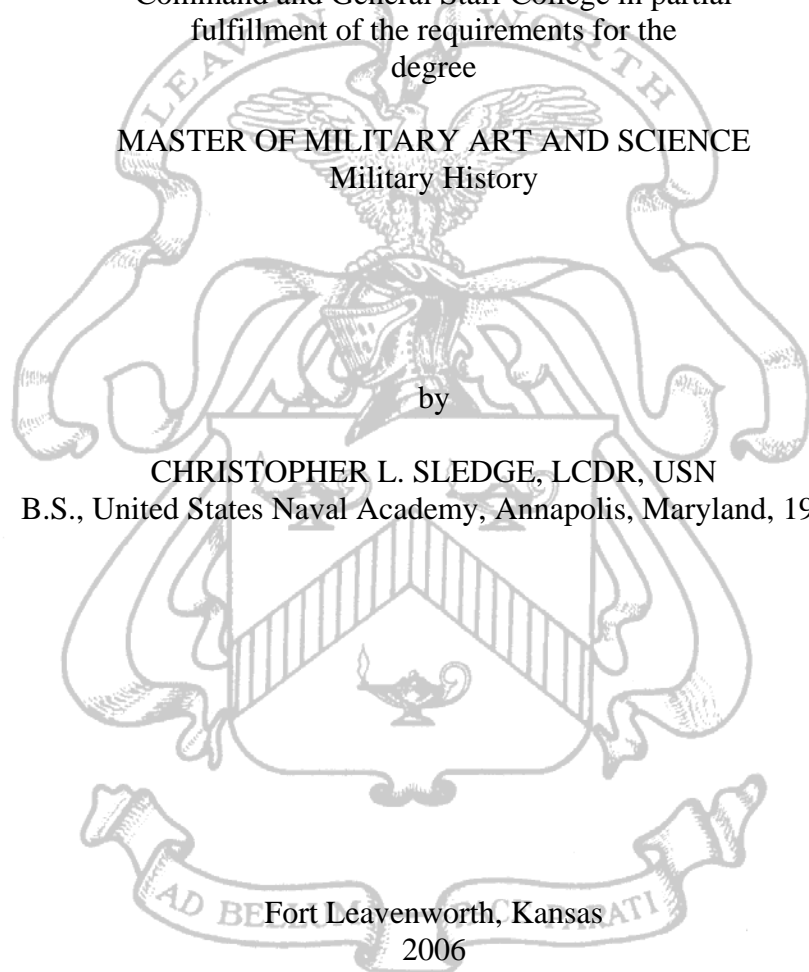THE UNION'S NAVAL WAR IN LOUISIANA, 1861-1863

A thesis presented to the Faculty of the U.S. Army
Command and General Staff College in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree

MASTER OF MILITARY ART AND SCIENCE
Military History

by

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Union naval operations in Louisiana featured some of the most important operations of the Civil War, led by two of the US Navy's most distinguished officers. During the period from 1861 to 1863, Admirals David G. Farragut and David D. Porter led Union naval forces in Louisiana in conducting: a blockade of the New Orleans, the Confederacy's largest city and busiest commercial port; a naval attack to capture New Orleans in April 1862; and joint operations to secure the Mississippi River, culminating in the surrender of Vicksburg and Port Hudson in July 1863. These operations have been the focus of many historical studies, but their relationship to Union naval strategy has often been overlooked. The primary elements of that strategy, as it applied in Louisiana, were a blockade of the Confederate coast and joint operations on the Mississippi River. This thesis studies the influences that shaped Union naval strategy in order to provide a strategic context for analyzing the development of naval operations in Louisiana from the implementation of the blockade to the opening of the Mississippi River. The result is a historical case study of the relationship between naval strategy and operations in a joint environment.

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ABSTRACT

THE UNION'S NAVAL WAR IN LOUISIANA, 1861-1863, by LCDR Christopher L. Sledge, USN, 141 pages.

Union naval operations in Louisiana featured some of the most important operations of the Civil War, led by two of the US Navy's most distinguished officers. During the period from 1861 to 1863, Admirals David G. Farragut and David D. Porter led Union naval forces in Louisiana in conducting: a blockade of the New Orleans, the Confederacy's largest city and busiest commercial port; a naval attack to capture New Orleans in April 1862; and joint operations to secure the Mississippi River, culminating in the surrender of Vicksburg and Port Hudson in July 1863. These operations have been the focus of many historical studies, but their relationship to Union naval strategy has often been overlooked. The primary elements of that strategy, as it applied in Louisiana, were a blockade of the Confederate coast and joint operations on the Mississippi River. This thesis studies the influences that shaped Union naval strategy in order to provide a strategic context for analyzing the development of naval operations in Louisiana from the implementation of the blockade to the opening of the Mississippi River. The result is a historical case study of the relationship between naval strategy and operations in a joint environment.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

> The streams that had carried the wealth and supported the trade of
> the seceding States turned against them, and admitted their
> enemies to their hearts.[1]

> Alfred Thayer Mahan, *The Influence of Sea Power upon History*

<u>Purpose and Research Question</u>

Published in 1890, *The Influence of Sea Power upon History* would earn its

author, Captain Alfred Thayer Mahan, a reputation as the world's foremost naval

historian and strategist. Mahan arrived at his thesis--that the path to national greatness lay

in the creation of a strong navy--primarily through his examination of the history of

British sea power. But Mahan's own experience as a young naval officer on blockade

duty in the Civil War also influenced his thinking. "Never did sea power play a greater or

more decisive part," Mahan wrote, "than in the contest which determined that the course

of the world's history would be modified by one great nation, instead of several rival

states, in the North American continent."[2]

Mahan's first published work, in fact, was a study of the Union navy in the Civil

War. In *The Gulf and Inland Waters*, his contribution to a three-volume naval history of

the war, Mahan examined naval operations in the Gulf of Mexico and on the inland

waters of the Mississippi Valley. In this work, Mahan weaved together official records

and personal interviews to narrate the navy's efforts from the initial operations in the

Mississippi Valley to the Battle of Mobile Bay. For all its exhaustive detail, however,

Mahan's first book reveals little of the strategic insight that would characterize his later works.

This thesis is an attempt to blend Mahan's early and later approaches to the writing of naval history--the operational-level approach of *The Gulf and Inland Waters* and the strategic-level approach of *The Influence of Sea Power upon History*--in a historical analysis of Union naval strategy and operations in Louisiana from 1861 to 1863. The primary question that has served as the focus of this study is: What was the relationship between Union naval strategy and the naval operations conducted in Louisiana during the period from 1861 to 1863? The aim of this thesis, then, is to bridge the gap between naval operations and naval strategy by describing not only "what" happened in Louisiana during the period under consideration, but "why" it happened. Therefore, several secondary and related questions have influenced the course of the study: What influences shaped the development of Union naval strategy? What were the US Navy's primary strategic tasks in Louisiana? How did these tasks drive operations conducted in Louisiana? What effect did the success or failure of these operations have in helping the navy accomplish its strategic tasks? Did naval strategy evolve as a result of naval operations in Louisiana?

Importance

While there seems to be no end to the writing of books on the Civil War, the role of naval operations in the war has received relatively little attention when compared to operations on land. Historian Spencer Tucker has recently noted that "until recent years, books on the naval aspects of the Civil War were few and far between." The result of this "unbalanced treatment," according to Tucker, is "the view that the naval war mattered

little."[3] This thesis is partly an effort to examine the importance of the naval operations conducted in Louisiana from the blockade of New Orleans to the victories that opened the Mississippi River to Union control.

The primary importance of this thesis, however, lies in its analysis of the relationship between naval operations and naval strategy. In his recent historiography of works relating to Union strategy, Civil War historian Gary Gallagher has noted that "the role of the navy languishes among the most neglected aspects of northern strategic planning." Gallagher has further observed that "most discussions of northern strategy virtually ignore its naval component."[4] This thesis is an attempt to rectify this deficiency by analyzing naval strategy as it was implemented in a specific theater of war.

The subject of Union naval operations in Louisiana during the period from 1861 to 1863 was chosen for a number of reasons. First, the operations in Louisiana encompassed many of the operational tasks performed by the Union navy during the war: blockading ports, bombarding fixed fortifications, and conducting joint riverine operations in support of the army. Second, because of its location, Louisiana was destined to play an important role in Union strategy. New Orleans, an important commercial center and the South's largest city, stood in Louisiana at the outlet of the Mississippi River, the primary waterway for transporting commercial goods from the nation's interior. Finally, the naval operations conducted in Louisiana during this time--the blockade and capture of New Orleans and the siege of Vicksburg and Port Hudson--were some of the most significant of the war. These strategic and operational considerations make this a suitable case study for evaluating the relationship between naval strategy and naval operations.

The study of the naval strategy of the Civil War, however, poses challenges for the researcher. In his study of the evolution of American strategy from the end of the Revolutionary War to the Civil War, historian Peter Maslowski has noted that, because "the nation had no institutions or systematic procedures to devise formal doctrines," Union strategists were free to respond in a "pragmatic, flexible manner" to strategic problems.[5] This was particularly true for the navy during the Civil War, a time when, according to naval historian Bern Anderson, "there were no established principles of naval strategy." The navy had no formal operational planning staff or even a naval counterpart to the army's general-in-chief. Responsibility for guiding naval operations was left in the hands of the Secretary of the Navy, who provided wide latitude to naval commanders to adjust to local circumstances in implementing broad strategic directives. For these reasons, Anderson has suggested that, instead of "naval strategy," it may be more fitting to use the concept of a "strategic pattern of naval operations."[6] Therefore, in order to understand the development of the Union's naval strategy in Louisiana, this thesis will pay particular attention to the operations conducted there, seeking to discern the shifting patterns operations that indicate a change in strategy.

<u>Overview</u>

Like the rest of the nation, the Union navy found itself unprepared for Civil War in the spring of 1861. The Navy Department, run by a secretary with a small staff to help oversee the service's administrative bureaus, had changed little since its birth in 1798. The navy was also in the process of a slow transition from sail to steam, and most of its few vessels were scattered in foreign waters, protecting the nation's overseas commerce. The conflict that erupted with the fall of Fort Sumter in April 1861 changed all that, as

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the navy embarked upon a furious process of transformation in order to carry out its primary strategic tasks. This study will examine how these strategic tasks were developed and implemented in Louisiana. During the course of this study, several themes will emerge which will be examined more fully in chapter 6.

The Union's naval strategy was shaped by several influences. The order to blockade the Confederate coastline immediately gave the navy its primary strategic task, but the decision to blockade was influenced by more than military necessity. Economic, political, and diplomatic considerations played a role, and the evolution of naval strategy in Louisiana would continue to demonstrate the influence of these factors. The Anaconda Plan, with its vision of a naval blockade and joint movement down the Mississippi to strangle the Confederacy, would also influence naval strategy, and joint operations on the Mississippi would constitute the navy's second strategic task in Louisiana. One of the themes that will emerge from this study is the seemingly disparate influences that shape strategy.

The blockade of New Orleans proved a challenging task to naval forces faced with a lengthy line of communications, limited forces, and the complex geography of the Mississippi Delta. These challenges led the navy in 1861 to create a temporary Blockade Board, charged with recommending measures to increase the effectiveness of the blockade. Despite the challenges, the blockade caused real hardship in New Orleans and effected the development of the Confederate navy. Another theme will be how the Union's primary strategic tasks of blockading and conducting joint operations on the Mississippi River allowed the Union to effectively employ and maintain its naval superiority.

The capture of New Orleans and subsequent joint operations on the Mississippi River represented a development of naval strategy in Louisiana. With the attack on New Orleans, the navy began to take an active role in operations to open the river, which had been viewed as primarily an army objective. The capture of New Orleans was a stunning victory for Farragut's West Gulf Blockading Squadron, but its success depended largely on an uncoordinated Union offensive further upriver that forced the Confederates to strip the defenses at New Orleans. Farragut would continue upriver to Vicksburg, hoping to quickly open the river to Union control, but more than a year would pass before the river was finally opened. Another theme that will surface in the course of the study is the importance of strategic and operational unity of effort.

Two of the Union navy's most distinguished officers played a vital part in shaping naval operations in Louisiana. Lieutenant (later Admiral) David D. Porter arrived off New Orleans in May 1861 as the commander of a blockade vessel and, two years later, led the Mississippi Squadron to a joint victory at Vicksburg. As commander of the West Gulf Blockading Squadron, Flag Officer (later Admiral) David G. Farragut led the naval attack on New Orleans and subsequent operations against Vicksburg and Port Hudson. A final theme that will emerge is the importance of having experienced leaders who can bridge the gap between the operational and strategic levels of war.

This thesis is divided into six chapters. Chapter 1 serves as the introduction. In chapter 2, the condition of the Union navy at the start of the war and the development of Union naval strategy following the fall of Fort Sumter are examined. Chapter 3 studies the blockade of New Orleans: the challenges faced by the blockaders, the work of the Blockade Board, and the effectiveness of the blockade. Chapter 4 analyzes the capture of

New Orleans: the influences that shaped the decision to attack, and the planning and

execution of the attack. Chapter 5 examines the joint operations to open the Mississippi

River, culminating with the sieges of Vicksburg and Port Hudson. Finally, chapter 6 will

offer an analysis of the themes that emerge in the course of the study.

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[1]A. T. Mahan, *The Influence of Sea Power Upon History, 1660-1783* (Boston, Mass.: Little, Brown and Company, 1890), 44.

[2]Ibid.

[3]Spencer C. Tucker, *Blue and Gray Navies: The Civil War Afloat* (Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 2006), ix.

[4]Gary W. Gallagher. "Blueprint for Victory: Northern Strategy and Military Policy," in *Writing the Civil War: The Quest to Understand*, eds. James M. McPherson and William J. Cooper, Jr. (Colombia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1998), 32.

[5]Peter Maslowski. "To the Edge of Greatness: The United States, 1783-1865" in *The Making of Strategy: Rules, States, and War*, eds. Alvin Bernstein, MacGregor Knox, and Williamson Murray (Cambridge, Mass.: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 235.

[6]Bern Anderson, "The Naval Strategy of the Civil War," *Military Affairs* 26, no. 1 (1962): 11.

CHAPTER 2

CRAFTING A NAVAL STRATEGY

> At the outbreak of the great rebellion our Navy was not in a
> condition to render that assistance which the occasion demanded.[1]

Admiral David D. Porter, *The Naval History of the Civil War*

Introduction

On 26 May 1861, the screw sloop USS *Brooklyn* arrived off the coast of

Louisiana, taking station at the mouth of the Mississippi River. Commander Charles H.

Poor, *Brooklyn*'s commanding officer, had received orders to proceed to the river and

establish the Union blockade proclaimed by President Abraham Lincoln on 19 April.[2]

For the citizens of New Orleans, almost fifty years had passed since enemy warships had

last threatened their city. In December 1814 a British fleet commanded by Vice Admiral

Alexander Cochrane had launched a campaign to seize New Orleans and claim control of

the Mississippi River.[3] As news of the *Brooklyn*'s arrival spread through the city, the

citizens of New Orleans must have recalled with pride how the British campaign had

ended with a stunning British defeat at the Battle of New Orleans.[4] Like the strategy the

Union would develop during the course of the Civil War, British military strategy in 1814

also included an extensive naval blockade, but stretched to such limits that it hardly

affected New Orleans.[5] With only one ship to blockade the extensive Mississippi River

Delta, the Union navy's effort promised to be no more than a paper blockade.

This chapter will examine the challenges faced by the Union navy at the

beginning of the war and the development of Union naval strategy following the fall of

Fort Sumter in order to understand their influences on naval operations in Louisiana. It

begins with a description of the condition of the Union navy at the beginning of the Civil War, focusing on the Union fleet, the organization of the Navy Department, and the new Secretary of the Navy. Following a brief examination of the Confederate navy, the Union's response to the crisis at Fort Sumter and the development of Union naval strategy in the wake of Fort Sumter's fall will be examined. Lincoln's proclamation of blockade would provide an initial strategic focus for Union naval efforts that would be supplemented by the strategic thought of Brevet Lieutenant General Winfield Scott, the Union general-in-chief. Scott's vision of a blockade of the Confederacy combined with a drive down the Mississippi River to New Orleans offered the Union navy a strategic guide that predicted a significant emphasis on naval operations in Louisiana. The basic summary of Union naval strategy provided by Secretary of the Navy Gideon Welles at the end of 1861 exhibited the influence of Scott's thinking and outlined the key tasks that would guide naval operations in Louisiana until the Mississippi River was secured in 1863.

<div align="center">The State of the Union Navy</div>

Although Congress created the Navy Department in 1798, the US Navy actually began four years earlier, with the passage of a bill providing for the purchase of six ships to "protect the commerce of the United States from the depredations of the Algerine corsairs."[6] The War Department had run the navy for its first four years of existence, until the increasing administrative burden and an imminent war with France led Congress to create a separate department to handle naval affairs. Under the first Secretary of the Navy, Benjamin Stoddert, the Navy Department consisted of a chief clerk, an accountant, and a handful of subordinate clerks.[7]

As the new commander in chief surveyed the status of the navy following his inauguration on 4 March 1861, he may have been struck by how little the navy had changed since in 1794. The USS *United States* and USS *Constitution*, two of the six sailing frigates ordered built that year, remained listed on the Navy Register, the official roll of ships in naval custody.[8] Of the ninety vessels on the list, twenty-one were considered unserviceable. Sailing vessels accounted for more than half the total, highlighting the navy's slow transformation from sail to steam propulsion.[9] Although the navies of Britain and France still retained sizeable sailing fleets, they were predominantly steam navies, dwarfing the Union fleet's total of forty steam vessels. None of these steam vessels were ironclads. The navy had sporadically funded construction of an iron-hulled steam vessel for more than twenty years, but the vessel was never completed. Britain and France had already completed their first ironclad warships, signaling the beginning of the end of the age of wooden vessels.[10]

Most of the forty-two vessels in commission were, as historian James McPherson describes, "patrolling waters thousands of miles from the United States," charged with defending the nation's rapidly expanding overseas commerce.[11] The navy's squadrons of oceangoing vessels ranged the waters of the Mediterranean, East Indies, and Pacific, as well as the coasts of Brazil and Africa. The Home Squadron consisted of twelve vessels, with only three stationed in northern ports.[12]

The navy's 1,550 officers were burdened by an inefficient personnel system that had no provision for retirement, rewarding longevity rather than ability. Promotion, according to historian Kevin Weddle, "became accessible only when death or an infrequent resignation left a vacancy."[13] Many of the navy's officers, like Captain David

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G. Farragut, had seen service in the War of 1812. By 1861, the sixty-year-old Farragut

had already served more than fifty years, having earned appointment as a midshipman in

1810.[14] Meanwhile, the glacial pace of promotion caused frustration for many junior

officers. At the age of fifty-three, Lieutenant David D. Porter had held his rank for twenty

years.[15]

The navy attempted to alleviate many of the deficiencies of the promotion system

in 1855 with the appointment of a Navy Efficiency Board, whose ranks included

prominent officers such as Commodore Matthew C. Perry and Commander Samuel F. Du

Pont. The board was tasked to "make a careful examination into the efficiency of the

officers of the line" and provide a list to the Secretary of the Navy of those officers who,

due to incompetence or infirmity, should be dismissed from the service or placed on a

reserve list.[16] Although not charged with overhauling the navy's promotion system, the

board, it was hoped, would clear the way for capable junior officers to earn well-deserved

advancement. The board's report, issued after five weeks of intense deliberation,

recommended the dismissal or retirement of 159 officers. The release of the report and

the accompanying list of new promotions, as Weddle has described, "launched a

firestorm of protest" that aroused the interest of Congress on behalf of the disgruntled

officers, many of whom would later be restored to service. In the end, the Efficiency

Board efforts realized only partial success and left a feeling of ill will among many in the

officer ranks.[17]

These senior officers had been educated through the traditional method of on-the-

job training at sea. The U.S. Navy's junior officers, however, were experiencing a

growing sense of professionalism that began with the creation of a Naval School in 1845.

In 1850, the U.S. Naval Academy, as it was renamed that year, introduced a standard

four-year curriculum to train and educate midshipmen in the specialized skills demanded

at sea: naval tactics, seamanship, mathematics, science, and gunnery, as well as English

and modern languages. By 1851 the school served as the sole source of commissions for

naval officers.[18]

The Navy Department had expanded since its modest beginnings in 1798. In 1842

the Board of Navy Commissioners that had assisted the Secretary of the Navy in the

performance of his duties since 1815 was abolished, replaced by a new bureau system.

The bureau system divided naval administration into five functional areas: Construction,

Equipment and Repair; Yards and Docks; Ordnance and Hydrography; Provisions and

Clothing; and Medicine and Surgery. Each bureau was subordinate to the Secretary of the

Navy, with "no provision organizing the chiefs of the bureaus into a board and vesting it

with corporate functions," according to historian Charles Paullin.[19] The creation of the

bureau system strengthened the role of the Secretary of the Navy, who now had sole

authority to set naval policy.[20]

Despite the growth of the Navy Department, the secretary's personal staff

remained small and lacked key positions required to assist the secretary in his duties. The

bureaus functioned solely as administrative bodies, responsible to the secretary for

constructing, arming, and equipping the fleet. Although the secretary retained

responsibility for employing the fleet, the Navy Department contained no operational

staff or senior naval aide to assist in planning or coordinating naval operations and

strategy.[21] As a result, the navy's influence on military decision making was often left to

a secretary with little or no naval experience. The lack of a senior naval counterpart to the

army's general-in-chief would not be addressed until 1915, with the creation of the post of Chief of Naval Operations.

Lincoln's Secretary of the Navy

As the head of a new Republican Party confronted with numerous regional and factional demands, Lincoln selected his new Secretary of the Navy with great care. In the charged atmosphere of the secession crisis, the selection of a cabinet-level secretary made an important political statement. Traditionally, the office of Secretary of the Navy had been filled by men known more for their political connections than their experience in naval matters. Fortunately, Lincoln's new Secretary of the Navy had both. Not only was Gideon Welles a prominent Republican from New England, he also "had solid experience in naval administration," according to historian William Roberts.[22]

Welles had risen to prominence in 1856 as the Republican Party's first candidate for governor of Connecticut. The newspaperman and former Jackson Democrat had quit "the Democrat party after the Kansas-Nebraska Act and helped organize the Republican Party in New England." Although defeated in Connecticut's gubernatorial election, Welles continued to lobby for the Republican cause, earning appointment to the party's executive committee. As a result, Welles, according to biographer John Niven, "emerged as one of the leading spokesmen for the Democratic faction of the Republican Party."[23]

Although Welles had supported Ohio's Salmon P. Chase, another former Democrat, at the 1860 Republican convention, his strong opposition to New York Senator William H. Seward helped secure Lincoln's nomination. Intent on appointing a former Democrat from New England to his cabinet, Lincoln eventually settled on Welles.[24] Welles's chief rival for the cabinet post had been Nathaniel P. Banks, a former

Speaker of the House and governor of Massachusetts, whose candidacy Lincoln rejected after strong opposition from prominent Republicans.[25] Welles joined the cabinet as Secretary of the Navy on 7 March 1861. Chase and Seward would also serve in the political hodgepodge of Lincoln's cabinet, where Seward soon established himself as Welles's chief rival. Welles, who would serve in the cabinet with Seward for eight years, ended his tenure in 1869 as the nation's longest serving Secretary of the Navy.[26]

In one sense, as William Roberts has observed, Welles "fit the traditional mold of a secretary of the navy." The new secretary "had never been a seafarer," having spent his career embroiled in the world of journalism and state and national politics.[27] Despite his lack of familiarity with operations at sea, Welles "came to the office with more experience in naval affairs than any of his predecessors," according to biographer John Niven.[28] Welles had served as chief of the navy's Bureau of Provisions and Clothing from 1846 to 1849, the last civilian to hold that post.[29] Welles gained valuable experience in the post during the Mexican War, waging his own battle to overcome poor communications and long distances to keep the navy provisioned.[30] As Welles entered office in March 1861, he could not have imagined how severely the looming conflict would put his political and administrative abilities to the test.

