“FOSTER MUST BUILD FORTS:’ THE FAILURE OF UNION OFFENSIVE STRATEGY IN EASTERN NORTH CAROLINA, 1862-1863.”

Derrick S. Brown

A Thesis Submitted to the
University of North Carolina Wilmington in Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts

Department of History
University of North Carolina Wilmington
2010

Approved By

Advisory Committee

Alan D. Watson         Larry W. Usilton

Chris E. Fonvielle, Jr.
Chair

Accepted by

Dean, Graduate School
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT .................................................................................................................................iii

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ............................................................................................................iv

DEDICATION ..............................................................................................................................vi

CHAPTER ONE - Union Operations in Eastern North Carolina, 1861-1863: A
Historiography ........................................................................................................................1

CHAPTER TWO - “The Highest Satisfaction to the President and the Whole Nation:”
Union Successes in Eastern North Carolina, 1861-1862 ......................................................31

CHAPTER THREE - “He Could Always Retire to his Rat-Hole:” The End of Union
Offensive Operations in Eastern North Carolina ..................................................................54

CHAPTER FOUR - “The Arrival of Governor Stanley [sic] will, I hope, do a great deal of
good:” Political Considerations and the Union Occupation of Eastern North Carolina ..74

CHAPTER FIVE - “The Burnside Expedition Has Passed Into History:” Conclusion ..93

BIBLIOGRAPHY ......................................................................................................................100
ABSTRACT

Historians generally consider the Union attacks on and subsequent occupation of eastern North Carolina, 1861-1863, as isolated and relatively unimportant incidences in the American Civil War. Nothing could be further from the truth. Examination of official war records of the Union and Confederate armies and navies, regimental histories, and campaign studies prove that Union military operations in North Carolina were part of a grand strategy to bring the war to an early close. Beginning with the capture of Hatteras Island on North Carolina’s Outer Banks in August 1861, and culminating with General Ambrose Burnside’s campaign to take New Bern and Beaufort, the Federals launched a series of attacks in North Carolina designed to isolate and neutralize the Confederate government and its main army in Virginia. For this plan to succeed, the Union army and navy needed to capture Wilmington, North Carolina’s largest city and seaport, and Goldsboro, a major railroad junction. Despite enjoying numerical superiority in both men and material in the state in 1862 and through much of 1863, Federal forces failed to take Wilmington and Goldsboro. In fact, neither city fell until 1865, the last year of the war. Thorough primary and secondary research has been undertaken to determine the military and political circumstances that prevented the Federals from capitalizing on their initial gains in North Carolina. A change in commanding generals, the absence of a concerted combined operations plan, the political importance of other theaters of war, and the tardiness of the Lincoln administration to affect a bold policy for handling escaped slaves and refugees all contributed to the U.S. Army and Navy falling short of their strategic goals in North Carolina.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

A debt of gratitude is owed to all the educators who have supported my love of history, especially Mr. Jack Johnson at Dixon Elementary School, Mr. Robbie Cauley at Dixon Middle School, Mr. George Speth at Dixon High School, and Dr. Richard Starnes at Western Carolina University. Without their encouragement, there is no way I would be in the position I am in now.

A special thank you goes to Site Manager Donny Taylor and my coworkers at Bentonville Battlefield State Historic Site. I am sure all of you guys have grown tired of hearing about my struggles completing this project, but your support and patience has been greatly appreciated.

Speaking of patience, I will forever be indebted to the History Graduate Coordinator, Dr. David La Vere. I will never be able to express how thankful I am to Dr. La Vere for not giving up on me when it must have appeared that I would never finish.

Many thanks are also owed to Dr. Alan Watson and Dr. Larry Usilton for agreeing to serve on my committee. I have tremendous respect for these two individuals who have now entered into their fifth decade of guiding young historians at UNCW. It is an honor to have their signatures on this manuscript.

What can I say about Dr. Chris Fonvielle, the chair of my thesis committee? I already had a strong interest in the Civil War when I arrived in Wilmington, but Dr. Fonvielle taught me how to merge being a Civil War “buff” with academic history. After working with Dr. Fonvielle for six years I still remain in awe of his knowledge of Civil War history, his writing and editing abilities, and his hustle on the basketball court. Thank you for everything Doc.
Finally, this goal would not have been achievable for me without my wife and family. From my parents and sister suffering through battlefield tours during family vacations, to my wife’s proofreading, an additional thesis would not be sufficient to list everything they have done to make this possible.
DEDICATION

For my wife, Erin, as we open up an exciting new chapter in our lives together.

Thank you for always believing in me, even when I doubted myself.
CHAPTER ONE

Union Operations in Eastern North Carolina, 1861-1863:
A Historiography

“I think you had better go, with any re-enforcements you can spare, to General McClellan.” With this one sentence order to Major General Ambrose Burnside in June 1862, President Abraham Lincoln inadvertently delayed Union offensive operations in eastern North Carolina for more than two years. Burnside and a portion of his army were abruptly evacuated from the Tar Heel state, where to date they had enjoyed only success in their military operations. Major General George McClellan’s desperate plea for reinforcements during his Peninsula Campaign compelled the War Department to transfer Burnside and his men to Virginia. The interruption of Burnside’s campaign in North Carolina to reinforce a theater that was considered more important by Washington established a precedent which would be followed by Union war planners throughout the conflict.¹

Beginning in August 1861, with General Benjamin Butler’s invasion of Hatteras Island, and culminating with General Ambrose Burnside’s capture of New Bern and Fort Macon, in the spring of 1862, the U.S. Army and Navy occupied two-thirds of North Carolina’s coastal plain. An important step in what is historically known as the

“Anaconda Plan,” the incursion into eastern North Carolina gave Federal forces a strategic foothold along the Confederacy’s periphery.

Military leaders, politicians, and civilians on both sides recognized the significance of the Federal expedition in North Carolina. The “Burnside Expedition” that captured New Bern was authorized at the highest levels of the Lincoln administration. The “amphibious division” which carried out the campaign was created by General McClellan, commander-in-chief of the Union army, and its success was lauded in Northern newspapers. Confederate authorities from Raleigh to Richmond lamented the loss of most of coastal North Carolina from the Virginia beaches to the White Oak River, and feared that the Federals might invade the interior of the state. As it turned out, those fears never materialized. Burnside’s successor, General John G. Foster, failed to follow up his predecessor’s successes. Union operations to attack and seize the vital transportation centers of Goldsboro and Wilmington, North Carolina inexplicably failed to come until 1865.  

The Civil War is the most written about topic in American history, but not all of the war’s campaigns have been fully covered. Perhaps because of the failure of the Federals to capitalize on their initial gains, the strategic importance of the Civil War in eastern North Carolina has been widely ignored in the overall historiography of the conflict. Specifically, the strategic opportunities created by the Union 1861-1862

---

offensives in coastal North Carolina have been by in large overlooked by Civil War historians.

Modern historians may not be aware of the importance of the 1861-1862 coastal war in North Carolina, but Federal strategists considered an invasion and occupation of North Carolina’s sounds and coastal places a key in bringing the rebellion to a close. There is no question that the Civil War in North Carolina has been written about. No single topic in the State’s history has been chronicled more than North Carolina’s participation in the Civil War. There is an established historiography suggesting that until 1865, North Carolina’s primary contribution to the war was raw man power. Such a consensus allows that there were successful Union operations in coastal North Carolina in 1861 and 1862, but these operations were only a side show to the more important Virginia theater.³

Unfortunately, this historiography only glosses over the strategic importance of Union activities in early war North Carolina and almost completely ignores the failures of the Federals to capitalize on their early gains. The historiographical assumption has been that U.S. forces had to go on the defensive in occupied North Carolina after Burnside was recalled to Virginia. This should not have been the case, considering most of North Carolina’s Confederate defenders were fighting battles in Virginia and Maryland. If the

---
³Minutes of “Commission of Conference,” July 1861. Subject File ON, Entry 464, Record Group (RG) 45, National Archives Building (NAB), Washington, DC (hereafter sited as the Blockade Strategy Board Minutes). Although “Commission of Conference” was its proper name, historians have long since referred to the commission as the “Blockade Strategy Board,” or just the “Blockade Board.” The Blockade Board recommended closing or capturing North Carolina’s inlets as soon as possible; Sauers, “A Succession of Honorable Victories,” 459; Barrett, The Civil War in North Carolina, 129.
The first people to examine the Civil War in eastern North Carolina were the veterans themselves. For former Confederates, it was imperative to place blame on others or deflect blame from themselves. Some of them believed that the South lost the war because it lost eastern North Carolina early in the war. Among Union veterans, the belief that the war could have ended sooner, had they exploited the opportunities in the Tar Heel state.

The most prolific Civil War memoirs were those written by generals, admirals, and politicians. Because most of the fighting in the east occurred in Virginia comparatively few Union general officers served in North Carolina. Many of the published accounts of the war in eastern North Carolina, therefore, were written by junior officers and enlisted men. Yet, this provides a more complete picture of the war in the state.⁴

Histories of the 4th Rhode Island Infantry, 5th Rhode Island Artillery Regiment, 9th New Jersey infantry, and 48th Pennsylvania Infantry provide views from the regimental level. Moreover, correspondence of North Carolina Unionists and Northern relief workers chronicle political and social life in occupied portions of the state. Historians have also discovered letters written by Union servicemen in North Carolina, including those of Corporal Zenas T. Haines from Massachusetts, and Lieutenant Commander Charles

---

⁴By 1865 the state was seemingly full of generals: William T. Sherman, Oliver O. Howard, Henry Slocum, and John Schofield on the Union side and Joseph E. Johnston, Braxton Bragg, Pierre Beauregard and Wade Hampton for the Confederates just to name a few.
Flusser of Maryland. Taken as a whole, these sources provide a comprehensive, firsthand account of the Union side in the struggle for eastern North Carolina during the Civil War.

George Allen’s history of the 4th Rhode Island’s experience in North Carolina is a first rate Union regimental history. Allen himself fought with the regiment, but also served as a volunteer crewman on the USS Commodore Perry, commanded by Lt. Commander Charles Flusser, at the battles of Roanoke Island and Elizabeth City in February 1862. Allen subsequently returned to infantry duty for the attacks on New Bern and Beaufort in the spring of that year.

Allen considered Burnside’s pause following the captures of Beaufort and Fort Macon much needed after “our three months’ campaign.” He was happy for the rest, but by June 1862, Allen had become impatient, and was anxious to resume campaigning as soon as possible. The last Confederate opposition ended with the fall of Fort Macon in April 1862, but two months later Allen’s company was still performing occupation duty in Beaufort. The soldiers of the 4th Rhode Island were relieved to finally get marching orders in July. Instead of advancing into the interior of North Carolina, however, the long awaited campaign took the Fourth to transport ships waiting to carry the regiment to assist General McClellan’s efforts to capture Richmond. Allen believed that his unit could have offered better service in the Tar Heel State, as there was comparatively little Confederate opposition there. He realized that they were going north because McClellan had been “beaten,” and was “retreating from before Richmond.” Allen may have also
realized this would temporarily end Union offensive operations in North Carolina, which
Union strategists believed might have brought the war to an earlier close.\(^5\)

The study of North Carolina during the Civil War invariably begins with Walter
Clark’s *Histories of the Several Regiments and Battalions from North Carolina in the
Great War 1861-‘65*. Published in 1901, the five volume series combines unit histories
by veterans of the state’s seventy plus Confederate regiments and battalions.

Unfortunately, the motivation for the publication of Clark’s books was as much
political as it was historical. Although an invaluable primary resource, Clark began
editing the series at the behest of a Democratic controlled state legislature locked in a
fierce battle against white Populists and black Republicans. During the 1890’s in North
Carolina, championing the Confederate cause was a convenient method for Democrats to
gain votes. Therefore, Clark adroitly selected only veterans who would have praised their
respective units’ services in the war.

Typical of the units detailed in Clark’s series is the 8th Regiment North Carolina
State Troops. Regimental historian H.T.J. Ludwig served as a drummer in Company H
during the regiment’s defense of coastal North Carolina in the winter of 1861/1862,
including Roanoke Island.\(^6\)

---

specified); Lee to Davis, March 21, 1862, ORA, Volume 51 (Part II), 512.

Although Ludwig did not credit his source he claimed that Burnside landed 15,000 men against a Confederate defense force of 1,400 men, 568 of whom were part of the 8th North Carolina. Ludwig noted that the Federals managed to overrun the island only by maneuvering through a weak point in the Confederate line—a swamp the Confederates thought impassable. According to Ludwig, the Eighth surrendered because “any further slaughter would have been useless and inhumane.” Such writings were typical of the turn of the century “lost cause” apologists. After being exchanged, the men of the Eighth engaged General Foster’s men as they marched on Goldsboro in December 1862. Similar to Federal accounts of the battle, Ludwig described the struggle for the railroad bridge in Goldsboro as significant. Yet the 8th North Carolina suffered only nine casualties. If the Eighth was as heavily engaged as Ludwig claimed, would the casualties not have been higher, especially if the Federals fought as desperately as they also claimed? If General Foster’s men were only able to inflict nine casualties on one of the primary regiments guarding Goldsboro, it hardly seems that the fight for the town was as desperate as both sides claimed.7

In 1998 and 1999 Dr. William C. Harris and John W. Hinds edited the wartime correspondence from Corporal Zenas T. Haines of the 44th Massachusetts Regiment and Lt. Commander Charles Flusser of the U.S. Navy. The 44th Massachusetts was comprised of nine month volunteers, primarily from Boston. Corporal Zenas T. Haines was a member of the Forty-Fourth’s Company D. Thousands of non-commissioned officers served in the Union army, but what distinguished Haines was that he also reported for the

7Ludwig, “Eighth Regiment,” 390. Burnside’s actually had approximately 10,000 officers and men.
Boston Herald. Professor William C. Harris has meticulously edited Haines’ wartime reports that were originally published in the Herald. Haines and the 44th Massachusetts did not arrive in New Bern until October 1862, several months after General Burnside had departed for Virginia. Haines was not impressed with the white civilians of eastern North Carolina, referring to them as “white trash.” His unit also encountered many runaway slaves, initially referred to as “contrabands.” The U.S. military was forced to forge a policy dealing with them in the absence of any specific instructions from Washington. Federal soldiers initially viewed runaway slaves with curiosity, but increasingly treated them with contempt as they spent more time around them.\(^8\)

