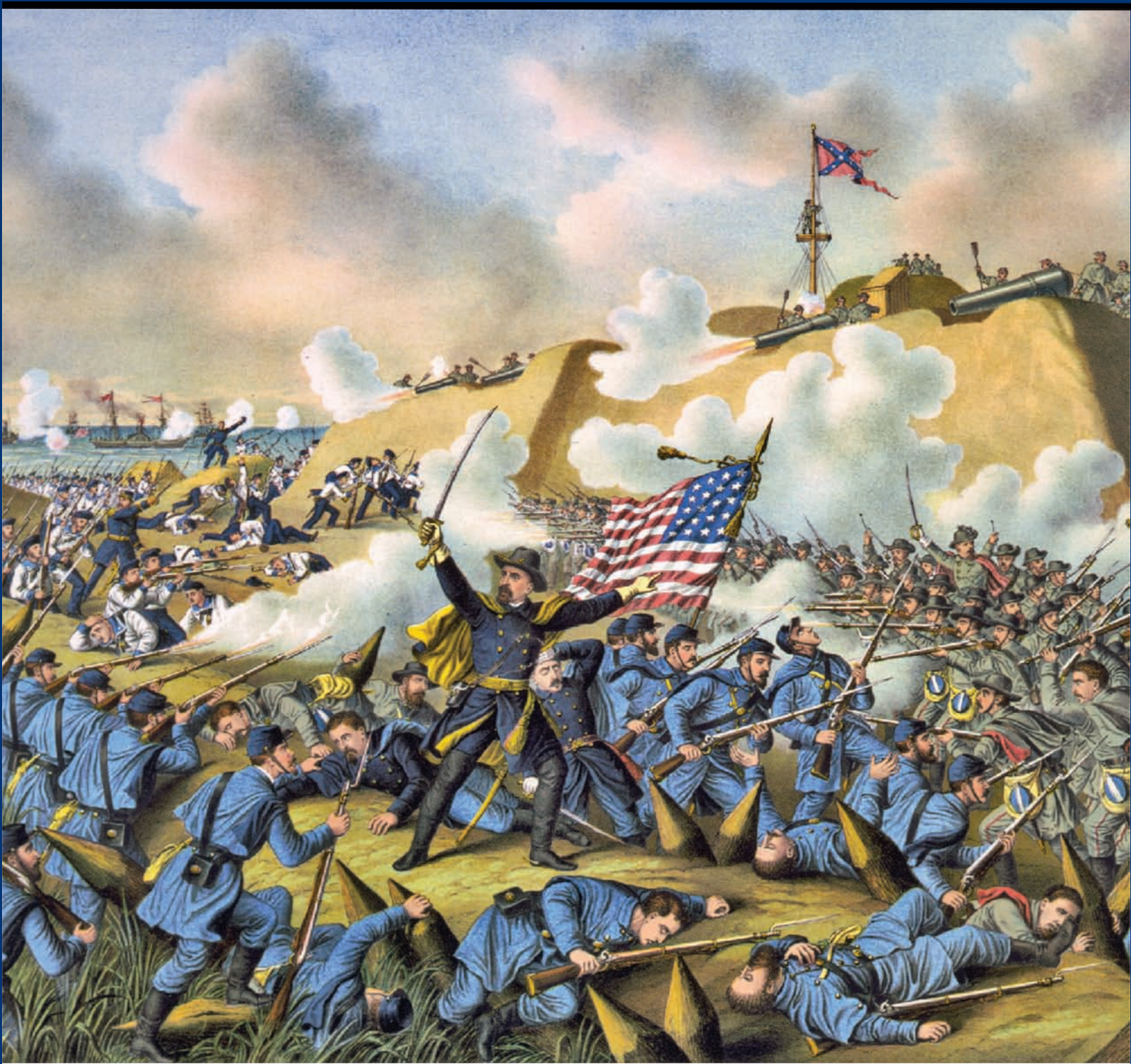
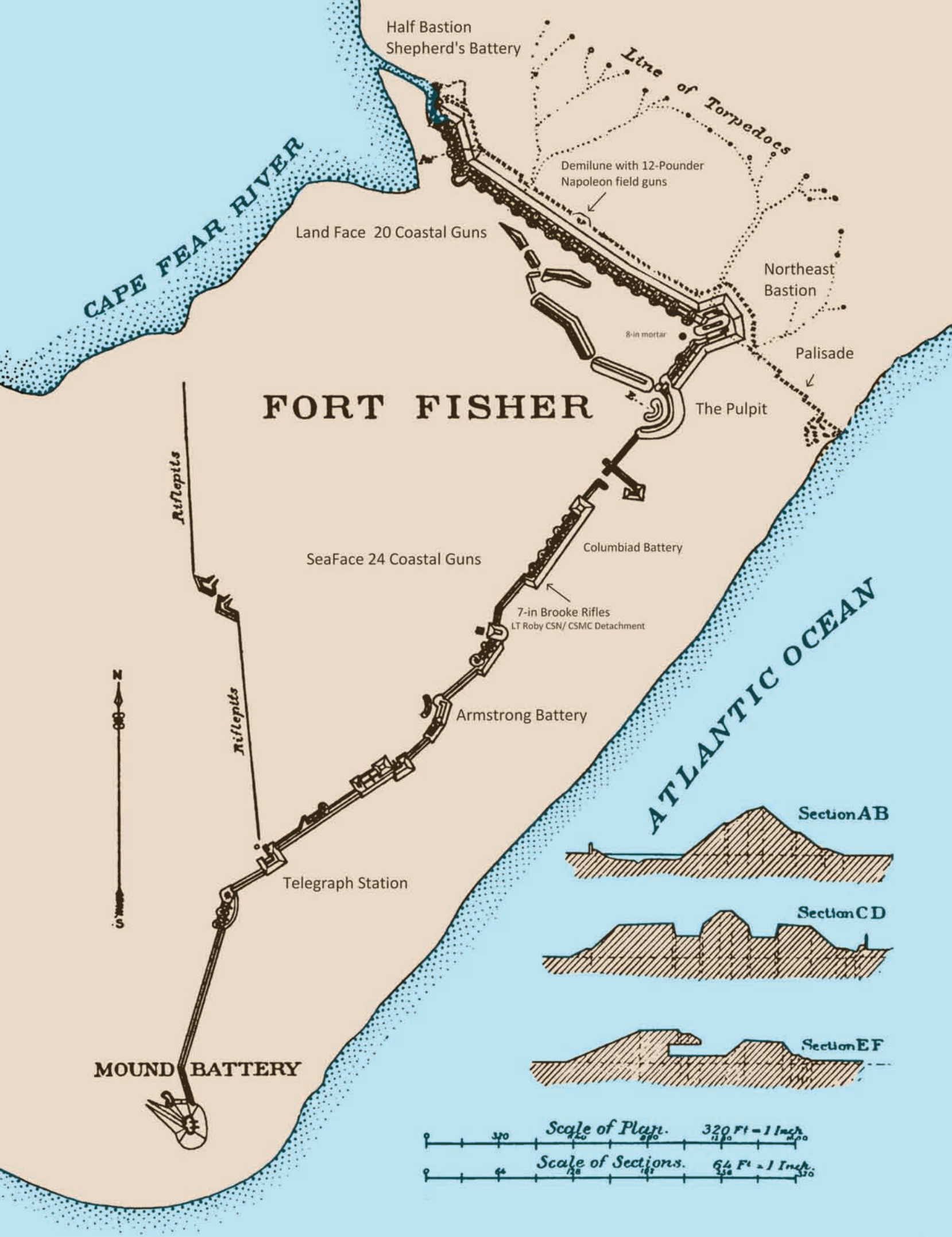


U.S. Marines in Battle

Fort Fisher

December 1864–January 1865





Half Bastion
Shepherd's Battery

Line of Torpedoes

Demilune with 12-Pounder
Napoleon field guns

Land Face 20 Coastal Guns

Northeast
Bastion

Palisade

FORT FISHER

8-in mortar

The Pulpit

SeaFace 24 Coastal Guns

Columbiad Battery

7-in Brooke Rifles
LT Roby CSN/ CSMC Detachment

Armstrong Battery

ATLANTIC OCEAN

Rifltpits

Rifltpits



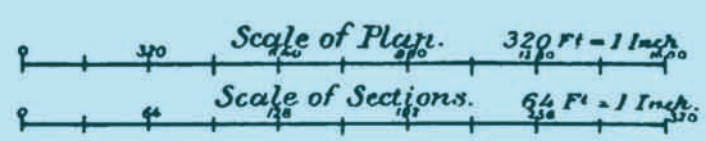
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Section EF

MOUND BATTERY



Fort Fisher

December 1864–January 1865

by Major David W. Kummer



In the long and storied history of the Marine Corps, its contributions to the Union effort during the Civil War have often been relegated to a mere footnote. An aged officer corps on the defensive against both attacks in Congress and the whims of senior naval authorities, chronic manpower shortages, and its traditional duties all contributed to limiting the Corps' role. Bad luck and the bookend humiliations at Bull Run in 1861 (also known in the South as First Manassas) and at Fort Fisher in 1865 on the North Carolina coast not only overshadowed the service of Marine battalions but also many instances of individual courage.

The Fort Fisher campaign, which spanned from December 1864 to January 1865, consisted of two separate battles in which Marines from both sides took part. The engagements marked the final large-scale amphibious operations of the war. While today many would naturally associate Marines and amphibious warfare, the Civil War was a time of ill-defined roles in which the U.S. Army took the lead in joint operations with the U.S. Navy.

Fort Fisher, long a thorn in the side of the Union, remained in the closing days of the war as a last hope for a dying Confederacy to prolong the conflict long enough for a political settlement. After years of disagreement over timing and resources, the U.S. Army and Navy finally agreed on the need for a joint—"combined" as it was known at the time—operation against the fort. For Marines on board ships of the U.S. fleet, bombarding the fort showcased their individual courage and skill manning large-caliber deck guns as they engaged in a deadly duel with Confederate batteries inside the fort. Ultimately, a combination of interservice rivalry, poor planning, and ego doomed the first attempt to take the fort.

In reaction to the fiasco, the Union Army swiftly dismissed its landing force commander to quell friction with the U.S. Navy. With personality conflicts largely resolved, the second attack on Fort Fisher succeeded despite lingering interservice rivalry. To prevent the Army from gaining all the glory, the fleet commander sent a naval brigade

ashore to take part in the final assault on the fort. Some 400 Marines who landed to support the attack found themselves assigned a difficult mission without benefit of adequate planning, coordination, or training.

On a sandy beach facing veteran Confederate infantry and the South's most formidable fort, the Marines and their naval brethren paid dearly for a flawed system, which on the whole produced a generation of naval officers largely ignorant of operations ashore. In the wake of the embarrassing retreat of the naval brigade, the Marines made a convenient scapegoat for the costly assault. The bloody debacle also soured some naval officers on the idea of contested amphibious landings and even in later years the value of Marines on board ship.

"Malakoff of the South"

On 24 December 1864, a Confederate Marine sentry at Fort Fisher spotted Union Rear Admiral David Dixon Porter's North Atlantic Blockading Squadron as it formed for battle off the North Carolina coast. Seventy miles away in Beaufort, North Carolina, 6,500 Union soldiers commanded by Major General Benjamin F. Butler made final preparations to join Porter in an attack on the Confederacy's largest coastal fort. Comparing Fort Fisher to the formidable stone tower fort used by Russia in the Crimean War in the defense of Sevastopol, observers dubbed it the "Malakoff of the South."¹ Some also likened it to the British stronghold of Gibraltar. Its official name honored Charles F. Fisher, colonel of the 6th North Carolina Infantry killed at the First Battle of Bull Run.

The fort dominated the entrances to the South's last remaining and most militarily important port at Wilmington, North Carolina. Since 1861, Union ships trying to impede the flow of foreign war materials reaching Wilmington watched the fort grow. Initially, it consisted of only a few disjointed and unimpressive works. However, the vision and tireless efforts of Confederate Colonel William Lamb convinced Confederates to build a fort of such proportions that no blockader dared challenge its guns for more than two years.

The importance of blockade running from Wilmington to Confederate military operations increased as the slow death grip of encroaching Union might exerted itself on every front. President Abraham Lincoln's reelection in November 1864 dampened any hopes in the Confederacy

On The Cover: *The Capture of Fort Fisher* by Kurz & Allison, is a fanciful rendering of the second assault on the fort circa 1890.

Library of Congress

At Left: Vintage map, circa 1883.

Adapted from *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War*



North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources

of a favorable political settlement. The Confederate trans-Mississippi region with its vast cattle herds and cotton sat in isolated irrelevance under naval blockade and Union control of the Mississippi River. Major General William T. Sherman's army continued to torch its way through Georgia en route to the sea. In Virginia's Shenandoah Valley, Major General Philip H. Sheridan's hard-riding troopers routed rebels at Cedar Creek and turned the Confederate breadbasket into a scorched wasteland. However, General Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia continued to stubbornly resist, subsisting largely on foreign supplies smuggled through the blockade at Wilmington.

By 1864, Wilmington—protected by Lamb's fort—was both an economic and military thorn in the side of the Union. Confederate commerce raiders that preyed on Northern shipping and blockade runners loaded with cotton both steamed out of Wilmington under the protection of Fort Fisher's guns. The city's railroad depot received Confederate cotton and shipped supplies to Lee's thinned but unbowed ranks besieged at Petersburg, Virginia. After repeated attempts to break the railroads supplying Confederates failed, General Ulysses S. Grant decided to capture Fort Fisher and cut off Lee's line of communications at its source.² The Fort Fisher campaign involved two separate attempts to take the bastion in December 1864 and January 1865. For Marines, whether Union or Confederate, the campaign placed them in key roles during the last large-scale amphibious operation of the war.

Before secession, the largely agrarian South shunned

the financial and infrastructure investments required to wage war on a continental scale. The daunting task of developing and managing the Confederate military-industrial complex from scratch fell on Brigadier General Josiah Gorgas. Even by 1864, however, for all of Gorgas's success, the South's industrial output could not meet all the demands placed on it by the army. To make up for shortages, the Confederate government relied on blockade running to trade cotton and tobacco for key war materials and weapons.³

General Winfield Scott, the aged architect of the American victory in the Mexican–American War, proposed a strategy—later called the Anaconda Plan—to coerce rebellious states back into the Union by blockading Southern ports and isolating the western Confederate states by controlling the Mississippi River. Following the first shots on Fort Sumter, South Carolina, President Lincoln instituted a blockade of Southern ports. Confederates seized Federal installations throughout the South, then began to build and arm coastal forts, such as Fort Fisher, with the spoils. At first, Lincoln's proclamation made little impact as the Union Navy had only 54 seaworthy vessels, and blockade runners enjoyed a high success ratio. The vast Confederate coastline in close proximity to the foreign neutral ports of Mexico, Cuba, and the West Indies proved difficult to blockade. In response, the Union Navy expanded to more than 600 ships and developed more effective tactics to stem Southern trade and commerce raiding.⁴ Over time, blockade runners saw their success

rate of evading the blockade incrementally reduced from 9-to-1 in 1861 to a 1-to-1 ratio by 1865.⁵

Even with increasing losses, the European demand for cotton, Union trade policy, and the South's lack of key materials drove a lucrative trade between Confederates in Wilmington and foreign blockade speculators.⁶ The logistical strain of feeding large armies forced Confederate authorities in the Deep South to implore planters to shift from cotton production to staple crops.⁷ The Union capture of New Orleans in April 1862, along with the shift in agrarian production, combined to create a relative scarcity of cotton in ports along the Gulf of Mexico. Consequently, ports such as Wilmington located closer to Bermuda and Nassau took on added importance for British firms running the blockade.⁸

The construction of Fort Fisher coincided with Wilmington's rise as the South's chief blockade-running port. Generally, Confederates tried to disperse key war industries into the relative safety of interior portions of the South. The Confederate Ordnance Department, however, found it convenient to centralize all official government freight going through the blockade.⁹ Wilmington's coastal geography proved to be ideal for trading through the blockade. The city's location 27 miles upstream and six miles inland on the east bank of the Cape Fear River protected it from direct naval bombardment but still provided access to the Atlantic. Confederates built Fort Fisher on a narrow peninsula at the river's entrance formed by the east bank of the Cape Fear River and the Atlantic Ocean. The peninsula, originally named Federal Point, was renamed Confederate Point during the war.¹⁰

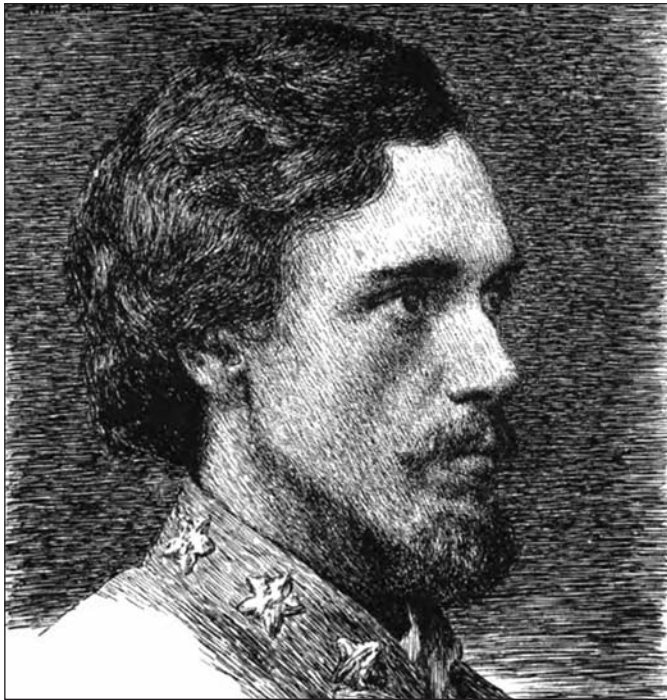
Smith's Island, an alluvial delta, divided the entrance to the Cape Fear River creating two approaches for vessels to run the Union gauntlet. For Federal ships on patrol off Wilmington, the two Smith Island inlets complicated their task and forced them to split into two patrol squadrons.¹¹ Fort Caswell guarded the old channel on the western side of Smith Island. However, its approach remained perilous for ships because of ever-shifting shoals created by the turbulent mixture of tides and river currents. In 1761, a hurricane formed New Inlet on Smith Island's north shoreline, which sat opposite Federal Point. The New Inlet dominated by Fort Fisher enjoyed a "more stable bar" that shallow draft blockade runners and Confederate commerce raiders could more readily navigate.¹²

The Cape Fear Estuaries and the Approaches to Wilmington

- [A] — River Batteries Below Wilmington
- [B] — Fort Anderson
- [C] — Fort Pender (Johnston), at Smithville
- [D] — Defenses at Old Inlet
- [E] — Fort Fisher and Battery Buchanan, at New Inlet

North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources





Battles and Leaders of the Civil War

Colonel William Lamb, a self-taught engineer, adapted Crimean War fortification designs to build mammoth earthworks to defend Wilmington.

Confederate efforts to fortify the peninsula overlooking New Inlet evolved over the course of the war. Under the direction Major Charles P. Bolles, several small batteries were first erected on Federal Point. For almost a year, the defenders sporadically added to Bolles's emplacements. Fort Fisher's palmetto log and sandbag defenses eventually mounted 17 guns by the time Colonel William Lamb took command in July 1862. Lamb, whose name became synonymous with the fort's construction, joined the Confederate army at age 26 after a brief career as a lawyer and newspaper editor.¹³ Although he had no practical training as an engineer, Lamb learned military tactics at the Rappahannock Military Academy before going on to earn a law degree from the College of William & Mary.¹⁴

Lamb's first command as captain of the Woodis Rifles, a militia company from Norfolk, Virginia, not only exposed him to combat but sent him on the road to becoming a self-taught engineer. In May 1861, Lamb's superiors issued the company two 10-pounder Parrott rifles and detailed the men to help protect battery construction on Sewells Point near Norfolk.

As the Lincoln administration tried to enforce a blockade along the Confederate coast, it hastily bought and converted civilian ships for military use. The commander of the newly acquired Union gunboat USS *Monticello* detailed to blockade the mouths of the James and Elizabeth Rivers at the southern end of Chesapeake Bay, received reports of the Confederate battery. Captain Henry Eagle's gunboat steamed toward the rebel battery late in the day

on 19 May 1861. The converted merchant steamer just leased from a civilian company only a month before now mounted a single 10-inch Dahlgren pivot gun forward and two 32-pounder guns aft. Captain Peyton H. Colquitt of Georgia commanded the overall defense of the battery ashore and ordered a detachment of artilleryists to crew three recently mounted 32-pounder smoothbore guns. He then ordered Lamb's men to make their two rifled guns ready to fire on the Union vessel as well. At 1730, a shot from the *Monticello* whizzed over the Confederate battery. As the Southerners prepared to return fire, they realized they had neither a Confederate nor Virginia flag to fly over the battery. As a stopgap measure, they raised Captain Colquitt's Georgia state flag above the earthworks in defiance.¹⁵

At a half-mile distance, Lamb's men opened fire on the ship. An hour-long artillery duel ensued between Confederates ashore and the heavy guns on board the *Monticello*. Confederate infantry peppered the ship with bullets, and Lamb's artilleryists hulled the gunboat five times, but the small diameter of the shot posed no real danger to the ship save a lucky hit on its boilers. Ashore, the large-caliber naval guns did some damage as two of the big shells scored hits within the fort, but overall, the thick earthen parapet thrown up around the battery largely protected both men and guns alike. After expending 114 rounds of shot and shell at the fort, the *Monticello* retired, which left both sides claiming the victory. As fate would have it, Lamb's duel with the *Monticello* renewed almost four years later at Fort Fisher. Though both sides claimed victory after the initial action in 1861, without doubt the artillery duel sparked Lamb's interest in engineering and fortifications and put him on the path to build the Confederate Gibraltar.¹⁶

Southern authorities assigned Brigadier General Joseph R. Anderson, owner of the Confederacy's largest foundry at Richmond's Tredegar Ironworks, to command defenses in the District of Wilmington. Anderson, a West Point graduate and successful military and civil engineer, added Captain Lamb to his staff. While accompanying Anderson to Charleston, Lamb obtained a complete military history of the Crimean War which included details of the Malakoff tower. It was part of a massive earthen fortification that defended Sevastopol on the Black Sea and frustrated efforts of the combined British and French fleets. Lamb went on to build fortifications based on the Crimean model with his own refinements and modifications.¹⁷

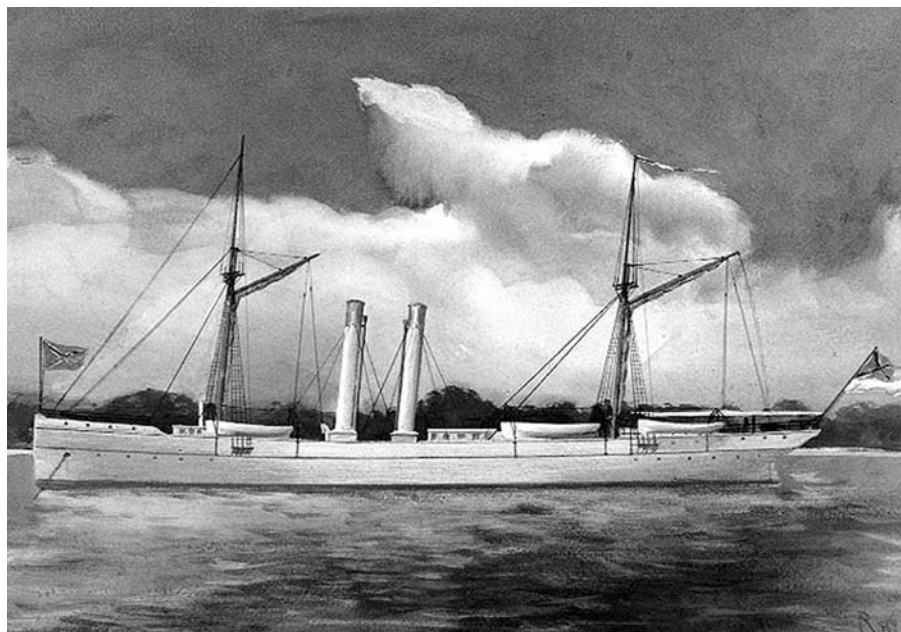
In May 1862, Anderson placed Lamb in charge of Fort Saint Philip—later renamed Fort Anderson—built by Confederates atop the ruins of old Saint Philip's Church.¹⁸ The fort sat on the west bank of the Cape Fear River, 15 miles below Wilmington, and guarded both river and land approaches to town.¹⁹ Lamb determined to strengthen existing works using lessons he gleaned from his studies of the

Crimea. In the process, he developed his trademark inverted “L-shaped” fort, which he later used at Fort Fisher. Fort Saint Philip, like Fort Fisher, featured “heavy earthen traverses separating gun chambers so that, in the event of attack, each gun chamber could become a self-contained fort.”²⁰

Lamb’s industrious work and aptitude for fortification evidently impressed his superiors. On 4 July 1862, Major General Samuel G. French, the new district commander, ordered Lamb to take command of Fort Fisher. Lamb’s initial inspection found several batteries of uneven quality. The fort itself was “small” and partially built with “perishable sandbags.” He expressed his disappointment with the fort and other modest works already built on Federal Point; he believed, “one of the Federal frigates could have cleaned it out with a couple of broadsides.”²¹ Lamb chose to rebuild the fort and improve its existing batteries for the express purpose of “resisting the fire of a fleet.”²² Having experienced the effects of heavy naval guns firsthand, his plans took on a mammoth scale. He lobbied French to build the new Fort Fisher on a “magnitude that it could withstand the heaviest fire of any guns in the American Navy.” French did not concur with Lamb’s plans for elevated batteries or the ambitious scale of the works, but he relented and gave the newly promoted major permission to commence work.²³

For several years, the Union devised a number of plans for an expedition against Wilmington, but U.S. Army–Navy relations and competing priorities thwarted them. As the principal port for running the Union blockade and Confederate commerce raiding, Wilmington was both financially and militarily vital. It housed one of the few Confederate banks of deposit and also a huge government-owned cotton press capable of binding 500 bales a day, along with associated warehouses and platforms to store and load bales. Finding sufficient railroad rolling stock to transport freight in and out of town, however, remained a troubling nuisance to Confederate agents managing blockade activities in Wilmington.²⁴

Despite Union efforts to blockade the port, commerce raiders and blockade runners defiantly continued to operate under the protective guns of Fort Fisher. New York merchants and insurers pressured Lincoln’s administration to deal with commerce raiders like the CSS *Tallahassee* and CSS *Chickamauga*, which sailed from Wilmington.²⁵ Late in the war, the city evolved into the sole point of entry for

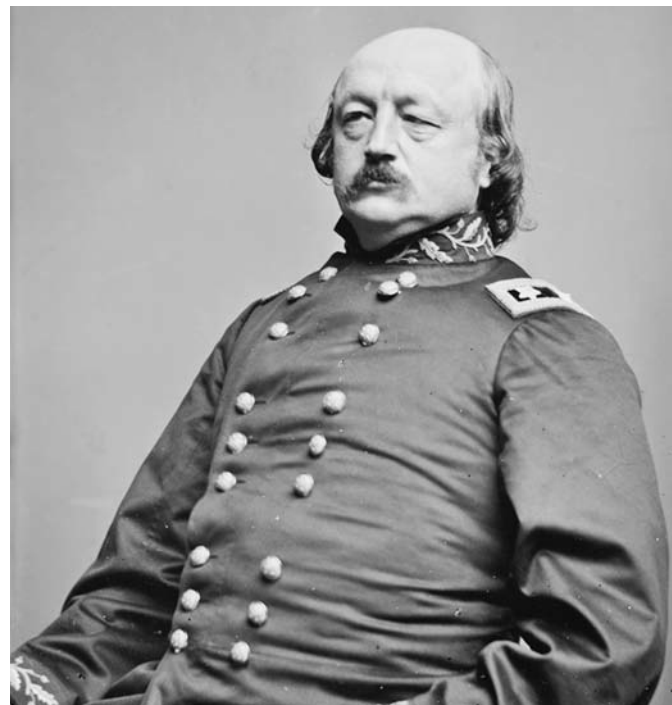


Naval History and Heritage Command
Confederates converted English-built steamers from blockade runners to commerce raiders. During the Fort Fisher Campaign, Confederate Marines and sailors from the CSS Chickamauga manned naval guns inside the fort.

foreign medical and ordnance supplies reaching Lee’s army. During 1863–64, Confederate agents imported more than 2,600 medicinal crates, 4,300 tons of meat, 500,000 pairs of shoes, 300,000 blankets, 330,000 stands of arms, 960 tons of saltpeter, and 750 tons of lead to manufacture ammunition.²⁶

Major General Benjamin F. Butler’s military career owed itself to prewar political clout, which he perpetuated with a combination of shrewdly timed media manipulation and political endorsements.

Library of Congress





U.S. Army Military History Institute

Battery Lamb, also known as the Mound Battery, served as both a lighthouse at night, which guided Confederate blockade runners, and an imposing battery that kept Union ships at bay.

Tactical Dilemma

By capturing Fort Fisher, Grant hoped to starve the Confederates into either evacuating Richmond or abandoning their Petersburg trenches to face his army head-on. Grant wanted Fort Fisher reduced in early October 1864; however, delays resulted from continued fighting around Petersburg, the 1864 presidential election, and Lee's rumored reinforcement of Wilmington. The Navy in the meantime energetically began to plan and marshal ships at Hampton Roads to make the assault. Administrative and logistic responsibility for the Fort Fisher campaign fell to the Department of Virginia and North Carolina commanded by Major General Benjamin F. Butler. Grant, however, never planned to send him to command the campaign given his checkered past. Butler, seemingly oblivious to Grant's intention to keep him out of the field, began to make a plan of his own to take the fort.²⁷

Butler exemplified the term "political general." The outbreak of the Civil War provided a means for men aspiring to wealth and high political office, and he used his military office for both. At the 1860 Democratic Convention, Butler's efforts to enhance his political clout backfired when he threw his support behind Senator Jefferson Davis of Mississippi, whom he thought to be a strong Unionist. Despite this error in judgment, however, Butler's title as brigadier of the Massachusetts state militia gave him a means to regain political relevancy. Always a cagey lawyer, he possessed good organizational skills and excelled at political wrangling and calculated drama to bolster his image in the press. However, he possessed no formal military training or field experience.²⁸

Butler kept his political aspirations at the forefront, but his bumbling field command and independent proclamations of policy often made him a liability for the Lincoln

administration.²⁹ Besides losing one of the first land engagements of the war, his wartime conduct not only threatened his political goals but also earned him several infamous nicknames. As the military governor of New Orleans, "Beast Butler" not only infuriated Southerners but also foreign powers by insulting the ladies of New Orleans and interfering with foreign diplomats. Working in conjunction with his brother, he displayed a propensity for scandal and looting. When he allegedly stole silver spoons from his New Orleans headquarters, local residents dubbed him "Spoons Butler."

