

THE ORIGINS OF THE MISSISSIPPI MARINE BRIGADE:
THE FIRST USE OF BROWN WATER TACTICS BY THE UNITED STATES
IN THE CIVIL WAR

by

THOMAS E. WALKER

Bachelor of Science, 2000
Texas Christian University
Fort Worth, Texas

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of
AddRan College of Humanities and Social Sciences
Texas Christian University
In partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

MASTER of ARTS

May, 2006

Copyright by
Thomas E. Walker
2006

Statement of Purpose

This project deals with the origins and history of an unconventional military unit, the Mississippi Marine Brigade, during the Civil War. The creation of the MMB allowed the Union to conduct tactical operations along the Mississippi River tributary system against Confederate guerrilla forces. While the unit had a short life span, it provided a blueprint for development of brown water naval operations in the Vietnamese Conflict, such as South Vietnamese Brown Berets, the U.S. Navy Patrol Boat Reconnaissance (PBR) program, and the U.S. Naval SEAL operations (Sea, Air, Land). Later, the Navy resurrected the lessons learned from the Civil War and currently employs them in their quick-reaction riverine patrol boats along the Tigris and Euphrates river in Iraq to combating insurgents using these important routes of supply and escape for insurgents attacking both Iraqi and United States forces.

The units currently involved in these operations along the Iraqi waterways belong to the Small Craft Company, part of the 2nd Marine Division based at Camp Lejeune and currently attached to the 24th Marine Expeditionary Unit on assignment in central Iraq. The type of craft used by these units, Riverine Assault Craft, draw upon the experiences learned from both Vietnam and the Civil War. The United

States Navy currently is in the process of building three 12 boat squadrons staffed with 700 sailors.

Admiral Mike Mullen, Chief of Naval Operations, during a speech at the Naval War College in August, 2005 stated that the Navy “is missing a great opportunity to influence events by not having a Riverine force.”¹ This type of response force would become useful in the Persian Gulf region because nearly thirty percent of the Northern Persian Gulf region is inaccessible to ships with drafts of more than twenty feet.

¹Any Klamper. River War. <http://www.military.com/forums/0,15240,86512,00.html>, Date accessed 1/2006

Acknowledgement

With great appreciation, this author acknowledges the much valued assistance and direction afforded to him from fellow graduate student and historian, David Slay.

The author also extends his thanks for the guidance and encouragement given to him by his mentor and advisor, Dr. Steven Woodworth.

Preface

The United States experienced one of the most difficult periods in its brief history when, in the mid-nineteenth century, the rebellious Southern states attempted to secede from the Union. This attempted splitting of the United States led to Civil War, which had profound effects on all aspects of American society, and echo to this very day.

Resistance secession caused the United States to make a number of adaptations to its military. The need for unconventional units became apparent during the war because the rebels' used irregular forces against Union troops.

In the spring of 1862, Union forces faced two major military problems in the Western Theater. One was the secessionist extensive modification and construction of ironclad naval forces at Memphis, Tennessee, and the other was a problem of irregular warfare by rebels in territory conquered by Union forces in the South.

The use of Confederate naval and guerrilla forces along the Western river systems of the United States led to the creation of two unique Union units, the Mississippi Ram Fleet under the command of Charles Ellet and, later, its land component, the Mississippi Marine

Brigade, led by his brother, Alfred Ellet. Charles Ellet began formation of the Ram Fleet in early November 1862, and it served until deactivated on August 3, 1864. Both of these Union volunteer units served with honor and distinction during the Southern rebellion of 1861.²

² Special Order No. 86, Headquarters, Military Division of West Mississippi, Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies, Series 1, Volume 41, p. 535-536.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter 1	1
Chapter 2	18
Chapter 3	36
Chapter 4	54
Chapter 5	71
Conclusion	85
Bibliography	88

Chapter 1

Before the Civil War, Charles Ellet, Jr. (1810-1862) was a civil engineer who specialized in bridge, dam, lock and waterway construction.³ During the Crimean War, Ellet spoke with Russian representatives who were in despair about the siege of Sebastopol in the winter of 1854. Ellet heard that the Russians planned to sink their fleet in Sebastopol's harbor in a desperate bid to break the British siege. During his conversations with Russian officials, Ellet recalled the old Greek tactic of reinforcing the ship's prow, which would enable to become a floating ram that could be used to ram and sink opposing ships.

The Greeks employed such vessels in the Mediterranean during the Peloponnesian War. They built rams onto the reinforced prows of their trireme ships (boats that had three tiers of oars) and, with the propulsion provided by the oars, they would ram into enemy ships in an attempt to disable or sink them. The theory behind the use of rams is a simple one, based on using a basic physics equation of employing the weight and speed of the ram to crush the side of an opposing ship.

³ Stewart Sifakis, Who Was Who in the Civil War (New York: Facts on File Publications, 1988), 202.

However, the rams had to strike a solid blow on the first attempt for, as Ellet stated, "No ram could stop to ram twice."⁴

He wrote a letter to the Russian government detailing his ideas on engineering a makeshift ram for use against enemy ships at the siege of Sebastopol. Russian officials at first seemed receptive to his idea, but their interest waned after the death of Czar Nicholas I in February 1854. In the end, nothing came of his proposal of using rams to break the blockade.

In April of 1855, Ellet approached U.S. Secretary of War Jefferson Davis through John Mason, the U.S. minister in Paris. In discussions with Secretary Davis, Ellet pushed the concept of converting existing ships into rams, but Davis rejected his ideas. In a pamphlet published December 1, 1855, Ellet reintroduced the idea of reinforcing a ship to withstand both shelling and the shock of ramming another vessel. This approach would entail making a ship's momentum an instrument of war. After writing several letters to various U. S. government officials providing details on how to create naval rams from existing ships, Ellet received a letter from Secretary of the Navy James C.

⁴ Norman E. Clarke, ed., Warfare Along the Mississippi: The Letters of Lieutenant Colonel George E. Currie (Mount Pleasant: Central Michigan University Press 1961), 12.

Dobbin, which thanked him for his interesting idea, but turned down his proposal to modify U.S. naval ships into waterborne juggernauts.⁵

A few years later, during the first year of the Civil War, Ellet observed that Major General George B. McClellan did not use the Union army in the Potomac River region very effectively. Ellet believed that General McClellan used the Army for parades, training, equipping, and drilling. Ellet criticized McClellan for the lack of initiative he displayed in the Potomac region. Ellet wrote two pamphlets critical of McClellan, the first pointing out the general's lack of action over the three months since he had assumed command of the Union ground forces in the Eastern Theater, which allowed the rebels to bring up reinforcements and to build fortifications all along the region across the Upper Potomac.⁶ The second pamphlet skewered McClellan's half-hearted attempt to land Federal troops on the southeast coast of Virginia and then leaving those Union forces exposed to rebel counterattack.⁷

As the war continued, Ellet proceeded from writing pamphlets to becoming more urgent in pressing his ideas for the development of naval rams. In April 1861, the Confederates had captured the facilities at the Norfolk Naval Yard. Subsequently word escaped that the rebels

⁵ John S.C. Abbott, "Heroic Deeds of Heroic Men—Charles Ellet and His Naval Steam Rams." Harper's New Monthly Magazine (February, 1866): 303.

⁶ Charles Ellet, "The Army of the Potomac," New York Times, (Letter to the Editor: October 9, 1861).

⁷ Charles Ellet, "Military Incapacity and What It Costs The Country" (New York: Ross & Tousey Press, February, 1862).

intended to convert one of the existing frigates there into an ironclad ram. Ellet wrote to Congress thirty days before the first Confederate ironclad made its appearance, reporting that the rebels had five steam rams deployed in several river locations. He noted in his letter that the Union did not have a single vessel able to withstand the onslaught of a properly constructed, reinforced ironclad ship.⁸ He also pushed for the implementation of his idea to incorporate naval rams in order to counteract the Confederate ironclad naval threats.

On March 8, 1862, the converted wooden frigate *Merrimac*, now plated with sheets of iron, equipped with a ram, and rechristened the *C.S.S. Virginia*, made its presence known in the naval battle at Hampton Roads. Under the command of Flag Officer Franklin Buchanan, this new rebel monstrosity steamed out of Norfolk, Virginia against the Union blockade fleet.⁹

Against this new type of vessel, the Union could initially muster only regular, wooden-hulled ships, including the 40-gun frigates *Roanoke* and *Minnesota*, the 50-gun frigate *Congress* and the 24-gun sloop *Cumberland*. During the battle, the *Virginia* used her ram to sink the *Cumberland* and her guns to burn the *Congress*. The U.S. frigates *Roanoke* and *Minnesota* ran aground while attempting to maneuver in

⁸ Charles Ellet, "Open Letter to Congress" (Missouri Historical Society, George Washington University Library, St. Louis: Georgetown Press, February 6, 1862).

⁹ Charles P. Roland, *An American Iliad: The Story of the Civil War, Second Edition* (Lexington, Kentucky, The University Press of Kentucky, 2004), 69.

the shallow waters at Hampton Roads. In return for this carnage, *Virginia* suffered only light damage, returning to port at nightfall.¹⁰

The next day March 9, 1862, she was back but this time faced a Union ironclad, the *Monitor*, which had made a rapid, dangerous ocean trip down from New York during a severe storm. The first clash of ironclad ships started at 9:00 a.m. and heralded a new era in naval combat.¹¹

This battle, though it ended in a draw, provided a glimpse into the future of naval warfare. With the advent of this formidable Confederate threat against Union shipping, Charles Ellet finally found an influential ally in the Lincoln administration in the form of Edwin M. Stanton, Secretary of War. Ellet again pitched his idea of reinforcing the bows of ships, as the Greeks did at the battle of Salamis. The Union navy could use the Greeks' ideas to construct makeshift rams and employ them to damage and sink rebel ships.

In January 1862, President Lincoln issued General War Order #1, ordering all Union military forces were to advance on all fronts. In February 1862, General Ulysses S. Grant took two divisions of men (totaling approximately 17,000 men) in coordination with a gunboat flotilla under the command of Flag Officer Andrew Foote. With these forces, General Grant conducted an assault on Confederates'

¹⁰ Steven E. Woodworth and Kenneth J. Winkle, Atlas of the Civil War (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 110.

¹¹ E. B. Long, The Civil War Day By Day: An Almanac 1861-1865 (Garden City, Illinois: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1971) 181.

strongholds Fort Henry and Fort Donelson on the Tennessee and Cumberland Rivers.¹² The flotilla consisted of four ironclad gunboats, the *Cincinnati* (the flag vessel for Foote), the *Essex*, the *Carondolet*, and the *Saint Louis*. Three wooden gunboats also stood by as reserves for the attack: the *A. O. Tyler*, the *Lexington*, and the *Conestoga*, which Foote employed to bombard the rebel strongholds.¹³ The iron-clads came from a design by James Eads. These gunboats had reinforced plates on the sides, but thinner protection on the top. Thus, the nickname of "Eads Turtles" had become attached to this class of iron-clads.

Secretary Stanton assumed total responsibility for the conversion of the Union ships into a ram fleet. He gave authorization to Ellet to initiate a unique army operation on the Mississippi River. Stanton ordered Ellet to scour the Western waterways in an effort to examine and purchase boats suitable for conversion into rams. On March 26, 1862, Stanton awarded Charles Ellet with commission as a colonel in the Union Army to ensure that he would have the needed authority to proceed with this procurement mission.¹⁴ After Ellet obtained the *Queen of the West*, the *Lancaster*, the *Monarch*, and the *Switzerland*,

¹² Charles P. Roland, *An American Iliad: The Story of the American Civil War, Second Edition* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2004), 60.

¹³ Charles Dana Gibson with E. Kay Gibson, *The Army's Navy Series, Volume II, Assault and Logistics Union Army Coastal and River Operations 1861-1866*, (Camden, N.J.: Ensign Press, 1995), 66.

¹⁴ Stanton to Ellet, OR, Series 1, Volume 22, p. 680.

Federal naval yards rushed these boats through the necessary reinforcement modifications on their prows to make them into the rams that Ellet had envisioned.

Now that Ellet had obtained the necessary equipment, the remaining difficulty lay in obtaining the manpower needed to crew these vessels.¹⁵ Ellet used thirteen members of his family to fill critical command positions, but he had to rely extensively on his powers of persuasion to obtain qualified personnel for the rams from other Union units. Ellet still needed army sharpshooters to provide the boats with the fire support needed against Confederate crews attempting to board them, but solved this problem by obtaining permission from Secretary Stanton to recruit from Union wounded convalescing at army hospitals.

Charles Ellet also received permission to transfer his brother, Captain Alfred W. Ellet, and his infantry company from the 59th Illinois Infantry regiment. He also received another company from the 63rd Illinois to help man the ram fleet.¹⁶ While his brother helped alleviate the problem of military personnel, Ellet found that the need for a crew to fire the boilers was still an issue.¹⁷ He found a solution to this dilemma by employing slaves who had recently escaped from their

¹⁵ Ellet to Stanton, OR, Series 1, Volume 22, p. 682-684.

¹⁶ John C. Abbott, "Heroic Deeds by Heroic Men-Charles Ellet and his Naval Steam Rams", Harper's New Monthly Magazine (February, 1866): 301, Ellet to Stanton, OR, Series 1, Volume 10, p. 127-28.

¹⁷ Ellet to Stanton, OR, Series 1, Volume 23, p. 78.

owners in the South and who volunteered for duty as firemen to stoke the ram fleet's boilers.

