



The Mississippi Campaign:

Part I: The Strategic Mississippi

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Winfield Scott

- Winfield Scott was a national hero and Union-loyal Virginian when he came to Washington in April 1861 as General-in-Chief
- He had fought in the War of 1812 and his campaign to capture Mexico City during the Mexican-American War led the Duke of Wellington to describe him as "the greatest living general"
- But at 73 and barely able to sit on his horse, he was unprepared and unsuited for the politicised environment and the constant undermining, by George McClellan in particular
- He resigned in October - and was promptly replaced by McClellan



The Anaconda Plan

- In May 1861 Scott put forward a well thought through plan to blockade the Atlantic and Gulf ports of the Confederacy while a combined force of army, gunboats and transports would move down the Mississippi Valley to New Orleans
- This would split the Confederacy in two and disrupt the flow of food and materials from Mexico through Texas
- He believed, or hoped, that the South would come to its senses eventually
- His plan was roundly ridiculed by generals, journalists and cartoonists
- They knew that the quickest, the most proper and the most manly way of ending the rebellion was to send Northern armies to engage and defeat Southern armies
- They dismissed his 'Anaconda Plan'



The Coastal Blockade

- Lincoln had already ordered a blockade of the southern sea ports soon after the fall of Fort Sumter, so he was very receptive to Scott's plan
- However, blockading a coastline of 3500 miles including 10 major ports and another 180 inlets, bays, and river mouths navigable to smaller vessels was a huge challenge for the Union navy
- With only 42 ships, 555 guns and 7600 sailors, this was way beyond its capability
- Not all of these were available for blockade duties and the Union held only 2 ports, one on the James River in Virginia and one at Key West in Florida
- New vessels were being commissioned or chartered every week and, by the end of 1861, the navy had 264 ships, 2557 guns and 22,000 sailors available

The Coastal Blockade (2)

- The first need was to increase the number of ports available to the fleet to reduce sailing time for resupply and repair
- This involved combined naval and infantry task forces or sometimes just naval
- Hatteras Inlet in North Carolina was the first to fall on 29 August
- In September, they seized Ship Island half way between Mobile and New Orleans
- In November, Port Royal in South Carolina was captured
- In February 1862, Roanoke Island in Virginia was taken and then used as a launching point to capture most of the remaining ports in North Carolina
- In April 1862, they were able to seal off the entrance to Savannah, Georgia
- Only Wilmington in North Carolina and Charleston in South Carolina remained open to the Confederates and would remain so until the last months of the war

The Coastal Blockade (3)

- There have been many arguments about the effectiveness of the blockade
- But it did not need to be perfect, it just needed to be sufficiently disruptive to trade by providing a strong deterrent
- The Union crews were given an entitlement to a half share of value of the cargoes they captured as an incentive
- Sleek, fast blockade runners, of which there were many, were not well suited to carrying large cargoes
- And cargoes of high profit consumer goods were more attractive to the risk takers than military supplies and food
- Inevitably, the emphasis for the Confederates for obtaining these supplies shifted to the Gulf of Mexico and Mississippi River

The importance of the rivers

- Rivers and railroads were the crucial for the movement of armies and materials
- Railroads could be ripped up - rivers, not so much
- But rivers do have a habit of changing course, speed and depth without human intervention, causing unexpected problems
- And mines, then known as 'torpedoes', were a relatively recent invention - as was mine sweeping
- Both sides were learning how to use the rivers effectively - for attack and defence

Some geography

- The Ohio River runs along the northern border of Kentucky until it joins the Mississippi with Illinois to the north and Missouri to the west
- Cairo in Illinois was the southernmost point of the Union and would become a vital military and industrial centre
- Just to the east of Cairo, the Tennessee and Cumberland Rivers flow into the Ohio
- These wide waterways cut deep into the Confederate heartland
- Stopping traffic on the Mississippi would not be sufficient to keep the Union at bay





Kentucky neutrality

- There were two major obstacles to implementing the proposed Mississippi campaign
- The first was Kentucky which formed a physical barrier for both sides
- It was a slave-owning state meaning its sympathies were southward
- But its economic interests definitely lay northward across the Ohio
- Therefore its politics was divided between two factions
- In order to reduce the risk of Kentucky falling into secession, Lincoln had guaranteed no change to slavery in the state
- The Governor and both houses of the legislature announced that the state would defend its borders, north and south, from any invaders
- It was a delicate balance that required caution and patience to prevent the state swinging to the other side
- As these qualities were not well represented or well regarded in either army, it was only a matter of time before it over-balanced

