

GAME PROFILE/DOCUMENTED PLAY

THE ALAMO

A Game to Remember

by George Schandel

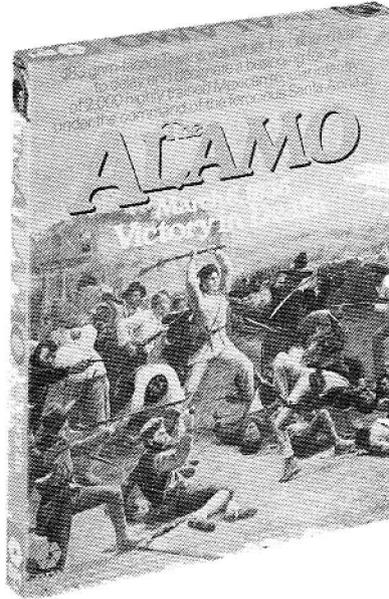
When Eric Smith (*Alamo's* designer) brought me the sketch map to the game, I thought to myself — they ain't gonna want it this way! The map ran the walls at true right angles and was not at all pictorial. It was accurate — but it didn't look like the Alamo. In mental desperation I reached back in time to all the low-level games I've done and came up with a blend of *Sniper* and *Cityfight* plus a dash of new design. It was a last minute change that the designer heartily approved of (even though he had to sweat to do all the necessary map adjustments).

— Redmond

Several *S&T* issues ago SPI announced that they had a game on the Alamo in the works. Issue after issue my anticipation mounted as I searched the brief progress reports for news of *The Alamo*. In the interims between issues I speculated about what the game would be like. Would the system employed be simple or complex? Would it be a new system or an adaptation of an existing SPI game system, and if the latter, which one? What about the scale — would it be man on man (basically), and how many counters would be required? Most important, when would it be completed? Then, finally, in one issue of *S&T* the designer revealed that the game was going fine and, but for the line of sight (LOS) rules, was nearly finished. They were having trouble with what? LOS rules? I became suspicious. What kind of monster was *The Alamo* turning into? Or worse, would SPI have to end up abandoning the project?

When the game came out, I was so worried that I would be disappointed I hesitated for three weeks before buying it. As a precaution that it might be something less than I expected, I bought a second game the same day (an unprecedented extravagance for me) that I already knew to be a good game (GDW's *1941*), to fill the possible post partem void! After inspecting the rules and map, however, my fears were greatly relieved. It was a good, straightforward game system, one which in some ways reminded me of the basic play mechanics of *Squad Leader* (of all things!). However, my initial hope for the game — to have an opportunity to see demonstrated the individual heroics of Bowie, Crockett, and Travis — were dashed. The counters for this trio did serve a combat function — but only as leaders.

I played the game the first time as though the Texans couldn't win. But they did. They were wiped out, but held out long enough to gain a substantial victory according to the victory conditions. I played the



game again. This time the Mexican assault was stopped cold, invoking the instant death victory conditions on Game-Turn Four. I tried again — and again — and again. Things did not improve for the Mexicans. The Texan side remained undefeated. I began to question the game's play balance. In desperation I reread the article on the battle in *S&T* #86. The account of the battle was very much like the way my first game had played except for one thing — the article mentioned the fact that the Mexicans turned the captured Texan cannons around on them once they were over the walls. This was the Mexican tactic I had overlooked. It was the key to Mexican victory in the game and also the secret to the game's play balance that had eluded me in my five solitaire games.

The first thing you will notice when you open the box containing *The Alamo* is the map graphics. The old Mission defenses are drawn to produce a three-dimensional effect. At first this seems confusing for LOS purposes, but once you get the idea it actually works better than the conventional flat graphics which conform to hexlines, since it makes it rather easy to distinguish between such things as the doorways, interior walls, gun slits and ramps which can easily be confused when represented in flat graphics. Although stacking is only one counter per hex, there is enough room on the map for the *Panzerblitz*-size hexes (my preferred size), all of the game charts, a detailed play summary, and a comprehensive explanation (and illustration) of how LOS works.

