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USAWC MILITARY STUDIES PROGRAM PAPER

JOINT OPERATIONS DURING THE CAMPAIGN OF 1862
ON THE TENNESSEE AND CUMBERLAND RIVERS

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BY

Lieutenant Colonel Douglas E. Cox

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ABSTRACT

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The Civil War campaign for Forts Henry and Donelson is illustrative of joint Army-Navy operations. It provides an excellent vehicle to study elements of joint efforts. This study is based on historical accounts and data obtained from Official Records and publications of first hand accounts of the events and personalities associated with the campaign. In addition to providing a strategic and tactical account of the campaign, the study highlights three key points of joint operations: planning, cooperation, and mutual support. It also spans three organizational levels: departmental, theater, and tactical.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

<u>Section</u>	<u>Page</u>
1. Introduction	1
2. The Western Flotilla	2
3. The Theater	10
4. The Operational Plan	13
5. The Joint Operations Against Ft. Henry	15
6. The Joint Operations Against Ft. Donelson	21
7. Conclusion	25
8. End Notes	28
9. Bibliography	32
10. Maps	34

INTRODUCTION

Our American Civil War has been referred to as the last of the old and the first of the new. The many technological advancements that were made tend to overshadow new doctrine, new tactics and new joint amphibious operations. The Civil War campaign of Forts Henry and Donelson provide an excellent study of joint Army and Navy operations. It began with the formation of a strategy by the Army which led to a requirement for new equipment, namely gunboats. The requirement pushed technology to develop the ironclads of the "brownwater" Navy. Doctrine, tactics, and training were still undeveloped ideas in the minds of a very few, but the joint operations on the Tennessee and Cumberland Rivers made those ideas a reality.

Fighting the Confederate forces was not the only battle the gunboats had to win. The officers in charge of the fledgling Western Flotilla had to contend with the U.S. Army and Navy for support. It was a struggle for scarce resources of men, arms, and supplies. Knowledge of the system, a belief in the mission, and personal tenacity became the prerequisites for success.

Many of the details of the campaign are still relevant today. The lessons that were learned then are some of the same lessons that we must continue to re-learn.

THE WESTERN FLOTILLA

In early May 1861, General Winfield Scott proposed a plan to President Lincoln and General George McClellan to blockade the Atlantic and Gulf ports of the Confederacy. This plan, known as the Anaconda Plan, included the establishment of a chain of fortified positions extending down the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers. Controlling the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers would be a major strategic advantage. The Mississippi, with its tributaries, formed a vast transportation network whose waterways moved much of the South's interstate commerce. River steamboats were the principal carriers of freight and passengers. There were few well developed roads and fewer railroads south of St. Louis. For the North, the rivers were also a great line of communications. Men and materials could be moved quickly from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, at the juncture of the Allegheny and Monongahela Rivers, down the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers to New Orleans. The strategy of the Anaconda Plan was to strangle the Confederacy on all sides. The plan consisted of three main elements: (a) enforce a coastal blockade, (b) split the Confederacy along the Mississippi River, (c) support land operations by amphibious assault, gunfire, and transport. The Anaconda Plan was also politically attractive because it was believed that it would bring the South to terms with less bloodshed than by any other plan.(1)

The War Department (Army) foresaw the need for gunboats to suppress Confederate river fortifications and decided to organize a Western Flotilla. The Army, being unfamiliar with naval architecture, asked the Navy Department for help. The Navy moved quickly and sent Commander John Rodgers to Cincinnati to establish Naval Forces on the western rivers under the command of General John C. Fremont. In fact, his orders read to report to General McClellan's Headquarters.(2) Rodgers proceeded to purchase and convert any river steamers that were suitable for military use. He bought three side-wheelers, the *Conestoga*, *Lexington*, and *A. O. Tyler* and transformed them into wooden-clad gunboats. He had their deckhouses covered with oak planking five inches thick, and their boilers and steam pipes lowered as much as possible.(3)

River steamers were also used as transports for Army troops and supplies. They were all contracted and controlled by the Army and their utility did not expand beyond moving ground forces from one location to another. For this reason amphibious operations lacked true joint efforts of the Army and Navy. The large number of transports needed to move thousands of troops were vulnerable to ambush and mines. The gunboats offered the best means to provide convoy security from shoreline attacks. Although the amphibious operations were controlled entirely by the Army the gunboats were needed for security and naval gunfire. The coordination effort was significant

and success required a marked degree of Army-Navy cooperation.

In July, 1861, Quartermaster-General M.C. Meigs advertised for a proposal to construct a number of ironclad gunboats for service on the Mississippi River. The famous civil engineer and bridge designer, James B. Eads of Missouri Wrecking Company, St. Louis, made the best offer in regard to a proposed completion date and price. He was contracted to provide seven gunboats in sixty-five days. Upon delivery they would be fitted with armaments and crews by the government. Special agents were sent to seven states around St. Louis to purchase timber for construction of the boats. Eads, later commissioned a captain, pulled together a consolidated industrial operation of the major manufacturing firms in St. Louis. Nearly all of the machine shops and foundries were involved. The telegraph lines linking St. Louis, Cincinnati and Pittsburgh were in use for hours daily sending instructions and coordinating the construction of steam engines and boilers for use in the gunboats. Within two weeks Eads had more than four thousand men employed in the various aspects of the gunboat construction. They worked around the clock, seven days a week. On 12 October, they launched their first gunboat, the *St. Louis*, just forty-five days from the laying of the keel. The remaining boats were also launched within the following five weeks. They were the *Cincinnati*,

