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**THE SWAMP ANGELS: A HISTORY OF SPAIGHT'S
11TH BATTALION, TEXAS VOLUNTEERS,
CONFEDERATE STATES ARMY**

by *W.T. Block*

"And with the united efforts of the Swamp Angels, we succeeded," Sergeant H.N. Connor wrote affectionately of his unit, Spaight's Texas Battalion, in 1863, when his comrades were faced with the prospect of no retreat and either "capture or be captured." Connor was writing about the 600 Confederate soldiers of Southeast Texas who were not destined to share the same glories of battle valor that Lieutenant R.W. "Dick" Dowling and his Davis Guards did. And although they fought in a number of battles and skirmishes, many more of the Swamp Angels were destined to die of yellow fever, dysentery, or measles than ever met their fate at the hands of their Northern enemies.

At first glance, the reader who is knowledgeable about Confederate Army history might ask, "Why Spaight's Battalion? Why not Colonel Ashley W. Spaight's Twenty-First Texas Regiment?" Actually, Spaight's Regiment only had regimental status during the last five months of the Civil War. Moreover, the new regiment added four companies, formerly of Griffin's Battalion, who were from Tarrant County, which radically changed the complex of the unit from a battalion of Southeast Texans from a few adjacent counties. Also, it transferred the artillery unit, Company B, to Bates' Thirteenth Regiment, although the cannoners remained in garrison at Fort Manhasset, Sabine Pass, until the war ended. In addition, the regiment as a unit was never committed to battle.

Two diaries of Spaight's Battalion have survived and the writer will cite from them frequently. One, "The Diary of Captain George W. O'Brien, 1863," was serialized in the *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* in 1963, and later was published in book form by its editor, Cooper K. Ragan of Houston. Another, the unpublished Diary of First Sergeant H.N. Connor, is owned by Dr. Haskell Monroe of the University of Missouri. O'Brien commanded Company E of the battalion, and Sergeant Connor was first sergeant of cavalry Company A. Two sets of memoirs were written by Captain K.D. Keith, who commanded artillery Company B. The first set of memoirs appeared in print as "Military Operations, Sabine Pass," in Burke's Texas Almanac and Immigrant's Guide For 1883, published in Houston. Keith, a Sabine Pass cotton merchant, went blind while writing his second set of memoirs, completing them only until September 1863, but they remain the best source of information about the Swamp Angels, as these Confederates styled themselves, of Spaight's Battalion and wartime Sabine Pass between 1861 and 1863.

Spaight's Battalion had its origins on April 20, 1861, when the citizens

of Sabine Pass mustered a 102-man militia company for ninety days, the Sabine Pass Guard, organized under the State Act of February 15, 1858.¹ This occurred several days before news of the attack on Fort Sumter, South Carolina, reached Sabine Pass. The Sabine Pass Guard marched about on the prairie, but nothing else was accomplished by them except the building of old Fort Sabine, which was destroyed in September 1862. In May 1861, Jefferson County expended \$2,000 to build the fort.² Keith and others obtained two eighteen-pound cannons in Galveston, two thirty-two-pound guns and some solid shot in Houston, and for the next month, the militiamen studied the artillery manuals in preparation for the defense of Fort Sabine.³

In July 1861, the ninety-day enlistments of the Sabine Pass Guard expired. Most of the men re-enlisted into two companies, one of them an artillery company, again known as the Sabine Pass Guard, captained by James B. Likens, a Sabine Pass attorney. The remainder enlisted in a cavalry company, the Ben McCulloch Coast Guard, raised by Dr. James H. Blair, a Sabine physician. This company became Company A of both Likens' Battalion and its successor, Spaight's Battalion, and after December 1, 1861, was captained by O.M. Marsh, a West Point graduate. These companies were mustered into the state militia for one year, and in 1862, K.D. Keith was elected captain of Co. B.⁴

In September 1861, Captain Likens visited General Paul O. Hebert's headquarters in Galveston, where he was promoted to major and authorized to raise Likens' Sixth Battalion of state militia. Likens' unit at Sabine Pass was to consist of Likens' cavalry Company A, soon to be commanded by Captain Marsh; Captain Blair's artillery Company B, soon to be captained by Keith; infantry Company C of Newton County, commanded by Captain Josephus S. Irvine, a veteran of the Battle of San Jacinto; and infantry Company D of Tyler County, commanded by Captain W.J. Spurlock.⁵