The 44th Massachusetts joined John G. Foster’s raid on Goldsboro in December 1862. Their orders reveal what was expected of them: “light marching order, but our two blankets haversacks containing three day’s rations of hard bread, beef, coffee and sugar, canteens, equipments and rifles, made up a considerable load.” The expedition was part of Burnside’s 1862 overland campaign. From Corporal Haines’ perspective, the raid was a huge success, as he believed that they ran the “rebel troops out of a large part of North Carolina, and [gave] them a terrible scare.” What Haines did not know was that there were not nearly as many Confederate troops in the state as Union military leaders had believed. Despite Haines’ optimistic assessment of the operation, General Foster knew that the raid was largely a failure, as it only temporarily destroyed the Wilmington and Weldon Railroad Bridge at Goldsboro. In the spring of 1863, the fighting 44th Massachusetts had essentially devolved into a military police force in New Bern. Haines

complained that such duty impaired esprit de corps, as the unit should have been engaged in offensive operations. The occupation and defense of New Bern may have seemed mundane as far as the soldiers of the 44th Massachusetts were concerned, but Professor Harris correctly argues in his edited volume of Haines’ correspondence that responsibility was a most important one undertaken.9

Lt. Commander Charles W. Flusser of the U.S. Navy had an experience similar to that of Haines in the 1862 coastal Carolina war. Though Southern-born, Flusser remained loyal to the Union, despite pressure from his family, friends and comrades. Flusser’s wartime letters from the rivers and sounds of eastern North Carolina have been compiled by John W. Hinds in, *The Invasion and Conquest of North Carolina*.10

The lethargy of the Union occupation in eastern North Carolina by 1863, compelled Flusser to comment that “there is a screw loose somewhere in Norfolk,” in May of the previous year. Like John Hedrick in Beaufort, Flusser was disgusted with the amount of illegal trade conducted between Union and Confederate forces in eastern North Carolina. He believed that Confederate forces in the state could be defeated if not for the complicity of the Union occupiers.11

Moreover, Commander Flusser was not impressed with the alleged Unionist sympathies of the people in eastern North Carolina. He complained of the “hatred which the southern people feel for us.” This anti-Union sentiment must have been particularly troubling for Flusser who was a Southerner himself. He respected his Confederate

---

adversaries for doing what they thought right. Nevertheless, he argued the Southerner “would damn me with his last breath.” On the other hand, Flusser revealed his racist views when he wrote that he wished African Americans in North Carolina would be sent back to Africa. Flusser felt that it was a combination of white Tar Heels’ hatred of Yankees, problems with former slaves, and ineptitude by his superiors, that led to the military stalemate in eastern North Carolina.\footnote{Hinds, *The Invasion and Conquest of North Carolina*, 256.}

It was not long after the war that so-called objective critiques of the war were published. One of those works was authored by a Union naval officer who served in North Carolina during the latter part of the war. Rear Admiral Daniel Ammen authored *The Atlantic Coast* in 1883, as part of a series of general war studies by Scribner’s and Sons. Considering that Ammen did not take part in North Carolina’s coastal war until the Battle of Fort Fisher, 1864-1865, his book does not have the preconceived bias that hampers so many veterans’ memoirs and regimental histories. Ammen claimed that the 1862 Union attack on New Bern was virtually unopposed, as the Union fleet suffered not a single casualty from the port’s defenders. He also claimed that although the Confederates matched Burnside’s force man for man, they never mounted a serious challenge. Ammen recounted Flusser’s raids in northeastern North Carolina, and Lt. William B. Cushing’s raid on Jacksonville, but he never mentioned any significant Union offensive operations in the state. He did, however, discuss the Confederate offensives in the state in 1863-1864.\footnote{Daniel Ammen, *The Atlantic Coast* (Wilmington, North Carolina: Scribner’s and Sons, 1905), 193, 196.}
Another Civil War history of North Carolina was that of Daniel Harvey Hill, Jr., son of Confederate Lieutenant General D.H. Hill, and the nephew of Thomas J. “Stonewall” Jackson. With such a lineage, it was perhaps hard for Hill’s studies to be impartial. If his familial connections were not enough to influence Hill’s views, he wrote his words, as did the authors in Clark’s *Regiments*, during the Democratic backlash against North Carolina’s black Republicans and poor white Populists. As Hill himself was an active Democrat, his writings underscore the importance his contemporaries placed on North Carolina’s Confederate history. Even so, Hill was the first non veteran to attempt a scholarly study on eastern North Carolina during the Civil War.

Hill’s two major publications, *North Carolina: Confederate Military History* and *Bethel to Sharpsburg*, were first published in 1899 and 1926 respectively. In them, he argued that North Carolina was ill prepared for the Burnside expedition, which had “every conceivable necessity for the prosecution of its mission.” This was in rebuttal to the argument that Burnside’s army halted at New Bern because it was ill-equipped to advance further into the state. Hill even contended that coastal North Carolina had been conceded to the Union because of the state’s devotion to the greater Confederacy. North Carolinians were allegedly so loyal to the Confederate cause they were willing to sacrifice their own state for the greater war effort. Being a good Tar Heel and a “Lost Cause” apologist, Hill contended that there were more than enough troops for North Carolina’s defense, but they were weakened by a want of sufficient arms and
ammunition. The North Carolina regiments that were well equipped had already been sent to Virginia.\footnote{Daniel Harvey Hill, Jr., \textit{Confederate Military History: North Carolina} (Atlanta: Confederate Publishing Company, 1899), 32-33, 45. Hill reasoned that the Confederate patriotism of North Carolinians allowed them to tolerate the state’s troops being used for the defense of Richmond while the state was under the subjugation of a Federal force.}

As to why the Federals never mounted a serious invasion into the interior of North Carolina, Hill was largely mute. He noted that Burnside’s objectives after the capture of New Bern were Goldsboro, Raleigh, and Wilmington, but attacks on these cities were delayed until Fort Macon could be reduced. Hill also claimed that the Yankee occupation forces in North Carolina were too busy robbing and pillaging to continue their offensive operations. Indeed, evidence shows that a substantial amount of goods and souvenirs were sent back to the North. The illegal confiscation of property compelled Union authorities to dispatch several ships and hundreds of men to quell the contraband trade. Ships that might have been deployed on the blockade were instead serving on inspection duty. Edward Stanly, Union military governor of occupied North Carolina, complained that “the state would long ago have rebelled against the rebellion,” if only the coastal war had “been conducted by soldiers who were Christians and gentlemen.”\footnote{Daniel Harvey Hill, Jr., \textit{Bethel to Sharpsburg} (Raleigh: Edwards and Broughton Company, 1926), 238, 246.}

Hill also observed that Burnside’s strategic plans were hampered by “hundreds of negroes” who inundated his lines at New Bern. Burnside ended up employing runaway slaves as laborers on Union military construction projects around New Bern, but he also had to detail soldiers to watch them.\footnote{Hill, Jr., \textit{Bethel to Sharpsburg}, 239.}
By the 1920’s, some academic historians had begun to challenge the arguments of the “Lost Cause” apologists such as D.H. Hill, Jr. Professor Frank L. Owsley argued that the Confederacy collapsed because of internal, not external, forces. In a landmark essay published in 1925, Owsley contended the doctrine of “state rights” and “local defense contributed very materially to the defeat of the Confederacy.” Owsley’s article highlighted the constant bickering between the Confederate government and some states. Governors were unwilling to sacrifice the defenses and resources of their states for the greater national good. Owsley argued that the reluctance of states to submit to Confederate authority made them more vulnerable to Federal incursions.17

Owsley focused in large part on Coastal North Carolina in his article. Unlike the patriotic state willing to sacrifice everything for the Confederacy depicted by Hill, Owsley described a state in turmoil, seemingly abandoned by Richmond and in “constant dread” of Federal amphibious assault. North Carolina’s wartime Governors Henry T. Clark 1861-1862 and Zebulon Vance, 1862-1865, were compelled to turn to their own devises for the state’s defense. This in turn inhibited cooperation between the state government and the few Confederate forces in the state. Owsley contended this is why the Federal invasion of coastal North Carolina met with so little opposition. Subsequent Union raids into North Carolina also met the light resistance because of the failure of Raleigh and Richmond to agree on a defensive policy, but the Federals failed to aggressively pursue their advantage.18

---

As the Civil War centennial approached, the historiography of the war improved. Much of the new literature focused on naval operations. One of the first books authored by this new “naval school” of Civil War historians was *The Rebel Shore: The Story of Union Sea Power in the Civil War*, by James M. Merrill, in 1957. Merrill argued that North Carolina’s coastal plain was virtually abandoned to Union forces and that the remainder of the state was just as undefended. “The Confederates were finished,” Merrill wrote, “Wilmington tottered.” He surmised that Admiral Louis M. Goldsborough, commander of the North Atlantic Blockading squadron, 1861-1862, should have pushed a flotilla of gunboats up the Cape Fear River, “and leveled the hapless Wilmington.” Merrill contended that even the limited successes of both the U.S. Army and U.S. Navy nearly crippled the Confederacy.\(^{19}\)

Virgil Carrington Jones authored a multi-volume naval history of the Civil War in the early 1960's. *The Civil War at Sea* addressed the Burnside expedition and the early occupation of eastern North Carolina. Jones argued that the Union would not have won the war without their overwhelming advantage in naval power, which was patently obvious in the capture of North Carolina’s Outer Banks and inland sounds. Jones contended that the battles for Hatteras Island were a precursor for future operations in the state. The Confederates “were placed at such disadvantage, having neither sufficient armament to compete at all with the enemy and having a fortification not sufficiently well constructed to enable [them] to remain still and endure the fire of the enemy.” In fact, Jones noted that the early Federal occupiers of the state correctly feared the pesky

mosquito more than they did the Confederate army. Jones echoed Merrill’s argument that Louis Goldsborough had all intentions of taking Wilmington without the army’s assistance. All the Flag Officer required was the USS Monitor fresh from its early March 1862 duel with the CSS Virginia. The plan was scrapped when the Monitor foundered and sank off of Cape Hatteras in December of 1862.²⁰

In an often overlooked article, Theodore Ropp put forth that the Union did not take advantage of their vast naval superiority until late in the war. Ropp argued that General Winfield Scott’s initial plan, later called the Anaconda Plan, only called for blockading the Southern coast and capturing the Mississippi River corridor. The Union naval strategy of amphibious operations developed over time. Secretary of the Navy Gideon Wells wanted to occupy selected sites along the Confederate coast for use as coaling stations for the four main blockading squadrons. Ropp credits the need for those bases as the primary reason for the Union’s amphibious operations.²¹

In Combined Operations in the Civil War, Rowena Reed, like most modern Civil War scholars, ignored Theodore Ropp’s assertion that there never was an “Anaconda Plan.” In fact, Reed titled one of her chapters, “The Anaconda,” in which she argued that the immensity of the blockade was detrimental to Federal offensive operations in the coastal states. Because so many ships were required to blockade the 3,549 mile long Southern coast from the Virginia coast to the Texas/Mexico border, few were available for combined operations. Both Generals Burnside and Foster were fearful of getting out

of range of naval covering fire, and the navy was ill-equipped to venture inside North Carolina’s inland waterways. Reed’s book credits the much maligned George McClellan with creating the strategy of combined operations that eventually contributed greatly to Union victory. Furthermore, Reed boldly contended that had McClellan’s operations, including Burnside’s expedition, been “full implemented, it would have ended the Civil War in 1862.” Ironically, a similar strategy undertaken in 1864-1865 by U.S. Grant with the cooperation of the Union navy did help finally bring an end to the war.22

Noted Civil War naval historian William N. Still Jr. stated in Why the South Lost the Civil War that the “the leaders of [Union] coastal operations rarely displayed either the vision or cooperation that had characterized operations on the inland waters.” In Still’s opinion opportunities were missed early in the war for more victories along the coast. Like the naval historians of the 1950's and 60's, Why the South Lost the Civil War implies that the Union navy should have assumed a greater role in the Burnside expedition, which might have resulted in the capture of Wilmington. Indeed, Wilmington appeared vulnerable to capture early on, at least according to Union Admiral S. Phillips Lee. In a letter to Secretary of the Navy Gideon Wells in 1863, Lee lamented that Wilmington “was as easy [to capture] then as difficult now.” 23

The North Atlantic Blockading Squadron was responsible for executing the coastal war in North Carolina. Robert Browning’s From Cape Charles to Cape Fear is the definitive history of the NABS, which emphasizes the advantage the Union navy

---

enjoyed in its operations along the Tar Heel Coast. According to Browning, the primary reason that the Union army did not advance into the interior of the state was because it was afraid to leave the security of the fleet. Like Reed, Browning argues the army would only go as far in North Carolina as the rivers allowed the navy to follow.\textsuperscript{24}

Browning and fellow nautical historian Kevin Weddle cite the importance of the Blockade Strategy Board in formulating combined operations strategy. Browning states that the idea for occupying eastern North Carolina, with the knowledge that the state would be lightly defended, was based on the recommendations of the Blockade Strategy Board. The Committee of Conference, as it was officially called, consisted of Captain S.F. Du Pont, Commander Charles H. Davis, Professor A.D. Bache of the U.S. Coast Geodetic Survey, and Major J. G. Barnard of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Because the U.S. Navy did not have a commander in chief during the war, Secretary Welles relied on committees such as the Blockade Strategy Board to develop a strategy for the Navy Department. Kevin Weddle, DuPont’s biographer, argues that the navy’s strategic planning was far in advance of the U.S. Army’s due to the work of the board. In a challenge of Ropp’s study, Weddle contends that the navy had a strategic plan for winning the war as early as 1861, and it was only because the army took three years to implement a plan of its own that the war lasted so long.\textsuperscript{25}

Dr. Craig L. Symonds, professor emeritus at the U.S. Naval Academy, published \textit{Lincoln and his Admirals} in 2008, and in 2010 edited \textit{Union Combined Operations in the

\textsuperscript{24}Robert M. Browning Jr., \textit{From Cape Charles to Cape Fear: The North Atlantic Blockading Squadron During the Civil War} (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1993), 37-38.