The Confederates had also thought of employing riverboats as rams. The Confederates had taken the advice that Ellet had written in a letter to Secretary of the Navy James C. Dobbin in 1855. In these letters, later reprinted in pamphlet form, Ellet explained that the two primary conditions in the construction and selection of the ships lay in the strength of the hull and the speed of the vessel. Ellet learned that the Confederates had started the process of converting steamers into ironclad rams for use in their River Defense Fleet, which heightened his concern about the rebels' use of these vessels against Union ships.¹⁸

While Ellet worked on the problems of equipping and manning the ram fleet, the Confederates launched an attack from Fort Pillow on May 10, 1862, at Plum Run Bend on the Mississippi River against Union forces bombarding the Fort. On May 9, 1862, Fleet Captain Charles Henry Davis had relieved Flag Officer Foote because he had aggravated injuries he sustained during the Fort Donelson campaign. This rebel naval force, led by Captain James E. Montgomery, consisted

¹⁸ Gene D. Lewis and Charles Ellet, Jr., The Engineer as Individualist, 1810-1862 (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1968), 183.

of eight armed river rams and gunboats.¹⁹ *Mortar Boat 16* had just taken up firing position to start the daily bombardment on Fort Pillow at Craigshead Point with the escort gunboat *Cincinnati*. As the Confederate river Defense fleet approached, the Union lookouts spotted them steaming fast upriver. As the *Cincinnati* attempted to reposition itself in a more defensive position, the *Carondolet* and the *Pittsburg* spotted the oncoming rebel ships, and cast off their moorings, attempted to build up steam and assist the *Cincinnati* and *Mortar Boat 16*. The crew on *Mortar Boat 16* cut their fuses and powder charges as short as they could so that the shells would provide an airburst pattern directly over the Confederate gunboats.

When the rebel fleet came into clear view of the rest of the Union Mississippi River Defense fleet, all eight Union ships raced to intercept them. The *Mound City* had partial power from her boilers and cast off from the riverbank along with the *Benton*. When the Confederate ram/gunboat *General Bragg* had closed to within one-fourth of a mile, the *Mound City* and *Benton* opened fire, however, as the *Cincinnati* crossed into their line of fire, they had to stop. The *General Bragg* struck the *Cincinnati* and punched a hole in its hull above the waterline. At point blank range, the *Cincinnati* gun crews fired on *General Bragg*, destroying its steering gear and thus causing it to drift

¹⁹ Steven Woodworth and Kenneth J. Winkle, *Atlas of the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 108.

downstream, while the rebel crew frantically attempted to regain steerage. The *Cincinnati* attempted to retreat upstream to safer waters, but the Confederate rams had not finished with her. The *General Sterling Price* and *General Sumter* closed on the *Cincinnati* and struck her, causing the Union ironclad to sink. The *Mound City* next fell victim to the Confederate rams when the *General Earl Van Dorn* struck the Union ironclad. This impact knocked off the entire bow structure of the *Mound City*, which would have sunk if not for the use of pumps. This event proves the effectiveness, as Colonel Ellet envisioned, of employing steam rams against opposing ships.²⁰

Despite his fleets' lack of readiness, the rebel attack forced Ellet to push his vessels farther south to put pressure on Montgomery, an action that prompted the rebel forces to withdraw from Plum Run Bend and back to the Fort Pillow area. At Fort Pillow, the rebels had constructed extensive fortifications. Situated on a high bluff, the Confederates had erected breastworks five miles long with cannons positioned in a tier format from the edge of the Mississippi River, to the main fort itself. The rebels had a total of 40 cannons including 10-inch Columbiads that could fire 50-pound shot 600 yards.²¹ With the pressure applied by Ellet's fleet, and the loss of Corinth to Union

²⁰ Gibson and Gibson, The Army's Navy Series 103-04.

²¹ Jack D. Coombe, Thunder Along the Mississippi: The River Battles that Split the Confederacy (Edison, New Jersey: Castle Books Press, 1996), 119.

forces, the rebels had to evacuate their fortifications at Fort Pillow, which Union troops later occupied. While at that location, Ellet continued to work on reinforcing the rams' prows to withstand the shock of crashing into rebel boats. The rams remained at anchor close to shore with Union infantry to provide security against possible sneak attack by Confederate troops.

Although no attack ever came, tensions remained high at the rams' portage. One night, a sentry heard noises coming from the undergrowth. Fearing an attack by rebel forces, the sentry sounded a general alert and everyone manned battle stations. After several tense minutes, it developed that the noises had come from a cow, which had wandered close to their anchorage site. The realization of the bovine nature of their attacker gave everyone a good laugh, allowing a release of built-up tension.²² This release came at a good time because shortly thereafter, because soon, the ram fleet would become deeply involved in naval battle.

On June 6, 1862, Ellet's ram fleet steamed towards the Confederate Mississippi riverport of Memphis.²³ Two Union gunboats escorted the ram fleet because the rams' only armament consisted of twenty sharpshooters who aimed through loopholes cut into the side

²² Clarke, ed., *Warfare Along the Mississippi* 99.

²³ Ellet's Report, ORN, Series 1, Volume 23, p. 125.

railings. Charles Ellet commanded the *Queen of the West*, Alfred Ellet the *Monarch*. In a report filed with Secretary of War, Edwin M.

Stanton, Colonel Ellet wrote:

On approaching Memphis I found the gun-boats under Commodore Davis anchored across the channel. I accordingly rounded to, with the Queen, (my flag-ship) and made fast to the Arkansas shore, with the intention of conferring with Commodore Davis and collecting information preparatory to the next movement. But my flagship had been but a few minutes secured to the bank, before a shot which seemed to pass over her, announced the presence of the enemy. I immediately ordered the lines cast off, signified to Lieut. Col. Alfred Ellet on the Monarch, whose place was next going into action, rounded to, with headed down stream, and passing between the gunboats....²⁴

Pushing rapidly past her Union escorts, the *Queen of the West* struck the first blow by ramming the nearest Confederate vessel, the *General Lovell*, a New Orleans towboat refitted by the rebels as a gunboat and makeshift ram. The *Lovell* immediately began to take on water and sank with most of the rebel crew on board. Admiral David Dixon Porter commended the valor of both Col. Charles Ellet and Lt.

²⁴ Warren D. Crandall and Isaac D. Newell, The History of the Ram Fleet and the Mississippi Marine Brigade in the War for the Union on the Mississippi and its Tributaries: The Story of the Ellets and their Men (St. Louis: Buschart Brothers Press, 1907), 76.

Col. Ellet for their actions during this battle for rushing ahead of the Union gunboats against the Confederate fleet.²⁵

After ramming the *Lovell*, the *Queen of the West* had come to a stop. Before she could regain her momentum, two Confederate rams, the *General Bragg* and the *General Sterling Price*, attacked, by attempting to ram her. The *Bragg* struck the wheelhouse area on the *Queen*, disabling one wheel, but did no serious damage. The *Bragg* then bounced off and ran into the oncoming *Price*, sheering off the paddle wheel from its side housing. The *Price* then swerved toward the Arkansas shore but sank before reaching the shoreline. During these events the Confederate and Union troops onboard these boats provided a heavy volume of rifle and cannon fire.

One of the pilots onboard the Union gunboat *Carondelet* wrote in a journal:

The first shot was fired by the rebels shortly after 5 o'clock. The gunboat fleet remained stationary, firing stern guns till the ram *Queen of the West*, followed by the ram *Monarch*, passed down to attack. We immediately followed but the time necessarily consumed in getting around, head down the stream together with the greater speed of the rams, left us far behind. The much decried "rotten and worthless steamboat" rams went in gallantly,

²⁵ Admiral David Dixon Porter, The Naval History of the Civil War (Secaucus, N.J.: Castle, a Division of Book Sales, Inc., 1984), 171.

sinking two rebel boats, and throwing the rest into confusion, so as to allow the gunboats to get pretty near before they (the rebels) started off on the grand skedaddle. We pursued as fast as possible firing on them till they all surrendered but one, which, being much faster than we were escaped...²⁶

After the initial crash of the *Queen of the West* against the rebel boat, Colonel Ellet stepped out on the deck of the *Queen* to survey damage done to his vessel and that done to the *Lovell*.

While on deck, he positioned himself between the chimneys in full view of the pilot and the forward part of the boat. Ellet became so engrossed in directing the *Queen* and monitoring the progress of the battle that he apparently forgot about the dangerous location in which he had placed himself. In this position, Ellet could effectively direct the Union ram fleet; however, it left him exposed to heavy rebel rifle fire. He eventually received a bullet wound to his knee, but he remained at his exposed post until victory became a reality for the Union fleet.

The *Monarch*, commanded by Alfred Ellet, rammed into the Confederate boat the *General Beauregard*. Even though the rebel boat attempted to avoid a solid collision, she still received a mortal blow and sank in a few minutes. The Union gunboats by this time had come

²⁶ Crandall and Newell, *The History of the Ram Fleet and the Mississippi Marine Brigade* 79.

into range and commenced bombarding the remaining rebel boats in the area. The *Jeff Thompson*, riddled by cannon and rifle fire, ran aground on the Arkansas shore and blew up. The badly shot-up *Sumter*, lay dead in the water, abandoned. The *Little Rebel*, the flagship of Captain Montgomery's fleet, became crippled by Union cannon fire, and the rebels would eventually abandon it along the Arkansas shoreline.

In the general confusion of the attack, three of the Confederate rams crashed into each other and received repeated Union broadsides, which caused them to either sink or forced them to run aground. The commander of the rebel boat *General Earl Van Dorn*, observing the chaos from the Union attack, retreated quickly down the Mississippi River with the Union vessels *Monarch* and the *Lancaster* in close pursuit.²⁷

In the span of one hour, the commanding Confederate naval presence on the Mississippi at Memphis lay in ruins, along with any hope of maintaining rebel control of the Mississippi River system.²⁸ During this conflict, the population of Memphis had lined the bluffs of the Mississippi, invited by Captain Montgomery, to witness the rebels'

²⁷ Coombe, *Thunder Along the Mississippi*, 131.

²⁸ John S.C. Abbott, "Heroic Deeds of Heroic Men—Charles Ellet and His Naval Steam Rams", *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* (February 1866), 303.

triumphant destruction of the oncoming Union fleet.²⁹ The shock of seeing the Confederate boats destroyed and the speed at which this unexpected turn of events unfolded caused dismay to spread rapidly among the populace of Memphis.

The only casualty sustained by the Union forces involved the bullet wound to Colonel Charles Ellet's knee, which became infected. As each day passed, Ellet's wound grew worse. As all medical efforts to treat his wound failed, Ellet resisted any suggestion by his doctors to amputate his leg. He reportedly stated, "Like my country, I prefer death to dismemberment," an attitude which eventually led to the only death suffered by the Federal forces as a result of the fleet action at Memphis. In mid June, the *Queen of the West* turned upriver to travel towards the cooler climate of Cairo, Illinois, with the wounded Colonel Ellet.

Upon reaching Cairo, Charles Ellet passed command of the ram fleet to his brother, Alfred, and transferred himself to the *Switzerland* to continue medical treatment. Despite all the surgeons' best efforts, short of amputation, Ellet died peacefully in his sleep on June 21, 1862.

Charles Ellet's brief military career provided the Union with one of the most brilliant naval victories ever won on inland waters. This

²⁹ Thompson to Beauregard, OR, Series 1, Volume 10, p. 913.

strategic victory gave the Federals control of the Mississippi River tributary system down to Vicksburg, Mississippi, thus allowing a rapid transport of Union troops and supplies deep into Confederate territory. The defeat of the rebel fleet by Ellet's rams during the naval battle of Memphis, and the surrender of the city to Union forces, left the only notable rebel fortifications at Vicksburg, Mississippi, as an obstacle to the sundering of the Confederacy.³⁰

³⁰Clarke, Warfare Along The Mississippi 53.

Chapter 2

After Charles Ellet's death on June 21, 1862, command of the Mississippi ram fleet fell to his brother, Alfred. Before the Civil War, Alfred had worked as a civil engineer, traveling around the country on various projects. When the Civil War erupted, Alfred joined the 59th Illinois Volunteer Infantry Regiment. While attached to the 59th, Ellet won election to the rank of captain and led his company during the March 1862, battle of Pea Ridge, Arkansas. This battle established firm control of Missouri by Union forces and allowed them to continue their campaign deeper into Confederate territory along the Mississippi River.

When Charles Ellet started the Mississippi Ram Fleet, he obtained Alfred's reassignment to the fleet so that Alfred could assume the position of second-in-command while he retained overall command. Alfred also brought with him much-needed riflemen to serve as sharpshooters in the ram fleet. When Charles Ellet died from his wound command of the Mississippi Ram Fleet devolved to recently promoted Lt. Col. Alfred Ellet.³¹

³¹ Stanton to Ellet, OR, Series 1, Volume 15, p. 497.

Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton fully realized the importance of transportation on the Mississippi River. When Alfred W. Ellet sent him a letter urging the formation of the Mississippi Marine Brigade, Stanton quickly summoned him to Washington. After an extensive discussion with him, Stanton promoted Ellet to the rank of Brigadier General and arranged the creation of this new unit. Thus, in a relatively short time, a new military unit with a unique mission became realized.

When Alfred assumed command of the Mississippi Ram Fleet, he had a reputation among his men as having the same brave, spirit that had distinguished his brother. While Ellet familiarized himself with the role of the commanding officer for the Mississippi Ram Fleet, he received a dispatch from Secretary of War Stanton, congratulating him on his assumption of command. Stanton stressed that the ram fleet and the auxiliary forces under his direction remained under the general command of the gunboat squadron by the order of President Abraham Lincoln. Nevertheless, Stanton still wanted frequent, full reports of all the ram fleet's activities from Ellet.

While he consolidated his position, Alfred wanted to continue the offensive against the rebel fleet, believing that the longer the delay, the more time the Confederates had for reorganizing after their crushing defeat at Memphis. Wanting to press the advantage gained, Ellet took the rams *Monarch*, *Fulton*, *Lancaster*, *Lioness*, and *Mingo*

down the Mississippi. During this journey, the fleet observed signs of several plantations lying abandoned and crossing points made by southerners fleeing from the Arkansas conscription service. At this time, the rebel military governor of Arkansas had started forced conscription of men into the Confederate ranks in Arkansas. During this trip down river toward Vicksburg, Ellet had assumed that Commodore Davis would follow close behind with the gunboats.

