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JOINT OPERATIONS IN THE JAMES RIVER BASIN, 1862-1865

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

by
DAVID K. ZATT, LCDR, USN
B.S., University of Notre Dame,
Notre Dame, Indiana, 1982

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This study is a strategic analysis of the Army's ability to perform the Joint Theater Missle Defense, (JTMD), mission. The need to protect against the short range theater ballistic missile threat is a rapidly growing problem. The assessment and analysis provided in this study identifies capabilities needed to improve or maintain Army ability in this mission. Additionally, this analysis reveals issues that effect the overall military JTMD capability, in light of sililar service roles and responsibilities.

The assessment is made by evaluating Army capability in each of the four JTMD mission areas: active defense, attack operations, passive defense, and command, control, communications and intelligence. The adequacy of each of the four mission areas is determined by analyzing effectiveness of current doctrine, training, leadership, organizational, and material systems (DTLOM criteria) that support each of the four Army JTMD missions. Evidence gathered leads to assessments concerning the readiness of the criteria so that in turn judgements can be drawn concerning capability in each of the four areas. Areas not fully validated are identified for further investigation.

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Name of Candidate: David K. Zatt, LCDR, USN

Thesis Title: Joint Operations in the James River Basin 1862-1865

Approved by:

_____, Thesis Committee Chairman
Lieutenant Colonel Philip J. Baker, M.S.

_____, Member
Commander Chris M. Handley, M.B.A.

_____, Member
Dr. Jerold E. Brown, Ph.D.

Accepted this 4th day of June 1993 by:

_____, Director, Graduate Degree Programs
Philip J. Brookes, Ph.D.

The opinions and conclusions expressed herein are those of the student author and do not necessarily represent the views of the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College or any other governmental agency. (References to this study should include the foregoing statement.)

ABSTRACT

JOINT OPERATIONS IN THE JAMES RIVER BASIN, 1862-1865 by LCDR David K. Zatt, USN, 121 pages.

This study is an analysis of Union joint operations in the James River Basin from 1862 to 1865. Specifically the contributions made by the Union Navy during the battles of this period.

It begins with an analysis of the Peninsula Campaign conducted by Major General George B. McClellan and Rear Admiral Louis M. Goldsborough in 1862 and concludes with the Union forces entry into Richmond in April 1865.

The Union Navy played a significant role in shaping the outcome of the battles for control of the James River Basin and the eventual capture of Richmond. The Navy's control of the river allowed Lieutenant General Grant to maintain his main supply base well forward in the theater. This enabled Grant to rapidly maneuver and resupply his forces.

The study provides lessons on the difficulties of joint operations and the requirements to ensure success in the joint arena. Furthermore, it provides today's United States military with a view of riverine and mine warfare operations and the implication of allowing these warfare areas to decay.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

This study is an analysis of the Union Navy's participation in the battles that took place in the James River Basin from 1862 to the fall of Richmond in April 1865. This examination provides important lessons for understanding the concerns and problems which may arise in today's joint and combined arena. Furthermore, it shows the intrinsic difficulties encountered in conducting cooperative operations without unity of command or joint doctrine. The analysis will show the inter-service requirements for conducting riverine operations. It will also illustrate the inherent difficulties associated with conducting operations in a mine environment. In order to highlight these areas and the contributions made by the Navy during this period in the James River Basin, the analysis focuses on several basic questions:

1. How involved was the Navy in the planning and execution of the battles? What was the commitment of the Navy toward the James River battles? Was this involvement substantial or superficial to the total operation?

2. How important to the outcome of the battles was the contribution of the Navy? If the Union had altered its import of the Naval portion of their order of battle, would the initiative have shifted?

3. How well did the Navy integrate into the general scheme of battle? What was the assistance that the Navy rendered in protection of the Union Army both on and off the waterways? What were the problems that each service encountered interfacing with a separate organization to achieve the common goal?

The Navy did in fact play an important role in the outcome of the American Civil War: from the blockading of ports to the battles upon the inland rivers, the Navy supported the Army's efforts throughout the war. In a letter written 26 August 1863, to Union men from his hometown, Springfield, Illinois, President Lincoln praised the achievements of the Navy:

> Nor must Uncle Sam's web-feet be forgotten. 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. Thanks to all.[1]

Unlike today's Defense Department which controls the United States military organization, the military during the Civil War was split into two separate organizations: the Department of War, and the Department of the Navy. In the James River Basin the Civil War Naval forces fell under the command of the North Atlantic Blockading Squadron. The North Atlantic Blockading Squadron had jurisdiction over the waters bounding North Carolina, Virginia, Maryland, and all associated tributaries. The James River Squadron (or James River Flotilla), established in 1862, was a subordinate command of the North Atlantic Blockading Squadron and had domain over the James River and its tributaries.

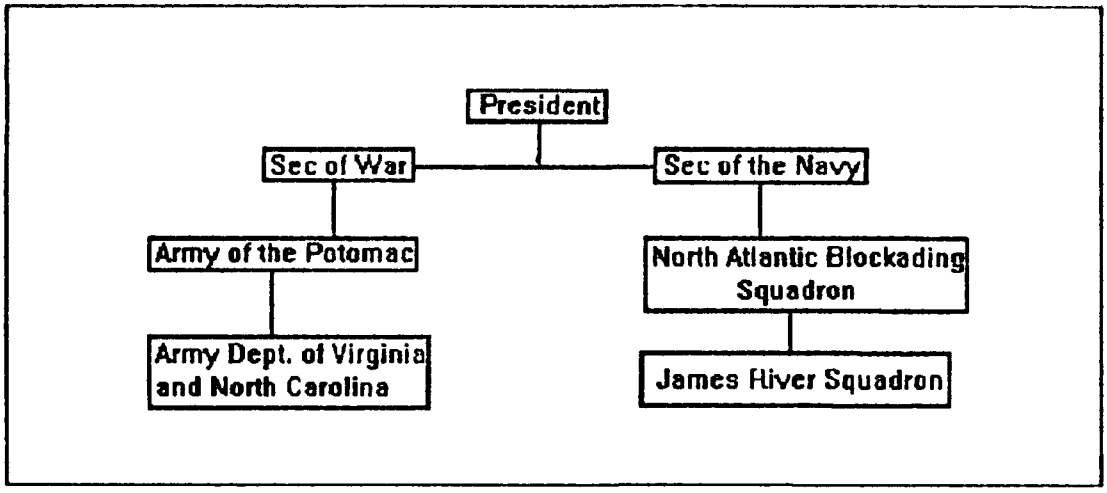

Figure 1. Union Command and Control Organization

The Department of the Potomac (or Army of the Potomac) was constituted in August 1861 and consisted of the Departments of Washington, Northeastern Virginia, and the Shenandoah. Included within its limits were the states of Delaware, Maryland, the District of Columbia, and that part of Virginia east of the Allegheny Mountains and north of the James River, except for Fort Monroe and sixty miles of the country around it which fell under the command of the Department of Virginia.[2] In April 1862 when Major General George B. McClellan commenced his Peninsula Campaign, the Departments of the Shenandoah and the Rappahanock were removed from the Department of the Potomac command. In July 1863 the Department of Virginia expanded to include portions of North Carolina, and its name changed to the Department of Virginia and North Carolina.

The Civil War era military system did not allow for simplicity of command and control by a single commander-in-chief as is common today. Sister services cooperation in the theater of operations had to be approved by both departments instead of being dictated by the commander-in-chief. Requests for assistance often required long lead times as the communications went up one chain-of-command and then down the other chain-of-command. Cross chain communications normally did not normally occur below the level of the area commander and occasionally were made at the Secretary level. This lack of command and control by a single entity allowed for departmental rivalry to interfere with operations. During the Civil War, the political rivalries occasionally became a significant hindrance to operations.

Gideon Welles, a soft-spoken career politician from Connecticut, was Abraham Lincoln's Secretary of the Navy. Charles A. Dana, Assistant Secretary of War during the Civil War, recalled:

> Welles was a curious-looking man: he wore a wig which was parted in the middle, the hair falling down on each side; and it was from his peculiar appearance . . . that the idea that he was an old fogy originated. . . . In spite of his peculiarities . . . Mr. Welles was a very wise, strong man. There was nothing decorative about him; there was no noise in the street when he went along; but he understood his duty, and did it efficiently, continually, and unwaveryingly. There was a good deal of opposition to him, for we had no navy when the war began, and he had to create one without much deliberation; but he was patient, laborious, and intelligent at task.[3]

Lincoln recognized that "Welles generally gave good counsel, whatever the issue, that above all, he was trustworthy and completely loyal."[4]

Lincoln's first Secretary of War, Simon Cameron, who had lost the President's confidence, was replaced in January 1862 by Edwin M. Stanton.

> The appointment of Mr. Stanton was not made on party or personal considerations. . . . He was appointed because, in addition to his great ability, his restless energy, and his absolute honesty, he was an unconditional Unionist of the Democratic faith, and his appointment would be a proof to the country that Mr. Lincoln regarded the war as a people's war, and not that of a party.[5]

Also known as a forceful, prodigious worker and a master of detail, Stanton was supremely confident of his own ability to cope with any problem.[6] Welles was not fond of Stanton, because of the latter's well known condescending remarks about Lincoln's administration. However, Stanton was backed by Welles' adversaries in the administration: Secretary of State William H. Seward and Secretary of the Treasury Salmon P. Chase. Having received counsel from Welles' enemies within the administration and Congress, Stanton entered the Cabinet prejudiced against Welles. Unfortunately, each man exacerbated these feelings by seizing every opportunity to rebut the other in the eyes of Lincoln.

Major General Winfield Scott, Commanding General of the United States Army at the beginning of the Civil War, proposed a strategic plan to force the Southern states to acquiesce and rejoin the Union. Craig Symond's, in his book

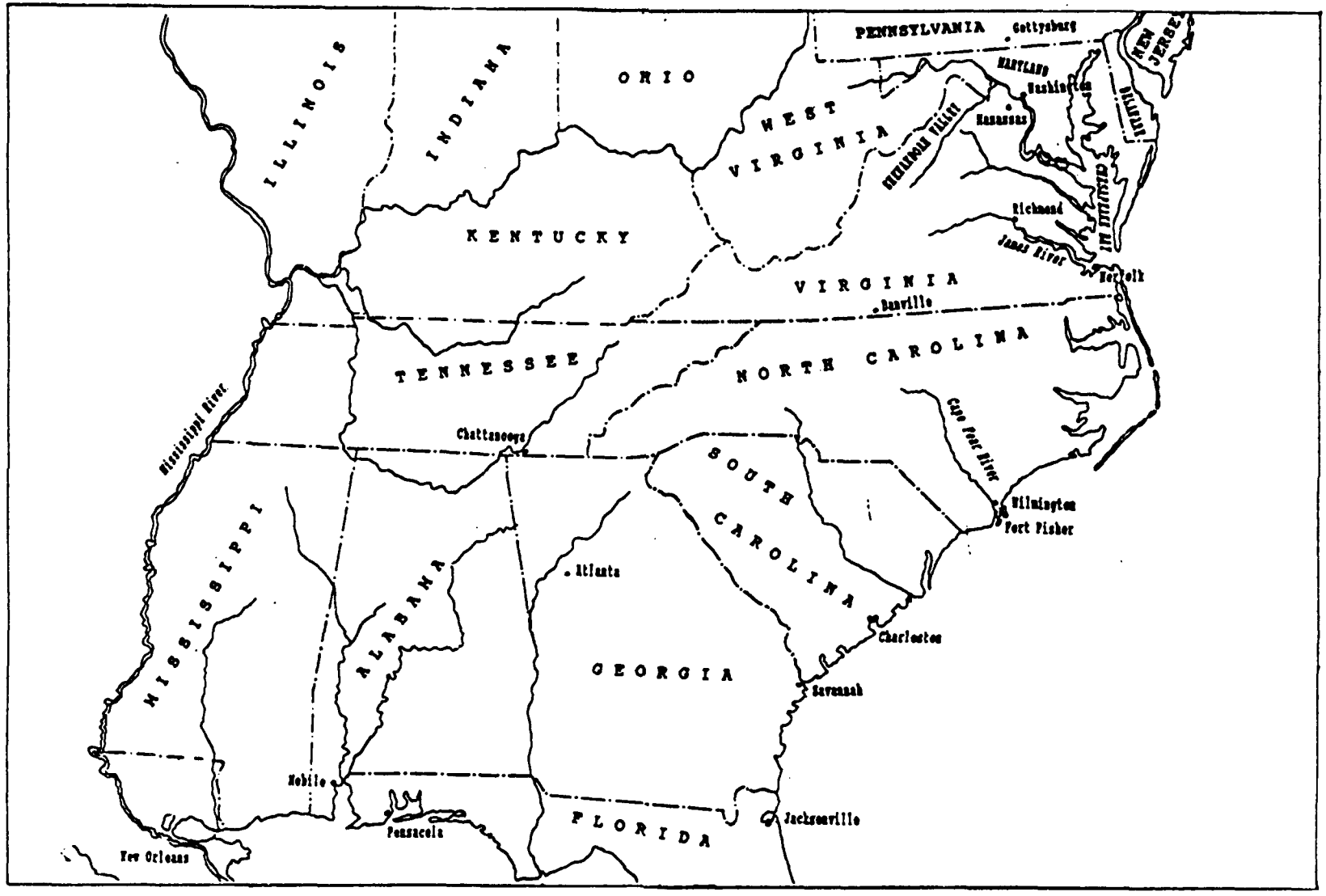

Figure 2. Southeastern United States

A Battlefield Atlas of the Civil War, gives the following summary of Scott's plan:

> The plan he offered to the President consisted of three elements, all designed to achieve not so much a military victory as a reconciliation:
>
> (1) A major army should be created to operate in northern Virginia, both to protect the Federal capital and to tie down the principal rebel army. Scott did not advocate an early offensive, however, largely because he knew that a spilling of blood was the surest guarantee of rendering a reconciliation impossible.
>
> (2) A naval blockade should be established to cut the Confederacy off from European military aid and diplomatic support. The subsequent isolation would demonstrate to the rebels their dependence on the Northern states and perhaps force them to reconsider their rashness.
>
> (3) A combined Army-Navy operation to control the Mississippi River should be mounted to split the Confederacy in half both physically and economically.[7]

Scott was severely criticized by the press, who dubbed his plan "The Anaconda Plan,"[8] because of his desire to enact such a passive stance toward the rebellious Southerners. Many of his subordinates, who also criticized him, believed that the proper approach should be a decisive assault on Richmond. Scott also believed that the Union Army was not prepared and it needed time to build-up a strong enough force to achieve such a victory. Lincoln accepted Scott's proposal as the basis for the overall Union strategy, but yielded to the masses and agreed to an early assault on Richmond which failed as Scott had predicted.

The James River Basin in southeastern Virginia was a strategic inland waterway during the Civil War. Flowing from the mountains in western Virginia, through the

Confederate capital in Richmond, and into the Chesapeake Bay, this river was vitally important to the interests of both the Union and Confederacy. Richmond was not only the capital city, but it was the premier industrial center, as well as one of the two main munitions centers in the Confederacy.

Where the river joined the Chesapeake it was flanked to the north by Fort Monroe and to the south by the shipyard in Norfolk. At the outbreak of the war, Union forces had been overrun in Norfolk and had lost one of the major shipyards in the country. Fort Monroe and the southern tip of the Virginia Peninsula were held, affording the Union an entrance to the eastern approaches of Richmond, and a base for operations against the Confederacy.

With Union naval superiority maintaining control of the Chesapeake Bay, it was critical for the Confederacy to retain control of Norfolk and the James River. Norfolk was the key to the control of the lower James River and the southeastern approaches to Richmond. Residents of Richmond feared Union control of the James River because there was no assurance that the Union Navy could not silence or pass defenses along the James. Furthermore, the James afforded the Federals the ability to conduct joint land-water operations all the way into Richmond. The loss of Norfolk would also make the Confederate controlled sounds of North Carolina vulnerable from its northern flank.

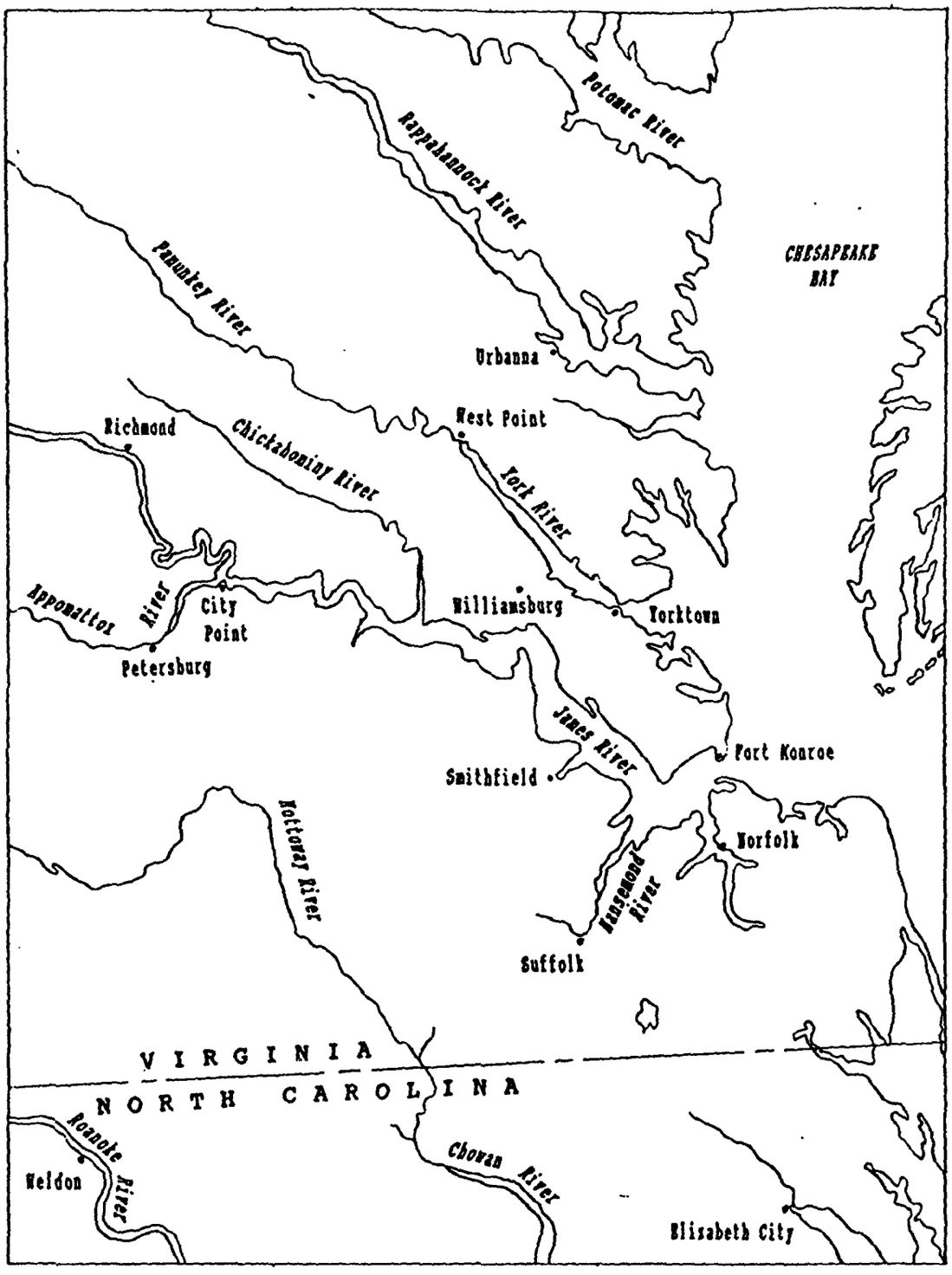

Figure 3. Southeastern Virginia

Chapter two is an examination of the Peninsula Campaign, conducted from April to June 1862. This campaign, conducted by the Union forces on the Peninsula of Southeastern Virginia and surrounding waters, will provide insight into the problems encountered by the Army-Navy team in the early days of the Civil War. The analysis will also provide a benchmark to measure the progress made by the Union forces in conducting joint operations.

Chapter three describes the relationships of Rear Admiral Lee and the three consecutive Major Generals he commanded with in the James River area. It evaluates the joint operations they conducted and gives perspectives on some of the weak points.

Chapter four is an analysis of the Union advance up the James River which took place during May and June of 1864. It describes the military situation during Grant's movement to the James River Basin and Petersburg. The chapter discusses the significance of Petersburg in the overall scheme to take Richmond and the significance of the Navy on the conduct of the battle.

