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## **INTRODUCTION**

Students of the Civil War find no shortage of material regarding the battle of Mobile Bay. There are numerous stirring accounts of Farragut's dramatic damning of the "torpedoes" and the guns of Fort Morgan, and of the gallant but futile resistance offered by the *CSS Tennessee* to the entire Union Fleet. These accounts range from the reminiscences of participants to the capably analyzed reappraisals by Centennial historians.

It is particularly frustrating then, to find hardly any adequate description of the land campaign for Mobile in the general accounts of the War between the States. A few lines are usually deemed sufficient by historians to relate this campaign to reduce the last major confederate stronghold in the West, described as the best fortified city in the Confederacy by General Joseph E. Johnston, and which indeed did not fall until after General Lee's surrender at Appomattox. It fell then to an attacking Federal force of some 45,000 troops, bolstered by a formidable siege train and by the support of the Federal Navy. *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War*, to give one example, devotes 33 well illustrated pages to the battle of Mobile Bay, but allows only one page for the land

operations of 1865 !

The following account is written as a small contribution to the Civil War Centennial and is intended to provide a brief but reasonably comprehensive account of the campaign. Operations will from necessity be viewed frequently from the positions of the attacking Federal forces. This by no means indicates personal bias on the writer's part, but is occasioned by the simple fact that most of the available information comes from Union sources. Confederate's staff and paper work broke down sadly in the closing days of the war, and the collection of 98 reports relative to this campaign in volume XLIX of the monumental Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies contains a solitary Confederate Army report, that of Brigadier-General Randall L. Gibson. Fortunately, more confederate material is found in the correspondence section. Also, Major-General Dabney H. Maury, who commanded the District of the Gulf at Mobile, did make a brief, belated report to Jefferson Davis when the latter was gathering material for his subsequent history of the Confederacy. This report, dated December 25, 1871, almost seven years after the war, and signed by Maury as "Prisoner of War on Parole", was subsequently published in the Southern Historical Society Papers of 1877 and is thus available, with additional interesting comments by General Maury.

Particularly disappointing is the fact that while General Maury and Lieutenant-General Richard Taylor, the Confederate Department Commander, both wrote highly literary and engaging memoirs of their service careers, they were rather reticent in their accounts of the fall of Mobile. While understandable - the subject could not have been pleasant to them - this is nonetheless regrettable, for these gallant, cultured gentlemen with both intimate knowledge and the gift for expression could have told us so much of interest.

There are other valid reasons for viewing the campaign largely from the Union side, particularly during the approaches to Mobile. The Union forces moved in several columns and by various routes, converging on the fixed points of the confederate Eastern Shore defenses at Spanish Fort and Blakely, and the overall picture of the campaign can only be shown by tracing these various movements.

The primary sources for this campaign - as for any land campaign - must be the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies. While not infallible, these reports made shortly after the event are usually more reliable than the recollections made years later in memoirs. After the Official Records, the major source work for this campaign is the History of the Campaign of Mobile, by Union Major-General C.C. Andrews, published in 1867. While written, quite naturally, with controlled Union bias, this remains an essential accurate treatment of the campaign and is an eminently fair work to be written so soon after the conflict and by an active participant. The book was favorably reviewed by both the Daily Advertiser and the Daily Times of Mobile, and even so partisan a reviewer as General Maury grudgingly admitted that "*... despite the defects of the work (...) it is a valuable addition to the history of the times, and will probably be the accepted authority on that side about the essential history of the last great battle of the War between the States*". The writer highly recommends Andrew's book.

A few observations may prove helpful to readers of this paper. When first mentioned, general officers are in most cases identified by their full rank at the time of the campaign, and subsequently, to avoid cumbersome repetition, are identified by simply General or by last name only. Eastern Shore, as a definite geographical area, has been capitalized. Occasional references have been made to present day cities or other place

names not in use during the Civil War, since place names take from reports and maps of that time are sometimes no longer in use. In most cases these anachronisms have been pointed out in the text.

The numbers involved in Civil War battles and campaigns are usually difficult to evaluate and this campaign is no exception. It is particularly difficult to establish the strength of the garrison at Spanish Fort, due to the absence of complete returns and to the shifting of troops between Spanish Fort and Blakely during the siege. The writer has made what he hopes is an intelligent estimate based upon the information available.

## **MOBILE IN 1865**

Mobile had a population of about 30,000 at the outbreak of the war ; by 1865, despite the absence of Mobilians serving all over the Confederacy this number had been increased by refugees (many from New Orleans) until Major-General Dabney H. Maury, who commanded the District of the Gulf, estimated that the city contained nearly 40,000 non-combatants. As the last major southern city in Confederate hands, Mobile was a natural refuge, and from contemporary accounts life in Mobile was not unpleasant - not at last for those who could afford the high prices for clothing and luxury items, and who could accustom themselves to the staple wartime fare of peas, corn meal and bacon. Confederate nurse Kate Cumming wrote that Mobile in January and February of 1865 was gayer than ever before with parties and balls almost every night and bands playing in Bienville Square two or three times a week.<sup>1</sup> There were frequent expressions of confidence and optimism regarding the enemy attack on Mobile, which must surely come with the spring. The Richmond Dispatch of March 29, 1865, giving news from Augusta, dated March 25, reported that "*The preparations for the defense of Mobile are very complete. Provisions for a six-months' siege have been accumulated. General Taylor has done everything for the successful defense of the city*".<sup>2</sup>

Despite the public expressions of faith and optimism, this gaiety (a phenomenon also observed in Richmond at this time) was largely a forced gaiety to hide the increasing awareness of impending disaster that must have invaded the minds of even the most patriotic, intelligent Mobilians. By 1865, the handwriting was on the wall, and while the citizens of Mobile might publicly proclaim that the shortages of coffee and of oysters were the worst effects of the Yankee domination of the lower bay, they knew otherwise in their hearts. It is significant that despite the gaiety the churches were open daily for special prayers.

Unfortunately, not all the Mobilians remained steadfast. When the Union troops did finally occupy Mobile there were some people ready to welcome them at the docks and early in 1865, there were a number of army deserters and civilian refugees who made their way to the Federal forces in Pensacola. These defectors provided detailed information about the defenses of Mobile, the water batteries, pile obstructions, etc. Much of this information was amazingly accurate, although estimates of Confederate strength in Mobile were somewhat erratic. Particularly useful was information regarding the Eastern Shore fortifications furnished by a Confederate engineer who was reported

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<sup>1</sup> Kate : *The Journal of a Confederate Nurse, Kate Cumming, edited by Richard B. Harwell (Baton Rouge, 1959), pp. 248-50. This work is a revision of Cumming, "A Journal of Hospital Life in the Confederate Army of Tennessee", Louisville, 1866.*

<sup>2</sup> *Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies (hereinafter cited as OR), Washington, 1880-1901, Series I, vol. XLIX, part II, p. 121.*

to have “*had charge of the works on the Eastern Shore up to the time of leaving*”.<sup>3</sup>

Interesting information about transportation and daily life in the city was also provided in these reports. A civilian cobbler reported that “*two steamers leave Mobile daily for Tensas Landing at 7:12 a.m. Trains leave at 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. and arrive at Pollard at 2:30 and 8:30 p.m. Flour, \$500 per barrel ; shoes, \$150 to \$275 per pair; homespun, worn before the war by Negroes, \$25 per yard; whisky, \$175 to \$200 per gallon*”.<sup>4</sup> He then proceeded to give valuable information about the number and disposition of Confederate troops guarding the railroad. Collectively, these sources of information were undoubtedly of great use to the Federals in formulating their plans for the Mobile Campaign.

Prior to Farragut’s quoted defeat of the *CSS Tennessee* and the capture of the forts at the mouth of the bay, Mobile had enjoyed the unique distinction of being the Gulf South’s only unclosed port (blockaded but not completely closed) since both New Orleans and Pensacola had been lost early in the war. In addition, Mobile’s connections to the Confederacy both by rail and by navigable rivers made it of inestimable value and caused the city to be heavily fortified throughout the war.

