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"THEY ARE GONE AND I AM GOING":

THE BATTLE OF MEMPHIS 6 JUNE 1862

by

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A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of Old Dominion University
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MASTER OF ARTS

HISTORY

OLD DOMINION UNIVERSITY
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ABSTRACT

"THEY ARE GONE AND I AM GOING": THE BATTLE OF MEMPHIS 6 JUNE 1862

Matthew T. Eng
Old Dominion University, 2008
Director: Dr. Brian J. Payne

This thesis examines the 6 June 1862 naval battle of Memphis between the Confederate River Defense Fleet and Union Ram Fleet and Western Flotilla. In just under two hours, the crowded and anxious populace lined along the Memphis bluffs witnessed the complete destruction of the last remaining Confederate fleet along the Mississippi River. Within the combined Union army and navy operations throughout the late winter and spring of 1862, the clash of iron-wielded rams and gunboats that occurred on a casually warm June morning tells much of the scope of the western war and its importance in ultimately securing the Mississippi River back to Federal control. Military possession of Memphis provided a natural invasion corridor to Vicksburg, Mississippi, the last remaining Confederate bastion along the Mississippi River. Newspapers around the country used the example of Memphis to highlight the decisive nature of the conflict at a time when morale greatly impacted the vitality of the entire war effort.

As the main terminus between the upper and lower Mississippi, the reopening of trade at Memphis pumped capital into the Federal economy, effectively aiding other theaters of warfare around the country. Viewing the Mississippi River as a source of economic wealth and livelihood, the strategic importance of Memphis as the Confederacy’s fifth largest city helped secure a large stake in the burgeoning cotton market left stagnant under southern trade restrictions. Memphians involved in the trade, processing, and export of materials like cotton now dealt under the direction of a Federal
government that hoped to not only secure the city’s resources, but the sympathies of its citizens and civilian authority as well. Stores reopened, riverine traffic along the Mississippi resumed, and publication of print media all occurred under an oath of allegiance to the Union, indeed a signal emphasizing the symbolism of southern capitulation. This thesis proves that the June 1862 engagement extended in influence far beyond the realm of a strategic defeat, aiding the Union war effort while providing a decisive and demoralizing loss for southern sympathizers militarily, socially, and economically.
This work is dedicated to the historians I admire at Old Dominion University and the friends and family who helped me throughout my graduate career.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I first want to thank Perry Library’s Interlibrary Loan Department. Without their hard work and dedication, a majority of the research in this thesis would not have been possible. My sincerest thanks to Dr. Brian J. Payne for his patience and expert guidance throughout the writing process, pushing me to think and write outside the realm of naval history. I am greatly appreciative of committee members Drs. Jonathan Phillips and Austin Jersild for the comments and academic advice both in and out of the classroom. I am indebted to the entire Old Dominion History Department for making this an enriching experience. I also want to thank Doug Forrest for his consummate professionalism, Stephen Hebert and Sibley Slinkard for their unbelievable friendship and commentary, Heather for a fresh beginning, and my family who have faithfully supported my highest goals and ambitions.
CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION: A CASE FOR MEMPHIS, TENNESSEE

Only four hours passed on a casually warm June morning as an energized crowd of citizens from Memphis, Tennessee, gathered to watch the ensuing battle between opposing naval forces. Although many city and military officials of the Confederacy pulled out with important documents and supplies the previous day, thousands of the Memphis populace lined along the fifty-foot bluff on the east side of the Mississippi River as if waiting for a sporting event. With promises of victory in their hearts, citizens were well aware their “Bluff City” was the last remaining bastion untouched by Federal control along the upper Mississippi. As they waited, they spotted black clouds of smoke pouring out the chimneys of Flag Officer Charles Davis’s Union fleet comprised of iron-wielded gunboats and ramming vessels converted from Ohio River steamboats. The Confederate River Defense Fleet, under the leadership of Captain James E. Montgomery, waited as their aggressors snaked down “Old Man River.” With no significant land forces available to combat the oncoming flotilla, the prominent commercial center of the Confederacy rested solely in the hands of the River Defense Fleet.¹

With Montgomery’s Defense Fleet left to its own devices, the technologically advanced rams and gunboats of the Union made quick work exposing the weaknesses of an inexperienced and undisciplined assemblage of Confederates. Those on shore

cowered at the sight of their protectorates crumbling with each forceful blow of cannon fire and ramming, iron-braced bow. Later, reporting to his superior General Beauregard from the perspective on shore, CSA brigadier-general M. Jeff Thompson remarked on the “faulty” handling of vessels in addition to a “misapprehension of orders surrounding the circumstances.” Seeing the promise of victory snatched away by Federal forces, Thompson remarked “they are gone and I am going,” and rode away from the city now under the Stars and Stripes. All the gallantry of the Confederate forces could not outweigh the overwhelming inertia of the combined Union fleet. When the smoke cleared after an hour and a half of pitched battle, the Confederate River Defense Fleet laid in ruins. As historian H. Allen Gosnell comments in *Guns on the Western Waters,* “the effort [. . .] was glorious but the failure was fatal and complete.” The citizens and military on shore beheld a monumental defeat, many asking if the fate of the Confederacy critically hung in the balance.

All but one of the Confederate vessels engaged in the battle were either sunk or captured by Union forces in what historian Spencer Tucker called “one of the most lopsided Union victories in the war.” Of the over one hundred and eighty casualties for
the Confederacy, the Union forces suffered only one. In the aftermath of the battle, the captured city of Memphis became not only a natural invasion corridor for troops, ships, and supplies along the upper Mississippi River, but an important economic juncture for trade that aided Union forces in other theaters of warfare for the remaining war years as well. Memphis citizens engrossed in Mississippi River cotton culture now dealt under the auspices of a Federal government that regulated all traffic into and out of the commercial hub. With the eventual capture of the Confederacy's "Gibraltar" at Vicksburg, Mississippi, the following year, Lincoln's superior military machine surrounded Jefferson Davis's Confederate forces in both land and sea operations, which tightened his grip on the South until their eventual defeat in the spring of 1865. Multifaceted in scope and vital after its capture, Memphis was an integral part of the outlined plans for the early 1862 Union offensive in the west.  

Riverine combat during the Civil War is highly underestimated in the scope of victories during the four years of conflict. Although both Union and Confederate navies in the west started in mere infancy, both camps became well aware of its importance for strategy and troop support. It was the action taken by combined naval forces that dictated how vital the west was for the war aims of Washington officials. By addressing the battle of Memphis as a decisive victory for the Union economically, militarily, and socially, this shows the significance in removing all obstacles along the Mississippi River under Confederate command. John D. Milligan noted in the introduction to his article on Ellet's ram conception and implementation, "Charles Ellet and His Naval Steam Ram,"

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5 This, as later discussed, is the famous Ram Fleet commander Colonel Charles Ellet, Jr. For more information, refer to the end of chapter three titled, "The Battle of Memphis."

6 Tucker, "Naval Battle of Memphis," 1321.
that Memphis “played an important part in destroying the last Confederate fleet worthy of the name.” Accordingly, this thesis examines the Civil War naval battle at Memphis, Tennessee on 6 June 1862. The clash of iron-wielded rams and gunboats that occurred on a casually warm June morning tells much of the western theater of warfare far beyond the confines of martial stratagem. Memphis stood as a proud symbol of Federal control along the upper Mississippi River. Richmond could only watch from afar as their vice grip along the river began to loosen with each forceful and triumphant Federal blow. Indeed, the United States flag flew defiantly and unchanged in the bluff city for the remainder of the war.

It is important to note what occurred during the first months of 1862 to fully comprehend the battle of Memphis and its aftermath. The second chapter examines the wartime events that occurred in the late winter and early spring of 1862. Specifically, the chapter focuses on the strategic locations along the Mississippi River and how they influenced policymakers in Washington, D.C. and Richmond, Virginia. Decisions made within the two capitals came to fruition in the early months of 1862 when the gears of war started to make serious headway. Officials felt they knew their adversary, and could accordingly expect the unexpected. This was not the case, however, for the western theater of naval warfare, where the realistic horrors of close-counter fighting took a new and innovative twist on the past as witnessed later at Memphis.

7 John D. Milligan, “Charles Ellet and His Naval Steam Ram,” Civil War History 9, no.2 (June 1963): 121.

8 Theodore Ropp, “Anaconda’s Anyone?” Military Affairs 27 (Summer 1963): 71-76.

The chapter also offers an introspective look at wartime Memphis, Tennessee, as a premier tactical and commercial center for the Confederacy. Memphis plays an important part before and after the engagement as a conduit for trade and resource management along the Mississippi River, the geographical focus of the study.\textsuperscript{10} A careful examination of the southern mindset following the naval battle of Plum Point Bend turns into a keen public obsession of the limited engagement. This obsession, like the engagement itself, was short lived. It is this idea that leads up to the second half of the chapter addressing the background to the "major players" and battle groups that eventually took part in the battle of Memphis. This assemblage includes Union Colonel Charles Ellet Jr.'s Ram Fleet, Flag Officer Charles Davis's Mississippi River Squadron, and Confederate Captain James Montgomery's Confederate River Defense Fleet.\textsuperscript{11}

The complicated nature of Memphis's antebellum commercial ties to the North contrasted against the "cotton, railroads, and the Negro" bound to the southern states.\textsuperscript{12} From a geographic standpoint, Memphis dealt its business in virtually all directions. A report from the \textit{Memphis Daily Appeal}, a prominent newspaper based in town, detailed the collectives' unabashed sympathies once word spread of Lincoln's 1860 election:

\textsuperscript{10} The theories that helped foment war along the Mississippi River are not mentioned in the thesis body, yet warrant some consideration. Winfield Scott's economic stranglehold or "Anaconda Plan" is one tactic of note. Although the exact details to his plan never came to exact fruition, one can see its remnants with Flag Officer David Glasgow Farragut's blockade of the Gulf of Mexico and the downriver offensive conducted by the Western Flotilla. For more information on this subject, see McPherson, \textit{Battle Cry of Freedom}, 333-334. As far Confederate strategy, Robert V. Bogle's article is an invaluable resource. For more information, see Robert V. Bogle, "Defeat Through Default: Confederate Naval Strategy for the Upper Mississippi River and its Tributaries, 1861-1862," \textit{Tennessee Historical Quarterly} 27 (1968): 62-71.

\textsuperscript{11} For one of the best discussions of engineer James Eads and the developments of the Union river defense fleets (Western Flotilla or Mississippi River Squadron in particular), please see the chapter entitled "The Mississippi River Ironclads" in Robert Macbride, \textit{Civil War Ironclads: The Dawn of Naval Armor} (Philadelphia: Chilton Books, 1962), 47-66.

\textsuperscript{12} Gerald M. Capers, Jr. \textit{The Biography of a River Town, Memphis: Its Heroic Age} (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1939), 81.
There is nothing of injury to this city to be apprehended from the election of Lincoln [...] The apprehension of danger so far as it exists here is groundless. Emphasis will gain both wealth and population from any civil commotion arising south of us, and we are satisfied that there never was a time when investments here will prove more profitable than those of today.  

Indeed, contemporary sources tied to the surrounding Memphis area like the Appeal and Memphis Daily Avalanche help to provide a cursory summation of the Memphis populace, a group as important to the narrative as the Union and Confederate combatants.  

Drawing on the timeline of events in the spring of 1862, the third chapter focuses on the 6 June engagement between opposing naval forces mentioned above. In creating a cohesive narrative of battle, the Official Records, or ORN, are frequently used to pinpoint the exact movements of the fleets, which began with a misplaced shot from the CS Ram Little Rebel. The description of the original position of the opposing fleets drawn by Boston Journal war correspondent Charles Coffin helps frame the battle within the context of Mississippi River and Memphis topography. Using newspaper sources as well as eyewitness accounts of Union servicemen watching the throng of Memphians along the bluffs, the first few pages of this chapter detail the initial reaction of the onlookers. The sentiment held by these men and women form an intricate parallel to the battle itself; certainly a symbolic gesture to the hopes and aspirations of the spectators that turned into cowers of frustration by battles end. The engagement highlights the strategic success of Colonel Charles Ellet Jr.’s newly created Ram Fleet and Captain Charles H. Davis’ Mississippi River gunboats, sinking two Confederate Rams outright and disabling another four. The gamble Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton took to create the Ram

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13 Memphis Daily Appeal, October 24, 1860.
Fleet manifested itself in the overwhelming Union naval victory. Only one vessel, the Van Dorn, escaped in with all pieces intact, yet its departure remained another casualty to the conflict.

At a time when Confederate victories in the east largely overshadowed the innumerable events in the western states, Confederate tactic took to the defensive, and consequently erected a series of forts along the Mississippi River in an effort to protect the vital waterway that allowed the free flow of information, supplies, and troop transports to dozens of hotspots throughout the South. Yet, as many historians like William Shea and Terrence Winschel show, fortifications along waterways “have several inherent weaknesses” and could accordingly “only delay the inevitable.” Placing these ideas within the framework of Memphis towards the end of the five month Union offensive beginning in February at Forts Henry and Donelson sheds light on the domino effect of Confederate land and sea losses during this period which culminated in their failed stand along the levee. Although discussions emerged concerning the protection of the city, no serious erections subsisted by June 1862. Without a doubt, Memphis provides a textbook example of Confederate strategic mismanagement. The early success felt by Confederate naval forces at Plum Point Bend dramatically reversed itself at


\[16\] William L. Shea and Terrence J. Winschel, Vicksburg is the Key: The Struggle for the Mississippi River (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2003), 4.
Memphis, as Montgomery’s River Defense Fleet drastically underestimated the tenacity and fighting spirit of the Western Flotilla and Ram Fleet.\textsuperscript{17}

The fourth chapter, “The City is in Your Power,” refers to a remark made by Memphis mayor John Park in an open letter of capitulation to Davis shortly after the engagement ended. By these words, it is abundantly clear that Memphis was a bitter loss for the South. After a brief discussion on the process of the return of Memphis under Federal control, the remainder of the chapter discusses the reaction of the battle as displayed in both the northern and southern press. Newspapers during the Civil War were by many accounts the only means that the northern and southern public came across information outside the home front. For others, especially in the southern states, the home front literally became the battlegrounds streamed across countless black and white headlines on a daily basis. Union war correspondents that witnessed the engagement onboard the tugs \textit{John H. Dickey}, \textit{Platte Valley}, and captured steamer \textit{Sovereign} sent back to the north well needed news given the recent and unpleasant results of George McClellan’s failed offensive to Richmond.\textsuperscript{18} However, Confederate newspapers such as the \textit{Memphis Daily Appeal} and \textit{Memphis Avalanche} present the prime focus of interpretation in the chapter. Because Memphis was a significant defeat for the Confederacy, a close examination of their print resources helps to understand their collective mentality when placed against Federal dailies and journal articles. In some cases, like the article published in the \textit{Appeal} later in the war, the city’s abandonment to

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item[\textsuperscript{17}] Chester G. Hearn, \textit{Ellet’s Brigade: The Strangest Outfit of All} (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2000), 32-33.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
its cause traced back to a long held disdain against the Confederate military authorities in the western theater.\textsuperscript{19} Much to the dismay of those who witnessed the defeat, the article’s author and \textit{Appeal} editor John Reid McClanahan claimed Memphis gave up without a fight “in some cases with ignominious cowardice,” comparing it to the bitter defeat at Nashville later in the war.\textsuperscript{20}

Taken what is known of the importance of Memphis as a key military and economic center of trade and transportation, the final chapter highlights the major developments of Memphis under Federal control. Militarily speaking, the city became part of a waterborne invasion corridor with the ability to send Federal troops and supplies downriver to Vicksburg, Mississippi. The Union fleet further benefitted from the remaining shipyard, one of two previously utilized by the Confederacy. Military officials used the city as a housing facility and repair station for vessels on the Mississippi. Memphis’s prewar reputation as a hub for “King Cotton” did not end under the Stars and Stripes, as competent officers sent to maintain control, like William Tecumseh Sherman, helped the city thrive as a depot for the cash crop, as well as sugar and molasses.\textsuperscript{21}

Speculators from the northern states took the news of Memphis’s capture as an opportunity to bring their own enterprises in. Although Sherman felt uneasy at the thought of these men entering into trade, war secretary Stanton and Henry Halleck trumped his apprehension because of the massive influx of profit stirred into the Federal

\textsuperscript{19} \textit{Memphis Daily Appeal}, March 3, 1863. The article, discussed later in the thesis, was a response to another article printed in the Savannah News. For more information, see Barbara G. Ellis, \textit{The Moving Appeal: Mr. McClanahan, Mrs. Dill, and the Civil War’s Great Newspaper Run} (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2003), 145-146.

\textsuperscript{20} Ellis, \textit{The Moving Appeal}, 145-146.

\textsuperscript{21} Capers, \textit{Biography of a River Town}, 152-153.
economy.\textsuperscript{22} The Confederacy also lost a major railroad terminus to their captors, many of which stretched to the far reaches of states still engaged in pitched battle throughout the south. Concluding remarks deal primary with the enduring legacy of Memphis and its impact on the Civil War. If the victories and accomplishments of Union forces dictated the outcome of the war, the naval battle of Memphis should be included in the list of decisive conflicts directly related to the eventual collapse of the Confederacy at Appomattox in 1865.\textsuperscript{23}

There are several pieces of scholarship written on the naval battle of Memphis at the graduate level. The first, written by Delta State College masters student Hewey Hulan Purvis in 1972, is titled “Naval Operations on the Western Rivers: From the Conception of the Inland Flotilla to the Battle of Memphis, June 6, 1862.” The most recent study at the graduate level, John Dougan’s “Battle of Memphis,” was completed in 1996 at the University of Memphis. Although these theses might provide keen insight into their sources and methodology, both are currently unavailable.\textsuperscript{24} Jesse Chapman’s 1985 MA thesis from Old Dominion University, “The Ellet Family and Riverine Warfare in the West—1861-1865,” discusses crucial elements to Ram Fleet commander Charles


\textsuperscript{23} Current, ed. \textit{Encyclopedia of the Confederacy}, 1028.

\textsuperscript{24} Hewey Hulan Purvis. “Naval Operations on the Western Rivers: From the Conception of the Inland Flotilla to the Battle of Memphis, June 6, 1862.” (M.A. thesis, Delta State College, 1972); John Dougan, “The Battle of Memphis” (M.A. thesis, University of Memphis, 1996). Of the libraries which house the copies of the theses, both are reported as either “missing” or “non-circulating,” leaving the only immediate option to travel to Tennessee and Mississippi to view the documents. Dougan’s thesis, although unattainable, would benefit the scholarship included in this paper as it is relatively new considering the breadth of writing on naval warfare in the 1960s.
Ellet, Jr.’s involvement at Memphis. Chapman mentions the battle itself as one chapter in the broader narrative to the Ellet family’s involvement during the war. Chapman’s ample use of primary and secondary sources added the accumulation of ideas in turning a seemingly unknown victory in 1862 into one described as “decisive,” yet does not specifically address the engagement as the prime focus of content.26

The majority of written material on the battle of Memphis in Civil War scholarship is viewed as supplemental in light of larger, more “significant” operations along the Mississippi River. Its impact in relation to securing the Mississippi is often overshadowed by other battles like New Orleans and Vicksburg in many notable sources. In William Shea and Terrence Winschel’s Vicksburg is the Key, a work focused on the sequence of events along the Mississippi River, the index lists several instances of “Memphis” as well as the Union and Confederate forces involved. Yet the book mentions the battle merely as an afterthought. Shea and Winschel, like other historians of the era, fold Memphis into the narrative more as an interesting sidebar of strategic importance rather than a significant battle in the narrative of conflict in the west.27

Memphis is often included together with land and naval engagements within the similar time frame it occurred. This provides the reasoning behind a careful discussion of the western theater of warfare in the second chapter. In James McPherson’s chapter on 1862 river warfare in his seminal Battle Cry of Freedom, he places a brief account of Memphis together with such actions as Shiloh, Fort Pillow, Fort Henry and Donelson,


26 For more information on Chapman’s use of sources in the bibliography, see Chapman, “The Ellet family and Riverine Warfare in the West- 1861-1865,” 104-108.

27 Shea and Winschel, Vicksburg is the Key, 20-24.
and Island No. 10. Following this narrative trend, John D. Milligan’s monograph *Gunboats Down the Mississippi* is another piece of scholarship that traces the evolution of movements along the Mississippi River throughout the war. The monograph is largely based off his doctoral thesis at the University of Michigan, later published in 1965 by the United States Naval Institute Press. Placed within a bevy of scholarship written during the 1960s like Virgil Carrington Jones’ *Civil War at Sea* and Bern Anderson’s *By Sea and By River*, Milligan’s concise history parallels the influence of the opposing ram fleets within the broader spectrum of western warfare. Much like Jones and Anderson, the engagement does not extend beyond its initial discussion. This is an oversight, for Memphis’s importance subsisted well after the beginning of June. However, Milligan’s short work is the best secondary source on the operations on the Mississippi River for its time, and is consequently utilized in every major scholarly work today similar in subject matter. In essence, the overall narrative of the Civil War is not earmarked by Memphis, yet is inevitably included in the timeline of events within the four years of conflict.

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28 Gary L. Donhardt’s *On the Road to Memphis with General Ulysses S. Grant* is another recent monograph written on the subject of Memphis, though rare in publication. Although the book in its first edition is only seventeen pages, it provides some insight into the overland operations during the period preceding the naval battle at Memphis. For more information, see Gary L. Donhardt, *On the Road to Memphis with Ulysses S. Grant* (Collierville, TN: Donhardt and Daughters, 1998).

29 Milligan also published a 1963 article in *Civil War History* which detailed many of his ideas included in his discussion on the battle of Memphis. The focus, however, is placed on Ellet’s personal experience in the engagement. Milligan does an excellent job incorporating primary documents with secondary scholarship surrounding the battle. For more information, see his short article in Milligan, “Charles Ellet,” 121-132.


In terms of its importance to the western theater, Chester G. Hearn's *Ellet's Brigade: The Strangest Outfit of All* is the most recent and subsequently matchless piece of secondary scholarship relating to the 6 June meeting. Although he does not focus primarily on the battle, his second chapter, "The Rams at Memphis," incorporates an intricate blend of primary and secondary scholarship, using the personal recollections of the Ellet family to tell the story. Hearn feels the "obscure" unit was paid "poor tribute" in the past, and accordingly wrote the monograph to give them the justice they deserved from its inception to the formation of the Mississippi River Marine Brigade later in the war. In his introduction, Hearn included a powerful quote from Warren D. Crandall that succinctly summarizes the authors' sentiments towards the engagement at Memphis.