By 1864, Butler's political clout landed him command of the Army of the James near Richmond. Infamously,

his abortive offensives on the James River Bermuda Hundred Peninsula only managed to isolate his army behind entrenchments across the neck of the peninsula despite facing a numerically inferior force. With Lincoln's reelection in doubt, "Bottled-up" Butler's series of military failures frustrated General-in-Chief Grant. Despite Butler's demonstrated military incompetence, Grant remarked that sometimes military priorities ran second to the political concerns with "provok[ing] the hostility of so important a personage."³⁰

While Butler planned the first attack on Fort Fisher, Colonel Lamb continued improving the bastion into the largest coastal fortification in the Confederacy. The self-taught engineer put the men of his 36th North Carolina Regiment to work and augmented them with more than 500 slaves and freedmen to speed construction.³¹ The day after Lamb took command of Fort Fisher, he spotted a blockader anchored only two miles from the fort and observed that his working parties were well within the range of the ship's guns. Upon investigation, he found that blockaders routinely fired harassing salvos into the fort, which interrupted construction efforts. Lamb changed the existing standing orders, which directed the batteries not to fire first, and then directed a nearby gun to open fire. The surprised vessel hurriedly got out of range, and for the next two years, work continued unmolested by enemy fire.³²

Over a six-month period in 1863, Mound Battery, the fort's most recognizable feature, took shape on the extreme right of its seaward facing batteries. Lamb employed two steam engines on elevated tracks to haul earth and create the nearly 50-foot-high mound. By the fall of 1864, Lamb's plans evolved into a huge inverted L-shaped fortress with two sides. The land face, 500 yards wide, sat across the neck of Federal Point. The sea face extended from the

Northeast Bastion at the apex of the fort in a southwesterly direction along the beach for almost 1,300 yards. By 1864, the fort mounted 44 large-caliber coastal guns, including the 170-pounder Blakely and 150-pounder Armstrong rifled guns imported from England.³³

In November 1862, new District of the Cape Fear commander, Major General William H. C. Whiting, a trained engineer, worried that Wilmington's geography hampered an effective defense.³⁴ Upon assuming command, he set about fortifying the Cape Fear River and its land approaches to support Fort Fisher. He strengthened forts guarding the old inlet and mentored Lamb. He also worried that an amphibious landing force north of the fort might bypass defenses, leaving Wilmington vulnerable without supporting infantry.³⁵

Whiting's personality, however, blotted his career. He managed to alienate himself from many Confederate leaders, including President Jefferson Davis. Reportedly, he spread rumors about General Braxton Bragg who was not only Davis's personal friend, but also one of his military advisors. The impending Union threat against Wilmington, rumors about Whiting's sobriety, and existing personal grudges led Davis to send Bragg to Wilmington in October 1864 to command the district. Bragg, however, carried his own baggage. He was not only prone to alienating locals, but his checkered military record also concerned many in the state.³⁶ Given his controversial past, Lamb doubted Bragg's ability to command the defense. Whiting, now Bragg's deputy, and Lamb redoubled their efforts amid swirling rumors of an impending attack.³⁷

The rumors proved true. Grant decided to seize the fort in a combined assault with the newly assigned North Atlantic Blockading Squadron commander, Rear Admiral

David Dixon Porter. Butler was well aware of Wilmington's significance and in fact had planned several attempts in the year prior hoping to cash in on a big victory.³⁸ Until the presidential election, Grant could not remove Butler from command, but he could try to isolate him at headquarters by assigning field leadership to another. Grant chose Butler's subordinate from the New Orleans campaign, Major General Godfrey Weitzel, to command the landing force composed of men from Butler's army.³⁹

The assault on Wilmington threatened to snatch Butler's last chance to restore his political fortunes. However, the upcoming election placed Butler in position to regain Lincoln's confidence thanks to his political connections and timely endorsement of the president's campaign in circulars and the Northern press.⁴⁰ Though Weitzel commanded the landing force, Butler commanded the Department of Southeastern Virginia and North Carolina. To Grant's consternation, Butler, ever the shrewd lawyer, determined that as the department commander, he could technically take the field with overall operational command, leaving the tactical employment of troops to Weitzel.⁴¹

The scientific and industrial developments over the previous half century created a dilemma for Butler and his staff as they planned to take Fort Fisher. Weapons development had outpaced that of tactics. Butler's own command experience around Petersburg made him well aware of the tactical difficulties breaching Confederate fortifications. Weitzel brought recent experience assaulting similar coastal forts, like Fort Wagner, outside Charleston. In early September, Butler learned that Grant intended to attack Fort Fisher. At Grant's suggestion, he tasked Weitzel to conduct a clandestine reconnaissance of the fort. Given

Interior view of Fort Fisher's first three traverses along the land face.

Library of Congress



their experience and recent intelligence, the fortification presented a daunting task that required a creative solution.

Fort Fisher's land face, which straddled the neck of Federal Point, began about 30 yards from the river and included a half bastion created from the old Shepherd's Battery. On the opposite end, facing the ocean, the land face was a full bastion called the Northeast Bastion. Between these two flanking bastions, the land face's parapet rose out of the sandy soil 20 feet at a 45-degree angle. Lamb designed the rampart to absorb the impact of "the heaviest artillery fire." It was 25 feet thick, planted with sea grass to prevent erosion. The gun chambers were almost six feet high, with each gun "mounted in barbette on Columbiad carriages." Lamb considered guns built in casement with palmetto logs and sandbags created only the "delusion" of safety. In practice, they only served to "snare" incoming projectiles, whereas earthworks absorbed the impact.⁴² Ideally, Lamb preferred iron backed by timber, but railroad iron was scarce. Instead, he had harnessed sand, which was the one readily available material with which to build the fort.⁴³

Between the guns ran massive sand traverses. They rose 12 feet above the parapet and extended back almost 30 feet to prevent enfilade fire effects. Each traverse also served as a magazine and bomb-proof shelter for the gun crews. Despite the land face's imposing features, 20 heavy guns and electrically detonated land mines or torpedoes, no moat protected it from an infantry assault. The sandy soil and a lack of materials prevented its construction. As a stopgap measure, the Confederates erected a wooden palisade fitted with ports to allow musket fire, and to bolster the defense, also added three mortars. Two 24-pounder Coehorn mortars were mounted in the fifth and sixth land face traverses and a single 8-inch siege mortar behind the land face. At the center of the land face, Confederates constructed a sally port and demi-lune—a small elevated redoubt—armed with 12-pounder field artillery. Rushing from the sally port, Lamb planned for Fort Fisher's defenders to mass behind the palisade backed by field artillery to repel an infantry assault.⁴⁴

The sea face from the Northeast Bastion to Mound Battery extended almost three-fourths of a mile down the beach. For 100 yards, the sea face mimicked construction of the land face in its enormity. Lamb converted an old palmetto log and sandbag casement battery known as Battery Meade into a fortified hospital bunker. He also adapted what was known as the "Pulpit," located near the hospital, into his combat command center because of its elevation and relative central position. Beyond the Pulpit, Lamb erected a series of batteries along the sea face with heavy but shorter traverses and lighter intervening parapets to conceal movement and provide cover within the fort. Mound Battery, at the southern end of the sea face,



Library of Congress

Rear Admiral David Dixon Porter was commander of the North Atlantic Blockading Squadron.

consisted of two large seacoast guns atop Lamb's towering mound to provide plunging fire into the New Inlet channel. Between the Pulpit and Mound Batteries, Lamb built the aptly named Armstrong Battery—also known as Purdie Battery—to mount the fort's huge 150-pounder Armstrong rifle. He also placed a telegraph station between the Armstrong and Mound Batteries to communicate with Wilmington and coordinate defense of the peninsula.⁴⁵

Confederates protected behind Lamb's massive earthworks and armed with heavy cannon and rifled muskets seemed invulnerable to standard tactics. The tactical problem presented by Fort Fisher caused Butler to look toward science to "reap the glory denied him in Virginia."⁴⁶ Throughout much of 1864, Confederate armies fought the Union to a stalemate. Union officers, Butler included, resorted to imaginative and sometimes odd solutions to try and break the impasse. In Virginia, Butler proposed floating a napalm-like solution across the James River against entrenched defenders.⁴⁷ While Grant for the most part supported these novel ideas, which often proved tactically feasible but impractical in execution for large bodies of men, they also sometimes proved costly to him in the court of public opinion.† But it was Butler's own experience supporting the Battle of the Crater, digging the Dutch Gap Canal, and accounts of a powerful powder barge ex-

* During the Overland Campaign of 1864, Grant was dubbed "Butcher Grant" by northern papers after a series of costly battles. Formidable earthworks and trench warfare presaging World War I characterized much of the campaign to take Richmond, forcing Union leaders to develop alternative tactics to overcome powerful Confederate defenses. The first of several unusual ideas Grant supported was Colonel Emory Upton's plan to use a dense column to attack the Confederate salient at Spotsylvania Courthouse. Once the armies settled into a siege around Petersburg, Grant approved plans brought up the chain of command by a regiment of former Pennsylvania coal miners to dig and explode a mine beneath Confederate lines. This became known as the Battle of the Crater. Butler himself convinced Grant to dig the Dutch Gap Canal as a way to bypass Confederate river batteries and ascend the James River toward Richmond.

BUTLER, PORTER, AND FORT JACKSON

Butler's relations with the Navy began on a much brighter note. In 1860, as war clouds loomed on the horizon, the Navy detailed the USS *Constitution* to be the school ship used at the U.S. Naval Academy at Annapolis, Maryland. The aging frigate, known to generations as "Old Ironsides," served as a floating dormitory and classroom for the most junior midshipmen at its mooring in the Severn River.⁴⁸ By April 1861, the country ripped itself apart and pro-secessionist riots in nearby Baltimore prevented Union troops, including Butler's newly raised Massachusetts regiment, from reaching the capital.

The Naval Academy continued to operate, although under a cloud, as Confederate cavalry drilled in view of its grounds and others threatened to shell and seize the *Constitution*. Amid all the threats and rumors, news arrived of a supposed waterborne expedition to capture the venerable vessel. In response, the academy staff prepared to defend its grounds and the ship, but she proved to be too cumbersome to maneuver or put to sea from the shallow waters of the Severn. As a result, officers instructed midshipmen as they gamely transformed it into a floating battery. Unknown to the

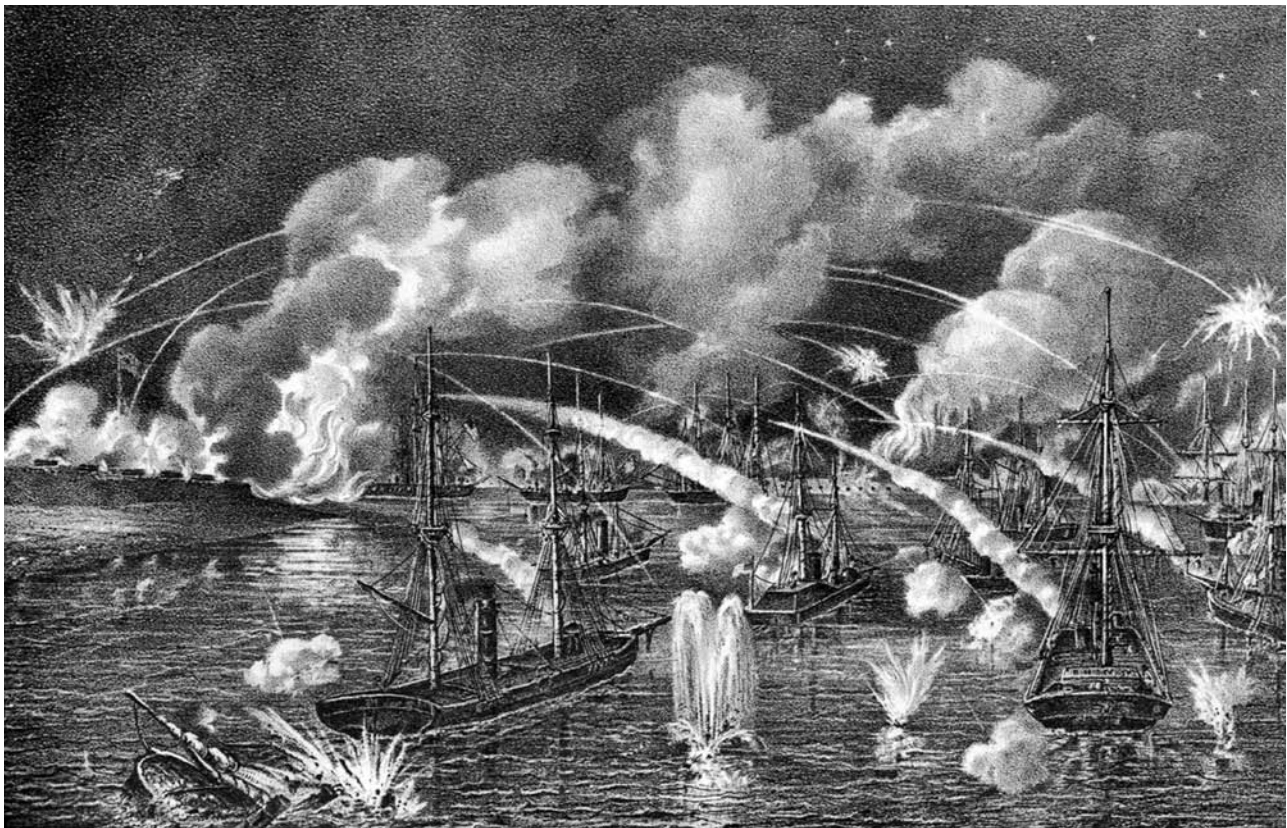
sailors, Butler, upon hearing the news of riots in Baltimore, commandeered the steamer *Maryland*, boarded his regiment, and made for Annapolis, which boasted a direct rail connection to Washington, DC.⁴⁹

On 21 April 1861, Old Ironsides made ready for action at the approach of an unidentified steamer. The teenage midshipmen nervously manned their stations waiting for the signal to fire on the vessel. On board the *Maryland*, Butler and other Army officers unfamiliar with naval protocol did not respond to hailing calls. After a few tense moments for the *Constitution*'s youngsters, the gun crews stood down when the mystery ship finally replied. Unknown to Butler, who was ignorant of most military subjects, he came just seconds from a short and inglorious end to his military career at the hands of midshipmen manning four 32-pounders aimed at the transport. After landing, Butler's regiment, made up of former New England fishermen, worked to lighten the old ship to ensure its escape from Confederate plots.⁵⁰

In the fall of 1861, weather and poor timing intervened to elevate David Dixon Porter in the minds of his superiors and, for the most part, ended dedicated

The bombardment of Fort Jackson is depicted in a period etching.

U.S. Army Military History Institute



Marine landing battalion operations. The results not only had implications for Union commanders at Fort Fisher, but also the Marines involved in the campaign. Following the Union defeat at the First Battle of Bull Run, Captain Samuel F. DuPont, commander of the South Atlantic Blockading Squadron, requested a Marine battalion to conduct landing operations. Major John G. Reynolds's unit, recently bloodied at Bull Run, trained and reequipped to provide DuPont with that dedicated landing force. DuPont wanted to capture the deepwater port at Port Royal, South Carolina, to allow the fleet to press the blockade of Southern ports throughout the year.

Initially, DuPont planned to capture the two forts guarding the harbor in a combined operation landing both Union infantry under Brigadier Thomas W. Sherman and Reynolds's Marine battalion. En route to Port Royal, however, a storm ripped into his fleet of more than 70 ships. The storm scattered the fleet and drove Army transports aground. In addition, the Army forces lost most of their artillery and ammunition. Reynolds's Marines fared no better when their side-wheel transport USS *Governor* foundered off the coast of South Carolina. After manning bilge pumps for two days, the Marines evacuated with most of their equipment onto the sloop USS *Sabine*.

The disastrous news forced Dupont to attack Forts Walker and Beauregard using only his wooden fleet. Given popular thinking of both engineers and naval officers at that time, such a choice offered only the prospect of a Pyrrhic victory. But, contrary to accepted wisdom, DuPont's attack and capture of Port Royal proved that a wooden fleet could not only pass under a gauntlet of heavy coastal fortifications, but also mete out severe punishment and survive the ordeal. For the Marine Corps, the ill-timed storm deprived it of an opportunity to showcase the ability of a properly trained and drilled landing battalion as opposed to hastily assembled formations like those used later at Fort Fisher, and which generally marked battalion landing operations for most of the war. After a few months of small-scale operations, the drain of maintaining Reynolds's battalion forced DuPont to transfer the unit back to its barracks where it was promptly disbanded.⁵¹ Meanwhile, news of Port Royal's fall inspired Porter, fresh from blockade duty in the Gulf of Mexico. He traveled to Washington and lobbied the Navy secretary Gideon Welles to capture New Orleans rather than try the impossible task of blockading it. He also advised Secretary Welles to employ a squadron of mortar schooners to enable the fleet to pass the strong fortifications at

Forts Jackson and Saint Philip on the Mississippi River. Welles liked the plan and even briefed it to President Lincoln. The president advised they should get Army approval from Major General George B. McClellan.⁵²

McClellan's blessing of the plan set the stage for the bad blood that ensued between Butler and Porter at Fort Fisher; however, a year later, the Army proposed sending Butler's troops to aid the naval efforts to seize New Orleans. Butler's early successes led to command at Fortress Monroe, Virginia, but his presence complicated McClellan's own aspirations and operational plans. The New Orleans expedition gave McClellan an opportunity to send his fellow Democrat down South and out the way where Butler could not interfere with the operations of the Army of the Potomac. In April 1862, the Navy under new Flag Officer David Glasgow Farragut and Butler's men, who recently occupied Ship Island, Mississippi, set their sights on the Crescent City.⁵³

After he sold his idea to Secretary Welles, Porter gathered a squadron of 21 schooners and five support vessels. In the meantime, he directed the casting of almost two dozen 13-inch siege mortars and thousands of shells at foundries in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Porter saw the mortars installed on board ship and sailed to meet the rest of Farragut's fleet in mid-February. By late March, Porter was busily employed helping to tow the larger ships in Farragut's fleet over the sand bars and into the river channel. By early April, he towed his schooners against the current upstream to a point below the rebel forts. From there, Porter's "Bummers" bombarded Fort Jackson for six days, helping Farragut's fleet to run past the fort on 24 April 1862 and then capture the city. Soon after, both forts, bypassed by Farragut, surrendered to Porter, who remained at anchor below them.

On 26 April, Captain John L. Broome and 200 Marines secured the New Orleans Customs House and city hall. Butler's troops arrived several days later to garrison the forts and city. Shortly afterward, Butler usurped credit in newspapers and dismissed Porter's mortar flotilla even though his troops were never engaged in the battle. Butler's stunt enraged Porter, and two years later, he pressed Grant to avoid working with Butler before the first attempt to take Fort Fisher.⁵⁴ Porter's lingering anger toward Butler belied the fact that he wasn't the only official to ruffle feathers by usurping credit. Secretary Welles and Assistant Secretary Fox both noted after the war that Porter inflated his own accomplishments at New Orleans to build his reputation to the detriment of his subordinates.⁵⁵

plosion in Erith, England, that convinced him that explosives might work against Fort Fisher.⁵⁶

“A Cheap Experiment in Pyrotechnics”

Butler’s plan required more than 200 tons of unusable black powder loaded in the hold of a ship converted to look like a Confederate blockade runner.⁵⁷ The Navy would tow the ship “within four or five hundred yards of Fort Fisher.” He believed detonation of the powder would render the garrison “paralyzed” and “by a prompt landing of men, seizure of the fort.”⁵⁸ After he briefed his naval counterpart on the plan, Porter described Butler’s excitement as “something like a hen that has laid an egg.” According to Porter, he liked the idea, despite Butler’s odd and secretive behavior, because it could potentially “simplify” seizure of the fort and would not involve “Congress or interference of the Committee on the Conduct of the War.”⁵⁹ However, one cannot help but wonder if the admiral’s own similar proposal some two decades earlier also influenced his consent to the plan.*

Butler also pitched his plan to high-ranking members of Lincoln’s cabinet, and even the president himself. But Secretary of the Navy Gideon Welles did not share Porter’s initial enthusiasm, and he convened a study to determine the feasibility of the project. Army and Navy ordnance and engineering experts scoffed at the plan, almost killing it. Butler’s close friend, Assistant Secretary of the Navy Gustavus V. Fox, liked the plan and became one of its chief proponents. Fox in his capacity with panel oversight, threw out the conclusions, reconvened the board, and coerced members to recommend Butler’s plan. With blessings of the experts fresh in hand, Fox got both Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton and Welles on board with the plan.⁶⁰ Grant for his part only wanted the oft-delayed expedition to begin. While doubtful of Butler’s assertions, he went along with the scheme, seeing “no serious harm could come of the experiment.”⁶¹

While historian Shelby Foote termed the Army-Navy combined amphibious force as an “unholy combination,”⁶² the Wilmington strike force could be better termed an untenable triumvirate. Butler and Porter carried a past of bad relations from the New Orleans campaign. Grant placed Weitzel in command of the landing force to limit Butler’s influence in the field and maintain harmonious relations with the Navy. However, Butler’s legal wrangling and subversion of Grant’s orders to Weitzel muddied the attempt.⁶³ As a result of Butler’s salesmanship, the powder boat be-

* Like many other Civil War leaders, Porter’s experiences in Mexico apparently colored his later decisions. For Porter those included support of the powder ship and concocting the naval brigade. During the Mexican-American War, Porter proposed his own scheme to blow up the Mexican fortress San Juan de Ulloa which defended Veracruz. Superiors, however, dismissed Porter’s impractical plan along with those put forward by other officers.



Naval History and Heritage Command
Assistant Secretary of the Navy Gustavus V. Fox, Butler’s personal friend, used his influence to get final approval of Butler’s scheme.

came the expedition’s central planning point, chief hope for success, and critical point of failure.⁶⁴ Further, a lack of communication not only resulted in increased distrust between Porter and Butler, but also additional delays that worsening winter weather only exacerbated.⁶⁵

An impatient Grant ordered Butler to assemble the 6,500-man strike force and transports while Porter’s fleet prepared to sail. The landing force comprised two divisions taken from Butler’s XXIV and XXV Corps commanded by Brigadier Generals Adelbert Ames and Charles J. Paine. Paine’s division consisted of two brigades of U.S. Colored Troops, as they were known at the time. Meanwhile, Confederates weakened Wilmington’s defenses by moving troops to head off Sherman’s campaign in Georgia. Grant sensed an opportunity and wanted Weitzel’s force ready to embark the moment Porter’s squadron weighed anchor.

Almost three months had passed since Grant decided to attack Wilmington, and Butler’s powder ship added another lengthy delay. In late November, with the explosive plan approved, outfitting a suitable ship fell to the Navy. By the first week of December, the expendable steamer *Louisiana*, which had seen duty as a sometime patrol and mail ship along the North Carolina coast, was selected. The Navy towed the vessel, only recently salvaged after it accidentally sank, to Hampton Roads.⁶⁶ Along with Ordnance Bureau engineers, they retrofitted the ship to resemble a blockade runner and loaded the condemned powder from Army and Navy stores.⁶⁷

Over time, Porter grew suspicious of Butler's motives and planned to ensure he did not again usurp credit from the Navy. He also worried that winter storms would derail the expedition while they waited for the powder ship and Butler to release troops for the expedition.⁶⁸ By 4 December 1864, Grant ordered the expedition to sail "with or without [Butler's] powder boat."⁶⁹ Two days later, as the ship neared completion, Butler issued written orders to Weitzel of an organizational nature only and omitted any operational goals. After seeing Weitzel's orders, Grant issued written orders to Butler, intended for—but never received by—Weitzel, which spelled out the aims of the expedition.⁷⁰ First, Grant wanted Weitzel to land and entrench across Federal Point to isolate Fort Fisher, then seize it by assault and naval bombardment, and, if feasible, capture Wilmington in conjunction with the Navy. Grant sent a telegram to Butler noting that the plan provided too few entrenching tools. Butler increased the number of tools but, as his actions later demonstrated, failed to grasp Grant's intent for their use.⁷¹ On 8 December, Weitzel, with Butler's approval, finally embarked troops onto waiting transports.

The all-important *Louisiana*, however, was not ready and neither were Porter's ships. On 10 December, the foul weather Porter earlier feared made it impossible for transports assembled off Fortress Monroe to sail. The weather abated two days later, but Porter then needed to replenish his ironclads at Beaufort, North Carolina. Butler agreed to a 36-hour delay and, with rations already running low on board his transports, also planned to replenish at Beaufort.

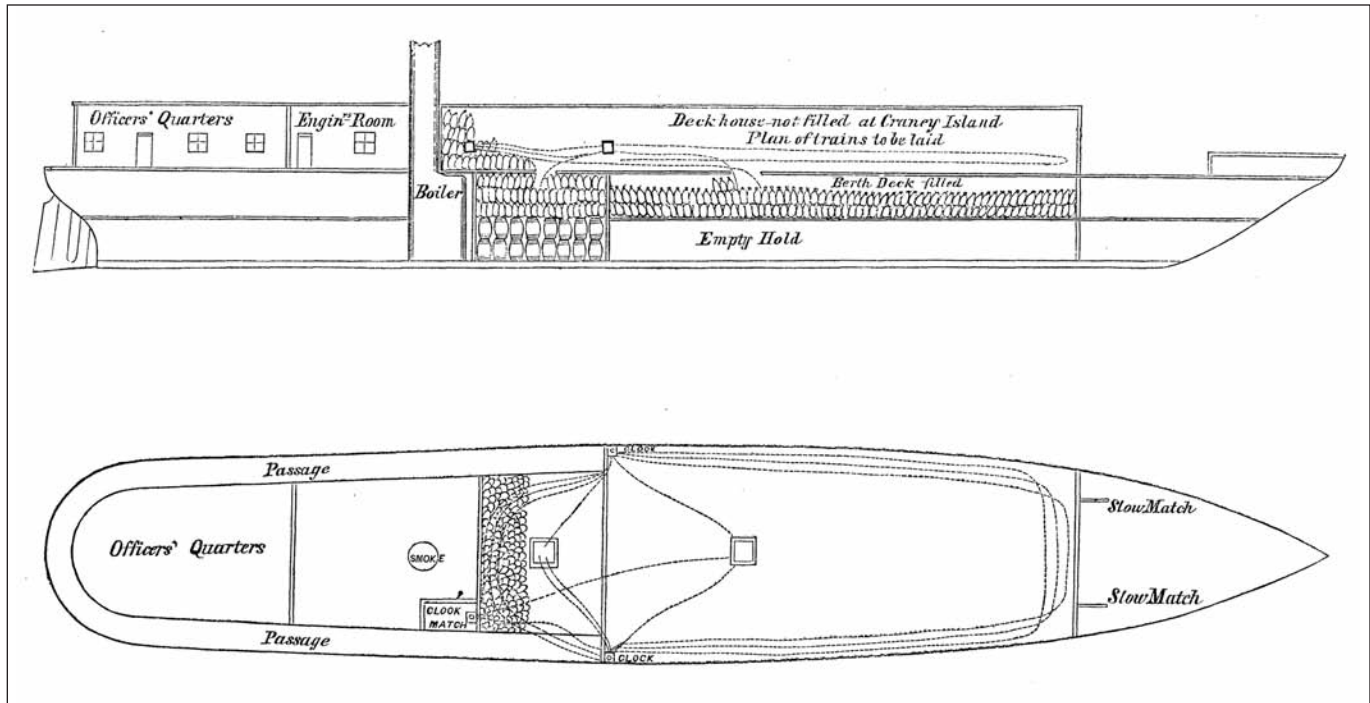
On 13 December, Butler ordered his transports to steam up the Potomac River until dark to misdirect Confederate spies he believed watched their movements. Porter's ships already sailed toward Beaufort by the time Butler's transports returned to Hampton Roads the next morning. Butler's last-minute concern for secrecy not only confused his own troops as to their objective but also the Navy.⁷²

Porter was not privy to Butler's deception plan and thought the Army transports were already en route to the rendezvous off Beaufort. Butler, for whatever reason, believed the rendezvous point to be 25 miles offshore from Fort Fisher. His transports assembled north of Wilmington off Masonboro Inlet late on 15 December. The next day, he moved a portion of his ships to the supposed offshore rendezvous point, but to his surprise, Porter's flotilla was not on station. Instead, he found only few large ships from Porter's 60-ship squadron. For three days, the transports idled, waiting for Porter's arrival. Butler for his part sent a ship in close to the fort with Weitzel and division commander Ames on consecutive days to conduct reconnaissance of New Inlet and the fort.⁷³

Finally on 19 December, the rest of Porter's ships, accompanied by the ironclads and the *Louisiana*, came into view—along with another winter storm. Porter blamed his tardiness on bad weather and difficulties with the powder ship, but he suggested moving up the timetable on the *Louisiana*. Butler viewed Porter's suggestion as an attempt by the Navy to take credit if the powder ship worked since it was not possible to land troops in rough seas. In the end, Butler's staff convinced Porter to rescind his order to ex-

These drawings of Butler's "Powdership," the former USS Louisiana, were used in a congressional hearing.

U.S. Congress: Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War



USS *NEW IRONSIDES*

Unlike its famed namesake predecessor, the USS *New Ironsides* actually boasted sides consisting of 4½-inch iron plate backed by 14 inches of white oak planking. The armor sloped outward toward the waterline and included a protective armored belt, which extended below the waterline. Shipbuilder Charles Cramp originally designed the ship to mount a battery of 16 8-inch guns, but during the government bidding phase, the design changed to substitute more powerful 9-inch guns. During construction, its armament grew even more powerful as the Navy outfitted the ship's gun deck with two 150-pounder Parrott rifles and an impressive battery of 14 11-inch smoothbore Dahlgren guns, considered to be best for fighting Confederate ironclads because of their rate of fire. Above the gun deck, the ship's spar deck was outfitted with two 50-pounder Dahlgren rifles. The Navy added a large iron ram to its prow during construction to complete the ship's offensive capabilities.⁷⁴

During its short career, the ship absorbed more punishment from Confederate guns than any other ship in the Navy.⁷⁵ The ironclad's final major action involved leading the bombardments against Fort Fisher. During the battle, 48 Marines made up its Marine Guard commanded by First Lieutenant Richard Collum, who later wrote the first official history of the Marine Corps.⁷⁶ After the war, the ship went into port in Philadelphia, where on 15 December 1866, during the first watch, an unattended stove on board ship finished what countless Confederate rounds could not. Newspapers cited the ship's inglorious end as post-war haste to cut spending that left the ironclad without a Marine Guard. The fire below decks, which quickly spread, was blamed on lazy contract watchmen. When hastily organized and inadequately equipped attempts to control the fire failed, port authorities towed the ship from its berth to nearby shallows where she burned to the waterline and sank.⁷⁷

USS New Ironsides was depicted as she appeared in 1863 by R. G. Skerrett.

