WASHINGTON SECURED:
BREAKING THE CONFEDERATE BLOCKADE
OF THE POTOMAC, 1861-1862.

A Thesis
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by
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Department of History
For My Parents
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INTRODUCTION

This study had its beginnings in 1971. At that time I was searching for a term-paper topic for a course in military history. Allan R. Millett of Ohio State University ran the course. With Dr. Millett's approval, I completed a short report on the significance of Aquia Creek, Virginia, in the American Civil War.

This initial brief project was inspired by actual contact with the remains of the Union supply base at Aquia Creek. My sister, Mrs. Paulette Watson, first introduced me to the site and encouraged my work on the subject. More detailed research followed, and I soon found myself writing an undergraduate honors paper on the same subject for Dr. Millett during the winter of 1972-73. From my home and "Headquarters," a large pre-Civil War mansion in Madison, Virginia, I made weekend excursions to Aquia Creek and to various libraries and archives in Washington, Richmond, and Charlottesville. The scenery of the Blue Ridge was spectacular and it kept me away from my studies more than it should have. Time was short and the paper was slow to take shape; finally, I completed the project but discovered that a great deal more needed to be said. Nonetheless, I received my degree and embarked upon a varied career of substitute teaching and camera sales.
During the summer of 1973 I presented my findings to a gathering of the Council on Abandoned Military Posts. In the course of this meeting, I met Mary Alice Wills and her husband Bob, who expressed interest in my work and told me that the war along the Potomac was a long, involved story of which the Aquia saga was only a small part. Earlier, I had received the same information from Mr. Jean Henson, with whom I had tramped about in the woods north of Fredericksburg searching for old fortifications. I decided that should I ever return to school, the war on the Potomac would probably be worthy of further research.

I did return to school shortly thereafter, and within a year I had decided - again, with Dr. Millett's advice and consent - to investigate this particular phase of the Civil War in depth for my Master's thesis. The results are now resting in the reader's hands.

The story is not yet complete. It probably never will be, any more than any history is ever complete, but I believe it is sufficient in scope to acquaint even the most casual reader with the rudiments of early wartime disorganization and petty interdepartmental disputes. It concerns an episode which has been largely ignored by most historians despite the insights it provides into the political workings of both Washington and Richmond in the early stages of the war.

This is the story of the Confederates' attempts to cut off Washington from communication and supply via the Potomac
River. The attempt ultimately failed; but it was the manner in which it was conceived and the way in which it failed that will interest the military historian. Though the events which took place along the Potomac in 1861-62 were not as dramatically climactic as the fall of Atlanta or Lee's flight to Appomattox, they shaped the entire future of the war in the east. The course of the war on the Potomac determined that the war would last another three years. The strong military and political position which the Confederates held was sacrificed in favor of a tenable defensive position. Such policy would be repeated by the Confederates throughout the course of the war.

The opposing forces of Washington and Richmond waged an important struggle along the two banks of the Potomac during the war's early months. Confederate guns in Virginia commanded the river, causing the Federal capital some physical hardship and much political embarrassment. The result was an amazing string of bureaucratic bickering between the Union Army, Navy, and Administration over who should take the responsibility of opening the river. Months passed and President Lincoln waited with growing impatience for his generals to do something. Meanwhile a great amount of gunfire enlivened the river, but the results were so negligible that Union newspapers began to ridicule their forces' efforts. Lincoln thought that the Union's vast military forces were much too slow in moving, and he finally issued his generals a direct order to begin a campaign and clear the river.
This was not the first time Lincoln spurred a general into action, and it would not be the last; but in this case, unlike the unhappy episode at Bull Run, the Union forces would taste at least a partial victory. The Confederate blockade vanished even as the Northern troops prepared to move against it.

The Union success, however unexpected, was a turning point of sorts. Though they were subsequently defeated in their Peninsular drive on Richmond, the Federals pushed the rebels away from the Potomac and Washington. The rebels indicated that they preferred to go on the defensive and the Union took the initiative. They would on occasion lose this initiative, but the Confederates would never again come close to isolating Washington from all sources of military supplies.

The story of the war on the Potomac is not one of gallant, decisive charges with flags flying and trumpets blaring. It is instead a tale of furtive commando raids, sneak attacks, smuggling operations, and long-range artillery duels. The episodes recounted herein show us how two uncertain armies sparred with each other, feeling out each other's defenses, plotting great moves and then cancelling them at the last minute. Such a story reminds us that those who served in this terrible struggle were much like the armies themselves: tense, scared, uncertain, but determined nonetheless. They were, in short, exactly as we are. This revelation in itself, though obvious, is sometimes
overlooked. To remember it is simultaneously reassuring and frightening, for it means that we have changed little - either in bravery or in bitter passion - during the one hundred and ten years since the war's end.
AQUIA AND POTOMAC CREEKS
(SHOWING n.186 (REBELS' MAJOR GUN POSITIONS))
CHAPTER I
THE BLOCKADE IS ESTABLISHED

Part 1
The Confederates' Actions:
"While the enemy holds the Potomac,
the steamer is of no value to us."

Late in April, 1861, two men stood on the bluffs sur-
rounding the terminus of the Richmond, Fredericksburg, and
Potomac Railroad at Aquia Creek, Virginia. One was Thomas
H. Williamson, Major of Engineers, Virginia Army. The other
was Lieutenant Hunter H. Lewis of the Virginia Navy. Their
common mission was to select a position for batteries with
which the railroad terminus, wharves, timber, railroad iron,
and the vessels docked at Aquia Creek could be protected
from the Union forces. They agreed that Split Rock Bluff,
on the same side of the creek as the landing, would be the
best site. From there, they believed, a battery could con-
trol the channel of the Potomac River. Both Williamson and
Lewis were thinking in terms of aggressive action: with
this battery, the secession forces could disrupt the Federal
hold on the river and perhaps open it to their own use.
Thinking of the steamer George Page, captured from the Fed-
erals at Alexandria, they stated: "While the enemy holds
the Potomac, the steamer is of no value to us."1 If the
rebels could break that hold, they could use the Page as a
gunboat for raiding the Maryland shore and disrupting Federal
shipping.

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Williamson and Lewis had chosen the spot the rebel forces intended to fortify first in order to make the vulnerable Virginia shore more secure. In just three weeks, the Lincoln Administration would be worried by the bad news that a Union vessel had sighted a rebel battery at Aquia. From this solitary fortification, the Confederates later expanded their system of earthenworks and batteries into a formidable obstacle which threatened to completely close the river to commercial traffic. The possibility of rebels crossing in force to the Maryland side of the river, where there were many who sympathized with their cause, was another concern which would plague the Federals for months to come.

Colonel Daniel Ruggles of the Virginia Army, who had ordered the reconnaissance of Aquia Creek, actually considered Aquia and the steamer Page to be of secondary importance. The position would be difficult to defend, as an enemy force could easily outflank it or attack it from the rear. The purpose of having batteries there was twofold. First, they would guard against a Union attack on Fredericksburg from the Potomac. Such an attack would logically begin at the Aquia terminus of the railroad. Second, they would draw attention from other points on the river which Ruggles and others believed to be more important.²

The most obvious of these places was Mathias Point, located eighteen miles south of the mouth of Aquia Creek. At Mathias Point, the river's channel was close to the Vir-
ginia shore. The point was a bluff, perhaps twenty feet above the water, and commanded the channel for about three-quarters of a mile. Long range guns could extend this dominance. Major Williamson recommended a ten-gun battery and entrenchment be placed there. Captain William F. Lynch of the Virginia Navy disagreed, saying it would be a waste of time, but he agreed to follow any orders given to him. 3

Adjutant General R. S. Garnett agreed with Lynch, and told Ruggles that four guns originally slated for Mathias Point would be of more benefit guarding the approaches to Fredericksburg at Aquia Creek. Major General Robert E. Lee also believed Aquia and Fredericksburg were more important than Mathias Point. He instructed Ruggles: "Your operations will be strictly defensive." Thus, Lee and Garnett, who were the men in charge, began to set the policy that would govern the rebel forces along the Potomac. Despite the opinions of a fair number of men who wished to take the offensive and drive the Federals off the river, the batteries would be primarily defensive in nature. 4

One reason for such a strategy simply was the lack of manpower. Lee appointed Captain Lynch to make an examination of "defensible points" along the river. Lynch soon had a number of sites selected, but the shortage of available troops delayed both their construction and full manning. This same problem confronted General Joseph E. Johnston in later months as he defended a perilously-thin line stretching from Aquia Creek to Winchester. The rebels sim-
ply did not have enough men to fill the lines, much less launch an offensive operation across the Potomac. Johnston would worry immensely about his right flank along the river, and as the months wore on he nervously considered falling back to new positions. 5

In the meantime, however, the war was still very young, and a spirit of optimism prevailed in the rebel lines. There was still good reason to think that Maryland would secede, in which case the Potomac would be entirely in rebel control and the Federal capital would be isolated. The Virginia troops' positions along the river gave them an opportunity to harass Union shipping and to embarrass and injure the Lincoln Administration. With this in mind, the rebels established their first batteries at Aquia on May 8, 1861. Records vary as to exactly how many guns were present, but there were at least four and possibly as many as thirteen. There were four or five in the main work near the depot, and more were in other positions nearby. Guns were shuttled in and out by rail as the need arose. The Union's Potomac Flotilla discovered the works on May 14. On that date four guns were present, and at least one of these was a 32-pounder. 6

This discovery was somewhat of a surprise in Washington, as Secretary of the Navy Gideon Welles had suspected that the rebels would first mount cannons on White House Point, farther up the river. The rebels were just beginning, however. They made plans to fortify other points where the
channel was narrower and within easier reach of shore guns than at Aquia. The Aquia guns were not the deterrent to river traffic Lewis and Williamson had envisioned since the channel was too far away. But the six-mile stretch of river between the Occoquan River and Choptawamsic Creek averaged only one and one-half miles in width, and the channel for large vessels was close to the Virginia shore. Heights dominating the river rose to forty, sixty, and even one hundred feet above the water. At some points, rifled guns would be able to throw shot far into Maryland; even smoothbores could reach the other side. On paper, at least, this would be a terrible deterrent to river traffic. Mathias Point was still under consideration for a battery as well. The rebels had grand plans, and Welles' tiny Potomac Flotilla, consisting of five ships in early May, could do little or nothing about them.

As if the batteries were not enough, the secession forces had at their disposal the captured steamer Page, which they renamed The City of Richmond. Their changes did not end with the name, however. They added two 24-pounder cannon, one fore and one aft; later, they replaced these with four 32-pounders plus a pivot gun amidships. They added a 150-man complement, and the swift side-wheel steamer, which was 128 feet long and boasted a moderate four-foot draught, was ready for action. "The notorious Page," as some Northerners called her, was the only steamer of any
consequence the rebels had on the river, but she would cause the Federals great concern and annoyance. 8

Shortly after the Federals discovered the Aquia Creek batteries, Ruggles, now a Brigadier General of Virginia Volunteers and in charge of the Department of Fredericksburg, began to worry that the Federals would not wait much longer to strike at Aquia and Fredericksburg itself. He knew that his batteries at the terminus could be outflanked, in which case the whole region between Aquia and the Rappahannock would be in jeopardy. On May 24, ten days after the Potomac Flotilla first spotted his guns, he asked for 1,000 reinforcements. The following day he objected when Captain Lynch moved two guns from Aquia to the railroad bridge over Potomac Creek, which was a fair distance inland. Ruggles' mission as outlined by his superiors was clear to him: "It is my hope to keep the enemy from landing, and keep communication open with the land." The guns at Potomac Creek Bridge did no good whatsoever in this task, and an enemy force could easily turn the position from "any direction." Adjutant General Garnett allayed these fears a bit by telling Ruggles that the 2nd Regiment, Tennessee Volunteers, plus a battery of four 6-pounders, were coming to his assistance. 9

During the following week Ruggles led a hectic life. The Potomac Flotilla engaged the Aquia batteries on May 31 and June 1 in what was the first bombardment conducted by
Union naval forces during the Civil War. Two days of thunderous cannonading ended in a standoff. The Northern vessels received several hits, and the rebel wharf, railway, and buildings were torn up. There were no casualties on either side, but the engagements produced great consternation among the secessionists, who feared that the Flotilla planned to make a landing. Ruggles had rushed several hundred men by train from Fredericksburg to Aquia on May 29th when the Flotilla fired a few shots in an attempt to stir up a fight. Ruggles arrived after the steamers had departed. Perhaps he was somewhat relieved when General Theophilus H. Holmes replaced him on June 5. Ruggles remained at Fredericksburg as Holmes' subordinate while Holmes made his own headquarters at Brooke's Station, a point much closer to the landing, from which he could reach Aquia in minutes should anything of importance demand his attention.

These first engagements created much excitement, but caused little change in strategy on either side. The Flotilla recognized its need for long-range guns, and Lee feared that soon it would have them. He also warned that the Federals might start using iron-plated ships. He gave Holmes, explicit instructions on how to fire at such vessels, as well as how to use railroad iron to the best advantage in constructing earthworks. Concerned that the Aquia batteries by themselves provided Virginia little protection, Lee determined to find the necessary troops to man additional batteries along the river. He already knew what Captain
Lynch's choices for battery sites were, so now he asked for other opinions.

Brigadier General P. G. T. Beauregard suggested placing a battery at the mouth of Quantico Creek. He also requested that the troops at Aquia and Brooke's Station reinforce him if necessary. General Holmes objected to this; typical of the rebels' problems at this time was the plain fact that Holmes considered himself to be too far away, with too few men to spare, to be of any help to Beauregard. Holmes would not come to his aid unless he were sure that Aquia and Fredericksburg were not threatened. 12

Holmes was more concerned with his own sector, which included Mathias Point as well as Aquia and Potomac Creeks. Lee had to keep stressing the need for secrecy while constructing fortifications along the river and specifically told Holmes to keep the troops at Mathias Point concealed. This meant the men were to prevent the Federals from landing, but they were not to fire at passing ships. Holmes did not have enough men on the point to protect a battery, so he built no major works. The troops stationed at Mathias were simply instructed to make sure the Federals did not come ashore and establish their own battery there. After the Flotilla made several landings, and especially following a severe clash on June 27 in which the commander of the Flotilla was killed, Lee began to regard the place as something of a nuisance. He could neither fortify it nor forget it. Should he fortify it, he feared the Federals would come
in force and blast him out, as it was exposed to fire and was difficult to reinforce quickly. Should he abandon the position, the Federals could seize it and cause great commotion. He wrote to General Holmes on the 28th:

...it has always been intended to erect a battery at Mathias Point....Its construction has been postponed, from the fact that it would be vigorously resisted....and from its exposed position would require a larger force to protect and defend it than was available.13

Holmes had suggested that Evansport would be an equally good spot from which to control the channel, but would have none of Mathias' disadvantages. Lee agreed, but stressed:

I think no unnecessary demonstration should be made to attract the enemy's attention, either at Evansport or at Mathias Point, which might disclose our purposes.14

Lee left to Holmes the decision as to which site was better suited. In either case, three 9-inch columbiads were to be forwarded to him. Lee warned his subordinate that before breaking ground for the battery, he should have everything necessary for its "speedy construction" and a "sufficient covering force" to protect it.15

The two men seem to have had trouble communicating their thoughts to each other. Holmes selected Evansport as the better site, but he did not know that he was to leave a covering force at Mathias Point to continue guarding against a Union landing. On July 6, Lee wrote of Mathias Point,

To erect a battery there would be for the purpose of preventing the passage of the enemy's vessels up the Potomac; which, so long as we hold our present positions above /Evansport/, ...is a matter of very little consequence.
Nevertheless, the enemy must never be permitted to occupy and fortify the point themselves....

Still, Holmes seems to have misunderstood. Lee found it necessary to write again, only three days later,

It is not the intention at present to establish a battery at Mathias Point, nor until everything is prepared, guns, troops, &c., for its speedy erection. It is, therefore, desirable, as you have already been advised, to allay the enemy's anxiety in reference to that point.

Then, in a tactful reprimand, he continued,

Had troops never been posted there...it would be viewed as of no more importance than other points on the river. But their attention having been attracted to it...I now fear, if not held by us, it will be seized by them and defended...perhaps, by keeping the troops out of sight, and setting a vigilant watch, prepared at any time to prevent its occupation and intrenchment, it might be all that was necessary.

Holmes was uncertain. He felt that if he withdrew most of the troops from the point, the enemy would land with "overwhelming force" that could not be resisted. Yet he said, "I cannot see why any importance should be attached to its possession." He reasoned that it was too far away from him to be reinforced and was simply not a good place for the Northerners to begin a march inland. Referring to a report by Commander C. S. Kennedy of the Confederate Navy, he echoed what Lee had told him a few days before: Evansport was as good a place as any for stopping the Potomac traffic. Then, in a burst of wistful enthusiasm, he called for aggressive action:
But why think of the navigation at all? If we invade Maryland it will be ours ...if not, the stoppage of it would not materially affect the strength of our enemies.\(^{15}\)

This final assertion is questionable. A blockade of a nation's capital quite naturally has both material and political effects. Lee sensed this, even if Holmes did not. Furthermore, the report which Holmes referred to gave the Confederates what they were looking for: a line of defense which could effectively harass the Northern shipping on the river, plus a continuous line of communication from Manassas to the Occoquan, and downriver to the Chopawamsic, Aquia, Brooke's Station, and Fredericksburg. Commander Kennedy's report named Quantico Creek and Shipping Point as places where 9-inch guns could close the channel. "One rifled 12-pounder will close the river in the day time. During the night tugs and vessels of light draft may pass by hugging the Maryland shore."\(^{19}\)

Lee was not quite ready, however. He wished to make sure his defenses were properly set before he provoked the North by blocking free passage on the Potomac. In this regard, he urged General Holmes to work on some proposed batteries to secure the Rappahannock before proceeding with other work. Lee mentioned almost casually that President Jefferson Davis agreed with this plan, and he tactfully prodded Holmes into seeing things his way. After the defensive works on the Rappahannock were complete—which Holmes should be able to accomplish quickly—he could return

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his attentions to the Potomac:

I do not think the Rappahannock will occupy you long, if the work is commenced with promptness and prosecuted with vigor.\textsuperscript{20}

In other words, if the works took a long time, then promptness and vigor, two very necessary virtues, were not employed. The implications of the letter were not lost on Holmes: it was a polite order. He built the Rappahannock batteries.

Finally, as the end of August approached, work began on the major batteries at Evansport. There were to be four batteries, with twenty guns in all. These guns included some 9-inch Dahlgrens, some 42-pounder navy guns, two rifled 32-pounders, and an English rifle, either a Roman or an Armstrong, which fired a 135-pound ball. Some of the guns were captured pieces: a 30-pounder taken at Manassas; two small Parrott rifles; and two 12-pounder howitzers. A line of pine trees would conceal the workmen. When everything was ready, the men would fell the trees with single axe-strokes, having previously cut them nearly through. Still, even as Holmes received orders to construct the batteries, he expressed doubts about their effectiveness. His own adjutant general had to assure him that Evansport was indeed more favorable than Mathias Point for such works.\textsuperscript{21}

President Davis had no doubts about the strategy. Exuding confidence as well as hope, he wrote to General Johnston, who commanded the Manassas-Potomac line, on September 5th:
If we can drive off the vessels from that part of the Potomac, the Marylanders can come safely to us and we may cross to that part of Maryland where our friends are to be found. 22

Davis was not blind to reality. He well knew the dangers to be encountered in an offensive thrust across the river. "It is true that a successful advance across the Potomac would relieve other places, but, if not successful, ruin would befall us," he warned Johnston a few days later. "The cause of the Confederacy is staked upon your army." Therefore this army should not be divided, nor should it undertake offensive operations in its "present condition." Davis knew the army was undermanned and ill-equipped, but he hoped the situation would soon improve. 23

Thus instructed, Johnston prepared to make the most of the situation by strengthening his right flank and interrupting the Potomac navigation as well. He asked the Norfolk Naval Yard to send him heavy guns. There were none to be had, so the general had to appeal to Holmes at Brooke's Station and the authorities in Richmond to supply him with the armament necessary to establish his batteries. Slowly, the guns trickled in. Holmes sent eight heavy-caliber pieces, including a rifled gun captured at Manassas. Three 32-pounders, one of them rifled, arrived three days later. General I. R. Trimble, appointed to command the Evansport batteries by special request of President Davis, was now having less luck with his benefactor. He could get fourteen guns from Richmond, but wanted twelve more 32-pounders, "six
now and the rest if called for." He wrote to General Huger at Norfolk: "I know you can take six out of the batteries at Norfolk, say four from the new batteries...and two from the entrenched camp." Trimble said he considered his mission as important as any, and he wished to spare no effort in order to insure success. He had fully 3,000 men under General W. H. C. Whiting to support the guns along the Occoquan-Potomac front. Trimble hoped to construct the works without being seen by the Federals. All he needed was an additional competent officer, and the guns themselves. 24

By September 29, two weeks after his communication with Huger, Trimble had one battery finished. The guns were mounted and ready. His efforts to conceal the work had been successful. By October 9, another battery was available for action. Holmes wrote to Adjutant General Samuel Cooper in Richmond that he was finally convinced the Evansport guns could close the river. He was also confident that the batteries and Whiting's troops could effectively repel any Union attack. Six days later, another battery was ready in time for a battle with the Union steamers Pocahontas and Seminole. The guns inflicted some damage on the Seminole, and the following day they hit the Pawnee several times. These events began to convince Union officials that the river was becoming a bit too hazardous for slow merchant ships to pass during daylight hours. 25
Part 2
Effects of the Blockade in Washington:
"The infinite injury and disgrace of our Government."

Even without the blockade, the Lincoln Administration found itself nearly isolated in April, 1861. Washington faced a hostile Virginia across the Potomac, and a wavering Maryland surrounded it. The two lines of supply to the capital were the Potomac River and a single line of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad from Baltimore. The Potomac bordered the two threatening states in its entire course from Washington to the Chesapeake. Washington feared a blockade long before one was established, but the government was powerless to prevent it. Troops were slow to arrive in the capital, and they were needed at points other than along the Lower Potomac. The Navy was primarily concerned with its blockade of Southern ports and could spare few worthwhile ships for patrolling the Potomac. Despite Secretary of the Navy Gideon Welles' best efforts, only two regular warships, plus one converted ferryboat and two converted tugs, were in the makeshift Potomac Flotilla in April.

The river situation demanded attention, but the Federals did little. They were still thinking defensively, just as the rebels were. They feared that the Confederates would
attack the capital. Rebel sympathizers constantly streamed into Virginia from Maryland, and Union people from Virginia fled to the capital for protection. On June 22, the Washington Star openly predicted a rebel attack on the city. As one observer noted: "Events are following each other in rapid succession." Indeed, they were happening too quickly for the government to keep up with them. The only defenses were those of Ft. Washington, downriver on the Maryland side, and a few minor works near bridges, camps, and the railroad. Ft. Washington's only previous challenge resulted in the inauspicious failure to halt the British during the War of 1812. Brevet Major J. A. Haskins, the fort's commander, received instructions to use his own discretion in halting vessels passing on the river. This order was of some importance when Haskins received it on June 3, but by October the fort was seeing considerably less traffic.

By early autumn, the Administration realized that the Potomac was effectively closed to large merchant ships, which simply could not run the gantlet in safety. This was not only a nuisance, it was a humiliation. Secretary of State William Seward attempted to convince European powers that the Federal Government was in control of the situation, but the facts were that the first battle of Manassas had been lost and now a large rebel force was camped within a few miles of the capital, effectively blockading its main supply route. The Union press put up a brave front for awhile. On September 30, the Daily National Intelligencer
declared that not a single vessel had yet been stopped in its passage, despite the rebels' efforts. General Daniel Sickles ridiculed the rebel batteries on October 3, saying the works had only one or two heavy guns. But by the middle of October, both Sickles and the press had stopped snickering. The big guns at Evansport had opened upon several Union warships, doing some damage. The rebel threat had become hard fact, and there was little that could be done about it. 29

Of primary concern was keeping open the supply line along the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad, which became the sole means of support for the beleaguered capital. Daily, sixty vessels docked at Baltimore, and their cargoes would immediately be sent to Washington by rail. Sometimes the number of cars on the tracks exceeded 400 per day. The Washington depot though adequate in peacetime, was not large enough to handle the increased volume. Nor was the single line of track sufficient to carry such traffic. The Federals enlarged the depot and improved the railroad. A Baltimore mob had destroyed part of the line in April, so General Ben Butler occupied the city and posted sentries every quarter-mile along the line. Union troops nearer the capital built Ft. Lincoln to protect the line as it made its final approach to the city. As a result, the railroad did unprecedented business, carrying troops and supplies at a rate that had not been achieved previously on any rail line. It was largely because of this profitable traffic that the
railroad's president, John Garrett, remained loyal to the Union. His loyalty was as much to the profit motive as it was to Mr. Lincoln.

Despite the tremendous volume of material pouring into the city, Washington found itself short of certain supplies. When the river blockade took full effect in October, the government found it necessary to establish a wagon train, numbering 100 wagons, to supplement the railroad's efforts. The government paid huge prices for the fuel and forage used by the army as wood, coal, and feed became scarce. Everyone in the city felt the effects of the blockade as prices rose and the quantity of available essential goods dropped. On October 21, Welles wrote to the commander of the Potomac Flotilla that forty vessels were stranded below Aquia Creek, waiting for escort or an end to the blockade. Only shallow-draught oyster boats could consistently and with all but perfect safety run the blockade. As a result Washington was well-stocked with oysters, if nothing else, for Thanksgiving:

The Flotilla numbered about 14 major craft and six launches during the autumn. Despite their best efforts, they could not shake the Confederate grip on the Virginia shore. The Union Army, rebuilding after the disaster at Manassas, was not yet ready to take the initiative to push the Confederates away from the Potomac. Many Union officials feared a Confederate invasion of Maryland somewhere along
the river between Mathias Point and Evansport. Among these was none other than Major General George B. McClellan, who commanded the Union armies. While the Flotilla captains cried for assistance and McClellan toyed with the idea of sending a large body of troops into Lower Maryland, the situation in Washington grew worse. The Chicago Times admitted:

Washington is now beginning to feel some of the evils of the beleaguered city. With its principal avenue closed by hostile batteries, it is dependent on the single-trace railroad from Baltimore for every article of daily consumption. This would be no inconvenience at all in ordinary times, when the national capital is only a mere village of 20,000 inhabitants. But now, when its ordinary population is augmented by an army of 200,000 men and 40,000 horses, it is a very different matter. The railroad is taxed beyond its utmost capacity. Yet, in spite of all, the supplies that arrive here are not equal to the demand. In regard to provender for the horses, it has become so scarce that the whole country for many miles around has been scoured for forage with very inefficient success.32

McClellan felt he was forced to act, compelled as much by his own fears as by demands from the population and Welles. He ordered General Joseph Hooker to occupy Charles and St. Mary's Counties in Lower Maryland and to do what he could to discourage a rebel invasion of the state. He gave Hooker a division of eight regiments, a few companies of cavalry, and eighteen field guns. An additional brigade joined him in December.

