GUSTAVUS V. FOX AND THE CIVIL WAR

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PREFACE

This study concentrates on the activities of Gustavus V. Fox, Union Assistant Secretary of the Navy during the Civil War. The investigation considers the role that Fox played in shaping the plans and policies of the Union Navy during that conflict. The obvious fact emerges that Fox was the official of foremost importance in the Navy Department in planning all the major naval operations undertaken by that branch of the service during the Civil War.

For aid on this paper I gratefully acknowledge the following: Mr. Alton Juhlin, Head of the Special Services Department of the University Library, for able help in acquiring needed materials for my study; Dr. Theodore L. Agnew, who critically read and willing assisted at all times; Dr. Norbert R. Mahnken, who brought clarity and style to my subject; Dr. Homer L. Knight, Head of the Department of History, who generously advised me in my work and encouraged this research effort; and Dr. John J. Beer, who taught me that there is more to writing than putting words on paper. Finally, I deeply appreciate the assistance of Dr. LeRoy H. Fischer, without whose help and guidance this paper could not have been written.

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CHAPTER I

THE YEARS BEFORE

Gustavus Vasa Fox barely missed being ranked among our ablest statesmen of the Civil War. An administrator and executive of exceptionable ability, he served in a subordinate capacity, and was thus deprived of the opportunity which might have provided him with a wider scope for his talents. As the Union Assistant Secretary of the Navy during the 1861-1865 conflict, he had nearly five stirring years, during which he stood side by side with the nation's leaders, respected and consulted both by Abraham Lincoln and Ulysses S. Grant. He was personally responsible for some of the most brilliant of the Union successes on the water. He was described by one observer as "the one really able man of the Lincoln administration."[1] Then, almost suddenly, his opportunity for distinction passed, and he retired to the obscurity of business, seldom to be heard of again.

This man from Massachusetts who was so vital to the Union in the Navy Department was born into humble circumstances on June 13, 1821, in Saugus, Essex County, Massachusetts, the son of Dr. Jesse and Oliva (Flint) Fox. His father was a country physician of moderate circumstances and thus was unable to give his son the advantages of a classical education. The elder Fox moved his family from Saugus to Lowell in

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[1]Claude Fuess, "Gustavus Vasa Fox," Phillips Bulletin, XIV (1927), 27. Hereafter cited as Fuess, "Gustavus Vasa Fox," Phillips Bulletin.

1823 when Gustavus was two years old. It was here that Fox received his education, in the common schools of that town.

As a young boy, despite a lingering interest in the ministry, Fox was fascinated by ships and became convinced that a naval career was his goal. Accordingly, he entered Phillips Academy, at Andover, Massachusetts in the fall of 1835, to prepare himself for such a career. Rows of wooden commons had recently been completed at the school, but Fox preferred to live in a private house. As a result, the young naval enthusiast spent his two-year term at Andover living at a "Mrs. Brown's" boarding house.[2]

Young Fox was another in a long line of distinguished Essex County men whose names were on the rolls of Phillips Academy. Fox left Andover at the age of 16, school having closed on the second Wednesday in August. Throughout that year Fox had been hesitating between the ministry and the navy but when he received an appointment as a midshipman at the United States Naval Academy at Annapolis, he eagerly accepted.[3]

Two years later, in 1839, Fox made his first cruise, to the Mediterranean on the Cyane, with Captain John Percival. His service at sea while in the Academy was in time of peace, and though few incidents occurred, his was not altogether a fair weather experience. He was on board the Saratoga in November of 1839 during a winter storm when, after having passed out of the harbor of Portsmouth, she was unable either to proceed or return and though anchored off shore, could not furl her sails.[4]

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[2]Fuess, "Gustavus Vasa Fox," Phillips Bulletin, XIV, 28.

[3]Ibid.

[4]Charles Boynton, History of the Navy During the Rebellion, (2 vols., New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1867), I, 58. Hereafter cited as Boynton, History of the Navy During the Rebellion.

The ship could only be saved by cutting away her masts and despite great suffering by the crew, this was done. Subsequently, he was on board the Independence, a fifty gun ship, commanded by Commodore Charles Stewart (who was to be of great help to Fox's plan immediately preceding the Fort Sumter expedition) in August of 1840, when the ship was struck by a white squall. The situation became critical after the first blast nearly laid the ship on her beam ends, tore away the head sails, and broke the main yard. With the head sails gone, the ship could not be brought around before the wind and it looked as if the vessel was leaning so far over as to fill with water.[5] In this emergency Fox exhibited the courage and coolness that characterized his naval career and his Fort Sumter expedition. Acting with lightning speed, he shouted to Commodore Stewart for permission to try to right the ship, which was immediately granted. Fox then led the crew to the fore rigging where the wind acted upon them as it would upon a sail.[6] The plan worked as the ship was brought slowly around and righted as she came before the wind.

Fox graduated from the Academy as an apprentice midshipman in 1841 and three years later passed the examination for midshipman at Philadelphia. He next participated in a two year cruise off the coasts of Africa and the West Indies. These years were uneventful, but during this time Fox gained invaluable experience which would greatly benefit him in future years. Two years later, in 1846, he was attached to the coast survey in the Gulf, service which helped to prepare him to judge

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[5]Boynton, History of the Navy During the Rebellion, I, 58.

[6]Ibid., 59.

the important questions connected with the blockade during the Civil War. The following year found Fox with Commodore Mathew C. Perry's squadron on board the Washington, participating in the operations of that squadron against the Mexican coast and ports. Thereafter, in the Mexican War, he was occupied with the transportation of troops to Vera Cruz. He was learning now, for the first time, something of the operations of actual naval warfare. After the end of the war, Fox sailed to Brazil and the East Indies as acting master of the Plymouth; two years later he joined the Dolphin as executive officer and visited the islands of the Pacific, plus California and the west coast of South America, returning by Cape Horn.

The first year of the new decade saw Fox's appointment to master, and the next two years found him as chief executive officer on board the mail steamer Baltic running between New York and Liverpool, England. In December of 1852, having earned his promotion to the rank of lieutenant, he was ordered to the Princeton, the flagship of a fishing squadron under Commodore William B. Shubrick, who later was very instrumental in giving David Farragut his chance for fame. In August of the next year Fox was detached and ordered to command the mail steamer Ohio, running between New York and Aspinwall, Panama. In 1854 Fox was transferred to the mail streamer George Law, which ran from New York to Charleston, on which he served until the following year. With his tour of duty now complete, he was detached and granted a one year's furlough.

In July of 1856 Fox resigned his commission in the navy, being thoroughly disgusted by the use of political influence in the promotional system of that branch of the government.[7] After leaving the navy,

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[7]Boynton, History of the Navy During the Rebellion, I, 59.

Fox married Virginia Woodbury, a daughter of Judge Levi Woodbury of Olivia, New Hampshire, and a sister of the wife of Montgomery Blair, later to be Lincoln's Postmaster General. The former navy officer now accepted a position as agent of the Bay State Woolen Mills in Lawrence, Massachusetts, remaining until February, 1861, when he resigned to serve the cause of the Union.

The Civil War offered Fox the greatest opportunity of his career. In February of 1861, when it became obvious that Fort Sumter was in grave danger, Montgomery Blair urged army commander-in-chief Winfield Scott to consult Fox on the matter of relieving the fort. From this time on, Fox was to play an important role in the affairs of the Civil War.

After the failure of his expedition to Fort Sumter in April, Fox conveyed to the Cabinet and to the President, the opinion that the diversion of his capital ship, the Powhatan, had made both him and the expedition look ridiculous. Because he felt he owed something to Fox for his effort at Fort Sumter and because he had always been impressed with the man, Lincoln asked Secretary of the Navy Gideon Welles to give Fox a job in the Navy Department.[8] Welles, realizing that Fox's efforts had been largely nullified by the Powhatan affair, acceded to Lincoln's request and appointed him to the position of Chief Clerk in the Navy Department on May 8, 1861.

The appointment of Fox to the Navy Department was a fortunate decision. Eighteen formative years of Fox's life had been spent in the navy, and in addition to knowing many naval people, he was well informed on

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[8]Charles McCartney, Mr. Lincoln's Admirals, (New York: Funk and Wagnalls Co., 1956), 15. Hereafter cited as McCartney, Mr. Lincoln's Admirals.

technical matters. His experience as mill superintendent in Lawrence gave him a knowledge of business affairs that also fitted him very well for the heavy responsibilities he was about to assume. Among his business acquaintances were many prominent merchants and shipmasters of New York and Boston. The community of merchants by whom the Navy Department was now cajoled, now condemned, was clamoring for naval ships to protect their harbors and to scour the seven seas to warn their vessels not to risk confiscation in Confederate ports. As a measure of reassurance to the politically important shipping interests in New England, Fox's appointment proved to be a master stroke by Lincoln.

After Fox had served for one month as Chief Clerk, Secretary Welles realized he would be invaluable as a close aid to him in the Department. There was a feeling in the administration that a man with actual experience on ships was badly needed in the Navy Department. Accordingly, on August 1, Welles pushed a bill through Congress creating for Fox the office of Assistant Secretary. Immediately after the bill passed, Lincoln appointed Fox to the new post. With Welles as Secretary and Fox as Assistant Secretary, the Navy Department was blessed with a rare combination of talents. Wells provided an intimate knowledge of political matters, a strong but unobtrusive personality, a readiness to accept advice from competent sources, and took upon himself the control of legislative concerns and worthily represented the navy in the Cabinet and to the nation. Fox, under the direction of Welles, regulated, planned, and handled those things which were purely naval or military in their structure. Seldom has their been a finer instance of "teamwork" in Washington.

CHAPTER II

THE FORT SUMTER EXPEDITION

Late March of 1861 found the North and South rapidly drifting close to Civil War. After South Carolina had seceded in December of 1860, President James Buchanan backed away from defending federal forts in the Southern states. At the time of Lincoln's inauguration, all the forts and naval yards in the seceded states, excepting Fort Pickens and Fort Sumter, fell without resisting to the Confederates. The South made it clear to Lincoln that the jurisdiction over these forts had passed to them upon their secession from the Union and that their retention by the federal government was equivalent to an act of war. Yet, for a month after his inauguration the President followed Buchanan's policy.

Major Robert Anderson in command at Fort Sumter had notified the War Department on March 15 that his supplies were running out and that the garrison would have to be provisioned if he was expected to hold the fort. Lincoln was now faced with an impossible situation. If he tried to provision or reinforce Fort Sumter, it would undoubtedly mean civil war; if, to avoid a conflict, he allowed Fort Sumter to fall into Confederate hands without a fight, the principle of the Union would be fatally compromised. Could a recognition of the Confederacy thereafter be avoided? The South had the advantage of time; it was up to Lincoln to decide which path the North would follow.

The President delayed action on the critical subject of reinforcing the federal forts after his inauguration, not so much because

he did not know what to do, but because he was watching Virginia.[9] The old state was worth waiting for; her sons were the ablest officers in the United States Army, and her soil was certain to be the theatre of any war between the states. Lincoln also knew that if Virginia seceded, North Carolina, Maryland, Kentucky, Tennessee, Missouri, and Arkansas were likely to follow. He closely watched the Virginia Convention that met in February and March, attempting to gauge the path they would take. Twice Lincoln offered to yield Fort Sumter to the South if the Virginians would break up their convention and back the Union.[10] When they refused, Lincoln knew for the first time that Virginia would join the Confederacy regardless of his policy.

The situation in late March remained very critical, and as the tension rose higher and higher, the name of Gustavus V. Fox became increasingly important. It was Fox's plan for the relief of Fort Sumter that would be the direct, immediate spark to set off the Civil War. Lincoln, to be sure, made his own decision to reinforce the fort, but it was Fox who convinced him that the plan could be carried out successfully. When Lincoln became convinced that this could be done he gained the confidence needed to force the South into a showdown instead of more of the waiting and inaction of the month before which had destroyed much of the confidence in the North and deeply tried the Union's patience.

It was through Montgomery Blair's influence with Winfield Scott and Lincoln that Fox was given the opportunity of presenting his plan. He

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[9]Roy P. Basler, (ed.), The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln, (9 vols., New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1953-55), IV, 282, 289.

[10]John T. Morse, Jr., (ed.), The Diary of Gideon Welles, (4 vols., Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1911), I, 6. Hereafter cited as Morse, Jr., (Ed.), Diary of Gideon Welles.

and Blair had earlier married sisters and were close friends. Blair watched with mounting frustration the growing danger of losing Fort Sumter during the early part of 1861. He had recently been appointed Postmaster General under Lincoln, and this position, plus a famous family name and background, gave him enough prestige to be held in high regard.

On February 2, Blair advised General Scott to consult Fox on how best to provision and reinforce Fort Sumter in view of the increasing danger that was confronting the fort.[1] Scott did this, and two days later the Assistant Secretary brought his plan for reinforcing Sumter to President Buchanan. Scott told Buchanan that he deemed the plan feasible, but the President was apprehensive about reinforcing the fort no matter how good the chances were.[2] Buchanan told Fox that the Star of the West expedition had convinced him that Fort Sumter would be extremely hard to reinforce.[3] To this Fox replied that he believed that expedition might have succeeded if it had held determinedly to its course and ignored the ineffective fire from the Confederate batteries at Charleston.[4] Knowing now that Buchanan was openly skeptical of any plan to reinforce Fort Sumter, Fox nevertheless presented

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[1]McCartney, Mr. Lincoln's Admirals, 15.

[2]David D. Porter, Naval History of the Civil War, (New York: Sherman Publishing Co., 1886), 96. Hereafter cited as Porter, Naval History of the Civil War.

[3]Ibid. (The Star of the West was under the command of Captain William McGowen of the Revenue Marine, and on January 5, 1861, was supposed to carry provisions to the battered fort. Upon entering the harbor and getting within range of the guns on Morris Island, she received fire, and it was obvious the ship would be sunk if she continued toward Fort Sumter. McGowen, realizing this, turned back.

[4]Richard J. West, Mr. Lincoln's Navy, (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1957), 18. Hereafter cited as West, Mr. Lincoln's Navy.

his plan.

Fox knew that all the channels going into Charleston were obstructed, but since some were four miles in width, they were too extensive to be completely closed. The bar around Charleston was only seven feet deep, too shallow for the passage of steamers capable of bearing a very offensive punch. Using this premise, Fox concluded that the South would expect light steamers in any attempt to reinforce the fort. Rather than play into Southern hands by using these tactics, Fox planned to use the Star of the West (a large, comfortable sea steamer) and hire two powerful light tugboats to carry the needed supplies. After arriving at Charleston, Fox's vessel would anchor off the bar and he would examine Southern naval preparations. If Southern vessels opposed the entrance to the bar, which would be at night, the armed ships, with help from the fort, would destroy them. Having dispersed this force, the two tugs, with one half of the troops on each, would relieve Sumter.

Buchanan never seriously considered Fox's plan, even though he thought it to be commendable. He was content to serve out his term without acting and on March 4 handed the problem of Fort Sumter to Lincoln.[5] His final orders to Anderson at the fort was that the Major should not prevent the South from erecting earth works within reasonable bounds while he held Fort Sumter as long as possible without precipating hostilities. This would seem to indicate that Buchanan wanted no trouble. After Jefferson Davis was elected President of the Confederacy on February 5, Fox was told by Scott that Fort Sumter probably would not be reinforced. The failure of the Star of the West expedition and fear that Buchanan would start a civil war if he attempted reinforcement

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[5]Porter, Naval History of the Civil War, 96.

of Fort Sumter were the factors that influenced the President's final decision not to reinforce the fort.[6]

The situation from early February through the middle of March remained one of stalemate between North and South. The South realized that all the pressure was on Lincoln and the North to make the first move, and they wisely played a waiting game. No more was heard about Fox's proposed plan to reinforce Fort Sumter until March 12, when he received a telegram from Montgomery Blair, telling him to proceed to Washington immediately to present his plan for reinforcing Fort Sumter to Lincoln. Blair, at least during the first four months of Lincoln's administration, had more influence with him than any other man in the Cabinet.[7] He was the one man in the Cabinet who thought that Fort Sumter should be maintained by the North, offering to resign if such an attempt were not made. As Blair saw confidence and loyalty drop in the North due to inactivity on the part of the government, he became convinced that at least an attempt should be made to provision the fort, if only to raise the morale of the Union. On March 11 Blair repeated to Lincoln his fears regarding Fort Sumter and mentioned to him that his brother-in-law, Gustavus Fox, a smart, experienced, former navy man had proposed a plan for reinforcing the fort in February to President Buchanan, a scheme that had been deemed feasible even by ultra conservative Winfield Scott.[8] Lincoln told Blair that he would like to hear Fox's plan at once.

Two days later Fox arrived in Washington and submitted his plan to

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[6]Porter, Naval History of the Civil War, 96.

[7]William E. Smith, The Francis Preston Blair Family in Politics, (2 vols., New York: The MacMillian Co., 1933), II, 92.

[8]Porter, Naval History of the Civil War, 96.

President Lincoln. Fox told Lincoln that although all the channels over the bar at Charleston were obstructed, the bar was too wide to be completely closed. He reasoned that at high water and smooth sea, the bar would be accessible to vessels drawing only seven feet of water. The North had no steamers of this type, so the success of the plan would have to depend on small boats relieving the fort under cover of darkness at high tide and under calm seas.

Having given Lincoln a good picture of the Southern defense, the former navy officer now turned to the heart of his plan, which included the ships and men necessary to make it a success. Fox's plan called for one large passenger liner to carry the needed troops and stores; several small gunboats to move into the mouth of the harbor to fight off enemy naval craft; and one large war vessel to supply a group of small boats with seamen when the supplies and troop reinforcements were to be run into Fort Sumter.[9] If Southern vessels attempted to oppose the entrance of the relief boats (a feint or flag of truce would find this out), Fox would send the armed ships close to the bar, and in unison with Major Anderson from the fort, would open fire on any vessels within range and would destroy naval fortifications, while preventing any naval succor from being sent down from the city. With surface opposition knocked out, Fox's small boats, on a full tide at night, would race for the fort. Fox realized that Confederate land batteries around the harbor would sink a few boats, but was confident that enough of them would get through.

Lincoln was impressed by the Fox plan because of its practical nature and also because he was fast coming to the conclusion that his conciliatory

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[9]Robert Thompson and Richard Wainwright, (eds.), Confidential Correspondence of Gustavus Vasa Fox, 1861-1865, (2 vols., New York: DeVinne Press, 1920), I, 19. Hereafter cited as Thomson and Wainwright, (eds.), Confidential Correspondence of G. V. Fox.

efforts toward the South to keep Virginia and the border states in the Union were proving fruitless and that something would have to be done one way or the other soon. Even so, he wanted to hear other opinions on Fox's plan, knowing that his knowledge of naval and military matters was meager.

On March 1, even before Fox's plan had been submitted or known about, Lincoln asked all of his Cabinet members to give their opinions on this question: "Assuming it to be possible to now provision Fort Sumter, under all the circumstances would it be wise to attempt it?"[10] With the exception of Montgomery Blair, who thought an attempt at reinforcement, even if it failed, was better than doing nothing, the Cabinet was unanimous in agreeing that Fort Sumter should be left to the Confederates to avert Civil War. Secretary of War Cameron's view was typical of the majority of the Cabinet, who thought Sumter should be abandoned. Cameron told Lincoln that Fort Sumter could have been reinforced easily when Anderson first moved in, but now, due to Fort Moultrie being strengthened and new land batteries having been constructed, "... the difficulty of reinforcing the fort has increased twenty fold."[11] Cameron then vetoed Fox's plan because he thought the Union could never provision the fort, much less hold it, and even if Sumter were reinforced, it would touch off a Civil War. He favored evacuation, the sooner the better.

Commander-in-chief Winfield Scott expressed the view of the over-

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[10] West, Mr. Lincoln's Navy, 17.

[11] The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies, (70 vols., 128 books in the U.S. serial set; Washington: Government Printing Office, 1880-1901), i, I, 197. Hereafter cited as Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies. (Series cited in small case roman numeral; volume in large case).

whelming majority of the military chiefs. Scott told Lincoln that two months earlier, in January, he had advised President Buchanan to reinforce Fort Sumter because he then thought a skeleton garrison could hold it. Now, because of increased Confederate forts and guns, he did not think the plan was feasible. His final advice to Lincoln was that for purposes of military importance Fort Sumter was not vital and from a military viewpoint it could not be reinforced successfully.[12]

Seeking to get a truer picture of the situation at Fort Sumter before making a final decision, Lincoln, on March 19, sent Fox to Charleston to consult with Anderson and to see first hand the conditions around and in the fort and to observe Confederate military preparation. In a letter to his wife dated the day he left, Fox said, "Abe Lincoln has taken a high esteem for me and wishes me to take dispatches to Major Anderson with regard to its final evacuation and to obtain a clearer statement of his condition which his letters, probably guarded, do not exhibit."[13] Fox also told his wife in the letter not to speak of the mission because it was not to be made public to avoid arousing any hopes or fears in the North.

