



**STRATEGY
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JOINT OPERATIONS AND THE VICKSBURG CAMPAIGN, 1863

BY

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ABSTRACT

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While the United States assumes the role of the world's only superpower, the armed forces are experiencing reductions in both funding and manpower. If the military is to effectively implement National Military Strategy, there must be unity of effort among the services. In an effort to learn from history, this study examines the Vicksburg campaign of 1863 to determine if it offers an example of effective joint operations. It argues that the eventual success of the Vicksburg campaign was the result of excellent relationships between the theater commanders, not insightful guidance from Washington or a shared perspective of how to win the war among the service secretaries.

INTRODUCTION

The accomplishments of today's armed forces depends on the successful incorporation of joint doctrine among the Army, Navy, Marines, and Air Force. While all the services are experiencing a reduction in both funding and manpower, there is a corresponding increase in tasking around the globe as the United States assumes the position as the world's only superpower. If the military is to effectively implement the National Military Strategy, there must be unity of effort. Joint Pub 1, Joint Warfare of the Armed Forces of the United States, suggests the riverine operations during the American Civil War, particularly the Vicksburg campaign, serve as excellent examples of effective joint operations overcoming difficult obstacles.¹

Is the Vicksburg campaign a good example of joint operations for modern military strategists? Did the theater commanders receive solid support for joint operations from the civilian leadership in Washington? Did they ask for such support? What can be learned from this historic campaign?

THEATER STRATEGY

The initial strategies employed by both the North and South relegated the western theater to a decidedly secondary role in the war. The North's desire for a quick, cheap victory and the South's "offensive-defensive" strategy focused the war effort on

¹ U.S., Department of Defense, Joint Warfare of the Armed Forces of the United States, Joint Pub 1 (1995), pp. II-2,3.

the struggle between the Army of the Potomac and the Army of Northern Virginia in the eastern theater.

NORTHERN STRATEGY

President Lincoln rejected the plan presented by General-in-Chief Winfield Scott, to blockade the Confederacy and slowly crush the Confederate Army along several fronts as a prelude to a large invasion. Lincoln wanted a quick victory with few casualties to maintain popular support for the war effort. Most of Lincoln's generals were West Point graduates and believers in a Napoleonic strategy of achieving victory through a single decisive battle. They criticized Scott's strategy and recommended the Union concentrate on the enemy's capital, Richmond. The northern press and, as a result, public opinion also called for a "Forward to Richmond" strategy. The press was very critical of Scott's "Anaconda Plan."²

Lincoln eventually replaced Winfield Scott with General George McClellan. While McClellan was not a "Napoleonic" strategist he did believe he could win the war through "maneuvering rather than fighting" and started what he believed was a quick and decisive march to capture Richmond and bring an end to the war.³ McClellan's failure in the resulting Peninsula Campaign and the failures of those who followed him as commander of the Army of the Potomac did not alter Lincoln's focus on the

² James M. McPherson, Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 334.

³ Russell F. Weigley, The American Way of War (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1973), p. 134.

eastern theater. While Lincoln looked to the west for victories to keep public morale high, he always came back to the east, looking for the general who could take Richmond and win the war.

Lincoln did incorporate some aspects of Winfield Scott's strategy to "strangle the Confederacy." He called upon the U.S. Navy to blockade Confederate ports along the Atlantic and Gulf coasts, from Virginia to Texas.⁴ He hoped to deprive the Confederacy of essential trade with Europe and prevent them from exchanging cotton for war materials. Lincoln also wanted to secure the Mississippi River from the Great Lakes down to New Orleans. This would divide the Confederacy militarily, and politically Lincoln needed to satisfy the demands of the midwest states who relied on the Mississippi River for trade.

