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Walter S. Pullar
U.S. Marine Corps

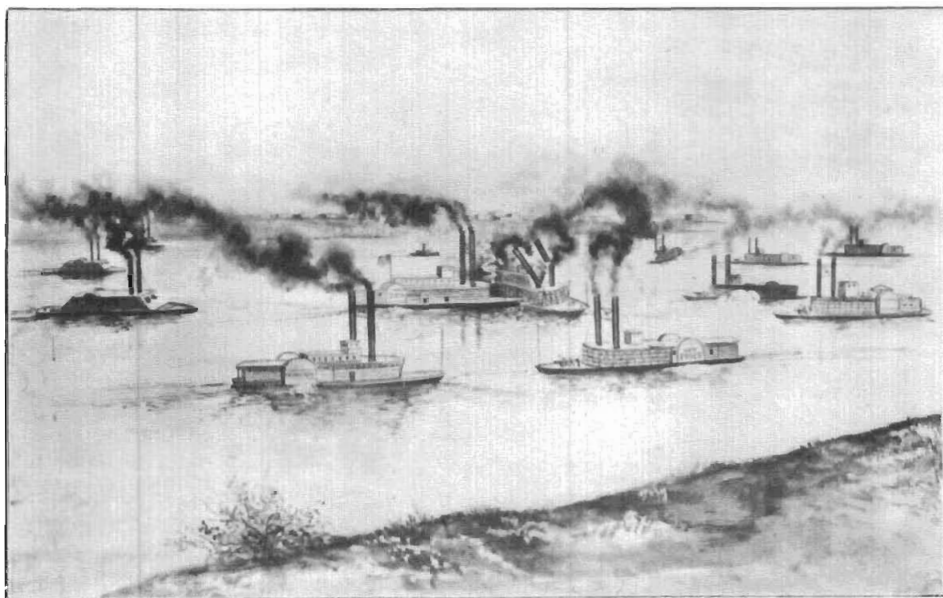
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ABE LINCOLN'S BROWN WATER NAVY



NAVAL BATTLE BEFORE MEMPHIS. JUNE 6, 1862.
Davis Boats at the left, Ellots in Center, Rebels to the right

Sketch from Warren D. Crandall, *History of the Ram Fleet and Marine Brigade* (St. Louis: Buschart, 1907), p. 53.

A research paper prepared by
Lieutenant Colonel Walter S. Pullar, U.S. Marine Corps
Faculty, School of Naval Command and Staff

INTRODUCTION

The general and his party dismounted at the levee where the flag gunboat was tied. Turning, they glanced back at the surrendered city of Vicksburg; it was quiet for the first time in many months. On this Independence Day in 1863 there was cause for celebration, and the admiral, rising to the occasion, invited the riders aboard and broke open his wine stores for a toast to the victory. "The South has been cleft in twain; Vicksburg and not Gettysburg, was the crisis of the Confederacy."¹ A combined army and navy operation that had begun 2 years before at the confluence of the Mississippi and Ohio Rivers had come to a successful conclusion.² Later, General Grant was to say of this victory, "The Navy . . . was all it could be, during the entire campaign. Without its assistance the campaign could not have been successfully made with twice the number of men engaged."³ Gen. W.T. Sherman was also elated with the final outcome of the battle and wrote, "In so magnificent a result I stop not to count who did it; it is done, and the day of our nation's birth is consecrated and baptized anew in a victory won by the united navy and army of our country."⁴

Vicksburg was the peak of success for both the Army of the West and the Navy's gunboat flotilla. These high-sounding phrases of harmony and goodwill had not always been the watchword of the river campaign nor would they always continue to be the guiding principle for either of these forces for the rest of the war. For the Navy the "unified command" that gave the Union its first victories at Forts Henry and Donelson, broke the back of the Confederacy at Vicksburg, and routed the guerrilla bands from the rivers was not always a harmonious experience. The seagoing forces had to learn to operate in the confines of the river, develop the ships and armament to fight this new

style of war, assemble the officers and crew to fight the ships, and weld all these factors into an operational organization that could withstand the tortures of the climate, rivers, and Army command. For a naval officer, the command of ships operating hundreds of miles from their natural element, the sea, was at best a poor substitute for his primary desires.

No matter where the force is located, at sea or on the river, the command is normally a reflection of its leader. The Mississippi Squadron was no exception. Throughout its history the flotilla was a mirror of the most colorful group of leaders that fate could assemble in one command. Through their efforts the force became renowned in all parts of the Union and the South. Abe Lincoln's brown water navy had representatives of Congress deliver orations in its honor; songwriters inscribe tunes such as the "Gunboat Quick Step";⁵ and, in general, won the esteem of the citizen of the North and the wonder of the visitor to this country. William Howard Russell, the British journalist who wasn't overly sympathetic to the Union's cause, remarked about the naval officers he had occasion to meet, "It will run hard against the Confederates when they get such men at work on the rivers and coasts for they seem to understand their business thoroughly and all they are not quite sure of is the readiness of the land forces to cooperate with their expeditionary movements."⁶ Russell was more perspicacious than he knew. The officers did lead the Mississippi Flotilla in a highly professional manner and did aid directly in the downfall of the South. However, once Vicksburg was captured and the leadership drained from the naval forces, the wine of victory was never as sweet. In 1865 the river fleet was sold at auction, the crews discharged, and the officers returned to other more traditional commands. "The iron turtles of Uncle Sam's inland navy,"⁷ a child of war but an orphan of

peace, was lost to the river, the Navy and the country.

