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EDWIN M. STANTON'S SPECIAL MILITARY UNITS
AND THE PROSECUTION OF THE WAR, 1862-1865

DISSERTATION

Presented to the Graduate Council of the
North Texas State University in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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Denton, Texas

May, 1978

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Mangrum, Robert Glen, Edwin M. Stanton's Special Military Units and the Prosecution of the War, 1862-1865. Doctor of Philosophy (History), May, 1978, 365 pp., 9 tables, 13 illustrations, bibliography, 192 titles.

The purpose of this dissertation is to analyze six special military units which were authorized and created by the War Department under the direction of Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton. In relating the military history of such special units the study determines what contributions and significance they made to the Union war effort. The special units under consideration are the Railroad Brigade, the U. S. Army Steam Ram Fleet, the Mississippi Marine Brigade, the Bureau of Military Information, the First District of Columbia Cavalry, and the U. S. Army Naval Brigade. In each case, the work describes the War Department's motives and military rationale for establishing the special unit. Additionally, each unit is examined to determine whether or not it followed the principles of war and the consequences. The act of improvisation by the War Department to meet various threats from the Confederate armed forces resulted in the creation of military units which were officered, manned, and equipped by the U. S. Army while performing duties which were not wholly in the army's purview. The text describes the organization, administration, and major operations of each of the six special military units as mobile, independent, private military forces.

The Ram Fleet, the Mississippi Marine Brigade, and the James River Naval Brigade, although composed completely of army personnel, conducted tactical operations within the scope of the Navy Department. The Bureau of Military Information was engaged in the activities of a twentieth century intelligence battalion, gathering both tactical and strategic intelligence for the Army of the Potomac. The First District of Columbia Cavalry was originally raised as a paramilitary organization to aid Col. Lafayette C. Baker, self-styled chief of the National Detective Police, in his crusade against traitors, spies, criminals, and other enemies of the Union. Following a period of unsuccessful operations against Confederate guerrilla leader John S. Mosby, the First District of Columbia was ordered to the Department of Virginia and North Carolina for use as a regular cavalry unit. The Railroad Brigade was a collection of green, untrained troops, ninety day militia, and sub-par officers, which was charged with the protection of the major rail lines in the Eastern Theater, a mission which was performed despite the composition of the Brigade. When confronted by battle-hardened Confederates, the Brigade collapsed and surrendered the vital rail and supply depot of Harper's Ferry, (West) Virginia. Whether judged a success or failure, the six special units were innovators of new tactics, weapon systems, and methods of conducting war. Their limited successes and failures prevented them from receiving recognition by the American people, the national government, and historians.

The study utilized manuscript collections at the Library of Congress, the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies, the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies, U. S. Army records in the National Archives, reports published by Congress, numerous memoirs and diaries of participants, and contemporary newspapers. In addition, a large number of secondary works were consulted which included monographs, biographies, and articles.

PREFACE

The study of war has occupied the mind of man since the dawn of recorded history. Every aspect of warfare has been examined in detail, catalogued, and categorized. As part of this detailed study, historians have analyzed all facets of the American Civil War. Campaigns, battles, and generals are but a few of the vast number of areas scrutinized. One area which has not been probed in any great depth concerns special military units of the Union army. Such units, authorized and created by Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton, have been neglected in the research of the war. This study will focus on six special units (the Railroad Brigade, the U. S. Army Steam Ram Fleet, the Mississippi Marine Brigade, the Bureau of Military Information, the First District of Columbia Cavalry, and the U. S. Army Naval Brigade), in order to determine whether they contributed to the Union war effort and to consider their significance as part of the total history of the war. In conjunction with this, the investigation seeks to determine the motives of the War Department and the military reasons such units were created. Accordingly, the principles of war will be scrutinized and a determination made as to whether such military units applied or violated the maxims.

The principles of war were applied in the majority of military operations conducted during the war. Where they were

not, military defeat often occurred. Not all tactical situations, however, lend themselves to orderly organized or developed planning or the use of regular (or conventional) military units. In such instances, innovative and unconventional solutions became necessary. Such was the case during several critical periods in the Civil War. Each time, the War Department chose to meet these unusual situations by improvisation. In improvising such units for special missions, the War Department created unprecedented situations. Whether the men involved in such special units would meet the challenges of the situation or would fail was a gamble Stanton's War Department was willing to accept in order to gain the ultimate objective, Union victory.

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CHAPTER I

IMPROVISATION AND THE RAILROADS

In the early chaotic months of the American Civil War, the Union faced challenges and worrisome problems in innumerable areas. In addition to the basic question of retaining control of federal facilities in secessionist states, the national government struggled to maintain the allegiance of the border states while attempting to organize the industry, society, and military in order to reassert federal authority. As the initial shock of southern secession waned, Washington reacted to events and threatened areas by improvisation. This seemed the only course of action, short of losing control of further tactical or strategic points. Since there was no historical precedent to provide guidance in the crisis, the federal government often created special military organizations to meet the exigencies of the situation.

An early example of this improvisation concerned the strategically important Baltimore and Ohio Railroad, the one line which directly linked Washington with the western theater by way of Louisville, Indianapolis, and Saint Louis. In addition to providing a communications and transportation link between the East and the West, the line was of utmost importance in the retention of the region of western Virginia

and Maryland because this mountainous area offered a buffer zone which protected eastern Ohio, western Pennsylvania, and the flank of any federal army which campaigned in the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia.¹

During the early months of 1861, haphazard efforts were made to guard sections of this and other railroads which linked Washington with the North. Usually these attempts were by local volunteers, and only slowly did the War Department formulate plans for an organized and supervised guard detail. As early as 1 August 1861, Brig. Gen. William S. Rosecrans, commanding the Department of the Ohio, which included western Virginia, was authorized by the secretary of war to muster in several additional companies of Virginia militia to guard railroad bridges and other key facilities, with the stipulation that this be done only if the men were Unionists.²

The piecemeal approach taken by the War Department to guard the railroads was apparent since several different Union officers were charged with the safety of the railroads. The Washington National Intelligencer reported on Wednesday, 11 September 1861, that Brig. Gen. Benjamin F. Kelley, commanding

¹Allan Nevins, The War For The Union: The Improvised War 1861-1862 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1959), p. 139.

²George D. Ruggles, Assistant Adjutant General, Adjutant General's Office to Brig. Gen. W. S. Rosecrans, 1 August 1861, U.S., War Department, The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies, R. N. Scott et al, eds., 130 vols. (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1880-1901), ser. 3, 1: 378 (hereafter cited as OR); Frederick H. Dyer, A Compendium of the War of the Rebellion 3 vols. (New York: Thomas Yoseloff, 1959) 1: 254.

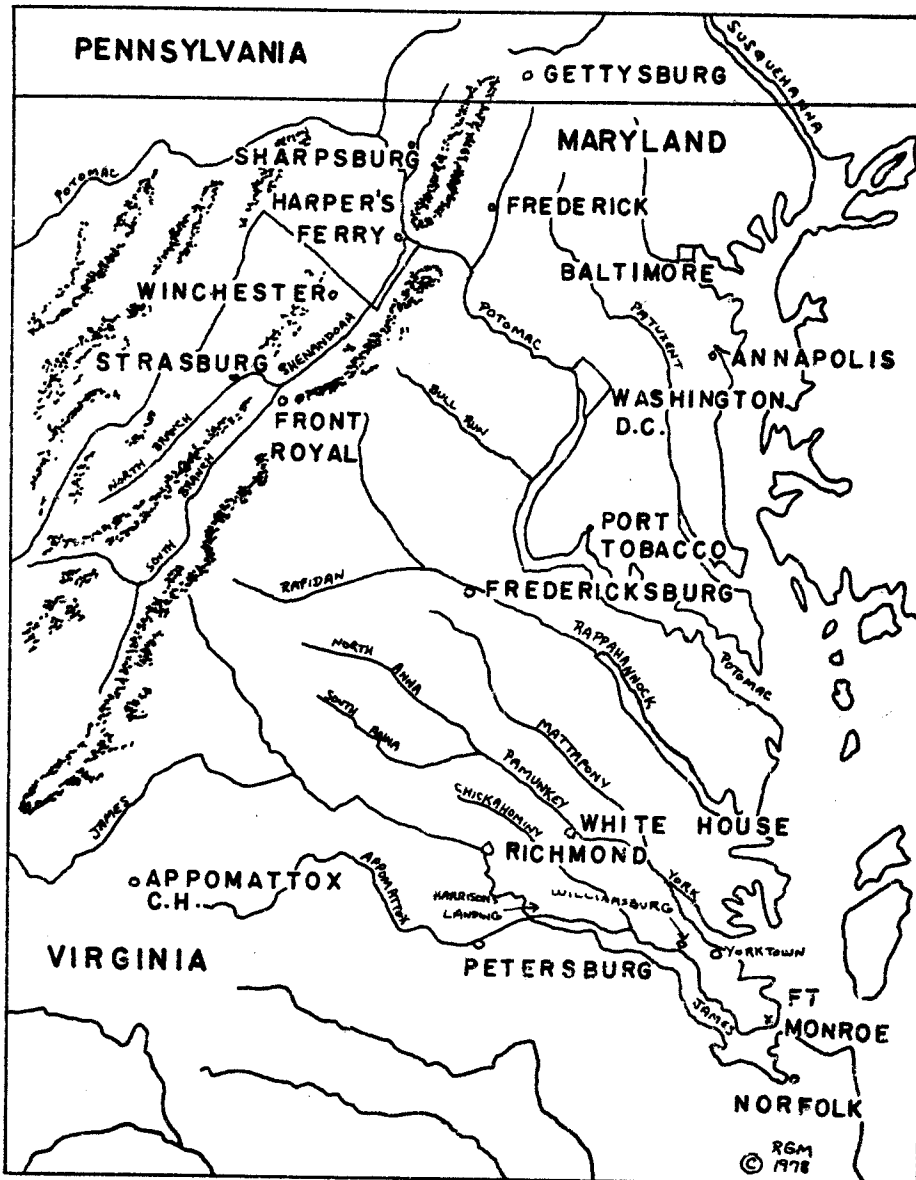
the Railroad District from Cumberland to Wheeling, (West) Virginia, had 3,000 men distributed in companies at the various railroad stations, while Col. John C. Robinson was in command of the Railroad District from Washington to Baltimore. Robinson instructed his regimental commanders to so position their companies that sentinels would be posted every one-fourth of a mile along the track, with special emphasis to be placed on bridges and culverts.³

Even with such precautions, the tracks were constantly damaged by Confederate guerrillas or sympathizers. The president inquired if the War Department had assigned a sufficient number of troops to such duty. Secretary of War Simon Cameron replied on 1 December 1861 that a sufficient force was available to protect the rails. Additional emphasis, however, by the War Department was placed on the performance of the guards while on duty. Robinson's Railroad Brigade issued orders on Sunday, 8 December, reemphasizing that sentinels must constantly be on the alert. Neither the practice of congregating at one place for idle conversation and mischief, nor the building of fires at night was to be permitted. The troops on guard would be required to walk their posts both day and night.⁴

³Washington National Intelligencer, 11 September 1861; General Order No. 1, Headquarters, Railroad Brigade, 10 November 1861, Record Group 393, "Records of the United States Army Commands," National Archives, Washington, D. C. (hereafter cited as RG 393).

⁴Simon Cameron, Secretary of War, to Lincoln, 1 December 1861, OR, ser. 3, 1: 706; General Order No. 4, Headquarters, Railroad Brigade, 8 December 1861, RG 393; General Order No. 4, Headquarters, Railroad Brigade, 1 February 1862, *ibid.*

Figure 1
Eastern Theater



Problems continued with the men on guard duty. As could be expected, some continued to build fires for heat during the cold winter nights, while others caused the trains to slow their speed because the men chose to walk on the track rather than form a path next to the roadbed. The result was either to delay the scheduling of the trains on the line or chance fatal accidents to the guards. Complaints also were made about members of the Railroad Brigade who boarded the trains without proper authorization and refused to pay their fare after riding the train. The Brigade was emphatic in asserting that no soldier could leave his post without a correctly signed pass, nor fail to pay the train fare if not on official duty. When soldiers were on official duty they were to be furnished with tickets which enabled the railroad to collect from the government.⁵

Robinson, commanding the newly designated Railroad Brigade, and responsible for the track between Baltimore and Washington, was replaced by Col. Dixon S. Miles of the Second U. S. Infantry in early March 1862. Miles assumed command of the Brigade on Monday, 10 March 1862. Born in Maryland, he had graduated from the United States Military Academy at West Point in 1824. Miles, ranked twenty-seventh in his class, had a moderately distinguished military career in the U. S. Army in the years prior to the Civil War. He was breveted twice for gallant and

⁵General Order No. 10, War Department, 4 February 1862, OR, ser. 3, 1: 879; Circular, Headquarters, Railroad Brigade, 17 March 1862, RG 393.

meritorious conduct during the Mexican War. Promoted to colonel of the Second Infantry Regiment in January 1859, he was on the frontier with his regiment when war broke out. The first summer of the war found Miles in command of the Fifth Division of the federal army and marching south into Virginia under the leadership of newly promoted Brig. Gen. Irwin McDowell. The battle of First Manassas, or Bull Run, on 21 July 1861 not only was a disaster for the Union cause but a personal one for Dixon Miles. Miles, commanding the reserve forces at Bull Run, was accused by Col. Israel B. Richardson, commanding Fourth Brigade, First Division, of being drunk and incapable of properly performing his duties that day. As a result of this charge, Miles was temporarily relieved of command of the Second Infantry. He immediately requested a court of inquiry, which finally was convened in mid-September but did not make its report until Tuesday, 6 November 1861. The court determined that Miles was in a drunken state at 7:00 P.M. on 21 July as Richardson had alleged; however, evidence was available that Miles had been ill for several days, and the army surgeon prescribed medicine and brandy. The court of inquiry dismissed this illness as inconsequential in creating Miles' drunken condition. However, the court determined that though Miles was drunk there was a lack of sufficient evidence to convict him before a court martial. The decision was reached only after the court had heard forty-eight witnesses: twenty-eight stating Miles was drunk, while twenty believed he was not.⁶

⁶Special Order No. 66, Headquarters, Army of the Potomac, 8 March 1862, RG 393; General Order No. 16, Headquarters,



Figure 2

Dixon S. Miles

(Mathew Brady Collection, National Archives, Washington, D. C.)

Probably in an effort to find a scapegoat for the Bull Run disaster, the Congress of the United States requested the president to furnish information concerning the Miles case. Republican Senator James W. Grimes of Iowa described the report as extraordinary. "They found that Colonel Miles was drunk on the occasion alluded to . . . he was drunk enough to justify Colonel Richardson in reporting him to be drunk, but not drunk enough to justify the calling of a court martial" ⁷

From September 1861 until March 1862 Miles had no assignment, but he dutifully reported himself ready for an assignment every month. While no documentation has been found to explain the assignment of Miles to the command of the Railroad Brigade, it can be assumed that the War Department believed that such an assignment was not critical and did not require a first rate officer.

Immediately following this assignment to the Railroad Brigade, the area of command responsibility was expanded to

Railroad Brigade, 10 March 1862, *ibid.*; Organization of U. S. Army at Bull Run, 21 July 1861, *OR*, ser. 1, 2: 315; Special Order No. 20, Headquarters, Army of the Potomac, 10 August 1861, RG 393; Special Order No. 56, Headquarters, Army of the Potomac, 14 September 1861, *ibid.*; Report, Court of Inquiry, D. S. Miles' conduct at Bull Run, 6 November 1861, *OR*, ser. 1, 2: 438; Washington National Intelligencer, 8 November 1861; William H. Powell, List of Officers of the Army of the United States From 1779 to 1900 (1900; reprint ed., Detroit: Gale Research, 1967), p. 481; Francis B. Heitman, Historical Register and Dictionary of the United States Army From Its Organization Sept. 29, 1789 to March 2, 1903, 2 vols., (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1903)1: 708; Biographical Directory of the American Congress 1774-1971 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1971) p. 1036; Col. Israel B. Richardson, Second Michigan Volunteers, to Brig. Gen. Irwin McDowell, 19 July 1861, *OR*, ser. 1, 2: 312.

⁷U.S., Congress, Senate, Congressional Globe, 37th Cong., 2d sess., 4-5 December 1861, [32, pt. 1] pp. 9, 17.

include the portion of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad between Harper's Ferry and Baltimore, and Miles was instructed to locate his headquarters at the Relay House, Maryland. An example of the many problems Miles encountered as a matter of course was Special Order 83 issued by the Headquarters, Army of the Potomac on Monday, 17 March 1862. Miles was instructed to make all reports to Maj. Gen. John A. Dix, commanding the Middle Department with headquarters at Baltimore. However, the Special Order stated that Miles might receive instructions regarding the portion of railroad found in the District of Columbia from Brig. Gen. James S. Wadsworth, military governor of the District. Improvisation thus led to a disorganized command structure.⁸

Another major problem Miles experienced was an increase of responsibility with a continuing decrease of troops to adequately guard the track. Robinson had noted this earlier in the month of March and had redistributed his regiments accordingly. This had necessitated a reduction in the number of sentinels along the railroad so as to require each company to actively patrol its area of responsibility twice during the day and twice at night. This only temporarily solved the problem, as the War Department extended its control of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad to include the vicinity of Harper's Ferry. This required the movement of troops to the area to

⁸Special Order No. 72, Headquarters, Army of the Potomac, 12 March 1862, RG 393; Special Order No. 83, Headquarters, Army of the Potomac, 17 March 1862, *ibid.*

guard this vital stretch of road, since it was unprotected in several places and the army feared depredations would be committed by disloyal persons living nearby.⁹

Miles was instructed on Saturday, 29 March 1862, to relocate the headquarters of the Railroad Brigade at Harper's Ferry. To guard this additional area, Brigade troops were assigned new positions in the region. In addition, Maj. Gen. George B. McClellan, general-in-chief and commanding the Army of the Potomac, ordered one regiment of infantry and five regiments of cavalry as reinforcements for the Railroad Brigade. McClellan instructed Miles in making his dispositions to consider placing a permanent guard at every bridge. On the same day, Miles reiterated the Brigade mission and the importance of vigilance. The Railroad Brigade, he wrote, was acting as a guard to prevent destruction by enemy troops or "evil disposed persons."¹⁰

To successfully accomplish the mission and utilize troops assigned to the Brigade, Miles recommended special tactics to his regimental commanders. The infantry units would station sentinels within hailing distance of one another and send out

⁹General Order No. 13, Headquarters, Railroad Brigade, 7 March 1862, RG 393; General Order No. 14, Headquarters, Railroad Brigade, 8 March 1862, *ibid.*; unnumbered order signed by Edwin M. Stanton, Secretary of War, 24 March 1862, Edwin McMasters Stanton Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, D. C.; Brig. Gen. Randolph B. Marcy, chief of staff, Army of the Potomac, to Col. D. S. Miles, 29 March 1862, OR, ser. 1, 12, pt. 3: 29.

¹⁰Special Order No. 94, Headquarters, Army of the Potomac, 28 March 1862, RG 393; Special Order No. 95, Headquarters, Army of the Potomac, 29 March 1862, OR, ser. 1, 12, pt. 3: 30; Maj. Gen. George B. McClellan to Marcy, 28 March 1862, *ibid.*, pp. 25-26; Marcy to Miles, 29 March 1862, *ibid.*, p. 28; Special Order No. 11, Headquarters, Railroad Brigade, 29 March 1862, RG 393.

patrols four times daily. Cavalry was to assist in protecting the track by providing dismounted troops as guards along the railroad, while providing mounted pickets or patrols to prevent the enemy's surprise approach. These patrols were to become familiar with the roads in the area in order to respond successfully when attacked or when forced from the position.¹¹

Miles officially moved his headquarters from the Relay House to Harper's Ferry on 5 April. On the tenth, he announced his staff: Lt. Henry M. Binney, Tenth Maine, Acting Aide de Camp; Lt. H. C. Reynolds, Sixtieth New York, Acting Assistant Adjutant General; Capt. John P. Rutherford, Fifty-fourth Pennsylvania, Brigade Quartermaster; Capt. Daniel Saint, Commissary of Subsistence; and Surgeon Iavington Quick, Brigade Surgeon. The Brigade commander, still attempting to come to grips with his over-extended command, which now stretched into three military departments (Rappahanock, Maryland, and Shenandoah) and covered 380 miles, had jurisdictional problems. The commanders of the three departments in which the Brigade was stationed believed the Brigade units in his department were under his command and thus required the multitude of periodic reports to be submitted to his headquarters. In addition, Miles discovered that ordnance, quartermaster, and subsistence officers were of the same opinion. Hence, chaos and confusion developed on a daily basis for even the most routine matters. Frustrated,

¹¹Lt. Henry M. Binney, aide de camp, to Lt. Col. C. R. Babbitt, Eighth New York Cavalry, 26 April 1862, RG 393; Binney to Col. Othneil DeForrest, Fifth New York Cavalry, 16 April 1862, *ibid.*

Miles attempted to cut through the red tape when the Fifty-fourth Pennsylvania Volunteers, in the most exposed position of the Brigade, urgently requested rifles and ammunition to bring the unit to a full table of organization. Writing to Brig. Gen. James W. Ripley, Chief of Ordnance at the War Department, Miles admitted he did not know

to whom to apply for anything . . . except Major General Dix I am unable to communicate with the other two commanders without involving serious delay, and hence I send direct to you that you may, by reference to the Honorable Secretary of War, have solved the embarrassing position in which I am placed.¹²

No answer concerning jurisdiction was received.

The quality of the troops assigned to the Railroad Brigade as guards, as might be expected, was not that of first rate front-line combat troops. In addition to the Fifty-fourth Pennsylvania, Col. J. M. Campbell commanding, the Brigade's composition at this time consisted of the Tenth Maine, Col. G. L. Beal commanding; the Sixtieth New York, Col. William B. Goodrich commanding; the First Maryland Potomac Home Brigade, Col. William P. Maulsby commanding; the Fourth Maryland Potomac Home Brigade (three companies), Capt. C. A. Welch commanding; the Patapsco Maryland Guard, Capt. T. S. McGowan commanding; the First

¹²Miles to Brig. Gen. James W. Ripley, Chief of Ordnance, War Department, 1 May 1862, RG 393; General Order No. 21, Headquarters, Railroad Brigade, 5 April 1862, *ibid.*; Heitman, Historical Register, 1: 811, 854, 857; General Order No. 22, Headquarters, Railroad Brigade, 10 April 1862, RG 393; Binney to Brig. Gen. Lorenzo Thomas, Adjutant General, War Department, 1 May 1862, *ibid.*

Maryland Potomac Home Brigade Cavalry (one company), Capt. Henry A. Cole commanding; Battery K, First New York Artillery, Capt. Lorenzo Crouse commanding; the Twelfth New York State Militia, Col. William G. Ward commanding; and the Eighth New York Cavalry, Lt. Col. C. R. Babbitt commanding.¹³ (See Table I.)

Reports of mutinies, depredations, terrorism, pillaging, and plundering were examples of the discipline and morale problems Miles had to solve. Along with such problems, the Brigade commander was confronted with a large amount of pro-Confederate sympathy from segments of the civil population. On Tuesday, 22 April 1862, Miles corresponded with Lt. Col. James S. Fillebrown, commanding at Charleston, (West) Virginia. Regretting the report that pro-rebel crowds were openly abusive and using insulting language to the troops, Fillebrown was instructed to put a stop to such activities by arresting those involved. If confronted with a continuation of such proceedings, he was authorized to use the bayonet to disperse the crowd and, ultimately, powder and ball, as Union patience was exhausted.¹⁴

¹³Dyer, Compendium, 1: 339; testimony of Col. William G. Ward, Twelfth New York National Guard, 16 October 1862, OR, ser. 1, 19, pt. 1: 730; composition of Railroad Brigade, 20 May 1862, OR, ser. 1, 12, pt. 3: 211; General Order No. 29, Headquarters, Railroad Brigade, 11 May 1862, RG 393.

¹⁴Miles to Col. J. M. Campbell, Fifty-fourth Pennsylvania Volunteers, 7 April 1862, RG 393; Miles to Col. William P. Maulsby, First Maryland Potomac Home Brigade, 11 April 1862, *ibid.*; Miles to Maj. R. M. Copeland, Assistant Adjutant General, New Market, Virginia, 6 May 1862, *ibid.*; Binney to Captain Gallett, Eighth New York Cavalry, 17 April 1862, *ibid.*; Binney to Lt. Col. James S. Fillebrown, 22 April 1862, *ibid.*; Fillebrown to Col. J. F. Knipe, commanding First Brigade, Banks' Corps, 25 September 1862, OR, ser. 1, 19, pt. 1: 488; Binney to a Lieutenant Witherell, Company K, Tenth Maine Volunteers, 13 May 1862, RG 393; Lt. H. C. Reynolds, Assistant Adjutant General to Lt. Col. C. R. Babbitt, Eighth New York Cavalry, 18 May 1862, *ibid.*

TABLE I

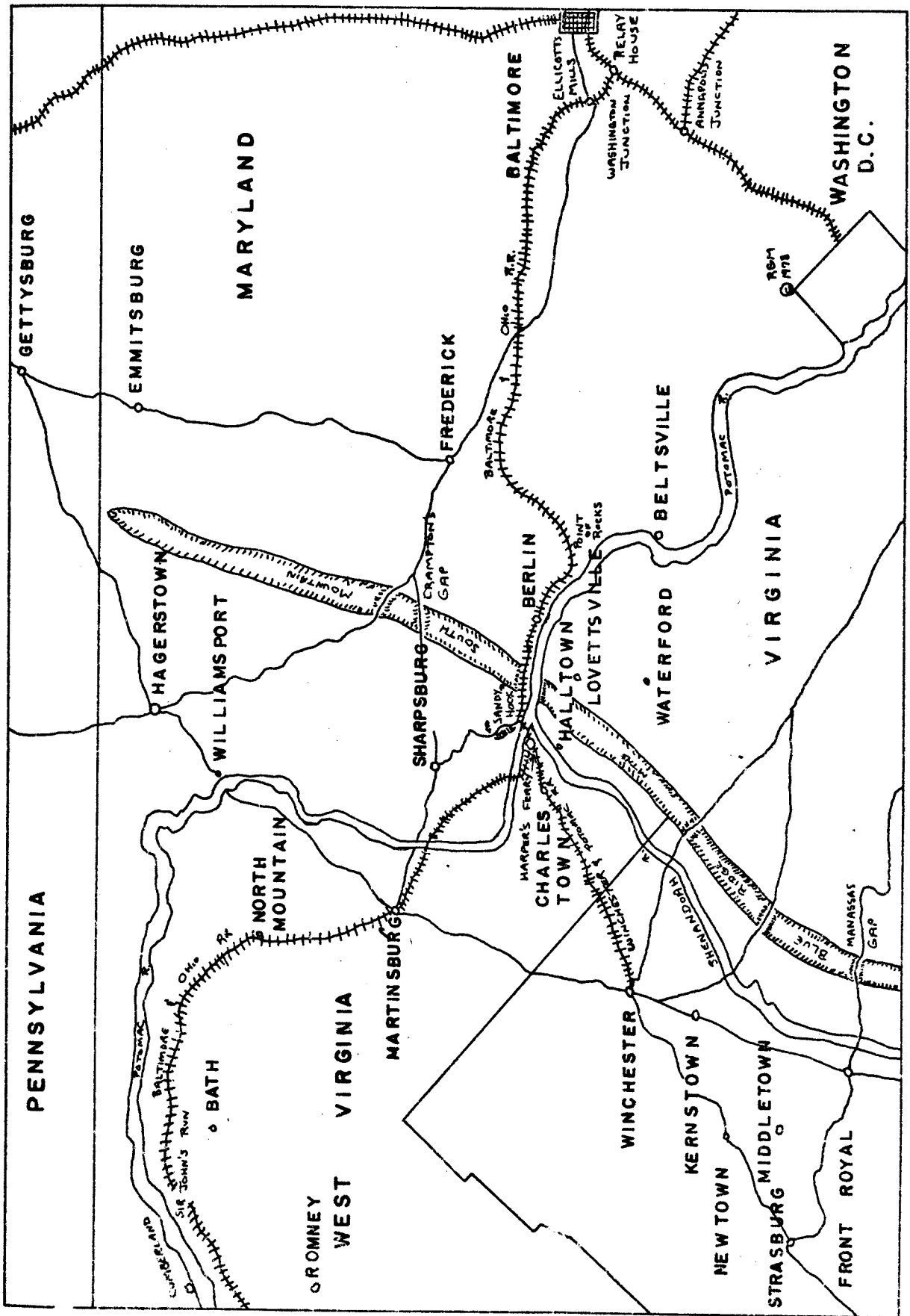
DISPOSITION AND STRENGTH OF RAILROAD BRIGADE
20 May 1862

Location	Present for Officers	Duty Men	Aggregate Present	Aggregate Present, Absent
Harper's Ferry (HQ)	3	0	3	3
Winchester, Va.	35	843	921	939
Charlestown, Va.	30	672	755	833
Sir John's Run, W.Va.	35	853	908	927
Opposite Williamsport	7	194	218	268
Relay House, Md.	34	852	925	938
Beltsville, Md.	28	384	454	502
Ellicotts Mills, Md.	3	97	103	103
Monocacy Bridge, Md.	32	648	706	847
Total	207	4,543	4,993	5,360

SOURCE: Abstract Return, 20 May 1862, OR, ser. 1, 12, pt. 3: 211.

Figure 3

Operations in Maryland and Virginia



Many of the problems which presented themselves could not be quickly solved because of the time required to communicate with far-flung units of the Railroad Brigade. Accordingly, Miles requested permission from the War Department to return his headquarters to the Relay House at Washington Junction. The position was better because of the more central location and faster communications. However, Miles admitted that "Except for neutral position for office purposes it is a matter of no personal interest where I am located as I have to be on the road daily whenever my prescense [sic] is required."¹⁵ Permission was never given for such a move.

Several problems were also difficult to solve because they required action by higher headquarters. One of the more pressing was the need for the establishment of an army general hospital for the Brigade's use. Another was the need for a replacement for Capt. Daniel Saint, Brigade commissary officer. Saint, seventy years old, had performed meritorious service in the War of 1812 but was too old and infirm to perform the very active duty to which he was presently assigned. Indeed, the Brigade had already appointed Lt. W. S. Dodre, the regimental quartermaster of the Tenth Maine Volunteers, as Saint's assistant and wished to make him the Brigade commissary officer. No answer was forthcoming from the War Department concerning the matter. Finally, in mid-July 1862, an inquiry reached Miles, asking if he would make a formal complaint against Saint so that the

¹⁵Miles to Brigadier General Thomas, Adjutant General, 8 May 1862, RG 393.

captain might be removed. Miles refused to make such a complaint, although Saint was

Ignorant of its duties, he no doubt has made many blunders and from not knowing all the laws and regulations, has shown indecision of action, which has warranted the assertion of incapacity. He is honest in purpose, honest in heart, a thorough loyal union gentleman endowed with all the kindest¹⁶ sentiments of a good, true hearted citizen

No extant records indicate Saint's subsequent removal but a list of Miles' staff dated 11 August 1862 revealed that a Captain Sullivan was serving as the assistant commissary of subsistence.

Despite the problems and weaknesses of the Railroad Brigade and the desperate need for time to correct such points, the war was rapidly approaching. Maj. Gen. Thomas J. (Stonewall) Jackson with a force of 17,000 men was marching northward up the Shenandoah Valley. To counter this, the Union had approximately 23,000 troops under several different commanders in the vicinity of the valley. Brig. Gen. James Shields commanded 7,000 at Kernstown; Brig. Gen. Robert C. Schenik commanded 2,268 at McDowell; while Maj. Gen. Nathaniel P. Banks commanding the Department of the Shenandoah had 9,178 dispersed at Front Royal, Middletown, Newtown, and Winchester. Other Union forces were commanded by Maj. Gen. John C. Frémont, and Brig. Gen. James

¹⁶Miles to Capt. Thomas G. Sullivan, Assistant Commissary of Subsistence, 23 July 1862, RG 393; Miles to Brig. Gen. William H. Hammond, Surgeon General of the Army, 2 May 1862, *ibid.*; Miles to Col. Joseph P. Taylor, Commissary General, War Department, 9 May 1862, *ibid.*; Miles to commanding officer, Hagerstown, Maryland, 11 August 1862, *ibid.*

Shields. The Railroad Brigade reported 207 officers and 4,543 men present for duty.¹⁷

Numerous skirmishes and engagements took place as Jackson met and defeated several Union units. Jackson's "foot cavalry" forced Banks to slowly withdraw northward. On 23 May, Jackson defeated the small force of 800 under Col. John R. Kenly, defending Front Royal, Virginia. The seizure of Front Royal presented the Confederates with the opportunity to cut off Banks' forces before he reached Winchester. This possibility frightened Washington; orders were given to Frémont and McDowell to reinforce the valley. Banks had already requested aid from Miles and the colonel had dispatched six companies of the Sixtieth New York, four companies of the First District of Columbia Volunteers, and six companies of the First Maryland Potomac Home Brigade by rail.¹⁸

On Saturday, the twenty-fourth, the majority of Banks' command succeeded in escaping Jackson's encirclement and reached Strasburg, Virginia. Miles reported to Washington that as his units arrived at Harper's Ferry he was ordering them south towards Winchester. He informed the War Department that all

¹⁷Bruce Catton, Terrible Swift Sword (New York: Pocket Books, 1967), p. 187; George F. R. Henderson, Stonewall Jackson and the American Civil War (1898; reprint ed., Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1968), p. 208; Robert U. Johnson and Clarence C. Buel, ed., Battles and Leaders of the Civil War, 4 vols. (New York: Castle Books, 1956), 2: 299-301; E. B. Long and Barbara Long, ed., The Civil War Day by Day: An Almanac 1861-1865 (Garden City: Doubleday, 1971), pp. 205-15; Composition of Railroad Brigade, 20 May 1862, OR, ser. 1, 12, pt. 3: 211.

¹⁸Long, Day by Day, p. 215; Miles to Brig. Gen. Thomas, Adjutant General, 23 May 1862, OR, ser. 1, 12, pt. 3: 217; Dyer, Compendium, 1: 255-56.

means of communicating with Banks had ceased except for the telegraph that paralleled the turnpike from Strasburg through Winchester to Harper's Ferry. Miles also reported that Confederate forces were marching through Middletown on the turnpike to Winchester. Since all telegraph communication had to be transferred at Harper's Ferry, Miles promised to keep the secretary informed.¹⁹

As the message implied that the enemy was between Banks and the colonel, Stanton instantly wired Miles at 12:30 P.M. and asked how Banks was able to transmit to him. No answer was forthcoming; Stanton and Lincoln lingered for an hour in the telegraph office at the War Department. Finally, the president could wait no longer, and at 1:30 P.M. queried Miles as to the feasibility of sending out a patrol from Winchester to determine if the enemy were north of Strasburg (where Banks had organized his defense) and moving on Winchester.

The president's message prompted a response from Miles at 2:00 P.M. The Brigade commander reported moving the First Maryland Cavalry, which had previously been posted on the road which led to Romney, the Middletown turnpike. In addition, the telegraph was working to Winchester but "For the last two hours, for some reason, it has ceased to do so."²⁰

¹⁹Miles to Thomas, 24 May 1862, OR, ser. 1, 12, pt. 3: 225; Long, Day by Day, p. 215.

²⁰Miles to Lincoln, 24 May 1862, Stanton to Miles, 24 May 1862, Lincoln to Miles, 24 May 1862, OR, ser. 1, 12, pt. 3: 225.

At 4:10 P.M. Miles transmitted to Washington a report that Confederate troops had cut the wires between Winchester and Strasburg four hours earlier. At this time, Harper's Ferry was being threatened, and Miles lamented that most of his command was either enroute to Winchester or had yet to arrive from Maryland. He observed that his position could be captured by a single battalion of rebels and that he would take no further action towards Winchester until the town was secure. In Washington the reaction was fear, shock, and disbelief. The inability to determine what was occurring in the valley led Stanton to wire Miles at 6:45 P.M. requesting specific information concerning Banks, the reported sounds of battle to the south, and the arrival of reinforcements at Harper's Ferry. By 10:15 P.M. either Washington had received no answer or an unsatisfactory one and queried Miles as to the feasibility of sending scouts to Winchester to determine the real situation. Angrily Stanton stated that they were "left in extraordinary state of uncertainty as to the real state of affairs, and think some pains should be taken to ascertain the real condition of things at Winchester."²¹

In conjunction with orders issued earlier in the day to Frémont and McDowell, Department of the Rappahannock, to proceed to the valley and engage Jackson's forces, the War Department ordered Brig. Gen. Rufus Saxton, commanding several thousand men in Washington, to march towards Harper's Ferry and, upon

²¹Stanton to Miles, 24 May 1862, OR, ser. 1, 12, pt. 3: 226; Miles to Stanton, 24 May 1862, ibid., p. 225; Catton, Terrible Swift Sword, pp. 286-87.

arrival, assume command. While nothing specifically mentions dissatisfaction with Miles' performance, one could surmise that the correspondence of the twenty-fourth had reduced confidence in the colonel in Washington.

While these various movements of Union troops were taking place, the Confederates under Jackson assaulted Winchester. The battle, occurring on Sunday, 25 May, witnessed, after some delay, Banks' force collapsing and retreating in disorder. On the twenty-sixth and twenty-seventh, Jackson's force enjoyed the food and new clothes from the Union stores at Winchester. The next day, as Jackson advanced on Harper's Ferry, Frémont and McDowell marched to intercept his line of retreat. On Thursday, the twenty-ninth, Jackson's troops demonstrated near Harper's Ferry. The following day, Jackson attempted to overwhelm the 7,000 men under Saxton, who had arrived and taken command on the twenty-sixth. Unsuccessful, Stonewall began to withdraw southward to avoid the trap being set by Frémont's and McDowell's converging forces. Saxton wired Washington on the thirty-first and reported his command was too worn down to join the federal pursuit of the retreating valley army of Jackson. He also reported that he had appointed Miles his chief of staff.²²

²²Catton, Terrible Swift Sword, pp. 288-89; Stanton to Brig. Gen. Rufus Saxton, 24 May 1862, OR, ser. 1, 12, pt. 1: 626; Saxton to Stanton, 31 May 1862, ibid., p. 636; Long, Day by Day, pp. 216-18; Battles and Leaders, 2: 299; Robert G. Tanner, Stonewall In The Valley: Thomas J. "Stonewall" Jackson's Shenandoah Valley Campaign Spring 1862 (Garden City: Doubleday, 1976), pp. 258-59, 265. Saxton's losses for the 29-30 May were one killed, six wounded, eight captured or missing, a total of fifteen casualties of 7,000 at Harper's Ferry. The units were:

Another report was made from Harper's Ferry on that last Saturday in May. Peter H. Watson, assistant secretary of war, had been sent to Harper's Ferry to provide Stanton with a more dependable report of the situation. Watson reported the disgraceful conduct of Colonel Maulsby's Maryland Potomac Home Brigade which stampeded to the rear in fear on Friday, because they believed they had been abandoned and would have to face the Confederate assault alone. There was no attack in progress, Watson observed, and Saxton had merely been shifting units to better positions. Maulsby reported to the brigadier general that he was unable to induce his men to return to their posts, whereupon Saxton, after a few uncomplimentary remarks, allowed the regiment to retire to Maryland "out of harm's way." Watson related General Saxton's evaluation "that he had never known troops to conduct themselves so disgracefully, and that he should feel it his duty to report them, that they might receive the scorn and indignation their bad conduct merit."²³

On Sunday, 1 June, Saxton was required to provide reinforcements for the developing pursuit of Jackson's army. Maj. Gen. Franz

Capt. H. A. Cole's Maryland Cavalry, six companies of the First Maryland Cavalry, four companies of the Fifth New York Cavalry, four dismounted companies of the Eighth New York Cavalry, Batteries K and L, First New York Artillery, Sixtieth New York Volunteers, Seventy-eighth New York Volunteers, 102d New York Volunteers, 109th Pennsylvania Volunteers, 111th Pennsylvania Volunteers, Third Delaware Volunteers, First Maryland Potomac Home Brigade, Purnell's Maryland Legion, Third Maryland Volunteers, First District of Columbia Volunteers, a battalion of the Eighth and Twelfth U. S. Infantry, and Daniels Naval Battery. Battles and Leaders, 2: 299.

²³Peter H. Watson, Assistant Secretary of War, to Stanton, 31 May 1862, OR, ser. 1, 12, pt. 3: 303-04.

Sigel, who succeeded Frémont in command of 10,000 men, marched from Harper's Ferry with two brigades on 2 June. He left Maulsby's regiment, Captain Cole's Maryland Cavalry, the Eighth New York Cavalry (dismounted) and the Naval Battery. The major general reported to the War Department that the troops at Harper's Ferry were in a very "inefficient condition." Of 8,000 in the garrison, Sigel declared, 1,200 were useless, while the remainder were undrilled and undisciplined. Furthermore, Saxton insisted on being relieved of his command responsibilities at Harper's Ferry. Indications from the official records indicate Saxton's desire was fulfilled as Miles' signature block again included the word "commanding."²⁴

Sigel's description of the troops at Harper's Ferry was accurate; Miles reported on the third of June a continued mutiny of several companies of the Eighth New York Cavalry because they had been dismounted and equipped as infantry. In conjunction with the units mentioned above that were retained for the defense of the ferry and the railroad, Sigel's command left several small detachments from his regiments. Miles noted trouble was developing since many of the detachments were without officers. Furthermore, men from so many different regiments had led to a breakdown of discipline, partially because a distinction could not be made between the troops left to guard the village and stragglers from

²⁴Special Order No. 4, Headquarters, Railroad Brigade, 2 June 1862, RG 393; Saxton to Stanton, 2 June 1862, OR, ser. 1, 12, pt. 1: 639; Maj. Gen. Franz Sigel to Stanton, 2 June 1862, OR, ser. 1, 12, pt. 3: 323.

Sigel's command. Miles suggested that Sigel send him one complete regiment in exchange for all the odds and ends of regiments in Harper's Ferry which would be sent forward. Sigel replied in the negative on the seventh, concluding if reinforcements were desired to apply to Washington. Miles claimed he was not asking for reinforcements as much as he was desiring order and dependable troops.²⁵

In the early days of June, Miles sent a request to Washington for a steam tug and authorization to hire canal boats to ferry supplies from the Maryland shore to Virginia. This was urgent because the Potomac River was rapidly rising with the spring run-off, and the bridge at Harper's Ferry was in danger of being washed downstream. Before the War Department could respond, the bridge was destroyed during the night of 4 June 1862.²⁶

The flood of the fourth swept away three sections of the four span bridge across the Potomac, flooded the army store houses, arsenal and the stables, and destroyed the bridges on the railroad to Winchester. The huge quantities of stores at Harper's Ferry from which the Union forces in the field were continually resupplied were isolated for several days, since the railroads and roads were made impassable by the flood. On

²⁵Miles to Capt. Charles W. Asmussen, Assistant Adjutant General, Sigel's Division, 3 June 1862, RG 393; Miles to Asmussen, 4 June 1862, *ibid.*; Miles to Asmussen, 5 June 1862, *ibid.*; Miles to Asmussen, 6 June 1862, *ibid.*; Miles to Maj. R. M. Copeland, Assistant Adjutant General, Shenandoah Department, 8 June 1862, *OR*, ser. 1, 51, pt. 1: 665-66.

²⁶Miles to Stanton, 4 June 1862, RG 393; Miles to Stanton, 5 June 1862, *ibid.*

the fifth, it was reported that 50-60,000 rations were in the village but unable to be distributed. Repairs were begun immediately, and by the sixth the railroad had been reopened to Martinsburg. In the following days, the railroad to Winchester was also reopened.²⁷

In conjunction with the natural disaster, the colonel had to resolve the latest disciplinary problem involving the dismounted Eighth New York Cavalry. Since its organization, the regiment had been without mounts. Miles, recognizing the situation could not continue, recommended either total disbandment or issuing cavalry equipment. The Eighth refused to serve as infantry during the critical days of May. Now located on the Maryland Heights, the men were to serve the artillery pieces located there, because Lt. C. H. Daniels and the sailors and marines who comprised the Naval Battery during the recent fight with Jackson had been ordered to return to the Washington Navy Yard. The large cannon and ammunition would remain in position, while the small howitzers were removed to Washington. Miles, describing the Eighth as disorganized and mutinous, had been promised that they would receive horses and cavalry arms. Whether the promise would suffice to satisfy their temporary use as artillery remained to be seen. On the tenth of June, orders were received from the War Department to mount the Eighth New York under its new commander, Col. B. W. Davis. Miles believed this would make it a dependable cavalry unit. To accomplish this, the regiment should be ordered

²⁷Miles to Maj. Gen. N. P. Banks, 5 June 1862, OR, ser. 1, 51, pt. 1: 659-60; Miles to Stanton, 6 June 1862, ibid., p. 661.

to Annapolis for formal instruction and to receive its horses and equipment. The men, Miles wrote, were young athletic farmer boys; good material to make good soldiers after receiving the proper training. It would take at least two months, however, to make the regiment serviceable for the field.²⁸

This objective of making units serviceable for the field was also on the mind of Secretary Edwin M. Stanton. One of these units was the Railroad Brigade. Miles was consulted as to positions, numbers required, and the quality of troops necessary to guard the railways from Washington to Baltimore, from Baltimore to Cumberland, and from Harper's Ferry to Winchester. In the area of the valley, Miles recommended that one infantry regiment with headquarters at Martinsburg should occupy the road from Duffield's to North Mountain; one regiment at Harper's Ferry and Halltown; one regiment from Charlestown to Winchester; one regiment from Back River to South Branch; and eight companies of cavalry scattered from Bath to Charlestown for any future contingency. Along with this, the colonel emphatically stated that it was "worse than useless" to place raw and undisciplined troops on the railroad; the best troops available should be given such a duty since it was impossible to have drill, and the men might become demoralized and undisciplined. This seemed

²⁸Miles to Asmussen, 5 June 1862, RG 393; Miles to Asmussen, 6 June 1862, *ibid.*; Miles to Asmussen, 8 June 1862, *ibid.*; Miles to Asmussen, 10 June 1862, *ibid.*; Miles to Asmussen, 12 June 1862, *ibid.*; Miles to Maj. R. M. Copeland, 14 June 1862, *ibid.*; Stanton to Miles, 6 June 1862, *OR*, ser. 1, 51, pt. 1: 661; Miles to Banks, 22 June 1862, *ibid.*, p. 690.

more probable with newly raised units than with well disciplined units.²⁹

While the War Department studied the situation concerning the Brigade, Miles was forced to meet his commitments with his understrength command, the chaotic detachments, and hodgepodge of troops available to him. He was unable to garrison several points because the troops at his disposal refused, in several instances, to obey any officer not of their own company. Likewise, if these soldiers were sent to separate posts, they would disintegrate into an irresponsible mob. In addition, two of his regiments, the Eighth New York Cavalry and the Maryland Potomac Home Brigade, were less than dependable. (The Eighth New York for reasons as mentioned above and the Maryland regiment because it had been enlisted exclusively for duty within the state of Maryland thus refusing to serve outside Maryland.)³⁰

During this period, Dix was replaced as commander of the Middle Department by Maj. Gen. John E. Wool, a seventy-eight year old professional soldier whose opinion was highly valued. First seeing service in the War of 1812, he had been a bookseller and law student in New York before raising a volunteer company. Receiving a regular army commission during that war, he later served as the Inspector General of the U. S. Army and attained

²⁹Miles to Banks, 5 June 1862, OR, ser. 1, 51, pt. 1: 660.

³⁰Miles to Asmussen, 6 June 1862, RG 393; Miles to Asmussen, 9 June 1862, *ibid.*; Thomas to Miles, 3 April 1862, *ibid.*; Miles to unidentified captain, 8 June 1862, *ibid.*; Miles to Asmussen, 10 June 1862, *ibid.*; Miles to Asmussen, 12 June 1862, *ibid.*; Miles to Copeland, 14 June 1862, *ibid.*; Miles to Banks, 22 June 1862, OR, ser. 1, 51, pt. 1: 690.

the rank of brigadier general in 1841. In 1836 he was in command of the troops charged with the removal of the Cherokees. During the Mexican War, he was second in command of Zachary Taylor's army. At Buena Vista he selected the ground, positioned and led the troops in the opening phases of the battle of February 1847. Following the Mexican War, he held several important department commands; in 1861 his promptness in reinforcing Fortress Monroe secured that post for the Union. His promotion to major general in May 1862 led to his assignment in June to the command of the Middle Department and Miles' Railroad Brigade.³¹

Wool, inspecting his command, reported to Stanton that Harper's Ferry was an indefensible position. The number of troops present for duty was 1,176 infantry and 182 cavalry. Included in the infantry total was the Eighth New York Cavalry and Maulsby's Maryland regiment. Wool observed that these men refused to work or do anything else; besides the lack of horses, many men had no weapons at all. Four regiments were desperately needed to garrison this important position. Along with the additional infantry, artillerymen were needed to man the two IX inch Dahlgrens, one rifled 50 pounder, four smooth bore 12 pounder howitzers and two III inch rifled guns present in the village.³²

³¹Dyer, Compendium, 1: 339; National Cyclopedia of American Biography, 4: 282.

³²Maj. Gen. John E. Wool, commanding Middle Department, to Stanton, 12 June 1862, OR, ser. 1, 12, pt. 3: 394; Miles to Stanton, 12 June 1862, ibid., p. 378.

Despite the occupation of Harper's Ferry by Union forces since 24 February 1862, Major General Wool forwarded a request in mid-June for an engineer officer to aid in the construction of two redoubts and other fortifications. This occurred in spite of Miles' occupation of the village since the tenth of April. Miles claimed he had the tools but no laborers; during Jackson's valley campaign of May, this was correct. However, both prior to and following this Confederate activity, nothing had been done. At the end of June, Miles reported that rain was delaying the construction but only "two or three days [of] fair weather will nearly complete them."³³

This statement would seem to indicate that the works were nearing completion. But mid-July found them only partially completed. Contrabands were still being gathered for use as laborers on the fortifications, and artillery positions were still being prepared. To supervise the contrabands, two civilians were hired by the Engineer Department of the War Department. On Friday, 25 July, Miles wrote to each of the cavalry regiments in the vicinity of Harper's Ferry asking for the bags in which grain ration was issued. These bags made excellent replacements for sand bags, which were in short supply, and were needed to finish the field fortifications.³⁴

³³Miles to Wool, 24 June 1862, RG 393; Miles to Stanton, 13 June 1862, OR, ser. 1, 12, pt. 3: 387.

³⁴Lt. B. H. Bellens to Captain Butler, Company G, Twenty-second New York National Guard, 20 July 1862, RG 393; Miles to Lt. Col. J. Austin, commanding Seventy-eighth New York, 21 July 1862, *ibid.*; Miles to Col. Arno Voss, commanding Twelfth Illinois Cavalry, 25 July 1862, *ibid.*

At the end of July Miles submitted topographical sketches to Wool showing the defensive positions at Harper's Ferry. The colonel specifically drew the general's attention to the higher elevation of Bolivar Heights, (West) Virginia, in relation to that of Camp Hill. The fortifications at Harper's Ferry, which were finally completed, were located at Camp Hill, not the higher position, and Miles suggested that Camp Hill would only be secure against a frontal attack if field works were erected on the crest of Bolivar Heights. It was not until the twenty-eighth of August, however, when Brig. Gen. George W. Cullum, an engineer, and Maj. Gen. Henry Halleck's chief of staff, inspected the fortifications and recommended the immediate adoption of Miles' proposal of 31 July, that work commenced on any type of field works on Bolivar Heights.³⁵ Whether these new works would be completed before the imminent Confederate assault or whether the patchwork organization of the Railroad Brigade would have enough cohesiveness to withstand such an assault remained to be seen. Most Union officers realized that success in combat would depend on how the individual soldier conducted himself on the battlefield and the leadership he received from his officers. Since the Brigade consisted of ill trained, ill equipped, poorly motivated, poorly led regiments, the outcome of such combat remained a mystery.

³⁵Miles to Lt. Col. W. D. Whipple, Assistant Adjutant General, Middle Department, 31 July 1862, RG 393; Miles to Wool, 28 August 1862, *ibid.*; Maj. Gen. Henry W. Halleck had been appointed General-in-Chief of the Union army on 11 July 1862. Long, Day by Day, p. 238.

CHAPTER II

THE RAILROAD BRIGADE IN ACTION

During, the hot, muggy days of the summer of 1862, Dixon S. Miles attempted to create a viable combat brigade out of the bits and pieces and cast offs of various Union regiments. He insisted that the mission of the Railroad Brigade was that of protecting the railroad, preventing the destruction of the track, roadbed, or bridges by Confederate guerrilla forces. There was never any intention for the Brigade to fight an organized enemy force and, if confronted by such forces, his regimental commanders were instructed to destroy everything of value and retreat towards Harper's Ferry. The threat of such action was considered remote, as the rumors of a Confederate attack by Jackson were considered to be just that--rumors. Miles, writing to Lt. Col. W. D. Whipple, the assistant adjutant general of the Eighth Corps and Middle Department, noted that

the railroad is in no more danger now than at any prior period. If it had not been strictly guarded it would have been destroyed. Guerrilla parties are all through the country Their object seems [to be] to collect men, horses, arms, do what damage they can to Union men and the Government, and rejoin their regiments.¹

¹Miles to Whipple, 20 August 1862, U.S., War Department, The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies, R. N. Scott et al, eds., 130 vols. (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1880-1901),

Regardless of whether the soldiers of the Brigade encountered such opponents, Miles was faced with the necessity of making soldiers out of raw, undisciplined troops. It would seem that the colonel succeeded in this venture, since Maj. Gen. John E. Wool complimented the officers and soldiers of the Brigade in mid-July for their soldierly appearance, proficiency in drill, and excellent discipline. But in August, Miles urgently requested that a general court martial board be appointed to consider the large number of cases of mutiny, desertion, and sleeping on post that necessitated such action.²

In addition, Miles had disciplinary problems with several combat units. One, styled the "Loudoun Rangers," though not assigned to the Brigade, was stationed fourteen miles southeast of Harper's Ferry and was within the Brigade area of responsibility. This company, commanded by Capt. S. C. Means, had been raised in Waterford, Virginia, and Point of Rocks, Maryland, in June 1862. Having no discipline, Means' company committed all kinds of depredations in Loudoun County, Virginia, living off the land and taking what they pleased "until the arrival of his men in any vicinity was a dread and terror."³

ser. 1, 51, pt. 1: 750 (hereafter cited as OR); Miles to Col. J. Maidhof, 17 July 1862, Record Group 393, "Records of the United States Army Commands," National Archives, Washington, D. C. (hereafter cited as RG 393); Whipple to Miles, 19 August 1862, OR, 1, 51, pt. 1: 747; Miles to Whipple, 29 July 1862, RG 393.

²General Order No. 34, Headquarters, Railroad Brigade, 23 July 1862, RG 393; Miles to Whipple, 20 August 1862, *ibid.*

³Miles to Whipple, 27 August 1862, OR, ser. 1, 51, pt. 1: 764-65; Frederick H. Dyer, A Compendium of the War of the Rebellion, 3 vols. (New York: Thomas Yoseloff, 1959), 1: 234; William F. Amann, ed., Personnel of the Civil War, 2 vols., 2: The Union Armies (New York: Thomas Yoseloff, 1961) 2: 236.

Having warned Means that his loose, straggling manner of encampment and marching made him susceptible to surprise attack, it came as no surprise to the colonel when couriers arrived with news that the Loudoun Rangers had been captured while sleeping in a church at Waterford on 27 August. The Brigade commander, reporting the news to Wool, advised the general that three companies of cavalry under Capt. Henry A. Cole were riding to Waterford to ascertain the damage and protect the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad. In conjunction, Miles complained that the regiment he received as reinforcements was untrained, "the men belonging to it never had a gun in their hands until the boxes were opened and muskets issued to them yesterday; nor does an officer of the command . . . know how to drill or anything about the drill."⁴

Likewise, a regiment of the New York National Guard, the Eleventh, was composed of three month soldiers, whose term of service expired on Thursday, 28 August 1862. The regiment's eight companies, guarding the Winchester railroad, had to be replaced, and Miles requested another unit. Major General Wool responded that none of the ninety day militia would leave the Brigade without orders from his headquarters. The Eleventh New York, desirous of discharge, were quite upset at this decision and refused to perform their duties past Monday, the first of September. Wool relented and permitted Col. Joachim Maidhof's Eleventh New York to march for home on 2 September 1862.⁵

⁴Miles to Whipple, 27 August 1862, OR, ser. 1, 51, pt. 1: 764-66.

⁵Miles to Whipple, 27 August 1862, OR, ser. 1, 51, pt. 1: 765; Wool to Miles, 27 August 1862, ibid., p. 765; Miles to Wool, 31 August 1862, RG 393.

Following the attack on the Loudoun Rangers, Miles' scouts reported that the number of rebels in the vicinity had increased. Miles responded by contracting his lines with the expectation that the troops on the Winchester road would be driven in at any moment. To prevent surprise, he ordered his units to have their arms in hand and be in battle formation before daybreak.⁶

At this point the War Department was unable to determine the intentions of the enemy. Maj. Gen. George B. McClellan's army was in transit from the peninsula of the York and James Rivers of Virginia, while Maj. Gen. John Pope's Army of Virginia skirmished with Gen. Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia along the Rappahannock. On the twenty-fifth of August, Maj. Gen. Thomas J. Jackson's corps began to march northward, followed by the remainder of Lee's army. Pope discovered his lines outflanked and moved north towards Manassas Junction, Virginia, a Union supply base. On Friday, the twenty-ninth, the two forces collided at the second battle of Manassas (Bull Run). Pope's army was defeated and forced to retreat to Centreville. Lee's first invasion of the North had begun. As the Confederate army edged northward, Pope was forced to withdraw into the entrenchments of Washington.⁷

⁶Miles to Wool, 28 August 1862, OR, ser. 1, 51, pt. 1: 767-68; Binney to Capt. A. M. Hunter, commander cavalry company at Smithfield, Virginia, 29 August 1862, RG 393; Miles to Whipple, 2 September 1862, *ibid.*

⁷E. B. Long and Barbara Long, ed., The Civil War Day By Day: An Almanac 1861-1865 (Garden City: Doubleday, 1971), pp. 253-58.

Because of the Confederate advance, the Union forces in the Shenandoah Valley were also outflanked and forced to fall back to Harper's Ferry. Tuesday, 2 September, Brig. Gen. Julius White, commanding a brigade at Winchester, Virginia, ordered his forces to evacuate the town and move towards that key position. White, having seen service as colonel of the Thirty-seventh Illinois Volunteers (the Frémont Rifles) in Missouri, had been promoted to brigadier general in recognition of his services at Pea Ridge, Arkansas, in March 1862. With the promotion he had been assigned duty in the Valley.⁸

As White's units evacuated the fortifications at Winchester, they destroyed all supplies incapable of being moved, spiked the four 32-pounder artillery pieces, and exploded the extra ammunition. White's sick, wounded, and baggage arrived at Harper's Ferry on the day following the evacuation. Meanwhile, Miles took precautionary steps by ordering his cavalry to watch the various crossings on the Potomac. White's brigade, consisting of the Thirty-ninth New York, Col. Frederick G. D'Utassy commanding; Thirty-second Ohio, Col. Thomas H. Ford commanding; Sixtieth Ohio, Col. William H. Trimble commanding; Ninth Vermont, Col. George J. Stannard commanding; Indiana Battery, Capt. Silas F. Rigby commanding; Ohio Battery, Capt. Benjamin F. Potts commanding; First Maryland Cavalry, Capt. Charles H. Russell commanding; and one battalion of Rhode Island Cavalry, Maj. Augustus W. Corliss

⁸Miles to Wool, 3 September 1862, OR, ser. 1, 51, pt. 1: 784; Mark M. Boatner III, Civil War Dictionary (New York: David McKay Co., 1959), p. 914.

commanding, filed into town on the third and fourth.⁹

With White's arrival at Harper's Ferry, Miles prepared to turn over command of the post. In conjunction with this action, Miles suggested that Wool reassign one of the two officers to Martinsburg, Virginia. This would avoid any potential conflicts over command. To everyone's surprise, especially General White, Wool ordered Miles to retain command of Harper's Ferry with most of White's troops, while White was ordered to assume command at Martinsburg. White's instructions were to hold the town "at all regards," while Miles was given wide discretion in determining his course of action and was cautioned to prepare his position so as not to be surprised. Wool's guidance concluded by emphasizing watchfulness, vigilance, and sound discretion.¹⁰

Angrily, White wrote Brig. Gen. George W. Cullum, Maj. Gen. Henry Halleck's chief of staff, demanding to know why he had been removed from command and by what authority this had occurred. Continuing, he explained that he had been assigned to duty in the Army of Virginia by the War Department, had been ordered by

⁹Miles to Wool, 3 September 1862, OR, ser. 1, 51, pt. 1: 784; White to Brig. Gen. G. W. Cullum, chief of staff, 6 September 1862, OR, ser. 1, 12, pt. 2: 765-66; Military Commission investigating evacuation of Winchester, Virginia, 17-23 October 1862, *ibid.*, pp. 767-803; Return of Union Casualties, 12-15 September 1862, OR, ser. 1, 19, pt. 1: 549.

¹⁰Miles to Whipple, 3 September 1862, RG 393; Miles to Voss, 4 September 1862, *ibid.*; Miles to Wool, 3 September 1862, OR, ser. 1, 51, pt. 1: 784; Special Order No. 112, Headquarters, Railroad Brigade, RG 393; Wool to Miles, 3 September 1862, OR, ser. 1, 51, pt. 1: 784; Wool to Miles, 4 September 1862, OR, ser. 1, 19, pt. 2: 181; Wool to White, 4 September 1862, *ibid.*, p. 181.

Halleck to evacuate Winchester and proceed to Harper's Ferry and was then ordered by Wool to relinquish his command at Harper's Ferry. Believing that only Halleck's order as general in chief could detach him from the Army of Virginia, he asked to be relieved from duty at Martinsburg and be reassigned to the front lines. Halleck answered White's inquiry on the eighth of September. The general-in-chief believed that White's movement from Winchester to Harper's Ferry brought the brigadier general under the authority of Wool's Eighth Corps. Further, it was not proper in the present circumstances to change Wool's dispositions since combat was about to be joined with the enemy. Perhaps, Halleck wrote, a different assignment would be given him as soon as possible. While White fumed, Miles graciously accepted the increase in responsibility given him by Major General Wool and White's order reassigning his combat units. Miles was confident "that the troops turned over to him will do faithfully their duty to their Country in sustaining their Country's honor and our national flag at this Post."¹¹

Not all soldiers in town would perform their duty, as was demonstrated when the Eleventh New York National Guard marched for home. They were scheduled to be followed by Col. William G. Ward's Twelfth New York National Guard, whose term of service

¹¹Special Order No. 112, Headquarters, Railroad Brigade, RG 393; White to Cullum, 6 September 1862, OR, ser. 1, 19, pt. 2: 198; Cullum to White, 6 September 1862, ibid., p. 199; White to Halleck, 8 September 1862, ibid., p. 218; Halleck to White, 8 September 1862, ibid., p. 218.

had expired on Wednesday, the third of September. Miles experienced the same difficulties with the Twelfth that he had with Maidhof's Eleventh. Since there was not enough transportation to move both regiments simultaneously, the Twelfth had to remain at Harper's Ferry until cars were available. In the interim, Ward's regiment became rowdy and "dissatisfied" at not being discharged.¹²

At the same time White's command was evacuating Winchester, Miles had ordered the Twelfth New York to strike its camp and move into the line of fortifications at Harper's Ferry. Appealing to the unit's patriotic feeling for the duty it was now called to perform, Miles pleaded for the regiment to "gloriously come up to its duty, and return after a short while home, to relate their valorous deeds, and have their names descend on the pages of imperishable history, as the defenders of Camp Hill, the glorious flag of our Country, its Constitution, and outraged laws."¹³ Major General Wool added to this appeal by asking the regiment to remain at Harper's Ferry "a few days" longer and reminded the men that to return to New York during these critical days would brand them as cowards. Refusing to see this happen, Wool thanked the men in advance on behalf of the country for remaining.¹⁴

¹²Miles to Whipple, 1 September 1862, RG 393; Miles to Whipple, 2 September 1862, *ibid.*; Miles to Wool, 3 September 1862, *ibid.*; Miles to Wool, 6 September 1862, *ibid.*

¹³Miles to Ward, 3 September 1862, RG 393.

¹⁴Wool to Ward, __September 1862, OR, ser. 1, 19, pt. 2: 181.

By the fourth, many reports had reached Washington of the movement of rebel forces into the valley with the ultimate objective of capturing Harper's Ferry. Not everyone was convinced; Miles believed that the supposed infantry entering the valley were, in reality, paroled prisoners marching in that direction. His cavalry patrol reports varied from no contact to encounters with small numbers of cavalry and infantry. Since his area of responsibility was so large, Miles seemed quite confident in his intelligence reports. On the evening of the fourth, he reported to his superiors that Col. Henry B. Banning, commanding the Eighty-seventh Ohio at Point of Rocks, Maryland, had observed Confederate forces crossing the Potomac and, threatened by overwhelming odds, abandoned the position. Miles immediately ordered Banning to halt and defend the road to Harper's Ferry. In addition, he ordered reinforcements to Banning's aid. The next day, he was informed that Banning's report was false; however, this information was incorrect. Lee had indeed begun crossing the Potomac enroute to Frederick, Maryland, which was occupied by Jackson on Saturday, 6 September.¹⁵

Confusion resulted from these events. Wool, reporting numerous crossings of the Potomac, decried the situation in which he found his troops. At Baltimore, he had two new regiments arming themselves, but the officers and men were totally ignorant

¹⁵Miles to Halleck, 4 September 1862, Abraham Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, D. C. (on microfilm NTSU Library); Miles to Halleck and Wool, 4 September 1862, Lincoln papers; Miles to Brig. Gen. William A. Hammond, Surgeon General U. S. Army, 2 September 1862, RG 393; Miles to Wool, 5 September 1862, OR, ser. 1, 51, pt. 1: 790; Long, Day by Day, pp. 261-62.

of battle drill. Since they would be useless if assigned to the field, Wool proposed posting them at Washington Junction and Relay House. Halleck informed Wool that the army would not be able to take the field in large force for at least two days. This was partly because Pope's Army of Virginia was being consolidated with McClellan's Army of the Potomac. Pope had been ordered to Washington to face a court of inquiry into his actions in Virginia, while McClellan assumed command of the greatly enlarged Army of the Potomac. While this was occurring, Harper's Ferry and Martinsburg, virtually cut off from Washington, were in danger of being attacked and overwhelmed. Halleck told Wool to make any dispositions he believed necessary and suggested that all troops in the vicinity of Harper's Ferry be withdrawn to Maryland Heights, which overlooked the town.¹⁶

Miles, responding to the developing situation, began to post his regiments so as to gain information and protect his position. He informed White at Martinsburg of the disruption of communication with Washington and of the reports that Confederate Maj. Gen. Ambrose P. Hill's "Light Division" had encamped at Lovettsville, seven miles from Harper's Ferry. Miles, determined to hold his ground, wrote, "There will be a day of reckoning with those who fail to obey orders or by abandonment of positions without orders or necessity."¹⁷ Several such positions were to

¹⁶Wool to Halleck, 5 September 1862, OR, ser. 1, 19, pt. 2: 188-89; Halleck to Wool, 5 September 1862, ibid., p. 189; Long, Day by Day, pp. 262-63.