Fox, arriving by way of Richmond and Wilmington, got into Charleston on March 21 and was met by Lieutenant Richard Hartstene of the Confederacy who took him to Governor Francis Pickens of South Carolina. Pickens consented to let him speak with Anderson. Hartstene took Fox to see the Fort Sumter commander after dark for a conversation that lasted for two hours. Once in the fort, Fox found that Anderson's men had been working feverishly to ready it against attack. The Major was very pessimistic about the chances of reinforcing the fort. He told Fox that the

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[12]Porter, Naval History of the Civil War, 96.

[13]Thompson and Wainwright (eds.), Confidential Correspondence of G. V. Fox, I, 10.

only way Sumter could be successfully reinforced would be to land an army on Morris Island off Charleston harbor, and that even this measure would probably be too late. Anderson felt that entrance to the fort by sea was an impossibility at this late date, and mentioned to Fox that his provisions would be exhausted by April 15. Said the Sumter commander about Fox's proposed expedition: "I confess that I would not be willing to risk my reputation in an attempt to throw reinforcements into this harbor within the time for our relief and with a view of holding the fort, without a force of 20,000 well disciplined men."[14]

While talking to Anderson in the dark (the Confederates would let Fox visit Anderson only under this condition) a freak event gave Fox an important idea on how to better his plan for reinforcing the fort. While listening to Anderson's reply to one of his questions, Fox heard the sound of oars and realized that, although very near the fort, a boat had come in unseen and unheard, until it was about 100 yards away. This gave Fox the idea of supplying the fort with small boats at night.[15] As the conversation came to a close Anderson told Fox that if he put his men on half rations, he could hold out until April 15. What Fox did not know was that Anderson had no intention of doing this unless so ordered by Washington. Fox had taken for granted that the Major would do this immediately on his own.[16] Fox wisely made no arrangement with Anderson for supplying or reinforcing the fort. After bidding Anderson goodby and wishing him good luck, Fox immediately returned to Washington.

Upon his arrival in Washington, Fox immediately reported to Lincoln

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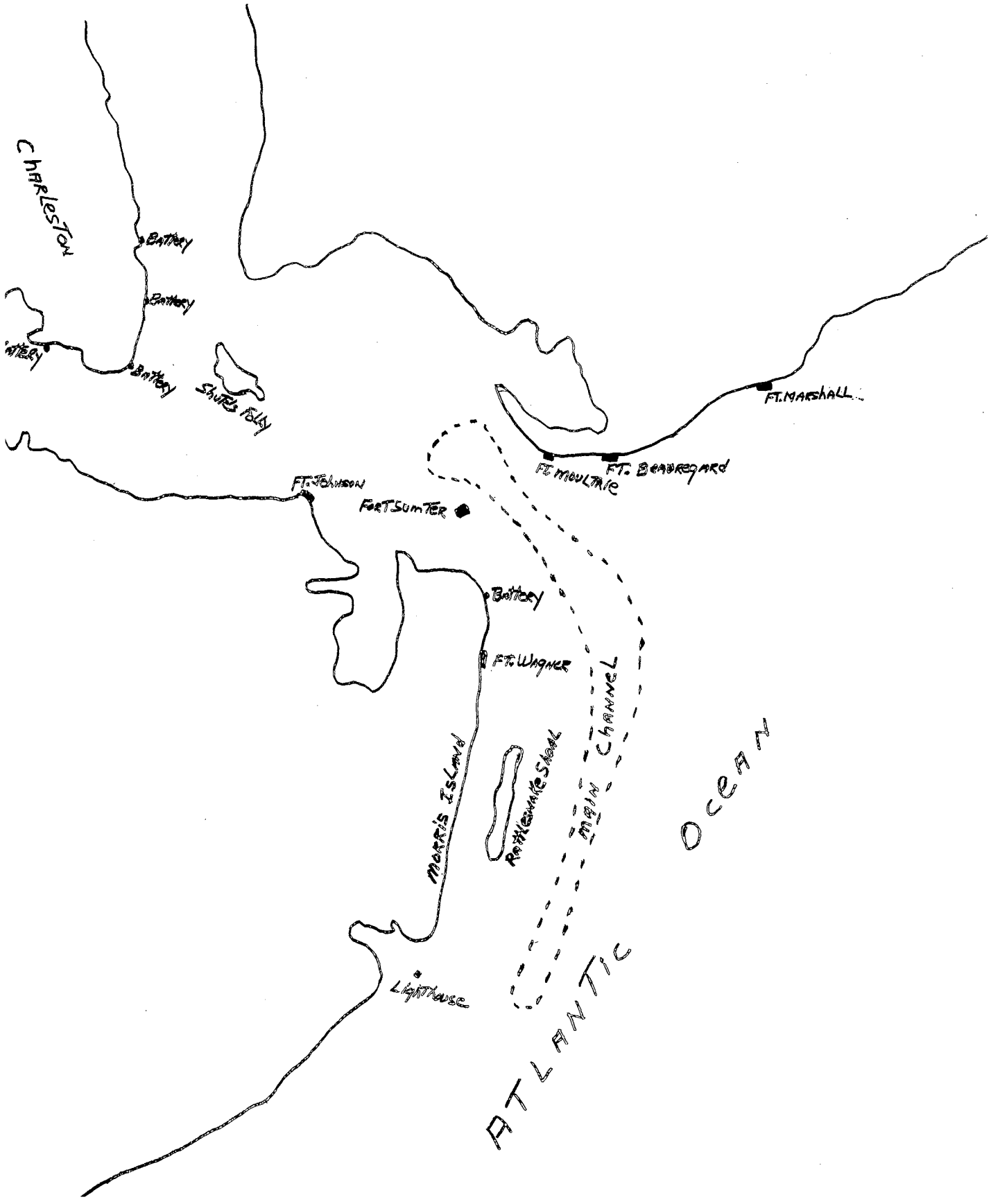
[14]Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies, i, I, 197.

[15]Porter, Naval History of the Civil War, 97.

[16]Ibid.

DEFENSES OF CHARLESTON CITY AND HARBOR

(House Miscellaneous Documents, War Atlas 1861-1865, 52nd Congress, 1st Session, XL, 139)



on his visit with Anderson at the fort. He was very optimistic about the chances for success in relieving Fort Sumter. He told Lincoln that the morale of Anderson's men was high and that he was sure he could get by the Southern shore batteries and naval vessels to reinforce the fort. Fox, however, played down the fact that Anderson was not anxious for an attempted relief of the fort, and in fact, had been very pessimistic about the plan's chances for success. The only change that Fox advocated making in his original plan as a result of the visit, would be to supply the fort with small, quiet boats.

During the last week of March, Fox appeared before Lincoln, Cabinet members, and military leaders to answer questions relating to his plan. Lincoln still wavered on the question of reinforcing Fort Sumter and desired other opinions on the proposed plan other than Fox's. To this Fox replied that, because the expedition was a naval plan, he felt that naval men should be asked to approve it. Lincoln agreed to this and asked Fox to produce two high ranking naval officers to defend his plan. On March 23 Commodore Silas Stringham (head of detailing in the Navy Department) and Commodore Charles Stewart (the officer under whom Fox served on the Washington) gave support to Fox's plan in a conference with Lincoln. They told him that passing batteries with light boats at night at right angles to the enemy's line of fire, at 1,300 yards distant, was not especially dangerous and had been done many times during the Crimean War.[17] They also mentioned to the President that steamships had been known to pass within 100 yards of a fort at night without being seen.

Despite these assurances, all the Cabinet members, excepting Blair,

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[17]Boynton, History of the Navy During the Rebellion, I, 246.

(and sometimes Secretary of the Treasury, Salmon P. Chase, who changed his views on the subject often) remained firmly against the plan, not so much because it might fail, but because it might precipitate a civil war. General Winfield Scott and the military heads also opposed the plan, largely because of friction between the Navy Department and the military. Scott argued that even if the fort was reinforced once, the problem would still come up again and again.[18]

After hearing all the arguments on the proposed expedition, Lincoln on March 28 sent his former law partner Ward Hill Lamon to Charleston to reassure Governor Pickens that Fort Sumter would not be reinforced and that Major Anderson would be transferred to another post in the near future. Then suddenly, on March 29, for reasons unknown, Lincoln changed his mind and told Fox to ready an expedition to relieve Fort Sumter. On the first of the new month Lincoln received a letter from Anderson and with it, a jolt. The Major revealed in the letter that he was expecting orders to vacate Fort Sumter as Lamon had indicated, and that his food supply was very low. Wrote Anderson: "I told Fox that if I placed the command on short allowance I could make provisions last until the 10th of this month, but as I have received no instructions from the State Department that it is desirable to do so it has not been done."[19] Lincoln was stunned upon reading this report and immediately notified Anderson of Fox's plan of relief. He told the commander that Fox's proposed plan called for an attempt to provision Fort Sumter and that only in case the attempt were resisted would he try to reinforce the fort.

Had Lincoln allowed the expedition to leave shortly after March 29,

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[18]Porter, Naval History of the Civil War, 97.

[19]Boynton, History of the Navy During the Rebellion, I, 246.

there still would have been plenty of time available to relieve Sumter before Anderson's supplies gave out. However, during the next five days Lincoln hesitated, and with this ensuing delay the chances for a successful expedition were greatly reduced. Meanwhile, Fox acted immediately after he was given the order to ready an expedition, and by April 2 he was ready to set out for Charleston harbor. To his chagrin and disgust this was not to be the case; he was delayed five more days before he could leave.

The delays encountered by Fox were largely the result of the Union government's trying to avoid war. Lincoln was still watching with vital interest the Virginia Convention. The President was in a dilemma; he was in danger of doing the wrong thing no matter which way he decided the Sumter question. If the Confederacy could get a peaceful evacuation of the fort, they could claim it as an acknowledgement of their rights and virtually of their independence. On the other hand, if they could provoke the government into attacking them at Fort Sumter, they could capture the fort in self defense; and Europe (which would be so vital in case of war), as David D. Porter indicated, would say, "Shame on a government that tries to crush a weaker and independent people, merely wishing to govern themselves."[20] The Cabinet, excepting Blair and the military, still hoping to avoid Fox's proposed reinforcement of the fort, used their influence on Lincoln to effect more delays in the early days of April.

Fox saw with every passing hour the chances for a successful expedition fade away. He realized now that Anderson could hold out only until April 15. He also knew that when he was given orders by Lincoln to start

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[20]Porter, Naval History of the Civil War, 94.

the expedition, it would take him at least three days to ready it and another five or six days to get from New York to Charleston by boat. The danger now was that he might not reach Charleston in time even if orders for the expedition came immediately. And still he received no word from Lincoln. On April 3 Fox expressed his disgust toward the delaying of the expedition to his friend Dr. Samuel Lowery, remarking that he had been ready since March 31, but that he now doubted if the expedition would ever get off.[21] He commented that he had viewed with disgust the delays, obstacles, indecision, and politics which had held up his expedition and had increased heavily the odds against successfully reinforcing the fort.[22] Fox now thought that war would start at Pensacola, because there the government was taking a stand.

While Fox was working feverishly to get his expedition to Fort Sumter underway, certain intriguing events were taking place in the nation's capital that would have a direct bearing on the success or failure of his plan. In a series of meetings from April 1 to April 6, Secretary of State William H. Seward and two able, young officers, David D. Porter and Montgomery C. Meigs, proposed a plan to President Lincoln that was destined to be the direct cause of the failure of the Fox expedition to Fort Sumter. This scheme called for the diversion of Fox's capital ship, the Powhatan. Whether this was a deliberate effort on their part will probably never be known, but their actions involving Fox's plan were extremely significant.

The four main ships to have been used in Fox's expedition were the United States steamers Powhatan, Harriet Lane, Pawnee, and Pocahantas.

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[21] Thompson and Wainwright, (eds.), Confidential Correspondence of G. V. Fox, I, 19.

[22] Ibid.

Of these four, the most important was the Powhatan. The other three ships were to be used only for their fire power. The Powhatan was essential to the plan because it had on its decks the 300 sailors who were to man the tugs and small boats to be used in the actual relief of Fort Sumter.

Captain Meigs and Lieutenant Porter had early in 1861, considered Fort Pickens, Florida, of vital importance to the North because of its fine harbor, good naval yard, and strategic position that could be used as a base of operations against New Orleans and the coasts of Louisiana and Texas.[23] When Secretary Seward got wind of this plan he immediately brought the two men to see Lincoln.

On April 2, Porter and Meigs, with Seward, met with Lincoln at the White House and told him of their plan. They deemed it too late to reinforce Sumter, and recommended instead the reinforcement of Fort Pickens, which they considered of much greater strategic value. Lincoln immediately saw a correlation between their views and some expressed by Seward earlier and speculated if this was merely a coincidence. Briefly outlining their plan, Meigs and Porter proposed setting up a military government for Florida whose purpose it would be to reinforce and hold securely forts Taylor, Pickens, and Jefferson. Seward agreed with this scheme, stating that he regarded forts Taylor and Jefferson off the Florida Keys as American Gibraltars, capable of controlling ocean traffic on the Gulf.[24] To Lincoln, this plan seemed very sound and a chance to restore lost confidence in the North, so he accepted it and decided to let Meigs and Porter reinforce Fort Pickens at Pensacola.

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[23]Porter, Naval History of the Civil War, 94.

[24]West, Mr. Lincoln's Navy, 21-22.

Lincoln, because he had not served in the navy, said he did not know how to write the necessary orders to the naval commanders involved in the plan, so he allowed Porter and Meigs to draft the orders, which he then read. Porter now impressed upon Lincoln what was already painfully true, that routine orders could not emanate from the Navy or War Departments without leaks, so honeycombed were the government departments with Southerners resigning or planning to resign. Thus he convinced Lincoln of the need to carry out these plans in complete secrecy.[25]

Lincoln had not yet realized that one of the ships he had just ordered sent to Florida, the Powhatan, was already assigned to Fox's expedition; he even had it listed as such in private papers in his desk, but these he neglected to check. Captain Andrew Foote, head of the navy yard in New York, was in a state of confusion, having received one letter from Lincoln ordering him to fit out the Powhatan and acknowledge Porter as the new commander while "under no circumstances communicate to the Navy Department that she is fitting out," and another from Gideon Welles also ordering him to fit out the Powhatan, while not designating any commander.[26] Since both orders required him to fit out the Powhatan for sea, Foote did just that. On April 5, however, Welles ordered Foote to assign the Powhatan to Captain Samuel Mercer for participation in the Fort Sumter expedition. Foote now became suspicious of treachery and was in favor of telegraphing Secretary Welles to clear up the situation. Porter stopped him from doing this, emphasizing the President's demand for secrecy.

Mercer and Porter conferred about the conflicting orders, and Mercer

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[25]West, Mr. Lincoln's Navy, 22.

[26]Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies, i, I, 109.

agreed to give his ship to Porter, following the orders of the President rather than those of the Secretary of the Navy. On April 6, at 2:45 P.M., Porter left New York for Pensacola abroad the Powhatan despite Foote's statement that he was expecting an important dispatch within the hour. Just after Porter's departure, (at 3:00 P.M.) Foote received the message, signed by Seward, ordering Porter to give up the Powhatan to Mercer. This change came because Welles had learned of the diversion of the Powhatan through the replacement of his Bureau of Detail head Commodore Stringham, by Captain Samuel Barron, unquestionably sympathetic to the South.[27] When he learned of the diversion Welles flew into a rage and rushed to see Lincoln at the White House to demand an explanation from the President and Seward. Welles heatedly told Lincoln that he did not like to have interference, of which he knew nothing, in his department. Lincoln replied that he was sorry for the mistake, but that he had not known the Powhatan was to be used in the Fort Sumter expedition. He then immediately ordered Seward to give up the Powhatan to Mercer.

Upon receiving Seward's message, Foote sent a Lieutenant Roe on a fast steamer to inform Porter of Seward's orders. Roe caught up to Porter at 6:00 P.M. and relayed the orders. Porter decided to disobey Seward's command because the Atlantic (with Meigs and 600 troops aboard) was ten miles ahead and was dependent upon the Powhatan for all her artillery. The loss of the ship now would cause the plan to fail, and besides, his orders from the President had been explicit and took precedence over Seward's. Porter wrote to the Secretary of State, "I have received my orders from the President and will execute them."[28] With

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[27]Morse Jr., (ed.), Diary of Gideon Welles, I, 17.

[28]Porter, Naval History of the Civil War, 103.

Porter's refusal to give up the Powhatan, whatever chance for success Fox's expedition had, now vanished.

After hearing delegates to the crucial Virginia Peace Convention tell him they would not abandon the conference despite his offer to pull out of Fort Sumter, Lincoln became convinced that Virginia and the border states would join the South no matter how conciliatory his policy was. This, coupled with a rapidly diminishing confidence among people of the North, caused him to make his final decision regarding Fort Sumter. On April 4 he told Fox to start the expedition to Charleston to relieve the fort.

The question of leadership of the expedition was a sore spot to Lincoln. Many high ranking naval men expressed a dislike toward Lincoln's choice of Fox as head of the expedition. They thought it was wrong and in bad taste to by-pass top naval commanders for a civilian to head the expedition and to direct movements of naval officers without authority of law, even if he had been in the navy before. This feeling on the part of certain naval, military, and civilian heads produced poor cooperation and hostility towards Fox's plan. These men thought that no naval commander familiar with the forms and precedents of the navy would or should submit quietly to this reflection upon this branch of the service. Fox recognized this situation immediately and asked the Secretary of the Navy on April 4 to have Commodore Stringham take command of the expedition. Stringham refused the order on the grounds that the expedition was too late to be successful and would likely ruin the reputation of the officer who undertook it.[29] Thus Fox, a volunteer, with no official connection with the government, was placed in sole charge of

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[29]Porter, Naval History of the Civil War, 97.

all military and naval operations which might be deemed advisable.

Fox realized that he had to act with great haste to retain even a slim chance of reaching Fort Sumter before Anderson's supplies gave out; he thought he might already be too late. For his expedition, Fox needed a steam frigate (the Powhatan) to carry the 300 sailors to be landed if necessary, a full complement of armed launches, two smaller steamers, and three tugs. Without the frigate and the sailors and launches she was to carry, the successful execution of the plan would be impossible.

Fox had nine days in which to charter steamers, provide men and boats, employ tugs, and then travel 632 miles to his destination, an almost impossible task. The hiring of the three tugs had been entrusted to Russell Sturgis, a friend of Fox's, who had great difficulty in procuring them, due to the danger of going to sea at that time. Fox, on March 10, had made arrangements with George Blount, William Aspinwall, and Charles Maxwell, New York shipowners, to obtain the necessary vessels. When Sturgis tried to get the tugs owned by Maxwell, that elderly gentleman was apprehensive about loaning them because of the added danger at this late date and also because of the influence of Secretary of State Seward.[30] Maxwell had been in Washington for two weeks before Sturgis came for the tugs and was in contact with Seward for much of that time. Fox believed that Seward advised Maxwell not to give up the tugs for use in the expedition.

With the exception of the Powhatan, which was being readied at the New York naval yards, the three other steamers (Harriet Lane, Pocahantas, and Pawnee) were in the water and when their commanders received their orders immediately proceeded to Charleston harbor. Fox originally

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[30]Porter, Naval History of the Civil War, 99.

asked for the Harriet Lane to be his capital ship, but when Welles showed a desire to use the Powhatan, he readily agreed to the change. Fox got into New York on April 5, chartered Aspinwall's Baltic, and delivered confidential orders to H. L. Scott, aide to the commander-in-chief of the New York naval yards and to D. D. Tompkins, quartermaster, ordering them to cause a detachment of 200 with enough guns, ammunition, and supplies, to be immediately organized. Colonel Scott ridiculed the idea of relieving Sumter, and by his indifference a crucial half day was lost. The recruits given to Fox were the rawest Scott could find, most of them having just entered the army. Having completed this job, Fox left for Charleston on April 8.

Secretary Welles gave Samuel Mercer of the Powhatan command of the expedition and ordered him to leave New York on that ship in time to be off Charleston Harbor, ten miles due east of the lighthouse, on the morning of April 11, and there to await the arrival of the other three ships and all the transports. The same orders were received by J. P. Gillis (Pawnee) at Norfolk, S. C. Rowan (Harriet Lane) at Norfolk, and Charles Faunce (Pocahantas) at New York, on April 5. They were ordered to report to Captain Mercer for special service and "...should he not be there you will await his arrival."[31]

Secretary of War Cameron gave Fox command of the complete expedition (Mercer was supposed to command the ships, but remain under Fox) and his final orders were issued on April 4. Fox was to try to deliver the provisions and if opposed, would report to Mercer, the senior naval officer off the harbor, who would force an entrance to allow both troops and supplies to enter Fort Sumter.[32] All of the ships left for Charleston

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[31]Thompson and Wainwright, (eds.), Confidential Correspondence of G. V. Fox, I, 23.

