



The Civil War Memoirs of  
Captain William J. Seymour

Reminiscences of a Louisiana Tiger

edited and annotated by

Terry L. Jones



SB

Savas Beatie  
California

©1997, 2020, 2023 Terry L. Jones

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the publisher.

Names: Seymour, William J. | Jones, Terry L., 1952- editor.

Title: The Civil War Memoirs of Captain William J. Seymour: Reminiscences of a Louisiana Tiger / Edited, with an Introduction, by Terry L. Jones.

Other titles: Reminiscences of a Louisiana Tiger

Description: El Dorado Hills, CA : Savas Beatie, [2020] | Includes bibliographical references and index. | Summary: "New Orleans newspaper editor William J. Seymour left behind an account of his wartime experiences. It is the only memoir by any field or staff officer of the famous 1st Louisiana Brigade (Hays' Brigade) in the Army of Northern Virginia. A perceptive and articulate officer, Seymour left behind an invaluable account of the Civil War's drudgery and horror, pomp and glory. Terry L. Jones' spare and judicious editing enhances Seymour's memoirs to create an indispensable resource for Civil War historians and Enthusiasts." — Provided by publisher.

Identifiers: LCCN 2020009574 | ISBN 9781611214642 (pbk: alk. paper) | ISBN 9781940669915 (ebook)

Subjects: LCSH: Seymour, William J. | United States—History—Civil War, 1861-1865—Personal narratives, Confederate. | Louisiana—History—Civil War, 1861-1865—Personal narratives. | Confederate States of America. Army. Louisiana Brigade, 1st. | Fort Jackson (La.)—History—Siege, 1862. | Soldiers—Louisiana—Biography.

Classification: LCC E605 .S54 2020 | DDC 973.7/82092 [B]—dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2020009574>

First Savas Beatie Trade Paper Edition, First Printing



Savas Beatie

989 Governor Drive, Suite 102

El Dorado Hills, CA 95762

916-941-6896

[www.savasbeatie.com](http://www.savasbeatie.com) / [sales@savasbeatie.com](mailto:sales@savasbeatie.com)

Savas Beatie titles are available at special discounts for bulk purchases in the United States. For more details, contact us by e-mail at [sales@savasbeatie.com](mailto:sales@savasbeatie.com), call us at 916-941-6896, or visit our website at [www.savasbeatie.com](http://www.savasbeatie.com).

Proudly printed in the United States of America

For Laura and Amie



Postwar photo of William J. Seymour

*George W. Gervais*

---

# Contents

Acknowledgments	vii
Introduction	ix
Chapter 1: Fort Jackson	1
Chapter 2: The Campaign in Virginia	27
Chapter 3: The Campaign in Pennsylvania	41
Chapter 4: Rappahannock Station and Mine Run	61
Chapter 5: The Campaign of 1864	79
Chapter 6: The Campaign of General Early in the Valley	105
Epilogue	117
End Notes	121
Bibliography	165
Index	171

## Photo

Postwar photo of William J. Seymour      frontis

## List of Maps

Lower Mississippi River	5
Virginia Theater of War	30
Second Fredericksburg	37
Second Battle of Winchester	45
Cemetery Hill	55
Rappahannock Station	69
Battle of the Wilderness	82
Spotsylvania	95
Shenandoah Valley	107
Third Battle of Winchester	109

## Acknowledgments


Editing the Seymour memoirs has been quite rewarding, and many people have aided me immeasurably. I would like to express my gratitude to the following people at the William L. Clements Library, University of Michigan at Ann Arbor, for allowing me the opportunity to edit and publish the Seymour manuscript: former director John C. Dann, former manuscript curator Galen R. Wilson, current director J. Kevin Graffagnino, and assistant curator of manuscripts Jayne Ptolemy. Doyle Harrison, Ben Schley, and Terry Waxham all provided valuable information during personal interviews; Hal Jespersen did an excellent job in producing the maps; and George W. Gervais graciously provided the photograph of Seymour. The archival staffs at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina; the Library of Congress and National Archives, Washington, D.C.; Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana; New York City Public Library, New York City, New York; Northwestern State University, Natchitoches, Louisiana; Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, North Carolina; and Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana, were indispensable in searching their various collections.

I originally published the Seymour memoirs with Louisiana State University Press in 1991, and the History Book Club offered it as an alternate monthly selection. After it went out of print, I regained the copy right and approached Ted Savas of Savas Beatie about republishing the book. I am grateful to Ted for agreeing to release a digital and paperback version of Seymour's memoirs.

