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Interviewee: Cotham, Edward

Interview Date: April 21, 2014

University of Houston
Oral History of Houston Project
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Interviewee: Edward T. Cotham

Interview Date: April 21, 2014

Place: Houston, Texas

Interviewer: Amado "Izzy" Yznaga

Transcriber: Michelle Kokes

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Abstract:

Civil War historian Edward Cotham discusses the personal and military history of Confederate hero, Dick Dowling. A Houston businessman and entrepreneur, Dowling owned several saloons in Houston, most notably the Bank of Bacchus, speculated in oil and gas leases in Harris and Jefferson Counties before the discovery of oil at Spindletop, and was recognized for his charitable efforts in the community. He is most well-known, however, for leading a group of Irish soldiers from Houston to victory at the Battle of Sabine Pass.

Cotham explains the particulars of the battle, beginning with how the men practiced their artillery marksmanship, and moving on to the layout of battle area, Dowling's strategy to let the men vote whether or not to engage the Union forces that out-numbered them a hundred to one, and the Confederates' overwhelming victory. Cotham believes that the victory changed the way local people, at least thought about the Irish who previously had been considered inferior but had clearly saved Houston from certain Union invasion.

Dowling returned to Houston a decorated war hero and reopened his bar but died just two years later at the age of thirty. He contracted yellow fever while staying in town to care for others who had contracted the disease. Confederate president Jefferson Davis spoke often of Dowling's effort as the greatest military victory in history.

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AY: Alright sir as I said this interview is about Dick Dowling. Just as a Civil War historian I wanted to get your insight and your thoughts on him. So I guess we will go ahead and start out with the interview questions if that's alright with you.

EC: That's fine.

AY: So in regard to Dick Dowling. Actually yourself sir can you tell me about your background please and how you became interested in Civil War history.

EC: Sure. I've been interested in Civil War history for many, many years. I remember my family taking me to Vicksburg when I was a very, very little child and being fascinated by all the monuments and the soldiers' things, and I've always been interested in it. You know my background just educationally, I was an economist. I went to law school and kind of got into the petroleum business eventually. That's one of the things that kind of interest me about Dick Dowling because he was very interested in the petroleum business in the very, very early part of the business in Texas.

AY: Wonderful. I've been to Vicksburg as well.

EC: Really?

AY: Gettysburg, Vicksburg, Manassas.

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EC: I've been to almost all of them. It's funny. I had the good fortune to be able to take on a tour a guy several years ago that had been to virtually every Civil War battlefield in America except for Sabine Pass.

AY: Oh really

EC: He'd never been to Sabine Pass. That was the last one. So kind of interesting. AY:
That's a lot of commitment there.

EC: Well it's kind of not on the way to anything else historically.

AY: That's true, very true. In regard to Dick Dowling, can you tell me what sort of research you've done? I know you've written several books on Civil War history. Can you tell me something like in regard to research you've done on Dick Dowling and his life prior to the Civil War as well as during the war years and after?

EC: Right. There has not been a whole lot written about Dick Dowling until fairly recently. A lady who was a member of Dowling's family, and there are no direct decedents from Dick Dowling. His children unfortunately didn't live to have children, but he had some collateral descendants with some of his siblings. And they are really, really nice folks, and one of the ladies that was part of that group started writing a biography of Dick Dowling many, many, many years ago. She unfortunately passed away early, but someone had been helping her over in Ireland, a guy named Tim Collins who I got to know quite well. Tim used Ann Ivins's notes and wrote what I considered to be the definitive biography of Dick Dowling and that was released basically last year in conjunction with the 150th anniversary of the Battle of Sabine Pass. But Tim and I had corresponded a lot, and in fact I wrote the forward for his book. The way I got interested in Dowling was that, you know, I've always been interested in the Civil War. We had a weekend place in Galveston so I started researching that just out of curiosity and found out that

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no book had ever been written about Civil War Galveston, so I wrote a book on that. And as part of that book I knew that the Irish group from Houston had been part of that, and I'm a Houstonian and so I was interested in that. So that got me to looking at the Battle of Sabine Pass in which Dowling was such a big feature. Then in conjunction, we were researching the naval site of that battle and Galveston, I got interested in the Union forces off Texas and then got into the nautical archeology part of this whole part of the coast. So one thing kind of leads into another, but Dowling is such a fascinating character in early Houston history.