Life at Sabine Pass during the fall of 1861 was dull and filled with monotonous close-order drill on the salt grass prairies for several sixteen-year-old soldiers who longed for action. E.I. Kellie, a Jasper, Texas, politician, wrote that "we drilled on the prairie for about six months," after which "six of us under age, who wanted to see a fight, packed up our duds ... went up to Jasper," and joined Captain R.H. Norsworthy's company. Kellie and his friends arrived on the Shiloh battlefield one day before the battle began.⁶

Captain Keith described life in Company B and the building of Fort Sabine and its barracks out of logs and rough lumber from the abandoned sawmill, and gunnery practice as the farm boys learned a new way of life. Sergeant Connor described life in Company A as the cavalry troopers built fourteen barracks and stables five miles west of Sabine Pass, guarded the beaches, rode as messengers and patrols to Beaumont and High Island, and received as armament 120 carbines from the Confederate command

in Galveston.⁷

In February and March 1862, two more companies became a part of Likens' Battalion. Captain George W. O'Brien had been discharged because of illness from the Army of Northern Virginia. After his recovery, he raised infantry Company E at Beaumont, built Camp Spindletop, located about four miles southwest of the "sawdust city," and drilled and marched out on the prairies near Beaumont. Captain Ashley Spaight had raised a cavalry company of militia in Liberty and Chambers counties, known as the Moss Bluff Rebels, and with their assignment to it, Major Likens' command became a battalion of six companies.⁸ Also in March 1862, Likens' Battalion was mustered into the Confederate Army for the duration of the war.⁹

In June 1862, the last major command shakeup occurred when Major Likens was promoted and authorized to raise a regiment of Texas cavalry. Captain Spaight was promoted to lieutenant colonel of the new Spaight's Eleventh Battalion, and Captain Irvine of Company C was elected major and executive officer. Lieutenant W. B. Duncan of Liberty was elected the new captain of Company F, and Lieutenant W. C. Gibbs was elected to replace Irvine of Company C.¹⁰

During the ensuing years, time would determine the whereabouts of the battalion in almost even years. During the years 1862 and 1864, the headquarters of Spaight's Battalion was at the quartermaster depot known as Beaumont Post, while the infantry and cavalry companies were stationed at Camp Spindletop, Sabine Pass, Beaumont, or Orange, where often the soldiers were detailed to guard government-owned cotton at the latter two points. One exception came in the spring of 1864 when Colonel Spaight's cavalry and infantry were stationed at Niblett's Bluff, Louisiana north of Orange, Texas, to counter Federal incursions up the Calcasieu River and support General Richard Taylor's movements in North Louisiana.

During all of 1863, Spaight's infantry and cavalry were stationed for a short time in Houston and for the next eight months in central Louisiana under General Taylor's command. During 1865, by which time the unit had reached regimental status, Spaight's infantry and dismounted cavalry, except Captain O'Brien's Company E, were stationed in Houston and Galveston until they were moved by train to Beaumont Post for discharge on May 24, 1865. Spaight's artillery Company B remained at Sabine Pass almost throughout the war. The cannoners were at Fort Sabine until September 24, 1862, were removed to Fort Grigsby at Port Neches until January 15, 1863, and were back at Sabine Pass at either Forts Griffin or Manhasset from October 1863, until the war ended. For nine months of 1863, half of Company B were assigned as gunners aboard the cottonclad gunboat *Uncle Ben* in Sabine Lake, while the remainder were detached under Lieutenant James Cassidy to man artillery aboard the cottonclad *John F. Carr* in Matagorda Bay.¹¹

During July 1862, the British steamer *Victoria* entered Sabine Pass carrying a load of munitions and an unwanted stowaway, the dreaded "yellow jack." Within a month, a particularly virulent form of yellow fever had afflicted almost 300 soldiers and civilians at Sabine Pass. As the victims began to die, the remainder of Sabine's residents, about 600 persons, fled inland, some taking the disease with them to Beaumont and Orange. By September 1, all but fourteen men of Company A and sixteen of Company B had contracted the disease, and at least forty or more soldiers and perhaps as many as 100 civilians died of the disease, with victims having about one chance in two of surviving. As late as October 20, people were still dying of yellow fever at Sabine Pass, Orange, and Beaumont. Sergeant Connor of Company A noted in his diary that his convalescing soldiers had to nurse and bury civilians, and Captain Keith of Company B added in his memoirs — "our principal business was to bury the dead."¹²