The Confederates Respond

As Welles entered his new post in March 1861, the nation stood on the brink of civil war. Lincoln's election had sparked a national crisis that had been smoldering for years and threatened to turn into an inferno. Led by South Carolina, seven states had already seceded, with the threat of more defections resting on Lincoln's response. Louisiana had been the sixth state to secede. Governor Thomas O. Moore had skillfully

steered his state toward the decision, rejoicing on 26 January 1861 when the state's secession convention, writes historian John Winters, "severed Louisiana's connections with the United States."[31]

Moore had been spoiling for a fight for months. Even before the vote for secession, he had ordered the state militia to seize the United States Arsenal at Baton Rouge and the two forts guarding the southern flank of New Orleans on the Mississippi River, Forts Jackson and St. Philip. A Military Board established in December to arm the state's growing number of militia companies was abolished in early March, leaving Moore and his adjutant general with primary authority for directing military preparations.[32] The seizure of Federal revenue vessels *Lewis Cass* and *Robert McClelland* had resulted in the beginnings of a modest state naval force. While Louisiana's Ordinance of Secession had "recognized the right of free navigation of the Mississippi River . . . by all friendly States bordering thereon," the state had taken over the collection of customs duties, forwarding the proceeds to the new Confederate government.[33]

The Confederate Congress also took steps to form a naval force, enacting legislation on 20 February to create a Confederate States Navy. "The man upon whose shoulders would fall the full responsibility of creating and directing the Confederate navy," according to naval historian Raimondo Luraghi, was Stephen R. Mallory.[34] A native of Florida, Mallory had extensive experience in naval matters, having recently served in the United States Senate as chairman of the Committee on Naval Affairs. A key supporter of the Navy Efficiency Board, Mallory had also been an energetic advocate of naval modernization. The navy's newest screw-propeller steam vessels had been

constructed during his tenure. Ironically, Mallory, as Luraghi has observed, "contributed perhaps more than anybody else to building the big navy against" which he would have to fight.[35]

Mallory faced a Herculean task in creating a Confederate navy from scratch. By the time of his appointment in February, Southerners had managed to capture only one Union vessel, the sidewheeler *Fulton*, seized in January at the Pensacola Navy Yard. Attempts to purchase or capture additional vessels had met with limited success, resulting in a naval force of ten vessels with a total of fifteen guns.[36] Hopes for establishing a Confederate shipbuilding industry rested on the small navy yard at Pensacola, and private shipbuilding industries spread throughout the South.

Despite the obstacles, the Confederacy had reasons to believe it could create a capable naval force. Although the only other navy yard in the South, Norfolk's Gosport Navy Yard, remained in Union hands, secession was still under debate in Virginia. The secession of that state might make a prize of one of the largest and most modern shipbuilding facilities in the United States.[37] In addition, the number of officers resigning their commissions in the Union navy to "go South" held promise that the Confederate navy would develop a solid nucleus of talented and experienced officers. These facts were not lost on the new Secretary of the Navy in Washington. As Welles undertook his duties in March, sixty-eight officers had already offered their resignations.[38] The number of resignations would mount as the crisis continued, with 373 officers eventually leaving the service.[39]

The fate of the navy yards weighed heavily on Welles. Although the Confederates held the Pensacola Navy Yard, the Federal garrison at Fort Pickens remained at its post.

Strategically located to guard the entrance to Pensacola Bay, the fort blocked access to the navy yard from the sea. In addition to the Federal garrison, ships from the navy's Home Squadron protected the fort. At Norfolk, only "routine moves" were made to improve the defenses at Gosport Navy Yard. With Virginia threatening to secede, any excessive defensive preparations at Norfolk, it was feared, might precipitate a decision to leave the Union.[40] As his first month in office passed, it became clear to Welles that the opening conflict in a civil war would most likely occur at South Carolina's Fort Sumter.

<u>Fort Sumter Falls</u>

Welles first learned of the looming conflict at Fort Sumter on 6 March, when Bvt. Lt. Gen. Winfield Scott informed him of the predicament facing Major Robert Anderson and his Federal garrison in South Carolina. Anderson had only six weeks of provisions for his troops manning the island fort that guarded the entrance to Charleston Harbor. Confederate forces ringing the harbor, led by Brigadier General Pierre G. T. Beauregard of Louisiana, threatened the fort with bombardment. Scott doubted any attempt to reinforce the fort by sea could succeed.[41]

Over the next several weeks, opinions in the cabinet shifted and hardened regarding the necessity of taking action, before falling out into two opposing camps. Scott and Secretary of State Seward urged a policy of conciliation, hoping the abandonment of the fort would ease the rising tension and help maintain the allegiance of the Border States. Postmaster General Montgomery Blair, joined by Welles and Secretary of the Treasury Chase, believed a "stand on Sumter would rally the Border states to the Union."[42] Furthermore, the bellicose Blair offered a plan to provision the fort by sea, courtesy of his brother-in-law Gustavus V. Fox.

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The forty-year-old Fox had seen extensive service during an eighteen-year naval career, before resigning his naval commission in 1856 to "accept a position as a business agent for the Bay State Mills in Lowell, Massachusetts."[43] According to Fox's plan, shallow draft boats would run the Confederate batteries at Charleston to supply the fort, while a handful of Union warships stood close to provide support. After receiving approval from Lincoln, Fox hastily prepared his expedition, departing New York on 8 April.[44]

Unbeknownst to Welles, Seward had secretly hatched a plan of his own to relieve Pensacola's Fort Pickens. The plan called for Lieutenant David D. Porter to take command of the USS *Powhatan*, a sidewheel steamer at the Brooklyn Navy Yard, and sail to the Gulf Coast. Lincoln endorsed Porter's expedition, undercutting the authority of his new Secretary of the Navy and, as Niven has observed, "depriving the Sumter expedition of its most powerful fleet unit."[45]

In the early morning hours of 12 April 1861, Confederate batteries began firing on the fort. Fox had just arrived offshore in the steamliner *Baltic* and noted the peculiar absence of the *Powhatan*, which had sailed two days before Fox left New York in the *Baltic*. Fox spent the next day battling heavy seas in his attempt to reach the fort, now critically short of supplies. With no relief in sight, Anderson surrendered on 13 April, the fort now aflame and reduced by heavy Confederate fire.[46] In the end, according to Niven, "Fox's force was of no use except to provide transportation home for Anderson and his garrison."[47]

Fox later claimed that the loss of *Powhatan*'s support had "deprived him of the means to accomplish" his mission. Lincoln would call the miscommunication regarding

Powhatan's mission "an accident" for which he "to some extent was" possibly responsible, while assuring Fox he would be the President's selection for any "daring and dangerous enterprise of a similar character."[48] John Niven suggests that the "detachment of Powhatan spared the administration what would have been a bloody reverse at Charleston Harbor." With *Powhatan* present for action, Fox would have likely attempted to reach the fort, and his expedition "would have been blown out of the water by the heavy Confederate batteries."[49] If so, the Union navy may have been deprived of its first Assistant Secretary of the Navy, who would offer indispensable support to Welles in running the Union's naval war.

The Proclamation of Blockade

Lincoln responded to the news of Fort Sumter's fall quickly, issuing a public proclamation on 15 April that ordered 75,000 militia be raised to "re-possess the forts, places, and property which have been seized from the Union."[50] Confederate President Jefferson Davis labeled the call for troops an act of aggression by a "foreign power" intent on "invading this Confederacy with an armed force." In response, he issued a proclamation on 17 April inviting "all those who may desire, by service in private armed vessels on the high seas, . . . to make application for commissions or letters of marque and reprisal."[51] These letters would grant authority from the Confederate government to private citizens to arm vessels and serve as privateers, raiding Union shipping. The action was justified in Davis's mind by the "absence of a fleet of public vessels" to provide adequate defense.[52]

The Confederate strategy of commerce raiding, or *guerre de course*, was a traditional strategy of weaker naval powers. Without a naval force to conduct offensive

operations against the Union fleet, the Confederacy would have to deliver indirect blows

by attacking Union maritime trade. *Guerre de course* had served as a key component of

naval strategy during the Revolutionary War and War of 1812, when feeble American

naval forces were matched against a dominant Royal Navy. During both these conflicts,

privateers had joined naval vessels in attacking British shipping. Until the Confederacy

could create a navy of its own, Davis planned to rely upon Confederate privateers to do

the same against the Union.[53]

Lincoln reacted on 19 April by issuing a proclamation of blockade, warning that a

"blockade of the ports within the states" engaged in an insurrection against the

government of the United States would be "set on foot." To enforce the blockade, "a

competent force" would be "posted so as to prevent entrance and exit of vessels from the

ports" of the southern coastline from South Carolina to Texas. The inability of the

government to effectively "execute the laws of the United States for the collection of the

revenues" and Davis's threat to "grant pretended letters of marque" had made the

proclamation necessary.[54] On 27 April Lincoln extended the blockade to include Virginia

and North Carolina. Thus, in the opening week of the conflict, the strategic focus of each

navy had been set, as Luraghi notes, "with two acts considered traditional in every past

maritime conflict."[55]

Four aspects of the blockade proclamation highlight the nature of the intended

blockade. First, the proclamation enunciated Lincoln's conviction that, as James

McPherson describes, "this was a domestic insurrection, a rebellion by certain lawless

citizens, not a war between nations."[56] Second, the proclamation was careful to avoid any

references to a "closure" of the Confederate ports; instead, the intended action was

referred to as a "blockade," a term with a precise, legal definition under international law. Third, the use of the phrase "competent force" proclaimed Lincoln's intent to establish an effective blockade of significant Confederate ports. Finally, the purpose of the blockade was twofold: to block Confederate trade and prevent Confederate privateers from raiding Union commerce.

Although the principles of blockade strategy were not defined in 1861, naval blockades had long been used as a tool of naval warfare. Britain had exploited its maritime superiority over the United States during the Revolutionary War and War of 1812 by blockading the American coast. The U.S. Navy also had experience conducting blockades, both in the Barbary Wars and the Mexican War. Many officers still in service had been assigned to blockade duty during the latter conflict, in which the navy, as historian Spencer Tucker has observed, performed many duties it would execute during the Civil War: blockading the Mexican coasts, maintaining lengthy lines of communication, supporting amphibious operations, and conducting riverine operations.[57]

Sir Julian S. Corbett later outlined the principles of blockade strategy in his classic work on naval theory, titled *Some Principles of Maritime Strategy*. In his book, published in 1911, Corbett divides blockades into what he calls "two well-defined categories, naval and commercial." Naval blockades, according to Corbett, were focused on securing command of the sea by either keeping an enemy fleet in port or forcing it to sea, where it could be engaged. Commercial blockades were a tool of superior fleets that could exercise their command of the sea to strangle enemy commerce. Through commercial blockade, wrote Corbett, "we choke the flow of his national activity afloat in the same way that military occupation of his territory chokes it ashore." The Union

blockade, then, was primarily a commercial blockade, designed to stop the flow of Confederate maritime trade.[58]

By 1861 the legal principles governing naval blockades had been firmly established in naval tradition and maritime law. The Declaration of Paris of 1856, signed by Britain and other European nations as a result of the Crimean War, was the "authoritative enunciation of the principles of international law governing the efficacy of blockades."[59] Among its provisions, the declaration abolished privateering and mandated that only blockades effectively preventing access to the coast of the enemy would be considered binding. Although the United States had refused to sign the agreement because of its prohibition on privateering, the declaration's provisions influenced the debate in Lincoln's cabinet.[60]

Debate concerning the proclamation of blockade generated almost as much controversy as the crisis over Fort Sumter, with Seward and Welles once again falling in opposing camps. Neither disputed the need to respond with naval action blocking access to Confederate ports; instead, the debate centered on the appropriate way to characterize the act, in adhering to the principles of maritime law.[61]

The arguments were presented at a cabinet meeting on 14 April 1861, the same day that Anderson formally surrendered Fort Sumter to Confederate forces. Joined by Chase and Blair, Welles advocated closing the ports of the Confederacy. As Welles pointed out, a naval blockade was an act of war between belligerents that would implicitly grant official status to the Confederacy. A declaration of blockade would clash with Lincoln's desire to frame the conflict as a domestic rebellion, for, as historian Stuart Anderson has pointed out, "a government engaged in putting down a mere insurrection

22

did not blockade its own ports, but closed them to commerce." In addition, the

Declaration of Paris stipulated that a blockade must be effective to receive formal

recognition by maritime nations.[62]

Welles was well aware of the inability of the small Union navy to undertake a

broad effort like a blockade of the entire Southern coast. Only three vessels were

immediately available to enforce a blockade that stretched from Virginia to the Rio

Grande, encompassing more than 3,500 miles of coastline. In addition, the coastline

contained 189 inlets and harbors, offering shallow water where Confederate shipping

could hide from deep-draft Union gunboats. For Welles, this evidence provided a

compelling case for "closing the ports."[63]

While granting the consistency of Welles's argument, Seward urged Lincoln to

declare a "blockade." Unlike a port closure, the legal principles governing blockades

were well established; therefore, a declaration of blockade, as Anderson describes, would

"shelter the government under the precedents of international law." As a result, a

declaration of blockade would avoid unnecessary diplomatic entanglements that might

result from an unclear policy like closing the ports. Furthermore, a port closure amounted

to little more than a legal fiction. The recent events at Fort Sumter clearly revealed that

the government could not enforce its claimed sovereignty over the seceded states.

Persuaded by Seward's argument, Lincoln determined to issue the proclamation of

blockade.[64]

Confederate reaction to the proclamation seemed to demonstrate the soundness of

Welles's argument. Jefferson Davis informed the Confederate Congress on 29 April that

such a proclamation "could only have been published under the sudden influence of

passion," because the "announcement of a mere paper blockade" was "manifestly a violation of the law of nations."[65] This thinking was echoed in Pensacola, where Brigadier General Braxton Bragg commanded Confederate forces. After receiving formal notification on 13 May of the establishment of a blockade at Pensacola, Bragg replied that the blockade was "an act of aggressive war" and "a virtual acknowledgement of our national existence and independence."[66]

While Lincoln had sacrificed the consistency of the port closure argument for the promise of avoiding foreign intervention that a blockade offered, events across the Atlantic seemed to validate Welles's logic. Great Britain announced a Neutrality Proclamation on 13 May, with France following suit on 10 June. British neutrality, according to historian Howard Jones, "automatically conferred legitimacy on the South as a belligerent, which the North regarded as the first step toward diplomatic recognition of Confederate independence." Although fears of British intervention would hound Lincoln through 1862, the decision to declare neutrality had been forced on Britain by Lincoln's proclamation of blockade. The true intent of British neutrality, as Jones notes, was to "avoid war while continuing to trade with both North and South."[67]

Scott's Anaconda

While Lincoln's blockade proclamation provided a primary strategic task for the Union navy, it was only part of a strategy the navy would develop to take full advantage of its maritime superiority. Ironically, the roots of Union naval strategy are found in the thinking of the nation's most revered soldier, Bvt. Lt. Gen. Winfield Scott. By 1861, Scott had seen more than fifty years of service in the army, highlighted by his landing at Vera Cruz and capture of Mexico City in 1847 during the Mexican War. Promoted to

brevet brigadier general during the War of 1812 at the age of twenty-seven, he had served

as general-in-chief for twenty years.[68] With the benefit of his experience conducting joint

operations, Scott crafted a clear military strategy designed to employ the Union's

superior naval power.

The key elements of Scott's plan were laid out in correspondence with Major

General George B. McClellan, commander of Union troops in Ohio. On 27 April 1861

the ambitious McClellan wrote to Scott, proposing a "plan of operations intended to

relieve the pressure upon Washington" and "bring the war to a speedy close." The main

effort of McClellan's plan was a movement of 80,000 troops across the Ohio River and

through western Virginia's Kanawha Valley, culminating in the capture of Richmond and

"the destruction of the Southern Army."[69] McClellan's flawed plan, according to

historian Stephen Sears, "inspired Scott . . . to formulate a strategy of his own."[70]

Scott replied on 3 May 1861 with a plan that would, in his words, "rely greatly on

the sure operation of a complete blockade of the Atlantic and Gulf ports." The blockade

would be accompanied by "a powerful movement down the Mississippi to the ocean . . .

and the capture of Forts Jackson and Saint Philip." The object of the movement was to

"keep open this great line of communication . . . so as to envelop the insurgent States and

bring them to terms with less bloodshed than by any other plan." Transports would be

needed to carry troops and equipment down the Mississippi River, with gunboats

protecting the front and rear of the advance. Finally, "New Orleans should be strongly

occupied and securely held until the present difficulties are composed." Because Scott

projected six months would be needed to train such a force, "the greatest obstacle" to the

successful execution of his plan was "the impatience of our patriotic and loyal Union friends."[71]

While the fundamental elements of the strategy were drawn from a lifetime of service, the parallels between the strategic situation faced by the United States in 1847 and that in 1861 suggest that Scott's Mexican War experience contributed significantly to his thinking. As historian Rowena Reed has noted, in both cases the nation faced an enemy with an extensive coastline, navigable rivers penetrating the interior, a dependence on foreign commerce, and a small navy. A strategy in Mexico that featured a blockade of the Mexican coast, a joint expedition to assault Vera Cruz, and the seizure of Mexico City by overland advance bears striking resemblance to Scott's plan in 1861. Reed contends that Scott simply adapted a tested strategy to fit a new situation, assuming "that what had worked in Mexico in 1847 would work equally well against the Confederacy in 1861."[72]

While insightful, Reed's argument ignores the fundamental difference between the two strategies. The strategy in the Mexican War, according to historian Allan Peskin, "had been to strike directly for the Mexican capital and end the war with one big blow, a very different plan than the slow economic strangulation he advocated in 1861."[73] Scott hoped to avoid the bloodshed that would result from a bold strike to seize the Confederate capital. An effective blockade would isolate the Confederacy from foreign trade, and the seizure of the Mississippi River and New Orleans would sever the heart of the rebellion from its sources of supply in the West. Scott's strategy of methodically enveloping the Confederacy was soon labeled the Anaconda Plan.[74]

Although Union strategy would undergo several changes over the course of the conflict, the Anaconda Plan, as historian James McPherson describes, "remained part of Northern military strategy through the war."[75] Moreover, the essential elements of the plan--a blockade of the Confederate coast and joint cooperation to secure the Mississippi River--accurately summarize the primary strategic tasks performed by the Union navy in Louisiana until July 1863, when the fall of Vicksburg and Port Hudson opened the river to Union control. With his call for the capture of Forts Jackson and St. Philip and occupation of New Orleans, Scott also forecast the important role that city would play as a focus of naval operations.

Despite the insights of the Anaconda Plan's basic strategy, operations on the Mississippi River would take a different course than envisioned by Scott. While Scott viewed the capture of New Orleans as the culmination of a joint movement down the Mississippi, the city would fall early in the war after a naval attack by a Union force pushing upriver. As a result, the culminating campaign to secure the river would occur at Vicksburg.

Welles, writing in February 1863, derided Scott's strategy as an "unwise" and "purely defensive" policy that he had opposed from the beginning.[76] Nevertheless, the influence of Scott's thinking on the development of Union naval strategy is evident in Welles's "Report of the Secretary of the Navy," delivered on 2 December 1861. In his report, Welles outlined "three different lines of naval operations," as he called them:

> 1. The closing of all the insurgent ports along a coast-line of nearly three thousand miles, in the form and under the exacting regulations of an international blockade.
>
> 2. The organization of combined naval and military expeditions to operate in force against various points of the southern coast, rendering efficient naval cooperation with the position and movements of such expeditions when landed,

and including also all needful naval aid to the Army in cutting off intercommunication with the rebels, and in its operations on the Mississippi and its tributaries; and,

3. The active pursuit of the piratical cruisers which might escape the vigilance of the blockading force and put to sea from the rebel ports.

These line of operations, he wrote, "constituted a triple task more arduous . . . than has before been demanded from the maritime power of any Government."[77]

Welles's third strategic task developed from events in the opening months of the blockade. The escape of the Confederate commerce raider CSS *Sumter* from New Orleans in June 1861, described below, not only caused tremendous embarrassment for the Navy Department, but launched Commander Raphael Semmes's war against Union shipping. Semmes made a return appearance in the CSS *Alabama* in January 1863, when he sank a Union steam vessel off the coast of Galveston, Texas. Besides the dispatch of a small number of vessels to hunt down commerce raiders, the "active pursuit of piratical cruisers" had little direct bearing on naval operations in Louisiana.[78]

The first two strategic tasks served as a basic guide to Union naval operations in Louisiana from the commencement of the blockade in May 1861 to the opening of the Mississippi in July 1863. While the primary task of blockading the Confederate coast was clearly a naval mission, Welles initially viewed the navy as playing only a supporting role to the army in securing the Mississippi River.[79] The navy would end up playing a much more significant role on the river than Welles imagined at first. By the beginning of 1863, he would have two squadrons operating there, and opening the river would become the focus of Union naval and military.

Summary

By the time Commander Charles H. Poor established the blockade of New Orleans in May 1861, the basic outline of Union naval strategy had been established. Lincoln responded to the crisis at Fort Sumter and the Confederate call for privateers by ordering a commercial blockade of the Confederacy, thus quickly establishing the navy's primary strategic task. The roots of the blockade strategy were present in the nation's previous naval conflicts, from the Revolutionary War to the Mexican War. The decision to proclaim a blockade rather than a port closure was dictated by the desire to avoid interference from foreign nations by adhering to international law, demonstrating how diplomatic, political and economic considerations can influence the development of strategy as much as military considerations. In fact, the Union navy, as it existed in April 1861, was unable to implement an effective blockade of the extensive Confederate coastline as called for by Lincoln. If the Union navy hoped to take full advantage of its maritime superiority, it would have to rapidly transform by improvising a fleet of suitable vessels.

The task of expanding the navy fell to Secretary of the Navy Welles, an able administrator well-suited to face the deficiencies in ships, personnel, and naval organization. Without a senior naval officer to guide operational planning, Welles would also have responsibility for crafting Union naval strategy. The primary strategic tasks Welles developed revealed the influence of the Anaconda Plan, which envisioned a combination of a naval blockade and joint movement down the Mississippi. These two primary strategic tasks--the naval blockade of the Confederate coast and joint operations on the Mississippi--would guide Union naval operations in Louisiana until July 1863.

[1] David D. Porter, *The Naval History of the Civil War* (New York: Sherman Publishing Co., 1886), 17.

[2] Poor to Welles, 29 May 1861, U.S. Navy Department, *Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies in the War of the Rebellion,* 31 vols. (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1894-1927), ser. I, 4:187. (Hereafter cited as *ORN*. All references are from series I unless otherwise noted.)