Finally, to my wife, Carol, I say thanks for being as patient and understanding as usual through this long publishing process.



# Introduction



a postwar newspaper article, former Confederate officer William Johnson Seymour revealed that he had kept a private journal during the 1862 Union siege of Fort Jackson, Louisiana.<sup>1</sup> From this obscure beginning emerged an engaging tale of bivouac and battle with Louisiana troops during the Civil War. Sometime between 1865 and 1886 Seymour apparently used his journal as the basis for a detailed reminiscence of his years in the service. Being a newspaper editor, Seymour recorded both major events and illuminating details of life in the Confederate army with the eye of a reporter. His story is particularly rewarding today because it is the only known narrative of length by a Confederate at Fort Jackson (aside from official reports) or by any field or staff officer in the famed 1st Louisiana Brigade of the Army of Northern Virginia. Unfortunately, the present location of Seymour's original war journal is unknown—and it is not even certain when the subsequent memoirs were written.

In 1948, for one hundred dollars, the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor purchased the Seymour Collection from a New York City manuscript dealer. Originally, the two-volume journal had belonged to William's father, Col. Isaac Gurdon Seymour, of the 6th Louisiana Volunteers. The first volume is stamped in gold "Drill Manual of Col. I. G. Seymour, 6th La. Regt." and has fifty-five pages of the colonel's handwritten drill commands. Then begins a narrative in William's handwriting entitled "Private Journal During the Confederate War,

William J. Seymour.” This journal covers Seymour’s activities from March 1862 to October 1864. A second, smaller volume contains a slightly different version of the same narrative, along with some handwritten passages from *Macbeth* in Colonel Seymour’s handwriting.

Captain William J. Seymour’s reminiscences are generally quite legible and well written, but at times he had difficulty with spelling, sentence structure, and punctuation. This edited work has kept faithful to his original writing as much as possible. For example, there have been few attempts to correct his misspellings or point them out by inserting [sic] because that would disrupt the narrative unnecessarily. At times, however, Seymour tended to write extremely long, run-on sentences that can be confusing. Therefore a few punctuation changes have been made, and some of the confusing sentences have been broken down into simpler ones. None of this minor editing has affected the intent or content of the manuscript. The rare factual mistakes Seymour made have been pointed out in the notes, and an attempt has been made to identify the many people mentioned in the memoir. Unfortunately, no substantive information has been found on some of these personalities.

The Seymours were part of the Connecticut Seymour family and were distant relatives of onetime presidential candidate Horatio Seymour. Isaac G. Seymour was born in October 1804 in Savannah, Georgia, and graduated with honors from Yale University in 1825. In 1827 he moved to Macon, Georgia, to open a law office and two years later married Caroline E. Whitlock. Tragically, the couple lost three children in infancy and a daughter, Catherine, at age nineteen. Seymour soon found publishing more enjoyable than the law and in 1832 became editor of the *Georgia Messenger*, a position he kept for seventeen years. He later was elected to the city council, became an active Whig spokesman, and in 1833 began a six-year stint as Macon’s first mayor.

Seymour found that he also had a military calling. When war erupted with the Seminole Indians in 1836, he was elected captain of the Macon Volunteers and served in Florida. General Winfield Scott was impressed with Seymour and offered him a commission in the regular army, but Seymour declined. He could not stay away from the military life, however. When the Mexican War began, Seymour raised a battalion of cavalry and again donned his country’s uniform. Scott, again Seymour’s commanding general, made him military governor of the Castle of Perote, Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna’s home. When Santa Anna left Mexico for Jamaica at war’s end, it was Seymour who escorted him to the coast. Seymour returned to

Georgia in 1848 but soon moved his family to New Orleans, where he became editor and partner of the New Orleans *Commercial Bulletin*, the city's leading financial newspaper.<sup>2</sup>

Seymour's only surviving son, William Johnson Seymour, was born May 12, 1832, in Macon but did not initially accompany the family to New Orleans. Instead, he enrolled in New York's Hobart College but apparently did not graduate. When William left school he moved to New Orleans to become an assistant editor and partner in the *Commercial Bulletin*. By 1860 the Seymour family had become an important part of New Orleans society.<sup>3</sup>