AY: Sure his namesake is written all through.

EC: Right. We have three streets named for Dick Dowling, oddly enough. There is Dowling Street, of course, Tuam Avenue from the little town that Dowling was from was named Tuam Avenue, and then Sabine Street, which was right outside of downtown so... most people don't know at least the third one.

AY: Yeah I was very well aware of the first two. The first two, I live actually where Richmond turns into Wheeler so it's not too far from Dowling there. In regard to, I've been looking for your book (I put in a request into the library to get a copy of it) on Thermopylae but I haven't received it, so I apologize. I haven't read it yet; I want to. Do you discuss any of Dowling's transitions from his birth time in Ireland to Houston? Could you go into that please?

EC: Dowling is a fascinating character for many reasons but one of the things that is so interesting about him is he, you know, he is born near Tuam Ireland in 1837 and, we don't know exactly when he came over to the United States but sometime after the great potato famine in 1847. Dowling comes over with some members of his family, and they first come to New Orleans. And New Orleans of course is just backed up with Irishman, it's a difficult situation. So Dowling eventually comes with at least one of his sisters over through the port of Galveston,

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which is kind of the entry point for immigrants at that time, and comes here to Houston. When he gets to Houston, he associates with the Irish community here and he does one real smart thing, which is that he falls in love with a young lady named Anne Odium (O-d-l-u-m) and he marries her. That happens not too long before the Civil War, and Anne Odium was the daughter of an early Irish pioneer here in Texas, who is a Texas Revolution veteran, and that connection manages to get Dowling enough resources to go into the business he wants to, which is to start a saloon business. In the saloon business he goes through three or four different iterations of it that are unsuccessful, and then he finally does the smartest thing he ever does business-wise and he sets up a saloon called the Bank of Bacchus directly across the street from the courthouse and that becomes the overnight sensation. Dowling is a master of public relations and comes up with his own drink called the “kiss me quick and go,” and it is written up in all the newspapers, and he gives all the newspapermen free drinks.

AY: The kiss me quick and go?

EC: The kiss me quick and go. And it is a big sensation. It's in the newspapers and becomes popular, and they write it all up. So Dowling on the eve of the Civil War is becoming very prominent in Houston business to the point to where he has like three bars and billiard halls and even starting a liquor importing business in Galveston to service his little empire.

AY: Do you know, I've heard some possible names of some of the other saloons.

EC: Well, The Shades is one.

AY: The Shades.

EC: Is one of the famous ones because there was a tree in front of it. But it was badly located.

AY: Was it?

EC: Yeah, he didn't...

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AY: Do we know the current location of the Bank of Bacchus?

EC: The old Bank of Bacchus, it's not too far from where the Old Market Square is downtown today.

AY: Okay. I've read that Dowling was also involved in a lot of other things here in Houston. Houston's premier businessman. In regard to a hook and ladder company something about a gas lighting within the city.

EC: That's right.

AY: What do you know about any of that?

EC: Dowling was a very, very socially forward guy. He was always wanting to give back to the community. If you read the newspapers of the day, you can just see that every time there was a public subscription to help the victims of illness of some fire or something, Dowling's name is always there and he is always a contributor to a bunch of different charitable causes, very charitable minded. So as you say he was one of the founding members of Hook and Ladder Company Number One, which is a predecessor, not the only one but one of the predecessors, of the Houston Fire Department. He also was the first man in Houston to have gas lighting in his business and his home, and he was just a pioneer in so many different ways. In 1866 he and some of his partners start buying oil and gas leases in Texas. They are some of the first oil and gas leases ever because he is interested in this gas lighting for his home and business, and he can just see the future for that. What is amazing about that is that he buys leases here in Harris County and over in Jefferson County, near Beaumont, in that area. And I've spotted some of those leases on a map and he was very close to having a lease over the property that would in the 1900 become Spindletop.

