- José de Urrea
- James “Jim” Bowie
- William B. Travis
- James Bonham
- casualties
- Susanna Dickinson
- noncombatants

The Story Continues

On January 9, 1836, Davy Crockett sat down to write a letter to his children. He had just arrived in Texas and described with enthusiasm his warm welcome. Settlers fired a cannon and held a dinner in honor of the famous frontiersman. He then looked for a place to settle and claim a piece of land. He also noted to his family that he had joined the Texas army as a volunteer and was happy with his choice. The letter would prove to be Crockett’s last.



The Mexican Army Advances

At the same time **Davy Crockett** was writing his letter to his children, Mexican forces were marching on Texas. Led by Santa Anna himself, these troops were determined to punish Texans for their rebellion. By February 1836 Santa Anna’s army of some 6,000 soldiers was well on its way to San Antonio. At the same time, Mexican General **José de Urrea** was headed toward Goliad along the Gulf Coast with another army.

The Texas army was unprepared for an advance by the Mexican troops, and Urrea quickly overtook the Texans headed to Matamoros. Urrea easily defeated the Texans, taking many of them prisoner. The only Texans to make it to Matamoros did so in chains.

The rest of the Texas forces—those that had not been sent to Matamoros—were scattered in small groups. Colonel James Neill had just over 100 troops in San Antonio. About 400 more soldiers were in Goliad under the command of Colonel James Fannin.

Sam Houston was alarmed that the Texas army was so ill prepared and disorganized. He sent **James “Jim” Bowie** to San Antonio to evaluate the situation there. Houston recommended that the former San Antonio de Valero Mission, better known as the Alamo, be destroyed and its artillery removed. Smith disagreed, believing it was important to defend the Alamo. Its defenses had been improved several years earlier to provide protection from American Indian attacks. In addition, the Texans there had access to weapons left by Cos and his army.

In addition, the Alamo was strategically located along the Old San Antonio Road—one of the two major routes through Texas. It was along this road that the Mexican army would probably approach San Antonio. The Alamo provided the best chance to stop an army along this road, and so Smith thought that the mission would be vital to any resistance.

On January 19 Bowie arrived in San Antonio with 25 men. He examined Colonel Neill’s improvements to the fort and its 21 cannons. He and Neill agreed that the Alamo and its artillery were too important to destroy. He wrote Governor Smith explaining why.

TEXAS VOICES

“The salvation of Texas depends in great measure on keeping Bexar [San Antonio] out of the hands of the enemy. . . . Colonel Neill and myself have come to the solemn resolution that we will rather die in these ditches than give them up to the enemy.”

—James Bowie, quoted in *Lone Star*, by T. R. Fehrenbach

When Smith received Bowie’s letter, he decided to send reinforcements to San Antonio. He ordered Colonel **William B. Travis** to raise a force and assist Bowie. However, Travis could gather only 30 soldiers. He and his troops rode in from San Felipe de Austin on February 3. Juan Seguín was also in San Antonio with a small group of volunteers.

As word spread of the rebellion, U.S. volunteers trickled into Texas. Davy Crockett led a dozen Tennessee volunteers into San Antonio a few days after Travis arrived. Although Crockett was a famous frontiersman and a former U.S. congressman, he did not want a position of authority. He told Travis, “Assign me some place and I and my Tennessee boys will defend it all right.” **James Bonham** and a volunteer force from Alabama called the Mobile Grays also joined the Texas defenders. When Colonel Neill left the Alamo to care for an ill family member, he put Travis in command. Travis and Bowie argued over control, finally agreeing to share command.

Reading Check Supporting a Point of View Do you agree or disagree with Bowie’s decision to defend the Alamo? Explain your answer.



