ADMINISTRATION OF THE
ATLANTIC BLOCKADE
1861-1865

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ADMINISTRATION OF THE
ATLANTIC BLOCKADE
1861-1865

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PREFACE

Of the vast amount of writings concerning the American Civil War only a very small percentage pertains to the Federal Navy's role. Undoubtedly this is so because this was primarily a land war. A few exploits of the Navy have received a great amount of acclaim, such as the Trent affair, the sinking of the Alabama, and possibly the ironclad battle between the Monitor and its adversary. The majority of naval activities were of a routine nature occasionally highlighted by a spectacular assault. Many of these went relatively unnoticed, but collectively they were of utmost importance and immeasurably contributed to the Federal victory. The purpose of this paper is to show in detail the role of only a portion of the Navy, the Atlantic Blockading Squadrons, during this conflict. The successes and frustrations of their administrators in carrying out their missions typify the challenge faced by the entire Navy. One needs only to add the areas of naval endeavor along the Gulf and inland waters to understand the important contribution of the Navy.
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Despite the vast amount of research on every phase of the Civil War's land operations, the role of the Navy has been largely neglected. Little or no attempt has yet been made to evaluate the blockade's strategic significance in Civil War history. Indeed, this aspect of the war has been treated in only one book, written in 1885.\footnote{James Russell Soley, The Navy in the Civil War, The Blockade and the Cruisers (New York, 1885).}

The Atlantic blockade of the Confederacy was one of the most tremendous undertakings of war and proved to be hydra-like in the problems it presented. The task of establishing an effective blockade amplified a host of related responsibilities for the unprepared Federal Navy. The fleet had to control the sea around the Confederacy, blockade the ports of the rebellion, cooperate with the Army in amphibious assaults on large stretches of Confederate coastline which denied the South use of hundreds of inlets and rivers. It also built bases for the blockade fleet, protected American commerce, attacked
fortifications, pursued blockade runners, conducted naval landings, guarded lines of communications and helped prevent foreign intervention in the war.

In 1861, the Union navy was composed primarily of sail-powered vessels, although it had a few ships that supported sail with steam. When the war ended four-fifths of the vessels were steamships, greatly enhancing the power and propulsion abilities of ships.2

The Civil War provided a transition in naval architecture. Wood yielded to iron as a material of construction, thus affording greater protection to ships and crews. Some of these ironclads were monitors, the invention of John Ericsson, engineer and naval architect. Construction of naval machinery and ordnance also was vastly improved. Nearly every type of boiler, engine, valve-gear and screw-propeller was tried. A chief engineer was sent to Europe to collect information concerning steam engineering. Experiments were conducted with the various types of coal located along the Eastern seaboard, to ascertain their effectiveness in naval vessels.3


3Ibid.
In ordnance, different cannon were developed, the largest being fifteen inch guns introduced by Assistant Secretary of the Navy Gustavus V. Fox. Rifled guns with breech-loading advantages also were developed by the Union during the war. These numerous innovations in construction and ordnance immeasurably increased the already pressing problems of administration.

Prior to 1861 the Navy Department had promoted officers on the basis of seniority alone, and the Navy had usually been unreceptive to new ideas for increasing its effectiveness. New concepts in naval strategy were needed to take advantage of the new developments in construction and ordnance. The belief that forts were superior to attacking ships was commonly accepted until new Federal strategy employed warships successfully against forts. Thus, ships, which had not previously attacked coastal


5Annual Report of the Secretary of the Navy, 1864, 2nd Session, 38th Congress, Executive Document No. 1, part 6, VI, p. 29.

6Soley, The Blockade and the Crusiers, pp. 4-8.

installations to any great extent, gradually overcame fortresses previously thought impregnable.

That period of Buchanan's administration between the election of Lincoln and his inauguration was one of little naval preparation or activity. The administration was doing nothing that might offend those Southern states that still remained in the Union.

The chief problem of the Lincoln administration, in the early months, was what to do about the numerous Federal forts and naval bases in the seceded states. Many of these installations had been turned over to the seceded states and federal troops withdrawn. Those forts which were deemed defensible were held as long as possible while the rest were surrendered. Union naval activity was confined at this time to the removal of troops from untenable positions within the South and cruising off the Southern shore.8

After Lincoln's inauguration in March, he chose Gideon Welles to be his Secretary of the Navy and Gustavus Fox his Assistant Secretary. These two men largely conducted the naval business of the war. Their relations with the President were reasonably intimate and cordial. They saw him almost

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8 Richard S. West, Mr. Lincoln's Navy (New York, 1957), pp. 8-9.
daily and often visited with him at all hours, discussing various problems in naval policy and administration. Upon this rapport of the naval command with the President depended the success or failure of the Navy.

When Welles and Fox took command, there were on March 4, 1861, ninety vessels, of which twenty-one were unservicable. Twenty-seven others were out of commission, leaving only forty-two in commission. Of these forty-two vessels, only twelve were in the Home Squadron. The rest were scattered around the globe. Of the twelve vessels in the Home Squadron, four were at Pensacola, one at Vera Cruz, and three en route to the United States from Vera Cruz. 9

Although Welles and Fox differed in background and in training, they worked together in harmony, their personalities complementing one another. Together they constituted a strong force in conducting the war and their harmony and efficiency permeated the Navy Department.

Gideon Welles came from a Connecticut family that was held in high esteem as one of the founding families of the colony.

He had a good education at the Episcopal Academy in Cheshire, Connecticut and at the Norwich University in Vermont. He studied law and at the age twenty-three became editor and part owner of the Hartford Times, which he edited until 1837. From 1827 to 1835 he was a member of the Connecticut legislature. He was also state comptroller of public accounts and for about five years he was postmaster of Hartford. From 1846 to 1849 he was chief of the Bureau of Provisions and Clothing in the Navy Department at Washington. Politically, Welles had been a Jacksonian Democrat with anti-slavery views. Subsequently he became a Republican and in 1856 was candidate for governor of Connecticut. He was a delegate to the Republican National Conventions of 1856 and 1860 and in the latter, he worked for Lincoln's nomination.  

In November, 1860 Lincoln began to consider various men for posts in his cabinet. At the urging of Vice-President Hannibal Hamlin, Welles was awarded the position of Secretary of the Navy. Lincoln from the first had been convinced of Welles's fitness for the position and his assignment to the post was in part due to his naval background. In addition, Welles

10Carl Sandburg, Abraham Lincoln, the War Years, 4 Vols. (New York, 1936), I, p. 150. Clarence Macartney, Mr. Lincoln's Admirals. (New York, 1956), pp. 4-6.
was the New England member and representative of the Demo-
cratic element of the Republican party. The Whig faction in
the party was generally unfriendly to him as, exemplified by the
animosity felt between Welles and the Secretary of State,
William H. Seward.\textsuperscript{11}

Thurlow Weed, one of the Whig leaders in New York,
disliked Welles and opposed his appointment as Secretary. In
December, 1860, Weed told the President that if he would,
on his way to his inauguration, stop long enough in New York,
Philadelphia or Baltimore to select an attractive figure-head
from the prow of a ship, adorn it with an attractive wig and
luxuriant whiskers, and would transfer it to the entrance of
the Navy Department, this figure-head would be quite as ser-
cvicable to the Navy as Welles, and much less expensive. "Oh,"
Mr. Lincoln replied, "wooden midshipmen answer very well in
novels, but we have to have a live secretary of the navy."\textsuperscript{12}

Welles's "elaborate wig and luxuriant whiskers" gave him
the appearance of an Old Testament patriarch, which cloaked
his keen intellect and vigorous middle-age. Welles was just
fifty-nine when he entered the cabinet. Secretary of State

\textsuperscript{11}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{12}Thurlow Weed, \textit{Autobiography}, 2 Vols. (Boston, New
York, 1883), I, 606-607, 611.
Seward and Secretary of War Cameron were both older, while Attorney General Bates was ten years his senior. Welles's paternal and kindly attitude toward officers and seamen earned him the title of "Father Welles" or "Old Man of the Sea."

Charles A. Dana, onetime Assistant Secretary of War to Stanton has left a vivid word picture of this unique man, Gideon Welles:

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, I have always thought, that the idea that he was an old fogy originated. I remember Governor Andrew, of Massachusetts, coming into my office at the War Department one day and asking where he could find "that old Mormon deacon, the Secretary of the Navy." In spite of his peculiarities, I think 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 unvariably. There was a good deal of opposition to him, for we had no navy when the war began, but he had to create one without much deliberation; but he was patient, laborious, and intelligent at his task.¹³

The quiet, efficient manner of the Secretary left him open to the unjust criticism that he was overly concerned with routine and that he was colorless. While Welles was not one of the flamboyant types that had so disastrously commanded

the Army of the Potomac, he was the epitome of the untiring, dedicated executive, fearless and unhesitant. He gathered the evidence and made his decisions with discipline and confidence. A patient man, the Secretary built a reputation for dependability, honor and a sense of justice. In general, Welles was an impartial man who applied the rules of the navy equally to all. No one was succored or received favoritism, regardless of the offender's rank. He kept squarely in the path of naval discipline and impartial administration of the naval code.

On several occasions he rebuked a naval court for bringing in a verdict contrary to the evidence presented. At a court-martial, in which Farragut was present, a Union captain was found guilty of dereliction of duty and failing to capture a fleeing Confederate vessel, an offense punishable by death. The court sentenced the guilty officer to be suspended from the navy for two years on leave-of-absence pay—an extremely mild penalty. In reviewing these findings, Welles stated that the sentence of the court was too mild for even a trivial offense and that such punishment as the court had prescribed "no officer could obtain from the Department as a favor."

The Secretary was not created in the image of a Prussian martinet; however, Welles would be most generous in praise

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14 *C.R.N., Series I, III, 467-470.*
of gallant and meritorious conduct. His congratulatory messages to his subordinates ring with hearty good will. Perhaps his newspaper experience was contributory to this ability to express himself clearly. His official reports sparkle with interest rarely elevated beyond the level of droll monosyllables. Welles also kept his own annual reports, and his diary in revised form clearly indicates a man of methodical nature, deliberate and analytical.

Although Welles did not have a technical knowledge of the navy, he did have a grasp of the business of the navy and the department. Fortunately, the limitations of his technical knowledge was adequately compensated by the extensive specialized knowledge of his Assistant Secretary of the Navy, Gustavus Vaza Fox, whose selection by President Lincoln proved a most fortuitous one. Fox was forty years old when the war began. Born in Massachusetts, Fox joined the navy and became a midshipman at the age of sixteen. Here he remained for eighteen years, seeing service in various squadrons throughout the world.\(^{15}\) Having left the navy in 1856 as a lieutenant, he came back to Washington in 1861 with a plan for the relief of Fort Sumter, and in April he was permitted by President Lincoln to put it into operation. The planning, promotion and execution of this

\(^{15}\) Thompson, *Fox Correspondence*, II, 3.
daring attempt attracted attention to his energy and initiative. The Fort Sumter expedition opened the way to his future appointment. On May 9, 1861, he was appointed chief clerk of the Navy Department, and on July 31 he was promoted to a newly-created position, Assistant Secretary of the Navy.¹⁶

Fox’s long service gave him a familiarity with the sea and naval tradition. He knew a number of naval officers and was thus fitted admirably well for the assistant secretaryship. He had also been a New England manufacturer and was conversant with thought and action outside the realm of the service. He understood business, its economics and administration.¹⁷ Despite his naval experience, however, Fox understood the science of naval operations only partially and his strategy at times was faulty. To Rear-Admiral C. H. Davis he appeared more ready to plan, than laboriously to execute.¹⁸ The Assistant Secretary’s greatest assets were his self-confidence, quickness of mind and decisiveness. His spirit was rarely gloomy and his nature was unusually buoyant even during the melancholy days of early defeat.

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷John Nicolay and John Hay, Abraham Lincoln, 10 Vols. (New York, 1886), V, 4-5.

Both the Secretary and Assistant Secretary were men who had a great capacity for hard work. Both wrote extensive correspondence. To those subordinate, they sometimes appeared overworked as night after night they toiled over their work at their offices. Fox occasionally visited navy yards or seaports of the North. Acting for the Secretary, Fox sometimes went to the "front" and occasionally the Secretary found time to escape the excessive burdens of his office and to accompany him. The Assistant Secretary witnessed the fight at Hampton Roads, in March, 1862, between the Monitor and the Merrimac.\(^{19}\)

After March 1, Welles became concerned with building up the Navy's effective strength. Contracts were let for building new ships and vessels were purchased from civilians. Officers were procured for the Navy from ranks of officers who had previously resigned, and from the merchant marine. Seamen were recruited, ships were recalled and plans were formulated for the role of the Navy in the suppression of the Rebellion. Steamers, tugs, ferry-boats, side-wheelers and miscellaneous craft were procured. By December, 1861, seventy-nine steamers and eighty-five sailing vessels had been acquired.

