



Farragut pulverizes Buchanan

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MOBILE AND MOBILE BAY

Mobile is located in the extreme south of the State of Alabama, on the edge of the bay that bears its name. It is a natural harbor on the Gulf of Mexico, about 33 miles deep and 23 miles wide. It is prolonged on its east side by the Bay of Bon Secours, is closed westward by the Dauphin Island and eastward by another strip of land, Mobile Point. Between these two sites, a three mile pass allows entry into the bay. The port city of Mobile is barred by a line of shoals, the Dog River Bar, which prevented heavy draught vessels from approaching within artillery range.

Mobile was founded by the French in 1702 and became the capital of Louisiana until 1720. In 1763, under the terms of the Treaty of Paris, the portion of Louisiana east of the Mississippi was ceded by France to England, including Mobile. In 1780, the Spanish - allies of the American Continentals and the French - took control of the city. They thus achieved the junction between Louisiana, west of the Mississippi River - an ex-French territory that became Spanish in 1762 - and their Florida colony.¹

In 1813, U.S. General Wilkinson easily captured the place from the Spanish, who in the meantime had become allies - although in a passive way - with the English during the war of 1812. At that time, Mobile was a village of 300 inhabitants! In 1819,

¹ Florida, originally a Spanish possession, had been ceded to Britain under the terms of the Treaty of Paris in 1763, to be returned to Spain under the terms of the Treaty of Paris (!) of 1783. It will finally become American in 1819 and obtain the status of 27th State of the Union in 1845.

Alabama became the 22nd State of the Union. Mobile's population had by then only grown to merely 809 souls. The city later became very prosperous thanks to the cotton and slave trade as well as other port activities. In town and on the luxury steamers crisscrossing the Mobile River, masses of money circulated and whisky, fine wines and beer flowed freely. It was not unusual to see plantations change hands at poker tables! According to the census of 1860, the urban area had 29,258 inhabitants, of whom 69 % were whites, 3 % free blacks and 28 % slaves. It ranked as the 27th most populous city of the United States, which was appreciable in the Old South. Indeed, Richmond, the Confederate capital in Virginia, boasted less than 40,000 souls. The census of 2000 showed that Mobile's population had grown to 198,000 inhabitants by that year.

Alabama seceded on January 11, 1861 and was the fourth State of the Deep South to join the Confederacy.² The Confederate flag floated in Mobile and as everywhere, the male population joined en masse the Rebel armies. The pre-war militias were reactivated, such as the Creole Guards, Southern Guards, Mobile Cadets and Pelham Cadets. Mobile played a vital role in the Southern railroad system. The Mobile & Ohio line ran from the city in a northwesterly direction, the Mobile & Great Northern line headed northeast and the Mobile & Pensacola line eastwards, linking further with the Alabama & Florida line.

All kinds of vessels were built in Mobile for the Confederate navy, including the famous submarine CSS *Hunley*. In July 1863, in the presence of Admiral Buchanan, the submersible successfully simulated an attack on a coal barge, feat that increased the Confederate confidence in fighting the wooden ships of the Union fleet.³ The gunboats *Gaines* and CSS *Morgan* came out of local shipyards. Mobile was not attacked during the first three years of the war and so the city was a rare haven of peace and relative prosperity in a Confederacy then in distress and turmoil. Thousands of civilians and injured or ill soldiers were comfortably treated in Mobile's private and naval hospitals that still exist today. However, in 1862 and 1863, as a precautionary measure, three lines of entrenchments were built on the land side. In addition, the obsolete Spanish fort of 1780, a former French trading post built in 1712, was rehabilitated on the east side while the new Fort Blakely was built northeast of the town.

In the meantime, the Union blockade eventually caught up with the poorer segments of the population. In April and September 1863, the chronic lack of commodities led to riots, as in Richmond at the same time. As of 1862, the Mobile naval defense was provided by the sole CSS *Baltic*, a river paddle wheel tugboat built in Philadelphia in 1860 and converted into a gunboat with the available means. The vessel was more like a sea monster from another age than a warship! It was decommissioned in 1863 and dismantled the following year, its armor reused in the construction of the CSS *Nashville*. On May 10, 1865, the carcass of the *Baltic* was finally recovered from the Tombigbee River in Alabama.