I-THE BEGINNING

Our Nation's planners of the 1860's had not foreseen the need for a brown water navy. In fact, they had foreseen little of anything naval. When Lincoln took office in 1861 the U.S. Navy had a total of 90 vessels on its rolls. Of these, 21 were unseaworthy, 27 were out of commission, and 42 were serving the needs of the Nation. Of the 42 ships in commission, only 11 of these were in American waters carrying a total armament of only 134 guns of all sizes and description.¹ Not one of these 42 naval ships was equipped as a floating hattery or gunboat even though both France and England had experimented and used ironclads since 1843, had developed ironclad rams by 1847, and had fought these ships in the Crimean War to excellent advantage in 1854-56. By 1861 these countries had a total of 26 ironclads manned and sailing under their colors.²

This lack of preparedness continued until the report by the Secretary of the Navy to Congress on 4 July 1861. Here Secretary Welles stated that much attention had been given the ironclad in other nations, and he knew that "now was not the period adapted to heavy expenditures by way of experiment . . ." but recommended that Congress establish a board to study the matter and provide the funds to construct at least one ironclad ship.³ Congress authorized the board on 3 August of the same year; the board later stated in its final report that there was little future in the ironclad in other than a harbor defense mission since there was no way to overcome the major objections of being too heavy for its size, using too much coal for the size of its bunkers, moving too slowly, and costing too much to build. The recommendations of the board reflected the conservative view of the naval leaders. The

board was sure that wooden boats were far superior, but they recommended that one boat be constructed to experiment with the idea. Not wanting to be too bold, the board further recommended a strict contract be let requiring the builder to forfeit his profit if the ship did not fulfill the board's requirements and specifications.⁴

The construction of ironclads to blockade the coast was beginning in the East, but what now was to happen in the West? Part of the "Anaconda Strategy" was to cut the South in two by moving a large force down the Mississippi River. Once this step had been decided, it was easy to predict the necessity of an inland navy to assist in the initial opening of the river and to keep the river free for the passage of troops, supplies, and equipment. With its overcommitted forces already deeply involved in establishment of the blockade, the Navy Department wanted little to do with an inland navy. Besides, the army had been assigned control of all operations in the Ohio and Mississippi Valleys; therefore, Secretary Welles turned all inquiries on the brown water navy over to the War Department.

It was this attitude of Welles, which he denied in later years, that brought together James B. Eads, a naval designer and Missouri riverman by trade, and Secretary of War Simon Cameron. Eads offered advice on strategic targets along the rivers that he knew so well, and he also offered one of his boats and some ideas on what a river gunboat should look like.⁵ He even submitted plans on his recommended war craft via the Navy Department to the War Department. With intense interest aroused in the sketches, Cameron directed Eads to report to General McClellan, Commander of the Department of the Ohio, for conferences and cooperation towards establishing a river force in the Mississippi Valley. At the request of the War Department, Welles ordered Comdr. John Rodgers to assist in the naval

armament for the river campaign.

Commander Rodgers' qualifications were not exactly fitted for liaison duty with the Army. He was available at the time, and he had experience in screw and sidewheelers; however, he was 14 years older than the general he was to work for and had never navigated in a river environment. The best qualification he had was purely accidental. A relative by marriage, Montgomery C. Meigs, was about to become the Quartermaster General of the Army. Whatever his qualifications, Rodgers was the son of the famous Commodore Rodgers who gave the Navy leadership in earlier times; the son preferred to be judged on his own accomplishments. In the words of his biographer, "he was not wont to be deterred by obstacles in the performance of his duty."⁶ He actually looked forward to his assignment for he was sure he had virtually a free hand in developing the river facet of the new command. According to his orders he was to be subject to the Department of the Army, be under the command of General McClellan, but report all his actions to the Department of the Navy or, rather, Secretary Welles.

With his orders in his hand, John Rodgers departed Washington for his new command. He was accompanied by Samuel M. Pook, a naval construction engineer. The Navy thought they should hear from Rodgers once in a while and were concerned when no information was received for about 5 weeks. If Secretary Welles was unhappy with no news, the first report from Rodgers with a bill of \$62,000 for the purchase of 3 ships and a conversion bill of \$41,000, caused extreme consternation. All Rodgers received in return from Welles was a curt answer for not keeping the Navy informed and a refusal to honor his purchases. With his horns trimmed and a large outstanding bill, Commander Rodgers sought out the Army general to approve the gunboats. Luckily, General McClellan approved the purchase, and

the War Department was charged for their first river hoats.⁷ Once the ships were accepted, Pook and Rodgers set about redesigning their hoats' interiors and exteriors so they would be fit for combat. The steam engines were lowered in the hulls and oaken sides crested to protect the engine, guns, and paddle wheels. While this reconstruction was being accomplished on the 3 "timber-clads," Eads was given a contract to build 7 ironclads for the river force. The plans to form a Mississippi flotilla were gaining steam, but the commander of the flotilla was losing it. John Rodgers found that it wasn't as easy to work with the Army as he had originally thought. Not only was he denied a free hand, but, he found that he was out-ranked by every colonel and brigadier in the Department of the Ohio. This was an embarrassment, because of his age, and made gunboat control impossible. Everyone who desired a boat to defuse his post or accompany him on a special foray would commandeer one. Rodgers seldom, if ever, knew where his command was located and used little or no tact in dealing with the Army officers concerned. In fact, he even managed to irritate General Fremont, McClellan's relief, by refusing to buy Eads' boat, "Submarine Number 7," which the general prized as an excellent river craft.