When war clouds gathered in 1861, Isaac returned yet again to the military. Offering his services to his adopted state, he was soon elected colonel of the largely Irish 6th Louisiana Volunteers. When his regiment was ordered to Virginia, Isaac had no choice but to turn over the reins of the *Commercial Bulletin* to William. This large responsibility concerned Isaac. To a friend he wrote, "William has arrived at that age that he must rely upon himself. He has the whole business given to him and he must depend upon his own wit . . . to carry it through."<sup>4</sup>

William chafed under this responsibility because he was eager to enter the military. In December, Brig. Gen. Richard Taylor, son of former president Zachary Taylor and commander of the 1st Louisiana Brigade in Virginia, offered William an appointment as his aide-de-camp. Seymour was forced to decline, however, because of his sense of duty to his father and their newspaper. By spring 1862, however, he could wait no longer and accepted the position of volunteer aide to Brig. Gen. Johnson Kelly Duncan, his future wife's brother-in-law. In late March, Duncan and Seymour steamed seventy-five miles down the Mississippi River to Fort Jackson, the main fortification protecting the city. For the next month Seymour was subjected to the brutal and sometimes spectacular realities of war. Surviving a tremendous bombardment by the United States Navy, he was among those Confederates who surrendered to Union forces on April 28, 1862.

After being paroled, Seymour returned to his newspaper in New Orleans but soon ran afoul of Maj. Gen. Benjamin F. "Beast" Butler, commander of the occupying troops. In violation of Butler's censorship order, Seymour published a patriotic obituary of his father after Colonel Seymour was killed in battle at Gaines' Mill, Virginia. Seymour was arrested and, ironically, incarcerated in Fort Jackson from August 1 to October 17, 1862.

Butler paroled Seymour a second time, and Seymour enjoyed a brief respite before the war swept him up again. On October 27 he married Elizabeth

Berthoud Grimshaw. Little is known of “Lizzy” except that she was the daughter of an Englishman who worked as a merchant in New Orleans; was of dark complexion with dark hair and gray eyes; stood five feet, five inches tall; and was twenty-three or twenty-four years old.<sup>5</sup> Soon after the wedding, Seymour moved his new bride out of occupied New Orleans to safety in his old hometown of Macon, Georgia.

By spring 1863, Seymour had secured a new position as volunteer aide to Brig. Gen. Harry T. Hays, the officer who replaced Richard Taylor as commander of the 1st Louisiana Brigade. For the next year and a half, Seymour served with some of the South’s most famous officers and fought with the Army of Northern Virginia from Chancellorsville to Third Winchester. During this time he was commissioned captain and was appointed the brigade’s assistant adjutant general. From this position Seymour saw the Confederate command system up close and formed strong opinions on how campaigns and battles were conducted. He was also a meticulous observer of details and kept a private journal. When he subsequently wrote his war memoirs, Seymour gave free rein to his opinions, and his journal observations allowed him to recall long-past incidents with great clarity.

The narrative begins with Fort Jackson.

## Chapter 1

# Fort Jackson

*When*

the Civil War began in April 1861, the Confederates realized that the Union would attack New Orleans, the South's largest and most important city. The city's defenses were entrusted to Brig. Gen. Johnson Kelly Duncan, a thirty-five-year-old Pennsylvania native and 1849 graduate of West Point. Kelly had resigned his army commission in 1855 to become superintendent of government construction in New Orleans. He was serving as chief engineer for the Louisiana Board of Public Works when war broke out and reentered the military as a brigadier general in command of New Orleans' coastal defenses.<sup>1</sup>

The city's protection depended almost entirely on Forts Jackson and St. Philip, located some seventy-five miles downriver. The forts were about seven hundred yards apart on opposite banks of the Mississippi River a short distance above a sharp bend where ships had to reduce speed to negotiate the curve and swift current. They had been part of the permanent defenses of the United States, but Louisiana militia seized them on January 10, 1861. In days past, the forts were deemed impregnable, but in 1862 they were badly deteriorated and needed modern guns.<sup>2</sup>

Of the two strongholds, Fort Jackson (named for Andrew Jackson) was by far the more important. Its construction had begun in 1822. Set on the right bank, this pentagon-shaped bastion had a 110-yard front and 22-foot-high brick walls. Its casemated guns were largely bombproof and were supported by a water battery. A deep moat ringed the fortress, and clear fields of fire had been

created by felling intervening trees. Fort Jackson's armament consisted of approximately seventy-five guns, ranging from six-pound smoothbores to ten-inch Columbiads. There were, however, precious few of the large guns and rifled cannons that were necessary to stop a modern river fleet. A garrison that included many foreign and northern-born men further weakened the fort. Having little enthusiasm for the war, most of the men had to be forced to leave New Orleans for the forts; some of the militia even mutinied and had to be prodded aboard the ships with bayonets.<sup>3</sup>