On April 19, 1861, President Lincoln ordered the blockade of the Southern coasts. It was lifted on June 23, 1865.⁴ On October 29, 1861, the Gulf Blockade Squadron was created. On February 20, 1862, it doubled in size, giving birth to a new West Gulf Blockade Squadron. Its mission was to monitor and block the coast of Pensacola, Florida, up to the Rio Grande in Texas. Mobile was included in its area of operation.

² After South Carolina on December 20, 1860, Florida on January 9, 1861, and Mississippi on January 10.

³ The CSS *Hunley* was later transferred to Charleston, South Carolina. It came to a tragic destiny after its unique engagement on February 17, 1864, after sinking the sloop USS *Housatonic*.

⁴ On the same day, 23 June 1865, in Indian Territory (Oklahoma), the Indian Cherokee Stand Watie was the last Confederate general to lay down his arms.

The new squadron was commanded by David Farragut.

The Richmond government wisely decided not to defend all of its thousands of miles of coastline, which was physically impossible anyway, and in any case sheer madness. It concentrated its efforts on the defense of its major sea ports. Despite this logical defensive approach, on April 25, 1862, New Orleans, Louisiana, fell into the hands of David Farragut.⁵ Mobile then became the most important Confederate port on the Gulf of Mexico⁶, at the heart of the traffic route between the South and Cuba and the Caribbean. Dozens of blockade runners supplied vast quantities of civilian and military goods much needed for the war effort, not to mention luxury items such as perfumes, French cognac and Cuban cigars equally necessary to maintain the morale of the military staff and most importantly, far more profitable than the uniforms and Enfield rifles imported from England for the Confederate army! Historians estimate that during the war, 2,500 attempts to run the blockade of the Gulf of Mexico were successful while only 500 were failures.

On September 4, 1862, the cruiser CSS *Florida*⁷, heavily damaged by fire from the Union navy, narrowly managed to infiltrate Mobile Bay. Repaired, it returned to sea as early as January 16, 1863 and destroyed or captured 38 enemy ships! At the time of the fall of New Orleans, Farragut considered with foresight that Mobile should be the next target. Federal authorities in Washington decided otherwise and sent their sailors along the Mississippi River to harass Vicksburg. However, the Union would invariably become one day interested in Mobile and the place had to be defended.

Between May 18 and July 26, 1862, the already famous David Farragut bombarded Vicksburg, also called the “Confederate Gibraltar”⁸ of Mississippi but nevertheless poorly defended. On July 4, 1863, Vicksburg finally surrendered to General Grant.⁹ On July 9, it was the turn of Port Hudson to fall. This was the last Confederate stronghold on the Mississippi River between Vicksburg and New Orleans, Louisiana. The Union now totally controlled the “Grand River” and the Confederacy was permanently split in two. From this point onwards, Farragut would focus his attention on Mobile. He knew that it was there and in its vicinity that the Confederates were building their fearsome ram ironclads against which classic wooden ships barely stood a chance. He therefore had to put an end to this very annoying Southern harbor, but he would have to be patient.

In August 1863, Farragut returned home to New York City where he remained for six months to enjoy a well-deserved leave. In January 1864, back in the Gulf, he made a detailed survey of the forts guarding the Mobile pass. He believed that 5,000 infantry would be sufficient to neutralize the enemy land obstacles. He then carefully prepared his operation. Farragut was convinced that to permanently block an enemy port, he

⁵ Rank used in the United States between 1857 and 1862, at the time when appeared the rank of Admiral in the Union navy. Unknown in European navies, it was attributed to the oldest Captain commanding a squadron in addition to his own ship, on which a specific flag floated so that everyone could recognize it.

⁶ Galveston, Texas, of minor importance, also rendered good services.

⁷ The CSS *Florida* was commanded by Captain John Mafitt, nicknamed the "Prince of Privateers" from August 17, 1862, to February 12, 1864. On October 7, 1864, the ship was illegally captured in the Brazilian port of Bahia by the USS *Wachusett*.