Chapter five describes the stalemate which remained in the Petersburg/James River region after the failure of the Union forces to maintain the initiative in June 1864. It is an analysis of the skirmishes which ensued and the role of the Navy in shaping the battlefield for future operations in late 1864 and 1865.

Chapter six describes the high level of cooperation between the Union Army and Navy which changed the face of operations. It also describes the assaults down the James River by the Confederate Navy and why they failed. The chapter examines the final push by the Union forces up the James River Basin to Richmond.

Chapter seven analyzes the changes in Army-Navy interaction during the Civil War in the James River Basin. It provides some insights into lessons learned in joint operations and the similarities which exist in today's Navy. Lastly, it answers the thesis question of how the Navy's participation affected the successes and failures of operations in the James River Basin.

Endnotes

1. U.S. Naval History Division, Civil War Naval Chronology, 1861-1865, (Washington, D.C.: USGPO, 1971), p. VI-31.

2. Frank J. Welcher, The Union Army 1861-1865, Organization and Operations, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), p. 796.

3. Charles A. Dana, Recollections of the Civil War, (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1898), p. 170.

4. John Niven, Gideon Welles, Lincoln's Secretary of the Navy, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), p. 402.

5. George C. Gorham, Life and Public Services of Edwin M. Stanton, (New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1899), p. 240.

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7. Craig L. Symonds, A Battlefield Atlas of the Civil War, (Baltimore: Nautical and Aviation Publishing Co. of America, 1983), p. 7.

8. Ibid.

CHAPTER TWO

PENINSULA CAMPAIGN

In the fall of 1861 Major General George B. McClellan was appointed General-in-Chief of the Union Army. Lincoln wanted a man who could lead the Union forces to a rapid victory and bring the bloodshed to a close. He believed that McClellan was the right man to replace the aging Major General Winfield Scott, who was retiring, and lead the Union to that victory. Lincoln agreed to be patient with McClellan and allow the latter time to develop his forces and a comprehensive attack plan. However, McClellan proved to be a very methodical, painstaking drill master, who brought his forces to smartness upon the parade field, but was too slow in conducting his opening assault against the Confederate forces.

In January 1862, Lincoln, who was receiving constant criticism from the press and Congress for not attacking the rebels, found he had no choice but to put forth a plan of his own. Lincoln's plan was to conduct an assault against the Confederates at Manassas, Virginia. McClellan, who had been sick for more than a month, broke his silence and proposed his Urbanna Plan. McClellan, believing that an assault at Manassas would lead to waste of life and useless

battles, recommended a flanking movement down the Chesapeake to Urbanna, Virginia and then overland to Richmond.

> The base of operations available for the Army of the Potomac is that of the lower Chesapeake Bay, which affords the shortest possible land routes to Richmond, & strikes directly at the heart of the enemy's power in the East. . . . This movement if successful gives us the Capital, the communications, the supplies of the rebels; Norfolk would fall; all the waters of the Chesapeake would be ours; all Virginia would be in our power; & the enemy forced to abandon Tennessee & North Carolina. Should we be beaten in a battle, we have a perfectly secure retreat down the Peninsula upon Fort Monroe, with our flanks perfectly secured by the fleet.[1]

McClellan, who was referred to by some as "Young Napoleon", proposed a brilliant, sweeping plan to flank the Confederate forces and take Richmond.

Although brilliant, McClellan's plan shows two character flaws of the general. First is his passion for secrecy. Even though the Navy was to play a vital role in his campaign, from protecting his troop movement to guarding his flanks, McClellan never consulted anyone in the Navy Department during his planning. McClellan did not know to what extent the Navy could provide cooperation, nor did he know the extent of Confederate naval resistance in the area. "The Navy . . . had never been consulted at any level of planning, nor had it ever been advised officially about the details of the operation."[2] Second is his preoccupation with the retreat. He was a general who did not consider his supply routes as "lines of communication," but rather as

"lines of retreat." This is not a general who is supremely confident in his Army's ability to carry the fight.

In the spring of 1862 McClellan commenced his long awaited campaign against Richmond. Although his Urbanna Plan had not been fully approved, he did receive Lincoln's approval to conduct the flanking movement up the Virginia Peninsula. The Virginia Peninsula is bounded by the James River to the south and the York River to the north. McClellan's plan required the Navy's full cooperation for support on the York River and protection for his troops redeploying on the Chesapeake.

At the beginning of the Peninsula Campaign the Union Navy did not have free access to the James River, because the river entrance was guarded by the Confederate naval forces stationed at the Norfolk Navy Yard, including the ironclad C.S.S. *Virginia* (former U.S.S. *Merrimac*). On 8 March 1862 the *Virginia* along with three other Confederate vessels attacked Union vessels in Hampton Roads, sinking one, capturing another and forcing the U.S.S. *Minnesota* to run aground. The following day the first battle of ironclads would take place. The first Union ironclad, the U.S.S. *Monitor,* reached Hampton Roads late in the evening of 8 March and set anchor alongside the *Minnesota.* At 8:45 a.m. on 9 March 1862 the *Monitor* and *Virginia* commenced a three and one-half hour duel. Although nearly every shot fired by both antagonists was a hit, neither ship was

severely damaged from these rounds. During an attempt by the *Virginia* to ram and sink the *Monitor*, the *Virginia* was damaged when the *Monitor's* "sharp upper edged side cut through the light iron shoe upon her stem and well into her oak."[3] The extent of damage to the *Virginia* was unknown by the Union. Union leaders in the area and in Washington feared a return of the mighty Confederate ironclad and reacted accordingly.

On 13 March, McClellan requested, through Stanton, that Welles send all available forces from the North and South Atlantic Blockading Squadrons to assist with the campaign. Although Welles had been told directly by Lincoln and heard from casual conversation that the Peninsula Campaign was soon to commence, he used this opportunity to rebuke both Stanton and McClellan. Since the Navy had not been consulted during the planning phase, but delegated to a supporting role, Welles replied to Stanton:

> If a movement is to be made upon Norfolk, always a favorite measure of this Department, instant measures will be taken . . . but unless such be the case, I should be extremely reluctant to take any measure that would even temporarily weaken the efficiency of the blockade.[4]

The inability of the two service chiefs to put aside their personal differences and work together forced McClellan to start the campaign from a weaker position. McClellan, however, must take a share of the blame, since he willfully neglected to consult with the Navy during the planning phase. Lincoln, who became very upset over the lack of

coordination between the two service secretaries, was informed by Welles that the Navy would provide the gunboats needed to protect McClellan's flanks when the expedition finally commenced.

McClellan was dealt a succession of setbacks in the first four days of April, the eve of the Peninsula Campaign. President Lincoln removed 55,000 men from McClellan's command: Major General Irvin McDowell's Corps of 35,000 men, was to become the newly formed Department of the Rappahanock; Brigadier General Louis Blenker's Division of 10,000 men were sent to Harper's Ferry and the Department of the Shenandoah, under command of Major General John C. Fremont; and the 10,000 men of the Department of Virginia, headquartered at Fort Monroe, would remain under the command of Major General John E. Wool.

McClellan also received bad news from the Flag Officer Louis M. Goldsborough, Commanding Admiral of the North Atlantic Blockading Squadron. The Navy could only afford to provide seven small gunboats, under command of Commander John S. Missroon, to aid McClellan on his thrust against Yorktown. This was the number of vessels McClellan and Goldsborough had agreed upon in their pre-movement conferences. However, the Confederate defenses were stronger than originally planned, so McClellan desired greater numbers of gunboats, as well as an ironclad. The remainder of the Hampton Roads area vessels, including the

only ironclad *Monitor*, were being held to counter the *Virginia*, should she come out of Norfolk. Goldsborough responded to McClellan, "I dare not leave the *Merrimac* (C.S.S. *Virginia*) and consorts unguarded. Were she out of the way everything I have here should be at work in your behalf."[5] Although the Navy felt confident that the *Monitor* could hold off or even defeat the *Virginia*, many members of the Union administration, state and city leaders feared that the *Virginia* would break out of Norfolk and attack the Union metropolitan centers unabated. So strong was the fear to protect Washington that Stanton convinced Lincoln to blockade the Potomac River with sunken vessels. The other metropolitan areas were reassured of *Virginia's* inability to transit the ocean.

The Union Navy provided minor assistance to the Army in breaking the defenses at Yorktown. The gunboats assigned to assist McClellan were small and considered by the naval commander to be unsuited to withstand the Confederate batteries which were protecting the York River at Yorktown and Gloucester. Commander Missroon believed the only role his small flotilla could play was that of harassing gunfire support to limit the Confederacy's ability to strengthen its' defenses. McClellan, however, saw Missroon's approach as too careful. In a letter to Assistant Secretary of the Navy, Gustavus V. Fox, dated 14 April 1862, McClellan requested that Missroon be replaced:

> I fear friend Missroon is not the man for the place exactly. . . . It would of course be a great advantage that the Army & Navy Comdrs should know each other & understand each other, so as to secure perfect cooperation. . . . Effective naval cooperation will shorten this affair by weeks.[6]

McClellan, in his understanding of the requirements for cooperation was reflecting upon his need to maneuver. There was no room to maneuver on land, therefore he needed the Navy to secure the water route to provide him access to the adversary's flank and rear. He was also providing us a glimpse into problems which arise from lack of unity of command. Field Manual 100-5 states unity of command is, "For every objective, ensure unity of effort under one responsible commander."[7] Although the Navy and Army had the same objective, the two commanders were not committed to perfect cooperation. Cooperation and unity of effort must start in the planning phase, and McClellan neglected to get the Navy's cooperation during this phase. Unfortunately for McClellan and the Union, lack of cooperation, or unity of command, was holding back the Union offensive.

Missroon did get replaced as commander of the York River Flotilla, but it was not until 30 April, merely four days prior to the fall of Yorktown. Fox, upon his inspection of the Confederate defenses at Yorktown, informed Goldsborough, on 7 May, that Missroon had over estimated the capabilities of the Yorktown defenses. Furthermore Fox felt "that if Missroon had pushed by with a couple of gunboats

the Navy would have had the credit of driving the army of the rebels out, besides immortality to himself."[8]

General Robert E. Lee wrote:

> It is my opinion that they [General McClellan's Army] are endeavoring to change their base of operations from James to York River. This change has no doubt been occasioned by their fear of the effect of the *Virginia* upon their shipping in the James.[9]

Unfortunately for the Union, so paralyzing was the thought of the *Virginia*, that her draft was overlooked when assessing the capability of this vessel to traverse the James River. There was rampant debate about her draft impeding her capability to transit the Potomac, but never was anything mentioned about how far up the James River she could transit. The draft at the time of her launch as the U.S.S. *Merrimack* (C.S.S. *Virginia*) was seventeen feet. After her capture, the Confederacy outfitted her with armor, thus increasing her draft to twenty-two feet. The James River was known to have a depth of nineteen feet, five miles above Newport News.

It was not until 7 May that any mention of *Virginia's* draft in relation to the James was made. Fox wrote to Goldsborough mentioning the draft problems of the *Virginia* and informing him that the enemy is retreating up the James side of the Peninsula, because the Union Navy has gunboats along the York side.[10] Coincidentally on this day, President Lincoln, who had arrived at Fort Monroe on 5 May 1862 to act as Commander-in-Chief in the field, ordered

Goldsborough to "send the *Galena* (iron vessel) and two other gunboats up the James River at once."[11]

The *Galena*, under the command of Commander John Rodgers, ascended the James with the gunboats *Aroostook* and *Port Royal*. On 8 May, Rodgers' squadron engaged and silenced Confederate batteries at Rock Wharf and Mother Tynes' Bluff long enough for the vessels to continue up the river. The Confederate vessels, aiding the batteries in guarding the river, retreated up river before the *Galena* could engage them. Rodgers was delayed two days in continuing his pursuit further up river however, as the *Galena* had run aground on a sand bar.

On 8 May 1862, President Lincoln ordered the *Monitor* and a handful of escorts to "open fire upon Sewell's Point . . . to ascertain the practicability of landing a body of troops thereabouts and to reduce the works if it should be done."[12] Receiving the information on the strong defenses remaining at Sewell's Point, Lincoln personally reconnoitered a landing site east of Willoughby Point where Major General John E. Wool's troops landed on 9 May and commenced their march on Norfolk. On 10 May, Wool's troops entered Norfolk and took control of the Shipyard. Unable to return to Norfolk, the *Virginia* was destroyed by Flag-Officer Josiah Tattnall, C.S. Navy, at Craney Island prior to retreating with his men, on the morning of 11 May 1862.[13] The Union gained Norfolk, its shipyard, and unimpeded access

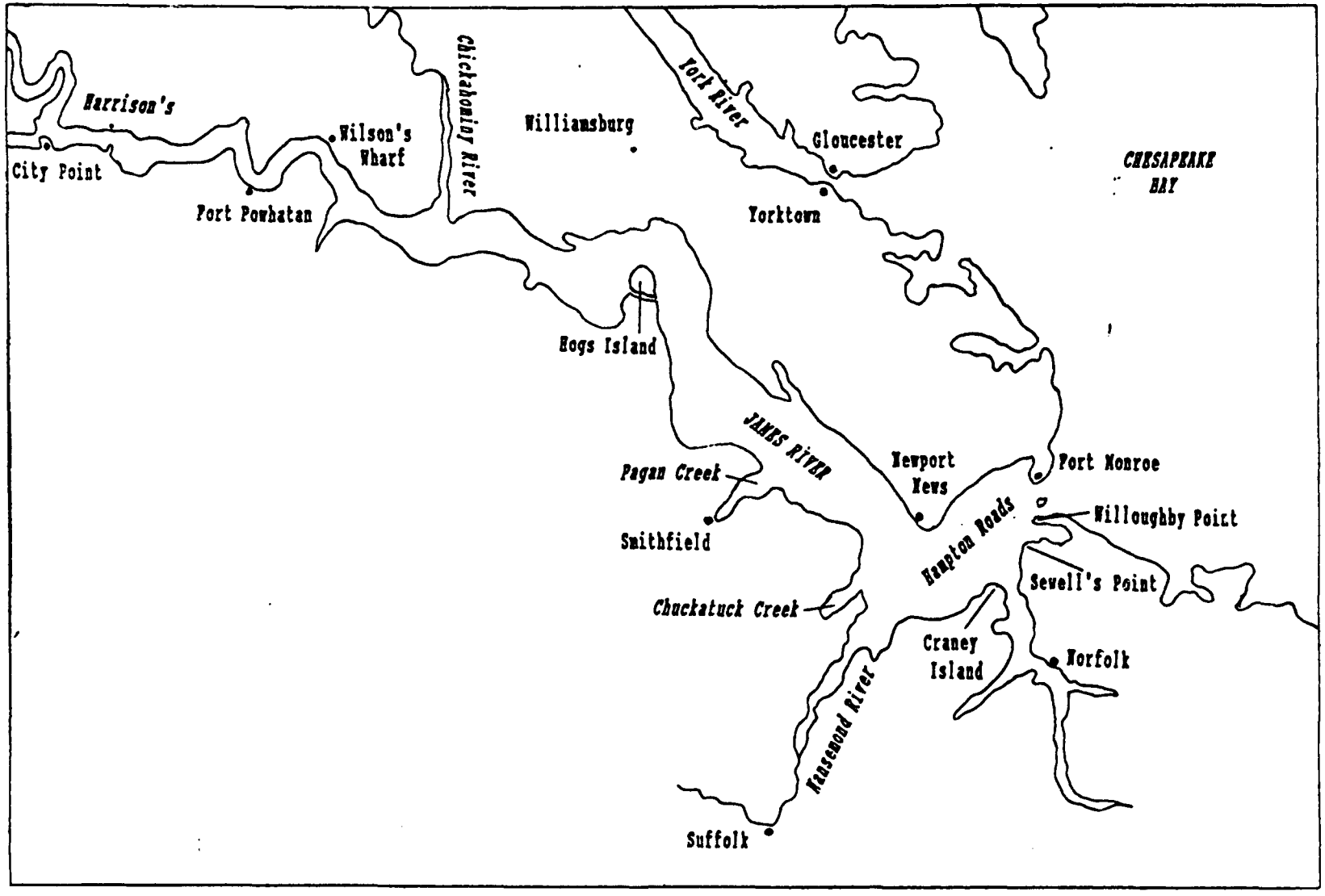

Figure 4. James River from Norfolk to City Point

to the lower James River, but more importantly, the Union now had a toehold on Richmond and the Confederacy.

Now that the threat of the *Virginia* was removed, the Union Navy sent the *Monitor* and *Stevens(Naugatuck)* up the James River "to reduce all the works of the enemy as they go along . . . and then get up to Richmond, all with the least possible delay, and shell the city to surrender."[14] The *Monitor* and *Stevens* joined Rodgers' squadron, now named the James River Flotilla, on 12 May. Rodgers' continued his ascendancy of the James River reaching as fas as Drewry's Bluff by 15 May.

The Confederacy, fearing a Union naval expedition up the James to Richmond, had ordered Tattnall's officers and men to establish defensive positions at Drewry's Bluff, eight miles south of Richmond. Along with shore batteries and sharpshooters the Confederates formed barriers in the river. So thorough were the barriers that Rodgers stated: "The barrier is such that vessels of the enemy, even if they had any, probably can not pass out; ours can not pass in."[15] Unsupported by ground troops, Rodgers was unable to pass the defenses, forcing him to return down the river.

The Union Navy and Army were both descending upon the Confederate capital, but once again there was no cooperation or joint planning. On 17 May, McClellan wrote, "I would urge the necessity of perfect cooperation between all the Army & Navy forces in Eastern Virginia. I have not

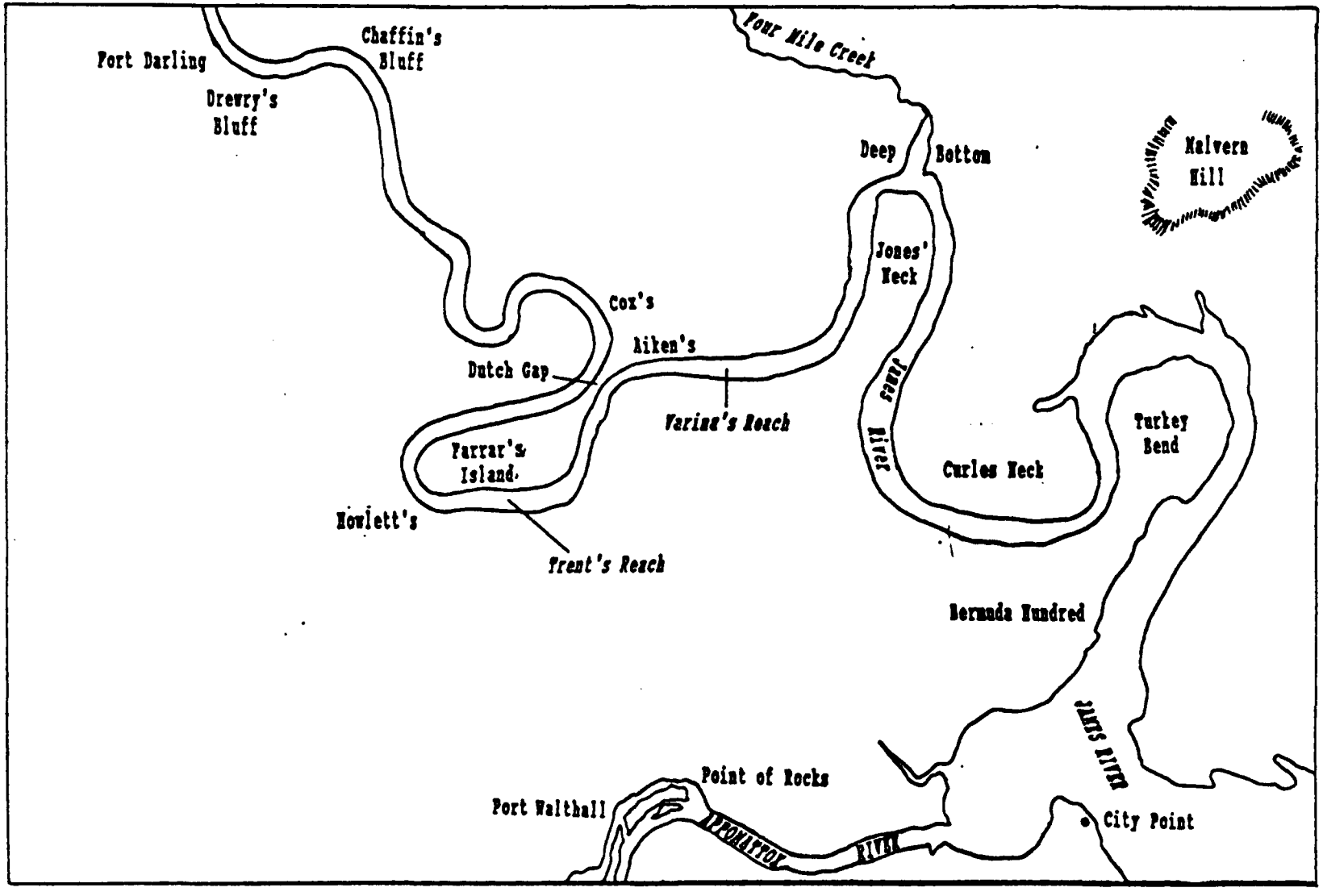

Figure 5. James River from City Point to Fort Darling

one word of official information as to the objects to be attained by any of them."[16] McClellan was elated by the advances of the Navy, for now they could protect his left flank and provide a second front to the offensive operations.