Louisville, Mound City, Cairo, Pittsburg (spelled as it was in 1861), and the *Carondelet*.(4)

The acquisition of the gunboats appeared to be a tremendous success, but this is not totally true. During this four month period there was a series of correspondence that clearly indicated a lack of joint cooperation. This fostered friction between the Army and Navy that continued throughout the river campaigns. In letters from Gideon Welles, the Secretary of the Navy, it is clear that he did not totally support the western river operations. At first his instructions to Cdr. Rodgers were rather ambiguous and open-ended in one regard, yet very definite in that interior river operations were an Army operation. The War Department, not the Navy, was responsible for purchasing the boats, manning, and providing weapons and munitions. Showing his political instincts, Secretary Welles caveated his instructions to leave the impression that the Navy was cooperating. "Whatever naval armament and crew may be necessary to carry into effect the objects here indicated, you will call for by proper requisition".(5) It is still true today as it was then, items may be requested but they are not always supplied. By assigning a navy commander to this job, inference can be drawn on the importance that Secretary Welles placed on the operation.(6) Actions taken by Cdr. Rodgers also ran counter to those of the Army, indicating a lack of joint planning. Instead of a unified

recruiting plan for riverboat service, the Army was in competition for rivermen. General McClellan's headquarters had made arrangements for river boat captains to purchase and prepare boats with crews for transportation of men and munitions. By the time modifications to Rodgers' three gunboats were completed most of the available river crews had signed on to the Army transports.

Cdr. Rodgers' purchase of the gunboats was also an area of discord. He may not have had the full approval of the Army to purchase the three boats. When Secretary Welles became aware of the purchase he was quick to chastise Cdr. Rodgers and reinforce his orders. This time Secretary Welles made the Navy's position very clear. The river boats were not wanted for naval purposes and if any were required for the Army, then it was the War Department's responsibility to purchase them. He further stated that the Navy could not supply the number of officers requested to man the interior operations of the boats. Cdr. Rodgers would have to manage with hired boatmen from the local area. Secretary Welles also made it unmistakable, "The employment of men and their subsistence, together with the necessary engineers, pilots, firemen, etc. . . properly belong to the Army. . and at the expense of the War Department".(7)

Two months later, for whatever reason, Major General Fremont sent a letter through an indirect command route, requesting that Cdr. Rodgers be removed and an officer be assigned to him with the authority of command of the

operations on the Mississippi. Analysis shows that General Fremont saw the need for a commander afloat to organize and employ the growing number of wooden and ironclad gunboats. On the twenty-sixth of August, Naval Captain Andrew Hull Foote was ordered to relieve Cdr. Rodgers and command the Army's western river gunboat flotilla.(8) Captain Foote's orders from Secretary Welles were the following:

"Sir: You have been selected to take command of the naval operations upon the western waters now organizing under the directions of the War Department . . . place yourself in communication with Major-General John C. Fremont, U.S. Army, who commands the Army of the West. You will cooperate fully and freely with him as to your movements. Requisitions must be made upon the War Department through General Fremont, and whatever the Army can not furnish the Navy will endeavor to supply, having due regard to the operations on the coast."(9)

Upon assuming command, Captain Foote was faced with the same exasperating problems as Cdr. Rodgers. Within two weeks, Mr. Eads would be launching the first of the ironclad riverboats. Foote was expected to outfit each gunboat with proper ordnance, munitions, crews, and provisions. The Army Ordnance Department was doing little more than making empty promises toward providing the required number and type of cannon, powder and shot. The recruitment of men for crews was still held as a local problem of the Army of the West. Within a few weeks of

assessing the gunboat situation, he apprised Major-General Fremont of the problem areas. Fremont wrote Foote, stating that he trusted Foote's discretion, charging him to use his judgment to get the job done. General Fremont also sent an order to Brigadier-General J. McKenstry, Deputy Quartermaster-General, stating "Sir: You will pay all bills properly approved by Captain Foote, on account of the gunboat service with which he is charged." (10) This was the first major step in solving the provisioning problem. Captain Foote's last duty assignment was the Naval Executive Officer at the New York Navy Yard. Experience gained there surely assisted him in working through the bureau system of the day. Unlike Cdr. Rodgers who sent correspondence directly to Secretary of the Navy (Gideon Welles), Foote began sending requests and reports to the Secretary of War, Assistant Secretary of the Navy (G.V. Fox), Quartermaster-General Meigs, Assistant Inspector of Ordnance (Lieutenant Henry A. Wise), state governors and selected congressmen. Within a short time most of the offices of authority from St. Louis to Washington, D.C. knew of the difficulties of the Western Flotilla. By December 1861 and the early part of January 1862 even President Lincoln was being furnished daily reports via Lt. Wise. (11)