\(^{19}\)West, Mr. Lincoln's Navy, pp. 122-123.
The total number of vessels brought during the war amounted to 418, of which 313 were steamers.\textsuperscript{20}

Construction of new ships was begun with fourteen sloops-of-war. These represented the most powerful warships of the period, one of which destroyed the powerful enemy raider, Alabama. Private parties were also authorized to construct small, heavily-armed screw gunboats. Many of these were built so quickly that they were known as "ninety-day gunboats."\textsuperscript{21} Twenty-three of this type were built and these ships were used for fighting and blockading throughout the whole war. Paddle wheel steamers were also built for use in rivers and channels. The most important measure for the increase of the naval force was the construction of ironclads. At an extra session of Congress in August, 1861, an appropriation of a million and a half dollars was passed for construction of armored vessels. These measures represent the effort undertaken during the first year of war to develop a navy capable of blockading the Confederate coast and participating in the many allied duties connected with the blockade.\textsuperscript{22}


\textsuperscript{21} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{22} Ibid., p. 16.
When Lincoln and Secretary of the Navy Gideon Welles assumed their duties in March, 1861, they found morale in the Navy Department in an appalling condition. Many of the clerks of the Department were hostile to the new Secretary. Many of the disaffected naval officers still on duty rallied around Captain George A. Magruder, chief of the Bureau of Ordnance, whose clerks were nearly all sympathetic to the South. The Naval Observatory in Washington, under Matthew F. Maury, was another center of secessionist propaganda. Other high-ranking officers were spreading so much dissension that most of the navy's officers were utterly demoralized. One, Captain Samuel Barron, a leader of a clique of pro-secession officers, was actually exercising some considerable influence on naval affairs.  

Welles had difficulty in knowing who was loyal. In addition, the Confederates had control of the Pensacola navy yard and threatened the Norfolk yard, while the situation at the Washington naval yard was insecure. Since no appropriations had been made recently for the navy, the yards were in pathetic condition. The national treasury was nearly bankrupt and under

\[23\text{Welles, } \text{Diary, I, 18-20.}\]
President Buchanan's policy of non-resistance, the navy was utterly unprepared for war.  

The new administration initially continued the passive policy of inactivity that had characterized Buchanan's administration. For the first three weeks Welles did little to increase or develop the naval defense of the country and during the second six weeks he did little more. In fact, very little could be done until the government decided what to do about Fort Sumter. By the end of March Lincoln had made up his mind to provision the fort, a decision which did not meet with consensus of his cabinet. With great secrecy Lincoln notified Welles that he wanted a sea expedition ready by April 6. It was to consist of three ships carrying 500 soldiers and sailors with adequate provisions for the Fort. Fox was sent to New York to make the necessary naval arrangements and there found authorities in opposition to the plan. He wrote that he was "... sick down to my heels." Lincoln and his cabinet members, as yet unfamiliar with each other and federal administration, were clumsy and awkward at their new work, often

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25 Fox, Correspondence, I, 13.
interfering in affairs outside their province and causing dire consequences. The attempts of William H. Seward, Secretary of State, to manage the government and influence naval affairs added to the confusion of the new administration.

Seward's influence on naval affairs greatly added to the confusion of the first weeks of the new administration. On April 1, without consulting the Secretary of the Navy, he obtained the President's signature on a most amazing order. This naval document was addressed to Gideon Welles and was an order from the President to make certain details of naval officers. Particularly significant was the instruction to Welles to detach Captain Silas H. Stringham from the Secretary's office and send him to Pensacola. It would appear that this was an attempt to replace the loyal unionist Stringham by the Southern sympathizer, Captain Samuel Barron. This order went far beyond Seward's jurisdiction and seemed to give management of the Navy Department to Barron.

Upon receiving these incredible orders, Welles was greatly astonished and he immediately went to the White House for an explanation. Lincoln professed great surprise to discover that he had signed an instrument of such great significance. He said that Seward had been at the White House during the day.

\[26\text{Welles, Diary, I, 17.}\]
on a matter that the Secretary of State was much concerned over, and that he had signed the document without reading it or knowing precisely what it was. Welles stated that he had no confidence in Barron's fidelity to the Union and felt that he was being forced into official intimacy with Barron, who appeared to be virtually handed the reins of government.\(^{27}\)

The Secretary went on to say that he felt the establishment of a bureau by executive order was unlawful, and the proposition to make a naval officer secretary of the navy de facto was illegal and in his view "monstrous." Lincoln said he knew nothing of Barron, that the document was not his even though he had signed it, and Welles should regard it as cancelled.\(^{28}\) Thereupon the President apologized for his blunder and later said that he and his Cabinet members were all new to their responsibilities and naturally would make some mistakes. This satisfied the Secretary, although he was suspicious of the Secretary of War and Porter, believing that the attempt to give Barron the key naval position was part of a sinister plot to give control of the Navy to Confederate officers. Barron was dismissed from the naval service and entered

\(^{27}\text{Ibid.}, \text{ pp. 17-18.}\)

\(^{28}\text{Welles, Diary, I, 18-19.}\)
the Confederate Navy just five days before the executive order was to give him virtual charge of the Navy Department.29

Seward's interference was not confined to the petty dimensions of shuffling naval officers. He planned a naval expedition for the relief of Fort Pickens, Florida, which was manned and under steam before Welles found out about it. This apparently was what Lincoln thought he was signing when he supported Barron's elevation to command. On April 1 Seward obtained the President's signature on a second document ordering Lieutenant Porter to proceed to New York navy yard and prepare an expedition for the relief of Fort Pickens.

At the same time the Secretary was getting together an expedition at the New York navy yard for the relief of Fort Sumter, which was to be under the command of Gustavus V. Fox. Both Welles and Seward intended that the powerful warship, Powhatan, should sail with their respective fleets. Thus, the orders concerning her were conflicting. The commandant of the New York naval yard was greatly confused. He gave the Powhatan to Porter since his orders were superior to Welles's by virtue of the President's signature.30 Welles knew nothing

29Welles, Diary, I, 36-37.

30Foote to Welles, April 4, 1861, O. R. N., Series I, IV, 234, 107.
of Porter's activity until the time Porter's fleet sailed from New York for Fort Pickens on April 6. When the Secretary learned about this he went, in company with Seward, to the White House for an explanation concerning the diverting of the Powhatan from the Fort Sumter expedition, a mistake that would render ineffective the expedition under Fox. Lincoln said he confused the name of the Powhatan with that of another ship and that Porter should turn the vessel over to Fox. An order to this effect was signed by Seward and sent to Porter at New York, but he had already sailed. A tug was sent with the orders to reach him before he got to sea, but Porter refused to detach the Powhatan from the fleet on the ground that he was acting under orders signed by the President, while the countermanding orders were signed by the President's subordinate, the Secretary of State. Thus, the Powhatan went to Fort Pickens and Welles and Fox maintained this fiasco caused the failure of the Sumter expedition.31

Although Navy Department bungling may have effected the immediate results in Charleston harbor, the ultimate outcome would have been the same. The clash had come, and the President had little alternative other than requesting troops to quell

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31Welles, Diary, I, 24-27.
the rebellion. Lincoln issued a call for 75,000 volunteers on April 15, to serve three months. This brought forth a retaliatory proclamation from Jefferson Davis on April 17, offering letters-of-marque to private mariners who wished to raid Union shipping. \(^{32}\) Lincoln adroitly frustrated this threat to the American merchant marine by branding holders of such letters-of-marque as pirates and proclaiming a formal blockade of the Southern coast on April 19, 1861.\(^ {33}\)

\(^{32}\)Scharf, History of Confederate States Navy, p. 53.

\(^{33}\)Hay, Abraham Lincoln, IV, 88-89.
CHAPTER II

EARLY COASTAL OPERATIONS

On April 19, 1861, Lincoln proclaimed a blockade of the entire Southern coastline from South Carolina to Texas and when Virginia and North Carolina seceded on April 27, he extended the blockade to include those states.¹

The length of the area blockaded was about 3000 miles and at first it was a "paper blockade," weak and ineffectual. There were very few ships to cover the immense coastline. Under the terms of the blockade, the South was given more consideration than was legally necessary. Lincoln could have made things easier for his naval pickets by simply closing the ports of the insurrectionary states. In this event, all violators would have been subject to capture like any miscreant violating any other domestic law. Lincoln conceded recognition of the Confederacy as a "government" rather than an insurrection, inasmuch as the Rebel government behaved the same was as an official government. He gave neutral rights to foreigners by proclaiming a formal "blockade," to be enforced

¹Proclamation of Lincoln, April 19, 1861, O. R. N. Series I, IV, 156-57.
according to the cumbersome rules of international law. Under this system the blockade began when a naval force was posted off a particular port, thus preventing the entrance and exit of vessels.²

Any vessel attempting to violate the blockade after being notified of its existence was declared subject to capture as a naval prize. Foreign vessels already in port were given fifteen days in which to put to sea. After this grace period the port would be closed and any vessel was liable to capture. When a neutral vessel arrived that had not heard of the blockade, a notification had to be inserted in writing on the muster roll of the vessel by the blockading officer together with the date and latitude. This constituted fair warning and any future attempt to run the blockade would result in capture. All Confederate vessels were, of course, captured.³

According to international law the blockade, to be binding, must be effectual. For many months it was little more than a proclamation. The Annual Report of Gideon Welles (1861) states the main course of action the Navy would attempt to follow concerning the blockade and its related duties.

³Welles to Stringham, May 1, 1861, O. R. N., Series I, V, 621-22.
These were

1. The closing of all the insurgent ports along a coast of nearly three thousand miles, in the form and under the exacting regulations of an international blockade, including the naval occupation and defense of the Potomac, from its mouth to the federal capital, as the boundary line between Maryland and Virginia, and also the main commercial avenue to the principal base of our military operations.

2. The organization of combined naval and military expeditions to operate in force against various points of the Southern coast, rendering efficient naval cooperation with the position and movements of such expeditions when landed, including also all needful naval aid to the army in cutting intercommunications with the rebels and units operating on the Mississippi and its tributaries; and

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

Thus, the blockade was brought together piecemeal, one or two ships as they were built, purchased, converted or brought back from overseas service. It took several months before the leading ports were blockaded and several years before such ports as Mobile and Wilmington were completely closed to blockade runners.

During the summer of 1861, U. S. naval vessels began to appear, one by one, off various parts of the Southern coast. Notices were given, some informally, of the purpose of the vessels. Garrett J. Pendergrast, the commanding

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officer at Hampton Roads, issued a formal document on April 30, calling attention to the President's proclamation and serving notice that he had a sufficient force there for the purpose of carrying out the proclamation. He also stated that vessels coming from a distance, unaware of the proclamation, would be warned off.\(^5\)

While Pendergrast had some vessels in Hampton Roads, he had no force whatever on the coast of North Carolina, which placed him on dubious grounds concerning the blockade's legality. This early legalism was important to neutrals in particular. Until the blockade was an accomplished fact, neutrals had the right to be warned off. If the blockaders were insufficient in number and unable to establish an obvious de facto blockade, its legality was open to serious question.\(^6\)

Shortly after the blockade was established, Welles appointed a board to formulate strategy and study the coast of the South Atlantic states. Captain S. F. Du Pont was brought to the capitol to head this board. Du Pont had the assistance of specialists in the Corps of Engineers and the U. S. Coast Survey.\(^7\) The Secretary also recalled ships

\(^5\)Soley, Blockade, p. 32.

\(^6\)Ibid.

\(^7\)O. R. N., Series I, XII, 195-206.
from foreign stations and set up three blockading squadrons. The Atlantic Blockading Squadron was under Silas Stringham. William Mervine headed the Gulf Squadron, while the Home Squadron in the West Indies was under Pendergrast. The first two squadrons commenced the blockade, while the third was to protect merchant ships from the depredations of Confederate privateers.

Welles hastened to strengthen the blockade. During the first nine months 76 vessels were repaired and recommissioned from the old navy, while 136 were purchased and 52 constructed, giving a total of 264 ships. The number of seamen was raised from 7,600 to 22,000. Thus, little time was lost in making a start toward an effective blockade, although the Secretary was handicapped for the first several months.

Slowly but surely, the inexorable ring around the Confederacy was established. The Niagara took position off Charleston on May 11. On the 19th she was replaced by the Harriet Lane, who cruised the area until the arrival of the powerful and permanent blockader, Minnesota. On May 28, the blockade of Savannah was established.

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9Jones, The Civil War at Sea, I, 119.
The blockade began in earnest around the entrance and inside the Chesapeake Bay. By July 1, the Atlantic Squadron consisted of twenty-two ships, most of which were stationed in Hampton Roads or cruising off the coast. Regardless of Union efforts, however, it was obvious that there were gross deficiencies. Wilmington, later to become one of the leading ports for the blockade runners, was still open while nearly two hundred openings for commerce—bays, channels, rivers, swamps and lagoons—went virtually unchallenged. Local newspapers delighted in boasting of how ships arrived and sailed with impunity. A British cruiser investigated the leading ports of the rebellion to ascertain the validity of the blockade. He also found it wanting.

Every few days Flag Officer Stringham, commander of the Atlantic Blockading Squadron, sent requests for more ships. Stringham had commenced operations with just fourteen vessels, and with these he was expected to maintain a strict blockade of the entire Southern coastline from Hampton Roads to Key West, a distance of some 1000 miles. This constant carping by Stringham at a time when Welles was

10 Soley, Blockade, p. 35.
11 Ibid.
scraping the barrel led him to suspect that perhaps the blockade could not be rendered as effective as first suspected.

Welles wrote to Stringham, "It is possible that some of the lighter craft may be in thick weather and at night run the blockade, but your great effort will be to prevent it."12

Welles's problem was getting the right kind of ships for his blockaders. The vessels had to be light enough to chase blockade runners, deep enough in the water to ride out storms and light enough draft to go near the shallow inlets. Realizing the pressing need for more ships, Welles unified the four ships of Pendergrast's Home Squadron with those of Stringham.13

The only base for the Atlantic Blockading Squadron was Hampton Roads, the safest and most commodious anchorage guarded by nearby Fortress Monroe. Other bases were too far North, while Hampton Roads was close enough to offer advantages as a supply base for coal and water.