Crandall, who wrote a history of the Ram Fleet and coordinated their collection of documents after the war, penned a letter in 1889 to *Official Records* compiler James R. Soley that the fleet "constituted some of the most important and brilliant episodes in the history of the war on the Mississippi River." It is the intention of this thesis to prove Crandall correct.

**MEMPHIS AS A DECISIVE CONFLICT**

The term "decisive" in context to war is often used to describe an event that changed the outcome of the wider arena of the given conflict. Generals like Robert E. Lee and George McClellan obsessed over Napoleonic strategy, and desperately sought to reinvent his decisive victories throughout the Civil War. Many books comment on the decisive nature of warfare, yet most concerning the Civil War pertain to land operations.

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32 Warren D. Crandall to James R. Soley, March 9, 1889, Mississippi Ram Fleet and Marine Brigade Papers, National Archives, Washington, D.C., in Hearn, *Ellet's Brigade*, 10. Hearn later added that Soley "admitted that if the navy did not publish the official papers of the Ram Fleet, its history during the Civil War would be lost."
Naval battles that center intently on this subject are few and far between. Most sources like Craig Symonds’ *Decision at Sea* focus on the battle between the USS *Monitor* and CSS *Virginia* in Hampton Roads, Virginia. Symonds, a leading historian at the United States Naval Academy, is no stranger to the idea of northern naval superiority. In his recent discussion on the battle of Hampton Roads, Symonds referred to it as the “milestone [...] passing of one era and the beginning of another.” If Hampton Roads was the first battle of its kind, and Symonds is in turn correct, subsequent conflicts along America’s waterways build upon the successes of mechanized naval warfare, thereby altering the way in which one views the outcome of the war itself.\footnote{33 Craig L. Symonds, *Decision at Sea: Five Naval Battles that Shaped American History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 137.}

Although the events in Virginia described above provided a showcase to the awesome potential of warfare to come, scholarship in naval history focuses its attention on this “decisive” battle because it was the first of its kind. In terms of this decisive nature of warfare, as well as the affects of the battle in relation to the economic and political consequences attached to a military defeat, the naval battle at Memphis in June 1862 cannot be overlooked. In one swift and crucial blow, the Confederacy lost a hotbed of resources and the means to transport it to aid their already crippling economy. Under Union control, Memphis provided a window through which to view a “lost opportunity” for the South and one gained for the North’s eventual attack and capture of Vicksburg, Mississippi on 4 July 1864. Vicksburg’s capitulation was only possible through the capture of Memphis and the security of the entire upper-Mississippi River region, as a
majority of ships involved in the 1864 campaign drew blood the previous year upriver at Memphis.\textsuperscript{34}

**DESCRIPTION OF PRIMARY SOURCES**

As this thesis focuses around the battlefield account and its effect on the population of the Confederacy, primary source material encompasses the bulk of the argument. Of all the primary source material utilized, the most important set of documents is the *Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies in the War of the Rebellion*. Commonly referred to as The *Official Records* or *ORN*, these volumes on military affairs are used in any major work on Civil War naval operations. One volume of particular value to this project is the twenty-third installment of the *Official Records*, titled “Naval Forces on Western Waters.” This volume contains a number of primary documents concerning Memphis before and after the battle, which includes telegrams, correspondence, battle reports, and eyewitness accounts. Exchanges of information between naval commanders and ground forces, as well as the government officials in Washington, D.C. and Richmond, respectively, are covered. Other primary source materials, specifically newspaper accounts of the conflict, are analyzed in the fourth chapter for their merit in dictating the socio-psychological effect of the battle’s result.\textsuperscript{35}

**METHODOLOGY**

It is impossible to reconstruct any battle as it exactly happened. Even with advances in modern technology, biases exist as to the conduct and outcome of battle. Memphis is no exception. What historians are left with in hindsight are the contemporary


\textsuperscript{35} For a look at the entire set of documents that concern the battle of Memphis, see *ORN*, XXIII, 118-144.
accounts in newspapers, published papers, letters, and diaries. The majority of secondary scholarship written on Memphis draws off the contemporary accounts of the Union and Confederate officers engaged at the battle. This does not suggest, however, that every historian's account of the battle along the Memphis levee is similar. To keep the battle account within the limits of historical accuracy, this thesis provides a comparison of newspaper evidence with eyewitness accounts of the engagement. Along the same line, the *Official Records* provide necessary source material to discuss an accurate portrayal to the military aspects of the battle. Indeed, Civil War scholars are fortunate enough to have access to both Union and Confederate correspondences included in the *Official Records* of the armed forces. Contemporary maps and illustrations of the battle offer further visual components to both primary and secondary source material.

There exists a stark contrast in how newspapers North and South treated the battle of Memphis. After the experience of Union naval forces in Hampton Roads, many northern newspapers merged the successes of the two engagements together as a sign not only of their inherent supremacy in naval matters, but in the ongoing operations of the war itself. To get a keen sense of Memphis's decisiveness, southern sources are read with the utmost detail to gain a sense of the true reaction felt throughout the Confederacy.

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36 Although the Official Records for both the army and navy are characteristically hailed as inaccurate and biased. James Merrill's 1963 survey article on the writings of naval history declared the Official Records as "handicapped by the sins of omission," placing the fault on its editors. For more information, see James M. Merrill, "Successors of Mahan: A Survey of Writings on American Naval History, 1914-1960," *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 50, no. 1 (June 1963): 80.


38 One such article praises the naval operations at both battles as a way to achieve victory while saving those in their ranks at the same time. For more information, see "Another Week of Civil War," *The Albion, A Journal of News, Politics, and Literature* 40, no. 24 (June 14, 1862): 282.
in direct correlation to the victorious rhetoric included in northern primary source material. Moreover, after Memphis, newspapermen fought a literary battle to win the “hearts and minds” of their respective citizens. Monographs and scholarly articles provide the necessary secondary source material to compliment and “fact check” primary sources used.

A CASE FOR MEMPHIS

There is no doubt that the battle of Memphis had a direct impact on the eventual capitulation of Confederate forces at Appomattox in 1865. Like any form of competition, every win or loss counts towards the eventual goal. Battles during the Civil War indeed have different levels of historical importance. Put into layman’s terms, the “quality” of victory superseded the “quantity” of losses. In securing Union victory in the west, the battles of New Orleans and Vicksburg along the lower Mississippi have dominated scholarship since the end of the war. However, if “Vicksburg is the key,” as Lincoln pointed out during the war, the means of unlocking that door occurred with the protection of the upper-Mississippi river region, which was possible only after the fall of Memphis in June of 1862.\(^39\)

Memphis’s importance extends far beyond the scope of the battle itself, as this is not exclusively a military history. Accordingly, this thesis shows a “multi-leveled” decisive victory at Memphis not solely in terms of military standards, but also on a political, social, and economic level. The level of morale seen in the newspaper accounts of the war and the reaction of some of the eyewitnesses of the battle itself stand testament to the decisive nature of the conflict. Morale can snuff the energy of a military force just

\(^{39}\) Shea and Winschel, *Vicksburg is the Key*, 1.
as fast as the civilian sector. Those who read their respective newspapers dictated the status of the war by the successes and defeats published. Through the spirited analyses of primary and secondary sources, the loss at Memphis is revealed as a demoralizing defeat for the South. Without the support of the general public, the scattered Confederate forces along the Mississippi River could only wait another year for the complete collapse of the West as a major theater of war.

It is inevitable that flaws exist in the argument that Memphis was a significant conflict during the Civil War. The fact that many Union servicemen traded with Confederate soldiers in the surrounding Memphis area is one example that draws less attention to the idea of total Federal control. The limited amount of primary source material available, albeit helpful, does not permit any historian to take a completely objective stance on the events surrounding the battle. Although this may appear as a fissure in the thesis argument, the beauty of history is in essence the ability to recognize these argumentative flaws. Regardless of the activity presented by both sides after its capture, the city nonetheless thrived. The use of primary and secondary evidence to craft the case for Memphis as a microcosm of ultimate Federal success is the underlying purpose behind the pages that follow. This is but one interpretation that expands our understanding of the western war through the sequence of events that occurred as a result of one limited engagement.

40 As described in the final chapter of this thesis, “Playing Strategy With the Enemy: The Bluff City.”
CHAPTER II
SPRING 1862 AND THE WESTERN THEATER OF WAR

In the spring of 1862, the Civil War on western waters reached a critical flashpoint. With General George McClellan’s Union army failing to achieve substantial victory in the east, the war in the west proved vital for the morale of troops in both theaters. The Federal army and navy intended to split the South in half by controlling all rivers from St. Louis to the Gulf of Mexico. Although a daunting task, by the end of April the Union achieved significant victories at Shiloh as well as Captain David Glasgow Farragut’s capture of New Orleans, Louisiana. New Orleans, the South’s largest city and key commercial and supply center, fell in part to Farragut’s expert use of the West Gulf Blockading Squadron and mortar boat flotilla.¹ The courageous Captain, already sixty and the veteran of two American wars, secured the city easily with superior firepower against supposedly “impenetrable” fortifications at Forts Jackson and St. Philip located seventy miles below the famed city at the mouth of the river. Indeed, in a matter of extreme oversight, the Confederate military felt the aged fortifications so powerful that they never constructed fortifications in its likeness closer to the Crescent City. With the barriers taken out in relative ease in a nighttime artillery duel on 24 April, Farragut’s

¹ Like President Abraham Lincoln, Ulysses S. Grant was able to see how important the west was in achieving victory for the entire Union army as early as 1862. After the victories at Fort Henry, Fort Donelson, and Shiloh, Grant felt that “the rebellion against the Government would collapse suddenly and soon, if a decisive victory could be gained over any of its armies.” Although the realization would take another year to achieve, Grant is regardless merited in his foresight. For more information about Grant from his personal memoirs, please see Ulysses S. Grant, The Personal Memoirs of Ulysses S. Grant (New York: Da Capo, 1982; reprint, New York: Modern Library, 1999), 193 (page citations refer to the reprint edition).
capture of New Orleans five days later solidified the first huge Federal naval success of the war.²

Disregarding strategy, there was a large amount of luck thrown in the direction of the Federal Navy concerning its success at New Orleans, which further dictated its future accomplishments in the months to come. It would be unfair to assume Jefferson Davis and the Confederacy were idle in the West through the first year of the war. Yet Davis and Secretary of Navy Stephen Mallory grew more concerned by early 1862 with the possibility of attack from the upper Mississippi, making it their prime focus.³ They deemed the myriad fortifications extending from Columbus, Kentucky, to Vicksburg, Mississippi, sufficient enough to stave off any naval force brave enough to pass the fortifications. Despite the Confederate capital’s location in Virginia, those primarily concerned with the overall southern war effort in the early spring of 1862 looked intently as the events unfolded in the lower and upper valley continually in the favor of their aggressors. As historian John D. Milligan suggested in Gunboats Down the Mississippi, the most Confederate strategy might expect throughout the war “was to deny superiority to the North.”⁴

² Richard Current, ed., The Encyclopedia of the Confederacy (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993), 1029; James McPherson, Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 418-420. Much of the success of the New Orleans offensive, besides a matter of extreme oversight by the Confederacy, was due to the use of the mortar boat flotilla under direction of Commander David Dixon Porter, an officer who played one of the most important roles concerning naval forces in the Civil War.

³ As William L. Shea and Terrence J. Winschel further explain in Vicksburg is the Key, “Davis and Mallory not only refused to send reinforcements but also crippled Lovell’s efforts to organize a coordinate defense. For more information, see William L. Shea and Terrence J. Winschel, Vicksburg is the Key: The Struggle for the Mississippi River (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2003), 13.

⁴ John D. Milligan, Gunboats Down the Mississippi (Annapolis: United States Naval Institute, 1965), xxi.
The free flow of trans-Mississippi communications in the West depended upon their success in holding the line over long periods of time. Given the almost immediate possibility of conflict as early as 1861, Confederate strategy could only warrant a policy defensive in nature. Officials in Richmond did not, however, heed the warnings of Colonel Mansfield Lovell, commander at New Orleans, concerning the buildup of vessels at the mouth of the river and the necessity for more support to stave off an eventual attack. Consequently, had the Confederate vessels completed at New Orleans stayed behind at New Orleans instead of joining the fleet at Fort Pillow on 17-18 April, Farragut’s capture might have drummed up more resistance.5

Union naval forces along the northern border of Missouri and Kentucky also achieved success in the early months of 1862. Flag Officer Henry H. Foote wrote to Secretary of Navy Gideon Welles suggesting action after the Confederacy burned several gunboats when they departed from Florence, Alabama.6 Situations like this set the initiative for a concerted offensive. Grant’s capture of Forts Henry and Donelson in coordination with Foote in February started a chain effect leading to a string of “near decisive victories” for the Union. The battle of Island No. 10, occurred seventeen days previous to the fall of New Orleans, and proved an essential step in securing the upper Mississippi River from Confederate forces.7 Writing from Fort Jackson, Tennessee,

5 James E. Montgomery to G.W. Randolph, ORA, July 1, 1862, LII, 38. The fleet at New Orleans that traveled up to Fort Pillow, what became James E. Montgomery’s River Defense Fleet, will be explained in further detail below. Indeed, it is safe to say had they engaged in the fight for New Orleans, the battle at Memphis would have occurred at a different time and under vastly different circumstances.

6 At the time, Flag Officer Foote was the overall commander of the Union naval forces in the West. Charles Henry Davis and David Dixon Porter later replace him after he is injured.

7 Many of the Confederate gunboats were released from the port city to defend the upper Mississippi River in April before New Orleans capitulated. For more information, see Robert V. Bogle,
General P.G.T. Beauregard confided to Major-General Earl Van Dorn that the loss of Island No. 10 “must also be followed immediately by the loss of the whole Mississippi Valley.”

Although the news of Island No. 10’s fall reached Richmond several days later, naval secretary Stephen Mallory knew the approaching Union ironclads might spell immediate disaster in the western theater. If Mallory was convinced that Union forces could not breach the upper Mississippi valley, the surrender of Island No. 10 forced the secretary to reconsider his position. Mallory accordingly looked further downriver for the possibility of a domino effect. Noting the strategic positions spotted along the Mississippi River, Mallory knew that the construction of the gunboat Arkansas neared completion under the direction of Captain John T. Shirley at Memphis, Tennessee. With the iron-reinforced hull near completion, the vessel proved highly valuable to the Confederate cause once word spread of the events in early April. Mallory sent a message to Captain George N. Hollins situated at Fort Pillow on 10 April to discuss the possibility of further Federal molestations. “On your best judgment,” the secretary remarked, “do not let the enemy get the boats at Memphis.” Once the news came of New Orleans’ eminent demise, Arkansas Commander Charles H. McBlair made the decision to retreat

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to Yazoo City, Mississippi, to finish the construction and outfitting of the *Arkansas*, leaving its sister ship the CSS *Tennessee* behind in the Memphis shipyard.  

The surrender of the tiny island hamlet opened the way for the Federal navy surrounding their base at Cairo, Illinois to steam down river and capture the evacuated Fort Pillow in late May.  

Strongpoint after strongpoint, Confederate forces ran away from what historian Michael Bennett called "coarse, untested, and unsafe vessels." The only things that stood in the way of linking the Union-held strongholds on the Mississippi were the bustling port cities of Memphis, Tennessee, and Vicksburg, Mississippi. Of all the passable waterways reachable from Cairo, the Mississippi River allowed a secondary outlet for attack should major general Henry Halleck's ground forces fail to reach their objectives. If United States Attorney General Edward Bates was correct when he stated in 1861 that only "one power will control it from Pittsburg and St. Paul to New Orleans," then the combined Union forces knew that the eventual command of the river in its entirety depended upon the capture of any and all bases under Confederate control.  

Situated forty miles above the levee in late May, both the Western Flotilla and West Gulf Blockading Squadron would make Memphis their primary target in the month to come.  

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10 Edwin C. Bearss, *Rebel Victory at Vicksburg* (Vicksburg, Miss.: Vicksburg Centennial Commemoration Commission, 1963), 101. Bearss notes that, although the CSS *Tennessee* stayed behind, rebel forces took its engine to be used in a vessel of the same name later in the war.  

11 Confederate forces evacuated Fort Pillow because General P.G.T. Beauregard left Corinth, Mississippi, in late May for fear of the ensuing attack by major general Henry Halleck's 100,000 plus forces. For more information on Corinth and its evacuation in relation to Fort Pillow, see McPherson, *Battle Cry*, 417.  


Farragut’s originally intended to meet up with Foote’s fleet moving down the Mississippi River at Vicksburg, located geographically between the approaching naval forces immediately following the capture of New Orleans. Farragut’s initial instructions from naval secretary Gideon Welles on 20 January was to not only provide a “vigorous” and effective blockade of the Gulf, but to “push a strong force up the river” should any advance approaching down from Cairo prove ineffective. If successful, as most naval historians suggest, the Confederacy “would be cut in two.” When Farragut attempted to proceed upon orders in May, pushing as far as three hundred miles to the outskirts of Vicksburg after taking Baton Rouge and Natchez, he made the decision to pull his fleet back to New Orleans after he encountered problems with navigation, supplies, and the shallow depth of the river. Farragut also had to deal with the decrepit state of the ships themselves, as a majority of them needed repairs after months of rigorous blockading duty. The river pilots knowledgeable of the Mississippi River that Farragut continually tried to recruit were too afraid to move the vessels upriver for fear of running aground. Writing to Welles aboard his flagship Hartford on 30 May after the failed attempt to penetrate past Vicksburg, Farragut detailed his many frustrations, anxiety-ridden and sleep deprived:

From all I could hear of the river, it was thought a great risk to send the large ships above Baton Rouge. In fact, the rebels exulted in seeing our ships go up, as they said we would never get one of them back again [. . .] We have no pilots. We take the boatmen who go up in the steamers or flatboats, and generally have to force them, but they know little or nothing of the river’s depth or channel for vessels of our draft.14

Colonel Lovell, now in Jackson, Mississippi, knew that the complicated nature of the river would force Farragut to retreat back downriver to safer ground, and accordingly did

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14 Farragut to Gideon Welles, May 30, 1862, ORN, XVIII, 519.
not worry about Vicksburg’s fate. For Welles and Assistant Secretary of the Navy
Gustavus Vasa Fox, however, Farragut’s retreat dramatically altered their timetable for
success in the West. Upon hearing the latest news wires from Natchez and Cairo
concerning the repulse, Fox wrote Farragut a concerned letter that his actions “may be a
fatal step as regards our western movements, since our advance to Memphis would have
been the means of forcing Beauregard to fight or retreat.” These ruminations confirm
that, despite the instance that ascending the river from its mouth was “of the utmost
importance” according to officials in the Navy Department; it would have to occur
further upriver where Rebel fortifications and fleets, not water levels, proved the only
adversary. With Vicksburg out of the question at the end of May, the next geostrategic
barriers posed by the Confederacy at the beginning of June were Fort Pillow and the city
of Memphis, Tennessee, protected by nearby Fort Randolph.16
RAMS AND THE BLUFF CITY
Memphis, Tennessee, during the Civil War was a bustling manufacturing center
for cotton and transportation hub for the Confederate military. Situated on the
Mississippi River across from the Arkansas state line, Memphis was the Confederacy’s
fifth largest city. The city attributed much of it success to its strategic position and its
four railroads stretching east and south. One railroad in particular, the Memphis Central
Railroad, connected Memphis to Vicksburg, Mississippi; indeed a crucial
communications and supply line. As a center of trade, the city helped to stimulate the
already crippling southern economy at the war’s outset. Protected by nearby Forts
Randolph and Pillow along the Mississippi River, many ardent southerners, like James

15 Gustavus Vasa Fox to Farragut, May 17, 1862, ORN, XVIII, 499.
16 Bearss, Rebel Victory, 2, 4, 48.
Montgomery, held on to the belief that Federal forces would “never penetrate farther down the Mississippi.” Yet because of the overwhelming manpower and machinery at the disposal of the pressing Union forces, adequate defense was necessary in securing the livelihood of the city.

Unfortunately for the South, there was no real effort to provide formidable defenses along the high bluffs. Nineteenth century historian and Army officer Francis Vinton Greene wrote that the city remained unfortified for fear of exposing “the city to bombardment and destruction.” On 3 June, M. Jeff Thompson, in command of the Missouri State Guards at Memphis, sent an important telegram to Daniel Ruggles at Grenada, Mississippi. Thompson urged the brigadier-general to provide mortar boats and troop transports in an effort to “play strategy with the enemy,” for if they arrived soon, he predicted that he could “hold this river above Memphis for a month.” Forces at Memphis soon received the disheartening news that the Confederates evacuated Fort Pillow. “For God’s sake,” Thompson addressed later in his telegram, “defend every bend and dispute every mile of river.” Similar reports issued the same day called for batteries

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17 Montgomery to Beauregard, May 12, 1862, ORN, XXIII, 57.


19 Along the Mississippi River, the northernmost Confederate fortification during the war was located at Columbus, Kentucky, the southernmost stronghold at New Orleans. Others, including Island No. 10 and Fort Pillow were captured by the time of the engagement at Memphis. Only Memphis and Vicksburg, the “key” to the Mississippi River, were left in June 1862. For a short yet concise history of Vicksburg and its correlation to Memphis, see the first chapter in Shea and Winschel, Vicksburg is the Key, 1-16.


21 Thompson played a crucial role in the events leading up to the battle of Memphis. For a detailed look at his own life through both primary and secondary source material, see M. Jeff Thompson, The Civil War Reminiscences of General M. Jeff Thompson (Dayton: Morningside House, 1988); Doris Land Mueller, M. Jeff Thompson: Missouri’s Swamp Fox of the Confederacy (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2007).
placements along the Tennessee shoreline. Thompson, the former mayor of St. Joseph, Missouri, relied on expediency for the guns to arrive later that night.  

