

10-1971

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Recommended Citation

Block, W. T. (1971) "Sabine Pass in the Civil War," *East Texas Historical Journal*: Vol. 9: Iss. 2, Article 6.

Available at: <http://scholarworks.sfasu.edu/ethj/vol9/iss2/6>

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SABINE PASS IN THE CIVIL WAR

W. T. BLOCK

In extreme Southeast Texas, where the confluence of the Sabine-Neches-Angelina waterways meets the sea, lies historic Sabine Pass. The decade before the Civil War witnessed the beginnings of an export commerce there that would eventually rank it, for a time, as the second-largest seaport on the Texas coast. It was the southern terminus for a fleet of six river steamers that freighted the timber and farm products along our East Texas river roads. Today, it is reduced by economics to a shadow of its former self, subsisting principally upon the sea-food and off-shore drilling industries.

Sabine Pass had its beginnings in 1832 when Thomas Cortis of England and John McGaffey of New Hampshire settled there.¹ In 1837, a Republic of Texas custom house was established at Sabine. Shortly afterward, the United States built its custom house across the channel in Louisiana, following Secretary of the Treasury Levi Woodbury's report to Congress that smuggling and contraband slave trade operations were being conducted there.²

In 1839, Sam Houston, Philip Sublette, and associates laid out the first townsite of Sabine, containing 2,060 lots, issuing \$250 denomination stock certificates, and employing as their local agent an early Sabine Pass settler named Niles F. Smith. In 1844, Smith and McGaffey entered into a partnership to develop the second townsite of Sabine Pass.³

However, neither promotion resulted in rapid growth. East Texas speculators rushed south to purchase lots or to stake out land claims, but few remained as settlers. The 1850 census lists about 150 inhabitants at Sabine, and an enumeration made in 1857 showed an increase in population of only thirty-five.

The census lists for 1860, however, indicate that a boom had transpired during the intervening years. By then, Sabine Pass (officially, Sabine City) had acquired a population of more than 500, exclusive of slaves, and a probable total nearing one thousand. The frontier settlement began to take on the trappings of civilization, boasting of a doctor, three lawyers, two hotels, two churches, three large exporting firms, a weekly newspaper, the Sabine *Times*, schools and music teachers, and a number of wholesale and retail merchant establishments. Fashionable Goble Academy was operated by the Presbyterian minister there.⁴

In 1850, Judge D. R. Wingate built one of the first modern steam sawmills in Texas at Sabine Pass, followed shortly thereafter by another steam mill owned by J. M. Long. By 1860, a cotton gin and a large sugar mill had been located there. Along the shores of Sabine Lake, contractor John Stamps was laying the first railroad trackage south of Beaumont.⁵

The Morgan Line of steam packets docked frequently at the three large wharves, providing regular freight, passenger, and mail service to New Orleans and Galveston. Sabine had increased its cotton exports from eighty-four bales in 1838 to more than 15,000 bales in 1858. The river steamer *Uncle Ben* had carried 5,000 of these, making five 800-mile roundtrips up the Sabine River, two of which reached Belzora, west of Longview in Smith County. Other exports in that year included 1,000,000 feet of lumber, 6,000,000 shingles, 200,000 barrel staves, and 115,000 pounds of tobacco. By 1859, more than forty vessels were regularly engaged in trade at the port.⁷

E. I. Kellie, founder in 1865 of the *Jasper Newsboy* and long-time steamboat captain and politician, confirmed in his memoirs that Sabine Pass was a boomtown in 1861, and estimated its population at 3,000. He was a sixteen-year-old printer's devil for the *Sabine Times* when its publisher, J. T. Fuller, died in the fall of 1860. Kellie continued publication alone until he enlisted in the local Confederate company in May of 1861.⁸

The outbreak of war shook the local citizenry to its roots for the town was acutely aware of its exposed position to guns of the Union Navy. Citizen sympathies were divided as well for a large percentage of them had been reared in the North. A letter of Colonel X. B. DeBray of Houston refers to the suspected disloyalties among the residents there.⁹

In the spring of 1861, Sabine Pass citizens organized a committee to prepare for the town's defense, electing the sawmill operator, Judge Wingate, as its chairman and K. D. Keith, an export merchant, as his assistant. Keith organized an infantry company, eventually designated as Company B, Spaight's 21st Regiment. He assumed its command as captain along with Lieutenants Niles H. Smith, son of Sam Houston's former agent, Joseph O. Cassidy, and Joseph Chastaine.

Keith drilled his company endlessly to the chagrin of its teenage recruits, and used them to construct a crude, earthwork fort in the marshland along the channel. This fortress, known as Fort Sabine, guarded the two channel entrances of a mile-long oyster reef that lay in the Pass. Keith mounted two 12-pounder Mexican field guns there along with a battery of 18-pounder smoothbores loaned from the defenses of Galveston. Later, he received two 32-pounder smoothbores to bolster the mudfort's armament, giving it an effective range of about 1,200 yards.¹⁰

In this early period, the story of Sabine Pass is generally one of considerable apathy on the part of the Confederate command. Its value as a haven for blockade runners is attested to in at least two letters. Colonel DeBray, commanding the Houston Sub-Military District, noted in one that Sabine Pass "has proven to be our most important seaport." The Confederate chief engineer for East Texas, Colonel Julius Kellersberger, added in another that "the Pass at Sabine is certainly a very important point, and in fact the only port from where we receive our powder and other articles."¹¹

In July of 1862, Kellersberger was ordered to Sabine City to inspect the condition of defenses there. He reported their total inadequacy, stating that the guns were too small to be effective, and that the crude earthworks were subject to overflow. He recommended that a new fort be built on higher ground near the channels' exits from the reef, and that five guns of adequate size be installed there. Three months later, Colonel DeBray chided the Trans-Mississippi Headquarters for its failure to act on this recommendation, stating that one of two current disasters might have been averted. At that moment, Union Lieutenant Frederick Crocker's squadron was in Sabine Lake, and another Union Fleet had captured Galveston.¹²

A third disaster had overtaken Sabine City, which, in effect, made DeBray's chiding pointless. In July of 1862, the British steamer *Victoria* ran the blockade, carrying both munitions and the dreaded yellow fever. Within days, soldiers and civilians alike were dying, and a general panic ensued with much of

the populace fleeing the city. Colonel Ashley Spaight, of Beaumont, furloughed most of his battalion to counteract spread of the contagion. A general quarantine was ordered at Sabine, and guards were posted south of Beaumont and Orange to prevent entry of Sabine City's refugees.¹³

Except for thirty effectives, Captain Keith's gunners were all furloughed or convalescent when Crocker's squadron attacked on September 24, 1862. Crocker's cannon pommelled the fort at will while all of the Confederate shells fell short. Colonel Spaight recorded that the defenders could do nothing except mount the breastwork and shake their fists in defiance.

At nightfall, Keith spiked and buried the guns, then retreated inland on Spaight's orders with his supplies and stores. For three weeks, Crocker's guns and launches depredated the area, burning Sabine's sawmills, railway station and roundhouse, many residences, and the railroad bridge over Taylor's Bayou, altogether more than \$100,000 worth of damage.¹⁴

Despairing of holding Sabine due to epidemic, transportation problems, and Crocker's presence in the Lake, Spaight prepared to defend only Beaumont and Orange. He hastily reassembled his battalion, and on October 2, 1862, dispatched an urgent request for guns, men, and Colonel Kellersberger's services. Kellersberger left Houston the following day with men and supplies, and by October 18 could report that the lower Neches and Sabine River defenses were shipshape.

At Port Neches, he built Fort Grigsby, one of five erected by the engineer in the Sabine Lake region, and armed it with a battery of 24-pounders, an arsenal, and a bombproof. He remarked of this fort that "this battery, if ably-manned and defended, can blow anything out of the water that can cross the bar." On the lower Sabine River, he built another on a high shellbank, and armed it with three 32-pounder brass howitzers. On the bars of both rivers, he scuttled 80-foot barges loaded with clamshell, so designed that the rivers could admit only the shallow-draft, Confederate river steamers.¹⁵

In the end, Kellersberger's labors proved to be little more than an exercise in futility. Crocker's squadron went all out for harassment, but he made no attempt to ascend the rivers. He lacked the land troops needed for a holding operation, and, being waterborn, had even less reason than the Confederates for exposing his men to the yellow fever contagion. After three weeks, he sailed his squadron through the Pass, and left, but the river forts remained as the Sabine area's only defenses for many months to come.

