

The Potomac Flotilla During the Civil War

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Prologue

Nine days after the firing on Fort Sumter, the beginning of the Civil War, Navy gunboats began patrolling the Potomac River, feeling out Confederate gun emplacements along the river. On 27 April 1861, Secretary of the Navy, Gideon Wells, authorized the formation of a Potomac Flotilla. The first vessels were assigned to the fleet in early May 1861. The main purpose of the Potomac Flotilla was to serve as a blockade against southern agents attempting to smuggle contraband goods from the north into the south. In a few instances, the gunboats were used to reduce Confederate artillery positions along the rivers and to support Union land operations adjacent to the rivers. However, these latter actions were much less frequent and intense as were those in the western rivers. Because some of the operations required moving along the shore of the Chesapeake Bay, many of the vessels of the Potomac Flotilla were much larger than those used in the western rivers. Further, many were rigged with sails in addition to being stream powered.

In this account, I describe only the more extensive actions involving Union gunboats. Most of the activities involved one or two vessels conducting routine patrolling, stopping suspicious vessels, capturing and destroying those carrying or suspected to have been carrying contraband goods. When first using the name of a gunboat commander or crewman in a given expedition, I give the exact title/rank. Because some of the ranks are rather long (e.g., "Acting Volunteer Lieutenant"), for all non-flag ranks, I simply use the last name in subsequent references within that account. For Admirals and Generals, I give the full rank with first usage in each account, but only Admiral/General for subsequent usages. Whenever known, I give the captain of each vessel cited in the text. In many cases the captain's name is not given, nor can be accurately determined from the reports or other sources. Further, for some captains and other mentioned crew members only the last name is available.

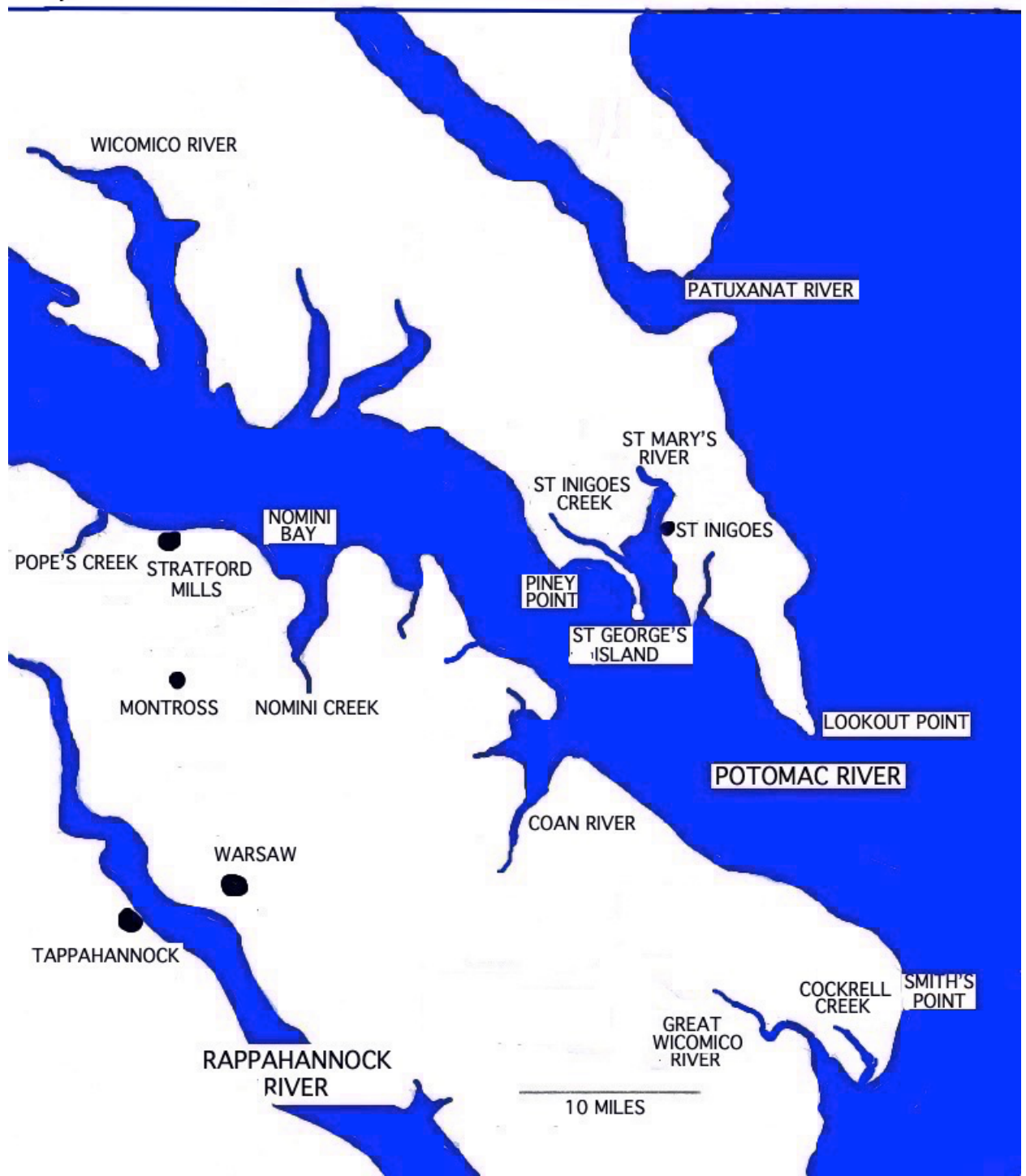
When referring to gunboats and transports, except in rare cases, I do not use the article "the" preceding the name. Urbanna, the town, and Urbanna Creek are mentioned several times in the accounts. In the original reports, from which the text is derived, only one "n" is used, e.g., "Urbana." In the text and maps, I have retained the spelling used in the reports of the time. Slaves who escaped to Union lines, were referred to as "contrabands" during the Civil War. When not referring to goods, this is the definition of "contrabands" in the text.

In developing the descriptions of actions of the Potomac Flotilla, I relied upon, as the primary source for my data, records in the *Official Reports of the Union and Confederate Navies in the War of the Rebellion* (Government Printing Office, Series 1: Vol. 4. (1896); Vol. 5. (1897). Additional information was obtained from a few internet sources.

Maps

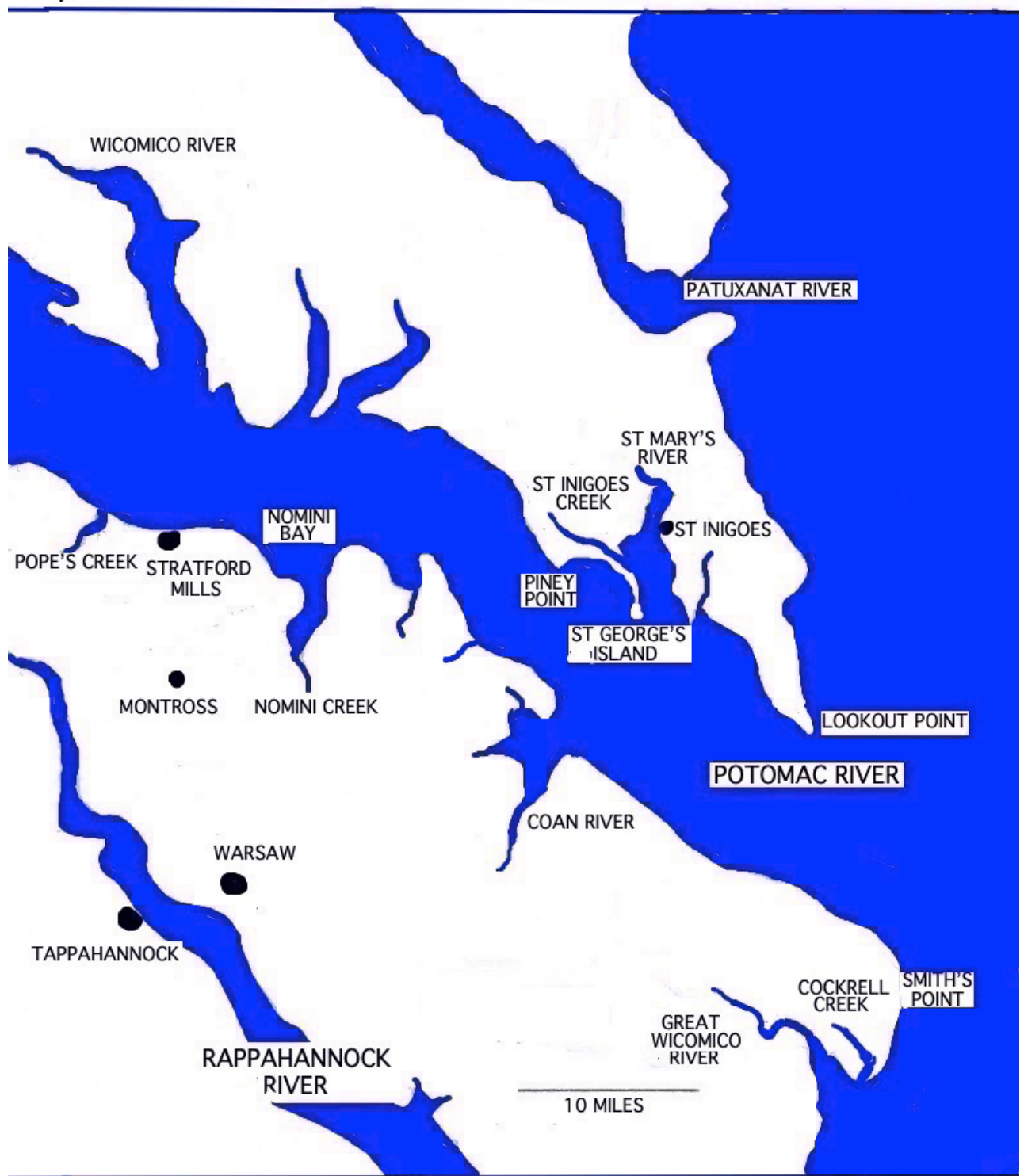
The following seven maps show the location of most of the sites mentioned in the accounts dealing with Potomac Flotilla during the Civil War. Several of the sites are not identified on current maps. For a few, I have been able to estimate their approximate locations using distances

from known sites given in the original reports, , or by place names (marinas, tidal stations, light houses, and street names, among others) on present day maps.

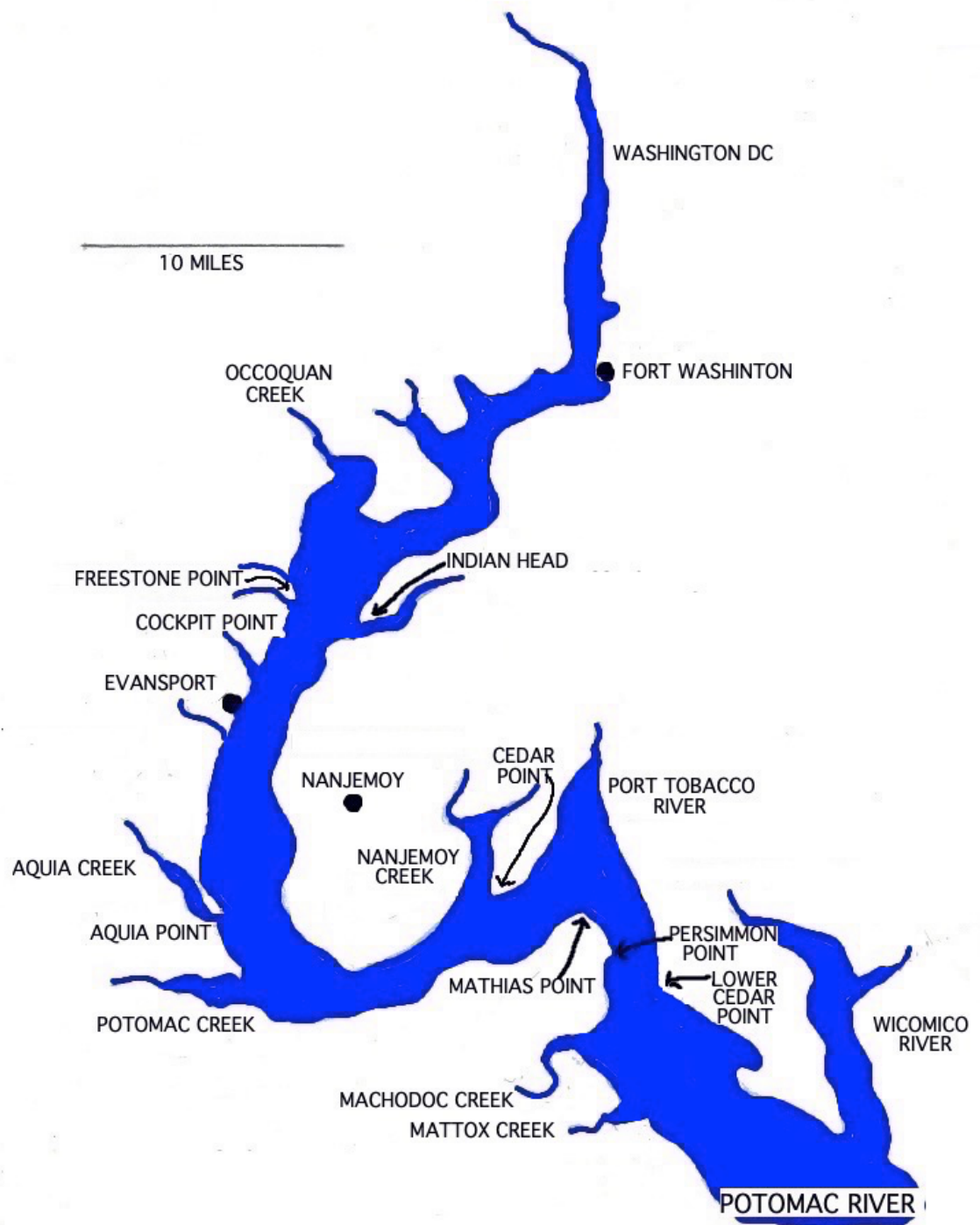




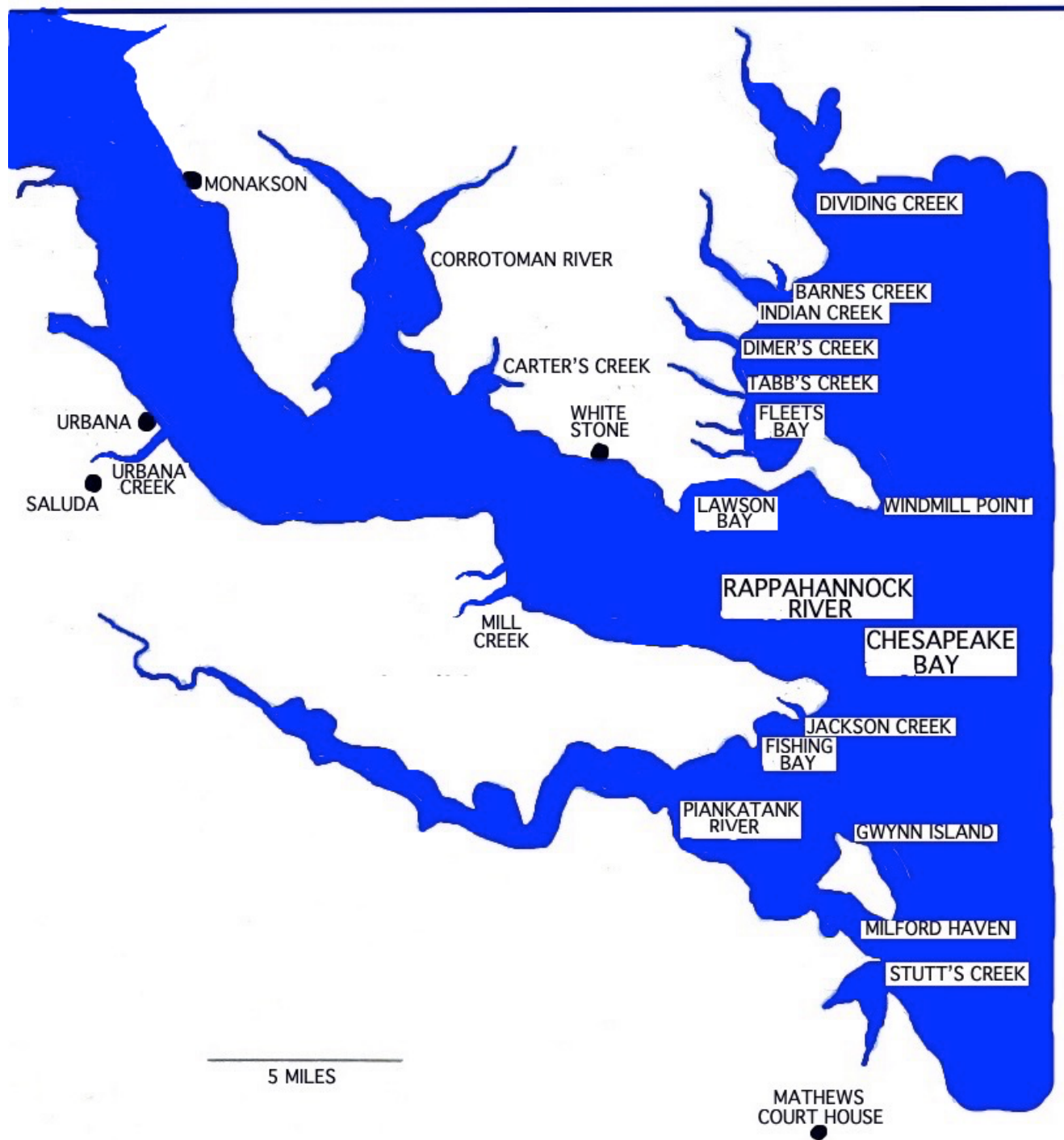
Map 1. Chesapeake Bay and Northern Neck. The latter is the land between the Potomac and Rappahannock Rivers, most of which was held by the Confederates throughout the Civil War. The Union controlled the Potomac River and the up-stream northern shore of the Rappahannock River for most of the war.



Map 2. Lower Potomac River.