⁸ The comparison between Vicksburg and the real Gibraltar, a British enclave located at the extreme Southern tip of Spain, is largely exaggerated! The British had taken the rock from the Spaniards in 1704. They unsuccessfully attempted to regain the position in 1727 and 1779. During the Second World War, a German-Spanish operation was envisaged to take the fortress but the idea was dropped. Today, Gibraltar is an important fortified British naval base where apes reign supreme! Spain has been trying since a long time to regain its former territory by diplomatic means, but without success to date!

⁹ The same day, Robert Lee abandoned Gettysburg. Sad “Independence Day” for the Confederates in 1863!

should occupy it. To do this, infantry troops were required. However, in the spring of 1864, the Union was launching its final major land offensives in Louisiana, Georgia and Virginia. General Grant was raking wide. Consequently, the Federal forces in Louisiana could not spare sufficient resources for an attack on Mobile and the army was apparently unable to provide the necessary infantry.

In May 1864, General William Sherman began his campaign against Atlanta. He had thought of capturing Mobile and using the town as his rear base. This project was abandoned. On May 20, 1864, the ironclad CSS *Tennessee* made its appearance in the bay. Farragut was somewhat afraid for his wooden fleet and apprehended a possible lifting of the Mobile blockade. In June 1864, General Edward Canby¹⁰ devised a plan to land on Dauphin Island and capture Fort Gaines, but his project never left the drawing board. Finally, the period from January to August 1864 would prove necessary to gather the material means to prepare a grand style offensive operation.

MOBILE AND ITS BAY IN TURMOIL

To defend Mobile in some sort of coherent way, the Confederates possessed some non negligible assets. Mobile was located in the District of the Gulf, part of the Confederate Department of Alabama and East Louisiana under the responsibility of the competent General Richard “Dick” Taylor.¹¹ The District itself was commanded by Major General Dabney Maury since April 27, 1863. Maury was an experienced professional¹² who unfortunately disposed of limited means.

Mobile Bay was defended by three forts. To the east was the small Fort Powell, armed with 18 guns and a garrison of 140 men. It had already been heavily bombarded by Farragut’s gunboats in February 1864. Fort Gaines stood on Dauphin Island, defended by 26 guns and occupied by 600 men. It was too remote to completely close the pass with cross fire from Fort Morgan. On Mobile Point, on the other side of the pass, was located the most important fortification, Fort Morgan held by 600 men. In 1813, during the war of 1812, an earth and wood redoubt had been built there by the Americans. In 1834, the US army built a larger and stronger brick bastion. In 1861, the Confederates obviously took over the stronghold. In 1864, the fort comprised 46 guns of several types: 32-pounders, 10-inch Columbiads¹³, and 7 and 8-inch Brookes. Oddly, only seven artillery pieces of the new *Water Battery* (battery installed near the water line) were aimed directly at the pass!

The 1st regiment of Tennessee, 21st regiment of Alabama, Pelham Cadets, marines and reservists garrisoned the forts. The guns were manned by the 1st artillery battalion of Alabama. The morale of the defenders was at its lowest since each man felt the final

¹⁰ Edward R. Canby (1817-1873) graduated from West Point Academy in 1839. In the spring of 1862, he defeated the Confederate Texas forces commanded by his brother-in-law Henry Sibley during their invasion of New Mexico.

¹¹ Richard Taylor (1826-1879) was the son of General Zachary Taylor, the victor of the 1846-1848 Mexican War. Strangely, he did not attend the Military Academy at West Point, but studied in Edinburgh, Scotland, in France, Harvard and Yale. In 1862, he brilliantly commanded the Louisiana troops in the Virginia Shenandoah Valley under *Stonewall* Jackson. In 1863 and 1864, he distinguished himself along the Red River, Louisiana, defeating the enemy at Mansfield on April 8, 1864.

¹² Dabney H. Maury (1822-1900), graduated from West Point Academy in 1846 (37/59). Cavalry officer, he was Chief of staff of General Earl Van Dorn and fought in the Trans-Mississippi Department.