Almost nothing is known of the names of those who died, for no muster roll, except for Company A, is available for that year. Keith wrote that two of his officers, Lieutenants Goodnoe and Concannon, died of the fever at the Pass as well as Lieutenant R.J. Parsons, the battalion quartermaster. Also, fourteen enlisted men of Company A died of yellow fever at Sabine Pass.¹³

Colonel Spaight, who was on court martial assignment in Houston, sent Assistant Surgeons George Holland and A.J. Hay and a team of nurses to Sabine to treat patients and report on the extent of the epidemic. Surgeon Holland wrote that as of September 1, twenty-five of forty afflicted soldiers had died of the disease, and more were expected to die. Order No. 205 of the Houston Sub-Military District quarantined Sabine Pass and cut off all communications and supplies to and from the seaport. On September 15, a town delegation protested the quarantine, stating that only five days' supplies were on hand and no more could be expected. Ten days later, Houston residents contributed \$695 to purchase medicines and supplies for the stricken community.¹⁴

As a result, Colonel Spaight furloughed the able-bodied members of his battalion for two weeks and ordered them to concentrate at the "Cowpens," near present-day Nederland, on their return. But some members of companies A and B were convalescing at Sabine Pass and were unable to travel, and some were former sailors and had no home other than Sabine Pass, with no place to go. While the furlough was in progress, a second disaster struck the town. Union Lieutenant Frederick Crocker's squadron consisting of the steam gunboat *Kensington*, the mortar schooner *Henry James*, and the United States schooner *Rachel Seaman*, entered the Sabine estuary and began shelling Fort Sabine. However, the squadron remained out of range of the fort's guns, and Captain Keith's gunners could only shake their fists and curse the Federals who felt no compulsion to endanger their lives and ships by sailing closer to the fort.¹⁵

With less than twenty-five men from two companies fit for duty, the fort, then under Major Irvine, returned the fire, but the range of their guns was much too short. At nightfall, Captain O'Brien arrived by train from Beaumont with thirty men, all of them convalescing fever victims. Both Keith and O'Brien proposed to remain and fight, but Major Irvine ordered the guns spiked and buried, all stores removed, and the Confederates evacuated on the last train to leave Sabine Pass during the Civil War. Soon afterward the Federals burned the railroad bridge over Taylor's Bayou.¹⁶

Colonel Spaight reassembled his battalion at the "Cowpens," at Camp Spindletop, and two companies, A and E, camped out near Sabine Lake at present-day Port Arthur. Units of companies C and D guarded the railroad bridge at Beaumont and government-owned cotton and quartermaster stores at Beaumont Post and at Orange. Union Lieutenant Crocker's squadron then occupied Sabine Lake and Pass, burned the railroad bridge, Fort Sabine, the artillery barracks, and the depot, all at Sabine, but they generally avoided the town because of the epidemic. Crocker armed a steamboat, *Dan*, captured in the Calcasieu River, with a thirty-pound rifled Parrott gun, and left the little steamer and *Rachel Seaman* to guard Sabine Lake and Pass, where they harassed both soldiers and civilians at every opportunity. On one occasion, *Dan* shelled the soldiers encamped near Taylor's Bayou, but no casualties resulted.¹⁷

On October 2, Colonel Spaight sent an urgent appeal to Houston for guns and equipment to fortify the Sabine and Neches rivers. The next day Major Julius Kellersberg, a Confederate engineer, arrived with men and equipment. He constructed Fort Grigsby at Port Neches and another fort at the mouth of the Sabine River. On October 18, Company B occupied Fort Grigsby to man its two twenty-four-pound batteries and remained there for three months. For about three weeks there was no activity on Lake Sabine except the movements of the enemy vessels, and Captain Keith recorded, "We remained at Fort Grigsby quietly."¹⁸