Ultimately, they never came. The telegrams communicated back and forth between Grenada and Memphis showed little progress, which irritated the landlocked Ruggles and bemused Thompson. The hastened retreat of forces in Tennessee had indeed turned Confederate strategy on its head. With a majority of its troops ill-fed, ill-equipped, and subsequently in poor health, the Confederacy would need to look elsewhere to hold the line. The inefficiency of troop supplies forced Thompson to take the threat of attack on a day to day basis. Whatever strengths in defenses witnessed at Island No. 10, Memphis in 1862 was sorely absent.  

The initial proposed Union attack on Memphis occurred as early as 17 April, when the then acting naval commander for the Western Flotilla Flag Officer Andrew Hull Foote wrote to Gideon Welles that he could have captured Memphis following the surrender at Island No. 10 “without opposition” if general John Pope did not withdrawal his troops from Fort Pillow that day. Much like the naval officials in Washington, Foote grew angered that his “best matured and most hopeful plans and expectations” were shattered, as he relied on the combined operations with ground forces to attack the major Confederate obstacles along the river’s edge. Foote wanted to take advantage of a strategy that worked at Island No. 10 and Forts Henry and Donelson.  

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23 Thompson to Ruggles, June 3, 1862, ORN, XXIII, 58.  

24 Andrew Hull Foote to Welles, April 17, 1862, ORN, XXIII, 7-8.  

25 Not only did this strategy work, but the losses of Union army and naval forces were considerably lower than their Confederate counterparts.
predicted that, had Pope stayed within range of Fort Pillow, the fall of both Fort Pillow and Memphis would take only six days, Foote knew early on that Memphis was essential to the war effort.²⁶

Although the Confederacy achieved success in the Virginia theater during this period, sufficient defense along the upper Mississippi River was crucial to saving their lifeline to the rest of the southern states. The role of the navy throughout the Confederate cause was, according to historians like Fletcher Pratt, “not a principle one.” Only two Confederate naval forces existed on the Mississippi River during the entirety of the Civil War. Farragut captured the first at New Orleans, which included the CSS Manassas, the “turtle-backed” ironclad which inflicted significant damage to Federal forces before it exploded and sunk. Commodore James E. Montgomery’s River Defense Fleet was the only force that could perpetually stand a chance against the North. Purchased and outfitted in New Orleans, the innovative ramming vessels converted from steamships used for riverine trade and transportation in the antebellum South.²⁷

These innovative rams came equipped with a heavy reinforced bow and engines protected by cotton bales and pine bulwarks, hence the term “cottonclads.” Manned and operated by army personnel, Mississippi riverboat captains commanded the fleet with previous knowledge to expertly navigate the winding rivers in warfare. It was Thompson’s hope that the riverboat captains’ firsthand experience in antebellum

²⁶ Foote to Welles, April 19, 1862, ORN, XXIII, 9. In William Jewett Tenney’s Military and Naval History of the Rebellion, written immediately following the war, he remarked that “This withdrawal of the force of Gen. Pope put a stop to the progress of the Mississippi river expedition. For more information from the immediate postwar perspective, see William Jewett Tenney, The Military and Naval History of the Rebellion in the United States (New York; D. Appleton & Company, 1866), 167.

²⁷ Fletcher Pratt, Civil War on Western Waters (New York: Holt, 1956), 98. This also had to be done privately, as there were no other naval shipyards on the Mississippi River besides the private shipyards at Memphis and New Orleans.
steamship navigation would turn the tide against their Union counterparts, whose stock of
donors came largely from the Naval Academy and thus possessed little knowledge of the
Mississippi River and its tributaries. Using speed to compliment the durable bow of
each vessel, Confederate personnel in the west felt their design advantageous when pitted
against the slower and less mobile Union ironclads.⁵⁸ The Van Dorn, the pride of the
River Defense Fleet, became the initial flagship of the Confederate Commodore.⁵⁹
Although the cost to outfit and construct the fleet was extraordinary, construction
proceeded on schedule in early 1862.⁶⁰ Colonel Mansfield Lovell sent the eight rams
encompassing the “makeshift navy” upriver from New Orleans in late April 1862 so they
could be put to the test in the upper Mississippi where action seemed inevitable.⁶¹

The fleet saw its first success on 10 May at Plum Point Bend, four miles upriver
from Fort Pillow. Montgomery, with the River Defense Fleet at Fort Pillow, found the
Federal Flotilla “in a favorable position,” and accordingly seized the opportunity to stop

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⁵⁸ The eight vessels of the River Defense Fleet in 1862 were the CSS General Beauregard,
Colonel Lovell, General Thompson, General Bragg, Sumter, General Sterling Price, Van Dorn, and Little
Rebel.

⁵⁹ Many historians are reluctant to consider the riverboat captain by his wartime ranking. In
Bogle’s “Defeat Through Default,” he refers to Montgomery’s rank as “commodore,” emphasizing the
lower casing. Yet given the nature of the Confederate navy’s infancy at the outset of war, officers of any
kind were needed to gain any advantage on the Mississippi River. Many of these problems plagued the
complicated relationship between army and navy personnel in the Union. For more information, see Bogle,
“Defeat Through Default,” 62-71. The changing of the Commodores flagship from the Van Dorn to the
Little Rebel occurred later on 6 June, when leaders found that the valuables onboard the Van Dorn should
be kept out of the limelight should battle come.

⁶⁰J. Thomas Scharf, History of the Confederate States Navy, From its Organization to the
Surrender of its Last Vessel, Vol. I (New York: Rogers & Sherwood, 1887), 250-251, in Raimondo
Luraghi, A History of the Confederate Navy (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1996), 128. As stated in
Scharf and Luraghi, the cost of the River Defense Fleet was $1,363,000. Considering the monetary
problems of the Confederacy in general at the war’s outset, the fleet necessitated not only action, but also
success.

them from their continual mortar boat bombardment of Fort Pillow. Like a swarm of hornets around their nest, Thompson’s fleet caught newly installed Western Flotilla Captain Charles Henry Davis completely off guard, implanting their design successfully against the better trained and more powerful gunboats. Suffering only the deaths of a steward and cook in an early morning surprise attack on Federal gunboats, the River Defense Fleet’s speed and striking bow put the Cincinnati and Mound City out of contention for the time being. By the time Davis’s gunboats caught on to the Confederate strategy and took position in shallow water, Thompson and his River Defense Fleet quietly fell back after only thirty minutes. The hit and run engagement proved equally confusing and demoralizing for the Union.

Thompson himself praised his officers and men for “their courage and promptness in executing all orders.” Further, Thompson confided to the Confederate Secretary of War that he “would have the entire fleet in the Upper Mississippi” if his fleet remained at full strength following the battle. Because Union general John Pope took the majority of his Army of the Mississippi with him to aid the army at Corinth, Mississippi, the brigade of troops left behind in the vicinity could only provide “effective fighting against the musquitos” along the Arkansas shoreline, as New York Herald

Montgomery to Randolph, July 1, 1862, ORA, LII, 38.

Historian Virgil Carrington Jones notes how “the exact damage on the Confederate side would not be made clear by the records,” attributing two killed and “eight or ten wounded.” For more information, see Virgil Carrington Jones, The Civil War at Sea: March 1862-July 1863, Vol. II, The River War (New York: Holt, 1961), 156-157.

Thompson to Randolph, July 1, 1862, ORA, LII, 38.

Thompson to Randolph, July 1, 1862, ORA, LII, 38.
correspondent Thomas W. Knox later mused. This in turn meant that only a naval force could attack the fort from afar, leaving the fleet helpless, alone, and surprised in the early morning confusion. Confederate sympathizers, tired by the lack of progress made by their navy, now had something to rally behind. As if the steam from the smokestacks could fill their puffed chests more, Montgomery and the Ram Fleet became media darlings seemingly overnight. Historians often refer to Plum Point Bend as the first naval victory for the Confederacy above New Orleans.

The “low, dark objects” peaking out of the morning mist proved to be both the bane of northern newspapers and triumph for southern legitimacy. Davis showed clear uneasiness from his first engagement as Western Flotilla leader, and the southern press wanted to make sure to expose every idiosyncrasy. The Memphis Daily Appeal, a prominent newspaper in not only Memphis proper but the western Confederate states as well, published a riveting account of the battle that highlighted the one sided nature of the affair. To Appeal editor John Reid McClanahan, the battle proved a success because Montgomery’s fleet design “proved an adequate and complete defense” against the same vessels which caused havoc in previous engagements. As battle accounts now conformed to the Appeal’s editorial agenda, Rebel soldiers and citizens alike now had

36 Thomas W. Knox, Camp-Fire and Cotton-Field: Southern Adventure in Time of War (New York: Da Capo Press, 1969), 171. As shown later, Herald correspondent Knox was among the many northern wartime correspondents that witnessed the cavalcade of events throughout the spring 1862 offensive.

37 Bogle, “Defeat Through Default,” 62; The New York Herald, May 18, 1862. It is important to note that many historians debate if there was a clear victor to this naval battle. There are few pieces of scholarship that mention it, let alone discuss its overall effect. Regardless, the battle provided some level of legitimacy to the River Defense Fleet, which gave them a feeling of overconfidence going into battle at Memphis. Regardless who historians deemed victorious in the wake of the battle, naval historians like James Merrill agree that the Union navy “were caught napping.”

38 Memphis Daily Appeal, May 13, 1862.
cause to continue on in spirited fashion. McClanahan used strong patriotic language to espouse the Confederate cause, which effectively answered questions posed in Richmond of “Do we have a navy?” Many northern eyewitness newspaper accounts, like Herald correspondent Thomas W. Knox aboard the Platte Valley, could only say that “neither fleet had much to boast as the result of that engagement.” Yet to those responsible for the early May blunder like Davis, the threat the River Defense Fleet initially posed grew very real.

Although the attack proved beneficial for southern morale, the Confederacy later evacuated nearby Fort Pillow on 4 June because its defense was decidedly “outflanked and indefensible” once Beauregard withdrew from his headquarters at Corinth, Mississippi, amidst faulty exhortations that his hasty retreat was a victory for the South. Confederate forces burned the remaining supplies at the fort before sending its six hundred retreating troops on the steamer Golden Age further downriver. Confederate officers like Montgomery still held fast in the belief that victory would remain in their hands “unless the enemy greatly increase their force” along the river. Pushing on from Fort Pillow and newly deserted Fort Randolph the following day, the Union fleet was ready for Memphis. Because the city was “too important to abandon blithely,” according

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40 Knox, Camp-Fire and Cotton-Field, 171. Thomas W. Knox witnessed the battle onboard the Platte Valley with St. Louis Republican war correspondent, though he acknowledged that the tug John H. Dickey was the “general rendezvous of the journalists.” Indeed, he included in his discussion of Plum Point Bend an account which showed the heroics of Dickey commander Jacob Musselman in outmaneuvering the encroaching Confederate forces. For more information, see Knox, Camp-Fire and Cotton-Field, 171-172, 181.

to historian William M. Fowler, Jr., the Confederate forces would have to make a stand in the face of recent defeats at the hands of the Federal navy.\textsuperscript{42}

The fleet that steadily approached the Memphis levee was a powerful one. Much in the same taste of the Confederacy, the Union navy christened their five ironclad warships operating along the upper Mississippi in homage to the great river cities of the North. Flag Officer Davis, commanding the flagship \textit{Benton}, trekked alongside the USS \textit{Carondelet}, St. Louis, Cairo, and Louisville on their way to Memphis with an air of confidence bordering egotism. The newly installed leader intended on commanding the Western Flotilla "like an orchestra without an instrument out of tune," devoid of outside distraction or influence.\textsuperscript{43} These gunboats, built by acclaimed St. Louis engineer and Mississippi River salvager James B. Eads, were strong and powerful but lacked some early inefficiency in design and speed.\textsuperscript{44} If the Federal War Departments "listened attentively" to Eads' design, the Mississippi River Ram Fleet functioning alongside Davis was the exact opposite.\textsuperscript{45}


\textsuperscript{43} The Western Flotilla is also referred to as the Mississippi River Squadron. Many historians use the terms interchangeably. The Flotilla was under control of the US Army until September 30, 1862, when former mortar boat Commander David Dixon Porter took over naval control in the western theater for the remainder of the war.

\textsuperscript{44} Eads built the eight gunboats encompassing the Western Flotilla in one hundred days, despite problems with manpower, money, and contractual agreements. Because of the success of the gunboats in riverine warfare in the spring save the engagement at Plum Point Bend, Eads would become the praise of the Union naval forces. One historian considered him "amongst the most prominent and powerful men in the entire Mississippi Valley." Eads, a multitaled man, would indeed play a large role in the power play of controlling the Mississippi River before and after the war. An excellent description of Eads and his personal struggles with Andrew Atkinson Humphreys is found in chapter two of John M. Barry, \textit{Rising Tide: The Great Mississippi Flood of 1927 and How it Changed America} (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997), 32-45.

\textsuperscript{45} Spencer Tucker, "Naval Battle of Memphis," in David S. Heidler and Jeanne T. Heidler, eds., \textit{Encyclopedia of the American Civil War: A Political, Social, and Military History} (Santa Barbara: ABL-
The newly formulated Ram Fleet commanded by Charles Ellet, Jr. matched well with the eight Confederate rams. The Ram Fleet that Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton commissioned Ellet to develop in April encompassed his vocational skills by converting Ohio River steamers into faster and stronger counterparts to the River Defense Fleet. Given the character of Ellet’s design, one might assume Federal Secretary of Navy Gideon Welles would accept the new plans at face value. Quite the contrary, Welles never completely accepted Ellet’s concept of a ramming fleet, and summarily dismissed the idea in favor of John Ericsson’s Monitor design. Moreover, Welles wrote in his personal diary that Ellet himself could not be trusted because he was “not a naval man,” leaving Secretary of War Stanton as the only man who acknowledged the idea in early 1862. It was not until the CSS Virginia’s deadly discourse with the USS Cumberland that many officials in Washington started to take Ellet serious. Stanton invited Ellet to Washington on 14 March for a preliminary discussion of details and supplies. Inevitably, Stanton would use the guise of the War Department to construct, outfit, and run Ellet’s project.

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CIO, Inc., 2000, 1320; Barry, Rising Tide, 29. Davis took over Foote’s position after an injury to his foot received during the action at Fort Donelson.

46 Unlike the ironclad warships of the west developed by James B. Eads, the rams were unarmed, yet provided formidable “maximum strength” protection against enemy gunfire and heavily reinforced hulls designed to ram into the enemy’s port and starboard sides. Like Ellet, Eads was an engineer yet had no prior experience in building vessels of war. For more information on Eads and Ellet, see Larry J. Daniel, Island No. 10: Struggle for the Mississippi Valley (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1996), 15.

47 Gideon Welles, The Diary of Gideon Welles, Secretary of the Navy Under Lincoln and Johnson, Vol. I, 1861-March 30, 1864 (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1911), 180. Ellet initially approached Welles in May of 1861 concerning his design, yet the Secretary of Navy never responded to him concerning the idea.

48 Chester G. Hearn, Ellet’s Brigade: The Strangest Outfit of All (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2000), 5. One might assume the interactions between Welles and Ellet formed a sort of rivalry in the months preceding the battles at Hampton Roads and Memphis. Most historians writing in recent years like Hearn dictate this interesting power play between army and navy operations. What is interesting, however, is the comment that Ellet was not a “naval man,” yet Ericsson’s experience with the
Seeing the success of the Confederate ironclad Virginia's first day performance at Hampton Roads in early March, officials in Washington grew convinced that Ellet's design might provide the answer to the Confederate naval forces in the west. Reports from Major General Henry W. Halleck in the West speculated that the Confederates had "one or more river boats [. . .] like the Merrimack" in New Orleans increasingly hastened the necessity of immediate action.\textsuperscript{49} Ellet did not personally care for Ericsson's Monitor design in the wake of its clash with the Virginia, and instead stood convinced his enterprise superior. His 1855 pamphlet on the use of steam-driven rams, which fell on deaf ears during the Crimean War and the Civil War's outset, finally came to fruition when its implantation proved more important than ever.\textsuperscript{50}

These rams, ranging from 170 to 180 feet in length, used 12 to 16 inches of iron-braced timber to reinforce the ramming bow. Ellet's one directional design intended to use the entire weight of each vessel to crush opposing forces upon impact, akin to the Greek triremes of antiquity.\textsuperscript{51} Ellet was extremely confident that the aid of the Mississippi River current would "run these rams into them, and if possible, sink them."

Indeed, Ellet's background as an author of several studies of flood control on the military was as limited as Ellet's. Although Stanton showed some doubt on the design and implementation of the Ram Fleet, he nonetheless gave Ellet carte blanche to outfit his fleet in the months following the engagement at Hampton Roads.\textsuperscript{49} Henry W. Halleck to Edwin M. Stanton, March 25, 1862, ORA, VIII, 642-64.

\textsuperscript{50} Gene D. Lewis, \textit{Charles Ellet Jr., The Engineer as Individualist, 1810-1862} (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986), 182-183. The 1855 pamphlet, titled "Coast and Harbour Defenses or the Submission of Steam Battering Rams for Ships of War," outlined the use of the Ram as a defensive weapon. As history dictates, Ellet's newly designed fleet operated under the intentions of an offensive nature.

\textsuperscript{51} Even Ellet knew that his plan would only work if the one directional design hit the opposing vessel squarely. Commenting to US Navy Lieutenant W. McGunnegle in April, Ellet detailed how, given idea situations, his rams would "assuredly make their way through the hull of any ordinary transport or gunboat." For more information, see Charles Ellet, Jr. to Lieutenant W. McGunnegle, April 27, 1862, ORN, XXIII, 78-79.
Mississippi and Ohio Rivers further solidified his pronounced expertise.\textsuperscript{52} With four rams ready for service by the beginning of May, the Union navy now possessed both firepower and ramming speed.\textsuperscript{53}

Charles Ellet, Jr., a frail fifty-two year old civil engineer from Pennsylvania, arrived in late May to help secure Fort Pillow for the Union. He received a “second chance” at a naval career after repeated failures to develop concrete initiatives earlier in the war. By the time the Ram Fleet was up and running, Ellet integrated a large part of his family into his organization, including his son Charles Rivers Ellet and younger brother Alfred.\textsuperscript{54} Alongside the Ellets, fifty men from the 59\textsuperscript{th} Illinois Volunteer Regiment acted as sharpshooters and military guard for the fleet, providing the only “firepower” onboard the Rams.\textsuperscript{55} Stanton made it clear that Ellet’s appointment as head of the fleet, albeit important to the success of the war effort, would be temporary. Despite Ellet’s persistence to ascend to a military rank “a grade higher” than Colonel, by 26 April Ellet understood Stanton’s confidence in his command and accepted the rank and control of the Ram Fleet.\textsuperscript{56}

If Davis was conservative in action, Colonel Ellet proved to be his converse.

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\textsuperscript{52} These published works of Ellet, \textit{Navigation of the Ohio and Other Rivers} and \textit{The Mississippi and Ohio Rivers} detail the employment of levees and reservoirs as early as 1852.


\textsuperscript{54} In all cases, he wanted to bring in as much of the family as possible. If Ellet was going to control it, he wanted to have it his way. Yet because Stanton was giving him relative leeway, and the possibility of prize money for each successful vessel captured, he accepted. Upon acceptance, Alfred Ellet was promoted to the rank of Lt. Colonel.

\textsuperscript{55} An excellent source to the background of the Illinois Volunteers can be found in D. Lathrop, \textit{History of the 59\textsuperscript{th} Illinois Volunteers} (Indianapolis, IN: Hall & Hutchinson, 1865).

\textsuperscript{56} Ellet to Stanton, April 25, 1862, \textit{ORN}, XXIII, 73-74.
and technological minds, their demeanor and personality could not be more opposite. Davis, Harvard educated and military trained as a young midshipman, was slow, methodical, and calculative in his actions. The *Official Records* paint the picture of a man unwilling to accept Ellet as an equal because he felt he was nothing more than a cavalier civil engineer with a reputation for confrontation. Much like Secretary of Navy Gideon Welles, Davis ignored Ellet's musings because he had no real experience with the military. In his *History of the Ram Fleet*, W.D. Crandall remarked that Davis wrote repeated letters to Stanton detailing how Ellet's vision "embarrassed him much" to the point of absurdity. In hindsight, the idea of close and responsive cooperation between separate military branches was not well thought out nor recommended.

Given the situation, the "hybrid fleet" would have to work together to ensure victory for the North. Failure to attack could result in a dramatic shift in momentum for a navy that came off of a string of successes in the west. Further, a loss might also allocate some time for the vulnerable Memphis to gather troops from surrounding areas, primarily from Beauregard's force 70,000 strong in nearby Tupelo, Mississippi. The vital port city

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57 Davis was in fact only seventeen years old when he joined the navy as a midshipman.

58 In his biography of Charles Ellet, Jr., Gene D. Lewis points out how Davis "not only wanted the Ram Fleet for dispatch boats, scouts, and pickets," he was "determined to have no other force operating independently of the Mississippi River Squadron." For more information, see Lewis, *Charles Ellet Jr.*, 211.

rested its fate on the overconfidence of the River Defense Fleet against the northern naval leviathan.\textsuperscript{60}

On 5 June, Davis and his gunboats anchored on the Tennessee shoreline at 8 PM near Island No. 45, a mile and a half above Memphis.\textsuperscript{61} On the way down, Davis spotted the Confederate transport steamer \textit{Sovereign} at a bend in the river. The vessel saw the armored flotilla and attempted a hasty retreat through the main channel, beaching itself as it turned around. The fleet eventually caught up with the grounded \textit{Sovereign}, taking possession of the steamer as a "valuable prize."\textsuperscript{62} Charles Coffin, a war correspondent from the \textit{Boston Journal} accompanying Davis's fleet, noted that the crew of the rebel steamer was traveling up the river, burning plantation cotton so that it would not "fall into the hands of the Yankees." Some of the civilians, saw the black smoke of the gunboats in the distance, and scampered to save their property. One individual conversing with Coffin proclaimed Union sentiment, speaking "bitterly against Jeff Davis" for burning his cotton and property.\textsuperscript{63}

\textsuperscript{60}McPherson, \textit{Battle Cry}, 417.

\textsuperscript{61} Local rivermen often referred to this area as "Paddy's Hen and Chickens," a small chain of land masses a few miles from Memphis.

\textsuperscript{62} Prior to capture, the crew of the \textit{Sovereign} attempted to set fire to the vessel, yet was unsuccessful before Union forces arrived.