[3] In many respects, the British naval strategy in the War of 1812 was similar to the strategy developed by the Union Navy, particularly concerning operations in Louisiana. On 14 July 1814, Vice Admiral Cochrane wrote to First Lord of the Admiralty Viscount Robert Saunders Dundas Melville to describe some of the challenges he faced in America: "the principal Towns in America all of which are situated upon navigable river – but none of Them Accessible to a direct attack from Shipping only,-- although open to a combined one with a land Force." Cochrane wrote Melville again on 3 September 1814 to explain the next phase of his naval strategy: "As the Season advances I propose going to the Carolinas Georgia &ca. & ending at N Orleans which I have not a doubt of being able to Subdue and thereby hold the Key of the Mississippi." Michael J. Crawford ed., *The Naval War of 1812: A Documentary History* (Washington, D.C.: Naval Historical Center, 2002), 3:133, 270.

[4] The British defeat at the Battle of New Orleans must have been a popular topic of conversation among the elite society of New Orleans. Journalist William Howard Russell, a special correspondent for *The Times* of London, was in New Orleans when the blockade was announced. On 30 May 1861, Russell was taken to visit the "scene of defeat of the British in the attack on New Orleans in 1815," as he wrote in his diary. Three days later Russell witnessed a discussion in which Isaac E. Morse, a prominent lawyer and former attorney general of Louisiana, debated the number of cotton bales present at the battle. See William H. Russell, *William Howard Russell's Civil War: Private Diary and Letters, 1861-1862,* ed. Martin Crawford (Athens, Ga.: University of Georgia Press, 1992), 63-65.

[5] Wade G. Dudley, *Splintering the Wooden Wall: The British Blockade of the United States, 1812-1815* (Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 2003), x.

[6] Charles O. Paullin, *Paullin's History of Naval Administration 1775-1911* (Annapolis, Md.: U.S. Naval Institute, 1968), 91.

[7] Ibid., 104.

[8] The *United States* was in ordinary (reserve status) at Norfolk's Gosport Navy Yard at the beginning of the war and was seized by the Confederates on 20 April 1861 when Norfolk was captured. The *Constitution* was a training ship at the U.S. Naval Academy and was relocated from Annapolis to Newport, Rhode Island, when the school

was moved in May 1861. Paul H. Silverstone, *Civil War Navies, 1855-1883* (Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 2001), 96-97.

[9]James R. Soley, *The Blockade and the Cruisers* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1883), 13.

[10]Tucker, *Blue and Gray Navies*, xxv. The French ironclad *La Gloire* entered service in 1859. The British armored frigate *Warrior*, "a far superior ship," according to Tucker entered service two years later.

[11]James M. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 313.

[12]Soley, *The Blockade and the Cruisers,* 14.

[13]Kevin J. Weddle, *Lincoln's Tragic Admiral: The Life of Samuel Francis Du Pont* (Charlottesville, Va.: University of Virginia Press, 2005), 59.

[14]Chester G. Hearn, *Admiral David Glasgow Farragut: The Civil War Years* (Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1998), xviii.

[15]Chester G. Hearn, *Admiral David Dixon Porter: The Civil War Years* (Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1996), 19.

[16]Paullin, *Paullin's History of Naval Administration*, 240.

[17]Weddle, *Lincoln's Tragic Admiral*, 75-76.

[18]Jack Sweetman, *The U.S. Naval Academy: An Illustrated History* (Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1979), 38-42.

[19]Paullin, *Paullin's History of Naval Administration*, 210.

[20]Geoffrey S. Smith, "An Uncertain Passage: The Bureaus Run the Navy, 1842-1861," in *In Peace and War: Interpretations of American Naval History, 1775-1978*, ed. Kenneth J. Hagan. (Wesport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1978), 84.

[21]Anderson, "The Naval Strategy of the Civil War," 11.

[22]William H. Roberts, *Now for the Contest: Coastal and Oceanic Naval Operations in the Civil War* (Lincoln, Neb.: University of Nebraska Press, 2004), 3.

[23]John Niven, "Gideon Welles," in *American Secretaries of the Navy, Volume 1, 1775-1913*, ed. Paolo E. Coletta. (Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1980), 323.

[24]John Niven, *Gideon Welles: Lincoln's Secretary of the Navy* (Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University Press, 1973), 314-315.

[25]Ibid., 317-318.

[26]Niven, "Gideon Welles," 356.

[27]Roberts, *Now for the Contest*, 3.

[28]Niven, *Gideon Welles*, 323.

[29]Paullin, *Paullin's History of Naval Administration*, 212.

[30]Niven, *Gideon Welles*, 322.

[31]John D. Winters, *The Civil War in Louisiana* (Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University Press, 1963), 3.

[32]Ibid., 19.

[33]Ibid., 44.

[34]Raimondo Luraghi, *A History of the Confederate Navy* (Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1996), 8.

[35]Ibid., 12.

[36]William Still, *Confederate Shipbuilding* (Athens, Ga.: University of Georgia Press, 1969), 6-7.

[37]Luraghi, *A History of the Confederate Navy*, 34.

[38]Niven, *Gideon Welles*, 324.

[39]McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 313.

[40]Niven, *Gideon Welles*, 339.

[41]Ibid. 325.

[42]Ibid. 327.

[43]John D. Hayes, "Captain Fox--He Is the Navy Department," *U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings* 91, no. 9 (1965): 65.

[44]Niven, *Gideon Welles*, 327-339.

[45]Ibid., 336.

[46]Fox to Welles, 24 February 1865, *ORN,* 4:249-250.

[47]Niven, *Gideon Welles,* 339.

[48]Lincoln to Fox, 1 May 1861, *ORN*, 4:251.

[49] Niven, *Gideon Welles,* 336.

[50]Proclamation calling militia and convening Congress, 15 April 1861, in Abraham Lincoln, *Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln,* 7 vols., ed. Roy P. Basler (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1953-1955), 4:331-332.

[51]Proclamation by the President of the Confederate States of America, 17 April 1861, *ORN*, 5:796.

[52]Davis to Confederate Congress, 29 April 1861, U.S. War Department, *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies.* 70 Vols. in 128 Parts. (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1880-1901), ser. 4, vol. 1:264. (Hereafter cited as *OR*.)

[53]Tucker, *Blue and Gray Navies*, xiii-xviii.

[54]Proclamation of Blockade, April 19, 1861, *ORN*, 4:156-157.

[55]Luraghi, *A History of the Confederate Navy,* 70.

[56]James M. McPherson, "Lincoln and the Strategy of Unconditional Surrender," in *Lincoln, the War President: The Gettysburg Lectures*, ed. Gabor S. Boritt. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 41.

[57]Spencer C. Tucker, *Blue and Gray Navies: The Civil War Afloat* (Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 2006), xx.

[58]Julian S. Corbett, *Some Principles of Maritime Strategy* (Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1988), 183-185.

[59]Alexander Holtzoff, "Some Phases of the Law of Blockade," *The American Journal of International Law* 10, no. 1 (1916): 54.

[60]Howard Jones, *Union in Peril: The Crisis over British Intervention in the Civil War* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 39.

[61]Stuart Anderson, "1861: Blockade vs. Closing the Confederate Ports," *Military Affairs* 41, no. 4 (1977): 190.

[62]Ibid.

[63]Ibid.

[64]Ibid.

[65]Davis to Confederate Congress, 29 April 1861, *OR*, ser. 4, vol. 1:264.

[66]Bragg to Adams, 14 May 1861, *ORN*, 4:168.

[67]Jones, *Union in Peril*, 3.

[68]Allan Peskin, *Winfield Scott and the Profession of Arms* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 2003), 36.

[69]McClellan to Scott, 27 April 1861, in George B. McClellan, *The Civil War Papers of George B. McClellan: Selected Correspondence, 1860-1865,* ed. Stephen W. Sears (New York: Ticknor and Fields, 1989), 13.

[70]Ibid., 2.

[71]Scott to McClellan, 3 May 1861, *OR*, ser. 1, vol. 51, pt. 1:369-370.

[72]Rowena Reed, *Combined Operations in the Civil War* (Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1978), 4.

[73]Peskin, *Winfield Scott*, 250.

[74]Theodore Ropp, "Anacondas Anyone?" *Military Affairs* 27, no. 2 (summer 1963): 71.

[75]McPherson, *Lincoln and the Strategy of Unconditional Surrender,* 42.

[76]Gideon Welles, *Diary of Gideon Welles: Secretary of the Navy under Lincoln and Johnson*, 3 vols., ed. Howard E. Beale (New York: W. W. Norton, 1960), 1:242.

[77]Gideon Welles, "Report of the Secretary of the Navy," 2 December 1861, in *Appendix to the Congressional Globe*, 37th Cong., 2d Sess., 1861, 18. In his report, Welles referred to the blockade as the "*closing* of all the insurgent ports . . . under the exacting regulations of an international blockade [emphasis mine]." Welles continued to believe that the proper action was to close the ports rather than proclaim a blockade. In a *Diary* entry on 22 August 1863, Welles referred to the blockade as "the error into which Mr. Seward plunged at the beginning, when he insisted that a blockade authorized by international law should be established instead of a closure of the ports by national law, and that the Rebels should be recognized as belligerents." Welles, *Diary*, 1:414.

[78] Spencer C. Tucker, *Raphael Semmes and the Alabama* (Abilene, Tex.: McWhiney Foundation Press, 1998), 56-58.

[79] Roberts, *Now for the Contest*, 9.

CHAPTER 3

CUTTING OFF THE CRESCENT CITY

> Blockading was desperately tedious work, make the best one could
> of it.[1]

Alfred Thayer Mahan, *From Sail to Steam*

Introduction

The steam frigate USS *Powhatan* had seen distinguished service since its

commissioning in 1852. Commodore Matthew C. Perry had made the vessel his flagship

during his naval mission to Japan from 1853 to 1854. During the early months of 1854,

Powhatan played host to a steady stream of diplomats and dignitaries in Tokyo Bay, as

Perry negotiated a trade agreement that would open ports to American shipping and end

two hundred years of Japanese isolation. Perry's mission and the resulting Treaty of

Kanagawa were a triumph of diplomacy that, as historian John Schroeder notes, "placed

him in the first rank of nineteenth-century American naval heroes."[2]

During the Mexican War, Perry had served as commander of the Home Squadron,

the fleet of naval vessels responsible for blockading Mexico's Gulf Coast and supporting

ground forces in their drive to Mexico City. Among the officers under Perry's command

in the Home Squadron was a lieutenant named David Dixon Porter. Porter's

distinguished service in the conflict gained the attention of Perry, who rewarded the

young officer with his first naval command, the gunboat *Spitfire*.[3]

As the Civil War began in the spring of 1861, Porter, still a lieutenant, held

command of Perry's old flagship. On 29 May *Powhatan* took station at the mouth of the

Mississippi River, joining the USS *Brooklyn* in the blockade of New Orleans. The vessel

that had been instrumental in opening an isolated Japan to American trade was now employed in cutting off the Confederacy from international commerce by sealing its most profitable port.[4]

This chapter will examine the Union navy's efforts to implement the primary element of its naval strategy in Louisiana: the blockade of New Orleans. The blockade of the Confederacy's largest port that began in May 1861 with the arrival of the *Brooklyn* and *Powhatan* would face numerous challenges that compromised its effectiveness. Blockaders struggled with inadequate resources, a long supply chain, limited personnel, and the challenging geography of the Mississippi Delta. Two incidents in particular would highlight the challenges of blockade duty--the escape of the Confederate raider CSS *Sumter* and a disastrous incident on the Mississippi River in October 1861. Secretary of the Navy Welles addressed these challenges by procuring vessels, addressing the need for personnel, and adapting the navy's organizational structure. He also created a Blockade Board, which would provide detailed strategic guidance for improving the effectiveness of the blockade.

<center>David Dixon Porter</center>

David Dixon Porter was born into naval royalty in 1813, while his father, Commodore David Porter, cruised the Pacific in the frigate *Essex*, hunting down British privateers. The famed naval hero had earlier seen action in the Barbary Wars, conducting America's first naval blockade. The elder Porter had been assigned to the sailing frigate USS *Philadelphia*, whose grounding in Tripoli harbor led to the imprisonment of the crew and the daring raid of Lieutenant Stephen Decatur.[5]

David D. Porter's early naval service had also resulted in a brief imprisonment. His father had resigned his commission 1826 following a court martial and subsequent suspension for actions taken in response to a dispute in Puerto Rico. Porter followed his father to Mexico, where the ex-commodore became the Mexican navy's general of marine. The teenage Porter saw significant action in Mexico, capped by six months of captivity on board a Spanish prison ship in Havana harbor following the defeat of the Mexican brig *Guerrerro*, commanded by his cousin, David H. Porter.[6]

After his release, Porter returned to the United States, receiving an appointment as a midshipman in February 1829. As historian Chester Hearn notes, Porter "had already seen more action at sea than most of the lieutenants who would supervise his naval education."[7] In addition to service at sea with the Mediterranean Squadron, Porter honed his seamanship skills with the Coast Survey. The Coast Survey was a scientific organization that fell under the administration of the Treasury Department but received significant support from the navy, which supplied officers to help chart America's coastline.[8] Porter's duty with the Coast Survey provided valuable experience in conducting shallow water naval operations, as he sounded and charted channels in some of the nation's busiest seaports.

Porter returned to Mexico in early 1847, joining the naval forces blockading the port of Vera Cruz. Porter distinguished himself with his service in the Mexican War, demonstrating the tactical skill, aggressive leadership, and combative spirit that would become his trademarks during the Civil War. As first lieutenant on the steamship *Spitfire*, Porter aided in the planning and execution of the naval bombardment of Vera Cruz in March 1847, using the surveying skills learned in his work with the Coast Survey. Porter,

placed in temporary command of *Spitfire* during the assault of Tabasco in June, used

explosives to clear the Tabasco River of obstructions, allowing vessels to transit upriver

and commence a bombardment of the fort guarding the town. Porter then led a landing

team that drove the defenders from the work, clearing the way for the surrender of the

town.[9]

The years between the wars found Porter engaged in a variety of tasks, including

another stint of duty with the Coast Survey. Most notably, Porter obtained temporary

leave from the service to command commercial mail steamships. Porter realized there

was little possibility of commanding a modern steam vessel in the navy. Not only was the

postwar navy in the process of reverting to a cost-effective fleet of sailing ships, but there

was little prospect of earning a quick promotion with the glut of officers ahead of him on

the seniority list. Porter tackled his commands with his usual energy, quickly gaining a

reputation for discipline and efficiency. In addition, he gained valuable practical

knowledge of modern steam vessels.[10]

Porter returned to active naval service in 1855, as historian Charles Dufour

describes, "thoroughly familiar with the Gulf waters and the Mississippi River."[11] As

civil war approached, Porter briefly considered returning to commercial steamship

service. His years of temporary duty had left him low on the seniority list, and the

thought of several more years as a lieutenant did not appeal to the enterprising officer;

however, a civil war offered possibilities of glory and quick promotion. As the crisis at

Fort Sumter intensified following Lincoln's inauguration, Porter, with his plan to

reinforce Pensacola's Fort Pickens, gained the notice of the new president. Secretary of

State Seward felt Fort Pickens could be successfully reinforced without inflaming

Confederate passion for secession, and solicited Porter's input regarding a potential operation.[12]

Porter's actions in securing command of the *Powhatan* and compromising the relief of Fort Sumter had left him out of favor with Welles. Welles had, in his words, "found great demoralization and defection among the naval officers" at the Navy Department when he assumed his new post, and Porter, whom Welles described as an officer "given to intrigues," was one of a number of officers "courted and caressed by the Secessionists." Under the circumstances, Welles questioned Porter's loyalty to the Union.[13] Yet Seward, through his plan to reinforce Fort Pickens, had "extricated [Porter] from Secession influences, and committed him at once, and decisively, to the Union cause."[14] As the navy undertook its blockade of the Confederate coast, Welles could hardly have realized how important a role Porter would play in the Union effort or that Porter would one day surpass even his revered father in rank and glory.

<div align="center">The Crescent City</div>

As the Union navy implemented its strategy to isolate the Confederacy in the early days of the war, New Orleans, as historian John D. Winters writes, "was destined to become one of the main targets of the Federal blockade."[15] By 1861 the cosmopolitan city founded by the French in 1718 on the banks of the lower Mississippi River had become the South's wealthiest and most prosperous city and one of its primary industrial centers.[16]

While the Confederacy's industrial capacity lagged far behind the Union's, New Orleans had the potential to become a significant industrial center. New Orleans was one of the South's primary shipbuilding centers, joined by Norfolk after the fall of the

Gosport Navy Yard in April. By that time, shipbuilders in New Orleans had already begun outfitting steam vessels with guns to serve as privateers. The city's nascent cloth and shoe manufacturers, powder mills, and saltworks could grow to support the needs of the war effort. In addition, iron foundries could convert from producing heavy machinery to manufacturing heavy guns, small arms, and shot and shell.[17]

The city's volume of trade ranked only behind New York. Economist David Surdam notes that "New Orleans was the great Southern trade center, dwarfing all of the remaining Southern ports," with "the value of its domestic exports" exceeding "the remaining Southern ports combined."[18] The city's location on the Gulf Coast made it a hub for regional and international trade. In addition, its connection to the vast Mississippi River system provided a vital commercial link to the nation's interior. The Mississippi "or its tributaries drained seventeen northern, border, and southern states."[19]

New Orleans served as a primary distribution center for tobacco, sugar, Texas beef, molasses, and grain; however, the most significant export it provided the world was cotton. The city, according to historian Stephen Wise, "was the focal point of the world's cotton trade," exporting more cotton in 1860 than all other ports in the United States combined.[20] An underdeveloped rail industry meant that most of the cotton and other goods traveled on the Mississippi River by steamboat or along the coast on small coastal vessels.

Despite the importance of New Orleans as a seaport, the city had, as Wise notes, "some natural features that limited its use and could keep it from reaching its full potential." Although there were several water routes from the Gulf of Mexico to the city, "only a few could be utilized by the larger ships that frequented the port."[21] Only shallow

draft vessels could approach the city from the east through Lake Pontchartrain. Vessels

approaching from the west were forced to navigate the shallow waters of Barataria Bay or

Berwick Bay and then a network of bayous to New Orleans.

The primary entrance to the city was the Mississippi River. Seventy-five miles

below New Orleans the river divided into four passes that, as historian Chester Hearn

describes, "pointed outward much like the claws of a giant bird, with its leg serving as the

river and its ankle joint as Head of Passes."[22] Head of Passes was a broad stretch of deep

water that provided suitable anchorages for vessels transiting the river. Extending from

Head of the Passes to the east was Pass a l'Outre, the busiest and deepest outlet, with a

depth of seventeen feet. On the western side of the delta, thirty miles from Pass a l'Outre,

lay Southwest Pass, the other major entrance to the river. South Pass and Northeast Pass,

which was a branch of Pass a l'Outre, lay between the two major passes. Both were

shallow passes that only light draft vessels could enter.

The entrances to the passes were constantly shifting, as mud deposited by the

river altered the course and depth of the channels. Towboats were a critical requirement

on the river, moving the deeper draft vessels that ran aground on the fluctuating bars.

These conditions that made the river trade with New Orleans such a challenge would also

test the Union blockading squadron.[23]

The Blockade Begins

New Orleans was ignored in the opening days of the blockade. With the fall of

Fort Sumter, Fort Pickens--its Federal garrison constantly threatened by Confederate

forces--became the primary focus of naval operations in the Gulf. The *Brooklyn* had been

stationed off Fort Pickens since February, with the *Powhatan*, commanded by Porter,

arriving on 17 April.[24] The fall of Gosport Navy Yard had also added to the pressure to keep Fort Pickens in Union hands. Norfolk had fallen to Confederate forces on 20 April. The evacuating Union forces bungled the attempt to demolish the yard during their departure, resulting in the capture of more than a thousand heavy naval guns. Confederate forces were also able to salvage the Union vessel *Merrimack*, which would be plated with iron and rechristened the CSS *Virginia*.[25]

The lack of blockaders off New Orleans became an issue in early May. On 4 May 1861, Welles issued orders to Captain William W. McKean, commander of the USS *Niagara*, to proceed to blockade duty in the Gulf of Mexico. Only two days prior, McKean had been ordered to proceed from New York to Charleston to establish the blockade of that city. In the meantime, Welles had received information "so important" that he deemed it "necessary to order the *Niagara* at once to the Gulf." Welles had learned that a shipment of arms from Belgium was soon expected to arrive at New Orleans and Mobile. Welles warned McKean that "an immediate and actual blockade" of these cities be undertaken, and that "all diligence" be exercised to "capture the vessels with arms and munitions on board." In addition to these orders, Welles provided guidance regarding blockade procedures. Upon arrival at a port, a vessel should give public notice of the blockade and allow no vessel to enter the port or river blockaded. Once official notice had been provided, neutral vessels would be allowed fifteen days to leave, with or without cargo.[26]

Welles, aware that only an effective blockade could stop critical war materiel from reaching Confederate ports, began issuing orders to vessels to proceed to the Gulf to seal off New Orleans and Mobile. On 6 May, Welles ordered the steamer USS *Huntsville*

to proceed from Brooklyn Navy Yard to blockade duty in the Gulf of Mexico.[27] Orders to

the steamers USS *Massachusetts* and USS *South Carolina* at Boston followed on 16 May,

and the following day three more vessels were directed to proceed "with all practicable

dispatch to the Gulf."[28] McKean arrived off Pensacola on 25 May and promptly issued

orders for the *Brooklyn* to proceed to the mouth of the Mississippi River and the

Powhatan to take station off Mobile. In a dispatch to Welles, McKean commented on the

lack of coal on station, noting that *Brooklyn* and *Powhatan* each had only a week's

supply. While McKean intended to send *Powhatan* to New Orleans as soon as sufficient

vessels were available, he noted that "two vessels were not sufficient to blockade the

mouth of the Mississippi."[29]

The *Brooklyn*, commanded by Commander Charles H. Poor, arrived off Pass a

l'Outre on 26 May, provided the required formal notification, and established the

blockade of New Orleans. The cargo vessel *H. E. Spearing*, laden with coffee for New

Orleans, had been seized en route, the first Confederate prize taken off New Orleans. The

Powhatan took up station at Southwest Pass on 29 May, having also captured a blockade

runner while steaming from Mobile.[30]

The reports sent by Poor and Porter over the next several weeks detailed a number

of challenges faced in the opening days of the blockade of New Orleans. Without more

vessels, particularly shallow draft vessels, to guard the passes of the river, the blockade

would not be effective and, therefore, not binding. The need for larger crews was another

pressing matter. Because prize crews had to be provided for vessels that were seized,

additional officers and men were needed to ensure the blockaders could continue to

operate. Porter lamented to Welles that "the present allowance of crews to vessels is for

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peace establishment and is not suited at all to times of war, if it is intended that the

vessels shall be efficient."[31] Both officers also feared they would soon be out of coal, and

Porter warned Welles on 1 June to he would "soon only be able to lie at the bar like a

sailing ship."[32]

Another problem faced by the blockaders was more mundane, but no less

challenging. Naval theorist Alfred Thayer Mahan, who spent most of the Civil War as a

lieutenant on blockade duty, would later recall the "dead monotony of the blockade,"

where there was practically nothing to do, because "nothing happened that required either

a doing or an undoing." Even for sailors practiced at idling away the hours by swapping

sea stories, "the largest reservoir of anecdotes was sure to run dry."[33] Blockade duty was

characterized by long stretches of intense boredom punctuated by brief periods of

frenzied activity when a sailor would spot a potential blockade runner and the ship would

give chase, in what historian Michael Bennet has called "the single most exciting

experience in the navy."[34]

Implementing the primary element of Union naval strategy was clearly going to

be an enormous challenge. Welles attempted to simplify the problem by dividing

blockade responsibility between two commands--the Atlantic and Gulf Blockading

Squadrons. Flag Officer William Mervine was assigned command of the Gulf Blockading

Squadron on 7 May, with an area of responsibility extending from Key West to the Rio

Grande. Mervine sent a circular letter to his new command on 22 May, reminding the

officers and men of "the great necessity that exists for prompt and energetic action,

untiring vigilance, and devotion to duty" that would be required to "crush the hydra of

secession."[35] "Energetic" and "untiring" were hardly words that could be used to describe

the squadron's new commander. Captain Samuel F. Du Pont described the seventy-year-old Mervine, a veteran of the War of 1812, as "the thickest-headed fellow we have."[36] Mervine was a fitting argument for the overhaul of the navy's antiquated retirement system.