The Norfolk yard was one of the three principal navy yards in the United States. In it were shops, sheds, machine shops and storehouses. Here were housed large quantities of valuable tools, machines and provisions, plus 2000 pieces of artillery.

12Welles to Stringham, June 5, 1861; O. R. N., Series I, V, 701-2.

13West, Mr. Lincoln's Navy, p. 60
There was a large stone drydock and near it were twelve ships. The *Merrimac*, worth $1,200,000, was one of these. The yard's worth was estimated at about $9,780,000.\(^\text{14}\)

Strategically, the yard was an offensive necessity for the Union and a defensive one for the Confederacy. To the Confederates, the ordnance stores were priceless. Due to the sensitivity of the Virginians, little was done to formulate a general plan for defense. When the Old Dominion seceded from the Union steps were belatedly taken to destroy all the property and abandon the yard. The work of destruction was hasty and ill-planned, allowing much valuable property to fall into the hands of the Confederates.\(^\text{15}\)

This vital base was retaken when General George McClellan's cautious advance up the James river peninsula necessitated a Confederate evacuation of Norfolk and scuttling of the ironclad *Virginia*. Re-occupation of this strategic area went far toward rectifying the early tragedy of the war when the Confederacy salvaged much Federal material and the hulk of the sunken *Merrimac*.

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\(^{15}\) Ibid.
The plan for tightening the blockade consisted of stationing large ships further outside a harbor and greater numbers of smaller vessels closer in. These vessels suffered from want of nearby coaling stations however, and it was particularly exasperating for Flag Officer Stringham to see them scurrying back to Fortress Monroe continually for fuel. There was a dire need for a supply base at the Southern extremity of the blockade.  

Three principal points early became objects of the blockade because of their commercial importance. They were Wilmington, Charleston and Savannah. The first two afforded special advantages to blockade runners and had well protected harbors, safe from attack and therefore remaining important until the end of the war.  

The geography of the Southern coastline helped the Federal Navy eventually develop concentration against these ports. The seacoast is fringed with low-lying islands which produce a complicated network of protected shallow water. These waters were too shallow for sea-going ships and restricted to shallow-draft vessels. Large numbers of these craft were captured

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16West, Mr. Lincoln's Navy, p. 61.

17Soley, Blockade, p. 85.
SECTION OF
C. WOOLWORTH COLTON'S
NEW GUIDE MAP
OF THE
UNITED STATES AND CANADA

With Railroads, Counties etc.

Figure 1 Map of the South Seacoast 1863.
by the blockade in the early months of the war allowing the Navy to concentrate later on the seaports.\(^1\)

The British naturally felt inclined to regard the blockade as a menace to trade. During the Napoleonic Wars the United States had insisted that this blockade be "effective." Now in a reversed role the United States could expect the British to challenge the blockade's effectiveness. This was accomplished indirectly by Charles Prioleau, the Confederate fiscal agent in Liverpool, associate of Fraser, Trenholn and Company. A cargo vessel duly made the voyage with no interference and with such impunity that the company bought and operated a fleet of blockade runners.\(^2\)

The need to blockade the secondary inlets and harbors was also a pressing problem. All too often ships, seeing that they were unable to enter Charleston, cruised up or down the coast, entering at some totally uncovered port or bay.\(^3\)

At other points along the Atlantic coast the blockade was more of a gesture than a threat. Daily reports of ships defying

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\(^1\) Bern Anderson, *By Sea and River*, p. 215.

\(^2\) Ibid., p. 216.

\(^3\) Ibid.
the blockade disturbed the Secretary and his Blockade Commander, Stringham. Many of these runners came from Bermuda, Nassau or New Brunswick. Southerners were also sending out commerce destroyers such as the Jefferson Davis, Dixie and Savannah. New York insurance companies sounded frantic cries to cease these depredations on the high seas, but the Navy did not have the ships to plug the leaky blockade, let alone pursue the raiders.\textsuperscript{21}

In late July, Welles presented a proposal to Lincoln to seize a suitable location along the Atlantic coast for a naval base and coaling station. A strike "down the flank of the enemy" was agreed upon even though the government was still reeling from the Bull Run debacle. Captain Du Pont was placed in command of the naval forces to be used.\textsuperscript{22}

Port Royal, South Carolina was chosen as the object of attack. It provided a fine anchorage, several miles wide and twenty miles inland. It lay within the boundary of South Carolina, chief architect of secession, and interposed between Charleston and Savannah. Capture of this point would have practical as well as psychological advantages of an incalculable nature. On August 3 Welles wrote Du Pont that "The

\textsuperscript{21} West, \textit{Mr. Lincoln's Navy}, p. 63.

\textsuperscript{22} Welles to Goldsborough, September 18, 1861, \textit{O.R.N.}, Series I, VI, 233-34.
importance of this expedition cannot be overestimated.\textsuperscript{23} Du Pont was ordered to New York for a conference with the navy, and was to prepare the expedition with all possible speed. The expedition was shelved for the time being, however. Troops could not be spared from the Washington area as continual Confederate threats to the Capitol necessitated keeping large forces near there. Delays led to postponement and it was Lincoln who finally issued a directive to the War Department that the "joint expedition of the Army and Navy, agreed upon some time since... is in no wise to be abandoned, but must be ready to move by the first of or very early in October."\textsuperscript{24}

In August the Navy conducted offensive operations against the North Carolina sounds. Welles issued the order to Flag Officer Stringham for this move on the same day that Du Pont was ordered to prepare for Fort Royal. The order instructed him to sink hulks loaded with stones across the inlets to the sounds.\textsuperscript{25}

\textsuperscript{23}Welles to Du Pont, August 3, 1861, O. R. N. Series I, XII, 207.

\textsuperscript{24}The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies (1880) VI, 171 (hereafter cited as O. R.).

\textsuperscript{25}Test, Mr. Lincoln's Navy, p. 75.
The plan also called for attacking the two forts guarding the mouth of Hatteras Inlet. Welles was finally able to obtain 880 men from Fortress Monroe under command of General Benjamin F. Butler to assist Stringham. The naval commander's lack of enthusiasm contrasted markedly with the impetuous Butler—anxious to prove his professional military detractors wrong. Stringham had already informed Welles that blocking the inlets was absurd as "a single gale often closes up a channel and opens a new one."^26

Butler, utilizing his extraordinary political gifts, offered a plan to capture and utilize the Hatteras Inlet as a naval base rather than attempt to destroy it, a plan which appealed to Stringham. Butler satisfied Washington's doubts and the plan was begun.

On August 28 an expedition of troops and seven warships headed for Hatteras Inlet.^27 After a brisk bombardment accompanied by an amphibious landing, the Confederates deserted the first fort and withdrew to the second. The following day the second fort succumbed.

Butler returned to Washington seeking the retention of Hatteras as a naval base rather than destruction of the forts

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^26 West, Mr. Lincoln's Navy, p. 75.

^27 O. R. N., Series I, VI, 120.
and channel. New orders were issued not to sink the block
ships and to convert Hatteras into a base. Supplies were
sent to the troops now stationed there.28

It was after the Hatteras episode that relations between
Stringham and Washington, already frayed, finally snapped.
Stringham failed to clear the inland waterways of North
Carolina and Virginia, or sink blockships in the other inlets
as Welles had directed. Under pressure from the press and
insinuations that the Army and Navy were uncooperative with
one another, Stringham resigned and Welles was happy to
receive his resignation.29

The Navy Department had seen the necessity of dividing
the Atlantic coast into two sections, and Welles had antici-
pated trouble with Stringham over a proposed reduction of
his force when the division would be made. The Secretary
dropped a surprise and warning to the officers of the navy in
choosing L. M. Goldsborough and S. F. Du Pont respectively,
to the commands of the North and South Atlantic Blockading
Squadrons.30 He was picking men by ability, not seniority.

28 Fox to Stringham, September 1, 1861, O. R. N.,
Series I, VI, 131.

29 Stringham to Welles, September 16, 1861, Ibid.,
pp. 216-17.

30 Welles to Goldsborough, September 18, 1861, Ibid.,
pp. 233-34.
Welles had now decided that the blockade must be made more strict, and he sought to establish a higher level of efficiency by putting a retirement board to work, weeding out the inefficient but well meaning officers. The heretofore neglected inlets on the coast, "... neglected since the capture of Hatteras... should be executed with as little delay as possible." He also stated the intent of the Navy to prosecute the Port Royal plans with vigor. Welles also admonished his naval commanders to cooperate in every way with the sister service. He warned Du Pont, "The President expects and requires... the most cordial and effective cooperation... and will hold any commander of either branch to a strict responsibility for any failure to procure harmony and secure the results proposed."^{32}

By October 22 the expedition for Fort Royal had been mobilized and was waiting for a break in the weather before sailing. This expedition represented the largest amphibious undertaking ever attempted by the United States and involved some 75 vessels. The army had collected 25 transports to carry the 16,927 soldiers, and there were numerous auxiliaries

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^{31}Welles to Goldsborough, September 18, 1861, O. R. N., Series I, VI, 233-34

^{32}West, Mr. Lincoln's Navy, p. 82.
to bring the provisions and horses.\textsuperscript{33}

Several delays ensued while the expedition waited at Fortress Monroe. It was discovered that the supply vessels had been loaded incorrectly and it would take four days to unload the small arms ammunition located in the holds of the vessels. General Wool of Fortress Monroe gave the army 350,000 rounds of cartridges from the magazine of the Fort and when the expedition had not sailed within the week, the commanding officer, General Thomas W. Sherman, was obliged to request from the fort sufficient rations for the troops.\textsuperscript{34}

On October 29 Du Pont and Sherman were finally able to sail and the huge formation ploughed into a hurricane off Cape Hatteras. Several ships were wrecked and most were dispersed. On November 2 there was only one ship left near Du Pont’s flagship, but sealed orders to all the scattered captains were opened and slowly they all trickled in to unite off the Port Royal bar. By November 5, twenty-five of the ships had congregated there.\textsuperscript{35} At 8:00 A. M. on Thursday, November 7, eight days after leaving Hampton Roads, Du Pont

\textsuperscript{33}Ibid., p. 83.

\textsuperscript{34}Jones, \textit{The Civil War at Sea}, I, 265.

\textsuperscript{35}\textit{R. N.}, Series I, XII, 242.
Figure 3. Map of Port Royal
steamed the largest task force of the war toward the Confederate forts.36

The hurricane had destroyed so many of the small boats that the troops would not be able to be used against the fort. The Navy would have to attack alone. Forts Walker and Beauregard lay on each side of the channel Du Pont intended to sail through. Attacking in two groups, the squadrons moved slowly ahead, discharging shell against Fort Walker. Shortly after noon, Fort Walker was abandoned and at 2:00 P. M. the first federal flag to be raised on South Carolina soil since Fort Sumter fell, was hoisted. Marines and sailors took possession of Fort Beauregard, also abandoned by the retreating Confederates the following morning.37 The Secretary of the Navy sent his "hearty congratulations" and salutes were fired at all navy yards. Congress passed a joint resolution of thanks to Captain Samuel F. Du Pont, "for the decisive and splendid victory achieved at Fort Royal on the seventh day of November last."38 Thus, the navy had won a significant victory over the center of secessionism and established a haven for the blockaders on the South Atlantic coast.

36 Ibid., p. 262.
37 Ibid., p. 286.
38 Welles to Du Pont, July 30, 1862, Ibid., p. 291.
Although Goldsborough had fifty vessels in February, 1862, with which to maintain the blockade from Washington, D. C. along the coast to the northern boundary of South Carolina, he still did not have all the ships he needed. There were three areas within his command that still presented insuperable problems. The Potomac and lower Chesapeake Bay constituted one, while the North Carolina sounds and the ports of Wilmington and Beaufort, North Carolina, were another. Off the Wilmington and Beaufort coasts, the blockaders carried out the usual responsibilities associated with the maintenance of the blockade. They warned off neutrals, kept Southern ships in port, boarded occasional merchantmen and very infrequently captured an attempted violator. Alfred T. Mahan, then a young blockade officer, wrote, "Day after day, day after day, we lay inactive, roil, roil."39

During the winter of 1861-62 it was decided to eliminate Confederate strength in the Carolina sounds in cooperation with the army and General Ambrose Burnside. Stringham's capture of Hatteras had necessitated this endeavor. Thirteen thousand troops were allocated for the project, which exemplified the importance attached to the expedition.40

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40 West, Mr. Lincoln's Navy, p. 108.
Figure 4 - Pamlico and Albemarle Sound
The campaign had as its objectives the capture of Roanoke Island between Pamlico and Albemarle Sounds, operations against the towns on Albemarle Sound including the blocking of the Albemarle and Chesapeake Canal, and an island strike toward Raleigh to cut the railroad from Richmond to Charleston. The latter objective was the only one not accomplished as the troops would be recalled by McClellan for the Peninsular campaign.

The sand bar in front of Hatteras inlet delayed Goldsborough and Burnside for three weeks as they sought to get their transports and supply ships across it. The inner bar across Pamlico Sound also caused some delay as the vessels had to be lightened even further. A fleet of armed Confederate tugboats was destroyed and Burnside was able to quickly overrun the small Confederate army sent to check him. The capture of Roanoke Island effectively cut off Norfolk from nearly all supply lines. Possession of this area also prevented the Confederacy from utilizing these sounds as blockade runner bases.