[32]Ibid., 20.

harbor at different times. Fox states that the Powhatan left on April 6 (it did, but not for Charleston harbor), the Pawnee on April 9, the Pocahantas on April 10, the Harriet Lane on April 8, and the tugs on April 8.

At 6:00 P.M. on April 8, the Baltic anchored off Sandy Hook, New Jersey. Fox was bothered at this time by the fact that he had not had a chance to speak with Welles about putting heavy howitzers on the man-of-wars for use in knocking out naval preparations while the tugs got through and also for use in the tugs themselves in case they had to grapple with the enemy. At 8:00 A.M. of April 9, the pilot of the Baltic was discharged and she was Charleston bound.

Lincoln destroyed whatever secrecy Fox's expedition had had when he insisted on informing Governor Pickens about the expedition. This he did through Robert Chew, a State Department employee who read to Pickens the message sent by the President. In effect, the message told Pickens that Fort Sumter would be provisioned and if the attempt was not resisted, no effort to reinforce the fort would be made without further notice.[23]

Soon after leaving Sandy Hook, the expedition encountered high winds and rough seas, which continued throughout most of the voyage to Charleston. As a result, the Baltic, the fastest and best vessel in the expedition, arrived on April 12, to meet the Harriet Lane, the only vessel that had arrived ahead of her. Fox was not aware of the fact that the Powhatan had been diverted to Pensacola; he also could not have known that the other vessels in his expedition were destined to arrive too late to be of any help to Fort Sumter. Thus, the expedition for which

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[33] Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies, i, I, 291.

he had worked so hard, often practically alone, had failed before it even had a chance to test itself.

When Fox arrived off Charleston harbor on board the Baltic at 3:00 A.M. of April 12, he had two messages that he had written during the voyage. The first was addressed to Governor Pickens. In this message, Fox told Pickens that the United States government had directed him to deliver a quantity of provisions to Major Anderson at the fort. (Due notice of this had been given earlier in a special message from Lincoln). Continued Fox's message, "...accordingly I send the first load. If one of your batteries open fire it will be upon an unarmed boat and unarmed man performing an act of duty and humanity."[34] To Captain Jackson, who would head the relief crew taking the provisions into the fort, Fox's orders were explicit; he was told to take provisions and a letter to Major Anderson in the fort and immediately to return; if fired on while going in, he was to return at once.[35] If anyone opposed his entrance, Jackson would give the letter addressed to Governor Pickens to that person and then return to the harbor. Under no circumstances was he to attempt to get through to Fort Sumter if opposed.

The shelling of Fort Sumter began at 3:00 A.M. on April 12; at that time, of all the vessels in Fox's expedition, only the Harriet Lane was anchored off Charleston harbor and ready for action. The Pawnee, because of high winds and seas, arrived three hours late and the Pocahantas came in at 2:00 P.M. on April 13, just in time to watch Fort Sumter surrender. The fate of the three tugs was even worse; the Uncle Ben had been driven into Wilmington by the violence of the gale and was captured by the

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[34]Thompson and Wainwright, (eds.), Confidential Correspondence of G. V. Fox, I, 18.

[35]Ibid.

Confederacy; the Yankee reached Charleston a few hours after Major Anderson's troops left with the Baltic for New York; and the Freeborn had not been permitted to leave New York. As to the whereabouts of the Powhatan, Fox knew nothing. It was not until 10:00 P.M. of April 13 that he learned, through a note from Captain Mercer to Captain Rowan, dated April 7, that the Powhatan, carrying his 300 soldiers, howitzers, and fighting launches, had been diverted to Pensacola.

As soon as the Pawnee arrived, (at 6:00 A.M. on April 12) Fox boarded her and asked Commander Rowan to accompany him in to land provisions at Fort Sumter. Rowan refused, replying stiffly that his orders were to await the Powhatan's arrival ten miles off Charleston harbor and that he would do just this, not caring to start a civil war.[36] Fox then used the revenue cutter Harriet Lane as an escort and moved in close to Fort Sumter, where he saw with dismay at 7:20 A.M., that the fort was being bombarded but was replying gallantly. Fox learned later that the shelling of Sumter started at approximately 3:00 A.M. on April 12 after Major Anderson had refused to surrender on that day but indicated that he would, with honor, when his supplies ran out, two days hence. The South, however, had done just what Fox thought they would have to do. While en route from New York to Charleston, Fox reasoned that the Southern spirit wanted a fight; the people in Charleston were getting dissatisfied with the Confederacy and were impatient for action. This is exactly what they got, and Fox's fears about the expedition being too late were now confirmed.

After watching the bombardment of the fort for a short time, Fox returned to the bar and told Commander Rowan of Fort Sumter's plight.

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[36] Thompson and Wainwright, (eds.), Confidential Correspondence of G. V. Fox, I, 32.

The Commander's attitude was now completely changed from his earlier refusal to go in, and he offered to attempt to land provisions immediately. With such willingness expressed, Fox advised both the Pawnee and Harriet Lane to go in close to the channel and anchor off the bar, which was done. The heavy seas and high winds had died down a little now and Fox wanted to attempt to land two boat loads of provisions that night. Because of the absence of the Powhatan and Pocahantas plus the shortage of hands and gun launches on the other two ships, he was overruled by Commanders Rowan and Gillis.[37] The two commanders did agree to escort him in the next morning in defiance of the batteries even if the other two ships did not show up.

During the night of April 12 the vessels stayed anchored in the channel waiting to meet the other two ships. Despite the heavy wind with an ensuing great swell and heavy fog, the Baltic, under Captain Fletcher, with Fox abroad, went ten miles out and signaled all night to show the still-expected Powhatan where they were.[38] While returning to the anchorage near daylight, Fletcher ran on Rattlesnake Shoal but soon got off. The waves were so high in the early morning that the Baltic had to anchor four miles away from the war vessels and could not load the boats. At 8:00 A.M. Fox and Lieutenant Hudson (an army officer on the Baltic) went by small boat to the Pawnee, from which they saw black smoke pouring from Sumter and the Southern batteries redoubling their fire. Severe weather during the forenoon prevented boats from being used to reinforce the fort, so Rowan captured an ice schooner and offered it to

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[37]Thompson and Wainwright, (eds.), Confidential Correspondence of G. V. Fox, I, 32.

[38]Ibid.

Fox to carry in men and provisions. Fox accepted and "...on the night of the 13th I should certainly have gone in and as certainly been knocked to pieces."[39] Fox now realized his cause to be hopeless. He had just learned, by a note from Mercer to Rowan, of the Powhatan's diversion. This knowledge plus the rough seas and high winds and the smoke pouring out of Fort Sumter, made a relief attempt impossible. One other curious incident served to hinder any chance of a relief expedition. On April 11 a number of merchant vessels had come into Charleston harbor and awaited the result of the bombardment, which led the South to believe that a large Union fleet waited off the harbor. This caused the South to strengthen their already formidable preparations for Fort Sumter.

Fox was extremely bitter over the failure of his expedition because he felt that without outside interference and delays he could have succeeded. To Fox the diversion of the Powhatan was the chief cause of the expedition's failure, because this ship carried everything essential for success.[40] The weather also played a very important role, preventing the expedition from arriving on time and keeping the fort from being reinforced by the small boats. Fox also listed the weakness of the fort itself as contributing to the expedition's failure. He said the military people had told Lincoln that an expedition could not get into the fort, but that if it did the fort was impregnable. Actually, the fort was anything but impregnable. The burning of the officers' quarters had ruined the gorge wall, and in two more days it would have crumbled. One shot

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[39] Thompson and Wainwright, (eds.), Confidential Correspondence of G. V. Fox, I, 32.

[40] Ibid., 35.

went through the magazine, shattering the wall and preventing the opening of the door. Said Fox, "So this impregnable fort with 33 guns and 17 mortars, after 34 hours of fighting, had $400,000 damage and is burned badly."[41] The countless delays before the expedition was allowed to proceed caused inefficiency and hurried preparations, when actually a plan of this magnitude and importance should have had months of careful preparation. Fox was especially bitter towards Seward, whom he had always suspected of being against the expedition. To further hamper Fox's chances for success, Lincoln had destroyed the secrecy of the plan by telling Pickens of the coming expedition. On Lincoln's behalf, however, it must be said that all orders that had been issued by the Navy Department for some time had been telegraphed to Charleston within the hour.

Fox certainly was not to blame for the failure to reinforce Sumter, and possibly even the absence of the Powhatan had little to do with it. The real reason for the plan's failure was the inaction of the government, the disagreement between army and naval heads as to the feasibility of the plan, and the length of time elapsing between the period when Fox proposed the plan and the time when he was allowed to put it into operation. No one seemed desirous of helping him, and most of those whose business it was to get the expedition off on schedule threw obstacles in his way.

On Sunday, April 14, at 2:00 P.M., under a flag of truce sent in by Captain Gillis, Fox offered a passage north to Anderson and his men. General P. T. Beauregard of the Confederate forces consented to this and allowed Anderson to salute the flag with fifty guns. The steamer Isabel took the troops outside the fort to the Baltic, which left that evening

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[41] Thompson and Wainwright, (eds.), Confidential Correspondence of G. V. Fox, 34.

directly for New York, arriving on the forenoon of April 18. When Anderson came aboard ship Fox praised the brave fight he and his men had put up and told him that Lincoln wanted South Carolina to appear before the civilized world as having fired the first shot.[42]

On the way home to New York, Anderson expressed disgust toward the government for not informing him more about the expedition (when it was coming and how many men) and the Lamon letter. He was also cool toward Fox for not telling him everything he knew while at the fort on March 21. Anderson told Fox that he should have made it clear to him whether the men were to be kept on half rations or not. When Fox explained that his hands had been tied and that he too had been duped and a victim of circumstances, Anderson apologized.

Fox always felt certain afterward, that without interference from Seward and delays caused by Lincoln, his plan would have succeeded. On April 19 he wrote a sarcastic letter to Lincoln in which he asked why the Powhatan, the one ship necessary for the successful execution of his plan, was diverted without any notification to him whatsoever. He remarked that somebody's influence had made the expedition look ridiculous. Fox told Lincoln that all he had done was to witness the bombardment of the fort alone with none of his ships, deprived by treachery of the power needed to accomplish his purpose.[43] He also said he had lost his reputation with the general public for the failure of the expedition, because he could not state the facts without injury to the government. Fox said a New York World correspondent had covered the action, and not knowing about the diversion of the Powhatan, would write very unfavorable

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[42]Thompson and Wainwright, (eds.), Confidential Correspondence of G. V. Fox, I, 35.

[43]Ibid., 41.

stories about the expedition.[44] In a return letter one week later, Lincoln told Fox he was sorry the failure to provision Sumter annoyed him because the wind and fog probably made it impossible anyway, but did admit ignorance in sending the Powhatan to Pensacola. Lincoln felt that Fox was angry mostly because of loss of prestige resulting from the expedition's failure. The President assured him that he was still held in high regard and that if another expedition were sent out, Fox again would head it. Said Lincoln, "You and I both anticipated that the cause of the country would be advanced by making the attempt to provision Fort Sumter, even if it should fail, and it is not a small consolation now to feel our anticipation is justified by the result."[45]

The one person Fox blamed most for the failure to relieve Sumter was Secretary of State Seward. Fox believed that it was Seward who was behind the plan to relieve Fort Pickens and that he had deliberately duped the unsuspecting Lincoln into using the Powhatan to stop any attempted relief of Fort Sumter. He thought Seward did this as a last resort to prevent the provisioning of Fort Sumter. According to Fox, Seward thought that if this could not be done, Anderson would have to surrender and war would be averted. Said Fox in a letter to Montgomery Blair regarding Seward and the Powhatan, "This order of the President was unknown to the War or Navy Department and was signed by him in ignorance that the Powhatan was one of my vessels. She was sent off on an expedition got up by the Secretary of State who thus interfered with the other departments as the last hope of preventing the reinforcement of

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[44] Thompson and Wainwright, (eds.), Confidential Correspondence of G. V. Fox, I, 35.

[45] Ibid., 42.

Fort Sumter."[46] On his feelings toward Seward, Fox said, "I shall get it straight in justification of myself and place a blow on the head of that timid (censored) W. H. Seward, who paralyzes every movement from adjunct fear."[47]

In explaining why his plan failed, Fox said that Seward used all his power against it from the time it was proposed until its failure.[48] Fox thought that Seward also used his influence to get General Scott and the military to oppose it. The Secretary of State's last trump was convincing Lincoln to send for Union delegates to the Virginia Peace Convention to tell them that Sumter would be evacuated if they would dissolve the Convention. According to Fox, by doing this, Seward delayed the expedition long enough to insure its failure.

Fox believed the failure of the Powhatan to arrive in Charleston to be the chief reason for the failure of the expedition. This he believed in spite of the delays and interferences before April 5. Without it he had only the Pawnee and Harriet Lane with one twelve pound gun and 200 raw recruits who had never seen a gun of this type. They had been sent by Colonel Scott to further insure failure. If the Powhatan had arrived on schedule on April 12, Fox thought he would have got men and provisions in because he had everything ready (boats, muffled oars, small packages of provisions); everything, that is, except the 300 sailors needed to man the boats used to provision the fort. Fox believed that even without the men, a tug could have brought the provisions in, but with

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[46]Thompson and Wainwright, (eds.), Confidential Correspondence of G. V. Fox, I, 40.

[47]Ibid., 42.

[48]Ibid., 39.

more risk. Defending his statement that the plan could have succeeded, Fox said that Captain Rowan, Captain Gillis, and Captain Foster of the Union Navy and Lieutenant Harstene of the Confederate Navy all thought it could and would have supplied and reinforced the fort.[49] Fox said that the fire from Fort Sumter had knocked out Confederate naval preparations and had only left the batteries and light boats of the defense to illuminate the channel. This would have made the task of the tugs much easier.

Fox also had some angry words to say about the structure of the fort, which military men had told him was extremely strong. This proved not to be the case at all. Inside of thirty-six hours the fort was a battered structure, on fire and with no hope of being reprovisioned. Fox felt that if the fort could have held out until the heavy seas had quieted down it could have still been reinforced and provisioned. He felt that the true condition of the fort was of the utmost importance and should have been brought up by the military before the expedition left. The expedition, he reasoned, would have been worthless even if it had reinforced and supplied Sumter, because the Confederates would have destroyed the fort completely within forty-eight hours. This would have made surrender inevitable.

Fox's plan for relieving and reinforcing Fort Sumter was not a fantastic idea; it was perfectly feasible and with any cooperation by the administration, would have succeeded. Whether or not Fort Sumter could have been held after being reinforced does not concern Fox or his plan. His orders were to supply, and if necessary, reinforce the fort, and nothing else. Anything that happened after reinforcement was a

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[49] Thompson and Wainwright, (eds.), Confidential Correspondence of G. V. Fox, I, 34.

separate problem. There is good reason to believe that influential men such as Seward, Winfield Scott, and Cameron, were against Fox's plan not so much because they thought the fort could not be supplied, but because they feared a civil war might come out of the attempt. Commodores Stringham and Stewart, two of the Union's top naval strategists, believed supplies and reinforcements could have easily been taken to Sumter, as did Gideon Welles. Fox himself had put in many years in the navy and was considered able in naval affairs. It seems incredible that if he were not certain of his plan, he would risk killing himself and 300 other men just for the effort.

The chances for a successful supply and reinforcement of Fort Sumter had been very good; that is, they were good if a series of unexpected developments had not occurred. If the expedition had gone off on schedule and according to plan without any interference or delays, it would almost certainly have succeeded. The plan could and should have worked out as originally set up minus unforeseen interferences and delays approximately as follows: Immediately after returning from his Fort Sumter conference with Major Anderson, Fox would have made all the arrangements for ships, tugs, supplies, and men to be ready to go by March 29. By April 5 at the latest, all ships, men, and supplies would have been off Charleston harbor and on the following day the attempt to reinforce the fort would have been made. If refused entrance, as he almost certainly would have been, Fox would have waited until darkness, and then reinforced and supplied the fort with armed tugs, manned by experienced sailors and receiving protection from the guns of Fort Sumter, and the four big steamers. This did not happen, and as a result, the expedition failed.

There are many views advanced as to why the expedition sent to Fort

Sumter failed, but the causes of failure fall into the following categories:

(1) The Union government was unsure of itself and indecisive as to what to do about Fort Sumter and, as a result, delayed too long in sending the expedition.

(2) Major Anderson knew nothing of the plan until April 4, when it was too late to prepare adequately for it.

(3) The delays of the expedition were caused by Seward's influence on Lincoln, by Lincoln's lack of confidence in himself during the early part of his administration, and by the President's plan in regard to keeping the border states in the Union.

(4) The Powhatan, the capital ship of Fox's expedition, which contained the supplies and men needed for a successful execution of his plan, was diverted to Pensacola by Secretary of State Seward.

(5) The lack of cooperation between the different departments of the government hampered Fox from the time his plan was proposed until its eventual failure.

(6) High winds, fog, and high seas caused the expedition to arrive late at Fort Sumter and made Fox's task of reinforcing the fort impossible.

(7) The lack of secrecy regarding Fox's plan and expedition was caused by government officials from the South deserting to the Confederacy. Lincoln's notification to Governor Pickens regarding Fox's expedition was also a contributing factor.

The firing on Fort Sumter by the South to stop the Fox expedition had important consequences, aside from starting the Civil War. The South now was seen in the eyes of Europe as having fired the first shot in the North-South controversy; as a result, the Union could not be

accused of attempting to bully a "free people" who were merely attempting to assert their independence. The spirit and patriotism of the North, which had reached a low ebb in early April, suddenly rose to fever pitch after the incident at Sumter, and Lincoln had no trouble in getting the 75,000 volunteers he called for.

Fort Sumter was not relieved, not because the President did not decide to do it, nor because there was any remissness in the Secretary of the Navy or any defect in Fox's plan, but because both orders and plans were secretly interfered with in a manner that could neither be foreseen nor avoided. Lincoln, however, was doubtlessly right in pointing out to Fox that the cause of the country had been advanced by making the attempt to provision the fort. The President knew that by attempting to provision Sumter, he placed the South in an impossible position: either they must resist the expedition and start hostilities, or by letting Fox provision the fort, they would admit that they were not the sovereign nation they professed to be.

CHAPTER III

THE ATTACK ON NEW ORLEANS

After the failure of his Fort Sumter expedition and his ensuing appointment as Assistant Secretary of the Navy, Fox soon became the navy's best strategist in the planning of naval operations. The first Confederate stronghold Fox wanted taken was New Orleans.

At the start of the Civil War, New Orleans was to the North a city of unusual interest as keystone of the blockade in the Gulf of Mexico, gateway to the interior waterways of a continent, and the South's largest, richest, and most cosmopolitan city. As the trading outlet in peacetime for over three thousand miles of navagible waters, she required wharves along the entire seven mile cresent of her levee to accommodate the hundreds of river steamboats and ocean going craft that handled her freight, lumber, grain, cattle, and hogs of the Middle West; turpentine, sugar, and cotton from the South.

A strategic segment of the Confederate military plan at the start of the war was to close the Mississippi River to keep the North from interfering with the shipment of supplies from Texas and the river's countless tributaries to the Confederacy. When the war broke out in April, 1861, the South had effectively carried out this part of their plan; nothing from above could go below Cairo, Illinois and no vessel from the ocean could pass forts Jackson and St. Philip, near the mouth of the Mississippi.

To Fox, an expert on naval affairs, an effective blockade of the

mouth of the Mississippi River to close the port of New Orleans was not possible. The river had so many outlets and channels of trade available that it would take a superhuman effort to close them all. One hundred miles below New Orleans, Pass a L'Outre, South Pass, and Southwest Pass were available for running in supplies; Lake Pontchartrain to the east and Barataria Bay to the west served the same purpose. Many secondary inlets, sprinkled around the Gulf Coast from Lake Ponchartrain to Atchafalaya Bay, (a 160 mile arc) caused more worries for the Union Navy.

By late November, 1861, Fox realized the time had come for action by the navy; crops of the Midwest had been harvested and piled up on wharves to await the opening of the Mississippi. The western pioneer had a restless temper, and the Lincoln administration was painfully aware of this fact. The political and strategic necessity to free the river for its usual traffic was imperative. By October the blockade on the eastern coast had been built up enough so that ships could be released for a thrust at New Orleans. Fox was also aware that John Slidell, a representative of the Southern government, had conferred with the English and French governments in Europe in May, and that both of these nations, especially the French, were ready to recognize the Confederacy as soon as their armies showed some military strength.[1] The Assistant Secretary considered this a threat to the hopes for a reunited union and realized that the North would have to make a show of strength soon to dissuade French and British intervention. By mid summer of 1861 Fox had conceived of a plan designed to show the British and French the power of the Union navy. The plan was for the capture of New Orleans.