Mervine would have his own set of difficulties to deal with as commander of the Gulf Blockading Squadron. Historian Kevin Weddle has summarized the challenges faced by blockade commanders as "lack of local knowledge, command and control problems, and logistics."[37] These issues would affect the blockade at New Orleans, the Gulf Blockading Squadron's most critical station. The complicated geography of the Louisiana coastline, with its numerous coastal inlets and bayous, and the shifting channels and varying waters depths of the Mississippi River, continually frustrated blockaders. Command and control was complicated by the size of the Gulf Blockading Squadron's area of responsibility, which stretched 840 miles in a straight line from Key West to the Rio Grande. New Orleans would also be the most difficult station to support logistically. As historian Dennis Ringle has observed, the "ships enforcing the blockade in the Gulf of Mexico operated at the end of the navy's supply tether."[38]

Shortly after arriving at Key West on 7 June, Mervine received instructions from Welles. "It is especially essential that the Mississippi be closed," Welles informed Mervine, and "you will at no time allow your force to be so diminished as to permit any vessel to enter or depart from New Orleans."[39] There were still only two vessels stationed at the passes, soon to be joined by a third, the *Massachusetts*, on 13 June. Mervine spent the month of June dealing with routine operational and administrative matters, including

moving his flagship *Mississippi* from Key West to its new station off Fort Pickens, where he arrived on 23 June.[40]

Mervine soon received a report from Porter, still stationed at Southwest Pass, that included details of a steam vessel "fitting out at New Orleans" named the *Sumter* that was "commanded by Raphael Semmes, formerly a commander in the U.S. Navy."[41] Mervine forwarded Porter's report to Welles on 27 June, but neglected to highlight *Sumter*'s status in New Orleans. Welles had already learned of the preparations from a dispatch dated 11 May 1861 that provided a "list of steamers bought and sold by Confederate pirates" in New Orleans. Included in the list was the *Habana*, with a note indicating that the vessel's name had been changed to *Sumter*.[42]

Semmes Escapes

Commander Raphael Semmes was a veteran of thirty-five years of service in the US Navy, having received his appointment as midshipman in 1826. Like Porter, Semmes had worked with the Coast Survey and seen service in the Mexican War, where he commanded blockading vessels and experienced firsthand the difficulty and tedium of blockade duty. More recently, he had served as a member of the navy's Lighthouse Board. The Maryland native resigned his naval commission in February 1861 in response to the secession of his adopted home state of Alabama.[43]

After a brief consultation with President Jefferson Davis in Montgomery, Semmes headed North to carry out his first assignment for the Confederate government-- purchasing military equipment and machinery. Upon his return to Montgomery, Semmes was appointed a commander in the Confederate navy and chief of the Lighthouse Bureau. After the shelling of Fort Sumter, Semmes wrote, "It became evident . . . that the Light-

House Bureau was no longer to be thought of." Semmes "at once sought an interview with the Secretary of the Navy, and explained to him my desire to go afloat."[44]

Understanding that the Confederacy had, according to Semmes, "nothing that could be called a navy," he became a strong proponent of commerce raiding. As Semmes would later describe, he endorsed a strategy of using a "well-organized system of private armed ships" to act in concert with the regular naval force in striking at enemy shipping. Because the "commercial marine" was "the enemy's chief source of wealth" and would be "a powerful means of enabling him to carry on the war," it "became an object of the first necessity . . . to strike at his commerce." Semmes found a strong supporter in Secretary of the Navy Stephen Mallory.[45]

Semmes learned from Mallory of the existence of a steam vessel in New Orleans named the *Habana* that, with the proper modifications, could become a suitable commerce raider. Semmes immediately requested and was assigned command of the vessel on 18 April. Rechristened CSS *Sumter* in honor of the recent Confederate victory, it would become the Confederate navy's first commissioned vessel.[46]

Semmes arrived in New Orleans on 22 April and set to work preparing his new command for sea. *Sumter* was stripped down and refitted with reinforced decks and additional coal bunkers; her guns came from the recently captured supply of arms at Norfolk. Semmes encountered numerous challenges in refitting *Sumter*, and his patience began to wear thin as Union vessels arrived to begin the blockade of New Orleans. "We are losing a great deal of precious time," he complained in his journal. "The enemy's flag is being flaunted in our faces . . . by his ships of war, and his vessels of commerce are

passing . . . on the ocean, in defiance, or in contempt of our power, and, as yet, we have not struck a blow."[47]

On 3 June *Sumter* was commissioned and launched, but two more weeks were required to complete sea trials and additional preparations. Semmes made his way to Head of the Passes on 21 June, where he obtained a pilot to remain constantly on board to, according to Semmes, "enable me to take advantage of any temporary absence of the enemy's cruisers." Semmes was surprised to discover that the *Brooklyn* had not taken up anchorage at Head of the Passes, which would "effectually seal all the passes of the river, with her presence alone" and "enable the enemy to withdraw the remainder of his blockading force." Semmes and his crew, beset by mosquitoes and blazing heat, continued to sit at anchor, waiting to make their escape.[48]

Porter discovered on 21 June that *Sumter* had anchored at Head of the Passes and suspected that Semmes was employing the side-wheeler *Ivy* as a scout to relay information regarding the disposition of the blockading vessels at the passes. Porter then executed a daring plan to seize the *Ivy* during one of the vessel's routine patrols down Southwest Pass, hoping to then board *Sumter* and proceed to New Orleans. But the *Ivy* failed to return, and a mail steamer that came down the pass three days later escaped before Porter's men could board her.[49]

Semmes made his escape on 30 June through Pass a l'Outre. The *Brooklyn* had left its station near the bar to chase a sailing vessel eight miles to the west, and Semmes seized the opportunity to make his way down the pass to open water. After spotting the smoke from *Sumter*, the *Brooklyn* made its way toward the bar. Commander Poor attempted to intercept Semmes, "but owing to the *Brooklyn's* want of speed," as Poor

claimed in his report, "was unable to get within gun range of her."[50] Poor retired to his station at Pass a l'Outre after a chase of three and one-half hours, leaving *Sumter*, as historian Spencer Tucker has stated, "free to roam the Gulf."[51]

Sumter would take eighteen prizes over the next six months before being blockaded by the Union navy at Gibraltar, leaving Semmes free to assume command of CSS *Alabama*. Although Porter would later call the event "one of the most exciting chases of the war" and refer to Semmes's escape as "a bold and dashing adventure," the affair caused tremendous embarrassment for Welles.[52] He wrote to Mervine on 16 July, stating that "the Department regrets to learn that a rebel steamer . . . passed out of the Mississippi and has been committing serious depredations on our commerce in the Gulf." Welles went on to remind Mervine that "no more privateers must be permitted to make their way into the Gulf" and pledged that he would continue to supply Mervine vessels to carry out an efficient blockade.[53]

Welles Responds

Since the fall of Fort Sumter and Lincoln's blockade proclamation, Welles had been busy, as biographer John Niven describes, exerting "every effort to build up a Navy that would convert a paper blockade to a real blockade and a tiny, largely obsolete fleet into a strong, modern striking force."[54] Lincoln, who had confessed to Welles in May that "I know but little about ships," gave his navy secretary great latitude in transforming the navy.[55] Welles quickly embarked upon a program to reorganize the Navy Department, procure new and more practical ships, and recruit and train the officers and men to man them. Welles's first need was assistance dealing with the operational and administrative burden of leading a wartime fleet. Gustavus V. Fox, who had earned Lincoln's

admiration for his leadership of the Sumter expedition, was appointed Chief Clerk to the Navy Department in May 1861, despite Welles's desire to appoint an acquaintance from Connecticut, William Faxon, to the position. As historian Charles O. Paullin observed, "Fox's career both in and out of the navy admirably fitted him for the assistant secretaryship."[56] Not only did Fox have extensive operational experience, but he was friendly with many of the officers on active duty, including Porter. On 31 July 1861, Congress passed an act authorizing the appointment of an Assistant Secretary of the Navy. Welles appointed Fox to the new position, allowing Faxon to assume Fox's former office as Chief Clerk. Welles and Fox quickly established an effective working relationship, with Fox assuming responsibility for much of the operational planning in the Navy Department.[57]

Another critical requirement was more ships to support the blockading squadrons. To fill this need, the Navy Department adopted several measures to increase the size of the fleet. The first measure, as historian James Soley has stated, "was to buy everything afloat that could be made of service."[58] The nation's large merchant marine fleet provided a source of vessels that, with the quick addition of suitable guns, could readily be converted to use by the navy. By the end of 1861, more than ninety vessels had been purchased.[59] Many of the vessels sent to the Gulf Blockading Squadron in the opening weeks of the blockade, like the steamers *Massachusetts* and *South Carolina*, had only recently been acquired.[60]

While these converted merchant vessels were suitable for filling a station on blockade duty, as Niven notes, they "were not designed for offensive operations against forts and the pursuit of fast, heavily-armed Confederate cruisers."[61] The immediate need

for capable vessels forced Welles to enlist the aid of private shipyards to supplement

construction at the navy yards. The Navy Department contracted for private construction

of small, heavily armed vessels, the "ninety-day gunboats" that would see service

primarily on blockade duty. These gunboats performed admirably during the war and

would play a significant role on the Mississippi River. In addition, the need for vessels

that could operate on the shallow, confined waters of the southern coast led to the

development of double-ended paddle-wheel steamers, which, with their shallow drafts

and rudders at both ends, were uniquely suited to riverine operations.[62]

The final measure taken by Welles to increase the size of the fleet was the

construction of ironclad vessels. In order to oversee the construction of these new ships,

Welles appointed an Ironclad Board, headed by Commodore Joseph Smith, which settled

on three separate ironclad designs. The most unconventional design was John Ericsson's

Monitor, which would gain notoriety in its contest with the CSS *Virginia* in March

1862.[63]

As historian William Roberts has observed, the vessels produced by this major

shipbuilding effort "would do little good without crews to man them." As noted above,

one of the earliest complaints from the blockading squadron was the need for more men

and officers to man blockading vessels and prize crews. Because this need would only be

compounded by the rapid construction of new vessels, Welles embarked upon a program

to rapidly increase the number of personnel on duty. This program produced quick

results: by the end of the year, the number of enlisted men in service was tripled from

7,600 to 22,000.[64]

When it came to the need for officers, the U.S. Naval Academy could not provide experienced officers rapidly enough to fill the immediate demand. While a number of former officers returned to active service, the bulk of new officers came through the appointment of volunteers. By the end of the war, Welles had commissioned approximately 7,500 volunteer officers, most coming from service in the merchant marine. In addition to expanding the officer ranks, Welles took the opportunity to push through needed reform of the retirement system, ridding the navy of much of the "dead wood" that had collected in the upper ranks. Legislation passed in August 1861 allowed the navy to retire or discharge incapacitated officers. Additional legislation passed in December stipulated that officers be retired at the age of sixty-two or after forty-five years of service. The reforms envisioned by the Retiring Board had finally come to pass.[65]

Blockade Board

As the war entered its first summer, Union efforts to improve the effectiveness of the blockade continued. These efforts assumed added importance in late July, when the Union defeat at Bull Run ended hope of a decisive victory that would quickly end the war. The defeat prompted Lincoln to reassess Union military strategy, which he summarized on 23 July in a "Memoranda of Military Policy Suggested by the Bull Run Defeat." In the first point of his memoranda--the only point relating directly to naval operations--Lincoln emphasized the importance of the naval strategy of blockade: "Let the plan for making the Blockade effective be pushed forward with all possible dispatch."[66] By this time, Welles had already taken a significant step in improving the effectiveness of the blockade, with the creation of what historian William Roberts has

called a "temporary study group" to examine the blockade problem. The Blockade Board would "greatly influence naval strategy" through its detailed reports and recommendations for maintaining the blockade.[67]

The idea for establishing the board had initially come from Alexander D. Bache, superintendent of the United States Coast Survey. Bache's office had been flooded with "numerous inquiries" regarding hydrographic information to support the blockaders and suggested to Assistant Secretary of the Navy Fox that the Navy, as Fox later wrote to Captain Samuel Du Pont, "have a board of persons . . . condense all the vast information in the Engineers Department, Coast Survey, and Navy, for the use of the blockading squadron." On 22 May 1861, Fox appealed to Du Pont, a former member of the Navy Retiring Board who was then commanding the Philadelphia Navy Yard, to "give up the Yard" and join the board.[68]

Du Pont wrote to Bache on 30 May, commending Bache for his "valuable suggestion" and declaring his desire to serve on a blockade board "at any moment." He believed his Mexican War experience, where he had "probably blockaded more than any one officer in the Navy," would allow him to make a contribution to the important work of the board. Thus far there was much "bungling" concerning the blockade, with many holding wrongheaded ideas that the entire coastline must be blockaded when "foreign interest" only required that the ports of entry be covered.[69]

The Blockade Board first convened on 27 June 1861, with Du Pont serving as chair. Du Pont's blockading experience and his service on other naval boards like the Navy Retiring Board made him, according to biographer Kevin Weddle, "uniquely qualified for the chairmanship of the Blockade Board.[70] Joining Du Pont were Bache,

Major John G. Barnard of the Army Corps of Engineers, and Commander Charles H. Davis, a close friend of Du Pont's, who served as secretary for the board.

The Blockade Board's board recommendations were compiled in six reports, referred to as "memoirs," which, as historian John Hayes describes, "outlined the hydrographic conditions along the Atlantic and Gulf coasts of the Confederacy, recommended points to be seized for bases, and provided other guidance for blockade operations."[71] The board's fifth report, dealing with "the shores of the United States bordering the Gulf of Mexico," was issued on 9 August 1861, with a supplemental report issued on 19 September. These reports covered the entire coastline from the Florida Keys to the Rio Grande, which was divided into six sections according to geographic characteristics. New Orleans and its various approaches, considered by the board the most important section in the region, was addressed first.[72]

The report exhaustively examined the Louisiana coastline, aiming to provide details on the labyrinthine geography of lakes, bays, bayous, swamps, channels, and canals that connected New Orleans and the Mississippi River to the Gulf of Mexico. Additionally, the board sought to examine the suitability of these various waterways for conducting naval operations. The Mississippi Delta and Head of the Passes received particular notice, and the board provided detailed information on the currents, water depths, and tidal characteristics of Pass a l'Outre and Southwest Pass.[73]

The most notable features of the report were brief recommendations the board provided regarding future naval plans for New Orleans. The primary issue to be addressed was whether the plan should, as the report stated, "embrace the conquest of [New Orleans] or the sealing up its trade and navigation." In the board's estimation, the

capture of New Orleans would require a significant number of vessels and troops and could be accomplished only through a slow advance using sieges to defeat the Confederate fortifications on the river. The board regarded such an operation "incompatible with the other nearer and more urgent naval and military operations in which the Government is now and will be for some time hereafter engaged," and thus recommended that the subject "be deferred for the present."[74]

The board proceeded to offer recommendations to cut off New Orleans from all trade, confident that "the moral effect of such a course will be quite as striking as that of its possession by the United States." In addition to a "careful watch" by blockading vessels on the passes of the Mississippi River and other approaches to New Orleans, the board provided two other recommendations that would feature prominently in future naval operations. First, the board recommended that Union forces take possession of Ship Island to serve as a "depot of coal and provisions, as well as a harbor for refuge and repair." In July Confederate forces had occupied the small island that lay twelve miles off the coast of Biloxi, Mississippi. The board considered the fortification of Ship Island one of the "principal means for closing up New Orleans."[75]

The board's second significant recommendation was the "complete fortification of the fork of the Mississippi at or just above the Passes."[76] The board provided further comment on this point in its supplemental report in September, speculating that "the seizing of the Head of the Passes would not be attended with any difficulty, or even be resisted." Because occupation of this area "would invite the most determined attacks," a strong naval force, including ironclad vessels, should be permanently maintained there.[77]

The Blockade Board, as Weddle has described, provided a "roadmap for the Union navy to conduct a major portion of its early strategic responsibilities."[78] By the time the final report was issued in September, the Atlantic Blockading Squadron was already implementing many of the board's earlier recommendations. At New Orleans, the Gulf Blockading Squadron would similarly follow, according to Weddle, "almost exactly the board's recommended course of action."[79] As the board had predicted, Confederate naval forces would put up a bitter fight at Head of the Passes.

<u>Affair at Head of the Passes</u>

With the summer of 1861 drawing to a close, it appeared that implementing the Blockade Board's proposals would be an easier task than imagined. Confederate forces, unable to hold Ship Island against the threat from the increasing number of blockading vessels, evacuated the island on 17 September. Two days later the sidewheel sloop *Water Witch* steamed up Pass a l'Outre to conduct a reconnaissance of the Head of the Passes, intending to locate a suitable site for the construction of a battery. *Water Witch* engaged in a brief exchange of fire with a Confederate steamer before disabling telegraph communications with New Orleans and returning downriver.[80]

Welles, disappointed with Mervine's performance, had relieved him as commander of the Gulf Blockading Squadron in early September. His replacement was Flag Officer William W. McKean, former commander of the screw frigate *Niagara*. McKean had just returned from a fruitless hunt for Semmes, who was raiding Union shipping in the Caribbean. In mid-August, Porter had also been detached from blockade duty to search for the Confederate raider. Porter's chase of *Sumter* would take *Powhatan* through the Caribbean and down to the coast of South America. He would return to the

Gulf at the end of October with a new promotion to commander and his ship badly in need of repairs.[81]

McKean's first priority as commander, he informed Welles on 22 September, was to "take possession . . . of the Head of the Passes, and to erect a battery there."[82] Welles had questioned Mervine on the feasibility of such an operation in July, before the Blockade Board issued its recommendations, but Mervine had delayed taking any action. McKean was not so slow to respond. By early October, four Union vessels were operating at the Head of the Passes: the *Water Witch*, the screw sloop *Richmond*, and the sailing sloops *Preble* and *Vincennes*. McKean, however, feared "the vessels in the river [were] in jeopardy." *Richmond*'s commander, Captain John Pope, had reported receiving harassing fire from the Confederate riverboat *Ivy* on 9 October. Because of their lack of maneuverability, the sailing sloops were, he reported, "of very little use in their present position."[83]

McKean had further cause to fear for the safety of his expedition. Rumors had been circulating since June of a Confederate plan to steam downriver and attack the Union blockading forces. In July, Porter received intelligence concerning a Confederate effort to outfit a steamer with an "iron horn."[84] The vessel was the CSS *Manassas*, a former tug named in honor of the Confederate victory in Virginia. The vessel had been covered with iron railing and outfitted with an underwater iron ram, her primary weapon. For Commodore George N. Hollins, commander of Confederate naval forces at New Orleans, *Manassas* was the ship he needed to, in the words of historian Charles Dufour, take "aggressive action against the blockading fleet after more than four months of astonishing passivity."[85]

In the early hours of 12 October, *Manassas* steamed toward Head of the Passes, followed by three fire rafts and a group of six riverboats dubbed the "Mosquito Fleet." The Union vessels were at anchor when the *Manassas* struck the USS *Richmond*, ripping a hole in her port side and tearing her free from the coal schooner tied alongside. In the confusion, guns were fired aimlessly, but some of the shots managed to strike the smokestacks of *Manassas*, which soon lost power and was grounded in the mud. With the fire rafts ablaze and floating downriver, the Union vessels fled down Southwest Pass. The *Richmond* and the *Vincennes* grounded while attempting to pass over the bar. Confederate vessels made their way downriver and commenced firing on the stranded Union ships.[86]

The embarrassing incident continued when Commander Robert Handy of the *Vincennes*, misinterpreting a signal from Pope, abandoned his vessel. Handy, an American flag wrapped around his waist, soon came on board the *Richmond* with a report that he had "placed a lighted slow match at the magazine." When the magazine failed to explode, Pope ordered Handy and his men to return to their ship. Both vessels were towed over the bar the next day.[87]

Except for the hole in *Richmond* and the loss of 15 tons of coal, damages were surprisingly light. The incident caused more embarrassment than anything else. McKean quickly launched an investigation and reported apologetically to Welles that "the more I hear and learn of the facts the more disgraceful does it appear."[88] Porter, writing more than twenty years after the incident and with the benefit of practically a lifetime at sea, called it "the most ridiculous affair that ever took place in the American Navy."[89]

The incident prompted McKean to reevaluate operations in the Gulf Blockading Squadron. The affair demonstrated the ineffectiveness of sailing sloops for blockading service. "The smallest steamer, mounting one heavy rifled gun," McKean declared to Welles, "would be more serviceable than a heavy sailing frigate." McKean requested that the squadron not be burdened with any more sailing vessels.[90]

McKean provided the first thorough estimate of the number and type of vessels required by his squadron to institute an effective blockade of the Gulf, a task the Blockade Board neglected to perform. As Weddle has noted, this "fundamental oversight . . . was one of the board's few failures."[91] McKean recommended that thirty-eight vessels be provided for the squadron, including six steam vessels at the passes.[92]

Warrant Officer Nicholas Lynch was one of the Union sailors caught in the navy's transition from sail to steam, as naval commanders came to realize the obsolescence of sailing vessels for blockade duty. As a sailmaker aboard the sailing sloop *Vincennes*, Lynch participated in the embarrassing engagement at the Head of Passes. The *Vincennes* would spend much of the next three years anchored off the coast of Mississippi, at Ship Island--"this Miserable Island of Desolation," as Lynch called it. The major efforts of capturing New Orleans and securing the Mississippi would be left to the more maneuverable steam vessels.[93]

<center>Effectiveness of the Blockade</center>

While the contribution of the naval blockade to the Union's victory in the Civil War is a subject of continuing debate among historians, the commercial blockade of New Orleans clearly caused real hardship for the city's citizens. By the fall of 1861, the supply of food and goods was dwindling, resulting in a rapid rise in inflation. Paper shortages

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caused newspapers to reduce or cease publication. Coin money was scarce, with Confederate paper money becoming the common currency. The blockade was also depriving vital industries of necessary raw materials.[94]

Economist David Surdam has recently summarized the blockade's effects on trade in New Orleans: As a result of the blockade, the city's coastal and foreign trade was severely reduced. Although more than three hundred vessels arrived from the Gulf in the ten months prior to the fall of the city, this was less than a sixth the normal number; and, few of these were oceangoing vessels carrying foreign trade. The blockade, combined with Union naval activity on the upper river and an unofficial Confederate trade embargo, crippled the cotton trade. Cotton receipts plummeted from a total of 187,500 bales in the fall of 1860 to fewer than 5,000 bales a year later. The cotton embargo also had the unintended effect of bolstering Union claims of the blockade's effectiveness.[95]

An important strategic effect of the blockade, notes Surdam, was the inability of shipbuilders at New Orleans to import raw materials needed to construct ironclads. As a result, necessary iron and machinery had to be transported from the eastern Confederacy, further taxing an overburdened railroad system and causing excessive delays in construction that could not be overcome before the fall of New Orleans.[96]

<center>Summary</center>

The Navy Department realized in the opening days of the conflict that it could not effectively execute its primary strategic task without cutting off the Confederacy's most important port. One of the first vessels to arrive off New Orleans in May 1861 was the sidewheeler *Powhatan*, commanded by Porter, who possessed an aggressive attitude and a wealth of experience operating steam vessels in shallow water. Porter and his fellow

blockaders faced enormous challenges off the mouth of the Mississippi: a lengthy supply chain, a lack of suitable vessels, and the complex geography of Louisiana's coastline. The escape of the Confederate raider *Sumter* and the embarrassing incident at Head of the Passes further highlighted the difficulty of implementing an effective blockade.

