

INTRODUCTION

ON

April 12, 1861, Confederate military forces under the command of General Pierre G.T. Beauregard opened fire on Fort Sumter, the United States Army fortification located at the entrance to the harbor of Charleston, South Carolina. The fort withstood a continuous bombardment until April 14, when Major Robert Anderson surrendered his besieged force. Hostilities between the United States and the newly organizing Confederacy, labeled as rebels by Union leadership, began. Many in both the United and Confederate States believed that the conflict would be short, relatively bloodless, and end in complete victory for their respective side. Few realized that it would take years of fighting, billions of dollars, and hundreds of thousands of lives before the United States was fully restored.

Brevet Lieutenant General Winfield Scott, commander of all army forces in the United States when the war began, was one of those who thought it would be a long war. Commanding the U.S. Army since the Mexican War and holding a general's commission since the War of 1812, Scott was recognized as America's top military mind. In the weeks after the fall of Fort Sumter, he developed a plan he believed could end the war with less bloodshed, even if it took years to accomplish. Scott wanted to encourage Union sympathizers and reconciliation through economic pressure.

The first part of Scott's strategy was a physical blockade of Confederate ports. The blockade was declared by President Abraham Lincoln five days after Fort Sumter surrendered. Without easy access to foreign trade, the Confederacy was hard pressed to supply its military needs, because of its limited industrial base and few railroads that connected less than a dozen Southern manufacturing cities.

The second part of Scott's plan was to seize control of the Mississippi River and tributaries using a large expeditionary force consisting of both naval ships and land forces to occupy the port cities of the western rivers. Federal control of the Mississippi divided the Confederacy in two, separating all of Texas and Arkansas, most of Louisiana, and all of the Indian and Arizona Territories from the rest of the Southern nation. This also cut the Confederacy's communication to the outside world via Mexico, and denied supplies and military forces in the western part of the Confederacy from reaching the eastern half of the country. Scott's proposed "Anaconda Plan" was ridiculed by some newspapers and politicians as too slow.

Ultimately, however, President Abraham Lincoln adopted the plan, in practice if not in name.

This book focuses on the campaigns for the vital western rivers and the role played by Confederate naval forces.

The Mississippi River and its tributaries comprise the largest waterway in North America. It was first settled and farmed by indigenous people as early as 4000 BCE. European explorers discovered the river, the French claiming the Mississippi and all of its tributary waters in the 17th Century. The river later served as a border between British and Spanish colonies in the west before the United States expanded its control into the area in the early 19th Century. By 1860, the Mississippi River was the great internal highway of the United States. Crops and livestock shipped down the river to New Orleans while immigrants, slaves, and imports flowed into the United States via the port city. When the Southern states seceded, leaders on both sides recognized that control of the Mississippi River and its tributaries was essential to success.

The blockade took years to gradually weaken the Confederacy. It took Federal forces less than a year after Fort Sumter to regain control of the Ohio River and most of the Mississippi River, including the South's largest and richest city New Orleans. Complete Union control of the "Father of Waters" came with the capture of Vicksburg, Mississippi, and Port Hudson, Louisiana, in July 1863. It required nearly two more years to secure its tributaries.

This study concentrates on Lincoln's strategic aim to control the Mississippi River and Confederate defensive measures to thwart the Federal goal. It examines the context, scope, means, and performance of Confederate naval and army forces in defending the Mississippi River and its tributaries.

Much was written about the Union conquest of the Mississippi River. The famous campaigns for control of the fortified towns of Vicksburg, Mississippi and Port Hudson, Louisiana, seen as the capstone of Union efforts on the river, are the most prevalent. Also important are the chronicles about the United States Navy's effort to build a riverine force that assisted in these campaigns. Often analyzed was the Union campaign for control of New Orleans and the mouth of the Mississippi River. Finally are the accounts of the Red River campaign of 1864 and the failures by Union military commanders to gain control of northwestern Louisiana. These four elements are almost always viewed from the perspective of Union forces and seem to downplay efforts by the Confederacy to provide a naval defense of North America's largest and most important waterway.

The first attempt to document the actions of Confederate naval forces on the western waters was done by a former Confederate naval officer, J. Thomas Scharf.

His book, published in 1887, devoted seven chapters to narratives about the internal waters of the Southern states. Often, Scharf took first-hand accounts from his former associates and merged them into one story. Overall, it serves as a good baseline of sequencing events and actions related to the Confederate Navy as a whole.

The Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies in the War of the Rebellion was published in the years following Scharf's book and added volumes of documents, firsthand accounts, battlefield reports, and other collections regarding the Confederate Navy; several whole volumes were devoted to operations on the western waters. This compilation however, does not tell a cohesive story. Instead the *Official Naval Records* is a collection of documents that must be carefully explored to determine what actually occurred. Furthermore, there is a serious lack of documents from Confederate viewpoints as many naval documents were destroyed during the evacuation of Richmond, Virginia in 1865.