AY: Really?

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EC: He might, literally, if he had lived he might have been the wealthiest guy in Texas.

AY: Wow.

EC: But yellow fever gripped Houston in 1867, and Dowling did what he always did, which was he personally went out and helped nursed the sick, caught the disease, and died at the age of only thirty years old.

AY: Wow. I didn't realize he acquired it by contact.

EC: Well, you can't really acquire it directly from contacted victims. It has to be by mosquito-borne illness.

AY: Okay.

EC: But he did, he stayed here and did catch the disease. Looked like he was going to recover and the newspaper said, "Dowling looks like he is going to recover." Then he took a turn for the worse and passed away at only thirty. That's one of the things that's so interesting is when you tell a story of Dowling coming over in the middle of this horrible thing of having to come into forced immigration, and to build this incredibly successful business empire, and to be such a visionary, to be, you know, this military thing that has never been equaled elsewhere, and to do all he did and only be thirty years old is amazing. And that's one of the reasons that when the people of Houston got around to building the first public statute in the 1905, Dick Dowling was the first guy to get a statute.

AY: Right that's the one over off of MacGregor.

EC: Yeah, by Hermann Park. It's moved three times.

AY: Right the .(10.33)

EC: Yeah, yeah.

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AY: I find it personally fascinating about his business exploits. His leases, his oil leases did they lead to any particular company that is still in existence today?

EC: No, I don't think...none of those, they were for a period of time but I don't think they were ever actually drilled or anything like that. But he, I mean, he was clearly fascinated with that business and for some reason they had picked out an area that would ultimately be really, really big in oil and gas. I think the reason he picked Jefferson County was, you know, of course that's where Sabine Pass is, that's where his fort was. And he'd kind of seen some of these areas that looked like they were sort of, they are not really high ground but they are really hill-ish, and he had read enough about it to think that maybe those would be good places to have leases.

AY: That's my next question did he have some sort of formal education in geology?

EC: No, he had no formal education at all that we know of.

AY: Okay.

EC: But he was, he was not an ignorant man. He was not very well educated in our conventional sense. He was also very shy in some ways and very self-assuming. I mean his report on the Battle of Sabine Pass is less than a page long. You know nobody that had that kind of experience in the Civil War would have written such a short thing, and of course he gave all the credit to a bunch of other people and he was really a very shy and unassuming guy.

AY: Interesting. You mentioned his home here in Houston. Is there any record of where he lived in town?

EC: There are records of it but I haven't looked it up. I don't think you could actually find the location of it. There is nothing remaining really from that period hardly at all.

AY: Oh yeah, I'm sure. I was wondering with regards to some sort of geographical location.

So he was a businessman. He lived the life he married Ms. Odlum.

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EC: Odlum.

AY: April 12, 1861, the war started. What was his interest in it? Why did he join? How did he get caught up in the Confederacy?

EC: Well it's kind of an interesting story and again he is a very prominent guy in the saloon business in the early 1860s. They didn't have country clubs in those days so what guys did was they joined sort of clubs that were military organizations. So Dowling joined a group that would ultimately be called the Davis Guard, and they were named after Jefferson Davis but of course at that time he was not a Civil War...that's before the war, he was a secretary of war and a Mexican War veteran. So that's why they named it after him. But you know the guys that were in this club the main people in it were a bunch of Irishmen, many of whom were dockworkers. Not all of whom were, but many of them were dockworkers and they were rank and file and they knew Dowling from the saloon. So he was the lieutenant and the treasurer of the group. They trusted him with the money. When the Civil War broke out and this must have been a hilarious group because they were an artillery company. So they would in the upper floors of some of Dowling's drinking establishments, they would practice loading and even firing small cannon. So those must have been some great club meetings.

AY: Within the building?