\textsuperscript{63} Davis to Welles, June 6, 1862, \textit{ORN}, XXIII, 119; Charles C. Coffin, \textit{My Days and Nights on the Battlefield} (Boston: Estes and Lauriat, 1887), 219. In his report on the travel downriver, navy Captain Henry Walke of the \textit{Carondelet} noted "on our way down the river we respected private property, and did not assail or molest any except those who were in arms against us." For more information, see Henry Walke, "The Western Flotilla at Fort Donelson, Island Number Ten, Fort Pillow and Memphis," in \textit{Battles and Leaders of the Civil War: Being for the Most Part Contributions by Union and Confederate Officers. Based on the "Century War Series"}, eds. Robert Underwood Johnson and Clarence Clough Buel (New Jersey: Castle Books, 1982), 449.
Ellet’s Ram Fleet anchored sixteen to eighteen miles upriver from Davis near Island No. 44 on the Arkansas shoreline. A testament to the lack of communication between Davis and Colonel Ellet, who later remarked that he had “no expectation” of conflict at Memphis, as reports showed the city was unfortified. As Crandall asserted, whatever action made “was to be done by each fleet according to the plans and ideas of its own commander.” Ellet’s flagship, Queen of the West, followed by the rams Monarch, Lancaster, Switzerland, and tenders Dick Fulton, T.D. Horner, Mingo, and Lioness, would wait until daylight to sail in half-mile increments downriver to meet Davis. Ellet ordered the Lioness, Sampson, and Mingo kept in back of the fleet in the event their precious tows of coal needed to be unloaded. Engagement or not, the ever-confident Ellet proclaimed he would “either control the Mississippi or be sunk in the attempt.”

City officials and military officers showed some mild apprehension at Memphis once the Western Flotilla came within range. Historian Fletcher Pratt comments in Civil War on Western Waters how the River Defense Fleet possessed both confusion and confidence going into battle. The twenty thousand barrels of coal requested by Commodore Montgomery to Colonel Lovell in New Orleans never arrived, which left a significant problem at hand. Montgomery spent the day asking those citizens still in

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64 Looking through the primary and secondary source material prior to the battle, there is a matter of debate as to how many miles Ellet’s Ram Fleet were located. The lower estimate, made by Gene D. Lewis, puts Ellet at “eight or ten miles above the gunboats.” In Ellet’s Brigade, Chester Hearn places them “sixteen river miles above Davis’s squadron.” W.D. Crandall’s report, as a participant in the engagement, has the fleet eighteen miles upriver from Memphis, placing the Ram Fleet around sixteen miles from the gunboats. For more information on the placement of the fleet through these sources, see Lewis, Charles Ellet, Jr., 169; Hearn, Ellet’s Brigade, 29; Crandall and Newell, History of Ram Fleet, 76.

65 Crandall and Newell, History of Ram Fleet, 76.

66 Ellet to Stanton, June 6, 1862, ORN, XXIII, 125; Crandall and Newell, History of Ram Fleet, 51; Ellet to McGunnegle, April 27, 1862, ORN, XXIII, 78-79.
Memphis for coal to fuel the River Defense Fleet, eventually coming by "wagonloads" from factories and private homes.\textsuperscript{67} By the afternoon, Memphis was astir with news of the Union flotilla mere miles upriver. With Forts Pillow and Randolph evacuated, it was hard to walk down Main Street without being asked, "When do you think the Federals will be here?" Indeed, nervous energy pervaded throughout town. Because Memphis was built on level ground, some citizens feared that any artillery barrage would level the city in minutes.\textsuperscript{68}

In his 1 July report to CS Secretary of War G.W. Randolph concerning the operations of the River Defense Fleet bookended between Plum Point Bend and Memphis, Montgomery wrote that his forces would have retreated on the night of the fifth "in view of the overwhelming strength" presented by Union forces. Yet the continued absence of Colonel Lovell’s coal supplies plagued the Fleet leader as day turned to night, supplying his Fleet with all available coal rounded up during the day. In hindsight, he hoped that a large supply of coal would allow his vessels to retreat to Vicksburg.\textsuperscript{69} As this alternative provided fruitless, his only option now was to either "destroy the boats or fight."\textsuperscript{70} Montgomery chose the latter, and quickly began to marshal the impending attack to civilians and soldiers alike.

\textsuperscript{67} It was Montgomery’s intention to settle at Vicksburg, yet the problems with coal forced him to stay back at Memphis.


\textsuperscript{69} Indeed, one of the reasons Montgomery gave to officials in Richmond for his forced retire to Fort Pillow at Plum Point Bend was the low supply of coal.

\textsuperscript{70} Montgomery to Randolph, July 1, 1862, \textit{ORA}, LII, 39.
Feelings of apprehension were not reserved for Confederate officers alone. Prominent area newspapers like the *Memphis Appeal* publicized the harsh reality that faced Memphis. Either out of want or necessity, the *Appeal*’s editorials from late May to early June adversely hindered public sentiment just days before the battle took place. The special defense meeting called on 31 May by Memphis Mayor John Park, albeit premature, received little support from the leading Memphis citizens that attended. The editorial published in the *Appeal* noted a citizenry “not as large or enthusiastic as the occasion required.” A short telegram sent to General Ruggles in Grenada on 3 June remarked how the speeches of General Thompson, Colonel Rosser, and Captain Baird were received “with the most discouraging results.” Accordingly, the civilians who attended these discussions refused Thompson’s suggestion to deploy his Missouri State Guard against Federal forces. Was this decision based more in their faith of the River Defense Fleet, or a great misunderstanding in the effectiveness of the Union flotilla?

After reporting on the 31 May meetings the following day, *Appeal* editors John Reid McClanahan and Benjamin Franklin Dill published their next six daily editions of the newspaper with the assumption that their beloved city would fall. It would be the last editions of the *Appeal* ever printed in Memphis, Tennessee. Coming from a paper anathema to discontent or discernment to the southern cause, readers knew as early as 22 May that McClanahan and Dill intended to move their office to Grenada, Mississippi. Although the *Appeal* editors intended to continue to publish daily editions “until the city

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72 Jones to Ruggles, June 3, 1862, *ORN*, XXIII, 59.

73 Ellis, *The Moving Appeal*, 158.

74 *Memphis Daily Appeal*, May 22, 1862.
is in complete and undisputed possession of the enemy,” the approach of the combined Federal forces only prolonged the inevitable. After publishing their 5 June edition detailing the fall of Fort Pillow and the attack to come, Appeal offices closed shop in Memphis for the last time. The popular newspaper situated on the corner of Memphis’ Union Street and Bank Avenue never opened again. Only John Reid McClanahan stayed behind, as Dill and many other Memphis citizens left that evening with the throng of citizens that mobbed the train station for a last minute seat to Grenada. Some citizens, like McClanahan, chose to stay behind. McClanahan could not resist “the biggest story of the city’s life.” To the Confederate sympathizer and ardent patriot, these trying times were merely business as usual.\footnote{Ellis, The Moving Appeal, 158-159.}

The military contingent quelled the fears of many the night of 5 June, holding several more meetings to reassure them that, given the chance, they would fight and win. Montgomery and Thompson needed a poignant speech to boost morale, one more effective than their first attempt in late May. That evening, Montgomery assembled a large crowd of citizens at the Gayoso House “with great excitement.” Stores closed and the entire town stood standstill to hear encouraging words. Montgomery commented of his intention to stay and fight, assuring the rabble that “you may see Lincoln’s gunboats sent to the bottom by the fleet which you built and manned.”\footnote{Memphis Avalanche, June 6, 1862.} Amidst cheers and exhortations, the city went to sleep confident in Montgomery’s promise for victory. The report published in the Memphis Avalanche mimicked that of its citizens:

The prospect is very good for a grand naval engagement which shall eclipse any thing ever seen before. There are many who would like the engagement to occur, who do not much relish the prospect of its occurring very near the city . . . All
however are rejoiced to learn that Memphis will not fall till conclusions are first tried on water, and at the cannon's mouth.  

That same night, and in the very building where he reassured Memphis citizens, Commodore Montgomery engaged in a heated argument with Jeff Thompson concerning the desire to draw first blood on the Federals. After hours of fruitless argument, and an angry telegraph sent off to General Beauregard, the "Missouri Swamp Fox" agreed that Montgomery would draw out his fleet in the early morning with hopes to once again catch the Union off guard. If successful, it would present the only way in which the "cottonclad" rams would achieve victory. In order to keep surprise on his side, Montgomery sent the Gordon Grant, a tug boat, up the river as reconnaissance for the Union fleet. During the night, however, the boat ran aground and was burned for fear of falling into the hands of the Federals. The Gordon Grants stoking flames proved an early sign that success rested in the eight Confederate rams alone. With the far superior Union fleet anchored above the city, they would need much more than luck on their side the following morning.  

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77 Memphis Avalanche, June 6, 1862.  
78 Pratt, Western Waters, 98-99; Coffin, My Days and Nights, 220; Jones, The Civil War at Sea, 173.
CHAPTER III
THE BATTLE OF MEMPHIS

M. Jeff Thompson would not surrender Memphis voluntarily. Some citizens felt so ardent to their cause that death provided the only option to capitulation. By the time the Union navy situated itself above the Memphis levee, the brigadier-general was more confident than ever. Either drunk by the success of his cohort at Plum Point Bend or his own legend, Thompson was certain that the River Defense Fleet would “chaw them up in just an hour.”1 Donning a sash, sword, and cockade hat with a red plume, Thompson is noted by some authors that he could capture the Yankee ironclads “with a half-dozen dog skiffs and twenty men with cutlasses.”2 Indeed, confidence, unlike proper fortifications and supplies, was in steady supply on the morning of the sixth. The Confederate fleet rest assured they could expose the design flaws of the Union gunboats, which lead to the crippling of the Cincinnati and Mound City the previous month. Having withdrawn from Fort Pillow without a fight, the Defense Fleet was eager to challenge the naval supremacy along the Mississippi River.3

Those who stayed in town flocked to the Mississippi shoreline to see the spectacle at sunrise on 6 June.4 Leaving their beds before daybreak, Memphis citizens felt the

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1 Memphis Avalanche, June 6, 1862.


noticably balmy air, with light clouds peaking along the eastern horizon. Because of the heavy activity in Memphis throughout the war, its streets were often paved only “with waves of mud.”

Memphis faithful carried the dust and mud on their feet to the levee. Alfred Ellet remarked in his account of the battle that the air was “beautifully clear and perfectly still.” Some came by foot, others traveled by horse and carriage. Windows overflowed with spectators, and every warehouse rooftop dotted with those eager for a prime vantage point. At the landing, six river steamers were tied up, idle and unmanned.

Situated along a small bend in the river near the railroad terminus, the River Defense Fleet was close behind and ready. In the distance, the Confederate flag hung atop the courthouse. The proud symbol of the city’s devotion to their cause flew defiantly against the prevailing winds. These were the same citizens that played Daniel Emmett’s immortal “Dixie” once news of the attack at Fort Sumter reached the western edge of Tennessee. This same group, whose strong commercial ties with Cincinnati and St. Louis before the war, now pumped over 55,000 bullets a day in a makeshift arsenal for the Confederate cause.

Every man, woman, and child came to the bluffs “in a holiday mood to cheer on their champions.” Many of those overlooking the river scene were soldiers from M. Jeff

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5 Mcllwaine, Memphis Down in Dixie, 115.


7 Mcllwaine, Memphis Down in Dixie, 112-113.

8 Charles C. Coffin, My Days and Nights on the Battlefield (Boston: Estes and Lauriat, 1887), 221.
Thompson’s Missouri State Guard, who around midnight the night before was called back from the train depot on its way to Grenada, Mississippi. Although Thompson ordered his companies “to hold themselves in readiness” the morning of the sixth, they accepted they would have little part in the ensuing mêlée given the fact that only waterborne vessels presented themselves before the city. Thompson himself asked his servant for a horse so he could see “the best points for witnessing the engagement.”

At 4 AM, within full view of Memphis, Captain Henry Walke of the Carondelet noticed the eight Confederate rams preparing for battle. For the first four hours of the day, the commander aboard the Federal gunboat noted the gathering of Rebel forces and presumed that attack drew near. By then, the River Defense Fleet formed two lines of battle in front of the city close to the landing, situated in the river’s channel where the current rushed “like a strong man in a race,” according to Walke. The General Beauregard, Little Rebel, General Price, and Sumter encompassed the front line, while the Colonel Lovell, Jeff Thompson, General Bragg, and Van Dorn steamed in the rear. By all accounts, as M. Jeff Thompson wrote after the battle, the fleet was “prepared for battle” well before daylight shimmered on the water. The clanking sound of coal shovels and paddle wheels could be heard in the distance. Crowds steadily increased. The noise of the spectators, soft at first, started to develop into a roar, adding to the

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9 Jones, *The Civil War at Sea*, 174; M. Jeff Thompson to P.G.T. Beauregard, June 7, 1862, ORN, XXIII, 140; Thomas W. Knox, *Camp-Fire and Cotton-Field: Southern Adventure in Time of War* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1969), 179. The quote, included in Knox’s description of the battle, appeared as a running conversation between Thompson and “a friend.” It should be noted that the quotation came from Knox’s description, and not from Thompson’s personal recollections of battle. There is no evidence in his official report to Beauregard that he stated these words, yet it is clear that he did in fact witness the engagement from the riverbank.


11 Thompson to Beauregard, June 7, 1862, ORN, XXIII, 139-140.
symphony of sounds heard by the Union fleet nearly two miles away.  

Although reports vary, there were between 10,000 to 15,000 people lined along the bluffs by first light.  

The view the Memphis faithful witnessed must have been spectacular. The Mississippi River, wider in 1862 than it is today, had its main and strongest channel closest to the Tennessee shoreline where Montgomery’s Fleet laid. Any vessel caught in the flowing current could cruise rapidly downstream. The narrowed parcel of river in front of Memphis guaranteed the inevitability of close quartered conflict. This further explains why Davis situated his gunboats at daylight with their sterns facing towards the enemy, hoping for a fast upriver escape if hostilities got out of hand.  

Davis was brazenly clear that he did not want a repeat of the surprise attack at Plum Point Bend. In a letter to his son composed on 31 May, which would later appear in his biography Life of Charles Henry Davis, the Western Flotilla leader wrote that if he “ever get near the Rebel fleet again, I shall destroy it, unless they anticipate me themselves.”  

Knowing the Mississippi River is the stage on which conflict took place, it is clear that Montgomery  

12 Some reports quantify the distance at a mile and a half.  

13 Henry Walke to Davis, June 6, 1862, ORN, XXIII, 122-123. In My Days and Nights on the Battlefield, Coffin places the estimate of citizens at ten thousand, whereas Cutler puts those present in the “tens of thousands.” The low estimate, by Virgil Jones, places the citizens lining the bluffs “not less than five thousand persons.” This number is also included in a short excerpt of Robert A. Sigafoos’ business history of Memphis, From Cotton Row to Beale Street. For more information, see Coffin, My Days and Nights, 221-222; J. Cutler Andrews, The South Reports the War (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970), 158; Jones, Civil War at Sea, 177; Robert A. Sigafoos, From Cotton Row to Beale Street: A Business History of Memphis (Memphis: Memphis State University Press, 1979), 42.  

14 Even after the success at New Orleans, Farragut knew that his oceangoing vessels could not navigate up the mighty Mississippi River. He also knew that the river level was slowly falling, as it did during the springtime season. Farragut called for an ironclad of the “Monitor type” which would be “worth all the gunboats on the river.” Although Farragut would get this type of help, it was with vessels without guns or Eads’ design. Where he would receive aid, given the makeup of warfare in the western theater, came from a highly unlikely source. For more information, see James P. Duffy, Lincoln’s Admiral: The Civil War Campaigns of David Farragut (Edison, NJ: Castle Books, 2006), 124.  

had the upper hand before the battle began. He had held advantage in early May. He could only hope for the same nearly a month later, one hundred miles downriver from Fort Pillow.  

Charles Coffin, a *Boston Journal* war correspondent that accompanied the fleet during their spring 1862 engagements, situated himself on the *Benton*’s tug with several other reporters from prominent northern newspapers nearby onboard the *John H. Dickey*. Should attack occur, he was at the ready. Baptized in conflict at the limited engagement at Plum Point Bend, Coffin waited to pen encouraging words as he lingered in the early morning for action. Coffin not only could dazzle his readers with words but pictures as well. One of his publications printed after the war in 1888, *Drum-Beat of the Nation*, included a brilliant overhead depiction of the opposing fleets before the attack began. From the distance aboard the wading tug, Coffin placed the Rebel fleet in a northwest orientation parallel to the Little Rock & Memphis Railroad extending to the Arkansas side of the Mississippi River. The Rebel vessels are strategy located inside the far edge of the river’s curve, almost as if to hide, only to sneak out to strike in the same resemblance only a month previous. One can notice upon inspection the high bluffs that hug the city of Memphis, the city streets that make up the prominent commercial center seemingly disappear at levee’s edge. Although the size of the river in conjunction to the fleet may be exaggerated, Coffin’s detail nonetheless sheds light on the orientation of the River Defense Fleet in the early morning.  

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17 Charles Carlton Coffin, *Drum-Beat of the Nation* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1888), as reproduced in Hearn, Ellet’s Brigade, 32. For more information on this picture, see Fig. 1 in APPENDIX A: MAPS AND ILLUSTRATIONS.
Ellet's Ram Fleet pulled into anchor in the early morning darkness, landing near the Arkansas shoreline next to Davis' fleet amidst a drowsy morning haze. Anchored across the river, from left to right, were the gunboats Benton, St. Louis, Cairo, Louisville, and Carondelet. Ellet had not received any enemy reports the night before, and docked next to Davis with intentions "of conferring with Commodore Davis and collecting information preparatory to the next movement."\(^{18}\) By the time Ellet arrived after 4 AM, Davis already ordered his fleet to raise anchor, seemingly unacknowledged to Ellet's arrival. Within minutes of docking at the Arkansas bank; however, Ellet would lose the chance to communicate with the stubborn gunboat captain. A cannon shot from the Little Rebel's sixty-four pound bow gun whizzed over the Union fleets, passing directly over the stern of the Queen. Although sources vary, the logbook of the Carondelet showed the first shot fired occurred between 4:50 AM and 5:10 AM.\(^{19}\) "If it had struck us," mused Charles Coffin atop a Federal tug, "our boat would have been splintered to kindlings in an instant." The gunboats quickly returned fire, "the roar of cannon and shell" shaking the earth on both shores "for many miles" as Coffin suggested. As if accepting a duel, the engagement at Memphis began.\(^{20}\)

Ellet, grasping the situation on the Queen of the Wests hurricane deck, signaled his Ram Fleet to make ready for an advance downriver. Now seeing the enemy within

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\(^{18}\) Ellet to Stanton, June 11, 1862, ORN, XXIII, 133.

\(^{19}\) Abstract Log of the USS Carondelet, May 26-November 29, 1862, ORN, XXIII, 684.

plain view, Ellet barked orders to his brother Alfred onboard the Monarch to “Round out and follow me! Now is our chance!” Upon raising anchor, Colonel Ellet warned his brother Alfred that it was “hardly possible that these rams will survive the action.” Under a thick black smoke from the gunboats’ heavy fire, the Queen of the West and Monarch emerged from the morass at full speed with the intention that the Lancaster and Switzerland would follow in kind. Although mildly fatalistic once combat seemed inevitable, Ellet was nonetheless confident that he could take any of the opposing force down as long as his ship stayed afloat. With each shot flying above his head, Ellet’s rams pushed forward at fifteen knots amidst resounding cheers and “wild huzzas” from the sedentary gunboat crews. Davis’s gunboat fleet, still waiting in position for orders, could only watch as the two gallant vessels vanished into the large plumes of smoke. After years of waiting, Ellet finally had his chance.21

Amongst the confusion of smoke and cannon fire, the Lancaster and Switzerland were unable join the Ellet brothers. The pilots onboard the Lancaster became “excited and confused” upon Colonel Ellet’s initial orders and mistakenly reversed their engines. This in turn backed the boat onto the Arkansas shoreline and ran it aground, which broke of its rudder at full steam. Had the misinformation between the pilots and commanding officer of the Lancaster never occurred, First Sergeant E. W. Sutherland felt his vessel “could have gone into action under more advantages than any other boat.”22

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21 Davis to Welles, June 6, 1862, ORN, XXIII: 119-120; Ellet, “Ellet and His Steam-Rams at Memphis,” 456; Merrill, Battle Flags South, 197.

22 E.W. Sutherland wrote a letter to Colonel Ellet expressing his regret that his vessel was unable to engage. He made it clear, however, that the Lancaster was indeed ready for action, yet ran ashore because of technical difficulties and misunderstanding of commands. He felt that, in light of the battle, his service might have been tarnished on Ellet’s official reports to Stanton. He remarked how “the statement that the engines were reversed for the purpose of avoiding the fire from our gunboats is preposterous.” For more information on this matter, see E.W. Sutherland to Ellet, June 6, 1862, ORN, XXIII, 128.
Switzerland's commander, following Ellet's orders to stay a half-mile behind the Lancaster, could only watch the struggle from afar. The remaining rams, likewise "true to their orders," remained behind the inactive Switzerland. Due to this chain-reaction of bad decisions, it would seem that the Union fleet was already off to a bad start.

Impending events, however, would soon dictate otherwise.23

By 5 AM the spectators and rebel forces caught their first glimpse of the Union fleet. Like the citizens, Montgomery was relatively unaware of the Union's joint forces. The element of surprise now shifted sides. Observers onshore could faintly glimpse two sets of smokestacks through the miasma, each carrying the moniker of their vessel between the belching pipes. In true form, Captain Davis stayed behind, and ordered his gunboat crews to finish their breakfasts of hot coffee, bread, and meat before venturing further downstream.24 Given an option, Davis felt that "fighting on full stomachs" proved more important than aiding the Queen of the West and Monarch.25

By the time the Rams were underway, Davis stopped firing. The only thing now exerted out of Davis's fleet was smoke and the silent sound of confusion. Many stared in awe as Ellet's vessel steamed ahead as if leaping atop the water. As the Queen of the West surged a half mile in front of the Monarch, Colonel Ellet set his sights on the approaching Colonel Lovell with the Little Rebel and General Price trailing close behind. Ellet, atop the hurricane deck, signaled his brother Alfred with his hat to focus on the approaching Beauregard, the ram vessel at the extreme right of the Confederate Defense

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23 Sutherland to Ellet, ORN, XXIII, 128-129; Hearn, Ellet's Brigade, 31.

