

## MORALE AS A FACTOR IN THE CONFEDERATE FAILURE AT ISLAND NUMBER TEN

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It is hardly fair to say that the battle of New Madrid/Island Number Ten/Madrid Bend<sup>1</sup> has been neglected by students of the Civil War. In addition to the numerous references scattered throughout the pages of the standard histories,<sup>2</sup> there have been in recent years a number of article-length studies in a variety of scholarly journals.<sup>3</sup> One might question the wisdom, therefore, of any attempt to plow once more in this well-cultivated field.

To conclude, however, that the subject is unworthy of further investigation would be rash and precipitate. In this regard it should be noted that almost without exception the special studies which have been made have concentrated upon Union strategy and tactics rather than upon the defensive plan of the Confederates.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, the approach has been the traditional variety of "drum and bugle" history in that the emphasis was placed upon the decisive role played by the leaders on the two sides. In order to explain the successes of the Federal forces, attention was called to the brilliant performance of such Union officers as Major General John Pope and Commander Henry Walke. If the Confederates failed in their efforts at defense, it was because of the inferior quality of the Southern Commanders—Generals John P.

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<sup>1</sup> The title of the battle as given here is technically correct since it emphasizes the successive phases of the engagement, but it is too bulky for repetition. Hereafter it will be abbreviated to Island No. 10.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, J. G. Randall and David Donald, *The Civil War and Reconstruction* (second edition, revised with enlarged bibliography; Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1969), 206-207, and Shelby Foote, *The Civil War: A Narrative* (New York: Random House, 1958), I, 307-308, 311, 342-43, 363, 378-79.

<sup>3</sup> Jay Carlton Mullen, "Pope's New Madrid and Island Number Ten Campaigns," *Missouri Historical Review*, LIX (April, 1965), 324-43; Howard P. Nash, "Island No. 10," *Civil War Times Illustrated*, V (December, 1966), 42-47; and Lonnie J. White, "Federal Operations at New Madrid and Island Number Ten," *West Tennessee Historical Society's Papers*, XVII (1963), 47-67. Although the narrative which I have written is much condensed because of the particular focus of this paper, I have relied very heavily on these accounts for the basic factual material.

<sup>4</sup> Note especially the titles of the Mullen and White articles in footnote number three *supra*.

McCown and William W. Mackall along with Flag-Officer George N. Hollins.

Such an approach is, of course, legitimate and in fact absolutely essential as a first step toward the understanding of the Confederate failure. At the same time it leaves many vital questions unanswered. Why, for example, did the Confederate leaders, whose background and training would have led us to expect far more from them, perform so poorly? And why were the natural advantages and resources at their disposal put to so little use? What were the intangible factors which had a bearing on the outcome? It is the purpose of this paper to examine one of these intangibles—the morale factor—and to determine, insofar as possible, its impact on the Southern soldiers who fought at Island No. 10.

#### I. A BRIEF ACCOUNT OF THE BATTLE

By way of background it would, no doubt, be helpful to the general reader to have a brief account of the battle. What follows is designed to meet that need.