EC: Within the building, yeah. And this kind of boisterous behavior would carry forward in the war. But when the war broke out they joined *en masse* as a group and they would become Company F for the First Texas Heavy Artillery. And when they joined it was even before Fort Sumter. I mean they were really part of the Texas forces well before the war breaks out formally, and they would go down to the Rio Grande as a group to try occupy Brownsville as part of that effort and they do that. They get to arguing with their superiors and they almost

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disbanded before they even start because they can't get along with their other military forces down there. But they eventually come back, and they spend most of the war, the first couple of years of the war, just practicing loading and firing these artillery pieces down in the Galveston area and manning some of the forts down there.

AY: The Battle of Galveston Bay, was Dick Dowling and his men associated with that?

EC: They were. They were one of the groups that was over on the waterfront area not too far from 20th and the Strand area where the battle starts. They do a good job as part of the artillery force that is shooting out at the shore, but when they come back to town the next day they read the accounts in the Houston newspaper about the battle and, you know. This is a time when there was a lot of prejudice against Irishman in this state. The newspaper account is something like, "The Irish boys did better than anybody had a right to expect of them." It was a real backhanded kind of a slap comment, and it made them mad. So they came back to Houston and they were celebrating their participation in the battle, and one thing lead to another. Guns were produced, alcohol was produced, and by the end of the evening, they had suffered half as many casualties celebrating the Battle of Galveston as they suffered during the battle itself.

AY: Really?

EC: Yeah, and so that's about the time that the people here in Texas the Confederate military authorities say, "You know these guys are good at firing cannon but they need to be off on their own somewhere." That's kind of when the decision originates that they are going to put them off in some place that's not really even considered all that important, which is Sabine Pass.

AY: Right, okay, so it was almost a punishment of sorts.

EC: Yeah, well, they are good. They are very good and they actually participated in a couple of... even a thing to capture the *Morning Light* one of their maritime exploits. But they realize

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that... The Texas people realize that they aren't going to fit in as part of one of these armies.

They have to kind of be off on their own doing their own thing.

AY: The, I want to get to Sabine Pass here in just a minute, but outside of the Galveston Bay battle were there any other battles or skirmishes that Dick Dowling was a part of? You mentioned Brownsville.

EC: Yeah Brownsville wasn't really a skirmish. They go down there and they kind of occupy it and force the surrender of that place and get the guns. The only other battle that they are really in, as I say, is when they are shipped over to the Sabine Pass area they go on two cotton-clad gunboats on January 21st of 1863. They go out into the Gulf and chase a couple of Union blockaders and actually capture them, the *Morning Light* and the *Velocity*. Dowling himself is tending the main gun onboard of the ship that forces the surrender.

AY: Really.

EC: Really, and what's interesting about that is we have a record in his own handwriting of all the people who were involved in this because he wants to make sure they get credit, and he thinks there might be some money coming their way from these two boats. He wants to make sure that everybody gets their fair share.

AY: So he was quite the fair commander.

EC: He really was. Again everybody trusted him. Everybody liked him. In fact it's funny if you look at the accounts we have by people who knew him. Everybody says that Dowling, two things they say about him, one is what a warmhearted individual he was and the second thing was what a great sense of humor he had. He was constantly playing practical jokes.

AY: Really?

EC: Which probably got him in trouble, but he was constantly playing practical jokes.

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AY: The Battle of Sabine Pass. I drove out to Sabine Pass just about two months ago and you've got to be going out there for a reason.

EC: You do, absolutely.

AY: And I know you are highly associated with the battleground area.

EC: Right.

AY: What can you tell me about the Battle of Sabine Pass? I know it was a very prestigious battle for Dick Dowling to be won. Can you go over the key points of the battle for me?

