

ADMIRAL DAVID GLASGOW FARRAGUT: A STUDY OF  
THE CRITERIA USED TO SELECT THE COMMANDER  
OF THE WEST GULF BLOCKADING SQUADRON

A thesis presented to the Faculty of the U.S. Army  
Command and General Staff College in partial  
fulfillment of the requirements for the  
degree

MASTER OF MILITARY ART AND SCIENCE  
General Studies

by

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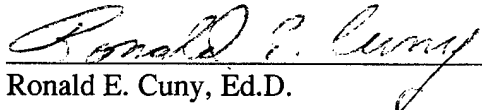
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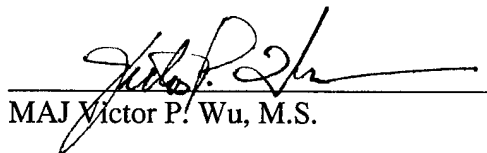
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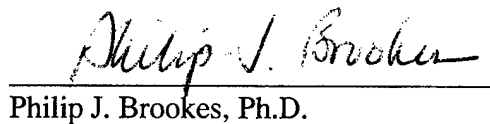
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## ABSTRACT

**ADMIRAL DAVID GLASGOW FARRAGUT: A STUDY OF THE CRITERIA USED TO SELECT THE COMANDER OF THE WEST GULF BLOCKADING SQUADRON**  
by LCDR Steven C. Ritchie, USN, 82 pages.

This study examines the life and career of Admiral David G. Farragut. Specifically, this paper addresses the primary question: Why was Farragut chosen to command the West Gulf Blockading Squadron?

This study seeks to establish the criteria used in Farragut's selection. This thesis breaks down the criteria into three areas. First, the study examines significant events in Farragut's career leading up to his selection. Second, this study analyzes Farragut's loyalty to the Union and its effect on his selection. Last, Farragut's political and family connections are examined to determine their effect on his selection.

Research shows that career performance and seniority, loyalty to country, and political connections were all factors in Farragut's appointment to command. By analyzing these factors and the selection process, this study contributes to the knowledge and understanding of how commanders were appointed during the Civil War.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### Purpose

The purpose for this study is to determine the criteria used in the selection of the Commander of the West Gulf Blockading Squadron, the most important naval expedition during the Civil War. Secretary of the Navy Gideon Welles appointed David Glasgow Farragut to this prestigious command. This thesis will seek to identify why Farragut was chosen.

#### Problem Setting

Gideon Welles, a former Democrat, small-town politician, and editor of the *Hartford Evening Post*, had supported Lincoln in the 1860 election. His reward was a post in the president's cabinet as Secretary of the Navy. His administrative skills were well adapted to the problems of war, and he used good judgment in his decisions.<sup>1</sup>

On 1 August 1861, Lincoln appointed Gustavus Fox to be Assistant Secretary of the Navy. Lincoln believed that Fox could give Welles assistance with his administrative load. Fox had served eighteen years as a naval officer and was well acquainted with naval technology. Welles' and Fox's qualities complimented each other.<sup>2</sup>

Welles and Fox had discussed the importance of the capture of New Orleans. After Du Pont's victory at Port Royal, Commander David Porter, who was Commodore Porter's son and Farragut's foster brother, arrived in Washington from serving in the Gulf of Mexico. Porter added his plan to disable the forts to Fox's plan to open up the Mississippi River by capturing New Orleans. Welles, Fox, and Porter met with Lincoln

to discuss the plan. After meeting with General McClellan, Lincoln approved the plan saying, "Go ahead, but avoid a disaster."<sup>3</sup>

The plan had been approved, but a commander was needed for the expedition.

Chester Hearn wrote:

Once Lincoln endorsed the expedition, Welles pondered for several weeks over the selection of a flag officer. He set high standards, stipulating that "the duty . . . required courage, audacity, tact, and fearless energy, with great self-reliance, decisive judgment, and ability to discriminate and act under trying and extraordinary circumstances." He and Fox scanned and studied "every prominent name in the higher grades of the navy."<sup>4</sup>

Farragut stood thirty-seventh on the unassigned Navy List.<sup>5</sup> He was not the most senior officer. Thus, the question: Why was David Glasgow Farragut chosen to command the West Gulf Blockading Squadron?

#### Research Questions

This research will determine the criteria used to select the Commander of the West Gulf Blockading Squadron. This will be accomplished by asking the question, Why was David Glasgow Farragut chosen to command the West Gulf Blockading Squadron? To answer this question, three secondary questions must first be answered.

1. How did Farragut's career and seniority contribute to his being selected?
2. How did Farragut demonstrate his loyalty to the Union and what effect did this have on his being chosen?
3. What effect did Farragut's political and family connections have on the process of his selection?

### Significance of the Research

Few full-length biographies have been written about David Glasgow Farragut despite the fact that he is one of the best known and most successful admirals of the United States Navy. Although there are a large number of biographical sketches of Farragut, these works mainly focus on Farragut's early life and on his command during the Civil War.

This study is important because it focuses on the factors that determined David Glasgow Farragut's selection and appointment as Commander of the West Gulf Blockading Squadron during the Civil War. It will provide a greater knowledge and understanding of the Civil War and how the Union dealt with the selection of commanders for the Navy forces during this time period. This research will provide a basis for future studies on comparing the process used for appointments during the Civil War to the process for present-day command appointments.

### Background

Admiral David Glasgow Farragut, the first Admiral of the United States Navy, fought with great distinction during America's Civil War. Some historians considered him to be the most important American Naval Officer prior to World War II. Numerous works listed in the bibliography directly addressed or touched upon the criteria which the Secretary of the Navy Gideon Welles used to determine which officer was to be assigned this critical billet as Commander of the West Gulf Blockading Squadron.

In 1998, *Admiral David Glasgow Farragut: The Civil War Years* by Chester G. Hearn, was published. Chester Hearn, a noted historian uses previously unavailable

family and archived records. This resource fully describes Farragut's extraordinary naval exploits, focusing primarily on the Civil War while describing his lifelong involvement with Captain David Porter, his foster father, and David Dixon Porter, his foster brother. Hearn uses recently discovered family correspondence to detail Farragut's relationships with his foster father, who signed up Farragut as a seagoing midshipman in the U.S. Navy at the age of nine, and with Porter's son, the only other full admiral to emerge from the Civil War. Hearn's work deserves credit because his book is the most detailed and complete work this author discovered that showcases Farragut's most prestigious career.<sup>6</sup>

Hearn also wrote another book *Admiral David Dixon Porter* which was published in 1996. Hearn's sources included materials now contained in official records, Porter's letter book and his journal, archival material of men who knew Porter, and the Naval Institute *Proceedings*. Hearn's book included information on events leading up to Porter's expedition to Fort Pickens and Welles' reaction to the incident. It also included details on Porter's meetings in Washington, on the plans to capture New Orleans, and on the selection of Farragut as commander of the expedition.<sup>7</sup>

Although David Glasgow Farragut is one of the best known and most successful Admirals of the U.S. Navy, there are few full-length biographies that have been written about him. Two are worthy of attention: Alfred T. Mahan's *Admiral Farragut* (New York, 1905), and Charles Lee Lewis's *David Glasgow Farragut*, two volumes (Annapolis, Maryland, 1941-1943). Loyall Farragut's biography of his father, *The Life and Letters of Admiral Farragut, First Admiral of the United States Navy* (New York,

1879), is mentioned because it was the primary source for Mahan's study and for most of the other biographies published prior to Lewis's biography.<sup>8</sup>

One source, John Niven, *Gideon Welles: Lincoln's Secretary of the Navy* (Oxford University Press, 1973), provided the most detailed account concerning Farragut's selection to command the West Gulf Blockading Squadron. Unfortunately, with few exceptions, other material quoted exactly the same sources concerning Farragut's selection. Charles Lee Lewis's *David Glasgow Farragut, Our First Admiral* (Annapolis, Maryland, 1943) references a writing by Gideon Welles in the *Galaxy, Admiral Farragut and New Orleans* (November 1871). This thesis will be focused on details of Farragut's selection found in John Niven's book. His work on this topic was more detailed and in-depth and was based on Mr. Welles's immense body of diaries and papers.<sup>9</sup>

*David Glasgow Farragut: Admiral in the Making* by Charles Lee Lewis was published in 1941. Lewis recognized that previous biographies did not have access to the large amount of material that had become available. Lewis was the first to read the original manuscript of *Some Reminiscences* by Admiral Farragut. Lewis felt that Loyall Farragut edited the original material and that using Farragut's exact words from his journals and letters could enhance that information about Farragut. He also examined the ships' logbooks to contribute to the accuracy of the information. Lewis's book relates the story of Farragut's life and a portrait of his character without glossing over Farragut's imperfections. It spans the time from Farragut's birth to the beginning of the Civil War. Lewis relates Farragut's early experiences with the Porters and his career up to the time that the Civil War began and Farragut moved to New York. Farragut's relationship with

the Porters, his plan to capture a castle at Vera Cruz during the Mexican War, and the loyalty he showed by moving to New York when Virginia seceded were all factors that influenced Welles's decision to select Farragut for command.<sup>10</sup>

After the success of his first book, Charles Lewis was encouraged to write a second volume to complete the biography on Farragut. *David Glasgow Farragut: Our First Admiral* was published in 1943. It presents Farragut's significant achievements. Material research by Lewis included Dr. Ellsworth Elliot Jr.'s collection of Farragut manuscripts, Mr. George T. Keating's copies of the note book and the diary of Farragut, microfilms of important letters from the Henry E. Huntington Library and Art Gallery, and the U.S. Naval Academy's Zabriskie Collection of manuscripts. Lewis's book covers events in Farragut's life from the time he moved his family to New York in 1861 to his death in 1870. Lewis indicates that Farragut's selection was influenced by Fox's opinion of Farragut's great superiority of character and Welles's appreciation for Farragut's plan to take the castle of San Juan d'Ulloa at Vera Cruz. Also, Captain Joe Smith, Captain Shubrick, Captain Foote and Captain Dahlgren recommended Farragut. Lewis stated that "Welles also records that Commander D. D. Porter was consulted and that he expressed confidence in Farragut."<sup>11</sup>

Loyall Farragut, *David Glasgow Farragut, First Admiral of the United States Navy*, embodies the journals and letters of his father, David Farragut. This resource describes Farragut's life from birth to death and includes his personal writings on the events of his life.<sup>12</sup>

James E. Homans, *Our Three Admirals: Farragut, Porter, Dewey*, published in 1899, provides a brief study of three officers' careers. These officers held the highest rank and title in the service and among them was David Glasgow Farragut. The biographical information in Homans's book came from biographies prepared for the *National Encyclopedia of American Biography* which family members approved. Loyall Farragut approved the biographical sketch of his father. Homans relates the events of Farragut's childhood and early career. He also examines Farragut's loyalty to the Union at the beginning of the Civil War. Although Homans includes information on Farragut's command of the West Gulf Blockading Squadron, he does not include any information on how Farragut was selected.<sup>13</sup>

*By Sea and by River: The Naval History of the Civil War* by Bern Anderson was published in 1962. Anderson recognized that the Naval History of the Civil War had not received the attention that the land campaigns had received. He discovered that most works were historical narratives relating naval events of the Civil War. Nothing had been written on the strategic impact of those events on the progress and outcome of the war. Anderson's main sources included *Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies in the War of Rebellion*, *Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies, Battles and Leaders of the Civil War*, and *Battle and Leaders*. He relates details about Secretary of the Navy Gideon Welles and Assistant Secretary of the Navy Gustavus Fox. He also gives details about the state of the U.S. Navy prior to the Civil War. Details leading up to the Civil War are examined. Anderson indicates that Welles was impressed that Farragut had left Norfolk and moved to New York when Virginia seceded. He also indicates that

Welles liked Farragut's daring plan to capture the castle of San Juan d'Ulloa at Vera Cruz during the Mexican War. Senior officers also agreed that Farragut was a capable officer. These factors influenced Welles's decision to appoint Farragut as Commander of the West Blockading Squadron.<sup>14</sup>

*Quarterdeck and Bridge*, edited by James C. Bradford, contains a chapter titled "David Glasgow Farragut" by William N. Still Jr. Still covers Farragut's life from the time of his birth to his death touching on key events. Among these events, Still briefly indicates Farragut's loyalty to the Union, his plan to capture the castle of San Juan d'Ulloa in Vera Cruz, and recommendations by Fox and Porter influenced Welles's decision to select Farragut. He also states that there were some reservations about Farragut's ability to command a large force, but Welles decided to select him regardless. "All who knew him gave him credit of being a good officer, of good sense," Welles wrote.<sup>15</sup>

Archibald Douglas Turnbull's book *Commodore David Porter, 1780-1843* was published in 1929. Turnbull's sources included papers from the Navy Department Library, Commodore Porter's journal, a book written by Admiral David D. Porter, and bits of unofficial history provided by living descendents. Turnbull's book describes the relationship between Farragut and the Porters and also the battles that Farragut fought with Porter. It is clear that Commodore Porter was a great influence in Farragut's life and career. There is no information in this book concerning the selection of Farragut by Welles.<sup>16</sup>

Clarence Edward Macartney's book *Mr. Lincoln's Admirals* was published in 1956. The opening chapter of this book contains information on about Secretary of the Navy Gideon Welles and Assistant Secretary of the Navy Gustavus Fox. It also establishes the naval background of the Civil War. In other chapters, Macartney describes the accomplishments of the Union's outstanding leaders. He includes a chapter on Farragut which includes events leading up to Welles's selection of Farragut. Welles was impressed with Farragut's act of loyalty by moving to New York when Virginia seceded. Farragut also came highly recommended by his foster brother, David Dixon Porter. Welles decided to select him for the command.<sup>17</sup>

*The Civil War at Sea* by Virgil Carrington Jones was published in 1962. Jones states, "While strength afloat can achieve many useful things of itself, a mighty virtue indeed is the added capability it gives of concentrating a nation's total power at the point of decision." Jones book addresses the Battle of Mobile Bay, which Farragut fought. It does not give any information on the selection of Farragut for the command of the West Gulf Blockading Squadron.<sup>18</sup>

Arthur W. Bergeron Jr.'s book *Confederate Mobile* was published in 1991. Securing Mobile, a major port on the Gulf Coast, was a very important objective for both the Union and the Confederacy. The book deals with events leading up to the Battle of Mobile Bay and the battle itself. Bergeron does not address Farragut's selection to be in command of the Union naval forces in the Gulf.<sup>19</sup>

*Lincoln's Admiral: The Civil War Campaigns of David Farragut* by James P. Duffy was published in 1997. Duffy examines the steps that led to Farragut's command.

