



Battle Of Sabine Pass

September 8, 1863

This drawing is a reconstruction of the Sabine Pass battle scene at the climactic moment, Sept. 8, 1863 — 100 years ago Sunday. Captain Amos Johnson of the *Sachem* (top left) has just sadly decided to strike his flag, while Captain Frederick Crocker in the grounded *Clifton* (center, right) engages Fort Griffin in a brief but spirited duel. The other two gunboats, *Arizona* (near the lighthouse) and *Granite City* (behind the *Clifton*), failed to join the action, ignoring frantic appeals from Johnson and Crocker.

Seven Union transports, the *Suffolk*, *St. Charles*, *Landis*, *Exact*, *Thomas*, *Laurel Hill* and *General Banks*, wait in background for a knockout of the fort to land thousands of soldiers on the Texas (right,) shore. Eleven additional ships of the Federal armada are anchored out of sight beyond the Sabine bar.

WERE TWO CHANNELS

The Pass was divided at the time into two channels, both shallow, by a long oyster reef (upper center). The *Sachem*, crawling slowly through the soft mud of the "Louisiana" channel, was struck at least twice while moving. A current sweeping around the reef's north end pushed her farther into the mud flat — and that was it. A 32-pound iron ball banged through her steam drum, enveloping the crew in clouds of steam and jets of scalding water.

In the meantime the *Clifton*, a 210-foot converted sidewheel ferry and powerfully armed, steamed determinedly up the near channel. Her mission was to knock out the impudent little fort and cover the troop landing. A shot cut her tiller rope and, spinning like a stricken turtle, she plowed solidly aground within point-blank range of Confederate Commander Dick Dowling's guns. The drawing shows the *Clifton's* paddle wheels reversed in a desperate but vain effort to back away.

CLIFTON SURRENDERS

The *Clifton* soon suffered the same fate that had been inflicted upon the *Sachem* by the fort's enthusiastic and accurate artillerymen — a busted boiler and a scalded crew. Captain Crocker, a brave and tough fighter, was forced to surrender.

The *Arizona*, the *Granite City* and the seven transports then wheeled about and steamed under forced draft for the open sea — and the battle was over.

Many tons of supplies and hundreds of mules — the latter with their heads tied down so they would drown — were dumped overboard by the fleeing Union transports. In spite of this, several Vessels lodged on the bar in their haste, but safely out of range of the fort.

DOWLING AMAZED

Lieutenant Dowling was amazed at the retreat of the Federal fleet. "What was the matter with your fellows?" he asked a captive signal officer.

"My impression is that our fellows had a sudden attack of homesickness," the Yankee replied. (Sketch, based on extensive historical research, by Floyd Murray of Orange.)

The Port Arthur News

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 6, 1963.