In November of 1861, Major-General Halleck assumed command of the Army of the West. In the same month Captain Foote was also promoted to Flag Officer easing some of the power struggle in obtaining cooperation. The manning of the

gunboats remained a continuing problem. In contrast to General Fremont, General Halleck was indifferent to operations of the flotilla of gunboats. His only solution to the manning problem was to call for volunteers. The Army became increasingly reluctant to detach men for duty on the gunboats. Although many soldiers were anxious to transfer to a clean, warm and apparently well protected gunboat, their unit commanding officers were unwilling to grant a transfer. To emphasize this point in a letter to General Halleck, Grant wrote that he had a number of offenders in the guardhouse and he suggested, "In view of the difficulties of getting men for the gunboat service, that these men be transferred to that service . . ."(12) Halleck further exacerbated the problem by proposing to detail whole regiments to include their officers to the gunboats. They would perform their duties as Marines but not under the command of the other Navy officers. Bitterness also arose when a standing order was made that Naval Officers of equal rank to Army Officers would be subordinate regardless to date of rank, even if aboard a gunboat. Armed with pressure from Washington and the arrival of the finished gunboats, Flag Officer Foote finally prevailed. Soldiers and a few seamen were diverted from the east. A combined force of over 1,000 was detailed for gunboat and mortar boat duty. In a few short months the gunboats of the Western Flotilla were ready for action. This was only possible through the

efforts of James Eads and the persistence and tenacity of Flag Officer Foote.

THE THEATER

The twin rivers of the Tennessee and Cumberland were referred to as the back door to the South. By the late spring of 1861, it was obvious that they provided an ideal invasion route deep into the Confederate heartland. Declaring herself a neutral state, Kentucky presented both sides with a political and tactical problem. The North did not want to enter Kentucky for fear of violating her neutrality and drive Kentucky to side with the Confederacy. The South would like to use the Ohio River as a natural border for the Confederate States. To add emphasis to the importance of the twin rivers, a Union amphibious force could drive deep into middle Tennessee and cut the vital rail networks of Memphis and Charleston, and Memphis, Clarksville, and Louisville Railroads, and capture Nashville. To protect his state and the flank of the Confederacy, the Governor of Tennessee, Isham G. Harris, ordered the construction of river fortifications near the Kentucky-Tennessee border. Fort Henry was located on the eastern bank of the Tennessee River opposite the Kentucky border. The larger Fort Donelson was built twelve miles due east on the west bank of the Cumberland. In September 1861, Confederates seized Columbus, Kentucky on the Mississippi

River and violated the state's neutrality. Union forces retaliated and occupied Paducah, Kentucky at the mouth of the Tennessee River. Soon afterwards Kentucky sided with the Union. The security of western Tennessee, Nashville and the rail network now depended upon the Confederate forces' ability to hold Forts Henry and Donelson.

Very little can be said for General Halleck's vision of amphibious operations and the employment of gunboats. The scope of his understanding was limited to the use of river transports to carry troops to a point where they could be off-loaded. The gunboats were just there to provide convoy security. Grant had a little broader experience level with the modified wooden gunboats: the *Lexington*, *Conestoga*, and *A.O. Tyler*. Still, he primarily used them only for reconnaissance.

While contending with the problems of building a gunboat fleet, Foote was concurrently developing ideas for future river operations. Within days after the commissioning of the ironclad gunboats in mid-January 1862, Foote proposed to Grant an attack on Fort Henry. Foote was convinced that Fort Henry could be taken without much difficulty by a joint force of gunboats and troops. Grant agreed with the concept but thought it would be better to move against Fort Donelson first. After further consideration, Grant yielded to Foote's assessment. Operationally Foote was faced with several problems. First was the logistical problem of ammunition and powder. There was precious little for

gunnery practice and training. In an order to Lieutenant Paulding, commander of the Gunboat *St. Louis*, Foote wrote,

"Sir, I must enjoin you to save your ammunition. No gun must be fired without your order in circumstances like those of yesterday. You will be particular in noting the range of the first shot, its height and distance. I was surprised yesterday, at Columbus, to see three or four of your shells bursting at such an elevation. The first shell should have shown the proper elevation of the guns. I was especially sorry to see the great elevation repeated, as it gave the enemy a poor idea of our gunnery. I am aware of your difficulties in a new and undisciplined crew and officers, but make these criticisms rather as indicative of correcting things in the future. Save your ammunition and let the first gun show you how to aim for the second."(13)

The second problem was the training and experience of the crews. Throughout the war the gunboat crews were a rather heterogeneous group. Some had seen service in the Ocean Navy, some came from commercial ships and boats of the Great Lakes and rivers, but many were like the Illinois Volunteers, "landlubbers". The new ironclad gunboats were state of the art technology for 1861. Every member of the crew learned their work skills through "on-the-job-training". The most promising aspect of the gunboat crews

was their morale and comradeship. Once a crew was established on board they bonded quickly and worked hard to learn their duties.

The final problem was the river itself. During late winter to early spring, the rivers of the Mississippi Valley Region and its tributaries would rise and fall erratically, thus making navigation chancy. If the water level was too low there would be a constant threat of running aground. Strong currents and driftwood would be a problem if the rivers were flooding. The weather was an annoyance common to both the Army and the Navy. With these three problems being critical factors, attacking the smaller Fort Henry first allowed the gunboat crews to gain combat experience with less risk. It also provided Foote the basis to plan and formulate joint operations for larger battles yet to come.