The presence of Hooker's division in Lower Maryland ended most fears of a rebel invasion from across the Potomac,
but it did not open the river to navigation. Despite grand plans for an invasion of the rebel shore, the presence of 12,500 troops, the assistance of the Flotilla, and the aid of reconnaissance balloons, the Federals could not open the Potomac. The rebel guns continued to threaten the channel, and the Union troops never got the opportunity to attack them from any direction. As a result, they stayed there, and Washington continued to suffer. On March 1, 1862, the New York Tribune complained:

There has been no safe communication by water between this city and the capital of the nation during all this time — a period of six months. This is one of the most humiliating of all national disgraces to which we have been compelled to submit. It has been most damaging to us in the eyes of the world. No one circumstance has been used more to our disadvantage with foreign nations than this. And it has helped the Confederates just in proportion as it has injured us. It has been their haughty boast that they had maintained steady and effectual sway over the great channel of commerce between this city and Washington, through which the immense supplies of our grand army of the Potomac would naturally have passed. Our own government has been subjected to very heavy expense, and great inconvenience, in consequence of this blockade. The inhabitants of Washington have at times suffered from a scarcity of both food and fuel from the same cause. If occasionally some vessel has got past the enemy’s guns, it has been under the cover of darkness, or at a considerable risk.... Whatever the reason, the Potomac has remained blockaded, to the infinite injury and disgrace of our government.33

The paper saw the problem well, and there seemed to be little action by the administration to correct the situation. Disputes arose concerning the best way for the army to advance. Many people were dissatisfied with McClellan’s in-
action, while McClellan, perhaps remembering what had hap-
pened to General Irvin McDowell when he was forced into ac-
tion before he felt ready, refused to move until he was suf-
ciently prepared. McClellan was even at odds with Lincoln
himself. The Federals seemed unable to recognize their
strengths and weaknesses and could come to no solid, work-
able consensus.

Then in early March, the problem suddenly evaporated.
The Confederates pulled back, ending the blockade themselves.
They probably destroyed or abandoned more material than the
Federals could have taken in an assault. McClellan had won
out. His reluctance to attack had somehow paid off in a
bloodless victory, and his critics became temporarily silent.
He was free to take the course of action he wished.

Hooker's Division, the Potomac Flotilla, and all of
Washington were astounded by the sudden rebel retreat, but
they all were pleased at their good fortune. The end of the
blockade meant an end to all its resultant discomforts and
political embarrassments. It meant an end to the inactivity
of the entire Army of the Potomac, and it led to new, if not
safer, tours of duty for the men of the Flotilla.

But questions still lingered. What action had the
Union taken to combat the blockade? Were these actions at
all effective? Most of all, why had the Confederates sud-
denly, and seemingly inexplicably, retreated while they
seemed to hold the upper hand?

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NOTES TO CHAPTER I


4. Garnett to Ruggles, May 6, 1861; J. M. Brooke to Ruggles, May 8, 1861; Lee to Ruggles, May 10, 1816; OR, Series I, Volume 2; pp. 807; 816; and 829.

All of these communications stress defensive action. An additional communication to Ruggles, from Gen. Philip St. George Cocke, dated May 11, appears in the same volume cited, pp. 831-32. In part, it reads, "By establishing a strong force at these points /Aquia, Dumfries, and the Occoquan/...we shall prevent surprise, hold the enemy in check along the Potomac...while we...hold ourselves in position by a connected chain of posts..." Nothing here alludes to the possibility of taking offensive action.


6. Hanson, Bull Run Remembers, pp. 41-2.

7. A description of these portions of the Virginia shore can be found in Hanson, Bull Run Remembers, pp. 43-5.

9. Letters, Ruggles to Garnett, May 24 and 25, 1861; Garnett to Ruggles, May 26, 1861. See OR, Series I, Volume 2, pp. 874-5; 876-9; and 880.

10. Wills, Confederate Blockade, p. 31.

11. Letters, Lee to Holmes, June 10, 1861; Lee to Letcher, June 15, OR, Series I, Volume 2, pp. 916-17; 927-29.

12. Letter, Brig. Gen. G. T. Beauregard to Col. W. B. Bate, at Camp Jackson, Brooke's Station, June 17, 1861. Indorsement sent with the above to Judah P. Benjamin by Th. H. Holmes, June 18; OR, Series I, Volume 2, pp. 932-33; and 933.

13. Letters, Lee to Holmes, June 20, 1861 and June 28, 1861, in OR, Series I, Volume 2, p. 941 and p. 959, respectively. Further information on Lee's opinion of the Mathias Point situation is in Hanson, *Bull Run Remembers*, p. 41.


15. Letter, Lee to Holmes, June 30, 1861, in OR, Series I, Volume 2, p. 961. Lee promised reinforcements as soon as they were available.


18. Holmes' wish to take the offensive was voiced in his letter to Lee, July 12, 1861. See OR, Series I, Volume 2, p. 976.

19. Commander Kennedy's report to Captain S. Barron,
Officer of Ordinance and Detail, was written July 8, 1861. See NR, Series I, Volume 4, pp. 775-76.


21. See Scharf, Confederate States Navy, p. 99, for a list of guns used by the rebels, and a rather flattering appraisal by Scharf of the effectiveness of the blockade. See communications, Johnston to Davis, August 19, 1861, and S. Cooper to Holmes, August 22, in OR, Series I, Volume 5, pp. 797-8 and 801-02.


23. Davis warns Johnston against dividing his forces in a letter of Sept. 8, 1861. See OR, Series I, Volume 5, pp. 833-34.

24. Letters, Cooper to Johnston, Sept. 9, 1861; Cooper to Johnston, Sept. 3; and Trimble to Huger, Sept. 15. All in OR, Series I, Volume 5, pp. 835; 827; and 853.

25. Trimble to Cooper, Sept. 29, 1861; and Holmes to Cooper, October 9, 1861. See OR, Series I, Volume 5; pp. 883 and 893.


Part 2


The order to Bvt. Major Haskins from Brig. Gen. Mansfield is in the National Archives, Record Group 393, call no. 5361, vol. 19, Letters Sent and Received, Dept. of Washington, dated June 3, 1861.
30. Descriptions of the Baltimore and Ohio line to Washington exist in many sources. See Weber, *Northern Railroads in the Civil War*, pp. 27-9, and p. 36 concerning Butler and Garrett. Some of Butler's troops were the 6th Massachusetts, who had been attacked by a Baltimore mob on their previous visit to the city. Also consult Scharf, *Confederate States Navy*, p. 105; Wills, *Confederate Blockade*, pp. 101-02; and Benjamin F. Cooling, *Symbol, Sword, and Shield* (Hamden, Connecticut: Archon Books, 1975), p. 69. President Lincoln's views on the Baltimore citizens who destroyed part of the railroad can be found in The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln, edited by Roy P. Basler (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1953). See Lincoln's reply to a delegation of Baltimore citizens, November 15, 1861, in which he links the city's lack of prosperity to the riots.

31. Scharf, *Confederate States Navy*, p. 105; George T. Stevens, *Three Years in the Sixth Corps* (Albany: S. R. Gray, 1886), pp. 12-13; Hanson, *Bull Run Remembers*, p. 52. The abundance of oysters is humorously detailed in Wills, *Confederate Blockade*, pp. 97-100; in these pages, the economic impact on the capitol is well-described.

Mrs. Wills notes that Harvey's Oyster Saloon "advertised that its boats ran the blockade daily."

32. Scharf, *Confederate States Navy*, p. 104 quotes the Chicago Times. No date is given.

33. Ibid., p. 103 quotes the New York Tribune.
CHAPTER II
THE POTOMAC FLOTILLA

Part 1
Dueling with the Batteries:
"Did you hear the Row?...
The 'varmints' shot away our mizzenmast...."

A few days prior to the first rebel inspection of Aquia Creek, Union Secretary of the Navy Gideon Welles instructed Lieutenant Thomas S. Fillebrown, commanding the U.S.S. Anacostia, to make an inspection of the river. While Fil- llebrown's attention was to be directed at the area around Kettle Bottom Shoals, just south of Alexandria, in order to protect that shallow area of the river from channel obstructions, he was also to capture prizes or prisoners if he met with interference. Finally, he was to watch for "suspicious movements." Welles anticipated trouble from both sides of the river, and he would get it soon enough.¹

The following day, Colonel C. F. Smith, U.S. Army, commanding the Department of Washington, reported that he had seized four vessels for Welles. These were the steamers Mount Vernon, Baltimore, Philadelphia, and Powhatan, which had been employed as passenger shuttles between Washington and the railroad terminus at Aquia Creek. In so doing, Smith deprived the Confederates of four steamers with which they could have worked much mischief. He ordered that they be sent to the Washington Navy Yard and converted into armed -26-
craft. The United States government compensated the Potomac Steamboat Company $170,000 for the four ships. Such was the inauspicious beginning of the Potomac Flotilla.  

Meanwhile, Lieutenant Fillebrown was making his inspection of the river. He saw the George Page at Aquia Creek but was afraid to get close enough to see whether there were any batteries present. He saw no earthworks or obstructions anywhere along his route. 3 Within four days the situation changed abruptly. Pilots reported to Captain John A. Dahlgren at the Naval Yard that the buoys in Kettle Bottom Shoal had been removed, making it difficult for large vessels to navigate there. That same day President Lincoln extended his declared blockade to include the states of North Carolina and Virginia. This added to the widening rift between Washington and the state of Virginia. With a potentially hostile enemy just across the river, the Yard needed some protection. The 71st New York Volunteer Regiment, part of Daniel Sickles' "excelsior Brigade," took positions there to guard public and naval property. 4

President Lincoln expected almost immediate trouble. On April 29, he ordered Welles to send a warship down to White House Point (also known variously as White Stone Point and White House Bluff), a prominent point dominating the river on the Virginia side, to see if there were any batteries there. He instructed Welles to have the ship attack any battery and to make daily reports to the President's office. He did not wish to be "caught napping." 5
Welles knew that he needed more ships to properly protect the river. Most of the larger vessels were already on duty blockading Southern ports. He knew that a large ship would not necessarily be the best sort of vessel to have, as it would present a good target and its deep draught would restrict its maneuverability. With this in mind, he directed James H. Ward, a former Naval Academy instructor now on active duty with the Navy, to select such vessels as might be useful for river duty. Ward found two propeller-driven steamers, both of which were new, and a New York City ferryboat. The two steamers would each mount a 24-pounder howitzer, while the ferry would use two 32-pounder smoothbores. Ward was ordered to the Potomac with his newly-acquired fleet, and he became the first Commander of the Potomac Flotilla. At his disposal were his three vessels - the Reliance, Resolute, and Thomas Freeborn, which he selected as his flagship - as well as the Anacostia, and the Pawnee. The Pawnee, a regular sloop-of-war, was by far the most powerful vessel in the flotilla, though by naval standards it was only a second-class sloop. She mounted ten guns, but offered a large target. Her presence made the Flotilla a respectable, though small, force.

Until these three vessels arrived on the Potomac, Welles was dependent upon the Anacostia, Pawnee, and other ships that might be temporarily available. The four steamers seized by Colonel Smith were not yet ready for action.

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The Anacostia was his most consistent source of reliable information in this period. Welles sent her down to Aquia on May 2, due to apprehensions about troops assembling at the railroad terminus. Though Lieutenant Filliebrown reported that there were no batteries either there or at White House Bluff, he did watch a train arrive and saw it and another depart, indicating some activity. Within a few days, the situation changed. On May 14, Lieutenant J. Glendy Sproston, aboard the Mount Vernon, reported hearing drumming at Aquia, and found that the rebels had established a four-gun battery near the wharf. About fifty men, some uniformed, were in and around the battery. A young man who ran a sloop on the river reported that the four guns were about the size of Sproston's piece, which was a 32-pounder. On the 19th Sproston saw three new guns - though he left no record as to exactly where they were placed.

The Federals' apprehension about these guns was due to a number of factors. They knew that the rebels realized the value of the landing itself. Soon, the defenders would probably discover the value of placing guns on points nearer the channel. Even at Aquia, which was well away from the channel, the Northerners feared that the rebels could hinder their movements. Consequently, they kept a close watch on Aquia and other points on the river, fearing rebel offensive action and waiting for a chance to do the batteries some damage.
Federal reconnaissances along the river were sometimes inadequate. Ships could not get sufficiently close to the enemy shore, and information from spies and civilian informants was often suspect or incomplete. Runaway blacks and others whose words might otherwise be trusted tended to have only second-hand or exaggerated information. Lieutenant Fillebrown heard that there were ten to fifteen guns at Aquia, but he could discover only four. The informant had given him second-hand information, which he had received from a rebel sympathizer. Fillebrown could not ascertain whether the informant was wrong or his own reconnaissance was faulty. Commander J. H. Ward encountered similar difficulties. Residents of Lower Maryland told him that the rebels kept a "constant communication" between Port Tobacco in Maryland and Mathias Point. This information was correct, but the Commander somehow received the faulty impression that there were very few rebel supporters in Maryland, and that the Port Tobacco - Mathias Point communication was the only such traffic on the Lower Potomac. Ward perhaps was a bit gullible; certainly, he was having difficulty discerning credible information from the unlikely reports.\(^8\)

The Administration was not content to sit and wait for the rebels to attack. The news from Aquia showed that something had to be done soon, before the Confederates were in a position to cross the river at will and cause immense havoc. Lincoln himself had commented a month before:

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Suppose Virginia erects, or permits to be erected, batteries on the opposite shore, to bombard the city [Washington], are we to stand still and see it done? In a word, if Virginia strikes us, are we not to strike back, and as effectively as we can?9

Acting according to this concept, the Union dispatched troops who, aided by the Pawnee, captured Alexandria, just across the river from the capital. Only a small force of rebel troops was present, and these fell back as the Federals advanced. Alexandria was secured with little bloodshed, and Washington had a small amount of breathing room.10 Still, the length of the river was insecure. Within a week of Alexandria's capture, Ward decided to do something about the Aquia Creek guns. On May 29, he threw a few shells at the batteries in hopes of eliciting a response and perhaps inducing the rebels to expose any hidden fortifications. The guns remained silent, though Ward had stirred up considerable excitement and confusion both at the landing itself and at the rebel headquarters in Fredericksburg. On May 31 he tried again, and this time his efforts resulted in the first major shooting action of the war for the Union Navy.

The initial engagement lasted for two hours. The Freeborn, Anacostia, and Resolute all got into the fray with the main battery by the railroad terminus and some batteries on the heights, which possessed rifled guns. The Federals sent a shot right through the main battery, destroying the officers' quarters, but no one on either side was killed. An eye witness on the Virginia shore claimed that only kind
providence had spared the rebels from having many casualties as the Union shots were "well-directed." Only a chicken and a horse were killed. The main battery fell silent, and Ward believed he had done it some damage. He pulled his ships away as the fire from the guns on the heights fell thick around him. His own guns could not reach them in reply. This he initially did not think to be of much importance as those guns could not command the river. They simply protected the terminus and its immediate vicinity. Nonetheless, he returned the next day, accompanied by the Pawnee. Perhaps he wished to discourage the rebels from fortifying the landing any further. If so, he was not successful. The renewed battle went on for five hours during the heat of the day. The rebels, conserving ammunition, did not fire often, and Ward took this to be an encouraging sign. The rebels did not seem as "spirited" as the day before. Ward's guns tore up the track and demolished some buildings. The rebels accidentally destroyed the pier themselves. Captain Lynch, commanding the batteries, feared that the Federals were using a building at the end of the pier to sight on his position. He ordered that the building be burned; but the fire spread, and soon the entire wharf was engulfed in flames. Under the constant pressure of the Union gunners, who fired 599 times that afternoon, Lynch refused to let his men extinguish the blaze.

The ships suffered as well. The Freeborn, hit below

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the water line, drew water badly. Herport wheel was cripp-
pled. The Pawnee took nine hits, four of which were in the
hull. The value of smaller ships for such missions was
amply demonstrated, as the Pawnee, being the larger ship,
attracted more fire, though Ward, aboard the Freeborn, re-
ported that "more than 100 shots have fallen aboard and a-
round us, any one of which would have struck a frigate."12

Despite this exchange of fire, neither side suffered
any fatalities. The Pawnee and Freeborn both needed repairs,
and the rebels did not abandon their positions, so the bat-
tle seems to have ended in their favor. Still, the Flotilla
performed well in its first encounter, and Ward had a chance
to test his new gun carriage, an innovation permitting large
guns to sweep 140 degrees. The Pawnee, after its repairs,
began lurking off the mouth of Aquia, guarding against a
possible sortie by the Page. The rebels likened the big
Union ship to a "wounded viper." Though the Confederates
had temporarily retained the upper hand, Aquia Creek re-
ceived continuous close Union attention from that point on-
ward.13

The steamers were fortunate to escape with no serious
casualties. Captain Lynch, waging a personal newspaper-ac-
count battle with Commander Ward, defended his men's honor
in a letter to the Fredericksburg News. He insisted that he
fired slowly to conserve ammunition and pointed out that
his firing had indeed been effective. Meanwhile, Ruggles
attempted to secure more columbiads to guard against a Union landing, and the "Walker Legion," stationed at the landing, put up a masked battery on Symmes' (Brent's) Point. Colonel William S. Bate was sure this battery could sink the Union ships if they returned to their previous battle positions. His confidence was well-founded, for he had two columbiads plus Walker's Rifle Battery as well. From his position on Symmes' Point, he could have caught the Pawnee and the Free-born in a deadly crossfire with the batteries on the opposite shore. But due to their need for repairs, the ships did not return the following day. 14

Despite Ward's enthusiasm concerning the burned wharf and his new gun carriage, critics of the Administration and other disgruntled Unionists recognized a stalemate when they saw one. One citizen commented:

Secretary Welles informed me that the batteries at Aquia Creek were silenced on Saturday ...and the depot and wharf buildings destroyed by fire. All this seems to me to amount to little for the enemy can at once rebuild them if the place is not occupied. 15

This was the crux of the matter, not only at Aquia but along the whole length of the river. The navy was in no position to occupy all of the strategic points along the Potomac, and the army was simply in no condition to advance. It would eventually move forward in July by a route other than along the river, but it would be repulsed so devastatingly as to make any thought of another offensive simply ludicrous. So the batteries at Aquia would stay and be joined by other,
more formidable works.

The Federals were most concerned about Mathias and White House Points. On June 8, Captain W. R. Palmer of the Topographical Engineers completed his surveys of those points and forwarded them to the U. S. Coast Survey. Captain John A. Dahlgren of the Washington Navy Yard decided that Mathias Point could not be effectively shelled from the Maryland shore and suggested to Welles that the place be occupied by Northern troops. He thought that six companies, plus supporting gunboats, could secure the point. He suggested that a counter-battery be constructed opposite White House Bluff, since there simply were no men available to capture and hold it. Dahlgren admitted that in order for ships to pass these two points, they would have to wait for nightfall.

Palmer's survey and Dahlgren's conclusions led Welles and Ward to consider a foray against Mathias Point. This piece of land, jutting out into the Potomac channel, had been the center of controversy between Confederate Generals Holmes and Lee. The Federals recognized the possible danger to their shipping, and determined that they could not afford to wait until the Confederates had actually established themselves there before mounting an attack. White House Bluff, closer to Washington, did not present the obstruction which Mathias Point could; besides, the Flotilla had already seen men at Mathias, and the place was known to
be a principal stop in the rebel Maryland-Virginia mail and supply route. White House Bluff could wait, but Mathias Point demanded attention.

These assumptions were accurate to a point. Lee was afraid the Federals would take notice of Mathias, so he purposely avoided mounting batteries there. The place was too difficult to reinforce and supply, and he believed that a battery there would come under a crossfire from the Flotilla and prove to be worthless. He hoped the Federals would ignore the point if he did not fortify it. This was wishful thinking. Even without batteries, the point attracted Union attention because of the rebel river trafficking. Meanwhile, Ruggles decided that a battery in position on White House Bluff would be untenable, and began to think seriously about putting guns at Evansport. Mathias and White House Points were dangerous to the Confederates for the same reason they were dangerous to the Federals: their proximity to the channel put them within easy range of the Flotilla's guns.

Neither side could read the other's mind, however, so Ward decided to take action against Mathias Point. He knew that ships passing Mathias had been greeted with hails of bullets, so he decided to burn away the trees and thickets that covered the point and hid rebel soldiers from view. On June 23 he asked Dahlgren to send him 200 troops and various materials necessary to accomplish this objective. Perhaps torn between taking action against the rebels on
the point and providing convoy for merchant ships, he told
Dahlgren that the vessels should convoy themselves in groups
of three or four. He knew that the danger on the river was
primarily from small sloops and rifle fire, not big guns or
large bodies of troops. The Page, according to his latest
intelligence, was up Aquia Creek and not manned nor armed.
He felt that the time to strike was within a few days before
the situation drastically changed. Ward himself was not
highly concerned about Mathias Point. He said he wished to
end the Federals' alarm. The danger from the Point was not
in itself very serious.

On June 21, Lieutenant William Budd and the steamer
Resolute descended upon the point, dispersed a few rebel
troopers with shots from his bow gun, and burned buildings
where rebel soldiers had been housed. The following day
the Pawnee sent ashore a party of forty sailors and marines,
in addition to Captain Woodbury of the Engineer Corps and
Lieutenant Palmer of the Topographical Engineers. The ship
fired thirty shells at a group rebel soldiers and then
shelled their nearby camp. No Union men were killed, and
they came away with two captured horses.

These two minor successes probably convinced Ward that
the time was right for a major attack on Mathias Point. On
June 26, he ordered S. C. Rowan of the Pawnee to provide
him with two boats, plus:

...all the tar you have on board...a gallon of
spirits and turpentine in a can, all the shov-
els and all the coal bags you have...all the
oakum...a quantity of old canvas...your gunner's dark lantern...every ax and hatchet.... The launch and boat you will see are provided with their kedges and all other expeditionary outfits...including a howitzer for the large boat....

Realizing Ward was going to attempt the destruction of trees and foliage on Mathias Point, Rowan, sent along the Resolute for assistance.

The morning of June 27 opened with the roar of the Freeborn's 32-pounder shelling the point. At ten o'clock, Ward, Lieutenant Chaplin, and a party of men gained the shore, but a large force of rebels drove them off. Ward returned to the Freeborn and opened up with the big gun while Chaplin and the men stood offshore in the small boats. Fifteen minutes later, Ward ordered the party back to the shore. They began constructing a sandbag breastwork and attempted to burn the trees and brush. This was difficult to do since the wood was green and wet and would not easily ignite. They had nearly finished the breastwork when Ward signalled them to return. No sooner had they reached the boats than a body of rebels set upon them. The rebels opened up on the retreating boats and the Freeborn with small arms fire. They wounded four seamen and killed Commander Ward, who bent over to sight the 32-pounder and was immediately hit in the abdomen. He died within the hour. The hastily-retreating Federals left sandbags, shovels, various other tools, and eleven Sharps rifles on shore. Once again the rebels had the upper hand, though they did
not discover for several days exactly how successful they had been. 21

Despite their triumph, the Confederates were uneasy. They expected their adversaries to attack again. Major R. M. Mayo, whose troops had repelled the landing party, told Ruggles that he considered artillery "absolutely necessary" for Mathias Point. "With a single smooth-bore 12-pounder I could have sunk the steamer and vessel without exposing my men more than they were," he claimed. Ruggles in turn reported that he did not believe he could hold the point without artillery, and this would be an "irretrievable blow" against Virginia's defenses. He believed himself to be "completely paralyzed for want of a battery of heavy guns to command the channel." 22

General Holmes took up the case with General Lee. He admitted it would be easier to close the navigation of the river from Evansport, rather than Mathias, but added, somewhat vaguely, that:

If you can send me two 32-pounders (rifled), or two 8-inch Columbiads, I believe I could stop the navigation of the river, if the general commanding thinks it a matter of sufficient importance to justify the expense. 23

Holmes did not specify which point he would work from, but he apparently meant Mathias. The following day (June 28) he wrote Lee that if he wanted a battery at that point, he should send another regiment and begin work on the fortification immediately.
In a series of letters previously described (see Chapter I), Lee and Holmes debated over the best positions for the river batteries. Lee felt the initial placing of troops at Mathias Point had been a mistake, as it attracted attention to the spot. Still, recent events did not justify putting a large body of troops there. He told Holmes to guard the place against attack, but to keep the troops out of sight and not erect any batteries. The important points of the river were further north; they could be readily supported and supplied, while Mathias Point could not.

While the strategic debates went on, action on the river did not cease. Captain Thomas T. Craven took Ward's place as the Flotilla's commander. On July 7 the U.S.S. Pocahontas shelled the George Page at Aquia Creek and apparently scored at least one hit, which set her ablaze. The Confederates extinguished the fire, but the day's action was not over. That afternoon, two casks floating downriver towards the Pawnee were picked up by the Resolute. Acting Master William Budd discovered that the casks were in reality a device intended to explode next to one of the Flotilla's ships. These were the first floating mines or "torpedoes" of the Civil War. Rowan summed up the incident: "The idea was a wicked one but the execution clumsy." The torpedoes had to be detonated by two long-burning fuses, a fact which rendered their effectiveness doubtful; if the casks were nowhere near a ship they would still explode and

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be wasted. Budd dubbed them an "infernal machine." The contraption was sent to Dahlgren for inspection.  

July proved to be a disastrous month for the Federal cause. The costly rout at Manassas threw the army into a state of disorganization. Emboldened by their victory, the rebels pressed their advantage where they were able. Arm-
ed camps increased in front of Washington and along the riv-
er. The Flotilla discovered one large camp and several bat-
teries on either side of Potomac Creek, a few miles below Aquia. The U. S. S. Yankee opened fire on this camp on July 29 and was rewarded for her efforts with a shot into her port wheelhouse from a concealed rebel battery. Her guns did not have the necessary range, so she and her com-
panion, the Resolute, had to back off.  

After this incident, a flurry of rebel activity began along the Potomac. On August 9, Lieutenant Commander R. H. Wyman of the Yankee saw four field guns near the Potomac Creek camp, plus a heavy battery on the other side of the creek. He received disturbing reports that there were a great many flat-boats and scows assembled at Aquia, prob-
able for some sort of operation. The Page was ready for service and was awaiting a chance to sneak out into the river. Blacks reported that a rebel force at Mathias of three or four hundred men was constructing earthworks. The same day Craven reported to Welles that he had information 2000 Tennessee troops were at Quantico Creek. On August 19,
William Budd told Craven that he had seen a large number of men and lights above Cockpit Point, but could not discover what they were doing. Craven received a communication from Welles along with a letter addressed to the President that claimed there were two 8-inch columbiads at Mathias Point inside new earthworks. The writer warned that an attack by the Flotilla would not be effective once the battery was completed. "An attack \[By Union forces\] should hold the place. They \[The rebels\] could always replace guns captured by us. It is a good spot to have; a dock could be built here for communication."\(^{26}\)

Welles repeated this view to Secretary of War Simon Cameron. Worried about Mathias Point, he asked if it were not possible to take possession of it and "thus keep the navigation of the Potomac....should the insurgents get possession of that point, it would require a very large force to dispossess them."\(^{27}\) Such an operation would have required the assistance of the Army; but the Army was not ready to cooperate as fully as the Flotilla and Welles would have liked. It was to be the Navy's fight until October, despite repeated pleas for help from Craven.

The Flotilla made do with an odd assortment of vessels, ranging from the regular sloops to the ferryboats, tugs, and even the \textit{Ice Boat} of the city of Philadelphia. The \textit{Ice Boat} (re-named the \textit{Release}) showed her mettle in an exchange with the Potomac Creek batteries on August 23. Despite shots
bursting over her and near her bow, she returned the fire well and came away with no injury. Several other ships got into the action, and though both sides reported that their opponents' fire was accurate, no serious damage was done. Though the rebel encampment was large, the Flotilla began to regard the Potomac Creek batteries much as they did the Aquia guns. They were a nuisance, but not a threat to navigation, and apparently were set up to defend the approaches to Fredericksburg rather than to attempt to block the channel or support a river crossing by a large Confederate force.

Reports continued to reach the Navy Department concerning new batteries at Mathias and other points. Many of these reports came from Negroes who claimed they had been working on the fortifications. The Negroes' stories were often similar, which lent credence to them. On August 30, two Blacks picked up by the Flotilla said they had been constructing batteries at Mathias, and the works were now ready for guns. Two weeks later four more Blacks were taken aboard the Yankee and told the same basic story, adding that 700 men were stationed two miles in back of Mathias Point and 2000 at Potomac Creek. On September 13, five more "contrabands" clambered aboard the Seminole and said that 400 men were working on a battery at Freestone Point and that they were ready to mount two heavy siege guns.