Following the loss of Galveston, a new commander, General J. B. Magruder, was transferred to Texas, and an immediate change in Confederate tactics was visible. One of his first acts was to gather what forces he could muster, and, with a motley assortment of cottonclad river craft, to drive the Federals from Galveston Bay.

Two of Magruder's units at Galveston were to play a major role in the defense of Sabine for the remainder of the war. One was Company F, of the First Texas Heavy Artillery, of which Lieutenant Richard Dowling was second in command. The other was Colonel W. H. Griffin's 21st Infantry Battalion, who had helped spearhead the attack on Kuhn's Wharf.¹⁶

Magruder then moved to destroy the blockading ships off Sabine City, which

action had been recommended earlier by Colonel DeBray. Magruder sent Company F, better known as the Davis Guards, to Orange, where two steamboats, the *Josiah Bell* and *Uncle Ben*, were being outfitted with cannon, cotton bales, and heavy oak timbers. Dowling's Guards were assigned to the cottonclad *Bell* whose main armament was a single 6-inch Columbiad rifle. Company B, Keith's command, served as artilleryists for the *Uncle Ben's* three 12-pounder guns, an assignment they retained until the war ended.

Loaded with sharpshooters from other companies as well, the two cottonclads left Orange on January 20, 1863, hopeful of finding the blockade ships at anchor offshore. Forewarned by columns of black smoke, the blockaders *Morning Light* and *Velocity* hoisted sail in an effort to escape. After a thirty-mile chase at sea, the steamboats came within range, and, in an amazing display of gunnery, Dowling's crew scored a direct hit, which destroyed a gun and its crew aboard the *Morning Light*. When their other gun crews were forced below decks by the Confederate musketry, both ships surrendered.¹⁷

For some months, Magruder had planned to rebuild Sabine's defenses. In March, 1863, he ordered Kellersberger and a work force of 500 slaves to begin construction on a new Fort Sabine, later renamed Fort Griffin. The engineer recorded in his memoirs that, upon arrival there, he found Sabine City "a deserted village. This is not entirely a correct assessment for the writer knows of many families who remained there throughout the war, particularly among the farmers in the countryside."¹⁸

For six months, the engineers continued work on the new fort, and it was still unfinished when a Federal invasion force attacked on September 8. Fort Griffin was somewhat triangular in shape, and about 100-yards long on each leg. It had a sawtooth front, where six guns were mounted, sloping walls ten feet high, and a parapet twenty-feet wide at the top, beneath which six underground arsenals and bombproofs were built. Construction materials were primarily dirt, logs, crosssties, and railroad iron.¹⁹

For armament, Kellersberger dug up the spiked 32-pounder guns at old Fort Sabine, and rebuilt them at the Confederate foundry in Galveston. He also abandoned the river forts, transferring all of their weapons and supplies to Fort Griffin.²⁰

Early in 1863, Magruder had begun the gradual transfer of Griffin's Battalion to Sabine Pass, which action was completed in June. This battalion consisted primarily of West Texas frontiersmen, who, by late summer, were threatening mutiny because of Comanche raids on their homes. At the same time, Magruder was forewarned of an impending Union attack on the Texas Coast, but he nevertheless ordered Griffin's mutinous element, all but two companies, to West Texas around September 1. This action reduced Confederate manpower in the Sabine area to about 300 men when the Union fleet arrived.²¹

The story of Dick Dowling's small but signal triumph is too well-recorded to require repetition here. Its effects, however, were momentous for both sides. It lulled the Union navy into believing that the defenses at Sabine were impregnable. It kept an occupation army out of East Texas. It kept the port open to blockade-runners, whose supplies helped curb the Union's Red River Campaign. And expressly for Sabine, it instilled in General Magruder a morbid fear that a second attack at Sabine was impending.

Magruder temporarily transferred his Houston headquarters and one-third of his command to Sabine Pass. On paper, this was 3,600 men, but one thousand of these were on detached service elsewhere. He ordered construction of extensive outer fortifications, wagon roads and rail construction, channel obstructions, and the building of a four-gun redoubt at Taylor's Bayou near Port Arthur.

In addition, he ordered construction of a major fortification of five redoubts seven miles west of Sabine City to guard the western approaches of the town. At this point, Sabine's two high-land ridges form a juncture near the beach, where Union troops could have debarked with ease. By October 15, Fort Manhassett neared completion with 500 troops and a number of guns in position there.²²

It was the Union stab at Brownsville, Texas that ended Sabine's primacy among Magruder's plans. By late November, he had transferred half of Sabine's defense force southward. Gradually, Federal soldiers occupied most of Texas' southern coastline, and Magruder retreated inland and north, determined to hold his Brazos-to-Sabine Pass position at all costs. And in this respect, he succeeded, for the Northern stretch of Texas coast remained unchanged until the war ended. With the exception of Galveston, Sabine's two forts were among the last in the Confederacy to lower the Rebel emblem on May 20, 1865.

Only one other action marked Sabine's Confederate history in the last year of the war. The Calcasieu River in Louisiana was oftentimes friendly territory for the Federal navy. A number of Union sympathizers lived along its Pass, and a 200-man band of Jayhawkers depredated Cameron Parish and sold stolen livestock to Union blockaders. On April 15, 1864, two West Gulf blockaders, the ironclads *Granite City* and *Wave* were ordered from New Orleans to Calcasieu Pass to buy cattle and horses, and to enlist disgruntled sympathizers for the Union navy.

Magruder misinterpreted their mission, believing it to be a prelude for invasion. He ordered Colonel Griffin to attack, and, at daylight on May 6, the Sabine garrison caught the ironclads at anchor in the Pass, awaiting coal. Creuzbauer's Battery of artillery scored 65 hits on the two vessels, while 300 Confederate sharpshooters maintained a steady musket fire at the gun crews. The *Granite City* surrendered after firing thirty rounds, but the *Wave* put up a gallant defense for two hours, striking her colors only after her steam drum exploded.²³

The remainder of the war at Sabine Pass was typical of that throughout the South—soured corn meal, no pay, no provisions, inflated currency, and low morale—all of which provoked mutinies and mass desertions. Following Lee's surrender, General Kirby-Smith and Magruder voiced blatant appeals for patriotism, but to no avail. By May 20, 1865, Sabine's defenders had abandoned their posts, and returned to their farms. On May 25, Union Lieutenant Pennington's detachment came ashore at Sabine and raised the Stars and Stripes over both forts.²⁴

If the 1866 exports are any gauge for measure, Sabine Pass must have bounced back quickly during the Reconstruction Era. Although her cotton and shingle exports for that year were cut in half, her lumber shipments trebled from one to three million board feet. By 1900, at the height of the port's supremacy, lumber shipments would reach 75,000,000 board feet annually.²⁵

Although Sabine Pass has long, and with justifiable pride, celebrated Dick Dowling's victory, this forty minutes of battle has come to be synonymous with its four years of Confederate history. All else has been consigned to historic obscurity, and myth and legend have often replaced fact. By 1890, all traces of Fort Griffin had disappeared, and the very existence and location of Fort Manhasset had long been forgotten.

In the summer of 1970, this writer became aware that a lost Confederate fort may have existed at the west end of Sabine Ridge. Research verified this, and with the aid of Confederate maps in National Archives, he was able to identify the five redoubts that once comprised Fort Manhasset. Traces of eroded embankments still outline two of the fortifications exactly. During the summer of 1970, excavation at one of them uncovered an entrenchment where more than two hundred 32-pounder Confederate shells lay encrusted and well-preserved in black gunpowder along with many other artifacts. The other four sites are still untouched. Since this excavation revealed the abandoning soldiers' deliberate intent to hide everything from the victors, Fort Manhasset's fourteen cannons (several of them being brass howitzers) may well be buried somewhere in the vicinity, for no primary source of evidence indicates otherwise.