THE OPERATIONAL PLAN

The approval and orders for operations conducted by the Western Flotilla had to be issued by Army headquarters, Department of the West.(14) Grant being senior, and commanding the majority of forces, assumed the role of what we would today call the joint task force commander. Grant presented the plan to General Halleck. Halleck called the plan preposterous and rejected it to the point of being

rude. Foote and Grant found a way to work around Halleck's bias of the gunboats and his contempt for Grant. On 22nd January 1862, General Charles F. Smith, commander of Union Troops at Paducah, was offered a ride on the *Lexington* to conduct one of the frequent gunboat reconnaissances up the Tennessee River. Lieutenant Shirk, commanding the gunboat fired a few long-range shots at Fort Henry; a demonstration of sorts for General Smith's benefit. General Smith was not impressed with Fort Henry and remarked to Grant, "I think that two ironclad gunboats would make short work of Fort Henry." Surreptitiously Grant and Foote had gained Smith's support for their plan. Six days later Foote, in Cairo, sent a letter to Halleck in St. Louis,

"General Grant and myself are of the opinion that Fort Henry, on the Tennessee River, can be carried with four ironclad gunboats and troops, and be permanently occupied. Have we your authority to move for that purpose when ready?"(15)

The same day Grant also sent a letter to Halleck asking permission to take Fort Henry.(16) Halleck had great regard for Smith's military thinking and there was little doubt that Halleck discussed the joint operation with him. Foote having surmised this and courted Smith for his support, it must have been humorous to him when he received the following telegram the next day from Halleck, "I am waiting for General Smith's report on road from Smithland to Fort Henry. As soon as that is received will give order.

Meantime, have everything ready."(17) Foote was also aware of Halleck's tendency to procrastinate. As soon as he received Halleck's telegram he wrote back "the Tennessee will soon fall, the movement up that river is desirable early next week (Monday), or in fact as soon as possible."(18) He even added a postscript to his letter which said, "P.S. - The roads are said to be good from Paducah to Fort Henry, even at this season."(19) Halleck had been properly backed into a corner and had to make a decision. The following day, 30 January 1862, Halleck gave Grant the approval to attack Fort Henry.(20)

Grant and Foote's plan was simple and yet shrewd. In anticipation Foote began pre-battle activities on the 13th of January. He sent three gunboats up the Cumberland and two up the Tennessee Rivers employing the tactic of a demonstration. On the 17th, the *Conestoga* and the *Lexington* reconnoitered the Tennessee River, just below Fort Henry. Again on the 21st and 22nd of January, gunboats performed reconnaissance of Fort Donelson and Fort Henry respectively. Detailed knowledge and careful preparations were key elements in the offensive operations against both Fort Henry and Fort Donelson.

THE JOINT OPERATION AGAINST FORT HENRY

On the 2nd of February, Grant started from Cairo with 17,000 men in transports guarded by four ironclads, the

Essex, *Carondelet*, *Cincinnati* and *St. Louis* and the wooden gunboats, *Tyler*, *Conestoga*, and *Lexington*. The following day transports carrying Brigadier General McClernand's division left Paducah and rendezvoused with the *Essex* and the *St. Louis*. At 4:30 a.m. on the morning of the 4th the combined convoys converged at a point eight miles below (North) Fort Henry.(21) Just prior to the troops disembarking on the east bank at Bailey's Landing, the gunboats fired several rounds from their cannons into the wood line. They were seeking a return of small arms fire from the shore. Today this is known as "recon by fire". Having determined that the landing site was safe, Grant ordered McClernand's cavalry ashore to scout the flanks and establish local security. During this time, Grant had transferred from his transport to the gunboat *Essex*. The *Essex* and the *Cincinnati* moved upriver and took up positions about three miles below Fort Henry. The two gunboats located the Confederate pickets at the mouth of Panther Creek and opened fire. The sustained firing of the gunboats provided protective fires for the debarkation of troops. Once the transports were off-loaded, they were ordered back to Paducah to pick up General Smith's division.

The following day can best be described as the build-up phase and battle preparation. The second lift of transports from Paducah continued to arrive throughout the day. McClernand conducted reconnaissance operations to the east and south. Naval reconnaissance of the river revealed that

the Confederates had mined the main channel with torpedoes.(22) Foote ordered the wooden gunboats *Tyler* and *Conestoga* to remove the "infernal machines".(23) They were able to remove six of the torpedoes and found that the others had been pulled from their moorings by driftwood as a result of flooding. Grant accompanied Foote onboard the *Cincinnati* for a final recon of Fort Henry. They came upon one of the torpedoes and Foote had it brought onboard for study. Both men were watching the disassembly when suddenly the torpedo made a strange hiss. Grant beat Foote up the ladder in a race to the top deck. When Foote asked Grant about his hurry, Grant replied that "the Army did not believe in letting the Navy get ahead of it".(24)

Grant and Foote completed the final details of their battle plan. They both agreed upon a joint attack by the Army and Navy. Two brigades from Smith's division would march along the western bank of the Tennessee on the Kentucky side and conduct a supporting attack on Fort Heiman. McClernand's reinforced division would be the main attack on Fort Henry. Foote's gunboats had the mission to bombard the Confederate fort until the Union Army was in position for an assault. Grant also attached a company of the 23d Indiana aboard the gunboats to act as sharpshooters from the upper decks. Transports were also held down river with a mission to be prepared to extract Smith's two brigades on the Kentucky side. This allowed them to

reinforce McClernand or be evacuated if they met too strong a resistance.