SOUTHERN STRATEGY

President Jefferson Davis was acutely aware of the Confederacy's emphasis on state's rights and localism. He was a West Point graduate familiar with the military principles of unity of effort and concentration of force, but felt compelled to divide the Confederate Army into eight departments and provide each state with home protection forces. Davis was convinced a defensive posture was the South's best strategy, because it forced the North to take the offensive and bleed itself dry attacking southern defensive positions. The South would use an "offensive-defensive" strategy and attack only when holding a

⁴ William M. Fowler, Jr., Under Two Flags: The American Navy in the Civil War (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1990), p. 47.

decisive advantage and primarily to deflate the will of the northern people.⁵ Most of the South's offensive actions would be by Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia. Lee's frequent feints toward Washington and the 1863 campaign culminating at Gettysburg grabbed the attention of Lincoln, his generals, and the press. These actions highlighted the East as the main theater of the war.

With the eyes of the nation focused on the eastern theater, military leaders in the western theater received conflicting guidance from Washington. Lincoln was anxious to "liberate" eastern Tennessee, a stronghold of Union support, from the Confederacy.⁶ At the same time, the president wanted the Mississippi River secured from Ohio down to the Gulf of Mexico. Later in the war, Lincoln directed an invasion of western Louisiana and Texas to counter French involvement in Mexico. These conflicting directives sent the Union army in the west off in different directions, often simultaneously.

CIVILIAN LEADERSHIP

The Secretary of War, Edwin M. Stanton, and the Secretary of the Navy, Gideon Welles, were highly critical of one another and not particularly interested in furthering Army/Navy relations. Their relationship laid the foundation of service "stovepipes" which limited joint efforts throughout the war. Welles

⁵ Charles P. Roland, An American Illiad: The Story of the Civil War (New York: McGraw-Hill, Inc., 1991), p. 44.

⁶ T. Harry Williams, Lincoln and His Generals (New York: Vintage Books, 1952), p. 47.

concentrated on Naval strategic priorities: blockade, capture of Confederate ports, and protecting Union commerce from Confederate raiders. Stanton concentrated on the land campaigns, defeating Lee's army in the East and the capture of strategic objectives in the West. There was no shared vision on how to win the war; Stanton and Welles saw little need to coordinate their efforts.

Compounding these differences in strategic vision was an intense personality conflict between the two service leaders. Welles' dislike of Stanton was evident from Stanton's first days in the cabinet:

When Mr. Stanton came into the War Department, for several months he assumed that the Navy was secondary and subject to the control and direction of the military branch of the Government. ... Stanton claimed that, instead of consulting and asking, the military could order naval assistance, and that it was the duty of the Secretary of the Navy and of naval officers to render it.⁷

Welles' relations with Stanton and Army/Navy relations in general were further weakened after the "Merrimac incident" in March, 1862. On the eve of McClellan's Peninsula Campaign in the spring of 1862, Lincoln's administration, with the exception of Welles and the Department of the Navy, panicked at the news the Confederacy had constructed a powerful iron clad on the hull of the former U.S.S. Merrimac. Stanton and others overreacted out of fear the C.S.S. Virginia could steam up the Potomac, bombard the capital, then proceed to break the Union blockade and attack at will such major ports as Baltimore, Philadelphia, and New

⁷ Gideon Welles, Diary of Gideon Wells, Vol. I (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1911), p. 69.

York. Lincoln, however, deferred to Stanton who directed sixty canal boats filled with stones be sunk at the entrance to Kettle Bottom Shoals. When it became apparent that indeed the C.S.S. Virginia was no threat to the northern ports, Welles was not forgiving. After the incident he wrote:

Mr. Stanton was fond of power and its exercise. It was more precious to him than pecuniary gain to dominate over his fellow man. He took pleasure in being ungracious and rough towards those who were under his control ... I am convinced he had but little moral courage nor much self-reliance when in trouble ... he was reckless and regardless of public expenditure, and the war expenses were greater by hundreds of millions than was necessary, or than they would have been had the Department been in other hands.⁸

Welles did not hide his feelings toward Stanton. He verbally attacked Stanton in Cabinet meetings and vehemently criticized his decisions. Welles held Stanton responsible for the attacks he received from disgruntled contractors and the press, suspecting Stanton of political sabotage. As a result, Stanton "side-stepped the peppery old shellback whenever he could."⁹ This significantly reduced constructive communications between the two service leaders.

