

Saluria, Fort Esperanza, and Military Operations on the Texas Coast, 1861-1864

LESTER N. FITZHUGH

Fort Esperanza was a Confederate fortification at Saluria, located at the extreme northeastern bulge of Matagorda Island. Wind and water have long since reduced the fort's outline, and Saluria was not rebuilt after its destruction in 1864. Matagorda Island, site of homesteads and ranches in 1861, is currently an Air Force gunnery range, and mud banks and flats choke the bays and inlets which sheltered small boats and steamers in 1862-1864. Nothing reminds the observer that here was played a scene of that most interesting of national dramas, the American Civil War.

The fort was one of a number of similar points of defense established on the Texas coast, and its story is necessarily told as part of the larger operations that involved the entire six hundred miles of coastline from Sabine Pass to Brazos Santiago, most parts of which had "alarms and excursions" during the war and for brief moments or longer were the focuses of a constant Texas dread of enemy invasion.

Such fears did not develop at once in 1861. In the summer of that year John Charles Fremont in Southern Missouri seemed a much greater threat to Texas than the occasional Federal vessel hovering off Galveston and other points, attempting to give an appearance of reality to a hardly enforceable blockade. It was not even certain that large scale hostilities would be necessary to establish the Southern Confederacy, and in June and July the best of the young men of Texas anxiously organized for service in Arkansas or hurried to Virginia to participate in such fighting as was expected at those places. Federal defeat at Manassas Junction in July and at Oak Hill (Wilson's Creek), Missouri, in August seemed for the moment to justify these sanguine expectations. But enemy reaction crystallized in a determination to carry the war to a military decision. By the end of the summer anxious Texas eyes were turned to the coast, where the Federal Navy began making itself sufficiently in evidence to raise apprehension that Texas itself might in time become the object of invasion and destruction.

Jefferson Davis' military policy was a defensive one. It is probable that he was the first Confederate to give attention to the coast of Texas when in June, 1861, he required Captain W. H. Stevens to submit a "memoir" on the subject of its defense. Among other

estimates and recommendations pertaining to the long Texas coast, Stevens submitted the following concerning the Matagorda Bay area and Aransas Pass:

.. At Pass Cavallo, three 32-pounders and two companies. At Aransas, two 24-pounders and one company. . . .

Pass Cavallo, entrance to Matagorda Bay, from whence the principal roads to Austin and San Antonio start, seven to ten feet on the bar. Three 32-pounders, one on Decrow's Point and two at the lighthouse, will do well. ...

Aransas—The bar has seven to ten feet water. From the mainland a good road to San Antonio and Western Texas via Goliad ...¹

Stevens evidently envisioned the “two companies” as those troops necessary to secure the guns proposed at Pass Cavallo, an estimate which proved him a better artilleryman and engineer than all-round tactician, as events would demonstrate.

There is no evidence in the record that this interest at Richmond was ever translated into specific activity on the Texas coast. From the beginning Texas defenses depended almost entirely on the initiative of whatever officer commanded the Department. Some heavy ordnance appears to have been secured from New Orleans during the fall of 1861, this going into the Galveston defenses. Some was available from ordnance stores seized at United States Army garrisons in the spring. Some guns were evidently procured and furnished the authorities by private citizens. Little was available from central sources to this outpost of the Confederacy in 1861, and literally nothing would be available later. Texas was a contributing member of the Confederacy, but she would look after her own defenses.

Initial military organization for defense of the state was undertaken by Brigadier General Earl Van Dorn. During the summer of 1861 Van Dorn submitted requisitions to Governor Edward Clark, successor to the ousted Sam Houston, for various troops to be stationed along the coast and at interior camps to act as reserves. These included three companies of artillery and various mounted and dismounted supporting companies envisioned for the Matagorda Bay area.²

After the departure of Van Dorn for Virginia, and following a brief interregnum in which command in Texas was exercised by Colonel H. E. McCulloch, Brigadier General Paul Octave Hébert arrived with orders to assume command of the Department of Texas and with his attention “specially directed to the coast defenses” of the state.³ Reporting to the new commander in detail concerning work on coastal defenses, McCulloch advised there were, or shortly would be, two companies of artillery at Saluria, these under the command of Captain Daniel D. Shea.⁴

¹ Stevens to Davis, June 12, 1861, *War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (130 vols.; Washington, 1880-1901), Series I, Vol. IV, 92.

² Byrd to McCulloch, September 9, 1861, *ibid.*, 103-104.

³ Walker to Hébert, August 14, 1861, *ibid.*, 97-98.

⁴ McCulloch to Hébert, September 20, 1861, *ibid.*, 107-109.

Initially Hébert made his headquarters at Galveston. Upon his arrival he attempted to make an estimate of Texas coastal defenses. In a letter of September 27, 1861, he stated to the secretary of war that he had found the coast “in almost a defenseless state, and in . . . almost total want of proper works and armaments; the task of defending successfully any point against an attack of any magnitude amounts to a military impossibility. . . ”⁵

In the meantime, McCulloch, at San Antonio, receiving no direct communication from Hébert during the first few weeks of that officer’s command, dispatched Lieutenant Colonel August C. Buchel to inspect Shea’s position on Matagorda Island. Buchel, graduate of the French *École Militaire* and veteran of the Turkish and Spanish armies and the Mexican War, found Shea manning four 24-pounders emplaced without earthworks in the vicinity of the Saluria lighthouse. Shea advised Buchel that “headquarters” had halted his efforts to construct proper redoubts pending arrival of a qualified engineer officer to plan the fortifications.⁶

McCulloch reported this visit to Hubert with recommendation that the work at Pass Cavallo be expedited, stating that the order to Shea to cease emplacing his guns “must have been given by General Van Dorn.” By this time Hébert was hearing from other quarters concerning the Matagorda Bay defenses.

It was already known in the fall of 1861 that the manpower resources of the Confederacy and her several states were inadequate to muster into regular service every able-bodied man who might be needed to fight and at the same time leave enough at home to provide local defense and produce the economic sinews of war. This inescapable fact suggested the formation of “home guard” regiments composed of those too young, too old, or otherwise unavailable for regular service. Such units, according to theory, would be organized and retained under state authority, available for emergency call into temporary service.

Maintenance of such forces was considered particularly advantageous along the Texas coast, where competent military minds saw a large problem in providing infantry and cavalry support for the numerous heavy artillery emplacements that would be necessary to defend against Federal incursion from the sea.

D. M. Stapp, civilian collector of customs at Indianola and commander of such home guard forces as were organizing in the Matagorda Bay area, left in the record the earliest and one of the best analyses of the defenses at Saluria on Matagorda Island. Under the date of October 17, 1861, Stapp wrote Hébert that Shea’s armament consisted of four 24-

⁵ Hébert to Walker, September 27, 1861, *ibid.*, 112-113.

⁶ McCulloch to Hébert, October 11, 1861, and Buchel to McCulloch, October 10, 1861, *ibid.*, 116-117.

pounders, two 12-pounders, and one 6-pounder. These, he said, were inadequately protected by “temporary embankments of sand.” Shea, with 180 Confederate troops in his command, was in no position to defend himself against a determined attack. Two large bayous between him and his “home guard” reinforcements rendered it improbable that reinforcements could reach him in time for usefulness. Stapp recommended that five infantry companies then undergoing instruction at Victoria be put on the island and that cavalry be detailed to patrol from Saluria to Cedar Bayou. His recommendation in the second premise apparently involved two commands from the Matagorda Bay area, and it is probable that in this respect Stapp was voicing community sentiment which would have preferred to see its protection provided by its own rather than to provide men for other seats of war and trust to strangers at home.⁷

Stapp made similar recommendations to William Byrd, Governor Clark’s adjutant general, who forwarded the suggestions to Hébert on October 28, 1861. Stapp recommended that the cavalry commands of Captain E. A. Pearson of Matagorda, Captain A. H. Phillips of Lavaca, and Captain Edward Beaumont should be placed on Matagorda Island and noted that only the four large guns of Shea’s command had been furnished by the Confederate authorities, the others having been provided by the “citizens or military board of Indianola.”⁸ The same letter mentioned the two artillery companies on the island as being those of Captain Shea and Captain J. M. Reuss.

Hébert wrestled throughout the month of November with the problem of placing his inadequate troops over the vast areas to be protected. He appears to have considered three artillery companies at Pass Cavallo to be optimum, with six companies of infantry and four of cavalry to patrol the coastal area from San Luis Pass to Matagorda Bay and be available as reserves.⁹ He also felt the need of competent commanders and appealed to the secretary of war for “one or two general officers” for placement in critical points.¹⁰

⁷ Stapp to Hébert, October 17, 1861, *ibid.*, 123-124.

⁸ Byrd to Hébert, October 28, 1861, with inclosed extract, Stapp to Byrd, undated, *ibid.*, 129-130. Pearson’s and Phillips’ companies eventually joined the 6th Texas Infantry and were taken out of the state in 1862; Beaumont’s company served in the Matagorda Bay area in 1862, probably as a unit of William O. Yager’s cavalry battalion. After that year the company was a part of August C. Buchel’s 1st Texas Cavalry Regiment, serving on the coast and in Louisiana.

⁹ Davis to Maclin, November 15, 1861, *ibid.*, 138-139.