24 Because the gunboats stayed in the background, many onshore believed that the Union fleet was retreating.

25 Ellet to Stanton, June 6, 1862, ORN, XXIII, 132-133; Coffin, My Days and Nights, 223, 227.
Fleet. The spectators, with "wild yells, shrieks, and clamors," anxiously awaited the Civil War's only engagement between opposing ram fleets.²⁶

Now within striking distance of the Lovell and Little Rebel, Ellet and the Queen of the West faced a dilemma that necessitated quick thinking. Ellet found it "impossible for me to direct the pilots, [...] as the distance between us and the enemy, short at first, became dangerously small." Ellet had to choose which vessel to attack first, as all three were in close proximity to each other. As the Lovell moved ahead and approached the Queen, it seemed as if a head-on collision would occur. Yet at this moment, the Lovell began to reverse in an effort to retreat back downstream with the fast current. The Lovell's engine unexpectedly cut off in the process, forcing its pilot to veer off course. The maneuver exposed its vulnerable broadside to Ellet's iron-braced bow, the ideal situation for his rams. Commenting on his mindset once this fortunate turn of events occurred, Ellet showed a remarkable sense of competence given his ignorance of naval tactics:

The two rebel boats, apparently quailing before the approaching collision, began first to back water and then to turn, thus presenting their broadsides to my attack [...] My speed was high, time was short, and the forward vessel presented rather the fairer mark. I selected her.²⁷

Carondelet Captain Henry Walke noted that the collision occurred at 6:15 AM, nearly two hours after Ellet and his Ram Fleet steamed downstream before Memphis.²⁸ The exposed middle of the Lovell forward of its wheelhouse allowed an easy target for Ellet's flagship to assault. Before colliding, the Lovell's crew made a meager attempt to use its

²⁶ Crandall and Newell, History of Ram Fleet, 54; Brown, American Naval Heroes, 1194. The assumption that Davis stopped firing once Ellet moved forward can be found in Hearn, Ellet's Brigade, 33.

²⁷ Ellet to Stanton, June 6, 1862, ORN, XXIII, 133.

²⁸ Abstract Log, Henry Walke, November 29, 1862, ORN, XXIII, 684.
deck gun, its canister falling idly into the distant water. The crash between the opposing rams, as Ellet later remarked to Stanton, “was terrific.” Everything in the Queen, from tables to a half-eaten breakfast, was broken by the forceful shock. The full power of Ellet’s expertly designed ram, along with the aid of the flowing Mississippi, tore into the Lovell, nearly breaking it in half. Crumpling under pressure like a tin can, the Lovell’s hull crushed under the weight of Ellet’s ram, its chimneys falling over almost the point of touching the Queen’s bow. The collision was by all accounts a textbook execution of his long-awaited brainchild.29

Although the Queen showed slight damage from the impact, the Lovell fared much worse. Immediately upon contact, the Lovell began to sink with the Queen still attached by its bow. When citizens atop the Memphis bluffs heard the first concussive blow from the shoreline, their ravenous cheers fell steadily silent. The bodies of the pilot and a large number of the crew were scattered atop the blood stained decks. Captain James Delancy, along with eighteen other members, swam ashore from the middle of the Mississippi River as civilians quickly dispatched lifeboats to save as many as possible. Despite the courageous rescue attempt, the remainder of its original compliment of eighty-six sunk to the murky deep within five minutes.30

29 Ellet to Stanton, June 6, 1862, ORN, XXIII, 133.

30 Thomas Scharf, History of the Confederate States Navy, From its Organization to the Surrender of its Last Vessel, Vol. I (New York: Rogers & Sherwood, 1887), 259; Crandall and Newell, History of Ram Fleet, 55. It is unclear how many sank with the Lovell. Most sources will tell you it is around five to eighteen that escaped the waters with their lives. For more information on the sinking of the CSS Lovell, see Spencer Tucker, “Naval Battle of Memphis,” in David S. Heidler and Jeanne T. Heidler, eds., Encyclopedia of the American Civil War: A Political, Social, and Military History (Santa Barbara: ABL-CIO, 2000), 1321. Other reports, primarily that of Charles H. Davis, suggest that the gunboat Benton attempted to rescue some of the survivors of the General Lovell that waded helplessly in the water. For more information on Davis’s battle account as told through his biography, see Davis, Life of Charles Henry Davis, 239.
It seems that an order to exact revenge was on the mind of the River Defense Fleet, answering in kind on Colonel Ellet's *Queen*. Only a few minutes passed by before Confederate craft evened the score.\(^{31}\) With the *Queen* flanked on both sides by rams *General Sumter* and *General Beauregard*, Captain Wallace W. Lamb of the *Sumter* seized the initiative, smashing into the *Queen* as it attempted to reverse from the sinking appendage.\(^{32}\) The collision broke the *Queens* tiller rope and crushed in the starboard wheel and hull, which rendered her "nearly helpless" in maneuverability. Ellet became curious of the effect of his bow blows. In a move that is equally misguided and heroic, Colonel Ellet ran out of the pilot house onto the open hurricane deck to assess the port wheelhouse damage. The reinforced boiler iron lining the pilot house could not protect him from the enemy while he ventured into the black smoke of battle.\(^{33}\)

As a result of his theatrics, Colonel Ellet was struck in the leg by a pistol shot from *General Price* Quartermaster J. Sullivan, which wounded him two to three inches above the knee.\(^{34}\) His brother, nearby on the *Monarch*, detailed how the Colonel "need not have been hurt," for he was "forgetful of everything save the demonstration of his

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\(^{31}\) In one of his many reports after the battle, Ellet remarked that it was "over seven or eight minutes [. . .] from the time of leaving the shore and passing the gunboats to the sinking of the rebel gunboat and the disabling of my flagship." For more information on Ellet's report, see Ellet to Stanton, June 6, 1862, *ORN*, XXIII, 134.

\(^{32}\) Although the vast majority of primary source accounts posit that the *Beauregard* was the first to ram the *Queen of the West*, J. Thomas Scharf's *History of the Confederate States Navy* includes an account from Capt. J. Henry Hart of the *Beauregard*. In his account, he gives credit to the *Sumter* for first colliding with the *Queen*. The choice to include the Sumter as the *Queen*'s first damage is made by the fact that Hart, who witnessed the battle from the *Beauregard*'s deck, did not claim his vessel drew first blood. For more information on this account, see Scharf, *History of the Confederate States Navy*, 259.

\(^{33}\) Ellet to Stanton, June 6, 1862, *ORN*, XXIII, 125.

\(^{34}\) These reports, not unlike the majority of those recorded after the battle, lack congruity. Gene Lewis places the Quartermaster J. Sullivan as Ellet's aggressor, whereas other sources only vaguely described the incident, and placed the onus on either the sinking *Lovell* or nearby *Beauregard*. 
principle of warfare.\textsuperscript{35} Ellet, "instantly disabled" from the bullet, still found strength lying prone to issue orders to his pilots once the \textit{Queen} successfully detached from the \textit{Lovell}. One of the onlookers from Davis's fleet commented after the battle of Ellet's cool confidence upon injury "as if nothing had happened." Remarkably, the flagship of the Ram Fleet was able to use its remaining wheel to run aground on the Arkansas shore, joining the submerged \textit{Lovell} "in a sinking condition." With the \textit{Queen} badly disabled and Davis's gunboats still peaking in the distance, Alfred Ellet's \textit{Monarch} was now the only Union vessel actively engaged in the conflict. Alfred, much like his brother, was thankfully quick on his feet and confident that his brother's ramming bow design could achieve success.\textsuperscript{36}

Seeing his brother out of the fight, Alfred Ellet and the \textit{Monarch} proceeded to attack the \textit{General Sumter}.\textsuperscript{37} The blow coordinated by pilots Thomas J. Collins and Charles M. Jackson disabled the vessel, stunning her for the moment. The attention then focused on the \textit{Monarch}, being the focal point of a flanking attack by the CS rams \textit{General Beauregard} and \textit{General Price} "in a deadly river waltz." The \textit{Price}, now within striking distance mere yards away of the \textit{Monarch}, veered off, just as the \textit{Beauregard} attempted to ram its port side. The speed of the \textit{Monarch} allowed Alfred to slip by the converging Confederate rams. Without time to react, Alfred's bold move caused the

\textsuperscript{35} This account can be found in a letter between Alfred and Mary Israel Ellet, Charles' wife, written the day after the engagement. These collections of papers are included in the Alfred Washington Ellet Papers at the Duke University Special Collections Library.

\textsuperscript{36} Lewis, Charles Ellet, Jr., 204; Ellet, "Ellet and His Steam-Rams at Memphis," 457; Coffin, \textit{My Days and Nights}, 228.

\textsuperscript{37} In his account, Captain J. Henry Hart of the \textit{Beauregard} mistakenly refers to the \textit{Monarch} as the ram \textit{Switzerland}, which never engaged in the battle. Hearn, the latest historian to write of the engagement, places the pistol shot originating from the \textit{Beauregard}. For more information, see Scharf, \textit{History of the Confederate States Navy}, 259; Hearn, \textit{Ellet's Brigade}, 34.
rams to smash into each other. The crashing of timbers “was fearful,” remarked a participant, “the vessels passed each other rolling and pitching like giants in mortal combat.” The concussive pressure once again echoed off the Memphis skyline. Citizens were by now both hushed and tremulous from the grave battle scene. The two craft separated from each other to find the Prices sidewheel and wheelhouse torn clean off, its remnants already floating down the channel.

Captain Thomas Henthorne of the Price used his remaining wheel to run aground on the Arkansas shoreline, near where Ellet’s Queen stood disabled. Before the crew of the Price could escape, Colonel Ellet ordered a detachment of his marines to board the vessel, taking its entire eighty-one crewmembers prisoner. Alfred Ellet’s ability to outwit and outmaneuver the Confederates allowed him the opportunity to further engage the enemy. Speed was still the deciding factor that gave the Union Ram Fleet its supreme advantage. Before the staggered Beauregard could collect itself from the Prices glancing blow, Monarch Captain David Dryden steamed ahead and rammed clear into her

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38 There is some controversy surrounding how and who sheared off the Price’s sidewheel. In the most recent account of the battle, Chester Hearn uses Alfred Ellet’s description of the battle included in Battles and Leaders. There is no mention of the collision in Ellet’s Brigade. Other historians, like Scharf, Milligan, and Coombe, use Henry Walke’s account in Battles and Leaders. George E. Currie, a witness on the Mingo, fails to mention it as well. As Coombe asserts, “Today, most historians agree with Walke.” For more information on these three accounts, see Ellet, “Ellet and His Steam-Rams at Memphis,” 457; Walke, “The Western Flotilla,” 450; George E. Currie, Warfare Along the Mississippi: The Letters of LT. George E. Currie, ed. Norman E. Clark (Mount Pleasant: Central Michigan University, 1961), 39-40, in Jack D. Coombe, Thunder Along the Mississippi: The River Battles That Split the Confederacy (New York: Bantam Books, 1996), 250n.

39 Ellet, Incidents of the Naval Engagement at Memphis, June 10, 1862, ORN, XXIII, 135; Coombe, Thunder Along the Mississippi, 131; Crandall and Newell, History of Ram Fleet, 54.

40 The designs for both rams used in the Civil War were constructed for similar purposes. The difference lies in their protection. We find through the example of the battle of Memphis the importance of protecting the boilers, which the Confederates designed to be in their hull. For more information, see Tucker, “Naval Battle of Memphis,” 1321.
broadside. Colonel Ellet, watching while wounded on the deck of his flagship, saw the *Beauregards* side burst open in the water.\(^{41}\)

The blow was so severe that "piles of furniture were precipitated from the Rebel steamer upon the forecastle of the *Monarch.*"\(^{42}\) Sharpshooters from the *Monarch*’s marine detachment onboard kept their rifle fire steady into the wounded ship. The Union gunboats, full and ready for action, finally advanced into the foray to aid the lonesome *Monarch*. Adding further insult to injury, the *Benton*, who by now resumed a steady fire, sent a well placed projectile from its fifty pound Parrot rifle directly into the *Beauregard*’s unprotected boiler room, scalding the hands of fourteen of its crew as it began its slow descent into muddy water. "For humanity’s sake,” the stars and bars were hauled down amidst guns blazing. Before *Beauregard* sank completely to its boiler room, Federals were able to rescue an invaluable book of semaphore signals used by the River Defense Fleet, forty-seven in all.\(^{43}\) The spectators on shore watched in horror as their mighty fleet began to disintegrate.\(^{44}\)

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\(^{41}\) Ellet to Stanton, June 6, 1862, *ORN*, XXIII, 125; Ellet to Stanton, June 11, 1862, *ORN*, XXIII, 134.

\(^{42}\) It should be noted that many of these remnants were still found onboard the *Monarch* after the engagement ended.

\(^{43}\) These included both “General signals” and “Night signals.” The shallowness of the water prevented the *Beauregard* to sink any further than the cabin. William Jewett Tenney also asserts that the crew onboard the *Beauregard* raised a white flag to stop the incessant fire from the Union Ram Fleet and Western Flotilla. For more information, see William Jewett Tenney, *The Military and Naval History of the Rebellion in the United States: With Biographical Sketches of Deceased Officers* (New York: D. Appleton & Company, 1865), 167.

\(^{44}\) Davis to Welles, June 7, 1862, *ORN*, XXIII, 124-125; Ellet to Stanton, June 10, 1862, *ORN*, XXIII, 134; Scharf, *History of Confederate States Navy*, 260; Jones, *Civil War at Sea*, 175.
Other reports, found in Alfred Ellet’s account of the battle, stated that his vessel *Monarch* took the *Beauregard* in tow in an effort to save it.\(^{45}\) One of the major reasons his brother Charles took the family into his enterprise was for the possibility of war spoils, which would include captured Confederate vessels. Before the *Beauregard* reached the Arkansas shore, according to Alfred Ellet, she sank to her boiler room in shoal water where it “finally became a total loss.”\(^{46}\) The sinking of the *Beauregard* is nonetheless corroborated by other eyewitness accounts from Davis and Charles Ellet, Jr.\(^{47}\)

Not to be outdone by Ellet’s Ram Fleet, Davis’s gunboats used their superior firepower on the River Defense Fleet. The Western Flotilla steamed downriver at ten miles per hour to engage the enemy. It is clearly evident throughout the fight that any one of the Federal ironclads outgunned and outmanned any opposition on land and water. The broadside fire from the ironclad *St. Louis* aroused many of the Confederate sharpshooters from Thompson’s Missouri State Guard located along the nearby woods, and “felling trees, branches, and Confederates” along the Tennessee shoreline.\(^{48}\) In one account of the battle, a cannonball soared over the high bluffs and into an icehouse, nearly missing a twelve year old boy still inside the confines of his home.\(^{49}\) Remarking on the sporadic bloodlust of the Union gunboats, Coffin’s account of the broadside fire

\(^{45}\) In John D. Milligan’s “Charles Ellet,” he included “a Union tug and boats from the Benton” to the rescue party. For more information, see John D. Milligan, “Charles Ellet and His Naval Steam Ram,” *Civil War History* 9, no. 2 (June 1963): 130.

\(^{46}\) Ellet, “Ellet and His Steam Rams at Memphis,” 457.

\(^{47}\) Davis to Welles, June 7, 1862, *ORN*, XXIII, 124-125; Ellet to Stanton, June 10, 1862, *ORN*, XXIII, 134.


\(^{49}\) McIlwaine, *Memphis Down in Dixie*, 117.
along the Mississippi shore included in *My Days and Nights on the Battlefield* details the sheer horrors of war:

The blood rushes through your veins. Your pulse is quickened. You long to get at the enemy [...] You care nothing for the screaming of the shot, the bursting of the shells. You have but one thought, - *to tear down that hateful flaunting flag, to smite the enemies of your country into the dust!*  

The *General Price*, wounded from the *Beauregard*, fell victim to cannon fire and subsequently ran aground into shallow water near the Arkansas shore. The *Little Rebel*, flagship of Commodore Montgomery’s flotilla, met a similar fate after receiving a deadly blow from cannon fire as it attempted to attack a nearby ram. The shot, piercing below the water line to the boiler room, caused the flagship to immediately sink. The *Monarch* mercifully pushed it to shore, running it aground and rendering it useless. Commodore Montgomery and most of his crew that survived both blast and collision hastily swam to shore, escaping through the mangled trees to avoid capture. Montgomery had to jump over the bow of his flagship in order to escape the same fate as the captured Confederates of the *Price*. The smoke from cannon fire choked the air from all directions. The battle soon became a veritable “turkey shoot” for the far superior ironclads. Within an hour, the Union sunk or disabled half of the Confederate Fleet. The majority of vessels ceased their operations opposite Memphis in full view to the crowd. The only option for those remaining was escape downriver.  

The Union forces began a ten-mile race downstream to capture, sink, or disable - the remaining ships of Montgomery’s steadily decreasing River Defense Fleet. By this point, as Flag Officer Davis remarked to Secretary Welles, Montgomery’s rams used

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51 Merrill, *Battle Flags South*, 198-199; Davis to Welles, June 6, 1862, ORN, XXIII, 120; Ellet to Stanton, June 6, 1862, ORN, XXIII, 125.
“their superiority of speed as [their] only means of safety” against pressing Union forces. Yet the converted steamships encompassing the Confederate fleet could not outrun the constant bombardment of Davis’s ironclads.\(^5^{2}\) The next victims, CS rams Bragg and General Sumter, fell quickly to cannon fire, which disabled them from further engaging downstream. W.W. Lamb, in command of the Sumter, waded to shore with his retreating crew, the blood “streaming from a finger just torn off by a bullet.” With both rams run aground and inoperable, desperation was the only choice of survival.\(^5^{3}\)

The Captain of the CSS Jeff Thompson chose to burn the remains of its already damaged vessel on the Arkansas shore, its powder magazine eventually showering the shoreline with timber and iron. For him, escape proved impossible, and made the decision accordingly to scuttle his ship along the west bank. Union forces eventually gave up the chase, the massive damage already done.\(^5^{4}\) Only one Confederate vessel, the ram Van Dorn, escaped intact down river. Captain Isaac D. Fulkerson, in command of the Van Dorn, was undoubtedly thankful to carry over “two hundred thousand dollars worth of powder and supplies” along with him, by then an indispensable component to the Confederate cause. The remaining Confederate forces left seven rams and over one hundred eighty casualties behind at Memphis.\(^5^{5}\) In a letter written to his Confederate

\(^5^{2}\) The gunboats could not travel more than ten miles per hour. An excellent resource detailing the background to the Cairo Class, as well as the gunboat Benton, is Robert MacBride, Civil War Ironclads: The Dawn of Naval Armor (Philadelphia: Chilton Books, 1962, 47-66.

\(^5^{3}\) Davis to Welles, June 6, 1862, ORN, XXIII, 120; Jones, Civil War at Sea, 175.

\(^5^{4}\) In his official report to Gideon Welles, Davis mentions that the Monarch and Lancaster pursued the Van Dorn. Most secondary sources credit the Monarch and Switzerland in the downriver endeavor. For more information, see Davis to Welles, June 6, 1862, ORN, XXIII, 120; Coombe, Thunder, 132.

\(^5^{5}\) By the time the Van Dorn reached the next and last strongpoint at Vicksburg, Mississippi, the entire Confederate fleet consisted of a mere handful of vessels. Along with the Van Dorn were the CSS Polk, Livingston, and General Clark, which were eventually set ablaze by the end of the month.
soldier son that day, Memphis merchant Joe Shepherd wrote that it was quite the "saddening affair" for the populace.\textsuperscript{56} The last Union guns silenced at 7:30 AM, its extinguishing echoes mirroring the diminished hopes and "unutterable sadness" felt by countless citizens anguishing along the Memphis levee.\textsuperscript{57}

Had the \textit{Switzerland} and \textit{Lancaster} entered into the conflict, the margin of defeat would be undoubtedly greater. Ellet regretted to inform Secretary of War Stanton on 8 June that if the two rams were active in the early morning hours, then the \textit{Van Dorn} would have never escaped. The only action they encountered throughout the morning was with the shoreline. Indeed, the burden of the fight fell unequally onto each of the Ellet brothers' shoulders. In all, five of the eight rams comprising Montgomery's fleet tasted the fury of Ellet's design, a remarkably feat given the odds. Although \textit{Lancaster} commander E.W. Sutherland sent a nasty report to Colonel Ellet suggesting "cowardice and incompetence" in leadership in an effort to save face, Stanton chose to believe Ellet. The unsavory game of fingers pointing aside, Stanton declared Colonel Ellet's efforts in coordination with the Western Flotilla a "glorious achievement."\textsuperscript{58}

The initial number of soldiers and sailors lost could not be calculated by Confederate forces in the immediate wake of the battle. The nature of the conflict on the swift moving Mississippi River placed the battle in several different places along the Tennessee banks, eventually moving downriver for the final phase. Thompson, who retreated in a hurried state from Memphis, wrote to Beauregard in Baldwyn, Mississippi,

\textsuperscript{56} McIlwaine, \textit{Memphis Down in Dixie}, 119. The quote is included in McIlwaine's text, yet she unfortunately provided no evidence as to where the source came from.


\textsuperscript{58} Stanton to Ellet, June 9, 1862, \textit{ORN}, XXIII, 129.
that "it is impossible to report casualties," for he felt he and his Guards might become among the dead or captured if he stayed to pony up any resistance other than surrender. Indeed, the 7 June report to Beauregard was riddled with inaccuracies that concerned the late naval engagement. His report also suggested that the Bragg and Van Dorn escaped downriver, yet he did not stay long enough to discover that the Bragg fell to Federal cannon fire during the chase further downriver out of sight of Memphis.59

The short but conclusive engagement at Memphis helped solidify many of the aspirations and apprehensions felt by Federal naval officers. For Charles Henry Davis, the destruction of the River Defense Fleet could now be forever removed "as a subject of anxiety."60 Fatigued and weary, Davis knew that his credibility rested upon the success of his fleet at Memphis, and accordingly depended on Boston Journal war correspondent Charles Coffin's "most excellent and ample description" to eloquently pontificate on his success as both leader and successor to Foote.61 For Davis, every newspaper that published a thorough account of the battle was like a silent vindication for his past mistakes, although he himself would never admit to them.62

Despite the repeated applications made by Colonel Charles Ellet, Jr. to Charles Henry Davis prior to the battle, their combined efforts nonetheless spelled overwhelming victory for Union naval forces that saw its first sting of defeat at Plum Point Bend the

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59 Thompson to Beauregard, June 7, 1862, ORN, XXIII, 140.