¹³ The smoothbore *Columbiad* had been developed as early as 1811. Improved in the 1850s by Captain Thomas J. Rodman, it was in 1860 the workhorse par excellence of the coastal defenses in the United States. It was produced in sizes 8, 10 and 15 inches. 15-inch-caliber *Rodman Columbiad* guns fired a projectile of 320 pounds at a range of 5,730 yards!

defeat of the South inexorably approaching, so nobody expected feats of heroism. The management of the forts was entrusted to Brigadier General Richard Lucian Page¹⁴. Confined until then to administrative tasks, he had never seen a battlefield. He set up his headquarters at fort Morgan.

The navy had not remained idle. It had built many obstructions in the bay and the CSS *Baltic* had laid 180 mines on three lines east of the pass. A narrow passage 700 feet wide to the east had been left open for blockade runners and other Confederate ships. The end of the minefield was clearly marked by a red buoy. Farragut was of course kept informed of these dispositions on a day to day basis. The enemy's idea was to draw the attackers under the fire of the guns of Fort Morgan. If they became entangled in the mine field, so much the better!

As for ships, the Confederate navy had three small paddle wheel gunboats. The CSS *Selma*, initially named *Florida*, was a steamship built in 1856 at Mobile on behalf of the Mobile Mail Line company. It was incorporated into the Confederate navy in June 1861 and renamed *Selma* in July 1862 after the launch of the cruiser CSS *Florida*. Its crew totaled 100 men. Its armament consisted of an 8-inch and two 9-inch smoothbore cannons as well as a 6.4-inch rifled gun. The CSS *Morgan* was a steam gunboat built in 1861-1862. The author does not know the size of its crew. Its armament consisted of 10 guns, types and sizes unknown. The gunboat CSS *Gaines* was hastily built in 1861-1862. It had a crew of 130 men and its artillery comprised an 8-inch rifled gun and five 32-pounder Brookes.

However, the Confederate navy relied mainly on the CSS *Tennessee* to make the difference with the enemy. The *Tennessee* was a heavily armed ram steamship with a single rectangular slanted casemate that was iron plated. Its construction had begun in October 1862, but it was not until April 1864 that it became operational. Its design followed the typical pattern of the Confederate ironclad type. The crew numbered 133 men. The battleship was armed with six rifled guns: two 7-inch and four 6.4-inch Brookes. Its armor consisted of a wooden frame on which were fixed 6-inch thick iron plates. The ship had however two major drawbacks: it was too slow and the transmission chains and rudder were poorly protected, flaws that would later prove fatal. All vessels combined, the Confederate fleet could barely align 26 guns.

These naval forces were commanded by Admiral Franklin *Old Buck* Buchanan, who was far from being a novice. He was born in 1800. Midshipman in 1815, he had participated in the second Barbary War in the Mediterranean Sea with his colleague and future opponent, midshipman David Farragut. He also took part in the Mexican War from 1847 to 1848. In 1854, he accompanied Commodore Perry to Japan. In March 1862, with the ironclad CSS *Virginia*, he had given a rough time to the Union fleet at Hampton Roads, Virginia, but was wounded in the engagement. He was promoted Admiral in 1862 and sent to Mobile to oversee the naval theatre of the Gulf of Mexico. The ironclad CSS *Tennessee* would be his flagship.

On the opposite side, the enemy had far better means of its policy. The key element was the West Gulf (of Mexico) Blockade Squadron commanded by a big fish of the Union Navy, Admiral David Glasgow Farragut. He was born in 1801. As early as 1810, he joined the navy with the rank of midshipman. He participated in the War of 1812. David Farragut was the first American naval officer promoted to the rank of Rear-Admiral in 1862 and the first to become Vice-Admiral in 1864 and Admiral in 1866.

¹⁴ Richard L. Page (1807-1901) was the nephew of General Robert Lee. He was a former officer of the United States and Confederate navies, promoted to Brigadier-General on March 1, 1864.