Naval History and Heritage Command



plode the *Louisiana*.⁷⁸ Unable to launch his attack, the next day, Porter formed ships into line-of-battle to conduct rehearsals. The practice runs, however, according to both Butler and Confederate accounts, alerted the defenders in Fort Fisher to the Union presence.⁷⁹ The Navy suggested Butler return to Beaufort to avoid the harsh weather and replenish the transports. Soon after, Butler's troop ships steamed north for Beaufort. The weather broke on 22 December, but the bulk of the transports remained in port to replenish stocks.⁸⁰

For all of Butler's last-minute secrecy as to the real objective of the expedition, by Christmas Eve, the element of surprise was lost. While the general vainly tried to keep the aim of the expedition secret by cutting off mail service to Porter's fleet, newspapers began leaking the plan soon after the ships departed Virginia.⁸¹ The news gave Confederates cause to bolster Lamb's garrison previously stripped of five companies of artillery to meet Sherman's advance. By the time Union ships appeared on the horizon on 20 December, Lamb's garrison only mustered about half its intended strength. Lee detached Major General Robert F. Hoke's division of 6,000 North Carolinians to bolster the defense, but their timely arrival remained doubtful. Confederate Commodore Robert F. Pinckney doubted Lamb's men could stand up to a naval bombardment. Lamb rebuffed Pinckney's assertion and remained confident about defending the fort.⁸²

The storms that forced Butler's transports back toward Beaufort provided time to strengthen Lamb's garrison and move supporting infantry from Virginia. In response to the crisis, North Carolina Governor Zebulon B. Vance sent what state troops he could muster, including 16- and 17-year-old boys of the North Carolina Junior Reserves. Led by their cadre officers, the young reservists took up entrenched positions on the Sugar Loaf, a piece of high ground five miles north of the fort, which covered the Wilmington Road.⁸³ During the fall of 1864, Whiting advised Lamb to build an entrenched camp for supporting infantry on Sugar Loaf. From that location, Whiting planned to coordinate with Lamb to support the fort and hopefully repulse landings on the nearby beaches.⁸⁴ On 22 December, the first of Hoke's brigades arrived in Wilmington and proceeded to the position. On the 23d, state reinforcements sent by Governor Vance continued to trickle in. Company-sized units from the 10th North Carolina Regiment, 13th North Carolina Battery, and 7th Battery of Junior Reserves arrived and brought the fort's garrison to almost 900 men.⁸⁵

Reinforcements also came from the Confederate naval units in Wilmington. The presence of the commerce raider *Chickamauga* in port and ongoing conversion of the *Tallahassee* back to blockade running left their naval contingents available for duty.⁸⁶ Confederate authorities in

Wilmington ordered their crews to augment the naval garrison which manned Battery Buchanan. Confederate Marines from the Wilmington Naval Station commanded by Captain Alfred C. Van Benthuyzen, along with some 32 sailors, boarded the transport *Yadkin* and steamed toward the fort. Lamb ordered the Marines and sailors under Confederate Navy Lieutenant Francis M. Roby of the *Chickamauga* to serve two salvaged naval guns inside the fort. Roby's detachment found its post manning two 7-inch Brooke rifled guns along the sea face in the partially completed Columbiad Battery.⁸⁷

Things Get Under Weigh

After months of preparation, both sides knew waiting had come to an end. Inside the fort, morale was high. Lamb's men sang campfire tunes and played instruments and games "with as much zest as if a more serious game were not impending."⁸⁸ Butler's seasick soldiers were ready to get off the ships as they bobbed about stuck below decks some 90 miles away in Beaufort. Admiral Porter, who worried about weather and the powder ship, became restless. Officers of the few transports that did arrive on 23 December informed him that Butler expected to assemble his landing force the following night and be ready to attack on Christmas Day. Porter decided to send the *Louisiana* and then launch a sustained bombardment. With luck, the stunned garrison would fall to a naval landing force before Butler returned.⁸⁹ To the disappointment of Lieutenant Commander William B. Cushing, captain of flagship USS *Malvern*, Porter chose Commander Alexander C. Rhind instead of Cushing to command volunteers who would steam *Louisiana* in close to the fort and set off its explosives. During first watch on the night of 23 December, the USS *Wilderness* towed *Louisiana* toward its appointed destiny. Porter ordered the rest of his ships to be prepared to go into action on Christmas Eve.⁹⁰

On board the powder ship, Rhind and the volunteers prepared fuses and timing devices to set off the 215 tons of powder stored below.⁹¹ Two weeks earlier when the fleet put into port at Beaufort, Rhind not only loaded another 30 tons of powder on board the ship, but discovered that the engineers had laid the fuse system improperly. Rhind also considered the clocks intended to set off a simultaneous explosion inadequate for such a sensitive task. Evidently, the ordnance engineers did not anticipate the motion of a ship at sea and used ordinary clocks. Rhind modified the clocks and repaired the fuse train to try and get a simultaneous explosion. Admiral Porter, however, distrusted the complex timing system and ordered Rhind to add a pile of combustibles in the aft cabin of the ship. The last man on board would ignite the "cord of pine knots" and evacuate, leaving nothing to chance in case the clockwork mechanism malfunctioned.⁹²

After the tug *Wilderness* released the ship, Rhind and his men steamed toward the fort in the early morning hours of 24 December. In addition to using Confederate lantern signals, they also planned to use signals from the support ship *Kansas* to estimate their position.⁹³ For blockade runners, the “big hill”—Lamb’s Mound Battery—provided the initial point to reckon final navigation into New Inlet, and at night, it served as a lighthouse. Each blockade runner carried a Confederate signalman who by means of coded lantern signals alerted Fort Fisher. The fort’s lookouts then placed range lights atop Mound Battery and on the beach. By closely following the signals, the ship’s pilot determined where to cross the bar into the New Inlet channel.⁹⁴ When Union ships spotted these signals, they, too, used lanterns to coordinate the chase and fire on the evading ship.⁹⁵ Fort Fisher’s guns, however, often provided the final margin of safety to keep blockaders at a distance.⁹⁶

Unexpectedly, the *Louisiana* spotted an unknown blockade runner, which turned out to be the *Little Hattie*, in the darkness. The *Little Hattie*’s captain expected another blockade runner and confused the powder boat for it. Taking advantage of the situation, Rhind followed *Little Hattie* toward the fort. However, the swift Confederate steamer easily outpaced Rhind’s bloated and clumsy floating bomb. *Little Hattie* passed into the channel and made for the wharf near Battery Buchanan. The vessel’s captain thought he had been followed and wished to see Colonel Lamb. Inside the fort, the blockade runner’s master reported to Lamb what he knew of the Union fleet. As the two were about to part, a sentry alerted the post that a ship was on fire off the fort. The captain thought it might be the runner *Agnes Fry*, which was due in from Nassau. Others thought it to be a Union blockader scuttled to avoid capture. Lamb issued orders not to fire on approaching ships and retired for the night.⁹⁸

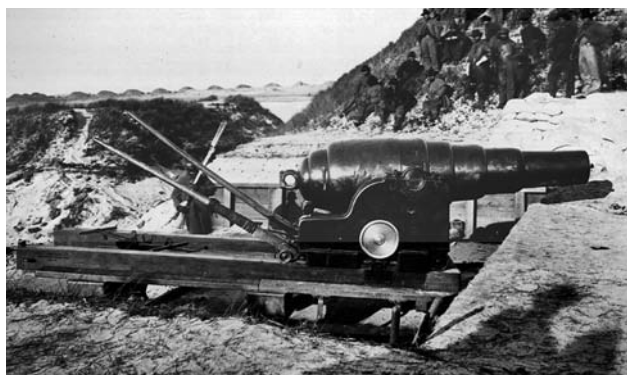
ARMSTRONG GUN

The famous Armstrong gun captured at Fort Fisher was one of two identical weapons imported from English manufacturer Sir William Armstrong & Co. The colossal gun tube with its signature reinforcing iron bands weighed almost 16,000 pounds and fired a nearly 150-pound projectile. Confederates mounted one of the Armstrongs in Fort Fisher and its twin in nearby Fort Caswell. The massive rifled gun was originally mounted on a mahogany carriage along the sea face. Fort Fisher’s garrison treated the monster weapon as their mascot and meticulously maintained the gun and its richly grained carriage.

The Armstrong was a sophisticated weapon that used what was known as the “shunt” system of rifling the gun barrel, which allowed easy loading for the crew. Rows of copper studs along the body of the shell

The Confederates’ prized Armstrong gun, shown here as captured, is currently on display at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, NY.

U.S. Army Military History Institute



Atlanta History Center

A 150-Pounder Armstrong shunt system shell recovered from Fort Fisher, NC. The shell had no fuse. Instead, it relied on heat and friction generated by impact against a target to ignite the internal powder charge.

grabbed grooves in the barrel to impart twist as the shell moved down the bore of the gun. Lamb’s Armstrong gun could fire two types of rounds, a shell that relied on friction and heat to detonate, and an armor-piercing bolt for short-range engagements against heavily armored ironclad warships.

After the war, both guns were removed and taken to the service academies as war trophies. The Fort Fisher gun resides at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, New York. The Navy removed the other gun captured at Fort Caswell to the U.S. Naval Academy at Annapolis, Maryland. That gun has since disappeared. It is believed that, somewhat ironically, the massive eight-ton gun went on to serve the Union it once fought against when it was melted for scrap during World War II.⁹⁷

Activity on board the *Louisiana* kept at a frantic pace as the crew tried to get the ship in close to shore. Rhind's navigator triangulated its position and distance from shore using the support vessel *Kansas's* lantern signals and those of Mound Battery. In the rough weather, however, Rhind's crew incorrectly estimated that the ship lay just 300 yards off the beach instead of its actual position of 600 yards. They then set anchor, lit fuses, combustibles, and prepared to evacuate the floating bomb. The tug *Wilderness* steamed nearby to recover Rhind and his men. Hurriedly, the men abandoned the ship and rowed to safety as the flames took over the doomed vessel. Fearing the explosion, Union ships remained at a safe distance 12 miles offshore and awaited the blast, which was to signal the start of the battle. Finally at 0150, the powder ship exploded.⁹⁹

Colonel Lamb, who used the old lighthouse keeper's home as his quarters, felt the concussion and rattle of an explosion. He thought it sounded like a 10-inch Columbiad shell going off, while sentries thought the powder boat to be a blockader run aground whose crew set it on fire to avoid capture.¹⁰⁰ Contrary to Butler's expectations, instead of simultaneously exploding, the powder only partially exploded, probably due to a combination of malfunctioning time mechanisms, fuses, and the fire set by Rhind's men. The result was "a cheap experiment in pyrotechnics" as burning powder created a large curtain of fire that shot into the air like a huge Roman candle. Instead of massive devastation and a dazed garrison, Porter discovered that the powder ship only succeeded in waking Confederates for the upcoming battle.¹⁰¹

Butler learned the next morning that Porter had sent in the *Louisiana*. Unaware that the ship only succeeded in momentarily burning away the darkness as it fizzled out, he hurriedly ordered his transports back toward Fort Fisher to keep the Navy from usurping all the glory. Despite Porter's professed confidence in Butler's scheme, he hedged his bets and published a conventional support plan for the Army landings. He circulated his General Order 70, which outlined the organization, tasks, and fire support assignments for each of three lines of battle and line of reserves that made up the squadron. The admiral also issued special orders to coordinate gunfire by compass if smoke obscured the fort and the use of marker buoys to prevent his larger ships from running aground in front of the fort.¹⁰²



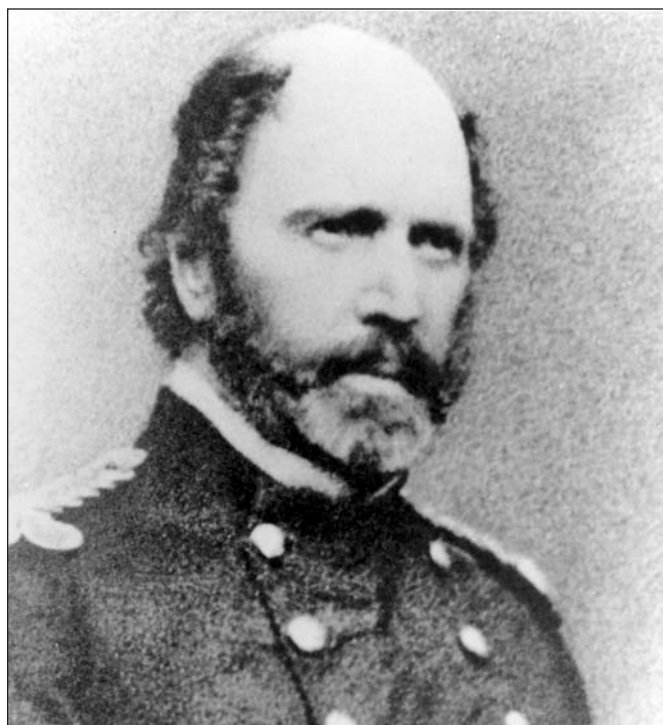
National Archives and Records Administration

The crew of a IX-inch Dahlgren gun drill on board a gunboat, most likely the USS Miami, in 1864. Because of personnel shortages, ship captains often assigned Marines to crew a deck gun led by a Marine officer or noncommissioned officer.

On 24 December, just after daybreak, the ships steamed toward the fort. Around noon, Confederate Marine Private Authur Muldoon, standing watch in Lamb's combat headquarters atop the Pulpit Battery, spotted a line of ironclads about a mile distant. The imposing ships anchored

Colonel John Harris was the sixth Commandant of the Marine Corps.

U.S. Marine Corps History Division



U.S. MARINE RECRUITING

The outbreak of the Civil War caught not only the hastily assembled Union Army but also the Marines off guard after the First Battle of Bull Run. The rapid expansion of the Navy to enforce the Anaconda Plan also placed additional burdens on the Corps. In response, Congress nearly doubled its size to almost 100 officers and 3,700 enlisted men; however, its relative size decreased when compared to the Navy. As the Navy expanded to 50,000 men, the Corps' relative strength dwindled from 20 percent down to a mere 7 percent. Senior naval officers repeatedly asked for more Marines and often patrolled the waters without Marine Guards on board.¹⁰³

In addition, Marine recruiters fought against a stacked recruit bounty system at the state level. Relatively generous recruiting bonuses offered by local state militia and Federal recruiters coupled with long four-year enlistments offered by the Marines hamstrung the Corps' own recruiting efforts. For much of the war, Navy and Marine recruits did not count against a state's draft quota. The conscription acts of 1862 and 1863 generally rewarded politically appointed officers, such as Butler, who could recruit and raise a regiment for the Army. By early 1864, Congress took action to correct the situation. Local boun-

ties in New York and Philadelphia, along with Federal money, induced recruits to join the Marine Corps. The Battle of Gettysburg and Grant's 1864 Overland Campaign, along with their correspondingly high casualty rate compared to that of the Marine Corps, also convinced many that they stood a better chance of survival as a Marine.¹⁰⁴

However, some in Congress, including Iowa Senator James W. Grimes, felt that the Army should absorb the Marines into a new regiment. In addition to congressional efforts to abolish the Marine Corps, Assistant Secretary of the Navy Fox viewed Marines as "clumsy" and favored transferring them to the Army as part of a naval efficiency program.¹⁰⁵ Colonel John Harris, Commandant of the Marine Corps, along with Marine Quartermaster Major William B. Slack, successfully fought off attempts by soliciting input from Rear Admirals Farragut, DuPont, and Porter along with other influential naval officers. Armed with these forceful endorsements, Harris published and forwarded the book *Letters from Naval Officers in Reference to the United States Marine Corps* to Secretary of the Navy Welles. In the end, the letter book influenced Congress to table the effort until after the war.¹⁰⁶

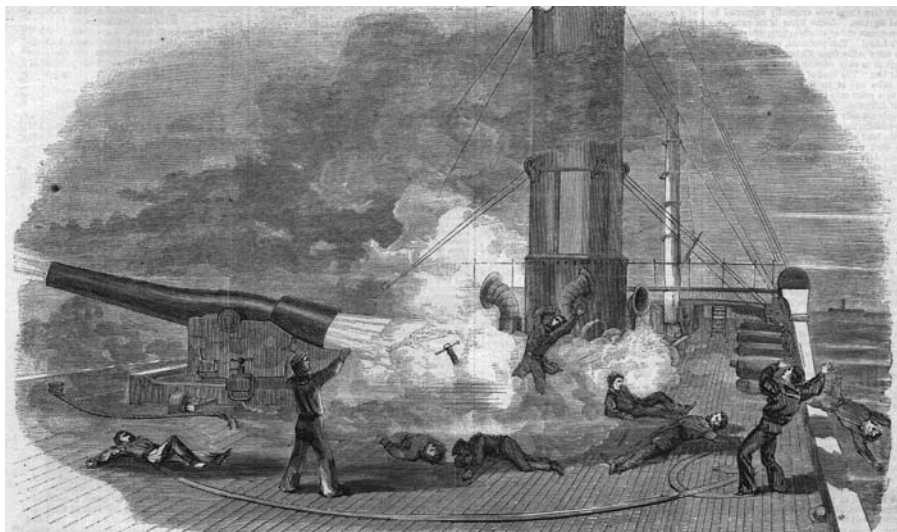
close to the beach off the apex of the fort.¹⁰⁷ The gray-clad artillerymen manned their guns and waited for Lamb's signal to fire. Meanwhile, the wooden ships of the Union squadron formed their lines of battle approximately 1,300 yards away from the fort to create a gigantic arc surrounding the fort. Out of range at 1.5 miles, Porter's line of reserve ships organized into four divisions. His flagship, the *Malvern*, a captured sidewheel blockade runner, was both fast and maneuverable. He positioned himself close to the middle of the arc where he could coordinate fires and communicate with his squadron.¹⁰⁸

The USS *New Ironsides*, the Navy's first ironclad not limited to coastal duty, led the flotilla of five ironclad vessels spotted by Confederate lookouts. She formed the reference point and base of fire in Porter's bombardment plan against Fort Fisher's land face. Including the ironclad ships, the squadron's combined firepower boasted a total of 63 vessels with 590 guns.¹⁰⁹ In comparison, the fort mounted only 44 guns. The fleet's combined broadside fired 22 tons of metal at the Confederates with every salvo. The magazines of just two of Porter's powerful frigates stored more ammunition than Lamb had available in the entire fort—3,600 shells. Fort Fisher's variety of large guns only added to the acute ammunition shortage and prevented a high rate of fire. The finely machined Armstrong rifle had only

12 usable shells. Because of the shortage, Lamb ordered every gun to fire only once every 30 minutes. If a ship tried to cross over the sand bar and make a run for the New Inlet channel, however, every gun had permission to fire as fast as possible.¹¹⁰

Just before 1300 on 24 December, the *New Ironsides* broke the calm, which prevailed on a "perfect winter day." One of its starboard 11-inch guns belched flame, hurtling its monstrous shell toward the Confederate flag atop the ramparts. Lamb ordered a nearby 10-inch gun to return fire, hoping to ricochet a shot off the water and through the hull of the *Susquehanna*. Lamb's gunners took careful aim and pulled the lanyard, which sent the shell skipping off the water like a huge bowling ball. The shot struck and put a hole through the ship's smokestack but failed to puncture the hull. Porter's fleet answered the Confederate gun with its own thundering salvos. Lamb's guns replied and sent massive shells skipping wildly across the otherwise calm waters.¹¹¹

The unfinished traverses in the Columbiad battery exposed Lieutenant Roby's detachment of Confederate Marines and sailors to the Union broadsides. Besides exposure to Union fire, Roby worried about overheating the Brooke rifles. To limit the detachment's exposure and prevent overheating, Roby ordered the men to seek cover and



University of Michigan Library

The Christmas Eve 1864 bursting of the 100-pound Parrott rifle on board the USS Juniata was depicted in the 21 January 1865 issue of Harper's Weekly.

only emerge every 15 minutes to fire. The rebel Marines and sailors cheered when their shots scored hits that splintered the hulls of wooden ships opposite the battery. Union ships responded, sending numerous shells overhead. Not every one exploded as intended, however. Some hit the sand behind the battery, then exploded, causing the rebels to dart for cover.¹¹² The Confederate Navy had retained the grog ration, which its Northern counterpart discontinued in 1862 under pressure from temperance societies.¹¹³ Seeing his men tire, Lieutenant Roby issued a ration—a mixture of equal parts water and rum—to maintain the men's strength. Just then a Union shell exploded, sending shrapnel that shattered the jug of grog and thereby “delivered a highly-condensed temperance lecture.”¹¹⁴

Though Confederate return fire paled in comparison to the volume aimed at the fort, some shells struck home among the fleet. Their guns hulled the USS *Osceola* amidships. The sidewheel gunboat limped away from the battle almost sinking before support vessels put it under tow. Porter's wooden ships tried to mitigate damage to critical areas with provisional armor. They lowered heavy chain curtains over the sides and stacked sandbags to protect the ship's boilers and other crucial areas. These efforts, however, were not always successful as one Confederate 7-inch shell punctured the sidewheel gunboat USS *Mackinaw's* boiler, scalding 10 of its crew, including three Marines.¹¹⁵ Though scoring hits, the fort's garrison wanted to concentrate fire on a single vessel to register a victory, but Lamb forced the artillerymen to conserve their limited ammunition supply. As a result, the fort only fired 672 shells the first day compared to approximately 10,000 by the Union. The paucity of Confederate firing also led Union leaders to think their bombardment had silenced the Confederate batteries.¹¹⁶

Plenty of Blame

The needs of the war placed the U.S. Marine Corps in a position to strengthen its ties with the Navy. Wartime recruiting difficulties strained the Corps' ability to meet its shipboard roles. Both services had trouble recruiting, and as a result, many ships went to sea without Marines, or only the equivalent of a modern squad on board, called a Sergeants Guard. Of almost 70 ships at Fort Fisher, only 24 in Porter's squadron posted Marines on board.¹¹⁷ In reaction to the Navy's own continued manpower struggles, ship captains increasingly assigned Marines to man deck guns. By early 1864, the Marine Corps Commandant, Colonel

John Harris, supported ships' captains by assigning Marines to naval gun crews. He wanted the Navy to accept Marines as “full partners” as a means to deflect efforts to absorb the Corps into the Army. As a result, the use of Marine gun crews on board ship evolved during the war into standard practice.¹¹⁸

Shipboard Marines, such as Sergeant Miles M. Oviatt from Olean, New York, manned powerful naval guns mounted on the weather deck. Noncommissioned officers like him captained a gun crew of almost two dozen Marines who served the ship's pivot guns. Oviatt was part of the Marine Guard commanded by Captain George P. Houston on board the screw sloop-of-war USS *Brooklyn*. Captain Charles Heywood, a future Commandant, enlisted Oviatt on 19 August 1862. Two years later, Oviatt became one of seven Marines awarded the Medal of Honor for actions during the Battle of Mobile Bay. The importance and acceptance of the Marine Corps' new shipboard artillery role is attested to by the fact that more than half of the 17 Medals of Honor awarded to Marines during the war went to those manning the Navy's great guns.¹¹⁹

Marines like Oviatt not only manned naval guns, including the 100-pounder Parrott or Dahlgren rifles, on board ship, but also retained their traditional role as “infantry soldiers trained for service afloat. Their discipline, equipment, character, and esprit de corps being that of a soldier . . . [gave] to a ship-of-war its military character.” They guarded the ship's magazine and prisoners, and maintained order and discipline. In addition, they served as part of the crew standing regular watches, and manned ropes.¹²⁰ They also retained their traditional role as sharpshooters. Marines “were efficient with their muskets, and . . . when ordered to fill vacancies at the guns, did it well.”¹²¹

Sergeant Richard Binder, captain of a Marine gun crew in the USS *Ticonderoga*, fought the 100-pounder Parrott rifle, which, unlike smooth-bore guns, had internal grooves that gave the weapon greater range and accuracy. The Parrotts were relatively simple in design for mass manufacturing, consisting basically of two parts—a heavy cast-iron tube with a reinforcing band of wrought iron around the breech.¹²² Parrott rifles, however, especially larger ones, proved prone to catastrophic failure just ahead of the breech band. Repeated firing of the guns in combat often ended with deadly results when barrels burst unexpectedly. During the first attack on Fort Fisher, five 100-pounder Parrots, including one on board the *Ticonderoga*, burst, killing or wounding 45 Marines and sailors.¹²³

Porter published a detailed plan to bombard the fort, which included the expected position of each ship to engage all of the Confederate batteries and prevent Lamb's artillerists from concentrating fire on any one vessel.¹²⁴ Implementing the plan proved difficult on 24 December as ships mistakenly anchored away from their assigned positions. In addition to Confederate fire, ships also had to contend with changing tides that impacted the accuracy of the Union guns. The shifting tides frustrated naval crews but, as Oviatt observed, it was the misalignment of the fleet that caused the smaller ships to miss their targets.¹²⁵ The calm winds also hampered effective engagement as smoke lingered around the guns rather than dissipating. These artificial clouds masked Confederate batteries from naval gunners afloat and prevented Lamb's gun crews ashore from adjusting fire as the impressive sight of Porter's squadron disappeared into the haze.¹²⁶ As a result, the Confederate batteries did little damage to Porter's ships as the majority of the "reb's firing . . . fell short or went over."¹²⁷

Above the smoke-blurred landscape, the Confederate banner defiantly waved high atop Mound Battery. Union gun crews throughout the squadron vied for the honor of shooting away the Confederate flag. Though well intentioned, many shots went high and missed the fort entirely. Lamb realized what the Union gunners were doing and moved a company battle flag to an area, which would not harm his garrison or their guns. Eventually, the flag was shot away and landed outside the parapet on the land face.

With the coming of night, the Navy ceased its bombardment.¹²⁸ Since Porter began the attack without coordination from the Army, few of Butler's transports arrived before nightfall. Without a landing to support, the Navy withdrew and awaited the ships from Beaufort. In defiance, Lamb fired the last shot of the day to assure the Union fleet it had not silenced the fort. Despite the smoke and fires observed in the fort from on board ship, Lamb's defenses remained largely intact. The fort lost only its out-buildings, sustained damage to three gun carriages, and

suffered 23 wounded. Despite Union assertions that the superb naval gunnery silenced the fort, Lamb felt "never since the invention of gunpowder, was there so much harmlessly expended."¹²⁹

At 0600 on Christmas Day, Weitzel and some of Butler's staff went on board the flagship *Malvern* to coordinate the landings and fire support against Confederates manning artillery batteries above the fort.¹³⁰ Porter wanted to follow up on what he thought had been an effective bombardment the previous day. However, the bad feelings between Butler and Porter continued to manifest. Porter mistook Lamb's ammunition conservation for effective gunnery that, according to Porter, rendered the fort open to seizure. As a result, he blamed Butler for not being ready to assault on 24 December. In a communiqué to Secretary Welles, Porter coolly reported that the fort was silenced on the 24th, but that there were no troops to "take possession," as he expected a shell-shocked garrison to give up at the first sight of Butler's troops. Weitzel, still expecting a determined stand against the landing and any assault on the fort, argued against Porter's view.¹³¹

Porter signaled to the squadron and by 0930 the entire fleet steamed toward Fort Fisher, in the words of Lieutenant J. Gillespie Cochrane on board the sidewheel USS *Alabama*, to "exchange Christmas presents with the 'rebs.'"¹³² Shortly before 1100, Union guns renewed the cannonade and shells once again rained down on the Confederate fort. During the morning meeting with Weitzel, Porter detailed 17 ships to cover the landing beach three miles north of the fort. He also provided launches and crew to land Butler's troops. However, confusion reigned in Butler's staff planning. Weitzel and Butler were certain that Porter sabotaged the landing by exploding the powder boat early, and as a result, they were sure to face heavy resistance. Butler favored abandoning the landings, but Colonel Cyrus B. Comstock, sent as an observer by Grant, urged the men to conduct a reconnaissance landing.¹³³

Porter tasked Captain Oliver S. Glisson to coordinate naval gunfire for Butler's landing. Butler dumbfounded Glisson with the revelation that the Army only intended to land 500 men despite the good weather and ammunition constraints within the fleet. The USS *Santiago De Cuba* and *Brooklyn* began preparatory fires on the landing beaches two miles north of Fort Fisher. They focused on Battery Anderson, a one-gun emplacement, manned by a company from the 42d North Carolina of Hoke's Division, to help oppose the landing. By early afternoon, landing craft were going ashore and Porter once again wondered why no massive assault was made on the fort while its defenders took refuge in their bombproofs.¹³⁴

Further reinforcement of Porter's opinions came from the landing beach when bluejackets took the first prisoners of the campaign. While part of Weitzel's landing force

approached Battery Anderson from its landing beach, officers on board the captured blockade runner *USS Britannia* spied a white flag above the earthworks. The ships ceased fire, and four of them launched surf boats to accept the surrender. The vessels rowed quickly toward the beach, each vying to get there first. Then the infantry ashore saw the boats approaching to snatch their prize away. A new race ensued between the Army ashore and the sailors afloat. *Britannia's* launch beached first and, as Porter predicted the day before, 70 shell-shocked veterans from the 42d North Carolina surrendered almost on cue to a lone ensign. The dejected-looking New York infantrymen arrived too late to capture their prize, which left the out-of-breath soldiers to watch as triumphant sailors took charge of the prisoners.¹³⁵

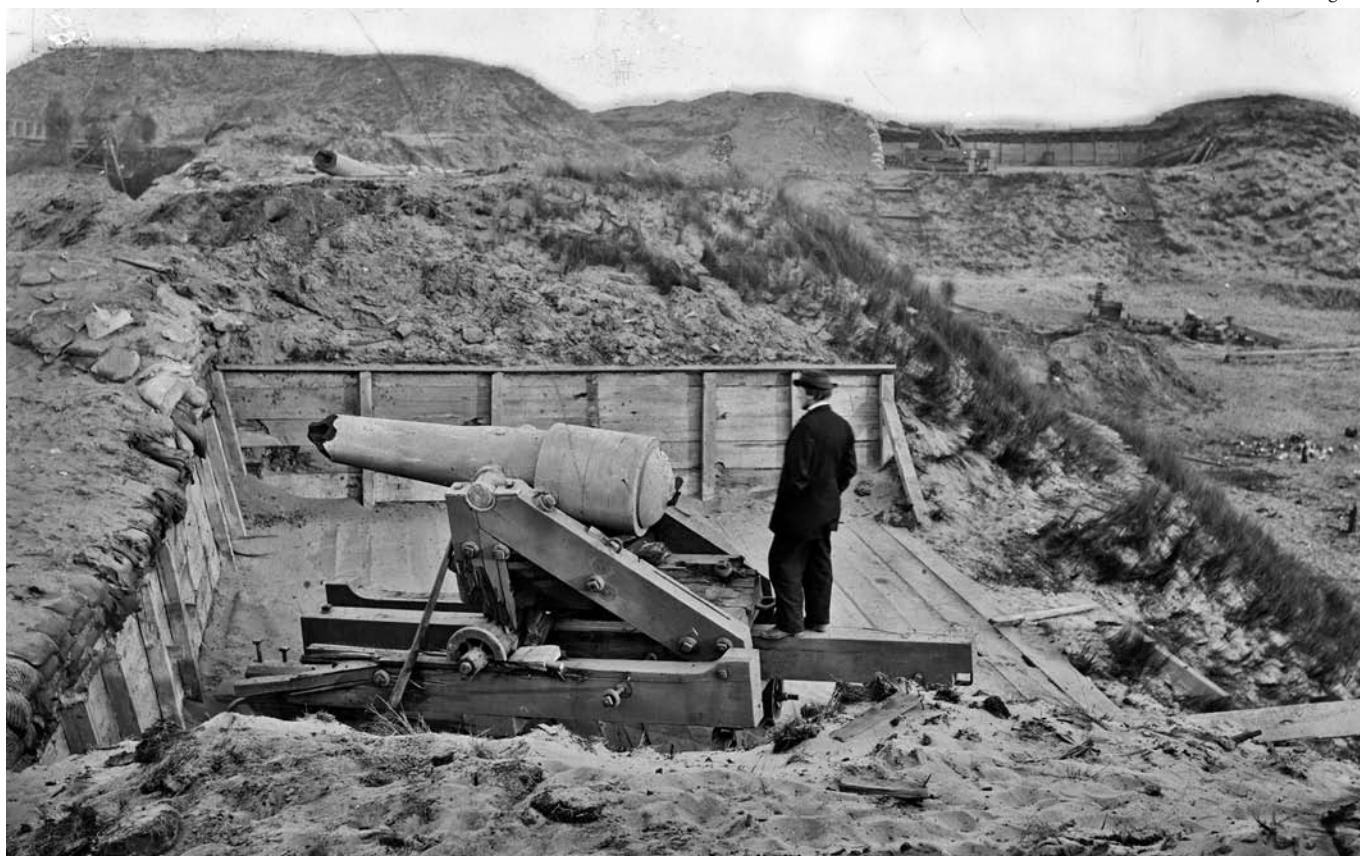
This encouraging news from the beach and seemingly effective fire against the fort made Porter think about an attempt on Wilmington itself by running past the fort. However, he needed accurate information on the depth of the bar and buoys to mark the channel before such a foray.¹³⁶ Ironically, Union efforts to chart the course into New Inlet inadvertently disabled more guns than all the Union cannon aimed at the sea face on Christmas Day. Lieutenant Commander William B. Cushing took sound-

ings of the bar into the New Inlet channel while “[r]ound shot, shell and shrapnel ploughed around” his surf boats. Confederate Marines and sailors in Columbiad Battery overlooking New Inlet fired so fast that Cushing was forced to bail the water “thrown into the boat” by so many near misses.¹³⁷ Colonel Lamb gave Roby’s naval detachment “discretion to fire upon vessels which approached the bar.” Lamb worried that the Union would make an attempt to run the bar and take the fort from behind.¹³⁸

Lamb knew that the tactics used at New Orleans and Mobile had been to run past defenses. He had planned Fort Fisher to defeat any similar attempt to run into New Inlet. Besides the fort’s impressive fortifications, electrically detonated floating torpedoes (mines) blocked the channel. The Confederate Navy planned to play a key role defending the entrance to the river. It had built several heavily armored ironclads to bolster river defenses. Two active ships, however, fell victim to the waters of the Cape Fear River in one way or another. After engaging Union blockaders in the spring of 1864, the *CSS Raleigh* ran aground and broke up under the immense weight of its armor. The less well built *CSS North Carolina* sank at its berthing in September 1864 after woodworms riddled the hull below the waterline. A new ironclad was being con-

This view, taken by Timothy O’Sullivan in February 1865, looks east toward the Northeast Bastion in the background. The weapon in the foreground (with most likely the photographer) is a banded and rifled 32-pounder. Heavy artillery on both sides was prone to catastrophic failure due to casting flaws or overheating.