Thus, after almost 4 months of duty with the Army in the West, Comdr. John Rodgers' leadership came to an end. Fremont summarized his feelings of Rodgers in an official letter to Missouri Senator Blair and an informal note to Assistant Secretary of the Navy Gustavus Fox. The official text asked Senator Blair to make sure the President knew that "It would subserve the public interest if Commander Rodgers would be removed."⁸ The private note was more blunt in its approach, "I don't like Commander Rodgers who is in charge of the gunboat operation--Will you ask to have him removed and some younger officer put in his place."⁹

Fremont felt that Rodgers was not pushing gunboat construction with sufficient zeal, and Rodgers did not keep his commander informed on the problems of gunboat organization and construction. Although Rodgers' removal was unfair, he had not profited from his similar experience with Welles. During this shuffle Commander Rodgers evidently did not keep his in-laws informed either, for General Meigs learned of his fate too late and could offer no assistance. On 6 September 1861, Comdr. John Rodgers was relieved of his command by Capt. Andrew Hull Foote and was transferred to Fremont's staff as a naval adviser until reassignment could be effected.

Rodgers did not have time to instill his personality into the flotilla, but he did give the brown water navy the dogged tenacity to stay alive as an organization and the determination to overcome all obstacles.

II-THE BAPTISM OF FIRE

When Capt. Andrew Foote arrived to take command of the flotilla, it came as a complete shock to Commander Rodgers. Evidently Fremont and Welles had not bothered to notify Rodgers that they no longer desired his services. Under these circumstances, change of command was humiliating but, as Foote described the occasion, Rodgers "behaved as a gentleman and an officer should."¹ Foote, a calm, energetic, deeply religious officer who cared about the feelings of others, was concerned with the whole situation. In addition, this assignment wasn't fitted to his taste. He loved blue water and room to maneuver his ships and would have preferred a naval command to this hybrid service involved in amphibious operations.²

The time of Foote's arrival coincided with the growth of the flotilla and with the pains that accompanied that growth. On 12 October 1861 the first U.S.

ironclad was launched at Carondelet, Mo.³ Two river snag boats were converted and also delivered for service. The increase in river boats created a requirement for more crews, weapons, and equipment; items that were already in short supply. These new problems, Foote found, only compounded the old ones that had plagued Rodgers, his predecessor. Centralized control of the ships was impossible, and Army assistance was less than enthusiastic. In an attempt to solve the basic problem of command, Foote appealed for assistance from Fremont. The commanding general, in his sweeping manner, published a directive to all Army officers to assist the Navy in every way. The order further told Foote that he should, "consider yourself in charge of and commanding this expedition."⁴ The naval captain accepted the gesture but did not take Fremont too literally. He knew that if he tried to enforce the order the Army would challenge his authority. With all hope lost for constructive assistance from the Army, Foote appealed to Secretary Welles for a temporary appointment that would advance his seniority and solve his command problem.

Command was but one of the problems tormenting the flotilla commander at this time. He had no funds to equip his force. To Foote's displeasure, it appears that Fremont had purchased and outfitted 2 river snag boats and 28 mortar boats without authority from the War Department. The rest of Eads' 7 ironclads were still under construction and could not be completed unless additional funds were received. General Meigs notified Foote that the Quartermaster General's Department was "embarrassed by the actions of the commanding general of the West . . . this department cannot remit money except for those [ships] contracted for under its authority."⁵ Continued complications of this type were only averted by the President's relief of Fremont for his

inept political ventures.

General Halleck was now the leader in the West, and Foote was searching for a new command. He was continually annoyed by the vague definition of his responsibilities, his men were not receiving pay, Army assistance was inadequate, his boats were ill-equipped, and the Army men assigned to fill out his crews were "ill fit" for shipboard life. With the change of commanding generals and the other constant annoyances, Foote thought it a perfect time to request relief from the river and asked for assignment to a separate naval command.

Secretary Welles was not prepared to release Captain Foote from his responsibilities. He approved of Foote's managerial capabilities and could think of no one more able to fill the position. The request for transfer was denied, but Foote was promoted to the rank of acting flag officer. This promotion placed Foote second only to the commanding general in the West and solved some of the old problem of command. With renewed vigor Flag Officer Foote set off to complete the organization, equipment, and manning of his flotilla, resolved that he would do his best regardless of his personal feelings.

Determination did not make old vexations disappear. Mr. Eads, who was still working on the ironclads, remained unpaid by the Army. Without funds, his workmen and suppliers were delaying production and were threatening a walk-out. Visits to Washington were unsuccessful. One telegraph report to Foote explains the frustrations of the pair. "After waiting four days, I have had an interview with Meigs, presenting accounts for \$300,000. I can obtain no assurance of receiving one dollar, and must return as I came."⁶ Lack of funds delayed shipbuilding, but lack of weapons delayed outfitting of ships already in commission and arming of mortar boats. This latter development was brought to the attention of the Presi-

dent when he was pressing for action in the west. Dissatisfied with inactivity, Lincoln stepped in, notified all commanders to make haste, and required Foote to submit daily reports on the status of his mortar boats. As a result of the President's action, supplies increased, the river ships received their weapons and mortars, and the Army had a new relief for General Ripley, Head of the Army Ordnance Bureau.⁷

With his force nearing completion, Foote was anxious to place his "turtles" in action. He knew he would have to face the Confederate river forts sooner or later, and he was sure any delay would enhance the rebel cause and limit his own chances of success. Both he and Grant were eager to move, but a combined request for orders from Halleck was denied. Secretary Welles was Foote's next target. Welles relayed the request from the West to Stanton, and he, in turn, flashed orders to Halleck to get Grant moving.⁸ The river flotilla was about to begin its war in earnest.