Mobile was protected on the vulnerable western land approaches by three lines of fortifications. The outer line was constructed by Captain G.T. Liernur in 1862. An inner line of fortifications was constructed by Brigadier-General Danville Leadbetter in 1863, a much stronger work including 16 enclosed forts. Still more formidable was the third line of works constructed in 1864 by Lieutenant-colonel Victor von Sheliha midway between the other two. This line contained 13 heavy bastioned forts and 8 well constructed redoubts. One of the major forts - Fort Mouton, near the intersection of Catherine Street and St. Stephens Road - was not leveled until 1961, its original shape still marvelously preserved.

An unpleasant aspect of these defensive works was the necessary accompanying destruction of the beautiful trees, gardens and shrubbery for which Mobile was - and still is - justly famed. Also, orders were issued that upon impending attack all houses near the defensive lines were to be fired immediately to avoid giving shelter to the enemy.

To man these works and the outlying defenses, the Mobile area was garrisoned with approximately 10,000 men, the March 10 returns from General Maury’s District of the Gulf reporting present for duty 735 officers and 9,205 men.<sup>5</sup> There was much variety in the origin and quality of these troops. Many were Reserves, old men and boys. A few were “Galvanized Yankees”, captured German and Irish immigrants who were willing to take up arms for the Confederacy rather than to languish in southern prisons. These troops were never very reliable, and one occasion, being sent out to meet a Federal raid from Mississippi, re-deserted in mass at first sight of the blue uniforms.<sup>6</sup> Fortunately, there were also present for the defense of Mobile a leavening of experienced veterans, officers and men, from the old Army of Tennessee. And those who have followed the history of that gallant army from Shiloh to Franklin and Nashville do not have to be told that no better fighting men have ever trod the face of this planet.

On the eastern side Mobile was protected by the tortuous river and delta system and by channel obstructions and water batteries that made the city virtually inaccessible on

<sup>3</sup> *OR, part I, pp. 864, 876.*

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid, pp. 830-31.*

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid, p. 1045.*

<sup>6</sup> *Recollections of a Virginian, D.H. Maury, New York, 1894, pp. 191-93.*

that side unless the enemy could come around and enter the Mobile River above the city and its defenses. This could possibly be accomplished by going up the Apalachee River (so designated on most Civil War maps ; present day maps reverse the designations of the Blakely and Apalachee Rivers) which was the easternmost of the river system, thence back down the Tensaw River, again up the Spanish River, and finally back down the Mobile River to the city. To guard against this invasion route - the one actually attempted - the Confederates constructed the river batteries, Fort Tracy and Fort Huger, at the junction of the Apalachee and Blakely Rivers, and began the covering Eastern Shore land fortifications of Spanish Fort and Blakely.

The latter work was located opposite the points where the Tensaw River joins the Blakely River (these are spelled Tensas and Blakely in Civil War reports and maps) at the site of the old town of Blakely. This was a thriving port in the 1820's and 1830's, an official port of entry to the United States with customs office, courthouse, shipyard and a population of more than 4,000. For a time it was larger than Mobile, but its growth was prevented by high prices set by land speculators, by recurring yellow fever epidemics, and by harbor improvements which provided a much shorter distance from deep water at the mouth of the Tensaw to the wharves of Mobile than the distance up the Tensaw to Blakely. By 1865 there was only a village, and today (1965) Blakely is truly a ghost town. There remain only the Civil War trenches, a few bricks, some tremendous live oaks, and the old cemetery with its crumbling headstones, which in themselves help tell the tragic story of Blakely.<sup>7</sup>

### **UNION PREPARATIONS FOR THE CAMPAIGN**

Mobile's importance to the Confederacy was obvious, and from a purely military standpoint the campaign should have been undertaken much earlier. Lieutenant-General Ulysses S. Grant had wanted to move upon Mobile after Vicksburg, but political considerations brought about Major-General Nathaniel P. Banks's ill-fated Red River expedition instead. When the Mobile campaign was finally launched, the end of the war was in sight and the port had been closed for months. Why, then, expend money and lives for a campaign that would have been vital two years earlier but no longer necessary ? There are several answers. The necessary troops were at last available and might as well be used than left in garrison. Too, it was the Federal policy at this point to prosecute the war relentlessly on all fronts, bringing war home to the civilian populace of the South as well as to the armies, and eliminating all sources of supply. Grant wanted "*to see the enemy entirely broken up in the West*", and stressed the importance of not giving the Confederates time to reorganize and collect deserters or to put Negroes in their ranks. He also thought it important to prevent the planting of crop for 1865 and to destroy railroads, machine shops and other war materials.

On January 19, 1865, General Grant ordered Major-General Edward R.S. Canby, commanding the Military District of West Mississippi, which included the department of the Gulf, to prepare for a campaign against Selma or Montgomery with Mobile as the first objective. Canby was by nature prudent and thorough and was moreover hampered by extremely bad weather, with high water everywhere on land and with heavy gales and dense fog making Gulf transportation difficult and hazardous. At any rate Canby

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<sup>7</sup> *History of the Campaign of Mobile*, C.C. Andrews, 2d ed., New York, 1889, pp. 121-22. This work, first published in 1867, is indispensable to a study of the Mobile Campaign ; *Mobile Harbor and Ship Channel*, H.E. Bisbort, paper 1241, *Journal of the Waterways and Harbors Division of the American Society of Civil Engineers*, vol. 83, n° WW2 May 1957, pp. 2-4 ; *Colonial Mobile*, P.J. Hamilton, 2d ed. Boston & New York, 1910, pp. 449-50.

was some two months making preparations and getting underway. General Grant despite his statements in his memoirs that he regretted the expenditure of lives in the Mobile Campaign so late in the war, had no such qualms at the time and became furious over the delay, going so far as to suggest to Secretary of War Stanton that he wanted Sheridan, as soon as he could be spared, to supersede Canby. Stanton smoothed things over temporarily and Canby was left in command.<sup>8</sup>

Canby's forces as finally assembled were approximately 45,000 strong and included the 16<sup>th</sup> Corps under Major-General Andrew J. Smith from the Army of the Cumberland, the 13<sup>th</sup> Corps which was reorganized under the command of Major-General Gordon Granger, and several thousand troops made up from the Reserve Corps of the District of west Mississippi, including Brigadier-General John P. Hawkins' division of U.S. colored infantry. By the middle of March these troops were disposed in the vicinity of Mobile Bay ready to begin the campaign. Major-General Benjamin H. Grierson (of Grierson's Raid fame) was left in New Orleans to organize and remount some 4,500 cavalry who were to participate in the closing operations of the war after the fall of Mobile.

The Union forces at Mobile Point and Dauphin Island were the 13<sup>th</sup> Corps (the divisions of Brigadier-Generals Veatch and Benson plus one brigade from the division of Brigadier-General Andrews) with a strength of 13,200 ; the 16<sup>th</sup> Corps, three divisions, 16,000 ; and engineers, artillery, cavalry scouts and escorts, 3,000 ; total 32,200. A special expeditionary force almost equivalent to an army corps was gathered at Pensacola Bay under Major-General Frederick Steele. This force was composed of two brigades of Andrew's division from the 13<sup>th</sup> Corps, 5,200 ; General Hawkins' division of colored infantry, 5,500 ; and the cavalry brigade of Brigadier-General Thomas J. Lucas, 2,500 ; total 13,200.<sup>9</sup>

The plan of operations for the invading forces can hardly be expressed more clearly and succinctly than the following quotation from General Canby's official report of the campaign :

*"The general plan of operations embraced the reduction of the enemy's works on the east side of Mobile Bay, the opening of the Tensas and Alabama Rivers, turning the strong works erected for the defense of Mobile, and forcing the surrender or evacuation of the city ; or if this was found to involve too great a delay, a direct movement upon Montgomery, shifting for the subsequent operations of the army the base of supplies from Mobile to Pensacola bay, and using the railroad from Pensacola to Montgomery for that purpose. In carrying out the first part of this plan the main army, moving by land and water, was to establish itself on firm ground on the east side of Mobile bay. Steele, with a sufficient force to meet any opposition that could be sent against him, was to move from Pensacola, threatening Montgomery and Selma, and covering the operations of the cavalry in disabling the railroads. This accomplished, he was to turn to the left and join the main force on Mobile Bay in season for the operations against Spanish Fort and Blakely. Minor operations for the purpose of distracting the enemy's attention were to be undertaken at the same time from Memphis, Vicksburg, Baton Rouge and the west side of Mobile Bay, and it was expected that Wilson's raid would give full employment to Forrest's rebel cavalry".<sup>10</sup>*

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<sup>8</sup> Max L. Heyman, Jr. "Prudent Soldier : a Biography of Major-General E.R.S. Canby" (Glendale, 1959), pp. 223-27.