Such reports from so many different points along the river were a cause of consternation for Craven and Welles.
Assistant Naval Secretary Gustavus V. Fox increased Craven's worries with a clipping from the Richmond *Examiner* of September 9, which claimed that the Potomac would soon be closed by powerful batteries. The paper claimed ten such works were already available for action. This was not regarded as propaganda, for the constant, growing activity along the Virginia shore had already convinced Welles that something was soon going to happen. On September 15, he told Craven that he was worried about the river being closed and asked where he should deliver supplies by land if the Flotilla was cut off from Washington. Disconcerted by this pessimistic note, Craven told him Mattawoman Creek would be the best spot. Then, on September 24, a Confederate deserter told the officers of the *Jacob Bell* that he had worked on batteries at Evansport that would command the shore for one-and-one-half miles and had 10,000 troops within ninety minutes' march. Trees masking the rebel positions would be cut down suddenly, so the guns could open on the channel without warning. This confirmed what Welles and Craven had feared: the rebels were indeed trying to blockade the river with powerful positions distributed throughout its length.  

Acting on this information, Commander Edward P. McCrea on the *Jacob Bell*, accompanied by the Seminole, steamed close to Freestone Point on the morning of September 25 and discerned a group of men working on what seemed to be a
battery. Both ships opened fire and drove the men off. Not until the Seminole, a large steam sloop, opened fire did they receive a reply. Rifled guns from the shore opened on the two ships, but scored no hits. The steamer Valley City, approaching the action, took a hit in the bow and the Seminole was compelled to tow her out. Louis T. Wigfall, commanding the 1st Texas Infantry at Freestone Point, reported to Jefferson Davis that General Whiting ordered him to keep firing even after the vessels were out of range "to show them we could drive them." Wigfall added, confidently:

The fleet is now divided - part above Powell's Run and part below. When Stevens' batteries are ready they will stop the lower detachment of the fleet. The infantry supports are active and ready. If the enemy land, our knowledge of the ground will make us equal to ten times their numbers. 31

Aboard the Pocahontas, Lieutenant Commander R. H. Wyman thought he sensed something unusual in the rebels' actions. He could not understand why the rebels had been more careless in exposing themselves to detection by the Flotilla, while constructing the Freestone batteries. "It commands nothing," he said of the point in a letter to Major General McClellan, and went on:

I feel confident that it is merely a ruse... to draw our attention from the other points to that until they are prepared at their more important points, such as High Point, Cockpit Point, and the bluff just above Evansport... There is one circumstance that strikes me with regard to Freestone Point, viz: that their workmen were not so carefully
concealed as usual, and to me it appears that they were intentionally exposed to view, as there was no necessity for bringing them at all outside the thick growth of trees until ready...this exposure is not in keeping with their usual maneuvers....

Wyman's fears, though not entirely borne out, were well founded regarding the rebels' intentions to establish batteries at other points. If they intended to use the Freestone guns only as a ruse they did not act like it. They put the guns to good use. On the morning of October 15, the Pocahontas and the Seminole passed in front of the batteries at Freestone. Captain Percival Drayton of the Pocahontas had received permission from Dahlgren to shoot at the batteries near Evansport, and as she passed she threw a shot at the Freestone guns. The Confederates did not reply to the Pocahontas, which continued steaming down the river, but welcomed the Seminole, which was following her partner slowly and "majestically," with a fearsome barrage. Added to the weight of the known guns was a battery which had previously been concealed. A windstorm had knocked down the rebels' screen of half-cut trees; now, after being fired upon by the lead ship, the Confederates felt they had no real say in the matter. Since they seemed to have been discovered, they decided to open up on the Seminole, which was within easy range.

The fight between the Seminole and the Freestone and Evansport batteries was intense. Commander John P. Gillis, master of the ship, reported to Welles that his vessels's
length and slow speed made her an easy target, but he had "returned the fire with interest" and had not increased his speed. Acknowledging that the rebels possessed rifled guns, he assessed the damage to his ship:

One of their shots crippled our mizzenmast about 15 feet below crosstrees, and cut away our starboard mizzen shroud; another carried away mainstays near mastehead; another passed through the rail near pivot gun; another, amidships...covering the deck with splinters; a heavy shell burst close under our starboard bow...waist boat shot through; starboard fore rigging shot away...several persons were scratched by the splinters, but providentially none killed.34

Gillis' unofficial report to Craven illuminated the duel with a bit more detail:

Dear Craven: Did you hear the row? We had quite a sharp action with the rebel batteries, three in number, as we passed Evansport yesterday. It continued about forty minutes, as the "old wagon" continued leisurely down the river....They poured the rifled shot and shell into us in a lively manner, which we answered briskly so long as our guns could be brought to bear. We kept steadily on our course, deeming it a matter of more importance to take the vessel uninjured to her destination /Fort Royal, S.C./ for work of more consequence than shelling the batteries of the Potomac.

The Pocahontas stirred up the party with a gun or two as she steamed ahead of us....she continued on, leaving us to do battle with the Dixie boys. They did us some damage. The "varmints" shot away our mizzenmast and mizzen aftershroud...a shell or two burst close under our starboard bow, giving us a fine shower bath at pivot gun, and burying some fragments in outside planking, etc....Our shell fell in and around their works, and I would think with effect, but of course they will not acknowledge any damage....I hurried, or hastened away, from your vessel /The Yankee/ to assist the Pocahontas. Did she come back to mine? Yes, some forty minutes after the fight was over - well, what of it? There was nobody hurt.35
A letter from one of the Seminole's crew members, published in the Philadelphia Bulletin, elaborates even more:

They sent us at least thirty rifled balls and shells, all splendidly aimed, their guns being evidently well manned. Some of their shot and shell went over us, about eight or nine feet clear of the deck, and only a few feet above my head. These fell or burst from twenty to forty rods beyond on our port side. Some burst just outside, before reaching us, and some just over our heads. Fragments of shell flew about the deck, and splinters in thousands.

We were struck eleven times....several banged clear through the ship, in one side and out the other....how the balls do hiss, and the shells sing aloud - a perfectly distinct, fascinating, locust-like song; but growing louder and faster as they come nearer, plunging, hissing, and bursting through the air! The fight was a severe one, and without knowing what the other side suffered, I do know that the Seminole suffered severely.36

Though Gillis seemed to consider the batteries on the Potomac of little consequence, these communications showed quite clearly that the rebel guns posed a serious threat to Union shipping. Only very good luck prevented loss of life. The following morning the Pawnee made the passage, preceded by the Mount Vernon, which was filled with marines. Two tugs accompanied the big sloop as well. Though the Mount Vernon slipped past the guns in the dark, the Pawnee drew their fire. Though Commander Wyman of the Pawnee reported taking six hits, two of them just above the water line, he reassured Craven that there was "no damage of any importance." Craven, however, saw the situation differently than Wyman and Gillis. He told Welles that "the fire from the rebel batteries was much more effective than I at first
thought it to be." He was glad that the Pawnee had not re-
turned the fire, for if she had, the flashes from her guns
would have made her an easier target. As it was, had the
men been at their battle stations, the men at the number
two gun would certainly have been killed. Obviously im-
pressed by the Confederates' shooting, he offered a recom-
mendation:

Considering the improvement of their gun prac-
tice I would respectfully suggest that until
the enemy's batteries be silenced or removed
there shall be no more transportation of gov-
ernment stores upon the river.37

Craven considered his vessels inadequate for the job
of silencing the batteries, claiming that it would be "van-
ity" to attempt to reduce the positions with his present
fleet. The batteries themselves could keep even the fleet's
fastest vessels under fire for about a half-hour, a time
period which increased as more guns were added. If naval
vessels were endangered, then certainly slower merchant
ships were vulnerable. The Flotilla was split into two
parts by the long line of guns, so the George Page could
effectively operate between Aquia and Quantico, carrying
men and supplies and menacing Union ships. The Potomac
was indeed closed to normal traffic, and Washington became
a blackaded city.38

Movable field batteries strengthened the rebel posi-
tions. The unpredictability of where the Confederates
might place their guns made the situation extremely trying

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for the Union. Welles began to worry immensely about the Union's deteriorating position. He appealed to Major General McClellan to station troops on the Maryland shore, both to prevent invasion from Virginia and to combat rebel sympathizers in Maryland:

The Navy Department is advised that the navigation of the Potomac River is becoming daily and almost hourly more dangerous. Commander Dahlgren telegraphs this morning that "some measure is needed to lessen the risk of the passage. Lights are shown on the Maryland shore to give notice of our vessels coming and should be seized. Small parties of troops should be distributed near the locality to observe and check communication by boats between the shores."

Similar views are expressed by Captain Craven, in command of the Flotilla. The Navy has extended itself to keep open this important avenue to the city, and thus far with success, but the erection of extensive batteries and stationing troops to the amount of many thousands in their vicinity, imperatively requires the action of the Army, unless communication by the river is to be abandoned, which on many accounts would be unfortunate and almost disastrous. I deem it important to communicate to you these reports and suggestions from the officers named and would add my concurrence.

McClellan took Welles seriously. He immediately replied that he would send troops to the Maryland side of the river. These troops were to examine the country and ascertain the value of erecting batteries of their own on the shoreline, in order to protect navigation. Elements of Daniel Sickles' "excelsior" Brigade arrived at Mattawoman Creek on October 21. Three days later, General Joseph Hooker's brigade, accompanied by three field batteries, left their camps at Bladensburg, Maryland, and marched to new positions on the
Lower Potomac. These two brigades were united into a division, commanded by Hooker. They established camps ranging from Port Tobacco to Mattawoman Creek. Hooker made his headquarters near Budd's Ferry.  

By this time, Captain Craven had already become exasperated. On October 18 he detained Union vessels that wished to pass the batteries. He directed those cargo ships bound upriver to go instead to Baltimore and unload their goods there. From Baltimore, the supplies would continue to the capital by rail. Two days after the "excelsior" Brigade began arriving, Craven deemed the Flotilla to be "utterly useless" for the protection of the river, and recommended that heavy guns, mortars, and the Flotilla's own guns be placed at Stump Neck. The concentrated fire of these pieces could perhaps dislodge the rebel batteries one at a time. Fearing for his own reputation, Craven asked to be detached from his command and stationed aboard a seagoing vessel.

On October 24, Welles sent Craven word that Hooker's brigade was on the way. He said that it would take larger guns than either Hooker or the Flotilla possessed to dislodge the Confederate guns, so Craven should keep his weapons aboard his ships. As a mild admonishment, he added:

These evidences of accumulated force in that quarter may for a time embarrass your command, but must not be permitted to discourage you, and I am confident will cause no relaxation of your vigilance or exertion.
Welles did not relieve Craven of his command, perhaps assuming that this rebuke was sufficient.

The matter did not end here. The following day, Dahlgren told Welles that the railroad from Baltimore was simply not sufficient to keep Washington properly supplied. On paper, the railroad could move 1500 to 1600 tons of material daily, and the city's total need, including the Army of the Potomac, amounted to only 1000 tons. But Dahlgren reported that he had already discovered shortages of various supplies, especially food, even on days when the river had not been obstructed by batteries. He warned,

> It does not seem advisable...to permit the river to be closed without some effort, for the railroad is not infallible, but is liable to interruption from severe storms....Moreover, the disposition of the hostile batteries is such as not only to separate our flotilla, but to exclude its action from some 25 or 30 miles of the river and leave this extent open to the steamer and other facilities for communicating with the Maryland shores....the advance of the army will undoubtedly clear the Virginia bank effectually, and even cause the loss of the cannon, which are too heavy for withdrawal.43

Dahlgren was counting on swift, decisive action from McClellan. His assumptions about the rebel guns and positions were indeed accurate, but the army would not be ready for such a movement until the following spring. He did assume that "counter batteries" on the Maryland shore could at least clear the river of Confederate craft, even if they could not open it to Union shipping. For this purpose he suggested the use of fifty heavy guns, operating opposite
the rebels from Cockpit Point through Evansport. He also proposed that the officer in command of the land force - that is, Hooker - be given the full command of the Flotilla. This was the sort of inter-service cooperation that was needed, but it was largely unheard of this early in the war.

Craven continued to be pessimistic. On October 31 he thought it impossible for any vessel drawing more than eight feet of water to pass up or down the river. Perhaps reflecting their commander's impatience with higher channels, three Flotilla captains aided Colonel Charles K. Graham's unauthorized landing at Mathias Point on November 12. This was the sort of cooperation Dahlgren had been thinking of, but reaction to the raid was mixed. Sickles praised Graham's action; Hooker frowned upon it but did not censure Graham for acting without orders; McClellan ordered the Colonel's arrest. Craven's position is uncertain.

Perhaps Craven did not really care a great deal about the whole affair. His pessimism, combined with a professed desire to be relieved of his command due to alleged reasons of health, brought about his dismissal as commander of the Flotilla on November 29. His temporary replacement was Lieutenant A. D. Harrell, who had led a daring raid on Quantico in October. On December 5, Lieutenant R. H. Wyman was named as the permanent replacement. Wyman's flagship was the Harriet Lane, which Craven had used for a
time when the **Yankee** was in poor repair. The **Freeborn** was no longer suitable as a flagship.⁴⁶

Craven had repeatedly told Welles that he simply needed more and better ships if he was to patrol the river successfully. The Flotilla had made the best possible use of the vessels it had, and this fact did not change with his departure. Early in December, the light-draught sidewheel steamer **Stepping Stones**, armed only with a 24-pounder howitzer, ran into Occoquan Bay on a reconnaissance mission. She was subjected to heavy musket fire as she made a daring run three miles up the Occoquan River and threw a shell over the village of Occoquan. Somehow she managed to not run aground, and she returned to the flotilla relatively unscathed.⁴⁷

Despite the best efforts of the rebel batteries, Federal shipping continued to defy them and repeatedly ran the gantlet. Reassured by the presence of Hooker's troops in Maryland, many light-draught vessels hugged the Maryland shore. Other ships openly defied the guns and passed through the channel, though this usually occurred only at night. Bolstered by the feeling that a rebel invasion of Maryland was now unlikely, the Flotilla continued to do its best to hamper the Confederate guns and interrupt contraband commerce. Both sides were becoming more proficient with their shooting, and when the **Anacostia** and **Yankee** engaged the Cockpit Point guns early in January, 1862, they
scored several direct hits. The Confederates responded with a shot through the Yankee's bow, which wounded one crewman. The battle ended when the Federals exploded two shots under the rebels' big gun, dismounting it and forcing the gunners to evacuate the position.

A major triumph for the Union occurred the following week. On January 11, the U. S. S. Pensacola slipped out of her moorings at Alexandria and proceeded downriver. Her destination was Hampton Roads, but, first she had to get past the Potomac batteries - no small feat for a ship of her size. She was a 3,000 ton steamsloop, 230 feet with a 44 foot beam. Her maximum speed was 9.5 knots. She carried three masts and full sailing rig. Her armament was impressive: twenty 9-inch and one 11-inch Dahlgren smoothbores, two heavy Parrott rifles, and two 12-pounder howitzers. Her size was the drawback. She drew a full 18 feet, 7 inches. There was absolutely no way out past the rebel batteries other than through the channel, which made her an excellent target. Her movements would be closely watched and reported by Confederate informers, making a quick, quiet escape unlikely. Nonetheless, the Navy decided to run the guns, for the Pensacola was needed for blockade duty.

The Pensacola began her journey in the early morning. The pilots did not want to navigate the "torturous" channel between Alexandria and White House Point in the dark. She
anchored at the latter place, waiting for nightfall, wishing to pass the guns at "moon down." Wyman's Flotilla vessels were stationed at various points, especially around the shoals near Mattawoman Creek, to guide the big ship through the channel. To provide a diversion: other ships would attack the batteries as she passed.

The Confederates suspected that the Pensacola would soon attempt to make a run down the river, but nonetheless the Federals caught them off guard. The sloop began her run at three o'clock in the morning, under a moonless, cloudy sky. At about four o'clock, a sentry at Freestone Point sighted her, but roused the gunners too late. They managed to fire only three shots, all of which missed. The sentries were confused by a light on the Yankee's mast. This light was meant to guide the Pensacola's passage, but it was mistaken for the Pensacola itself. By the time they realized their mistake, the big ship was getting out of range.

The men at Shipping Point were not fooled. Alerted by the shooting at Freestone and Cockpit Points, the lower batteries took about twenty shots at the ship, which was now going at full steam. The Pensacola did not answer, not wishing to reveal her exact position and offer a better target. The ship took no hits, though many shells passed overhead.

The Pensacola's escape was a great disappointment for
the Confederates and shook General Johnston's confidence in the ability of the batteries to do the Federals any substantial damage. He did not share the optimism of Brigadier General S. G. French, who claimed on January 14 - two days after the Pensacola passed safely - that "not a sail has passed for weeks. The river would be lifeless and desolate except for the eight or ten steamers always in sight above and below." French had not even realized that the vessel that had passed a few nights previously was in fact the Pensacola! He spoke of the ship as if he feared it would soon attempt the passage, while in reality it already had! He complained that if the upper batteries had opened upon "the vessel" sooner, they would have been able to get a great many more shots at her. Johnston realized that "the vessel" was the Pensacola and was bitterly disappointed over her escape. He began to feel that his right flank was vulnerable.53

Minor actions continued through the early months of 1862. The Federals attempted to use a snowstorm to cover the passage of the Jacob Bell, Harriet Lane, and Baltimore past the Cockpit Point guns, but the Harriet Lane was hit in the port wheelhouse and had to be towed out of danger. Although the Flotilla continued to frequently engage the batteries, this was the last recorded action in which a Union war-vessel was damaged by the Confederate guns. Within a month, the Federals had control of the Virginia shore.
The Potomac Flotilla was as concerned with the preservation of Federal commerce as with the destruction of the rebel batteries. The two missions went hand in hand. Navigation on the Potomac was extremely dangerous for Union vessels, due not only to the hostile guns in Virginia, but to the presence of the George Page, the secession sympathizers in Maryland, and frequent rebel traffic between the two states as well. The channel was treacherous, and after the Confederates removed buoys and markers, even the most careful vessels could find themselves aground. Owing to the tidal nature of the river and its many inlets, various shoal areas, such as the "Mattawoman Mud" off Stump Neck, would be passable at high tide but extremely dangerous when the tide receded. Thus the Flotilla found itself working frantically to free stranded vessels, and often as not a Flotilla ship would itself run aground. Such a stationary target was very tempting for the rebel gunners in Virginia, as well as the more daring Maryland sympathizers and Confederate soldiers who would find an available boat and capture or destroy the stranded craft.

This was the case in the middle of June, 1861, when
the schooner *Christina Kern* ran aground near Mathias Point while attempting a night passage. A party of Virginians seized the ship and burned it. Commander Ward of the Flotilla reported that such an occurrence was unnecessary. Navigation at night was quite dangerous due to the removal of the buoys and channel markers. The Flotilla was distributed at various points along the river, and the schooner could have found protection with one of its ships rather than attempting the night voyage.

The area near Mathias Point became a trouble-spot for Union shipping. Regarded as the most dangerous point on the river by one Flotilla captain, the shoals below the point and nearby Lower Cedar Point were the site of numerous mishaps. On July 5 the schooner *J. W. Maitland*, loaded with 280 tons of government coal, ran aground on the Lower Cedar Point shoals within three cables' lengths of the Flotilla's own *Yankee*, which grounded on Yates Shoal. The *Thomas Freeborn*, R. B. Lowry commanding, approached the two ships. When the *Yankee* floated at three-thirty in the morning, she did not respond to the *Freeborn*’s hail and steamed away upriver, ignoring Lowry's order to render assistance to the *Maitland*. Greatly angered, Lowry told S. C. Rowan, the Flotilla's commanding officer, that the *Yankee*'s commander, whether his junior or senior, had shown "discourtesy and indifference." After twelve hours of work, the *Freeborn* managed to free the schooner, but the matter
did not end there. Disgusted with the Yankee commander's incompetance, Rowan fumed to Welles:

The conduct of the Yankee was doubly reprehensible...in not offering assistance to the schooner and in treating with contempt the order of Lieutenant Lowry....
These men should be taught common civility at the least, and if they persist in not answering hails, as some of them do, they may get shot. In these times we can't tell at night who are friends unless we get prompt evidence....
Lieutenant Lowry would have been justified in sending a shot after the Yankee....56

Federal efforts to protect friendly schooners did not always end successfully. In June, the rebels captured the steamer St. Nicholas and then proceeded to garner three more Union vessels before anything could be done to stop them. At this particular time, some of the Flotilla, including the Pawnee, were in Washington for the funeral of the late Commander Ward; but even with the Flotilla present, the Confederates occasionally were able to snatch a vessel literally out from under the Federals' noses. In October, the schooner Fairfax, carrying a cargo of hay, furniture, and cement, became a rebel prize when her tow-line from the Resolute suddenly broke.57

During October the situation had so worsened that Commander Craven requested that commercial vessels go to Baltimore rather than Washington with their cargoes. Welles emphasized to one unhappy captain that the river could be navigated only at the captain's own risk. Sometimes only those who felt they had friends among the rebels would take
this risk, but even they were not always safe. Late in December, the vessel Mary Willis was hit below the water line by rebel fire from Boyd's Hole. She ran aground and defied efforts to free her. The captain had been amply warned by pickets at the Nanjemoy River to not proceed up the Potomac, but he had ignored them. Now, splashing ashore, his vessel still mired fast, he grumbled that he couldn't understand why the Confederates had shot at him, since he was "no damned Yankee."\(^{58}\)

In contrast to the Federals' problems, secessionist trade, transportation, and communication between the Maryland and Virginia shores continued in spite of the best efforts of the Flotilla to halt it. Mail, supplies, and men were regularly transported from one side of the river to the other. For a time, the rebels may have had more success than their adversaries in navigating the river. Commander Rowan on the Pawnee complained on June 9 that there seemed to be communication between the shores throughout the length of the river. "The people of Maryland all side with the enemy, so far as I can tell," he gloomily reported. On June 5 a rowboat suspected of carrying rebel mail had been captured; three days later, the Resolute burned a schooner on the Virginia side of the river; and Acting Commander Budd on the Resolute reported that the lighthouse keeper at Blackistone Island, far downriver, had been threatened with violence if he did not put out

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his light. The keeper had asked for Union protection, adding that huge quantities of supplies and men were always crossing the river in his vicinity between Breton's Bay and St. Mary's. 59

In view of the immense problems confronting the Flotilla, it is somewhat amusing to note that the Federals optimistically referred to the ships as a "Blockading Squadron." Try as they might, the Union vessels had a difficult time trying to live up to this title. With so few vessels available early in the war, a real blockade was next to impossible. Small boats, waiting for darkness and timing their runs for the most opportune moments, simply could not be halted without a great deal of trouble and luck. The Reliance learned on June 11 that it was to continue its blockade duties, but was to extend its vigilance all the way downriver to Point Lookcut, a distance of about fifty miles from Chopawamsic Creek. In addition, the Reliance would visit the lighthouse at Blackstone Island, making sure the situation was under control. The lighthouse keepers at Point Lookout and Blackstone Island would supply Lieutenant P. K. Mygatt, the ship's commander, with information regarding rebel movements. These duties were a large order for the Reliance. She was a new screw steamer, but small, lightly armed, and only a single vessel. But the size and condition of the Flotilla demanded that newer ships take on much of the burden of stopping rebel blockade-runners. 60
Still, the Flotilla's vigilance paid off with numerous catches. On June 17, Ward took possession of the schooner Bachelor, whose master had supposedly lied to Commander Rowan about his cargo, misused his pass, and then tied up in a concealed position near Mathias Point. Ward wished this capture to serve as a lesson and warning to others. The next day, Welles gave permission to Rowan, commanding the Pawnee, to seize a large quantity of "suspicious" stores on the Maryland shore unless the custodians of the goods could prove they were not intended for shipment to Virginia. The stores included 10,000 pounds of bacon, six barrels of whiskey, three casks of sugar, and two sacks of coffee. The required proof was not forthcoming, and Rowan seized the goods the next day, much to the Marylanders' dismay.

Meanwhile, the overworked Reliance destroyed five boats suspected of being involved in cross-river traffic and captured four more at Evansport. Then, firing canister, she broke up and drove inland a party of rebel pickets. Prudently, Lieutenant J. C. Chaplin, then in command of the steamer, withdrew after dispersing the pickets, not knowing how large a force lay concealed close by the shore. The following day, the side-wheel steamer Mount Vernon (later named the Mount Washington) was dispatched to seize a sloop known to have conveyed men from Maryland to Virginia. This sloop was also suspected of having taken arms
from Port Tobacco to Mathias Point. The 71st New York volunteers tried to seize the arms, but the sloop beat them to the cache. Dahlgren, upset at having missed this haul, wanted the sloop taken. No record relating to the Mount Vernon's success or failure is available.

Welles began to demand better results from Commander Craven and his subordinates. He told Craven that he should examine more carefully the cargoes of vessels plying the river, citing the case of the Buena Vista. The late Commander Ward had seized this vessel, and later its cargo of whiskey was sold. Subsequently, five barrels of "whisky" turned out to be loaded with pistols. Welles told Craven,

\[ \text{It is very important that a full and final end should be put to the intercourse between the two shores, and the capture or destruction of all vessels engaged in the crime is fully warranted.} \]

Exhortation may have heightened the Flotilla's efforts, but it was impossible for Craven to live up to such standards. He needed more ships to provide the sort of protection the secretary wanted. Craven suggested that land batteries could be established on those Maryland points used by the rebels as landing places, and two or three infantry regiments stationed nearby could provide support for the artillerists. These points were Marshall's Point, Stump Neck, Indian Head, Budd's Ferry, Smith's Point, Lower Thom's Point, and Upper Cedar Point. This idea was initially rejected, as troops simply were not available.
Instead, Welles instructed Craven to search without warrant on the Maryland shore for arms, ammunition, and supplies which were "reasonably" believed to belong to the rebels. Thus the policy did not really change a great deal, and Craven was still without substantial help.\footnote{64}

Interrupting the rebel trade was not easy, even in areas where Confederate batteries did not exist. On August 15 the 	extbf{Resolute} dispatched a boat and six men to board a schooner that had grounded off Lower Cedar Point. The schooner was loaded with what seemed to be barrels of powder. As the boat reached the suspicious vessel, soldiers concealed on the shore opened fire, killing thee of the crew. Such an incident dramatized the need of the Flotilla for support. On August 19, two hundred marines were assigned to Craven for use in breaking up depots of rebel arms and provisions. Assistant Naval Secretary Gustavus Fox told Craven that he should be judicious in the use of these marines. McClellan was at that time contemplating sending a battalion of troops into the Lower Potomac region of Maryland to provide the Flotilla with some support, so there was no sense in Craven taking chances: "It is desirable that you should not go beyond the reach of the support of your accompanying vessels." Such a move would involve too much risk, especially when the army could take care of problems farther inland. This was the first real indication Craven received that help was in fact on the way.\footnote{65}
These marines were but a small force and could do little by themselves. Their arrival did not bring about any radical changes in the situation. The following week, the U.S.S. Philadelphia, on her way to Washington, noticed that along the entire Maryland shore, the ship's movements were signalled to the Virginia side by lanterns. Such an observation clearly indicated the presence of a large number of Confederate sympathizers in Maryland. Craven could no nothing, but he knew that his Flotilla was endangered by such watchfulness. His force was already stretched thin when Welles wrote on September 2, asking that a vessel be posted off Smith's Point to cut off cross-river traffic originating there. Then, charges were raised by Captain Duryea of the 5th New York that the Flotilla was negligent and permitted vessels to run close to the Virginia shore near the mouth of the river. Exasperated, Craven wrote Welles on September 5 that Duryea probably was mistaken. He admitted there was much illegal traffic, but claimed again that his force was too small for the large job assigned to it. "Situated as I have been, with so few vessels at my command, and these but half equipped and manned, it has been impossible to prevent it illegal traffic."66

Reports of rebel trafficking came to Welles from various sources. The Department undoubtedly felt it had no choice but to forward the information to Craven and
hope the commander could make the best of the situation. On September 6, Fox forwarded a communication concerning the rebels' use of "punts," small ducking boats, which were difficult to see even from a short distance. A week later, Fox told Craven that the Baltimore papers appeared almost as regularly in Richmond as they did in Baltimore, a fact which showed continual, reliable mail service between the two cities. In fact, Lieutenant R. H. Wyman, Craven's successor, told Welles in December that he believed most of the illicit trade had its origins in Baltimore.67

There also was continual rebel traffic between Richmond and the rebel positions on the Potomac. The government said private individuals for the temporary use or outright purchase of their vessels for this service. Other individuals were hired to transport supplies to the troops by themselves, in an effort to supplement the military supply system. In January, 1862, William Morgan received fifteen dollars to transport supplies from the capital to Aquia Creek. In February, he repeated the run, adding a trip to Quantico for an extra five dollars. Morgan successfully returned to Richmond on both occasions to collect his money. The Flotilla simply did not have the capacity to stop every private vessel on the river.68

Union precautions did make life miserable for those who depended upon shipping on the Potomac for their liveli-
hood. Restrictions on shipping became very bothersome and endangered many businessman's source of income. In July, a group of thirty-three men with interest in the Potomac steamboat traffic complained formally to Craven that the Flotilla's restrictions interrupted their business and were causing them financial injury. Specifically, they called for the resumption of steamer traffic between Baltimore and Washington, assuring Craven that they would respect and accept whatever other restrictions were necessary. Craven was already under pressure to more thoroughly inspect cargos, and after the St. Nicholas affair, the Navy was reluctant to ease any restrictions. Only private vessels carrying non-government goods were permitted to make the run, and then only at their own risk. 69

Part 3
The St. Nicholas and the Page:
"Would anyone but a Yankee be guilty of such rascality?"