Due to a shortage of personnel, Foote could only man 4 ironclads and the 3 wooden gunboats for action against Fort Henry. He had asked for action and was granted his request. He would not now ask for a delay for additional crews. There were no textbooks to follow in attacking a stone fort with an ironclad; therefore, the flag officer decided to use the tactics he knew best: economy and firepower. As the flotilla approached the fort, the "cost effective" leader reminded his men of their responsibilities, "Every charge you fire from one of these guns costs the government about eight dollars," he shouted, and with those words of caution, the flagship proceeded to run up a quick bill of \$24 before they landed the first round on the fort.⁹ For tactics, Foote fought strength against strength. He faced the fort with the iron-plated bows of his gunboats raining shells on the fort with the heavy naval guns. The timberclads remained in the

rear, bringing long-range fire on the target. In keeping with his days at sea, Foote had his gunners deliver well-aimed, rapid fire on the gun enplacements, endeavoring to force the rebel gun crews away from their guns and destroy the fort. In place of remaining at a distance, as most ship commanders recommended, Foote approached to within 300 yards of the fort, pressing home the attack. The defenders were not ready for this bold maneuver, and as one of their number stated afterward, "... they showed one broad and leaping sheet of flame."¹⁰ Within the hour the battle was won. The fort surrendered to the gunboats before the Army could arrive on the scene. The Navy's stock was high as the Union cheered the victory.

The Navy seemed to have demonstrated that an ironclad was superior when engaging a stone fort. This was a false theory as was demonstrated in the flotilla's next battle. With the Army landed and Fort Henry captured, Grant set off across country to take his second objective, Fort Donelson. Foote wanted to cooperate but opined that his ships and crews were not ready to engage in another battle without recuperation. On 11 February, Halleck ordered Foote up the Cumberland River to assist Grant in the capture of Fort Donelson. Foote wanted to bring up the mortar boats to bolster the firepower against the fort, but there was no time. Boldly, yet cautiously, Foote took his fleet into their second action. This time the fort, and not the ironclads, was to prove to be the better participant.¹¹

The river boats had earned a name for themselves at Fort Henry. As soon as they appeared above Fort Donelson, General Pillow wired for assistance. "The gunboats are destroying us . . . they can't hurt us if you can keep those ironclad hellhounds in check."¹² General Pillow may have been worried, but his gunners were in a better position than those of Fort Henry, and they

were able to deliver plunging fire down on the weak topsides of the turtles. It was soon evident that the day did not belong to the boats, and they withdrew from the fray badly damaged. Foote himself received 2 wounds while directing fire on the fort. Neither appeared to be too serious, but they weakened his health and were the eventual cause of his death.

After the battle Foote retired his force to Cairo to lick its wounds and repair damages. Some of the first words of criticism for his actions at Donelson came from the former flotilla commander, Commander Rodgers, now naval aide to Halleck. Rodgers was particularly critical of Foote's close-in tactics and expounded a new tactical maxim. "Ironclads were to fight wooden ships and stone forts at distances which leave the ironclads impregnable to the artillery opposing them."¹³ This comment did not faze Foote for he was a firm believer in his own tactics; he was perturbed with the Army, however. The military messages to Washington and the national news slighted, in his opinion, the performance of the gunboats at Donelson. This injustice was compounded by the fact that it was the Army that ordered his force into battle when it was not prepared for further combat. These events so preyed on his mind that he was determined, and so informed Welles, not to obey any future orders issued by an Army officer. Along with his complaint he requested the Navy be given an equal command with the Army and not be relegated to an auxiliary command under them. Secretary Welles tried to pacify Foote by praising him for his accomplishments, yet at the same time he issued but a slight warning concerning Foote's relationship with the Army.

Foote did not have the leisure to pout for any prolonged period. Gunboats were required at both Pittsburg Landing and Island Number 10. The ability to support two operations simul-

taneously was a definite indication that the flotilla had come of age and was an important adjunct to the Army. The fire support at Pittsburg Landing and the effective fire of both the gunboats and the mortar boats at Island Number 10 proved to be essential to the Union victories. As the Army and Navy joined in coordinated combat, the close associations welded the 2 commands in friendship. An example of this kinship was demonstrated in W.T. Sherman's concern over the death of Captain Gwinn. "We of the Army deplored his loss as much as his fellows in the Navy, for he had been intimately associated with us in our previous operations . . . we had come to regard him as one of us."¹⁴ Foote was still jealous of his ships and their reputation, but he understood the Army a little more.

Late in April, Foote's failing health made it impossible for him to meet his growing responsibilities. He notified Welles of his discomfort and requested a second in command that could shoulder the flotilla's problems while he withdrew for a while to rest and recuperate. On 22 April 1862 the Navy Department dispatched orders to Capt. Henry C. Davis to report for duty to the Mississippi Flotilla. He arrived at his new post on 9 May, met the flag officer, and prepared to take command while Foote took leave. The sick commander departed, never again to return to the gunboats or to effective active duty.

Foote, a man who could deliver a sermon with the devastating effect of a broadside, was the catalyst that brought the flotilla from an assemblage of boats to a fighting organization. Granted, Rodgers did much of the spade work, but it was Foote who manned, equipped, and fought the gunboats in a manner to bring fame to himself and to the force. He considered his primary duty that of organizing the flotilla; the actual fighting of the force was of secondary concern. He grasped the full meaning of the river warfare, dedicated

himself to it, and thereby enabled the command to be an effective fighting force. His description of the relationship between the Army and Navy in river operations, "like blades of shears, united invincible, separated, almost useless"¹⁵ indicates he understood the value of amphibious operations even though he remained a deepwater sailor.