The inland navy

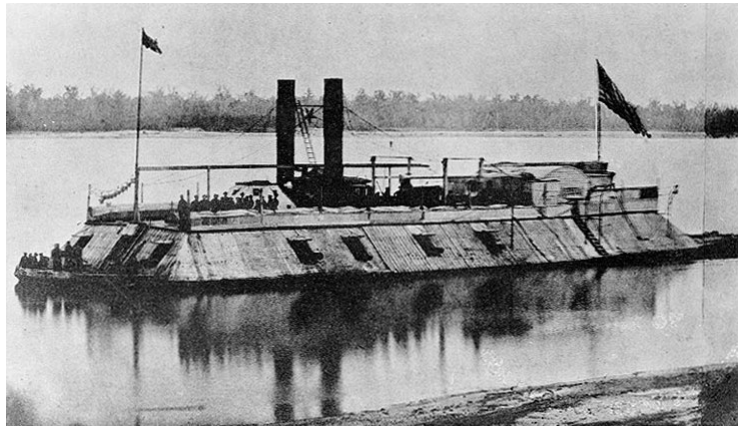
- The second obstacle was that there were no suitable gunboats available in the upper reaches of the Mississippi and there was no way of bringing them up the river past the Confederate forts
- To create an inland navy, existing paddle wheel steamers were converted to carry guns and new ones were built
- These 'Timberclads' played a key role throughout the war
- However, both sides saw the advantages in adding armour to vessels making them 'Ironclads'
- The North had much greater financial and manufacturing capacity and a willingness to support innovative designs
- There was an opportunity to build boats that were fit for purpose, or, at least, that was the intention
- The outcomes were not always successful

USS Essex Converted Timberclad



- 1 × 32-pounder
- 3 × 11-inch Dahlgren smooth bores
- 1 × 10-inch Dahlgren smooth bore
- 1 × 12-pounder howitzer

USS Carondelet City-class Ironclad (Pook's Turtles)



City-class ironclad gunboat

- Seven were built by industrialist James Eads of St Louis with vital contributions from Commander John Rodgers and boat designer Samuel Pook
- When they first appeared their design was so unusual they were nicknamed Pook's Turtles
- The USS Cairo, Carondelet, Cincinnati, Louisville, Mound City, Pittsburg, and St. Louis (later renamed Baron De Kalb) would play an important role in the campaign
- Positions were provided for 13 guns
- Three gunports faced forward, four were on each side, and two aft
- Initially, the armament of most vessels of the class consisted of six 32-pounders, three 8-inch Dahlgren smooth bore guns and four 42-pounder army rifles
- Some carried a single 12-pounder boat howitzer

City-class ironclad gunboat (2)

- Complement 251 officers and enlisted
- Displacement 512 tons; Length 175 ft; Beam 51 ft 2 in; Draft 6 ft
- Three keels, the outboard pair somewhat longer than the one on the centerline, gave greater stability
- Armour: Casemate - 2.5 in; Pilothouse - 1.25 in
- The sides were sloped at 35° to deflect broadside shots
- A 22-foot paddlewheel was driven by two steam engines
- Five boilers, 36 inches in diameter and 24 feet long, gave steam to a cylinder 22 inches in diameter with a six-foot stroke
- They could achieve a speed of 4 knots
- They combined firepower, protection, and mobility

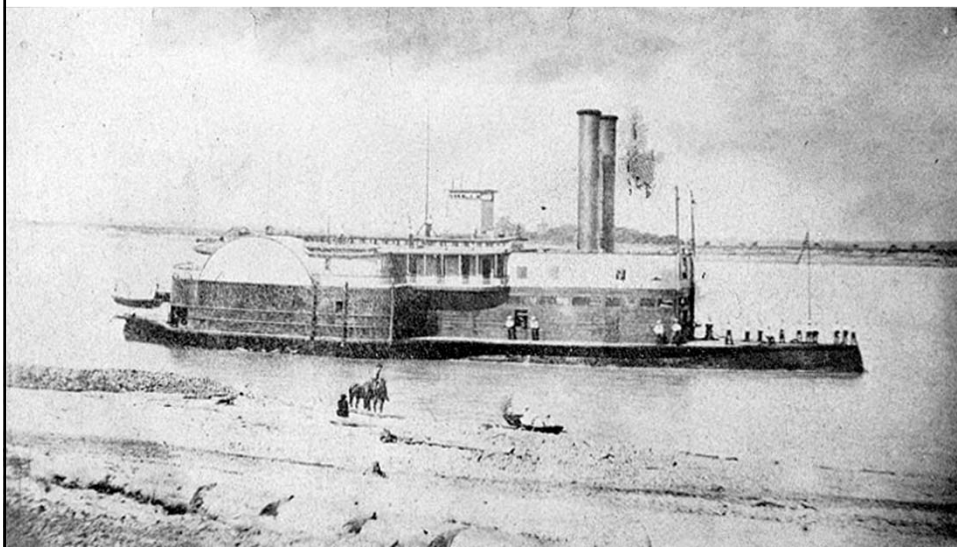
City-class ironclad gunboat (3)

