

POPE'S NEW MADRID AND ISLAND NUMBER 10 CAMPAIGNS

BY JAY CARLTON MULLEN

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Meandering through a self-created alluvial basin, the lower Mississippi River flows some eleven hundred miles from Cape Girardeau, Missouri, to the sea. Few natural barriers impede the river's course through this basin. As a consequence countless swamps and horseshoe lakes flank the river. In 1869 this alluvial bottom was not easily traversed except by water. During the first half of the 19th century, while railroads were experiencing a painful adolescence, the Mississippi and forty-five of its tributaries formed a network of internal transportation that extended over 15,000 miles.

Except for two areas, the alluvial bottom in southeast Missouri is practically flat. The two exceptions are the Scott County Hills and Crowley's Ridge. The Scott County Hills, a paleozoic uplift, extends inland almost fifteen miles from the Mississippi River. Crowley's Ridge extends south from Scott County into Arkansas and ends at the mouth of the St. Francois River near Helena, Arkansas. Although the bottom is devoid of hills, it is wrinkled with small sand ridges. Easternmost of these is Sikeston (or Sikes') Ridge which runs south from the Scott County Hills to New Madrid. This rise is about a half mile wide and rises about ten feet above the bottom's level. The lowlands between Sikeston Ridge and the Mississippi are partially drained by two bayous, St. Johns and St. James.¹

The river that was such a blessing to commercial transportation during peacetime was of highest military importance during the Civil War. Flowing north to south, it was an avenue of transportation into either section that, unlike a railroad, did not require

¹Harold Fisk, *Geological Investigations of the Alluvial Valley of the Lower Mississippi River* (War Department: Corps of Engineers, U.S. Army, 1944), 27. Robert Sidney Douglas, *History of Southeast Missouri; A Narrative Account of its Historical Progress, its People and its Principal Interests* (Cape Girardeau, Mo., 1961), xii-xiii.

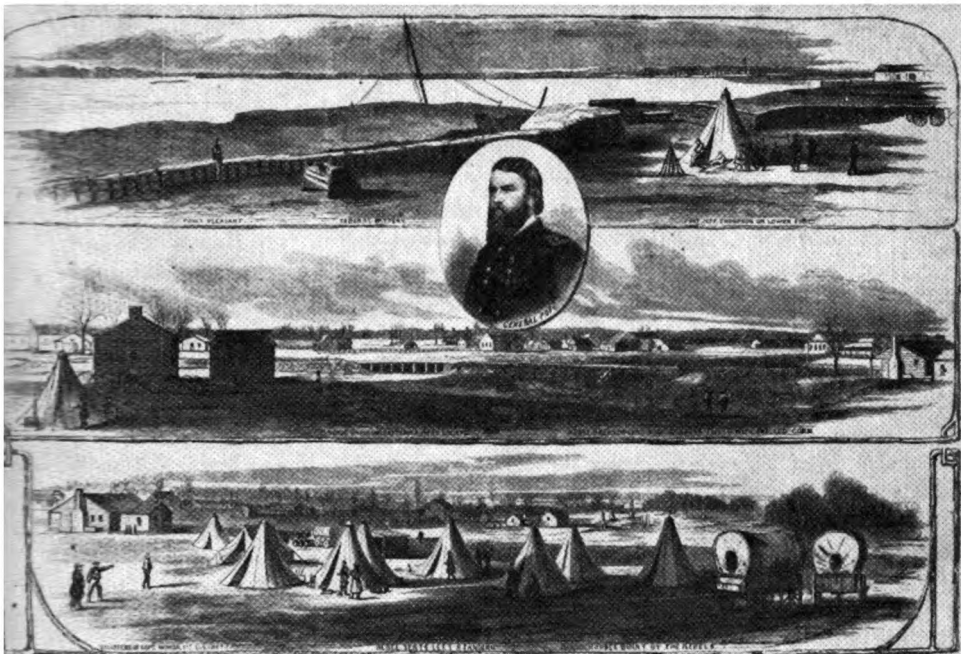
thousands deployed along its length guarding bridges, track, and vehicles from swift striking cavalry units. Only formidable artillery installations could hope to contend with the withering fire-power of gunboats. Inclement weather conditions which practically precluded land travel posed only a minor inconvenience to armies transported by boats.

Both the Confederacy and the Union appreciated the strategic value of the river, but the Confederate government's concept of a purely defensive war prevented its exploiting the river's potential as a highway into the North. In northern Virginia Federal leaders had grimly realized that frontal attacks in that theatre yielded little when the Confederates had the natural allies of Chesapeake Bay on the east and the Appalachian Mountains on the west to prevent a Union flanking movement. The east flowing rivers of this area provided natural barriers against Union armies descending into the Old Dominion. The most effective way for the Federal forces to overcome this position was by a gigantic flanking movement covering some 1,000 miles from Nashville, through eastern Tennessee and northern Georgia, and then around the southern extremity of the Appalachians to the rear of Virginia. To succeed in such a maneuver the Union right flank had to be securely protected. Union control of the Mississippi would ensure this.²

Early in the war Winfield Scott advocated that the Federals capture the Mississippi. But there were vast problems of organization to be dealt with before either side could organize functional armies. Had the Missouri militia, under secessionist governor Claiborne Jackson, been able to seize that state the Confederacy's river orientation would have been entirely different. However, the swift action of Generals Nathaniel Lyon and Francis P. Blair thwarted Southern plans with the capture of the militia at Camp Jackson in St. Louis and the driving of the remaining state forces into Missouri's southwest corner.

Meanwhile, activity in Tennessee was directed toward preventing Northern forces from descending the river. Before the Tennessee voters could express themselves in a secession referendum the Tennessee Assembly ratified a military league with the Confederacy and defenses were constructed on the second Chickasaw Bluff to

²Gordon B. Turner, *A History of Military Affairs in Western Society Since the Eighteenth Century* (New York, 1953), 147, 153; Archer Jones, *Confederate Strategy from Shiloh to Vicksburg* (Baton Rouge, 1961), 6, 16-25; G.F.R. Henderson, *The Civil War: A Soldier's View* (Chicago, 1958), 198.



