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# The Cape Fear Civil War Round Table

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## The *HEBE* Incident

August 18th-23rd 1863

By **Ray Flowers**

At daylight of August 18th 1863, the British blockade-runner *Hebe* was run aground, seven miles north of Fort Fisher, by the Federal blockader **U.S.S. *Niphon***. While attempting to destroy the beached vessel in the midst of a northeaster, heavy surf swept three boats and fifteen Union seamen ashore where they were promptly captured. Soon after, a ship to shore gunfight erupted for possession of the stranded steamer, as the nine-gun *Niphon*, assisted by the six-gun **U.S.S. *Shokokon***, duelled with a two-gun section of Rebel rifled field artillery. Four hours later, high seas and secessionist fire forced the Yankee gunboats to retire.

For the next few days, Confederate salvage operations on the *Hebe* continued uninterrupted, until the morning of the 23rd, when the *Niphon* reappeared---reinforced by the nine-gun **U.S.S. *James Adger*** and the forty-eight gun frigate **U.S.S. *Minnesota***.



Anticipating a Rebel retreat, the *Niphon* took up position south of the wreck; simultaneously, the *James Adger* and the *Minnesota* closed to within a half-mile of the Confederate battery. They opened a frightful fire, expending over three hundred rounds and nearly a ton and a half of gun powder, killing one Confederate, wounding five others, and successfully driving the Tar Heels from their guns\*. Subsequently the *Hebe* was shelled to destruction, once a party from the *Minnesota* had landed and evacuated the abandoned cannons. Come November 2004, the two rifles captured that day, now trophies of war, are the very guns that will be on loan and displayed in the Fort Fisher State Historic Site Visitors Center exhibit hall, compliments of the [UNITED STATES NAVY](http://www.usnavy.com).

\*Notice that before retreating in the face of a galling Federal fire, some stalwart "Johnny Reb" maintained enough wits to remove the breech block from the Whitworth, thus effectually "spiking the gun."

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