A rough outline of the Alamo mission in 1836

Photo of the Alamo in 1901


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The plan of the Alamo.
Note the size of the area which Travis and his men were responsible for defending.

Homer S. Thrall. *A Pictorial History of Texas: From the Earliest Visits of European Adventurers, to AD 1879.* (St. Louis, Missouri, 1879)
The interior well that the defenders of the Alamo used throughout the siege, preventing Santa Anna from denying the Texans water.

One of the small skirmishes that occurred during the siege.

Meanwhile, Santa Anna had received reinforcements, and now enlarged his guard, the sentinels being placed nearer the fort. The Texans sallied out for wood and water, without loss; and at night they succeeded in burning some old houses north-east from the fort, and near a battery erected by the enemy on the Alamo ditch, about eight hundred yards distant.†

† Almonté’s Journal. Travis to President of the Convention, March 3, 1836.

H. K. Yoakum. History of Texas: From its first settlement in 1685 to its annexation to the United States in 1846, Vol. 2 (NY: Redfield, 1855)
The Mexican bombardment of the Alamo and the Texan defensive measures.

During all this time the Mexicans kept up a constant firing, but with little effect. On the 28th, they erected another battery at the old mill, eight hundred yards north, and attempted to cut off the water from the fort. The Texans were engaged in strengthening their works, by throwing up earth on the inside of the walls.

* * *

On the morning of the 1st of March, thirty-two gallant men from Gonzales were safely conducted by Captain John W. Smith into the Alamo, making the effective force under Travis one hundred and eighty-eight men. The bombardment of the fort still continued. The Texans, being short of ammunition, fired but seldom.

H. K. Yoakum. History of Texas: From its first settlement in 1685 to its annexation to the United States in 1846, Vol. 2 (NY: Redfield, 1855)
Colonel William B. Travis’s original letter from the Alamo on February 24, 1836, the second day of the siege.
(Page one of two. See next slide for transcription.)
Commandancy of the Alamo--
Bejar, Fby 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,
Colonel William B. Travis’s original letter from the Alamo on February 24, 1836, the second day of the siege.

(Page two of two. See next slide for transcription.)
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 --

Travis
The postscript (in pencil) added by courier Captain Albert Martin on February 25th to Colonel William B. Travis’s original letter from the Alamo.

Lancelot Smither added his own note (in ink) when the letter arrived at Gonzales.
Since the above was written I heard a very heavy Cannonade during the whole day think there must have been an attack made upon the alamo We were short of ammunition when I left Hurry on all the men you can in haste When I left there was but 150 determined to do or die tomorrow I leave for Bejar with what men I can raise [copy here illegible] at all events -- Col. Almonte is there the troops are under the Command of Gen. Seisma

[printed sideways]
Nb I hope that Every One will Rondevu at gonzales as soon poseble as the Brave Solders are suffering do not neglect this powder is very scarce and should not be delad one moment

L. Smither
After declaring his determination to sell his life as dearly as possible, and drawing a line with his sword, Travis exhorted all who were willing to fight with him to form on the line. With one exception, all fell into the ranks, and even Bowie, who was dying with the consumption, had his cot carried to the line. The man who declined to enter the ranks, that night made his escape.
The Texan defenses of the Alamo

Santa Anna’s decision to directly assault the Alamo.

Primary Source Adventures: Remember The Alamo

A drawing of General Lopez de Santa Anna

Homer S. Thrall. *A Pictorial History of Texas: From the Earliest Visits of European Adventurers to A.D. 1879* (St. Louis, MO: N.D. Thompson, 1879)

University of North Texas Libraries
A romanticized representation of the final battle for the Alamo.

Homer S. Thrall. *A Pictorial History of Texas: From the Earliest Visits of European Adventurers, to AD 1879.* (St. Louis, MO: N.D. Thompson, 1879)
A 1901 photo of the San Fernando Cathedral, where a Texan scout rung the bells to warn of Santa Anna’s approach.

Santa Anna’s assault against the Alamo’s walls on March 6th, 1836.

On Sunday morning, the 6th of March, a little after midnight, the Alamo was surrounded by the entire Mexican army. The cavalry were placed without the infantry, to cut them down if they offered to give way. The latter were provided with scaling-ladders. The enemy, thus forming a circle facing the fort, advanced rapidly under a tremendous fire from the Texan rifles and artillery. Just at daylight the ladders were placed against the walls, and an attempt made by the enemy to enter the fort, but they were driven back by the stern defenders within. Again the charge was sounded, and a second effort made to reach the top of the walls, but again the assailants were repulsed. For a few minutes there was a pause. By the presence, threats, and promises, of Santa Anna, a third assault was made, and with more fatal success. The enemy, reaching the tops of the ladders, wavered and fell; but their places were supplied by the hundreds pressing onward and behind them on each ladder. At length, killed, cut down, and exhausted, the Texan defenders did not retreat, but ceased to keep back the Mexicans. Instantly the fort was filled by the latter. The survivors within the walls still continued to do battle. They clubbed their guns, and used them till they were nearly all cut down.