<sup>9</sup> OR S. I, vol. XLIX, part 1, p. 92.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid*, part 1., pp. 92-93.

Of these diversions, by far the most important was Wilson's Raid, which was actually another full-scale invasion.

## **WILSON'S RAID**

The expedition led by 28 years old Major-General James H. Wilkson was one of the most successful cavalry operations of the entire war. Wilson was transferred to the West in October 1864 from the Army of the Potomac where he had become noted for efficiency and leadership. After the battle of Nashville and the closing operations of Hodd's Tennessee Campaign, Wilson reorganized the Cavalry Corps, and assembled along the Tennessee River in northwest Alabama the largest and best equipped body of cavalry ever seen on this continent. By March 22, 1865, Wilson was ready to head his column south, while Canby on the Gulf was moving toward Mobile.

While usually designated as "Wilson's raid, this was no cavalry raid in the usual sense of the term. Wilson did not depend upon surprise and celerity to escape superior forces - his force was highly mobile to be true, but he also had superior numbers over anything that Lieutenant-General Nathan Bedford Forrest could put in his way and he was far better armed and mounted. His force has been likened in striking power to the German Panzer Divisions of World War II.<sup>11</sup>

Wilson's force consisted of three divisions under Brigadier-Generals McCook, Long and Upton, totaling some 13,500 strong, 12,000 mounted and 1,500 with the supply train. Most of them were armed with the seven-shots Spencer repeating carbine as well as with revolvers and sabers. They traveled light. A train o wagons and pack mules carried reserve supplies of ammunition, sugar, salt, coffee and hardtack only, with the intention of foraging off the countryside. Each trooper carried five days' light rations, 24 pounds of grain, 100 rounds of ammunition and two spare horseshoes.<sup>12</sup>

Wilson's first major objective was Selma (Alabama) which was, after Richmond, the largest munitions depot in the South. Also in Selma were the naval foundry and various machine shops, foundries and factories that produced war materials ranging from horseshoes and shovels to Brooke rifled cannon. Vast quantities of supplies of all kinds were stored in Selma, making the city one of the most valuable and most vital installations in the Confederacy.

Space does not permit an extensive treatment of the campaign, which is included here only to show its influence on the Mobile Campaign. General Wilson was able and energetic and he succeeded admirably - although it is most interesting to speculate upon what might have happened if General Forrest had been able to oppose him with anything close to equal force. As it was, Forrest was able only to delay Wilson in minor engagements near Montevallo and Randolph and at Ebenezer Church, and Selma was invested on April 2, 1865.

Forrest's defending force was comprised of perhaps 5,000 to 7,000 men (estimates vary upward from as few as 3,000) of whom about half were untrained and inexperienced militia or ordinary male citizens impressed by Forrest, who ordered that every able bodied man must go "*into the works or into the river*".<sup>13</sup> This force, numerically inferior to Wilson's to begin with, could not be relied upon to resist veteran

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<sup>11</sup> Jerry Keenan, "Wilson's Selma Raid" (*Civil War Times Illustrated*, vol. 1, n°9, Gettysburg, January 1963), pp. 37-44. This is an excellent brief account of Wilson's Raid, with maps and illustrations.

<sup>12</sup> *OR S. I*, vol. XLIX, part 1, p. 356 ; Andrews, *op. cit.*, pp. 243-44.

<sup>13</sup> John A. Wyeth, "That Devil Forrest" (*New York, 1959*), p. 534. This work is a revision of Wyeth, "Life of General Nathan B. Forrest" (*New York, 1899*).

trained cavalymen armed with repeating carbines, and the natural consequence was that Selma fell to a surprise attack on the night of April 2 - the same day that Richmond fell to Grant's army. Forrest and a few men fought their way out and escaped along the Burnsville Road.

Selma was mercilessly sacked. Wilson's cavalymen became drunk on Confederate whiskey stored in the town and they plundered and pillaged all night, committing numerous robberies, murders and outrages. Women were robbed of their jewelry ; even the Negroes were robbed of their few possessions. Silverware and anything of value fell prey to the vandal hordes. The flames of burning Selma - private and public buildings alike - lighted the sky for ten miles. Worse than robberies were the senseless, malicious acts of destruction. Pianos were carried out and used for feeding troughs for horses ; food and clothing were want only destroyed ; molasses and soft soap were mixed together in the cellars. After Wilson's forces were remounted, hundreds of horses and mules were killed deliberately and left in streets, yards and doorways where they fell. The stench became almost unbearable before citizens could borrow animals from the countryside to drag the decaying carcasses to the river. As Wilson's cavalry moved eastward across the Black Belt to Montgomery, with canteens filled with stolen jewelry, their night marches were lighted by the flames of burning houses.<sup>14</sup>

It should be noted to General Wilson's credit that he opposed such pillage and on April 11, 1865 issued special field orders as follows : "*The attention of division commanders is called to orders heretofore published in regard to pillaging. The evil has increased to such an extent as to call for the most prompt and decided measures, and all officers and men are enjoined to aid in suppressing a practice dishonorable and unbecoming of a Christian soldier. Hereafter no enlisted man, servant or employee belonging to the cavalry corps will be allowed to enter a house under any pretense whatever, except under the direction of a commissioned officer, and then only for the purpose of obtaining provisions or information. Any violation of this order may be punished by death, or any other punishment that division commanders may direct*".<sup>15</sup>

Earlier in the campaign, a brigade of 1,500 commanded by Brigadier-General John T. Croxton had been detached at Elyton (a small town at the site of present day Birmingham) to destroy military objectives around Tuscaloosa (Alabama). On April 4, Croxton burned the University of Alabama and its splendid library on the grounds that it was a military school.

Wilson took Montgomery without a fight on April 12 (Mobile also occupied on this date) and left on April 14, moving on into Georgia.

It had been hoped by Lieutenant-General Richard "Dick" Taylor, who commanded the Confederate department of East Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama, that Forrest could defeat Wilson and then move to reinforce Maury at Mobile. Unfortunately, this could not be.

One consequence of the Yankee outrages was the strengthened determination of the defenders of Mobile - particularly in the light of their knowledge of the attackers included Hawkins' colored division. The men in the field doubtlessly shared General Maury's expressed opinion that the consequences of Mobile "*being stormed by a combined force of Federal and Negro troops would have been shocking*".<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Walter L. Fleming, "Civil War and reconstruction in Alabama" (New York, 1905), pp. 72-74, 77. ; Walter M. Jackson, "The Story of Selma" (Birmingham, 1954), pp. 242-44 ; *The Alabama Confederate Reader*, edited by Malcolm C. McMillan ((University, Alabama, 1963), pp. 413-16.

<sup>15</sup> *OR S. I*, vol. XLIX, part 2, pp. 319-20.

<sup>16</sup> Dabney H. Maury , "The Defense of Mobile in 1865" (*Southern Historical Society Papers* ", vol. III, n°1, Richmond, 1877), p. 8.

## **CANBY'S APPROACH TO SPANISH FORT**

General Canby, of course, could not know when he started his approach to Mobile that his long range objectives of Selma and Montgomery would fall to General Wilson before Canby's first could be taken, due to the stubborn defense ordered by the Confederate forces on the eastern shore. After careful preparation Canby was ready by mid-March to begin his campaign. Rations were limited to hard bread, salt meat, coffee, sugar and salt, with one-fourth rations of soap. Each infantry soldier was armed with rifled musket and bayonet, and carried 40 rounds of ammunition in his cartridge box, with an additional 60 rounds per man transported in the company wagons. In addition to the regularly organized pioneer companies, entrenching tools were carried at the rate of one pick, axe and spade for each twelve men. The troops were limited to the clothes they wore plus a change of underclothing and an extra pair of shoes. These articles were carried by the soldier, along with his blanket and overcoat.<sup>17</sup>

The march began March 17, 1865 with the 13<sup>th</sup> Corps moving by land around Bon Secour Bay, crossing the East Branch of Fish River and moving north and west to Danley's Mills (also referred to as Dannelly's or Donnelly's Mills), which is in the area known today as Marlow Ferry or simply Marlow. Located on the North Branch of Fish River (the main stream), this was the point of concentration with the 16<sup>th</sup> Corps. This movement was not completed until March 24 due to the rains and the difficulties in moving wagons and guns over all but impassable terrain. Wagons sank to their axles and horses and mules to their bellies, and had to be pulled out by the soldiers, using long rope and wading waist deep at times in mud and water. General officers were to be seen wading the mud and lending a hand on the ropes. Much of the distance had to be corduroyed continuously and the rain fell in such torrents that the newly laid corduroy timbers were often afloat and were sometimes washed away.