Although it is much too early to beat the drums, there is a current drive on to restore the Fort Griffin Battle site into a state-owned recreation park complete with a restored fort, museum, boating ramps, and other facilities. State archaeologists and Parks and Wildlife officials have investigated both sites thoroughly in recent weeks, and with their reports as a basis, funds for land purchase and restoration will be included as a line item appropriation in the Texas Parks and Wildlife budget for 1971. It is true that all these efforts may fail, but, whatever the outcome, the Sabine area of Texas has become acutely conscious of its Civil War heritage in recent months, which this writer, of course, hopes will continue.

FOOTNOTES

¹Beaumont *Enterprise*, May 31, 1936; Port Arthur *News*, undated photocopy, 1938.

²House Document No. 466, 25th Congress, 2nd Session; U. S.—Republic of Texas Boundary Commission Map, 1840; map Z-54-13 in National Archives.

³Port Arthur *News*, September 11, 1966; Jefferson County Deed Records, Vol. C., 215-17; *ibid.*, Vol. E, 191, 354, 301, 438-39; Jasper County Deed Records, Vol. E., 189.

⁴Texas GLO Map of Jefferson County, 1918; Jefferson County, Texas census, 1850; *Texas Almanac*, 1859.

⁵Census Records, 1860; Jasper *Newsboy*, January 12, 1923.

⁶Beaumont *Enterprise*, January 8, 1933; Census Records, 1860; Jefferson County Marriage Record A-B, 139.

⁷Jasper *Newsboy*, January 12, 1923; *Beaumont Enterprise*, January 8, 1933; 1859 *Texas Almanac*, 150-51.

⁸Jasper *Newsboy*, January 12, 1923.

⁹*War of the Rebellion-Official Records, Armies*, Series I, Vol. XV, 816.

¹⁰Memoirs of K. D. Keith, "Military Operations, Sabine Pass, 1861-63," 67th Annual Meeting, Texas State Historical Association, April 26, 1963; "History of Spaight's Texas Regiment," Texas Archives, University of Texas; Jasper *Newsboy*, January 12, 1923.

¹¹*Official Records, Armies*, Series I, Vol. XV, 143; series I, Vol. IX, 729.

¹²*Official Records, Armies*, Series I, Vol. XV, 143-51, 816.

¹³"Military Operations, Sabine Pass, 1861-63," 1.

¹⁴*Official Records, Armies*, Series I, Vol. XV, 143-47, 816; Alwyn Barr, "Texas Coastal Defense, 1861-65," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, Vol. XLV (July, 1961), 12-13.

¹⁵*Official Records, Armies*, Series I, Vol. XV, 146-47, 150, 852-52; S. O. No. 95, Headquarters, Sub-Military District of Houston.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 214-20.

¹⁷J. T. Scharf, *History of the Confederate States Navy* (New York: 1887), 515-18; G. O. No. 45, Headquarters, Military District of Texas, March 11, 1863; *Official Records, Armies*, Series I, Vol. XV, 239-40.

¹⁸J. Kellersberger, *Memoirs of an Engineer in the Confederate Army in Texas* (translated by H. Sundstrom), University of Texas Library, 30.

¹⁹Confederate maps and drawings Nos. Z-51-2, Z-54-11, Z-54-6, Z-298, Z-54-2, and Z-54-7, all in Record Group 77, National Archives.

¹⁰Kellersberger, *Memoirs*, 30-31; *Port Arthur News*, August 30, 1970.

¹¹*Official Records, Armies*, Series I, Vol. XXVI, Part II, 73, 248; *ibid.*, Vol. XXVI, Part I, 303.

¹²*Ibid.*, 281, 298-99, 318-21; Map 3, Plate XXXII, "Official Atlas of the Civil War."

¹³"History of Spaight's Texas Regiment"; *Beaumont Enterprise*, May 9, 1909; *Official Records, Armies*, Series I, Vol. XXXIV, Part I, 912-14; *Official Records, Navies*, Series I, Vol. XXI, 746-61; Alwyn Barr, "Battle of Calcasieu Pass," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, Vol. LXVI (July, 1962), 59-68.

¹⁴Scharf, *History of the Confederate States, Navy*, 529.

¹⁵*Texas Almanac*, 1867.

EDITOR'S NOTE: The following articles are reprinted from Sabine area newspapers.

FORT GRIFFIN MYTHS EXPLODED

By W. T. BLOCK

(As plans advance in an effort to restore the 1863 Battle of Sabine Pass site, W. T. Block of Nederland, a history teaching fellow at Lamar University and assistant postmaster at Nederland, has obtained copies of a sketch of the fort from National Archives. This is a story of Fort Griffin and the gun emplacements there.)

In September, 1863, Dick Dowling's Irishmen won their battle spurs and war bonnets at an unfinished earthen fortress known today as Fort Griffin. This battle is one of the best-documented events of the Civil War, whose details are retold and relived each year during the "Dick Dowling Days" celebration at Sabine Pass.

However, Dowling's fortress is less well-known, and over the century has been clouded with myth and legend. With the possibility that its site may be restored by the state of Texas, it is imperative that these myths be replaced with authenticity.

Since the Civil War Centennial in 1963, many maps and drawings have appeared in newspapers and magazines, purporting to be Fort Griffin. Whatever the skillful drawings and artistic quality, most have been four-sided affairs, being no more than the artist's conception of what the fort looked like.

The listings of National Archives do not indicate that Fort Griffin's plans survived. However, they do list plans for "Fort Sabine," which, at first glance, one might confuse with an earlier fortification of that name (three-quarters-mile south of the present battleground), which was abandoned in 1862.

Actually, in Civil War days, the fort was listed both as Fort Griffin and Fort Sabine. General Magruder's official report of the battle on Sept. 9, 1863, indicates it may also have been known as "Fort Grigsby," former name of an abandoned fort at Port Neches. As late as 1864, one Confederate map still identified Fort Griffin as being "Fort Sabine."

The following Confederate maps in National Archives, all a part of "Record Group 77," show the site of Fort Griffin, and are available at \$1.25 to \$2.50 each: Map Nos. Z-51-2, Z-54-11, Z-54-6, Z-298, Z-54-2, and Z-54-7. Another unnumbered map is a redrawing of map Z-54-11, and is labeled "Plan of Sabine Pass, its Defenses and Means of Communication, J. Kellersberg, Chief Engineer, East Texas District, October 15, 1863." A concise copy of it appears as Plate XXXII, Map 3, in "Official Atlas of the Civil War."

The key to defense of Sabine Pass lay in the mile-long oyster reef in the harbor. It had two passages through it, the Texas and Louisiana channels, through which enemy gunboats had to pass.

Old Fort Sabine had been located on marshy ground at the southeast entrances to the reef. Fort Griffin was located on higher land at the present battleground near the two channel exits from the reef.

Construction at Fort Griffin probably began in March, 1863, since it was

well under way when the lighthouse skirmish took place on April 18. It was designed by Col. Valery Sulakowski, chief engineer of the Military District of Texas. Its construction was supervised by Lt. Col. Julius G. Kellersberg, who chose its site and whose memoirs describe its building.

Four other engineers on Kellersberg's staff contributed to its completion. One of them, Lt. Nicholas H. Smith, won considerable fame for his gallant command of two of Dowling's guns. However, historians have often confused him with Lt. Niles H. Smith, a native Sabine Pass infantryman, who fought there aboard the Confederate cottonclad *Uncle Ben*.

Fort Griffin's irregular, sawtooth front was purposely designed to afford protection to the individual gun crews. Otherwise, all of the fort's guns might have been reduced by a single shell exploding within the compound.

One of the popular myths is that Fort Griffin was built by the Davis Guards. Kellersberg's memoirs record that he brought 500 slaves from Houston for that purpose, and two maps indicate the location of the slave quarters and the slave hospital. The slaves were later used in the construction of Fort Manhattin in the fall of 1863.

