This Great Contest Afloat

THE CIVIL WAR ON THE SEAS, COASTLINE, RIVERS, AND OCEANS

by Neil P. Chatelain

EMERGING CIVIL WAR SERIES

Unedited Excerpt

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First edition, first printing

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Chatelain, Neil P. author
Title: This Great Contest Afloat : The Civil War on the Seas, Coastline, Rivers, and Oceans / Neil P. Chatelain.
Description: El Dorado Hills, CA : Savas Beatie, 2026. | Series: Emerging Civil War series | Summary: "In his latest Civil War offering, award-winning historian and professor Neil P. Chatelain unpacks each of these distinct naval theaters of conflict - seas, coastline, rivers, and ocean. Using prolific firsthand accounts merged with keen macro analysis, Chatelain takes readers to the decks of blockade-runners, beaches of coastal assaults, riverine ironclads, and targeted merchants, showing the extent and impact of Civil War naval activity" -- Provided by publisher.
Identifiers: LCCN 2025046086 | ISBN 9781611217773 (paperback) | ISBN 9781611217780 (ebook)
Subjects: LCSH: United States. Navy--History--Civil War, 1861-1865 | Confederate States of America. Navy--History | United States--History--Civil War, 1861-1865--Naval operations | Confederate States of America--History, Naval
Classification: LCC E591 .C3949 2026 | DDC 973.7/5--dc23/eng/20260112
LC record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2025046086

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Proudly published, printed, and warehoused in the United States of America.

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Footnotes for this volume are available at
https://emergingcivilwar.com/publication/footnotes/

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Photo Credits: Brittany Oliva-Chatelain (bloc); *Confederate Veteran*, Vol. 10, No. 9 (cv); William Emerson Strong Photograph Album, Duke University (duke); *Harper's Weekly* (hw); Library of Congress (loc); Chris Mackowski (cm); National Archives (na); NASA Earth Observatory (nasa); Naval History and Heritage Command (nhhc); Neil P. Chatelain (npc); National Portrait Gallery (npg); *The Photographic History of the Civil War,* Vol. 6 (phcw); *San Francisco Call* (sfc); *Shreveport Times* (st); Theodore Roosevelt, *An Autobiography* (tr); US Navy Photograph (usn); Wayne Fitzpatrick (wf)

For the Emerging Civil War Series

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Foreword

BY DWIGHT S. HUGHES

"Nor must Uncle Sam's web-feet be forgotten," wrote President Abraham Lincoln. "At all the watery margins they have been present. Not only on the deep sea, the broad bay, and the rapid river, but also up the narrow, muddy bayou, and wherever the ground was a little damp, they have been and made their tracks." In a Civil War that was principally a land conflict, naval operations were more than just peripheral or supporting; they were central to the story and are essential to understanding that momentous struggle.

In his classic treatise, *On War*, Carl von Clausewitz discussed "different factors of space, mass, and time" related to battle, one being the "theater of operations," which he defined as: "A sector of the total war area which has protected boundaries and so a certain degree of independence." Protected boundaries might consist of fortifications, natural barriers, or simply distance. A theater is "a subordinate entity in itself—depending on the extent to which changes occurring elsewhere in the war area affect it not directly but only indirectly." This framework characterizes military operations in terms

John Ericsson invented the screw propeller and the ironclad *Monitor*, revolutionizing naval warfare. His memorial in Washington, D.C., dedicated in 1926, commemorates "Adventure," "Labor," and "Vision." (cm)

of locality and environment while clarifying interacting events, influences, and consequences.

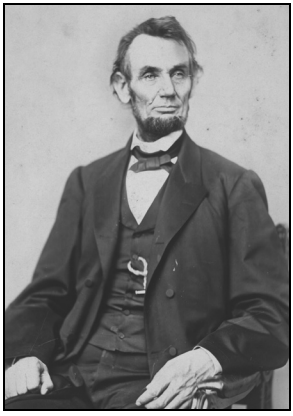
Civil War combat theaters are identified as the Eastern, Western, and Trans-Mississippi, each containing subordinate campaign sectors. However, the conflict's naval side also can be defined in distinct zones of activity or theaters, which warrant independent consideration: the offshore blockade, littoral coastline, heartland rivers, and open oceans.

The Blockade

The blockade became the United States Navy's primary mission, unprecedented in scope as the war's largest and longest campaign, viewed by many on both sides of the Atlantic as impossible. It constituted a discrete naval zone of operations with monumental challenges across 3,500 miles of Atlantic and Gulf coast from the surf out to several miles seaward.

The mission was unprecedented in strategy: Previous blockades—most recently Great Britain's enormous effort during the French wars of revolution and empire early in the century—concentrated on confining enemy naval forces in key ports to impede them from challenging command of the sea and from invading colonies or homeland. Disruption of their seaborne commerce was a secondary consideration. The president and Secretary of the Navy Gideon Welles thought differently, envisioning the most ambitious blockade ever attempted, suppressing ingress and egress of countless trading vessels of all nations to and from hundreds of estuaries, bays, harbors, and streams, large and small.