Views at New Madrid and Point Pleasant

protect the lower Mississippi Valley from invasion.³ Because Kentucky was endeavoring to remain neutral, the southernmost Union position was established at Cairo at the junction of the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers. Both contingents covetously eyed the Iron Banks at Columbus, Kentucky, a series of bluffs which were ideally suited for military fortification.

The Confederate victory at Bull Run put Southern thought in offensive tenor. After Tennessee joined the Confederacy, General Gideon J. Pillow's West Tennessee Command was placed under General Leonidas Polk. With designs on southern Missouri, Polk dispatched Pillow's force upriver to occupy the Missouri river town of New Madrid. On July 28, 1861, eight Confederate steamers splashed up to the New Madrid levee, and amid the cheers of the local citizenry General Pillow's Army of Liberation tramped down the gangplanks onto Missouri soil.

Meanwhile, William J. Hardee had a Confederate force of some 4,500 in Pochahontas, Arkansas. M. Jeff Thompson had a small contingent of assorted fighters encamped near Bloomfield by the Great Mingo Swamp. Pillow, Thompson, and Missouri's secessionist governor, Claiborne Jackson, met at New Madrid to formulate a scheme for capturing southern Missouri.⁴

³James Walter Fertig, *The Secession and Reconstruction of Tennessee* (Chicago, 1898), 18; *Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies in the War of the Rebellion* (Washington, 1894-1922), XXII, 786-787, (Hereinafter cited as ORN); *War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (Washington, 1880-1901), Series I, Vol. IV, 251. (Hereinafter cited as OR. All references will be to Series I.)

⁴OR, III, 618-619.

New Madrid was a point of prime military importance in this area. Besides serving as a base of operations for a Confederate offensive in Missouri it could also be a base for cutting the communications of any force attempting an overland invasion of Arkansas down Crowley's Ridge. But a more important military vantage point lay eight miles upriver from New Madrid. Here a landmark known to rivermen as Island Number Ten, so named because it was the tenth island below the Ohio, was declared by a Confederate engineer, A. B. Gray, to have no superior above Memphis as a position for repelling the enemy and protecting the Mississippi Valley.⁵

After their defeat at Wilson's Creek where Lyon was killed, the Federal troops in Missouri were grouped at Rolla and St. Louis. General Sterling Price was expected to advance from the state's southwestern corner where he had been driven by Lyon, while Hardee and Thompson moved in concert out of the southeast. This two-pronged attack was intended to outflank the Federals at Rolla, forcing their retreat to St. Louis. Pillow, in the meantime, was to advance overland and capture the river town of Cape Girardeau. From Cape Girardeau's bluffs his army could block communications on the Mississippi between St. Louis and Cairo, cross the river, capture Cairo from above, and thus relieve the threat of a Federal river descent.⁶

Hardee moved out of Arkansas to Greenville, where he waited for Thompson to join him before attacking Ironton, the southern terminus of the St. Louis and Iron Mountain Railroad. Thompson, in the meantime, had received orders from Governor Jackson to join Pillow in the move on Cape Girardeau. In a night and a day Thompson led his command through the Mingo and Nigger Wool Swamps and encamped at Sikeston. He advanced from that point to Benton and then to Commerce where his artillery fired a few rounds at passing Union steamboats. He was anxious for a fight, but he reigned his eagerness awaiting Pillow's move. It never came.

In New Madrid, Pillow was nursing a carbuncle on his buttock that made riding anything but pleasant. And his offensive fervor was displaced by thoughts of defense. He maintained that his threats on Cape Girardeau had prevented a concentration of Federals in western Missouri and the most urgent matter seemed to be the protection of the Mississippi Valley and the Tennessee interior by fortifying Columbus, Kentucky.⁷ Thompson, exas-

⁵*Ibid.*, 651-652, 662.

⁶*Ibid.*, 618-619.

⁷*Ibid.*, 686; Jay Monaghan, *Swamp Fox of the Confederacy: The Life and Military Services of M. Jeff Thompson* (Tuscaloosa, Ala., 1957), 31-33.

perated that he had been ordered through the swamps for no purpose, was separated from Hardee who was as eager as he to fight. However, with Union strength in Cape Girardeau daily growing, he had no choice but to withdraw. Hardee felt he had obligations to Arkansas and withdrew to that state. With the fizzling out of the southeast Missouri campaign in the summer of 1861 went a prime opportunity for a Confederate offensive in the Mississippi Valley; from then on no major Confederate offensive could be generated and efforts were directed at stopping Union offensives.

During August, both Polk and Pillow felt that their position at New Madrid was untenable. Polk was disposed toward falling back on the already substantial works at Forts Pillow and Randolph on the Chickasaw Bluffs and to use Union City, Tennessee, as a base of operations into Missouri. Pillow, however, implored Polk to let him ascend the river into neutral Kentucky and fortify the Iron Banks at Columbus, a point of "paramount military necessity," where he could "close the door effectually against invasion of Tennessee or descent of the Mississippi."⁸ Polk, with the endorsement of Jefferson Davis, finally consented and Columbus was fortified by the Confederates.⁹

The Union leaders had the highest respect for Columbus, both as a defensive stronghold and a potential offensive sally port. No attempt was ever made to take it although on November 6, 1861, the Federals did clash with the Confederates at Belmont, Missouri, an encampment on the river opposite Columbus. Both sides scored the encounter a victory.¹⁰ Nevertheless, the river position of both was unaltered and the Confederates continued talking about moving from Columbus to "emancipate" St. Louis.¹¹

While the Confederates were trying to get the southeast Missouri offensive underway, Confederate engineer A. B. Gray had been using slaves to advance construction on Island Ten's fortifications. Gray had once endorsed a letter of Pillow's attesting to the superiority of Columbus as a defensive site, but he later rescinded his endorsement in favor of Island Number Ten. When Columbus was fortified Gray contended that the attention being focused there was causing New Madrid and Island Number Ten to be neglected. He maintained that the Island, properly fortified, could offer the greatest resistance to land and water attack. But Gray was having troubles. He could not obtain the necessary men or equipment

⁸OR, III, 686-687.