Another myth holds that Dowling's battle did not occur at the site of the present-day battleground. There is nothing in the record to support this; in fact a number of maps verify Fort Griffin's exact location.

Other proofs exist that Sulakowski's drawing of "Fort Sabine" is actually the plan for Fort Griffin. The six-gun emplacements on it coincide precisely with Dowling's report of Sept. 9, 1863.

Sulakowski shows the following guns as being mounted there: two 32-pounder long-iron smoothbores, two 24-pounder long-iron smoothbores, and two 32-pounder brass howitzers (short-barrel cannons), which were also unrifled.

Confederate cannon were never so numerous in this area that their movement cannot be traced with ease. The 24-pounders had been removed from abandoned Fort Grigsby at Port Neches. Earlier, the brass howitzers had been mounted at a shellbank fort near the mouth of Sabine River.

The 32-pounder iron guns had been spiked and buried at abandoned Fort Sabine in 1862. A detailed account of their excavation and repair appeared in *The News* on Aug. 30.

Fort Griffin's battlements had sloping, outer walls 16-feet long. The rampart at the top of the embankments was 20 feet wide along the sawtooth front and 10 feet wide on the west wall. The northside "stoccardo" was still unfinished at the time of Dowling's triumph.

The fort was 100 yards long along the north and west walls, not including the V-shaped protrusion in the west wall. No explanation for this projection can be offered except for its possible use in the rear defense of the fort.

Three large cisterns were installed at Fort Griffin. In Civil War days, all drinking water was carried by steamboat from Beaumont or Orange.

The fort's casemates (where the gun carriages were mounted) dropped five feet beneath the level of the rampart, allowing room for a man's head to see above it and for the gun barrels to project seaward through the embrasures.

According to the plans, the fort had spaces for six bombproofs and magazines of which only four were to be completed. They were eight feet high, eight

feet wide, and 30 feet long, built into the sawtooth front of the fort, adjacent to the guns.

When the U. S. Navy forces occupied Fort Griffin on May 25, 1865, Union Lt. Pennington reported in a dispatch that the roofs of the bombproofs consisted of layers of logs, railroad iron, and dirt, laid to a thickness of several feet.

A variety of shoring timbers were probably used in the fort's construction. The burning of two sawmills by Union launches in 1862 indicates that there was probably a good supply of logs at Sabine Pass. In addition, ship timbers from the grounded (and burned) Union blockader *Morning Light* were reported by Colonel A. W. Spaight as having been used.

Other sources indicate that crossties from abandoned railroad trackage along the shores of Sabine Lake were used as well. A letter to Col. Sulakowski dated Oct. 4, 1863, ordered his engineers to cut timber along the channel for use in the outer fortifications.

Fort Griffin probably remained in some state of construction until the end of the war. Sulakowski's letter outlined sufficient work to keep the engineers and the slaves occupied for many months to come.

The letter ordered Col. Kellersberg to complete an additional magazine, more embankments and ditches, rows of torpedoes (mines) in the ground, outer fortifications, completion of work at Fort Manhattett, a wagon road, railroad construction, and construction of a four-gun redoubt at Taylor's Bayou (near Texaco Island). This four-gun Confederate fort at Port Arthur appears in the 1864 map as having been completed.

(Reprint from The Port Arthur News, Sunday, January 24, 1971)

CALCASIEU PASS VICTORY, HEROISM 'EQUAL DOWLING'S'

By W. T. BLOCK

(W. T. Block, a teaching fellow in history at Lamar University and descendant of two of the first families to settle in mid-Jefferson County, has written another story depicting early history in the Sabine Pass and West Louisiana history, this one telling of an event not as well known as the "Battle of Sabine Pass.")

In 1909, Joseph Alexander Brickhouse, a Beaumont, Texas Confederate veteran, expressed regret in his memoirs that the Battle of Calcasieu Pass had been lost to posterity. He wrote one of the two or three eyewitness accounts that have survived.

Brickhouse, an ordinance officer, was stationed at Fort Manhattett in 1864. His unit, Capt. E. Creuzbauer's Battery of Texas artillery, was part of the Sabine Pass contingent that engaged and captured two Union ironclads at Cameron, La., on May 6, 1864.

Creuzbauer's battery, mostly Fayette county, Texas, immigrant Germans, was recently eulogized in Judge Paul C. Boetel's book, "The Big Guns of Fayette."

"While I would not pluck one feather from the plume of fame worn by Dick Dowling," Brickhouse remarked, "yet I must say that the Battle of Cal-

casieau Pass and the victory achieved was in every way equal to that achieved by Dick Dowling and his immortal heroes at Sabine Pass.

"We fought in the open prairie, bringing on the attack with four small pieces of artillery and less than 300 infantry, poorly armed, attacking two such boats as the *Granite City* and the *Wave* and capturing them after an action of less than two hours and 40 minutes duration.

The names of Capt. Charles Wellhausen and Maj. Felix C. McReynolds and their men deserve to be written in letters of gold and placed high upon the monument of fame erected to the memory of Southern heroes."

Although 20 or more Union and Confederate dead lie buried somewhere on the salt grass prairies near it, Cameron, La., like Fort Manassett, has no historical marker to commemorate its Civil War heritage. The battle's historical obscurity (that Brickhouse feated) survives instead.

Cameron parish as a political entity was not organized until after the war ended. Its geographic confines became, in a sense, a no-man's-land, neglected by the Confederacy because of its inaccessibility, and prized by the Union navy as a source of supply and, as this story relates, a coaling point.

An earthwork fortification at the Pass was abandoned by the Confederates shortly after it was built. For much of the war, a single cavalry company of 30 horsemen patrolled infrequently from Johnson's Bayou to Grand Chenier, and 10 days before the battle, even this force was withdrawn.

Although the parish furnished many fighters for the Confederacy—soldiers at Sabine Pass, men like Isaac Bonsall of Cameron, who died a hero at Vicksburg, it involuntarily furnished refuge as well to scores of "Jayhawkers," who hid out in the isolated canebrakes and cheniers.

The Jayhawkers were a motley assortment of disgruntled Northern sympathizers, draft-dodgers, and deserters (many of them from Texas), who peddled stolen beef, horses, and supplies to Union blockaders. Confederate cavalry battled sporadically with these brigands, but with only partial success.

On March 7, 1864, Capt. W. J. Howerton, a cavalry officer on the Calcasieu, notified Sabine Headquarters by letter that a detachment had encountered "the nest of jayhawkers, and that force is capturing and killing them off, hanging the scoundrels . . . Some nine or more have been captured, a good many more killed, and they were then hemmed in a place called Tussan's Cove, and fighting."

On another occasion, a cavalry lieutenant expressed fear that the 200-man Jayhawker band would pirate the gunpowder cargoes of two blockade-runners in Mermentau river before troops could arrive to unload them.

The regard which the Union navy held for Cameron's isolated recesses is aptly expressed in the sealed orders given to the gunboat *Wave* when that ship sailed from New Orleans on April 15, 1864, bound for Calcasieu river. They informed the vessel's master, Lt. Benjamin Loring, that he was being sent there "to assist the army in getting stock, and to pick up recruits for the navy," presumably from among the Jayhawkers.

On April 24, after a delay in Vermillion bay, Loring brought his vessel opposite Calcasieu Pass, and fired a number of shells into the old fort. Upon receiving no response, he steamed about two miles upstream and anchored.

Two days later the *Granite City* arrived and anchored 300 yards downstream for the *Wave*. Its master, Lt. C. W. Lamson, had aboard a U. S. Army detachment of 27 men, whose assignment was to round up livestock brought in by the Jayhawkers.

Lt. Loring brought with him from New Orleans a man named Smith and his sons, along with six or seven other Union sympathizers, whom Union dispatches refer to as "refugees." Smith, who resided at Cameron, and his group were assigned to various picket duties. In addition, they acted as "go-betweens" between the warships and the Jayhawker elements and as recruiters for the Union navy.