There are only 100 counters with the game; 26 are Texan units, another 39 are

Mexican, and 17 are Texan cannon. The Mexican counters represent between 35 and 55 men each and are color coded by the historical attack column to which the unit belonged, allowing for easy set up. The Texan counters vary from seven to ten men each and are identified by the state (or country) from which the men originated. All unit counters are backprinted for reduced strength. Ten of the unit counters are leaders of both sides, but only the Mexican leaders are back-printed for replacement. Turns represent five minutes each and hexes ten yards across. The game is quite easy to learn, so much so that a description of the sequence of play should suffice in providing a feel for what the game is all about and how the game system works.

The Sequence of Play

Mexican Replacement Phase: Mexican units "eliminated" on a previous turn may be brought back into play, if eligible, or may be moved closer to the "batter's box" to be brought in on the next turn or the turn after that. Units that are "eliminated" and which have lost two steps are eligible to return to play two turns after their destruction, while those having lost three steps when "eliminated" are eligible to return in three turns. Each step lost by the Mexicans represents ten casualties. The running total of such losses is kept track of on the map-sheet for VP purposes.

Mexican Reserve Placement Phase: If the Mexicans had an unrouted/undisordered unit in the Alamo on the last Reserve Commitment Phase and opted to commit the Mexican Reserve column, these units may now be placed in their pre-plotted entry area on the map-sheet.

Texan Movement Phase: Units of both sides have eight movement points (MP's) each turn. Climbing some walls may require the expenditure of four MP's while other walls may only require two. It behooves the Texan player to move his units so as to cover any wall hex the Mexican units might be able to reach in their subsequent Movement Phase. Once inside the Alamo, the morale of all Mexican units increases by one, while Texan morale decreases by one.

Zones of control (ZOC's) exist *only* between adjacent hexes of the same level — another matter to which the Texans must pay attention if they are to remain viable. Mexican ZOC's are locking for Texan units, but Texan ZOC's do not entirely block Mexican units. A Mexican unit may leave a Texan ZOC provided that there is another Mexican unit in that Texan's ZOC. This rule is excellent and will undoubtedly be employed in

future tactical games because it realistically demonstrates the limited ability of eight or so men to stop forty or more enemies from flanking them while they are busily engaged with an equal number. Once a Texan counter is caught in the ZOC of a Mexican unit it is virtually doomed. The Texan unit of eight men may have a firepower of the same number, but its melee value will only be one or two. Also, it cannot attack with fire if it is in an enemy ZOC, but must melee attack if it is to attack at all.

The Mexican counters, on the other hand, have only one number (from seven to ten if unreduced) which is the morale, melee, and firepower rating of the unit. A similar face-to-face encounter has less affect on them. This fact should be kept in mind when the Texan counters take refuge in the buildings under the ramparts because the Mexican units exert ZOC's through a doorway hexside, but not through a gunslit hexside.

Texan Combat Phase: The Texan player may fire cannons which are stacked with units and which are *not adjacent* to Mexican units. Thus, those Mexican units