III-THE NAVAL ENGAGEMENTS AND NEW ARRIVALS

When Foote departed from the gunboats, he did so only as a temporary move. A rest, he assured himself, was all that he required. Since his departure was not permanent, his flag remained on the command ship, and the title of commander remained in his name. The assignment to the full responsibility of the flotilla without the designation of commander or temporary elevation to flag officer was a constant irritation to Captain Davis. He was a man who appreciated the pure straight lines of science and the large headlines of publicity. He was certain that, as second in command, anything he did right would be credited to Foote, and anything that went wrong would be debited from the Davis account. This situation was not altered until 23 June 1862 when the Department of the Navy was certain that Foote would not return to the river.

All this was more galling to Davis since it had been just the element of chance that had brought him to the river command in the first place. He had been awaiting assignment at Naval Headquarters to become head of one of the departments, a post more suited to his taste, when Foote's request for assistance arrived. Welles could spare no one else at the time, and Davis was selected. He was not a complete newcomer to the world of the gunboats as he had previously sat as junior member of the ironclad board created by Congress in 1861. As a member of this august group

Davis had reportedly opposed the construction of ironclads for general naval use but did recommend that they be utilized in harbors and rivers.¹ His relationship with Welles was not close, and the Secretary could only say of his qualifications that he possesses an "affable manner [that] would enable him to get along well with the army" and whose "scientific caution would discourage unnecessary risks of the flotilla."²

The Secretary of the Navy knew his officers well. In a letter to his family just prior to his assumption of command, Davis outlined what would be his thinking and tactics for his tour of command. His emphasis would be on defense. He feared a defeat of the gunboats would expose the Army's rear area to the South, and everything that had been gained up to that time would be lost.³

With defense as his primary aim, Captain Davis assumed command of the river fleet; on 10 May 1862 all hell broke loose. The Confederate River Defense Force, composed of ram boats, attacked Davis' mortar boats and 1 gunboat in the vicinity of Fort Pillow. The results were disastrous. Two gunboats were severely damaged and lay submerged on the western bank of the river, and a disproportionate number of casualties were received. The new commander's worst dreams were realized as the national press was rather rough with him. Davis tried to call the action anything but a defeat. He condemned the news reporters for covering the contest from a mile upriver and not reporting events but only rumors they could glean from those men involved in the fight. Why the river boats were caught by surprise was argued long after the powder smoke had cleared, but the boldness of the rebels was attributed to the lack in variety of tactics in shelling Fort Pillow and a desire of the Confederates to strike the new commander and embarrass him before he could

become completely familiar with his situation on the river.

If Davis was defensive minded before, this short naval engagement made him even more so. The national press had him in an ill humor, and he was not contemplating any further movements for a while. To say the least, he was not very receptive to the arrival of a new, eager commander of a small, ill-disciplined fleet of strange river boats. General Ellet and his rams were not received with open arms.

About the time the river fleet was recuperating from their wounds received at Fort Donelson, Secretary Stanton, Welles' counterpart in the Army, met with civilian engineer Charles Ellet and was enthralled by the idea of using steam rams on the Mississippi to oppose the rebel boats. Stanton was impressed with Ellet, obtained a general order for him, and notified Halleck that a man with "courage and energy and willing to risk his own life on his own job"⁴ was recruiting a new command for duty in the West. Stanton then published an order bringing into being the Ram Fleet. This was a separate command from both the Army forces and the Navy's flotilla. Ellet was to act in cooperation with the gunboats but was under the direction of the War Department. In effect, the Mississippi now had 2 naval commands under 2 separate commanders who were responsible to 2 different departments, but who must act almost in the same water. Quite a complex system of control and one that was sure to cause problems.

In any event, after the defeat at Fort Pillow, Ellet arrived on the river with his rams and a burning desire for action. He requested support from the gunboats for a raid on the rebel fleet south of Fort Pillow but was refused by the now overtimid Davis. Since the rams were unarmed, Ellet would have to await the pleasure of the naval officer. Davis informed him that the rams would be used as infantry, letting them run in

after the heavy work was done by the gunboats.⁵ Disturbed by the inactivity of the flotilla, Ellet sent a boat south for a reconnaissance of the river. He found the fort evacuated and the Confederate boats in the vicinity of Memphis. With this new information, Davis decided to stir and agreed to move on the naval forces based at Memphis. His tactics would take the gunboats in first, and the rams would follow waiting for an opening to strike. The flotilla was again on the offensive.

The combination of gunboats and rams was too much for the Confederate River Defense Force, and the overwhelming victory destroyed all but one of the rebel river boats. Memphis surrendered. The first purely naval victory on the Mississippi was a resounding success. After his previous press Davis was quite enthusiastic with his latest coverage. To make sure the reporters received the right information, Davis placed them on his gunboats. When he wrote his family on the outcome of the battle he included a note about the press. "You will have the most excellent description of the fight by Mr. Coffin, of the *Boston Journal*, who was happily with my fleet and a witness to the whole affair."⁶

The two naval engagements at Fort Pillow and Memphis, accompanied by their press clippings, were the only major battles fought during Davis' tour as commander of the river forces. During the same time span there were some important additions to the flotilla that increased the efficiency of the naval forces. In addition to the 9 rams brought by Ellet, the flotilla was now adding numerous additional craft to assist the gunboats. These miscellaneous craft included school boats, carpenter shops, smithy boats, machine ships, supply ships, coal barges, powder vessels, and dispatch ships. Most of these additions were for the sole purpose of relieving the fleet of its dependence on the bases upriver. One of the most

interesting of the new arrivals was the hospital ship U.S.S. *Red Rover*. The Army surgeons of the forces operating on the river had been requesting floating hospitals for some time. After the battle of Pittsburg Landing the doctors were especially adamant since there was no place on the river banks to tend the wounded. Sherman's Adjutant General, Captain Hammond, expressed the situation very well in a note to his counterpart on Grant's staff when he said, "There is neither house or buildings that can be used for a hospital here. I hope to receive an order soon to establish floating hospitals. . . ." Before this note could be dispatched, General Sherman returned to his headquarters and appended the following postscript. "I have just read this letter and approve all but the floating hospitals; regimental surgeons can take care of all sick, except for chronic cases."⁷ Irrespective of Sherman's objections, the hospital ship was approved and arrived in June of 1862. On its arrival Davis was able to report to his family, "Yesterday our hospital boat, just fitted out at St. Louis, came down river. . . You would be most agreeably struck by her neatness, airiness and comfortable accommodations. She is an honor to her projectors and the government."⁸