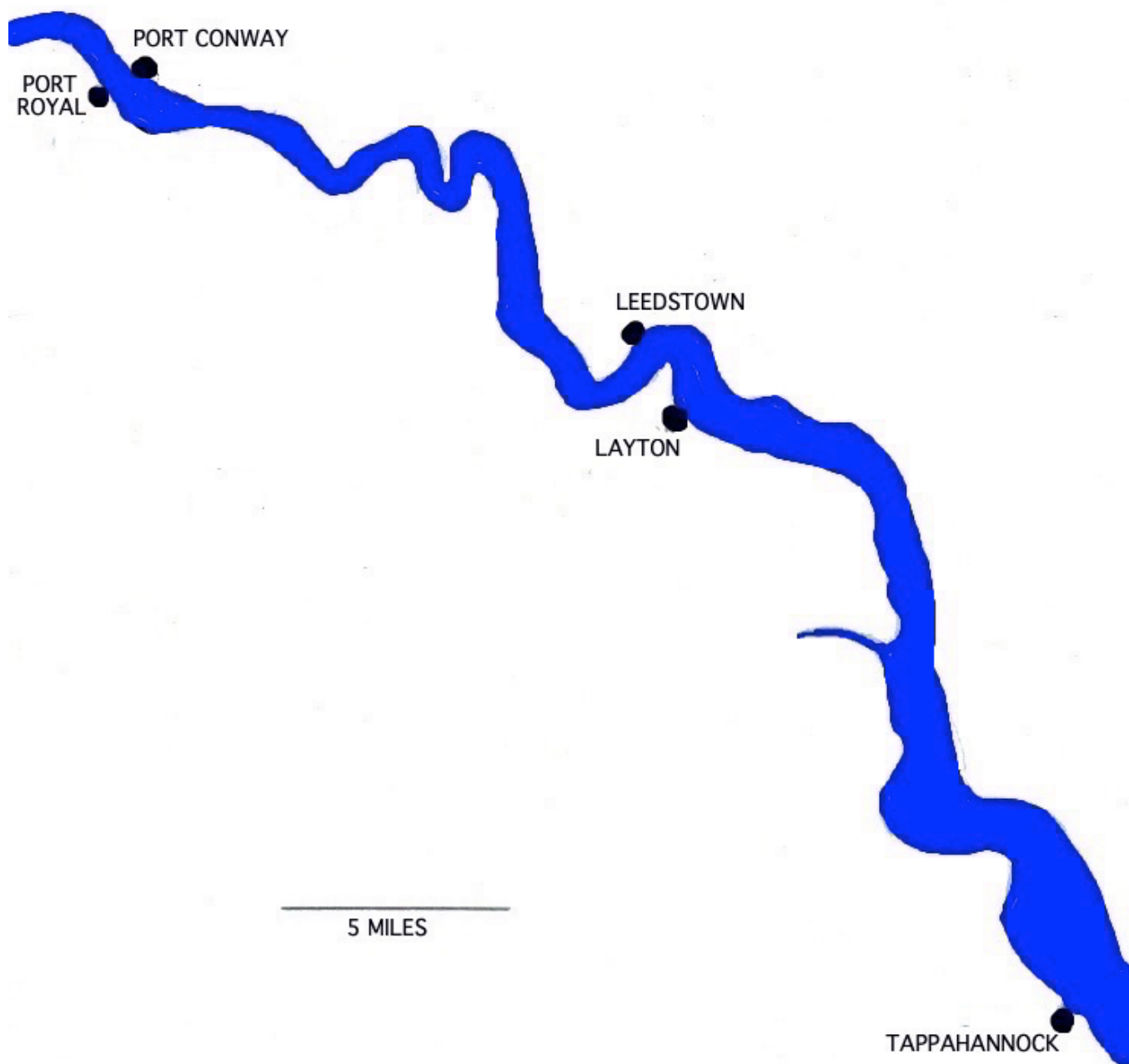
Map 3. Upper Potomac River



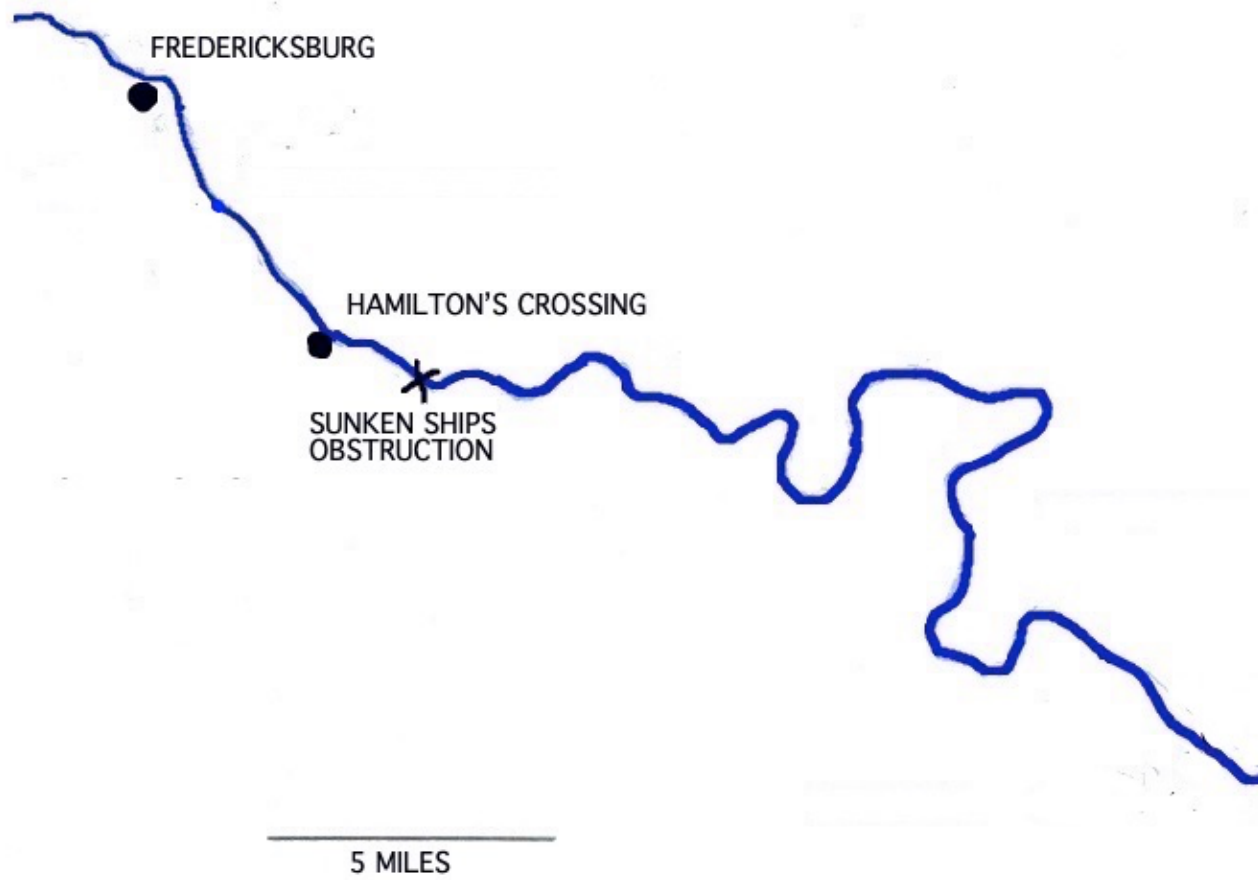
Map 4. Lower Rappahannock River.



Map 5. Upper lower Rappahannock River.



Map 6. Lower upper Rappahannock River.



Map 7. Upper Rappahannock River.

1861

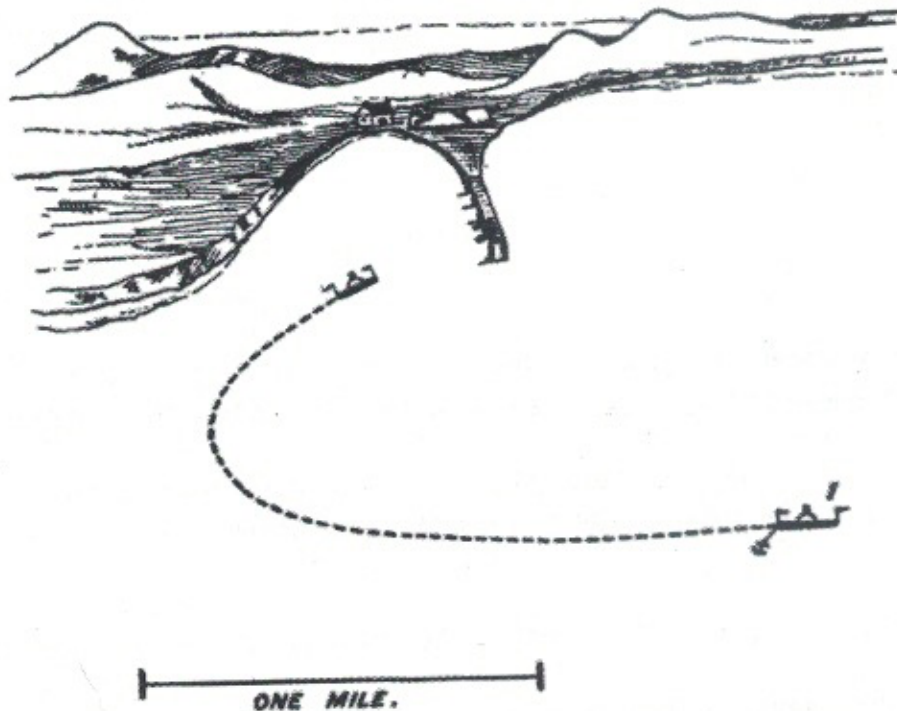
First Reconnaissance Mission, 21 April

The first extensive reconnaissance mission (before establishment of the Potomac Flotilla) conducted by Union gunboats was led by *Mount Vernon* (Lieutenant John Glendy Sproston). She left the Navy Yard, near Washington, D. C., at 11:30 PM, 20 April, tying up at the wharf at Fort Washington at 1:30 AM. From there she departed at 6:30 AM, the 21st, and steamed down the Potomac River. At 9:00 AM, *Mount Vernon* fell in with the gunboats *Pawnee* (Commander Stephen C. Rowan), *Keystone State* (Lieutenant Stephen D. Le Roy) and *Anacostia* (Lieutenant Thomas S. Fillebrown). After boarding *Anacostia* to confer with Fillebrown, Sproston returned to *Mount Vernon* and continued on downriver, where he came to anchor near the Cedar Point light ship.

Soon afterwards, smoke was seen in the direction of the light ship. A few minutes later, a boat carrying 20 men left the light ship, and the ship was observed to be on fire. Sproston ordered the firing of ten musket rounds in an attempt to bring the small boat around, but it continued on. He then fired a shell across its bow. The boat proceeded on and landed on the Virginia shore. *Mount Vernon* moved down to the light-boat, lowered a launch and went alongside. She was a “perfect wreck.” The launch returned to *Mount Vernon*, which steamed back up to Fort Washington.

The commander of Fort Washington, fearing an attack during the night, asked Sproston to anchor *Mount Vernon* off the fort for the remainder of the night. At 5:00 AM the next morning, as *Mount Vernon* was readying to get underway, *Anacostia* came into sight. Sproston went aboard her and was ordered to take *Mount Vernon* back downriver to look for enemy batteries. *Mount Vernon* proceeded on past the wreck of the Cedar Point light ship. Having seen no evidence of Confederate batteries, Sproston turned *Mount Vernon* about and steamed back to Fort Washington, making fast to the wharf at 5:30 PM.

Reconnaissance of Aquia Point Battery, 14 May

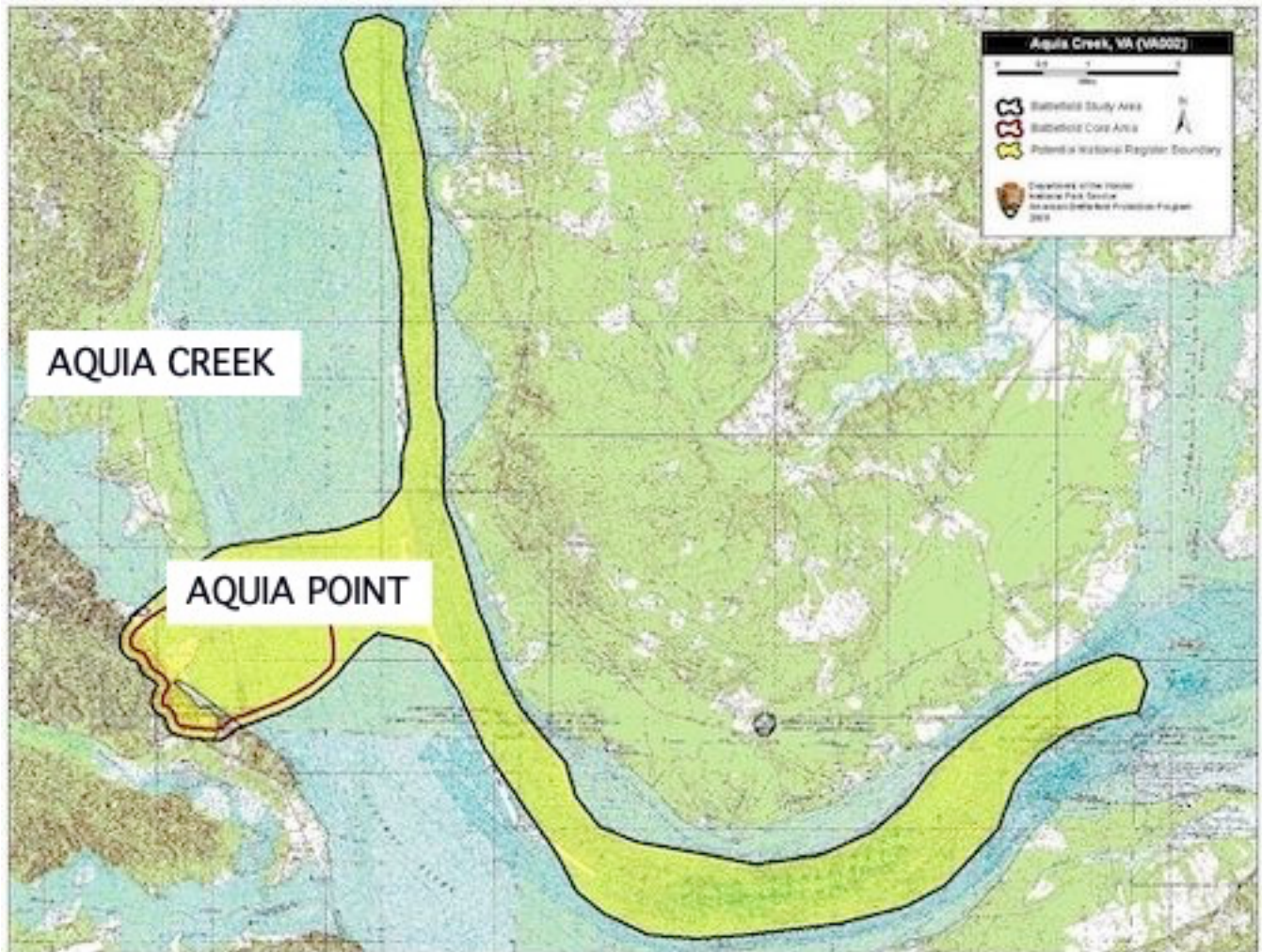


Aquia Point, Potomac River. Movement of *Mount Vernon* up close to the Confederate battery located there and then back out into the river.

Mount Vernon (Lieutenant John Glendy Sproston) was at anchor at her assigned station off Aquia Point the night of 13-14 May. At daylight Sproston raised anchor and moved to within a third of a mile from the shore, keeping his long gun trained on the battery. He observed a semi-circular earthen battery with four embrasures, one of which contained a 32-pounder. It was pointed at *Mount Vernon*, with an officer holding the lock string. In a second embrasure, the men were preparing to mount a gun. A field piece was in the third, pointed toward the opposite side of the wharf. From the number of men present, Sproston presumed there to be at least two field pieces in the fourth embrasure, located at the end of the wharf. As *Mount Vernon* remained near the battery, these men retreated to the main fortification and began cutting down trees in front of it and digging out the interior of the battery.

After about 15 minutes, *Mount Vernon* moved back out to her original position where she met up with *Pocahontas* (Commander John P. Gillis) coming downriver. Sproston's pilot (Captain Walter) told him that Henry Hainey, who ran a sloop in the river, came up from Aquia Point the 13th, reporting having seen there a battery of four 32-pounders and two field pieces.

Aquia Creek, Potomac River, 29 May-1 June



Aquia Creek and Point, Potomac River.

On 8 May, the Confederates began fortifying the northern terminus of the Fredericksburg and Potomac Railroad at Aquia Landing at the mouth of Aquia Creek. The first battery (“sand battery”) was located on the banks of the river, to protect the railroad facility. The second was placed on the heights overlooking the landing and the Potomac River. The latter fortification also was a threat to Union usage of the Potomac. The Union gunboat, *Mount Vernon*, first detected the fortifications on 14 May, but did not fire on them.

On 29 May, *Thomas Freeborn* (Commander James H. Ward, Commander of the Potomac Flotilla), *Anacostia* (Lieutenant Napoleon Collins) and *Resolute* (Acting Master William Budd) moved into position and for an attack on the Confederate batteries protecting the Confederate railroad terminus at Aquia Creek. The three gunboats fired on the enemy batteries for an hour. Although the batteries returned fire, neither side’s fire was accurate.

On 31 May, the three gunboats returned and fired a heavy cannonade into the Confederate batteries. The vessels kept firing for two hours, all the while being subjected to rapid return fire. The gunboats expended all their ammunition suitable for distance firing in silencing the sand batteries at the railroad terminus. Immediately thereafter, shells fired from batteries on the heights began falling around and on the Union gunboats. Unfortunately, these guns were beyond the reach of the Union cannon. After an hour of being subjected to the Confederate fire, the gunboats withdrew out of range of the enemy fire. In spite of the heavy Confederate shelling, only one crewman, on *Thomas Freeman*, was wounded.

On the evening of 31 May, *Pawnee* (Commander Stephen C. Rowan) moved downriver to join in on the attack at Aquia Creek. As she passed *Reliance* (Lieutenant Jared P. K. Mygatt), now on station at Aquia Creek, and *Anacostia* at 3:00 AM the 1st, Mygatt told Rowan that Ward had moved *Thomas Freeman* ten miles downriver. Rowan continued on, reaching Ward at 6:00 AM. *Thomas Freeman* and *Pawnee* left at 9:00 AM for Aquia Creek to renew the attack. At 11:30 AM the two vessels moved into position, *Anacostia* and *Reliance* remaining out of range of the batteries and in position to tow *Thomas Freeman* and *Pawnee* away, should they become disabled. As they approached the batteries, *Thomas Freeborn*, with a lighter draft, moved to the inside and *Pawnee* remained just outside on the starboard quarter to avoid grounding. Return fire, from the Confederates revealed the batteries on the heights had been moved to the railroad terminus, replacing those destroyed the 31st.

As *Freeman* and *Pawnee* began firing on the railroad terminus, the Confederates set fire to the buildings on the end of the railroad wharf and commenced firing on the Union vessels. The gunboats returned the fire. When Rowan saw that he could not elevate his guns sufficiently to hit the target, he moved *Pawnee* ahead of *Thomas Freeman* and as close to the shore as possible and began firing. He held that position, continuing to fire until the current pulled *Pawnee* out of range. Rowan rounded her to and moved back, even closer to the target, and opened a "terrible fire" from the 9-inch guns. The batteries were silenced twice, but soon resumed firing each time. Houses near the fortifications and the southern end of the bridge across Aquia Creek were set afire, eventually destroying most of the bridge. By 4:30 PM, the gunboat crewmen were fatigued from the heavy work and high temperatures. Furthermore, only two or three shells, from a single gun, were fired at the gunboats the last hour of the engagement and enemy gunners were observed abandoning the position. Ward ordered cease fire.

Thomas Freeborn took a number of hits, causing the vessel to leak badly, other shots damaged the port wheel and gouged the wrought-iron shaft of the port wheel. Fortunately, there was no injury among the crewman. *Pawnee* was struck nine times during the engagement, four shots into the hull, one of them passing through the bulwarks, tearing up the deck and glancing on board when hitting one of the iron straps. Of the shots that hit above the hull, one passed through main topsail yard, another shattered the mizzenmast head and topmast, while another passed through the smokestack. The only injury was to, Rowan, who received a facial scratch from a small splinter.

Thomas Freeborn, moved up to Washington to repair the damage and resupply her ammunition. *Pawnee* remained downriver, taking *Thomas Freeborn*'s place in the blockade.

Mathias Point, 24-27 June

In passing Mathias Point the third week of June, vessels of the Potomac Flotilla had taken musket fire, from a distance of 500-600 yards. The owner of the site, a Dr. E. B. Hooe, was known

to be active in anti-Union endeavors. The doctor received contraband supplies from a southern sympathizer on the Maryland shore and then sent them on south. Hooe's house and out-buildings quartered men assisting in his operation. It was decided that this position must be destroyed to ensure safe passage down the Potomac to the Chesapeake Bay. On the 23rd of June, Commander James H. Ward, Commander of the Potomac Flotilla (*Thomas Freeborn*) requested the aid of 200 Union troops to clear the under-brush in front of the point to allow for better vision in attacking Mathias Point. On the 24th, Acting Master William Budd (*Resolute*) shelled the position to disperse the troops stationed there and put ashore a landing party that burned the premises, including the house and buildings that quartered the troops.

The next day, *Pawnee* (Commander Stephen C. Rowan), accompanied by the steamer, *James Guy*, was dispatched from Aquia Creek on a reconnaissance mission to ascertain whether the Confederates were positioning artillery batteries at Mathias Point. Arriving at there at 5:00 AM, the 25th, the gunboat took musket fire from one or two companies of enemy troops. A few rounds from *Pawnee* routed the soldiers. Rowan then sent ashore a party of 40 sailors and marines, under command of Captain Woodbury, to reconnoiter the site. Rowan had *Pawnee* fire approximately 30 rounds in support of the landing party. The party returned to *Pawnee* having determined there were 600 Confederate troops in and around Mathias Point. *Pawnee* then returned to Aquia Point. There was no indication of gun emplacements being employed. The Confederates had determined Mathias Point was unsuitable for siting batteries to disrupt Union navigation on the Potomac. A more suitable place had been found in the vicinity of Evansport.

About sundown, the 26th, while at anchor off Aquia Creek, Rowan received an order from Ward, requesting he send two launches, under command of Lieutenant James C. Chaplin, down to Nanjemoy Creek. There, the launches were to be left alongside the schooner, *Dana*. Ward and *Thomas Freeborn* would come up and move the launches up to Mathias Point to assist in clearing the vegetation on Mathias Point. Rowan placed 23 men aboard the two cutters, which were provisioned with axes and hatchets to clear the trees and shrubs, as well as tar and turpentine needed to burn the cut vegetation. Once outfitted, Rowan took charge of the launches, placed them in tow by *Reliance* (Acting Master Thomas J. Linnekin), and left for Nanjemoy Creek at 9:00 PM. Not finding *Thomas Freeborn* there, they stopped for the night. The boats proceeded on the next morning, encountering *Thomas Freeborn* about five miles below Mathias Point. The two vessels, with the small boats in tow, moved up and to begin the attack on Mathias Point.