⁹*Ibid.*, 179-192.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 267-272, 348-357; C. C. Buel and R. U. Johnson, *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War* (New York, 1887), I, 348-357. (Hereinafter cited as *BL*. All references will be to volume I.)

¹¹OR, VIII, 728-729.

for construction. He had no boats for construction duties, and soon his slave laborers would be returning to their farms for the September harvests. Two of his competent officers had been transferred, and some of his guns were sent upstream to Columbus.¹²

But events of the winter months turned New Madrid and Island Number Ten from secondary positions into a point of prime importance. When Grant's capture of Forts Henry and Donelson on the Tennessee and Cumberland Rivers had rendered Columbus untenable, the Columbus garrison was forced to withdraw downriver and re-establish itself. Work was then speeded up on the heretofore neglected fortifications at Island Number Ten until its strength inspired one Confederate brigadier to pronounce the position the "Thermopylae of the South."¹³

Captain Gray described the position saying, "The absence of any impressively strong features in topography might create an unfavorable opinion to its strength." But actually it afforded a formidable position. The Island itself lay six miles upstream from New Madrid in a river bend that turns the south flowing river 180 degrees and directs it northward to New Madrid where it turns again and resumes its southward direction. The Tennessee peninsula that is bordered by this loop in the Mississippi is called Madrid Bend. In 1862 the Island was flanked on the left by Reelfoot Lake and the swamps that surrounded it, and on the right by the Missouri swamps. To the east, New Madrid was bordered by the same swamp that flanked the Island and the fields west and north of the town also tapered into swamps. Due to the proximity of the lake and swamp the positions on the Island and the bordering banks could not be flanked and the batteries would have made folly of a direct assault. New Madrid was the weak point in this defensive system. Unlike the Island, its flanks were not protected by swamps. Sike's Ridge could provide an avenue of approach for hostile forces. Consequently New Madrid was the recipient of the first Union downriver movement.¹⁴

Two days after the fall of Forts Henry and Donelson Brigadier General John Pope was directed by General Henry Halleck to reduce New Madrid and Island Number Ten. Pope moved his Union Army of the Mississippi aboard steamboats upstream from Cairo to Commerce, a Missouri river hamlet at the foot of the Scott County Hills. On February 28, 1862, Pope's command uncoiled from its base at Commerce and began moving west along

¹²OR, III, 630, 651-652, 665, 687, 703-704.

¹³OR, VIII, 150-156.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, 79.

the Scott County Hills. Five miles inland the column dipped from the high road along the hills into the swampy bottoms. A mile later it ascended onto Sikeston Ridge, the slight rise that ran south above the flooded bottoms to New Madrid.

The entire march was hampered by drizzling rain and snow, and the artillery had to be pushed and dragged by hand. The green soldiers, undaunted by the mud and rain, attended to their duties ungrudgingly. During the day the units became spread out along the line of march with the rear units jogging until about midnight before catching up with their comrades bivouacing on the farm of Nathaniel Watkins, a half-brother of Henry Clay. One officer maintained that that night, despite the mud and rain, he slept as soundly as he ever did in his life. The army camped the next night at Sikeston and on the third of March arrived before New Madrid. Here it drove in the Confederate pickets, and invested the town.¹⁵

The fortifications the Union soldiers faced at New Madrid were not as effective as they might have been. Jeff Thompson had tried to advise Polk that the Island could be passed via New Madrid and that works should be extended from the river to the swamps west of town, but Polk had disagreed. The existing fortifications did not extend to the swamps, so Pope's men were able to bypass them and envelop the town.¹⁶ Realizing this flaw in the position, Thompson decided to try an independent defensive scheme. With twenty of his men and three one-pounder cannons, he rode out of Sikeston trying to appear as the van of a large force. When the enemy was sighted he boldly deployed his men as though expecting immediate support and fired a cannon. Thompson expected his demonstration to precipitate a hasty Federal retreat. Rather, a bugle sounded and the blue-coated cavalymen charged. It seems that this detachment had been dispatched specifically to handle Thompson because a report from a local farmer advised them precisely of his strength.

Thompson ordered an immediate retreat. Then, according to an Illinois cavalryman who took part in the pursuit, "the fun commenced." Thompson and his men galloped off leaving behind them a trail of blankets, hats, weapons, and even artillery as they tried to outdistance the pursuing Federals. A trooper riding next to Thompson received a searing wound from a Union ball that passed over his knuckles. Thompson administered first-aid at a full gallop by extracting a pocket flask of peach brandy and pouring it on the wound. Then, helping himself to a swig, he passed it on to his

¹⁵*Ibid.*, 80-88; Oscar Lawrence Jackson, *The Colonel's Diary* (Sharon, Pa., 1922), 44-45.

