

The Bandera PROPHEET

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Today in Texas history

Three Spanish treasure ships wrecked off Padre Island

By Bandera Spirits of Texas

On April 29, 1554, three Spanish ships were wrecked by a storm off Padre Island near present-day Port Mansfield. The San Esteban, the Espíritu Santo, the Santa María de Yciar, and the San Andrés had set out from Mexico on April 9, bound for Spain. Only the San Andrés escaped the storm.

Approximately 300 people were on the three wrecked vessels; of them, perhaps one-half to two-thirds drowned before reaching the beach. A small contingent, probably including Francisco del Huerto, departed for Mexico in a little boat to organize a relief expedition. The second and larger group of survivors undertook what they thought would be a short journey back to Mexico by land. They ran afoul of the local Indians, and only one survivor, Fray Marcos de Mena, reached Pánuco.

A Spanish salvage expedition arrived at the site of the wrecks within two months and managed to recover less than half of the 1,000,000 ducats the ships were carrying. After that, the remains of the three ships lay undiscovered until the late 1960s.

Artifacts recovered from the San Esteban are now in the Corpus Christi Museum.