

US Civil War Battle at GALVESTON

January 1, 1863

A major part of the Union battle plan was to blockade Southern ports to prevent trade and gain control of the seaports. In Texas, the port targeted was Galveston.

In October, 1862, Union ships attacked and Galveston was easily captured by the Union forces.

When General John Bankhead Magruder replaced General Hebert as Commander of the Military Department in Texas, he decided to retake Galveston.

His plans were carefully and secretly drawn up. The Neptune and Bayou City, which were two steamboats, were converted to confederate "cottonclads." This meant that bales of cotton were placed around the gunwales and decks for reinforcement. There were approximately 300 men placed on the two ships. Two smaller ships called "tenders" (which meant they carried the supplies and provisions) followed loaded with riflemen.

Magruder sent his land force of 1,000 men to Virginia Point, on the mainland opposite Galveston. He joined them on December 29, 1862.

Before sunrise on December 31, 1862 Magruder's troops waded across to Galveston. At dawn, they attacked and drove the Union troops to the north end of the island. In the meantime, the Confederate cottonclads moved into the harbor. There were four Union ships. The Neptune sank under Union fire, but Bayou City was able to move in close and the riflemen on board swept over the Union vessels with a deadly attack. Two of the Union ships - the steamship and brig - were unable to escape and were captured. The gunboat and transport fled to the Gulf of Mexico.

The Union troops surrendered and General Magruder took 300 prisoners of war. Jefferson Davis, President of the Confederacy, commended General Magruder and his men.

Although the Union continued to blockade the Southern coast, no attempts were made to recapture Galveston.

US Civil War

Battle at Sabine Pass

September 8, 1863

Failure to keep control of Galveston did not stop the Union from maintaining command of the Gulf of Mexico.

Union naval commanders drew up plans to seize Sabine Pass with the ultimate goal of seizing Beaumont and Houston. Thus the Union was gaining a foothold in Texas, such as the ones achieved in New Orleans and Mobile.

On September 8, 1863, four Union gunboats led 20 transport ships containing 5,000 men toward Sabine Pass. Major General William B. Franklin was in command of the Union forces.

Sabine Pass was guarded by Fort Griffin, a small Confederate post. The junior lieutenant, Dick Dowling, was in command in the absence of his senior officers. Forty-two men and several cannons were in the fort. A Confederate steamship and detachment of infantry were in the vicinity.

The attack began. The 5,000 Union troops held back as the Union gunboats moved up the channel and began to bombard the fort. The shelling lasted an hour and a half. The gunboats withdrew and came back again. They assumed the Confederate post would have withdrawn and the troops would begin their invasion.

However, Dowling had another plan in mind. During the gunboat attack, he ordered his men to withhold fire. When they returned the second time, Dowling waited until the warships were within 1200 yards. He ordered his men to start firing the cannons into each ship in turn. All of this was while they were under attack themselves.

The result was astounding. The Union navy was shocked and battered. Two ships were lost, 100 men were killed or injured, and 350 prisoners were taken. The remainder of the Union troops made their way back to New Orleans.

Lieutenant Dowling and his men had fought the most brilliant and decisive small action of the Civil War. Dowling and his men received Confederate War medals for their victory.

US Civil War

Red River Campaign

March 10 to May 22, 1864

Early in the Civil War, the Union troops moved into the Louisiana area. In March, 1864, Union commanders launched an attack to invade northeastern Texas. A force of over 25,000 Union troops was moving up the Red River and gathered at Mansfield, Louisiana. This group was led by General Nathan Banks and was supported by a fleet of ironclads. General Banks had hoped to link up with a smaller group of Union troops of about 15,000 men from the area around Poison Springs, Arkansas.

The Confederate troops were growing desperate by this time as they were losing the Civil War in the eastern areas. Food and supplies for the Confederate troops were very limited.

Despite these terrible odds, the Confederate troops, led by General Richard Taylor were able to stop the Union attack. On April 8, General Richard Taylor took the offensive and attacked the Union force outside of Mansfield, Louisiana. General Taylor had a force of about 9,000 men when the attack began. Turning the Union forces away from Texas and the important "seaport" of Jefferson, Texas, the Union army retreated into Mississippi without ever invading Texas.

US Civil War

Battle at Palmito Ranch

May 13, 1865

In 1865, things were looking very bad for the Confederacy. The Union was winning the Civil War. Along the Rio Grande, many things were happening. In Mexico, they were facing invasion by the French.

President Lincoln sent General Wallace of the Union army to negotiate with the Confederates in the Rio Grande area. General Wallace felt that he could get them to rejoin the Union and together they could drive the French out of Mexico.

A truce was agreed upon with Colonel John S. "RIP" Ford, but an eager Union officer sent a Negro regiment to Palmito Ranch on May 12, 1865.

Encouraged by Confederate General E. Kirby Smith in the west to continue fighting, the remaining Confederate troops gathered near Brownsville. Fighting between the Confederate troops and the Union regiment broke out on May 13, 1865. The Union men were on foot when Colonel Ford's cavalry attacked and complete chaos broke out. The Union troops were scattered and many were killed.

When the fighting stopped, over 220 Union soldiers lay dead on the battlefield. Colonel Ford and his men captured over 100 prisoners. The irony of this battle was that the Civil War had been over for a month. The Confederates led by General Robert E. Lee had already surrendered on April 9, 1865 to Union General Ulysses S. Grant at Appomattox Courthouse, Virginia.