Civil War. Although *Lincoln and his Admirals* contends that the Burnside expedition delayed the more important attack on Port Royal, South Carolina. In his introduction to *Union Combined Operations in the Civil War*, Symonds commends Rowena Reed for authoring the first book on Union combined operations, but claims that her fascination with McClellan weakens her argument. Symonds’ claim that McClellan’s “charm” put Reed under a “spell” seems unduly harsh. Reed’s comparison of McClellan’s 1862 strategy including the Burnside expedition, and Grant’s 1864-1865 strategy were good plans. It is true that Grant was a much better tactician than McClellan, yet their operational strategies were very similar. Symonds asserts that had McClellan’s Peninsula campaign in Virginia in 1863 been successful, slavery would have remained intact after the war. Though “Little Mac” possessed many faults, he should not be held responsible for the fact that emancipation was not an official national objective for the Union until 1863. Symonds mistakenly discredits McClellan as a strategist because of the general’s well-criticized tactical and political failings.\(^{26}\)

Dr. David E. Long of East Carolina focused his chapter in *Union Combined Operations in the Civil War* on Burnside’s combined operations in Pamlico Sound, North Carolina, Long compares the relative genius of Burnside’s campaign with miscues he made as commander of the Army of the Potomac in 1862. Long credits Burnside with

remarkable success in North Carolina, even if he failed to “fulfill McClellan’s notion of using the North Carolina Sounds to penetrate into the heart of the Confederacy.”

In “A Thorn, Not a Dagger,” Dr. David C. Skaggs also extols Burnside for the limited success of his invasion of North Carolina. Like Reed and Long, Skaggs praises McClellan’s use of joint operations to put General Burnside in position to have a strategic effect on the outcome of the war. Unlike Reed and Long, however, Skaggs blames McClellan and Lincoln for not having the courage to adequately support Burnside in North Carolina. Skaggs describes the coastal war as a “missed opportunity,” and a “cul-de-sac,” a good analogy for a military campaign that turned into a dead-end operation in the Tar Heel state early on.

Although his focus is the 1864-1865 Wilmington campaign, Professor Chris E. Fonvielle, Jr. of UNC Wilmington illustrates the threat Union occupation of eastern North Carolina presented to “the South’s main seaport” as early as 1862 in Union combined operations of the Civil War. Admiral Goldsborough and General Foster planned a combined arms assault on Wilmington in the winter of 1862-1863. In this attack, the Union navy would have bombarded the forts that guarded the mouth of the Cape Fear River, while Foster attacked the relatively weak northern defenses of Wilmington. As Virgil Jones in The Civil War At Sea noted this attack was called off in part because of the loss of the Monitor. Fonvielle contends that the attack on Wilmington might have occurred had the political importance of Charleston not superseded it.

---

was “psychological need in the North for a victory at Charleston,” Fonvielle argues as South Carolinians were considered the North to be the war’s instigators. Although the Union never got over its determination to take Charleston, the Federals finally turned their undivided attention toward Wilmington in late 1864. Fonvielle credits “real cooperation between the [U.S Navy’s and the U.S. Army’s] commanders and forces” for the capture of Wilmington in February 1865. Similar success might have been two or three years earlier had possible cooperation existed between the Federal army and navy in North Carolina.²⁹

Although published forty-seven years ago, The Civil War in North Carolina by John G. Barrett’s is considered by most historians to be the single best volume on the history of the war in the state. However, he was impressed by Burnside’s accomplishments in North Carolina and did not judge the expedition by its lack of accomplishments. Barrett noted many of the problems the Federals faced once they occupied the eastern part of the state, especially dealing with slaves. In early 1862, there was no formal Union policy on the contraband issue, as it was then called. Like Hill before him, Barrett wrote that Burnside employed them to build forts and other labor projects. Burnside was relieved when the contraband and refugee problems shifted to Governor Stanly. Freed from political administration issues, Burnside and later Foster now focused on peace keeping in New Bern and coastal North Carolina. Unfortunately,

the police work naturally had a deleterious effect on the offensive capabilities of the expedition. 30

Another reason Barrett did not think the Federals could march at will through the interior of the state was that they “exaggerated Unionist sentiments in eastern North Carolina.” Barrett wrote his work at the end of the era of the “consensus” in American historiography. Like D.H. Hill Jr. five decades before him, Barrett argued that virtually all North Carolinians supported the Confederacy, a notion that recent scholarship has challenged. Barrett was correct, however, in arguing that Tar Heels in the eastern part of the state did not fully or wholly support the Union. A revolt of North Carolinians against the Confederacy for which the Federals hoped never materialized. 31

General Benjamin F. Butler was primarily involved in the North Carolina theater of operation only at the very beginning of the war and then at the very end, but he did help formulate Union strategy in the state. Howard P. Nash pointed out in his biography of Butler that it was the general’s disobedience of orders which showed the Union that they could occupy coastal North Carolina virtually unopposed. Butler and Flag Officer Silas Stringham were able to seize the strategic inlet at Cape Hatteras with only a small force of several hundred men and a few warships. Although this incursion occurred in August 1861 against inexperienced Confederate forces, the attack was undertaken by an equally untried blue clad detachment. If Butler could gain a foothold in North Carolina

31 Barrett, The Civil War in North Carolina, 17, 128.
with such a small force, what could a well trained, well organized and aggressive army have done in the state?³²

Another important biography, Edward Stanley: Whiggery’s Tarheel “Conqueror” about the Union occupation of North Carolina was written by Norman D. Brown in 1971. Stanly had been a prewar Whig politician in North Carolina and Washington City. He was Lincoln’s personal choice to help bring North Carolina back into the Union. Critics, however, claimed that Stanley proved to be too soft on the slaveholding whites at the expense of blacks and poor whites. In a 1951 article in Military Affairs, Robert J. Futrell addressed Stanley and other military governors in the occupied South. In essence, Futrell argued that these administrators caused more problems than they solved. Though Futrell’s article used the Stanly administration as an example of a failed military governorship, Brown defended Stanly in his publication. He argued that Stanly’s ability to govern was compromised because of the political turmoil that resulted from the governor’s repatriating slaves to their former masters and not allowing black children to attend school. In part because he disagreed with the “Emancipation Proclamation,” a weary and politically weakened Governor Stanly tenured his resignation to President Lincoln in January 1863. Thus, the Union army resumed political leadership in eastern North Carolina, compelling General Foster to spend more time administrating and less time planning offensive operations. Foster did neither remarkably well. A stable civilian

administration in New Bern, capable of governing the Union occupied portions of North Carolina, would have allowed Foster to concentrate solely on military affairs.\(^{33}\)

If the citizens of eastern North Carolina did not flock to the Union banner, neither were they uniformly pro Confederate as Paul Escott argues in *After Secession: Jefferson Davis and the Failure of Confederate Nationalism*. Building off Frank Owsley’s state rights thesis, Escott notes that North Carolinians were infamous for their desertion in the ranks and their ability to evade conscription officers. With the Federals in control of the eastern part of the state, Tar Heels who did not want to fight for the Confederacy could seek amnesty from the occupiers. According to Escott, men were apt to go to the Union lines because they believed that North Carolina had been abandoned by the Confederate government, as most of the state’s regiments had been transferred to other theaters. Though this phenomenon decreased the fighting strength of North Carolina’s Confederate units, it also created a refugee problem for the Union occupiers of New Bern.\(^{34}\)

In 1986, Escott co-authored with Dr. Jeffery Crow “The Social Order and Violent Disorder: An Analysis of North Carolina in the Revolution and the Civil War,” for *The Journal of Southern History*. Echoing Frank Owsley’s and Escott’s own arguments, Escott and Crow assert that North Carolina was not the cohesive entity that D.H. Hill and John Barrett believed. They contend that North Carolina during the Civil War was similar to the state during the American Revolution. Lawless groups of armed men terrorized the inhabitants of the state for their own selfish causes. In their view, the lack


of political and military authority by the state and Confederate governments during the Civil War allowed history to repeat itself. They maintain North Carolina was unable to govern itself, much less repel a Federal invasion of the state.\textsuperscript{35}

\textit{War of Another Kind: a Southern Community in the Great Rebellion}, by Wayne Durrill, follows the same model set by Escott and Crow. Durrill, who looked at Washington County, North Carolina argued that the Civil War in eastern sector of the state was much more than North versus South. Durrill declared that Unionism was widespread in coastal North Carolina, and Washington County was a prime example. His book claims that many poor whites willingly joined the Federals because they had begun to object to the dominance of the regions plantation owning elite. If Unionist sentiment had been effectively cultivated by the Federal occupiers of coastal North Carolina, the meager defenses of the state may have eroded further, making a U.S. offensive even easier.\textsuperscript{36}

The kind of difficulties the state faced maintaining order in eastern North Carolina with the threat of a looming U.S. invasion became problems for the Federals once they occupied portions of the state. Recently captured areas like coastal North Carolina often boasted large numbers of runaway slaves and poor white refugees. Law and order needed to be established to prevent chaos. Stephen Ash detailed what life was like in these garrisoned towns in his 1995 book, \textit{When the Yankees Came}. According to Ash, the Union army was immediately transformed into a mass provost force after capturing

Confederate territories. The U.S. Army ended up becoming military police in New Bern, with Generals Burnside and Foster acting as de-facto sheriffs. In effect, the army was responsible for simultaneously keeping the peace and waging war.\(^{37}\)

The M.A. theses of Charles Penny and Alex Christopher Meekins focused on the guerilla wars in and around Union-occupied North Carolina. Penny’s focus was on the emergence of the Union Buffaloes, groups of Tar Heel Unionists who served as both regular and irregular soldiers in the U.S. Army. The role of white North Carolina soldiers who fought for the Union was ignored in the earlier consensus histories written by D.H. Hill Jr. and John Barrett. Partisan Confederate forces spent an inordinate amount of time trying to eliminate the Buffaloes with only limited success. If North Carolina’s defenders could not handle the Buffaloes, how could they combat the Union army? Though Meekins’ artfully crafted thesis is almost exclusively about the war in the northeastern part of the state, he does argue that support for the Federals was widespread in eastern North Carolina. In a well articulated criticism of Burnside’s prisoner-of-war policy, Meekins claims the general made a “fateful mistake” by paroling Confederate captives he captured in eastern North Carolina. The former prisoners of war once again became the Confederate defenders of the state.\(^{38}\)

Several titles published in the last decades of the twentieth and the first decade of the twenty-first century give voice to the African Americans who sought refuge behind


Union lines. *James City: A Black Community in North Carolina, 1863-1900* was authored by Joe A. Mobley, and it detailed the plight of the African-Americans who were near New Bern during the Civil War. According to Mobley, James City was the desperate attempt of the Union occupation force to deal with the thousands of escaped slaves who flocked to the city. James City was a joint undertaking between the Union army and charitable Christian organizations. Every Federal incursion into the state freed hundreds of slaves who naturally flocked to Union occupied eastern North Carolina. These raids were great for humanitarian reasons, but it was hard for the Union occupiers to get enough supplies to feed the army and refugees as well. James City was eventually created for the African Americans, but not until 1863 after Union forces had settled into garrison duty along the coast.  

---

*Time Full of Trial: The Roanoke Island Freedmen’s Colony, 1862-1867,* was published by Patricia C. Click in 2001. Click argued that Roanoke Island was well suited for a freedmen’s colony because it was already home to many slaves, and its white inhabitants were not strong secessionists. Roanoke Island was also the first readily accessible part of North Carolina that the Federals occupied, which allowed the island’s occupants more time to adjust to Federal rule. Though Roanoke Island served the same humanitarian purpose as James City, the island was better suited as a freedman’s colony because it was never threatened with recapture like colonies on the mainland. Because of the freedmen’s colony however, the island required the presence of garrison troops, thus

---

sapping the fighting strength of forces in New Bern that could have otherwise invaded other portions of North Carolina.40

Although the contributions of African Americans to the Union war effort in eastern North Carolina during the Civil War have historically been overlooked, two recently published books have attempted to turn the historiographical tide. David S. Cecelski’s *The Waterman’s Song* and John David Smith’s *Black Soldiers in Blue*, both document the advantages that African Americans brought to the Union occupiers of eastern North Carolina. Previous historians such as D.H. Hill Jr. have considered escaped slaves a drain on the manpower of the Burnside/ Foster occupation of North Carolina. Not so argues John David Smith in *Black Soldiers in Blue*. In his estimation, the freed blacks were a ready source of manpower for Federals in North Carolina.41 David Cecelski added in *The Waterman’s Song*, that the Federals would not have gained possession of eastern North Carolina towns so easily, if not for the black pilots to guide their ships. The U.S. Government’s contraband policy was vague in 1862, but neither Smith nor Cecelski would argue that this affected Union offensives in North Carolina.

William Marvel’s 1991 biography of Ambrose Burnside did not fault the general for not capturing more of North Carolina. Marvel argued that Burnside’s North Carolina incursion was only a side show to the more important Virginia theater, and that his force was not strong enough to move into the Confederate interior. Burnside, the commander


on the ground, felt strong enough to mount such a movement, yet the Secretary of war ordered him to avoid a confrontation. After McClellan had made some progress on the Virginia Peninsula, and Burnside’s orders to stay on the defensive lapsed, his plan for an advance was thwarted by the absence of supply wagons. When this final problem was remedied, and Burnside prepared to move, then came the faithful order for him to steam to Virginia. Marvel articulates that Burnside was innately aggressive. Although his aggression would be to the Army of the Potomac’s detriment at Antietam and Fredericksburg, it may have led to great successes in North Carolina if not for his transfer to Virginia.42

The only book written specifically about Burnside’s expedition to North Carolina was authored by Richard Sauers in 1996. Considered by some historians to be the definitive study of the campaign, “A Succession of Honorable Victories,” is a blow by blow account of Burnside’s invasion. Like Marvel before him, Sauers lauded General Burnside for a largely effective campaign, and did not take Burnside to task for what he did not accomplish. Sauers argued that Burnside accomplished great feats because he gave his three division commanders leeway when implementing strategy. This prepared the senior division commander John Foster to take over in Burnside’s absence.43

Criticism from Sauers, though sparse, was reserved for the Union navy and politicians who tried prematurely to bring North Carolina back into the Union. Sauers noted the inability of the Union navy to completely clear out Confederate resistance from the North Carolina sounds. Sauers also argued that the U.S. government was naive in

---

believing North Carolinians would back the Union presence in the state just because portions of the Outer Banks did. If Burnside had adopted a harder hand at war like William T. Sherman would eventually do, then North Carolina might have been conquered earlier.\textsuperscript{44}

Though not an academic historian, William R. Trotter thoroughly examined the Civil War in the state with a three volume history written from a geographical perspective. \textit{Ironclads and Columbiads} is the third book of the trilogy, and the one that deals specifically with the North Carolina coast. Although the book reiterates the familiar narrative of the Federal invasion, and subsequent occupation, it does go more in depth on some issues that academic historians such as Barrett have neglected. In \textit{Ironclads and Columbiads}, Trotter detailed a scourge that hit both Union and Confederate controlled North Carolina in 1862. This force was yellow fever, an extremely infectious disease carried by mosquitoes. Yellow fever struck New Bern, but it attacked with more virulence in Wilmington. Approximately 650 lives were lost in Wilmington to yellow fever in 1862. However bad it was for Wilmington’s citizens, the pestilence may have been a blessing in disguise to the Confederacy, as the Union was not eager to capture a town infested with yellow fever.\textsuperscript{45}

Trotter’s book is sympathetic to General Foster, arguing that the Union general had no choice but to build forts and stay on the defensive after Burnside was recalled north. By Trotter’s account, Foster commanded only 9,500 men, not a huge force by Civil War standards, but an army much larger that what the Confederates could muster in

\textsuperscript{44}Sauers, “A Succession of Honorable Victories,” 451-452.