Foote made the observation that the timing of the joint attack should be staggered to allow the soldiers sufficient time to get in position, his argument being that the muddy roads would greatly slow the land movement. Grant stubbornly held to the original schedule. Everyone would start at the same time. By not reconsidering the sequencing of events, this led to the only flaw in an otherwise ingenious joint operations plan.

Across the river from Fort Henry, on the Kentucky side, Confederate forces, under the command of Colonel Adolphus Heiman, had constructed a smaller earthen fort. Fort Heiman, named after its commander, was occupied by 1100 Confederates and supported by a section of artillery. The shelling and harassing fires from the gunboats on the 4th convinced Colonel Heiman that his small fort could not withstand a large Union attack. He persuaded Brigadier General Lloyd Tilghman, the ranking Confederate officer in the area, that it would be best to move the garrison to Fort Henry. Just before daylight on the morning of the 5th of February, the Fort Heiman garrison was ferried across the river.

General Tilghman, on the night of 5 February, called his senior officers for a meeting. Colonels Heiman, Nathan Bedford Forrest, and Joseph Drake were the three brigade commanders present. They estimated the Union Forces to be

more than 25,000. Collectively the Confederates had less than 4,000 to defend Fort Henry. To make matters worse, most were untrained and newly-formed regiments armed with shotguns and hunting rifles. The best equipped regiment was armed with old flint-lock "Tower of London" muskets that were drawn from the state armory.(25) In fact, many of these muskets had seen service in the War of 1812. The general consensus was that it would be impossible to oppose such an overwhelming force. The decision was made to withdraw to Fort Donelson and combine their forces with the two Confederate divisions under Generals Pillow and Buckner. General Tilghman recognized the need to man the fort in order to cover the withdrawal and gain time. He asked Captain Jesse Taylor if he could hold the fort for one hour against a determined attack. Captain Taylor said that he could. Company B, 1st Tennessee Artillery, and fifty-four men comprised the Confederate force left to defend Fort Henry.

At about 10:20 a.m. on the 6th of February, Foote, aboard the *Cincinnati*, hoisted his signal pennant to prepare for battle. Unknown to the Navy, confusion had delayed the Army and they were still in their camp. Half an hour later, the gunboats began to move upriver in a staggered column formation. When they came in sight of the fort the four ironclads deployed on line with the two wooden gunboats held in reserve. Just after noon, Foote scanned the woodline trying to locate the progress of Grant's Army.

He had no idea where the Army was but he was determined to continue with the attack. The *Cincinnati* fired three shots from a distance of about 1700 yards to range the guns for the flotilla.

As the gunboats closed on Fort Henry, the accuracy of both sides improved. The shells from the gunboats ripped open the cotton sacks filled with sand and dirt that were used to shore up the outer works of the fort. Under the intense pounding of the gunboats the earth-works began to give way exposing the Confederate guns to fire. The Confederates only had two heavy guns that could be effective at long range. One was a 128 pound, 10-inch Columbiad and the other was a 6-inch rifle. For shorter range they had eight 32 pounders and two 42 pounders. After two hours of furious battle, the Fort experienced a series of ill fated accidents. First the 6-inch rifle exploded killing or disabling everyone in the immediate area. Soon after the Columbiad was spiked when the primer was jammed and broke off in the vent.(26) With the long range gun silenced, the gunboats closed in with increased fire. Two of the Fort's 32-pounders were hit disabling both gun crews. By 1:50 p.m. the fort was down to four serviceable guns. General Tilghman reasoned that any further resistance would only entail a useless loss of life. The Confederate delaying action had cost the South 99 casualties - 5 dead, 11 wounded, 5 missing, and 78 prisoners. Fort Henry was

only required to fight for one hour but they were able to hold for over two hours.

When the Confederate Colors were lowered, Grant's Army still had not arrived. A late start, bad roads, and mud had prevented the Army from making it a joint battle. Foote received Tilghman aboard the *Cincinnati* and officially accepted the surrender of Fort Henry.

In the fort versus gunboat duel, the four ironclads fared quite well. The *Cincinnati* received 31 shots, the *Essex* 15, the *St. Louis* 7, and the *Carondelet* 6. Two men were killed and twenty-seven were wounded. Most of the casualties were a result of a shot that pierced the *Essex's* boilers wounding and scalding twenty-four men. Of those scalded, several died later from their burns. The slow-moving gunboats had proved their worth. Their iron plate and heavy beams provided enough protection to allow them to sustain a considerable number of direct hits. Had the ground forces arrived as planned, they could have relieved the pressure on the gunboats and reduced the amount of battle damage to the ironclads.

THE JOINT OPERATION AGAINST FORT DONELSON

Grant wanted to move the next day and take Fort Donelson on the 8th of February. Several of the ironclads had to be repaired or replaced if naval gunfire was to support the continued operation. Grant was forced to delay the attack

on Fort Donelson until Foote could return from Cairo with more gunboats. Foote had no sooner limped back to Cairo, before Halleck and Grant began to telegraph for his immediate return. On February 11, Foote reluctantly left Cairo with three ironclads: the *St. Louis*, *Louisville*, and *Pittsburg*. The three wooden-clad gunboats and the ironclad, *Carondelet* remained on the Tennessee River at Fort Henry. This is all the boats that he had crews to man. Just before he departed he wrote to Secretary of the Navy Welles, "I shall do all in my power to render the gunboats effective in the fight. . . if we could wait ten days, and I had men (enough), I would go with eight mortar boats and six armored boats. . ."(27)

Manning the crews was the same problem Foote had at Fort Henry. It just so happened that the four ironclads and the three wooden gunboats were sufficient naval power to carry the day at Henry. In order to get the same number of ironclads underway for Fort Donelson, Foote had to split up the remaining crews and cross level among the four boats. The transfer of crews wrecked the sailors' morale and a number of his men ran off rather than be transferred.