Once there, the gunboats fired shot, shell and grape into the woods. At about 10:00 AM, Chaplin's landing party went ashore, accompanied by Ward and Rowan. The men moved out in a line of skirmishers. When they had moved about 300 yards inland, the landing party ran into Confederate pickets, who fired and retreated. The Union men followed, keeping up the fire. As the landing party approached the brow of a small ridge, a force of four or five hundred enemy troops was observed coming up toward them. Ward ordered the men back to their boats and to lie off while he returned to *Thomas Freeman* and directed more fire into the bush.

After firing for 15 minutes, Ward and the landing party went ashore again to throw up a breastwork of sandbags. At 5:00 PM, when the work was completed and was being covered with shrubs, the men were attacked with musket fire. The landing party retreated back to their boats, Rowan remaining on the beach until all were safely aboard the launches. By this time, the launches had drifted out into the river. Rather than have a boat come back to shore, Rowan swam out to one of the boats and moved to *Thomas Freeborn*. Rowan's boat was riddled by Confederate musket fire, the flag staff shot away and 19 holes in the flag. The landing party returned safely, except for two wounded, both *Pawnee* crewmen. Ward returned to *Thomas Freeborn*, and while

sighting her forward gun on the enemy troops firing from the shore, was struck in the abdomen by a rifle bullet. He died from internal hemorrhaging about an hour later. Ward's body was transported back to the Navy Yard aboard *Pawnee*, arriving there at 9:30 AM, the 28th.

Reconnaissance to Mathias Point, 15 August

Captain Thomas T. Craven, Commander of the Potomac Fleet, at 11:00 AM 15 August, dispatched Acting Master William Budd of *Resolute*, accompanied by *Reliance* (Acting Master Thomas J. Linnekin) down to Mathias Point to determine enemy activity at or about the point. Seeing no indication of presence of Confederate forces, Budd went on downriver to capture a schooner that was aground on the Virginia shore at Lower Cedar Point. A short distance above Persimmon Point, he dispatched a boat from *Resolute*, with an officer and five seamen to capture the schooner. Just as the men boarded the schooner, they were fired on by a volley of musketry from about 30 men in the bushes only 5-6 yards distant. Three of the boat's party were killed instantly and another wounded.

Resolute immediately opened fire into the bushes from which the musket fire was coming. After four or five rounds, the enemy troops dispersed. While the firing was taking place, the three surviving crewmen succeeded in getting the schooner afloat. At that time, *Reliance* came up and fired into the dispersing Confederates. Linnekin also sent a launch to assist moving the captured vessel away from the site. *Resolute's* launch was riddled with musket shot. After all this action, it was discovered the schooner had two large cracks in her hull and could not be moved upstream. She was abandoned. Budd returned to Aquia Creek at 3:00 PM, at which time Craven ordered him to proceed to the Navy Yard with the dead and wounded.

Potomac Creek, 23 August

On 23 August, Lieutenant Edward P. McCrea in *Jacob Bell*, accompanied by *Resolute* (Acting Master William Budd) and *Reliance* (Acting Lieutenant Jared P. K. Mygatt) approached Potomac Creek to check out the strength of a Confederate encampment presumed to be located there. *Jacob Bell* and *Resolute* stood off the creek, but the latter vessel drew too much water. *Jacob Bell* moved close in, firing two shells over the tents of the encampment. A battery on the beach to the left of the position returned the fire. *Jacob Bell* commenced firing at the battery, which ceased firing. Two batteries of rifled cannon at the point of the creek, one with four heavy guns, the other with two long-range rifled cannons, began firing rapidly on the Union vessel. Shells fell all around and over *Jacob Bell*, but none hit her. Seeing that the Confederate batteries were beyond the range of the Union boat, McCrae, moved *Jacob Bell* out of the range of the enemy guns. *Jacob Bell* and *Resolute* left for Aquia Point at 6:00 PM, arriving there at 6:30 PM.

While *Jacob Bell* was engaged, *Ice Boat* (aka, *Release*; there also was another boat named *Release* in the Atlantic blockade fleet) with Lieutenant Thomas Pattison in command, moved into position to fire upon the batteries. Just as *Ice Boat* got underway, Mygatt of *Reliance* came aboard. Given Mygatt was more familiar with the river, Pattison asked him to take charge of the boat as they moved in close. At 4:45 PM, *Ice Boat* opened fire on the batteries with her heavy rifled gun and soon afterwards, the 9-inch Dahlgren. At 5:30 PM, the battery on the south side of the creek ceased firing. Pattison then concentrated his fire on the battery on the north side of the creek, which had been firing at him "with vigor." Two enemy shells passed over the hurricane deck and

six or eight burst under the bow. None of the crew was hit. At 6:00 PM, Pattison withdrew and *Ice Boat* moved back to Aquia Creek.

Engagement at Freestone Point, 25 September

While on a reconnaissance mission along the Potomac on 24 September, Lieutenant Edward P. McCrea (*Jacob Bell*) observed enemy works in progress at Freestone Point, suggestive of laying out positions for placement of artillery batteries. Dense underbrush prevented him from seeing any more. The next day, *Jacob Bell*, accompanied by *Seminole* (Lieutenant Charles S. Norton), *Penguin* (Acting Lieutenant Thomas A. Budd), *Thomas Freeborn* (Lieutenant A. D. Harrell), *Satellite* (Acting Master Joseph Spinney), *Murray* (Midshipman John F. McGlensey) and *Valley City* (Lieutenant James C. Chaplin) departed Indian Head at 9:30 AM for Freestone Point, where the Confederates were working on the battery. Upon arriving there, *Jacob Bell* fired six rounds, dispersing the work crew. Receiving no counter fire, McCrae stood back into the river. Just as he did so, *Jacob Bell* was fired upon from the point. *Seminole* then opened fire, eliciting return fire from Freestone Point, disclosing a battery already in place there. *Seminole* and the Confederate battery exchange fire for 30 minutes, at which time, McCrae ordered Norton to cease fire and return to Indian Head. As she was moving across the river, *Seminole* was shot at by the battery and returned fire. The battery then opened up on *Valley City*. The battery continued firing at all vessels and steamers passing up and down the river until 3:00 PM, but no one was injured.

As *Seminole* passed *Valley City*, Norton was informed that a shot from the battery had gone through the bow of *Valley City* and she did not have enough steam to get out of way of the gun fire. *Seminole* took her under tow and proceeded toward Indian Head. McCrae estimated presence of four guns at the emplacement, including at least one rifled long-range gun.

Engagement at Stratford Mills, 10 October

When passing Stratford Mills on 7 October, *Dana* (Acting Master's Mate William T. Street) was fired upon. *Dana* fired one shot in return, but the gun jammed on the second shot. As dark was coming on, *Dana*, withdrew. On the 10th, Street moved again to Stratford Mills, intending to retaliate, if again fired upon. As *Dana* approached, horns were sounded ashore and men were observed on the beach and bluffs overlooking the river. Those on the shore took cover behind wood piles and fired on *Dana*. Street fired five shrapnel shells at them, all the dry ammunition he had. He was unable to observe the effects. The guns on the bluffs began a constant fire so long as *Dana* remained off-shore, but did not hit the vessel. Shortly afterwards, *Island Belle* (Acting Master's Mate Arnold G. Harris) came downriver, steamed within half a mile of the batteries and fired a rifled shell at the mills, causing some 30 men to scurry behind the wood pile where they commenced firing at *Island Belle*. She was not hit, the shells going over her or dropping short. Harris fired into the wood pile, the first shell too high, the second too low, the third hitting the wood pile, scattering the wood and wounding several of the Confederate gunners. He kept up the fire until all the enemy troops had disappeared. Harris then backed *Island Belle* out into the river and returned upstream.

Dana sailed downriver. As she passed the mouth of Nomini Bay, a man appeared on the hill waving a signal. Street moved *Dana* in close to shore and the man yelled he wanted to come aboard. Street told him to go down to a sandy beach 300 yards below where he could be taken aboard. When *Dana* was as close to the beach as possible, about 15-20 men began firing muskets

at the ship. Having no more dry ammunition, Street had the crewmen lie down on the deck as he steered *Dana* back into the river and out of range of the muskets. None of the crew was hit.

Passage of Confederate Batteries on the Potomac River, 15 October

Pocahontas (Commander Percival Drayton), and *Seminole* (Commander John P. Gillis) were slowly moving down the Potomac the 15th of October, *Pocahontas* in the lead. The gunboats passed Occoquan Creek at 9:40 AM, where *Yankee*, Captain Thomas T. Craven's (Commander of the Potomac Flotilla) flag ship, was having her engine worked on. As *Pocahontas* was passing Evansport and Shipping Point, at 10:30 AM, she fired eight to ten shells into the town. Not seeing any return fire, *Pocahontas* ceased firing. At about 10:45 AM, *Seminole* came abreast of Evansport and began receiving fire from three Confederate batteries of at least ten heavy guns, two or three of which were rifled. Two of the batteries were on the river bank, the other 400 yards inland. The firing from the shore continued for twenty minutes, 30-35 rounds in all, so long as *Seminole* was in range of the Confederate batteries. *Seminole* was hit several times; a shot crippled the mizzenmast about 15 feet below the crosstrees and cut away the starboard after mizzen shroud; one carried away mainstays near the masthead; one passed through the rail near the pivot gun; one amidships passed through both hammock nettings and rail; the waist boat was shot through; a rifled shot struck obliquely and "glanced off quarter seizing of after swifter"; the starboard fore rigging was shot away. *Seminole* fired 20 rounds in return.

Pawnee (Lieutenant Robert H. Wyman) also passed the batteries later in the day. Wyman had decided not to return any fire unless his vessel was incurring destructive enemy fire. He had the crew ready the guns for firing and then move to the opposite side of the deck. As *Pawnee* passed the battery, she was hit six times: through the nettings, starboard and port, in wake of No. 2 gun, cutting the hammock in two; a shot glancing off the starboard bow; amidships, two feet above the water line; through the dingy and into inside, lodging just above air port of first Lieutenant's room, starting it; knocked off the boat's rudder abaft starboard gangway; cutting away fore vang. Had the crewmen been manning their guns, the crew of No. 2 would have been killed. For some reason or other Wyman did not order *Pawnee* to return the fire. *Couer de Lion* and *Harriet Lane* (Captain Thomas T. Craven) both passed the batteries during the night. Although both were fired upon, neither vessel was hit as they steamed by.

The Confederate position was not damaged during the engagement. The battery appeared to consist of five or six guns, two 32-pounders, one heavy (maybe 6-inch) gun and two or three small rifles, positioned in two batteries. Craven reported to the Secretary of the Navy, that the battery at Evansport and Shipping Point could not be destroyed by gunboats. He further reported that so long as the battery was in place, navigation of the Potomac would be "effectively closed."

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Cockpit Point, 3 January and 9 March



Confederate batteries at Evansport, Shipping Point, Cockpit Point, and Freestone Point.

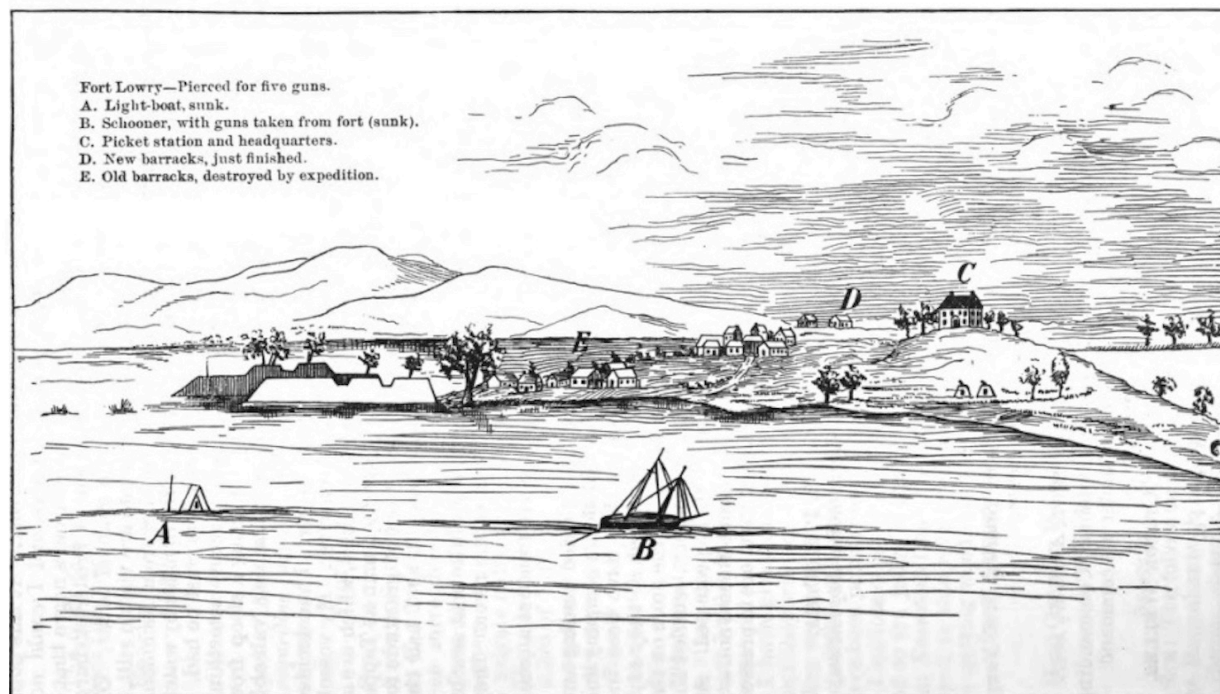
Lieutenant R. H. Wyman, Commander of the Potomac Fleet, on 3 January, ordered *Anacostia* (Lieutenant Oscar C. Badger) and *Yankee* (Lieutenant Thomas H. Eastman) to enfilade the Confederate battery at Cockpit Point in order to determine the extent of the works there. Upon arrival at their designation, both vessels moved inside Cockpit Point and began firing into the enemy emplacement. Shells fell directly into the battery, those of *Anacostia* were especially well-placed. The guns on the extreme point of the battery were immediately silenced. The battery only responded with two rifled guns, an 80-pounder and a 12-pounder. Four shots were fired at the Union vessels as they passed inside the battery. An 80-pounder shell went through the port bow of

Yankee, lodging in a berth on the starboard side of the forecastle. It caused no serious damage, only slightly wounding one crewman. As the battery was firing its fourth shot, a 9-inch shell from *Anacostia* and a 6-inch shell from *Yankee* exploded under the Confederate gun, almost simultaneously with the flash of the gun. The battery was dismantled and the crew fled. After firing a few more rounds, *Anacostia* and *Yankee* stood off, out of range of the enemy guns.

Observations of activities in the battery made by Badger and Eastman before they retired, indicated there to be four or five guns in the current battery. The heavy gun had been remounted and moved to the northern face as protection from another flanking movement. A breastwork was thrown up, which protected Cockpit Point from the north flank.

Yankee and *Anacostia* returned to Cockpit Point on the 9th of March to check the validity of a report that the Confederates had abandoned the battery there. Upon firing into the emplacement and not receiving return fire, a small landing party was sent ashore. It found the site abandoned, raised the Union flag over the works and spiked the guns that had been left behind. Immediately after realizing the Union knew of the evacuation of the Cockpit Point, the Confederates set fire to everything at the Evansport batteries. They apparently lacked means of removing the weapons, magazines and camp fixtures. Some of the magazines did not explode and were salvaged by a landing party. The Confederates had ceased defensive operations on the Potomac River.

Reconnaissance Expedition Up the Rappahannock River, 13-15 April



Fort Lowry

Secretary of the Navy Gideon Wells ordered a reconnaissance mission up the Rappahannock River on 13 April to unmask Confederate positions along the river and determine enemy troop strengths near the river. Lieutenant Edward P. McCrae (*Jacob Bell*) was placed in command of the expedition. The following vessels were assigned to McCrae: *Satellite*, *Island Bell*, *Resolute*, *Reliance*, and *Piedmontese*. As the vessels paused at St. Georges Island, on the Potomac River, on their way to the Rappahannock, McCrae was told by two men that when they left Fredericksburg two weeks prior, there were 30,000 troops in the vicinity of the city.

The flotilla entered the Rappahannock at 8:30 PM the 13th, moving as far upriver as Carter's Creek, before anchoring for the night, at 11:20 PM. Not having a river pilot, McCrae sent a party ashore in attempt to find one. When the party returned empty-handed, Acting Master Street on the *Jacob Bell*, who had some knowledge of the river, volunteered to guide the boats. The next day the flotilla moved upriver, stopping for the night when the boats arrived at Urbana at midnight. When a shore party tried to go ashore the next morning, the 14th, the launch was riddled by musketry from the shore, and had to return to the gunboats. The Union boats fired into the rifle pits. Because women and children were observed running about, the gunboats did not fire into the town. The boats then continued on upriver.

At noon, they came upon Ft. Lowry, the only fort along the river. Receiving no fire from the fort, McCrae sent ashore a landing party in three launches. The men destroyed at least eight heavy rifled guns and burned the newly constructed barracks, sufficient to quarter 8,000 troops. After the landing party was back aboard, the flotilla continued on up to Tappahannock, stopping there for the night. Conversations with local citizens revealed that it was too dangerous to proceed on up to Fredericksburg without the services of a river pilot. The next morning, McCrae turned the flotilla and began the trip back downriver. On the way down, two schooners were captured as they were coming out of Totouskey Creek. The vessels arrived back at the mouth of the Rappahannock that evening.

Reconnaissance Up the Rappahannock River, 20 April

Secretary of the Navy, Gideon Welles dispatched Lieutenant Robert H. Wyman, Commander of the Potomac Flotilla, to make another reconnaissance up the Rappahannock as far as Fredericksburg. There is no record as to the gunboats on this mission. He mentions presence of "*two of the lightest steamers*" (see below) suggesting several boats. He arrived at Fredericksburg at 10:00 AM the 20th of April, meeting no opposition from the shore, except for a few shots by pickets, as he went up the river. There were two breastworks for guns along the river, one at Ft. Lowry, the other seven miles below Fredericksburg. There was no obstruction within the river up to within seven miles of the city. At that point several schooners loaded with stones were sunk in the channel. Wyman proceeded on to Fredericksburg with two of the lightest draft steamers. There, he found Union ground forces had captured the city. Soundings taken as he moved the boats past the obstructions identified a channel through which most vessels could pass at high water.

During the excursion up the river, the flotilla captured nine Confederate vessels: steamers, *Eureka* and *Roundout*; schooners, *Monterey*, *Lookout*, *Sarah Ann*, *Sydney Jones*, *Falcon*, and *Sea Flower*; Sloop, *Reindeer*. In addition, the Confederates burned the schooners, *Virginia* and *St. Nicholas*, as well as about 40 private schooners to prevent their being captured.

Expedition to Piankatank River, 29 April

At the request of (newly promoted) Commodore Robert H. Wyman, Commander of the Potomac Flotilla, Lieutenant Samuel MaGaw (*Thomas Freeborn*), accompanied by *Island Bell* and the recently captured, *Eureka* (Acting Master Harris), patrolled the Piankatank River on 29 April. MaGaw left *Thomas Freeman* at anchor at the mouth of the river, with Master's Mate J. J. Brice in command. MaGaw boarded *Island Bell* and, with *Eureka*, moved on up the Piankatank, where he found three scuttled schooners. On the way down, *Eureka* and *Island Bell* were attacked by a battery of light artillery, but without doing any damage to the boats. *Island Bell* received two rifled shells and some musket balls, but incurred no serious damage or injury to the crew. *Eureka* was hit by three rifled shells: one through the pilot house; one through her smoke stack; one on the after deck, cutting away her steering gear. No one was wounded and she was repaired within 15 minutes.

When the two vessels arrived at Fishing Bay, they found *Thomas Freeborn* had been under fire, from a masked battery on an elevated position 500-600 yards from the river. She had returned the fire, silencing the enemy guns. The pilot and one seaman were slightly wounded.

Capture and Release of the Schooner *Mail*, 1 August

On 1 August, Lt Commander Samuel Magaw sent the Executive Officer, Acting Master James L. Plunkett, of the *Thomas Freeborn*, with an armed crew in a launch from that vessel up the Coan River in search of a schooner appearing to be violating the blockade of the river. Six miles up the river Plunkett observed the schooner being unloaded by a number of men, and the cargo placed on wagons. The men were attempting to remove the cargo before Plunkett's launch reached the wharf. He fired several shots at the men, who abandoned their work and fled into nearby woods.