Farragut had 18 ships. First, four monitors¹⁵, armored vessels lying low on the water line, with metal turrets rotating 360 degrees, a novelty “made in USA”. There were two single-turret monitors and two others with double-turrets. The turret of the USS *Tecumseh* was fitted with two 15-inch smoothbore Dahlgren guns¹⁶ while the double-turrets of the USS *Chickasaw* were each provided with two 11-inch smoothbore Dahlgrens. Followed seven screw sloops of war, big steam/sail frigates armed with large caliber guns. Partially armored, these were nevertheless powerful ships built between 1858 and 1862. Among them was the USS *Hartford*, Farragut’s flagship launched in 1858. Its impressive artillery comprised twenty 9-inch smoothbore Dahlgren guns, two 20-pounder Parrott rifles and two other 12-pounders. Finally, the federal fleet included seven gunboats partially armored and carrying a variety of guns. In total, the navy artillery could muster roughly 200 pieces.

To ensure the necessary liaison with the army, Signal Corps officers¹⁷ were spread among the main vessels. This was a novelty that would prove highly effective. The XIXth Corps¹⁸ finally provided a small infantry division of 2,400 men commanded by General Gordon Granger, veteran of the Tennessee campaigns. Its three brigades comprised a heavy siege artillery regiment, a brigade of pioneers, two regiments of black soldiers and strangely... the 3^d Maryland cavalry regiment! These ground troops landed safely on Dauphin Island on August 4, 1864.

NAVAL BATTLE

The Union fleet was now positioned in the Gulf of Mexico, opposite the entrance of Mobile Bay. The front line was held by the four monitors, followed by the seven sloops with the gunboats on the port side. This tactic had been decided by Farragut on 12 July and was intended to protect the smaller ships from enemy fire and facilitate their passage in the narrow gully. Finally, at dawn on August 5, 1864, the conditions were ideal to launch an attack. The tide was rising, allowing the fleet to reduce steam pressure and the southwesterly breeze to push the smoke of the ships towards the gunners of Fort Morgan. The Confederate vessels were also in position, ready to intercept the Union fleet beyond the mine field. The first phase consisted in passing the forts. At 5.30 a.m., Farragut and Drayton, the captain of the USS *Hartford*, finished their breakfast and at 5.45, the Union fleet began moving. At the same time, Admiral Buchanan was just getting up. Moments later, he urged his men to fight in a “Nelsonian” style.

At 6.35 a.m., the fleet approached Sand Island and its lighthouse. At 6.47, the monitor USS *Tecumseh* fired the first shot at Fort Morgan. At 7 a.m., Farragut’s squadron was less than 1.5 nautical mile away. General Page ordered the fort to return fire. Five minutes later, the USS *Manhattan* opened fire, followed by the USS *Hartford*. At 7.10, the monitor USS *Chickasaw* came into action, its guns blazing at Fort Morgan. Moments later, the USS *Winnebago* and the USS *Brooklyn* also spewed their shots and

¹⁵ The name of the first vessel of this type was the USS *Monitor*, which came into action at Hampton Roads, Virginia, on 9 March 1862, against the CSS *Virginia*, ex-USS *Merrimac*(k). It sank accidentally off the coast of Cape Hatteras, North Carolina, on December 31, 1862.

¹⁶ Naval gun developed by John A. Dahlgren, head of artillery ordinance and Rear Admiral of the Union navy in 1863. There existed a monstrous 20-inch Dahlgren gun, never equaled in any navy in the world!

¹⁷ Transmission Corps responsible for signaling, usually by flags.

¹⁸ As early as July, 1864, two divisions of the XIXth Corps had been transferred to Washington, DC, to help repel the attack of Confederate General Jubal Early.

shells. The battle had started.