North Carolina in late 1862. Given these figures, Trotter let General Foster off the hook too easily for his lack of offensive action in North Carolina.\footnote{Trotter, \textit{Ironclads and Columbiads}, 157-158.}

Dan Morrill’s \textit{The Civil War in the Carolina’s} and John Carbone’s \textit{The Civil War in Coastal North Carolina} are both narrative histories in the mold of Barrett and Trotter, adding little to the historical record. Carbone did make the case that Burnside had plenty of troops to move into the interior of the state, although both authors argued the chances of a serious Union offensive ended when General Burnside was recalled to Virginia. Morrill also hinted at missed opportunities, but he failed to explain how or why the Federals failed.\footnote{John S. Carbone, \textit{The Civil War in Coastal North Carolina} (Raleigh: North Carolina Division of Archives and History, 2001), 65; Dan L. Morrill, \textit{The Civil War in the Carolinas} (Charleston: The Nautical and Aviation Publishing Company of American, 2002), 285-286.}

As this chapter has shown, the Civil War in North Carolina has been well documented, yet the historical record overlooks North Carolina’s importance in 1862-1863 Union offensive strategy. Subsequent chapters of this thesis will bridge the gap in the historiography. Chapter Two will focus on Union successes in eastern North Carolina in late 1861 and early 1862. Chapter Three discusses the failure of combined operations in the state. Finally, the focus of Chapter Four is the Union political and civil administration in eastern North Carolina, and how it affected Federal strategic initiatives in the state.
CHAPTER TWO

“The Highest Satisfaction to the President and the Whole Nation:”

Union Successes in Eastern North Carolina, 1861-1862

As Corporal Zenas T. Haines from Company D of the 44th Massachusetts Infantry Regiment steamed south toward Morehead City, North Carolina in October 1862, he did not know what to expect. Many weeks into Haines’ nine month enlistment period, military service had yet to carry him outside of his native Massachusetts. Since mustering into service, the 44th Massachusetts had spent several months training for an invasion of the Confederacy that some of the regiment’s more impatient soldiers thought would never come. Haines’ unit was not comprised of typical outdoorsmen and farmers; indeed, it was a collection of educated clerks and academics from institutions of higher learning in and around Boston. Typical of the regiment’s enlistees, Corporal Haines was himself a reporter for the Boston Herald. Members of the regiment suspected that they had not been deployed because the military brass worried that clerks would not fight well. Corporal Haines began to fret that the war might end before the 44th Massachusetts was sent south to bring “the fire and the sword.”1

Members of the Forty-fourth need not have been concerned, as they finally were ordered in October to prepare for deployment south. On October 22, 1862, the entire regiment boarded transports bound for Union occupied eastern North Carolina. Haines’ initial reaction was one of patriotic glee: “let us all perform our duty to the state and the United States, and may God help us all.” Once onboard ship however, Haines’ attitude

---

1Harris, ed., “In the Country of the Enemy,” 2-5, 66; John David Smith, foreword to Harris, ed., “In the Country of the Enemy,” x.
quickly changed, especially in regards to travel arrangements: “The youth of Boston, packed like so many herrings in the steerage.” He also complained about the lack of a naval escort for the steamer’s journey southward: “We are the same as defenseless. From our vast navy of war vessels not even one little gunboat has been spared to escort us to our destination.” After reaching North Carolina the 44th Massachusetts soon went into a minor battle. Haines observed: “It is doubtful if the history of the war furnishes an instance where a skirmish with the enemy has occurred under circumstances more trying to the Union troops, or better calculated to test their moral endurance and pluck.” In only a few short weeks in North Carolina, Haines and his comrades had experienced all of the “fire and the sword” they wanted.²

Although the regiment believed that its mettle had been tested, their first engagement was correctly labeled by Haines as only a skirmish. Nevertheless, the fight at Rawls’ Mill, North Carolina, was the Forty-fourth’s heaviest action of the war. Surprisingly so, considering that most of regiment’s term of enlistment was spent protecting a foothold deep inside supposedly hostile Confederate territory. Haines’ unit managed to traverse hundreds of miles across eastern North Carolina without being involved in a major battle. The regiment principally participated in occupation duty at Beaufort, New Bern, Washington, Plymouth, Williamston, and was in the rearguard of General John G. Foster’s raid on Goldsboro. While Haines often heard rumors of strong Confederate forces set to retake these towns, neither the Forty-fourth nor any other unit engaged these phantom armies. Of 1,018 members of the regiment who went off for war

in 1862, 902 of them returned to Boston in June of 1863. Indeed, almost 90% made it home unharmed to New England, despite bouts with yellow fever and malaria, which turned out to be more dangerous foes than Confederate forces. The lack of battlefield casualties reveals that the Forty-fourth had a relatively painless experience occupying eastern North Carolina.³

The 44th Massachusetts did not encounter much resistance because of events that had occurred in North Carolina earlier in the war. Forts Hatteras and Clark, Confederate bastions that guarded the entrance to Hatteras Inlet, fell to Union forces on August, 29, 1861. As a result, Confederate forces abandoned the forts guarding Ocracoke and Oregon Inlets. By the end of autumn 1861, Union forces controlled the entire length of the Outer Banks, and more importantly, the inlets to Albemarle and Pamlico Sounds.⁴

The barrier islands now became a base for Federal operations in North Carolina. On February 8, 1862, Union troops captured Roanoke Island and its garrison of “2500 men, 5 forts, and 32 cannons.” After taking Roanoke, this force, later known as the “Burnside Expedition” for its whiskered commander, proceeded to capture New Bern on March 16. Havelock, Newport and Washington also fell that March, along with Elizabeth City and Beaufort which were captured in April 1862. Aided by an escaped slave harbor pilot, the Federals even forced Fort Macon on Bogue Banks to capitulate on April 26. Other eastern North Carolina towns of varying significance also fell into Union hands.⁵

---

³Harris, ed., “In the Country of the Enemy,” 87.
⁵Thomas F. Edmands, “Operations in North Carolina, 1861-1862,” in Operations on the Atlantic - 33 -
General Burnside, in his report to Washington, described his expedition as a “succession of honorable victories,” but he was only half right. While Union forces were indeed successful in many towns in eastern North Carolina, their captures could hardly be classified as great victories. For one thing, Confederate forces offered little opposition. One Massachusetts colonel observed that the Confederates were “blind,” or at best, “careless” defenders. Because of their adversary’s carelessness, Federal troops were now permanently lodged in a strategic location which threatened Wilmington, the state’s principal seaport, Raleigh, the state capital, and even the Confederate national capital at Richmond. Although Burnside’s victories may have been better characterized as Confederate failures, the Lincoln administration was ecstatic nonetheless. “The report of the late brilliant successes of the United States forces under your command has afforded the highest satisfaction of the President and to this Department and to the whole nation, and thanks for distinguished service are again tendered to you and the officers and soldiers of your command. It will be the pleasure of the Department to strengthen you and support you to the utmost extent within its power,” Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton informed General Burnside and his men. This was heady praise from Washington for an attack that some critics labeled as a diversionary campaign.⁶

Although they expected more enemy opposition, Union forces now had a strong foothold along the perimeter with a strategic plan to rapidly strike into the interior. This strategy was crafted in part by a “Commission of Conference” chaired by S.F. DuPont of

---

the U.S. Navy. The enduring legacy of the Blockade Strategy Board, the name for which the “Commission of Conference” was more commonly known, was the recommendation to blockade or close Confederate seaports and occupy strategic points along the southern seaboard. Due to its rugged coast, North Carolina was almost an afterthought to this Federal strategy. Only when the Confederates exploited the Outer Banks as a haven for commerce raiders did the Federals focus attention on the Tar Heel state. Even then, their initial plan was merely to clog the inlets and channels used by the Confederate cruisers and privateers by sinking ships in them.⁷

General Benjamin F. Butler advised Washington as to the strategic value of North Carolina. Butler had been ordered to dam the entrance to Hatteras Inlet. Instead, the politician-turned-general defied his orders by capturing and occupying Hatteras Island in late August 1861. This attack was the first joint operation of the war. Beginning with Hatteras, it was victory after victory for the Union in eastern North Carolina. These victories were accomplished in large part because of the lack of adequate coastal defenses, sent instead to the Virginia battlefront.⁸

By the time Corporal Haines’ 44th Massachusetts arrived in North Carolina, along with several other fresh Union regiments, the Federals appeared destined to advance inland from the coast to secure the interior of North Carolina. Burnside otherwise could

---


⁸Reed, Combined Operations in the Civil War, 11-15; Barrett, The Civil War in North Carolina, 129. According to Barrett, 47 of North Carolina’s 49 infantry regiments were deployed to Virginia by the end of June 1862.
have cooperated with the U.S. Navy for an attack on Wilmington, the state’s largest seaport. Some advocated using eastern North Carolina as base of operations against strategic targets in southeastern Virginia including Suffolk, Petersburg, and Richmond. Strategic opportunities existed for U.S. forces to capitalize on their early victories in North Carolina. If these strategies had been acted on rapidly, Federal forces in North Carolina might have provided the North the opportunity to end the war sooner.\(^9\)

Despite having these options, the Union occupiers of eastern North Carolina in fact did little to nothing for the next year-and-a half of the war. If Haines’ experience in North Carolina seemed monotonous, it is because his regiment marched from quarter to quarter without doing much fighting. It probably seemed to Haines that marching was all the Federals did in North Carolina, as his unit had already missed most of the combat. On June 28, 1862, President Lincoln personally recalled Burnside and 8,000 men from his army to reinforce McClellan who was in headlong retreat from Confederate forces on the Virginia Peninsula. With Burnside’s departure, Federal authorities seemed satisfied to suspend offensive operations and consolidate their gains in North Carolina. Although the Union still enjoyed overwhelming numerical superiority in the state, the new commander, Brigadier General John G. Foster, considered it prudent to wait for reinforcements. Even as Union reinforcements trickled into coastal North Carolina, little sustained offensive action was ever taken. Consequently, by mid-1863, the strategic initiative in North Carolina had been surrendered to the Confederates.\(^10\)

\(^9\)Burnside to Stanton, May 5, 1862, McClellan to Burnside, January 7, 1862, and Stanton to Burnside, May 11, 1862, all in ORA, Volume 9, 352, 383, 386.

This chapter then examines Union victories in eastern North Carolina, followed by an extended period of Federal inactivity. Why after so many “honorable victories” did the Union decide to give up offensive operations in North Carolina? Was it out of concern for the alleged strong Confederate military presence in the state, as the Union high command believed, or were Federal troops hiding from ghosts? Why did the US War and Navy Departments alter a policy that had been extremely successful throughout the first twelve months of the war?

President Abraham Lincoln initially declared a blockade of the seceded states on April 19, 1861. When the embargo was extended to include the North Carolina coast on April 27, 1861, the state was ill prepared for war. After all, North Carolina had not yet left the Union. In fact, it would not do so in fact for another month, on May 20. After Virginia and Tennessee seceded, however, it seemed only a matter of time before North Carolina would also join the nascent Confederacy. Even if many Tar Heel politicians were eager to leave the Union, the state’s government was by no means ready for war. North Carolinians did not seem to appreciate the danger the U.S. Navy posed to the state’s 300-mile-long coastline. Moreover, the Jefferson Davis administration in Richmond seemed indifferent to North Carolina. President Davis expected all available recruits and arms to be sent to Virginia for defense of the national capital. Territories in North Carolina were thus deemed temporarily expendable. Both North Carolina and the Confederacy would pay dearly for these miscalculations, as the Union army would be
permanently lodged on the North Carolina coast before the Southern high-command realized its strategic value.\(^\text{11}\)

One man who did appreciate North Carolina’s vulnerability was the state’s first war-time governor, John Ellis. Even before the Tar Heel state joined the Confederacy, Ellis ordered the construction of Forts Hatteras and Clark, for the protection of Hatteras Inlet. Forts Caswell and Johnston, which guarded the mouth of the Cape Fear River, as well as Fort Macon on Bogue Banks, which protected Beaufort, were all seized on Ellis’ orders. Unlike Fort Sumter in South Carolina and Fort Pickens in Florida, these Federal installations were taken without opposition from U.S. ordnance caretakers. Ordnance Sergeant James Reilly at Fort Johnston, Frederick Dardingkiller at Fort Caswell and Captain John G. Foster at Fort Macon were unwilling or unable to offer resistance. Nonetheless, the capturing North Carolina militia units were proud of their victories. The easy operations convinced many militiamen that war might well be relatively brief and painless. The state’s emboldened defenders believed that their forts would protect them from anything that the United States could send their way.\(^\text{12}\)

The militia men either did not know, or did not care, that their victories could not have been accomplished if the forts had been defended. The state had insufficient arms and ammunition to conduct a siege similar to the one conducted against Fort Sumter. It is


\(^{12}\)Trotter, *Ironclads and Columbiads*, 8-12, 16; Ellis to Buchanan, January 12, 1861, Reilly to Cooper, January 10, 1861, Foster to Totton, May 18, 1861, and Dardingkiller to Cooper, January 14, 1861, all in ORA, Volume 1, 475-477, 484; Thomas Rowland, and Kate Mason Rowland, “The Letters from Major Thomas Rowland, C.S.A. from North Carolina, 1861-1862,” The William and Mary Quarterly Historical Magazine 25 (Oct., 1916): 76. Forts Caswell and Johnston were technically seized before North Carolina seceded, and were thus returned to Federal authorities on Governor Ellis’s orders. Captain Foster of Fort Macon, would later become General Foster in command of Union forces in North Carolina.
true that on April 22, 1861 state forces captured the United States Arsenal at Fayetteville and its stores of guns. Unfortunately all was not as it seemed, as the bulk of the 37,000 weapons at the arsenal were old flintlock muskets, a type of gun used as far back as the American Revolution. The muskets were of no practical use for North Carolina’s provisional army until they could be converted to percussion style rifled weapons. The Fayetteville Arsenal would eventually prove useful, as the rifling machinery from Harpers Ferry was moved there. The arsenal’s capture in 1861, however, provided little immediate help.\(^{13}\)

The state’s militia forces organized before the war were adequate for taking unguarded forts, but the government realized that many more soldiers were needed to garrison them. Not until North Carolina left the Union did the state’s leaders realize the daunting task they faced in securing the coast. Governor Ellis requested 30,000 volunteers and 50,000 answered the call. North Carolina initially turned away some superfluous volunteers in 1861 and early 1862, since they could not be sufficiently armed and equipped.\(^{14}\)

Although the state was at first overwhelmed by the massive outpouring of volunteers, the government was soon able to create an efficient system for training the troops. John F. Hoke, the state’s first adjutant general, and his replacement, James G. Martin, were both effective at organizing raw units into fighting regiments. By the end of the year, Hoke and Martin had organized forty-one regiments for state service. These men were armed with an assortment of weapons, most imported through the Federal

---

\(^{13}\)Anderson to Thomas, April 23, 1861, ORA, Volume 1, 478; Sauers, “A Succession of Honorable Victories,” 78.