¹⁰ Hébert to Benjamin, November 15, 1861, *ibid.*, 139-140. There were relatively few professionally trained officers in Texas at the outbreak of the war, and none of these wanted service on the Texas coast. Of 304 graduates of West Point who served in the Confederate Army, only twelve or thirteen were Texans. Of these only one (Colonel John C. Moore) held a post even briefly at a Texas coastal point.



On November 15, 1861, Hébert dispatched an aide to the interior of the state with the mission of securing the loan or employment of slaves for the purpose of erecting

fortifications on the coast.¹¹ A shortage of labor for this purpose would be a recurring one on the Texas coast throughout the war.

An otherwise unidentified "Major Slum," an engineer officer, was sent to Pass Cavallo to furnish technical assistance in the proper construction of the fort at that place. Arrival of this officer touched off popular resentment at Indianola, the exact nature of which is not ascertainable. The fact of this resentment was stated in a letter to Hébert signed by a number of Indianolans, the same communication making detailed representations concerning the deficiencies at Saluria. Hébert's adjutant general replied stiffly to this protest, stating there was no other qualified engineer officer to send to Saluria, but that Colonel R. R. Garland would visit the area to determine whether or not his own command, the 6th Texas Infantry, could be disposed to support the fort.¹²

Garland, a professional officer of the "old army," made this visit and reported to Hébert on December 6, 1861, that Captain Shea's selection of a site for his guns was a proper one, but a competent engineer officer should be detailed to supervise their emplacement. He added that the isolated position of the fort made its support a difficult matter and purported to find no role for his own troops in their then "state of organization and appointment." He made no estimate of what he would have considered an adequate force for the purpose, but it was obviously a large, well trained one.¹³

In the meantime, on December 3, 1861, Hébert defined H. E. McCulloch's command to include the Victoria and Saluria areas. This made San Antonio, McCulloch's headquarters, the immediate nerve center for operations in and below the Matagorda Bay area.¹⁴

On December 7, 1861, Shea's men fired sixteen rounds at a Federal vessel which came within their range, claiming several hits in this first engagement with the enemy.¹⁵ On December 14, 1861, Colonel Garland reported another visit to Saluria, during which he observed the vessel fired on by the garrison a week earlier. The Federal ship, apparently a blockader, remained out of range and engaged in occasional gunnery

¹¹ Special Order No. 143, Headquarters Military Department of Texas, November 15, 1861, *ibid.*, 140.

¹² Davis to Woodward, *et al.*, November 16, 1861, *ibid.*, 143-144.

¹³ Garland to Davis, December 6, 1861, *ibid.*, 153. Garland's career in the Confederate Army was subsequently ruined by the blight cast on it as a result of his responsible part in the unsuccessful defense and surrender of Arkansas Post in January, 1863. This was all in the future, however, and it may be assumed his real objection to the use of his regiment on Matagorda Bay lay in the popular conviction in the winter of 1861-1862 that military careers would be more surely made out of the state. The 6th Texas Infantry included some units that had been under arms since the preceding spring, and its "organization and appointment" was as good as other regiments then organizing.

¹⁴ Special Order No. 206, Headquarters Military Department of Texas, December 3, 1861, *ibid.*, 151-152.

¹⁵ Shea to Davis, December 9, 1861, *ibid.*, 155-156.

practice, showing no disposition to go away. Garland reported that Shea was busily engaged in constructing ferries to be used on the bayous across his line of support and retreat between Matagorda Island and the mainland. Garland left a detachment from his own regiment with Shea, made a suggestion that the guns be moved "some two miles further up the Pass," and left three companies at Indianola.¹⁶

After these events the winter of 1861-1862 passed without special incident until February, 1862. Major Caleb G. Forshey, an artillery officer with engineering accomplishments, was de-tailed to supervise construction of the works at Saluria. Forshey has been traditionally credited with the construction of Fort Esperanza, and it was during these months and under his supervision that the works took on their completed outline. During this period the designation "Fort Esperanza" first appears in the record.

On November 7, 1861, Francis R. Lubbock, elected to succeed Clark, took office as governor of Texas. Governor Lubbock's first order of business was to appoint a state military board especially charged to find ways and means to supply ordnance for coast defense. Lubbock also planned a more orderly organization of the militia, the "home guard" units, and he included all these matters in his first message to the legislature.¹⁷

On January 1, 1862, General Hébert moved his headquarters from Galveston to Houston, where it was kept by him and his successors in command for the remainder of the war. Thereafter Houston was more nearly the capital of Texas than Austin, if the site of the most critical decisions of administrative and military policy within a state is determinant of such a matter.¹⁸

On February 11, 1862, occurred the first of those events at a critical Texas coastal point which were to become routine in the year to follow. On that date a bark of the Federal Navy, the *Afton*, Captain J. W. Kittredge commanding, made landings at Aransas Pass, taking provisions from the inhabitants and securing as prisoners several citizens of the area. These invaders, secured by guns of the *Afton*, drove off a force of Confederates under Captain B. F. Neal and made themselves at home on Mustang and St. Joseph islands, committing depredations and landing and reembarking with impunity for several days.

¹⁶ Garland to Davis, December 14, 1861, *ibid.*, 156-157. Garland's recommendation concerning removal of the guns at Pass Cavallo was apparently not considered seriously in any quarter. It would have extended an already difficult line of withdrawal, and Shea and every other commander subsequently concerned with Fort Esperanza were most attentive to the possibility that the place would eventually be evacuated under fire.

¹⁷ Clement A. Evans (ed.), *Confederate Military History* (12 vols.; Atlanta, 1899), XI, 58-59.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 49.

Aransas Pass was the backdoor to Matagorda Bay, and an enemy who could force the lower pass could sail unmolested to attack Indianola or Lavaca. Hearing of the invasion by Kittredge and his men, D. D. Shea, advanced to a majority, proceeded with thirty-two mounted men from Saluria down Matagorda Island to deal with the Federal sailors.

Arriving at Cedar Bayou, Shea learned of Neal's retirement to the mainland and of the presence of Federals at Aransas Pass in too heavy strength for him to cope with by himself. Contacting Neal on the mainland, Shea endeavored to organize a capturing force.

This project failed, but the effort produced a parley between Shea and the commander of the *Afton* in which the Federal officer asserted his power and intention to "hold and command" the coast with his ship. This threat was an impressive one, and Shea returned to Saluria and Fort Esperanza filled both with disgust and alarm at Neal's failure to keep the Federals out of the lower pass.¹⁹

Elements of the Fort Esperanza garrison at the time were still from Colonel Garland's regiment, and as Shea made his report of the Aransas Pass matter to that officer, the inference is that Garland was at least temporarily charged with command responsibility in the matter of the Matagorda Bay defenses.

Kittredge was joined by other Federal ships during the month, and these commenced a harassment of the coast from Matagorda to Aransas Pass. Availability of water and provisions on shore and the enemy military requirement that as much Confederate water transportation as possible be captured or destroyed, dictated further Federal landings, and frequent small boat penetrations were made to the intracoastal channel between Corpus Christi and Matagorda Bay.

Captain Neal, still commanding Confederate forces on the Aransas Pass shell bank, somewhat retrieved his damaged reputation on February 22, 1862, when he intercepted one of these forces. The fight which followed was carried on from small boats on both sides and with neither casualties nor particular result except to drive away the invaders. Neal's report of the affair complained of a lack of powder for his two 6-pounders and confessed a disadvantage in attempting to cope with an enemy more skilled than Texans in the use of small boats.²⁰

McCulloch, from San Antonio, supplied the requested powder to Neal and reinforced the Aransas Pass defenses with Major William O. Yager's battalion of cavalry. In his report to Hubert, McCulloch referred to an expected but unarrived shipment of heavy ordnance for the Corpus Christi area.²¹

¹⁹ Collected Reports, *Official Records*, Series I, Vol. IX, 482-486. Shea was much impressed with Kittredge's power to do harm on the Texas coast, and he developed very little of the chivalrous admiration for the daring Federal which came to be felt in some quarters of the Corpus Christi area.

²⁰ Neal to McCulloch, February 22, 1862, *ibid.*, 526.

²¹ McCulloch to Davis, February 27, 1862, *ibid.*, 525-526. All correspondence pertaining to the Corpus Christi and Aransas Pass defenses at this period suggests a curious lack of energy in

On March 4, 1862, Kittredge landed at Saluria under a white flag to hold another parley with Shea. Shea's report of this talk with the enemy, which involved the release of prisoners, asked official approval of a Confederate blockade maintained by him at Pass Cavallo to keep friendly shipping from venturing out to be captured by the hovering Federal vessels.²²

Throughout the spring the Federal blockade was intensified from the Sabine to the Rio Grande. On March 14, 1862, Hébert received instructions from Richmond to forward all available troops except those "necessary to man the coast batteries" to Major General Earl Van Dorn, then at Little Rock.²³ The Confederacy met with triple disaster in February: Fort Henry and Fort Donelson fell, Nashville was evacuated, and Albert Sidney Johnston meanwhile was pulling his scattered wings together in northeastern Mississippi. Every possible man was needed across the Mississippi River, and in Texas the prospects for increased coastal protection waned while enemy blockade's increased daily.