Library of Congress



structed, but the *Wilmington* remained in dry dock months away from completion. Despite naval plans, the loss of the ironclads meant only the Confederate cruiser *Chickamauga* patrolled upriver beyond the fort.¹³⁹

Lamb focused his defensive plans toward the most likely avenues of approach by building extensive earthworks across Federal Point and facing the New Inlet. He ran out of time, however, in securing the rear of the fort. As a result, only a line of rifle pits extended across the back of the fortification. From Mound Battery to the end of Federal Point, the sand rose only some three feet above sea level, and storms frequently submerged the area.¹⁴⁰ A Confederate naval detachment of approximately 150 sailors and 25 Marines manned Battery Buchanan.¹⁴¹ The small enclosed redoubt, located at the extreme tip of Federal Point, mounted several large guns that covered New Inlet. In addition, Lamb intended the small but powerful redoubt to secure the nearby wharf on the Cape Fear River for arriving reinforcements or to cover a hasty withdrawal from the main fort.¹⁴²

Confederate Marines and sailors in the Columbiad Battery did their part to “promptly driv[e] out” ships which approached the channel. Like their Union counterparts on board ship, Confederate Marines suffered casualties when their cannon suddenly exploded. Amid the din of battle, they tried to prevent their 7-inch Brooke rifles from overheating. Despite these efforts, one gun exploded, followed 90 minutes later by the other, which disabled both guns and wounded some of crew. Contrary to Porter’s claims, and even with all of the firepower directed against Lamb’s fort, the only guns disabled on Christmas Day came from overheating, not Union fire.¹⁴³

At the opposite end of the fort, Weitzel’s skirmishers cautiously ventured off the landing beaches. The 500-man force moved south under the cover of the naval bombardment and reached a point only 75 yards from Fort Fisher’s palisade. At 1500, Weitzel, accompanied by Colonel Cyrus B. Comstock, went ashore to evaluate the situation. In a forward line of rifle pits, they met brigade commander Brigadier General Newton M. Curtis. To Weitzel’s disappointment, he found few of the heavy guns disabled. Curtis urged that 2,000 men waiting for orders on the landing beach be brought forward immediately. He advised Weitzel to attack the fort on its flank near the river. Weitzel then left Curtis’s troops to brief Butler on the situation on board the Army command vessel *Ben De Ford*.¹⁴⁴ Curtis’s assessment encouraged division commander Ames, who began to prepare his division for the order to assault he was sure would come.¹⁴⁵

General Whiting, on scene as an advisor, and Lamb, along with a nervous garrison, waited out Porter’s barrage in Fort Fisher’s traverse bunkers as almost 130 shells per minute crashed around them. Just after 1700, Lamb sig-

naled Battery Buchanan to reinforce his position and soon two-thirds of the garrison’s Marines and sailors sprinted toward the fort.¹⁴⁶ Suddenly at 1730, the shelling stopped, and the Confederates fully expected a violent Union charge at any moment. Lamb rushed 800 hastily assembled Confederate defenders out of the sally port toward the wooden palisade. Just behind the wooden spikes, they manned 12-pounder field guns and formed a line of battle to receive the Union assault. Curtis’s men lay less than 100 yards from the palisade as Lamb steadied the shaky school boys sent to him by Governor Vance. When the Union charge came, he planned to break up the formation with deadly canister rounds at close range, then explode the minefield behind them to demoralize the survivors. But the attack never materialized, and skirmishing between the two forces slackened in the approaching darkness.¹⁴⁷

Unknown to Lamb, prior experience at Fort Wagner, South Carolina, weighed on Weitzel as he surveyed the imposing defenses along the fort’s land face during the afternoon.¹⁴⁸ He found the guns intact, and prisoners confirmed that Hoke’s division occupied high ground in his rear. Weitzel briefed Butler that he could not take the fort. Butler blamed the Navy for the powder-boat fiasco and failure to knock out Lamb’s heavy guns. Ignoring Grant’s explicit instructions to entrench and secure a beachhead, Butler ordered a general withdrawal. Officers both ashore and afloat were stunned. Curtis’s men fell back amid conflicting orders to advance then retreat while Confederate musket and canister fire peppered their positions. Curtis complied with orders to retire, and by 2030 the entire landing force returned to the beach. Porter fully expected an assault on the fort after the Navy ceased firing. In disbelief, he watched launches evacuate the Army off the landing beach and onto waiting transports. By early evening, the weather changed for the worse, leaving Curtis’s brigade and its prisoners stranded on the beach and under fire from Hoke’s skirmishers. Porter ordered gunboats to close in and support the soaked, hungry, and stranded men.¹⁴⁹

Butler considered the Fort Fisher expedition finished and abruptly left for Virginia even though 700 men still shivered on the beach waiting to be evacuated. After 24 hours, the weather improved, and the remaining troops embarked. By 27 December, the fleet disappeared over the horizon as fast as it appeared a week earlier. Leaders on both sides were incredulous about the expedition and blamed the outcome on poor generalship. Though the guns fell silent, both Butler and Porter wasted no time firing off a series of dispatches blaming the other. Porter immediately sent reports praising the Navy and criticizing Butler, which newspapers printed just five days after the battle.¹⁵⁰



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Major General Alfred H. Terry commanded Union infantry during the second attack on Fort Fisher.

The reports overstated the effects of the powder ship and the naval bombardment and ignored the fact that two days of heavy naval bombardment failed to achieve any significant damage against the fort, its guns, or garrison.¹⁵¹ Porter lobbied Secretary Welles to renew the campaign with someone other than Butler, surmising that a coordinated attack on the fort would succeed.¹⁵² Confederates cheered news of Butler's repulse, but Lamb blamed Bragg for failing to support the fort and launch an attack to capture the troops Butler left stranded on the beach.¹⁵³

During the battle and in immediate after-action reports, both Butler and Porter relied on Curtis's reconnaissance but interpreted the information in different ways. Porter took reports from ashore at face value when they seemed to confirm his own views. Butler's anger over the powder ship debacle skewed his opinion toward caution. One thing both men had in common was they co-opted the information to assail each other in the press after the fact rather than use it to direct the campaign at the time.¹⁵⁴

Butler's rash decision to abandon the landings meant he overlooked important information. In Curtis's after-action report, he credited the 142d New York Infantry with entering the fort and capturing the garrison flag.¹⁵⁵ In reality, it was just a company battle flag, the very same flag Lamb posted to draw Union fire.¹⁵⁶ Under the cover of naval fire, Curtis's brigade advanced along the river to the western edge of the land face. They took cover in an aban-

doned advanced redoubt. Lieutenant William H. Walling of the 142d saw Lamb's target flag shot away and fall onto Fort Fisher's parapet. Walling and several men advanced through a hole in the palisade. Walling then secured the flag and was later awarded the Medal of Honor.¹⁵⁷

While much was made of recovering the flag, the young lieutenant and several of his men did make an important—but largely overlooked—discovery at the time. When both Walling and Sergeant John W. White peered over the parapet, they found that Fort Fisher only had two complete sides instead of four.¹⁵⁸ Both Weitzel and Butler assumed from observations, deserter interviews, and Weitzel's reconnaissance that the fort was a "square bastioned work."¹⁵⁹

Unknown to Butler was Lamb's main concern that the rear of the fort would be exposed by "a thousand sailors and Marines" landing between Mound Battery and Battery Buchanan. Union troops would have faced "little opposition at that time [had they] attacked us in the rear."¹⁶⁰ Confederate Marine Corporal Thomas Lawley deserted to Union lines from Battery Buchanan and confirmed Lamb's fear of a landing near Mound Battery. Confederates saw crews taking soundings near the bar, and Lamb later added a 24-pounder gun and an advanced redoubt near Battery Buchanan to help secure the rear of the fort.¹⁶¹ Both Butler and Weitzel overlooked the new information in their haste to abandon the beaches. Comstock, a special staff officer sent by Grant, did notice and forwarded the intelligence reports back to Grant. Grant commented on Butler's after-action report and criticized him for abandoning the landings before reconciling all the intelligence gathered by Curtis's brigade.¹⁶²

Initially, however, Grant reserved judgment and took Butler's side as Porter jumped out front in the press criticizing the Army. Comstock blamed Porter more so than Butler for difficulties coordinating the attack. For a few days, Butler's command of the department seemed secure; however, new information arrived at Grant's headquarters. Not only did the Navy criticize Butler, but reports from Army officers critical of Butler convinced Grant to make a change. Butler also lost support in the political realm as the halls of Congress aligned against him. Political enemies called for investigations and a court-martial. Presidential politics no longer tied Grant's hands, and in early January, he ordered Weitzel sent on 30 days leave, and by 8 January, a courier delivered official notice that relieved Butler of command.¹⁶³

The Second Assault on Fort Fisher

Porter anticipated a second attempt on the fort and kept his squadron together off Beaufort. Secretary Welles telegraphed Grant to inform him that the Navy stood



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A Confederate hand grenade.

ready to support another expedition and maintained a squadron near Fort Fisher to prevent Confederates from building new works. The message also informed Grant that the Navy could sail closer to the shore than first thought to protect the landing beach from Hoke's brigades and cover the assault.¹⁶⁴ When Grant came around to the Navy's view of the events, he quickly decided to send the same men back to Fort Fisher, but with a different commander.

This time Grant sent Major General Alfred H. Terry in command along with an additional brigade, bringing the total to nearly 9,500 men for the assault. He also placed one division from Major General Philip H. Sheridan's corps on standby to assist Terry if the situation required. Grant's friend and most trusted lieutenant, Major General William T. Sherman, offered to take Wilmington in reverse by marching from South Carolina. Initially, Grant only sought to prevent Lee's army from drawing foreign supplies from the port, but Sherman's advance into the Carolinas now provided him with another reason to send a second expedition to capture not only the fort, but also Wilmington to assist Sherman.¹⁶⁵

While Grant agreed to the second combined effort with Porter, it is interesting that he chose another general from the volunteer ranks rather than a West Point graduate. Like Butler, Terry was a lawyer in civilian life. The comparisons stopped there, however. Their characters and personalities were diametrically opposite and, unlike Butler, Terry displayed competence as a field commander. Porter initially doubted Grant's decision, especially when he discovered that Terry was one of Butler's subordinates. However, he soon changed his mind when they met.¹⁶⁶

Secrecy, or a lack of it, hampered the first thrust toward Wilmington. Furthermore, Butler's belated and confusing attempt at secrecy only served to further strain relations

with the Navy. However, it was the loose talk and newspaper leaks that kept Confederate spies well informed of Union intentions. Grant was determined to maintain operational secrecy for the second expedition. Aiding Sherman's northward thrust from Savannah provided a plausible excuse for keeping Porter's sizable flotilla on station in Beaufort, North Carolina, while at the same time embarking Union troops from Fortress Monroe, Virginia. To both keep Confederates guessing and maintain the secrecy that was so lacking in December, Grant sent Terry and his men to sea under sealed orders.

The second expedition wasted no time, as Terry's men steamed to meet Porter's fleet on 4 January 1865. Four days later, the fleet of transports arrived off Beaufort Harbor in North Carolina. Terry, unsure of his Navy counterpart based on reports from Butler, went ashore to meet Porter for the first time. Porter also felt uneasy after the December fiasco. The two leaders, however, established a mutual understanding and got to work planning the assault. In that initial meeting, Terry and Porter agreed to the basic outline of the operation: land, entrench, then make a coordinated attack.¹⁶⁷

Since December, Porter had advanced the idea of a naval landing force to his superiors. During the first bombardment, Lamb's ammunition conservation plan and the reports from Curtis's brigade convinced him that the Navy should get credit when the fort fell to the guns of the fleet.¹⁶⁸ Privately, Porter wished to take the fort himself using only sailors, but he realized that many of them were raw recruits and had "no knowledge of musket or drill." He also knew that undertaking the expedition without the Army could be disastrous since the sailors could not tolerate the demoralizing effect of massed fire from regular

A Confederate torpedo or land mine was an altered shell with either a waterproof percussion fuse or an electrically detonated fuse like those at Fort Fisher.

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troops.¹⁶⁹ In the spirit of renewed cooperation, Terry accepted Porter's plan to land a force of Marines and sailors from the squadron.

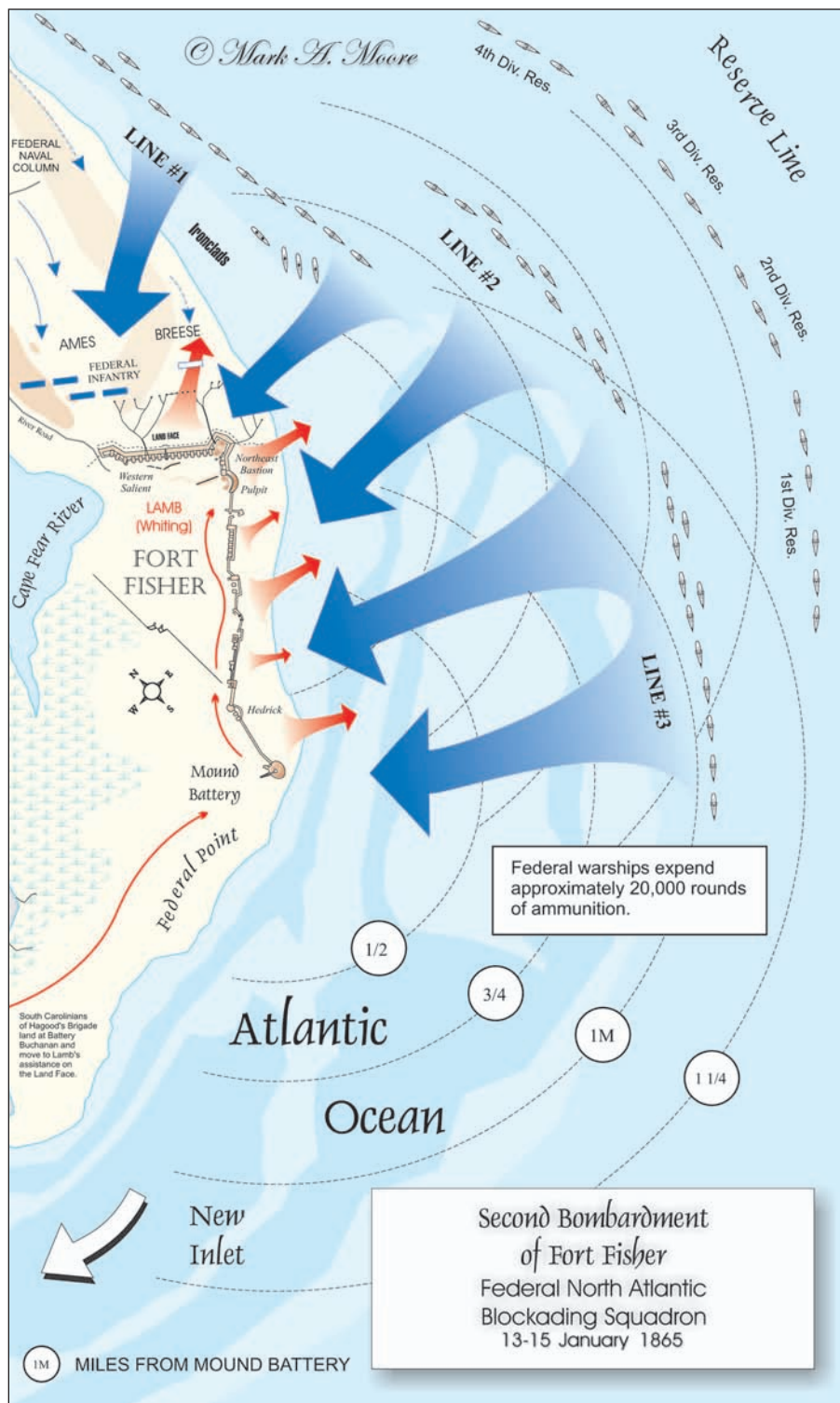
Porter secretly worried that his raw, untrained blue-jackets would wilt under the massed volley fire of Confederate infantry; regardless, determined not to let the Army take all the credit, he published General Order 81. His idea harkened back to his Mexican War experiences

when Commodore Matthew C. Perry used a similar assemblage of Marines and sailors to force passage upstream and capture the Mexican town of Tabasco.¹⁷⁰ Porter's plan envisioned an organization of 2,000 men from the fleet to create a naval brigade. He directed the Marines to form at the rear of the brigade to cover the advancing sailors with musket and carbine fire. He then detailed how sailors armed with revolvers and "well sharpened" cutlasses would "board" the sea face of Fort Fisher in a "seaman-like way." Despite private concerns, he boldly predicted that the naval brigade would "carry the day."¹⁷¹

In the wake of the first Fort Fisher fiasco, Porter revised the naval bombardment plan. One of the lessons gleaned from the first attack involved getting the powerful ironclad *New Ironsides* into correct position to serve as a reference for the remaining vessels. Previously, the massive ship missed its assigned position, a mistake that rippled throughout the squadron as each vessel in turn anchored out of position. For the upcoming advance, Porter clarified instructions and assigned ships into three lines of battle. He encouraged his captains to get closer than they attempted in December and attempted to ensure this by moving each line of battle a quarter-mile closer to Fort Fisher on the revised plan of attack distributed to the squadron.¹⁷²

Following Terry and Porter's planning session on 8 January, a winter storm delayed the expedition for several days. The heavy seas also complicated Porter's efforts to replenish ships with coal and more than 15,000 additional shells. Ships damaged in the first attack were hurriedly repaired to sail with the fleet. Undaunted by logistical difficulties, Terry and Porter issued orders to coordinate landing the infantry and suppress Confederate defenses. On 12 January, the combined fleet steamed toward Fort Fisher. Unlike Butler's landings, Terry and Porter wasted no time getting the Army ashore. At dawn on 13 January, the ironclads anchored off Fort Fisher's land face and began to pum-

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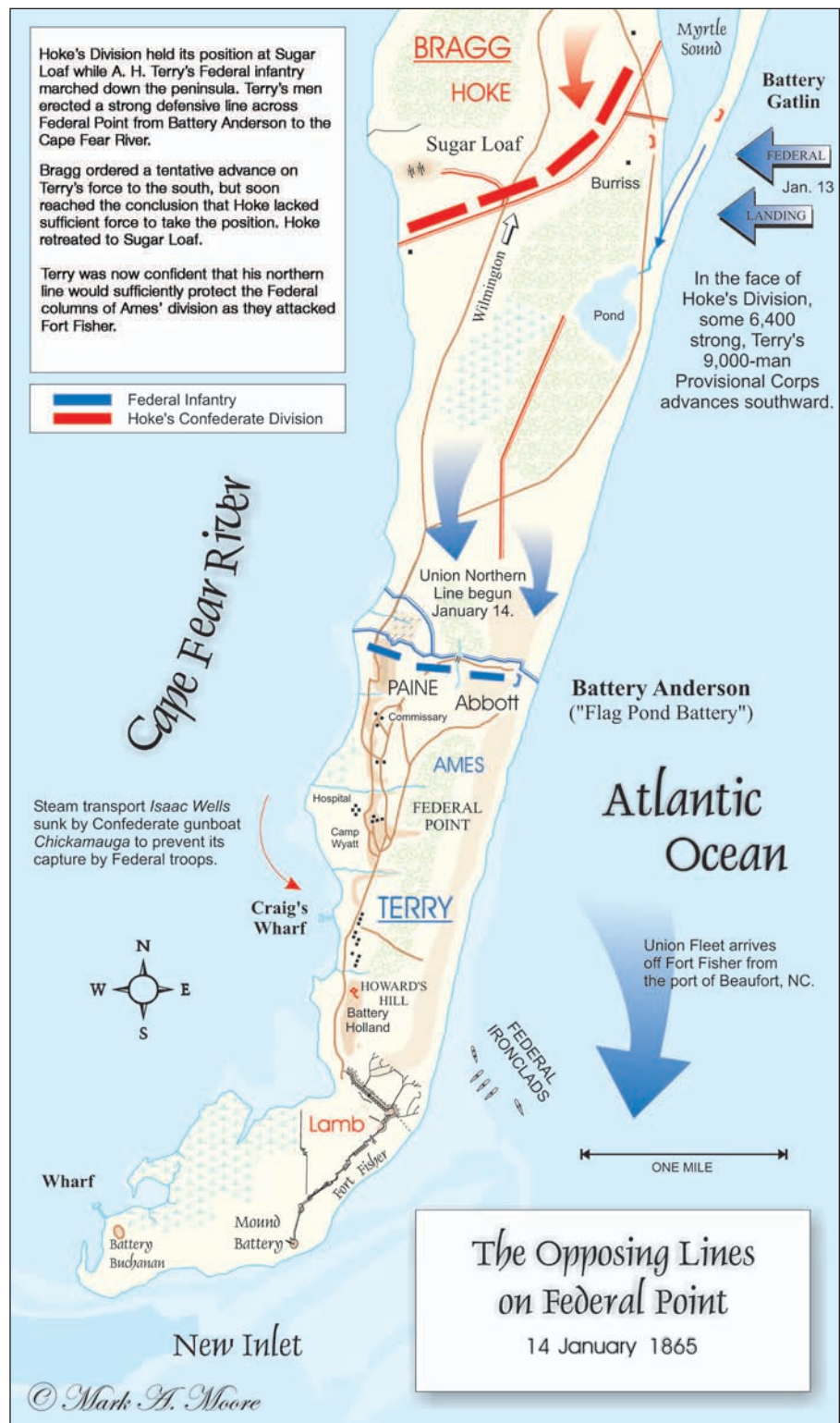


mel its earthworks. The remainder of the fleet and the Army transports moved in close to the landing beach three miles to the north to provide covering fire and offload men and supplies. By a little after 1400, Terry's men had assembled on shore and begun to dig in across the width of Federal Point.¹⁷³

Since Butler's attack, Lamb had kept his garrison employed on fatigue duty remounting disabled guns, resupplying the magazines, and building new barracks for the men. He removed buoys marking mines in the New Inlet channel and requested reinforcements. Also on Lamb's wish list were hand grenades to fight off an infantry assault and submerged mines to prevent the otherwise invulnerable ironclads from anchoring close enough to support the landings. In addition, Lamb requested another 500 slaves to augment the 200 "feeble and worn out" laborers he had feverishly overworked making emergency repairs to the fort. He lobbied General Whiting's chief-of-staff (and brother-in-law), Major James H. Hill, to urge the general to send the labor along with heavy timber to add four guns around Mound Battery. Lamb noted that while his defenses stood ready to repel the Union fleet, added labor would allow him to mend palisades and traverses along the land face and "make [Porter] leave some of his vessels behind."¹⁷⁴ However, few of Lamb's logistical requests were filled by the hard-pressed Southern ordnance bureau. When Porter's fleet reappeared off Wilmington, Bragg sent some 700 men to bolster Lamb's garrison. With these, it numbered around 1,500 men but was still vastly outnumbered by the Union task force. Lamb's concern grew with the realization that Bragg seemed content to sit in a passive defense posture while Union troops dug in unmolested by Hoke's division.¹⁷⁵

As in December, the *New Ironsides* formed the backbone of Porter's fire-support plan. Just as before, the entire squadron formation depended on the first vessel dropping anchor in the correct spot. The plan required the

massive ironclad to anchor roughly one-half mile off Fort Fisher's Northeast Bastion. Four smaller *Monitor*-type ironclads anchored in turn would provide direct fire close into the shore but out of the *Ironsides*' line of fire. The remaining battle lines formed in succession with a fourth line of reserves organized into four divisions out of range



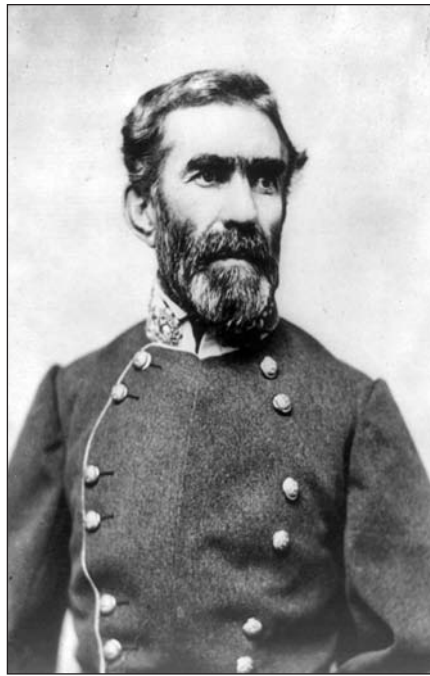
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of Confederate guns. The resulting semicircular formation of ships enabled Porter to concentrate fire to both support the landings and counter the fort's seaward batteries.¹⁷⁶

After the Army completed its landing on 13 January, Porter signaled the remaining ships to anchor in line-of-battle to bombard the fort. This time he placed the *Brooklyn* at the head of the first line. The Marine gun crews fought their guns and exchanged fire with Confederate batteries inside the fort. Following the earlier Parrott rifle explosions and Congressional inquiries, Porter's squadron understandably hesitated to use the 100-pounder guns. Porter tried to minimize the danger and ordered that guns, like Sergeant Oviatt's, be fired if "at all" with a reduced charge of powder and different fuse.¹⁷⁷ Although Oviatt recorded the accidents in his diary, he did not seem fearful of another explosion. When the squadron renewed the attack on Fort Fisher, action on 14 January left the ship critically low on shells. The next day, shortly after dawn, the *Brooklyn* left to replenish its magazine, but by noon arrived back on station. Despite the danger of another accident, Oviatt recorded that in three hours, the ship fired all but 30 of the 800 shells taken on board in the morning.¹⁷⁸

Once his troops dried out from sloshing ashore and replenished their soaked ammunition, Terry established defensible positions two miles north of the fort across the neck of Federal Point. Unlike Butler, Terry intended to stay. He came ashore prepared with more than 300,000 rounds of ammunition and a "pyramid of hardtack," along with the intention to use the extra entrenching tools Grant told Butler to bring the first time. Union soldiers put them to good use and worked throughout the night digging trenches into the soft Carolina sand to secure the Union rear against Hoke's division.¹⁷⁹

Meanwhile, Bragg apparently drew the wrong conclusions from Butler's abortive campaign the previous December. Bragg incorrectly believed that the December attack demonstrated the superiority of fortified coastal batteries over naval weaponry. Congratulations poured into Bragg's Wilmington headquarters, which only further lulled him into a false sense of security. Unbelievably, and despite numerous Union naval victories to the contrary by the likes of DuPont, Farragut, and Rear Admiral Louis M. Goldsborough, Bragg boldly held onto this belief even as



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General Braxton Bragg was directed by Confederate President Jefferson Davis to command the defense of Wilmington in the fall of 1864; however, his subsequent lack of action to defend Fort Fisher confused and angered his subordinates.

Terry's men dug in across Federal Point.¹⁸⁰

This flawed point of view led Bragg and Hoke to continue to passively occupy the Sugarloaf high ground, four-and-a-half miles north of the fort, concerned that Terry intended to bypass Fort Fisher and attack Wilmington directly.¹⁸¹ They seemingly failed to grasp Grant's assessment of the situation, which noted that just by entrenching to isolate Fort Fisher, Union forces effectively closed Wilmington.¹⁸² Grant and Lee both took the view that if the fort fell, then so would Wilmington. Bragg suffered from not only poor situational awareness, but also doubted Hoke's men. By the time Bragg and Hoke personally rode forward to assess the situation on the morning of 14 January, they found that Terry's troops had already created strong defenses, which Bragg deemed too powerful to overcome. For this, he laid the blame "squarely on Hoke's shoulders."¹⁸³

Terry's troops crept ever closer to the still-imposing fort. The Confederate cruiser *Chickamauga*, on patrol in the Cape Fear River, spotted Union troops advancing toward the fort amidst the undergrowth of the river bank. The cruiser shelled the blue-clad soldiers, even taking General Terry himself under fire as he conducted a reconnaissance of the fort. Meanwhile, Curtis's brigade worked throughout the day and dug successive lines of rifle pits and trenches to within musket shot of the fort. Undeterred by the ever increasing menace outside the walls and Bragg's empty promises of support, Lamb boldly planned a night attack. After sunset, he hoped to dislodge Terry's men and take advantage of the Southerners' knowledge of the terrain in the darkness to avoid the powerful naval artillery anchored just offshore. He telegraphed Bragg to request support in a simultaneous night attack and waited impatiently. Waiting turned to disgust as the time passed without Bragg sending so much as an acknowledgment while the fort's garrison vainly stood ready to charge. Sometime during the night, Bragg belatedly tried to bolster Lamb's garrison with a South Carolina brigade commanded by Brigadier General Johnson Hagood. However, only 480 of more than 1,200 men assigned ever arrived as transports broke down or were forced to retire by Union fire.¹⁸⁴

Porter's fleet continuously punished the fort, forcing Lamb's men to seek cover and leaving them unable to ef-



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Another O'Sullivan view, this shows the outside land face of Fort Fisher taken from the second gun chamber of Shepherd's Battery on the Western Salient. It looks southeast toward the Northeast Bastion in the far distance. Visible at left is the palisade and, in the center, the main sally port. The dismounted gun is an 8-inch Columbiad.

fectively fight back, repair damage, or rest. During the day, Porter's fleet concentrated its fire on the fort to cover Terry's men; at night, the ironclads remained at anchor and rotated duty firing volleys into the fort. The increasingly violent metal storm aimed at the fort's landward face ripped into portions of the nine-foot-high palisade, flung guns from their carriages, and cut wires to the torpedo field. The unrelenting punishment from the fleet not only began to break Confederate spirits but also bodies as casualties mounted into the hundreds within the fort.¹⁸⁵

Marine gun captains Sergeant Richard Binder and Orderly Sergeant Isaac N. Fry manned their 100-pounder Parrot rifles at the forward and aft batteries in the *Ticonderoga*. During the preassault bombardment, they directed devastating fire upon the fort despite accurate return fire from Confederate shore batteries. During the battle, both "maintained a well-placed fire upon the batteries on shore." For their "skill and courage[ous]" actions during the three-day bombardment, both were awarded the Medal of Honor.¹⁸⁶

While Marines demonstrated proficiency at the great guns, accuracy did not initially equate to efficiency. Following the first assault on Fort Fisher, official Union reports celebrated and Confederates later mocked members of Weitzel's landing force. Porter's official report initially praised the landing force, which captured a small Confederate flag knocked down by his shipboard artilleryists.¹⁸⁷

In hindsight, Porter used the flag as a lesson for his gun crews before the next assault on Fort Fisher. He lectured the Navy and Marine gun crews about the "great many shells . . . thrown away firing at the flag staff." He correctly surmised that Confederates placed their flags as decoys to draw fire away from the fort's guns. Instead, he urged gun crew captains to "pick out the guns."¹⁸⁸ Further, he warned his gunners about inaccurate fire, stating that when "firing against earthworks . . . the shell burst in the air is thrown away." To gain maximum effect, Porter directed gun crews to aim for the earthen parapets in order to lodge the explosive shells into the structure before they exploded.¹⁸⁹ During the second bombardment of the fort, this change in tactics proved devastating to Confederate guns intended to spoil an infantry assault along the fort's land face. Save for one heavy gun, partially defiladed by the Northeast Bastion, naval gunfire suppressed Confederate gun crews and systematically disabled the carriages of the other 19 heavy guns sighted toward the landing force.¹⁹⁰

In stark contrast to the December attack, Porter wrote both General Grant and Secretary Welles to report the harmonious joint relations between Terry and himself after the first day's bombardment and successful landing. Supporting Terry's landing force did not mean, however, that Porter relented on sending the naval brigade ashore for the upcoming assault. Late on 14 January, General

Terry and Colonel Comstock returned from a personal reconnaissance of the fort's land face. They briefed Porter that conditions were favorable for an assault the next day and that naval artillery had succeeded in knocking out the guns Weitzel found intact the previous December. Porter and Terry then agreed on a set of conditions to coordinate the assault. Terry asserted that the attack should commence late in the afternoon to allow naval artillery to further weaken the defenses but still allow enough daylight to get inside the fort. Porter insisted that his naval brigade share in the glory and assault along the beach toward the Northeast Bastion. Both men agreed to the other's condition, wary of warnings from superiors and public opinion should they fail to work together.¹⁹¹

The one major detail they failed to coordinate revolved around the time of the attack. Both men agreed that Terry's force would initiate the attack and signal the fleet. Immediately, the ships would shift fire and the naval brigade would launch its attack. However, both men left the meeting believing the ground assault scheduled for 15 January began at a different time. Porter thought the assault would begin at 1400, while Terry planned to advance an hour later. The misunderstanding resulted in grave consequences for hundreds of Marines and sailors waiting to take part in Porter's grand adventure ashore.¹⁹²

Porter's interservice rivalry with the Army only reinforced romantic notions of bluejackets seizing glory atop Fort Fisher's ramparts. The naval brigade captivated Porter like the powder ship enamored Butler during the first at-

Brigadier General Jacob Zeilin was the seventh Commandant of the Marine Corps.