The next great attempt to chronicle the naval operations on the Mississippi River was done by Fletcher Pratt in 1956. His book, *Civil War on the Western Waters*, was the first full narrative of the naval war on the Mississippi River and its tributaries. Pratt's work outlined the course of the war on these rivers, but its shortcomings were a lack of adequate source documentation and small errors in describing ship construction, commissioning, and conversion. Other works, such as Jack Coombe's *Thunder Along the Mississippi*, published in 1996, sought to retell the tale of the river battles for control of the Mississippi River. Coombe's effort in particular relied on accounts from the Union perspective. Furthermore, since it was a story about the control of only the Mississippi River, the tale abruptly ends with the siege and capture of Vicksburg. Actions of the Confederacy were presented in reaction to Union endeavors. The most recent book on Civil War naval operations as a whole was by its most preeminent historian. James McPherson's 2012 *War on the Waters* highlights the river campaigns and their importance to the Union's war efforts, though he likewise follows Pratt and Coombe by largely downplaying Confederate naval efforts in this theatre as reactionary and unorganized.

Two recent works made attempts to highlight Confederate naval operations. Raimondo Luraghi's *History of the Confederate Navy*, published in English in 1996, provided an excellent overview of the Confederate Navy as a whole. Chapters are devoted to naval operations on the Mississippi River, efforts to build both a conventional and ironclad force on the river, and later efforts to do so on tributary waterways. Overall, Luraghi's work remains an impressive accounting of Confederate naval actions in the Civil War. R. Thomas Campbell's *Confederate Naval Forces on Western Waters*, published in 2005, was the first attempt to describe the

Confederate naval defense of the Mississippi River and its tributaries. Campbell's work was an engaging tale of this defense, covering issues related to forming a navy at New Orleans, the ironclad construction programs on the river and tributaries, the battles for control of the river, and the struggle for control of each tributary. Campbell's work provided the first detailed examination of Confederate naval forces on the Mississippi River. However, it did not address the Confederate defense of Mississippi Sound and Lake Pontchartrain, or operations on the upper Mississippi River and tributaries by the Confederate Army in 1864 and 1865. Nonetheless, his book set the standard for research and knowledge of Confederate naval operations in this area.

Two books that documented the campaigns for New Orleans include Chester Hearn's *The Capture of New Orleans 1862* published in 1995 and Charles Dufour's *The Night the War Was Lost* published in 1960. Other regional works include Donald Frazier's 1996-2020 quadrille about the war in Louisiana and Texas, and Edward McCaul's 2014 book *To Retain Command of the Mississippi* about the river battles for control of Memphis. These studies provide a breadth of detail regarding local operations, but sometimes neglect Confederate naval operations.

Defending the Arteries of Rebellion closely examines overall naval defense by the Confederacy for the Mississippi River and its tributaries. From the very beginning of hostilities, the Confederate States of America attempted to create a navy to protect its territory along its internal waterways. This defense included mobile armies operating near the Mississippi River, static fortifications at key points, and naval ships operating in conjunction with those fortifications and armies or on their own.

This study focuses on the Confederate Navy, but not exclusively. For example, the siege of Vicksburg is examined, but land operations in that campaign are already available in great detail in other published sources. The Confederate Navy was just one part of the naval defense that evolved. The Confederate Army usually worked with, and sometimes against, their naval counterparts to crew and operate ships, especially when naval personnel were short-staffed or unavailable. Most notably, soldiers of the local garrison at Vicksburg manned artillery on the ironclad *Arkansas* in the summer of 1862, serving directly under naval officers. Also, the Confederate River Defense Fleet established in 1862 was manned by civilian contractors and officially a part of the Confederate Army. Members of the Confederate Marine Corps and Revenue Service also rendered support when they were available and operating in the area. Some civilians established their own private naval elements, particularly at New Orleans through privateers. Individual

states also created a naval defense, most notably Louisiana's efforts to build a small naval fleet in the spring of 1862.

Besides operating ships, construction and refit programs, supply systems, fortification building and expansion, ground operations, and irregular actions also were important elements in the Confederacy's defensive efforts. From large shipbuilding and supply centers in New Orleans, Louisiana and Memphis, Tennessee, to small, uninhabited areas along the Yazoo River and Bayou Teche, the Confederacy struggled to build modern warships intended to challenge Union hegemony of the river valley. Just as soldiers manned the ships when required, Confederate naval personnel contributed to the ground defense of military installations when there was a need for men and a shortage of ships in the area. Finally, there were a series of irregular exploits. These ranged in size and scale from the first successful use of underwater mines (called torpedoes), boarding enemy ships, and experimentation with submarines and torpedo boats. It was an amazing amount of inventive and improvised activities while under wartime stress and confusing and sometimes egotistical military and civilian leadership.

Defending the Arteries of Rebellion is divided into four major parts. Chapters one through three focus on efforts by the Confederate Navy and other organizations to create a naval presence on the Mississippi River; primarily on building, and equipping ships for use, particularly the first phase of ironclad construction in the fall of 1861. Chapters four through six cover the 1862 naval battles for control of the Mississippi River's upper and lower extremities such as the siege of Island Number Ten and the campaigns for control of Memphis, Tennessee, and New Orleans. Chapters seven through ten examine the final operations for control of the Mississippi River, including the year-long struggle for Vicksburg. This third part analyzes operations in southern Louisiana for control of Bayou Teche and the Atchafalaya River in 1863, contest for control of the Yazoo River in 1863 and 1864, and the second phase of Confederate river ironclad construction on these tributaries. The final part of the book, consisting of chapters eleven and twelve, discuss the actions by Confederate naval forces on the tributaries of the Mississippi River, most notably, the defense of the Red River to the end of the war.

These four parts are followed by summaries, analysis, conclusions, and insights into how the Confederacy learned quickly to defend its rivers for more than three years using impromptu construction, innovations, and ad hoc forces.