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[1] A. T. Mahan, Admiral Farragut, (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1892), 175. Hereafter cited as Mahan, Admiral Farragut.

The former navy captain outlined his plan for the capture of the Crescent City to Secretary Welles during the summer of 1861. Fox told Welles that if New Orleans was not captured, the great West would be excluded from all the lower river markets and from the Gulf, while from the Mississippi River and all its tributaries below the Ohio the South was drawing unlimited supplies. The vast and fertile regions west of the Mississippi, especially Texas, were removed from the theatre of war and therefore produced supplies for the South as if there were no war. Fox felt that a thrust through the South's back door resulting in the capture of New Orleans and the control of the Mississippi would be a terrible blow to the Confederacy because it would serve to block their main artery of commerce.

By the middle of November, 1861, the Assistant Secretary had his superior convinced of the possibilities of the plan, and Welles consented to allow him to present it to President Lincoln. Fox was personally familiar with the Mississippi River, having traveled it many times while in the merchant service before the war. He was sure the forts and New Orleans could be taken by a strictly naval expedition, using the army only to occupy the city. Fox thought the army would only be in the way of, and would interfere with his plan.. Throughout the war he remained jealous of all the credit the army received, while engaged in operations with the navy. He felt that the navy, which had done all that was expected of her, and had a better record than the army, did not receive the credit she deserved.[2]

By November 7, the navy, blockading the Atlantic coast, had captured

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[2]Thompson and Wainwright, (eds.), Confidential Correspondence of G. V. Fox, I, 313-314.

Hatteras Island, Roanoke Island, and Port Royal, and Fox thought the time was ripe to start making preliminary preparations for the capture of New Orleans. After sounding out some military men on the feasibility of such a plan, he was dismayed to find that few thought it had any chance of success. Despite this setback Fox felt that he had two factors in his favor: (1) The Confederacy felt almost entirely secure in their defenses below the city, which tended to make them overconfident; (2) the Union had succeeded in diverting public attention to other points (Mobile, Galveston) as the probable objects of the next naval attack.

Having first taken the necessary but strictly preliminary step of seizing as a depot Ship Island, in Mississippi Sound (about one hundred miles from the mouth of the river), Fox submitted his plan, which had been accepted by Welles, to the President on November 12. The President still held the Assistant Secretary in high regard, in spite of the ill-fated Fort Sumter expedition of the previous April that had touched off the Civil War. Lincoln also recognized him as a professional man who had extensive acquaintance with naval officers and ships.

Fox's plan was dangerous, in that wooden ships must run past two powerful forts to capture New Orleans; he based it on two historical precedents. The experiences of the Allied navies in the Crimean War convinced him that although the wooden sides of ships could not stand up against prolonged fights with forts, they were on the other hand capable of enduring such battering as they might receive in running by them through an unobstructed channel.[3] This thesis received support by the results of the attacks on Hatteras Inlet and Port Royal in the

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[3]Mahan, Admiral Farragut, 118.

summer and fall of 1861. Fox also remembered George Washington's advice to the French admiral De Grasse during the Revolutionary War; he should send ships past Cornwallis' works to control the upper York River because land batteries had little effect on vessels passing with a breeze.[4]

The Assistant Secretary therefore explained to Lincoln that the delta passes and secondary entrances to Barataria Bay and Lake Ponchartrain were so numerous that it was virtually impossible to blockade New Orleans from the outside. Instead, he suggested running past the forts as a means of capturing the city. After New Orleans had been captured, Fox said the isolated forts would be compelled to surrender. The army would only have to cooperate to the extent of loaning a few thousand troops to occupy the city. Fox told Lincoln that he would use swift steamers to run past Fort St. Philip and Fort Jackson, after which he would capture and hold New Orleans until the army arrived. The Assistant Secretary was frank to say that the plan was very dangerous and daring but commented that the advantages to be gained in case of success were higher than the risk involved. After telling Lincoln that he was very optimistic about the plan, Fox left, leaving the President to another momentous decision.

Lincoln thought about Fox's plan for three days, and then decided that he did not know enough about military or naval operations to make a wise decision. Hence, on November 15, he called a very important secret conference at General George B. McClellan's home, to which McClellan, Welles, Fox, and Commander David D. Porter of the Powhatan episode were invited. The latter was held in high esteem by Fox, and

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[4]Mahan, Admiral Farragut, 118.

since he had made regular trips to New Orleans in command of a mail steamer before the war, his knowledge of the river to the city was considered invaluable.

Two army plans for the capture of New Orleans were brought up by McClellan at the meeting. The oldest plan, talked of by military men when the war broke out consisted of taking New Orleans by a force descending from above without naval cooperation. The navy would only have to be used to transport part of the army expedition up river. This proposed expedition had been under control of the War Department until it was shown that an iron clad fleet was essential to the reduction of river ports, at which time it was transferred to the Navy Department. Fox immediately stated to the committee assembled that this plan could not be worked successfully unless New Orleans and the forts were captured by a sea assault.

In the second plan, the military had backing from Secretary Welles and the President. The strategy presented by McClellan conceded to the navy that the best chance for a successful attack on New Orleans would be from the Gulf. However, the organizers of this plan thought that success would require a large number of smaller, (preferably ironclad) more powerfully armed gunboats than the navy had, along with approximately 50,000 men, and the conduct of sieges. McClellan stated that, after taking the two forts with slow advances, another slow and bloody movement would be necessary against secondary positions leading up to New Orleans, in which operation naval ships would enfilade the Confederate positions ahead of the troops. Fox was quick to point out the weak points of this plan in relation to his, explaining that his plan was quicker, less expensive, and contained the element of surprise.

After listening to the military plans, Fox repeated his own for the

benefit of McClellan and Porter. Commander Porter told Fox that he thought the plan was a good one, but held that a mortar flotilla should first shell the forts before the steamers ran by and before troops occupied the city. Fox could not see why the operation had to be cluttered up by mortar schooners when fast steamers were able to run the forts. Porter explained that the mortars could eliminate the necessity for military operations ashore. Speaking especially for McClellan's benefit now, Porter stated that a forty eight hour naval barrage using thirteen inch siege artillery on schooners would knock out enemy guns, permit the steamers to snap off Confederate supply lines, and hold New Orleans until the army could arrive.

Fox saw at the very beginning of the meeting what McClellan really wanted: a military attack on Mobile first which would be the start of an all-out offensive against New Orleans. This type of plan, which would require thousands of men, was not possible right away; therefore Fox held out for an immediate effective plan. McClellan still labored under the illusion that 50,000 men would be needed to besiege the forts. He believed that it was impossible for wooden ships to run by the forts, especially Fort Jackson which, with its tier of heavy coast guns, was the strongest military defense in the country.[5] The 50,000 men McClellan deemed necessary to take the forts could not be spared from Virginia, and it looked as if the plan would fail for lack of military cooperation. Porter and Fox now explained to the "little colonel" that 50,000 troops would not be needed; 10,000 would be sufficient to hold New Orleans.

The Assistant Secretary still could see no reason why a mortar bombardment was necessary, but to get the support of McClellan, he

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[5]Richard West, The Second Admiral, (New York: Coward-McCann Inc., 1937), 115-116. Hereafter cited as West, The Second Admiral.

approved Porter's plan which McClellan liked. The enthusiasm of navy men for the Porter idea convinced him that even if the forts were not reduced, their gun crews would be demoralized and driven to shelter long enough for the fleet to run by. This factor, coupled with Fox's statement that only 10,000 men would be needed to occupy New Orleans, plus the 2,500 on Ship Island, swung McClellan in favor of the New Orleans plan.

Lincoln now approved the plan, but because of Southern spies in the capital, decided to keep it a secret. Even the Secretary of War was not informed. Mobile, Pensacola, and Galveston were mentioned as possible destinations for the expedition, and even Charleston and Savannah were included. New Orleans was not mentioned. Lincoln and McClellan designated Major John G. Barnard of the engineer corps to help Porter adjust the details of the expedition. Barnard advocated not merely bombarding the forts, but reducing them; this was added to the plan. In his words: "To pass those forts with a fleet and appear before New Orleans is merely a raid and not a capture. New Orleans and the river cannot be held until communications are perfectly established."[6]

The inability of the army and navy to work together, even after the plan was approved by President Lincoln, held up its operation. When the navy had ships the army did not have men, and vice versa. The spirit of distrust between the two branches was reflected in the first joint operation of the war, Hatteras Inlet, and remained throughout. Wrote Fox to Admiral Samuel DuPont, head of the South Atlantic Blockading Squadron, "We have a joke down here on the two late commanders of the Hatteras expedition, that after the fight they /Admiral Silas

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[6]Mahan, Admiral Farragut, 121-122.

Stringham and General Benjamin Butler[7] had a foot race North to see who should get there first and get the credit."[7]

General Butler, a controversial political general who had given McClellan nothing but trouble with his political influence and breaches of military etiquette, was given command of the army force to be used in the capture of New Orleans. Here McClellan saw a chance to get rid of Butler for a while by sending him to New England to recruit troops for an expedition that might never get under way. Fox approved McClellan's appointment, but not without some misgivings.

In late December of 1861, Welles, Fox, Porter, McClellan, and Lincoln agreed on the final plan for the capture of New Orleans. The plan used was Fox's with Porter's mortar bombardment incorporated into it. The expedition would leave as quickly as possible for Ship Island, where it would ready itself for movement to New Orleans; from there the flotilla would quickly enter the Mississippi River and prepare for action at Pilot Town. The treacherous channels up to the forts would then be surveyed and the mortar schooners placed in position for bombardment. The barrier of hulks and chains the Confederacy had thrown across the river would be broken at the last minute and, as the expedition ran past the forts, mortar fire would double and redouble while the mortar schooners would move close to the forts and draw their fire. A dangerous plan this was, to be sure, but the high stakes to be gained if the expedition succeeded, justified it.

Now that the plan had definitely been decided upon, the big question was, who would command the expedition? The two best admirals in the Union Navy, Samuel DuPont and Andrew Foote, were serving in other

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[7]Thompson and Wainwright, (eds.), Confidential Correspondence of G. V. Fox, I, 205.

key areas (DuPont headed the South Atlantic Blockade and Foote, the North Mississippi Squadron in co-ordination with the army) and could not be spared. The first choice of Fox was Captain Porter, who despite his increase in rank was unable to head the expedition. Fox's second choice was Captain David Farragut. The Assistant Secretary had become interested in Farragut as a possible commander while searching for candidates in the Navy Register with Secretary Welles in early December of 1861. Farragut also had a powerful friend in the navy in the person of Captain Porter, his foster brother.[8] Porter was regarded as an able officer by Fox, and this undoubtedly influenced his selection. Although Farragut was thirty-seventh on the list of captains for promotion and had spent over one half of his naval career on shore duty, Fox was extremely impressed by the way in which he left Norfolk immediately after the war broke out, even though his family and friends lived in that city. To Fox, "This showed great superiority in character, clear perception of duty, and firm resolution in the performance of it."[9]

Fox was not willing to trust his own limited judgment of Farragut's capabilities, so he asked the two heads of the navy bureaus, Rear Admiral Joseph Smith and Rear Admiral William Shubrick, plus Admiral Andrew Foote and Admiral James Dahlgren for their opinion on Captain Farragut's ability to lead a large campaign against Mobile or some other point. They all rated him as a good officer, but since he had never commanded a large force, doubted his ability to administer the affairs

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[8]Charles Lewis, David Glasgow Farragut, Our First Admiral, (2 vols., Annapolis: United States Naval Institute, 1943), I, 18-19. Hereafter cited as Lewis, D. G. Farragut.

[9]Jim Dan Hill, Sea Dogs of the Sixties, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1935), 13.

of a large squadron. When this same question was put to Porter he answered, "While Farragut is not a Nelson or a Collingwood, he is the best man of his rank."[10] Partly because he admired Farragut and had faith in Porter's judgment, and partly because no one else was available, Fox, on December 15, had practically decided on Farragut for the command of the New Orleans expedition.

For such a daring plan, a man of unquestionable loyalty was needed; thus, even after his name had been selected by Fox, Farragut came under close scrutiny by the Navy Department because some of his family still lived in Norfolk. That he had left Norfolk immediately when war broke out could not be doubted, but could he be depended upon to exert his energies to the utmost? To find the answer to this question and to avoid committing the Navy Department to something it might regret, Fox sent Porter to New York on duty with the mortar flotilla with orders to check on Farragut's loyalty. Despite the fact that Farragut was his own foster brother, the Captain put him through a rigorous cross-examination; Farragut's stated views showed him to be completely loyal.

Now, all that remained was to see if Farragut was in favor of the military segment of the plan. Fox met the Captain at the train depot in Washington on December 21 upon his arrival from New York, and took him to the house of Postmaster General Montgomery Blair, where the three men breakfasted together and discussed the plan. After breakfast, Fox laid before the Captain the plan of attack and the force to be employed, and asked his opinion of it. Farragut without hesitation said it would succeed. When Fox told him he would command the expedition, Farragut became wildly enthusiastic and said it was the chance he had waited for

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[10]Richard West, Gideon Welles, Lincoln's Navy Department, (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1943), 168. Hereafter cited as West, Gideon Welles, Lincoln's Navy Department.

all his life.[11] The Assistant Secretary gave him a list of vessels and asked if they were enough. Farragut said he could run by the forts and capture New Orleans with two thirds the number. This astounded Fox because all other naval commanders had been crying for more ships even when they had enough, but he told Farragut he would receive more ships anyway.

Farragut thought very little of the military portion of the plan and said if he had been consulted earlier he would have advised against the employment of the mortar flotilla. He had no faith in this mode of attack since his observations at San Juan de Ulloa twenty-three years before.[12] Farragut was convinced the fleet could run by the forts and anticipated nothing but delay from the bombardment; he suggested that horizontal fire from modern ordnance was better than mortar fire. Because the arrangements had already been made, however, he was willing to give the bombs a trial. As Farragut left the meeting he turned to Blair and Fox and said, "I expect to pass the forts and restore New Orleans to the government or never return. I may not come back but the city will be ours."[13] After Farragut left, Fox asked Blair if he did not think the Captain was too rash and enthusiastic. Blair quieted these fears by telling Fox that this enthusiasm on the part of Farragut was optimism and not boasting, and that he had been favorably impressed with the man.

On December 23, Farragut was directed to hold himself in readiness to take over command of the West Gulf Blockading Squadron and the

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[11] Mahan, Admiral Farragut, 124.

[12] Ibid.

[13] Lewis, D. G. Farragut, II, 13.

expedition to New Orleans. The utmost secrecy was observed, as is illustrated by this letter from Farragut to his wife: "Keep your lips closed and burn my letters, for perfect silence is to be observed. I am to have a flag in the Gulf and the rest depends on myself. Keep calm and quiet. I shall sail in three weeks."[14] On January 9, 1862, Farragut received his official appointment to command the West Gulf Blockading Squadron, which was to operate from the mouth of the Rio Grande to the eastern shore of St. Andrew's Bay in West Florida.

David Porter, logically enough, was delegated by the Navy Department to lead the mortar flotilla and on November 15 Fox designated the Captain to go to New York to create this flotilla. Fox had made the arrangements for the mortars to be built in Pittsburgh. The rest of the flotilla he had fitted out in New York, involving purchase of schooners, carriages for the mortars, and a half dozen light draft steamers for towing the mortar schooners upriver. Porter was ordered by Fox to examine and report on the naval vessels under construction at Philadelphia, New York, and Hartford. This supervision by Porter served to hurry the construction of these vessels for the New Orleans campaign; on February 3, all the mortar schooners and steamers were finished, and Porter left for Key West.

On January 14, Fox was dismayed by an incident that threatened to destroy the whole plan. On that day Simon Cameron resigned as Secretary of War, and Edward Stanton replaced him. The War Department previously had not been told of the New Orleans plan because the Confederacy was often forewarned by spies in that department. The danger now was that

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[14]Loyall Farragut, (ed.), Life and Letters of Admiral David Glasgow Farragut, (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1879), 208.

Stanton would not approve of the plan. Fox had reason to feel worried because General Butler, who was to command the military forces at New Orleans, was under fire from abolitionist Governor John A. Andrew of Massachusetts for corruption and malpractice in recruiting men from that state. Andrew wanted the commissions given by Butler cancelled and that gentlemen removed from the army. Meanwhile, McClellan was only too eager to oblige the Governor. By doing this he not only would rid himself of a problem general but also would get out of participating in a plan that he considered doomed to failure. Fox appealed to Stanton at once, but the Secretary wanted to hear McClellan's views on the subject, and the "little colonel" recommended suspension of the expedition. The Assistant Secretary now worked feverishly with General Butler and General J. G. Barnard to justify the navy's plan of operation and to show the significance of the plan. Stanton finally agreed to go through with the Assistant Secretary's plan, and in so doing commenced a lifetime hostility with McClellan.

Farragut left Hampton Roads on February 2 and sailed into Key West, Florida, nine days later to stock up on coal and supplies. On February 20, the long voyage of Farragut's flagship, the Hartford, came to an end with her arrival at Ship Island. This rendezvous was a small island, lying thirty miles south of Biloxi, Mississippi and 100 miles from the mouth of the river and was to be Farragut's base of operations. The island had been seized on September 17 of the previous year by Commander Melancton Smith of the Massachusetts as a preliminary step in the plan.

The secret of the proposed New Orleans campaign was so well kept that the Washington Globe reported Farragut's destination to be the Mediterranean. Other speculation named Mobile, Galveston, and Savannah as possible destinations, but no one, especially in the South, thought

that the Union would dare attempt to capture New Orleans. Fox was increasingly annoyed by having what was to be the largest United States naval operation up to that time referred to as "General Butler's expedition."

On March 1, Farragut wrote to Fox suggesting that he capture Fort Livingstone and thus close the latter avenue of approach to the Mississippi. He wanted to take the fort while waiting for Porter who was being detained at Key West until his mortar schooners appeared. Fox told Farragut that this was not feasible, that nothing should be allowed to interfere with the main object of his expedition, "the success of which is the downfall of everything else."[15] Fox said that Admiral Foote, who was driving from the North on the Mississippi, had had great success and might reach New Orleans before he did. Said Fox, "A success at Fort Livingstone would cause some delay and might tend to strengthen other forts, while a want of success would do us most serious injury. If we fail let it be at the main point, where, if you succeed, all other victories are cast in the shade."[16]

Farragut showed displeasure for the great optimism Fox had for the New Orleans plan. He expressed this in his answer to a letter from Fox on February 12, in which the Assistant Secretary had shown satisfaction over the fact that the commander was satisfied with his force. Farragut quickly pointed out that this reference had been to the New Orleans plan and not to the blockade, for which he could use fifteen more vessels. Farragut told Fox that he hoped to realize the navy's expectations at

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[15]Thompson and Wainwright, (eds.), Confidential Correspondence of G. V. Fox, I, 306.

[16]Ibid., I, 306-307.

New Orleans, but that he wished the department would realize the difficulties involved.

On February 20 at Ship Island Farragut started preparations for the attack, and encountered his first serious difficulty getting his vessels over sand bars. This difficulty had not been foreseen by Fox and threatened to destroy any hope of capturing New Orleans, even before the plan had a chance to succeed. It was necessary to get Farragut's large vessels over the bar at the head of the passes of the Mississippi to get into the main stream of the river. (The river separates into several branches and in each of these, as a matter of course, a bar is formed at the point of division). Before the war it was known that enough water covered the bar to get the vessels through, but Fox had not reckoned with his blockade, which had not allowed daily passage of big ships and as a result had permitted silt to collect, which caused shallow water. These delta channels forced Farragut to spend a whole week pulling his ships across. This caused the secrecy of the plan to be destroyed, as the South could now gauge the exact destination of the expedition. The big ships were relieved of all their weight except coal and were dragged through a foot of mud by steamers. The biggest ship, the Colorado, could not make it across the bar at all, which was a great blow to Farragut's plan. Being fifty feet higher than the forts, the Colorado was expected to sweep the forts' interiors with its guns.