- However, being the first of their type, they had design flaws
- Their weakest point was the hull which was easily penetrated and there was no way to isolate the damage, such as by watertight compartments
- This made them vulnerable to mines (Cairo and Baron De Kalb) and to ramming (Cincinnati and Mound City)
- Their armor was inadequate in two respects
- Both the deck and the stern were uncovered which made them vulnerable to plunging fire
- Gaps in the armor left the steering cables uncovered, so their steering could be knocked out rather easily
- Also, there was nowhere for the steam to escape if a boiler was hit
- And they were unable to back up against a current
- Despite these flaws, they proved to be very powerful weapons when used well

Ram fleet

- Charles Ellet Jr, a noted, if eccentric, civil engineer, had been making a case for years for reviving the use of ramming in naval warfare
- A primary tactic for galleys in classical times, it had been abandoned with the development of sailing ships and gunpowder
- He believed that steam powered vessels could revive ramming tactics, particular for the confined spaces of rivers
- His persistence was rewarded in March 1862 with a contract to build 9
- Ellet converted several powerful river towboats, heavily reinforcing their hulls for ramming with a top speed of 15 knots
- They had light protection for their boilers, engines and upper works
- They were originally given no artillery, later they were fitted with several guns
- The legend is that all 9 captains were named Ellet, but, in fact, only 4 were, the remaining 5 Ellets were just crew members

An Ellet Ram

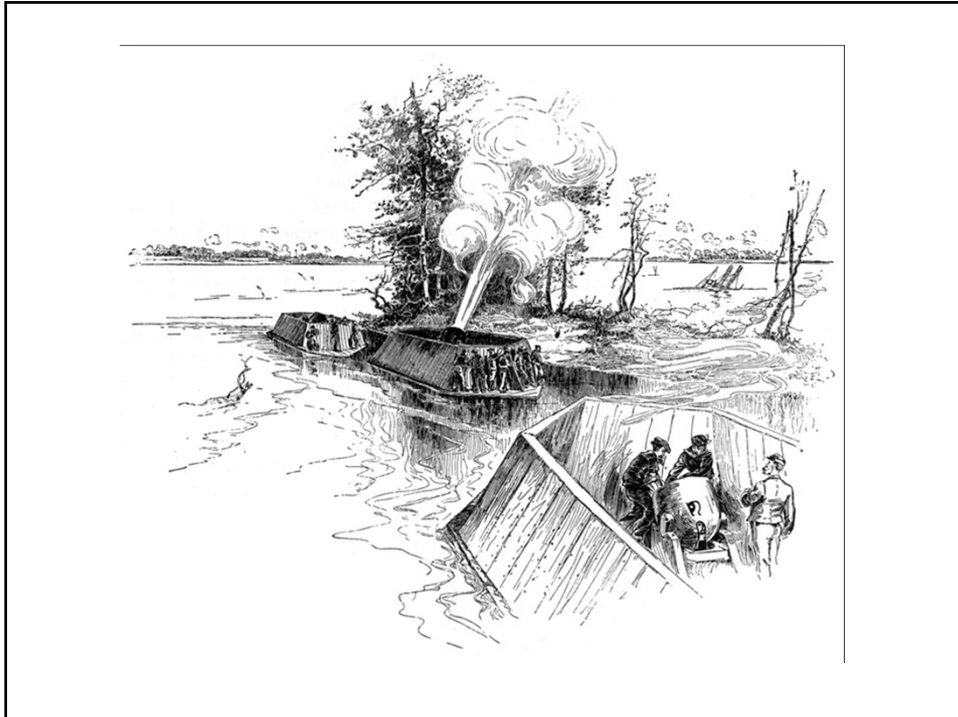


Mortar boats

- 13-inch mortars firing 227 pound shells up to 4600 yards were designed for use on land rather on water
- That didn't stop them being placed on flat bottom barges, which could be towed or floated into position
- The constructors added a platform of timbers roughly 60 feet by 25 feet
- Bulwarks, six to seven feet tall, formed a superstructure
- Inside the space formed by the bulwarks was room for the mortar, its bed, and handling equipment, but there was no room for the 15 man crew
- When firing, the crews stood on the aft end, or when possible, walked out onto shore, to avoid the overpressure blast
- In practice they were too inaccurate and too difficult to coordinate to hit targets and were generally more dangerous to the crew members than to their targets
- This was not one of their better ideas