Plunkett pulled alongside the schooner, found to be the *Mail*, and taking her under tow, moved unmolested downriver. The crew, five men (two of whom said they were owners) and one boy, were still aboard. The cargo consisted of 75 bags of salt, a large quantity of wheat and groceries, some whiskey, and a box of musket balls. The owners said they were trading in Virginia under authority of the U. S. Treasury Department. On the 7th, Magaw was directed by the Secretary of the Treasury to release *Mail* to its owners.

Expedition to Gwynn's Island and Nomini Creek, 3-4 November

Lt Commander Edward P. McCrea, Commanding Officer of the Second Division of the Potomac Flotilla, ordered Acting Master Charles H. Brown (*Coeur de Lion*), along with *Teaser* (Acting Ensign Philip Sheridan) and the schooner, *S. H. Poole* (Acting Master's Mate Gallagher) to Gwynn's Island, Virginia, in the Chesapeake Bay, off Virginia's middle Peninsula. The purpose was to evacuate Union loyalist families and their belongings from the island. Brown arrived at the mouth of the Rappahannock River the night of the 2nd, joining *Teaser* and *S. H. Poole* already at anchor there. The next morning the three vessels proceeded on to Gwynn's Island.

Brown sent *H. S. Poole*, under the protection of *Teaser*, to the island harbor to begin boarding the Union families and their effects. In late afternoon, Brown recalled the two vessels.

At 8:00 PM he sent crewmen in a launch from each steamer to protect the house during the night. The next morning, after breakfast, the boats returned to load the remainder of the effects, having finished the task and backed away from the island by noon. At that time, Brown received a message from Confederate army Lieutenant T. Fitzhugh that he wished to confer, under a flag of truce, with him regarding removal of the Union people.

The two officers met and agreed to suspend hostilities until *S. H. Poole* had boarded the Union families and had moved out of the harbor. The truce was extended so that *S. H. Poole* and *Teaser* might fill their water casts. Because of the additional civilian passengers, the water supply would not hold out during the return trip.

Also, on the 4th, *Jacob Bell* (Acting Master William T. Street) arrived at the mouth of Nomini Creek at 12:00 PM. He deemed the water over the bar too shallow to proceed farther with *Jacob Bell*. He sent a launch from the gunboat, armed with a howitzer and 13 men under charge of Acting Ensign G. E. McConnell, up Nomini Creek to capture or to destroy enemy vessels in the creek. Soon after the launch was under way, Street learned the creek extended 17 miles inland. Feeling it not safe to send such a small force that far inland, he dispatched a cutter in charge of Master's Mate J. H. Butler, with five men, to overtake the launch and tell McConnell to make a short reconnaissance and return with all vessels. This they did, the two boats continuing on up the creek. Five miles from the mouth, a large schooner, *Robert Wilber*, was found hidden in a very small bay. The water was too shallow to bring her out and she was burned, along with a smaller, unnamed, schooner on the opposite shore. When he received information of a nearby enemy force, Brown deemed it inadvisable to proceed farther up the creek. He returned back to *Jacob Bell* at the mouth of Nomini Creek, arriving there at sundown.

Engagement at Port Royal, 4 December

On 4 December, a flotilla, including: *Currituck* (Acting Master William F. Shankland), *Coeur de Lion* (Acting Master Charles H. Brown), *Anacostia* (Acting Master Nelson Provost), and *Jacob Bell* (Acting Master William T. Street), under the command of Shankland, were at anchor at Port Conway, opposite Port Royal. At 4:15 PM, the gunboats were fired upon by Confederate batteries located on a hill at Pratt's Landing two and one-half miles downriver. Shankland ordered the flotilla to weigh anchor and move down to within range of the landing and return fire. As the boats did so, a second battery on a hill back of Port Conway opened fire. At about 5:10 PM, the enemy artillery ceased firing, but the Union vessels continued receiving musket fire. Shankland ordered the vessels back to their previous position, off Port Conway. When they did, *Anacostia* came under fire from the city. She and *Jacob Bell* returned the fire. With night coming on, Shankland ordered the vessels on downriver, out of range of the Confederate fire, and to anchor below Pratt's Landing. As they passed the landing, the Confederates once again fired on the Union vessels, all of which returned the fire. *Jacob Bell* took a shell through the port sill, causing only minor damage. None of the other vessels was hit and none of the crewmen injured. The flotilla anchored for the night three miles below their former anchorage, to await further orders.

Engagement at Brandywine Hill, 10 December

On 10 December, when returning to Port Royal from the mouth of the Rappahannock River, *Currituck* (Acting Master Thomas J. Linnekin), *Yankee* (Lt Commander Samuel MaGaw), *Anacostia* (Acting Master Nelson Provost), *Jacob Bell* (Acting Master William T. Street), and

Teaser (Ensign Philip Sheridan), at 2:25 PM, were fired upon by artillery located on Brandywine Hill. The enemy fired 30 some rounds at the flotilla, without hitting a vessel. The Union gunboats returned the fire as they moved on upriver to anchor three miles below Port Conway, where the vessels dropped anchor at 2:40 PM. Another Confederate battery, about a mile north of the first one then opened fire. Return fire commenced at 3:20 PM. At 4:00 PM a 30-pounder Parrott percussion shell struck *Currituck* on the starboard side, 20 inches below the water line. A shot plug was put in the hole, as the vessel continued firing.

Cease fire from the boats was ordered at 4:30 PM. Five minutes later, a similar round hit *Currituck* on the starboard side aft of the main rigging, went through the fire room and exploded, wounding four crewmen, one mortally. The shell also broke the blower, blower engine and steam gauge pipe. Two coal schooners, *Kadosh* and *Sarah Minge*, lying near *Jacob Bell* were fired upon by the Brandywine battery. *Kadosh* was hit in her stern, killing Captain Samuel A. Simmons. Street immediately got underway, returning fire with his 50-pounder rifle and 8-inch gun until the cease fire at 4:30. No one was injured on *Jacob Bell*.

1863

Destruction of Salt Works on Dividing Creek, 12 January

On 12 January, Acting Master Thomas J. Linnekin, responded to a report of a place on Dividing Creek that was shipping contraband supplies from Baltimore to Virginia. A salt mill was also believed to be at the site. Linnekin took *Currituck* up the creek in search of the salt mill. On the South West Branch, he found the salt works located in a steam sawmill owned by an Oscar Yerby. Linnekin sent a party ashore, which destroyed all the kettles and other equipment, except for the boiler that was heavily bricked all around. Its destruction would have entailed burning the entire sawmill and a large quantity of lumber. Linnekin left word with Yerby to cease production of salt. Otherwise, he would return and raze all the buildings to the ground.

Linnekin remained in the vicinity of the sawmill for the night, departing downstream the next morning. On the way down, *Currituck* captured the steamer *Hampton*. Although, she was ostensibly cleared for oystering, she had aboard goods apparently loaded at Baltimore and several passengers, with letters indicating they habitually traveled to and from Virginia. Linnekin later placed *Hampton* in tow by the steamer *Leslie* to be taken to the Navy yard.

Captures by U. S. S. *Currituck*, 23-25 January

Currituck (Acting Master Thomas J. Linnekin) was anchored at the mouth of the Rappahannock River on 23 January, when two canoes were observed breaking the blockade and heading toward the Piankatank River. Linnekin weighed anchor and gave chase. The canoes soon were lost in heavy fog. Linnekin dropped anchor at the mouth of Jackson Creek and sent a gig, under command of the Executive Officer, Ensign Nelson, and a cutter, commanded by Master's Mate Ambrose Felix, up the creek in search of the canoes. A civilian along the shore told Nelson there was a scuttled sloop in the South West Branch. The two boats proceeded on up to the sloop, which was empty, plugged the leaks and pumped out the water. Felix's crew went ashore to locate

the cargo. It was not found. Twenty men were seen to be running from the site along with three cavalymen, two of which were captured.

Nelson, with the gig in tow, got the sloop under way and headed upstream. As the vessels passed some thick woods, they began taking heavy musket fire from about 30 riflemen. The Confederates shouted for Nelson to give up the sloop. Instead, Nelson ordered his men to return the fire, while he remained at the helm. Eventually, the musket fire became so intense, Nelson had to retire to the cabin. He kept the sloop on course, the men on the sloop and gig firing, until fire from the bank ceased. *Currituck* could not fire because the boats were between it and the men firing from the shore. Once the Union vessels were clear, *Currituck* shelled the woods for 30 minutes. The results could not be observed. None of the party that went up the creek was hit. The three vessels rounded to and returned down the creek to *Currituck*. The latter vessel began patrolling the shore line between Piankatank River and Dividing Creek, while the sloop was moved to the Navy Yard

On the 25th, while moving from Dividing Creek to Indian Creek, with *Currituck*, Linnekin saw two canoes moving out in the river. He fired a gun over them, bringing them to. They were laden with approximately \$5,000 worth of goods. The goods were placed aboard *Currituck* and the canoes taken in tow. Upon arriving at Indian Creek, the gig and a cutter, under command of Nelson, were dispatched to explore Barnes Creek. There they found five abandoned canoes, all loaded with miscellaneous freight. They were brought back to *Currituck*. At 10:00 PM the 25th, two men called from the shore, saying that there was a sloop and two canoes in Tabb's Creek, two miles away. Linnekin sent a party to the creek. There they located the vessels and captured all the crew, but one. The sloop, *Queen of the Fleet*, was empty, but the canoes were full of freight. These, too, were brought back to *Currituck*.

Capture of *Sarah Lavinia* and *Ladies Delight*, 8-13 May

On 8 May, Acting Master William T. Street, in *Primrose*, moved up the Rappahannock River to the Corrotoman River to search for boats running the blockade. Street stopped at the mouth of the Corrotoman to pick up an oystering man, who knew something of the river, as a pilot. The man told Street that a schooner that had run the blockade was up the river. *Primrose* then proceeded up the Corrotoman River as far as the water would allow. From there, Street maned small boats to continue on upriver. Shortly, he came upon *Sara Lavinia*. Upon seeing the Union boats approach, the crew abandoned their boat, escaping to the shore. The vessel was empty; her cargo already had been off loaded. Street put Acting Master's Mate Jacob Hahn in charge of taking *Sara Lavinia* downriver.

Acting Master Thomas J. Linnekin, in *Currituck*, accompanied by *Primrose*, left the mouth of the Rappahannock River at 4:30 AM, the 12th for Carter's Creek. At 11:00 AM, they met up with *Satellite* (Acting Master John F. D. Robinson) which had been sent up to the mouth of the Corrotoman River the night of the 11th to intercept canoes moving goods to Urbana. Upon arriving there, Linnekin sent launches up the Corrotoman in search of contraband goods. The party returned to the mouth of Carter Creek at 11:00 AM, reporting having been informed that the warehouses at Urbana were filled with government goods, including those from *Sara Livinia*.

The three boats left immediately for Urbana, arriving there at 12:45 PM. When arriving off the wharf, Street and 35 men were sent ashore to reconnoiter the area. They returned shortly to say the town and nearby areas were clear of Confederate troops. Linnekin immediately sent small boats to empty the warehouses and load the goods on the gunboats. This was completed by

5:00 PM. He then ordered *Satellite* to proceed up Urbana Creek to pick up some bacon stored on a wharf. Unfortunately, because of a stopped-up injection pipe, she went aground and the operations were stopped for the night.

The high tide the next morning failed to float *Satellite*. In the meantime, Linnekin sent boats from *Currituck* and *Primrose* to bring off the bacon. This was finished by 1:30 PM. At 2:00 PM, Street was ordered to take *Primrose* and 65 extra men in some small boats four miles down the Rappahannock to capture contraband goods that *Sara Lavinia* had stored in various houses along the way. At high tide, 7:00 PM, with the assistance of *Anacostia* (Acting Master Nelson Provost), which had just arrived, *Satellite* was finally floated. At 9:00 PM, *Primrose* returned. The vessels remained at anchor at Urbana the rest of the night.

At 8:00 PM, the 14th, Acting Ensign Nelson, with 50 men in five boats, was sent on up Urbana Creek to bring out the schooner *Ladies Delight*. The owner, a Mr. Street, a prominent secessionist in Urbana, had recently raised her for the purpose of running the blockade. Three boats placed her in tow and moved her down to the gunboats. The other two boats continued on upstream to destroy another schooner. On the way back down the creek, Nelson's boats were fired upon by a small group of citizens. He also took on board two refugees and their families, along with a large number of contrabands. After the five small boats were back from Urbana Creek, the entire flotilla returned to the mouth of the Rappahannock.

Capture of Schooner, *Emily*, 21 May

Acting Master Thomas H. Linnekin, on *Currituck*, accompanied by *Anacostia* (Acting Master Nelson Provost) and *Satellite* (Acting Master John F. D. Robinson), departed Windmill Point at 4:00 AM, the 22nd, for Monaskon wharf, nine miles above Urbana, to capture goods that were known to be there. At 6:00 AM, when just above Urbana, Linnekin saw a schooner about eight miles up ahead. He sent *Satellite*, his fastest boat, to overtake the schooner. Twenty minutes later the schooner was seen to be on fire and a boat with about ten men leave the schooner. *Satellite* stopped and fired her after gun at them, but the shell fell short and the men escaped on the south shore of the Rappahannock. Linnekin signaled *Satellite* to proceed, board the schooner and extinguish the fire. She was boarded 7:15 AM when the vessels were off Punch Bowl Point, a little over ten miles above Urbana. With the use of a bucket brigade and a force pump, the crewmen from *Satellite* soon extinguish the blaze. There was little damage to the schooner, identified as *Emily*, and her cargo. *Satellite* took her under tow and, along with the other two gunboats, steamed to Monaskon wharf, arriving there at 9:00 AM. Once there, Linnekin learned that Union cavalry had been there the day before and burned all the goods.

Capture of *Arctic* and *Sarah*, 28 May

Acting Master John F. D. Robinson steamed *Satellite* up the east branch of the Wicomico River on 28 May to capture the schooners, *Arctic* and *Sarah*. These vessels had been running the blockade, smuggling goods from Maryland to Virginia. Upon reaching the two schooners, Robinson found their cargos had already been offloaded. He had the vessels stripped of their sails and set ablaze. The sails were sent to the Navy Yard.

Expedition to Tappahannock, 30 May

Currituck (Acting Master Thomas J. Linnekin), accompanied by *Primrose* (Acting Master William T. Street), *Anacostia* (Acting Master Nelson Provost) and *Satellite* (Acting Master John F. D. Robinson), conducted an expedition up the Rappahannock River to Tappahannock, 30 May, to destroy Confederate stores located there. The flotilla left Lawson Bay at 3:20 AM, arriving unhindered at Tappahannock at 8:15 AM. Only a few enemy cavalymen were seen below Ft. Lowry. On the approach to Tappahannock, a small sloop was seen moving up the river. Linnekin ordered Street to pursue the vessel. He fired several shots toward the sloop, but she escaped into a small creek two miles upriver before *Primrose* could catch up. Street, realizing it was not prudent to follow it up the creek, given the small number of men aboard his vessel, returned back down to the other vessels anchored off Tappahannock.

Landing parties, under command of Provost, sent ashore to search Tappahannock, learned a company of Confederate Cavalry was stationed there, but had withdrawn to a church at the far side of the town. Word was sent back to the flotilla requesting more men. Upon their arrival, the men advanced toward the church. After exchanging a few shots, the enemy troops withdrew to a small ravine about a mile from the town. The Union troops searched some of the houses in the town for arms, but found none. They burned a storehouse containing large quantities of bacon and corn and a large barn holding approximately 20,000 bushels of corn. The gunboats fired rounds into ravine beyond the town now and then during the day to keep the cavalry troops at bay. When the landing party was back aboard, the flotilla returned downriver.

Capture of schooners, *Cassandra* and *Nanjemoy*, 10-15 July

On 9 July, a schooner, *Nanjemoy*, was stopped for inspection by the guard vessel at Piney Point on the Potomac River. Even though her cargo seemed questionable ("Carrying coals to Newcastle.") she had a valid pass to proceed from Georgetown to Baltimore and was cleared to continue. The next day Lt Commander Samuel Magaw, commander of the First Division of the Potomac Fleet, learned she had gone into the Coan River. He sent Acting Ensign James W. Turner, in *Yankee*, up the Coan to seize the schooner and intercept the goods which were being transported over land to the Rappahannock River.

Yankee departed for the Coan River at 10:35 AM 10 July. Unfortunately, *Yankee* went aground a mile short of where *Nanjemoy* was at a wharf and was not floated until 6:30 PM. By this time Turner had learned the goods already had been moved to the neighborhood of Union wharf on the Rappahannock and *Nanjemoy* dismantled and beached. Turner then moved *Yankee* back down to Piney Point and reported to Magaw.

Turner was ordered immediately to proceed up the Rappahannock River to capture the schooner *Cassandra*. The schooner was near Jones Point, with a large quantity of goods still aboard. When they saw *Yankee* approaching, the crew of *Cassandra*, set her on fire and broke several barrels of whiskey onto the flames, rapidly increasing the magnitude of the fire. Turner boarded the schooner with ten men and all the fire buckets he could muster, finally extinguishing the flames. Fourteen barrels of whiskey and 68-69 kegs of soda were salvageable. Although,

Cassandra was old and comparatively worthless, apparently having been sunk for some time and raised for this mission, she was brought back to Lookout Point.

Turner and *Yankee* were sent back up the Coan River to retrieve what was left of *Nanjemoy*. He was able to get the wreckage back to Lookout Point the 15th. From there, both schooners were taken to the Navy Yard.

Capture of *Satellite* and *Reliance*, 16 August

On the 24th of July, Commodore Andrew A. Harwood, commander of the Potomac Flotilla, received a communication from the Navy Department informing him that a spy had reported 500 men, with six boats on wagons (actually, there were only four boats and 82 men), had been heard to say they were going to surprise Union gunboats on the Rappahannock. Harwood ordered the flotilla boat commanders to be on special alert to prevent being caught unawares by boarding parties.

Satellite (Acting Master John F. D. Robinson) and *Reliance* (Acting Ensign Henry Walters), along with *Thomas Freeborn*, *Jacob Bell*, *Currituck* (Acting Master Thomas J. Linnekin), and *Tulip* were at anchor in the middle of the river at the mouth of the Rappahannock River the night of 22-23 August. The night was dark and rainy. The gunboats of the flotilla were anchored within hailing distance by horn, about 200 yards, of each other. At daylight, the 23rd, *Satellite* and *Reliance* were missing from their moorings.

At 12:20 AM, the 23rd of August, a boat containing about 25 men had approached *Satellite*. The lookout, Nelson Frazier, challenged the boat, the reply from Confederate Lieutenant John T. Wood, in command of the intruders, was, "Second Cutter." Frazier replied, "Come along-sides." and hailed them a second time and was answered, "Privateers." At the same time, ten men from another boat came over the bow of *Satellite*. The seven men on watch were immediately overpowered, one mortally wounded. There was not time to slip the anchor so *Satellite* could get under way. Officer of the deck, Acting Master's Mate William H. Fogg, called out "Rebels aboard." The Executive Officer, Acting Ensign Rudolph Sommers, grabbed his cutlass and ran toward the quarter-deck. On the way there, he was shot through the neck and received three saber cuts on his arm, before being overpowered. Although the other crewmen made a slight resistance, some being wounded, the boarding party quickly took control of the ship. Robinson was roused from his cabin and ordered to surrender *Satellite* to the boarders. This he did and returned to his cabin. With *Satellite* now in hands of the boarders, Wood, seeing fighting was continuing on *Reliance*, sent a boat with men to the aid of the boarders on that vessel. One crewman of *Satellite* was able to slip overboard and swim ashore. In the morning he came aboard one of the other boats and reported the events of the night.

Simultaneously to the boarding of *Satellite*, *Reliance* was approached by another boarding party in two boats, under command of a Lieutenant Hoge. They were challenged at 75 yards by the lookout, John Hand. No answer ensued and the boats continued approaching. They were hailed a second time. This time Hoge replied, "Putman." Hand immediately ran aft, rousing the crew and officers, crying out, "Rebel boarders!" One cannon shell and musket fire were aimed at the approaching boats, to no effect. The Confederates climbed over the railings and were on deck before the anchor could be slipped. By then, the crewmen were awakened and on deck. Walters began running forward from his hammock on the quarter-deck, yelling for the man at the bitts to slip the anchor cable, but the crewman was wounded and could not do so. Walters continued running, in the process of which he was struck by a saber and shot through the abdomen. He blew

the whistle for assistance from *Satellite*, not knowing she had been captured already, before falling exhausted to his knees. Some of the crew were taken prisoner, while others, joined in the fight to drive off the boarders. With arrival of the Confederates from the *Satellite* boarding party, the remaining crewmen were quickly subdued. Hoge was seriously wounded in the fighting.

The two captured boats were sailed upriver to Urbana during the early morning hours. The Union prisoners were disembarked and the four wounded Union crewmen treated before being paroled. The remainder were marched to Richmond where six weeks later the crewmen were paroled. The officers remained in prison.