The New Orleans plan was three to five weeks behind schedule by March 1, and Welles and Fox were now concerned and impatient. The delays, however, were not Farragut's fault. Besides losing a little over a week in pulling his vessels over the bars, he was so short of coal that he had to borrow some from the army to keep his vessels ready for river service. When Fox heard of this he became enraged and contacted

John Lenthall of New York, who was responsible for the coal. Upon investigation, Fox found that some of his messages had not been received, that some ships had been lost in storms, while others had gone to the wrong destination. To make sure the coal would arrive on time from now on, Fox gave each ship an escort, and by April the coal was coming in regularly. Another delay was due to Porter, who was still at Key West waiting for his mortar schooners. During these delays Farragut repaired his ships and went over information on the forts sent to him by Fox. In reply to an impatient March letter from Fox, Farragut said, "The moment Captain Porter arrives, I will collect my vessels which are pretty close around me and dash up river, but I do not wish to make a display before I am ready as I wish to keep up the delusion that Mobile is the first object of attack."[17]

Due to the countless delays that held up the execution of the New Orleans plan, Fox started to have doubts about Farragut's ability and wondered if he had not make a mistake in choosing the man. Farragut's remark that a struggle between ironclads and wooden ships would be very unequal and that he regretted the fact that the Department could not give him any, was interpreted by Fox as meaning that the Captain was losing confidence in the plan. After the Merrimac created a panic in Washington on March 9 by destroying the Cumberland and Congress, Fox sent Farragut all the information he had on ironclads being built in New Orleans and told him to move upriver before they were finished. The failure of the commander to do this, plus his letter to Fox asking for light craft vessels, caused a terrific jolt to the Assistant Secretary's faith in him. Fox did not understand that Farragut wanted these ships

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[17] Lewis, D. G. Farragut, II, 23.

for the blockade and not for the New Orleans expedition. After these two incidents Fox wrote the following letter to Porter, "A cold shudder ran through me....I trust we have made no mistake in the man but his dispatches are very discouraging. It is not too late to rectify our mistake. You must frankly give me your views from Ship Island, for the cause of our country is above all personal considerations. I shall have no peace until I hear from you."[18] Fox immediately received from Porter a pertinent reply stating that he had already told the Assistant Secretary that Farragut was no Nelson or Collinwood, but was still as competent as any man of his rank. Porter concluded by stating that it was too late to change command at that time anyway.[19]

Farragut in the meantime, knowing nothing of Fox's lack of confidence in him, had been poised and ready to go in early March, but was still being detained by Porter at Key West. Finally he could stand the delays no longer, and on March 7, left for Pilot Town at the mouth of the Mississippi to begin operations. One day earlier, on March 6, Porter's towing steamers finally arrived, and on that day he left to join Farragut at Ship Island.

After the panic of March 9, Fox was very worried about the ironclads nearing completion at New Orleans, and hoped that Farragut would hurry the expedition along. The Assistant Secretary no longer felt as sure of his plan as he once had. Welles, in a letter to Farragut on March 15, told him to be extremely careful with regard to the Southern ironclads. For the first time Fox realized just how dangerous and daring his plan was. Farragut was, and always had been, cognizant of the danger

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[18]Lewis, D. G. Farragut, II, 28.

[19]Ibid., 29.

involved, and in a letter to Fox dated March 21 told him that he was aware of what he had to encounter; it would either be "death or victory for me....I have no fears but all will do their duty and if fortune does not smile on us we will be in the land of promise in less than ten days."[20] Fox had figured on a purely naval attack with only such military cooperation as was necessary to hold New Orleans. Once over the bar, the channel as far as the city had no natural obstruction, was clearly defined, and was easily followed by day or night without a pilot. The heavy current of early spring months, while it would probably retard passage of ships and keep them under fire longer, would make it difficult for the South to maintain in position any barriers set up. Fox knew that the forts to be passed were powerful but he also knew that they were dependent on New Orleans, ninety miles upriver, for food and supplies. If the ships could run by the forts they would eventually have to surrender. Fox's plan in brief was to turn the forts by passing their fire, seize their communications line to the upper river and their base at New Orleans, and then hand New Orleans over to the army.

The final sailing orders Farragut received from Secretary Welles were: "When you are completely ready, you will collect such vessels that can be spared from the blockade and proceed up the Mississippi River and reduce the defenses which guard the approaches to New Orleans, when you will appear off that city and take possession of it under the guns of your squadron and hoist the American flag therein, keeping possession until troops can be sent to you. If the Mississippi Squadron from Cairo shall not have descended the river, you will take advantage of the panic to push a strong force up the river to take

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[20]Lewis, D. G. Farragut, II, 27.

their defenses in the rear."[21]

Just before leaving with the expedition Farragut expressed thanks to Fox for the trust and confidence he had placed in him and thanked him for the chance to command the expedition. Farragut said he would endeavor to merit the confidence and realize the expectations of both his friends and the country. He said, "If I fail, it will not be from want of exertion or determination to accomplish, but to circumstances beyond my control."[22] These remarks by the commander restored any confidence that Fox might have lost in him during the earlier delays.

At 9:45 on the morning of April 18, 1862, Porter moved his mortar schooners into position and began bombarding forts Jackson and St. Philip. The battle for New Orleans had begun. The bombardment, which was scheduled for forty-eight hours had little effect on the forts, forcing Porter to shell them for four more days, with still little effect. At the end of five days the store of ammunition was almost exhausted; the crews were worn out by their day-and-night labors, and the mortar schooners were shaken and strained by the ceaseless concussion. By the morning of April 24, Farragut decided he had waited long enough and prepared to run by the forts. He gave the following orders to his men: "No vessel must withdraw from battle under any circumstances, without the consent of the flag officer. I wish you to understand that the day is at hand when you will be called upon to meet the enemy in the worst

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[21] The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies in the War of the Rebellion, (27 vols., Washington: Government Printing Office, 1917), i, I, 7-8. Hereafter cited as Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies.

[22] Thompson and Wainwright, (eds.), Confidential Correspondence of G. V. Fox, I, 308.

form possible in our profession."[23]

Through letters from Fox, reports from Southern Unionists, and messages from army scouts, Farragut knew the defenses of the South on the Mississippi were very formidable and had been deemed impregnable by French and English naval observers. From the forts below New Orleans to Cairo, there was scarcely a point on either shore where they had not planted a fort or a battery. Each fort had been built in a place where natural advantages could be used -- heavy cover, high ledges, curves in the river, river currents. The Confederate forts had heavy rifles and ten inch guns, plus thirteen armed steamers, the steam battery Louisiana, and the ram Manassas. Besides this, a strong barrier, made up of three foot square timbers firmly placed together, plus an enormous iron chain supported by eight hulks of schooners, was thrown across the river at point blank range from the forts. Although Farragut had no knowledge of it as yet, the Confederates were also prepared to use fire ships if necessary. "To open the Mississippi and capture New Orleans, to restore and maintain up it, from the Ohio to the sea, free and safe navigation," said naval historian Charles Boynton, "was certainly one of the most dangerous and difficult enterprises of the war, perhaps it may be safely said, of modern times."[24]

At 1:55 A.M. on April 24 the attack began. All men were apprehensive upon the manner in which each could manage his ship and fight his vessel in the night, through the swift currents of an unknown river, in constant danger of ramming each other. The plan had the fleet divided into three divisions; one would run the gantlet and the other two would

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[23]Boynton, History of the Navy During the Rebellion, II, 161.

[24]Ibid., 139.

hit Fort Jackson and Fort St. Philip. At the same time five steamers of the mortar fleet would throw grape and canister into the batteries of the forts to silence their guns. The fleet passed the forts in these three divisions; the first, under Captain Theodore Bailey, the second, under Farragut, and the third, under Captain Henry H. Bell. Eight steam sloops of war and fifteen wooden gunboats, amidst terrific fire, crashed through the boom line strung across the river and ran the gantlet of fire rafts, armored rams, and the river defense fleet, with surprisingly few casualties. When Farragut's fleet anchored off shore on April 25, New Orleans had been abandoned by the Confederates. On the following day, Union forces took possession. Two days later, forts St. Philip and Jackson surrendered.

Fox was jubilant when he heard of the fall of New Orleans and immediately wrote to Farragut: "Your unparalleled achievements are before the country and are gratefully acknowledged throughout the breadth of the whole land".[25] Fox was more pleased because this was a naval victory than he was because it was a great Union victory. In a letter to Porter he said that the prestige of the navy was at its highest point ever, and that even England could not produce such a victory by her fleet. Said the Assistant Secretary, "I am happy at having relied entirely upon the navy to capture New Orleans. I maintained it and the country is happy with the result."[26] Fox even congratulated General Butler for his part in the campaign but sensed, even at that early date, what was to come out of Butler's rule of New Orleans, when he

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[25]Thompson and Wainwright, (eds.), Confidential Correspondence of G. V. Fox, I, 313.

[26]Ibid., 313-314.

said, "Wishing you all the success and feeling the deepest interest in your movements since I had so much to do with sending you there. Believe me."[27] It was not an easy victory, as was shown by the following statement by David Porter in a letter to Fox: "It will take me ten years to rest and recover from the exhaustion caused by vexation of spirit in the last year. My liver is completely turned upside down."[28]

The running of the forts and the capture of New Orleans showed that the original Fox plan would have been superior to the Fox-Porter plan that was used. When General Mansfield Lovell (Confederate commander on the Mississippi) learned of the mortar flotilla in February, he commenced preparations for a defense against a naval attack. If he had received the help he asked for, the naval expedition might not have succeeded. Fox's view had been that the bombardment would really inflict little injury to the forts, while such a fleet would impede movements, arouse vigilance, and lead to preparations for a more formidable defense. This is precisely what happened.

After the war, in support of his original plan, Fox wrote that the delay of six days awaiting Porter's reduction of the forts, "...unquestionably augmented the defenses at New Orleans."[29] How precious were the hours during which the commander delayed the ascent is shown by the fact that the Louisiana, which Porter represented as the most formidable ironclad in the world, was almost ready; yet the Union had not a single

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[27]James Marshall, (ed.), Private and Official Correspondence of General Benjamin Butler, (5 vols., Norwood, Massachusetts: The Plimpton Press, 1917), I, 502.

[28]West, The Second Admiral, II, 141.

[29]Lewis, D. G. Farragut, II, 52.

ironclad to oppose it. Said Fox, "The fire rafts, naval defenses, rams, and obstructions which really constituted the peril to Farragut were unquestionably immensely increased by every hour's delay to try the effects of the bombardment."[30]

General Viscount Wolseley of England, an unprejudiced authority on military affairs during the Civil War, backed Fox's arguments by stating that the large number of shells actually exploded in the forts had comparatively little effect on them. Said Wolseley, "Had it been necessary to silence by mortar fire the guns of Fort Jackson and the water battery before the ships ran the gantlet between Forts Jackson and St. Philip, David Farragut would never have achieved his success."[31]

The capture of New Orleans was significant as the last victory won by wooden vessels of the United States Navy. It was the crowing exploit of the oldtime navy, for after the Merrimac-Monitor battle, the wooden vessels gave way to ironclads. The plan by Fox to launch a naval attack on New Orleans was one of the great strategic decisions of the war, and had the plan been followed up by the military with a coordinated attack against Port Hudson and Vicksburg, the war might have ended as much as a year earlier.

This great naval battle of the Civil War was the boldest and most successful attempt ever to match wooden ships against forts at close range, when the forts had heavy guns and were assisted by ironclad rams and a fleet almost as numerous as the one that attacked them. Fox's plan for the capture of New Orleans had, before the battle, caused anxiety

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[30] Lewis, D. G. Farragut, II, 52.

[31] Viscount Wolseley, "An English View of the Civil War," The North American Review, CXLIX (1889), 31.

among many Union leaders. It was not unreasonable to assume that with the Louisiana and Manassas, the Confederacy would destroy the Union fleet after the shattering fire of the forts. Despite these doubts about his plan, Fox had carefully surveyed the character and armaments of the forts, the peril of a night attack, and the power of the Confederate fleet. On the other hand, he had the element of surprise working for him. Nobody in the South before the attack on New Orleans expected such a move. The defense of the river was considered impregnable by men skilled in war while the feeling in New Orleans was one of insolence and security. The chief fear of the Confederate commanders at forts Jackson and St. Philip was that the severity of their fire might turn back the fleet before it was in their power.

The significance of Fox's plan and the capture of New Orleans is note-worthy in that it helped kill the strength and backbone of the Confederacy. The victory at New Orleans and eventual opening of the Mississippi was a great boost to the Union at a time when it badly needed a boost. A failure would have been disastrous, as the war would have been greatly prolonged. The continued control of the lower Mississippi would have enabled the South to draw unlimited supplies from west of the river, while holding as a last resort the possibility of withdrawal into Texas and continuing the struggle in the hope of eventually obtaining recognition from England and France.

The knowledge that powerful ironclads were being built at New Orleans caused Fox to intensify his efforts to capture that city in the early months of 1862. He realized that if New Orleans stayed in Confederate hands much longer and the ironclads were completed, the Union squadron on the Mississippi would be in critical danger. Had the city been left three months longer to perfect its defenses, the Union's

wooden fleet would have been driven north and the entire Southern coast would have been sealed against them. The blockade might then have been raised and the independence of the Confederacy recognized by Europe.[32]

As a demoralizing blow to the South, the capture of New Orleans ranks with Sherman's march to the sea. The blow here was even greater because it came earlier in the war. For three years the Confederacy was deprived of two important forts and her largest port of entry for military and economic supplies from the outside world. Significant advantages obtained by the Union from this victory were (1) the sealing of the blockade at its most difficult point, (2) the destruction of potentially powerful enemy ironclads while they were still being built, (3) the control of the Southern gateway to the Mississippi River by the Union.

The importance of the capture of New Orleans was felt immediately all over the world. In the South the fall of the Cresent City may have been the dagger in her back that finally killed her. The failure of Napoleon III of France to recognize the Confederacy without England has been traced by some historians to the fall of New Orleans.[33] If Fox's plan had failed, it is not unlikely that a few months later, when McClellan's army was severely hurt in Virginia, England would have taken steps to recognize the Confederacy.

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[32]Porter, Naval History of the Civil War, 246-247.

[33]Mahan, Admiral Farragut, 175-176.

CHAPTER IV

THE CHARLESTON BLOCKADE

As Boston was regarded as the cradle of American liberty during the Revolutionary War, so Charleston was considered the nursery of disunion during the Civil War. Richmond was the Union's chief objective, as its fall was expected to end the war, but it was to Charleston that the dislike of the North was directed. The second largest city of the South, Charleston was the cradle of secession; it was here that the flag was first fired on. In the words of Secretary of the Navy Welles, "The moral effect of its capture would be great."[1] If Charleston could be taken, the national flag and honor would be partially restored. Thus public sentiment was heavy for an early demonstration against the South Carolina stronghold.

Although the value to morale of capturing Charleston was a chief reason for operations against that city, certain strategic advantages were not to be overlooked. Despite a very determined blockade by the South Atlantic Blockading Squadron, Charleston was one of two points (Wilmington was the other) through which munitions of war and other supplies from Europe found entrance to the Confederacy. If the city could be captured, a gaping hole in the Union blockade would be filled. Union naval heads worried about ironclads being built, both in Charleston and Savannah, Georgia. If this was allowed to continue the blockade might

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[1]Morse Jr., (ed.), Diary of Gideon Welles, I, 314.

possibly be broken by ironclad rams, not only at Charleston, but up and down the Atlantic Coast. If Charleston could be taken, not only would the building of ironclads be stopped there, but building would also cease in Savannah, which depended on Charleston for materials and protection.

Finally, the threat of foreign intervention by either France or England was a cause of great concern to the Union during 1862 and early 1863 when the Union armies were suffering from defeats at Fredricksburg and Chancellorsville. If the Confederacy could show that they could maintain Charleston and break the Union blockade of that city, the chances for recognition would have been extremely good.

Thus Charleston became a city of great importance to both North and South during the Civil War. Lincoln and the North wanted Fort Sumter and Charleston because both were symbols of secession; the South was just as determined to keep them for that very same reason. With this in mind, the Assistant Secretary conceived in early 1862 a naval plan to take Charleston. Fox realized that this attempt would probably be the most difficult task undertaken by the navy during the war, but he also realized that the advantages to be gained by success were both great and vital to the Union. He also knew that the man who conceived such a daring plan and achieved success would win unbounded popularity and become a great hero to the Union.

Fox was disgusted with the futile attempts that had been made to blockade Charleston.[2] The ordinary position of the blockading squadron was approximately four miles from land, and it was not a difficult feat for English steamers to pass through the blockaders at night and pass at

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[2] Boynton, History of the Navy During the Rebellion, I, 20.

daylight into the harbor by one of numerous channels. The city could be approached by small steamers from the northeast by means of Bull's Bay through an interior channel, while Stono and other inlets were open from the southwest.

In December, 1861, Fox proposed a plan to help make the blockade of Charleston Harbor more effective by sinking a stone fleet at the entrance. By sinking thirty old stone-filled whaling vessels, purchased by the government for $160,000, Fox hoped to close the entrance to Charleston. These ships were sunk in rows on the bar under the direction of Captain Charles Davis on the night of December 6. This action by the Union Navy caused a sharp protest to be made by the English government, sympathetic to the South and worried about their profitable smuggling operations. They were dismayed at the Union for ruining a good harbor, and hinted that this action might be cause for a declaration of war or recognition of the Confederacy.[3] The government hurriedly told the British that they would leave two good channels open.

The plan proved to be a failure. The vessels buried themselves in the sand or were gradually moved out of position by the action of the water. The old hulks that did not sink certainly offered no disadvantage to incoming vessels and were even used as guides to indicate new channels washed out by the currents. When the British realized these sunken hulls offered no obstruction to the channels, their anger subsided, and relations warmed up once again.

The Assistant Secretary on March 6 told Admiral DuPont, heading the South Atlantic Blockading Squadron, that a regular trade seemed to be going on from Nassau and Havana to the United States' Southern coast.

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[3]Boynton, History of the Navy During the Rebellion, II, 425-426.

He stated that it could not be entirely stopped and said he did not believe that the Confederates used Charleston much, but that the blockade should be increased. In this letter Fox hinted that he thought the blockade of Charleston would not be very effective and that possibly the city might have to be captured in order to make it so.

The dramatic Monitor-Merrimac battle of March 9, 1862, was observed with interest by Fox off Hampton Roads and gave him the idea for his Charleston plan. From observing this battle, Fox picked up a tremendous amount of confidence in ironclad ships. Unfortunately, he made the fatal error of mistaking their great defensive power to mean that they also were a great offensive weapon. This brash confidence would prove to be the fatal error of the Charleston plan. After the Merrimac-Monitor battle, Fox thought that turret vessels might do what wooden ships could not -- capture Charleston. The Assistant Secretary was excited about the potentiality of these ironclads and succeeded in convincing authorities in Washington of their usefulness when he arrived home. Fox had formed the highest opinion as to the force and invulnerability of the ironclads. The first monitor had saved so much at a time of great peril that his imagination led him to hopes not to be realized. It was at this point that Fox conceived of the plan to capture Charleston by using monitors. Although the conditions were totally different, no distinction whatever was made between the potentiality of monitors with respect to other ships and their ability to cope with land defenses. Under this misapprehension and without waiting for further tests of the vessels' offensive power, Fox convinced the Navy Department to embark on a massive building program of monitors. Fox thought they would revolutionize all existing conditions of naval warfare, and these rash predictions for the ironclads tended to create false optimism in the North.

Fox's plan for the capture of Charleston was to be purely naval. The Assistant Secretary had been distressed by all the attention showered upon the army when the navy, throughout the war, he believed, had done much more. If the navy could take Charleston on its own, reasoned Fox, it would be rid of a feeling of inferiority from which it had suffered since 1812. Green army volunteers, poorly trained and poorly led, plus the account of the military bungling of General David Hunter in the evacuation of James Island, convinced Welles and the Assistant Secretary that the best way to operate was alone, as at Port Royal and New Orleans.[4] Fox's plan therefore called for a force of monitors to be sent inside Charleston Harbor, ignoring Fort Sumter and the other forts at the entrance. Once inside, they would compel the surrender of the forts by threat of bombarding Charleston.

In April, 1862, Fox told DuPont that the summer work of the Union must be done by the Navy, and offered the ironclads Monitor and Galena to him for this purpose; Fox also asked his views on Charleston. Fox then mentioned that the constant running of the blockade by ships from Havana and Nassau, and the escape of the Nashvile, had caused petitions to be circulated calling for the removal of Secretary Welles. Fox inferred that the attack on Charleston would help maintain the political career of the Secretary.[5]

A May letter to DuPont showed Fox's enthusiasm for the Charleston attack and his demand that the army be excluded: "If I give you the Monitor and Galena don't you think we can go squarely at it by the Channel

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[4] West, Gideon Welles, Lincoln's Navy Department, 220.

