SECTION 1

The Battle of the Alamo

Why It Matters Now

The Alamo showed the world that a heroic fight can change the course of history even if the battle itself is lost.

TERMS & NAMES

James Clinton Neill, James Walker Fannin, Martín Perfecto de Cos, Antonio López de Santa Anna, David Crockett, José Urrea, Green B. Jamison, **fortify,** James Bowie, William Barret Travis, Battle of the Alamo, **garrison, bombard**

OBJECTIVES

1. Explain the roles played by Santa Anna and Travis during the Battle of the Alamo.
2. Describe the events of the Battle of the Alamo.
3. Identify the significance of the year 1836.

MAIN IDEA

After the Texans' victory at San Antonio, Santa Anna led his army into Texas. He fought the Texas defenders at the Alamo in the most famous battle in Texas history.

WHAT *Would You Do?*

Write your response to Interact with History in your Texas Notebook.

INTERACT WITH HISTORY

Imagine that you are in a battle in which you and your troops are outnumbered. You realize that no one else is coming to help you. You could retreat, but you have promised to fight the battle to the end. Would you stay and fight or would you leave?



Cannonballs and rifle, 1800s

Linking History

To the Arts

In February 2000, Alamo officials uncovered eighteenth-century frescoes painted on the Alamo's walls that had been hidden for years beneath layers of whitewash. A fresco is created by painting on wet plaster. The paintings were found in a room next to the sanctuary, which previously had been closed to tourists. Experts claim that the newly discovered works of art may be the most significant find of Spanish mission art in Texas. ● **What might be learned from this artwork?**

Remember the Alamo

In December 1835 many Texans thought that the centralist threat to Texas had ended. After the Battle of San Antonio, Edward Burleson turned over command of the forces to Francis Johnson. When Johnson left to take part in the planned expedition to Matamoros, command passed to Colonel James Clinton Neill. Colonel James Walker Fannin commanded another force near Goliad. With General Martín Perfecto de Cos in retreat, no Mexican troops remained in Texas.

However, the capture of Captain Antonio Tenorio (teh•NOHR•ee•o) and his men in Anahuac and of Cos's army in San Antonio enraged Antonio López de Santa Anna. Even while Cos continued his retreat, Santa Anna started north with a large army. He felt an urgent need to reestablish Texas under Mexican control and to rid Texas of the Anglo American and Tejano rebels who openly defied his rule.

The Texans were unaware that Santa Anna had decided to lead his army into Texas. They believed that he would wait until spring to launch an attack. As a result, the Texas forces remained unorganized and scattered. Their lack of preparation would ultimately cost them at their next encounter with Mexican troops, the Battle of the Alamo.

The Battle of the Alamo is the most famous military clash in Texas history and is the subject of many movies and novels. Even with all this

attention, there are still unanswered questions. What were the motives of the Texan defenders and the Mexican army? How many Texans defended the Alamo? When did David Crockett lose his life? One thing is certain. The battle cry "Remember the Alamo," chanted by Texans during the last battle of the Texas Revolution, still echoes in the twenty-first century.

Movement of the Mexican Troops

Two main roads led into Texas from Mexico, the Atascosito Road and the Old San Antonio Road (also known as the Camino Real). Atascosito Road entered Texas at Matamoros and continued north through Goliad and Victoria. It passed near the present location of Houston and continued on to the Louisiana border. The Old San Antonio Road crossed into Texas at Eagle Pass and continued northeast to San Antonio and then to Nacogdoches. James W. Fannin's men at Presidio La Bahía in Goliad could defend the Atascosito Road. James C. Neill's forces guarded the route through San Antonio.

Angry from the previous defeat in San Antonio, Santa Anna quickly moved his army north to Texas. In January 1836, he sent one wing under General José Urrea (ooh•RAY•uh) up the Atascosito Road. Santa Anna and the remaining troops made their way to San Antonio.