EC: Sure. The... what was happening at Sabine Pass was the Union decided to make a major invasion of Texas and they were going to get a force of about 20,000 men together to go do that. And they wanted to go into Texas for a couple of reasons, the main of which was they were afraid that Mexico was going, the French forces of Mexico were going to come across to try to take Texas and use the war as an excuse. So General Nathaniel Banks in New Orleans decided to go ahead and launch this invasion but he looked at the map and decided he didn't want to attack Galveston again because that had been a mistake. They'd lost the battle there and they'd had problems down in Corpus Christi, and he figured the one area that was probably safe was coming in through Sabine Pass. So the idea was they were going to go in Sabine Pass and that was just going to be the place they unloaded. Nobody thought there was going to be a battle there of any kind. They were just going to get off the boat there, march up to the railroad, which was up near Beaumont and Liberty, and then march across to Houston, take Houston, and then take Galveston from the rear. It's a real clever kind of maneuver to do that. What they didn't realize, I guess, was that the fort had been built, Fort Griffin had been built at Sabine Pass. It was very dramatically expanded. It had some good ground. It was well designed and Dowling's men had

six cannon in that fort. So when the Union Navy shows up with the first group of this armed

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force. You know it was about 6,000 men in this first wave, and they decided well they are going to have the navy attack these forts and subdue them and then the army is going to get off the boat and start this major invasion. But what they didn't realize was that the fort that Dowling had was beautifully designed so that all the guns pointed directly down the channels at Sabine Pass, the entrance to Sabine Pass. So any warship coming up the waters of the pass had to come right in front of that fort. And Dowling's guns, they had practiced firing those guns again and again and again, and they knew exactly where they would fire. These guys a lot of them were dockworkers. They could move those guns around, probably they were the best artillerymen the Civil War produced anywhere. They waited and waited until the ships came up into firing range into where they marked it specifically with stakes, and Dowling and his men got up and started firing at these ships. Even though the Union gun boats, you know, the force outnumbered them over a hundred to one, they were outgunned probably seven or eight to one, the guns were not in the forward part of the boat; and Dowling's guns were all perfectly sighted to aim at these boats. The armor on the steamboats the Union had was not thick, it was very thin. So Dowling, when he raised up and gave the order to fire, it didn't take long for him to put shot right through the side of these steamboats into their steam machinery and disabled the ships. The battle only lasted about forty-five minutes, and at the end of it Dowling and his roughly forty-one men had disabled the two Union gunboats and forced the rest of the Union invasion force to flee out the entrance to Sabine Pass, never to really make a serious attack again.

AY: The stakes that they drove into the bed of the river, as a military man myself, there is a technique known as pre-plotted artillery, essentially that we use now. Had that been used before that time?

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EC: Yeah, that had been used; that was not unusual. There were two engineers here in Texas that one of them was a Poland... one of them was Polish, one of them was Swiss, who really knew the complete state of warfare and Napoleonic tactics and all that. So they were very familiar with how to do that and when they brought the guns into Sabine Pass, one of the engineers had stood there and actually drawn a white line down the gun barrel to help with the aiming of it, and they practiced it. He would go out and he would put the stakes up there, and he knew the range too. He knew that these guns would be most effective if they were fired relatively close. So they waited until they were within you know 500 yards or so to really make their first serious firing.

AY: Quite effectively.

EC: Very effectively.

AY: In regard to Fort Griffin. Clearly, like I've said I've been there just recently, and I know they've dredged the riverbed and the sides, but I've heard and I've read some parts about it being constructed with slave labor.

EC: It was.

AY: What can you tell me about that in regard to slave ownership? Did Dick Dowling participate? Did he own slaves?

EC: We don't know that Dick Dowling himself owned any slaves. We've never found that he did own any slaves, and of course his men were relatively, you know, not relatively well off, so it is doubtful that any of them had any slaves at the time. The engineers that designed Fort Griffin had to obtain a bunch of slaves to build the fort. They had tried using the soldiers to build the fort but had not been very successful. So like you say, they had to go and get some slave labor and impressed it to build the fort. The problem with that was that there weren't very many

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slaves in the Beaumont-Sabine Pass area. That area was not a place where cotton was grown.

The main industry there was lumber and wood and that was not a slave-intensive area. So they had to go back, and we've actually traced some of the account records, the receipts and stuff, expense accounts, if you will. They went over to some of the Brazos and those areas, the plantations there and got together probably around 300 slaves to build the defenses of Galveston. They built those in the summer of 1863, early 1863 into the summer, and it was just living hell out there according to the engineers that supervised it. It must have been terrible for the men that worked there.