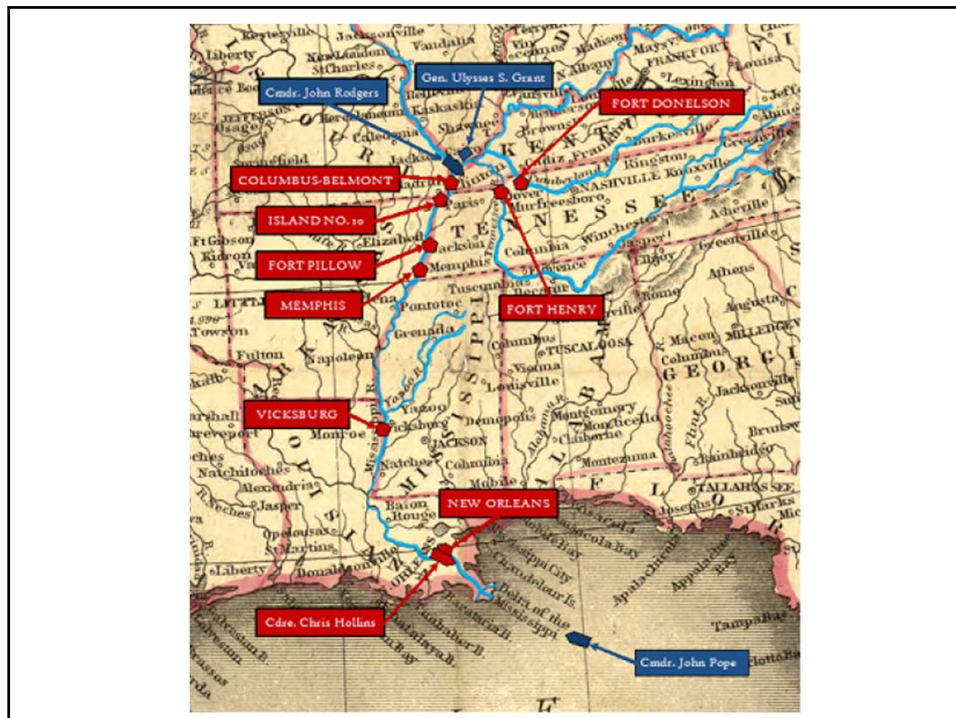
Mortar boat





Confederate forts

- While the navy was being built and the neutrality of Kentucky was being more or less respected, the Union forces were rather limited in what they could do
- The Confederates were busily implementing their 'Gibraltar' strategy of building well-armed forts at locations along the rivers that had natural advantages
- The Mississippi had a number of very suitable sites, less so the Tennessee and Cumberland rivers
- The better locations on these rivers were in Kentucky which was not accessible to them so they placed a fort on each river on the Tennessee side of the border
- There was an element of strategic blindness as well, in that defending the Mississippi dominated their thinking
- They would soon face an opponent whose strategic thinking was far superior to theirs



Kentucky neutrality (2)

- The Union Commander of the West, John C Frémont, based in St Louis, was a vainglorious man-of-destiny, former presidential candidate, explorer and soldier, known for creating chaos wherever he went
- He is credited with ordering the building of the mortar boat fleet
- He lasted in this role from July to November 1861 before he was removed by Lincoln for issuing his own emancipation proclamation for Missouri without authority thereby risking the loss of Kentucky
- Before he departed, he had identified a young brigadier who was an "unassuming character not given to self elation, of dogged persistence, of iron will"
- So he gave Ulysses S Grant his first field command
- His first mission was to secure the strategically important town of Cairo, Illinois, against a threatened Confederate attack with 3,000 untrained troops



Columbus, Kentucky



Kentucky neutrality (3)