To impede any attempt to run by the forts, a boom made of huge cypress logs chained together was strung across the river and anchored both to the river bottom and to each bank. Above this barricade was assembled a motley assortment of water craft to engage the Union fleet should it appear. This ragtag navy consisted of Confederate and state gunboats, converted tugs, and other odd vessels—approximately a dozen in all, bearing forty-two guns. Some forty to fifty fire rafts loaded with pine logs soaked in turpentine and tar filled out the mongrel fleet.<sup>4</sup>

By the end of March 1862, the Union fleet had entered the Mississippi River and anchored at Pilot Town. Commanded by Capt. David Farragut, the fleet consisted of seventeen men-of-war, twenty mortar boats, and seven gunboats and carried an impressive 268 guns. Farragut's mortar boats were under the command of Commodore David Porter, Farragut's foster brother. Farragut and Porter were confident that the passage of the forts would be easy. Porter even boasted that the thirteen-inch shells of his mortar boats would batter down the forts' walls within forty-eight hours. The contest began in early April.<sup>5</sup>

\* \* \*

In December 1861, Brig. Genl. Richard Taylor, Commanding First Louisiana Brigade, Jackson's Corps, Army of Northern Virginia, tendered me the appointment of aide-de-camp on his Staff. My Father, who commanded the Sixth Louisiana Regt. of that Brigade, informed me by letter that if I accepted this appointment he would be compelled, greatly against his will, to throw up his commission and return to New Orleans to take charge of the "Commercial Bulletin" newspaper, then being conducted by me. Knowing that such a course would be exceedingly distasteful to him, he being passionately fond of military life, I reluctantly declined the proffered appointment.<sup>6</sup>

On the 13th of March, 1862, I was appointed Volunteer Aide-de-Camp to Brig. Genl. J. K. Duncan, Commanding the Coast Defenses of Louisiana. Upon the receipt of information that a large fleet of Federal vessels were crossing the

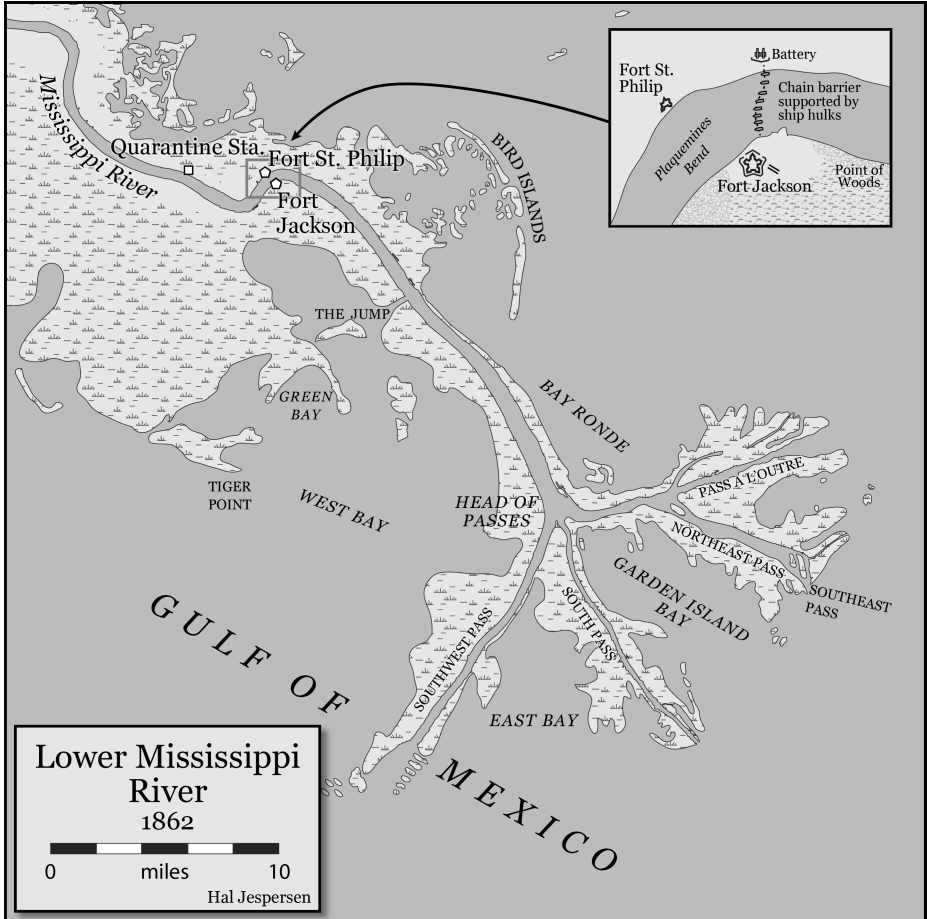
bars on the Mississippi River for the purpose of attacking the Forts, situated seventy-nine miles below New Orleans, I accompanied General Duncan to Fort Jackson on the 28th of March, 1862. This Fort is on the right bank of the River, and almost directly opposite is Fort St. Philip; upon these two forts the Confederate authorities depended for the defence of the River approach to the City. In the two works there were about one hundred and ten guns mounted, but they were for the most part of too small caliber for “guns of position,” being 32 & 24 pounders, with eight inch Columbiads<sup>7</sup>—altogether too light to cope successfully with the 9 & 11 inch Dalghrens<sup>8</sup> & the 13 inch mortars which formed the armament of the Federal fleet. Gen. Duncan had fully represented this fact to the Secretary of War, Mr. Benjamin,<sup>9</sup> and repeatedly and strongly urged upon him the necessity of furnishing the Forts with larger guns. But that functionary, who was miserably deficient in those qualifications that are requisite in an efficient War Secretary, turned a deaf ear to the General’s importunities and very confidently asserted that the Forts, in the condition they were then in, could stop any fleet that might attempt to ascend the River. Great stress was laid on the fact that in 1815, Fort St. Philip alone was able to successfully resist the passage of the River by the English Squadron; but the astute Secretary did not bear in mind that the British had no others but sailing vessels, while the Federal’s fleet consisted of twenty-seven swift-running & powerfully armed steamers, besides mortar vessels.<sup>10</sup>