¹⁷Miles to Maulsby, 6 September 1862, OR, ser. 1, 51, pt. 1: 794; Miles to White, 6 September 1862, ibid., p. 794.

be held at all costs. One was Sandy Hook, Maryland, where Col. William P. Maulsby's First Maryland Potomac Home Brigade (five companies) was posted; another was Berlin, Maryland, where Banning's Eighty-seventh Ohio was located. If Banning were forced to yield the position, he was ordered to stop at Sandy Hook, as that place was "to be defended at all hazards."¹⁸

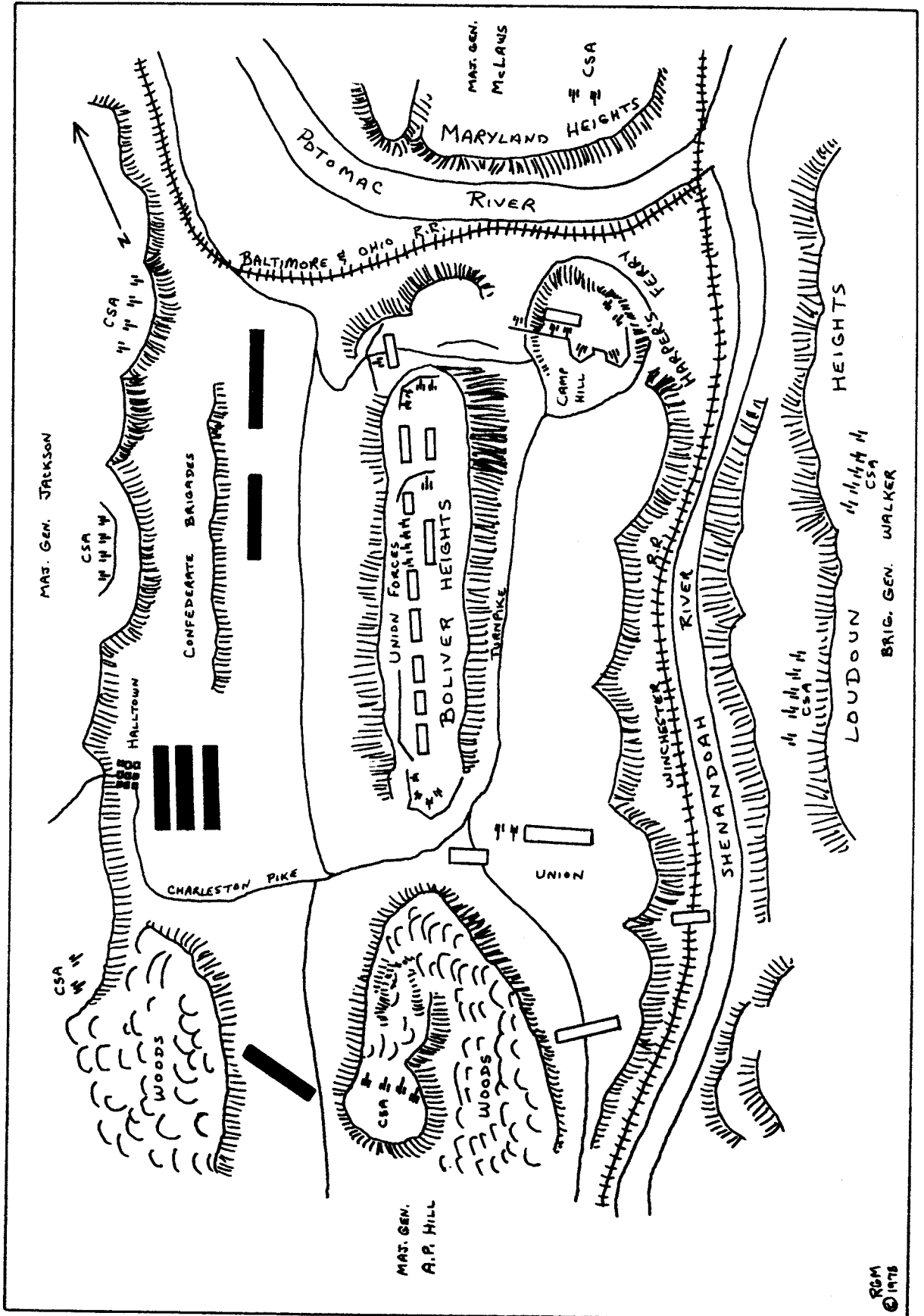
Miles, with orders to hold the key position of Harper's Ferry, faced a difficult task. The town, located in the angle formed by the junction of the Potomac and Shenandoah Rivers, was surrounded on all sides by high ground. Four key pieces of terrain dominated and controlled the town in the valley below. The first, located to the west of town in Virginia, was Bolivar Heights. Bolivar Heights rose abruptly from the town, spreading out into a plain to the west and then rose again forming a parapet sloping down to the surrounding countryside. The second key feature was Camp Hill, which rose immediately from town towards the west to Bolivar Heights. Loudoun Heights, eastward across the Shenandoah River from Harper's Ferry, was a third terrain feature. The most important terrain feature and the key to any defense of the position was Maryland Heights. Maryland Heights, north from the town on the Maryland side of the Potomac River in the angle formed by the bend of the river, rose to an elevation of 1,500 feet.¹⁹

¹⁸Miles to Banning, 6 September 1862, OR, ser. 1, 51, pt. 1: 795; Miles to Maulsby, 6 September 1862, ibid., pp. 794-95.

¹⁹Washington National Intelligencer, 25 September 1862; Shelby Foote, The Civil War: A Narrative, 3 vols. (New York: Random House, 1958-1974), 1: 667; Douglas Southall Freeman, R. E. Lee: A Biography, 4 vols. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1934-35), 2: 361.

Figure 4

Defenses at Harper's Ferry



RCM
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Any successful defense of Harper's Ferry dictated that these heights be garrisoned and fortified. With Confederate forces only seven miles to the southeast, the only fortified positions were those completed between May and July on Camp Hill. Frantically, Miles began collecting contraband blacks to dig the long-neglected field fortifications on the heights. To defend these heights, Miles organized his regiments into four brigades. The First Brigade, commanded by Colonel D'Utassy, consisted of the Thirty-ninth New York, 111th New York, 115th New York, and Battery Fifteen of the Indiana Volunteers. It occupied the right half of Bolivar Heights. The left half would be occupied by the Second Brigade, commanded by Colonel Trimble, and consisted of the Sixtieth Ohio, 126th New York, Ninth Vermont, and Pott's Battery of Ohio artillery. Maryland Heights would be defended by the Third Brigade, commanded by Colonel Ford. It consisted of the Thirty-second Ohio, a battalion of the First Maryland Potomac Home Brigade, Company F of the Fifth New York Heavy Artillery, a battalion of Rhode Island cavalry and a detachment of the First Maryland Cavalry. The Fourth Brigade, acting as the reserve, occupied Camp Hill and the trenches prepared earlier. Commanded by Colonel Ward, the Fourth Brigade consisted of the Twelfth New York National Guard, Company A of the Fifth New York Heavy Artillery, Rigby's Battery of Indiana artillery, and the Eighty-seventh Ohio. The position was well supported with a battery of Napoleons, two 24-pounder howitzers and two 20-pounder Parrotts which commanded both the Shenandoah River and Bolivar Heights. This artillery could

sweep the plain to the west of Bolivar Heights and also had the range to bombard Maryland Heights and Loudoun Heights. Artillery was also placed on Maryland Heights since this was the key to the entire defense. About one-half way up this mountain, in a cleared position, were placed two XI inch Dahlgrens, one 30-pounder rifled gun, and two brass Napoleons under McGrath's command. To support the naval battery, so called because it had been originally emplaced and manned in May and June by sailors from the Washington Navy Yard, two additional Napoleons were located on the plateau to the right of McGrath's battery. Bolivar Heights was supported by two batteries of Napoleons.²⁰

During the time Miles' forces were able to keep Confederate units at bay for five days, Washington wired Wool for the latest information from Martinsburg and Harper's Ferry, while prodding McClellan to counter Lee's invasion into Maryland. Wool assured Lincoln that Harper's Ferry would be defended but reported that Martinsburg was coming under increasing rebel pressure. This was in accordance with Lee's plan of operation. To secure the proper amount of supplies while operating in Maryland, he either had to depend on an overextended and unprotected supply line via Culpeper Courthouse, Virginia, or relocate his communication supply line down the Shenandoah Valley. Tuesday, 9 September,

²⁰Special Order No. 113, Headquarters, Railroad Brigade, 6 September 1862, RG 393; Miles to Maulsby, 6 September 1862, OR, ser. 1, 51, pt. 1: 795; Binney to White, 18 September 1862, OR, ser. 1, 19, pt. 1: 533-34; White to Whipple, 22 September 1862, *ibid.*, p. 526; Washington National Intelligencer, 25 September 1862; Stanton to Miles, 6 June 1862, OR, ser. 1, 51, pt. 1: 661.

Lee issued orders for such a change. In order to establish the new supply line, his forces had to capture Martinsburg and Harper's Ferry. Because time was a factor, Lee had to turn to Jackson to insure that the difficult maneuver would succeed.²¹

Since Harper's Ferry was vulnerable, the capture of the heights was of the utmost importance. Further, if the Union garrison were to be captured along with the village, the task was made more difficult. The capture of any one of the heights would provide an excellent artillery position from which the town could be shelled. But an enemy attacked from the Virginia side of the river could easily retreat across the Potomac to Maryland. Assaulted from the Maryland side and from Bolivar Heights, a resourceful enemy could fall back to Loudoun Heights. The answer was to attack all three positions simultaneously with three columns of troops--one for Loudoun Heights, one for Maryland Heights, and one for Bolivar Heights.²²

Lee's army began the maneuver on Wednesday morning, the tenth of September. As the Confederate columns marched towards their objectives, Miles informed White of his plans for any potential action. The colonel did not believe their positions were threatened, however, as Confederate forces in the Shenandoah Valley consisted of straggling guerrillas. Confident that McClellan would force the rebels back across the Potomac, Miles planned on retarding and harassing the retreating enemy. But

²¹Wool to Lincoln, 7 September 1862, Lincoln Papers; Long, Day by Day, p. 264; Freeman, Lee, 2: 359, 363.

²²Freeman, Lee, 2: 361-62.

if he were confronted by a Confederate force of 15,000 or more, he planned to do little more than hold the position. Since his orders were to hold Harper's Ferry at all costs and to the "last extremity," he would not divide his force as this "would lead to the loss of this place and destruction of the detachment [sent out] This, then, could not be done without acting contrary to the orders and wishes of the Government."²³ A reporter for the Washington National Intelligencer declared that "All is perfectly quiet in this neighborhood. The place is occupied by a Union force amply sufficient to hold it against the largest force of rebels; none of whom, however, have yet shown themselves."²⁴

While Miles was reassuring White as to the impossibility of an enemy attack, Lee's three columns were trudging towards the unsuspecting colonel. McClellan's cavalry revealed that Lee's army was moving west from Frederick, Maryland. This prompted McClellan to accelerate his cautious pursuit, while continuing to prepare for battle. He advised the War Department to order Miles to abandon Harper's Ferry where, besides being continually exposed to the enemy, his men were of little use. McClellan, believing Lee outnumbered his forces, wanted all the reinforcements he could obtain.²⁵

By Thursday, Confederate units under Maj. Gen. James Longstreet had entered Hagerstown, Maryland, while Jackson's

²³Miles to White, 10 September 1862, OR, ser. 1, 51, pt. 1: 812.

²⁴Washington National Intelligencer, 12 September 1862.

²⁵Long, Day by Day, p. 264; McClellan to Halleck, 11 September 1862, OR, ser. 1, 19, pt. 2: 254.

column pressed towards the Union garrison under White at Martinsburg. At the same time, Confederate Brig. Gen. John G. Walker's small but fresh division was tramping towards the undefended Loudoun Heights. The fourth rebel column, scheduled to attack Maryland Heights, was commanded by Maj. Gen. Lafayette McLaws and consisted of ten brigades. Contrary to Lee's plan, McLaws spent Thursday night encamped at Brownsville, Maryland, six miles from Harper's Ferry. The six miles remaining to McLaws were the most difficult. The eastern slope of Maryland Heights seemed unassailable; a march southward in the valley parallel to the high ground would invite Union artillery fire. The only way to capture the Heights, McLaws decided, was to climb them four miles north of the Potomac and drive southward along the crest.²⁶

In the meantime, the growing pressure on Martinsburg compelled Brigadier General White to begin evacuating his garrison. He requested wagons and a train from Harper's Ferry in which to carry away equipment and supplies. Miles was unable to provide such assistance. Further complicating the situation, the railroad agent at Martinsburg, disobeying White's orders, allowed eleven empty cars to leave the village on the tenth. Despite these problems, White's units were able to withdraw from the position with most of the public property. However, the retreat did not get underway until 2:00 A.M. Friday morning.

²⁶Freeman, Lee, 2: 363; Douglas Southall Freeman, Lee's Lieutenants: A Study In Command, 3 vols. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1942-44), 2: 184, 186.

On the march White's regiments encountered Confederate pickets but were able to brush them aside and continue towards Harper's Ferry. Reaching the town in the afternoon of 12 September, were the Twelfth Illinois Cavalry, Col. Arno Voss commanding; Sixty-fifth Illinois, Col. Daniel Cameron commanding; 125th New York, Col. George L. Willard commanding; and Battery M of the Second Illinois Artillery, Capt. John C. Phillips commanding. The addition of these units to the garrison of Harper's Ferry increased the total number of Union troops defending the position to 14,000.²⁷

In conjunction with White's evacuation of Martinsburg, Miles reported the rapidly changing situation to Halleck. Threatened from the east and north, the colonel predicted that the message would be the last until the affair was over. By Friday, the twelfth, the envelopment of Harper's Ferry had begun in earnest. Jackson's regiments entered Martinsburg on the heels of the retreating garrison, then traveled on towards Bolivar Heights. At ten o'clock on Saturday morning, his column reached the Union positions. While Jackson's column encamped at Halltown, two miles from Bolivar Heights, Walker's division seized the unoccupied Loudoun Heights. McLaws' brigades, having ascended

²⁷White to Miles, 11 September 1862, OR, ser. 1, 51, pt. 1: 819; White to Miles, 11 September 1862, ibid., p. 820; White to Whipple, 20 September 1862, OR, ser. 1, 19, pt. 1: 524; White to Miles, 13 September 1862, ibid., p. 525; Robert U. Johnson and Clarence C. Buel, eds., Battles and Leaders of the Civil War, 4 vols. (New York: Castle Books, 1956), 2: 618; A. G. Curtin, Governor of Pennsylvania, to Stanton, 15 September 1862, OR, ser. 1, 19, pt. 2: 305; Return of Union Casualties, 12-15 September 1862, OR, ser. 1, 19, pt. 1: 549.

Maryland Heights at the north end, struggled over boulders and the steep mountainside towards the southern edge. At daylight on the thirteenth, this force was one mile from the Potomac River.²⁸

With skirmishing continuing on all sides, Brigadier General White and Colonel Miles conferred. White proposed that Miles, possessing a familiarity with the topography of the vicinity and having posted the various regiments and artillery, continue as commander of the garrison at Harper's Ferry. This offer by White, the senior officer present, was made in part because of the impending battle which made it improper to have a change of command, as well as White's belief that his assignment to Martinsburg had indicated that Major General Wool desired Miles to retain command at Harper's Ferry. Miles, highly flattered, issued General Order No. 42 announcing that the general "with a magnanimity equal to his valor, proffers to [Miles] . . . his services and those of the troops he brought with him, for its defense, and its present necessity. This act of high-toned chivalric generosity, of which there are but few precedents in our army, overwhelms me with the deepest gratitude."²⁹

Having solved the problem of command, White, acting as Miles' second in command, was assigned duty on the left of the

²⁸Miles to Halleck, 11 September 1862, OR, ser. 1, 51, pt. 1: 819; Freeman, Lee's Lieutenants, 2: 165, 187; Henry Kyd Douglas, I Rode With Stonewall (1940; reprint ed., Atlanta: Mockingbird Books, 1976), p. 157.

²⁹General Order No. 42, Headquarters, Railroad Brigade, 13 September 1862, RG 393; White to Miles, 13 September 1862, OR, ser. 1, 19, pt. 1: 525.

line at Bolivar Heights. As Saturday morning waned, the fighting became heavier on Maryland Heights as McLaws' troops pressed forward. Col. Thomas Ford, commanding about 1,150 men, had earlier attempted to fortify his position and emplace additional artillery but was unable to obtain any extra cannon. After conducting a two day delaying action, Ford's Third Brigade found itself on the crest of the mountain. Miles and his staff, supervising the defense, arrived on the Heights at eleven o'clock. Miles and Lt. John L. Willmon, his aide de camp, discovered that the wounding of Col. Eliakim Sherrill, the commander of the 126th New York, had produced a panic among the troops on Maryland Heights, especially the 126th New York. As a result, many fled the field in confusion and disorder. The remaining soldiers, defending behind a hastily built breastwork, heard, or imagined, from the general ebb and flow of men to the rear that an order to retreat had been given and commenced a headlong retreat down the mountain. Only with great difficulty was order restored and troops again placed in position on the Heights. Miles, deciding he had been misled by his intelligence reports as to the number of enemy in the vicinity, told Ford that if his men gave way again he was to immediately withdraw his forces from Maryland Heights to Bolivar Heights. Miles then rode to Bolivar Heights to check on the fighting there.³⁰

The cannonading by both sides grew heavier as the day passed. About this time, a courier from Ford reached Miles' party on Bolivar Heights. The message declared that the

³⁰White to Thomas, 25 September 1862, OR, ser. 1, 19, pt. 1: 531; Binney to White, 18 September 1862, *ibid.*, pp. 536-37; Ford to White, _ September 1862, *ibid.*, pp. 542-43; Freeman. Lee's Lieutenants. 2: 187.

regiments on Maryland Heights were refusing to fight; thus, Ford could no longer hold the heights. Miles responded with an explicit order to hold his position. Upon reflection, Miles now found Ford's position more defensible than it had appeared during the morning, because it was supported by the cannon on Camp Hill. Emphatically, Ford was told to hold on until "the cow's tails drop off."³¹

Receiving reinforcements all day, Ford's line, now numbering 4,600, seemed to stabilize until 3:30, when he discovered that two Confederate brigades threatened to turn his flank. Ford, following Miles' original orders, ordered the guns to be spiked, dismounted, and pushed off the crest of the mountain. He then proceeded to withdraw his regiments to the Virginia side of the Potomac River.³²

On Bolivar Heights, two and one-half miles away, Lt. Henry M. Binney, one of Miles' aides, noted movement on the heights and called Miles' attention to the activity. The colonel, along with several of his officers, scanned the heights with field glasses. Exclaiming, "My God, Colonel Ford is evacuating his position; we must stop it."³³ Miles immediately started for the position, but the distance being so great, by the time the colonel reached Camp Hill it was apparent the position had been

³¹Miles to Ford, 13 September 1862, RG 393; Binney to White, 18 September 1862, OR, ser. 1, 19, pt.1: 536-37.

³²Binney to White, 18 September 1862, OR, ser. 1, 19, pt. 1: 537; Ford to White, _ September 1862, ibid., pp. 543-44.

³³Binney to White, 18 September 1862, ibid., p. 537.

totally abandoned; and it was too late to rectify the action of Ford's brigade. Ford's troops crossed the Potomac on the pontoon bridge and took position on Bolivar Heights. Confederate forces, numbering between 5,000 and 8,000, took possession of the summit on Maryland Heights and prepared to emplace artillery on the recently abandoned strong point.³⁴

While the Union cause experienced the disaster on Maryland Heights, probing assaults were being conducted by Jackson's men, and Confederate artillery, located on Loudoun Heights, opened up on Union positions. From midafternoon until sunset the two armies engaged in an artillery duel. Darkness finally brought a respite from the cannonading.

On Sunday morning, the fourteenth of September, Jackson carefully prepared his assault plans. In command of six of the Army of Northern Virginia's nine infantry divisions (about 25,000 men), he desired to conclude this operation quickly so this force could rejoin Lee's column at Sharpsburg, Maryland. After detailed and time-consuming preparations, the artillery, located on Maryland Heights, Loudoun Heights, Charlestown road, and Shepherdstown road, opened fire. The Confederate cannonade was heavy and accurate, making it impossible for the Union gunners to work the guns on Camp Hill without casualties. At the end of the day, two Union guns had been disabled by the bombardment and several houses in the village had been destroyed. Miles' chief of artillery, Maj. Henry B. McIlvaine, reported that all

³⁴Binney to White, 18 September 1862, OR, ser. 1, 19, pt. 1: 537; Ford to White _ September 1862, ibid., p. 544; White to Whipple, 22 September 1862, ibid., p. 526.

long range ammunition had been expended as a result of the artillery contest and only thirty-six rounds of any type remained.³⁵

On Sunday night, several officers of the cavalry regiments present in the fortress conferred with Miles as to the possibility of fighting their way through the enemy and reaching Union lines in Maryland. Miles agreed and ordered the entire cavalry force, consisting of the Eighth New York, Twelfth Illinois, First Maryland, Cole's cavalry, and a battalion of Rhode Island cavalry, to cross the Potomac by way of the pontoon bridge, take the Sharpsburg road, and fight their way to McClellan's army. Col. Arno Voss, in command, led the troopers out of the ever-closing trap at 8:00 P.M. Sunday night. The escape was successful, as 1,300 cavalry reached Greencastle, Pennsylvania, at 9:00 A.M. the fifteenth. Several other officers visited Miles at his quarters that night. Many of these officers counseled surrender or evacuation. Miles' reply was that he had been ordered to hold the position at all costs and intended to do so until his last shell had been expended.³⁶

Meantime, Jackson was completing plans for reduction of the strongpoint. Various combat units were moved during the

³⁵Binney to White, 8 September 1862, OR, ser. 1, 19, pt. 1: 537-38; Maj. Henry B. McIlvaine, Fifth New York Heavy Artillery, to White, *ibid.*, p. 547; Freeman, Lee's Lieutenants, 2: 188, 194; George F. R. Henderson, Stonewall Jackson and the American Civil War (1898; reprint ed., Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1968), p. 412; Jackson to Lee, 23 April 1863, OR, ser. 1, 19, pt. 1: 955.

³⁶Binney to White, 18 September 1862, OR, ser. 1, 19, pt. 1: 538; Special Order No. 120, Headquarters, Railroad Brigade, 14 September 1862, RG 393; Curtin to Stanton, 15 September 1862, OR, ser. 1, 19, pt. 2: 305.

night, including the artillery batteries. By 8:15 P.M., Jackson, believing he could now make a favorable report to Lee, wrote that Harper's Ferry would be captured on Monday, 15 September. To carry this out, the Confederate infantry were placed in battle formation before dawn. A heavy mist enveloped the Union positions as the sun rose. By 5:30 there was enough light to open fire; the fire was so heavy that it quickly enfiladed the Union positions on Camp Hill and Bolivar Heights. The cannonading was answered by the federal artillery until the battery officers reported their ammunition exhausted. As the Union fire slackened, Jackson directed his artillery to cease fire. As that action was the signal for launching the infantry assault, the Confederate brigades began to march forward to administer the death blow. The emergence of Confederate infantry prompted the Union artillery to fire their few remaining rounds. This action immediately prompted a vicious renewal of the rebel bombardment, which would permanently silence the Union batteries.³⁷

During the rebel bombardment, White and Miles conferred on Bolivar Heights. A council of the officers commanding the provisional brigades was then called. Colonel D'Utassy and Colonel Trimble were summoned to the meeting. The council unanimously agreed that it was useless to attempt to hold the position longer and recommended that Miles surrender. White concurred with the decision because of the loss of Maryland

³⁷Freeman, Lee's Lieutenants, 2: 196-97.

Heights, the expenditure of all long range artillery ammunition, the strength of the enemy, and the prospect of a needless sacrifice of life without a reasonable hope of Union victory. Further, it appeared that Harper's Ferry was not to be reinforced, as the sound of artillery fire from McClellan's forces had daily receded to the northwest.³⁸

Based on the decision of the council of officers, Miles ordered the white flag to be displayed. A horseman with the flag rode from right to left along the Union works. For several minutes the artillery continued to roar until it was ascertained that the white flag was being displayed. When this was realized, cheering swept the Confederate line. Unfortunately, some of the more distant rebel batteries did not receive the order to cease fire for several more minutes. Miles asked White to negotiate the surrender. Miles, with Lieutenant Binney, remained on the eastern slope of Bolivar Heights, while White and several aides left to find their horses. Miles, talking with Binney, was hit by shrapnel from a shell exploding immediately behind them. The metal tore the flesh entirely from his left calf, while a small piece cut the right calf. Immediately, Colonel Miles was carried to an ambulance and transported to a doctor.³⁹

³⁸Binney to White, 18 September 1862, OR, ser. 1, 19, pt. 1: 539; White to Whipple, 22 September 1862, *ibid.*, p. 528; White to Thomas, 25 September 1862, *ibid.*, p. 531.

³⁹Freeman, Lee's Lieutenants, 2: 197; Binney to White, 18 September 1862, OR, ser. 1, 19, pt. 1: 539; White to Whipple, 22 September 1862, *ibid.*, p. 528.

In the meantime, Brigadier General White rode through the lines with the flag of truce. A member of Jackson's staff, Capt. Henry Kyd Douglas, assistant adjutant general, wrote:

There was nothing strikingly military about his [White's] looks, but he was mounted on a handsome black horse, was handsomely uniformed, with an untarnished sabre, immaculate gloves and boots, and had a staff fittingly equipped. He must have been somewhat astonished to find in General Jackson the worst-dressed, worst mounted, most faded and dingy-looking general he had ever seen anyone surrender to, with a staff, not much for looks or equipment.⁴⁰

Jackson appointed Maj. Gen. A. P. Hill to arrange the terms of capitulation with White. There was, in reality, little to be arranged, as Jackson had already stated that the surrender was to be unconditional. Regardless, the terms were generous: all officers and men of the garrison, except Confederate deserters, were paroled with the stipulation of not serving against the Confederacy until regularly exchanged. The Union officers were allowed to retain their side arms and personal property, while all public property and munitions were turned over to the rebels. Furthermore, Jackson allowed the prisoners to retain their overcoats and blankets, loaned them two wagons per regiment for the transportation of baggage and gave them two days' rations (which emptied the Union subsistence stores at Harper's Ferry).⁴¹

Following the formal signature of the terms of surrender, preparations were made for the paroled prisoners to march towards

⁴⁰Douglas, I Rode With Stonewall, p. 161; Freeman, Lee's Lieutenants, 2: 198.

⁴¹Freeman, Lee's Lieutenants, 2: 198-99; Terms of Capitulation, 15 September 1862, OR, ser. 1, 19, pt. 1: 529-30; White to Whipple, 22 September 1862, ibid., p. 528.

Frederick, Maryland. As the Union regiments laid down their arms and were mustered for the parole records, the magnitude of the surrender became apparent. The Union forces surrendered at Harper's Ferry numbered 12,693 men, 40 cannon, 13,000 small arms, 200 wagons, \$1,000,000 in military stores, and 100 tons of ammunition. Union casualties numbered forty-six dead, and 171 wounded, while Confederate casualties totaled about 100 men.⁴² (See Table II.)

Meanwhile, Jackson and his staff entered Harper's Ferry. As they rode into town, many Union soldiers lined the route to see "Stonewall." Several rendered a salute which he promptly returned. The Confederates intermingled with their captives, swapping stories, tobacco, and news. Quickly, orders were given to prepare the Confederate regiments for a continuation of the march. The men were fed and allowed to rummage through the sutler's stores at Harper's Ferry until midafternoon. Preparations were then completed for five of the rebel divisions to proceed to Sharpsburg, sixteen miles away, where Lee waited. Leaving A. P. Hill's division to supervise and conclude the paroling of the prisoners, this movement began almost immediately. These

⁴²Return of Union Casualties, 12-15 September 1862, OR, ser. 1, 19, pt. 1: 549; McIlvaine to White, 19 September 1862, ibid., p. 548; New York Times, 18 September 1862; Washington National Intelligencer, 25 September 1862; Henderson, Stonewall Jackson, p. 419. The actual number paroled is in question. Freeman gives the number at about 11,000; the New York Times, 18 September, set the number at 11,583; Battles and Leaders place it at 12,520; the Return of Casualties in OR shows a total of wounded, captured, and missing at 12,693. Jackson's report to Lee placed the number at about 11,000.

units reached the little town of Sharpsburg on Tuesday morning, the sixteenth of September.⁴³

The process of paroling the garrison of Harper's Ferry was completed on the same day, and it was marched to Frederick, Maryland. Upon arriving there, White's column was ordered to proceed to Annapolis, which it reached on the twenty-first. Colonel Miles, severely wounded in the waning moments of the bombardment on Monday morning, had his right leg amputated that day. The wound, causing complications, led to his death at 4:30 P.M. on 16 September. On his death bed he commended several officers, including White, for bravery during the fight and vowed that "he had done his duty; he was an old soldier and willing to die." His body was conveyed to Baltimore and buried there on Friday, 19 September.⁴⁴

News of the surrender was slow in reaching Union lines and the nation's capital. Six days before, on the eleventh, McClellan had advised evacuation of the position, but Halleck had refused to consider the suggestion. Once Miles' troops had been surrounded, "Old Brains," as Halleck was called, looked foolish. With the discovery of Lee's lost order by McClellan's forces, it appeared that Halleck had set a trap for Lee. With the "lost order" in hand, McClellan seemed confident he could relieve the besieged garrison and destroy the Army of Northern Virginia in the same move.⁴⁵

⁴³Freeman, Lee's Lieutenants, 2: 199-201.

⁴⁴Binney to White, 18 September 1862, OR, ser. 1, 19, pt. 1: 540; White to Whipple, 22 September 1862, ibid., p. 528.

⁴⁵Bruce Catton, Mr. Lincoln's Army (1951; reprint ed., New York: Pocket Books, 1964), p. 224; Boatner, Dictionary, p. 367.

TABLE II

CASUALTIES OF UNION FORCES, HARPER'S FERRY
12-15 September 1862

Command	Killed		Wounded		Captured or Missing Officers	Men	Aggregate
	Officers	Men	Officers	Men			
General Staff	1				6		7
12th Illinois Cavalry				2	4	153	159
Battery M, 2d Illinois Artillery					3	97	100
65th Illinois Infantry		1		6	32	778	817
15th Indiana Battery				3	4	114	121
Rigby's Indiana Battery					4	109	113
1st Maryland Cavalry	1			2	1	19	23
Cole's Maryland Cavalry							
1st Maryland Potomac Home Brigade		6		6	32	747	791
3d Maryland Potomac Home Brigade	1	2	1	8	24	510	546
8th New York Cavalry					5	87	92
Batteries A & F, 5th New York Heavy Artillery		2			9	256	267
12th New York Militia					30	530	560
39th New York Infantry				15	10	520	545
111th New York Infantry		5		6	36	934	981
115th New York Infantry			1	10	28	950	989
125th New York Infantry		2		1	38	881	922
126th New York Infantry	1	12	4	38	30	946	1,031
Battery F, 32d Ohio Infantry					2	82	84

TABLE II (cont.)

Command	Killed		Wounded		Captured or Missing Officers Men	Aggregate
	Officers	Men	Officers	Men		
32d Ohio Infantry	1	9	3	55	31	742
60th Ohio Infantry		2	1	5	38	913
87th Ohio Infantry		1			38	1,015
7th Squadron Rhode Island Cavalry						
9th Vermont Infantry				3	30	747
Unattached, in hospitals					1,172	1,172
Total	5	41	13	160	435	12,085

SOURCE: Return of Casualties, 12-15 September 1862, OR, ser. 1, 19, pt. 1: 549.

In this situation, the War Department had decreed that no post was to be surrendered and expected "every officer and every man [to] . . . fight as if the fate of the Government depended upon him."⁴⁶ Thus, McClellan promised to reach Harper's Ferry, if that garrison resisted for any length of time. In conjunction with this, he sent several messages to Miles ordering him to hold out to the last and promising reinforcements as quickly as possible. Further, he ordered his artillery to fire a signal on a frequent basis to indicate that the relief column was approaching the besieged garrison.

The relief column, consisting of 18,000 men under Maj. Gen. William B. Franklin commanding Sixth Corps, Army of the Potomac, was ordered to crash through Confederate forces at Crampton's Gap, turn south, and rescue the beleaguered forces at Harper's Ferry. The one flaw in McClellan's orders was the absence of urgency. Instead of ordering Franklin forward on the night of the thirteenth, he was given marching orders for daybreak of the fourteenth. By the time the Sixth Corps reached the pass, McLaws had secured Maryland Heights, was emplacing artillery, and had posted several infantry regiments at Crampton's Gap. In the remaining hours of daylight of the fourteenth, Franklin's forces seized the gap but, believing the rebel forces outnumbered them and with the advent of darkness, did nothing further. Dawn of the fifteenth found his corps encamped five miles from Harper's Ferry.⁴⁷

⁴⁶Stanton to White, 7 September 1862, OR, ser. 1, 51, pt.1: 798.

⁴⁷McClellan to Halleck, 12 September 1862, OR, ser. 1, 19, pt. 2: 271-72; McClellan to Lincoln, 12 September 1862, ibid., p. 272; McClellan to Thomas, 15 October 1862, OR, ser. 1, 19, pt.

The heavy rebel cannonading, which had been heard forty miles from Harper's Ferry, indicated that Miles still resisted. Between eight and nine o'clock on the morning of 15 September, the firing stopped. With the silence, Franklin knew that the garrison had fallen and thereupon abandoned any attempt to relieve the post.

As news of the calamity became known, questions and recriminations flew with a fury. The surrender, coming as a surprise to many government officials and the public in general, necessitated an explanation. McClellan, upon learning that the garrison at Harper's Ferry had heard the approaching Union artillery, could not understand why the place had not resisted longer, since relief was near at hand. He concluded that "resistance was not as stubborn as it might have been. Had he [Miles] held the Maryland Heights he would inevitably have been saved."⁴⁸

In spite of the earliest reports from newspaper correspondents present at Harper's Ferry during the siege which were full of praise for the stubborn, gallant defense of the position, the act of surrender was censured. The Albany Atlas and Argus

1: 26; Marcy to Brig. Gen. Alfred Pleasonton, commanding Cavalry Corps, Army of the Potomac, 13 September 1862, OR, ser. 1, 51, pt. 1: 829; Catton, Mr. Lincoln's Army, pp. 227, 230, 233-34, 241.

⁴⁸ McClellan to Halleck, 16 September 1862, OR, ser. 1, 19, pt. 2: 307; Thomas R. Lounsbury, "In the Defenses of Washington," Yale Review, 2 (1913): 392; David Donald, ed., Inside Lincoln's Cabinet: The Civil War Diaries of Salmon P. Chase (1954; reprint ed., New York: Kraus Reprint, 1970), pp. 140, 147; New York Times, 15 September 1862; McClellan to Thomas, 15 October 1862, OR, ser. 1, 19, pt. 1: 26; McClellan to Thomas, 4 August 1863, ibid., p. 47.

described it as an ignoble defeat and a humiliation to American arms. The New York Tribune considered it shameful and observed that the 12,000 men surrendered was larger than those surrendered by Burgoyne or Cornwallis during the Revolution. Moreover, Miles' force had superior weapons and held the key terrain, but after two days of skirmishing was forced to surrender with a loss of less than 300 men.⁴⁹ The low number of casualties convinced the New York Times that the surrender was one of the "most disastrous blows inflicted upon the Union cause."⁵⁰ However, the Times insisted the Union soldiers had resisted valiantly until every key position had been wrested from them; Miles then saw further resistance was without hope of success. The troops, upon hearing the news, grumbled and vented "bitter personal reproaches and execrations of their commanding officer."⁵¹

The glaring mistake of the garrison commander, the newspapers believed, was in not preparing for enemy attacks. No attempt was made to occupy Loudoun Heights or to construct field fortifications. "It seems incredible," the Times editorialized, "that Col. Miles, a trained and experienced soldier, should not have appreciated the importance of preparing to hold these Heights;

⁴⁹Albany Atlas and Argus, 20 September 1862; New York Tribune, 20 September 1862. British Gen. John Burgoyne surrendered 5,700 troops at Saratoga, New York, on 17 October 1777; British Gen. Charles Cornwallis surrendered 8,000 at Yorktown, Virginia, on 19 October 1781; American Gen. Benjamin Lincoln surrendered 2,571 at Charleston on 12 May 1780. Mark M. Boatner III, Encyclopedia of the American Revolution (New York: David McKay Co., 1966), pp. 130, 212, 285, 635.

⁵⁰New York Times, 18 September 1862.

⁵¹Ibid.

and yet it is still less credible, that if he did appreciate it, he should so entirely have neglected to do it."⁵²

Other newspapers seemed to agree; the Chicago Tribune believed "horrible mismanagement" had been at fault; while the New York Tribune lamented that the untimely surrender prevented McClellan from capturing or destroying piecemeal Lee's scattered army. The Albany Evening Journal maintained that from the first moment until the surrender the defense was a series of blunders; yet, if the ammunition were exhausted, defeat was unavoidable. Reserving judgment until all details were made known, the Evening Journal predicted there would be time to condemn and punish negligence if the defeat had been avoidable.⁵³

In Washington, the first of many official reports concerning the defeat was received. The impression created by such sketchy reports was best expressed by Secretary of the Navy Gideon Welles. These vague and often conflicting accounts seemed to indicate that Harper's Ferry

was thrown to the Rebels [with scarcely] a struggle. Miles . . . was unfit for the post--was . . . drunk at the first battle of Bull Run last year, and ought to have been dismissed as was talked of. The War Department, or someone or more ARE in fault; in not relieving the service of [known] drunkards and traitors.⁵⁴

⁵²Ibid.

⁵³Chicago Tribune, 17 September 1862; New York Tribune, 18 September 1862; Albany Evening Journal, 19 September 1862.

⁵⁴Howard K. Beale, ed., Diary of Gideon Welles Secretary of the Navy Under Lincoln and Johnson, 3 vols. (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1960) 1: 140; Chase Diary, p. 147.

Less than a week after the surrender, the newspapers, government officials, and members of Congress were asking probing questions concerning the conduct of the defense and had begun to press for a thorough investigation. The New York Times believed that every officer who was responsible for the battle's outcome should be punished with the severest penalty provided in the Articles of War. Calling for the speedy punishment of Ford for his cowardly and disgraceful surrender of Maryland Heights, the Chicago Tribune thought Miles and White were also guilty of causing the Union's disgrace. The staid New York Tribune questioned the War Department and asked:

How many officers whose "sympathies are with the South" have you today in important positions? How many whom you know to be drunkards are you allowing still to lead our heroes to sure destruction? How many whom you freely speak of in your private conferences as utterly unfit for their posts are you still retaining therein?⁵⁵

The calls for an inquiry also came from several of the participants. The most important was Brigadier General White, who requested the adjutant general of the army to appoint a military commission to investigate the causes of the surrender and make a determination as to its correctness.

In the meantime, after the paroled garrison reached Annapolis on Sunday, the twenty-first, they were assigned to Camp Parole outside the city. It was necessary to guard the

⁵⁵New York Tribune, 20 September 1862; Chicago Tribune, 20 September 1862; New York Times, 20 September 1862.

paroled troops because of the tendency of the men to plunder and to disintegrate into an undisciplined mob. On the twenty-third, 2,300 men were transported by rail to Chicago. In the succeeding days, as many as the railroad could transport followed until the entire garrison (except for the Twelfth New York National Guard which returned to New York state) was in Chicago. Whether these troops were ever declared exchanged or were posted to the frontier for service against the Indians is impossible to determine.⁵⁶

In either case, the Railroad Brigade, ill equipped and poorly trained for regular military operations, had failed to meet the challenge when confronted with combat. The various regiments comprising Miles' command were either newly raised, poorly trained, poorly equipped, or undisciplined because of the mission assigned the Railroad Brigade. The walking of a guard post along a desolate stretch of railroad on a daily basis for an extended period of time was not conducive to building esprit, discipline, or well trained soldiers. If, in addition, the troops assigned to such duties had received little training prior to such an assignment and were officered by inexperienced and untrained men, it was little wonder that such regiments, when faced with the prospect of regular battle, would not perform as well as better trained or combat experienced regiments.

⁵⁶White to Whipple, 22 September 1862, OR, ser. 1, 19, pt. 1: 529; Brig. Gen. Daniel Tyler, commanding Camp Parole, Maryland, to Col. J. C. Kelton, assistant adjutant general, 23 September 1862, *ibid.*, pp. 801-02; Wool to Stanton, 19 September 1862, OR, ser. 1, 19, pt. 2: 332.

CHAPTER III

THE HARPER'S FERRY MILITARY COMMISSION

The public outcry for an investigation of the Harper's Ferry catastrophe produced a special military commission. The commission, appointed by Special Order Number 256, was to assemble in Washington on Thursday, 25 September. To chair the commission, Maj. Gen. David Hunter, U. S. Volunteers, was selected. Hunter, born in Washington, D. C. in 1802, graduated twenty-fifth (of forty) in the class of 1822 at West Point. Having seen combat on the frontier, in Mexico, and in several battles of the Civil War, he was considered a competent combat officer. In addition to the inquiry into Harper's Ferry, Hunter served on Fitz-John Porter's court martial and presided over the court martial that tried the assassination conspirators. Other members of the commission were Maj. Gen. George Cadwalder; Brig. Gen. Christopher C. Augur; Capt. Donn Piatt, assistant adjutant general, Thirteenth Ohio Infantry; Capt. Flamen Ball, Jr., aide de camp; and Col. Joseph Holt, the judge advocate general.

In conjunction with this action, orders were issued on the twenty-second of September to arrest Brig. Gen. Julius White, Col. Frederick G. D'Utassy, Col. William H. Trimble, and Col. Thomas H. Ford. Col. William G. Ward of the Twelfth New York

and the numerous regimental commanders were detained as witnesses. The investigation, deferred several times because of travel delays, formally convened and began its work on Tuesday, 30 September 1862.¹

The commission was instructed to examine and report all the facts bearing upon the conduct of Brigadier General White, Colonel Ford, and Col. Dixon S. Miles, or their subordinates, in evacuating Maryland Heights and in the surrender of Harper's Ferry. In order to do this, the commission addressed several questions. The members first questioned who had assigned Miles to command troops at Harper's Ferry and why this assignment had been made. This led, of course, to the Army of the Potomac order assigning Miles to the Railroad Brigade in March 1862. No specific reason was given for Maj. Gen. George B. McClellan, commanding that army, to appoint Miles to such a command. In all likelihood, a colonel was needed for that less than glamorous assignment, and it was considered a "safe" duty for a man like Miles. Regardless, none of the witnesses seemed to know how Miles was chosen to be responsible for Harper's Ferry. Maj. Gen.

¹Special Order No. 256, War Department, 23 September 1862, U.S., War Department, The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies, R. N. Scott et al, eds., 130 vols. (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1880-1901), ser. 1, 19, pt. 1: 549-50 (hereafter cited as OR); Mark M. Boatner, Civil War Dictionary (New York: David McKay Co., 1959), pp. 34, 112, 406, 418; Dictionary of American Biography, p. 400; New York Tribune, 24 September 1862; Halleck to Thomas, 22 September 1862, OR, ser. 1, 19, pt. 1: 801; Proceedings of Harper's Ferry Military Commission, 30 September 1862, ibid., p. 551; Francis B. Heitman, Historical Register and Dictionary of the United States Army, From Its Organization September 29, 1789 to March 2, 1903, 2 vols. (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1903), 1: 187, 790.

Henry Halleck flatly stated that the colonel was in command at Harper's Ferry when he arrived in Washington as general-in-chief in July 1862, and he had never been able to discern who was responsible for the assignment. When questioned about a telegram expressing "the utmost confidence in . . . [Miles and ready to give him] full credit for the defense," Halleck suggested that it was addressed to the commanding officer, regardless of who that might have been and was, in reality, a mere formality.²

Maj. Gen. John E. Wool, as commander of the Middle Department and Eighth Corps, intimated under questioning that Miles was the best regular army officer available for such an assignment as protecting the railroads and, later, defending the key rail terminal of Harper's Ferry. Despite Wool's admission that Brigadier General White and Brevet Brig. Gen. William W. Morris, commanding Fort McHenry, might have performed more acceptable service at Harper's Ferry, he repeated that Miles was the only regular army officer he could assign there. The Baltimore American concluded that Wool had exhibited a prejudice "when he swore that Colonel Miles was the only regular he had for that post. He preferred an incapable Colonel to a Brigadier General of Volunteers, and having staked so much upon West Point, the gallant old General should now bravely abide the result of his venture."³

²Halleck as witness, 29 October 1862, OR, ser. 1, 19, pt. 1: 787; Proceedings Military Commission, 30 September 1862, *ibid.*, p. 551; Special Order No. 66, Headquarters, Army of the Potomac, 8 March 1862, Record Group 393, "Records of the United States Army Commands" National Archives, Washington, D. C.

³Baltimore American and Commercial Advertiser, 15 November 1862; Wool as witness, 30 October 1862, OR, ser. 1, 19, pt. 1: 791-92.

Queried as to his assessment of Miles' ability to command, Wool responded that the colonel appeared to be zealous and determined to do everything required of his unit for accomplishment of his mission. But the general believed Miles was overwhelmed with his duties and responsibilities and probably did not have the innate ability to embrace such an important assignment.⁴

Continuing with this particular question, the Military Commission inquired into Miles' fitness for command. Col. Frederick D'Utassy, commanding the First Brigade at Harper's Ferry, reluctantly spoke of his dead commander. When pressed by the commission, D'Utassy revealed that Miles frequently issued written orders and then almost immediately contradicted them verbally. Explaining further, D'Utassy observed that Miles' health was broken because of previous abuse. Having served under Miles at Bull Run, D'Utassy divulged that Miles had become a teetotaler since then and, when Miles had been questioned about this, he swore that he had taken an oath never to touch alcohol again. The sudden change to total abstinence, D'Utassy believed, had physically harmed Miles. Because of this, the First Brigade commander admitted that he did not consider Miles fit to command at Harper's Ferry.⁵

The Second Brigade commander, Colonel Trimble, did not consider Miles fit for command, either. Describing Miles as a man without decisiveness of character and firmness, Trimble

⁴Wool as witness, 30 October 1862, OR, ser. 1, 19, pt. 1: 791-92.

⁵D'Utassy as witness, 7 October 1862, *ibid.*, p. 600.

lashed out at Miles for not being on Bolivar Heights when the fighting began. Trimble claimed that he had been left on the Heights without a plan of defense, any instructions, any authority to call for reinforcements, and the enemy advancing on his position. Because Trimble was inexperienced, he felt betrayed by having been left in such an embarrassing position. The commission then inquired as to whether Miles was drunk during the siege. Trimble, discounting rumors he had heard about Miles' drinking problem, refused to think such a thing about any superior officer and, instead, believed Miles' actions were caused by his weaknesses of character, decision, firmness, and good judgment.⁶

One of Miles' aide de camps, Lt. Henry M. Binney, offered the most convincing evidence that the colonel was not intoxicated nor drunk and refused to drink even at a private party on the fourth of July. Binney insisted that Miles' nerves were not affected by the desire for alcohol. Instead,

he was calm and cool, under all circumstances, and seemed to be equal to all emergencies that might arise, except on . . . the morning of the surrender [Then] surrounded as he was, and attacked on all sides, he seemed to be a little flustered, and hardly to know how to act.⁷

In addition to these officers, several regimental officers did not consider Miles to have been competent to command such a large force. One of these was Lt. Col. Hasbrouck Davis of the

⁶Trimble as witness, 20 October 1862, *ibid.*, pp. 746-47, 756.

⁷Binney as witness, 21 October 1862, *ibid.*, p. 761.

Twelfth Illinois Cavalry. Davis maintained that the lack of competency resulted not from Miles' military education but his character; Miles did not impress Davis as having a strong temperament, even though he was an honest man. Further, Miles did not seem to realize the immense responsibility he had at Harper's Ferry or to his country. Davis questioned the lack of any fixed policy or plan and insisted Miles should have done something to save the 12,000 man garrison from the shame of surrender.⁸ Col. William P. Maulsby agreed, stating that Miles often added verbally to his written orders, and this resulted in conflicting instructions. Lt. Col. S. W. Downey, of the Third Maryland Potomac Home Brigade, revealed that Miles countermanded his orders often, and this presented an impression of a personality in conflict and a mind indecisive and confused. Downey concluded that Miles was not competent to command before the siege or during it and insisted this opinion was held by several other officers of the garrison. Finally, Col. Daniel Cameron, of the Sixty-fifth Illinois, described Miles as acting confused and stupid because his judgment was dulled. Because of this, Cameron revealed that the officers and men at Harper's Ferry had a low opinion of Miles' ability to command.⁹

⁸Davis as witness, 9 October 1862, *ibid.*, pp. 630-31.

⁹Maulsby as witness, 4 October 1862, *ibid.*, pp. 556, 558; Downey as witness, 9 October 1862, *ibid.*, pp. 621-23; Cameron as witness, 10 October 1862, *ibid.*, pp. 632, 635. The mental deterioration of men in the field, according to one author/soldier, was common during the war. It was also credited with dulling the intellect of regular army personnel while in garrison on the frontier. This explained "why some of the older officers of the

In conjunction with the question of fitness of command, the colonel's conduct in dealing with the enemy was also questioned. Several witnesses testified to the commission that a number of captured Confederate soldiers were paroled and allowed to pass through the Union lines during the siege. One, a First Lieutenant Rouse of the Twelfth Virginia Cavalry, was paroled during the battle and appeared at the head of rebel troops in Harper's Ferry after the surrender. Since Rouse had not been regularly exchanged, this was considered a violation of the parole. According to the testimony, these actions, when made known to the troops, caused great excitement and consternation, with many of the soldiers denouncing Miles and questioning his loyalty.¹⁰

In spite of the reaction of the Union garrison, none of the witnesses openly charged Miles with treason or disloyalty to the United States. On the contrary, several men were adamant in their belief that Miles was loyal to the Union and had not, by his actions, committed any traitorous deed while in command at Harper's Ferry.

regular army, who had spent their lives largely in outpost service, seemed so stupid. One of our ablest corps commanders, himself a graduate of West Point, once told a friend of mine that a West Pointer knew more the day he graduated than he ever did afterwards" Thomas R. Lounsbury, "In the Defenses of Washington," Yale Review 2 (1913): 399-400.

¹⁰Cameron as witness, 10 October 1862, OR, ser. 1, 19, pt. 1: 633; Capt. Charles Goodman, assistant quartermaster, as witness, 10 October 1862, ibid., pp. 639-41; Lt. John L. Willmon, aide de camp, as witness, 10 October 1862, ibid., pp. 642-43; Maj. Charles H. Russell, First Maryland Cavalry, as witness, ibid., p. 725; Ward as witness, 16 October 1862, ibid., p. 731; Trimble as witness, 20 October 1862, ibid., pp. 747-48; Binney as witness, 16 October 1862, ibid., pp. 737-41.

The question persisted, and several northern newspapers published stories that a Confederate officer, representing Jackson, met Miles several days prior to the surrender in order to make arrangements for the betrayal of the Union garrison. The New York Times, scoffing at this story, observed that since Ford had abandoned Maryland Heights, Miles could not have conspired to do this. The colonel had many faults, the newspaper conceded, but Miles was not a traitor. Moreover, Maj. Gen. Thomas Jackson's assistant adjutant general, Capt. Henry Kyd Douglas, writing in his memoirs, swore that no such arrangement was made because "Everything that Jackson did was inconsistent with it. Colonel Miles may not have been equal to the situation, perhaps was not, but he was no traitor."¹¹

If, as the evidence seemed to indicate, Colonel Miles was not qualified to command the Railroad Brigade or the garrison at Harper's Ferry, the next question the Military Commission had to answer concerned Brigadier General White's acquiescence in relinquishing his command responsibilities. White explained that Miles, a regular army officer, had been specifically named by the general-in-chief, "if not in express terms at least by implication," as the commander of the garrison at Harper's Ferry and this had been confirmed by Major General Wool, commanding

¹¹Henry Kyd Douglas, I Rode With Stonewall (1940; reprint ed., Atlanta: Mockingbird Books, 1976), pp. 161-62; Binney as witness, 7 October 1862, OR, ser. 1, 19, pt. 1: 592-93; Capt. Eugene McGrath, Company B, Fifth New York Artillery, 14 October 1862, *ibid.*, p. 700; White as witness, 15 October 1862, *ibid.*, p. 715; Ward as witness, 16 October 1862, *ibid.*, p. 731; McIlvaine as witness, 20 October 1862, *ibid.*, pp. 751-52; New York Times, 22 September 1862.

the Department and Eighth Corps. As a result, this indicated to White "that the authorities, confiding in the patriotism and ability of Colonel Miles, intended that he should retain the command" and White could not legally supersede him.¹² Continuing, White believed if he had been legally able to replace Miles

it would have been not only in contravention of the intentions of the proper authority, but unjust to him, and, to all appearances, subversive of the public interests, inasmuch as his mature years, his military education, long experience as an officer of the army [forty years], his familiarity with the topography of Harper's Ferry and its vicinity, knowledge of the forces present and of the subsistence and ordnance stores on hand, and having placed the troops and guns according to the plan of defense which his judgment had dictated as the best, warranted the confidence reposed in him by the General-in-Chief, entitled him to the credit of whatever there might occur, in the defense of the place, of a meritorious character, and made him responsible for the proper execution of the trust confided to his hands.¹³

This explanation, having been confirmed by several witnesses, was accepted by the commission. A related question concerned the charge, made by several newspapers and military officers, that neither Brigadier General White nor a council of war was consulted as to the feasibility of surrender prior to the formal act of capitulation. Evidence presented by D'Utassy, Trimble, and Binney indicated that an officer's council was held on Bolivar Heights during the rebel bombardment Monday morning, the fifteenth of September. Nevertheless, only D'Utassy, Trimble, Miles, and White participated; commanders of the eleven infantry

¹²White to Maj. Gen. David Hunter, 22 October 1862, OR, ser. 1, 19, pt. 1: 774.

¹³Ibid., pp. 775-76.

regiments and six artillery batteries were not consulted as to the feasibility of further resistance.¹⁴

The issue of sustained resistance prompted the commission to analyze the preeminent act of the entire affair: the abandonment of Maryland Heights to the enemy on Saturday, 13 September. As expected, the witnesses' testimony was contradictory. In spite of differences in details, however, the majority of testimony concluded that Miles had given Ford discretionary power to abandon the key position of Maryland Heights if threatened with defeat. This seemed to indicate that Miles realized that ultimately Ford's weak brigade would be overwhelmed by the brute force of the enemy. The surprise, apparent when Miles discovered the withdrawal from the Heights on Saturday, was explained by Maulsby when he quoted Miles as exclaiming "I am afraid Colonel Ford has abandoned the heights almost too soon."¹⁵

Maulsby's supposition was strengthened when Thomas Noakes, a civilian guide, insisted Miles had informed him that he did not believe Maryland Heights could be held and had authorized Ford to withdraw if threatened. Provision was even made, claimed Maj. Sylvester M. Hewitt of the Thirty-second Ohio, for a signal

¹⁴Col. George L. Willard, 125th New York, 6 October 1862, *ibid.*, pp. 565-66; D'Utassy as witness 7 October 1862, *ibid.*, pp. 596, 598-99; Cameron as witness, 10 October 1862, *ibid.*, p. 636; Trimble as witness, 20 October 1862, *ibid.*, p. 745; Binney as witness, 7 October 1862, *ibid.*, pp. 584-85; Thomas memorandum of interrogations of regimental commanders, 23 September 1862, *ibid.*, pp. 553-54; Return of Casualties, 12-15 September 1862, *ibid.*, p. 549.

¹⁵Maulsby as witness, 4 October 1862, *ibid.*, pp. 557-58; Col. Simeon Sammon, 115th New York, 9 October 1862, *ibid.*, p. 626; Maj. S. M. Hewitt, Thirty-second Ohio, 16 October 1862, *ibid.*, pp. 733-37.

fire on top of the mountain so that when lit the artillery on Bolivar Heights and Camp Hill could cover the evacuation of the Heights. At the same time, Ford had received instructions from Miles to spike, and thus render useless, the large artillery pieces on the Heights which could not easily be removed in a retreat.¹⁶

With the resolution of the issue of who was responsible for the authority to withdraw from Maryland Heights, the inquiry turned to the more specific question of timing. Most of the witnesses agreed that Ford had prematurely abandoned the Heights. Their view was reinforced, since Confederate forces did not occupy the position in strength for twenty-four hours following the retreat. Despite requests from several officers, including Colonel D'Utassy, Miles had refused to order an assault on the position during this critical twenty-four hour period. Miles had rationalized his decision by stating that the Union artillery pieces left on the mountain were spiked and useless. Besides, Miles believed "the enemy would not occupy it, having silenced our guns. It was of no importance to us then, and, therefore, he saw no necessity of going over there."¹⁷

¹⁶Noakes as witness, 4 October 1862, *ibid.*, p. 559; Hewitt as witness, 6 October 1862, *ibid.*, p. 566; Rev. Sylvester W. Clemans, chaplain, 115th New York, 7 October 1862, *ibid.*, p. 576; Binney as witness, 7 October 1862, *ibid.*, pp. 582, 594; McGrath as witness, 14 October 1862, *ibid.*, pp. 692-93; Mrs. Elizabeth Brown, wife of Captain Brown, First Maryland Potomac Home Brigade, 15 October 1862, *ibid.*, p. 719.

¹⁷Binney as witness, 7 October 1862, *ibid.*, pp. 578-80; D'Utassy as witness, 7 October 1862, *ibid.*, pp. 596-97; Col. George L. Willard, 125th New York, 6 October 1862, *ibid.*, p. 563; Col. Jesse Segoine, 111th New York, 13 October 1862, *ibid.* p. 683.

A few officers dissented, believing the refusal by Miles not to transfer men and artillery or provide axes and shovels to build field fortifications on the Heights had doomed the defensive effort before it began. Without field works, adequate manpower, or artillery support, they concluded that any attempt to retain Maryland Heights was almost impossible. Of course, it was also agreed that 50,000 men and extensive field fortifications were necessary to defend the entire position surrounding Harper's Ferry.

Thus, the examination led to a review of the preparations made to defend the post with special attention focused on the construction of field works. Perhaps the most telling witness concerning this issue was Capt. W. Angelo Powell, army corps of engineers. Powell, originally assigned to White's brigade at Winchester, arrived at Harper's Ferry when White evacuated Winchester. Together the two men had recommended fortification of several points surrounding the Ferry. The first of these was Loudoun Heights. Miles rebuffed the idea because the enemy "would attack like they did in the spring, that is, from the front [Bolivar Heights]." ¹⁸ Likewise, suggestions were made to cut down trees on Bolivar Heights and Maryland Heights in order to build field works, while providing a clear field of fire and a greatly enlarged field of observation. Since Miles refused to do this, the Confederate sharpshooters were able to use the

¹⁸ Powell as witness, 23 October 1862, *ibid.*, pp. 763-64; Hewitt as witness, 6 October 1862, *ibid.*, p. 568; Willard as witness, 6 October 1862, *ibid.*, p. 561.

forest as cover and approached to within 100 yards of the Union artillery. Miles insisted on leaving the forest intact so as to mask federal activities around Harper's Ferry; instead, it acted as a shelter for the enemy's attack.¹⁹

Powell, clearly miffed at the lack of preparation by the commandant of Harper's Ferry, continued his testimony by describing the only field works constructed during a three month period. These works, on Camp Hill, consisted of a face and two bastions and a line of earthworks. But they were of little value when the rebels gained the high ground and commanded the Union positions on Camp Hill. He then sketched a detailed plan of fortifications which, if constructed, might have prevented the loss of the position. Other officers noted the weaknesses or lack of field fortifications and attributed this to poor planning, lack of coordination, mismanagement of the available labor force, indecisiveness, and an incorrect utilization of time.²⁰

Works had been hastily thrown up on Bolivar Heights and Maryland Heights, but the men had neither the proper tools, materials, nor time to construct adequate positions with which to withstand an artillery barrage such as they experienced between Friday and Monday. Furthermore, it was doubtful such positions would have repelled the Confederate infantry assault planned for Monday morning, the fifteenth of September.²¹

¹⁹Powell as witness, 23 October 1862, *ibid.*, pp. 764-65, 768-69.

²⁰Maulsby as witness, 4 October 1862, *ibid.*, p. 557.

²¹Willard as witness, 6 October 1862, *ibid.*, p. 563; Hewitt as witness, 6 October 1862, *ibid.*, pp. 569, 574-75.

Another factor considered by the commission was the morale of the Union garrison. By dawn on Monday morning, these men had nagging questions, in addition to the anxieties of impending battle, concerning unexplained activities and rumors relating to the garrison commander, Maryland Heights, food, ammunition, the Union cavalry, and the expected relief column. The troops' confidence had already been shaken by the stories describing the Union "fortress." When they reached the Ferry "they found no work had been done upon the place at all; that there were no abatis; no preparations for defense, and if there were any infantry intrenchments there . . . [they were] not able to discover them."²²

Testimony indicated that the troops had reason to worry. The embattled garrison began receiving half rations almost from the moment the siege began. The shortage of hard bread was especially crucial despite the seizure of all the flour in the civilian stores and mills in the vicinity. Likewise, the amount of forage on hand was limited.²³ Also in short supply was long-range artillery ammunition. This shortage developed as the Union artillery answered the rebel cannonade. In order to conserve the remaining ammunition, Miles ordered the artillery to engage only known targets. On Monday morning the battery commanders reported that all long-range ammunition had been expended; only canister remained.²⁴

²²Cameron as witness, 10 October 1862, *ibid.*, p. 638.

²³Binney as witness, 7 October 1862, *ibid.*, pp. 585, 588, 590.

²⁴Capt. Silas F. Rigby, First Independent Indiana Battery, 10 October 1862, *ibid.*, pp. 650-52; Capt. Benjamin F. Potts, artillery battery, 10 October 1862, *ibid.*, p. 654; Capt. J. C. H. vonSehlen, Battery No. 15, Indiana Volunteers, 10 October 1862, *ibid.*, p. 664.

Likewise, the rumor of escaping Union troops, which had swept through the camps Sunday night, was found to be true in the light of Monday morning. The Union cavalry, numbering about 2,500 troopers, had escaped the closing trap by crossing the Potomac and riding north towards Sharpsburg, Maryland. The commission, like the soldiers that Monday morning, inquired if the infantry and artillery could have also escaped Jackson's grasp. The response was contradictory. Several witnesses emphatically denied the possibility because of the terrain the escape route traversed. Others believed that an attempt should have been made, notwithstanding the likelihood that such an attempt would have meant fighting their way out of Harper's Ferry since the possibility of escaping undetected, as the cavalry had done, did not exist.²⁵

Thomas Noakes, the civilian who guided the cavalry through its escape route, contended the road was narrow and difficult and thought the infantry would not have been able to march as fast as the cavalry. The artillery would have to negotiate several ravines, fields, and fences, making the road too rough for a surreptitious escape. If an easier route had been chosen, the escape would have become a fighting withdrawal. The officer commanding the escape, Lt. Col. Hasbrouck Davis, agreed and observed that the rate of march was so fast that "it would have been utterly impossible for the artillery and infantry to have accompanied us, even if the road had been good."²⁶

²⁵Capt. John C. Phillips, Second Illinois Light Artillery, 13 October 1862, *ibid.*, pp. 684-85; McIlvaine, 20 October 1862, *ibid.*, p. 750.

²⁶Davis as witness, 9 October 1862, *ibid.*, p. 629; Binney as

Likewise, the entire garrison would have had to cross the Potomac by way of the pontoon bridge. Besides the noise, the likelihood of damage to the bridge or the blocking of it by even one loaded wagon would cause a delay of precious minutes, which were not to be had. Moreover, this movement would have consumed one entire night, and at daylight the entire command would have been strung out on the road at the base of the mountain. The force could have been easily outflanked or destroyed by enemy artillery.²⁷

On the other hand, the officers who favored making such an attempt, while admitting the route to be difficult, believed anything was better than what did occur. Colonel Trimble advised the commission that such a proposition had been placed before Colonel Miles. Miles refused because he had been ordered to hold the town of Harper's Ferry at all hazards. Miles interpreted his orders to hold the position as specifically referring to the town. While he recognized the importance of Maryland Heights, he insisted "that to leave Harper's Ferry even to go on Maryland Heights would be disobeying his instructions."²⁸

Instead of approving the proposal to take the entire command and execute a fighting withdrawal, Miles authorized the attempt

witness, 7 October 1862, *ibid.*, pp. 583-84; Noakes as witness, 4 October 1862, *ibid.*, pp. 558-59.

²⁷McIlvaine as witness, 20 October 1862, *ibid.*, p. 750.

²⁸Report of Military Commission, 3 November 1862, *ibid.*, p. 796; Lt. Charles G. Bacon, Thirty-ninth New York, 13 October 1862, *ibid.*, pp. 670-71; Phillips as witness, 13 October 1862, *ibid.*, p. 685; Trimble as witness, 20 October 1862, *ibid.*, p. 745; New York Times, 13 November 1862.

of the cavalry to escape but insisted that the cavalry ride out of the position without any "led horses" or bugle calls.²⁹ The cavalry was ordered to be quiet because Miles feared the infantry, if aware of the activity, would panic and degenerate into an undisciplined horde, which would mob the bridge across the Potomac in their desire to escape the impending disaster.³⁰ Miles seemed to be correct in his assumption that a panic would have ensued if it were common knowledge the cavalry were attempting to escape the doomed defenses. This event, in conjunction with the ever fainter artillery fire from McClellan's relief column, caused the men to despair and presaged the hopelessness of their situation.

The final question considered by the Military Commission concerned the small number of Union casualties. This seemed to indicate the Union resistance was not as stubborn as it could have been. Since evidence had already been presented concerning the shortage of long-range artillery ammunition, the shortage

²⁹Horses were led when the animals had sore backs. "The remedy against recurrence of sore backs on horses was invariably to order the trooper to walk and lead the disabled animal." The lesson usually convinced the soldier to be more careful with the blanket, dismount when climbing steep hills, allow the horse frequent rest, and remove the saddle after several hours in the saddle. Jack Coggins, Arms and Equipment of the Civil War (Garden City: Doubleday, 1962), p. 53.

³⁰Binney as witness, 7 October 1862, OR, ser. 1, 19, pt. 1: 584,586; Trimble as witness, 20 October 1862, ibid., p. 745; Means as witness, 20 October 1862, ibid., pp. 752-53; Capt. William H. Grafflin, 23 October 1862, ibid., pp. 770-71; Cameron as witness, 10 October 1862, ibid., p. 636; McIlvaine as witness, 20 October 1862, ibid., p. 750.

of rations and the loss of several key terrain features, the commission reluctantly concluded that federal resistance was not properly orchestrated.³¹

Deliberations, beginning on 30 October, continued until Monday morning, the third of November. The commission, in discussing the verdict, reviewed the evidence furnished by fifty-three witnesses and recorded in 900 pages of testimony. The report, adopted at 11:00 A.M. on the third, determined that

Harper's Ferry, as well as Maryland Heights, was prematurely surrendered. The garrison should have been satisfied that relief, however long delayed, would come at last, and that 1,000 men killed in Harper's Ferry would have made a small loss had the post been secured, and probably save 2,000 at Antietam Had the garrison been slower to surrender or the Army of the Potomac swifter to march, the enemy would have been forced to raise the siege or have been taken in detail, with the Potomac dividing his forces.³²

With the exception of Col. Thomas H. Ford, all officers under arrest pending the investigation were acquitted of any wrong doing and commended by the commission for their actions. Ford, charged with improper conduct because of the abandonment of Maryland Heights, was found to have received discretionary authority from Miles to retreat when necessary. Capt. John T. Whittier, Company F, First Maryland Potomac Home Brigade, testified that Miles had informed Ford "If you can't hold it [Maryland

³¹Report of Military Commission, 3 November 1862, *ibid.*, p. 800.

³²*Ibid.*

Heights], leave it."³³ The evidence, both circumstantial and direct, indicated that the act of abandoning Maryland Heights did not displease Miles. However, the commission, considering Ford's action, concluded Ford did not conduct a proper defense of the Heights and the retreat from such a key position was premature. Neither were Union forces driven from the field nor casualties high enough to indicate a contested defense. Ford's actions in this matter indicated a lack of military capacity, and the commission recommended that he be disqualified from receiving any further commands.³⁴

Turning to the officer in command of the garrison and responsible for the surrender, the Military Commission concluded that the evidence proved that Miles was incapable of command, and this led to the disgraceful surrender of the post. Finding that Miles had disobeyed orders from Wool in mid-August concerning the fortification of Maryland Heights, the commission labeled such actions "criminally negligent" because Miles admitted to his officers that the Heights were the key to the defense. In spite of such a revelation, the commission concluded Ford's weak brigade was improperly positioned. Moreover, Miles' refusal to provide Ford with the necessary tools to prepare field fortifications or reinforce the position was intolerable. Finally, Miles'

³³Report of Military Commission, 3 November 1862, *ibid.*, p. 795; Capt. John T. Whittier, Company F, First Maryland Potomac Home Brigade, 15 October 1862, *ibid.*, p. 712.

³⁴Report of Military Commission, 3 November 1862, *ibid.*, pp. 798-800.

authorization to abandon the Heights and his failure to assign White such an important position illustrated "the utter incapacity" of the colonel.³⁵

Besides the commission's findings concerning these two officers, the panel also berated McClellan for not using the utmost speed in pursuing the enemy into Maryland and for not communicating to Franklin the need for maximum speed in reaching Harper's Ferry. Likewise, it believed Wool should be censured for his conduct, because he retained the incapable colonel in command at such a key point.³⁶

The public reaction to the commission report was mixed. Several newspapers disputed the attempt to place a portion of the blame on McClellan or Wool. For example, the Albany Atlas and Argus, a Democratic newspaper, demurred that "After having cashiered the officers who were in command of the Ferry, for not defending it, it will not do, by way of an afterthought, to cashier McClellan for not relieving it."³⁷ The New York Tribune responded to such a partisan defense of McClellan's actions by noting that "Little Mac" made no attempt to move to Miles' relief for the eight days prior to the surrender of Harper's Ferry. The editor questioned whether by some reasonable activity he might have relieved and protected Miles before the time, when in

³⁵Ibid., p. 799.

³⁶Ibid., p. 800; Albany Evening Journal, 13 November 1862.