At 7.22, the *Hartford* was hit. Smoke significantly reduced the visibility so that Farragut could see little from the bridge. He nevertheless had to follow the action. Unnoticed, and despite his 63 years of age, he climbed in the mizzen rigging 50 feet above deck. Moments later, Captain Drayton became aware of this folly and sent a sailor up the ropes to secure the Admiral. Binoculars in hand, Farragut continued to direct the battle, shouting his orders to the bridge. At 7.30, the *Tecumseh* passed Fort Morgan and was heading toward its designated target, the ironclad CSS *Tennessee*. However, instead of staying east of the minefield as ordered, he rushed straight into it. The pilot had probably not seen the red buoy. Almost immediately, a mine exploded under its hull, creating an important breach in which water immediately engulfed. The *Tecumseh* sank within minutes, drowning 93 crew members, among them Captain Tunis Craven. Only 21 seamen survived. Why the *Tecumseh* ran into the mine field remains a mystery.

In the meantime, Captain Alden of the USS *Brooklyn*, leading the column of wooden sloops, hesitated on what to do. He believed he saw mines and stopped his ship in the middle of the channel, waiting for instructions from Farragut. He even began to veer his vessel, which risked causing a terrible pileup since one does not easily stop a ship in motion. It was 7.52 and Farragut was not ready to give up. "*Damn the torpedoes! Machines full ahead!*" he shouted. He ordered Captain Drayton to pass round the *Brooklyn* so that the *Hartford* could take the lead of the column. It was the flagship's turn to be in the middle of the minefield. Was the *Hartford* going to meet the same tragic fate as the *Tecumseh*? Farragut presumed that the enemy mines had been in the water for a long time and that most of their detonators were corroded by sea water, rendering the mines harmless. Miraculously, not one exploded! Farragut had won his bet and now the entire column of fourteen wooden ships appeared in Mobile Bay while the heavy guns of the monitors continued to bombard Fort Morgan.

The Confederate fleet was ready for the enemy squadron. It concentrated its fire on the *Hartford*. The guns of the fort were also taking part in the action. On the *Hartford*, sailors were falling by the dozens. At this point in time, the Confederate ironclad CSS *Tennessee* entered the scene, steaming from behind Fort Morgan. Too slow, it failed to catch up with the *Hartford* and had thus to concentrate on other preys with its artillery. Sporadic gunfire was directed at the other thirteen ships, inflicting some losses to their crews. Northern shells bounced off the *Tennessee's* armored casemate, causing no harm to the ironclad. However, the Confederate battleship was unable to ram or sink any of the wooden ship, even though it had itself been slightly damaged by the iron ram of the sloop USS *Monongahela*. In any event, by 8 a.m., all Union vessels had passed Fort Morgan. Farragut put the fleet at anchor some 4 nautical miles north of the fort. At 8.30 a.m., the men were enjoying their breakfast.

The fate of the Confederate flotilla had nevertheless been sealed. At 8 a.m., the USS *Metacomb* separated from the *Hartford* and started chasing the gunboat CSS *Selma*, which was harassing the US flagship. A lucky shot from one of its 9-inch guns killed eight rebel sailors and injured seven others. At 9.10, the *Selma* lowered its colors. The same evening, CSS *Selma* was renamed USS *Selma*. The gunboat would later participate in the bombardment of the forts defended by former Confederate comrades. Three other federal gunboats also joined the hunt. The CSS *Gaines* was easily caught up by its follower and shot to pieces. It would have sunk had it not run aground. As a last resort, its crew finally set fire to the wreck. The CSS *Morgan* offered no resistance and remained under the protection of the guns of the fort. The following night, it slipped

through the Union fleet at anchor and reached Mobile city the next day.¹⁹

There still remained to silence the threatening *Tennessee*. The Federal sailors had barely sipped their coffee that a lookout reported the approach of the Confederate ironclad. Buchanan planned to repeat his exploit of Hampton Roads, Virginia, in March 1862. However, the conditions had changed since then. In 1862, the Union ships stood at anchor. In Mobile Bay, they were on the move. In Virginia, Buchanan confronted a single monitor. Here, there were three! Farragut had also seen the arrival of the *Tennessee*. In a first move, he sent two sloops, faster than the monitors, to confront it. The US flagship followed. The *Tennessee* went directly for the *Hartford*, trying to avoid the first two sloops, but to no avail. At 9.25 a.m., the *Monongahela* struck the Confederate ironclad for the second time with its ram. However, the collision was not frontal but at an oblique angle, and so it caused no great damage. Five minutes later, the USS *Lackawanna* repeated the same maneuver without result. The two sloops had been shaken more than their Confederate counterpart, which even managed to fire some shots while they struggled to disengage.