Colonel J. J. Cook, commanding at Galveston, prepared to evacuate the city. Hébert shared his conviction that the place could not be defended and imposed on Cook the single restriction that the city not be formally surrendered under any circumstances. Both nervously awaited the Federal demonstration off Galveston which would be the signal for its abandonment, the signal which was, in fact, delayed until the following October.²⁴

Major Yager, at Aransas Pass, appears to have been the only Confederate commander on the Texas coast during the spring who enjoyed any success in a contest with the Federal Navy. On April 22, 1862, two Federal launches penetrated Cedar Bayou, between Matagorda and St. Joseph islands, and captured three Confederate sloops, the *Democrat*, the *Swan*, and the *Mustang*. Securing two of these, with the crews of all three as prisoners, the enemy set sail to run down the bay to Aransas Pass, intending to escape into the Gulf disguised as friendly shipping. Warned of the incident

fortifying this area against enemy penetration. There were peculiar engineering problems in emplacing guns at Aransas Pass, and McCulloch obviously needed a professionally qualified subordinate in command of the entire area.

²² Shea to Garland, March 4, 1862, *ibid.*, 702-704. Shea's "blockade in reverse" is somewhat startling to the historically initiated reader. By the spring of 1862 "blockading" was a recognized form of commerce in the Southern States, and ship captains and owners expected to take their chances. There is no indication of Hébert's reaction to Shea's closing of Pass Cavallo. For the record, there were probably very few ships of substantial tonnage to put in and out of Pass Cavallo: the peculiar advantage enjoyed by such commerce at the mouth of the Rio Grande insured that the great bulk of Confederate importations would come through Brownsville.

²³ Hébert to Randolph, April 19, 1862, *ibid.*, 707.

²⁴ Collected Correspondence, *ibid.*, 710-712. Neither Hébert nor Cook had any faith in their power to beat off an attack on Galveston, which would have been evacuated without delay had the enemy made substantial demonstrations against the city.

and enemy intent, Yager intercepted the captured vessels with his small boats. Kittredge himself was in command of the raiders.

Beaching all craft at Blind Bayou, Kittredge and his men escaped into the dunes of St. Joseph Island, nightfall preventing their pursuit. Yager gathered in the Confederate sloops and Federal launches and released the grateful prisoners, abandoned by the escaping Union seamen.²⁵

Among the trophies of this fine chase was a mariner's compass which Yager turned over to Major Forshey, the Fort Esperanza engineer, to be presented by General Hébert to Commodore William Hunter, Confederate States Navy.²⁶

Brigadier General Hamilton P. Bee assumed command of the newly designated Sub-Military District of the Rio Grande on April 24, 1862, McCulloch leaving for East Texas and other fields of endeavor. Though he was to reappear in the state within the year, McCulloch would thereafter be concerned with affairs of the interior. Bee's responsibility, as had McCulloch's, included the Victoria and Saluria areas as its eastern limit.²⁷

On May 30, 1862, Hébert placed all Texas under martial law.²⁸ Bee had previously taken this step in his own sub-district, and irritation caused by enforcement of these measures, though eventually disavowed from Richmond, began to erode away some of the Texas enthusiasm for the war.

On May 26, 1862, the War Department created the Trans-Mississippi Department, to include the states of Missouri, Arkansas, and Indian Territory, that part of Louisiana west of the Mississippi River, and all of Texas. Hébert was directed to take command of this enormous area pending arrival of its announced commander, Major General John B. Magruder. Subsequent modification of these orders placed Major General T. H. Holmes in command of the Trans-Mississippi Department. Major General T. C. Hindman was given subordinate command in Arkansas, Missouri, and the Indian Territory; Major General Richard Taylor in Louisiana west of the Mississippi River; and Hébert in Texas and the Arizona Territory.²⁹

In July the ubiquitous Kittredge again appeared off Aransas Pass in his role as Texas gadfly. The Confederate fortifications at Aransas Pass had either never been adequate to prevent enemy passage or were not manned by men with sufficient determination to make them effective. Whatever the case, in early July, Kittredge took the pass without

²⁵ Yager to Benton, April 25, 1862, *ibid.*, 603-604.

²⁶ Commodore Hunter had been ordered to Texas during the summer of 1861. He seems to have acted primarily as an adviser to the department commander in the construction of coastal defenses.

²⁷ General Order No. 3, Headquarters Sub-Military District of Rio Grande, April 24, 1862. *Official Records*, Series I, Vol. IX, 708-709.

²⁸ General Order No. 45. Headquarters Department of Texas, May 30, 1862, *ibid.*, 715-716.

²⁹ Lee to Hébert, May 26, 1862, *ibid.*, 713; also General Order No. 5. Headquarters Trans-Mississippi Department, August 20, 1862, *ibid.*, 731.

receiving even token resistance, and Federal ships penetrated to the inner passage of the coast. Panic ensued from Corpus Christi to Matagorda. The heavy ordnance of the Union Navy appeared irresistible, and under its mouths Federal captains landed raiders when and where they wished. In an effort to make such landings as uninviting as possible, Hébert's headquarters encouraged evacuation of coastal areas, stirring up hornet nests of opposition as politically articulate citizens loudly denounced the apparent intent of those in authority to make no effective resistance to enemy landings.

Kittredge had lost none of his penchant for conversation under white flags, and on August 14, 1862, he presented himself with four ships off Corpus Christi. Communicating with Major A. M. Hobby, commanding Confederate troops at Corpus Christi, Kittredge received that officer's refusal to permit him to "examine the public buildings" at Corpus Christi and "report of their condition" to the Federal government. Forty-eight hours were arranged between Kittredge and Hobby to evacuate the city of noncombatants, and on August 16, 1862, the Federal fleet and the Confederate shore batteries fought a day-long action. The enemy ships withdrew at close of day. Returning on August 18, 1862, Kittredge landed a small force which was driven back to its boats, and Corpus Christi was safe.³⁰

At some unspecified date during this period Fort Esperanza and Matagorda Island were abandoned by their defenders, Major Shea removing his guns and troops to the mainland.³¹ There is no evidence that the "home guard" units organized along the coast during the previous fall and winter had any effectiveness to waylay, cut off, or otherwise take any action to discourage indiscriminate enemy raiding on the Texas coast.

In September, to the huge delight of all Texas, Captain Kittredge fell into a trap set by Captain John Ireland of Hobby's Battalion and was taken prisoner. He was well treated by his captors, who had conceived considerable admiration for the daring Federal officer, and was eventually forwarded for exchange.³²

On September 23, 1862, three Federal vessels forced evacuation of the Sabine City defenses, the Union ordnance outranging that of the defenders.³³ The invaders made a

³⁰ Collected Reports, *ibid.*, 618-623. Hobby, a young Refugio County merchant, had attained some political prominence in the years immediately preceding the war. His battalion (five companies) was organized in the spring of 1862 and ordered to Corpus Christi in late July of that year.

³¹ There is neither order nor report in the Official Records stating the fact or date of the evacuation of Fort Esperanza. Shea's headquarters were established at Indianola by June 10, 1862, and Saluria was evidently abandoned before that date. Collected Reports, *ibid.*, 609-614, and Collected Correspondence, *ibid.*, 723-729, are revealing as to the general condition of military affairs, public alarm, and so on in the Matagorda-Corpus Christi bay areas in July and August, 1862.

³² Collected Reports, *ibid.*, 624-626. Ireland was prominent in Texas political affairs after the war and was elected governor in 1882 and 1884.

³³ Spaight to Franklin, September 26, 1862, *ibid.*, XV, 144-145.

limited exploitation of this toehold in Texas, and their armed sloops penetrated to Beaumont before the end of the month. On October 2, 1862, the Federals burned the railroad depot near that town.³⁴ Difficulties of all Confederate coastal garrisons in the late summer and early fall of that year were enhanced by the existence of camp measles and yellow fever in epidemic proportion.³⁵

On October 8, 1862, Galveston was evacuated under the guns of a Federal fleet so formidable as, in the judgment of Hébert and Colonel Cook, to make resistance impossible. A four-day grace period allowed by the Federal naval commander to evacuate non-combatants was also utilized by Cook and his immediate superior, Colonel Xavier B. DeBray, commanding the Sub-District of Houston, to bring off the island virtually all portable ordnance and other military material.³⁶

On October 31, 1862, Major Shea and his batteries beat off a Federal attempt on Lavaca. The enemy gave up his efforts on November 1, 1862, after firing 252 shot and shell into the town.³⁷ While the record is fragmentary, Shea had obviously withdrawn all his forces from the Indianola area, and the Federal ships and landing parties had free run of virtually all the Matagorda Bay area.

Through the remainder of the fall of 1862, the single events along the coast appearing in the records involved occasional encounters between Union sailors foraging in small boats and Confederate pickets outpostting the coast and off-shore islands. On December 5, 1862, Captain Ireland again distinguished himself by driving an enemy party across Mustang Island, capturing its boats, and killing two enemy seamen.³⁸

The fall of Galveston and related events triggered off a period of feverish activity at the mouth of every Texas river to throw up obstacles to hostile penetration of Texas proper.³⁹ As weeks went by with no real enemy effort in that direction, however, Confederate commanders recaptured their breath. Early in November Colonel DeBray,

³⁴ Spaight to Franklin, October 2, 1862, *ibid.*, 146-147. It should be noted that this and every other attack made on a Texas coastal point until late in 1863 was a United States Navy affair. The enemy had no power to occupy and retain any point at which he forced a Confederate evacuation.

³⁵ Collected Reports, *ibid.*, 143-147. All reports emphasize yellow fever and measles as a primary problem in retaining any semblance of military force in the Sabine Pass area; see also Bee to Davis, November 15, 1862, *ibid.*, 181, concerning yellow fever among troops on Matagorda Bay. Malaria and yellow fever were endemic at all Texas coastal points, and unacclimated troops suffered heavily.