³⁷Washington National Intelligencer, 13 November 1862; Albany Atlas and Argus, 13, 19 November 1862.

consequence of the stupidity of Ford and Miles, the position was actually lost.³⁸

The president, receiving the report of the commission, read and approved the proceedings. On the eighteenth of November 1862, orders were issued dissolving the commission and dismissing Colonel Ford, Thirty-second Ohio, and Maj. William H. Baird, 126th New York, from the armed services of the United States. Ford, ill during the battle on Maryland Heights, received a note from White expressing his sympathy and hope that a review of the evidence could be obtained. Such a review, White believed, would show that Ford's mental ability and performance was affected by his illness. No evidence has been found to indicate that such a review was ever conducted or was Ford recalled to Union service. The commission report tarnished the record of these men and Colonel Miles. The colonel's contributions and services to the United States would fade from the public memory and when the events of September 1862 were related in history texts, little was said concerning the battle at Harper's Ferry and its important relationship to the more famous battle twenty miles to the north at Sharpsburg.³⁹

Although the Railroad Brigade cased its colors for the last time on the fifteenth of September 1862, the requirement to protect the Union's lifeline of iron compelled the War Department to post

³⁸New York Tribune, 17 November 1862.

³⁹General Order No. 183, War Department, 8 November 1862, OR, ser. 1, 19, pt.1: 802-03; White to Ford, 18 November 1862, Abraham Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, D. C. (on microfilm NTSU Library).

troops, either untrained or, after 1863, from the Invalid Corps, along the track to prevent destruction by Confederate guerrilla forces. The need for a special force had been successfully demonstrated, but, in this instance, the commander of the unit, tested under the most severe conditions, was found wanting. Since this seemed to be the assessment of the War Department, the policy of improvising to meet special problems or needs was vindicated. Only time would tell whether the War Department had the ability to judge the character of officers called upon to assume such extraordinary responsibilities and power.

CHAPTER IV

THE U. S. ARMY STEAM RAM FLEET

A second example of improvisation by the War Department which arose out of necessity and developed without the guidance of precedent, was in response to the Confederate ironclad ram, Virginia (Merrimac). In March 1862 the Virginia attacked and destroyed the Union ships Cumberland and Congress. The success of the rebel ironclad in Hampton Roads led to much concern in Washington about the vessels of similar construction the Confederacy was building on the Mississippi River. Such a technological innovation in naval warfare demanded a creative and unconventional solution. The action taken by Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton to meet this threat resulted in the establishment of a naval unit organized, equipped, and supplied by the U. S. Army.

The man chiefly responsible for proposing this solution was a noted antebellum civil engineer from Pennsylvania. Charles Ellet, Jr., born 1 January 1810 at Penn's Manor in Bucks County, Pennsylvania, had attained eminence as a result of several wire suspension bridges designed and constructed under his supervision. Likewise, his brilliant study, published in 1853, The Mississippi and Ohio Rivers, heralded his emergence as an expert in the areas of flood control and navigational improvements. Altogether Ellet's hyperactive intellectual powers produced forty-six

published works as well as various technical and popular articles.¹

During the 1850s, while serving as a consulting engineer to the Virginia Central Railroad, Ellet went to Europe to study European railroading methods. During the transatlantic voyage he heard of the collision and sinking of the Collins liner, Arctic, by a small vessel. Greatly impressed, he quickly noted the potential power and destructive effect of a vessel propelled by steam when used as a ram. He immediately submitted to the Russian government, then involved in the Crimean War, a proposal, utilizing steam rams to relieve Sevastopol. The Russians, considering the project, terminated the negotiations for purchasing Ellet's expertise to construct such vessels when Czar Nicholas I suddenly died. At this point Ellet offered his ideas to Russia's opponents, Great Britain and France.²

Sensing that the allies were not interested, Ellet returned to the United States. In 1855, he published a pamphlet entitled Coast and Harbour Defences or the Submission of Steam Battering Rams for Ships of War. In the pamphlet he proposed that the steam ram be employed primarily as a defensive weapon to protect

¹Dictionary of American Biography, p. 87 (hereafter cited as DAB); National Cyclopedia of American Biography, p. 360 (hereafter cited as National Cyclopedia); Gene D. Lewis, Charles Ellet, Jr. The Engineer As Individualist 1810-1862 (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1968), p. 5.

²Warren D. Crandall and Isaac D. Newell, History of the Ram Fleet and the Mississippi Marine Brigade in the War For the Union on the Mississippi and Its Tributaries: The Story of the Ellets and their Men (St. Louis: Buschart Brothers, 1907), p. 11; Lewis, Charles Ellet, Jr., pp. 182-83.

the harbors and coasts of the United States. While the naval battering ram as a weapon was not an innovation, being traced back to the Greeks and Phoenicians, the new aspect was the use of steam to propel the ram.³

Ellet approached the idea with his typical scientific thoroughness. By applying the formula $f = mv^2$ (force equal mass times velocity squared), he sought to demonstrate the superiority of the steam ram as a naval weapon. Ellet insisted that the rams needed neither guns nor armor, as the ram's velocity was guaranteed by using steam engines which produced a maximum speed of fifteen knots. This would make them the fastest vessels afloat. Mass was achieved by loading the bow of the ram with lumber and placing three solid bulkheads of a foot or more in thickness down the length of the vessel. This would insure that upon impact the entire ship would be a single rigid unit.⁴

Moving to Georgetown, District of Columbia, in 1857, Ellet continued his attempts to interest the Navy Department in his steam ram proposal. The navy repeatedly dismissed the matter, partly because there was a lack of guidance and appropriations from Congress, the general inertness of the department itself,

³Ellet conceived the principle of the naval steam ram not realizing that Sir Isaac Coffin of the British Navy had been the first to mention a steam ram, although as a secondary weapon to guns. Further, Commodore Barron outlined a series of naval tactics based on steam motivation which included the ram principle in 1832. Lewis, Charles Ellet, Jr., pp. 182-83.

⁴Shelby Foote, The Civil War: A Narrative, 3 vols. (New York: Random House, 1958-74), 1: 386; Lewis, Charles Ellet, Jr., pp. 182-83.

and the inability of those individuals in decision making positions of the national government to recognize the advantages, both militarily and economically, of the steam ram as compared to a conventional warship.⁵

By the outbreak of the Civil War, Ellet had offered his idea to several governments without success. In May of 1861, he wrote the secretary of the navy, Gideon Welles of Connecticut. While proposing that the navy adopt his steam rams, Ellet did not foresee, at this stage of the war, any need for such a naval vessel in combat operations against the Confederacy. Instead, steam rams should be built, Ellet argued, in order to provide a formidable method of defending the coasts and harbors against a foreign naval attack. After waiting two months for Welles to respond, Ellet concluded in mid-July that the secretary did not intend to do anything about the rams. On July 11 Ellet wrote to Republican Congressman Charles B. Sedgwick of New York, chairman of the House naval affairs committee, to persuade the committee to publish the Navy Department's correspondence concerning the proposal. The naval committee did not respond. Ellet even had a personal interview with President Lincoln in August, in a final desperate attempt to realize his goal.⁶

⁵National Cyclopedia, p. 360; Lewis, Charles Ellet, Jr., p. 183; DAB, p. 87.

⁶John D. Milligan, "Charles Ellet and His Naval Steam Ram," Civil War History 9 (1963): 123; Charles Ellet to Welles, 21 June 1861, U.S., Department of the Navy, Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies in the War of the Rebellion, Richard Rush et al, eds., 30 vols (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1894-1914), ser. 1, 22: 288 (hereafter cited as ORN); Lewis, Charles Ellet, Jr., p. 176; Who Was Who In America, Historical Volume 1607-1896, pp. 472-73. Besides his proposal for steam rams, Charles Ellet also recommended a plan

Two motives spurred Charles Ellet's almost frantic offers of service for the war effort. First was Ellet's need for a sustained income, since the majority of public projects requiring civil engineers had been postponed by the war. More important, perhaps, was his intense patriotism. This led him to become quite concerned with the Lincoln administration's conduct of the war and prompted him to publish two pamphlets. The first, The Army of the Potomac and Its Mismanagement, was addressed to the president in December 1861. The second, Military Incapacity and What It Costs the Country, followed in February 1862.⁷

Ellet's "excitement over the inactivity of the government 'made his friends almost dread his presence, for his importunity knew no bounds.'"⁸ This excitement grew as the Confederates proceeded to construct five ironclads at Norfolk, Mobile, and New Orleans in the spring of 1862. In addition to guns these ironclads were being fitted out as rams with an iron wedge beak. Many years after the war, a naval officer described how Ellet

in September 1861 to raid the Confederate railroads in Virginia with the objective of isolating the Confederate army so that McClellan could launch a surprise attack. This suggestion was followed in October 1861 by a letter to Simon Cameron protesting the lack of troops at several of the forts south of the Potomac. Charles Ellet to Lincoln, 20 September 1861, Abraham Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, D. C. (on microfilm NTSU Library); Charles Ellet to Salmon P. Chase, 17 September 1861, *ibid.*; Charles Ellet to Cameron, 7 October 1861, Record Group 107, "Records of the Office of the Secretary of War," National Archives, Washington, D. C. (on microfilm M221 "Letters Received by the Secretary of War, Registered Series, 1801-70," Fort Worth, Texas, Regional Branch, National Archives) (hereafter cited as RG 107).

⁷Lewis, Charles Ellet, Jr., pp. 176, 184; DAB, p. 88; National Cyclopedia, p. 360.

⁸Lewis, Charles Ellet, Jr., p. 184.

"had nearly gone insane on the ram question and had written and besieged the departments at Washington until they nearly went insane too."⁹

Charles Ellet was especially fearful of the ironclad at Norfolk (the Merrimac) since it was the one rebel vessel nearing completion. Its early completion could produce disastrous results for the Union, Ellet pointed out in his pamphlet Military Incapacity and What It Costs the Country, since the United States had no comparable vessels with which to counter such a threat. If the Merrimac succeeded in escaping the Union blockade, the result would be attacks on both armed and commercial vessels.¹⁰

Thus, it came as no surprise to Ellet when the Merrimac steamed down the Elizabeth River and offered battle with the Union navy. The naval actions in Hampton Roads 8-9 March 1862 altered the attitude held by government officials regarding steam rams. The C.S.S. Virginia (Merrimac) rammed the USS Cumberland below the waterline causing her to immediately sink with a loss of 121 men, while the USS Congress ran aground and was set ablaze with hot shot and incendiary shell. On the ninth,

⁹Herbert P. Gambrell, "Rams versus Gunboats . . . A Landsman's Naval Exploits," Southwest Review 23 (1937): 54; Lewis, Charles Ellet, Jr., pp. 184-85; Virgil C. Jones, The Civil War At Sea, 3 vols. (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1960-62), 1: 395.

¹⁰Charles Ellet, Jr., Military Incapacity and What It Costs The Country (New York: Ross and Tousey, 1862), p. 14 (on microfiche NTSU Library).

the Virginia met the USS Monitor in a four-hour engagement which marked the end of the wooden warship and created a panic atmosphere in Washington. The secretary of the navy related in his diary that there was general excitement and alarm in the capital and among the cabinet members. "But the most frightened man on that gloomy day, the most so . . . of any during the Rebellion was the Secretary of War. He was at times almost frantic" ¹¹ Part of the secretary's reaction was due to his total loss of confidence in the navy. Since the Union navy appeared to be unable to cope with the Merrimac, Stanton seized the occasion to direct naval affairs himself. An article in the Atlantic Monthly in 1870 concerning Stanton's contributions to the war effort concluded that he "was ever ready to assume, especially in critical moments, the gravest responsibilities." ¹²

As part of this general reaction to the situation, Stanton requested Charles Ellet to come to the War Department on 14 March 1862. Though venomous enemies for ten years because of a lawsuit which had placed the two men on opposite sides of the issue, Stanton saw the engineer's usefulness in meeting the

¹¹Howard K. Beale, ed., Diary of Gideon Welles Secretary of the Navy Under Lincoln and Johnson, 3 vols. (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1960) 1: 62; Rear Adm. E. M. Eller et al, eds., Civil War Naval Chronology 1861-1865 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1971), p. II-29.

¹²"Edwin M. Stanton," Atlantic Monthly 25 (1870): 240.

military crisis.¹³ Stanton sent Ellet on an inspection of naval defenses on the Potomac River. Ellet reported that no practical measures had been taken to sink the Merrimac and recommended that five steam transports be acquired so that they might be outfitted as rams. These vessels, with small volunteer crews, would stand by with steam up until the enemy ram was sighted and would then hurl themselves at full speed into the Merrimac's sides. This would entail the loss, Ellet stated, of two steamers but would eliminate the Merrimac in the process.¹⁴

A more detailed report was delivered by Ellet on 20 March. After the engineer left the secretary's office, Brig. Gen. Montgomery C. Meigs, quartermaster general, suggested that the government could use Ellet's talents in building war vessels in the western theater of war. Stanton confirmed that Ellet would be a good man for such an undertaking, adding that the engineer had "more ingenuity, more personal courage, and more enterprise than anybody else He is a clear, forcible, controversial writer His fancy and will are predominate

¹³In 1849 Ellet completed the world's longest suspension bridge (at the time) over the Ohio River, at Wheeling, (West) Virginia. A suit, ultimately heard in the United States Supreme Court, initiated in the name of the State of Pennsylvania on behalf of the citizens of Pittsburgh, resulted in a decree of abatement. Edwin M. Stanton argued the case for the plaintiffs; during the litigation Stanton and Ellet became bitter enemies. DAB, p. 87.

¹⁴Charles Ellet to Stanton, 16 March 1862, RG 107; Gambrell, "Rams vs. Gunboats," p. 48; Stanton to Ellet, 14 March 1862, ORN, ser. 1, 22: 665.

points, and once having taken a notion he will not allow it to be questioned."¹⁵

The fear in Washington had by this time begun to subside since the Monitor had neutralized the Virginia. As attention turned to the Confederate ironclads being constructed at New Orleans, Stanton telegraphed Maj. Gen. Henry W. Halleck in Saint Louis on 25 March 1862 to report a meeting of naval and military engineers at the War Department. The engineers agreed that a steam ram striking and sinking an ironclad vessel was the best means of countering the Confederate threat.¹⁶

Stanton selected his antagonist, Charles Ellet, to carry out this decision. In a meeting of the secretary of war and his chief advisors, Stanton announced his decision. He proposed that Ellet construct one or more rams in the West as quickly as possible. Meigs; Brig. Gen. Lorenzo Thomas, adjutant general; and Col. Joseph P. Taylor, commissary general, supported the choice and plan. Bvt. Brig. Gen. James C. Totten, chief engineer, questioned whether Ellet would be held directly responsible to Stanton. Stanton replied yes, and if Ellet were not flexible in his relations with the army, he would be

¹⁵Lewis, Charles Ellet, Jr., pp. 189- 90; Milligan, "Charles Ellet," p. 126.

¹⁶Stanton to Halleck, 25 March 1862, U.S., War Department, The War of the Rebellion: A Compiation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies, R. N. Scott et al, eds., 130 vols. (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1880-1901), ser. 1, 8: 643 (hereafter cited as OR); Capt. Andrew H. Foote, USN, to Capt. Charles H. Davis, USN, 28 May 1862, ORN, ser. 1, 23: 110.

dismissed. The construction of the boats was all Ellet was to do, at this time.¹⁷

Hence, Stanton, having determined that the federal Navy Department was ineffective, assumed the initiative and organized a naval unit manned by volunteer soldiers under army officers to meet the dangerous situation on the Mississippi River. Ellet received instructions on 27 March to proceed to Pittsburgh, Cincinnati, and New Albany (Indiana) to modify existing steamboats into steam rams as a defense against ironclad vessels on the western waters. Ellet was to be paid for his services at the rate of ten dollars per day and ten cents per mile traveled. Having instructed Ellet to select and prepare the most suitable steamboats available in the least possible time span, Stanton had expressed "the hope that not more than twenty days would be consumed in getting them ready for service."¹⁸ Ellet immediately began to purchase vessels upon his arrival in Pittsburgh.

Ellet also sent a telegram to Halleck upon his arrival in Pittsburgh. If there were a military necessity, he would send a steamboat, mechanics, and building materials down the river immediately "with instructions to strengthen and protect her as well as they can on the way down the river, and follow

¹⁷Lewis, Charles Ellet, Jr., p. 190.

¹⁸C. Ellet to Lt. W. McGunnigle, USN, 27 April 1862, OR, ser. 1, 10, pt. 2: 622; Norman E. Clarke, Sr., ed., Warfare Along the Mississippi: The Letters of Lieutenant Colonel George E. Currie (Mount Pleasant: Central Michigan University, 1961), pp. ix-x; Stanton to Ellet, 27 March 1862, OR, ser. 1, 10, pt. 2: 69.

her up with others as fast as they reach here."¹⁹ Naturally, if more time could be permitted, the workmanship would be more substantial. Ellet admitted that these converted river steamboats would "be only off-hand contrivances at best, mere substitutes for rams, but if we find a few brave pilots and engineers to man them we can make them do the work."²⁰ Halleck replied that at the present he had no further intelligence about the Confederate ironclads, and Ellet should proceed accordingly.²¹

Preferring to construct the ram fleet at Pittsburgh, Ellet received instructions from Stanton expressing a desire to utilize the facilities at Cincinnati and New Albany also "so as to avoid the imputation of local favoritism, and also to bring out the whole mechanical energy of the Ohio Valley."²² Sparing no expense nor materials, Ellet was to be aided by committees appointed by the boards of trade of Pittsburgh, Cincinnati, New Albany, and Madison (Indiana). These committees were composed of experts in ship building and steamboat engineering, with the construction work to be distributed among these cities to avoid delay and to prevent overtaxing the limited number of mechanics and raw materials available.

¹⁹Ellet to Halleck, 28 March 1862, ORN, ser. 1, 22: 681.

²⁰Ibid.

²¹Lewis, Charles Ellet, Jr., p. 191.

²²Ibid.; Stanton to Ellet, 28 March 1862, ORN, ser. 1, 22: 680.

In 1862, three types of steam propulsion were used in shallow waters such as the western rivers: the stern-wheel, the side-wheel, and the propeller. The stern-wheel type steamboat, used for towing barges because of its immense power and speed, was too unwieldy to manage in a current and head winds. Also the shaft, crank, and wheel could not be protected from enemy fire. The side-wheel type steamboat was used primarily as a passenger and freight carrier as it had sufficient speed for any practical commercial purposes. This type was easily handled in winds and currents, and its machinery and wheels could be adequately protected from enemy fire. The propeller type of steamboat was not commonly used on western rivers since the propeller had to be adapted to the most shallow depth of water encountered and, as acting Rear Adm. David D. Porter reported to Welles in May 1862, "for a large portion of the year the depth does not exceed . . . 6 feet, and hence this small diameter of propeller for steamers of large size is useless to obtain speed."²³ Also, floating debris such as rafts, timber, foliage, underwater snags, and obstacles would damage propellers faster than side- or stern-wheels. In addition, the sand in the river water rapidly corroded the underwater propeller journals.

At Pittsburgh five vessels, which were fast, strong stern-wheel coal tow boats, were selected, while at Cincinnati four side-wheel vessels were purchased. The vessels selected

²³Porter to Welles, 6 May 1862, ORN, ser. 1, 23: 83.

at Pittsburgh (the Mingo, Lioness, Samson, Dick Fulton, and T. D. Horner) were boats with average dimensions of 170 feet in length, 30 feet beam, and a 5-foot hold. The vessels purchased in Cincinnati (the Queen of the West, Lancaster No. 3, the Switzerland, and the Monarch) were side-wheel boats with the larger of the four being 180 feet in length, 37½ feet beam, and an 8-foot hold. Of the nine vessels, the seven larger vessels were modified as rams, while the two small stern-wheel tow boats were used as tenders. In emergencies, however, Ellet intended using the two tenders as rams.²⁴ (See Table III.)

The total cost of purchasing, rebuilding, and outfitting the nine vessels was \$243,987.69. Also acquired were three large coal barges to be used as protection when passing Confederate artillery batteries on the river bank. The total cost of purchasing and rebuilding these barges was \$21,989.47. Sundry expenses totaled \$9,022.84. The total cost of establishing and organizing the fleet and purchasing equipment was \$275,000.00.²⁵

The steamboats were converted into rams by running three heavy, solid timber bulkheads (12 to 16 inches thick) fore and aft, from stem to stern. The central bulkhead was placed directly over the keelson, a longitudinal structure running above the keel and fastened to it in order to reinforce and

²⁴Ellet to McGunnigle, 27 April 1862, OR, ser. 1, 10, pt. 2: 622; James Brooks, assistant quartermaster, to Meigs, 7 November 1862, OR, ser. 3, 2: 834.

²⁵Brooks to Meigs, 7 November 1862, OR, ser. 3, 2: 834-35.

strengthen the framework. Each of these bulkheads was braced against the others and the outer two were braced, in addition, against the hull of the boat. All three bulkheads were braced against the deck and floor timbers. The bulkheads were held in place by heavy iron rods and screw bolts. The objective was to add the weight of the boat to the momentum of the central bulkhead at the moment of collision.

The boilers and machinery were held in place with iron rods and protected by a heavy double wall of live oak timber 8 to 12 inches thick. These walls were securely fastened and bolted to the hull and extended from the main deck to a few inches below the cabin floor. The upper cabins of the steamboat were cut down or leveled, and the prow was filled with heavy timbers extending to midship. In addition, the pilot house of each vessel was protected against small arms fire. Each vessel was painted black in order to give it as savage an appearance as possible. "Despite all this preparation, the boats [were but] mere shells [so] as to earn the name of black death traps among the men."²⁶

In addition to the rams, the three coal barges were modified to afford protection for the rams, since those vessels were not

²⁶Clarke, ed., Warfare Along the Mississippi, pp. 39-40, 47; Ellet to McGunnigle, 27 April 1862, OR, ser. 1, 10, pt. 2: 622; John S. C. Abbott, "Heroic Deeds of Heroic Men--Charles Ellet and His Naval Steam Rams," Harper's New Monthly Magazine, 32 (1866): 301; Washington National Intelligencer, 11 June 1862; Stanton to Halleck, 29 March 1862, OR, ser. 1, 10, pt. 2: 77; Ellet to Stanton, 1 April 1862, Lincoln Papers.

designed to withstand heavy ordnance. The ram would be protected by a barge lashed to the side facing the enemy's guns. On the barge was built a sharp angled roof made of timber twelve inches in thickness. The sides of the roof, made of such solid timber, were further reinforced by filling the angles formed between the sides of the barge and the slanting timbers of the roof with assorted materials of wood or brick so that line shots would be prevented.²⁷

Ellet calculated that a ram, in an attack, would be subject to a minimum number of hits by estimating the speed necessary to travel from extreme range to the actual collision, the number of artillery weapons which the enemy could fire during this time, the margin for bad shooting, and the small area of vital parts (boiler and rudder) offering a target. The return fire produced by the ram's sharpshooters and the confusion produced by the ramming of the enemy vessel were also considered. The New Orleans Daily Picayune reported 27 September 1862 that events had showed that "the calculation reduced the chances [of a hit] to a remarkably low ratio."²⁸

To man the vessels, Stanton offered Ellet two or three good naval officers who would be detailed to the army. Ellet, however, preferred daring and skillful river men and did not foresee any difficulty in recruiting them. However, if these men could not be acquired, Ellet would then request naval officers.

²⁷Clarke, ed., Warfare Along the Mississippi, p. 41.

²⁸New Orleans Daily Picayune, 27 September 1862.

TABLE III

THE VESSELS OF THE RAM FLEET

Queen of the West--Side-wheel steamer of 400 tons, it was built in Cincinnati in 1854. The Queen, purchased for \$16,000 in 1862 by the U. S. Army, was 180 feet in length, 37½ feet in beam, and an eight foot hold. The cost of rebuilding the vessel was \$23,083.69. The Queen was grounded and captured 14 February 1863 at Fort DeRussy, Louisiana, on the Red River. The Confederates refitted it as a cottonclad. In conjunction with the Confederate ram Webb, the vessel sank the U.S.S. Indianola on 24 February 1863. The Queen was sunk by federal gunboats 14 April 1863.

Switzerland--Side-wheel steamer of 400 tons, the Switzerland was purchased for \$12,000 in 1862 by the U. S. Army. The cost of rebuilding it was \$22,277.26. In conjunction with the Lancaster, the vessel ran the batteries at Vicksburg on 25 March 1863. It was reported sunk on the Mississippi River above Commerce, Missouri, in November 1864.

Lancaster No. 3--Side-wheel steamer of 350 tons, it was purchased for \$8,000 in 1862 by the U. S. Army. The cost of rebuilding was \$15,783.78. The vessel attempted to run the batteries at Vicksburg but was sunk on 25 March 1863.

Mingo--Stern-wheel steamer of 300 tons, it was purchased for \$18,000 in 1862 by the U. S. Army. The Mingo had a maximum speed of twelve knots but averaged only seven. The cost of rebuilding was \$8,483.57. It was accidentally sunk at Cape Girardeau, Missouri, in November 1862.

Lioness--Stern-wheel steamer of 300 tons, the Lioness was purchased for \$22,000 in 1862 by the U. S. Army, and was modified at a cost of \$8,348.73 with Charles R. Ellet's torpedo clearing device. The vessel was sold in October 1865 and abandoned in 1870.

Samson--Stern-wheel steamer of 300 tons, the vessel was purchased for \$21,750 in 1862 by the U. S. Army. The cost of rebuilding was \$9,160.61. It was transferred to the quartermaster department on 27 November 1862. The steamer was converted to a blacksmith shop on 12 December 1862 and was sold at auction at Mound City, Illinois, 17 August 1865 for \$16,000.

T. D. Horner--Stern-wheel steamer of 200 tons, the Horner was purchased for \$9,000 in 1862 by the U. S. Army as a steam tug. The cost of rebuilding was \$4,210.41.

Dick Fulton--Stern-wheel steamer of 175 tons, it was purchased for \$10,875 in 1862 by the U. S. Army as a steam tug and was rebuilt for \$3,562.47. The vessel was sold in October 1865. It exploded at New Orleans on 2 February 1866 with the loss of four lives.

Monarch--Side-wheel steamer of 400 tons, the vessel was purchased at Pittsburgh in 1862. After participating in numerous military operations, the Monarch was dropped from the active list in 1864. It remained in reserve ready for immediate recall to active service until going to Mound City, Illinois, for dismantling in July 1865.

SOURCE: Sketch of Naval Vessels Service, ORN, ser. 1, 23: 163; 25: 179-80; ser. 2, 1: 74, 123, 144, 187, 199, 218; Eller, Civil War Naval Chronology, p. VI-289; Myron J. Smith, Jr., American Civil War Navies: A Bibliography (Metuchen: The Scarecrow Press, 1972), pp. 310, 318, 323; U.S., Department of the Navy, Dictionary of American Naval Fighting Ships, Vol. 4 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1969), p. 414; New York Times, 18 November 1864; Brooks to Meigs, 7 November 1862, OR, ser. 3, 2: 834-35.

The men, Ellet reiterated on 29 March, must volunteer with the understanding that the duty would be dangerous. In addition, Ellet wanted authorization to assure the men that commendable services would be reported to the secretary of war, who would recommend them to the president and Congress.

On 19 April in a letter to Stanton, Ellet elaborated on his proposals to engage crews for the rams. Stanton approved Ellet's plan on 25 April. The crews were to be contracted at the current Mississippi River wages with prize money authorized for the capture or destruction of enemy vessels. At the end of March the navy was under the impression that the steam rams would be manned and officered by that department. On 10 April 1862, Flag Officer Andrew H. Foote, commanding U. S. Naval forces on the Mississippi, telegraphed Secretary Welles and requested 300 to 400 men for the crews of the rams.²⁹ The navy soon realized the army intended manning the vessels with experienced river men. One naval officer described such men as "some of the most desperate characters that entered the service on either side. Friend feared them as well as foe. They acknowledged allegiance to neither army or navy, but claimed to have a contract to settle the Rebellion in their own way" ³⁰

²⁹Ellet to Stanton, 31 March 1862, ORN, ser. 1, 22: 683-84; Stanton to Ellet, 31 March 1862, OR, ser. 1, 10, pt. 2: 84; Stanton to Ellet, 31 March 1862, ORN, ser. 1, 22: 683; Foote to Welles, 10 April 1862, *ibid.*, p. 768; Ellet to Stanton, 29 March 1862, OR, ser. 1, 10, pt. 2: 78; Stanton to Ellet, 25 April 1862, OR, ser. 3, 2: 25.

³⁰Gambrell, "Rams vs. Gunboats," p. 65.

To protect the vessels, a military guard of twelve to twenty men, under a lieutenant of Ellet's choice, was authorized with an officer of higher grade in overall command of all army personnel. This military guard, all volunteers, was to perform guard duty and assist in the vessel's defense. The total force on the seven rams and two tenders was 350 men. Stanton then proposed to appoint Ellet a colonel on the staff of Maj. Gen. John C. Frémont, commanding U. S. Army forces in the western theater of operations; despite this staff appointment, Ellet would be subject only to the orders of the secretary of war. Stanton wished to confer military rank on Ellet so that the engineer might have authority over the entire ram force for the duration of the campaign. Charles Ellet preferred not to hold any military rank unless Stanton deemed it indispensable. If it were unavoidable, then Ellet wanted to be appointed a brigadier general. He also requested that his brother, Capt. Alfred W. Ellet of the Fifty-ninth Illinois Volunteers, be appointed as second in command and authorized to bring a limited number of men from his regiment with him. Moreover, Stanton authorized a surgeon and assistant surgeon for the ram fleet and directed all military commanders to comply with Ellet's requisitions.³¹

On 26 April 1862 Ellet accepted the appointment of colonel after Stanton had pointed out that the rank of colonel was the

³¹Ellet to Stanton, 19 April 1862, OR, ser. 1, 10, pt. 2: 112-13; Ellet to Stanton, 25 April 1862, ibid., p. 127; Stanton to Ellet, 25 April 1862, OR, ser. 3, 2: 25; Bruce Catton, The Coming Fury (1961; reprint ed., Pocket Books, 1967), p. 474; Gambrell, "Rams vs. Gunboats," p. 59.

highest rank he could give without the action of the Senate, which would only cause delay. Ellet's brother, Alfred, was appointed a lieutenant colonel and second in command and ordered to Saint Louis with six officers and fifty privates, all to be volunteers from his regiment. However, the number of men was not as important as their readiness for action and dependable courage. Charles Ellet was so busy that "three weeks were to elapse before [he] found time to get a uniform; and it was near the end of May when he first put it on, to find that the eagle on the shoulder, and a military hat, are better passports than brains or character."³²

Previously, Stanton had assured his subordinates at the War Department that the Ram Fleet would be under the command of the army officer in whose area of authority they were operating. Instead, on 25 April 1862, he gave Charles Ellet a virtually independent command with only one proviso: Ellet could move against the enemy only with the concurrence of the naval commander. Ellet protested this clause in his instructions as he feared his proposed tactics would not be in accordance with accepted naval ideas; therefore, he would be compelled to wait until the opportunity to attack the enemy had passed.³³

³²Gambrell, "Rams vs. Gunboats," p. 59; Stanton to Ellet, 26 April 1862, OR, ser. 1, 10, pt. 2: 130-31; Ellet to Stanton, 26 April 1862, ibid., p. 131; Ellet to Brigadier General Schofield, commanding U.S. forces in Missouri, 27 April 1862, ORN, ser. 1, 23: 78.

³³Milligan, "Charles Ellet," p. 127; Stanton to Ellet, 25 April 1862, OR, ser. 3, 2: 25; Ellet to Stanton, 25 April 1862, OR, ser. 1, 10, pt. 2: 127-28.

Recognizing the basic principle of unity of command, Stanton replied on 26 April that since the Ram Fleet was engaged in a peculiar service, the expression "concurrence" had been used rather than placing the fleet under the command of a naval officer. Stanton believed there should not be two commanders "on the same element in war operations, but . . . the naval commander will be so advised and will be desired not to exercise direct control over . . . movements unless they shall manifestly expose the general operations on the Mississippi" ³⁴

In actuality, Ellet had acquired a self-sufficient command.

This command consisted of seven unarmed vessels, as Ellet believed the ram as a weapon was more effective than artillery. The vessels, however, would have small arms for the soldiers detailed as the military guard. On 30 April, 300 navy revolvers, 300 cutlasses, and nine small cases of parapet hand grenades, which would be used to clear the bow in case of boarding, were requisitioned. Also requested were 300 "breechloading or other short rifles or carbines, to use on vessels between decks, where long guns cannot be conveniently handled." ³⁵ The majority of these arms were finally received at Cairo, Illinois, at the end of May 1862; however, many of the issued weapons had been condemned as unserviceable prior to being issued. These weapons were used to arm the soldiers assigned as sharpshooters to each vessel. Added to these conventional weapons for defense of the

³⁴Stanton to Ellet, 26 April 1862, ORN, ser. 1, 23: 74.

³⁵Stanton to A. W. Ellet, 15 May 1862, OR, ser. 1, 10, pt. 2: 195-96.

vessel, a hose was "attached to the boilers with which to throw hot water in case of being boarded by the enemy."³⁶

In the final days before departure downriver, Ellet had his officers conduct training of the men, both soldiers and crews, in the use of small boats and life preservers, established a system of signals between the boats, and made the Queen of the West his flagship. In addition, training was conducted in the defense of each vessel.³⁷

Near the end of April 1862, preparations were made to move south to Fort Pillow, Tennessee. Tuesday, 29 April, the rams Mingo and Lioness with coal barges left Pittsburgh for the Mississippi, with the Samson following on the thirtieth. The tender Dick Fulton overtook the two rams towing coal barges before they reached Louisville. Ellet reported to Peter H. Watson, the assistant secretary of war, on 15 May 1862, that the five rams of the smaller class, under the command of Lt. Col. A. W. Ellet, were to reach Cairo by the sixteenth and would proceed without delay to Fort Wright, Tennessee. The sixth ram would overtake the fleet on the Mississippi River. The seventh and most powerful ram left Madison on Thursday, the fifteenth,

³⁶Clarke, ed., Warfare Along the Mississippi, p. 40; Ellet to Stanton, 30 April 1862, OR, ser. 3, 2: 28; Stanton to A. W. Ellet, 15 May 1862, OR, ser. 1, 10, pt. 2: 195-96; A. W. Ellet to Charles Ellet, 26 May 1862, ORN, ser. 1, 23: 107-8.

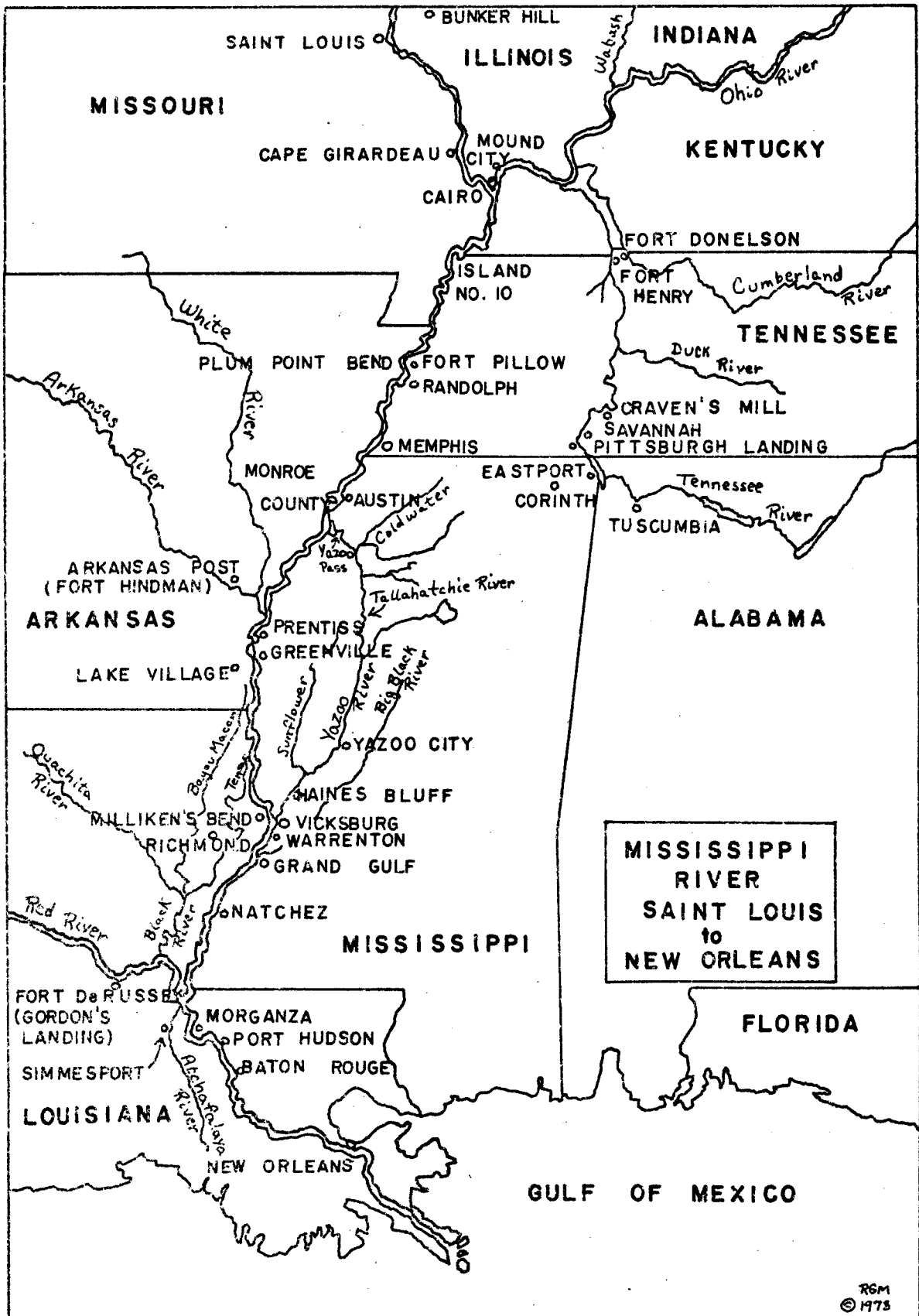
³⁷Crandall and Newell, History of the Ram Fleet, p. 39.

and was expected to reach Fort Wright on Sunday with Colonel Ellet on board.³⁸ By the evening of 25 May 1862, Stanton's experiment in naval warfare, based on Charles Ellet's "brown paper" rams, was prepared for combat at Fort Pillow, Tennessee.

³⁸Ellet to Stanton, 28 April 1862, OR, ser. 1, 10, pt. 2: 138; Stanton to Halleck, 28 April 1862, ibid., p. 138; Ellet to Peter H. Watson, 15 May 1862, ibid., p. 195; Ellet to Stanton, 26 May 1862, ibid., p. 215; Crandall and Newell, History of the Ram Fleet, p. 73; Ellet to Stanton, 20 May 1862, Lincoln Papers.

Figure 5

Mississippi River Valley



RG1
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CHAPTER V

THE RAM FLEET IN COMBAT

The first clash by Charles Ellet's Ram Fleet was not with Confederate military forces as intended, but with a second element of Secretary Edwin M. Stanton's navy, the Western Gunboat Flotilla. The Flotilla, created during the early months of the rebellion, was organized to conduct naval operations on the Mississippi River. The War Department, taking the initiative, established, equipped, funded, and partially manned the gunboats (the officers having been supplied by the navy). When Stanton was appointed head of the War Department, he accepted his predecessor's project as his own and, subsequently, increased and strengthened the gunboat squadron. Having been convinced of the navy's inadequacy as a result of the Hampton Roads fight, Stanton also authorized the construction of Charles Ellet's Ram Fleet.

Stanton's objective in the West was to secure control of the Mississippi River because the river was the main commercial route in the West, and it was the natural avenue of advance for the Union armies into the heart of the South. The navy, Stanton insisted, existed merely to provide support for the land forces, and, if the Navy Department would not submit to army orders,

Stanton implied that he would create naval units which would be responsive to his will.¹

The first confrontation between the army and navy occurred at the end of May 1862, after the Ram Fleet arrived above Fort Pillow, Tennessee. Stanton, unaware of the potential ambiguities in his orders to Ellet, wrote Maj. Gen. Henry Halleck at Pittsburgh Landing, Tennessee, 28 April 1862 that Ellet was subject to the orders of the gunboat fleet commander at Fort Pillow. Ellet interpreted his order of "concurrence" differently and stated on 30 May that he would move alone against the enemy since Capt. Charles H. Davis, U. S. Navy, commanding the Gunboat Flotilla, declined Ellet's proposal of using the rams to attack the enemy below Fort Pillow. Davis, having ordered Ellet to remain at anchor, questioned his disobedience. Ellet replied that he did not consider himself under naval authority since his fleet was outfitted under the orders of the War Department.² Further, the naval commander's nonconcurrence in any move against the

¹New York Times, 2 December 1862; Gene D. Lewis, Charles Ellet, Jr. The Engineer As Individualist 1810-1862 (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1968), p. 189; Howard K. Beale, ed., Diary of Gideon Welles Secretary of the Navy Under Lincoln and Johnson, 3 vols. (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1960) 1: 69.

²Stanton to Halleck, 28 April 1862, U.S., War Department, The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies, R. N. Scott et al, eds., 130 vols. (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1880-1901), ser. 1, 10, pt. 2: 138 (hereafter cited as OR); Ellet to Davis, 28 May 1862, U.S., Department of the Navy, Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies in the War of the Rebellion, Richard Rush, et al, eds., 30 vols. (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1894-1914), ser. 1, 23: 34 (hereafter cited as ORN). The U. S. Army Quartermaster's Department reported in

enemy would be respected only if such a movement hindered naval operations. The naval commander, however, would not be held responsible for ram fleet operations nor allowed to interfere with them if they merely involved a hazard to Ellet's command. Ellet then pledged complete cooperation and use of the rams in combat as if the naval commander actually had the right to command them. Reluctantly, Davis agreed on 3 June to Ellet's interpretation of the orders.³

Prior to any military operation below Fort Pillow by the rams, however, the Confederates evacuated the position, which had sustained a continuous bombardment since 14 April. Upon discovering the empty fortifications, Captain Davis ordered the gunboats and rams south. The Union vessels were two miles from Memphis when the sun set 5 June 1862.⁴ Colonel Ellet wrote

December 1862 the construction, during the preceeding fiscal year, of a fleet of ironclad gunboats and steam rams which were officered and manned jointly by the Navy and War Departments. However, in a letter to Gustavus V. Fox, assistant secretary of the navy, dated 5 March 1862, Flag Officer Andrew H. Foote asserted that the gunboat flotilla belonged neither to the army nor navy since neither service provided adequate logistical support. Further, the Navy Department considered the gunboats as army property while the War Department considered them navy property. U.S., Congress, House, Annual Report Secretary of War 1 December 1862, 37th Cong., 3d sess., 1862, Exec. Doc. No. 1, p. 12; Robert M. Thompson and Richard Wainwright, eds., Confidential Correspondence of Gustavus Vasa Fox Assistant Secretary of the Navy 1861-1865, 2 vols. (New York: DeVinne Press, 1920) 2: 39; Thomas A. Scott, assistant secretary of war, to Stanton, 9 March 1862, Edwin McMasters Stanton Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, D. C.

³Stanton to Halleck, 28 April 1862, OR, ser. 1, 10, pt. 2: 138; Ellet to Stanton, 30 May 1862, ibid., p. 231; Ellet to Davis, 2 June 1862, ORN, ser. 1, 23: 39-40; Davis to Ellet, 3 June 1862, ibid., p. 42.

⁴Ellet's rams camped separately about 18 miles above Memphis on the Tennessee shore on the night of 5 June. Ellet to Stanton, 11 June 1862, ORN, ser. 1, 23: 133.

that "having seen the rebel fleet abandon a position whence they could choose their own time of attack, with Fort Pillow to fall back upon, I had no expectation that they would make a stand at Memphis, which was represented to be entirely unfortified."⁵

At 5:30 A.M., Friday, 6 June 1862, the U. S. Army Steam Ram Fleet participated in its only major naval action of the war. The naval battle of Memphis was primarily significant because of the city's importance, not only as a great commercial center but as a strategic prize in the defensive line of the Confederacy. The city was the western terminus of an extensive railway system. The great trunk line, which extended westward from Richmond through Virginia, east Tennessee, northern Georgia, Alabama, and Mississippi, reached the river at Memphis. A railroad from Charleston and another from Mobile and New Orleans, made a junction with this main line to the south of the city, while on the north the Nashville railroad connected Memphis with the Cumberland Valley and the Ohio. The South's control of the Mississippi River and Memphis with the railroads converging there, could contribute strategically to the Southern cause.⁶

Memphis was not fortified, having instead depended on Fort Pillow for its defense. When the Confederate army evacuated Fort Pillow, the Mississippi River Defense Fleet also steamed south. This fleet of eight ships, a portion of the vessels

⁵Ibid.

⁶Lewis, Charles Ellet, Jr., p. 199.

purchased by the Confederate War Department in early 1862, had been intended for defense of the Mississippi River. Manned by army personnel, they were under the command of Capt. James E. Montgomery, CSN, a former river steamboat captain.

Fresh from his victory of 10 May 1862 at Plum Point Bend, Tennessee, in which his fleet sank two federal gunboats, Montgomery fell back on Memphis to take on coal. When the federal gunboats and rams appeared at dawn, 6 June 1862, Montgomery, who was unable to retreat to Vicksburg on account of his shortage of fuel and unwilling to destroy his vessels, decided to fight. Reassuring a crowd, panic-stricken when told of the evacuation of Fort Pillow and the approach of the Yankees, Montgomery told them that he "had no intention of retreating any farther. I have come here, that you may see Lincoln's gunboats sent to the bottom by the fleet which you built and manned."⁷

Daylight found the Confederate vessels lying at the levee below the city. Upon sighting the federals, they dropped below Rail Road Point in order to clear for action. Returning again, Montgomery arranged the fleet in front of the city. As Davis's gunboats slipped anchor, the rebels opened fire. Davis reported later his supposition that the Confederates intention was to draw federal fire into the city, a situation avoided by returning fire with great care. Colonel Ellet reported that when his rams

⁷Ibid., p. 200; Rear Adm. E. M. Eller et al, eds., Civil War Naval Chronology 1861-1865 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1971), pp. VI-213, VI-329; Chicago Tribune, 10 June 1862.

arrived above Memphis he found the gunboats anchored across the channel. He rounded to with the Queen of the West, his flagship, and secured it on the Arkansas side of the river "with the intention of conferring with Commodore Davis and collecting information preparatory to the next movement."⁸ Before Ellet could confer with Davis, the battle began. The Queen of the West and the Monarch cast off all lines and steamed rapidly past the federal gunboats which were returning the rebel fire.

Ellet discovered the rebel rams, armed with guns, heading upstream toward the Union fleet while a large crowd of spectators, estimated in the thousands, watched from the levee at Memphis. Ellet directed his attack against the two rebel rams in the middle of the river. The distance between the Queen and the enemy rapidly diminished when suddenly the two rebel ships veered away, having apparently lost their courage. The Queen's speed was such that when she hit the first rebel forward of the wheelhouse everything loose aboard the Queen was thrown forward and broken by the shock. The rebel's hull was crushed, with her chimneys toppling over; she sank in deep water in the middle of the river. Before the Queen could clear herself of the wreckage, it collided with another rebel, the General Sterling Price, which had been disabled while attempting to attack the Monarch. The collision on the port side near the wheelhouse

⁸Ellet to Stanton, 11 June 1862, ORN, ser. 1, 23: 133; Davis to Welles, 6 June 1862, ibid., p. 119.

broke the Queen's tiller rope and crushed the wheel and a portion of the hull, which left it nearly helpless. Ellet left the pilot house and went out on the deck, where he was wounded by small-arms fire from the General Price.

The Monarch, commanded by Lt. Col. Alfred W. Ellet, had followed the Queen past the federal gunboats and attempted to ram the General Price. The rebel General Beauregard attempted to damage the Monarch but instead collided with the General Price, completely cutting away the port wheel and wheelhouse of that vessel. After the battle Col. Charles Ellet reported that his vessels had rammed five enemy ships. Three rebel gunboats were sunk, while the remaining two were forced to shore.⁹

At the same time the rams attacked, the federal gunboat flotilla slowly moved toward the enemy. The firing from the gunboats was continuous and highly accurate. Davis, in his official report, observed that after the initial engagements and subsequent Union victories on the part of Ellet's rams, the rebel fleet was compelled to depend on their superior speed for safety. The battle, lasting nearly an hour, resulted in the destruction of four of the enemy vessels. Only the Van Dorn escaped, although pursued by the Monarch and Lancaster No. 3.¹⁰ Continuing, Davis detailed the damage to each Confederate

⁹Ellet to Stanton, 11 June 1862, ORN, ser. 1, 23: 133-34; Davis to Welles, 6 June 1862, ibid., p. 119; Ellet memo, 10 June 1862, ibid., p. 135; Eller, Civil War Naval Chronology, p. VI-236.

¹⁰Davis to Welles, 6 June 1862, ORN, ser. 1, 23: 119-20.

vessel: the Colonel Lovell was sunk by the Queen of the West; the General Beauregard was blown up when its boilers exploded while sustaining other damage from Union shells; the Little Rebel was damaged by Union shells, running ashore; the General M. Jeff Thompson was set on fire by Union shells and run ashore; the General Price was damaged in a collision with the Beauregard in addition to damage from Union shells; the General Sumter was badly damaged by Union shot and run aground; and the General Bragg was set on fire by Union shells, running aground. Lt. Samuel L. Phelps, in an unofficial report, observed that the Ellet rams accomplished little; however, "the confusion created by them gave us better chances at the rebel craft."¹¹

The after-action reports made by the various participants and the eyewitnesses on the levee at Memphis and on the Arkansas shore differ as to what action inflicted the fatal blow to the Confederate vessels. The intermingling of the rebel and Union vessels during the battle and the accumulating smoke from exploding ammunition and from the smokestacks of the different vessels impaired observations and led to uncertainties. Finally, many of the Confederate vessels were buffeted by both the rams and gunboat bombardment; it was obviously difficult to determine which damage proved decisive.¹²

¹¹Samuel L. Phelps to Foote, ORN, ser. 1, 23: 135; Davis to Welles, *ibid.*, p. 120.

¹²Ellet to Stanton, 11 June 1862, ORN, ser. 1, 23: 134; Lewis, Charles Ellet, Jr., p. 201.

These uncertainties led to many divergent assessments as to the value of the Steam Ram Fleet, and also led historians to credit the victory at Memphis to Davis and his gunboats instead of Ellet and his rams. A biographer of Charles Ellet observed that most of the newspapers credited the victory to the gunboats. An exception was the Chicago Tribune, which praised Ellet's achievements while maintaining that the battle "demonstrated that he [Ellet] can accomplish more than the construction of suspension bridges, or fixing grades of railroads, or writing criticisms on the war."¹³ A Confederate eyewitness, Brig. Gen. M. Jeff Thompson of the Missouri State Guard, reported to Confederate Gen. Pierre G. T. Beauregard at Grenada, Mississippi, on 7 June. Thompson expressed the opinion that the rebel boats were mishandled, while the plan of battle was faulty. Confirming this evaluation, the noted historian of the Confederate navy, J. Thomas Scharf, concluded the battle demonstrated the foolishness exhibited by the Confederate War Department in attempting to fight in an unfamiliar medium. The expense, inefficiency, and defeat which followed were predictable results of such a policy.¹⁴

The Union gunboat commander, basking in the victory, did concede in his official report to Secretary Gideon Welles that he had been ably supported by the Ram Fleet and cited Colonel

¹³Lewis, Charles Ellet, Jr., p. 203.

¹⁴Brig. Gen. M. Jeff Thompson to Beauregard, 7 June 1862, ORN, ser. 1, 23: 140; J. Thomas Scharf, History of the Confederate States Navy From Its Organization To the Surrender of Its Last Vessel (New York: Rogers and Sherwood, 1887), p. 262.

Ellet for his gallantry in action. Further, "the attack made by the two rams under Colonel Ellet, which took place before the flotilla closed in with the enemy, was bold and successful."¹⁵ However, Davis, ignoring an earlier surrender of the city to Medical Cadet Charles Rivers Ellet (Col. Charles Ellet's son), demanded and personally received the capitulation by the mayor of Memphis. Davis did not mention the previous surrender in his official report.¹⁶

Charles Ellet attributed the victory at Memphis to the independent operations of the rams. No Union vessels were lost, and varied estimates about the enemy killed and wounded were reported. Brig. Gen. William K. Strong, who had accompanied the Western Gunboat Flotilla from Fort Pillow, reported to Major General Halleck that the Ram Fleet performed valuable service in the battle with the result of approximately 100 enemy killed while only one Union man had been wounded, Col. Charles Ellet.¹⁷

The reaction of the northern press to the victory was varied.¹⁸ The New York Times, in an editorial on 17 June,

¹⁵Davis to Welles, 6 June 1862, ORN, ser. 1, 23: 121; Davis to Welles, 6 June 1862, OR, ser. 1, 10, pt. 2: 907.

¹⁶National Cyclopedia of American Biography, p. 360; Davis to Welles, 6 June 1862, ORN, ser. 1, 23: 121; Lewis, Charles Ellet, Jr., p. 205.

¹⁷Memo, 6 June 1862, ORN, ser. 1, 23: 123; Ellet to Stanton, 15 June 1862, *ibid.*, p. 209; Brig. Gen. William K. Strong to Halleck, 8 June 1862, OR, ser. 1, 10, pt. 1: 906.

¹⁸The southern press, in general, responded to the loss of Memphis with disdain. The Charleston Daily Courier of 17 June 1862 declared that the capture of Memphis was merely another event to add to the "list of Federal achievements."

called this first naval battle in which ram met ram an example of the "great practical utility of aquatic rams. Prior to the arrival of Ellet's Ram Fleet, the battle of the gunboats was an affair which promised to be of dubious result."¹⁹ In a front page article entitled "The Last of the Naval Fights," the Chicago Tribune declared that as a result of the battle the United States would henceforth be a first class naval power. The Confederate navy was not destroyed in order to avoid capture, as had often happened in the past, but "it was driven under and out of sight by the sorest of punishments, and in one of the stoutest encounters in the annals of naval warfare."²⁰ More tangible than recognition as a first class naval power, was the reopening of the Mississippi River. The Washington National Intelligencer interpreted the victory at Memphis as the beginning of the end of the war.

This intelligence is . . . tantamount to the announcement that the Mississippi river, throughout its entire length, is now virtually cleared of the obstructions by which the insurgents have sought

Yet it has been a victory without a result. Nothing has been lost to the Confederacy but a city, and nothing has been added to the 'Union,' but a population . . . [hostile to the Union]." The Richmond Whig of 16 June 1862 applauded the courage of James Montgomery's command who "preferred to fight and die gloriously, rather than his fleet should play the ignoble part enacted by [Commodore Josiah] Tatnall with the Virginia [Merrimac] which was scuttled in Norfolk on 11 May 1862 to prevent capture." The Richmond Daily Dispatch viewed the loss of the city realistically and concluded that after the Union forces occupied Fort Wood and Fort Pillow, Tennessee, the fall of Memphis was only a matter of time. Richmond Daily Dispatch, 14 June 1862; Richmond Whig, 16 June 1862; Charleston Daily Courier, 17 June 1862. See also Charleston Mercury, 6, 12 June 1862.

¹⁹New York Times, 17 June 1862.

²⁰Chicago Tribune, 9 June 1862.

to impede its navigation under the national authority with the reclamation of this valley, the dream of a "Southern Confederacy," we need not add, has received a shock from which it can never recover.²¹

The Baltimore American and Commercial Advertiser echoed the National Intelligencer sentiments and described the battle "as one of the stirring incidents of the war, of which each day almost brings a repetition. Yet this repossession of the great river of the Continent is, in moral force and grandeur, the grand event of the war."²² Finally, the Chicago Tribune on 10 June declared that the naval forces of the United States performed honorably for the country. The article then touched on the conflict of command authority when it described the Ram Fleet as "independent of the navy--also of the army, which has caused some confusion."²³

Stanton had expressed his opinion concerning Davis's refusal to allow Ellet to attack at Fort Pillow on 5 June 1862 in a telegram to Halleck, regretting that President Lincoln had refused to place Ellet's rams under army command. On the seventh Stanton wrote Charles Ellet approving Ellet's actions at Fort Pillow and at Memphis. Further, the War Department regretted that Ellet had to encounter so much opposition in employing the rams, and Stanton hoped that the obstacles would soon be overcome. After being directed to convey the thanks of the War Department to his volunteers and soldiers, Ellet was assured that the

²¹Washington National Intelligencer, 9 June 1862.

²²Baltimore American and Commercial Advertiser, 9 June 1862.

²³Chicago Tribune, 10 June 1862.

department's confidence in his discretion and conduct was strong and the secretary of war would continue to support him.²⁴

The second conflict of authority between Charles Ellet and Captain Davis occurred immediately after the battle of Memphis. The argument concerned the captured rebel ram, the Little Rebel. The vessel, with a prize crew on board from the Monarch, was seized by Davis's men. Ellet wrote several notes requesting the return of his prize. An expedition was being prepared to go down the river and Ellet desired to send this vessel with the detachment. Davis replied on 9 June, stating, "it would not be in my power to give you the Little Rebel or any other one of the captured vessels of the rebel squadron. To do so would interfere with my general plan of operation."²⁵ Ellet replied, again describing the capture of the Little Rebel

²⁴Stanton to Halleck, 5 June 1862, ORN, ser. 1, 23: 48; Stanton to Ellet, 7 June 1862, OR, ser. 1, 10, pt. 1: 901. The letter of congratulations sent to Col. Charles Ellet for the victory at Memphis was dated 9 June 1862. In part Stanton said, "The news of your glorious achievement at Memphis . . . was only dampened by your personal injury. You will accept for yourself, and return to your officers, engineers, pilots, soldiers, and boatmen, the cordial thanks of this Department for gallantry, courage, and skill manifested on that occasion." Stanton to Ellet, 9 June 1862, OR, ser. 1, 10, pt. 1: 909. The Navy Department's letter of thanks and congratulations, dated 18 June 1862, was addressed to Captain Davis. Welles said, "I congratulate you and your associates on the virtual annihilation of the rebel force on the Mississippi and the surrender to you of the city of Memphis. These events are the sequel of gallant services rendered by our naval heroes and those who have been associated with them in a series of conflicts and triumphs on the Western waters for the maintenance of the rightful authority of the Government and the integrity of the Union." Welles to Davis, 18 June 1862, ORN, ser. 1, 23: 137.

²⁵Davis to Ellet, 9 June 1862, ORN, ser. 1, 23: 143-44; Lewis, Charles Ellet, Jr., p. 206; memo, 7 June 1862, ORN, ser. 1, 23: 142; Ellet to Davis, 8 June 1862, ORN, ser. 1, 23: 143.

by the Monarch and the subsequent confiscation of the vessel from Ellet's prize crew by sailors of Davis's command, "I do not ask you to give her to me, as your note assumes, but merely to restore the spoils of my first and, I fear, my last naval engagement."²⁶

A proposed operation up the White River also caused a problem in the command relationship. Ellet was willing to cooperate with Davis by detaching the Lancaster, the Mingo, the Lioness, and the Horner for the expedition. However, he desired to maintain unit integrity on the expedition and proposed to place Lt. George Currie of the Ram Fleet in command of the vessels on the expedition. Currie's instructions would be to cooperate in every way, but he would retain freedom of action if the opportunity presented itself to launch an assault by the rams against enemy vessels. Davis acknowledged the offer of cooperation but believed "the intentions of the service in view would be retarded rather than promoted by the presence of a force acting under divided authority."²⁷

The expedition sailed on 15 June without Ellet's rams. On the same day he reported to Stanton, explaining that he had not sent a detachment up the White River "to act in conjunction with the gunboats . . . because the commodore was not willing

²⁶Ellet to Davis, 10 June 1862, ORN, ser. 1, 23: 147.

²⁷Davis to Ellet, 11 June 1862, *ibid.*, p. 163; Ellet to Stanton, 11 June 1862, *ibid.*, p. 162.

to receive my cooperation unless I placed my vessels under the command of one of his officers. This, of course, I could not consent to do."²⁸

During this conflict in command, Charles Ellet's wound, more serious than anyone had thought at first, worsened daily. The wound, caused by a ball striking him about two or three inches above the knee, could only be mended by amputation. Ellet "resisted all appeals saying, 'Like his country, he preferred death to dismemberment'"²⁹ Charles Ellet related to Stanton on the fifteenth of June that he was suffering so much pain from his wound that he was unable to transact business or complete his after-action report. In addition to his wound, he had suffered from nervous prostration, fever, and the measles. It was decided on the fifteenth that Charles should place his brother, Lt. Col. Alfred W. Ellet, in temporary command and proceed north to cooler quarters where he might be more comfortable and recover. Monday, 16 June, the Switzerland, with Colonel Ellet, his wife, daughter, his mother Sarah, and his brother, Edward, started for Cairo, Illinois. The surgeon of the Ram Fleet accompanied the party. Charles Ellet failed to respond to the medical treatment and at 4:00 A.M. on Saturday, 21 June 1862,

²⁸Ellet to Stanton, 15 June 1862, *ibid.*, p. 209.

²⁹Undated letter from Lt. Col. George E. Currie, an officer in the Mississippi Marine Brigade, Norman E. Clarke, Sr., ed., Warfare Along the Mississippi: The Letters of Lieutenant Colonel George E. Currie (Mount Pleasant: Central Michigan University, 1961), p. 52; Lewis, Charles Ellet, Jr., pp. 204, 207.

he died as the boat neared the wharf at Cairo. His body was taken to Philadelphia, where he lay in state under the Liberty Bell at Independence Hall and was viewed by thousands of citizens. He received a large military funeral and was buried on 28 June in the family grave at Laurel Hill Cemetery.³⁰

The Living Age, commenting in August 1862, confessed that the country had great reason to mourn Ellet as a man of innovation, unbounded courage and heedless of personal risk. The colonel "may justly be styled the hero of the great naval battle at Memphis." Further, his achievements in civil engineering would be "ranked among the most memorable of his age."³¹ Harper's credited Ellet with having been the first to give the practical shape to the theories of fighting with steam, and noted that he had "also the distinction of dying a martyr to its demonstration."³²

³⁰Ellet to Stanton, 15 June 1862, OR, ser. 1, 17, pt. 2: 9; Lewis, Charles Ellet, Jr., p. 207; Clarke, ed., Warfare Along the Mississippi, p. 52; Stanton to James Brooks, 21 June 1862, OR, ser. 1, 52, pt. 1, p. 258; Warren D. Crandall and Isaac D. Newell, History of the Ram Fleet and the Mississippi Marine Brigade in the War For the Union on the Mississippi and Its Tributaries: The Story of the Ellets and their Men (St. Louis: Buschart Brothers, 1907), p. 84; General Order No. 87, War Department, 24 July 1862, Record Group 94, "Records of the Adjutant General's Office," National Archives, Washington, D. C. (hereafter cited as RG 94). An article in the Philadelphia Inquirer dated 27 June 1862 mentioned that the City Council of Philadelphia appropriated \$500 to bear the expenses of the funeral. His wife died two weeks later of exhaustion from grief and was buried next to her husband. Lewis, Charles Ellet, Jr., p. 207.

³¹"From the North American, 22 June: Colonel Charles Ellet, Jr.," Living Age 74 (1862): 239-40.

³²John S. C. Abbott, "Heroic Deeds of Heroic Men--Charles Ellet and His Naval Steam Rams," Harper's New Monthly Magazine 32 (1866): 295.

Lt. Col. Alfred Washington Ellet, second in command of the Ram Fleet, assumed command upon notification of Charles's death. Alfred was born 11 October 1820 on his father's farm, Penn's Manor, in Bucks County, Pennsylvania. He was the youngest of six sons and the thirteenth child born in the family. At the beginning of the war, he was acting as Charles's agent in several land speculation ventures while farming at Bunker Hill, Illinois. Described as a man of fine moral character, of high ideals, temperate, benevolent, and uncompromising in his sense of justice and right, Alfred was also ambitious. In July 1861, he raised a company of volunteers from the area of Bunker Hill and was elected captain of the company. Since the company was unable to be accepted for Union service as an Illinois regiment because that state's quota had already been filled, it entered federal service at the arsenal at Saint Louis, Missouri, being mustered in as Company I, Ninth Missouri Infantry on 20 August 1861. The entire regiment was composed of men from Illinois, and this regiment was soon redesignated as the Fifty-ninth Illinois Infantry Regiment.

Upon being ordered to duty with the Ram Fleet, Alfred Ellet quickly mastered a knowledge of river craft and navigation. Though not a military tactician, Alfred was described in the official history of the Marine Brigade as skillfully gathering about him those who were, and availing himself of their knowledge. On the battlefield when duty called, his courage and skill were unquestioned.³³

³³Grandall and Newell, History of the Ram Fleet, pp. 245-47; John D. Milligan, Gunboats Down the Mississippi, (Annapolis,



Figure 6

Alfred W. Ellet

(Mathew Brady Collection, National Archives, Washington, D. C.)

Stanton sent a clarification of instructions to Lt. Col. Alfred Ellet on two dates, 20 June and 24 June. Each letter confirmed Alfred as Charles Ellet's successor and also attempted to clarify previous instructions placing the Ram Fleet under the general supervision of the commander of the gunboat squadron. Such an arrangement was to be continued, as the president desired it, "believing that co-operative action will be more likely to produce good results than independent action, and that the commander of the gun-boats should have chief command."³⁴

Before Lieutenant Colonel Ellet received this order, he steamed south with his command without authorization, reaching a point on the Mississippi River three miles above Vicksburg on 24 June.³⁵ Upon arriving there, he learned Rear Adm. David G. Farragut's fleet was located below Vicksburg. Never one to wait for orders, Alfred Ellet opened communications with Farragut

Maryland: U.S. Naval Institute, 1962), p. 80; Francis B. Heitman, Historical Register and Dictionary of the United States Army From Its Organization, September 29, 1789, to March 2, 1903, 2 vols. (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1903) 1: 401; National Cyclopaedia, p. 361; Alfred Washington Ellet Papers, Perkins Library, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina.

³⁴Stanton to A. W. Ellet, 20 June 1862, OR, ser. 1, 52, pt. 1: 258; Stanton to A. W. Ellet, 24 June 1862, OR, ser. 1, 15: 497.

³⁵A. W. Ellet notified Davis of his assumption of command on 18 June and his plans to move down the river the next day. He requested suggestions which would enable him to cooperate with any portion of the western flotilla. Davis replied the same day commenting that "it does not occur to me to make any particular suggestions, such as you refer to. I am in hopes that the principal object of the expedition is already accomplished." Davis to A. W. Ellet, 18 June 1862, ORN, ser. 1, 23: 214; A. W. Ellet to Davis, 18 June 1862, ibid.

and offered to cooperate in all offensive operations against Vicksburg, which was weakly defended at that time. Farragut, however, reported that the 3,300 troops under Brig. Gen. Thomas Williams and Ellet's Ram Fleet were too small to attack or occupy the town and could only skirmish with its defenders.³⁶

Instead, nine of Farragut's ships steamed past the batteries at Vicksburg at 4:00 A.M. Saturday, 28 June 1862. The Ram Fleet, having conducted a reconnaissance on 26 June up the Yazoo River, had discovered the Confederate ram Arkansas, and plans were made to destroy the ram after Farragut arrived above Vicksburg. The gunboats, Tyler and Carondelet, and the ram, Queen of the West, proceeded up the Yazoo on 14 July. At 6:00 A.M. heavy firing was heard from up the Yazoo and within half an hour the Queen and Tyler, followed by a badly damaged Carondelet, reappeared above the combined fleets. These boats were hotly pursued by the Arkansas. The Lancaster, the first vessel to get underway, made an effort to ram the rebel vessel but was hit by a solid shot which penetrated its bulwarks and a steam drum, disabling it instantly and scalding a number of its crew. The Arkansas, an ironclad ram with armored sides at forty-five degree angles, was heavily armed with nine guns and seemingly able to resist nearly all shots fired at it. After running past the combined federal fleets of Farragut, Davis, and Ellet's rams, the Arkansas anchored below the batteries at Vicksburg. On the twentieth,

³⁶Milligan, Gunboats Down the Mississippi, pp. 79-80; A. W. Ellet to Farragut, 24 June 1862, ORN, ser. 1, 19: 583; Farragut to Welles, 2 July 1862, ORN, ser. 1, 18: 610.

Ellet proposed an attack on the Arkansas where it lay anchored. The Queen of the West attacked the Arkansas on Tuesday, 22 July, but failed to destroy the enemy even though causing considerable damage. The attack plan had called for support from Union gunboats, which were to have suppressed the artillery fire from the Vicksburg fortifications. This artillery support did not materialize, and the Queen was riddled with shell holes and damaged so severely that Ellet sent the ram north to be repaired.³⁷

Farragut and Davis both reported the action to Welles, commending Ellet for his daring act of courage. At the time of the attack, only estimates of the damage could be made. After Vicksburg surrendered in July 1863, statements obtained from officers and crewmen of the Arkansas revealed that the injuries received from the ramming by the Queen permanently damaged its machinery, and the Arkansas rendered no effective service after the attack. Upon receipt of the various reports, Stanton sent Ellet a letter of commendation for his gallantry in the action and promised to recommend him to President Lincoln for nomination to the rank of brigadier general.³⁸

³⁷Abstract of the log of the ram Lancaster No. 3,24, 28 June, 15 July 1862, ORN, ser. 1, 23: 242-44; Crandall and Newell, History of the Ram Fleet, pp. 99, 109; John S. C. Abbott, "Heroic Deeds of Heroic Men--Opening the Mississippi," Harper's New Monthly Magazine 33 (1866): 304; "From the Edinburgh Review: The American Navy In the Late War," Living Age, 8 September 1866, p. 593; A. W. Ellet to Lieutenant Hunter, 14 July 1862, ORN, ser. 1, 19: 44; A. W. Ellet to Davis, 20 July 1862, ibid., p. 44; A. W. Ellet to Stanton, 23 July 1862, ibid., p. 46; Washington National Intelligencer, 5 August 1862.