¹⁶OR, VIII, 174; Monaghan, 48.

nephew. As the Confederate fugitives neared the haven that lay within the New Madrid lines, the Illinois cavalry reined in with three captured cannons to their credit.¹⁷

The rest of the Federals were soon employed in the less glamorous contest of besieging the town. Located below the town was Fort Thompson, a bastioned work of four earth walls, four hundred feet long, with fourteen heavy guns. Fort Bankhead lay above the town near the south of St. John's Bayou. Its parapet ditch lay behind an abatis of brush and felled trees, and it boasted batteries of four smooth bore thirty-two pounders and six lighter pieces. Trench lines connected these two forts. Five regiments of infantry and a few companies of artillery garrisoned the positions. Peering over the river bank onto the level ground surrounding New Madrid were the heavy guns of six Confederate gunboats capable of sweeping the trenches if Union infantry ever occupied them.¹⁸ Until Pope could obtain heavy guns to expel the gunboats, an assault was deemed unwise.¹⁹ Both sides settled down to wait out a siege that was "confounded dull." For two weeks the Northerners watched the gunboat smokestacks from their tents and listened to the music of the nearby Rebel bands, but life seemed less exciting than in camp at Cairo. During this lull, visiting nearby farms was a popular pastime among Union soldiers. While some men occupied the natives with interesting conversation, their cohorts out back confiscated supplements to the army's diet. Pope finally had to detail the cavalry to halt such forays. They were seldom called to arms.²⁰

Pope took his light guns to Point Pleasant, twelve miles below New Madrid, and placed them in deep entrenchments. He had hoped to stop navigation with these batteries but they merely annoyed Confederate boats.²¹ On March 11, however, four 128-pound cannons were dispatched from Cairo which, within thirty-four hours, would break the stalemate. At daylight on the 13th, the besieged Confederates were greeted by two roaring batteries situated less than 800 yards from their lines. During the night the Yankees had silently picked and spaded their trenches forward and implanted these batteries.²² The two armies exchanged fire all day

¹⁷OR, VIII, 102, 110-111, 125, 171-173; Charles W. Wills, *Army Life of an Illinois Soldier, Including a Day by Day Record of Sherman's March to the Sea: Letters and Diary of the Late Charles W. Wills* (Washington, 1906), 64.

¹⁸OR, VIII, 81, 163.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, 102-106.

²⁰Wills, *Army Life*, 65, 75; Jackson, *Colonel's Diary*, 45.

²¹OR, VIII, 81-82, 104-105.

²²OR, VIII, 82-84, 96; Whitclaw Reid, *Ohio in the War* (Cincinnati, 1868), II, 196.

while various Union infantrymen gave moral support to their gunners by jumping out of their trenches, cheering and waving their hats, and then rapidly tumbling back into the trenches.²³ With entrenching tools, others were busy extending the trenches even closer to the Confederate lines. A Confederate shot hit one of the batteries, disabling a gun, killing one man and wounding six others. But the Federals still prepared to move the remaining three guns forward under the cover of darkness.²⁴

That evening the Confederate leaders held a council of war aboard the gunboat *McRae*. They agreed that Union columns on an open field were no match for their defenses, but men advancing through trenches was something with which they could not cope. The position seemed untenable without large reinforcements, and these were unavailable. Commodore George Hollins decided to withdraw his fleet. He did not want his gunboats moving back and forth from shore as evacuation ferries under the muzzles of the big Union guns. Inadequate personnel, weary infantry, no relief pending, and an inability to stop approaching trenches were deemed reasons enough by the Confederates for evacuation. During the night while Union troops were eagerly advancing trenches and moving cannons, sullen Confederates were haphazardly attending to a confused evacuation. A thunderstorm created chaos and the surly Confederates refused to load the cannons, ammunition, and other supplies aboard the boats. With a complete breakdown in discipline, the officers joined the men aboard the boats and the town was evacuated with most of its armament and supplies left behind.

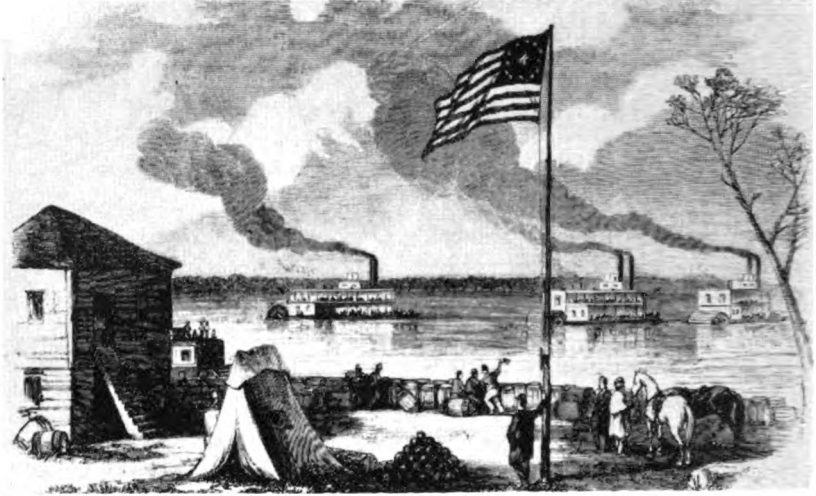
The drenched Union soldiers who unflinchingly stood their posts throughout the stormy night had no idea they were facing a deserted bastion until the bearer of a white flag greeted them at sunrise with the news that the town was empty. Entering the town, the Federals observed the residue of a confused withdrawal. Knapsacks, small arms, baggage, tools, and ammunition were strewn throughout the area. Tents for 10,000, horses, mules, wagons, and ammunition fell to the Union. Pope then fixed his mind on his next objective, the formidable Island Number Ten.²⁵

The Confederate commander at New Madrid had not been working in concert with the engineers at Island Number Ten. Gray had offered earlier to aid in the construction of the town's defenses

²³Wills, *Army Life*, 68.

²⁴OR, VIII, 83-87, 96; Jackson, *Colonel's Diary*, 40-41.

²⁵OR, VIII, 83, 163-165, 185; ORN, XXII, 750-751.