The success at Pamlico and Albemarle Sounds did not alter the location of the base for the North Atlantic Blockading

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41 Ibid., p. 109.

42 Jones, The Civil War at Sea, I, 385.
Squadron, which continued to be at Hampton Roads. Occasional sorties by small Confederate warships maintained an everlasting peril for the unwary supply boats near Fortress Monroe and Hampton Roads. These craft, when attacked, would scurry under cover of Confederate land batteries. The real threat was directed toward the blockading warships and came in the form of the rebuilt ironclad, C. S. S. Virginia. A change in the concept of naval warfare and armor was ushered in when the Monitor and Virginia rained shot upon each other. While tactically the battle was a draw, it had utmost significance strategically in that the blockade was saved from the one threat that only the Monitor could check.

The battle of the ironclads had raised as many questions as it had answered. Should ironclads completely replace the now apparently obsolete wooden warships? Their seaworthiness was another important consideration. Anxious to answer in the affirmative on both counts was the renowned naval architect and engineer, John A. Dahlgren. Currently testing a new fifteen inch gun, Dahlgren personified the new era of naval development. He hoped to command the impending ironclad

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43 West, Mr. Lincoln's Navy, p. 110.

44 Fox to Welles, March 8, 1862, O. R. N., Series I, VII, 6, 7.
attack on Charleston, recently planned because of the Monitor's effectiveness. In this endeavor he had the support of the President, who was his ardent admirer.\textsuperscript{45}

By fall of 1862, the blockade was still largely ineffectual. Du Pont had maintained a reasonable check on the large sea-ports, considering the inadequate forces he had and the interference he suffered. He had been ordered on occasion, to chase blockade runners and detach ships for specialized tasks.\textsuperscript{46}

However, a change was now slowly developing concerning the blockading strategy. Until now the thinking had held that the way to stop the South from trading was to close the area off by squadrons of ships. Ironclads had now presented the possibility of conducting offensive naval operations against fortified harbor positions. Charleston was the likely location for an attack of this kind. This port had become something of a psychological target as well as an important port for blockade runners. The President, particularly, desired this symbol of rebellion firmly in Union hands.

Welles, in theory, denied Dahlgren's request to command the monitors because he was too valuable to be taken from the

\textsuperscript{45}M. V. Dahlgren, Memoirs of John A. Dahlgren (Boston, 1882), p. 49; Welles, Diary, I, 158.

\textsuperscript{46}Welles to Du Pont, October 8, 1861, O. R. N., Series I, XII, 212.
Actually, the Secretary possibly was aware that Dahlgren was more the scholar than the battle leader and felt that his services were better suited in research, an area obviously totally unsuited to the cantankerous Du Pont.

Since promotions were given for victories in battle, Dahlgren was blocked. Lincoln even went so far as to suggest that a promotion initiated by the Secretary would receive positive attention. Welles called the inventor to Washington and Du Pont was notified that the ironclads would soon be sent. After the conference, Dahlgren was given a promotion to the rank of Rear Admiral and given the title, Chief of the Bureau of Ordnance, a position which only partially quelled the growing desire to lead his monitors into battle.

At Charleston, the need for the attack daily became more obvious. Running the blockade was becoming a practiced profession with its own rigid requirements for success. By the beginning of 1863 special ships, low, long, greyhounds with disappearing stacks that could blow off steam below water,

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48 Welles, *Diary*, I, 163-64.

began sliding by the hulking blockaders at Charleston.\textsuperscript{50} Their very presence was an indication that the "paper blockade" was indeed, more effective than the Confederates cared to admit.

Thus, the blockade, which had been only a proclamation in the beginning, had settled down to a dragnet of sorts. To be sure, it was incomplete and much more traffic went unhindered than was caught. Neutral ships sometimes ran in and out of Southern ports with such aplomb as to make one wonder if the blockaders were conniving to prolong the war.\textsuperscript{51}

Nevertheless, certain valuable cargoes were intercepted by the Northern greyhounds from time to time. One of these "plums" was driven ashore by Du Pont's blockaders off Charleston on January 29, 1863, carrying what was probably the most priceless cargo of the war. Besides the usual cargo of guns, small arms and ammunition, the fast British \textit{Princess Royal} had on board two tremendous steam engines built for ironclads and a crew of expert machinists, "to instruct the rebels in the management of new machinery and in the manufacture of steel-pointed projectiles." The prize was so valuable that the

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{50} Downes to Wise, September 11, 1862, \textit{O. R. N.}\textit{ Series I, XIII, 324.}

\item \textsuperscript{51} West, Mr. Lincoln's \textit{Navy}, p. 288.
\end{itemize}
Confederates risked their two ironclads in an abortive attempt to recapture the precious cargo.\textsuperscript{52}

The Navy thus maintained a sometimes leaky but fairly effective blockade. Of foremost consideration was how to close the port of Charleston, a source of general futility for the blockaders. The plan involved the use of ironclads which were being gathered for a Farragut-like assault, but while the Union waited for ironclads the Confederates continued to filter through the ring of ships outside the bar.

\textsuperscript{52}Du Pont to Welles, February 24, 1863, \textit{O. R. N.}, Series I, XIII, 556.
CHAPTER III
TIGHTENING THE NOOSE

The impending attack by ironclads on Charleston was to be patterned after the brilliant dash by Farragut at New Orleans. Du Pont was expected to take relatively untried inventions and steam past the dangerous forts in the harbor virtually up to the docks. Such bravado was demanded in view of the fact that Farragut had accomplished essentially the same thing with wooden ships.

Obviously this expectation did not take into consideration the numerous batteries of guns which would be continually hammering at the ironclad fleet. Farragut had steamed his fleet past two forts, to be sure. He had even snapped a chain of obstacles in his path with the help of "sappers", but attacking Charleston harbor with its prearranged artillery crossfires every foot of the way, was many times more difficult than attacking the defenses of New Orleans. To accomplish this in revolutionary warships with unfamiliar crews was tantamount to requesting the impossible.

Du Pont continued his usual routine of the blockade and waited for the ironclads to be sent to him. Of the two
existing ironclads, the Galena was considered too thin-skinned and was not dispatched to Du Pont. The Monitor, flushed from its success over the Merrimac, foundered off Cape Hatteras, revealing the unseaworthiness of the new craft. The newer monitors suffered from the same problem. Several had to stop at the Washington navy yard for repairs. Since there were no skilled workmen for the new iron ships, they had to be detained at the yard while specialists were brought in to make repairs. This interim brought scores of visitors who delighted in inspecting every facet of the new vessels, much to the consternation of the naval officers. It was on one such unofficial inspection that the President and some members of his cabinet crawled over every portion of the warships.

The delays were exasperating and northern newspapers demanded action. The need to somehow end blockade running in and out of Charleston became daily more obvious. The Federals repeatedly complained how difficult a place it was

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1O.R.N., Series I, VIII, 412.

2West, Mr. Lincoln's Navy, p. 226.

3Ibid.
to blockade. Captain John Downes expressed this same sense of futility:

I am kept pretty constantly upon blockade service, and hard and discouraging duty it is, off Charleston. I do not believe it possible to blockade the place effectually, and at times I am inclined to believe that with good pilots and judicious choice of time and opportunity, the blockade is but a trifling impediment in the way of steamers entering the harbor, painted lead color as they are; of a dark night, or a rainy one, they will pass, or can pass, within a few hundred yards without being detected, and, guided by signal inside the harbor, they almost invariably manage to avoid the blockading vessels. I would be glad if I could only impress upon you some faint notion of how disgusting it is to us, after going through the anxieties of riding out a black, rainy, windy night in three or three and one half fathoms of water, with our senses all on the alert for sound of paddles or sight of miscreant violator of our blockade and destroyer of our peace, when morning comes to behold him lying there placidly inside of Fort Sumter, as if his getting there was the most natural thing in the world and the easiest.

Charleston's defenders, anticipating the not-too-secret attack, stretched chains and nets of obstructions festooned with "torpedoes" across the inner channels and erected extra batteries of artillery along the shoreline.

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4DuPont to Welles, September 2, 1862, O.R.N., Series I, XIII, 292.

5Downes to Wise, September 11, 1862, Ibid., p. 324.
The Confederates were preparing for the anticipated assault by constructing iron-plated rams. Du Pont grew less enthusiastic about the attack as he waited for the ironclads. In writing to Commodore Bailey, he stated,

You are aware there is no 'running by;' the harbor is a bog, or cul de sac, to say nothing of obstructions, which ironclads are much less serviceable in removing, as you know, than wooden vessels with their boats and appliances. I hope and believe we can do the job as well as most people. I shall certainly try.6

In view of the Confederate attempts to break the blockade at Charleston, Du Pont requested all of the ironclads Welles could spare. After receiving them he still procrastinated. Finally he launched his attack on April 7, 1963, while another prodding message was on its way to him.

The attack was made by nine monitors, each mounting an eleven-inch and a fifteen-inch Dahlgren gun. All vessels were hit numerous times, shearing off bolts and damaging plates,7 enough to discourage Du Pont into what General Hunter feared—a period of inactivity.8 The forts were easily able to withstand the attack. Du Pont sent a messenger to report the misfortune to Welles and to report the Commander's

6Du Pont to Bailey, October 30, 1862, Ibid., p. 423.
7Ibid., XIV, 51.
8Hunter to Lincoln, May 22, 1863, Ibid., pp. 32-35.
decision to abandon the attack. Welles and the President were appalled when they discovered Du Pont's desire to cancel the project. Not understanding the concentration of fire on the monitors, Welles believed Du Pont had sent his messenger home to "howl" and to "strengthen faith in himself and impair faith in the monitors."\(^9\)

On April 13 Lincoln telegraphed Du Pont: "Hold your position inside the bar near Charleston, or if you shall have left it, return to it and hold it until further orders. . ."\(^10\) Du Pont had instead returned the monitors to Port Royal for repairs and shipment to Farragut in the Gulf. This and other disagreements, plus the fixed attitude of defeatism led to Du Pont's removal and eventual replacement by Lincoln's favorite, Dahlgren. The new commander of the South Atlantic Blockading Squadron did not resort to another dash against Charleston, but with his new Army associate, engineer and Major General Quincy A. Gilmore, commenced a long and arduous campaign on nearby Morris Island. Here the monitors proved valuable support while the Army, in an extensive campaign, slowly subdued the island and its strategic fort which


\(^10\)Lincoln to Du Pont, April 13, 1863, *O.R.N.* Series I, XIV, 132.
guarded the approaches to the harbor of Charleston.\textsuperscript{11}

Friction developed between Dahlgren and Gilmore over the command of naval troops designated to assault Fort Wagner. Welles quickly defended his naval commander while remarking that both men were better "... as ordnance officers than in active command.\textsuperscript{12} Federal occupation of the fort finally accomplished the purpose of sealing off Charleston as an easy port for blockade runners while long range artillery threw hundreds of shells into the city.

Thus success at Charleston came only partially for the Federal Navy. Charleston was no longer the flagrant example of impunity to the United States flag, for blockade runners found the ingress and egress to the port far more hazardous than before.\textsuperscript{13} Dahlgren said it was closed to all but specially designated ships and even these found passage difficult. So thorough did the watch become that a vessel on the way out, whose presence was only known by seeing her two masts cut off the light momentarily on Sumter, was captured by the

\textsuperscript{11}Ibić., p. 567.

\textsuperscript{12}Welles, Diary, I, 475.

\textsuperscript{13}Soley, Blockade, p. 108.
observers signalling the cruisers outside.\textsuperscript{14} The port could never be completely closed, for specially designated runners continued to occasionally get in and out up the the end of the war.

The capture of Fort Pulaski and the victory at Port Royal had already closed Savannah as a useful port and the additional ships were added to the operations at Charleston. In the early months of 1863, Welles could find satisfaction in the fact that there were more vessels on a single station than the Navy had in commission at the outbreak of the war.\textsuperscript{15} The Confederacy made several abortive attempts to lift the blockade of the South Atlantic squadrons, employing ironclads and even a primitive submarine, but all were futile.\textsuperscript{16}

Two years of war had resulted in the closing of Savannah as a useful port to the Confederacy, while Charleston's effectiveness was greatly retarded. As these ports lost significance new ones opened up to exasperate and frustrate Northern attempts to choke the South completely by sea.

\textsuperscript{14}\textit{Ibid.}

\textsuperscript{15}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 116.

\textsuperscript{16}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 118.
One of the most successful ports for blockade runners was Wilmington, North Carolina. Wilmington had become the more prominent port for blockade running because it was reached by a stream that had two widely separated entrances, each defended by strong fortification: Fort Fisher at New Inlet on the east, and Fort Smith and Caswell at Western Bar, the lower mouth. Each required as many blockaders as Charleston according to Admiral Lee. At New Inlet blockade runners could hug the shore and quietly slip by without being heard, due to the surf pounding on the shore and the inability to see against the background of land. Since the beginning of the war this port had mushroomed in growth until it finally became the chief port for blockade running. So effective was Wilmington that despite the numerous blockaders off shore, runners ran in and out almost adhering to schedule.

Signaling with rockets was a favorite method of the blockaders to notify each other that a runner had been spotted. In theory the rocket was to be fired in the general direction of the route taken by the fleeing ship. Often it was difficult to tell which way the rocket was

17Lee to Fox, February 20, 1865, O.R.N., Series I, IX, 495.
In an old chart the markings are not very

To York 21st June 1864.

INDORMENT

forwarded to the Chief of Staff, U.S.A., with my

letter and project of this date.