The 16<sup>th</sup> Corps had an easier passage, being transported by the navy across the bay from Dauphin Island and up the Fish River to the ferry landing at Danley's Mills. This movement was accomplished from March 20 to March 22. The 13<sup>th</sup> Corps advance reached Fish River on March 21 and crossed on the 22<sup>nd</sup> on a pontoon bridge over 300 feet long. The remaining elements of the 13<sup>th</sup> were mainly up by March 24. It is easy to imagine the gibes and banter that must have been exchanged between the two corps !

The movement of the 13<sup>th</sup> Corps had been closely observed by Confederate scouts, and on March 24 a daring raid was made on the Federal column, which was not closed up. Lieutenant Sibley of the 15<sup>th</sup> Confederate cavalry, with only eight men, made a surprise attack and captured five infantry stragglers along with ten mules and several teamsters. This raid caused considerable excitement among the Federals.<sup>18</sup>

While the movements of the main forces up the Eastern Shore were being accomplished, a diversion was created on the western side of the bay. On March 18, Colonel J.B. Moore with his brigade of some 1,700 infantry (the first Brigade of the Third Division, 16<sup>th</sup> Corps) and two Rodman guns landed at Cedar Point and moved up to Fowl River by March 20, brushing back the light cavalry force in his front. Colonel Moore made his force seem larger than it was by repeating all bugle calls several times, and they were said to have been reported in Mobile from 4,000 to 6,000 troops. Moore's orders did not call for advancing beyond Fowl River, and on March 22 he received orders to embark for Fish River to rejoin the 16<sup>th</sup> Corps. It is of interest that some of the

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<sup>17</sup> *Andrews, op. cit., p. 29*

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid, pp. 35-36.*

inhabitants of the area requested Colonel Moore to show them the United States flag, which they had never seen.

On March 25, General Canby moved forward with both corps and some of the heavy artillery, with the men carrying rations for four days. Some minor skirmishing occurred with Confederate cavalry and sharpshooters but the movement was not seriously opposed. By nightfall both corps were entrenched at Deer Park, somewhat north and east of the present city of Fairhope, with one brigade, commanded by Colonel Bertram, encamped at Montrose on the bay.

On the 26<sup>th</sup>, the Federals continued to advance by three separate routes. Bertram moved north along the Bayshore road toward Spanish Fort ; Granger, with the remainder of the 13<sup>th</sup> Corps moved by a road that angled to the left, joining the Bayshore road just below D'Olive's Creek. Smith's 16<sup>th</sup> Corps moved almost due north on a course toward C. Sibley's Mill which took them about three miles to the right of Spanish Fort.

General Maury, believing at first that only the 13<sup>th</sup> Corps was advancing, was prepared to offer battle at D'Olive's Creek with some 4,500 men. Maury, 42 years old, was a Virginian and a West Point graduate with a distinguished record in the old army as well in Confederate service. He had been a Major General since November 4, 1862.<sup>19</sup> Under him were Brigadier-Generals John Richardson Liddell and Randall Lee Gibson. Liddell was the senior Brigadier ; his commission ranked from July 17, 1862 while Gibson's was from January 11, 1864. Liddell was born in Mississippi in 1815 and was appointed to West Point in 1833, but dropped out after one year with a low class standing. He had fought at Perryville, Murfreesboro, Chickamauga, and in the Red River Campaign.<sup>20</sup> Gibson, 32 years old, was from Louisiana although born in Kentucky while his family was visiting there. A Yale graduate and a brilliant man, he practiced law in New Orleans after the war and was United States Senator from Louisiana. He had a distinguished record from Shiloh, where he was Colonel of the 13<sup>th</sup> Louisiana Infantry, on through the Atlanta campaign and Hood's Tennessee Campaign.<sup>21</sup> Upon these three officers rested the direct responsibility for the defense of Mobile.

Becoming aware that he was facing two corps, one of which was flanking him on his left, Maury wisely decided to fall back into the defensive works at Spanish Fort and Blakely. General Maury returned to his District of the Gulf headquarters in Mobile, leaving General Liddell in immediate command at Blakely and General Gibson in command at Spanish Fort. The bridge over Bay Minette Creek was burned by Liddell after crossing with his command.

The bridge at D'Olive Creek was also destroyed and the crossing was heavily mined on both banks. These land mines or "torpedoes" caused casualties of three men and four horses killed in Bertram's brigade and fifty torpedoes were reportedly taken up there the next day. All elements of General Granger's 13<sup>th</sup> Corps moved to invest Spanish Fort, and Granger himself, extending his lines at dusk, was caught between the fire of his own troops and that of the Confederate skirmishers, and narrowly escaped the fate of Stonewall Jackson at Chancellorsville. The Confederates had fired the woods, and used the light from the burning leaves and underbrush to spot the advancing Federal skirmishers.

The 16<sup>th</sup> Corps moved on to Sibley's Mill, pushing back Confederate skirmishers. On

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<sup>19</sup> Ezra J. Warner, *Generals in Gray* (Baton Rouge, 1959), pp. 215-216.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 187-88.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 104-105.

the morning of March 27, the divisions of Brigadier-Generals Carr and McArthur moved back to their left to assist the 13<sup>th</sup> Corps in the investment of Spanish Fort. The remaining division under Brigadier-General Garrard remained at Sibley's to watch Blakely and, it was hoped, to cooperate with General Steele, who was moving from Pensacola.

### **STEELE'S MARCH FROM PENSACOLA**

General Steele's forces at Pensacola Bay were encamped at Barrancas, now on the Naval Air Station. An attractive tent city was laid out, with pine trees cut and hauled to camp and set out in neat rows. Several weeks were very pleasantly spent here in drill and special training.

On March 11, General Andrews was sent to Pensacola to repair the wharf. This was very effectively accomplished despite several days of bad weather. In addition, 800 yards of railroads were laid to the wharf. This was in accordance with General Canby's plan of using Pensacola Bay as an alternate supply point for movements against Montgomery if Mobile could not be taken. Andrews described Pensacola as "*remarkable for its ruined and lonely condition*". It appeared once to have contained 5,000 people, but in 1865 this had been reduced to an estimated 100, with much of the town destroyed by fire, having been raided by troops from both sides. According to Andrews there were "*not a dozen sound buildings in the town and not a single shop doing business*".<sup>22</sup>

General Steele moved to Pensacola on March 19 with the cavalry brigade of Lucas and the Negro division under General Hawkins. On March 20, the command moved out on the road to Pollard (Alabama) with ten days' rations - five carried by the men and five in the supply train of some 270 wagons. The same rains and flood, which had impeded Canby's 13th Corps, made Steele's progress slow and exceedingly difficult. Again, guns and wagons sank to the hubs, and the roads had been continuously corduroyed for miles. Steele, after finally reaching Blakely reported that "*the infantry of my command had now completed a march of about 100 miles from Barrancas, 70 of which the road passed over swamps and quicksands, 50 of which they corduroyed and bridged*".<sup>23</sup>

On March 19, Lieutenant-Colonel Andrew B. Spurling had been sent with some 800 cavalry to strike the railroad between Pollard and Montgomery. The raiders were given a good start by transporting them by water up the Blackwater River to near Milton. Spurling was highly successful. At 3 o'clock on the morning of the 24<sup>th</sup>, he cut the railroad above Evergreen (Alabama) and captured both the up and down trains, two locomotives and 14 cars loaded with Confederate supplies, which he destroyed. Approximately 100 Confederate soldiers and officers bound for Mobile were captured. At Sparta, more property was destroyed, and by the 26<sup>th</sup>, when Spurling rejoined Steele's column, he had captured in various skirmishes 20 more prisoners. He brought in the prisoners along with some 200 Negroes and 250 horses and mules, all without loss of a man. Spurling's troopers had also liberated a plentiful supply of tobacco, which they distributed generously among the other troops.