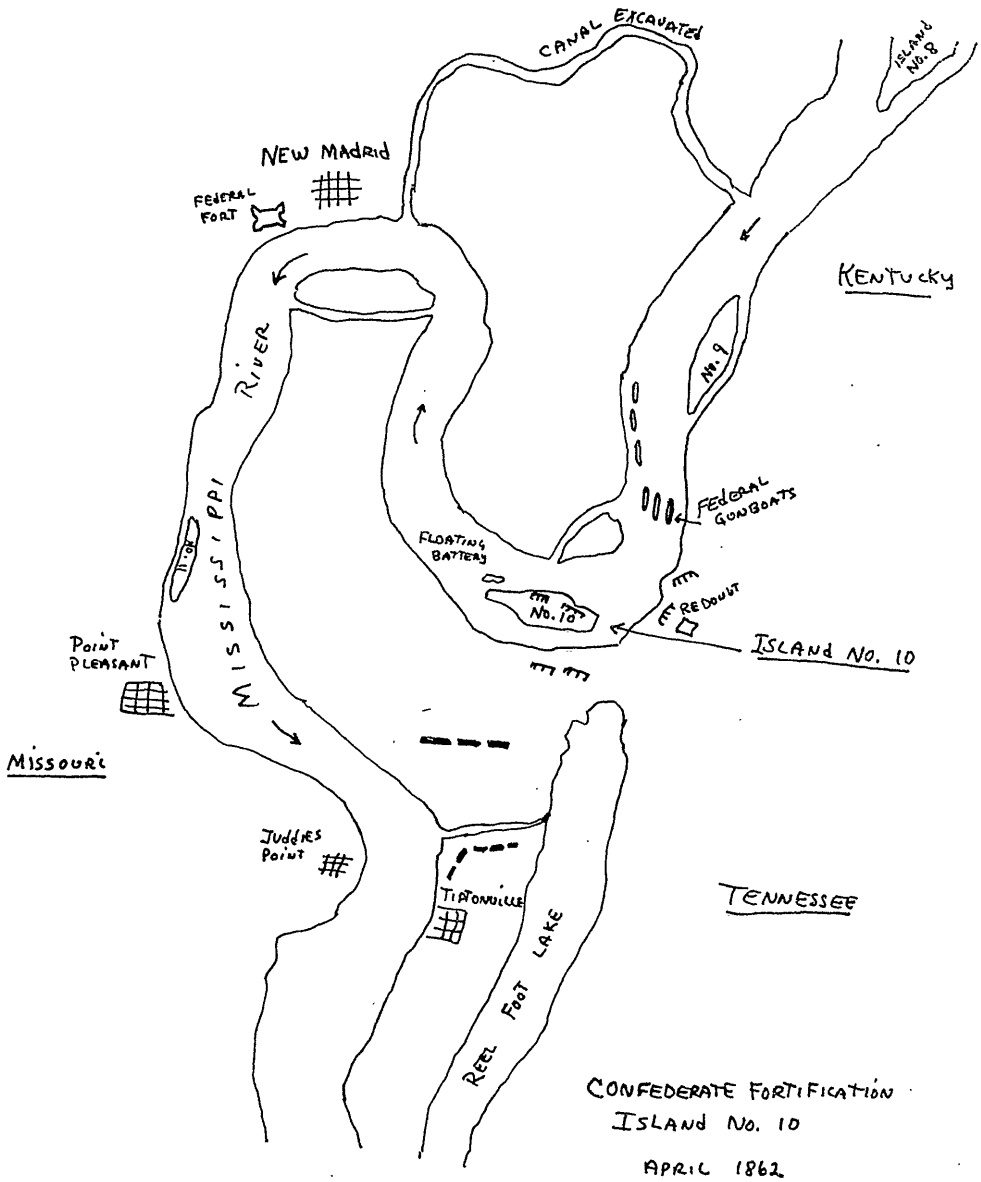
In the western theater the Union strategy was designed initially to seize and maintain control of the principal rivers—the Cumberland, the Tennessee, and the Mississippi—and it was in pursuit of this plan that the assaults upon Forts Henry on the Tennessee and Donelson on the Cumberland were launched.

By way of contrast, the Confederate strategy in the west was, almost without exception, defensive. Forts Henry and Donelson were crucial spots in the "line of the Cumberland" which extended all the way from Columbus, Kentucky, on the west to Cumberland Gap in the east. When resistance at Henry and Donelson crumbled, the western anchor at Columbus was no longer viable, and it was quickly decided to move the stronghold some fifty miles south to Island No. 10.<sup>5</sup>

The island itself—number ten in the series counting southward from the mouth of the Ohio River—lay in midstream just south of the Kentucky border at a spot where the river made something close to a *u*-turn to begin a northward course for some seven miles before resuming its normal southerly direction toward the Gulf of Mexico. On the north side of the river at the top of this second *u*-turn lay the little

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<sup>5</sup> See the map on page 119.



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town of New Madrid, Missouri. Across the river from the town, and stretching off to the south between the arms of the second *u*, lay a peninsula generally known as Madrid Bend.

It was here—at New Madrid; at Madrid Bend, and at Island No. 10—that the battle took place in March and April of 1862. New Madrid, seized by the Confederates early in the war, was the key in the defense against invasion by land forces since the only avenue of approach during springtime flooding ran southward from Sikeston to the town. In preparation for the anticipated attack the town was fortified with the construction of two earthwork forts—Bankhead on the east or upstream side and Thompson on the west or downstream side—which were connected with a series of trenches. The two forts were garrisoned with five regiments of infantry and three batteries of artillery. Brigadier General Alexander P. Stewart, a West Point graduate who was charged with the defense of the town, estimated his force at something less than three thousand effectives.<sup>6</sup>