³⁶ Collected Reports, *ibid.*, 147-153. Neither Hébert nor his successors in command ever regarded Galveston as defensible against serious naval attack. As the Federal Navy was operating alone, without army auxiliaries at this period, however, it is by no means certain that Galveston could have been taken in 1862 had its defenders been willing to resist at the price of heavy naval bombardment and possible physical destruction of the city itself.

³⁷ Collected Reports, *ibid.*, 181-183.

³⁸ Willke to Gray, December 8, 1862, *ibid.*, 190-191.

³⁹ DeBray to Davis, November 12, 1862, *ibid.*, 865.

reporting from Houston, envisioned recapture of Galveston, noting the enemy had failed to occupy it in force.⁴⁰

The people of the state were disturbed at the loss of Galveston, and considerable long-festering resentment against Hébert came to a head in October and November. It was popularly asserted that his timorous attitude concerning Galveston resulted in its needless evacuation. It was also asserted, though without apparent foundation, that the successful defense of Corpus Christi and Lavaca was made against his orders.⁴¹

But Hébert was not to remain in Texas long enough to reap much of the bitter fruit of the year's activities. On November 29, 1862, Major General John B. Magruder, "Prince John" to his old army intimates and colorful veteran of the spring and summer campaigns in Virginia, arrived to assume command of the Department of Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona.⁴² Hébert, evidently in a hurry, anticipated Magruder by two days, turning the command over to Bee on November 27 and leaving for Arkansas.⁴³

Among the first duties of the new department commander was the compilation of a departmental strength return, an administrative detail which, complained old General Theophilus Hunter Holmes from Little Rock, had never been forthcoming from Texas during the entire war. This return showed an aggregate of approximately 10,000 men present and absent at all points in Texas.⁴⁴ The return did not indicate an island garrison at any point on the Texas coast in November, 1862, and the only Confederate force on Matagorda Bay was Shea's at Lavaca.

Magruder set to work with energy, writing letters in all directions, with pleas made for arms and men to both his superiors and to Governor Lubbock.⁴⁵ He made immediate

⁴⁰ DeBray to Davis, November 20, 1862, *ibid.*, 856-857.

⁴¹ Gray to Davis, November 20, 1862, *ibid.*, 868-871. This letter to the Confederate president from a distinguished Texan and member of the Confederate Congress states the entire popular case against Hébert.

⁴² General Order No. 1, Headquarters District of Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona, November 29, 1862, *ibid.*, 880-881.

⁴³ General Order No. 9, Headquarters District of Texas, November 27, 1862, *ibid.*, 879.

⁴⁴ Abstract Return for November, 1862, *ibid.*, 883-884.

⁴⁵ Magruder to Lubbock, December 21, 1862, *ibid.*, 903-904. Magruder arrived at Houston with a conviction the state was about to be assailed by some astronomically numbered force operating from Louisiana. He retained this belief unimpaired throughout his service in Texas, relinquishing it only after his transfer to command of the Department of Arkansas, at which time he decided the Texas threat was over and demanded reinforcement from the straitened Texas garrisons to meet similar threatened disaster there. It is probable that Magruder was sent to Texas because there was no point in the Confederacy geographically more remote from Richmond to which he could be sent. But in spite of his over-active imagination it is to Magruder's credit that he was a fighter, not disposed to approach military problems negatively, and worse things could have happened to Texas in 1862 than the arrival of John Bankhead Magruder, one of the few senior generals of the Confederacy yet to have a biographer.

plans for the recapture of Galveston, which the Federals were just beginning to garrison, meaning to reoccupy the island city before it could be occupied in force.

Plans were matured between Christmas and New Year's Eve, 1862. Magruder, as part of his overall plan, directed Major Shea to destroy the town and lighthouse at Saluria, Major Hobby at Corpus Christi to destroy the lighthouse at Aransas, and troops at Brownsville to effect similar destruction on Padre Island.⁴⁶ In each instance the implementation of these orders was necessarily in the nature of an offshore raid to points intermittently occupied by the Federal enemy.

On January 1, 1863, Magruder retook Galveston, an event which electrified Texas and the Confederacy. The details are omitted from this narrative, but they included enough Texas-style heroics to guarantee that Magruder would make his beginning in the state secure in the good esteem of her people, an advantage lacked by Hébert during the greater period of his service in Texas.

Magruder faced 1863 with confidence. Characteristically, his report on the recapture of Galveston also asserted the recapture of the entire Texas "coast and islands."⁴⁷ Presumably this claim was based on Confederate capability of maintaining small outposts on the offshore islands. It was not based on anything else. The Union fleet had access without hindrance to both Matagorda and Corpus Christi bays, and under its guns the enemy sailors were free to prey on the Texas coast at any point except the immediate vicinity of Corpus Christi and Lavaca.

Whatever Magruder's military shortcomings, lack of imagination was not one of them. The recapture of Galveston stimulated him to envision the capture of Federal ships, using available small craft manned by soldiers and operating from the Texas coast and islands. An effort on January 4, 1863, to toll in the Federal transport *Cambria*, unaware of the recapture of Galveston, failed after Magruder's pilot was aboard.⁴⁸

Magruder made proposals to Shea at Lavaca, evoking the following reply on January 15, 1863:

... [I] state for the information of the major general commanding that the land adjacent to the position of the armed blockaders (now off Saluria) is unfavorable for land operations except with the lightest pieces, and then the range is too great. The bridges and flatboats affording

⁴⁶ Turner to DeBray, December 25, 1862, *ibid.*, 909. This order further directed destruction of "all the houses at Pass Cavallo if practicable," and actual destruction and abandonment of Saluria by its civilian inhabitants appear to date from this order. As will appear later in this narrative, military occupation of the place continued intermittently through 1864 or later.

⁴⁷ Collected Reports, *ibid.*, 199-227.

⁴⁸ Mason to Turner, January 8, 1863, *ibid.*, 935-93. Had this stratagem succeeded Magruder's cup would literally have overflowed. The *Cambria* had on board E. J. Davis, later Reconstruction governor of Texas, and some two hundred other "apostate Texans," together with arms, equipment, saddles, and horses of the 1st Texas Cavalry (Union). The pilot sent aboard the *Cambria* was met with suspicion and had too little presence to maintain the deception that Galveston was still in Federal hands.

communications between Indianola and Saluria have been burned or removed. The land is low and flat, and the only road to the Pass is on the margin of the bay.

I would respectfully submit the following for the general's approval:

If it is the intention of the major general to attack the enemy's vessels in this bay with a fleet from the east, I will fit up and man a schooner now in these waters of about 70 tons burden. There is also a small high-pressure steamboat, but of very little power, old and frail, and very slow. Small sail-boats can be procured, dismantled, and used as launches. I can mount on the schooner mentioned about two 24-pounders and one 12-pounder.

I have about forty lances; no six-shooters nor cutlasses. My command at this post is very small—only two companies; but if the general approves of my fitting up the vessels mentioned I will order a sufficient force from the command at Corpus Christi to fill up the number required. .

..

If the general orders to be put into commission the water forces referred to I will await his orders, and if the eastern fleet needs a good pilot from this place I will send one who can be relied on, though I need his services here.

It is humiliating to us to see in our bay a small force of the enemy and we have not the means to attack or destroy them. ...⁴⁹

Shea's letter is indicative of the low estate of Matagorda Bay defenses, but his willingness to exert himself must have pleased Magruder, who cancelled previously issued orders transferring Colonel Peter C. Wood's 36th Texas Cavalry from the Lavaca area to the Rio Grande.⁵⁰

On January 21, 1863, one of Magruder's schemes to utilize small shipping and soldier gunners to attack the Federal Navy paid off at Sabine Pass. A 12-gun vessel and a 2-gun schooner with their crews were captured by Major O. M. Watkins and volunteers from Colonel Charles L. Pyron's 2nd Texas Cavalry, Lieutenant Colonel A. W. Spaight's infantry battalion, and Colonel J. J. Cook's 1st Regiment of Heavy Artillery.⁵¹

The promise of Magruder's auspicious beginning was being fulfilled, and Texas applauded the man under whose leadership the enemy was being chastened on bay and rivermouth.

A letter to Magruder from Major Forshey, on March 2, 1863, described the situation at Pass Cavallo and Aransas at that date:

. . . But what shall be done at Pass Cavallo? My answer would be, "Resume the Fort Esperanza and prepare for the defense of the Pass."

Let me suggest the method, and this will appear less objectionable and will meet the difficulties Major Shea presented. For a supply of lumber take the inferior and vacant buildings in Indianola and reconstruct the bridges down the Saluria Bayou; use a barge there for a ferry as before; conscript 300 negroes and make the road complete (in two weeks) from Indianola, and then carry the guns back to Fort Esperanza, repair and reoccupy it. Meantime plant the additional torpedoes in the channel below the fort and especially down near the bar. Then,

⁴⁹ Shea to Turner, January 15, 1863, *ibid.*, 949-950.

⁵⁰ Bee to Dickerson, February 3, 1863, *ibid.*, 965-966.

⁵¹ Magruder to Cooper, January 24, 1863, *ibid.*, 237-238.

general, for a point on the bay just north of Shea's or Big Bayou, construct a military road back through the prairie toward Green Lake, that in retreat the guns and wagons may get out of range from the gunboats that might pursue. Bearing in mind that all the guns we have for that Pass are siege guns, I believe they could be saved if we should be overpowered; but I have faith that torpedoes and pluck, a dauntless front, will keep off the enemy, unless he has a very powerful navy and resolves to risk the destruction of many vessels and men in taking possession. ...