Q. MILLMORE,

Capt. Cap.

SMITHVILLE

SMITH'S ISLAND

Wilmington Approaches

Figure 6
pointing, making this technique less than satisfactory. After a rocket was fired several blockade vessels would go off in pursuit of the culprit, each on a different course in hopes of sighting the runners. Often a chase would develop if the runner was sighted, with blockader running down the fleeing ship and capturing it.

For days at a stretch the blockaders would lie in wait without making any captures, a drain on their nerves and their patience. While many of the blockade runners were Englishmen, a good many of them were Northerners from New York. These money-makers were not so concerned with the cause of the Confederacy as they were in amassing a large fortune. In 1861 it was estimated that about one runner out of every nine was lost. By 1862 one in seven was lost, while in '63 one in four was lost. Profits were so high that after two successful runs it was said that an investor could stand to lose his ship.

Admiral Lee attempted to tighten the blockade outside Wilmington but the blockade runners still continued to get

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20Jones, *The Civil War at Sea*, III, 78.
through. The odds favored the blockade runners, as they could pick the time for a dash. If the Federal vessels came too close in, they risked destruction on rocks or by gunfire from forts.\textsuperscript{21} In ten months, ninety vessels slipped past the blockaders. In one month a runner came in on an average of one every other day and on some days four or five would make it through. The frustration of the blockaders was expressed by one on board ships:

There ought to be ten blockade runners caught where we now get one. We have fifteen miles to guard, and to do it we have sometimes four and sometimes only two vessels. Ten vessels is the least number we ought to have. The blockade seems to be a farce, and I am ashamed and disgusted with the whole thing.\textsuperscript{22}

The U. S. Consul at Nassau wrote that:

Since I have been here there have been as many as one hundred and twenty-four trips; but twelve steamers have been lost or captured. . . . Under such circumstances England can set up a plausible claim that the blockade is not such as to meet the demands of public law, and make a good case to foreign powers. The fact is, success of the runners is the rule and capture the exception.\textsuperscript{23}

\textsuperscript{21}David Porter, \textit{Naval History of the Civil War} (New York, 1886), p. 35.

\textsuperscript{22}Scharf, \textit{History of the Confederate States Navy}, p. 475.

\textsuperscript{23}O.R.N., Series I, II, 221.
Despite the difficulties experienced by the blockaders, the Confederacy did begin to feel the effects on its economy. Freight rates soared with the tightening of the blockade, ranging from $300 to $1000 a ton. Wages were also very high, with ship captains receiving as much as $5,000 for a single run; the chief officer, $1,250; second and third officers, $750 each; the chief engineer, $2,500; the crew and firemen, $250 each; and the pilot, $3,500. High wages were demanded because effective blockade running necessitated exacting qualities. The blockade runners had the cunning of a fox, the patience of Job and the bravery of a Spartan warrior.

Since good run through the blockade brought tremendous prices, the Confederacy was often hard put to meet these expenses. An economic hardship was placed on the South even when goods were successfully brought through the blockade. In order to prevent the profligate importation of luxury items at the expense of the military necessities, the Confederate government passed restrictive laws. Financiers for blockade runners wrote home about the immense fortunes to be made by shipping

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24 Jones, The Civil War at Sea, III, 82.
goods to the Confederacy. One Alfred Judah wrote from Nassau that:

... four out of every six vessels that start to run the blockade succeed, and goods of all kinds are worth ridiculous prices there. ... There is one man here who commenced in this line of business as soon as the war broke out and he has made over $2,000,000.26

Thus blockade running became a necessity if the Confederacy was to survive for any length of time. The collective port for blockade runners was Nassau, Bermuda. This once quiet fishing port became a teeming center of activity during the Civil War.27 After a visit to Nassau in 1863, Judge J. S. Bosworth, Chief Justice of the New York Superior Court, told of a harbor bustling with activity. "There are over twenty swift, light-draft steamers running regularly between this and Wilmington," he stated. "Over one million rifles and any quantity of cannon and ammunition have gone from this port, the steamers bringing back cotton and other cargo."28

A particularly valuable cargo fell to the blockaders in the form of the Cornubia, a fast side-wheel steamer whose

26Jones, The Civil War at Sea, III, 83.
27Ibid.
28Bosworth to Harris, March 16, 1863, O.R.N., Series I, XIII, 781.
captain remarked that "... even though the Cornubia is a small vessel the Confederate government could better have afforded to lose almost any other vessel." The ship was laden with ammunition, arms, saltpeter and lead. A packet of papers thrown overboard before the capture was recovered by the blockaders and revealed that the Confederacy had lost all faith in intervention by England and France. On the following day, November 10, 1863, a runner was captured that had previously made twenty-one successful runs through the blockade.29

The experience of the English-built blockade runner, Kate, was an example of the growing efficiency of the blockade as well as the sophisticated counter measures to it. In daylight it was difficult to discern her presence more than a few yards away but at night she was virtually invisible.30 Nearly caught running into Charleston, this slim, long, low, side-wheel steamer was equipped with feathering paddles and rakish funnels that could be telescoped down to near the deck. Her hull skimmed only a few feet out of the water and the ship's

29Ibid., IX, 275.

30Jones, The Civil War at Sea, III, 74-75.
color blended with the sky. The two masts were short, with no yards, and she burned a smokeless coal. She could also blow off steam under water.\textsuperscript{31}

After a harried run through the blockade of eighteen ships, her skipper decided, on the second trip, that the blockade at Charleston had become too tight, and headed for Wilmington, only to be driven ashore early in the morning.

As one after another ship fell to the blockade during the first two weeks in November, 1863, foul play was suspected from commercial rivals in blockade trade. The Niphon, Ella and Annie were added in two nights to the previous bag of ships and resulted in a severe turn in the fortunes of the blockade war for the Confederacy. Within several weeks the Confederate government passed an act prohibiting the importation of cotton, tobacco, naval stores, sugar, molasses and rice, "except under such uniform regulations as shall be made by the President of the Confederate States."\textsuperscript{32}

Meantime, the blockade lapse at Wilmington continued to be recognized by the Secretary of the Navy although he was unable to stop the runners at the time. Welles complained,

\textsuperscript{31}O.R.N., Series I, IX, 123

\textsuperscript{32}O.R., Series 4, III, 78.
. . . I am attacked for not having more vessels before Wilmington, Mobile and other places and thus making the blockade completely effective, and accused of neglect and indifference for not sending off twenty ships to hunt up the Alabama. 33

Nevertheless, Welles saw the end of 1863 as indicative of the Union determination to destroy the Confederacy.

While the Navy was having trouble with blockade runners, the Confederacy was showing signs of strain after Gettysburg. The Secretary stated, "The Rebels show discontent, distrust and feebleness. They evidently begin to despair, and the loud declarations that they do not and will not yield confirm it." 34

By November, 1863, the tightening of the Union blockade particularly at Wilmington, was noted by one John Tory Bourne, Confederate Agent to Fraser, Trendholm and Company. He stated:

I regret I cannot advise further shipments of cotton, the Flora arrived yesterday with cotton from Wilmington and brings the news of five captures out of seven blockade runners, therefore you may not expect to receive over 300 bales in the next three months. 35

33 Welles, Diary, I, 499.
34 Ibid, p. 500
The blockade at Wilmington was anything but closed, however. The commander of the North Atlantic Blockading Squadron, Sam Lee, was apparently more concerned with the piling up of prize money from the capture of blockade runners. He would not move against Wilmington without powerful land cooperation. This objective could have easily been taken after Roanoke Island fell in 1862, when Yankee guns had terrified inhabitants and commenced antagonisms between local people and the Confederate government.36 Gideon Welles, however, believed that the blockade was effectively constricting the Confederacy and stabbing at the will to fight. He saw his department as one in which the plan for victory was running smoothly in comparison with the bungling of the army or the State Department.37

In one area, however, the Navy was torn apart by conflicts and outside pressures. This was the problem of the commerce-raiders, or "Rebel-pirates", that sank Union

36Welles, Diary, II, 146-47.
37Ibid., I, 519.
merchant vessels. Admonishing Captain Poor of the Brooklyn for allowing the raider, Sumter, to escape through the blockade, Welles tried to tighten the ring around Confederate ports and at the same time allowed blockaders en route north for repairs to conduct short search cruises for the raiders. Complaints from insurance and shipping interests had the effect of forcing Welles to detach occasional warships from the blockade in the attempt to run these vessels down. These raiders were successful in forcing the Navy Department to relax its grip on Southern seaports as Welles detached several ships to prowl the sea lanes astride strategic intersections such as the English Channel, Gibraltar, Capetown and Bahia. As the Alabama began sinking ships Welles added additional search vessels by chartering ships rather than further depleting the blockade. To prevent the blockaders from being overly tempted by an exciting "fox chase," he created a West India Squadron for the express purpose of chasing down the raiders.

38 West, Mr. Lincoln's Navy, p. 274.
39 Welles, Diary, II, 207.
40 West, Mr. Lincoln's Navy, p. 277.
41 Ibid.
Due to the depredations of the Confederate cruisers, "Uncle Gideon" was criticized in the Northern press. He was characterized in Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper as "the Old Man of the Sea," astride the shoulders of "Sinbad Lincoln," wading down the blockade coast. Another cartoon in Harper's Weekly depicted a senile old Secretary lounging on rocks labeled "Washington" and "Beaufort," reading a very old newspaper with cobwebs stretched between his slippers while a surface raider slipped out to sea.

If his problems consisted of keeping blockade runners from chasing will-of-the-wisps, he also had the troublesome Charles Wilkes, who had earlier practiced a quarter-deck decision in plucking the Confederate commissioners, Mason and Slidell, from aboard a British warship. This intrepid act had nearly brought Great Britain into the war on the side of the Confederacy and Wilkes had languished in inactivity ever since. Wilkes was now given the task of commanding the new squadron, tracking down the rebel raiders and protecting American shipping. Remembering his impetuosity,

42Illustrated Newspaper, May 3, 1862, p. 4.
43Harper's Weekly, April 12, 1862, p. 5.
Welles reminded Wilkes, "You will respect the rights of neutrals, always avoiding to give unnecessary offense while asserting the authority and enforcing the duties of your command." 44

Wilkes operated around Bermuda instead of patrolling in his allotted cruising area. His continual calls for more ships from the blockade irritated the Secretary, particularly when Wilkes showed more interest in collecting prize money through the seizure of blockade runners. 45 Eight months after his appointment he was recalled. The English had protested his bellicosity at Bermuda, an area which was outside his sphere of operations. He had also detained one of his ships that might have intercepted the Alabama. Welles characterized him as "erratic, impulsive, opinionated." 46

Only one serious attempt was made to raise the blockade of the North Atlantic Squadron and to end the occupation of the Sounds of North Carolina. This took place in 1864, when the powerful ironclad ram Albemarle made her appearance at Plymouth. This vessel had been built in a

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44 Welles to Wilkes, O.R.N., Series I, I, 470.
45 Welles, Diary, I, 304.
46 Ibid.
cornfield at Edward's Ferry on the Roanoke River. The Navy knew of her presence as early as June, 1863, but could not reach her due to the shallow water and artillery batteries that lined the river bank. The officer who discovered this threat, Charles W. Flusser, made insistent plans to the Admiral in command, the Navy Department and the Secretary of War to prevent its construction, but to no avail; and work continued unhindered.  

By 1864, the ram was completed and preparations were made to move against the Federal forces at Plymouth. After a brisk fight in which the Albemarle assisted, Plymouth was recaptured. The Navy Department was now determined to destroy the Albemarle and selected William B. Cushing, a proven hero under fire, to accomplish the task. In a most extraordinary manner Cushing guided a small launch at high speed toward the pen of logs that protected the Albemarle. Gliding over these obstacles, he extended a spar, which had a torpedo attached to the end. Carefully guiding it under the hull of the ironclad, Cushing detonated it. Such unbelievable heroics were accomplished while sentries fired...

48 O.R.N., Series I, X, 613.
49 Ibid., p. 624.
directly at him, their bullets whistling through his clothing but otherwise not harming him.\textsuperscript{49} As the Albemarle exploded, his tiny launch was swamped by the splash of a near miss and beached on the pen of logs. Incredibly, Cushing and one other crewman escaped. This deadly threat to the blockade existed no longer and a grateful Congress thanked this youthful hero. Congressional appreciation was rarely extended beyond the realm of exceptional combat heroics and the Secretary and his able assistant plodded meticulously along, if not lauded, albeit, at least unimpeded by a tacitly-approving Congress.

Unlike army administrators, Welles and Fox were not continually subject to criticisms and reviews of policy to any great extent. The one exception was the hostility of Senator John P. Hale, chairman of the Senate Committee on Naval Affairs. While the Secretary did not outwardly bristle at the misrepresentations and unwarranted attacks of criticism, and maintained courteous official relations with him,\textsuperscript{50} Welles set him down in his diary as

\textsuperscript{49}\textsuperscript{Ibid.}, p. 624.

\textsuperscript{50}\textsuperscript{Welles, Diary, I, 487.}
"a mass of corruption." In 1863 Hale was brought before the Senate Judiciary Committee on the charge that he had accepted a bribe from a man convicted of fraud against the government and had appeared before the Secretary of War on his behalf. The committee gave Hale the benefit of the doubt. It suggested the money was a fee rather than a bribe and exonerated him from wrongdoing, but at the same time indirectly censured him by including in its report a bill to outlaw such practice in the future.