Fort Donelson presented an entirely different problem for the flotilla. Fort Donelson was located on the west bank of the Cumberland River, just north of the town of Dover, Tennessee. Its fortifications were the strongest military work in the entire theatre of war. Unlike Fort

Henry, which was built almost at water level, Fort Donelson was atop a ridge that rose about a hundred feet above the river. Foote knew that he had three problems. The first was not enough crew to man all the boats. This meant that he could not bring enough cannon fire to bear to suppress the enemy's guns. Nor did he have enough boats to hold in reserve. The second and third problems dealt with the elevation of the fort. The fort could employ plunging fire which Foote knew to be more damaging to the gunboats' armor plate. The last problem would be the gunnery technique. The gunboats would have to fire uphill at the fort, doing little damage to the interior works. The mortar boats that could lob rounds into the fort were best suited for this battle, but again, there were no crews for them.

The *Carondelet* reached Fort Donelson on 12 February, one day ahead of Foote and the other gunboats. Late in the night of the 13th, Foote rendezvoused with the *Carondelet* down stream from Fort Donelson. Besides his gunboats from Cairo, Foote had escorted ten army transports carrying reinforcements. The following morning Grant and his staff met with Foote aboard his flagship *St. Louis* to coordinate their battle plan. The joint plan called for an attack on the fort from the land side with three divisions and shelling by naval gunfire. The objective of the gunboats was to silence the water batteries located just below the main works of Fort Donelson; they would then move upriver to Dover and shell the Confederate entrenchments where they

approached the river. Concurrently the Army would attack the enemy's right.

At 2:00 p.m., the gunboats moved upriver in a formation similar to that used at Fort Henry. An hour later the flagship, *St. Louis*, opened fire on the water battery. The range was about one mile. The Confederates held their fire until the gunboats had closed to almost a range of 300-400 yards and then opened with all guns. The water battery was severely pounded but in the end it was the gunboats that took the real beating. Brigadier General Gideon J. Pillow, C.S. Army, had given the order for all batteries to hold their fire until the gunboats were within point-blank range. Drawing the gunboats in allowed the Confederates to maximize the effect of the 10-inch Columbiad and 32-pound rifled gun. It also meant that the gunboats had to weather the intense mauling until they could maneuver back out of range.(28)

By 4:30 the gunboat battle was over. All the ironclads had been hit many times and three severely damaged. A shell had damaged the *Louisville's* steering gear so badly that the gunboat could only drift down river. A hit on the *St. Louis's* pilothouse killed the pilot and wounded Foote in the ankle. It also damaged the steering gear enough that the *St. Louis* had to drop out of the fight. The *Pittsburg* was hit 40 times and retired from the battle with all of her guns run aft to keep water from coming into two large holes in her bow. The *Carondelet's* pilot was

killed by a shot from a 10-inch Columbiad. Of the four ironclads, only the *Carondelet* was battle ready after the fight. Despite the practical defeat of the gunboats, Grant's troops took Fort Donelson after a siege of several days.

Ironically, on the 16th of February, General McClellan telegraphed Foote from Washington the following, "Sorry you are wounded. How seriously? Your conduct magnificent. With what force do you return? I send nearly 600 sailors for you tomorrow."(29)

CONCLUSION

The campaign for Forts Henry and Donelson provides a historical example of joint Army-Navy operations. Insights can be gained to joint cooperation at all levels of our military structure. The Western Theater of Operations was clearly the responsibility of the Army. The need for gunboats was an Army need, not a Navy need. The Navy's top priority for resources was the blockade of the Atlantic and Gulf coastlines. This was a major factor in Secretary of the Navy Welles' reluctance to support a fresh water Navy. The War Department's lack of cooperation indicated that the eastern theater, and cries of "On to Richmond", carried greater emphasis. It wasn't until President Lincoln became involved that matters improved.

National objectives must be clearly stated so they can be properly resourced in keeping with national priorities. One can never expect to achieve a coordinated effort if the Armed Forces continue to assume that problems will be solved by another service. Lack of support and cooperation at the Department level carried down to the Theater level. As the Theater Commander, Halleck had the responsibility to allocate resources to each element of his command. If he did not have sufficient resources, then it was incumbent upon him to state his needs to a higher authority. There is no evidence in any correspondence that Halleck helped Foote break through the barrier of the War Department to obtain men or supplies.

Teamwork and unity of effort can first be seen at the tactical level. Here were two commanders, Foote and Grant, with a common objective. Together they developed a joint plan where the combat power of each mutually supported the other. There was no grumbling or discord when Grant assumed the role of joint task force commander. The gunboats under Foote's command gave full measure and only retired after three of the four ironclads had been put out of action from enemy fire.