Rodgers requested that the Army provide assistance and take Drewry's Bluff from the rear, but the Army was not forthcoming to this request. McClellan met with Goldsborough on 23 May to talk about this subject, but McClellan did not want to split up his forces. Instead he told Goldsborough that once the Army had moved across the Chickahominy, the decision would be made when to attack. Goldsborough agreed to McClellan's plan and used his James River Flotilla to eradicate the remaining enemy outposts along the James, below Drewry's Bluff, in order to facilitate movement of supplies.[17]

On 25 May, McClellan was within seven miles of Richmond. So strong was his push that the residents of Richmond began an evacuation of the city. He would gain no closer to Richmond. The Confederates had launched a demonstration on Washington which Lincoln believed to be a massive assault. So much was Lincoln worried that he withdrew part of McDowell's forces to protect Washington. Lincoln also ordered McClellan to spread his lines in order to protect McDowell. This overextension allowed the Confederacy an opening in which to counterattack McClellan

and stop his advance. The struggle continued for over a month with neither side making great gains.

Throughout, the James River Flotilla maintained McClellan's left flank and kept supplies flowing, but could not overcome the defenses at Drewry's Bluff. McClellan never considered himself in a position to send forces to take Drewry's Bluff. This was mostly due to McClellan's belief that the Confederate forces before him numbered between 150,000 and 200,000. In actuality, General Robert E. Lee's forces numbered between 80,000 an 100,000.[18] McClellan's high estimation of the enemy coupled with his zealous concern for his "lines of retreat" hampered his ability to pursue and carry the initiative. McClellan's slow pursuit earned him the nickname of "Virginia creeper" from the Confederates. Also, the inability of the Union forces to work in concert provided General Robert E. Lee sufficient time to stiffen his defenses and repulse the offensive.

During the planning stages and throughout the Peninsula Campaign, the Union leaders showed a duality of direction while trying to achieve the same endstate. Although he has to take a large share of the blame for the failure of the Peninsula Campaign, McClellan does not stand alone. From the President down to the flotilla commanders, everyone had a hand in the debacle. There were times when unity of effort was accomplished through decisions by the

naval commanders to have their forces support the Army in whatever it needed, but there was no single commander in the field, who had control of all Navy and Army forces. In fact, during the early portion of May 1862, a ship commander, in the Hampton Roads area, may have been getting his orders from four of five different people: the President, the Secretary of the Navy, the Assistant Secretary of the Navy, the Commander of the North Atlantic Blockading Squadron, and the Commander of the James River Flotilla. The situation was very similar for the Army forces. The only time unity of command functioned, was when the President as Commander-in-Chief, lead the assault on Norfolk, but he only did this with a small portion of the forces. Unity of command during this campaign was nonexistent.

Endnotes

1. George B. McClellan, The Civil War Papers of George B. McClellan, Selected Correspondence, 1860-1865, edited by Stephen W. Sears (New York: Ticknor & Fields, 1989), p. 167. (cited hereinafter as Sears)

2. Niven, p. 408.

3. Secretary of the Navy, Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies in the War of the Rebellion Series I, Vol VII, North Atlantic Blockading Squadron, from March 8 to September 4, 1862, (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1898), p. 26. (cited hereinafter as OR; additionally, all subsequent references to the OR will be from Series I unless otherwise indicated).

4. Ibid., p. 125.

5. Ibid., p. 206.

6. Sears, p. 238.

7. U.S. Army, FM 100-5, Field Manual--Operations, (Washington: United States Department of the Army, 1986), p. 175.

8. OR, Vol VII, p. 327.

9. U.S. Naval History Division, p. II-47.

10. OR, Vol VII, p. 327.

11. Ibid., p. 326.

12. Ibid., p. 330.

13. Ibid., p. 335-338

14. Ibid., p. 343.

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16. Sears, p. 268.

17. OR, Vol VII, p. 416.

18. Sears, p. 205.

CHAPTER THREE

ADMIRAL LEE AND THE GENERALS

The James River area had remained relatively quiet since the withdrawal of Major General McClellan's forces in August 1862. Although mired in differences over trade permits (given to Union merchants to sell humanitarian goods in Confederate territories) and possible violations of blockade regulations, the Union Army and Navy had maintained an amicable working relationship. In July 1862, Rear Admiral Louis M. Goldsborough requested to be relieved of his command because of Welles' meddling with the James River Squadron.[1] The corrupt situation with trade permits and blockade violations, throughout the area controlled by the North Atlantic Blockading Squadron, placed Welles in a delicate position in naming a replacement. In September 1862, Rear Admiral Samuel P. Lee replaced Goldsborough as commander of the North Atlantic Blockading Squadron. Welles needed a scrupulously honest man. Courageous and imaginative, Lee had a prodigious capacity for precise and detailed work. He was given the job over many older officers because Welles needed a man who had a good head for business.[2]

When he assumed command, Admiral Lee's counterpart in the Army was Major General John A. Dix, the Commander of the Department of Virginia. Dix, a powerful War Democrat from New York, believed that he was authorized to grant trade permits within the area controlled by his command. Furthermore, Dix believed that broader trade should be authorized "on humanitarian grounds--the relief of civilian suffering in the occupied area."[3] The incompatible viewpoints on the interpretation of the blockade regulations and the limits on permits, caused a strain on Dix and Lee's relationship. Lee stood his ground on this issue, as Welles had predicted. In a letter to Welles, Lee stated:

> I respectfully invite the atttention of the Department to the grave position assumed by General Dix in direct opposition to the orders of the Government.[4]

Welles' reply justified Lee's stance:

> The course of Admiral Lee is correct. Vessels must not be permitted to pass . . . on General Dix's request. The Secretary of War will, however, send for General Dix to visit Washington with a view to adjust this matter.[5]

Although this incident proved embarrasing for Dix, he and Lee were able to overlook their differences on trade permits to conduct numerous joint operations. These operations met with mixed success and began to weigh heavily on Lee's mind. It was during this time that Lee started to become disheartened by the enormous requirements placed upon his command to provide the many Army outposts with

protection. Not a firm believer in maintaining these widely scattered outposts, Lee wrote Welles:

> The Army authorities make frequent urgent, embarassing calls on me for gunboats to assist them in holding weak detached posts and long, weak lines, which they can not hold, and which the gunboats could not secure even if I had the number and kind which these extraordinary calls require.[6]

Admiral Lee, however, remained unwavering in his commitment to afford every possible assistance to the Army, and ensured that his subordinates did likewise.

In the spring of 1863 Confederate General Robert E. Lee, wanting to stop the Union advances being made in Virginia and North Carolina, ordered attacks throughout the area. Dix and Admiral Lee soon found themselves staving off simultaneous attacks on Washington, North Carolina, and on Suffolk and Williamsburg in Virginia. Already at an insufficient level of vessels to cover the Army's needs, Admiral Lee requested more vessels from Welles. Welles sent additional vessels, but could only provide "what are called ferryboats in New York and gunboats"[7] in the James. Although not of great quality, the gunboats provided the quantity necessary to assist the Army in fending off the Confederates who withdrew in May.

Immediately following their withdrawal, the Confederates were engaged by Union forces at Chancellorsville, Virginia. With these forces occupied, Admiral Lee believed the opportunity had come to advance on Richmond. Writing to Dix, Lee proposed the use of his

gunboats and ironclads to escort Dix's 30,000 soldiers on an offensive up the James against Fort Powhatan, Petersburg and Richmond.[8] The idea was shelved, however, when President Lincoln, worried for the safety of Washington, told Major General Joseph Hooker to call off all offensives against Richmond and attack General Lee's Army.

On 10 July 1863, Lincoln authorized Admiral Lee to conduct a demonstration up the James River. Even though the Union forces had fared well at Gettysburg, the Union needed a way of reducing the pressure being exerted on Washington from the Army of Northern Virginia. It was hoped that a thrust up the James, threatening Richmond, would force General Lee to divert a portion of his forces to protect the Confederate capital. Admiral Lee sailed up the James on 11 July with two ironclads, five gunboats, two tugs and two small schooners. The demonstration proved extremely productive with the flotilla ascending the river to Chaffin's Bluff, barely eight miles from Richmond. Lee was unable to continue due to the strong fortifications at both Chaffin and Drewry's Bluffs, and the river obstructions abeam Drewry's Bluff. However, during the ascent, he was able to destroy the batteries at Fort Powhatan. This expedition, coupled with a joint Army-Navy operation on the Pamunkey River in June, exposed a weakness in the defenses around Richmond.[9]

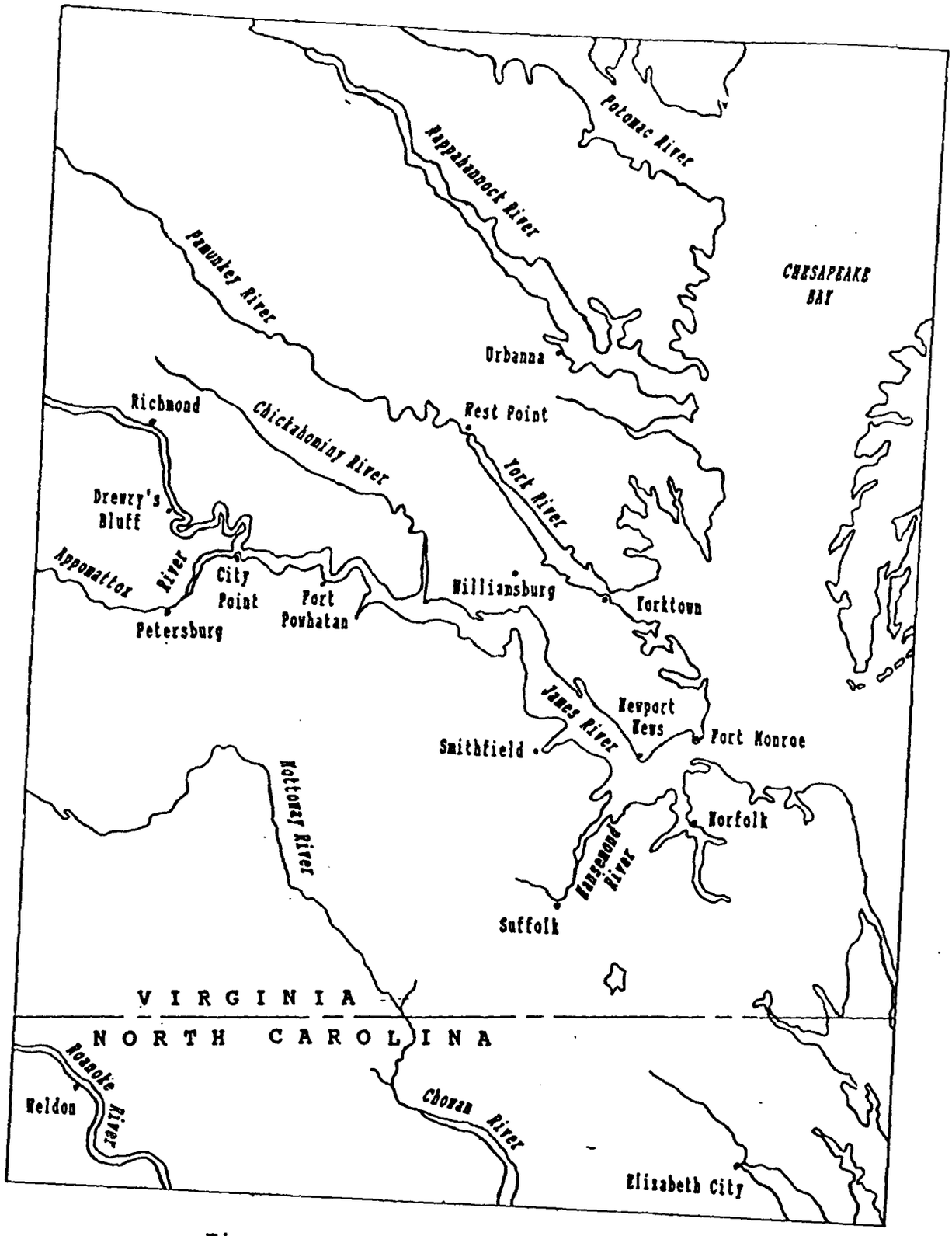

Figure 6. Southeastern Virginia

While Admiral Lee was on his demonstration up the James River, Dix was relieved by Major General John G. Foster. It was at this time that the Department of Virginia was expanded to include portions of North Carolina, and its name was changed to the Department of Virginia and North Carolina. Unlike Dix, Foster believed in the necessity for maintaining a strong blockade. Foster tightly controlled permits which relieved much of the tension that existed during Dix's command. Previous to Foster assuming command, Lee and Foster had corresponded occasionally. The topics of most of their correspondence had been the Union strategy and the Army-Navy operations. Specifically, their different viewpoints on outposts and the contributions these make to the Union's strategy. Foster wrote Lee, "These three points [Elizabeth, Plymouth, and Washington, North Carolina] gives us the whole of the eastern counties, in bags, as it were, of which we hold the mouths."[10] Lee, disagreing with Foster, wrote:

> Our present policy of occupying detached posts struck me . . . as being expensive, insecure, and subjecting us to attack in detail, whereas if we occupied one good position, the concentration of our land and Naval forces would better enable us to act our part of prosecuting the war.[11]

Neither had won the other over to his point of view, but the two had learned to take the middle ground during discussions of operations. Also, this correspondence had produced mutual admiration and trust.

In early August 1863, Foster along with Lee's Chief of Staff, Captain Guert Gansevoort, led a joint Army-Navy reconnaisance up the James River. The force consisted of three Navy gunboats and an Army tug carrying sharpshooters. Once again the Union forces ascending the James were stopped below Chaffin's Bluff. This time, however, the Union received serious damage to one vessel and "marks of musketry on the different vessels were almost innumerable."[12] Just below Chaffin's Bluff, the *Commodore Barney* had two torpedoes (what today are called mines) explode under the starboard bow, knocking twenty men overboard and partially disabling the engine. The vessel was taken under tow for the descent of the James. On the trip up the James, the vessels received sporadic gunfire. During the return trip, however, the Confederates provided a much greater resistance with artillery and musketry at both Deep Bottom and Turkey Island Bend. The fire was silenced by the gunboats and all vessels returned down river to Newport News.[13]

Admiral Lee's time with Dix and now Foster provided an opportunity to conduct many joint operations. These operations provided the forces involved with much needed experience. The experience notwithstanding, the operations did not produce any written doctrine. Procedures and tactics were learned on the job or were passed along from the more experienced soldiers and sailors. Typical joint operations would be conducted as follows. The Army and Navy

commanders would discuss the mission and find the right mix of forces, from those available, to complete that mission. The Navy provided the big gun protection to the transports during the transit and landing/embarking phases. The Navy would also provide gunfire support to established positions when the Army requested assistance in order to repulse an attack. Picket duty usually fell to the perview of the Army, although the Navy could provide limited pickets from its sailors and occasionally, embarked Marines. As was seen in the August reconnaisance up the James River, snipers and light artillery can cause problems for the vessels transitting inland waterways. The picket's would guard the shore area along the river as the vessel transitted, and if required dislodge the snipers and artillery. Furthermore, the pickets were vitally important for securing Confederate signal stations and torpedo control positions (shore stations which controlled the detonation of electric torpedoes).

Most of the failures of joint operations occurred because of poor planning. In a letter to General Foster, dated 3 October 1863, Admiral Lee provided the following insight into this problem of, and a possible solution to, planning far enough in advance to have the right assets available for the mission:

> It was not until you were on board this afternoon that I was fully aware of the number of gunboats necessary to cooperate with the movement of troops . . . from Yorktown to-morrow morning I

> respectfully request that in future the plan of joint expedition within the limits of our commands shall, when practicable, be fully and timely arranged between you and myself.[14]

Foster agreed to this statement and conducted himself accordingly. Their next joint operation was to be the occupation of Fort Powhatan, which Lee felt was of greater importance than the holding of Suffolk or Williamsburg. This fort would provide a forward staging area for future offensives toward Richmond, and it would also provide the Union with commanding lines of fire on the James. Foster was ready to occupy Fort Powhatan, but only on agreement from Lee that the Navy would maintain the fort's lines of communications open. Both men made the necessary arrangements and the date of occupation was set for 10 November. However, Foster was relieved by Major General Benjamin F. Butler on 3 November, and the plan was not carried out.

Lee had lost a partner, who acted as his equal and saw the value in planning and conducting operations accordingly. Furthermore, he had lost a counterpart who controlled the problem of trade permits and possible violations. Butler, "a political general who had a talent for exploiting the main chance,"[15] was not looked upon as a man who would follow in Foster's footsteps. A prominent War Democrat, Butler had significant political influence in Washington as well as the administration. Because of this

influence, the problem of trade permits moved back into the forefront of matters in the James River area.

Butler quickly went to work with Salmon P. Chase, Secretary of the Treasury, to allow oystering in the James and Nansemond Rivers. Lee was adamantly opposed to this concept for fear of reducing his vessels' capability to protect themselves due to the increased congestion on the rivers. His pleas were in vain, however, and the President allowed the oystering. Lee's prediction had come true when, on 09 April 1864, his flagship *Minnesota* was attacked by a Confederate torpedo boat. Even though little damage had occurred to the *Minnesota*, Lee had his opportunity to reign in the oystering to an area and distance from his vessels which he could manage. Not blaming the entire affair on oystering, Lee quickly announced new security measures to protect his vessels. These measures proved effective as no other torpedo boat attacks succeeded in the James River throughout the remainder of the war.

Throughout this period, Admiral Lee attempted to bring joint planning to the forefront of operations in the area under his command. Both Major Generals Dix and Foster agreed with Lee in the necessity of planning after having observed the folly of attempting ad hoc operations. The lessons learned are that the lack of joint command and doctrine place the success of an operation solely on the cooperation of the individual commanders.

Endnotes

1. OR, Vol VII, p. 573.

2. D.T. Cornish and V.J. Laas, Lincoln's Lee, The Life of Samuel Phillips Lee, (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1986), p. 130.

3. Ibid., p. 124.

4. OR, Vol VIII, p. 36.

5. Ibid.

6. Ibid., p. 729-730.

7. Ibid., p. 717.

8. Ibid., p. 839.

9. OR, Vol IX, p. 111-116.

10. Cornish and Laas, p. 129.

11. OR, Vol IX, p. 688.

12. Ibid., p. 147.

13. Ibid., p. 145-149.

14. Ibid., p. 226.

15. Niven, p. 460.

CHAPTER FOUR

BUTLER'S ADVANCE MAY-JUNE 1864

Operationally, the James River was quiet in the early months of 1864 because neither side could afford heavy commitment or losses in this theater. Indeed, both sides were using the winter months to regroup and rest. Lincoln was also using this period to search for a new commander of his armies. The Confederacy was beginning to feel the full exertion of the Union blockade. Resources were becoming ever more scarce as the "Anaconda's Coils" tightened. In the North Atlantic Blockading Squadron and Army of Virginia and North Carolina, emphasis was being placed on the closure of Wilmington and the Sounds of North Carolina. The James River remained neutral territory from Drewry's Bluff to below Hogs Island. Although the Union forces had planned on taking control of Fort Powhatan, neither side had sufficient forces in the river to take and hold this fort for any long duration.

A noted administrator, Major General Benjamin F. Butler, the new commander of the Army of Virginia and North Carolina, quickly started to surround himself with the best subordinates he could get assigned to him. His first priority was to obtain the services of Brigadier General

Charles K. Graham. Graham was a hard charging officer who Butler wanted to lead his Naval Brigade (Army gunboats used to protect the Army transports and ground movements--many times had a Navy officer in command of individual vessels). Having started his career in the Navy, Graham would be able to understand his naval counterparts better and conduct joint operations more smoothly.[1] Butler envisioned using his Naval Brigade commander to lead the Army gunboat forces in the joint operations conducted by his command.