Hale's threat to Welles and Fox was ended, and following his unsuccessful attempt at renomination to the Senate by a Republican caucus, he was made minister to Spain by President Lincoln to help "break his fall." This was to partially repay Hale for his help previously as a leader in the anti-slavery crusade and in the organization of the Republican party.

Thus, the untiring Secretary and his capable assistant independently sought measures that would tighten the blockade around Wilmington and cut off supplies to Lee's army.

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51 Ibid., p. 489.
52 Ibid., pp. 482-3, 489.
53 Ibid., II, 255.
While Welles could look back on the successful closing of Confederate ports, as long as Wilmington lay open, the Union naval efforts were incomplete.
CHAPTER IV

FINALE AT WILMINGTON

Three years of war had resulted in the closing of nearly all major ports and minor inlets of the Confederacy. Wilmington, the last major port on the Atlantic ocean, was the last and most difficult problem for the United States Navy. It was here that the Navy came nearer to failure than at any other point. Wilmington was closer to both Richmond and Bermuda than the other Confederate ports.

The Navy might effectively close other Southern ports, but one haven for blockade runners like Wilmington could conceivably suffice to serve the needs of the Confederacy. Thus, Union naval strategy sought to close this port since it was nearly impossible to blockade effectively. Ships seemed to pass through the cordons of vessels in spite of all precautions. The indecision of Admiral Sam P. Lee contributed to the general ineffectiveness, although he realized that Wilmington would have to be captured by a land attack. Lee's Senior Officer off Cape Fear reported:
It is greatly to our mortification, after all our watchfulness. None can be more vigilant than we are. The officer on the watch, with the quartermaster, always on the bridge, lookouts on each bow, gangway and quarter.¹ For myself, I never pretend to turn in at night, and am frequently on deck during the night inspecting the lookouts in person, taking what sleep I can get in my clothes, ready for a moment's call.²

Wilmington would have to be captured by land and sea forces working together. Since Fort Fisher was located at the Southern tip of a peninsula which had Wilmington as its base, the logical strategy was to have the fleet land ground forces interposing between the two. After much consultation and little support by the Army Chief-of-Staff, George Halleck, Welles authorized Lee to move against Wilmington on his own in the hope that he might accomplish something alone.³ Lee made several reconnaissance patrols close to Wilmington, but no major attack was launched.

In June, 1864 a reckless plan to capture Fort Fisher was partially attempted by Colonel James Jourdan, Commander of Union forces stationed at nearby Beaufort.

²Ibid.
³Welles to Lee, May 1, 1863, O.R.N., Series I, VIII, 834.
Jourdan sailed past the fort in a U. S. warship, deliberately drawing fire from the fort, but remained out of range. He then went aboard another ship and requested that the captain help him land fifteen hundred men on the beach between the hours of 11:00 P. M. and 1:00 A. M. The commander, J. C. Howell, thought the idea impossible as the rebels kept signal lights lit and in three hours he could land no more than three hundred and fifty men. 4

Early in September, Welles had decided that in order to close the door to Wilmington, he would need a more resourceful and energetic naval commander to lead the assault. He sent a dispatch to Admiral Farragut which outlined the lengthy history of futility at Wilmington and the fact that General U. S. Grant would soon be ready to send some of his troops to cooperate in a naval attack on the defenses of the Cape Fear river. This force could be expected to "... command the naval force," and he would be expected to "... be at Port Royal by the latter part of September, when further orders will await you." 5 Welles felt that to

4Jones, The Civil War at Sea, III, 311.

continue with Lee would impair the one real chance to deal the Confederacy a death-blow. He confided that, "He is true and loyal, prudent and cautious. Farragut would take the place three times while Lee was preparing, and hesitating, and looking behind for more aid." Farragut replied that he was overexerted and in bad health and he declined the position. This probably was the result of his very recent attack at Mobile Bay, which while successful was also exhausting. The aging admiral needed a period of recuperation and Welles was quick to remark that, "a life so precious must not be thrown away," and quickly cancelled the order.

The Secretary now called Admiral David D. Porter, second in fame to Farragut, to Washington. Welles was satisfied Porter was the man for the crucial task and stated,

Admiral Porter is probably the best man for the service, but his selection will cut Lee to the quick. Porter is young, and his rapid promotion has placed him in rank beyond those

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6 Welles, Diary, II, 146-47.

7 Welles to Farragut, September 22, 1864, O.R.N., Series I, X, 473.
who were his seniors, some of whom it might be well to have in this expedition. But again, personal considerations must yield to the public interest.®

Welles, Fox and Porter, "Talked over the subject of Wilmington," according to Welles. He soon discovered that Porter preferred to remain on the Mississippi river, "...but repeated what he has heretofore said, that he had been treated kindly by the Department, and if I ordered him to go over Niagara Falls in an iron pot he should obey the order." 9

Perhaps the most revealing grasp of strategy was reflected in Welles' determination to close Wilmington, the last effective port of the struggling Confederacy. He wrote,

The importance of closing Wilmington is paramount to all other questions, more important, practically, than the capture of Richmond. It has been impossible to get the War Department and military authorities to enter into the spirit of this work. They did not appreciate it. But they and Grant have now engaged in it, and Grant is persistent. 10

8Welles, Diary, II, 146-47
9Ibid., p. 148.
10Ibid., p. 146.
Porter brought a sense of efficiency and discipline unknown previously to the blockaders. Upon evening retirement of the crew guns were to be loaded and ready. In event of general alarm, the men, Porter stated, "... must not wait to dress themselves, but get to quarters with their clothes in their hands. They must be practiced constantly at night quarters."\(^{11}\) The new commander also instructed Commander W. H. Macomb, in charge of naval activity in the sounds, to outfit his boats with suitable grapnels to tackle the Albemarle, should that vessel descend from the Roanoke river. Porter said, "You will, in case she comes out, make a dash at her with every vessel you have, and 'lay her on board,' using canister to fire into her ports. ... Even if half your vessels are sunk you must pursue this course."\(^{12}\) To the intrepid Cushing, he promised a promotion in grade if he sank the Rebel ram Albemarle. Cushing accommodated his new commander and Porter was moved by what he termed, "... a heroic enterprise seldom equaled

\(^{11}\)Porter to Nichols, November 19, 1864, O.R.N., Series I, XI, 75-76.

\(^{12}\)Porter to Macomb, October 22, 1864, O.R.N., Series I, X, 594.
and never excelled." He said it was the kind of exploit that was. "an absolute disregard of death or danger . . . the spirit evinced by this officer is what I wish to see prevailing this squadron."\(^{13}\)

Weeks passed and still Grant did not send the necessary troops for the expedition. On October 28, Welles officially protested to the President:

Every other squadron has been depleted and vessels detached from other duty to strengthen this expedition. The vessels are concentrated at Hampton Roads and Beaufort, where they remain, an immense force lying idle, awaiting the movements of the army. The retention of so many vessels from blockade and cruising duty is a most serious injury to the public service, and if the expedition can not go forward for want of troops, I desire to be notified, so that the ships may be relieved and dispersed for other service. . . . The importance of closing Wilmington is so well understood by you that I refrain from presenting any new arguments. . . the autumn weather so favorable for such an expedition is fast passing away. The public expect this attack and the country will be distressed if it be not made; to procrastinate much longer will be to peril its success.\(^{14}\)

Lincoln did not prod Grant into action but General B. F. Butler provided a temporary answer, at least, to the Navy's

\(^{13}\) *O.R.N.*, Series I, X, 618.

predicament. Butler suggested an untried and somewhat bizarre idea. He suggested to Fox that a shipload of powder be sailed up to the fort and detonated, which hopefully would stun the garrison during the attack. The Navy Department examined reports made available by the eminent General Richard Delafield, chief engineer, showing the results of a recent such experiment in England. A special meeting was called by Assistant Secretary of the Navy Fox to consider this possibility and reports were sent to Porter with a request for his opinion on the subject. Porter approved the attempt, saying, "I was not opposed, myself, to the experiment, for I think anything worth trying ..." The powder boat was prepared and when Grant learned the Confederate General Braxton Bragg had withdrawn from Wilmington to face Sherman at Savannah, he ordered the expedition to start at once, with or without the powder boat. Butler hurriedly collected the powder aboard the explosive ship and had it towed to Beaufort, the fleet's advanced base. On

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15 Fox to Porter, November 22, 1864, O.R.N., Series I, XI, 207; Delafield to Dana, November 18, 1864, O.R.N., Series I, XI, 207-14.


17 West, Mr. Lincoln's Navy, p. 296.
December 13, the largest fleet to yet sail to battle in the Western hemisphere began moving from Hampton Roads southward—fifty-seven vessels with six hundred twenty-seven guns. Specific instructions were given the commander of the vessel towing the powder boat, that no fire was to be lighted or cigars smoked on board.

Porter issued an order to his fleet to remain twelve miles off the coast until the powder boat had exploded, and then move closer to support the attack by delivering a tremendous bombardment from various distances while troops were being landed. The commander of the powder boat was Alexander C. Rhind, a man even Secretary Welles looked upon as "an impulsive but brave and rash man."

Porter let his subordinate know the hazards of the attempt and the responsibility involved.

Great risks have to be run, and there are chances that you may lose your life in this adventure; but the risk is worth the running, when the importance of the project is to be considered and the fame to be gained by this novel undertaking,

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18 Jones, The Civil War at Sea, III, 318.
20 Welles, Diary, I, 268.
which is either to prove that forts on the water are useless or that the rebels are proof against gunpowder.\textsuperscript{21}

Porter was never under the delusion that the explosion would obliterate the immediate area. He took a middle position and believed that the shock of the blast would suffice to immobilize the fort's garrison.

The powder ship was finally brought gingerly to the location for exploding. In spite of the complicated series of fuses Porter set store in a simple fire which he directed Rhind to start just before leaving the ship.\textsuperscript{22} The prepared fuses failed to ignite the explosive and it was the simple small fire which belatedly did the job. No one was even knocked down by the blast and the commander of the undamaged Fort Fisher reported next morning, "A blockader got aground near the fort, set fire to herself, and blew up."\textsuperscript{23}

At daybreak, December 24, Fort Fisher stood defiant and unscathed. Butler still had not arrived with the troops and at 12:30 Porter ordered his colossal force to open fire on the fort. The bombardment was extremely heavy and

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{21}Porter to Rhind, December 17, 1864, O.R.N., Series I, XI, 222.

\textsuperscript{22}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{23}O.R.N., Series I, XI, 371.
\end{footnotesize}
Porter felt that "all that is wanted now is the troops to land to go into them." Of the fort, Porter wrote to Welles, "I am merely firing at it now to keep up practice.\textsuperscript{24} Butler finally arrived at sunset, and then with only part of his force. Disgusted, Porter ordered the fleet to cease firing and withdraw.

Damage to the fort was superficial and few men had been disabled by the intense firing. Colonel Lamb, commandant of the fort, felt that he might indeed have damaged the attackers to a greater degree than he suffered.\textsuperscript{25} On the following day, December 25, a new attack was commenced by Porter's fleet while Butler demurred on a landing due to the possibility of bad weather, saying, "... we had better not land any."\textsuperscript{26} In view of the quiet behavior of Fort Fisher, Butler reversed his decision and began landing men to take the fort by storm. As the troops formed and made for the fort the naval bombardment was increased and with

\textsuperscript{24}Porter to Welles, December 24, 1864, \textit{O.R.N.} Series I, XI, 253.


\textsuperscript{26}Glisson to Porter, January 1, 1865, \textit{O.R.N.}, Series I, XI, 333.
tremendous ferocity. One hundred thirty shots per minute began raining into and around Fort Fisher.\(^{27}\)

The troops advanced on the fort until grape and canister pouring from its heavy guns stopped the troops short of the fort. While Porter out at sea waited for the expected sign of capture, he was appalled when a signal was flashed to the effect that "Butler's troops are re-embarking."\(^{28}\) All but six hundred men were brought back aboard ship and Butler headed for Hampton Roads. The Navy was left the difficult task of plucking the unprovisioned men off the beach.\(^{29}\)

Before he departed, Butler communicated via written report to Porter his reason for withdrawing.

> In view of the threatening aspect of the weather, wind arising from the southeast, rendering it impossible to make further landing through the surf, I caused the troops with their prisoners to re-embark, and see nothing further that can be done by the land forces. I shall therefore sail for Hampton Roads as soon as the transport fleet can be got in order.\(^{30}\)

\(^{27}\)Jones, *The Civil War at Sea*, III, 332.

\(^{28}\)Ibid., pp. 333-34.

\(^{29}\)Ibid., p. 336.

Porter was infuriated with the behavior of Butler and in a dispatch heaped with sarcasm commented,

I wish some more of your gallant fellows had followed the officer who took the flag from the parapet, and the brave fellow who took the horse out from the fort. I think they would have found it an easier conquest than is supposed.31

Porter's report to Welles was a scathing denunciation of Butler's ineptitude.

My dispatch of yesterday will give you an account of our operations, but will scarcely give you an idea of my disappointment at the conduct of the Army authorities in not attempting to take possession of the fort, which had been so completely silenced by our guns; they were so blown up, burst up, and torn up that the people inside had no intention of fighting any longer. Had the Army made a show of surrounding it, it would have been ours, but nothing of the kind was done. The men landed, reconnoitered, and hearing that the enemy was massing troops somewhere, the order was given to re-embark.