The Henry and Donelson campaigns also provided examples of joint tactics in the use of naval gunfire to support an amphibious landing and the naval bombardment in support of a land objective. Even though the combat operation was not

letter perfect, the plan was designed around a coordinated attack by both Army and Naval Forces.

The majority of successful joint operations are primarily confined to the tactical level. This is also the level where the greatest amount of cooperation between services is found. If successful joint endeavors are to be achieved at higher levels of command, then the same degree of cooperation and unity of effort must prevail.

END NOTES

1. Naval History Division, Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, Navy Department, Civil War Naval Chronology (six parts), Washington, D.C. 1961, page 14, hereafter cited Chronology.
2. Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies in the War of the Rebellion, Series I, Volume 22, page 280, hereafter cited ORN.
3. Nash, A Naval History of the Civil War, page 28.
4. Eads, "Recollections of Foote and the Gun-Boats." Battles and Leaders of the Civil War, page 338.
5. ORN, I, 22 page 280.
6. The Army in 1861 equated the rank of a Navy Commander as little more than an Army Major. Today this rank may not denote significant authority but prior to the Civil War promotions were very few and a long time coming. An officer's ability could not be measured by his rank. Before his appointment to the Western Flotilla, Commander Rodgers had achieved a noteworthy reputation for his part in burning the Norfolk Navy Ship Yard.

He was also aide to DuPont and son of Commodore Rodgers (War of 1812). Later he became the Captain of the monitor, *Weehawken*.

7. ORN, I, 22 page 285.
8. Chronology, page 23.
9. ORN, I, 22 page 307.
10. ORN, I, 22 page 333.
11. ORN, I, 22 page 522.
12. Chronology, page 40.
13. ORN, I, 22 page 500.
14. NASH, A Naval History of the Civil War, page 103.
15. ORN, I, 22 page 524.
16. U.S. War Department, War of the Rebellion: Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies, Series I, Vol. 7, page 121, Hereafter cited ORA.

17. ORN, I, 22 page 525.
18. ORN, I, 22 page 526.
19. ORN, I, 22 page 526
20. ORA, I, 7 page 121.
21. Bearss, The Fall of Fort Henry, page 7.
22. The type of "torpedo" employed was actually a mine. It was fashioned by attaching a demijohn filled with powder to a piece of wood large enough to float the charge. It was then anchored in the river just below the surface of the water.
23. Bearss, The Fall of Fort Henry, page 7.
24. Chronology, page 17.
25. Taylor, "The Defense of Fort Henry", Battles and Leaders of the Civil War, page 370.
26. ORA, I, 7 page 134