- Frémont now ordered Grant to seize Columbus
- With its high cliffs, there were good reasons for this, but it was potentially disastrous for the Union politically
- Fortunately for the Union, they did not have a monopoly on vainglorious, incompetent generals
- M/G Bishop Leonidas Polk, pre-empting Grant's arrival by a day, crossed into Kentucky and took Columbus on 4 September and proceeded to install 140 guns, making it the South's northern-most 'Gibraltar'
- With 17,000 troops, a mile-long chain across the river and 'torpedoes', it would become a formidable barrier
- Grant changed his plan and seized Paducah on the Ohio two days later
- But the Confederates had broken neutrality first, allowing the pro-Unionist Governor and legislature to commit to the Union
- In any case, Paducah was a better location for Grant as it controlled the entrances to the Tennessee and Cumberland rivers

Henry Halleck

- Frémont was replaced by M/G Henry Halleck in the restructured Department of the Missouri which now included Kentucky west of the Cumberland
- M/G Don Carlos Buell was put in charge of the Department of the Ohio which included the rest of Kentucky and Tennessee
- This structure created a strong rivalry rather than a willingness to cooperate
- Halleck was a clever man who had authored Elements of Military Art and Science (based on Napoleon's campaigns) and translated Jomini's life of Napoleon
- He was an excellent administrator and he set about fixing up the chaos left by Frémont
- He was less interested in fighting the Confederates, preferring to remain at his headquarters in St Louis



Henry Halleck (2)

- With no experience of battlefield command, he focused his efforts on jockeying for position with Buell and ensuring that his subordinates such as Grant did not do anything to embarrass him
- Then Halleck received the worst possible news
- 19 January 1862, George Thomas had defeated a Confederate army at Mill Springs (Fishing Creek) in eastern Kentucky, the first major victory on land for the Union
- Buell would get the credit and would have the edge over Halleck unless he could come up with something fast
- He now received a wire from Grant: "With permission, I will take Fort Henry on the Tennessee, and establish and hold a large camp there"
- What would have been a dangerously reckless adventure a few days earlier suddenly became a sensible plan
- Halleck's approval came with the command "You will move with the least delay possible", an unnecessary addition when dealing with Grant

Andrew Foote

- Grant would need some gunboats to pull this off and Pook's Turtles were now ready to go
- At this time the inland navy was under control of the army although the officers were mainly navy people
- With anyone other than Grant this could have led to major problems
- And Flag Officer Andrew Foote also had no interest in fighting inter-service battles
- He had 40 years' service with the US Navy having joined as midshipman in 1822
- Their partnership only lasted a few months with Foote being invalided out in May after being injured at Fort Donelson but it was an effective one while it lasted





Fort Henry - 6 February

- Fort Henry was located on low ground on the eastern bank of the Tennessee rather than on the higher western bank to allow easy transfers with Fort Donelson, 12 miles away
- However, by this time, much of the fort had been inundated when the river rose 14 feet and the torpedoes had also been rendered useless
- The Union force comprised 4 ironclads, 3 timberclads and 15,000 troops who were disembarked safely downstream
- Being heavily outnumbered, the Confederates decided to withdraw all but a small number of gunners
- After a brief firefight, during which the Essex was seriously damaged, the Confederates surrendered before the infantry arrived
- Foote now sent the 3 timberclads 150 miles up the Tennessee all the way to Muscle Shoals in Alabama destroying a vital rail bridge and destroying or capturing 9 Confederate boats including a partially completed ironclad which became a Union boat