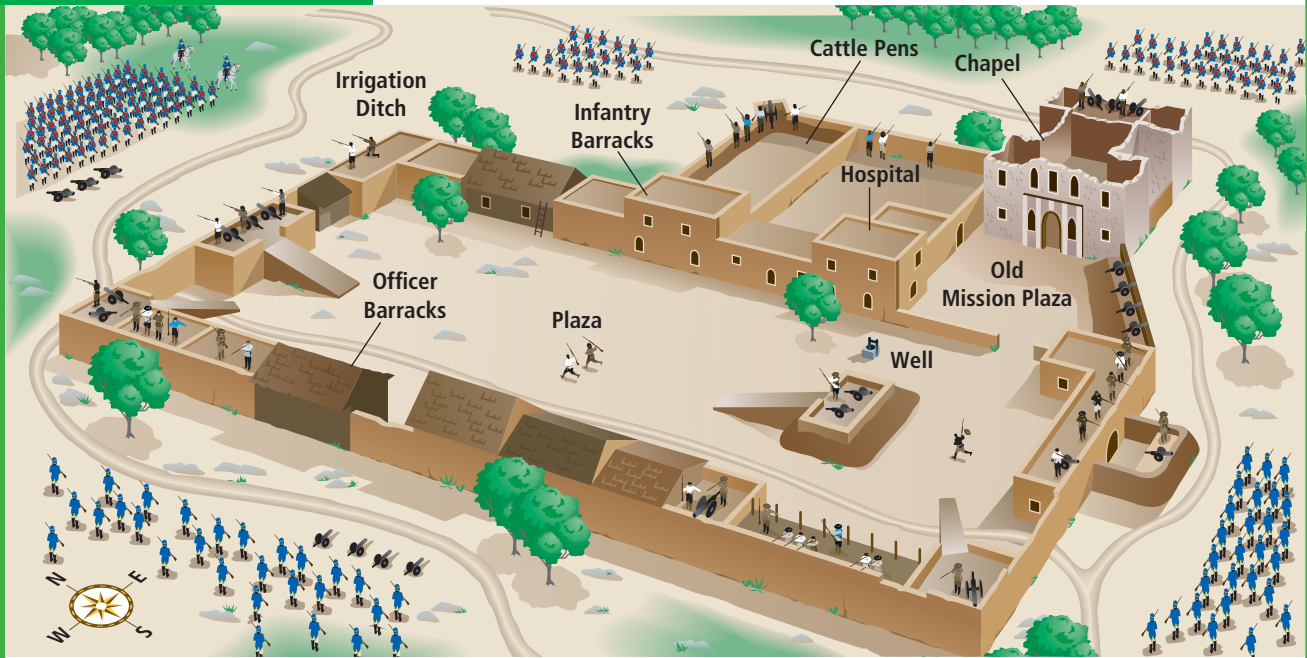
BIOGRAPHY

William B. Travis

(c. 1809–1836) William B. Travis was born in South Carolina, but his family moved to Alabama in 1818. He later became an attorney and married Rosanna Cato. In 1830 Travis left his family and headed for Texas. He acquired land from Stephen F. Austin and set up a law practice at Anahuac. Travis became part of a rebel group that opposed the Law of April 6, 1830. After the Consultation, he became a lieutenant colonel in the Texas army. In February of 1836, he was chosen as one of the commanders at the Alamo. Upon his death he became a Texas hero. **What role did Travis play in the Texas Revolution?**

The Siege of the Alamo

In preparation for the Siege of the Alamo, Texans built up the fortifications around the old mission and placed cannons in strategic spots along the walls. However, they needed more troops to defend such a large area.



Visualizing History

- 1. Science, Technology & Society** What improvements did the Texans make to the Alamo to help their chances of survival?
- 2. Connecting to Today** Why do you think many Texans today consider the defenders of the Alamo heroes?



The Siege Begins

As the Mexican forces approached San Antonio, the Texas troops at the Alamo built up their defenses. Green Jameson, a 29-year-old lawyer, was in charge of strengthening the plaza walls. He and the other defenders built up some of the walls to 12 feet high and 2 feet thick. Jameson directed the building of palisades—high fences made of stakes—behind which soldiers could fight. He also worked with artillery officer Almaron Dickinson to choose locations for the fort's 21 cannons. Even with such improvements, the Alamo would be difficult to defend without more troops. It had originally been built as a mission, not a fort. The area enclosed by the two buildings and walls of the Alamo was about three acres, and would require about 1,000 soldiers to defend it properly. The Texas soldiers in the Alamo at this time numbered little more than 150.

