

The Settling of Texas and the War for Texan Independence

Extension article #2– The Alamo

Remember the Alamo by Vale Fitzpatrick (excerpted)

http://education.texashistory.unt.edu/lessons/psa/Remember_Alamo/

The Alamo is, perhaps the quintessential¹ event in Texas history. It served to fire the Texas revolutionaries, who led the charge at San Jacinto with cries of “Remember the Alamo.” Many have compared the Texans’ defense of the Alamo to the Spartan stand at Thermopylae², an epic stand against impossible odds where the defenders sold their lives dearly – aiding the eventual victory of their cause, and in the process, securing their immortality. Anson Jones, the last president of the Republic of Texas commented that the Alamo “has no parallel except the defense of the pass of Thermopylae...”

By February 1836, Texan military forces consisted of nearly one hundred men in the Alamo. The Texas forces were unready and scattered. Unfortunately, Santa Anna’s army was on the march. It vastly outnumbered the Texans in infantry, and the Mexican cavalry was so highly disciplined and well-equipped it could decimate any Texan force caught in the open.

On the 21st of February the vanguard³ of the Mexican army appeared before San Antonio, attacked and took possession of the town, driving the small Texans’ garrison into the Alamo. The Mexicans immediately began the siege of that fort. Santa Anna demanded unconditional surrender. [Col.] Travis wrote, “I have answered the demand with a cannon shot, and our flag still waves proudly from the walls....”

On Mary 5 – day twelve of the siege – Santa Anna called a conference of his commanders. Santa Anna [then] ordered a morning assault on the Alamo. Santa Anna ordered the attack to begin just before dawn on March 6 focusing on four different points on the walls. The Texans opened a heavy cannon and rifle fire on the attacking Mexicans. Travis was one of the first to die.

Once the Mexicans breached the walls, the Texans withdrew to the chapel and barracks, but the outcome was not in doubt. The Mexicans used the defenders’ own cannon to blast their way into the buildings. After brutal hand-to-hand fighting the battle was over, and Santa Anna’s forces held the fort.

The siege of the Alamo cost Santa Anna’s army more than lost personnel and material: the morale of the Mexican army was damaged. The army had no surgeons

¹ most typically representative of a quality, state, etc; perfect

² 300 Spartans defended a mountain pass, holding the Persian army.

³ The troops moving at the head of an army.

to treat the wounded, no medicines, no bandages, no gauze, and very meager food. The sacrifice at the Alamo aided the Texan cause in many ways. The heroic tale of the Alamo defenders fighting to the last man inspired Texans and increased support for the Texan cause. The battle weakened Santa Anna's army and damaged its morale. Finally, the Alamo provided Texans with a powerful rallying cry and delayed Santa Anna by two weeks – allowing the convention of 1836 that met on March 1 to declare independence and establish a temporary government.