U.S. Marine Corps History Division



tack. Porter issued his order to the man chosen to lead the brigade, Lieutenant Commander Kidder R. Breese, as if Fort Fisher were nothing more than an enemy vessel to be taken at sea. Although Porter rehearsed getting the squadron into line-of-battle, even going so far as to alert Confederates to their presence, he made no such investment in the landing party. Senior division officer Lieutenant Commander Thomas O. Selfridge of the USS *Huron* later lamented Porter's tactical error. He said, "expecting a body of sailors, collected hastily from different ships, unknown to each other, armed with swords and pistols, to stand against veteran soldiers armed with rifle and bayonets" amounted to a tragic and "fatal" mistake.¹⁹³

According to the plan, when the sailors "boarded" the land face, Porter intended the Marines to retain their traditional role as sharpshooters. He envisioned Marines following in the rear of the brigade to cover the assault and then snipe Confederates inside the fort from atop the ramparts. He worried, however, that Confederates would turn guns from Mound Battery against the attacking Union troops inside the fort. To counter the predicament, Porter ordered "every three men" to "seize a prisoner, pitch him over the walls, and get behind the fort for protection."¹⁹⁴

Early on the morning of 15 January, Porter and Terry held one last conference to coordinate the attack. At 1000, Porter issued landing orders to the squadron. The naval brigade's boats began to land outside of small-arms range covered by the guns of the ironclads. Meanwhile, Lamb frantically tried to persuade Bragg to attack before the fort's defenses collapsed under the weight of the combined Union force. General Whiting, who arrived at the fort several days earlier to assist Lamb, coolly noted, "Lamb, my boy I have come to share your fate. You and your garrison are to be sacrificed."¹⁹⁵

By noon, surf boats landed 35 detachments from throughout the squadron. On board the flagship *Malvern*, Lieutenant Commander Cushing, along with 40 other volunteers, including Admiral Porter's 19-year-old son, joined the landing party, not realizing that the attack "was sheer, murderous madness."¹⁹⁶ Carlisle P. Porter had resigned his commission as an acting midshipman a year earlier and now served as his father's secretary. He shared the carefree attitude of many on board ship and joined the "lark" ashore. Breese detailed young Porter to act as one of his runners to carry orders during the attack.¹⁹⁷

Near the beach, the growing mass of men milled about leaderless. Each of the various shore parties remained under the immediate command of its officers; however, no one knew exactly who held overall command of the brigade. Breese, Porter's fleet captain, left the beach in search of General Terry to try and coordinate the attack. In his absence, men huddled together on the beach "like a flock of sheep." Confederates in the fort began to take notice and soon began

THE MEDAL OF HONOR

In 1782, George Washington created the Badge of Military Merit, known more popularly today as the Purple Heart.¹⁹⁸ After the Revolution, Washington's award—but not its precedent—fell out of use. Prior to the Civil War, a presidential “Certificate of Merit” and the brevet rank system provided the means to recognize gallant actions. The outbreak of the Civil War renewed the call to recognize military valor in defending the Union. However, General Winfield Scott fought against a new medal.

In late 1861, Scott's retirement and McClellan's ascension to General-In-Chief reinvigorated proponents of a new medal. Iowa Senator James W. Grimes introduced a bill to recognize enlisted Marines and sailors for gallantry and seamanship during the war. The Medal of Honor was approved by Congress, and President Lincoln signed the bill on 21 December 1861. A few months later, the government also ap-

proved a version of the Medal of Honor for the Army.¹⁹⁹

Of more than 1,500 Medals of Honor awarded for action in the Civil War, only a few Marines received the nation's highest honor. The number of awards is not surprising considering the small size and largely shipboard role of Marines in the war. The Fort Fisher campaign, however, placed Marines in a significant role both supporting the landings and taking part in the assaults, which ultimately brought about capitulation of the fort. Of the 17 Medals of Honor awarded to Marines during the war, more than a third were a result of the attacks on Fort Fisher. Six Marines, four ashore and two on board ship, received the Medal for their actions during the campaign. At the time, Marine officers were ineligible for the award; however, five were brevetted for gallantry during the Naval Brigade's assault.²⁰⁰

Medal of Honor presented to Corporal Andrew J. Tomlin and the inscription on its reverse.

Gen Alfred M. Gray Marine Corps Research Center



to shell the gaggle of men. Lieutenant Commander James Parker, the USS *Minnesota's* executive officer, was the senior officer ashore. Confederate fire convinced him to organize the sailors and gain some control over the chaotic situation.²⁰¹

Parker assembled the 1,600 sailors into a column of three lines organized around the naval squadron's divisions. The squadron's senior division officers each commanded one of the lines. Soon, however, Breese, along with his two aides,

one of whom bore Admiral Porter's flag, returned to the beach. Parker relinquished command of the formation upon learning that Porter intended Breese to lead the attack. Breese kept Parker's organizational structure and added the hastily assembled Marine battalion to the brigade formation.²⁰²

In the first line, Marine Captain Lucien LeCompte Dawson commanded the 400 Marines. Lieutenant Commander Charles H. Cushman commanded the second



Battles and Leaders of the Civil War
Lieutenant Commander Kidder R. Breese.

line, Lieutenant Commander James Parker the third, and Lieutenant Commander Thomas O. Selfridge commanded the fourth. Meanwhile, Lieutenant Samuel W. Preston's detachment of sailors moved forward to dig rifle pits, covered by a detachment of Marines led by Second Lieutenant Louis E. Fagan.²⁰³

While most Marine Corps officers hailed from the Northeast, Dawson was born in 1836 at Natchez, Mississippi, and grew up in Texas. His family later settled in Arkansas, but his father, a former Army officer and Indian agent, ran to Texas to avoid an 1844 murder charge. In 1859, Dawson accepted a commission as a second lieutenant under an appointment from Texas. By 1865, he commanded the Marine Guard on board the frigate *USS Colorado*.²⁰⁴

The Marine battalion suffered from some of the same organizational problems as the naval contingent. Some 20 detachments of Marines, ranging in size from a dozen to almost 50, milled about on the landing beach waiting for orders. Captain George Butler, the senior Marine ashore, sent Lieutenant Fagan's detachment forward to cover the advance party digging trenches. However, he did not try to organize the battalion. Captain Dawson, as battalion commander, had to brief Admiral Porter on board the flagship, delaying his arrival on the beach. When Dawson finally came ashore, he found that Captain Butler had done nothing to organize the Marines. Hurriedly, he grouped the

disparate detachments into four companies. Officers hastily organized the men with little time to establish company much less a platoon command structure.²⁰⁵

Early in the war, both the Navy and Marine Corps saw advantages in maintaining a dedicated battalion organization for landings. In 1862, they disbanded the organization as it proved to be a burden on supply. Later in the war, mixed naval battalions such as Porter's took part in landings; however, they generally lacked unit cohesion and the logistical support to pose a serious threat to determined Confederate resistance.²⁰⁶ In the summer of 1863, then-Major Jacob Zeilin, who by 1865 became the Commandant, wrote then-Commandant Harris of the difficulty assembling a Marine battalion from ships of the fleet. Almost foreshadowing Dawson's difficulties at Fort Fisher, Zeilin wrote:

The Marine Corps is accustomed to act in small detachments on board ship and ashore, and opportunities rarely offer to have more than one company together, and therefore when several detachments are united, it is absolutely necessary that they should have time to become organized and drilled as a battalion and to know their officers and their duties on a larger scale. . . . [I]t would be very dangerous to attempt any hazardous operation requiring coolness and promptness on their part; and no duty which they could be called upon to perform requires such perfect discipline and drill as landing under fire.²⁰⁷

Adding to the chaotic situation, Breese's inability to establish contact with the Army after getting ashore further confused his timeline to synchronize his attack with that of Terry's men. In addition to problems with organization and based on Porter's orders, Breese thought Terry intended to attack momentarily. Around 1300, Breese, unsure how to coordinate the naval brigade's advance, sent a runner, Navy Lieutenant Benjamin H. Porter, recently paroled from a Confederate prison, to make contact with Terry. Thinking the Army was about to attack, Breese ordered Dawson to hasten his companies into formation so that the entire column would not fall behind the agreed time line. Dawson hurriedly rushed the Marine battalion to the front of the naval column with 25 skirmishers in the lead.²⁰⁸

While the Marines tried to organize themselves, Breese added to their confusion. He mistakenly thought that on a signal at 1400, the two forces would launch a simultaneous attack on either flank of the land face. Ships supporting the attack would shift fire toward the interior of the fort. Next, Dawson's Marines, armed with rifled muskets and a variety of naval carbines, would occupy a forward line of rifle pits to cover the assault and snipe Confederates atop the parapet. Breese planned for the naval brigade's 1,600 sailors, armed with cutlasses and revolvers, to ad-

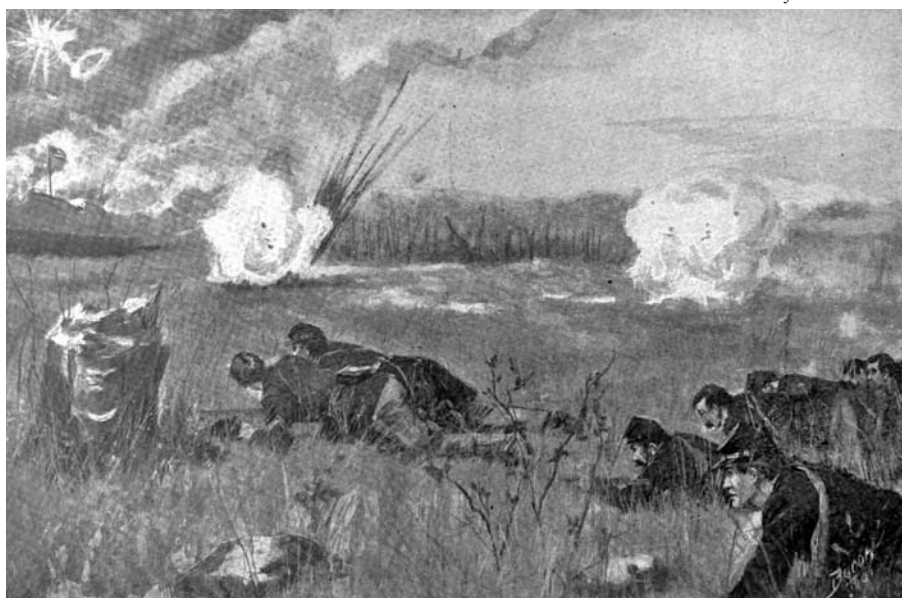
vance on a line perpendicular to the beach and then storm the formidable Northeast Bastion. Meanwhile, Terry's men intended to attack the other flank along the Cape Fear River.²⁰⁹

Trying to maintain the faulty timeline, the brigade marched at the double-quick toward Fort Fisher on line, then halted about a mile away. Breese ordered Dawson to occupy the line of rifle pits dug by Preston's advanced party, about 600 yards from the fort. He directed Dawson to move forward into a second line of rifle pits nearer the fort when they were completed. Breese then planned for the naval assault column to rush the fort while Dawson's Marines provided cover for the assault or a retreat should they be repulsed. Following Porter's plan, after Breese's men gained the parapet, Dawson's Marines were to follow and occupy the top of the traverses to snipe the enemy within the fort.²¹⁰

Around 1400, Breese formed the brigade again and marched the men in a column down the beach to within a half-mile of Fort Fisher. Dawson took the Marines to the line of rifle pits 600 yards from the fort and waited for the advance party to complete the support-by-fire position nearest the fort. Soon after, a messenger countermanded Breese's previous instructions. The new orders directed Dawson to shift the Marines forward 150 yards and to the extreme left flank to a line of dunes close to the apex of the Northeast Bastion, which provided "splendid cover." Dawson challenged the messenger to ensure he understood the new orders, and soon the Marines lay prone on the beach as Breese's sailors advanced and took cover alongside the Marines.²¹¹

This illustration, published in 1907, depicts the scene described by Marine Sergeant Richard Binder of the advance of the Navy sharpshooters' unit under Lieutenant Williams—including Binder and other Marines from the USS Ticonderoga—during the sailors' and Marines' 15 January 1865 assault on Fort Fisher.

Battles and Leaders of the Civil War



The Marines were not the only ones questioning Breese's tactics. On the other flank, the Army methodically moved its brigades forward under the cover of the low ground and scrub along the river and Wilmington Road. Breese's runner, Lieutenant Porter, approached General Curtis to try and coordinate the attack. Curtis and other Army officers were "appalled" at the naval brigade's lack of organization and drill. Curtis then lectured the young naval officer on Breese's impending tactical error. According to Curtis, the naval brigade's formation was both too narrow in its frontage and too long. As shaped, Breese's formation subjected the naval brigade to flank fire and too little mass or firepower at the breach point. Curtis later recalled, "if you go forward as you are, you will be fearfully punished, and the only good you will do us will be to receive the fire which otherwise would come to our lines." Disregarding the general's lesson, Lieutenant Porter boldly predicted the naval brigade would carry the day and made his way back to Breese. As fate would have it, Lieutenant Porter learned that Curtis's lesson held truth and fell leading his men during the charge toward the fort.²¹²

During the day, Lieutenant Preston's detachment of sappers steadily worked its way forward preparing rifle pits for the Marine battalion. Second Lieutenant Fagan's Marines, assigned to protect the sailors as they dug, found themselves too far from the fort to hamper Confederate artillerists aiming for the detachment. The Marines dug with their bayonets or bare hands, then took cover to wait for the Navy to complete the second line of trenches. While Dawson's battalion impatiently waited on the beach,

the second trench line dug by sappers filled with soldiers and Marines less than 200 yards from the fort. But the Marines were not able to get into position without taking casualties.²¹³

Both Marines and sailors found the sandy, barren plain to be too hotly contested with Confederate fire to march in a standard formation. Fagan deployed his Marines as skirmishers to avoid bunching the men into an easy target for rebel artillery. They moved forward in bounds, waiting for canister shot to pass overhead before leaping to their feet and advancing a few yards at a time. As they got closer to the front, Confederates opened on Fagan's detachment with two 12-pounder Napoleons. Several of the Marines were wounded by the shower of fragments. Despite incessant Confederate fire, Corporal Andrew J.

MARINE MUSICIANS

The Drum and Fife Corps as an organization was separate from the Marine Band, which was a ceremonial unit. Musicians who accompanied Marines on board ship consisted of a fifer and a drummer. Musicians as young as eight years old enlisted in the Marine Corps under a musical apprenticeship. Music boys, as they were known, attended the music school at the Marine Barracks in Washington under the tutelage of Drum Major John Roach. After a period of up to a year, the young musicians transferred to other Marine barracks or on board ship. Being a musician, however, did not usually equate to crossing over into the Marine Band.²¹⁴

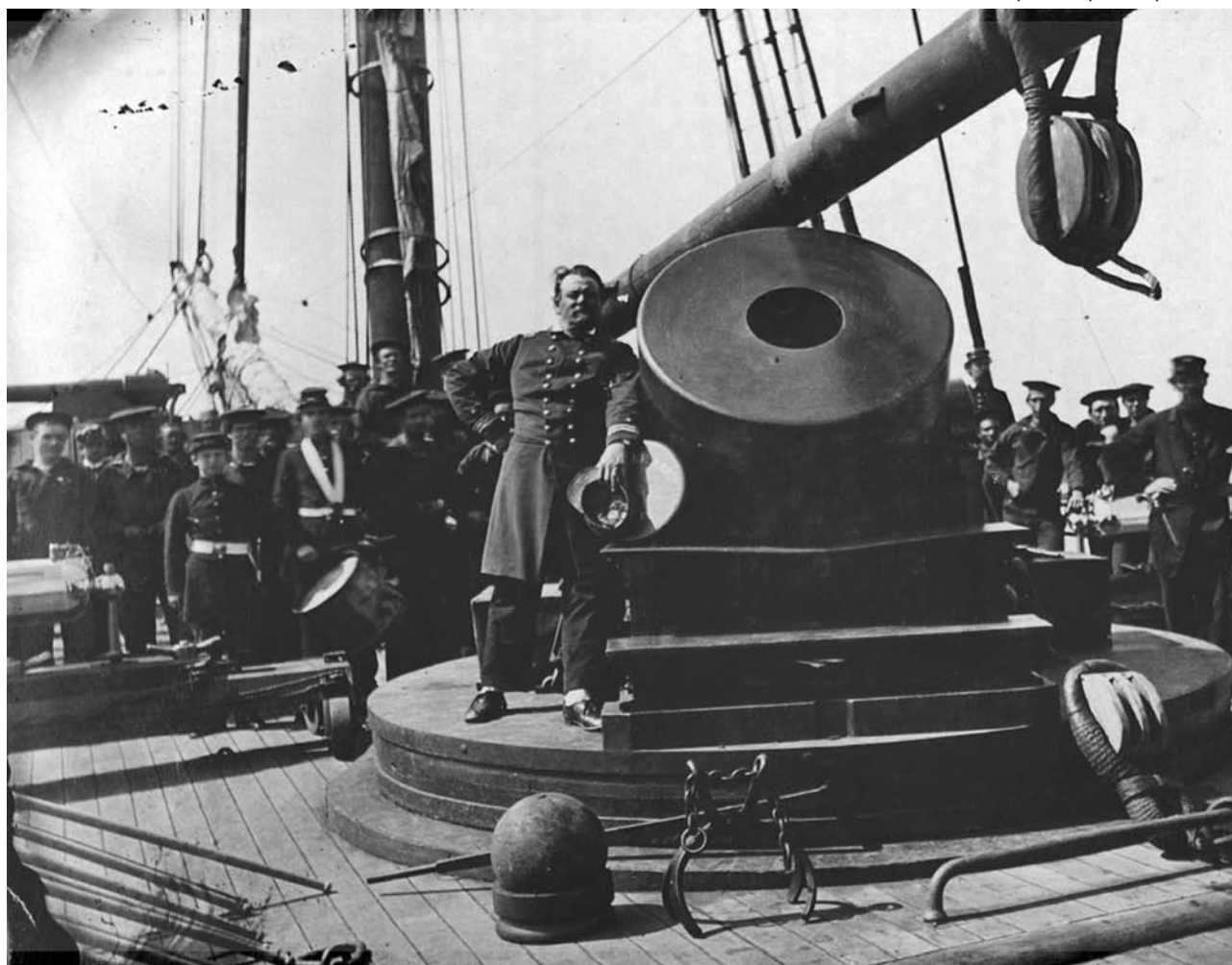
Roach was the exception. He graduated as a music boy in 1827, and like most of his peers, completed a seven-year indenture and gained a discharge at age 21. Some music boys reenlisted back and forth between the line and musical ranks. Roach first reen-

listed as a fifer then transferred to the line. He rose to the rank of sergeant before returning to music. By 1859, he had become the drum major of the Marine Band and master of the music school.²¹⁵

Musicians on board ship called Marines to guard and general quarters as well as sound reveille, muster, mess, liberty, retreat, and colors. They further helped keep their fellow Marines sharp by playing tunes during drill. As Marine Private Charles Brother recalled, "Quarters . . . a short drill afterwards, double quick to 'Pop goes the weasel.'"²¹⁶ While the band only faced the pointed barbs of members of the Washington press, the drum and fife corps faced actual danger in combat. From the first battle at Bull Run, musicians accompanied Marines into combat. Despite sharing many of the dangers of their line counterparts, no Marine musician ever lost his life in combat.²¹⁷

Musicians (far left) on board the mortar schooner USS C. P. Williams pose near the mortar "Ole Abe" off the coast of Hilton Head, SC, in 1862.

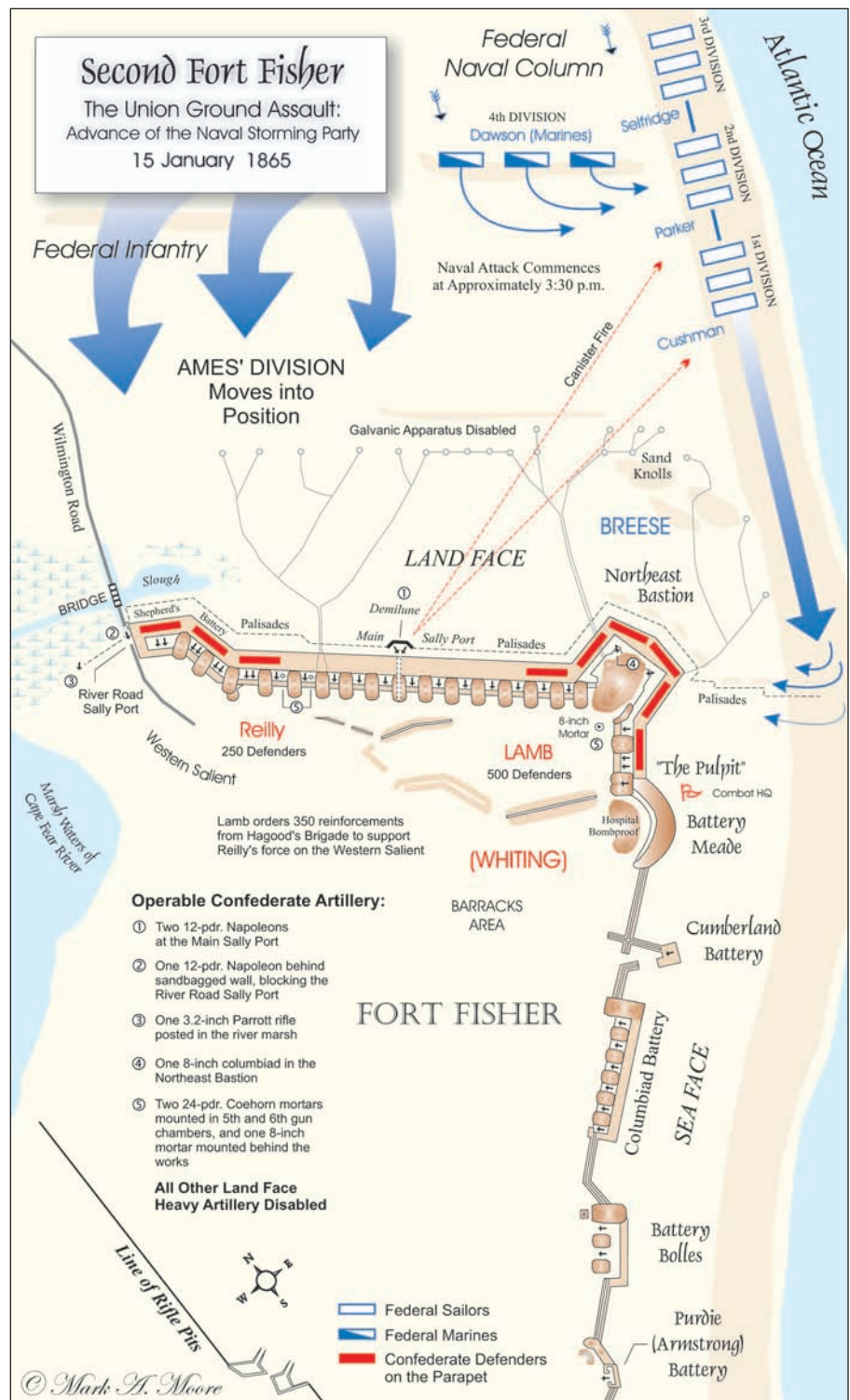
U.S. Army Military History Institute



Tomlin hoisted one of the wounded Marines over his shoulder and carried him to a covered position. Acting on Fagan's orders, other Marines unleashed a well-aimed volley of fire on the artillery crews, forcing them to temporarily abandon the guns. Later, Tomlin's act of courage was recognized with the award of the Medal of Honor.²¹⁸

Earlier in the day, First Lieutenant Charles F. Williams, commanding *Ticonderoga's* Marine Guard, which included Sergeants Binder and Fry along with three other noncommissioned officers and 20 privates, went ashore. As the naval brigade formed, a call went out for volunteers to act as sharpshooters to cover sappers digging trenches. When no one volunteered, Lieutenant Williams stepped forward to volunteer his entire detachment.²¹⁹ Though relatively few in number, the detachment carried the Spencer repeating rifle, which amplified their relative firepower over anyone carrying the standard .58-caliber rifle musket. Confederate fire forced the detachment to crawl most of the way to their posts near the fort. Williams assigned a squad to man the rifle pits and took the rest of the troops to some nearby sand dunes close to the apex of the Northeast Bastion.²²⁰ Confederates in the fort spotted the bluejackets massing on the beach, and Lamb ordered the single remaining gun on the land face, along with the Mound Battery guns, to engage the naval brigade.²²¹ Williams's Marines answered with their Spencer rifles, sending a torrent of lead on the rebel artillerists.²²²

Confederate Marine Second Lieutenant Henry M. Doak commanded an 8-inch mortar behind the land face. Lamb had originally placed him in command of three large coastal defense guns, but three days of constant naval bombardment put all of them out of action. Sporadic sniper fire from Marines and soldiers in nearby rifle pits pinned down the crews of Lamb's remaining artillery. With most of the cannon disabled along the parapet, Doak took command of the mortar and engaged Union snipers in rifle pits near



the land face. Just as his mortar bracketed the rifle pits, Commodore William Radford on board the *New Ironsides* spotted Doak's position and directed the ironclad's gunners to target it. Soon a shell landed near the mortar, decimating the crew and wounding Doak.²²³

The wounded lieutenant's fight, however, did not end at Fort Fisher. When the fort fell, he along with other wounded Confederates were captured and sent to Fortress



Battles and Leaders of the Civil War

This depiction of the assault of the naval column on Fort Fisher's Northeast Bastion was first published in 1884.

Monroe, Virginia. By February, Union officials exchanged him for a Union prisoner, and he soon transferred to the Confederate hospital in Richmond. Doak had enlisted in a Tennessee infantry regiment in 1861 and seen action at Shiloh. In late 1862, he gained appointment into the Confederate Marine Corps and saw duty at Drewry's Bluff and other East Coast naval stations. By 1864, he was in Wilmington and for a time commanded the Marine Guard on board the CSS *Tallahassee*. By April 1865, his timely release and quick recovery in Richmond allowed him to join Lee's army when Confederates evacuated the capital. Doak surrendered along with the remainder of the army at Appomattox.²²⁴

With Confederate mortar fire curbed, the Marines succeeded in suppressing the rebels along the land face; however, the Spencer rifles' rate of fire could not be sustained without a resupply of cartridges. As the Marines ran out of ammunition, their enemy attempted to take some measure of revenge. Renewed artillery fire forced isolated Marine snipers to improve their shallow trenches to ride out the metal storm. Fast firing Marines, including Sergeant Binder, were not only forced to remain at the bottom of their trenches until sunset but were also powerless to cover the naval brigade's attack.²²⁵

While the naval brigade waited for the signal to assault, Dawson's Marines were sheltering with the sailors in a semi-exposed position. The crest of the beach offered some cover from direct fire as Confederate rifles cracked in the distance and bullets whizzed through the air. Meanwhile, Lieutenant Benjamin H. Porter brought back news that the Army intended to assault at 1500. The land face's sole surviving cannon roared to life, firing at the sailors. From the redoubt near the center sally port, 12-pounder Napoleons fired shells filled with deadly case shot. The ironclads answered the Confederate guns and sent shells screaming overhead, which sometimes burst early and showered Breese's command with iron shrapnel. For more

than 30 minutes, men crowded along the narrow beach trying to seek shelter. The rapidly changing orders and ensuing chaos on the beach left Dawson confused as to his mission while the Marine battalion became hopelessly mingled into the body of sailors.²²⁶

One of the Marines seeking shelter on the beach was musician Alexander J. McDonald. While musicians faced danger in combat on board ship, they did not normally exchange their instruments for muskets to join landing parties. McDonald was one of two musicians assigned to the USS *Vanderbilt's* Marine Guard. He had seen action in the Mexican War and entered the hallowed Halls of Montezuma recalled today in the *Marines' Hymn* when in 1847 he took part in the charge on Chapultepec Castle. During the Fort Fisher attack, he was one of four of *Vanderbilt's* Marines wounded by Confederate fire. Though Marine musicians often faced danger in combat on land and sea, MacDonald's wound is notable for being the only combat casualty suffered by Marine musicians during the war.²²⁷

Finally at 1525, lookouts on board Porter's flagship observed the Army signal flags. The ship sounded its steam whistle, which resonated to the beach as the entire squadron repeated the signal to shift fire away from the land face. Knowing they were to attack after the Army launched its assault, Breese took movements by some soldiers as Terry's assault. Suddenly, Dawson's command and the rest of the naval brigade heard the order to charge. In stark contrast to the Army, which Terry ordered to charge in silence, the sailors raced forward with a cheer in a loose column. The Marines, heavily weighed down with 40 rounds of ammunition and rifles, tried in vain to catch up to the lead element of the naval column in the soft sand. To Dawson it appeared that Breese abandoned the earlier plan for Marines to occupy rifle pits to cover the advance. Now, he and the Marine battalion found themselves advancing under fire without clear orders. Dawson quickly determined to continue moving his men toward the palisade, which provided the only piece of cover in view. Breese's order to charge over the final 600 yards rather than quickstep under covering fire of the Marines not only caught Dawson's heavily burdened command off guard, but also strung out the entire naval brigade down the beach.²²⁸

The Army originally intended to assault Fort Fisher in a dense column of fours, but Brigadier Newton M. Curtis convinced General Terry to shift to a two-deep line formation out of concern for casualties.²²⁹ In theory, an at-



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The palisade fronting the Confederate works at Fort Fisher's land face, shown in February 1865, concerned General Terry.