Abraham Lincoln was a novice at naval matters when the war began, but had good subordinates to rely upon. (npg)



The mission was unprecedented in technology: Secretary Welles undertook an immense, unparalleled warship procurement and building program arming almost anything that could float including tugs, ferries, or merchant vessels of all sizes and shapes while constructing new warship classes to novel designs with advanced industrial manufacture, particularly for ironclads. The fleet surged from a third-rate force of less than 100 ships to over 600 war vessels, one of the largest, most powerful, and technologically advanced in the world.

The mission was unprecedented in tactics: Lessons for blockade under sail were adopted from the Royal Navy, augmented by innovative steam tactics for barriers afloat attempting to sight, catch, engage, and capture or

destroy runners despite darkness, fog, and storm. A new operational unit, the blockade squadron, led by the newly established rank of admiral and involving masses of ships from dozens to hundreds presented additional challenges in command and control, signaling, and seamanship.

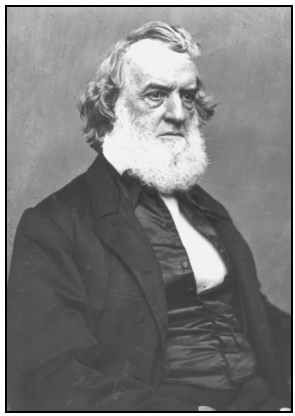
The mission was unprecedented in administration: Mid-century social reforms upended ancient traditions of the sea, promotion patterns, and forms of discipline while a crude departmental bureaucracy faced trials in mass recruitment, training, and personnel management. The Navy exploded from 10,000 to 50,000 officers and men. Led by a core of salty veterans, a fresh generation of officers arose, steeped in modern technologies, educated at the new Naval Academy in Annapolis, and fired in the crucible of war. They were joined by a gaggle of newly minted volunteer officers from civilian pursuits, many with little maritime experience. The nascent position of naval engineer began transforming the ancient maritime profession.

The struggle also coalesced crewmen into a professional enlisted corps whose members belonged to the service rather than to individual warships. With the notable exception of rivermen in the heartland, crewmen on both sides of the conflict tended to come from the burgeoning industrial working classes of Northern and European cities rather than from rural towns and farms. Culturally distinct from soldiers, they fought a different war primarily from personal rather than ideological motivations including the promise—real but mostly unrealized—of prize money for captured blockade-runners.

Officers were immersed in a multicultural ethos accustomed to the polyglot assemblage of transnational mariners who had more in common with each other than with homebound compatriots. Captains desperate for recruits of any shade from anywhere, trainable in hard and dangerous physical labor, looked on race or language as minor factors.

Freedmen and contrabands became integrated as seamen into crews earlier, more quietly, on a more equal basis, and in proportionally larger numbers than into the army, even some into the Confederate navy. The insular life afloat employed authoritarian structures and firm discipline, customized through millennia to the requirements of huge, complex machines in a hostile environment, and hardly less strict in its way than slavery.

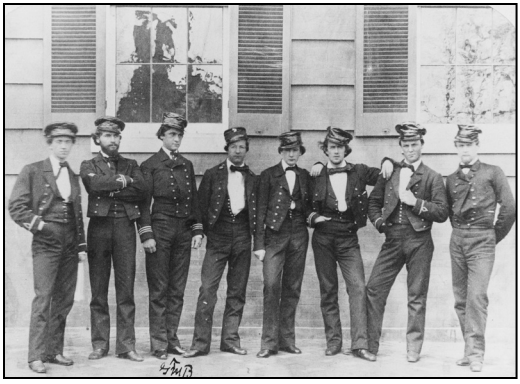
Meanwhile, Confederates sought to neutralize the blockade. Southerners struggled to birth a navy



Abraham Lincoln often called Navy Secretary Gideon Welles by the moniker Father Neptune. An antebellum Democrat, Welles was known for his blunt honesty and no-nonsense approach. (loc)

from scratch, modeled after the enemy's example, and facing the same trials exacerbated by acute shortage of maritime resources, infrastructure, and skills. Half of the U.S. Navy's southern-born officers joined the rebellion, forming a cadre of expertise, some among the most talented. Crewmen frequently were diverted from the army over intense resistance from generals.

Led by its able secretary, Stephen R. Mallory, the Confederate Navy was more successful than should have been expected. Mallory focused on strategies of the underdog: commerce raiding and blockade running at sea, with defense of key fortified positions along interior lines ashore bolstered by asymmetric new technologies such as ironclads, torpedoes, and submarines. The new government bought, confiscated, and converted what vessels it could acquire. It also undertook an extensive effort in Great Britain and France to purchase or construct commerce raiders, blockade-runners, and ironclads, elevating international tensions to the boiling point.