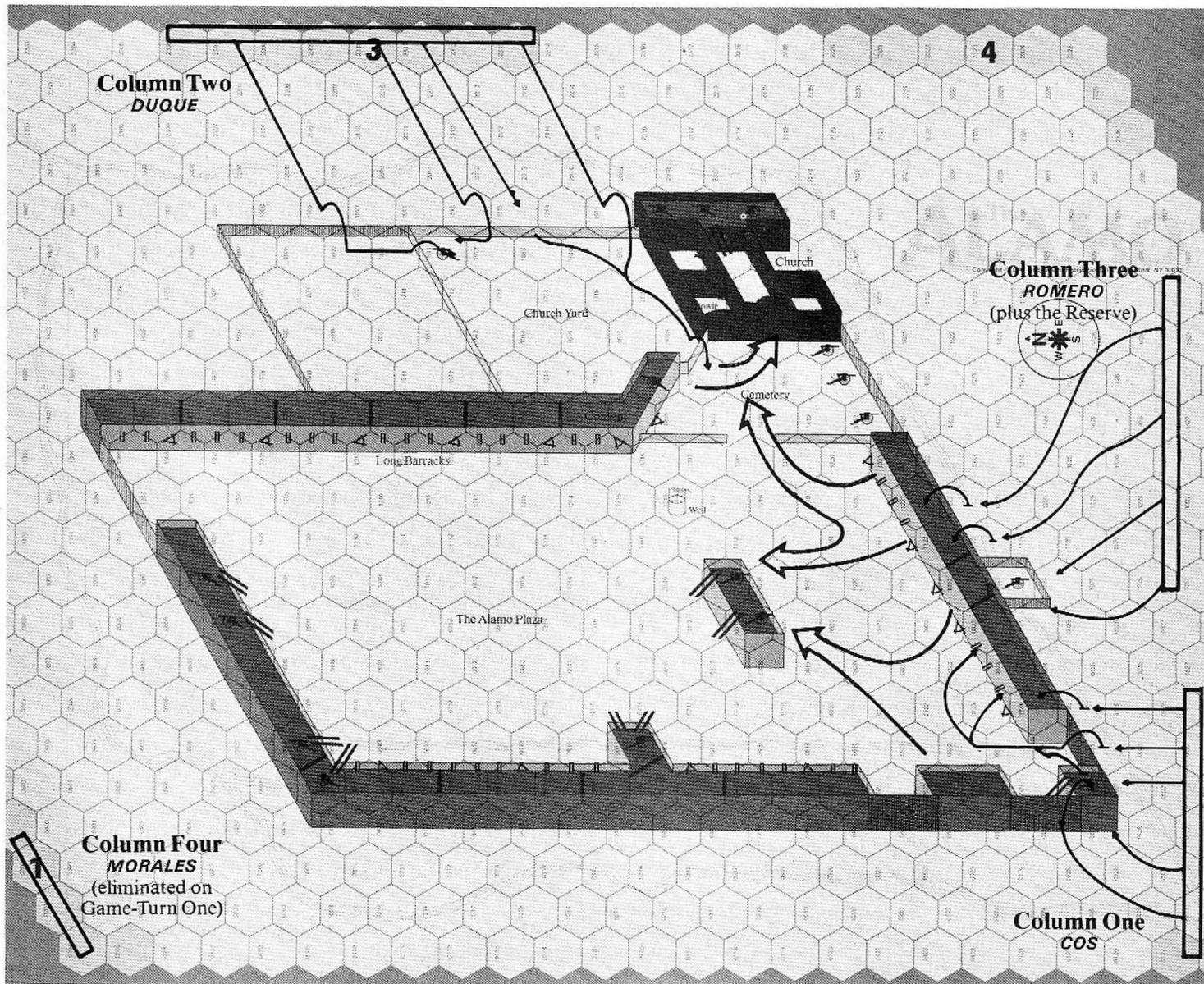
which survive the charge across the open ground and reach the outer walls of the Alamo can no longer be targeted by a cannon immediately in front of them.

A Texan unit, in addition to being able to fire a cannon, may also fire or melee attack on its turn, giving the Texans a one-two punch at the point where the Mexicans are most vulnerable — when they are approaching the fort walls. Units attack one at a time and an enemy unit may be attacked more than once in a given turn. The attacking unit's fire/melee value is modified by the target unit's terrain. All modifiers are factored in on the Combat Results Table (CRT). One die is rolled. The result may be a.) no effect, b.) a "C" — counterattack — or c.) a 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, or "H." This last result calls for the target unit's morale to be checked. An "H" requires a simple morale check with modifiers including such factors as a leader being stacked with either the attacking or target units affecting the roll. A numbered result means that number is added to the morale check roll in addition to the other modifiers.

If the morale check roll exceeds the

unit's morale by one, it becomes disordered. If the dice roll exceeds the morale by two, the unit is disordered and, in addition, loses one step; a unit which has already been reduced is eliminated. If the roll exceeds the unit's morale by three or more, the unit is "eliminated"; if a unit has already lost one step, in this case it *still* loses two steps for a total of thirty casualties. Units that are eliminated in this manner are brought back later at their reduced strength. The trick is to disorder or reduce a unit and then target it again. If the combat system seems similar to *Squad Leader* here, it is because this is exactly how it feels in play.