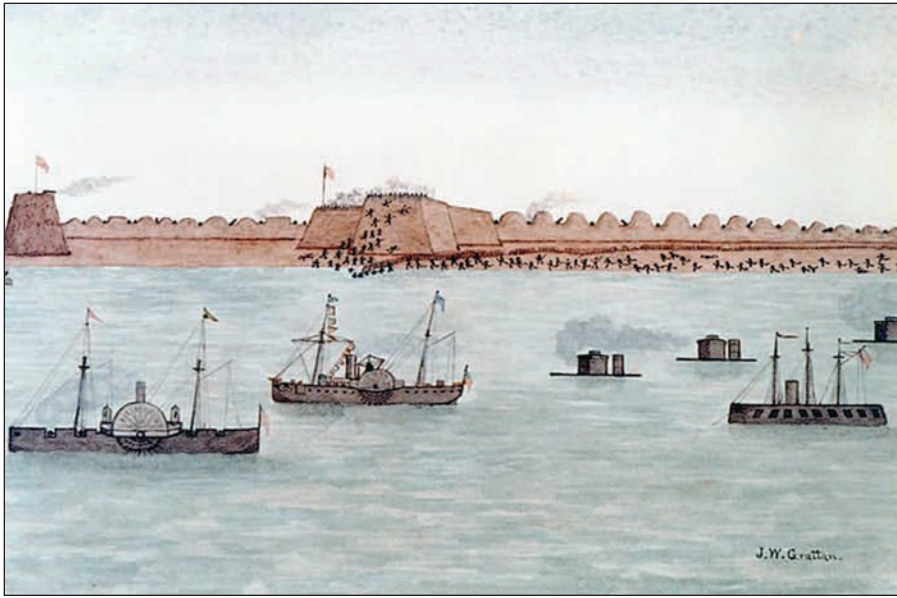
tack by a dense column along a narrow front mimicked the highly successful tactic used to breach the formidable Confederate lines at Spotsylvania Courthouse in May 1864. Instead of assaulting in a two-deep line formation over an extended front, regiments formed up into a dense column and charged—without pausing to fire—with bayonets fixed. Grant thought so highly of the novel idea that he adapted it in scale up to a corps tactic. Although apparently accidental, Breese's column potentially produced a similar shock effect with 1,600 sailors brandishing cutlasses at close quarters. In addition, they carried revolvers, which offered more available firepower at close range than single-shot muzzle-loading rifles.

Regardless, effective employment of the tactic required the column to maintain its integrity to overwhelm defenders at the point of the breach. However, Breese's column, as General Curtis observed, instead of remaining in a compact formation, elongated down the length of the beach. Soft sand, the long distance to be covered, and intense Confederate fire separated the lead elements from the rear. In addition, Breese never ordered Dawson's Marines, originally intended to provide covering fire for the advance, to occupy the line of rifle pits dug by Lieutenant Preston's party. When the sailors reached the palisade, they had neither covering fire nor enough men to launch an effective assault and were forced to wait on the

The Naval Brigade failed to account for the palisade fronting the Northeast Bastion, shown a month after the fort fell.

U.S. Army Military History Institute





Naval History and Heritage Command

An undated watercolor by eyewitness Ensign John W. Grattan, of Rear Admiral David Dixon Porter's staff, depicts the storming of the fort, as the bombarding fleet stands offshore. The sidewheel steamer in the center flying signal flags is Porter's flagship, the USS Malvern. The USS New Ironsides is at right with three monitors.

rear elements of the brigade. Meanwhile, Dawson's heavily burdened Marines trudged through the deep sand at the double quick trying to gain ground and reach the palisade before the assault took place.²³⁰

According to Porter's landing orders, he directed the naval column to keep its flags furled until they gained the top of the parapet. However, the divisions of the brigade neglected that part of the order and charged down the beach with flags flying. The spectacle and elongated nature of the column caused Confederates to hastily divide forces to repel the impending assault. Lamb split his available defenders.²³¹ He placed 500 on the parapet to face Breese, then ordered Hagood's men to the opposite flank near Shepherd's Battery. The South Carolinians refused to leave the shel-

The Naval brigade attempts to break through the wooden palisade in their ill-fated assault. The c.1887 print of a painting by J. O. Davidson erroneously depicts the famous 150-pounder Armstrong rifle as being part of the armament of the Northeast Bastion.

Library of Congress



ROBLEY DUNGLISON EVANS

Robley Dunglison Evans was born in Floyd County, Virginia, on 18 August 1846 and graduated from the U.S. Naval Academy in 1864. He received a commission as an acting ensign and served on board the sidewheel steam frigate USS *Powhatan* during the rest of the Civil War. “Fighting Bob,” as he was known later in life, distinguished himself during the second assault on Fort Fisher, where he received several serious wounds that caused life-long trouble. He reportedly threatened to shoot a battlefield surgeon who attempted to remove his wounded leg. His injuries led to a brief retirement, but he returned to active duty in 1867. Evans’s opinion of amphibious operations changed following Fort Fisher, and he along with other naval officers blamed Marines for the failure.

During the late 1860s, Evans served on board the USS *Piscataqua*, flagship of the Asiatic Fleet. He was promoted to lieutenant commander, then assigned shore duty at the Washington Navy Yard and the Naval Academy. He returned to sea with the European Squadron, and by the early 1890s, he commanded the gunboat USS *Yorktown* in the Pacific Squadron. In

1893, Evans was promoted to captain and the next year commanded the new battleship USS *Indiana* (BB 1). Ironically, Evans, whose life was saved by a Marine, joined other naval reformers who wanted to remove all Marines from the battleships. Initially, he even refused to accept the Marine Guard on board ship until the Secretary of the Navy forced him to take them. Before retiring in the first decade of the new century, Evans went on to command battleship USS *Iowa* (BB 4) in the Battle of Santiago, and nearly a decade later led the Great White Fleet on the first leg of its historic round-the-world cruise.²³²

Lieutenant Commander Robley D. Evans, photographed in 1870.
Naval History and Heritage Command



ter of the bombproofs, which left only 250 men to oppose the Army’s assault on the western end of the land face.*

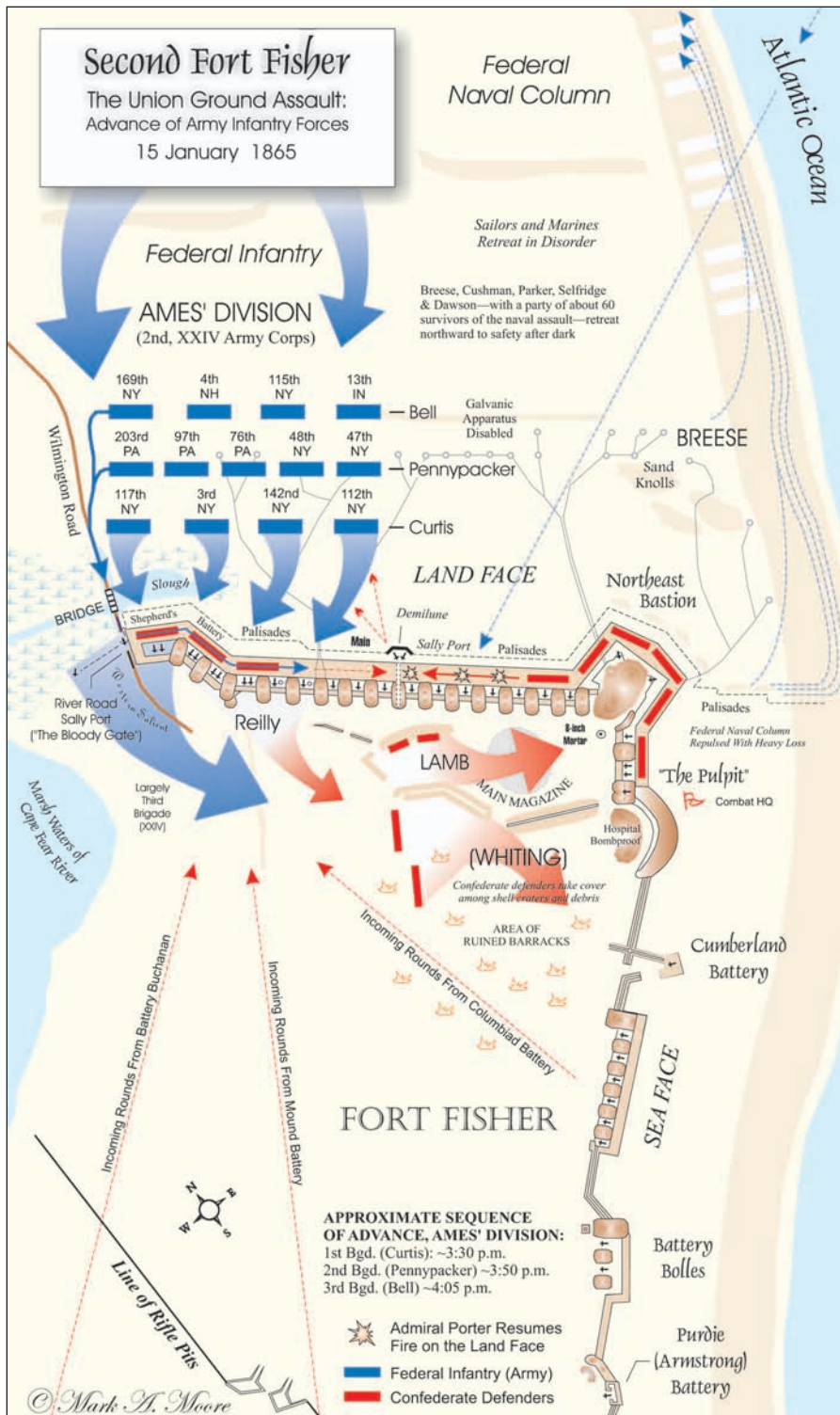
The palisade caused another tactical problem. On 14 January, Terry worried that it might hamper the Army’s assault and pressed Porter to focus on its destruction. Near the Northeast Bastion, the palisade paralleled the land face and passed in front of the bastion toward the surf. On the other flank, Terry’s troops, as a precaution, in addition to axes brought black powder demolition charges to blast through the palisade but found naval gunfire had done its work.²³³ Breese made no such plans and found the log wall mostly intact. Instead of passing over or through the palisade to attack frontally, the obstacle forced attackers to either flank around it near the surf or go through small gaps created by naval artillery.

When Porter’s call for volunteers to go ashore went out to the fleet, sailors flocked to join the landing party. The opportunity seemed to be an ideal chance at glory for men convinced the task would be an easy one based on the previous attempt in December. The sailors heartily raised the cheer when Breese gave the order to charge. Undeterred by intensifying rebel fire, the naval brigade raced across 600 yards of barren sandy beach into the teeth of Lamb’s defenses.

* There is some contention over the effect of the naval brigade’s attack. After the fact, naval officers tried to salvage some pride by claiming they made Terry’s assault possible by drawing Confederate attention and defenders away from the western flank. Some authors, including Rod Gragg, accept the Navy’s version. Others, such as University of North Carolina Wilmington historian Chris E. Fonvielle Jr., put more stock in Hagood’s men failing to respond to Lamb’s orders.

As they closed on the fort, the head of the column lurched to a halt when Lamb’s forces unleashed a blistering volley of cannon and rifle fire. Confederate bullets drove the head of the column away from the beach. At the same time, the torrent of lead also broke the forward momentum of the rear of the formation, forcing most of the brigade to seek cover at the edge of the surf about 100 yards short of the log palisade. Though heavily weighed down, about half of the Marine battalion caught up to the head of the column. They took shelter near several small sand hills less than 100 yards from the fort. Captain Dawson, mindful of his orders to provide cover fire, directed the Marines to open fire on the parapets. The remaining sailors followed the admiral’s flag toward a small angle in the palisade, which offered cover from the riflemen high above on the fort’s ramparts. Out of breath and desperate to seek cover, they halted along the palisade, only to end up being “packed like sheep in a pen.” A few tried to assault around the palisade, but the detour further dispersed the already stretched column as it snaked its way around the wooden obstacle.²³⁴

Lieutenant Commander James Parker, commanding the naval brigade’s third line, went ashore with one of the larger landing parties consisting of 241 men from the *Minnesota*. This group included Captain George Butler and 50 Marines. Parker and many of the landing party reached the palisade along with Captain Butler and a few Marines. The officers sensed an impending slaughter if they remained much longer packed in against the wooden barrier.



ment. The small band clung to their foothold as men took multiple hits from point-blank rifle fire. But they numbered too few to push back the massed defenders. The charge crumbled, and wounded men played dead, hoping Confederate marksmen would target others. In addition to Captain Butler, Parker's after-action report singled out Corporal John Rannah and Privates John Shivers and Henry Thompson as the only Marines who charged through the palisade breach. All three received the Medal of Honor for their actions.²³⁵

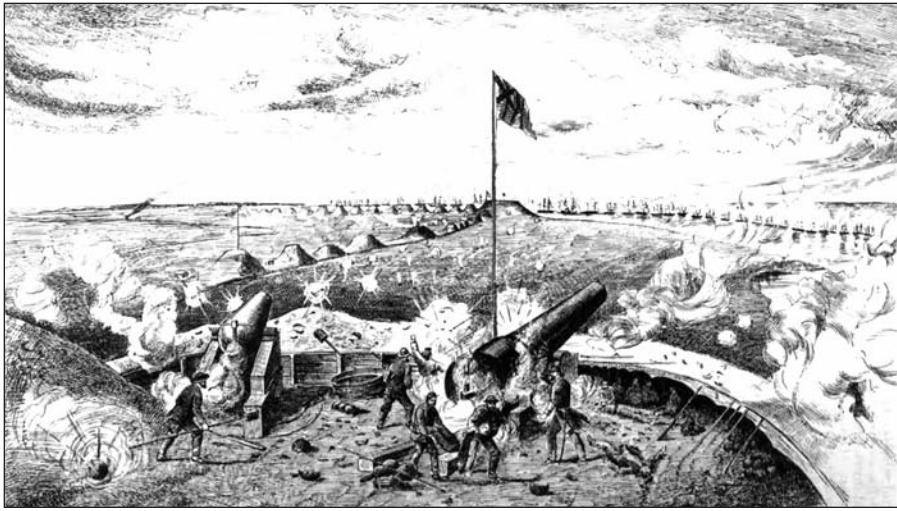
Only five men made it near the top of the parapet. One was Lieutenant, later Rear Admiral, Robley D. Evans. Shot once through the leg, Evans continued on only to be hit again, this time taking a .58-caliber bullet through the right knee, felling him. The same rebel fired at him again, this time hitting Evans in the foot, taking off part of a toe. Bleeding profusely, he pulled his pistol and shot the rebel in the neck. The mortally wounded Confederate rolled down the embankment and came to rest near Evans. Meanwhile, the remaining bluejackets hastily retreated to seek cover on the other side of the wall.²³⁶

Marines tried vainly to disperse their tormentors as officers attempted to find a way to get their men out of the "slaughter pen." Volley musket fire tore into the ranks as some tried to assault around the palisade, only to be cut off from their comrades and summarily cut down in a hail of gunfire on the other side of the palisade. Others tried to squeeze through damaged sections of the log wall, only to meet a similar fate.²³⁷ Marine Private Henry Wasmuth saw Lieutenant Evans lying

wounded near the parapet as Confederates made catcalls daring anyone to come back through the palisade. Defiantly, Wasmuth charged through the gap, grabbed Evans, and dragged him out of the line of fire. However, the huge shells of the *New Ironsides* began crashing all around, forcing Wasmuth to again brave Confederate fire to get Evans into the defilade of a shell crater. Evans warned Wasmuth to take cover, but he arrogantly dismissed Confederate ri-

cade. Parker attempted to regain the initiative while Breese tried to rally almost 1,000 sailors taking cover on the beach. Determined to charge through a hole in the palisade, he sounded the attack and entered the breach, followed by 60 sailors and a few Marines.

Confederate infantry waited atop the parapet on the other side of the log wall. Under a withering hail of lead, Parker's charge made its way up the steep sand embank-



History of the Confederate States Navy

During the first battle of Fort Fisher, the large flag atop Lamb's 50-foot-high Mound Battery drew the fire of Porter's fleet. During the second battle, Colonel Lamb turned the battery's guns upon both Porter's naval brigade and attacking Union infantry.

flemen saying, "the bullet has not been made that will kill me." Shortly after, Evans watched helplessly as Wasmuth bled to death from a gunshot wound to the neck.²³⁸

Confederates rained fire onto the mass of Marines and sailors huddled less than 100 yards distant. Breese and the other officers continued to rally the men and press them toward making an assault on the parapet. After repeated attempts failed, the rear of the formation gave way. A general panic ensued that carried away most of Breese's brigade along with many of Dawson's Marines. Only a relatively small group of sailors and Marines remained huddled with their officers under the shelter of the palisade.²³⁹

By 1600, the Navy/Marine assault was all over. Almost 300 of the naval brigade lay dead or wounded on the sandy beach. However, on the other flank, Breese's "diversion" gave Terry the break he needed to gain a foothold within the fort. The naval assault forced Lamb to divide his forces. As a result, he mistakenly left only about 250 rebels to face the Union onslaught of more than 3,500 veteran infantry concealed in the low-ground undergrowth along the Cape Fear River. The Army tried to navigate over the swampy terrain then race around the flank of the first traverse but instead found a hostile reception of close-range cannon and rifle fire.

On Terry's left, brigades charged toward the fort as Confederates desperately tried to detonate Lamb's torpedo-laden killing field. However, days of naval bombardment had cut the wires that operated the electrical detonators. In a few terrifying moments, the brigades passed the remains of the palisade and reached the base of the parapet. While Lamb and Whiting led the defense of the Northeast Bastion, Major James Reilly, commanding a detachment of the 1st Regiment North Carolina Artillery, took over defense on the Confederate left. Instead

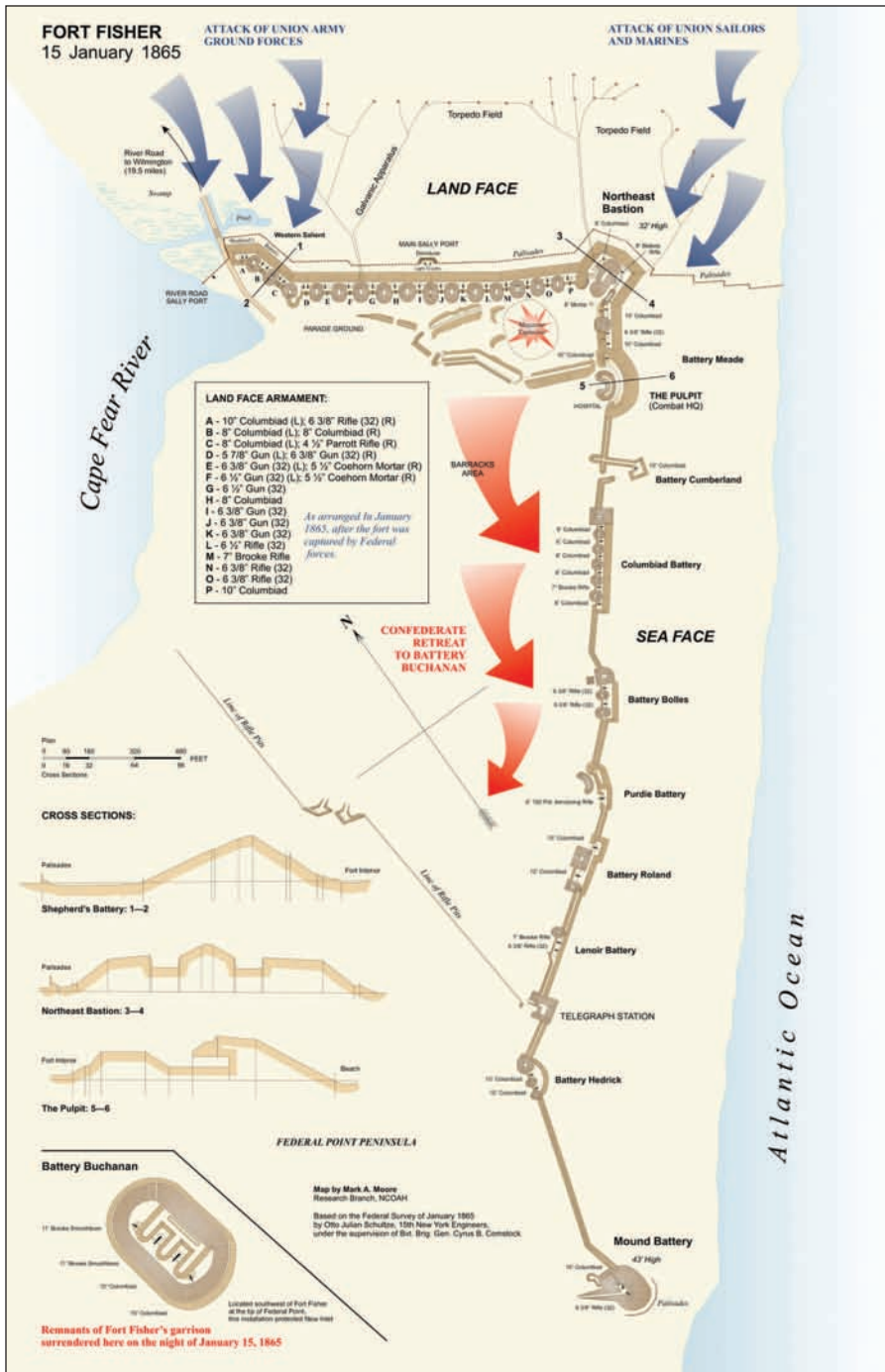
of massing his riflemen atop the parapet where they could fire down on Federals trying to ascend the steep slope, Reilly placed them in the plank-lined gun chambers. While the move shielded his men from enemy fire, it also prevented them from firing into Federals massing at the rampart's base. This tactical error allowed Terry's men to ascend the steep slope with relatively little hostile fire compared to that faced by the naval brigade on the Northeast Bastion. Reilly's defenders quickly found themselves outnumbered and engaged in a close-up fight as more and more Union troops climbed the wall.²⁴⁰

Meanwhile, Dawson tried to regroup his remaining Marines. He

began an orderly withdrawal by leading them back to the cover of the beach. There he directed them to return fire as he withdrew his command by squads. Lieutenant Commander Cushing, who had survived the onslaught at the Northeast Bastion, began to rally sailors and Marines who had retreated down the beach.²⁴¹ The withdrawal of the Marines left a few of Lieutenant Fagan's party still in the forward trenches near the Army brigades. When Terry's attack began, these seven Marines—one sergeant and six privates—joined the attack to take the traverses along the land face.²⁴²

On the opposite flank, Brigadier General Curtis personally led his men up the steep slope and urged them forward to engage Reilly's defenders. Savage fighting, which took a toll on both sides, ensued over Shepherd's Battery half-bastion and entrance gate on the Confederates' extreme left. Despite vastly outnumbering the fort's garrison, Curtis's brigade began to stall in the face of stiff resistance. Terry quickly sent 20-year-old Colonel Galusha Pennypacker, who would become the nation's youngest general officer following the battle, and his 2d Brigade into the fray. Accompanied by division commander General Adelbert Ames, the rush of fresh troops overran outnumbered Confederates along what was known as the "Bloody Gate." Curtis's men steadily expanded their foothold in the fort and held on for more reserves to exploit their success.²⁴³

The fight at the Northeast Bastion obscured the fact that the Army was making its own attack. Initially, Lamb and Whiting were ignorant to the fact that Union troops had entered the fort. As reports filtered in of a massive assault on the left, Lamb directed the Mound Battery to engage Terry's troops. Within a quarter hour of sending Pennypacker's brigade, Terry launched Ames's 3d Brigade,



North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources
The Confederate Retreat

led by Colonel Louis Bell toward the fort. However, a Confederate sharpshooter dropped Bell with a mortal wound before he reached the bastion. The brigade charged forward inside Fort Fisher and onto its parade ground through the recently captured Bloody Gate. After Bell went down, General Ames took charge of the brigade and ordered it to assault toward the Northeast Bastion. Seeing the rear of the fort in jeopardy, Confederate Marines and sailors in Battery Buchanan fired into the blue-clad columns, striking both friend and foe alike.²⁴⁴

tillery poured on the parade ground and stopped the Union advance in its tracks. Along the land face, fighting was also at a stand-off following the loss of Whiting. However, Lamb still believed he could push the Union troops out with one more attack. He formed his men in line of battle and prepared them to make one last desperate charge to save the fort.²⁴⁶

Resumption of the naval bombardment and the sight of Union troops entrenching across the parade ground forced Lamb to launch his counterattack. The men formed, bay-

The repulse of Breese's column allowed Lamb and Whiting to shift forces to meet the new attack on the other flank. By 1600, 3,500 Union infantry were fighting desperately against outnumbered but tenacious Confederates. General Whiting led reinforcements to counterattack Union troops who had already captured the first three traverses and gun chambers. Whiting's strike force, including some of Captain Van Benthuyzen's Marines, met Curtis's men atop the fourth traverse. In the melee that followed, both North and South fought point blank in hand-to-hand combat trying to wrest control from each other. Whiting's timely arrival worked, sending Union troops reeling back to the third traverse. Both sides took brief respites in the gun chambers separated by the huge traverse, gathering strength and nerve to charge again. And once more, men charged up opposite sides of the traverse and, once again, Southerners pushed the Federals back. Shortly after, Whiting led another savage charge up the third traverse. However, the general soon fell while trying to wrest a flag from a Union flag bearer atop the wall. The wounded general urged his men on before being taken back to the hospital bombproof below the Pulpit.²⁴⁵

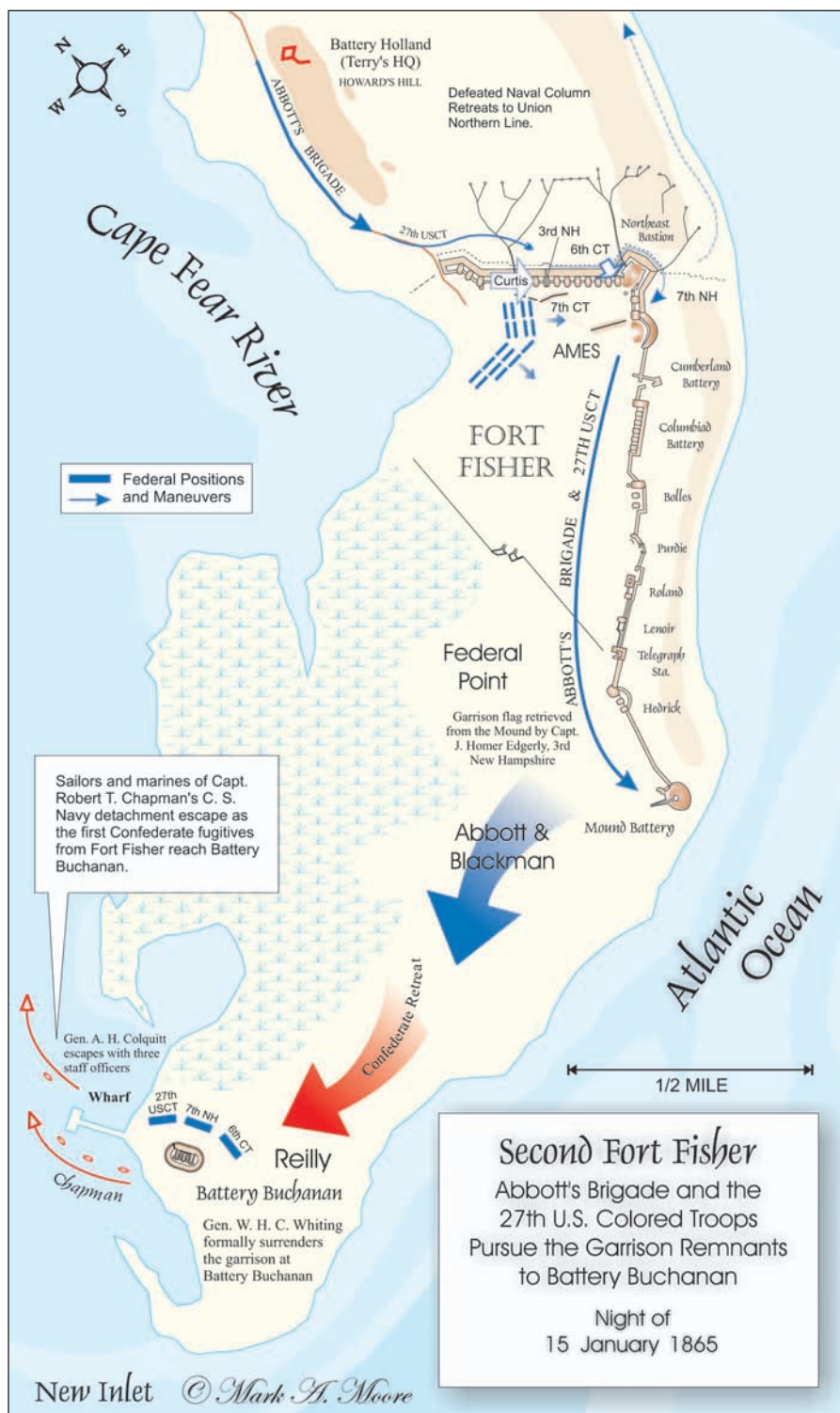
Realizing that Bragg had no intention of relieving the fort, Lamb hurried along the sea face to hastily scrape together another counterattack force. He directed three guns in the Columbiad Battery to turn their fire on the advancing Union troops. Shortly after, Lamb returned to the land face with about 100 volunteers. Southern ar-

onets fixed, ready to follow their leader. Just as Lamb gave the order to move forward, a Union bullet slammed into the young colonel. He fell with a broken hip and was soon whisked toward the hospital bombproof to join Whiting. With the loss of their leader, the rebel charge dissipated as men sought cover. By 1630, while the two commanders lay wounded in the rapidly filling hospital, Lamb reluctantly called for his subordinate and turned over command of the defense to Major Reilly.²⁴⁷

Tough fighting along the land face traverses wore down attacker and defender alike. However, the sheer weight of numbers and Terry's request to resume the naval bombardment caused the outnumbered defenders to grudgingly give ground. Despite the ingenious concept of Lamb's defensive fortifications, their design at times worked in favor of the attacker. The imposing height of each traverse not only created a series of successive small forts for defenders but also an impromptu blast wall that assaulting Union soldiers used.²⁴⁸

Prior to the assault, Terry sent an Army signal officer on board Porter's flagship to act as a staff liaison to coordinate shifting naval fires. Once Terry's regiments gained a foothold in the fort, they were able to take advantage of the height and width of the land face traverses to seek cover while the Navy blasted away at the next traverse. When fire shifted, Union troops assaulted over the top into a mass of stunned Confederates waiting in the next gun chamber. While Porter's gun crews undoubtedly had improved their accuracy since December, some shells still fell short. The bursting projectiles showered remnants of the naval brigade with hot fragments as they sheltered near the palisade. Enough shells missed their target to force some in the brigade to prefer surrender in lieu of remaining exposed to the incessant shelling.²⁴⁹