Two rebel ships caused the Union much embarrassment on the Potomac. The first of these was the Page, the side-wheel steamer which the Confederates had captured at Alexandria when Virginia seceded. She was stationed at Aquia Creek and was fitted out first with two 24-pounders and later with four 32-pounders; she could carry 150 men and had a shallow draught, making her a useful river gunboat. The Page's capacity for transporting troops made her both a threat to shipping and a possible transport vessel for
landing troops on the Maryland shore.

The guns at the mouth of Aquia Creek protected the Page from attack by the Flotilla. Only the Freeborn could possibly attack her where she lay, for the Pawnee had too large a draught and presented a good target, while other Federal vessels were outclassed against her. The steamer was also protected by a large force of infantry. Commander Ward considered attempting to burn the Page, but he had to scrap the idea because of her position (a considerable distance up the creek) and her large guard. On June 10, he recommended that the Pawnee or Pocahontas be placed at the mouth of Aquia to keep the Page from sneaking out. He feared that other vessels would not be suited for such duty, for the Page could conceivably destroy or capture them. On June 13, he ordered that no vessel but the Reliance was to be underway at night; this was to prevent confusion and to protect all Union craft against capture. The Pawnee was stationed outside of Aquia Creek, guarding against both the Page and the cross-river traffic from Smith's Point.

The Federals kept up a close watch on the Page at all times. When she came near the mouth of the creek on July 7, the Pocahontas engaged her, setting her afire. The Page retreated up the creek. It is possible that she had just launched the first "torpedoes" of the war, which were later recovered by the Resolute. The crew extinguished the Page's fire and moored her farther up the creek.
One stormy night, the Page managed to elude the Union ships and slipped up the river to Quantico Creek, arriving there on October 23, 1861. Captain R. S. Williamson of the U. S. Topographical Engineers feared that the rebels could now move troops and artillery across the river. Williamson told Adjutant General Seth Williams that a strong cavalry outpost could ward off rebel attacks and keep an eye on the steamer's further movements. Colonel Nelson Taylor of the "Excelsior" Brigade's Third Regiment told Craven that "there are some indications on the other side of preparations for crossing to this shore," adding that he had no artillery that could oppose such a landing. Meanwhile, the Page took shelter under the protection of the Shipping Point guns.\(^7^2\)

That afternoon, the Page began to shell some of Sickles' "Excelsior" troops. Hooker's brigade arrived to assist on the following morning. This quieted fears of an imminent invasion, but on October 25 the New York Herald complained:

\[\ldots\text{the rebel steamer George Page, poking her nose out of Aquia Creek, has suddenly made her appearance, and has been complimenting the Sickles brigade on the Maryland shore with a few specimen shells. Next we shall probably hear of another mosquito fleet, and of the capture of some of our river transports, unless we put an end, and that very soon, to this rebel blockade of the Potomac.}\ldots\]  \(^7^3\)

Besides causing great embarrassment and apprehension, the Page had forced Sickles' men to move away from the
river. McClellan, in turn, finally felt compelled to send some troops to Sickles' (and Craven's) aid rather than keep them in the Washington defenses until he was ready for his Spring movement. It is significant that he sent Hooker's brigade. Hooker's brigade was small, and when it combined with Sickles' to make a division, Hooker found himself at the head of the army's smallest division. McClellan simply noted that Hooker's troops were the closest to the Lower Potomac. Still, he had certainly spared no more troops than he absolutely had to.  

Hooker's men were eager for action. The Page was an enemy within their grasp and seemed vulnerable. A group of artillery captains wrote to Welles and asked that the Flotilla cooperate with them in "cutting out" the steamer, but Lieutenant Wyman assured the secretary that the Page was well-protected. The rebels anticipated an attack upon her, and had earthworks and batteries nearby. Some of these had been especially constructed for her defense. The Page's own guns guarded against direct approaches across the water. The Confederates had found that Chopawamsic Creek offered the ship a safer harbor than Quantico since the former site was only 150 yards wide at the anchorage. This would make any attack upon her subject to a wicked crossfire. The Page slipped from one anchorage to another at night, making her whereabouts uncertain; therefore she was far less vulnerable.
These movements caused much concern among the Federals. Hooker was afraid that she would slip out on a dark night and capture unsuspecting Union vessels. As much as the Flotilla had counted on Hooker's arrival, he now indicated he was dependent upon them as well: "...if some of the vessels of the Flotilla would take a proper position above and below the mouth of the Quantico [where the Page was stationed that week], and near it (which they can do with impunity any night when the moon is not shining), they might cut off her retreat."76

Despite all the concern about the rebel vessel, she never once sank or captured any Union shipping. Only once did she attempt to land troops on the Maryland side, and then she was scared off by Union pickets. Her attempt to capture the store-ship Wyandunk failed when the Flotilla's E. B. Hale appeared on the scene and chased her away. 77

The only other steamer the rebels had on the Potomac was the St. Nicholas, and her sortie there lasted but a short while. The St. Nicholas was a Union passenger steamer making the run from Baltimore to Washington. In June, Lieutenant Hunter H. Lewis of the Confederate Navy noticed that the Pawnee let the St. Nicholas draw alongside without challenging her. Repeated observation of this occurrence led to the formulation of a daring plan to capture the St. Nicholas and use her in turn to capture the Pawnee. With the Pawnee captured, the Flotilla's strength would be
vastly reduced. The big ship could drive the Potomac Flotilla off the river, and open the Maryland shore to easy communication. Lewis consulted with General Holmes, who did not wish to personally take responsibility for the risky venture, and he sent Lewis to Richmond to gain approval. Lewis found a collaborator in Captain M. F. Maury of the Navy. Secretary of War L. P. Walker gave his permission to proceed. Holmes, however, was given some discretion in the affair, and he decided the plan was too risky to attempt. He did not wish to order volunteer troops to undertake such a mission. But Captain George N. Hollins of the Navy and Colonel Richard Thomas obtained permission and money from Governor Letcher of Virginia, and told Lewis they were going to attempt his plan. On June 28, dressed as a "French lady," Thomas managed to sneak several trunks filled with weapons aboard the St. Nicholas in Baltimore. Other conspirators dressed as civilians boarded there and at Point Lookout. A mile north of Point Lookout, the rebels doffed their disguises and reappeared on deck dressed as Zouaves, armed with guns and cutlasses. The crew offered no resistance.  

The plan did not work perfectly. A regiment of infantry, accompanied by Lewis, was supposed to meet the steamer, but they did not reach the appointed sport (Coan River Landing) at the proper time. While waiting for the men to appear, the rebels on the St. Nicholas discovered
(by reading the Baltimore papers on the steamer) that the Pawnee was in Washington for the funeral of Commander Ward. Changing their plan, Captain Hollins headed for the Chesapeake, where he captured three northern vessels. The first was the brig Monticello, bound from Brazil to Baltimore with 3500 bags of coffee. The second victim was the schooner Mary Pierce, bound from Boston to Washington with 260 tons of ice. Hollins then caught the schooner Margaret, going from Alexandria to Staten Island with 270 tons of coal. The St. Nicholas used the coal herself, but Hollins sent the ice to Fredericksburg's hospitals. Bounties were paid for both the ice and the St. Nicholas herself. The "Baltimore gentleman" who owned the coffee was compensated by the Confederate government and the ship was returned to him. The skipper of the Mary Pierce, seeing the high prices paid for the ice, proposed to Hollins that he return for another load of ice, let himself be captured again, and then split the profit. Hollins scoffed: "Would anyone but a Yankee have been guilty of such rascality?" The price paid for the ice is not known, but the steamer itself brought $45,000. The St. Nicholas became a gunboat in the Confederate Navy and was stationed on the Rappahannock River. 79

Had the Pawnee been present the day of the capture, chances are good that the scheme still would have failed. Commander Ward had been told by Welles that he suspected
the *St. Nicholas* of carrying contraband material and landing it at Smith's Point, from where it was smuggled to Aquia Creek. He recommended that he stop and search the vessel. Thus alerted, the *Pawnee* would probably have been ready for action when the *St. Nicholas* approached in her attempt to capture the big vessel. Although the *Pawnee*'s crew would have had smugglers and not Zouaves on their minds, at least they would not have been completely surprised, and a terrific fight probably would have resulted. After the *St. Nicholas* affair, the Federals were conscious of the possibility of similar attempts. Indeed, a plot to capture the *Reliance* came to naught when the ship's captain got wind of the plan and changed his anchorage.

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**Part 4**

The Federals Fear a Rebel Crossing:
"...In ten days I shall command the Potomac..."

Federal apprehension over a rebel crossing of the river did not abate until Hooker's division occupied Lower Maryland. Until then, Welles, Craven, and others expressed constant fear of such a move. The necessary cooperation between the Army and Navy simply did not exist. McClellan, meanwhile, thought that the Potomac River was primarily the Navy's responsibility.

As early as July 1, soon after the debacle at Mathias Point, Welles became convinced that the river would soon be closed by rebel batteries unless Union troops occupied
one or more "prominent points." He was not specific, but he probably was thinking of Mathias Point and the positions near Evansport and White House Bluff. Late in the month, many flatboats appeared in the vicinity of Aquia Creek, and at least one informant said that the Page now mounted six guns. This activity increased Welles' fears. His captains had reported that "it appears that the collection of so many flatboats in that neighborhood must be for some other object than that of intercepting passing steamers." He suspected that the rebels intended to effect a crossing. Welles told Craven to send the Pawnee to the area if necessary.

McClellan revealed his attitude on August 10. He said he had been informed by "indisputable" sources that the rebels were gathering at Aquia and intended to cross in steamers, flatboats, and scows. The remedy was simple:

...frustrate this design by destroying any craft that may be assembled...the most effectual method of doing so would be the employment of as many more steamers as can be made available by the Navy Department.\

Craven received instructions from the Bureau of Detail to extend his surveillance as far as possible into the Potomac's tributaries. The bureau noted that there had been "unusually active" rebel traffic recently, and it feared that 14,000 Confederates were going to push across.

Assistant Secretary of the Navy Gustavus Fox spoke
with McClellan on August 11, and told Craven that the general had mentioned fear of a "small" force coming across the river. He told Craven to speak with McClellan personally. He suggested that a few ships could be sunk in the channel to impede a crossing, and promised that the Flotilla's size would soon be increased. Craven thereupon wrote to Welles, recommending that the army get into the act. He wanted batteries at those points where rebel communication was taking place, and he believed that this would render a large crossing "absolutely impossible."

Later that week, Welles placed Craven on his guard. The Secretary believed that a memorandum he had intercepted was written by Jefferson Davis. The memorandum read:

Have no street fights; keep Baltimore quiet for the present; in ten days I shall command the Potomac and cross between Mathias Point and Aquia Creek into Charles and St. Mary's counties (they are all friends there) and march upon Annapolis. Then having two of the approaches to Washington in possession, let Baltimore rise and burn the bridges. The movements in the Upper Potomac are only feints.

Welles believed the source of this information to be "unquestionable." He told Craven to destroy every vessel on both sides of the river if not clear there seemed to be any connection between them and the rebel crossing. This was a large order, for on the same day, Dahlgren told Craven that there were 142 scows and longboats at Aquia, and about as many at Chopawamsic, Powell's, and Quantico Creeks. There were seven in Neabsco and fifteen in the
Occoquan. Craven reported that he believed the rebels were indeed preparing for some great move. He added:

Unless the landings on the Maryland side are immediately occupied by our troops and made secure by extended batteries I shall be placed between two fires, and it will be hardly possible with the small force under my command to protect the passages across the river. 86

As if this was not bad enough, he reported that the rudder of his flagship, the Yankee, was damaged, making it difficult to maneuver. He asked the department to increase the size of the Flotilla "immediately." 87

Indeed, the Flotilla was not very large yet. William Budd told McClellan that the entire Flotilla, with the exception of one brig, was off Aquia. The ships were the Pawnee, Pocahontas, Ice Boat (Release), Yankee, Freeborn, Resolute, and Reliance. Budd added: "There is not a single Federal gun between Aquia Creek and Fort Washington, nor from Aquia to the mouth of the Rappahannock." He called attention to the fact that the Coan River, Yeocomico River, and Great Wicomico Bay had deep channels, were perfect for concealing vessels, and were all unguarded. Budd warned that the rebels had cut down all the trees on Brent's Point at the mouth of Aquia Creek and could now sweep it with guns which they placed there. There seemed to be a buildup in that area, as a ravine between Aquia and Potomac Creeks had been fortified and a 1200 yard work constructed, connecting two batteries.

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Budd complained,

The Pawnee is within good shelling distance... his rifle guns will hunt her out... when he gets them in position. The enemy is strengthening his position by every possible means. We do nothing. 88

McClellan recognized the threat, admitting there were "strong indications" of a rebel crossing "of the Potomac south of this city near Aquia Creek, where they are erecting strong batteries." Meanwhile, Robert B. Ely, commanding the U. S. Schooner Dana, engaged in a brazen spying adventure. In disguise, he visited a Maryland secessionist, Mr. Coad, who talked openly of his own rebel sympathies and of a planned crossing into Maryland. Rebel companies were ready for the crossing, and, according to Coad, "You cannot find a Union man from Breton's Bay to Point Lookout, except Dr. Jones and the inhabitants of St. George's Island." 89

Welles was still concerned with other locales, however. On August 20, he appealed to Secretary of War Simon Cameron:

The importance of keeping open the navigation of the Potomac is so obvious that no argument is necessary on the subject... there are one or two points where shore batteries can be made to interrupt communication, and... I would most urgently request that immediate measures be taken by the War Department to fortify and entrench Mathias Point.... Attention on repeated occasions has been called to the particular necessity of holding that place as absolutely essential to the unobstructed navigation of the Potomac.... 90
Mathias Point could control the channel, Welles figured, thus making a cross-channel move easier for its possessor. But McClellan believed that the rebels would throw their main force across the river above Washington, while diversions took place at Aquia Creek, the Occoquan, and Mathias Point. In a communication to Cameron on September 8, McClellan exhibited what was later to be recognized as a fatal flaw: that of overestimating his enemy's forces. He believed that 30,000 men would take part in the diversions on the Lower Potomac, while 100,000 would be free for the main assault north of the capital. He feared this army would move first to Baltimore, thus cutting the rail line to Washington. He claimed he needed 300,000 troops to insure success. No wonder he was reluctant to send men and guns to Lower Maryland, where he believed only "diversions" would take place! He estimated that he had at the most 70,000 men available. He could thus spare none for anyplace that did not seem to absolutely need them. 91

McClellan sent Brigadier General J. G. Barnard, Chief of Engineers, to investigate points at which the rebels could set up batteries. Barnard reported that Hallowing Point and Whetstone Point were good sites for batteries, but noted that the former could possibly be dislodged. Batteries already existed at Freestone Point, but Barnard believed them to be defensive, much as he assumed the Aquia
guns were. Quantico seemed favorable to guns for both
blockading the river and supporting a crossing. The Aquia
and Potomac Creek guns were solely for defense. Mathias
Point could be a troublesome spot, but the rebel inaction
there seemed logical:

Mathias Point is the one on the whole river
(except perhaps Whetstone) where the naviga-
tion could be most effectively closed...why
has not this point been before this occupied
by hostile batteries? Simply...because it
would require a good many guns and a good
many men to protect those guns at a remote
point, where the men and guns would be lost
for any other purpose than this subordinate
one of interrupting our navigation.92

Barnard had shrewdly deduced the correct reasons for
the rebels' inaction at Mathias Point. He also recognized
that there was simply no way to prevent the construction
of batteries at Cockpit Point short of an attack on them,
but more could be built wherever the Confederates held
the far shore. Though he recommended that ten to twenty
guns be mounted on the Maryland shore opposite Occoquan
and Freestone Point, and another fifty across from Evans-
port and Cockpit Point, he was not sufficiently apprehen-
sive of batteries at Mathias and Whetstone Points to
recommend that counter-batteries be put up opposite them.
He wished to wait and see exactly how badly commerce was
disrupted before countering such guns.93

The disruption which occurred was serious. Still,
McClellan did not send troops to counter the threat, be-
lieving the worst problems would occur north of Washington and not to the south. Captain Craven grew increasingly impatient, and, apprehensive of what seemed to be a large buildup, made a great effort to clear the river of suspicious craft. Two weeks before Barnard's inspection, he sank two ships, the T. W. Riley and the Jane Wright, under Welles' earlier order to destroy suspicious vessels in spite of previously issued passes. The owners of the ships howled, but the commander was taking no chances. Now, after Barnard's visit, there was still no action from the Army and the rebels did not seem ready to leave. The sinkings continued, and many boats of various sizes fell victim to the purge of "suspicious" craft. The most memorable event in this regard was a daring sortie by three launches, commanded by Lieutenant Abram D. Harrell, into Quantico Creek. There, in the early morning of October 11, the Federals burned the schooner Mary Washington, which they feared was being readied to carry a sizeable number of Confederate troops into Maryland. Though the launches were within easy range of either shore and their oars were perforated with bullet holes, no one was hurt.94

Such heroics were not uncommon, but undoubtedly the Flotilla crews wished that they could get some support. Hooker's division was to arrive shortly, but even after the troops' arrival, the Flotilla was plagued with prob-
lems. Chief among these was the condition of the vessels themselves.

Part 5
The Flotilla's Condition:
"There is not one of the steamers that is not liable...
to utter disability by even a musket ball...."

Hooker's arrival in Lower Maryland with 8000 troops and eighteen guns was heartily welcomed by the beleaguered Flotilla. Hooker had no authority to cross the river to attack the guns, however, so the batteries remained. The Flotilla was still expected to remain on the river both as a sentry and as an escort for Union vessels. As long as Hooker remained on the defensive, the Potomac Flotilla would solely handle any attacks upon the Confederate positions.95

From the very beginning the Flotilla had been a rather odd assortment of ships which for the most part had either been converted to their new wartime purpose, or were simply not capable of performing the sort of task to which they had been assigned. Among the ships that took part in the Flotilla's first action at Aquia Creek, only the Pawnee was a real warship, and she was but a second-class sloop. The original flagship, the Thomas Freeborn, was a converted ferryboat. After the ill-fated attack on Mathias Point in which Commander Ward was killed, Lieutenant R. B. Lowry reported on the ship's
condition. He found it to be in extremely bad repair:

The frequent firings from her 32-pounders and stern gun have very much shattered the upper works and weakened her frame, at no time a strong one. The crews are very much worn out by exposure, bad quarters, want of fresh provisions, and constant, severe duty....The vessel leaks badly. On yesterday eleven Sharps rifles were lost by the men of this ship, leaving only ten on board, insufficient to arm her men for proper defense.96

With this report, Lowry enclosed Chief Engineer C. B. Spencer's report, which Lowry believed to "speak for itself:"

The engine is very much out of line;...the expansion joint on the exhaust pipe is cracked, and the joint on the condenser and steam chest is blown out, all caused by the cannonading....a great amount of sand has accumulated in the boilers, on account of our having been run ashore so often, and require cleaning. Steam has been kept on the boilers constantly since the 12th June. The vessel is leaking very freely, caused by having been hard aground several times....state of the machinery is such that, in my opinion, the repairs should be made without delay.97

The Flotilla's new commander, Captain T. T. Craven, chose the Yankee as the new flagship. She was but a fourrate, sidewheel wooden steamer mounting two 32-pounders, but her condition was better than that of the Freeborn. Craven's problems multiplied as time went on, because many of the Flotilla's vessels had major damages. Commander Benjamin Dove of the Pocahontas reported on July 4 not only that the Freeborn and Reliance were in poor shape, but that his own engine's cylinders were so
exposed that one good shot would disable him. He wished to cover the cylinders with coal bags, more to conceal them than to protect them exposed cylinders a common problem among the Flotilla's ships.  

Perhaps typical for many of the vessels were the difficulties reported by the U.S.S. Underwriter, which Lieutenant James M. Pritchett considered unfit for service. She was undermanned, with only twenty-one men to pass powder and shell for two guns. Her cooking arrangements were incomplete, necessitating that the rations be cooked in small portions. Quarters were insufficient, and men had to sleep on the deck; the magazine was poorly constructed, since the powder and the projectiles had to be stored together. Equipment was poor or non-existent: no signals, either for day or night, were aboard. Only one small boat, without davits, was available. There were no small arms and no spyglass. The boiler was leaking, and the ship was taking water so badly that three or four hours per day were needed to pump her out.

To add to these already serious problems, records show virtual rash of collisions between vessels of the Flotilla in late September and early October, though the reasons for the mishaps are unrecorded. On September 25, the Seminole hit the Valley City; on or about October 1, the Yankee and the Samuel E. Grice ran together; a day later, the Jacob Bell collided with the Island Belle; on
October 8, the *Penguin* and *Rescue* met abruptly; and in this same period (no date is given) the *Seminole* and *Wabash* ran together. At least one of these mishaps was serious enough to cause major damage. Jacob M. Dallas, carpenter of the *Seminole*, found that as a result of the collision with the *Wabash*, the bow was two inches down, and the ship took in sixteen to eighteen inches of water per day, with the amount increasing noticeably after the ship's guns were fired.

The morning that the *Pocahontas* and *Seminole* engaged the Evansport batteries, Craven had been forced to remain a spectator due to a faulty engine on the *Yankee*. A. D. Harrell, hero of the October 11 raid into Quantico, reported in November that his ship, the *Union*, was in perhaps the worst shape of all:

> I have refrained from reporting the condition of this vessel until I can defer it no longer. She has been leaking very badly for a long time past and it is increasing daily, and now has reached 9 to 10 inches per hour. As we have no means of freeing her except by the hand pumps, the crew are now employed nearly half their time in keeping the water below the floor of the engine room...her boilers and machinery also are very much out of order.

(emphasis added.)

Craven knew quite well what sort of decrepit state his ships were in. He wrote Welles on September 16:

> Again, sir, I beg leave to remind the department of the very inefficient condition of the vessels comprising the flotilla. With the exception of the *Pocahontas*, *Seminole*, *Penguin*, and *Union*, there
is not (one) of the steamers that is not liable, in consequence of the exposed condition of their engine, to utter disability by even a musket ball; and besides all this there are almost daily complaints from some one of them of repairs needed to engines, strengthening of decks, etc. 102

Craven was not exaggerating. From many of his subordinates, reports continually came in, complaining of the poor condition of their vessels. R. B. Lowry of the Freeborn summed up the situation quite well when he reported as early as July 1, "I shall guard the river as well as I possibly can. On every hand the rebels seem to be getting bolder, while our force is getting weaker." The weakness was due to sheer lack of numbers, the lack of equipment, and of course the terrible condition of the ships. On August 27, the U.S.S. Pembroke arrived from Massachusetts, but was sent back to Boston barely a week later. Craven complained that the withdrawal of both the Pembroke and the Pawnee, which was sent to Fortress Monroe for a period of ten days, weakened the strength of the Flotilla by one-half. These two ships were very powerful vessels, badly needed on the Potomac, and the remaining ships simply could not match their firepower. When the great fright concerning a possible rebel crossing occurred in October, Craven desperately tried to get the Flotilla enlarged, requesting an additional nine or ten vessels, five of which would be stationed off Aquia, the

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others off Indian Head. The appeal was in vain. 103

A great many vessels were at one time or another employed as part of the Potomac Flotilla, but most of these were small gunboats. The size and strength of the Flotilla was never great enough to accomplish the goals which Welles had set for it, especially that of stopping rebel traffic. Nonetheless, the Flotilla performed well, considering the handicaps under which it labored.
NOTES TO CHAPTER II
Part 1


2. Letter, C.F. Smith to Welles, April 21, 1861, NR, Series I, Volume 4, p. 416. Also consult National Archives, Record Group (RG) 393, Item 5361, Letters Sent and Received, Dept. of Washington, Volume 19, April 21, 1861, Smith to Welles; also National Archives, RG 393, Item 5367: Special Orders, April-August, 1861, Special Order #16: calls for armament of these vessels.

Mary Alice Wills, in The Confederate Blockade of Washington, D.C., 1861-1862 (Parsons, W. Va.: McClain Printing Company, 1975), gives the price of governmental compensation to the steamboat company. See p. 15.


Consult the National Archives, RG 393, Item 5361, Letters Sent and Received, Dept. of Washington, Vol. 19, for the order to the 71st New York Infantry, dated April 27, 1861.


7. Welles to Dahlgren, May 2, 1861; Fillebrown to Welles, May 3, 1861; Gillis to Welles, May 14, 1861; and Sproston to Gillis, May 14, 1861. All in NR, Ser. I, Vol. 4, pp. 443; 444; 462; and 463. Also see Wills, Confederate Blockade, pp. 23-26.

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8. Pillebrown to Welles, May 15, 1861; same, May 17, 1861; Ward to Welles, May 22, 1861. All in NR, Ser. I, Vol. 4, pp. 464; 466; and 475.


11. There is much material available on these first conflicts at Aquia, some of it contradictory. See NR, Ser. I, Vol. 4, Ward to Welles, May 31, 1861; M. W. McCluskey to L. P. Walker, June 1; Lynch to Barron, June 2; Rowan to Welles, June 2; and Ward to Welles, June 1; pp. 490-1; 501; 495-6; 492-3; and 491-2.

12. Rowan to Welles, June 2; Ward to Welles, June 1; and Wm. B. Bate to L. P. Walker, June 11. All in NR, Ser. I, Vol. 4, pp. 492-3; 491-2; and 500.


14. Lynch to Editor of Fredericksburg News, June 9, 1861; Ruggles to Garnett, June 4; and Bate to Walker, June 11. All in NR, Ser. I, Vol. 4, pp. 499-500; 498-99; and p. 500.