Fort Donelson - 16 February

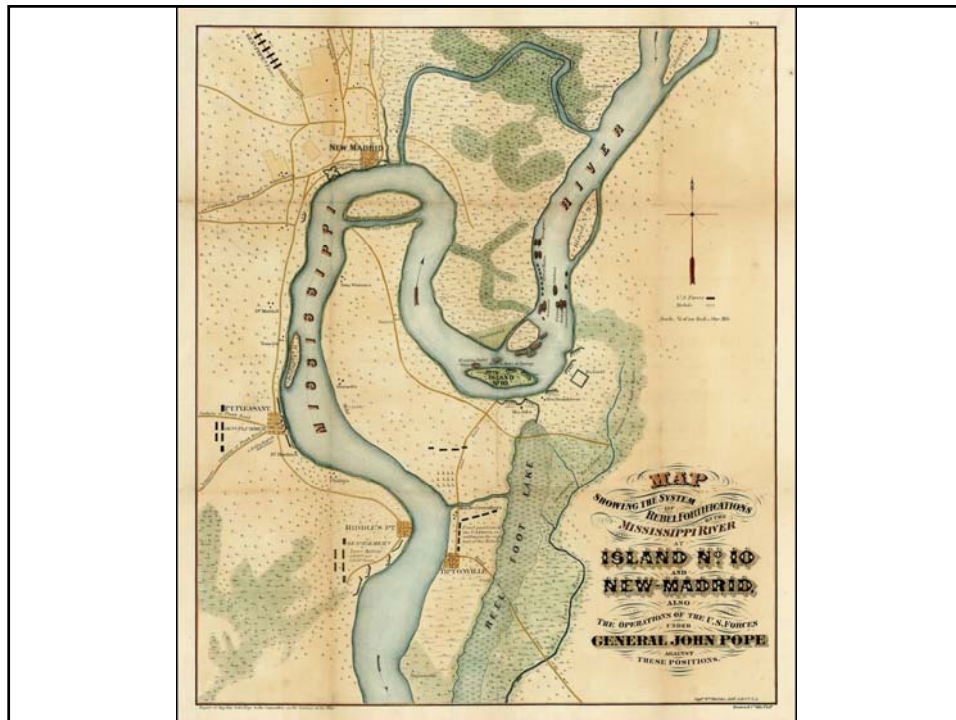
- Grant now proposed moving on Fort Donelson: Halleck approved and sent more troops
- The boats had to go all the way downstream, get repairs done and then up the Cumberland so Grant waited for a few days before setting out
- Meanwhile, the Confederates had brought in reinforcements as the loss of Donelson would leave Nashville exposed
- Grant laid siege but, when the boats arrived, they ventured too close and were severely damaged by plunging fire and had to pull back
- Despite opportunities to break out, the Confederates surrendered 12,000 troops - unconditionally, as Grant famously demanded
- Grant was still learning how to control a field army and made crucial mistakes but the public perception was of a man who marched on Wednesday, skirmished on Thursday, watched his fleet repulsed on Friday, fought desperately on Saturday and received the surrender on Sunday – he was Unconditional Surrender Grant

Strategy in practice

- Nashville, the capital of Tennessee, was now totally exposed and the Confederate forces withdrew some days before Buell's army arrived from Kentucky
- Columbus was now in danger of being cut off and Polk reluctantly pulled his 17,000 troops and 140 guns out, never having engaged the enemy
- The largest guns and 7,000 troops were sent down river to reinforce New Madrid and Island No 10 just south of the Kentucky-Tennessee border, the next strongly defensible point on the winding Mississippi
- This was done so skillfully and so secretively that, when Foote brought his boats down to attack Columbus, there was nobody there to fight
- The first of the 'Gibaltars' had fallen

Henry Halleck (3)

- After Donelson, Grant had been promoted to M/G and Halleck saw a new rival emerging
- He began undermining Grant, reporting on rumours that he had heard, while continuing to seek to gain sole command of the West
- He realised he had overstepped when the Adjutant General proposed an official enquiry and asked for hard evidence to be presented
- He backed off, just in time to be rewarded with the promotion he had been pleading for, and he was no longer in a position to continue undermining the one person most responsible for that promotion
- Grant's newly renamed Army of the Tennessee was preparing to go after a major confederate army at Corinth in Mississippi, an important rail centre for the east-west and north-south lines
- He rejoined his troops and gunboats at Pittsburgh Landing, 22 miles north of Corinth, near a little church called Shiloh, and waited for Buell to arrive