Neill realized that the Old San Antonio Road needed to be guarded well. So, with the help of engineer Green B. Jamison, Neill strengthened the walls of the Alamo, a former mission turned into a fort. The Texans **fortified** the Alamo with 21 cannons, making the Alamo the most heavily defended fortress in the western part of North America.

fortify *to make stronger with military defense*

Wanted: Volunteers to Fight

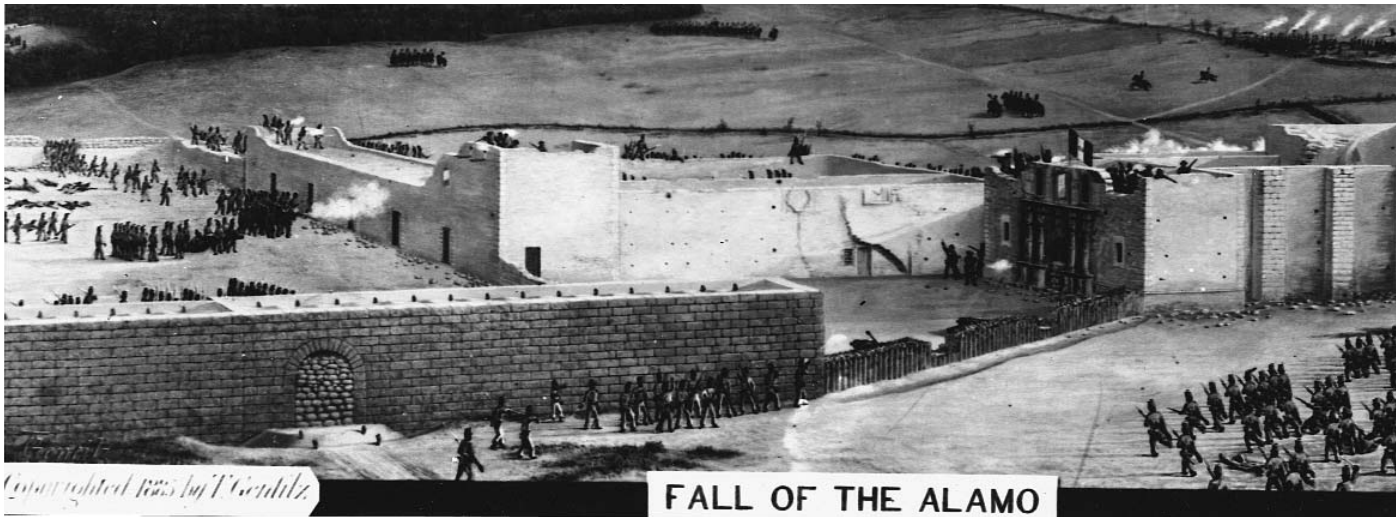
Neill knew he did not have enough soldiers to defend the Alamo. Most of the Army of the People had returned home. Others had followed Dr. James Grant and Colonel Francis Johnson on a mission to Matamoros to help Grant reclaim land that had been taken from him by Santa Anna's government. After their departure Neill commanded only about 30 men.

IN THIS LAND OF OURS

PLACE

San Antonio seemed a good place for the Mexican army to capture. It was the center of Mexican government in Texas. Although it was the largest town in Texas, most of the residents were of Mexican heritage. Therefore, Santa Anna assumed San Antonio could easily be defended by the Mexicans if the Alamo were taken. • **Where was San Antonio located in relation to the colonies in East Texas?**

▼ Texas soldiers worked hard to fortify the mission for defense against the Mexican army. • **What road was being traveled by the Mexican army on its way to the Alamo?**





▶ Antonio López de Santa Anna, William B. Travis, James Bowie, and David Crockett were key figures in the Battle of the Alamo. ● **In what ways were these leaders similar?**

Colonel James Bowie and his men had reached San Antonio with orders from Sam Houston to destroy the Alamo. However, Bowie and Neill decided to stay and fight. Bowie agreed to serve under Neill, and the work of preparing the Alamo's defenses continued. Bowie's men were rebels and were not considered regular soldiers in the Texas army. Nevertheless, Neill welcomed them. Governor Smith asked William Barret Travis to recruit 100 men and lead them to San Antonio to support Neill. Travis was able to raise only 29 men. He and the recruits arrived at the Alamo on February 3. David Crockett, a former volunteer colonel and member of Congress from Tennessee, arrived with about a dozen men on February 8. They, too, had come to join the fight in Texas.

In mid-February, Neill left San Antonio due to a family emergency. He placed Travis, then only 26 years old, in command. Travis, like Neill, held a rank in the Texas army. Bowie, though older and more experienced in frontier fighting, was only a volunteer. Bowie and his men were not pleased. They demanded an election of officers, a tradition among volunteer forces. The decision was split between the volunteers and the regulars. The volunteers supported Bowie, but the regulars chose Travis. Bowie and Travis set aside their personal differences and agreed to a joint command. Less than two weeks later Bowie became seriously ill and passed the command to Travis.