In addition to the land forces committed to the defense of the town, there lay offshore a fleet of some five to eight Confederate gunboats under the command of Flag Officer George N. Hollins, a veteran of the U. S. Navy with a long and distinguished career before the outbreak of the Civil War and his decision to side with the Confederacy. These gunboats, armed with something like twenty guns, were nothing more than converted river craft and, with but two exceptions, unprotected by armor-plating and therefore highly vulnerable to artillery and mortar fire.<sup>7</sup>

If the fortifications at New Madrid were designed to cope with invasion by land, the intent of the preparations on and near the island was to interdict traffic on the river. For this purpose ten batteries of artillery were mounted—five spread out along the northern shore of the

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<sup>6</sup> Report of Brig. Gen. Alexander P. Stewart to Major General Leonidas Polk, March 31, 1862, *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, Ser. I, VIII, 163. Hereafter this bulky title will be abbreviated, *Official Records, Armies*. For a biographical sketch of Stewart see the article in Ezra J. Warner, *Generals in Gray: Lives of the Confederate Commanders* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1959), 293-94.

<sup>7</sup> The imprecision with regard to the number of vessels and guns reflects the fact that there were discrepancies in the accounts presented to the Congressional Investigating Committee (CSA) in the wake of the engagement. J. Thomas Scharf, *History of the Confederate States Navy from Its Organization to the Surrender of Its Last Vessel* (New York: Rogers and Sherwood, 1887), I, 243-44. For Hollins' distinguished career in the United States Navy, see the article by William K. Doty, *Dictionary of American Biography* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1960), V, 152.

island and another five scattered along the left bank (the Tennessee short) beginning at a point somewhat above the island. In addition to the ten batteries just described, there was a floating battery, sometimes referred to as the Pelican Dry Dock of New Orleans. At the outset of the naval bombardment the floating battery was anchored on the north side of the island. All told, these batteries mounted about seventy guns capable of destroying ironclad vessels and were placed in such a fashion as to direct fire at the enemy from three sides. The precise number of troops involved in the defensive operations on and near the island is not easy to ascertain, but perhaps five thousand is close to the actual count.<sup>8</sup> The man chosen to command the entire defensive network, including those at New Madrid, was John P. McCown, a graduate of the West Point Military Academy and a distinguished veteran of the Mexican War. At the time he assumed his command at Island No. 10 he was a Brigadier General, but in the course of the campaign (on March 10), he was promoted to Major General.<sup>9</sup>

New Madrid was first to feel the effects of the Union drive down the river. Having moved south from Commerce, Missouri, General Pope, with some 23,000 men, arrived in front of the town on March 5.<sup>10</sup> While his main force began the work of investing the city, a detachment of three infantry regiments with supporting troops under Colonel Joseph B. Plummer was dispatched around the Confederate left flank (Fort Thompson) to take up positions some twelve miles to the south at Point Pleasant. The obvious intent was to prepare for a river crossing and an assault upon the rear defense of the island which lay on the other side of Madrid Bend.

In the meantime Pope had sent for four heavy-siege guns to be used in the reduction of the works around the town. When these were finally in place on March 13, the decisive assault upon the town was launched. With their supply lines seriously threatened by Plummer's contingent at Point Pleasant and without any prospect of reinforcements, the Confederate Commanders—McCown, Stewart, and Hollins

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<sup>8</sup> Howard P. Nash, Jr., *A Naval History of the Civil War* (New York: A. S. Barnes and Company, 1972), 111; Scharf, *Confederate Navy*, I, 245; *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War* (New York: Thomas Yoseloff, 1956), I, 444n.

<sup>9</sup> Warner, *Confederate Commanders*, 199-200.

<sup>10</sup> The figure for Pope's army varies from 20,000 to 25,000. Nash, *Naval History*, 111; Stanley F. Horn, *The Army of Tennessee* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1953), 76, 144.

—met on the evening of the thirteenth and decided to evacuate the city without delay. When the morning of the fourteenth dawned, the fortifications were empty with the exception of the ample evidence of a hasty and poorly executed withdrawal. Some of the troops evacuated from New Madrid took up positions in the Bend across from Plummer; others were carried down the river to Fort Pillow where preparations were well under way for the next stand against the Union's relentless advance.