16. Palmer's Maps are in the National Archives, RG 77, Topographical Records, Drawer 55. Consult NR, Ser. I, Vol. 4, for Palmer's letter to Prof. A. D. Bache, Supt. of the U.S. Coast Survey, June 8, 1861; and for a letter, Dahlgren to Welles, June 20. Pp. 505-506 and 528, respectively.


19. For a description of the activities and the rebel facilities on the Virginia shore in this area, see NR, Ser. I, Vol. 4, pp. 533-34 for a letter, Budd to Welles, June 25, 1861, and p. 535, Rowan to Welles, also June 25.


21. Accounts vary as to whether the Freeborn acted alone on this mission, or whether the Resolute had arrived on the scene. Nor is it clear whether anyone fired any large gun after Ward was hit. It seems as though the Freeborn's gun remained silent, but Major R. M. Mayo reported that "the steamer" opened fire on his men. He also referred to "the steamer and vessel," as if there were two large ships present. Perhaps one fired and the other did not. See the next paragraph on p. 40. Also consult NR, Ser. I, Vol. 4, Parker to Welles, June 28; Chaplin to Rowan, June 28; Rowan to Welles, June 28; Mayo to Ruggles, June 28: pp. 536-38; 539-40; 540; 544-45. See Wills, Confederate Blockade, pp. 36-41, and p. 38 for a contemporary picture of the action. The picture shows two ships, but Mrs. Wills believes there was only one.


26. OR, Ser. I, Vol. 5, p. 557: Wyman's memorandum, unaddressed, describes the facilities and flat-boats at Potomac and Aquia Creeks. See also NR, Ser. I, Vol. 4, Craven to Welles, August 9; Budd to Craven, August 19; and Welles to Craven, with enclosure, August 19; pp. 600; 619-20; 623.

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27. Wills, Confederate Blockade, pp. 42-45.


29. Craven to Welles, Aug. 30, 1861; Craven to Fox, Sept. 11, 1861; Norton to Craven, Sept. 23, 1861; all in NR, Ser. I, Vol. 4, pp. 645; 669; 687.


33. Wills, Confederate Blockade, p. 78. Hanson, Bull Run Remembers, pp. 45-8.


38. Hanson, Bull Run Remembers, p. 49.


44. Ibid.


46. Wills, Confederate Blockade, p. 87.

47. Hanson, Bull Run Remembers, p. 61.


Part 2


62. Rowan to Welles, June 19; Dahlgren to Welles, June 20; W. T. Valiant to S. P. Chase, June 5. NR, Ser. I, Vol. 4, pp. 525; 524; 511.


64. Wills, Confederate Blockade, pp. 47-55. See especially p. 49.

65. Budd to Craven, Aug. 15, 1861; Fox to Craven, Aug. 19. NR, Ser. I, Vol. 4, pp. 609-10; 625-26. See Wills, Confederate Blockade, p. 59. There seems to be some question as to where this schooner was grounded, whether it was at Persimmon Point or Lower Cedar Point.

66. Parker to Dahlgren, Aug. 28; Welles to Craven, Sept. 2; Craven to Welles, Sept. 5. NR, Ser. I, Vol. 4, pp. 643; 653; 658-59.

67. Fox to Craven, Sept. 6; Craven to Fox, with enclosure, I. Nesbitt to M. Blair, Sept. 13, 1861. NR, Ser. I, Vol. 4, pp. 663; 671. Also see Vol. 5, Wyman to Welles, Dec. 18, 1861, pp. 7-8.

68. Consult National Archives, RG 45, Subject File OX, Box XI. Transportation of supplies for Confederate States Navy other than railroad, for examples of this trade and Morgan's payment sheets.

Part 3


73. Craven to Welles, Oct. 23, 1861. NR, Ser. I, Vol. 4, p. 733. Craven knew that Sickles was being shelled, but doubted that the Page was transporting troops across the river.


77. Scharf, Confederate Navy, p. 102. Harrell to Craven. NR, Ser. I, Vol. 4, pp. 758-59. Apparently the Page was out in the river with a great many men aboard on the misty night of November 28, but she worked no known mischief.


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81. Welles to Cameron, July 1; "Union" to Rowan, July 29. NR, Ser. I, Vol. 4, pp. 557; 593.


86. Ibid. Also see Dahlgren to Craven Aug. 15, 1861, p. 609, and Craven to Welles, Aug. 15, pp. 614-15.


90. A lengthy letter from Welles to Simon Cameron on this subject, dated Aug. 20, 1861, may be found in both the OR, Ser. I, Vol. 5, p. 573, and the NR, Ser. I, Vol. 4, p. 628.

91. George B. McClellan, McClellan's Own Story (New York: Charles L. Webster and Company, 1887), pp. 106-07 describes in full the sort of attack the Major General expected.


93. Ibid. This lengthy letter goes into great detail on Barnard's findings. Ironically, Barnard went downriver with Lt. Wyman of the Flotilla, and described him as quite helpful. Again, here was a bit of inter-service cooperation in the early action, the sort of which was badly needed.


Part 5


98. Dove to Dahlgren, July 4, 1861, in NR, Ser. I, Vol. 4, pp. 561-62. Dove, in addition to requesting coal bags, commented that Prof. Lowe's Balloon were "the only means of ascertaining the fact of erecting fortifications."

99. These astounding facts concerning the Underwriter are detailed by Prichett to Livingston, Aug. 28, 1861. NR, Ser. I, Vol. 4, p. 639.

100. Minor details concerning these collisions are in NR, Ser. I, Vol. 4. See pp. 696-97, 701-02, and 706. See In particular Jacob M. Dallas to Gillis, Sept. 28, p. 697.


103. A Northern correspondent listed the Yankee, Pocahontas, Seminole, Penguin, Union, Valley City, Jacob Bell, Island Belle, Rescue, Herbert, Resolute, and Satellite as being off Indian Head in October. He said there were also a number of gunboats downriver; among these was the Freeborn. He did not give the names of the other vessels. See Scharf, Confederate Navy, pp. 101-02.

Also consult Lowry to Rowan, July 1, 1861; Livingston to Craven, Aug. 21, 1861; Craven to Welles, Sept. 4, 1861; and Craven to Welles, Oct. 21, 1861. All in NR, Ser. I, Vol. 4, respectively, pp. 549; 637; 661; and 729-30.

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CHAPTER III
THE UNION ARMY ON THE LOWER POTOMAC

Part I
Hooker's Arrival:
"...they expect an assault
more than they do of delivering one...."

Joseph Hooker came to Washington in hopes of gaining command of a regiment and putting to use some of his military expertise. For awhile it appeared that he would be frustrated in this design, but he impressed President Lincoln with his demeanor and was given command of a brigade. He had graduated from the U. S. Military Academy in 1837 and later served in the Mexican War, and Lincoln did not wish to let his knowledge go to waste. Something was pleasantly unusual about Hooker, Lincoln noted:

...his eye was steady and clear - his manner not half so confident as his words, and altogether he had the air of a man of sense and intelligence who thoroughly believed in himself and who would at least try to make his words good.1

Four volunteer regiments composed Hooker's brigade: the 1st Massachusetts, which had seen action in the preliminary action of Manassas at Blackburn's Ford; the 11th Massachusetts, which had failed to distinguish itself at Manassas; the 2nd New Hampshire, which fought hard and hung on well at the first battle under the personal guidance of its brigade commander, Ambrose Burnside; and the
28th Pennsylvania, which had missed the fight entirely. The brigade was stationed at Bladensburg, Maryland, and was one of three brigades held in reserve to support those elements of the Army of the Potomac which were stationed near the Upper Potomac. The arrival of the 1st Michigan temporarily strengthened the brigade. This regiment had seen some fighting at Manassas and had since been guarding the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad line to the capital.²

Hooker trained and drilled his troops well. There were daily drills before and after breakfast, and a dress parade in the late afternoon. Officers and men alike drilled in marching, the manual of arms, use of the bayonet, and target shooting. The men worked on fortifications protecting the approaches to Washington along the Baltimore and Ohio line. Hooker enforced strict discipline and kept the road well-guarded. He worked hard to make sure all regulations were rigidly adhered to, and made every effort to keep his men well supplied with rations and clothing, though he had difficulty in securing proper arms and ammunition. He was readily available to officers and men with "complaints to be aired and favors to be asked....He early struck upon the right balance of discipline and paternalism which marks those generals who gain the good will of their men."³

Welles and the officers of the Potomac Flotilla
pressed McClellan throughout the summer of 1861 to place some of his troops on the Lower Potomac. He wrote to Secretary of War Simon Cameron that he feared an attack on the Upper Potomac more than on the Lower, and he believed himself to be vastly outmanned. Thus he was reluctant to send soldiers into Lower Maryland. Still, as a result of constant pleas from the Navy Department, plus increasing rebel activity along the lower river, McClellan detached Hooker's 1st Massachusetts for active duty to deal with rebel smuggling and recruiting in Charles County, Maryland. Colonel Robert Cowdin reported after three weeks that the power of the secessionists in that part of Maryland had not been exaggerated or overestimated.

Cowdin's regiment aided in a general policing of Charles and St. Mary's counties that had already been undertaken by General Daniel E. Sickles' "Excelsior" brigade, consisting of the 70th, 71st, 72nd, 73rd, and 74th New York Volunteer Regiments. On October 11th, the "Excelsior" was put under Hooker's command, along with eight companies of Indiana cavalry and one battery of the 1st U.S. Artillery. The 1st Massachusetts rejoined Hooker, while the 1st Michigan was permanently detached. Hooker was now in command of a small division, and on October 23 received orders to take the entire force that was still in Bladensburg to the Lower Potomac. His mission was to
block a Confederate invasion of Maryland, curb smuggling and recruiting, keep the river open, and protect shipping. Hooker proceeded to Budd's Ferry, opposite the Evansport guns, and began to distribute his troops along the river. He was pleased to be away from his commander and have a chance to prove his ability. He knew how stifling being "under rank" could be, especially when McClellan was biding his time and not eager to move. 5

The division reached the Lower Potomac during the last week in October. Hooker established his headquarters near Budd's Ferry. Troops stationed nearby named their campground "Camp Hooker," but he called it "Camp Baker" after his friend Edward D. Baker, lost at Ball's Bluff. Hooker stationed his troops at all important crossroads and river crossings. At Rum Point on Mattawoman Creek he established a depot, with a large wharf and storehouses. He added another warehouse at Liverpool Point, and eventually set up telegraphic communication with McClellan's Headquarters. Hooker sought out Captain Craven of the Potomac Flotilla and consulted with him concerning the need for earthworks on Indian Head and at Budd's Ferry. The former would prevent further fortification of the Virginia shore, while the latter could intercept the George Page. Hooker possessed three field batteries for the purpose of harassing the Page. Captain Robert S.
Williamson of the U.S. Topographical Engineers made observations both of the rebel batteries and of possible sites for Union guns. He recognized that the Virginia shore was considerably higher than that of Maryland, and, seeing the long distance between the opposing armies, suggested that large mortar batteries be constructed. These would be more effective than field pieces in countering the rebel guns. None of Williamson's ideas were implemented because the necessary equipment was not available.6

Hooker's troops had marched for four wearying days on rough roads to reach their destination. Once in camp, they resumed drilling, but this practice was sometimes interrupted by the weather. Muddy conditions forced the troops to build corduroy roads from the Rum Point landing to their various regimental camps. These camps were widely separated. The 26th Pennsylvania occupied the junction of the Budd's Ferry and Hilltop roads, while the 2nd New Hampshire was at the town of Hilltop itself. The other regiments took up positions at other important junctions. Some of them were supported by batteries. Hooker told Adjutant General Seth Williams that in assigning these positions, he made his primary concern the easy concentration of troops. Operations on the river were of secondary importance. There was still a great deal of
apprehension concerning a rebel invasion, and Hooker wanted to be sure he could maneuver his men wherever necessary in order to repel the Confederates.

A few days later, Captain Williamson confidently told Brigadier General R. B. Marcy, Chief of Staff of the Department of the Potomac: "Our army occupying this part of Maryland, there is little chance of the enemy attempting to cross the river." He also said that the destruction of the Page was in itself not so desirable or necessary as to risk the loss of life which would probably accompany such an effort. Batteries that could reach her anchorage would also be within easy range of the rebel guns. The real object was to establish such batteries as could keep the river open to transportation. He wanted a "long line of formidable guns," including mortars and a 64-pounder rifled cannon from the U.S.S. Union. "The Page is not of much importance to either party....The object of batteries must be to open the river and destroy the enemy's works...."

Williams gave Hooker instructions to construct earthworks for two 20-pounder Parrott rigles which would be used against the Page. Hooker was not much concerned about the steamer, nor was he apprehensive about an invasion. The Page had not come down the river since his arrival, and he noted that the rebels were building new earthworks, "which in part confirms me in the opinion that they are still act-
ing on the defensive." He did not think the Page would venture out, except at night. Perhaps he did not yet understand that her night activity was exactly what the Flotilla feared the most.

On October 28, Hooker reported that fifteen guns opened on a Union schooner ascending the river. Apparently she was not struck, for she continued on her course. This was the general's first observance of the rebel guns in action, and he soon began to shape a low opinion of their effectiveness. He observed "masses of infantry" on the opposite shore, but could not discern how many men were there:

In this regard the opposite side remains a sealed book to me, I have not been able to find any one able or willing to furnish me with any satisfactory information as to the number of the rebel force opposed to me. Of one fact, however, I am almost confident, and it is this: that they expect an assault more than they do of delivering one....

The general's views were in stark contrast to almost all other reports the authorities in Washington had been receiving for some time. It certainly was welcome news, though no one was sure whether they could believe it or not.

On the same day, Hooker noted that a rebel boat displaying a flag of truce had approached the shore and suddenly dropped a barrel overboard. He suspected that it was another of their "infernal machines" and commented to
Craven, "If this is the use to which the enemy is to put flags of truce, God help us from Southern chivalry."

Craven in turn informed the general that the rebels had three depots of boats, each containing 100 craft of various sizes, but Hooker refused to be ruffled. "...If it be a fact, the enemy doubtless intends to slip up the river with them instead of crossing it. Such is my opinion."10

Hooker agreed to construct counter-batteries on Indian Head, but he also had bolder plans. On October 30, only a week after his arrival in Lower Maryland, he told Adjutant General Williams that he wanted to occupy the high ground at Quantico. He could then place field artillery there, and keep the rebels away from their batteries. If he could accomplish this, he could keep the river open. This sort of thinking was a definite step forward. Hooker was not intimidated by the rebel positions across the river and strongly suggested steps that could be taken against them. General Williams was undoubtedly appreciative of Hooker's positive attitude and told him:

The general [McClellan] will take into serious consideration your proposition as to the occupancy of the high ground above the main work of the enemy at Quantico. The scheme will involve considerable additions to your force, and before coming to a final determination upon the subject, the general would be glad to have full information as to the ground, the approaches, the character of the landing; in fine, upon every material point relating to the matter.11

McClellan was being properly judicious. Hooker was
eager to distinguish himself, but McClellan needed to be more conservative and consider implications of such an attack in the overall scheme of operations. Hooker contended that by taking possession of Possum Nose, he could in one night fortify the place against 30,000 attackers, and his artillery could dislodge the rebels from their batteries. Such an estimate accompanied by such confidence, were probably enough in themselves to induce McClellan to be cautious. The Union needed a certain victory, and while Hooker's words were brave, they did not necessarily reflect reality. Had McClellan been in charge solely of the Army of the Potomac, he might have had time to plan such an invasion with Hooker. As it was, he had replaced General Winfield Scott as commander of all the Union armies; thus, he had more to be concerned with than simply the situation on the Lower Potomac. Hooker's plan was postponed.

Though Hooker was denied this chance, his popularity was growing in the capital. His bold statements and his initial efforts to open the river met with hearty approval. General Sickles, in Washington at the time, wrote that "The President spoke warmly and enthusiastically of you...."

The Joint Congressional Committee on the Conduct of the War, established after the Federal disaster at Ball's Bluff, remained friendly to Hooker even though it showed
no great liking for many other generals. Hooker’s bold
statements were not unfounded. He had a genuine disdain
for the rebel batteries and did not share the common con-
cern about the blockade. He believed there was no real
threat to navigation and that small boats were perfectly
safe in attempting to pass the rebel guns. He candidly
reported on November 1:

Oyster boats continue to pass up and down in
safety. The random shooting of the enemy ren-
ders it an adventure of comparative safety. My
observation is that they are as likely to be
struck by lightning as by the rebel shot.13

Few commercial vessels were victims of rebel shots
during Hooker’s entire stay in Lower Maryland. According
to one source, only one merchant ship was hit. On one
occasion, a Federal cargo ship, the Mystic, anchored in
front of the rebel batteries and dared the gunners to try
their luck. Eighty-seven shots flew about the ship, but
all missed, much to the amusement of the crew and the Fed-
eral troops. A few of the Potomac Flotilla’s vessels re-
ceived injury, but these were in direct encounters with
the batteries. None were sunk. Early in November, sev-
eral ships easily ran past the batteries. On one occasion
a schooner under full sail was fired upon thirty-two times
by seven different batteries, but the rebels failed to
damage her. A week later, Hooker reported:

Three schooners passed up the river under a
six-knot breeze without the slightest injury,
although thirty-seven heavy guns were discharged
to dispute their passage. The crews seemed to entertain a just appreciation of the batteries, for they sailed along with as much unconcern as they would to enter New York harbor. They do fire wretchedly. Whether it is owing to the projectiles or the guns I am not informed. Several of the pieces are rifled, but they seem to throw more wildly, if possible, than the smooth-bores. From what was witnessed to-day and on previous occasion, I am forced to the conclusion that the rebel batteries in this vicinity should not be a terror to any one. 14

Elections that November were to determine whether Maryland would side with the secessionists or the Union. Well aware of the danger to Washington and the Union cause should Maryland secede, Hooker did his part to make sure the election went in favor of the Federals. He assured Adjutant General Williams that he would suppress any attempted coercion or intimidation on the part of secessionist leaders. He noted that Perry Davis, the secessionist candidate for the legislature and a tavern-keeper in Port Tobacco, had been touring the district, "filling the heads of his listeners with his secession heresies." Hooker directed that he be arrested. He also heard of plans for a secession rally and picnic on election day at the White Horse Tavern, and he decided to "invite a full company of Indiana Cavalry" to break up the gathering. The election went smoothly and ended with a surprisingly easy Union victory. Maryland stayed in the Union, due in part to the high-handed tactics of Hooker and other military commanders. Hooker then released Perry Davis upon receiving assurances
that had he been elected, he would have voted against the secession measures.

On November 11th, an unauthorized landing and reconnaissance of Mathias Point took place. Colonel Charles K. Graham of the 74th New York regiment, in collaboration with Samuel Magaw on the Freeborn, Arnold Harris of the Island Belle, and William Street of the Dana, took 400 men and landed on the hostile shore, killing one picket, scattering the rest, and burning some houses. An extensive reconnaissance followed, and Graham ascertained that there were no rebel works on the point. He exulted:

The successful expedition by so small a force, and upon so important a point, cannot fail to have inspired the enemy with fear for the large portion of unprotected coast along the Potomac, and will not fail...to cause them to scatter their forces along the exposed points, and thus prevent them from concentrating a large force at any one position.16

Graham was very optimistic in making such a judgment. His estimation was correct to the extent that the Confederates were very concerned about the place, but they did not attempt to "scatter their forces" as he hoped they would. Brigadier General Sickles, Graham's immediate superior, was complimentary of the Colonel's initiative, and made no mention of the fact that he had acted without orders. Indeed, he approved of the whole affair. He wished that he could receive permission to conduct similar missions:
If I am honored with particular instructions as to any place on the shore to be visited, either in small groups or in force, the duty will be promptly, and I believe successfully, performed...there is little doubt that, with the able and enthusiastic co-operation we are sure to receive, if permitted, from the gallant officers of the Flotilla, some useful results may be confidently promised.17

William T. Street of the schooner Dana also believed the expedition was a success, and thought that it would throw the rebels into a "great state of trepidation" over the unprotected portions of the river. Hooker simply noted that:

The expedition was projected without my authority or even knowledge. As it appears to have had no unfortunate sequence...I shall not censure him [Graham], but in future [sic] no operations will be projected without my sanction; otherwise my command may be dishonored before I know it.18

McClellan ordered Graham's arrest, but the Colonel was released when Hooker found that the buildings destroyed had in fact been used by the Confederates for military purposes. McClellan was not pleased with the possibility that such eagerness could lead to a major confrontation before he was ready for it.19

These events were only the beginnings of a large amount of action which took place on the Lower Potomac during November. On November 1, Hooker's guns fired seven shots, some of which may have hit the Page, but he considered the field pieces to be largely ineffective. He had allowed the firing only to give his young officers
some target practice. Two weeks later, a schooner loaded with wood came under hostile fire when the wind died. The crew abandoned her, and the rebels sent out a detachment of men who set her afire. Hooker had meanwhile dispatched a battalion of the 1st Massachusetts and a section of Lieutenant Colonel Getty's battery to prevent her destruction. Some Massachusetts infantrymen got ahold of a small boat, boarded the schooner, extinguished the flames, and guided her out of danger. Lieutenant Adelbert Ames of the Fifth Artillery, commanding Battery A, claimed that the rebels had fired 100 shots at the schooner, but all had missed.

The exhibition of miserable marksmanship continued the following day. Hooker laughingly told Adjutant General Williams:

...the rebels have discharged no less than seventy or eighty guns at a solitary steamer passing down the river without effect. It cannot be possible that they will persevere much longer in their fruitless efforts to close the navigation of the river...it is not in their power to present any formidable barrier to the almost uninterrupted passage of vessels up and down the Potomac. I am aware that a different opinion prevails among those whose experience would entitle their opinion to more consideration than my own, and for that reason it is with some reluctance that I advance it; nevertheless it is my conviction...of all the rebel firing since I have been on the river, and it has been immense, but two of their shot have taken effect, and that was the wood schooner anchored in the middle of the river. /Possibly he means the Mystic, or perhaps the ship which the 1st Massachusetts saved./ She was hit twice, once in her hull and once in her main-sail, if that may be called a hit. With
a light breeze or a favorable current, a seventy-
four line-of-battle-ship can ascend or de-
send the river at night with impunity.21
(emphasis added.)

Hooker began to worry about the onset of winter. On
November 5 he had twenty teams of horses stuck in the mud,
necessitating that supplies be brought in exclusively by
water. By November 15, he had been instructed to concen-
trate his division between Budd's Ferry and Sandy Point,
which allowed him to watch the rebels' movements more
closely and also shortened the supply route from the land-
ing on Mattawoman Creek to the troops' camps. He told
Craven that he had to move the landing point closer to the
mouth of the creek than Rum Point. Land communication to
Washington was forbidden except via horseback. No teams
were permitted to pull wagons. Hooker wished to spare his
teams the exhaustion of hauling supplies through heavy mud.
Brigade hospitals were established in order to end the
transfer of sick men to Washington, a practice which had
led to prolonged absences of both the ill and those trans-
porting them.

Hooker also became concerned with the need for winter
housing. Williams informed him that his present position
was not regarded as permanent, and thus he should build
only temporary shelter rather than elaborate stabling for
his horses. Winter huts were not yet ready, since the
troops believed that they were going to be sent to South

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Finally, the men built comfortable winter huts when the weather turned too cold for them to wait any longer. Hooker knew that navigation on the river might at any time be interrupted by ice, and McClellan instructed him to store six weeks' supplies in order to provide against his being cut off from Washington. 22

Another brigade joined Hooker's division on November 28. This was the "Jersey Blues," which consisted of the 5th, 6th, 7th, and 8th New Jersey volunteer regiments under Colonel Samuel H. Starr. The brigade added 4,000 men to Hooker's forces. Smith's and Bunting's New York batteries and a detachment of Battery E, 1st U.S. Artillery, also arrived. Camping at Chicamuxen Creek, the Jersey boys did a lot of drilling and drumming, and a joke passed around the division that the rebel commander across the river had sent word to Hooker, complaining that he would have to evacuate his position if Hooker could not keep the Jersey Brigade from drumming and disturbing his troops' sleep. 23

Hooker's men lacked adequate weapons. When he inspected the Jersey Brigade on December 9, he found that many men were supplied with old flintlocks, which needed to be replaced. In the 5th New Jersey, 91 men had no firearms whatever, while others had weapons that were unserviceable due to defects or missing parts. The same was true in the 7th regiment, though no man was unarmed. In
the 8th, only one weapon in ten was serviceable. Hooker's problems in acquiring arms and ammunition continued, probably because McClellan gave first priority to those troops who occupied the land north of Washington, where he believed the greatest threat existed.

Winter camp life was difficult but not uninteresting for Hooker's men. The weather was unpleasant, especially after Christmas. The river froze, as Hooker had feared, on January 6, 1862. Four days later, the ice melted but torrential rains began and created bottomless mud roads. Freeze and thaw then alternated the balance of the winter. When the weather permitted, Hooker drilled the troops, and always paid strict attention to their discipline. Everyone had to "toe the mark." "It is safe to say," wrote a member of the Jersey Brigade, "that when we landed on the Peninsula in the spring of 1862, there was no finer division in the Army of the Potomac." The troops liked Hooker and took pride in their performance.

Artillery duels with the rebels often enlivened the camps. One New Jersey soldier wrote in his diary on December 19:

We had lots of sport yesterday firing into the rebel batteries at Shipping Point opposite....we fired in all about fifty rounds. It required some time before we got the range of the battery, the distance being about two miles. After that we hit them at every pop. Usually the rebels do not think it worthwhile to answer our shots from the light batteries, but this

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time they got mad and opened fire on us with nine-inch shell. The moment the guard sees the flash from their gun he cries out "here she comes" and all hands tumble head over heels into the hole, where they lie in a heap until the shell has passed over or burst. The first shell burst in the ground a few hundred feet past us, a piece of some eight-pound weight flying back...and striking within ten feet of the Captain. The next shell burst in the water in front of us. The balance of their shells went over us, bursting after they had passed us. Two did not go off; these we dug up together with a solid shot and took them to camp. While the boys were digging up the first one another shell came along striking in the same place; fortunately it did not burst else their cake would have been dough.

The report reaches us about four seconds before the shell. Then the shell comes whizzing along slowly - with the fuze burning; if they should happen to burst over the pit we would all go to the devil; a section of Smith's battery were driven out last week. The cause of the shell not bursting is owing to the poor fuzes. Toward evening we had quite a laugh at a lieutenant of the 1st Massachusetts pickets; he was standing in front of a low negro cabin and boasting that he would never run under cover when a shell came; a few minutes afterwards a shell went through the roof of the cabin behind him, and a more frightened man I never saw. We did not have the luck to have any gunboats pass that day; whenever that is the case they have a lively time....

The trooper also noted,

Oysters in the shell are very cheap here, twenty-five for ten cents...they are very good on the half-shell....

