

RIFLE FIRE IN DARK VICTORY

By
Alan R. Arvold

At the siege of the Alamo, the vast majority of all personal firearms used (over 90%) were of the smoothbore variety. However, there were a small number of rifles on both sides which did have a minor, but discernable, impact on the fighting. On the Texan side about 25% of the men had rifles as their personal firearms. These rifles were basically hunting rifles, ranging from the short-barreled Plains variety to the famed long-barreled Kentucky rifles. A little over half of these riflemen were spread out among the different smoothbore armed units manning the walls, shooting at targets of opportunity beyond the range of the smoothbore muskets. (During the final assault on the Alamo, it is doubtful that these riflemen fired their rifles more than once, switching over to their extra muskets to keep up a steady rate of fire.) The rest of the riflemen were in the units manning the positions at the wooden palisade between the Chapel and the Low Barracks. Their purpose was to engage Mexican units charging the palisade at a longer range than was possible with muskets in order to stop the attack further out, as it was recognized as a dangerous weak point in the Alamo's perimeter. These rifle armed units used their rifles throughout the final assault and were quite effective in pinning down the Mexican Fourth Column during the first part of the final assault on the Alamo.

On the Mexican side, the Zappadore Battalion in the Reserve Column was the only rifle armed unit in the Mexican forces that attacked the Alamo in the final assault. The Zappadores were armed exclusively with British surplus "Baker" military rifles, most of which dated back to the time of the Napoleonic Wars. During the battle after the North Wall had been cleared of Texans, Zappadore units standing on top of the North Wall supported the other Mexican units advancing into the Alamo's plaza by engaging Texans at the far end of the plaza and on top of the Low Barracks with rifle fire.

While rifle fire did not have a decisive impact during the final assault, it certainly did have an effect and thus, should be included in the game. The following rules will do just that.

15.0 Rifle Fire

15.1 General: In Dark Victory certain units are considered to be armed exclusively with rifles. These units have a longer range over which they can fire their weapons at enemy units, but must pay an increased Action Factor Cost in order to fire their weapons.

15.2 Texan Units: The following Texan units are considered to be rifle armed; the one 5/3/2 and the two 9/4/1 infantry units located in hexes 2629, 2728, and/or 2828.

15.3 Mexican Units: The following Mexican units are considered to be rifled armed; all Mexican Sapper units (identified by the "S" printed next to their formation numbers) in the Reserve Column.

15.4 Range: The advantage of rifle fire is the extended range over which rifle armed units can engage targets. For Texan units the maximum range is 30 hexes and for the Mexican units the maximum range is 20 hexes.

Note: The ranges stated above represent the maximum effective range which units can engage targets with massed rifle fire. While there were undoubtedly sharpshooters on both sides who could hit targets beyond those ranges, they were few and rare. The reason for the difference in the maximum ranges is

two-fold. One, the Mexican Army used a cheap inferior grade of gunpowder compared to the standard US gunpowder used by the Texans. This cheap gunpowder had less propellant force, thus causing a reduction in range. Two, the Texans were more experienced and proficient with their rifles, considering they used them quite often for hunting game in peacetime. The Zappadores only had rifle practice a few times a year and thus were less skilled.

15.5 Line of Sight (LOS): Rifle fire is subject to the same LOS rules as regular fire, including the rules dealing with the pre-dawn darkness and dawn, with one exception. Rifle armed units which occupy intermediate and high-level hexes do not have their line of sight blocked by any ground level units or obstacles (low walls) at any distance, providing their target units are also on intermediate or high-level hexes.

Note: Due to the longer straight trajectory of rifle fire, it was possible to fire over the heads of people on ground level along the entire length of the Alamo, providing both the firer and the target were on the walls.

15.6 Action Cost: The disadvantage of rifle fire is that it takes longer to load the rifle due to the difficulty in ramming a lead ball down a rifled barrel. Thus, it costs a Texan unit 9 AF to fire its rifles and a Mexican unit 12 AF to fire its rifles.

15.7 Texan Extra Gun Counters: Extra Gun counters may be stacked with the Texan rifle armed units. These units may fire using these Extra gun counters and any which they may move to at the 3 AF cost, but will only have a maximum range of 10 hexes when they do.

Note: The riflemen at the palisade did have extra loaded muskets at their location to use in case the Mexicans got up too close to the palisade in their assault. As it turned out, they did not need to use them until the Mexicans were swarming their right flank from the direction of the Plaza.

General Note: Players may wonder about the difference in ranges between regular Texan and Mexican units, even though both have smoothbore muskets. The reason for it is this. Mexican infantry never received musketry training beyond learning how to load and fire their muskets. When they fired their weapons in combat they fired their muskets from the hip, pointing their weapons towards the enemy, which made for a very short effective range (about 30 yards). The Zappadores were an exception to this. Being the elite infantry of the Mexican Army, they received basic musketry training, including learning how to aim, and even spent a few times a year at the rifle range. The regular Mexican infantry never even got to do that. Texan infantry, being mostly frontiersmen, were more familiar with firearms as they were part of their everyday life. At least they knew how to aim which is why they have a longer effective range than the Mexicans. It should be noted that smoothbore muskets had a maximum effective range of between 50 to 100 yards, beyond which accuracy dropped off rather drastically.