When the fleet approached Island 97, located 40 miles north of Vicksburg, Ellet decided on his own to continue down toward Vicksburg without escort. He secured the tow barges connected to his boats, left the *Lioness* and *Mingo* to maintain guard, and pushed on with the *Fulton*, *Lancaster*, and *Monarch*. While Alfred did not have a reputation for brilliance or cunning, these actions showed rare independence of thought and action, not common among Union military commanders. Ellet acquired information that Admiral Farragut had arrived just below Vicksburg and devised a system to contact him by sending four men overland, avoiding Confederate forces in the area. This system allowed coordination between the two fleets, and when Union land forces under the command of Brigadier General Thomas Williams arrived, the fleets could provide and coordinate important naval support during the campaign against Vicksburg.³²

³² Crandall Newell, [The History of the Ram Fleet and the Mississippi Marine Brigade](#) 90.

General Williams had received orders from General Benjamin Butler to dig a canal across the neck of land known as Desoto Point opposite Vicksburg.³³ This extension of land was approximately 5 miles across, and the idea was to provide an alternative water route around Vicksburg's dangerous cannons. But this attempt to circumvent the Confederate fortifications at Vicksburg failed, and General Williams's ground forces eventually withdrew.³⁴

During the naval siege at Vicksburg, another threat to Union shipping made itself apparent in the form of guerrilla attacks. Rebel scouting and foraging groups made their presence known on both sides of the Mississippi by firing on passing boats. In a report to Secretary of War Edwin Stanton, General Ellet writes:

I have received Quartermaster Brooks ten brass field pieces to add to the security of my boats from the attacks of the guerilla bands that are now infesting the banks of the river, and, to enable us to inflict punishment on such bands when they do attack us. I find it necessary to ask for authority to increase my military force of 75 men and, if consistent with the service, would wish to obtain these men from the Seventh Regiment Ill. Volunteer Infantry. At present I am keeping my force occupied

³³Woodworth and Winkle, Atlas of the Civil War 120.

³⁴Sifakis, Who Was Who in the Civil War 718-719.

by occasionally sending a boat to Memphis at the request of Flag-officers Farragut and Davis, and by reconnoissances (sic) up the Yazoo River. Yesterday I found our guns of great service upon one of these trips. I was attacked and fired into by various bands, who scattered and fled before each well directed discharge of grape. The Yazoo River is lined with ruffian bands and filled with valuable steamers owned by the Southern Confederacy.³⁵

During this time, Farragut and Davis repeatedly requested more land forces to support naval operations on the Mississippi River system.

In a letter dated July 14, 1862, to General Henry Halleck, Secretary Stanton wrote, "The Secretary of the Navy desires to know whether you have, any land forces to co-operate in the operations at Vicksburg. Please inform me immediately, in as much as orders he intends to give will depend on your answer."³⁶ General Halleck replied, "I can not, at present, give Commodore Farragut any aid against Vicksburg. I am sending reinforcements to General Curtis in Arkansas, and to General Buell in Tennessee and Kentucky."³⁷ This

³⁵ Crandall and Newell, The History of the Ram Fleet and the Mississippi Marine Brigade 96-97.

³⁶ Stanton to Halleck, OR, Series 1, Volume 15, p. 92.

³⁷ Halleck to Stanton, OR, Series1, Volume 15, p. 94.

failure to respond left any Union reaction to these attacks in the hands of the ram fleet and the devices of Ellet and Admiral David Dixon Porter. At first, Admiral Porter attempted to squash this new type of unconventional Confederate warfare by employing conventional naval tactics. He also ordered that if any guerrillas fell into the hands of Union troops, they should be treated as robbers and thieves.³⁸

After the fall of Memphis and the destruction of the Confederate naval fleet based there, the rebels resorted to devolution of military tactics. They began relying on hit and run attacks, small unit ambushes, sniping at commercial and military river traffic, and causing diversions of Union troops to hunt down the scattered insurgent units along the banks of the Mississippi. When Admiral Porter assumed command of the Mississippi River Squadron in October 1862, he realized the necessity of using a force of marines, carried by his boats, to react to attacks by the rebel insurgents.

In response to these unconventional threats to military and commercial traffic on the Mississippi River system, Porter consulted with General Ellet. The two officers thought it necessary to request the formation of a new type of unit that would become a quick reaction, riverine-based force.³⁹ Porter understood that Union

³⁸ Crandall and Newell, The History of the Ram Fleet and the Mississippi Marine Brigade 229.

³⁹ Welles to Stanton, ORN, Series 1, Volume 23, p. 298.

warships could not alone defeat these guerrilla attacks and that they needed a land component to attack this new Confederate threat to river traffic.

The guerrilla tactics employed by Confederate forces along the Mississippi River proved a major problem, especially for military transports, and, by the fall of 1862, attacks on river shipping were a common, even a daily, occurrence. The attacks varied from minor sniping episodes that targeted the wheelmen and river pilots, to artillery barrages and the use of infantry units up to a battalion in size to conduct raids on Union forces.⁴⁰

The constant guerrilla attacks led to the cooperation of Admiral Porter and newly promoted Brigadier General Alfred Ellet in requesting the formation of a quick reaction, riverine-based force.⁴¹ The amphibious force formed by the Union to combat the Confederate irregular attacks on river traffic took the title of the Mississippi Marine Brigade (MMB).⁴² The MMB utilized the Mississippi Ram Fleet boats as their base and transports.

The Navy Department could not provide Marines to supplement Admiral Porter's fleet, but the War Department did purchase several

⁴⁰ Curtis to Halleck, 31, August 1862, OR, Series 1, Volume 13, p. 240.

⁴¹ Porter to Welles, ORN, Series 1, Volume 23, p. 428.

⁴² Welles's Office Records, ORN, Volume 23, p. 396.

boats: *Autocrat*, *B.J. Adams*, *Baltic*, *Diana*, *Fairchild*, *John Raine*, and the *Woodford*. The U.S. Navy added three steam boats as support vessels, the *Belle Darlington*, *Alf Cutling* and *Cleveland*. The *Autocrat*, *B.J. Adams*, *Baltic*, *Diana*, and the *John Raine* had operated as large boats that cruised up and down the Mississippi River between New Orleans and Memphis before the Civil War.

These boats required extensive refitting to protect their boilers with heavy, thick timbers and large bunkers. Extending from the lower deck all the way to the overhead, two-inches of solid oak shielding provided protection for the Union riflemen. Into these bulwarks, workmen cut loopholes for Union troops to aim their weapons and large portholes with hinged covers on them to provide ventilation. To protect the pilots from rebel gunfire, the pilothouses had large sheets of boilerplate iron installed along the walls.⁴³

Other alterations to the boats involved the use of pulleys hanging from the forecastle to raise and lower a large, railed gangway, which allowed two horses to embark or disembark at the same time. This ramp facilitated the on loading and off-loading of troops and equipment. The gangway also had attachments that allowed a large crane to swivel to either side of the vessel for deployment of Union forces. The living quarters for the officers, located in the aft-part of

⁴³ Clarke, Warfare Along The Mississippi 59.

the cabin decks, allowed them to gain access to the main deck area in case of attack, and the forepart of the cabin deck was converted into mess halls for the men. The middle deck area, just to the rear of the boilers contained the enlisted men's sleeping quarters. To prevent the Confederates from boarding, each vessel had large hot-water hoses to tap into the boiler water system for a readily available supply of hot water. Ellet outfitted a few of the vessels for support duties; he equipped the *Fairchild* as a quartermaster and commissary boat and the *Woodford* as a floating hospital boat.

Thus, by the start of 1863, the Mississippi Marine Brigade had a fleet that consisted of three stern-wheel and four side-wheel steam boats with three steam powered tugs used for courier and resupply duties and six small coal barges to re-supply fuel to the fleet. Each of the five transports could carry a contingent of 125 cavalry horses and riders with 250 infantrymen as support. As a result of these additional forces, the total strength of the MMB came to 625 cavalry and 1,250 infantrymen. The cost of purchasing the needed boats, refitting and equipping the vessels, and reassigning the men totaled approximately \$350,000.⁴⁴

This new type of unit had the tactical objective of providing protection to all traffic on the Mississippi River system. It would

⁴⁴ Clarke, Warfare Along the Mississippi 60.

conduct counter-guerrilla operations meant, in the words of Lt. Col. George E. Currie, to “to keep the Mississippi River free of the roving bands of guerrillas that swarm upon its banks, firing upon passing steamers with artillery and small arms, thus preventing the Government from sending supplies to the troops in that part of the southern country tributary to the Mississippi River.”⁴⁵ Lt. Col. Currie would become instrumental in the Mississippi Marine Brigade by assuming a prominent role in the leadership of the ground forces portion of the Brigade.

The MMB consisted of one brigadier general to assume overall command and staff to assist him, one colonel, a lieutenant colonel, two majors, and the usual assortment of captains and lieutenants to assume the command as regular army staff officers. On November 7, 1862, President Abraham Lincoln wrote the order to Ellet ordering him to report to “Rear Admiral Porter for instructions, and act under his directions until otherwise ordered by the War Department.”⁴⁶ On November 8, 1862, Assistant Secretary of the Navy Gustavus Fox wrote to Admiral Porter in order to address concerns expressed by Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton that the Unit would operate less

⁴⁵ George E. Currie, *Personal Correspondence Papers*, (Missouri Historical Society, George Washington University Library, St. Louis, Mo).

⁴⁶ Roy P. Basler, ed., *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln* Volume 5, (New Brunswick, N. J.: Rutgers University Press 1953), 490.

effectively under the command of the Navy. As Fox said, "If Ellet is the right kind of man all will go well, and if he goes wrong Stanton will say it arose from placing him under a Navy officer."⁴⁷ Thus, while the Mississippi Marine Brigade fell under the auspices of the army, it was under navy command for operations on the Mississippi River system. This unique combination of two branches of the armed services later caused much trouble communicating along an established chain of command.

A letter to General E. Kirby Smith from James Seddon, the Confederate Secretary of War, proved the need for the services of the Mississippi Marine Brigade. The MMB captured the rebel letter during operations near Natchez, Mississippi, in November 1863. In the letter, Seddon recognized "the necessity for the raising of small bands of men armed with rifles and field pieces, for the expressed purpose of interrupting navigation on the Mississippi. The work had to continue no matter the cost, as the possession of the river by the enemies of the Confederacy would continue to have a bad effect upon the Confederate prospects throughout."⁴⁸ Seddon's own words clearly

⁴⁷ Robert Means Thompson and Richard Wainwright, eds., Confidential Correspondence of Gustavus Vasa Fox: Assistant Secretary of the Navy 1861-1865. Volume 2, (Freeport, New York: Books for Library Press, 1920), 147.

⁴⁸ Clarke, Warfare Along the Mississippi 57.

expressed the importance of continuing the tactics employed by the Marine brigade to disrupt the guerrillas along the Mississippi.

The MMB quickly became involved in military action along the 500-plus miles of the lower Mississippi River. With the destruction of the rebel fleet at the battle of Memphis, the waterway to Vicksburg was open to Union forces. The Mississippi River would allow rapid transportation of Northern units and supplies, thus making the safe navigation of this waterway of high importance.

In November of 1862, General Grant first attempted a combined land and water expedition to capture Vicksburg, considered by most Union Generals to be the Gibraltar of the West. To accomplish this task, Grant would need transports to move General William T. Sherman's troops if he wanted to prevent General McClernand from attempting an assault on Vicksburg. To solve this problem, Grant turned to Admiral Porter and the ships of the Mississippi Marine Brigade. Grant requested the use of the MMB transports to help facilitate the movement of Sherman's men.⁴⁹ The area around Vicksburg allowed for an almost perfect geographical position for defense. At that location on the Mississippi, the bluffs rise up to 250 feet above the water and extend for 100 miles from the north to the south. North of Vicksburg lay the Yazoo river and its delta, a gloomy

⁴⁹ William T. Sherman, Memoirs of Gen'l W.T. Sherman: Written By Himself 2 volumes, (New York: Charles L. Webster & Co., 1891), 310.

stretch of swampy land extending 175 miles from north to south and 60 miles from east to west. The ground immediately south of Vicksburg was almost as swampy and impassable.⁵⁰

These features provided a solid defense for the rebel fortifications surrounding Vicksburg. General Grant believed that the way to capture Vicksburg was from the east; he planned to work his forces down to Jackson, then turn and march to the west towards Vicksburg. In November 1862, Grant started moving his forces into Mississippi, against Confederate troops under the command of General John C. Pemberton.⁵¹ By December 1862, Grant had positioned his forces to the east and north of Vicksburg at Chickasaw Bayou.

Meanwhile, ordered to form this new, river-based, quick-reaction unit in November of 1862, Alfred Ellet faced difficulty in obtaining staffing. The lack of available Marine Corps personnel led to some unorthodox measures to obtain army personnel to fill the ranks.⁵² Recruiting officers posted hands, such as the following which appeared in Cairo, Illinois in December, 1862:

The "MISSISSIPPI MARINE BRIGADE"

Convalescent Soldiers! Hurrah Boys!

⁵⁰ Matloff, Army Historical Series 237.

⁵¹ Steven Woodworth, Nothing But Victory, Army of the Tennessee, 1861-1865 (New York: Alfred A. Knopf Press, 2005), 255-261.

⁵² A. W. Ellet to Halleck, 13, December, 1862, OR Series1, Volume 17, p. 406.

Brigadier General Ellet of the Ram Fleet having obtained permission from the War Department to recruit convalescent soldiers from any hospital is organizing a Mississippi Marine Brigade. A regiment is just organizing at St. Louis, and promises to become the most renowned in the service.