New gunboats were also being built and added to the force. The active mind of James Eads had not stopped with the construction of the first ironclads. He continued to improve design and produce better ships for the river operations. One significant addition to the fleet was a new class of gunboat that included in its design 2 turrets. The turrets were a new step in the engineering of ironclads and were more advanced than the turret of Ericson's that was used on the Monitor and now standard in naval construction. Ericson's success made the Government hesitant to accept something new and untried, but they finally approved Eads' ships with 1 Ericson turret and 1 of Eads

design with 1 stipulation. As Davis himself stated, the Government "consented that I should place one of my turrets on each of the two vessels at my own risk, to be replaced by Erierson's in case of failure."⁹ The new turrets operated by steam, fired every 45 seconds, and eventually became the prototype of all turrets used on U.S. men-of-war.

Davis himself added to the increasing number of ships being constructed by requesting permission from Washington to "construct or rather purchase . . . some steamboats of light draught that can navigate these waters during the dry season."¹⁰ These ships, although they were not delivered until after Davis' departure, were called tinclads and were a great asset to the progress of the river warfare.

While the growing naval forces improved their combatant strength, it still festered under the Army command. This anomalous condition continued until Congress passed a new law on 20 September of 1862. On this date the flotilla officially became the Mississippi Squadron, was transferred to the command of the Department of the Navy, and the brown water navy finally had a separate, equal command. All naval vessels on the Mississippi were now under the jurisdiction of Secretary Welles. At least that is how Welles interpreted the law. Stanton disagreed. He refused to transfer the Ram Fleet to the Navy.¹¹

The Navy now had direct command of its forces on the river, and Welles was satisfied. He was satisfied with the command, but not with its commander. Since this was low-water time on the river and naval operations were at a standstill, Welles decided it would be a good time to change commanders as well as the command structure. Davis was recalled to Washington to head the Bureau of Navigation, and Comdr. David D. Porter, ex-commander of Admiral Farragut's mortar boats, was named to succeed Davis on 1 October 1862. The conservative, cautious Davis

was being replaced by a younger, bolder, and more colorful commander who would change the defensive posture of the last few months into an aggressive offensive position.

IV--THE PEAK OF SUCCESS

Comdr. David D. Porter's career in the Navy had not been one of all grandeur and success before his assignment to the river command. He had alternately been in and out of trouble with both political and departmental leaders. Stanton referred to him as a "gas bag who makes a great fuss and claims credit that belongs to others."¹ However, Porter's previous work under Farragut was approved by Chase, Blair, and Seward. Porter had received some adverse publicity from his actions in the Newport Club, Newport, R.I., where he engaged in a short but furious argument with a local member while recuperating from an attack of "breakbone fever." His imprudent choice of words on this occasion netted him 2 trips to Washington, D.C., and a severe reprimand from Welles.² Evidently Porter was not one of Welles' favorites, but Welles overcame personal feelings when he assigned Porter to the command in the West. Welles felt that Porter did not possess the organizational ability of Foote, but did possess an element of bravery and luck. He was aware that Porter was not well liked by his brother officers, but was certain his youth and active demeanor would overcome other obstacles.³ At the time Porter received his orders to "immediately hoist your flag as an acting Rear-Admiral" he was promoted over 40 captains and 25 other commanders. This type of advancement was unheard of in the Navy of the 1860's.⁴

The river force relationships with the Army command structure were well known to Porter at the time of his assignment. He felt no revulsion at being stranded in river warfare and was anxious to strike the enemy wherever pos-

sible. Relations with the Army were not the only problem confronting the commander of the Mississippi Squadron. The organization was now quite large in both ships and area coverage. The unit included more than 150 vessels, its operations extended over 3,000 miles of navigable rivers, and navigation problems were prevalent in much of this area. All of these difficulties imposed burdens of increased responsibility on the commander of the brown water navy, but Admiral Porter took them in full stride. He did discover before long that it was physically impossible to satisfy the demands for naval cooperation made by the Army post commanders along the rivers. The Navy might now have a separate command, but the mission to support the Army was still priority. It seemed everyone wanted a gunboat and made unreasonable demands based on rumors. Porter even received requests from the Navy and War Departments for the movement of gunboats to certain areas. At one point, when it appeared the flotilla would be torn apart by these requests, Porter wired Grant the following message, "I have a few gunboats here, where do you want them."⁵ Grant took the hint, and at least part of Porter's cooperation problems were solved.