Several officers of the U.S. Naval Academy class of 1861, which was pressed into the fleet to help lead growing blockading squadrons. (nhhc)

The blockade generated intense international controversy as Great Britain—the world hegemon in ocean commerce and naval power—sought to sustain essential trade with cotton states. In a flourishing global economy fueled by industrialization and vast trade networks, ancient arguments resurfaced over the rights and responsibilities of neutral nations under international law, disturbing echoes of the Revolution and War of 1812. Britons attracted by the lucrative trade funded, built, commanded, and manned many blockade-runners.

No grand engagements occurred in the blockade theater and no national heroes arose. The most renowned squadron commanders, Admirals David Farragut and David Dixon Porter, earned their reputations attacking Rebel ports and conquering heartland rivers. Other old salts like Louis M. Goldsborough, Samuel Phillips Lee (cousin to R. E. Lee), Samuel Francis Du Pont, and John Dahlgren endured the thankless commands with little glory.

Thousands of storm-tossed and bored blockaders on hundreds of vessels surveilled undifferentiated sand dunes and swamps from the Chesapeake Bay to the Rio Grande while infrequently bursting into frenetic action

for a few shots at a Rebel runner. Many got through, but a significant number did not; many others did not try. Although quantitative conclusions are elusive, the blockade progressively constricted the Southern economy, deprived its citizens, and degraded home-front morale.

The Littoral

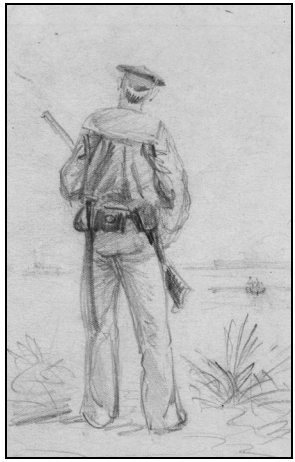
The littoral theater overlapped land and sea at the edge of the continent beginning at the surf line but extending inland along Atlantic and Gulf coasts to encompass beaches, estuaries, deltas, bays, and harbors. Operations were principally an extension of the blockade and conducted by the same squadrons, but as in the blockade, they presented new obstacles engendering novel strategies and tactics with new tools. Initial efforts to secure Southern harbors for maintaining steam blockaders led to the strategic capture of coastal enclaves and fortified ports. The navy shielded littoral supply lines, escorted amphibious forces, engaged enemy vessels, and provided heavy shore bombardment.

Titanic clashes erupted against powerful defenses that vulnerable, wind-dependent men-of-war with smaller guns could never contest. But mid-century warships were more stoutly built than predecessors, powered by steam as well as sail; propeller-driven ships with lighter draft maneuvered shallow waters. Seagoing ironclads and revolutionary monitors for the North, and solid casemate ironclads for the South, demonstrated strengths and weaknesses of nascent technology. Naval and coastal guns were advancing in range and firepower with improved manufacture, larger caliber, and rifled bores shooting explosive shells.

Southern fortifications evolved from massive stone ramparts, which could disintegrate under those shells, to extensive sand, earth, and log bulwarks, which tended to absorb them. Innovative Union steaming formations reduced or bypassed key forts while Rebels struggled to defend them, sometimes successfully, also employing ironclads, torpedoes, and submarines. Technology evened the ancient contest between ship and shore.

The U.S. Navy and Army undertook major cooperative operations within a common strategic framework leading to unprecedented amphibious invasions. Most officers considered their respective professions as distinct domains of land and sea ending

Sailors were often required to man land fortifications and to guard their own naval stations ashore. (loc)



at high tide. They served unique cultures with ancient traditions, were frequent rivals for public approval and resources, and were not accustomed to immense, coordinated operations. Officers and seamen trained to sail and fight on the high seas were minimally experienced in shallow waters and narrow channels. The navy had to sharpen its skills.

Below the commander-in-chief, there was no joint army-navy commander, no joint staff, and no protocols or mechanisms for directing joint operations. Officers of one service could issue no orders to an officer of the other service, respective rank notwithstanding. Success in the field depended on cooperation between commanders from the squadron and theater level down to individual vessels and units. These became matters of individual personalities and will, impeded by interservice differences or jealousies of rank. Failure to plan and execute together begat lost strategic opportunities and tactical missteps. In places like the North Carolina sounds and Fort Fisher, however, efficient army-navy partnerships produced hard won victories with major implications political and strategic, but it was a learning process.

While the blockade discouraged seaborne commerce, operations in the littoral sequentially shuttered Rebel ports and facilitated campaigns ashore. The U.S. Navy's first admiral, David Farragut, gained prominence representing a progressively more technological and competent sea service.