Farragut's youth, his career, and his loyalty to the Union are discussed. The process by which Farragut was selected includes a statement that the elimination of John A. Dahlgren played a part in Farragut's appointment. The book goes on to examine Farragut's career after his selection.<sup>20</sup>

*Mr. Lincoln's Navy* by Richard S. West Jr. was published in 1957. West's book examines the Fort Sumter and Fort Pickens incident, Welles's buildup of the Navy, Lincoln's blockade policy, and the launching of the New Orleans expedition. West states that Welles's selection of Farragut was influenced by Farragut's termination of his Southern connections and Porter's confidence in him. Since Porter was to play a large part in the expedition, his word carried weight.<sup>21</sup>

Dave Page's book *Ships Versus Shore* was published in 1994. Page includes a chapter on Louisiana. Steps leading up to the Battle of New Orleans and the battle itself are examined. Page states that Welles was impressed with Farragut's plan to attack Vera Cruz during the Mexican War and asked him to adapt the plan to use against New Orleans.<sup>22</sup>

*Damn the Torpedoes! Naval Incidents of the Civil War* by A. A. Hoehling was published in 1989. Hoehling believed that the naval actions of the Civil War were overshadowed by the land battles. His book includes stories on Farragut's battles. Nothing about Farragut's selection was included.<sup>23</sup>

David F. Long's book *Nothing Too Daring* was published in 1970. It is a biography of Commodore David Porter from 1780 to 1843. Long includes events in Farragut's childhood related to his connection with the Porter family.<sup>24</sup>

Not having access to primary sources, this author relied heavily on the authors of these book who did have access to original documents, papers, and journals. Many of these books provided ample background information on the life of Farragut and his career following his appointment as commander of the West Gulf Blockading Squadron. Some sources included information on the events that led up to his appointment and these are discussed in chapter 3.

### Delimitations

This study uses historical material to examine the factors and criteria that influenced the decision of the Secretary of the Navy Gideon Welles to appoint David Glasgow Farragut as Commander of the West Gulf Blockading Squadron during the Civil War. Many sources were researched and analyzed to determine these factors: career and seniority, loyalty to the Union, and political and family connections. This research focuses on these factors to answer the question: Why was David Glasgow Farragut chosen to command the West Gulf Blockading Squadron? Although this study briefly examines the life and career of Admiral Farragut, it is not meant to be an in-depth biography.

### Limitations

This research was limited to historical sources that could be obtained in the local area. The source by John Niven *Gideon Welles: Lincoln's Secretary of the Navy* (Oxford University Press, 1973) provided the most recent writings concerning Farragut's selection to command the West Gulf Blockading Squadron. Unfortunately, with few exceptions, other sources quoted exactly the same source concerning Farragut's selection. Having no

access to primary research material, this study relies heavily upon Chester Hearn, *Admiral David Glasgow Farragut: The Civil War Years*, for his references to primary research material. Fortunately, he had access to the Naval Academy Museum which provided him papers of Farragut including the Zabriskie Collection, which is mainly Farragut's wartime papers, but also contains many of the Admiral's letters to and from his prewar and postwar friends and associates. He also obtained primary-source documents through the Brown Library in Williamsport, Pennsylvania. Other sources, archives, papers, letters, and other collections were obtained from the following: U.S. Naval Institute; Naval Academy's Nimitz Library; Huntington Library in San Marino, California; Historical Society of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia; Louisiana Historical Association; National Archives; and the Library of Congress.

### Methodology

#### Introduction

This study uses historical research to address the primary question: Why was David Glasgow Farragut chosen to command the West Gulf Blockading Squadron? This will be accomplished by answering the following three secondary questions:

1. How did Farragut's career and seniority contribute to his being selected?
2. How did Farragut demonstrate his loyalty to the Union and what effect did this have on his being chosen?
3. What effect did Farragut's political and family connections have on the process of his selection?

## Specific Aspects of Methodology

There are five principal parts to the research methodology of this paper. Chapter 1 states the purpose, problem setting, primary and secondary research questions, significance of the study, background, delimitations and limitations of the research, methodology used, and definitions of terms. Chapter 2 summarizes and evaluates existing literature on David G. Farragut prior to his selection as the Commander of the West Gulf Blockading Squadron. Chapter 3 summarizes events leading up to the ratification of the plan for the West Gulf Blockading Squadron and the need for a commander. Chapter 4 completes the research by analyzing the selection of David Farragut as Commander. Chapter 5 provides a summary, conclusions drawn, and recommendations for further research.

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<sup>1</sup>Chester G. Hearn, *Admiral David Glasgow Farragut: The Civil War Years* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1998), 46.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, 46.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, 46-48.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, 49.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, 50.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup>Chester G. Hearn, *Admiral David Dixon Porter: The Civil War Years* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1996), 1-118.

<sup>8</sup>James C. Bradford, ed., *Quarterdeck and Bridge: Two Centuries of American Naval Leaders* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1997), 125-145.

<sup>9</sup>John Niven, *Gideon Welles: Lincoln's Secretary of the Navy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), 3-387.

<sup>10</sup>Charles Lee Lewis, *David Glasgow Farragut: Admiral in the Making* (Annapolis, MD: United States Naval Institute, 1941), 1-296.

<sup>11</sup>Charles Lee Lewis, *David Glasgow Farragut: Our First Admiral* (Annapolis, MD: United States Naval Institute, 1943), 1-65.

<sup>12</sup>Loyall Farragut, *The Life of David Glasgow Farragut, First Admiral of the United States Navy* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1879), 5-159.

<sup>13</sup>James E. Homans, *Our Three Admirals: Farragut, Porter, Dewey* (New York: James T. White & Co., 1899), 1-72.

<sup>14</sup>Bern Anderson, *By Sea and by River* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1962), 2-293.

<sup>15</sup>Bradford, 125-143.

<sup>16</sup>Archibald Douglas Turnbull, *Commodore David Porter 1780-1843* (New York: The Century Co., 1929), 80-104.

<sup>17</sup>Clarence Edward Macartney, *Mr. Lincoln's Admirals* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1956), 3-317.

<sup>18</sup>Virgil C. Jones, *The Civil War at Sea* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1956), 229-312.

<sup>19</sup>Arthur W. Bergeron, Jr., *Confederate Mobile* (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 1991), 36-195.

<sup>20</sup>James P. Duffy, *Lincoln's Admiral: The Civil War Campaigns of David Farragut* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1997), 3-262.

<sup>21</sup>Richard Sedgewick West, *Mr. Lincoln's Navy* (New York: Longmans, Green and Company, 1957), 1-157.

<sup>22</sup>Dave Page, *Ships Versus Shore* (Nashville, TN: Rutledge Hill Press, 1994), 285-332.

<sup>23</sup>A. A. Hoehling, *Damn the Torpedoes! Naval Incidents of the Civil War* (Winston-Salem, NC: John F. Blair, 1989), 1-185.

<sup>24</sup>David Long, *Nothing Too Daring: A Biography of Commodore David Porter* (Annapolis, MD: United States Naval Institute, 1970), 1-100.

## CHAPTER 2

### DAVID GLASGOW FARRAGUT

#### Farragut's Childhood

Farragut was of pure Spanish blood on his father's side. His father, George Farragut, was born at Ciudadela on one of the Balearic Islands off the coast of Spain. He was a descendent of Don Pedro, who helped expel the Moors from Spain. George Farragut's career began at the age of ten and included service in the Russian Navy and service with the colonies against the British. He fought many battles on land and sea. While serving in the Tennessee militia, he married Elizabeth Shine, and they lived in Campbell's Station where David Glasgow Farragut was born.<sup>1</sup>

David Glasgow Farragut was born on 5 July 1801 at Campbell's Station, near Knoxville, Tennessee. Farragut spent the first six years of his life in a rustic cabin on the Tennessee River. Indians continually attacked residents of Tennessee, which caused George Farragut to be gone frequently serving in the militia. Farragut's most vivid childhood memory was "the day hostile Indians made their appearance, and his courageous mother, having put the children in the loft in the barn, stood at the door with an uplifted ax in her hand."<sup>2</sup> His father arrived shortly after the Indians left. He pursued the Indians with his command, overtook them, and punished them. The Indians never returned to the cabin.<sup>3</sup>

In 1807, Farragut's family moved to New Orleans where Major George Farragut took command of a gunboat. One day while Farragut's father was lake fishing he noticed a man in a boat that was suffering from sunstroke. Mr. George Farragut helped this man

and took him home with him to care for him. This sick man was Mr. David Porter, Sr. Mr. Porter did not recover and after some time in Farragut's care, he died. This was a very trying time for the Farragut household. Young David's mother had been critically ill with Yellow Fever as well and died the same day as Mr. Porter.<sup>4</sup>

Mr. George Farragut was overwhelmed with the loss of his wife and friend Mr. Porter. To make matters worse, he found it difficult to care for all his children. One day Commander David Porter, Mr. Porter's son, visited him. Commander David Porter, then in charge of the New Orleans Naval Station, as an act of gratitude, offered to take one of Farragut's children to raise. Young David, eight years of age, was impressed with the Commander's uniform with the gold stripes on the sleeves. David told his father that he would like to go and live with Commander David Porter and his family.<sup>5</sup>

After George Farragut was relieved of command of the gunboat, he was transferred to the naval station at New Orleans. At this time, he also purchased a farm on the Pascagoula River.<sup>6</sup> Farragut wrote:

I accompanied a young man whom my father sent to clear the place. This expedition was my first experience on salt water, and I fervently hoped, at that time, it would be my last. He took us in a small boat across Lake Pontchartrain, when it was blowing almost a gale.<sup>7</sup>

About his father, Farragut wrote, "When anyone suggested to him the risk to which he subjected his children in thus crossing the Lake, he generally replied that now was the time to conquer their fears."<sup>8</sup>

George Farragut had a very strong fondness for the sea. When his health prevented him from participating in active naval service or extended cruises, he made

frequent trips with his children across Lake Pontchartrain. Farragut wrote, "When the weather was bad we usually slept on the beach of one of the numerous islands in the Lake, or else on the shore of the main land, wrapped in the boat sail, and, if the weather was cold, we generally half buried ourselves in the dry sand."<sup>9</sup>

Farragut wrote in his journal, "I continued to reside with Commodore Porter, occasionally accompanying him on excursions and boat expeditions, and sometimes going with my father across the Lake to his plantation; so that I soon became fond of this adventurous sort of life."<sup>10</sup>

When Commander Porter was relieved from command of the New Orleans Naval Station, Farragut accompanied him on the *Vesuvius* to Washington. They stopped in Havana where they heard a British ship had fired into the *Vixen*, a U.S. Navy ship.<sup>11</sup>

Farragut wrote of the incident:

I mention this merely because I believe it was the first thing that caused bad feeling in me toward the English nation. I was too young to know anything about the Revolution; but I looked upon this as an insult to be paid in kind, and was anxious to discharge the debt with interest.<sup>12</sup>

Farragut was placed in school while Commander Porter and his family remained in Washington for several months. While Farragut was in Washington, he met Secretary of the Navy Paul Hamilton who promised him a midshipman's warrant when he turned ten. The Porter family then moved to their residence in Chester, Pennsylvania. Farragut moved with them and again attended school until Commander Porter was appointed to command the *Essex*, and Farragut was given his midshipman's warrant.<sup>13</sup>

### Farragut's Early Adventures at Sea

Commander Porter and Farragut traveled by stage from Chester to Norfolk, Virginia, to join the *Essex*. The ship was refitted and then they joined the coast squadron.

Farragut wrote:

We cruised on the coast, and exercised the crews until they were brought to as great a state of perfection and discipline as ever existed, probably, in the Navy. Our ship, the *Essex*, was the "smartest" in the squadron.<sup>14</sup>

David Farragut always attributed his appointment in the Navy to his parents nursing Sailing Master David Porter prior to his death and Commander Porter's generosity and gratefulness for this act.<sup>15</sup> Commander Porter did play a role in Farragut's appointment, but Farragut's father probably would have eventually secured an appointment for him.