\(^{14}\)Barrett, The Civil War in North Carolina, 18.
blockade of the state’s coast. This was an impressive feat, yet General Martin claimed he could have outfitted another 10,000 men if only he possessed “arms to put in their hands.”

Martin performed admirably in organizing regiments for the state’s defense, yet the Carolina coast still remained vulnerable to attack. The seaboard was not totally neglected, but the majority of Tar Heel soldiers were deployed to Virginia. The Old Dominion would be a major theater of battle as Washington and Richmond were only 100 miles apart. Part of Federal strategy was to march on Richmond. The war’s first major battle was fought outside Manassas, Virginia, when General Irvin McDowell first tried to advance on the Confederate capital. It was clear very early in the war that the Confederate high command considered North Carolina’s defense secondary to that of Virginia. The Confederate policy of sacrificing less significant areas for Richmond’s protection continued throughout the war.

North Carolina was ill prepared to fight a land war, but even less ready for a naval conflict. Like the other Confederate states, North Carolina began the war with no navy. Some states, including North Carolina, assembled crude gunboat flotillas but more resources should have been devoted to increasing the state’s sea power. Dubbed the “mosquito fleet” by its detractors, North Carolina’s naval contingent consisted of five tugs which had been secured from a canal company. General D.H. Hill compelled to coordinate with the “mosquito fleet” in 1862, described the use of such boats as “futile,” complaining that they could be “laughed” from the water. Despite Hill’s assessment the

---

smaller ships did offer one advantage, in that they did not draw much water and were well suited for North Carolina’s many inland waterways. Much had been accomplished in preparing for war when the state was invaded in August 1861. Even so, it was not enough.\textsuperscript{17}

The first Federal operations against North Carolina occurred on the Outer Banks in late August 1861. Major General Benjamin Butler, U.S. Army, and Commodore Silas Stringham, U.S. Navy were instructed to reduce Forts Hatteras and Clark at Hatteras Inlet so that stone barges could be sunk in the waterway. The Federals reached Hatteras on August 27, and despite some problems with heavy surf, were able to land troops the following day.\textsuperscript{18}

While blue-clad troops went ashore, Union warships, including the large frigates *USS Cumberland* and *USS Minnesota* bombarded both Forts Hatteras and Clark. Reeling from the bombardment, and realizing their precarious position, some of the garrison of Fort Clark surrendered, while others fled to Fort Hatteras. Reinforced by Clark’s refugees, it appeared for a while that the larger Fort Hatteras might repel the Federals. The incessant shelling eventually wore down the defenders however, and on August 29, they asked for terms of surrender. As part of the negotiations, the Fort’s commander, Major W.B. Thompson, requested that his men be allowed to keep their side arms and return home. The obtuse General Butler however, responded that the Confederates were to be his prisoners of war. Butler’s hard line nearly provoked resumption of hostilities,

\textsuperscript{17}Wise to Huger, February 17, 1862, *ORN*, Volume 6, 762-765; Trotter, *Ironclads and Columbiads*, 20.

before Major Thompson realized that he had no choice but to give in to Butler’s demands.19

The capture of Hatteras Island was a major psychological victory for the North, which was still reeling from its defeat at the Battle of Manassas. Butler himself had been defeated in a skirmish at Big Bethel, Virginia in June 1861. Thus the Hatteras campaign was immensely important to Butler as well. Not only was it a moral victory, but it gave the Union “715 prisoners, 17,000 stands of arms, 30 pieces of cannon, one 10-inch Columbiad, a prize brig loaded with cotton, a sloop loaded with provisions and stores, two light-boats, a schooner in ballasts, 5 stands of colors, 150 bags of coffee, and etc.”20

Now that Federal forces had a foothold on the Outer Banks, it seemed illogical to abandon the strategically important area. Their plan had been to sink stone barges in Hatteras Inlet, but it now seemed prudent to both Butler and Stringham to hold the area and await reinforcements. Butler was ordered to return to Hampton Roads on the successful completion of his mission, but instead steamed to Washington to advocate holding Hatteras Island. Although he was under threat of court martial, Butler was able to convince the Union high command of the benefits of holding Hatteras. Butler was a far better politician than a soldier, but he was correct to convince the War Department to hold onto Hatteras.21

The Confederates, on the other hand, tried to downplay their losses on the Outer Banks. Like their Northern counterparts, the Southern press did not appreciate Hatteras’s

---

20Butler to Wool, August 30, 1861, ORA, Volume 4, 581-586.
21Reed, Combined Operations in the Civil War, 15; Stringham to Welles, September 2, 1861, ORN, Volume 6, 124; Edmands, “Operations in North Carolina, 1861-1862,” 58.
strategic value. The New Bern *Weekly Progress*, a pro-secession newspaper declared on September 5, 1861, that the battle did “not amount to much.” Later, however, the paper’s editor observed, “it is too late to censure anybody about this disaster. We warned the State authorities again and again that the place was not in a condition to withstand an attack but they heeded us not. The place could have been held and ought to have been held, and somebody is to blame for its not being held.” The *Weekly Progress* admitted that the loss of Hatteras gave the U.S. Navy free access to the state’s rivers and sounds. Indeed Hatteras did amount to something; it set a precedent for future Federal operations against “the Old North State.”

The Hatteras campaign revealed the vulnerability of coastal North Carolina to a determined enemy campaign. Now the barrier island was to be used as a base of operations for further Union incursions into the state. The Federals spent much of the winter of 1861-1862 planning their next advance, while their occupation troops spent a miserable few months occupying the Outer Banks during the winter storm season. North Carolina’s defenders spent their time reorganizing the state’s coastal defenses for a seemingly imminent attack. They abandoned their remaining installations on the Outer Banks, and concentrated their forces on Roanoke Island in the Albemarle Sound and on the mainland.23

Although it was assumed that Roanoke Island would be the next Union target, the Confederates could not be certain. They were left with little choice but to stretch their defenses to include Wilmington, Fort Macon, and also New Bern. Forced to split their

---

meager manpower reserves amongst all these potential targets, they were not adequately able to defend any of them. When the attack finally did occur, it was after all against Roanoke Island in February 1862.24

The Confederates had constructed “five different fortifications and an entrenched camp in the center” for Roanoke’s protection. The forts were garrisoned by only 1,400 soldiers under Brigadier General Henry Wise, former governor of Virginia. Despite the relatively small size of the garrison, the Confederate commanders realized the strategic importance of the island, as it separated Pamlico and Albemarle sounds. If Federal gunboats made their way into Albemarle Sound, all of southeastern Virginia would be threatened. It was imperative therefore that the Confederates held Roanoke Island.25

Whereas Butler’s expedition force that captured Hatteras Island had comprised less than 1,000 men, a division of 10,000 troops, commanded by Ambrose Burnside was organized for the assault on Roanoke Island. In a similar plan to the one espoused by the Blockade Strategy Board, Major General George B. McClellan suggested in late 1861 the creation of an amphibious division intended as a rapid reaction force to be deployed on the Confederate flank during his planned Peninsula Campaign. The similarity of plans should come as no surprise because McClellan’s chief engineer and advisor John J. Barnard, was on the board. Initially the force was to be used under McClellan’s direct operational control, operating in concert with the Army of the Potomac on the Peninsula. Perhaps because Lincoln and Stanton were tired of waiting on McClellan to advance, the

expedition was sent to North Carolina in February, even though the Army of the Potomac would not deploy to the Peninsula until March. Even so, McClellan was still commander-in-chief of army, and could count on his good friend Burnside to follow his orders, and support him if necessary.26

Burnside’s expedition sailed from Fortress Monroe on January 11, 1862, and was in position to attack Roanoke Island until February 7. One Yankee officer fittingly described the passage to Roanoke as the hardest work of the campaign, since storms and inclement weather proved to be as tough to handle as Confederate defenders.27

The naval arm of the Federal forces was commanded by Commodore Louis M. Goldsborough. The Commodore had long advocated capturing Roanoke Island, making him a perfect choice to lead the naval component of the campaign. Goldsborough’s flotilla of seventeen light draft gunboats armed with fifty-four cannon would get Burnside’s men to the target, land the troops, and bombard Confederate forts. A secondary naval objective was to engage and, if possible, destroy the canal boats that made up the Confederate “mosquito fleet,” under the command of Flag Officer W.F. Lynch. The Union gunboats made short work of the tiny Confederate States naval contingent supporting Roanoke, and were able to put ashore Burnside’s entire force on the island during the evening of February 7, and the following morning.28

26 Daly, “Burnside’s Amphibious Division, 1862,” 88; Reed, Combined Operations in the Civil War, 39; McClellan to Cameron, September 6, 1861 and McClellan to Cameron, September 6, 1861, both in ORA, Volume 5, 36, 586; Goldsborough to Welles, November 11, 1861, ORN, Volume 6, 421-422.

27 Edmands, “Operations in North Carolina, 1861-1862,” 63; Oliver E. Coolidge to Father and Sister, January 14, 1862, Oliver S. Coolidge Papers, Special Collections Library, Duke University, Durham NC (hereafter sited as the Coolidge Papers). Coolidge, a native Bostonians used to winter storms confirmed the severity of the gale in a letter home to his family.

28 Burnside to Thomas, February 14, 1862, ORA, Volume 9, 75-81; Daly, “Burnside’s Amphibious Division, 1862,” 88.
Instead of slowly rowing to shore, the men were landed on Roanoke by having their boats towed swiftly onto the beaches. Four thousand men were landed in only a matter of minutes. The Confederate force was totally overwhelmed by sheer weight of numbers. There was fierce fighting on the island, and Roanoke’s defenders did not surrender until late on the eighth, but the battle was never really in doubt.29

The news of the Island’s capture had serious military and political repercussions for the Confederates. Roanoke gave the Federals a convenient base for operations against Norfolk, the Confederacy’s most important naval base. Confederate defenses in southeastern Virginia and northeastern North Carolina had to be reorganized to watch for an attack from the south. The shifting of these forces was complicated by the finger pointing between Wise and his immediate commander General Benjamin J. Hugar, as neither commander wanted responsibility for the debacle on Roanoke Island. While South Carolinian Hugar feuded with the Virginian Wise, the defense of North Carolina was neglected much to the dismay of the state’s citizens. Willing to blame anyone for loss except himself, Wise further alienated North Carolinians by insinuating that North Carolina troops were responsible for Roanoke’s capture. Eventually, repercussion from the battle would even reach the Davis administration, prompting him to sack Secretary of War Judah Benjamin.30

---

29Burnside to Thomas, February 14, 1862, ORA, Volume 9, 75-81; Anderson, By Sea and By River: The Naval History of the Civil War, 63; Meekins, “Caught Between Scylla and Charybids,” 59. Admiral Anderson’s book favorably compares the landings on Roanoke to the use of motorized landing craft during WW II.