Travis tried to recruit more defenders for the Alamo. Juan Seguín, James Butler Bonham, and others carried letters to Goliad, Gonzales, and other communities asking for help. Fannin was reluctant to abandon his post at Goliad to join the troops at the Alamo. By the time he reconsidered and attempted to do so, it was too late.

Multicultural Connections

An Alamo Defender

José Toribio Losoya was not far from home when he fought at the Alamo. He had been born in the Alamo barrio, or neighborhood, and his family lived near the southwest corner of the mission enclosure. When the battle broke out, his family was displaced for months. His wife and children remained safe in the mission chapel while he fought and died in the battle. ● **Why might there have been a conflict of interest for Tejanos in the fight for independence?**

Then came the news of Santa Anna's arrival in San Antonio on February 23 and the beginning of the 13-day siege of the Alamo. Travis's appeals suddenly had greater importance. Desperately needing more volunteers, Travis wrote the following message soon after the siege began. He sent John William Smith, who slipped through Santa Anna's lines, to Gonzales to deliver the message. This letter has been called the most heroic document in Texas history.

Commandancy of the Alamo
Bejar, Feby, 24th 1836—

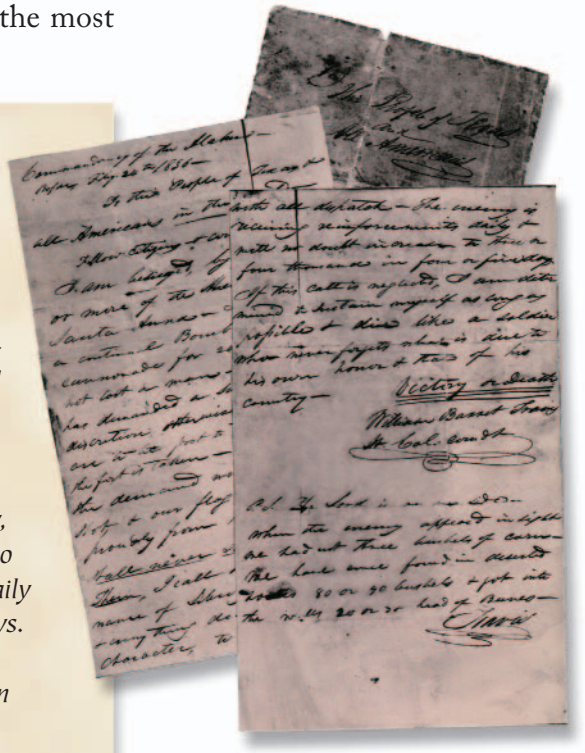
To the People of Texas & all Americans in the world—Fellow citizens & compatriots—

I am besieged, by a thousand or more of the Mexicans under Santa Anna—I have sustained a continual Bombardment & cannonade for 24 hours & have not lost a man—The enemy has demanded a surrender at discretion 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—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 myself as long as possible & die like a soldier who never forgets what is due to his own honor & that of his 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 & got into the walls 20 or 30 head of Beeves [cattle]—

Travis



Travis's original letter, stored in the Texas State Library and Archives

Fall of the Alamo

Why did Santa Anna attack the Alamo? Such a small **garrison** was little threat to Santa Anna. Historians argue that Santa Anna attacked the Alamo for political, not military, reasons. He had promised to sweep the Anglo Americans and Tejano rebels from Texas. He did not want political enemies in Mexico to claim he had avoided a fight.

garrison *troops stationed at a military post*

For 13 days, Mexican cannonballs **bombarded** the Alamo while Mexican troops prepared for battle. By March 5 about 1,800 troops had surrounded the Alamo. To warn Texans of their fate, Santa Anna's soldiers raised a blood-red flag. This was the traditional symbol of no mercy. Santa Anna ordered the attack to begin early the next day. Mexican buglers blared the "Degüello" (deh•GWAY•yoh), a tune played

bombard *to attack often with artillery*

to start an attack. The blare of José María Gonzales's bugle launched them into battle. In his diary Mexican officer José Enrique de la Peña described the beginning of the battle:

TEXAS VOICES

. . . a bugle call to attention was the agreed signal and we soon heard that terrible bugle call of death.