27. ORN, I, 22, page 550

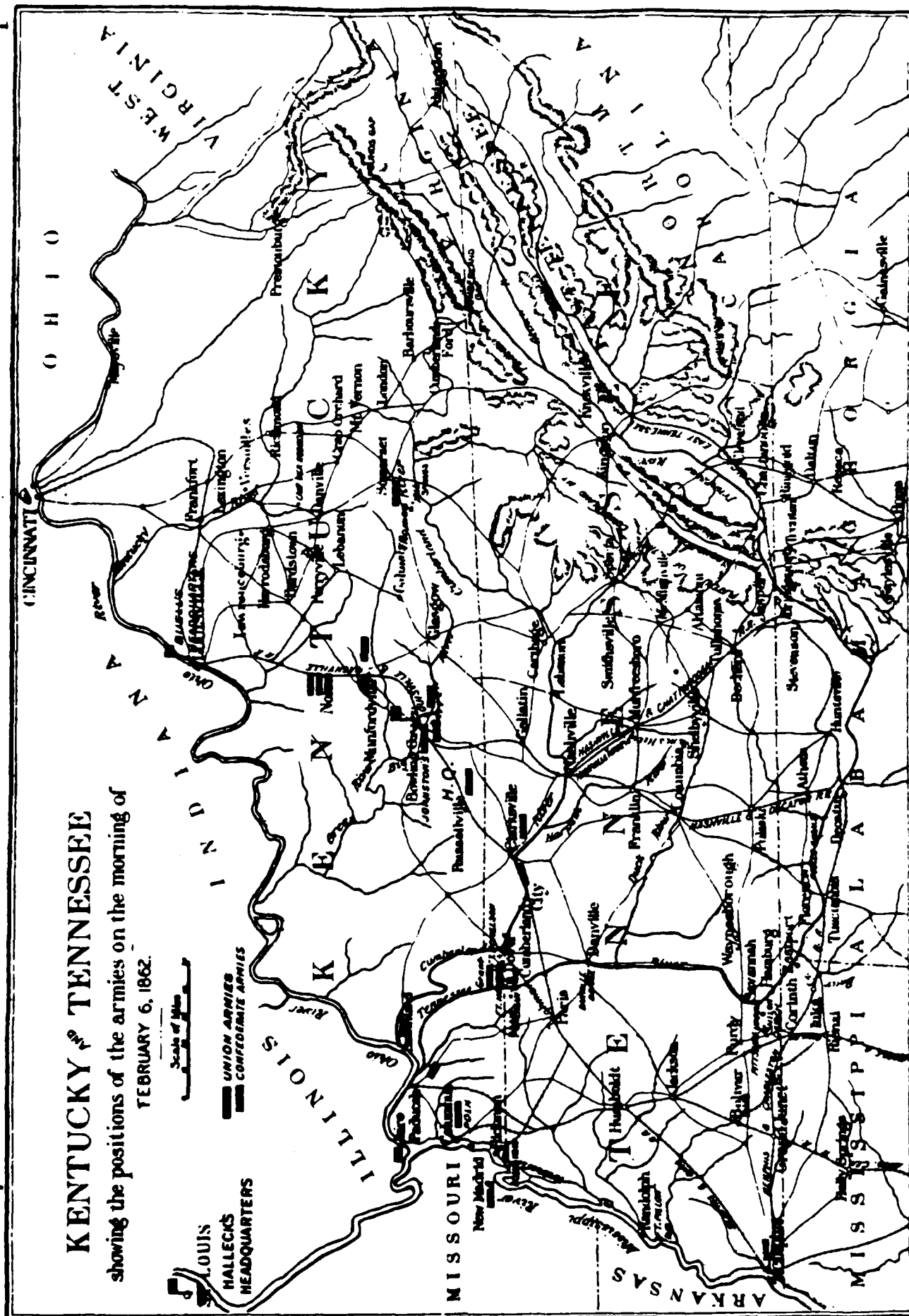
• 28. ORA, I, 7 page 280

• 29. Chronology, page 23.

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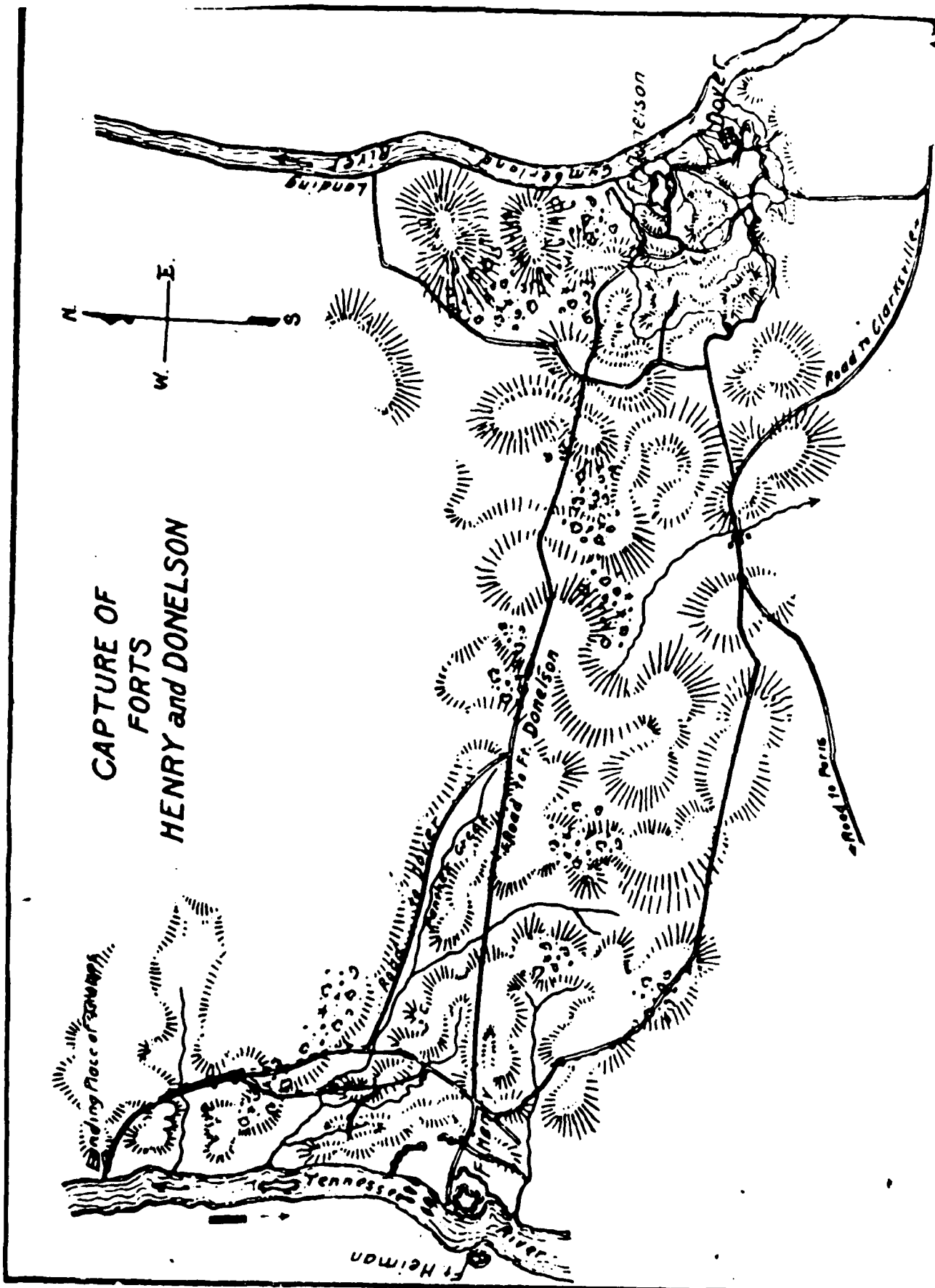
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KENTUCKY & TENNESSEE

showing the positions of the armies on the morning of
FEBRUARY 6, 1862.

Scale of Miles
UNION ARMIES
CONFEDERATE ARMIES



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