Steele's main column had pushed on through the mud, meeting minor opposition from Confederate cavalry pickets. On March 24, a 300 yards long bridge on piles was

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<sup>22</sup> Andrews, *op. cit.*, p. 117.

<sup>23</sup> OR S. I, vol. XLIX, part 1, p. 282.

built over the flooded Pine Barren Creek. The piles were started by men diving under the water, and the completion of the bridge in a day was achieved.

The first serious Confederate opposition was encountered near Bluff Springs at Pringle's Creek. Here a sharp engagement occurred between Lucas' cavalry and several hundred dismounted Confederate cavalymen. Brigadier-General James H. Clanton gallantly but unwisely refused to withdraw, and a Federal cavalry charge overran the outnumbered Confederates, killing and wounding several and capturing General Clanton with 17 other commissioned officers and 100 men. General Clanton was severely wounded. The Federal loss was reported at two killed and four wounded. Some of the escaping Confederates were so hotly pursued by the Federals that they rode off the bridge over the Escambia River (the center portion had been washed away) and drowned with their horses or, if lucky, escaped to the far bank. A few of the pursuing Federal horsemen were so close that they also rode off the bridge and lost their horses, among them Major Perry of General Lucas' staff.

On March 26, General Andrews with an infantry brigade was detached to take Pollard. This was accomplished without opposition and the Confederate Government property and 1,000 yards of railroad were destroyed.

Steele turned toward Blakely on March 27, moving along the railroad toward Canoe Station. The men were now put on half rations and foraging parties were sent out, but the countryside was remarkably destitute of supplies. By March 30 the men were on one-third rations and the majority were suffering from hunger. Andrews remarked upon the *"difference in economy and husbandry of the men"* noting that while many were living on parched corn, a few would have plump haversacks well furnished with bacon, hardtack, coffee and sugar.<sup>24</sup> A private soldier made the following graphic entry in his diary on March 30 : *"Tired, wet, muddy and hungry. Our supper consisted tonight of sassafras tea and parched corn, which we had picked up from the ground where our cavalry had fed"*.<sup>25</sup>

On March 31, General Canby started a supply train of 75 wagons to Steele but these did not reach him until after he was at Blakely. By this time Steele's men had supplied themselves, having reached the more thickly country around Stockton, where an ample supply of meat and grain was obtained. A picked cavalry detail had also foraged westward to the Alabama River, bringing in badly needed beef cattle and sheep.

Steele's orders were to move to Holyoke (or Hollvoak), about five miles east and a little south of Blakely, where he was to meet the supply train, escorted by General Veatch's division from the 13<sup>th</sup> Corps. Colonel Spurling's cavalry had the advance on April 1 and ran into a roadblock north of Blakely, which he charged and captured, taking 77 prisoners. Lucas and Hawkins were sent up with their troops, and the cavalry drove the Confederate skirmishers into the works at Blakely.

Steele had to wait for Andrews' division to come up before moving on to Holyoke. On April 2 the Confederate attacked Hawkins' division with a strong line of skirmishers under Brigadier-General Cockrell. The attack was repulsed and the Confederates were driven back into their works. General Steele, knowing that the Federal plan called for his force to operate against Blakely, abandoned his march to Holyoke to hold what he had gained at Blakely. Andrews' division was moved around to the left of Hawkins' Negro division and Blakely was invested. Now the Confederate forces on the Eastern

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<sup>24</sup> Andrews, *op. cit.*, p. 117.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 117 ; Andrews does not identify the diarist.

Shore were fixed in their defensive works and subject to a siege by vastly superior numbers, the results of which were inevitable.

## **SIEGE AND SURRENDER**

When the investment of Blakely was completed on April 2, the garrison at Spanish Fort was enduring its seventh day of siege, the investment here having been accomplished in a pouring rain on March 27. The defenders' task was most difficult. The condition of the works, which were entered by the Confederates on the evening of March 26, was well described by General Gibson in his official report :

*" ... my instructions were to assume immediate command of the defenses of Spanish Fort. Set apart for this purpose were Brigadier-General Bryan M. Thomas' brigade of Alabama reserves, about 950 muskets strong ; Colonel Isaac W. Patton's artillery, 360 effectives, and my own brigade of 500 rifles, Colonel F.L. Campbell commanding. Batteries Huger and Travy likewise constituted a part of this general command ... but are not included in the above estimate ... Upon examination I discovered the line of defense to be about 3,500 yards long, inclosing a battery of four heavy guns in Spanish Fort overlooking the bay, and strengthened by three redoubts, so located they commanded very well the right and center of the position. The whole artillery consisted of six heavy guns, 14 field pieces and 12 Coehorn mortars. Several additional guns were received during the operations. Of this line there were 400 yards on the extreme right, in front of which the forest had been cut down, but no defensive works constructed ; about 350 yards in the center, across a deep ravine, in front of which was only a slight curtain partially complete, and about 600 yards on the extreme left with no works of any kind and the dense forest covering that flank untouched ... It was apparent that an immense work with the spade, pick and axe was before us, and that some decisive measure must be adopted to prevent the large army already upon our front from coming upon us vigorously or by an onset. At once the main party was disposed along the rifle-pits and set hard at work, though there was quite a deficiency of tools. Special parties were detailed to lay off a long line of battle as far in advance of the position as they could go, and to make camp fires along its whole length ; and other devices were employed to create an exaggerated impression of our numbers, and to conceal the exact locality of our positions. To gain time, and by show of confidence and boldness to make the enemy cautious, I resolved to attack him before daylight the next morning. Lieutenant-Colonel R.H. Lindsay with 550 men in gallant style charged his lines, surprised and drove in his skirmishers, captured a few prisoners and a large number of arms and accouterments, and was only recalled after the enemy was revealed in a heavy and extended order of battle. Our object seemed to be accomplished, for it was not until late in the evening that he advanced, feeling his way cautiously, and making no assault, invested our defenses. My scouts reported two corps d'armée in front of us (the 13<sup>th</sup> and the 16<sup>th</sup>), Major-General Canby commanding. From information derived from the prisoners, and from drawings and maps captured with one of the engineers of the 16<sup>th</sup> Corps, I estimated the force to be not less than 20,000 muskets strong ; perhaps much larger".<sup>26</sup>*

This appraisal was remarkable for its clarity and objectiveness, and the Confederates were fortunate in having in command at Spanish Fort a general officer of the intelligence, skill and determination shown by General Gibson during the siege.

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<sup>26</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 314-15.

It may be noted that the numbers quoted from General Gibson's report add up to 1810 and this figure has been frequently quoted as the strength of the garrison at Spanish Fort. This is inaccurate - and the gallantry of the Confederate defense needs no enhancement by minimizing the number of the defenders, although it is admittedly difficult (if not impossible) to establish the strength of the garrison. It must be understood that the Confederate system of enumeration was quite complicated and that "effective strength" quoted in reports usually refer to enlisted men actually serving arms and excluding officers as well as those enlisted men sick or on special duty. Thus the number of troops actually present were frequently more than might be deduced from such statements as "950 muskets strong".

A further complication at Spanish Fort was the substitution of Ector's and Holtzclaw's brigades for Thomas' brigade of Alabama Reserves who tired very quickly from the labor of entrenchment. In his report to Jefferson Davis, General Maury stated that the Spanish Fort at first "*consisted of about 2,500 effectives, but I reduced its numbers by transferring the brigade of boy-reserves to Blakely, and replacing it by veterans of Ector's brigade and Holtzclaw's Alabama brigade. After this change was made (about the fourth day of the siege) the position was held by 1,500 muskets and less than 300 artillerymen*".<sup>27</sup>

This again does not afford an accurate appraisal of the total strength of the garrison. Conflicting information is furnished in Gibson's reports which give for March 28, "*aggregate presents 3,400*" and for March 29, "*2,688 total present ; aggregate present 2,888 ; number of guns 2,325 ; 24 public and 10 private Negroes*".<sup>28</sup> Obviously the 3,400 number was during the exchange of troops when some were arriving by boats and others getting ready to depart. The March 29 figure of 2,688 is more nearly typical of the garrison's total number, but even this figure is uncertain since Gibson's telegraphic messages make it evident that not all of the reserves were transferred by March 30 and that not all of Holtzclaw's brigade were transferred by March 31. The question of numbers is further complicated by General Gibson's final estimate of "*a total loss of 93 killed, 395 wounded and 250 missing out of a force of less than 2,000 men*".<sup>29</sup>

Interestingly, General Canby reported the capture of 600 prisoners (not 250) at Spanish Fort. General Andrews in his book gave the strength of the garrison on April 7 as 2,827 for the total aggregate present with 2,047 for the number of small arms,<sup>30</sup> without making it clear whether his source was a captured report (not in Official Records) or an entry in the diary of a Confederate officer, a source much used by Andrews. At any rate, since numbers were given by Andrews to the nearest man for each brigade, this must have been based on more than an estimate and is in reasonable agreement with General Gibson's report of 2,888 for March 29, allowing for losses and the further transfer of troops after Gibson's report. From the conflicting evidence available it seems likely that the garrison numbered somewhere between 2,000 (possibly 2,500) and 3,000 during most of the siege.