Gideon Welles was a politician who had no practical experience as a sailor. His appointment by Lincoln was purely political. Welles' lack of sea experience made him the target of criticism from those who "often expressed opinion that no man should be Secretary of the Navy who has not had command of, and

⁸ Ibid., pp. 67-68.

⁹ Benjamin P. Thomas and Harold M. Hyman, Stanton: The Life and Times of Lincoln's Secretary of War (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1962), p. 151.

sailing of, a ship."¹⁰ Welles publicly refused to let such criticism affect him, calling his doubters "simple" and "egotistical" for thinking sea experience was necessary for conducting business as Secretary of the Navy.¹¹ This criticism did cause Stanton to speculate that Welles deferred matters of sea warfare and strategy to his Assistant Secretary of the Navy, Gustavus Fox.¹² Stanton had little regard for Welles' opinion on most military matters.

In the final analysis, Gideon Welles had a large ego and was resentful of representing a service which was playing a supporting role to the Army. Stanton should have recognized this and tried to ease the tensions between himself and Welles. By ignoring and avoiding Welles, Stanton compounded the problem. The relationship between Welles and Stanton created a substantial roadblock to smooth joint cooperation between the services.

THE EARLY WESTERN CAMPAIGN: NEW ORLEANS TO VICKSBURG

Early in the war, the western theater was dominated by service rivalries with no unity of effort between the Army and Navy.

In 1861, Gustavus Fox developed a comprehensive plan for the capture of New Orleans, the South's largest port. Fox's plan was primarily a naval operation, requiring army forces only for the occupation of New Orleans after its surrender. Welles and Fox

¹⁰ Welles, Diary of Gideon Wells, p. 215.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Thomas, Lincoln's Secretary of War, p. 181.

never admitted, or refused to realize, that the most effective way for the Navy to enforce a blockade was to capture and occupy the ports, not wait to intercept the ships at sea. The Navy was roundly criticized in the press for their ineffectual blockade along the Atlantic. Welles wanted a naval success and he wanted to keep the Army from getting the credit.¹³ Wells directed Fox to keep his plan secret from the War Department "so it wouldn't be leaked to the enemy."¹⁴ After Lincoln approved the plan, Welles and Fox had a difficult time getting the Army's cooperation. Winfield Scott was not enthusiastic about supplying troops for a naval offensive action. McClellan, after replacing Scott, reluctantly agreed to support the plan.¹⁵

Welles selected Admiral David Glasgow Farragut to lead the naval attack. New Orleans was defended by two forts at the mouth of the Mississippi, Ft. St. Philip and Ft. Jackson. Welles and Fox thought Farragut's fleet would need concentrated fire power to subdue the forts. Commodore David D. Porter, under Farragut's command, developed the idea of mounting mortars on schooners to provide the needed fire support.¹⁶

On April 16, 1862, Porter led the initial attack on Ft. St. Phillip and Ft. Jackson. For five days Porter tried to subdue the forts with fire from his mortar schooners but was

¹³ Fowler, Under Two Flags, p. 135.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 171.

¹⁵ Bern Anderson, By Sea and By River: The Naval History of the Civil War (New York: Da Capo Press, Inc., 1962), p. 117.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 118.

unsuccessful. Farragut decided to make a night run past the forts. Farragut's gunboats cut a hole through the river barriers and his force successfully passed the gauntlet with minimal losses. Once past the forts, Farragut landed General Butler's 15,000 troops below New Orleans. When Farragut's ships reached New Orleans, they were able to suppress the city's light defenses and rout the 3,000 militia troops defending it. On 1 May, General Butler reached the city and began the Federal occupation.¹⁷

From New Orleans, Farragut's forces continued north to capture Baton Rouge and Natchez which were essentially undefended. Farragut did not experience any resistance until reaching Vicksburg. Confederate General Leonidas Polk decided to take a stand at Vicksburg and deny the North complete control of the river. When Farragut reached Vicksburg on 18 May there were only 8 to 10 heavy guns in place and few troops.¹⁸ Vicksburg presented a difficult tactical problem for Farragut's forces. The city's fortified walls sat high above the river, a difficult target for Farragut's gunboats. North of the city were marshlands overgrown with vegetation.¹⁹ Farragut's guns could not reach the enemy's positions and the Union army commander, with a force of only 1,500 men, did not think he had sufficient troops to take the city. After six days Farragut returned to New

¹⁷ Ibid., pp. 121-125.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 129.