61 "Life of Charles Henry Davis, Rear-Admiral," June 6, 1862, ORN, XXIII, 196.

62 Writing back home to his son, the future United States navy Captain of the same name, Davis at Memphis wanted to make sure that he "keep all good accounts for me to see," for "you will not depend on me for the story." Davis did not want to write the history himself, but loved to relish in the glow of the press response. For more information on the press reaction following the battle, see chapter four and "Life of Charles Henry Davis, Rear-Admiral," June 6, 1862, ORN, XXIII, 196.
month before. Davis took more credit than deserved, however, for the success. His account included in the *Official Records* shows scant mention of Ellet’s attack, albeit “bold and successful.”63 Indeed, Davis placed more boldness in Captain Henry Maynadier’s idle mortar fleet than the fighting bravado of Ellet’s Rams. If victors do in fact write the histories of conflict, than Davis might be upset today to find no scholarly reference to Davis’s actions alone as the primary reason for success at Memphis.64

*Harpers New Monthly Magazine* writer John S.C. Abbott wrote in 1866 that it was “the gallant onset of the rams,” not Davis’s contributions, which “broke the rebel spirit for spirited resistance.” For the Rebel fleet, there was no possibility of a counterattack. Only the lament of misapprehension and frustration remained as the river once again turned calm. Any resident hoping for Confederate vessels to peak in the distance of the river were found wanting. As the far edge of the line along the upper Mississippi River, no resistance downriver could present itself. The *Van Dorn*, by then a foregone memory, was the only remaining form of Confederate force on the river from Cairo to the outskirts of Vicksburg. More important, for the city hopeful dwellers that morning, there was only defeat.65

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63 Davis to Welles, June 6, 1862, *ORN*, XXIII, 121. According to Davis, Captain Maynadier’s mortar fleet took possession of the Beauregard and its crew as prisoners. Yet Ellet’s report noted that the *Monarch* took the Beauregard as prisoners after its heated engagement on the Memphis waterfront. For more information on Ellet’s report, see Ellet’s Report, June, 6, 11, 1862, *ORN*, XXIII, 125, 134.

64 Historians like Chester G. Hearn agree with the idea that the Western Flotilla cannot be divorced from the Ram Fleet’s contributions at Memphis. In his conclusion to his chapter on the battle of Memphis, Hearn stated that “Ellet and Davis both deserved a share of the credit, because without each other the battle could have provoked different outcome. For more information, see Hearn, *Ellet’s Brigade*, 42.

It is impossible to tell what may have happened if Davis proceeded downriver at the same time as the Queen of the West and Monarch. Future Western Flotilla David Dixon Porter commented that, had the thrust towards the enemy occurred simultaneously, "it is probable that five of the enemy's vessels would have been sunk, and not even the Van Dorn would have escaped." The facts, however, remain. The battle before the city of Memphis showed those that watched a unique and awesome presentation of riverine warfare. Unsuitable for any action outside the confines of close quarter action, Memphis proved to be an excellent location. For the first half of the battle, Ellet's Ram Fleet and Montgomery's River Defense Fleet alone engaged in combat. What is more impressive is that Ellet's rams sunk Montgomery's fleet without using conventional weapons like cannons. The age old technique used in Roman galleys and Phoenician war vessels in ancient times morphed itself into the fast moving, iron-wielded creation along the Mississippi River. It was the first and last time it ever occurred in the Civil War.

Historian Chester G. Hearn, who wrote the most recent account of the battle in Ellet's Brigade, backed up the idea that Davis "used words implying that the whole affair had been a cooperative effort when in reality there had been no communication between himself and Ellet." Ellet knew he had the confidence of Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton, while Davis confided in the good graces of Secretary of Navy Gideon Welles. This adds further ambiguity to the complicated nature of authority between naval forces and the Ram Fleet, an issue unresolved well after the guns silenced on 6 June. Even M. Jeff Thompson admitted to the one-sided nature of the whirlwind attack, as he remarked

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67 Hearn, Ellet's Brigade, 37.
to Beauregard after the battle that the “rams did most of the execution and were handled more adroitly than ours.” Unfortunately for Ellet, the grievances were never wholeheartedly resolved. Now, as the *Van Dorn* escaped through the lonely path downriver, Davis felt the constant thorn in his side since he began his tenure as Western Flotilla commander suddenly and exuberantly lifted. With no military contingent left standing in the city, it was now for the taking.

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68 Thompson to Beauregard, June 7, 1862, *ORN*, XXIII, 140

69 David Dixon Porter later wrote in his *Naval History of the Civil War* that “Rear-Admiral Davis had no military authority over the ram fleet.” For more information on this quote, see Porter, *Naval History*, 171.
CHAPTER IV

"THE CITY IS IN YOUR POWER."
SURRENDER, THE PRESS, AND PUBLIC MORALE

In just under two hours, the Union's naval forces destroyed an entire fleet of Confederate warships. Historian Spencer C. Tucker called the encounter at Memphis "one of the most lopsided Union victories in the war."¹ John Barron Deaderick, a distant relative of Memphis mayor John Park, remarked how the battle proved to be an "inexcusable oversight" for the Confederacy. The Union navy managed to sink two ships and disable another four with relative ease. Federal losses, in contrast to their counterparts, were hardly acknowledgeable. Three men in Davis's fleet were "only slightly" injured from the attack. The only significant loss to the Union was the Ram Fleet commander himself. Ellet did not feel his wound sufficient enough to stop direction of the Ram Fleet during the battle, and remained in the early morning fight to his best ability. Amidst initial unseen complications, Colonel Charles Ellet, Jr. died of his leg wound two weeks later in Cairo, Illinois. The brave civil engineer, who tried for seven years to place his ramming conjecture into Washington military think tanks, died at his invention's first test before an awed crowd of thousands.²

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² Ellet's death was attributed not only to the leg wound, but also to dysentery and the measles as well. Cairo, Illinois, was not the healthiest of places during the Civil War. Michael J. Bennett describes Cairo as smelling so bad it "assails the nostrils." The poor health conditions at large army camps like Cairo could have a large part in why Colonel Charles Ellet, Jr. died from a superficial flesh wound, although most reports say that he died upon his arrival at the base. For more information on the sanitary conditions at Cairo, see Michael J. Bennett, Union Jacks: Yankee Sailors in the Civil War (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 82.
Harpers New Monthly Magazine columnist John S.C. Abbott eloquently summed up the hopes and feelings of the Memphis populace after the attack:

While the action was in progress the bluffs of the city of Memphis were lined with spectators, many of whom had been invited by the rebel Commodore Montgomery to witness the sinking of the whole Yankee fleet. Their surprise and chagrin at the sudden and unexpected turn of affairs was equaled only by their admiration of the intrepid manner in which the Union rams had plunged into the fray.3

The men and women who came to see the destruction of the Western Flotilla instead saw complete and utter annihilation of their own. Brigadier-General M. Jeff Thompson, so confident beforehand of the Confederate fleet, indiscreetly rode out of town before the city could be taken over by Federal troops, famously remarking “They are gone and I am going.”4 Whatever fate laid in store for Memphis, Thompson did not want to stay and find out. Writing from Grenada the following day, Montgomery could only conclude that the absence of firepower handed Confederate forces their swift defeat. Nowhere in his report does Montgomery articulate the valor or bravery of his compatriots, and remarked it his “painful necessity” to report to Beauregard “the almost entire destruction of the River Defense Fleet.”5 War correspondent and future Memphis newspaperman Thomas W. Knox mused that the “chawing up” stated by Thompson before the battle “was not referred to again.”6 In any case, Thompson and his Missouri guards retired from Memphis in haste. His exit left all hope that a Confederate force could protect the bluff

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4 There are multiple sources that use this famous quote from M. Jeff Thompson. For the background to the quote included in secondary sources, see Virgil Carrington Jones, The Civil War at Sea: March 1862-July 1863, Vol. II, The River War (New York: Holt, 1961), 177.

5 Thompson to Beauregard, June 7, 1862, ORN, XXIII, 139.

city along the Mississippi River. What many southerners thought would be absolute victory turned out to be a decisive defeat.7

Any apprehension Memphis Mayor John Park possessed that early morning turned quickly to anger and frustration. With the entirety of the River Defense Fleet captured, sunk, or fleeing towards Vicksburg, Park found himself situated in an important Confederate port city with no proper means of defense. Citizens fled the city by the Mississippi and Tennessee railways, leaving their property and slaves into the hands of the enemy forces.8 To Ellet, the faint sound of whistles in the background meant that Confederate forces were running away with priceless military provisions by railroad. He could not wait for the Western Flotilla’s approval to take the city. Davis’s personal request of Park to surrender the city in the late morning received a negative response by the mayor and many of the inhabitants still inside town.9

Ellet knew the nature of Davis and his thirst for recognition that the success at Memphis was his alone. The injured Ram Fleet commander accordingly took measures into his hands which ensured no further molestations occurred along the waterfront that day. Ellet and his men were done fighting, and did not want to risk the possibility of armed civilian or military resistance when Memphis fell. Closer to the shore where the city silently waited its new benefactors, Ellet made the decision to beat Davis to the punch. If Davis was so adamant about their continual lack of communication, then Ellet would take away the sweet feeling of the first landing he so desperately wanted. Either


8 The Memphis citizens that did stay to watch the battle either left in the late morning before Union forces arrived at the city or in the evening amidst much confusion and haste.

way, the letters and telegrams sent back home to Washington show Ellet’s unabashed patriotism to the Federal cause.¹⁰ He also knew that four soldiers alone could not return the city by itself. Raising the Federal flag when Colonel Graham Fitch’s Indiana infantry arrived proved the best-case scenario to get the process started. Fitch’s arrival would signal the completed form of Federal occupation, yet a temporary show of Union situational control proved necessary in Ellet’s eyes. Time for action grew progressively thinner as the early morning dissipated into daytime. There was a distinct prospect of added confusion should word spread around town that the Federal fleet stood idle by the riverside, either unwilling or unable to take the city. The short message sent with his son penned earlier than Davis’s response called for the civilian authorities to immediately “return the city to the care and protection of the Constitution.”¹¹

Colonel Ellet sent medical cadet Charles R. Ellet, Jr., his son accompanying the Ram Fleet, two sharpshooters, and Lieutenant Warren D. Crandall from Company D of the 59th Illinois Volunteers to return the city once again to Federal control. The men arrived relatively unarmed in a rowboat at the shore with the short and concise instructions. Although Charles carried a white flag of truce to the still Confederate held shoreline, Ellet wanted to be careful that the surrender occurred smoothly, which further explained why he sent the small detachment of sharpshooters with his son and Lieutenant

¹⁰ Ellet to Stanton, June 7, 1862, ORN, XXIII, 126-127; Ellet to daughter, June 6, 1862, Cabell-Ellet Papers, Alderman Library, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, Virginia, in Hearn, Ellet’s Brigade, 38. Writing to Stanton, Ellet commented that one of the major reasons for taking the city in such haste was the fact that one of his crewmen informed him of a white flag waving in the distance of the city. Even injured, Ellet found the time between the surrender discussions to write recommendations to everyone from the chief engineers to his own brother Alfred Ellet for valor to Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton while recuperating on the Ram Switzerland.

Crandall. It could be assumed that Colonel Ellet himself would have taken the place of his son Charles if he was uninjured during the battle. Despite the misgivings of his wife, the Ram Fleet commander wrote to Mary Israel Ellet on 2 June that he accepted Charlie's request to join his father's venture, and added that "[Charlie] is here now, and in fact there will be plenty for him to do." Seemingly prophetic, the wounded leader proved to be correct four days later.

With no combat experience, the young cadet now had the opportunity to become the first extension of Federal control in Memphis. Private Cyrus Lathrop and sergeant William H. McDonald, the sharpshooters sent with Ellet and Crandall, each carried a United States flag tucked safely underneath their arm. The truce flag, albeit important, paled in comparison to the latter in the minds of the onlookers. As the soldiers walked towards the town center, women cried in humiliation of the demoralizing defeat earlier that morning. The four Union men selected for the flags two edifices that once exemplified Confederate control, the courthouse and post office building along Memphis's front row.

Merely out of necessity, Mayor John Park agreed to allow the unwanted ceremony to take place. He warned the Union men upon their initial meeting that he could not guarantee their safety, and accordingly advised them to return to wait for more Federal troops, as he no longer had a police force to fend off the populace. Yet, much like his father, medical cadet Charles Ellet stuck to his orders and demanded compliance.

12 Charles Ellet, Jr. to Mary Israel Ellet, June 2, 1862, Ellet Papers, Special Collections Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan, in Hearn, Ellet's Brigade, 37.

13 Davis to Welles, June 6, 1862, ORN, XXIII: 121; Jones, The Civil War at Sea, 177; Crandall and Newell, History of the Ram Fleet, 56.

14 Crandall and Newell, History of the Ram Fleet, 56.
With no hope in sight for relief, the portly Park acquiesced to Ellet's demands with a short letter in response; "our reply to you is simply to state, respectfully, that we have no force to oppose the raising of the flags you have directed to be raised." As the group of men began to walk towards their destinations along front row, a member of the gathering mob grabbed one of the United States flags out of hands of a marine sharpshooter and summarily ripped it in spirited defiance. With only one flag left, Ellet and his company decided to proceed to the post office.¹⁵

Stores around the city closed, and everyone's attention focused on the city's impending fall. Residents watched as the young Ellet raised the United States flag atop the post office. Citizens responded in protest and hurled everything from insults to rocks at the small group of Union men. The sketch included in Crandall's *History of the Ram Fleet* shows a hysterical crowd angered at the sight of the flags' raising. Some are shown in the foreground fighting amongst each other. It is almost as if the flapping of their coattails could match the persistent verbal assault thrown up to their Yankee visitors looking down from the four story building. Yet these actions proved fruitless. The sharpshooters did not want to engage the heated crowd, even though there were reports of several pistol shots aimed to strike Ellet and his men. Nor did Mayor Park want further trouble. By the time the flag waved triumphantly in the air, Park urged the multitude to desist their visible protests. It would only be a matter of time before the ball started by colonel Ellet's directions aboard the *Switzerland* completed its revolutions, safely at the bottom of the hill; safely over. The angered crowds slowly thinned as they saw the

steamer *Henry von Phul* puff smoke towards the landing, carrying the awaited troop support.16

By 11 AM, colonel Fitch’s Indiana Brigade arrived in town to take military possession of Memphis. At this point, Davis felt it his duty to send his message to the mayor who by now already felt the city in the hands of Federal forces. He made sure to note that he, not Ellet’s son, represented the proper surrender under “the authority of the United States, which I have the honor to represent.” With the formal surrender in the hands of the mayor, he responded back a second and final time that “by the force of circumstances the city is in your power.”17 The mayor already grew fearful of the threat of naval bombardment should he not comply with any and all offers for acquiescence. The city officially returned under Federal possession.18

The victory at Memphis helped foment widespread relief and positive morale for Union partisans. During a time when other theaters of war continually failed, Union sympathizers found shreds of hope in the murky Mississippi waters. A newswoman from the *Cincinnati Daily Commercial* described the victory as “decisive, speedy, and effectual.” Foote, jealousy-ridden by Davis’s two grand victories, needed to make sure that he rode Davis’s coattails all the way to Washington even though injured and away from conflict.19 Similarly, Carondelet commander Henry Walke similarly wrote a letter

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16 Crandall and Newell, *History of the Ram Fleet*, 58-60. For more information on the sketch included in Crandall and Newell’s *History*, see APPENDIX A: MAPS AND ILLUSTRATIONS.

17 Davis to John Park, June 6, 1862, *ORN*, XXIII, 121.


19 Foote, who did not witness the engagement, felt that it was Davis as commander of the Western Flotilla that succeeded in defeating the River Defense Fleet. James Mason Hoppin, who wrote an 1874 biography on Foote’s life as Rear-Admiral of the navy, commented that the battle “brought to an end the
written to Davis later in the day which pontificated on Davis’s “providential and brilliant success in the suppression of the rebellion.”20 The CS Rams Little Rebel, General Sumter, and General Bragg were taken as a “prize” for the Union navy, which later became a matter of contention between Captain Davis and Charles Ellet, Jr.21 Indeed, the Confederate forces that once occupied Memphis paled in comparison to the superiority of the North now overseeing its operations. The Memphis Avalanche reported between 70 and 100 prisoners taken captive, which included 20 officers. The battle helped establish and legitimize northern naval supremacy until the end of the war.22

For the throng of citizens around the country, newspapers provided the only means of attaining information on the whereabouts and movements of the Union and Confederate forces. Those who stayed behind, either willing or unable, felt the cold sting of defeat or the sweet smell of victory through the various press giants operating both north and south. Reporters that witnessed the storied engagements throughout the war used their writing to transmit not only news for the sake of public information, but the

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20 Walkc to Davis, June 6, 1862, ORN, XXIII, 123.

21 Walke to Davis, Memorandum, June 6, 1862, ORN, XXIII, 123. There is a spirited debate between Davis and Ellet concerning exactly who should take control of the repossessed vessels, specifically the Little Rebel. Because the Ram Fleet played a larger part in their sinking, Ellet sent a memorandum to Davis that expressed his interest to incorporate the vessel “in immediate service.” Yet Davis, always unwilling to back down to a fight against his comrade, ordered Ellet two days later to comply with his orders. The movement of the “Little Rebel or any other one of the captured vessels of the rebel squadron” to the Ram Fleet, Davis felt, “would interfere with my general plan of operation.” For more information as shown in the ORN, see Memorandum of Colonel Ellet,” June 7, 1862, ORN, XXIII, 142; Davis to Ellet, June 9, 1862, ORN, XXIII, 143-144.

22 James M. Merrill, Battle Flags South: The Story of the Civil War on Western Waters (Rutherford: Farleigh Dickinson Press, 1970), 199-200; Memphis Avalanche, June 9, 1862.
benefit of overall morale and cause. For the Confederacy in particular, as J. Cutler Andrews noted, "the importance of public morale as a factor in Confederate military success was obvious," and journalists used the terms "morale" and "spirit" interchangeably to help foment a body of language conducive to the overall war effort.23

A careful examination of contemporary print media and their respective wartime correspondents indicated the paramount success felt in the north and demoralizing defeat of southern cause and pride that existed once the smoke cleared. Through these sources, there existed a sharp contrast in the language and interpretation of the battle, either through published descriptions or visual interpretations. Although newspapers like the Memphis Appeal attempted to justify the loss at Memphis as a mere chink in the Confederate armor, the battle nonetheless vocalized discontent towards Federal forces that occupied the famed river metropolis.

NORTHERN PRESS RESPONSE TO MEMPHIS

Well before the battle of Memphis, many northern press correspondents in the west covered the process of southern disenfranchisement that occurred up and down the Mississippi River. Thomas Knox, a correspondent for the New York Herald, spent a majority of the month of May covering the infamous Confederate "cotton-burning order" which commanded all planters involved in the Mississippi River trade to burn their cotton for fear of it falling into Federal hands. As he traveled along the banks of the Mississippi River from Fort Randolph to Memphis aboard the tug Platte Valley, Knox noticed the plumes of smoke that rose in the distance. "Had it then possessed the value that attached to it two years later," Knox later wrote in his published memoirs as a

western war correspondent, *Camp-Fire and Cotton-Field*, "I fear there would have been many attempts to save it for transfer to a Northern market." Alongside Knox in the *Platte Valley* was a correspondent from the *Cincinnati Daily Commercial*, another prominent northern newspaper. Although he did not write a specific report published in the *Herald* after the conflict, his response included in *Camp-Fire and Cotton-Field* is nonetheless valuable. Remarking on the outcome of the battle, Knox concluded his thoughts on a conflict that "did a good morning's work" for the Union cause.24

At a time when a majority of northern newspapers merely published the official correspondence of servicemen to the War Department in Washington, the *Herald's* short but concise newswire introducing the capture to the northern public as overwhelming success which ended "in a running fight."25 Two days after its initial publication of the defeat, the *Herald* included a collection of pertinent documents between Ellet and Mayor John Park with the triumphant title "The Capture of Memphis."26 Other northern newspapers published similar correspondence between military leaders in Memphis to Washington, D.C. Some, like the political and literary journal *Albion*, went as far as to compare the defeat of Confederate naval forces to Homer's *Iliad* and "the sanguinary clash of arms therein set-forth."27 The article, not unlike many historians today, placed its success together with the "recent" engagement at Hampton Roads. The headline

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25 *New York Herald*, June 9, 1862. For more information on similar reports reproduced in the northern press immediately following the battle, see *Liberator*, June 13, 1862; *Christian Advocate and Journal*, June 12, 1862.

26 It is interesting to note that the correspondence between Charles Henry Davis and Mayor John Park is not included in the news report published on 11 June 1862. For more information, see *New York Herald*, June 11, 1862.

27 *The Albion*, June 14, 1862.
included on the third page of the 14 June edition of the Saturday Evening Post added to the language of defeat beyond official reports:

LATEST NEWS.
ANOTHER NAVAL VICTORY.
DESPERATE NAVAL FIGHT ON THE MISSISSIPPI.
REBEL FLEET DESTROYED.
The SURRENDER OF MEMPHIS. ²⁸

On 13 June, the Herald published a news report that detailed the stabilized condition at Memphis. A portion of the report in particular proved detrimental to the Confederate cause and highly beneficial for those eager to return key commercial centers along the Mississippi River back to prewar normality:

The people generally seem rejoiced to enter more under the protection of the government. The stores are being opened and many of the merchants are starting for the Northern cities to buy goods in the old fashion, and application to ship 6,000 bales of cotton have already been made to our authorities [. . .] The people of Memphis treat our soldiers with kindness and cordiality. ²⁹

During the same time that McClellan’s offensive to Richmond proved uncertain, the capture of the important strategic and commercial center undoubtedly breathed fresh life into the northern populace awaiting Virginia’s results. The idea that the people of Memphis treated their newfound captors “with kindness and cordiality” added further insult to injury to those Confederate sympathizers still inside the city who only four days before “pledged themselves never to surrender.” ³⁰ Herald journalists in the field like Knox did well in their respective Civil War careers, as it was reported that the paper

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²⁸ Saturday Evening Post, June 14, 1862. The lowered font in the third line of the Post headline is done in an effort to make its reproduction as true to the original source as possible.