30B, Estvan, War Pictures from the South (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1863), 250. Sauers, “A Succession of Honorable Victories,” 217-221; Barrett, The Civil War in North Carolina, 74. Being relieved as Secretary of War could hardly have been a blow to Benjamin, because he was immediately promoted to the more prestigious Secretary of State Position.
After taking Roanoke, Burnside and Goldsborough moved promptly against the North Carolina mainland. The remainder of Lynch’s ships were rounded up and destroyed, and now the towns of Winton, Columbia, and Elizabeth City were all raided or burned. Having lost Albemarle Sound Confederate forces had little choice but to pool resources for the defense of New Bern in Craven County. This was a strategically sound and necessary move, but left vast stretches of North Carolina’s coastal plain open to the enemy.\footnote{Sauers, “A Succession of Honorable Victories,” 231.}

If New Bern fell into Union hands, the Federals would occupy a triangle that stretched from New Bern to Hatteras, then up to Roanoke. New Bern, unlike Roanoke, was to be held at all costs. By removing Judah Benjamin, Davis hoped to set an example by reinforcing that New Bern must be held. The old town of New Bern was located at the confluence of the Neuse and Trent Rivers, giving the town a strategic position for controlling Pamlico Sound. Furthermore, New Bern was a thriving seaport and North Carolina’s second most populated city.\footnote{Frederick M. Osborne, ed., Private Osborne: Massachusetts 23rd Volunteers Burnside Expedition, Roanoke Island, Second Front Against Richmond (Gretna: Pelican Publishing Company, 2002), 62; Hattaway and Jones, How the North Won, 112-113; Harris, ed., “In the Country of the Enemy,” 12.}

After the fall of Roanoke, state politicians felt far less secure about strategic centers to the south. Interim Governor Henry T. Clark asked the Confederate government for desperately needed reinforcements. He also published a proclamation that March in the state’s newspapers, calling out the home guard. Both of these actions would be too little and too late for New Bern’s salvation.\footnote{Weekly Progress, (New Bern), 5 September 1861, 11 March 1862.}
On March 11, the same day that Clark issued his proclamation, the Federal fleet disembarked from Roanoke and headed for New Bern. Burnside’s soldiers were landed thirteen miles below New Bern on March 13, and immediately advanced toward the town. This swift march by Union forces compelled the Confederates to evacuate their forts on the lower Neuse River. Four thousand disorganized rebel soldiers were concentrated outside of New Bern under the command of General Lawrence O’Bryan Branch. In a four hour battle on March 14, the Confederate lines were broken by Burnside’s three brigades. After the Southerners fled, the Union soldiers were able to march into the city with a loss of only ninety-one men.\footnote{Ammen, \textit{The Atlantic Coast}, 189; Fred Osborne to Mother, Osborne, ed., \textit{Private Osborne}, 65-66; Burnside to Thomas, March 16, 1862, \textit{ORA}, Volume 9, 197-199.}

With New Bern now in Federal hands, Burnside encountered an unexpected side effect of conquering Confederate territory. No sooner had the last Confederates retreated from New Bern than refugees, mostly escaped slaves, flocked to the town. Burnside explained that the freed slaves caused him “anxiety.” What was he to do with all of these listless men and women? Burnside faced a dilemma that plagued many Union commanders during the first two years of the Civil War. Because the Federal government in early 1862 lacked a formal policy regarding runaways, Burnside was forced to craft a policy himself. The refugee problems and Burnside’s solutions to them will be described in detail in Chapter Four of this thesis.\footnote{Burnside to Stanton, March 21, 1862, \textit{ORA}, Volume 9, 199-201; C. Vann Woodward, foreword to \textit{Rehearsal for Reconstruction: The Port Royal Experiment} by Willie Lee Rose (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964), xii.}

Confederate resistance in New Bern had been surprisingly light, so Burnside determined to move immediately on Beaufort, and its main guardian, Fort Macon. The
Confederates, however, believed that Burnside’s next target would be Goldsboro, on the Wilmington and Weldon Railroad to the west. Some North Carolina regiments were rushed back to the state from Virginia, but they were deployed so as to defend the state’s interior, not the eastern portion of the state. Confederate forces were for the most part content to cut their losses by not contesting Federal control of the eastern part of the state.\textsuperscript{36}

Thus without much opposition, the Union army was able to march down the Atlantic and North Carolina Railroad from New Bern to Morehead City and Beaufort, capturing both towns within days New Bern’s fall. If they had possessed rolling stock, Burnside’s men might have ridden a train into town, but instead used handcars. The detachment sent to Beaufort from the west was preceded into the town by Federal soldiers in boats from the east. The rafts were piloted into the harbor at Beaufort, under the guns of Fort Macon, by a sympathetic escaped slave. This action should have made it evident to Burnside that the abundance of runaway slaves could work to his advantage. Instead Burnside continued to feel uneasy about their presence in eastern North Carolina.\textsuperscript{37}

The capture of Beaufort isolated Fort Macon, and its small 450 man garrison commanded by Colonel Moses White. Beginning on March 23, the casemated stronghold was put under siege by Union infantry and artillery commanded by Brigadier General

\textsuperscript{36}Barrett, \textit{The Civil War in North Carolina}, 108-109; Frank Parker to my Dearest Wife, March 14, 1862, and Frank Parker to my Dearest Wife, March 18, 1862, both in Frank M. Parker Papers, North Carolina State Archives, Raleigh NC. According to its commander Frank Parker, the 30th North Carolina was ordered to Goldsboro to await Burnside’s advance although he preferred to move to New Bern to face the Federals head on.

\textsuperscript{37}Barrett, \textit{The Civil War in North Carolina}, 109; Cecelski, \textit{The Waterman’s Song}, 153; Burnside to Stanton, March 21, 1862, \textit{ORA}, Volume 9, 199-201.
John D. Park’s Brigade on one side, and the U.S. Navy’s North Atlantic Blockading Squadron on the other. Federal rifled artillery did much damage to the fort’s masonry walls, but the garrison stubbornly held out until late April. Eventually the Unionists dug a trench within mortar range of the bastion, forcing it to surrender on April 26, 1862. Fort Macon’s capture gave the Federal fleet access to Beaufort Harbor, a deep water port with easy access to the Atlantic Ocean.\(^{38}\)

By May, 1862 the North Carolina coast from Bogue Banks to the Virginia border was under Federal control, and now they turned their interest toward capturing Goldsboro. The town sat at the intersection of the Wilmington and Weldon and the Atlantic and North Carolina railroads, the state’s primary north-south and east-west arteries. From Goldsboro, Burnside’s army could either move south towards Wilmington or west towards Raleigh. Perhaps more importantly, a Federal force on the Wilmington and Weldon would intercept the flow of supplies north to main Confederate army in Virginia. After consolidating his forces in New Bern, Burnside wired McClellan for instructions. Burnside suggested that he could move to Goldsboro to threaten Raleigh or Wilmington as previously planned, or he could march to Weldon, cut the railroad, and threaten Southeastern Virginia.\(^{39}\)

Burnside’s force had enjoyed much success in North Carolina, and the Confederates were offering little opposition. Burnside hoped to maintain his momentum

---


\(^{39}\) Burnside to Stanton, June 24, 1862, *ORA*, Volume 9, 403-404; Oliver Coolidge to [Father and Sister], June 18, 1862, Coolidge Papers. Private Coolidge of the 23rd Massachusetts could thought that the Federal New Bern garrison was gearing up for another fight, but wondered if any Confederate army was “cheek enough” to face the Burnside Expedition.
by continuing offensive operations. After the loss of New Bern in March, Robert E. Lee stated that “another such disaster would be ruinous.” The fall of Goldsboro would have been even more damaging because of its proximity to Wilmington and Raleigh, and the railroads. Not only would occupying Goldsboro give the Federals many strategic opportunities, its capture would have been relatively painless during the initial phases of the expedition. Instead it would be several months before the Union army attempted an attack on Goldsboro, and even then only in the form of a raid.  

On June 25, 1862, Burnside did receive his long awaited orders to move on Goldsboro from General McClellan. The two month delay allowed the Confederates time to better defend the town. Despite these preparations, it is doubtful that Goldsboro could have been successfully defended. The strength of the defenses became a moot point on June 28, because President Abraham Lincoln saved Goldsboro from capture by ordering Burnside, with a large portion of his column, to reinforce McClellan outside of Richmond. Retreating from General Lee’s attacking army, McClellan desperately requested reinforcements. Lincoln decided to recall Burnside’s force to Virginia, but held them in reserve for McClellan’s aid. The best way to have taken pressure off McClellan’s army would have been to allow Burnside to move on Goldsboro. Any Confederate reinforcements for Goldsboro would have been taken from Lee’s army, providing real relief for the Army of the Potomac. Instead, Burnside’s transfer to Virginia did little to help the permanently stalled Peninsula Campaign.

---

40Barrett, _The Civil War in North Carolina_, 107. See Chapter Three for more information on Foster’s Goldsboro raid.

41Sauers, “_A Succession of Honorable Victories_,” 443; Lincoln to Burnside, June 28, 1862, ORA, Volume 9, 404.
Burnside’s departure with much of his army to Virginia left his successor, John G. Foster, with too few troops to immediately continue offensive operations in North Carolina. Reinforcements, including Corporal Haines’ 44th Massachusetts Infantry Regiment that arrived in October 1862, however bolstered Foster’s force to an even larger number than Burnside had commanded. Yet Foster made only one fainthearted attempt to capture Goldsboro. The next chapter will discuss why Foster remained largely inactive when a determined campaign might have been detrimental to the Confederates.42

Burnside and his predecessor, Benjamin Butler had pierced the soft underbelly of the Confederacy through North Carolina. The state was ill-prepared for war in 1861, and its soldiers were sent to fight in other theaters, enabling the North to secure two-thirds of the North Carolina coast within the first year of the war. The state simply did not yet have the manpower to both send men to Virginia and keep its own coastline safe. Blue-clad forces were successful in battles at Hatteras, Roanoke, New Bern, Fort Macon, and a host of other smaller forts and towns. Inadequate North Carolina troops and resources seemed powerless to stop the Federal offensive juggernaut.

Based on the recommendations of the Blockade Strategy Board, General Butler, General McClellan, and Admirals Stringham and Goldsborough, North Carolina became a perfect test for what has become known as the Union’s Anaconda Plan. Yet for all of their early successes, the Federals suspended offensive operations in North Carolina. Ironically, as the war went on, North Carolina became more important to the Confederacy, and neglected by the Union. It was not until the Fort Fisher campaigns of

42Harris, ed., “In the Country of the Enemy,” 106.
December and January, 1864-1865 that the state once again became an important military target for the Union.\textsuperscript{43}

The Burnside expedition had set a precedent for Union success in North Carolina and other portions of the Confederate interior. Unlike some others, General Burnside realized that the advantages of Federal operations in North Carolina were invaluable. If nothing else, the attacks caused the removal of state troops from Virginia. Even with Confederate troop redeployments, Burnside never faced significant opposition. It was a serious and inexcusable blunder by the Federal government not to follow up Burnside’s victories by securing the remainder of eastern North Carolina when the opportunity was there.\textsuperscript{44}

\textsuperscript{43}Blockade Strategy Board Minutes, July 1861.

\textsuperscript{44}Symonds, Lincoln and his Admirals, 67; Barrett, The Civil War in North Carolina, 108; Edmands, “Operations in North Carolina, 1861-1862,” 82-83. According to Symonds, several members of Lincoln’s cabinet were not even aware of the existence of the Burnside Expedition.
CHAPTER THREE

“He Could Always Retire to his Rat-Hole:”

The End of Union Offensive Operations in Eastern North Carolina

“The End of Union Offensive Operations in Eastern North Carolina”

“Wilmington is of much more importance in a military and naval point of view than Charleston.”
--Admiral S.P. Lee, commander of the North Atlantic Blockading Squadron, December 1862.

“I trust in god that you are not going to let Foster inveigle you into any Wilmington operation until we are through here.”
--Admiral S.F. Du Pont, commander of U.S. Navy forces attacking Charleston, March 1863.

According to Captain J. Lewis Stackpole, commander of Company I, 24th Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry, “only a mad prophet would have foretold that the first connection between the troops in North Carolina and one of the grand armies would be made by the penetration of a western army from Atlanta to the sea, and its march from Savannah up the coast.” Stackpole argued that by early 1863, Federal troops in eastern North Carolina “were left waiting for that very improbable event.” The Union high command may have considered North Carolina a backwater theater of war, but Stackpole bristled at the notion that it was only a “sideshow.” The captain knew that Federal forces in North Carolina were intended to be a “flank movement when McClellan should have driven the enemy southward from Richmond.” Richmond did not fall until 1865, and not coincidently, Union forces in eastern North Carolina did not advance from their base of operations on the Carolina coast until that same year.¹

¹Major J. Lewis Stackpole, “The Department of North Carolina Under General Foster, July, 1862, to July, 1863” in Operations on the Atlantic Coast 1861-1865, Virginia 1862,1864: The Papers of the Military Historical Society of Massachusetts IX (Boston: The Military Historical Society of Massachusetts,
Stackpole and his comrades, tasked with occupying coastal North Carolina, were victims of a drastic change in Federal strategy in the state. The alteration of strategy resulted partly from a change in commanding generals, but also from a political tug-of-war between the army and the navy and service branch commanders in competing theaters of war. On almost every occasion, important offensive operations in eastern North Carolina lost out in the tug-of-war.

After General Burnside and most of his army were recalled to Virginia in late June 1862, the high command deemed the occupation force in New Bern under General John G. Foster too small for further offensive operations. Foster’s command was temporarily reduced to about 7,000 men from Burnside’s high of 15,000, comprising seven regiments of infantry, one cavalry regiment, and one heavy artillery regiment. These few battalions were expected to garrison thousands of square miles of eastern North Carolina including the far flung towns of New Bern, Beaufort, Washington, Elizabeth City, as well as Roanoke Island.²

In response to the reduction in force, Foster ordered the construction of an elaborate series of earthen defenses to guard against Confederate counterattacks. The sound of Foster’s picks and spades did not please Commander S.C. Rowan who headed naval forces on the North Carolina sounds. Rowan correctly interpreted the construction of forts as an indication that the army was ready to end offensive operations, consolidate captured territories, and settle into occupation duty in eastern North Carolina. The

---
²Stackpole, “The Department of North Carolina Under General Foster,” 87; Foster to Stanton, July 8, 1862, ORA, Volume 9, 410.
Commander complained furthermore, that forts so close to the coast might be captured by Confederates and turned on his own “webfooted people.” Yet Rowan was resigned to the fact that “Foster is an engineer, and he must build forts.”

Rowan may have had little confidence in Foster because of his reputation as a cautious, albeit effective engineer, but it was wise for the army to construct defensive works in North Carolina. While Foster believed that he needed to fortify his base to protect the drastically reduced forces from a Confederate counterattack, he tried to prove his detractors wrong by planning a series of aggressive raids toward Goldsboro, Raleigh, and Wilmington. They were intended to disrupt Confederate operations, and to gain intelligence about roads, rivers and creek crossings, and the lay of the land in areas beyond Union lines. Foster intended to use the information gathered during these reconnaissance missions to plan future offensive operations to be undertaken once reinforcements arrived.