³⁸Farragut to Welles, 29 July 1862, ORN, ser. 1, 19: 97; Davis to Welles, 23 July 1862, ibid., p. 49; Stanton to A. W. Ellet, 31 July 1862, OR, ser. 1, 15: 39; Welles to Farragut and Davis, 2 August 1862, Gideon Welles Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, D. C.

Prior to the appearance of the Arkansas on the Mississippi, Ellet had requested authorization to increase his command and improve vessel security. In July 1862, he placed ten brass field pieces on the rams to provide additional security to counter increasing guerrilla attacks. This in turn created a need for seventy-five additional soldiers to man this artillery and increase the guard. It had become necessary to keep some of his rams on constant patrol of the river to disperse the growing number of guerrilla units. Approval came in August to increase his force by enlistment; if the men enlisted were already in the army they would be discharged from their former units. Also approved was the use of blacks as deckhands and firemen.³⁹

During the period July-November 1862, the rams performed duties as scouts, convoy escorts, picket ships, couriers, and commerce raiders. The major role, however, was countering guerrilla warfare. Almost every day reports would arrive of attacks on one side of the Mississippi or the other.

[The guerrilla] attacks were always made from secreted and defensible positions, in woods, or behind levees, and the first the passing boat would know of their presence would be the letting loose of a section, or whole battery, of field artillery, and often supported by battalions of riflemen, and generally their greatest damage was effected by the first fire.⁴⁰

³⁹A. W. Ellet to Stanton, 13 July 1862, OR, ser. 1, 15: 521; A. W. Ellet to Stanton, 23 July 1862, *ibid.*, p. 38; A. W. Ellet to Stanton, 23 July 1862, ORN, ser. 1, 19: 46; Halleck to A. W. Ellet, 23 August 1862, OR, ser. 3, 2: 440-41; A. W. Ellet to Stanton, 25 July 1862, OR, ser. 1, 15: 529-30; Halleck to A. W. Ellet, 1 August 1862, OR, ser. 1, 17, pt. 2: 149.

⁴⁰Crandall and Newell, History of the Ram Fleet, pp. 126, 129-30.

While the struggle for control of navigation on the Mississippi and its tributaries was beginning, a far-reaching political clash had developed. The command problem of the gunboats, rams, and naval squadrons on the western waters attracted the attention of Congress soon after the naval engagement at Memphis. The request for additional funds, accompanied by recommendations of the army quartermaster general, may have prompted this interest. The quartermaster general, Brig. Gen. Montgomery C. Meigs, reported to Secretary Stanton 23 May 1862 the estimated cost of indebtedness to the department which would be necessary to maintain the army's western navy. For example, the steam rams, which had cost \$300,000 to purchase, reconstruct, and outfit, would require a further \$100,000 to keep them in service for the remainder of the fiscal year, which ended in thirty-eight days.⁴¹

Meigs proposed to request funds from Congress in order to maintain the rams until the end of September 1862, when the vessels would complete their usefulness. Meigs also suggested transferring the gunboat flotilla on the thirtieth of June, at the expiration of the fiscal year, to the Navy Department. The quartermaster general reasoned that

the service is more naval than land service, and the commanding officers are all Navy officers and most of the men are sailors. Much of the ordnance and ordnance stores have been supplied by the Navy Department . . . and I think it would conduce to

⁴¹Montgomery C. Meigs to Stanton, 23 May 1862, OR, ser. 3, 2: 836-37.

economy and efficiency to make the whole fleet a part of the naval establishment of the United States.⁴²

Congress, while appropriating additional funds to operate the steam rams until the end of the fiscal year, attempted to correct the central problem, the conflict of command authority. In answer to an inquiry from Senator Preston King, Republican from New York, Secretary Welles replied that the gunboats on the Mississippi and their crews were under the authority of the War Department. At the same time, Congressman Francis P. Blair, Republican representative from Missouri and member of the House Committee on Military Affairs, introduced bill H.R. 518, transferring the Western Gunboat Fleet from the War Department to the Navy Department, on 10 June 1862. The bill was amended in the Senate by Senator James W. Grimes, Republican from Iowa. The amendment required all vessels still under construction or being repaired under the authority of the War Department to be completed and paid for by that department. The bill, as amended, was approved by both houses and signed by President Lincoln 16 July 1862.⁴³

⁴²Ibid.

⁴³General Order No. 77, 11 July 1862, OR, ser. 3, 2: 215, 217; Welles to Senator Preston King, 30 June 1862, ORN, ser. 1, 23: 247; U.S., Congress, House, Congressional Globe, 37th Cong., 2d sess., 10 June 1862, [32, pt. 3] p. 2647; The World Almanac and Book of Facts 1868 (New York: The New York World, 1868), p. 63. The command situation was chaotic. Welles stated flatly to Senator King that the gunboats and crews were under the authority of the War Department but neglected to mention that Welles received all the reports from Captain Davis, then commanding the Western Gunboat Flotilla. Further, Stanton mentioned in a letter to Halleck in late June 1862 that "no report was ever made to this Department by the Commander of the gunboats." Stanton to Halleck, 27 June 1862, OR, ser. 1, 17,

The act of Congress did not correct the problem. Indeed, it was temporarily magnified as a result of the ambiguity of the law. The intent was clear as to all vessels on the Mississippi except the Ram Fleet, fountainhead of the controversy. As a result, the transfer of vessels, naval stores, supplies, and property relating to the Western Gunboat Fleet was not ordered by the War Department until 2 October 1862, even though the law of 16 July had been effective from the date of passage of the bill. Before General Order No. 150 was issued ordering the transfer, a vigorous controversy arose between the Navy and War Departments regarding interpretation of the law. Lieutenant Colonel Ellet and Secretary Stanton contended that the law of 16 July 1862 did not apply specifically to the Ram Fleet and, therefore, the rams were still under the administration of the War Department. The War Department reasoned that the rams had never carried guns; therefore, they could not be considered gunboats and were not affected. The navy considered the act of 16 July as transferring all vessels, including the rams. This divided opinion became apparent in September when the assistant secretary of war, Peter H. Watson, queried Welles as to whether the navy considered the transfer law as having included the Ram

pt. 2: 40; U.S., Congress, Senate, Congressional Globe, 37th Cong., 2d sess., 15 July 1862, [32, pt. 4] p. 3352; World Almanac, p. 62. The law as approved read in part that "the Western gunboat fleet constructed by the War Department for operations on the Western waters shall be transferred to the Navy Department, which will be hereafter charged with the expense of its repair, support, and maintenance: Provided, that all vessels now under construction or repair by authority of the War Department shall be completed and paid for under the authority of that Department from appropriations made for that purpose." U.S., Statutes At Large, 12: 587.

Fleet and, if so, had the necessary transfer of funds for the support and maintenance of the fleet been requested. Welles replied that the War Department had to decide the question. However, the navy expected to receive the rams on 1 October but without the army personnel then assigned to them.⁴⁴

Late in September, with the issue still in doubt, Davis reported to Gustavus V. Fox, assistant secretary of the navy. The Western Gunboat Flotilla commander observed that Ellet, undoubtedly convinced the rams were included under the law and in order to avoid turning the vessels over to the navy, was making preparations to transfer the vessels instead to the special quartermaster at Cairo, Illinois. Davis questioned whether the law included the rams and, if so, he needed to know "in time to secure all the vessels. They are very valuable, and would be of the greatest service . . . as dispatch boats, scouts, and pickets."⁴⁵

Instead, Ellet, attempting to economize, may have been acting on a suggestion from the Ram Fleet quartermaster, James Brooks. Among Brooks's suggestions was the recommendation to pay the fleet's deck hands twenty-five dollars per month instead

⁴⁴H. Allen Gosnell, Guns on the Western Waters: The Story of River Gunboats In the Civil War (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1949), p. 24; General Order No. 150, 2 October 1862, OR, ser. 3, 2: 644; Milligan, Gunboats Down the Mississippi, p. 97; Lewis, Charles Ellet, Jr., p. 211; Peter H. Watson, assistant secretary of war, to Welles, 11 September 1862, ORN, ser. 1, 23: 352; Welles to Stanton, 16 September 1862, Welles Papers; Porter to Welles, 16 October 1862, ORN, ser. 1, 23: 418; Welles to Davis, 10 September 1862, Welles Papers.

⁴⁵Davis to Fox, 23 September 1862, ORN, ser. 1, 23: 373.

of the current wage of forty dollars. The fleet could "pick up a set of good contrabands for that purpose which with a little drilling will make good deckhands and they make the best firemen. Twenty-five dollars will be for them larger wages. This will save over \$2,000 per month."⁴⁶ Another suggestion, the disposal of three of the stern-wheel steamboats, was found agreeable to Ellet. Ellet admitted these boats were of little use to him and would greatly lessen expenses. He would also be able to discharge a large number of men whom he considered worthless.⁴⁷

Involved in the question of transfer was the real problem of command. The navy believed that since the unit operated on the Mississippi there was enough justification for a unified naval command with naval personnel in charge. The army, on the other hand, considered the unit as an integral part of land operations and, therefore, under the area army command. Stanton confided to Halleck in a letter dated 27 June 1862 that he had requested the president's permission to assign Ellet's rams to Halleck, but Lincoln "thought they should be under the command of the officer commanding the gunboats, and instructions were given accordingly."⁴⁸ Welles diagnosed this adamant stand by

⁴⁶Crandall and Newell, History of the Ram Fleet, pp. 120-21.

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 128. The Mingo, Lioness, and Fulton were considered by Ellet for disposal. According to a report dated 4 December 1862, the Mingo and the Samson were the two boats transferred to the navy from the army quartermaster. Charles Rivers Ellet to Porter, 4 December 1862, ORN, ser. 1,23: 532.

⁴⁸Stanton to Halleck, 27 June 1862, OR, ser. 1, 17, pt. 2: 40.

the War Department in his diary on 10 October when he wrote, "The Army has fallen in love with the gunboats and wants them in every creek."⁴⁹

Alfred Ellet secretly declared to James Brooks that a decision to include the Ram Fleet in the transfer would prompt his resignation. He would never accept subordination to Davis, after their quarrel. The situation became even more confused after the transfer order was issued by the War Department. Lieutenant Colonel Ellet received no instructions concerning the transfer until 20 October, when Stanton informed him that the Ram Fleet was not included in the transfer of the gunboats to the navy. Instead, its disposition was open to further consideration.⁵⁰

Stanton neglected to inform Welles of the decision to retain the Ram Fleet. When the gunboat fleet was transferred to the navy, the Western Gunboat Fleet was renamed the Mississippi Squadron. With the new vessels and unit name, there was a new commander, acting Rear Adm. David D. Porter, age 49, who raised his flag on the river 15 October. Realizing that the appointment of Porter would be criticized, Welles observed that while his selection would be unpopular, Porter's field of operations was peculiar, requiring a young and active officer.

⁴⁹Beale, ed., Diary of Gideon Welles, 1: 167. Porter observed in January 1863 that "The Army seems to think that 30,000 of them cannot move without a gunboat, when detachments should land every time a musket is fired." Porter to A. W. Ellet, 29 January 1863, ORN, ser. 1, 24: 209.

⁵⁰Crandall and Newell, History of the Ram Fleet, p. 128; Stanton to A. W. Ellet, 20 October 1862, OR, ser. 1, 17, pt. 2: 282.

Porter was informed by Ellet on 21 October of Stanton's refusal to transfer the rams. The idea that Ellet considered himself "authorized to act on this river independent of the naval commander" was intolerable to Porter. He declared this order in violation of the federal law and notified Ellet that he recognized no organization within the limits of his command other than that established by the Navy Department. Further, Porter issued an order to his command to detain all vessels not acting under orders issued by the Mississippi Squadron.⁵¹

Porter, fearing that the conflict was aiding the enemy at the expense of the government, tried to convince Ellet of the tactical error of having an independent command on the river and advised the ram commander to have the ships prepared for transfer to the navy. Realizing the futility of reasoning with the lieutenant colonel, Porter wrote Fox on 2 November pleading for a final decision and citing the need for explicit written orders concerning the transfer of the rams. He further warned that "The War Department might as well give up, for the Rams shall not move unless they are transferred to this squadron."⁵²

In Washington, the situation was fast approaching the crisis point, with the conflict in the cabinet growing bitter.

⁵¹Porter to Welles, 21 October 1862, ORN, ser. 1, 23: 430; Rear Adm. Bern Anderson, By Sea and By River: The Naval History of the Civil War (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1962), pp. 137-38; Eller, Civil War Naval Chronology, p. II-100; Welles to Stanton, 21 October 1862, Welles Papers.

⁵²Thompson and Wainwright, eds., Confidential Correspondence of G. V. Fox, 2: 147; Porter to A. W. Ellet, 25 October 1862, ORN, ser. 1, 23: 445; Porter to Welles, 5 November 1862, ibid., p. 465.

Welles in his diary entry of 4 November 1862 described the emergency as he viewed it:

Congress wisely ordered a transfer of all war vessels on the Mississippi to the Navy. It was not by my suggestion or procurement that this law was passed, but it was proper. It has, however, greatly disturbed Stanton, who supported by Halleck and Ellet, opposes a transfer of the ram fleet as not strictly within the letter, though it is undoubtedly the intent of the law. That Ellet should wish a distinct command is not surprising. It is characteristic. He is full of zeal to overflowing; is not, however, a naval man, but is, very naturally, delighted with an independent naval command in this adventurous ram service. It is, however, a pitiful business on the part of Stanton and Halleck, who should take an administrative view and who should be aware there cannot be two distinct commands on the river under different orders from different Departments without endangering collision.⁵³

After long discussions and heated arguments, a full cabinet meeting on 7 November 1862 considered the question. Welles and Stanton presented their cases for the president's decision. Stanton, having a special interest in the Ram Fleet since he had created the unit and was proud of the rams' successes, prevented the Ram Fleet's inclusion in the transfer.⁵⁴

In response, Welles confided to his diary the observation that

Mr. Stanton was fond of power and of its exercise. It was more precious to him than pecuniary gain to dominate over his fellow man [In addition] he was reckless and regardless of public expenditure, and the war expenses were greater by hundreds of millions than was necessary, or than they would have been had the Department been in other hands.⁵⁵

⁵³Beale, ed., Diary of Gideon Welles, 1: 180.

⁵⁴Crandall and Newell, History of the Ram Fleet, p. 129; Lewis, Charles Ellet, Jr., p. 211-12; Fox to Porter, 8 November 1862, ORN, ser. 1, 23: 469.

⁵⁵Beale, ed., Diary of Gideon Welles, 1: 67-68.

The crisis culminated with the president signing an executive order placing Ellet and his command under Porter's orders and authority, thus ending the debate.⁵⁶ Fox notified Porter of the decision, but he had little faith that this arrangement was the proper solution, since Ellet and the Ram Fleet were still army units. Fox then warned Porter to be certain his position in any difference with the army was correct. Finally, Fox was certain the arrangement would succeed if Ellet were the "right kind of man . . . , and if it goes wrong, Stanton will say it arose from placing him under a Navy officer."⁵⁷

During the controversy, Porter, desiring to settle the issue and at the same time meet a growing military threat of guerrilla warfare, proposed the forming of a naval brigade. This naval brigade would operate with the Mississippi Squadron for the purpose of combating the numerous guerrilla units and other scattered Confederate forces along the rivers. His plan would "ensure the highest degree of efficiency . . . and remove all difficulties in regard to the transfer of the Ram Fleet, by placing Colonel Ellet in command of this force."⁵⁸ The establishment of such a brigade under Ellet, Porter felt, would

⁵⁶The executive order dated 7 November 1862 read: "Ordered, That Brigadier-General Ellet report to Rear-Admiral Porter for instructions, and act under his direction until otherwise ordered by the War Department. Abraham Lincoln." Executive Order, 7 November 1862, OR, ser. 1, 17, pt. 2: 323. Stanton sent Ellet a second order dated 8 November which clarified the president's order by placing the Mississippi Marine Brigade and Ram Fleet under Porter's command; however, both units continued to be administered by the War Department. Stanton to A. W. Ellet, 8 November 1862, ORN, ser. 1, 23: 469; Milligan, Gunboats Down the Mississippi, p. 97.

⁵⁷Fox to Porter, 8 November 1862, ORN, ser. 1, 23: 469.

⁵⁸Porter to Welles, 21 October 1862, *ibid.*, p. 428.

secure the services of a good officer in an area where he was specially qualified, while it would secure greater efficiency in the Ram Fleet. That organization would be in the hands of trained navy officers and greater cooperation would result in all naval operations.⁵⁹

When President Lincoln made his decision regarding the rams, the marine brigade proposed by Porter was also approved. On 11 November 1862 Alfred W. Ellet, recently promoted to brigadier general as a result of his gallantry and bravery against the Confederate ram Arkansas, was authorized to organize the Mississippi Marine Brigade.⁶⁰ With this action, the Union army's experiment in naval warfare, the Steam Ram Fleet, would be overshadowed by the newly authorized Mississippi Marine Brigade. The rams had performed the service for which Charles Ellet had intended and modified the river steam boats. Their greatest contribution was made at Memphis; the rams also contributed to the Union war effort by providing much needed vessels at a crucial time on the lower Mississippi River.

⁵⁹Ibid.

⁶⁰Heitman, Historical Register, 1: 401; Halleck to A. W. Ellet, 11 November 1862, OR, ser. 3, 2: 761-62; A. W. Ellet to Thomas, 7 November 1862, Personnel Files, National Archives, Washington, D. C. Ellet was promoted to the rank of brigadier general of United States Volunteers with a date of rank of 1 November 1862. Heitman, Historical Register, 1: 401. See also General Order No. 316, War Department, 18 September 1863, RG 94.

CHAPTER VI

THE MISSISSIPPI MARINE BRIGADE

The authorization of 11 November 1862 to organize a Marine Brigade for combat service on the Mississippi River was a new tactical innovation. Riverine forces, designed to counter guerrilla operations along the western river, had been utilized in many joint army-navy operations prior to November 1862, but the Marine Brigade was the first unit organized primarily for such operations.¹ The Mississippi Marine Brigade had as its primary mission the maintenance of an unobstructed river by the brigade's interdiction against

the roving bands of guerrillas that swarm upon its banks, firing upon passing steamers with artillery and small arms, thus preventing the Government sending supplies to the troops in that part of the southern country tributary to the Mississippi river.²

¹Previous joint army-navy riverine operations conducted by American forces included: the 1775-77 operations along the Hudson River--Lake Champlain--St. Lawrence River system; War of 1812 operations on the Great Lakes, Chesapeake Bay and the defense of New Orleans; operations from 1835 to 1842 in the Florida Everglades against the Creek and Seminole; operations during the Mexican War on the Tabasco River against San Juan Bautista; and numerous riverine operations conducted in the Civil War. Initial incidents included: Grant's aborted attack at Belmont, Missouri, in 1861; operations against Forts Henry and Donelson; the capture of New Orleans; and initial operations against Vicksburg in the summer of 1862. U.S., Department of the Army, Vietnam Studies: Riverine Operations 1966-1969, by Maj. Gen. William B. Fulton (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1973), pp. 3-8.

²Norman E. Clarke, Sr., ed., Warfare Along the Mississippi: The Letters of Lieutenant Colonel George E. Currie (Mount

The adoption of guerrilla warfare by Confederate army units in the Mississippi Valley was considered by the North as a step backward; a mode of warfare more suitable for savages and barbarians. Typical of early efforts to suppress guerrilla warfare was a broadside addressed to the inhabitants of Monroe County, Arkansas, dated 23 June 1862.

Guerrilla bands raised in your vicinity have fired from the woods upon the United States gunboats and transports in White River It is in your power to prevent it in your vicinity. You will, therefore, . . . be held responsible in person and property. Upon the renewal of such attacks an expedition will be sent against you, to seize and destroy your personal property.³

Because the threatened destruction of private property failed to stem the vicious attacks on unarmed Union transports, Rear Adm. David D. Porter issued an anti-guerrilla order. Guerrillas taken as prisoner would be treated as highwaymen and assassins and would be kept in close confinement. Finally, Porter declared, "If this savage and barbarous Confederate policy

Pleasant: Central Michigan University, 1961), p. 72.

³J. W. Shirk, lieutenant, commanding U. S. Gunboat Lexington, to Davis, 30 June 1862, U.S., Department of the Navy, Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies in the War of the Rebellion, Richard Rush et al, eds., 30 vols. (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1894-1914), ser. 1, 23: 186 (hereafter cited as ORN). Northern public opinion supported such retaliatory measures as evidenced by newspaper reports. The New York Times reported the destruction of Milliken's Bend, Louisiana, on 5 September 1862. The Union troops "proceeded to plunder all the stores, shops and dwellings where the inhabitants had deserted them. The sacking of a few towns will teach these gentlemen better than to shoot our men from behind the trees, etc, etc." New York Times, 5 September 1862. The Washington National Intelligencer reported the burning of Prentiss, Mississippi, 30 September 1862. The 30 October 1862 edition reported the destruction of Randolph, Tennessee. "The inhabitants of the town were generally disloyal." Washington National Intelligencer, 3 October 1862; 22, 30 September 1862.

can not be put a stop to we will try what virtue there is in hanging."⁴

Despite such warnings, by the fall of 1862 the Confederate army was engaged in a moderately successful and systematic guerrilla war. Rarely a day passed without a guerrilla attack somewhere on the river. Units varied in size and often consisted of an entire battery of field artillery and a battalion of infantry. Neither the gunboats nor the rams had sufficient manpower to deal adequately with this threat.

Both Brig. Gen. Alfred W. Ellet and Porter were credited with recommending the employment of a riverine force capable of swift mobility, independent of army commands and naval movements, with a landing force of mounted men, who could pursue, capture, or disperse guerrilla forces. Similiar recommendations had,

⁴Warren D. Crandall and Isaac D. Newell, History of the Ram Fleet and the Mississippi Marine Brigade in the War For the Union on the Mississippi and Its Tributaries: The Story of the Ellets and their Men (St. Louis: Buschart Brothers, 1907), pp. 229, 233. It is interesting to note the Confederate reaction to such measures as destroying towns and private property. "In this vandalic mode of warfare, the Federals are following closely in the footsteps of the British and tories in our first revolution, who invariably vented their spleen and gratified their hellish propensities in the robbery of citizens and in the burning of towns and villages. They really seem to have read over the history of those times afresh, and to have taken the demoniacal conduct of the British as their model and guide in the prosecution of this war. In the first revolution the planters were robbed of their slave property and all else they possessed; the people at large, who would not swear allegiance to the British Crown, were burned out of house and home, and the war generally conducted on such an inhuman scale as to shock the moral sense of mankind. The Lincolnites wherever they have gained a footing, have proved themselves close imitators of our ancient and vandalic foe." Richmond Enquirer, 1 May 1863.

however, been made earlier. Maj. Gen. Samuel R. Curtis, as early as July 1862, had recommended the employment of a mobile force to keep the Mississippi River open. At the time, Maj. Gen. Henry Halleck referred the matter to the Navy Department. Gideon Welles informed Edwin M. Stanton on 21 August 1862 that orders had been issued requiring the gunboats to prevent the enemy from occupying the banks of the river. "The primary object of the flotilla is to keep the river unobstructed and to sweep from it all floating craft of every description, but . . . [it will] assist the army in dispersing the shores and adjacent country of all enemies" ⁵

As a result of an armed reconnaissance below Vicksburg, Major General Curtis made a second recommendation in August 1862.

The navy and army, moved to any point on the Mississippi River, makes a new and unexpected base, from which the troops can dash into the country and carry destruction into the enemy's line on the railroad or Yazoo or up the small streams of Arkansas, carrying death and desolation into the country. ⁶

⁵Welles to Stanton, 21 August 1862, ORN, ser. 1, 23: 308; Crandall and Newell, History of the Ram Fleet, p. 126; Curtis to Halleck, 20 July 1862, ORN, ser. 1, 23: 304-05; Peter H. Watson to Welles, 18 August 1862, *ibid.*, p. 304.

⁶Curtis to Halleck, 31 August 1862, ORN, ser. 1, 23: 298; J. A. McClernand to Stanton, 15 July 1864, Abraham Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, D. C. (on microfilm NTSU Library). Two senior naval officers also mentioned the subject. Flag Officer Andrew H. Foote wrote Welles in June 1862 regarding "reorganizing, arranging, and distribution of the flotilla to protect the peaceful commerce of the rivers against a guerrilla warfare." Foote to Welles, 13 June 1862, ORN, ser. 1, 23: 155. Rear Adm. David G. Farragut organized a mobile force of four sixteen-oar whale boats armed with artillery and troops to cruise the river in search of guerrillas. Washington National Intelligencer, 2 October 1862. See also Lt. J. S. Hurd, commanding Exchange, to War Department, 24 September 1863, ORN, ser. 1, 25: 299-300.

Thus, the idea for the unit had been proposed before. In October 1862, Porter presented his plan for a naval brigade to the Navy Department, while Ellet communicated with the War Department. Porter originally requested the brigade to be composed of marines with Alfred W. Ellet in command. The Navy Department was unable to furnish the marines, however, and Stanton then proposed to supply the necessary vessels to transport the brigade and the troops to compose such a unit.⁷

When Ellet received notification of a promotion to brigadier general in November 1862, there was a request for him to travel to Washington in order to confer with Stanton concerning the proposed brigade. During these meetings, the details of the brigade were agreed upon, and the activation order was issued 11 November. The Mississippi Marine Brigade was authorized to consist of one regiment of infantry, two squadrons of cavalry, and one battery of ten pounders for field service. The officers would be commissioned by the president, and the troops would be organized under the same regulations and federal law as other volunteer units. The Ram Fleet was included as a subordinate unit of the brigade. Halleck and Stanton directed Ellet to cooperate with the western naval commander, but as Brigadier General Ellet observed in a letter to Charles Rivers Ellet on 3 November 1862, "[the War Department] wished me to understand that I was not to be placed under his [Porter's] command."

⁷Crandall and Newell, History of the Ram Fleet, pp. 137, 249, 252; Memo Regarding Operations of Mississippi Squadron, October 1862-May 1863, ORN, ser. 1, 23: 396.

However, following the president's order of 7 November, Ellet was placed under Porter's command.⁸

To transport the Brigade, seven large steam boats and three steam tugs were purchased. The transports, all former New Orleans packets, were the Autocrat, the flagship of the brigade; the B. J. Adams; the Baltic; the Diana; the E. H. Fairchild; the John Raine; and the Woodford. The three steam tugs were the Belle Darlington, the Cleveland, and the Alf Cutling. The Fairchild was equipped as a quartermaster and commissary boat while the Woodford was outfitted as a hospital boat. The five remaining steamers were designed with living quarters for the officers and men of the Brigade. The steamers were modified for the Brigade's horses by placing permanent stalls on the lower deck of each vessel. The responsibility for supervising the feeding and cleaning of the horses and stalls was divided among the non-commissioned officers of each company.⁹ (See Table IV.)

⁸Gene D. Lewis, Charles Ellet, Jr. The Engineer as Individualist 1810-1862 (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1968), p. 212; Crandall and Newell, History of the Ram Fleet, p. 138; Halleck to A. W. Ellet, 11 November 1862, U.S., War Department, The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies, R. N. Scott et al, eds., 130 vols. (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1880-1901), ser. 3, 2: 761-62 (hereafter cited as OR); Clarke, ed., Warfare Along the Mississippi, pp. 71-72; Stanton to Ellet, 8 November 1862, Record Group 107, "Records of the Office of Secretary of War," National Archives, Washington, D. C. (on microfilm M6 "Letters Sent Relating to Military Affairs," Fort Worth, Texas Regional Branch, National Archives).

⁹Clarke, ed., Warfare Along the Mississippi, p. 59; List of vessels, 15 March-31 December 1863, ORN, ser. 1, 20: xiv; Disposition of Marine Brigade Fleet, undated, OR, ser. 1, 41, pt. 4: 609; List of vessels in Marine Brigade and present stations, 1 June 1863, ORN, ser. 1, 25: 147; Boat Order No. 5, Headquarters, First Infantry (Mounted) Mississippi Marine Brigade,

TABLE IV

THE VESSELS OF THE MARINE BRIGADE

Autocrat--New Orleans packet of 662.4 tons, it was the flagship of the Brigade. Purchased by the U. S. Army in December 1862, the vessel was still employed by the Quartermaster Department at the end of the fiscal year ending 30 June 1865.

B. J. Adams--New Orleans packet of 497.55 tons, it was purchased by the U. S. Army in December 1862.

Baltic--New Orleans packet of 593.15 tons, it was purchased by the U. S. Army in December 1862.

Diana--New Orleans packet of 563.90 tons, it was purchased by the U. S. Army in December 1862.

E. H. Fairchild--New Orleans packet of 496.74 tons, it was purchased by the U. S. Army in December 1862 and equipped as the brigade's quartermaster and commissary boat.

John Raine--New Orleans packet of 541.20 tons, it was purchased by the U. S. Army in December 1862.

Woodford--New Orleans packet of 487.71 tons, it was purchased by the U. S. Army in December 1862. The Woodford was equipped as the brigade's hospital boat.

Belle Darlington--Steam tugboat purchased by the U. S. Army in December 1862.

Cleveland--Steam tugboat purchased by the U. S. Army in December 1862.

Alf Cutling--Steam tugboat purchased by the U. S. Army in December 1862.

SOURCE: U.S., Congress, House, Annual Report of the Secretary of War, Exec. Doc. No. 1, 39th Cong., 1st sess., 1865, p. 298.

The seven steam packets, once refitted, had their boilers protected by heavy timbers and huge coal bunkers. From the lower deck to the hurricane roof a wall of solid, two-inch thick oak, of double thickness, with a two-inch air space in between, encompassed each vessel. Loop-holes for muskets and large port holes with doors provided ventilation and defensive positions in the wall. The pilot houses were protected by two semi-circular sheets of boiler iron. The forward part of the cabin decks were used as the enlisted men's mess, while the after part of the cabin decks served as officer's quarters. The enlisted men's sleeping quarters were located on an intermediary deck, built in aft of the boilers. Officers and men were provided with acceptable wash rooms, bath rooms, and facilities for washing clothes. Hanging from pulleys above the forecastle was a large railed gangway, wide enough for two horses to pass abreast. This gangway was ready for immediate use and could quickly be attached to a huge crane on either side of the boat and lowered to permit passage ashore. To protect against boarding attempts, each vessel was equipped with a hot water hose, connected to the boiler and ready for instant use. The vessels were furnished with only those things absolutely necessary for the comfort of the officers and men. The remaining

27 April 1864, Record Group 94, "Records of the Adjutant General's Office," National Archives, Washington, D. C. (hereafter cited as RG 94); Brooks to Porter, 29 November 1862, ORN, ser. 1, 23: 514.

furniture, bedding, and the like from the original equipment of the boats were sold and the funds realized from the sale were turned over to the federal treasury.¹⁰

By January 1863, the Brigade fleet consisted of three stern-wheel and four side-wheel steamers comprising the Ram Fleet; five steamers as troop transports; one vessel as a supply ship for commissary and quartermaster supplies; one vessel as a hospital ship; three steam tugs as courier vessels; and six coal barges. The Brigade fleet could easily carry for short distances 5,000 men, 2,000 horses, 130 wagons, and 1,900 tons of freight. Each of the five troop transports would normally carry 125 cavalry horses and men and 250 infantry with the entire brigade projected to number 625 cavalry and 1,250 infantry. The total cost of purchasing, rebuilding, and outfitting the seven large steamers and three steam tugs was \$350,000 in addition to the expense of the military troops on board.¹¹

While the equipment for the Brigade was rapidly acquired, Ellet encountered problems enlisting personnel. Porter reported

¹⁰Crandall and Newell, History of the Ram Fleet, p. 259.

¹¹Maj. Gen. Napoleon J. T. Dana to Maj. C. T. Christensen, assistant adjutant general, 15 August 1864, OR, ser. 1, 41, pt. 2: 712. The ram, Mingo, had accidentally been sunk at Cape Girardeau, Missouri, in November 1862, while the ram, Samson, had been converted to a floating blacksmith shop in December 1862, by the Quartermaster Department at Saint Louis. The remaining rams, Queen of the West, the Lancaster, the Dick Fulton, the T. D. Horner, the Lioness, the Monarch, and the Switzerland participated in active military operations while the Marine Brigade was being raised and trained in Saint Louis. See historical sketch U.S.S. Mingo, undated, ORN, ser. 2, 1: 144; historical sketch U.S.S. Samson, undated, ibid., p. 199; Myron J. Smith, Jr., American Civil War Navies: A Bibliography (Metuchen, N. J.: Scarecrow Press, 1972), p. 318.

to Welles on 12 December 1862 that Ellet was receiving no assistance from the army, and under the circumstances Porter predicted the Brigade would not be raised at all. Ellet attributed his difficulty to the large number of bounties paid and the numerous drafts made to meet the northern states quota of troops. Further, since the Brigade did not represent any particular state, no bounty to recruits could be offered to induce enlistments. Men considering enlistment seemed to prefer units raised in their home area.

Therefore, on 13 December Ellet requested authorization from Halleck to recruit men from military units already on active duty and from the convalescents in military hospitals. Ellet thought convalescents would make good soldiers for his Brigade since the duty was easier and less fatiguing. Ellet argued that by recruiting convalescents the hospitals would be relieved of the men fit for service "who will otherwise continue to be a burden upon the country, or have to be discharged [As] disciplined soldiers [they] will . . . be ready for service, while recruits will have to be kept out of service until drilled."¹² Impatient, Ellet sent a second request on the twentieth to recruit in military hospitals. Stanton approved the recruitment of convalescents on 21 December. Any soldier recruited for the Brigade was to be discharged from his former unit so that he could legally be reenlisted for active service.¹³

¹²A. W. Ellet to Halleck, 13 December 1862, OR, ser. 1, 17, pt.2: 406; Porter to Welles, 12 December 1862, ORN, ser. 1, 23: 543; Crandall and Newell, History of the Ram Fleet, pp. 253-54.

¹³A. W. Ellet to Halleck, 20 December 1862, OR, ser. 3, 2: 952-53; Halleck to A. W. Ellet, 21 December 1862, ibid., p. 953;

Even with the authority to recruit from hospitals and the authorization to offer bounties, the recruiting went slowly. On 7 January 1863 Ellet reported to Porter that he would have to remain in Saint Louis for weeks since his men were not yet satisfactorily trained in the new tactics of the Marine Brigade. "It was a great mistake that my command was not assigned me from troops already in the field."¹⁴

Special orders authorizing hospital recruitment were issued from headquarters, Department of the Missouri, as well as headquarters, Department of the Ohio. Recruiting literature usually appeared in the form of handbills. Excerpts from some of this literature included: "Soldiering Made Easy!" "special permission from the Secretary of War to receive volunteers . . . from the drafted men of every State," "[the service] has the following advantages: 1. There are no trenches to dig. 2. There are no rebel houses to guard. 3. There is no picket duty to

Halleck to Maj. Gen. Horatio G. Wright, commanding Department of the Ohio, ORN, ser. 1, 24: 31; Crandall and Newell, History of the Ram Fleet, p. 255. Problems would arise, however, as a result of the unusual way of raising the Brigade. Since the Brigade was recruited from other army units, it is probable some of the questions raised in 1905, when James W. Brown, representative from Pennsylvania, attempted to have the survivors of the Brigade, their widows and minors receive federal pensions (as other Union army veterans), were caused by the "displeasure incurred of officers whose commands had thus been temporarily depleted--a displeasure shown in many instances . . . by such muster-roll entries as 'Absent without Leave,' 'Never returned from Hospital,' and even 'Deserter'--charges" Crandall and Newell, History of the Ram Fleet, p. 3. U.S., Congress, House, Representative James W. Brown, for the Mississippi Marine Brigade, H.R. 16287, 58th Cong., 3d sess., 3 March 1905, Congressional Record [39: Appendix], pp. 168-69.

¹⁴A. W. Ellet to Porter, 7 January 1863, ORN, ser. 1, 24: 141.

perform. 4. There is no danger of camps in the mud, but always a chance to sleep under cover. 5. There is no chance of short rations. 6. Command will always be kept together." "No long, hard marches, camping without tents or food, or carrying heavy knapsacks, but good, comfortable quarters, and good facilities for cooking at all times." "Brigade will become famous in the annals of the Mississippi River Warfare." "Every soldier re-enlisting in this Brigade is entitled to a final settlement and all pay in arrears will be paid up promptly, besides two dollars premium, one month's pay in advance, and twenty-five dollars bounty for re-enlisting."¹⁵

While recruitment continued, the Brigade's field and staff officers were being selected. The Brigade commander's staff consisted of Capt. Warren D. Crandall, assistant adjutant general; Lt. Edward C. Ellet and Lt. Sanford G. Scarritt, aides de camp; Maj. James Robarts, surgeon; eight assistant surgeons; Capt. George Q. White, quartermaster; Capt. James C. Brooks, commissary of subsistence and purchasing quartermaster; and Capt William H. Lewis, paymaster. No chaplain was requested or appointed to the Brigade. The First Regiment Infantry, Mississippi Marine Brigade was commanded by Col. Charles Rivers Ellet. The second in command was Lt. Col. George E. Currie. Other regimental staff officers included Maj. David S. Tallerday, executive officer; Lt. H. G. Curtis, adjutant; and Lt. James Beach, assistant quartermaster.

¹⁵Clarke, ed., Warfare Along the Mississippi, pp. 59-62; Crandall and Newell, History of the Ram Fleet, pp. 255-57.

No chaplain was assigned to the regiment. The regiment consisted of ten letter companies, designated A through K. In December 1863, the regiment was mounted and redesignated the First Infantry Regiment (Mounted), Mississippi Marine Brigade. The First Battalion Cavalry, Mississippi Marine Brigade, was commanded by Maj. James M. Hubbard. The adjutant was 2d Lt. LeRoy Mayne. The battalion consisted of four letter troops, designated A through D. The light artillery battery was commanded by Capt. David P. Walling and consisted of one 20-pounder Parrott and two brass 12-pounders on the Diana, one 20-pounder and two 10-pounders on the Baltic, and two Rodmans and two brass 12-pounders on the Adams. The Mississippi Marine Brigade Ram Fleet was commanded by Lt. Col. John A. Ellet. The executive officer was Maj. John W. Lawrence and Lt. George W. Bailey was the adjutant.

All of the Brigade's officers were to rank as infantry except the cavalry and artillery officers. Further, all officers were to be considered army and not naval officers. As Lt. Col. George E. Currie observed in a letter of March 1863, such an arrangement made the Brigade "in the military parlance neither Army or Navy, the one or the other; and yet both."¹⁶ (See Table V.)

¹⁶Clarke, ed., Warfare Along the Mississippi, p. 72; Crandall and Newell, History of the Ram Fleet, pp. 260-61, 396; William F. Amann, ed., Personnel of the Civil War, 2 vols., vol. 2: The Union Armies, (New York: Thomas Yoseloff, 1961) 2: 150; Regimental Order No. 87, Headquarters, First Infantry (Mounted), Mississippi Marine Brigade, 28 December 1863, RG 94; General Order No. 126, War Department, 6 September 1862, *ibid.* Currie recommended that the infantry be issued a rapid firing rifle such as the Henry, Sharps, or the Colt because of the small number of men comprising the Brigade. Currie to Ellet, 31 January 1863, RG 94.

TABLE V

ELLETS SERVING IN MARINE BRIGADE

Charles Ellet, Jr.,--Son of Charles and Mary Israel Ellet of Pennsylvania, he was born 1 January 1810. A noted civil engineer before the war, Charles was commissioned a colonel of the staff and commanded the ram fleet. He died on 21 June 1862 as a result of wounds received at the Battle of Memphis.

Alfred Washington Ellet--Youngest of six sons of Charles and Mary Israel Ellet, he was born 11 October 1820. A farmer in Illinois at the beginning of the war, he raised a company of infantry and was selected as captain. He was subsequently appointed a lieutenant colonel and second in command of the ram fleet. Upon the death of his brother Charles, Alfred assumed command of the ram fleet. On 1 November 1862, he was promoted to a brigadier general of United States Volunteers. He organized and commanded the Mississippi Marine Brigade until the unit was deactivated. He resigned his commission 21 December 1864 and died in Eldorado, Kansas, 12 January 1895.

Charles Rivers Ellet--Son of Charles Ellet, Jr., he was born 1 June 1843. A medical student when the war began, he volunteered as an assistant surgeon and was appointed as a medical cadet. In November 1862, Charles Rivers assumed command with the rank of colonel of the line of the ram fleet. He was later placed in command of the First Infantry of the Marine Brigade, commanded by his uncle Alfred W. Ellet. He resigned his commission in August, 1863, and died in his sleep at Bunker Hill, Illinois, 29 October 1863.

John A. Ellet--Nephew of Alfred W. and Charles Ellet, Jr., he was promoted to lieutenant colonel as second in command of the ram fleet under Charles Rivers Ellet. He became ram fleet commander when Charles Rivers was reassigned to the marine infantry. John was given command of the consolidated marine regiment in August 1864, when the Brigade was deactivated.

Richard C. Ellet--Nephew of Alfred W. and Charles Ellet, Jr., he was the brother of John A. Ellet and a cousin of Edward C. Ellet. He served as a lieutenant in the Marine Brigade Cavalry Squadron.

Edward C. Ellet--Son of Alfred W. Ellet, he served as his aide de camp with the rank of lieutenant. His cousins, Charles Rivers, Richard C., and John A. Ellet were officers of the Marine Brigade.

For biographical information on the Ellets, see Crandall and Newell, History of the Ram Fleet, p. 5; Clarke, ed., Warfare Along the Mississippi, pp. x-xi.

The War Department approved of General Ellet's recommendation for staff and command positions, and these men were duly commissioned by President Lincoln. With his selections for officers approved, Ellet returned from Washington, D. C., to Mound City, Illinois, on 19 November. He was given a spirited reception by the officers and men of the Ram Fleet and presented with a "superb" sword of "beautiful" design and workmanship.

The Brigade established its recruiting headquarters at 109 North Third Street, Saint Louis. The command itself was billeted at Benton Barracks, which encompassed the fairgrounds located in the northwestern precinct of Saint Louis. The recruits were collected, uniformed, equipped, and trained there. The winter of 1862-63 was excessively cold but the troops practiced daily in company, regimental, and brigade drill. Currie, a master of discipline and tactics, was in charge of the training.¹⁷

As each company received sufficient men, company officers were appointed. Currie related in a letter of March 1863 that the "drilling of the men and schooling of the officers kept the camp in a continuous stir from early morning until night. My [Currie's] greatest ambition being to make this command proficient in drill and unexcelled in military discipline."¹⁸

¹⁷Crandall and Newell, History of the Ram Fleet, pp. 138, 253, 257; Clarke, ed., Warfare Along the Mississippi, p. 143.

¹⁸Clarke, ed., Warfare Along the Mississippi, p. 73. Prior to the Tennessee River expedition of April 1863, the Brigade adopted the system of signals developed by the Signal Corps. One officer and three to four men from each vessel were trained to send and receive messages using the signal flag kit. Crandall and Newell, History of the Ram Fleet, p. 423.

In February 1863, a general review of Union army units and a parade as part of Washington's Birthday were held in Saint Louis. Currie attributed the favorable reaction of the civilian crowd to the new uniforms and accouterments of the Brigade. The Brigade "had the honor of attracting greater attention and were given more praise by the press for . . . military bearing than any of the many organizations that took part . . ."¹⁹ Currie observed that "the praises bestowed upon us [the Brigade] that day seemed to inspire the officers and men with renewed determination to put forth their greatest efforts to maintain the enviable reputation established on that occasion."²⁰

Finally, in March the Brigade was ready for the field. Alfred W. Ellet reported the strength of the military units of the Brigade to Stanton on 4 March 1863 as six companies of infantry with 527 men, four companies of cavalry with 368 men, and one company of light artillery with 140 men and six artillery pieces. However, two hundred recruits were yet to be organized into units since these men had just arrived.²¹

¹⁹Clarke, ed., Warfare Along the Mississippi, pp. 74-75. The uniform adopted by the Brigade was the same as the regulation uniform worn by the federal army except for the hat or cap, described as being of a semi-naval design and "made with full, round tops, broad, straight visors, and a wide green band with trimmings of gold lace." Crandall and Newell, History of the Ram Fleet, p. 258. See also Clarke, ed., Warfare Along the Mississippi, p. 74; Francis A. Lord, Uniforms of the Civil War (New York: Thomas Yoseloff, 1970), p. 78.

²⁰Clarke, ed., Warfare Along the Mississippi, p. 75.

²¹A. W. Ellet to Stanton, 4 March 1863, OR, ser. 3, 3: 59.

On Thursday, 5 March, all of the transports except the hospital ship Woodford arrived at Saint Louis, and the Brigade began to load the supplies and equipment necessary for the expected battles downriver. The men were paid and quartered on the transports. Finally, all loading and coaling of the ships was completed and at 6:00 A.M. Friday, 13 March 1863, the Autocrat, Adams, Baltic, Diana, and Fairchild proceeded under steam for Vicksburg. The Raine was to remain at Saint Louis until all the recruits arrived. The fleet arrived at Cairo at 9:00 A.M. Saturday, where the hospital ship and ram Lancaster joined the squadron. The vessels took on more coal until the sixteenth when the lines were cast off, and the Brigade started south.²²

The Brigade, numbering approximately twelve hundred men on this third Monday in March 1863, would never during its entire existence reach the total strength originally authorized. However, Brigadier General Ellet continued his attempts to enlarge his command. In May 1863, he wrote Stanton requesting a second regiment of infantry for the Brigade.

I find from experience that my force is too small, and entirely insufficient . . . against the enemy . . . , and at the same time provide for the safety of my boats. If permitted to choose, I would ask that the Thirty-third Regiment of Illinois Volunteers . . . be added to the Marine Brigade. No additional boats will be required for this increase of the command.²³

²²Crandall and Newell, History of the Ram Fleet, p. 261.

²³A. W. Ellet to Stanton, 25 May 1863, OR, ser. 1, 24, pt. 3: 349. As early as October 1862, Ellet requested additional troops. The company he requested, Company K, Eighteenth Illinois,

No record has been discovered of the reply, if any, by Stanton. The Brigade was never enlarged.

While the Marine Brigade was being raised at Saint Louis, the Ram Fleet under Col. Charles Rivers Ellet, the son of Charles Ellet, Jr., was participating in various military operations on the Mississippi. Charles Rivers Ellet was born 1 June 1843 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Highly intelligent, he was a medical student in Georgetown, District of Columbia, when the war began, Volunteering as an assistant surgeon, Charles was appointed a medical cadet, and in June 1862 Stanton assigned him to the Ram Fleet. At the conclusion of the battle of Memphis, the mayor surrendered the town to Charles Rivers Ellet. Confronting an angry, pro-Confederate mob, he bravely raised the United States flag over the post office building which signified the total surrender of the city. Later, he crossed on foot the treacherous and rebel-held peninsula opposite Vicksburg, in order to establish communications with Rear Adm. David G. Farragut. In November 1862, at the age of nineteen, he assumed command of the Ram Fleet as a colonel of the line.²⁴

One of Charles Rivers Ellet's earliest contributions after assuming command of the Ram Fleet was the design of a raft which would remove torpedoes obstructing the Yazoo River. His plan, submitted on 28 December 1862, called for a raft 70 feet long

was assigned 11 December 1862. Halleck to Ellet, 11 December 1862, OR, ser. 1, 17, pt. 2: 398; Crandall and Newell, History of the Ram Fleet, pp. 136, 138.

²⁴National Cyclopedia of American Biography, pp. 360-61.

and 30 feet wide to be attached to the bow of a steamer. The forward end of the raft would resemble a rake with vertical stakes 7 to 8 feet in length spaced a few inches apart. "The teeth of the rake," wrote Ellet, "would catch any wire, cord, or other contrivance to explode the torpedo from the shore and tear it loose. If the infernal machine happened to go off . . . the steamboat . . . would be uninjured." Such a device, Ellet declared, would eliminate the need to expose men to danger, as the stream "could be cleared of torpedoes as fast as a boat could run."²⁵ Porter approved of the plan and instructed Ellet to keep the device for removing torpedoes attached to the Lioness to be used as the need arose. Approved also in January 1863, was the removal from the Ram Fleet of twenty-three men infected with smallpox.²⁶

Meanwhile, the Queen of the West and the Lioness were involved in the abortive attempt to reach Vicksburg by way of the Yazoo River during the last days of December 1862. Maj. Gen. William T. Sherman, commanding 32,000 troops, landed on the low ground near the mouth of the Yazoo River, and supported by Porter's gunboats, assaulted Confederate positions on 29 December 1862. The attack failed, and the federal troops were forced to retire. Heavy rains hindered movement, and Porter reported that any attempt to gain Vicksburg from that direction was useless. Sherman planned a second assault for 31 December, but

²⁵C. R. Ellet to Porter, 28 December 1862, ORN, ser. 1, 23: 582.

²⁶Porter to C. R. Ellet, 1 January 1863, *ibid.*, p. 598; C. R. Ellet to Porter, ORN, ser. 1, 24: 138.

fog prevented Ellet's assignment to clear the Yazoo of torpedoes and Sherman's plan to take Haines Bluff.²⁷

In January the ram Monarch accompanied the naval expedition which supported Maj. Gen. John A. McClernand's 30,000 troops in the assault on Fort Hindman on the Arkansas River. A member of an army unit (probably Company K, Eighteenth Illinois) detailed to the Ram Fleet and assigned to the Monarch at Cairo, Sgt. Samuel J. Bartlett of Ohio, described the operations at Fort Hindman and life on a ram. Leaving Cairo in December 1862, Sergeant Bartlett, aboard the Monarch, reported:

started down the Miss. Have been patrolling this, Ark. & White rivers ever since, except when on duty at some point as guard for a few days at a time I am well satisfied with our new position on the fleet. It is much more easy, nicer, and better than in the army Have good eating and comfortable sleeping apartments and in fact all the comforts of home except dear friends.²⁸

The first major action accompanying the formal establishment of the Brigade began on the first of February 1863 when Porter ordered Col. Charles Rivers Ellet to run the batteries of Vicksburg in order to destroy the Confederate steamer City of Vicksburg at anchor before the city. The Queen succeeded in running the batteries, struck the steamer, but failed to sink her. The Queen was successful in disabling the City of Vicksburg

²⁷C. R. Ellet to A. W. Ellet, 3 January 1863, OR, ser. 1, 17, pt. 1: 662-63; Edwin W. Sutherland, commanding the Queen of the West, to C. R. Ellet, 4 January 1863, *ibid.*, pp. 664-65; Porter to Welles, 31 December 1862, ORN, ser. 1, 23: 592; Porter to Welles, 5 January 1863, *ibid.*, pp. 608-10.

²⁸L. Moody Simms, Jr., "A Union Volunteer with the Mississippi Ram Fleet," Lincoln Herald 70 (1968): 191-92; C. R. Ellet to A. W. Ellet, 12 January 1863, OR, ser. 1, 17, pt. 1: 779.

by fire, however. The New York Tribune attributed the damage to

a couple of heavy wads saturated with combustibles, which were accordingly shot into her side. The smoke and flame shooting out of the cabin doors of the steamer a few seconds afterward told the result. The Rebels at length succeeded in extinguishing the flames, but the boat must have sustained very serious damage.²⁹

Below Vicksburg, Ellet requested and received from Sherman two 30-pound Parrott guns with which to arm the Queen. The guns were mounted on 6 February; Ellet received supplemental instructions from Porter on the eighth. "The great object," wrote Porter, was "to destroy all you can of the enemy's stores and provisions and get your vessel back safe Do not show your colors along the river unless necessary in action."³⁰

Thus, the Queen, now acting as a commerce raider, continued downstream on the night of 10 February. The vessel reached the mouth of the Red River on Wednesday, the eleventh, and destroyed skiffs and flatboats on both shores. On the morning of 12 February, it ascended the Red River as far as the mouth of the Atchafalaya River, where Confederate army supplies and wagons were destroyed. Continuing up the Red River on Friday, the federals burned all buildings on three large adjoining plantations and reached the mouth of the Black River that evening. Also

²⁹New York Tribune, 16 February 1863; Porter to Welles, 8 February 1863, OR, ser. 1, 24, pt. 3: 39; Porter to Grant, 1 February 1863, ORN, ser. 1, 24: 217; Porter to Welles, 2 February 1863, *ibid.*; Porter to C. R. Ellet, 1 February 1863, *ibid.*, p. 218; C. R. Ellet to Porter, 2 February 1863, *ibid.*, p. 219.

³⁰Porter to C. R. Ellet, 8 February 1863, ORN, ser. 1, 24: 374; C. R. Ellet to Sherman, 6 February 1863, *ibid.*, p. 371; Special Order No. 34, Headquarters, Fifteenth Corps, 6 February 1863, OR, ser. 1, 24, pt. 3: 37; Porter to Welles, 5 February 1863, Lincoln Papers.

captured and destroyed during this time were three Confederate steamers, the A. W. Baker, the Mars, and the Berwick Bay.

Saturday morning, 14 February, the Queen captured the steamboat Era No. 5, loaded with 4,500 bushels of Confederate corn, on the Black River. Intent on more destruction and capture, the Queen proceeded upstream to Gordon's Landing. Arriving there at dusk, it encountered three strong rebel vessels and strong Confederate artillery batteries. The Washington National Intelligencer reprinted a report from the Richmond Examiner which described what happened. Colonel Ellet undoubtedly forced the rebel pilot of the Era No. 5

to take the wheel, and ordered him to take the boat to our [Confederate] batteries. [John] Burke feigned fear, but finally took the wheel under a Yankee guard. Upon nearing the batteries he told the Yankees they were fifteen miles from them, immediately running close in, when she [the Queen] received a shot which broke the steam-pipe, disabling the boat. The Yankees were wholly unprepared for fight, and suspected no danger. Burke jumped overboard and drifted ashore.³¹

Other reports claimed that the Queen ran aground and was then disabled by artillery fire when the vessel attempted to back away from the enemy. Charles Rivers Ellet ordered the vessel scuttled and withdrew on the captured Era. The attempt to burn the Queen failed and Confederate forces boarded it. It was reported in the Alexandria Louisiana Democrat that one 30-pounder rifled Parrott gun, one 20-pounder Parrott, three

³¹Washington National Intelligencer, 26 February 1863; C. R. Ellet to Porter, 21 February 1863, OR, ser. 1, 24, pt. 1: 341-45; C. R. Ellet to Porter, 2 February 1863, ibid., pp. 336-38; C. R. Ellet to A. W. Ellet, 5 February 1863, ibid., p. 338; C. R. Ellet to Porter, 21 February 1863, ORN, ser. 1, 24: 383-86; Francis T. Miller et al, eds., The Photographic History of the Civil War, 10 vols. (1911; reprint ed., New York: Thomas Yoseloff, 1957), 6: 318.

12-pounder howitzers, a large quantity of ordnance stores, a large amount of quinine, two cases of amputation instruments, clothing, flour, bacon, beef, pork, lard, bread, and other stores were captured along with most of the deck hands and contrabands. The federals continued to retreat downstream and finally reached the Mississippi River at dawn on 15 February.³²

This was the first major loss in the Ram Fleet, and it caused some concern in Washington. Porter had earlier ordered the gunboat Indianola to run the batteries and support the Queen in its commerce raiding operations; however, the Indianola had been detained eighteen hours by fog at the mouth of the Yazoo and did not arrive below Vicksburg in time. Porter had considered the ram and gunboat strong enough to force Port Hudson to surrender by blockading the Red River and starving the garrison into submission. Porter reported to Welles on 22 February that, while the intrinsic value of the Queen was nothing, having "paid for herself five times over by the destruction and capture of rebel property," the loss was of significance as the vessel had obtained a national character.³³

³²C. R. Ellet to Porter, 21 February 1863, OR, ser. 1, 24, pt. 1: 341-45; Washington National Intelligencer, 26 February 1863; C. R. Ellet to Porter, 21 February 1863, ORN, ser. 1, 24: 384; J. L. Brent, "Capture of the Indianola," Southern Historical Society Papers 1 (1876): 92; Porter to Welles, 22 February 1863, ORN, ser. 1, 24: 382; Alexandria Louisiana Democrat, 18 February 1863. The Queen of the West had been grounded and disabled off Fort DeRussey, Louisiana. The Confederates raised and repaired it, refitting it as a cotton-clad. In conjunction with the Confederate ram Webb, she sank the U.S.S. Indianola near the Red River on 24 February 1863. The Queen was finally destroyed after a fight with three federal gunboats on the Atchafalaya River in April 1863. Rear Adm. E. M. Eller et al, eds., Civil War Naval Chronology 1861-1865 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1971), p. VI-289.

³³Porter to Welles, 22 February 1863, ORN, ser. 1, 24: 383;

Further, Porter believed that Ellet had lost the vessel without any excuse, but he regretted that he had employed this type of vessel as a commerce raider. However, he had no other vessel in the Mississippi Squadron which could have mastered the current and, for this reason, had chosen the ram. The ram did achieve Porter's objective of destroying and capturing Confederate property worth over \$100,000. Ellet returned with 170 bales of cotton worth \$70,000, 4,500 bushels of corn, and a steamboat valued at \$18,000. Porter, however, was still disgusted with the entire situation and declared that the "Ellet rams are fit for nothing but tow boats."³⁴

The Indianola, remaining south of Vicksburg, was attacked by rebel rams and sunk on 24 February 1863. Following the loss, Porter again expressed his regrets concerning the whole matter. "There is no use," he affirmed, "to conceal the fact, but this has, in my opinion, been the most humiliating affair that has occurred during this rebellion."³⁵ Welles replied by instructing Porter to conduct a court of inquiry into the loss of the Queen and the Indianola. Yet the official records contain no mention

Porter to Lt. Comdr. George Brown, commanding U.S.S. Indianola, 12 February 1863, *ibid.*, p. 376; Porter to Welles, 22 February 1863, *ibid.*, p. 382.

³⁴Porter to Welles, 22 February 1863, ORN, ser. 1, 24: 383; Porter to Welles, 23 February 1863, *ibid.*, p. 383; Ellet to Porter, 21 February 1863, *ibid.*, pp. 383-86.

³⁵Porter to Welles, 27 February 1863, ORN, ser. 1, 24: 390; Eller, Civil War Naval Chronology, p. III-32.

of this court of inquiry or any evidence the court was in fact conducted.³⁶

Following close on the loss of the Queen and its subsequent use by the Confederacy was a request from Farragut, whose fleet was conducting operations below Vicksburg. Farragut, attempting to conduct a blockade below the fortress city but short on warships, requested aid from Porter's Mississippi Squadron above the city. His plan was to receive two rams and one ironclad gunboat so that he could maintain the blockade between Vicksburg and Port Hudson. "The Red River trade is now the only resource of the enemy for their supplies at both Vicksburg and Port Hudson. The failure of my vessels to get by Port Hudson has reduced me [Farragut] to the necessity of asking" for assistance.³⁷

On 22 March Gen. Alfred W. Ellet, having arrived from Saint Louis, sent a request to Farragut for confirmation of the requirement. Farragut was not present, being downriver, and his aides were not aware of a request for rams and gunboats. Porter was also gone, directing a naval operation upriver. Capt. Henry I. Walke, Porter's second in command, was willing to meet Farragut's request for two of Ellet's rams "but when I [Walke]

³⁶Welles to Porter, 10 March 1863, ORN, ser. 1, 24: 392. Porter observed that the losses of the Queen and the Indianola were the more significant since he had thought the vessels' commanders would "have the wisdom and patriotism to destroy their vessels, even if they had to go with them." Porter to Welles, 27 February 1863, ORN, ser. 1, 24: 390. On February 18, 1863, Porter praised C. R. Ellet, having admired "bravery whenever it is connected with judgment; that is the reason I shove your [A. W. Ellet's] nephew into all kinds of scrapes." Porter to A. W. Ellet, 18 February 1863, ORN, ser. 1, 24: 424.

³⁷Farragut to A. W. Ellet, 23 March 1863, OR, ser. 1, 24, pt. 1: 474.

proposed to send Colonel Ellet [Charles Rivers], the commander of the Switzerland, he declined to obey my orders during the presence of General Ellet, who had just arrived with the Marine Brigade and who claims to have command of the rams."³⁸

Ellet, realizing the likelihood of a conflict of command authority over the Ram Fleet, exchanged letters with Farragut on Monday, 23 March 1863. Farragut replied on the same day and again pressed his request for the warships. He was "unwilling to interfere with the admiral's [Porter's] command in any way, but . . . feel assured that if he were here he would grant the assistance I so much need to carry out this great object."³⁹

On Tuesday, General Ellet informed Walke of his intent to send two rams, the Lancaster and the Switzerland, below Vicksburg to the aid of Farragut. The general suggested again that Walke send the gunboat Farragut had requested; Walke refused to cooperate. The rams were to run the gauntlet Tuesday evening. Maj. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant requested ten or twelve small boats for an attack against Warrenton on the same day. Brigadier General Ellet replied by informing Grant of the proposed movement of vessels below Vicksburg. The rams, once south of Vicksburg, will "convey the troops across to attack the batteries [at

³⁸Capt. H. Walke, U. S. Navy, to Porter, 23 March 1863, ORN, ser. 1, 20: 13; A. W. Ellet to Farragut, 22 March 1863, ibid., p. 12; Loyall Farragut, secretary to Admiral Farragut, to A. W. Ellet, 22 March 1863, ibid., p. 13; Lt. Comdr. K. R. Breese to Porter, 22 March 1863, ORN, ser. 1, 20: 10; Crandall and Newell, History of the Ram Fleet, p. 192.

³⁹Farragut to A. W. Ellet, 23 March 1863, OR, ser. 1, 24, pt. 1: 474; Crandall and Newell, History of the Ram Fleet, p. 194.

Warrenton], while the flagship Hartford [Farragut's flagship] silences their guns; no small boats will, therefore, be needed."⁴⁰

At daybreak Saturday, 25 March, the two rams steamed south past the Confederate batteries at Vicksburg. The batteries opened fire and the Lancaster was hit at the water line, splitting its hull in two; the Lancaster received over thirty direct hits before sinking. The Washington National Intelligencer reported that the Lancaster received hits which split its hull and passed through the boilers, cutting its steam pipe. "She soon commenced to sink, and in a few seconds disappeared beneath the engulfing [sic] waves."⁴¹ The second ram, the Switzerland, which was in the lead, was disabled but not a total loss. The vessel received a ten-inch shell in its boilers which resulted in the scalding of the contraband firemen. The superstructure of the boat was riddled with holes but the Switzerland was not abandoned as it was not sinking. The damage was repaired within three days of the incident.⁴²

⁴⁰A. W. Ellet to Grant, 24 March 1863, ORN, ser. 1, 20: 17; A. W. Ellet to Captain Walke, 24 March 1863, ibid., p. 16; Captain Walke to A. W. Ellet, 24 March 1863, ibid., p. 16; Grant to A. W. Ellet, 24 March 1863, OR, ser. 1, 24, pt. 3: 136.

⁴¹Washington National Intelligencer, 4 April 1863; Captain Walke to Porter, 25 March 1863, ORN, ser. 1, 20: 18; Baltimore American and Commercial Advertiser, 1 April 1863; Washington National Intelligencer, 2 April 1863.

⁴²A. W. Ellet to Stanton, 26 March 1863, OR, ser. 1, 24, pt. 1: 473; Crandall and Newell, History of the Ram Fleet, pp. 200-01.

Questions were immediately raised as to the causes of the loss. Charles Rivers Ellet reported that his departure, originally planned during the darker part of the night, had been delayed because of the short time allowed for preparations and the necessity of loading large quantities of stores and provisions. By the time the rams got underway, it was nearing dawn, and the night had become clear, calm, and bathed in starlight, with a slight wind blowing toward the rebel batteries. "The wind," wrote Ellet, "was extremely unfavorable, and notwithstanding the caution with which the boats put out into the middle of the stream, the puff of their escape pipes could be heard with fatal distinctness below."⁴³ As a result of the late departure, the attempt to pass the batteries was conducted in the first moments of dawn. This only aggravated the loss.

Farragut wrote Grant, deeply regretting the failure of the rams to reach his fleet without loss, and blamed himself "very much for not insisting on General Ellet's waiting for a dark night."⁴⁴ He had a sleepless night as a result of Ellet's impetuosity and rashness, but he never considered the possibility that Ellet would attempt to pass the guns of Vicksburg in the daytime. Undoubtedly General Ellet did have more zeal than discretion! Calling it an unfortunate affair, Porter reacted by questioning the authority by which the rams were sent past

⁴³C. R. Ellet to A. W. Ellet, 25 March 1863, ORN, ser. 1, 20: 19-20; J. A. Ellet to C. R. Ellet, 25 March 1863, ibid., p. 21.

⁴⁴Farragut to Grant, 25 March 1863, OR, ser. 1, 24, pt. 3: 143.

the batteries at Vicksburg, in the daytime and without any protection for their hulls. Porter concluded that the rams "were not at all prepared for so hazardous an adventure, nor at all suited for any service that will take them any distance from a machine shop."⁴⁵

The loss of the Lancaster made it apparent that the rams were not physically battle-worthy. In a report dated 5 February 1863 from Lt. Philip F. Howell, commanding the Lancaster during the White River expedition, the Lancaster was described as being in a disabled condition and totally unfit for service because its boilers were completely worn out and leaking. Porter described the Lancaster as miserable and not the slightest of use since it was all worn out. Grant, writing Halleck, described the Lancaster as a rotten and worthless vessel. A sound vessel would not have been damaged like the Lancaster. Since there were no casualties, it was fortunate the imperfect condition of the vessel had been revealed "at this time [rather than] . . . at some other time, when more valuable vessels might have been risked, relying on this boat for assistance."⁴⁶

⁴⁵Porter to Welles, 26 March 1863, ORN, ser. 1, 20: 22; Porter to A. W. Ellet, 25 March 1863, OR, ser. 1, 24, pt. 1: 475; Farragut to Grant, 25 March 1863, OR, ser. 1, 24, pt. 3: 143; Farragut to Maj. Gen. Nathaniel P. Banks, commanding the Department of the Gulf, 6 April 1863, ORN, ser. 1, 20: 45-46; Farragut to Commodore Henry W. Morris, commanding below Port Hudson, 7 April 1863, *ibid.*, p. 49.

⁴⁶Lt. P. F. Howell, commanding Lancaster, to Capt. T. O. Selfridge, commanding U. S. Navy at White River, 5 February 1863, ORN, ser. 1, 24: 239; Grant to Halleck, 27 March 1863, OR, ser. 1, 24, pt. 1: 23-24; Porter to Farragut, 26 March 1863, ORN, ser. 1, 20: 28; Porter to Welles, 30 March 1863, *ibid.*, p. 40.

On 28 March, Porter reported to Welles that "General Ellet knew as well as anyone that she [the Lancaster] was a rotten, unseviceable vessel, and would have sunk had she attempted to run into anything She was rigged up a little and palmed off on Admiral Farragut as a good vessel."⁴⁷ Welles replied that Porter had not yet satisfactorily informed the Navy Department as to "whether additional disgrace and disaster are to attach to the Navy from recklessness and disobedience of orders on the part of those not under the naval articles of war."⁴⁸

Finally, the New York Times observed on Monday, 6 April, that the loss of the ram was not as bad as it seemed. "It is worth the loss of one such boat to secure another for the protection of Farragut's boats the loss . . . is more than compensated the Switzerland has gotten through . . . although damaged"⁴⁹

The Switzerland, now under the command of Lt. Col. John A. Ellet, Brig. Gen. Alfred W. Ellet's nephew, was ordered to operate with Farragut's forces, once repaired.⁵⁰ Porter made the order quite explicit, emphasizing that John A. Ellet could do nothing, no matter how small, without the consent of Farragut. Porter issued a second order to that effect on 28 March and

⁴⁷Porter to Welles, 28 March 1863, ORN, ser. 1, 24: 515-16.

⁴⁸Welles to Porter, 2 April 1863, ORN, ser. 1, 20: 45.

⁴⁹New York Times, 6 April 1863.

⁵⁰Col. Charles Rivers Ellet assumed command of the First Regiment Infantry of the Marine Brigade after the loss of the

required that the ram pass the Confederate artillery batteries at Warrenton on a moonless night. Porter considered "the loss of the Lancaster was owing to proper precaution not having been taken in this respect, and where the object in view was not properly considered."⁵¹

General Ellet outlined, perhaps in the most logical manner, the objectives to be achieved by the Switzerland below Vicksburg. He wrote that the purpose of the ram was to assist in maintaining control of the river between Vicksburg and Port Hudson, cutting off the enemy's communications and supplies from the Red River, and to aid in repelling enemy vessels if they chose to attack Farragut's vessels.⁵²

Finally, Porter wrote Farragut on 26 March 1863, and warned him to keep an iron hand on the commander of the Switzerland. If Farragut did not make the commander understand that he was under Farragut's orders, the man would "go off on a cruise

Lancaster. He was not familiar with infantry tactics and tended to stay in the background. The assignment of Ellet to the regiment "and the departure of the Switzerland . . . to serve with Farragut below, together with the detaching of one or two other rams for special duty . . . practically ended the service of the ram fleet, as a distinct command" Crandall and Newell, History of the Ram Fleet, pp. 219, 333.