AY: Yeah. After the war, I know that Fort Griffin was bombarded quite a bit right up to the battle. What happened at Fort Griffin? How long was it there, the breast works?

EC: We don't know how long it survived. It would not have survived very long. And the reason I say that is it is made, it is earth and shell over a, probably a timber-type base, and some of the stuff inside of some of the bomb proofs and everything where they would have kept the ordinance was railroad iron enforced. So none of that would have survived very long. In the case of the Galveston ones we have records of those fortifications and you can still see them as late as about 1885. But what happens with the Texas coast is periodically these storms come in, and by 1900, of course, Galveston you can't see any trace of it; even, you know, fifty years ago, you can't see any trace of it. And we've had, I think, three separate archeological investigations of the Sabine Pass battleground and have never been able to definitively trace anything to the original fortifications. Most of which, by the way, are out in the water today, very little of it is even on land today.

AY: In regard to the location there, the lighthouse across the river, that lighthouse was a surviving, was there at the time of the battle wasn't it?

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EC: Yeah in fact...

AY: It was used as a spotting...

EC: It was, by both sides. In fact, that was a key point for the battle. The Confederates had used the lighthouse, which had been built well before the Civil War, as a spotting station to monitor the activities of the Union blockading fleet and the shipping going from Louisiana to the Texas coast and back. So they kept careful records there. And what happened was the Union saw these guys going up into there and decided to spring a trap for them, and they did that and captured some of the Confederates that were going to go up into the lighthouse. The Confederates were so mad about that, they caught a Union party doing the same thing and attacked them as well. So we had a series of skirmishes over the lighthouse. But the bottom line on that was that between the skirmishes neither side was able to make really effective use of the lighthouse in 1863 so when the Union came to attack at Sabine Pass they didn't have good intelligence on the new fort that Dowling and his men were in. They didn't know how many guns, how big of guns, how effective they were. They just didn't have good intelligence. And I think that's one of the reasons the battle turned out the way it did.

AY: Yeah. So clearly the Confederate forces won, Dick Dowling saved the day, if you will. Were there any other key players at the battle besides Dick Dowling? I mean he was the lieutenant over the unit. Were there other folks that were outstanding players within the battle?

EC: There were only three officers. You know the numbers in the accounts were different. You don't know for sure how many. Dowling himself, his official report says fewer than fifty. His surgeon, a guy who was named Bailey who was a great officer, said there were thirty-eight men and three officers. He and an engineer and Dowling. Those were the only three engineers, and they fought right alongside the men with the doctor helping to load the weapons. So they

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were all a very material part of the thing. The interesting part to me is before the battle...I mean Dowling and his men watched this huge armada assemble off the entrance of Sabine Pass. There were twenty-five, twenty-six ships there off the entrance to the pass on the evening of September the 7th. Dowling's orders were that if he was faced with an overwhelming force, he was to spike or disable his guns and then retreat. You know to anybody that would have looked like an overwhelming force I think. But Dowling didn't want to quit, and so he actually put it up to a vote of his men and he said, "Are we going to stay or are we going to leave?" And the men voted unanimously to stay, and Dowling recorded that in his after-action report and said that they actually adopted as their motto, "Victory or death," which was the last words from William Barrett Travis at the Alamo. So these guys were clearly thinking, you know they were about to be overwhelmed but they were going to go down swinging. No other officer would have done that, would have put that up to a vote. I meant that's an amazing tactic. But you know, again, Dowling knew these guys from well before the war. He knew all of them. He knew them at their best and certainly their worst. And he knew they'd fight better if they thought it was their own idea, and they did.

AY: It's definitely a different way of leading.

EC: Yeah, very different.

AY: As an officer.

EC: They probably set a record, we think, for firing these pieces fast, loading and firing. By the end there, they weren't even sponging them out, doing anything to clear it out. And one of the records we have says that the pieces were so hot that they couldn't be touched for several days because they were fired so many times in such a short period of time.