Colonel Spaight ordered cavalry Company A back to Sabine Pass to keep the range cattle driven inland from the Pass to preclude their use by the Federals as a food supply. On October 20, 1862, thirty troopers were concealed in high grass near Winegate's Sawmill when *Dan* steamed up the Pass, towing the *Velocity*. The Confederates fired four carbine volleys at *Dan*, and in turn, were fired at with grape and cannister shot by *Dan's* artillerymen. The next day, a detachment from *Dan* came ashore with a six-pound boat howitzer and burned \$150,000 of saw and planing mills, houses and stacked lumber, as well as Company A's cavalry barracks and stables west of the town.¹⁹

The horsemen of Company A immediately singled out *Dan* as their special target for mischief and revenge. To even the odds, they contributed \$500 of personal funds to purchase a wheeled, six-pound cannon (promptly dubbed "Aunt Jane") and solid shot in Houston, but the gun was still no

match for the thirty-pound Parrott gun on the steamer, which had five times the fire power.

In the meantime, the Federals captured Galveston Island, and a new Confederate general arrived in Houston to command the Texas military district. Immediately, General J.B. Magruder planned for the recapture of Galveston and the breaking of the blockade at Sabine Pass by outfitting and arming of two cottonclad steamboats, *Uncle Ben* and *Josiah Bell*, at an Orange shipyard. After two unsuccessful attempts, nine troopers of Company A rowed up to *Dan* during a dense fog on the night of January 8, 1863, and they set fire to the steamer with fifty blazing, pine knot torches, which they threw onto the decks and sidewheel paddles. Then they watched gleefully as the hated gunboat burned to the waterline and sank at its anchorage at the Sabine lighthouse. When his schooner sprang a leak and needed repairs, Union Lieutenant Quincy Hooper anchored the Federal schooner *Rachel Seaman* offshore at a point five miles from the Sabine bar. Thus, the Federal occupation of Sabine Lake had ended, but two other Union gunboats, *Morning Light* and *Velocity*, took up positions off the bar after the *Rachel Seaman* left.²⁰

On January 15, 1863, Captain Keith of Company B received orders to leave Fort Grigsby and proceed to Orange, where his new assignment was to man the two twelve-pound cannon aboard the cottonclad *Uncle Ben*. As soon as Keith arrived in Orange, he soon encountered the man he would grow to loathe. Major O.M. Watkins had been sent from Houston by General Magruder to command the Sabine Pass expedition to break the blockade, but the major's greatest challenge was to remain intoxicated throughout the affair. Keith's gunners went aboard *Uncle Ben*, and Captain Odium's Company F, First Texas Heavy Artillery, were assigned to the single sixty-four-pound rifled cannon aboard *Josiah Bell*. Members of the Swamp Angels and Pyron's Regiment drew straws to see who would go aboard and serve as sharpshooters aboard the gunboats.²¹

At daylight on January 21, 1863, the plucky cottonclads steamed out of the Sabine Pass, prepared to engage the blockade ships *Morning Light* and *Velocity* in battle. The three Confederate guns were going up against twelve guns on the blockaders, nine thirty-two-pound guns on *Morning Light* and three twelve-pound guns on *Velocity*. The former, a large, three-masted, square-rigged ship, and *Velocity* hoisted all sails in an effort to escape, but the breeze was not sufficient to fill their sails. However the chase lasted two hours and twenty-seven miles at sea, and as the distance narrowed to two and one-half miles, four shells from *Josiah Bell* exploded on *Morning Light*, killing and wounding several and destroying one gun. Later, when Confederate musketry forced the gun crews from the decks, both blockaders surrendered.²²

Prize crews brought the captured ships to port, but the 900-ton *Morning Light*, because of its sixteen-foot draft, was anchored outside the bar by order of the inebriated major. Keith and Captain Peter Stockholm,

both experienced bar pilots, pleaded that they be allowed to kedge the prize ship across the bar with the help of the steamers, but Major Watkins, "using language unfit to print," refused them the opportunity to try. Keith begged to put his Company B artillerists aboard as they could defend the ship from attack, but again, Watkins refused, allowing only some of the Company A cavalymen to remain aboard. As a result, *Morning Light* had to be burned the following day when the Federal gunboats *Cayuga* and *New London* arrived on the scene. Besides the nine cannon aboard, *Morning Light* had 200 barrels of pork and other food, 200 tons of shells, munitions, and supplies aboard, as well as 400 tons of badly-needed pig iron as ballast in her hold. Keith concluded that "if Magruder were so foolish as to send such a thing as that (Watkins) to command, the whole thing could go!"²³