The navy bluejackets quickly destroyed the bridges over Mud and Oyster bayous, the only route over which Confederate troops could travel. The vessels stationed pickets at several points, and, seemingly content with the security precautions they had taken, settled down to await recoaling, livestock, and Jayhawker enlistees for their navy.

News of the shelling of the fort and of the gunboats' arrival reached Sabine Pass via loyal residents living near Cameron. Col. H. W. Griffin wired Houston immediately for instructions, fearing that Union plans were much more sinister than they actually were. He envisioned the gunboats as the vanguard of a full-scale attempt to outflank Sabine Pass (where the Davis Guards still manned Fort Griffin), and to take Beaumont and Houston via Lake Charles and Niblett's Bluff, Louisiana.

The reply from General J. B. Magruder's Houston headquarters came back quickly and precisely, "Attack the small force at Calcasieu at once, and disperse, defeat, or capture the expedition!"

Col. A. W. Spaight, at Niblett's Bluff, sent three companies of his infantry as part of the attack force. A fourth, Company B. of Spaight's battalion, was already at Sabine. Command of these units, plus three companies of Griffin's Battalion, was given to Maj. Felix McReynolds, commandant at Fort Manhassett.

McReynold's 200-plus infantrymen crossed the Sabine Pass channel on the afternoon of May 4 and began the 38-mile trek to Calcasieu. Capt. Creuzbauer's battery of 49 men and four small field guns, two 12-pounders and two 6-pounders, left Fort Manhassett after dusk to escape detection by blockading vessels offshore (half of his men and horses were on detached service). They boarded a steamboat at Sabine and shortened their journey by debarking at the head of Johnson's bayou.

The attack force, about 300 in all, was spearheaded by a company of Lt. Col. Andrew Daly's cavalry. At midnight on May 5, it was delayed about one hour while work to span the bayous with pontoon bridges continued. At 4:30 a.m. on May 6, Col. Griffin and his troops reached the Pass and there awaited the daylight needed to begin the attack.

By prior arrangement, Creuzbauer's gunners were to open fire at 1,000 yards and to cover the infantry's advance to the banks of Calcasieu Pass. As soon as the sharpshooters' muskets could be trained on the ironclads' gun crews, the artillery planned to advance another 500 yards so that their cannon fire could take greater effect. The riflemen found no cover along this stretch of the Pass except to lie in prone positions on the salt grass prairie.

Surprise was complete, but the Confederate gunners could only get off 10

rounds before the enemy's return fire began to arrive. The first shells from the 24- and 32-pounder Union guns took devastating effect, and two gunners on one field piece fell with the first burst. Gun No. 3 was soon knocked out with four wounded, two mortally.

At this point, the battle seesawed between victory and defeat. With gun No. 3 disabled and the horses of gun No. 4 dead, the burden of battle fell upon the infantry's musket fire while the bigger guns moved forward. Brickhouse describes Welhausen and McReynolds as "two of the bravest officers who ever drew swords, (who) rallied their men in such terms as no one who heard them will ever forget."

The Union gun crews faltered as well before the crossfire of 200 Confederate muskets. As Creuzbauer's 12-pounder guns resumed fire, one cannonball tore away the *Granite City's* helm, and a shell exploded inside of her hull. Already puffs of smoke emitted from the stacks as both gunboats struggled to get up steam and escape.

At this point, Lt. Lamson aboard the *Granite City* had had enough although he had fired only 30 rounds (he had panicked and fled headlong before Dowling's withering fire the year before). Lamson hoisted a white flag and then lowered a boat so the Confederate commander could come aboard.

Col. Griffin marvelled at the carnage aboard Lamson's gunboat. The deck of the *Granite City* was littered with blood, splinters, and the severely wounded, but nowhere did he note any dead combatants aboard the vessel. The explanation literally "came to the surface" in the aftermath of the conflict.

Lt. Loring, aboard the *Wave*, had no intention of following Lamson's example. The ironclad was his first command, and he still hoped to get up steam, hoist anchors, and escape.

The *Wave* lay around a bend in the Pass from the *Granite City*. Its gun crews rained canister shot among the infantry, killing at least five in Griffin's companies. However, one circumstance worked to the Confederates' advantage. Having no steam up at first, the *Wave* was wholly dependent upon current movements in aiming her broadsides.

McReynolds maneuvered his fighters 300 yards nearer to where the *Wave* was anchored and where a mesquite-covered levee and a cow pen offered some cover. From this point, the Rebel muskets peppered the ironclad's decks each time that the blue jackets sought to hoist anchors.

The battle raged on for another hour during which time Creuzbauer's gunners hit the *Wave* with 65 shells. Lt. Wellhausen directed the fire of gun No. 1 which soon scored hits on the wheelhouse and boilers. Perhaps gunner Brickhouse scored the luckiest shot of the day when a cannonball from gun No. 4 struck a 32-pounder howitzer on the *Wave* and split its barrel full length.

With his decks in shambles, 10 men wounded, and escaping steam everywhere, Lt. Loring had no recourse but to strike his colors. However, he hesitated to lower a boat while his men were tossing side arms, shells, the ship's safe and other supplies overboard. When McReynolds threatened to resume fire, Loring hurriedly picked up the boarding party and surrendered his sword to the Rebel major.

That night, the Confederates feasted on captured hams and sardines while

166 Union prisoners tried the less palatable Rebel rations. With two ships, quantities of stores, and 16 guns captured, Griffin's victory was only slightly less rewarding than was Dowling's triumph although it lacked the latter's Alamo-like quality.

Hostilities resumed on May 10 when a launch from the blockader *New London* entered Calcasieu Pass to deliver a dispatch to the *Granite City*. Seeing the Rebel ensign at the ironclad's masthead, Union Ensign Henry Jackson thought it some kind of a joke in progress and fired a shot across the ironclad's bow. A single shot from the captured steamer killed Jackson, and his six companions in the launch surrendered.

Union prisoners had nothing but praise for a lone, Confederate infantryman whom they said remained standing on the prairie as he rammed his charge and fired his musket. His utter disregard of his person unnerved them—"It irritated every man that shot at him."

To this day, the exact total of the battle's casualties is unknown. Griffin's second dispatch reported eight Confederates killed and 13 wounded, some of whom later died. Loring reported 24 wounded on the two gunboats of whom four later died.

Col. Griffin reported on May 11 that five bodies of bluejackets had floated up on the beach each with weights attached. Since it was thus apparent that Lamson had thrown his dead overboard in the midst of battle it became impossible to determine the Union casualties because between 15 and 20 of them had been thrown overboard.

The battle evidently put an end to Jayhawker depredations upon the Cameron parish citizenry. Nothing more is recorded about them. The 250 cattle and 200 horses sold by them to the Union Navy became a part of the spoils of battle and were eventually shipped to Sabine Pass.

Although the wounded remained aboard the gunboats in Calcasieu Pass and the infantry remained behind to guard the prisoners Brickhouse and his buddies were soon back at Fort Manhasset manning the artillery at the Western terminus of Sabine's defenses.

Griffin's men had fought their last battle. There was nothing left for them except to wait out the war and to lower Sabine's Rebel emblems when defeat finally came.

Griffin's Calcasieu veterans included leading Jefferson County citizens of the 1850s. Two from Beaumont included Capt. A. W. Junker, a business man, and Capt. George W. O'Brien. O'Brien was clerk of Jefferson County court until the war began and later was an early, if not the first, Beaumont newspaper publisher.

Several were Sabine Pass businessmen of the pre-war period who organized Company B of Spaight's battalion there in 1861. McReynolds was an early patentee of five sections of land there, and later became executive officer of Spaight's Infantry. Capt. K. D. Keith was a partner in Craig and Keith, one of the largest commission mercantile firms at Sabine.

Lt. Niles H. Smith settled at Sabine in the 1830s and, jointly with John McGaffey, founded the second town of Sabine Pass in 1845. Others of Company

B included Lts. Joseph Cassidy and Joe Chastine who, along with Smith, were lauded by Dick Dowling for their role in his famed battle.