²⁹ New York Herald, June 13, 1862.

³⁰ Knox, Camp-Fire and Cotton-Field, 182.
spent an estimated $500,000 to $750,000 on coverage throughout the four years of conflict, an extraordinary sum of money by 1860s standards.  

Indeed, news came at a high price. The merit of proper news reporting rested in not only establishing factual information, but its interpretation and elaboration of successes and defeats. Knox’s eyewitness account sheds light on Memphis’s success. Given his background, his account is a departure from a “facts only” approach to war reporting, as he is able to blend literary and factual elements of the battle into a narrative of the 6 June engagement and its subsequent aftermath. Beginning from the “easy victory” stated by Thompson to the “scenes of confusion” amongst conversations of disloyalty among the Memphis populace after the battle ended, Knox covered all bases in a manner befitting to the nature of battle itself: sharp and concise. Northern citizens eagerly waiting for information across the United States could only hope for similar reports.  

Correspondents from the New York Evangelist provided an interesting look at an eyewitness account of the battle. Of the myriad newspaper publications surrounding Memphis’s defeat, the 19 June edition of the Evangelist offered the best detail from the onshore perspective. The article emphasized the crushing defeat as witnessed by Memphis citizens along the bluffs, and remarked towards the beginning of the piece that “No pen can describe the agony of that moment to thousands [. . .] No wonder that tears were shed on shore.” The article went on to explain the eagerness of the gunboat Benton whose crew saved the “noble-hearted men” from certain death. It was as if the journalists


32 Knox, Camp-Fire and Cotton-Field, 179-180.
felt sorry for the men involved, and more importantly, the spectators who saw their friends “defeated, crushed, humiliated, drowning.” Indeed, the correspondents realized the saddened state of its citizens who came to the edge of the city to see the annihilation of the Federal fleet. Instead, the “hireling Yankees” made quick work of the River Defense Fleet, as the populace watched their defenders sink one by one in the rushing river.

The two illustrations sketched by Harper’s Weekly correspondent Alexander Simplot add a unique component to the discussion of the northern press’s response to Memphis. Simplot, whose previous experience at Fort Henry and the Corinth campaign helped his thirst for covering wartime events, drew the most dramatic depiction of the battle in the 28 June edition of Harper’s Weekly. The caption of the picture, aptly titled “The Total Annihilation of the Rebel Fleet by the Federal Fleet Under Commodore Davis,” showed every aspect of the battle’s heated moments; from the Monarchs bruising attack on the CS ram Beauregard to the scattered populace along the periphery. Simplot chose the Monarchs attack on the Beauregard as the highlight of the piece, located in the foreground. Upon close inspection of the picture amidst the smoke and scuttled vessels

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33 Another quote stated later in the article detailed this sympathetic response to the loss: “There stood the thousands and saw their pets go down […] Fortunately, no spectator was injured, although there were several narrow escapes.” For more information, see New York Evangelist, June 19, 1862.

34 New York Evangelist, June 19, 1862.

35 Michael Roth, Historical Dictionary of War Journalists (Greenwood, CT: Greenwood Press, 1997), 286-287. Although Roth declared Simplot one of “the unluckiest artists of the war,” he did not end his stint at Harper’s until the following year when he was replaced by the highly successful Thomas R. Davis.
in the background, the men jumping from the *Beauregards* stern served as a symbol for the conflict itself; one mired in panic, misapprehension, and delusion.\(^{36}\)

The second sketch published on 5 July titled “Hoisting the Stars and Stripes Over the Post Office at Memphis, Tennessee,” provided another vivid interpretation to the symbolic nature of Federal control. The work, with countless citizens angrily shouting as the flag is hoisted atop the post office, complimented the newspapers corresponding headline and body, “Memphis Under the Stars and Stripes” in strict literal terms:

Our old subscribers in Memphis, Tennessee, who have so long been deprived of *Harper’s Weekly* by the insane rebellion of the secessionists, will probably not be sorry to find some illustrations of their city in our pages this week.\(^{37}\)

The article goes on to say that “business in Memphis,” like the article published in the 13 June edition of the *Herald* described above, “is falling into its old channeled.” These various articles and illustrations showed proof to the success of the Union combined fleets at Memphis. Northerners could breathe a sigh of relief as yet another city along the Mississippi River fell back to its prewar status. For those sympathetic to the Confederate cause, however, the events of 6 June proved a disaster.\(^{38}\)

**SOUTHERN PRESS RESPONSE TO MEMPHIS**

As a witness to the Confederate fleet at Memphis, *Appeal* editor John Reid McClanahan knew the response he penned would have to speak in some measures of the near perfect execution of Federal forces. His detail of the battle was not for a lack of want, as he watched the engagement from the wharf mere yards away from the short

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\(^{36}\) Alexander Simplot, “The Total Annihilation of the Rebel Fleet by the Federal Fleet Under Commodore Davis,” *Harper’s Weekly*, June 28, 1862. For more information on this picture, see Fig. 2 in APPENDIX A: MAPS AND ILLUSTRATIONS.

\(^{37}\) *Harper’s Weekly*, July 5, 1862.

\(^{38}\) *Harper’s Weekly*, July 5, 1862.
conflict. Indeed, McClanahan witnessed the battles first blow between the *Lovell* and *Queen of the West* from only two hundred yards away. As historian Barbara Ellis wrote in her 2003 study on the *Appeal*, "he had action almost in his lap." More than any other citizen who saw it that morning, McClanahan knew the repercussions of the loss, for he had published the last issues of the *Appeal* under headlines like "NOT YET" and "BURN THE COTTON," which he felt prudent to publish because "every bale destroyed is as good as putting a man in the field." Yet the language presented in the issues prior to that June morning spoke of the inevitability of defeat. Rather than stay inside the city with the public that held its interest for many years, McClanahan left Memphis shortly after the conflict ended for Grenada, Mississippi, where he wrote and published his 9 June edition as the first in his paper’s exile. As Ellis commented eloquently in *The Moving Appeal*, "His key words" from the first issue in Grenada "seemed pumped from a dry and melancholy heart." McClanahan wrote:

The occupation of Memphis by the Federal forces has convinced us of the necessity of removing our office of publication to Grenada, Mississippi [. . .] our principle motive has been to continue in a position wherein we may be able to render efficient service to the cause we advocate, hereafter as heretofore; and in accomplishing this, should be succeed, we will find out greatest reward. Our fate is indissolubly connected with that of the Confederacy.

Here he already established the decision to make sacrifices. Had he been correct in stating the unyielding success of cause in the months prior to the string of losses in the spring of 1862, there would not have been the necessity to pen such words. Yet by the

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40 *Memphis Daily Appeal*, May 22, June 3, 1862.


42 *Memphis Daily Appeal*, June 9, 1862.
desperate times he witnessed himself, desperate measures were accordingly made and published for the masses to digest. McClanahan’s decision to flee, along with fellow editor and proprietor Benjamin F. Dill, was nothing new for the readers of their famed city’s newspaper. Indeed, seeing the continual loss of key battles along the Mississippi like Shiloh and New Orleans, the editors published as early as 29 April of their eventual flight from Memphis, for if they stayed “Lincoln’s hireling minions would deprive us of the privilege of expressing [. . .] our earnest God-speed to the progress of the Southern independence.”

The 9 June edition of the Appeal, now with the dateline of “Memphis Daily Appeal” replaced by “Grenada, Mississippi,” went on to cover the one-sided nature of the naval battle over two pages, from the first shots fired to the hastened exit of the Confederacy’s last vessel in the upper-Mississippi, the Van Dorn. Yet within all the minutia of the harrowing defeat, McClanahan felt it his duty to shed positive light for his readers. As J. Cutler Andrews noted in his article on the southern press and its impact on morale, “the Confederate press continued to explain away subsequent military defeats [. . .] to put a good face on the deteriorating military situation.” Rather than blame the Confederate leadership for the defeat as many newspaper did at the time, however, McClanahan chose instead to justify the loss by over-exaggerating the vastly outnumbered and outmaneuvered Rebel fleet in the likeness of brigadier-general M. Jeff

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43 Memphis Daily Appeal, April 29, 1862.

Thompson’s official report to Beauregard.\textsuperscript{45} The language used, however, did nothing to show positive input on the already obvious loss:

That the fleet of the enemy was vastly superior to ours, not only in number of vessels, but also in the weight of ordnance, was well known before it was determined to give battle [. . .] our loses will not, we believe exceed fifty in killed and wounded, and [100] hundred prisoners.\textsuperscript{46}

These words came from the same man who once compared the Confederate cause in the west to the French during the “great revolution.”\textsuperscript{47} As a witness to the conflict, McClanahan should have known the relative number of losses of the opposing fleets, yet accordingly noted towards the end of the article that “the enemy loss was fully equal to ours.” Now, in wake of the battle, could only begin its discussion of the engagement with a headline vastly similar to the 14 June edition of the \textit{Saturday Evening Post}:

\begin{quote}
THE FALL OF MEMPHIS
NAVAL BATTLE ON THE MISSISSIPPI
DESTRUCTION OF THE CONFEDERATE FLEET
ESCAPE OF THE VAN DORN WITH $200,000 WORTH OF PROPERTY!
THE FEDERAIS IN THE CITY!\textsuperscript{48}
\end{quote}

By the time Memphians opened their newspapers to this headline, the \textit{Appeal} was long gone to its new location one hundred miles away. For them, the words scrolled across the pages were a harsh reality. Much like the Confederacy by early June in the west, the

\textsuperscript{45} Thompson to Beauregard, June 7, 1862, \textit{ORN}, XXIII, 139-140.

\textsuperscript{46} \textit{Memphis Daily Appeal}, June 9, 1862.

\textsuperscript{47} \textit{Memphis Daily Appeal}, May 4, 1862. The “great revolution” refers to the 1789 French Revolution.

\textsuperscript{48} \textit{Memphis Daily Appeal}, June 9, 1862.
press retreated south closer to the last remaining Confederate bastion at Vicksburg, conveniently located in state.\textsuperscript{49}

In response to the battlefield accounts published in northern newspapers, the 13 June editorial discredited the Federal attempts to rescue the crews of the disabled gunboats. Angered by the widely held belief that Davis’s gunboats and tugs humanely rescued Confederates drowning in the river, McClanahan felt it his duty to print the “truth” to these falsities. Basing his argument off the instance where civilians set out on small boats to rescue men aboard the \textit{Lovell}, McClanahan added that “four shots were fired at them from two of the Federal vessels,” most likely the \textit{Benton} and \textit{St. Louis} given the geographical proximity to the sinking ship. He hated the fact that “further destruction” fell to the Rebel fleet after “the drowning men were rendered non-combatants by the casualties of war.”\textsuperscript{50} Based on the historical documents and eyewitness accounts on the battle itself, one can surmise that McClanahan’s conclusions are not warranted given the fact that a majority of the vessels left, notably the \textit{Sumter} and \textit{General Price}, still engaged in heated conflict.\textsuperscript{51}

Prominent southern newspapers outside of the western theater like the \textit{Charleston Mercury} knew McClanahan and Dill’s credibility as publishers, and printed the \textit{Appeal} account in their own newspapers once word spread of Memphis’s demise.\textsuperscript{52} In their 12 June edition, the \textit{Charleston Mercury} wrote a short summary of the battle under a similar


\textsuperscript{50} \textit{Memphis Daily Appeal}, June 13, 1862.

\textsuperscript{51} Ellet to Stanton, June 6, 1862, \textit{ORN}, XXIII, 125.

\textsuperscript{52} \textit{Charleston Mercury}, June 13, 1862. The 9 June account of the \textit{Appeal} is published in this edition of the \textit{Charleston Mercury}.
title mentioned above. "Considering the desperate character of the fight," the article concluded that the damage was minimal compared to the slaughter it might have been. Indeed, the article honed in on the fight they felt was "the most desperate of the war." Their continual use of the word "desperate" alone helped to show that the northern press was not alone in their sentiments of the Federal fleet's decisive victory.53

Other newspapers followed J. Cutler Andrew's thesis centered on the southern preponderancy to justify their defeats well after the Confederacy's "high point of public morale" at the beginning of the war.54 If he was correct in this statement, then Memphis provided a key example, if not the most dramatic, during the late spring and early summer months of 1862. Another reporter from the Charleston, South Carolina, newspaper consortium, Felix G. de Fontaine, witnessed the engagement from an observation point while resting on a sickbed. His 17 June report was by Andrews' estimation "the best that was published from the Southern point of view."55 The journalist, a former New York Herald correspondent, justified the loss at Memphis due to Montgomery's inability to find sufficient coal to retreat down to Vicksburg, an idea that refuted the widely held criticism that the River Defense Fleet leader should have avoided the fight for the sake of saving his fleet. Much like McClanahan, de Fontaine eventually fled from Memphis once his friend in town warned him that the Federals "were looking for him" because he continued to publish reports sympathetic to the Confederacy. The journalist escaped the city disguised as a farmer and headed to safety at Hernando,

53 Charleston Mercury, June 12, 1862.


Mississippi. Indeed, by the time Union forces were established in town, they quickly began a new campaign to snuff out and detain all media outlets in the surrounding area.\footnote{Andrews, \textit{The South Reports the War}, 159.}

One of the major turning points of Federal control was their management and eventual takeover of the southern press that still operated in Memphis. The exchange of colonel Graham Fitch's Indiana brigade for the thousands of citizens that fled southward by rail lines left many residents and business inside the city bemused and befuddled. Memphis newspapers like the \textit{Avalanche} and \textit{Argus} resumed publication under Federal occupation. Of the two, the \textit{Argus} remained under the watchful eyes of their newfound occupiers in the first week of occupation. Accordingly, by the time Grant arrived to monitor all aspects of the city in early July, he required all newspapers within its limits to take an oath of allegiance which dictated that "no newspaper will be permitted to be published within this district unless the editors and proprietors thereof, shall first take an oath that they will bear true allegiance to the government of the United States of America."\footnote{John McCleod Keating and O.F. Vedder, \textit{History of the City of Memphis and Shelby County, Tennessee: With Illustrations and Biographical Sketches of Some of Its Prominent Citizens}, Vol. 1 (Syracuse, N.Y.: D. Mason & Co., Publishers, 1888), 515-516.} Union officials wanted to use earlier reports of pro-Union sentiment in Memphis to their best advantage.\footnote{\textit{New Orleans Daily Crescent}, March 10, 1862, in Andrews, \textit{The South Reports the War}, 159.} When the \textit{Argus} proved uncertain to the conditions mandated by the future president, it was summarily suppressed until 24 August. For them, control of the print media allowed a dose of reality missing from southern
newspapers that did not receive an upturn of fortunes until July 1862 with Robert E. Lee’s victorious stand at the Seven Days Battles.⁵⁹

The *Memphis Avalanche*, a major press located within the city, published equally harrowing details of the battle and city under the auspices of the Stars and Stripes as seen in both northern and southern presses. There existed a stark contrast between the language included in the newspaper before and after the battle. The 6 June edition of the *Avalanche* published rumors that many “still believe the Federals will never get to Memphis by river.”⁶⁰ With this uncertainty now a blatant reality under new direction, the first issue published after the battle showed signs of change in its main message. Included in the first page of the 8 June edition, a short paragraph summed up the hopes and feelings of Federal authorities and lament for Confederate sympathizers that loomed in town:

The first orders of the authorities now paramount in Memphis, will be found in our columns today; and we trust and believe the good sense of our people will render dear to them the wisdom of obedience to a power they are unable to resist [. . .] in placing us under the immediate control of officers of that government whose political opinions [. . .] have rendered urbane, political and kindly in disposition.⁶¹


⁶⁰ *Memphis Avalanche*, June 6, 1862.

⁶¹ *Memphis Avalanche*, June 8, 1862.
The article went on to urge the Memphis populace to comply with the “wisdom and obedience” of the Federal Government. Reports already started to notice a difference of feeling in the public, according to the Avalanche, as retail trade and storeowners started to open back up. According to Herald correspondent Thomas W. Knox, the Avalanche was later “interfered with by our authorities; and, under the name of the Memphis Bulletin with new editorial management, was allowed to reappear.” Accordingly, Knox, with New York Tribune journalist A.D. Richardson, took control of the editorial department of the Memphis Argus on 17 June.

Under the new management, Knox and Richardson published articles “of a positive character,” and kept the publishers on to keep some semblance of harmony among the amalgam now living beside the Mississippi River. Unlike the “migratory sheet” of the Memphis Appeal, the Bulletin and Argus remained in town and published Union editorials. In some cases, by Knox’s experience at the Argus, the publishers once under Rebel control “bore the inconvenience with an excellent grace,” writing what they felt was necessary for the surrounding public to hear. For these newspapers, their strength of Confederate cause, not unlike the battle itself, ended swiftly and effectively in the hands of their aggressors.

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62 Like the Appeal, the 8 June edition of the Avalanche attempted to justify their loss, for “the Confederate fleet was really in no condition to encounter such an opposition. At best they were only rams, which has already seen good service.” The only service they saw, however, was at Plum Point Bend on 10 May 1862.

63 Ellis, The Moving Appeal, 170; Knox, Camp-Fire and Cotton-Field, 190.

64 Knox, Camp-Fire and Cotton-Field, 190-191.
CHAPTER V
PLAYING STRATEGY WITH THE ENEMY: THE BLUFF CITY

After the battle of Memphis, Union forces in the West found its takeover highly advantageous. The former Confederate naval yard in town became an important base of operations for the Union navy throughout the western war. The manufacturing resources left at the Federal’s disposal allowed the army to develop trade in the area, often suspiciously with the Confederacy. Indeed, vessels for trade and transport eclipsed those of warfare in the months following the battle. Thousands of pounds of cotton, coffee, and sugar transported to northern states supplied and funded the Virginia theater, which by the early summer of 1862 became the focus of Union strategy. Cotton, the king commodity in Memphis before the war, remained its main staple of trade under Federal control. Using the naval base in coordination with the four railways connected to the city, Memphis became one of the main depots for ironclads, troops, and supplies for the impending siege of Vicksburg, Mississippi. Ships in need of repair now had a closer port of call. The temporary silence of Flag Officer Farragut’s guns along the bottom of the Mississippi River now had reason to recommence operations, now in coordination with Davis’s Western Flotilla. The attack corridor opened all the way from Cairo to New Orleans, sandwiching Vicksburg in between.

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2 A base of operations much closer to conflict, as opposed to the main source of Union operations at Cairo, Illinois. For more information, see below.

3 James M. Merrill, Battle Flags South: The Story of the Civil War Navies on Western Waters (Rutherford: Farleigh Dickinson University Press, 1970), 200; Spencer Tucker, "Naval Battle of
SHERMAN AND THE OPENING OF TRADE

William Tecumseh Sherman arrived in Memphis on 21 June 1862. His orders were to replace General Grant as the new commander of Memphis in the District of West Tennessee.4 Coming straight from General Henry Halleck’s Corinth campaign that ended in early June, Sherman recognized that it was “a decisive blow to the Confederate cause in our quarter, and changed the whole aspect of affairs in West Tennessee.” Sherman arrived in town towards the end of June and immediately saw its citizens still demoralized by the defeat. “They openly admitted,” noted Sherman, “that their cause sustained a death-blow.”5 He also noticed that, since his assignment as Memphis overseer, a handful of his Union compatriots did not act aggressive enough to open the city back up to his personal standards:

When we first entered Memphis, July 21, 1862, I found the place dead; no business doing, the stores closed, churches, schools, and every thing shut up. The people were all more or less in sympathy with our enemies, and there was a strong

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4 William Tecumseh Sherman, Memoirs of General W.T. Sherman, Written by Himself, Vol. I (New York: Charles L. Webster & Co., 1891), 287. Ulysses S. Grant, who was at the time the commander of the District of West Tennessee, was sent to aid Halleck at Corinth. This occurred at a time when “terrible disasters had befallen our other armies in Virginia and the East.” Although Grant was the commander of the District of West Tennessee, Sherman replaced Colonel James R. Slack as the commandant of Memphis. For more information, see B.G. Ellis, The Moving Appeal: Mr. McClanahan, Mrs. Dill, and the Civil War’s Great Newspaper Run (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2003), 170.

5 Sherman, Memoirs, 292.
prospect that the whole civil population would become a dead weight in our hands.  

Memphis citizens, no doubt frustrated from their press’s takeover and subsequent bashing of their fleet’s defeat, found in Sherman a wholly capable and stern commander. Unlike his predecessors, Sherman did what was necessary to act out the instructions of the Federal high command. As an observer and soldier of the western theater, Sherman knew the prime importance of the Mississippi River as a conduit for trade and transport. Yet, once established in town, Sherman excelled in his first position as commanding officer of a controlled population, and even eventually gained some levels of respect and admiration. Historian Gerald M. Capers remarked in his history of Memphis that Sherman “displayed as much regard for the rights of citizens and sincere concern for the welfare of the city.”  