General Graham rapidly fell into his role and conducted a joint Army-Navy expedition up the Nansemond in early December 1863. The expedition's goal, to intercept a load of tobacco in the area of Suffolk, was successful. In January, Graham planned a similar expedition to capture a small group of rebels and tobacco. With forces using the Pagan and Chuckatuck Creeks, Graham hoped to encircle the rebels and take them by surprise. The information Graham had received on the rebels' disposition was incorrect, and his Pagan Creek landing party, approximately ninety soldiers, was quickly overrun and taken prisoner. Graham's Chuckatuck Creek forces met no resistance and returned safely, but without finding any tobacco. This expedition's resounding failure led Rear Admiral Samuel P. Lee to write Butler, as he had Foster, "suggesting that hereafter all expeditions requiring Naval cooperation, . . . be arranged between you and myself before they are undertaken."[2]

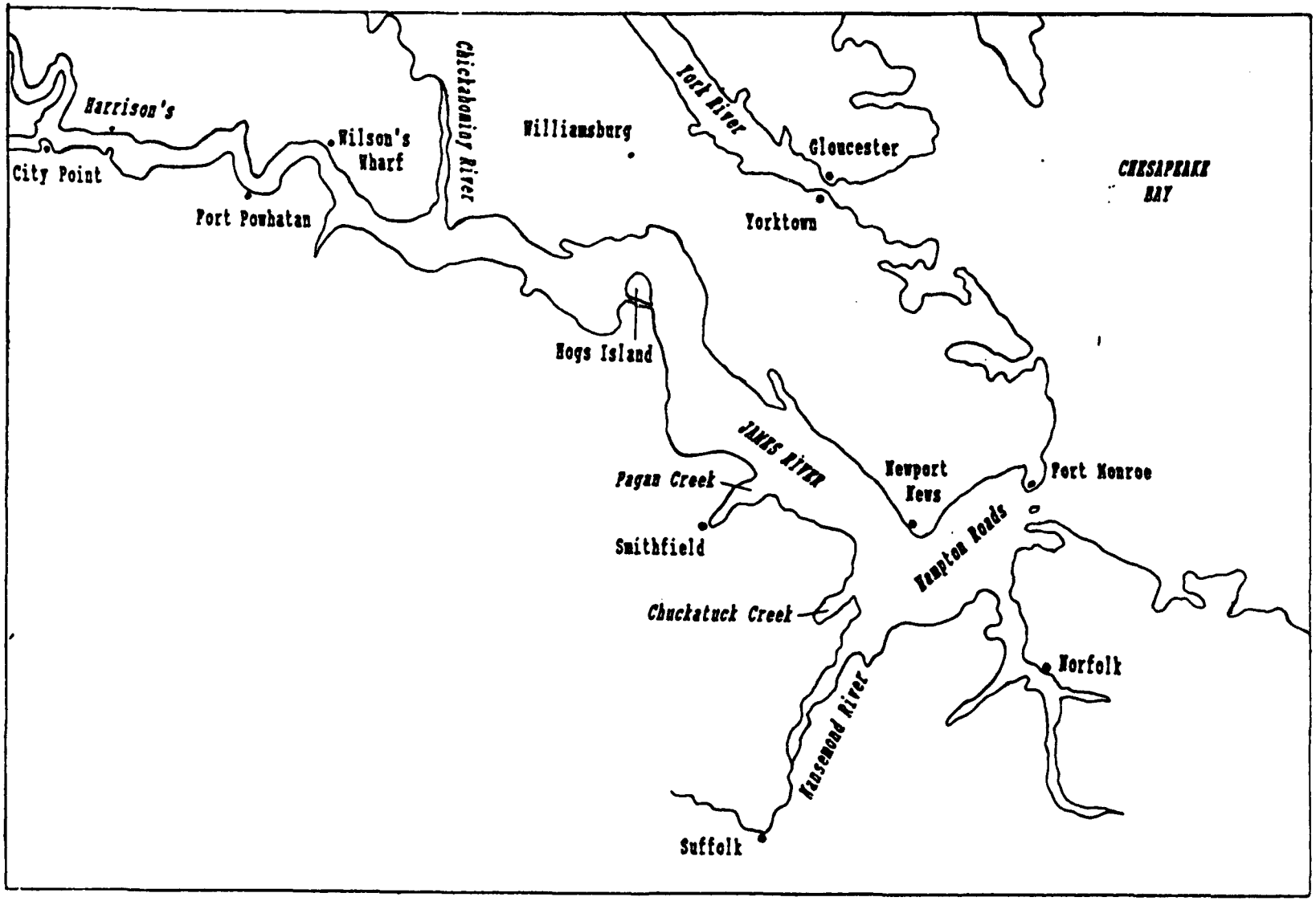

Figure 7. James River from Norfolk to City Point

It appears that Lee believed he was partially responsible for the expedition's failure, even though none of his vessels or men had been damaged or hurt. Furthermore, it was a failure that might have been prevented, had the proper joint planning been conducted prior to the expedition's commencement. Lee's letter to Butler was his way of protecting his subordinates and vessels from being placed in a no-win situation, while increasing the likelihood of a successful expedition.

Seeing the need for unity of effort during joint operations, Butler concurred with Lee on the requirement to better plan the expeditions. Throughout the following months, Butler and Lee sent numerous corresondence requesting and offering assistance. In early March, Butler, planning an expedition to recapture a stolen army tug, requested that Lee sit in on the planning meeting to ensure good inter-service integration. "I should be glad to have you accompany us [Major General Butler and Brigadier Generals Graham], in order that we may arrange the plan together."[3] Although the army tug was destroyed prior to its recapture by the joint Army-Navy expedition, the incident had shown a positive change in attitude toward joint planning.

On 12 March 1864, Lieutenant General Ulysses S. Grant became the General-in-Chief of the Armies of the United States. It was just prior to this day that Grant had

met President Lincoln for the first time. During this meeting, Lincoln and Grant discussed the responsibilities each had toward finishing this war. Specifically, "Lincoln would keep the river of recruits and supplies flowing, and Grant would use them to go after Lee."[4] Grant was fortunate enough to become head of the Army at the time when "Lincoln . . . [had] developed into a . . . man of supreme military judgment."[5] That is to say, Lincoln finally learned to give his Generals freedom to conduct the battles, while he remained concerned with the strategic level of the war. Grant was now in position to bring all the Federal forces to bear on the Confederacy simultaneously. In late March, Grant had chosen the directions for assault on the Confederacy and commenced informing his subordinate Generals of the plan. Grant's plan was for a nearly simultaneous attack on all fronts with two primary offensives and three secondary offensives.

> One of these [major offensives] would be a drive by Major General William T. Sherman's Armies from Chattanooga, Tennessee, toward Atlanta, Georgia [Joe Johnston's Army being his objective point]. [The second major offensive], an advance toward the Confederate capital would be made by Major General George Meade's Army of the Potomac. Meade's advance was to be overland in order to engage Lee . . . while simultaneously covering Washington.
>
> [The three secondary offensives]: The first was to be an advance by an Army under Major General Nathaniel Banks from New Orleans toward Mobile, Alabama. Second, Major General Franz Sigel would lead another small Army into the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia [for the purpose of cutting the Virginia and Tennessee railroad]. Finally, forces in the coastal Department of Virginia and North Carolina

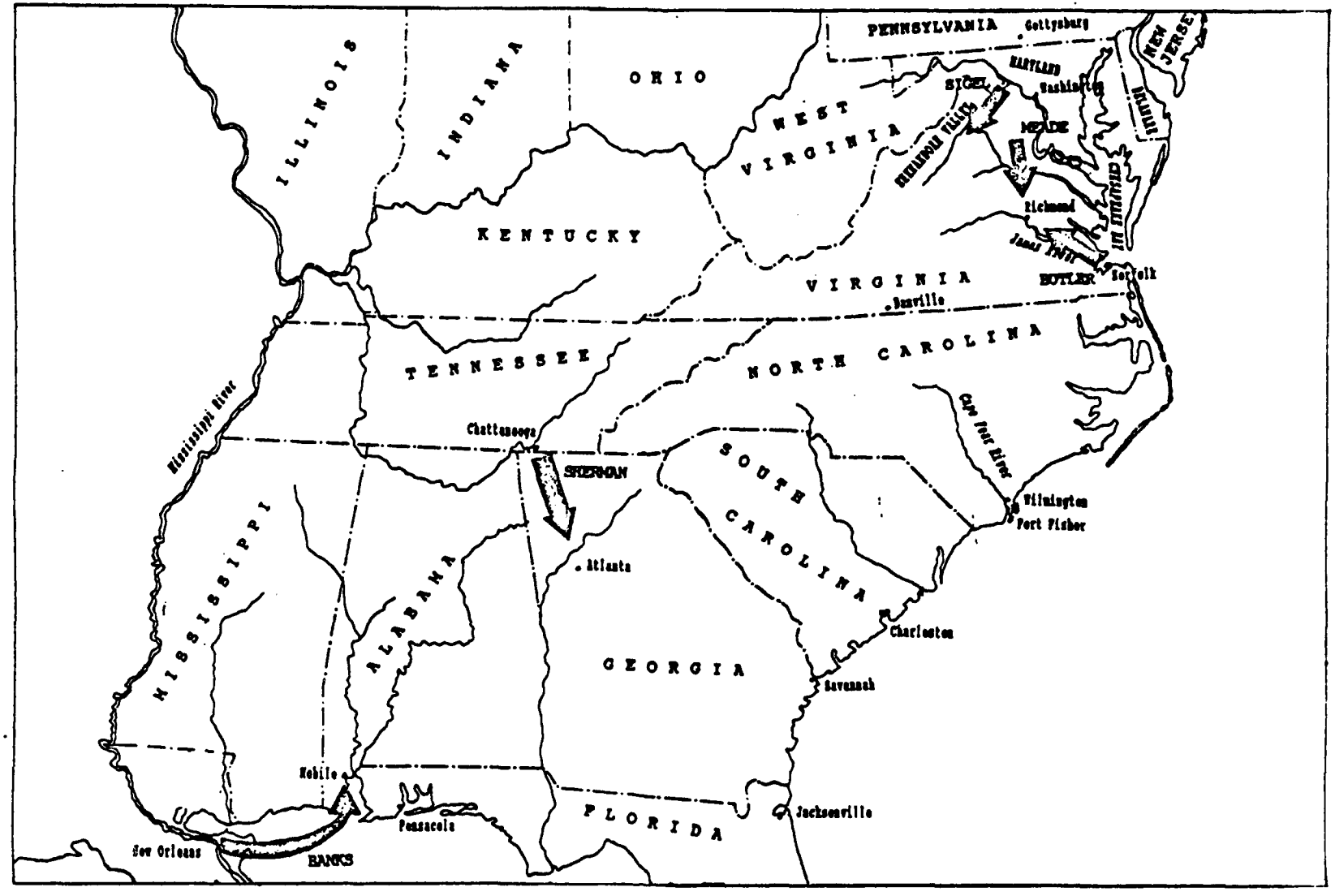

Figure 8. Grant's Strategic Plan of 1864

> would advance from Hampton Roads up the south side of the James River toward Richmond.[6]

These plans by Grant were of colossal scale and in strong need of naval support in order to be successful. He did not, however, discuss any of these plans with the Navy other than a hint given to Admiral Lee. During a meeting on 1 April, Lee discussed the addition of two ironclads to the James River Squadron, which Grant had requested be added. This was the extent of information received except for a notification from Major General William F. Smith that he would be leading a column against Richmond and desired naval cooperation.[7] Lee wrote Gideon Welles, Secretary of the Navy, requesting these two ironclads and information on additional vessels available for such an expedition, but Welles was unaware of any undertaking. Writing to Edwin M. Stanton, Secretary of War, on 7 April, Welles stated that the two ironclads were available, but requested to know why they were needed.

> This Department has not been informed of the duty expected of these ironclads, or whether additional naval force is required, which would be the case in the event of an army being sent as far as City Point. Public rumor points to a movement of this kind, which can not be successful unless a cooperating naval force is kept in the James River.[8]

Neither Stanton or Major General Henry W. Halleck, who had remained in Washington as Grant's Chief-of-Staff of the Army, could answer Welles' request. It was not until the following day that Grant would furnish Halleck with information regarding the movement up the James River. "It

is the intention to operate up the James River as far as City Point and all the cooperation the Navy can give us we want."[9] Even though Grant was requesting cooperation from the Navy, he had started off his campaign in the same fashion Major General George B. McClellan had in 1862.

By not involving the Navy in the planning phase, Grant was placing himself in a weaker position. As happened to McClellan, the Navy had assets that could be shifted from other theaters to aid in the more important campaign, if enough advanced planning had been given. Lee had eluded to this fact in a letter to Welles in late March.

> I respectfully suggest that as . . . all the monitors are at Charleston that some . . . may be recalled in time to participate in the movement against Richmond should one be made.[10]

Lee was specifically referring to light-draft monitors, because the ironclads currently in the James River could not support the Army up to City Point. Also, in Grant's case, the Navy had assets being held in strategic reserve awaiting for the crews to man them. Welles wrote Stanton: "Twice the number of steamers required have been ready for two months, excepting the crews."[11] Manning was a problem, because at this point in the war the Army was transferring soldiers to the Navy to supplement manning of vessels. These soldiers were all volunteers, most of whom had sailing experience which allowed for more rapid acclimation to shipboard life. Grant's lack of counsel with the Navy reduced the time available to transfer vessels to the most important theater,

thus putting Naval support to Grant's plans in a position of lesser strength.

On 25 April, after a request from Lee for specifics on the proposed James River expedition, Butler provided Lee with detailed information on the offensive. The Army and the Navy would swiftly move up the river and conduct a joint attack. Butler would take his 30,000 men up the river to debark at both City Point and Bermuda Hundred. Butler expected Lee to hold the James River above Farrar's Island and the Appomattox above Port Walthall free from Confederate naval attacks. Lee was also responsible for maintaining an open line of communications down the James. This included the positions at Fort Powhatan and Wilson's Wharf, which commanded the James River above and below them.[12] Butler was also providing impetus for the continued cooperation between the two commanders.

> The Army will expect to render all the aid and cooperation in its power to the Navy . . . and to receive that hearty and genial cooperation from the Navy which the commanding general has always had the good fortune to receive from the Navy, . . . so that the great objective point, the capture of Richmond, may be the joint enterprise of the united services of the Army and Navy.[13]

Butler was quick to seize the initiative in the spirit of cooperation. He offered his gunboats as the lead vessels for "drawing the river for torpedoes or obstructions, as their loss (if so unfortunate) would not be so serious as a loss of more valuable Naval vessels."[14]

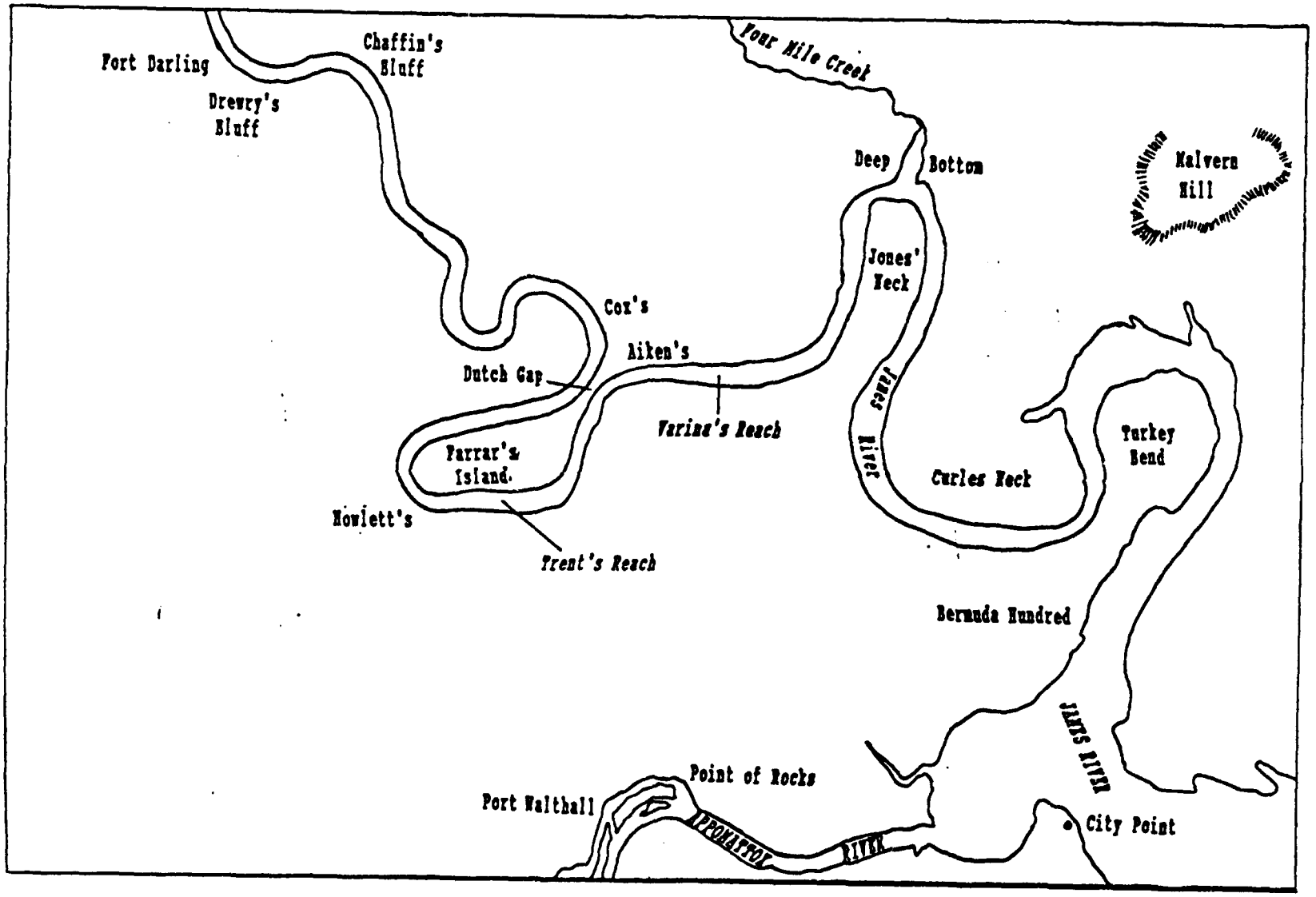

Figure 9. James River from City Point to Fort Darling

Admiral Lee answered Butler's request with a strong acceptance and hearty welcome to assault Richmond up the James. He did, however, inform Butler of problems with the plan as put forth. Specifically, that he could not put ironclads into the Appomattox, but could get wooden gunboats to assist as far as perhaps Point of Rocks. Also, that the ironclads could only get as high as Trent's Reach on the James.[15] These problems were due to the vessels' draft being greater than the water depth of the rivers. Lee, who had recommended an offensive up the James for more than a year, assured Butler, "that intelligent and hearty co-operation is the first wish of myself, and will be the effort of the officers and men of my command."[16]

Although given a warning in early April as to the offensive's objective, it was not until this official correspondence that Lee was provided the substance to back his previous requests for more light-draft monitors. To Lee's advantage, Gustavus V. Fox, Assistant Secretary of the Navy, was at Fort Monroe visiting Butler, a long time friend. Fox had been informed of the plan by Butler on 26 April. Owing to the tremendous responsibility placed on the James River Squadron, Fox immediately sent telegrams to Welles requesting additional vessels. Welles, anticipating the offensive requirements, had previously sent three ironclads and three gunboats to Lee which arrived on 28 April. Although they did not arrive prior to commencement

of the offensive, Welles also sent two gunboats and two tugs to Lee in response to Fox's request.[17] Lee was able to piece together a force of twenty-seven naval vessels, including five ironclads to assist the Army on the James River offensive.

As ordered by Grant, Butler's self proclaimed Army of the James commenced its ascent of the James River on the evening of 4 May 1864, the same day that Grant commenced his Wilderness Campaign.[18] As agreed upon, Butler's Naval Brigade gunboats commanded by Brigadier General Graham led the way, drawing for torpedoes and obstructions, followed by the Navy gunboats. Army transport vessels, arranged in order of landing, were to be protected in front by the gunboats and in back by the ironclads. The ironclads were placed last due to their requirement to cross Harrison's Bar near high water which occurred at 4:00 pm, 5 May.[19] However, the Army transports, delayed four hours in getting underway due to loading difficulties, were ultimately positioned at the rear of the column.[20]

Lee had arranged his vessels to best take advantage of their qualities and limitations. Each ironclad maintained a tender once on station and was positioned to utilize its guns to the maximum extent possible. The *Atlanta*, the deepest draft ironclad, remained at Fort Powhatan with its tender, *Young America*. The *Dawn* assisted the *Atlanta* while maintaining vigil at Wilson's Wharf.