They went away as soon as the majority of the troops were on the transports, and it coming on to blow rather fresh, about seven hundred were left on shore. . . There never was a fort that invited soldiers to walk in and take possession more plainly than Fort Fisher, and an officer got on the parapet even, saw no one inside, and brought away the flag we had cut down. . . If General Hancock, with ten thousand men, was sent down here, we could walk right into the fort.32


Confederate prisoners taken from the fort also stated that the effect of the powder boat's explosion had been demoralizing. Porter dispatched this information to the Secretary as well.\(^{33}\) Porter continued his diatribe against Butler in still another message to Welles which smouldered with explosive fury. "... it was, however, nothing more than I expected when General Butler mixed himself up in this expedition, starting his troops out from Hampton Roads with only a few days provisions, and without water. ..."\(^{34}\)

Continuing his blistering attack, Porter wrote to Sherman and said he hoped Wilmington was on the General's list of objectives.

This is merely on your way to Richmond.

... I do hope, my dear General, that you will second me here, and let our people see the folly of employing such generals as Butler and Banks. I have tried them both and God save me from further connection with such generals.\(^{35}\)

Grant wrote to Porter asking him to hold on for a short time and promising that new forces would be sent


\(^{34}\)Ibid.

SKETCH OF VICINITY OF FORT FISHER.
Surveyed under the direction of
Bvt. Brig. Gen. C.H. COMSTOCK,
Chief Engineer,
by OTTO JULIAN SCHULTZE,
Private 15th NY Engineers.

Scale
——— 2000 ——— 3000 feet

Union
Confederate

FORT BUCHANAN

FORT FISHER

Figure 7
Ft. Buchanan
Fort Fisher
without the former commander. Thus, Porter at the end of 1864, prepared another tirade for Welles to read, implo
rering the Secretary to make no changes in the disposition of the fleet until plans were settled for the conquest of Fort Fisher. Again he blasted Butler.36

The respite from disaster was to be a brief one for the defenders of Fort Fisher. On January 13, a huge fleet stood off the fort to seaward. This time there were about five thousand men under command of Major General Alfred H. Terry, an experienced officer of previous coastal campaigns. All day long men went ashore while the warships bombarded the fort. Steadily, inexorably, the Union forces ground the defenders down, although the fort's garrison took a heavy toll of marines and sailors. The surrender of the fort came late that evening and with it the final death-knell of the Confederacy.37

After the fall of Fort Fisher, the gates of the Atlantic coast were finally completely shut on the collapsing Confederates.

37Ibid., pp. 434-36.
In four days, from January 12 to January 16, eight vessels that left Nassau all failed to clear the blockade. Four were captured and the others driven off. Several other vessels attempting to go into Charleston found the port completely blockaded and fled. Blockaders were frustrated completely now and cargos piled up at embarkation points. At Nassau frustrated blockade runners began collecting until their number totaled thirty-five and a value of fifteen million dollars. The once profitable blockade-running business which had steadily ebbed with the closing of Southern ports was now a fool's undertaking. Closed effectively on the Atlantic coast, it would continue until end of hostilities in the trans-Mississippi.

With the end of blockade running, Lee's army was doomed for want of supplies. The desperate situation called for a reckless attempt to break the blockade or fall. Consequently, the Confederacy pinned its nearly futile hopes on a dash by rams based on the James river. The objective was Grant's huge supply base at City Point.

38 Jones, The Civil War at Sea, III, 364.


40 Rawlins to Parker, January 21, 1865, O.R.N. Series I, XI, 632.
The attempt was about as hopeless as the flickering cause of the Confederacy. It was based on the fact that resistance would be light since most of the effective warships were off Fort Fisher. The Union forces at Grant's base, City Point, anticipated an attack and the Union commander of the James river fleet urgently requested more monitors. Porter was not particularly worried by a Confederate attack, for he had great faith in the huge, twin-turreted monitor, Onondaga. This ship had double turrets armed with fifteen-inch Dahlgrens plus lesser armament. Ten other warships were with the Union fleet, opposed to three Confederate ironclads, plus smaller vessels.41

The Confederate commander, Flag Officer John K. Mitchell, believed he could, "... overcome any force the enemy can bring against us at this time, unless we have been deceived in our information."42 The Confederate ironclads started down river and successfully ran past several batteries. The Federal fleet had moved further downstream, even the powerful Onondaga was moved safely

41 Jones, The Civil War at Sea, III, 365.

out of range. Running aground, the Confederate ironclads were discovered in the night sky by searchlights while guns along the banks peppered the fleeing Southerners. Now the Union river fleet moved back up and joined in the general battle, the Onondaga hurling her huge missiles. One Confederate warship, the Drewry, was exploded by a hit on her magazine.43

The Scorpion, stranded nearby, was too badly damaged by the Drewry's explosion to be saved and was abandoned. The crippled Virginia headed back up the James river. A war council was held and it was decided that it would be impossible to break through.44 The Confederacy's James river squadron was still bottled up in the river, its strength greatly reduced. Thus ended the last attempt by an organized naval force of the Confederate States to secure an ever more elusive victory over the Union warships of the Atlantic Blockading Squadrons.

In spite of the limited Union success in the action, it was considered a fiasco and the commander, William A. Parker,


44 Mitchell to Pickett, January 25, 1865, O.R.N., Series I, XI, 668.
was removed from command. Grant was angry and Porter heaped abuse on him by the admonition, "No man ever had a better chance than you to make yourself known to the world."\(^4\) Parker wrote Welles, "I kept the monitor, Onondaga, out of range of the enemy's batteries by direction of Rear Admiral Porter."\(^4\)

On February 18, joyous news was sent by Admiral Dahlgren to Porter from Charleston, "You will see by the date of this that the Navy's occupation has given this pride of rebeldom to the Union flag, and thus the rebellion is shut out from the ocean and foreign sympathy."\(^4\) This restoration of the flag atop Fort Sumter symbolized the unqualified success of Northern arms and naval might. To navy men this was in like measure equivalent to the army success at Appomattox.

Dahlgren wrote Welles in jubilant terms, "To me the fall of Charleston seems scarcely less important than that at Richmond. It is the last seaport by which it can be

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\(^4\) Parker to Welles, January 26, 1865, O.R.N., Series I, XI, 644-45.

\(^4\) Dahlgren to Porter, February 18, 1865, O.R.N., Series I, XVI, 250.
made sure that a bale of cotton can go abroad.  Loss of Charleston, Wilmington and Savannah caused the Confederacy to dispose of the remaining blockade runners and attempt to purchase with the profit smaller vessels that would draw less than six feet of water. These, Stephen Mallory, Secretary of the Confederate Navy, reasoned, could then be used to sneak small arms and supplies in to Columbus, Georgia, by way of Apalachicola Bay. The apparent seriousness of this proposal belies the logical reasoning of the Confederate Navy Secretary, who was obviously, unaware of or insensitive to, the impending calamity long since discernable. Still the "lost cause," while unable to topple its antagonist, was able to stir up unnecessary trouble and bloodshed. This took the form of floating mines, "torpedoes," which wreaked havoc during the twilight of the rebellion. One such mine blew apart Admiral Dahlgren's flagship, Harvest Moon, while he was waiting for breakfast one morning, nearly killing this great contributor to weaponry.

48 Dahlgren to Welles, February 22, 1865, O.R.N., Series I, XVI, 263.
49 Jones, The Civil War at Sea, III, 369.
50 Dahlgren to Welles, March 1, 1865, O.R.N., Series I, XVI, 282-83.
Other ships began striking mines (torpedoes), in widely divergent locales. The ironclad, *Patapsco*, hit one and went down near Fort Sumter while aiding in the removal of obstructions.\textsuperscript{51} A transport was blown up there and near Mobile two monitors, a gunboat and steamer were sunk over a two week period. Elsewhere in one day, two gunboats, a steamer and a cutter were sunk. From as far as New Orleans came news of a loaded troop transport that struck a mine. Dahlgren wrote to Welles concerning mines:

So much has been said in ridicule of torpedoes that very little precautions are deemed necessary, and if resorted to are probably taken with less care than if due weight was attached to the existence of these mischievous things.\textsuperscript{52}

By April the crumbling of the Confederacy had reached avalanche proportions and Raphael Semmes, of *Alabama* fame, was instructed to destroy his bottled-up fleet immediately. In the early hours of morning, April 3, 1865, the remains of the Confederate navy were destroyed by explosives.\textsuperscript{53}

\textsuperscript{51}West to Dahlgren, March 20, 1865, *O.R.N.*, Series I, XVI, 296.

\textsuperscript{52}Dahlgren to Welles, March 1, 1865, *O.R.N.*, Series I, XVI, 282–283.

\textsuperscript{53}Mallory to Semmes, April 2, 1865, *O.R.N.*, Series I, XII, 191.
Virginia No. 2, on which so much forlorn hope had sailed, ceased to exist and its destruction marked the complete victory of the Atlantic Blockading Squadrons.

Semmes gathered his little band of navy men and headed inland to Danville while Richmond burned all night. Thus, they were separated militarily from their element forever. On the high seas several Confederate cruisers still lurked, picking off Yankee merchant ships. The most successful of these, and the last one to fire naval guns, was the C.S.S. Shenandoah. Gradually these raiders surrendered, but the Shenandoah was unaccounted for and Secretary Welles warned blockaders from Maine to Texas to be on the lookout for her as she might try to attack the American coast. As late as August, long after hostilities had ceased, Welles warned the commander of the Pacific Squadron, "Being an erratic ship, without country or destination, no definite instructions can be given you." \(^5^4\) On November 6, 1865, the Shenandoah docked at Liverpool, England, ending the cruise of the last Confederate surface raider. So ended the Confederate Navy, which had risen to challenge the eventually crippling blockade drawn even tighter around the Southern seacoast.

\(^5^4\)Welles to Pearson, August 3, 1865, O.R.N., Series I, III, 576.
It was a navy of great improvisation, like the Hunley, which as a submersible had sunk the U.S.S. Housatonic off Charleston and had in turn disappeared in the same action. Developing ironclads, mines (torpedoes), sleek blockade runners, the Confederate navy had attempted to improvise in order to overcome, and had failed.

The U. S. Navy had its share of ingenuity as well. Men like Dahlgren, who developed new weaponry and rifled guns, heros like Cushing, who repeatedly defied death, were nearly commonplace. The Navy had grown from ninety-odd creaking hulks in '61 to more than six hundred in '65. This fantastic buildup of ships was impressive to the world and foretold to those who cared to learn the lesson of what the new world was capable of in future wars.
CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

How effective was the blockade? A few historians have seized on the ineffectiveness of the blockade in keeping material out of Confederate ports, indicating that the blockade was not effective. Casual observation would seem to support this position, for only about half the blockade runners that slid past the Federal watchdogs were ever caught. Gideon Welles, Secretary of the Navy, released a report in 1865 which showed that the United States Navy had captured or destroyed 295 blockade-running steamers, 44 sailing ships and 683 schooners making a total of 1,022 vessels. The adjudicated value of the captured ships and cargoes was placed at $24,500,000. This failed to include an estimated additional amount of $7,000,000 worth of ships and cargoes run ashore and destroyed, making a total of $31,500,000. One might add to that total $2,000,000 more, which was closer to the Southern estimate. The total value of the blockade running business,
including ships and cargoes, can be reasonably estimated at $150,000,000 gold standard.¹

One might add that the benefits of the blockade running to the South were incalculable. The cargo carried, the activity maintained, the armies supported and the sympathy engendered by the blockade runners all played a vital role in the Southern bid for victory. Certainly, without the benefits of the runners, one cannot visualize a Confederacy enduring for four painful years.

The Confederacy continually claimed that the blockade was ineffectual and therefore illegal because it did not seal off Southern ports. This barrage of propaganda aided Southern morale at the time, but no amount of it could change the irrefutable fact that to a large degree, what was happening for the worse inside the Confederacy was due in part to the blockade.

Much has been made of the fact that many of the more skillful captains of blockade runners repeatedly ran the blockade even after it was tightened. One critic has listed twenty-two blockade runners that ran the blockade more than eight times. What is not noted, however, is

¹Cockran, Blockade Runners of the Confederacy, pp. 331-32.
that twenty of the runners on this list were caught on the very next attempt. Seventeen were captured and three were destroyed by being run aground and burned. S. C. Hawley, United States consul at Nassau, reported that between March 10, 1863 and June 1 of that year, there had been twenty-eight sailings from that port, of which thirteen were lost, eight being captured. He estimated the average expectancy of a blockade runner to be about four and one-half voyages, and a number of runners were captured or destroyed on the first run.

One incident occurring in September, 1863, was indicative of the hollow cries of failure hurled by Southerners. This concerned the blockade runner, June, which was captured by the blockader, Connecticut, and contained a personal letter from the purser that stated, "I consider it quite a farce to call it a blockade when a vessel can go in without being fired at." With an amusing satisfaction, the Commander of the Connecticut, J. J. Almy, forwarded the letter and noted with wry satisfaction that the author of the letter on the very next day after his own capture,

2Anderson, By Sea and by River, pp. 226-27.
3Ibid., p. 227.
4O.R.N., Series I, IX, 214.
watched the Connecticut chase ashore and destroy another blockade runner.