A "C" — counterattack — result allows the target unit to immediately counterattack the enemy unit out of phase. An optional rule allows Texans stacked with a leader to counterattack a number of times equal to the leader's rating, ignoring any "C" results that they might receive when counterattacking. In my opinion, the one thing that saves this game from becoming set-piece and predictable is the counterattack on the CRT. It is possible to lose a key unit at the most incon-



venient time, in its own turn when it is supposed to be eliminating the other fellow's units. The enemy still has Movement and Combat Phases to take place, but the counterattacking unit's movement — and hence its ability to plug any gap created in the defenses — is over!

Texan Rally Phase: Disordered units are rallied and routed units are either disordered or, if stacked with a leader, rallied.

Mexican Reserve Commitment Phase: The Mexican player may choose to commit his reserve units if he has a formed unit inside the Alamo.

Mexican Movement, Combat, and Rally Phase, in that order. These are similar to those described in the activities of the Texan Phases.

Mexican Withdrawal Check Phase: During the first five turns if the Mexicans have lost a specified number of casualties, the Texans automatically win (the assault is called off). The number of casualties that triggers this "instant death" condition varies from turn to turn. It is 350 casualties in the first turn, and an additional 50 in each subsequent turn, up to turn five, 550. If the Texan does not beat the Mexican player on the first five turns, he has to try to hold out through turn twelve — or as long as he can. The Mexican player has to eliminate all of the Texan units to end the game. The game's winner is then determined by the number of Victory Points the Texans have accumulated. The Texans get one point for each turn that they have held out and one point for each 100 Mexican casualties (rounded to the closest 100).

Battle Report

To set up the game, the Mexican player secretly writes down through which of the six entry areas he will bring on his four assault columns and later, his reserve. The Texan player then places his units within the confines of the Alamo (no Texan unit may leave the Alamo at any time during the game). Since I played *solitaire*, I set up the Texans first, then threw one die for each Mexican column to determine where they would be brought in. The result was: Column 1, under Cos, area 6; Column 2, under Duque, area 3; Column 3, under Romero, area 5; Column 4, under Morales, area 1; the column of the Reserve, under Amat, area 5.

For this game I used the optional Texan "ferocious counterattack" rule, mentioned earlier and the optional rule for ranged small arms fire.

Game-Turn 1: Under the personal direction of Travis, the Texan's fire disordered the Scouts of the Jimenez battalion. A 12-pounder operated by the Texans plastered the disordered Scouts, inflicting a loss of twenty men. Similarly, the Scouts of both the St. Louis and the Matamoros battalions were made short work of by an 18-pounder and various other Texan cannon. The Texans were off to a good start, having swept the entire north wall clear of attackers (3 Mexican counters were eliminated for a total of 60 casualties). On the east side, 100 soldiers of Duque's column were cut down by a blast from the 6-pounders on the top of the Mission and the long rifles of the Kentuckians (4 of the 8 counters were eliminated). Crockett's Ten-

nesseans inflicted 40 casualties on Romero's column attacking the south wall, while some men from various southern states of the US under the direction of Dickinson picked off 20 men from Cos' column which was advancing on the southwest corner of the Alamo (3 of 8 counters were eliminated). A total of two hundred and twenty Mexicans had been downed in the first five minute fusillade from the Texan ramparts.

The Mexicans still on the field hastened their movement toward the Alamo walls in the hope of escaping the withering fire of the Texan cannon. Lucky shooting by Duque's men, finding shelter behind a cattle pen, accounted for the loss of ten defenders on the east wall. Romero's column, attempting to force in the door to the south wall, met with no success, but a group of the Aldama battalion led by Cos, fought their way onto the southwest wall, capturing an 8-pounder and bayonetting the seven Alabamian defenders.