Travis and the rest of the Alamo defenders hoped for reinforcements. Very soon, however, Travis began hearing reports that Santa Anna's army was approaching. At first, the Texans doubted the reports. Travis and Bowie had thought that the rainy weather would delay the Mexicans until mid-March. However, they were wrong. Santa Anna had pushed hard. On February 23 a lookout spotted the Mexican troops marching down the road.



VIDEO

The Alamo

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As Mexican troops marched into the city, the defenders, their families, and some local residents rushed to get inside the walls of the Alamo. Expecting a siege, the defenders gathered food, ammunition, and other supplies from local citizens. General Santa Anna arrived just after the defenders were safely inside and soon demanded their surrender. The Texas rebels responded by firing a cannon shot toward the Mexican army. Santa Anna reacted swiftly. He ordered that a large blood-red flag be raised so the defenders within the Alamo could see it. This “no quarter” flag meant that Santa Anna would leave no survivors. The siege of the Alamo was underway.

On February 24, Mexican forces began firing on the Alamo. That day Travis wrote a plea “To the People of Texas and All Americans in the World.” The letter was a request for aid in the face of certain death.

Cannons bombarded the Alamo for hours at a time. Bowie, who had been ill, collapsed on the second day of the siege. Travis took charge. On the fourth day of the siege, Travis ordered the Texas troops to stop returning the Mexicans’ fire and save their ammunition. He was worried that Santa Anna’s army would soon launch a full-scale attack.

Reading Check Evaluating How did Texas troops prepare for the siege of the Alamo, and was it adequate preparation in your point of view?



HISTORIC DOCUMENT

Travis’s Letter

William B. Travis wrote this plea for help at the Alamo on February 24, 1836.

“Commandancy of the Alamo—
Bejar [San Antonio], Fby. 24th 1836—
To the people of Texas & all Americans in the world—

Fellow Citizens—& compatriots—
I am **besieged**,¹ by a thousand or more of the Mexicans under Santa Anna—I have **sustained**² a **continual** Bombardment & **cannonade**³ for 24 hours & have not lost a man—The enemy has demanded a surrender at **discretion**,⁴ otherwise, the garrison are to be put to the sword, if the fort is taken—I have answered the demand with a cannon shot, & our flag still waves proudly from the walls—I shall never surrender or retreat. Then, I call on you in the name of Liberty, of patriotism & everything dear to the American character, to come to our aid, with all **dispatch**⁵—The

enemy is receiving reinforcements daily & will no doubt increase to three or four thousand in four or five days. If this call is neglected, I am determined to **sustain**⁶ myself as long as possible & die like a soldier who never forgets what is due to his own honor & that of this country—

VICTORY OR DEATH

William Barret Travis

Lt. Col. Comdt.

P.S. The Lord is on our side—when the enemy appeared in sight we had not three bushels of corn—we have since found in deserted houses 80 or 90 bushels and got into the walls 20 or 30 heads of **Beeves**.⁷

Travis”

Analyzing Primary Sources

- 1. Finding the Main Idea** What request does Travis make?
- 2. Making Generalizations and Predictions** What effect do you think this letter had?

¹**besieged**: under attack

²**sustained**: suffered

³**cannonade**: attack by cannons

⁴**discretion**: without demands

⁵**dispatch**: speed

⁶**sustain**: protect

⁷**Beeves**: cattle



Interpreting Visuals

The Alamo. Fighting during the Mexican attack on the Alamo was fierce. The artist's portrayal here is fictionalized. **How did the artist portray the bravery of Texas soldiers?**



The Fall of the Alamo

Travis sent out several more requests for help. Bonham left to find aid for the Alamo, only to sneak back in on March 3. Juan Seguín also sneaked past Mexican troops to request help from Goliad. But little help arrived. On March 1, 32 volunteers from Gonzales rode into the Alamo. Led by Captain Albert Martin, they crept in under cover of early morning darkness. There would be no other help.