After the offshore battle, General Magruder gradually began the transfer of Colonel W.H. Griffin's Battalion from Galveston to Sabine Pass, and the movement of Colonel Spaight's cavalry and infantry (five companies) to Virginia Point opposite Galveston Island. On May 1, Colonel Spaight received countermanding orders to proceed to central Louisiana to reinforce General Richard Taylor's army, which at that moment was harassing a retreating army of Federals, about 15,000 men under General Nathaniel Banks. Colonel Spaight's troops became a part of the commands of three other Texas commanders, General Tom Green's brigade, Colonel R. Major's brigade, and Colonel J.W. Speight's brigade, whose Fifteenth Texas Regiment was a part of the brigade he temporarily commanded. Many historians of the Texas Confederates have confused this similarity of names. Although their names, Speight and Spaight, were pronounced the same (spate), Colonel J.W. Speight's Fifteenth Regiment was from McLennan County. Colonel Spaight's companies were engaged in a number of engagements and skirmishes, altogether more than twenty, during the next six months, the most important of them being the Battle of Fordoche Bayou, fought on September 29, and the Battle of Bayou Bourbeau, fought on November 3, 1863.²⁴

Only one set of muster rolls of Spaight's Battalion are known to survive. About 1965, Cooper K. Ragan, attorney and historian of Houston, copied the six muster rolls which are in the Spaight's Battalion jacket (Record Group 109, File 174, Confederate Records) in the National Archives. The musters show eighty-six men enrolled in Company A; 117 in Company B; 137 in Company C; 119 in Company D; 127 in Company E; and eighty-five in Company F; total for battalion, 681 men.²⁵ Of about fourteen men who died of disease in Company A and appear on Sergeant Connor's personal muster roll, only seven of them also appear on the battalion muster roll. Also, Connor listed about ten deserters who do not appear on the battalion jacket rolls, and none of the late enlistees after 1863, such as Valentine Wiess, are on it. Connor recorded that 180 men had served in Company A at one time or another during the war.²⁶ The

battalion muster rolls show a total of twenty-four deserters for three companies, most of them occurring in Louisiana in 1863, but the final tally was probably nearer to seventy-five.²⁷

O'Brien's and Connor's diaries tell a less interesting side of the Civil War, a saga perhaps short of gunsmoke, but long on personal endurance, hardships, the constantly wet or freezing weather, rampant illness, and death most often at the hands of nature. O'Brien's company suffered mostly from dysentery, and four of his men died. During much of October and December of 1863, O'Brien wrote of his troops slogging and even camping in water ankle-deep or more, with nothing to eat and temperatures hovering near the freezing mark.²⁸

Sergeant Connor also wrote much about the saga without gunsmoke. In August 1863, he wrote that there "was much sickness among us — nearly all down at once — only four men fit for duty." Later, he wrote that "while we were at Vermillion (La.) the first time, several of our company died of measles." In October 1863, he wrote that "we have had nothing to eat for two days."

Connor wrote endlessly about the rain and the cold. In January 1864, he noted in his diary: "Reached Liberty (Tx.) today, frozen out. Yesterday it was so cold we could not travel, horses, saddles, blankets, clothes all frozen stiff. One man frozen to death. Today the ice on the ponds held the weight of our horses without cracking, causing them to slide and fall, injuring them severely." Between December 10-29, 1863, so Connor noted, it only stopped raining twice, in order to freeze and start sleeting. Captain Gibbs' Company C reported six dead of illness and a total of thirty-seven sick during the Louisiana campaign, presumably of measles since most of them, like Connor's men, died at Vermillion.²⁹