Relentlessly, the *Tennessee* continued its slow progress towards the *Hartford*. The collision seemed inevitable, which would have sent the two ships to the bottom of the bay. At the last minute, the Confederate battleship slightly veered to starboard. At 9.35, the *Hartford* grated past the CSS *Tennessee* and poured on a full point-blank broadside that bounced off the battleship without causing any damage. The ironclad only managed to fire a single shell due to defective primers. Five Union sailors were killed and eight others injured. Where was Admiral Farragut during the engagement? Up in the mizzen rigging for the second time!

The last act lasted from 9.40 to 10 a.m. While the *Hartford* maneuvered to ram the *Tennessee*, it was itself accidentally hit by the sloop USS *Lackawanna*. Fortunately the shock took place above the waterline; otherwise, the *Hartford* would have been sunk by a Northern ship! Farragut narrowly escaped death and the damage proved without consequence.

In the meantime, the *Chickasaw* and *Manhattan* had arrived on the battle scene. From this point on, the balance would tip in favor of the Federals. The monitors bombarded their target at point blank range during 20 long minutes. The crew of the *Tennessee* went through hell. The smoke stack of the battleship was blown to pieces and steam pressure dropped tragically. The ironclad finally grinded to a standstill. The mast bearing the flag disappeared. The transmission chains and rudder were also damaged and the ship could no longer be steered. The opening mechanism of the firing ports no longer functioned and the artillery became useless. A mechanic bravely slipped out to try to open the ports manually but he was killed instantly by an 11-inch shell. Although the metal shielding resisted, the shock of enemy fire blew up a portion of the internal oak structure. Wood splinters killed and wounded many men. Among the latter was Admiral Buchanan with a broken leg.

The sloop *Ossipee* was preparing to deliver “the coup de grace” to the locked battleship. This would not be necessary. Indeed, at 10 a.m., no longer having any means of combat, Captain Johnston received Buchanan’s permission to surrender. The white flag was hoisted and the guns fell silent. After 3 hours and 15 minutes of intense confrontation, the battle ended. USS *Ossipee* sent a rowboat with a detachment of

¹⁹ The gunboat participated in the battle for Fort Blakely in April 1865. The vessel finally surrendered to the Union Navy on May 4, 1865.

marines, who climbed aboard the defeated ironclad. Buchanan handed over his sword and was taken prisoner with the crew. Transferred to the gunboat USS *Metacomet*, he was further taken to a hospital in Pensacola, Florida.²⁰

REDUCTION OF THE FORTS

Having no longer anything to fear from the completely destroyed Confederate navy, Farragut concentrated his efforts on the forts. The monitor USS *Chicasaw* shot a few rounds at the small Fort Powell. Its garrison became quickly demoralized. Despite the orders of General Page to fight against all odds, Colonel Williams estimated that it was futile to resist. His men resorted to spike the guns and blow up the stores before retreating to Mobile city. The Granger division approached Fort Gaines without hindrance. Its artillery was protected by the sand dunes and fired on the Rebel stronghold with impunity. On August 8, 1864, after four days of bombardment, Colonel Anderson surrendered the fort.

The fate of fort Gaines settled, General Granger moved his troops from Dauphin Island to the rear of Fort Morgan. He landed unopposed at Pilot Town on August 9, 1864. The Union general was preparing to set siege to the fortress in a conventional way, with a subtle combination of trenches, bombardments, breeches and assaults. He had the support of the three monitors of the fleet, soon joined by a strange armored vessel named USS *Tennessee*. This ship was no other than the Confederate battleship captured on 5 August, quickly repaired, renamed and sent into battle with new colors!