Shortly after assuming command, Foster ordered two Massachusetts regiments, the 17th commanded by Lt. Colonel John Fellows, and the 27th commanded by Colonel Horace Lee, to raid Pollocksville in Jones County. Meanwhile, Confederate salt works were destroyed near Currituck Sound and Bogue Inlet by Colonel William Howard’s 1st New York Marine Artillery and Colonel Thomas Stevenson’s 24th Massachusetts Regiment. Foster also used troopers from his lone cavalry regiment, Simon Mix’s 3rd New York, to scout areas of possible advance. With the information gathered from raids and scouts, Foster was certain that despite his small force, he could hold eastern North

---

3Rowen to Goldsborough, March 29, 1862, ORN, Volume 7, 187-189.
4Foster to Stanton, July 29, 1862, and Foster to Halleck, August 17, 1862, both in ORA, Volume 9, 411-413, 416.
Carolina. By mid August 1862, he was confident enough to inform U.S. Army Commander-in-Chief Henry Halleck, that he was ready for limited offensive operations in North Carolina. Foster calculated that he could attack, “if ordered,” toward Raleigh with 5,000 men defeating any “rebel force” in his way.5

Although optimistic that such an attack would be successful, Foster would have preferred a larger assault force than the 5,000 soldiers he had available. Foster understood that he simply did not have enough troops to capture and hold more territory and towns, which would compel him to withdraw to New Bern after the advance. The general assured Halleck that he could attack and hold the forts at the Cape Fear if he were reinforced with an additional “seven regiments of infantry.” Otherwise, the raids into the interior of the state would yield no significant results.6

Unfortunately for Foster, reinforcements were not immediately forthcoming as Union forces elsewhere met a series of battlefield setbacks in the summer of 1862. McClellan’s army was thoroughly beaten back from the gates of Richmond by Robert E. Lee during the Seven Days Battles in late June and early July. After immobilizing McClellan on the Peninsula, Lee defeated the Army of Virginia under John Pope at the battle of Second Manassas in late August. Lee followed up this victory with an invasion of Maryland in September. Although Lee was eventually forced to withdraw from Northern territory, his campaign led to the recall of Federal troops from other sectors for Washington’s protection. Thus, no troops were available to go to North Carolina.

---

5Stackpole, “The Department of North Carolina Under General Foster,” 88; Foster to Halleck, August 17, 1862, ORA, Volume 9, 416.
6Foster to Halleck, August 17, 1862, ORA, Volume 9, 416.
Potentially as problematic for Foster in North Carolina, McClellan’s resounding defeat led to him being deposed as U.S. Army Commander-in-Chief in favor of Halleck. McClellan had been one of the architects of the Burnside expedition, and was an advocate of continued offensive operations in eastern North Carolina. He firmly believed in a strong Union military presence in the Tar Heel state because it threatened Richmond’s southern flank. In theory, at least, this would limit Confederate reinforcements from being moved from North Carolina to Virginia, aiding Federal armies in the Old Dominion. Had “Little Mac” been able to capture Richmond, his large army could have merged with Union forces moving in from the Carolina coast to attack Goldsboro, Raleigh, and Wilmington. Unlike McClellan, Halleck failed to grasp the strategic importance of eastern North Carolina. In the words of combined operations historian Dr. Rowena Reed, “Halleck’s appointment to overall command brought about a shift in military objectives,” robbing the Union of any “strategic plan for defeating the Confederacy.”

After Lee’s strategic defeat in Maryland once again secured the Union capital, a slow trickle of nine-month volunteers began to arrive as reinforcements for General Foster in the early fall of 1862. By November, his force had been increased to nearly 18,000 men, about 4,000 more than Burnside ever commanded in the theater. Even though these recruits were mostly raw and untested, Foster determined to make good use of them before their brief terms of enlistment expired. He personally led a 5,000 man force toward the town of Tarboro, nearly eighty miles northwest of New Bern, with the

---

7Stackpole, “The Department of North Carolina Under General Foster,” 110; Reed, Combined Operations in the Civil War, 43, 107, 322. Reed, Combined Operations in the Civil War, 189, 191.
hope of capturing the town and Confederates foraging in the area. He failed to accomplish either goal. Confederate forces retreated after a skirmish fought near Rawls’ Mill on November 2, and rendezvoused with additional grey-clad troops around Tarboro to prevent Foster from capturing the town.\textsuperscript{8}

Although disappointed, Foster believed that his Tarboro raid was not a totally wasted effort. He forced the withdrawal of Confederates foraging in the area for the protection of Tarboro, and many of Foster’s raw recruits gained valuable combat experience. The battle of Rawls’ Mill may have only been a skirmish, but some participating regiments, like the 44\textsuperscript{th} Massachusetts Infantry, had only been in existence for sixty days. Many previously untried soldiers were now better prepared for the next Federal offensive in the state.\textsuperscript{9}

Both General Foster and Rear Admiral S.P. Lee of the North Atlantic Blockading Squadron thought Wilmington should be their next objective. Unfortunately, neither the army nor the navy could quite agree on how or when to go about assaulting North Carolina’s largest town and principal seaport. Naval officers urged Foster to begin preparing to move against Wilmington as soon as he returned from his Tarboro raid. Admiral Lee ordered soundings taken of Old and New inlets at the mouth of the Cape Fear River, and arranged for transports to bring Foster reinforcements from tidewater Virginia.\textsuperscript{10}

\textsuperscript{8}Returns of the Department of North Carolina, November 30, 1862, \textit{ORA}, Volume 18, 468; Barrett, \textit{The Civil War in North Carolina}, 136-139.

\textsuperscript{9}Harris, \textit{In the Country of the Enemy}, 85.

\textsuperscript{10}Parker to Foster, December 8, 1862, \textit{ORA}, Volume 18, 475; Lee to Sands, December 21, 1862, and Lee to Welles, December 25, 1862, both in \textit{ORN}, Volume 8, 318-319.
By late 1862, Wilmington had become an attractive target due to the tremendous amount of illicit trade venturing in and out of the town. The seaport was technically blockaded by the U.S. Navy, but the quarantine was ineffective at best until much later in the war. Steamers with valuable supplies for the Confederacy made the port on an almost nightly basis. That Wilmington was a suitable place for these blockade runners was due more to geography than anything else. The shoal waters at the mouth of the Cape Fear were much more suitable for the light draft steamers used by blockade runners than for large Union warships. Approaching blockade runners also had the option of entering Old or New inlets which were only a few miles apart on the inside of the river, but were separated at sea by the ever dangerous Frying Pan Shoals. In essence, this required the navy to operate two separate blockading forces at the mouth of the Cape Fear River, which there never were enough ships to effectively do. Wilmington was also less than 800 miles away from the exporting ports of Bermuda, and Nassau, and via rail less than 300 miles away from Confederate armies near Richmond.  

Foster was as eager to move on Wilmington as Lee, but he decided to make the capture of Goldsboro his next objective. Although Admiral Lee urged on December 2, that Foster “get through with Goldsboro,” the general logically reasoned that Goldsboro was nearly as strategically important as Wilmington. Goldsboro was the location of the intersection of the Wilmington and Weldon and the Atlantic and North Carolina railroads. Supplies brought through the blockade into Wilmington had to pass through Goldsboro to reach the Confederate army in Virginia. The occupation of Goldsboro by

---

Federal troops would have been nearly as damaging to the Confederates as losing Wilmington. Besides, Foster thought that he could at bare minimum raid Goldsboro while the navy prepared for Wilmington, and still be in position for his part in the Cape Fear expedition.\footnote{Lee to Fox, December 2, 1862, and Murray to Lee, December 11, 1862, ORN, Volume 8, 245-246, 287.}

On December 11, 1862 Foster advanced with 10,000 men toward Goldsboro, by way of Kinston. The attack corresponded with the overland march of new commander Ambrose Burnside’s Army of the Potomac, from Washington to Richmond. The turn of events must have seemed like déjà vu to Foster and Burnside. In the spring of 1862, it was Burnside’s job to advance into eastern North Carolina to prevent Confederate forces in the state being diverted for the defense of Richmond. In December of that year, it was Foster’s responsibility to keep Confederate forces in North Carolina occupied, and away from Virginia. The deposed, brooding, former commander of the Army of the Potomac, George McClellan, must have appreciated the irony.\footnote{Foster to Halleck, December 10, 1862, ORA, Volume 18, 476.}

Unfortunately, Foster’s attack on Goldsboro did not go as smoothly as he hoped. The Federals encountered Confederates at Southwest Creek near Kinston on December 13. After brushing aside the grey-clad vanguard, the Federals’ approach to Kinston was impeded again by more Confederates on December 14. Although Foster’s column eventually forced a Confederate withdrawal, it encountered further opposition on December 16, at Whitehall, east of Goldsboro. Superior U.S. artillery drove the
Confederates from Whitehall, but the Southerners took up a new line of defense near Goldsboro.\textsuperscript{14}

Goldsboro was defended by General Thomas L. Clingman’s entrenched, but outnumbered North Carolina brigade, however Foster received intelligence that additional Confederates were heading south because of Burnside’s defeat at Fredericksburg on December 13. Because of the freed up reinforcements, Foster concluded that there was little chance of capturing Goldsboro, and that a retreat to New Bern was the better part of valor. Despite spirited resistance from Clingman’s and the newly arrived brigades of Nathan Evans and James Pettigrew, the Federals burned and shelled Goldsboro Bridge on the Neuse River. After the destruction of the bridge, and the dismantling of several miles of the Wilmington and Weldon Railroad, Foster ordered his force back to New Bern.\textsuperscript{15}

In his official report, General Foster characterized his Goldsboro raid as a “perfect success.” But what did the foray truly accomplish? The Wilmington and Weldon Railroad was indeed damaged, but it was up and running again within a few weeks. The Federals were victorious in each engagement of the campaign, but they faced much more opposition and suffered far more casualties than expected. If the raid’s intent was to divert Confederate forces from Burnside’s rout of march in Virginia, than it can be considered only a marginal success. The defenders of Goldsboro were reinforced from Virginia, but only after Burnside’s defeat at Fredericksburg. Confederate war planners could shift reinforcements to North Carolina because they were confident that the Army

\textsuperscript{14}Stackpole, “The Department of North Carolina Under General Foster,” 93.
\textsuperscript{15}\textit{Kinston, Whitehall, and Goldsboro (North Carolina) Expedition, December 1862} (New York: W.W. Howe, 1890), 37-38; Stackpole, “The Department of North Carolina Under General Foster,” 93.
of the Potomac was temporarily immobilized due to its debilitating losses. The transfer of a few Confederate regiments to North Carolina did not help Burnside’s demoralized army, but it did make operations more difficult for Federals in North Carolina.16

Historians and even participants have debated Foster’s intentions with regard to Goldsboro. At least one of Foster’s field officers, the 24th Massachusetts’ J. Lewis Stackpole did not think the expedition only a raid. Indeed, Stackpole claimed that Foster planned on capturing Goldsboro. He based his argument primarily on the size of the expeditionary force, which totaled 10,000 men, including Henry Wessells’ brigade on loan from the Army of the Potomac. The force that Foster set out for Goldsboro with was too large to effectively raid, because it was too slow and bulky. Furthermore Stackpole argued, the strategic importance of capturing Goldsboro far outweighed any risks involved in the operation because the Federals could be rapidly reinforced via rail from the coast. If Goldsboro could have been successfully captured, Foster could have moved directly down the Wilmington and Weldon for his attack on Wilmington.17

Although Stackpole believed the expedition was intended to capture and occupy Goldsboro, Foster evidently did not feel the town was worth fighting a decisive battle over. Besides, Foster returned to New Bern with several victories in hand, including the destruction of the Goldsboro bridge. At the same time, Foster might have attempted a full

16Foster to Halleck, December 23, 1862, ORA, Volume 18, 489; Barrett, The Civil War in North Carolina, 148.
17Stackpole, “The Department of North Carolina Under General Foster,” 90, 94. Admiral Lee preferred that Foster attack from New Bern instead, see Lee to Fox, December 2, 1862, ORN, Volume 8, 245-246.
scale assault on Goldsboro had he not met strong Confederate resistance. Either way he was able to claim success.\textsuperscript{18}

But as Admiral Lee had feared, the Goldsboro expedition delayed the U.S. Army’s plans for capturing Wilmington. First and foremost, Foster suffered nearly 600 casualties during his operation. Though the numbers paled in comparison with the losses suffered by Burnside the previous week at Fredericksburg, the casualty rate was considered high for operations in North Carolina. Because of his losses, and Confederate forces “largely increased in North Carolina from Fredericksburg,” Foster did not think his command strong enough to move on Wilmington. He would have to wait for additional reinforcements.\textsuperscript{19}

The U.S. Navy also experienced difficulties with their plans for capturing Wilmington and the Cape Fear River defenses. Because of the strength of Fort Caswell, on Oak Island and Fort Holmes on Smith Island (Bald Head Island), and obstructions at the mouth of the river, the navy decided that their best chance at success would be to enter the Cape Fear by way of New Inlet, if it was deep enough. After getting their gunboats across the bar, the Federals could bombard Fort Caswell first, and later, Fort Fisher from inside and outside the harbor.\textsuperscript{20}

The drawback of this plan was the shallowness of New Inlet, which was less than eleven feet deep at high tide. Leading the naval assault on Wilmington would be the USS Monitor and the USS Passaic. Both ironclads had a draft of more than ten feet, making it

\textsuperscript{18}Foster to Halleck, December 10, 1862, and Foster to Halleck, December 20, 1862 both in ORA, Volume 18, 54, 476.
\textsuperscript{19}Return of casualties in the Union forces, and Halleck to Foster, December 14, 1862, ORA, Volume 18, 60,481.
\textsuperscript{20}Lee to Foster, December 28, 1862, ORN, Volume 8, 328-329.
virtually impossible for them to enter New Inlet. Thus out of necessity, the navy’s focus then shifted to Old Inlet, also known as the Western Bar. Though Old Inlet was much deeper, naval officers worried about obstructions and mines placed in the river by its Confederate defenders. Engineers informed Admiral Lee that the obstructions should be removed before an attempt to breach the river was made.  

Despite the obstacles, Lee was determined to try to get the ships across the Western Bar. The Navy Department offered the two ironclads for only a limited time, and they were the only ships capable of withstanding heavy artillery fire from Fort Caswell and Fort Holmes on opposite sides of the channel. S.P. Lee was under orders from Secretary of the Navy Gideon Welles to either attempt to enter the river, or send the two monitors south to Admiral Du Pont at Port Royal, South Carolina. Pressure was beginning to mount for an assault on Charleston, where the war began and political and popular interest centered. In effect, Lee had to use the ships quickly, or lose them.

Unfortunately for Lee, the army was not prepared for a rapid advance on Wilmington, forcing Lee to alter his own plans. These plans no longer included the Monitor, which sank off Cape Hatteras on New Years Eve 1862. Lee’s new plan was now more dependent on an overland assault by Foster on Wilmington. After capturing the town and destroying any gunboats there, Foster’s column could attack the Cape Fear forts from above, while the navy bombarded them from the ocean side. The navy would keep

---

21 Memoranda obtained from the statements of George F. Bowan, Wilmington Pilot, Drayton to Lee, December 27, 1862 and Bankhead to Lee, December 27, 1862, all in ORN, Volume 8, 326-328.  
22 Welles to Lee, December 26, 1862, ORN, Volume 8, 323.
Foster’s army resupplied during the advance by way of Masonboro or New Topsail inlets.  