The incident no doubt had an important bearing on his career; but it is highly probable that, even if he had never met his "kind friend and guardian," as he calls Commodore Porter, to whom he acknowledged through life his great obligations, and with whom to the last he maintained the closest relations of friendship, his early training, his fondness for sea life, and the inclinations of his father who had already procured the appointment of his eldest son William in the Navy, would still have given David Glasgow to the same service.<sup>16</sup>

After the war broke out with Great Britain in 1812, the *Essex* captured a number of prizes in the Pacific. At the age of twelve, Farragut, as prize master, took one of them into a city in Chile.<sup>17</sup> This event was of great importance in shaping Farragut's character. Farragut was selected to command a party of seamen on the *Barclay*, an American whaler that had been recaptured from Peruvian privateers, during a long transit. The Captain of the *Barclay* went with his ship and was very upset that the command of the seamen was not given to him, but to a little boy. Being a violent-tempered old man, he attempted to

overawe the boy so that he would surrender his authority. "When the day arrived for our separation from the squadron," Farragut writes in his journal, "the Captain was furious, and very plainly intimated to me that I would find myself off New Zealand in the morning." Farragut demurred to this because the other ships were fast disappearing from view.<sup>18</sup>

I considered that my day of trial had arrived, as I was a little afraid of the old fellow, as every one else was. But the time had come for me at least to play the man; so I mustered up courage and informed the captain that I desired the maintopsail filled away, in order that we might close the other ships. He replied that he would shoot any man who dared to touch a rope without his orders; he would go his own course, and had no idea of trusting himself with a d—d nutshell; and then he went below for his pistols. I called my right-hand man of the crew and told him the situation. I also informed him that I wanted the maintopsail filled. He answered with a clear "Ay, ay, sir!" in a manner which was not to be misunderstood, and my confidence was perfectly restored. From that moment I became master of the vessel, and immediately gave all necessary orders for making sail, notifying the captain not to come on deck with his pistols unless his wished to go overboard, for I would really have had very little trouble in having such an order obeyed.<sup>19</sup>

Farragut reported the incident to Captain Downes upon rejoining him. The captain also gave his report indicating that he only tried to frighten Farragut. To show the captain that he did not fear him, Farragut offered to proceed with him to Valparaiso. Farragut was in command. The captain was only his adviser in navigating the vessel. Thus, the voyage went smoothly.<sup>20</sup> Farragut later wrote that commanding the *Barclay* was "an important event in my life. I felt no little pride at finding myself in command at twelve years of age."<sup>21</sup>

Farragut was very impressed with the *Essex*. Porter had done all that he could in the way of preparing for victory by refitting his ship and drilling his crew. Farragut had most admirable models, both in his captain and in his ship.<sup>22</sup>

The former daring to recklessness, yet leaving nothing to chance; fearless of responsibility, but ever sagacious in its exercise; a rigid disciplinarian, who yet tempered rigor by a profound knowledge of and sympathy with the peculiarities of the men who were under him. The latter--the ship--became, as ships under strong captains tend to become the embodiment of the commander's spirit.<sup>23</sup>

Farragut never failed to give credit to Commander Porter for the "rare ability and resplendent heroism which distinguished that great naval commander." Farragut and his country were fortunate that "the young sailor was trained in a school so admirably adapted to develop his character and shape his career."<sup>24</sup>

On 28 March 1814, the *Essex* fought the two British warships *Cherub* and *Phoebe*. *Essex* and her crew fought well but were outnumbered and after a bloody and long fight, she lowered her flag after two and a half hours. She had gone into battle with 255 men. Of these, 58 were killed, 66 wounded, and 31 missing.<sup>25</sup> When the *Essex* was taken, Farragut became a prisoner of war.

Farragut was almost thirteen years old when he experienced this, the longest and bloodiest battle of his distinguished career. He was not in command during this battle and thus did not experience the demand "upon the professional ability or the moral courage which grapples with responsibility, of which he gave such high proof in his later life."<sup>26</sup> Even so, Farragut had performed extremely well during the battle, and Commander Porter would have recommended him for promotion except that he was too young. It was on the *Essex* that young Farragut found himself, at the beginning of his

career, facing several severe tests of his arduous calling. Long stormy passages and naval battles shaped Farragut's young career.<sup>27</sup> During his first fifteen years of his life, David Farragut had more experiences at sea than some sailors have in their entire career.<sup>28</sup>

#### Farragut Continues His Education

In 1817, Farragut accompanied Mr. Charles Folsom, a chaplain, to Tunis and remained there for the purpose of furthering his education. Mr. Folsom wrote:

Mr. Farragut has been, almost from infancy, in the naval service, with exceedingly limited opportunities of improving his mind. His prospects in life depend on his merits and abilities in a peculiar manner, as he is entirely destitute of the aids of fortune or the influences of friends, other than those whom his character may attach to him.<sup>29</sup>

In that same letter, Folsom also wrote:

During his connection with this ship a favorable change has been observed in him. He has acquired a sense of character and a manly tone of thinking from which the best results are to be expected. His desire of cultivating his mind, which at first was feeble, has grown into an ardent zeal. His attention to his studies of late, the manner in which he has repaid my endeavors to advance his knowledge, his improving character, and his peculiar situation, have conspired to excite in me a strong interest in his welfare, and a wish to do all in my power to promote his education. At this critical period of his life, the opportunity he may enjoy with me may prove of incalculable advantage to him, while his conduct for some time past affords a pledge that he will not be disposed to abuse it. He sees that Mr. Ogden, his constant companion in service, has been manifestly benefited by a similar indulgence, and a generous ambition makes him unwilling to be surpassed by one with whom he has formerly been put in competition.<sup>30</sup>

Farragut traveled with Mr. Folsom to Marseilles and then to Tunis where he lived and studied for nine months. During this time, he studied mathematics, English literature, French, and Italian. Three months into his studies, his health started to suffer from spending too much time indoors. The doctor recommended that he take a horseback trip.<sup>31</sup> It was during this trip that Farragut experienced sunstroke that caused a partial

paralysis of his tongue. He was unable to speak and suffered from nausea for several hours.<sup>32</sup> Farragut's vision was affected for the rest of his life. He was never able to read or write even one page without straining his eyes.<sup>33</sup>

After Farragut returned to Tunis, the plague broke out. In October 1818, Farragut decided to accompany the Danish Consul to Leghorn to escape the plague. There, they had to endure a forty-day quarantine. From there, Farragut went on to Pisa then onto Messina, Sicily, where he reported for duty. He spent the remainder of the winter in Messina where he attended balls and participated in sporting events. Farragut wrote, "I always held my own at all athletic exercises."<sup>34</sup>

#### Farragut Returns to Sea

In 1819, Farragut deployed to the Mediterranean on the *Franklin*. Subsequently, he was appointed as acting lieutenant on the *Shark*. Farragut wrote the following about his promotion:

One of the important events of my life was obtaining an acting lieutenancy when but little over eighteen years of age. This caused me to feel that I was now associated with men, on an equality, and must act with more circumspection. When I became First Lieutenant, my duties were still more important; for, in truth, I was really commander of the vessel, and yet I was not responsible--an anomalous position, which has spoiled some of our best officers. I consider it a great advantage to obtain command young, having observed, as a general thing, that persons who come into authority late in life shrink from responsibility, and often break down under its weight.<sup>35</sup>

The *Shark* proceeded to Malta and then to Port Mahon. In the spring of 1820, Commodore Bainbridge took command and Farragut was ordered home to take his examination.

### Farragut's Adventure Going Home

Farragut took passage on the *America*, a merchant ship. A few days from the coast of the United States, a Colombian brig of war approached them. Farragut observed, "Men trained to arms will never fail, if properly led." He then took charge of the ship until he was sure there was no danger.<sup>36</sup>

When we consider that it was a boy of eighteen, orphaned at an early age, and thrown upon his own resources, who accomplished this feat of assuming command of a vessel in which he was a passenger, infusing a martial spirit into the crew of a merchantman in actual contemplation of an immediate battle, and preparing for a skillful and gallant defense against a supposed pirate, we can then see that the Admiral of after years was not made such in a day, or by the mere exigencies of the Civil War, but was born for it and trained for it through a long experience.<sup>37</sup>

### The Perry Family Incident

While in New York for his examination, Farragut became involved in the court-martial of Christopher Raymond Perry for drunkenness. Perry was the brother-in-law of Captain George W. Rodgers and the brother of Oliver Hazard Perry and Matthew Calbraith Perry. Farragut had served under Perry and knew him as a drunk and stated so. This almost resulted in a duel between Farragut and Rodgers. Rodgers got even with Farragut by convincing the examining board to reject Farragut for promotion because of insubordination.<sup>38</sup> In 1821, he was finally promoted to Lieutenant and commanded the *Ferret*, his first naval command. Farragut later wrote of the Perry incident:

It was a good lesson that has served me much in life, although it cost me dearly. It was the hardest blow I have ever sustained to my pride and the greatest mortification to my vanity. I might have deserved a rebuke, as I am told some of the members proposed, but certainly not a punishment that was to last during life.<sup>39</sup>

### Farragut's Personal Life

In 1823, he married Susan C. Marchant of Norfolk, Virginia. She suffered for many years from neuralgia, and Farragut spent his shore duty caring for her. Farragut took her to New York for four months for treatment in 1826 and then returned to Norfolk where he remained for two years to take care for her. Farragut then returned to sea duty. But when his wife's condition deteriorated in 1834, he returned to care for her until 1838. She was so fragile during this time that he had to carry her like a child. Farragut again returned to sea duty in 1838, but in 1839 he had to return to Norfolk and remained there with his wife until she died in December 1840.<sup>40</sup> Farragut wrote:

At this time the disease of my afflicted wife appeared to be drawing to a crisis. On the 27th of December, she terminated a life of unequalled suffering, which for sixteen years she had borne with unparalleled resignation and patience, affording a beautiful example of calmness and fortitude.<sup>41</sup>

Farragut's gentleness of character was well demonstrated by the way that he cared for his invalid wife. He was constantly with her when he was not at sea, caring for her through sixteen years of suffering. Those who knew him remarked upon it, and one lady said, "When Captain Farragut dies, he should have a monument reaching to the skies, made by every wife in the city contributing a stone to it."<sup>42</sup>

Three years later, Farragut married Virginia Loyall, also of Norfolk. They had one son whom they named Loyall.<sup>43</sup>

### The Plan to Capture the Castle of San Juan in Vera Cruz

From the end of the War of 1812 until the time of the Civil War, Farragut's career was varied but unspectacular. He served as First Lieutenant on the *Natchez* in 1833

during the Nullification Crisis when South Carolina disregarded the U.S. revenue laws.<sup>44</sup> He received his first major command, the sloop *Decatur*, in 1842 and his last, the *Brooklyn*, in 1860. In between his command of the *Decatur* and his command of the *Brooklyn*, he commanded the *Saratoga* during the Mexican War. At the outbreak of the Mexican War, Farragut had made application for command urging "that I could take the castle of San Juan d'Ulloa at Vera Cruz with the *Pennsylvania* and two sloops of war like the *Saratoga*."<sup>45</sup>

Farragut had served on the sloop-of-war *Erie* in the Gulf in 1838 during the war between France and Mexico and was present when the French, under Admiral Baudin, took the castle. Immediately after the surrender, Farragut studied the castle and realized its vulnerability to ships. He also studied the French plans of attack.<sup>46</sup> Farragut later wrote that he "made it a rule of my life to note these things with a view to the possible future."<sup>47</sup>

Farragut used this experience to form his plan.<sup>48</sup> He was almost determined to be a "monomaniac" at the declaration of this plan and obviously the plan was not permitted. Ironically, it was this plan, of which Welles was familiar that helped secure Farragut's prestigious command during the Civil War.<sup>49</sup>

Farragut took command of the *Saratoga* and proceeded to Vera Cruz, but he arrived too late. The castle had already surrendered to army forces under General Scott.<sup>50</sup> Farragut called this cruise the "most mortifying in his experience because when he arrived, he found the castle in the hands of the army and not the navy."<sup>51</sup> Farragut wrote, "The Navy would stand on a different footing today, if our ships had made the attack."<sup>52</sup>

He believed that the rank of Admiral should exist in the Navy and that the grade should be created because of a brilliant achievement. He felt that an opportunity had been thrown away by the failure of the Navy to attack the castle.<sup>53</sup>

Farragut also thought this a mortifying experience because Commodore Perry would not allow him to participate in any expeditions. Farragut believed that the reason for this was related to Farragut's earlier role in the court-martial of Perry's brother for drunkenness.<sup>54</sup>

#### Establishing Mare Island Navy Yard

Of his shore assignments the most important was the period from 1854 to 1859, which he spent in California establishing the Mare Island Navy Yard. The Federal Government needed a naval yard on the Pacific Coast. The site chosen was Mare Island in San Pablo Bay. In 1854, Farragut was ordered to begin work on establishing the navy yard. Farragut labored to complete the project, so that it would be ready to repair and supply cruisers in case of war.<sup>55</sup>

During the four years at Mare Island, Farragut's health improved. He had suffered from Yellow Fever and cholera while serving in tropical climates. The daily exercise and the good climate on the Pacific Coast agreed with him.<sup>56</sup>

#### Farragut's Loyalty

In September 1855 he was promoted to captain. When the Civil War broke out, he was awaiting orders at home in Norfolk. Then sixty years old, he had spent nearly half a century in the Navy.<sup>57</sup>