The Rivers

Nowhere did wet and dry operations converge more thoroughly and uniquely than in the heartland where riverine warfare was invented, merging maritime mobility and firepower with hard fighting on land. The campaign for the Lower Mississippi and its tributaries—America's spine—was one of the war's longest and most challenging, extending over 1,000 twisting river miles (double what the crow would fly) from Cairo, Illinois, to New Orleans, cutting through six states in a massive alluvial flood plain averaging 75 miles wide, the best cotton land in the world. This also was an extension of blockade strategy, an outgrowth of the Anaconda Plan, and at the heart of the Western Theater.

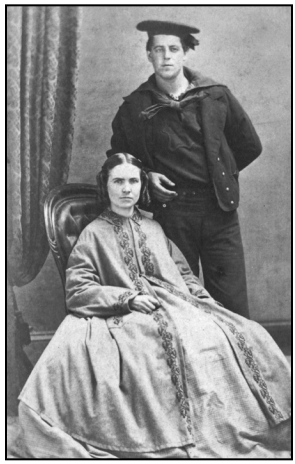
In tactics and technology, however, riverine warfare was a new concept. Inland waterways had always been

barriers or highways to armies, and boats that employed them did little more than transport troops and cargo. History offered few examples of extensive operations involving specialized classes of war vessels officered and manned by naval personnel cooperating with land forces. Emergent technologies of steam propulsion, iron armor, and heavy naval artillery were untested in river combat. Deepwater seamen had no experience in this difficult environment.

U.S. Navy Secretary Welles initially considered western rivers wholly an army responsibility, dispatching just a few officers and advisors to assist in assembling a support flotilla. Commander John Rodgers and Flag Officer Andrew Foote, along with prominent civil engineers James Eads and Charles Ellet, converted or built innovative river gunboats and rams including timberclads, tinclads, and the hardy city-class ironclads, while hundreds of lightly armed or unarmed steamboats provided transport and supply. These elements coalesced into the navy's unprecedented Mississippi River Squadron.

Along shallow and narrow, swift flowing and meandering, wreck and snag infested channels and swamps, riverine forces reconnoitered and patrolled, transported and sustained land forces, conducted amphibious expeditions and sieges, provided heavy artillery support, interdicted enemy trade and transportation, and defended friendly commerce. Officers relied on civilian river pilots to maneuver their shallow-draft, broad beamed vessels. Crews were recruited primarily from riverports, towns, farms, and the army; freedmen and contrabands constituted a significant proportion.

Excellent army-navy partnerships formed, notably generals U. S. Grant and W. T. Sherman with Flag Officer Foote and Adm. David D. Porter. Union sailors and soldiers fought together from Forts Henry and Donelson through Shiloh and down the Mississippi at Island No. 10 and Memphis to Vicksburg. "The navy under Porter was all it could be, during the entire [Vicksburg] campaign," Grant concluded. "Without its assistance the campaign could not have been successfully made. . . . The most perfect harmony reigned between the two arms of the service." For two more years, the river squadron dominated the heartland and split the Confederacy, although the 1864 Red River campaign was both dramatic and futile.



Before leaving for potentially years at sea, many sailors took photographs with their loved ones as keepsakes. (loc)

Colonel John Harris, U.S. Marine Corps, was commandant of the Marine Corps in 1861. He oversaw a rapid growth of the Corps to keep up with wartime needs until passing away in 1864. (loc)

Confederates attempted to counter with defensive positions augmented by a few hastily assembled gunboats, rams, and ironclads. The Union victory at Memphis essentially eliminated any Rebel naval presence on the rivers. The ironclad CSS *Arkansas* made a spectacular run through the Federal fleet above Vicksburg but was destroyed soon after. In the heartland, land and water forces meshed most effectively for the Union conducting a type of warfare not seen again until the conflict in Vietnam.

The Oceans

Commander James Bulloch, chief agent in Europe for the nascent navy of the rebellion, wrote in his memoir: "It is now well known that the Confederate Government made great efforts to organize a naval force abroad during the Civil War, and that a few armed cruisers were got afloat, which destroyed many American ships and well-nigh drove the American commercial flag from the high seas." Far-ranging Rebel raiders operated primarily in the Atlantic and Caribbean, but Capt. Raphael Semmes rambled CSS *Alabama* as far as the South China Sea while CSS *Shenandoah* circumnavigated the globe and nearly wiped out the North Pacific whaling fleet six weeks after Appomattox.

Commerce destruction or *guerre de course* was a familiar form of ocean warfare, favored by weaker contestants and rivaling fleet combat in impact; Americans vigorously attacked enemy trade in every contest leading up to 1861. Not unlike the objectives of William T. Sherman laying waste to swaths of Georgia and the Carolinas, this asymmetric strategy targeted the opponent's economy, home-front morale, and will to fight.