Hooker began using what he termed "horse marines" along the river. These were cavalry pickets who patrolled up and down the shoreline, occasionally dismounting and taking to boats. A week before Christmas, the Third Indiana Cavalry caught a sloop, the Victory, which had

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been engaged in the rebel trade. The crew escaped, but the Indiana "horse marines" captured the cargo. The load, amounting to forty tons, consisted of 86,250 percussion caps, 43 pounds of flax thread, 87 dozen fancy brass buttons, tools, utensils, clothing, and money. The ship had come out of Baltimore. Hooker sent the cargo to Washington but retained the sloop for his division's use. 27

On Christmas day the Navy Department received the offer of a fine present from Caleb S. Wright, who operated two ships which ran daily between the capital and Rum Point. Wright greatly feared that the rebels were going to erect a battery at Hallowing Point, about seven miles below Mount Vernon. This was a narrow point of the river, and vessels drawing more than six feet had to pass within a quarter-mile of the rebel shore. Mr. Wright offered to land 1,000 of Hooker's troops there, for nothing, immediately. The present was politely declined. 28

During the Christmas season, Hooker said that he would go to Washington for part of the holidays,

...if I had anyone to leave my command with, except Sickles, with whom I would expect to have it dishonored in less than twelve hours after leaving. 29

Such sentiments must have been kept secret, because Sickles later became one of Hooker's few boosters for higher rank. This statement was indicative of the argument that Hooker and his subordinate had been carrying on
for some time. I apparently started with a disagreement over the use of ambulances, which Hooker claimed Sickles' brigade had used to transport lazy soldiers. Hooker also thought that Sickles' men were poorly disciplined, and the 74th New York's unauthorized excursion to Mathias Point had been a perfect example. Sickles complained to McClellan about such accusations, but Hooker dryly told the commanding General,

In my official intercourse with veteran politicians suddenly raised to high military rank, I have found it necessary to observe their correspondence with especial circumspection. 30

It appears as if Hooker was lecturing McClellan, but his commander was probably well aware of Sickles' reputation. Sickles had been an uncompromising, outspoken Democratic congressman prior to the war, but had somehow managed to get Lincoln's authorization to raise a brigade. This nomination was never approved by the Senate, and some partisans and newspapers claimed that any troops raised by Sickles would "march off to Jeff Davis in the first battle in which they were engaged." As a result, Sickles spent much of his time in Washington, trying to get his nomination approved. He had little time left to attend to military matters. In the end, the Senate negated Sickles' appointment, and Hooker requested a competent man to lead the brigade. When told to make his own appointment, his choice was one of Sickles' own junior officers from the
"Excelsior," and this caused more controversy. Sickles was left in Washington when Hooker left for the Peninsula in the spring, but in the meantime, the troublesome relationship between the two generals served only to hamper the division's operations.\textsuperscript{31}

Sickles was not the only officer who caused problems. General Henry M. Naglee, a McClellan appointee, was placed in charge of the First Brigade. Most of the troops disliked him. Once, when he gave orders to build a jail "without a crack or an opening," his orders were followed to the letter, and the new jail had no door. Interestingly, when McClellan summoned a council of war later in the spring, Naglee was present, while his superior, Hooker, was not. Hooker was believed to have disliked Naglee himself, beginning when Naglee took almost all of the shots during an artillery practice with new Whitworth guns, leaving few for Hooker and the artillery captains.\textsuperscript{32}

The greatest confrontation took place between Hooker and McClellan himself. On various occasion, they had disagreements over certain points: the number of troops assigned to Hooker; the sort of weapons which the men possessed; and the initial disagreement over Hooker's proposed invasion of Possum Nose. On January 10, the two met, and Hooker probably pushed for a move across the river. Ten days later, he received McClellan's request to make the move against the batteries, if for no other
purpose than throwing the rebel guns in the river. McClellan wanted to get Hooker's views of the feasibility of such a plan prior to its enactment, and a week later, Hooker's ideas were down on paper. They were complex, calling for a three-day, three-pronged move against Aquia and the rebel communications, a frontal attack on Evansport and Cockpit Point, and a rear attack across the Neabsco or Powell Creek. The plans were not well formulated, and Hooker added, almost as an afterthought, that another division would be needed to make the plan feasible. 33

R. H. Wyman, the Flotilla's new commander, warned that he did not have sufficient vessels for such a plan. He had only eleven steamers, all of which were very vulnerable, and could carry no more than 1,000 men. He recommended that the steamers two barges and launches filled with troops rather than take men aboard themselves. All that was needed, then, to put the plan into operation were the necessary barges and another division of troops: Hooker said that General Samuel P. Heintzelman could bring up his troops to aid the movement, and claimed that all he wished to do was clear the river of batteries, not enter into a major pitched battle. He emphasized that this operation would need "great secrecy, dispatch, resolution, and, indeed, all the brightest virtues of a soldier." He figured 4,000 troops of his division would take part, and would cross in canal boats, towed by Flotilla steamers.

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His planning was hampered by the miserable weather, which made observations by balloon impossible.\textsuperscript{34}

Though Hooker underestimated his enemy's strength, the fact remains that he was one of the few men in high rank on either side who was not solely concerned with the defense of his position, but was offensively-minded. He was not far wrong in supposing the rebel batteries' supports to be widely scattered, and this factor could well have been decisive had the move been made. On January 27, the same day that Hooker submitted the plan to McClellan, Lincoln issued General War Order Number One, ordering the armies to move on or by February 22. The President and his new Secretary of War, E. M. Stanton, were tired of waiting for action. Largely because of this order, Hooker received the go-ahead from a skeptical McClellan, who consented to the President against his better judgement. Knowing McClellan had plans of his own, Hooker reassured him that the destruction of the batteries would "in no way expose the future intentions of the Major General in the conduct of the war." The expedition as authorized consisted of 4,000 men, but was not the three-pronged movement Hooker had originally envisioned. Still, it was a move. On February 15 the troops were ready, but canal boats and barges had not arrived. A week later, McClellan offered the support of the ironclad Ericsson and another 10,000 or even 15,000 men. But Hooker waited too long,
and on February 27, after convincing Lincoln of the need to delay longer, McClellan told Hooker to make no move until he received further orders. Some believed McClellan had helped to scuttle the plan, as literally everyone — in Washington, on the boats at Rum Point, and even the Baltimore papers — seemed to know of it. Hooker had earlier been appalled at the loose talk in Washington. Now, it was out of the question to go ahead with the offensive when there had been no secrecy whatever.  

Had he been able to make the move on the 15th it may have succeeded, but two weeks later it could well have been suicidal. But on the fifteenth, the originally-appointed day, things were greatly disorganized. Hooker had no boats, and he did not know to what extent the Flotilla was ready to cooperate. He wanted a dark, misty night, but February 15 was crisp and clear. He simply stated, "It is out of the question to make the attack tonight." He did not know whether the barges would hold 4,000 troops even when they finally did arrive, and he feared that if he experimented to see what the capacity was, he would attract attention. He knew that if his forces were detected too early, the rebels could bring in reinforcements from Dumfries, so a moonlit night with snow on the ground would be fatal to his plans. He considered a favorable morning more important than the addition of the Ericsson (later known as the Monitor) to his forces.
Officially, McClellan cancelled the move upon getting the unfavorable report of Brigadier General Barnard, who termed the operation "impracticable." Hooker, upset over the lack of secrecy, probably wondered exactly how word of the operation got out in the first place. His Chief of Artillery, C. W. Wainwright, said that "all Washington knows of it," and suspected that McClellan had intentionally let word of the plan get around. This provided an excuse for cancelling the operation and gained more time for planning the operation in which McClellan had more faith: the invasion from the Chesapeake at Urbanna, with an overland march to Richmond. It also was an "easy way of letting Hooker down," Wainwright thought: rather than telling Hooker he had better plans, McClellan could tell him that the lack of secrecy made success impossible. 37

Neither Hooker nor McClellan could know that within only two weeks, Hooker would indeed be across the river, and McClellan would have to re-shape and re-think his plans for a drive on Richmond. Neither man could possibly have known that the rebels were so afraid of a Federal flanking move as to suddenly and precipitously abandon the positions which for so long had plagued and bedeviled the Flotilla and the capital itself.
Part 2
The Citizens of Lower Maryland:
"...the ruthless hands of those very friends who came here to protect us...."

The citizens of Charles County, Maryland, must have felt like the residents of occupied enemy territory. The state as yet had not seceded, but the southern sympathies of many residents were well known. Union troops, sent to keep order and make sure the state did not vote for secession, caused bitter resentment among the citizens. Long after the election, the Port Tobacco Times felt sufficient cause to run an editorial disputing the assertion that Union troops were present for their protection. The state had cast its vote for the Union, and the county was thus a loyal county:

...in fact, we are exposed to more danger, to more losses and damage or at least as much as if these very rebels whom we are to be protected against were here. Our farmers are deprived of their provender to such an extent that their cattle must die....fences, farms, and fields fall prey to the ruthless hands of those very friends who came here to protect us.38

The indignities began as early as June 20, 1861, when Union troops landed at Chapel Point, went to the home of Captain Samuel Cox, and demanded that he surrender arms which were owned by the state. They reached a peak when Hooker arrived with his division and began to arrest many
citizens, sending them to Washington for questioning. Hooker's first contact with the situation in Charles County was through Colonel Robert Cowdin of the 1st Massachusetts, whose regiment was temporarily detached to police the county. Cowdin told Hooker there was no doubt that troops had been raised in the county for the rebel army, adding that the sympathies of the population were definitely with the Confederates. Hooker told Cowdin to keep his eye on the Potomac, and to not search any homes unless he was very sure that those houses were used by the rebels as depots for contraband arms and supplies. Still, such search and seizure could not help but create animosity between citizens and soldiers.39

Quite often, those civilians most suspected of secessionist activity were those who resided near the river and could thus easily communicate, by boat or signal, with the rebel shore. Especially suspect were the Posey family, who resided near Budd's Ferry; the widow Budd; and the Runyeas and the Masons, who lived a few miles down-river from the ferry. Mr. Posey was arrested in October on charges of communicating with the rebels, and although he was later released, the Federals continued to watch him closely. His daughters were suspected of signalling the Virginia shore with mirrors and lanterns. Mrs. Budd and Poseys were involved in a clandestine cross-river mail service, operated jointly with Mr. Evans of Evansport.

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The Federals used both the Budd house - which the widow abandoned when she discovered the rebel guns pointed directly at her - and the Posey house for shelter. The Budd home suffered immensely from misuse at the soldiers' hands, and the troops burned it to the ground when they left in the spring.

The soldiers quickly discovered that there were a great many "widows" in Charles County. Soon they realized that these women had husbands who were alive and well in the rebel army, but they hoped to save their property from confiscation by posing as widows. It was truly a difficult position for the women to be in, and the soldiers were not always sympathetic or understanding of their plight.

Hooker found it difficult to obtain reliable information from the citizens, and attributed this to their predominantly secessionist sentiments. He cooperated fully with the government's efforts to defeat the secessionists in the November election, breaking up the gathering at White Horse Tavern and arresting Perry Davis. Aided by special agent Lafayette C. Baker of the State Department, he attempted to arrest as many "traitors" as possible. His Indiana "horse marines" spent much of their time breaking up the regular, well-protected mail service between Baltimore and Richmond. The Flotilla could not stop every
small boat that crossed the river, but the "horse marines" began picketing in the river, either mounted in shallow water, or paddling about without their horses in small boats. These devices proved to be successful, though they were not infallible.

Civilian resentment for past mistreatment was difficult to cope with. Brigadier General George Sykes, accompanying the Jersey Brigade in its election duties prior to its assignment to Hooker's division, reported that the inhabitants were at first very alarmed at his arrival. However, they later said that had the Jersey troops been the first to visit them, there would not have been the great alienation which had occurred earlier; the first Union troopers had confiscated slaves and horses and destroyed private property. As a result, many people had become antagonistic to the Union cause; others fled across the river. General Lafayette C. Baker reported later in November that the people of Port Tobacco bitterly resented the treatment they had received at the hands of Colonel Graham's 74th New York regiment. General Baker defended Graham, saying that there were only four or five "Union people" in town anyway, and the residents had probably been the first aggressors.

This may or may not have been the case, but there is no doubt that a great deal of illegal trafficking went on
out of Port Tobacco and its immediate vicinity. Mr. George
Dent and Mr. Thomas A. Jones were two men who operated out
of the Port Tobacco River and Pope's Creek, across from
Mathias Point. Jones noted that due to the sun's reflec-
tion, it was difficult to see a small boat on the river
near sunset, so he made most of his movements at that
time. If conditions were not safe, the daughter of Major
Roderick Watson would hang a clack signal in her window.
Many others simply entered the rebel forces. One group
of alienated Marylanders, the 1st Maryland Confederate
Light Artillery, were among the troops stationed at the
Shipping Point batteries.

In an effort to reduce this antagonism, McClellan
told Hooker that since no confiscation act had yet been
passed, no military commander could take possession of
private property. Such action would amount to "pillage"
and would be "strictly suppressed." This referred to run-
away slaves as well. Slaves who had been employed by re-
bel forces for military purposes could be used for "pub-
lic service" by the Federals, but those who were fugitives
from civilian masters had to be refused admittance to the
camp. Hooker, displeased with this, told slaveowners that
they would be welcome to search the camps for their miss-
ing slaves, but if they got into a row with the soldiers,
they would be locked up as ordinary troublemakers. Need-
less to say, most runaways were safe in Hooker's camps.
These efforts were far from sufficient or successful. Illegal traffic continued, largely unabated. Only the retreat of the Confederate forces brought it to a halt.

Part 3
The Federals' Innovative Observation System:
"...from the balloon no doubt I shall be able to furnish you with more specific and satisfactory information...."

The concept of using balloons for observation purposes had first come to President Lincoln's attention early in the war, when Professor Thaddeus C. Lowe of Cincinnati demonstrated the practicality of direct telegraphic communication from an "aerial station" to some point on the ground. Lincoln had attempted to interest General Scott in the idea, but the old soldier was less than enthusiastic. McClellan, however, was young and innovative, and employed Lowe and several other balloonists - "aeronaughts," they called themselves - in his army. Though the "aeronaughts" were rivals and did not always get along, especially in the case of Lowe and John LaMountain, they performed a valuable service. Their faith in their craft and use of a "high eastern wind" enabled them to get excellent views of rebel positions which often proved to be of great value to Union commanders. 46

Balloon equipment was present at several points along the Federal Potomac River lines. Hooker at Budd's Ferry
was the first to receive his full complement of aeronautic equipment. He had been employing spies, with less than spectacular success, in an effort to discover the number of troops facing him. McClellan felt that he could use a balloon for this purpose, as well as that of discovering where the Page was located and observing the movements and additions of various batteries.

On November 10, Lowe and his assistant, William Paullin, arrived at Stump Neck with the balloon Constitution and asked for an officer and a crew of men to assist in the operations. Though he supplied the men, Hooker was slow to approve of the balloon. He was very curious about its principles, but he vacillated between praise and condemnation of the contraption. This was largely due to the seeming ineptness of Paullin, and the terrible weather which hindered both the ascent and the visibility. Eventually, he recognized its value, and even made an ascent himself.

As many as three men could ascend in the balloon to a height of 1000 feet. Lowe, Paullin, and General Sickles made the first ascent at Stump Neck. Their initial observations were enough to prove that the rebels had not reduced their forces, as Hooker had at one time thought. Hooker had the Constitution moved to Budd's Ferry, nearer his headquarters. Lowe went back to Washington to make arrangements for other balloons, and Paullin was left in
charge of Hooker's balloon. His first solo ascensions identified guns at the Shipping Point batteries, the Bull Run Parrott rifle, some camouflaged gun positions, and a large number of troops. These observations added nothing new, but confirmed or gave a fuller picture to what was already suspected. Hooker was impressed with this beginning, commenting at one point to Adjutant General Williams, "...from the balloon no doubt I shall be able to furnish you with more specific and satisfactory information...".

Then a series of setbacks occurred. Favorable weather disappeared, and winds and mists replaced the calm, clear skies for two weeks. Hooker became impatient, and Lowe, instead of returning with a supply of iron and acid for the balloon's gas generator, was delayed in Washington. When he finally arrived, he left only enough materials to fill the balloon once. Paullin ascended on November 29 and drew rebel fire. The shots burst within fifty yards of him, and a fragment supposedly struck his car. He got back unharmed, but that evening a storm came up which compelled him to discharge the balloon's gas to prevent damage. Only then did he discover his lack of supplies, and he had no hydrogen for a new ascent. Hooker became very annoyed, denouncing the balloon in general and Paullin in particular, though Lowe and the weather were actually more at fault. Hooker wrote to Adjutant General Williams,
The history of the balloon while here is one of accidents and failures. I almost despair of being able to run it to any account at this season of the year. Hitherto we have been prevented from taking any satisfactory observations from the rain, wind, or smoky state of the atmosphere, and now we have no gas. In the hands of its present manager I apprehend we will find it of little or no service.

Paullin restored Hooker's confidence on December 8. Finally well-supplied with hydrogen, he made ten ascents in two days of good weather. Hooker had wanted a draughtsman to go up with Paullin and draw a map of the rebel positions. That day, Colonel William Small of the 26th Pennsylvania undertook this mission, and, braving the rebel shells that burst within 200 feet of him, he drew an excellent map. By comparing campfires and tentage with that of the Union side of the river, Colonel Small estimated that there were 12,000 rebel troops within his vision. The colonel praised Paullin in his report to Hooker:

Mr. Paullin, the aeronaut in charge of the balloon, is entitled to much credit for the skill and zeal displayed in conducting the ascensions and in seconding my efforts to comply with your instructions.

Colonel Cowdin of the 1st Massachusetts also went up and praised Paullin's work. Finally, Hooker's enthusiasm became so well restored that he himself ascended. Hooker now began to trust in, and depend upon, the balloon. By March, he obviously recognized its value. When there appeared to be a rebel buildup on March 5, he
told Williams that he would ascertain from the balloon whether the reports were true or not. Without the balloon, estimates of troop strengths would have been inaccurate. The only means available for such estimates, other than spies and informers, was the amount of smoke from enemy campfires, a very unreliable source of information at best.  

Though Paullin regained Hooker's favor, he lost that of Lowe by carrying on an ambrotype business in camp in addition to his official balloon duties...Lowe dismissed him and replaced him with Ebenezer Seaver. Lowe's father, Clovis Lowe, was Seaver's assistant. Seaver took his duties very seriously, but he had his quirks: he wore a gaudy, unofficial uniform and possessed a highly pompous attitude. He was skillful and able, however, so the elder Lowe and the officers cooperated with him, though they occasionally made fun of his peculiarities. Upon being appointed to his new position, Seaver made a statement which undoubtedly dumbfounded Hooker:

...I hereby announce my determination to permit no one to interfere with or dictate to me in the performance of the duties appertaining to the proper performance of the charge entrusted to me. Hereafter all orders in any way relating to the management of the balloon will be given by myself in person, or by someone especially authorized by me. (emphasis added.)

Hooker probably was a bit surprised to learn that
Seaver outranked him. Ebeneezer was, after all, employed by the War Department. But Hooker never recorded any complaints about Seaver's performance, so the new man must have worked efficiently.

Another innovation used on the Lower Potomac was the "balloon boat." This was the G. W. Parke Custis, added to the balloon equipment late in November. She had a single flat deck and a shallow draught. Having no engines, it had to be towed or poled into position. With its draught, it could be placed in positions that would be otherwise inaccessible. The boat provided quick, easy transportation of the balloon equipment and permitted ascensions over water. Calcium lights were occasionally used on night ascensions over the river. 55

The rebels detested and feared the balloon as much as the Federals hated their torpedos. They knew that the Federals could observe their movements, positions, and numbers, so they felt that their plans were laid bare. Johnston told Whiting on December 5 that if there was a major confrontation, "the infernal balloon" could well deny them any great success. On one occasion, every gun available opened on the Constitution as it ascended, and the noise from this barrage was heard all the way to Washington, leading one Union general to believe that a major engagement was taking place downriver. Despite all

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the shots thrown at it, the rebels never succeeded in hitting the balloon. 56

The balloon aided Hooker in making his plans for the assault on the rebel positions. It was information gathered during the aerial observations that led him to believe he could defeat the forces gathered against him. Though Hooker had been skeptical and at times difficult to deal with, in the end he proved himself to be open-minded, receptive, and appreciative of this innovation in warfare.
NOTES TO CHAPTER III

Part 1


2. Herbert, Joe Hooker, pp. 51-53. Herbert bluntly states that the 11th Massachusetts "behaved miserably at Bull Run."

3. Herbert, Joe Hooker, pp. 52-53.


Also see Herbert, Joe Hooker, p. 53, concerning Colonel Cowdin's findings in Lower Maryland.

5. The regiments of Hooker's division are listed in Herbert, Joe Hooker, pp. 51, 54, 60-61; his instructions from McClellan are detailed on p. 55. For information concerning the 1st Michigan, see pp. 57-58.

6. Hooker's conference with Craven is described in Herbert, Joe Hooker, pp. 57-58. Hooker's attitude concerning the Page can be found in Joseph Mills Hanson, Bull Run Remembers (Manassas, Va.: National Capitol Publishers, Inc., 1961), pp. 50-51. For Williamson's report to the Adjutant General, see report, Williamson to Williams, Oct. 25, 1861, in OR, Series I, Volume V, pp. 375-76.

7. Martin A. Haynes, A History of the Second Regiment New Hampshire Volunteer Infantry in the War of the Rebellion (Manchester, New Hampshire: Charles F. Livingston, 1865), pp. 33-35, describes the camp life of Hooker's troops during the winter of 1861-62. Also consult Letter, Hooker to Williams, October 26, 1861, Old Military Records Division, Record Group (RG) 94, Letters Received, Army of
the Potomac (AP), 1861, National Archives, Washington, D.C.


10. Letter, Craven to Welles, October 31, 1861; letter, Hooker to Williams, October 28, 1861. Both in U. S. Navy Department, Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies in the War of the Rebellion (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1897), pp. 742-43 and 384-85, respectively. These records are hereafter cited as NR.

11. Letter, Williamson to Williams, October 29, 1861; Williams (for McClellan) to Hooker, October 31, 1861. Both in OR, Series I, Volume V, pp. 376-77; 635-36. The latter is also available in the Old Military Records Division, RG 393, AP #1, Letters Sent, July 1861 - February 1862, in the National Archives, Washington, D.C. See also Mary Alice Wills, The Confederate Blockade of Washington, D.C. 1861-1862 (Parsons, W. Va.: McClain Printing Company, 1975), p. 133.

12. Herbert, Joe Hooker, p. 58.

13. Herbert, Joe Hooker, pp. 56-59 concerns Hooker's opinion of the batteries and his status in the eyes of the Joint Committee. See Hooker to Williams, November 1, 1861, in OR, Series I, Volume V, p. 638.

14. Herbert, Joe Hooker, p. 61. Wills, Confederate Blockade, p. 112 gives an account of the Mystic. Also see Hooker's letters to Williams of November 3 and 11, 1861, in OR, Series I, Volume V, pp. 640, 648-49, for his accounts of steamers passing on the river.


17. Sickles to Wm. H. Lawrence, Acting Assistant Adjutant General, November 12, 1861, in OR, Series I, Volume V, pp. 408-09.

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20. Letters, Hooker to Williams, November 1 and November 14, 1861. In OR, Series I, Volume V, pp. 638 and 421-22 respectively.


22. Hooker's winter concerns are well-chronicled. See Herbert, Joe Hooker, pp. 60-61; Hooker to Williams, November 5, 1861, in OR, Series I, Volume V, pp. 642-43; Hooker to Craven, November 15, 1861, in NR, Series I, Volume IV, pp. 753-54.

Also consult Old Military Records Division, RG 393, AP, Letters Sent, July 1861-February 1862. There are many communications present concerning Hooker's winter camps. Most revealing are Williams' letters to Hooker of November 13, November 22, and December 20, 1861.


24. Letter, Hooker to Williams, December 9, 1861, in Old Military Records Division, RG 94, Office of the Adjutant General, Letters Sent and Received, AP, Box I, National Archives, Washington, D.C. Hooker complains in this letter about the faulty weaponry of the Jersey Brigade.


27. Letter, Hooker to Williams, December 17, 1861, in OR, Series I, Volume V, p. 469.


29. Herbert, Joe Hooker, p. 66, details the Hooker-Sickles dispute over ambulances.
30. Ibid., p. 66.

31. Ibid., pp. 67-68. The subordinate officer named to replace Sickles was Colonel Nelson Taylor of the 72nd New York.


33. Herbert, Joe Hooker, pp. 68-69, gives the plans which Hooker devised, as well as commenting on its dangers.

34. Letter, Wyman to Hooker, January 24, 1862; letter, Hooker to Williams, January 27, 1862, Both in OR, Series I, Volume V, pp. 707; 709-11.

35. Hanson, Bull Run Remembers, pp. 50-51; Herbert, Joe Hooker, pp. 69-71; letter, Hooker to Williams, February 20, 1862, in OR, Series I, Volume V, pp. 724-25.

36. Letters. Hooker to Williams, February 17, 1862; Hooker to T. Eckert, February 23, 1862; Hooker to R. B. Marcy, February 15, 1862. All in OR, Series I, Volume 5: pp. 723-24; 726-27; 722-23. The Ericsson was none other than the famous Monitor; McClellan had spurred its development for use against the batteries.


Part 2


40. Letters, Nelson Taylor to Sickles, October 22, 1861; Hooker to Williams, October 28, 1861. Both in OR, Series I, Volume V; pp. 372-73; 631-32. Also see letter, Fillebrown to Welles, May 15, 1861, in NR, Series I, Volume IV, p. 464; Wills, Confederate Blockade, pp. 91-93; and Hanson, Bull Run Remembers, p. 45.

41. Wills, Confederate Blockade, pp. 91-93 gives some insight to the "widow" situation in Lower Maryland.

42. Herbert, Joe Hooker, pp. 53, 62 tells of Hooker's dealings with Maryland secessionists. Also see letter, Jno. Withers to Holmes, November 23, 1861, in OR, Series I, Volume V, p. 967, for a description of a mail pickup by Confederate agents.

43. Letter, Sykes to H. W. Smith, November 11, 1861, in OR, Series I, Volume V, pp. 387-88. See also Klapthor and Brown, Charles County, pp. 124-25 for Mr. Jones' description of his sunset crossings.

44. For details on George Dent, consult Wills, Confederate Blockade, p. 51. Consult Scharf, Maryland, concerning the 1st Maryland Confederate Light Artillery.

45. Letters, Assistant Adjutant General to Hooker, December 1 and December 26, 1861. Both in Old Military Records Division, RG 393, AP #1, Letters Sent, July 1861-February 1862, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

Part 3


49. Haydon, Aeronautics, pp. 348-49; Herbert, Joe Hooker, p. 60. Letter, Hooker to Williams, November 16, 1861, in OR, Series I, Volume V, pp. 653-54.

50. Haydon, Aeronautics, pp. 350-54, details Hooker's attitude towards Paullin. Also consult a letter from Hooker to Williams, November 30, 1861, available in the Old Military Records Division, RG 94, Box 1, Pilots, Balloon and Construction Corps, Sutlers, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

51. Letter, Wm. Small to Hooker, December 9, 1861, in Old Military Records, RG 94, Box 1, Pilots, Balloon and Construction Corps, Sutlers, National Archives, Washington, D.C. Small's drawing is available in the Brady Photo Collection of the National Archives. Also consult Haydon, Aeronautics, p. 355-56.

52. Haydon, Aeronautics, pp. 355-56, details the rebels' shooting and Small's praise for Paullin.

53. Haydon, Aeronautics, p. 359. Hooker to Williams, January 8 and March 5, 1862, in OR, Series I, Volume V, pp. 695-96 and p. 735 respectively.


55. Ibid., pp. 256-58 gives specifics on the "balloonboat."

56. Ibid., pp. 357-58 shows the Confederates' concern with the balloon. Letter, Johnston to Whiting, December 5, 1861, in OR, Series I, Volume V, p. 982 contains Johnston's "infernal balloon" statement.
CHAPTER IV
McCLELLAN, LINCOLN, AND HOOKER

"He showed himself incapable at the outset...."

General Hooker and Major General George McClellan, head of all the Union armies, viewed the situation along the Potomac very differently. The batteries were an annoyance to McClellan but were not the biggest problem he faced. He was concerned with major operations all over the country, as well as with the restoration of order and morale to the Army of the Potomac. McClellan was already at the "top;" Hooker was eager for a chance to prove himself and climb further in the estimation of his superiors. What would have been a major operation for Hooker was but a minor one to his commander. Furthermore, McClellan did not think that a cross-river strike had much chance of success. Even if he could be guaranteed of such success, he simply did not want to move in that particular direction.