Although Farragut's native state was Tennessee, he had made his home for many years in Virginia. His wife was also a Virginian. He was in Norfolk awaiting orders during the winter of 1860-1861. During the period of unrest, they hoped and prayed that there would not be a civil war. Through all of this, Farragut strongly opposed secession. He also had close associations with the South and did not want to fight against it. "God forbid," he said, "that I should have to raise my hand against the South!" but the words themselves showed that, however bitter the decision, he was ready to make it.<sup>58</sup> The situation deteriorated when states that had seceded started seizing forts. Farragut supported Lincoln's decision to recover forts taken by seceding states. He felt a strong allegiance to the United States. Virginia voted to secede on 17 April. Farragut learned of the states' action when he visited his friends at a local store the next day. Farragut immediately felt a change in attitude towards him from his fellow officers. They told him that he must either resign from the Navy or leave Norfolk.<sup>59</sup> He replied, "I can not live here, and will seek some other place where I can live, and on two hours' notice."<sup>60</sup> He immediately went home and said to his wife, "This act of mine may cause years of separation from your family; so you must decide quickly whether you will go north or remain here."<sup>61</sup> She told him she would go and immediately began to pack.<sup>62</sup>

Farragut then moved his family to New York. They moved into a small cottage in the village of Hastings on the Hudson. There he remained waiting for four months. As an officer of Southern descent, he was under suspicion. On 1 May, Farragut wrote to Secretary of the Navy Gideon Welles. He explained his reasons for moving and requested active duty. On 22 June, Farragut executed an oath of allegiance in which he

promised to serve the U.S. “honestly and faithfully, without any mental reservation, against all their enemies and opposers whatsoever.” Then Farragut again waited for orders.<sup>63</sup>

Time was needed to allow public opinion to settle and for the Federal Government itself to wait and determine which officers would resign. While so many officers were resigning and joining the Confederacy, Farragut remained loyal. This enhanced his standing with Welles. Nevertheless, Welles was reluctant to give an important post to an officer of Southern birth.<sup>64</sup> Later, Welles and Fox would admit that Farragut’s actions in moving his family to New York made a favorable impression on them, but Welles was aware of the political reality.<sup>65</sup>

#### Farragut Serves on the Retirement Board

The Navy had relatively few serviceable vessels compared to the long list of senior officers awaiting command. Welles recalled, “While it might have been wrong to dismiss any of them from the service, it would have been a greater wrong to give some of them active service.”<sup>66</sup> On 3 August, Congress allowed the Navy to establish a retirement board. On 4 September, Farragut finally received orders and was appointed to this board. These were not the orders that he wanted. The duty, though most important with war actually existing, was delicate and trying and far from consonant to Farragut’s active and enterprising character. “Though the duty was distasteful, Farragut handled it with delicacy, impartiality, and decisiveness.”<sup>67</sup>

### Farragut Awaits Active Duty Orders

Welles did not know which of his Southern-born officers he could trust. This made Welles hesitate to appoint Farragut to active duty. To pass the time Farragut would take long walks. The paranoid locals thought he was on a mission to destroy the Croton Aqueduct and deprive New York City of its water supply.<sup>68</sup>

While Farragut was taking long walks, Confederates occupied every fort along the Southern Coastline from Texas to the Potomac River below Washington. At the same time, Welles was trying to implement a blockade of Southern ports.<sup>69</sup>

### A Summary of Farragut's Life and Service

Farragut had already lived a life filled with interesting experiences and adventures. He had lived through the age of sail to the age of steam. He had served under or with David Porter, William Bainbridge, Oliver Hazard Perry, Charles Morris, Charles Stewart, Jacob Jones, Jesse D. Elliott, Isaac Chauncey, John Downes, and other distinguished officers. In several cruises he became familiar with many Mediterranean ports, fought pirates in the Caribbean, and was at the Brazil Station during a time of civil strife. Farragut had perhaps "become more familiar with the Mexican people and the eastern coast of Mexico than any other officer in the United States Navy."<sup>70</sup> He had been off Vera Cruz when the French took the Castle of San Juan de Ulloa. He had taken part in the Mexican War. Farragut had been on the *Brandywine* when it transported General Lafayette back to France after his visit to the United States. He witnessed the "wise use of force and diplomacy" on the *Natchez* off Charleston during the Nullification crisis. Farragut had also met many distinguished people throughout his career including the

Grand Duke of Tuscany, the Emperor of Austria, Prince Metternich and the King of Naples, Dom Pedro I of Brazil, General Santa Anna of Mexico, General Rosas of Buenos Aires, General Lafayette and Admiral Baudin of France, American Ministers to Mexico Poinsett and McLane, and General Winfield Scott.<sup>71</sup>

Farragut served as a member of a naval board to select incapacitated officers for retirement. Farragut's chances for command were not promising. He was close to retirement age, had been passed over three times for squadron commander, and had spent very little time at sea since the Mexican War. He gained the ill will of the powerful Perry family through a youthful indiscretion, which probably delayed his promotion and kept him from distinguishing himself during the Mexican War. In fact, his greatest accomplishment had been the establishment of the Mare Island Navy Yard.<sup>72</sup>

#### Farragut's Personal Hardships

Farragut's life also included afflictions and periods of dull routine when the future seemed to hold no offer of promotion or professional distinction. He suffered sunstroke in Tunis that handicapped his eyesight for the rest of his life. He had to flee Tunis because of the plague. He suffered through attacks of Yellow Fever three or four times and one attack of cholera that he barely survived.<sup>73</sup>

#### Farragut's Character and Leadership Skills

Farragut had complete confidence in his own judgment and in his opinion about anything related to naval affairs including naval officers, operations, and tactics. He is quoted as having said, "As to being prepared for defeat, I certainly am not. Any man who is prepared for defeat, would be half defeated before he commenced."<sup>74</sup> Farragut's self-

confidence evolved from his intelligence, knowledge, and a passion for careful and thorough planning. He spent hours studying the different positions in which ships might be placed using wooden models. He would also get underway to practice keeping close order and changing formation and course.<sup>75</sup>

The tactics he employed were carefully worked out, based on an analysis of his weaknesses and those of this opponent. One of his greatest innovations was the lashing of weak vessels to the sides of more powerful warships. He grasped the limitations of land fortifications in naval actions and utilized this tactical understanding successfully. He also believed in maximum firepower. "The best protection against the enemy's fire is a well-directed fire from our own guns."<sup>76</sup>

Farragut had an extremely energetic and aggressive nature, which is absolutely essential for a successful military commander. The strain of conflict seemed to tap new reservoirs of strength. He enjoyed demonstrating his physical strength and agility. His mental vigor was apparent and remarked upon by observers.<sup>77</sup>

Farragut's personal courage greatly influenced his actions. Many attributed his extraordinary courage to strong religious beliefs. Yet, this does not adequately explain his willingness to "Damn the torpedoes."<sup>78</sup> His sense of duty and his unusually strong desire to succeed in the Navy was a more likely explanation. Farragut himself said, "He who dies in doing his duty . . . has played out the drama of life to the best advantage."<sup>79</sup> Bern Anderson wrote, "The Navy would not produce another officer as gifted as Farragut until the naval leaders of World War II."<sup>80</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Alfred T. Mahan, *Admiral Farragut* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1905), 1-4.

<sup>2</sup>Clarence Edward Macartney, *Mr. Lincoln's Admirals* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1956), 32.

<sup>3</sup>Loyall Farragut, *David Glasgow Farragut, First Admiral of the United States Navy* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1879), 5-8.

<sup>4</sup>Charles Lee Lewis, *David Glasgow Farragut: Admiral in the Making* (Annapolis, MD: United States Naval Institute, 1941), 17.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>6</sup>Farragut, 9.

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*, 9-10.

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup>Lewis, *David Glasgow Farragut: Admiral in the Making*, 125.

<sup>18</sup>Mahan, 26.

<sup>19</sup>Chester G. Hearn, *Admiral David Glasgow Farragut: The Civil War Years* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1998), 8-9.

- <sup>20</sup>Mahan, 26-27.
- <sup>21</sup>James P. Duffy, *Lincoln's Admiral: The Civil War Campaigns of David Farragut* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1997), 10.
- <sup>22</sup>Mahan, 31.
- <sup>23</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>24</sup>Farragut, 31.
- <sup>25</sup>Mahan, 31-44.
- <sup>26</sup>Ibid., 44-45.
- <sup>27</sup>Lewis, *David Glasgow Farragut: Admiral in the Making* , 125.
- <sup>28</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>29</sup>Farragut, 61.
- <sup>30</sup>Ibid., 61-62.
- <sup>31</sup>Ibid., 63-64.
- <sup>32</sup>Ibid., 65.
- <sup>33</sup>Duffy, 20.
- <sup>34</sup>Ibid., 75.
- <sup>35</sup>Ibid., 81.
- <sup>36</sup>Ibid., 81-82.
- <sup>37</sup>Ibid., 83.
- <sup>38</sup>Ibid., 22-23.
- <sup>39</sup>Ibid., 23.
- <sup>40</sup>Ibid., 103-136.
- <sup>41</sup>Ibid., 136.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid.

<sup>43</sup>James C. Bradford, *Quarterdeck and Bridge: Two Centuries of American Naval Leaders* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1997), 125-146.

<sup>44</sup>Farragut, 113.

<sup>45</sup>James E. Homans, *Our Three Admirals: Farragut, Porter, Dewey* (New York: James T. White & Co., 1989), 24.

<sup>46</sup>Jim Dan Hill, *Sea Dogs of the Sixties* (New York: A. S. Barnes & Company, Inc., 1935), 156-157.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., 157.

<sup>48</sup>Farragut, 156.

<sup>49</sup>Homans, 24.

<sup>50</sup>Farragut, 158.

<sup>51</sup>Hearn, *Admiral David Glasgow Farragut: The Civil War Years*, 34.

<sup>52</sup>Farragut, 158-159.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., 159.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid., 168-169.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid., 169.

<sup>57</sup>Mahan, 99-110.

<sup>58</sup>Hearn, *Admiral David Glasgow Farragut: The Civil War Years*, 41-42.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid.

<sup>60</sup>Lewis, *David Glasgow Farragut: Admiral in the Making*, 291.

<sup>61</sup>Mahan, 114.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid.

<sup>63</sup>Hearn, *Admiral David Glasgow Farragut: The Civil War Years*, 42-43.

<sup>64</sup>Macartney, 29.

<sup>65</sup>John Niven, *Gideon Welles: Lincoln's Secretary of the Navy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), 383.

<sup>66</sup>Hearn, *Admiral David Glasgow Farragut: The Civil War Years*, 43.

<sup>67</sup>Ibid.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid.

<sup>69</sup>Ibid.

<sup>70</sup>Lewis, *David Glasgow Farragut: Admiral in the Making*, 293-294..

<sup>71</sup>Ibid., 294.

<sup>72</sup>Bradford, 125-146.

<sup>73</sup>Lewis, *David Glasgow Farragut: Admiral in the Making*, 294.

<sup>74</sup>Macartney, 143.

<sup>75</sup>Ibid.

<sup>76</sup>Ibid., 144.

<sup>77</sup>Ibid.

<sup>78</sup>Ibid., 145.

<sup>79</sup>Ibid.

<sup>80</sup>Ibid.

## CHAPTER 3

### EVENTS PRIOR TO FARRAGUT'S SELECTION

The naval officers who obtained success in the war of the rebellion ought not to forget, amidst the honors and rewards they won, how much they were indebted to the Herculean efforts of those in the Navy Department, for the support they received under the most trying circumstances--how after the first surprise of being forced into a great war, and the slow process of realizing the situation had been passed, ships and guns were furnished as if by magic.<sup>1</sup>

Clarence Edward Macartney, *Mr. Lincoln's Admirals*

#### Introduction

The war came along when the navy was transitioning from sail to steam, wooden ships to iron, smoothbore guns and solid shot to rifled cannon and explosive shells. It was also the first effective use in naval warfare of revolving turrets, mines, submarines, and graduated gun sights. The controversies within the naval service as to these innovations were vigorous, at times bitter.<sup>2</sup>

Clarence Edward Macartney, *Mr. Lincoln's Admirals*

President Lincoln declared a blockade of the Southern Coastline in April 1861.

At the time, there were only twenty-nine steam vessels of war in the entire Navy. When Lincoln was inaugurated, there were only three warships available for use in Union ports. Large numbers of ships had to be built or purchased in a remarkably short time period. The South soon began to feel the effects of the blockade.<sup>3</sup>

It was a gigantic enterprise to procure the ships necessary for battle and for blockade duty. After the ships had been bought or built, they had to be maintained. The

engines had to be kept in running order, and the guns had to be ready for firing. Also, the crews had to be properly trained and disciplined.<sup>4</sup>

The work of the Navy was obvious: "to establish a blockade of southern coasts and ports all the way from Cape Henry to the Rio Grande; to get possession of the Mississippi, and its tributary streams and thus cut the Confederacy in two, separating Texas, Louisiana and Arkansas from the seceded states east of the Mississippi."<sup>5</sup> The Navy needed fast cruisers to run down blockade runners and commerce raiders. They had to be capable of attacking various forts and capturing important port cities, such as Charleston, Savannah, Mobile, New Orleans, and Vicksburg.<sup>6</sup>

By January 1861, 37 percent of commissioned Navy officers had resigned and joined the Confederacy. Among the Southern-born Navy officers who joined the Confederacy were Franklin Buchanan, Samuel Barron, Matthew F. Maury, Josiah Tattnall, John M. Brooke, and Raphael Semmes. All were distinguished officers prior to the war or achieved distinction during the war. Many of the officers with whom these men had previously served were shocked at their defection.<sup>7</sup>

That class of officers who at such time sought duties in the Pacific and on foreign stations were considered, *prima facie*, as in sympathy with the Secessionists, but not yet prepared to give up their commissions and abandon the Government. No men were more fully aware that a conflict was impending, and that, if hostilities commenced and they were within call of the Department, they would be required to participate. Hence a disposition to evade an unpleasant dilemma by going away was not misunderstood.<sup>8</sup>

These were only a few of the issues that faced the Secretary of the Navy prior to and during the Civil War.