International agreements outlawed the ancient practice of privateering, licensing armed civilian vessels to capture enemy merchantmen for profit. Mallory, therefore, championed a new class of dedicated, state-commissioned warships. Small, swift, lightly armed cruisers combining the advantages of fast sail with steam propulsion would be sustainable for long cruises against a merchant fleet still under canvas while avoiding combat. They were officered by some of the U.S. Navy's best Southern men and crewed primarily by foreign mariners.

Commander Bulloch had *Alabama* and *Florida* purpose built to naval standards in Liverpool, but

most Rebel raiders were converted merchantmen. He surreptitiously purchased, armed, and manned *Shenandoah*, a perfect blend of British tea clipper constructed on the Clyde with an auxiliary steam engine. Other conversions were less successful, however.

Eight Confederate cruisers caught some 240 Union merchant ships and drove hundreds more into foreign ownership to sail under a neutral flag immune to capture. Secretary Welles focused his resources on the blockade, reluctantly dispatching a few warships to chase them down, usually too little, too late. Maritime insurance rates soared; owners fearfully held their vessels in port, and foreign contracts dried up. Influential Yankee shipping and whaling interests, many not enamored of the war to begin with, bombarded the Lincoln administration with pleas to secure peace at whatever cost.

Confederate blockade runners, commerce raiders, and seagoing ironclads purchased, converted, or constructed in Great Britain and France, exacerbated tensions. Great Britain recognized the Confederacy as a legitimate revolutionary movement subject to rules and protections of international law; other countries followed. Their naval vessels received the same courtesy and status as those of all nations. The Lincoln administration, however, insisted that Rebel raiders be treated as stateless pirates subject to capture and hanging by any naval power wherever encountered. The cruisers sowed diplomatic discord from the Caribbean to Brazil, Cape Town to Singapore and Melbourne; *Shenandoah* frightened San Franciscans.

Considering results versus outlays, commerce warfare was arguably the Confederacy's most effective military campaign, decimating the U.S. merchant and whaling fleets. Despite losses and panic in the North, however, the cruisers put not a dent in the Yankee war machine nor in the flourishing trade that supported it. Commerce just shifted to neutral vessels, mostly British, and the whaling industry was ebbing anyway. The legacy of Rebel raiders would inspire German commerce warfare in the world wars employing surface cruisers and submarines.

DWIGHT S. HUGHES ***graduated from the U.S. Naval Academy in 1967 with a major in history and government. He served 20 years as a Navy surface warfare officer on many oceans in ships ranging from destroyer to aircraft carrier and with river forces in Vietnam. Among Dwight's works, he authored the Emerging Civil War Series book*** **Unlike Anything That Ever Floated: The *Monitor* and *Virginia* and the Battle of Hampton Roads, March 8–9, 1862.**