It is raised for and becomes as a part of the above Brigade, commanded by Brigadier General A. W. Ellet, well known commander of the Mississippi Ram Fleet. The "Ellet Scouts" will be furnished good quarters and transports fitted out expressly for them, where they will keep their valuables, clothing, stores, etc., and with other parts of the Brigade, (consisting of infantry, cavalry, and artillery), on similar vessels, will keep company and act in concert with the Mississippi Ram Fleet. No long hard marches, camping without tents or food or carrying heavy knapsacks, but good, comfortable quarters and good facilities for cooking at all times.

The "Ellet Scouts" are expected to see plenty of active service on the Mississippi River and its tributaries in keeping it clear of rebel guerrillas, and securing to the public the free and safe navigation of the great highway. They are expected to act promptly and at short notice, in concert with some of the Rams and gunboats at distant points, with secrecy and dispatch, and

landing, to operate on shore in an attack, in the rear, or a sudden assault...

Captain W. H. Wright

Recruiting Officer⁵³

This novel approach to recruitment, with the primary focus on good food, comfortable quarters and easy duty would later become a standard tool for military recruiters to employ worldwide. Highlighting the positive aspects of military activity, and using the fame generated from the recent Union naval victory at Memphis, while downplaying the negative side of military duties, helped fill many positions in the MMB.

Another handbill printed and passed out to Union field hospital units by Captain James Crandall read:

MISSISSIPPI MARINE BRIGADE

Soldiering Made Easy! No more Marching

No Carrying Knapsacks!

\$100.00 Bounty!

A Marine Brigade, to act in concert with the invincible Ram Fleet, is to be raised immediately. All under the command of Brigadier General A. W. Ellet. Large steam boats are engaged to carry the troops down into the rear of the rebellion and open the

⁵³ William Wright, "Recruiting Handbill" posted at Union Hospitals, (Missouri Historical Society, George Washington University Library, St. Louis: December, 1862).

Mississippi and her tributaries to the navigation of the northwest. They will be provided on the boats with good cooks and bedding. General Ellet has received special permission from the Secretary of War to receive volunteers for the Brigade from the drafted men of every State. Those who are desirous of serving their country, exempt from the hardships of soldiers, will do well to join this organization. Transportation will be furnished to headquarters, St. Louis, for all volunteers. The undersigned is a recruiting officer for this Brigade either for cavalry, artillery or infantry.

His office will be found at A. S. Foots Intelligence office, bank Street, opposite Weddell House.

Captain J. R. Crandall

Recruiting Officer⁵⁴

Another hand bill distributed in December to Union hospital units stated:

The proposed service is especially attractive to old soldiers. It has the following advantages:

1. There are no trenches to dig.
2. There are no rebel houses to guard.

⁵⁴ Captain J.R. Crandall, "Recruiting Handbill" distributed to Union Hospital Units (Missouri Historical Society, George Washington University Library St. Louis: December, 1862).

3. There is no picket duty to perform.
4. There is no danger of camps in the mud, but always a chance to sleep under cover.
5. There is no chance of short rations.
6. Command will always be kept together.⁵⁵

By February 1863, even with the additional personnel brought by recently promoted General Alfred Ellet's old Company from the 59th Illinois Regiment, the Mississippi Marine Brigade mustered only 527 infantry, 368 cavalry and 140 artillerymen. Overall the unit fell short of its recruiting goal by 500 men, and consequently the artillery could field only six light field guns.⁵⁶

From early February until the last days of April 1863, the Mississippi Marine Brigade engaged in a rigorous schedule of training to develop coordination between the cavalry and the infantrymen of this new unit and to learn to operate together. Lieutenant Colonel George E. Currie wrote in a letter home, "The Cavalry and the Artillery companies were rapidly filling up and drilling of the men and schooling of the officers kept the camp in a continuous stir from early morning

⁵⁵Unknown Author," Recruiting Handbill" distributed to Union Hospitals, (Missouri Historical Society, George Washington University Library, St. Louis: December 1862).

⁵⁶ Chester G. Hearn, Ellet's Brigade: The Strangest Outfit of All (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2000), 146.

until night. My greatest ambition being to make this command proficient in drill and unexcelled in military discipline."⁵⁷

Fortunately, the expense and effort spent on training, equipping, and refitting the brigade provided much-needed time for the Unit to bring itself up to acceptable standards of operation. It also enabled the men to build a strong sense of *esprit de corps*. The brigade soon enough found itself involved in riverine operations along the tributaries of the Mississippi River against determined and numerous Confederate guerrilla forces that were endangering Union river traffic.

⁵⁷Currie, Personal Correspondence Papers.

Chapter 3

During April 1863, the MMB conducted the first of a series of raids on the Tennessee River up to Eastport, Mississippi. During operations near Savannah, Tennessee, the brigade attempted to close in on approximately three hundred guerrillas reported in the local area by loyalist civilians who recently had their homes ransacked and destroyed. While the search by the brigade's cavalry did not turn up any large groups of rebels, they found and destroyed a number of mills, captured a large amount of Confederate military commissary supplies, and captured three Butternut pickets without any Union casualties.⁵⁸

On April 19, two companies of the MMB cavalry carried dispatches from Corinth for General Dodge. While returning from this duty late at night, the troopers saw numerous rebel campfires in the distance and reported this fact when they arrived back at their base camp. The next day, the brigade sent several units of infantry and cavalry scouting down both sides of the river. During this excursion the Marine Brigade captured nineteen Confederates, several horses and

⁵⁸Crandall and Newell, History of the Ram Fleet and the Mississippi Marine Brigade 275.

mules, and a large amount of commissary stores and cotton bales marked CSA.⁵⁹

At the confluence of the Duck and Tennessee River, the MMB encountered a very difficult point in navigation. Here the Tennessee River had rocky shoals extending a quarter of a mile downstream from the Duck River junction. The narrow river channel increased the river current. Here the rebel's positioned a four-gun battery, which opened salvos on the *Autocrat* as it slowed to maneuver through the shoals. The *Autocrat*, *Diana*, and *Adams* responded with artillery fire of their own, and six hundred rebels from the Sixth Texas Rangers opened up with rifle fire on the brigade as the transports moved in to off-load troops.

This skirmish soon turned into a pitched battle as the main force of the Marine Brigade landed and the rebels started withdrawing from their prepared positions. The terrain favored a defending force--a marshy, soft ground covered with thick, patchy woods and winding roads--which provided a topography with many opportunities for a defending force to ambush pursuing troops. The rapid deployment of the Mississippi Marine Brigade forced the Confederate troops to

⁵⁹ Crandall and Newell, History of the Ram Fleet and the Mississippi Marine Brigade 275.

withdraw, and the only further contact came from the rebel rearguard.⁶⁰

The Brigade's return fire proved effective by inflicting rebel losses numbering ten dead, including their commander, Major James White, who the MMB found dying in a farmhouse four miles away from the river. The Marine brigade suspected that they wounded many more since they observed two Confederate ambulances full of wounded leaving the battle site and found several large pools of blood on the opposite river bank. The Brigade's losses amounted to two men killed and several wounded, only one seriously. The first engagement of the MMB proved its viability against unconventional Confederate forces.⁶¹ These initial skirmishes also provided the MMB with a chance to refine tactics, develop self-confidence and firmly establish a strong sense of *esprit de corps*.

The next test for the MMB involved a skirmish near the town of Austin, Mississippi. Located midway between Memphis, Tennessee, and Helena, Arkansas, this area had a general population before the rebellion that numbered approximately 100. With the war in progress, all men and boys of military age left to participate in the conflict, which left the population at around fifty. On May 23, 1863, the ram

⁶⁰ Crandall and Newell, History of the Ram Fleet 277-278.

⁶¹ A. W. Ellet to Stanton, OR, Series 1, Volume 23, p. 279.

fleet, which consisted of nine steamboats and their support vessels, carried onboard four companies of infantry, and a battery consisting of six rifled guns and two light, portable mountain howitzers. The boats had casemates from the lower decks that extended toward the hurricane deck. Behind these casemates, the ships had at least one twenty-pounder Parrot gun.

While most of the fleet steamed ahead toward Helena, the officers on the commissary and quartermaster boats of the MMB lagged behind. When these vessels caught up with the rest of the fleet, they reported receiving fire from a two-gun Confederate battery located on a hill near a school half a mile above Austin, on the east bank of the Mississippi River.⁶² When General Ellet heard the report, even though he received it in the middle of the night, he ordered the fleet to turn around as soon as possible and return to the Austin area.

When the MMB fleet arrived at Austin the next day, the scene that greeted the men astounded them. The community and the surrounding houses showed no signs of war or conflict, but instead elegance and refinement, clean streets, lawns neatly kept, and when the Marines landed on May 24, the citizens came out decked in their finest raiments. This image of a peaceful, quieter time gave the brigade a false sense of security and peace.

⁶² Clarke, Warfare Along the Mississippi, 79.

The fleet arrived at dawn, and four cavalry companies quickly disembarked and rode out circling the outside perimeter of the town looking for the Confederate forces responsible for shooting at river traffic. The infantry also disembarked and marched through town along the main road, leaving a small detachment under Captain Isaac D. Newell, to guard the boats and question the town's citizens. The four cavalry companies, under the command of Major James M. Hubbard, continued down the principal thoroughfare in town. The MMB cavalry soon encountered another road outside of Austin, which led to a large, thickly forested area that had thick, heavy underbrush. When the cavalry troops arrived at this crossroad, they took the right hand road and continued in a southeastern direction.⁶³

Rebel scouts witnessing the disembarkation of the cavalry and, thinking that they were the only troops onboard, laid a trap for the horse Marines, intending to draw them into the forest and capture them there. The main rebel force had quartered at another landing approximately three miles above town. When the Confederate cavalry rode out, it rapidly marched down another road, passed to the rear of Austin, and met the main road behind the MMB cavalry, effectively cutting them off from infantry support.⁶⁴

⁶³ Clarke, Warfare Along the Mississippi 79.

⁶⁴ Crandall and Newell, The History of the Ram Fleet and the Mississippi Marine Brigade 286.

The MMB Cavalry continued down the right hand road, well past Beaver Dam Lake, when Major Hubbard realized that the rebels had not traveled this road. The Major turned the battalion around, returned to the crossroads, and took the other route. As the brigade cavalry retraced its route, the men encountered the Confederates coming up behind them. The rebel forces, numbering 1,000 mounted troops, met the MMB about eight miles outside of Austin.

The initial barrage of Confederate gunfire sowed confusion in the Union cavalry. The MMB dismounted and took cover in a depression lined with cypress trees and low bushes, which provided cover in their front. A large stream lay to the Brigades' rear. The rebels lined up on the opposite side of the depression, crossed the road and extended their line to a large cane break, thus almost encircling Major Hubbard and his men.

The Confederates, under command of Brigadier General James Chalmers, demanded Hubbard's surrender. The Major refused, and the battle commenced. The Confederate forces repeatedly assaulted the MMB lines, advancing on foot out of the cane break and across the open area in front of the Marines. Each time the attackers met a heavy barrage of rifle fire. After one hour, the MMB cavalry began to run low on ammunition. One of Hubbard's men donned the uniform of a "butternut" and swam across the waterway to lead the MMB infantry

units back to break the encirclement. While the battle ensued, General Ellet noticed his missing cavalry unit and initiated a search, accompanied by four orderlies attached to his staff. The orderlies bumped into the rear guard of the Confederates at the crossroads. After an initial surprise volley from a small number of hidden rebels, the enemy ran off to warn the main Confederate group. Realizing the danger of becoming trapped between two armed, hostile forces, the Confederate commander ordered a withdrawal.

The skirmish outside of Austin lasted for two hours and the rebels reported their losses to disguised Union scouts two days later. In their words, "We had a very severe battle, and came near losing our two pieces (of artillery) but finally cut our way out. We lost seven killed, including a Colonel, thirty wounded, and twenty missing."⁶⁵ The battle cost the MMB two men dead and nineteen wounded. The Marines also captured three prisoners and twenty-two stands of arms. The inhabitants of Austin must have been aware of such a large nearby concentration of rebel forces. Therefore, after a thorough search for war supplies, Major Hubbard put a torch to the town. As the fire spread, the Marines could hear concealed ammunition cooking off from the heat in its hiding places.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Crandall and Newell, The History of the Ram Fleet and the Mississippi Marine Brigade 287-88.

⁶⁶ A.W. Ellet to Stanton, OR, Series 1, Volume 24, p. 431.

After destroying the town of Austin, General Ellet had the county records of Tunica County, which had previously resided at Austin, given to Union Brigadier General Benjamin Prentiss. The Mississippi Marine Brigade and its fleet then returned to Helena. When General Ellet arrived, he filed an after-action report that detailed the necessity of attacking the Austin area, described the battle of Beaver Dam Lake, and explained the necessity of torching the town of Austin. Ellet also wrote to Secretary Stanton, stressing the bravery showed by all the members of the Mississippi Marine Brigade requesting the assignment of another regiment of infantry, the Thirty-Third Regiment Illinois Volunteers commanded by Colonel Charles E. Lippincott. The request for additional troops for the MMB, however, remained unfilled.⁶⁷

On May 29, 1863, General Ulysses S. Grant had an assignment awaiting the Marine Brigade when it returned to Young's Point from Austin, Mississippi. Grant's Army had enveloped Vicksburg and had committed itself to its siege. While Union General Frank Blair's division attempted to secure the area between the Big Black and Yazoo river since the area was rich in food and forage, General Grant requested Admiral Porter to send the MMB, a unit that Grant had thought highly of and had proven itself very useful, up to Haines' Bluff.

⁶⁷ Crandall and Newell, The History of the Ram Fleet and the Mississippi Marine Brigade 290.