¹⁹ John D. Milligan, Gunboats Down the Mississippi (Annapolis: United States Naval Institute, 1965), p. 79.

Orleans. The New York press mistakenly reported Farragut retired down the Mississippi with his fleet before reaching Vicksburg. President Lincoln was upset and Wells was furious, especially after the Army had claimed responsibility for clearing out most of the northern Mississippi. Without waiting for Farragut's own report, both the president and Wells ordered Farragut back to Vicksburg.²⁰

Once again, cooperation between the Army and Navy broke down. General Butler initially offered 7,000 troops to Farragut to help take Vicksburg but later changed his mind and dispatched only 3,000 troops under the command of General Williams.²¹ When Farragut reached Vicksburg again, its defenses were improved but still vulnerable. General Williams decided not to attack the city directly. He wanted to bypass the Vicksburg defenses by digging a canal around the city. Farragut was anxious to attack the city before more Confederate forces arrived. He requested additional troops from General Halleck, the Army's Western Theater Commander. Halleck refused, saying it would be weeks before he would have any forces to spare.²² In fact, Halleck had a very large force and the troops needed for success at Vicksburg could have been dispatched without seriously affecting his strength. Halleck, however, was intent on keeping his forces massed for an attack on Corinth.²³ Frustrated, both Farragut and

²⁰ Anderson, By Sea and By River, pp. 129-130.

²¹ Ibid., p. 131.

²² Ibid., p. 132.

²³ Rowena Reed, Combined Operations in the Civil War

Porter felt that building a canal was a waste of time and manpower. They wrote Welles asking for assistance in applying pressure to obtain support from the Army. Welles' subsequent message to Stanton received a classic rebuff from the War Department and Stanton's Assistant Secretary of War, Wolcott, who replied to Welles:

Sir: The Secretary of War directs me to acknowledge the receipt of your communication ... transmitting an extract from a letter addressed by Commodore Porter to Flag Officer Farragut, which contains many valuable and interesting suggestions relative to the condition of affairs in the neighborhood of Vicksburg and the importance of the capture of the city by the combined operations of the fleet and land forces of General Williams. I am instructed by the Secretary to thank you for the pleasure of pursuing the same, and to inform you that your letter and enclosure have been referred to Major General Halleck, general-in-chief, for such action as may deem advisable ...²⁴

The Navy should not have been surprised by the lack of Army support. Welles and Fox planned the New Orleans campaign without any input from the Army. They went so far as to keep the plan a secret from the Army. They should not have expected the Army's enthusiastic support and willingness to commit troops when their plan developed problems. Fox was convinced that if Halleck had supported Farragut's efforts the North could have opened the Mississippi River years earlier than it did.²⁵

(Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1978), p. 202.

²⁴ Official Record, Ser I Vol 15, pp. 531-534.

²⁵ Robert M. Thompson and Richard Wainright, eds., Confidential Correspondence of Gustavus Vasa Fox, Assistant Secretary of the Navy, 1861-1865 (New York: De Vinne Press, 1920), p. 335.

VICKSBURG CAMPAIGN -THE PLAYERS

While initially cooperation between the services was poor in the western theater, the Army and Navy leaders who eventually captured Vicksburg developed an excellent joint relationship.

