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Museum of Southern History

Freshman

“12 lb Shell with Fuse, ca. 1861”

1013 Words

A Lonely Cannonball and the Battle of Galveston

docked in Houston, and it may likely have come from the *Neptune*, a confederate ship that was sunk in the Battle of Galveston⁶.

This particular twelve pound cannon shell, given that it was recovered from a sunken vessel in Galveston Bay and how it matches the confederate design of cannonball, seems to more than likely originate in the Battle of Galveston.

Galveston had been originally taken by the men and ships of Union Commander William B. Renshaw on October 4th, 1862, after a close range firefight and the subsequent Confederate retreat by Col. Joseph J. Cook.⁷ The Union held Galveston and the harbor by the strength of their six ships, and were reinforced by 264 men of the 42nd Massachusetts Infantry, who arrived on Christmas day to occupy Galveston.

But Texas had a new overall military leader, Maj. Gen. John B. Magruder, who planned to take back the city of Galveston⁸ with a couple thousand men, twenty cannons, and two ships.

In the early morning hours of January 1, 1863, with the new year having barely begun, Gen. Magruder led a New Year's invasion of Galveston, taking the Union garrison by surprise. But the Confederate forces were driven back from the wharf by Renshaw's naval guns despite outnumbering the Mass. Infantry. Then with all the attention on coastal invasion, the two Confederate "cottonclads"(a ship protected from cannonfire by bales of cotton pinned to the hull of the ship, and also a play on the "ironclad" warships used by both sides) the *Neptune* and the

Bayou City attacked the Union ships from behind⁹. The *Neptune* ran aground, crippled by heavy cannonfire. The *Bayou City*'s cannon overheated and exploded, but her captain Henry Lubbock rammed his limping ship into the USS *Harriet Lane*, seizing the ship and killing most of the Union officers¹⁰. After the capture of the *Harriet Lane*, Lubbock demanded the surrender of the rest of the Union fleet. Union Commander Renshaw refused, and prepared to scuttle his flagship, the *Westfield*, which had run aground during the battle. Unfortunately for Renshaw, his explosives ignited prematurely, killing him and many others on board and leaving the ship a burning wreck in the harbor¹¹. After the death of their commander



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