Despairing of obtaining timely assistance from the General Government, the Confederate authorities in Louisiana, the Governor of the State, & the Citizens of New Orleans went to work to prepare as best they could for the defense of the City. Money was lavishly subscribed; eight ten inch Columbiads were ordered to be cast at the different Foundries in the city; a number of tow boats and Steamships were converted into war steamers, protected by cotton bulkheads; and the construction of two iron clads was commenced. But, unfortunately, we had relied too much & too long upon getting assistance from the Government, and the above preparations could not be consummated before the attack was commenced. The heavy guns were never finished; the cotton-clad boats, of which great expectation had been formed, proved to be no match for the enemy’s war-steame[r]s, and were all, with one or two exception, knocked to pieces or set on fire in a very few minutes at the passage of the Forts. Of the two iron clads, one [*Mississippi*] was never so far completed as to be armed, while the other [*Louisiana*] was carried to the Forts when she could only be used during the bombardment as a floating battery, and that not effectively.

In the month of February a raft was built across the River some three hundred yards below Fort Jackson, under the direction of Major Montague;<sup>11</sup> it was constructed of logs strongly chained together in sections, each section held in its place by an anchor. Under ordinary circumstances this obstruction would, no doubt, have answered the purpose for which it was built, viz. to prevent the enemy's vessels from moving past the Forts. But it unfortunately happened that the River during this season rose to an unwanted height; the current was thereby greatly accelerated and vast quantities of drift wood were floated down against the raft, which, though every effort was made to relieve it as much as possible of this immense pressure, was swept from its moorings & carried through the Passes far out to sea. Lt. Col. Higgins<sup>12</sup> afterwards attempted to place an obstruction at the same point; this consisted of a line of schooners, anchored at short intervals with bows up stream, and thoroughly chained together amid ships as well as by stem & stern. The running rigging, rattlings & cables were left to trail astern of these schooners as an additional impediment to tangle in the propeller wheels of the enemy's vessels. This obstruction also proved ineffectual, as will be seen hereafter.

Pensacola, having been evacuated by the Confederate Army under Gen. Bragg,<sup>13</sup> Gen. Duncan dispatched his brother, Major Wm P. Duncan, to that place to take possession of any pieces of heavy ordnance that might be found remaining there unappropriated. Major Duncan found and sent to the Forts the following guns: three 10 inch Columbiads; three 8 inch Columbiads, one 42 pounder rifled gun, and five 10 inch sea-coast mortars.<sup>14</sup> These, with a seven inch rifle gun (of the Brooke patent),<sup>15</sup> were the only additions made to the armament of the Forts.