[5] Thompson and Wainwright, (eds.), Confidential Correspondence of G. V. Fox, I, 115.

as to make it purely navy? Any other plan we shall play second. Port Royal and New Orleans suit me....if you can finish Charleston with the navy the country will rejoice above all other victories."[6] Fox remarked to DuPont that it might be impossible, but he felt that the crowning act of the war ought to be accomplished by the navy: "I feel that my duties are twofold: first, to beat our Southern friends and second, to beat the army. We have done it so far and people acknowledge it and give us credit."[7] Port Royal and New Orleans were mentioned by Fox as examples of naval successes; the navy knocked over the forts with the army looking on. He stated that the Union generals never gave the navy any credit, but the Confederate soldiers and newspapers showed them plenty of respect. After telling the Admiral that the Monitor could go all over the harbor and return unscathed because she was impregnable, Fox said: "If you can go to Charleston, you will go there with the army as spectators as we arranged it at Port Royal."[8]

On September, 1862, Fox made the first official mention of an attack on Charleston in a letter to Captain A. C. Rhind of the South Atlantic Squadron: "We are having a dark spell just now," he wrote, referring to military losses, "our next blow will be Charleston and the day is fast approaching."[9]

Admiral DuPont was called to Washington in December of 1862 for preliminary discussions with the President and Navy Department on the

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[6]Thompson and Wainwright, (eds.), Confidential Correspondence of G. V. Fox, I, 119-120.

[7]Ibid., 126.

[8]Ibid., 192-193.

[9]Ibid., II, 368.

subject of Charleston. At this meeting Fox first set forth his plan to DuPont and President Lincoln, neither of whom had previously heard of it. Welles did not take much part in the conversation, as Fox was very familiar with Charleston and did most of the talking. The Assistant Secretary impressed upon DuPont and the President the complete confidence of the Navy Department in the aggressive power of the monitors against land fortifications. Fox even remarked that one monitor alone might cause the evacuation of Charleston. DuPont was quick to remind the Assistant Secretary that three monitors (Monitor, Galena, Naugatuck) with several wooden gunboats had earlier failed to take Fort Darling, despite great gallantry.

Even before DuPont was called to the Washington meeting, he had already decided that Charleston would have to be taken by amphibious assault. His plan called for 25,000 soldiers to attack Charleston from James Island, while the fleet attacked the harbor in a joint army-navy operation. The army was ready at this time to furnish enough men for an amphibious assault, 10,000 having been transferred to Port Royal in the summer of 1862, with more on the way. Fox brushed aside these recommendations by DuPont, claiming that the monitors were invincible and could come and go inside Charleston Harbor without harm. The Assistant Secretary was doing all the talking now and could not see why the army had to be used when the ironclads were invincible and the navy had a chance for once to get some long deserved credit. After Fox ended his arguments, DuPont, against his better judgment, remained quiet. He was afraid that if he insisted upon a co-ordinated attack he would be replaced by someone else and deprived of great fame in case of success at Charleston. He also did not want to make it seem as if he was shirking his duty.

When the conference broke up nothing had really been settled. Fox still held that ironclads were invincible and that the attack should be naval. DuPont, although unusually quiet at the meeting, still believed in an army-navy attack, not placing too much confidence as yet in the monitors. Because DuPont had not really disagreed with him, Fox took this to mean the Admiral was in full agreement with his views and plan. Here was the cause of the failure of the plan. The two chief figures, necessary to the success of the operation, both worked for its success in directly opposite ways. This created false optimism and hurt the preliminary operations. Said DuPont after the war about the December meeting, "The Department will therefore perceive that when I left Washington there was really nothing matured, though I was impressed with the fixed determination of the Department that Charleston should be attacked, and that with the ironclads, the attack must be successful."[10]

Soon after the meeting a problem of leadership arose. Admiral Dahlgren, the navy's top ordnance officer and personal favorite of President Lincoln, heard about DuPont's feelings toward an exclusively naval attack on Charleston and applied for command of the South Atlantic Blockading Squadron. Fox was adamant that DuPont should continue as head of the squadron, not only because of his previous success at Port Royal, but because he had appointed him as commander of the South Atlantic Blockade. However, Welles realized that Dahlgren had influence with Lincoln and tried to compromise. He asked DuPont if he would consent to a division of labor, with Dahlgren handling the flotilla of ironclads while DuPont devoted himself to the blockade, although remaining chief

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[10] H. A. DuPont, Rear Admiral Samuel Francis DuPont, U. S. Navy, (New York: J. J. Little and Ives Co., 1926), 164. Hereafter cited as DuPont, Rear Admiral S. F. DuPont.

squadron commander. DuPont indignantly refused, stating that Dahlgren had before preferred shore duty to sterner service afloat but now wanted the honors of sea service. Because of his key victory at Port Royal plus Fox's influence, he remained commander of the squadron.

With the plan at least tentatively agreed upon, Fox went before Congress to ask for money to use on a massive building program of monitors. In June, 1862, he told that body that he would give them Charleston by the time the next session convened if they would appropriate the money for the invincible ironclads. He remarked to a special committee on naval affairs that once the Merrimac was destroyed, the navy would have no trouble taking the Monitor into Charleston. To do this, however, he needed money for the construction of an ironclad fleet. Convinced by Fox's arguments, Congress appropriated enough funds to build twenty-seven ironclads, complete with fifteen inch Dahlgren guns, also advocated by Fox. This action, plus the enthusiasm of the Assistant Secretary, caused an unprecedented feeling of optimism in the North that was destined to be rudely deflated when the attack on Charleston failed.

Fox came under heavy criticism from Senator John Hale of Vermont and some of the other old navy men in Congress for his excessive commitment to build monitors, while neglecting other types of ships. Despite this criticism and the ensuing failure of the monitors at Charleston, Fox was right in his demand for an ironclad navy. The era of ironclads had definitely begun; and any other than these vessels would have met a complete disaster at Charleston. The Keokuk, the only non-monitor at Charleston, proved this theory, as she was so shattered by enemy fire that in a few minutes she was forced to withdraw and later sank.

The Assistant Secretary selected all the commanders for the attack

on Charleston and chose only the bravest and best to insure DuPont of every chance for success. The commanders were Percival Drayton, John Worden, A. C. Rhind, George Rodgers, Daniel Ammen, John Rodgers, Thomas Turner, Donald Fairfax, and John Downes, all of whom would make their names during the Civil War. To insure speed in constructing the vessels, the Assistant Secretary personally made many trips to New York to check on the progress of the ironclads. When he did not have time, he periodically sent someone else.

The optimism that Fox held at the time of the December meeting on the power of ironclads and the expected success of the Charleston attack increased rather than diminished during the next four months, despite caution urged by DuPont and other high ranking naval officers. In January Fox wrote DuPont that Union armies were advancing and that the "rebellion staggers to receive the final blow by your avenging arm, at Charleston and Savannah. The eyes of the whole country are on you.... I commend you to His keeping with no misgivings as to the result."[11] The Assistant Secretary mentioned to DuPont that a new story had been added to the Navy Department building in Washington and a fine flag staff was standing empty, the flag not to be raised until Charleston fell. He told the Admiral that if Fort Sumter's flag was taken it would be flown under the Union flag.

Fox did not entertain much hope for army assistance in his plan, nor did he want much. However, any hope he might have had for at least nominal military aid was destroyed by what he called the "disgraceful evacuation" of James Island by General Hunter in June of 1862.[12]

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[11] Thompson and Wainwright, (eds.), Confidential Correspondence of G. V. Fox, I, 173.

[12] Ibid., 142.

Over 10,000 men were taken off the island on the whim that they were not being adequately supported and supplied. Before this evacuation, Fox seemed to have been willing to accept at least limited military help, and when Hunter evacuated the island he was understandably bitter. In a letter to DuPont shortly after the withdrawal, he remarked: "The James Island evacuation was most disgraceful. Had they held their positions, it would have prevented reinforcements from leaving for Richmond ....you will have to do it /Charleston/ as you have done everything else, alone."[13] The loss of James Island was a severe blow to any proposed attempt to capture Charleston. It was the only place where the army could maintain a firm base of operations in complete communication with the navy. Batteries could have been set up to help protect the fleet in Charleston Harbor, and a jumping-off place for the soldiers could have been established. Commented Captain Drayton (one of DuPont's highly rated junior commanders) about the evacuation: "I do not believe Charleston can be taken except through James Island and trust that the rebellion cannot end until its cradle is in our possession."[14]

DuPont, from the first day he heard of Fox's plan, attempted to melt the great optimism and confidence shown by the Assistant Secretary concerning the Charleston attack. In May, 1862, he cautioned Fox to think coolly and dispassionately on the subject. He told the Assistant Secretary to keep the following things in mind with regard to the attack: (1) there would be no running the gantlet night or day as had been done at New Orleans; (2) there could be no bombardment of a week

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[13] Thompson and Wainwright, (eds.), Confidential Correspondence of G. V. Fox, I, 142.

[14] Ibid., 136.

to fatigue or demoralize the enemy, for the defenses of the Mississippi were the merest shams in comparison; (3) for thirteen months the industry of the Confederates in the harbor had been ceaseless; (4) Fort Sumter had been strengthened by a water battery, Cummings Point was covered by heavy works, the middle ground had been piled and fortified, and Fort Johnson, Castle Pinckney, and Fort Moultrie improved. Concluding, DuPont remarked: "I merely allude to all this, that your own intelligent and brave mind may not be carried away by a superficial view of recent events...."[15] Later, in September, DuPont again cautioned Fox: "Do not go it half cocked about Charleston, it is a bigger job than Port Royal....loss of life is nothing but failure now at Charleston is ten times the failure elsewhere."[16]

During the early days of March, 1863, DuPont became dismayed at the continued overconfidence of Fox in thinking the monitors would take Charleston with little or no trouble. Fox had commented that he thought the fleet might enter the harbor silently and surprise the city. He received this cynical DuPont reply: "Excuse me but I could not but smile at your grand plan of sailing in silently on our friends, there is no question what the result would be....I think we shall have to batter and pound beyond any precedent in history."[17]

There is no doubt that Fox wanted Charleston as much for the glory it would bring the navy as for its strategic value to the Union. He may well have also considered the personal glory involved. Farragut had

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[15] Thompson and Wainwright, (eds.), Confidential Correspondence of G. V. Fox, I, 122-123.

[16] Ibid., 156.

[17] Ibid., 187.

first called this latter fact to the attention of Welles by telling the Secretary that Fox had often signed his name to telegrams sent by Welles. Welles said that he was aware of Fox's desire to get his name in the history of the times, but that he considered this fault very minor.

After the fall of Port Pulaski to Union forces in April, 1862, the defense of Charleston Harbor was increased by the Confederates. A fort on Cummings Point was built, and positions at Castle Pinckney and Fort Moultrie were strengthened. However, it was not until General Beauregard took command of the Department of South Carolina and Georgia in September, 1862, that the defense of Charleston was really strengthened. He quickly concluded upon investigation, that the defense of the harbor could not withstand a Union ironclad attack and quickly moved to revise it. Beauregard had more mines dumped, ropes stretched across the channel, and poles driven into the water. He hoped that by doing this, he would entangle Union ships, allowing forts to concentrate their fire in one area. More batteries were built and a continuous line of signal stations was established, while in Charleston itself two ironclads, the Palmetto State and Chicoral, were being built to aid in the city's defense.

Beauregard had conceived of five approaches by which the Union could attack Charleston in the early months of 1863. They were (1) from Bull's Bay to the north; (2) from the Southern route, attempting to take Charleston from the rear; (3) from James Island to the south; (4) from Sullivan's Island to the north; and (5) from Morris Island. Of these five approaches the one most feared by the General was the James Island avenue. This island contained few Confederate troops for the long coast line they had to defend, which left them vulnerable to

capture by a nominal Union force. If this could have been accomplished, Union troops might have set up batteries and bombarded Charleston, forcing its surrender.

By the early winter months of the new year, under the supervision of scientific engineers, Charleston Harbor became one of the strongest defensive positions in the world, not by means of masonry defenses but by well constructed and located earthworks, armed with the heaviest guns then known, both rifled and smooth bore.[18] An enemy coming in from the sea would have to pass between Sullivan's Island on the north and Morris Island on the south, both of which were lined with forts and batteries, including Moultrie and Wagner, while just beyond Moultrie stood formidable Fort Sumter. Beyond Sumter and protecting the inner harbor were rope, frame, and pile obstructions, countless torpedoes, forts and batteries at every key position, and several ironclads. Furthermore, it was not possible for any naval vessel to reach Charleston without threading its way through narrow and intricate channels blocked by obstructions. The danger of shoals for the ironclads to negotiate was also an everpresent problem.

In the spring and summer of 1862, his mind occupied with other naval strategy, Gustavus Fox had to be content with maintaining a fairly efficient blockade of Charleston and reconnoitering in all directions to discover some practical method of approach to the city. DuPont told Fox, who never really believed him, that the defense of Charleston could not be compared to that of New Orleans in 1862. Fox still thought that any extra disadvantages at Charleston would be more than offset by the use of monitors. DuPont explained that after Farragut had run by Fort

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[18] Boynton, History of the Navy During the Rebellion, II, 441.

St. Philip and Fort Jackson, there had been nothing of a formidable nature to stop him from taking New Orleans. With Charleston it was different. If he ran by Fort Sumter, he would only run into other forts, plus batteries, mines, obstructions, and Confederate artillery, all possessing the finest ordnance used at that time. But the Assistant Secretary still maintained his faith in the power of the ironclads.

Fox worked feverishly through the fall of 1862 and the winter of 1862-1863 obtaining more information on Charleston and perfecting his plan of attack. He stayed up nights and worked long hours poring over information on the obstructions and fortifications of the city. Finally, he thought he had found a way to pass through the dangerous water obstructions by using iron rafts pushed by monitors. In December work was immediately started on these rams. The Assistant Secretary hired two torpedo men to handle the torpedoes in the harbor. Fox thought that the rams being built would have little trouble smashing through the obstructions; "My impression is that either of our men could clear our rafts and piles so as to open a passage and to destroy the city and have the forts."[19] With extreme audacity and little regard for the Confederate defenses, Fox told DuPont that once he had passed the forts he should avoid damaging United States property wherever possible.

Fox became a little worried during the summer of 1862 when DuPont told him to push construction of the ironclads because Charleston and Savannah were building them faster than the Union. The Assistant Secretary had memories of the Confederate ram Arkansas and the damage she had caused at New Orleans and shuddered to think of a repeat per-

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[19] Thompson and Wainwright, (eds.), Confidential Correspondence of G. V. Fox, I, 157-158.

formance of that episode. His confidence in DuPont and the ironclads still remained firm, however: "If I did not feel so much confidence in your resources and in the cry 'all's well' from your squadron, I should take apprehension about the ironclads at Savannah and Charleston."[20]

The Assistant Secretary sent all the ironclads available, including those newly completed, to Charleston at the expense of Farragut on the Mississippi, who was in constant danger of having his wooden ships destroyed by Confederate rams. After the Arkansas incident Farragut pleaded for more ironclads, but Fox refused reluctantly, taking a calculated risk that Farragut could hold his own until DuPont captured Charleston.

Two minor problems that troubled DuPont before the attack on Charleston were solved in a hurry by Fox. The first problem was the lack of coal for the blockading squadron, which forced DuPont to borrow from the army. Fox immediately put pressure on John Lenthall, the navy's New York coal contractor, and the fuel was soon forthcoming. The press, by continually giving the army most of the credit and by singling out two or three naval officers for praise after every battle, caused the morale of DuPont's fleet to sink to a low ebb in the summer of 1862, with the result that the Admiral asked Fox to do something about it. This he did by issuing all naval reports at the same time and by telling the reporters informally that if they did not stop the unfair and inaccurate reporting, they would have restrictions put on them. The quality of reporting soon improved, and DuPont had no more complaints to make.

Fox was tireless in his efforts to perfect the attack on Charleston and gave DuPont everything he asked for to insure success. The

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[20]Thompson and Wainwright, (eds.), Confidential Correspondence of G. V. Fox, I, 143.

work of Fox did not go unmentioned. Admiral Foote, commanding the North Mississippi Squadron and one of the most respected men in the navy, called him one of the most able and far-sighted men in that branch of the service. DuPont, who was closest to Fox in the months just before the attack on Charleston, was especially convinced of the great qualities in the man. Said the Admiral, "The ships of my squadron are in as high condition as I can expect and I am thankful to the Department for its endeavors to make it as efficient as possible, and to your practical, intelligent, and personal supervision and zeal I shall ever recur whatever the results in store for us may be."[21] The Admiral also told Fox that the data he released regarding new defenses near Charleston was very helpful and boosted the morale of the blockading squadron.

The need for deliberate and careful planning to insure success at Charleston was clear. Fox's confidence in the monitors and his promise to Congress of Charleston by the next session had created great optimism in the country. If the attack failed, the nation would feel let down, public opinion would swing against the navy, and it would be exceedingly hard to get money to build his dream, an ironclad fleet. DuPont sensed his anxieties by remarking in a February, 1863 letter: "I sympathize in the tremendous calls upon you and what a hard master our public is to serve. The best way is not to think too much of what will please it, but what is best and what is duty."[22]

The British consul to Washington, D. C. stirred up a storm in Congress when he told that body in May, 1862, that armed troopships of the

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[21]Thompson and Wainwright, (eds.), Confidential Correspondence of G. V. Fox, I, 64.

[22]Ibid., 103.

Confederacy carrying munitions of war had been allowed to go in and out of Charleston with no attempt made to stop them. This caused the Senate Committee on Naval Affairs to investigate the effectiveness of the blockade at Charleston. Welles and Fox vigorously defended DuPont and his movements. Fox charged that this was a deliberate attempt by the British to make the Union lift the blockade on the grounds that it was not effective, so they could legalize their unneutral acts favoring the Confederacy. Fox told the Committee that although only one out of eight blockade-runners were being caught at Charleston, this did not tell the whole story. He said the blockade was much more effective than the figures seemed to indicate because it prevented many of the important, larger ships destined for Charleston from even attempting to enter the harbor.

Fox almost pulled a coup de grace in January of 1863, while still preparing for the attack on Charleston. He conceived of a tremendously daring plan to capture the powerful Confederate port of Wilmington en-route to Charleston. He had been informed that yellow fever was raging in that city and that the defenders were exhausted and their transportation uncertain. Fox immediately appointed Commodore Samuel Phillips Lee, head of the North Atlantic Squadron, to take three ironclads (Passic, Montauk, and the Monitor) and capture Wilmington. The Confederate commander at Wilmington was painfully aware that he had nothing with which to stop the monitors. Fate, however, stepped in on his side. On December 31, 1862, the Monitor, with twenty-six men aboard, sank off Cape Hatteras, and the bold Fox plan had to be abandoned.

As fall gave way to winter in 1862, Lincoln and the North became impatient toward the repeated delays at Charleston. One factor causing the delays was the indisposition of the War Department to cooperate

with the navy. Until the Cape Hatteras and Port Royal victories, it was not supposed that the navy would take such a prominent part in the war.

Probably the chief reason for the delays was DuPont's doubt regarding the power of monitors against armed fortifications. Finally, on March 3, after much deliberation, DuPont determined he would test the effectiveness of the monitors. Accordingly, on that day, the Passaic (Captain Drayton), Patapsco (Captain Ammen), and Nohant (Captain Downes), attacked Fort McAllister in Georgia. Captain John Worden had made a lone venture against the fort in January with the monitor Montauk, and although he received little damage, he inflicted little upon the forts. The attack was not considered to be a true test of the monitors, because the Montauk was not as powerful offensively as the three monitors to be used against Fort McAllister.

The three ships were subjected to the fire of the forts for eight hours without injury, but the same was true of the fort. This attack should have taught Fox a valuable lesson by showing that, although the monitors were impregnable, they showed no corresponding quality of destructiveness. The fifteen-inch turret gun advocated by Fox and Dahlgren, although powerful, showed some glaring faults during the battle. It fired only once every five minutes, and between times while the turret was turning the enemy would wait until the port holes appeared and fire. After an eight hour fight in which the fort suffered almost no damage, the three ships returned to Charleston Harbor. Said DuPont about the attack: "This experiment convinces me... that in all such operations to secure success, troops are necessary."[23] Fox still

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[23] DuPont, Rear Admiral S. F. DuPont, 166.

remained unconvinced and thought Charleston would be a different story. He pleaded with DuPont not to let the army spoil his plan.

The political situation in the North made it imperative that the attack on Charleston come soon. The Seven Days Battle on the Yorktown Peninsula and the Second Battle of Bull Run had lowered the Union spirit, and the people were adamant in their demand for positive action by the Republican administration. The people who had so lavishly supported the war were now disillusioned. Treasury notes depreciated, and in the fall elections discontent was reflected as the Democrats won big gains. To help quiet criticism of the administration, Fox once again promised Congress Charleston by the time they reconvened. Said the Assistant Secretary in a letter to DuPont in December, 1862: "The political condition of things renders it imperative that we should possess all the Southern ports possible."[24] He hinted that the weak measures of the Republican administration were responsible for this situation. DuPont reminded Fox that he was blockading effectively seven ports, instead of the two that he was supposed to and remarked that there was a limit to how much one squadron could do. Approximately a month later Fox told DuPont why it was essential that he attack as soon as possible: "Finances, politics, foreign relations all seem to ask for Charleston before Congress adjourns so as to shape legislation."[25] The hidden meaning in this letter inferred that the Assistant Secretary feared British recognition of the Confederacy resulting from key losses suffered by Union armies and lack of Royal Navy confidence in the Union

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[24] Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies, i, XII, 477.