⁵¹Porter to J. A. Ellet, 28 March 1863, ORN, ser. 1, 20: 30; Porter to J. A. Ellet, 27 March 1863, ibid., p. 30; Farragut to C. R. Ellet, 27 March 1863, ibid., p. 34.

⁵²A. W. Ellet to C. R. Ellet, 24 March 1863, OR, ser. 1, 24, pt. 1: 475; A. W. Ellet to J. A. Ellet, 28 March 1863, ORN, ser. 1, 20: 31. Farragut requested two ironclad gunboats and two rams to blockade the Red River. One request was directed to Porter, the other to Welles. He made the request "so that when it becomes absolutely necessary for me to go down the river to replenish my provisions and resume my duties in command of the blockading squadron, that I may do so without reopening the

somewhere before you know it, and then get the ship into trouble. She is a very formidable ship as a ram, but I would never expect to see her again if she got out of your sight."⁵³

However, a new crisis, a conflict of command authority, now appeared. Porter's order was referred by the commander of the Switzerland to General Ellet in accordance with a general order, dated 23 March 1863, issued by the headquarters of the Mississippi Marine Brigade. Upon being notified of these actions, Porter informed Gen. Alfred W. Ellet that he considered John A. Ellet's actions disrespectful and, therefore, had ordered his arrest and court martial. Attempting to exert his command authority, Porter declared that his orders should be promptly obeyed. He did not recognize General Ellet's authority to give any orders relating to the management of the Ram Fleet or the Brigade if not originated by the naval commander of the Mississippi Squadron.⁵⁴

General Ellet, answering Porter's communication on Wednesday, 1 April, assumed all responsibility for John A. Ellet's actions as he was merely following orders issued by the general. The

Red River trade." Farragut to Porter, 25 March 1863, ORN, ser. 1, 20: 24. See also Farragut to Welles, 27 March 1863, ibid., pp. 34-35.

⁵³Porter to Farragut, 26 March 1863, ORN, ser. 1, 20: 29.

⁵⁴J. A. Ellet to Porter, 28 March 1863, ibid., p. 31; Porter to A. W. Ellet, 31 March 1863, ibid., pp. 31-32. The general order John A. Ellet referred to was General Order No. 4, issued by the Headquarters, Mississippi Marine Brigade, on 23 March 1863. It read: "No officer of the Mississippi Marine Brigade will, upon any occasion whatever, move his boat--unless in cases where the actual safety of the boat requires it--without first obtaining the sanction of the general commanding, and in his absence of the highest officer of this command present." General Order No. 4, Headquarters, Marine Brigade, 23 March 1863, ORN, ser. 1, 24: 524.

movement of Brigade vessels without authorization from Brigade headquarters would not be tolerated. Further, while the general was commander, "no subordinate officer will be permitted to execute any order not transmitted through the proper military channel."⁵⁵

Porter, realizing his authority was being challenged, suspended Gen. Alfred W. Ellet from his command 2 April until the government could take the proper and necessary actions. In taking this action, Porter pointed out that Ellet had raised an unnecessary question in John A. Ellet's case since Porter had, under the circumstances, assumed the role of immediate commander, the general having been absent upriver. Under such conditions, Porter reasoned, with no other senior officer present, the public interest would have suffered if any orders had to be routed through the general. The propriety of transmitting orders through proper military channels was not in question; rather, General Ellet had violated his authority, the admiral concluded, when he failed to report to Porter (in compliance with the president's orders) prior to dispatching two rams to Farragut. The right to regulate the movements of vessels of the squadron was vested in Porter, and no officer of division or the general could exercise such power unless Porter was inaccessible and a matter of military necessity occurred, which was not the situation at issue. Porter saw no prospect of

⁵⁵A. W. Ellet to Porter, 1 April 1863, ORN, ser. 1, 20: 32.

cooperation and harmony between the Brigade and the Squadron while Ellet was acting under ideas adverse to discipline. Finally, the general's assumption of responsibility created antagonism in Porter's command. The general's subsequent approval of John A. Ellet's conduct convinced Porter "that the public interests were secondary to an unnecessary form, and that an officer and vessel belonging to my command were sent off by an officer of division without my knowing even what orders the commander was acting under."⁵⁶

A report complaining of Gen. Alfred W. Ellet's conduct was dispatched to Welles the same day. After detailing the charges against the general, Porter charged that the general was attempting to usurp his authority and in so doing was disregarding the admiral's orders. Porter believed he had acted properly and then recommended either the disbandment of the Marine Brigade, as the need for such a unit had ended because of the increased number of patrolling gunboats, or the transfer of the Brigade to army control since the Brigade had interfered with movements ordered by Grant. Finally, a desperate need had arisen for steamboats because essential troop movements had been crippled on account of the lack of sufficient transport. Moreover, Ellet, having little knowledge of military affairs, nevertheless desired to assume more authority than was granted him by law. Porter was embarrassed to be "associated with

⁵⁶Porter to A. W. Ellet, 2 April 1863, ORN, ser. 1, 24: 524-25.

persons who are thinking more of their own personal aggrandizement than they do of this Union."⁵⁷

The reaction in Washington was recorded in Welles's diary. The War Department, still offended by the transfer law of 16 July 1862, claimed that the armed vessels on the western rivers should be subject to military and not naval control. Welles observed that the Ellets were

brave, venturous, intelligent engineers, not always discreet or wise, but with many daring and excellent qualities. They had under them a set of courageous and picked men, . . . but refused to come under naval orders The result was, as I anticipated.⁵⁸

The assistant secretary of the navy, Gustavus V. Fox, was not surprised at the conflict over command authority. "Having protested in cabinet meeting against this ram fleet under soldiers and as at present organized," he had been prepared for trouble but not quite of the magnitude which had occurred.⁵⁹

⁵⁷Porter to Welles, 2 April 1863, *ibid.*, p. 524. The charges against General Ellet briefly stated were: 1) before reporting to Porter in obedience to the executive order, Ellet sent two rams, unprepared for running the batteries, south to Farragut; 2) the loss of the Lancaster and the damaged Switzerland; 3) Ellet "forbid" the commander of the Switzerland to obey Porter's orders to report to Farragut and not to run the batteries at Warrenton in the daytime; 4) Ellet's disrespectful letter which informed Porter he assumed all responsibility for John A. Ellet's conduct; 5) Ellet's refusal to permit any subordinate officer to obey any order which had not been routed through Brigade headquarters; 6) Porter observed that the course of action Ellet followed adversely affected joint actions and that Ellet "was determined to assume authority and disregard orders"; 7) given orders to move to Greenville, Mississippi, without delay and cut off enemy troops there, Ellet traveled only to Milliken's Bend where he delayed until Porter ordered his return. Porter to Welles, 2 April 1863, ORN, ser. 1, 24: 523.

⁵⁸Howard K. Beale, ed., Diary of Gideon Welles Secretary of the Navy Under Lincoln and Johnson, 3 vols. (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1960), 1: 272.

⁵⁹Robert M. Thompson and Richard Wainwright, eds., Confidential

Farragut attempted to soothe the situation when he wrote:

first, to exonerate myself from any charge of a disposition to interfere with your [Porter's] command, and secondly, with a hope to excuse General Ellet from any feeling to do that which he thought would be disagreeable to you; but, on the contrary, all who surrounded him at the time thought, and so expressed themselves, that it would be in accordance with your wishes.⁶⁰

Gen. Alfred W. Ellet, presenting his version of the controversy to Stanton, asserted that he did not consider his actions in violation of the executive order since he had not yet received any orders from anyone except the War Department. Secondly, he considered Farragut's case to be of an urgent nature and of great importance to the outcome of the war. In conclusion, Ellet requested removal from command if Stanton were displeased or considered Ellet's actions incorrect. "If I have done wrong," Ellet wrote in May 1863, "or have exceeded what was my authority I should be relieved at once from this command, and if my action has been proper it is but fair that I should have some expression to that effect."⁶¹ Stanton, of course, did support Ellet and violently denounced Porter as a "'gas bag and fussy fellow, blowing his own trumpet and stealing credit which belongs to others.'"⁶²

Correspondence of Gustavus Vasa Fox Assistant Secretary of the Navy 1861-1865, 2 vols. (New York: DeVinne Press, 1920), 2: 164.

⁶⁰Farragut to Porter, 25 March 1863, ORN, ser. 1, 20: 24.

⁶¹A. W. Ellet memorandum, undated ibid., p. 53; Stanton to A. W. Ellet, 13 April 1863, ibid., p. 50; Crandall and Newell, History of the Ram Fleet, p. 214; A. W. Ellet to Stanton, 10 April 1863, OR, ser. 1, 24, pt. 3: 185-86; A. W. Ellet to Brooks, 13 May 1863, ORN, ser. 1, 20: 52.

⁶²Beale, ed., Diary of Gideon Welles, 1: 273; Stanton to A. W. Ellet, 13 April 1863, Edwin McMasters Stanton Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, D. C.

The command crisis was solved abruptly, however, when General Ellet withdrew the 1 April letter which had been so controversial. After a private, personal interview between Porter and Ellet, the command conflict was terminated. Concessions were made by both individuals, and their relations again became harmonious and peaceful. Porter revealed in a letter to Fox in mid-April 1863 that he had been close to arresting the general, but the situation had been solved at this meeting. Porter's opinion about Ellet had changed as now he thought of him as a "good fellow, but he is only fit to run the Batteries at Vicksburg, without any result."⁶³ The admiral then characterized all the Ellets as being brave but possessing no intelligence or common sense. He was glad to be rid of the entire Brigade for a short time, since he had ordered the unit up the Tennessee River where battle was expected; he would not be surprised, however, if the Brigade was ineffective in combat.⁶⁴

⁶³Thompson and Wainwright, eds., Confidential Correspondence of G. V. Fox, 2: 165-66; Crandall and Newell, History of the Ram Fleet, p. 209. In June 1863, relations between Porter and Ellet again became strained as a result of some anonymous newspaper correspondence discussing operations on the Mississippi. Evidently, the articles were written in such a way as to offend Porter and his pride. These letters, appearing in Saint Louis and Memphis newspapers, praised General Ellet for his swiftness of movement and combat readiness, while Porter was criticized for his overcaution and sluggish movements. These letters were written on sheets of paper with the Marine Brigade headings printed on them. Porter expressed his belief that the general was not responsible for the letters but "nevertheless, . . . they had left a sting which rankled on his mind . . ." Crandall and Newell, History of the Ram Fleet, pp. 301-02.

⁶⁴Thompson and Wainwright, eds., Confidential Correspondence of G. V. Fox, 2: 165-66.

The question of combat effectiveness was not to be answered as the Brigade never reached the fighting. The Brigade was ordered up the Tennessee with numerous instructions. First, the Brigade was to report to Maj. Gen. Steven A. Hurlbut, commanding Sixteenth Corps at Memphis, but General Ellet chose not to report to him. On 9 April, Hurlbut ordered Brig. Gen. Grenville M. Dodge to reprimand Ellet upon his arrival at Corinth, Mississippi. Grant had requested Porter to send the Brigade up the Tennessee River so that it might cooperate with Dodge and meet a threatened Confederate attack in northern Mississippi and Alabama. Ellet was instructed to help Col. Abel D. Streight's command capture horses and mules in order to mount the unit for a raid into Confederate territory and then to convoy the expedition to Eastport, Mississippi, where Streight's command would disembark and proceed with his orders. Finally, Ellet was to destroy "all rafts, flatboats, skiffs or canoes and destroy all the means they [Confederate] may have of transporting an army. Saw mills should be destroyed and lumber burned up" ⁶⁵

General Ellet and the Brigade were delayed at Cairo for four days when it became difficult to obtain sufficient coal.

⁶⁵Crandall and Newell, History of the Ram Fleet, p. 266; Grant to Halleck, 4 April 1863, OR, ser. 1, 24, pt. 1: 25; Hurlbut to Dodge, 9 April 1863, OR, ser. 1, 24, pt. 3: 181; Grant to Hurlbut, 4 April 1863, ibid., p. 172; Grant to Porter, 4 April 1863, ORN, ser. 1, 24: 76; Crandall and Newell, History of the Ram Fleet, p. 270. Streight's raid, conducted 26 April-3 May 1863, ended with the surrender of his unit to Confederate army forces. Streight's report was made in August 1864.

Ellet used these days to obtain supplies and perform repair work on the vessels. Leaving Cairo on 14 April, the Brigade arrived at Fort Henry the next day. The Brigade then convoyed Colonel Streight's unit to Eastport, Mississippi, arriving there on the nineteenth of April. On 14 April, Dodge queried Hurlbut as to Ellet's whereabouts. Hurlbut notified Grant:

[the] Marine Brigade has not reported yet. If Ellet has gone up the Tennessee, as directed, he will be in time to co-operate. If not, he should be cashiered for running by me without reporting. His assistance would be invaluable at this time, provided his command is of any use at all, which I do not know.⁶⁶

Ellet reported that he opened communications with Dodge at Eastport. Dodge requested that the Brigade move to Savannah and make a demonstration there to distract the enemy's attention while Dodge advanced on Tuscumbia, Alabama. Upon reaching Savannah, Tennessee, the Brigade cavalry disembarked and proceeded east to Craven's Mill, eighteen miles from Savannah, where the cavalry destroyed the mill, Confederate stores, and a Confederate regimental headquarters. The federals were forced from Tuscumbia on 18 April. The general commanding Union forces there, Maj. Gen. Richard J. Oglesby, reported to Hurlbut that the Union forces lost the town since the Marine Brigade failed to arrive. Hurlbut believed Ellet's Brigade "willfully delayed at Cairo

⁶⁶Hurlbut to Grant, 14 April 1863, OR, ser. 1, 24, pt. 3: 193; Itinerary of Marine Brigade for April 1863, OR, ser. 1, 23, pt. 1: 279; Dodge to Hurlbut, 14 April 1863, OR, ser. 1, 24, pt. 3: 192; A. W. Ellet to Porter, undated report, ORN, ser. 1, 24: 529; Kenneth P. Williams, Lincoln Finds A General: A Military Study of the Civil War, 5 vols. (New York: Macmillan, 1950-1959), 5: 186.

five days, as I am informed . . . His boats are reported too deep to go up to Tuscombia [sic], or even Eastport."⁶⁷

Porter had expressed the view that the Brigade was "well organized and will, no doubt, do good service."⁶⁸

Ellet's unit raided the area near the river, destroying several mills and large amounts of lumber, but as the water was becoming very low, he was forced to return downstream. Oglesby reported, however, that the river was rising at this time. On Sunday morning, 26 April, three miles below the mouth of the Duck River, the Brigade was attacked by a regiment of 700 rebels and two pieces of artillery. "The enemy had evidently mistaken us for unarmed boats, and were unprepared for the resistance they met with. We repulsed them with severe loss . . . and pursued their retreat some 12 miles."⁶⁹

After the battle the "west bank of the Tennessee River was lined with refugees, who have been driven from their homes for love to the old Union."⁷⁰ Ellet exhausted his supplies providing for the refugees and, since the water in the river

⁶⁷Hurlbut to Lt. Col. John A. Rawlins, assistant adjutant general at Milliken's Bend, 20 April 1863, OR, ser. 1, 24, pt. 3: 214; Maj. Gen. Richard J. Oglesby to Hurlbut, 19 April 1863, OR, ser. 1, 23, pt. 1: 244; A. W. Ellet to Porter, undated report, ORN, ser. 1, 24: 529-31.

⁶⁸Porter to Welles, 9 April 1863, ORN, ser. 1, 24: 79.

⁶⁹A. W. Ellet to Porter, undated report, *ibid.*, p. 530; Oglesby to Hurlbut, 19 April 1863, OR, ser. 1, 23, pt. 1: 244; A. W. Ellet to Stanton, 30 April 1863, *ibid.*, p. 278; Crandall and Newell, History of the Ram Fleet, pp. 277-78; Miller, Photographic History, 6: 69.

⁷⁰A. W. Ellet to Stanton, 30 April 1863, OR, ser. 1, 23, pt. 1: 279.

was too low to remain or attempt to go upstream to reach Dodge, the Brigade returned to Fort Henry. On 7 May, the Brigade left the river, having destroyed a large number of flatboats and ferryboats and transported a large number of Unionists out of the combat zone.⁷¹ Arriving at Cairo on Friday, 8 May, the Brigade immediately began to repair the damage sustained while on the Tennessee River.

Ellet shortly received orders from Washington to proceed down the Mississippi to Vicksburg. Accordingly, the Brigade set sail from Cairo on the sixteenth. Proceeding at a leisurely pace, stopping frequently to exercise men and horses, Ellet passed Memphis on 22 May. About thirty-five miles above Helena, Arkansas, the Fairchild, the commissary and quartermaster boat, was fired upon from an academy located about a half a mile above Austin, Mississippi.⁷²

When General Ellet heard of the attack made on the Fairchild and a small trading boat, the Bostonia, he issued orders for the return of the fleet to Austin. The Baltic, the Fairchild, the Raine, the Lioness, and the Fulton were to proceed south to the mouth of White River while the remainder of the fleet would return for the "punishment" of the guerrillas. The Brigade

⁷¹A. W. Ellet to Porter, undated report, ORN, ser. 1, 24: 530.

⁷²Halleck to A. W. Ellet, 20 May 1863, OR, ser. 1, 24, pt. 3: 333; Crandall and Newell, History of the Ram Fleet, p. 285; Clarke, ed., Warfare Along the Mississippi, p. 79. Austin, Mississippi, with a peacetime population of 100, was described by Currie as a "clean neat snugly build little town . . . [with] homes [that] were comfortable, if not elegant, streets clean, lawns and gardens well kept and brightened with groups of women and children in holiday attire, presented . . . a peace and calm and quiet happiness . . ." Clarke, ed., Warfare Along the Mississippi, pp. 77-78.

started at 2:00 A.M. on Sunday, 24 May, reaching Austin at sunrise.

Ellet planned to disembark the cavalry as soon as the boats reached Austin and then follow with the infantry. Major Hubbard, commanding the Union cavalry, encountered the enemy eight miles from the town. The Confederate units, the Second Arkansas Cavalry and the Second Mississippi Partisans, numbered 1,000 men and two pieces of artillery. The rebels cut off Hubbard's command by surrounding him in a woods. Hubbard was able to repel the enemy's repeated charges with his dismounted cavalry until the Brigade infantry finally arrived and drove the rebels from the field.⁷³

The Brigade returned to the town; the officers and men went to their quarters while the horses were unsaddled and cared for. It came as a surprise to Lieutenant Colonel Currie, who commanded the Brigade infantry regiment, when General Ellet's orderlies and the provost detachment, having searched each building in the town, read an order issued by the Brigade headquarters to the effect that at 4:00 P.M. every house in the town would be burned. The search was undertaken since the general believed that the illicit trade of smuggling goods into Confederate lines was centered in Austin. Ellet's official report listed whiskey, salt, molasses, fish, dry goods, medicines

⁷³Crandall and Newell, History of the Ram Fleet, p. 285; Clarke, ed., Warfare Along the Mississippi, pp. 79-82; Brig. Gen. James R. Chalmers to Gen. Johnston Canton, 26 May 1863, OR, ser. 1, 24, pt. 2: 430; A. W. Ellet to Porter, undated report, ORN, ser. 1, 24: 531.

in large quantities and unbroken packages as being discovered in the town. Capt. Isaac D. Newell, the brigade provost marshal, reported nothing of importance being discovered, and only a small quantity of contraband was confiscated.⁷⁴

The townspeople begged the general to reconsider, but to no avail. Currie, describing the conflagration, observed "those who in boasted chivalry, had gone in the service for protection of home and country" were engaged in the "valiant struggle" of subduing women and children by that most barbarous crime of arson.⁷⁵

An immense explosion during the fire occurred in the basement of the courthouse, where a quantity of Confederate ammunition, probably overlooked in the search, had been stored. Currie, in describing the actions at Austin in a letter, felt that each soldier in the Brigade:

resented the part he was compelled to play in that disgraceful affair It was an unmilitary act to say the least. A stain upon that record which we worked hard to make brilliant. It was one of those unnecessary acts . . . and he who cannot command himself to judge dispassionately and without motives of revenge should never be a commander of men⁷⁶

The Brigade then continued south to Vicksburg and arrived there Friday morning, 29 May 1863. At this time Grant requested

⁷⁴Crandall and Newell, History of the Ram Fleet, pp. 289-90; Clarke, ed., Warfare Along the Mississippi, pp. 82-84; A. W. Ellet to Porter, undated report, ORN, ser. 1, 24: 531.

⁷⁵Clarke, ed., Warfare Along the Mississippi, p. 83.

⁷⁶Crandall and Newell, History of the Ram Fleet, p. 290; Clarke, ed., Warfare Along the Mississippi, pp. 83-84; Chicago Tribune, 30 May 1863.

that Porter "send the Marine Brigade--a floating non-descript force . . . which proved very useful--up to Haines' Bluff to hold it until reinforcements could be sent."⁷⁷ The Brigade was relieved by regular forces on the thirty-first, and then the fleet was used to transport reinforcements to Grant. However, General Ellet refused to disembark his Brigade so that the transports could carry more men; and, instead, his entire command, including horses, remained on board. Grant observed that "They are not subject to my orders, or it would be different."⁷⁸

After transporting troops, the Brigade participated in an expedition with Brig. Gen. Joseph A. Mower and his command. The expedition engaged the enemy at Richmond, Louisiana, on 15 June and subsequently destroyed the town. A second operation conducted in June involved the Raine and the Brigade troops assigned to it. The expedition, under the command of Lt. Col. Samuel J. Nasmith of the Twenty-fifth Wisconsin Volunteer Infantry, proceeded from Greenville, Mississippi, to Spanish Moss Bend, Arkansas. Upon arriving, all troops were ordered to disembark. The troops on the Raine under Major Hubbard, refused to obey the order. Nasmith concluded that "the portion of the

⁷⁷Personal Memoirs of U. S. Grant (1895; reprint ed., New York: Bonanza Books, n.d.) p. 455; A. W. Ellet to Porter, undated report, ORN, ser. 1, 24: 531; Grant to Porter, 29 May 1863, OR, ser. 1, 24, pt. 3: 361.

⁷⁸Grant to General Washburn, 23 July 1863, OR, ser. 1, 24, pt. 3: 546; Crandall and Newell, History of the Ram Fleet, pp. 294, 296; Grant to Porter, 31 May 1863, OR, ser. 1, 24, pt. 3: 368.

Marine Brigade which accompanied me proved to be entirely worthless," since his orders were never willingly obeyed. Instead, "the officer in command was disposed to find fault and cavil when any real service was required of them."⁷⁹

The Brigade also participated in siege operations at Vicksburg in June 1863. Lt. Col. George E. Currie, during a personal reconnaissance, found a location for an artillery piece which could disrupt a steam foundry operating inside Vicksburg. The foundry was producing cannonball and shot for the Confederate defenders. A 20-pound Parrott gun was requisitioned from Porter and located across the river from the foundry. After many hazardous hours and days constructing the position at night, the gun was fired at 9:00 A.M. Tuesday, 23 June. The foundry was destroyed on the twenty-fifth, and subsequently other targets in the city were damaged. The position, called Fort Adams for the name of the vessel Currie commanded, was under continuous Confederate artillery fire, but the city of Vicksburg surrendered before the position could be destroyed.⁸⁰

After the last Confederate strongpoint surrendered, the Mississippi River was free of obstructions. But, instead of

⁷⁹Lt. Col. Samuel J. Nasmith to Lt. Col. John A. Rawlins, 1 July 1863, OR, ser. 1, 24, pt. 2: 517-18; Brig. Gen. Joseph A. Mower to Capt. J. K. Pierson, acting assistant adjutant general, 17 June 1863, OR, ser. 1, 24, pt. 2: 451; Brig. Gen. Alexander Asboth to Halleck, 18 June 1863; OR, ser. 1, 24, pt. 2: 507; Charles A. Dana, assistant secretary of war, to Stanton, 21 June 1863, OR, ser. 1, 24, pt. 1: 102; Nasmith to Rawlins, 1 July 1863, OR, ser. 1, 24, pt. 2: 517; C. A. Dana to Stanton, 18 June 1863, Stanton Papers.

⁸⁰Crandall and Newell, History of the Ram Fleet, p. 304; A. W. Ellet to Porter, 9 July 1863, ORN, ser. 1, 25: 77; Capt. Thomas C. Groshon, commanding Fort Adams, to A. W. Ellet, 5 July 1863, *ibid.*, pp. 78-79; Clarke, ed., Warfare Along the Mississippi, pp. 86-91.

being used to patrol the river against guerrillas, the Brigade was providing troop transports for Grant's army.⁸¹ Thus, the Mississippi Marine Brigade had been in a combat zone for four and one-half months, participating in various types of military operations, but had yet to conduct anti-guerrilla operations, the task for which the unit had been designed, raised, and outfitted.

⁸¹Porter to A. W. Ellet, 22 July 1863, ORN, ser. 1, 25: 319; Crandall and Newell, History of the Ram Fleet, p. 296.

CHAPTER VII

THE MARINE BRIGADE AND THE WAR IN THE WEST

The summer of 1863 was the turning point of the war; Union victories in both western and eastern theaters ushered in the final scenes of the Confederacy. This summer also introduced the denouement of the Mississippi Marine Brigade. The loss of the Queen of the West and the Lancaster, the subsequent command conflicts, and the question of combat effectiveness strengthened a growing movement, developing since November 1862, both in the West and in Washington, to place the Brigade (and the Ram Fleet) under army control. Rear Adm. David D. Porter's report, suspending Brig. Gen. Alfred W. Ellet from command, had also contained his recommendation to transfer the Brigade to army authority, minus the Ram Fleet, which Porter wanted for the navy. Gideon Welles approached Edwin M. Stanton on 16 April, urging either the merger of the combat troops and their transports into the army or the discharge of the entire Brigade.¹

¹Welles to Stanton, 16 April 1863, U.S., Department of the Navy, Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies in the War of the Rebellion, Richard Rush et al, eds., 30 vols. (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1894-1914), ser. 1, 24: 548 (hereafter cited as ORN); Porter to Welles, 2 April 1863, *ibid.*, pp. 522-24. Porter expressed his opinion concerning the vessels comprising the Ram Fleet in a letter to Welles in April 1863. The Ram Fleet, Porter insisted, "should be turned

In mid-July 1863, Porter noted the army's need for steam transports and coincidentally the Brigade's capability to accommodate 10,000 men on its vessels. By placing the Brigade under Maj. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant, all military movements could be properly directed and coordinated. The Brigade had now become so small that its combat effectiveness was no longer available for use against the guerrillas on the Mississippi. If placed under Grant's command, 10,000 men could be moved to any point required for the suppression of guerrillas. Porter had repeatedly offered to have the Brigade report to Grant for orders, but Grant preferred the unit to be placed under his control completely, so that he could make permanent organizational changes.²

Because Grant was commander-in-chief of the Army of the Mississippi, it was not correct military procedure for a separate military force to be conducting independent operations. Furthermore, the Brigade was no longer needed on the river, as Porter felt the guerrillas were being controlled by his gunboats. Porter concluded that the Brigade could not exist as a separate army corps and was convinced that it was in the national interests that the Brigade be abolished or attached to the army, where

over entirely to the Navy, to have naval officers on board, and the present officers to be attached to the Marine Brigade or to be got rid of. Whatever disaster may happen to those vessels is attached to the Navy, while any success is appropriated by the Ellet Ram Fleet." Porter to Welles, 11 April 1863, ORN, ser. 1, 24: 541.

²Porter to Welles, 13 July 1863, U.S., War Department, The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies, R. N. Scott et al, eds., 130 vols. (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1880-1901), ser. 1, 24, pt. 3: 565 (hereafter cited as OR).

it could be made more useful and be kept under military rule. Furthermore, Porter was hesitant to order units of soldiers to land along the river, since Grant was positioning troops of his command at different points for the purpose of providing protection to the area. Thus, to order Brigade units into areas of Grant's jurisdiction would interfere with his lawful right of command.³

Stanton informed Welles on 5 August that Maj. Gen. Henry W. Halleck and he had agreed that since the transfer of the Brigade to the army and the Ram Fleet to the navy had been discussed in the Cabinet and a negative verdict reached, no further action should be taken to change the decision at the time. The navy remained, therefore, in command of the Brigade, or so it appeared. On 24 August, Halleck authorized Grant to use any of Ellet's Brigade for temporary shore duty and any of his vessels for temporary transports as the need arose. However, Stanton would

³Porter to Welles, 2 April 1863, ORN, ser. 1, 24: 523; Porter to Welles, 16 August 1863, ORN, ser. 1, 25: 370; Kenneth P. Williams, Lincoln Finds A General: A Military Study of the Civil War, 5 vols. (New York: Macmillan, 1950-1959), 5: 101. Stanton was informed by his own subordinates of the situation. Adjutant General Thomas contended "No allusion is made to the complaints--the ostensible ground of action in the matter--but the purpose is evident, to get the Brigade ashore, dispossessed of the boats. And it is likewise apparent that both Porter and Grant at that time desired this result--each from motives of his own--doubtless believed by each to be for the best interests of the service." Thomas to Stanton, 14 August 1863, Warren D. Crandall and Isaac D. Newell, History of the Ram Fleet and the Mississippi Marine Brigade in the War for the Union on the Mississippi and Its Tributaries: The Story of the Ellets and their Men (St. Louis: Buschart Brothers, 1907), p. 316. C. A. Dana, assistant secretary of war, maintained that the Marine Brigade was "very useless, as well as a very costly institution." Dana to Stanton, 11 June 1863, Edwin McMasters Stanton Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, D. C.

not approve the conversion of the Brigade into a regular land brigade since it "was organized and the men enlisted especially for service as river-men, in conjunction with either the military or naval forces, as circumstances might require."⁴ The Brigade had proven valuable and could still be quite useful against guerrilla units in the West, according to the secretary.

On 27 August, Grant received a second order authorizing him to assume command of the Marine Brigade and to take all necessary steps to correct its discipline and restore proper military authority. He was not authorized to disband the Brigade but would be able to detach and assign to shore duty any element deemed necessary for the best public interest. General Ellet was informed by Stanton of this on Saturday, 29 August. It seemed apparent that no one in the War Department deemed it of sufficient importance to inform the navy of this major shift in command structure, since during this period reports were received in Washington from Porter which indicated no knowledge of such a change. On Sunday, 20 September, Porter was unofficially informed of the transfer. He requested confirmation from Welles as quickly as possible since the squadron was supplying the Marine Brigade with coal--an item in short supply until the river was high enough to bring coal barges south. Porter observed

⁴Halleck to Grant, 24 August 1863, OR, ser. 1, 30, pt. 3: 144; Stanton to Welles, 5 August 1863, OR, ser. 1, 24, pt. 3: 576. Stanton feared that the men, enlisted for a special service, might have a legal claim to release from their contract if the type of service was changed. Halleck to Grant, 24 August 1863, OR, ser. 1, 30, pt. 3: 144.

that if the rumor proved true, the army could assume logistical support for the Brigade. The Navy Department replied that no confirmation or information concerning the transfer of Ellet's Brigade had been received.⁵

Grant ordered the concentration of the Brigade at Vicksburg for reorganization in October. Porter, not having any guidance from the navy, declined to interfere and continued to wait "until the usual steps are taken that are customary from one Department to another."⁶ Welles, displeased with the situation, questioned the procedure in handling the transfer. The War Department indicated that correspondence received from Porter, favorably endorsed by the Navy Department, had convinced them that the navy desired a transfer of the command responsibilities for the unit. Thereupon the Navy Department, though ruffled, acquiesced in the transfer and notified Porter on Wednesday, 21 October 1863.⁷

⁵Halleck to Grant, 27 August 1863, OR, ser. 1, 30, pt. 3: 183; Stanton to A. W. Ellet, 29 August 1863, Stanton Papers; Porter to Welles, 20 September 1863, ORN, ser. 1, 25: 295; Welles to Porter, 29 September 1863, ibid., p. 295; Crandall and Newell, History of the Ram Fleet, p. 321. Grant was directed to correct the disciplinary problem in the Brigade, bringing all guilty parties to trial and punishment. The order Ellet received from Stanton simply stated: "Your command has been placed under charge of Major-General Grant. All applications for authority to recruit, or for other purposes, must be made to him." Stanton to Ellet, 29 August 1863, OR, ser. 1, 30, pt. 3: 212. See also Halleck to Grant, 27 August 1863, ibid., p. 183.

⁶Porter to Welles, 12 October 1863, ORN, ser. 1, 25: 296; Porter to Welles, 4 October 1863, ibid.

⁷Porter to Welles, 12 October 1863, ibid.; Stanton to Welles, 14 October 1863, ibid., p. 297; Welles to Porter, 19 October 1863, ibid., p. 300; Welles to Porter, 21 October 1863, Gideon Welles Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, D. C. Porter and

Grant, named commander of the Military Division of the Mississippi in mid-October 1863, placed Maj. Gen. William T. Sherman, commander of the Army of the Tennessee, in charge of the Marine Brigade. Porter, in a letter of 29 October, recommended that Sherman carry through the plan Grant and the admiral had agreed upon--the breakup of the unit, with the vessels to be used as transports while the officers and men were to be reorganized as a regular infantry brigade. "I do hope," Porter pleaded, "you will break up the whole concern as General Grant intended to do. The country will be served by so doing. These are the very vessels wanted in the Tennessee as transports."⁸

Although it had been Grant's original intention to take the Ram Fleet and refit these vessels as transports, in the end the rams remained a part of the Ellet Brigade. General Ellet succeeded, through an underhanded and questionable tactic, in retaining the rams. Porter related to Fox his view concerning the situation in mid-November 1863. Describing Ellet, Porter related that the general was determined to have an independent command "and has set General Grant's order at defiance, and paid no attention to the Secretary of War." If the Marine Brigade were deactivated, he planned on falling back on the Ram Fleet.⁹

General Ellet parted on cordial terms. Porter wrote, "as our official relations are at an end, permit me to express my appreciation of the zeal you have always manifested in regard to the public service" Porter to Ellet, 30 October 1863, ORN, ser. 1, 25: 301.

⁸Porter to Sherman, 29 October 1863, OR, ser. 1, 31, pt. 1: 783; U.S., Department of the Army, American Military History 1607-1958 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1959), p. 256.

⁹Porter to Fox, 14 November 1863, ORN, ser. 1, 25: 558.

As part of Ellet's plan, new rams were being constructed from surplus funds appropriated for the Ram Fleet. Obviously, a new squadron of rams with the capability of independent operation would soon be on the river. Ellet had earlier requested the construction of a new, stronger, better armored gunboat/ram so he might not have to depend on naval forces for support. Earlier in the summer of 1863, Porter himself, undoubtedly assuming the Marine Brigade would remain under his authority, had recommended an increase in personnel strength of the unit. The fleet was capable of transporting two more regiments, one of infantry and one of cavalry. "The organization is very small in numbers and the increase I ask for would add much to its efficiency . . . General Ellet . . . does not mind what duty he is performing as long as he can serve the cause."¹⁰

¹⁰Porter to Welles, 2 July 1863, *ibid.*, p. 214; K. R. Breese to Porter, 12 November 1863, *ibid.*, p. 559; A. W. Ellet to Brooks, 1 August 1862, *OR*, ser. 1, 17, pt. 2: 148-49; Ellet to Stanton, 28 September 1862, *ibid.*, p. 241; Robert M. Thompson and Richard Wainwright, eds., Confidential Correspondence of Gustavus Vasa Fox Assistant Secretary of the Navy 1861-1865, 2 vols. (New York: DeVinne Press, 1920), 2: 193. Fox inquired about the rams under construction at New Albany. Halleck informed him that Stanton was willing to transfer them to the navy if Porter would only inform them where they were, since no one in the War Department knew about them. Yet a report from Lt. Comdr. K. Randolph Breese on 12 November stated that the rams had been "authorized by Mr. Stanton, who rather objected to having any iron put on them, as it might be considered infringing on the Navy, and they be styled gunboats. General Meigs also has inspected them, and I believe they are regularly recognized by the War Department." Breese to Porter, 12 November 1863, *ORN*, ser. 1, 25: 559. Grant was informed of these rams by his quartermaster general and immediately ordered the cessation of the work, as the need for railroad steam engines was of more importance. Thompson and Wainwright, eds., Confidential Correspondence of G. V. Fox, 2: 193, 195; Brig. Gen. R. Allen to Grant, 19 November 1863, *OR*, ser. 1, 31, pt. 3: 195.

During the hectic month of August 1863, while control of the Marine Brigade passed from naval to army hands, Gen. Alfred W. Ellet went to Philadelphia on leave. Col. Charles Rivers Ellet, no longer on cordial terms with his uncle, resigned his commission and left for home on 21 August.¹¹ Lt. Col. George E. Currie assumed command and ordered the Brigade on a reconnaissance patrol down the Mississippi. Currie, attempting to prove the military value of the unit and his ability as an officer, encountered minor guerrilla forces. His sortie would have accomplished little if his troops had not accidentally captured three Confederate officers, including the paymaster of the Confederate Army of Mississippi. Captured along with the officers

¹¹Norman E. Clarke, Sr., ed., Warfare Along the Mississippi: The Letters of Lieutenant Colonel George E. Currie (Mount Pleasant: Central Michigan University, 1961), pp. 93-94; Gene D. Lewis, Charles Ellet, Jr. The Engineer As Individualist 1810-1862 (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1968), p. 213; A. W. Ellet to Stanton, 21 September 1863, OR, ser. 1, 30, pt. 3: 757; Special Order No. 402, War Department, 8 September 1863, Record Group 94, "Records of the Adjutant General's Office," National Archives, Washington, D. C. (hereafter cited as RG 94). Charles Rivers Ellet's health, never good, had deteriorated during active service. In October, he visited his uncle Edward at Bunker Hill, Illinois. At the time he was suffering from neuralgia of the face. (Neuralgia was an "affection" of one or more nerves (especially in the head or face) causing pain, which was usually of an intermittent but frequently intense character.) Oxford English Dictionary, s.v. "neuralgia." Before retiring for the evening, Charles Rivers Ellet took a pain killer and died in his sleep, Thursday evening, 29 October 1863. Some historians conjecture that Charles Rivers, only twenty years old at his death, had died of an overdose of the drug he used to kill the pain. His death "resulted either from that cause [neuralgia], or from an injudicious though usual remedy taken to alleviate the pain." New York Times, 29 November 1863; Lewis, Charles Ellet, Jr., p. 213; Stanton to A. W. Ellet, 1 November 1863, ORN, ser. 1, 25: 301; Baltimore American and Commercial Advertiser, 3 November 1863. Charles Rivers Ellet was buried next to his father and mother at Laurel Hill Cemetery, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Crandall and Newell, History of the Ram Fleet, p. 333.

was \$2,200,000 in Confederate funds. The value of the captured currency computed at fifteen cents on the United States dollar was \$1,200,000. Even without an Ellet in command, the Brigade could perform valuable service for the Union.¹²

By October 1863, the Mississippi Marine Brigade had completely returned to army control. With the return to army command channels, the Brigade finally assumed the full time function of a riverine force with the mission of searching out and destroying Confederate guerrilla units in the Mississippi River valley. However, while performing this mission, the Brigade earned a questionable reputation by committing crimes, plundering, pillaging, devastating, and looting the civilian population, both Unionist and rebel, along the western waters.

Discipline in the Brigade was never a showcase for the Union forces. This was recognized by a court of inquiry convened in February 1863, to investigate the refusal of Josiah Reeder, a pilot on board the Queen of the West, to obey a lawful order. The findings of the court noted that the pilots, engineers, firemen, and men on board the rams considered themselves neither soldiers nor sailors; the personnel were ignorant of regulations and laws to which they were subject; some personnel were allowed to disobey orders while others were punished for the same offense; and, in general, the discipline of the unit was poor. The court

¹²Clarke, ed., Warfare Along the Mississippi, pp. 95, 99-100; A. W. Ellet to Stanton, 21 September 1863, OR, ser. 1, 30, pt. 3: 757; Stanton to A. W. Ellet, 21 September 1863, ibid.

sustained all charges, but having considered the "imperfect understanding had with the immediate commanders of the ram fleet, and apparently irregular manner of doing things on those vessels, the accused is hereby released from any further proceedings, and is at liberty to go"13

Other examples of disciplinary cases occurring in the Brigade included the case of W. G. Curtis, an engineer on the Queen of the West, who was charged with mutiny and language unbecoming an officer. A court martial was conducted with no results. A second case involved Joe M. Davis, a pilot on the Queen of the West, charged with deserting his post. At the same time, charges were brought against the pilot of the Switzerland, Alexander C. Smith, for the same offense. Both men were sent under arrest to Sherman in Memphis. No further action was taken.

A third case involved Lt. J. H. Johnson, one of three officers from the Fifty-ninth Illinois in the original detail of men to the fleet. Johnson was arrested for desertion but appealed to General Ellet for leniency. Ellet withdrew the charges and ordered him to report back to his former unit. A second case for cowardice in the face of the enemy involved Lt. W. B. Russell, of the Sixty-third Illinois, commander of the Lancaster. He was returned to his former regiment. One man, R. S. Grooms, deserted in October 1862; he was never captured. In like manner, no evidence was found to sustain a

¹³Report of Court of Inquiry, 29 March 1863, OR, ser. 1, 24, pt. 3: 161; Crandall and Newell, History of the Ram Fleet, pp. 237, 239.

charge in the case of a pilot named Garvey, who reputedly ran the Queen of the West aground under the Confederate guns at Fort DeRussy and whose incompetence and possible treasonous act had caused the loss of the ram. The charge was finally dropped. Other areas of disciplinary problems included gambling on board the vessels; the wearing of civilian clothing with the military uniform; straggling while on the march; boisterous yelling, laughing, running, dancing, and wrestling on the ships; spitting on the deck by the men; and the soldiers' cleanliness. The official history of the Brigade observed that for all practical purposes "the force of whatever discipline was attempted, was found alone in the inconvenience and disgrace attached to a period of arrest."¹⁴

One final incident will suffice to illustrate the problem of discipline in the Brigade. Widespread dissatisfaction throughout the Brigade resulted from the quality and quantity of the food being served in the enlisted men's mess. This dissatisfaction led to insubordination and violence. The command, only recently organized, had not yet adjusted to life on the

¹⁴Crandall and Newell, History of the Ram Fleet, pp. 135, 236-37, 240-41; Special Order No. 53, Headquarters, Mississippi Marine Brigade, 20 May 1863, RG 94; General Order No. 7, Headquarters, Mississippi Marine Brigade, June 1863, *ibid.*; General Order No. 1, Headquarters, Mississippi Marine Brigade, 4 January 1864, *ibid.*; Order of March, 15 April 1864, *ibid.* Orders were issued forbidding the men from bathing in the river during the heat of the day. Instead, the troops could bathe in the early morning from 5:00 A.M. to 9:00 A.M. or in the evening from 6:00 P.M. to 8:00 P.M. This instruction was later modified because the surgeon believed "the health of the men of this command to have been heretofore greatly impaired by the constant practice of bathing during the heat of the day" General Order No. 8, U.S.S. Diana, 24 June 1863, RG 94; General Order No. 9, Headquarters, Mississippi Marine Brigade, 20 June 1864, *ibid.*

steamboats, and the cooks were inexperienced. The disturbance, once quelled, had to be met with disciplinary action. The four men considered to be the leaders of the incident were arrested and court martialed. Various sentences were imposed, ranging from the loss of four months pay with a reduction to the rank of private, to the loss of twelve months pay with twelve months at hard labor. In addition, regulations were issued supervising meals on board the boats. Elaborate facing movements were required in marching each company to the table. Further, the meals were to be taken in a becoming and orderly manner with hats removed and in silence. Upon completion of the meal, the company was to be marched from the dining hall. Finally, no soldier was allowed in the dining room except at meal times.¹⁵

These cases raised an issue finally decided by the judge advocate general's office in Washington, D. C. Stanton questioned under what legal auspices pilots, engineers, and boatmen of the Ram Fleet could be prosecuted and punished for offenses committed while on active duty. The War Department legal advisor ruled that the Ram Fleet, a special unit of the army, was under the laws and regulations governing the discipline

¹⁵Crandall and Newell, History of the Ram Fleet, p. 263; Rules and Regulations of U.S.S. Diana, 13 March 1863, RG 94; General Order No. 6, U.S.S. Diana, 14 June 1863, *ibid.*; Special Order, U.S.S. Baltic, 2 December 1863, *ibid.*

of the army. However, the pilots, engineers, and boatmen were neither officers nor enlisted men and could not be tried under the Articles of War. They were made subject to military orders in accordance with the regulations and discipline of war under a special article (Article 60). Interpreting Article 60 to include those individuals who served with the army by contract, hire, or pay (which included the men of the Ram Fleet), the persons under discussion could be tried by court martial under Article 60 of the Articles of War.¹⁶

Discipline was definitely a problem of the Brigade. Porter gave Ellet instructions concerning the Brigade's discipline in March 1863. Emphasizing good order, Porter hoped the general would not permit his troops to pillage or enter civilian houses, and if the situation required foraging for food, it had to be done under the supervision of an authorized officer. Furthermore, a distinction had to be made between Confederate owned cotton and loyal citizens' cotton. In most cases this distinction could have been easily determined, as cotton owned by the Confederate government was distinctly marked. As early as June 1862, the Confederate military, recognizing the increasing threat of confiscation by Union naval units, had issued orders that cotton should be stored at least twenty miles from any navigable waterway. The cotton was to be protected by a shed

¹⁶Opinion of Judge Advocate General, U. S. Army, 11 June 1863, OR, ser. 1, 24, pt. 3: 160; Welles to Porter, 6 February 1864, Welles Papers. Article 60 of the Articles of War read: "All sutlers and retainers to the camp, and all persons whatsoever, serving with the armies of the United States in the field, though not enlisted soldiers, are to be subject to orders, according to the rules and discipline of war." U.S., War Department, Revised

and guarded by one dependable man and four conscripts. These men were authorized to destroy the cotton if the enemy approached the area.¹⁷

Union forces, recognizing that the vast majority of cotton on the river belonged to the Confederate government, began to confiscate or destroy all cotton they found. Any captured cotton would be sold for the benefit of the United States government. Sherman observed that when the enemy burned cotton to avoid capture by the Union forces, it effectively helped the Union cause. As it was "their property . . . but so long as they have cotton, corn, horses, or anything, we will appropriate it or destroy it so long as their confederates in war act in violence to us and our lawful commerce."¹⁸

This official policy concerning cotton and the drastic measures taken to stem guerrilla warfare along the Mississippi created an atmosphere which was not conducive to good discipline. Porter had expressed his hope that the Mississippi Marine Brigade would be a model of discipline. However, incidents involving members of the Brigade were reported as early as August 1862, when Millikin's Bend and Richmond Station, Louisiana, were

Regulations for the Army of the United States 1861 (1861; reprint ed., Gettysburg: Civil War Times Illustrated, 1974), p. 508.

¹⁷Porter to A. W. Ellet, 26 March 1863, ORN, ser. 1, 24: 513-14; Arkansas State Gazette, 14 June 1862.

¹⁸Sherman to Lt. Comdr. E. K. Owen, commanding Fifth Division, Mississippi Squadron, 30 January 1864, OR, ser. 1, 32, pt. 1: 185; Porter to Welles, 1 February 1863, ORN, ser. 1, 24: 214; General Order No. 8, Headquarters, Right Wing Thirteenth Corps, 18 December 1862, ORN, ser. 1, 23: 557.

sacked and destroyed. The unnecessary destruction of Austin and Greenville, Mississippi, Simmesport, Louisiana, and numerous other towns attested to the violence of total war. Most of the towns destroyed by the Brigade were in retaliation for guerrilla units having fired upon federal boats nearby.

The Washington National Intelligencer observed:

the conduct of the troops . . . is becoming very prejudicial to our good name and to their efficiency. A spirit of destruction and wanton ferocity seems to have seized upon many of them, which is quite incredible . . . in fact, unless checked by summary example, there is danger of our whole noble army degenerating into a band of cut-throats and robbers.¹⁹

It was reported from numerous sources that the Marine Brigade, not exempt from this spirit described in the Washington newspaper, landed at many places along the river to commit what Lt. Comdr. T. O. Selfridge, who witnessed these actions, called "unnecessary depredations." Another critic, the chief of staff of the Department of the Gulf, reported that the Brigade stopped

¹⁹Washington National Intelligencer, 31 March 1864; Porter to A. W. Ellet, 26 March 1863, ORN, ser. 1, 24: 514; New York Times, 5 September 1862; A. W. Ellet to Stanton, 25 May 1863, ORN, ser. 1, 24, pt. 2: 431; Richmond Enquirer, 12 June 1863. Porter's anti-guerrilla order of February 1863, which threatened hanging for those caught as guerrillas and destruction of property of those who provided sanctuary for them, resulted in violent denunciations by the Confederates. Porter claimed his measures had worked, but some officers under his command despaired at having to commit such barbarities. The Confederate army requested in writing a confirmation from Grant of authenticity. The Richmond Enquirer described the Yankee navy as having "descended from his lofty position and assumed that of a marauder upon our river coast." Richmond Enquirer, 28 April 1863. The New York Times applauded the measures taken to deter guerrilla warfare, saying that "the hundreds of blackened chimneys along the river, give proof that the threat was not an idle one." New York Times, 4 April 1864. See also Porter to Welles, 12 December 1862, ORN, ser. 1, 23: 543-44; Crandall and Newell, History of the Ram Fleet, pp. 229-30, 232.

at every landing on the Red River, "solely for the purpose of pillaging and the destruction of private property."²⁰

Confederate forces also reported numerous crimes committed by the Brigade. On 12 April 1863, Col. S. W. Ferguson recommended to Brig. Gen. S. D. Lee that his force remain in the vicinity of Deer Creek since "that infernal expedition under Ellet, who burns and destroys everything on the river, has lately been on the river near here. He might land to destroy what is left."²¹ Ferguson also reported the capture of five members of the Brigade who had in their possession stolen private property from civilian houses in the area.

When Porter recommended the transfer of the Brigade to the army in July 1863, he mentioned having received a large number of complaints concerning depredations committed which, whether exaggerated or not, seemed to indicate a need of reorganization of the unit. One of these reports came from Lt. Edward Shaw, commanding the gunboat Juliet, who witnessed Ellet's men cross the river in small boats to the opposite shore, where all sorts of crimes were committed against civilians and apparently for no reason other than sheer mischief.²²

In August 1863, Grant forwarded a complaint from Natchez, Mississippi, to the adjutant general in Washington. While he

²⁰Brig. Gen. C. P. Stone, chief of staff, Department of the Gulf, to Major General McPherson, 29 March 1864, OR, ser. 1, 34, pt. 2: 768; Lt. Comdr. T. O. Selfridge to Porter, 22 September 1863, ORN, ser. 1, 25: 429.

²¹Col. S. W. Ferguson to Brig. Gen. S. D. Lee, 12 April 1863, OR, ser. 1, 24, pt. 1: 510.

²²Porter to Welles, 13 July 1863, OR, ser. 1, 24, pt. 3: 565; Lieutenant Shaw to Porter, 14 July 1863, ORN, ser. 1, 25: 302-03.

thought it highly probable that the charges were overstated, there was no doubt that the Brigade's conduct was undesirable, especially in comparison with the large cost to maintain the Brigade. The Brigade was accused by A. T. Bowie of Natchez with having stolen \$25,000 worth of silverware, liquors, meats, clothes, table and house linens from an old man seventy years of age. The company of marine cavalry claimed that they were independent of the authority of the United States and were paid for their services by captured booty.²³

Porter, in a letter dated 16 August urging the transfer of the Brigade, cited the effect the undesirable actions of the Brigade had among the population along the river as a major reason for its transfer and removal from the river. He had not reported these questionable incidents before as "a feeling of delicacy toward a branch of another corps prevented" his doing so.²⁴ But now the people were, Porter felt, willing to resume their allegiance if a conciliatory course were followed. A conciliatory spirit was not likely to be shown by an irregular

²³Grant to Brig. Gen. L. Thomas, Adjutant General, 14 August 1863, OR, ser. 1, 30, pt. 3: 24; A. T. Bowie to Brigadier General Ransom, 4 August 1863, *ibid.*, p. 25; Porter to Fox, 14 November 1863, ORN, ser. 1, 25: 558.

²⁴Porter to Sherman, 29 October 1863, OR, ser. 1, 31, pt. 1: 783; Porter to Welles, 16 August 1863, ORN, ser. 1, 25: 370; Welles to Porter, 6 February 1864, *ibid.*, p. 740; Lt. Comdr. James A. Greer, commanding Fourth District, Mississippi River, to Acting Lt. C. A. Wright, U.S.S. Forest Rose, 17 December 1863, *ibid.*, p. 641.

body of men composing the Brigade who considered every raid they made as being in the enemy's country.²⁵

In September and again in October, mention was made of numerous unnecessary crimes. In November, it was reported by Lt. George W. Brown, commanding the U. S. Naval Station at White River, Arkansas, that men uniformed as the Marine Brigade pillaged the plantation of Miles H. McGehee, a Unionist; the farm never having been abandoned but always occupied by its owner or his agents. The plantation had been visited on four separate occasions with the soldiers taking mules, horses, harness, buckles, ham, poultry, molasses, and cotton valued at \$15,000, and destroying the garden, fences, plants, trees, and the orchard to a value of \$3,000.²⁶

In January 1864, charges were pressed against units of the Mississippi Squadron. Porter was convinced that the charges originated from the conduct of the Ram Fleet or the Marine Brigade.

[These units commit] depredations on friends and foes alike There will be no justice on this river to the inhabitants until the Ram Fleet is broken up and the Marine Brigade placed under strict Army control, which is not the case at present.²⁷

²⁵Porter to Welles, 16 August 1863, ORN, ser. 1, 25: 370. The official history explained the Brigade's unpopularity with Confederates as they "'did not trouble themselves much about' the amenities of war.' They [the Brigade] saw so many irregularities committed by the enemy, that they retaliated, in many instances by destroying the property of disloyal persons, and often returned from an expedition with sufficient stores captured from the enemy to last them a month.'" Crandall and Newell, History of the Ram Fleet, p. 283.

²⁶Lt. George W. Brown, commanding naval forces on White River, to Porter, 10 November 1863, ORN, ser. 1, 25: 550-51.

²⁷Porter to Welles, 17 January 1864, *ibid.*, pp. 693-94.

Among the charges against the Brigade was the theft of \$20,000 worth of silverware, china, linen, damask curtains, liquors, pork, bacon, salt, Negroes' clothes and shoes, and books from the plantation of John Routh, a Union sympathizer. Near Natchez, Mississippi, the Brigade indiscriminately killed cattle and also stole cattle, mules, poultry, horses, and Negroes belonging to a Unionist named Duncan. A third plantation, belonging to C. J. Field, a Unionist, was robbed of all gold coin, horses, and silverware.

The Marine Brigade has done more toward embittering them (the people along the river) toward our cause than any movement yet made under the auspices of the Navy. Many who suffered thereby are known to entertain strong Union sentiments.²⁸

General Alfred W. Ellet, who was reportedly intolerant of any type of lawlessness, immediately attempted to answer these charges. Ellet claimed his investigation revealed that the majority of the stolen property had been taken by Negroes in the area of the claimant or had been procured for the use of the troops with no claim of reimbursement to the owner having been made. The remainder of the charges was justified by claiming that the owners of the "stolen" property were in actuality rebels participating in the war; thus, his troops acted correctly in confiscating implements of war and collecting "back taxes."²⁹

²⁸James A. Greer, commanding gunboat Benton, to Porter, 21 December 1863, *ibid.*, p. 697; John Routh, plantation owner, to Porter, 7 August 1863, *ibid.*, p. 696; C. J. Field, plantation owner, to Porter, 26 December 1863, *ibid.*, pp. 696-97.

²⁹A. W. Ellet to McPherson, 31 January 1864, *ibid.*, p. 727; statement by V. T. Waren, 7 November 1863, *ibid.*, pp. 727-28; Capt. J. R. Crandall to A. W. Ellet, 25 January 1864, *ibid.*, pp. 729-30; Crandall and Newell, History of the Ram Fleet, pp. 317-18.

After Ellet answered the charges of misconduct on the part of his Brigade, he was assigned the mission of providing protection to the government leased plantations on the Mississippi River. The policy of leasing plantations for the federal government was designed to supply cotton for the Union by utilizing abandoned or leased property. However, this policy was not without its critics. Sherman believed such a policy would be too costly in manpower and funds. "As a speculation this is a bad one. Every pound of cotton raised will cost the United States \$500, and so far as effect is concerned it will not have one particle of effect on the main war."³⁰

Sherman's criticism seemed to be valid, as illustrated by an expedition to Grand Gulf, Mississippi, in February-March 1864. The Brigade was to provide protection to the leased plantations in the area, to federal treasury agents who were to collect back taxes, and for the "Twelfth Louisiana Infantry, African Descent," who would attempt to recruit blacks for the regiment. However, Col. Charles A. Gilchrist, commanding the Twelfth Louisiana, reported that his troops were employed under General Ellet's order in hauling cotton bales from various plantations in the area. Ellet, Gilchrist claimed, had allowed cotton

³⁰Sherman to Lorenzo Thomas, 11 March 1864, OR, ser. 1, 32, pt. 3: 57; McPherson to A. W. Ellet, 3 January 1864, OR, ser. 1, 32, pt. 2: 20; Halleck to Grant, 16 February 1864, ibid., p. 407; Special Order No. 44, Headquarters, Army of the Tennessee, 27 February 1864, ibid., p. 488; Grant to Sherman, 4 March 1864, OR, ser. 1, 32, pt. 3: 19; Crandall and Newell, History of the Ram Fleet, p. 363.

clearly marked CSA or suspected of being Confederate property to be claimed as private property and sold to a cotton speculator who shipped the cotton to New Orleans. Gilchrist questioned the transporting of cotton at government expense without reimbursement for services. When the operation ended in early March, Gilchrist reported that his unit had marched 250 miles, damaged the regimental wagons, exposed his men to danger, and recruited twenty men.

As far as ending the war is concerned, we did just nothing at all; but, if anything, served to prolong it by assisting a lot of rebels and thieves to sell and get to market about 1,515 bales of private, C.S.A., and abandoned cotton, and a lot of speculators, whose loyalty I very much suspect, in making fortunes.³¹

Gilchrist estimated that \$200,000 worth of cotton was obtained, supposedly for the U. S. Treasury, but he concluded that not one cent found its way into the federal treasury. Instead, the general, the treasury agents, and the speculators took possession of all the cotton. As other high ranking military officers had also concluded, reports of guerrillas were originated by "some cotton stealers, who wanted an expedition sent out, so that they could follow in the wake and steal cotton."³²

The Brigade was suspected of cotton speculation, though without tangible evidence, as well as trading with the enemy.

³¹Col. Charles A. Gilchrist to Lt. Col. W. T. Clark, assistant adjutant general, 9 March 1864, OR, ser. 1, 32, pt. 1: 400; Gilchrist report, 9 March 1864, ibid., pp. 395-400.

³²McPherson to Sherman, 22 November 1863, OR, ser. 1, 31, pt. 3: 229; Gilchrist to Clark, 9 March 1864, OR, ser. 1, 32, pt. 1: 400.

Lt. Comdr. Elias K. Owen reported to Porter that, while he could not obtain any sworn testimony, he was convinced that the Brigade was selling all sorts of contraband to the rebels. He had heard this from hundreds of people from Vicksburg to Cypress Bend and therefore recommended the disbandment of the Brigade, since it was common knowledge that members of the Brigade would do anything and everything for money.³³

During the summer of 1864, the Brigade patrolled the river, conducted raids on rebel territory, and engaged almost daily in short skirmishes with Confederate guerrillas. Only two major engagements, the first at Lake Village, Arkansas, in June, and the second at Coleman's Plantation in July 1864, were of importance in the fourth summer of the war. Currie wrote that the battle at Coleman's Plantation had been

one of the most desperate I engaged in during the war. Had the rebel plans . . . "not gang aglae," without doubt the entire command would have been

³³Lt. Comdr. J. A. Greer to Lt. W. R. Hoel, commanding Pittsburg, 25 February 1864, ORN, ser. 1, 25: 785; Porter to Welles, 6 June 1864, ORN, ser. 1, 26: 363; Lt. Comdr. E. K. Owen to Porter, 29 May 1864, ibid., p. 335. Porter investigated quite thoroughly the illicit trade and made a report in May 1864. Included was an excerpt from a western newspaper, origin unknown, which editorialized "on one of the causes which has done much to unfit and dispirit this army. I refer to the wholesale venality and corruption which prevails. It is an astounding fact that nearly every prominent commander of the army post or controller of stores and transportation is openly accused of receiving bribes for favors. Cotton is the curse of the army of the lower Mississippi. Such vast sums are ready to be lavished on this staple, that it requires an inbred integrity to resist the temptation If ever [any] system was abused, the present policy of selling supplies to the rebels is All sorts of goods in large quantities, including contraband, are going to the enemy" Unmarked newspaper clipping as enclosure to Porter report to Welles, 31 May 1864, ibid., p. 343.

destroyed . . . and the capture of our entire fleet would have made it one of the most important victories of the South.³⁴

As fate would have it, these two engagements would be the last major actions of the Brigade. It had become apparent by June of 1864 that some action had to be taken by the War Department to correct command problems, alleged crimes against civilians, suspected cotton speculation, trade with the enemy, and the need for transports. The military need for a riverine force had also come to an end.³⁵ Assistant Secretary of War Charles A. Dana, reporting to Stanton, observed that the Brigade was a useless as well as a costly operation. In a letter to Quartermaster General Montgomery C. Meigs, James Brooks, quartermaster of the Marine Brigade, expressed his opinion about the efficiency and value of the Brigade. While the concept of such a military organization was sound and practical, the Brigade, through the necessity of being operational quickly, had been established with some inherent problems, the chief having been the recruitment of personnel from convalescents in the hospitals. Many of these men were found to be unfit for military service. An even larger number had adopted the lazy habits of malingerers, with the

³⁴Clarke, ed., Warfare Along the Mississippi, pp. 101, 122, 126; Capt. Perry Evans to Major Elliott, assistant adjutant general at Maj. Gen. S. D. Lee's headquarters, 13 June 1864, OR, ser. 1, 39, pt. 1: 232.

³⁵The Washington National Intelligencer reported that the western rivers were "so thoroughly guarded by this large fleet of gunboats [Mississippi Squadron] that is part to impossible [sic] for guerrillas to impede navigation or perpetrate any great damage to steamboats anywhere between Cairo and New Orleans." Washington National Intelligencer, 3 October 1863.

result that the Brigade became operational in March 1863 with poorly qualified personnel instead of well-ordered, disciplined men. However, the large majority of discipline problems were caused by the men and were not a failure of leadership or inefficiency on the part of the officers.³⁶

Finally, the War Department hesitated no longer, and on Wednesday, 3 August 1864, orders were issued deactivating the Mississippi Marine Brigade. The enlisted men with unexpired terms of service were to be returned to their former regiments from which they had originally enlisted. Those personnel with short periods of enlistment remaining were to be assigned garrison duty at Vicksburg. The officers appointed for the Brigade would be mustered out as soon as the transfer of men and property was completed. General Ellet would then proceed to Washington and report to Stanton. The vessels of the fleet were to be turned over to the quartermaster's department as part of the reserve transportation fleet.³⁷

The Brigade, inactive from 31 July to 4 August at Vicksburg, was instructed to prepare for an inspection by Maj. Gen. Napoleon J. T. Dana. The inspection was conducted on Sunday afternoon, 7 August. In August, the Brigade consisted of 976 men, comprising ten companies of mounted infantry and four companies of cavalry.

³⁶Charles A. Dana, assistant secretary of war, to Stanton, 11 June 1863, OR, ser. 1, 24, pt.1: 96-97; Brooks to Meigs, 19 July 1864, ORN, ser. 1, 26: 481.

³⁷Special Order No. 86, Headquarters, Military Division of West Mississippi, 3 August 1864, OR, ser. 1, 41, pt. 2: 535-36; Washington National Intelligencer, 26 August 1864.

The artillery battery had neither guns, arms, nor horses as this equipment had been requisitioned by Maj. Gen. James B. McPherson for an artillery battery when his army moved into the field. The fleet consisted of six large steam transports, three tow boats, three small steam tugs, two small rams, and six barges for cavalry. The transport capability of these vessels with the Brigade troops on board was 1,800 men, 1,042 horses, 20 wagons, and 650 tons of freight. The operational costs of the Brigade was extremely high, each transport costing \$100,000 to operate per year.³⁸

The Brigade's deactivation, like everything else the Brigade did, was not routine. As a result of the peculiar enlistment conditions of the Brigade, revised orders were issued which assigned the officers and men of the Brigade to a single infantry regiment. The consolidated marine regiment, commanded by Lt. Col. John A. Ellet, was assigned to the First Brigade, First Division, Seventeenth Corps at Vicksburg. The regiment reported on Saturday, 27 August 1864. About 3:00 P.M. it was reported to

³⁸Clarke, ed., Warfare Along the Mississippi, pp. 125-26; Maj. Gen. Napoleon J. T. Dana to Maj. C. T. Christensen, assistant adjutant general, 15 August 1864, OR, ser. 1, 41, pt. 2: 712-13. The results of the inspection were: First Regiment Mounted Infantry--Aggregate effective strength 543 with 289 serviceable, 54 unserviceable horses. Arms, equipment and accouterments in good condition. Discipline and sanitary conditions good. First Battalion Cavalry--Aggregate effective strength 247 with 174 serviceable, 42 unserviceable horses. The arms, equipment and clothing good. Sanitary condition good. Artillery battery--Aggregate effective strength 122 but without horses or equipment. Rams Switzerland and Monarch, in good order and effective as gunboats or rams; aggregate effective strength was 64. Dana inspection report to Christensen, 15 August 1864, *ibid.*

the Vicksburg headquarters that the regiment had mutinied and refused all orders to leave the transports. The Seventy-second Illinois Infantry and the Fifth Illinois Cavalry were called out to put down and quell the mutiny, enforce order, and march the marine regiment to camp. After much indecision by General Ellet, a subordinate officer, Maj. David S. Tallerday, was asked to talk to the men and move the regiment ashore. The troops, ordered off the boats, formed a company line on the levee in a disorderly, disorganized manner. Most of the men agreed to go peacefully to the camp, while the mutineers, numbering forty-eight, were arrested and confined. The remainder of the regiment marched in an orderly manner to the camp. Reported the commander of the First Brigade, First Division:

The regiment is demoralized, insubordinate, undisciplined, and grossly ignorant. The officers obey all orders willingly, but endeavor to maintain . . . good order . . . but they are dissatisfied, think themselves aggrieved and wronged. The men seem to care but little for their commands.³⁹

In conclusion, the officer making the report observed that the regiment would not be of any further benefit or service whatever to the United States.

As part of the deactivation, all boats of the fleet were transferred to the quartermaster department. The steamers Diana, Baltic, and Alf Cutling were assigned to Morganza, Louisiana. The Autocrat and the Raine were posted to Memphis, while the

³⁹Col. F. A. Starring, commanding First Brigade, First Division, Seventeenth Corps, to Lt. Col. H. C. Rodgers, assistant adjutant general, 29 August 1864, OR, ser. 1, 39, pt. 2: 400; Crandall and Newell, History of the Ram Fleet, pp. 441-42; Starring to Rodgers, 29 August 1864, OR, ser. 1, 39, pt. 2: 318-20.

Adams, the Fairchild, and the Belle Darlington were ordered to Vicksburg. The Monarch, the Switzerland, the Lioness, the Horner, and the Cleveland were assigned to New Orleans, with the Fulton reporting to Natchez. Most of the vessels were in need of repair and, after being refitted, were assigned to the quartermaster transportation reserve.⁴⁰

General Ellet left the western theater and, after reporting to Stanton, went to Philadelphia to await reassignment. Waiting a few months for orders, he resigned his commission on 21 December 1864. He remained in Philadelphia, caring for his mother until 1870, when she died. After her death, he moved to Topeka, Kansas, where two sons lived, but went to Eldorado, Kansas, in 1871. On Wednesday, 12 January 1895, at the age of seventy-four, Alfred W. Ellet died.⁴¹

The reorganized consolidated marine regiment, issued new arms and equipment, appointed new company commanders and company designations, based upon the seniority of the company commanders. The regiment, with orders to discipline and train the reorganized

⁴⁰Crandall and Newell, History of the Ram Fleet, p. 443; Meigs to Stanton, 3 November 1864, OR, ser. 3, 4: 891; Disposition of Marine Brigade Fleet, undated, OR, ser. 1, 41, pt. 4: 609; Annual Report of the Quartermaster General, 38th Cong., 2d sess., 3 November 1864, Exec. Doc. No. 83, p. 135.