Upon reaching central Louisiana in May 1863, Colonel Spaight's three infantry companies (C, D, and E) were attached to Colonel J.W. Speight's brigade, and the two cavalry companies (A and F) to Colonel Major's cavalry brigade. General Taylor's Confederates in Louisiana usually numbered around 8,000 men, of which about 2,300 were under General Tom Green, Union General Nathaniel Franklin's retreating army was usually numbered at about 15,000 men, with occasional estimates as high as 25,000. On the night of September 28, 1863, Green's and Speight's brigades crossed the Atchafalaya River, and on the 29th attacked the isolated Nineteenth Iowa and Twenty-Sixty Indiana regiment at Stirling Plantation on Fardoche Bayou. Green led a frontal assault, while Speight's brigade of infantry attacked from the rear. Colonel Ashley Spaight's battalion of three companies attacked through a sugar cane field, reaching an opening around the sugar mill, where most of Company E's bitterest fighting took place. Companies A and F were in reserve and saw no action since Major's cavalry was detailed to guard the pathway of retreat or escape route in case the attack went badly.³⁰

Both Union regiments, numbering about 460, surrendered intact after a lively battle and 150 Union killed and wounded in addition to prisoners. Confederate casualties in Speight's Brigade were twenty-nine killed and seventy-four wounded, of whom nine killed and ten wounded were from Spaight's Battalion, who according to one report lost the highest pro rata percentage of men, one-seventh. Privates J.P. Irvine (son of Major Irvine) and A.F. Inman were killed in Company C; Captain Spurlock and Privates D.B. Harvill, J. Moody, and W. McKinney of Tyler County were killed in Company C.; and from O'Brien's Company E, Privates Sam McKee, J.A. Willis, and J.A. McFaddin, all of Beaumont, were killed. One Nineteenth Iowa officer noted: "The Rebels got everything we had except our clothes."³¹

A month later, General Tom Green attacked the rearguard of the Union column, General S. Burbridge's brigade of 1,625 men, at Bayou Bourbeau, seven miles south of Opelousas, La. Again, it amounted to a Union rout, who sustained losses of 154 killed and wounded and 562 men captured, along with a wagon train of supplies. Confederate losses of 180 killed, wounded, and missing were born principally by the Rebel infantry, but Spaight's Battalion fared much better than others, apparently not making contact with the enemy force until their surrender was underway. However, Connor wrote in his diary that Company A helped chase the Union cavalry all the way back into the town of Vermillionville.³²

Spaight's Battalion returned to Texas because General Tom Green's brigade was ordered back to deal with a Union invasion at Brownsville in November 1863. Altogether, Company A had participated in twenty Louisiana battles and skirmishes, so Sergeant Connor noted, only two of which were battles and the other eighteen were skirmishes.³³

On the return to Texas, some of Spaight's troops were permitted to return to their homes for a visit, but they soon reassembled at Beaumont Post, with individual companies scattered from Sabine Pass to Niblett's Bluff, La. After the Battle of Sabine Pass in September 1863, Company B was reassigned from the cottonclad *Uncle Ben* to garrison duty at Fort Griffin to man the additional guns captured aboard the disabled gunboats *Sachem* and *Clifton*. As of December 1863, Company B still shared Fort Griffin with Lieutenant Dowling and the Davis Guards who were soon reassigned to Galveston. Company B remained at either Fort Griffin or Fort Manhassett until the war ended, although that unit had been reassigned by then as Company I, Bates' Thirteenth Regiment, in November 1864.³⁴

By April 1864, the headquarters and five companies of Spaight's Battalion were back at Niblett's Bluff, La., while General Franklin was making his last offensive stab and enduring his most embarrassing defeats at the Battles of Sabine Crossroads and Pleasant Hill, La., between April 8 and 12, 1864. At almost the same instant, there was a Federal incursion into the Calcasieu River, when the Federal gunboat *Wave* anchored there on

April 24 and was followed three days later by the arrival of the Union gunboat *Granite City*. When Colonel W.H. Griffin telegraphed Confederate headquarters in Houston, he was notified to "attack the small force at Calcasieu and disperse, defeat, and capture the expedition."³⁵ Colonel Spaight dispatched companies A, C, D and E to Colonel Griffin's command at Sabine Pass, after which Spaight rode with the remainder of the battalion, principally Captain Duncan's Company F of cavalry, to safeguard Confederate cotton, steamboats, and blockade-runners at Lake Charles.³⁶