These two bluffs commanded the river above and below them and were imperative to maintaining the line of communication back to Hampton Roads.[21] Once above Harrison's Bar, Lee positioned two wooden gunboats at the mouth of the Appomattox and three below City Point. The remainder of the vessels, except the ironclad *Canonicus* went up the river past Bermuda Hundred. The vessels were positioned in this manner to cover the simultaneous landing of troops at City Point and Bermuda Hundred.[22]

Although Butler was delayed in getting his troops underway, he was quick to get his forces ashore and capture the day's objectives. The Union had great success due to surprise, but the signal outposts along the James River warned Richmond of the offensive prior to Butler's forces capturing them. Butler wrote Grant that evening: "No opposition thus far, apparently a complete surprise. Monitors all . . . above City Point. The operations of the fleet have been conducted today with energy and success."[23] This statement alludes to Butler's fear of the Navy failing the Army, by not being able to hold the James River.[24]

On the following day, 6 May, the Army began to entrench itself at Bermuda Hundred. Butler's orders from Grant were to entrench at once and concentrate his forces. Butler was then to move along the south side of the James River, in cooperation with the Army of the Potomac, against Richmond. If practicable, he could use his cavalry to

attack the railroad network surrounding Petersburg.[25] While the Army was busy fortifying, the Union fleet was ascending further up the James River. Admiral Lee had given orders for the Army gunboats to lead, with Navy wooden gunboats to follow. These vessels were to drag the river for torpedoes and obstructions and remove any found.

The river had been cleared up to Deep Bottom without incident. It was at this location that the *Commodore Jones* ran into a torpedo which "exploded directly under the ship with terrible effect, causing her destruction instantly, absolutely blowing the vessel to splinters."[26] A trailing vessel, the *Mackinaw*, immediately sent a landing party of marines ashore to find the control station for the torpedo. The landing party found the station with a dead man, who had been shot by the landing party, lying next to the controls. Another man, a member of the Confederate States Naval Submarine Battery Service, was caught trying to escape and was questioned for information about more torpedoes possibly in the water.

> At first he was not communicative and evaded, on the grounds of ignorance, the questions put to him, but being placed in the forward gunboat employed in dragging for torpedoes and given to understand that he would share the fate of the boat, he signified his willingness to tell all he knew about them.[27]

Although it is in violation of today's standards for the treatment of prisoners, this method of interrogation proved extremely effective. The Confederate sailor divulged the location of three other torpedoes and also information about

how they were set and how quickly they could be placed in the river. He also gave the size of the torpedoes which ranged from 400 to 2000 pounds of powder.[28] This information, along with the capture of a full system, allowed the Union Navy to better understand how the system worked as well as how to defend against it.

On 7 May, the *Shawsheen*, dragging for torpedoes at Turkey Island Bend, was attacked by a Confederate battery located on the northern shore. The battery soldiers captured the gunboat and crew. The crew were taken prisoner and the vessel was set ablaze and destroyed. This incident, coupled with the loss of the *Commodore Jones*, reaffirmed to Lee the absolute necessity for control of the banks adjoining the river. Lee also realized that he had to keep his vessels in better position to support each other as well as needing to sweep the river better for torpedoes prior to allowing his ironclads to venture further up the James.

Butler and Lee met on 8 May to discuss the operations and the requirements the Army needed for protection along the James River. Lee was quite content with Butler's request for "the occupation by the Navy of Curles Neck Reach [which] will afford the Army all the protection that it requires."[29] Although Admiral Lee wanted to continue the offensive to Richmond, if the Army was going to hold its position he was much happier to maintain shorter lines of communications. The next few days were quiet on

the James River and Admiral Lee used this time to develop further defensive measures against the Confederate torpedoes. On 12 May he assigned four vessels to a special "torpedo and picket division," whose duty during the day was to patrol and reconnoiter the river banks and drag the river for torpedoes. At night these ships were to protect against Confederate rams, fire rafts, and torpedoes as well as river craft by using their organic boats to picket.[30]

During this timeframe, Butler was conducting demonstrations along the Appomattox which the Navy gunboats were supporting, but his demonstration toward Drewry's, on 12 May, to free his cavalry was never discussed with the Navy. Even though the fighting would take place right up to the river's edge, Butler did not talk with Lee to request naval assistance. On the day following the demonstration, Butler wrote Lee, "I think it would be of great public service if you can put your boats so as to cover my landing for supplies at Howlett's House."[31] Lee continued to move up the river and arrived at Trent's Reach on 15 May, even though he did not receive this letter until the evening of 16 May.

Lee had heard the pounding of the guns from the direction of Drewry's Bluff, and he rightly assumed that Butler was moving toward Fort Darling. The Navy was unable to assist the Army on 13 May due to the river not having been swept clear of torpedoes and obstructions. Writing on

this day, Lee notified Butler that unless the General could provide protection on both sides of the river from artillery and sniper attacks, the Navy's lines of communications could easily be severed.[32] Lee pointed to the buildup of Confederate troops at Deep Bottom and north of Dutch Gap. He also noted, "the number and kind of gunboats are barely sufficient to cover your communications, . . . and our communications to this point."[33] Lee could not help Butler in this case, because of Butler's lack of timely communications. The two day delay, from when Butler first notified his subordinate generals about the move on Drewry's Bluff, would have been sufficient time to drag the river for torpedoes from Curles Neck up to Howlett's House at Trent's Reach. Lee had not let the mention of promoting "public service" fall on deaf ears and took this opportunity to remind Butler that the public's interests are best served by the Army-Navy team. "Permit me to suggest that it will promote the public service if you can conveniently keep up communication with me and apprise me of your movements."[34]

The Union ships were in tenuous positions, barely able to aide each other in an emergency while maintaining the river open to communications. Realizing that this situation would not hold for an extended period, Admiral Lee requested assistance from Butler in the form of troops to man the river banks to protect the Navy's communications and keep the river open. Lee wrote, "Can not you cooperate?"[35]

Even though he sent sharpshooters and artillery to aid the Navy, Butler found himself unable to send sufficient forces to provide this protection. Butler had been sent with 30,000 troops to complete a mission that only a few months previous, Grant had thought would take 60,000.[36] On 14 May, Butler was assisted in sending troops to protect the northern bank of the James, when Major General Philip H. Sheridan's cavalry moved onto that bank to receive supplies. Butler rapidly requested that Sheridan send a force as far up as Chaffin's Farm to seek out and destroy all torpedo control houses.[37] Sheridan's raids greatly assisted the Navy's movement up the James River.

Throughout this period, Butler's campaign was one of missed opportunities. Although Butler is not free from blame, his subordinate generals were the prime reason that Butler's advances were not more successful. Major Generals William F. Smith and Quincy A. Gillmore, the two corps commanders, were not quick enough to seize the initiative in most cases, and in some cases fully aborted the offensive. On the evening of 5-6 May, Butler realizing the unpreparedness of the Confederate defenses wanted to push on toward Richmond, but his two corps commanders were unwilling to take such a bold risk.[38] Similarly on 16 May, with Butler now in position to seize Fort Darling and Drewry's Bluff, Gillmore delayed sufficiently to lose any advantage the Union had during its offensive. Gillmore's delay gave

the Confederates time to react and sieze the initiative.[39] This would be Butler's last opportunity to take possession of the most important bluffs, Drewry's and Chaffin's, commanding the James River. Butler commenced his retreat back to the fortified positions at Bermuda Hundred to await the arrival of the Army of the Potomac and General Grant.

Butler's retreat allowed the Confederates to take possession of Howlett's House, which commanded the Trent's Reach and Upper Dutch Gap portions of the James. "Both Lee and the Confederates were well aware that, if completed, the Howlett battery would effectively close the James River to further naval penetration."[40] Admiral Lee attempted to stop the Confederate construction by shelling the position from his gunboats, but he was unsuccessful. Butler, for his part, was unable to mount a land attack on the position. The Confederate Army worked feverishly to complete the position until on the evening of 18 May they mounted the guns. It was also on this day that Admiral Lee received the news that the water depth of the bar at Trent's was insufficient for the monitors to cross.[41] Therefore, the remainder of the river would have to be traversed by wooden gunboats if the Union Navy was to take part in an assault on Richmond.

With Butler nestled in at Bermuda Hundred, Admiral Lee had no alternative but to maintain the lines of communications along the river in hope of a resurgence by

Butler. The relationship between Lee and Butler became strained. Lee wanted to move strongly onto the offensive and he repeatedly tried to sway Butler in that direction, but to no avail. Lee summed up his frustration in a letter to Major General John G. Foster: "Naval movements necessarily follow Army policy in this matter, as we can not withdraw our assistance whilst you need it in the occupation of a place."[42]

Having repulsed the Union advance along the southern side of the James River, the Confederates were ready to move on the offensive. The Confederate cavalry made the first thrust against Fort Powhatan on 21 May. In a daylight raid the rebels attacked the outer defensive works and managed to drive back the Union pickets. The ironclad *Atlanta* and the gunboat *Dawn*, which was called from its position abeam Wilson's Wharf, took positions on the fort's flanks and shelled the Confederate cavalry. The naval vessels were able to repel the thrust and the rebels withdrew.[43]

In a similar incident on 24 May, the Confederate cavalry conducted an attack on the Union fortifications at Wilson's Wharf. The defenses of Wilson's Wharf were manned by 1,100 Negro troops and aided by the naval gunboat, *Dawn*. The tenacious troops and the gunfire from the naval vessels (the *Young America* had come from its position below Fort Powhatan to assist) were too strong for the rebels, who withdrew after a five hour struggle.[44] "[Brigadier] General

Edward A. Wild, commanding the Army defenses, praised the Navy's work: 'He stated . . . that the gunboats were of great assistance to him in repelling their [the rebels] attack.'"[45]

These two attacks had shown the tenuousness of Butler and Lee's lines of communications. However, it was during this time that Grant, with Major General Henry W. Halleck's urging, was contemplating removing 20,000 troops from Butler's command. Halleck, a proponent of the frontal assault on Richmond, had never wanted the advance along the James, and wished that all of Butler's forces were joined to Grant. "Halleck's disregard of sea power made it impossible for him to perceive that this element permitted strategic flexibility."[46] On 25 May, General Smith's Corps was transported to the York River to join Grant. Although a major blow to Butler's planned offensive on Petersburg, it was also a blow to the established defenses Lee had arranged on the James. Lee was forced to send ships from the James River to augment naval presence on the York River to protect Smith's Corps.

Tensions, already high from the transfer of vessels, were raised considerably when word was received that three Confederate ironclads were in position below the obstructions at Drewry's Bluff. The ironclads, joined by six gunboats and nine fire ships, were preparing for an attack on the Union fleet.[47] The news of this large force

aligning for an attack brought the need for obstructions in the river at Trent's reach to the forefront of discussion between Butler and Lee. Admiral Lee did not want to set the obstructions because of his strong desire to fight the enemy. He did, however, realize the importance of maintaining control of the river up to Trent's Reach in order to protect Butler's forces. Butler knew that the Confederacy had put forth a formidable force and was concerned for his right flank. He did not press the matter with Lee, but allowed the decision to be made by the admiral. Butler wrote Lee:

> Your note relating to the sinking of the obstructions is received . . . . The necessity of holding our positions here is an overwhelming military one. But how you are to hold yours in the river is of course wholly for you to determine.[48]

Lee, knowing where the obstructions would provide the most protection yet still allow him to maintain flexibility, turned to Welles to ensure that the Navy Department had no difficulties with the placing of obstructions. Welles abstained from telling his commander how to run his squadron, responded simply: "Left to discretion of admiral in command, in whom the Department has confidence."[49] Lee refrained from placing the obstructions until 15 June, when he bowed to Grant's wishes. With the Army's assistance the obstructions were placed as Lee had desired.

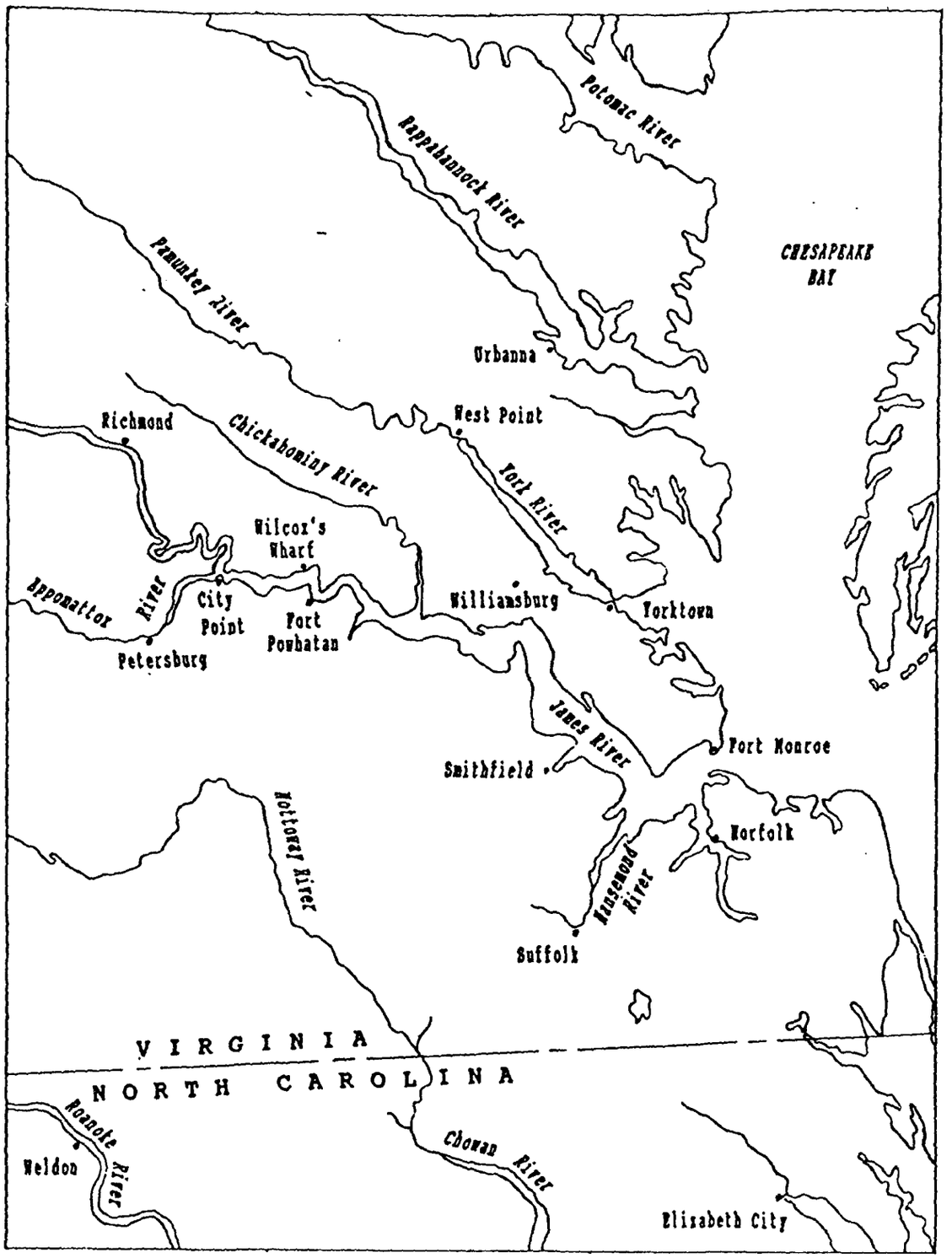

Figure 10. Southeastern Virginia

On 14 June, Grant requested that the Navy protect his crossing at Wilcox's Wharf. Lee immediately sent the *Mackinaw* and the *Atlanta* to Wilcox's Wharf to protect Grant's crossing from the north side to south side of the James River, which went smoothly. However, on 17 June and again on the 21st, Confederate forces attacked the Army's supply trains. On both occasions naval bombardment was able to quell the Confederate fire and drive the attackers off.[50]

Admiral Lee's naval forces were tested again on 21 June 1864, when the Confederate Army and Navy conducted a joint long range bombardment on the Union naval forces. The Confederate Army battery at Howlett's House commenced bombarding the Union fleet in Trent's Reach. The Confederate Navy, from concealed positions above Dutch Gap, shelled Trent's Reach as well as the Union vessels located in Varina's Reach.[51] The Union Navy counter-fired on the Confederate shore batteries, managing to destroy a few of the positions. The Union Navy did not return fire upon the Confederate Naval vessels, because the Federals could not see their adversary. Although the battle carried on for more than five hours, neither fleet suffered serious damage during the exchange.[52]

This engagement provided Lee with a fantastic opportunity to obtain support from the Army, specifically in the form of shore batteries. Writing Grant two days later, Lee explained the events of the engagement and also the

predicament of placing the Union ironclads in a position of continuously defending against the Rebel shore battery at Howlett's House, unsupported by the Army. Lee finished by saying, "Our Naval resources would thus be reserved for their ironclads and not exhausted on their earthworks."[53] Grant understood the importance of the ironclads and saw the wisdom of Lee's request. He immediately wrote Butler to provide assistance:

> I think it will be advisable to put two or four guns of heavy caliber on your shore battery to command Howlett's battery and the reach above the obstructions. This will enable the monitors to drop down out of range of the land batteries. It is desirable that they [monitors] should not lay habitually under fire, but should be where, in a few minutes, they can run up to engage the enemy's ironclads or land batteries, if necessary.[54]

Having received the Army's assistance, Lee also had more obstructions placed to increase the protection of the Union's position. This was a matter that Grant felt strongly about to ensure the security of his flank.

Although the Union had brought joint attacks to a halt, the Union Navy's gunboats and monitors continued to protect Army forces all along the James River ensuring freedom of movement for the Federal field trains. Grant, believing that cutting off his enemy's logistics lines from Charleston and Wilmington would have a telling effect on their ability to continue the war, ordered the attack of Petersburg. Butler had tried to take Petersburg prior to Grant's arrival in June, but his generals' delays and

timidity allowed the Confederacy time to establish strong defenses around the city.[55] Grant also sent forces against the Petersburg defenses, but his efforts were also thwarted. Grant's generals did not press the fight when they had arrested the momentum and at other times the Union's communications broke down. Thus, the Confederate forces maintained their hold on Petersburg and kept the railways leading into the city open.[56]

Even though Grant did not achieve success in capturing Richmond or Petersburg, he could take stock in what was accomplished. Grant had maneuvered into a position which would make the outcome inevitable. General Robert E. Lee also understood what Grant had achieved. General Lee had told Major General Jubal Early weeks before. "We must destroy this army of Grant's before he gets to the James River. If he gets there it will become a siege, and then it will be a mere question of time."[57] The siege had commenced and would last nine months.

This period is marked by continuous failures of complete cooperation between the sister services. Early in Butler's tenure, he had learned how joint Army-Navy planning could provide for more positive results on the battlefield. However, once the strain of a large scale battle was placed upon him, his focus narrowed to exclude the Navy. Had Butler conducted joint planning throughout the offensive, it is likely the Union would have been able to hold Howlett's

House and perhaps even taken possession of Fort Darling. Butler and Lee's expedition was hurt during the planning phase by Grant. His unwillingness to plan jointly with the Navy Department, had placed the expedition in a position of lesser strength by reducing naval support available.

Endnotes

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CHAPTER FIVE

SIEGE WARFARE

Lieutenant General Ulysses S. Grant's June 1864 attempt at gaining control of Petersburg and the railways entering the city, which fed supplies to General Robert E. Lee's Confederate Army, had failed. Although neither wanted it, both generals knew a seige had commenced and it would only be a matter of time until the Union forces would prevail. On the James River, Rear Admiral Samuel P. Lee, Commander of the North Atlantic Blockading Squadron, was solidifying his defenses.