Welles responded by buying and building more steam vessels, increasing the number of personnel while ridding the navy of the dead wood at the top of the ranks, and adapting the navy's organizational structure. This organizational change included the creation of the post of Assistant Secretary of the Navy and the establishment of two squadrons to conduct blockade operations. A temporary Blockade Board was also established to conduct a detailed analysis of the Confederate coastline and recommend measures for improving the effectiveness of the blockade. The Union navy adapted to the challenges of blockade duty, causing significant hardship at New Orleans. In addition to its crippling effects on the city's cotton trade, the blockade stunted the growth of the Confederate navy.

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[2]John H. Schroeder, *Matthew Calbraith Perry: Antebellum Sailor and Diplomat* (Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 2001), xiii.

[3]Hearn, *Admiral David Dixon Porter*, 27.

[4]Ibid., 53.

[5]Richard Zacks, *The Pirate Coast: Thomas Jefferson, the First Marines, and the Secret Mission of 1805* (New York: Hyperion, 2005), 17-30.

[6]Hearn, *Admiral David Dixon Porter*, 7-11.

[7]Ibid., 11.

[8]Donald L. Carney, *Lincoln's Navy: The Ship, Men, and Organizations, 1861-1865* (Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1998), 210.

[9]Hearn, *Admiral David Dixon Porter*, 25-27.

[10]Tamar Moser Melia, "David Dixon Porter: Fighting Sailor," in *Captains of the Old Steam Navy: Makers of the American Naval Tradition 1840-1880*, ed. James C. Bradford (Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1986), 229.

[11]Charles L. Dufour, *The Night the War Was Lost* (Lincoln, Neb.: University of Nebraska Press, 1990), 130.

[12]Porter, *Incidents and Anecdotes*, 13-15. In a rare instance of understatement for Porter, he notes in his recounting of the incident that "the best of feeling did not exist between the heads of the State and Navy Departments."

[13]Welles, *Diary*, 1:19-20.

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[16]Chester G. Hearn, *The Capture of New Orleans, 1862* (Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University Press, 1995), 8.

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[20]Stephen R. Wise, *Lifeline of the Confederacy: Blockade Running During the Civil War* (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1988), 21.

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[22]Hearn, *Admiral David Dixon Porter*, 54.

[23]Wise, *Lifeline of the Confederacy,* 22.

[24]Hearn, *Admiral David Dixon Porter*, 47-78.

[25]Tucker, *Blue and Gray Navies*, 67.

[26]Welles to McKean, 4 May 1861, *ORN*, 4:155-156.

[27]Welles to Price, 6 May 1861, *ORN*, 4:158.

[28]Welles to Smith and Alden, 16 May 1861, *ORN,* 4:172; Welles to Ellison, Shaw and Sartori, 17 May 1861, *ORN*, 4:175.

[29]McKean to Welles, 27 May 1861, *ORN*, 4:181-182.

[30]Poor to Welles, 29 May 1861, *ORN*, 4:187-188.

[31]Porter to Welles, 30 May 1861, *ORN*, 4:188-189.

[32]Porter to Welles, 1 June 1861, *ORN*, 4:194.

[33]Mahan, *From Sail to Steam*, 174-175.

[34]Michael J. Bennet, *Union Jacks: Yankee Sailors in the Civil War* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 59.

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[37]Kevin J. Weddle, *Lincoln's Tragic Admiral*, 109.

[38]Dennis J. Ringle, *Life in Mr. Lincoln's Navy* (Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1998), 114.

[39]Welles to Mervine, 8 June 1861, *ORN*, 16:529.

[40]Mervine to Welles, 27 June 1861, *ORN*, 16:561-162.

[41]Porter to Mervine, 19 June 1861, *ORN*, 16:563-564.

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[45]Ibid., 93.

[46]Ibid., 93-94.

[47]Ibid., 104.

[48]Ibid., 109-112.

[49]Porter to Mervine, 4 July 1861, *ORN*, 16:571-573.

[50]Poor to Mervine, 30 June 1861, *ORN*, 1:34.

[51]Tucker, *Raphael Semmes and the Alabama*, 28-30.

[52]David D. Porter, *The Naval History of the Civil War* (New York: Sherman Publishing Co., 1886), 605-606.

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[54]Niven, *Gideon Welles*, 327.

[55]Lincoln to Welles, 14 May 1861, in Lincoln, *Collected Works*, ed. Basler, 4:370.

[56]Paullin, *Paullin's History of Naval Administration*, 255.

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[60]Silverstone, *Civil War Navies*, 59.

[61]Niven, "Gideon Welles," 331.

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[66]Memoranda of Military Policy Suggested by the Bull Run Defeat, 23 July 1861, in Lincoln, *Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, ed. Basler, 4:457.

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[72]First report for blockading the coast bordering the Gulf of Mexico, 9 August 1861, *ORN*, 16:619.

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[77]Third report for blockading the coast bordering the Gulf of Mexico, 19 September 1861, *ORN*, 16:680.

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[84]Porter to Mervine, 19 July 1861, ibid., 601-602.

[85]Dufour, *Night the War Was Lost,* 76.

[86]Pope to McKean, 13 October 1861, *ORN*, 703-704.

[87]Ibid., 704.

[88]McKean to Welles, 25 October 1861, ibid., 705.

[89]Porter, *The Naval History of the Civil War,* 91.

[90]McKean to Welles, 25 October 1861, *ORN*, 16:708.

[91]Weddle, *Lincoln's Tragic Admiral*, 115-116.

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[95] Surdam, *Northern Naval Superiority*, 59.

[96] David G. Surdam, "The Union Navy's Blockade Reconsidered," in *Naval Blockades and Seapower: Strategies and Counter-Strategies, 1805-2005*, eds. Bruce A. Elleman and S. C. M. Paine (New York: Routledge, 2006), 69.

CHAPTER 4

CAPTURING NEW ORLEANS

Everything relating to the capture of New Orleans must always be interesting.[1]

David D. Porter, *Incidents and Anecdotes of the Civil War*

Introduction

On 28 March 1862, Commander David D. Porter penned a private letter to Assistant Secretary of the Navy Gustavus V. Fox. The sluggish pace of preparations for the imminent attack on New Orleans aggravated Porter, and he directed his frustrations against his commander, Flag Officer David G. Farragut. "I never thought Farragut a Nelson, or a Collingwood," Porter wrote. "I only consider him the best of his rank and so consider him still; but men of his age in a seafaring life are not fit for the command of important enterprises."[2]

Behind Porter's criticism lay a trace of professional jealousy, more alarming because of his close relationship with Farragut. The two men, separated in age by twelve years, were foster brothers, and must have held startlingly different recollections of the elder Porter. If David D. Porter remembered a father disgraced by a court martial and forced to seek glory with the Mexican navy, Farragut could recall the hero of the War of 1812. Farragut had been a young midshipman then, when the *Essex* had achieved lasting fame in the Pacific. Now Farragut was in command of the West Gulf Blockading Squadron, where a victory at New Orleans promised the glory his foster brother sought.[3]

If Porter hesitated to rank Farragut with the British heroes of the Battle of Trafalgar, history would deal with Farragut more kindly. Theodore Roosevelt would call

Farragut "the greatest admiral since Nelson."[4] Porter would earn a similar comparison by Ulysses S. Grant, who claimed Porter was "as great an admiral as Lord Nelson."[5] The stunning naval victory at New Orleans established the reputation of the two men who would play a critical role in naval operations in Louisiana. Both would receive a congressional vote of thanks for their distinguished service at the battle, and Farragut would be rewarded in July 1862 with a promotion to rear admiral, the first officer to hold that newly created rank.[6]

This chapter will examine the capture of New Orleans in April 1862, as naval forces in Louisiana began to take an active role in accomplishing the strategic task of opening the Mississippi River, which had been viewed as primarily an army objective. Joint operations conducted on the Atlantic Coast during the fall of 1861 revealed the feasibility of naval vessels operating against fixed fortifications, but also established a dangerous pattern for joint operations. These victories offered hope that Union naval forces could penetrate the defenses of the Mississippi River and capture New Orleans. The plan to capture the city owed much to the aggressive Porter, who would lead Farragut's mortar flotilla during the attack. Farragut's capture of the city also benefited from a Union offensive in the upper Mississippi Valley that weakened the defenses at New Orleans.

<center>Victories on the Atlantic Coast</center>

The Navy Department responded to the Blockade Board's recommendations in the summer of 1861 by taking action on the Atlantic Coast. Welles had directed the board to propose sites on the coast that could be secured for use as logistics bases, providing the fleet the fuel and stores necessary to conduct an extended blockade. Because securing and

holding these sites would require cooperation with the army, the board's

recommendations received the approval of a group of senior army officers, including Bvt.

Lt. Gen. Winfield Scott. Lincoln soon fully endorsed the board's proposals. The defeat at

Bull Run, as historian Kevin Weddle has noted, left Lincoln "precious few tools with

which to take the fight to the Confederacy," and "the board's proposals promised to make

the blockade work."[7]

In September 1861, Secretary of the Navy Gideon Welles relieved the unwieldy

command and control problem burdening Flag Officer Silas H. Stringham by dividing his

Atlantic Blockading Squadron at the border of North and South Carolina--a measure

recommended by the Blockade Board. Flag Officer Louis M. Goldsborough was assigned

command of the North Atlantic Blockading Squadron. Command of the South Atlantic

Blockading Squadron went to Flag Officer Samuel F. Du Pont, who, as head of the

Blockade Board, understood that, as Weddle has noted, "it was impossible for one man to

effectively exercise command from the mouth of the Chesapeake to Key West."[8]

Welles also acted rapidly to implement the board's other significant

recommendation, the seizure of points on the Atlantic Coast to support the blockade.

North Carolina's Hatteras Inlet was the first site selected. The War Department

cooperated by supplying 860 troops under the command of Major General Benjamin F.

Butler, a "political general" from Massachusetts. The plan of attack called for an

amphibious landing by Butler's troops in conjunction with a naval bombardment of the

two forts protecting the inlet. The landing on 28 August was poorly planned and

executed, and the naval vessels under the Stringham's command forced the surrender of

the forts before Butler's troops had seen any real action. As the first joint operation of the

Civil War, the successful attack on Hatteras Inlet, according to historian Rowena Reed, "established a pattern scarcely broken until the summer of 1863."[9]

The much larger expedition in November to seize Port Royal was almost a repeat of the action at Hatteras. Du Pont and Brigadier General Thomas W. Sherman led the assault against the South Carolina port, guarded by two forts recently constructed at the suggestion of Confederate General P. G. T. Beauregard. Any prospects of a successful joint operation ended when a severe storm in transit scattered and grounded many of the transports. Du Pont chose to continue the attack with naval gunfire alone, and he commenced the bombardment on the morning of 7 November. The forts were soon abandoned, and Sherman's troops, arriving late to the action, occupied both by the following morning. Although Du Pont had been forced by events to abandon the plans for a joint attack, "the truth was," as naval historian Bern Anderson has summarized, "the forts fell entirely as a result of naval gunfire."[10]

If the victories at Hatteras Inlet and Port Royal boosted flagging Union morale, they also provided lessons for the Navy Department that would affect planning for operations in Louisiana. The navy had turned conventional wisdom on its head by twice demonstrating that naval gunfire alone could subdue fixed fortifications. Also, the victories helped establish a pattern for joint operations that, according to Reed, viewed it as "the Navy's role to reduce shore defenses by bombardment, and the Army's to stand in the wings, ready for the occupation."[11] The result was what naval historian William Roberts has described as "bombardment fever," an ailment the victory at New Orleans would do little to alleviate.[12]

<u>Planning the Attack</u>

If "victory has a thousand fathers," then the capture of New Orleans was no different. Welles, Fox, and Porter each claimed later to have played a pivotal role in conceiving one of the most significant naval operations of the war. Porter would get the last word in the argument, publishing his personal reminiscences, titled *Incidents and Anecdotes of the Civil War*, in 1885, after the deaths of his rivals. In this work Porter claimed sole credit for breaking the operational lethargy at the Navy Department by urging a daring expedition to seize New Orleans, as well as recommending the assignment of Farragut to command.[13] In reality, each would have a role to play in adapting naval strategy in response to the victories on the Atlantic Coast.

Two factors weighed against a potential naval attack at New Orleans. First, joint operations to secure the Mississippi River, while constituting one of the navy's strategic tasks, were viewed as an army objective. In support of these operations, the navy had helped establish a gunboat squadron at Cairo, Illinois, to work with the army in the Mississippi Valley. The squadron, commanded first by Commander John Rodgers and later by Flag Officer Andrew H. Foote, was under the operational control of the War Department, which funded the construction of the squadron's gunboats. Because Welles considered these operations on the Mississippi River to be primarily an army mission, Foote received, according to historian Bern Anderson, "much sympathy but little real help from the Navy Department."[14]

The second factor was the influence of the Blockade Board. In its report on New Orleans, the Blockade Board had stated its opinion that, although the numerous approaches to New Orleans made closing the city to trade an insurmountable challenge,

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its strong defenses made capturing the city too difficult a task to accomplish. Instead, the board had provided measures to improve the effectiveness of the blockade, like occupying Ship Island and Head of the Passes. The capture of New Orleans, while important, would have to be deferred until the Navy, they believed, "was prepared to ascend the river with vessels of war sufficiently protected to contend with the forts."[15]

Hatteras Inlet fell three weeks after the board issued its report on New Orleans. At the Navy Department, Assistant Secretary of the Navy Fox soon began to contemplate the possibility that New Orleans could be captured in a similar operation launched from the Gulf. As a former sailor, he was familiar with the city and its approaches, and felt confident that the forts guarding the southern flank of the city could be passed at night without help from the Army. Then, with New Orleans captured and the army upriver, the forts, their lines of communication with the city now severed, would be forced to surrender. Fox's bold plan appealed to Welles, who, as biographer John Niven notes, was not "indifferent to the personal acclaim he could expect to receive from such a successful stroke."[16]

The daring scheme received further support after the joint attack on Port Royal on 7 November. Any remaining uncertainty ended a week later, with Porter's arrival at the Navy Department. The *Powhatan* had returned to the Brooklyn Navy Yard on 9 November for badly needed repairs, and Porter took the opportunity to journey to Washington and "lay a proposition for the capture of New Orleans before the Secretary of the Navy," as he later recorded.[17] Having recently returned from the Mississippi, Porter was able to address Welles's remaining doubts regarding the feasibility of the operation. Porter responded to lingering concerns regarding the strength of the forts by

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recommending that a mortar flotilla be used to conduct a preparatory bombardment.

Porter's enthusiasm and proposals assured Welles, who sought a meeting with the

president.[18]

Lincoln, as Niven describes, "was carried away with the idea," and decided that

Major General George B. McClellan, the Union's new general-in-chief, should be

consulted immediately.[19] McClellan, concerned by the sizeable force necessary to

capture the city and its forts, was initially reluctant to support the operation. On 15

November, the naval representatives informed McClellan they were planning a naval

operation that required only 10,000 troops to occupy the city after its surrender.

Persuaded by their assurances, McClellan endorsed the plan, adding his support for

Porter's mortar bombardment.[20]

Preparations soon began, with Fox selecting the naval forces for the operation

while Porter created his mortar flotilla--twenty converted schooners each mounting a 13-

inch mortar. Responsibility for selecting the expedition's commander was left to Welles.

Porter would have a part to play here, too, by urging the appointment of an officer many

considered an unlikely candidate--a sixty-year-old native of Tennessee named David

Glasgow Farragut.[21]

Flag Officer David G. Farragut

Farragut, like his foster brother Porter, was born to a seafaring life. In 1807, at the

age of six, the Tennessee native moved with his family to New Orleans, where his father

served as sailing master of a gunboat. An immigrant from Minorca, George Farragut had

participated in the American Revolution as both a sailor and soldier. David Farragut's

mother died less than a year after their arrival in New Orleans, leaving behind five

children. Commander David Porter, who ran the naval station at New Orleans, helped

relieve George Farragut's burden by assuming guardianship of David.[22]

Farragut received an appointment as a midshipman in 1810, and accompanied his

guardian the next year when Porter was assigned command of the sailing frigate USS

Essex. Farragut gained a valuable education at sea after war began in June 1812, as *Essex*

battled British men-of-war and whalers operating under letters of marque. *Essex* also

routinely stopped at various ports to refit the ship and rest the crew. Farragut later

recalled a memorable visit to the exotic Marquesas Islands in late 1813 for "a few weeks'

indulgence on shore, after the toils and privations of war cruising," as he called it. Porter

ensured that most of Farragut's time in the islands was spent on board ship, where the

young midshipman could pursue his studies "away from temptation."[23]

As a twelve-year-old midshipman Farragut gained his first command when he

served as prize master of a recaptured American whaler. His service on the *Essex* ended

in March 1814, when Porter attempted to escape from two British warships blockading

the harbor at Valparaiso, Chile. The outgunned Porter fought until late in the day, when,

with his ship now severely damaged and much of his crew injured or dying, he was

forced to surrender. Farragut had fought bravely, working the guns, delivering messages

for Porter, and carrying powder. After the battle he went below, as he recalled, among the

"mangled bodies" of his "dead and dying" shipmates, where he helped the surgeon dress

wounds.[24] All this he would later refer to as "one of the most eventful cruises of my

life."[25]

Farragut's time on *Essex* would be the last significant naval action in which he

participated until 1862. Historian William Still has described Farragut's career during

these intervening years as "varied but unspectacular."[26] Farragut bounced between duty

at sea and duty ashore at his home in Norfolk. During the Mexican War, he commanded

the sloop USS *Saratoga*, but an outbreak of yellow fever and an ongoing dispute with

Commodore Matthew C. Perry caused Farragut to label this "the most mortifying" cruise

he "had seen since entering the Navy."[27]

After the Mexican War, Farragut returned to Norfolk, where he remained until

1854, when he was sent to California to build a new navy yard at Mare Island. By 1858,

the yard was complete, and Farragut, now promoted to captain, was assigned to command

USS *Brooklyn*, one of the Navy's new screw sloops. During his two years in command of

Brooklyn, Farragut made numerous trips to New Orleans, "freshening his memory of the

locality," as his son would later write.[28]

Farragut was in Norfolk awaiting orders when the war began. With such strong

ties to the South--born in Tennessee, a longtime resident of Virginia, with family still

residing in New Orleans--he was naturally expected to support secession. Farragut

nevertheless declared his fierce loyalty to the Union, and, after Virginia passed its

ordinance of secession in April 1861, he left Norfolk for New York.[29]

Farragut awaited orders until September, when he was assigned duty with the

naval retiring board, hardly the sort of duty desired by an officer like Farragut. In

December Farragut was ordered to report to the Navy Department, and, on 21 December,

Welles informed Farragut of his selection to command the naval expedition against New

Orleans. The selection came as welcome news to Farragut, who revealed his excitement

later that day in a note: "I am to have a flag in the Gulf, and the rest depends on me."[30]

His opportunity to take an active part in the war had finally arrived.

<u>Union Preparations</u>

Welles issued preparatory orders to Farragut two days later, informing the new flag officer of his intention "to divide the present Gulf Blockading Squadron." [31] Welles had seen the benefits of simplifying command and control when he had separated the Atlantic Blockading Squadron in September. Farragut would face no less a challenge in the Gulf, where he would be tasked to lead the expedition to capture New Orleans while enforcing the continuing blockade. On 9 January 1862, Welles made the division official, and Farragut was appointed to command the new Western Gulf Blockading Squadron, with an area of responsibility extending from Pensacola to the Rio Grande. [32]

On 20 January, Farragut received further orders from Welles regarding the employment of his new squadron. Welles provided a list of the vessels that Flag Officer William W. McKean, now commanding the newly constituted Eastern Gulf Blockading Squadron, would transfer to Farragut upon his arrival. In addition, Porter's flotilla of "bomb vessels," as Welles called them, were attached to Farragut's squadron. When all preparations were complete, Welles directed, Farragut was to "proceed up the Mississippi River and reduce the defenses which guard the approaches to New Orleans, when you will appear off that city and take possession of it under the guns of your squadron." Also, if the naval forces operating on the upper Mississippi at Cairo had not completed their descent of the river, Farragut was to "take advantage of the panic to push a strong force up the river to take all their defenses in the rear." Welles reminded Farragut that "the Department and the country will require of you success" in shooting "down those who war against the Union."[33]

The attacks on Hatteras Inlet and Port Royal had been conceived as joint

operations, but poor planning and severe weather meant that both were primarily naval

affairs. As a result of these earlier naval victories, the concept of operations for New

Orleans was different, as demonstrated by Welles's orders to Farragut. These orders

make only a limited reference to any sort of joint cooperation, noting that, once the city

had been captured, Farragut should keep "possession until troops can be sent to you."[34]

Welles provided further guidance on 10 February, advising Farragut that "a division from

Ship Island will probably be ready to occupy the forts that will fall into your hands."[35]

McClellan's instructions to Major Benjamin F. Butler sounded a similar note. A

veteran of the expedition at Hatteras, Butler was "assigned to the command of the land

forces destined to cooperate with the Navy in the attack upon New Orleans," as

McClellan's orders stated. Butler would command the new Department of the Gulf, with

a force of nearly 18,000 soldiers. Forts Jackson and St. Philip offered the primary

obstacle to the capture of New Orleans, but McClellan "expected that the Navy can

reduce the works," requiring Butler to only "leave a sufficient garrison in them to render

them perfectly secure." Only if the Navy was unable to reduce the forts would Butler

have to land his forces and conduct an assault.[36]

Even with preparations underway for the capture of New Orleans, Welles

continued to impress upon Farragut the need to maintain a "vigorous blockade." "Cutting

off all communications," he instructed Farragut on 25 January 1862, would "not only

distress and cripple the States in insurrection," but an effective blockade would "destroy

any excuse or pretext on the part of foreign governments to aid and relieve" the

Confederacy.[37] Even now, almost nine months after the blockade proclamation, fears that

ineffectiveness of the blockade would result in British intervention continued to hound Welles and the administration.