⁴¹Crandall and Newell, History of the Ram Fleet, pp. 444-45; Special Orders No. 348, War Department, 15 October 1864, OR, ser. 1, 41, pt. 3: 880. William F. Amann, ed., Personnel of the Civil War, 2 vols., vol. 2: The Union Armies, (New York: Thomas Yoseloff, 1961) 2: 35; New York Times, 12 January 1895; Lewis, Charles Ellet, Jr., p. 213; Grant to Stanton, 23 November 1864, Record Group 108, "Records of the Headquarters of the Army," National Archives, Washington, D. C.; A. W. Ellet to Thomas, 28 December 1864, Army Personnel Records, National Archives, Washington, D. C.

unit, issued the following training schedule: reveille and roll call, 5:00 A.M.; breakfast, 6:00 A.M.; sick call, 7:00 A.M.; company drill, 7:45-8:45 A.M.; guard mount, 9:00 A.M.; dinner, 12:00; first sergeant call, 1:00 P.M.; battalion drill, 1:00-6:00 P.M.; press guards, 6:00 P.M.; supper, 7:00 P.M.; retreat at sunset; and tattoo and roll call, 8:45 P.M.

The men, dissatisfied with the situation, expressed their displeasure in several ways. Some refused to sign the payrolls and did not receive their monthly pay because their signature might keep them in the service. Others, desiring an honorable discharge from the military service, retained a lawyer, James H. Purdy, late an officer of the Fifty-ninth New York Infantry, to petition President Lincoln. Purdy obtained an interview with the president and, having presented the Brigade's case, received a decision three weeks later. Lincoln ordered the discharge of the Brigade on Monday, 5 December 1864. The consolidated marine regiment was mustered out by the last day of January 1865. Thus ended the military service of Ellet's Mississippi Marine Brigade.⁴²

⁴²Crandall and Newell, History of the Ram Fleet, pp. 445, 447, 452, 454-55; General Order No. 1, Headquarters, Marine Regiment, 26 August 1864, RG 94; Regimental Order No. 3, Headquarters Marine Regiment, 28 August 1864, *ibid.*; Memo, Company A, Marine Regiment, 25 September 1864, *ibid.* The men's case rested on the terms of enlistment in the Brigade, especially the three points: the Brigade's service would only be on the western rivers; the Brigade would always operate as a single unit; and the Brigade's sole purpose was to counter guerrilla operations in the Mississippi valley. The special order issued on 5 December 1864, ordering the discharge of the Brigade read in part that the "enlisted men . . . who enlisted for and were mustered into that organization, will . . . be mustered out of the service of the United States, and those detached from regiments in the field (without re-enlisting) will be returned to their respective regiments to serve out their term of enlistment." Crandall and Newell, History of the Ram Fleet, pp. 152, 454.

With the mustering out ceremony of the consolidated marine regiment in January 1865, the American military's second experiment with improvisation had ended. The need to improvise, which resulted in the creation of the Ram Fleet and Marine Brigade, was prompted by three reasons. First, the military necessity for such a unit to counter the Confederate guerrilla war along the Mississippi was illustrated by a captured letter from James A. Seddon, Confederate secretary of war (1862-1865), to Gen. E. Kirby Smith. Seddon suggested to Smith that "[small units be raised and armed] for the express purpose of interrupting navigation on the Mississippi."⁴³

Second, interservice rivalry and mistrust, influenced by the vast increase in size of the Union army and navy during the four years of war, and the tremendous advances in weaponry, tactics, and industrial capacity, led to competition by the two branches for the glory, the men, the materials of war, and the funds with which to wage it. This mutual distrust led Stanton, as secretary of war, to attempt to create his own naval forces with which to prosecute the war. As a result of Stanton's initiative, the U. S. Army created and administered a Western Gunboat Flotilla, a Ram Fleet, and a Marine Brigade. This situation was encouraged by the navy's initial reluctance to fight the war on the western rivers.⁴⁴

⁴³Clarke, ed., Warfare Along the Mississippi, p. 57; Jon L. Wakelyn, Biographical Dictionary of the Confederacy (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1977), p. 379.

⁴⁴Thomas P. Benjamin and Harold M. Hyman, Stanton: The Life and Times of Lincoln's Secretary of War (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1962), p. 370.

The third reason for improvisation was personal gain. Blatantly obvious to those even casually familiar with the Marine Brigade, avarice was present from the highest circles in Washington to the Marine Brigade's lowest private. Not only personal glory but monetary gain was to be obtained. Thus, the establishment of a virtually independent, private military force provided a bitter lesson for the nation. The Brigade was accused of depredations against civilians (both loyal and rebel) and was involved in the government's subsequent loss of revenue from misrouted Confederate cotton, while the tremendous amount of public funds expended to establish and maintain such an organization was considered a questionable expense.

Yet, with all this, the idea of a riverine force had been proven tactically sound. However, the major weakness of such a special unit was the violation of the principle of unity of command. In the end, unity of command was recognized as more important than independent action. This was necessary in order for the full combat power to be brought to bear against the enemy. Command unity was obtained most effectively by the coordinated action of all forces under the authority of a single commander.

The Mississippi Marine Brigade, if originally organized with well disciplined troops instead of convalescents and glory seekers, and under strict army control, could have been recognized as an important contribution to the Union's war effort and an accepted tactical innovation. Instead, as a result of events and the conduct of the unit, the Brigade was considered a misfit and the experiment a failure.

CHAPTER VIII

BUREAU OF MILITARY INFORMATION

A fourth special military unit, largely ignored by the American public, the government, and historians, was the Bureau of Military Information. Created by Brig. Gen. Marsena R. Patrick, provost marshal general of the Army of the Potomac, from an ad hoc collection of agents, scouts, and spies, the Bureau was the forerunner of American twentieth century military intelligence units.

The process of translating an untried concept, such as the Bureau of Military Information, into operational reality began when Maj. Gen. George B. McClellan was assigned to the Army of the Potomac. Before receiving this assignment, McClellan had commanded the Department of the Ohio. Acting as his intelligence chief was a civilian detective named Allan Pinkerton. Pinkerton, born in Scotland in 1819, had settled in Illinois in 1842 and become a deputy sheriff. By 1850 he had opened a detective agency in Chicago. In April 1861, Pinkerton was summoned to Washington to help organize the federal secret service. At the invitation of McClellan, a close friend and former client, he left the chaotic capital for the Department of the Ohio.¹

¹Mark M. Boatner III, Civil War Dictionary (New York: David McKay Co., 1959), p. 654; Dictionary of American Biography,

In July 1861, McClellan was ordered to Washington to assume command of the Army of the Potomac. Pinkerton accompanied him to the capital at "Little Mac's" request. Pinkerton's instructions from the general were to organize a "secret service force" which would be "continually occupied in procuring, from all possible sources, information regarding the strength, positions and movements of the enemy."² While in the nation's capital, Pinkerton was under the direction of the secretary of war and Col. Andrew Porter, provost marshal of the District of Columbia; but when the army went to the field, the detective reported directly to McClellan.

During the campaigns of 1862, Pinkerton's intelligence service depended upon prisoners of war, contrabands, pro-Union southerners, deserters, blockade runners, southern newspapers, and observations made by his scouts for the information he provided McClellan. Although McClellan seemed satisfied with Pinkerton's estimates, both contemporaries and historians have disputed the accuracy of such reports, especially the estimate made on 26 June 1862, which claimed the Confederacy had from 100,000 to 120,000 men in front of Richmond. The tendency by Pinkerton's operatives to exaggerate enemy strength influenced McClellan in his military operations and, undoubtedly, contributed to the general's removal following the Peninsular and Antietam

pp. 622-23 (hereafter cited as DAB); Allan Pinkerton, The Spy of the Rebellion: Being A True History of the Spy System of the United States Army During the Late Rebellion (New York: G. W. Carleton, 1883), pp. 140-41, 153, 245, 459-60.

²Pinkerton, The Spy of the Rebellion, p. 245.

campaigns. In his place, Lincoln appointed Maj. Gen. Ambrose E. Burnside.³

Pinkerton, while not claiming any military expertise, argued that McClellan was removed because of "malignant political intriguers, who feared that his growing popularity would result in political exaltation."⁴ With the "young Napoleon's" removal, Pinkerton, declining to continue working with the Army of the Potomac, closed his organization and ceased collecting information about the enemy. Later, he was employed as a government investigator in numerous claims cases involving the federal government, and, in 1865, he returned to Chicago and his private detective agency.⁵

The new commander of the Army of the Potomac, Burnside, reorganized his command, but such a reorganization did not include any provision for the collection of intelligence. Instead, Burnside relied upon such traditional means of collecting information as the Union cavalry. Following the military disaster at Fredericksburg in December 1862, Burnside was replaced by Maj.

³Ibid., pp. xxvii, xxix-xxx, 587; Shelby Foote, The Civil War: A Narrative, 3 vols. (New York: Random House, 1958-1974), 1: 102; Allan Nevins, The War For The Union: The Improvised War 1861-1862 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1959), p. 300; Boatner, Dictionary pp. 107, 524; Joseph P. Cullen, The Peninsula Campaign 1862: McClellan and Lee Struggle For Richmond (New York: Bonanza Books, 1973), p. 25. Boatner placed the total number of Confederates at 60,000 while Freeman set the number at 85,500. Boatner, p. 632; Douglas Southall Freeman, R. E. Lee: A Biography, 4 vols. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1934-35), 2: 116.

⁴Pinkerton, The Spy of the Rebellion, pp. 457-58.

⁵Harnett T. Kane, Spies For the Blue and Gray (Garden City: Hanover House, 1954), p. 126; Pinkerton, The Spy of the Rebellion, pp. 583-84; Francis T. Miller et al, eds., The Photographic History of the Civil War, 10 vols. (1911: reprint ed., New York: Thomas Yoseloff, 1957), 8: 276; DAB, p. 623.

Gen. Joseph Hooker.⁶

With Hooker's assignment as commanding general, Patrick, who had been appointed provost marshal general of the Army of the Potomac by McClellan in October 1862, approached "Fighting Joe" with a proposal to establish a new "secret service" in order to collect much needed information about the rebels. It was obvious to Patrick that such an organization was essential, since the army needed information of a higher quality than Pinkerton had provided in 1862. Improvements were possible because anyone with a knowledge of the military was able to avoid the obvious errors committed by the Pinkertons.

After securing Hooker's reluctant approval, Patrick's first problem in organizing such a service was finding good men. On Tuesday, 10 February 1863, the brigadier general interviewed Col. George H. Sharpe of the 120th New York. Sharpe, a lawyer, impressed Patrick, and the provost marshal confided in his diary that Sharpe "would be a pleasant man to be associated with"⁷ On the nineteenth of February, Sharpe was attached

⁶Kane, Spies For Blue and Gray, p. 126; Boatner, Dictionary, p. 409; David S. Sparks, "General Patrick's Progress: Intelligence and Security in the Army of the Potomac," Civil War History 10 (1964): 378.

⁷David S. Sparks, ed., Inside Lincoln's Army: The Diary of Marsena Rudolph Patrick, Provost Marshal General, Army of the Potomac (New York: Thomas Yoseloff, 1964), pp. 18, 212; Russell F. Weigley, History of the United States Army (New York: Macmillan, 1967), p. 241; Diary entry, 5 February 1863, Marsena Rudolph Patrick Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, D. C.; General Order No. 161, Headquarters, Army of the Potomac, 6 October 1862, U.S., War Department, The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies, R. N. Scott et al, eds., 130 vols. (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1880-1901), ser. 1, 19, pt. 2: 389 (hereafter cited as OR); General Order No. 32, Headquarters, Army of the Potomac, 30 March 1863, OR, ser. 1, 25, pt. 2: 167; Sparks, "Patrick's Progress," p. 378.

to army headquarters as the deputy provost marshal general. Throughout February and March of 1863, Patrick requested the assignment of certain officers, noncommissioned officers, and privates to his department for the Bureau of Military Information. (See Table VI.)

Thus, on the eve of the Chancellorsville campaign of April-May 1863, Patrick had transformed his idea for a secret service into the reality of the Bureau of Military Information. The Bureau, headed by Sharpe, was concerned with procuring, processing, and disseminating intelligence of the enemy. These activities were in conjunction with the overall duties of the provost marshal general. Patrick was responsible, in addition to the gathering of intelligence, for the suppression of marauding, depredations, brawls, and disturbances; the prevention of straggling; the suppression of gambling houses, drinking houses, bar rooms, and brothels; the regulation of hotels, taverns, markets, and places of public amusement; searches, seizures, and arrests; execution of sentences of general court martials; enforcement of orders prohibiting the sale of alcohol; apprehending deserters and prisoners of war; providing counter signs and passes; and investigating complaints of citizens concerning the conduct of U. S. soldiers.⁸

⁸Special Order No. 50, Headquarters, Army of the Potomac, 19 February 1863, Record Group 393, "Records of the United States Army Commands," National Archives, Washington, D. C. (hereafter cited as RG 393); Register of Letters Received, Army of the Potomac, 23 March 1863, *ibid.*; General Order No. 32, Headquarters, Army of the Potomac, 30 March 1863, *ibid.*; McClellan to Brig. Gen. Lorenzo Thomas, adjutant general, 4 August 1863, *OR*, ser. 1, 5: 30; U.S., National Archives, Preliminary Inventory of the Records of U. S. Army Continental Commands 1821-1920, vol. 2: Polyonymous Successions of Commands 1861-70 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1973) 2: 211.

TABLE VI

PROVOST MARSHAL GENERAL DEPARTMENT
ARMY OF THE POTOMAC

- Brig. Gen. Marsena R. Patrick, New York Volunteers, Provost
Marshal General
- Col. George H. Sharpe, 120th New York, Deputy Provost Marshal
General in charge of Bureau of Information
- Maj. William H. Wood, 17th U.S. Infantry, in charge of
convalescents, recruits, and returning soldiers
- Capt. Phillip Schuyler, 14th U.S. Infantry, acting assistant
adjutant general
- Capt. LaFayette Lyttle, 94th New York, in charge of prisoners
of war, receiving and distributing soldiers
- Capt. W. W. Beckwith, 20th New York Militia, in charge of trade,
transportation and passes
- Capt. H. P. Clinton, Commissary of Subsistence and additional
army quartermaster
- Capt. John McEntee, 20th New York, Bureau of Information, under
orders General Sigel's office
- Capt. Edson Fitch, 93d New York, acting assistant inspector
general
- Capt. Charles E. Scoville, 94th New York, miscellaneous duties
between provost marshal general and corps provost marshals
- Capt. Jacob L. Snyder, 120th New York, in charge of sutlers
and transportation of goods
- 1st Lt. J. B. Wright, 11th U.S. Infantry, in charge of passes,
Army of the Potomac
- 2d Lt. David B. Parker, 72d New York, general mail agent,
Army of the Potomac in Washington, D. C.

SOURCE: Marsena R. Patrick, Army Personnel Records,
National Archives, Washington, D. C.



Figure 7

Marsena R. Patrick

(Mathew Brady Collection, National Archives, Washington, D. C.)



Figure 8

George H. Sharpe

(Mathew Brady Collection, National Archives, Washington, D. C.)

Notwithstanding the organization of the Bureau and initiation of the intelligence gathering process, Hooker was slow in making use of this unit. Instead, "Fighting Joe" continued to rely on the reports of his cavalry commander, Brig. Gen. Alfred Pleasonton. The failure of Union arms at Chancellorsville proved that these cavalry reports were totally unreliable, but Hooker continued to ignore the Bureau despite "the most astonishingly correct information" ⁹

As it became evident that Hooker was unqualified to command the Army of the Potomac, the War Department relieved him on 28 June 1863. Hooker was replaced by Maj. Gen. George G. Meade, who had previously commanded Fifth Corps at Chancellorsville. Two days later Meade committed the Army of the Potomac to combat at Gettysburg. The new commanding general was able to counter Lee's invasion, in part, because on the second day of his command he had ordered the Bureau to gather the necessary information. Sharpe was instructed to send men "to Gettysburg, Hanover, Greencastle, Chambersburg, and Jefferson and get as much information as you can of the numbers, position, and force of the enemy, with their movements." ¹⁰

⁹Weigley, History of the U. S. Army, p. 242; Sparks, Patrick Diary, p. 260. Since Hooker placed no credence on the Bureau's data, he relied heavily on his cavalry. Therefore, he interpreted cavalry reports and a report from a federal signal station concerning Jackson's column to indicate that Lee's army was retreating. Thus, Hooker was realigning his troops in order to mount a pursuit when his right was crushed by Jackson's flank assault. Edward Steere, "Catalyst of Victory," Army Information Digest 16 (August 1961): 91.

¹⁰Boatner, Dictionary, p. 539; Maj. Gen. Daniel Butterfield, Chief of Staff Army of the Potomac, to Sharpe, 29 June 1863, OR, ser. 1, 27, pt. 3: 399.

Sharpe's Bureau of Military Information used several different methods of collecting data. The most successful method was the interrogation of prisoners of war and Confederate deserters. Sharpe was particularly adept at examining such people and often touched the mind and heart of the plain southern people. He was able to delve deeply by convincing the prisoners that any hope of a speedy release depended upon a full disclosure of their knowledge concerning the rebel army. The information obtained in such a manner was highly accurate because it was honestly given to the Union interrogator. Sharpe boasted to his superiors that the Bureau's information was so accurate and complete that he was "entirely familiar with the organization of the rebel forces in Virginia and North Carolina, with each regiment, brigade and division, with the changes therein, and in their officers and locations."¹¹

Perhaps the major difficulty Sharpe encountered concerning the interrogation of prisoners and deserters was the failure by front line units and their officers to forward these individuals as quickly as possible. Such a situation warranted a general order, issued in April 1863, which detailed the responsibility for sending prisoners, deserters, contrabands, refugees, and captured newspapers to Sharpe's headquarters. This was followed in January 1864 by letters from Maj. Gen. Andrew A. Humphreys,

¹¹Sharpe to Brig. Gen. John H. Martindale, military governor of Washington, 12 December 1863, RG 393; Brig. Gen. Horace Porter, "Campaigning With Grant," Century Magazine 53 (New Series 31) (1897): 838.

chief of staff of the Army of the Potomac. Humphreys reiterated the importance of forwarding prisoners and emphasized "that they should not be examined or be permitted to hold intercourse with anyone, except so far as related to the security of the command into whose lines they come."¹²

A second method of intelligence collection was the use of scouts, agents, or reconnaissance patrols behind Confederate lines. Reconnaissance patrols, utilizing conventional Union forces (usually cavalry), were instructed to "drive in" Confederate pickets, if necessary, in order to get information. It was better, army headquarters believed, to lose some men than to be without any knowledge of the enemy. More useful to the gathering of intelligence were the surreptitious scouts and agents operating behind the rebel army. Such men as a Sergeant Hunnicutt, Dan Cole, Patrick Cunningham, Edward Hopkins, William Arndoff, and Milton W. Cline were sent as scouts to Richmond as many as two or three times a week. The men's identities as Union agents were protected as thoroughly as possible. When captured rebel currency was available, the Bureau's scouts and agents were provided with ample funds for defraying their expenses. Sharpe preferred to use Confederate dollars, if possible, since U. S. currency "naturally would attract suspicion, and have therefore to be converted for their use."¹³

¹²Maj. Gen. Andrew A. Humphreys, Chief of Staff Army of the Potomac, to Brig. Gen. David McMurtree Gregg, commanding Cavalry Corps, 29 January 1864; OR, ser. 1, 33: 441; General Order No. 40, Headquarters, Army of the Potomac, 10 April 1863, RG 393.

¹³Grant to Stanton, 4 February 1865, OR, ser. 1, 46, pt. 2: 366; Brig. Gen. Seth Williams, assistant adjutant general Army

The amount of rebel money actually used for such purposes cannot be determined, but a letter from Grant to Stanton in February 1865 indicated that \$20,000 to \$50,000 was sufficient for Sharpe's operations. In conjunction with the funding of forays into Richmond and Petersburg, the Bureau also found it necessary to have a large amount of U. S. currency on hand to pay individual informers or civilian agents for information provided to the Bureau. Records indicate that the sum varied from a low of \$25 to \$200 for such services.¹⁴

The large number of agents and scouts dispatched to Richmond gathered updated data on Confederate activities and transmitted reports from Union agents residing in the South. Such loyal southern people were normally referred to in the official dispatches and reports as "our friends" or "the Union men" in Richmond. Most of these spies remained anonymous. An exception was Elizabeth Van Lew, a member of a prominent Richmond

of the Potomac, to Brig. Gen. Alfred Pleasonton, 17 June 1863, OR, ser. 1, 27, pt. 3: 172; Michael Graham, Bureau agent at Martinsburg, Virginia, to Sharpe, 20 October 1863, OR, ser. 1, 29, pt. 2: 360; Maj. Gen. John F. Reynolds, commanding First Corps, to Butterfield, 29 June 1863, OR, ser. 1, 27, pt. 3: 397; Sharpe to Butterfield, 23 June 1863, ibid., p. 266; Sparks, Patrick Diary, p. 251; Sharpe to Humphreys, 14 June 1864; OR, ser. 1, 40, pt. 2: 19; Michael Graham to Sharpe, 22 October 1863, OR, ser. 1, 29, pt. 2: 369; Brig. Gen. Eliakim P. Scammon, commanding division at Charleston, West Virginia, to Halleck, 23 October 1863, ibid., p. 372.

¹⁴Grant to Stanton, 4 February 1865, OR, ser. 1, 46, pt. 2: 366; Special Order No. 136, Headquarters, Armies of the United States, 25 November 1864, Record Group 108, "Records of the Headquarters of the Army," National Archives, Washington, D. C. (hereafter cited as RG 108); Special Order No. 138, Headquarters, Armies of the United States, 28 November 1864, ibid.

family, who successfully supplied information to the Bureau until the fall of Richmond in April 1865.¹⁵

Another method of collecting data on Confederate activities was the interviewing of refugees. These people, usually Unionist in sympathy, were subjected to the same type of interrogation as prisoners of war and Confederate deserters. The type of information they provided was usually of a non-military nature and related to such areas as civilian morale, gold prices, the shortages of food and medicine, and rumors of troop movements, and, after June 1864, the expected evacuation of Richmond and Petersburg.¹⁶

In conjunction with interviews of refugees, Sharpe's operatives also questioned contraband blacks entering Union lines. Although many of these former slaves were ignorant and offered confused or contradictory statements, there were some who proved quite helpful in providing material about rebel troop movements. What might be considered minor, unimportant

¹⁵Sharpe to Meade, 18 January 1865, OR, ser. 1, 46, pt. 2: 171; Sharpe to Humphreys, 27 September 1864, OR, ser. 1, 42, pt. 2: 1050; Sharpe to Maj. Theodore S. Bowers, assistant adjutant general, 11 February 1865, RG 108; Kane, Spies For Blue and Gray, p. 239; Boatner, Dictionary, p. 867.

¹⁶Sharpe to Martindale, 12 December 1863, RG 393; Dana to Stanton, 9 June 1864, OR, ser. 1, 36, pt. 1: 93; Lt. Frederick L. Manning, Bureau agent, to Sharpe, 26 August 1864, OR, ser. 1, 47, pt. 2: 522; Manning to Sharpe, 28 August 1864, OR, ser. 1, 42, pt. 2: 556; Sharpe to Humphreys, 1 September 1864, ibid., p. 629; Sharpe to Humphreys, 17 September 1864, ibid., pp. 881-82; Sharpe to Maj. Gen. Gouverneur K. Warren, commanding Fifth Corps, 3 September 1864, OR, ser. 1, 47, pt. 2: 678; Brig. Gen. Israel Vodges, commanding Defenses of Norfolk and Portsmouth, Virginia, to Grant, 21 February 1865, OR, ser. 1, 46, pt. 2: 618; Capt. Phillip Schuyler, assistant adjutant general, to Sharpe, 23 February 1865, ibid., p. 657; Sharpe to Humphreys, 23 October 1863, OR, ser. 1, 29, pt. 2: 371.

details to the contraband informer could influence or reaffirm data from another source. For example, two contrabands, servants for officers on Lt. Gen. Richard H. Anderson's staff, crossed over into Union lines on 9 July 1864. These two men gave the location of Anderson's headquarters as Sycamore street, south of Petersburg near Lieutenant Creek. They also located A. P. Hill's corps on the right, Longstreet's in the center, and Beauregard's on the left. Further details provided by the two servants included a detailed description of damage suffered by the city, bridges across the Appomattox, and the relocation of the commissary department because of Union artillery fire. This was the type of information which allowed the Bureau to constantly up-date the Confederate order of battle and gauge Union success on the battlefield.¹⁷

Likewise, escaped Union soldiers provided information concerning the enemy. Their reports, often quite detailed, ranged from descriptions of prison life to operations and measures taken to defend the southern railroads. This material,

¹⁷Capt. John McEntee, assistant provost marshal, to Sharpe, 11 June 1863, OR, ser. 1, 27, pt. 3: 67; Sharpe to Humphreys, 4 May 1864, OR, ser. 1, 36, pt. 2: 372; Sharpe to Humphreys, 19 June 1864, OR, ser. 1, 40, pt. 2: 212; Sharpe to Humphreys, 25 June 1864, ibid., pp. 403-04; John C. Babcock, Bureau agent, to Humphreys, 3 July 1864, ibid., p. 601; Sharpe to a Lieutenant Davenport, Major General Butler's staff, 11 August 1864, OR, ser. 1, 42, pt. 2: 116; Sharpe to Humphreys, 9 July 1864, OR, ser. 1, 40, pt. 3: 96-97; Biographical Dictionary of the Confederacy (1977), s. v. "Anderson, Richard H. ." Order of battle is defined as a tabulation of military units, or organizations, participating in combat. Included in this information would be the unit commander and composition and strength of the unit. Boatner, Dictionary, p. 610.

although dated, provided the Bureau with additional depth of understanding. Thus, the Bureau could locate, for example, known enemy reserves, objectives for cavalry raids, and defensive strong points.¹⁸

Information was also collected by Union outposts, pickets, and as the result of skirmishes. The importance of relaying such information to higher headquarters was emphasized at the same time the Bureau of Information was organized. General Order No. 18 of March 1863 declared that

Important information from the outposts, or advices regarding movements of the enemy must not be delayed in transmission While the telegraph must be made use of to transmit such intelligence, dispatching duplicates by couriers must not be omitted where the slightest possible doubt exists as to certain and correct transmission by telegraph.¹⁹

However, the collection of data on the enemy was not limited to input from prisoners, deserters, refugees, contrabands, scouts, spies, or Union pickets. Reports were also collected from the U. S. Signal Corps which intercepted numerous Confederate signals, primarily of the "wigwag" (signal flag) system. Such intercepted messages added to the total knowledge of the enemy. Likewise, the observation reports from the Signal Corps (as the Signal Corps always located their signal towers on the high ground) allowed the Bureau to plot the movements of rebel units and supply trains. Finally, captured southern newspapers provided a wealth of information concerning the condition of the Confederate

¹⁸McEntee to Humphreys, OR, ser. 1, 40, pt. 3: 692.

¹⁹General Order No. 18, Headquarters, Army of the Potomac, 3 March 1863, RG 393.

army, southern morale, the results of battles in other theaters of war, the prices of food and gold, and the inner workings and debates of the Confederate government.²⁰

Once the information was collected from these diverse sources, it was checked with other data for accuracy and realism. Such a process, by pinpointing exact locations of enemy units, the unit's commander, strength, morale, and the condition of equipment, tended to prevent the mistake Pinkerton's intelligence operation had committed in overestimating enemy forces. The final step in the intelligence process was to catalogue the information in an intelligence summary so the commander could formulate his battle plans.²¹

The Bureau was successful in the procuring of intelligence because of the "multiplied and laborious examinations" of the enemy. Sharpe, summarizing the accomplishments of the Bureau, noted

from the best information, we learn that the rebel organization has never before been obtained in this army, until it was too late to use it; and that at

²⁰Capt. James S. Hall, signal officer, to Sharpe, 30 April 1863, OR, ser. 1, 25, pt. 2: 301; Capt. B. F. Fisher, chief signal officer, Army of the Potomac, to Humphreys, 27 June 1864, OR, ser. 1, 40, pt. 2: 465; Babcock to Humphreys, 12 July 1864, OR, ser. 1, 40, pt. 3: 178; Capt. L. B. Norton, chief signal officer, Army of the Potomac, to Humphreys, 23 October 1863, OR, ser. 1, 29, pt. 2: 372; Maj. Gen. John G. Foster, commanding Department of Virginia and North Carolina, to Halleck, 22 October 1863, *ibid.*, pp. 369-70; Sharpe to Humphreys, 26 November 1864, OR, ser. 1, 42, pt. 3: 710; Intelligence Diary, Army of the Potomac, RG 393; Grant to Stanton, 8 February 1865, OR, ser. 1, 46, pt. 2: 474-75.

²¹Meade to Halleck, 24 October 1863, OR, ser. 1, 29, pt. 2: 376; Sharpe to McEntee, 8 June 1863, OR, ser. 1, 27, pt. 3: 35; Sharpe to Bowers, 9 January 1865, RG 108; Sharpe to Seth Williams, 27 May 1863, OR, ser. 1, 25, pt. 2: 528; Capt. John L. McPhail, provost marshal at Baltimore, to Sharpe, 14 February 1864, OR,

no previous time has any attempt been made to locate the enemy's forces, that has proved anyway successful, or to estimate them within any reasonable number of men.²²

Such efficiency and accomplishment did not go unnoticed. In July of 1864, Patrick was designated as provost marshal general of the Armies Operating Against Richmond. This appointment followed the movements of the Army of the James, commanded by Maj. Gen. Benjamin F. Butler, and the Army of the Potomac, commanded by Meade, to Petersburg, Virginia. Lt. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant, appointed general-in-chief of the Armies of the U. S. in March 1864, had engineered the campaign which culminated in the siege of Petersburg. Patrick, confiding to his diary, related his conversation with Grant regarding the assignment. The position of provost marshal general of the Armies Operating Against Richmond was to be "a Central power to regulate Butler & others, but, as Grant expressly says, not to take me from the Army of Potomac--[.]"²³ The reason Grant established his headquarters in the field and, after June 1864, closely supervised both Meade and Butler's armies was his disgust with Meade "stickling about his own dignity."²⁴

ser. 1, 33: 559; Sharpe to McEntee, 23 April 1864, *ibid.*, p. 954.

²²Sharpe to Butterfield, 15 March 1863, RG 393.

²³Special Order No. 48, Headquarters, Armies of the United States, 4 July 1864, OR, ser. 1, 40, pt. 2: 622; Sparks, Patrick Diary, p. 393.

²⁴Charles A. Dana, assistant secretary of war, to Stanton, 5 April 1865, Edwin McMasters Stanton Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, D. C.

Such an explanation was offered by the assistant secretary of war, C. A. Dana, in April 1865. This view was reinforced by Meade's reaction to Patrick's appointment as provost marshal general of the combined armies. Although Patrick was given additional responsibilities in July 1864, his staff, especially the Bureau, were not permitted by Meade to be moved to Grant's headquarters, located at City Point, Virginia. According to Patrick's diary, Meade charged

that the whole Bureau of Information was good for nothing--that it furnished no information not already received thro' the Cavalry--that it ought to be broken up & that Genl. Grant thought so, too--I [Patrick] disagreed with him entirely and told him that he had refused to let us do what was desired & which we knew to be for the best interests of the Service--I therefore told him, that I proposed to transfer that Bureau to Genl. Grant's Head Quarters & there give it a trial, when, if it still proved worthless, it should be disbanded [.]²⁵

Meade became intensely angry and declared he would not permit such a transfer. Patrick concluded the diary entry with an assessment of Meade's personality. The commanding general of the Army of the Potomac, Patrick believed, considered that army his personal property, "that the Heads of Staff Departments are simply his personal Staff Officers & control their Departments & Exercise their functions thro' him, not under him as Subordinates governed by the laws & usages of their own Departments [.]"²⁶

²⁵Sparks, Patrick Diary, pp. 393-94; Sparks, "Patrick's Progress," p. 382.

²⁶Ibid. Despite Meade's disagreement with Patrick, he refused to allow Patrick to transfer from Headquarters, Army of the Potomac to Sixth Corps. At the same time, September 1864, Meade recommended Patrick for promotion to brevet major general. Register of Letters Received, Army of the Potomac, 20 September

Meade appealed to Grant concerning the relocation of Patrick's headquarters to City Point. At the time, Grant supported Meade's view, and Patrick remained at the headquarters of the Army of the Potomac. In conjunction with the argument between Meade and Patrick over the location of Patrick's headquarters and the Bureau of Information, there occurred a conflict between Sharpe and Patrick. This difference of opinion, developing gradually, centered upon Sharpe's desire for higher authority. In September 1864, Sharpe inquired what Patrick's plans for the winter were, hoping that Patrick would take a leave and turn the duties of provost marshal over to him. Patrick, recognizing Sharpe's basic desire for power, described the colonel as "not the man to place much reliance on, so far as business in a business way is concerned--He is quite too fond of a nice time, loves fun and is very irregular in all his ways--[.]"²

By November 1864 the two men had reached the point where Sharpe had submitted his resignation. Meade declined to act upon the request until he had conferred with Grant. While no record of such a conversation was discovered, the resignation was not accepted; instead, orders were issued twelve days later by Grant's headquarters reassigning Sharpe to City Point as

1863, RG 393; Register of Letters Received, Headquarters, Armies of the United States, 23 September 1863, RG 108; Meade to Stanton, 19 September 1864, OR, ser. 1, 51, pt. 1: 1181.

²⁷Meade to Grant, 6 July 1864, OR, ser. 1, 40, pt. 3: 35; Grant to Meade, 6 July 1864, ibid.; Seth Williams to Patrick, 8 July 1864, Register of Letters Sent, Army of the Potomac, RG 393; Sparks, Patrick Diary, pp. 292, 422, 425.

assistant provost marshal general of the Armies Operating Against Richmond. Thus, Sharpe was still Patrick's executive officer. The differences between Sharpe and Patrick, never specified, continued until the end of the war.²⁸

Meanwhile, the administrative bookkeeping of the Union army had not changed the basic structure of Patrick's department. Whether carrying the title of provost marshal general of the Army of the Potomac or the Armies Operating Against Richmond, the Bureau of Military Information continued to be supervised by Sharpe who, in turn, continued to report to Patrick. The value of the Bureau of Information was recognized almost immediately by Grant after he assumed command as general-in-chief. As he formulated his plans for a new offensive against the South, he issued orders to Butler, Maj. Gen. Franz Sigel, and Brig. Gen. Joseph B. Sullivan to establish bureaus of information within their respective commands. The bureaus

under proper management, will be of material advantage, not only to the Army of the Potomac, but to . . . [each] command; and while the officers, who will be detailed for duty at these bureaux, will be instructed to have this double purpose in view, . . . [the commanders were] requested to yield to the plan . . . [their] hearty cooperation²⁹

²⁸Sparks, Patrick Diary, pp. 443, 479; Special Order No. 141, Headquarters, Armies of the United States, 2 December 1864, OR, ser. 1, 42, pt. 3: 779.

²⁹E. B. Long and Barbara Long, eds., The Civil War Day By Day: An Almanac 1861-1865 (Garden City: Doubleday, 1971), p. 473; Brig. Gen. Edward R. S. Canby, assistant adjutant general, War Department, to Maj. Gen. Benjamin F. Butler, Brig. Gen. Joseph B. Sullivan, commanding at Harper's Ferry, Maj. Gen. Franz Sigel, and Meade, 21 March 1864, Record Group 107, "Records of the Office of the Secretary of War," National Archives, Washington, D. C. (on microfilm M6, "Letters Sent Relating to Military Affairs," Fort Worth, Texas Regional Branch, National Archives.)

Brig. Gen. Marsena R. Patrick was relieved of his position as provost marshal general of the Army of the Potomac in March 1865. Moving his headquarters to City Point, he devoted his full attention to his duties as provost marshal general of the Armies Operating Against Richmond. On the twelfth of April, he was transferred to the Department of Virginia and appointed the department's provost marshal. Patrick was to concentrate on Richmond because of his "integrity and purity of character, his familiarity with the people and affairs of Virginia, and business qualifications" ³⁰ By June, however, Grant, worrying about Patrick's "kindness of heart," queried Halleck as to whether Washington thought the general was suited for the demands of military government. The question became a mute one as Patrick requested to be relieved of duty on 9 June 1865. This was followed by the president's acceptance of his resignation on Tuesday, 13 June 1865. In August 1865, Patrick was promoted to brevet major general for faithful and meritorious services during the war. Following the war, he was president of an agricultural society and governor of a soldiers' home in Ohio. He died in 1888 at the age of seventy-seven. ³¹

³⁰Bowers to Maj. Gen. Edward O. Ord, commanding Department of Virginia, 12 April 1865, OR, ser. 1, 46, pt. 3: 724; General Order No. 12, Headquarters, Army of the Potomac, 16 March 1865, *ibid.*, p. 5; General Order No. 40, Headquarters, Department of Virginia, 15 April 1865, *ibid.*, p. 763.

³¹Grant to Halleck, 1 June 1865, OR, ser. 1, 46, pt. 3: 1244; General Order No. 69, Headquarters, Department of Virginia, 9 June 1865, *ibid.*, p. 1267; Special Order No. 300, War Department, 13 June 1865, Record Group 94, "Records of the Adjutant General's Office," National Archives, Washington, D. C.; General Order No. 133, War Department, 22 August 1865, *ibid.*; Boatner, Dictionary, p. 623.

Colonel Sharpe was promoted to brevet brigadier general in December 1864. He continued to serve as assistant provost marshal general of the Armies Operating Against Richmond and chief of the Bureau of Military Information until the end of the war. He was present at the surrender at Appomattox on 9 April 1865 and was placed in charge of receiving the Confederate muster rolls. After the historic meeting between Grant and Lee had concluded at Wilbur McLean's house, Sharpe purchased a pair of brass candlesticks for ten dollars as a memento of the event. In June 1865 he requested and was relieved of his duties as assistant provost marshal general. At this time he reported to his regiment and was mustered out. He served with the diplomatic corps in Europe following the war and held a number of public offices in New York before his death in 1900 at the age of seventy-two.³²

During the last twelve months of the war, several bureaus were authorized and admonished to gather intelligence concerning the enemy. The improvised and special nature of such organizations had proven its worth in the Army of the Potomac and was adopted for the other commands operating in the eastern theater. Unfortunately, the very nature of the Bureau, with its need for secrecy and the tendency to improvise, prevented the activities of the Bureau from being publicized to the American public.

³²Boatner, Dictionary, p. 735; Special Order No. 72, Headquarters, Armies of the United States, 9 April 1865, RG 108; Porter, "Campaigning With Grant," p. 887; Special Order No. 276, War Department, 3 June 1865, OR, ser. 1, 46, pt. 3: 1250.

Following the end of the war, the officers and men assembled by Patrick and Sharpe were relieved of their duties with the Bureau and returned to their respective regiments. No one connected with the Bureau considered their activities anything but normal and routine, and so no final report or "unit history" detailing the organization, daily operation, and composition of this forerunner of twentieth century military intelligence was written.³³

John C. Babcock, one of Sharpe's operatives, received several inquiries from Sharpe's son Henry in 1904-05 requesting Babcock's aid in writing a history of the Bureau of Information. By January 1905, Babcock, sixty-nine years old, was the last surviving member of this special unit. Henry Sharpe disclosed to Babcock that he had attempted, for several years,

to persuade my father to write an account of the "Bureau . . ." for the benefit of the War Dept., and when in 1899 I [Henry G.] was assigned to duty in Washington he promised to come . . . and to occupy himself in preparing the account . . . but unfortunately he was called away [died] in January.³⁴

From the letters extant from Henry G. Sharpe, it was apparent that Babcock never provided him with such material. Thus, the unit faded into oblivion.

The activities of the Bureau of Military Information blazed a new trail in the age old problem of piercing the "fog of war."

³³Edwin C. Fishel, "The Mythology of Civil War Intelligence," Civil War History 10 (1964): 357.

³⁴Record of Military Service, John C. Babcock Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, D. C.; Henry G. Sharpe, son of Col. George H. Sharpe, to Babcock, 7 July 1904, *ibid.*; Sharpe to Babcock, 11 January 1905, *ibid.*; Sharpe to Babcock, 11 November 1905, *ibid.*

The ability to acquire accurate information of the enemy was advanced by such men as Sharpe and his agents. Unfortunately, their achievement was not recognized by the War Department, and their expertise was lost to the Army of the late nineteenth century. When the U. S. Army faced another conventional war, the lessons learned on the battlefields of 1861-65 would have to be relearned in combat. Nevertheless, a precedent had been set, and the War Department would finally establish a Bureau of Information in the adjutant general's office which was destined to become the Military Intelligence Division of the Army General Staff in 1904.³⁵ Although Sharpe's Bureau was crude and rudimentary, it was ultimately able to provide Union army commanders with the necessary data with which to make basic combat decisions. For that reason alone, this special and improvised military unit was a success and contributed to the ultimate success of Union arms.

³⁵U.S., Department of the Army, American Military History 1607-1958 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1959), p. 291; Steere, "Catalyst of Victory," pp. 90, 98-99.

CHAPTER IX

FIRST DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA CAVALRY REGIMENT

Military intelligence, or, as it was styled in the nineteenth century, "secret service," was not limited to combat situations or to such organizations as the Bureau of Military Information. Secret service activities were performed by Union agents in the North as well as in the South. As early as Lincoln's inauguration, Allan Pinkerton and his civilian detectives were operating in the nation's capital and other important northern cities, such as Baltimore and New York. With Maj. Gen. George B. McClellan's appointment as general-in-chief, Pinkerton established his secret service organization in Washington. This organization had a two-fold purpose: the collecting of intelligence for Union combat operations and the conducting of counter espionage activities. Washington was placed under martial law with Col. Andrew Porter, Sixteenth U. S. Infantry, as provost marshal. In addition to infantry, cavalry, and artillery, Porter's provost guard included Pinkerton's detectives. Since the capital contained many disloyal persons, Pinkerton's detectives were kept busy apprehending Confederate sympathizers.¹

¹Edward Steere, "Catalyst of Victory," Army Information Digest 16 (1961): 92, 95; Allan Pinkerton, The Spy of the Rebellion Being A True History of the Spy System of the United States Army During the Late Rebellion (New York: G. W. Carleton, 1883), pp. 246-47, 249.

Besides Pinkerton's detectives, who worked for the War Department, several additional organizations had general investigative functions during the war. From the beginning of the war until February 1862, Secretary of State William H. Seward, acting through U. S. marshals and other government officials, arrested and imprisoned many persons suspected of treasonable or disloyal activities. One of his agents was Lafayette C. Baker. Baker, born in Stafford, Genesee County, New York, on 13 October 1826, was the grandson of Capt. Remember Baker, one of Ethan Allen's officers. Baker's father moved the family to Michigan in 1839; Lafayette C. Baker returned to the East in 1848, working as a mechanic in New York City and Philadelphia. Migrating to San Francisco in 1853, he soon became one of the most active and dauntless members of the Vigilance Committee (an informal council exercising police power for the capture, speedy trial, and summary punishment of criminals). In New York on business when the war began, he traveled to Washington and offered his services to the government.²

Accepting his aid, Gen. Winfield Scott, the aged general-in-chief, sent Baker to Richmond to gather intelligence. Upon reaching the Confederate capital, he was arrested and taken to President Jefferson Davis. The Confederates, impressed with

²U.S., National Archives, Pamphlet to Accompany M797, "Case Files of Investigations by Levi C. Turner and Lafayette C. Baker 1861-1866," (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1970), p. 1; Francis B. Heitman, Historical Register and Dictionary of the United States Army From Its Organization Sept. 29, 1789 to March 2, 1903, 2 vols., (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1903), 1: 184; National Cyclopedia of American Biography, 5: 331-32.

Baker, became convinced of his southern loyalties and sent him back North, believing he was their spy. Additional missions which increased Baker's reputation and stature led to his employment as a roving agent for the State Department. For his work he received \$100 a month plus expenses.

One of his early investigations led to the exposure of several pro-secessionist postmasters in southern Maryland. Once these men had been arrested, he wrote Postmaster General Montgomery Blair requesting the authority to remove any further postmasters who were disloyal. Blair, like Scott and Seward, fell under Baker's sway and authorized him wide discretionary powers. Thus, Baker, described by a biographer as "power hungry," gradually infiltrated the War, State, and Post Office Departments.³

Over and above these personal contacts, Baker asked Seward for 200-300 men who, living off the land, could police the environs of the District of Columbia. Seward took no action on this request. Nevertheless, Seward continued to build an organization of detectives, which went virtually unnoticed during the chaotic days of 1861. Slowly, one man after another, when given a mission by the secretary of state, approached Baker for advice and guidance. Baker's biographer observed, "There was nothing formal or official about this development. In the

³Mark M. Boatner III, Civil War Dictionary (New York: David McKay Co., 1959), pp. 728, 739; National Cyclopedia, 5: 331-32; Jacob Moglever, Death To Traitors: The Story of General Lafayette C. Baker Lincoln's Forgotten Secret Service Chief (Garden City: Doubleday & Co., 1960), pp. 73, 78-80; Baker to Seward, 10 October 1861, U.S., War Department, The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies, R. N. Scott et al, eds., 130 vols. (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1880-1901), ser. 2, 1: 600 (hereafter cited as OR).

confusion of wartime bureaucracy, strong individuals created their own spheres."⁴

Thus, Baker progressively gained in power and influence, while disregarding due process, warrants for search and arrest, and other constitutional guarantees. His improvised "Bureau of Detective Service" continued to arrest more and more suspects until the federal prisons reached the bursting point. The rationale for such a wholesale violation of American citizens' civil rights stemmed from the fear the federal court system would not enforce the Conspiracies Act of 31 July 1861 and, later, the Treason Act (also known as the second confiscation act) of 17 July 1862. These laws, ineffective for punishing antiwar activities in the North, were rendered inoperative because the federal district attorneys and the attorney general were indifferent to prosecution, and this made convictions few in number. Lincoln responded by suspending the habeas corpus privilege and resorting to summary arrest by executive authority. During 1861, Seward was in charge of these arrests and used his "secret service" organization to effect the arrest of at least 1,000 suspects. Most were not told why they were arrested; many never had a formal charge filed nor a case against them presented in court.⁵

⁴Mogelever, Death To Traitors, pp. 80, 83-84.

⁵Dictionary of American Biography, 1: 523; Lafayette C. Baker, History of the United States Secret Service (Philadelphia: published by author, 1867), p. 45; James G. Randall and David Donald, The Civil War and Reconstruction (Boston: D. C. Heath, 1961), pp. 297, 300-01; Mogelever, Death To Traitors, p. 87.



Figure 9

Lafayette C. Baker

(Mathew Brady Collection, National Archives, Washington, D. C.)

However, the public indignation aroused by the large number of arrests finally pressured the administration to release large numbers of political prisoners and, at the same time, transfer control of such arrests from the State to War Department. An executive order, issued on Friday, 14 February 1862, catalogued the reasons why American civil rights were violated and declared that the need for such arrests had ended because the period of chaos had ceased. The order asserted that "The line between loyalty and disloyalty is plainly defined. The whole structure of the Government is firm and stable. Apprehension of public danger and facilities for treasonable practices have diminished" ⁶

With the transfer of arrest authority from the State Department to the War Department, Baker found himself without further employment. This led Seward to write Baker a letter of introduction on 15 February to Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton. Baker was immediately accepted for War Department service, authorized to choose his own men and organize a bureau of secret service. He was assured he would receive secret funds from Stanton with which to operate. Finally, he was informed that he would receive all instructions from and be directly responsible to the secretary of war. Accordingly, Baker proceeded to create a "new kind of

The Commissary General of Prisoners reported 13,535 prisoners were arrested and confined in military prisons from February 1862 to 1865. This figure did not include those prisoners confined by the State or Navy Departments. James G. Randall, Constitutional Problems Under Lincoln (New York: D. Appleton, 1926), p. 152.

⁶Executive Order No. 1, 14 February 1862, OR, ser. 2, 2: 221-23; Randall and Donald, Civil War and Reconstruction, p. 301.

police agency for the nation, an independent free-from-politics organization of investigators whose sole unrelenting job was to discover and immobilize the enemies of the republic."⁷ To staff his "National Detectives" Baker sought men who could learn the art of disguise and deception. The men, who would become detectives, had to "possess ability, shrewdness, great self-reliance and self control, discretion, courage, and integrity." Moreover, they needed an extraordinary amount of intelligence, an understanding of men, and be unapproachable by corruption or bribery.⁸

Baker located the headquarters of his National Detectives in a two story brick building at 217 Pennsylvania Avenue in Washington, D. C. The front office, a general meeting place and lounge for off-duty detectives, was described as "unattractive." On one wall was located a gun rack filled with carbines; the other walls were covered with various models of pistols, belts, and cartridge boxes, while heavy overcoats and riding boots were

⁷Mogelever, Death To Traitors, pp. 88, 90; Seward to Stanton, 15 February 1862, OR, ser. 2, 2: 224; Simeon Draper, Provost Marshal General, War Department, to Stanton, 6 December 1862, OR, ser. 3, 2: 938. Assistant Secretary of War, Peter H. Watson, was entrusted with the responsibility of supervising Baker's National Detectives. In August 1862, Watson (with Stanton's knowledge) reprimanded Baker for using the title "Chief of the National Detectives of the War Department" on his stationery. At this time Baker was "acting simply as a detective policeman, temporarily in the service of the United States and that this assumption . . . [was] unwarrantable and a fraud upon the public" Watson to Baker, 22 August 1862, Record Group 107, "Records of the Office of Secretary of War," National Archives, Washington, D. C. (on microfilm M6 "Letters Sent Relating to Military Affairs," Fort Worth, Texas Regional Branch, National Archives). See also Benjamin P. Thomas and Harold M. Hyman, Stanton: The Life and Times of Lincoln's Secretary of War (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1962), p. 153.

⁸Baker, History of U. S. Secret Service, pp. 34-35; Mogelever, Death To Traitors, p. 91; Thomas and Hyman, Stanton, p. 153; Otto

scattered throughout the room. The "Colonel," as Baker was universally called even though the title was merely complimentary, occupied the back, or private, office. Because of the growing number of denunciations and enemies, Baker summoned several of his brothers and cousins to Washington. These men were placed on the payroll of the National Detectives to provide the "Colonel" with men he could trust.⁹

During 1862, Lafayette Baker successfully established an innovative detective bureau. He was the first to use a police dossier system and a criminal photo file for identification; he instituted a policy of arresting suspects at night when their resistance to interrogation and ability to seek help was at the lowest point. Likewise, he made a science of the interrogation of prisoners. When the suspect was arrested, he was brought, handcuffed, to 217 Pennsylvania Avenue, where he was subjected to a "brow-beating" examination. This interrogation was repeated as often as Baker chose in order to double check the testimony given by the suspect. The prisoner was kept in Baker's headquarters for weeks, without warrant, affidavit, or other legal authority. If the accused somehow took measures for his protection, the prisoner was hurriedly transferred to the Old Capitol Prison,

Eisenschiml, Why Was Lincoln Murdered? (New York: Halcyon House, 1939), p. 189.

⁹Seward to S. W. Morton, special agent of State Department, 13 January 1862, OR, ser. 2, 2: 187; Mogelever, Death To Traitors, pp. 112-13. Lafayette C. Baker hired two of his brothers, Calvin and Milo Baker. They wrote encouraging letters home, reporting the adventurous nature of the work. This prompted Lafayette C. Baker's two cousins, Joseph Stannard and Luther Byron Baker, to come from Lansing, Michigan, to Washington. Mogelever, Death To Traitors, pp. 111-12.

which was administered by the War Department and beyond the reach of civil authorities.¹⁰

Old Capitol Prison, by the summer of 1862, was Baker's private domain. The building, originally built to house the national government while the Capitol was being reconstructed following the War of 1812, was a three-story red brick structure located on the north side of the Capitol Plaza on a hill overlooking the city of Washington. The Senate had occupied the first floor, while the House had met on the second floor. When the Capitol was restored, Congress moved and sold the building to private citizens who converted it into a rooming house. Eventually, the building, with many additions and alterations, became a worn out, dilapidated structure, which by 1861 had only one family living there. The entrance on First Street was under a long arched window which opened on the former Senate chamber. The two wings of the building enclosed a large courtyard. The other two sides of the courtyard were formed by private homes which were commandeered as additional prison space. The superintendent of Old Capitol Prison was Col. William P. Wood, a close acquaintance of the secretary of war and confidant of the chief of the National Detectives.¹¹

¹⁰Mogelever, Death To Traitors, pp. 111, 121; Eisenschiml, Why Was Lincoln Murdered?, pp. 189-90.

¹¹Mogelever, Death To Traitors, pp. 118-20; Eisenschiml, Why Was Lincoln Murdered?, p. 189; Randall, Constitutional Problems, p. 152. No accurate records were maintained as to the number of prisoners confined at Old Capitol Prison or to the number who died as a result of the confinement and undernourishment. The death list for Old Capitol at the end of the first year of operation was placed at 500. No lists were issued after that year. Mogelever, Death To Traitors, p. 127.

Baker's power was formalized in September 1862 when he was appointed a special provost marshal for the War Department. Prior to this, he held the title of special agent with no official organization under his authority. Following this action by the War Department, McClellan was relieved (for a second time) as commander of the Army of the Potomac; Pinkerton refused to cooperate with Little Mac's successor and closed his organization. When Pinkerton departed Washington, Baker moved into the existing power vacuum with his National Detectives. Baker concerned himself chiefly with matters that had little to do with the conduct of the war. Instead, he took charge of abandoned Confederate property, investigated charges of fraud committed by Union contractors, aided the Treasury Department in capturing counterfeiters, and arrested bounty jumpers, deserters, and disloyal citizens.¹²

The stepped-up operations of the National Detectives brought Baker into conflict with the provost marshal general of the Army of the Potomac, Brig. Gen. Marsena R. Patrick. Patrick refused to recognize Baker's authority to send agents through Union lines on intelligence missions and ordered their arrest, although he realized his action would "raise a breeze."¹³

¹²Stanton to Baker, 12 September 1862, OR, ser. 3, 2: 539; Harnett T. Kane, Spies For The Blue and Gray (Garden City, New Jersey: Hanover House, 1954), p. 126; Steere, "Catalyst of Victory," p. 95; Francis T. Miller et al, eds., The Photographic History of the Civil War, 10 vols. (1911; reprint ed., New York: Thomas Yoseloff, 1957), 8: 282; Edwin C. Fishel, "The Mythology of Civil War Intelligence," Civil War History 10 (1964): 347-49.

¹³David S. Sparks, ed., Inside Lincoln's Army: The Diary of Marsena Rudolph Patrick, Provost Marshal General, Army of the

The conflict deepened when Patrick learned that Baker suspected him of trading with the enemy and plundering private homes in rebel towns. Patrick retaliated by accusing Baker of major criminal activities, including murder. Writing in his diary, Patrick explained why neither Maj. Gen. Ambrose E. Burnside nor Maj. Gen. Joseph Hooker would oppose Baker and his encroachment on army affairs. Patrick believed

The reason why Burnside would not act against Baker was, that when he [Burnside] was here last summer [1862], he kept a woman whom Baker passed down here, to him & who was one of Baker's creatures [Hooker] went up to Washington . . . , drew his pay in the middle of the month, went to a gambling house, staid [sic] all night, lost all his money, . . . [and next day] drew his commutation for fuel and quarters¹⁴

Partly to counter Baker's encroachment of army authority and power and partly to fill the vacuum created by Pinkerton's departure in November 1862, Patrick organized the Bureau of Military Information in February 1863. Following this, he attempted to smooth differences with Baker. In April 1863, he requested that an amendment be made to an endorsement to a letter of 29 January 1863. In Patrick's endorsement of that date, he inferred that Baker had committed acts which were criminal in nature because he believed Baker had committed

Potomac (New York: Thomas Yoseloff, 1964), pp. 204-05; David S. Sparks, "General Patrick's Progress: Intelligence and Security in the Army of the Potomac," Civil War History 10 (1964): 379.

¹⁴Sparks, Patrick Diary, pp. 207, 217, 226. Patrick surmised Baker was so powerful because "he is, really, in the employ of Seward . . . and is only nominally on duty in the War Department--Seward uses him to dog political men--women are kept at the Hotels with false keys & every guest is under surveillance--Well! I [Patrick] came to the conclusion, that where so much roguery exists, the Country is hardly worth saving--" Ibid., p. 218.

murder. These words were stricken out as requested. However, the desired result did not follow. Instead, the personal conflict would continue until the end of the war.¹⁵

More important events soon occupied Baker's attention. During the spring of 1863, he convinced Lincoln and Stanton of his need for a military force under his personal control. The National Detectives' rapidly accumulating business made such a request necessary because of the increasing delay caused by the wait for troops to be supplied by the provost marshal. The proposed cavalry unit would be used against the rebels, Union deserters, corrupt Union paymasters, saboteurs, subversives, and other "enemies." The authorization for such a special unit was finally made after Baker discovered an obscure act of Congress which permitted the raising and equipping of a battalion of infantry and a battalion of cavalry for service within the District of Columbia. The act viewed these troops' mission as maintaining law and order in the capital. Baker, obtaining Lincoln's approval,

¹⁵Patrick to Watson, 7 April 1863, RG 107, (on microfilm M221 "Letters Received by Secretary of War, Registered Series 1801-70," Fort Worth, Texas Regional Branch, National Archives). The personal conflict reached a climax in the fall of 1863 when Baker tried to deprive the Union army camps of women and liquor. Baker issued orders for the confiscation of liquor and the closure of all gambling houses. The Quartermaster General of the Army, Brig. Gen. Montgomery C. Meigs, informed Baker that the responsibility for the good conduct of the army belonged to the army and not his detective bureau. Baker responded by claiming that these vices were undermining the army; if the provost marshal general would not clean it up, Baker would. The conflict was never resolved, only postponed by military movements and operations beginning in the spring of 1864. Mogelever, Death To Traitors, pp. 243-44.

received a letter of authorization on 5 May 1863 to raise a battalion of four companies of cavalry for special service. He also received the authority to appoint the officers of the battalion and was appointed a colonel in the United States Volunteers. Thousands of applications were received from men desiring to serve in this elite cavalry unit. Baker's "desire to organize a corps of intelligent, moral, and worthy men" led to his refusal to sell commissions because he wanted "honest men, not rogues."¹⁶

The battalion, consisting of four companies (A, B, C, and E), was organized at Washington from June to December 1863. Baker decided that this battalion would be the best equipped, best housed, and best fed soldiers guarding the capital. The camp of the First District of Columbia was half a mile east of the Capitol building, near an extensive system of military hospitals. Styled "Camp Baker," the area originally was sparsely populated. Quickly, stables, barracks, officers' quarters, an arsenal, and other service buildings were built. Stanton authorized Baker to purchase the best horses that could be procured in the country and issued the men the Henry repeating rifle (16 shot), as well

¹⁶Mogelever, Death To Traitors, pp. 212-15; Baker, History of U. S. Secret Service, pp. 195-96; E. D. Townsend, assistant adjutant general, to Baker, 5 May 1863, OR, ser. 3, 3: 191. Union general officers were surprised that Baker was raising a cavalry unit, since they believed he already had enough undercover agents in key positions spying on them in the field. Baker quoted a major general as remarking that these men were "'a set of d--d spies, and ought to be killed; and the officers of the regiment are detectives in disguise, reporting to you [Baker] whatever is said by the army commanders.'" Baker, History of U. S. Secret Service, p. 197; Mogelever, Death To Traitors, p. 213.

as revolvers, sabers, belts, saddles, and other carbines.

Baker commissioned his cousin, Joseph S. Baker, a captain and placed him in charge of drill; cousin Luther B. Baker was given the rank of lieutenant. Colonel Baker discovered, to his indignation, that he could not be carried on the muster rolls as commanding officer of the unit with the rank of colonel because the unit was too small. To solve this, he had himself detailed "on detached duty" as chief of the National Detectives of the War Department.¹⁷

Once a week Colonel Baker would ride into Camp Baker in a specially tailored colonel's uniform, with sash and large golden epaulets. He would order the battalion drawn up so he could speak to them. Seated on his horse, he made quite a spectacle. Joseph S. Baker, reminiscing to his son, Ray Stannard Baker, revealed that the colonel made "little speeches to the battalion. His sentences were short. His language was picturesque. He sat nervously on his horse. Every gesture was a copy of a Napoleon. These little speeches were usually quite unimportant."¹⁸

Soon the battalion was ready for service. But it soon became evident to Colonel Baker that one battalion was not large enough to perform all the tasks he had in mind. Included in these duties were night raids, ferreting out the disloyal, traitors, discovering the crooks, both civilian and military,

¹⁷Mogelever, Death To Traitors, pp. 215-17; Baker, History of U. S. Secret Service, p. 197; Frederick H. Dyer, A Compendium of the War of the Rebellion, 3 vols. (New York: Thomas Yoseloff, 1959), 3: 1018.

¹⁸Mogelever, Death To Traitors, p. 217.

and capturing rebel guerrillas, especially John S. Mosby. This was too much for the number of men available. Accordingly, Baker once more approached Lincoln and Stanton for authority to expand his battalion to regimental size.

The repeated skirmishes between Baker's Rangers and Mosby during the summer of 1863 provided Baker with the justification needed to finally convince the War Department to authorize such an expansion. The ability of Mosby's guerrillas to move at will amidst the Army of the Potomac convinced Stanton that Baker's unit was needed. Hundreds of men volunteered for places in the expanded military unit. Baker's biographer questioned "Whether the attraction was the promise that no soldier . . . would ever be sent outside the immediate vicinity of the District of Columbia or whether Baker's fame inspired all types of adventurers . . . [to clamor for enlistment]."¹⁹

Ever the "wheeler-dealer," Baker turned to Horatio Seymour, the War Democrat governor of New York, and demanded authority to enlist men for his regiment in central and western New York. In making such a remarkable demand, Colonel Baker disclosed the qualifications and duties of a Baker Ranger (as he viewed it). Duty in the First District of Columbia Cavalry required excellent mental and physical prowess, "intelligence, sobriety, self-dependence, bodily vigor, the power of endurance and, though last not least, that knowledge of the horse which results from early practical

¹⁹Ibid., pp. 219-20; Baker, History of U. S. Secret Service, p. 197.

experience and management of that noble animal."²⁰ Since he had grown up in central and western New York, Baker was familiar with the type of man found in that locale. As a result, he desired to recruit that type of person for his elite service. Notwithstanding such a desire, the First District of Columbia was eventually expanded by the assignment of eight companies of cavalry from Maine.

Meanwhile, the existing unit continued to perform missions for Baker while waiting for the eight companies to be raised and transported to Washington. The vast majority of the battalion's activities consisted of attempts to force Mosby to a fight. As a result, Capt. Joseph S. Baker was in western Maryland in the last days of June 1863 when word was received of Lee's invasion of the North. Receiving a report that Sharpsburg was held by Confederate forces, the captain, with his 300 man battalion, proceeded to attack and capture the town on 1 July. From there they proceeded north towards Gettysburg, arriving on the night of 3 July. The battalion participated in the Union assaults on the retreating columns of the Army of Northern Virginia.²¹

²⁰Mogelever, Death To Traitors, p. 221; Dyer, Compendium, 3: 1018; Special Order No. 262, War Department, 13 June 1863, Record Group 94, "Records of the Adjutant General's Office," National Archives, Washington, D. C. (hereafter cited as RG 94). Baker's biographer suggested that Lincoln had a hand in ordering the additional companies to be raised in Maine instead of New York, perhaps because of the political party affiliation of the governor of New York. Mogelever, Death To Traitors, p. 221.

²¹Mogelever, Death To Traitors, pp. 232-35; E. B. Long and Barbara Long, ed., The Civil War Day by Day: An Almanac 1861-1865 (Garden City: Doubleday, 1971), pp. 379-80.

When not in the field chasing Mosby, Baker's Rangers were performing the routine duties of soldiers. Uniform violations of the men on guard duty prompted the battalion commander to issue an order requiring those on guard duty to be dressed in jackets instead of the blouse (shirt) usually worn. Also the men who were not clean and soldierly in appearance would not be accepted for guard. With the arrival of a new commander, Lt. Col. Everton J. Conger, on 25 September 1863, a new schedule of daily drill was issued. Dismounted squad drill was conducted from 8:00-9:00 A.M. During this hour sabre exercise and deployment as skirmishers was practiced. At 9:00 A.M. boots and saddles was sounded; this was followed at 9:20 A.M. by the bugle call to horse. Mounted drill followed until 10:20 A.M. when battle drill was conducted. At 11:20 A.M. recall was sounded and followed by housekeeping and mess. In the afternoon, battle drill was renewed at 2:00 P.M. and continued until evening mess.²²

The soldierly routine was followed, except for patrols and missions, throughout the remainder of 1863. In October the regiment finally received one of the eight companies from Maine and immediately began drilling and training the new arrivals. The remaining seven companies were mustered into federal service on 8 February 1864 and began transporting to Camp Baker. The

²²Col. C. R. Lowell, Second Massachusetts Cavalry, to Lt. Col. J. H. Taylor, assistant adjutant general, 13 October 1863, OR, ser. 1, 29, pt. 1: 480; Brig. Gen. Michael Corcoran to a Captain Potter, assistant adjutant general, 21 October 1863, OR, ser. 1, 29, pt. 2: 363; Baker to J. H. Taylor, 22 October 1863, OR, ser. 1, 29, pt. 1: 494; Special Order No. 9, Headquarters, First District of Columbia Cavalry, 16 September 1863, RG 94; Special Order No. 11, Headquarters, First District of Columbia Cavalry, 28 September 1863, *ibid.*

last company reached Washington on 29 April 1864. (See Table VII).

The First District of Columbia Cavalry regiment received orders on Monday, 25 January 1864, to report to Maj. Gen. Benjamin F. Butler, commanding the Department of Virginia and North Carolina and the Army of the James. Whether Baker had requested the regiment's assignment to combat, as was claimed in his memoir, or it was assigned to Butler because of the shortage of trained and equipped cavalry, was never determined. In either case, Colonel Baker was not present with the regiment when it was ordered to southeastern Virginia. On 7 November 1863, he was relieved of his duties as provost marshal of the War Department; no explanation was found, but the records inferred that the growing displeasure with his activities by those in influential positions accounted for this action. Baker was awarded a thirty-day leave with authorization to recruit for the regiment. Upon his return on 11 December, he was detailed for "special duty" under the orders of the secretary of war and was ordered to report in person for instructions. Thus, Colonel Baker and his regiment parted company; he would periodically visit the regiment in the field and would continue to be in nominal command of the unit, but he did not participate in any combat operations involving the First District of Columbia Cavalry.

Instead, Baker continued his crusade against traitors, spies, corruption, vandalism, and disloyalty. By the end of the war, he had investigated internal corruption in the Treasury Department, Copperhead organizations, corruption with the recruiting service of the army and navy, and fraud by army contractors. Following

the surrender at Appomattox, Baker's National Detectives aided in the apprehension of John Wilkes Booth and the other conspirators in the Lincoln assassination.²³

In spite of the special equipment and training the men of the newly raised First District of Columbia Cavalry had received, the regiment proceeded to report to Butler's department in January 1864. This was in response to a request from Butler's headquarters at Fort Monroe to Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton. Butler, assigned to the command of the department in late 1863, immediately began to request additional troops for the projected campaign of 1864. By the end of 1863, the War Department was beginning to experience a manpower shortage and, as a result, the specially trained First District of Columbia Cavalry was among those units selected for reassignment to Butler's command.²⁴

The newly enlarged regiment was slow in being transferred to Yorktown during the waning days of January. Impatient, Butler bombarded Washington with repeated inquiries as to the whereabouts of Baker's cavalry. By Friday, 29 January 1864, only 281 men

²³Baker, History of U. S. Secret Service, pp. 197, 199, 201; Special Order No. 22, Headquarters, Department of Washington, 25 January 1864, RG 94; Miller, Photographic History, 4: 329; Special Order No. 496, War Department, 7 November 1863, RG 94; Special Order No. 550, War Department, 11 December 1863, *ibid.*; Special Order No. 494, War Department, 6 November 1863, *ibid.*; Regimental Order No. 4, Headquarters, First District of Columbia Cavalry, 25 September 1863, *ibid.* For an interesting theory concerning Baker's involvement in the assassination of Lincoln, see David Bolsiger and Charles E. Sellier, Jr., The Lincoln Conspiracy (Los Angeles: Schick Sunn Classic Books, 1977) and Robert H. Fowler, "Was Stanton Behind Lincoln's Murder?" Civil War Times 3 (1961): 5-23.

²⁴Special Order No. 42, War Department, 27 January 1864, RG 94; Butler to Stanton, 26 January 1864, Benjamin Franklin Butler Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, D. C.

of the regiment's authorized strength of 1,254 had arrived at Yorktown under Capt. Joseph S. Baker. This battalion arrived on the peninsula with the understanding they were to perform picket duty. As a result, Butler queried the War Department as to the expected arrival date of the remainder of Baker's regiment, since those who had already arrived were without tents and other camp equipment. It was fortunate for the men that the weather was unseasonably warm. The official unit history of Baker's cavalry related that the battalion, establishing its camp two miles from Yorktown on the York River, had never seen a "morning so summer like and scenery so charming . . . in mid-winter."²⁵

On 29 January, the battalion was ordered to relocate its camp eight miles farther west. This placed the location of Baker's cavalry three miles east of Williamsburg, Virginia. The regiment would continue to trickle into Butler's department throughout the spring; however, Lafayette C. Baker retained the equivalent of a company in Washington until the close of the war.