On May 4, 1864, Colonel Griffin ferried seven companies of infantry, one battery of artillery, and thirty cavalymen, altogether perhaps 300 men, from Sabine Pass to Johnson's Bayou, Louisiana, and then began the 38-mile trek to the Calcasieu Pass, where the battle of the same name commenced at daylight on May 6. Surprise was complete, but the Confederates had to fight on the open prairie with no concealment of any kind. Encumbered by anchors, no steam pressure up, and the accurate Confederate musketry, the Union Bluejackets put up a spirited defense for ninety minutes before surrendered. Creuzbauer's Battery struck both vessels with a total of sixty-five exploding artillery shells, which left the gunboats complete wrecks. Of the fourteen Confederates killed in the battle, only one, Jackson Risinger of Company D, was from Spaight's Battalion.³⁷

The spoils of victory included sixteen guns, ten of which were twenty-four-pound Dahlgrens, 166 prisoners, 450 cattle and horses stolen by the Jayhawkers, and large quantities of stores and munitions. Colonel Griffin quickly removed all Confederates from Louisiana except Company A, the prisoners, and some guns and stores via the beach road to Sabine Pass. His decision to leave the cavalymen of Company A aboard the captured steamers instead of Creuzbauer's Battery could have proven as fatal as the drunken Major Watkins' choice to put cavalry aboard the *Morning Light*, for by May 10, three Union gunboats were anchored off Calcasieu Bar, debating whether to shoot their way inland and recapture the steamers.³⁸

The Calcasieu battle would be the last action for Spaight's Battalion, or Regiment as it was soon to be known, and was also the last battle for control of the Texas-Louisiana coastline. Captain O'Brien's Company E returned to Sabine Post and remained there, except for a short tenure at Niblett's Bluff, until after the war ended. On May 26, 1864, a seventh company, Captain Thomas Leonard's Company G of Newton County, was added to Spaight's Battalion muster rolls, but like the regiment, it too never saw any battle action.³⁹

After Company B was transferred to Bates' Regiment and sent to Fort Manhasset, at the west end of the Front Ridge at Sabine, in November 1864, O'Brien's company became the new Company B of the new Spaight's Twenty-First Texas Regiment by the consolidation with four

companies of Griffin's Battalion. As the senior officer, Ashley Spaight was promoted to colonel with Lieutenant Colonel Griffin remaining as regimental executive officer. And thus, the history of Spaight's Eleventh Battalion came to an end, for the new regiment of ten companies was never committed to battle.⁴⁰

In January 1865, nine companies of the regiment were transferred to Confederate headquarters in Houston, where for a time Colonel Spaight served as post commandant.⁴¹ About April 25, 1865, the regiment was transferred to Galveston, where it remained for one month, and Ragsdale's Battalion was shifted to Sabine Pass to replace Spaight's command.⁴² About May 22, the 21st Regiment was transferred back to Beaumont Post, where its companies were discharged on May 24 and 25.⁴³

Regarding general behavior and conduct, no greater tribute could be bestowed on soldiers than that rendered by a Houston newspaper on the occasion of the transfer of Spaight's Regiment to Galveston, as follows:

"...It is but just that we should say on departure of Colonel A.W. Spaight that it (the Twenty-first Regiment) is the best disciplined, quietest, and best disposed body of men we have ever seen among us. This regiment has been on post duty here for several months, and during that time, we have not heard of a single deprecation committed by any of its men; we have seen no rowdyism, no drunkenness ... Such a regiment is an honor to its commander and a credit to the service...."⁴⁴

By May 24, both of Sabine's forts had been abandoned, making them, except for Galveston, the last in the old Confederacy to lower their Rebel emblems as the soldiers marched away to Beaumont for their military discharges and a return to civilian life. One historian wrote in his naval history that "... only the forts at Sabine Pass were still defiantly held." Keith's men hastily buried the fourteen cannon, shells, and gunpowder at Fort Manhasset, and on August 29-31, 1970, the writer was privileged to help dig up 200 cannon balls there. On May 25, the first Union naval contingent came ashore after General Lee's surrender, only to find Fort Griffin abandoned and the guns spiked.⁴⁵ Thus, Jefferson County's three Confederate company commanders, Captains Keith, O'Brien, and O.M. Marsh, ended the four-year struggle in the same county where they had mustered their troops.