Farragut arrived at Ship Island on 20 February in his flagship, USS *Hartford*. Since its capture in September, the island had become a major support base for Union operations in the Gulf. Farragut took decisive action, ordering USS *Brooklyn* to proceed to Head of the Passes on 22 February, the first Union presence there since the previous September.[38] The pace of preparations soon slowed, and Farragut spent the next two months assembling his fleet, performing the time-consuming and difficult task of towing his deep draft vessels over the shallow bars of the Mississippi, and conducting a reconnaissance of the river and Confederate defenses. As Farragut readied his fleet for action, operations in the upper Mississippi Valley were already underway that would shape the battlefield at New Orleans.[39]

The Union's hopes for achieving its military and political objectives in 1862 were pinned on the success of coordinated advances--what Lincoln called "menacing [the enemy] with superior forces at different points, at the same time."[40] McClellan assumed duties as general-in-chief in November 1861, bringing with him a vastly different conception of Union strategic imperatives than his predecessor. McClellan abandoned Scott's slow strangulation of the Confederacy in favor of a decisive campaign by McClellan's Army of the Potomac, in which the other simultaneous operations--in Maj. Gen. Henry W. Halleck's Department of the Missouri and Brig. Gen. Don Carlos Buell's Department of the Ohio--were secondary and supporting efforts.[41]

Frustrated by delays in the commencement of the anticipated operations, Lincoln issued General War Order No. 1 on 27 January 1862, commanding that a "general

movement of the Land and Naval forces of the United States against the insurgent forces" begin on 22 February.[42] McClellan's Peninsula Campaign would not get underway until March, after he had been relieved of duties as general-in-chief. By that time, however, Halleck and Buell had already made significant gains in the West. By the end of February, Nashville had surrendered, and Forts Henry and Donelson on the Tennessee and Cumberland rivers were in Union hands. The Union operations in Tennessee would demonstrate what historian James McPherson has called "the strategic wisdom of Lincoln's desire to attack several places simultaneously," as Confederate defenses at New Orleans were stripped to face the threat from the upper Mississippi.[43]

<u>Confederate Defenses</u>

The Confederates had recognized early on the importance of holding New Orleans and improving the defenses on the Mississippi River. Louisiana native Major Pierre G. T. Beauregard had informed Louisiana's Military Board in February 1861 that the Mississippi River was the state's "most vulnerable point," leaving New Orleans in danger of attack. "Even when in a condition of proper defense," Beauregard warned, Forts Jackson and St. Philip "could not prevent the passage of steamers during a dark or stormy night." In addition to improving the condition of the forts, Beauregard urged the completion of an obstacle across the river to slow the progress of any vessels, leaving them to suffer under the "severe crossfire" of the forts.[44]

The task of defending New Orleans fell to Major General Mansfield Lovell, an 1842 graduate of West Point and twice-wounded veteran of the Mexican War. Lovell resigned his commission in 1854 and, by 1858, was the deputy street commissioner of New York City. As civil war approached, Lovell's services were courted by the new

Confederacy, but not until after the Battle of First Bull Run did he seek a commission in the Confederate States Army. On 25 September 1861, Lovell was appointed a brigadier general and ordered to New Orleans to serve under Major General David E. Twiggs. Before Lovell could depart, however, Twiggs requested to be relieved. Lovell was promptly promoted to major general and ordered to assume command of the defenses at New Orleans.[45]

Lovell arrived in New Orleans on 17 October to find that Twiggs had done little to strengthen the defenses of the city. In April 1863 Lovell would testify before a Confederate court of inquiry investigating the capture of New Orleans and note that Twiggs had left the department "almost entirely defenseless." Twiggs, Lovell testified, had confessed to being in a "feeble state of health," that left him "unable to get anything done."[46] Lovell immediately set to work to overcome months of neglect, as he improved the entrenchments around the city, strengthened the forts, completed an obstruction across the river, and increased the production of powder and guns.[47]

Two permanent fortifications south of New Orleans constituted Lovell's primary defense against a naval attack from the Mississippi River. Forts Jackson and St. Philip stood twenty miles upriver from Head of the Passes and seventy-five miles below the city. Guarding the north side of the river was Fort St. Philip, a brick and earth work completed in 1815, the year the British had attacked New Orleans. The newer Fort Jackson, a larger work constructed of brick, stood on the south side of the river, seven-hundred yards downstream. Lovell found the forts in "a better state of preparation than the other works," he stated, "owing to the exertions" of their commander, Colonel

Johnson K. Duncan. Still, Lovell found the forts poorly armed, and replaced many of the smaller 24-pound guns with 42 and 32-pound guns obtained from Norfolk.[48]

An obstruction across the river, under the guns of the two forts, was completed in December. Constructed of forty-foot-long cypress trees connected by chains, the obstruction was secured to large trees on one side of the bank and to large anchors on the other. In addition, a number of anchors were attached to logs and placed upstream to provided added support. Maintaining the obstruction proved to be a challenge, as the shifting bottom and swift current caused the anchors to drift. Also, drift wood accumulated behind the obstruction faster than it could be removed. "All my endeavors to get chains and anchors to secure it in position," Lovell later lamented, "proved futile."[49]

As he prepared his squadron for action, Farragut knew he would have to pass the gauntlet of the forts, and, as historian Charles Dufour has conjectured, "doubtless spent many hours studying the lengthy memorandum" of Brigadier General John G. Barnard.[50] Barnard, Chief Engineer of the Army of the Potomac and a member of the defunct Blockade Board, had been assigned to the forts before the war, and had high expectations for the expedition. "To capture New Orleans from the mouth is," he eagerly predicted, "to take a great stride toward obtaining complete triumph for our arms."[51]

Barnard not only provided detailed information concerning the construction and armament of the forts, but also offered guidance regarding the impending passage. Any attempt to pass the forts, he recommended, should be made at night, when ranging the guns of the forts would be more difficult. The forts should be taken before proceeding up the river to capture New Orleans, because the city could not be held until communications with the lower river were established. Also, if the fleet met considerable

resistance higher up the river, it would have to pass the forts again, facing the possibility

of greater losses. Although the armament of the forts were "not very formidable to

vessels of war," it was still "not a trifling undertaking to pass so large a number of guns

at such close quarters."[52]

Barnard's memorandum concluded with a challenge to the Navy: "In this project

everything depends on the success of the naval part of the plan."[53] At the Navy

Department, there was uncertainty concerning the naval part of the plan in March, after

what Welles called the "recent occurrences at Hampton Roads." The havoc caused by the

CSS *Virginia* at Hampton Roads on 7 March had at once alerted Welles to the dangers

posed by ironclad vessels, and he wrote to Farragut on 12 March, warning him to pay

"particular attention" to the "subject of reported armorclads at New Orleans and Mobile."

Welles feared that "no unclad ship can contend, except at great odds, with even a

moderately armored vessel."[54]

The Confederate Navy hoped to prove Welles right, and made the construction of

ironclad vessels a focus of their shipbuilding efforts. In September 1861 Confederate

Secretary of the Navy Stephen Mallory approved the construction of two ironclads, the

Louisiana and the *Mississippi*, at New Orleans. As historian William Still has noted,

"except for the Gosport Navy Yard at Norfolk, New Orleans was the most important

shipbuilding center of the Confederacy."[55] Even so, the city was unable to support

construction of two large ironclads. The contracts were issued to two separate builders,

who were forced to compete for limited resources of timber and iron. Labor disputes and

delays obtaining engines and boilers further plagued the shipbuilders, who worked

feverishly, but unsuccessfully, to complete the vessels before Farragut's attack. Only one of the vessels, the incomplete *Louisiana*, would participate in the battle.[56]

While Farragut assembled his fleet, Confederate defenses at New Orleans were slowly "stripped of men, guns, and ships" as Lovell would later testify.[57] Confederate leaders believed that Forts Jackson and St. Philip formed an impenetrable barrier against a naval attack from the south. The most serious threat, it appeared, came from the north, where the Union offensive continued to move toward New Orleans, delivering further blows in early April with a victory at Shiloh and the capture of Island No. 10 on the Mississippi River. Lovell was ordered to send armed steamers and thousands of troops in response, leaving him with few resources: three thousand poorly armed troops, two undermanned forts mounting 126 guns, a fragile river obstruction supplemented with anchored hulks, and a small River Defense Fleet. Besides the *Louisiana* and the ironclad ram *Manassas*, Commander John K. Mitchell, the commander of Confederate naval forces at New Orleans, could muster only a dozen other vessels, for a total of forty guns.[58]

<div align="center">Farragut's Attack</div>

Porter's mortar flotilla began its work on the morning of 18 April. The schooners, their masts camouflaged by brush, were organized in three divisions and anchored on the banks of the river at positions marked to show the distance to each of the forts. The schooners fired their mortars at ten-minute intervals, focusing initially on Fort Jackson. The defenders returned fire, and Porter responded by sending his gunboats upriver to draw fire away from his mortars. By evening, smoke was rising from Fort Jackson, and return fire ceased as the defenders worked to extinguish the blaze. His crews tired and

hungry after a day of shelling, Porter decided to cease firing as well, just when the fort was most vulnerable. Porter's crews rested through the night as the fort continued to burn.[59]

More than 1,400 shells were fired the first day. The shelling continued for five more days, as Porter's divisions worked through the night to deliver fire. Despite the firing of 16,800 shells, the forts--their defenses battered, numerous guns disabled, and men exhausted--continued to hold out. "We are still cheerful," Brigadier General Duncan reported to Lovell on 23 April, "and have an abiding confidence in our ultimate success."[60] By 23 April, Porter's men were also "overcome with fatigue," as he relayed to Welles in his official report on 30 April, and the supply of ammunition began to run low. He "urged Flag Officer Farragut to commence the attack with the ships at night."[61]

Farragut needed no urging from Porter to attack. From the beginning, he doubted the ability of the mortars to force the surrender of the forts. On 20 April, he issued a general order announcing his decision to run the forts before the supply of shells ran out.[62] That night, two vessels were sent upriver to destroy the obstruction anchored between the forts. By this point, the obstruction consisted of a heavy chain buoyed by eight anchored hulks. Under a heavy barrage from the forts, the ships managed to damage the chain, freeing the hulks and clearing a passage for the Union fleet.[63]

Farragut signaled his fleet to get underway in the early morning hours of 24 April. His seventeen vessels, mounting 181 guns, were organized in three divisions and advanced upriver in two columns, each assigned to engage one of the forts. Supported by Porter's mortar flotilla, Farragut's fleets passed the obstruction in the river and made their way toward the forts.[64]

Captain William J. Seymour, a Confederate army officer and volunteer aide to Duncan, was at Fort Jackson during the Union attack. A New Orleans newspaperman, Seymour kept a journal during the attack which he later used as a basis for his wartime memoirs. Seymour described the action as Farragut's fleet approached the forts:

> As soon as they were within range, the guns of both forts opened a well directed fire upon the leading ships, which was followed by broadsides after broadsides and the engagement became general. Unfortunately the air was so still that after our first fire, the smoke hung so low over the River as to shut out the enemy's ships from our view, so that our gunners had to direct their fire by the flashes of the enemy's broadsides. At this time twenty-one mortar vessels and twenty-three Steamers, mounting in all about 200 guns, were pouring into the Forts a perfect storm of shot, shell, grape, Cannister, and spherical can. The roar of the artillery was deafening; the rushing sound of the descending bombs, the sharp, whizzing noise made by the jagged fragments of exploded shells, the whirring of grape shot and hissing of Cannister balls--all this was well calculated to disturb the equanimity of the strongest nerved man.

At one point during the attack, the fort's chaplain, Seymour recalled, "placed his mouth to my ear and called out that hell could not be more terrible to the sight than Fort Jackson." Casualties were light, but the fort's defenses were weakened by the desertion of more than 200 troops on 27 April. Seymour surrendered with the remainder of the garrison the next day.[65]

Because of heavy Confederate fire and delays caused by loose chains from the damaged obstruction, three of the Union vessels were unable to pass the forts. Farragut's flagship, the *Hartford*, was met by a floating fire raft that set the ship ablaze. The "ship was soon on fire halfway up to her tops," Farragut later reported, but the fire was quickly extinguished."[66] The fleet continued upriver to engage Confederate gunboats, including the ironclads *Manassas* and *Louisiana*. Here, the Confederate fleet, as historian John Winters has described, made a "sorry showing." The fleet was reduced to "a demoralized shambles" by the Federals and their own lack of training and cooperation.[67] The

Manassas delivered several minor blows to Federal warships before running ground. Abandoned by her crew, she began to float downriver, where she exploded and sank.[68] The *Louisiana*, moored to the shore above the forts, survived the engagement, only to be destroyed by her crew on 28 April, as Porter negotiated the surrender of the forts with Duncan.[69]

The Union fleet anchored off New Orleans in the early afternoon of 25 April. Farragut had lost only one vessel upriver, and his total casualties were relatively light: 39 killed and 171 wounded.[70] Farragut was astonished by what he found. "I never witnessed such vandalism in my life," he reported to Welles. Ships, docks, and sheds were on fire, and burning cotton was floating downriver. Along with the cotton was the burning hulk of the ironclad *Mississippi*, which the Confederates had been unable to complete.[71]

Farragut sent Captain Theodorus Bailey, who had led the vanguard of the fleet during the attack, to demand the surrender of the city. Both the mayor of New Orleans, John T. Monroe, and Lovell refused to surrender, and Lovell soon departed to evacuate the remaining Confederate troops and equipment from the city. Without Union troops to support him, Farragut was unable to force a surrender, and a stalemate quickly developed: no Union troops to occupy the city and no Confederate troops to defend it. Farragut grew tired of the cat and mouse game with Monroe, and, on 29 April, ordered a force of marines ashore to hoist the American flag on the custom house and haul down the state flag at city hall. The same day, Farragut learned of the surrender of the forts to Porter.[72]

Butler arrived to take possession of the city on 1 May, with 1,400 troops and his wife in tow. On 24 April, Butler had congratulated Farragut for his "bold, daring,

brilliant, and successful passage of the forts" earlier that morning.[73] Farragut, relieved by the arrival of the occupying forces, acknowledged the congratulations, thanking Butler for the "intrepidity with which you so soon followed up our success." Farragut offered his additional hope that Butler would "now occupy the city without further difficulty other than those incident to a conquered city, disordered by anarchy and the reign of terror which this unfortunate city has passed through." Farragut left the city six days later, heading upriver to join the rest of his command at Baton Rouge.[74]

The six days between the surrender of the city on 25 April and the arrival of the occupying forces on 1 May allowed Lovell and his troops time to carry away valuable military equipment they would use to fortify positions upriver. Historian Rowena Reed has suggested this was a critical mistake caused by a failure to properly plan and conduct a joint attack on the city.[75] Yet the victory at New Orleans seemed to confirm the pattern of joint operations established earlier, with Farragut's naval gunfire preparing the way for Butler's occupying forces.

The capture of New Orleans had important strategic effects for the navy. First, the city could now serve as a base of operations for naval forces operating on the lower Mississippi, facilitating a joint campaign to secure the entire river. In addition, the surrender of New Orleans, followed by the evacuation of Pensacola and Norfolk in early May and Memphis the following month, did much to cripple the Confederate shipbuilding program.[76] Finally, the capture of the city marked the end of the blockade of New Orleans. On 12 May, Lincoln proclaimed the blockade could be "safely relaxed with advantage to the interest of commerce."[77] The navy's primary strategic task in Louisiana

was now complete, and the focus of operations would shift to opening the Mississippi River.

At the Navy Department, Assistant Secretary Fox was delighted with the results. Soon after learning of Farragut's victory, he wrote to Porter: "We are all made very happy by the magnificent achievement of the fleet in the Mississippi. England has no such record, and the Navy (as I intended it should) has effected it all."[78]

Summary

While joint operations on the Mississippi were a strategic task of the navy, they were considered a supporting effort for an army objective. The decision to attack New Orleans marked a shift in Union naval strategy, as naval forces took an active role in a drive upriver. The decision was influenced by the joint attacks at Hatteras and Port Royal and the enthusiastic endorsement of Porter. In support of the operation, Welles continued the organizational transformation of the navy, creating the West Gulf Blockading Squadron and assigning Farragut to command.

The naval operation to capture New Orleans was not tied to a larger strategy on the Mississippi River. Still, the victory benefited from a Union offensive on the upper Mississippi that forced the Confederates to strip the city of men and vessels to defend against what they viewed as the primary threat from upriver. Farragut took advantage of the weakened defenses to run past the forts guarding the southern flank of the city. Although the surrender of the city had important benefits for the navy, the delay in the arrival of occupying forces allowed the defenders to continue the fight upriver.

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[1]Porter, *Incidents and Anecdotes*, 47.

[2]Porter to Fox, 28 March 1862, in Gustavus V. Fox, *Confidential Correspondence of Gustavus Vasa Fox, Assistant Secretary of the Navy, 1861-1865,* eds. Robert M. Thompson and Richard Wainwright, 2 vols. (New York: Naval Historical Society, 1918), 2:89-90.

[3]In his *Diary*, Welles makes several references to Porter's ambition. Most telling is a reference on 1 October 1863, after Porter had been selected to command the Mississippi Squadron. After noting several of Porter's positive qualities, Welles describes Porter as having "excessive and sometimes unscrupulous ambition," being "impressed with and boastful of his own powers," and "given to exaggeration in everything relating to himself," which he calls "a Porter infirmity." In another entry, Welles claims Porter "had no hesitation in trampling down a brother officer if it would benefit himself." Welles, *Diary*, 1:88 and157.

[4]Theodore Roosevelt and Henry Cabot Lodge, *Hero Tales: How Common Lives Reveal the Uncommon Genius of America* (Nashville, Tenn.: Cumberland House, 2000), 212.

[5]Joseph T. Glatthaar, *Partners in Command: Relationships Between Leaders in the Civil War* (New York: The Free Press, 1994), 188-189.

[6]Hearn, *Admiral David Glasgow Farragut*, 127 and 160.

[7]Weddle, *Lincoln's Tragic Admiral*, 119.

[8]Ibid., 117.

[9]Reed, *Combined Operations in the Civil War*, 12.

[10]Anderson, *By Sea and by River*, 56.

[11]Reed, *Combined Operations in the Civil War*, 31.

[12]Roberts, *Now for the Contest*, 44.

[13]Porter, *Incidents and Anecdotes*, 65.

[14]Anderson, *By Sea and by River*, 85.

[15]First report for blockading the coast bordering the Gulf of Mexico, 9 August 1861, *ORN*, 16:627.

[16]Niven, "Gideon Welles," 380.

[17]Porter, *Incidents and Anecdotes*, 64.

[18]Chester Hearn, *The Capture of New Orleans, 1862* (Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University Press, 1995), 98-99.

[19]Niven, *Gideon Welles*, 382.

[20]Ibid.

[21]Porter, *The Opening of the Lower Mississippi,*26.

[22]Loyall Farragut, *The Life of David Glasgow Farragut, First Admiral of the United States Navy* (Cranbury, N.J.: The Scholar's Bookshelf, 2006), 7-11.

[23]Ibid., 27.

[24]Ibid., 41-42.

[25]Ibid., 48.

[26]William N. Still, "David Glasgow Farragut: The Union's Nelson," in *Makers of the American Naval Tradition, 1840-1880*, ed. James C. Bradford (Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1986), 167.

[27]Farragut, 157.

[28]Ibid., 200.

[29]Hearn, *Admiral David Glasgow Farragut*, 42-43.

[30]Farragut, 208.

[31]Welles to Farragut, 23 December 1861, *ORN*, 18:4.

[32]Welles to Farragut, 9 January 1862, *ORN*, 18:5.

[33]Welles to Farragut, 20 January 1862, *ORN*, 18:7-8.

[34]Ibid.

[35]Welles to Farragut, 10 February 1862, *ORN*, 18:15.

[36]McClellan to Butler, 23 February 1862, in *The Civil War Papers of George B. McClellan*, ed. Sears, 188.

[37]Welles to Farragut, 25 January 1862, *ORN*, 18:9.

[38]Farragut to Captain Thomas T. Craven, 22 February 1861, *ORN*, 18:35.

[39]Hearn, *Admiral David Glasgow Farragut*, 71-87.

[40]Lincoln to Buell, 13 January 1862, in Lincoln, *Collected Works*, ed. Basler, 5:98.

[41]Stephen W. Sears, *George B. McClellan: The Young Napoleon* (New York: Ticknor and Fields, 1988), 98-99.

[42]President's General War Order No. 1, 27 January 1862, in Lincoln, *Collected Works*, ed. Basler, 5:111.

[43]McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 418.

[44]Beauregard to Military Board of the State of Louisiana, 13 February 1862, *OR*, ser. 1, 1:500-501.

[45]Arthur W. Bergeron, Jr. "Mansfield Lovell," in *Leadership During the Civil War: The 1989 Deep Delta Civil War Symposium: Themes in Honor of T. Harry Williams*, eds. Roman J. Heleniak and Lawrence L. Hewitt (Shippensburg, Pa.: White Mane Publishing, 1992), 87-94.

[46]Lovell to Court of Inquiry, 7 April 1863, *OR*, ser. 1, 6:558

[47]Bergeron, "Mansfield Lovell," 94-95.

[48]Ibid., 559-560.

[49]Ibid., 564-565.

[50]Dufour, *The Night the War Was Lost*, 220.

[51]Barnard to Welles, 28 January 1862, *ORN*, 18:23.

[52]Ibid., 19-23.

[53]Ibid., 23.

[54]Welles to Farragut, 12 March 1862, *ORN,* 18:59.

[55]William N. Still, *Iron Afloat: The Story of the Confederate Armorclads* (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1985), 43.

[56]Ibid.

[57]Lovell to Court of Inquiry, 7 April 1863, *OR*, ser. 1, 6:561.

[58]Porter, "The Opening of the Lower Mississippi," 31-32.

[59]Porter to Welles, 30 April 1862, *ORN*, 18:362-364.

[60]Duncan to Lovell, 23 April 1862, *ORN,* 18:442.

[61]Porter to Welles, 30 April 1862, *ORN*, 18:367. Porter soon regretted including this statement in his official report, and wrote to Fox on 10 May 1862, stating that "although this is so, it won't do in a public dispatch to say so." Fox, *Confidential Correspondence*, eds. Thompson and Wainwright, 2:100.

[62]Farragut's general order, 20 April 1862, *ORN*, 18:160.

[63]Farragut to Welles, 6 May 1862, *ORN*, 18:156.

[64]Winters, *Civil War in Louisiana*, 85-93.

[65]William J. Seymour, *The Civil War Memoirs of Captain William J. Seymour: Reminiscences of a Louisiana Tiger*, ed. Terry L. Jones (Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University Press, 1991), 25-35.

[66]Ibid., 156-157.

[67]Winters, *Civil War in Louisiana*, 94-95.

[68]Porter to Welles, 25 April 1862, *ORN*, 18:358.

[69]Porter, *Incidents and Anecdotes*, 53-54.

[70]Winters, *Civil War in* Louisiana, 98.

[71]Farragut to Welles, 25 April 1862, *ORN*, 18:153.

[72]Farragut to Welles, 6 May 1862, *ORN,* 18:159.

[73]Butler to Farragut, 24 April 1862, *ORN,* 18:243.

[74]Hearn, *Admiral David Glasgow Farragut*, 131.

[75]Reed, *Combined Operations in the Civil War,* 195.

[76]Still, *Confederate Shipbuilding*, 30-31.

[77]Proclamation raising the blockade of certain ports, 12 May 1862, in Lincoln, *Collected Works*, ed. Basler, 5:210.