²⁵Samuel H. Merrill, The Campaigns of the First Maine and First District of Columbia Cavalry (Portland, Maine: Bailey and Noyes, 1866), p. 229; Butler to Brig. Gen. Isaac J. Wistar, commanding Forces at Yorktown, 27 January 1864, Butler Papers; Butler to Col. Robert M. West, commanding Forces at Yorktown, 28 January 1864, *ibid.*; West to Butler, 28 January 1864, *ibid.*; Butler to Maj. Gen. Christopher C. Augur, commanding Department of Washington, 29 January 1864, OR, ser. 1, 33: 444; Special Order No. __, Headquarters, First District of Columbia Cavalry, 29 January 1864, RG 94; Fred A. Shannon, The Organization and Administration of the Union Army 1861-1865, 2 vols. (Cleveland: Arthur H. Clark Co., 1928), 2: 270.

TABLE VII

ORGANIZATION OF FIRST DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA CAVALRY
April 1864

Colonel Lafayette C. Baker
 Lt. Col. Everton J. Conger
 Maj. Joseph S. Baker
 Maj. Joel W. Cloudman
 Maj. Daniel S. Curtis
 1st Lt. George A. Dickson, Adjutant
 1st Lt. Luther B. Baker, Quartermaster
 Surgeon George J. Northrop
 Chaplain Samuel H. Merrill
 Sgt. Major John A. Campbell
 Quartermaster Sergeant — Miller
 Commissary Sergeant — Wolfer
 Hospital Steward — Lovejoy
 Chief Musician — Bigelow
 Company A Capt. William Hamilton Company G Capt. Thomas C. Webber
 Company B Capt. Michael McNamara Company H Capt. Andrew M. Benson
 Company C Capt. George Griffin Company I Capt. Robert F. Dyer
 Company D Capt. William S. Howe Company K Capt. John W. Freese
 Company E Capt. Thomas C. Speers Company L Capt. Charles C. Chase
 Company F Capt. Edward T. Sanford Company M Capt. Daniel F. Sargent

SOURCE: Merrill, Campaigns of the First D. C., pp. 232-33;
 Organization of Regiment, First District of Columbia Cavalry
 Regiment Record Books, RG 94.

The slowly reinforced regiment, under Lt. Col. Everton J. Conger, was assigned to Col. Samuel P. Spear's cavalry brigade. Spear's command immediately began conducting raids and reconnaissance missions in which Baker's cavalry participated. Amidst the activities of war, the regiment established a daily routine: reveille was sounded at daylight, with stable call immediately afterwards. This was followed by breakfast at 7:00 A.M. and work call at 8:00 A.M. At 10:00 A.M. water call was sounded; at 11:45 A.M. recall was heard in preparation for dinner at 12:00 M. At 1:00 P.M. work call was again sounded. At 3:30 P.M. recall was played; this was followed by stable call at 4:00 P.M. Following the evening meal, retreat was held at sunset with guard mount succeeding. Tattoo was scheduled for 8:30 P.M. with taps being played at 8:45 P.M.²⁶

When not performing the mundane housekeeping chores common to all soldiers, Baker's troops participated in several expeditions, reconnaissances, scouts, and skirmishes during 1864. As early as 5 February, the First District of Columbia participated in a scheme of Butler's which called for the capture of Jefferson Davis and other major Confederate leaders, while freeing Union

²⁶Butler to Wistar, 31 January 1864, Butler Papers; Organization of Troops in Department of Virginia and North Carolina, 31 January 1864, OR, ser. 1, 33: 483; Merrill, Campaigns of the First D. C., pp. 229-31; Company Order No. 1, Company B, First District of Columbia, 5 February 1864, RG 94; Special Order No. 77, Headquarters, Department of Virginia and North Carolina, 18 March 1864, Record Group 393, "Records of the United States Army Commands," National Archives, Washington, D. C. (hereafter cited as RG 393). The remainder of the regiment finally reached the Department of Virginia and North Carolina on 12 May 1864. Merrill, Campaigns of the First D. C., p. 248.

prisoners by raiding Richmond. Baker's men were to secure and retain Bottom Bridge on the Chickahominy River only twelve miles from Richmond, while the remainder of the cavalry would march on to Richmond. The unit did little fighting, participating in the skirmishing at Bottom Bridge and Baltimore Store. The raid never reached the city of Richmond.²⁷

Following this, the companies present in Virginia were ordered to Newport News, on the James River, a march of twenty-five miles. In turn, Baker's cavalry (minus Company B) was relocated on Friday, 19 February 1864, from Newport News to Norfolk. From Norfolk they were ordered to Great Bridge on the Elizabeth River, ten miles south of Norfolk. The regimental history observed that the march from Norfolk to Great Bridge occurred during the coldest weather ever experienced by the men during their term of military service. This march was followed by an even more difficult movement which required two days to complete. Leaving Companies A and C at Great Bridge, Lt. William S. Howe, in command of Companies D and E, moved to Pungo Bridge in order to relieve the Tenth New York Cavalry. This march crossed twenty-five miles of rebel territory and required the crossing of several unbridged streams and swamps. The two companies remained in position until 1 March 1864, when they were ordered to Deep Creek, south of Norfolk, on the edge of Dismal Swamp.²⁸

²⁷Wistar to Col. Samuel P. Spear, commanding cavalry brigade, 5 February 1864, OR, ser. 1, 33: 521; Confederate Brig. Gen. Eppa Hutton to Maj. T. O. Chestney, 9 February 1864, *ibid.*, p. 150; Long, Day By Day, p. 461.

²⁸Merrill, Campaigns of the First D. C., pp. 230-32; Special Order No. 50, Headquarters, Department of Virginia and North

Company B, remaining at Newport News, noted on 22 March that it was the only Union unit at that location and requested an immediate resupply of ammunition, replacements for malfunctioning rifles and pistols, and recruits to bring the unit up to authorized strength. The company, consisting of sixty-eight men, did not even have its authorized number of officers because it was not at minimum strength.²⁹

Meanwhile, the remainder of the First District of Columbia Cavalry Regiment remained in Washington. Baker's cavalry, originally composed of four companies (A, B, C, E), was brought to regimental strength by the addition of eight companies of cavalry from Maine. Company D, quickly raised in Maine, reached Washington on 25 October 1863. The remaining seven companies began arriving at Camp Baker in Washington, D. C., in February. (Company F arrived on 14 February; the remainder arrived on 29 February 1864.) Throughout March, these companies were trained while waiting to be mounted. When not on duty, these men from Maine relaxed by playing cards, singing, drinking, wrestling, boxing, horse racing, target shooting, and baseball. The men of the "Pine Tree State" undoubtedly enjoyed themselves heartily, as an order was issued on 19 March 1864 directing company commanders to instruct the men that their games had to be played

Carolina, 19 February 1864, RG 393; Col. J. W. Shaffer, Chief of Staff, Army of the James, to Brig. Gen. Charles A. Heckman, commanding division at Norfolk and Portsmouth, 19 February 1864, OR, ser. 1, 33: 576.

²⁹Capt. Michael McNamara, Company B, to Lt. Col. Everton J. Conger, 22 March 1864, RG 94.

in the rear of the armory and not in the area of the officers' quarters. Such exuberance by the men and, conversely, such minor problems as excessive noise, were soon to pass.³⁰

Butler, concerned about the number of men present for duty in his department, queried Col. Lafayette Baker as to the location of the remainder of his regiment. Baker, as nominal commander of the regiment, was technically under Butler's command, although he was on detached and special service to the War Department. Without waiting for a reply from the regimental commander, Butler, contacted Peter H. Watson, assistant secretary of war, on Tuesday, 22 March 1864. Having been informed by Baker that the remainder of the cavalry regiment was detained because of a lack of horses, Butler requested Watson to intercede because of the general's need for cavalry. The records indicate Butler's second letter attained the desired results; orders were issued on Wednesday, the sixth of April, for the remainder of the regiment to embark on transports from the Sixth Street Dock at 6:00 A.M. the following day. Despite this order, a delay was experienced before the entire command was transported to Norfolk. As a result, Butler, writing Watson again, informed the assistant secretary that his command was preparing to take the field and needed the two unmounted battalions in Washington within ten days. The War Department responded by issuing an order authorizing the movement

³⁰Merrill, Campaigns of the First D. C., pp. 228, 231; Fred A. Shannon, "The Life of the Common Soldier in the Union Army, 1861-1865," Mississippi Valley Historical Review 13 (1927): 480-81; Post Order No. 1, Camp Baker, 19 March 1864, RG 94.

of any portion of the regiment which was equipped and ready for the field to Fort Monroe. The regiment responded by ordering all available men (numbering 600) to the Sixth Street wharf for transportation to Fort Monroe at 12:00 M. on 13 May 1864.³¹

In the meantime, Lt. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant was made general-in-chief of the Armies of the United States on 12 March 1864. Establishing his headquarters with Maj. Gen. Gordon Meade's Army of the Potomac, he assumed strategic direction of the Union war effort. On the thirteenth of April, he offered to assign Col. August V. Kautz as a possible commander of Butler's cavalry division. Butler accepted this excellent cavalry officer, and Kautz was assigned to his command on 17 April 1864. Butler appointed Kautz chief of cavalry of the Department of Virginia and North Carolina and instructed him to "Organize and discipline it [the cavalry] that it may be made as effective as possible with a view of active operations."³²

Kautz set about his task and quickly reorganized the available cavalry into two brigades. As a result of this reorganization, the First District of Columbia was reassigned from Spear's brigade to the First Brigade of the cavalry division

³¹Butler to Maj. J. S. Baker, 21 March 1864, Butler Papers; Butler to Peter H. Watson, 22 March 1864, *ibid.*; Butler to Col. L. C. Baker, 1 April 1864, *ibid.*; Special Order No. 10, Camp Baker, 6 April 1864, RG 94; Butler to Watson, 8 April 1864, OR, ser. 1, 33: 824; Special Order No. 145, War Department, 12 April 1864, RG 94; Special Order No. __, Headquarters, First District of Columbia, 12 May 1864, RG 94; Lt. H. T. Schroeder to Maj. R. S. Davis, assistant adjutant general, 13 May 1864, OR, ser. 1, 36, pt. 2: 740; Merrill, Campaigns of the First D. C., p. 235.

³²Shaffer, to Kautz, 20 April 1864, Butler Papers; Boatner, Dictionary, pp. 353, 449; Grant to Butler, 13 April 1864, Butler Papers; Special Order No. 150, War Department, 17 April 1864, RG 94.

under Col. Simon H. Mix. Kautz was promoted to brigadier general on 7 May 1864 and appointed commander of the cavalry division.³³

Thus, the arrival of the remainder of the regiment at Fort Monroe coincided with the organization of Butler's cavalry division and the opening of the campaign of 1864. Notwithstanding the amount of time available for the outfitting of the regiment, Baker's cavalry still lacked a full complement of equipment. For instance, on Monday, 2 May 1864, Conger, in command of Baker's regiment, attempting to acquire a flag staff from the division quartermaster, confessed that "Bread is the Staff of Life and is one of the certain issues; but what we want is a flag staff an uncertain issue and now Col. allow me to say how much we regret its absence."³⁴ The records do not indicate whether the regiment acquired the flag staff.

Regardless of missing equipment or understrength companies, the regiment marched with Kautz's cavalry division on its first raid on 5 May 1864. The raid coincided with the movement of Butler's Army of the James from Fort Monroe and Norfolk up the James River. Landing 30,000 Union troops at City Point and Bermuda Hundred, Butler's army was to threaten Richmond by capturing Petersburg. Kautz's division, marching overland from

³³General Order No. 1, Headquarters, Kautz Cavalry Division, 28 April 1864, OR, ser. 1, 33: 1013; Organization of Troops in Department of Virginia and North Carolina, 30 April 1864, *ibid.*, p. 1054; Organization of the Army of the James, 5 May 1864, OR, ser. 1, 36, pt. 1: 119. The regiment was reassigned to Spear's brigade in July 1864. Summary of Casualties, 31 July 1864, OR, ser. 1, 40, pt. 1: 268.

³⁴Conger to Colonel Greene, quartermaster of cavalry division, 2 May 1864, RG 94.

Suffolk, Virginia, reached City Point on 10 May. During the five day march, the division skirmished with rebel troops several times while destroying track, bridges, and public buildings. The action at Jarrett's Station, Virginia, on 8 May 1864, gained the First District of Columbia Cavalry a commendation from First Brigade headquarters. In the skirmish, the regiment had two killed and eight wounded while aiding in the capture of the bridge across the Nottoway River by conducting a dismounted charge.³⁵

Kautz's division reached City Point on 10 May; the First District of Columbia crossed the Appomattox to Bermuda Hundred on the eleventh and encamped near Butler's headquarters. The regiment, selected as the advance guard, led Kautz's division on a second raid the following day. Encountering pickets near Swift Creek, the regiment returned the fire sharply and continued the advance. Kautz's division, with Baker's cavalry in the lead, rode rapidly through Chesterfield Court House, pausing to release some rebel conscripts from jail. Leaving the town, the column continued to Coalfield Station on the Richmond and Danville railroad, only thirteen miles west of Richmond. Having reached Coalfield Station at 11:00 P.M., the unit surprised the inhabitants, who were panic-stricken by the arrival of Union soldiers in such a "safe" locale. Taking pains to avoid adding to the panic of the rebel civilians, the regiment (under orders

³⁵Merrill, Campaigns of the First D. C., pp. 235-37; Long, Day By Day, p. 493; Miller, Photographic History, 3: 318; J. S. Baker to Col. S. H. Mix, 29 May 1864, OR, ser. 1, 36, pt. 2: 179-80.

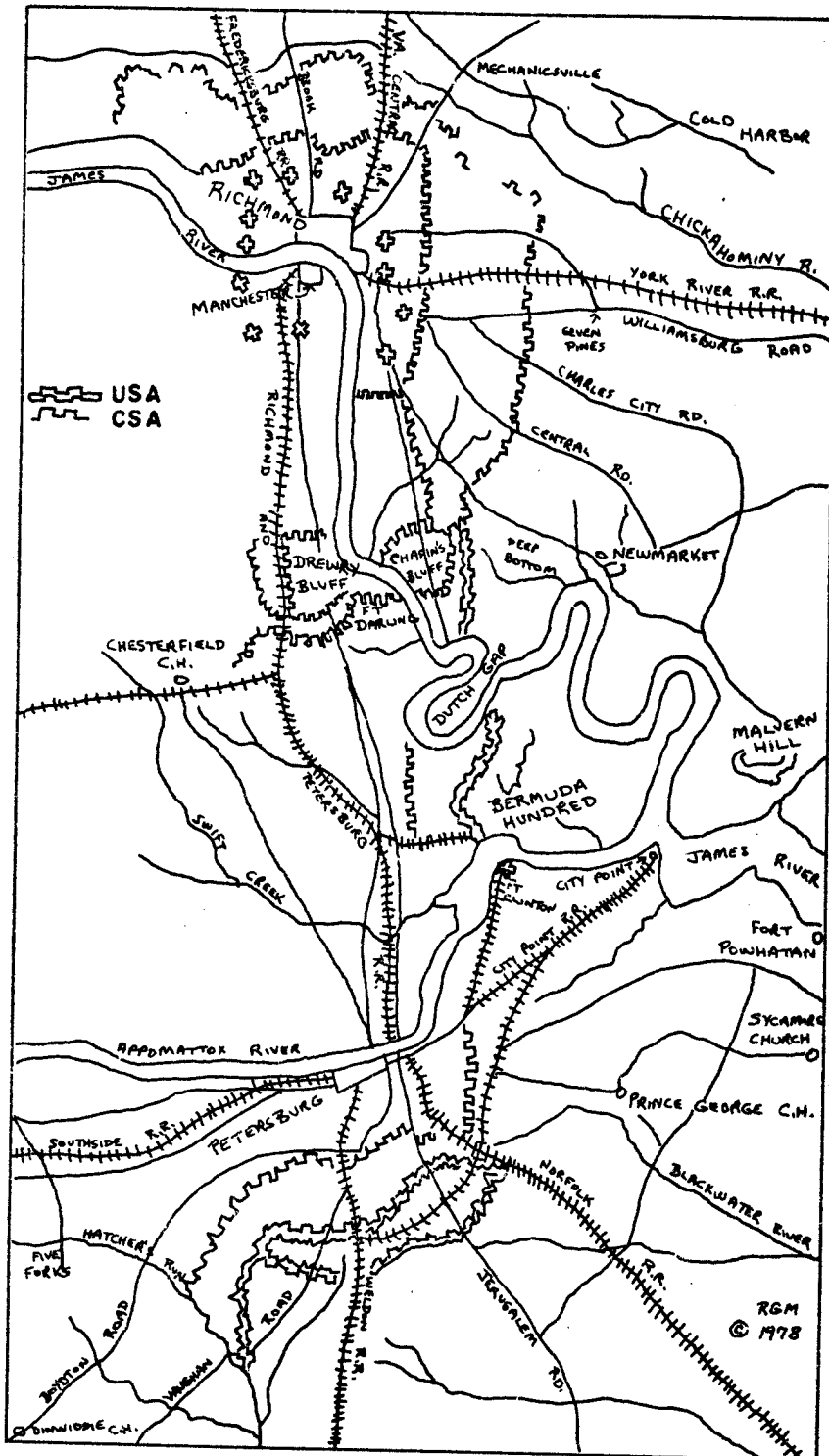
from Kautz) quickly destroyed the telegraph, railroad track, depot, water tanks, wood sheds, and a tannery.³⁶

Saturday, 14 May 1864, the regiment was again assigned the duty of advance guard. During the day, Baker's cavalry aided in the destruction of public property at Wellville Station. On the fifteenth, the regiment again was in the rear of the division. After crossing a bridge on the Appomattox River, Joseph S. Baker (now a major and in command of the regiment) was ordered to destroy the bridge after the column had passed. That evening the command camped in Lawrenceville. The following day at noon the regiment was again ordered to the front of the marching column. During the afternoon, Jarrett's Station was reached, and the water tank was burned, several prisoners captured, and a pontoon bridge train destroyed. Continuing the advance, the regiment reached Freeman's Bridge on the Nottaway River about midnight. It was discovered that Kautz's division was in a trap because a section of the bridge had been removed by the rebels. The river was unfordable at this point, and the closest fords were heavily guarded by Confederate troops. Baker's cavalry was instructed to repair the damaged bridge, which was accomplished in two and a half hours. The command then crossed the bridge, brushing aside the enemy and continued towards City Point, arriving there in the afternoon of the seventeenth. The division, although exhausted, suffered only thirty casualties.

³⁶J. S. Baker to Maj. Ferris Jacobs, Jr., commanding First Brigade, 26 May 1864, OR, ser. 1, 36, pt. 2: 180-81; Maj. Newton Hall, Third New York Cavalry, to Major Jacobs, 18 May 1864, ibid., p. 183; Merrill, Campaigns of the First D. C., pp. 237-40.

Figure 11

Defenses of Richmond and Petersburg



Finally, the First District of Columbia was one of several regiments commended as a result of the unit's performance during the raid.³⁷

While six companies of the regiment were gaining glory with General Kautz, the remaining six companies finally arrived from Washington. These companies, still without horses, were transshipped from Fort Monroe to Norfolk. Upon arriving, they reported to Brig. Gen. George F. Shepley, commanding the District of Eastern Virginia and North Carolina. Shepley ordered the two battalions to Portsmouth, Virginia, where they went into camp in the rear of the town. The men from Maine, comprising the six companies at Portsmouth, remained there until 22 May when they boarded transports for the Bermuda Hundred. Disembarking on 23 May 1864, the six companies went into camp next to the other six companies of Baker's cavalry. This marked the first time the entire regiment was assembled in one place.³⁸

As a result of an inspection conducted by Kautz, it was determined that between 500 and 1,000 horses were disabled and unfit for service. By consolidating and establishing a cavalry depot, Kautz decided he could maintain about 2,000 good horses ready for the field. Thus, the six companies of the regiment were ordered from Portsmouth to Bermuda Hundred. This was

³⁷J. S. Baker to Jacobs, 26 May 1864, OR, ser. 1, 36, pt. 2: 180-81; Merrill, Campaigns of the First D. C., pp. 237-42; Jacobs to Capt. M. J. Asch, assistant adjutant general cavalry division, 26 May 1864, OR, ser. 1, 36, pt. 2: 177; Mix to Asch, 29 May 1864, ibid., p. 176.

³⁸Merrill, Campaigns of the First D. C., p. 248; Lt. H. T. Schroeder, assistant adjutant general, to Maj. R. S. Davis, 13 May 1864, OR, ser. 1, 36, pt. 2: 740.

followed by orders to dismount a portion of the cavalry division so the horses could be rested, given pasture, and screened for permanently disabled animals. During the time required for the horses to recuperate, that portion of the cavalry division which had been dismounted was assigned a section of Butler's fortifications which extended from the Point of Rocks on the Appomattox, northward to Dutch Gap on the James, a distance of five miles. The six dismounted companies were located about mid-point of the line, between the two rivers, in an open field and on level ground. The regiment's tents were located to the rear of the fortifications. The Confederates had a line of fortifications in front of Butler's line, varying in distance from one-half to two miles. During the days the First District of Columbia served as infantry in the field works, the enemy shelled the line daily. Only once, on Saturday, 28 May 1864, at 3:00 A.M. did the rebels threaten an assault. The Confederate artillery bombarded the Union works and the regiment was assembled for combat. After three hours, it became apparent the blow was not to be made that day. It finally came on 4 June, when the Confederates attempted an assault on Butler's center which was repulsed.³⁹

Meanwhile, the six mounted companies participated in an operation against Petersburg. Planning to use two columns

³⁹Kautz to Shaffer, 19 May 1864, OR, ser. 1, 36, pt. 2: 939; Shaffer to Kautz, 19 May 1864, ibid.; telegram to Lieutenant Schroeder, 21 May 1864, RG 393; General Order No. ____, Headquarters, Army of the James, 26 May 1864, ibid.; Merrill, Campaigns of the First D. C., pp. 249-55. See also volume 6 of Miller's Photographic History for an excellent pictorial essay on Union remount stations.

(one consisting of Kautz's cavalry and the other of Brig. Gen. Quincy A. Gillmore's infantry), Butler called for a swift march and the capture of Petersburg. The cavalry departed on 9 June, but progress was slow. The division did not reach the enemy's lines until noon; since the position appeared weak, Kautz ordered the First District of Columbia dismounted and employed as skirmishers while the Fifth Pennsylvania Cavalry attacked on the left. The attack delayed the column an hour. Upon reaching the outskirts of Petersburg, Kautz discovered rebels in a position to defend the city. Because Kautz heard nothing from the direction of Gillmore's column, he concluded the infantry had retired to Union lines and ordered his column to do likewise. "The conduct of the men," Kautz wrote in his official report, ". . . was even better than I expected, for while I have great confidence in them as cavalry, I did not know what they would do in assaulting intrenchments."⁴⁰

Unfortunately, Butler's mismanagement of this assault prevented the Union army from seizing Petersburg when it was weakly defended. Instead, it convinced many in the War Department, including Grant, of Butler's incapacity as a combat commander. But Butler's political influence prevented Lincoln from removing him from command before the upcoming presidential election of 1864. Butler, fearing such action, reported to Stanton that Kautz "charged [the] enemy's works at Petersburg, and carried them, penetrating the town, but not being supported by General

⁴⁰Kautz to Maj. R. S. Davis, 11 June 1864, OR, ser. 1, 36, pt. 2: 308-09.

Gillmore, who had withdrawn his forces without a conflict, . . . was obliged to withdraw without further effect."⁴¹

While the higher command swirled in the controversy over responsibility for the failure to capture Petersburg, Conger, expressing his appreciation to the regiment, praised the men, saying "Yet you have done but your duty . . . you are expected to fight, you are here for that purpose, never fail when ordered to accomplish what men can do and win the name of the fighting D. C."⁴²

In conjunction with such rhetoric, the six dismounted companies of the regiment were relieved from duty in the trenches on 13 June and on the following day were mounted. Kautz cavalry division received orders on the fifteenth to conduct a second assault on Petersburg. The entire regiment was ordered to the field, but Conger was unable to comply because of the inexperience of the men in the six newly mounted companies. Likewise, the equipment issued to these companies was either incomplete or worn out. Accordingly, only the veteran companies of Baker's cavalry participated in the attack. The cavalry skirmished with the Confederate line on the fifteenth but were forced to withdraw when no Union reinforcements arrived. On the sixteenth, the division guarded the left flank of the newly arrived Army of

⁴¹Butler to Stanton, 10 June 1864, *ibid.*, p. 273; Conger to Kautz, 11 June 1864, *ibid.*, p. 310; Spear to Asch, 11 June 1864, *ibid.*, pp. 310-12; Long, Day By Day, p. 518.

⁴²Regimental Order No. 27, Headquarters, First District of Columbia, 5 [?] June 1864, RG 94.

the Potomac. The next day the division returned to its camps.⁴³

While the men rested from the arduous fighting of the preceding days, Grant, having crossed the James River with Meade's Army of the Potomac, informed Butler on 20 June 1864 of his desire to mount a cavalry raid to cut Confederate lines of communication, including the Weldon and South Side (or Lynchburg) railroads south of Petersburg. Brig. Gen. James H. Wilson, commanding the Third Division of the Army of the Potomac's Cavalry Corps, was to lead the raid. In addition to Wilson's division, Butler was to assign Kautz's division to Wilson's command. All twelve companies of the First District of Columbia Cavalry were included in the order of "boots and saddles," which was given at 1:00 o'clock on the morning of Wednesday the twenty-second of June.

The Wilson-Kautz raid began at Blanford, on the Suffolk railroad, four miles south of Petersburg. Marching through Prince George Court House, the cavalry reached the Weldon railroad at Ream's Station, twelve miles from Petersburg. The destruction of public property, the buildings at the station, and a considerable amount of track followed. While the troopers of Wilson's division were thus engaged, Kautz proceeded to Burkeville. Confederate Maj. Gen. William H. F. (Rooney) Lee's cavalry division, the only mounted troops available to oppose the raid at this time, attempted to separate the two Union

⁴³Merrill, Campaigns of the First D. C., pp. 258-59; Conger to Lt. J. Frank Cummings, adjutant general, Second Brigade, 17 June 1864, RG 94; Spear to Asch, 17 June 1864, OR, ser. 1, 40, pt. 1: 738-39; Spear to Asch, 1 July 1864, ibid., p. 741; Kautz to Davis, 20 June 1864, ibid., pp. 728-30.

divisions by occupying Nottoway Station. Wilson attacked Lee to protect Kautz, who was destroying the railroad at Burkeville. The action was indecisive, allowing both Union divisions to march south and rejoin forces on 24 June at Keysville on the Danville railroad. With Wilson's division providing a screen to protect Kautz from Rooney Lee, the Army of the James troopers galloped towards the Roanoke Bridge, which spanned the Staunton River at the mouth of the Little Roanoke River. The position, of strategic importance, was heavily fortified by Confederate troops. The approach to the bridge was over open level ground. Kautz ordered Conger's regiment to burn the bridge. Supported by the fire of the rest of the division, Conger led the men of the District of Columbia and Maine on foot across the open ground. The Confederates opened fire with grape and canister and the attempt to reach the bridge failed.⁴⁴

Following this aborted effort, Wilson ordered the command to march eastward in order to link up with Union troops he believed to be along the Weldon railroad. Unaware the federal forces had not reached those positions, nor that Maj. Gen. Philip H. Sheridan's raid on the Virginia Central railroad had been thwarted, forcing Sheridan to withdraw across the James on

⁴⁴Grant to Butler, 20 June 1864, OR, ser. 1, 40, pt. 2: 257; Butler to Kautz, 20 June 1864, ibid., p. 267; Butler to Grant, 20 June 1864, ibid., p. 257; Ulysses S. Grant, Personal Memoirs, 2 vols. (1895; reprint ed., New York: Bonanza Books, n.d.), 2: 284-86, 298-99, 303; Boatner, Dictionary, pp. 931-32; Merrill, Campaigns of the First D. C., pp. 261-67; Officer List, Record Book of the First District of Columbia, RG 94; Spear to Asch, 1 July 1864, OR, ser. 1, 40, pt. 1: 739-40; J. S. Baker to Conger, 17 July 1864, ibid., p. 741; J. S. Baker to Spear, 1 July 1864, ibid., p. 742; Kautz to Capt. L. Siebert, assistant adjutant general, 4 July 1864, ibid., pp. 730-33.

25 June 1864, Wilson continued east, covering seventy miles in two days. At 10:00 on the morning of the twenty-eighth, Wilson reached the Iron Bridge across Stony Creek, located ten miles south of Ream's Station. To prevent Wilson's companies from crossing the creek was Maj. Gen. Wade Hampton's four rebel cavalry brigades. While Wilson's division skirmished with Hampton, Kautz trudged west of the railroad with orders to cross at Ream's Station. Supposing that Ream's Station was in Union hands, the weary cavalry men discovered Maj. Gen. Fitzhugh Lee's cavalry division in position at the crossing. In the meantime, Wilson had broken contact with Hampton and joined Kautz at Ream's Station. The Confederates, now comprising all three cavalry divisions and one infantry division, presented a difficult problem. Recognizing that the only hope of escape was in rapid movements, Wilson ordered the destruction of his supply trains (horse-drawn supply wagons) and ordered a retreat towards the Nottoway River. Before the orders could be carried out, the two divisions were separated by the Confederates. Kautz ordered his division to charge across the railroad, which was in a deep cut ten to twelve feet in depth, cross a deep stream and an "impassable" swamp to gain the Union lines. The official history of the First District of Columbia described the wild, chaotic moment:

mounted men slide down that steep embankment to the railroad track, and scramble up the opposite bank, and dash down the next declivity into the stream, and wallow through mire and water . . . amid the thunder of artillery, and with solid shot plunging, and shells exploding, and grape and canister raining,

and musket balls whistling around them, till they reached the opposite shore, and disappeared in the swamp.⁴⁵

Wilson, with the remainder of his division, was pursued by Fitz Lee to the Nottoway which was crossed on the thirtieth. The Yankee cavalry men then galloped for the James. Surmising his escape route, Hampton pushed his command to the breaking point in order to intercept Wilson. However, the race was won when Wilson crossed the Blackwater River on 1 July ahead of Hampton. The Wilson-Kautz raid, beginning with 5,000 cavalry, suffered 1,500 casualties, the loss of the Union trains, and twelve pieces of artillery. The First District of Columbia suffered fourteen killed, fifty-eight wounded, and sixty-six captured or missing. One of the wounded was Lieutenant Colonel Conger, who was given a medical leave. While at home on the surgeon's certificate of disability, he was placed on detached service at Lafayette C. Baker's headquarters, acting as second in command of Baker's National Detectives. Joseph S. Baker, promoted to the rank of major in March 1864, succeeded to the field command of the regiment. Despite the casualties, the Wilson-Kautz raid was considered a success because of the destruction of buildings, cotton, commissary stores, railroad equipment and track around Richmond and Petersburg. Such destruction resulted in severing rail communications between

⁴⁵Merrill, Campaigns of the First D. C., pp. 267-70; Boatner, Dictionary, p. 932; Grant, Memoirs, 2: 300-02; Spear to Asch, 1 July 1864, OR, ser. 1, 40, pt. 1: 740-41; J. S. Baker to Spear, 1 July 1864, ibid., p. 742; Kautz to Siebert, 4 July 1864, ibid., pp. 730-33.

these two cities and the rest of Virginia for several weeks.⁴⁶

Following the return of the regiment to Union lines, it began a period of rest and training. On 27 July 1864, the entire cavalry force, in conjunction with the Second Corps, was ordered to the north side of the James River in an attempt to distract the enemy from Union operations at Petersburg. Skirmishing occurred at Deep Bottom, Darbytown, Strawberry Plains, and New Market road. On the thirtieth, following the explosion of the Petersburg mine, the regiment returned to camp. The regiment was posted to picket duty on Tuesday, 2 August, on the extreme left of the army. The picket line occupied by the regiment extended from the left of the Union line of fortifications eastward through Prince George Court House, Lee's Mills, Sycamore Church, and Cox's Mills. In conjunction with the occupation of the picket line, the headquarters of the regiment was established on 3 August at Sycamore Church, about ten miles southeast of City Point. From the eighth to the twenty-first, Baker's cavalry performed picket duty throughout the region.⁴⁷

Maj. Joseph S. Baker reported to Kautz on 13 August that a large herd of government cattle was located near Cocke's Mill and that it was exposed to guerrillas. Since the regiment had been ordered to Prince George Court House, no Union units were in a position to protect the cattle. Kautz, informing his

⁴⁶Boatner, Dictionary, p. 932; Return of Casualties, 15-30 June 1864, OR, ser. 1, 40, pt. 1: 238; Officer List, Record Book of the First District of Columbia, RG 94; Special Order No. 214, Headquarters, Department of Virginia and North Carolina, 6 August 1864, RG 393.

⁴⁷Merrill, Campaigns of the First D. C., pp. 271-73; Long, Day by Day, pp. 546-48.

superiors, complained that he had but 1,300 men to picket a line twenty-five miles in length. The only solution was to move the cattle herd. Before any action was taken, fighting developed along the Weldon railroad on the twenty-first. Continuing at intervals for the remainder of the week, the First District of Columbia, according to Spear, "did admirably [in the skirmishing]." ⁴⁸

Returning to picket duty, the regiment was surprised to receive orders from the War Department transferring Companies D, F, G, H, I, K, J, and M, along with any other men who enlisted from the state of Maine, to the First Maine Cavalry. The process of transferring the men from the "Pine Tree State" was repeatedly interrupted by picket duty and counter guerrilla operations. Finally, other units on picket duty were instructed to assume responsibility of the line picketed by the eight Maine companies. Despite this, delays would continue to prevent the transfer. ⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Kautz to Maj. Gen. Andrew A. Humphreys, chief of staff, Army of the Potomac, 13 August 1864, OR, ser. 1, 42, pt. 2: 166; Humphreys to Kautz, 13 August 1864, ibid.; Kautz to Humphreys, 13 August 1864, ibid., pp. 166-67; Merrill, Campaigns of the First D. C., pp. 273-76; Spear to Asch, 26 August 1864, OR, ser. 1, 42, pt. 1: 834.

⁴⁹ J. S. Baker to Spear, 3 September 1864, OR, ser. 1, 42, pt. 1: 842; Special Order No. 283, War Department, 27 August 1864, RG 94; Kautz to Capt. H. C. Weir, assistant adjutant general, 4 September 1864, OR, ser. 1, 42, pt. 2: 694-95; Maj. Samuel Wetherill, Eleventh Pennsylvania Cavalry, to Spear, 4 September 1864, ibid., p. 695; Asch to Wetherill, 5 September 1864, ibid., p. 716; Itinerary of Army of the Potomac and Army of the James, August-December 1864, OR, ser. 1, 42, pt. 1: 82; J. S. Baker to Spear, 10 August 1864, RG 94; Lt. H. D. Williard, assistant adjutant general, Second Brigade, to J. S. Baker, 1 September 1864, ibid.; Weir to Kautz, 3 September 1864, OR, ser. 1, 42, pt. 2: 682; Kautz to Weir, 3 September 1864, ibid., p. 681; Special Order No. 252, Headquarters, Department of Virginia and North Carolina, 13 September 1864, RG 393.

Regimental headquarters, reestablished at Sycamore Church on 3 September 1864, tried to prepare the eight companies for transfer while the regiment continued to function as a combat unit. In addition, the number of sick increased almost daily because of the excessive duty required of the men. The regiment, in constant service since its arrival in Butler's department in January, was charged with establishing a picket line five miles in length. The average number of men available to perform such duty was 319 by the seventh of September. Regimental Surgeon R. R. Wiestling, complaining to Major Baker, cited a Sergeant Heiser of Company C who had been on duty six out of the last eight days; on the seventh of September he reported at sick call.⁵⁰

Besides excessive work, the regiment was plagued with other problems. In trying to prepare the Maine men for transfer, Major Baker informed brigade headquarters that most of the men in the unit had not been paid; the eight companies of Maine men had not received pay for seven months, while the original four companies were last paid on 30 April 1864. Both officers and men were in need of pay; their families were suffering, as the majority of the regiment were married men. Likewise, the horses were in need of hay and shoes, and the men needed clothing. Finally, the number of men detailed to other duties by higher headquarters made it difficult for the remainder of the regiment

⁵⁰Maj. Franklin A. Stratton, Eleventh Pennsylvania Cavalry, to Lt. Furman Gulic, assistant adjutant general, Second Brigade, 18 September 1864, OR, ser. 1, 42, pt. 1: 842; R. R. Wiestling, assistant surgeon, to J. S. Baker, 7 September 1864, RG 94.

to perform its duties and complete the transfer to the First Maine Cavalry.⁵¹

While the officers attempted to address the myriad of details required by the War Department in transferring men and equipment from one unit to another, the regiment continued to picket a five mile stretch of road running east and west through wooded country. Two battalions, under Major Baker, held the right of this line, with the reserve at regimental headquarters at Sycamore Church, while Capt. William S. Howe, with one battalion, occupied the left with the reserve at Cox's Mills. At dawn on Friday, 16 September 1864, the regiment was suddenly attacked by Hampton's cavalry and two infantry brigades.⁵²

The rebels assaulted both the regiment's left and right flanks simultaneously. The Charleston Mercury reported that "So sudden and rapid was the assault, that the Yankees rushed from their tents en dishabile, and were enabled to make comparatively but a feeble resistance."⁵³ The raid, well planned and executed, aimed at seizing the cattle herd, reported earlier by Baker as too close to the front line and dangerously exposed. Surprised, demoralized, and panic-stricken, the men of the regiment fell back in disorder towards regimental headquarters at Sycamore Church. Attempting to rally at the church, Baker

⁵¹J. S. Baker to Spear, 10 August 1864, RG 94; J. S. Baker to Spear, 17 August 1864, *ibid.*; J. S. Baker to Wetherill, 14 September 1864, *ibid.*

⁵²Merrill, Campaigns of the First D. C., p. 278; Charleston Mercury, 24 September 1864.

⁵³Charleston Mercury, 24 September 1864; Col. T. B. Gates, commanding Headquarters Post and Defenses, Army of the Potomac, to Brig. Gen. M. R. Patrick, 16 September 1864, OR, ser. 1, 42, pt. 2: 859.

at first refused the surrender request, but, following a Confederate charge, the remnants of the regiment lay down their arms.⁵⁴

Hampton's cattle raid was successful, as the Confederates captured the cattle herd of 2,486 head, 300 Union prisoners, the regiment's records, and numerous arms, wagons, and horses. In addition, the Confederate troops found the Union camps "prolific of delicacies and provisions. Oranges, lemons, segars [sic], crackers, and good things and useful, were found in great

⁵⁴Charleston Mercury, 24 September 1864; Merrill, Campaigns of the First D. C., pp. 279-85; Sharpe to Humphreys, 16 September 1864, OR, ser. 1, 47, pt. 2: 856; Sharpe to Butler, 16 September 1864, ibid., p. 870; Capt. J. H. Woodward, commissary of subsistence, to Lt. Col. M. R. Morgan, chief of commissary, 16 September 1864, OR, ser. 1, 42, pt. 1: 26; Capt. Nathaniel A. Richardson to Capt. J. H. Woodward, 20 September 1864, ibid., p. 28; Brig. Gen. H. E. Davies, Jr., commanding Second Cavalry Division, to Humphreys, 19 September 1864, ibid., p. 614; Kautz to Weir, 16 September 1864, OR, ser. 1, 42, pt. 2: 873-74; Kautz to Humphreys, 16 September 1864, ibid., p. 874; Kautz to Weir, 16 September 1864, ibid., p. 875; Wetherill to Asch, 18 September 1864, OR, ser. 1, 42, pt. 1: 836-38; Kautz to Weir, 19 September 1864, ibid., pp. 821-23. Joseph S. Baker, wounded by a saber cut across the head, was left for dead at Sycamore Church. On the following day, he awoke to discover a Confederate soldier attempting to remove his cavalry boots. When the Confederates discovered he was alive, they had two of the regiment's privates, captured in the raid, carry him on a stretcher to the Confederate lines. Baker, although weak from exposure and the loss of blood, demanded to be taken to the enemy headquarters in order to file a formal protest concerning the theft of his boots. Carried to Hampton's tent, Baker demanded the return of his boots. Hampton responded by returning the boots within a short time. Following the war, Baker wrote Hampton and inquired whether the Confederate general remembered the incident. The anecdote ended by quoting Hampton as saying, "I hope . . . that the boots continued to give you service long after the battle." Baker concluded by observing "that rebel was a perfect gentleman." Ray S. Baker, Native American: The Book of My Youth (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1941), pp. 49-51.

profusion, and not a few of them were secured. Everything not brought off were destroyed."⁵⁵ Southern newspapers applauded the daring of Hampton's raid. The Richmond Whig, for example, proclaimed "General Hampton and his men are full feather, and eager for another chance at Grant's choice beef."⁵⁶

The Union army's response was to pursue Hampton and the captured cattle in the hope of recapturing the beef. The pursuit, quickly improvised, succeeded in recovering only fifty head of cattle. Meade informed Grant of the attempt but confessed that

called suddenly, as our troops were, without time to draw in pickets and detachments [the Union mustered 3,000 to pursue an enemy estimated at 6,000] With this superiority and a knowledge of the country and preparations made to stop pursuit, it is hardly fair to expect more than what was accomplished⁵⁷

In the days that followed, a debate ensued as to the responsibility for losing the cattle herd. The question posed was whether the First District of Columbia while on picket duty had failed to provide adequate warning, or was the herd of cattle located too close to the front lines as Major Baker had reported in August. While the hunt for a scapegoat went on, it was revealed by the Wilmington Daily Journal of 28 November 1864 that a North Carolina private named Waterbury, captured by the

⁵⁵Charleston Mercury, 24 September 1864; Woodward to Morgan, 16 September 1864, OR, ser. 1, 42, pt. 1: 27; Charleston Daily Courier, 20 September 1864; Gates to Patrick, 16 September 1864, OR, ser. 1, 42, pt. 2: 854; Kautz to Weir, 19 September 1864, ibid., p. 933.

⁵⁶Richmond Whig, 19 September 1864.

⁵⁷Meade to Grant, 17 September 1864, OR, ser. 1, 42, pt. 1: 34; Meade to Lt. Col. T. S. Bowers, assistant adjutant general, 19 September 1864, ibid., pp. 34-35; Kautz to Weir, 16 September 1864, OR, ser. 1, 42, pt. 2: 875; Kautz to Humphreys, 16 September 1864, ibid., pp. 875-76; Weir to Kautz, 16 September 1864, ibid.,

Union forces near Sycamore Church in August 1864, had discovered the presence of the cattle herd while making his escape from Union authorities. Upon reaching Confederate lines, Waterbury reported in detail the location and terrain. This led to Hampton's successful raid of 16 September.⁵⁸

The question of responsibility was a moot question for a large number of the regiment. Kautz reported 212 men of the unit captured during the action at Sycamore Church. Included in this number was Maj. Joseph S. Baker, authorized to continue in command of the unit after the eight companies had been transferred. With Baker's capture, Capt. Thomas C. Speers assumed command of the remnant of the regiment. He informed Kautz on the nineteenth that the necessary papers for the transfer of the eight companies were being prepared again. Owing to the capture of Baker and several other officers, Speers had encountered some difficulties in obtaining the necessary data for the transfer.

p. 876; Kautz to Weir, 16 September 1864, *ibid.*; Kautz to Humphreys, 16 September 1864, *ibid.*, p. 877; Wetherill to Asch, 16 September 1864, *ibid.*, p. 878; Wetherill to Asch, 18 September 1864, OR, ser. 1, 42, pt. 1: 837-38.

⁵⁸Wilmington Daily Journal, 28 November 1864. The regimental history of the First District of Columbia related that a high ranking army officer, well respected, was responsible for the location of the cattle herd. "Shortly after this affair, this officer dined with the commander-in-chief at the headquarters of General Kautz. In the course of conversation, he put this question: 'General, how long are we to remain here?' The reticent Grant smoked on a few seconds, and . . . quietly answered; 'I don't know, General; if you keep on feeding Lee's army with beef, we shall have to stay a good while.'" Merrill, Campaigns of the First D. C., p. 285.

The long delayed transfer of the men from Maine finally was accomplished by the end of September 1864.⁵⁹

With the departure of the eight companies, the "regiment" was reduced in strength to a small battalion of about 100 men. In conjunction with the transfer, the First District of Columbia was in a state of demoralization as a result of the losses suffered at Sycamore Church and had become "gun-shy" because of the surprise attack. Kautz observed that the men of the unit were "in a fit state to snatch at any story afloat."⁶⁰ An example of this was a confused report made by pickets at Sycamore Church on 21 September concerning an enemy force in the area. Kautz ordered a scout in the direction of the reported enemy but confessed that the First District of Columbia were "so nervous since their disaster that I do not place much confidence in their reports."⁶¹

In an attempt to bolster morale, the brigade commander, Spear, issued a congratulatory order which praised the First District of Columbia for their gallant and meritorious service. Noting that the unit was "often placed in dangerous and important places where they always signalized themselves by promptness . . . and thorough execution of orders" Spear insisted that at Sycamore

⁵⁹Kautz to Humphreys, 16 September 1864, OR, ser. 1, 42, pt. 2: 877; Special Order No. 55, Headquarters, Kautz Cavalry Division, 15 September 1864, RG 94; Capt. Thomas C. Spear to Kautz, 19 September 1864, *ibid.*; Kautz to Weir, 19 September 1864, OR, ser. 1, 42, pt. 1: 823.

⁶⁰Kautz to Weir, 20 September 1864, OR, ser. 1, 42, pt. 2: 951; Gates to Patrick, 16 September 1864, *ibid.*, p. 854.

⁶¹Kautz to Weir, 21 September 1864, *ibid.*, p. 962. See also Wetherill to Asch, 18 September 1864, *ibid.*, p. 908; Stratton to Gulic, 18 September 1864, *ibid.*

Church Baker's cavalry had been overpowered by a superior enemy force and by fighting to the last man had honorably performed their duty.⁶²

Notwithstanding the disaster at Sycamore Church, the U. S. Armies Operating Against Richmond and Petersburg settled into their winter siege lines and conducted only minor operations during the remainder of 1864. As the active field operations waned, Butler attempted to bring his command up to strength by ordering all officers and men on detached service outside the Department of Virginia and North Carolina to return to their units or resign. One of these was Col. Lafayette C. Baker, who was on detached duty at the War Department. Baker, utilizing his influential friends in Washington, was able to ignore Butler's order and even obtained a thirty-day leave in November 1864. Before Butler could respond to what he considered an act of insubordination, he was relieved by Lincoln and replaced by Maj. Gen. Edward O. C. Ord on 7 January 1865.⁶³

Dissatisfaction also was growing among the men of Baker's cavalry. Numbering only 174 men and sixteen officers following the transfer of the Maine companies (with seventy of this number prisoners of war), the remainder complained that the terms of their enlistment had been violated. Promised special duty in

⁶²Congratulatory Special Order No. 2, Headquarters, Second Brigade, Kautz Division, 23 September 1864, RG 94.

⁶³Grant, Memoirs, 2: 341-43; Butler to Brig. Gen. Lorenzo Thomas, adjutant general, 25 October 1864, RG 393; Special Order No. 381, War Department, 3 November 1864, RG 94; Long, Day By Day, p. 620; Boatner, Dictionary, p. 609.

connection with Baker's National Detective Police, they were to receive \$402 bounty and not leave the District of Columbia. Such assurances were ignored while the men "in good faith . . . have done their whole duty to the Government, in no one instance have they discharged their part of the contract, in the nature of duty or bounty."⁶⁴ A request for reassignment to the District and to the National Detective Police was forwarded to the commanding general of the Army of the James.

Maj. Joseph S. Baker, paroled in October and exchanged in December, returned to the First District of Columbia and assumed command on 29 December 1864. Immediately, he entered the growing controversy. He proposed that either the unit be given authority to recruit so as to regain its strength as a twelve company regiment, be allowed to consolidate the four existing companies with another cavalry regiment, or reorganize the unit into a two company cavalry battalion. An answer was finally received from the War Department on Wednesday, 8 February 1865. The First District of Columbia was to consolidate the remaining companies into a battalion consisting of two companies of equal strength. Company level officers made excess by the consolidation were to be mustered out along with Lieutenant Colonel Conger, Maj. Joel H. Cloudman, and Maj. Daniel L. Curtis. Major Baker made recommendations as to the officers to be retained.⁶⁵

⁶⁴Capt. George Griffin, commanding First District of Columbia, to Lt. Col. Edward W. Smith, assistant adjutant general, 6 December 1864, RG 393.

⁶⁵Officer List, Record Book of the First District of Columbia, RG 94; J. S. Baker, to commanding general, Department of Virginia

Upon the completion of the reorganization, the battalion was placed in Brig. Gen. Ronald S. Mackenzie's cavalry brigade and participated in the waning operations against the Army of Northern Virginia. Present at the skirmishes at Dinwiddie Court House 30-31 March, Five Forks 1 April, Gravelly Ford on Hatcher's Run 2 April, Amelia Court House 4-5 April, Dinwiddie Road and Sailor's Creek 6 April, Farmville and Prince Edward Court House 7 April, Appomattox Station 8 April, and Appomattox Court House 9 April 1865, the battalion was placed on picket duty following the surrender. On the twelfth of April, the unit was sent to Lynchburg where it received the formal surrender of that city. Leaving Lynchburg on the sixteenth, Baker's cavalry entered Richmond on Monday, 24 April 1865. Following the cessation of hostilities, the battalion performed duty in the Department of Virginia until it was mustered out on 26 October 1865.⁶⁶

and North Carolina, 23 January 1865, RG 393; Special Order No. 62, War Department, 8 February 1865, RG 94; J. S. Baker to commanding general, Department of Virginia and North Carolina, 20 February 1865, RG 393.

⁶⁶Frederick H. Dyer, A Compendium of the War of the Rebellion, 3 vols. (New York: Thomas Yoseloff, 1959), 3: 1019; J. S. Baker to Maj. A. H. Fenn, assistant adjutant general, Cavalry Brigade, 26 April 1865, OR, ser. 1, 46, pt. 1: 1249-51; Brig. Gen. R. S. Mackenzie to Bvt. Col. Edward W. Smith, 8 May 1865, *ibid.*, pp. 1244-46; Organization of Troops in Department of Virginia, 30 April 1865, OR, ser. 1, 46, pt. 3: 1033; Circular No. 46, War Department, 20 October 1865, OR, ser. 3, 5: 157. The question of consolidating the First District of Columbia with the First Maryland Cavalry was never resolved. J. S. Baker polled his company commanders in February of 1865 concerning the question; indecision or opposition prevented this act from occurring. Most of the opposition came, not from the officers or men of the unit, but from L. C. Baker. Colonel Baker discovered that consolidation would require his release from active military service. Of course, he refused to give up his military rank. J. S. Baker to company commanders, 26 February 1865, RG 94; Brig. Gen. L. C. Baker to commanding general, Department of Virginia and North Carolina, 28 July 1865, RG 393.

With the act of mustering out the 107 man unit, the First District of Columbia Cavalry, a special unit, raised and specially equipped for duty with Col. Lafayette C. Baker's National Detective Police and Secret Service, passed into history. Neither the monetary expenses nor the numerous problems of outfitting such a unit for special service was justified, since the majority of the time the unit existed, it functioned as a regular cavalry regiment. The combat record of the unit was excellent, despite the disaster at Sycamore Church in September 1864 and in spite of the special training the original four companies had received when plans called for these men to provide Baker with a paramilitary force to catch spies, traitors, criminals, and other enemies of the Union. Perhaps the favorable combat record was produced, in part, by the special equipment Baker insisted on issuing to his men. Since the unit was armed with sixteen shot Henry repeating rifles, it was capable of influencing many actions in which it participated. Finally, the men who enlisted for Baker's cavalry had a flair for adventure and excitement. This élan only faltered and waned after the mishap at Sycamore Church. Ultimately, the First District of Columbia Cavalry, as a special unit, was a failure. However, as a regular combat regiment, the men of Baker's cavalry performed as well as could be expected for a unit quickly raised, trained, and rushed into the field.

CHAPTER X

THE U. S. ARMY NAVAL BRIGADE

A sixth example of improvisation in the Union war effort was the creation of an Army Naval Brigade by Maj. Gen. Benjamin F. Butler. Such a Naval Brigade was raised, manned, and officered by the Union army under the auspices of Butler's Department of Virginia and North Carolina and the Army of the James. Deemed necessary because of the numerous navigable rivers, inlets, and creeks in Butler's area of responsibility, the War Department under Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton approved the creation of such a special unit with the assignment of Brig. Gen. Charles Kinnard Graham to Butler's department as brigade commander. Graham was chosen to command such a special unit because of his former naval service, having entered the U. S. Navy as a midshipman in 1841.¹

Butler, in his earlier command experience at Fort Monroe (May-October 1861), had encountered difficulties and impossible delays in acquiring naval transports, naval escorts, and chartered civilian craft with which to transport his command. As a result, he distrusted both contract transportation and the

¹National Cyclopedia of American Biography, 12: 299; Sketch of Charles K. Graham's service from December 1863 to August 1865, Army Personnel File, National Archives, Washington, D. C.

U. S. Navy. When reassigned to the command of the Department of Virginia and North Carolina on 11 November 1863, he immediately set about organizing his own naval squadron. The nucleus of such a squadron was found in the army gunboats operating in the nearby coastal waters. These gunboats were acquired at the same time the War Department was building gunboats on the western rivers; such vessels, manned by Union soldiers, were procured to aid the Union army in its drive on Richmond. The congressional act of July 1862 which transferred the army's Western Gunboat Fleet to the Navy Department did not apply to these vessels, as it dealt specifically with those on western waters. Accordingly, in the East the army quartermaster continued to contract, modify, or purchase vessels for use as transports and gunboats.²

The navy, regarding the army vessels with disdain, believed the War Department's efforts at creating a naval force a misguided

²Richard S. West, Jr., Lincoln's Scapegoat General: A Life of Benjamin F. Butler 1818-1893 (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1965), p. 221; E. B. Long and Barbara Long, eds., The Civil War Day by Day: An Almanac 1861-1865 (Garden City: Doubleday, 1971), p. 432; Montgomery C. Meigs to Stanton, 23 May 1862, U. S., War Department, The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies, R. N. Scott et al, eds., 130 vols. (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1880-1901), ser. 3, 2: 836-37 (hereafter cited as OR); S. P. Lee to Maj. Gen. John A. Dix, 17 September 1862, OR, ser. 1, 18: 393; Dix to S. P. Lee, 25 September 1862, ibid., p. 404; Dix to Meigs, 10 December 1862, ibid., p. 476; U.S., Statutes At Large, 12: 587; List of Steamers Employed by War Department, 22 October 1862, U.S., Department of the Navy, Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies in the War of the Rebellion, Richard Rush et al, eds., 30 vols. (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1894-1914), ser. 1, 8: 54 (hereafter cited as ORN); List of Vessels Employed by War Department, 11 March 1863, ORN, ibid., p. 597.

effort. Acting Rear Admiral Samuel P. Lee, commanding the North Atlantic Blockading Squadron, concluded that the army placed "a complimentary but exaggerated opinion upon the capabilities of these gunboats."³ Yet in the same letter, Lee admitted that the navy gunboats were too few in number, too frail, lightly armed, and too small draught to adequately protect their powder, steam magazines, and machinery from enemy artillery or sharpshooters. The solution, in Lee's opinion, was not army vessels but a concentration of naval craft. This would be accomplished by abandoning less important posts on unimportant creeks, rivers, and streams. By abandoning such outposts the navy would be freed from the responsibility of protecting the less important army positions.⁴

Another difficulty experienced by the army prior to Butler's arrival as department commander was the lack of an organized army gunboat squadron under a single commander. Maj. Gen. John G. Foster, commanding the Department of Virginia and North Carolina from July to November 1863, ordered the General Jessup to patrol the Albemarle Sound and the Pasquotank River. The gunboat was subsequently ordered to another location by Maj. Gen. John J. Peck, commanding the District of North Carolina. Besides the development of a conflict between generals over orders, the gunboats experienced a continual turn-over of personnel. For

³S. P. Lee to Maj. Gen. John G. Foster, 17 April 1863, OR, ser. 1, 18: 630.

⁴Ibid., pp. 630-31.

instance, the men of Company I, Ninety-ninth New York, manning several gunboats, were ordered back to their regiment in August 1863. It was not discovered this had occurred until two weeks later. As a result, the gunboats were without crews and unable to perform their mission of preventing blockade running, smuggling, and mail carrying. Likewise, the acquisition of information concerning enemy movements was limited while the harassment of rebel guerrilla units and the conduct of raids into areas behind Confederate lines was curtailed.⁵

Accordingly, Butler, after assuming command, immediately set about correcting the chaotic command structure as it applied to the army gunboats and solving the recurring problem of manpower aboard the vessels. An aspirant for the command position was Brig. Gen. Charles K. Graham, who desired a command in Butler's department because he had not fully recovered from a severe wound received at Gettysburg on the second of July 1863. This wound prevented him from accepting a proffered command in Eastern Tennessee because it would require an immense amount of work and entail an excessive amount of time in the field. Likewise, Graham refused to return to the Army of the Potomac because "he would be unpleasantly situated in being ranked by an officer he feels

⁵Mark M. Boatner III, Civil War Dictionary (New York: David McKay Co., 1959), p. 302; Brig. Gen. Henry M. Naglee, District of Virginia, to Lt. Col. Southard Hoffman, assistant adjutant general, 28 September 1863, OR, ser. 1, 27, pt. 3: 847; Foster to commander of Flora Temple, 30 September 1863, Record Group 393, "Records of the United States Army Commands," National Archives, Washington, D. C. (Hereafter cited as RG 393).

and believes to be his inferior."⁶ Butler also received several recommendations from Graham's friends, urging him to consider Graham's request for an assignment in the Department of Virginia and North Carolina. These recommendations, and Graham's naval background, led to a request that he be assigned to the Naval Brigade as Butler's reorganized naval force was called.

The War Department approved the request and assigned Graham to the department on Monday, 16 November 1863. Graham, born in New York City on 3 June 1824, entered the U. S. Navy as a midshipman in 1841. Serving with the Gulf Squadron during the Mexican War, he resigned in 1848 because of ill health. Becoming interested in the science of engineering, he studied civil engineering. At the same time, he studied law and was admitted to the bar in 1855. In 1857 Graham, appointed construction engineer at the Brooklyn Navy Yard, superintended the building of the dry dock at that facility. At the outbreak of the war in 1861, he volunteered for service in the Union army. He helped organize the Excelsior Brigade, formed from employees of the Navy Yard, and was appointed a major in the unit. On 26 May 1862 he received a commission as colonel of the Seventy-fourth New York. Following several gallant and distinguished

⁶Thomas F. Meagher to Butler, 13 November 1863, Jessie A. Marshall, ed., Private and Official Correspondence of Gen. Benjamin F. Butler During the Period of the Civil War, 5 vols. (Norwood, Mass.: Plimpton Press, 1917), 3: 141-42; Graham to Butler, 11 November 1863, Benjamin Franklin Butler Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, D. C.; Butler to Stanton, 13 November 1863, *ibid.*; A. G. Curtin to Butler, 14 November 1863, *ibid.*; James F. Brady to Butler, 14 November 1863, *ibid.*



Figure 12

Charles K. Graham

(Mathew Brady Collection, National Archives, Washington, D. C.)

actions against the enemy, he was appointed a brigadier general on 29 November 1862. At Gettysburg he commanded the First Brigade, First Division of Sickles's Third Corps. Wounded and taken prisoner, he refused parole and was taken to Richmond. Graham was finally exchanged on 22 September 1863.⁷

Following convalescence and receipt of his new assignment, Graham was ordered to proceed to New York City, inspect the armed transports being built by Norman Wiard, and determine their suitability as gunboats. Finding the vessels acceptable, the government formally purchased the Burnside, Reno, Parke, and Foster. At the same time Graham conducted his inspection, he examined the recruiting process of the "Marine Artillery

⁷Statement of service, Charles K. Graham, 16 February 1865, Army Personnel File, National Archives, Washington, D. C.; Special Order No. 508, War Department, 16 November 1863, Record Group 94, "Records of the Adjutant General's Office," National Archives, Washington, D. C. (hereafter cited as RG 94); Francis B. Heitman, Historical Register and Dictionary of the United States Army From Its Organization Sept. 29, 1789 to March 2, 1903, 2 vols., (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1903), 1: 467; National Cyclopaedia, 12: 299; Maj. Gen. Daniel E. Sickles to Lincoln, 19 August 1862, Graham's Army Personnel File, National Archives, Washington, D. C.; Graham to Lincoln, 28 September 1862, *ibid.*; Graham to Brig. Gen. Lorenzo Thomas, 21 February 1863, *ibid.*; Kenneth P. Williams, Lincoln Finds a General: A Military Study of the Civil War, 5 vols., (New York: Macmillan, 1950-59), 1: 143-44, 2: 764; Brig. Gen. Joseph Hooker to Brig. Gen. Seth Williams, adjutant general Army of the Potomac, 12 November 1861, OR, ser. 1, 5: 407; Graham to Sickles, 11 November 1861, *ibid.*, p. 411; Sickles to Williams, 20 May 1863, OR, ser. 1, 25, pt. 1: 394; Meade to Halleck, 2 July 1863, OR, ser. 1, 27, pt. 1: 72; Organization of Army of Potomac, 1-3 July 1863, *ibid.*, p. 159; Capt. E. R. Bowen, 114th Pennsylvania, to Lt. R. Dale Benson, assistant adjutant general, 12 July 1863, *ibid.*, pp. 503-04; Maj. Gen. E. A. Hitchcock, Commissioner for Exchange of Prisoners, to Brig. Gen. S. A. Meredith, Commissioner of Exchange, 5 September 1863, OR, ser. 2, 6: 260; Hitchcock to Meredith, 11 September 1863, *ibid.*, p. 280; Meredith to Col. William Hoffman, 24 September 1863, *ibid.*, p. 315; General Order No. 316, War Department, 18 September 1863, RG 94.

Battalion." Officially designated the Third Battalion, Thirteenth New York Heavy Artillery, the battalion, consisting of seamen, was composed of Companies, I, K, L, and M. Men selected as officers were required to produce evidence of good character, service in the navy, revenue (coast guard), or merchant marine, and be willing to submit to an examination in seamanship and naval gunnery. Because of these requirements, the Naval Brigade had to request the assignment of several additional officers from the U. S. Navy.⁸

In addition to the four vessels purchased in New York, the Naval Brigade purchased and armed the Chamberlain, the General Jessup, the Shrapnel, the Mosswood, the Samuel L. Brewster, the Smith Briggs, the Long Branch, and the Flora Temple. (See Table VIII.) The Chamberlain was selected by Graham as the flagship of the Brigade. To man these vessels, the Brigade was assigned the units from the Thirteenth New York Heavy Artillery and various detachments from the companies (except Company H) of the Third Pennsylvania Heavy Artillery. The

⁸Special Order No. 129, Headquarters, Army of the James, 26 November 1863, RG 393; Graham to Butler, 28 November 1863, *ibid.*; Butler to Peter H. Watson, 28 December 1863, Butler Papers; Butler to Fox, 26 November 1863, *ibid.*; Fox to Butler, 28 November 1863, *ibid.*; Butler to Stanton, 14 December 1863, *ibid.*; Col. J. W. Shaffer to Butler, 2 December 1863, Marshall, Butler Correspondence, 3: 178-79; Graham to Lt. Col. T. S. Bowers, assistant adjutant general, 17 February 1865, OR, ser. 1, 46, pt. 2: 582; Butler to Watson, 14 January 1864, RG 393; Frederick H. Dyer, A Compendium of the War of the Rebellion, 3 vols. (New York: Thomas Yoseloff, 1959), 3: 1386. Arnold Harris, ensign in the U. S. Navy, was assigned to the Naval Brigade. He also received a commission as a lieutenant in Graham's Marine Artillery. Butler to Arnold Harris, 29 December 1863, Marshall, Butler Correspondence, 3: 264-65.

men were armed with short, .56 caliber Ballard rifles, navy revolvers, and cutlasses, while the vessels were armed with howitzers or guns obtained from the army ordnance department.

By 10 December 1863 Graham had brought order out of chaos and had organized and equipped the Brigade. The principal staff officers of Graham's headquarters were Capt. Charles H. Graves, assistant adjutant general; Capt. Charles M. Sampson, assistant quartermaster; 1st Lt. Willard Bullard, Seventy-fourth New York, aide de camp; 1st Lt. R. Dale Benson, 114th Pennsylvania, aide de camp; F. W. Vandersloot, Third Pennsylvania Heavy Artillery, assistant surgeon; and Maj. F. R. Hassler, Thirteenth New York Heavy Artillery, inspector general and engineer officer. With headquarters located at Norfolk, Virginia, the Naval Brigade was ready for active service. Butler suggested that the Naval Brigade was "to the Navy and all operations on water, what well organized and effective Cavalry ought to be to the Army with this advantage that their horses never tire out."⁹

Commencing operations, Graham ordered the Brewster and the Spaulding to proceed to Wilmington, North Carolina, and attempt

⁹Butler to C. A. Dana, 3 August 1864, Record Group 107, "Records of the Office of the Secretary of War," National Archives, Washington, D. C. (on microfilm M221 "Letters Received by the Secretary of War, Registered Series, 1801-70," Fort Worth, Texas, Regional Branch, National Archives) (hereafter cited as RG 107); Vessels of Naval Brigade, date unknown, RG 393; Dyer, Compendium, 1: 399, 3: 1386, 1571; Statement of Service, C. K. Graham, 16 February 1865, Army Personnel File, National Archives, Washington, D. C.; Special Order No. 141, Headquarters, Army of the James, 8 December 1863, RG 393; Butler to Watson, 16 January 1864, Butler Papers; Special Order No. 32, Headquarters, Department of Virginia and North Carolina, 1 February 1864, RG 393; Graham to Maj. R. S. Davis, 20 June 1864, *ibid.*; Special Order No. 264, Headquarters, Department of Virginia and North Carolina, 25 September 1864, OR, ser. 1, 42, pt. 2: 1025; Long, Day by Day, p. 249.

to enter the protected harbor in order to destroy Confederate blockade runners. The Brewster was to attempt to pass the Confederate batteries at Fort Caswell by pretending to be a blockade runner. If successful, the gunboat was to proceed up river to Wilmington and destroy all vessels in the harbor. The Spaulding and the naval blockading forces present off Wilmington were to aid in the deception by giving chase to the Brewster. The attempt was never made as Admiral Lee received information indicating all vessels were being stopped on the lower river by a chain barrier. The Confederates boarded and inspected each vessel before allowing them to proceed to the harbor at Wilmington. Appraised of this intelligence, Graham wisely chose not to make the attempt.¹⁰

During the year 1864, the Brigade engaged in twenty-seven expeditions into rebel held territory. A consequence of these military missions was the capture of vast quantities of stores, specie, bonds, blockade runners, tobacco, salt, horses, mules, oxen, wagons, equipment, arms, quartermaster stores, artillery, and miscellaneous enemy goods. In addition, the Naval Brigade captured a number of prisoners and battle flags while freeing several hundred contrabands.¹¹

¹⁰Butler to Arnold Harris, 29 December 1863, Marshall, Butler Correspondence, 3: 264-65; Butler to S. P. Lee, 29 December 1863, Butler Papers; West, Lincoln's Scapegoat General, p. 279; Graham to S. P. Lee, 7 January 1864, ORN, ser. 1, 9: 383-84; Rear Adm. E. M. Eller et al, eds., Civil War Naval Chronology 1861-1865 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1971), pp. IV-3-4.

¹¹Sketch of Graham's service, Army Personnel File, National Archives, Washington, D. C.; Statement of Service, C. K. Graham, 16 February 1865, *ibid.*; Operations of Naval Brigade, date unknown, *ibid.*

TABLE VIII

VESSELS OF THE NAVAL BRIGADE

Chamberlain--The flagship of the Brigade, the Chamberlain was a side-wheel steamer of 269 tons. Commanded by 1st Lt. H. P. Wells, Thirteenth New York Heavy Artillery, the vessel was chartered for \$120 per month. Assigned forty-four enlisted men, two civilian engineers, one pilot, and four firemen, the vessel carried one Gatling gun, one 30-pounder Parrott gun, four 6-pounder Sawyer guns, and one 12-pounder army howitzer.

General Jessup--A propeller steamer of 150 tons owned by the U. S. government, the vessel was originally built by the Confederacy at Norfolk. Partially destroyed when Norfolk was evacuated, it was rebuilt by the Quartermaster Department. Commanded by 1st Lt. A. C. Margerum, Third Pennsylvania Heavy Artillery, the vessel was assigned thirty-four enlisted men, two civilian engineers, one pilot, four firemen, and one cook, and carried two 30-pounder Parrott guns.

Parke--A government owned side-wheel steamer of 220 tons built by Norman Wiard of New York, it was 140 feet in length and drew three and a half feet of water. Commanded by Capt. A. L. Fitch, Thirteenth New York Heavy Artillery, the vessel was assigned two officers, ten enlisted men, three civilian engineers, three firemen, one cook, and three coal passers. The boat could transport 100-120 men. Armaments were either Sawyer guns or 12-pounder howitzers.