The Union plan for the reduction of the fortifications on Island No. 10 and on the mainland called for the services of Flag Officer Andrew H. Foote and his flotilla. Having repaired the damages sustained at Henry and Donelson, Foote arrived above the island on March 15 with a force of seven gunboats and ten mortar boats. The gunboats, commonly called ironclads, had been specially designed and constructed for service on the western waters by James B. Eads of St. Louis.<sup>11</sup> The naval bombardment began immediately upon Foote's arrival and was continued intermittently until the surrender of the island. Dr. S. H. Caldwell, the surgeon for the 46th Regiment of Tennessee Infantry, was on the island on March 17 when some of the heaviest shelling of the entire engagement took place and reported his experiences to his wife. "It is the grandest spectacle I ever witnessed when all the guns are at work but I assure you a most fearful one." Caldwell was amazed that such a shelling produced no casualties.<sup>12</sup>

If Foote had anticipated that the defensive works before him would crumble under his withering fire, he was sadly disappointed, and Pope, chafing at the bit to launch his cross-river assault, was stymied for lack of gunboat support which he desperately needed. Nor could the Flag Officer be persuaded to risk one of his gunboats in the attempt to run the batteries on the island.<sup>13</sup>

The solution to the problem finally agreed upon by Pope and his staff was a canal across the top of the first *u* from the vicinity of Island

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<sup>11</sup> Scharf, *Confederate Navy*, I, 242, 244; Military Telegram from Flag Officer A. H. Foote to Honorable Gideon Wells, March 20, 1862, Federal Collection, State Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

<sup>12</sup> S. H. Caldwell to his wife, March 17, 1862, typescript copy in the possession of Mr. Emmett Lewis, Tiptonville, Tennessee. The originals of these letters are in the possession of Mrs. Rowena Davis, Paris, Tennessee, Dr. Caldwell's granddaughter, who loaned them to Mr. Lewis for publication in the *Lake County Banner*. For a full account of the naval bombardment see the article by Walke in *Battles and Leaders*, I, 439, 441.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 441.

No. 8, along a flooded wagon road to a connection with St. John's Bayou and eventually back into the Mississippi just east of New Madrid. Completion of the canal required nineteen days, and even then the result was something less than satisfactory. Flood waters had receded to the extent that the canal would not accommodate the gunboats which drew six feet of water. Pope would have shallow draft transports for his troops but still no gunboats for the reduction of shore batteries.<sup>14</sup>

Pope was not satisfied. He still wanted gunboats and pressed Foote for action. The impasse was finally resolved when Commander Henry Walke of the *Carondelet* volunteered to make the attempt to run the gantlet. Following elaborate preparation of the ship, the expedition was launched under cover of a severe thunderstorm on the night of April 4. Battery No. 1 on the mainland, nearly submerged in the flooded bottom land and the victim of a Union raid three days earlier, was silent. The floating battery, having been subjected to a withering barrage on April 2, had been blasted loose from its mooring and had drifted some three miles down river where its fires were ineffective. The *Carondelet*, untouched by the island's batteries, escaped unscathed and put in at New Madrid at about midnight.<sup>15</sup>

When the gunboat *Pittsburg* repeated the *Carondelet's* feat on the night of April 6 and 7, the stage was set for Pope's long-anticipated river crossing which came about midnight on the 7th. Brigadier General William W. Mackall—a West Point graduate twice decorated for his service in the Mexican War—having succeeded McCown in command on March 31, was unable to organize any effective resistance to Pope's advance and at four o'clock A.M. on the 8th surrendered with all of his command near the outskirts of Tiptonville.<sup>16</sup> In the meantime, Foote effected a landing on the island and captured the remnant left there when the final evacuation took place. Some of the island's defenders, along with elements of the shore contingent, moved southward along

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<sup>14</sup> Mullen, "New Madrid and Island Number Ten," 337. For a detailed account by the engineer officer who opened the canal see *Battles and Leaders*, I, 462.

<sup>15</sup> Commander Henry Walke tells the story of his exploits in *Ibid.*, 441 ff; Walter B. Norris, "Carondelet," *Dictionary of American History* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1946), I, 317; Phillips Melville, "The *Carondelet* Runs the Gantlet," *American Heritage*, X (October, 1959), 66-72.

<sup>16</sup> *Battles and Leaders*, I, 445. The exact size of the force surrendered was the subject of considerable controversy. James D. Porter, Tennessee (in *Confederate Military History: A Library of Confederate States History*, ed. Clement Anselm Evans. Atlanta: Confederate Publishing Company, 1899), VIII, 32.

the western shore of Reelfoot Lake where they were ferried to the eastern bank and made their escape.

## II. MORALE AS A FACTOR

Most of the attempts to affix responsibility for the Confederate fiasco at Island No. 10—at the time of the battle and subsequently by historical researchers—have focused attention on the Southern leaders in the engagement. Within six months following the engagement two of the field-grade officers, Col. E. W. Gantt, a regimental commander at Ft. Thompson, and General McCown himself were accused of drunkenness, and although modern researchers have not pressed this drunkenness charge, they have tended to blame McCown and Mackall for the failure.<sup>17</sup> In this preoccupation with the leadership little attention has been paid to such intangible factors as the morale of the troops during the course of the engagement.