While at the Bluff, the Marine Brigade was to secure and hold it until reinforcements arrived.⁶⁸

On June 11, 1863, the MMB arrived at Young's Point, Louisiana, where it received news that Confederate forces had attacked the Union garrison at Milliken's Bend just north of their position, but the black troops stationed there repulsed the rebel attacks. On June 13, the brigade sent out small cavalry units to scout the surrounding areas. During these expeditions, they reported the positions of rebels in large numbers around Richmond, Louisiana. Ellet realized the need for a localized operation and started planning to use the MMB in conjunction with General Joseph Mower's brigade, detached from duty with the Army of the Tennessee. The plan called for General Mower and his men to move down from Young's Point toward Richmond while Ellet's brigade would disembark at Milliken's Bend and march to join them where the roads from Young's Point and Milliken's Bend came together about three miles from Richmond.

While awaiting the start of this operation, General Ellet contacted Captain Isaac D. Newell for a special assignment. Ellet had obtained from Admiral Porter several Spencer long-range rifles and ammunition. He gave these weapons to Newell and a few selected men for a harassment mission on the Confederate garrison at Vicksburg. Early

⁶⁸ Ulysses Grant, The Personal Memoirs of Ulysses S. Grant Two Volumes (Old Saybrook, CT.: Konecky & Konecky, 1885-1886), 320, Grant to Porter, ORA, Series 1, Volume 24, p. 368.

on the morning of June 14, Ellet had six deck hands dig a large square pit behind and partly into the levee fronting the Mississippi directly across from Vicksburg. The pit's location provided an excellent hiding place for a small group of men.

Captain Newell and his men sniped at the Confederate water wagons that came down to a spot across from the pit. He and his men would occupy two separate positions away from the firing pit, one above the pit and the other below. The spot opposite them had become the central watering point for the Confederate garrison. When the rebels would bring down the large water carts to fill up, as they did every morning, the MMB would fire on them using their longer range, repeating rifles. This action spread chaos among the teamsters who drove the wagons, causing them to bolt from the area. These attacks proved a serious threat that the rebels had not encountered before, a threat to their water supply.

After the wagon masters retreated, Captain Newell and his men hastened to the prepared pits behind the levee. The Confederates opened fire with every cannon and rifle available along the shoreline, but they were aiming at the positions from which Newell and his men had been sniping. The MMB repeated the exercise during the day each time the rebels sent down a wagon train to obtain water, and in the evening Newell and his men retired from this position.

In the early morning hours of June 15, 1863, the MMB fleet left Young's Point and steamed to Milliken's Bend as originally planned. The men then marched to the meeting point with General Mower, arriving at approximately 10:00 a.m.. There the troops rested briefly and the officers conferred on further plans. Not far from Richmond, Louisiana, the MMB cavalry encountered rebel troops and battle commenced. The Union forces of both Ellet and Mower deployed ten field artillery pieces against the four pieces positioned by the Confederates. The Federal infantry deployed and performed a flanking maneuver, which forced the rebels to withdraw across a bridge spanning Roundaway Bayou. The rebels set fire to the bridge as they withdrew, in an attempt to slow down Union pursuit.⁶⁹ However, the men of the MMB and Mower's Brigade extinguished the flames and continued the pursuit. The engagement had been primarily an exchange of artillery fire. The Union suffered only one killed and eight wounded, while the rebels' losses totaled one killed, ten wounded, and ten taken prisoner. The MMB returned to their transports while Mower's men destroyed most of the town before returning to Young's Point on June 16.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ Crandall and Newell, The History of the Ram Fleet and the Mississippi Marine Brigade 300.

⁷⁰ Dana to Stanton, OR, Series 1, Volume 24, p. 102.

Admiral Porter wrote in glowing terms about the conduct of the Mississippi Marine Brigade in an after-action report to Secretary of the Navy, Gideon Welles:

Sir:-I have the honor to inform you that, hearing the enemy had collected a force of 12,000 men at Richmond, La., nine miles from Milliken's Bend. I sent General Ellet (M.M. Brigade) to General Mower, at Young's Point, to act in conjunction to break them up. General Mower promptly acceded to the request, and with about 1,200 men, in company with the Marine Brigade, General A.W. Ellet commanding, proceeded to Richmond, where they completely routed the advance guard of the rebels, consisting of 4,000 men and six pieces of artillery, captured a lot of stores, and the town was completely destroyed in the melee. This duty was handsomely performed by the different parties concerned in it.

D. D. Porter

Commanding Mississippi Squadron.⁷¹

During this time, an unfortunate event arose which would eventually sour relations between Porter and the Mississippi Marine Brigade. Anonymous letters surfaced in several Northern newspapers concerning the operations of the Mississippi Marine Brigade, praising

⁷¹ Porter's Report, ORN, Series 1, Volume 25, p. 175.

Brigadier General Ellet for his prompt response and courage while condemning Admiral Porter for his tendency toward caution and timidity.⁷² These letters bore the letterhead of General Ellet's headquarters, which one could only obtain at the Marine Brigade main base. Anyone who had access to Ellet's stationery could have obtained blank sheets of paper to write the letters; while not normally damning evidence by itself, the letterhead gave Admiral Porter a reason to dislike the Mississippi Marine Brigade. Porter publicly stated that he sincerely believed Ellet had not personally written these letters, but he did hold General Ellet responsible for their release.

While Admiral Porter had officially stated that he did not believe the Ellet, or other members of his family on staff, was responsible for these publications, he expressed his true feelings later in a letter to Union General William T. Sherman. In this letter, he accused Ellet of "publishing contemptible articles in the papers, which I never noticed, beyond exposing the parties to General Stephen Hurlbut, and having the progress of the editors suddenly arrested. In these transactions," Porter continued, "the Ellets were guilty of gross falsehoods, in making malicious statements, and lied deliberately afterward denying them."

⁷² Crandall and Newell, The History of the Ram Fleet and the Mississippi Marine Brigade 301.

Clearly, these statements show that Admiral Porter felt a growing animosity toward General Ellet and his brigade.⁷³

The MMB next became involved in a skirmish at Goodrich's Landing, Louisiana, an area also known as The Mounds, and Lake Providence. Union forces had previously secured control of The Mounds area. As the Federals started occupying the surrounding parishes, escaped slaves came out of hiding and flocked to the area. The U. S. Treasury Department had started leasing some of the local plantation lands and had the freed slaves to grow crops and cotton to supply troops in the area and provide cotton for sale to defray the costs of the war. Union African-American troops provided protection for these facilities under contract with the U.S. Government.

On June 29, 1863, Confederate forces under the command of Colonel William H. Parsons attacked a Union position built on The Mounds in Louisiana. General Ellet ordered his cavalry and infantry to The Mounds area to link up with the two black regiments located in the vicinity. The Confederate raiding forces in the area burned buildings and crops, and on June 30, 1863, the MMB cavalry battalion encountered the rebels. As more of Ellet's forces rushed to the horsemen's aid, they forced Parson's troops to disengage and

⁷³ Crandall and Newell, The History of the Ram Fleet and the Mississippi Marine Brigade 303.

withdraw.⁷⁴ These raids by Confederate forces showed that while rebel troops could cause some monetary damage, they could not effect any lasting damage on Union forces in the area.

During June and July of 1863, units of the MMB participated in the siege of Vicksburg and became instrumental in the destruction of an important rebel foundry that had become involved in the reprocessing of the spent cannon balls and shots fired at the rebel fortifications. When units of the Brigade returned from operations near Richmond, the MMB conceived of a possible way to disrupt rebel activities at this foundry.

On June 16, 1863, Lieutenant Colonel George Currie of the MMB he observed how the foundry ran twenty-four hours a day, converting spent munitions into useable shot for rebel guns. Lt. Col. Currie requested and received permission from Admiral Porter to use deck hands and men from the MMB to put a 20-pound Parrott gun in an emplacement behind the levee opposite Vicksburg, near the tracks of the Shreveport and Texas Railroad⁷⁵ in order to destroy this valuable rebel asset.

While Currie had the gun emplacement dug at night and in silence, he had this position reinforced with railroad iron, which provided

⁷⁴ Hearn, Ellet's Brigade 174.

⁷⁵ Crandall and Newell, The History of the Ram Fleet and the Mississippi Marine Brigade 304, Ellet's Report, ORN, Series 1, Volume 25, p. 77.

protection for the gun and crew. He also had an opening cut through the levee and employed railroad cross ties to provide support for the position. Lt. Col. Currie transported the Parrot gun to the upper peninsula area, lashed the gun to a large plank and, with the help of fifty black boat hands, pulled the gun into position after sunset to maintain the secrecy of the firing site.

The movement of the gun had to occur at night to keep the firing position secret. The boat hands placed a plank under the Parrot gun and, with a long rope, pulled it over one mile through deep, soft soil.⁷⁶ From this location, on 16th of June, the cannon started bombarding the foundry. The Confederates realized the importance of the foundry and replied with heavy cannon fire in return.

After several days of bombardment, the Confederates attempted a ruse to find the location of the cannon. On June 25th, they sent out a small boat under a flag of truce. The crew announced that it had eight wounded Union soldiers onboard who had been prisoners for the past several months and wanted to hand them over for treatment by the Federal forces. The real purpose of the Confederate crew was to discover the location of the MMB battery. However, the men of the brigade outsmarted them by sending a lieutenant and a squad of soldiers to the shoreline to accept transfer of the wounded Union

⁷⁶ Clarke, Warfare Along the Mississippi 87, Ellet's Report, ORN, Volume 25, p. 77.

soldiers. This action prevented the rebels from finding the exact location of the hidden battery.⁷⁷

The successful nature of this position, and the placement of additional guns, under the direction of Captain Thomas C. Groshon of F Company, MMB Infantry, an experienced artillery officer, in a similar position provided a problem which the Confederates could not solve. Lieutenant Colonel Currie named his west-bank artillery position Fort Adams, in honor of his headquarters boat the *B. J. Adams*. He felt great pride in building this position, without the aid or direction of an engineer. Eventually the rebels did succeed in disabling one of the MMB gun positions when a huge artillery shell came in an arcing trajectory that punched through the iron casement roof, destroying the position. In recognition of his efforts, Admiral Porter gave Currie a sixty-day leave, with special permission to travel outside the United States if he wanted to.⁷⁸

The Parrott gun batteries destroyed the rebel foundry on June 25 when one of the shells fired by Captain Groshon crashed through the boiler forcing the foundry to shut down. Although the platforms came under heavy Confederate counter-bombardment, the Union artillery

⁷⁷ Crandall and Newell, The History of the Ram Fleet and the Mississippi Marine Brigade 307.

⁷⁸ Clarke, Warfare Along the Mississippi 91, Groshon to Ellet, ORN, Series 1, Volume 25, p. 78.

pieces continued firing on targets of opportunity until Vicksburg surrendered on July 4, 1863.⁷⁹

The rebel surrender of the city of Vicksburg split the Confederacy, made continued resistance against the efforts of the Union more difficult, and made communication between the eastern and western areas of the rebellion more tenuous. While the Mississippi River itself became free of permanent, fortified rebel positions with the surrender of Port Hudson, Louisiana, on July 9, 1863, the threat to Union shipping on the Mississippi and its tributaries continued in the form of guerrilla attacks.

New orders eventually came to the MMB on August 27, 1863,⁸⁰ removing the Brigade from the jurisdiction of the Navy and placed it under the ultimate command of Major General Ulysses S. Grant.⁸¹ This transfer of authority to an army command structure focused the MMB on land engagements now and less on riverine combat operations.

Grant had earlier received authorization to use the MMB and its boats for the transportation of his troops on August 24, 1863. Then on August 27, the same day Lt. Col. Currie returned from his sixty day

⁷⁹ Crandall and Newell, The History of the Ram Fleet and the Mississippi Marine Brigade 304, Groshon's Report, ORN, Volume 25, p. 78-80.

⁸⁰ Halleck to Grant, ORA, Series 1, Volume 30, p. 144.

⁸¹ Porter to A.W. Ellet, ORN, Series 1, Volume 25, p. 319.

leave, Grant assumed total command of the brigade and its assets.⁸² However, due to lack of communication between command authorities, Admiral Porter did not become aware of the transfer until October 24, 1863.⁸³ This delay gave more ammunition to the building animosity Porter felt toward anyone associated with the Mississippi Marine Brigade.

⁸² Grant to Halleck, OR, Series 1, Volume 25, p. 183.

⁸³ Welles to Porter, ORN, Series 1, Volume 25, p. 295.

Chapter 4

When Lt. Col. George Currie returned from leave on August 27, 1863, he found that during his absence Col. Charles Rivers Ellet, Charles Ellet's son, and Adjutant Richard Curtis from his regiment had resigned and gone home, leaving the Mississippi Marine Brigade under the command of Major Hubbard of the cavalry battalion. Major Hubbard had instructions from Brigadier General Alfred Ellet to give Lt. Col. Currie a letter ordering him to assume command of the remaining boats located at Vicksburg. Ellet directed Currie to pay special attention to the area from above Greenville, Mississippi, to below Napoleon, Arkansas. Ellet had also instructed Currie to use his best judgment on conducting operations along the Mississippi River system.

As Currie assumed command, he contemplated his first moves. He would obey the order to wait for refueling, but he decided to disobey the rest of the orders left by General Ellet. He conducted the river patrols as ordered. However, instead of waiting for the guerrillas to attack, he ordered the brigade to hunt down the rebels in their own backyards.⁸⁴ On the morning of August 29, after a tour of the city of Vicksburg, Currie went on patrol at Griffin's Landing, Mississippi, with

⁸⁴Clarke, Warfare along the Mississippi 95.

his small group of cavalry. This action proved an important, successful test for the tactics that Currie later employed, using the MMB in hunting down guerrillas. During this patrol, his unit captured seven prisoners and scavenged a large quantity of beef and wood needed for repairs to the Marine brigade vessels. It also convinced Currie of the necessity for speed in attacking guerrilla strongholds.