Conceptualizing the Blockade

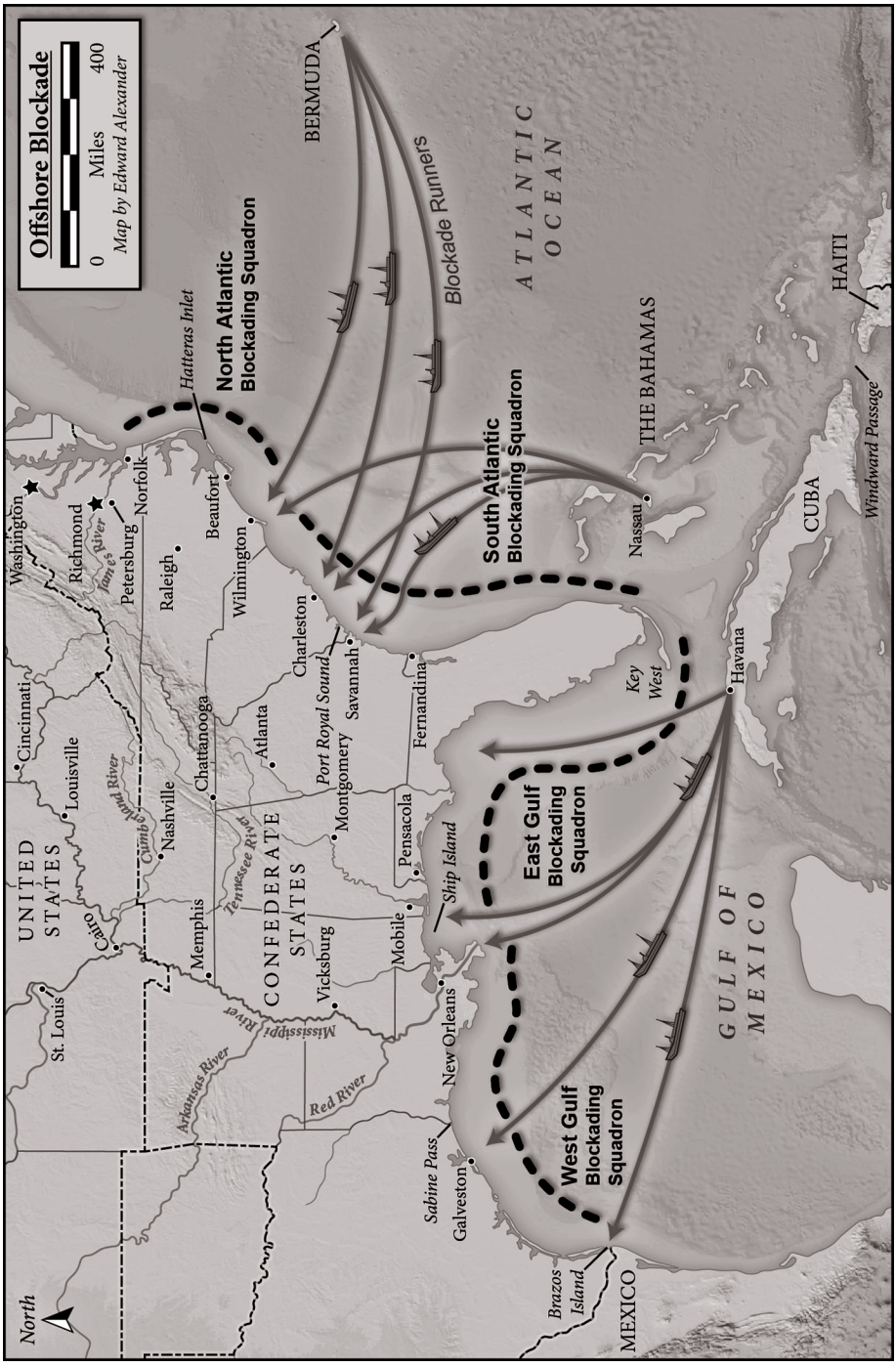
CHAPTER ONE

BLOCKADE ACTIVITY, PART 1: 1861

On April 19, 1861, Abraham Lincoln declared "a blockade of the ports" of rebelling states, ordering "a competent force . . . posted so as to prevent entrance and exit of vessels" from Texas, Louisiana, Alabama, Mississippi, Florida, Georgia, and South Carolina. Eight days later, the blockade extended to North Carolina and Virginia. With a simple pen stroke, Lincoln began the Civil War's longest continuous campaign, which became the U.S. Navy's most visible wartime contribution. It became a drawn-out sustained operation envisioned to prevent Confederate communications abroad, halt cotton exports, and block arms and accoutrements from being brought into rebelling states.

Lincoln's secretary of state, William Seward, pressed for a blockade to demonstrate U.S. sovereignty over rebelling territory while simultaneously dissuading European intervention in the conflict. In January 1861, even before assuming his cabinet position, Seward spoke with British minister Lord Richard Lyons about whether British ships would "conform to the regulation of the de facto or the de jure government," pressing the British to

Du Pont Circle, in Washington, D.C., honors Rear Admiral Samuel Francis Du Pont, who chaired the blockade board in 1861, evaluating the scope and requirements of a blockade of the Confederacy. (nhhc)

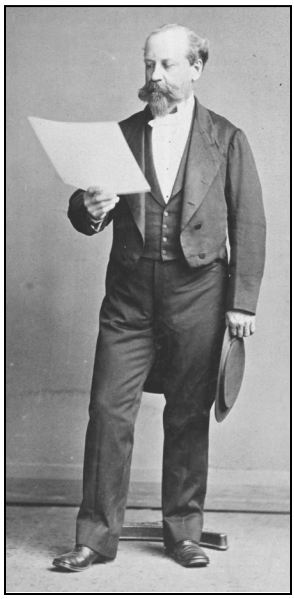


OFFSHORE BLOCKADE—The massive Confederate coastline required significant naval assets to effectively blockade. Gideon Welles eventually created four blockading squadrons, two each to cover the Atlantic and Gulf respectively. It took years, but eventually the Confederacy was strangled of many supplies.

admit the seceding states were illegitimate. On April 1, 1861, Seward urged Lincoln to "have the Navy recalled from foreign stations to be prepared for a blockade." Lincoln assented after Fort Sumter's surrender, announcing his blockade.

Two men oversaw the wartime U.S. Navy. Connecticut native and abolitionist Gideon Welles capably served as navy secretary through the war years. Often called "Father Neptune" by Lincoln, Welles's only modern biographer called him "an eminent journalist, politician, statesman, and administrator" who "observed his contemporaries with a keen eye."