[78]Fox to Porter, 13 May 1862, in Fox, *Confidential Correspondence,* eds. Thompson and Wainwright, 2:101.

CHAPTER 5

OPENING THE MISSISSIPPI

> I rode into Vicksburg with the troops, and went to the river to
> exchange congratulations with the navy upon our joint victory.[1]

Ulysses S. Grant, *Personal Memoirs*

Introduction

On 18 May 1862, the screw sloop USS *Oneida* was anchored in the Mississippi River south of Vicksburg, Mississippi. Along with *Oneida* were transports bearing 1,500 troops, under the command of Brigadier General Thomas Williams, from Major General Benjamin F. Butler's division. In the previous two weeks, Flag Officer David G. Farragut's West Gulf Blockading Squadron had followed up its victory at New Orleans with the capture of Baton Rouge and Natchez. The undefended towns had surrendered quickly in the face of the Union threat, and now Williams and *Oneida*'s commanding officer, Commander Samuel P. Lee, hoped Vicksburg would do the same. Their demand for the surrender of the town was met with an unexpected response, however, from Colonel James L. Autrey, the Military Governor at Vicksburg. "Mississippians," he proclaimed, "don't know, and refuse to learn, how to surrender to an enemy. If Commodore Farragut or Brigadier-General Butler can teach them, let them come and try."[2] Echoing Autrey's response, Vicksburg's mayor announced that "neither municipal authorities nor the citizens will ever consent to a surrender of the city."[3] Ultimately, Vicksburg would surrender, but it would take more than a year for Union forces to achieve success in what naval historian Bern Anderson has called "one of the longest and bloodiest campaigns of the war."[4]

This chapter will consider Union naval strategy and operations from the capture of New Orleans to the surrender of Vicksburg and Port Hudson in July 1863, when Union land and naval forces attained control over the Mississippi River. While the victory at New Orleans had been obtained with relatively little inter-service cooperation, Farragut quickly realized the need for joint action to secure the upper Mississippi. Nonetheless, the operations there would suffer from the lack of a coherent joint strategy and conflicting interests and personalities of navy and army commanders. Taking advantage of the Union's uncoordinated efforts, the Confederates strengthened the defenses at two towns overlooking the Mississippi River. The sites proved resistant to the type of bombardment that had preceded earlier naval victories. Although the joint actions against Vicksburg and Port Hudson would be, according to historian Roger Beaumont, "the most effective extended American joint operations seen prior to World War II," victory would come only after more than a year in which Union forces slowly learned to exploit the operational advantages provided by joint cooperation.[5]

The First Attempt

David D. Porter later claimed that his proposal for the capture of New Orleans had also included a plan to capture Vicksburg. "Had this plan been carried out," he wrote, "we would have accomplished, with very little loss of life, what eventually cost a great deal of bloodshed and a vast outlay of money."[6] Undoubtedly, an aggressive operation to rapidly follow the capture of New Orleans with a joint attack on a lightly defended Vicksburg in the spring of 1862 would have opened the river. At the time, however, there was little understanding of how difficult a challenge Vicksburg would become. The common belief was that the fall of New Orleans would open the Mississippi River to

Union control. Before the capture of the city, Brigadier General John G. Barnard had optimistically predicted that, with the surrender of Forts Jackson and St. Philip, "New Orleans and Louisiana fall" and "the Valley of the Mississippi is conquered."[7] The only task that remained for Farragut, then, was to link up with the Western Flotilla operating in the upper Mississippi Valley.

Welles's orders to Farragut, written on 20 January 1862, made no mention of Vicksburg. In fact, the divergent tasks spelled out by Welles revealed the lack of a coherent strategy for Farragut's squadron. After the attack on New Orleans, Welles wrote, Farragut should "push a strong force up the river" to meet the expedition descending the river from Cairo. Also, Farragut was to "reduce the fortifications which defend Mobile Bay and turn them over to the army to hold."[8] In the absence of direct orders, Farragut preferred to attack Mobile first. Like the capture of New Orleans, the capture of Mobile would relieve stress on his blockading forces, now stretched thin by operations on the Mississippi. Additionally, an operation against Mobile Bay would avoid the many frustrations of riverine operations: obtaining coal, battling the swift currents, and operating deep draft vessels in the shallow water and constantly shifting channels. On 29 April, Farragut indicated his intentions to Welles: to "sail for Mobile with the fleet" once Butler was "safely in possession" of New Orleans.[9]

Nevertheless, Farragut decided to push a small force of gunboats upriver, and they quickly met with success at Baton Rouge and Natchez. Trailing the gunboats were two transports with Brig. Gen. Williams's troops onboard. In his orders to Butler on 23 February, Major General George B. McClellan, general-in-chief, directed that "the occupation of Baton Rouge by a combined naval and land force should be accomplished

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as soon as possible after you have gained New Orleans." Next, Butler was to "endeavor to open [his] communications with the Northern column of the Mississippi." Echoing Welles's orders to Farragut, McClellan instructed Butler to "make a combined attack on Mobile" once New Orleans was secured. In all these operations, Butler should, wrote McClellan, "give all the assistance in [his] power to Army and Navy commanders in [his] vicinity."[10] According to Butler, he quickly agreed with Farragut to "give him the troops needed to occupy the places that he could take with his fleet," but the need to secure New Orleans dictated that only a small force could be provided for operations further upriver.[11]

Lee and Williams found an imposing defensive position at Vicksburg, a town located four hundred miles above New Orleans on the east bank of the Mississippi. Its defensive batteries commanded the river from high bluffs, some more than two hundred feet above the river--higher than Farragut's guns could effectively reach. Adding to its defensibility, the town was situated at a hairpin turn in the Mississippi, where strong currents made navigation difficult, and any vessels transiting the river would suffer from lengthy exposure to Confederate fire. Additionally, Vicksburg was connected by rail to the east, providing the capability of quickly reinforcing its defenses. Directly across the river lay another railroad connected to Shreveport, in northwest Louisiana. Under the circumstances, Lee and Williams were hesitant to take action.[12]

Frustrated by the delay in taking Vicksburg and confident that a sufficient show of force would result in the town's surrender, Farragut decided to press upriver with more vessels. Vicksburg's refusal to surrender insulted Farragut, and he wanted to "chastise the enemy by destroying the town," as Commander H. H. Bell related in his diary on 27 May.

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However, Farragut's commanders advised against a joint attack, and Williams warned that he did not have the forces available to secure the batteries on the heights. Dejected, Farragut departed for New Orleans, ordering six gunboats to remain behind to blockade the town.[13]

If at First You Do Not Succeed

Farragut hoped the way was now open to attack Mobile, but he returned to New Orleans on 30 May to find clarifying orders from the Navy Department. A letter from Fox, written on 12 May, informed Farragut that "the opening of the Mississippi is of more importance than Mobile."[14] Fox hoped that Farragut's squadron could join with the Western Flotilla operating in the upper Mississippi Valley, where Major General Henry W. Halleck was slowly pursuing a Confederate army led by General P. G. T. Beauregard from Shiloh to Corinth. Five days later Fox wrote again, instructing Farragut that "Mobile, Pensacola, and in fact the whole coast sinks into insignificance compared with [clearing the river]."[15] Farragut responded, detailing the challenges faced on his recent expedition and warning that "the elements of destruction to the Navy in this river are beyond anything I ever encountered, and if the same destruction continues the whole Navy will be destroyed in twelve months."[16]

His strategic guidance was now clear, though, and Farragut reluctantly mounted an expedition to open the river at Vicksburg. He would have to make his joint attack on Vicksburg soon, before the summer drought made navigation too hazardous. In consultation with Butler, Farragut proposed sending 7,000 troops upriver, supported by Farragut's gunboats and part of Porter's mortar flotilla, which could reach the imposing heights at Vicksburg. Porter had been sent to Ship Island after the capture of New

Orleans, and he departed immediately for the Mississippi, predicting a dismal outcome

for the expedition. "We are not prepared for it and will fail," he wrote Farragut. "It is a

different affair from Fort Jackson or St. Philip altogether."[17]

Farragut started upriver on 8 June, anxious to fight what he hoped would be "the

last battle of the Mississippi River."[18] He soon learned that Memphis had fallen on 6

June. Farragut welcomed the news that Flag Officer Charles H. Davis's Western Flotilla

would be making its way downriver, since Davis's gunboats were better suited for

operations on the river than his own deep-draft vessels. In addition, a deserter from

Vicksburg confirmed rumors Farragut had been hearing for the previous month: the CSS

Arkansas, an ironclad ram the Confederates were building at Yazoo City, upriver from

Vicksburg, was almost ready for service.[19] Since Farragut had left Vicksburg in May, the

Confederates had also continued to improve the town's defenses. Fifteen thousand

Confederate troops under Major General Earl Van Dorn now defended Vicksburg,

supported by twenty-seven guns positioned both on the bluffs and in two water batteries

at the river's edge.[20]

Farragut passed the batteries of Vicksburg in the early morning of 28 June, after

an opening bombardment by Porter's mortars. Farragut's squadron sustained heavy fire

during its two-hour passage, and its commander quickly recognized the futility of

attempting to capture the heavily defended town with only Williams's 3,300 troops for

support. "I passed up the river this morning, but to no purpose," he wrote Welles after the

passage. "I am satisfied that it is not possible for us to take Vicksburg without an army

force of twelve to fifteen thousand men."[21] Porter agreed, writing to Fox on 30 June that

"we have gained nothing by going through except to show that the navy is ready to do

anything. I will not call this a battle we have fought; it was a useless sacrifice of human life." Until the army was prepared to seize the batteries, there was little use in the navy making repeated attempts to destroy them.[22]

At Vicksburg, Van Dorn understood the situation just as well as Farragut. He informed Confederate President Jefferson Davis via telegram on 12 July that the "city can only be taken by an army."[23] Farragut requested support from Halleck on 28 June, instructing Halleck that clearing the river would be "impossible without your assistance."[24] Halleck responded on 3 July: "The scattered and weakened condition of my forces renders it impossible for me at the present to detach any troops to cooperate with you on Vicksburg."[25] At the Navy Department, requests by Welles for additional support received the same response.[26]

Farragut and Flag Officer Davis met above Vicksburg on 1 July, and their vessels began a sporadic bombardment of the defenses. Without troops to mount a joint attack, however, the offensive quickly lost momentum. Williams's troops began work on a canal across De Soto Point--the narrow strip of land in the bend of the river opposite Vicksburg--hoping to provide a safe route to navigate past Vicksburg's batteries. The river soon began to drop faster than William's men could dig, however, and the project was quickly abandoned. On 5 July, Welles ordered Farragut to detach Porter and twelve of his mortar boats and send them to Hampton Roads to assist McClellan's Army of the Potomac after its failed attempt to seize Richmond.[27]

Welles wrote to Farragut on 14 July, instructing him to prepare a withdrawal from the Mississippi River. "The Army has failed to furnish the necessary troops for the capture of Vicksburg, and has not at present . . . an available force to send there to

cooperate with you in its capture," Welles wrote. Farragut was to leave Davis in control

of operations on the Mississippi for the time being.[28] The ironclad ram *Arkansas* got

underway from its berth in Yahoo City the same day, slowly making its way downriver.

The *Arkansas*'s appearance the next morning "took us all by surprise," Farragut reported

to Welles on 17 July. Before Davis and Farragut could get up steam to pursue, the

ironclad, now severely damaged by Union gunfire, had safely arrived under the batteries

at Vicksburg. Farragut sent a force downriver that night to destroy the ram, but darkness

prevented his vessels from inflicting much further damage. The *Arkansas* inflicted

numerous casualties on Farragut's squadron, but even more embarrassing was the fact

that Farragut had been caught completely off guard. He vowed to Welles to "leave no

stone unturned to destroy her."[29]

Over the next several days, Farragut pressed Davis to take action, even marching

across De Soto Point to meet with him on 21 July. Finally persuaded, Davis approved an

attack, but the disorganized effort on the morning of 22 July resulted in little damage to

Arkansas. Farragut was "disappointed and chagrined" by the results.[30] Later that day,

Farragut received orders from Welles to leave the Mississippi. Before departing, he

offered Davis his "best wishes for a speedy release from this embarrassment by an

increase of both land and naval forces."[31]

Van Dorn responded to Farragut's departure by ordering an attack to recapture

Baton Rouge. Supported by Davis's gunboats, Williams's troops fought off the

Confederate attack on 5 August, but Williams was killed in the action. Confederate

forces, commanded by Major General John C. Breckinridge, had counted on the support

of the *Arkansas*, but the ironclad's engines failed during transit, and she was scuttled by

her crew. Fearing a subsequent attack on New Orleans, Butler decided to concentrate his forces and, two weeks later, ordered his troops to abandon Baton Rouge.[32] In the meantime, Breckinridge occupied Port Hudson, a site twenty-five miles upriver from Baton Rouge. Like Vicksburg, Port Hudson stood on bluffs overlooking the east bank of the Mississippi, where Confederate batteries could command the approaches. Yet "General Butler and the Federal navy," writes historian John Winters, "made no attempt to dislodge the Confederates from their new position until it was too late."[33]

While Union forces regrouped during the fall of 1862, the Confederates continued to improve their defenses on the lower Mississippi. The batteries at Port Hudson were strengthened, aided by the capture of cannon from an abandoned Union gunboat; and former crewmembers of the CSS *Arkansas* who had avoided capture helped man the batteries.[34] With strengthened works at Port Hudson, the Confederates controlled the Mississippi River from Port Hudson to Vicksburg, a distance of 110 miles. Into this section of the river, about forty miles above Port Hudson, flowed the Red River.[35] While Confederate communications with the states west of the river were now secure, Union communications were restricted, hampering efforts to coordinate actions against the Confederate defenses. Additionally, Confederate forces now had access to rich resources from the West that flowed down the Red River.[36]

The operational reverses in Louisiana during the summer of 1862 were matched in the East, where the failure of McClellan's Peninsula Campaign and Major General John Pope's defeat at Second Manassas had damaged Union confidence. On 9 September, with the Confederate Army of Northern Virginia having crossed into Maryland, Fox wrote to Farragut, now the Navy's first rear admiral: "It is a dark time for

us just now, and the country asks for another naval victory." Nevertheless, Fox cautioned

Farragut against taking any unnecessary risks. "We only expect a blockade now and the

preservation of New Orleans."[37]

Farragut had returned to the Gulf after his departure from the Mississippi in early

August, and he would spend the next several months there, working to increase the

effectiveness of the blockade. The demand for vessels on the Mississippi had weakened

the blockade, leaving Mobile and Galveston, in particular, easy ports of operations for

blockade runners. The deficiency of the blockade at Mobile was highlighted in early

September, when the Confederate raider CSS *Florida* slipped by the blockaders stationed

off Mobile Bay. Taking advantage of weak defenses at Galveston, Farragut sent four

gunboats to capture the entrance to that port in early September, where they remained

until a Confederate attack in late December ended the brief naval occupation. Adding to

Farragut's concerns was the surprise attack by the CSS *Alabama* off Galveston in early

January. By that time, however, Farragut was at New Orleans, preparing for the

campaign that would finally secure the Mississippi.[38]

<center>Shifting Strategy</center>

Driven by military, political, and economic considerations, Union strategy shifted

in the fall of 1862, reflecting, in part, a return to the broad strategic outline of the

Anaconda Plan. McClellan's campaign in the East had failed to bring decisive victory,

and the Union's new general-in-chief, Maj. Gen. Halleck, sought to shift the main effort

to the Mississippi, where Maj. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant now commanded the Army of the

Tennessee. For Lincoln, the priority in the West had always been East Tennessee, but, as

historian Ludwell H. Johnson has described, "it was becoming increasingly apparent to

Lincoln that the overriding object of the war in the West was the opening of the Mississippi." The war had severed the economic ties linking the states of the Old Northwest and the lower Mississippi Valley, where the capture of New Orleans had reopened the city to northern trade. Political pressure mounted to open the river.[39]

As historians Herman Hattaway and Archer Jones describe, Lincoln "responded enthusiastically to a plan of Major General John A. McClernand," a Democratic politician from Illinois, to raise troops from the Midwest to open the river. McClernand expected to command the expedition downriver, but Halleck sent his troops to Grant's department, hoping to marginalize the political general.[40]

Maj. Gen. Nathaniel P. Banks was selected by Lincoln to lead a similar expedition upriver from New Orleans, where he would relieve Maj. Gen. Butler as commander of the Department of the Gulf. A former governor of Massachusetts and the Republican Party's first speaker of the House of Representatives, Banks's political skills surpassed his military ability. During the summer of 1862, he had served as an able foil to Confederate Maj. Gen. Thomas J. "Stonewall" Jackson, during Jackson's Shenandoah Valley Campaign. Despite his liabilities as a military commander, Banks was needed by Lincoln, as biographer James Hollandsworth describes, to "experiment with a strategy to coax seceded states back in to the Union."[41]

The political and economic reconstruction of Louisiana, begun after the capture of New Orleans, had stalled under Butler's iron rule. Butler had taken stern measures to ensure peace following the occupation of the city: imprisoning citizens, demanding oaths of allegiance, and censoring newspapers. Butler's aggressive tactics inflamed anti-Union passions and angered the city's foreign consuls, who harassed the State Department with

complaints. With the resumption of trade, northern speculators--led by Butler's brother, "Colonel" A.J. Butler--flooded the city, drawn by the promise of huge profits. Corruption was rampant, and Butler turned a blind eye as speculators traded goods with Confederates.[42]

Banks arrived in New Orleans in December, immediately reversing many of Butler's policies. A policy of conciliation would restore latent Union sentiment, Banks believed, and facilitate the establishment of a loyal government. Congressional elections had recently been held in the two districts under Union control, and Banks also hoped to extend the right to vote by expanding the amount of territory under Union occupation.[43]

Despite the potential conflict between these divergent military and political objectives, Banks's task was clear in Halleck's mind. "The opening of the Mississippi River is now the great and primary object of your expedition," Halleck informed Banks in November. In executing his orders, Banks would have "the co-operation of the rear-admiral commanding the naval forces in the Gulf and the Mississippi River."[44]

Farragut returned to New Orleans in November to prepare his squadron for the upcoming campaign. He soon learned of the defensive improvements made at Port Hudson during his absence in a report delivered on 18 November: "the fortifications of Port Hudson are now . . . capable of resisting more effectually than Vicksburg the passage of any fleet or vessel."[45] In addition, Farragut received a note from Lincoln concerning the imminent arrival of Banks, who "is in command of a considerable land-force for operating in the South," Lincoln wrote. "I shall be glad for you to co-operate with him," Lincoln continued, "and give him such assistance as you can consistently with your orders from the Navy Department."[46]

With Farragut "cooperating" with Banks on the lower Mississippi, the task of supporting the drive downriver was assigned to Acting Rear Admiral Porter. On 1 October, Flag Officer Charles H. Davis's Western Flotilla, which had operated under army control since May 1861, was placed under the administration of the Navy Department and designated the Mississippi Squadron. Expecting "rough work on the Mississippi," Welles replaced Davis--"more of a scholar than sailor," as Welles described him--with the "young and active" Porter.[47] Porter soon arrived at Cairo, displaying his usual mix of confidence and aggressiveness. "What a chance we have for Vicksburg now," he wrote to Fox on 17 October, "no one there, and we could walk right in if we had the soldiers."[48]

The Second Offensive Stumbles

Banks and Farragut began their work on the lower Mississippi in December, with the re-occupation of Baton Rouge. Having received "every assurance of hearty co-operation and support" from Farragut, Banks next planned to "move against Port Hudson," as he wrote to Halleck on 18 December.[49] Although his 31,000 troops were more than twice the size of the Confederate force at Port Hudson, Banks hesitated, exhibiting the excessive caution that would plague his operations against Port Hudson. As historian Lawrence Lee Hewitt has stated, "had Banks acted instead of overestimating his opponent and doubting his own troops' capabilities, he might have taken Port Hudson in a matter of days."[50]

The campaign at Vicksburg started in early December with a disastrous setback, when the gunboat USS *Cairo* was lost after striking a mine in the Yazoo River, a tributary of the Mississippi that joins the river north of Vicksburg.[51] The *Cairo* and four

other vessels had been sent to the Yazoo to clear the river of mines in preparation for an advance on Vicksburg. The coordinated attack featured an overland march by Grant to threaten Vicksburg, while Maj. Gen. William T. Sherman, commanding McClernand's troops, moved downriver with Porter's assistance to assault Vicksburg's defenses. Grant, as he later wrote, "doubted McClernand's fitness," and hoped to complete his attack before McClernand arrived to take command of his troops.[52]

The coordinated advance soon faltered. Forced to withdraw after Confederate cavalry raids damaged his line of communications, Grant was unable to communicate with Sherman, who attacked the defenses at Vicksburg without support. Sherman's assaults at Chickasaw Bayou on 29 December ended disastrously. Severe rain, cold, and fog prevented further action, and Sherman ordered a withdrawal. Porter summed up the action in a letter to Fox on 16 January: "the soldiers fought like devils, although they did not succeed."[53]

After arriving in early January to reclaim command of his troops, McClernand quickly went upriver to seize Arkansas Post, the site of a Confederate outpost on the Arkansas River. The army transports departed upriver on 4 January, accompanied by Porter and eight of his gunboats. The well-coordinated joint--Porter called it "one of the prettiest little affairs of the war"--ended a week later, with the surrender of 5,000 Confederate troops.[54] Nevertheless, the expedition convinced Porter that he and McClernand, he wrote, "could never co-operate harmoniously."[55] At the urging of both Porter and Sherman, Grant assumed command of McClernand's troops.

As the campaign continued, Porter and Farragut received surprisingly little guidance from the Navy Department regarding the cooperation they were to provide the

army. Welles had provided general direction to Farragut in October to "guard the lower part of the river, especially where it is joined by the Red River," but he offered no orders directing Farragut to cooperate with Banks.[56] Farragut revealed his frustration at the end of December in a letter to Fox. "Mobile can be taken at any moment," Farragut wrote, "but my implied orders, (I have no others) are to assist the Army to attack Port Hudson and Vicksburg."[57]

Farragut still hoped to relieve the stress on his blockaders by capturing Mobile, but he realized Vicksburg and Port Hudson would have to be captured first. Banks and Grant, however, were unwilling to order costly assaults against the strengthened defenses. For the time being, Porter and Farragut would cooperate by cutting off Confederate supplies from the Red River and supporting Grant's attempts to, in his words, "secure a landing on high ground east of the Mississippi" from which he could assault Vicksburg.[58]

Porter acted first, sending gunboats past Vicksburg in early February to blockade the mouth of the Red River. The gunboats captured several prizes, but the Confederates responded aggressively and soon seized both vessels. Determined to support Porter's blockade with a more sizable force, Farragut planned a run past the batteries at Port Hudson. Farragut started upriver with seven vessels on the night of 14 March, expecting a coordinated attack by Banks to divert Confederate fire. Banks's support failed to arrive in time, and Farragut's vessels faced the full force of the Confederate shelling. Only Farragut's flagship *Hartford* and a gunboat successfully made the passage. A despondent Farragut wrote to Welles on 16 March "to report the disaster to my fleet."[59]

Now separated from the rest of his squadron, Farragut operated with his small blockading force for the next two months, receiving supplies and additional support from

the Porter's Mississippi Squadron. Banks soon decided to reinforce the effort to cut off

the flow of Confederate supplies. He had written to Halleck in January concerning his

intent to conduct "an immediate movement with all the force I can spare in the direction

of the Red River" that, if successful, would "cut off many of their supplies and render the

position [at Port Hudson] less important and impregnable."[60] Supported by transports and

shallow steamers operating on the inland rivers and bayous, Banks now moved up the

interior of Louisiana. By the end of April, Banks controlled the mouth of the Red River,

and he wrote to Grant to ask for support. "It is of the utmost possible importance that you

should send a force to the Red River immediately to co-operate with Army and Navy

now here." Banks optimistically added that "an addition to my force now will give us the

whole country west of the Mississippi."[61]

Despite its success, Banks's expedition served primarily to satisfy his own

political objectives and diverted attention from the main effort on the Mississippi.