Six divisions of Pope's army leave New Madrid aboard the *Emma*, *W. B. Terry* and *Hattie Gilmore* to attack the Confederate position at Island No. 10 from the rear.

but his offer was refused. He then concentrated his efforts on the Island. Aiding the Island's engineer company, had been about two hundred Negroes and one hundred and twenty-eight Irishmen. Soldiers had been daily detailed to assist, but they did not accomplish much. Work speeded up when Columbus was evacuated. Each day more guns were mounted until twenty-four heavy artillery pieces were in place on the Tennessee shore and nineteen pieces were mounted in four batteries on the Island.²⁶

The first mainland battery, termed the Redan Fort, was established to cover the river while the other batteries were being completed. It was not expected to be occupied during high water. Batteries number two and three were on firm ground downstream with their seven guns supporting the Redan. Batteries four and five stood across from the Island's head. Located on the upper tip of the Island, were a 128-pound columbiad and four smooth bore thirty-two pounders. This installation was dubbed the Belmont Battery, and a hundred yards below it battery number two faced the Missouri shore. Battery three lay two hundred and seventy-five yards further down. Batteries four and five were removed to the Tennessee shore below the Island to prevent a Federal crossing. They were replaced by the floating battery, *New Orleans*, with eight, eight-inch columbiads and a rifled thirty-two pounder.²⁷

Parapets were constructed for three guns on the shore between batteries four and five, but guns were never mounted there. A square redoubt to the left and rear of number four, mounted two cannons that covered batteries two to five inclusive. Passage

²⁶*OR*, VIII, 148-153.

²⁷*Ibid.*, 136, 139-152.

through a wash channel on the Missouri shore was obstructed by the sinking of the steamer *Winchester*. Six gunboats, two of them lightly armored, were assigned to the Island but the commanding general, William W. Mackall, felt they were worthless for either defense or offense. He believed they were not worth the cost of the fuel required to run them because they always seemed to be absent when needed.²⁸

Anxious to cut the Island's supply line, Pope ordered that some prominent river points be fortified. The heavy guns captured at New Madrid were dragged by hand down river. Avoiding the fire of Rebel gunboats by working at night, the Federals established batteries at Dr. Martin's, Riddle's Point, and Andy Riddle's, in addition to the battery at Point Pleasant. This still did not isolate the Island, however, because boats could still pass upriver under the cover of night or by hugging the Tennessee shore. Confederate supplies were also landed at Tiptonville, Tennessee, and conveyed across the peninsula neck. Pope realized, therefore, that the Island could not be cut off until he crossed to Tennessee and blocked the supply line. To forestall his crossing, the Confederates established batteries below the Island at possible landing sites.²⁹

Pope's original plan, however, was for the Union gunboats and mortar fleet to bomb the Island garrison into oblivion. On March 15, 1862, the day after New Madrid's fall, the Confederate upriver picket boat *Grampus* came steaming down the river, its whistle signalling the approach of the Union fleet. At 9:00 a.m. the Federals emerged into the bend and commenced an all day cannonade. The long range bombardment continued throughout the following day with no visible results. Gray's assessment of the position was being verified, for the swamps were preventing a flanking movement and the gunboats were staying at long range.

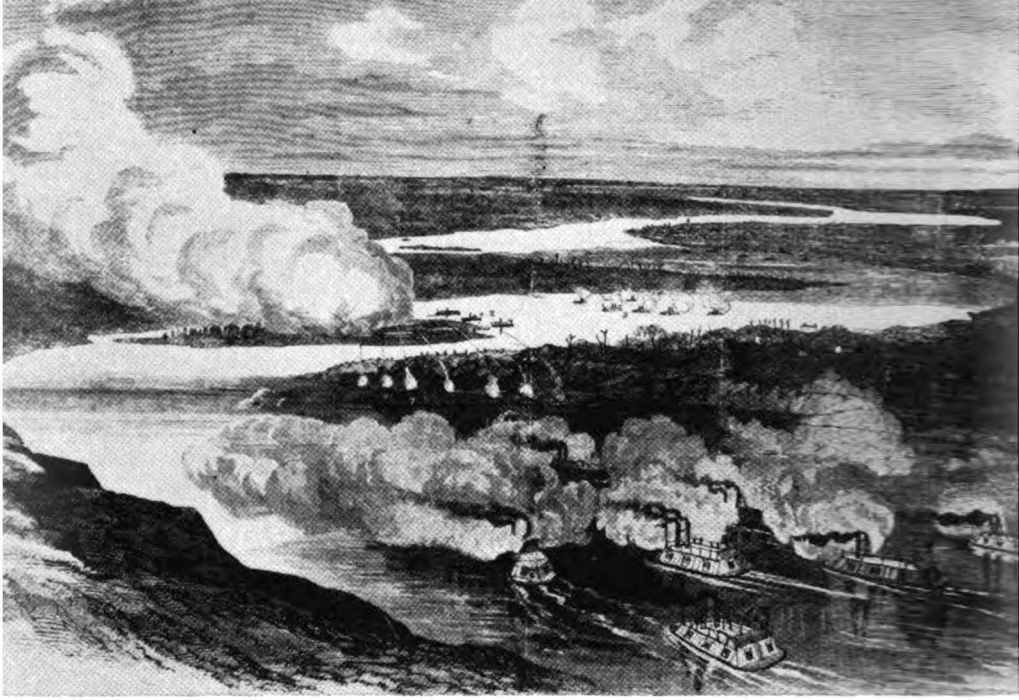
During the first two days of the Union bombardment, the Confederate batteries were mute. But when six Federal gunboats attacked the Redan Fort they met a spirited resistance. Twenty men sloshing about in two feet of floodwater managed to repel the attack. This created the impression that the Redan Fort was a formidable installation. The Federals withdrew and resumed their long range bombardment.³⁰

Pope was anxiously waiting below New Madrid for an opportunity to cross into Tennessee, but Confederate batteries and gunboats on the opposite shore still held him at bay. When two

²⁸ORN, XXII, 738, 740-741, 751.

²⁹OR, VIII, 85-86, 114-115, 140, 140; Jackson, *Colonel's Diary*, 50-51.

³⁰OR, VIII, 170-171, 174-175, 179, 181; ORN, XXII, 691, 694, 754; BL, 439.