Welles was capably assisted by Gustavus Vasa Fox, his assistant navy secretary. A former naval officer and well-connected textile manufacturer, Fox influenced Lincoln's early actions against the seceded states. Knowing most antebellum officers, Fox, whom Lincoln called "a live man, whose services we cannot well dispense with," provided keen insights for senior appointments and ascertained qualities of Rebel officers.



Gustavus Vasa Fox, naval officer turned merchant, became the U.S. Navy's capable assistant secretary. (nhhc)

Lincoln's blockade declaration caused an uproar, both for its nomenclature and scale. The choice of the term "blockade" upset many diplomats within the State Department. A blockade is something undertaken by one belligerent nation against another, and with Abraham Lincoln declaring one, he tacitly admitted the Confederate States were a nation, at least in a de facto status. Many diplomats would have preferred if Lincoln instead ordered Southern ports closed, a temporary measure of a nation to officially deny entry to one's ports. Showcasing the arguments, Welles complained in his diary about how the "State Department is sensitively apprehensive" because of "the old error, running back to the commencement of difficulties, when the Rebels were recognized as belligerents, and a blockade was ordered instead of closing the ports." Regardless of whether it was a closure or a blockade, the United States Navy understood its mission: block rebellious ports and harbors to prevent commerce and discourse between rebelling states and the outside world.

The blockade's scale also caused an uproar. The Confederacy's coastline stretched for 3,500 miles of ports, rivers, inlets, bayous, and passages. A physical blockade necessitated ships be posted at each of these areas to prevent passage. The international 1856 Paris

Declaration compounded this. Following the Crimean War, major European powers gathered to clarify rules of naval warfare. One of the declaration's four provisions concerned blockades, noting that "Blockades, in order to be binding, must be effective, that is to say, maintained by a force sufficient really to prevent access to the coast of the enemy."

This declaration changed the blockade's nature and impacted its implementation. Though the United States was not party to the 1856 Paris Declaration, Britain and France were, and thus Abraham Lincoln's naval forces were backed into a corner of being forced to abide by the declaration or risk European powers ignoring it. A paper blockade of words alone would not suffice, and European ships and diplomats frequently inspected the blockade. Admiral Sir Alexander Milne, commanding British ships in North America, made his vessels patrol the coast, documenting whether "all Blockading Squadrons" were "adequate to maintain efficiently the Blockade."

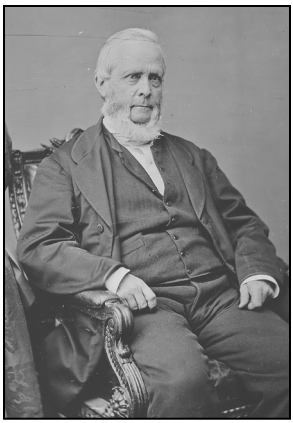
There were less than 50 warships in the U.S. Navy in early 1861, most being older vessels. This force was insufficient to successfully blockade all major Confederate waterways and coastal urban centers, much less cooperate with the army to assault inland. As future admiral David Dixon Porter—just a lieutenant in early 1861—noted, "our Navy was not in a condition to render that assistance which the occasion demanded; the larger portion of it was employed on foreign stations" and "many of our vessels of war were, as a rule, too large, and drew too much water to enter the shoal Southern harbors, and a majority of them were sailing frigates."

Compounding the matter, officers serving abroad began submitting letters asking "to return to the United States for the purpose of resigning." Three hundred and seventy-three antebellum navy commissioned and warrant officers resigned or were dismissed from the service, fully 24 percent of the officer corps, a percentage comparable to resignations from the antebellum army. So many officers ultimately joined the Confederacy that amongst commissioned line officers in the rebel naval forces "73% held antebellum US Government experience," meaning "the Confederacy's small navy was able to maintain professional leadership via career officers" at a higher rate than other organizations.

Gideon Welles made implementing a physical blockade his department's top priority. It was a demanding enterprise, the largest undertaken in the navy's history, but thanks to efforts during the 15 years before secession, the United States was perhaps more ready to tackle it than most realize. For one, the U.S. Navy already existed, with a fleet of ships, far more than the Confederates could muster. It also possessed an established bureaucracy and shipbuilding program capable of sustaining overseas deployments. In its war against Mexico from 1846–1848, the United States blockaded Mexico's eastern coastline and the Baja peninsula, though not to the scale required in the 1860s. These facilitated the landing of U.S. forces along Mexico's coastline and paved the way for the march on Mexico City. Though these were undertaken against a nearly nonexistent Mexican Navy, it meant that many of Welles's officers, as well as those now in Confederate uniform, were familiar with the principles, logistics, and benefits of a naval blockade.