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AY: Wow. Did they have any...I mean when you have such a hot weapon you'd have some sort of misfire, the powder igniting would misfire...

EC: Yeah, one thing about it, these were old guns. In fact that was the big guns that made the difference had been dug up out of the earth and people had thought at one time they couldn't be salvaged. It was really amazing. When the engineer heard they were firing those guns, he was really worried that they would kill more of their own men than the enemy.

AY: Sure. Can you talk to me about after the battle? Dick Dowling rose to hero status. Can you talk about that please?

EC: Yeah, he does. It gets written up in the papers. When the accounts of the battle get back to Richmond, nobody can believe that this happened and they think that it's a joke or that it's an exaggeration and it becomes clear that, no, this in fact what happened. So the people in Houston realize immediately that this little group of Irishman have saved them because that expedition was headed for Houston, no doubt about it. So they took up a collection and put together some money and bought some silver Mexican coins that were hammered into medals to give to everybody that had been in the fort that day. The Confederate Congress authorized special thanks to them, and so to some it's been argued that these are the equivalent to the Confederate version of the Medal of Honor.

AY: Oh really?

EC: Yeah. The only thing that the Confederacy ever recognized for bravery during the war were these men and these medals. Very interesting.

AY: Wow.

EC: Dowling himself would never again be in another battle. He...the Texas people kind of pick him up as sort of a folk hero and parade him around the state. They'll make him a major by

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the end of the war, and he becomes kind of like a walking recruiting poster, going around there.

And his men, they will stay along the Texas coast but they will never really be involved in a major battle again either.

AY: Does Dowling travel around the south to recruit or just?

EC: Just Texas. See because by this time, by September of '63, Vicksburg has been lost and the Union controls the Mississippi River so there's nothing, you can't hardly get across to the other side.

AY: Yeah good point. After the war he comes back to Houston.

EC: He comes back to Houston, sets up his bar again and puts ads in the newspaper that the Bank of Bacchus is reopened and available for deposits. In fact it's funny for the first couple of weeks he says, "The Bank of Bacchus is happy to welcome our former friends and customers." And then there are so many Union army officers in town that Dowling changes it and says, "We now welcome our former friends and our former enemies to come in and make deposits." And it's funny because again Dowling is a folk hero not only to the Confederates but even the Union people have heard about this exploit, which Jefferson Davis called the most amazing victory in all of military history. So they come into see the local celebrity. And we have one account of one guy coming in there and going to play a practical joke on Dowling and tries to pay for his drinks with Confederate money, and Dowling without blinking an eye, takes the Confederate money and gives the guy his change in gold. The guy is so embarrassed about having done that he tries to undo the deal and get back the money and give Dowling the right currency, and Dowling will not hear of it. He will not undo the transaction and kind of gets the guy back, and everybody laughs at his response to him.

AY: Wow. How long did he operate the Bank of Bacchus before his death?

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EC: Not too long. Again in 1865 he reopens it, and then he dies in '67, so it doesn't really survive very long. But this is the period... '65 to '67 is the period when he's really doing the oil and gas leasing, building his business. He invites down a bunch of people who are lecturing on scientific things to Houston. He is doing all sorts of charitable things as well as a number of Irish causes, which he has always been passionately built into.

AY: Sure. His lasting impression on Houston. You mentioned earlier that there are three streets here in town. Is it Tuam?

EC: Tuam [pronounced like two words, "Two am"]. They call it Tuam [pronounced as one word, "Two-um"] over in Ireland.

AY: And then Dowling and then Sabine Street. His lasting impression on Houston there is a statue.

EC: There is a statue.

AY: What else?