About this time Porter was endeavoring to solve another perplexing problem. His boats were continually harassed by snipers or small guerrilla bands along the river banks. None of the ships were equipped to protect themselves from this danger, and their crews were too small to provide a landing force to chase down the offenders. As the admiral said in a letter to one of his Marine friends, "A ship without Marines is like a garment without buttons."⁶ Porter requested Marines from the Navy Department but was refused. The War Department took the plea from Welles and honored it by establishing the Mississippi Marine Brigade under the com-

mand of the now Brig. Gen. Alfred Ellet, another member of the swash-buckling family of the Ram Fleet. In keeping with Stanton's old habits, he held the new unit under his command but directed the commander to operate in conjunction with the Ram Fleet and in cooperation with the gunboats.⁷

Stanton's tenacious hold on the Ram Fleet and Marine Brigade was just one of the elements of command confusion on the river that faced Porter. Lincoln stepped into the picture to help complicate matters by assigning General McClelland to the Mississippi Department. This placed Porter in a position of not being sure which commander should receive the priority of his efforts. Grant interpreted Lincoln's order as placing McClelland under his authority since the Mississippi was in his specific area of operations. McClelland, of course, was sure he had been given an independent command. Even Banks was involved, for Halleek's previous order to his command left the boundaries undefined on the Mississippi River but stated that Banks could operate up the river as far as he desired.⁸ Porter, given his preference, desired to work with Grant. McClelland's snub of the Navy's contribution at the battle of Arkansas Post increased Porter's dislike for the political general. At the same time Grant became displeased with McClelland's independent action because it weakened the main thrust toward Vicksburg. The final outcome of this venture was the appointment of Grant as the overall commander in the area and the downgrading and eventual relief of McClelland.

With the lines of command defined, Porter was able to establish a better system of command on his portion of the river. His area included all of the Mississippi and its tributaries from St. Louis to Vicksburg. Farragut retained the lower half of the river until Grant decided to take Vicksburg from the south. Porter then passed part of his

MISSISSIPPI MARINE BRIGADE!

SOLDIERING MADE EASY!—NO HARD MARCHING!—NO CARRYING KNAPSACKS!—
\$100.00 BOUNTY!!

A Marine Brigade, to act in concert with the invincible Ram Fleet, is to be raised immediately.—All under the command of Brig. Gen. A. W. Ellet. Large Steamboats are engaged to carry the troops down into the heart of Rebellom, and open the Mississippi and her tributaries to the navigation of the Northwest. There will be but very little marching for any of the troops. They will be provided on the Boats with good cooks and bedding.

General Ellet has received special permission from the Secretary of War to receive volunteers for the Brigade from the drafted men of every state. Those who are desirous of serving their country, exempt from the usual hardships of soldiers, will do well to join this organization. Transportation will be furnished to Headquarters, St. Louis, for all Volunteers.

∴ The undersigned is a Recruiting Officer for this Brigade, either for Cavalry, Artillery or Infantry.

His office was found at A. S. Foot's Intelligence Office, Bank-St., opposite Weddell House.

CAPT. J. R. CRANDALL.

[From a Handbill].

"The proposed service is especially attractive to old soldiers. It 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 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. The command will always be kept together."

THE "MISS. MARINE BRIGADE!"

CONVALESCENT SOLDIERS!—HURRAH BOYS!

Source: Warren D. Crandall, *History of the Ram Fleet and Marine Brigade* (St. Louis: Buschart, 1907), p. 256.

squadron past the forts, and his command was extended. Porter also started operating on the Red River, before it was officially assigned as his area, because he placed so much importance on this entrance into the western half of Dixieland. After Vicksburg, Porter was given the whole river and the Red River officially. This increase in responsibility required Porter to redistribute his force into 8 districts to effectively control the rivers.

The complexities of command and problems of the rivers should have been enough to keep Porter's mind busy. But, as Welles had stated earlier, the admiral

was an active man. In order to protect his ships from the river forts, Porter used a number of innovations. He used the gunboats strong sides to protect the hulls of the steamers and weaker ships. He carried his own coal barges with him when he went south of the barrier forts at Vicksburg to provide the coal supply that was severely curtailed by the small bunkers on the ironclads. He also required his ships to strap logs to their hulls to protect them from rams or damage from fire rafts. One of his most productive ideas led to the saga of the dummy monitor.

The forts at Vicksburg were built on

a high bluff and were studded with cannon. Before he did battle with these guns the admiral wanted a better idea of their exact locations. In order to achieve this goal, Porter built a dummy monitor from an old coal barge, made wooden turrets and painted them black, and stacked pork barrels over mud furnaces to resemble smoke stacks. Once completed, Porter set the craft adrift after dark and let the river current carry the dummy past the forts. The fake gunboat did more than accomplish its mission. A few rebel ships south of the forts saw the approach of the gunboat and quickly withdrew to the south to avoid an engagement. Their departure left a salvage crew, working on some cannon and other valuable equipment in a sunken river boat, unprotected. The crew threw what they had saved back in the river, fired the hulk of the wreck, and fled before they could be captured.⁹ This malicious ruse of Porter's was a grim, practical "joke" on the enemy, and by it, the active mind of the commander was able to gain needed information without endangering his force.

About this time the tinclads, requested earlier by Davis, arrived. The Army said of these vessels that they drew so little water they could "float on a heavy dew."¹⁰ Their draught of 3 feet made the excursions into the Red River and other Mississippi tributaries possible and played an important role in the squadron during the last years of the war.

Adm. David Porter may have been a "gas bag" and may not have been liked by everybody, but he performed a highly creditable job as commander of the Mississippi Squadron during the peak of success for the brown water navy. After the Arkansas Post experience he maintained communications with his superiors and, in fact, scooped the Army when he notified Secretary Welles of the victory at Vicksburg. Porter performed his tasks well and, according to the glowing remarks of the

2 best northern generals, his ships must have performed their mission in an excellent manner. The Mississippi Squadron had come of age. The shears referred to by Foote, the second flotilla commander, were functioning as they should, and the Army and Navy were reaping the benefits. Admiral Porter had more time to serve in the West, hut, after Vicksburg, the rest was certainly an anticlimax and, at times, almost a disaster.