General Ulysses S. Grant was an strong advocate of joint Army/Navy operations. Grant's attitude toward the Navy was shaped by several early experiences in the war. In September 1861, Grant, in his first independent operation, moved against the enemy town of Belmont along the Mississippi River. He had a force of 2,700 men supported by gunboats and transports under the command of Commodore Henry Walke.²⁶ Grant's men were not seasoned, but performed well and managed to take the Confederate camp.²⁷ However, the ensuing Confederate counterattack routed Grant's troops, driving them back toward the river. Walke realized Grant's desperate situation and had transports ready and waiting with gunboat fire support to cover the withdrawal. Grant and his force narrowly escaped. This would be the most perilous personal danger Grant encountered during the war.²⁸ Grant would always have a great fondness for his rescuers, the Navy and their gunboats. During the remainder of his western campaign, Grant would not make a move along the Mississippi without gunboat support. He would always have a tremendous working relationship with his Naval commander.

²⁶ McPherson, Battle Cry of Freedom, p. 395.

²⁷ Bruce Catton, Grant Moves South (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1960), pp. 74-76.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 78.

Grant's naval counterpart for the Vicksburg campaign was Rear Admiral David Porter. Secretary Welles put Porter in charge of the Western Flotilla (renamed the Mississippi Squadron) with mixed emotions.

[Porter] has however, stirring and positive qualities, is fertile in resources, has great energy, excessive and sometimes not over-scrupulous ambition, is impressed and boastful of his own powers, given to exaggeration in relation to himself, . . . , is not generous to older and superior living officers, whom he is too ready to traduce, but is kind and patronizing to favorites who are juniors, and generally to officer inferiors. Is given to cliquism but is brave and daring like all his family. . . . It is a question with his mixture of good and bad traits, how he will succeed. . . . If he does well I shall get no credit; if he fails I shall be blamed.²⁹

Porter had served under Farragut during the New Orleans campaign. Even though Admiral Farragut was a close family friend, Porter was jealous of Farragut and eager to make a name for himself.³⁰ Being relegated to command of a "brown water" fleet of wooden gunboats, hybrid mortar schooners and ironclads was tough medicine for a proud "blue water" navy man. Porter also had family tradition driving his ambition. His father was a national hero during the War of 1812. After the war, however, Commodore Porter got into a dispute with several congressmen and naval officials. As a result he was court martialed and suspended without pay. Commodore Porter left the Navy in disgrace. David Porter was anxious to resurrect the family name and avenge his father.³¹

²⁹ Welles, The Diary of Gideon Wells, pp. 157-158.

³⁰ Anderson, By Sea and By River, p. 131.

³¹ Joseph T. Glatthaar, Partners in Command: The Relationship Between Leaders in the Civil War (New York: Free Press, 1994), p.

After assuming command of the Mississippi Squadron, Porter had orders from Secretary Welles to wait for General McClernand, who was organizing an army with Lincoln's consent, to move on Vicksburg. While Porter would have preferred to work with McClernand, a political officer not from West Point, he discovered that Grant was also preparing to move on Vicksburg. Since it was obvious Grant would move first, Porter wrote Sherman and Grant and volunteered his assistance.³² While Porter did not trust West Pointers and did not like the Army in general, feeling Army officers never gave the Navy proper credit,³³ he realized his accomplishments must come from effective cooperation with the Army.

The third main player in the successful joint operations that resulted in the capture of Vicksburg was Brigadier General William T. Sherman. Like Grant and Porter, Sherman was motivated by personal reasons to do whatever was necessary to make the operation a success. Before Halleck assigned him to assist Grant, Sherman was on a training camp assignment in St. Louis. He had been relieved of command from the Department of Ohio when he lost the confidence of the Administration.³⁴ Sherman knew this was his chance to regain his reputation and participate in the main war effort. Sherman did everything possible to build

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³² Ibid., p. 103.

³³ Reed, Combined Operations in the Civil War, p. 230.

³⁴ Vincent J. Esposito, ed., The West Point Atlas of American Wars, Vol I (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1959), map 25.

good relations with Grant and Porter. He knew he would not get a second chance.

The tremendous cooperative spirit that existed between Grant, Porter and Sherman is well documented. Compared to the previous squabbling between Farragut, Porter, Butler and Halleck, Grant, Sherman and Porter were models for joint operations. It is interesting to note, however, that this cooperative trio did not achieve any significant objectives along the Mississippi. While Farragut and Butler secured the key ports of New Orleans and Memphis and opened up most of the Mississippi River, Grant, Porter, and Sherman spent most of their efforts in several unsuccessful attempts to capture Vicksburg.