Nearly a month before Sherman arrived, Colonel Slack wrote a statement from his headquarters at Memphis that dictated the series of events leading to Memphis’s transition back under Federal economic control. In his proclamation addressed to the public, Slack commented on the restoration of confidence, happiness, and prosperity

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7 In a letter to Halleck on 17 September 1863, Sherman commented on the prime importance of the Mississippi River: “The Valley of the Mississippi is America, and although Railroads have changed the Economy of intercommunications, yet the water channels still mark the lines of fertile land, and afford carriage to the heavy products of it.” For more information on this in relation to the objectives and significance of the river, see Sherman to Halleck, September 17, 1863, Stanton Papers, in John D. Milligan, *Gunboats Down the Mississippi* (Annapolis: United States Naval Institute, 1965), xx.


necessary for cities like Memphis to thrive in the future, and accordingly invited people in the surrounding area to "come to the city and purchase supplies for their necessary wants."\textsuperscript{10} He went on in the brief note to offer protection only to those who engaged in "legitimate" pursuits of commerce. This conciliatory message formed a direct parallel to Sherman's arrival into town one month later, who took Slack's admission to the next level far beyond pen and paper. After opening up stores, churches, schools, and amusement locales, Sherman felt his sympathetic hand added much to Memphis's newfound appearance as an "active, busy, prosperous place."\textsuperscript{11}

Three days after he arrived in town, Sherman granted passage for citizens around the surrounding countryside to engage in commerce. There was; however, one important message included in his acceptance of the free flow of commerce: Any person suspected of possessing war contraband was subject to examination by Federal authorities. His 24 July "Orders No. 61" allowed businesses in Memphis to be "as free and obstructed as is consistent with a state of war."\textsuperscript{12} Sherman wanted trade to persist again amidst pressure from the government in Washington and Henry Halleck, yet had to do what was "proper" and "necessary" to remain dutiful during wartime. He also was not blind to the fact that Confederate sympathizers still possessed sentiment with the South. As a consequence to these observations, he ordered only five roads for travel in and out of the city during daylight hours.\textsuperscript{13}

\textsuperscript{10} Memphis Bulletin, July 4, 1862. The proclamation was penned on 20 June, yet did not appear in newspapers like the Bulletin until the following month. One can assume, however, that a majority of the citizens eager to reinvigorate their economy knew of the message.

\textsuperscript{11} Sherman, Memoirs, 293.

\textsuperscript{12} Sherman, Orders No. 61, July 24, 1863, ORA, XVII, pt. II, 117.

\textsuperscript{13} Sherman, Orders No. 61, July 24, 1863, ORA, XVII, pt. II, 117.
Writing to the Federally-run *Union Appeal*, Sherman blasted editor Samuel Sawyer for the "highly indiscreet" portrayal of Sherman's leadership only three days in. "In the interest, welfare, and glory of the whole Government of the United States," Sherman wrote, "I must take time and be satisfied that injustice be not done." Even if Sherman knew his post was in all likeliness temporary, these facts showed his profound importance to stimulate not only commerce, but also the common cause of the United States. Regardless of their sympathy or disdain of the Federal forces in the city, trade now opened in full force at Memphis. Even though there were consistent reports coming into Sherman that detailed suspicions of bribery by Confederate sympathizers, Sherman lifted Lincoln's August 1861 trade ban. Because Memphians were in a steep depression in their business economy since the beginning of 1862, many citizens hoped Sherman's order would allow their prewar luxuries to return.

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14 Sherman to Samuel Sawyer, July 24, 1863, *ORA*, XVII, pt. II, 116. In reference to the judge, mayor, policemen, and the board of alderman still in town, Sherman wrote to the wear Sawyer that everything would be done "all in good time."

15 For more information on illegal trade with the Confederacy, see Parks, "Confederate Trade Center," 293-294; E. Merton Coulter, "Commercial Intercourse with the Confederacy in the Mississippi Valley, 1861-1865," *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 5, no. 4 (March 1919): 377. In Robert A. Sigafous, *From Cotton Row to Beale Street: A Business History of Memphis* (Memphis: Memphis State University Press, 1979), 44, he included a short commentary on the existence of smuggling and illegal trade between newcomers, existing residents, and the Federals. Because the Federal policy on trade remained lax with an occasional policy made by Memphis's command leaders like Grant and Sherman, "loyalty to the cause of either the Union or the Confederacy was a secondary consideration to those individuals." Yet, if one takes into account the amount of free trade policy success enacted at Memphis during the first months of its occupation, it is the mere fact that illegal trade existed because the city itself thrived as a hub of activity, both economically and militarily. Looking through the lens of Memphis with a watchful eye, one must take a broad opportunist approach to understand the supreme importance the city had in the success of the western theater.

16 Parks, "Confederate Trade Center," 293-294. Lincoln banned trade with the South on 16 August 1861. As Parks notes in his article, this policy "was still in force when Memphis fell into Federal hands."
THE FABRIC OF THEIR LIVES

At the beginning of the war, Memphis held the proud distinction as a premier center of the burgeoning cotton trade. With over 22,000 residents in 1863, a majority of these men and women made their living on the profitable and exportable commodity.\(^{17}\) Along with the ability to transport cotton up and down the Mississippi River and its tributaries, Memphis’s railroad terminus increased its capabilities for its distribution to the far reaches of the southern states. One in particular, the Memphis & Charleston Railroad, ran from Memphis to Chattanooga, Tennessee, a railroad line that historian Jack D. Coombe felt “had to be defended at all costs” for its strategic and commercial value.\(^ {18}\) The Memphis & Charleston Railroad also connected with the Mobile & Ohio Railroad at its junction further east in Union held Corinth, Mississippi.\(^ {19}\)

Railroads like the Memphis & Charleston line allowed the free flow of cotton and other materials like molasses and sugar into the hands of southerners desperately in need of these staples.\(^ {20}\) Historian James L. Watkins wrote that the success of the railroads was “due to the rapid development of the cotton industry in the Southwest.”\(^ {21}\) Accordingly, as Coombe later noted in *Thunder Along the Mississippi*, the line met with the

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\(^{17}\) Sigafoos, *From Cotton Rowe to Beale Street*, 41. The actual number of citizens as stated by Sigafoos was 22,623 residents, with the total count for Shelby County at 31,139.

\(^{18}\) Jack D. Coombe, *Thunder Along the Mississippi: The River Battles That Split the Confederacy* (New York: Bantam Books, 1996), 95. The Memphis and Ohio Railroad, another important line that terminated at Memphis, was destroyed at its bridge site in Clarksville, Tennessee, in February 1862 under Grant’s orders. The Memphis & Little Rock Railroad, which originated in Madison, Arkansas, also met its terminus in the bluff city. For more information, see Coombe, *Thunder Along the Mississippi*, 73, 120.

\(^{19}\) Coombe, *Thunder Along the Mississippi*, 128.


\(^{21}\) Watkins, *King Cotton*, 4.
Chattanooga & Atlanta Railroad which “linked the produce-growing regions of Arkansas to the eastern edge of the Confederacy, supplying Southern armies and populace with food and troops.”\textsuperscript{22} They also linked key Confederate sectors along its east to west orientation. Indeed, each of Memphis’s four railroads, with the exception of the Memphis & Ohio, sent vital supplies eastward to aid others theaters of warfare. Yet Memphis’s surrender to the hands of capable Federal forces silenced any car to the east without careful consideration and inspection.

With the inevitability of its capture in the spring of 1862, southern states lost a major hub of commercial availability in Memphis. The trade ban still intact by midsummer allowed no real possibility for trade along the Mississippi, as combined Union forces closed in on the remaining bastions both north and south. If one merged geography with strategy, their economic interdiction set aside any chance for regulatory commerce in the west after the fall of New Orleans and Memphis, respectively. Evidently, the Confederate government’s crippling financial situation had to look elsewhere for resource capital by June.\textsuperscript{23}

The Confederate government knew that their adversaries wanted their steady supply of cotton when the war began. The once close-knit connection between northern cities like St. Louis to Memphis faced the harsh reality separate from each other for their respective economic and strategic necessity. In his article on Confederate commercial intercourse in the Mississippi Valley, E. Merton Coulter noted that “the northern and southern portions of the United States were almost absolutely dependent upon each

\textsuperscript{22} Coombe, Thunder Along the Mississippi, 120.

\textsuperscript{23} Sigafoos, From Cotton Rowe to Beale Street, 41.
Officials in Richmond realized that their staple crop could be exchanged for much needed military supplies by 1862 in order to maintain their successes in the east and hold off the Union onslaught in the west.

In an effort to merge economics with military strategy, the Confederate Congress passed a variety of acts restricting trade with the enemy. The most famous of these, the "Cotton Burning" order, mandated Mississippi River cotton growers to burn their supplies. The upper-river embargo on cotton invariably halted trade in the area, as many witnessed the steady decline in the area’s economy as an unfortunate result. As cotton’s price per pound steadily rose in the spring of 1862, speculators from New York markets waited anxiously for cities like Memphis to fall under the Union’s liberal trade policy. This, of course, angered many local growers who had to store thousands of bales along the Memphis bluff. There were no potential buyers for these merchants because of the presence of naval forces along their trade routes. One report from the Memphis Appeal noted nearly three hundred thousand bales of cotton set ablaze once news spread of the impending flotilla’s presence. In the same 3 June editorial, Appeal editor John Reid McClanahan penned this second page headline in an effort to mix tragedy with strategy:

BURN THE COTTON

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25 In Parks, “A Confederate Trade Center,” 290, the author noted that in Liverpool, England, “cotton was selling at twenty-eight cents,” a figure much higher than North American markets.

26 In his personal diary, lawyer John Hallum remarked on the absence of trade and price of goods under Confederate occupation: “Cotton had no present merchantable value, the first grades of molasses only command 2 ½ cents per gallon, one dollar per barrel of forty gallons; the best grade of brown sugar two cents per pound.” For more information, see John Hallum, The Diary of an Old Lawyer (Nashville, TN: Southwestern Publishing House, 1895), 186.

27 Memphis Daily Appeal, June 3, 1862.
Yes, burn it! And why? Because every bale destroyed is as good as putting a man in the field. Because our implacable enemies want it. Because, if they get it, they thereby get the “sinews of war.” Because without it they must suffer.28

Unfortunately for McClanahan, his wishes came out in half truth. When the Federals took the city on 6 June, the Confederacy attempted to burn their amassed cotton stores, yet a majority of the priceless commodity was eventually saved.29 Had the goods been spared at Memphis and subsequently sold under Federal occupation, Tennessee native and lawyer John Hallum estimated the goods’ value at $54 million at a price of forty cents per pound the day it burned. Refuting the statement made by McClanahan above, Hallum eloquently noted in a dose of realism that the cotton turned to ash that day happened “on the idiotic idea that its destruction would cripple the North far more than it would injure the South.” For him, the burned cotton order on 6 June simply meant empty pockets and an even emptier sense of pride and prestige once held in the city.30

Once placed under Federal control, Memphis became one of the first southern cotton markets opened in the South after its occupation, falling just behind New Orleans. By the time the cotton bales left at Memphis went out onto the market amidst a throng of Yankee speculators and merchants, the price rose to nearly thirty cents per pound. The reports published that accounted for several Confederate raids on cotton shipments to the Memphis market could not stem the tidal wave of success witnessed along the bluffs.31

By the beginning of July, 8,227 bales of cotton were purchased and shipped upriver to

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28 Memphis Daily Appeal, June 3, 1862.
29 Sigafoos, From Cotton Rowe to Beale Street, 44.
30 Hallum, Diary of an Old Lawyer, 186.
31 Memphis Bulletin, July 30, 1862. According to the Bulletin article, raiders burned 60 bales of cotton on one such occasion.
pump life into the Federal economy. In November of the same year, the Bulletin reported “an average of 800 bales of cotton per week is said to be received in Memphis from West Tennessee.” Nearly two years later, the Charleston Mercury reported fifty thousand bales of cotton handled in Memphis alone under military authorities.

To further notions of compliance, Sherman created a Board of Trade for Memphis, comprised of Memphis citizens who took the oath of allegiance to the Stars and Stripes. Federal control of cotton resources allowed a decline in shortages in the north, not only providing bivouac tents for Federal forces throughout the theaters of war, but the relief of the likelihood of European intervention into the conflict. By the time the steady flow of goods shipped from St. Louis and Cincinnati to Memphis, New York Herald correspondent Thomas Knox noted “the supply was far greater than the demand.” The rush for northern merchants to initiate trade proved ultimate beneficial only after the city came under new management. In all cases, Memphis had once again arrived.

“WE HAVE LOST OUR STRONGHOLD ON THE MISSISSIPPI”

The capture of Memphis allowed the combined union forces a new center to operate, outfit, and subsequently send its forces downriver towards its new and final objective, Vicksburg. Against a Confederate force largely defeated as a result of the June 6 engagement, focus along the river from Memphis looked down the Mississippi

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32 Memphis Bulletin, July 3, 1862. This source of information can also be found in Memphis Daily Appeal, June 21, 1862.
33 The Charleston Mercury, November 19, 1862.
35 Knox, Camp-Fire and Cotton-Field, 193.
36 Capers, Biography of a River Town, 152-153.
River invasion corridor towards the last remaining river city. Lincoln viewed the opening of the Mississippi the highest priority of his western operatives. Sherman, who spent a considerable amount of time in Memphis correcting its fragile system of operations, wrote to his brother John Sherman in the beginning of 1863 that the Confederacy’s ultimate demise from the river’s use and utilization was “far more important than the conquest in Virginia.” In an attempt to right the wrongs made by the Confederacy at Memphis, Union officials built Fort Pickering using slave labor. The fort, with the capability to house ten thousand soldiers, was never afforded the chance for use. Militarily speaking, Memphis became the strategic middle between Vicksburg and the far reach of the Union river base at Cairo.38

It is interesting to note an almost converse relationship between the successes and defeats in the Virginia and western theater of operations. In the late spring and early summer of 1862, momentum stayed westward. Viewing the string of bases held by the Union military on the river alone, Memphis now represented the far edge on the upper-Mississippi. Cairo, the long held base for Union attack and supply, was now essentially replaced by Memphis. Indeed, Memphis served a main naval depot and occupation facility for the Western Flotilla until 1865. With the successful completion of the Vicksburg campaign on 4 July 1863 using the waterways and land forces under General Ulysses S. Grant and Western Flotilla commander David Dixon Porter, Union vessels


now had the possibility to navigate and protect the Mississippi River from St. Louis to the Gulf of Mexico.\textsuperscript{39}

The initial southern press reaction after the fall of Vicksburg was “hot resentment of the deceptive news reports.” Either through misinformation or overconfidence in the garrison itself, journalists in the area took the news harshly. Indeed, many southern newspapers like the \textit{Savannah Republican} declared such reports as “systematic lying” by the Confederate officials within the city who promised it could hold out.\textsuperscript{40} The slow trickle of losses, sped up by the capitulation of Memphis in 1862, a year later increased to a steady stream that flowed as fast and rapid as the Mississippi River that hugged the city itself. \textit{Memphis Appeal} correspondent J.R. Thompson wrote from Richmond on 13 July 1863 that the general public grew increasingly convinced that “we have lost our stronghold on the Mississippi.”\textsuperscript{41} Although the fall was not a complete surprise to the southern public, Thompson’s ruminations were correct. The Mississippi River now had a lone principal actor and agent for the remainder of the war. As U.S. Attorney General Edward Bates wrote so poignantly in his diary entry concerning the complicated interplay between power and control along the Mississippi, “the Government may be changed, but the river cannot be divided.”\textsuperscript{42} One force. One river.

\textbf{CONCLUSION}

The Civil War harnessed the technology of the age that introduced the dawn of total warfare. Like the minie bullet to a rifle company, ironsides and rams changed the

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{39} Sigafoos, \textit{From Cotton Rowe to Beale Street}, 43.
  \item \textsuperscript{40} \textit{Savannah Republican}, July 10, 1863.
  \item \textsuperscript{41} \textit{Memphis Daily Appeal}, July 13, 1863.
\end{itemize}
way the world witnessed naval conflict, large or small. The annihilation of Commodore James E. Montgomery’s River Defense Fleet at Memphis signaled the effect of decisive naval supremacy and the morale of citizens and troops alike. The combined fleets of Captain Charles H. Davis’s Western Flotilla gunboats and Colonel Charles Ellet, Jr.’s iron-braced Ram Fleet showed speed, efficiency, and power. “Although the capture was not that spectacular as that of New Orleans,” historian Bern Anderson remarked, “Memphis was a significant victory for the Union Squadron and a severe loss for the Confederacy.” The security of Memphis allowed Federal forces to obtain the necessary material to attack Vicksburg, the “Gibraltar of the Confederacy.”

A veritable pantheon of “what if’s” surround the battle of Memphis and the character of warfare along the Mississippi River. Would southern naval forces along western waters put up more resistance if provided the equal opportunities and manpower of the North? Did the result of the battle conclude faultiness of command leadership? Unfortunately, most historians like Robert V. Bogle confirmed the fate of the Confederacy to its mere lack of want and interest in a navy. “How,” naval historian Raimondo Luraghi noted in the preface to his 1996 History of the Confederate Navy, “did an agricultural country with a limited industrial plant [.] succeed in building a navy that confronted the formidable navy of the Northern states through four years of merciless fighting?”

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44 Milligan, Gunboats Down the Mississippi, 75-77; William L. Shea and Terrence J. Winschel, Vicksburg is the Key: The Struggle for the Mississippi River (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2003), 17.

subject, the question still remains, leaving historians to apply such examples as Memphis to further aid this hypothesis.46

Given the reluctance of the Confederate Congress to allocate sufficient funds to expand their infantile naval forces, it is both impressive and harrowing that the Confederate River Defense Fleet became in essence a product of strategic inefficiency. Bogle concluded in his short article “Defeat Through Default,” it is “only speculation whether the addition of naval support at Confederate strongholds could have halted the Union advance.” Bogle also added that, even though the overall performance record of the Confederate navy commanded respect, “the opposite was true of its Mississippi River campaign.”47 Only Fort Pillow and Fort Randolph, two Confederate shore defenses along the Mississippi River, existed by the beginning of June. With their surrender, however, it was only a matter of time and effort that separated the Union from control of the city. It is a common example of too little, too late for the southern war effort along the then Union held river cities from Cairo to Memphis, the last remaining economic and strategic stronghold along the upper-Mississippi.48

Without the supply lines coming in and out of Memphis, it grew difficult for southerners to stretch its funding out of the main source of their economy. With Vicksburg captured one year later in 1863, the Union’s combined forces sealed off the Mississippi River to the Confederacy, splitting secessionist land in half. Federal forces controlled all points from St. Louis to New Orleans. Although the concept of ramming


vessels lived and died along the Memphis shoreline, their success in coordination with Davis’s gunboat flotilla surprised the overzealous Confederates, which thereby altered the course of war for the ultimate success of the Union by 1865.\footnote{Milligan, \textit{Gunboats Down the Mississippi}, 75-77.}
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**MAP KEY¹**

**Union Naval Forces, 6 June 1862**
1. Position of Western Flotilla gunboats, Captain Charles H. Davis
   Q. Ram *Queen of the West*, Colonel Charles Ellet, Jr. commanding
   M. Ram *Monarch*, Lieutenant Alfred Ellet commanding

**Confederate River Defense Fleet**
2. CSS *General Beauregard*

¹ The map key presented here helps to explain the events that occurred the morning of 6 June 1862. Using the key provided in Hearn, *Ellet's Brigade*, 32, as a guide, the corresponding numbers represent the position of the Union's Western Flotilla and Ram Fleet, as well as the Confederate River Defense Fleet under the command of James E. Montgomery. Hearn, however, regards Davis as a Flag Officer in his key, yet he did not attain this rank until 1863. At the time of the engagement, Davis was a Captain in the United States navy. The dotted lines including in the drawing detail the movement of the *Queen of the West* and *Monarch* during the engagement. This pictorial depiction of the battle of Memphis helps solidify the importance the two Union rams had throughout the early morning. Further detail of this illustration can be found in the third chapter, "The Battle of Memphis."
3. CSS Little Rebel
4. CSS General Price
5. CSS Sumter
6. CSS General Lovell
7. CSS General Jeff. Thompson
8. CSS General Bragg
9. CSS General Van Dorn
Fig. 2. "The Total Annihilation of the Rebel Fleet by the Federal Fleet Under Commodore Davis," *Harpers Weekly*, June 28, 1862. In the foreground of the picture, the US Ram *Monarch* is ramming the Beauregard, which occurred early in the battle (see below). Sketch by Alexander Simplot, *Harpers Weekly* correspondent.²

Simplot's illustration is the most dramatic depiction of the battle at Memphis. With the heated battle in the foreground and the throng of citizens scattered along the periphery, his sketch masterfully detailed the one-sided nature of the short conflict. Upon close inspection, the sketch also showed how close quartered the battle developed to once the fighting became general. One must note, however, that many artists like Simplot over-exaggerated the time line of events in order to "fit" everything within the confines of the sketch itself.³

² This sketch can also be found on the Naval Historical Center's website (Photo# NH 42367).

³ Although he received the commission at *Harper's* due to a submitted sketch, Simplot resigned from the famed newspaper in 1862 "unable to find a cure for the chronic diarrhea that had plagued him since the Shiloh campaign. For more information, see Mitchel P. Roth, *Historical Dictionary of War Journalism* (Greenwood, CT: Greenwood Press, 1997), 287.
Fig. 3. "Naval Battle Before Memphis," in Warren D. Crandall and Isaac D. Newell, *History of the Ram Fleet and the Mississippi Marine Brigade in the War for the Union on the Mississippi and its Tributaries: The Story of the Ellets and Their Men* (St. Louis, MO: Buschart Bros., 1907), 53.

Lieutenant Warren D. Crandall and Isaac D. Newell's sketch of the naval battle of Memphis, albeit less dramatic than *Harper's Weekly* artist Alexander Simplot's depiction, is nonetheless helpful. Given the eyewitness accounts, *Official Records*, and scholarly interpretations on the battle itself, it is clear that the picture included in their *History of the Ram Fleet* was drawn from the perspective of the Arkansas shore line, as Davis's boats are located to the far left amidst the pall of smoke emanating from the opposing ram fleets. Unfortunately, no source included in the text stated exactly who drew the picture.
Fig. 4. “Hoisting the Stars and Stripes Over the Post-Office at Memphis, Tennessee,” Harpers Weekly, July 5, 1862. Sketch by Alexander Simplot, Harpers Weekly correspondent.

Although it is inconclusive how many Memphis citizens flocked to the post office located on Front Row, Simplot’s dramatic depiction of the hoisting of the American flag is a helpful reminder to the symbolism of Federal control following the engagement.
I am originally from Virginia Beach, Virginia. After graduating high school in 2002, I attended James Madison University and graduated in 2006 with a BA in History and a minor in Educational Media. I began the Masters Program at Old Dominion University in the fall of 2006. I spent my first year at ODU as a Graduate Teaching Assistant (GTA) under Dr. Carolyn Lawes and Michael Hucles. This past year, I taught discussion sections as a Graduate Teaching Assistant Instructor (GTAI) under Dr. Douglas Greene and Timothy Nevin. I will spend summer 2008 as an Educational Intern at the Hampton Roads Naval Museum, in Norfolk, VA. Furthermore, I will continue to work towards my goal to enter a history doctoral program with an emphasis in American naval history along the Mississippi River.