General Gibson was most active in improving the defenses at Spanish Fort but was hampered by the shortage of tools. The statement of engineer implements on hand in the District of the Gulf, March 1, 1865 listed only 674 shovels, 122 spades, 179 picks, 141 axes and 346 wheelbarrows in serviceable condition.<sup>31</sup> Knowing that the Union siege

<sup>27</sup> Maury, "*The Defense of Mobile in 1865*", *op. cit.*, p. 7.

<sup>28</sup> *OR S. I.*, vol. XLIX, part 2, pp. 1168, 1174.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 318.

<sup>30</sup> Andrews, *op. cit.*, p. 146.

<sup>31</sup> *OR S. I.*, vol. XLIX, part 1, p. 1055.

train of heavy artillery would soon open on the position, Gibson told his men, “*You must dig, dig, dig. Nothing can save us here but the spade*”.<sup>32</sup> The enemy’s work aroused Gibson’s envy and admiration ; he reported to Maury on April 3, “*I never saw such digging as the enemy does - he is like a mole*”. More sober was the statement, “*every man of this command has been up all nigh*”.<sup>33</sup> Gibson was to report after the siege that the garrison had been unable to take “*any unbroken rest, except such as they could snatch while on duty in the main works. When there was no fighting there was digging, cutting, moving ammunition, taking down and putting up heavy guns, and repairing damages, and extending the main lines. Two weeks of constant work, night and day, with the musket and spade, failed to discourage, but could not fail to fatigue and jade the troops*”.<sup>34</sup> Gibson was constantly appealing to headquarters for more men, for ammunition, for tools and Negroes.

A crisis arose on April 1 when General Maury ordered Ector’s brigade withdrawn from Spanish Fort to Blakely under the mistaken impression that Steele’s force was larger than the two corps at Spanish Fort. Gibson sought almost frantically to forestall this, sending four telegrams to Maury in less than two hours, and informing him that in the opinion of Gibson and all of his brigade commanders the position could not be held with this reduction in force. “*Let me assure you of one thing,*” Gibson said ; “*whatever force is left here shall make a defense that will reflect no discredit upon our army. Every officer and man will do his whole duty*”. Finally, receiving no satisfaction, General Gibson ended bluntly : “*Please answer if you have received my three telegrams relative to this matter. Answer my dispatches*”.<sup>35</sup> Maury’s reply, if any, is missing from the records, but Ector’s brigade was not withdrawn. And Maury was later to say “*I consider the defense of Spanish Fort by General Gibson and the gentlemen of his command one of the most spirited defenses of the war*”.<sup>36</sup>

General Gibson on April 4 resorted to a novel expedient to utilize the enemy ammunition being thrown into Spanish Fort by promising a 36 hours leave of absence for any man salvaging 25 pounds of enemy lead, 25 solid shot or shell or 6 mortar shells. The Federal artillerists also had their problems. The captain of one Indiana battery complained of defective shells, which he said were made more effective by emptying out the powder, refilling them with sand, and using them as solid shot.

The Confederate artillery at Spanish Fort included remnants of some of the most famous batteries of the war; among them, Slocomb’s 5<sup>th</sup> Co. of the Washington Artillery of New Orleans (whose 8 inch Columbiad, the “Lady Slocomb” is proudly displayed outside the Confederate Museum in New Orleans), Phillips’ Battery, Perry’s Battery and Lumsden’s Battery. The river batteries in Forts Tracy and Huger were effective at first against the Federal right but were hampered by a shortage of ammunition. They were made less effective by the installation of heavy Federal rifled batteries (100 pounder and 30 pounder Parrotts) on high ground on each side of Bay Minette Creek. The Federals had hoped to get assault boats and crews from the navy and to surprise the river batteries but the boats did not become available until after the issue was decided.

The small Confederate fleet of gunboats (*CSS Nashville, Huntsville, Tuscaloosa, Morgan and Baltic*) were also effective against Hawkins’ Negro division on the Federal

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<sup>32</sup> *Ibid*, part 2, p. 1180.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid*, p. 1194 ; Andrews, *op. cit.*, p. 136. These two versions of this message are not identical. Andrews version, may be a rough draft which was revised in sending. The colorful “like a mole” is not in OR.

<sup>34</sup> OR S. I, vol. XLIX, part 1, p. 316.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid*, part 2, pp. 1185-87.

<sup>36</sup> Maury , “ *The Defense of Mobile in 1865* ”, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

right at Blakely. They were finally driven off by the establishment of heavy rifled batteries on the commanding high ground.

The Union Navy was much less effective than had been hoped, due to the danger of grounding on the bars at the river mouths, and particularly to the deadly Confederate torpedoes which took a heavy toll of Union vessels in March and April. On March 12 the gunboat *Althea* was sunk in Blakely River. On March 28 and March 29 the monitors *Milwaukee* and *Osage* were sunk, and on April 1 the tinclad gunboat *Rodolph* went down while on a salvage mission to the *Milwaukee*. These were all near the mouth of the Blakely River. The tug *Isa* was completely destroyed by a torpedo on April 13, after the fall of the forts. On April 14 the wooden gunboat *Sciota* went down in Mobile Bay; on the same day a launch from the *Cincinnati* was lost in Blakely River. Still another torpedo victim was the army transport *R.B. Hamilton* that went down in Mobile Bay on May 12, 1865. Casualties reported from these sinkings were 23 killed and 32 wounded.<sup>37</sup>

The Confederates also made effective use of land mines called “sub-terra shells” or “torpedoes”. These devices were planted at roads and stream crossings and outside the works at Blakely and Spanish Fort. They were usually 12 pounder shells filled with powder, and equipped with a firing pin which when stepped upon would strike an ordinary percussion cap on a nipple, this detonating device being substituted for the common fuse plug. While they caused a number of casualties, the chief effect of the “torpedoes” was probably their effect on morale.

There were numerous instances of heroism during the siege. Union Captain R.B. Stearns advanced his skirmish line to within 150 yards of the redoubt occupied by the Washington Artillery and their small arms fire was very troublesome to the gunners. Among those killed was Colonel William E. Burnett, Maury’s Chief of Artillery, who was on an inspection trip. Confederate Captain Clement Watson, of General Gibson’s staff, volunteered to lead a sortie from the garrison. This was done at sunset, after a bombardment of the advanced skirmishers and under cover of a smoke screen from burning brush, and the sortie was a brilliant success. Captain Stearns and some 20 men were captured. General Gibson interviewed the captured Union captain and, as a complimentary gesture from one gallant officer to another, invited him to share General Gibson’s supper of “*cold fowl and cold water, with tin table furniture*”.<sup>38</sup>

Immediately after the investment of Spanish Fort the Union supply depot was moved to Starke’s Landing, some five miles below Spanish Fort, at or about the site of the present town of Daphne. Wharves were built, roads were opened, and the supply of the Union army was secured.

The Confederate defenders under General Liddell at Blakely were somewhat better off than their compatriots at Spanish Fort. The fortifications were in a much more advanced state at Blakely and there were more men manning the works, to face a smaller attacking force. Too, they endured a siege of only half the duration of that at Spanish Fort. Yet, while most of the garrison at Spanish Fort escaped, the garrison at Blakely was doomed to almost total capture. Such are the fortunes of war.