Currie took steps to remedy the shortcoming of the MMB's lack of speed in the performance of the Brigade. He knew that while he had two companies of cavalry, the number of mounted troops available to him would not suffice for the activities he had planned. He further realized that infantrymen would be too slow. Marching on foot and during warm weather, the foot soldiers would slow the MMB cavalry in its operations. So Currie decided to capture enough mules to mount his infantry, though the mules had not become fully broken for riding and the MMB lacked basic equipment for riding them. Through September 1, until September 7, he sent out patrols to obtain the needed mounts for his infantry.⁸⁵

With the increased reliance on mounts, another problem soon became apparent: the lack of space for their transportation. A remedy presented itself in the form of an abandoned coal barge the Brigade obtained. With the use of a nearby sawmill and confiscated lumber,

⁸⁵ Currie, Personal Correspondence Papers.

the MMB constructed stables large enough to shelter its newly acquired mounts.

On September 9, Lt. Col. Currie embarked on a series of operations near Beulah Landing, Mississippi 100 miles upriver from Vicksburg. Here he refined the tactics that the Marine Brigade would use to counter guerrilla operations. He devised a plan to use two companies of newly mounted infantrymen, one as an advanced company to surround the buildings of a plantation and hold all persons there until Currie arrived with the main brigade units. While the main body of horse marines searched the plantation, the other company would scout ahead to the next plantation and repeat the procedure.

The patrols had orders to search all buildings for guerillas, arms, and contraband. Fifteen miles from their starting point, Lt. Col. Currie sent Capt. Edward G. Hughes and a company of mounted infantry down a road between two plantations. He ordered them to scout for a mile while the rest of the brigade went ahead to the next plantation. Thirty minutes after they had arrived at the next plantation, Captain Hughes returned with a large stagecoach containing four passengers and a driver. Currie ordered the men searched for weapons and discovered that each person carried a nine-chambered revolver of English manufacture. The revolvers were new and fully loaded, but

the rebels on the stagecoach, caught by surprise by Captain Hughes' men, did not get to use them.

Currie ordered Capt. Hughes and his men to escort the prisoners and their stagecoach to Bolivar's Landing where the Marine brigade had its main encampment. Currie had the men escorted onto his boat and had them and their belongings searched thoroughly. While the MMB found nothing else of interest among their personal belongings, the search of the stagecoach revealed a secret compartment under the floorboards. In the compartment, they found a black carpetbag containing \$1,200,000 in Confederate money and a bank draft for another one million Confederate dollars. In addition, inside the bag the MMB found a large packet of papers, including letters written by Jefferson Davis to several officers in the Confederate army and a large number of commissions for officers recently promoted.

When Lt. Col. Currie interviewed the commanding rebel officer, Lieutenant William Clemson, the Confederate confessed that he had the duty of paymaster and that his intended route took him to Little Rock, Arkansas, to deliver the pay for the Confederate Trans-Mississippi army. The rebel paymaster also reported that his commanding officer told him the Union soldiers would rob him of his

cargo and then kill him and his men. To his great relief, he realized the falseness of that story.⁸⁶

Lieutenant Colonel Currie reported the capture of the Confederate money to Major General James McPherson who had command of the Vicksburg area. McPherson ordered Currie to send the money and the Confederate papers to the War Department in Washington, D.C. Lieutenant Edward C. Ellet, an aide on General A. W. Ellet's staff, escorted the money and packet of papers. The War Department used the money to provide Union spies with Confederate currency for use when sent on secret missions in the South.

Between September 8 and 24, the Marine brigade continued the successful combination of tactics that led to the capture of Lieutenant Clemson. During this time, the MMB captured Confederate Colonel Trusten Polk, another rebel paymaster. Colonel Polk had in his possession \$52,340 Confederate dollars and a bank draft signed by Confederate Secretary of the Treasury Cristopher Memminger for one million dollars. During a two-week period, the total Confederate cash and bank drafts confiscated by the Marine Brigade amounted to \$3,252,340.⁸⁷

⁸⁶Clarke, Warfare along the Mississippi 99, Stanton to Ellet, OR, Series 1, Volume 30, p. 756.

⁸⁷ A.W. Ellet to Stanton, OR, Series 1, Volume 30, p. 757.

On October 18, 1863, Union troops supposedly detected a force of approximately 1,200 Confederates from the Sixth Texas Cavalry advancing into northeastern Louisiana. General McPherson, who also commanded the seventeenth Corps, Army of the Tennessee, requested reinforcements, and Grant sent the MMB. The new mission objective kept the Brigade busy fruitlessly chasing various rumors of rebel forces massing in different places around the Vicksburg area for the next two weeks.⁸⁸

On November 1, 1863, in a heavy rainstorm, Currie set out on patrol with his cavalry and mule-mounted infantry with a single artillery piece. Late that afternoon, near the Buckner Plantation on Deer Creek, he halted his force after marching twenty-three miles. After interrogating the local citizens, Currie felt that the rebels did not have enough of a presence to become a considerable threat and sent the artillery back to the transports with a small escort of mounted infantry. He then continued with the rest of his troops down Duck Creek towards Carolina Landing, where the ram *Horner* awaited their arrival on the 4th.⁸⁹

When Currie began his patrol the next morning, he ran into a force of 120 Confederate cavalry. The rebels had taken cover on the

⁸⁸ McPherson to Grant, OR, Series 1, Volume 30, p. 805.

⁸⁹ Crandall and Newell, 327.

opposite side of a bridge, giving them a clear field of fire to keep the MMB from crossing the Duck River. Currie wanted to keep the rebels from escaping and so ordered his troops to maintain close contact while he hastily sent for the return of the cannon. However, the MMB troops maintained too much pressure on the guerrillas, and the rebels withdrew. Currie saw them go and ordered a charge across the bridge. A running fire-fight ensued for the next couple of miles until the rebels fled into nearby cane breaks and dense woods. Currie soon realized the danger he had put his forces in with half the brigade left behind as escort for the cannon, and the rest scattered along the Confederate trail. As the recent rains had made the roads almost impassable from flooding, Currie wisely decided not to pursue the retreating rebels any further.⁹⁰

On November 8, the MMB cavalry, under command of Capt. Oscar F. Brown, landed at Glencoe, on the Mississippi shore, while the mounted infantry under the command of Major John Tallerday, landed on the opposite shore in Arkansas. While the cavalry continued its patrols down to Bolivar Landing, it had little contact with guerillas. The mounted infantry patrolled down to Napoleon, where the scheduled meeting of the transports took place. The infantry had captured a large number of Confederate prisoners, among them a

rebel mail carrier who had possession of over two hundred pounds of mail. In addition, the MMB infantry caught two cotton manufacturers who traveled from Macon, Georgia. The cotton manufacturers had a new cotton machine, recently purchased, and they were on their way to Camden, Arkansas, to make cloth for the Confederate army.

Following these operations, the MMB learned that the rebels had captured the Union steamer *Allen Collier* at Laconia, Arkansas, and burned it. When Lt. Col. Currie heard of this operation on November 9, he immediately left Napoleon, intent on finding those responsible. Currie's forces landed at the mouth of the White River and found some of the men from the *Collier's* crew. By interrogating the crewmembers, Currie learned that the leader of the marauders, Captain Robert Montgomery, owned a nearby plantation on Bogue Phalia, in Bolivar County, Mississippi.

On November 10, Currie's force arrived near Beulah Landing, captured one of Capt. Montgomery's men, and learned that the marauders had taken cover in the ubiquitous canebreaks. Currie knew that an attempt to take on Montgomery's force in the canebreaks was suicidal. Instead, he rode to Montgomery's plantation, where his forces removed the Montgomery family furniture and burned every plantation building except the negro quarters.

Mrs. Montgomery knew that this action by the Marine Brigade was in retaliation for the burning of the *Allen Collier* by her husband and his followers. "This is no more than I expected when I heard what my husband had done," she remarked. Currie made sure that word spread that any more rebel depredation would lead to the destruction of their own homes. On the way back to Bolivar Landing, where the MMB transports awaited, the Brigade captured a large number of prisoners and, among them, three more rebel mail carriers.⁹¹

In December 1863, guerrilla forces made their presence known in operations south of Vicksburg, especially along the Mississippi River in the Natchez area. Here the Confederates, under the command of Brigadier General William Wirt Adams, sniped at Union river traffic and inflicted moderate damage on several boats.⁹² The MMB deployed units with the Seventeenth Corps units under Brigadier General Walter Q. Gresham and began operations south and east from Natchez.

Confederate General Adams noted in his own reports that his objective in the Natchez area revolved around interrupting river navigation on the Mississippi.⁹³ He also hoped to surprise and capture the city of Natchez, which had only a small Union garrison at that time. The rebel forces under General Adams numbered approximately

⁹¹ Warren and Newell, The History of the Ram Fleet and the Mississippi Marine Brigade 329-30.

⁹² McPherson to Sherman, OR, Series 1, Volume 31, p. 309.

⁹³ McPherson to Grant, OR, Volume 31, p. 595.

1,059 and the capture of Natchez would have provided Adams with not only a quick and easy victory but also a rich one.

The Union forces received a report that General Adams had encamped twenty miles southeast of Natchez. With that information, General Gresham requested that the Marine Brigade disembark at Ellis' Cliff and move overland toward Adams. While Ellet's horse marines moved in, Gresham moved his forces around to the east of Adams's presumed location to capture the only road the rebels could use to move away from Ellet's attack, intending to catch the Confederate troops between the two opposing forces in a classic hammer and anvil maneuver.

Unfortunately, Adams moved his command toward Natchez before the Union forces had positioned themselves. When Gresham realized that Adams had moved his troops, he sent a courier to Ellet directing him down the road from Natchez while he pushed up the road in pursuit. Adams, however, did not stay on the road to Natchez. Rather, he followed it for only a few miles then swung east to avoid the trap.⁹⁴ This movement placed Adams behind Gresham and, on December 6, he took advantage of this position, bringing up his artillery and, launching an attack on Gresham's forces with the 11th Arkansas Cavalry and Major Stockdale's battalion. This turn of

⁹⁴ Crandall and Newell, The History of the Ram Fleet and the Mississippi Marine Brigade 339-40, Ellet's Report, OR, Series 1, Volume 31, p. 598.

circumstances surprised Gresham's command and compelled a hasty flight back towards the Mississippi.

Ellet continued pursuit of Adams toward Kingston and overran several small rebel camps. At one Confederate encampment, Camp Cotton, Union forces surprised and captured almost all the rebel troops except for a Major Richard Wyche, who jumped into the Little River and eluded the Marines.⁹⁵ The horse Marines returned to Vicksburg afterward to plan their next operation, close to Port Gibson, Mississippi.

During the operations near Port Gibson, Lt. Col. Currie's advanced guard passed a large house after dark. The occupants, Southern sympathizers, passed word to a nearby Confederate unit that the MMB had returned to boats. The rebels returned to their previously held positions and established picket posts along the road. When Currie, riding at the head of the main Marine brigade force, came upon the rebels, he challenged them to identify themselves. They answered, "Confederates-Who are you?" Currie replied, "I am Colonel Currie of the Marine Brigade. Surrender!" The words had scarcely left his lips, when rebel bullets started flying.⁹⁶ The brigade returned fire and

⁹⁵ Farrar to McPherson, OR, Series 1, Volume 31, p. 597.

⁹⁶ Crandall and Newell, The History of the Ram Fleet and the Mississippi Marine Brigade 343.

during this fire-fight, the MMB killed the Confederate commander and captured fifteen men along with the rebel mail they carried.

In this joint operation with the Marine brigade and General Gresham's division in the Natchez area, Union forces netted three rebel officers, twenty-eight privates, thirty horses and one battalion flag. Additional captures included a large amount of quartermaster and commissary stores, all of which the MMB destroyed, including shoes, hats, cloth, sugar, flour and twenty rifles. No documentation notes any Union loss of life or casualties during the Natchez expedition other than the exhaustion of several horses.⁹⁷ This series of operations provided a unique opportunity for the MMB to show cooperation with other Federal units.

In December 1863, Grant assigned the MMB a special mission. The brigade would travel to Port Gibson, Mississippi, on sealed orders. The reason for the secrecy soon became clear. When Ellet opened his orders, he found that Grant had detailed the MMB to capture and carry back to Vicksburg as prisoners fifty aristocratic Confederate women. Only on his return to base did Ellet learn the purpose of the Port Gibson raid. In Mississippi, Confederate troops had taken captive a number of Northern schoolteachers who had recently relocated there to teach the freed slaves. The rebels took these teachers captive and

⁹⁷ Farrar to McPherson, OR, Series 1, Volume 31, p. 598.

put them to work washing, mending, cooking, and doing other menial tasks. Once the Southern captives arrived at Vicksburg, they would be offered in exchange for the captive schoolteachers. The exchange of hostages finally occurred one month after the MMB returned to Vicksburg.⁹⁸ After this mission, the Marine Brigade returned to the assignment of attempting to capture Confederate General William Wirt Adams.

The horse marines, along with General Gresham's forces, spent several weeks fruitlessly chasing Adams across the countryside. This attempt to kill or capture Adams led the Marine brigade into an exhausting campaign across eastern Mississippi. Eventually, General McPherson recalled the MMB to Vicksburg to perform garrison duty.

In February 1864, Major Tallerday of the Mississippi Marine Brigade mounted infantry conducted a series of scouting expeditions outside the Vicksburg area searching for William Quantrell's Confederate raiders, whom many local people thought to be active in the area. During this exercise, Tallerday received information about some hidden Confederate cotton bales. When the MMB arrived at the reported location of the bales, Maj. Tallerday found only a farmer who denied having any C.S.A. cotton.⁹⁹ The major had become suspicious of the farmer and decided to try and deceive him into revealing his

⁹⁸Hearn, Ellet's Brigade 185.