### Secretary of the Navy Gideon Welles

Welles, once an active Democrat, left that party when the Democrats helped pass the Kansas-Nebraska Bill which revoked the Missouri Compromise and opened new territory to slavery. Welles strongly opposed slavery and abandoned the Democrats. He then joined the Republican Party. In 1860, he attended the Republican National Convention at Chicago as chairman of the Republican Delegation from Connecticut. At the convention, he supported the nomination of Salmon P. Chase and worked against William H. Seward's nomination. The canceling out of these two candidates helped Lincoln win the nomination. Later, Welles was on the committee which notified Lincoln of his election.<sup>9</sup>

Lincoln appointed Seward as Secretary of State. When it came time for Lincoln to select his new Secretary of the Navy, Welles's name was suggested by the Vice-President elect Hannibal Hamlin, and Welles was appointed. Because of his part in the overthrow of Seward's nomination at the Chicago convention, Seward disliked Welles immensely. Therefore, Seward strongly objected to Welles being appointed as the Secretary of the Navy. Lincoln made the appointment in spite of Seward's objections.<sup>10</sup> Thus began the friction between Lincoln's Secretary of State and Secretary of the Navy.

When Welles assumed his duties, he was faced with problems that neither his predecessors nor successors had to confront. The Navy had less than one hundred ships and they were widely scattered. Officers were resigning and joining the Confederacy almost daily.<sup>11</sup>

To make matters worse, the federal government did not know how to best utilize the Navy. It was placed under the orders of the commander in chief of the Western Army and became simply a division of the land forces. However, a different view prevailed in the Navy Department, and the general indifference allowed the department much leeway.<sup>12</sup>

Senator John P. Hale, Chairman of the Senate Committee on Naval Affairs, showed hostility toward Welles and Fox throughout the war. Publicly Welles endured Hale, but privately he dismissed him as "a mass of corruption."<sup>13</sup> Blair later stated to Welles a quote from Senator Thomas Hart Benton that "a man is made great by his enemies, and not by his friends."<sup>14</sup> Welles's opponents made a great contribution to Welles becoming a great Civil War figure.<sup>15</sup>

Not only did Welles have to deal with the political infighting of Lincoln's cabinet, he was faced with a pitifully inadequate Navy at the beginning of the war. The total area that had to be patrolled and blockaded was over nine thousand miles. "Never before in the history of war did a navy undertake such a stupendous task."<sup>16</sup> Yet Welles accomplished the task with leadership, patience, and wisdom. Although Welles was frequently targeted for abuse for not doing things faster, today the considered judgment is that the "building, assembling, arming, and manning of so vast a fleet was done with remarkable dispatch."<sup>17</sup>

The following table<sup>18</sup> reveals the state of the Navy and what Welles accomplished during the war:

	<u>1861</u>	<u>1865</u>
Ships	90	670
Officers	1,300	6,700
Seamen	7,500	51,500
Budget	\$12,000,000	\$123,000,000

Welles was singularly fortunate in his selection of officers. Although he had the advice of his able assistant Fox and of others, the final decision was his. Rarely did the officers that Welles selected disappoint him or the country.<sup>19</sup>

Secretary of State Seward had a plan, which was kept secret from both the War and Navy departments. Seward suggested to Lincoln that an expedition be launched to strengthen Fort Pickens in the Gulf instead of trying to reinforce Fort Sumter. It was this plan which launched David Dixon Porter into the midst of great events.<sup>20</sup>

The night before Porter was to leave to assume his duties with the Coast Survey on the Pacific Coast, he was summoned to Seward's office. Seward asked him, "Can you tell me how we can save Fort Pickens from falling into the hands of the rebels?" Porter answered, "I can, sir." "Then," Seward said "you are the man I want."<sup>21</sup> Porter asked Seward for the *Powhatan*. His plan was to land six or seven companies of infantry at the fort covered by the guns of a warship, the *Powhatan*.<sup>22</sup>

Captain M. C. Meigs, an army officer, had recommended Porter to Seward. At the time Porter was only a lieutenant in the Navy. Meigs happened to stop by during Porter's meeting with Seward. Seward asked them to come with him to a meeting with Lincoln at the White House. The three discussed their plan with the President. They also suggested that all orders come directly from the President due to the perceived rampant disloyalty in the Navy Department. Lincoln was concerned about how Welles would

react, but Porter replied, "Oh, I will make it all right with Mr. Welles." Porter wrote two orders and Lincoln, totally disregarding seniority, signed them without even reading them. The first gave Porter command of the *Powhatan* and directed him to proceed to Fort Pickens. By signing Porter's order, he sent a lieutenant to relieve a senior captain, Captain Mercer. The second order directed the Commandant of the New York Navy Yard, Captain Foote, to quickly prepare the *Powhatan* for sea without informing the Navy Department.<sup>23</sup>

Foote had previously received instructions from Welles to ready the *Powhatan* for sea. The ship and crew were to be key players in relieving Fort Sumter and the *Powhatan* was to be Assistant Secretary of the Navy Fox's Flagship. Captain Foote was an old friend and classmate of Secretary Welles and wrote Welles about the visit of some young officer presenting the conflicting orders. This was the first indication to Welles that some secret plan was in the making. Since a naval officer was involved, he suspected that other senior naval officers might be involved as well.<sup>24</sup>

When preparation of the *Powhatan* was slowed by conflicting orders from the Secretary of the Navy, Seward went to see Welles. Welles informed Seward that Porter had no command and that the *Powhatan* was to be Fox's flagship for the Fort Sumter expedition. Seward was frustrated. He did not explain the Fort Pickens plan to Welles but suggested that they go see the President.<sup>25</sup>

Lincoln showed surprise when informed of the situation. The President did not remember that the *Powhatan* was to be used by Fox at Fort Sumter. After Welles read

the instructions to the President, Lincoln told Seward that the *Powhatan* must be returned to Captain Mercer for the Fort Sumter expedition.<sup>26</sup>

The *Powhatan* had barely gotten underway when Captain Foote came alongside with a telegram for Porter. It read: "Deliver up the *Powhatan* at once to Captain Mercer. Seward." Porter sent back a telegram that read: "Have received confidential orders from the President, and shall obey them. Porter." Thus, an important expedition began and "the Secretary of the Navy and the Secretary of War were as ignorant of it as if they had been members of the Confederate cabinet instead of Lincoln's."<sup>27</sup>

Fox, unaware of *Powhatan's* sailing, proceeded to Charleston to await Captain Mercer and the *Powhatan*, not knowing that the ship had been taken from him. Due to bad weather and the absence of the *Powhatan*, Fox was unable to provide relief to Fort Sumter and suffered the humiliation of watching its surrender.<sup>28</sup>

Lincoln later thought it was strange for the Secretary of State to dabble in naval affairs. Seward, after learning his lesson, agreed and promised Welles that it would not happen again.<sup>29</sup>

Lincoln took full responsibility for promising the *Powhatan* to both Fox and Porter for two different expeditions. He wrote to Fox:

I sincerely regret that the failure of the late attempt to provision Fort Sumter should be the source of any annoyance to you. The practicability of your plan was not, in fact, brought to a test. By reason of a gale, well known in advance to be possible, and not improbable, the tugs, an essential part of the plan, never reached the ground; while, by accident, for which you were in no way responsible, and possibly I to some extent was, you were deprived of a war vessel with her men which you deemed of great importance to the enterprise. I must cheerfully assure you, and truly declare that the failure of the undertaking has not lowered you a particle, while the qualities you developed in the effort have greatly heightened you in my estimation. For a daring and dangerous enterprise, of a similar

character, you would today be the man, of all my acquaintances, whom I would select.<sup>30</sup>

#### Assistant Secretary of the Navy Gustavus Fox

Secretary of the Navy Gideon Welles was not a military man, though he had connections with the service in the past. Fortunately Lincoln called to Welles's assistance Mr. Gustavus Fox, who had been in the Navy for eighteen years, and only five years before the war had resigned and entered civil life. Mr. Fox had a combination of both business experience and an extensive knowledge of naval operations.<sup>31</sup>

Gustavus Fox was named Assistant Secretary of the Navy in August 1861. This was a very important appointment. Prior to the war, there had been no Assistant Secretary position. The post was created for Fox and from then on, Welles had a trained seaman by his side that provided him outstanding counsel and nautical advice.<sup>32</sup>

Fox was appointed a midshipman in 1838, and after his commissioning, served during the Mexican War transporting troops to Vera Cruz. Fox was promoted to lieutenant in 1852, and eventually left the navy in 1856. The assignment of Fox as the Assistant Secretary proved invaluable to the Navy Department. His experienced advice was normally well received by Lincoln and Welles who lacked military or naval experience.<sup>33</sup>

Montgomery Blair became the Postmaster General in Lincoln's cabinet. Fox and Blair were connected by marriage. Fox's wife and Blair's wife were sisters. It was this connection which opened a door of great opportunity for Fox in the Civil War.<sup>34</sup>

Fox often wrote and received confidential correspondence from naval officers of all ranks. These letters often covered matters difficult to address in official navy correspondence. The naval officers knew Fox and believed that he understood their difficulties and problems. Although extremely busy with his department work, Fox took the time to write letters of counsel, sympathy, and encouragement. Many of these letters were written between Fox and David Dixon Porter. "Fox had the highest opinion of Porter and admired his fighting spirit."<sup>35</sup>

Welles and Fox made a great team and sincerely admired and respected one another. When Fox discussed leaving office in January 1866, Welles recorded in his diary his opinion of his colleague through the stirring years of war:

I regret to lose him from the department, where, notwithstanding some peculiarities, which have caused dissatisfaction with a few, he is of a most invaluable service. He has a combination of nautical intelligence and common sense such as hardly be found in another, and we have worked together with entire harmony, never in a single instance having had a misunderstanding.<sup>36</sup>

Fox served the Navy Department with honor and distinction. When he finally left the department, he bade farewell to Welles. Welles wrote in his diary:

He was very much affected, and said words wanting to express his high respect and admiration for me and the qualities which I possessed for the position which I filled. Spoke of our five years' intercourse during which there had not been one unpleasant word, nor, as he was aware, an unpleasant thought between us. He has been useful to the country and to me, relieving me of many labors and defending me, I believe, always. His manner and ways have sometimes given offense to others, but he is patriotic and true.<sup>37</sup>

### The New Orleans Expedition

Porter received a promotion to Commander after the Fort Pickens expedition. His first assignment, ironically, was blockade duty on the *Powhatan*. Mobile and the

Southwest pass of the Mississippi were among his assigned areas. When the *Powhatan* needed an overhaul, the ship returned to the yard in New York.<sup>38</sup>

While in the yard, Porter reported to Washington to call on Mr. Welles with a plan to capture New Orleans. At first, Welles showed no interest in seeing him. Welles maintained a low opinion of Porter for his role in the *Powhatan's* secret mission. Although Welles eventually blamed Seward for inspiring the plot and Lincoln for agreeing with it, the incident resulted in a strained relationship with Porter.<sup>39</sup>

While waiting to see Welles at the Navy Department, Porter happened to meet Senator John P. Hale, chairman of the Senate Committee on Naval Affairs, and Senator James Wilson Grimes. Porter took advantage of the opportunity and explained his plan to them; they took him to see Welles. After hearing the plan, Welles proposed they speak with the President.<sup>40</sup>

Mr. Lincoln, who was unfamiliar with maritime matters, engrossed with the idea of invasion from the north, and disposed to doubt the possibility of success; but with his usual open-mindedness consented to a full discussion by experts from both services.<sup>41</sup>

After hearing Porter's plan, Lincoln responded:

It seems to me that what the lieutenant proposes is feasible. The Mississippi is the backbone of the rebellion, it is the key to the whole situation. While the Confederates hold it, they can obtain supplies of all kinds, and it is a barrier against our forces. Come, let us go and see General McClellan.<sup>42</sup>

A meeting was held at General McClellan's headquarters. There were present, besides the President, Secretary of the Navy Gideon Welles, Assistant Secretary of the Navy Gustavus Fox, Commander David Porter, and General McClellan. Though more

hazardous than traditional approaches, the proposition of the Navy Department was in principle strategically sound.<sup>43</sup> Upon hearing Porter's plan, McClellan said he could commit two thousand troops to the attack against New Orleans. The President felt that after defeating New Orleans, the force should proceed against Vicksburg, "which is the key to all that country watered by the Mississippi and its tributaries. If the Confederates once fortify the neighboring hills, they will be able to hold that point for an indefinite time, and it will require a large force to dislodge them."<sup>44</sup> The President left Porter and McClellan to work out their plans and said he would return later that night.<sup>45</sup>

Commander Porter suggested that the naval vessels should be accompanied by a mortar flotilla, to subdue the fire of the forts by bombardment, and so to allow the fleet to pass without risk, or with risk much diminished. This proposition appealed to the engineer instincts of McClellan.<sup>46</sup>

When Lincoln returned, Porter and McClellan submitted their plans to him and Lincoln ratified them. Secretary of the Navy Gideon Welles was directed to prepare the necessary ships. The plans included warships and mortar boats, which would bombard the forts. Porter was appointed commander of the mortar fleet.<sup>47</sup> Mr. Fox had a deservedly high estimate of Porter's professional ability. If Porter had been more senior in rank, Fox would have suggested him for the command of the expedition.<sup>48</sup>

Welles and Fox began to designate warships for the expedition, while Porter was assigned to collect and refit the schooners to carry the mortars. Twenty-one schooners would be needed.<sup>49</sup>

New Orleans was the sixth most populous city in the United States and it ranked almost first in the nation in export trade. Its capture would have great strategic importance. "The possession of the lower Mississippi would cut the Confederacy in two, leaving Texas, Arkansas, and Louisiana, a chief source of supply for the Confederate armies, separated from the seceded states east of the Mississippi."<sup>50</sup>

The Union recognized early on the importance of taking New Orleans. New Orleans was defended by two forts, Jackson and St. Philip, which were manned by one thousand troops. Despite Du Pont's and Foote's successes, the opinion prevailed that no fleet could safely pass the forts. It was believed that an attack would come down the river from the north.<sup>51</sup>

After Porter's part in the Fort Pickens and *Powhatan* incident, most men in Welles position would have relieved Porter of duty. Fortunately, Welles did not allow his private prejudices to influence his official decisions. Welles was impressed with Porter's plan and his dynamic energy.<sup>52</sup> Having already abandoned the seniority rule, Welles pushed a law through congress that did away with the seniority rule and allowed the Secretary of the Navy to choose leaders that were in the prime.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Clarence Edward Macartney, *Mr. Lincoln's Admirals* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1956), 3.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, vii.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*, 35-36.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., 260.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., 4-5.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., 14.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., 6.