In discussing matters on that portion of the coast I am reminded to refer again to Major Shea. I learned after our interview respecting his position that Colonel Hobby had found the aversion of the troops in that region to his being placed over them was so intense that he expressed a perfect willingness to waive his pretensions and take a lieutenant-colonelcy under Major Shea. Both commands, Corpus and Lavaca, desired Shea to have command—an officer of experience and merit and thoroughly disciplined soldier, while they regarded Hobby as having resorted to political influence to supersede or forestall him ...⁵²

Forshey's reference to Hobby concerned the organization of the 8th Texas Infantry in February by combination of Hobby's infantry and Shea's artillery battalions with several other miscellaneous companies to fill out an entire regiment. Shea benefited by promotion to lieutenant colonel of the new regiment, and the record does not indicate that any official cognizance was ever taken of the alleged dissatisfaction with Hobby. There is, in fact, nothing in the record indicating any proper basis for criticism of Hobby unless the perennially soft condition of Aransas Pass defenses are attributable to him. His responsibilities in the area, however, did not begin until long after Aransas Pass could have been fortified at leisure. His spirited defiance of Kittredge in the previous summer, followed by the successful defense of Corpus Christi, was particularly creditable to him in view of the fact that at the same time professional soldiers had been evacuating Galveston. Subsequent organization of the Matagorda-Corpus Christi bay areas for defense, however, would make the union of the two commands under Hobby more theoretical than actual during the remainder of 1863.

On April 18, 1863, at Sabine Post and on May 3, 1863, at St. Joseph Island, enemy foragers were intercepted by Confederate troops and severely punished.⁵³ But such events, encouraging to the public mind, were of little consequence as compared with the entry of Federal men-of-war to lie just out of range off coastal towns and cities.⁵⁴

Magruder continued sanguine in his views on the utility of improvised war vessels. On May 23, 1863, he directed Lieutenant Colonel Shea at Lavaca to arm the steamer *Lucy Gwin* to operate in the Matagorda and Aransas area with the previously armed *Cora*. On this same date he divided the Matagorda-Corpus Christi coast between Shea

⁵² Forshey to Magruder, March 2, 1863, *ibid.*, 1001-1003.

⁵³ Collected Reports, *ibid.*, 402-405.

⁵⁴ Continual small-boat raiding of Union seamen was exasperating to Texans, and much energy was expended in attempting to head off and destroy these parties; but the advantage lay with the Federals who could normally accomplish whatever purpose dictated a raid and then escape before Confederate troops could collect against them. Their boats could be kept off the coast only if their ships were kept out of the passes.

and Hobby, the dividing line being Cedar Bayou, between Matagorda and St. Joseph islands.⁵⁵ The order delineating these commands placed Colonel W. R. Bradfute over both areas, Bradfute to report through Bee to Magruder.

Colonel Bradfute was to be prominent in Matagorda and Corpus Christi bay affairs for the rest of the year 1863. Unfortunately, there is more in the record concerning this officer which arouses curiosity than satisfies it. At outbreak of the war Bradfute, referred to as a "captain," was with Ben McCulloch as a member of the state troops which forced the surrender of the Federal garrisons at San Antonio. Several months later he escorted the guns from San Antonio to Dallas which were issued to Good's artillery battery, and he accompanied this unit and Colonel Elkanah Greer's 3rd Texas Cavalry to Arkansas in the summer of 1861. He then served as "volunteer aide" to McCulloch until that officer's death at Elkhorn Tavern (Pea Ridge), on March 7, 1862. Van Dorn then took Bradfute to Mississippi and was instrumental in securing a colonelcy for him in a recommendation emphasizing his experience as a former officer of the "old army."

Bradfute served Van Dorn and others without particular distinction through the summer of 1862, usually commanding outposts and such improvised forces as might require a special commander. In the fall, for reasons not explained in the records, he was returned west of the Mississippi River to report to Major General T. H. Holmes for assignment within the Trans-Mississippi Department. Holmes turned him over to Major General T. C. Hindman, commanding in Arkansas, who gave him a brigade. Bradfute quickly incurred Hindman's wrath by turning his brigade over to its senior colonel on grounds of illness and absenting himself without notice to Hindman.

Holmes then sent Bradfute to Magruder in Texas. Magruder's original plan to use him involved a super-command of the entire Indian frontier, but this scheme was displaced by the one of putting him over the Matagorda-Corpus Christi coastal area.⁵⁶

Militarily, it was a sound plan to place these areas under a single commander, though Magruder's actual motivation for doing so is not apparent from the record. It

⁵⁵ Special Order No. 140, Headquarters District of Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona, May 23, 1863, *Official Records*, Series I, Vol. XXVI, Part 2, pp. 16-17.

⁵⁶ Before the war Bradfute commanded Company G, and United States Cavalry. This regiment included such later prominent Confederates as Albert Sidney Johnston, Robert E. Lee, William J. Hardee, Earl Van Dorn, E. Kirby Smith, and John B. Hood. Bradfute's presumed close acquaintance with these officers should have assured him adequate sponsorship for rank and responsibility in Confederate service. Certain episodes in his "old army" service, however, suggest he may have had a difficult, possibly trouble-making personality. Van Dorn alone seems to have made efforts in his behalf. Even this support must have been withdrawn in whatever circumstances were involved in Bradfute's return to the Trans-Mississippi. His Confederate service is traceable in the *Official Records*, Volumes I, III, VIII, X, XIII, XV, XVII, XXII, XXVI, and LIII, all Series I. There is no reference to him anywhere after December, 1863, and the researcher is left with the inference he either left military service or was again dispatched to a new post, this time to duty so obscure as to have no record.

may simply have appealed to him as a device to make use of an officer of rank and background who appeared at his headquarters. Or it may have been an action related to the heretofore mentioned Matagorda Bay resentment of Hobby at Corpus Christi. Shea appears, as a practical matter, to have passed from under Hobby's command during the remainder of his service on Matagorda Bay.⁵⁷

By June, 1863, Magruder's "navy" consisted of the *Bayou City* and the *Diana* at Harrisburg, the *Uncle Ben* on the Sabine River, and the *J. H. Bell* at Sabine Pass. The *John F. Carr* and *Mary Hill* were being fitted out at Lynchburg for service on Matagorda Bay.⁵⁸ Such ordnance as was mounted on these vessels was manned by soldier gunners under command of Major C. M. Mason as "Chief of Marine Artillery," a title evidently manufactured out of whole cloth by Magruder.

Magruder had difficulty in finding guns for his improvised fleet. Following the recapture of Galveston he had acquiesced in the removal to Shreveport of the guns of the Federal ship *Harriet Lane*, taken in that action. These he subsequently demanded back from Lieutenant General Edmund Kirby Smith, new commander of the Trans-Mississippi Department. Smith's waspish chief of staff, Brigadier General W. R. Boggs, was as disputatious a letter writer as Magruder himself, and the *Harriet Lane* ordnance remained on the Red River.⁵⁹

In the same month Shea was directed to reoccupy Saluria and Fort Esperanza and to defend Pass Cavallo "to the last."⁶⁰ Both he and Hobby were reinforced with companies drawn from the 36th Texas Cavalry.⁶¹

The fall of Vicksburg, on July 4, 1863, renewed Texas' fears of invasion, it being obvious that the Federal concentration on the Mississippi could free large enemy forces to operate in other directions. Magruder called for soldier volunteers to work on coastal fortifications, promising each man a monthly bonus of \$30 in addition to his pay and an extra half-ration daily for his services.⁶²

In August the steamer *John F. Carr*, 2-guns, was berthed at Saluria to aid in the defense of Matagorda Bay.⁶³ An unexplained matter of the same month was an order from Magruder's headquarters relieving Colonel Bradfute and directing him to report to

⁵⁷ Whatever the command situation under Bradfute, all parties seem to have worked agreeably together until Colonel Peter C. Woods, 36th Texas Cavalry, made some pretensions based on the fact that he had four companies in the Corpus Christi-Matagorda bay defenses. Magruder squelched these in a letter to Bee, July 20, 1863, *ibid.*, XXVI, Part 2, p. 118.

⁵⁸ Mason to Turner, June 24, 1863, *ibid.*, 81.

⁵⁹ Magruder to Boggs, June 25, 1863, *ibid.*, 82-83; Boggs to Magruder, June 30, 1863, *ibid.*, 97-98.

⁶⁰ Stanard to Shea, June 4, 1863, *ibid.*, 37.

⁶¹ Turner to Bee, June 9, 1863, *ibid.*, 42.

⁶² Special Order No. 190, Headquarters District of Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona, July 16, 1863, *ibid.*, 115-116.

⁶³ Smith to Shea, August 16, 1863, *ibid.*, 171.

Houston in arrest.⁶⁴ Whatever the difficulties in which Bradfute found himself, they were evidently settled without delay with Bradfute reinstated in command.