Historians estimate that there were about 200 soldiers defending the Alamo. Santa Anna, on the other hand, had at least 1,800 troops. Travis made one last desperate appeal for aid. On March 3 he sent a letter to Washington-on-the-Brazos.

Analyzing Primary Sources

Drawing Inferences and Conclusions What does Travis mean when he says he has to “fight the enemy on his own terms”?

TEXAS VOICES

“Colonel Fannin is said to be on the march to this place with reinforcements, but I fear it is not true, as I have repeatedly sent to him for aid without receiving any. . . . I look to the colonies alone for aid; unless it arrives soon, I shall have to fight the enemy on his own terms.”

—William B. Travis, quoted in *Documents of Texas History*, edited by Ernest Wallace

In the early morning hours of March 6 the Texas defenders were awakened suddenly. They heard shouts from Mexican soldiers and the sound of music. Santa Anna’s army band was playing “El Degüello.” The song meant that no mercy would be shown.

At about 5:00 A.M., four columns of Mexican soldiers attacked, but they were halted by the Texas artillery. The Mexican forces regrouped, however, and the four columns of troops then overwhelmed the Texans. Mexican soldiers entered the Alamo by the hundreds. They captured a cannon, turned it inward, and opened fire. Hand-to-hand combat then followed.

As the smoke cleared, almost all the defenders were dead. Among those killed were all the leaders of the defenders, including Travis, Crockett, Bowie, and Bonham. Also among the dead were several Tejano defenders, including Juan Abamillo, Juan A. Badillo, Carlos Espalier, José María Esparza, Antonio Fuentes, Damacio Jiménez, José Toribio Losoya, and Andrés Nava. Accounts of Mexican losses vary, but there were about 600 Mexican casualties. **Casualties** are those killed, wounded, captured, or missing during battle.

Only a few Texans survived the Alamo. One of the survivors was **Susanna Dickinson**, wife of Almaron Dickinson, and her daughter Angelina. Other survivors were Ana Salazar Esparza, wife of José María Esparza, and her children. Santa Anna also spared a slave named Joe and several other **noncombatants**, or people not involved in fighting. Many of these noncombatants had entered the Alamo looking for safety from the approaching Mexican army. Despite the brutality of the attack, most—but not all—of these noncombatants survived.

General Santa Anna believed that the fall of the Alamo would convince Texans to surrender. In a letter, he wrote that he had achieved “a complete and glorious triumph.” Instead, the Alamo became a symbol to many Texans that they must fight on at any cost. “Remember the Alamo!” became a rallying cry for the Texan army.

Reading Check Analyzing Information Why do you think that the fall of the Alamo became a symbol that inspired many Texans to fight on?

That's Interesting!

Line in the Sand

According to a famous Texas legend that arose in the 1870s, William B. Travis took his sword and drew a line on the ground on March 5. Anyone who wished to stay and defend the Alamo was asked to cross over the line. All but one of the troops did so. Some believe the one who did not was Louis Rose.



Section 3 Review



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ONLINE QUIZ

1. Define and explain:

- casualties
- noncombatants

2. Identify and explain

the significance of each of the following:

- Davy Crockett
- José de Urrea
- James “Jim” Bowie
- William B. Travis
- James Bonham
- Susanna Dickinson

3. Sequencing

Copy the diagram below. Use it to show the path of events that led to the fall of the Alamo.

The Siege of the Alamo begins.
The Alamo falls.

4. Finding the Main Idea

- Why did Travis write his letter to the people of Texas? What was the result?
- Based on the model and text, why were the Texans defeated at the Alamo?
- What role did Santa Anna play at the Alamo?

5. Writing and Critical Thinking

myWriteSmart

Evaluating Imagine that you are at the Alamo during the siege. Describe in a journal the traits of leadership that Texans showed. Consider the following:

- Bowie’s decision to protect the Alamo
- Travis’s actions