That morale in the Confederate ranks was at an extremely low level is hardly open to question. General Mackall, having assumed command on March 31, consulted with his regimental commanders who informed him that "their men were broken down by hard labor, dispirited by two recent evacuations [undoubtedly Columbus and New Madrid], and impressed with the idea that the post was untenable and its defense hopeless."<sup>18</sup> The regimental commanders were not alone in their estimation of the morale factor. General Mackall himself quickly decided that the situation was desperate. "It takes an army to defend the ground," he wrote to Beauregard. "One good regiment would be better than the force which I have. It never had any discipline. It is disheartened—apathetic."<sup>19</sup> The hopelessness of the situation must have been obvious to all the Confederate personnel from the Commanding General down to the lowest private. When the naval bombardment had lasted about a week, Dr. Caldwell was writing to his wife, "Our officers tell the men openly that we are whipped and that we will all be taken prisoners, etc. etc. and I firmly believe that if they are ever lead [*sic*] into battle they will run like turkeys."<sup>20</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Col. E. W. Gantt to Maj. Gen. Leonidas Polk, August 27, 1862, *Official Records, Armies*, VIII, 169; McCown to Polk, April 9, 1862, *ibid.*, 132; White, "New Madrid and Island Number Ten," 67.

<sup>18</sup> Report of Brig. Gen. William W. Mackall to General S. Cooper, August 21, 1862, *Official Records, Armies*, VIII, 132.

<sup>19</sup> Quoted in White, "New Madrid and Island Number Ten," 61.

<sup>20</sup> Caldwell to his wife, March 22, 1862, typescript copy of Mr. Lewis.



The generalization that morale among the defenders of Island No. 10 was low poses some fundamental questions. How did this prevailing attitude manifest itself? What were the tangible evidences of despondency? How can this pervasive hopelessness and despair be explained?

If one could have spent some time with the troops in the tents and in the trenches, he would have, no doubt, had ample evidence in support of the low-morale thesis. According to Dr. Caldwell, the soldiers were desperately homesick and talked endlessly about their families. "We have the most homesick regt. . . . that ever was organized," he wrote. "It has been nothing but home home all the time. . . ."<sup>21</sup>

Homesickness among soldiers is not uncommon, and the intensity of the emotion is very difficult if not impossible to measure. At the same time it is well known that homesickness is directly related to the quality of the mail service, and at Island No. 10 it was extremely poor. Dr. Caldwell, who was writing to his wife in Paris (Henry County, Tennessee) throughout the engagement, relied almost solely upon travellers to bring his mail and to carry his letters. In these epistles he harangued his wife considerably because he had not received letters from her. She had no excuse, he felt, because people were arriving at his location frequently who had recently passed through Paris. "For gracious sakes," he wrote in exasperation, "send it [your letter] by mail if no other way[.] It is true it might take a letter a month to come that way but that would be better than none at all."<sup>22</sup> If the postal service was so bad that it was to be relied upon only in the last resort, and if it would take a month for a letter to travel roughly seventy-five miles from Paris to Island No. 10, one can imagine the deplorable situation for the regiments from Arkansas, Louisiana, Alabama, and Mississippi.

Low morale was manifested also in what might be described as a general lack of discipline. In Caldwell's unit, the 46th Regiment of Tennessee Infantry, at least, there was a considerable amount of chafing under authority and the regimen of military life. On March 12—before the evacuation of New Madrid and before the beginning of the naval bombardment—Dr. Caldwell told his wife in strictest confidence that

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<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

"All of Capt. Cooper's men signed [*sic*] a petition yesterday to make him resign [*sic*] whether he wants to or not."<sup>23</sup> The Captain Cooper in question was Sylvester C. Cooper, the Commanding Officer of Company D, and it is doubtful if he was any less competent than a good many other company commanders. Captured when the island's force surrendered, he was a prisoner for some time, and when the unit was reorganized he was re-elected as company commander, was promoted to major, and fought again at Franklin where he was wounded and captured once more.<sup>24</sup>

This chafing under authority manifested itself from time to time in a variety of threats freely voiced throughout the camp. Col. John M. Clark, the regimental commander for the 46th Tennessee Infantry, was apparently highly unpopular with all the men of the regiment. Officers repeatedly threatened to resign, while the enlisted men talked openly about desertion.<sup>25</sup>

