

During the Civil War, Texas did not suffer as much as some of the other Southern states. No major battles were fought on Texas soil. But there was one small battle that will never be forgotten—the Battle of Sabine Pass. It was one of the most spectacular Southern victories of the whole war.

Sabine Pass was a narrow waterway. It connected the Gulf of Mexico with the Sabine River and Sabine Lake. Important cities lay inland. And the pass was the only way ships could reach them. No wonder the North wanted to take it!

The South had built a small mud fort at the pass. The fort was guarded by six small cannon. But these were not of much use. They could shoot only a short distance.

The Northern general, William B. Franklin, planned to capture the fort. Then he would take the important towns in East Texas. On September 8, 1863, he began to move. He sent four warships to the mouth of the pass. On board were five thousand soldiers. They and their general thought they would be able to destroy the fort without much trouble.

Dick Dowling, a young Southern lieutenant, was in command of the fort. He had only forty-seven men. At the sight of the huge Northern force, he was floored. Things looked hopeless. He was outnumbered more than a hundred to one.

“What shall we do?” he asked his men. “Shall we fight or surrender?”

“Fight!” shouted the men with one voice. “Fight to the last!” And they prepared for what might well be their last battle.

Dowling knew that his cannon could not

shoot very far. But the Sabine Pass was very narrow. He knew that the warships would have to sail close to the fort. So he told his gunners to hold their fire until he gave the order. That way, they would waste no shots. They waited. The ships came closer and closer. But not a shot was fired. The men on the ships began to shout. “What’s the matter? Why don’t you come out and show yourselves?”

“Fire!” shouted Lieutenant Dowling. With a deafening roar, the cannon did their work. The warships fired back, but did little damage. The battle was soon over. One ship was sunk; another surrendered. A third, badly damaged, sailed away. Only one ship escaped harm. It hurried off, never to come back.

Dowling’s men towed in the ship that had surrendered. They took 350 prisoners. Captain Crooker, the ship’s commanding officer, was one of them. He asked to speak to the commanding officer of the fort.

Dick Dowling, covered with dust, stepped forward.

“Where are your soldiers?” asked Captain Crooker.

“Here they are,” said Dowling. He pointed to the handful of men who were guarding the prisoners.

“Is that *all*?” gasped the captain in disbelief.

“That’s all,” Dowling nodded.

The captain was led away, shaking his head. How could it be? Forty-seven soldiers had defeated four United States warships and five thousand men! It was certainly one of the most remarkable battles of the war.

CHECK YOUR READING

1. **During the Civil War, Texas saw**
 - A a few small battles
 - B only one major battle
 - C many major battles

2. **Sabine Pass was a**
 - A mountain trail
 - B city street
 - C water route

3. **The fort that defended the pass was made of**
 - A logs
 - B mud
 - C stone

4. **The fort's cannon were of little use because they could not**
 - A fire very fast
 - B aim in all directions
 - C shoot very far

5. **How many warships did General Franklin send?**
 - A Three
 - B Four
 - C Five

6. **When the gunners did not shoot, the men on the ships**
 - A shouted to them
 - B jumped into the water
 - C put down their guns

7. **The main reason the cannon did so much damage was that the gunners**
 - A fired at exactly the same time
 - B held their fire till the last
 - C all fired at a single ship

8. **How many of the ships were sunk?**
 - A One
 - B Two
 - C Three

9. **Captain Crooker was surprised to see**
 - A how much the fort was damaged
 - B how many prisoners there were
 - C how few men Dick Dowling had

10. **For the North, the battle was**
 - A a lucky break
 - B a costly victory
 - C an unexpected defeat