In December 1862, they made their first attack on Vicksburg. Grant directed a diversion north of the city, near Grenada. Porter's gunboats stationed themselves on the Yazoo River to provide artillery support for Sherman who would attack Confederate forces at Chickasaw Bluffs. Prior to Sherman's attack he wrote Porter:

Time now is the great object. ... I know you will promptly cooperate. It will not be necessary to engage their Vicksburg batteries until I have broken all their inland communication. Then Vicksburg must be attacked by land and water. In this I defer much to you.³⁵

The attack was an utter failure. A Confederate cavalry raid cut Grant's supply lines and he had to withdraw. The Confederate forces were able to reinforce Chickasaw Bluffs and Sherman's forces were driven back.³⁶ For the next two months Grant

³⁵ Official Record Ser.I Vol.17, p. 392.

directed multiple attempts to dig canals and find alternate waterways around and above Vicksburg. He was hoping to strike the city while avoiding a direct assault on the bluffs. These attempts also failed but not due to any lack of cooperation between the three commanders.

Sherman and Porter developed a strong relationship of cooperation and trust. During one of Porter's expeditions to find an alternate waterway, he and his gunboats were grounded by obstructions placed by Confederate troops to block their passage. The flotilla came under attack from snipers and Porter was trapped, ready to abandon the ships. Sherman received word of Porter's situation and led a party to his rescue.³⁷ When Sherman was attacked in the pages of the New York Herald for his inactivity prior to the final drive on Vicksburg, it was Porter who fired off a letter to defend Sherman. Sherman was very grateful to Porter and wrote:

I thank you most heartily for your kind and considerate letter... I shall always account myself fortunate to be near officers of the old Navy, and would be most happy if I could think it possible the Navy and Army of our country could ever again enjoy the high tone of honor and honesty that characterized them in our youth.³⁸

The exemplary cooperation between the Army and Navy during the Vicksburg campaign was not the result of doctrine, insightful guidance by the civilian leaders in Washington, or the strategic insight of the theater commanders. In fact, the Secretary of the

³⁶ Glatthaar, Partners in Command, pp. 168-169.

³⁷ Ibid., pp. 171-173.

³⁸ Official Record Ser. I Vol.17, p. 889.

Navy wrote Porter and asked him why he was wasting time supporting Grant's maneuvers when he should be patrolling the river below Vicksburg. Porter answered:

While it is my desire to carry out the wishes of the department in relation to all matters connected with operations here, still I must act in accordance with my judgment and a more full knowledge of affairs than the Department could possibly have³⁹

The individual battlefield leaders, Grant, Porter and Sherman were motivated by either personal experiences or desire to succeed. They knew they needed each other to succeed.

VICKSBURG-THE BATTLE (4 APRIL TO 4 JULY 1863)

While Porter, Grant, and Sherman worked closely together in the futile canal attempts, the actual Vicksburg campaign which resulted in the city's surrender was primarily an Army operation with only small assistance from Porter's fleet. Unity of effort and joint operations were not the reason for success at Vicksburg.

During the Vicksburg campaign, the contributions of Admiral Porter and his gunboats were minimal. Grant finally realized he would have to go below Vicksburg and attack it from the east. What developed was a month-long ground campaign. Porter's transports ferried Grant's troops across the Mississippi below Vicksburg with the support of the gunboats. Sherman and McPherson also worked their way south, below Vicksburg, crossed the Mississippi and moved on Jackson. Grant's forces drove General Joseph Johnston out of Jackson, Mississippi and prevented

³⁹ Official Record Ser. I Vol. 24, p. 541.

him from linking up with General Pemberton. Once Grant separated the two Confederate forces, he drove Pemberton back into Vicksburg, surrounded the city and began a month-long siege. Admiral Porter did not have much to do during this period, prior to the siege, and went further south down river to patrol and clear out Confederate ships. Once Grant invested Vicksburg from the East, Porter's fleet did provide the blocking western wall⁴⁰ during the siege that resulted in the city's surrender.