The reasons for Col. Clark's unpopularity are not entirely obvious. It was Dr. Caldwell's judgment, however, "that he has been too lenient all the time."<sup>26</sup> Caldwell undoubtedly had additional cause to be disillusioned with the leadership in his regiment. On the night of March 17-18—the night following the heaviest bombardment in the entire engagement—he had participated with a large contingent from the regiment in a vain attempt to reinforce Battery No. 1, the "Redan" fort. The major obstacle to the success of the mission was high water which made a normal march to the battery impossible. In the confusion which attended the effort Col. Clark became separated from his command and splashed around the bottomland for several hours in a futile attempt to find his troops. When he finally gave up and returned to camp, he discovered that his men had long since preceded him. "Somebody in a high office," Caldwell wrote to his wife, "acted very badly indeed on that night," and then in strictest confidence he added, "I would have been glad to have seen some few whose names I will not mention fall over with a hole through their heads."<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Caldwell to his wife, March 12, 1862, Lake County *Banner*, September 5, 1974.

<sup>24</sup> Edwin H. Rennolds, *A History of the Henry County Commands Which Served in the Confederate States Army* (Kennesaw, Georgia: Continental Book Company, 1961), 205.

<sup>25</sup> Caldwell to his wife, March 22, 1862, typescript of Mr. Lewis.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, March 19 and 22, 1862, Lake County *Banner*, August 29, 1974, and typescript of Mr. Lewis.

Grumbling and complaining about the calibre of leadership at Island No. 10 was apparently not limited to the 46th Regiment. Early in March Caldwell himself was threatening to resign. "We have a commander placed over us that is very unpopular . . ." he wrote to his wife.<sup>28</sup> The commander in question was not Clark but rather Col. J. B. G. Kennedy of the 21st Regiment of Louisiana Infantry. Placed in command of the entire defensive mission on the island about February 27, Kennedy was responsible for the performance of two regiments—his own (the 21st) and the 46th Tennessee. If Dr. Caldwell was expressing himself accurately when he said "All of us are trying to get him removed," it would appear that Louisiana soldiers as well as Tennesseans were disaffected with their leaders.<sup>29</sup>

Grumbling and complaining are by no means the least desirable of the several forms of expression which a lack of discipline may take. Malingering is worse. By definition malingering is pretending to be ill in order to avoid duty or work. When the artillery barrage had lasted a full week, Dr. Caldwell reported to his wife—once again in the strictest of confidence—that he was being deluged with applications for sick leaves and medical discharges. There had been at last 150 such requests, and he had approved only two. "Jimmy Cooney has been after me for two or three days," he wrote, "but I have positively refused and I recon [*sic*] that he will be an enemy forever—But he is in better health than I ever saw him and looks as stout as anybody."<sup>30</sup>

Such phenomena are not really difficult to explain. When men are placed in a position of great danger, the natural response is fear, and they will adopt a variety of techniques to cope with these emotions. "Nearly all of them are half scared to death," wrote Caldwell.<sup>31</sup> But the morale factor involves a vicious cycle. Men were afraid and pretended to be ill; their pretensions were detected and they were punished with the assignment of double duty; and the morale level all the while sank lower and lower.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, March 11, 1862, Lake County Banner, October 17, 1974.

<sup>29</sup> Report of Col. J. B. G. Kennedy to Polk, July 4, 1862, *Official Records, Armies*, VIII, 178-79; Caldwell to his wife, March 11, 1862, Lake County Banner, October 17, 1974.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, March 22, 1862, typescript of Mr. Lewis.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

How widespread such malingering was is difficult, perhaps impossible, to determine, but it is virtually certain that it was not limited to the 46th Tennessee Regiment. General McCown, in his report of the evacuation of New Madrid pointed out that several men and at least one officer were left behind when the gunboats pulled away. Although he was willing to admit that some of these had merely taken shelter from the storm, he suspected that others had hid themselves to avoid work.<sup>33</sup>

Perhaps the most devastating of the many varieties of lack of discipline is insubordination, the candid refusal of a soldier to obey legitimate orders. Once again it is difficult to determine with precision the extent to which the troops were infected with this malignancy. In his report on the evacuation of New Madrid, General Stewart stated succinctly that "the men became sullen and indifferent—indisposed to work."<sup>34</sup> It is probably safe to say the situation at Fort Thompson was more grave than Stewart's simple statement would seem to indicate. When General Beauregard ordered an investigation of the fiasco at the Missouri town, his Acting Inspector-General, George W. Brent reported that "the men [were] disinclined to obey orders."<sup>35</sup> One modern historian, who has carefully examined the evidence, categorically declares that, "surly Confederates refused to load cannons, ammunition and other supplies aboard the boats."<sup>36</sup>