<sup>12</sup>Alfred T. Mahan, *Admiral Farragut* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1905), 117.

<sup>13</sup>Macartney, 20.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., 22.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., 6-7.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., 7.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., 6.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., 10.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., 263.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., 263-264.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., 264.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., 264-265.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., 265.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., 265-266.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., 266.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., 267.

<sup>29</sup>Chester G. Hearn, *Admiral David Glasgow Farragut: The Civil War Years* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1998), 45.

<sup>30</sup>Macartney, 267-268.

<sup>31</sup>Hearn, *Admiral David Glasgow Farragut: The Civil War Years*, 46.

<sup>32</sup>Macartney, 13.

<sup>33</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup>*Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>36</sup>*Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>37</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup>*Ibid.*, 268.

<sup>39</sup>Hearn, *Admiral David Glasgow Farragut: The Civil War Years*, 45.

<sup>40</sup>Macartney, 26.

<sup>41</sup>John Niven, Gideon Welles: *Lincoln's Secretary of the Navy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), 382.

<sup>42</sup>Macartney, 26-27.

<sup>43</sup>Mahan, 120.

<sup>44</sup>Macartney, 27.

<sup>45</sup>*Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>46</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup>Lewis, *David Glasgow Farragut: Our First Admiral*, 9.

<sup>49</sup>Hearn, *Admiral David Glasgow Farragut: The Civil War Years*, 48.

<sup>50</sup>Macartney, 24.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., 25.

<sup>52</sup>Hearn, *Admiral David Glasgow Farragut: The Civil War Years*, 165.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., 167.

## CHAPTER 4

### SELECTION OF A COMMANDER

#### Introduction

After the New Orleans expedition was authorized, a commander had to be selected. Fox thought well of Porter but he was too junior in rank to be considered for command of the West Gulf Blockading Squadron.<sup>1</sup>

The nomination of the commanding officer could not be deferred any longer. Both speed and secrecy were large elements in the success of the expedition. There was little guidance for selecting a commander for this type of expedition from among the officers whose length of service and professional reputation indicated them as suitable. They needed a man who had the audacity and self-reliance demanded by the intended operations. This mission was to be contrary to the more usual and accepted practices of war.<sup>2</sup>

#### Lincoln's Choice

Tradition stipulated that seniority should determine the selection of squadron commanders. Welles had scrapped this "hoary headed absurdity" and had placed David Porter in charge of the mortar flotilla. Porter was a junior commander, who had been in this rank under three months.<sup>3</sup>

Welles partially fell back to seniority when selecting a commander because Commander Dahlgren, Lincoln's favorite, was being urged for a promotion. After the meeting at McClellan's house, the President said to Welles, "I will make a Captain of Dahlgren as soon as you say there is a place."<sup>4</sup> A day or so later, Lincoln again

mentioned the promotion. Welles could not dismiss the President's recommendation of the most ambitious officer in the Navy. Welles knew that appointing a junior commander would severely damage the morale of the senior officers' corp.<sup>5</sup>

#### Review of Eligible Officers

Along with Welles, Fox reviewed the Captain List to select the officer who would become the Flag Officer of the new West Gulf Blockading Squadron and lead the secret attack on New Orleans. The bureau chiefs and naval station commanders could not be spared or were considered too old for arduous sea duty. Welles also did not want to transfer experienced flag officers already in important commands afloat. Several officers were considered for the important command. Commodores Goldsborough, Du Pont, and McKean were among those considered, but Welles decided against them for reasons ranging from extreme prejudice against the Army to being lazy.<sup>6</sup> Initially, Welles did not even consider officers born in the South, regarding them as "particularly suspect."<sup>7</sup> However, as his choices became limited, he was forced to at least consider them.<sup>8</sup> Only one Captain, David Glasgow Farragut, remained on the list, not disqualified by age or record. Samuel Breeze was the most senior and had experience as a squadron commander but had not been to sea in over three years.<sup>9</sup> Although Welles had doubts about Farragut, he preferred him to Dahlgren, and on paper Farragut was more qualified.<sup>10</sup>

#### Selection of Farragut

David Glasgow Farragut was number fifty-seven on the active duty Navy List and number thirty-seven on the unassigned Navy List. After a review of Farragut's record, Fox determined Farragut spent nearly half of his career on shore duty. Farragut was

respected as an expert in gunnery, enjoying a friendly rivalry with Captain Dahlgren in this field.<sup>11</sup> Wells said of Farragut, "He had a good but not conspicuous record. All who knew him gave him credit of being a good officer, of good sense and good habits."

Welles could have added that Farragut was sixty years old and had been passed over three times for squadron command.<sup>12</sup> David Dixon Porter told Welles that although Farragut was not a Nelson, he was the best man of his rank. Welles was not impressed with Porter's demeanor, but believed he was a good judge of character.<sup>13</sup>

With fifty years of service, twenty of that at sea, Farragut's greatest accomplishment had been the establishment of the Mare Island Navy Yard near San Francisco. This was hardly a "recommendation for command of a complex and hazardous expedition."<sup>14</sup>

Secretary of the Navy Welles had formed a favorable opinion of Farragut during the Mexican War when Welles was Chief of the Bureau of Provisions and Clothing for the Navy.<sup>15</sup> It was Welles's first contact with David Glasgow Farragut. Although Farragut's plan for a naval attack on the Castle of San Juan de Ulloa at Vera Cruz was not accepted, Welles was very impressed with Farragut's ability and character as well as his daring plan.<sup>16</sup>

Captain Hiram Paulding was one of the first to recommend Farragut. Paulding wrote to Fox:

We have great and important work to be done there [in the Gulf] I hope at no distant time. Don't be unmindful of Farragut. He is a valuable officer whenever you can use him.<sup>17</sup>

James Barney, an old quartermaster on duty in the gulf, had the answer and confided to Master Winfield S. Schley that if "Davy Farragut 'came down here' it wouldn't be long before the fur was a-flying," but nobody in Washington asked old quartermasters for their opinions.<sup>18</sup>

Assistant Secretary of the Navy Fox recommended to Welles several officers for the command. Porter urged Farragut's appointment. Farragut was Porter's foster brother, but there is no evidence that this was Porter's motivation for recommending Farragut.<sup>19</sup>

Although, Porter was quoted as saying, "My father would have wished Farragut to have it."<sup>20</sup> Porter surely felt some bitterness. He wrote in a letter to his mother after the war, "Pay no attention to the reports of me being a candidate for the Presidency . . . I would not give my present place for a dozen presidencies . . . I do like, tho', to make Farragut feel bad; he stole half of my thunder in the war."<sup>21</sup>

Welles consulted many officers for their opinion. "Most of them, I think, while speaking well of Farragut, doubted if he was equal to the position--certainly not so well appointed a man as others--but yet no one would name the man for a great and active campaign against Mobile or some other port."<sup>22</sup> This included Commodore Joseph Smith who thought Farragut "bold, courageous and energetic"<sup>23</sup> but would not commit himself to recommending Farragut for a squadron command.<sup>24</sup> Since Welles appointed Porter as the commander of the mortar flotilla, Porter's opinion carried weight and he supported Farragut.<sup>25</sup>

The impression made by Farragut in moving his family from Norfolk had great impact on Mr. Fox who endorsed his appointment. This, Fox argued, showed "great superiority of character, clear perception of duty, and firm resolution in the performance

of it."<sup>26</sup> It was evident that Farragut stood well above the other accomplished officers in Fox's eyes.<sup>27</sup>

Once Welles decided that he would probably select Farragut, he sent Porter to meet with Farragut to gage his attitude toward the war and his willingness to take the command. Porter reported, "I found him as I expected, loyal to the utmost extent; and although at that time he did not know the nature of the expedition he authorized me to accept for him the Secretary's offer."<sup>28</sup> It only remained to be seen if Farragut would approve of the plan for the expedition.<sup>29</sup>

Farragut was ordered to report for an informal meeting with Fox. The meeting took place at the house of Postmaster-General Montgomery Blair. Fox reviewed the plan of attack, the forces to be employed, and the objectives to be attained. Farragut was asked his opinion, and answered unhesitatingly that it would succeed. Fox then had Farragut review the list of vessels being fitted out and asked if they were enough. Farragut replied he would run the forts and capture New Orleans with two-thirds the number. Fox told him that additional vessels would be made available and that he would command the expedition. Farragut's delight and enthusiasm were so great that when he left, Fox asked Blair, his brother-in-law, if he thought Farragut was too enthusiastic; Blair replied that he was very impressed with him and was sure he would succeed. There could be no question that his heart was in the war and in the expedition. Whether he would rise to the occasion remained to be seen.<sup>30</sup>

Farragut did say that had he been previously consulted, he would have advised against the employment of the mortar flotilla. He had no faith in that mode of attack

based on his observations twenty-three years before at the Castle San Juan de Ulloa in Vera Cruz. He was convinced that the fleet could run by the forts. Nevertheless, he was willing to give the mortar flotilla a chance.<sup>31</sup>

Farragut then had an interview with Secretary of the Navy Welles in which he said that he “expected to pass the forts and restore New Orleans to the Government or never return. He might not come back, but the city would be ours.”<sup>32</sup> Welles was pleased. While seeking a commander for the expedition to New Orleans, Welles had identified certain qualifications, which included “courage, audacity, tact, and fearless energy, with great self-reliance, decisive judgment, and ability to discriminate and act under trying and extraordinary circumstances.”<sup>33</sup> Welles felt that Farragut met these qualifications. Welles covered the secret instructions about New Orleans with Farragut and then announced to the press that Farragut was his selection as the Flag Officer of the new West Gulf Blockading Squadron.<sup>34</sup>

In conclusion, Secretary of the Navy Gideon Welles decided to appoint Farragut to the prestigious command to open the Mississippi River and capture the port of New Orleans for many reasons. First, Farragut had impressed Welles by leaving Norfolk and moving his family to New York when Virginia seceded. Second, Welles was impressed with Farragut’s plan to capture a fortification at Vera Cruz during the Mexican War. Third, Commander David Porter, the son of Farragut’s guardian, and Assistant Secretary of the Navy Gustavus Fox also urged Farragut’s selection. Last, Farragut was also the most likely senior candidate not already assigned to an important command or disqualified by age or record.<sup>35</sup>

“He was never profuse in promises,” writes Mr. Wells, the Secretary of the Navy, regarding Farragut, “but he felt complimented that he was selected, and I saw that in modest self-reliance he considered himself equal to the emergency and to the expectation of the Government.”<sup>36</sup>

To his home Farragut wrote:

Keep your lips closed and burn my letters, for perfect silence is to be observed—the first injunction of the Secretary. I am to have a flag in the Gulf, and the rest depends upon myself. Keep calm and silent. I shall sail in three weeks.<sup>37</sup>

Welles’s appointment of Farragut did raise questions with the small group who knew of the New Orleans expedition. Lincoln, upset that Welles had not selected Dahlgren, declared that he had never heard of Farragut. Even Montgomery Blair questioned the selection of Farragut. Seward was also skeptical.<sup>38</sup>

Upon receiving orders to command the West Gulf Blockading Squadron, Farragut wrote to his wife:

I have now obtained what I have been looking for all my life--a flag--and having obtained it, all that is necessary to complete the scene is victory. If I die in the attempt, it will be only what every officer has to expect. He who dies in doing his duty to his country, and at peace with God, has played out the drama of his life to the best advantage.<sup>39</sup>

#### Farragut’s Command

On assuming command of the West Gulf Blockading Squadron, Farragut began sending requests for more ships, more men, more supplies, and more equipment. This caused Welles and Fox to have apprehensions about Farragut’s appointment. Farragut’s requests seemed excessive to Fox and Welles. Also, Farragut believed he needed shallow-draft vessels to work in close to shore. This request concerned them. They were

afraid that Farragut had changed the department's plan to use heavy vessels for the attack.