Burnside--Government owned side-wheel steamer built by Norman Wiard, it was commanded by Capt. W. Hallett, Thirteenth New York Heavy Artillery. Measuring 140 feet in length with a draught of three and a half feet, the vessel was assigned three officers, forty-nine enlisted men, three civilian engineers, one pilot, three firemen, and three coal passers. The boat was armed with two 6-pounder Sawyer guns and one 12-pounder army howitzer.

Foster--Government owned side-wheel steamer of 200 tons built by Norman Wiard, it was commanded by 1st Lt. W. G. Hart, Thirteenth New York Heavy Artillery. The vessel measured

140 feet in length and drew three and a half feet of water. Assigned three officers, 106 enlisted men, three civilian engineers, one pilot, three firemen, and one cook, the vessel was armed with four 6-pounder Sawyer guns and one 12-pounder army howitzer.

Reno--Government owned side-wheel steamer of 200 tons built by Norman Wiard, the vessel measured 140 feet in length with a draught of three and a half feet. Commanded by Capt. J. S. Gordon, Thirteenth New York Heavy Artillery, the vessel was manned by three officers, ninety-five enlisted men, three engineers, and three firemen. It was armed with two 6-pounder Sawyer guns, one 12-pounder Dahlgren gun, one 10-pounder Parrott gun, and one 12-pounder Boat howitzer.

Shrapnel--Government owned side-wheel steamer of 150 tons was commanded by 1st Lt. A. G. Rohrman, Third Pennsylvania Heavy Artillery. Assigned forty enlisted men, two civilian engineers, and one fireman, the vessel was armed with one 24-pounder Dahlgren gun and two 12-pounder Dahlgrens. Originally a canal boat, the boat was sunk near Coinjock, Virginia, on 24 November 1864. Raised, the Shrapnel was undergoing repairs when the war ended.

Grenade--Same as the Shrapnel, the vessel was being rebuilt and receiving a new boiler at New Berne, North Carolina, when the war ended.

Mosswood--Chartered for \$100 a day, the vessel was a propeller steamer of 144 tons. Drawing nine feet of water, the Mosswood was commanded by Acting Ensign A. Harris, USN. The vessel was rebuilt at Norfolk and carried one 30-pounder Parrott gun and two 10-pounder Parrott guns. There was a crew of thirty-four.

Samuel L. Brewster--Chartered for \$120 a day, the vessel was a side-wheel steamer of 224 tons. Armed with one 30-pounder Parrott gun, two 24-pounder Dahlgrens, one 12-pounder Dahlgren, and one Sawyer rifled gun, it was sunk off Fort Clifton on the Appomattox River near Petersburg, Virginia, on 9 May 1864.

Smith Briggs--Chartered for \$150 a month because of her length, draught and excellent construction, the vessel was armed with two 10-pounder Parrotts. It was sunk near Smithfield, Virginia, on Pagan Creek on 1 February 1864.

Long Branch--Chartered for \$80 a day, the vessel was a side-wheel steamer of 276 tons.

Flora Temple--A steam tug of 85 tons, commanded by Lt. William H. Bleadenhiser, Third Pennsylvania Heavy Artillery, the vessel was chartered for \$45 a day. With a light draught the Flora Temple was narrow of beam, enabling it to be used in small streams and canals.

Steam Launch--Completed in January 1865, the launch was thirty-four feet long and mounted with one 12-pounder howitzer.

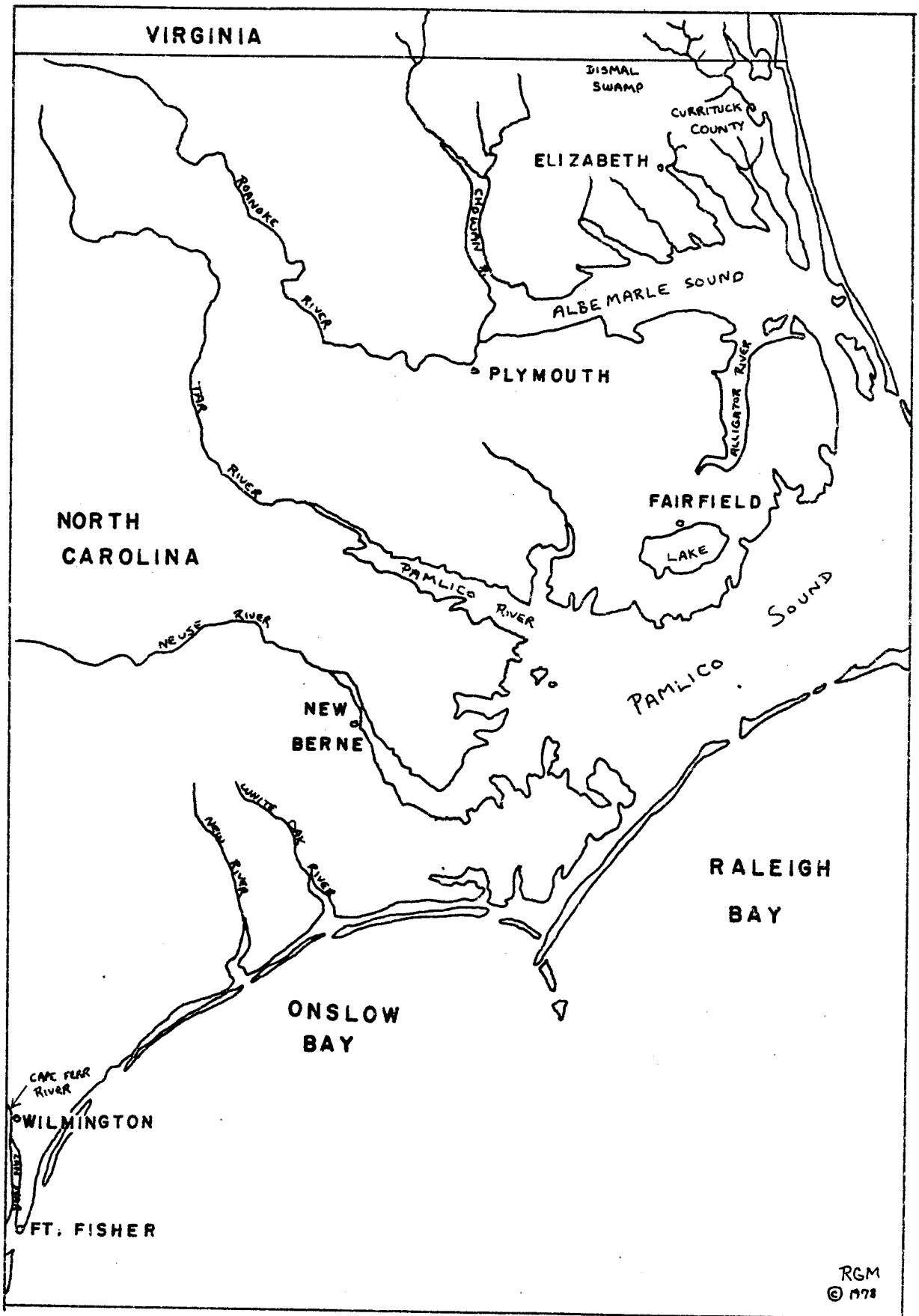
Gazelle--Steam transport used by the Quartermaster Department on the Chesapeake and Albemarle Canal. Armed with one 6-pounder howitzer, it had a crew of one sergeant and ten enlisted men.

Clinton--Steam transport used by the Quartermaster Department on the Chesapeake and Albemarle Canal. It was armed with one 6-pounder howitzer, and had a crew of one sergeant and ten enlisted men.

SOURCES: U.S., Congress, House, Annual Report of the Secretary of War, Exec. Doc. No. 83, 38th Cong., 2d sess., 1865, pp. 185-90; U.S., Congress, House, Annual Report of the Secretary of War, Exec. Doc., No. 1, 39th Cong., 1st sess., 1865, pp. 181, 298-99, 302-03, 330-33, 348-49. List of Vessels Owned by Government, 15 October 1864, OR, ser. 3, 4: 915-17; Vessels of the Naval Brigade, date unknown, RG 393; Maj. Gen. John A. Dix to Brig. Gen. Montgomery C. Meigs, 4 April 1863, 6 June 1863, *ibid.*; Special Order No. 72, Headquarters, Army of the James, 30 September 1863, *ibid.*; Wilmington, North Carolina, Daily Journal, 5 February 1864; Graham to Butler, 16 January 1864, Butler Papers; Graham to Butler, 4 February 1864, *ibid.*; Graham to Butler, 3 October 1864, *ibid.*; Graham to Butler, 26 November 1864, OR, ser. 1, 42, pt. 3: 716; Graham to Ord, 21 January 1865, OR, ser. 1, 46, pt. 2: 196-97.

Figure 13

Operations in North Carolina



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One of the first of these military expeditions was conducted as a reconnaissance up the James River. The river, 340 miles in length, was navigable for vessels as large as 130 tons as far as Richmond. The tide ascends to Richmond where the falls were located. The capital of the Confederacy was located on seven hills, like Rome, and had had a population of 37,910 in 1860. Graham, with the Jessup, Smith Briggs, and Flora Temple, accompanied by army transport George Washington, left Norfolk with about 350 men on Sunday, 24 January 1864, at 5:00 P.M. Steaming up the river, the expedition reached Brandon, seven miles below Fort Powhatan (located twelve miles below the confluence of the James and Appomattox Rivers) at 5:00 A.M. on the twenty-fifth. The entire force was disembarked without opposition and surrounded the house of a Doctor Ritchie, upon whose plantation the force had landed. Capturing Ritchie and his overseers, the command advanced towards a Confederate signal station at Mount Pleasant, on the James River. Finding the men assigned to the signal station asleep, Graham's men quickly captured the six rebels, one large telescope, one small telescope, one signal flag, three night signals, arms, and accouterments. Large quantities of wheat, corn, hay, and pork were destroyed nearby, while a number of horses and mules were captured, and 137 contrabands returned with the expedition. The Jessup and Smith Briggs meanwhile captured the sloop Birdloe and the schooner Thomas F. Dawson. The schooner had as passengers five blockade runners with the following amount of money: \$755 in gold, \$656 in treasury notes, \$7,000 in bonds on the states of

Florida, Maryland, and North Carolina, \$347 in Confederate money, \$3 in silver, \$1,796.50 in southern bank notes, and \$10 in northern bank notes. The total was \$10,567.50. Not a shot was fired during the mission and the expedition returned to Fort Monroe, arriving there at 10:40 P.M.¹²

This early success was marred by a misunderstanding and conflict of personalities arising from a complaint of misconduct on the part of one of Graham's subordinates. Butler angrily demanded to see Graham and inquired about a Captain Harris. Graham, assuming Butler was inquiring of Navy Ensign Arnold Harris, awaited the ensign's arrival at Norfolk. At 4:00 P.M. Friday, the twenty-ninth, Graham, choosing not to wait any longer, embarked for Fort Monroe, the location of Butler's headquarters. Graham's boat ran aground, and he did not reach Butler's headquarters until 10:30 P.M. Butler received Graham in a brusque manner and accused him of failing to destroy contraband property in the vicinity of Brandon during the recent raid. Tersely ending the conversation, Butler ordered Graham to report again at 9:30 A.M. the following morning. Graham returned to Norfolk, reaching his quarters at 1:00 A.M. On Saturday morning, accompanied by Ensign Harris, he departed at 7:00 A.M. on board the Jessup, without breakfast, and reached

¹²Graham to Butler, 25 January 1864, Butler Papers; Graham to Butler, 26 January 1864, OR, ser. 1, 33: 28; New Orleans Daily Picayune, 6 June 1862; Donald Barr Chidsey, The Great Conspiracy: Aaron Burr and His Strange Doings in the West (New York: Crown Publishing, 1967), p. 91; Butler to Stanton, 25 January 1864, ORN, ser. 1, 9: 421; U.S., Census Office, Eighth Census of the United States, Book 1 Population in 1860 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1864), p. 519.

Butler's office at 10:00 A.M. Kept waiting for an hour, he was finally admitted. Butler showed Graham a letter from a detective which accused Harris of wrongdoing. Harris, mistaken for another officer, was cleared, and the business was concluded.¹³

Graham, thoroughly upset, believed himself wronged. Having been treated without the proper military etiquette to which his rank entitled him, he angrily requested relief from duty. Demanding a court of inquiry to clear his conduct during the recent expedition and his activities since being assigned to Butler's department, he submitted a formal application to the adjutant general for reassignment on the same day. On the thirty-first, Butler invited Graham to visit him at his "earliest convenience." At this meeting Butler corrected the misunderstanding.¹⁴

While in the midst of the quarrel, Graham dispatched an expedition to Smithfield, Virginia. The purpose of the raid was to capture a small enemy force located on the peninsula formed by Pagan and Chuckatuck Creeks and the Nansemond River. Landing troops on the Chuckatuck Creek in order to occupy the village of Chuckatuck, while putting a detachment ashore at Smithfield on Pagan Creek, called for excellent weather and

¹³Butler to Graham, 29 January 1864, Butler Papers; Graham to Butler, *ibid.*; Graham to Thomas, 30 January 1864, *ibid.* The real accused officer was Lt. Thomas S. Harris, Third Pennsylvania Heavy Artillery, who commanded the Jessup. He was accused of selling two boxes of tobacco confiscated from the schooner Thomas F. Dawson. Graham arrested the officer on 30 January 1864. Tobacco was confiscated as contraband under Butler's orders because it was used to purchase war materials. Butler to Graham, 3 February 1864, RG 393; Graham to Butler, 1 February 1864, *ibid.*; Butler to Graham, 28 January 1864, Marshall, Butler Correspondence, 3: 343.

¹⁴Graham to Butler, 31 January 1864, Butler Papers; Butler to Graham, *ibid.*

quick response from the gunboats. Unfortunately, the area was shrouded in fog at nightfall, and this prevented the movement of the vessels. This resulted in the capture of the detachment and the Smith Briggs at Smithfield by Confederate forces. The Smith Briggs was destroyed by the rebels to prevent her recapture by Graham's forces. The Union detachment taken prisoner at Smithfield consisted of two officers, 107 enlisted men, and eight civilians.¹⁵

Following the mishap at Smithfield, the Naval Brigade conducted three further expeditions up the Alligator, the Piankantank, and the Chowan Rivers in North Carolina and attempted to rescue escaped Union prisoners on the Chickahominy River in Virginia. The Brigade's activities, producing few results, prompted some naval officers to observe that the army gunboats steamed to and fro "without having derived any moral or material benefits."¹⁶ Although several army officers would agree, Major General Peck, reporting the reconnaissance on the Alligator River and subsequent capture of the Confederate army's Spencer Rangers

¹⁵Graham to Butler, 6 February 1864, RG 393; Graham to S. P. Lee, 1 February 1864, Butler Papers; Casualties of expedition to Smithfield, Virginia, 3 February 1864, *ibid.*; S. P. Lee to Acting Master W. B. Sheldon, commanding USS Shokokon, 31 January 1864, ORN, ser. 1, 9: 424; S. P. Lee to Gideon Welles, 2 February 1864, *ibid.*, pp. 425-26; S. P. Lee to Lt. Cdr. J. H. Gillis, commanding Commodore Morris, 1 February 1864, *ibid.*, p. 428; J. H. Gillis to S. P. Lee, 1 February 1864, *ibid.*, pp. 429-30; Graham to Butler, 2 February 1864, OR, ser. 1, 33: 103-06.

¹⁶Acting Master G. C. Schulze to Acting Volunteer Lt. Edward Hooker, 24 March 1864, ORN, ser. 1, 5: 406; S. P. Lee to Welles, 17 February 1864, ORN, ser. 1, 9: 491; Operations of Naval Brigade, date unknown, Graham's Army Personnel File, National Archives, Washington, D. C.

at Fairfield, North Carolina, emphasized the performance of the men, despite a heavy snow storm. Peck praised the effort and exclaimed, "Another proof is added of the value of our army gun-boats."¹⁷

The disdain with which navy officers viewed Graham's Naval Brigade prompted Butler to write Assistant Secretary of the Navy Gustavus V. Fox. Suggested in part by the lack of cooperation between the services, Butler could not allow navy officers to interfere with army operations. The problem, Butler admitted, was found among subordinates, particularly of men of the Potomac Flotilla. Requesting action from the Navy Department, he assured Fox that no such difficulties existed between the general and Rear Admiral Lee.¹⁸

Partly to answer expected criticism from the Navy Department and partly to streamline army operations further, Butler's headquarters assigned Graham command of all army gunboats within the Department of Virginia and North Carolina on 9 February 1864. This was followed by a flurry of activity as the Brigade attempted to eliminate Confederate signal stations, capture guerrillas, gather intelligence for the coming campaign of the summer of 1864, and conduct search and destroy missions. The spring weather hampered such operations by forcing the gunboats to conduct their movements in the daylight. Accordingly, the

¹⁷Maj. Gen. John J. Peck to Maj. R. S. Davis, assistant adjutant general, 23 February 1864, OR, ser. 1, 33: 155.

¹⁸Butler to Fox, 20 February 1864, RG 393.

amount of success of these expeditions was limited. Operations on the Chickahominy River, the Nansemond River, Chuckatuck Creek, and Pagan Creek concluded the month of April 1864.¹⁹

As the Naval Brigade began to enhance the prosecution of the war, Graham encountered the Brigade's first major discipline and morale problem. Eighty-two members of Company I, Thirteenth New York Heavy Artillery, assigned to the gunboat Foster, complained the rations issued them were only two-thirds of the quantity authorized. The missing rations, the men believed, had been sold by the officers. They also believed the officers received one-third of the fresh meat ration (officers received thirty cents for each meal and were required to pay for their food). Graham appointed a board of inquiry composed of Capt. C. M. Sampson, 1st Lt. Willard Bullard, and 1st Lt. Henry Wills. The board ruled that the company officers (Capt. R. M. McLaughlin, 1st Lt. P. A. O'Malley, 1st Lt. Kingsburg and 1st Lt. Russel) were guilty of using the enlisted men's rations and "that they have daily deprived the men of the rations that have been issued by the government . . . and by so doing they have done manifest injury to the service."²⁰

¹⁹General Order No. 18, Headquarters, Eighteenth Corps, 9 February 1864, OR, ser. 1, 33: 542; Graham to Butler, 7 April 1864, Butler Papers; Col. J. W. Shaffer, chief of staff, Army of the James, to Graham, 12 April 1864, RG 393; Shaffer to Brig. Gen. Heckman, 12 April 1864, Marshall, Butler Correspondence, 4: 69; S. P. Lee to Welles, 16 April 1864, ORN, ser. 1, 9: 615-16; Graham to Shaffer, 16 April 1864, OR, ser. 1, 33: 271-73; Col. Andrew Elwell, commanding Twenty-third Massachusetts, to Graham, 15 April 1864, *ibid.*, pp. 273-74; Maj. James F. Milligan, signal officer, Confederate Department of North Carolina, to Maj. Gen. George E. Pickett, 19 April 1864, *ibid.*, p. 1293.

²⁰Findings of Board of Inquiry, 23 April 1864, Butler Papers; Enlisted Men of Company I, Thirteenth New York Heavy Artillery, to Graham, 16 April 1864, *ibid.*

Especially singled out were McLaughlin and O'Malley because of testimony indicating they gave direct orders to the enlisted men used as servants to take food from the company stores for the use of the company officers. Butler approved the findings and ordered the two men dishonorably dismissed from the Union army. McLaughlin appealed, claiming Bullard, a personal enemy, was determined to ruin the captain. "The men he [Bullard] has selected for his base purpose, have all of them at various times been punished for habitual drunkenness, or disobedience of Orders."²¹

McLaughlin claimed the shortage of rations was caused by the loss of a launch containing the supplies which sank during operations off Wilmington, North Carolina, in January 1864. Other occasions where shortages occurred were explained by the Brigade practice of issuing rations for a number of days when preparing for an expedition. Returning several days early the rations already drawn sometimes spoiled before being consumed because the men refused to eat tainted food. Finally, McLaughlin testified that he was on detached service most of the time since his company was mustered into government service in November 1863. While on detached service, he swore he paid for his rations as per U. S. Army regulations.²²

²¹Capt. R. W. McLaughlin to Col. W. A. Howard, 26 April 1864, Butler Papers; Special Order No. 44, Headquarters, Naval Brigade, *ibid.*; Findings of Board of Inquiry, 23 April 1864, *ibid.* On 28 April McLaughlin withdrew his charge that Bullard looked for evidence in an improper manner because Bullard "made no inquiry in the matter until after the complaint had been made by members of my company and the case had been referred to a board of investigation of which he was a member." McLaughlin to Butler, 28 April 1864, Butler Papers.

²²McLaughlin to Howard, 26 April 1864, Butler Papers. The

The commander of the Thirteenth New York Heavy Artillery, Col. William A. Howard, defended McLaughlin as a brave and gallant officer. Graham regretted the charge against McLaughlin was true but "justice to the service will [not] permit me to overlook the offence on that account. If the sentence is mitigated it should be by the Executive." The president did not intervene.²³

In the midst of the inquiry, Confederate General Braxton Bragg led a three brigade assault on the Union garrison at Plymouth, North Carolina. The attack, made in conjunction with the ram Albemarle, began on 17 April. The garrison, under Brig. Gen. Henry W. Wessells, was composed of four infantry regiments, artillery, and cavalry. Wessells, dependent on naval gunfire, repeatedly asked for reinforcements. The Albemarle, appearing on Tuesday, 19 April, sank the army gunboat Bombshell and the USS Smithfield, while disabling the USS Miami and forcing the remainder of the U. S. fleet to flee. The encircled garrison, numbering 2,834, was forced to surrender on Wednesday. Graham, ordered to Plymouth in the face of the Confederate naval threat, was ordered to attack and destroy the Albemarle. After news

U. S. Army Regulations stated "An officer may draw subsistence stores, paying cash for them at contract or cost prices . . . on his certificate that they are for his own use . . ." U.S., War Department, Revised Regulations for the Army of the United States 1861 (1861; reprint ed., Gettysburg: Civil War Times Illustrated, 1974), p. 245.

²³Graham to Butler, 29 April 1864, Butler Papers; Howard to Maj. R. S. Davis, 27 April 1864, *ibid.*

arrived reporting the loss of Plymouth, Butler instructed Graham to discontinue the search for the Albemarle and return to Fort Monroe by the thirtieth.²⁴

Graham returned to Norfolk; on Sunday, 1 May 1864, Butler requested he travel to Fort Monroe. Leaving his sick bed, Graham arrived at Butler's headquarters and was informed the Naval Brigade would lead the advance of Butler's expedition up the James River. Butler ordered the Brigade to destroy Confederate signal stations on the river, while sweeping the river of torpedoes and other obstructions. The movement began at 7:00 A.M. on Thursday, 5 May 1864. The objective of the move was to land the two corps comprising Butler's Army of the James at City Point and Bermuda Hundred. From these points the Army of the James would seize Petersburg and threaten Richmond from the south, while the Army of the Potomac battled the Army of Northern Virginia north of Richmond. Achieving complete surprise, Butler's forces quickly consolidated their position and fortified their lines.²⁵

On May 6 the Naval Brigade entered the Appomattox River, the first Union vessels to do so. Remaining at the mouth of the

²⁴Boatner, Dictionary, p. 656; Butler to Fox, 21 April 1864, OR, ser. 1, 33: 279; Brig. Gen. I. N. Palmer, commanding Sub-District of New Berne, to Shaffer, 23 April 1864, ibid., pp. 960-61; Butler to Graham, 24 April 1864, ibid., p. 968.

²⁵Sketch of Graham's service, Army Personnel File, National Archives, Washington, D. C.; Statement of Service, C. K. Graham, 16 February 1865, ibid.; Order of Movement of Army of James, May 1864, ORN, ser. 1, 9: 721-22; New York Times, 6-8 May 1864; Richmond Whig, 7 May 1864. Butler promised Graham to recommend him for promotion to major general in the army or commodore in the navy, whichever Graham preferred, if the expedition was a success. Statement of Service, 16 February 1865, Army Personnel File, National Archives, Washington, D. C.

river, Graham's force acted as a skirmish line during the following days. On the ninth, Butler ordered Graham to ascend the Appomattox River as a covering force for Brig. Gen. Edward W. Hinks's division of black troops who were ordered to seize Petersburg. The Brigade vessels engaged the rebel batteries at Fort Clifton. In the severe three hour artillery exchange which followed, the Samuel L. Brewster was sunk. Hinks's men were unable to advance because Fort Clifton not only commanded the river but the road to Petersburg. The order was then given to withdraw.²⁶

After the occupation of City Point and Bermuda Hundred, Graham's command was active in patrolling the James and Appomattox Rivers, maintaining the Union lines of communication and dueling with Confederate shore batteries. The Brigade also performed picket duty on the Appomattox. Gunboats were dispatched to other areas such as the Rappahannock River during the summer of 1864. Missions included the destruction of Confederate signal stations, houses, and buildings along waterways which afforded guerrillas shelter and storage, guarding quartermaster stores, conducting reconnaissances into enemy held areas, and clearing the river of torpedoes and other "infernal machines."²⁷

²⁶Sketch of Graham's service, Army Personnel File, National Archives, Washington, D. C.; 1st Lt. S. B. Partridge, Signal Corps, to Capt. Lemuel B. Norton, chief signal officer, 10 May 1864, OR, ser. 1, 36, pt. 2: 28-29.

²⁷1st Lt. A. C. Margerum to Capt. Charles H. Graves, 4 June 1864, Butler Papers; Graham to Butler, 17 August 1864, *ibid.*; Butler to Graham, 15 June 1864, Marshall, Butler Correspondence, 4: 372; Lt. H. W. Miller, USS Mendota to Cdr. Edward T. Nicholas,

In the midst of these routine but important missions, Graham's command experienced several internal problems. The first involved Col. William A. Howard, commanding Thirteenth New York Heavy Artillery, and his attempts to be mustered into the federal service as the colonel of that regiment. Howard decided the source of this opposition originated not in the War Department but, because he defended McLaughlin in the ration case, at Graham's headquarters, perhaps even with Graham himself. Claiming Graham had quarreled with the officers of the Third Battalion, Thirteenth New York, and had lost the men's confidence, Howard admitted that "all the officers & men look upon him as an enemy."²⁸ Further, Howard asserted Graham was influential in obtaining a position for his nephew as adjutant of the regiment while Graham's sister was an "inmate of my Headquarters"²⁹ Graham denied the charges; Butler responded by querying the War Department for the reason Howard was not being accepted for service. The response indicated Howard was suspected of approving and certifying false and fraudulent accounts against

31 May 1864, ORN, ser. 1, 10: 109; Graham to Butler, 20 May 1864, OR, ser. 1, 36, pt. 3: 42; Butler to Graham, 20 May 1864, *ibid.*; Brig. Gen. G. F. Shepley to Colonel Paine, 6 June 1864, *ibid.* p. 664; Graham to Shaffer, 17 July 1864, OR, ser. 1, 40, pt. 1: 745-47; Butler to Graham, 26 June 1864, OR, ser. 1, 40, pt. 2: 460; Butler to Graham, 18 June 1864, *ibid.*, p. 206; Graham to Butler, 18 June 1864, *ibid.*, pp. 206-07; Graham to Butler, 13 July 1864, OR, ser. 1, 40, pt. 3: 221; Graham to Butler, 19 July 1864, *ibid.*, p. 343; Butler to Captain Smith, commanding U. S. Navy Forces on James River, 18 July 1864, *ibid.*, p. 328.

²⁸W. A. Howard to Graham, 3 June 1864, Butler Papers.

²⁹*Ibid.*

the government in connection with the recruitment of his regiment. Howard denied the charge but was never mustered as colonel of the Thirteenth New York.³⁰

A second difficulty involved a complaint lodged by the enlisted men of a detachment of the Third Pennsylvania Heavy Artillery stationed near Point of Rocks, Virginia, (on the Appomattox River). The complaint accused Capt. W. H. Bladenheiser of ill treatment of his command. Graham, noting this was not the first complaint, ordered 1st Lt. Howard Rogers, Thirteenth New York Heavy Artillery, to investigate. The inquiry revealed that the charges originated from discontented and ill disciplined men who did not like field service. Thus, the charges were dismissed; however, minor complaints concerning the supplying of these detachments by their companies were found true. To eliminate this, all Brigade detachments were instructed to requisition their supplies directly from Brigade headquarters. Bladenheiser received a letter of reprimand for his misconduct.³¹

A third difficulty concerned the Naval Brigade's enlisted men and the inability to provide them with seamen's clothing. The Third Battalion of the Thirteenth New York, raised for naval service, was authorized seamen's clothing. The regimental quartermaster refused to turn over the clothing to the Naval

³⁰Graham to Butler, 12 June 1864, *ibid.*; Howard to Butler, 16 June 1864, *ibid.*

³¹Enlisted men, Third Pennsylvania Heavy Artillery, to Shaffer, 28 June 1864, RG 393; Graham to 1st Lt. Howard Rogers, Thirteenth New York Heavy Artillery, 20 July 1864, *ibid.*; Rogers Report of Investigation, July 1864, *ibid.*; Edward W. Smith, assistant adjutant general, to Graham, 13 October 1864, *ibid.*

Brigade because not all the companies of that battalion were assigned to Graham's command. The clothing was finally obtained when Graham succeeded in having the last company (M) of the battalion assigned to the Naval Brigade.³²

Graham also experienced a similar problem with the Third Pennsylvania Heavy Artillery. From the outset of the Naval Brigade's existence, various detachments from the several companies of the Third Pennsylvania were assigned to Graham's command. From an administrative view this was a bureaucratic nightmare. Accordingly, in August 1864 the Brigade commander requested that the various detachments assigned to the Brigade be returned to the regiment. Instead, two complete companies should be assigned to the Naval Brigade. This would allow the commanders of companies "from which the detachments on the Gunboats are taken [to] . . . be present with the [companies and this would] thus obviate the difficulty in clothing and equipping the men, and avoid complaints from company commanders relative to the men detached from their companies." No such action occurred, despite the reasoned plea of the Brigade commander.³³

More serious matters soon demanded Graham's attention. Receiving a warning order to prepare an expedition for the Rappahannock River, he gathered as many gunboats and men as possible. Ordered to proceed up the Rappahannock until he

³²Graham to R. S. Davis, 11 July 1864, *ibid.*; Complaint of Enlisted Men, Third Pennsylvania Heavy Artillery, 3 August 1864, *ibid.*; Graham to R. S. Davis, 22 September 1864, *ibid.*; Graham to Butler, 25 November 1864, *ibid.*

³³Graham to R. S. Davis, *ibid.*

arrived at the residence of Mrs. John Seddon, located four miles below Fredericksburg, Graham burned the place at 9:30 P.M. on Tuesday, 2 August 1864. This act, committed under instructions from Butler, was in retaliation for the destruction of Postmaster General Montgomery Blair's home at Silver Springs, Maryland, by Confederate Maj. Gen. Jubal A. Early on 11 July 1864. The home belonged to the widow of John Seddon, who was the brother of the Confederate Secretary of War James A. Seddon. According to the Richmond Whig of 6 August, the Union troops gave Mrs. Seddon only twenty-five minutes to get her five children, eighty year old mother, and any of their belongings out of the house before it was fired. No aid was given her by the men. James Seddon, writing Early to inform him of the details of the depredation, trusted the general's judgment and relied upon him, "should opportunity offer, to exact fitting retribution." Continuing, Seddon denounced the act

as one of the very meanest, pettiest, and most malignant atrocities committed by our miscreant invaders during the war [after assessing that the house was owned in its entirety by his brother's widow] an expedition of at least two gun-boats . . . were specially ordered by a major-general . . . to proceed some hundred miles to burn the house and effects of a widow and helpless children . . . and to turn them out at night, in rain and darkness, with two of the infant children seriously sick . . . on no other ground of selection than that they were . . . relations of a public functionary of the Government against which they were warring.³⁴

³⁴James A. Seddon, Confederate Secretary of War, to Lt. Gen. J. A. Early, 13 August 1864, OR, ser. 1, 43, pt. 1: 998-99; Long, Day by Day, p. 537; Butler to Graham, 25 July 1864, OR, ser. 1, 40, pt. 3: 456; Graham to Butler, 4 August 1864, OR, ser. 1, 52, pt. 2: 51; Butler to Grant, 5 August 1864, OR, ser. 1, 42, pt. 2: 62; Butler to Montgomery Blair, 5 August 1864, ibid.; Richmond Whig, 6 August 1864.

Following this action, there occurred a reorganization of the Union siege lines around Petersburg and Richmond. Lt. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant determined that the line was of sufficient strength to allow a reduction in the number of units occupying them. Accordingly, the Eighteenth Corps, commanded by Maj. Gen. Edward O. C. Ord, was withdrawn for rest and reequipment with a view to future operations. To cover the over extended line, Butler ordered Brig. Gen. August V. Kautz to dismount his cavalry division and also obtain a considerable number of Graham's men. The Naval Brigade settled into a dull routine, occasionally disturbed by Bureau of Military Information intelligence reports of probable or suspected enemy attacks. In October Maj. Gen. David B. Birney, commanding Tenth Corps and a former acquaintance of Graham, requested permission to appoint the Naval Brigade commander a division commander in Birney's corps. Butler agreed, provided that Graham also continued to devote a fair amount of time to the Naval Brigade. Graham responded to Butler's offer by expressing a preference to remain solely in command of the Brigade because of the projected expedition against Fort Fisher and Wilmington, North Carolina. The commander of that expedition, Maj. Gen. Godfrey Weitzel, had promised Graham a command commensurate with his abilities and the brigadier general, desiring the notoriety and glory to be gained from such a feat, declined Birney's offer. However, Graham was not adverse to extra duties and responsibilities and was assigned the command of all troops occupying the line between the James and Appomattox Rivers.

Graham organized these units into a Provisional Division and assumed command on 17 October 1864. The general was relieved of this additional responsibility in December so as to finalize preparations for the expedition to Fort Fisher.³⁵

The men of the Naval Brigade, restless and idle as the opposing armies settled into winter siege lines, were put to work in December with picks, shovels, and axes as a fatigue party and aided in the building of a Union hospital at Point of Rocks on the Appomattox River. Some members of the Brigade, more fortunate, remained on the gunboats. These boats patrolled, skirmished, and, in general, performed unimportant tasks. Sometimes, the gunboats exceeded their authority and clashed with U. S. Navy vessels rather than rebel craft. On 16 November 1864, the Jessup and Mosswood were ordered to the Rappahannock. The navy, informed the mission of the vessels was the removal of torpedoes, objected to the assignment as it violated the navy's prerogative of action on that river. Graham found the matter perplexing because the two gunboats had, so he believed, been sent to the Rappahannock to intercept blockade runners

³⁵Grant to Butler, 12 August 1864, Ulysses S. Grant Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, D. C. (on microfilm NTSU Library); Butler to Maj. Gen. David B. Birney, 13 August 1864, OR, ser. 1, 42, pt. 2: 162; George A. Kinsel, acting chief of staff, Department of Virginia and North Carolina, to George H. Sharpe, 16 September 1864, *ibid.*, p. 871; Butler to Graham, 6 October 1864, OR, ser. 1, 42, pt. 3: 101; Graham to Butler, 6 October 1864, Butler Papers; General Order No. 132, Headquarters, Department of Virginia and North Carolina, 15 October 1864, OR, ser. 1, 42, pt. 3: 243; General Order No. 1, Headquarters, Provisional Division, 17 October 1864, *ibid.*, p. 261; Special Order No. 386, Headquarters, Department of Virginia and North Carolina, 4 December 1864, *ibid.*, p. 800. Maj. Gen. David B. Birney died of malaria on 18 October 1864, making the question an academic one. Boatner, Dictionary, p. 65.

and mail carriers. The matter remained unresolved.³⁶

Notwithstanding the various events and actions the Brigade had been involved in during 1864, the most important expedition the Naval Brigade actively participated in during the war was the expedition against Fort Fisher. Butler, receiving orders from Grant, organized such an expedition. Instructed to cooperate with the navy, the goal of such an expedition was the destruction of the fort and the closing of the last major port of the Confederacy, Wilmington, North Carolina. Butler, not able to resist personal involvement, took command of the two divisions assigned Weitzel. With 6,500 men, two artillery batteries, the Naval Brigade and Rear Adm. David D. Porter's North Atlantic Squadron, the expedition proceeded towards Fort Fisher on Thursday, 8 December 1864. The Confederate War Department reinforced the post by ordering an infantry division to Wilmington. The navy was in the act of bombarding the fort when Weitzel's transports, delayed by bad weather, finally arrived on the twenty-fourth. Fort Fisher, located on the north side of New Inlet, was a formidable earth work fortification, revetted with heavy timber and having bomb proofs for 2,000 men. Armed with thirty guns, it was supported by Fort Caswell on Oak Island, Fort Johnson at Smithville, Fort Saint Philip at Old Brunswick and several sand batteries.³⁷

³⁶Butler to Graham, 2 December 1864, Marshall, Butler Correspondence, 5: 375; Foxhall A. Parker, commanding Potomac Flotilla, to Graham, 16 November 1864, RG 393.

³⁷Boatner, Dictionary, pp. 292-93; Reconnaissance Report, 25 January 1864, OR, ser. 1, 33: 425-26; Wilmington Daily Journal, 25 December 1864.

The Union artillery, numbering 578 guns, commenced a bombardment at 1:00 P.M. on the twenty-fourth. This "exceeded," the Wilmington Daily Journal reported, "in its awful fury anything [the reporter] . . . ever had witnessed or could conceive of. In rapidity it resembled the roll of musketry rather than the distinct and separate reports of cannon."³⁸

In conjunction with the naval fire, Union troops had landed two miles up the coast from Fort Fisher by noon on Sunday (Christmas Day), captured a sand battery and pushed skirmishers to within seventy-five yards of the fort. By dusk, intelligence gathered by Union patrols, captured Confederates, and deserters indicated that a heavy force of Confederates were near the fort. The decision to withdraw was made in the face of the estimate that the casualties incurred in seizing the fort would be high in Union killed and wounded. Weitzel, reporting the situation to Butler, who along with Graham, was aboard the Chamberlain and off the breakers, contended "that it would be butchery to order an assault on [Fort Fisher since the artillery bombardment had done little damage to the work]" ³⁹

Ordering a reembarkation, the expedition withdrew on Tuesday, 27 December 1864. Accompanied by 300 prisoners, the expedition

³⁸Wilmington Daily Journal, 25 December 1864.

³⁹Weitzel to Brig. Gen. J. W. Turner, chief of staff, 31 December 1864, OR, ser. 1, 42, pt. 1: 985-87; Wilmington Daily Journal, 28-29 December 1864; Brig. Gen. A. Ames, commanding Second Division, Twenty-fourth Corps, to Captain Wheeler, assistant adjutant general, to Weitzel, OR, ser. 1, 42, pt. 1: 980-82.

returned to Fort Monroe by the end of the month. Graham, in charge of the landing craft, was commended "for his industry and energy in getting these into system and organizing them, and for the efficient services he and his command rendered during the disembarkation and re-embarkation of the troops."⁴⁰ Union casualties were ten wounded during the assault, two killed, and one officer captured, while one man drowned during the reembarkation.

An investigation ensued to determine the cause for the failure of the expedition to seize Fort Fisher. While some northern papers blamed the navy, others found fault with Butler. Grant, however, believed a lapse of security provided the Confederates with the necessary information to reinforce the fort. Reporting to Lincoln, Grant complained,

The Wilmington expedition has proven a gross and culpable failure Delays and free talk of the object of the expedition enabled the enemy to move troops to Wilmington to defeat it. After the expedition sailed from Fort Monroe three days of fine weather was squandered during which the enemy was without a force to protect himself. Who is to blame I hope will be known.⁴¹

By 7 January 1865 Grant indicated that he considered Butler to be responsible for the misadventure and was "inclined to

⁴⁰Weitzel to Turner, OR, ser. 1, 42, pt. 1: 987.

⁴¹Grant to Lincoln, 28 December 1864, Record Group 108, "Records of the Headquarters of the Army," National Archives, Washington, D. C., (hereafter cited as RG 108); Lt. Sidney B. DeKay to Butler, 31 December 1864, Marshall, Butler Correspondence, 5: 439-41; Graham to Butler, 29 December 1864, Butler Papers; Sidney B. DeKay to Butler, 31 December 1864, *ibid.*; Charleston Daily Courier, 9 January 1865; Butler to Grant, 3 January 1865, OR, ser. 1, 42, pt. 1: 966-70; Grant to Stanton, 7 January 1865, *ibid.*, pp. 970-75.

ascribe the delay . . . to an experiment [of Butler's] . . . the explosion of gunpowder in the open air."⁴² The explosion of 215 tons of gunpowder, aboard a "powder ship" near the fort, was purposefully set off, in a hope that the explosion would either destroy the fort or its defenders. The experiment was an abject failure. Fort Fisher was finally captured by an expedition led by Maj. Gen. Alfred H. Terry on 15 January 1865.⁴³

With Butler's failure to capture Fort Fisher, Grant, completely dissatisfied with Butler's performance, requested his removal from the command of the Department and the Army of the James. Reluctant to take such an action before this, Grant admitted to Stanton that the good of the service demanded such a drastic act immediately. Continuing, Grant explained that in his absence Butler, as the senior major general, "necessarily commands, and there is a lack of confidence felt in his military ability, making him an unsafe commander for a large Army. His administration of the affairs of his Department is also objectionable."⁴⁴ Lincoln, securely reelected for a second term and no longer needing the political General Butler, approved the request, and on 7 January 1865 Butler was replaced by Ord. Butler, in his farewell to the soldiers of the Army of the James,

⁴²Grant to Stanton, 7 January 1865, OR, ser. 1, 42, pt. 1: 970.

⁴³Boatner, Dictionary, pp. 293-94; Grant to Porter, 3 January 1865, RG 108; Wilmington Daily Journal, 17 January 1865; Eller, Civil War Naval Chronology, p. V-11; Stanton to Terry and Porter, 16 January 1865, ORN, ser. 1, 11: 458. The Naval Brigade was not part of the second expedition against Fort Fisher. Grant to Terry, 4 January 1865, OR, ser. 1, 46, pt. 2: 35.

⁴⁴Grant to Stanton, 4 January 1865, Butler Papers.

attacked the charge of failure at Fort Fisher by declaring he "refused to order the useless sacrifice of the lives of such soldiers [at Fort Fisher and was relieved] The wasted blood of my men does not stain my garments [as they do Grant for such costly assaults at Cold Harbor, Spotsylvania, and the Wilderness]." ⁴⁵

Graham, having requested reassignment to a command in the field following Butler's departure, was, instead, assigned as an additional duty the command of the Defenses of Burmuda Hundred (17 February to 19 March) and then the ports of Norfolk and Portsmouth (20 March to 16 June 1865). Writing Butler in an attempt to return to a combat command, Graham predicted that he would not be commander of the Brigade much longer because "no officer appointed to succeed you, being likely to appreciate its value, now that Fort Fisher has been taken, its usefulness . . . having passed away." ⁴⁶ Butler was unable to aid him in his efforts to gain a new assignment and closed his letter by confessing his "regrets that I . . . [never took] you from the

⁴⁵Special Order No. 5, Headquarters, Armies of the United States, 7 January 1865, Butler Papers; General Order No. 1, War Department, 7 January 1865, *ibid.*; Butler's Farewell Address, 8 January 1865, OR, ser. 1, 46, pt. 2: 71.

⁴⁶Graham to Butler, 18 January 1865, Butler Papers; Graham to Butler, 25 January 1865, RG 393; Special Order No. 48, Headquarters, Department of Virginia, 17 February 1865, OR, ser. 1, 46, pt. 2: 581; Ord to Graham, 9 March 1865, *ibid.*, p. 907; General Order No. 12, Headquarters, District of Eastern Virginia, 20 March 1865, OR, ser. 1., 46, pt. 3: 57; Special Order No. 162, Headquarters, Army of the James, 16 June 1865, RG 393.

Marine service, where you did such efficient service, and put you in the field."⁴⁷

Following Graham's service at Portsmouth, he was assigned by the War Department to command the Parole Camps located at Annapolis, Maryland. He also presided at several court martials and boards of survey during this time. He was honorably mustered out of the military on 24 August 1865 as a brevet major general, having received the promotion for gallant and meritorious services during the war. Returning to New York City, he became chief engineer of the New York Dock Department, Surveyor of the Port of New York, and New York State Commissioner of Gettysburg Monuments. He died at Lakewood, New Jersey, on 15 April 1889.⁴⁸

Upon the return of the Naval Brigade from the ill-fated expedition to Fort Fisher, Graham's command was active in keeping open river communications with the "Armies Operating Against Richmond," patrolling, picketing, and skirmishing.⁴⁹ Because the war had begun to move away from the waterways under Graham's

⁴⁷Graham to Butler, 22 January 1865, Marshall, Butler Correspondence, 5: 510-11.

⁴⁸National Cyclopedia, 12: 299; Proceedings of Board of Survey, 22 June 1865, RG 393; Special Order No. 367, War Department, 13 July 1865, RG 94; General Order No. 133, War Department, 22 August 1865, *ibid.*; General Order No. 135, War Department, 24 August 1865, *ibid.*

⁴⁹Sketch of Graham's service, Army Personnel File, National Archives, Washington, D. C.; Grant to Commanders of Gunboats, 24 January 1865, Grant Papers; Turner to Graham, 28 January 1865, OR, ser. 1, 46, pt. 2: 283; Graham to Commodore J. F. Schenck, commanding USS Powhatan, 6 February 1865, ORN, ser. 1, 12: 11; Turner to Graham, 3 March 1865, OR, ser. 1, 46, pt. 2: 818; Col. S. H. Roberts, 139th New York, to Brig. Gen. J. A. Rawlins, chief of staff, Grant's Headquarters, 9 March 1865, OR, ser. 1, 46, pt. 1: 542-43; Acting Volunteer Lt. Edward Hooker, commanding First Division, Potomac Flotilla, to F. A. Parker, 14 March 1865, ORN, ser. 1, 5: 527-28; Peter Hayes to Parker, 16 March 1865, OR, ser. 1, 46, pt. 3: 17.

responsibility, the continued need and expense of operating the Naval Brigade came under review. In August 1864, Grant had been asked whether the army gunboats should be turned over to the Navy Department as the Western Gunboat Flotilla had been in 1862. Grant answered that "Owing to the great amount of inland navigation in the Department . . . a fleet of light draft gunboats . . . [was deemed] essential . . . [Grant was] inclined to believe they are of more service attached to the Army."⁵⁰ In February, however, Grant requested the transfer of the Naval Brigade to the navy with the officers and men to be returned to their regiments. The War Department agreed and began the process of transferring the vessels, as soon as the soldiers manning the boats could be replaced by the navy. The sudden end of the war found the transfer still incomplete. Ord, seeking approval to disband the Brigade, reported that the vessels, which were needed as transports, were idle and at anchor at Norfolk. The War Department approved the action and orders were issued on Thursday, 25 May 1865, ending the military service of the Naval Brigade. The vessels were turned over to the Quartermaster Department while the men were to report to their respective regiments in order to be mustered out of federal service. At the height of its service, the Brigade numbered twenty-two officers and 698 men present for duty with an

⁵⁰Grant to War Department, 16 August 1864, RG 107.

aggregate present and absent of 1,272 men.⁵¹

The Naval Brigade, created to meet the need of the army for transportation in an area of numerous creeks, streams, and rivers, was utilized as a fighting force, encompassing both naval and military activities. Providing a means of landing troops in areas otherwise inaccessible to the Union army and allowing these men to conduct raids and reconnaissances proved of immense value to the Union war effort, especially during the early days of the Brigade's existence when little activity was being conducted on land because of the winter weather. Such weather made road conditions impassable and the Brigade was a practical way to conduct raids and continue to maintain military pressure on the Confederacy. The men of the Brigade were not feared by the Confederate army; indeed, the Brigade was described as a "dastardly and villainous set, . . . easily whipped with a determined party."⁵²

In spite of this, the Naval Brigade contributed not only to the Union war effort but to the theory of amphibious warfare

⁵¹Grant to War Department, 7 February 1865, *ibid.*; Abstract of Returns, Department of Virginia and North Carolina, November 1864, *OR*, ser. 1, 42, pt. 3: 766; E. D. Townsend, assistant adjutant general, to Grant, 14 February 1865, *OR*, ser. 1, 46, pt. 2: 553; Ord to Bvt. Brig. Gen. J. C. Kelton, assistant adjutant general, Division of the James, 7 May 1865, *OR*, ser. 1, 46, pt. 3: 1108; Ord to Grant, 19 May 1865, *ibid.*, p. 1178; Lt. Col. Edward W. Smith, assistant adjutant general, to Brig. Gen. Gordon, 27 May 1865, *ibid.*, p. 1226; Special Order No. 141, Headquarters, Army of the James, 25 May 1865, RG 393.

⁵²Maj. Gen. J. G. Foster, commanding Department of the South, to Halleck, 11 June 1864, *OR*, ser. 1, 35, pt. 2: 125; Graham to Lt. Col. E. W. Smith, 25 January 1865, *OR*, ser. 1, 46, pt. 2: 263; Maj. James F. Milligan, Confederate Signal Corps, to Gen. Samuel Cooper, 1 January 1865, *OR*, ser. 1, 42, pt. 1: 870; Graham to Shaffer, 13 January 1864, RG 393.

and tactics. It also advanced the technology of such landings providing a basis of experience, in addition to that of the U. S. Navy, for future use in other wars involving the United States. The Brigade, as a special unit, met the situation which had prompted the need for such a unit and performed the task as best it could. As the campaign of 1864 changed the complexion of the war in the Eastern Theater, the need for the Naval Brigade waned. The final action occurred at Fort Fisher, where the Brigade exhibited its ability to land troops on a beach under hostile fire. Of the several special units created under the auspices of the War Department, the Naval Brigade, specially equipped and trained for a special purpose, was one of the few to perform its intended mission successfully and, in so doing, contribute to the Union's war effort.

CHAPTER XI

SPECIAL UNITS AND THE PROSECUTION OF THE WAR

Special military units, such as the Railroad Brigade, the Ram Fleet, the Mississippi Marine Brigade, the Bureau of Military Information, Baker's National Detectives, the First District of Columbia Cavalry, and the Naval Brigade, were created by the Union war machine to meet particular situations and accomplish specific missions. As a result, their commanders had an unusual status, with only a nominal chain of command to acknowledge. These units were, in addition, required to report either directly to Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton or his subordinates in the War Department. The uniqueness of such circumstances, the result of improvisation on the part of the United States government, produced an unprecedented opportunity to experiment and introduce new innovations in tactics, weaponry, and the conduct of war.

At the same time Stanton's special units pioneered in these areas, they violated several recognized principles of war. (See Table IX.) In each case the War Department violated the principle of unity of command by authorizing these special units a degree of autonomy. By ignoring the dictum "For every task there should be unity of effort under one responsible commander," the stage was set for the events previously related.¹

¹Mark M. Boatner III, Civil War Dictionary (New York: David McKay Co., 1959), p. 672.

TABLE IX

PRINCIPLES OF WAR

- Objective--"Direct all efforts toward a decisive, obtainable goal." The destruction of the enemy's armed forces and his will to fight is the ultimate military objective.
- Offensive--"Seize, retain, and exploit the initiative." Even on the defensive the commander seeks every opportunity to return to the offensive.
- Simplicity--"Prepare uncomplicated plans and concise orders to insure thorough understanding and execution."
- Unity of command--"For every task there should be unity of effort under one responsible commander." This can be obtained by coordination of all forces by either direction or by cooperation.
- Mass--"Achieve military superiority at the decisive place and time." Mass is essentially a combination of manpower, fire power, leadership, morale, and training. It is not necessary to be numerically superior to the enemy.
- Economy of force--"Allocate to secondary efforts minimum essential combat power." Use of the means at hand is necessary to gain the ascendancy without undue waste of manpower and material.
- Movement--"The skillful employment of troops by the use of maneuver in order to place the enemy at a relative disadvantage."
- Surprise--"The employment of secrecy and rapidity to attain maximum effect with minimum loss." It consists of attacking the enemy when, where, or in such a way that he is unprepared.

Security--"Accomplish your purpose before the enemy can effectively react." The use of measures to secure against observation and surprise in order to maintain freedom of action.

Cooperation--Coordination with adjacent units, whether army or navy.

SOURCES: Boatner, Dictionary, pp. 671-72; Edward J. Stackpole, "Generalship in the Civil War," Military Affairs 24 (1960): 57-58; U.S., Department of the Army, American Military History 1607-1958 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1959), pp. 4-5.

Within the broad parameters set by Washington, the individual commander had complete freedom of operation and would succeed or fail accordingly. If the individual selected to organize and command such a special unit possessed excellent qualifications of intelligence, ethics, and honesty, while displaying a flair for military affairs, the results were successful. Such famous units as Col. Hiram Berdan's First U. S. Sharpshooters, Col. Richard H. Rush's Lancers (Sixth Pennsylvania Cavalry), Col. Albert J. Myer's Signal Corps, Dr. Henry W. Bellow's Sanitary Commission, and the five Indian Home Guard Regiments were successful as special units because of the caliber of men involved. On the other hand, this was only partially true of the special units under consideration here. The degree of success or failure these special units experienced was dependent upon the quality of the units' officers, enlisted men, equipment, and their adherence (or lack of it) to the principles of war.

The Railroad Brigade, under Col. Dixon S. Miles, accomplished the unit's mission of protecting the railroad by preventing the destruction of track, roadbed, and bridges by Confederate guerrillas. But when confronted with conventional enemy forces, the Railroad Brigade failed. Miles, promoted after thirty-five years of federal service to the rank of colonel of his regiment, must have been judged by the War Department as less than outstanding and without the qualities of a general officer. Having graduated from the U. S. Military Academy in 1824, he was promoted as a matter of course. Otherwise, he would have been considered for such a promotion to general. Instead, the

War Department passed him over. Of 1,080 officers the regular army had on active duty in 1861, only 142 were promoted to general. One of these, Irvin McDowell, was promoted from the rank of major to brigadier general in May 1861. McDowell, younger than Miles, graduated from West Point in the class of 1838.² Following the Union defeat at Manassas in 1861 and the charges against Miles for misconduct, the War Department assigned the colonel to what was considered a nonessential, low priority command. Lacking foresight or assuming the Shenandoah Valley and Harper's Ferry would never be threatened by Confederate forces, the mediocre colonel was forgotten. The routine administration of the Railroad Brigade indicated that Miles was functioning beyond his capabilities. Moreover, the failure to locate and prepare correct defensive positions around Harper's Ferry in the face of Maj. Gen. Thomas J. Jackson's valley campaign of May-June 1862 was nothing short of gross incompetence. The assignment of raw, untrained and undisciplined troops by the War Department also contributed to the debacle. Nevertheless, the Railroad Brigade, under a more effective officer, might have avoided the results of September 1862. Miles failed to apply the principle of the offensive (i.e., retain the initiative) by his failure to construct field fortifications on areas of key terrain, clear fields of fire by cutting down the woods near his line, and properly dividing and assigning his regiments

²Ibid., pp. 531, 673.

to key terrain features. Likewise, Miles issued conflicting and contradictory orders which infringed upon the principle of simplicity. Such contradictions ultimately allowed Col. Thomas H. Ford, commanding Maryland Heights, to withdraw on his own decision. This act, by a subordinate, doomed the garrison of Harper's Ferry.

Furthermore, the placement of the Brigade's regiments and the limited number of artillery pieces around the defensive lines neglected the principles of mass and economy of force. A correct combination of firepower, manpower, and prepared fortifications would have forced Jackson to spend time, a precious commodity, in assaulting the garrison. The Union relief column might have reached the garrison in time while the battle of Sharpsburg might have ended with the destruction in detail of the Army of Northern Virginia, thus shortening the war.

In addition, the application of the principle of movement would have provided Miles, with the advantage of interior lines, the extra troops with which to strengthen any threatened sector of the defensive line.³ Instead, he allowed his reserve located on Camp Hill to remain in a position rendered useless and subjected to Confederate artillery fire.

Finally, the Railroad Brigade's outposts had reported the crossing of one Confederate column at the Potomac, while another

³Interior lines indicates a situation where one commander has the advantage of being able to deploy his forces against the enemy faster than the enemy can counter his moves. A commander possesses interior lines by virtue of a central position or by virtue of superior lateral communications. Ibid., pp. 425-26.

was reported approaching from the valley. Miles chose to withdraw into the "fortress" of Harper's Ferry instead of using the principle of surprise and ordering harrassing assaults against the enemy when he was most vulnerable. In conjunction with such action, Miles failed to apply the principle of security. Although aware of the approach of the enemy, the garrison at Harper's Ferry took no extraordinary security measures and allowed Jackson's troops ease of movement and the choice of the time of attack. Under these circumstances the defense of Harper's Ferry was doomed to failure.

The second special unit, the Army Steam Ram Fleet, was the product of like adversity. The reverse inflicted upon the U. S. Navy in Hampton Roads in March 1862 by the Confederate ram Virginia (Merrimac) convinced Stanton of the ineptitude of the Navy Department of Secretary Gideon Welles. Once decided upon a course of action, Stanton was "resolved to take any steps that may be necessary to crush the rebellion and preserve the Union."⁴ The secretary of war exhibited such a belief by his constant support of special military units and the consistency with which he turned to the organization of new ones when unusual circumstances arose. Ultimately Stanton's objective in creating new and unusual military units was to obtain a Union victory. In January 1862, Stanton declared, "The purpose of this war is to attack, pursue

⁴New York Times, 20 January 1862; Benjamin P. Thomas and Harold M. Hyman, Stanton: The Life and Times of Lincoln's Secretary of War (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1962), p. 150.

and destroy the rebellious enemy, and to deliver the country from the danger menaced by traitors. Alacrity, daring, courageous spirit and patriotic zeal on all occasions and under every circumstance are expected from the army of the United States."⁵

In choosing Charles Ellet, Jr., a former antagonist, Stanton displayed his willingness to experiment with untried ideas, weapon systems, and men. Regardless of the means used, the goal was Union victory. The Steam Ram Fleet, like the War Department's Western Gunboat Flotilla, was designed to counter the existence of several Confederate warships on the western rivers. Choosing not to wait while the navy slowly prepared to contest these waterways, Stanton ordered modification of existing vessels into warships. Refusing to permit the Steam Ram Fleet to become a part of the navy's forces on the Mississippi, the secretary of war instructed Ellet to report directly to the War Department. Such a violation of the principle of unity of command hindered the Ram Fleet's cooperation with the naval squadron on the Mississippi. The most important contribution of the Ram Fleet as a combat unit occurred at the battle of Memphis in June 1862. Although the Ram Fleet continued to exist as a separate military unit until 1864, its functions following Memphis involved acting as a commerce raider and patrol boat, activities of every Union vessel in the west, regardless of whether it was a navy gunboat or an army transport. The question as to the caliber of the commander, Charles Ellet, Jr., remained

⁵Chicago Tribune, 23 January 1862.

unanswered following his untimely death as a result of the battle of Memphis. Ellet's brother Alfred W., who assumed command, never was given the opportunity to display his talents in handling the Steam Ram Fleet because of his preoccupation with the organization of another special unit, the Mississippi Marine Brigade.

The Marine Brigade's mission was suppression of Confederate guerrilla operations along the western rivers. It is difficult to determine whether the unit was successful in accomplishing such a mission since the complexion of the war in the western theater began to change while the Brigade was being raised. Following the Brigade's aborted expedition up the Tennessee River in April 1863 and the savage retaliatory raid on Austin, Mississippi, Alfred W. Ellet's command contributed little more to the war effort than the addition of more Union vessels patrolling the Mississippi River valley. Ultimately, the inactivity led the officers and men of the Marine Brigade to more questionable actions resulting in charges of looting, depredations, trading with the enemy, and speculation in captured cotton. Such activities, coupled with several conflicts of command authority, eventually convinced Stanton to approve Ulysses S. Grant's request to deactivate the Brigade, place the men in a conventional infantry regiment and utilize the vessels for much needed army transports. Thereupon, Alfred W. Ellet resigned his commission and, following a mutiny of the enlisted men, the remainder of the Brigade was discharged.

Perhaps the most successful of the several special units under discussion was the Army of the Potomac's Bureau of Military Information. Reversing the process of organization, the Bureau was conceived and established at field level and then approved by the War Department. Exhibiting all the traits of an efficient, well run organization, the Bureau's level of success was best measured by the ever increasing accuracy of the reports of the Confederate order of battle and locations of the enemy units. Despite conflicts between Brig. Gen. Marsena R. Patrick and his superiors, the unit functioned to a high degree of efficiency. Likewise, personality conflicts and differences in life styles between Patrick and his chief assistant, Col. George H. Sharpe, did not hinder the intelligence process. Moreover, the mission of gathering accurate information concerning the Confederate forces facing the Army of the Potomac was successfully accomplished. Such a feat did not go unnoticed, and the War Department directed the other major armies operating in the eastern theater to organize similar bureaus. Perhaps the greatest compliment was paid Patrick's Bureau by Lt. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant, when the general-in-chief directed that the Bureau of Military Information be relocated to Grant's headquarters at City Point, Virginia. Unfortunately, following the war, the men active in the process of gathering intelligence did not consider their activities unusual; thus, the nation benefited from their expertise but for a fleeting moment.

Just the opposite occurred with the National Detectives and the self-styled director of "Secret Service," Lafayette C. Baker.

Baker, egotistical and covetous of power, inserted himself into a power vacuum which had developed during the early days of the war. The chaos in Washington and the fears of the northern public allowed Baker to create a powerful network of operatives with which to ferret out traitors, spies, cowards, and political enemies. Following Allan Pinkerton's departure in November 1862, Baker gained entry into the inner circle of Stanton's intimates. Gideon Welles described Baker as "wholly unreliable, regardless of character and the rights of persons, incapable of discrimination, and zealous to do something sensational."⁶

Baker's growing power and purview soon led him to request Stanton's authorization for a military unit with which to counter the enemies of the Union. The result was the organization of the First District of Columbia Cavalry Battalion (later Regiment). The cavalry battalion, originally raised for special duty within the District of Columbia, eventually aroused public indignation as exemplified by an undated newspaper clipping found as an enclosure to a letter from Maj. Gen. Benjamin F. Butler to the War Department in December 1863. The clipping read in part:

No military authority has exercised as much power in Washington and the surrounding country as the cavalry force under [Baker] Many serious complaints have been made of the abuse of this power in arbitrary arrests and spolations, and . . . enough has transpired to satisfy the

⁶Howard K. Beale, ed., Diary of Gideon Welles: Secretary of the Navy Under Lincoln and Johnson, 3 vols. (New York: W. W. Norton, 1960) 1: 518-19; Otto Eisenschiml, Why Was Lincoln Murdered? (New York: Halcyon House, 1939), p. 187.

Government that the delegation to subordinate officers of irresponsible power is generally unwise, and sure to be abused, and it is understood that the system has been abolished by order of the Secretary of War.⁷

In reality, the First District of Columbia was ordered to the Department of Virginia and North Carolina for service as a conventional cavalry regiment while Baker continued his activities with the National Detectives. As a special unit, with special training and special weapons, the First District of Columbia had previously performed in a satisfactory manner the mission for which it was organized. In conventional combat it likewise gave a surprisingly good account of itself. Whether this was the result of having been issued Henry Repeating rifles or to the leadership of Lt. Col. Everton J. Conger, Maj. Joseph S. Baker, and Maj. Daniel S. Curtis, the combat record of the unit was, with one exception, acceptable. The exception was the skirmish at Sycamore Church in September 1864. Caught by surprise, many of the troopers of the unit were captured along with the Union army's cattle herd. The violation of the principle of security and the trauma of the transfer of the eight companies of Maine recruits were events from which the First District of Columbia never recovered. Following September 1864, the battalion's participation in combat was of little consequence.

Of a major consequence, especially in the winter of 1863 (October 1863-March 1864), was the Army Naval Brigade, organized

⁷Butler to War Department, 12 December 1863, Record Group 107, "Records of the Office of Secretary of War," National Archives, Washington, D. C. (on microfilm M221 "Letters Received by the Secretary of War, Registered Series, 1801-70," Fort Worth, Texas Regional Branch, National Archives).

to aid in the suppression of guerrilla operations, patrol the vast number of waterways within the Department of Virginia and North Carolina, and provide Butler with a dependable naval force for use as artillery or naval transport. To command the army's Naval Brigade, Butler requested and was assigned Brig. Gen. Charles K. Graham, an outstanding officer and a man of integrity. Graham's assignment was made by Stanton in November 1863. Although the Naval Brigade participated in only two major actions, the expedition up the James River to City Point and Bermuda Hundred in May 1864 and the ill-fated expedition to Fort Fisher in December 1864, the routine patrols and minor skirmishes with the Confederate army proved effective, especially in the months before the Army of the James and Army of the Potomac began operations around Richmond and Petersburg. Such winter operations helped maintain pressure on the enemy. Thus, Graham's Naval Brigade sustained the initiative for the Union army during a season which traditionally had been less active than spring and summer.

Further, the Naval Brigade aided in the development of tactics involving river operations, beach assaults, and the use of Gatling guns. Graham even suggested the formation of a sharpshooters battalion for use as an integral part of the Naval Brigade. Notwithstanding the contributions made by Graham's Brigade, the unit, by its very existence, violated several principles of war. Besides the principle of unity of command, the Naval Brigade experienced many of the same conflicts of authority on the waterways of Virginia and North Carolina as Ellet's Marine Brigade had in the Mississippi River valley.

Such conflicts prompted Grant to recommend, as he had concerning the Marine Brigade, the transfer of the Brigade vessels to the navy with the soldiers being reassigned to their respective regiments. But such an action never occurred because the war terminated.⁸

Following the close of the war, public knowledge concerning the existence of most special units faded from public memory and was overlooked in the historical studies which followed. Because they had contributed in only a minor way to the Union's war effort or had failed (as at Harper's Ferry), the six special units received little, if any, mention in the thousands of memoirs, accounts, and studies of the war. This was unfortunate, as the study of such special units not only adds technical data to the military history of the Civil War but offers a different perspective from which to view the events comprising the war.

From the point of view of the men who made the decisions, either to create such units or in command of such units, a serious situation existed and demanded immediate action. The War Department, like its counterpart in Richmond, chose improvisation as the only possible solution to many such problems. In each case the perceived threat was later seen to be less serious than when the action was first taken. The special unit, created to meet the perceived problem, was deemed the fastest way to deal properly with the problems, rather than utilizing

⁸Boatner, Dictionary, p. 327; Graham to Butler, 23 January 1864, Benjamin Franklin Butler Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, D. C.

regular combat regiments which would have to be retrained, in some cases rearmed or reequipped, and transported in most cases an excessive distance to meet the enemy.

The sense of urgency of 1861 did not seem to wane as the war progressed, partly because of the continuing introduction of new weapons, new challenges, and new situations. Thus, Stanton continued to use improvised units when necessary until the close of the war. The special units, full of vigor and spoiling for a fight when first organized, quickly settled down into the same dull routine as the "regular" regiments comprising the Union army. Once the special problem for which the special unit had been raised, equipped, and trained was defeated, neutralized, or found to be less of a threat than first perceived, the morale and discipline of such units deteriorated. In some cases, such as the Marine Brigade, the rate of decline was drastic, and the unit became an unruly band of criminals causing as many problems as the guerrillas they were intended to suppress.

Despite such examples, Stanton's department continued to respond to such crises by improvisation. Such a tendency was not limited merely to the War Department, as there were several instances when the Navy Department authorized the establishment of special units to meet special problems. The building of western gunboats and the arming of sailors for duty as infantry were only two examples of such improvisation. Perhaps Welles accurately described what was occurring within the country when he wrote:

The country has under gone a great revolution,
and will never again in all respects be the country

of the past but it will be with a modified government As a people we are undergoing a transformation Gradually but certainly the authority and power of the government are being more strongly felt for it is more decisively exercised.⁹

The increased power of the federal government, grasping at ways to preserve and defend itself in the face of the challenges of war, led in many directions. One path, long neglected by historians, was the one trod by Edwin M. Stanton and his special military units. Ultimately, these units contributed little to the Union's war effort when compared to regiments like the First Maine Heavy Artillery with the highest number of battle losses suffered by any regiment during the war or to officers like Grant, Sherman, Philip H. Sheridan, or George H. Thomas. Despite this, their contribution was made, if not to the victory of 1865, to the knowledge and body of experience of the nation's armed forces. The Railroad Brigade, the Ram Fleet, the Mississippi Marine Brigade, the Bureau of Military Information, the First District of Columbia Cavalry, and the Naval Brigade, if originally organized with well disciplined troops, officered by men of quality, and under strict army control and supervision, could have been recognized as important contributions to the Union's

⁹Welles to Mrs. M. J. Welles, 21 August 1861, Gideon Welles Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, D. C.; Allan Nevins, The Statesmanship of the Civil War (New York: Collier Books, 1962), p. 63; New York Times, 28 February 1862; Rear Adm. John A. Dahlgren to Comdr. Foxhall A. Parker, 12 July 1863, U.S., Department of the Navy, Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies in the War of the Rebellion, Richard Rush et al, eds., 30 vols. (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1894-1914), ser. 1, 14: 337; Rear Adm. E. M. Eller et al, eds., Civil War Naval Chronology 1861-1865 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1971), p. IV-138.

war effort and accepted for the tactical innovations they represented. Instead, as a result of their combat records and, in some cases, the conduct of their officers and men, they were considered misfits, and such experiments as the units represented were viewed as failures. As failures, the tactical innovations were forgotten by the American people, the national government, and historians.

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