As the sun sank low in the sky, inside the fort, the tide of battle began to turn against the defenders. Lieutenant Evans still lay wounded in a shell crater along the beach,



North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources
The Surrender of Fort Fisher

but each successive wave of the rising tide lapped more water into the crater. Fearful of drowning, he called to a nearby Marine protected by a small dune. The Marine initially refused to aid the wounded officer because of intense Confederate fire. Fighting Bob, however, aimed his pistol at the Marine, who quickly changed his mind and dragged Evans to a covered position. His encounters with Marines

were not yet over. Naval gunfire once again began to scream overhead, which to Evans's surprise caused the ground beneath him to move. He soon found that he lay atop a Marine completely buried under the sand. The Marine was probably one of Lieutenant Williams's fast-firing Spencer sharpshooters now out of ammunition and waiting for the sun to set. With each incoming salvo, the Marine cringed, causing Evans painful twinges in his wounded legs. Despite promises to remain still, the Marine continued to move underneath the lieutenant with each shell. Evans, now irritated, "tapped him between the eyes with the butt of [his] revolver." The Marine quieted down and remained still until darkness fell.²⁵⁰

By 1800, shadows covered much of the beach. Breese's small party began to run from the cover of the palisade in groups of twos and threes. Suddenly, Confederate rifles again targeted the beach, kicking up the sand behind sailors running toward safety. Casualties mounted and forced the remainder to wait until darkness prevented Confederates from observing their withdrawal. Far down the beach, the remnants of the naval brigade reformed its shattered ranks and moved the wounded to makeshift field hospitals. Captain Dawson assembled almost 200 Marines while Lieutenant Commanders Cushing and Cushman rallied the sailors. Inside the fort, a third counterattack led by Major Reilly forced Federals back, but then stalled. Division commander General Ames wanted to dig in for the night, while General Curtis disagreed and pleaded for more reinforcements. Their argument ended when a jagged piece of shrapnel ripped out Curtis's left eye.²⁵¹

The still-shocked remnants of Breese's command reported to General Terry's field headquarters for orders. Their arrival helped Terry make a timely decision between Ames's insistence on digging in or Colonel Comstock, who shared Curtis's opinion that fresh reserves could take the fort. Terry decided to send in the new troops from Abbot's brigade recently vacated from their fortifications facing Sugarloaf. In the reserves' place, Marines and sailors filed into sandy rifle pits to face Hoke's division, which continued to menace the rear of Terry's command. By 1900, Abbott's brigade, reinforced by the 27th Regiment of U.S. Colored Troops, prepared to launch what became the final assault to capture the fort.²⁵²

At almost 2100, Abbott's men began the attack on the eighth and ninth traverses along the land face. Soon the combination of fresh troops and firepower from Abbott's Spencer-wielding sharpshooters overwhelmed the last defenders at the Northeast Bastion. On board ship, Admiral Porter ceased bombardment, fearing further casualties from the naval guns. Reilly's men ran low on ammunition, and he decided to evacuate what remained of the garrison. In Battery Buchanan, Lieutenant Robert T. Chapman

sensed the end and began drinking along with his men. Major William Saunders arrived at the battery to telegraph authorities of the fort's fate. At that prompting, Saunders, Chapman, and the remaining sailors spiked the guns, abandoned the battery, and took all the remaining launches.²⁵³

While Major Reilly organized the withdrawal toward Battery Buchanan, Captain Van Benthuisen gathered the slightly wounded into litter-bearing teams to evacuate Whiting, Lamb, and other officers wounded too badly to walk. The remaining defenders covered their escape toward the wharf along the river. However, the tired Confederates found the battery abandoned and all the boats taken.²⁵⁴ Just then a single rowboat appeared out of the darkness with Brigadier General Alfred H. Colquitt, whom Bragg had sent to command the defense of the fort. Any pretensions of command evaporated with the approach of Union infantry. Colquitt refused to evacuate Whiting, and the presumptive commander bid a hasty retreat into the night, leaving Lamb and his men to face Terry's pursuing brigades.²⁵⁵

Isolated and without the guns and garrison of Battery Buchanan to make a last stand, Reilly, Van Benthuisen, and Whiting's chief of staff went out to offer the fort's surrender. The men waited in the moonlight as Union skirmishers approached across the barren stretch of sand. Major Reilly offered his sword to Captain E. Lewis Moore of the 7th Connecticut, while Lamb and Whiting waited on their stretchers to officially surrender to General Terry. By 2200, the battle was over. A cheer up went throughout the fort, which reached the ears of sailors on board ships. Marines and sailors echoed the cheer as their ships sent up a great cascade of rockets to celebrate the victory.²⁵⁶

Terry's division commander, General Ames, detached Lieutenant Colonel Samuel M. Zent of the 13th Regiment Indiana Volunteers to post sentries on all the fort's remaining magazines and traverse bunkers. Zent inspected the fort and posted 31 sentries to guard the bunkers, but in the darkness neglected to post a guard on the large man-made mound directly behind the Northeast Bastion. Regardless of sentries, soldiers, sailors, and some Marines carried on the celebration late into the night inside the fort. They rummaged through the recently abandoned bombproofs and magazines seeking souvenirs and a place to sleep. Men, both Union and their Confederate prisoners, crowded into the dimly lit bunkers while others camped in and around the fort's main magazine.²⁵⁷ Men from the 169th New York Regiment stretched out on the "luxuriant turf" crowning the magazine, which still held more than six tons of gunpowder.²⁵⁸

Squads of Marines patrolled the fort, gathered abandoned weapons, stacked the dead, and guarded prisoners while others took the opportunity to scavenge for sou-

venirs. Several sailors and Marines began to drink liquor found in the Confederate hospital bunker below the Pulpit Battery. They staggered from one traverse to the next going through abandoned Confederate equipment, randomly discharging firearms while lighting their way with open-flame lanterns. At 0715 on 16 January, several Marines were noticed going into the fort's main magazine.²⁵⁹ Just 15 minutes later, Federal Point reverberated with a thunderous explosion that sent a torrent of debris and bodies skyward as tons of black powder in the magazine exploded. Among the 200 Union and Confederate soldiers killed were three Marines. The discovery, however, of a wire leading toward the river sparked rumors that a booby-trapped mine exploded the magazine. In the end, General Terry's court of inquiry placed more emphasis on drunk and careless Union troops than on Confederates.²⁶⁰

Officially, Union losses from all services totaled almost 1,000 while Confederate losses were almost double that figure when counting killed and captured. Dawn on 16 January revealed a hellish landscape. The wreckage of war littered the beach, parapets, and bombproofs within the fort. Bodies lay where they fell, already beginning to stiffen in odd contortions. Sailors from the fleet came ashore to survey the scene and search for their dead. When the recovery party found the bodies of Lieutenants Preston and Porter, they noted how serene Porter looked but that Preston's face bore the look of anguish.²⁶¹

Sailors, and presumably Marines also, unaccustomed to daily exposure to death, sat in shocked disbelief at the soldiers' callous treatment of the dead. To their distress, they found bodies stripped lying naked on the beach, their possessions taken not by desperate Confederate scavengers but by morbid Union souvenir seekers. Exhausted men within the fort slept in the traverse bunkers and awoke to find themselves curled up next to dead men. Terry's men, hardened by months in the front lines around Petersburg, looked upon the ghastly sight as commonplace. Some proceeded to stack the dead into makeshift tables on which to play cards or eat their rations. Others built their cooking fires and walked among the human wreckage making jokes. Ironically, Porter saw the gruesome effect of the magazine explosion as actually vindicating both Butler's assertion and Porter's support for the powder ship scheme.²⁶²

After the Battle

Following the successful capture of Fort Fisher, Lieutenant Commander Breese and Admiral Porter both blamed Marines for the failure of the naval assault. While it is true that the Marine Corps efforts to reform training standards had lagged, Captain Dawson and his Marines were capable and trained to do the task laid out in Porter and Breese's plan. However, as both Commandant Zeilin laid out in 1863

and Captain Dawson described in his 1865 after-action report, naval officers unrealistically expected disparate groups of men, whether Navy or Marine, to assemble as a cohesive unit on short notice and complete difficult missions without prior rehearsals or coordination while under enemy fire. Both Admiral Porter and his fleet captain Breese were products of a Navy that placed little value or emphasis on its officers developing professional skills to employ the naval brigade effectively.

In the aftermath, only a handful of the 100 or so Confederate Marines escaped Fort Fisher. More than 60 became prisoners, while the remainder fell in the savage fighting along the land face traverses. With Fort Fisher in Union hands, the only Confederate Marine post of significance remained at Drewry's Bluff, Virginia, guarding the James River approach to Richmond. However, the Confederate Marine Corps, like the Confederacy, only had weeks to live. In early April 1865, Grant's Army finally forced Lee to evacuate the rebel capital, and a few Confederate Marines from Fort Fisher, including Lieutenant Doak, found themselves in Richmond to take part in the final death throes of the Confederacy.

The Marine battalion, on the other hand, although on the winning side, made a convenient scapegoat. Not only did many at Fort Fisher blame drunken Marines for the explosion of the magazine, but both Porter and Breese criticized the Marine battalion for its combat performance despite many individual acts of courage. Admiral Porter tried to convince senior Marines that he in fact supported them, "though the Marines did not do their duty."²⁶³

The war soon came to a close, and Marines once again found themselves under attack, this time from some in Congress. The Marines, with strong backing of senior naval officers, successfully fought off plans to disband the Corps and even saw Commandant Zeilin promoted. But assigning blame for the failure of the naval brigade only added to the overall narrative of perceived Marine Corps failure during the entire war.²⁶⁴

Contributing Factors to the Repulse of the Naval Brigade

For most of first half of the nineteenth century, naval officers in general lacked training on infantry tactics and drill despite the fact that they often led landing parties. Any training was, according to Midshipman Hubbard T. Minor, "sporadic and haphazard at best."²⁶⁵ During the Jacksonian period, the "Old Navy" distrusted a professional officer corps as being too British.²⁶⁶ As a result, a midshipman often first entered service as little more than a captain's errand boy and training came on the job. Formal instruction relied on the officers on board ship, who often lacked enthusiasm to teach midshipmen reading, mathematics, and gunnery, much less on how to be a gentleman. Between 1807 and

1825, some reformers pushed for formalized training. As a result, naval schools began to appear at the Navy yards along the mid-Atlantic. Appointment standards, however, remained lax as the Navy did not even require basic literacy or a general knowledge of mathematics and geography until 1831. That is not to say the system did not produce. But it was geared toward making naval officers, not soldiers.²⁶⁷ Like Marine Corps officer appointments, they had little to do with merit and everything to do with politics and influence.²⁶⁸

Naval Culture in Transition Examples from the Battle

At the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, New York, superintendant Sylvanus Thayer first established a military curriculum standard based on science and engineering rather than the standard classical education. The birth of the steam Navy in 1839 led reform-minded officers and traditionalists alike to establish a school for Navy officer training based on engineering. In 1842, a new school opened outside Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and operated for three years until the Navy disbanded it. In the fall of 1845, the Naval School—reorganized and renamed in 1850 as the Naval Academy—opened on the grounds of old Fort Severn at Annapolis, Maryland.²⁶⁹

Naturally, the service academies focused in their sphere. At West Point, Dennis Hart Mahan, author of *A Treatise on Field Fortification*, instructed the men, who later led the armies during the Civil War, on tactics and strategy.²⁷⁰ Reformist naval officers wrote authoritative works on oceanography and naval ordnance and later, at Annapolis, professors modeled much of their curriculum after West Point. Those first and subsequent classes, however, were heavily tilted toward mathematics, navigation, and gunnery rather than infantry drill. Professor Henry H. Lockwood, later a Union brigadier at Gettysburg, first instructed the midshipmen on infantry tactics and drill in 1848, only to be burned in effigy and disobeyed by midshipmen.²⁷¹

Professor Mahan's son, Alfred Thayer Mahan, who became a famous naval strategist in his own right, attended the Naval Academy in the early 1850s. He thought Lockwood, who suffered from a stutter, while well intentioned, only prompted ridicule and a sense of light-hearted misbehavior among the young men. Most drills involved seamanship or naval gunnery and carried a strict sense of professionalism for the students. Lockwood's course on military tactics, however, only served to further a sense of ridicule for most things that involved "soldiering."²⁷² The midshipmen generally disliked Marines and regarded drill as too military and for landlubbers. Following reforms of the early 1850s, however, all classes of midshipmen received a standardized regimen that included drill and infantry tactics. Even so, the relative importance of infantry tactics in the curriculum

paled in comparison to learning most subjects save history and geography, which also ranked near the bottom.²⁷³

At Fort Fisher, the Navy's attitudes toward officer education and infantry drill not only reflected generational differences in the officers, but also impacted the outcome of the naval brigade's assault. Admiral Porter entered the officer corps in the Old Navy. Lieutenant Commander Breese, on the other hand, represented a generation in transition from the ideas of the "old salts" to those espoused by reform-minded juniors. Lieutenant Benjamin H. Porter represented efforts by the Navy to educate and create a professional officer corps. None of these officers, however, received the full benefit of infantry training and drill so despised by Lieutenant Porter when addressing General Curtis prior to the naval brigade's assault.

Admiral Porter

Admiral Porter's career followed the traditional path of the Old Navy, having begun in 1827 at the age of 14. His father, Commodore David Porter, first won fame commanding the USS *Essex* in the War of 1812. During the John Quincy Adams administration, however, Commodore Porter was forced to leave the Navy and traveled to Mexico to offer his services. He volunteered to command the Mexican Navy and he, along with several relatives, accepted commissions in the service. Commodore Porter also appointed his son a midshipman in the Mexican Navy under the elder Porter's cousin, Captain David H. Porter. After two years, then 16-year-old David Dixon Porter gained an appointment as a midshipman in the U.S. Navy. During the brief Mexican naval stint, he had learned how to handle and fight a ship. Porter never took part in formal infantry tactics or drill as part of any organized training program. The little firsthand infantry experience he gained came during the Mexican-American War. Like many other Civil War leaders, those experiences in Mexico apparently impacted his later decisions. For him, those included support of Butler's powder ship and concocting the naval brigade.²⁷⁴

Before joining Commodore David Conner's Home Squadron in early 1847, David Dixon Porter remained stuck in a New Orleans recruiting post. American forces under General Winfield Scott marshaled and were preparing to make a landing at Veracruz, Mexico. Porter proposed a plan to blow up the fortress San Juan de Ulloa, which guarded the port of Veracruz, in hopes of gaining a transfer. Having spent time inside the fort as a young boy when his father was commander in chief of the Mexican Navy, Porter was well acquainted with its layout. He volunteered to lead the attack in which the ramparts of the fort would be blasted by 100-pound casks of black powder planted beneath walls at the water's edge. Superiors, however, dismissed his plan as both risky and unrealistic.²⁷⁵ Almost 20 years later, Porter remained convinced of the potential of his plan and backed

Butler's powder ship idea, even going so far as to try and usurp the entire scheme. The tragic explosion of Fort Fisher's magazine only reinforced Porter's opinion about the effectiveness of explosives against fortifications first adopted as an aspiring lieutenant during the Mexican War.

Porter's insistent Mexican War correspondence landed him the transfer he sought. He arrived off the Mexican coast in late February 1847 assigned to the USS *Spitfire*. The schooner was captained by Commander Josiah Tattnall, who would later resign his commission to join Confederate service. Of more importance to his Civil War operations, Porter witnessed General Winfield Scott's amphibious landings and the success of combined operations during the 20-day siege at Veracruz. In April, he took part in the naval attack and observed the contested landing and capture of the Mexican coastal town of Tuxpan.²⁷⁶

In June, Porter witnessed and took part in Commodore Matthew C. Perry's attack and occupation of Tabasco. During the ascent up the Tobasco River (present-day Grijalva River), Perry's force encountered three lightly manned forts. The small squadron disabled two of the gun emplacements and seized the third by force. Perry landed a naval brigade of 1,200 men with 10 six-pounder cannon to overrun the Mexicans and allow his gunboats to pass. The naval brigade fell behind the gunboats, which continued to press up river. Near Tabasco, Porter gained his only meaningful firsthand experience fighting ashore at Tamultec and Chiflon. Just below the town lay Fort Iturbide, mounting seven guns with a sizable garrison of several hundred. The gunboats opened fire on the works while a small landing party went ashore. At the head of the 70-man party, Porter led a charge up hill that boarded and captured the fort while taking 11 casualties.²⁷⁷

This experience, along with personal ambition and service rivalry, evidently blinded Porter to the faults in his own plan for the naval brigade at Fort Fisher. Despite private worries about his bluejackets being poorly drilled on infantry tactics, he made no effort to train the men before the assault. Without doubt, Porter's plans and execution of the naval bombardment and support of both Army landings evidence his expertise at naval warfare. Sadly, Fort Fisher's Confederate defenders exposed Porter's faulty assumptions about both the demoralizing effect of naval gunfire on professional infantry and his own fitness to plan and coordinate the naval brigade's ground assault.

Other Examples

Breese, on the other hand, gained appointment in late 1846 to the Naval School but immediately left to serve in the Mexican–American War. Four years later, he returned to complete about eight months of training in order to satisfy the lieutenantcy boards. After the Naval Academy's reforms of 1850 and 1851, Breese fell into a transitional and less-than-ideal academic plan rather than the four-year one es-

poused by Professor Lockwood and others at the academy. Under the four-year curriculum, Breese would have taken infantry tactics in his third year. However, even then, drill only represented 2.5 percent of the studies, and the academy did not even receive muskets until 1852.²⁷⁸

Upon his return to the academy, Breese was totally unprepared to lead any of Lockwood's shore drills normally assigned to upper classmen. He and other "sea lieutenants" who returned after years on board ship opted to lead exercises involving the light artillery pieces. Although the guns were small by comparison, both midshipman and fleet returnees took the drills seriously as they approximated the skills required to man the great guns on board ship. On the other hand, Breese and his peers only served to further promote the "resultant disrespect" for both Professor Lockwood and his drills among the underclassmen.²⁷⁹

Lieutenant Benjamin Porter, arrived at the academy in 1859 under the four-year plan, but the looming Civil War forced the Union to call Porter and most of his class to active service in May 1861. Undoubtedly, he benefitted from the 1851 academic and disciplinary reforms, but as a member of the second class, he received only the rudiments of tactical training. He still displayed the same dismissive attitude toward infantry drill and tactics that his predecessors did when Professor Lockwood first introduced the subject in 1848.²⁸⁰

Captain Dawson also suffered from prewar attitudes toward professionalism in the officer ranks. At the outbreak of the war, there were no Marine Corps officers who graduated from either West Point or the Naval Academy despite Commandant Archibald Henderson's attempts at Marine officer appointment reforms. For officers at a barracks or in the fleet, little reason existed to change because of the generally limited role for Marines at sea and ashore. Henderson's attempted reforms proved to be too late to be implemented before the war.²⁸¹

Additionally, the cadre of Marine Corps officers was aged. Mexican War veterans made up the few field grade officers who put more interest in trifling court-martials against one another than reforms. Even company grade officers averaged more than 25 years of service. A Marine Corps officer stood an equal chance of retiring or dying in office. Unlike Dawson, officers generally came from eastern states and had influential families with ties to politics or the naval services. The secession crisis hit the Marine Corps hard and it lost 20 officers—almost one-third of its ranks. Marine Corps professionalism suffered as a result of antebellum political appointments and the uneven quality of the remaining officers, which created a leadership vacuum. Many of the Corps' promising younger officers went South, while the old field grades remained largely focused on administration rather than field duty.²⁸²

The dearth of leaders prompted Congress and the Navy

to respond by authorizing 38 new lieutenants. However, the appointments remained very political, with many going to the sons of high-ranking Army and Navy officers. Even so, naval officers recognized that the Marines were uniquely trained to conduct operations suited to the infantry. Unfortunately for the naval brigade at Fort Fisher, the Marines who were most qualified to lead, plan, and coordinate the attack ashore were relegated to a supporting role due to institutional tradition and common doctrinal views held by naval and Marine officers alike.²⁸³

A Marine Corps Stuck in the Past

After four long years of war, the Navy held the victory at Fort Fisher as equivalent to Appomattox for the Army.²⁸⁴ The old cliché that history is written by the victors also applied to policy after the war. Soon after the guns fell silent, much of the 600-ship Navy that had been amassed to defeat the Confederate nation demobilized, while many of the remaining vessels rusted and rotted away in naval yards. At the same time, large seagoing warships reverted back to the Navy's prewar role of protecting shipping routes and serving abroad for extended patrols. The scarcity of ships compared to the glut of naval officers to serve them caused a power struggle between older naval officers and those of the new generation. Men of the Old Navy, represented by Porter, won the battle. Marines, such as Zeilin, who shared the same traditional views, ensured Marine Corps survival in its traditional role reminiscent of the War of 1812.²⁸⁵

The debacle at the First Battle of Bull Run served only to reinforce prewar attitudes that consolidated around traditional roles supporting the Navy. As a result, the Marine Corps remained resistant to change.²⁸⁶ Marine Commandants, including Henderson, Harris, and Zeilin, narrowly focused on survival of the Corps against the efforts of Congress and Secretary Fox to disband it. They failed to grasp larger concepts for Marine employment as a standing amphibious brigade, which required a large expansion.²⁸⁷ While bad luck and timing also played a part, Major General George B. McClellan's ascension to General-in-Chief in late 1861 put the Army in position to embrace what could have been a Marine Corps role.

McClellan took lessons from observing the Crimean War and being a railroad executive and put them into action as part of a grand strategy. After the Union defeat at the First Battle of Bull Run, rebel forces dug in and blockaded the upper Potomac River in northern Virginia. McClellan reorganized and retrained the Army, but Confederates in northern Virginia remained close enough to threaten the nation's capital. In response, McClellan devised a campaign strategy to shift the fortunes of war back toward the Union. His plan involved amphibious landings to turn Confederates out of their prepared defenses to

avoid bloody frontal assaults while making his own attack on the Confederate capital in nearby Richmond, Virginia.²⁸⁸

With the Marine Corps focused inward and given its comparatively small size, the Army began to develop its own "Marine" units, partially to execute McClellan's plan. The first of these was the 1st Regiment New York Marine Artillery, a volunteer unit raised by Colonel William A. Howard. He recruited and organized the regiment in New York City for service on gunboats, with an eye toward mimicking Royal Marine artillery. The unit was short lived; it took part in Burnside's 1862 amphibious campaign before being disbanded in 1863.²⁸⁹

Another notable "Marine" unit organized by the Army was Graham's Naval Brigade, also a brainchild of Colonel Howard. Command went to former midshipman Charles K. Graham who joined the Army and rose to rank of brigadier of volunteers. The unit served primarily in Butler's Department of Virginia. The commander of the South Atlantic Blockading Squadron, Rear Admiral John A. Dahlgren, on the other hand, collaborated with Major General John G. Foster to create Hatch's Coastal Division to make amphibious raids along coastal Georgia and South Carolina. Dahlgren in fact dedicated a naval brigade of 500 Marines and sailors led by Commander George H. Preble to the effort.²⁹⁰

Along the Mississippi River, the chronic shortage of Marines and continued partisan attacks on shipping led the Army to create the Mississippi Marine Brigade at the behest of Admiral David Dixon Porter. They saw duty patrolling Western waters on board armed transports, which interdicted Confederate cavalry and guerrillas operating along the river. The unit, however, fell under a cloud of suspicion because of naval prize regulations. Porter and other officers were implicated in illegal cotton trading. Eventually, the unit's checkered record and spurious dealings led to its disbandment after the Red River Campaign.²⁹¹

Doctrinal Blinders

Regardless of the units involved, the Union war effort along the Southern coast and vast inland waterways created an opportunity that few leaders within the Marine Corps seemed to grasp at the time. At Fort Fisher, Marines performed admirably as individuals, but conducting battalion-sized operations on short notice proved once again to be a disaster. Certainly, a lack of vision and institutional inertia along with a dose of bad luck hampered Marine success throughout the war.²⁹² But the Navy's belated efforts to develop a professional officer corps did little to correct the deficiencies in planning, coordinating, and executing operations ashore like the naval brigade's attack at Fort Fisher. Though Porter's naval brigade suffered a tac-

tical defeat, the operation overall marked a significant improvement over the first attempt to seize the fort.

Unlike today, amphibious operations in the Civil War lacked a single overarching doctrine to clearly delineate roles during each phase. Success or failure potentially devolved down to personalities of the commanders and their willingness to cooperate as evidenced by the schemes and suspicions exhibited by both Butler and Porter during the first attack. The second attack demonstrated the effectiveness of amphibious warfare when both parties were of one mind to cooperate toward a single purpose.²⁹³ Interestingly, as much as Terry and Porter cooperated and coordinated their efforts to ensure success of the overall plan, internally, Porter's naval brigade still suffered from many of the problems that plagued the first attack.

As envisioned by Porter, the naval brigade operated external to Terry's force and coordination existed only in broad terms. However, circumstances intervened and after its bloody repulse, the naval brigade reported to General Terry. Terry picketed the sailors and Marines along his northern line of entrenchments to watch for attacks by Hoke's division on Sugar Loaf. This decision released hundreds of fresh soldiers to exploit gains within the fort. But Terry's action was a tactical contingency, which Porter never mentioned or apparently even contemplated in his landing orders to Breese.

Ideally, the brigade would have operated ashore under the direct orders of the Army much like Preble's naval brigade formed by South Atlantic Blockading Squadron commander Rear Admiral Dahlgren.* Only a month before

* Dahlgren is best known for his contributions to naval gunnery and ordnance development. In 1861, he also co-wrote a textbook for the Naval Academy—*Instruction for Naval Light Artillery: Afloat and Ashore*. It focused on drill and employment of the naval howitzers that he helped develop. Preble's naval brigade was apparently organized and drilled along the lines of this manual, which may help explain its relatively smooth integration with the Army.

Fort Fisher, Commander Preble's command went into action as part of a combined force against the railroads near Savannah, Georgia. Prior to landing his brigade, Dahlgren drafted written orders directing Preble to not only cooperate, but also report to the senior Army officer ashore for both tactical employment and some logistical support.²⁹⁴ In addition to a firm delineation of roles ashore, Dahlgren ensured Preble's command was both properly drilled and organized to operate effectively as part of a combined force.²⁹⁵ At Fort Fisher, Porter's brigade struggled to cooperate and synchronize its actions ashore with those of Terry's command. It had little in the way of direct contact save runners, like Lieutenant Benjamin Porter, who dismissed sound tactical advice.

The second attack on the fort has been held up as a model of Army-Navy cooperation from landing troops, to battlefield communication and supporting fires.²⁹⁶ Much of that credit lay with General Terry for having both staffs plan in detail. He ensured good communications to support the attack with naval gunfire by sending signal corps officers on board Porter's flagship to relay signals from the beach. Internally, Porter's brigade had no such luxury in the way of detailed staff planning, communication, or coordination of supporting fires. The same lack of planning and communication that bred mistrust and the eventual failure of Butler's attack doomed the assault by Marines and sailors of the fleet against the Northeast Bastion.

Today, the tides and time have eroded away much of Fort Fisher. Along the land face, only the first few traverses rise above the surrounding marshy terrain. Visitors can still view the remains of Battery Buchanan and several of the land face traverses; however, the greater part of the fort, including the Northeast Bastion, no longer exists. Perhaps fittingly, the scene of the valiant but ill-conceived attack by soldiers of the sea has long since been reclaimed by the Atlantic Ocean.

NOTES

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2006), 89–90.

²⁹⁴ “Dahlgren to Preble,” 28 November 1864, ORN, Series I, 16:69; “Hatch to Preble,” 29 November 1864, ORN, Series I, 16:71; “Hatch to Preble,” 30 November 1864, ORN, Series I, 16:72; “Report of Commander Preble to Brigadier General Hatch,” 4 December 1864, ORN, Series I, 16:76–78; “Report of Brigadier General John P. Hatch,” December 1864, ORN, Series I, 44:421–25.

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APPENDIX

Sources for Further Reading on Marines During the Civil War

Unpublished Materials

Ingalls, David M. "Francis Scala: Leader of the Marine Band from 1855 to 1871." Master's thesis, Catholic University of America, 1957.

An early work discussing influential Marine Band leader Francis Scala who served in that capacity during the Civil War.

Krivdo, Michael E. "Marines in Gray: The Birth, Life and Death of the Confederate States Marine Corps." Master's thesis, Texas A&M University, 2010. <http://hdl.handle.net/1969.1/ETD-TAMU-1132>.

The author argues political realities and Civil War expediencies allowed the Confederate States Marine Corps (CSMC) to expand into roles and actually outpace its Northern counterpart in some respects despite its minute size and short lifespan.

LeClair, Paul Joseph. "The Francis Scala Collection: Music in Washington, DC at the time of the Civil War." PhD diss., Catholic University of America, 1973.

Discusses the Marine Band and its leader Francis Scala during the Civil War.

Pacios, Daniel M. "Seawolves of the Confederacy: The Origin, Development, and Operations of the Confederate States Marine Corps." Master's thesis, Southwest Texas State University, 1993.

Ryan, Jeffrey T. "From Bull Run to Fort Fisher: Marine Battalions in the Civil War." Master's thesis, Temple University, 1991.

_____. "On Land and Sea: The United States Marine Corps in the Civil War." PhD diss., Temple University, 1997.

Two studies that provide a well-documented bibliography to begin research on Marine Corps Civil War participation.

Scala, Francis Maria. *Francis Maria Scala Collection, 1820–1915*. Music Division, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

Collection of Marine Band leader Scala who served from 1855–71. Primarily consists of manuscript and printed music composed by Scala for band concerts, military formations, and White House functions. In addition, the collection includes photographs, clippings, programs, and some correspondence.

Shoemaker, Judge Ferris. *Judge Ferris Shoemaker Papers, 1861–1866*. Kroch Library, Division of Rare & Manuscript Collections, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY.

Correspondence and diaries relating to Shoemaker's service in the Marine Corps while attached to the USS *Saranac* on the Pacific Station during the Civil War.

United States. Department of the Navy. *Records of the United States Marine Corps*. Record Group 127. National Archives Building, Washington, DC.

Researchers have found records group subgroup 127.2 "Records of the Office of the Commandant, 1798–1978" contains important correspondence not published in the *Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies*. Particularly, the "Letters sent" and "Letters received" subgroups proved valuable.

_____. Marine Corps. Historical Reference Branch Subject File. History Division. United States Marine Corps, Quantico, VA.

The Historical Reference Branch maintains subject files that encompass a mixture of primary and secondary sources on the Civil War. A good starting point for inquiries into Marine activities during the Civil War and individual Marine officers' biographical data.

Published Materials

Primary Sources

Beyer, Walter F., and Oscar F. Keydel. *Deeds of Valor: How America's Heroes Won the Medal of Honor*. 2 vols. Detroit: Perrien-Keydel Co., 1901.

A compilation of various first-hand accounts of acts by soldiers, sailors, and Marines during the Civil War, which led to receipt of the Medal Of Honor. Volume two describes the accounts of Medal of Honor recipients Sgts John F. Mackie and Richard Binder for actions at Drewry's Bluff and Fort Fisher respectively.

Burton, Amos. *A Journal of the Cruise of the U.S. Ship Susquehanna: During the Years 1860, 1861, 1862 and 1863*. New York: Edward O. Jenkins, 1863. Special Collections, Pace Library, University of West Florida, Pensacola.

A Marine private's chronological record of service on board the USS *Susquehanna* from her commissioning, 17 August 1860, until 5 May 1863; includes an undated roster of the ship's personnel. While there are nuggets of useful information, Burton's "journal" reads more like a Jane Austin novel leaving the researcher to wade through an excess of superfluous text.