⁹⁹Crandall and Newell, The History of the Ram Fleet and the Mississippi Marine Brigade 364-65.

secret. The major told him that Federal uniforms did not always clothe Yankees. He asked the planter if he knew that Quantrell's men had encamped nearby and that they sometimes dressed up as Yankee soldiers? The farmer replied that he did not know that information and asked if he was with Quantrell. Tallerday took the farmer aside and told him, "I am all right, and am here under proper orders to look after this cotton. I don't ask you to commit yourself, since you are so near Federal lines, but just give me the necessary pointers." The farmer then led the MMB unit to the cotton bales that he had hidden to prevent seizure.

When the Mississippi Marine Brigade did not find itself performing guard duty, or in the field, Lt. Col. Currie kept the men busy daily doing small-unit drills, repairing the transports and equipment, or performing civic duty projects in the local area around Vicksburg.

On March 10, 1864, the Mississippi Marine Brigade received orders to embark under the immediate command of Major General A. J. Smith to participate in the Red River Expedition led by Major General Nathaniel P. Banks.¹⁰⁰ On March 12, the expedition began, and two days later General Smith landed a brigade of troops near Yellow Bayou, Louisiana, with the MMB's cavalry battalion participating in the advanced guard. The Brigade continued the march overland to Fort

¹⁰⁰Woodworth, Atlas of the Civil War 222.

De Russy near Marksville, Louisiana. With the assistance of Smith's force, and after a two-hour battle, they captured this Confederate fort. During the Union march across Louisiana, the MMB cavalry gained the admiration and respect of General Smith's men for its daring and bravery. General Smith saw the actions of the MMB and decided to give the Marine Brigade cavalry the honor of furnishing a bodyguard for him and his command staff.¹⁰¹ However, on March 27, the Marine Brigade received orders from General McPherson to return to the Mississippi waterways.

In April 1864, after returning to the Mississippi and its tributaries, the brigade once again found itself tasked with trying to capture Wirt Adams. Union Major General John McArthur had moved his troops into the Yazoo River region near Yazoo City. All through April and into May the Union forces attempted to pin down the wily Adams, but to no avail. On May 13, Major Warren Crandall's cavalry battalion, detailed to deliver messages to McArthur, bumped into Adams's brigade encampment. Crandall realized the danger he had ridden into and ordered his troops to turn about and run. With Confederate cavalry in pursuit, they retreated to Yazoo City, forty miles away, without

¹⁰¹ Crandall and Newell, The History of the Ran Fleet and the Mississippi Marine Brigade 377, Bank's Report, OR, Series 1, Volume 24, p. 197.

dismounting.¹⁰² While the Mississippi Marine Brigade had accomplished the mission of finding Adams's main encampment, it found the base camp too dangerous to deal with alone. The MMB unit under Maj. Crandall wisely decided to leave the area.

¹⁰² Crandall and Newell, History of the Ram Fleet and the Mississippi Marine Brigade 409-410, Adams's Report, OR, Series 1, Volume 39, p. 11.

Chapter 5

In May of 1864, Confederate Brigadier General John S. Marmaduke boasted that he would come to the Mississippi River system and destroy the Mississippi Marine Brigade. Marmaduke stationed several of his artillery pieces along the Mississippi, just above the city of Greenville, Arkansas. This position provided an excellent place for attacking river traffic. Just north of Greenville, the river makes a sharp bend, then runs to the northeast, which forced river traffic to slow down to make the turn. The river continues northeast until, near Greenville, it veers back to the southwest, making a long, narrow peninsula pointing to the northeast. This peculiar geographical feature allowed a battery of artillery to fire from one side of the peninsula and then move three quarters of a mile to a new firing position. The same cannon could thus get a second opportunity to attack Union shipping.

This position, however, had its drawbacks as the rebels had no levee for protection. In fact, the artillery rested either on an open slope or on an open beach area, making it vulnerable to return fire. Lit. Col. Currie realized that the force positioned here was not just a small guerrilla band. He later found out that General Marmaduke had

approximately 6,000 men under his direct command or in close proximity, most of whom had mounts, and at least six artillery pieces.

The Mississippi Marine Brigade's normal mission parameters did not involve convoy escorts. However, the lack of naval support for convoys forced this new role upon them. On May 31, the MMB finally received orders to become involved in the fight at Greenville. This order led to the Mississippi Marine Brigade's new assignment under Union Brigadier General Joseph Mower's command.

On June 4, 1864, the Mississippi Marine Brigade received orders from Mower to assist in operations in the area of Lake Village, Arkansas. Direct operational command of this expedition rested with Mower's commanding officer, General Smith while rebel Colonel Colton Greene commanded the Confederate forces encamped near Red Leaf, Arkansas, under the overall command of General Marmaduke. The transports of the Mississippi Marine Brigade also transported two squadrons of the 4th Iowa Cavalry, and disembarked at Sunnyside Landing, Mississippi, upstream from Lake Village.¹⁰³

From there, the operational plan had them march and make contact with Smith's 10,000 infantry, artillery, and cavalry that advanced from the West. As soon as the MMB and the Iowa cavalry disembarked from the transport *Diana*, the units pushed forward a

¹⁰³Crandall and Newell, The History of the Ram Fleet and the Mississippi Marine Brigade 414, Mower's Report, OR, Series 1, Volume 34, p. 971.

skirmish line and advanced toward Lake Village. Smith placed Currie in command of all the mounted elements with the Marine brigade and ordered him to locate the Confederate forces but not to get involved in a pitched battle.

As the mounted troops under Currie's command advanced, they encountered the rebel picket lines at a bridge crossing a small creek. The MMB rushed against the rebel pickets and forced them to withdraw from the bridge. The Confederates fell back toward an open field, skirting some nearby woods. After some maneuvering, the MMB drove the rebels from their second position and forced them back across a levee. Then, in accordance with General Smith's orders, Currie withdrew his command to the transports and informed General Smith of the enemy location.¹⁰⁴

The next morning, a heavy rainstorm hampered the deployment of the mounted troops. Currie had his men retrace the previous day's steps and found the rebels in the same position. The mounted troops again forced the rebels back to the open field battle site. However, this time, the Confederates had reinforcements, which made dislodging them more difficult. The MMB dismounted and advanced under whatever cover they could find in the open field; the heavy

¹⁰⁴Clarke, Warfare Along the Mississippi p. 105.

downpour proved a welcome aid by partially obscuring the movements of the Federal forces.

The role that Currie and his troops had in Smith's plans depended on their ability to find the Confederates, and keep the rebels pinned down and occupied with their assault. This attack allowed Smith to approach undetected with his main force and join in the attack.¹⁰⁵ As the Federals advanced, Smith consulted with Currie about the disposition of the enemy and the MMB. He had General Joseph Mower's division and a four-gun battery brought into position over the levee, taking a front position and relieving Capt. Newell's men of the MMB.

The Marine brigade fell back to a flanking position, where the men found a cotton gin building and converted it to a hospital. Mower had the four-gun battery open fire, but, the rebels had a hidden artillery battery of their own nearby that responded with such accuracy that Mower had to withdraw his own after only two volleys. As Mower's infantry moved forward, Greene's men, supported by artillery, fought a delaying action and fell back to Ditch Bayou. Here the Confederate forces had well-placed defenses in thick woods which provided them with shelter. This prepared position also housed the main Confederate force and afforded them with an open field of fire with a large, shallow

¹⁰⁵ Currie, Personal Correspondence Papers.

bayou in front of them, forcing the Union troops to fight at a disadvantage.

When Smith drew up his battle plans, Currie gave him information on guerrilla tactics and recommended Captain Calvin G. Fisher of Co. E, advise the general on the local terrain, which the captain knew well. Capt. Fisher warned strongly against an infantry attack across the bayou, since it would drastically slow down the men as they attempted to cross, and the Confederates had well concealed and sheltered positions from which to fight. Smith, however, chose to ignore Fisher's advice and formed up his men in a line, a mile long, and advanced across the field towards the stream.

The rebels responded with heavy rifle and cannon fire that in less than 30 minutes inflicted over 100 casualties on the men in blue. Smith then ordered the Marine Brigade to charge the positions of the rebels, who at this time had started withdrawing. The bayou, while not deep, did have a thick layer of black muck across the bottom. The tenacious muck prevented the horses of the MMB from gaining a solid footing, and slipping and stumbling, the mounts floundered across as best as they could.¹⁰⁶

After slowing the Marine brigade's advance, Greene and his rebels gradually withdrew to Parker's Landing. The Union forces under Smith

¹⁰⁶Crandall and Newell, The History of the Ram Fleet and the Mississippi Marine Brigade 414-17, Hubbard's Report and Mower's Report, OR, Series 1, Volume 34, p. 971-974.

finally captured Lake Village on June 6, 1863.¹⁰⁷ The Mississippi Marine Brigade encamped at this location for the night and left on the morning of the 7th. In his after-action report, Currie wrote that the battle of Lake Village did not have a victor. The fight cost the Union at least

120 men dead or wounded, no accurate accounting of the rebel casualties could be ascertained because they left none behind. They shot at a mark, and when tired of the play, rode away. The Marine Brigade accomplished the only part of the fight that was creditable. For two days they contended with a vastly larger force, held it in check and only quitted the front when the infantry in large numbers arrived. With the number at the command of General Smith we could have enveloped the enemy and captured him, but he erred in judgment from the start and the battle was lost.¹⁰⁸

Although it was a minor part of the Red River campaign, this unfortunate and unnecessary loss of life marred the expedition.

During the rest of the summer of 1864, the Brigade continued to patrol the banks and tributaries of the Mississippi River system. It conducted raids on various rebel-held areas and skirmished frequently

¹⁰⁷ Battle Summary: Old River Lake, Ar. <http://www.cr.nps.gov/hps/abpp/battles/ar017.htm>, Date accessed: April 6, 2005.

¹⁰⁸ Crandall and Newell, The History of the Ram Fleet and the Mississippi Marine Brigade 416.

with roaming Confederate forces. The brigade had only one major engagement left in its short life span; the battle at Coleman's Plantation, in Mississippi.

On July 2, 1864, the Marine brigade departed Vicksburg and deployed around Rodney, Mississippi. At six o'clock in the morning on July 3, the entire complement of the MMB moved out, except for two companies left onboard the *Baltic*. Because of the unmounted black infantrymen, the march did not progress rapidly. While proceeding along the road to Oakland College, outside of Rodney, the horse marines encountered rebel picket guards.

By noon, the advanced party of the Marine Brigade arrived at Coleman's Crossroads, so named because of the intersecting roads leading to Port Gibson, Natchez, and Fayetteville. Here the MMB's lead elements had to await the arrival of the main body. The brigade set up its headquarters at Coleman's plantation, and the rest of the horse marines and foot soldiers arrived, encamped, and set up strong pickets for the night. Throughout the hours of darkness, rebel forces probed the MMB pickets.

On July 4, the mounted infantry took the road toward Port Gibson and the cavalry rode toward Fayetteville, in the opposite direction, scouting for rebels. Each element had gone only about three miles when the cavalry encountered Confederate infantry. The horsemen

charged the rebels in the bushes that lined the road to Fayetteville while Major Warren Crandall sent for reinforcements. The messenger Crandall sent reached the mounted infantry about three miles down the road; the mule-riders turned about and made their best speed to the cavalry's assistance. When the MMB reinforcements arrived on scene, the rebels slowly retreated, fighting at every step. After a day of skirmishing, the exhausted MMB units withdrew to their base camp. Unknown to the Marines, the Confederates followed close behind.

The rebels waited for the MMB to relax, take off their saddles, and start to feed their horses before they launched an attack. Some of the MMB units had not yet returned from a scouting trip. Upon hearing the gunfire, they hurriedly returned to camp and found the rebels threatening to overrun it. General Ellet consulted with Currie and realized that all local rebel forces were converging on the brigade's location. He ordered the redeployment of the 52^d and the 48th Louisiana Colored Infantry regiments along with his own dismounted infantry.¹⁰⁹ Currie positioned his forces behind a rail fence and the outer buildings of the plantation. During the battle, the 52^d and the 48th Colored regiments bravely resisted nearly overwhelming pressure from the Confederate forces. During the retreat to the river, the black regiments frequently rode double on their mounts, each

¹⁰⁹Crandall and Newell, The History of the Ram Fleet and the Mississippi Marine Brigade 424.

horse carrying a dismounted Marine trooper and its regular black infantryman. As the rebels followed, they cut off the route the MMB's had traveled from Rodney. If the brigade remained in its current location, the rebels would have effectively isolated it.

This danger of becoming cut-off forced the MMB, and the 48th and the 52^d United States Colored Troops to fight their way through the Confederates stationed along the road. Currie's cavalry battalion led the breakout, followed by the mounted infantry, and the wagon train. General Ellet brought up the rear with the artillery and the 48th and the 52^d U. S. C. T. As the Federal forces retreated through the Coleman's Crossroads area, with the rebels started sniping at them from concealed positions. Ellet's forces also faced sporadic infantry attacks as they retreated to Rodney. Unfortunately, few records exist to catalog the fight at Coleman's Plantation and the surrounding area. The Marines did not know whom they had fought, although some reasoned that the rebels belonged to Wirt Adams's brigade.

The 52^d U.S.C.T. suffered the most casualties, with 70 men injured. Maj. Warren Crandall reported that the MMB had only one man killed and fifteen wounded or missing.¹¹⁰ The underlying logic of the rebels' attack had been the Confederate hope that the black regiments would not stand and fight. Once the colored troops fled and caused

¹¹⁰Hearn, Ellet's Brigade 252-53.

confusion, the rebels would overwhelm the remaining Marine Brigade units.

After spending seven days in the Coleman Plantation-Rodney, Mississippi, area, the MMB marched out on the Port Gibson road. On July 8, the units arrived at Grand Gulf and the Marine brigade, along with the two black regiments returned to Vicksburg.