Nearly everything that has been said about lack of discipline can be explained in terms of defective training of the Confederate troops. Perhaps experiences of the 46th Regiment of Tennessee Infantry will illustrate the nature of the problem. From the time the unit was formed in Paris in late November of 1861 until it was deployed at Island No. 10 in early January of the next year, there was virtually no opportunity for serious training. Most of this time was spent in the construction of winter quarters at Union City, while many of the unit's men were detailed as guards for vital railroad facilities.<sup>37</sup> Commodore Hollins, in his report to General Polk on the helter-skelter evacuation of New

<sup>33</sup> Report of McCown to Col. Thomas Jordan, March 31, 1862, *Official Records, Armies*, VIII, 128.

<sup>34</sup> Report of Stewart to Polk, March 31, 1862, *ibid.*, 164.

<sup>35</sup> Report of Maj. George W. Brent to General G. T. Beauregard, April 15, 1862 *ibid.*, 138.

<sup>36</sup> Mullen, "New Madrid and Island Number Ten," 333.

<sup>37</sup> Rennolds, *Henry County Commands*, 180-82.

Madrid, touched the very heart of the matter when he said, "I believe much more might have been saved if stricter discipline had been manifested among the troops; but from my own observation I doubt the possibility among volunteers raised and officered as many of our régiments are."<sup>38</sup>

It is not really surprising that there is evidence of poor morale among the troops at Island No. 10. The surprising thing is that in a setting which offered so little by way of hope and encouragement, the evidence remains so meager. The battle itself followed quickly on the heels of the double defeat at Forts Henry and Donelson and the evacuation at Columbus, Kentucky. Furthermore, the engagement took place in the midst of feverish preparations for the inevitable withdrawal to Fort Pillow.<sup>39</sup> And finally, a major clash along the Tennessee River far to the south of Henry and Donelson was anticipated momentarily.

The Union forces at Island No. 10 exceeded their Confederate counterparts by a ratio something larger than two to one, and the Confederates lived from day to day with the assurance that no reinforcements would be forthcoming.<sup>40</sup> The evacuation of New Madrid (so vital to the defensive plan) and its occupation by Union troops must have come as a crushing blow to the flagging spirits of the Confederate defenders. Caldwell's letter of March 7 reveals not only his profound understanding of the tactical importance of the Missouri town but also what must have been the common feeling of desperation in view of recent events. "If the Lincolmites [Federal forces] take that place we will of course have to fall back. The Lord only knows where to. I am afraid into the Gulf of New Mexico."<sup>41</sup> Evidence is lacking to show the impact of General McCown's dismissal on March 31 and his replacement by General Mackall, but it is unlikely that the move produced any appreciable elevation in the level of morale.

The list of factors contributing to low morale has not yet been exhausted, and once again the history of the 46th Regiment of Tennes-

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<sup>38</sup> Report of Flag Officer George N. Hollins, to Polk, March 30, 1862, *Official Records, Armies*, VIII, 185.

<sup>39</sup> It would appear that Beauregard considered Island No. 10 as little more than a delaying action while Fort Pillow was prepared for the major defensive stand. Mullen, "New Madrid and Island Number Ten," 342.

<sup>40</sup> Beauregard had made it abundantly plain to McCown that Island No. 10 would not be reinforced pending the outcome of the engagement in the south. Beauregard to McCown, March 22, 1862, Alfred Roman, *The Military Operations of General Beauregard in the War Between the States, 1861-1865* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1883), 561.

<sup>41</sup> Caldwell to his wife, March 7, 1862, Lake County *Banner*, October 17, 1974.

see Infantry will illustrate a point. Poorly trained, as we have already noted, the unit suffered also from a lack of arms and ammunition. A variety of shotguns, squirrel rifles, and antiquated muskets made up the arsenal of the regiment, according to a contemporary who fought at Island No. 10. There were a meager seven guns in one company.<sup>42</sup> "As we have no guns," Caldwell observed, "they make 'sappers and miners' of us."<sup>43</sup> The expression "sappers and miners" was a common one used to denote engineer troops who spent their time cutting trees (sapping) and digging field works (mining). As if it were not bad enough for the men of the 46th to be poorly trained and equipped as infantrymen, they were required to serve in a capacity for which they had no training at all!