Late in the same month Magruder positioned the rest of Woods's 36th Texas Cavalry on the Guadalupe River, within supporting distance of both Hobby at Corpus Christi and Shea at Saluria.⁶⁵

During the summer Magruder forwarded to Kirby Smith a plan submitted by his chief engineer, Colonel V. Sulakowski, to raise several regiments of troops in Europe. Smith, avid for men regardless of source, submitted this scheme to a conference of the governors of the states in his department, proposing that land bounties be added to other inducements to be held out to the hoped-for recruits. The governors reacted unfavorably to this suggestion, and though Smith authorized Sulakowski to proceed to Europe with limited power to raise regiments, promising a brigadier general's rank for two or more regiments, the authority was not acted on.⁶⁶

Magruder's activities also included mineral surveys of the state. The primary need was iron, and Magruder received reports and estimates on deposits of this mineral which would not, in fact, be opened and exploited until World War II.⁶⁷

During the latter part of the summer, 1863, as in the previous year, out-of-state authorities made heavy demands for troops stationed in Texas, and much of Magruder's reserve strength was drained away to assist Brigadier General William Steele, under heavy threat in northern Arkansas.

Convinced that enemy landings would be effected on the Texas coast late in 1863, Magruder saw little hope of saving Corpus Christi or Lavaca, though he considered retention of Saluria and Fort Esperanza essential to keeping Galveston.⁶⁸ It is difficult to see how he considered holding Fort Esperanza even a remote possibility with Lavaca in enemy hands, and his excited reasoning at this time may have reflected those odd deficiencies in Magruder's military makeup which had made the Richmond authorities willing to dispense with his services after the Peninsular Campaign.

⁶⁴ Special Order No. 216, Headquarters District of Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona, August 12, 1863, *ibid.*, 160.

⁶⁵ Turner to Bee, July 31, 1863, *ibid.*, 128-129; Turner to Bradfute, August 7, 1863, *ibid.*, 151-152.

⁶⁶ Smith to Magruder, August 30, 1863, *ibid.*, 189-190.

⁶⁷ Washington to Turner, August 31, 1863, *ibid.*, 191-193.

⁶⁸ Yancey to Bee, September 1, 1863, *ibid.*, 196-197. This letter directed discontinuance of the Aransas forts, an appearance of fortification and a few guns only to be kept there until total evacuation was forced by the enemy. It further stated, "Saluria must be defended; otherwise Galveston will be turned and the troops caught." This proposition was tactically preposterous, as later events would demonstrate.

On September 1, 1863, official credence was given to a rumor that four Federal columns were converging on Texas: one from the Indian Territory, another from northern Arkansas, a third from Vicksburg, and a fourth from Natchez.⁶⁹

Magruder acted to reinforce the Sabine, Galveston, and Saluria points of defense, removing from Corpus Christi two companies of the 36th Texas Cavalry and ordering these to Saluria to reinforce Fort Esperanza. Regular troops, wherever possible, were to be replaced by state militia and the better trained and disciplined Confederate units made available for employment at critical points.⁷⁰

Kirby Smith at Shreveport wrote to John Slidell on September 2, 1863, of the threat to Texas and solicited his attention to the desirability of securing French intervention in Texas in concert with the imperial French plans in Mexico. Smith informed Magruder of this step and directed him to act immediately to impress on A. Superviele, special Confederate agent en route to Mexico, the importance of securing French cooperation to save the Rio Grande and Lavaca.⁷¹

Magruder found himself in the unenviable position of being required, as he phrased it, to determine the “relative importance of the different sections of Texas to be defended.” There simply were not enough troops in Texas to garrison all critical points on the coast and elsewhere.

Magruder concluded that command of the area between the Sabine and the Brazos rivers was vital to retaining Texas as a contributing member of the Confederacy, this area being the heart of the beef and corn production of the state. He announced to Kirby Smith that to the end of defending this area he was prepared to give up the Rio Grande and the coast as far up as Saluria, together with San Antonio if necessary; he would hold Saluria if possible but if required to do so would anchor his defenses on the mouths of the Sabine and the Brazos. He deplored orders sending troops to North Texas, though conceding that the mutinous condition of some of the units affected, those recruited from counties and areas of the state under threat of Indian raids, made them virtually

⁶⁹ General Order No. 149, Headquarters District of Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona, September 1, 1863, *ibid.*, 198.

⁷⁰ Special Order No. 238, Headquarters District of Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona, September 2, 1863, *ibid.*, 200-201.

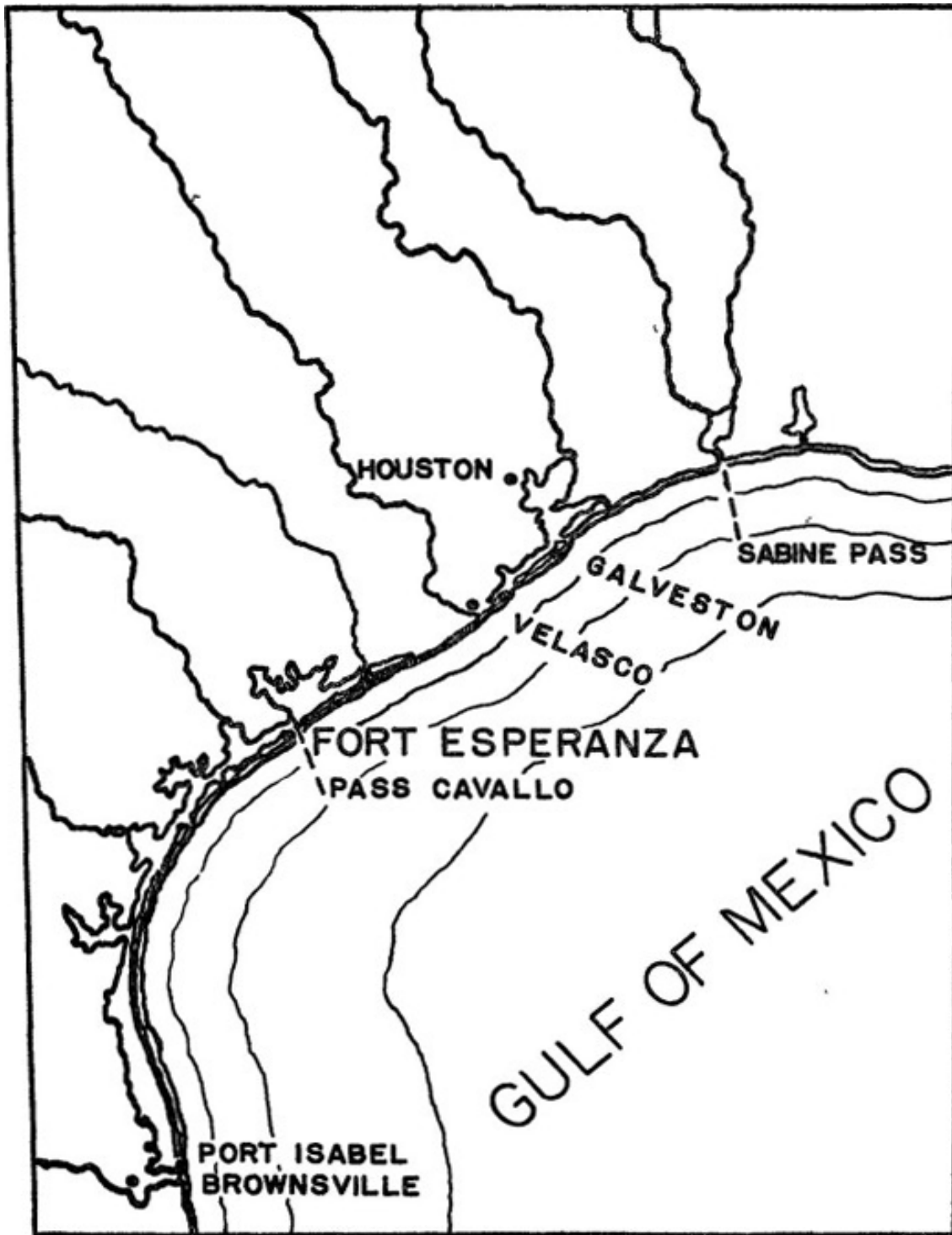
⁷¹ Bryan to Magruder, September 4, 1863, *ibid.*, 202. Affairs of that part of the Confederacy in the Trans-Mississippi Department and French forces laboring to establish a Mexican empire under the Hapsburg Maximilian inevitably touched at many points of common interest. Napoleon III dared not provoke war with the United States, yet nothing but the establishment of the Confederate States could protect him from eventually being called to account under the Monroe Doctrine. Confederates, having much to gain and nothing to lose should the French become embroiled in the war, were impatient with the Bonapartist caution.

useless on the coast.⁷² Smith approved Magruder's views, though deploring the prospective loss of the Rio Grande as a "base of supplies."⁷³

The expected attempt of the Federal enemy was made at Sabine Pass. This expedition, embarked at New Orleans under Union Major General William B. Franklin on September 4, 1863, was a joint army-navy operation. Five thousand troops, twenty transports, and five armed naval craft arrived off Sabine City on September 8, 1863. The Confederate fort defending the pass was manned by Company F of Cook's 1st Texas Heavy Artillery Regiment, otherwise known as the "Davis Guards." In the absence of its captain, the forty-man garrison of the fort was commanded by a young Houstonian, native of Ireland, whose name since that day has been a part of Texas folklore.

⁷² Magruder to Boggs, September 4, 1863, *ibid.*, 203-205.

⁷³ Smith to Magruder, September 7, 1863, *ibid.*, 214-215.