As was not unusual in this strange “Brothers’ War”, there were numerous friendly conversational exchanges between the opposing skirmishers at both Spanish Fort and Blakely. At the latter works, skirmishers from Garrard’s 16<sup>th</sup> Corps division and

<sup>37</sup> *Civil War Naval Chronology: 1861-1865* (Washington, 1961-65), part V, pp. 60, 69, 71, 73-74, 86-87 ; Milton F. Perry, *Infernal Machines* (Baton Rouge, 1965), pp. 182-88 ; *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War*, edited by R. U. Johnson and C.C. Buel, 4 vols. (New York, 1887-88), vol. IV, p. 412.

<sup>38</sup> *Andrews, op. cit.*, pp. 84-87.

Thomas' Alabama Reserves arranged truces of some length, "*during which they would meet and converse in a friendly manner, often discussing public questions relating to the war. They would also exchange newspapers, and trade coffee and sugar for tobacco*".<sup>39</sup>

Such was the Union advantage of numbers that there is little doubt that both Confederate works would have fallen to a determined assault at almost any time during the siege. The Union commander elected to save lives by making thorough preparations and this was the wiser course. The Union forces would have had to wait in any event to bring up supplies before moving on to Montgomery.

By April 8 there were in position against Spanish Fort's 53 siege guns (including ten 20-pounder rifles and 16 mortars) and 37 field pieces. During the siege more than 10,000 rounds of artillery and approximately one million rounds of small arms fire were expended by the Union forces at Spanish Fort. Ten siege rifles and 5 siege howitzers enfiladed the Confederate left and center, and 5 siege howitzers on the Federal right enfiladed the Confederate center. On the night of April 8<sup>th</sup>, Colonel William Bell's 8<sup>th</sup> Iowa Volunteer Infantry carried the weakest portion of the Confederate line (their extreme left), many of the Confederates defending to the last and "*dying in the last ditch*".<sup>40</sup> It became obvious that Union possession of the left of the works would give them complete enfilading fire and would make the works untenable on April 9<sup>th</sup>. General Gibson wisely decided to evacuate the position on the night of the 8<sup>th</sup>. General Gibson's description of the evacuation follows :

*"The guns were ordered to be spiked, and time was allowed for this purpose; the few remaining stores were issued; the sick and wounded were carefully removed; the infirmary corps and several hundred Negroes who arrived that evening to be employed in the defense, and, finally, in good order, the whole garrison was withdrawn. The retreat was along a narrow treadway, about eighteen inches wide, which ran from a small peninsula from the left flank across the river, and over a broad marsh to a deep channel opposite Battery Huger. It was about 1,200 yards long and was commanded throughout by the enemy's heavy batteries in front of our left flank. It was concealed by the high grass and covered with moss, and the troops pulled off their shoes, and thus, in a noiseless manner, succeeded in retiring without attracting the attention of the enemy. The night was rather dark and the movement could not be hurried. From the end of the treadway they were conveyed in light boats to Battery Huger, and thence to Blakely in steamers, except a few under Colonel Bush Jones, who was directed to go up the marsh to Blakely (...) From Blakely they were ordered to Mobile by the Major-General commanding the District of the Gulf"*.<sup>41</sup>

Blakely now received the full attention of the Federals. The position would have been evacuated on the night of the 9<sup>th</sup> but it was carried by a general assault about six o'clock on the evening of April 9, 1865, hours after General Lee's surrender at Appomattox, in the last truly great battle of the war. General Canby described the assault (which included some 16,000 troops) in his official report as follows :

*"The enemy's line had a development of two miles and a half. It consisted of nine strong redoubts connected by rifle pits and palisades, and was covered in front by slashings and abatis, and in some places by outworks of telegraph wire and by torpedoes or subterra shells. The advance was made at the appointed time, and was as*

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<sup>39</sup> *Ibid*, p. 184.

<sup>40</sup> *OR*, S. I, vol. XLIX, part 1, p. 278.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid*, p. 317.

*nearly simultaneous as it could possibly be from the length of the line and the obstructed character of the ground. With a gallantry to which there were no exceptions the troops pressed forward under a heavy fire of artillery and musketry passing over exploding torpedoes, networks and abatis, and assaulted and carried the enemy's works in about twenty minutes, each division carrying the works in its front. The immediate results of this victory were - flags, all the armament, material and supplies, and 3,700 prisoners, of whom three were generals and 197 commissioned officers of lower grades".*<sup>42</sup>

General Steele reported the number of prisoners at about 3,200. The general officers captured were Brigadier-General Liddell, Cockrell and Thomas. The struggle, while brief, was desperate and many Confederates fought to the death. Fourteen Medals of Honor were awarded for the assault at Blakely, most of them for the capture of flags. Unfortunately some of the Negro soldiers attacked Confederate prisoners and slaughtered them after the surrender according to Confederate accounts.<sup>43</sup> Andrews admitted that two white officers of the 68<sup>th</sup> Regiment were injured, one mortally, in their efforts to save the prisoners; he stated however that this was not general and that many of the prisoners were properly treated by their colored captors. Reportedly, "*a colored soldier of the 50<sup>th</sup> regiment found his former young master among the prisoners. They appeared happy to meet, and drank from the same canteen*".<sup>44</sup> During the night there were occasional explosions of torpedoes, killing some of the men who were searching for killed and wounded. "*It was*" wrote Andrews, "*a discordant and melancholy sound to hear*".

Now only the two little outposts of Fort Huger and Fort Tracy remained. No longer needing to conserve their limited ammunition supply, they fought furiously for two days after being ordered by General Maury to open all their guns upon the enemy and to hold their position until ordered to retire. This they did, until the evacuation of Mobile was complete. The works were not abandoned until the night of April 11, and it was 9 o'clock on Wednesday, April 12 that the gallant defenders left the wharf of Mobile for Demopolis. They carried with them the satisfaction of duty well performed, having fired, in General Maury's words, "*the last cannon in the last great battle of the war for the freedom of the Southern States*".<sup>45</sup>

The forts were occupied by navy detachments (who learned of the evacuation from deserters) and by pontonniers, who were in the vicinity taking up a canvas bridge, and were amused to be the first army troops into the forts. The occupying troops on the next days found the guns inscribed: "*Eleven o'clock, P.M. April 11. Captured by the 114<sup>th</sup> Illinois (pontonniers)*".<sup>46</sup>

General Lucas had been detached on April 5 with his cavalry brigade and a battery of rifled guns, and had been sent to Claiborne to block the navigation of the Alabama River and cut off the retreat from Mobile. He was hampered by unusually high water and returned to Blakely on the 18<sup>th</sup>. Near Mount Pleasant he was attacked on his way to Claiborne by elements of the 15<sup>th</sup> Confederate Cavalry. Lucas, with superior numbers, easily dispersed the attackers, taking some 70 prisoners. Federal casualties were light.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 97-98.

<sup>43</sup> *Cumming, op. cit.*, p. 306.

<sup>44</sup> *Andrews, op. cit.*, p. 201.

<sup>45</sup> *Maury*, "*The Defense of Mobile*", *op. cit.* p. 10.

<sup>46</sup> *Andrews, op. cit.*, p. 231.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 239-40; *Thomas C. McCorvey*, "*Alabama Historical Sketches*" (Charlottesville, 1960), pp. 143-56.

## ***The Occupation of Mobile***

The general orders given to General Maury by Generals Beauregard and Taylor were to save his garrison after having defended his position as long as was consistent with the ultimate safety of his troops, and to burn all the cotton in the city, except that which had been guaranteed protection against such burning by the Confederate authorities. It had been hoped that if Maury could hold the city for seven days, Forrest could defeat Wilson and come to the aid of Mobile. General Gibson and his outnumbered garrison at Spanish Fort had fought twice the seven days - but to no avail, as the depleted Confederate cavalry under Forrest could not cope with Wilson. After the fall of the Eastern Shore forts, General Maury's forces were reduced to less than 5,000 men and his supply of ammunition was nearly exhausted; he decided to evacuate Mobile at once. In his report to Jefferson Davis, General Maury stated, "*I completed the evacuation of Mobile on Wednesday morning, having dismantle the works, removed the stores best suited for troops in the field, transferred the commissary stores to the Mayor for the use of the people, and marched out with 4,500 infantry and artillery, 27 light cannons, and brought off all the land and water transportation*".<sup>48</sup>

General Maury remained in the city on the night of Tuesday, April 11, and marched out with the rear guard of Colonel Robert Lindsay's Louisiana infantry on Wednesday morning, leaving General Gibson to see to the withdrawal of the cavalry pickets and the burning of the cotton. Most of the artillery that could not be removed was left spiked and with projectiles jammed in the bores according to the Federals, who reported the "capture" of 18 pieces of field artillery, 34 pieces of siege and garrison artillery and 98 pieces of sea coast artillery in the city.<sup>49</sup>

These were trying times indeed for the brave women of Mobile as they watched the muddy, tired Confederate troops march out of the city. They said sad farewells to husbands, brothers and sweethearts, not knowing if they would see them again. They knew not what was in store for themselves - only that the morrow would bring them under the domination of the dreaded Yankees, with whatever inconvenience or danger this might entail. Their worse fears were, happily not realized, due largely to the high character of their captor, General Canby.