It is estimated that about 600 ships of all descriptions were engaged in blockade running, but this figure is probably far too low. There were probably some 8,000 violations of the blockade during the war and these resulted in the importation of approximately 600,000 small arms, 550,000 pairs of shoes, and large amounts of meat, saltpeter, lead, and other items. Of course, much in the way of supplies came from the lively trade carried on with the North; General Sherman said that Cincinnati furnished more goods to the Confederacy than Charleston. Also the trade across the Rio Grande brought in substantial quantities of supplies.\(^5\)

At one point the Confederacy was embarrassed by the blockade. Before the specially designated ships began to run by the blockade, Union watchdogs had nearly swept all earlier runners from the sea, causing a diminishing in the volume of supplies to the Confederates just at the time when the demand was greatly increased by the emergencies of warfare, and thus causing general distress and frustration.\(^6\)


\(^6\) Ibid., p. 852.
When the blockage-running was at its height, in 1863, a Confederate officer stated that the arrivals and departures were equal to one steamer a day, taking all the Confederate ports together. The British in particular thought they could monopolize the blockade business and in so doing, reap a huge harvest. With plenty of capital and some of the swiftest ships afloat, British companies entered the business with large investments. They found, however, that it was at best a very risky business and that neither skilled officers nor swift steamers could offset the perils that threatened their investments. All ingenious efforts to cope with the blockade were in turn subverted by new tactics, varied coastal operations and the ever-tightening noose around the naval-weak Confederacy. The gains were not equal to the increasing losses and the blockade runners were at last driven from the coast entirely, and kept away, although armed and supported by the greatest naval power at the time. Eventually, those engaged in blockade running gave up, admitting that the blockade was a success. A Confederate officer also stated that when Fort Fisher fell their last port was gone, and the blockade running was ended.

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7 Ibid.
8 Ibid., p. 853.
The Confederacy in one sense was born, lived and died because of the myth of "King Cotton." Staking all on the hope that English mills would need to import cotton, the South believed the five million people of England would be unable to continue production without it. The South elevated the King Cotton theory to an importance comparable to that of the states-right doctrine. Shortsightedness on the part of the Confederacy was responsible for the actual restricted planting techniques employed and burning of cotton as a patriotic duty.\(^9\) As a result of this campaign only about a million and a half bales were produced in 1862 as compared with four and a half million for 1861.\(^10\) Unfortunately for the South, English mills had stored up a good deal of cotton before the outbreak of the war and the bumper crop of cotton from 1860 had already been sold. Thus, English mills had enough raw material on hand to last until the fall of 1862.\(^11\) By the time this ran out new sources of cotton had been developed in Egypt and India.\(^12\) Moreover, a scarce


\(^10\)Ibid., p. 501


\(^12\)Ibid.
wheat crop return caused Britain to import grain from the United States. Consequently, it has been asserted with some exaggeration that cotton was dethroned during the war while Northern wheat became king. It is also significant that wheat influenced England more favorably to the Northern position since Great Britain, which had imported only 90,000 quarters of wheat and flour in 1859, imported more than 5,000,000 in 1862.

The Confederacy continually contended the blockade was ineffectual, a "paper blockade." They had for some time a heady list of statistics to prove their point. Secretary Judah P. Benjamin stated the United States was operating the blockade with an average of one ship for every three hundred miles of coast. He estimated that the port of Charleston was handling an annual foreign trade of $21,000,000 in 1863, compared to less than $19,000,000 in 1858. He also stated that steamers operated by the Confederacy had made forty-four voyages through the blockade between January and September, 1863, without a single

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13 Ibid.

ship being lost by capture. He protested against international recognition of a blockade that guarded merely seven ports ranging over a three thousand mile coastline with 189 openings.\textsuperscript{15}

In spite of the Herculean efforts by Gideon Welles and Gustavus Fox, the blockade was not completely successful. Much needed material entered the Confederacy, and it is doubtful whether the blockade ever prevented the South from conducting a single military operation. The Confederacy was defeated by Union armies not ships. Firearms, artillery and ammunition came in reasonable amounts from Europe. About 260,000 to 330,000 stand of small arms were imported by the Confederacy.\textsuperscript{16}

As early as 1863 there was considerable risk in running the blockade. By then the Union Navy had ships with adequate speed to catch most of the blockade runners, which at that time were not the specially designed craft so effective later. Experience improved the blockaders' technique and only constant alertness and expert handling of vessels prevented capture of many more runners.

\textsuperscript{15}O.R.N., Series II, III, 884-86.

\textsuperscript{16}Randall, The Civil War and Reconstruction, pp. 501-02.
When Welles ordered Dahlgren to move his ironclads inside the bar off Charleston and maintained nightly patrols in the harbor's entrance in 1863, blockade running there almost completely stopped. This marked a turning point as Wilmington became the last center of traffic on the Atlantic coast. When in July, 1864 Admiral S. P. Lee, commander of the North Atlantic Blockading Squadron, set up an outer patrol group of fast cruisers to intercept outboard runners at daylight and inbound runners before dark, there were thirty-two blockading ships off Wilmington. Union naval administration was not satisfied with this situation and an inner line of shallow-draft ships was stationed as close to the fort as was possible.

Still another line of ships farther out intercepted and chased blockade runners. If a runner got through this line it still had to face one farther to seaward, as well as dodge cruisers at sea or near the destination. With such a concentration allowed at one port, the Navy's policy of closing one port at a time was vindicated.

Navy Secretary Gideon Welles very wisely concentrated the blockade off the important Southern ports. This caused runners to land where there were no ports, but minor inlets. Most vessels of this type could only carry a few bales of
cotton and were not significant to the war effort. By running the blockade they added to the statistics of blockade running and made the noose appear more relaxed than it actually was. 17

The best answer to the effectiveness of the blockade is seen in what happened to the Southern economy. Due to the Union blockade, the blockade running companies insisted on being paid in gold for their imports and this helped to drain the Confederacy's small goal reserves and reduce it to trade by barter, with cotton as the principal medium of exchange. The blockade was able to be more effective than it might have been because the Southern economy stubbornly clung to this staple. 18 Thus, the Confederacy was dealt a crippling blow which might have been blunted by better planning.

Cotton was not all that was affected by the blockade. Ordinary necessities of life such as shoes, clothing and housewares were virtually unobtainable except at the highest of prices. While the high prices were in part due to the runaway inflation of the Confederate government, still

17 Anderson, By Sea and by River, p. 228.

accounts of life in the South during the war are complete with accounts of continual shortages and improvisations. When such simple things as needles were so scarce that thorns were used, it becomes obvious that loss of morale and 'elan were results of blockade and precursors of defeat.  

Even the Confederate army felt the pinch of the blockade. As early as the Battle of Antietam in September, 1862, many of Lee's soldiers were without shoes, and this continued to be a problem for the Southern armies. The Battle of Gettysburg was precipitated by Confederate advance units looking for shoes. Uniforms and blankets were in short supply and General N. P. Banks, onetime Union commander opposite "Stonewall" Jackson, was humorously dubbed, "Lee's commissary," when he lost so much equipment to Confederates.

Government-operated blockade runners were not even able to thwart the blockade in the waning months of the war, and the critical situation of food and clothing for Lee's troops is borne out by the fact that one of Grant's first acts after Lee's surrender was to issue rations to the

19 _ibid._

20 O.R.N., Series I, VI, 59.
half-starved, nearly naked remnants of Lee's army. Statistics which emphasize the number of blockade-runners that succeeded as compared to those that were lost do not tell the whole story. The Civil War blockade-runner was a small specialized ship of low hull and light construction, and few regular vessels with large tonnage braved the ring of ships. The full effect of the blockade is to be measured not merely in terms of the stoppage of blockade runners, but even more so in terms of the very large cargo vessels that recognized the futility of running the blockade.²¹

The Confederacy did not even have access to their own ports and their cruisers were denied use of them altogether. Ships bound for the South could not be protected and could be captured anywhere on the ocean, and the importance of neutral ports such as Nassau indicates the great power of the blockade. One might conclude that the blockade was a potent factor in the defeat of the Confederacy. This lesson in the application of sea power was not lost on a then youthful blockader aboard a Union vessel—A. T. Mahan. It would be this same young sailor who would write one of the

most profound and influential of all naval treatises. Mahan would inspire a naval building program in his own country and was the prime mover in stimulating German desires for a great fleet.

Complete credit for bringing the South to its knees cannot be given to the Union blockade. Yet, this was a means by which the South was started on the way to defeat, directly or indirectly. It was only after the South had been weakened that the North was able to begin winning consistent victories on land. Without this great pressure of seapower this end could never have been achieved. The blockade was the powerful instrument of that weapon and was a major factor in the collapse and defeat of the Confederacy.

Welles and Fox faced enormous criticism when they initially failed in their attempt to blockade the Southern ports. At the beginning of the war such an undertaking was deemed impossible by men both at home and abroad. To their surprise this impossible operation was soon an accomplished fact. In determining the policy of the government toward the South, Welles' advice was highly valued by the President and his judgment was usually sober and well-balanced. Less demonstrative than Seward or Stanton, the Secretary could and did take an occasional opposite view.
It will be remembered that at the time of the Mason-Slidell incident Welles wrote a congratulatory letter to Captain Wilkes. The Secretary did not have a knowledge of international law, but was in warm agreement with strong quarter-deck decisions.

Welles and the Secretary of State were totally opposed to each other, and rarely were on the same side in discussions that came before the cabinet. Welles always looked with suspicion on Seward and considered him an intriguing and designing politician. This in part went back to the initial days of Lincoln's administration when the Secretary of State unnecessarily interfered with the Navy Department.

The President was fortunate to have a man as stable as Gideon Welles in command of the navy. Lincoln was a familiar visitor to the Navy Department building, particularly since it was just a stone's throw from the White House. Since the rooms of Fox and Welles were close to each other on the second floor, the President often relaxed here and chatted in an informal manner. Dahlgren has left us a picture of one of these visits:

23. Welles, Diary, I, 25.
I went to the Department. Found the President in the Chief Clerk's room with the Secretary and Fox. He looks thin and badly, and is very nervous. Complained of everything. They were doing nothing at Vicksburg or Charleston. Du Pont was asking for one ironclad after another, as fast as they were built. He said the canal at Vicksburg was of no account, and wondered that a sensible man would do it. I tried my hand at consolation, without much avail. He thought the favorable state of public expectation would pass away before anything was done. Then levelled a couple of jokes at the doings at Vicksburg and Charleston. Poor gentleman!24

Since Lincoln kept in close touch with the navy a frequent visitor to the White House was the Assistant Secretary, Gustavus Fox. To him fell the duty of obtaining proper naval legislation. It was not unusual for leading naval officers to call on the President when they were in Washington. Chief among the President's naval advisors were Farragut, Porter, Dahlgren, Du Pont, Davis, Foote and Wise. Lincoln could take an active part in conferences on naval affairs and often he made a decision himself and issued an order.

The planning of naval operations was largely a result of work by Welles, Fox and naval commanders. However, the President often acted as critic and a suggestion maker,

although he generally respected the decisions and plans formulated by his professionals. His involvement in affairs of the Atlantic Blockade was rare, being more obvious in the naval affairs of the Mississippi river.

The Atlantic Blockade involved a great deal of cooperation with the army as amphibious warfare was used, although its full potential was never discovered during the Civil War. In all cooperative movements, much consultation took place between officers of both services and with the President prior to action. It was a rare occasion when the President strongly intervened in the operations of the Atlantic Blockade, but when he did it was in a strong and forceful manner as at Charleston in April, 1863, when he told Du Pont to hold his position "inside the bar near Charleston."25 Before the message reached him, Du Pont had withdrawn his ships from the bar and he regarded the message as a reflection on his management and asked to be relieved. This, however, was an unusual example of the President's interference.

While Lincoln left the administration of the navy in the hands of Welles and Fox, he valued, perhaps most, the

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25 Lincoln to Du Pont, April 13, 1863, O.R.N., Series I, XIV, 132.
advice of the commander of the South Atlantic Blockading Squadron, John Dahlgren. Having recognized his genius early and through weekly visitations and having built a strong rapport with him, it was to Dahlgren the President went for reassurance when Washington was supposedly threatened by the Merrimac. The two visited often, dined together at the White House and took short cruises on the Potomac occasionally. This might have partly been due to the fact that Dahlgren, of all the officers of the Washington yard, almost alone remained faithful to the Union.

One can only speculate as to the relative importance of the blockade in shortening the war, but the evidence shows that it was very great. Less questionable was the efficient administration of the Atlantic Blockading Squadrons under Welles and Fox. Beginning with a few obsolete vessels, Welles soon had a legally working blockade in effect along the coast and with help from the army was able to capture and hold vast stretches of Confederate coastline. That the administrators failed to grasp the full potential of amphibious warfare and strike inland in force was not the fault of the Navy, for the Secretary pleaded even with the President, to no avail, for the capture of
Wilmington by those shore-based troops.

The Navy's capture of cities and harbors along the coast enabled the North to establish bases from which its blockaders could operate. This allowed for a more effective blockade as it cut off large areas of coastline and drastically lowered Confederate morale. It is quite possible that Great Britain, aware of the determined efforts at blockade by the North, and cognizant of large stretches of coastline in the hands of the legal government of the Union, decided that recognition of the Confederate attitude of blockade might some day boomerang for the island empire in a future conflict.

Certainly, without the Navy the war could have dragged on indefinitely and the North might have at last grown weary of military coercion. Along the Atlantic coast the Navy and the Army had to operate jointly for success. One could not be completely successful without the other. The Navy's part has been too long relegated to the background due to the fact that the Confederacy virtually had no Navy and the Civil War was primarily a conflict on land. While the Navy quietly went about its efficient work of subjugation, the Army made the spectacular headlines. The blockade of the Atlantic coast was often routine and unspectacular, but it proved partially decisive.
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