It was later revealed that on the 13th, while *Satellite* was off Urbana, four boats came out of the Piankatank River and approached her. Three men came aboard to sell the crew chickens. While on board, the men learned of the location of the ammunition supplies and the small arms. When the boarders came aboard the 23rd, these were seized the first thing.

Destruction of *Satellite* and *Reliance*, 30 August- 3 September

Major General George G. Meade, Commander of the Army of the Potomac, directed Brigadier General Hugh J. Kilpatrick to proceed to Port Conway, Virginia to destroy the captured *Satellite* and *Reliance*, known to be abandoned nearby on the Rappahannock River. General Meade was not overly hopeful that the mission would succeed, however. Confederate forces, including artillery, were so abundant in the area, it would be difficult for General Kilpatrick to bring his artillery to bear on the captured vessels.

On the same date, Commodore Andrew A. Harwood, Commander of the Potomac Flotilla, led an expedition up the Rappahannock in another attempt to destroy *Satellite* and *Reliance*. He left the Navy Yard in *Ella* at 3:15 PM and arrived at Windmill Point at the mouth of the Rappahannock at 5:30 AM, the 31st. There, he met up with the ironclad, *Sangamon* (Lt John Weidman), *Commodore Jones*, *Commodore Morris*, *Currituck* (Acting Master Thomas J. Linnekin), *Jacob Bell*, *Dragon* (Lt Commander Samuel Magaw), and *Tulip*. Harwood transferred to the *Sangamon* and started upriver at 6:15 AM, accompanied by *Dragon*, *Commodore Morris* and *Jacob Bell*. The flotilla passed Ft. Lowry at 1:30 PM. They received no fire from the fort. Either it was abandoned, or the gunners withheld their fire. At 2:15 PM, the vessels anchored a short distance above Tappahannock. The pilot did not think they could go any farther, because of low water.

Harwood sent Magaw in *Dragon* on upriver to sound the river. He returned reporting water depth unfavorable to moving any farther up. Harwood waited until high tide and sent Magaw up again. He reported water levels barely suitable for passage. Harwood lightened *Sangamon* by removing much of the ammunition and proceeded upriver at 5:30 AM, 1 September. *Sangamon* had gone only 500 yards when she grounded. *Commodore Morris* and *Jacob Belle* came up and took all the coal off *Sangamon*. She then was able to return back to the anchorage. At 11:15 AM, a telegram was delivered to Harwood telling him *Satellite* and *Reliance* had been destroyed by the army. Harwood abandoned the mission and returned the flotilla back down to the mouth of the Rappahannock.

1864

Expedition to Northern Neck, 12 January

Acting Volunteer Lieutenant Edward Hooker, Commander of the Second Division Potomac Flotilla, aboard *Yankee*, accompanied by *Currituck* (Acting Master Thomas J. Linnekin), *Anacostia* (Acting Master Nelson Provost), *Tulip*, and *Jacob Bell* (Acting Master G. C. Schulze), provided cover for a force of Union cavalry and infantry, under command of Brigadier General Gilman Marston, on the peninsula between the Rappahannock and Potomac Rivers on 12 January. The flotilla began moving up the Rappahannock River at 10:00 AM, with Hooker assigning the vessels to their stations on the way up. *Yankee*, with *Currituck*, arrived at Union wharf at 5:00 PM. When it appeared all was quiet, *Currituck* returned to her station. *Yankee* tied up for the night at the Union wharf ferry.

The next morning, under a hazy, cloudy sky, *Yankee* proceeded on upriver, as far as Totouskey Creek. There Hooker observed five large boats and several men on the bank. Three of the boats were on wheels, with long teams of horses and cattle attached. The water was too shallow to reach the boats in order to destroy them and his rifled cannon was the only one that would reach them. He did not think it prudent to send his small boats to destroy the boats that were left behind. *Yankee* fired three shots at the men on the shore, dispersing them, then turned and moved downriver. At noon a white flag appeared on the shore. A launch was sent ashore, the men returning with information that Confederate cavalry were two to three miles inland and approaching the head of the Corrotoman River. Hooker moved *Yankee* on down river, communicating this information to the other boats and turned again back upriver.

The weather turned “thick”, and encountering *Currituck* at anchor at her station, Hooker tied up *Yankee* to her stern, remaining there the rest of the night and until the fog lifted at noon the 14th. She then moved downriver, collecting the other boats as she passed them, arriving at the mouth of the Rappahannock at 7:00 PM. Hooker assigned night positions to the other boats and cruised with *Yankee* in Fleet’s Bay. At noon the 15th, *Yankee* entered the Great Wicomico River moving up to make contact with land troops. Having done that and seeing that gunboat support was not needed, at 2:00 PM, Hooker moved back to the Rappahannock, the expedition completed.

Expedition to Circus Point, Rappahannock River, 18-21 April

In mid April, Commander Foxall A. Parker, Commander of the Potomac Flotilla, learned that the Confederates had placed a ferry on the Rappahannock River at Circus point, a few miles below Tappahannock, and were collecting a number of vessels to attack the Union blockade gunboats. He went aboard *Commodore Read* and put together a group of gunboats, including *Eureka* (Acting Ensign Hallock), *Fuchsia* (Acting Master William T. Street), that began moving up the Rappahannock the morning of the 18th. The flotilla checked out both banks along the various creeks from Circus Point to Windmill Point for the next two days. The results of the two-day’s efforts were: 2 ferries broken up; 7 large lighters, three pontoon boats, 22 large skiffs and canoes, 200 white oak beams and knees, 500 cords of pine wood, and 300 barrels of corn destroyed;

22 small boats, 1,000 pounds of bacon, 2 horses, 60 bushels of wheat and a chest of carpenters' tools were brought off, as were five refugees and 45 men, women and children contraband.

A landing party, commanded by Street, put ashore on the south side of the Rappahannock at Bowlers Rocks, was opposed by a cavalry force of about 500. Fire from *Eureka* kept the enemy troops at bay. The afternoon of the 21st, *Eureka* was sent to capture two boats hauled up on the shore just below Urbana. When she got to within 30 yards of the boats, *Eureka* was attacked by a large number of enemy, armed with rifles and a light artillery piece, who had been lying in ambush. *Eureka*, with only sixteen crewmen and officers aboard, responded with a "withering fire" from its 12-pounder and small arms. Within ten minutes the enemy was dispersed. Fortunately, the Confederate fire had been high, over the boat, resulting in no damage or injury to the crewmen.

A party of 18 armed Confederates were observed about two miles from *Commodore Read*, crawling on their knees, apparently planning on firing on some of the crewmen then on shore. A single shell was fired by *Commodore Read* into their midst, killing or wounding many. Only four men were observed fleeing the scene. The gunboats then returned to the mouth of the Rappahannock.

Expedition to Carter's Creek, 29 April

On 29 April, Acting Volunteer Lieutenant Edward Hooker, in *Yankee*, accompanied by *Thomas Freeborn*, *Tulip* and *Fuchsia* (Acting Master William T. Street), was sent on an expedition up the Rappahannock River to Carter's Creek. He stationed *Thomas Freeborn* at the mouth of the Rappahannock and *Tulip* at the bay creeks above and proceeded upriver with *Fuchsia*. The two gunboats moved into Carter's Creek until the creek became too shallow to continue and dropped anchor. From there, they sent three armed launches on up the creek, as far as they could go. A landing party, Street in command, went ashore to move toward White Stone. After advancing half a mile, the Union troops were met by a company of Confederate cavalry. The cavalry fired a few shots before being routed. Advancing farther, Street observed a fire ahead. The Confederates were burning their commissary stores. There was also a new camp, large enough to accommodate nearly a thousand men, under construction. The Union troops destroyed several log houses and some tents. When an enemy force began advancing on him, Street fell back to the boats, destroying grain and forage on the way.

While Street's force was so engaged, Hooker employed the remaining boats in confiscating Confederate supplies and clearing out the creeks near the vessels. The results of the expedition were: one camp destroyed; a large quantity of grain destroyed; eleven boats and canoes destroyed; seventeen boats captured; a number of horses, sheep and hogs confiscated; a number of contrabands brought away. The edible stock was divided up among the gunboats, the rest placed aboard *Thomas Freeborn*. The expedition also identified the location of nine torpedoes in the Rappahannock. A large enemy cavalry force was observed crossing the Rappahannock at Port Royal, apparently attempting to move behind the Union Army guarding Washington.

Expedition to the Piankatank River and Mill Creek, 12-13 May

Commander Foxhall A. Parker, Commander of the Potomac Flotilla, learned on 11 May that a party of Confederates were placing torpedoes in the Piankatank River and on the

Rappahannock, in the vicinity of Urbana. He arranged for 300 colored infantry and 15 cavalymen, under command of Colonel A. G. Draper, to accompany Acting Master William T. Street (*Fuchsia*) and 20 seamen to attack “without delay” the enemy force. Acting Volunteer Lieutenant Edward Hooker (*Yankee*), accompanied by *Currituck* (Acting Master Thomas J. Linnekin) and *Fuchsia*, left St. Inigoes the evening of the 11th and joined up with the army tug, *Commodore Foote*, bearing army troops. Owing to slowness of the accompanying transport, *Star*, the flotilla was delayed somewhat in departing the morning of the 12th. The vessels reached the designated location, near Urbana, on the Rappahannock and had off loaded the ground forces by 9:00 AM. Street took about 35 seamen and a howitzer from *Fuchsia* and accompanied the army troops. They advanced to the house of a Henry Barrack, where previously there had been 60 guerrillas or marines encamped, but they were gone. Street then took a detachment of 100 men and advanced up the Saluda road where they burned a grist mill containing a large quantity of corn and wheat, along with a sawmill and a lot of lumber. From there the detachment moved onto and proceeded down the road to Fishing Bay.

As soon as the landing party had moved out, Hooker detailed one launch, each, from the three gunboats, in command of Acting Master Cook, to search ahead for torpedoes. Several were exploded and two hauled out. *Resolute*, with a launch, arrived at noon and was sent to Cook where it was sent at once up Mill Creek. There she destroyed a large number of boats and some grain. In the meant time, the land forces pushed on to Milford Haven on the Piankatank. At 6:00 PM, Hooker took *Yankee* to the Piankatank, leaving the other vessels, including *Dragon*, which had just arrived with a coal schooner, with Cook. By 10:00 PM *Yankee* had arrived at the head of Fishing Bay, where Hooker met up with the Colonel Draper and the seamen.

At daylight the 13th, the rest of the fleet arrived, as well as *Jacob Bell* (Acting Master G. C. Schulze), and proceeded to move the troops to the south side of the Piankatank so they could conduct a raid to and from the vicinity of Mathews Courthouse. They moved out at 10:00 AM and returned at 8:00 PM. As it was raining heavily when the troops arrived back at the boats, they were not reembarked until the morning of the 14th. All were aboard by 11:00 AM.

The results of the raid were: one mill and several granaries full of grain burned; several torpedoes exploded and six captured, along with a quantity of powder; about 30 boats destroyed; a large number of cattle and mules and some carts brought back. Union casualties were one killed and five wounded, three severely.

Expedition up the Rappahannock River, 16-19 May

On 14 May, Lt Commander Thomas H. Eastman relayed an order from Commander Foxhall A. Parker, Commanding Officer of the Potomac Fleet, to Acting Volunteer Lieutenant Edward Hooker (*Yankee*) to conduct an expedition up the Rappahannock River to Fredericksburg, taking with him *Fuchsia* (Acting Master William T. Street), *Jacob Bell* (Acting Master G. C. Schulze), *Currituck*, *Dragon*, and *Anacostia*, the latter two vessels being designated to keep the river open from the mouth to Bowlers Rocks, while the others proceed on up to Fredericksburg.

Hooker’s men had for two or three days had been working day and night, in constant rain, putting the boats into condition to conduct operations and were thoroughly exhausted. Hooker proposed that he give the men time off to rest on Sunday, the 15th, and begin the expedition the morning of the 16th. This was approved and the order modified by Eastman. *Anacostia* was to be left off at Piankatank (one of her launches, with a crew, was taken in tow by *Yankee*); *Currituck* was to keep the river open behind the flotilla at all times; *Dragon*, with launch and crew, was to

be sent to Eastman immediately; torpedo fenders were to be kept at the head of all vessels at all times. There were reports of torpedoes in the river at Urbana, Union wharf, Bowlers Rocks, Circus Point, Ft. Lowry, Tappahannock, Leedstown, and at Port Royal.

Hooker began moving the flotilla up the Rappahannock the morning of the 16th, following his orders as he did so. The boats stopped for the night at Union wharf. A landing party, under command of Street went ashore, destroying military property and returning with a quantity of bacon found in a wagon.

On the morning of the 17th, the flotilla got underway, with launches on each side of the river (north, Acting Master G. C. Schulze; south, Acting Master Cook) to drag for torpedoes around Bowlers Rocks. As the boats approached the southern shore, Confederate cavalry were seen approaching. *Currituck* was sent to protect the boats, but she went aground. Hooker then sent *Jacob Bell* to the assistance of *Currituck*, but her draft was too deep, so he moved *Yankee* up to assist the boats and to fire on the enemy cavalry, dispersing them. *Currituck* was not floated until the next high tide.

At 2:00 AM, the 18th, *Currituck* and *Jacob Bell* caught up with the other vessels. Moving again at daylight, the boats slowly felt their way upriver to and continuing on past Tappahannock. Landing parties were put ashore at frequent intervals to get information regarding enemy activity. At one place a man who said he knew the location of torpedoes was brought aboard as a guide. The flotilla moved more rapidly after that, with every suspicious place being dragged. No torpedoes were found. The boats reached Pratt's Point below Port Royal at 9:00 PM, where they anchored for the night.

At daylight the 19th, Hooker sent *Currituck*, along with *Anacostia's* launch and crew, back downriver and advanced, with *Yankee* and *Fuchsia*, on past Port Royal. Confident there were no torpedoes in the river, the vessels pushed on rapidly. Unfortunately, *Fuchsia* went aground and had to wait for the tide to come in before she was floated. At 1:00 PM, the boats reached the barricade of sunken boats, seven miles below Fredericksburg, but they found a passage through. For the next six miles the water was shallow, but *Yankee* and *Jacob Bell* made it on up to the wharf at Fredericksburg. Coming through the barricade, *Yankee* struck a rock, breaking out four wooden and one iron balance of her starboard paddle. *Fuchsia* had to drop anchor about a mile below the wharf, the water becoming too shallow for her to continue farther.

The Rappahannock was now open for transports. The next several days found the gunboats conveying army transports up the river to Fredericksburg.

Expedition to the Northern Neck, 11-21 June

The Potomac Flotilla, under command of Acting Master William T. Street (*Fuchsia*): *Commodore Read* (Acting Volunteer Lieutenant Edward Hooker), *Teaser*, *Resolute*, *Eureka*, and *Thomas Freeborn* began moving up the Potomac River the evening of 11 June in support an army expedition, under command of Colonel A. G. Draper, to the Northern Neck of Virginia. The vessels arrived at Pope's Creek early the morning of the 12th, with 500 soldiers, 50 cavalrymen and 100 sailors going ashore. Street and Draper accompanied the landing force, which moved out at 11:00 AM. A detachment of 150 soldiers and 12 cavalrymen, led by Captain W. H. Smith, was ordered to proceed to Smith's wharf on the Rappahannock River and then down the Rappahannock side of the neck to Warsaw. The main body moved down the road past Montross to form up with the detachment at Warsaw. When the main body was four miles from Montross, a second

detachment was sent to Nomini Bay to inform Smith that the land force would meet up with him and be taken aboard the boats at Machodoc Creek the following day.

When the landing party had moved out, *Teaser* and *Resolute* were sent to their stations and the rest of the flotilla, except for *Commodore Read* and *Eureka* departed for Nomini Bay. The latter two boats remained behind to attempt to float a grounded transport. The transport was floated at 6:00 PM, the 12th. The two gunboats and four transports then proceeded to Nomini Bay where they loaded on board a “drove” of cattle confiscated by the detachment that had been sent there. In approaching the wharf, the transport *Favorite* became grounded and was floated, with the help of *Commodore Read*, just before daylight the next morning. In the meantime, *Eureka* accompanied the remaining transports to Machodoc Creek, where *Teaser* was stationed.

The troops continued on to the crossroads leading to Warsaw, where they encamped for the night while awaiting the detachment to come up. Street took 50 sailors and nine cavalrymen on to Machodoc Creek to deliver to the waiting boats livestock and farming equipment that had been captured along the way. He left Ensign Nelson in charge of the remaining sailors to accompany Draper the next day. Street arrived at the vessels at 9:30 PM and remained there the rest of the night. Rather than proceeding on to Machodoc Creek the morning of the 14th, Draper and the remaining land force decided to meet up with the boats at Union wharf, which would have shortened the marching time. Unfortunately, *Commodore Read* did not have enough coal to make it up the Rappahannock to Union Wharf and needed to take on coal. Up to that time, the expedition had captured 150 head of cattle, 33 horses, 20 sheep, a large quantity of farming equipment, eight prisoners, and 50 contrabands. These were loaded on transports the 14th and 15th and were delivered to Point Lookout.

At noon the 16th, *Commodore Read* (which had refueled at St Inigoes), *Thomas Freeborn* and *Jacob Bell* arrived at Union Wharf and embarked the sailors, leaving only army troops on the shore. In the afternoon a small Confederate Cavalry unit attacked the army troops and were repulsed. Although there were sharp skirmishes during the night, the enemy did not press the issue. The attack was renewed by 300 enemy (against 150 Union soldiers and navy men) at 7:00 AM the 17th, continuing until 1:00 PM.

At 6:00 PM, enemy troops were observed about three fourths of a mile from Union Wharf, apparently preparing to make a night attack on the army troops. *Commodore Read* opened upon the Confederates, continuing firing at the dispersing troops until they were out of range of the boats’ guns. As soon as it was dark, the army troops began coming aboard *Commodore Read*. Just before all were embarked, Confederate cavalry made a dash to the wharf. A broadside from the Union gunboat “skedaddled” the enemy.

Commodore Read, *Thomas Freeborn* and *Jacob Bell* began moving upriver at 2:00 AM the 18th to Layton’s wharf, 18 miles above Tappahannock. Upon arriving there at 6:30 AM, the army troops were disembarked. The intent was to take aboard all the cattle that could be collected and remove them downriver. However, just before night, the land troops were driven back to the ships by an enemy detachment from a force estimated to be about 10, 000 strong. When the attacking troops came within range, the Union boats, they were dispersed by intense gunfire. The troops were reembarked at 4:00 AM, the 19th, and the flotilla began moving down to Tappahannock, arriving there at 7:00 PM, where the three boats were joined by *Fuchsia*.

Two of the transports that were loaded with livestock, farming equipment and contraband were dispatched to Lookout Point. *Fuchsia* was sent to Bowlers Rocks, while the other three gunboats took up position around Tappahannock: *Thomas Freeborn*, above; *Commodore Read*, front of; *Jacob Bell*, below. Troops were put ashore. An enemy cavalry attack at 3:00 PM was

routed by gunfire from *Jacob Bell*. The night was spent embarking cattle on the transports. There being no room on the transports, the troops and horses were taken aboard the gunboats. They were transferred to army transports that had returned from Lookout Point the morning of the 20th. The transfer was completed by 3:00 AM, the 22nd.

The flotilla retired back down the Rappahannock, the expedition completed. The mission resulted in the capture of between 400 and 500 cattle, nearly 200 horses, as many sheep, and several hundred contrabands, as well as a steamer load of farming utensils. Union casualties were: Army--2 killed and 2 missing; Navy--1 killed, 2 or 3 slightly wounded and 1 missing.

Expedition to Milford Haven and Stutt's Creek, 24 September

Fuchsia (Acting Master William T. Street), accompanied by *Thomas Freeborn* (Acting Master William A. Arthur) and *Mercury* (Acting Ensign Philip Sheridan), at 9:30 AM, 24 September, began moving from the Rappahannock River toward Stutt's Creek to capture some boats located there. It was believed these boats were headed to the mouth of the Piankatank River to attack a Union vessel. Street left *Fuchsia* and *Thomas Freeborn* at the mouth of the Milford Haven, and went on ahead through the Haven, in *Mercury*, to Stutt's Creek, with armed launches in tow.

About three miles up the creek, the 40 men in the launches were put ashore, under command of Arthur and Sheridan. There they discovered, and captured, several large boats and a Confederate fishery, the latter was destroyed by the landing party. Farther on, some smaller boats were encountered and destroyed. The landing party reembarked the launches and *Mercury* returned to the mouth of Milford Haven. There, they were joined by *Fuchsia* and *Thomas Freeman*, to return to the mouth of the Rappahannock, arriving at the anchorage at 6:00 PM. This was a brief, but successful, expedition. Thirteen boats were destroyed, five brought away and a fishery destroyed.