On May 25, 1865, as First Sergeant H.N. Connor received his discharge from the Confederate States Army, he made his last entry in his diary. He spoke for every one of the Swamp Angels who was returning home, disillusioned and angry, after four long years of slogging mud, freezing to death, going hungry, and burying comrades who had either died in action or from disease. Even if Connor failed to pinpoint the exact causes for the Confederacy's defeat, his words are eternal for the bitterness they express, as follows:

"... And with this ends our hopes and efforts to establish a separate,

independent Republic. And with this surrender, we surrender our States' Rights' Doctrine, not from moral conviction, but from bayonet conviction, which outrules all others. Thousands have sealed the struggle with their lives. Wealth has been expended, but "Political Corruption" (?) has lost to us our dearest rights and hopes for a nation of Southern people."⁴⁶

The story of Spaight's Battalion chronicles four of the hardest years of the lives of perhaps 800 men, all from the contiguous counties of deepest Southeast Texas. In defeat, however bitter, they could still hold their heads up for the most part, proud of their loyalty and service, and to quote an old adage — "They also serve who only stand and wait" — even if in ankle-deep water or ice. Perhaps they succeeded more so in their future civilian pursuits rather than their military, for many of them became the most prominent sawmillers, merchants, and entrepreneurs that Southeast Texas has even seen.

NOTES

¹Muster Roll, "Sabine Pass Guard," April 20, 1861, Texas State Archives, K.D. Keith, "The Memoirs of Capt K.D. Keith," *Texas Gulf Historical and Biographical Record*, X (Nov., 1974), p. 55, hereinafter cited as "Keith." C.R. Walker, M.D., "Spaight's Battalion, C.S.A." *Texas Gulf Historical and Biographical Record*, VIII (Nov., 1972), p. 22, hereinafter cited as "Walker;" C.K. Ragan (ed.), *The Diary of Captain George W. O'Brien* (Houston, N.D.), p. 5, hereinafter cited as "O'Brien."

²Vol. C, p. 72, Commissioners Court Minutes, Jefferson County Archives.

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⁷Keith, "Memoirs," pp. 55-56; Connor, "Diary," p. 1.

⁸O'Brien, "Diary," p. 6; Walker, "Spaight's Battalion," p. 23; "History of Spaight's Texas Regiment," A.W. Spaight Papers.

⁹*Houston Tri-Weekly Telegraph*, April 8, 1862.

¹⁰O'Brien, "Diary," p. 6; Walker, "Spaight's Battalion," p. 23; "History of Spaight's Texas Regiment," A.W. Spaight Papers.

¹¹*War of the Rebellion—Official Records—Armies* (Washington, D.C.: 1880-1901), Series I, Vol. XV, pp. 143-147; Series I, Vol. XXVI, Part 2, pp. 73, 208, 376, 391; Keith, "Memories," pp. 59-63; O'Brien, "Diary," pp. 7-16; Block, *History of Jefferson County*, p. 100.

¹²Keith, "Military Operations," pp. 66-67; Keith, "Memoirs," pp. 57-58; Connor, "Diary," p. 2.

¹⁴Keith, "Memoirs," p. 59; Connor, "Diary," List of Casualties of Co. A; Galveston *Tri-Weekly News*, Sept. 12, 1862.

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¹⁷Keith, "Memoirs," p. 20; Connor, "Diary," p. 2; Galveston *Weekly News*, Oct. 1, 1862; Houston *Tri-Weekly Telegraph*, Oct. 6, 1862.

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²⁸See Footnote 25.

²⁹O'Brien, "Diary," pp. 23-29, 50, 58-59.

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³⁵*Official Records-Armies*, Series I, Vol. XXVI, Part 2, p. 563, and Vol. XLVIII, Part 1, p. 1356; O'Brien, "Diary," p. 6.

³⁶*Official Records-Armies*, Series I, Vol., XXXIV, Part 2, pp. 806-808.

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⁴⁰*IBID.*, p. 7, taken from the 21st Regimental Jacket, Record Group No. 94, File 174, Confederate Records in the National Archives.

⁴¹*Official Records-Armies*, Series I, Vol. SLVIII, Part 1, pp. 1356-1357.

⁴²*IBID.*, Part 1, p. 1356 and Part 2, pp. 1287, 1297.

⁴³Connor, "Diary," p. 34.

⁴⁴*Houston Tri-Weekly Telegraph*, May 3, 1865.

⁴⁵Scharf, *History of the Confederate States Navy*, p. 529.

⁴⁶Connor, "Diary," p. 34.