V--THE ENDING

The Mississippi was now open. Vicksburg and Port Hudson, the last Confederate bastions, were taken, and the North held the passageway to the gulf. After the fall of these last two strongholds, the war on the rivers took on an entirely different character. The only forts left for the South were on the Red River and adjacent streams, and their river defense fleet totaled one boat. Small crossings could still be made by Confederate troops and supplies, but no longer could large forces cross the big river or any of its branches. The movable fortresses of the Navy could deliver heavy artillery everywhere.

Porter and the major portion of his command supported General Banks on his Red River operation into the western half of the Confederacy in 1864. His close support in this case almost led to his own capture and the capture or destruction of his boats. Banks advanced with the gunboats, obtained a victory at Pleasant Hill, but then made a sudden withdrawal from the area and left the gunboats behind. This was the first and only time the Army left the river forces to the mercy of the river and the enemy. The vessels managed to escape, hut no thanks to Banks. Porter's comments on this operation did not flatter Banks, and it is easy to understand the naval commander's view.

The only other problem of note that occurred during Porter's tenure of command was concerning the coordination

and cooperation of the river naval forces. The responsibility of command over the Ram Fleet had never been resolved. Ellet was sure he was independent, and Porter knew the act of Congress had placed the fleet under his command. The situation came to a head when Porter ordered 2 rams to an assigned mission without notifying Ellet. The boats refused to obey and were backed by Ellet since he had not issued the order to the rams himself. Admiral Porter, without hesitation but with obvious cunning, responded by simply placing General Ellet under arrest.¹ Once Porter had taken this brilliant action, the next common superior had to enter the conflict of wills to make a final determination on who commanded the movements of the Ram Fleet. Ellet's headquarters soon received a telegraph message from Washington directing the general to "report to Rear Admiral Porter for instructions and act under his directions until otherwise directed by the War Department."² The dispatch was signed by the Commander in Chief, President Abraham Lincoln. The Navy now commanded all river forces, and no further directives were required or issued from the War Department.

With only minor engagements encountered on the river, the full potential of a fighting leader was being lost to the Nation. Therefore, on 22 September 1864, Porter was ordered to the Atlantic Blockade Squadron and was to be relieved by Capt. S. Phillips Lee. He turned his command over to his second in command, Captain Pennoek, until his relief arrived on 1 November 1864. Pennoek and Lee continued the small action war on the river until August 1865 with few changes in Admiral Porter's command structure or organization. The war was over, the job finished, and on 14 August 1865, Admiral Lee was relieved of command, and the Mississippi Squadron ceased to exist. The ships were auctioned off or transferred to Army quartermasters, and the crews

were discharged.

The boats are sold, and the men and their leaders are gone, but the epic accomplishments of these few years on the river live on in our history. As seen from this vantage point of over 100 years, Abe's brown water navy achieved its honors through the leadership of its commanders. These leaders--Rodgers, Foote, Davis, and Porter--did not possess all of the attributes of a perfect naval leader, but judged in comparison with their peers and in the context of the naval leader of their day, they were decidedly well above the norm.

The naval officer corps was simply not as prepared for the Civil War as they should have been. The rank of commodore, the highest rank of the time, was an august personage who surrounded himself with pomp and a conventional grandeur. He achieved his position on a system whose reliance was based solely on age and time in service and whose authority was despotic in nature. This system caused junior officers to assume less responsibility and took away their desire for initiative. When they finally reached the age to assume command, their brains were numb from lack of use, and they could not be counted on to be other than mediocre. The long period of peace between 1812-1861 did not expose this weakness; only the war magnified it in the first year of hostilities.

The commanders for the Mississippi River forces came out of the mold previously described, but each in his own way was able to overcome conservative training and achieve some measure of individual success by initiative and creative thinking. Rodgers, tactless and blunt, at least provided the initial momentum to the naval forces in the West. His drive and sheer determination procured the first timberclads. His main fault was complete absorption in his work and complete neglect of everything else, including his superiors. From this start Foote added his organizational

ability, dedication to duty, and fighting nature to prove to all that the Navy had a significant role to play in the river campaign. Davis' contribution was less apparent than the others, but he demonstrated that the naval power on the Mississippi was not to be contested and, as an independent unit, could be counted on to maintain control of the rivers once the forts were defeated. Finally, Porter added his aggressive courage, style, imagination, and thorough understanding of combined Army and Navy operations to lead the naval forces to the peak of their performance. All of these leaders helped accomplish what the South never did seem to appreciate: the power of a joint naval and military force was far superior to the total force of the naval and military units operating separately.

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Back on the levee at Vicksburg, the general and his party departed the flagship, and the admiral seemed extremely pleased. He saw the visit as a gesture of the unpretending acknowledgment on the part of the Army of the services

provided by the Navy. With the true feeling of the moment, the admiral sat down to complete his report to the Secretary of the Navy on the part the Navy played in the recent victory. A little out of character for this boastful officer, the report contained this moderate claim. "The Navy," he wrote, "performed a less conspicuous part in the capture of Vicksburg than the army; still it has been employed in a manner highly creditable to all concerned."³

BIOGRAPHIC SUMMARY



Lt. Col. Walter S. Pullar, U.S. Marine Corps, has done undergraduate work at Lehigh University and the University of Rhode Island and is a graduate of the Naval War College, School of Naval Command and Staff. As an infantry officer, he served both in Korea and Vietnam where, in the latter, he was Commanding Officer of the 2d Battalion, 26th Marines. Lieutenant Colonel Pullar is currently assigned to the faculty of the School of Naval Command and Staff.

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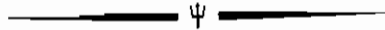
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I have not the particular shining bauble or feather in my cap for crowds to gaze at or kneel to, but I have power and resolution for foes to tremble at.

Oliver Cromwell, 1599-1658