At first, McClellan was every bit on the defensive as Johnston was. He believed that Johnston confronted him with a force that was much larger than his own. Allen Pinkerton spied for him and told him the rebel army was 150,000 strong, and 18,000 of them were at Dunfries.¹ Just as Johnston feared a Union crossing, McClellan

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suspected that Johnston would cross the river and invade Maryland. In August, he warned Welles that he was convinced the Confederates would cross the Potomac in force from Aquia Creek. He urged Welles to bring major warships up from Hampton Roads:

If the Naval Department will render it absolutely impossible for the enemy to cross the river below Washington, the security of the capital will be greatly increased.²

McClellan believed that the Navy was primarily responsible for the defense of the Potomac River and claimed that it was the Navy's fault that the rebels established their blockade. He claimed a larger naval force, present on the river from the war's outset, could have prevented the rebels from placing their guns along the Virginia shore. Welles and the Flotilla officers said that this had been impossible, and claimed that the army had the responsibility of watching the Maryland shoreline. The Navy simply did not have the capacity to police the interior, as was absolutely necessary. The debate raged for some time. In September, McClellan suggested that two brigades of New England troops could carry out coastal operations of the Potomac and Chesapeake, utilizing tugs and propeller boats for transportation. Experienced men from the merchant service would serve as officers, and a naval officer would be present to add his expertise. The whole organization would be under McClellan as "an integral part of the Army of the Potomac." He distrusted
the Navy's ability to land troops properly, so this force could take care of such operations in the inlets of the Chesapeake and the Potomac. This force was eventually organized, but it did not see action along the Potomac. Instead, it went to North Carolina under the command of Ambrose Burnside.  

In October, pressure mounted on McClellan to take some positive action to assist the Navy in clearing the rebel guns from the river. Sickles' Excelsior Brigade received the assignment to police the area around Port Tobacco, but this in itself was insufficient. Welles wanted to detach the Pawnee, Pocahontas, Seminole, and E. B. Forbes from the Flotilla and send them to Port Royal, South Carolina, but he felt that something had to be done about the rebel batteries before these ships passed in front of them. Lincoln agreed, since the full impact of the embarrassing situation was making itself felt. McClellan agreed to land men above Mathias Point and clear the river of the major batteries. Dahlgren and Craven began to assemble the necessary boats. Craven was immensely pleased with the general's willingness to help, but the pleasure was short-lived. McClellan changed his mind, saying his engineers informed him that such a landing was impossible. This annoyed Gustavus Fox, assistant Secretary of the Navy. He grumbled that the business of landing troops was the Navy's affair and no one else's.

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McClellan's decision infuriated Craven, for most of the arrangements had already been made. He felt his own reputation would suffer if the river remained closed. Lincoln was mortified; Fox said the President "manifested more feeling and disappointment than I have ever seen him exhibit...." McClellan, however, would not be swayed. He believed the best way to combat the batteries was by a flanking land march and not a landing from the river. He was not ready for such a march, as he did not yet wish to trigger a major confrontation.  

Lincoln, feeling the economic and political pressures resulting from the blockade, badgered McClellan to move the troops forward as soon as possible. He was relieved when the general finally sent Hooker's troops to protect Lower Maryland, but the blockade was still intact. In December, the President suggested a two-pronged movement to cross the Occoquan and move toward Richmond after taking Centreville and Manassas. But McClellan was taken ill on December 20 with typhoid fever. This effectively halted planning for any sort of move over the river.

Not everyone was sympathetic to McClellan's plight. General John G. Barnard, McClellan's own Chief of Engineers, wrote Senator John Sherman on January 6,

He showed himself incapable in the outset of appreciating and grasping his position by utterly failing to do anything - permitting the Potomac to be blockaded in the face of 250,000 men...until he lost the essential requisites to success - the confidence of the Administration and the country. Who was George B.
McClellan...that this country should wait 2/3'd of a year for some stupendous thing which he would ultimately do, while the enemy in numbers vastly inferior was shutting us up in our very captial! Bah! History records few such opportunities of greatness offered - and so stupendously...lost....

When McClellan recovered from his illness, he found that opinion had shifted against him. Lincoln was exasperated enough with the general's inaction to argue with him at length about the best course to take. Lincoln wanted the batteries disposed of and simply desired the army to get moving, so the country could see that the government was not totally helpless. Like General Barnard, he felt that McClellan had been wasting time and opportunities. He feared for the condition and morale of the army as well, and with good reason. A member of the New York 77th Volunteers wrote:

...it cannot be concealed that while the Grand Army stationed about the Capital panted for action and longed for the glory of the battle-field, a gloom possessed the spirits of the men, and a feeling, that all this splendid material was destined to a "masterly inactivity," prevailed.

Such inactivity could hardly be beneficial. When the army finally did begin to come out of hibernation, Colonel Charles Wainwright noted that drills were disappointing, the officers ignorant, and the men out of condition and "slouchy." The inactivity was not beneficial to the troops, and it left the country wondering exactly what was going on.
Lincoln wanted action, but he and McClellan continued to differ on what exactly should be done. McClellan, thinking he was confronted by 150,000 Confederates, looked for a path around them. He had no intention to fight the rebels on Johnston's terms or on ground that favored the defenders. He began to envision a plan for transporting the army by water from Annapolis to a place called Urbanna, at the mouth of the Rappahannock. This would avoid the Potomac batteries altogether, and would put the Union army between Johnston and Richmond. Johnston would be forced to abandon his entrenchments - including the Potomac batteries - to come to the aid of the rebel capital. He would be forced to do battle close to Richmond - if indeed he got there before McClellan - and a Union Victory there would be decisive. But the President favored a land route through the Manassas-Centreville lines, which would cut the rebel communications and protect the federal capital.9

Lincoln decided to force McClellan's hand. Showing that he considered himself the man in charge of the situation, he issued General War Order Number One on January 27, 1862. In part, the order read:

Ordered that the 22nd. day of February 1862, be the day for a general movement of the Land and Naval forces of the United States against the insurgent forces....the General-in-Chief with all other commanders and subordinates....will severally be held to their strict and full responsibilities, for the prompt execution of this order.10

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Four days later, Lincoln issued "Special War Order Number One," which referred specifically to the Army of the Potomac:

Ordered that all the disposable force of the Army of the Potomac, after providing for the defense of Washington, be formed into an expedition, for the immediate object of seizing and occupying a point upon the Rail Road South Westward of what is known as Manassas Junction, all details to be in the discretion of the general-in-chief, and the expedition to move before, or on, the 22nd. day of February next.11

McClellan was dumbfounded. Lincoln's order would not only make him move sooner than he wished, but it detailed a scheme entirely different from the one he had been planning. He felt sure that if he could put his own plan into operation, the rebels would be forced to abandon the positions which so concerned the President. The Confederates held a strong central position from Dumfries to Manassas. It would be very difficult to break it with a frontal assault. He managed to secure the order's suspension, and then he detailed his plan to the President.12

Lincoln did not care for McClellan's water route for several reasons: the Union army would appear to be moving backward by marching to Annapolis; McClellan would have to leave more troops behind to protect the capital than if he marched overland; and he foresaw delays in both the departure and debarkation. Lincoln detailed his objections on February 3:

You and I have distinct, and different plans for a movement of the Army of the Potomac - yours to be down the Chesapeake, up the Rappa-
hannock to Urbana, *sic*, and across land to the terminus of the railroad in the York River —, mine to move directly to a point on the Railroad South West of Manassas.

If you can give me satisfactory answers to the following questions, I shall gladly yield my plan to yours.

1st. Does not your plan involve a greatly larger expenditure of time, and money than mine?

2nd. Wherein is a victory *more certain* by your plan than mine?

3rd. Wherein is a victory *more valuable* by your plan than mine?

4th. In fact, would it not be less valuable, in this, that it would break no lines of the enemy's *sic* communications, while mine would?

5th. In case of disaster, would not a safe retreat be more difficult by your plan than by mine? 13

McClellan would not be quietly persuaded. He saw his object — the capture of Richmond, not the destruction of the rebel army — to be more valuable than the breaking of rebel communication. He would be able to get quite close to Richmond before encountering any entrenched troops, while Lincoln would have him assault a strong line far from the rebel capital. McClellan believed that Johnston would be expecting exactly the sort of move the President suggested. McClellan's plan would still gain the President's objectives: Johnston would be forced to leave his Dumfries-Manassas lines if the Union threatened Richmond. Even if the President's plan succeeded, Richmond would still be far away. 14

Lincoln agreed that McClellan should consult his generals on the matter. McClellan presented his views to a council of war with twelve generals. The generals voted to move against Richmond from the Rappahannock, without
disturbing the batteries. Voting against this were Generals McDowell, Sumner, Heintzelman, and Barnard. Hooker also opposed the plan, but he was not present at the meeting. The vote of the generals prompted Lincoln to shelve Special War Order Number One. Still, he did not formally approve McClellan's plan until March 8, and he stipulated that action had to begin by the 18th. McClellan had thus gained nearly a month of time, and was allowed put his plan into operation. There was only one catch: Lincoln insisted that an adequate number of troops be left behind to protect the capital, and he wanted assurances that the batteries would be disposed of.15

During February, the Joint Congressional Committee on the Conduct of the War also applied pressure to McClellan. Their main concern was the rebel blockade. In response to these continual pressure from two branches of the government, McClellan let Hooker develop plans for crossing the river and assaulting the rebel positions. He did not like Hooker's plans, but he gave the impression that he would let his eager subordinate go through with them. Indeed, had Hooker moved a bit faster, he might actually have been able to try his scheme. As early as February 8, McClellan and Lincoln talked of supplying Hooker with canal boats for the crossing. Hooker and McClellan set the invasion date at February 15, but the necessary boats were not delivered by that date. Thirty canal boats arrived two days later, but McClellan had not

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determined their capacity. Hooker became exasperated by the delays. 16

McClellan was probably moving reluctantly because he felt he was being forced to make a demonstration on the rebel flank earlier than he wished. His foot-dragging was possibly calculated. He wanted to gain time to get his Urbanna operation underway before he made a Potomac crossing which could scare Johnston into retreating toward Fredericksburg. At the same time, he wished to give the illusion that he was trying to carry out his instructions.

McClellan did not want Hooker's troops to be sitting in Lower Maryland - or even in Dumfries - while his Urbanna campaign was getting under way. He knew that Hooker could probably take a few batteries, but he thought that only a general movement by the army could guarantee success in forcing the rebels to abandon all their Potomac positions, as well as bringing about a confrontation near Richmond. If Hooker was badly beaten, the Union cause would suffer; if he was successful, and Johnston retreated, the Urbanna move could well be ruined. McClellan wanted Johnston to stay where he was until the Urbanna campaign was well under way. He used Barnard's unfavorable view of Hooker's operation, the inadequate supply of vessels, and miserable road conditions as excuses to delay the crossing. 16 On February 27, he instructed Hooker to stay where he was, pending further orders. In later years, McClellan recalled:
I did not regard the inconvenience resulting from the presence of the enemy's batteries on the Potomac as sufficiently great to justify the direct efforts necessary to dislodge them, especially since it was absolutely certain that they would evacuate all their positions as soon as they became aware of the movement down the Chesapeake. It was therefore with the greatest reluctance that I made the arrangements required to carry out the positive orders of the government, and it was with great satisfaction that I found myself relieved from the necessity of making what I knew to be a false and unnecessary movement. 17

Although both he and the Administration may have been pleased, McClellan had to reshuffle his plans when Johnston suddenly withdrew to a line south of the Rappahannock. The movement through Urbanna was off, since the rebels had negated its effectiveness by moving to their new positions. McClellan had sent canal boats and Hooker had made aerial observations, and all the activity alerted Johnston to the fact that something was about to happen. McClellan had not moved quite slowly enough in sending Hooker his equipment; nor had he moved quickly enough with his move to Urbanna. No sooner had Lincoln told him to go ahead than the rebels placed themselves astride his path. McClellan, still set on a water move, turned his attention to the Peninsula between the York and James Rivers.

Had the administration not insisted upon taking the batteries, or had Lincoln given McClellan permission to go ahead with the Urbanna movement a few days earlier, McClellan could conceivably have succeed with his Urbanna movement. In fact, had any one of a great number of
possibilities came about - had McClellan been able to get underway earlier, while simultaneously using Hooker as a diversion, or telling Hooker to keep perfectly still and lull Johnston into a false sense of security, for example - the Union might have been successful. None of these contingencies developed, but McClellan at least was free of the batteries and could pursue his own plans on the Peninsula, with the added assistance of Hooker's division.

By March 13, Lincoln and the rest of Washington was breathing easier. The blockade was finally gone, a threat to the Union Navy by the Merrimac had been suppressed, and McClellan would soon be on the move. Lincoln still had a few directives for the Major General: he wanted troops left at Manassas and Washington, to secure both places. But the rest of the army would move by water - from Washington, now that the batteries were gone - and begin the long-awaited spring offensive. The Peninsular Campaign was about to begin.18
NOTES TO CHAPTER IV

1. Pinkerton's estimates of rebel forces are available in Joseph Mills Hanson's Bull Run Remembers (Manassas, Va.: National Capitol Publishers, Inc., 1961), pp. 62-63. Once report which McClellan refused to believe was that the rebels had mounted "Quaker guns" - logs, carved and painted to resemble cannon - in their works to deceive the Federals.


3. Mary Alice Wills, The Confederate Blockade of Washington, D.C., 1861-1862 (Parsons, W. Va.: McClain Printing Company, 1975), p. 89. See also a letter from McClellan to Simon Cameron, September 6, 1861, in OR, Series I, Volume V, p. 36.

4. Wills, Confederate Blockade, pp. 72-75.

5. Roy P. Basler, ed., The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln, eight volumes (New Brunswick, N. J.: Rutgers University Press, 1953), Volume V, p. 34. Lincoln wrote a memorandum to McClellan on or about December 1, 1861, concerning the "Potomac Campaign," but apparently the memorandum never was given to the Major General. (This source hereafter cited as CWAL)


9. Bruce Catton, *The Army of the Potomac: Mr. Lincoln's Army* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Double-day, Inc., 1962), p. 87. Catton says that McClellan was inspired by another soldier into developing his Urbanna campaign.


For the council of war, see McClellan, *Own Story*, p. 196, and Wills, *Confederate Blockade*, p. 124-25.

For a description of the proposed route and Hooker's objection, see Nevins, ed., *Diary of Battle*, p. 25. Lincoln's desire to keep troops in Washington is well-known. One source is Hughes, *Johnston*, pp. 104-05.


Lincoln showed a great deal of concern about the canal boats. See his letter to McClellan, February 8, 1862, and the accompanying footnote, in Basler, ed., *CWAL*, Volume V, p. 130.

17. This is a peculiar quote. In full, McClellan says "...aware of the movement to the James and York Rivers." (Emphasis added.) There is no evidence to suggest that he had already decided to move from the James and York rather than the Rappanannock. He probably changed his plans only after Johnston changed his positions. See Catton, *Lincoln's Army*, p. 99. Catton believes McClellan planned on going to Urbanna up until the time that the Confederates withdrew to
the Rappahannock. See McClellan, Own Story, p. 197, for
the peculiar quote. Possibly, in recalling the event
years later, McClellan confused the sequence of events.

18. Stanton to McClellan, March 13, 1862, in Basler,
left at Manassas and Washington, but leaves the rest to
McClellan.
CHAPTER V
WASHINGTON SECURED

Part 1
Confederate Apprehensions:
"...the position is difficult and anxious."

Though his guns seriously threatened the physical
and political well-being of Washington, General Joseph E.
Johnston knew that his own position was far from secure.
He uneasily watched the buildup of McClellan's powerful
army. He suspected that General McDowell had seriously
considered turning the rebel right flank, rather than the
left, during the first Manassas campaign. Had McDowell
done so, he would have shortened his own communications
and threatened the Confederate rail line. The inexperience
of his troops induced him to march along easier terrain
and hit the rebels' left flank. Now, McClellan commanded
experienced soldiers. He was an excellent engineer and
was not daunted by the various river crossings he would
have to make should he attack the rebel right. Johnston
wished to continue the blockade, since he understood the
prestige that it brought the Confederacy, and he knew of
the difficulties it caused Washington. Nonetheless, he
was apprehensive that the Federals would launch an attack
on his Potomac positions - as Hooker was indeed planning -
and he kept in constant communication with General
Theophilus Holmes and W. H. C. Whiting. 1

The entire Confederate force shared Johnston's fears. On the very day that the 4th Texas Volunteers arrived at Dumfries, they received three "false alarms" that the "Yankees" had landed in Virginia and were attacking the batteries. Johnston kept a close eye on river traffic, even as his antagonists were doing; he was greatly relieved when thirty-six steamers put out to sea, thus removing what he considered to be a major threat to his shoreline. He made sure the riverbank was well-picketed and was confident that the Federals could not land without being seen. 2

Johnston suffered from misinformation, just as McClellan did. He received word on October 29 that the enemy numbered 15,000 near Budd's Ferry, with eighty pieces of field artillery. He believed they would attack as soon as they acquired sufficient transportation. These figures far exceeded the actual numbers. Actual Union troop strength at that time was 8,000, and there were only eighteen field pieces. Johnston did not know his information was so inaccurate. Little wonder that he prepared his men for defensive rather than offensive operations! 3

Johnston did not fear Hooker's counter-batteries. "At the distance of two miles they cannot kill a man a day," he told Whiting. "I fear landing in force." Hooker thus correctly read Johnston's mind when he reasoned that the rebels would not attack. The Confederates confronted

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much the same problems as Hooker. Winter was approaching, and Johnston was reluctant to build winter huts, fearing that he would have to move as soon as they were finished. Furthermore, he believed that the vicinity near the river was a very unhealthy place to establish a winter camp. The roads were as miserable as the weather. The situation would be very grim indeed if the Federals struck.  

General Whiting grew very apprehensive when Paullin began his balloon reconnaissances. He and P. G. T. Beauregard agreed that the ascensions indicated Federal offensive movements. They made plans to fortify certain hills and to hold the line of the Occoquan in case of attack. Johnston wrote to Secretary of War Judah P. Benjamin that he needed reinforcements, claiming that if the Federals landed in force they could entrench themselves very quickly and would then be difficult to dislodge. Again, this is precisely the plan Hooker had in mind. Johnston knew his forces were thinly stretched, and he could not afford to divide his forces, nor go marching off in support of a besieged position. He needed more troops.  

Johnston continued to receive reports concerning an imminent Federal invasion. Whiting’s report of November 15 indicated that the rebel spies had heard of an operation which the Federals had been planning:

They will attack by the flotilla above and below, and attempt throwing a very large force across ....I have seen [General] French, and he pronounces the batteries untenable against the fire from
the opposite side and the fleets... We have tremendous odds against us, and if they cross the run [probably Neabsco, or Powell's] we shall have a heavy fight... my dear General, the position is difficult and anxious.... 6

This plan had indeed been contemplated by the Union; but, unknown to the rebels, McClellan had called it off.

Johnston's forces had a great deal of territory to cover, and he and his subordinates planned and re-planned their defensive strategy to cover every possibility. Even when he could get reinforcements, they were not always well-trained or well-equipped. On November 16, he discovered that five regiments were arriving from Richmond - all unarmed - and he had only enough weapons for two of them. He sent all five regiments to Whiting for duty in the Potomac batteries. But he had other fronts to worry about, and he told Whiting:

If they [the Federals] come upon you in large numbers, approaching, say, half of their effective force for field operations, the whole of this army would be thrown against them, with a determination to crush them; but if their attack upon you should prove to be only a strong demonstration, or even a real attack with numbers only a little superior to your own, it would not be well to further divide this army.... 7

Constant communications from subordinates led Johnston to believe that the next attack would come along the Potomac, with an additional thrust across the Occoquan to cut the batteries off from the main body of the rebel force. Whiting cried for reinforcements, and Johnston passed along his urgent note to the War Department. He added
that the force was far too weak for the responsibilities it held, and that if the enemy landed at Evansport Whiting would have to fall back. Still, Whiting was confident not only that he would be able to drive the Federals back, but that he could retake the batteries as well. "I shall not hesitate for a moment to sacrifice the blockade of the river - that is, the Evansport batteries - to securing the entire annihilation of his force...." Once the main threat was disposed of, the batteries would be re-captured.  

Jefferson Davis, much like his counterpart in Washington, attempted to counsel Johnston during these tense months of watching and waiting, but there were major differences between Davis and Lincoln. Lincoln was more forceful and demanding with McClellan, while Davis always left the "final decision" to Johnston. Lincoln felt that he was the person in charge, as his "War Orders" signify. He could supply both reinforcements and weapons more easily than Davis, who could only tell his generals, ".... if it were possible, I would send you more troops...."  

While some Federals were worried about Daniel Sickles' recruits, Johnston was beset by doubts about his own men. Major R. L. T. Beale reported late in November:

I think I discover many slight indications of disaffection with our cause....the deprivation of salt, sugar, and coffee is severely felt.... contact with the North in trade had to some extent rendered many very lukewarm....the obvious importance to the North of securing pos-
session of the south bank of the Potomac... would justify strenuous efforts to win over these people, and the unrestricted ingress and egress from Maryland affords every facility to tamper with and mislead them... an officer in the militia, I hear, thinks that over half of his company, if they did not openly take sides with, would at least refuse to fight the Yankees....

Holmes agreed, fearing that not only the absence of goods, but the prolonged absence of fathers and husbands as well, caused a great strain upon those left at home. But he was also confident that if the Federals did not attack soon, then they would not do so for some time, since winter was approaching. He recommended that if an attack did not come soon, he would send a regiment from his batteries to substitute for the militia, which in turn could be sent home.

Much as the Federals feared the cross-river traffic, the rebels feared it as well. Major and Provost Marshall R. L. T. Beale told Secretary of War Judah Benjamin that he feared a "deserter" from Sickles' brigade would come across, be welcomed and taken into the army, and then would slip back to the Federals once he had acquired the desired information. He also noted that the desertions were about equal to the recruits, a fact which hurt the rebel cause tremendously.

The situation grew more strained as the New Year approached. Secretary of War Judah Benjamin figured that there was no longer any sense in trying to continue recruiting efforts in Maryland, as adequate time had already
been expended on the enterprise. On December 16 he told General Holmes that he expected simultaneous attacks upon Mathias Point, Winchester, and Centreville before the end of the week. Brigadier General Holmes complained in turn that the Federals had been firing their counter-batteries for three weeks, inflicting casualties and causing a great deal of inconvenience. But no attack came. The only hostile presence in Virginia was that of a loyal Confederate, furious that the army had dismantled his house and buildings near Dumfries and used the planking for winter quarters.

Colonel Wade Hampton, commanding troops on the Occoquan, scoffed at the reports of imminent invasion. "The fact is, I do not think the enemy will come anywhere, and we ought to beat up his quarters," he told Whiting. He continued confidently:

...if you will allow it, I feel sure that I can bag a large party of the enemy....If we were to send over some infantry, a few guns, and a large force of cavalry, we could stampede the whole camp over there....There is no chance for a fight here, so we will have to look one up.  

Whiting was not of the same mind. He was content to prepare for the anticipated Federal attack. Whiting, French, and Holmes all reported their forces were too small to hold their positions, so Johnston was not about to send Hampton or anyone else out on a wild foray. French complained:
An enemy landing here /Evansport/ or near here would rush to the accomplishment of his object — the capture of the guns — and must be met instantly...for the labor to be performed in strengthening the works by shelters and ditches, and the large guards at night required on the river front, the force is inadequate, and, considering the constant annoyance day and night from the enemy, no troops in this vicinity are as unpleasantly situated.15

In this midst of his concern over his overextended front and the possibility of an assault, Johnston suddenly discovered that his positions had been described in detail in the Richmond Dispatch. Fearing he had been the victim of a Union spy, he complained to Judah Benjamin:

The information it /The article/ contains would be very valuable to the enemy, such as he would pay for liberally, I cannot suppose it innocent-ly published. The author's name is Shepardson or Shepherdson, styled Doctor. I respectfully suggest his arrest....Could not the editor of the paper be included in the accusation?

The letter itself, from Shepherdson under the name "Bohemian," ran as follows:

Today our whole army is engaged in building log houses for winter quarters....Several brigades will remain where they now are, near the fortifications in Centreville....General Kirby Smith's brigade is at Camp Wigfall....near by the whole of Van Dorn's division are making themselves comfortable...a few brigades are scattered down towards the Occoquan....the Cavalry has fallen back a little....General Stuart will remain in the advance. It is probable that General Johnston will occupy the Lewis house....16

Such information could indeed be disastrous. Johnston had no doubt that the Federals had already received the information. Benjamin was sympathetic but there was little he could do with Shepherdson in the Richmond Civil
courts. He told the general to arrest the man if he set foot in camp again. Then he could be given a military trial. Benjamin warned Johnston that he had been too lenient with members of the press, a practice which had to stop.

"Bohemian" undoubtedly caused some realignment of the rebel forces after his letter's publication. Certainly, the incident did nothing to ease Johnston's worries over his vulnerability. He and Holmes anxiously waited while Ambrose Burnside's expedition was fitting out. They expected Burnside to land near Potomac Creek and march on Fredericksburg. Beauregard figured Burnside would strike the Potomac batteries, but he was confident of attaining a "brilliant success." When Burnside's expedition went to North Carolina, the Confederates began to realize that the Federals did not have to attack their river batteries or even Fredericksburg to get to Richmond; a more convenient route, by water, lay open to them. Holmes warned Johnston that "If General McClellan advances, it will certainly be irrespective of our batteries." In this he was correct, though he himself mistakenly thought that the Union commander would strike at Centreville.

Johnston was worried. He recognized that the Federals could send a force by water to the Chesapeake, and come upon Richmond without ever getting within range of his Potomac guns. They could also slip around him and descend
upon Fredericksburg. After the miserable performance of the batteries against the Pensacola, Johnston began to have doubts as to the guns' effectiveness. Despite the proud protestations of his subordinates to the contrary, he told Davis, "I believe that the guns on the Potomac River have very little effect. Vessels pass the batteries at night without much damage." This, added to his expectations of a large Federal attack at Potomac Creek - a move which would easily outflank his long, thin lines - prompted him to meet with Davis and the Cabinet. The meeting took place on February 20. Davis and Johnston agreed to move the army to a new line of defense south of the Rappahannock. This would shorten Johnston's lines and would protect Richmond against drives from the north, the Rappahannock, or from Potomac Creek. Though he would be thirty miles farther from Washington, Johnston would have twenty-eight fewer miles of defensive works to man. Instead of being spread from Leesburg to Dumfries, his troops would be concentrated between Fredericksburg and the Upper Rappahannock.\footnote{19}

Johnston returned to the troops and prepared to move. The weather for such a large-scale movement was unpromising, and rain made the roads nearly impassable. He noted that it took well-mounted officers six and one-half hours to go only twelve miles. With such conditions, he would not be able to move his large guns from their positions.
He feared that the Federals would not give him sufficient
time to evacuate all his stores and equipment, and grew
apprehensive over the repeated Union naval and aerial re-
connaissances. 20

Davis wanted the big guns removed, but Johnston was
resigned to the necessity of leaving them behind. The
move could not be made by water due to Union batteries
and the flotilla's presence, but a water route offered
the only chance of getting the heavy pieces out. John-
ston told Davis, "Much of both kinds of material personal
and army property must be sacrificed in the contemplated
movement." On February 28, he told the President that
the mismanagement of the railroads made preparations for
the movement very difficult, and warned that if the enemy
moved from Harper's Ferry or Charleston upon Winchester,
he would have to make his move without any further delay
which would result in the loss or destruction of a great
amount of material. He repeated that Whiting believed it
would be impossible to remove the heavy guns from along
the river. 21

Davis was concerned that the enemy was so closely
observing Johnston's preparations, and that the Federals
might in fact be ready to move before he was. He told
his general to "disencumber yourself of everything which
would interfere with your rapid movement," noting that
the big guns were badly needed elsewhere. He regretted

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Johnston's appraisal that they had to be abandoned. But once again, he left this judgment to his field commander, confessing ignorance of the situation:

...as has been my custom, I have only sought to present general purposes and views. I rely upon your special knowledge and high ability to effect whatever is practicable in this our hour of need.