H. K. Yoakum. History of Texas: From its first settlement in 1685 to its annexation to the United States in 1846, Vol. 2 (NY: Redfield, 1855)
A dramatized drawing of the hand-to-hand fighting as the surviving Texans fought to the last.

A representation of David Crockett


University of North Texas Libraries
A dramatized account of Crockett's death.

Crockett, with several others, were driven to a corner of the church where, with backs to the wall, they fought with the fury of tigers. Their faces were begrimed with powder, and blood trickled from many wounds. Crockett had a frightful gash across his forehead. Piles of Mexicans, dead and dying, lay around them.

When they could fight no longer, Crockett and five others were taken prisoners, and carried before General Santa Anna.

General Castrillon, who captured them, was a brave man, and he loved bravery in others. He wanted to save their lives. He said to General Santa Anna, "Sire, here are six prisoners, what shall I do with them?"

"Did I not tell you that no prisoners were to be taken?" shouted Santa Anna in rage. "To death with them."

This cruel order was immediately carried out. The last Texan had fallen, and with him the Alamo.
A dramatized account of the aftermath of the battle of the Alamo.

Thus fell the Alamo and its heroic defenders; but before them lay the bodies of five hundred and twenty-one of the enemy, with a like number wounded. At an hour by sun, on that sabbath morning, all was still; yet the crimson waters of the aqueduct around the fort resembled the red flag on the church at Bexar! The defenders of Texas did not retreat, but lay there in obedience to the command of their country; and in that obedience the world has witnessed among men no greater moral sublimity.

Those in the fort that survived were, Mrs. Dickinson (wife of Lieutenant Dickinson, who fell in the defence), her child, a negro-servant of Colonel Travis, and two Mexican women of Bexar.*

Santa Anna’s letter to McArdle explaining why the Alamo defenders had to die on March 16, 1874.
(Transcriptions in Spanish and English are on the next two slides.)
Ashurst Mr. H.A. McArdle
Independencia
Tejas

Muy sur mio:

Satisfazcien a su fa
vorecida fha 4 de Enero te dire: que respecto de
la toma o restauracion de la fortaleza del Alamo
en Abril de 1836, pues hay que anadir a lo que
se dijo entonces en los partes oficiales, y a lo que
es de notoriedad. Sin embargo, por satisfacer
a los deseos de Ud anadire que aquel hecho de
armas fue sangriente porque el Gefe Travis
que mandaba las fuerzas del Alamo no quiso
entrar en acomodamiento algun y sus contesta
cciones eran insultantes, se hizo preciso asaltar la
fortaleza antes de que fuera auxiliada por
Samuel Houston que caminaba en su asisto
con fuerzas respetables. La obstinacion de
Travis y sus soldados dio lugar a la muer
te de todos ellos, pues ninguno quiso rendirse.
La lucha duro mas de dos horas desde que los
soldados Mexicanos pesaron aquellos muros
escalandolos con resolucion.
Mexico March 19, 1874

Mr. H.A. McArdle
Independence,
Texas

Dear Sir:

In response to your favor of the 4th of January, I have to say that in regard to the restitution or restoration of the fortress of the Alamo, in April 1836 there is but little I can add to what was said in my official dispatches, and what was notorious. Notwithstanding, for your satisfaction, I will add that, that conflict of arms was bloody, because the chief Travis, who commanded the forces of the Alamo, would not enter into any capitulation, and his responses were insulting, which made it imperative to assault the fort before it could be reinforced by Samuel Houston who was marching to its succor with respectable forces. The obstinancy of Travis and his soldiers was the cause of the death of the whole of them, for not one would surrender. The struggle lasted more than two hours, and until the ramparts were resolutely scaled by Mexican soldiers.
Santa Anna’s letter to McArdle explaining why the Alamo defenders had to die on March 16th, 1874.
The text and translation of Santa Anna’s letter.

**SPANISH**

Celebrare que esta explicacion llene los deseos de Ud y que conozca mi buena disposicion para ser virlo como su mas at'o S.S.

A. L. de Sta Anna

**ENGLISH**

Hoping this explanation will fill your wishes and that you will be satisfied of my good disposition to be truthful, as I am your obedient servant

A.L. de Santa Anna
Portrait of Anson Jones, last president of the Republic of Texas.


University of North Texas Libraries
Anson Jones’s comments on Travis and the Alamo

MEMORANDA. [1850.

S8

June 4th.—The defence of the Alamo by Travis is one of the most splendid instances of bravery and noble devotion to the cause of one’s country on the page of history, and has no parallel except the defence of the pass of Thermopylae by Leonidas and his little band of Spartans.

MEMORANDA. [1850.

S8

the example of high
and elevated heroism they left behind was of priceless value, and constituted a legacy, the benefits of which will last while Texas has a name. It nerved at the time the heart and the arm of every Texan,