The city was surrendered around noon on Wednesday, April 12. General Gordon Granger crossed from Starke's Landing to the west side of the bay near the mouth of Dog River. Mayor R.H. Slough and some other prominent gentlemen went down the Bay Shell Road in a carriage with a white flag to surrender the open city. Union officers entered the city and the U.S. flag was run up atop the Battle House and at City Hall. The Union troops marched into town in the afternoon to the tune of "Yankee Doodle", being cheered by a few citizens, to the disgust of the many. This ended four years of war for Mobile.<sup>50</sup>

The final Union recapitulation of casualties for the campaign was as follows: 232 killed, 1,403 wounded and 43 captured or missing for an aggregate of 1,678 casualties. Canby reported that the total losses of the Confederates killed and wounded were not fully ascertained. The prisoners accounted for by the provost-marshal-general were four officers, 304 commissioned officers of lower grades, and 4,616 enlisted men; total

<sup>48</sup> Maury, "*The Defense of Mobile*", *op. cit.*, p. 8.

<sup>49</sup> *OR S. I.*, vol. XLIX, part 1, p. 151.

<sup>50</sup> *Mobile: 1861-1865*, edited by Sidney A. Smith and C. Carter Smith Jr. (Chicago, 1964), pp. 42-44 ; "*Civil War Naval Chronology*", *op. cit.*, part Y-1865, pp. 83-85 ; Caldwell Delaney, "*The Story of Mobile*" (*Mobile*, 1933, 1962), pp. 139-42 ; Caldwell Delaney, "*Remember Mobile*" (*Mobile*, 1948), pp. 210-11.

4,924. He also reported the capture of numerous flags, “231 pieces of artillery, and a large quantity of army material and naval stores”.<sup>51</sup>

It is a pleasure to relate that the occupation of Mobile was not accompanied by the severe treatment of the civilian populace that was common in Georgia and the Carolinas under Union Major-General Sherman. General Canby, through the gentlemancy and considerate discharge of his duties, won the respect of Mobilians and was remembered by many as the “Friendly Enemy”. While in Mobile, General Canby stayed at the residence of Confederate Major William H. Ketchum at the corner of Government and Franklin Streets. At first, the intention was that the occupants would have to vacate the house, which was to be used by General Canby and his staff. Mrs. Ketchum asked permission to remain in her home and General Canby reconsidered the matter. The William Stewart residence across the street was used for headquarters and staff, while General Canby with one aide stayed at the Ketchum home. Mrs. Ketchum was permitted to remain in her home and act as hostess and housekeeper for her Union guests. When Major Ketchum returned to his home he resumed his place at the head of the table, with General Canby moving graciously to the side. It is of interest that the Ketchum’s silver was borrowed for use in a banquet given at headquarters on the occasion of a visit by Major-General Benjamin F. Butler and it was reported as “a noteworthy fact that all the silver was accounted for and returned, even to the last spoon”.<sup>52</sup>

## **AFTERMATH AND RETROSPECT**

Canby’s military operations after the fall of Mobile can be briefly stated. General Smith’s 16<sup>th</sup> Corps marched to Montgomery on April 14. General Grierson, reporting from New Orleans, was sent on the 17<sup>th</sup> on Smith’s right flank with 4,000 effective cavalry to destroy supply points and gather up scattered Confederate troops. This raid carried to Eufaula (Alabama) on the Georgia line. General Benton was sent to close up the Tombigbee River in conjunction with the navy to prevent the egress of the Confederate gunboats. General Steele with his original infantry force and some artillery moved by water to Montgomery, convoyed by the navy. One division was left at Selma.

After the fall of Mobile the war was virtually at an end. General Lee had already bowed to the inevitable and had surrendered to General Grant at Appomattox on April 9. General Joseph E. Johnston surrendered to General W.T. Sherman on April 26. This left General Richard Taylor’s Department the only organized force of consequence east of the Mississippi River.

General Taylor and General Canby arranged an informal meeting on April 29 at Magee’s farm twelve miles north of Mobile. General Taylor described this meeting in his inimitable style in his delightful “Destruction and Reconstruction”. General Canby was escorted by a brigade and a military band with a complement of well dressed officers. General Taylor arrived with a single aide, both in uniform somewhat the worse for wear, on a handcar propelled by two Negroes. This, to the witty Taylor (who said that he sat by the cradle of the Confederacy and followed its hearse) seemed to effectively contrast the fortunes of the respective causes.<sup>53</sup>

The two generals met again, formally, in Citronelle (Alabama) on May 4, 1865 and

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<sup>51</sup> *OR S. I, vol. XLIX, part 1, p. 99.*

<sup>52</sup> *Erwin Craighead, “Mobile: Fact and Tradition” (Mobile, 1930), pp. 202-207.*

<sup>53</sup> *Richard Taylor, “Destruction and Reconstruction” (New York, 1879), pp. 224-25 ; Heyman, op. cit., pp. 232-34.*

Taylor surrendered on substantially the same terms as had Generals Lee and Johnston.

In retrospect, Canby's Mobile Campaign remains rather difficult to evaluate. It was well organized and was successful in that he achieved the capture of Mobile with relatively light casualties. Had the campaign occurred with the same result some two years earlier it would have been universally acclaimed as one of the most brilliant operations of the war. As it was, Canby was made to appear heavy-footed by Wilson's dramatic raid which captured Selma and Montgomery.

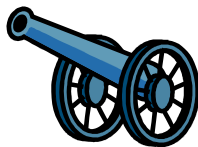
General Maury was highly critical of Canby's strategy in attacking on the Eastern Shore, maintaining that his work would have been shorter and easier had he invested the city by a western approach. Maury went so far as to speculate that Canby might have captured Maury's entire army.<sup>54</sup> This is quite in contrast with earlier expressed opinions of the Mobile fortifications, and to the writer is not wholly logical. The Mobile works were much more formidable and more nearly completed, and had the advantage of connected interior lines, which would permit the shifting of troops as required.

For that matter, it seems possible that General Maury might have made better use of his forces in the actual campaign. The Fowl River demonstration was of short duration and the absence of any appreciable Federal force on the west side of the bay should have been ascertained by more efficient use of cavalry, making it possible to bolster the defenses of the Eastern Shore. It must be said, however, in justice to General Maury, that his task was quite hopeless in any event and that his timely evacuation of Mobile undoubtedly spared the city from considerable destruction.

The storm of a century has not worn away the trenches at Spanish Fort and Blakely, and they still yield their treasures to electronically equipped relic hunters. Spanish Fort has been developed into a most attractive residential area, and while the Civil War buffs deplore the inundation of this historic site by houses and streets, they may at least take pleasure in the preservation of small portions of the works by the developer and in the attractive interpretative markers displayed throughout the area.

Mobilians of today may with the utmost convenience drive their automobiles around the area of the Confederate works, but never, it is hoped, without pausing for a moment's reflection and for a grateful tribute to these weary, brave, hopelessly outnumbered men in gray, who here bought time for their city and their loved ones - and perhaps saved Mobile from the fate of Selma.

No one had expressed this tribute better than did General Gibson, 100 years ago, in the closing lines of his official report, when he wrote, "*... with the position, we left behind, filling soldier's graves, many of the bravest and best; and if any credit shall attach to the defense of Spanish Fort, it belongs to the heroes whose sleep shall no more be disturbed by the cannon's roar*".<sup>55</sup>




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<sup>54</sup> Maury, "The Defense of Mobile", *op. cit.*, pp. 1-2; Heyman, *op. cit.*, pp. 230-31.

<sup>55</sup> *OR S. I*, vol. XLIX, part 1, p. 318.