One factor which has an enormous bearing on the morale of soldiers remains to be examined. That factor is the health of the troops, and even a cursory examination of the evidence suggests that it was poor. At Ft. Thompson, "There were a good many sick," according to Stewart's report to Polk.<sup>44</sup> General Polk, already concerned about the state of affairs at Island No. 10 and Madrid Bend, sent his Acting Inspector General Lieutenant Colonel E. D. Blake to conduct an investigation during the last week of March. Blake's report must have been disturbing, to say the least. He found "about 2,000 effective men and about 1,557 on the sick report."<sup>45</sup>

Illness was no respecter of persons. Dr. Caldwell, who was "run to death" caring for the many sick members of his command, was himself ill.<sup>46</sup> General Walker's report of the unhappy events at New Madrid was considerably delayed because the general was not well enough to write.<sup>47</sup> At the time McCown was relieved of his command, he was probably already ill; he was certainly sick in the week following his departure for Memphis—with a serious attack of pneumonia.<sup>48</sup>

Bad weather during the first week in March was a major factor. There were rain and snow in great abundance, and the dirt roads turned to a sea of mud. Troops wallowed in the mire up to their knees, and

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<sup>42</sup> Rennolds, *Henry County Commands*, 180-82.

<sup>43</sup> Caldwell to his wife, March 17, 1862, typescript of Mr. Lewis.

<sup>44</sup> Report of Stewart to Polk, March 31, 1862, *Official Records, Armies*, VIII, 163.

<sup>45</sup> Report of Lieut. Col. E. D. Blake to Polk, April 10, 1862, *ibid.*, 136.

<sup>46</sup> Caldwell to his wife, March 24, 1862, typescript of Mr. Lewis.

<sup>47</sup> Report of Brig. Gen. L. M. Walker to Jordan, April 9, 1862, *Official Records, Armies*, VIII, 170.

<sup>48</sup> Report of McCown to Polk, April 9, 1862, *ibid.*, 131.

sickness ran rampant. It was during this week that the siege of New Madrid began. When the war was over, John T. Irion of Company "G," Fifth Regiment of Tennessee Infantry, remembered that Pope's artillery "kept us in the trenches much of the time, and the weather being bad we suffered much from exposure."<sup>49</sup> McCown's report rendered at the time of his release pointed out that "the bad weather and exposure had increased our sick to an alarming extent."<sup>50</sup>

Upper respiratory infections caused by exposure to inclement weather was not the only malady with which the defenders of Island No. 10 were plagued. The 46th Regiment was stricken with an outbreak of measles almost immediately upon its arrival at Madrid Bend in early January.<sup>51</sup> Apparently, the measles continued to afflict the troops. Among those who escaped when the collapse finally came on April 8, there were "many recently from the hospital, some with measles, mumps, and other diseases still upon them."<sup>52</sup>

As might be suspected, dysentery was a problem. Dr. Caldwell, whose illness was mentioned earlier, undoubtedly suffered from this indisposition so common to military camps throughout the Civil War. Although he never identified the nature of his illness, his comments to his wife left little doubt on the subject. "I am so ill," he wrote, "that I have no idea that we can ever live together in any piece [*sic*] again . . ."<sup>53</sup> Dysentery contributes little to the elevation of morale.

The defenders of Island No. 10 had ample cause to be dispirited, dejected, even desperate. The war was going badly, the mail service was poor, training and equipment were inadequate, the Federal advance was relentless and devastating, and everywhere one turned there were soldiers who were sick. Students of this battle have been prone to ask the question, "Why did the Confederate defense turn out to be so weak and ineffective?" Perhaps in the light of the evidence presented here the question should be re-phrased, "How did these despondent men succeed in holding out so long?"

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<sup>49</sup> John T. Irion, "Fifth Tennessee Infantry," (typescript copy in the Confederate Collection, State Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee, n.d.), 1. For a graphic description of the weather see Caldwell to his wife, March 7, 1862, *Lake County Banner*, October 17, 1974.

<sup>50</sup> Report of McCown to Jordan, March 31, 1862, *Official Records, Armies*, VIII, 128.

<sup>51</sup> Rennolds, *Henry County Commands*, 180-81.

<sup>52</sup> Report of Lieut. Col. W. D. S. Cook to Jordan, April 13, 1862, *Official Records, Armies*, VIII, 177.

<sup>53</sup> Caldwell to his wife, March 24, 1862, typescript of Mr. Lewis.