Having placed additional obstructions at Trent's Reach, Admiral Lee felt secure that the Confederates could not pass through these defenses. He remained concerned about his squadron's ability to maintain security all along the James River while retaining an offensive capability. Admiral Lee turned his attention to Jones' Neck and Deep Bottom where the rebels were able to place a heavy gun battery. On 30 June, the gunboat *Hunchback* and the ironclad *Saugus* were dispatched to drive off the rebel battery.[1] The vessels were successful, but Admiral Lee knew he needed assistance from the Army to ensure there would not be a recurrence. Writing to Major General Benjamin F. Butler,

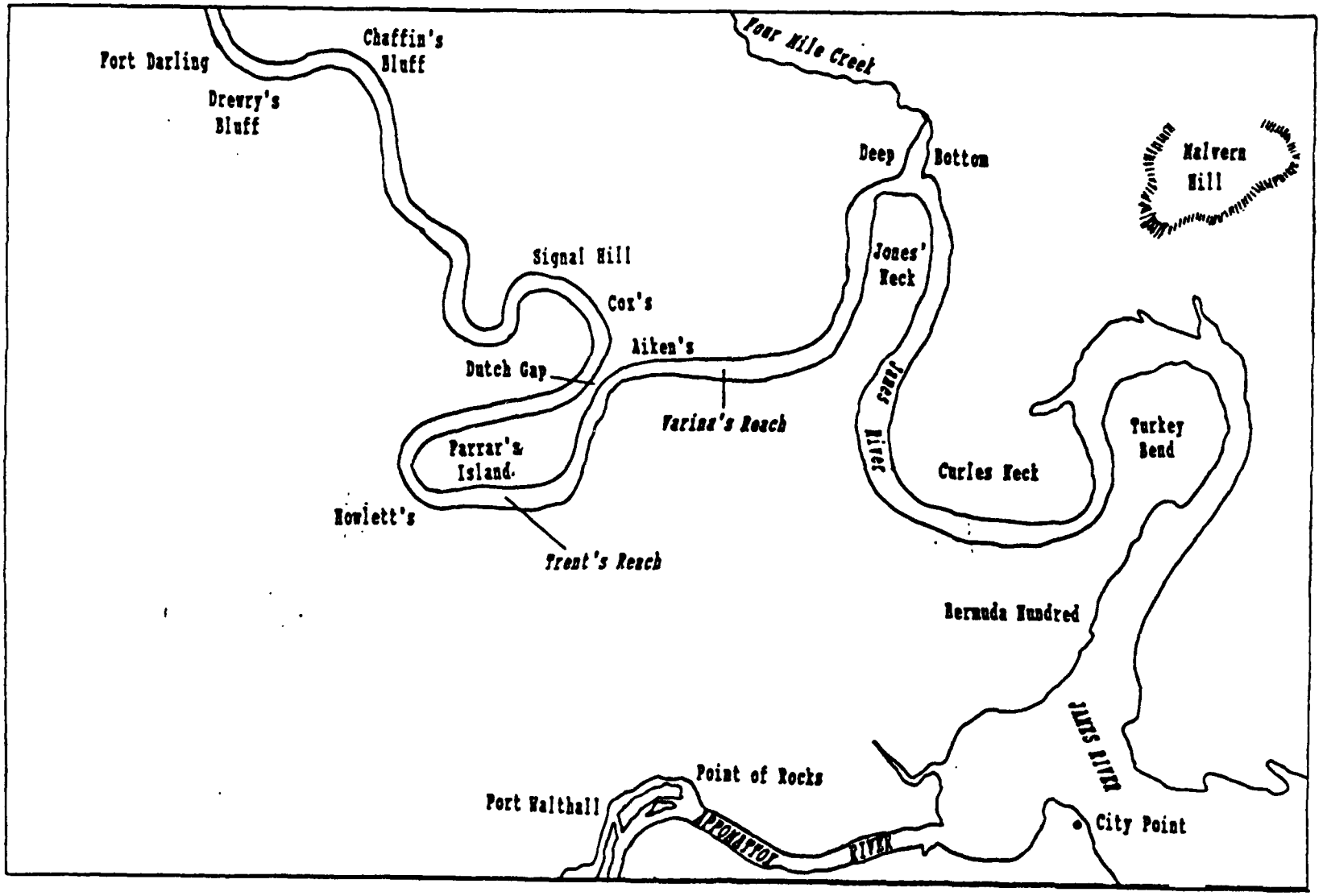

Figure 11. James River from City Point to Fort Darling

Lee requested that the Army increase its forces in the Deep Bottom area in order to prevent the Confederates from obtaining a position to shell the Army pontoon bridge and works at Deep Bottom as well as the river.

> The importance of holding our position at Deep Bottom is obvious. Without doing so our communications are cut there, and our wooden vessels can not remain above that point, and the monitors would be alone and exposed to the enemy's light torpedo craft from above and out of Four Mile Creek.[2]

Butler heeded Lee's request and with increased ground forces in place the Union controlled Deep Bottom for the remainder of the war.

With the rebels in control of Malvern Hill, Admiral Lee remained wary of a torpedo attack from Turkey Island Creek or Four Mile Creek. His orders to obstruct these two creeks were carried out on 12 July.[3] Also on this date a joint Army-Navy force of 120 men conducted a raid on Cox's Farm. The successful raid destroyed the signal station at Cox's and captured a torpedo, two hundred pounds of powder and a galvanic battery (used to detonate the torpedo).[4] Two days later the Confederate artillery battery on Malvern Hill temporarily closed navigation on the James River, until it was silenced by the *Pequot* and the *Commodore Morris*.[5] The operations showed how the Navy could check tactical reverses with the big guns of the river craft that could swiftly be brought to bear on decisive points near the river. Also, the intimate operations with the Army facilitated the small

advances made by the Union along the north side of the James.

On 22 July Gideon Welles, Secretary of the Navy, directed Admiral Lee to: "inform this Department whether any ironclads attached to your command can be withdrawn, having due regard to . . . holding possession of the James."[6] Welles also asked Lee to obtain Grant's perspective on removing the ironclads. In early August, Grant wrote Rear Admiral Lee:

> I think it would be imprudent to withdraw them. At least two such vessels, in my judgment, should be kept in the upper James. They stand a constant threat to the enemy and prevent him taking the offensive.[7]

Rear Admiral Lee, disappointed that Grant took this defensive strategy, professed a drastically different strategy. Lee had repeatedly asked the Army to establish batteries on land to support a naval advance, but the Army resisted, citing the difficulty of removing heavy artillery in case of retreat. Lee's response to this thinking was: "I never entertained the idea of retreating."[8] He felt strongly that the Union would triumph in an ironclad confrontation on the James River. Lee, adding to Grant's proposal on ironclads in the James River, believed that:

> It would be unwise and hazardous to withdraw any part of the ironclads permanently from James River, and thus expose the communications of the Army, and the campaign against Richmond, to great peril if not certain reverse.[9]

Welles heeded Grant and Lee's suggestions and maintained the

James River ironclad fleet at three for the moment. However, Lee knew that Welles would be forced to withdraw one, and possibly two, of the ironclads for duty on the coast. The ports at Charleston and Wilmington were receiving large shipments despite the success of the blockades. The only way to completely stop the flow of goods would be to take possession of the ports, which were heavily guarded.

Welles verified the importance of the blockade and the closing of the ports on 26 July when he ordered Admiral Lee to move his headquarters. "Hereafter the headquarters of the North Atlantic Blockading Squadron will be Beaufort [North Carolina], . . . giving your principal attention to the blockade, which has latterly become very inefficient."[10] The North Atlantic Blockading Squadron was split into four divisions, two for blockade purposes, one for the sounds of North Carolina, and one for the James River and surrounding waters. On 28 July, Captain Melancton Smith became the first Divisional Officer in James River.[11]

Captain Smith was quickly indoctrinated into the difficulties of maintaining the river open for troop movements and communications. On his first day as divisional officer, the rebels conducted an attack on the forces in the Deep Bottom area. The Confederacy had assembled a large force north of the river to repulse a Union offensive on 25 July and decided to conduct a counter-attack. The *Agawam*

and the *Mendota* aided the Union Army in repulsing the Confederate assault. "[Major] General [Winfield S.] Hancock informed him [Commander Ed T. Nichols, of the *Mendota*] that his shelling was very effective and of great assistance to his [Hancock's] operations."[12] The Navy vessels spent the entire night of 28-29 July protecting the pontoon bridges at Deep Bottom to enable the Union forces that had come north of the James River to return back to positions abreast Petersburg. Grant was preparing for a 30 July attack on the Confederate defenses around the city.

"This was the famous battle of the Crater. In conception it bid fair to become the most brilliant stroke of the war; in execution it became a tragic fiasco."[13] A tunnel, filled with gun powder, had been constructed under the Confederate defenses at Petersburg and Grant had hoped to take advantage of the explosion. Once again Grant had been disappointed by his subordinate generals. Confusion over which troops would conduct the initial assault, white troops or black troops, and lack of leadership by divisional commanders, led to a disorganized mob assault on the Confederate positions. Although the Confederate forces were initially stunned by the explosion, they recovered in sufficient time to soundly repulse the Union assault. Grant summarized the lost opportunity to Major General Henry W. Halleck two days later: "Such opportunity for carrying

fortifications I have never seen and do not expect again to have."[14]

Shortly after the Battle of the Crater work commenced on another engineering enterprise, the Dutch Gap Canal. Proposed by Major General Butler as a means for bypassing the Confederate defenses at Howlett's House, the Dutch Gap Canal would also bypass the sandbar at Trent's Reach.[15] This enterprise caused additional requirements on Captain Smith's James River Division, already strained by further Confederate raids and snipers all along the river. Although the Union controlled the James River, the Confederacy still had enough access to much of the river for purposes of erecting batteries and sniper positions. In the first week of August, the James River Division was called upon to repulse Confederate insurgencies at Wilcox's Wharf, Harrison's Landing, Bermuda Hundred, Turkey Creek, and conduct a joint Army-Navy land attack against Cox's farm.[16]

The most successful Confederate assault of the week was conducted by two members of the Confederate Torpedo Corps on City Point. On 9 August, John Maxwell and R.K. Dillard successfully entered the wharf at City Point and deposited a clockwork torpedo (fifty pounds of powder, detonated by a timer) on one of the powder and munitions barges. One hour later the ordinary wooden box, containing the clockwork torpedo, exploded setting off a chain reaction which destroyed a large portion of the supply area.[17]

In addition to fighting off the Confederate raids, Captain Smith's division was confronting illness all along the James River. The high incidence of sickness in the lowlands surrounding the James River took a toll on the Union defenses.

> We consider the causes of the great amount of sickness on board vessels to be, first, and chiefly, that exposure to malaria, the necessary consequence of a residence upon the waters of James River; as secondary causes to this, but in our opinion highly conducive to the hurtful influence, we would enumerate the heated atmosphere of the ironclads.[18]

So severe was the outbreak of sickness during this time period that Major General Butler ordered Brigadier General George F. Shepley, Commanding Officer Norfolk, to order a quarantine. "Issue a most stringent order at once in relation to quarantine. Specially extending it to Naval vessels . . . . The safety of our whole Army up here may depend upon this order."[19]

Despite the losses in manpower Captain Smith was taking due to illness, he managed to maintain a viable defensive front and provided assistance to the Army during a Union attack against the Confederate forces at Chaffin's Farm. On 13 August, Grant ordered Major General Hancock to conduct an assault north of the James River to Chaffin's Bluff.[20] The Navy protected the crossing of the troops and stood abreast Deep Bottom to assist. In a breakdown of joint communications, Captain Smith was not informed of the Army's progress during the initial stages of the battle. He

reported to Welles, "I regret that the want of official courtesy on the part of the Army prevents me from communicating any details or any valuable information."[21] This situation was rectified when Butler requested Captain Smith conduct a joint Army-Navy attack on the forces at Cox's Farm and Signal Hill. Coordination between the Army and Navy forces was carried out superbly. The Navy vessels aided in the movement of troops to Aiken's Landing and commenced shelling the Confederate positions upon observing the Union Army's advance. "The officers of the land forces express[ed] themselves as most pleased at the assistance afforded by the vessels."[22]

The Federal forces did not retain possession of Signal Hill for very long. General Lee also saw the necessity for a strong Navy in order to carry out his operations. When Signal Hill was overrun by Union forces, General Lee sent the following request to Flag Officer John K. Mitchell, Commander of the Confederate James River Squadron: "The enemy is on Signal Hill, fortifying. Please try and drive them off. Our picket line is reestablished with the exception of Signal Hill."[23] Mitchell responded immediately to General Lee's request by sending the ironclads *C.S.S. Virginia* (the second vessel to bear this name, referred to hereafter as *Virginia No. 2*) and *C.S.S. Richmond* down river. The Confederate vessels shelled the Union forces upon Signal Hill for sixteen hours, until

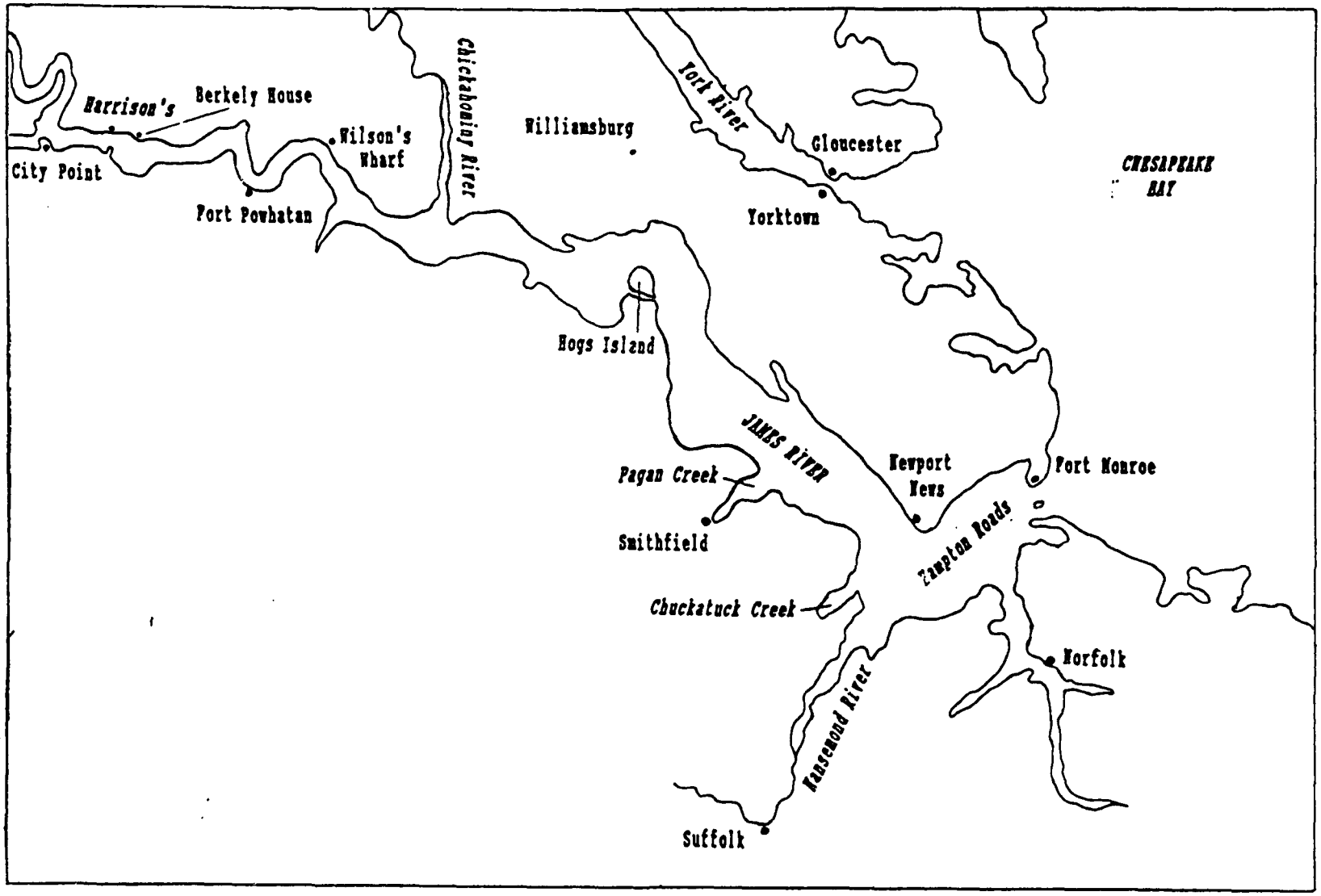

Figure 12. James River from Norfolk to City Point

informed by a scout "that the enemy had abandoned their position at Signal Hill, and that our [Confederate] pickets occupied it."[24] Although the Union forces had been pushed back, they had gained ground above Dutch Gap, thus expanding their position north of the James River.

At the end of August, Captain Smith was given assistance in the protection of navigation along the James River when Grant established an Army garrison at Berkely House on the north bank of the river. This move by Grant was in reaction to the report of torpedoes having been placed in the James River below City Point by the rebels on the north side of the river.[25] Grant was finally taking action on the numerous requests from Admiral Lee and Captain Smith to provide ground troops along the river to prevent rebel access.

On 17 September 1864, Rear Admiral Lee received orders to assume command of the Western Gulf Blockading Squadron. He was to be replaced by Rear Admiral David G. Farragut, the current Commander of the Western Gulf Blockading Squadron. Lee was told to remain at his current station, working on the upcoming assault on Fort Fisher, until the arrival of his relief.[26] Farragut for reasons of decreasing health, and because he thought the attack on Fort Fisher to be folly, declined the position. Secretary Welles turned to Rear Admiral David D. Porter to fill the void left by Farragut.

Grant found Porter to be a welcome choice to head the Squadron. Having worked closely with both Farragut and Porter on the Mississippi, Grant had enjoyed their professionalism. He had admired Porter's competent, professional performance at Vicksburg, where as he was weary of Lee because of Lee's association with the failed James River expedition.[27] Not only was Grant more comfortable with Porter at the helm, but Welles had developed reservations about Lee's ability to conduct operations on a grand scale.

> While he has administered the affairs of his squadron safely, he has failed to devise and execute any important act. The same opportunities in the hands of Porter, or Foote, or Farragut, and, I think, of John Rodgers, would have shown vastly more important results.[28]

"Porter was a very active, courageous, fresh-minded man and an experienced naval officer."[29] Porter had made his mark early in the war by getting orders directly from President Lincoln to conduct an expedition to Pensacola. Although he had gone behind the back of the Department, Porter's success had tempered Welles' hostility. Porter's initiative showed again when he proposed the attack on New Orleans. Recognizing the impossibility of blockading the many entrances to New Orleans, Porter recommended a Navy led joint assault on the forts surrounding the city. Together with his foster-brother Rear Admiral Farragut, Porter's plan was a smashing success in which the Navy had taken control of the city prior to the arrival of the Army. On the heels

of these successes, Porter was given command of the Mississippi Squadron and promoted to Rear Admiral, skipping the rank of Captain.[30] It was during this tour that Porter, Grant, and Major General William T. Sherman realized the potential and power of joint Army-Navy operations. Their work led to the capture of the Confederate stronghold at Vicksburg and the opening of the Mississippi River to the Union.

Rear Admiral Porter took command of the North Atlantic Blockading Squadron on 12 October 1864, and rapidly made his impression on the command. He reorganized the Squadron into five divisions, adding the Division of Ironclads, and promulgated his standard operating procedures. These procedures encompassed areas from required reports and the development of a turn over file, to sanitary precautions, boat crew exercises, and adherance to uniform requirements. However, these orders are lacking in procedures for cooperating in joint expeditions with the Army. Porter found the squadron to be in disarray and lacking in order and discipline, and he believed the squadron had a far road to travel to attain those qualities. Porter was quick to inform Welles of his findings. "There is much to be done, and it is necessary."[31]

The James River had remained quiet for the majority of September and October, except toward the end of each month. In late September, Grant conducted an attack on both

ends of the Confederate defenses. Butler's Army attacked the northern end, above the James, while Major General George G. Meade's Army attacked the southern end, below Petersburg. This attack was successful in gaining possession of Signal Hill (renamed Fort Brady by the Union) and moved the Union Army to within six miles of Richmond. Again in late October, "Grant tried another double swipe at both ends of [General] Lee's line at Petersburg and Richmond. Though unsuccessful, this forced [General] Lee to lengthen his defenses further."[32] These would be the last major offensives along the James River during 1864 as the Union turned its eyes toward Wilmington, North Carolina.