[25] Thompson and Wainwright, (eds.), Confidential Correspondence of G. V. Fox, I, 180.

fleet and blockade. Future Congressional appropriations for an ironclad navy also were paramount to Fox. It was generally thought in high naval circles at the time that if the Atlantic Coast blockade, particularly at Charleston, could be proved ineffective, England would recognize the Confederacy. The delays by DuPont made the British wonder if the Union Navy could be considered a threat in the event they should give recognition to the South.

Despite the critical situation in United States diplomatic circles and the peril to Farragut on the Mississippi, where his wooden ships were endangered by Confederate ironclads, DuPont still hesitated. Even though Fox had given him every ironclad vessel available to the Union, thus making him as ready as he could ever be, the Admiral delayed positive action. He still lacked confidence in the monitors and in the Charleston plan. This type of admiralship aroused the ire of both President Lincoln and Secretary Welles, who lost confidence in DuPont because of his delaying tactics. Just before the attack Lincoln told Welles: "The long delay of DuPont, his constant calling for more ships and more ironclads, was like McClellan calling for more regiments."[26] He thought the two men were alike and prepared himself for a repulse at Charleston. Welles, his confidence waning, as the time for the battle drew near, also feared a defeat and was furious with the Admiral for his constant delaying.

After the Cumberland and Congress had been disabled by the Merrimac on March 9, 1862, and the South had proclaimed the blockade broken, Fox remained calm. He did infer that DuPont should hurry the attack, as the President was getting restive, suggesting that he was having a hard

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[26]McCartney, Mr. Lincoln's Admirals, 134-135.

time restraining the impatient Lincoln. Said Fox: "We are very anxious, but shall not press you."[27] Fox by February, 1863, was the only man in the Department who still had confidence in DuPont and expected a victory at Charleston. Advice given by Admiral Dahlgren, builder of the fifteen inch gun and an expert on naval architecture, went unheeded by Fox. Dahlgren told Fox that his previous impressions of the monitors had been confirmed; that whatever degree of impenetrability they had was not matched by a corresponding quality of aggression or destructiveness against forts. Their slowness of fire gave full time for gunboats in the forts to take shelter in the bombproofs. The Assistant Secretary however, still remained confident.

A week before the attack, Fox wrote to monitor builder John Ericsson and told him that although everyone else was despondent about Charleston, he remained confident: "I must say I never had a shadow of doubt as to our success and this confidence arises from a study of your marvelous vessels."[28] In reply to this letter, Ericsson tried to deflate the Fox bubble of optimism. He stated that monitors had not been planned for attacks on coastal towns, but for defense of them. He told Fox that he could not share his confidence relative to the capture of New Orleans: "If you succeed it will not be a mechanical consequence of your 'marvelous' vessels, but because you are marvelously fortunate. The most I dare hope for is that the contest will end without loss of that prestige which your ironclads have conferred on the nation abroad ...."[29]

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[27] Thompson and Wainwright, (eds.), Confidential Correspondence of G. V. Fox, I, 178-179.

[28] McCartney, Mr. Lincoln's Admirals, 128.

[29] Robert Johnson and Clarence Buel, (eds.), Battles and Leaders of the Civil War (4 vols., New York: Thomas Yoseloff, Inc., 1956), IV, 30.

Fox was dismayed on February 16 when he learned in a meeting with the President, Secretary of War Stanton, General H. W. Halleck, and General John G. Foster that DuPont was considering abandoning the all-navy plan in favor of supporting the army in a siege of Charleston. He learned of DuPont's change of mind through General Foster, who had just returned from Charleston Harbor. According to Foster, he and DuPont had measured James Island and found it too wide to be covered by guns from the ironclads, assuming they could get to Charleston. The plan they advocated would have used ironclads to protect the army from Morris Island while they erected batteries to reduce Sumter. Fox was enraged and immediately challenged the army men to tell him what the result would be if ironclads reached a position off the city. They all replied that this would mean the evacuation of James Island. Fox then demanded to know why the forts would have to be attacked. The army chiefs could give him no answer. The Assistant Secretary then told the President that if the navy could by-pass the forts and then reach the city, the purpose would be accomplished. If they could not by-pass the forts, then a siege would be in order. The President concurred.

Fox, supported by the President, wanted to visit DuPont to make sure the original plan would be carried out. Welles refused the request because Fox had too much work in the Department waiting for him and because he felt that DuPont's pride would be hurt by such a visit. The Assistant Secretary did dispatch an urgent letter to DuPont telling him of the events that took place at the meeting, and which expressed the hope that he would not be duped into a siege by the army. Although DuPont protested in a return letter that his only purpose had been to protect the army while they took Morris Island, it was clear that the Admiral had been planning to work with the army in a siege. It was

only the pressure of Fox that had stopped him.

On April 2 Lincoln came to the end of the line with DuPont. He doubted that the Admiral would ever attack Charleston, much less capture it, and was in favor of sending General Hunter and all the ironclads directly to New Orleans, as the Mississippi was the principal area of operations at that time and was being critically threatened by the Confederates. With considerable difficulty Fox restrained Lincoln from sending the ironclads to the Mississippi and thus breaking up his plan. The President did insist that after the attack all but two ironclads should be sent to New Orleans. Secretary Welles accordingly wrote DuPont ordering him to send all his ironclads to New Orleans after the attack, "... reserving for yourself only two."[30] The wording of the letter was such as to direct criticism toward DuPont. Fox, trying desperately to save his plan for a successful attack on Charleston, immediately wrote DuPont a letter explaining why he would lose all his ironclads: "We must abandon all other operations until a future time. We cannot clean the Mississippi River without the ironclads, and as all the supplies come down the Red River, that stretch of the river must be in our possession."[31]

At 1:15 P.M., April 7, 1863, Union ironclads, led by the Weehawken and followed in succession by the Passaic, Montauk, Patapsco, New Ironsides, Catskill, Nantucket, Nahant, and Keokuk, entered Charleston Harbor and prepared to attack the city. At 2:10 P.M. the ships ran into Confederate obstructions which extended from Fort Moultrie to Fort

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[30] DuPont, Rear Admiral S. F. DuPont, 259.

[31] Thompson and Wainwright, (eds.), Confidential Correspondence of G. V. Fox, I, 197.

Sumter. It was here that a fatal mistake was made by the Union commanders. Instead of attempting to pass the forts as Fox had advocated, the monitors, one after another, stopped and turned at the obstructions, thus breaking the line of attack and causing them to huddle confusedly at the very point where Confederate guns were turned on them. In this position they were in danger of striking bottom and hindering each other's fire, plus being extremely vulnerable to the Confederate guns. Not being able to place his ships properly and with night approaching, DuPont withdrew from the harbor at 4:30 P.M., fully intending to renew the attack on the following day. During that same evening, DuPont's officers came on board the flagship and, after a two hour conference with the Admiral, decided it would be utterly impractical to make another attempt at Charleston with the force at hand. Although no ship had been exposed to enemy fire for more than forty minutes, five ironclads were partially or wholly disabled, attesting to the violence of the fire. DuPont was convinced another attack on Charleston would result in a disaster. The Admiral mentioned as causes of failure the slowness of the monitors' fire, the inability of his squadron to occupy any battery they might silence, and the impossibility of taking the outer forts, Sumter and Moultrie (which he had hoped the army could take).

The performance of the monitors only partially justified Fox's faith in them. Their big disadvantage offensively was that they could fire only once every five minutes due to a slow moving turret. Their offensive power was never really tested against the forts because Fox's plan was not adequately followed. Had the ironclads plowed through the obstructions, which Fox had planned for by building iron rafts, and attempted to run the forts instead of engaging them under the most unfavorable circumstances, (all huddled together near the obstructions)

the chances for success would have been greatly increased. Defensively, the performance of the ironclads exceeded even Fox's expectations. Against the heaviest ordnance ever thrown against any ships, and at short range, the ironclads suffered little damage as compared with the best wooden ships.

To Henry Villard, a correspondence with the New York Tribune, who was on board the New Ironsides during the battle, it was to DuPont's credit that he chose not to renew the attack. Choosing between the certain destruction of the monitors in case of another attack and loss of personal prestige, DuPont chose the latter, according to the reporter: "It was evidence of true courage of the highest order on his part to listen to the dictates of reason rather than follow the impulses of rash daring."[32]

In retrospect, the attack on Charleston was doomed to failure from the beginning. A purely naval success was out of the question. The force given DuPont, although large, was still too small, and the obstructions, torpedoes, and forts were so numerous that it would have taken a miracle for a hostile fleet to reach the city. The lack of knowledge as to what the monitors could do caused their commanders to lack confidence in them, and this may have been the key psychological factor in the short battle that ensued. The monitors, because of their lack of speed and slow firing turret had little offensive power; yet they allowed an enormous number of shells to be fired against them, thereby suggesting their defensive worth. The formidable defense of the Confederates also cannot be overlooked as a cause for failure. The obstructions localized

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[32] DuPont, Rear Admiral S. F. DuPont, 209.

the fleet in one area, permitting the big guns of the forts to pound them almost at will.

When the Assistant Secretary received a letter from General Daniel Butterfield on April 10, stating that the Keokuk had been sunk and that the attack had been a failure, he refused to believe it or even give the information to the public. Fox could not believe that after all the support he had given DuPont, the Admiral would start the main attack at 2:00 P.M. and retire defeated only two hours later. The Assistant Secretary believed the main attack would come the following day. When he was assured the attack had been a failure, Fox was bitterly disappointed. He had done a yeoman's job in planning the attack, readying it, selecting its commanders, and building an ironclad fleet. The success at Charleston, he believed, would have given the navy the credit it had long deserved, while boosting sagging Union prestige, and would have been regarded as one of the crowning achievements of the war. Now the downfall of the "infernal Confederacy" would have to be postponed for two years, while the navy flagstaff with its gilded eagle would wait in vain to fling the banner of victory.[33] The failure of the Charleston attack was blamed by Fox on DuPont. After providing the Admiral with the best ships and men, and nearly driving himself into exhaustion to insure success, Fox was astounded that DuPont would give up so easily. The friendship that had been so warm between the two men during the war now broke completely, and DuPont bitterly wrote to his friend Captain Davis: "I have been 47 years in the navy. My name is identified with my country ...while where will Fox be in 22 months.?"[34]

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[33] McCartney, Mr. Lincoln's Admirals, 141-142.

[34] Ibid., 16.

Charges and countercharges flew after the failure at Charleston as to who was responsible for the navy's defeat. The Navy Department blamed DuPont, and DuPont blamed the Navy Department. Later the Admiral was subpoened to testify before a Senate investigating committee checking into war matters. Some of the blame undoubtedly must go to DuPont, who was too old and too timid to combine the monitors' defensive strength and the wooden ships' fire power and maneuverability to his advantage. He was afraid to speak his mind against a purely naval attack for fear of being called a coward. After the failure he was reproached by the Department for not stating beforehand how meager the chances for a success at Charleston really were. The fact was that the whole Navy Department, especially Fox, and the Northern public had so high an opinion of the monitors that they believed Charleston would be conquered immediately.

The real blame for failure must rest with Fox, although it is only fair to say that his actual plan was never attempted by the timid DuPont. However, the Assistant Secretary believed that he was giving DuPont the keys to Charleston when he gave him untested monitors in which he placed such great confidence. He erred again when he passed up a chance for an amphibious landing in favor of a naval "glory" attack, to spite the army, failing to heed DuPont's pre-attack reports. He should have been aware of the Admiral's distaste for the Charleston plan, the monitors' shortcomings, and the squadron's deterioration.

Fox knew about and could have used the Dahlgren plan (a co-ordinated amphibious, army-navy attack), but chose not to. Why was it not tried? The question is easily answered. Fox was so impressed with the power of the monitors that he urged DuPont to make a grand stroke at the first trial of these vessels. The Assistant Secretary must take the

blame for using these untried, untested ships in such a crucial attack. He took this chance, among other reasons, not so much because he was absolutely sure of success (he was reasonably sure), but because he wanted to impress Union naval might upon the English and French governments who were seeking a favorable excuse to recognize the Confederacy. At the same time, it would have been a great triumph for the navy to conquer the nest of secession.

Probably the difference between Fox, the hero at New Orleans, and Fox, the failure at Charleston, was not caused by his daring tactics finally catching up with him. It was having a daring Farragut at New Orleans and a cautious DuPont at Charleston. Fox did prove false DuPont's argument that it was unsafe for Union blockaders to lie within the Charleston Bar and blockade it effectively. This was shown later by DuPont's successor, Admiral Dahlgren, who anchored his fleet within the bar without any difficulty or danger. This change in Union blockading tactics greatly increased the effectiveness of the blockade on the Atlantic coast.

Lincoln, incensed by DuPont's failure at Charleston, immediately sent a harsh note to the Admiral ordering him to hold his position inside the Charleston Bar and not to leave it. The President sarcasticly told DuPont that he might attack if he so desired. The next day Lincoln cooled off and telegraphed the Admiral that he had meant no censure. The damage had, however, been done. On April 16 DuPont asked Welles to show no hesitation in removing him for an officer, "who in its /Navy Department's/ opinion is more able to execute that service in which I have had the misfortune to fail -- the capture of Charleston."[35] Thus ended the final chapter in a plan gone awry.

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[35] DuPont, Rear Admiral S. F. DuPont, 283-284.

DuPont was replaced by Admiral Andrew Foote on June 3, and when that elderly officer suddenly died, Admiral Dahlgren assumed command.

Fox remained convinced that his plan could have been carried out successfully if he had had a commander with courage, daring, and confidence to lead it. After Dahlgren became head of the South Atlantic Blockading Squadron, the Assistant Secretary tried repeatedly to get the one man who met those qualifications, David Farragut, but without success. Despite the fact that Dahlgren failed in his attempts to take Charleston in 1863-64, and the city remained in Confederate hands to the end of the war, Fox was never convinced that his master stroke could not have worked.

Events after the removal of DuPont as head of the South Atlantic Blockading Squadron proved that the Admiral had been right in his testimony that Charleston could not be taken by a purely naval attack. The events of the next two years proved this view. No ship of the navy entered the harbor of Charleston, even after Sumter was in ruins, its fire silenced, and the batteries of Morris Island in Union possession. The harbor was a circle of fire not to be passed. On September 7, 1863 a coordinated, army-naval attack led by General John Gilmore and Admiral Dahlgren, captured Battery Gregg and Fort Wagner and reduced Fort Sumter, but still was unable to capture Charleston. Now the strategy of Fox took on a marked change. An inspection by the Assistant Secretary of the theater of war, and a knowledge of the direction in which its forces were sweeping, made it evident that the occupation of Charleston was worth little as far as a military objective was concerned. With this in mind, Fox ordered the Charleston harbor effectively sealed by vessels remaining inside the bar and Fort Sumter reduced. If Confederate forces could be held in Charleston in defense of the city, instead of reinforcing troops elsewhere, the purpose would be served.

The failure of Dahlgren to capture Charleston indicated that DuPont had been right in opposing a purely naval attack. Although Dahlgren did safely remain inside the bar (which DuPont said could not be done), he himself became convinced that it was folly to think Charleston could be captured by a purely naval venture and he was not sure that even a combined force could take it. Soon after he had assumed command and had seen what he was up against, Dahlgren tried to cool Fox's confidence and his demand for a victory at Charleston. In reply to an impatient Fox letter, he said: "But my dear Fox, you must modify that condition of success as indispensable. No man with new elements in conflict can promise to be successful."[36]

Fox was often criticized after the war for not using the same method of attack to take Charleston that was used to force the surrender of Fort Pulaski one month earlier. This fort had succumbed without too much effort to the joint attacks of General Thomas W. Sherman and Admiral DuPont. The military contingent had been adequate, and the plans pursued were based on sound strategic principles. The Assistant Secretary, however, always maintained that the forts at Charleston did not have to be reduced; running by them would have been sufficient to force the surrender of the city. As a result, he never seriously considered the Pulaski plan, preferring to rely on the principles of naval warfare that he had used so effectively at New Orleans a year earlier. Thus Charleston remained as a powerful symbol of Confederate strength to the end of the war. The proud South Carolina city finally fell on February 18, 1865 to General William Sherman returning from his march to the sea.

The significance of the Union attack on Charleston is noteworthy.

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[36] Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies, i, XV, 251.

As a result, it was found that blockading vessels could remain safely inside the bar in Charleston Harbor, thus making the blockade much more effective. Without such a blockade, the Confederate armies would have been abundantly supplied with the best European war material in exchange for cotton. Their fighting power in the field would thus have been greatly augmented. The great ironclad fleet that attacked Charleston, even though it failed, showed enough strength so as to discourage any final notions the French and British may have entertained of supporting the Confederacy. Fox must get most of the credit for this result, because he was the driving force behind the massive ironclad building program undertaken. Even though failure after failure followed the attempts to take Charleston, a degree of satisfaction was evident in the North. At least attempts were being made to capture the hotbed of secession, and the blockade was being drawn ever tighter. With the constant naval pressure being inserted upon Charleston the Confederates were forced to keep badly needed troops in the city to protect it. The desire for Charleston by the Union and especially by Fox led to the building of an ironclad fleet in the North. This fleet not only gave the Union an advantage over the Confederacy, but it also discouraged friendly relations between the South and foreign nations.

The historian of the Confederate Navy was probably not exaggerating when he declared: "In all the history of the war upon the seaboard, the operations around Charleston easily take first place. The progress of the siege...,the naval experiments in the opposition of forts to ironclad fleets, the development of heavy ordnance, the evolution of torpedo warfare in these waters, were studied with the most profound interest by the civilized world."[37]

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[37] Joseph Durkin, Stephen R. Mallory, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1954), 258.

The Fox plan for Charleston had failed, to be sure, but as a result of the failure the blockade had been tightened. From then on, traffic to Charleston was almost at an end, and the credit of the Confederate States sank to a new low. Thenceforth, the Confederacy would have to depend on scanty supplies at home, and their downfall was considered as only a matter of time.

CHAPTER V

FOX THE ADMINISTRATOR

Not only did the navy at the outset of the Civil War lack both the vessels and men imperatively needed, but worse still, there was in Washington no organization such as a general naval staff, nor even any particular person able to deal with the numberless problems which arose in that area. These problems were to allot to each commander the required force for the work assigned him; to decide which of these tasks was paramount for the moment; to maintain the provision of vessels, officers, and enlisted personnel; to keep up the flow of supplies in ammunition, fuel, and food; and last, but greatest of all, to survey the whole military and naval field and map out, in harmony with the military authorities, a general plan covering many minor campaigns, all moving toward the common end, the defeat of the enemy. The emergency of the moment antedated the establishment of a war college which would have provided a body of men who had studied the art of war in its larger phases. Hence a planning section, to prepare a general scheme for waging naval warfare and to work out its details, was non-existent. It was for the purpose of handling these problems that the office of Assistant Secretary of the Navy was created by President Lincoln and Fox selected for the post. After August 1, 1861, Fox was responsible for practically all of the naval planning and action during the Civil War.

Secretary Welles, at the start of the war, had realized the necessity of having an adviser in his Department who could take charge of the

practical side of naval affairs and who, by his knowledge of the navy's wants, could assist him to meet the overpowering difficulties that were piling up. Not until Fox was appointed Assistant Secretary was attention paid to building ironclads and other vessels necessary for coast and river service.[1]

Fox brought into the Navy Department a knowledge of naval matters which could not by any possibility have been attained by a man of purely civilian experience. His eighteen years as a naval officer had given him a great advantage. Though perhaps he did not have the prestige that would have been held by a board of admirals, the success of the navy during the war and its rapid increase in numbers and efficiency showed that he was alive to all the requirements.