Game-Turn 2: With the pressure relieved on the north wall, and greatly alleviated on the east wall, the defenders of the Alamo shifted their efforts to dislodging those Mexicans who penetrated their southwest redoubt. But Cos' men survived the fire directed at them and even managed to pick off 4 Tennesseans who were manning the cannon of the ramparts in the center of the courtyard. Travis' men, racing along the west wall, shot up the head of the column coming to support Cos, inflicting 20 casualties. Forty more Mexicans at the gate by the south wall fell as did 20 others near the east wall, who were in the act of turning a cannon in the church yard against the wall.

The Mexicans scaled the barrier wall between the mission building and the east wall and overran the nine New Yorkers posted there. A spirited thrust by some of the Jimenez men forced their way onto the south wall, killing Dickinson and 9 Tennesseans. The wily Cos sent his men down into the courtyard and up the edge of the inner south wall against the Carolinians who had been joined by Crockett, while at the same time he supported the *melee* with men newly arrived on the wall. Three of the Carolinians were shot, but they held the Mexicans back. Santa Anna, seeing victory in his grasp, committed his reserve to exploit Cos' breakthrough. Additional Mexicans, halted by the first salvos from the Alamo, regained heart and rejoined their comrades by the walls.

Game-Turn 3: Threatened by three breaches in their defenses and faced with the prospect of being cut off from their prepared positions under the rampart walls, the Texans began to abandon the Alamo walls. Eight Missourians stayed behind to hold back Cos. These were disposed of, but not before all the other Texans escaped from the walls or across the courtyard. One building containing 21 defenders was broken into and all of the defenders fell. A cannon, pushed up to another building, failed to blast a hole large enough to give the assailants access. Other Mexican soldiers got the idea and more captured Texan cannon were turned against the inner walls sheltering the Texans.

Game-Turn 4: A cannon blasted a hole in the east wall, exposing the defenders in one room to the oncoming fury. A breach was also

made in the inner south wall containing Bonham and his men. Another room was taken by storm and 14 defenders were put to the sword, as were ten Pennsylvanians near the south wall.

Game-Turn 5: The door of the mission was blown down by an 8-pounder. All along the inner wall, the Texans put up a desperate struggle, but Davy Crockett and four Carolinians were killed.

Game-Turn 6: Twenty Mexicans assaulting the inner east wall were caught in a cross-fire by its defenders and by Travis' men who were hiding under the west wall and had not yet been attacked.

Game-Turn 7: Bonham and 8 defenders were subdued and another building blown open. The only remaining unbreached building was the one containing Travis and eight men.

Game-Turn 8: Twenty more Mexicans were shot down by the grim defenders trapped in the crumpled ruins of the east wall. Travis' building was opened by an 8-pounder and his men literally executed by Amat's reserve grenadiers who fired volley after volley into them. Eight Mississippians who resisted some 150 Mexicans for a full fifteen minutes after their wall was breached finally were overcome. Ten others at the mission door were also dispatched.

Game-Turn 9: Eighteen more of the defenders were cleared out of the various buildings until only two pockets of resistance remained. Seventeen men were still trapped against the rubble of the east wall. Ten Virginians sheltered with Bowie inside the chapel.

Game-Turn 10: The resistance by the east wall was eliminated and the mission door blasted open. Five of the Virginians were killed in the ensuing *melee*.

Game-Turn 11: Bowie and his heroic five were finally disposed of.

The Texans gain 11 Victory Points for the number of turns they were able to resist, plus three more for the 340 Mexicans who became casualties, for a marginal Texan victory. Had the Mexicans rolled one number higher on their *melee* against Bowie and his Virginians in Game-Turn 10, the Mexicans would have had a marginal victory.

Summary

As a game and a simulation, *The Alamo* is a genuine tour de force, a representative of what the New York "think tank" can do when their efforts are fully coordinated. The rules are a model of clarity with no fuzzy wording, ambiguity, or loopholes left by things unsaid. *The Alamo* is a game that can be played many times, but which will still retain a player's interest. If it does not become a classic, there is no justice or reason in wargameedom.

It may be the only game out on the subject, but its uncanny ability to capture the essence of the kind of fighting that took place that day will make *The Alamo* the only one to have — unless, of course, someone puts together a game that does it all as well but at a different scale — say, for instance, one in which ole Davy is not just a leader counter, and each Texan (at least) is represented by an individual counter. ■■