View of the attack on Island No. 10 by Commodore Foote's flotilla
In the foreground are Union gunboats. Union mortar boats shell the Island at long range from behind a point. Confederate transports and gunboats are shown below the Island.

days of bombarding did not break the stalemate he suggested to flag officer Andrew H. Foote that a gunboat be sent past the batteries to ferry his troops. When Foote vetoed the idea as impractical, Pope was furious, but his hands were tied.³¹ General Schuyler Hamilton suggested a canal to bypass the batteries and Colonel Josiah W. Bissell, who had just reconnoitered the swamps on both sides of the river, said such an undertaking might succeed. Pope authorized the project, so Bissell and six hundred engineers set out to link a flooded wagon road with Wilson's Bayou which flowed into St. John's Bayou. St. John's Bayou emptied into the river at New Madrid, seven miles below the Island.

While the engineers worked feverishly on the canal, boredom and monotony plagued the other Federals. Time was passed aboard the boats by reading, writing, playing cards, chess, or lounging in hammocks. One individual claimed that "the explosions in no wise disturbed my afternoon naps."³² Times were equally dull for the army. Some of the officers grew apprehensive and talked of withdrawing.³³ Foote warned Halleck that if disaster befell the Union boats, Confederate gunboats could ascend the river and

³¹OR, VIII, 86, 120.

³²Albert D. Richardson, *The Secret Service* (Hartford, 1865), 231.

³³Wills, *Army Life*, 73.

assail Cairo, St. Louis, or Louisville.³⁴ Halleck opposed Pope's plan for crossing the river and he suggested that he hold the Confederates in check with part of his force while the remainder moved back to Cairo and attempted to turn the Island by ascending the Tennessee River. But Pope felt he was too near the finish to change plans, so the canal work continued.³⁵

The Confederates knew that if the river was crossed all was lost. They also knew that a canal was being constructed that would allow boats to bypass the Island's batteries. But the Confederates were certain that such a canal could not be successfully constructed.³⁶ However, from dawn till dusk the swamp rang with the sounds of Federals laboring with saws, axes, and tackles. Trees were cut off about eight feet above the water line by men on platforms and were then hauled out of the way by steam capstans. A large raft with a saw on a partially submerged A-frame was then lashed to the stump. The apex of the frame pivoted while the bladed bottom arched back and forth through the stump, propelled by two men at opposite ends, alternately pulling a rope, while a third guided the teeth. If the blade was pinched a powerful tackle was used to pull the stump back. After the six-mile-long corridor was cut the bayous were cleared of driftwood and debris. When, after nineteen days, the twelve-mile detour to New Madrid was finally opened only steam transports passed through, for the flood had receded some and it was not deep enough for the gunboats.

Since the gunboats could not pass through the canal, makeshift gunboats were built that could. They were constructed by lashing and bolting three coal barges together. The middle barge, which mounted the cannons, was sandbagged and bulkheaded with heavy timbers. The outer barges were packed with lumber, cotton, and watertight barrels for protection. The steamers and bargeboats were kept up the bayou out of sight from the Confederates while the troops prepared to move. The barges were never used, for Foote, in the meantime, had consented to let a gunboat run the batteries.³⁷ During the canal digging, the gunboats and mortars had continued their fruitless labors. But they were assisted by a new military innovation, an observation balloon aided in directing the mortar fire. While accuracy may have improved, the results were still negligible.³⁸

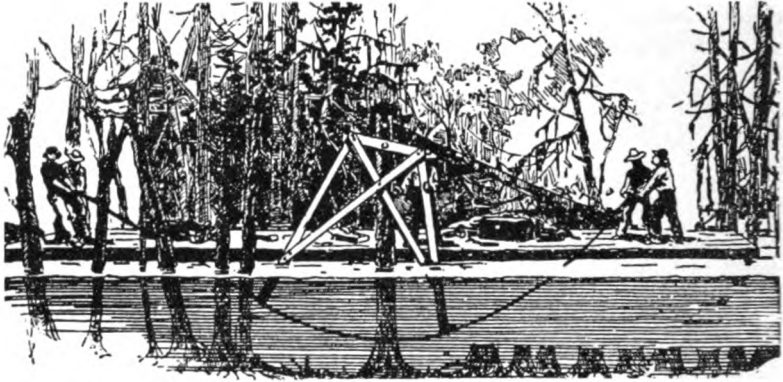
³⁴*ORN*, XXII, 687-688.

³⁵*Ibid.*, 690.

³⁶*OR*, VIII, 132-133.

³⁷*BL*, 461-462.

³⁸Frederick Stansbury Haydon, *Aeronautics in the Union and Confederate Armies* (Baltimore, 1941), I, 394-397.



Missouri Engineer Regiment Sawing Channel Through Swamp To Help U. S. Troops Capture Island No. 10.

On April 1, as the canal was nearing completion, an expedition of forty picked men from the 42nd Illinois, embarked aboard five boats on a desperate mission. After hiding in the timber until nightfall they steamed directly into the muzzles of the Redan Fort in an amphibious assault. Their resistance was comprised of two rifle shots fired by a pair of sentries who immediately effected a hasty retreat. The 42nd Illinoisans made the April Fool's Day discovery that the fearsome Redan Fort had been rendered untenable by the flood. Its garrison had merely become a bluff. The Illinoisans spiked the guns with files and rowed back to their boats. With the realization that this position was impotent, it was decided that a gunboat might be able to run successfully past the Island's batteries. Protected by a gunboat, the transports that had passed through the canal could then ferry Pope's men across the river to isolate the Island.³⁹