Although the Confederate James River Squadron was bottled up north of Trent's Reach, the ingenious Confederate Torpedo Corps continued its operations further south in the river. On 27 November, Major General Butler's steamer *Greyhound* was destroyed by a coal-torpedo (a vessel containing about ten pounds of gun powder covered with a mixture of tar and coal dust, as to resemble a large lump of coal)[33]. Rear Admiral Porter was on board with Butler for a planning conference on the upcoming Fort Fisher expedition. Both men survived the incident. Porter later described the incident:

> We had left Bermuda Hundred five or six miles behind us when suddenly an explosion forward startled us, and in a moment large volumes of smoke poured out of the engine-room. The Admiral went on to marvel at the ingenuity which nearly cost him his life: In devices for blowing up vessels the Confederates were

far ahead of us, putting Yankee ingenuity to shame.[34]

Captain Smith, who received orders to command the gunboat *Wabash* during the upcoming attack on Fort Fisher, was relieved as Commander of the Fifth Division (initially designated Fourth Division) by Commander William A. Parker on 22 November 1864.[35] Parker received much in the way of assistance and encouragement from Porter in the first few weeks of taking command. In readiness for his upcoming assault on Fort Fisher, Porter paid particular attention to ensuring Parker was prepared to handle the rigors of command on the James River. "While I [Porter] am absent you [Parker] will have to depend on your own resources and not wait for orders from me beyond those I leave you for your guidance."[36] Porter had left guidance on numerous defensive measures to carry out to include lookout arming and training, and the use of locomotion lanterns to search the river at night, especially for torpedoes. Lastly, Porter empowered Parker to be alert, and take advantage if the opportunity arose. "If occasion offers, cooperate with the Army. Encourage the officers to perform daring acts. We must not forget the old saying, 'Nothing ventured, nothing gained.'"[37]

During the first week of December, the Confederates started concentrating raiding parties down the James River in the vicinity of Smithfield and the Nansemond River. Porter ordered Parker to move vessels down the James River

to protect the navigation in this area from Confederate raiders. In Porter's last correspondence to Parker prior to departing for the North Carolina coast and Fort Fisher, he reigned in Parker's control of the vessels at Trent's Reach. "Don't let any of the vessels fire at the Howlett battery, and keep them all out of fire until further orders."[38]

On 13 December Admiral Porter sailed for Beaufort, North Carolina to commence the assault on Fort Fisher. The objective of the joint Army-Navy operation was to take control of Fort Fisher which guarded the entrance to Cape Fear River. The ultimate objective of the expedition was the seizure of Wilmington, North Carolina, the last major seaport available to the Confederacy.

At the end of 1864, General Lee, rapidly running short on supplies, doggedly clung to his position defending Richmond. Meanwhile, Grant who was headquartered in City Point, only seven miles from Petersburg, with his great superiority in numbers waited patiently for the outcome at Fort Fisher. The Union Navy's control of all the major rivers along the Chesapeake Bay had provided Grant with the ability to reduce his supply train. This afforded Grant interior lines of communications.

The summer and fall of 1864 proved to be the downfall for Rear Admiral Lee. The operational stagnation that had prevailed throughout his command had provided Welles the impetus to remove Lee from the North Atlantic

Blockading Squadron. Welles needed an operationally oriented admiral in the command now that the trade and permit issue had been reduced. The appointment of Porter to the post was most beneficial for Army-Navy cooperation in the region. Grant was not at ease with Lee due to his association with the Bermuda Hundred Campaign. Porter was a man whom Grant trusted professionally to achieve any mission. In the words of Major General George B. McClellan: "It would of course be a great advantage that the Army & Navy Comdrs should know each other & understand each other, so as to secure perfect cooperation."[11] Due to the lack of joint command or doctrine, unity of effort is best achieved by cooperation born from mutual trust. The James River now had that trust.

Endnotes

1. OR, Vol X, p. 216.

2. Ibid., 217.

3. Ibid., p. 262, 266.

4. Ibid., p. 267.

5. U.S. Naval History Division, p. IV-89.

6. OR, Vol X, p. 296.

7. Simon, Vol 11, p. 386.

8. Cornish and Laas, p. 133.

9. OR, Vol X, p. 373.

10. Ibid., p. 307.

11. Ibid., p. 315.

12. Ibid., p. 319.

13. J.M. McPherson, Battle Cry of Freedom, The Civil War Era, (New York: Ballantine Bocks, 1988), p. 758.

14. Simon, Vol 11, p. 361.

15. Marshall, Vol IV, p. 552.

16. OR, Vol X, p. 330-337.

17. Friedrich von Ehrenkrook,(translated from the German by SGM Frederick Martin), History of Submarine Mining & Torpedoes, (Willets Point, N.Y.H.: Battalion Press, 1879??), p. 35.

18. U.S. Naval History Division, p. IV-103.

19. Marshall, Vol IV, p. 514.

20. Simon, Vol 11, p. 411.

21. OR, Vol X, p. 363.

22. Ibid., p. 367.

23. U.S. Naval History Division, p. IV-105.

24. OR, Vol X, p. 367-368.

25. Simon, Vol 12, p. 110-114.

26. OR, Vol X, p. 467.

27. Cornish and Laas, p. 138.

28. Ibid., p. 139.

29. Dana, p. 85.

30. Paul Lewis, Yankee Admiral, (New York: David McKay Company, Inc., 1968), p. 93, 101, 130.

31. OR, Vol X, p. 552-562.

32. McPherson, p. 778-780.

33. Ehrenkrook, p. 35.

34. U.S. Naval History Division, p. IV-136.

35. OR, Vol X, p. 558; Vol XI, p. 81.

36. OR, Vol XI, p. 120.

37. Ibid.

38. Ibid., p. 156.

39. Sears, p. 238.

CHAPTER SIX

TAKING OF RICHMOND

At the end of 1864, the focus for operations in the North Atlantic Blockading Squadron was the attack on Fort Fisher. The Union's expedition to the Cape Fear River had two primary objectives: "The first object of the expedition . . . is to close to the enemy the port of Wilmington. If successful in this the second will be to capture Wilmington itself."[1] The joint Army-Navy assault against Fort Fisher, commanded by Rear Admiral David D. Porter and Major General Benjamin F. Butler, would lead to the completion of the expedition's first objective. However, Butler's timidity was the ruin of the assault. "The men [Army] landed, reconnoitered, and hearing that the enemy were massing troops somewhere, the order was given to reembark."[2] Butler had given the order, and once his men were embarked he returned to Hampton Roads. Upon hearing the events, Lieutenant General Ulysses S. Grant was furious with Butler. Having lost faith in Butler, Grant wrote Lincoln requesting Butler's removal. "I am constrained to request the removal of Maj. Gen. B.F. Butler . . . . There is a lack of confidence felt in his ability, making him an unsafe commander for a large Army."[3] President Abraham Lincoln,

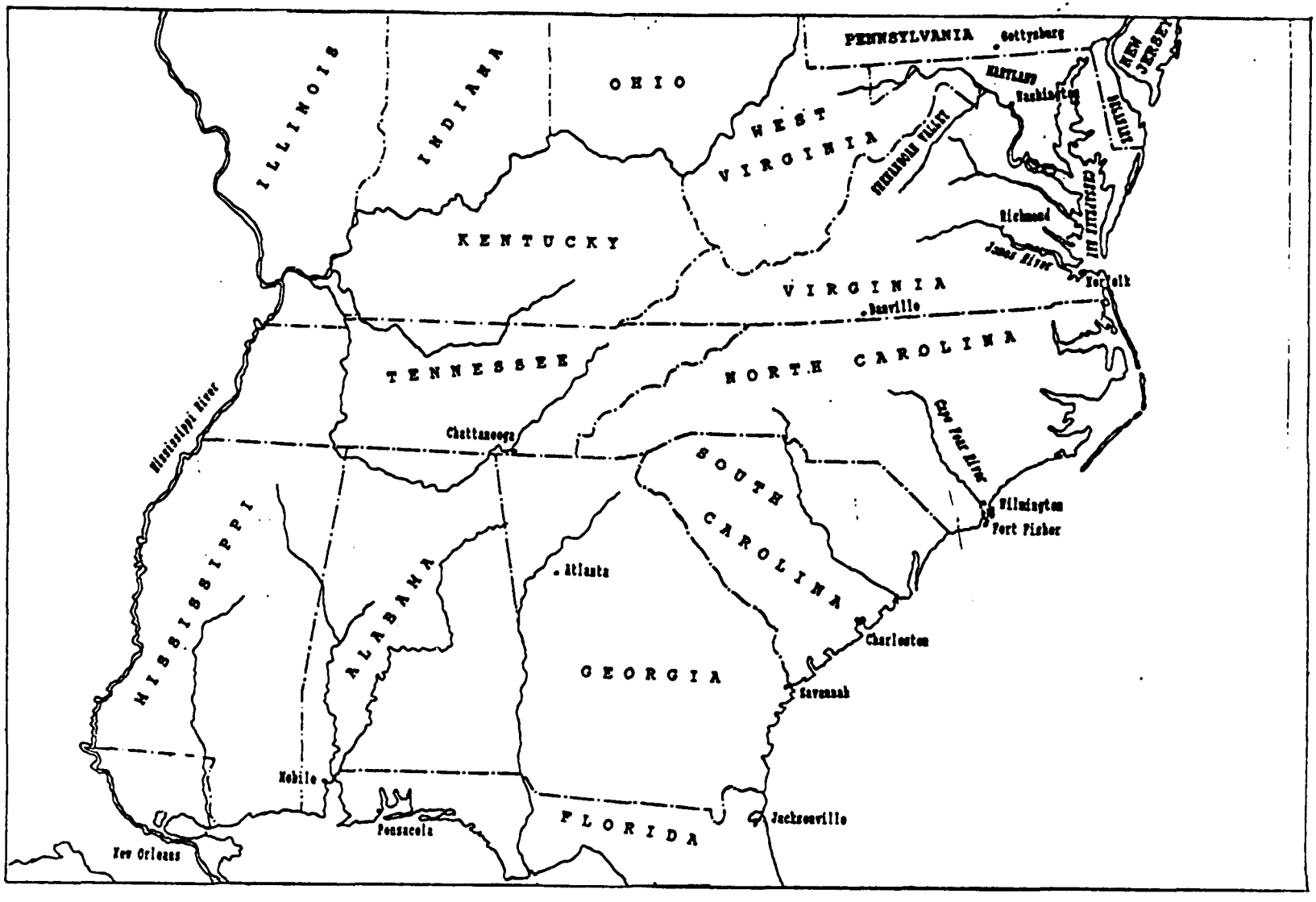

Figure 13. Southeastern United States

who was reelected in November no longer needed the War Democrat, agreed with Grant and removed Butler from command.

Grant quickly tried to turn this withdrawal by Butler into an operational advantage. He asked Admiral Porter to hold the position near Fort Fisher, but pull back the assault force out of view of the enemy. "It is desirable the enemy should be lulled into all the security possible, in hopes he will send back here [Petersburg] or against Sherman the reinforcements sent to defend Wilmington."[4] Porter was elated that the Army would participate in a reattack of Fort Fisher, for he was confident that the assault would succeed. He was also happy to see that Grant had had a change of commanders and had informed the new commander, Major General Alfred H. Terry, to govern his actions on Porter's suggestions. The second attack on Fort Fisher achieved surprise and was successful. On 15 January the Union took possession of the fort. Shortly afterward, Wilmington fell under Union control, thus allowing Porter to reduce his force on the coast, providing more vessels for the James River.[5]

During the assaults on Fort Fisher, the James River squadron (Fifth Division) had an overall reduction in combat power. Porter had withdrawn three ironclads from the James River in order to increase his fire power at Fort Fisher. Although the ironclads were replaced by gunboats and the number of vessels in the division had remained constant, the

advantage had shifted to the Confederacy. Confederate Flag-Officer John K. Mitchell, Commander of the James River Squadron, speaking on the numerical superiority of the Union Navy had stated, "we can never hope to encounter him [Union Navy] on anything like equal terms, except from accident."[6] Noticing this accident, the Confederate James River Squadron decided to attempt an assault on Grant's headquarters at City Point. Confederate Secretary of the Navy Stephen R. Mallory wrote to Mitchell:

> If we can block the river at or below City Point, Grant might be compelled to evacuate his position. I regard an attack upon the enemy and the obstructions of the river at City Point, to cut off Grant's supplies, as a movement of the first importance to the country, and one which should be accomplished if possible.[7]

Mitchell, agreeing with Mallory's assessment of the opportunity, commenced planning the attack. With the aid of Major General George E. Pickett's field artillery and batteries at Howlett's House, the Confederate assault was planned for 22-23 January. However, the attack was postponed due to inclement weather. Writing to Pickett, Mitchell rescheduled the attack for the following night. "I deeply regret that the foggy weather will prevent our moving down tonight . . . . Tomorrow night our movement will be made, and I will be glad to have your cooperation as agreed upon for tonight."[8]

On the night of 23-24 January, Mitchell led the assault down the river aboard the ironclad *C.S.S. Virginia*

No. 2. The Confederate Naval force consisted of: the ironclads *Virginia No. 2, Fredericksburg,* and *Richmond,* the gunboats *Hampton, Nansemond, Drewry,* and *Beaufort,* and the torpedo boats *Hornet, Scorpion,* and *Wasp.*

The Union Army located at Fort Brady (formerly called Signal Hill) spotted the Confederate vessels and reported the movement to Grant and the Navy. Captain William A. Parker, Commander of the Fifth Division, ordered his ironclad and gunboats at Dutch Gap and Jones' Neck to prepare for attack. He also placed his torpedo boats below Dutch Gap with orders to attack the Confederate ironclads, should the rebel vessels pass through the obstructions.[9]

The Confederate fleet reached Trent's Reach just after midnight, but only the *Fredericksburg* was able to clear the Union obstructions. To Mitchell's dismay the *Virginia No. 2, Richmond, Drewry,* and *Scorpion* had all run aground, due to their inability to anchor against the strong current. Mitchell immediately recalled the *Fredericksburg* to help defend the stranded vessels. He knew that at daylight his grounded vessels would come under fire from the Union batteries. At first light, 24 January, the Union shore batteries brought the Confederate vessels under fire. Union fire proved accurate and effective. The *Scorpion* was abandoned and scuttled, while the *Drewry* was destroyed when a mortar shell exploded in her magazine. Later in the morning the Union vessels returned to Trent's Reach to

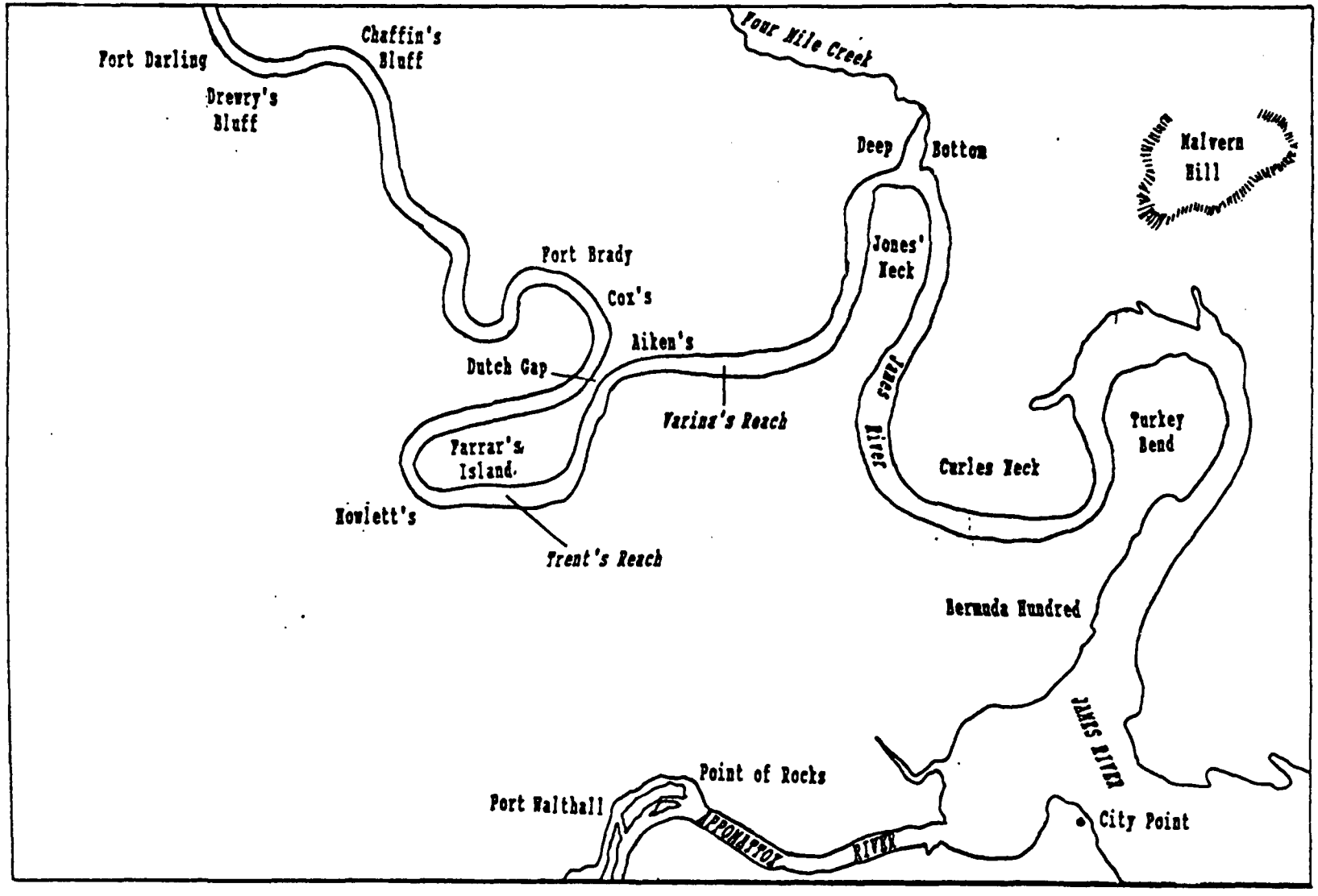

Figure 14. James River from City Point to Fort Darling 1865

assist the shore batteries in quieting the Confederate batteries at Howlett's and ensuring the damaged Confederate ironclads, which had been refloated, retired up the river.[10]

Even though the Confederate fleet had returned back up the river before noon on 24 January, Grant did not receive this information until late on that day. This caused him great consternation and he spent his day attempting to receive increased forces from the Navy. Grant, having received information that the Union Navy was not confronting the Confederates and unable to communicate with Parker, wrote Welles requesting his orders be heeded. Welles went one step further by giving Grant permission to directly order the Navy gunboats to take action.[11] Grant also had requested that Parker be relieved due to negligence. When word of the Navy's inaction reached Washington, Lincoln requested an investigation be conducted to determine what had gone wrong. Admiral David G. Farragut was dispatched, but upon arriving at City Point found the James River quiet, and Commodore William Radford in command of the Fifth Division.[12]

The threat of another Confederate Navy attack down the river had been nearly eliminated, by placing additional obstructions at Trent's Reach, illuminating the Reach with locomotive lights, and increasing the number of ironclads to three. Grant noted, "We are far differently prepared now, both on land and water, from what we were the last time the

rebel ironclads came down."[13] Radford's next priority was to rid the lower James River of the Confederate torpedo crews, which had been spotted in the vicinity of Smithfield, Virginia. Commodore Radford ordered his forces in the lower James River to cooperate with Brigadier General Charles K. Graham, the Commander of the Army's Naval Brigade. A joint Army-Navy expedition was undertaken along Pagan Creek and the Nansemond River. After a successful expedition in which the Union forces captured a torpedo boat and a torpedo, along with the commander of the Confederate torpedo detachment, Graham praised the Navy for its aid. "I desire to express my thanks for the important assistance rendered by . . . the Navy, and my approbation of the manner in which they . . . searched the creek and banks adjoining."[14] Radford and Graham's teamwork in ferreting out Confederate torpedo crews lead to the complete freedom of navigation along the James River for the remainder of the war.