EC: Well there are actually seven different monuments to Dowling and his men. All across the place. There are of course two here. There is one over where he is buried in Saint Vincent's, kind of across from the original Ninfa's. There's a monument at the Sabine Pass battlefield, which I'm sure you saw. There's a window in Richmond, Virginia, and there is actually a monument to him in Tuam, Ireland, which is funny because, I think, this is the most heavily monumented small group of men in the entire Civil War. So that's kind of a funny thing. But I would say his enduring legacy is this, to me. He, when Dowling and his men started the war, there was a tremendous prejudice in this area against Irishman. Like I said early reports of battles and everything made fun of the Irish and just kind of treated them as though they were somebody you had to deal with but you didn't really want to. You didn't want those guys to

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have any major point of responsibility. After the Battle of Sabine Pass. All that stopped. You can read in the tone of the newspapers there's a lot of statements in there about how, "You know the Irish have always been great warriors," and, "the Irishmen had our backs on this," and "these guys had every reason to bolt and run and they stood there..." I think the people of Texas recognized that they had done something really special and important there. And I think the tone in Irish-American relations in this state at least maybe changed as part of that whole process.

AY: Really.

EC: I think you can see that starting to evolve after that point. That's why, you know, we have a very large Irish community here in Texas, a very large Irish community in Houston, and they are very active in social things to this day.

AY: You know and kind of touching on that, as Civil War is pretty much a hobby of mine, I've been to Gettysburg and I saw the monuments to the Irish brigade Colonel Patrick Kelly I've read is also from the same place.

EC: Very similar.

AY: From Tuam, Galway County, has there been any kind of history check to see if there is any sort of relation between the two of them?

EC: I don't know of anything like that. I've never seen any biographical connection with that.

AY: Okay.

EC: Dowling himself was actually from a little town a little area called Knock, K-n-o-c-k, near Tuam but it was, you know, a family kind of farm area.

AY: Wonderful is there anything else that I may of missed, something that you think might be of interest?

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EC: I don't think so, Dowling is just a fascinating individual on so many, so many levels, and he doesn't fit the standard views of Civil War officers, his men don't fit the standard views of Civil War soldiers. The battle, the battles he is involved in, the Battle of Galveston, the Battle of Sabine Pass, some of the most unique of the whole war. They don't fit very well into any kind of standard classification. It's a state park. It's not a national park. Now if Dowling had gone down in flames and the federal invasion had started there, it might be a national park today. But it's always been kind of a little area out there that has not been sufficiently well understood but like you say Dowling's kind of built into the fabric of this part of Texas and his story should be better known.

AY: You think that's part of the "to the victor goes the spoils"?

EC: That's right. They get to write the history.

AY: Because....state parks in Alabama.

EC: Dowling, again, he was not a very highly literate guy. He didn't last long enough after the war to write a biography and probably would not have anyway. And the entire sum total of what we know from Dowling about the battle is in this official record in an order, I mean an after-action report, he wrote that is less than a page really.

AY: When I first came in you mentioned in the thirties and forties, everybody knew of Dowling in Houston.

EC: Yeah there was actually a text book to tell the people the stories of Texas, to tell school kids about the Alamo and San Jacinto and one of the chapters was on, was called "Brave Dick Dowling," and it talked about Sabine Pass.

AY: It's kind of lost these days.

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EC: Yeah. Jefferson Davis came down after the war to Houston, where the state fair was being held, and he wanted to see Dowling but found out that Dowling had died. But several of Dowling's men came to see Davis. Jefferson Davis had been sent one of these silver medals because he was the namesake of the organization, but he'd had it stolen from him when he was captured. Davis had been trying to find that medal for years after the war. But the Dowling's men when they went to see him down here presented him with a replica of another medal and Davis cherished it. And when he would give speeches about who were the Confederate heroes of the war, he'd always mention Jackson, he'd mention Lee, he'd mention all the people that were famous; but he'd always mentioned Dick Dowling and the men in that fort that day because he said it was the most amazing victory in all of military history, period. And he compared it to the Thermopylae, of course, the famous battle with the Greeks and the Spartans.

AY: Well that's all I have. I really appreciate your time, sir.

EC: You're welcome. Let me go get something. I'll be right back.

AY: Okay.

EC: I don't have a Sabine Pass book but I do have a Galveston book there, and that's for you. Take it with you.

AY: Oh, wow, Thank you very much. I appreciate that.

End of interview.