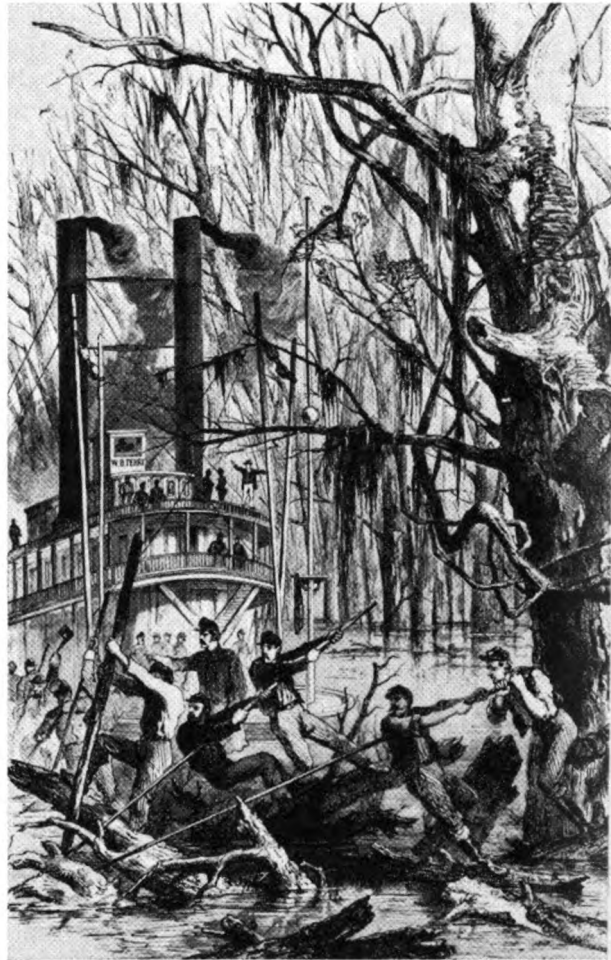
On March 30, Foote had ordered Commodore Henry Walke of the *Carondelet* to proceed downriver to New Madrid on the first dark or foggy night to protect Pope's ferry transports.⁴⁰ Pope had written Halleck on April 2 that he intended to cross without a gunboat but the *Carondelet* moved before he could act. A barge loaded with hay and coal was lashed to the *Carondelet's* port side to protect her magazine. The escape steam was diverted through the wheel house to prevent the puffing noise it made when blown through the stacks. A hose was attached to the boiler to provide scalding water to repel boarders. Pistols, cutlasses, boarding pikes,

³⁹*OR*, VIII, 119, 124-125.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, 121; *ORN*, XXII, 704-705, 708.

and hand grenades were issued while the crew waited for the moon to set before casting off.

A storm was blowing in as the gunboat glided downstream. Flashes of bluish-white lightning occasionally illuminated the black night. Twice the soot in the smoke stacks, no longer dampened by the escape steam, blazed and exposed the boat to the Confederates, but the cannoners were unprepared. Their cannons roared harmlessly into the darkness while the gunboat skirted the Island's edge, probably beneath the cannons' lines of fire. Passing the floating New Orleans battery, she received a shot in the coal barge and another in a hay bale but no harm was done. About midnight the



The United States transport *W. B. Terry* pushes its way through the swamps and bayous in an attempt to bypass Island No. 10.



**Memphis Ferry
Boat Champion**

Yazoo

**Gunboat
Grampus**

**John
Simonds**

**Red
Rover**

Prine

VIEW OF CONFEDERATE STEAMBOATS SUNI

Carondelet steamed into New Madrid. The Union soldiers in New Madrid greeted the *Carondelet* with cheers, tears, laughter, and cannon salutes. As the boat's crewmen came ashore they were seized and carried through town on the shoulders of the soldiers.⁴¹

Fearful of the consequences the evening could have, Brigadier General W. W. Mackall tried to bolster the morale and rally the Confederates with the following announcement:

Soldiers: The key of the Mississippi is intrusted to your courage, to your discipline, to your patience. Exhibit the coolness and patience of last night and hold it.⁴²

That day Pope asked Foote for another gunboat urging that another run was not too large a risk for the lives of 10,000 men.⁴³ At 2:00 a.m. April 7, the gunboat *Pittsburgh* duplicated the *Carondelet's* feat.⁴⁴

Union soldiers lined the Mississippi's banks on April 7th as though they were watching a matinee featuring the *Carondelet* and *Pittsburgh*. Working together, one upstream and one down, the gunboats assailed each of the five Rebel batteries. A spectator reported that, "They go at them as if they'd go right upon land if the Confederates would stay there." He said the battery opposite Point Pleasant worked their guns until the *Carondelet* closed to within three hundred yards, then they broke and ran and "they used their legs to advantage; all but one and he walked away with his arms folded perfectly at ease."⁴⁵

At midnight, Walke signalled that the batteries had been silenced. The transports which had emerged from their hiding places in Bayou St. John, began to ferry the Federals into Tennessee.

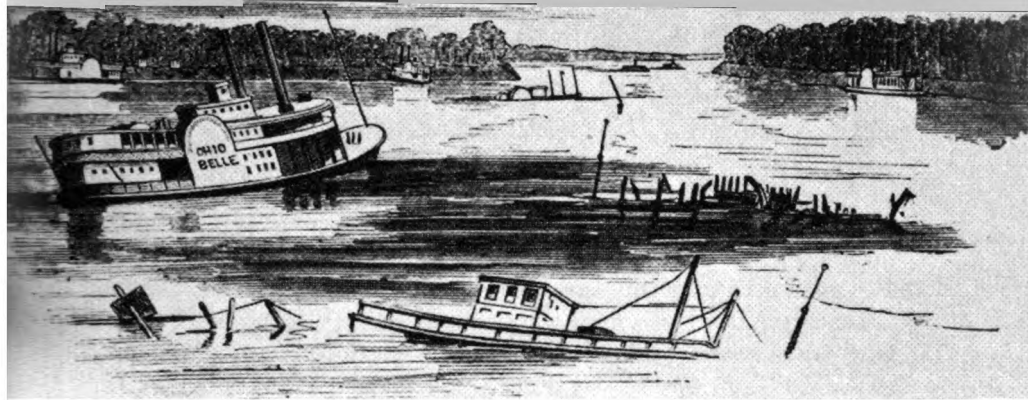
⁴¹OR, VIII, 443-445; *New York Times*, April 10, 1862.

⁴²ORN, XXII, 722.

⁴³*Ibid.*, 715-716.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, 719.

⁴⁵Wills, *Army Life*, 79.