At the end of February, the Union Navy began the task of reducing the inventory from that required to gain control of the Confederate ports. Secretary Welles could reinforce the James River forces with ships from the south. Secretary Welles immediately summoned three ironclads to the James River, two were from Charleston, and one was from Wilmington. Welles continued to transfer ironclads into the James River so that by the end of March, the James River fleet had eight ironclads.[15]

By the beginning of March General Lee's army was feeling the effect of the loss of Wilmington, the Confederacy's last seaport. So severe was the reduction in supplies that General Lee started "appealing to the civilian population to search their households for any spare guns, cutlasses, equestrian gear and tools."[16] Meanwhile, the Union economy had soared to new heights of productivity and immigration had raised the availability of soldiers. These factors allowed Grant to increase his troop strength and restock his supplies in preparation for the spring offensive.[17]

Unlike McClellan's Peninsula Campaign in 1862, Grant's spring offensive was receiving full support of the president. During the Peninsula Campaign Lincoln was preoccupied with the protection of Washington and was persuaded to withdraw forces previously conveyed to McClellan. In 1865 Lincoln was secure in Washington's defense and focused solely on the strategy to be followed to close the war. On 24 March, Lincoln, on board the steamer *River Queen*, reached City Point for a visit with Grant to discuss the upcoming offensive.[18]

Coincidental to Lincoln's visit, General Lee took his last bold gamble of the war. Lee attempted to break through the Union's line and strike the supply base at City Point. He was hoping to cripple Grant's army so that the Union's spring attack could not be launched.[19]

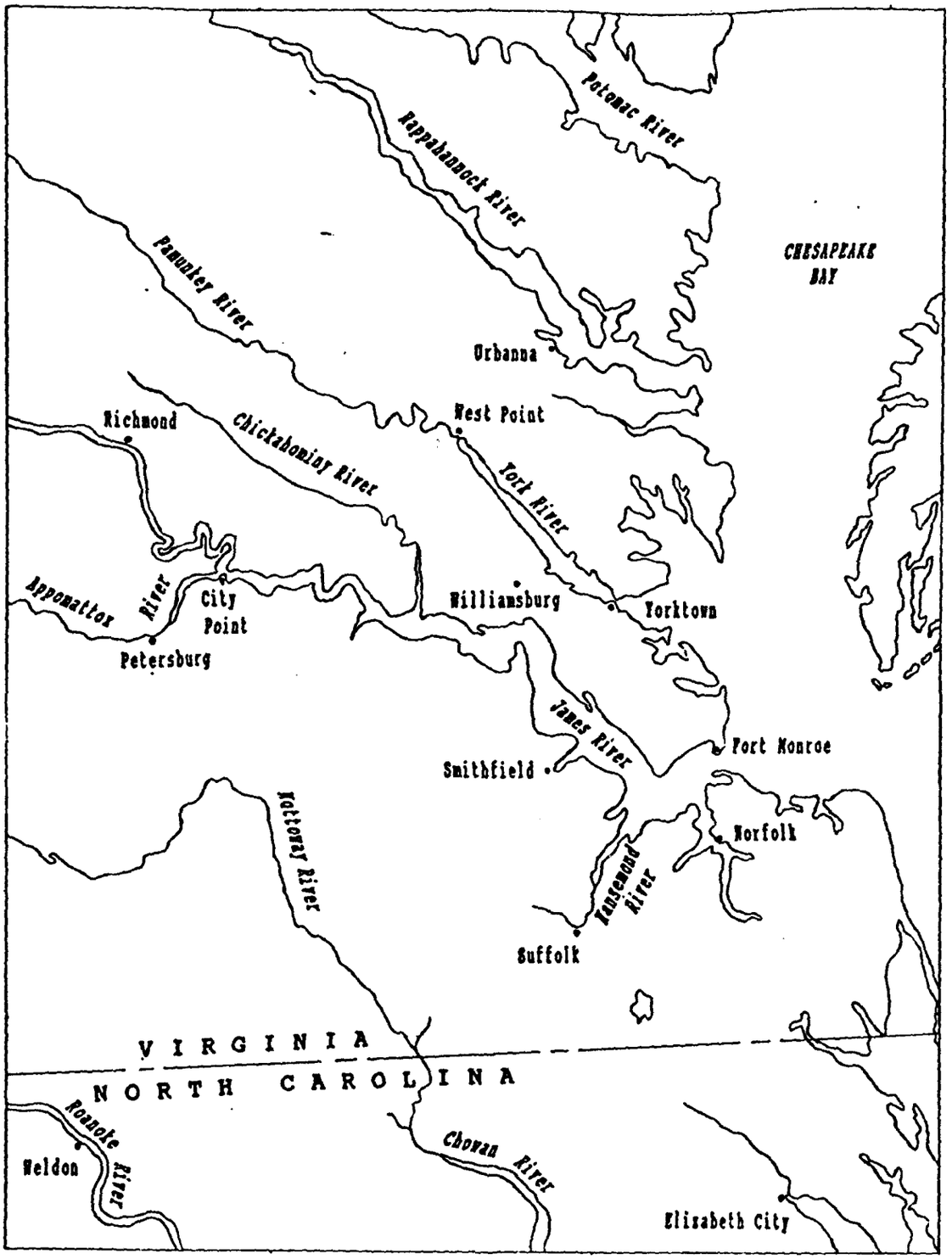

Figure 15. Southeastern Virginia

The Confederates enjoyed initial success by breaking through the Union's left flank and taking control of a portion of the Union's trenches. Grant, worried for his supplies at City Point, requested assistance from Porter. "The enemy have attacked, . . . if they are permitted to get through they may march towards City Point, I would suggest putting one or two gunboats on the Appomattox."[20] Porter responded quickly and placed two gunboats on the Appomattox, as Grant had requested. Union forces were quick to counterattack and turn back the Confederate thrust, thus crushing any opportunity Lee had of delaying the Union's spring offensive.

On 27 March, Lincoln conferred with Grant, Porter, and Sherman on the impending offensive. Lincoln stayed at City Point until the spring offensive commenced when he boarded the *Malvern* with Porter. On 29 March Grant launched his final attack against the Confederacy.

> The positions of the opposing forces on this date demonstrated vividly what superiority afloat had meant to the North in this giant struggle that decided the future of the nation. From his overflowing advance bases on the James at City Point, only a few miles from General Lee's lines, General Grant was on the move for the final battle of the long saga in Virginia.[21]

Moving to the southwest in an attempt to flank Lee, Grant remained concerned for his lifeline on the James River. "During the absence of the greater part of the Army, I would respectfully request that you direct one or two gunboats to lay in the Appomattox, and two in the James River."[22]

Porter reassured Grant by placing twice the force requested by Grant to protect the arsenal at City Point. Although the Union Army was making progress around Petersburg, Porter wanted to draw attention to the James to aid Grant's troops. On the night of 1 April, Porter's fleet conducted a feint attack up the James River. "The object is merely to make the rebels think that we are about to make an attack. They are prepared to sink their gunboats at the first sign of one."[23]

With the Army having taken control of Petersburg earlier in the day, on the night of 2 April, Lincoln asked Porter, "Can't the Navy do something at this particular moment to make history?"[24] Porter's reply was a tribute to the Navy during the war: "The Navy is doing its best just now, holding the enemy's four [three] heavy ironclads in utter uselessness. If those vessels could reach City Point they would commit great havoc."[25]

On that same evening the Confederate forces under General Lee, along with the government in Richmond, commenced its withdrawal. Secretary Mallory, foreseeing the inevitable, ordered the destruction of the Confederate James River Squadron. Rear Admiral Raphael Semmes, who had taken command of the squadron only two months previous, carried out the order on the following morning. The officers and men then joined the exodus from Richmond along with General Lee's forces enroute to Danville.[26]

With the withdrawal of the Confederate forces from the James River, Lincoln wanted to ascend the river in order to visit Richmond. On 3 April, Porter ordered the removal of the obstructions at Trent's Reach and Drewry's Bluff, and a complete sweep of the James River for torpedoes. Porter further said, "Be careful and thorough in dragging the river for torpedoes . . . . Be impressed with the necessity of driving ahead, but have no accidents happen."[27] The following day, Lincoln and Porter ascended that portion of the James River which had been cut off from the Union for more than four years. Porter reported to Welles, "On the 4th of April I accompanied the President up to Richmond, where he was received with the greatest demonstrations of joy."[28]

Although the Union survived the joint Confederate attack in January, this incident provides insight into focusing too strongly on one operation at the detriment of another area of responsibility. The Union Navy reduced its ironclad force in the James River to a level below that agreed upon only four months before so that the Fort Fisher assault force might be enlarged. At the same time, the Confederacy had increased its force to the strongest it had ever attained. This failure to recognize the shift in power, must be blamed on the Navy leadership. However, this period does show us the success of cooperation and unity of effort. The meeting of the service commanders and the

President, provided the best joint planning possible: the mutual understanding and cooperation of the service commanders along with the support of the President.

Endnotes

1. Simon, Vol 13, p. 71.
2. OR, Vol XI, p. 261.
3. Simon, Vol 13, p. 223.
4. Ibid., p. 190.
5. McPherson, p. 820.
6. OR, Vol XI, p. 792.
7. U.S. Naval History Division, p. V-17.
8. OR, Vol XI, p. 806.
9. Ibid., p. 645,553.
10. Ibid., p. 668-671.
11. Simon, Vol 13, p. 305.
12. OR, Vol XI, p. 646.
13. Simon, Vol 14, p. 45.
14. OR, Vol XII, p. 11.
15. Ibid., p. 93.
16. U.S. Naval History Division, p. V-54.
17. McPherson, p. 816.
18. Simon, Vol 14, p. 215-216.
19. McPherson, p. 845.
20. Simon, Vol 14, p. 223.
21. U.S. Naval History Division, p. V-73.
22. Simon, Vol 14, p. 249.
23. OR, Vol XII, p. 95.
24. U.S. Naval History Division, p. V-75.
25. Ibid.

26. Ibid., p. V-76.

27. OR, Vol XII, p. 97.

28. Ibid.

CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUSION

This thesis has examined how the Union Navy conducted the battles upon the James River during the period 1862-1865. The overall conclusion is that the Union Navy played a significant role in shaping the outcome of the battle for control of the James River Basin and the eventual capture of Richmond. Also, had the Union Navy lessened its involvement there would have been a shift in force ratio which could have transferred initiative to the Confederacy.

The Union Navy, however, was not without its faults. Secretary Welles placed the Peninsula Campaign in a position of lesser strength by allowing his personal and professional differences with the War Department and Major General McClellan to interfere with proper assistance. Although McClellan's secrecy provided the impetus for this decision, Welles had sufficient knowledge of the plan to move greater assets into the James River Basin. However, since Welles' department was not officially apprised of the plan he felt the Union would best be served by keeping greater forces employed in blockading duty than in helping the Army assault. It must be noted that the Navy had an insufficient

number of vessels to conduct the blockade of the Confederate coast, as well as the riverine operations.

The battles in the James River Basin provide us with a glimpse at the inherent problems when attempting to fight a war without a joint command structure. Although both the Army and Navy were attempting to reach the same endstate, they were travelling down different paths. Unfortunately these paths did not always run parallel. Occasionally they would diverge and in some cases crash into one another. From the planning phase through to the execution phase, unity of command was lacking.

During the planning of the two major campaigns up the James, both McClellan and Grant showed a lack of understanding of joint planning to optimize power projection. Neither saw the need to bring the Navy on board during the planning. Instead they relegated the Navy to a support role. Unfortunately for Grant, the Navy was left with insufficient time to provide the naval assets required to successfully obtain the mission objectives. Not knowing the plan retarded the Navy's ability to properly allocate resources throughout its theaters of operations to achieve the most imperative objective. Joint planning allows each service to best decide what assets are required for their portion of the operation.

The absence of unity of command was the greatest single factor which led to difficulties during operations.

The lack of joint doctrine, joint training, and a joint command structure forced the services to conduct operations through cooperation alone. This placed a large requirement on the interpersonal relationships of the two commanders. Only a feeling of mutual trust provided the impetus for complete cooperation and unity of effort. On only two occasions was unity of command seen: When Lincoln directed the assault on Norfolk in May 1862; and when Grant had complete control of forces in January 1865 when the Confederate Army-Navy attacked at Trent's Reach.

Unity of command disintegrated further during the Civil War, due to the interference of Washington. During the early portions of the war, the administration routinely ordered forces in the field to conduct missions without utilizing the chain-of-command. Thus the Army and Navy commanders in the field found their troops busy conducting tasks not associated with the commander's mission. Furthermore, once a commander was given a mission and allocated forces, Washington would remove assets without prior discussion with the commander. Not until Grant took over in 1864 did Lincoln cease his interfering. Appropriately, Lincoln provided Grant an objective and the manpower to achieve it, then stepped back and provided support as needed. The same was true with Welles and the North Atlantic Blockading Squadron. Welles had learned by

late 1863 not to meddle in the daily running of the command, since he then had confidence in the Commanding Admiral.

Today's joint military establishment has removed many of the burdens associated with joint operations by developing joint organization, doctrine and equipment, and conducting joint training. The joint command structure provides one commander with the ability to ensure unity of effort under his lead. Unity of effort starts at the national level where the President along with the National Security Council members clearly articulate strategic objectives. These objectives are provided via the Joint Chiefs of Staff to the Unified Commander who is given autonomy in conducting the mission. However, plans developed by the Unified Commander are reviewed by the Council to ensure their desires are being met. The Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1986 strengthened the power of the Unified Commanders to control the forces assigned and further relegated the service secretaries to administrative functions.

This system is in place to guard against interference from outside the theater of operations. Nevertheless, today's technology allows the President, who may be thousands of miles from the war zone, to see pictures from the front line within seconds of origination. This ability can lead to overcontrol by the National Security Council and must be guarded against. As was seen during the

Civil War and again during Vietnam, lack of unity of command can lead to diverging actions attempting to achieve the same goal, but causing interference and failure.

Joint operations rely heavily on command and control. To accomplish this task the military has developed doctrine and equipment. Joint doctrine has been produced to provide the services with a common language and procedures to use during inter-service operations. Equipment has been acquired to provide compatibility between the services. In order to bring these tools to their peak effectiveness, the services have increased joint training. We saw in Desert Storm how the military has realized the goal of unity of command through its improvements in the areas of joint organization, doctrine, equipment and training. These skills will be required even more during our times of shrinking budgets.

Although unity of command has been elevated to a high level of effectiveness, there are two lessons from the Civil War which the Navy must readdress: counter-mine operations, and riverine warfare. Even though the Navy's budget is being reduced, it must continue to increase its ability to conduct counter-mine operations. Like the planners during the Civil War, we must also plan to combat mines. The presence of mines off the coast of Kuwait during Desert Storm was one of the major reasons the United States did not conduct an amphibious assault against the Iraqi held

territory. Although these weapons are powerful and stealthy, their relatively inexpensive price makes them ideal weapons for countering a large navy. Until 1986, the United States had allowed its mine hunting capabilities to dwindle due to its focus toward deep water operations. However, the less than successful performance during Desert Storm and the tanker escort operations of the late 1980's has provided the impetus to a much required increase in counter-mine capability.

The second area for concern to today's Navy is riverine operations. This thesis provided many insights into the complex requirements for riverine operations. The requirement for water borne forces to transit so closely to the banks requires that land and water forces work in conjunction to advance or maintain the defensive. Unlike the Civil War, today's joint forces have the command structure and doctrine (Doctrine For Joint Riverine Operations, Joint Pub 3-06) to facilitate joint riverine operations. Noteworthy, however, is the omission in the Unified Action Armed Forces (UNAAF) JCS Pub. 2 of which service has overall responsibility for riverine operations. Nor is it listed in the UNAAF as a primary or collateral duty of any service. The Coast Guard has the closest function for conducting riverine operations: providing port security and coastal defense.[1]

Like the Civil War, today's military is lacking in the training and equipment to conduct riverine operations. The Navy and the Army do have special forces personnel capable of conducting riverine operations, but the equipment they use is barely sufficient for their own requirements. Separate from the special forces, the Navy has a small number of river patrol boats remaining from the Vietnam War. But these are old and of insufficient quantity to sustain an operation similar to Vietnam. The Navy is in the progress of obtaining new patrol boats, but they are not of the gunboat quality required for a large scale operation. Rather, they are suited for harbor patrol and coastal drug interdiction operations.[2] Even if the Navy's new patrol boats could handle the rigors of wartime operations, the Navy is unable to provide trained personnel to operate them.

Once again, outside the special operations branch there is a small group of sailors who have received training in riverine operations. For the most part, these personnel have received their training while assigned to one of the few duty assignments requiring river operations, such as the Panama Canal. Outside these assignments there is currently no training being given to other Navy personnel on riverine operations.

The Navy must look at this problem more closely. As the Navy moves further away from the battle at sea to battle from the sea, the requirement for riverine forces will

become more crucial. Today's political realities are focusing United States attention to areas where riverine operations are more likely. Also, in this time of shrinking budgets, the Navy must acquire equipment equally suited for intense riverine operations as well as port security. As George Washington noted:

> In any operation, and under all circumstances, a decisive naval superiority is to be considered as a fundamental principle, and the basis upon which every hope of success must ultimately depend.[3]

Whether it is on the deep oceans or the deltas and rivers, it is the Navy's duty to remain strong. The United States military team requires nothing less.

Endnotes

1. Joint Chiefs of Staff, Unified Action Armed Forces (UNAAF), JCS Pub. 2, (Washington, D.C., 1986), p. 2-1 to 2-14.

2. Richard Sharpe, Jane's Fighting Ships, 1990-1991, (Alexandria: Jane's Information Group, 1990), p. 773-774.

3. U.S. Naval History Division, p. xi.

APPENDIX A

VESSELS

Gunboats. At the beginning of the war, stop gap measures were taken by converting river steamers, ferryboats, or merchant vessels to gunboats. These vessels would be fitted with guns and used on the rivers or deep water depending on their draft and propulsion. Paddle wheels were used on the rivers until designs were made for screw driven vessels with shallower draft. Later designs produced flat-bottom, shallow draft gunboats using a stern mounted screw, which was less vulnerable to enemy fire than the paddle wheel vessels.

Ironclads. These vessels were wooden gunboats which had been covered with iron plating to withstand the incessant pounding of gunfire. These vessels were normally of much deeper draft and still vulnerable to ramming under the waterline, since the iron plating stopped at that level.

Monitors. Also referred to as ironclads, these vessels receive their name from the first vessel of the class. A shallow draft construction, these vessels were completely iron plated on a wooden hull. Unlike the other gunboats and ironclads, monitors were fitted with one or two revolving turrets for its gun(s). The Confederacy did not have any vessels of this class.

Torpedo Boats. Small steam boats outfitted with a spar torpedo attached to the bow. The spar torpedo was a long pole which held an exploding device. Although specific vessels held this designation, toward the end of the war many of the gunboats also were fitted with the spar torpedoes to increase defensive capabilities.

Transports. Primarily operated by the Army, these vessels would usually have a Navy master or ensign in command.

APPENDIX B

BIOGRAPHY

Union

Major General Benjamin F. Butler. Replaced Foster as Commander of the Department of Virginia and North Carolina. A War Democrat, he led the Army of the James against the rebels at Bermuda Hundred in May-June 1864.

Major General John A. Dix. A War Democrat, he was Commander of the Department of Virginia in 1862-1863.

Major General John G. Foster. Replaced Dix as Commander of the newly formed Department of Virginia and North Carolina. Held this command for five months.

Major General Quincy A. Gillmore. Commanded the X Corps under the Army of the James during the spring assault against Richmond and Petersburg.

Rear Admiral Louis M. Goldsborough. First Commander of the North Atlantic Blockading Squadron.

Brigadier General Charles K. Graham. Commander of the Naval Brigade of the Department of Virginia and North Carolina from November 1863-April 1865. Started his career as a Navy officer.

Rear Admiral Samuel Philip Lee. Second Commander of the North Atlantic Blockading Squadron, from September 1862-September 1864.

Commander John S. Missroon. Commander of the York River Flotilla during the Peninsula Campaign.

Commander William A. Parker. Commander of the newly formed Fifth Division (James River Squadron) November 1864-January 1865.

Rear Admiral David D. Porter. Assumed command of the North Atlantic Blockading Squadron in October 1864. Led the assault and capture of Fort Fisher, and commanded the James River vessels during the capture of Petersburg and Richmond.

Commodore William Radford. Commander of the Ironclad Division under Porter, assumed command of the Fifth Division after Parker relieved for cause.

Commodore John Rodgers. Led expedition up James River in May 1862 which was repulsed by the Confederates at Drewry's Bluff.

Captain Melancton Smith. First Divisional Officer in the James River. He held this position from July-November 1864. Commanded the gunboat *Wabash* during attack on Fort Fisher.

Major General William F. Smith. Commanded the XVIII Corps under the Army of the James during the spring assault against Richmond and Petersburg.

Major General Alfred H. Terry. Assumed command of the Fort Fisher assault army after Butler was relieved. Subsequently became the Commander of the Department of Virginia and North Carolina.

Major General John E. Wool. Commanding General of Fort Monroe 1862-1863. Lead expedition which recaptured Norfolk in May 1862.

Confederate

Stephen R. Mallory. Confederate Secretary of the Navy throughout the Civil War.

Flag Officer John K. Mitchell. Commander of the Confederate James River Squadron. Led the unsuccessful assaults down the James River against the defenses in and around Trent's Reach.

Flag Officer Raphael Semmes. Commanded the *CSS Alabama* prior to assuming command of the Confederate James River Squadron. Ordered the destruction of the squadron's vessels 3 April 1865 prior to the evacuation of Richmond.

Flag Officer Josiah Tattnall. Commanding Officer of the *CSS Virginia*. Ordered the sinking of the *Virginia* in May 1862.

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