When the General & I arrived at Fort Jackson, we found the garrison in a very uncomfortable situation. The extraordinarily high stage of water in the River and the continued prevalence of Easterly gales had caused the water to rise in the Fort, and a considerable portion of the parade plaine and the floors of a number of the casemates were submerged to a depth of from 10 to 15 inches. A trench was cut around the main magazine & it required constant pumping to prevent our ammunition from being spoilt. The garrison was put to work at mounting the heavy guns that had been brought over from Pensacola, which was very severe labor owing to the high water and the soft, yielding condition of the ground over which the guns and carriages had to be transported. Sand bags were placed over the two magazine to protect them from the effects of a vertical (mortar) fire and the old water battery back of Fort Jackson, which had never been armed and the traces of which had become almost obliterated by the action



of many storms and the rank growth of weeds, was put in order and guns mounted thereon. To accomplish all this the men soon worked by reliefs, day and night; and on the 13th of April every thing had been done, with the limited amount of material at hand, which human energy and skill could accomplish to prepare the Fort for the coming conflict.

A large number of rafts loaded with light wood had been brought down from the city & moored above the Forts for the purpose of being ignited & turned loose to drift down the River among the enemy's ships. The following steamers, protected by cotton bulkheads and prepared with iron prows to act as rams, were sent down to assist in the defense of the Forts. The *Warrior*, *Stonewall Jackson*, *Defiance* and *Resolute*, *Governor Moore*, and *General Quitman*—commanded respectively by Captain Stephenson,<sup>16</sup> Philips, McCoy, Hooper,<sup>17</sup> Beverly Kennon<sup>18</sup> & Alex Grant.<sup>19</sup> Subsequently, the C.S. steamers

*Manassas* (ironclad ram), Capt. Warley,<sup>20</sup> *Jackson*, Capt. Renshaw & *McRae*, Capt. Huger,<sup>21</sup> arrived.

A regiment of infantry under command of Col. Sysmoinks<sup>22</sup> was stationed at the Quarantine Station—seven miles above the Forts—to establish picket posts at the heads of the canals leading from the River into the bays back of the Station, to guard against a land force being thrown above us by means of launches. A company of sharpshooters, under command of Capt. W. G. Mullen,<sup>23</sup> was placed in the woods on the right bank of the River 2 ½ miles below Fort Jackson to pick off the officers on board the enemy's vessels when they should come up on reconnoiting expeditions. The above comprise the preparation made to resist the passage of the enemy's fleet up the River.

On the 10th & 11th of April the raft of schooners was badly damaged by the high winds that then prevailed, which damage was greatly increased by several "fire rafts" breaking loose from their moorings & drifting against it, parting the chain cables & scattering most of the schooners. This we regarded as a great calamity, for we had depended upon this raft to detain the enemy's ships under our fire long enough for us to seriously damage them, if not to destroy most of them. The sharpshooters, most of whom were stationed at the Point of Woods,<sup>24</sup> accomplished little or nothing, owing to the high water, and after remaining there three days, they were withdrawn and sent back to town. The fire rafts upon which we relied to disturb the enemy's fleet after it had taken a position and to keep the river well lighted up so that we could frustrate any attempt that might be made by the Yankee steamers to dash past the Forts under cover of darkness, proved to be, for the most part, failures, owing to the lack of skill & judgment displayed by the officers of the River Fleet who had them in charge.

We had a line of telegraph wire extending to within half of a mile of "The Jump,"<sup>25</sup> nine miles below Fort Jackson & a steamer was sent down the River every day as near as possible to the Heads of the Passes for the purpose of reconnoiting the enemy; while scouts, skiffs & pirogues, were operating in the bays to the East & West of the River, to keep us advised of the enemy's movements.

The enemy kept 10 to 12 of his light draft Steamers at the Heads of the Passes, 22 miles below Fort Jackson for the purpose of concealing this movement, while he was working his larger ships over the South West Bar, he having failed to effect an entrance by way of Pass a l'Outre.<sup>26</sup>

*April 9th.* On this day while our working parties were busily engaged in mounting guns and strengthening our defenses, a brisk cannonading was heard from the direction of the Hds. of the Passes. The long roll was beaten & officers