Welles explained departmental policy:

I never left it for the officers to decide whether they thought it best. Admiral Farragut did not know that we intended to capture New Orleans and Forts Jackson and St. Philip until the matter was decided upon and he was notified or his appointment, told what was required of him to do.<sup>40</sup>

Fox disregarded sound practice when he wrote to Porter:

I trust we have made no mistake in our man but his dispatches are very discouraging. It is not too late to rectify our mistake. You must frankly give me your views from Ship Island.<sup>41</sup>

Fox's mind was not set at ease by Porter's response. Porter indicated that it was too late for a change and added: "Men of his age in a seafaring life are not fit for important enterprises, they lack the vigor of youth . . . I have great hopes of the mortars if all else fails."<sup>42</sup> This set the tone for all of Porter's private correspondence with Fox. Porter would undercut Farragut and his captains every chance he got. He managed to cover himself if Farragut failed and to advance himself if Farragut succeeded.<sup>43</sup>

Although Welles and Fox were doubtful about Farragut and worried about the expedition, they spared nothing to supply Farragut with everything that he requested. Welles waited apprehensively for the reports of Farragut's progress. Their faith in Farragut had been severely shaken by Farragut's complaints, numerous requests, and Porter's letters. Welles expressed his concerns to Captain Davis saying, "Oh, if you and Du Pont were only there I should have no fears about the result--Du Pont and Foote and yourself enjoy our perfect confidence."<sup>44</sup>

Farragut would soon prove his leadership capabilities. He was an active commander. Subordinate commanders and deck officers were kept constantly on alert because they did not know when Farragut's flag officer's barge might come alongside to conduct inspections and visits. When Farragut found that one ship had taken protective measures that he liked, he then ordered the remaining ships to follow suit. This resulted in great enthusiasm and competition throughout the command. For example, Captain Craven of the *Brooklyn* was giving additional protection to his boilers and machinery by draping his spare anchor chain over the sides by the boilers. Unless other captains could come up with a better idea, Farragut had them follow the same practice.<sup>45</sup>

Farragut came up with many observations and opinions that were quickly transferred into orders and promptly executed. He came up with several tactical innovations. Some examples include whitewashing the decks to allow gunners to find their tools at night, adding light howitzers to the rigging, and smearing mud on visible portions of the ships' hulls. He shifted cargo to the bow so that if a ship ran aground, the current would not move the bow around and cause confusion as to the ship's heading to other ships in the column.<sup>46</sup>

In addition to the routine problems of ships, material, and personnel, Farragut's biggest problem concerned the Confederate forts and the fleet defending New Orleans. He studied maps, surveys, and specifications for the forts. He also used night patrol boats to get accurate information and descriptions of barriers and other defensive actions at the forts. Farragut believed he could defeat the opposing fleet, force a passage of the forts, and with marines, establish a base at Quarantine to allow Butler's troops to be brought

over land from the sea. From this base the Army could begin a deliberate down-river siege against the forts while he and an adequate portion of the fleet pressed on and subdued New Orleans, which in turn would be held by a portion of the Army. This was Farragut's plan to capture New Orleans.<sup>47</sup>

On the evening of 20 April Farragut realized that he was running short of ammunition. Porter's mortar flotilla was not doing much damage and was requiring counterfire by the ships. The mortar boats were vulnerable to Confederate fire. Farragut called a conference of his captains and division commanders. His purpose was not to seek advice but to let them know of his plan. Porter proposed that the mortar bombardment should be continued. After the formal reading of Porter's plan by a subordinate and following discussions, Farragut then covered his plan in detail and provided written copies to his commanders. Some of them wished to further discuss Porter's plan, but Farragut made it clear that further consideration was no longer on the agenda. His decision had been made.<sup>48</sup> In Farragut's plan, the army was to play second fiddle. Memories of the Navy's role at Vera Cruz still bothered him and he now wanted the Navy to do its own work and reap the rewards.<sup>49</sup>

That night the campaign against New Orleans began. Gunboats went in to break the barriers and received hot fire from the defending Confederate guns. Eventually, the barriers were broken and provided a wide breach in what had been an impassable barrier. Three nights later, Farragut gave the signal to advance. A long single column of three divisions began their run. At 0330 24 April many of the ships got underway, surprising the Confederates before they could bring any appreciable fire on the Federal advance.<sup>50</sup>

As more ships passed, an intense battle pursued. The ships passing through the narrow breach had to dodge fire from the forts, burning rafts, and other debris. While dodging one of these burning rafts, the *Hartford*, Admiral Farragut's flag ship, ran aground right under the guns of Fort St. Philip. Thanks to the current, prior training, efforts of the crew, and perhaps a few encouraging remarks from Farragut, the *Hartford* finished the passage of the forts safely. Many ships failed equal challenges, but by dawn of 24 April thirteen of Farragut's fleet had passed the forts while all of the Confederate men-of-war were sunk, driven ashore, or had left the area.<sup>51</sup>

It is significant that throughout the confusion of the battle that Farragut did not give a single command or signal that affected his fleet as a whole. In short, his work was completed when he finished his preparations, organization, force dispositions, and assignment of objectives. While Farragut exercised little control over his command during the action, he quickly put it under his direct orders immediately afterward. They proceeded to Quarantine where they rested and made repairs.<sup>52</sup>

Early on the morning of 25 April Farragut led eleven of the thirteen ships up the river toward New Orleans. As he approached he saw signs of the despair and panic in the city. The river was littered with the debris of Confederate government property that was being destroyed. Flaming cargoes of cotton drifted past, as well as all kinds of other commodities.<sup>53</sup>

Just beyond English Turn, his lead ships drew fire of the batteries of the inner circle of defense. The Confederates were quickly driven from these light defenses by the combined broadsides of the heavy ships. Now, the third largest port in the Western

Hemisphere was at the mercy of the man who fifteen years before had gotten into disrepute with the Navy Department for becoming disgruntled with his superiors for not boldly attacking Vera Cruz in similar fashion.<sup>54</sup>

While the Confederates continued destruction of public property, Farragut tried to contact official authorities for the surrender of the city. Though the city was under Federal guns, Farragut argued patiently for three days with both civil and military authorities. No one was willing to bear the onus of hauling down the Confederate flag on City Hall. About this time, Brigadier General Duncan, C.S.A., arrived from Fort Jackson with the news that the fort had surrendered. This broke the false pride of New Orleans, and when Farragut landed 250 marines on 29 April they took possession of the public buildings without resistance. It was not until 1 May that Butler's army moved into the city.<sup>55</sup>

When Welles received the first dispatch from New Orleans, he was amazed. Farragut not only had passed the forts but also sank most of the enemy fleet guarding the city in the process. When Welles received the full details of the battle, the Department of the Navy and the President finally realized that Farragut was a "fighting admiral, an authentic naval hero."<sup>56</sup>

### Reflections

Later, Welles reflected on his selection of Farragut and made a notation in his journal which showed his patience and understanding of Farragut:

Farragut has prompt, energetic, excellent qualities, but no fondness for written details of self-laudation; does but one thing at a time, but does that strong and well; is better fitted to lead an expedition through danger and difficulty than to command an extensive blockade; is a good officer in a great emergency, will more

willingly take great risks in order to obtain great results than any officer in high position in either navy or army, and unlike most of them, prefers that others should tell the story of his well-doing rather than relate it himself.<sup>57</sup>

On Porter, Welles wrote:

In some respects the man whom Welles had picked as Commander-In-Chief of the squadron in the upper Mississippi Valley was the precise opposite of Farragut. A healthy extrovert, David D. Porter was physically miserable if he could not be doing many things at once. He had a fondness for written reports, using 5,000 instead of 500 words, and Welles, always annoyed by effusiveness, ascribed to Porter an egregious desire for self-laudation. While Welles could not admire the personality of Porter as he did Farragut's, he did recognize the man's vigor and resource, but Porter's elevation from the rank of a junior commander to acting Rear Admiral was still, in Welles' view, experimental.<sup>58</sup>

Farragut was a meticulous Flag Officer who wanted to be fully prepared. He

wrote:

You must be prepared to execute all those duties to which you have been so long trained in the Navy without having the opportunity of practicing. I expect every vessel's crew to be well exercised at their guns . . . I shall expect the most prompt attention to signals; and verbal orders, either from myself or the Captain of the fleet.<sup>59</sup>

Eighteen months after the capture of New Orleans, while Lincoln was brooding about Meade's failure to pursue Lee after Gettysburg, he remarked to Welles, "There had not been, take it all in all, so good an appointment in either branch of the service as Farragut."<sup>60</sup> In the selection of senior officers and choosing the right men for the right jobs, the Navy outperformed the Army during the Civil War.<sup>61</sup>

David Glasgow Farragut, the first admiral, never fought a battle against other ships on the open sea. This was a keen disappointment to him. Farragut, at the age of thirteen, did participate in one desperate sea fight with Commodore Porter on the *Essex*. Upon hearing of the *Kearsarge's* victory over the *Alabama*, Farragut wrote, "The victory

of the *Kearsarge* over the *Alabama* raised me up. I would sooner have fought that fight than any ever fought on the ocean.”<sup>62</sup> Farragut achieved great victories at New Orleans and Mobile Bay, but he regretted never having led a fleet to battle on the open sea.<sup>63</sup>

Farragut was the most competent naval officer on either side during the Civil War. He was, as Bern Anderson wrote, “head and shoulders above them all.” He had all the attributes of a great commander: intelligence, knowledge, self-confidence, enormous energy and courage.<sup>64</sup>

David Glasgow Farragut commanded the most important naval expedition to be mounted during the war, the opening of the Mississippi River and the capture of the port of New Orleans. In recognition of his exceptional service during the Civil War, Congress created the rank of rear admiral and bestowed it on him on 16 July 1862. He was also the first to receive the title of vice-admiral on 23 December 1864, and the title of admiral on 25 July 1866.<sup>65</sup>

At the unveiling of a memorial stone marking the birthplace of Admiral Farragut in 1900, Admiral George Dewey said:

I consider it a great honor and opportunity to pay my homage to the memory of Admiral Farragut, that great Naval Commander--in my opinion the greatest in the annals of our country. This opinion I have formed, not by reading of his gallant deeds, but from personal contacts with him. Having served in his squadron, under his immediate command, though I was but a young man, I am proud to say that Farragut was my friend. Many years ago I took him for my special example, and in all the important epochs of my life, particularly during the most recent years, I have always thought, before deciding upon a course of action when a crisis was pending, “What would Farragut have done under similar circumstances?”<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Alfred T. Mahan, *Admiral Farragut* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1905), 122.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 167.

<sup>4</sup>John Niven, *Gideon Welles: Lincoln's Secretary of the Navy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), 383.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, 384.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*, 382-383.

<sup>7</sup>Richard S. West Jr., *Gideon Welles Lincoln's Navy Department* (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1943), 167-168.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, 168.

<sup>9</sup>Niven, 382-383.

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*, 383-384.

<sup>11</sup>West, *Gideon Welles Lincoln's Navy Department*, 168-169.

<sup>12</sup>Niven, 382-383.

<sup>13</sup>West, *Gideon Welles Lincoln's Navy Department*, 168-169.

<sup>14</sup>Niven, 383.

<sup>15</sup>Clarence Edward Macartney, *Mr. Lincoln's Admirals* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1956), 29.

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*, 3-4.

<sup>17</sup>*Ibid.*, 28-29.

<sup>18</sup>Chester G. Hearn, *Admiral David Glasgow Farragut: The Civil War Years* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1998), 49.

<sup>19</sup>Macartney, 29-30.

<sup>20</sup>Archibald Douglas Turnbull, *Commodore David Porter, 1780-1843* (New York: The Century Co., 1929), 82.

<sup>21</sup>*Ibid.*, 81-82.

<sup>22</sup>Macartney, 30.

<sup>23</sup>Niven, 383.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid.

<sup>26</sup>Mahan, 123.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid.

<sup>28</sup>Macartney, 30.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., 10-11.

<sup>30</sup>Mahan, 124.

<sup>31</sup>Hearn, *Admiral David Glasgow Farragut: The Civil War Years*, 125.

<sup>32</sup>Macartney, 30.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., 30-31.

<sup>34</sup>Richard S. West Jr., *Gideon Welles Lincoln's Navy Department* (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1943), 169.

<sup>35</sup>Niven, 383.

<sup>36</sup>Mahan, 124-125.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., 125.

<sup>38</sup>Niven, 384.

<sup>39</sup>Macartney, 36.

<sup>40</sup>Niven, 384-385.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., 384.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., 385.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., 385.

<sup>45</sup>Jim Dan Hill, *Sea Dogs of the Sixties* (New York: A. S. Barnes & Company, Inc., 1935), 16.

<sup>46</sup>*Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>47</sup>*Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>48</sup>*Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>49</sup>*Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>50</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup>*Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>52</sup>*Ibid.*, 29-30.

<sup>53</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>54</sup>*Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>55</sup>*Ibid.*, 30-31.

<sup>56</sup>Niven, 385.