The record justifies Lieutenant Dick Dowling's claim to remembrance. He and his "dockwallopers," Irish like himself, disabled and forced the surrender of two enemy gunboats, the *Sachem* and the *Clifton*, totaling 13 guns and 350 crewmen and

passengers, crippled a third gunboat, and so disheartened the Federal commander as to cause return of the entire expedition to the mouth of the Mississippi River.⁷⁴

The Dowling saga is too well-known in Texas to require repetition. It was an almost unique occurrence of the war, Alamo-like in its main outline with the gratifying additional feature in its case that the defenders won the fight. The happy event, ever since clouded with legend and uncritical sentiment, may have a prosaic military explanation in the background and character of Colonel J. J. Cook, graduate of the United States Naval Academy, officer of the "old navy," and remorseless drill master to the young Texans who made up his gun crews. Dowling and his men stood to their work on September 8, 1863, and they wrought the sort of destruction on the enemy which others at other times and places failed to do because of lack of skill and skill-engendered confidence in themselves.

On September 9, 1863, Magruder ordered the balance of Hobby's regiment from Corpus Christi to Saluria, leaving two guns and a detachment to "defend Aransas Pass against launches." It was hoped that incoming state troops would suffice to man the defenses thus depleted, but Magruder was acting on his plan to give Matagorda Bay priority over Corpus Christi.⁷⁵ Just what this move meant in terms of reinforcement to Shea is problematical. Hobby's regiment was somewhat unique in that while designated an "infantry" regiment, the bulk of its companies had never served except as heavy artillery. At least one of its companies was composed of Spanish speaking Latin-Americans, and the regiment, never enabled to work together as a single force, had developed little cohesiveness or *esprit de corps*. It is apparent that Major John Ireland accompanied a part of the force to Saluria; it is equally apparent that the number of men involved was relatively small. These and subsequent moves were accompanied by much desertion from that portion of the regiment which had been stationed at Corpus Christi.

Magruder's most immediate fear was that the enemy still had intentions on Sabine Pass or some other Texas point from which he could project operations against the critical Houston area. It seemed incredible that so large a force as that attempting entry on September 8, 1863, had given up so easily. Throughout the month Magruder corresponded with Kirby Smith and his subordinate in Louisiana, Major General Richard Taylor, seeking aid which neither could furnish him in repelling an expected landing on the Texas coast or enemy concentration before Niblett's Bluff, site of Magruder's defenses across the Sabine River. With two Federal columns converging in northern Arkansas and Little Rock evacuated on September 10, 1863, Smith felt constrained to follow a "wait and see" policy prior to disjoining his main troop dispositions to reinforce Magruder.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ Collected Reports, *ibid.*, XXVI, Part 1, pp. 285-312.

⁷⁵ Special Order No. 245, Headquarters District of Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona, September 9, 1863, *ibid.*, Part 2, p. 216. Hobby himself evidently remained at Corpus Christi to act as post commander and commander of such troops as remained or came into that place.

⁷⁶ Smith to Taylor, September 17, 1863, *ibid.*, 233.

In addition to other problems, Magruder had no arms for many of the troops that were available to him, either Confederate regulars or the home guards being scrounged up by state authorities. Then on September 21, 1863, the English blockader *Love Bird* arrived off the mouth of the Rio Grande with 10,000 Enfield rifles and ammunition consigned to Confederate authorities via a Matamoros importer. Her timorous captain insisted on unloading these from Mexican waters. When only 4200 rifles had been lightered to the Texas shore the *Love Bird* was snapped up by a French frigate and conveyed to Vera Cruz. A similar incident in July involving the *Goodyear* had cost Confederate Texas a large shipment of arms and Magruder's anguished protests reverberated in both Paris and London. The record suggests that the confiscated cargoes may have been given up to Confederate agents in the following year, but they were lost to Magruder during this most critical period of his service in Texas.⁷⁷

To compound all other problems, hostile Indian depredations on the Texas frontier increased during the fall of 1863. This threat to soldier families resulted in near mutiny and much desertion in a number of regiments stationed on the coast.⁷⁸

Enemy intentions remained uncertain through the month of October. Welcome news of a Confederate victory at Chickamauga, together with Federal failure to do anything decisive on the Arkansas front, somewhat eased the tensions of the previous month. Magruder, however, became convinced that a large Federal expedition was outfitting to enter Texas via Niblett's Bluff, and he envisioned the loss of the critical Beaumont-Houston-Galveston area unless Taylor in Louisiana could be induced to reinforce him in repelling this attempt.

Both Taylor and Kirby Smith, required to consider larger areas of responsibility than Magruder, were forced to await developments. When the Federal commander in Louisiana, Major General Nathaniel P. Banks, made his first move his operations took the form of an advance into the Teche country, to the vicinity of Opelousas. This was countered by Taylor, and when the Federals fell back to Berwick Bay late in October

⁷⁷ Bee to Slidell, September 89, 1863, with enclosures, *ibid.*, 272-274. Texan crews of the lighters involved were jailed by Matamoros authorities for this technical violation of Mexican neutrality and revenue laws. Consignment of arms to Matamoros importers was a common device to protect such vessels at sea from Union blockade's; these would then be unloaded in Texas waters. Bee regarded the captain and supercargo of the *Love Bird* as not knowing their business. See Bee to Clements, October 3, 1863, *ibid.*, 286-287.

⁷⁸ Special Order No. 264, Headquarters District of Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona, September 30, 1863, *ibid.*, 277-278. The most conspicuous difficulty of this nature during the fall of 1863 involved Colonel A. W. Terrell's cavalry regiment, though the grievance of these troops was an order dismounting them more than concern about Indians. It seems just to observe here that inefficient frontier forces had been unable to prevent Indian incursions; many Texans on the coast were from remote frontier homesteads and all too familiar with the horrors of Indian war. More than special orders couched in high flown rhetoric was required to reconcile them to staying with their colors.

both Smith and Taylor were satisfied that the large enemy concentrations in the state were about to be depleted to reinforce beleaguered Rosecrans at Chattanooga. The entire threat to Texas seemed momentarily suspended, though this was not the view of Magruder, and events of the next few days were to justify his fears. The blow that fell, however, was not the one most expected.

On November 2, 1863, a Federal force under Major General Banks landed at Brazos Santiago, marching on Brownsville two days later. Bee, who was at Fort Brown, fired the public buildings at that place, burned all stored cotton, then withdrew with such equipment and supplies as could be carried off.⁷⁹

The evacuation of Brownsville was attended by a notable amount of disorder, fire, explosion, mutiny, and indiscriminate pillaging. The fantastically complicated political situation in Matamoros, just across the river, erupted in three "revolutions" in as many days, disturbances which alarmed the United States consul in the war-swollen "boom town" and completely bemused New Englander Banks upon his arrival at Brownsville.

At his first stopping place, Santa Gertrudis on the King Ranch, Bee concluded that there was no immediate need for the evacuation of the Rio Grande, and that San Antonio was not under threat. Magruder, correctly estimating the probable next move of the enemy, directed Bee to proceed to Corpus Christi, it being imperative that as much public property as possible be salvaged before the expected fall of that place.⁸⁰

On the night of November 16, 1863, Banks's fleet discharged a landing force of 1,500 off Mustang Island, twenty-two miles from Aransas Pass. Marching rapidly, supported by gunboats, this force assailed the small company of Hobby's regiment and a company of state troops stationed at the pass, forcing their surrender on the morning of November 17, 1863.⁸¹ The Union troops made immediate preparation to move up St. Joseph Island and Matagorda Island to take Fort Esperanza from the rear.

Colonel W. R. Bradfute, at Corpus Christi when Aransas Pass was taken, made a run by the Confederate steamer *Cora*, evaded the Federals, and reached Saluria on November 18, 1863. Getting off a report to Magruder, he made preparation to receive the enemy at Fort Esperanza. Bee, arriving at Corpus Christi as these events took place, prepared to evacuate the town, removing his own troops, the remnants of Hobby's regiment still at Corpus Christi, and a few state troops still there under arms, eastward to a point where forage was obtainable and he could better cover possible enemy

⁷⁹ Reports of General Hamilton P. Bee, *ibid.*, Part 1, pp. 432-439.

⁸⁰ Turner to Bee, November 13, 1863, *ibid.*, Part 2, p. 412. Magruder's primary concern was to remove all government cotton from Corpus Christi before the place was occupied by the Federals.

⁸¹ Banks to Halleck, November 18, 1863, with enclosures, *ibid.*, Part 1, pp. 409-410. Ambiguous expressions in this report may be responsible for the error perpetuated to this day that Banks took Corpus Christi itself before attacking the garrison at Aransas Pass. Banks's plan to penetrate Corpus Christi Pass and land his force on the inner side of Mustang Island was frustrated by low water. The force was discharged on the Gulf side of the island.

landings at Lamar or other coastal points threatening the interior. There seems to have been no thought in his or anyone's mind that Corpus Christi would remain out of enemy hands with Aransas Pass taken by the Federals.⁸²

Magruder moved as quickly as he could to assemble reinforcements, ordering Woods's 36th Texas Cavalry and Pyron's 2nd Texas Cavalry to Matagorda. Shipping had been assembled at that point to transport reinforcements to Fort Esperanza. In the meantime, a bitter norther struck. Water in Matagorda Bay became so rough that Bradfute objected to the water reinforcement plan as unsafe. He proposed that these regiments be marched around Matagorda Bay, further suggesting that they might be interposed between him and a Federal force he was convinced had landed at Lamar. As Fort Esperanza was abandoned before either Woods or Pyron was ready to take ship, no final decision was required as to employment of these forces.⁸³

Within Fort Esperanza Major John Ireland, 8th Texas Infantry, exercised command, through Bradfute seems to have been at the fort most of the time during these few frenzied days. The record furnishes no clue as to the whereabouts of Lieutenant Colonel Shea, proper commander of the fort. He may have been ill and absent, service on the Texas coast that summer and fall having been attended with the usual sick rate. Troops present in the fort included Shea's old battalion (two batteries), two or three companies of Hobby's 8th Texas Infantry, and two or three small units of state troops, a total of about 500 officers and men.