Operations on the Great Wicomico River, 15-18 October

The Union picket boat *No. 2* (Stockholm, First name and rank unknown), of the North Atlantic Squadron, had not been heard from since leaving Old Point, at the mouth of the James River, on 8 October. While cruising off the Virginia coast on 15 October, Acting Ensign Nelson (*Mercury*), encountered the tug, *Kingfisher*, searching for *No. 2*. Nelson requested the tug search the coast between Windmill and Smith's Points in case she had beached there. Nelson searched from Bluff Point to the Mouth of the Great Wicomico. Not finding her, he continued searching until the morning of the 17th. That morning, Nelson received information from two Confederate prisoners on the army gunboat, *General Foster*, that *No. 2* had come into the Great Wicomico, Stockholm confusing it for the Potomac, around 4:30 PM, the 8th and dropped anchor. Shortly afterwards, she was attacked with musket fire by group of home guard, under command of a Captain Covington. *No. 2* started to leave the river, but went aground on an oyster bank. When the tide went out, leaving her high and dry, the boat and crew were captured. The crew was taken to Heathsville and thence to Richmond. The boat was stripped of everything useful, including a howitzer, and burned.

General Foster resumed cruising the Great Wicomico and upon anchoring at the mouth for the night the 16th, came under fire from a party of home guard on the south shore. *Mercury* was cruising off the mouth of the river at that time and upon hearing the gunfire, Nelson stood toward

the action, fired two shells into to the shore, dispersing the attackers. He then withdrew back to cruising the shoreline. Around midnight the 18th, the lookout of *Mercury* saw a signal light on the northern bank of the Great Wicomico, with people passing in front of it, purposely showing themselves. Nelson presumed this was a ploy by the home guard to entice him toward the shore under the assumption they were refugees wanting to be taking off. Nelson moved *Mercury* in toward the shore, firing two shells at the light as he went. As expected, *Mercury* was fired upon by volleys of musketry from three sources. *Mercury* fired several shells into the woods into which the home guard troops had fled.

Upon learning of the action, Acting Volunteer Lieutenant Edward Hooker, in *Commodore Read*, who was lying off the mouth of the Rappahannock River, moved up to the Great Wicomico River and at 9:30 AM the 18th, began moving up the river. He fired into the woods on both sides of the river attempting to cause the home guard to fire on the gunboat. None did, so he steamed back to the mouth of Cockrell Creek and dropped anchor. Small forces of home guard appeared now and then, but were dispersed by shell fire from *Commodore Read*. Hooker moved his vessel back to Rappahannock at dark.

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Expedition to Fredericksburg, 6-8 March

On 6 March, Acting Lt Commander Edward Hooker was ordered by Commander Foxhall A. Parker, commander of the Potomac Flotilla, to move *Commodore Read*, along with *Yankee* (acting Master Cook), *Delaware* (Acting Master J. H. Eldridge) and *Heliotrope* (Acting Master Griffin) up the Rappahannock River to cooperate with an army expedition on its way to Fredericksburg. The vessels left Jones Point on the Rappahannock on 6 March, but were impeded in making progress because movement of army boats on the river.

On arriving at Tappahannock, they found some of the army transports had run aground. The flotilla paused there, with *Yankee* and the army boat *Chamberlain* coming to their assistance. At this time, Hooker got in touch with Brigadier General S. H. Roberts, offering him to come aboard *Commander Read* and use it as his headquarters. General Roberts readily agreed. The army transports were soon afloat so that they could continue on upriver. Because the boiler of *Yankee* was somewhat weak, she was placed at the end of the column. General Roberts had *Chamberlain* remain with *Yankee* should she need assistance.

As the gunboats proceeded upriver, they encountered several boats, none of which were of any value and were destroyed. At 7:00 PM, the flotilla stopped for the night at the obstructions in the river, seven miles below Fredericksburg. Soon afterward, *Yankee* arrived. On the way up, some of the transports were found to be at anchor or aground. After anchoring, Hooker dispatched his pilot and Acting Ensign Shurtleff, from *Commodore Reid*, along with a number of men, to go back and assist the transports in moving up to where they were to land their troops. Hooker and General Roberts then went aboard Hooker's gig and went on up to Fredericksburg, arriving at the wharf at 9:00 PM. By then, army troops were arriving in the city and setting about their tasks. A picket of about 50 men were taken across to the north bank of the Rappahannock on Hooker's gig.

The army troops burned and destroyed the railroad bridge, the depot, and a portion of the track near Hamilton's Crossing, six miles below Fredericksburg. The telegraph line was cut and the telegraphic equipment removed. A train of 26 cars, 18 of which were loaded with tobacco, and an army wagon train were burned. Several mules and 30-40 prisoners taken, along with several hundred boxes of tobacco and some bales of cotton. All were placed aboard the army transports. At 3:00 AM the 7th, the army troops were back aboard and the boats began descending the river.

During the night there were several groundings and a few collisions, but the boats were soon back afloat. No serious damage was incurred by most of the vessels. One of the troop transports had to be relieved, the 200 troops placed aboard *Yankee*. Along the way Confederate sharpshooters fired at the boats. *Yankee* and *Commander Read* and some of the army transports returned the fire. About 3:00 PM the 8th, the flotilla reached the mouth of the Rappahannock. One of the army transports took aboard the troops on *Yankee* and the transports proceeded on to Ft. Monroe. The navy boats remained at the mouth of the Rappahannock.

Expedition up the Rappahannock River, 12-14 March

Acting Volunteer Lieutenant Edward Hooker, in *Commodore Read*, began moving up the Rappahannock River the evening of 12 March to cooperate with Union army troops in the Northern Neck area of Virginia. Arriving near Ft. Lowry at 9:30 PM, he met up with *Delaware* (Acting Master J. H. Eldridge) and *Morse* (Acting Master G. W. Hyde), which, along with the army gunboat, *Mosswood*, were at anchor there. Hooker ordered *Morse* to patrol the river near Tappahannock ferry and left *Mosswood* to look out for Circus Point and Bowlers Rocks. Hooker took with him *Delaware* as he moved on up to Leedstown to coordinate with Brigadier General S. H. Roberts. About 4:00 AM, the 13th, the two vessels turned about and headed back downriver. Heavy firing was heard from below at 6:00 AM, the boats continued on at full speed. The two gunboats passed Ft. Lowry at 7:30 AM, and as they approached *Morse*, Hooker learned that both *Morse* and *Mosswood* had been taking enemy fire from two rifled field pieces of the old battery at Paradise since 5:00 AM. Both vessels had been returning fire. *Morse* was hit hard at the forward starboard end of the of the house, bulkhead between the dispensary and steerage, carlines of hammock, and two window sashes and glass totally destroyed. The battery became silent upon the arrival of *Commodore Read* and *Delaware*. Hooker then sent Eldridge in *Delaware* to destroy some large boats at Tappahannock.

Hooker directed fire from *Commodore Read* into the woods behind the breastwork, assuming the guns had been withdrawn there. There was no response. He sent an armed launch, to land a shore party, under charge of Acting Ensign Shurtleff, to assess the situation. The gunners and the guns had retreated away from the fort. When cavalry reinforcements appeared moving toward the shore party, Hooker called them back to *Commodore Read*.

Afraid that the guns were being moved to Tappahannock, at 10:00 AM, Hooker sent *Morse* to reinforce *Delaware* at Tappahannock and *Mosswood* downriver in case the guns had moved in that direction. *Commander Read* remained in front of the battery, firing periodically into the woods and at nearby cavalry troops. Soon he ceased firing, hoping the cavalry might accidentally gather together, offering him a better target. They never did.

Meanwhile, *Delaware* and *Morse* were anchored about 50 yards off the Tappahannock wharf, shelling the river boats. The boats destroyed, at 2:00 PM, the 13th, Eldridge moved *Delaware* down to *Commodore Read* to report the complete destruction of eight small vessels and

a large flat ferry boat at that place. He also reported that he could destroy the bridge below Tappahannock with shell fire. Hooker sent him back up, taking with him *Morse*. *Delaware* met up with *Morse*, moving downriver, turned her about and at 4:30 PM began firing on the bridge. At 5:15, the bridge destroyed, the gunboats stood down the river.

About 6:00 PM, *Morse* went aground on Bowlers Rocks, finally refloating herself at 7:00 PM. After reporting the bridge destroyed and casualties among a group of enemy cavalry troops crossing the bridge, *Delaware* dropped down to Union wharf for the night. *Morse* joined her. About dark, workmen were observed repairing the breastwork of the battery opposite *Commodore Read*. Hooker directed more fire into the position, dispersing the work party.

As it was becoming dark, a launch was observed coming upriver with its ensign set. It brought word that *Mosswood* was hard aground. Hooker moved *Commodore Read* down and tried to pull her off, but to no avail. He anchored close to her and had *Morse* and *Delaware* to remain a mile upstream, at Union wharf, while *Commander Read* made another attempt to float *Mosswood*. This was finally accomplished at 1:00 AM the 14th. At 1:30 AM, the 14th, *Banshee* arrived from downriver with orders from General Roberts to move the flotilla to the York River to cooperate with him on that river. Hooker sent *Banshee* on upriver to inform the other two boats to get underway and proceed to downriver. The orders were relayed at 2:30 AM. *Banshee* went aground in turning about. Eldridge moved *Delaware* into position to refloat *Banshee*. Two attempts failed, one resulting in carrying away her mast. Finally, at 11:30 AM, the tide floated her free.

Taking with him *Mosswood*, Hooker and *Commander Read* moved back to the mouth of the Rappahannock, arriving there about 5:00 PM, the 14th, where they were joined by *Morse* and later by *Delaware* and *Banshee*.

Operations in Mattox Creek, 16-18 March

Lt Commander Thomas H. Eastman (*Don*), along with *Stepping Stones* (Acting Master Roderick), *Heliotrope* (Acting Ensign Griffin) and *Resolute* (Acting Ensign Gibson), left St. Inigoes about 7:00 PM, the 15th, and entered Mattox Creek at daylight the 16th. All four gunboats grounded in the shallow water as they entered the creek. Eastman put ashore landing parties on the left side of the creek to check the nearby houses for enemy troops. About 2:00 PM, he sent Acting Ensign Brice, with 40 men, to the south side of Mattox Creek. Brice's landing party found they were opposed by about 50 Confederate cavalymen moving out of a nearby woods. Eight or ten cavalry troops came down on his left flank. These were driven back. When the rest saw this group retreating, they, too, retired back into the woods.

By this time, *Don* had *Stepping Stones* afloat. Eastman moved in and fired on the Confederate cavalry driving them farther back. Brice's party searched the houses on the south side of the creek, finding only some bales of tobacco and smooth bore cartridges and caps. By then, it was nearing dark. Eastman moved *Don* out of the creek to wait until morning to continue the expedition. In moving out of the creek, *Stepping Stones* once again grounded and *Heliotrope* was still grounded.

By 4:00 AM the 17th, *Heliotrope* had floated herself. Eastman asked her to assist in freeing *Stepping Stones*, which had been blown aground even harder during the night. At 8:00 AM, Eastman sent his launch, armed with one howitzer, and troops under the command of Acting Ensign Summers to clear the right prong of the creek, while Eastman led 70 marines and sailors up the shore. The creek was cleared and four boats destroyed.

Eastman then moved *Don* back to *Stepping Stones* and sent a launch up the left fork of Mattox Creek to clear the creek. Ensign Summers cleared the creek, destroying three schooners, all the while under musket fire from 300-400 Confederates. The launch was riddled by bullets and half of the oars cut away, but only one man was wounded. Bowswain's Mate P. Mullen, of the *Don*, lay on his back while loading the howitzer and firing into the enemy troops. A number were killed, the rest dispersing.

At 5:00 PM, Summers' force fell back to where *Stepping Stones* was still aground and fortified the point for the night. At daybreak the next morning, the Confederate troops withdrew after making an abortive move against the Union position. The troops returned to the boats, *Stepping Stones* refloated and the flotilla returned to St. Inigoes.

Destruction of Steamer *Harriet De Ford*, 6 April

At daylight 6 April, Acting Volunteer Lieutenant Edward Hooker (*Commodore Read*) began an expedition to destroy the steamer *Harriet De Ford*, which had been captured earlier by the Confederates. Two crewmen who had been aboard the vessel told him the steamer was in Indian Creek, above Windmill Point. He took with him *Coeur de Lion* (Acting Master Morris), *Thomas Freeborn* (Acting Master William T. Street) and *Heliotrope* (Acting Master Griffin). The latter two vessels were some distance in the rear. Within a mile up Indian Creek, *Coeur de Lion* grounded hard, but was soon floated. *Heliotrope* and *Thomas Freeborn* by that time had caught up. *Heliotrope*, having aboard a pilot with familiarity with the channels of the creeks, took the lead. The three vessels moved on about five miles up the creek, firing into the adjacent woods as they went. *Heliotrope* and *Thomas Freeborn*, being of lighter draft than *Commodore Read*, were able to proceed one to two miles farther up the creek than the latter vessel. As they did so, Hooker took aboard a member of the crew of *Harriet de Ford*. He reported that she was in Dimer's Creek, rather than Indian Creek. Hooker pulled back the other two vessels and had *Thomas Freeborn* and *Coeur de Lion* proceed at once to Dimer's Creek, with *Heliotrope* remaining behind to pilot *Commodore Read* back out of Indian Creek.

At Dimer's Creek, it was discovered the Confederates had set fire to *Harriet De Ford* and she had burned down to the water and was still burning. Her boiler and machinery were fired into by the gunboats, destroying them. The flotilla then returned to the mouth of the Rappahannock.

This was the last major operation of the Potomac Fleet.

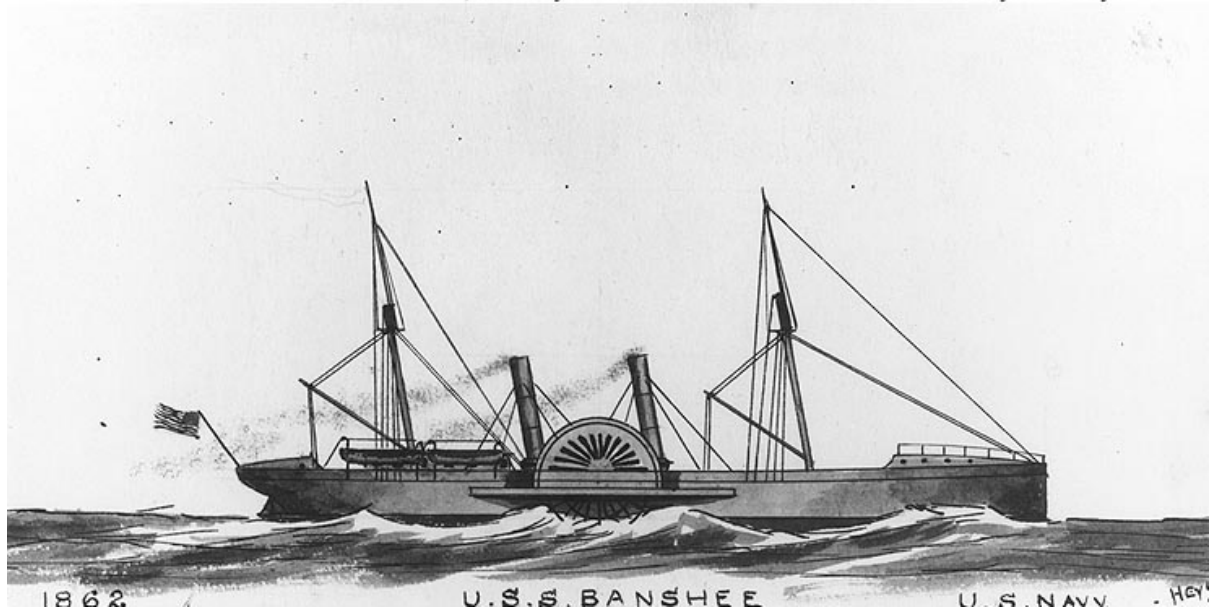
Epilogue

On 18 July 1865, Secretary of the Navy, Gideon Wells, ordered Commander Foxall A. Parker, Commander of the Potomac Flotilla, to disband the Flotilla on 25 July. This was accomplished. Most of the gunboats were moved to the Navy Yard, decommissioned and sold.

Union Gunboats

There are relatively few images of the gunboats of the Potomac Flotilla. Most of those that are available are represented mainly as sketches and drawings. The images below were obtained from a variety of internet sources.

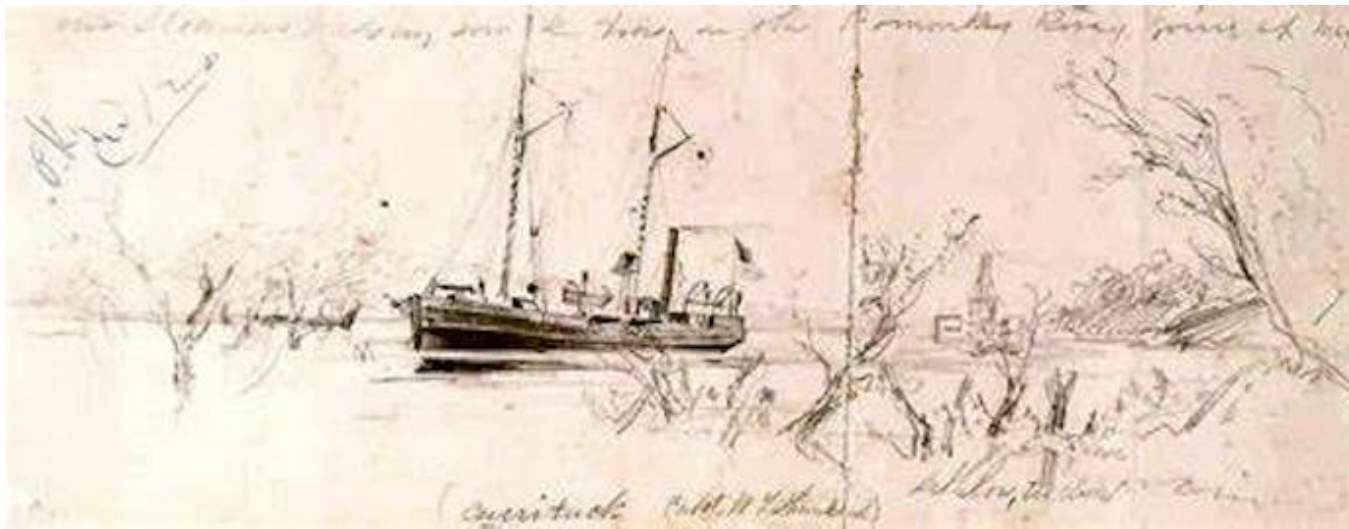
Photo # NH 63867 USS Banshee, formerly the blockade runner Banshee. Artwork by Erik Heyl