<sup>57</sup>West, *Gideon Welles: Lincoln's Navy Department*, 203.

<sup>58</sup>*Ibid.*, 204.

<sup>59</sup>A. A. Hoehling, *Damn the Torpedoes! Naval Incidents of the Civil War* (Winston-Salem, NC: John F. Blair, 1989), 106.

<sup>60</sup>Niven, 387.

<sup>61</sup>Hearn, *Admiral David Glasgow Farragut: The Civil War Years*, 385.

<sup>62</sup>Macartney, 23.

<sup>63</sup>*Ibid.*, 23-24.

<sup>64</sup>*Ibid.*, 143.

<sup>65</sup>James C. Bradford, ed. *Quarterdeck and Bridge: Two Centuries of American Naval Leaders* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1997), 125-146.

<sup>66</sup>Macartney, 77.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The job of a president and his cabinet during times of war is exceptionally difficult. During the Union's buildup of its military prior to and during the early stages of the Civil War, the Union Navy faced enormous challenges. One of these challenges was to select its military leaders and commanders. The Civil War presented a unique conflict among the active military officers. Loyalty and allegiance were key issues of concern, not only of the military officers but among the civilian military leaders as well. This loyalty issue was prevalent on both sides. This study has focused on the Union Navy and how the Union naval leaders dealt with the issue of loyalty and other factors in selecting its commanders to lead their navy. In particular, it focuses on the selection of Admiral David Glasgow Farragut as the Commander of the West Gulf Blockading Squadron.

The purpose in conducting this study was to determine why David Glasgow Farragut was selected for command. I had no preconceived ideas about his selection. In fact, I was perplexed by his selection prior to my research. I did know that at the time of his selection, he was sixty years old. As I began my research, I became immensely intrigued with Farragut's career. After all, he was the Navy's first Admiral. As my research demonstrated, Farragut's career was unspectacular prior to the Civil War. In fact, after the end of the Mexican War until the death of his first wife, Farragut spent most of his time on shore duty while caring for her.

So, why was this sixty-year-old officer who was having a mediocre career selected for such a prestigious command? As preceding chapters show, there were

numerous factors, which Secretary of the Navy Gideon Welles used to select Farragut. Seniority, political and family ties, tactical plan, leadership, and loyalty all played a part in Farragut's selection. This author concludes, however, that it was Farragut's loyalty to the Union that sealed his selection as Commander of the West Gulf Blockading Squadron. It was not just Farragut's loyalty to the North; it was his unyielding loyalty to the United States Navy. Farragut loved his navy and proclaimed his loyalty to it, even though his home was in the South.

Farragut's love for the navy started at a very young age. His time with his guardian, Commander Porter, on the *Essex* during the War of 1812, formed this nine-year-old-midshipman's love of the sea. Porter taught him about leadership, command, and war at sea; inspired Farragut's morals; and helped shape the character that would serve him well later in his career. Farragut's experiences with Porter were the basis for developing Farragut's loyalty and his love of the Union Navy.

When the Civil War broke out, loyalty was a very serious concern for the federal government. Naval officers and civilian leaders were resigning daily and joining the Confederacy. Every officer was suspect to some degree. Prior to his selection, Farragut was highly suspicious to many. He was born and lived in the South. His wife was a Southerner as well. When his home state of Virginia seceded, Farragut feared the worst. He did not want to fight against the South, but he knew that he would eventually have to do so. He immediately moved his family to New York and wrote several letters to the War Department seeking orders. The loyalty he demonstrated by moving his family to the North played a major role in his selection as commander by Welles.

When Secretary of the Navy Gideon Welles and Assistant Secretary of the Navy Gustavus Fox finalized a plan to attack New Orleans, they needed a naval officer who would command this very important mission. This type of decision has relevance today. How were officers detailed and assigned to command? Secretary Welles also had his hands full with other issues. Loyalty issues, political infighting, and building up the Navy, both ships and personnel, were other difficult obstacles that faced the Navy Department at the time.

There were several other factors or criteria that Welles considered during Farragut's selection process. First, there was the issue of seniority. Farragut was not the most senior officer being considered. In fact, he was thirty-seventh on the list. The key issue impacting seniority was that many of the more senior officers were already in command or other important jobs and could not be spared. The remaining officers on the list above Farragut were disqualified from selection due to performance records, age, or other negative factors. Welles did not agree with the assigning of officers to command based solely on seniority. Lincoln supported this belief as well as evidenced by him assigning Lieutenant Porter to relieve the commander of the *Powhatan*. Seniority certainly played a role, albeit a small one, in the selection process.

The issues of political, family or friendship influences upon Welles selection of Farragut were discussed. Farragut had not had a spectacular career up to this point. In fact, he had been passed over for squadron command three times. His best-documented sea experiences were with Commander Porter as a midshipman. It was this tie with the Porter family that played a role in Welles selection of Farragut. Fox would have

recommended Commander David Dixon Porter, Farragut's foster brother, for the position, but he was a very junior commander. Porter was well known in socially elite circles and played a key role in formulating the New Orleans plan. Porter spoke highly of Farragut's command qualities to both Welles and Fox prior to Farragut's selection. Porter had been appointed to command the mortar flotilla for the mission and therefore his view carried weight and played a role in Farragut's selection.

It is ironic that later, Porter undermined Farragut every chance he got while writing personal letters to Fox and Welles. In fact, at one point, both Fox and Welles became concerned that they had made a mistake in selecting Farragut partly due to Porter's letters about Farragut. When the results finally arrived following the fall of New Orleans, Welles and Fox realized their choice had proved to be the right one.

A political tie that played a major role in Farragut's selection was the Secretary of the Navy himself, Gideon Welles. At the beginning of the Mexican War, Farragut briefed a plan to attack a castle at Vera Cruz to the Navy Department Board of which Welles was a member. Even though Farragut's plan was not accepted, Welles was extremely impressed with the plan. This plan turned out to contain the same essentials as the New Orleans plan, such as running ships passed the armed forts. Welles remembered Farragut and his plan, and this played a major role in Welles's selection of Farragut.

All of the above played a part in Welles's decision that Farragut would command the West Gulf Blockading Squadron. Welles did not blindly choose Farragut. Welles sought the opinions of other officers. Most felt that Farragut was a good officer, but many did not feel certain that Farragut was ready for such a large and important

command. Even President Lincoln had Commander Dahlgren, his favorite, in mind for the command. Welles took this decision very seriously and could not just ignore the President's desires. With Fox, Welles weighed each factor and established tough selection criteria. Welles finally decided on Farragut. A decision that would become one of the most significant assignments made by the Navy Department during the Civil War.

Farragut's successes during the Civil War are well documented in history. As history shows, Welles's decision to select Farragut played a critical part in bringing the South to the end of its war effort based largely on Farragut and his fleet's actions in securing the Gulf coast and access to the Mississippi River.

This study has relevance even today. Hopefully the nation will never again be faced with civil war where loyalty would be the most important criteria used in detailing officers. Although today, the loyalty criteria is not an issue of concern in detailing officers or assigning commanders, this study has demonstrated other criteria that faced the Navy Department prior to and during the Civil War that the Navy Department takes into account even today. Some may argue, but this author has no doubt that political and family ties, favoritism, tactical expertise, and leadership all play in the selection process.

#### Recommendations For Further Research

This study of Farragut's selection has in this author's opinion opened many possibilities for further research. This author during research on Minewarfare changed the direction of this thesis when material on Admiral Farragut "Damning the Torpedoes" in the Battle of Mobile Bay was studied. This battle alone would be worth further study.

In researching the events that led up to Farragut's selection by Welles, an enormous amount of topics for further study and research were determined. The Navy's first Admiral, in this author's opinion, deserves much more study and research than currently exists. Farragut is a true and genuine Civil War hero and should be studied more by all naval officers. Farragut, based upon this research, is a perfect role model for all navy officers in command. Another study could be done just on Farragut's leadership qualities. A more detailed study of the events in Farragut's life that shaped his morals, character, and leadership that enabled him to be such a successful commander should prove valuable to all military officers, not just naval officers. Farragut was a highly successful commander, because of his leadership, morals, and character.

It would be interesting for a study to compare Farragut's leadership qualities with another naval officer. His foster brother David Dixon Porter would be a good choice, or possibly a leader in the Confederate Navy.

Another recommended area of study would be the naval actions in which Farragut participated. Having already mentioned the Battle of Mobile Bay, this study could range from Farragut's actions as a midshipman on the *Essex* against the British, to fort running along the Mississippi, to the capture of New Orleans. The events during the Mexican War and at Vera Cruz should not be ignored.

While the areas of study listed above would be most interesting, there are numerous other areas of recommended study. One area would be the handling of wounded during the Civil War. The following recommendations for further research may apply to all branches of service, not just the Navy. Soldiers bleeding to death from

wounds caused the majority of Civil War deaths. Whether on land or at sea, battle casualties could have been significantly reduced if the wounded had received proper medical attention like basic first aid, medical supplies, evaluation, and appropriate number of properly trained doctors. Whether comparing Army and Navy during the Civil War, World War I, World War II, or Vietnam, this would be an interesting topic to research.

Another area is the effect of weather and how it plays a critical role in any military engagement. History shows that weather has played a significant role in determining the outcome of various battles and campaigns on air, land, and sea. From the Civil War to present day, weather is a major player that must be addressed and accounted for during the planning, execution, and post-conflict operations.

Communications is always at the forefront of any operation. Communication reliability has significantly improved over the years with the increase in communication technology, that is, wireless versus mail. Particularly during the Civil War, communications between commanders and their civilian leadership caused major problems. This is especially true for naval sea commanders who had to rely on the mail. This inherent delay of communications caused confusion, delays, and missed opportunities.

Along with officer slating, promotions, and detailing, officer retirements could be a valuable area of study. Prior to the Civil War there were no officer retirements. One was in the Navy for life. In fact, Farragut sat on the Navy's first board that determined which officers would be retired. Retirement Boards may or may not be an issue facing

today's Navy, but during the nation's history it could have been a major concern for officers like Farragut.

Technological advances in ships, armament, and tactics have radically changed warfare. A good study would be to compare battles and how the technological advances affected the outcomes. As far as technological advances go, iron versus wood, steam versus sail, and rifled versus smoothbore gun could be naval-related areas to examine. These three areas provide an abundance of areas to be studied in naval history.

Another navy issue is ship repair. Ship repair was a major issue during the Civil War and was a problem for Farragut during his preparations to take New Orleans. The study could cover how this problem was accounted for and what was done to prevent this occurrence in later conflicts including World War II.

Supplies and logistics always play a crucial role in any conflict. During the Civil War, logistics caused many problems for both navy and army on both sides. Lastly, service interoperability may have been responsible for either victory or defeat for both sides during the Civil War.

This list only touches upon the areas of further study and research that was determined during this research. Many of these areas have been determined to be decisive on the battlefield throughout history. The purpose of this further study in this author's view is to learn the lessons that soldiers and leaders have learned the hard way, paying with their lives. Hopefully, military officers will learn from these lessons and do their part in preventing history from repeating itself.

## GLOSSARY

Barclay. The ship upon which Farragut commanded a party of seamen at age twelve.

Battle of New Orleans. Decisive battle in the Civil War won by David Glasgow Farragut, Commander of the West Gulf Blockading Squadron.

Brooklyn. Farragut's last major command in 1860.

Dahlgren, John. Commander in the United States Navy favored by Lincoln.

Du Pont, Samuel. Successfully captured Port Royal which encouraged Fox in his plan to capture New Orleans.

Decatur. A sloop which was Farragut's first major command in 1842.

Essex. A frigate in the United States Navy commanded by David Porter in 1811. This was the first ship upon which Farragut served.

Ferret. The first ship commanded by Lieutenant David Glasgow Farragut in 1821.

Fox, Gustavus. Assistant Secretary of the Navy appointed by President Lincoln in 1861 to assist Secretary of the Navy Gideon Welles. Fox had served eighteen years as a naval officer and was well acquainted with naval technology. It was Fox who suggested the plan to capture New Orleans.

Loyalty. A strong sense of allegiance.

Mare Island Navy Yard. Established by Farragut in California from 1854 to 1859.

McClellan, George B. General in the United States Army who committed forces to assist with the plan to capture New Orleans.

Naval Retirement Board. A committee used by the United States Navy to select incapacitated officers for retirement. Farragut served on this board.

Porter, David. Commodore in the United States Navy who became the foster father to David Glasgow Farragut. He helped Farragut become a midshipman in the Navy at age 9.

Porter, David Dixon. Foster brother to David Glasgow Farragut who recommended Farragut for command of the West Gulf Blockading Squadron.

Secession. The act of the Confederate States withdrawing from the Union.

Selection. The act of choosing an officer for appointment to a command.

Seniority. The state of having the most years in service.

Saratoga. A sloop commanded by Farragut during the Mexican War in 1847.

Union. The United States of America.

Welles, Gideon. Secretary of the Navy appointed by President Lincoln for his support during the 1860 election. Welles for a former Democrat, small-town politician, and editor of the Hartford Evening Post. Welles appointed Farragut to the prestigious command to open the Mississippi River and capture the port of New Orleans.

West Gulf Blockading Squadron. The squadron commanded by David Glasgow Farragut that was responsible for the capture of New Orleans and other decisive battles along the Gulf Coast. This squadron was formed to gain control of the Mississippi River and ports along the Gulf Coast in order to stop supplies to the Confederate Army.

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