The incident closed when, at Houston, the Confederate commandant reported the Battle of Calcasieu Pass to his superior at Trans-Mississippi Headquarters. It was as precise and matter-of-fact as were his orders to attack, curtly reading "Griffin attacked the enemy at Calcasieu yesterday morning; captured gunboats *Granite City* and *Wave*."

(Reprint from The Port Arthur News, Sunday, January 3, 1971.)

WHERE WAS FORT GRIGSBY? HISTORIAN MAY HAVE ANSWER

(ED. NOTE: Mr. Block who is assistant postmaster at Nederland and a teaching fellow at Lamar University is a descendant of a pioneer family of the area. Long interested in Southeast Texas history, Mr. Block recently found the remains of Civil War Fort Manhasset near Sabine. Further research by the historian has resulted in the following story.)

By W. T. BLOCK

If you were searching in Jefferson County for the site of a lost Confederate fortress, would you bother to look within the city limits of Port Neches? Probably not. Yet somewhere between Port Neches Park and the Texaco Inc. dock, old Fort Grigsby once stood.

The dock area was its probable location. From that point, the fort's guns could traverse over a wider arc in sighting upon enemy vessels attempting to ascend the river.

Its builder, Lt. Col. Getulius Kellersberger, once remarked of it, "This battery, if ably-manned and defended, can blow anything out of the water that can cross the bar."

Kellersberger, Confederate chief engineer for East Texas, built no less than 20 Confederate forts at points between the Brazos and Sabine Rivers (including Forts Griffin and Manhasset) and as far west as Austin.

Actually, Fort Grigsby was a hastily-constructed fortification of mud and clamshell embankments shored up by upright pointed logs. Its main battery was two 24-pounder long-iron guns. It also had a "substantial" arsenal and bombproof.

After the fort was abandoned in the summer of 1863, these same guns were two of the six used by Lt. Dick Dowling to mangle two Union warships at the second Battle of Sabine Pass.

The decision to build Fort Grigsby was made on October 2, 1862. On that date, Col. Ashley Spaight, in command at Beaumont, requested guns, men, and the services of Col. (then Major) Kellersberger to construct new defenses along the two rivers. The following day, the engineer left Houston with men and supplies to begin construction at Fort Grigsby, and fifteen days later, could report that it was nearing completion. Ususally, from 200 to 300 slaves were used on such projects.

At the same moment, a squadron of three Union ships was in Sabine Lake, depredating Sabine Pass and the railroad along the lake's shores. In a three-week orgy of destruction, they burned Sabine's railway station, roundhouse, two saw-mills, many residences, and set fire to Taylor's Bayou railroad bridge.

Col. Spaight apparently gave up hope of holding Sabine Pass and Lake, and, by fortifying the rivers, prepared to defend only Beaumont and Orange.

Fort Sabine, at Sabine Pass, had been abandoned on September 24, 1862; its 30 defenders having spiked their guns and retreated to Beaumont with their supplies and stores. At the time, most of Spaight's troops were furloughed or convalescent due to yellow fever and measles epidemics.

Kellersberger also built a Sabine River fort on a shell bank eight miles south of Orange and armed it with three 32 pounder guns. On the bars of the two rivers, he scuttled 80-foot barges loaded with clamshell, so designed that the rivers could admit only shallow-draft river steamers.

Fort Grigsby was apparently abandoned after July of 1863. It would be pointless for souvenir hunters to seek its site because its guns, munitions, and stores were moved to the then-unfinished Fort Griffin.

In its day, Fort Grigsby must have been well-known to the commanding general in Houston. On September 9, 1863, the day after Dowling's triumph, Gen. J. B. Magruder sent a dispatch from Sabine Pass to the Headquarters, Trans-Mississippi Department. In it, he erroneously reported that Dowling's victory had taken place at Fort Grigsby rather than at Fort Griffin.

(Reprint from Midcounty Chronicle, Monday, November 23, 1970.)

NEW CHAPTER IN HISTORY OF SABINE PASS WRITTEN

(Sept. 8 is the anniversary date of the Civil War battle at Sabine Pass, in 1863. A third generation descendant of one of the first settlers in Port Neches has written a new chapter in the history of that era. He is W. T. Block of Nederland, Lamar graduate, assistant postmaster and a teaching fellow at Lamar this fall. His grandfather, Albert Block, settled in Port Neches in 1846. His father was Will Block. His mother still lives in Nederland. This account of what he calls "The Saga of Dowling recalled in Fort's Re-Discovery," is in his own words.)

By W. T. BLOCK

At a point six miles southwest of Sabine, a stretch of salt grass prairie extends northwestward from Highway 87 to Knight's Lake. Looking across this duck hunter's paradise today, it would take a super-imaginative mind to conjure up the mental vision of a bustling Confederate fortress on the site, garrisoned by several hundred men.

In the fall of 1863, this was Fort Manhassett—a newly-constructed string of five fortifications, and a key cog in the Confederate defense plan for Sabine Pass.

Almost 107 years ago, Dick Dowling's artillerymen in 40 minutes blazed their way into the hearts of all Southerners, and won one of the only two gold

medallions authorized by the Confederate Congress. They likewise shot the remainder of the war at Sabine into historical oblivion.

Today much of it must be reconstructed from the archives where the very existence, location, and purpose of Fort Manhasset have lain buried in the dust.

After the fall of Vicksburg, Secretary of State Seward pressured General Nathaniel Banks to initiate offensive action along the Texas coast. He hoped to warn France that its invasion of Mexico was unacceptable and would be dealt with summarily. Seizure of Sabine and its rail and river routes would choke off blockade-running there as well as the flow of supplies to the Rebel armies in Louisiana. The marksmanship of Sabine's Irish defenders crushed Union hopes, however, and sent Banks' force scuttling homeward in retreat.

Dowling's victory did not make Sabine Pass "queen for a day" for the eyes of Texas and the Trans-Mississippi department remained focused upon it for the succeeding three months. Maj. Gen. J. B. Magruder of Galveston, commander of the Texas-New Mexico-Arizona district, seemed obsessed with fear that the Federals would strike again at Sabine, and could not believe that so large a force would retreat permanently after the first affray. By October, 1863, he had increased Sabine's small garrison up to 2,300 men in strength, more than 20 per cent of the forces under his command.

It seemed apparent that Magruder feared a combined land assault on Sabine Pass from both the Louisiana and Texas coasts as well as a naval attack. Whether or not he knew that his garrison had just captured two of the only five available vessels capable of navigating the Pass' shallow channels is not clear, but he may have extracted this information from Federal prisoners.

On Sept. 10, 1863, he advised General Richard Taylor in Louisiana that "the (the Federal fleet) has disappeared, and it is supposed has gone to Calcasieu," information which Federal prisoners had volunteered. He asked Taylor to transfer Gen. Mouton's Brigade from Vermillionville to Niblett's Bluff, near Lake Charles and in turn sent Colonel A. Buchel's 1,000-man First Texas Mounted Rifles into Southwest Louisiana to halt Federal encroachment along the coast east of Sabine.

For the first two years, Sabine Pass had been a chief target for Confederate neglect. Early in 1863, Magruder foresaw its strategic importance and ordered the construction of Fort Griffin there by his chief engineer for East Texas, Major Getulius Kellersberger (whose October, 1863, map of Sabine's defenses survives as does his memoirs published in 1967).

On Sept. 4, 1863, four days before the battle, Magruder ordered Kellersberger to construct Fort Manhasset to guard the Pass' western land approach. It took its name from a Union coal schooner, the *USS Manhasset*, which beached and foundered near the spot while the fort was being built. Five weeks later, the fort, nearing completion, was garrisoned and armed with two 32-pound howitzers. Later, its defenses were strengthened to include six guns as well as some brass howitzers, two on wheels, captured aboard the *USS Granite City* during action at Calcasieu Pass.

At the peak of its importance in October and November of 1863, Fort Manhasset's garrison may have numbered from 400 to 500 men. In December, 1863, after more than half of the Sabine forces had been dispatched southward to meet the new Federal menace at Brownsville, the fort's complement still numbered 10 officers and 266 men, two more than were then stationed at Fort Griffin.