José Enrique de la Peña, *Personal Narrative*

Awakened by the shout "The Mexicans are coming!" Travis raced up the north wall. He was among the first defenders to die. Cannons were fired against the advancing columns of Mexican soldiers. However, their overwhelming numbers enabled them to reach the Alamo's walls. Scrambling up ladders, they burst through the Alamo's defenses. Fighting raged throughout the walls. Bowie was killed on his sickbed, though some credit him with fighting even there. By eight o'clock in the morning—only 90 minutes after the attack began—resistance had ceased. Hundreds of Texan soldiers and Mexican soldiers lay dead.

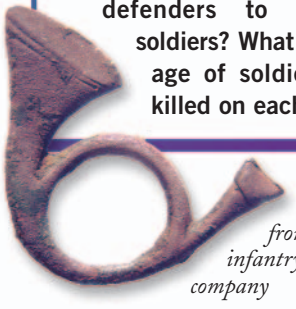
Casualties and Survivors

No one knows exactly how many people were killed during the Battle of the Alamo. Most historians believe that all of the 189 Alamo defenders and about 600 Mexican soldiers were killed. For years, many thought that David Crockett was among the last of the defenders to die and that he did so fighting. However, José Enrique de la Peña wrote in his diary that Crockett and six others attempted to surrender when they realized they were defeated. According to de la Peña, Santa Anna ordered the Mexican officers to put them all to death.

Linking History

To Mathematics

The number of men who fought at the Battle of the Alamo had a great impact on its outcome. Most historians agree that about 189 Alamo defenders and about 1,800 Mexicans soldiers battled at the Alamo. It is also generally agreed that all of the defenders and about 600 Mexican soldiers lost their lives during the battle. ● **According to these historical statistics, what was the ratio of Texas defenders to Mexican soldiers? What percentage of soldiers were killed on each side?**



Horn emblem from Mexican infantry rifle company

▼ Although only a small portion of the Alamo still stands today, the mission spanned more than three acres of land. ● **Why was the Alamo so difficult to defend?**

Image not available for use on CD-ROM. Please refer to the image in the textbook.



First known photo of the Alamo, 1849



The restored Alamo today

THEN & NOW

THE ALAMO Throughout history the Alamo has served many purposes. First used as a mission, it later served as San Antonio's first hospital, a Masonic lodge, a jail, a general store, a warehouse, and even a police station. Thanks to Clara Driscoll, the historical landmark still stands today. In 1905 this South Texas rancher loaned the State of Texas money to purchase the Alamo and save it from being torn down. For this reason, Driscoll is known as the "Savior of the Alamo." Today, the Alamo is owned by the State of Texas and managed by the Daughters of the Republic of Texas. **Why do you think preserving historical landmarks is important?**

Not all of the defenders of the Alamo were Anglo Americans. Nine Tejanos also defended Texas against Santa Anna and the central government. They were Juan Abamillo, Juan Badillo, Carlos Espalier, Gregorio Esparza, Antonio Fuentes, José M. Guerrero, Damacio Jimenez, José Toribio Losoya, and Andrés Nava.

Santa Anna spared several women, children, and African American slaves. Among the survivors were Susanna Dickinson, widow of the captain in charge of artillery, Almeron Dickinson; their 15-month-old daughter, Angelina; and Travis's slave, Joe. They were released by Santa Anna to tell other Texans about the destruction and horror they witnessed at the Alamo. Their message was simple: Santa Anna is coming to drive the Texans out of Texas.

SECTION 1 ASSESSMENT

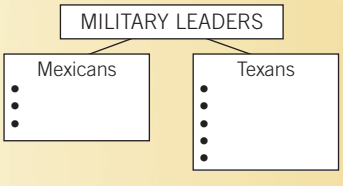
Terms & Names

Identify:

- fortify
- garrison
- bombard

Organizing Information

Use a diagram like the one shown to identify military leaders at the Battle of the Alamo.



What qualities made these people effective leaders?

Critical Thinking

1. Compare the situations that Santa Anna and Travis faced at the Alamo.
2. What were the casualties at the siege of the Alamo?
3. Why is the Battle of the Alamo considered a turning point in Texas history?

Interact with History

Review your response to *Interact with History* in your Texas Notebook. Knowing that the defenders of the Alamo became Texas heroes, would you make the same decision?

ACTIVITY

History

Go to www.celebratingtexas.com to research the Activity topic.

Online or in your school library, find information about one of the defenders at the Alamo. Then audiotape an account of the battle from that person's point of view.