Amiral **Ohio Belle** **DeSoto** **Kenawha Valley** **Burned Winchester** **Mars**

BETWEEN ISLAND NO. 10 AND NEW MADRID

The Confederate garrison had discarded all thoughts of defense and abandoned their position in a pell-mell rush toward Tiptonville. Brigadier General E. A. Paine ordered his command to stack their intrenching tools on the river bank and set out in hot pursuit of the fleeing Confederates. Proceeding down the peninsula, they met a deployed force of about 2,600 Confederates who fled when the Federals formed into a battle line. The Confederates tried unsuccessfully to reform a second and third time. By the time the Federals reached the Confederate camp near Tiptonville, they had captured 359 stragglers. At 4:00 a.m. a flag of truce was received by the Union general. He accepted the unconditional surrender of Mackall's entire command.⁴⁶

While Paine was pressing down the peninsula, the 51st Illinois and Second Iowa Cavalry proceeded up the river road toward Island Number Ten. The Island's garrison had degenerated into chaos. Realizing a land force would be soon upon their rear, they surrendered to Foote.⁴⁷ The men at the Tennessee shore batteries tried to escape across Reelfoot Lake. Men with axes jealously defended their company's skiffs against intrusion by members of other companies. One company gave their horses precedence over their comrades in arms.⁴⁸ About 150 men managed to escape through the swamps and lakes but 6,000 were captured, among them three generals and seven colonels. Over 100 heavy siege guns, 24 pieces of field artillery and several thousand stands of small arms were captured as well as immense quantities of ammunition, together with tents, horses, and wagons. The *Grampus* and the floating battery had been scuttled.⁴⁹ A particularly valuable prize that was seized was a copy of the Confederate navy signals.⁵⁰

⁴⁶OR, VIII, 109-110.

⁴⁷*Ibid.*, 89.

⁴⁸*Ibid.*, 177-178.

⁴⁹*Ibid.*, 78-79, 112, 133-135, 158-159, 177-178.

⁵⁰ORN, XXII, 722-723.

The 37th and 39th Ohio scoured the area after the surrender, picking up prisoners. They reported that nearly all of the surrounding houses were occupied by sick or wounded Confederates.⁵¹ The Federals were somewhat astonished when they discovered a camp ground occupied by some twenty cosmopolitan Memphis women. One observer said that "it required no penetrating optics to determine their position and calling."⁵² The whole day's work was achieved without a single Union casualty.

Pope's successful campaign was loudly proclaimed throughout the North. By order of the governor of Massachusetts a one-hundred-gun salute was fired at high noon on the Boston Common honoring the "noble men of the west."⁵³ A similar salute was also fired in Providence, Rhode Island.⁵⁴ Letters of congratulation were sent by Congress to the leaders.⁵⁵ The Southern commander of the department, P. G. T. Beauregard, claimed that Island Number Ten was a mere outpost of Ft. Pillow, a stopgap holding while Pillow was reinforced. With Mackall's surrender, work on Fort Pillow was speeded up. The Confederates now intended to halt the Yankee descent of the river at the formidable Chickasaw Bluffs.

Today, due to the shifting nature of the Mississippi's channel, Island Number Ten has merged with the Missouri shore. A century's floods have obliterated any physical evidence that might give testament to the Island's military past. The Missouri swamps have been drained and forests and cotton fields now stand where armies once camped. Only records, diaries, and books verify the past struggle. What transpired at New Madrid and Island Number Ten cannot be interpreted as having a profound strategic effect on the course of the war, for the Union successes on the Tennessee River at Shiloh and at Corinth would have necessitated a later Confederate abandonment of these Missouri positions just as Fort Pillow was later abandoned.

However, only the passage of time affords the historian the perspective to make such a pronouncement. In April, 1862, neither North nor South could foresee that the Mississippi's future would be determined by events on the Tennessee River. If the Federal armies had faltered on the Tennessee, then the Mississippi River campaigns would have become the key to the war in the west.

⁵¹OR, VIII, 98-100.

⁵²Junius Henri Browne, *Four Years in Secession* (Hartford, 1865), 132-134; *The Picket Line* [By a member of G. A. R.] (New York, n.d.), 89.

⁵³ORN, XXII, 730.

⁵⁴*New York Times*, April 10, 1862.

⁵⁵Roy P. Basler, ed., *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln* (New Brunswick, 1953), V, 299, 352.

But though the Mississippi campaigns are classed on the periphery of the Tennessee's during 1862, the events at New Madrid and Island Number Ten deserve recognition in their own right. In a war so renowned for death and carnage, it is indeed unique that campaigns involving so many men around a major defensive point could have been so decisively resolved with so little loss of life. But whether these campaigns are examined as an integral aspect of a broader strategical picture or as individual episodes with unique tactical innovations, these Missouri campaigns merit the acknowledgment of all Americans who are interested in their past.



He Would Have to Steal Chickens in Missouri

From the *Bowling Green Times*, November 27, 1902.

Bill Rose, a notorious chicken thief, who gave Louisiana, Missouri, and other points as his home, was captured near Quincy, Illinois, last week with a sack of stolen chickens in his wagon. He was released upon a promise that he never return to Illinois. He will now operate in Missouri.

Sarcoxie's Strawberries

Sarcoxie Record, June 17, 1904.

The last carload of Strawberries for the season of 1904 was shipped Thursday, making a grand total of 161 cars. . . . While this is an enormous output, far exceeding that of any other point, it cannot be said that berry culture has been profitable this year to the grower, conditions being unfavorable all along the line.

Wolf Chase

From the *LaGrange Weekly Indicator*, Jan. 5, 1899.

Wolves are reported to be very plentiful near Saverton, Ralls County, Mo. One night last week while a man was driving home from Hannibal he claims that a pack of the animals chased him for over a mile, barking at him and trying to catch hold of him while in his buggy. The probabilities are that the wolves that the man saw were in his stomach at the time he was traveling along the road and had been seen by him some few minutes before in some of Hannibal's saloons.