U. S. S. Banshee



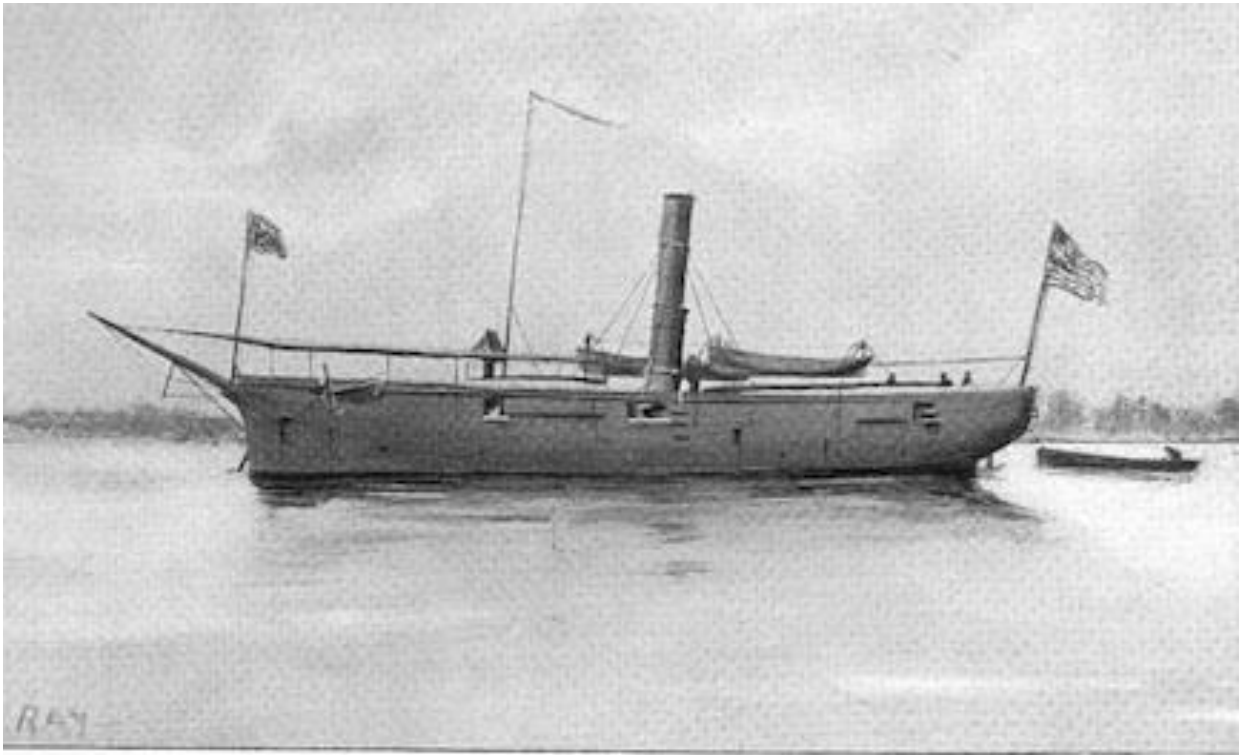
U. S. S. Coeur de Lion



U. S. S. Currituck

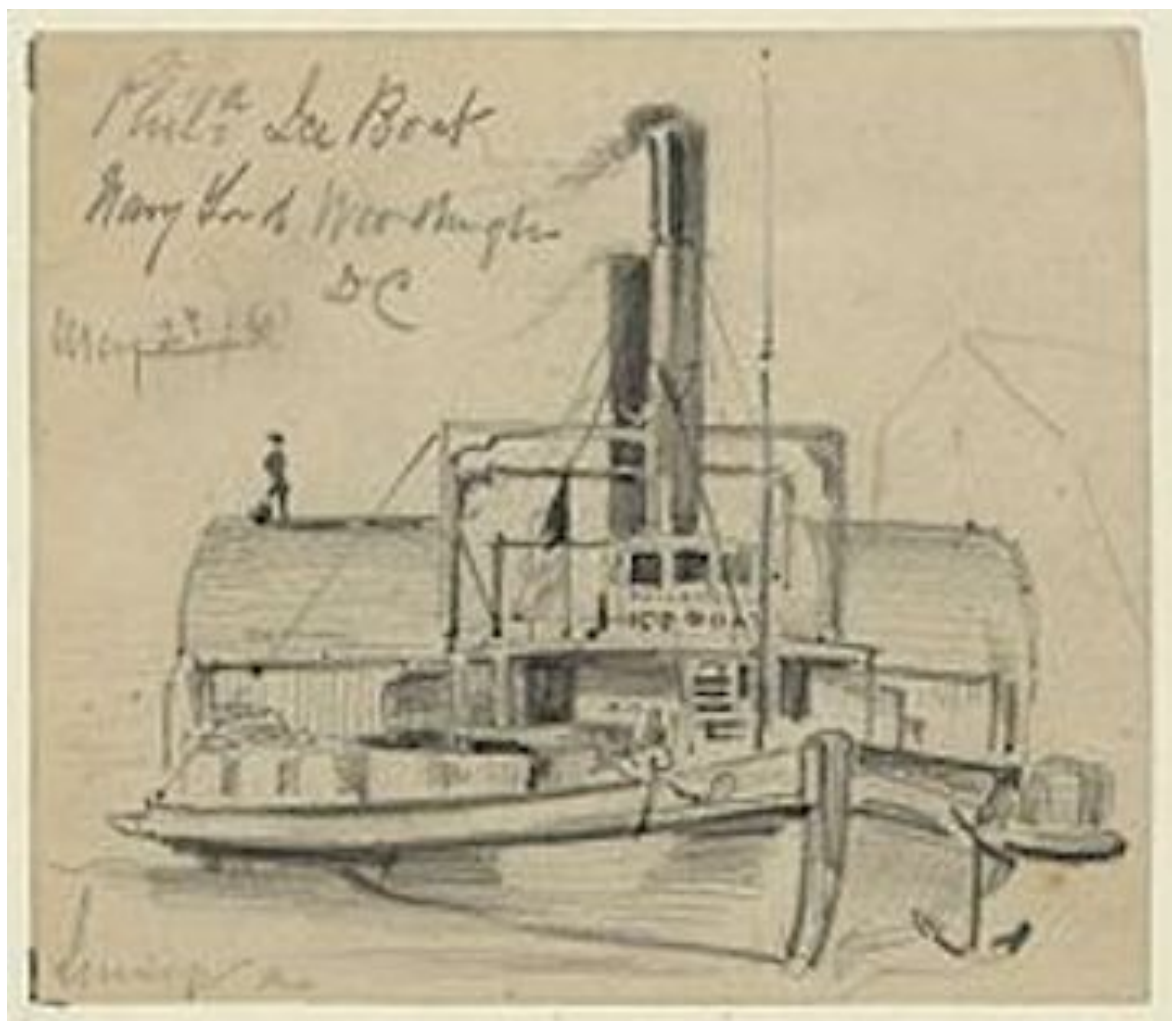


U. S. S. Delaware



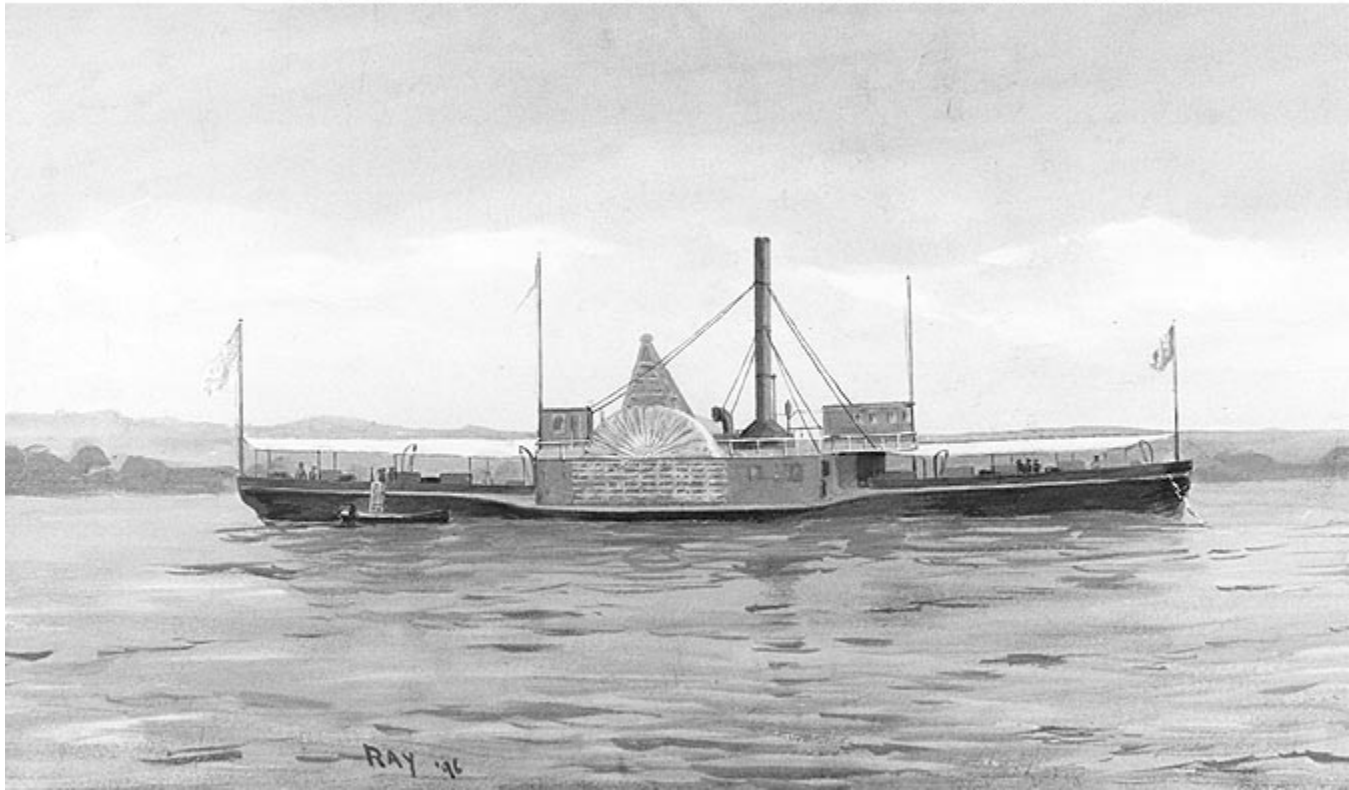
UNITED STATES STEAMER FUCHSIA.