Farragut believed the blockade or the Red River was having some effect in cutting off

supplies, but he considered the blockade a shaping operation designed to leave the

garrison at Port Hudson vulnerable to attack. But Banks, according to historian Rowena

Reed, "confused cause and effect," believing Port Hudson would fall when supplies were

cut off rather than seeking to stop the flow of supplies by capturing Port Hudson.[62]

Grant and Porter

There was little evidence at the beginning of the campaign to predict the effective

working relationship Grant and Porter would build. At first, the two were united by little

more than their mutual disdain for McClernand. Porter had written to Fox in November,

as preparations for the initial joint attack were being made: "I don't trust the Army; it is

very evident that Grant is going to try and take Vicksburg without us, but he can't do it."[63] Grant, however, had demonstrated a facility for commanding joint operations, having worked with the Western Flotilla during his earlier victories at Forts Henry and Donelson. But the flotilla had been under the control of the War Department, a situation, as naval theorist A. T. Mahan described, "entirely contrary to the established rule by which, when military and naval forces are acting together, the commander of each branch decides what he can or can not do, and is not under the control of the other."[64] Grant likewise summed up the relationship: "I had no more authority to command Porter than he had to command me."[65] Yet Porter, as he described to Sherman in November, had come to his new command "ready to cooperate with anybody and everybody."[66]

United by their focused determination, their relationship would be cemented during the late winter and spring of 1863, as they embarked upon a series of expeditions to find an alternate approach to Vicksburg that avoided the imposing bluffs Sherman had attempted to assault in December. Grant later stated that he had little confidence these initial attempts would succeed, referring to them as "a series of experiments to consume time, and to divert the attention of the enemy, of my troops, and of the public generally."[67] At the time, Farragut considered Grant's "experiments" a waste of assets, complaining to Fox in April that Grant "kept our Navy tailing through swamps to protect his soldiers when a force between Vicksburg and Port Hudson . . . would have been of greater injury to the enemy."[68]

Grant's "experiments" began in January, when work resumed on a canal across De Soto Point. Dredges were brought in to aid the effort, but the canal was within range of Confederate batteries, and the work was abandoned in March. Work on another canal

further north was begun in February, in an attempt to bypass Vicksburg by a route that led down to the Red River. As Grant later recorded, he saw "there was scarcely a chance of this every becoming a practicable route for moving troops," and quickly cancelled the project.[69]

The final two expeditions relied heavily upon naval support. The Yazoo Pass expedition, begun in February, and the Steele's Bayou expedition in March were both efforts to flank Vicksburg through the connecting maze of rivers and bayous north of the town. Both expeditions featured the most challenging riverine operations of the campaign, as the army troop transports and Porter's gunboats confronted shallow water, confining channels, tangling masses of overhanging trees, and harassing Confederate fire. The Yazoo Pass expedition ended when it came upon sunken steamers in the river and a hastily constructed defensive position the Confederates had named Fort Pemberton, after the commander of the defenses at Vicksburg.[70]

Before the Yazoo Pass expedition ended, Porter discovered what he thought was a better route to the Yazoo River above Vicksburg. Porter decided to lead the Steele's Bayou expedition himself, and his vessels got underway on 14 March. The expedition made slow progress as it steamed through its twisting route to the Yazoo River. Porter soon discovered that the Confederates were blocking the channel behind with trees and were engaging his vessels with batteries and sharpshooters. He appealed to Sherman for support, and Sherman arrived the next day to rescue Porter's gunboats. Porter later summed up the results of the expeditions, writing "ours was a pretty piece of strategy for getting into the rear of Vicksburg, but Pemberton's was better."[71]

<u>The Fall of Vicksburg and Port Hudson</u>

In the wake of the failed attempts to get in the rear of Vicksburg's defenses, Grant made the decision that would result in one of the most celebrated campaigns of the war. Grant would march his troops down the Louisiana side of the river and cross below Vicksburg, allowing him to approach the defenses from the south. "The co-operation of the navy was absolutely essential to the success (even to the contemplation) of such an enterprise," as Grant later wrote. Porter's cooperation would be necessary to escort Grant's transports below the batteries, conduct the crossing of the river, and continue to support Grant once he started to work his way inland. [72]

As Porter's squadron prepared to pass the batteries at Vicksburg, Grant's troops began their march downstream in preparation for crossing the river. The passage was made on the night of 16 April with nine gunboats and three army transports. The vessels had been covered with heavy logs and wet hay as added protection against Confederate fire, and only one transport was lost.[73]

More transports soon made the passage, and Grant prepared his forces to cross the river at Grand Gulf, twenty-five miles south of Vicksburg. The Confederates had heavily fortified Grand Gulf, and Porter's squadron engaged the batteries for more than five hours on 29 April in an attempt to secure a passage for Grant's troops. Grant decided to land his troops on the west bank and march them south of the batteries, allowing Porter to escort the empty transports past Grand Gulf. On the morning of 30 April, Grant's troops began landing on the east bank of the river at Bruinsburg, Mississippi. With Banks engaged in the interior of Louisiana, there was no hope of a coordinated attack to capture Port Hudson and open the lines of communication to the south. Grant, as he described,

"determined to move independently of Banks, cut loose from my base of supply, destroy the rebel force in the rear of Vicksburg and invest or capture the city."[74]

With Grant fighting east of the Mississippi, Porter steamed to the mouth of the Red River, intending to relieve Farragut before Grant arrived at Vicksburg. Porter captured an abandoned Fort De Russy on 4 May and continued to push upriver, taking possession of Alexandria three days later. Porter turned the city over to Banks that evening. Dropping water levels in the Red River prevented further operations, and Porter returned to Vicksburg.[75]

Grant's campaign brought him to the rear of Vicksburg on 18 May, after defeating Pemberton at Champion's Hill two days prior. After failed assaults on 19 and 22 May, Grant "determined upon a regular siege," as he later wrote. Porter supported the siege by bombarding the defenses with mortars, escorting transports, protecting supply routes, and sending siege guns ashore to operate with the army. "With the navy holding the river," Grant later proclaimed, "the investment of Vicksburg was complete."[76] Pemberton finally surrendered Vicksburg on 4 July, following a six-week siege.[77]

Porter wrote to Welles on 11 July, a week after the surrender, to give credit to the naval officers who had contributed to the victory. Porter, who had battled Butler for credit over the capture of New Orleans, offered praise for the work Grant and his troops had done at Vicksburg. "To the army do we owe immediate thanks for the capture of Vicksburg," Porter wrote, hastening to add that "the army was much facilitated by the navy, which was ready at all times to cooperate."[78] Grant offered similar thoughts regarding the navy: "The navy under Porter was all it could be, during the entire

campaign. Without its assistance the campaign could not have been successfully made with twice the number of men engaged."[79]

Port Hudson surrendered after a similar siege. Banks left Alexandria on 14 May, transporting his troops across the Mississippi to invest Port Hudson by 25 May. Grant's inland campaign had depleted the garrison at Port Hudson, and Banks's force now outnumbered the 7,000 defenders by a margin of four to one. Banks settled into a siege after unsuccessful assaults on 27 May and 14 June, and Farragut's squadron continued to bombard the defenses with mortars. With Vicksburg captured and supplies running low, the garrison at Port Hudson surrendered on 8 July.[80]

Fox wrote to Farragut on 10 July to congratulate him "upon the final opening of the Mississippi" and remind him of the events that had transpired during the previous year. "We do not forget that you and Davis met at Vicksburg a year ago and that five thousand troops which I vainly asked of Halleck . . . were denied and a years fighting on the flank of that river is the consequence." Yet even after the remarkable level of joint cooperation displayed on the river in the previous year, Fox confessed ignorance concerning the next phase of operations. "We have no orders to send at present. We know not what the movements of the Army are to be."[81]

Summary

Naval forces pushed up the Mississippi after the victory at New Orleans, but the operations against Vicksburg in the summer of 1862, according to historian John Milligan, "proved emphatically that only a well-organized joint operation had any hope of forcing the fortress to submit."[82] Met by the reality of the imposing defensive position at Vicksburg, hopes of quickly securing the Mississippi faded. The high earthworks at

Vicksburg proved resistant to naval bombardment, and additional troops needed to mount a joint attack could not be spared.

Victory would only come after a shift in Union strategy late in 1862 made opening the Mississippi a main effort for Union forces. The challenging joint operations that led to the surrender of Vicksburg and Port Hudson demonstrated the advantage that Union naval supremacy provided against the fixed Confederate defenses. Naval forces under Porter and Farragut supported the maneuver and supply of ground forces and sieges of Confederate defenses. Despite the lack of clear guidance from the Navy Department, Porter and Farragut, with varying degrees of success, effectively cooperated with Grant and Banks, leading to the surrender of the two fortresses on the Mississippi and opening the entire river to Union control.

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[1]Ulysses S. Grant, *Personal Memoirs* (New York: The Modern Library, 1999), 302.

[2]Autrey to Lee, 18 May 1862, *ORN*, 18:492.

[3]Lindsay to Lee, 18 May 1862, *ORN*, 18:492.

[4]Anderson, *By Sea and by River*, 133.

[5]Roger A. Beaumont, *Joint Military Operations: A Short History* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1993), 25.

[6]Porter, *Incidents and Anecdotes of the Civil War, 95*

[7]Barnard to Welles, 28 January 1862, *ORN*, 18:23

[8]Welles to Farragut, 20 January 1862, *ORN*, 18:8.

[9]Farragut to Welles, 29 April 1862, *ORN*, 18:148.

[10]McClellan to Butler, 23 February 1862, in *Civil War Papers of George B. McClellan*, ed. Sears, 189.

[11]Benjamin F. Butler, *Autobiography and Personal Reminiscences of Major General Benjamin F. Butler: Butler's Book*, (Boston: A.M. Thayer and Co., 1892), 455.

[12]Diary of Commander H. H. Bell, *ORN*, 18:703-706.

[13]Ibid., 706.

[14]Fox to Farragut, 17 May 1862, in Fox, *Confidential Correspondence,* eds. Thompson and Wainwright, 1:313.

[15]Ibid., 1:315.

[16]Farragut to Welles, 30 May 1862, *ORN*, 18:521.

[17]Porter to Farragut, 3 June 1862, *ORN,* 18:577.

[18]Farragut, *Life of David Glasgow Farragut*, 272.

[19]Diary of Commander H. H. Bell, *ORN*, 18:709.

[20]John D. Milligan, *Gunboats down the Mississippi* (Annapolis, Md.: United States Naval Institute, 1965), 80.

[21]Farragut to Welles, 28 June 1862, *ORN*, 18:588.

[22]Porter to Fox, 20 June 1862, in Fox, *Confidential Correspondence,* eds. Thompson and Wainwright, 2:122-123.

[23]Van Dorn to Davis, 12 July 1862, *ORN*, 18:651.

[24]Farragut to Halleck, 28 June 1862, *ORN*, 18:590.

[25]Halleck to Farragut, 3 July 1862, *ORN*, 18:593.

[26]Stanton to Welles, 14 July 1862, *ORN*, 18:636.

[27]Welles to Farragut, 5 July 1862, *ORN*, 18:629.

[28]Welles to Farragut, 14 July 1862, *ORN*, 18:595.

[29]Farragut to Welles, 17 July 1862, *ORN*, 19:4.

[30]Farragut to Davis, 22 July 1862, *ORN*, 18:17.

[31]Farragut to Davis, 23 July 1862, *ORN*, 19:19.

[32]Butler, *Butler's Book*, 484.

[33]Winter, *Civil War in Louisiana*, 124.

[34]Lawrence Lee Hewitt, *Port Hudson, Confederate Bastion on the Mississippi* (Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University Press, 1987), 18-19.

[35]Edward Cunningham, *The Port Hudson Campaign, 1862-1863* (Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University Press, 1963), 6.

[36]A. T. Mahan, *The Gulf and Inland Waters* (New York: Charles Scribners Sons, 1885), 106.

[37]Fox to Farragut, 9 September 1862, in Fox, *Confidential Correspondence,* eds. Thompson and Wainwright, 1:317.

[38]Still, "David Glasgow Farragut," 174-176.

[39]Ludwell H. Johnson, *Red River Campaign: Politics and Cotton in the Civil War* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1993), 17-18.

[40]Herman Hattaway and Archer Jones, *How the North Won: A Military History of the Civil War* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1983), 293.

[41]James G. Hollandsworth, Jr., *Pretense of Glory: The Life of General Nathaniel P. Banks* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1998), 84.

[42]Winter, *Civil War in Louisiana*, 125-139.

[43]Hollandsworth, *Pretense of Glory*, 95.

[44]Halleck to Banks, 9 November 1862, *OR,* ser. 1, 15:590-591.

[45]Ransom to Farragut, 18 November 1862, *ORN*, 19:351.

[46]Lincoln to Farragut, 11 November 1862, in Lincoln, *Collected Works*, ed. Basler, 5:495.

[47]Welles, *Diary*, 1:158.

[48]Porter to Fox, 17 October 1862, in Fox, *Confidential Correspondence,* eds. Thompson and Wainwright, 2:141.

[49]Banks to Halleck, 18 December 1862, *OR*, ser. 1, 15:614.

[50]Hewitt, *Port Hudson*, 38-39.

[51]Selfridge to Walke, 13 December 1862, *ORN*, 23:548-550.

[52]Grant, *Personal Memoirs*, 228.

[53]Porter to Fox, 13 January 1862, in Fox, *Confidential Correspondence,* eds. Thompson and Wainwright, 2:154.

[54]Porter, *Naval History of the Civil War*, 292.

[55]Porter, *Incidents and Anecdotes*, 131-132.

[56]Welles to Farragut, 2 October 1862, *ORN*, 19:245.

[57]Farragut to Fox, 23 December 1862, in Fox, *Confidential Correspondence,* eds. Thompson and Wainwright, 1:322.

[58]Grant, *Personal Memoirs*, 236.

[59]Farragut to Welles, 16 March 1862, *ORN*, 19:665.

[60]Banks to Halleck, 24 January 1863, *OR*, ser. 1, 15:661.

[61]Banks to Grant, 30 April 1863, *OR*, ser.1, 15:711.

[62]Reed, *Combined Operations in the Civil War*, 253.

[63]Porter to Fox, 12 November 1862, in Fox, *Confidential Correspondence,* eds. Thompson and Wainwright, 2:150.

[64]Mahan, *Gulf and Inland Waters*, 20.

[65]Grant, *Personal Memoirs*, 243.

[66]Porter to Sherman, 24 November 1862, *ORN*, 23:500.

[67]Grant, *Personal Memoirs*, 236.

[68]Farragut to Fox, 2 April 1863, in Fox, *Confidential Correspondence,* eds. Thompson and Wainwright, 1:331.

[69]Grant, *Personal Memoirs*, 236-238.

[70]Porter, *Incidents and Anecdotes*, 139-142.

[71]Ibid., 142.

[72]Grant, *Personal Memoirs*, 243

[73]Porter to Welles, 19 April 1863, *ORN*, 24:553-554.

[74]Grant, *Personal Memoirs*, 261.

[75]Porter to Welles, 7 May 1863, *ORN*, 24:645.

[76]Grant, *Personal Memoirs*, 283.

[77]Ibid., 301-303.

[78]Porter to Welles, 11 July 1863, *ORN*, 25:279.

[79]Grant, *Personal Memoirs*, 307.

[80]Hollandsworth, Jr., *Pretense of Glory*, 121-133.

[81]Fox to Farragut, 10 July 1863, in Fox, *Confidential Correspondence*, eds. Thompson and Wainwright, 1:335.

[82]Milligan, *Gunboats down the Mississippi*, 178.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

The Father of Waters again goes unvexed to the sea.[1]

Abraham Lincoln, *Collected Works*

On 26 August 1863, in a letter to James C. Conkling, a friend and fellow lawyer from Illinois, President Lincoln recounted the string of recent Union victories that were helping turn the tide of the war. Lincoln paid particular attention to the recent victories on the Mississippi River--the "Father of Waters" as he called it--pronouncing that "those who have cleared the great river may very well be proud." Lincoln went on to acknowledge the specific contributions of the Union navy. "Nor must Uncle Sam's Web-feet be forgotten," he wrote. "At all the watery margins they have been present. Not only on the deep sea, the broad bay, and the rapid river, but also up the narrow muddy bayou, and wherever the ground was a little damp, they have been, and made their tracks."[2]

Lincoln's words aptly summarize the important contribution made by the Union navy in the opening of the Mississippi River. The surrender of Vicksburg and Port Hudson in July 1863 capped more than two years of operations in Louisiana that began with the start of the blockade in May 1861. This thesis has examined the relationship between these important operations and the Union's naval strategy that developed after the fall of Fort Sumter and continued to evolve in response to changes at the operational level of war.

In the course of the study, four significant themes have emerged that tie the operations in Louisiana together and highlight important aspects of the relationship between strategy and operations. The four themes are: the relationship between military

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strategy and political, economic, and diplomatic objectives; the importance of developing a strategy that capitalizes on military strengths; the importance of strategic unity of effort in a joint environment; and the importance of effective leadership.

Military strategy is never free from the influence of political, economic and diplomatic considerations. Two examples from the Union's naval war in Louisiana bear this out. First, Lincoln's proclamation of blockade immediately set the primary strategic task for the Union navy, but the proclamation demonstrated significant incongruity between strategic objectives and military capabilities. The blockade was an economic strategy to strangle the Confederacy, but diplomatic influences also had an important part in shaping the strategy. The desire to minimize foreign entanglements led to the proclamation of a blockade rather than a port closure, and the navy had to rapidly improvise a fleet of ships to ensure that the blockade was effective and, therefore, legal.

The Mississippi campaign also demonstrated many of these influences. The shift in Union strategy that led to the emphasis on opening the Mississippi River at the end of 1862 was driven by more than military necessity. Important political and economic considerations influenced Lincoln's decision to place the main emphasis on operations in the West. The influences were demonstrated in Louisiana as well, where Maj. Gen. Banks was assigned to command the upriver expedition while continuing the economic and political reconstruction of Louisiana. His divergent tasks would divide his focus and damage the effectiveness of the joint operation with Farragut to capture Port Hudson.

The second significant theme that runs throughout the study is the Union's ability to craft a strategy that effectively employed and maintained its naval superiority against what was primarily a land power. The blockade deprived the Confederacy of goods and

raw materials, and naval gunboats and transports on the Mississippi provided the operational capability that allowed Farragut to rapidly bypass Forts Jackson and St. Philip and allowed Grant to cross the river during the Vicksburg Campaign.

The Union's naval operations in Louisiana also ensured it maintained its naval superiority. In *The Influence of Sea Power upon History*, Mahan wrote: "Those who recall how the blockade was maintained, and the class of ships that blockaded during the great part of the war, know that the plan . . . could not have been carried out in the face of a real navy."[3] For Mahan, the enduring lesson of the blockade was that it would have been ineffective against a stronger naval power. A more relevant lesson regarding the development of Union naval strategy is that the blockade was effective because it was able to prevent the Confederacy from becoming a strong naval power. As economist David Surdam has described, "the Union blockade proved crucial in protecting the Northern navy against a Southern fleet." A weak blockade, Surdam adds, "would have significantly eased the Confederacy's difficulties in constructing or obtaining a naval force to sweep away the blockaders and to attack the North."[4] The Union effectively used its existing navy, large merchant marine, and greater industrial capacity to improvise a fleet that could blockade the Confederate coast. As a result, vital raw materials and heavy marine equipment were denied the Confederacy that it desperately needed to build a strong navy. A similar conclusion can be drawn from the operations on the Mississippi River. The naval attack to capture New Orleans in April 1862 deprived the Confederacy of one of its primary shipbuilding centers. When combined with the evacuation of Norfolk and Pensacola and the fall of Memphis soon after, the Confederate shipbuilding

program was dealt a crippling blow that ensured the Union navy would maintain its naval superiority.

The operations on Louisiana also highlight the importance of having unity of effort in a joint environment. The Vicksburg Campaign has justly become an early and important example of the importance of joint operations, demonstrating the importance of unity of effort at the operational level. In the context of this study, however, an important question to ask when it comes to the development of strategy is: Why was the Mississippi River opened in July 1863 rather than following the capture of New Orleans in May 1862, when Vicksburg was still relatively undefended?

The victory at New Orleans was a significant victory that indicated a shift in naval strategy in Louisiana, as the navy began a drive upriver on the Mississippi. The joint victories against fixed fortifications on the Atlantic Coast and the influence of Porter led the navy to conduct an attack on New Orleans, leading to the stunning and unexpected capture of the city. The attack benefited from a Union offensive upriver that drew Confederate troops and vessels away from New Orleans, but there was not yet a coordinated joint strategy to open the Mississippi. Union strategy still focused on operations in the East, and troops could not be spared to follow up the victory at New Orleans. The result was a feeble attempt to seize Vicksburg. Consequently, the defenses at Vicksburg were strengthened, and the Confederates would occupy Port Hudson. Not until the end of the year would the Mississippi become the focus of Union operations, and the costly campaign would last until July 1863.

The Blockade Board was far from the modern concept of a joint planning board. As a group tasked to study the naval blockade and provide measures to improve its

effectiveness, it had a limited focus. Nevertheless, the board had joint representation and its recommendations led to some of the war's earliest joint victories. A similar board to examine operations on the inland waters and provide recommendations to improve joint operations there would have facilitated the strategic unity of effort.

The final theme that has emerged throughout this study is the importance of effective leadership. The naval war in Louisiana benefited from the presence of two courageous and determined leaders who took the broad strategic guidance from the Navy Department and translated it into action in the Gulf of Mexico and on the Mississippi River. In contrast to the army commanders with whom they cooperated, both Farragut and Porter had spent almost a lifetime in uniform, and both had operated extensively on the Mississippi River. In an era when effective joint cooperation relied upon the good relations of commanders, both were able to subordinate their personal interests in the pursuit of common objectives.

Porter's work in Louisiana would continue in the spring of 1864 with the Red River Campaign, a disastrous joint operation conducted with Maj. Gen. Banks. Farragut would finally get his chance to attack Mobile Bay in August of that year. Both would be rewarded after the war with promotion to full admiral, a fitting tribute to their contributions to the naval war in Louisiana.

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[1]Lincoln to Conkling, 26 August 1863, in Lincoln, *Collected Works*, ed. Basler, 6:409.

[2]Ibid.

[3]Mahan, *Influence of Sea Power upon History*, 43.

[4]Surdam, "The Union Navy's Blockade Reconsidered," 69.

GLOSSARY

Joint Operation. An operation involving land and naval forces acting in cooperation in pursuit of a common objective. No unified command structure is implied.

Naval Operation. An operation solely or primarily conducted by naval forces.

Naval Strategy. The art and science of employing naval power in pursuit of a national objective.

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