Confederate Navy Secretary Stephen Mallory advocated for naval reforms in the United States in the 1850s. (npg)

The U.S. Navy also instituted reforms in the decade before the Civil War that made implementing a blockade more feasible. Ironically, many came at the behest of Stephen Mallory, a member of the House of Representatives who oversaw the Committee on Naval Affairs. That decade saw the development of retirement boards, where naval officers were evaluated for competence, age, and health. Those found wanting were forcibly retired from the naval service. Though it caused great angst amongst senior members of the officer corps, it also chipped away at the age-old policy of advancement through seniority; however, targeted officers "earnestly appealed" their dismissals and many eventually were reinstated, demonstrating limitations of reform when facing political connections. This was coupled with the establishment of the Naval Academy, in Annapolis, Maryland—moved to Newport, Rhode Island during the war—to formally standardize professional training of the navy's officers. Because of Jefferson Davis's desire for reforms, once Florida seceded, he appointed Mallory as his navy secretary. Mallory served capably for the entire war. Many historians have considered him Davis's best cabinet pick, including Dennis L. Peterson, whose comparative analysis of Confederate cabinet members called Mallory the Confederacy's "most loyal, most consistent,



Naval Constructor John Lenthall oversaw acquisition of civilian ships into the U.S. Navy. (na)

and most successful cabinet member, considering what he had (or did not have) to work with."

The 1850s also saw the construction of two new classes of screw-propellor steamships. Fast, maneuverable, and heavily armed with modern Dahlgren shell guns, these ships formed the core initial blockading force. The larger class included six steam frigates—comparatively larger warships with a single large deck housing artillery—: *Merrimack, Wabash, Roanoke, Niagara, Minnesota,* and *Colorado*. *Merrimack* was famously burned and later converted into the Confederate ironclad ram *Virginia*, but the other five all served on blockade duty, though their deep drafts prevented them from entering small Confederate ports. A class of screw-sloops-of-war—relatively smaller warships using steam engines driving propellors for propulsion—was also built that decade, including the steamers *Hartford, Brooklyn, Richmond,* and *Lancaster*. Still smaller steam-sloops-of-war built by the navy in the decade before the war included the warships *Pawnee, Pocahontas, Mohawk, Crusader, Mohican, Dacotah, San Jacinto, Saginaw, Seminole, Wyoming, Narragansett,* and *Susquehanna*, a combination of both paddle-wheelers and screw-steamers—ships using massive rotating wheels or screw propellors for propulsion respectively.

In January 1861, of the 57 warships actively in commission or laid up in ordinary—meaning they were decommissioned and placed in a reserve status—22 were built the decade before, using the latest propulsion, armament, and engineering systems. These ships proved invaluable in establishing the blockade.

Chief Engineer Benjamin Franklin Isherwood, USN, oversaw the U.S. Navy's Bureau of Steam Engineering. (na)

In many ways, the navy was far more prepared for its primary blockading task than the antebellum army was for its primary task, to militarily defeat the Confederacy. This preparation was aided by the plethora of gifted engineers and constructors assisting the U.S. war effort. Chief Constructor John Lenthall designed and helped oversee construction of hosts of wooden steamers while Chief Engineer Benjamin Isherwood designed the engines that kept Federal vessels steaming. Chief Engineer Alban Stimers liaised between the navy and ironclad construction shipyards; George D. Morgan, Welles's brother-in-law, oversaw civilian ship acquisition; and Rear Adm. Francis Gregory oversaw civilian vessel construction. Together, these men made a rapid increase in the United States Navy possible.

While Lincoln and Seward both pressed the concept of blockading Confederate ports, it became a particular focal point of Bvt. Lt. Gen. Winfield Scott's famed Anaconda Plan. On May 2, 1861, Scott put to paper a preference to subdue the rebelling states by "enveloping them all (nearly) at once by a cordon of posts on the Mississippi to its mouth from its junction with the Ohio, and by blockading ships of war on the sea board." The next day, Scott told Maj. Gen. George McClellan his intentions, outlining how the army should "rely greatly on the sure operation of a complete blockade of the Atlantic and Gulf ports," coupled with "a powerful movement down the Mississippi to the ocean . . . to envelop the insurgent States and bring them to terms." The press chastised Scott's plan for being a lengthy and drawn-out process, even though it would "inevitably crush the Rebels, as the Anaconda would its victim after it had coiled around it." Nonetheless, the plan became one adopted on a de facto basis, implementing both a blockade and a push down the Mississippi.

Initially, Welles divided the Confederacy into two zones. The Atlantic Blockading Squadron oversaw Confederate ports from Virginia down to Florida's tip, while the Gulf Blockading Squadron extended the blockade west through the Gulf to the Texas-Mexico border. However, the initial orders for each squadron were to simply post warships at critical ports to prevent flow of ships and supplies.

Captain Samuel Francis Du Pont, USN, led the blockade board in 1861 before commanding the South Atlantic Blockading Squadron. His high reputation waned as the war continued thanks to his lack of results attacking Charleston in 1863. (npg)

End of Unedited Excerpt