Johnston planned to move during the first week of March. On March 3, he warned Davis that not all was going well, due primarily to the condition of the roads and streams. He fretted over the suffering and sickness his men would incur if the weather did not improve, and over the equipment which would inevitably be lost. On the 5th, Whiting observed the activity of Hooker's barges, canal boats, and field pieces, which were being assembled for an assault on the batteries. Johnston feared that his opponent was about to take the field, and told Whiting that his move would begin in two or three days:

It ought to have been done four or five days ago, but the enemy being still and the country in such condition, I didn't like to sacrifice anything. If I telegraph, "It is time," give your orders, and move.23

Part 2
Johnston Abandons the Batteries: "Judge Lynch would have presided at their trial."

President Davis was unaware that Johnston intended to abandon his positions so soon. Incredibly, there appears to have been a breakdown in communications just about at this time. As late as March 4, Davis was apologetically
writing to the General that he was sorry the men had not been granted any furloughs for the past month, and promised to remedy the situation. Nothing whatsoever was said about the impending movement. 24

Johnston's retreat should certainly have come as no surprise to the President. He had been appraised of the situation in February. Johnston reasoned that there were four possible routes his opponents could take: the one used in July through Manassas; a water route to the Rappahannock; a water route to the Peninsula of the York and James Rivers; and a land trek through Maryland, crossing at Potomac Creek. It was this last route that he suspected as being the most likely, especially since Hooker's troops had been showing signs of activity for some time. Were this the route chosen, Johnston figured, McClellan's army would probably be concealed until the time of the crossing. They would then be two days' march closer to Richmond than most of his own forces. He expected to be attacked any time after mid-February, an estimate that corresponded exactly to Hooker's original planned date of February 15. The new line along the Rappahannock enabled him to intercept both Hooker and McClellan. If he guessed incorrectly about the route taken, he would still be closer to Richmond by two days' march, and could quickly move to intercept the Federals. 25

Fearing that McClellan had three times as many men
as he, Johnston decided there was simply no sense in being attacked and outflanked by a vastly superior force. On March 7, Whiting received the go-ahead, and he told Colonel Hampton:

Packing will be commenced at once... during the night provisions will be cooked and distributed to the men... During the night guards are required to maintain perfect order, silence, and discipline... At daylight... the trains will start... preserve the formation of rank and prevent the men from straggling...26

Such a retrograde movement could easily have a discouraging effect upon the men. Colonel John B. Hood told his men:

You must not regard it as a disgrace - it's never a disgrace to retreat when the welfare of your country requires such a movement. You are now leaving... to enter upon a stirring campaign... fraught with the destinies of our young Confederacy. Its success or failure rests upon the soldiers of the South...27

The march began on the 8th, and though some elements did a remarkably thorough job of breaking camp and carrying away their equipment, the movement was not always orderly. Chaplain Charles Davis of the 4th Texas noted,

Of the small amount of personal belongings with which we started, the quartermaster threw away a great part, owing to the wretched condition of the roads, and by so doing bitterly disappointed many, both officers and men.28

Private possessions and the various equipment of infantrymen were not all that was lost on this day. All of the big guns which had guarded the Potomac were left behind, most of them filled with explosive charges and
tightly plugged in order that they would destroy themselves. The gallant little Page was blown up in Quantico Creek, along with the prize Fairfax. Tenting and camping materials of all sorts, ammunition, and even an occasional hot meal were all abandoned, though much material was cunningly hidden. Secretary of War Benjamin had cheerily telegraphed to Holmes just prior to the march, "remove your heavy guns and munitions, preserving in front only such light rifle guns as could be readily withdrawn on approach of the enemy." This was impossible, and that Benjamin could have been so ignorant of the real situation is surprising. He had, however, foreseen one circumstance: Hampton's Legion indeed had trouble breaking contact with the enemy. Heintzelman's pickets attacked that morning, and Hampton's entire force had to be pulled up to repel the spirited Federals. Otherwise, the rebels managed to break away suddenly, to the utter surprise of the Union troops. 29

Hooker and the Flotilla discovered the next morning that the rebels had abandoned their positions. The Anacostia moved in and shelled some of the batteries for an hour without receiving a reply. Large fires at Shipping Point and Evansport made it evident that the Confederates were destroying much of their material. Explosions and fires extended from the shore well back from the river. "Everyone turned out to watch the conflagration," wrote a
Jersey soldier. Jubilant men from the 1st Massachusetts hopped into small boats and raised the flag over Shipping Point. Hooker reported that Whiting had left in "great haste for Fredericksburg, leaving stores of clothing and provisions behind." General R. B. Marcy, McClellan's Chief of Staff, wired back that Hooker should take the batteries and destroy them if he could do so without running any great risk. Hooker immediately instructed Colonel Starr of the Third (Jersey) Brigade to visit the Virginia shore with 500 men and bring back anything of value. They were also to cut away the parapet in order that hawssers could be attached to the guns. The Flotilla could then pull them down to the river. The next day, these 500 men, plus an additional 500 from the First Brigade, went across. They found most of the big guns spiked, but some were still usable. The Federals were impressed with the batteries' formidable construction. They exhumed "graves" full of tools, tents, mess kits, and clothing. Even some large guns were buried. Much private property was left as well. They brought back articles ranging from munitions to bloodhound pups and "Underwood's Boston Pickles."\(^3^0\)

The Union troops discovered extensive batteries and large camps. "The deserted camps were found supplied with everything needful for winter quarters," wrote a Massachusetts trooper. Huts were of logs with floors and roofs of board, glazed windows, and in at least one case green curtains. There were plenty of arrangements and utensils
for cooking, too. "In one instance, a table had been set...the meat was already cut, and the cakes by the
fire...the occupants of the place were in too much of a
hurry to stop for lunch." But everything was found to be
very filthy. "The houses were infested with vermin, damp,
and black with smoke, and most of our men would rather
sleep on the ground than in one of them." This may have
been exaggeration; but in a coffin warehouse there were
twelve completed coffins and an order from one regiment
for twenty-four a fact which may indicate unhealthy camp
conditions. Company rolls indicated a high death rate
among the rebels, confirming Johnston's belief that the
place was an unhealthy one for a winter campe. 31

The situation was not the same in all quarters. At
Cockpit Point, Captain Frobel of the 5th Alabama Volun-
teers made sure that nothing of any use was left behind.
Powder was emptied from shells, and then the shells were
buried. Active resistance occurred when three guerrillas,
caught attempting to regain some of the rebel property,
shot and killed a private of the 2nd New Hampshire. The
regiment was furious, for the victim's companion swore
that the man had surrendered but was shot anyway. The
reimental historian grumbled that had the guerrillas been
captured, "Judge Lynch would have presided at their trial."32

Meanwhile, Hooker felt triumphant. "Everything left
behind indicates they left hastily and in great confusion,"
he exulted. Many big guns were damaged, including the English rifled 98-pounder, but many gun carriages were destroyed. Hooker had his men tumble the guns over the embankment, where the Flotilla could easily get to them. R. H. Wyman, the Flotilla's commanding officer, reported that though the rebels had set fire to everything and many guns were burst or dismounted, large quantities of shot and shell had been saved by quick Union action. He supposed that the rebel transportation system was seriously deficient, for huge amounts of usable material had been left behind. The batteries themselves were more formidable than he had imagined, and the guns were quite good. There were several "Quaker guns," however; i.e., logs, painted and carved to look like guns to a distant observer.

The following day, Hooker reported that the batteries at Cockpit were completely destroyed, while destruction was still taking place at the other positions. Only the works at Aquia Creek were still in rebel hands. Hooker was eager to get the work accomplished, for the ironclad Merrimac had appeared at Hampton Roads and was expected to steam up to Washington. In this regard, Hooker was confident that he could pierce the ship's armor with the Whitworth guns if he could get a good shot at her. He decided to plant the guns on Stump Neck. As things turned out, this threat soon passed, thanks to the same Monitor (Ericsson) which McClellan had wished to use against the
Potomac batteries. Hooker was able to continue taking the rebel guns without interruption. 33

During this most critical period, Jefferson Davis somehow lost all track of what was happening on the Potomac. On the tenth, three days after Johnston had given the order to retreat, Davis told him:

Further assurance given to me this day that you shall be promptly and adequately re-inforced, so as to enable you to maintain your position and resume first policy when the roads permit. 34

"First policy" was the orderly withdrawal of all equipment, including the guns. The pieces were in Federal hands even as Davis wrote these words. Only the position at Aquia Creek remained in Confederate hands, and soon they would withdraw from there as well. Hooker knew that trains were still running to and from Aquia Landing, but he expected the rebels to retreat and destroy the rail line as they left. He knew that Fredericksburg was being fortified and estimated that at least 17,000 troops were there. By March 14, he could finally report that all former rebel positions "from Cockpit to Aquia Creek are now utterly demolished." This was not quite accurate, as he still did not own Aquia, though Freestone, to the north of Cockpit, was in Federal hands; nonetheless, the blockade was ended. Hooker claimed, "A defeat could not have been more disastrous to the rebels. They left in the utmost consternation." In this the general was correct. 35

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NOTES TO CHAPTER V

Part 1


3. Letter, Holmes to Benjamin, October 29, 1861, in OR, Series I, Volume V, p. 928. Holmes gained this information from an intelligent soldier sent from Evansport.


5. P. G. T. Beauregard to Whiting, November 13, 1861; Johnston to Benjamin, November 16, 1861. Both in OR, Series I, Volume V, pp. 950-51; 955-56. In the latter communication, Johnston believed that the Federals could fortify the Virginia shore against counterattack, and felt that McClellan was attempting to divide the rebel army.

6. This quote is from Whiting's letter to Johnston, November 15, 1861, in OR, Series I, Volume V, pp. 956-57. Johnston forwarded the letter to Benjamin the following day.

8. I. R. Trimble was sure that the Federals would attack the batteries within short order and urged Johnston to make a personal inspection along the river. See Trimble to Johnston, November 16, 1861; Whiting's memorandum to Johnston, accompanied by Johnston's Indorsement to the War Department, both of November 26, 1861; Whiting to Johnston, November 28, 1861; and Johnston to Whiting, December 7, 1861. All in OR, Series I, Volume V, pp. 959-60; 970; 971-72; 986.

9. Davis to Johnston, November 18, 1861, OR, Series I, Volume V, p. 963.

10. This commentary on Virginia civilians is contained in Beale's letter of November 30 to an unspecified Colonel. See OR, Series I, Volume V, pp. 972-73.

11. Holmes to S. Cooper, December 12, 1861, in OR, Series I, Volume V, p. 993.


13. Benjamin to Beale, unspecified date (between December 12-16, 1861); Benjamin to Holmes, December 16, 1861; S. G. French to S. Cooper, December 17, 1861; and C. W. C. Dunnington to R. M. Smith (later forwarded to Benjamin), December 16, 1861. All in OR, Series I, Volume V, pp. 996-97; 997; 469-70; and 998-99.


15. French emphasized that the batteries were vulnerable to attack. See his letter to Cooper, December 30, 1861, in OR, Series I, Volume V, pp. 1012-13.

16. The letter to the editor of the Richmond Dispatch from "Bohemian" was dated December 27, 1861. Johnston wrote to complain of it to Benjamin on December 30. See OR, Series I, Volume V, pp. 1014-15.

17. Benjamin figured that a military court-martial could easily find sufficient evidence against "Bohemian" to convict him as a spy. See Benjamin to Johnston, January 5, 1862, in OR, Series I, Volume V, pp. 1020-21.

18. Some Confederate communications concerning Burnside's expedition are Holmes to Cooper, January 2, 1862; Beauregard to D. H. Hill, January 4, 1862; and Holmes to Johnston, January 17, 1862. All in OR, Series I, Volume V, pp. 1018; 1019-20; and 1035-36.
19. Johnston to Davis, February 23, 1862, in OR, Series I, Volume V, p. 1079. Also see Hanson, Bull Run Remembers, pp. 72-73 concerning the Johnston-Davis meeting and the army's preparation for the move.


22. Davis to Johnston, February 28, 1862, in OR, Series I, Volume V, pp. 1083-85. Davis tells Johnston to "disembark yourself of everything which would interfere with your rapid movement...The heavy guns at Manassas and Evansport, needed elsewhere and reported to be useless in their present position, would necessarily be abandoned in any hasty retreat, I regret that you find it impossible to move them..." Davis seems to endorse, however regretfully, Johnston's decision to abandon the guns.


Part 2


25. Wills, Confederate Blockade, p. 155.


27. Davis, Texas to Maryland, pp. 24-25.


30. There are a tremendous amount of sources relating events during the initial Federal seizure of the batteries. See in particular Wills, Confederate Blockade, pp. 147-49. Also refer to Walter H. Herbert, Fighting Joe Hooker (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Publishers, 1944), p. 71. Letters and communications include Dahlgren to Stanton, March 9, 1862 (Dahlgren is forwarding a communication from Wyman); Hooker to R. B. Marcy, March 9, 1862; Marcy to Hooker, March 9, 1862; and Jos. Dickinson to S. H. Starr, March 9, 1862, all in the OR, Series I, Volume V, pp. 526; 524; 524; 524-25. Consult a telegram from Wyman to Welles, March 9, 1862, and a letter from Wyman to Welles of the same date in U. S. Navy Department, Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies in the War of the Rebellion (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1897), p. 23. (Hereafter cited as NR). Also see Martin A. Haynes, A History of the Second Regiment, New Hampshire Volunteer Infantry in the War of the Rebellion (Manchester, New Hampshire: Charles F. Livingston, 1865), pp. 36-37, for the end quote and the rebel guerilla action.


32. Wills, Confederate Blockade, pp. 152-53. Haynes, Second New Hampshire, pp. 36-37, contains the end quote and an account of the rebels' guerilla action.


34. Davis to Johnston, March 10, 1862, in OR, Series I, Volume V, p. 1096.

35. S. Cooper to Holmes, March 11, 1862; Hooker to Marcy, March 12, 1862; Hooker to Williams, March 14, 1862. All in OR, Series I, Volume V, pp. 755-56. Also see Hanson, Bull Run Remembers, p. 78.
CHAPTER VI
AFTERMATH

Part I
Immediate Reactions:
"...I was...in the dark as to your purposes...."

The Confederates reluctantly withdrew from Aquia, their last foothold on the Potomac, but they had no choice in the matter. The Flotilla could now concentrate its main strength upon them there, and Hooker could storm down from the north, cutting them off from Fredericksburg, if he acted swiftly enough. He had already shown that he valued time by quickly crossing the river, nearly at the heels of Whiting's troops. The rebels at Aquia could ill afford to take chances with him. Indeed, he was already making plans for moving inland. On March 14, he sent ten companies of the 6th New Jersey to Dumfries by alternate routes, sweeping the area from the Chopawamsic to Quantico.

After the rebels abandoned Aquia, the Northern armies were free of any Potomac obstruction and could move in any direction they desired. Political pressure and embarrassment were lifted from Lincoln and Washington. The Union had been given the initiative. No longer did they have to fear a rebel invasion into Lower Maryland; Washington and Maryland were secured. The Union had won

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an impressive, profitable victory without making an at-
tack.

Jefferson Davis finally became aware of what was happening on March 15. He received a communication from Johnston dated the 13th, the first official news he had received concerning the situation:

...before the receipt of yours of the 13th, I was as much in the dark as to your purposes, condition, and necessities as at the time of our conversation on the subject a month since ....I have had many alarming reports of great destruction of ammunition, camp equipage, and provisions, indicating precipitate retreat; but, having heard of no cause of such a sudden move-
ment, I was at a loss to believe it.

Johnston's earlier communications apparently never reached him. Davis again had no advice to offer and could "sug-

f stat nothing as to the position you should take. 3

Meanwhile, Johnston was busy establishing his new position. He made temporary headquarters at Culpeper Court-House, and directed operations from there. He heard that Jackson had been compelled to abandon Winchester, just as he had feared. He suspected that the Federals would next move on Fredericksburg. He wished to confront the Federals with a large force before they reached the city, and directed all troops to the southern bank of the Rappahannock, thinking the attack would come from Potomac Creek. McClellan had considered such a move, but with the new situation it was out of the question. The Federal commander had more glorious goals than the capture of

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Fredericksburg, and he turned his attention to the pen-
insula between the James and York rivers. 4

Whatever else they would do, the Federals would move
slowly. McClellan was not about to let Hooker go crash-
ing towards Fredericksburg; he needed the division fresh
and intact for the major campaign on the Peninsula.
Hooker was limited to sending small-scale expeditions and
raiding parties towards Dumfries. While these forces were
not sent near Fredericksburg, the rebels feared that they
would descend at any moment. Holmes reported that all of
Hooker's division was across the Chopawamsic along the
Telegraph road. This simply was not the case. Hooker
was still in Maryland, directing piecemeal movements from
Camp Baker. Holmes told Lee that Fredericksburg was in
the line of attack and could not be held if the Federals
took possession of the heights across the Rappahannock.
Lee was somewhat surprised, and asked Holmes to reevaluate
the situation and make what adjustments he could. Holmes
was showing a great amount of nervousness, considering
that the plan to retreat had certainly come as no surprise
to him. 5

On the 18th, Wyman told Welles that there were still
1800 men at Aquia, 800 at Brooke's Station, 700 at the
town of Aquia, 200 men and seven artillery pieces at
Stafford, and 20,000 men at Fredericksburg. Hooker wanted
to get his entire division across the river to confront
these troops. As of March 13, his division was a part of the newly-formed Third Corps under Brigadier General Samuel P. Heintzelman. Heintzelman told Hooker to move across the Potomac, but reversed his order the following day. Hooker's division was too small to go by itself to Fredericksburg, and McClellan now had his mind firmly set upon the Peninsular campaign.

Initially, Johnston was complimented on his skillful withdrawal; but when it became evident that the Federals were not going to immediately attack and a great amount of material had been left behind, Confederate commanders found it necessary to explain their actions. Johnston had seemingly retreated with no pursuer in sight. J. J. Archer of the 5th Texas explained on March 21, "As it was contemplated that the enemy might attack during the movement, it was not deemed prudent to send any of the ammunition in advance." He added, "every article which...could possibly be carried was brought away." General Whiting claimed that he had been "maliciously slandered" by reports that he had left huge amounts of material behind. He had received orders at midday of March 7 to move the following morning, and had been forced to use pack-mules to carry stores. His troops were on half-rations, but had been forced to march from sixteen to forty miles on extremely poor roads. Johnston complained that the railroad's "miserable performance" was responsible for delays
and the inability to get all personal property out.  

But such protestations did not answer the Davis Administration's basic questions. Why had the retreat been so sudden? How did Johnston misinterpret the indications of when and where the attack would come? If all the material could not be removed, why had it not been completely destroyed? Johnston believed he had done the best job possible, but Davis undoubtedly felt the general had made a mistake. Certainly, it began to appear that way to the officials in Richmond.

Part 2
Long-range Effects:
"Johnston was a sensible man who did only sensible things."

The blockade had caused Washington physical discomfort and political embarrassment. Its sudden abandonment came as a pleasant surprise to the Union in general and Lincoln and McClellan in particular, but it caused a great deal of second-guessing in Richmond. Davis, who had not demonstrated a great amount of leadership or military expertise, and who continually told Johnston that the major decisions of troop movement were up to him, had lost contact with his commanding general during the crucial days before the retreat. Later, he questioned the general's course of action.

Meanwhile, Johnston misread the Union intent. Though he correctly assumed that Hooker was planning a move, he
had no way of knowing that McClellan would suddenly cancel the attack. Johnston acted in the only sensible manner; had another general been at the helm of the Union army, there probably would have been some sort of Union stroke at the batteries. Only McClellan would take so much time in readying his move and in fighting Lincoln's Special War Order Number One with such insistence as to delay all operations. Johnston felt his position was untenable, and he was correct. Had McClellan been able to make the move to Urbanna quickly, Johnston would have had to withdraw hurriedly. Had Hooker struck, Johnston might have been pushed back. In either case, he would have been subjected to a great deal of criticism.

Johnston simply guessed incorrectly when he decided that the Federals were ready to strike. This bad guess had disastrous consequences in terms of material lost, but the loss was certainly no greater than had he waited for McClellan to strike. If Johnston had made an error, it was in not deciding to move earlier. Had the decision been made a week or two prior to February 20, then perhaps adequate preparations could have been made to get more supplies away from the river. But he had little choice in this, for February 20 was the date he was able to meet with Davis and the cabinet.

Strategically, the Confederate retreat was well-conceived. It forced McClellan to change his plans, and put
the rebel forces in far better position to meet any attack that the Union could throw at them. Had the Confederates not moved, McClellan might have gotten his Urbanna campaign successfully underway. But William T. Sherman would comment a few years later, "Johnston was a sensible man who only did sensible things." Confronted by the possibility of disaster on a number of fronts and having no excellent opportunities, Johnston made the only sensible choice. This ultimately resulted in the failure of McClellan's Peninsular campaign and the extension of the war. 9

Still, in the long run, the withdrawal hurt the Confederate cause. It removed a major threat to Maryland and the Potomac, and thus made strategic planning a great deal easier for the Federals. Useful materials that were difficult to replace were destroyed or lost to the enemy. The Lincoln Administration could claim that it had cleared the Potomac, if not by direct action then at least by constant harassment of the batteries and the assemblage of a huge army. All political and propaganda value that the blockade contributed was lost once the Confederates withdrew. European powers could no longer consider (Washington) to be in a state of siege. By lifting the blockade, the rebels lost the possibility of gaining early European support. They rid their enemies of an embarrassing, prestige-damaging impediment to navigation.

Why had the Union not acted sooner? The Navy was
primarily concerned with the coastal blockade, and most of its warships were not meant for shallow inland waters like Potomac and its tributaries. The Union Army felt less prepared than the rebels for mounting an assault, for the battle of Manassas in July had thrown it into a state of confusion. This put a note of precaution in future plans. Another defeat would be very costly, both in terms of men and in morale. An invasion across the wide Potomac would be a dangerous undertaking, while a move on land from Alexandria would meet with stiff resistance in rugged terrain. McClellan wanted to make things as perfect as possible, and he did not want to risk everything on one operation, especially when he believed he could force the rebels to abandon their positions on the river merely by threatening them elsewhere. As one author sees it; many things were at stake:

Reduction of the batteries would have ended humiliation, contributed to morale, appeased politicians, put off a clamor for a big movement, made McClellan a hero and improved the diplomatic position of the United States as it tried to foil England's recognition of the Confederacy.¹⁰

McClellan nonetheless refused to make a direct assault upon the batteries. He believed his alternate plans to be better and feasible more. They would not entail the risks the projected move against the batteries would. He could avoid contact with Johnston's army altogether, and could even possibly beat him to Richmond. He would fight on ground of his own choosing. Furthermore, he believed

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the rebel force to be stronger than it actually was, and he did not wish to attack a superior force. Had he been given a free hand by Lincoln and the Joint Congressional Committee on the Conduct of the War, his flanking move to Urbanna may well have been a great triumph.

But McClellan's plans held a major flaw: they presumed success. Had he made his move before Johnston retreated, then his plan would have been successful even had he not been able to take Richmond. But Johnston moved first, and now McClellan either had to beat Johnston badly or take Richmond in order to gain plaudits from Washington. He did neither, and his failure intensified feeling against him. He had failed to please Lincoln and his critics by moving swiftly, and his own plan ended in failure. This resulted in a reshuffling of the high command, and led directly to Union disasters at Cedar Mountain and Second Manassas.

Why had there not been more cooperation between the Army and Navy? Only in a few isolated cases, such as Colonel Graham's unauthorized excursion to Mathias Point and Hooker's use of the Flotilla in hauling away rebels' abandoned guns, was there a great amount of cooperation between the two services. This was largely because the available ships were simply too small to transport a large number of troops. Flotilla officers communicated regularly with Hooker, informing him of events at other points on
the river, delivering messages, and aiding in reconnaissances. But the Navy and McClellan often differed, as evidenced by the October dispute over landing troops on the Virginia shore. Animosities developed: Welles continually badgered the War Department to send troops into Lower Maryland, while McClellan believed the Navy's negligence had allowed the blockade to be established in the first place. A certain amount of inter-departmental rivalry existed, and everyone had their own ideas of how the war could best be run. Only John Dahlgren seemed willing to let Navy personnel follow an Army commander's orders.

Still, there probably would have been an opportunity for the two services to work together had McClellan wished to attack the batteries. As it was, he did not consider such a plan feasible. He wanted to make no such move, so the chance for large-scale cooperation never came about.

Perhaps the entire situation could be expected early in the war, which was a clash of inexperienced armies and commanders. Both sides were wary and indecisive; both chose to remain on the defensive, knowing that along the Potomac the defense had the upper hand; both commanders believed themselves outnumbered. The end result was a situation in which neither President was pleased with the performance of his commanding general. Both McClellan and Johnston had very good, sound military reasons behind their actions, but they had failed to satisfy their Presidents or silence their critics.
It is interesting to note that this period marked the beginning of each President's disillusionment with these two men. The Presidents had acted entirely differently, but each was unsatisfied in the end. Davis was very upset as he did not understand Johnston's movement. He had been passive, leaving all the tactical decisions to Johnston, but he was not pleased with the outcome. In contrast, Lincoln had very actively debated with McClellan over the proper movements, but he too was dissatisfied. Both Presidents let their generals have the final say, and both regretted doing so. The disillusion created in 1861-62 manifested itself later in the war.

Whatever the effects of the missed chances and blunders surrounding the Potomac blockade, one fact is certain: the Confederates never again - except during the Antietam or Gettysburg campaigns - presented such a threat to the city of Washington. Certainly, they never again threatened to cut off the Federal capital from the Chesapeake, and they were unable to threaten Lower Maryland again. The material they lost in their retreat was irreplaceable, and the "breathing room" they gave the Federal capital was never again seriously threatened for an extended period. Washington was truly secured, as the withdrawal placed Maryland firmly in the Union camp, opened the river to shipping, and created favorable propaganda possibilities for the Federals. Though Johnston's reasons
for retreat were sound, the fact is that the retreat amounted to a defensive maneuver; the South, due to lack of men and equipment, would often be forced to take the defensive during the war. The movement was indicative of what was to come, a prelude to later defeats for the South. The significance of the blockade lies not in that the Union took so long to attempt to break it; rather, it lies in the fact that once the Union showed any signs of offensive movement, the blockade was broken very easily.
NOTES TO CHAPTER VI

Part 1


Also see Davis to Johnston, March 15, 1862 in OR, Series I, Volume V, pp. 527-28.

4. Johnston to Whiting, March 15, 1862; Johnston to Whiting, March 15, 1862, 10:40 a.m.; Holmes to Lee, March 15, 1862. All in OR, Series I, Volume V, pp. 1102; 1101-02; 1100.

5. Hooker to McClellan, March 16, 1862; Hooker to McClellan, same date; Jos. Dickinson to Sickles, March 16, 1862; Davis to Johnston, March 16, 1862; unaddressed, unsigned letter, possibly from Holmes to Lee, dated March 16, 1862; Lee to Holmes, March 16, 1862. All in OR, Series I, Volume V, pp. 761; 761-62; 761; 1102-03; 1100-01; 1103.


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7. Mary Alice Wills, *Confederate Blockade*, pp. 159-61.

8. Colonel Archer to J. H. Hill, March 21, 1862; Report, Whiting to Holmes, March 21, 1862; Johnston to Cooper, March 12, 1862; Whiting to Benjamin, March 22, 1862. All in *OR*, Series I, Volume V, pp. 534; 528-31; 526-27; 528.

Part 2


10. Wills, *Confederate Blockade*, p. 117.
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