GUNBOATS

The Navy's gunboats were an overrated asset throughout the war. Their contribution to the battles in the western theater were minimal. In fact, it was the Navy's transports ships that were more valuable than the fighting gunboats.

The inflated reputation of the Navy's gunboats was established during the battle for Fort Henry on the Tennessee River. Fort Henry sat in a valley on a bend in the river. Its position made it indefensible against either a land or water attack.⁴¹ At the time of the attack, the flood-swollen Tennessee River made defense of the fort even more impossible. When the Confederates saw the Union army advance, the fort's commander, General Tilghman, ordered most of his troops to Fort Donelson, eleven miles to the east on the Cumberland River. Foote's gunboats were able to deliver a devastating fire on Ft. Henry and

⁴⁰ Esposito, Atlas of American Wars, maps 103-106.

⁴¹ John D. Milligan, Gunboats down the Mississippi (Annapolis: United States Naval Institute, 1965), p. 39.

the fort's garrison surrendered within two hours. The gunboats won a victory without the help of Grant's ground forces. The victory at Ft. Henry received tremendous coverage in the northern press. It was a welcome story in Washington, anxious for a victory after so many defeats for the Army of the Potomac in the eastern theater.⁴² For the remainder of the war, Army commanders in both the east and west requested gunboat support for their battles. The gunboat was considered essential to any ground campaign.

The actual limited capabilities of the gunboats was clearly demonstrated in the subsequent battle at Fort Donelson. Following Ft. Henry's surrender, General Grant optimistically predicted he would take Ft. Donelson in two days. Such was not to be the case. As Grant marched his troops to Ft. Donelson, Foote sailed his gunboats to the Cumberland River. Grant did not want to attack Donelson without the gunboats. Ft. Donelson sat high on a hilltop. When the fighting began, the gunboats did little damage to the fort's batteries while suffering devastating return fire. Foote was forced to withdraw from the fight. The Confederate victory over the navy was decisive.⁴³ Grant was eventually able to take the fort after successfully rebuffing a Confederate attempt to break out from his siege.

The gunboats were the "ugly stepchild" of the armed forces. They did not have the appeal of a "ship of the line" schooner to

⁴² Ibid., p. 43.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 48.

attract the attention of the blue water Navy. The War Department built the first wooden gunboats and the Navy built the later ironclads. They were manned by both Army soldiers and Navy sailors. When Congress finally moved the gunboats from the Army to the Navy, it was not because of a request from anyone in the Navy or Secretary Welles, though Welles did think the transfer was a good idea for unity of command for river operations.⁴⁴

CONCLUSIONS

The riverine operations during the American Civil War, and the Vicksburg campaign in particular, were not a good example of effective joint operations.

- The western theater did not receive the attention of the eastern theater. The guidance provided from Washington was often conflicting, directing theater commanders to proceed in different directions. The success of the resulting ad hoc operations was due to the relationships among the theater commanders, not a result of any effective joint planning from a shared perspective on how to win the war.

- The Secretary of War, Stanton, and Secretary of the Navy, Welles were not interested in developing joint operations. Welles focused on blockading the Atlantic and Gulf coasts, capturing Confederate ports, and keeping the Mississippi River clear from the Great Lakes to New Orleans. Stanton focused on attacking Lee's army in the east and capturing strategic

⁴⁴ Welles, Diary of Gideon Welles, p. 180.

objectives in the west. They did not support joint operations and did nothing to encourage them.

- The Navy planned the capture of New Orleans without any Army input, going so far as to keep their plan secret from the senior Army commander in the theater.

- The Navy refused to accept the idea that the best way to enforce a blockade was to physically occupy the port, not wait and intercept the ships at sea. Occupation of the port would require cooperation with the Army, an option unacceptable to Secretary Welles.

- Grant, Sherman, and Porter were motivated by factors other than promoting joint operations. Each had personal reasons for promoting good unity of effort.

- The Navy's contribution to the fall of Vicksburg was actually quite minimal. Joint operations did not bring the fall of Vicksburg.

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