On July 10, a Union force under the direction of Major General Henry W. Slocum, commander of the District of Vicksburg, Department of the Tennessee, had marched from Vicksburg to Jackson on a scouting mission, and encountered Wirt Adams's Cavalry. The Mississippi Marine Brigade received orders to reinforce Slocum on the Big Black River. The MMB packed ammunition, rations, and equipment and marched out in a heavy rainstorm. The muddy roads, heavy rain, and flooded streams hampered their progress.¹¹¹

The horse Marines met Slocum's cavalry at the pontoon bridge that crossed the Big Black. The brigade put Slocum's wounded in ambulances for the trip back to Vicksburg. These men had sustained their wounds during the skirmish with Wirt's men. The Marines reported continued firing from Confederate positions on the other side of the river. Ellet ordered the mounted infantry and cavalry down the Jackson Road toward Edwards Station. During the march, the MMB

¹¹¹Crandall and Newell, The History of the Ram Fleet and the Mississippi Marine Brigade 430.

skirmished intermittently with Confederates on their flank and rear, but no serious engagement occurred. On July 12, the MMB marched south to Utica and stopped there for the night. That night a rebel cavalry company charged the pickets. A nearby Federal cavalry company heard the sounds of battle and unexpectedly showed up and charged the attacking Confederates. Fighting devolved into a melee with pistols and sabers until the rebels took flight with the Union cavalry in hot pursuit. In this fray, Union casualties consisted of one man dead; while the rebels suffered three dead and four captured.¹¹²

On July 13, the 1st Mississippi Cavalry, a black regiment attached to the MMB, went on a mission to reconnoiter the area and encountered some Confederate troops located nearby. The black troopers charged the enemy and ran into a large group of rebels hidden nearby. In the first charge, the 1st lost its commander, Major James Wilson. The black troopers' second attack repelled the Confederates, driving them off.

On July 14, the Marine Brigade continued its march towards Port Gibson, once again in pursuit of the elusive Wirt Adams'. The Marines arrived without incident, and the next day part of the brigade left for Grand Gulf in transports that traveled up the North Fork Bayou Pierre

¹¹²Clarke, Warfare Along the Mississippi 122.

and landed near Port Gibson to pick up the MMB. The rebels observed this weakening and attacked that night.

The 2^d New Jersey Cavalry had just relieved the Marines from picket duty. The Garden State troopers came armed with seven-shot carbines and revolvers and repulsed the initial attack. The MMB cavalry and mounted infantry fell into battle formation. The Confederate attack proved too strong for the Union soldiers and forced them to retreat, but in good order, for several miles. The Marine Brigade cavalry formed the rearguard, and after it had ambushed the attacking Confederates several times, the rebels finally gave up the chase.¹¹³

On July 16, General Slocum ordered the MMB ashore at Natchez, Mississippi, and took its transports to move his troops to Jefferson Davis's Plantation between Natchez and Vicksburg. The next day the Marine Brigade troops were still awaiting the transports' return, when the rebels attacked their camp. The horse marines, along with the 48th and 52^d United States Colored Troops, repulsed the fierce attack of the rebels that cost the Confederates twenty-five dead, including their commander, Major Richard Davis Wood, six more wounded, and fifteen prisoners.¹¹⁴

¹¹³ Karge to Morgan, OR, Series 1, Volume 39, p. 247.

¹¹⁴ Crandall and Newell, The History of the Ram Fleet and the Mississippi Marine Brigade 433, Karge to Morgan, OR Series Volume 39, 356.

On July 18, the MMB transports returned the brigade to Vicksburg after the Marine Brigade had spent the week fighting Confederate guerrillas in the Port Gibson area. Upon the MMB's return to Vicksburg on August 4, 1864, Ellet ordered them to clean and organize their main camp while resuming garrison duty until August 7, 1864. At that time, the Inspector General, Major General Napoleon Dana, arrived to conduct a unit readiness inspection.¹¹⁵ His arrival came at an unfortunate time. Disease and a month of hard, active campaigning against Confederate guerilla forces had depleted the ranks of the Brigade. Dana ordered a full inspection of the brigade's men, horses, equipment and artillery on the same Sunday he arrived. Furthermore, the artillery battery had neither guns nor horses due to McPherson's requisition of those needed items several days earlier. These factors led the Inspector General to file an unfavorable report to Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton, who authorized the Mississippi Marine Brigade's deactivation.

Unfortunately, the dire news of the unit's deactivation caused a number of the MMB members to become upset when the army tried to reassign them to regular units. Union General Edward R. S. Canby attempted to reassign those men whose enlistments had not expired to their original units or to the Vicksburg garrison. The troops felt that

¹¹⁵ Special Order #84, OR, Series 1, Volume 61, p. 497.

their enlistment contract made them unique by obligating them to serve only in the Mississippi Marine Brigade and not in regular army units. Forty-eight members of the MMB refused to participate in the consolidation process, and were subsequently arrested for mutiny.

Those members of the Marine Brigade arrested and charged with mutiny against military authority hired attorney Major James H. Purdy to represent them in court. Purdy obtained an audience with President Abraham Lincoln and, after reviewing the facts of the case, the President ordered the honorable discharge of the Mississippi Marine Brigade members on December 5, 1864.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁶Crandall and Newell, The History of the Ram Fleet and the Mississippi Marine Brigade 440.

Conclusion

The consolidation of the MMB into regular army units brought to a close the first experiment with large-scale use of a riverine, quick reaction force ever deployed by the United States. The U.S. would not use the riverine force idea again until the 1960's during the Vietnam Conflict. In Vietnam, the same basic principles came into use that the Ellets had developed to combat guerrilla insurgency. Both times the tactics used provided excellent results. In the Civil War, the Mississippi Marine Brigade proved effective in disrupting Confederate guerrilla attempts to intercept Union river traffic on the Mississippi and its various tributaries.

During its brief life span, the MMB confiscated over 3,000 bales of Confederate cotton and over \$3,000,000 dollars in cash and bank drafts, inflicted extensive casualties, and compelled the surrender of numerous rebel forces. While functioning as an independent unit, the MMB suffered light casualties—only two officers and fifteen enlisted men—died in combat. The majority of deaths in the MMB, one Officer and thirty-eight enlisted men, stemmed from disease and accidental injuries. The brigade did suffer from a difficulty in maintaining unity of command related to its being transferred from an army to a naval

command for different missions. In addition, the MMB suffered from a lack of understanding on the part of commanders as to how to use a riverine force in combating Confederate guerrilla action against Union river traffic. Another problem faced by the Mississippi Marine Brigade dealt with the jealousy and rivalry felt by Union Admiral David Dixon Porter towards Brigadier General Alfred W. Ellet.

Nevertheless, the MMB proved the value and necessity of a quick-reaction, independent force. As the Secretary of the Navy under Presidents Abraham Lincoln and Andrew Johnson, Gideon Wells wrote in his personal diary that the Ellets were "Brave, venturesome, intelligent engineers, not always discreet or wise, but with many daring and excellent qualities. They had under them a set of courageous and picked men."¹¹⁷ However, these qualities can prove troublesome to superiors not accustomed to them.

The Ellets and their men showed what a few hand-picked men could do when given the right tools and the opportunity to carry out their missions. They showed that the Union needed to employ new tactics and techniques against a tenacious enemy who did not follow the old, established codes of conduct regarding war. They also showed that although Ellet had recruited the unit from Union hospitals,

¹¹⁷ Howard K. Beale, ed., Diary of Gideon Welles Secretary of the Navy under Lincoln and Johnson, 3 volumes. (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1960), Vol. 1, p. 272.

the unit could be an effective tool against a difficult and stubborn insurgency.

Bibliography

- Abbott, John S.C. "Heroic Deeds of Heroic Men: Charles Ellet and His Naval Steam Rams." Harpers New Monthly Magazine, February 1866, 295-312.
- Basler, Roy P., ed. The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln. 9 Volumes. New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1953.
- Beale, Howard K., ed. Diary of Gideon Welles Secretary of the Navy Under Lincoln and Johnson. 3 Volumes. New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1960.
- Clarke, Norman E., ed. Warfare Along The Mississippi: The Letters of Lieutenant Colonel George E. Currie. Mount Pleasant: Central Michigan University, 1961.
- Coombe, Jack D. Thunder Along the Mississippi: The River Battles that split the Confederacy. Edison, New Jersey: Castle Books, 1996.
- Crandall, J.R. Recruiting Handbill For The Mississippi Marine Brigade Posted at Union Hospital Units: Privately Published, 1862.

- Crandall, Warren G. and Newell, Isaac D. History of Ram Fleet and the Mississippi Marine Brigade in the War for the Union on the Mississippi and its tributaries. The Story of the Ellets and their Men. St. Louis: Bruschart Brothers, 1907.
- Currie, George E. George E. Currie Papers. St. Louis: Missouri Historical Society.
- Ellet, Charles. Military Incapacity and What it Costs the Country. New York: Ross & Tousey, 1862.
- Ellet, Charles. Open Letter to Congress. Georgetown: Privately Published, February 6, 1862.
- Ellet, Charles. The Army of the Potomac. New York: Privately Published, 1861.
- Gibson, Charles Dana and E. Kay. The Army's Navy Series, Volume II, Assault and Logistics, Union Army Coastal and River Operations. 1861-1866. Camden: Ensign Press, 1995.
- Grant, Ulysses S.. The Personal Memoirs of Ulysses S. Grant, Two Volumes in One. Old Saybrook, CT.: Konecky & Konecky, 1888-86.
- Hearn, Chester G. Ellet's Brigade: The Strangest Outfit Of All. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2000.

Long, E.B. The Civil War Day By Day: An Almanac 1861-1865.

Garden City, New York: DoubleDay & Company, Inc., 1971.

Matloff, Maurice. Army Historical Series: American Military History.

Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History, United States Army,
1973.

Porter, David Dixon. The Naval History of the Civil War. Secausus,

New Jersey: Castle, a Division of Book Sales, Inc., 1984.

Roland, Charles P. An American Iliad: The Story of the Civil War.

Lexington, Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 2004.

Sherman, William T. Personal Memoirs of W.T. Sherman:

Written by Himself. New York: Charles L. Webster & Co., 1891.

Sifakis, Stewart. Who Was Who in the Civil War. New York: Facts

On File Publications, 1988.

Thompson, Robert Means and Richard Wainwright, Editors.

Confidential Correspondence of Gustavus Vasa Fox: Assistant

Secretary of the Navy, 1861-1865. Two Volumes. Freeport, New

York: Books For Libraries Press, 1920.

Unknown Author. Recruiting Handbill For The Mississippi Marine

Brigade. Posted at Union Hospital Units: Privately Published,

1862.

U.S., War Department. The War of the Rebellion:

A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies. R.N. Scott et al, eds. 130 volumes. Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1880-1901.

U.S., War Department. The War of the Rebellion:

A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies. Richard Rush et al, eds. 130 volumes. Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1894-1914.

Woodworth, Steven E. and Winkle, Kenneth J.. Atlas Of The Civil War. Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2004.

Woodworth, Steven E.. Nothing But Victory: Army of the Tennessee, 1861-1865. New York: Alfred A. Knopf Press, 2005.

Wright, William. Recruiting Handbill For The Mississippi Marine Brigade. Posted at Union Hospital Units: Privately Published, 1862.

Internet Source-

Any Klamper, River War,

<http://www.military.com/forums/0,15240,86512,00.html>, date accessed, January, 2006.

Battle Summary: Old River Lake, Ar.

<http://www.cr.nps.gov/hps/abpp/battles/ar017.htm>, Date

accessed: April 6, 2005.

VITA

Thomas Walker
6363 Twilight Circle
Fort Worth, Texas, 76179
(817) 881-0161

Education

M.A. 2006	Texas Christian University	Expected May
B.S.	Texas Christian University	2000
Associates Degree	Dallas Community College	1990

Major Field: U.S. Civil War Period; Dr. Steven Woodworth

Minor Field: Military History

Thesis Title: *The Origins of the Mississippi Marine Brigade: The Use of Brown Water Tactics by the U.S. in the Civil War*

Advisor: Dr. Steven Woodworth

Academic Experience:

August 2004-December 2004 Grading Assistant to Dr. Floyd-Thomas, Texas Christian University.

Non-Academic Experience:

December 2000-Present R.N. with specialty in Trauma and Hospice.

August 1990-December 2000 Licensed Vocational Nurse.

Committees:

February 2002-October 2003 Quality Control/Continuing Education Committee, Harris Methodist Hospital, HEB, Bedford, Texas.

January 2001-February 2002 Education Committee, Ivinson
Memorial Hospital,
Laramie, Wyoming.

Membership:

Phi Alpha Theta
Southern Historical Association

ABSTRACT

THE ORIGINS OF THE MISSISSIPPI MARINE BRIGADE: THE USE OF BROWN WATER TACTICS BY THE U.S. DURING THE CIVIL WAR

By Thomas E. Walker
Department of History
Texas Christian University

Thesis Advisor: Steven Woodworth, Professor of History

This thesis demonstrates the importance of, and historical necessity for a quick reaction, riverine based force to combat the growing problem of rebel guerrilla warfare attacks on the Mississippi River traffic. The thesis takes a chronological view on the formation of the Mississippi Marine Brigade from its predecessor, the Mississippi Ram Fleet. This work examines how it formed, the ships involved, the various commanders who guided their actions, and how effective the unit performed under adverse conditions and changing command structures.

The Civil War taught the United States that not everyone believed in using Napoleonic style military tactics. That on the battlefield, there is no code of honor, no line drawn that forbade the use of guerrilla style warfare. Thus, the concept of the Mississippi Marine Brigade came to life. After the fall of Vicksburg, rebel guerrilla attacks on Union shipping, military and commercial, exploded across the

Mississippi River system. To combat these attacks, the Union commanders turned to a recently promoted commander of the Mississippi Ram Fleet, General Alfred Ellet. Ellet suggested to Admiral David Dixon Porter that a rapid reaction, riverine based unit could be organized using the ships of the Ram Fleet to combat the rising problems of guerrilla warfare on the Mississippi.