The Navy Department was in a state of mass confusion when Fox assumed his duties on August 1, 1861. The April proclamation by President Lincoln declaring all Confederate ports under blockade caught the Navy Department totally unprepared for such a contingency. The confusion incident to a change of adminstrations was heightened many-fold by resignations of many Southern officers due to the secession of their states and the resulting outbreak of hostilities. These resignations, besides created a feeling of uncertainty and distrust, had disorganized the Department and Administration for some time. Congress had adjourned in March without providing for the navy, and it was up to Welles and Fox to meet the situation as best they could. Fox, as Assistant Secretary, assumed supervision of all the navy bureaus and took charge of all professional and naval matters. It was his responsibility to supervise the outfitting, armament, and operations of naval vessels and plans plus the

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[1]Porter, Naval History of the Civil War, 355.

suggestions that made up naval strategy.[2]

At the outset of the war, Fox's work encompassed three chief areas. (1) All the ports along the Southern Coast had to be closed under the most exacting regulations of international law, including the occupation of the Potomac River from its mouth to the federal capital. Had the Potomac been blocked by enemy guns at any time during the war, the position of Union armies in Virginia would have been critical. (2) The necessity of establishing an effective organization of combined naval and military expeditions against various points on the coast, plus a large naval force on the Mississippi, was vital. (3) There had to be created a suitable number of swift vessels for the active pursuit of Confederate cruisers which might elude the blockading force of the Atlantic coast.[3] Fox accomplished much of this before the war was much more than a year old, as is shown by the fact that by mid-1862 the blockade had been successfully established in many areas, the Potomac had been made safe, the Mississippi was open, the Western army was placed securely in the heart of Tennessee, and the seacoast ports, excepting Charleston and Wilmington, had been regained.

There were only a few vessels in the Union Navy at the outset of the war which could be relied upon for blockading service, and none were suitable for the pursuit of Confederate cruisers. Fox wasted no time in acting; he immediately put into commission every vessel in the navy and purchased others for temporary service from the merchant marine. Because of the resignations of many naval officers, a scarcity of commanders resulted which Fox hurriedly corrected by pushing a bill through Congress,

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[2] Boynton, History of the Navy During the Rebellion, I, 62.

[3] Porter, Naval History of the Civil War, 33.

authorizing the Secretary of the Navy to appoint officers from the merchant marine if they could pass qualifying examinations. The Assistant Secretary also was instrumental in preparing top-flight young officers through establishment of gunnery and naval training schools at different naval yards.

Fox must receive much credit for improving the administration of the navy. Before he took office there was little hope for promotion by any young officers because of the seniority system then in effect. As a result, many elderly, incapable men rose to the top in the navy, and the few younger officers who cared to stay in had no chance of advancement. Fox himself had left the navy in 1856 for that very reason. To improve the efficiency and quality of the navy, Fox issued sensible rules for promotion which did much to elevate the service and retire those who, from age or other disability, were no longer fit for active duty. This action by Fox was the first gleam of hope in a half century for a more efficient navy.[4] Fox's measures were approved by Congress, which gave the President power to appoint to the highest grades officers who had shown themselves gallant or efficient in the performance of duty. Another provision in Fox's recommendations called for the retirement of officers from service on three-fourths of their sea pay after forty-five years in the navy or upon reaching the age of sixty-two. A permanent organization of line officers of the navy was also established by the Assistant Secretary, adding three grades to the number then in existence. Under this plan, flag officers would command squadrons with commodores, commanders, captains, and lieutenant commanders commanding single vessels.

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[4] Porter, Naval History of the Civil War, 37.

In May, 1862, Fox asked Senator William Grimes of Iowa to include in his naval appropriations bill a provision calling for the abolition of rum. The law forbade distilled liquors, except for medical purposes, to be on board ship. "All insubordination, all misery," said Fox, "every deviltry on board ships can be traced to rum."[5]

Fox commented on the direction of his efforts in the Navy Department at this time: "I have endeavored in this war to preserve the organization of the navy and to carve out work for it which should be purely naval, depending entirely upon the power of its ordnance, the skill of its officers, and the courage of its sailors.....we have won and now must take advantage of it to place the navy and the school /Academy/ on a sound basis to meet the requirements of the times."[6]

Fox's term as Assistant Secretary was characterized by his daring and originality. Never afraid or unwilling to try something new, his boldness and conceptions regarding new methods of naval warfare, and the courage with which he defended and helped introduce these inventions, stood out and commanded the attention of the world. He completely accepted the idea of the ironclads and spoke in their defense to Congress to get appropriations for building them. It is Fox who gets the credit for bringing into use the fifteen inch Dahlgren gun, without which the monitor would have lost much importance.

Fox's courage and daring have already been established. His expedition to relieve Fort Sumter before the war, against overwhelming odds and extreme danger; his choice of a then unknown naval captain named

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[5] Thompson and Wainwright, (eds.), Confidential Correspondence of G. V. Fox, II, 304.

[6] Ibid., 302-303.

David Farragut to command the vital New Orleans naval campaign; the New Orleans plan itself, which resulted in that city's capture when all the army and most of the navy were saying it couldn't be done; the attempt to capture Charleston with a fleet of untested ironclads -- all were planned and carried out by a man who knew little fear and had enough confidence in himself to chance things that might have resulted in complete disaster. It is no coincidence that many of these daring maneuvers by Fox were successful because the South was taken by surprise. This was especially true at New Orleans.

Typical of Fox's daring was the plan he and General Butler concocked in 1864 to capture Fort Fisher, North Carolina, after Mobile had fallen and the Mississippi was safe. Both men thought that a ship with a large quantity of powder could be pushed so near the fort that an explosion would not only level its walls but perhaps detonate the magazine.[7] On the night of December 24, 1864, (with General Butler anchored sixty miles away to avoid debris from the explosion) a steamer disguised as a blockade runner, was pushed next to the fort and set afire. The tremendous explosion anticipated never came. The blast did very little damage to the fort, without any satisfactory explanation.

The Assistant Secretary was at Fort Monroe, off Hampton Roads, on March 9, 1862, and witnessed the Merrimac-Monitor battle. As he noticed that the shot from the Monitor glanced off the sloping sides of the Merrimac, he wondered why no one had ever thought of casting larger guns with heavier shot that would knock in the side of a ship with the first broadside.[8] Before leaving the fort he saw the then untested and

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[7] Boynton, History of the Navy During the Rebellion, II, 570.

[8] Porter, Naval History of the Civil War, 362.

unused fifteen inch Dahlgren gun lying on the dock. When he returned to Washington he received Welles' approval to have turrets made big enough for the mammoth fifteen incher. Thus it was that fifteen inch guns came into common usage on monitors during the Civil War.

Fox showed foresight in directing the building of the ironclads. He insisted that they be small enough (a ten foot draft at the most) to allow them to pass through the most narrow and tortuous streams, where if they lacked room to turn, they could go out again, stern foremost. It was Fox who also suggested building those large ships of war, over 3,000 tons, that could make seventeen and a half knots for twenty-four consecutive hours, the greatest speed ever attained by a naval power at that time.

After the fall of the Norfolk Navy Yard to the Confederacy and subsequent capture of the ironclad Merrimac in April, 1861, Fox realized the great threat of the Confederate Navy to the North. He knew the Confederate Secretary of the Navy, Stephen Mallory, had staked the success of his navy on two well-conceived projects: (1) the creation of commerce destroyers like the Alabama, and (2) the construction of ironclads similar to the Merrimac, to break the blockade and carry the fight to the enemy.[9] The Assistant Secretary, therefore, was eager very early in the war to embark upon the construction of ironclads. One other factor entered into Fox's zeal to build an ironclad fleet immediately. He felt sure that unless he could show England and France that the Union possessed a powerful naval force and blockade, recognition of the Confederacy by these two countries would soon be forthcoming.[10]

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[9] James P. Baxter III, Introduction of the Ironclad Warship, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1933), 237.

[10] Ibid.

The Assistant Secretary fought alone for ironclads at the start of the war. Secretary Welles was cool toward the vessels, and most naval men scoffed at them as "freaks". The French Navy had only a few ironclads, while English naval officers laughed at the idea of an ironclad fleet. Most Congressmen agreed with the English naval heads and thought the ironclads would go down in the first gale of wind. With all this opposition against him, Fox nevertheless secretly asked John Laird, England's famous builder of rams, to submit bids for ironclads.[11] Welles later denied that Laird had been asked to submit bids, stating that no person had been authorized to apply to Laird or any other foreign shipbuilder to build vessels for the Union, and that when foreign agents had applied for a contract they had been refused. Welles undoubtedly spoke the truth, but Fox's unpublished papers show that he was the man who asked Laird to submit bids, fearing that the Union would need the ironclads very soon.[12]

Attempts by Fox early in the war to start building monitors were stymied. John Lenthall, chief naval architect and one of the best in the world, was opposed to all ironclads. A board of officers established by Congress in May of 1861 to investigate the feasibility of building monitors only recommended building vessels that could be guaranteed a success by their builders. Even after the Merrimac-Monitor affair, the board offered only to ask Congress at the following session for $10,000 for experiments on different iron plates, as if the government could wait. Led by Senator John Hale of New Hampshire and Congressman Henry Winter

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[11] James P. Baxter III, Introduction of the Ironclad Warship, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1933), 271.

[12] Ibid.

Davis of Maryland, Congress opposed the building of ironclads as not being feasible.

Fox was instrumental in getting the first bill ever passed by Congress for the construction of an ironclad fleet. The panic created by the Merrimac on March 9, 1862, induced Congress to pass a bill authorizing the Secretary of Navy "to cause to be constructed by contract or otherwise, as he shall deem best for the public interest, not exceeding twenty ironclad steam gunboats", and appropriated $10,000,000 to that end.[13] Fox's promise of Charleston to Congress in return for the appropriation proved to be an important factor in the bill's passage.

The Assistant Secretary, with John Ericsson, opposed the European ship plan calling for an increase in the number and penetrating power of small guns with enlarged ships to carry them. The two men instead choose for the attack, the smashing power of the heavy shot and for the defense, a small surface of invulnerable power.[14] The revolving turret, which could be turned anywhere for firing, was held to be a great advantage by Fox.

As things turned out, Fox's agitation for the Monitor in December, 1861, came just in time to save the day for the North three months later, when the Monitor contained the Merrimac off Hampton Roads. The significance of the battle is noteworthy. If the North had not had a monitor to check the Merrimac, the blockade would have been destroyed and quite conceivably the South would have received British and French recognition.

After the failure of the ironclads to take Charleston in April of

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[13]Baxter, Introduction of the Ironclad Warship, 281.

[14]Boynton, History of the Navy During the Rebellion, I, 16-17.

1863, Senator Hale unleashed a barrage of criticism upon Fox, who had earlier promised Charleston to Congress. Hale called him the real head of the Department (which, in many ways, he was) and said that Gideon Welles was actually "pure and honest," but misguided.[15]

Although Fox wanted an ironclad fleet to contain and eventually defeat the secessionists, he was looking ahead to bigger game. As soon as the Assistant Secretary became convinced of England's intentions toward the Confederacy, he determined to build a fleet of cruisers of the Ammonoosuck class to be able to meet her abroad as well as at home.[16] He did his job well. At the end of the war thirty steamers were completed, rivaling England for control of the waters. Reported Captain William Horton of the Royal Navy to the Duke of Somerset on January 15, 1865: "But I have more particularly been led to consider... the ships which have latterly been constructed in America and which are eminently calculated to cut up and destroy our commerce in event of hostilities. The floating wealth of this nation... could not with the naval resources we now possess, be protected in any degree against depredations of such cruisers as now form a prominent feature in the navy of the United States."[17]

Fox's role in the establishment of the ironclad fleet for the Union was significant. That Ericsson deserves the credit for the original monitor idea, no one will deny; but next to Ericsson, the Assistant Secretary of the Navy did more than anyone else to improve the idea and apply it to naval warfare. It was a matter which the Navy Department

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[15] West, Gideon Welles, Lincoln's Navy Department, 311.

[16] Boynton, History of the Navy During the Rebellion, I, 63.

[17] Ibid.

had to handle cautiously, for though the Monitor had demonstrated her superiority over the Merrimac, the plan was not altogether acceptable to the majority of naval officers. It was only when anxiety was felt lest we might be involved in a war with France or England that patriotic feelings got the upper hand, and Congress came forward to vote the necessary money for the monitors.[18]

In few cases in the history of our country has there been a finer instance of "teamwork" in government than that which took place between Welles and Fox during the Civil War. It was a rare combination of talents. Welles, with his intimate knowledge of political matters and strong but unobtrusive personality, his readiness to accept advice from competent sources, took upon himself the control of legislative concerns and worthily represented the navy in the cabinet and to the nation; Fox, under the direction of Welles, regulated those things which were purely technical and military in their nature. Fox secured the confidence of his chief very early in the war after the failure of the Fort Sumter expedition. That Welles trusted his Assistant Secretary completely in the most important naval decisions can be seen by Fox's plan of action being adopted for New Orleans and Charleston by the Secretary, who also came to agree with his efforts to build up an ironclad fleet.

The Assistant Secretary was almost an exact opposite of Welles in personality. He was aggressive, but also tactful and persuasive. He was possessed of amazing energy and endowed with a lively sense of humor; he was fond of people, fond of working, and full of ambition. Unlike Welles, Fox was unable to sit long at his desk. He frequently observed battles and checked upon the building of Union ships and ordnance. The

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[18]Porter, Naval History of the Civil War, 362.

Assistant Secretary was quick to jump at conclusions and was an incurable extrovert and optimist.

Welles became annoyed at Fox for occasionally signing his name to naval orders, thus creating the impression that they originated with him. However, "these were little weaknesses, and I permit it to give me no annoyance," said the Navy Secretary.[19] Welles often stated that Senator Hale of New Hampshire and Representative Davis of Maryland, two foes of the Administration, had tried many times to create the impression that Fox was the actual head of the Department, in order to cause dissension between them, but to no avail. The truth was that Fox, a large man mentally and physically, made an impression on visitors and became so indispensible to the Department that Welles could not help being a little envious.[20]

When Fox retired as Assistant Secretary in May of 1866, Welles, who with all his irritability and querulousness, said: "I regret to lose him from the Department where . . . he is of almost invaluable service and has in him a great amount of labor. He has a combination of nautical intelligence and common sense, such as can hardly be found in another and we have worked together with entire harmony, never in a single instance having had a misunderstanding . . . his place I cannot make good in some respects."[21]

When the Civil War ended, Fox realized that there was little more for him to accomplish in Washington. On January 17, 1866, he informed Welles that he had been offered the presidency of the new steamboat line about to be established between New York and San Francisco. Another

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[19] Fuess, "Gustavus Vasa Fox," Phillips Bulletin, XXI, 12.

[20] Ibid.

[21] Ibid.

honor, however, was in store for him. On April 16, 1866, the life of Alexander II, Czar of Russia, was saved from the attack of an assassin, and on May 16, President Andrew Johnson signed a Congressional Resolution expressing the satisfaction of the American people at his escape. The President selected Fox as the bearer of the congratulatory resolution. The crossing of the Atlantic to present the message would be made in the monitor Miantonomoh. It seemed like a good time to test the monitor in open water, and it was only fitting that Fox should deliver the message in one of them, since he had earlier declared that the ironclads were perfectly safe at sea. The trip by Fox to Europe was taken only partly to congratulate the Czar on his escape; its chief purpose actually was to show in Europe the flag of reunited America and to convey a solemn warming to potential enemies that the United States was conscious of her rights on the high seas.[22]

Welles made the following entry in his diary for May 12, 1866, regarding Fox's proposed trip: "Fox is bewildered with the idea of going out in his official capacity as Assistant Secretary of the Navy to Europe. I am sorry to see so much self-glorification. But he is stimulated by Seward, Grimes, and others."[23]

Fox formally resigned as Assistant Secretary of the Navy on May 22, 1866, and on the following day called on Welles at his home to say farewell. Both men were much affected, and the unsentimental Welles made this entry: "He has been useful to the country and to me, relieving me of many labors and defending me, I believe, always. His manner and ways have sometimes given offense to others, but he is patriotic and true."[24]

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[22]West, Gideon Welles, Lincoln's Navy Department, 325.

[23]Fuess, "Gustavus Vasa Fox," Phillips Bulletin, XXI, 14.

[24]Ibid.

On May 31, when he was on his way to Newfoundland, Fox was reappointed as Assistant Secretary, and thus went to Russia in an official capacity.

The enemies of Fox's ironclads and those who associated his name with them, as the man responsible for their introduction, rejoiced and sneered when it was announced he was to go to Europe in the Miantonomoh. They said it would be a fitting end for the man who had introduced the "iron coffins" into the navy to go down and be buried with one at the bottom of the ocean.[25]

Fox had particularly requested that he be allowed to take passage across the Atlantic in the Miantonomoh in order to demonstrate that this type of vessel was seaworthy. Welles, jealous of the attantion the Assistant Secretary was receiving, accused Fox of trying to obtain "useful celebrity" by making the first trip across the Atlantic in a monitor.[26] The Miantonomoh left St. John's, New York on June 5 and arrived safely in Queenstown, England on June 15, after a passage of ten days and eighteen hours, thus setting the question for all time as to whether a monitor would cross the Atlantic and fight rough seas. The monitor created a mild sensation among British naval officers. In fact, wherever the vessel dropped anchor the little ironclad was the object of curiosity.[27]

The Fox expedition was received most graciously everywhere it stopped, especially in Russia, where the Czar gave a grand banquet and the members were feted almost continuously from the moment of their

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[25] Boynton, History of the Navy During the Rebellion, I, 64.

[26] Fuess, "Gustavus Vasa Fox," Phillips Bulletin, XXI, 14.

[27] Ibid.

arrival until their departure. The friendly feeling displayed between the two countries at this time undoubtedly was largely responsible for Russia's offer in 1867, to sell Russian America, or Alaska, to the United States. On December 13, 1866, Fox returned from Europe, and early the following year reported to Secretary Seward the gifts and distinctions bestowed upon him during his journey. He then retired from office and settled down in Lowell.

There he soon accepted a position as manager of the Middlesex Mills. In this location, on December 9, 1871, he was visited by the Grand Duke Alexis, third son of the Czar, and Lowell had one of its most exciting days. After a visit to several mills, the Grand Duke was entertained at dinner in the home of Fox, where the host showed the Grand Duke the memorials which he had brought back from Russia.

Occasionally, but not often, Fox made public appearances in later days. He protested in a public letter against the ommission of any recognition of naval heroes in the groups on the bas-reliefs at the base of the monument on Boston Common. He was a member of the Appalachian Mountain Club and often attended its meetings, even writing a pamphlet on Mount Kearsarge. In 1878, he was one of the speakers at the great dinner celebrating the centennial of Phillips Academy.[28] Later Fox became a member of the lumber firm of Robert Mudge, Sawter, and Company in Boston. He died in New York City on October 29, 1883.

Many changes in the Union Navy were evident at the end of the Civil War as a result of Fox's activities during that four and a half year span. From its confused state and hopeless condition at the start of the war, the navy increased its ships from ninety to 670, the officers

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[28] Fuess, "Gustavus Vasa Fox," Phillips Bulletin, XXI, 16.

from 1300 to 6700, and the seamen from 7500 to 51,500 by its end.[29] Some two hundred vessels were built either at the navy yards by the government or at private shipyards under contract, and more than three hundred vessels were purchased. The net annual expenditures of the navy rose from $12,000,000 to $123,000,000.[30] Besides doing a yeoman job in getting an ironclad fleet for the navy, Fox fought for and got improved construction of naval machinery and ordnance.

The most significant role played by Fox throughout the Civil War was his planning and directing of operations for the Union Navy, both alone and in co-ordination with the army. The naval operations of the Civil War were the most extensive ever undertaken by the navy. A blockade of the Southern states was successfully enforced, many important naval expeditions were projected and executed, numerous rivers of the South and West were actively patrolled, and the commerce destroyers of the enemy were tracked over distant seas. At the beginning of the war the blockading of the extensive coast of the Confederacy was deemed impossible by many men, both at home and abroad. To their surprise, this difficult undertaking was soon accomplished. The length of the coast blockaded, measured from Alexandria, Virginia, to the Rio Grande, was 3549 miles. 189 openings to rivers, or indentations of the coast were guarded. On the Mississippi and its tributaries the gunboats traversed and patrolled 3615 miles; and on the sounds, bayous, rivers, and inlets of the Atlantic and Gulf coasts, about 2,000 miles.[31]

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[29] J. O. Paullin, "President Lincoln and the Navy," American Historical Review, XIV (1909), 284.

[30] Ibid.

[31] Ibid., 285.

Next in importance to the blockade were the naval operations against the batteries, forts, and fortified towns and cities on the sea coast and rivers of the Confederacy. As examples of this class of operations, it is sufficient to mention the memorable achievements of Farragut at New Orleans, Vicksburg and Mobile, of Porter at Fort Fisher, and of Du-Pont and Dahlgren at Charleston.

Professor John W. Churchill, eminent naval historian and analyst, summed up Fox's contribution to the Union during the Civil War: "By his fertility of resource and quiet but persistent energy, he introduced the monitor into the naval service, brought order out of chaos in the Navy Department and created out of almost nothing, an efficient navy."[32]

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[32]Fuess, "Gustavus Vasa Fox," Phillips Bulletin, XXI, 16.

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