U. S. S. Fuchsia

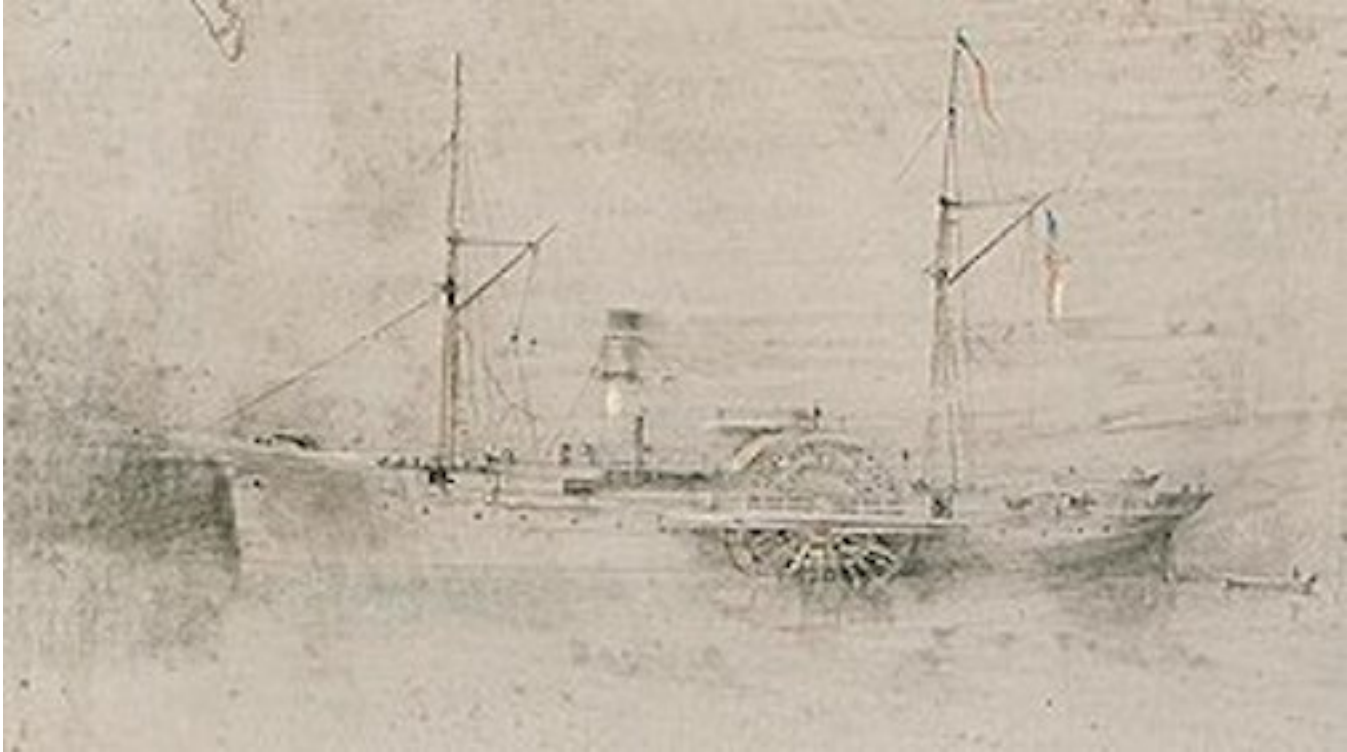


U. S S. Ice Boat

Photo # NH 57838 USS Jacob Bell. Wash drawing by Clary Ray



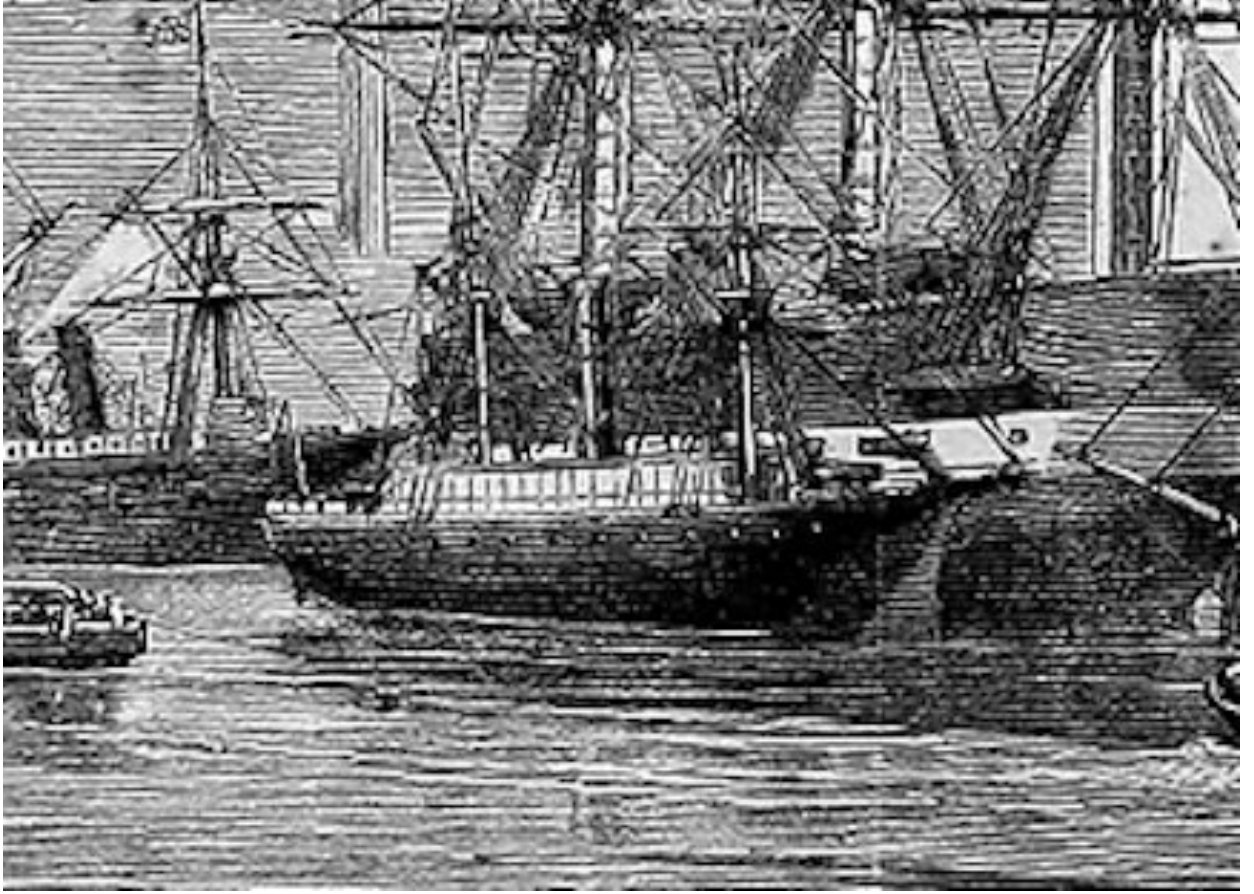
U. S. S. Jacob Bell



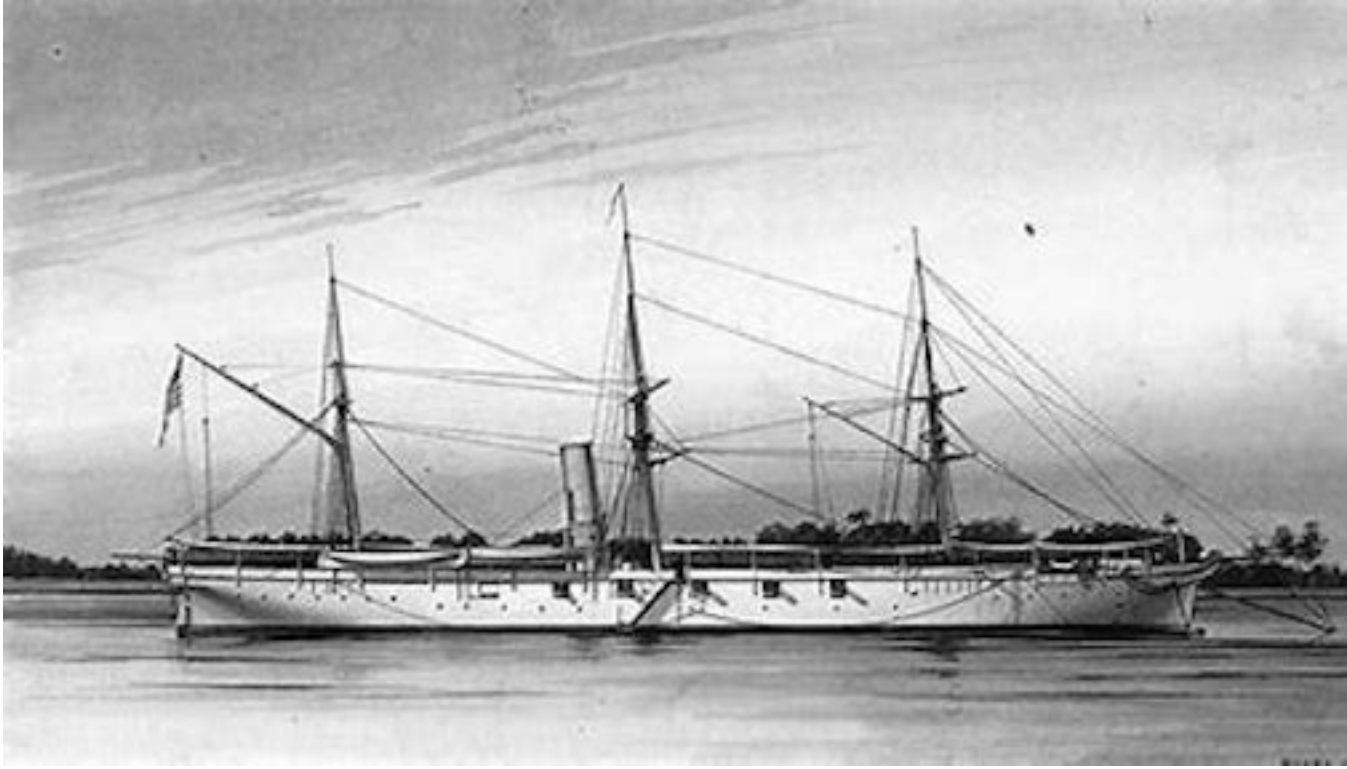
U. S. S. Keystone State



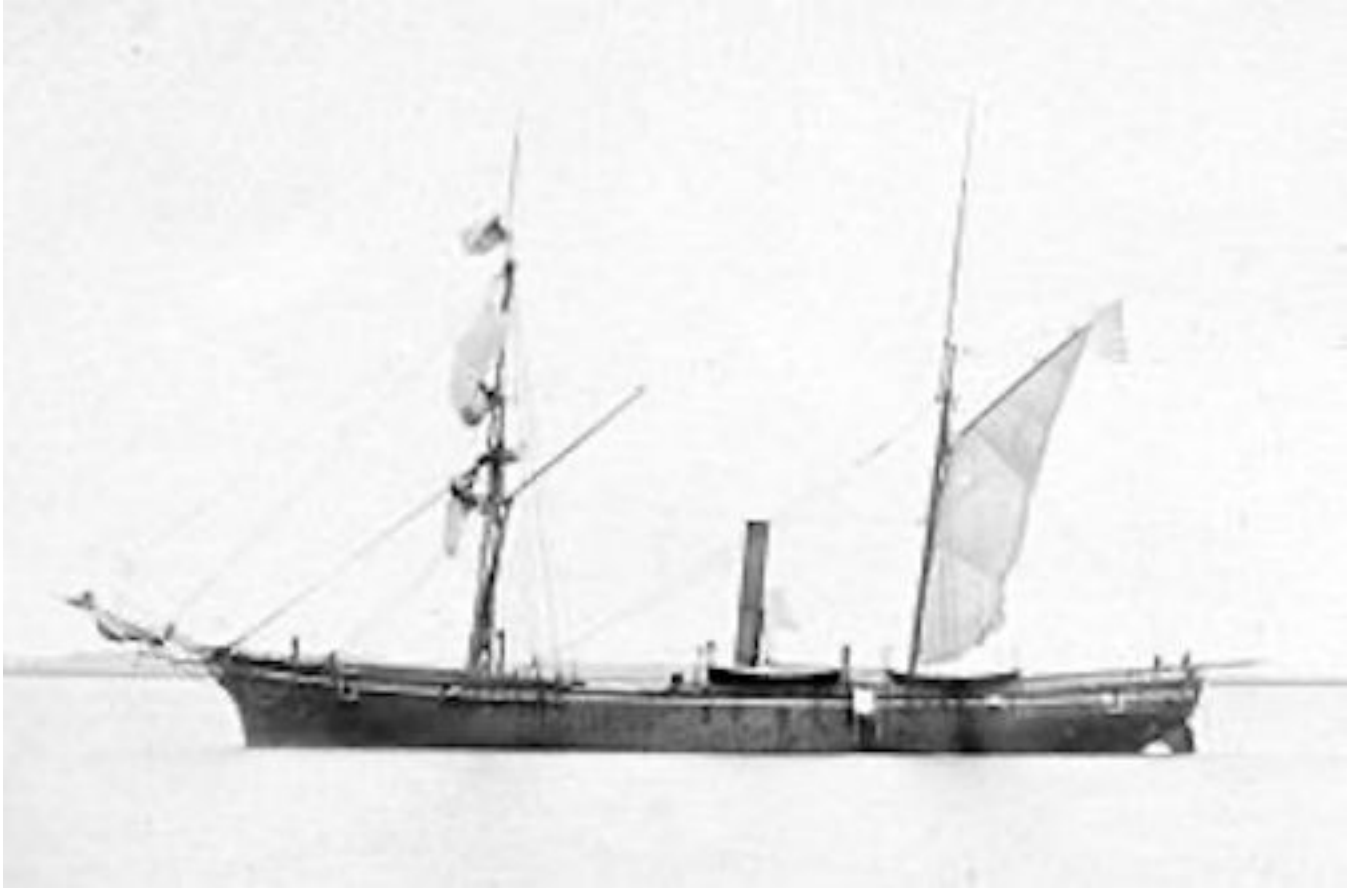
U. S. S. Morse



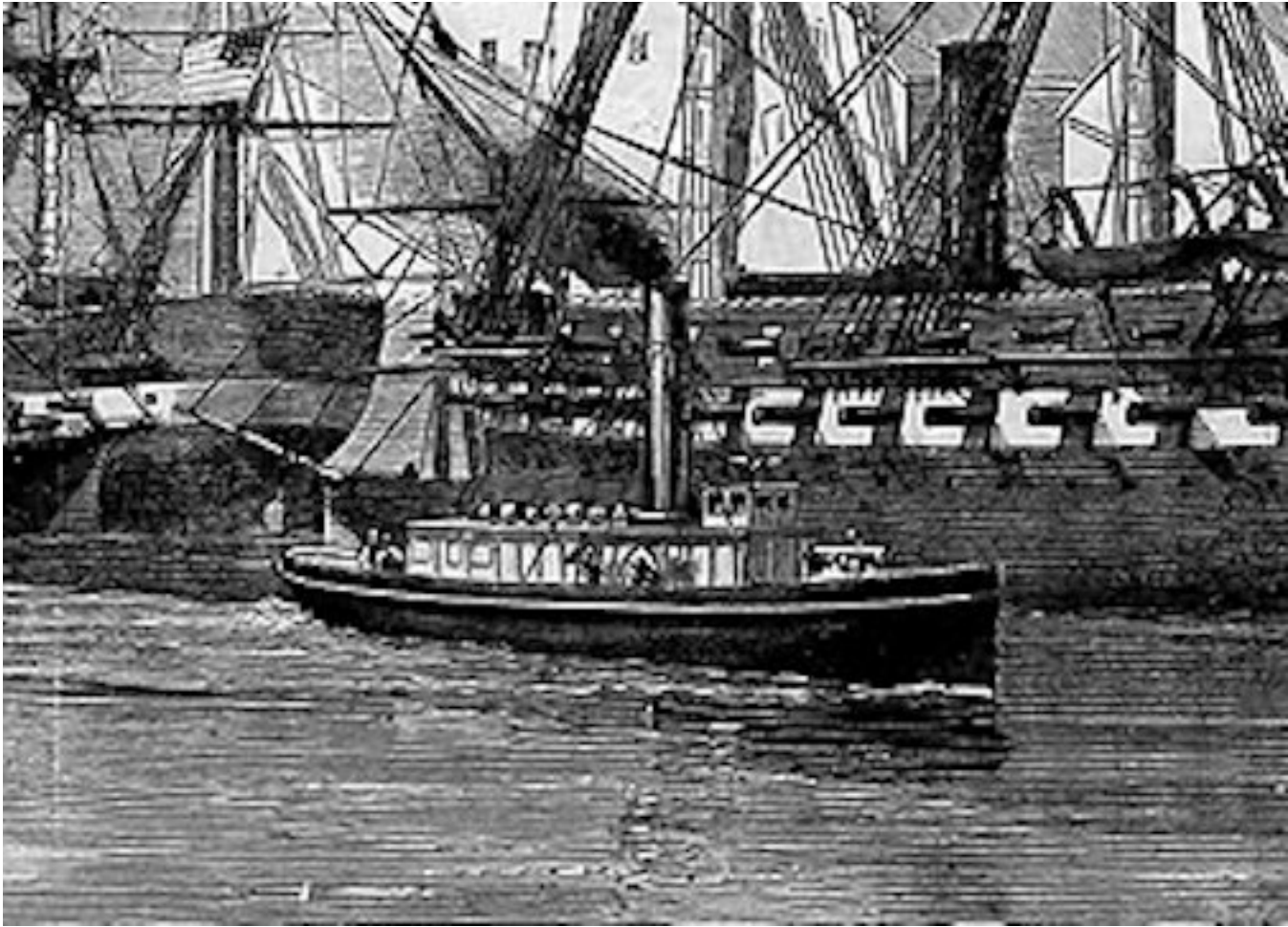
U. S. S. Mount Vernon (Foreground)



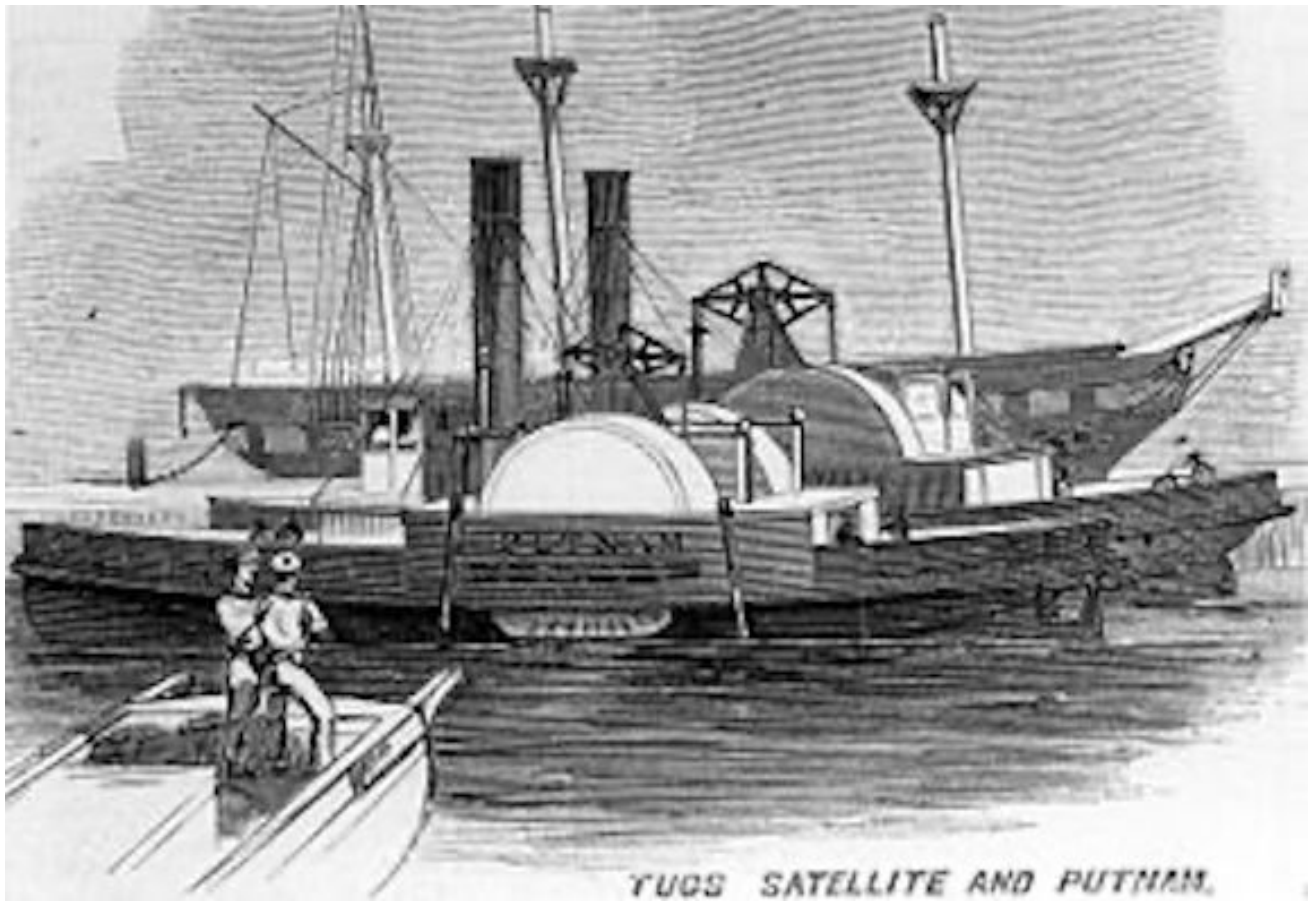
U. S. S. Pawnee



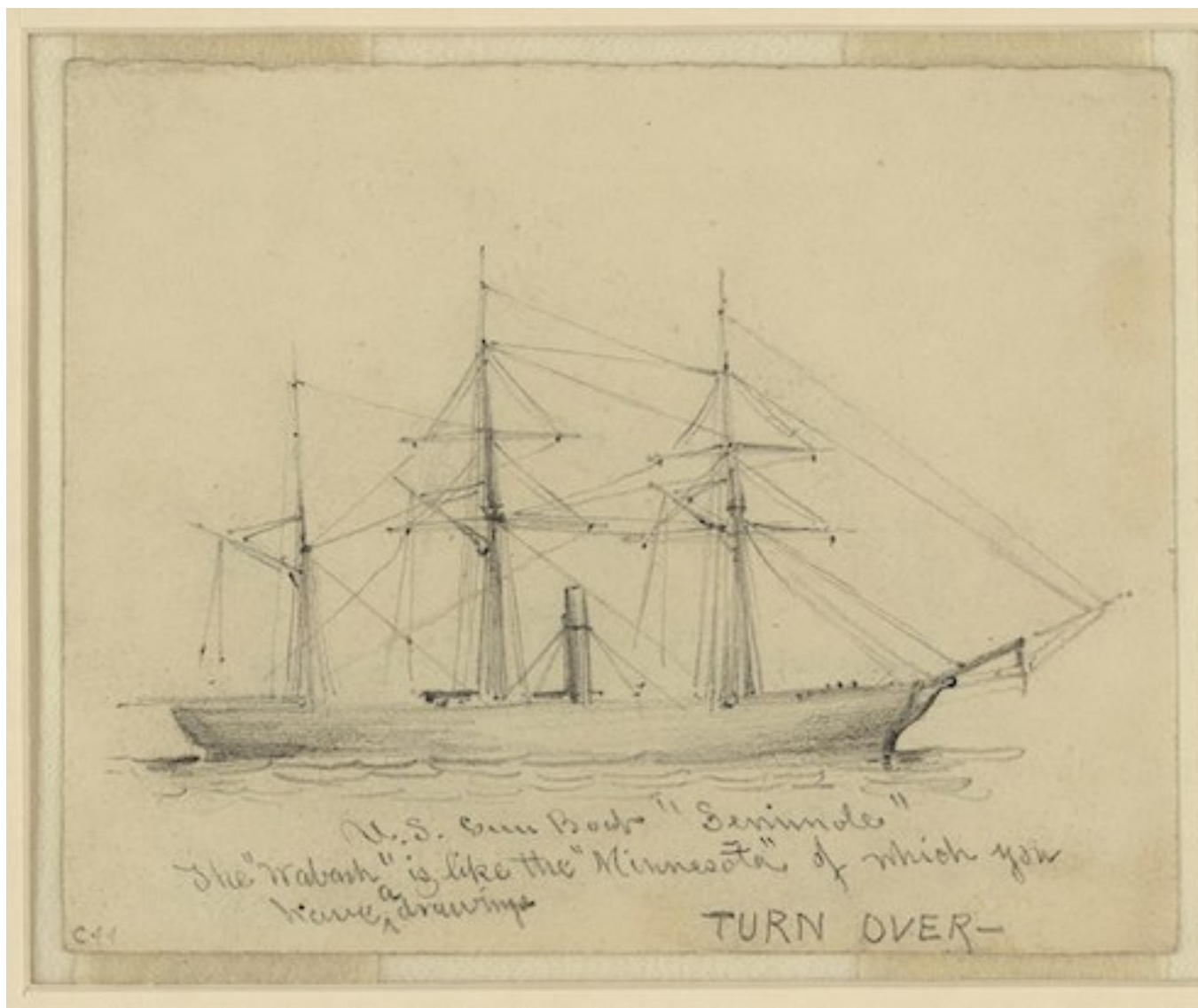
U. S. S. Pocahontas



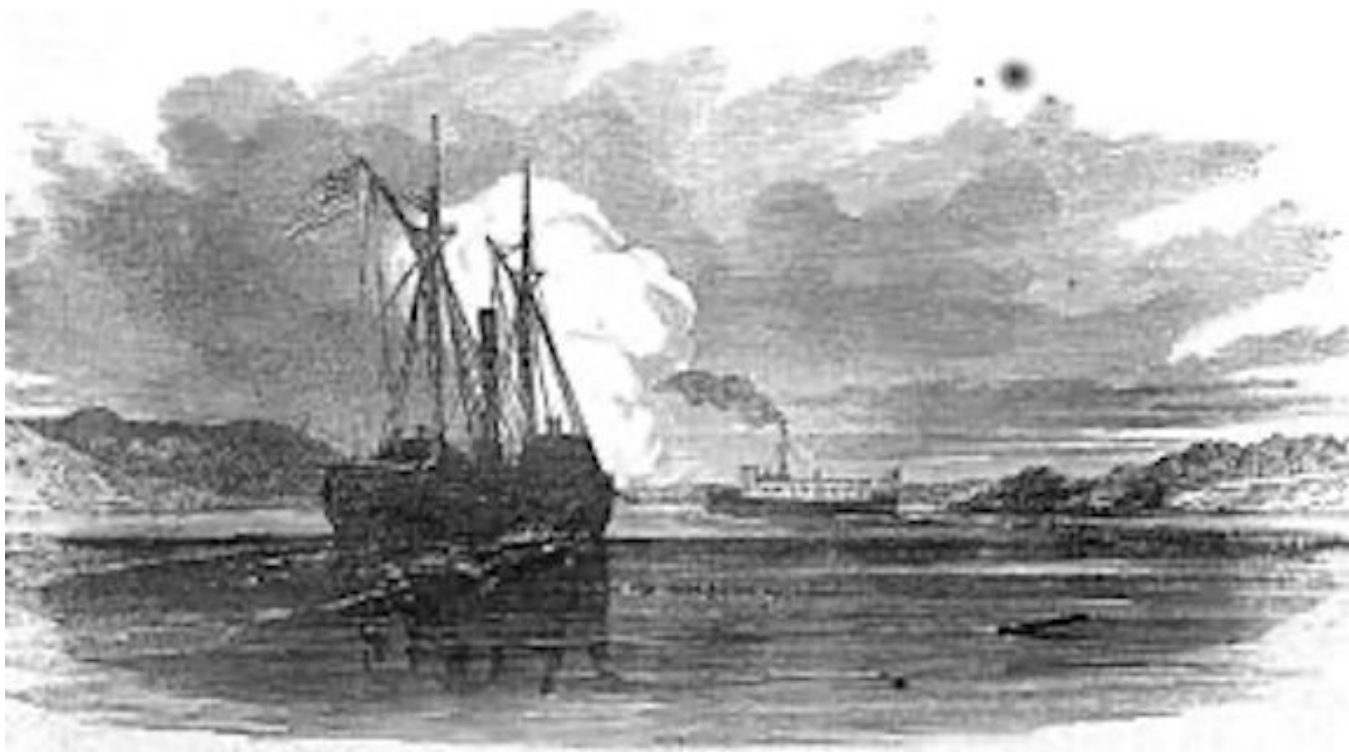
U. S. S. Resolute (Foreground)



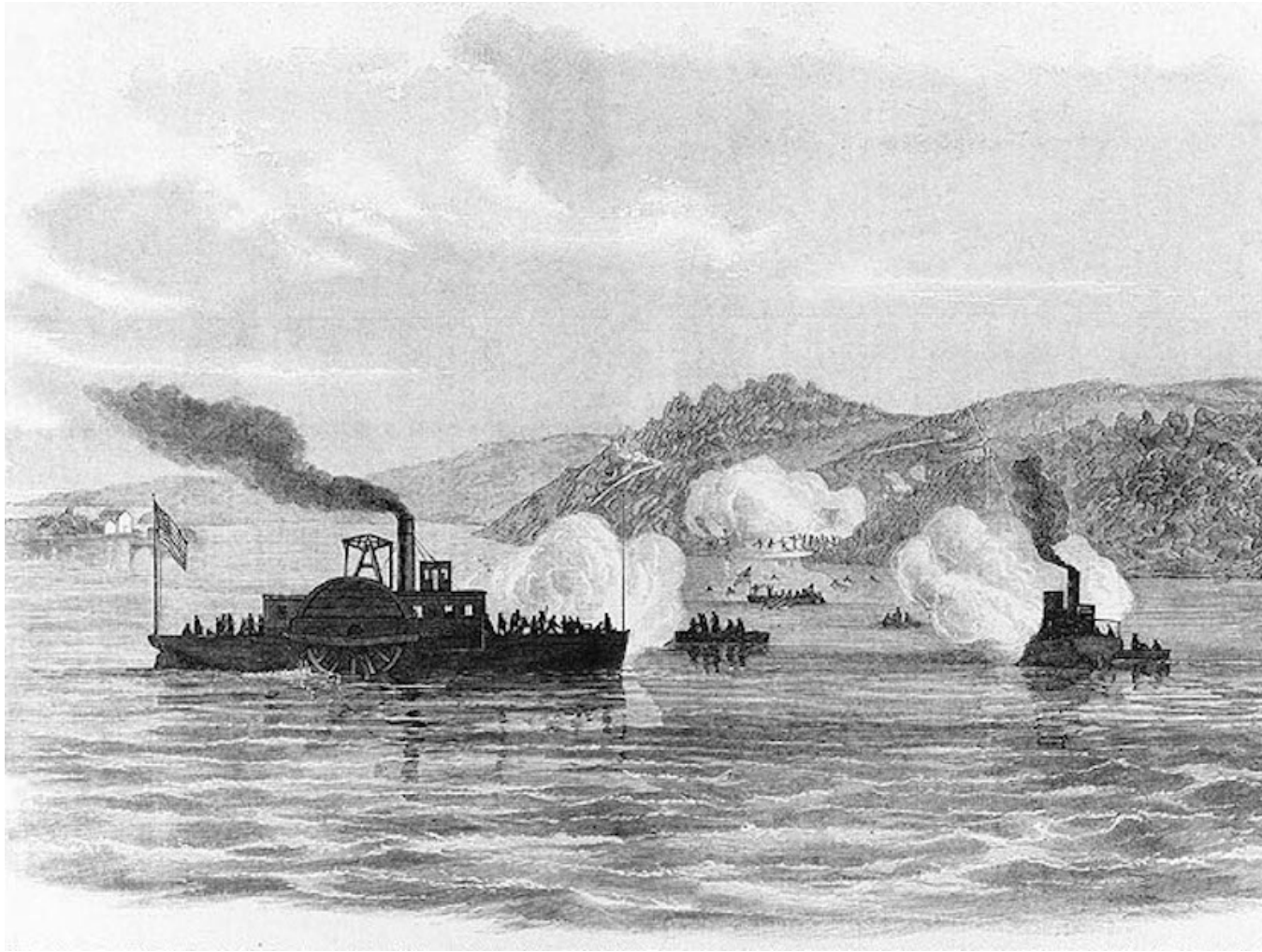
U. S. S. Satelllite (Rear)



U. S. S. Seminole



U. S. S. Teaser (Left)



U. S. S. Thomas Freeborn (Left foreground)



U. S. S. Thomas Freeborn