After that date, its strategic importance waned although the morning report from Sabine headquarters for May 10, 1865, still reported 5 officers and 146 men in garrison there. Ten days later the fort was abandoned as Confederate forces dispersed to their respective farms.

On May 25, 1865, U. S. Navy Lieutenant Pennington spiked the five 10" guns at Fort Griffin and hoisted the Stars and Stripes above both forts, making them among the last in the Confederacy to lower the Rebel emblem. What happened to the probable 12 to 14 artillery pieces at Fort Manhasset remains a mystery since their disposition is not reported in either the Union or Confederate dispatches of that period.

Kellersberger's map describes the forts as "Redoubts A, B, and C" constructed along the front of the defense line, and "Flank Defenses I and II" were at the rear. The forts were 1800 feet apart and built at the points of equilateral triangles across Sabine Ridge. Each was surrounded by earth embankments and ditches as well as "abatis" works (felled timbers with sharpened ends).

Four of them, all except Redoubt C on the shores of Lake Knight, had a total of 10 gun platforms. It is Redoubt A through which Highway 87 passes, and where more than 50 cannonballs and shells were dug up by road machinery about 1928.

Today, Forts Griffin and Manhasset's batteries are silenced and infested with mosquitoes. Somehow, this writer still cannot walk among their hallowed mounds without hearing the echoes of cannonfire and the reverberation of that Rebel yell that sent a Federal fleet scurrying to safety 107 years ago.

(Reprint from The Port Arthur News, Sunday, August 2, 1970.)

LEGEND OF 2 OLD CANNONS Sabine history written in gunsmoke

(As the anniversary date, Sept. 8, of the Battle of Sabine Pass during the Civil War approaches, W. T. Block, of Nederland, a third generation descendant of one of the early settlers of Port Neches, has completed additional historical research and written another new chapter in the history. This account that he calls "A Tale of Two Cannons" is in his own words.)

By W. T. BLOCK

Once again, Jefferson County joins the Sabine Pass citizenry in their annual celebration of "Dick Dowling Days" on the Sept. 4-7 weekend.

Amid the shrimp fries and pageantry, the legends that surround the Irish gunners will recirculate.

One of them, the story of two cannons that wrote half of that chapter in gunsmoke, is virtually unknown and may be of interest to readers.

In the spring of 1863, the Confederate chief engineer for East Texas, Maj. Getulius Kellersberger, arrived at Sabine Pass with orders to construct Fort Griffin. Upon arrival, he found the village largely deserted, its two sawmills, railway station, roundhouse, and many residences having been burned the previous year by Federal naval forces.

For the fortress site, Kellersberger chose a point where the ship channel made a near right angle turn. This location would permit the mud fort's guns to sweep across a wider arc. He had a work force of 500 conscripted slaves and a supply of logs, but no armament.

All that was available were two old field guns, of 6- and 12-pound capacity, much too small for coastal defense against Union warships. He was aware that two 24-pound cannons were mounted at a shellbank fort on the Sabine river 12 miles south of Orange, Texas, and arranged for their transfer to Sabine Pass.

An old fisherman told Kellersberger about two 32-pound guns that had been buried a year earlier at old Fort Sabine. The engineer had seen these cannons during an inspection the previous year, but knew that they had been spiked when that fort was abandoned. He feared that they would be damaged beyond repair, but knew as well, that if his new installation were to be defended properly, he must acquire larger weapons.

The fisherman showed Kellersberger the site where the guns were buried. After some probing, they located the buried weapons as well as a large supply of 32-pound cannonballs.

As the engineer had feared, the damage to them was considerable. Each had been spiked with round files, the trunions (swivels) had been cut away, and one barrel had been wedged with a cannonball. As one who had interspersed wooden dummies with real guns among Galveston's defenses, Kellersberger was reluctant to throw them away, and at the first opportunity took them to the Confederate foundry in that city.

At home, his chief, Col. Valery Sulakowski, advised strongly against trying to repair the rusted weapons. Still reluctant to dispose of them, Kellersberger consulted the foundry's chief machinist. The foundryman attacked the problem with vigor. Day and night, he and the engineer hurried to complete the repairs for reports had already reached Gen. J. B. Magruder's headquarters that the Federals would soon turn their attention to the Texas coast.

Repair of the big guns required moulding special 16-inch iron rings and stretching them over the barrels while heated and glowing red. Then a groove one-half inch deep and one and one-half inches wide was twisted into each barrel over which threaded wrought-iron rings were stretched. The greatest hazard lay in boring the grooves too deep, which might cause the barrels to burst when fired.

Shortly afterward, Kellersberger loaded the repaired guns along with two 32-pound howitzers on a train. While enroute to Sabine, he gave each two coats of paint in order to save time. Two days later, the smoothbore weapons were mounted on gun carriages and placed in position on the platforms. The guns survived the test firings, and Kellersberger drove white markers near the end of the Texas and Louisiana channels on each side of a large oyster reef to indicate their maximum range.

When the engineer returned to Galveston, his fears were not dimmed completely, and he recorded in his memoirs that he spent many sleepless nights. He knew that, in the din of battle, the cannons would probably not be accorded even the minimum precaution of swabbing-out (which proved true). When the *USS Sachem* steamed up Louisiana channel, the first of the repaired weapons was concentrated on her because of their greater range and accuracy.

These guns were commanded by Lt. Dowling personally, and on one occasion, he narrowly missed death when a Union cannonball knocked the elevating screw from one of them. From one of them, gunner Michael McKernan fired the well-aimed round that exploded the *Sachem's* steam drum. At the end, the vessels lay helpless wrecks, engulfed in steam from their ruptured boilers.

At 5 a.m. on Sept. 8, 1863, Maj. Kellersberger received a telegram at his home that the Federal fleet had attacked Sabine, and that he should report immediately to Houston. He commandeered a hand car, and with the aid of four slaves, covered the 48 miles of trackage in time to leave with Magruder's staff on the train for Sabine.

En route, his fears remained that the repaired gun barrels might explode in the ensuing battle. However, his fears were groundless. Upon arrival, he found two mangled gunboats, captured cannons and stores, and prisoners, ample testimony to the quality of his and his foundryman's craftsmanship as well as of Irish marksmanship.

(Reprint from The Port Arthur News, Saturday, August 29, 1970.)

VERSATILITY WAS PROUD BOAST OF AREA CIVIL WAR OUTFIT

(W. T. Block, a third generation descendant of one of the company of soldiers engaged in the Battle of Sabine Pass, has written a tribute to this company's part in the battle. He is assistant postmaster at Nederland and a teaching fellow at Lamar Tech in history. Block holds a degree in history from Tech and has done extensive research into the Battle of Sabine Pass history. He recently discovered new facts about the battle and has written two previous articles for The News. His latest work is entitled "Area Confederate Unit Men were Versatile Fighters.")

By W. T. BLOCK

Was Jefferson County's Company B of Spaight's 21st Texas Infantry Regiment the most versatile unit of the Civil War? Quite possibly.

As Confederate marines, Navy gunners, infantry and coast artillerists, it fulfilled a wide range of military duties, both on land and afloat up to 30 miles at sea.

In addition, Company B held the longest record of service at Sabine Pass of any Confederate unit, the only one to participate in all four military engagements in which the Sabine garrison took part.

The 21st Regiment was formed by combining Col. Ashley Spaight's battalion with Col. W. H. Griffin's battalion in November of 1864. B Company had been a part of Spaight's command which originated as the "Moss Bluff Rebels" organized in South Liberty County on Aug. 24, 1861.

Spaight's other units included the Beaumont-based companies commanded by Capts. George W. O'Brien and A. W. Junker. The battalion's executive officer was Maj. F. C. McReynolds, the first commandant at Fort Manhasset and an early patentee of five sections of land at Sabine Pass.

Company B was ably commanded by Capt. K. D. Keith throughout the war. Often detailed elsewhere, Keith sometimes relinquished command to his capable subordinate, Lt. J. O. Cassidy.