On August 16, Granger received an unexpected gift: a line of trenches dug out by the Confederates and abandoned for unknown reasons. He installed his heavy mortars at a range of 490 yards and his 30-pounder rifled guns at 1,200 yards. On 20 August, a severe storm prevented any operation. The weather improved, and during the day of 22 August, Fort Morgan was subject to an intensive close range bombardment from 16 siege mortars, 18 guns, the three monitors, the battleship USS *Tennessee* and the wooden sloops firing at long range. Under this hail of fire and fearing an explosion of his magazines containing 36 tons of powder, General Page ordered to dump the gun powder into the sea! His decision was sound as the wooden structures of the fort were set ablaze by enemy bombardment and the fire was extinguished with great difficulty! On August 23 at 6 o'clock in the morning, General Page had little choice but to hoist the surrender flag and the siege ended. Page preferred to break his sword on his knee rather than hand it over to a Union officer. He was immediately arrested and imprisoned, being suspected of having ordered certain destructions after his surrender, which was against the laws of war. He was trialed by a military court in New Orleans, but was finally acquitted.

No assault against the forts had been necessary. The sole action of the artillery had been sufficient to obtain their surrender. Thus ended the epic battle for the possession of Mobile Bay. The Union victory was complete. The port of Mobile was blocked and would no longer help the Confederate cause. In relation to the intensity of the fighting, the firepower and quantity of metal and explosives exchanged, the losses were surprisingly low. Farragut's fleet deplored the loss of a monitor. Damage to the wooden ships, although significant for some, was not irreversible and would be quickly repaired. The human toll was 150 dead and 170 wounded out of about 3,500 officers and sailors.

²⁰ He was exchanged in February 1865 and still recovering from his wounds at the end of the war.

Granger's division of XIXth Corps fared even better with casualties amounting to one soldier killed and seven wounded.

Buchanan's fleet had ceased to exist. The CSS *Selma* and *Tennessee* were captured then reactivated for service in the Union navy. The CSS *Gaines* had run aground and then was burned by its crew. The survivors had been taken prisoners. Only the CSS *Morgan* was able to escape and reach the port of Mobile. The Confederate losses were significantly lighter than those of their counterpart. Twelve sailors were killed and 19 others wounded out of a total of about 500 men. The Confederate forts were badly damaged by the severe land and naval bombardments and no longer of any military value. The exact losses of their garrisons are unknown, but probably quite low. What is sure is that all their defenders were sent to Union prison camps with their navy comrades, except the 140 men of Fort Powell and the crew of the CSS *Morgan*.

FINAL LAND CAMPAIGN AGAINST MOBILE

In late March, 1865, the war was drawing to an end, but the Confederate flag still floated on the great city of Mobile as General Dabney Maury held the place with 10,000 men, 300 guns and 5 gunboats. However, events were going to accelerate. General Edward Canby had now 45,000 soldiers at his disposal to operate against Maury. Two land based columns headed towards Mobile from the east. One of 13,000 men, commanded by General Frederick Steele marched from Pensacola, Florida. The other, with 32,000 soldiers commanded by Canby himself, started from Fort Morgan. Spanish Fort and Fort Blakely were attacked on 8 and 9 April 1865.²¹ On 12 April, General Canby entered Mobile without any resistance. The previous day, General Maury had evacuated the indefensible town with the 4,500 men and 27 guns that were left.

On May 4, 1865, at Citronelle, Alabama, 40 miles north of Mobile, General Richard "Dick" Taylor was forced to surrender the last 12,000 men of the Department of Alabama and East Louisiana, ending Confederate resistance east of the Mississippi. But the war was not quite over in Mobile. On May 25, 1865, a Federal munitions store exploded in Beauregard Street. The blast caused the death of 300 people! A 30 feet deep crater marked the location of the vanished depot. Some boats docked along the Mobile River sank and the Northern part of the city was gutted by fire.

General Grant reported later in his memoirs, with little good faith: "*For two years, I have tried to send an expedition against Mobile when its possession by us would have been a great advantage. It eventually cost lives to take it when its possession was irrelevant*". He was quite right. However, he had probably forgotten that it was he who had been unable to provide, at the proper time, the infantry requested by Farragut!

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²¹ Fateful day for the Confederacy, since on this same April 9, 1865, General Robert Lee was forced to surrender at Appomattox, Virginia.