Island No 10 – 7 April 1862

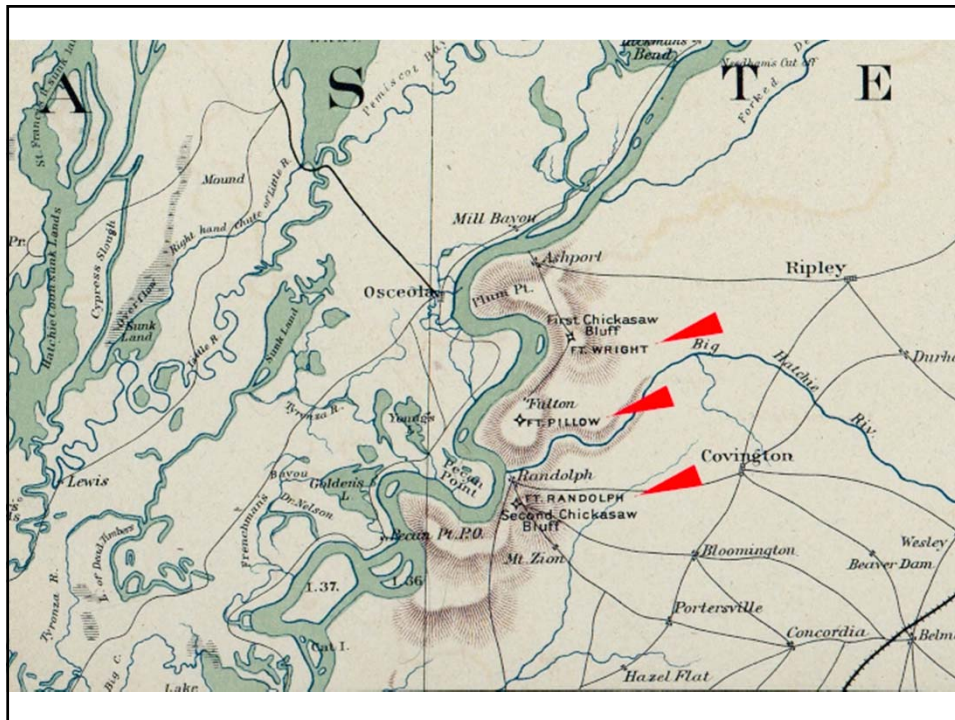
- New Madrid and Point Pleasant protected the western bank, Island No 10 with its 39 guns protected the approaches from the north and swamps protected the eastern bank
- Foote was now very wary about exposing his 7 ironclads, some of them freshly repaired, to plunging fire so he used 11 mortar boats to lob shells at the island from a distance to little effect
- In the meantime, B/G John Pope took New Madrid and Point Pleasant on the western bank and brought his shallow draft troop transports through a freshly-dug canal but it was too shallow for the gunboats that he needed to protect his river crossing
- The skipper of the Carondelet volunteered to make a night run and succeeded so the Pittsburgh made the run the next night
- This allowed Pope to cross the river, capturing 7000 troops without the loss of a single man
- This victory was unfortunately overshadowed by events to the east

Shiloh 6-7 April

- Grant and Sherman were not expecting any move from the Confederates
- The Union troops had not entrenched and were caught mostly by surprise at breakfast
- The Union line was forced back 2 miles, but was saved from disaster largely by the defence of the Hornet's Nest, the death of AS Johnston (the senior Confederate commander), heavy bombardment from the gunboats and Grant's and Sherman's strong leadership under fire
- The first of Buell's troops crossed the river overnight and Grant's counterattack on the second day soundly defeated the Confederates now led by PGT Beauregard
- This was the first of the large battles of the Civil War (100,000 troops in total) and the casualties at 24% were way higher than any ever experienced in the US, but a sign of things to come
- Grant was now vilified in the press but Lincoln resisted demands for him to be sacked – 'I cannot spare this man; he fights.'

On to Corinth! 29 April - 30 May

- Halleck responded to the bad press as a true officer of high rank but no actual battle command experience would
- He left St Louis to take charge of the 22 mile march to Corinth to show how it should be done – by the book that he had translated
- He summoned Pope's Army of the Mississippi to form a combined force 120,000 strong, twice the Confederate numbers, leaving the navy to clear the Mississippi by itself
- Despite have some of the most formidable fighting generals under his command – Grant, Pope, Sherman, Thomas for starters – he was not going to take any chances
- Each day after advancing at snail's pace over a short distance – 5 miles in 3 weeks - the army would stop and entrench, rising at dawn fully prepared for a surprise attack - while Beauregard waited patiently at Corinth
- When they finally arrived, Beauregard had already evacuated the town having lost nearly as many men to typhoid and dysentery as in the fighting at Shiloh