Church, Frank L., James Pickett Jones, and Edward F. Keuchel. *Civil War Marine: A Diary of the Red River Expedition, 1864*. Washington, DC: History and Museums Division, Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps, 1975.

The Civil War journal of Marine Lt Frank L. Church who commanded the Marine Guard on board Admiral Porter's flagship *Black Hawk* during the abortive 1864 Red River Campaign.

Fredd, John P. "Civil War Blockade." *Recruiters' Bulletin* 2, no. 5 (March 1916):12.

_____. "Life on the Blockade." *Recruiters' Bulletin* 2, no. 1 (November 1915):1-2.

A biographical sketch of Fredd is included. Also published in *Marines Magazine* 1 no. 1 (Dec 1915):9-11.

_____. "More about the Uniform of 1859." *Recruiters' Bulletin* 4 no. 3 (January 1918):12.

Marine veteran's description of wartime service and of the uniform he wore during the Civil War. More recent scholarship cast doubts on the authenticity of Fredd's claims to have been a Marine during the Civil War. See: Church, Jones, and Keuchel. *Civil War Marine: A Diary of the Red River Expedition, 1864*.

Graves, Henry Lea, and Richard Barksdale Harwell. *A Confederate Marine: A Sketch of Henry Lea Graves with Excerpts from the Graves Family Correspondence, 1861-1865*. Tuscaloosa, AL: Confederate Pub. Co., 1963.

One of the few accounts of a Confederate Marine officer, consisting of a series of letters detailing camp life, events in Savannah written by Graves as he served at Naval Station Savannah.

Gusley, Henry O., and Edward T. Cotham. *The Southern Journey of a Civil War Marine: The Illustrated Note-Book of Henry O. Gusley*. Clifton and Shirley Caldwell Texas Heritage Series, no. 10. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006.

The journal of Marine Private Henry O. Gusley. He took part in naval skirmishes along the Mississippi River and also saw duty in the West Gulf Blockading Squadron from Pensacola, Florida, to Texas. Gusley fell prisoner after the Confederate victory at Sabine Pass and spent time as a prisoner-of-war in Texas and Louisiana prisons.

Hammersly, Lewis R. *The Records of Living Officers of the U.S. Navy & Marine Corps: Compiled from Official Sources*. Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1878.

Official period naval publication giving many organizational related details and service-related data on both Navy and Marine Corps officers. Useful for the researcher to provide service record data, previous assignments, and brevet awards during the Civil War.

Johnson, Robert Underwood, and Clarence Clough Buel, eds. *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War: Being for the Most Part Contributions by Union and Confederate Officers*, Vol. 4. New York: Century Co., 1888.

One volume in a series, which features articles about various Civil War battles written by the commanders. Although the accounts were written well after the fact, the editors provided the reader with information from both sides. Where details or opinions differ, the editors integrate dissenting opinions or observations from the opposing commander in the footnotes, which is unique and useful. Several articles describe battles in which a Marine

battalion participated including ill-fated attacks on Forts Sumter and Fisher. The Fort Fisher articles by Union and Confederate leaders in the battle shift blame away from the Marine Corps and onto Admiral Porter.

Mackie, John F. "The Destruction of Norfolk Navy Yard, April 21, 1861." *Home and Country/incorporating the Grand Army Review* 4, Nos. 9-12 (March-May 1889):1011-12; 1041, 1057-58; 1062-63.

Brief account by Civil War Medal of Honor recipient of the Marines' part in the botched attempts to raze the Gosport Naval Yard, which provided occupying Confederates with more than 1,000 naval guns and the tools to build the ironclad CSS *Virginia*.

Oviatt, Miles M., and Mary P. Livingston. *A Civil War Marine at Sea: The Diary of Medal of Honor Recipient Miles M. Oviatt*. Shippensburg, PA: White Mane Publishing Co., 1998.

The diary of Sgt Miles M. Oviatt who, after the Battle of Mobile Bay, received one of only 17 Medals of Honor awarded to Marines during the Civil War. His diary chronicles life on board ship patrolling the Atlantic trade routes for Confederate privateers, gun crew assignments, and the Union attacks on Fort Fisher.

Peet, Frederick Tomlinson. *Civil War Letters and Documents of Frederick Tomlinson Peet: With the Seventh New York Regiment. With First Berdan's Sharp-Shooters. Prisoner to the Confederates. In the United States Marine Corps*. Newport, R.I.: Privately printed, 1917.

_____. *Personal Experiences in the Civil War: . . . in the United States Marine Corps*. New York, 1905.

Peet reminisces about life in the North Atlantic Blockading Squadron. He provides some details of events surrounding the Union landings on Folly Island, SC. It also mentions the capture of Charleston's outlying Confederate defenses including Fort Wagner, however, the account lacks much in the way of personal details.

United States Congress. House. *The Reports of the Committees of the House of Representatives, Made During the Second Session, Thirty-Ninth Congress, 1866-67*. Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 1867.

Following the Civil War, an effort was made to merge the Marine Corps into the Army. Report 22 includes the testimony of many well-known naval officers attesting to the nature of Marine Corps service during the war. It also describes the roles of the Marine Corps and its value to fighting ships of the Navy.

_____. Senate. *The Reports of Committees of the Senate of the United States for the Second Session of the Thirty-Seventh Congress, 1861-62*. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1862.

Report 37 details the evacuation and destruction of naval yards at Pensacola and Norfolk. Marines, especially at Norfolk, took part in the botched attempt to destroy the yard.

_____. Senate. *The Reports of Committees of the Senate of the United States for the Third Session of the Thirty-Seventh Congress*. 4 vols. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1863.

Part II contains Senate Report 108 detailing testimony before the Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War. This dealt with the Union disaster at the Battle of Bull Run in July 1861. Col John Harris lamented in correspondence after the battle that for the first time Marines turned their backs to the enemy, inadvertently starting a 150-year narrative of Marine failure during the Civil War. Testimony from key officers include brigade commander Col Andrew Porter, and artillery officers Maj William F. Barry and Capts James B. Ricketts and Charles Griffin, whose batteries Marines were assigned to protect. Testimony not only does not blame Maj John G. Reynolds's Marine battalion, but in some cases vindicates Marine conduct during the battle.

United States. Department of the Navy. *Regulations for the Government of the United States Navy, 1865*. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1865.

The researcher will find articles that relate to Marines especially while embarked at sea useful to understanding the relative autonomy of a Marine Guard commanding officer and how the guard functioned at sea.

_____. Marine Corps. *Regulations for the Uniform and Dress of the Marine Corps of the United States, 1859*. Philadelphia: Charles De Silver, 1859.

Official description and specifications for the Marine uniform of the Civil War era, accompanied by color illustrations and line drawings.

_____. Naval History Division. "The Journal of Private Charles Brother, USMC." *Civil War Naval Chronology, 1861–1865*. Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 1971. Appendix IV, VI47–VI84.

An excellent personal narrative with explanatory notes of enlisted Marine life on board ship in the West Gulf Blockading Squadron. Besides listing many details of life at sea, and shipboard duties, Brother also describes action during the Battle of Mobile Bay.

_____. Office of Naval Records and Library. *Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies in the War of the Rebellion*. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1894–1922.

Well-known reference for official naval after-action reports and correspondence regarding the blockade, landing parties, and battles involving Marines.

_____. War Department. *The War of the Rebellion: a Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1880–1901.

Official Army after-action reports and correspondence regarding combined operations or what would today be termed joint operations with the naval services during the war.

United States and John Harris. *Letters from Naval Officers in Reference to the United States Marine Corps*. Washington, DC: F. Taylor, 1864.

A series of letters published in book form that circulated in the Senate, written by high ranking Civil War naval officers in response to a request from Commandant Harris and Major W. B. Slack, Marine Quartermaster, to defeat an effort in Congress to disband the Marine Corps or fold it into the Army.

Welles, Gideon, and Edgar Thaddeus Welles. *Diary of Gideon Welles, Secretary of the Navy Under Lincoln and Johnson*. 3 vols. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1911.

The period diary of Lincoln's Secretary of the Navy. It helps provide some insight into administration views relating to the Marine Corps including the press flap over band leader Scala's musical choices, recruiting, enlistment bounties, and wartime bickering between senior Marine officers.

Secondary Sources

Aldrich, M. Almy. *History of the United States Marine Corps*. Boston: Henry L. Shepherd and Co., 1875.

In Marine Corps historiography, Aldrich's work is one of the first attempts to detail the service's history from its beginnings up to and immediately following the Civil War. It relies heavily on extracts of official reports. Major Richard Collum provided most of the official documents and reports.

Bennett, Michael J. *Union Jacks: Yankee Sailors in the Civil War*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004.

Bennett's social history details the lives, backgrounds, and motivations of Union sailors—bluejackets—during the war. While the book does not discuss Marines, it does provide insight into areas of overlap between the naval services particularly in recruiting practices and socio-economic backgrounds. Many of the Marine Guards' shipboard duties revolved around maintaining order and discipline among the crew. This book is helpful for understanding that task. Another interesting section discusses the relative isolation of sailors—and presumably Marines—on board ship from the horrors of war seen by Army units.

Clark, George B., ed. *United States Marine Corps Medal of Honor Recipients: A Comprehensive Registry, Including U.S. Navy Medical Personnel Honored for Serving Marines in Combat*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2005.

A compilation of all Marine Corps Medal of Honor recipients, including medals from the Civil War, with citations.

Coletta, Paolo Enrico. *An Annotated Bibliography of U.S. Marine Corps History*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1986.

Organized by time period, the section covering the Civil War largely reprints O'Quinlivan's work.

Collum, Richard S. *History of the United States Marine Corps*. Philadelphia: L. R. Hamersly & Co., 1890.

Another early history by Maj Collum who provided most of the documentation for Aldrich's work. Collum participated in the Civil War, however, his history and description of events almost duplicate Aldrich. While the book is useful, it was written in a detached style leaving out the personal observation of events that diaries and the like bring out.

Cureton, Charles H., and David M. Sullivan. *The Civil War Uniforms of the United States Marine Corps: The Regulations of 1859*. San Jose, CA: R. James Bender Publishing, 2009.

A recent publication illustrating the 1859 uniform regulations used by Marines during the Civil War. The book also adds newly published period photographs and discusses the European influences and in some cases break from traditional influences that made the 1859 rendition of the uniform unique to the Marine Corps.

Donnelly, Ralph W. *The Confederate States Marine Corps: The Rebel Leathernecks*. Shippensburg, PA: White Mane Publishing Co., 1989.

One of the few authoritative studies of the Confederate Marine Corps.

_____. *Service Records of Confederate Enlisted Marines*. Washington, NC: Donnelly, 1979.

One of the few works for researchers looking at CSMC enlisted records. It is almost entirely produced from rosters and provides general enlistment data on Confederate enlisted Marines.

Donnelly, Ralph W., and David M. Sullivan. *Biographical Sketches of the Commissioned Officers of the Confederate States Marine Corps*. Shippensburg, PA: White Mane Books, 2001.

Brief accounts on the biographical and military career aspects of Confederate Marine officers.

Dudley, William S. *Going South: U.S. Navy Officer Resignations & Dismissals on the Eve of the Civil War*. Washington, DC: Naval Historical Foundation, 1981.

A scholarly informational pamphlet covering the Secession Crisis as it applied to naval resignations. The appendices provide a table of Marine officer resignations and appointments into Confederate service.

Field, Ron. *American Civil War Marines 1861–65*. Oxford, UK: Osprey, 2004.

A general reference for Marine uniforms for both North and South with many illustrations.

Fonville Jr., Chris E. *The Wilmington Campaign: Last Rays of Departing Hope*. Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 2001.

An excellent and exhaustive account of the entire Wilmington campaign in which Marines from both sides played roles in the battle outside of their normal shipboard duties.

Gardner, Donald Ray. *The Confederate Corps of Marines*. Quantico, VA: Marine Corps History Division, 2007.

A revised version of Gen Gardner's 1973 master's thesis. The account largely relates CSMC service at Drewry's Bluff and describes uniforms and accoutrements.

Heinl Jr., Robert Debs. *Soldiers of the Sea: The United States Marine Corps, 1775–1962*. Baltimore, MD: Nautical & Aviation Publishing Co. of America, 1991.

A general history written by Col Heinl probably best known by Marines for his work *Victory at High Tide: The Inchon-Seoul Campaign*. The original completed just before the Vietnam War details Marine Corps service during the Civil War as part of a comprehensive history up through the late 1950s. Heinl's brief take on the Civil War focused on Marine Corps organizational and institutional limitations.

Lewis, Charles Lee. *Famous American Marines, An Account of the Corps: the Exploits of Officers and Men on Land, by Air and Sea, from the Decks of the Bonhomme Richard to the Summit of Mount Suribachi*. Boston: Page, 1950.

Provides biographical sketches of important Marines including Commandant Charles Heywood's service as a company grade officer during the Civil War.

Lynch, Barbara A., and John E. Vajda. *United States Naval History: A Bibliography*. Washington, DC: Naval Historical Center, Department of the Navy, 1993.

A relatively recent bibliography of naval history. The work breaks down topically so the researcher can quickly reference the Civil War and biography sections.

McAulay, John D. *Civil War Small Arms of the U.S. Navy and Marine Corps*. Lincoln, RI: Andrew Mowbray Publishers, 1999.

Description of general and specialized naval versions of weapons and shipboard ordnance records used by the sea services.

McClellan, Edwin N. *History of the U.S. Marine Corps*. Washington, DC: Headquarters Marine Corps, 1925.

A post-World War I history of the Marine Corps at a time when the State Department used the service as an intervention force around the world and when it was developing small war tactics. Two-volume document circulated only in mimeograph form, never published.

Metcalf, Clyde H. *A History of the United States Marine Corps*. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1939.

A general history written before World War II shaped modern views of the Marines Corps. Metcalf follows up on Collum's earlier work to produce a general history that carries the Corps into the first quarter of the 20th century.

Miller, William M. and John H. Johnstone. *A Chronology of the United States Marine Corps, 1775–1934*. Washington, DC: Historical Division, Headquarters, U. S. Marine Corps, 1970.

Brief chronological entries on Marine activities and operations, Marine Civil War operations listed in section III.

Millet, Alan R. *Semper Fidelis: The History of the United States Marine Corps*. New York: The Free Press, 1991.

The authoritative Marine Corps history from its beginnings to the late-20th century. More scholarly in both style and substance than previous works; a good starting point for the Civil War period researcher interested in Marine contributions.

Millett, Allan R., and Jack Shulimson, eds. *Commandants of the Marine Corps*. Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2004.

Essays discussing the period of service for the Commandants of the Marine Corps. Useful to research aspects of the three Civil War-era Commandants. However, the essays do not discuss the Civil War experience of post-war commandants.

Moskin, J. Robert. *The Story of the U.S. Marine Corps*. New York: Paddington Press, 1979.

Another general history along the lines of Simmons.

Nalty, Bernard C. *The United States Marines at Harper's Ferry and in the Civil War*. Marine Corps historical reference pamphlet. Washington, DC: History and Museums Division Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps, 1983.

An official Marine Corps publication reprinted from a series of informational pamphlets originally published around the centennial of the Civil War. The Harpers Ferry section is useful for the researcher; however, the subsequent coverage of the Civil War is useful as general reference only.

O'Quinlivan, Michael, and Rowland P. Gill. *An Annotated Bibliography of the United States Marines in the Civil War*. Washington, DC: Historical Branch, G-3 Division, U.S. Marine Corps, 1968.

The bibliography lists many early articles and works, which are largely superseded by subsequent publications.

Parker, William D. *A Concise History of the United States Marine Corps: 1775-1969*. Washington, DC: Historical Division Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps, 1970.

An official Marine Corps publication which outlines the Civil War services of the Marine Corps as part of the general history.

Rankin, Robert H. *Uniforms of the Sea Services: a Pictorial History*. Annapolis, MD: U.S. Naval Institute, 1962.

A description of uniforms worn by U. S. Marines during the Civil War produced during the Civil War centennial.

Ressler, D. Michael. *Historical Perspective on the President's Own U.S. Marine Band: 200th Anniversary*. Washington, DC: Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps, 1998.

A well-researched general history of the U.S. Marine Band. Particularly useful are the portions dealing with

band leader Francis Scala who directed the band from 1855-71. Scala oversaw the evolution of the band, modernizing both its instruments and increasing its musical catalog. The pamphlet also discusses the band's role at the Lincoln White House and Gettysburg dedication ceremony. The pamphlet is not documented, however, it appears the author relied heavily on author O'Sullivan's work and Marine Band Library and Archives holdings.

Robinson, Charles M. *Hurricane of Fire: The Union Assault on Fort Fisher*. Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1998.

A scholarly account of the campaign to take Fort Fisher including coverage of Confederate Marine activities before and during the battles.

Simmons, Edwin H. *The United States Marines: A History*. Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2003.

The fourth edition of Gen Simmons work. Provides a good starting point for themes in Marine-specific Civil War research, however, the footnotes and bibliography of a more scholarly work are noticeably absent.

Simmons, Edwin H., and J. Robert Moskin, eds. *The Marines*. New York: Barnes & Noble Books, 2004.

A series of short essays chronicling the Marine experience from the Corps founding to the current era.

Sullivan, David M. *The United States Marine Corps in the Civil War: The First Year*. Shippensburg, PA: White Mane Publishing Company, 1997.

_____. *The United States Marine Corps in the Civil War: The Second Year*. Shippensburg, PA: White Mane Publishing Company, 1997.

_____. *The United States Marine Corps in the Civil War: The Third Year*. Shippensburg, PA: White Mane Publishing Company, 1998.

_____. *The United States Marine Corps in the Civil War: The Final Year*. Shippensburg, PA: White Mane Books, 2000.

Sullivan's four-volume series provides the most complete account of the Marine Corps during the Civil War despite its small size and relatively limited role. Sullivan brings much in the way of primary materials including new sources and unpublished diaries. This revisionist work challenges commonly held themes in the Marine Corps' historic narrative.

United States Naval History Division. *Civil War Naval Chronology, 1861-1865*. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1971.

A reprint and consolidation of a previously multi-volume work pertaining to naval aspects of the war. Appendix IV contains the wartime journal of Private Charles Brother.

Articles

Alexander, Joseph H. "Civil War Marines: Four Frustrating Years, Part I." *Leatherneck* 90, no. 11 (November 2007):66-71.

_____. "Civil War Marines: Four Frustrating Years, Part II." *Leatherneck* 90, no. 12 (December 2007):16–20.

Colonel Alexander presents a brief outline of all of the themes and major operations involving Marines during the war and provides a synopsis of lessons that should have been gleaned by Marine leadership after the war for the contemporary reader.

Asprey, Robert B. "The Assault on Fort Fisher" *Marine Corps Gazette* 49, no. 11 (November 1965):30–31.

A short account of the Christmas Day 1864 joint Federal Army, Navy, and Marine Corps amphibious assault on a major Confederate stronghold on the North Carolina coast.

Bailey, Anne J. "The Mississippi Marine Brigade: Fighting Rebel Guerillas on Western Waters." *Military History of the Southwest* 22, no. 1 (Spring 1992):31–42.

Discusses one of several U.S. Army "marine" units which fought the war as part of combined Army-Navy operations. Useful to describe how the Army took over what later developed into a central Marine Corps capability and mission in the 20th century.

Bearss, Edwin C. "Civil War Operations in and around Pensacola." *The Florida Historical Quarterly* 36, no. 2 (October 1957):125–65.

_____. "Civil War Operations in and around Pensacola Part II." *The Florida Historical Quarterly* 39, no. 3 (January 1961):231–55.

_____. "Civil War Operations in and around Pensacola Part III." *The Florida Historical Quarterly* 39, no. 4 (April 1961):330–53.

The renowned author, Marine, and former National Park Service chief historian wrote one of the first modern Civil War histories of Pensacola. Marines figured prominently during the Secession Crisis and reinforcement of Fort Pickens. The series of articles also mentions Confederate Marines in Bragg's Army of Pensacola and early landings by Marines near Biloxi.

Cassidy, John F. "Field Service in the Civil War: Squadron Marines in Combined Operations." *Marine Corps Gazette* 1, no. 3 (Sept 1916):290–97.

Contains a report of operations by 1stLt George G. Stoddard, USMC, commander of the Marine battalion in the Broad River expedition, November 1864–January 1865.

Cooling, Benjamin Franklin. "Civil War Deterrent: Defenses of Washington." *Military Affairs* 29, no. 4 (Winter 1965–66):164–78.

_____. "Defending Washington during the Civil War." *Records of the Columbia Historical Society, Washington, DC* 71/72 (1971-1972):314–37.

Both articles discuss the relative inadequacy of the 19th-century peacetime national defense posture to secure the

capital. During the Civil War, Marines figured into the equation early on as they represented the only available regular troops.

"Confederate Commandoes." *Marine Corps Gazette* 30, no. 12 (December 1946):iv.

Brief description of CSMC boarding the USS *Underwriter* at New Bern, NC.

Dawson, Joseph G. "With Fidelity and Effectiveness: Archibald Henderson's Lasting Legacy to the U.S. Marine Corps." *The Journal of Military History* 62, no. 4 (October 1998):727–53.

A useful article which describes Henderson's attempts to reform, modernize, and expand Marine Corps roles on the eve of the Civil War.

Donnelly, Ralph W. "Battle Honors and Services of Confederate Marines." *Military Affairs* 23, no. 1 (Spring 1959):37–40.

Chronology of CSMC actions and ship detachments.

_____. "The Confederate Marines at Drewry's Bluff." *Virginia Cavalcade* 16, no. 2 (Autumn 1966):42–47.

Account of CSMC training and actions at their principle camp located at Drewry's Bluff.

_____. "A Confederate Navy Forlorn Hope." *Military Affairs* 28, no. 2 (Summer 1964):73–78.

An account of one of the last Confederate attempts to clear the James River of Federal control using a task force of CSA, CSN, and CSMC personnel under the direction of Lt Read, CSN.

_____. "Federal Batteries on the Henry House Hill, Bull Run, 1861." *Military Affairs* 21, no. 4 (Winter 1957):188–92.

A revisionist article, which reinterprets the key action at Bull Run when the 33d Virginia cut down Griffin's Battery. Donnelly blames the defeat not on a loss of men but of horses. The historic narrative often blamed Marines for failing to support the battery instead of McDowell's chief of artillery for mistaking blue-clad Confederates for supporting infantry who subsequently leveled devastating volley fire on the battery.

_____. "Uniforms and Equipment of Confederate Marines." *Military Collector & Historian* 9, no. 1 (Spring 1957): 1–7.

Describes CSMC uniforms and equipment.

Gould, James Warren. "The Civil War in the Far East (U.S. Civil War in Asiatic waters)." U.S. Naval Institute *Proceedings* 88, no. 9 (September 1962):160–63.

Hayes, John D. "The Marine Corps in the American Civil War." *Shipmate* 23, no. 11 (November 1960):2–4.

A concise account of institutional and doctrinal limitations, which influenced Marine employment during the Civil War.

King, Joseph E. "The Fort Fisher Campaigns, 1864–1865." U.S. Naval Institute *Proceedings* 77, no. 8 (August 1951):842–55.

General account focusing on the “naval brigade.”

Krivdo, Micheal E. “Confederate Marine Corps Recruiting in New Orleans and Marine Activities in the First Year of the Civil War.” *Louisiana History: The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association* 48, no. 4 (Fall 2007):441–66.

The article focuses on early CSMC activities in New Orleans. After the Crescent City fell to the Union Navy, Mobile, Alabama, became the center of Confederate Marine activity on the Gulf Coast.

Long, Richard A. “Send Me Thirty Marines . . .” *Leatherneck* 44, no. 4 (April 1961):16–21, 72; no. 5 (May 1961):47–53.

Chronology of Marine operations during the Civil War.

Lonn, Ella. “The Extent and Importance of Federal Naval Raids on Salt-making in Florida, 1862-1865.” *Florida Historical Society Quarterly* 10, no. 4 (July 1932):167–84.

An excellent article, though mainly drawn from the *Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies*, describing the importance of salt-making along the panhandle of Florida. The author describes the process, its importance to the Confederate cause, and early Union efforts to stamp out the large salt works that sprang up along the many inland salt marshes and estuaries. While the article focuses on naval riverine operations, it is illustrative of the small scale-type landings where Marines operated most effectively due to the prevailing views of organization and employment rather than in large-scale battalion operations.

Magruder III, John H. “Sergeant’s Sword, a Symbol Sheathed in Honor.” *Marine Corps Gazette* 38, no. 11 (November 1954):33–35.

Description of the sword, Model 1850, assigned to Marine noncommissioned officers since 1875 but worn by Marine commissioned officers during the Civil War.

_____. “The Wreck of the *Governor*.” *Leatherneck* 38, no. 11 (Nov 1955):74–77.

The foundering on 2 November 1862 of a vessel carrying a battalion of Marines intended to participate in the Port Royal operation.

McClellan, Edwin N. “The Capture of Fort Fisher.” *Marine Corps Gazette* 5, no. 1 (March 1920):59–80.

_____. “The Capture of New Orleans.” *Marine Corps Gazette* 5, no. 4 (December 1920):360–69.

Inter-war period articles written about joint operations, which focus on amphibious aspects of the Civil War at a time when the Marine Corps was beginning to expand its educational institutions to both develop the traditions and professional knowledge base among Marines.

McKenzie Jr., Kenneth F. “Among the Last to Run.” *Naval History* 17, no. 5 (October 2003):24–30.

The author recounts the debacle at Bull Run which falls in with the well-trod narrative that lumps the Marine bat-

alion in with every volunteer regiment that fled as compared to the other regular battalion, which stood and retained its equipment. While differing from revisionist author Sullivan, McKenzie’s purpose in relating the battle is to demonstrate how the “Corps’ old guard” did not actively support large land operations with the Army and used the “Great Skedaddle” to consolidate their grip and cling to traditional roles rather than seizing the opportunity to expand into the amphibious warfare role, which is today synonymous with the Marine Corps.

Nalty, Bernard. “An Escort for Lincoln.” *Leatherneck* 44, no. 2 (February 1961):78–79, 83.

Brief account of 2dLt Henry C. Cochrane, USMC, in the honor guard for the president at Gettysburg, July 1863, with commentary on Cochrane’s personality and later career.

_____. “Blue and Gray.” *Leatherneck* 43, no. 11 (November 1960):54–57.

Briefly describes operations in which both Union and Confederate Marines took part.

Ohls, Gary J. “Fort Fisher: Amphibious Victory in the American Civil War.” *Naval War College Review* 59, no. 4 (Autumn 2006):81–99.

A scholarly, well-documented article on the capture of Fort Fisher.

Rentfrow, Frank H. “An Incident at Fort Fisher.” *Leatherneck* 21, no. 11 (November 1938):10–11.

Recalls the actions of Pvt Henry Wasmuth to save Lt (and later RAdm) Robley D. Evans after the failed assault on the Northeast Bastion.

_____. “On to Richmond.” *Leatherneck* 22, no. 1 (January 1939):10–11.

Marines on board the USS *Galena* including Sgt John Mackie during the attack on Drewry’s Bluff.

_____. “We Fight Our Countries Battles.” *Leatherneck* 13, no. 2 (February 1930):4–5.

Short narrative of the two battles of Fort Fisher.

Sharp, Arthur G. “Reynold’s Regrets.” *Civil War Times Illustrated* 26, no. 8 (December 1977):22–33.

An article detailing the Civil War career of the Corps’ only senior officer to take field command. While most of the senior officers at the start of the war contented themselves to remain in comfortable commands at the various Marine barracks in New York, Philadelphia, and elsewhere, Col Reynolds took field command of a Marine battalion only to see opportunities slip away because of bad luck at Bull Run and for the Port Royal expedition on board the steamer *Governor*.

Simmons, Edwin H. “The Federals and Fort Fisher, Part I.” *Marine Corps Gazette* 35, no. 1 (January 1951):52–59.

- A short account of the first battle of Fort Fisher in December 1864.
- _____. "The Federals and Fort Fisher, Part II." *Marine Corps Gazette* 35, no. 2 (February 1951):47–54.
- A short account of the second battle of Fort Fisher and Porter's naval brigade along with a brief defense of the Marines who Porter and Breese later blamed for the failed assault.
- _____. "Fort Fisher: Amphibious Finale to the Civil War." *Fortitudine* 16, no. 1 (Summer 1986):3–8.
- A brief recap of events surrounding the capture of Fort Fisher.
- Sullivan, David M. "Baptism By Fire." *Pensacola Historical Illustrated* 1, no. 2 (1984):8–14.
- Describes activities of Confederate Marines along the Gulf coast and under Bragg at Pensacola early in the war.
- _____. "The Confederate States Marine Corps." *The Southern Partisan Magazine* 4, no. 2 (Spring 1984):42–47.
- _____. "The Confederate States Marine Corps in Georgia, 1861–1865." *The Atlanta Historical Journal* 29, no. 4 (Winter 1985–86):75–94.
- Scholarly article describing Confederate Marines involvement at Savannah.
- _____. "The Confederate States Marine Corps in South Carolina, 1861–1865." *The South Carolina Historical Magazine* 86, no. 2 (April 1985):113–27.
- An article, which highlights the contributions of Confederate marines to the Southern war effort in Charleston.
- _____. "A Few Good Men." *Confederate Veteran* 33, no. 2 (March 1985):14–20.
- Article describing Confederate Marine activities during the entire war.
- _____. "The Few, the Forgotten: The Confederate States Marine Corps." *Military Images* (November–December 1981):16–21.
- _____. "John Albert Pearson Jr.: Arkansas Soldier and Confederate Marine." *The Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 45, no. 3 (Autumn 1986):250–60.
- _____. "The Marine Battalion at the Battle of Bull Run: Emending the Record." *Leatherneck* (February 2002):42–49.
- A revisionist article, which hones in on the successes of the Marine battalion vice the failures which its commander, Maj Reynolds, and the Commandant Col Harris focused on in after-action reports. Contrary to popular culture and myth about Marine Corps traditions, Reynolds' report formed the cornerstone of an almost 140-year narrative detailing Marine failures during the battle and over the course of the war. Sullivan argues that despite the fact that the vast majority of the Marines present only had days of military experience, the battalion carried itself with honor. His article details how the battalion not only rallied on several occasions to take part in counterattacks, but in fact penetrated the Confederate line further than any other Federal unit. Finally, he argues that Reynolds' battalion maintained its integrity and discipline well after many other units crumbled until Confederate artillery rained down on the mass of troops trying to withdraw across Cub Run.
- _____. "Rebel Marines." *America's Civil War* (March 1991):14–20, 60.
- A general article describing the Confederate Marine contributions to the Southern war effort.
- Thacker, Joel D. "Highlights of U. S. Marine Corps Activities in the District of Columbia." *Records of the Columbia Historical Society, Washington, DC*. 51/52 (1951–52):78–86.
- An article describing the history of the Marine Corps in and around Washington since the founding of the District of Columbia.
- Walker, J. B. "Here's a Chance for the Marines!" *Leatherneck* 84, no. 2 (February 2001):38–41.
- A brief description of the Federal attempt to pass the Confederate defenses at Drewry's Bluff, VA, where Cpl John F. Mackie became the first Marine to earn the Medal of Honor.
- Walker, Robert M. "Marines in Gray: The Forgotten Service of Confederacy." *Civil War Times* 2, no. 5 (August–September 1960):16–17.

The bombardment and capture of Fort Fisher, 15 January 1865.
Library of Congress



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Back Cover: The logotype reproduced on the back cover has as its major element the oldest military insignia in continuous use in the United States. It first appeared, as shown here, on Marine Corps buttons adopted in 1804. With the stars changed to five points, the device has continued on Marine Corps buttons to the present day.



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