

The Alamo!

It's been 183 years since the fall of the Alamo, and exactly what happened then and there is hotly contested by professional historians and laymen alike. Many have their own axes to grind, which only confuses the issue even further, but I present the traditional interpretation here...

The story actually began in 1519, when Spain claimed the region comprising the present state of Texas [*hat off, heads bowed*]. In 1718, the Presidio San Antonio de Bexar and the Mission San Antonio de Valero (The Alamo) were established on the San Antonio River. It wasn't until 1754, however, that construction started on the present Alamo chapel. The name "Alamo" actually goes back to 1801, when the Second Flying Company of San Carlos del Alamo de Parras occupied the Mission Valero as a garrison.

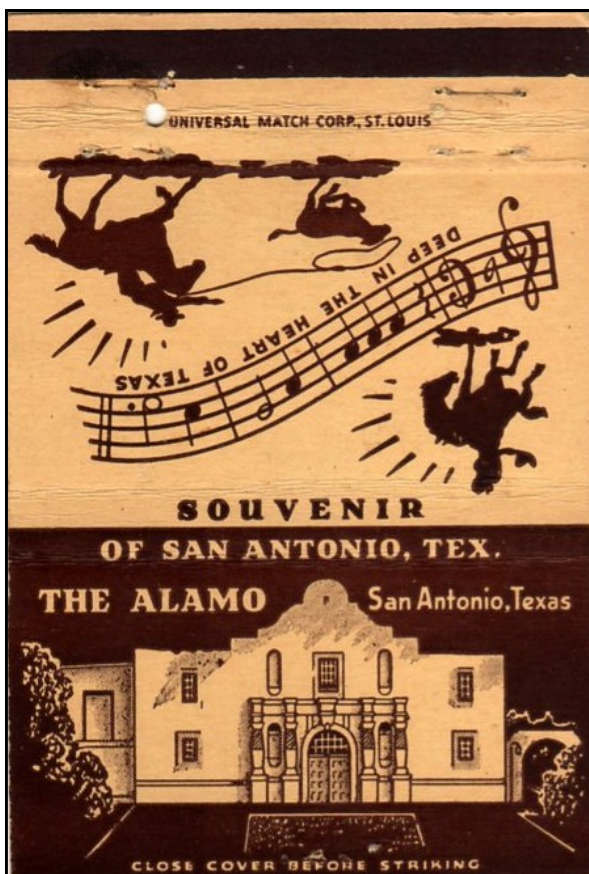
Twenty-one years later, in 1822, Stephen Austin brought in the first 300 Anglo families to help Mexico settle Texas, and two years later the Mexican Constitution promised statehood for the Texas territory. Mexico was in state of turmoil, though.

Following a series of revolutions, Santa Ana was elected President of Mexico in 1834, but Texas residents had already been complaining for two years about constitutional violations. Coming to power, Santa Ana reviewed the complaints and granted Texas greater representation in the state legislature.

In October, 1835, the Texas situation exploded over a trivial incident involving a cannon! October - The refusal of Gonzales residents to return a cannon to the Mexican army led to an exchange of gunfire. In response, Santa Anna sent troops under Martin Perfecto de Cos to San Antonio. The Alamo became part of the defenses of the city. Several weeks later, led by Austin, an army of untrained and often unruly settlers laid siege to the Mexican army, which held positions in the Alamo and the plazas of the town.

The Texan forces were victorious in a skirmish near Concepción mission, and in the "Grass Fight," but the siege dragged on into November with no agreement on how to proceed. Called to serve as a commissioner to the United States, Austin left San Antonio in November, and opinion was divided on how to proceed until Ben Milam rallied the force to an attack on December 5. After five days of fighting, during which Milam was killed, the Battle of Bexar concluded with the surrender of Mexican forces. Cos agreed to withdraw to the south, leaving Texas under the control of the rebel army.

On February 3, 1836 - William Barret Travis and a small group of reinforcements arrived at the Alamo, then under the command of James C. Neill. Five days later Crockett arrived with a group of volunteers. On the 12th, with the departure of Neill, Travis was elected commander of the regular army



forces at the Alamo, while Jim Bowie is chosen to lead the volunteers. The Mexican army under Santa Anna reaches San Antonio on February 23. The Texan force retreated into the walled Alamo compound. On March 2, the Texas Declaration of Independence was approved by delegates meeting at Washington-on-the-Brazos. On March 6, the attack upon the fortified Alamo began before dawn.



And so it was that 189 men faced and held off 4,000 Mexican troops for 13 days in the Battle of the Alamo. Many famous stories are told of the events and heroism of those 13 days, of how all 189 defenders voted and volunteered to fight to the death rather than capitulate to Santa Anna's surrender ultimatum, and of the last moments of the last defenders. When the fighting ended, all of the Alamo's occupants other than women, children, and Travis's slave Joe, were dead. Losses to the attacking Mexican army are estimated to be at least 600. Santa Anna declared the battle "...but a small affair" and ordered the bodies of the defenders burned. Colonel Juan Almonte, noting the great number of casualties, declared, "Another such victory and we are ruined."

The smoldering desire for freedom, kindled by the funeral pyres of the Alamo, burst into flames three weeks later at Goliad, when Santa Anna ordered the massacre of more than 300 prisoners taken at the Battle of Coleto Creek. Forty-six days after the fall of the Alamo, less than 800 angered Texans and American volunteers led by General Sam Houston launched a furious attack on the 1,500 Mexican troops at San Jacinto. Shouting "Remember the Alamo!" and "Remember Goliad!", they routed the Mexican army in minutes, killing 634 and losing 9. Santa Anna was captured; Texas was free; and a new republic was born. Texas was annexed to the United States on December 29, 1845.