There is considerable indication in Bradfute's worried dispatches that he regarded the fort as untenable in the face of forces threatening it. And it is quite probable a conviction that he was about to be cut off by a column marching from Lamar hastened his decision to evacuate the fort and Matagorda Island. When the expected Federal column approached Saluria on November 27, 1863, Bradfute interposed a light skirmish

⁸² Bee to Turner, November 19, 1863, and Bee to Turner, November 21, 1863, *ibid.*, 436-438; also Bee to Turner, November 24, 1863, *ibid.*, Part 2, pp. 442-444. Bradfute took Captain P. H. Breeden's company, 8th Texas Infantry, with him on board the *Cora* and announced a purpose to bring off the Aransas Pass garrison. Whether he made any effort to accomplish this object or, if doing so, how he was frustrated in his design, the record does not show. As Federal ships immediately crossed the Aransas bar and entered the inner channel, Bradfute probably had no opportunity to contact the Confederates. Bee at Corpus Christi was uncertain of Bradfute's own fate until either November 19 or 20. A flag of truce dispatched to Aransas Pass by Hobby was unanswered and the bearer retained until November 26.

⁸³ Turner to Bradfute, November 26, 1863, *ibid.*, 446-447; Bradfute to Turner, November 26, 1863, *ibid.*, 447; Murray to Turner, November 26, 1863, *ibid.*, 448. Bradfute at Saluria knew what qualified military men had understood all along about Fort Esperanza. Its Achilles heel was the thirty miles of open island to its rear. Supported by Federal ships in the inner passage, Banks's larger force could either march up Matagorda Island and invest the fort from the rear or it could effect a landing in the vicinity of Lamar, move to Lavaca, and cut the Saluria garrison's line of retreat.

line between it and its objective. This was quickly brushed back into the fort and the Federals moved in and emplaced their rifled artillery on November 28, 1863.

The fort was shelled throughout the next day, Federal gunboats supporting the attack. That night Bradfute held a council of war, concluding with his officers to abandon the fort. This was done in good order, the fort and magazines being fired and the garrison and movable artillery brought off to the mainland without enemy interference on the night of November 29, 1863.⁸⁴

With the enemy firmly established at Brazos Santiago and Brownsville, and Aransas Pass and Saluria, the Texas coast was effectively closed from its southernmost tip northeast to Velasco. The interior, of course, appeared open to the dreaded invasion, and Texas apprehension was divided only as to the direction it would take. Magruder, acting on his conviction that the heart of Texas and her power to remain an effective member of the Confederacy lay in the area between the Sabine and Brazos rivers, concentrated his forces to meet invasion at Caney Creek, twenty miles west of Velasco and the Brazos River. In doing this he did not entirely give up his conviction that Banks had prepared an advance overland from Louisiana into the lower Sabine area of the state. His alarms on these scores lasted longer than they did with his chief, Kirby Smith, who, before end of the year, had apparently appraised Banks's Texas operations as limited to little more than they had already accomplished.⁸⁵

This estimate turned out to be the correct one. Washington had not been completely informed of Banks's intentions on the Texas coast, and he was refused the means to enlarge his operations at any of the points taken in November. The Federal commanders were left at Saluria and at Aransas Pass to fret about reinforcements, supplies, and imaginary Texas hosts just beyond the coastal dunes.⁸⁶

⁸⁴ Collected Dispatches, *ibid.*, Part 1, pp. 445-447; also Collected Reports (Union), *ibid.*, pp. 414-428. A never-solved mystery lies in the conflicting accounts of the death of Major Charles Hill at Cedar Bayou on November 23, 1863. A concise statement of the several accounts is given in Dudley G. Wooten, *A Comprehensive History of Texas* (2 vols.; Dallas, 1898), II, 541-542. Governor John Ireland's statement in later years must have been based on an account given him by the "Captain Barden" referred to in Ireland's report in *Official Records*, Series I, Vol. XXVI, Part 1, p. 447. As no captain of this name is known to have served in the area, this was probably S. H. Darden, commander of state troops at Fort Esperanza. Whatever the actual facts, Hill's death should have been attributed to excessive use of flags of truce by Confederates on the Texas coast.

⁸⁵ This was the conclusion concerning Smith's frame of mind reached by his biographer, J. H. Parks, *General Edmund Kirby Smith* (Baton Rouge, 1954), 341, based on Smith to Magruder, December 15, 1863, *Official Records*, Series I, Vol. XXVI, Part 1, p. 508.

⁸⁶ The island-based Federals suffered for lack of good water, and such firewood as was afforded was rapidly exhausted in the cold and wet Texas winter. Under these conditions, and as it grew apparent they were not to be reinforced, the fine edge of morale engendered by their recent victories rapidly wore away.

In December the Federals at Saluria cautiously crossed over to Indianola, and during the winter they held the southwest part of Matagorda Bay. Here they were largely confined in their movements to the environs of Indianola itself, made uncomfortable throughout the winter by inadequate supplies, scarcity of fuel, and the continual presence of small parties of Confederate horsemen on the surrounding prairie.⁸⁷

No effort was made by the Union forces to occupy Corpus Christi, though the city and surrounding area were afflicted by periodic visits in force from the Aransas Pass garrison, the Federals hunting cotton and inflicting considerable incidental annoyance on the families of Confederate soldiers in the Corpus Christi Bay area.⁸⁸ Until they were ousted from Brownsville on July 30, 1864, enemy raiding parties, foragers, and cotton hunters probed up the Rio Grande as far as Laredo.

At the mouth of creek and river Federal gunboats flung shells to panic defenders of improvised works. These threats served their primary purpose, and Texas horses and men, suffering for forage and supplies, were exhausted by marches and countermarches from one imagined point of danger to another.⁸⁹

On March 10, 1864, the Federals abandoned Indianola and the entire Matagorda mainland, withdrawing to Saluria and Fort Esperanza. They expended much effort in rehabilitating and improving the fort against Confederate attack, a threat generated in their minds by four months of inactivity surrounded by hostile pickets.⁹⁰ The entire garrison, together with the one at Aransas Pass, was withdrawn in June of 1864. Thereafter the only Federal troops in Texas were at Brazos Santiago, retained to block Boca Chica and Point Isabel as places of entry for Confederate commerce.

⁸⁷ Texas historians have not taken serious note of Alexander E. Sweet's satirical narrative of Confederate operations around Indianola in the winter of 1863-1864. See Alexander E. Sweet and U. Armoy Knox, *On a Mexican Mustang through Texas from the Gulf to the Rio Grande* (Houston, 1884), 476-486, 489, 501.

Sweet's father, James R. Sweet, had been lieutenant colonel of the 33rd Texas Cavalry, and the younger Sweet was a member of this regiment which outposted Indianola during the Federal occupation. After the war he turned Republican, and his wit concerning his Confederate service may not have been appreciated. Any reader interested in the Federal account of what may have been Sweet's "Battle of Norris's Bridge" should read Benton to Brown, February 23, 1864, *Official Records*, Series I, Vol. XXIV, Part 2, pp. 401-402.

⁸⁸ Upton to Duff, February 13, 1864, *ibid.*, Part 1, pp. 135-136; also Nolan to Ford, March 21, 1864, *ibid.*, pp. 643-644.

⁸⁹ Turner to Alston, January 9, 1864, *ibid.*, Part 2, pp. 849-850.

⁹⁰ The astonishing amount of labor expended in this effort is illustrated by the fact that the rails from the Indianola terminus of the San Antonio and Mexican Gulf Railway, destroyed by retreating Confederates in December, 1863, were laboriously transferred to Fort Esperanza and incorporated into the fort's "bombproofs." An additional ironical fact concerning this construction was that in 1865, following the war, Federal forces at Indianola, under necessity of restoring port facilities, brought these rails back to Indianola and used them in rebuilding the port tracks. See Emery to Palfrey, July 6, 1865, *ibid.*, XLVIII, Part 2, pp. 1054-1055.

It was the judgment of Kirby Smith that the Confederacy could no longer support a fort at Saluria, and Fort Esperanza was not reoccupied during the remainder of the war.⁹¹ Until the end there would be recurring reports of Federal concentration in New Orleans aimed at invasion of Texas. But the battle of Mansfield in April, 1864, and the frustration of Banks's last grand design, ended Federal aspirations to project a campaign against the state.

Texas was not molested again during the war.

⁹¹ Boggs to Walker, September 17, 1864, *ibid.*, XLI, Part 3, pp. 939-940. A Confederate map of the Texas coast prepared in 1864 and included in the atlas to the *Official Records* shows a "Fort DeBray" at the Saluria site. Actual existence of such an installation is not indicated by any other record. Its placement on a map may have represented a headquarters project abandoned on receipt of the order cited above. Another possibility is that occasional picket or outpost forces sent to Saluria may have so denominated the abandoned fortification.