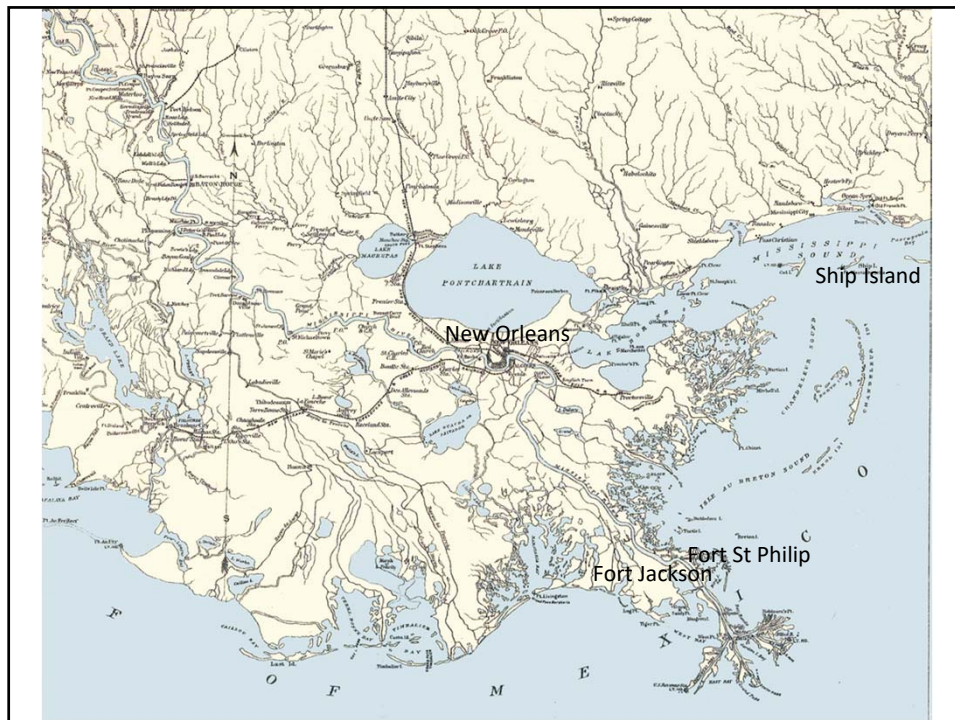


Plum Point Bend / Fort Pillow 10 May

- With only 2 infantry regiments left to help take Fort Pillow, Foote had resorted to the mortars again
- With 7 ironclads available, each one took turns daily to protect a mortar boat at Plum Point Bend lobbing shells at Fort Pillow while the remainder stayed upstream
- 9 May Foote was invalided out of the navy due to his injury from Donelson and was replaced by Charles Davis
- 10 May the Cincinnati was on relaxed guard duty when it was surprised by 8 Southern rams and sunk
- The Mound City came up too late and too early – it also was sunk
- With the remaining Union ironclads now arriving in force, the Confederates withdrew to the security of Fort Pillow's guns
- After the fall of Corinth, Fort Pillow was completely outflanked and was abandoned on 4 June
- Another 'Gibraltar' had fallen and Memphis was exposed

Memphis 6 June

- 5 Union ironclads in line abreast appeared in front of Memphis to take on the 8 Confederate rams with an adoring crowd on the banks and cliffs expecting a repeat of Plum Point Bend
- The fight was over just as quickly but not with the desired outcome
- Suddenly, Charles Ellet's rams powered between the ironclads
- His own ram was able to hit one of the Confederate boats broadside as it tried to swing away and cut it in two causing it to sink within minutes
- His brother Alfred's ram went between 2 opponents causing them to collide in its wake, putting both out of action
- The gunboats quickly cleaned up the rest in the resulting chaos: 1 sunk, 2 burned, 4 captured, 1 got away
- Ellet's 19 year old son went ashore in a rowboat with 3 seamen and a US flag to accept the formal surrender of the city
- His father had taken a bullet in the knee, infection set in and he died 2 weeks later, the only Union casualty



New Orleans

- 18 April Flag Officer David Farragut launched a heavy mortar bombardment of Forts St Philp and Jackson which blocked a key bend in the Mississippi about 70 miles south of New Orleans
- After 6 frustrating days, he decided to run the gauntlet of the forts, fire boats and assorted other vessels - and 13 boats got through
- The Confederates seriously missed the 8 boats that had gone north, soon to be destroyed at Memphis, and they only had 3000 militia, with the army troops having gone north to fight at Shiloh
- 25 April his ships reached New Orleans while M/G Benjamin Butler's 15,000 troops arrived on 1 May to take control of the city
- Farragut continued north taking Baton Rouge and Natchez but withdrew after an abortive attack on Vicksburg
- A combined attack from the inland and saltwater fleets in late June failed
- Farragut decided that Vicksburg could wait for another day

Henry Halleck (4)

- For the crawl to Corinth, Halleck had made Grant his deputy, but with no responsibility for anything
- After a renewed bout of undermining, Grant was ready to resign but Sherman talked him out of it and suggested he “wait for some happy accident” to restore his position
- After a few more weeks of undermining, he was summoned to see Halleck and expected the worst
- Instead, Halleck advised him that he was going to Washington to replace McClellan as General-in-Chief
- Grant, as the most senior officer west of the Appalachians, would be responsible for a Department covering North Mississippi, West Tennessee and Kentucky west of the Cumberland
- The problem of Vicksburg was now his to solve, along with all the other problems he would face holding on to the extensive territorial gains of the last 6 months

References

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