After December, 1862, B Company's special assignment was manning the pop-gun artillery (usually three 12-pound smoothbore cannons) aboard the Confederate cottonclad *Uncle Ben*. This 135-foot Sabine river steamer remained near Sabine Pass throughout the war, assuming a vital role in the supply line and in two of the military engagements.

Keith's rebels underwent their baptism of fire at Fort Sabine (three-fourths mile south of Fort Griffin) on Sept. 24, 1862. On that date, U.S. Navy Lt. Frederick Crocker brought a squadron, consisting of two schooners and a screw-steamer, into Sabine lake to depredate the area.

Most of Keith's gunners were convalescent or furloughed due to a yellow fever epidemic. Their shots falling short, the 30 effectives could do little but shake their fists in defiance, while Crocker's long-range guns pommelled their position.

As dusk neared, Capt. Keith spiked and buried the fort's four guns and evacuated the stores and hospitalized patients to Beaumont. Crocker's squadron camped out at Buck Ridge, near Johnson's bayou, while his launches engaged in a three-week orgy of pillage and burning. When Crocker ignominiously surrendered his sword to Lt. Dick Dowling one year later, the event had special meaning to Keith's veterans aboard the *Uncle Ben*.

Revenge came first at sea on Jan. 21, 1863. Earlier Company B had been ordered to Orange along with the Davis Guards to man two newly-outfitted cottonclads, the *Josiah Bell* and the *Uncle Ben*. Gen. J. B. Magruder had just driven the Union forces from Galveston.

The rebel steamers put to sea on a calm day. The Davis Guards and sharpshooters from Aycock's company and Pyron's regiment manned the 180-foot *Bell*. Dowling's main battery was a six inch Columbiad rifle with which he hoped to outshoot the gunners aboard the 900-ton blockader *Morning Light*.

Keith's men aboard the *Uncle Ben* steamed after the *USS Velocity*, a former Confederate schooner captured offshore by Crocker during his earlier foray.

The blockaders hoisted all sail in an effort to outrun the pineknot-burning steamers. Dowling opened up at a range of two miles, and, displaying unerring accuracy, knocked out the *Morning Light's* No. 2 port gun, killing and wounding all of the gun crew. As the *Bell* moved in closer, the sharpshooters picked off the *Morning Light's* gunners until they fled in panic below deck. Unable to continue the fight, the blockader surrendered.

Keith's men aboard the *Uncle Ben* displayed equal tenacity. As gunners and sharpshooting marines, they pecked away at the *Velocity's* gun crews until the schooner hoisted a white flag. Without a prize crew, Keith's rebels had to double as sailors in order to bring the schooner back to Sabine.

The following September, Company B could do little but remain idle during Dowling's 40 minutes of glory. Still aboard the *Uncle Ben*, Keith's boys steamed up the channel to draw the Union fleet's fire, but had to retreat to Sabine Lake when the *USS Sachem's* shells began passing overhead.

To have closed for battle with the long-range Yankee guns would have been

suicide. Instead, the *Uncle Ben* had to be content with towing the disabled *Sachem* back to the Texas shore. The fruits of victory may have tasted many grains sweeter to Capt. Keith's veterans. Having never known defeat, Dowling's Guards were unable to make the comparison.

One more engagement marked Company B's career before the war ended. As sharpshooting infantry, they accompanied Col. W. H. Griffin's men, Capt. Creuzbauer's battery of artillery, and Capt. Andrew Daly's cavalry on March 6, 1864 to Calcasieu Pass where the Confederates caught two Union gunboats at anchor. The ironclad *Granite City* and the tin-clad *Wave* were awaiting coal while a Union army detachment was ashore rounding up cattle and recruiting Northern sympathizers for service in the Union navy.

At daylight, Creuzbauer's gunners opened fire from behind a mesquite-covered levee while Keith's men rained torrents of minie balls on the Union sailors. After an hour and 40-minute battle and 16 holes near her waterline, the *Granite City* surrendered. The Confederates quickly boarded her and turned the fire of the ship's brass howitzers on the *Wave*. Soon holed like a sieve, the tinclad hoisted a white flag.

While suffering 22 casualties, Col. Griffin's troops inflicted a like number on the Union sailors, captured two gunboats, 16 guns and 175 prisoners. These were the fifth and sixth Union vessels to fall victim to the Sabine Pass garrison in the course of 16 months.

As soldiers and sailors, steamboat marines, artillerymen, and infantrymen, Capt. Keith's rebels would have found few, if any, equal their versatility as fighters. They suffered one defeat and shared in three victories that captured six ships, 45 guns and 650 prisoners for the Confederate cause. Their valor helped keep East Texas free from Union occupation and fed supplies from blockade-runners to the hard-pressed Rebel armies in Louisiana.

However, the course of the war was settled on the fields of Virginia. On May 20, 1865, five weeks after Robert E. Lee's surrender, Keith's veterans joined the Davis Guards in lowering Fort Griffin's Rebel emblem, and, disillusioned and embittered, the men of Company B went home to sow their crops.

(Reprint from The Port Arthur News, Sunday, October 11, 1970)

FORT MANHASSETT DISGORGES HUGE TREASURE OF ARTIFACTS

SABINE PASS—Excavators of the newly-found Fort Manhassett here have received an unexpected bonus in digging Friday and Saturday.

During what was supposed to be token digging for pictures, three cannonballs were unearthed Friday.

By late Saturday, some 30 cannonballs and kegs of gunpowder were discovered.

The first three cannonballs were discovered by accident about one foot from the surface when a tractor equipped with digging machinery was set into operation at noon Friday for news reporters and cameramen who were on the scene to witness the start of digging for the fort, which was itself the object of a three-

month search. The find was made in one of five mounds to be searched during the excavation.

The artifacts are intended to be used in a proposed museum here, according to W. T. Block of Nederland, a Lamar Tech history instructor who is one of the descendants of Albert Block, an early settler of Port Neches and a Confederate soldier of Company B, Spaight's Texas Infantry. Company B manned Fort Griffin during the Battle of Sabine Pass.

Block said, "Sabine Pass is too small to construct a museum. This should be an area project."

"Fort Griffin was manned by soldiers of Orange, Liberty and Jefferson Counties and should be of historical interest to the people around here," he said.

Block is the man who verified the location of Fort Manhasset last week with 1863 maps of Sabine Pass.

Jimmy Lee, publicity chairman for the "Dick Dowling Days" celebration held each year beginning Sept. 4 to commemorate the Battle of Sabine Pass, was on hand with Block Friday when the cannonballs were discovered.

Lee said Fort Manhasset was not the scene of any major battles. He termed it "a quiet bit of history."

Digging continued at the site late Friday and resumed Saturday. Guards were posted during the night to protect the grounds from treasure seekers.

A crowd of 150 spectators watched Saturday as more cannonballs were unearthed along with crumbling wooden kegs of gunpowder which have been drenched by a dozen hurricane floods during the past 100 years.

The relics were found at a depth of eight feet. Electronic detectors are being used in the search.

The area was roped off Saturday to avoid injuries as the digging continued. By late Saturday some 30 cannonballs had been wrested from the mud.

Lee said the digging "is a wonderful prelude to the 1970 'Dick Dowling Days' set for next weekend." He added, "We've barely scratched the surface."

Four of the five fort breastworks remained untouched Saturday with traces of trenches used by Confederate soldiers clearly visible.

All items found will be tagged with the name of the finder and the date of discovery for use in the proposed museum, which has gained the support of State Sen. D. Roy Harrington, the Texas Historical Society, and the United Daughters of the Confederacy.

Area persons who have mementos and artifacts found around Sabine Pass are urged to return them for use in the museum. Each item will be similarly marked with the contributor's name and discovery date.

Sabine Pass Chamber of Commerce representatives taking part in digging, in addition to Lee, include George Trotter, Chamber president, Art Haller, Robert Eldridge and Constable Rudolph Franklin.

(Reprint from The Port Arthur News, Sunday, August 30, 1970.)