The operation looked promising after Foster was finally reinforced in late December 1862. In addition to Wessells’ Brigade, 12,000 additional soldiers were transferred from Virginia to the Department of North Carolina, bringing Foster’s aggregate total to nearly 28,000 men. Even with his increased strength, Foster was hesitant to launch an overland assault on Wilmington. He fretted that the seven days it would take his army to march to Wilmington would enable Confederate “forces to be drawn from Charleston and Savannah.” Cautious by nature, Foster learned at Goldsboro how quickly reinforcements could be shifted by rail. He worried that his army might get trapped at the Cape Fear by superior Confederate forces.  

Foster suggested to Lee that he proceed with his plan to attack Fort Caswell despite the river obstructions. The army could still assist if the navy could transport it from New Bern to Oak Island. Lee’s confidence was shaken however, after the loss of the Monitor. Back and forth the two commanders went in the last weeks of December 1862 and the first weeks of January 1863 without reaching a consensus on how to move forward. Authorities in Washington by then had grown impatient with both Foster and Lee, and instead decided to table the assault on Wilmington. Many of Lee’s ships, and most of Foster’s men were sent to South Carolina for an attack on Charleston.

---

23 Browning, From Cape Charles to Cape Fear, 282-283; Lee to Foster, December 28, 1862, ORN, Volume 8, 328-329.
24 Halleck to Dix, December 24, 1862, ORA, Volume 18, 490; Foster to Lee, January 4, 1863, ORN, Volume 8, 399-400.
25 Foster to Lee, January 4, 1863, and Welles to Lee, January 13, 1863, both in ORN, Volume 8, 399-400, 420; Foster to Halleck, January 17, 1863, ORA, Volume 18, 520.
It was regrettable that Foster and Lee could not agree on a plan of attack. The strategic importance of Wilmington over Charleston was evident to almost everyone involved. Admiral Lee wrote “Wilmington is of much more importance in a military and naval point of view than Charleston,” yet the failure of Lee and Foster to take the initiative for an assault on the Confederate’s principal seaport may have prolonged the war. Admiral David Dixon Porter, who in 1865 would lead the naval component of the expedition that finally captured Wilmington, said:

Many reasons existed why the Army could not co-operate in an attack upon Wilmington, which thus remained upwards of a year longer than it should have done the great depot of supplies for the Confederate armies. Many fast steamers from the Clyde, and other parts of Great Britain, continued to elude the utmost efforts of the blockading squadron, and reached Wilmington with valuable cargoes of arms and munitions of war. There was no field for great achievement except the capture of Fort Fisher and the other defenses of Wilmington, which might have been taken earlier in the war, but the task was postponed until it required nearly half of the Navy to overcome the obstacles then presented. 26

This was not the first time that the military high command favored operations in South Carolina over those in North Carolina. The Burnside expedition had been delayed for several weeks during the late fall of 1861 and early winter of 1862 because of the lack of army transports. In fact, the transports had been diverted by the navy for Flag Officer Du Pont’s Port Royal expedition. Burnside then had to scramble to procure enough light draft boats from private individuals to enter the North Carolina sounds. One of the first recommendations of the Blockade Strategy Board was an expedition in South Carolina, and Du Pont, the President of the Board, was subsequently chosen to lead the attack. It

26Lee to Sands, December 21, 1865, ORN, Volume 8, 318-319; David Dixon Porter, The Naval History of the Civil War (New York: The Sherman Company, 1886), 463.
was determined at the highest levels of the Federal government that Du Pont would get his ships, while Burnside would have to wait.27

The following year, Du Pont was still clamoring for support of his operations in South Carolina. As soon as Admiral Lee began to doubt his ability to get ironclads into the Cape Fear River, pressure mounted to send them to Charleston instead. Though Du Pont and the Navy Department increasingly stressed the importance of capturing Charleston, any benefits from its fall would have been mostly political. Assistant Secretary of the Navy Gustavus V. Fox described the eventual capture of Charleston as the “fall of Satan’s Kingdom.” The capture of Charleston would have been an excellent psychological victory when the Union badly needed one in late 1862 or early 1863. Yet geography mitigated Charleston’s strategic importance. The capture of the city was in no way as advantageously vital as capturing Wilmington. Unlike North Carolina’s largest seaport, Charleston sat inside of a large but open harbor, relatively close to the Atlantic, making the port easier for the U.S. Navy to bottle up. Whereas the blockade of Charleston was moderately successful, it was extremely difficult for Lincoln’s navy to keep blockade runners out of Wilmington. Even more important was the fact that supplies from the Cape Fear River had a nearly 200 mile shorter trip to Richmond than those from the South Carolina Low Country.28

28 Fox to Du Pont, June 3, 1862, Confidential Correspondence of Gustavus Vasa Fox Assistant Secretary of the Navy 1861-1865 ed. Robert Means Thompson and Richard Wainwright (New York: De Vinne Press, 1918), 126 (hereafter sited as Correspondence of Gustavus Vasa Fox); Lee to Welles, February 26, 1863, ORN, Volume 8, 573-578.
The loss of Lee’s ironclads was not a fatal blow to a potential Wilmington attack. In the winter of 1862-1863 he continued to plot to take the city. The plan he pitched to Foster involved an intense bombardment from offshore, which monitors were not well suited for because of their slow rate of fire. If Foster had agreed to cooperate with this plan of attack, conventional wooden ships with multiple batteries would have been much more effective at shelling the Confederate river defenses than monitors mounted with only two heavy guns. Because of his reduction in force, Foster demurred on this plan as well.²⁹

Union hopes for the capture of Wilmington in 1862-63 ended when the War Department stripped General Foster of nearly half his troops for the Charleston campaign. Because Foster would not risk the overland assault on Wilmington from New Bern, and Lee did not think it was feasible to launch a joint amphibious attack on the lower Cape Fear, much of the forces accumulated in North Carolina were sent to operate against Charleston. General Foster was granted permission to accompany his soldiers to South Carolina which he claimed was necessary because “many of the troops are old men with me, and my experience with embarking and etc. is extensive,” but the real reason may have been that Foster was not content to settle back into mundane occupation duty in New Bern. If the troops that were sent south had participated in an immediate joint assault on the Charleston harbor forts, the soldiers might have been returned to North Carolina in time for the situation in the Tar Heel state to be salvaged. Instead, there was

²⁹Lee to Welles, February 26, 1863, ORN, Volume 8, 573-575.
less cooperation between the army and navy in South Carolina than there had been in North Carolina. 30

Whereas Admiral Lee was content with the army taking the initiative in North Carolina, the U.S. Navy was determined to capture Charleston alone. Gustavus Fox felt that the navy’s monitors were impregnable to artillery fire, and insisted that Admiral Du Pont advance on Charleston before the army could get into position to help. According to Fox, his “duties [were] two fold: first to beat our southern friends, second to beat the army.” Instead of leaving Foster’s army in North Carolina where, given time, something might have been accomplished, the force was shifted to an area of inter-service distrust and political turmoil. 31

To make matters worse, Foster made a bad impression on Admiral Du Pont and General David Hunter, Union army commander in South Carolina. Du Pont took exception to Foster’s actions when the general arrived at Charleston. Foster made a forced reconnaissance of Morris Island that accomplished little except to alert the Confederates of the increased Union presence in the area. Not long after this initial snafu, Foster and Hunter soon got into a squabble about command. Foster assumed that his troops were to be kept separate from Hunter’s main force, so that they could return to North Carolina when the Wilmington campaign was renewed. As the senior ranking officer, Hunter intended only to keep Foster in titular command of his troops in South Carolina. When Foster temporarily returned to New Bern to check on affairs there however, Hunter integrated Foster’s Eighteenth Army Corps into his own Tenth Corps.

31 Fox to Du Pont, June 3, 1862, Correspondence of Gustavus Vasa Fox, 126.
Both Foster and Brigadier General Henry Naglee, who commanded the Eighteenth Corps troops in Foster’s absence, protested to General Halleck and Secretary of War Henry Stanton. Hunter retaliated by relieving Naglee of command and banishing him from the lines.\(^{32}\)

Halleck finally interceded to resolve the dispute. He censured both Foster and Hunter, while conceding that each commander was technically correct. Hunter was instructed to rescind the order that absorbed Foster’s corps into his command, but his authority as commander of the Department of the South and all troops therein the department was sustained. At the same time, Secretary of War Stanton upheld Hunter’s discretion to remove Naglee from command if he saw fit. Halleck then went on to say that “if the plans of the government should fail to be carried out, for want of this harmony, those who have engendered and fostered animosities and jealousies will incur a very serious responsibility.”\(^{33}\)

Despite Halleck’s stern warning, the damage had already been done. The deployment of soldiers from North Carolina to the Department of the South was controversial due to the lack of cooperation between Union senior officers at Charleston. Confederate authorities soon learned about the row and altered their plans accordingly. Temporarily in command in southeastern Virginia and northeastern North Carolina, Lieutenant General James Longstreet, commander of the Army of Northern Virginia’s

\(^{32}\)Dupont to Fox, March 2, 1863, *ORN*, Volume 13, 720; Naglee to Hunter, February 11, 1863, General Order No. 13, February 11, 1863, Hunter to Naglee, February 12, 1863, Foster to Naglee, February 9, 1863, Special Order No. 127, March 5, 1863 and Foster to Thomas, March 2, 1863, all in *Correspondence, Orders, Etc. Between Major General David Hunter, Major General J.G. Foster and Brigadier General M. Naglee, and Others February and March, 1863* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott and Company, 1863), 3-11, 13, 33-36 (hereafter sited as *Correspondence, Orders, Etc.*).

\(^{33}\)Halleck to Hunter, February 15, 1863, and Halleck to Hunter February 16, 1863 both in *Correspondence, Orders, Etc.*, 15-17.
First Corps, observed that “when generals quarrel their troops will not fight; that is, they will not fight a severe battle.” Not surprisingly then, Charleston was not captured until 1865.\textsuperscript{34}

Disappointed that his soldiers were not being used properly by General Hunter, Foster asked “for the return of the brave men who are subject to mortification and discomfort and a situation apparently of no benefit to the public service.” It was imperative to get his soldiers back in large part to mitigate the rapidly deteriorating situation in eastern North Carolina. Longstreet placed Major General D.H. Hill in command in North Carolina, and the aggressive Hill was preparing offensive operations in the state. The Confederates demonstrated against New Bern in March 1863, and put Washington under siege that April. Although the primary purpose of these attacks was the collection of supplies, the Federals thought that a large Confederate force had been organized to dislodge them from their foothold in eastern North Carolina.\textsuperscript{35}

Foster was eventually able to break the siege of Washington, but his soldiers in South Carolina were never returned to the Tar Heel state. This turn of events forced Foster to remain on the defensive with roughly 12,000 soldiers against what he incorrectly assumed was a numerically superior enemy force. The Federal’s defensive strategy prompted D.H. Hill to comment facetiously that North Carolina had become Foster’s “rat-hole.”\textsuperscript{36}

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{\textsuperscript{34}Longstreet to Beauregard, March 2, 1863, \textit{ORA}, Volume 18, 905.}
\footnote{\textsuperscript{36}Foster to Halleck, April 20, 1863, in Henry M. Naglee, \textit{Report of the Conduct of the Advance of the Column for the Relief of Little Washington April 18th-19th, 1863} (Philadelphia: Collins Printer, 1863), - 72 -}
Though the Federals would continue to raid from their rat-hole, it was the
Confederates who were on the offensive in eastern North Carolina in 1863 and 1864. The
last best hope for a decisive Federal offensive in North Carolina was lost when General
Foster and Admiral Lee refused to move against Wilmington in December 1862 or
January 1863, when they had the soldiers and the ships to do so.

8; Stackpole, “The Department of North Carolina Under General Foster,” 109; Hill to Longstreet, March 16, 1863, ORA Volume 18, 188-189.
CHAPTER FOUR

“The Arrival of Governor Stanley [sic] will, I hope, do a great deal of good:”

Political Considerations and the Union Occupation of Eastern North Carolina

On June 28, 1862, just as General Ambrose Burnside prepared to attack Goldsboro, North Carolina, he was ordered by President Lincoln to transfer his 7,000 man army to Virginia. According to Colonel Thomas F. Edmands, this “stopped [the expedition] in the prime of its life. It was not allowed to seize Goldsboro; to capture Wilmington; to stop the flourishing foreign trade of the Cape Fear River; to save the treasure and blood that took Fort Fisher; to cut off the two railroads over which from Wilmington the Confederacy drew the bulk of its foreign supplies; to threaten Weldon; to render perhaps unnecessary the siege of Petersburg; or to starve perhaps the Confederate Government out of Richmond.” Edmands further argued that only “the stoppage of supplies, and the old story of interference from Washington checked [the] progress” of Burnside’s company. Even though his force in Virginia would be, according to Edmands, but “a drop in the bucket,” Burnside had no choice but to follow his orders.¹

In corresponding with General McClellan and Secretary of War Stanton, Burnside stated that he could “place 7,000 infantry in Norfolk ready for transportation to the White House in five days, but with no wagons, camp equipage, artillery, or cavalry; or I can place at a point on the Chowan River, with a view of cooperating in an attack on Petersburg, 7,000 infantry, 12 pieces of artillery, 3 companies of cavalry, wagons enough for the ammunition and five days’ subsistence, at five days’ notice. (Of course I can

¹Edmands, “Operations in North Carolina, 1861-1862,” 82-83; Burnside to McClellan, July 3, 1862, and Lincoln to Burnside June 28, 1862 both in ORA, Volume 9, 404, 406.
move on Weldon with the same force), or I can move on Goldsboro at 60 hours’ notice with 10,000 infantry, 20 pieces of artillery, and 5 companies of cavalry.” Despite having nearly 16,000 able bodied soldiers in his army, Burnside was confident that he could advance with only 7,000.²

Why did the general not plan to use the other 8,500 soldiers in his command to give his proposed assault more striking power? Unfortunately, the remaining troops in the Department of North Carolina were deemed necessary for occupation duty. Burnside was under explicit instructions from McClellan to “leave at least 5,000 [troops] in New Berne [sic], 1,000 as railway guard, 1,000 at Beaufort and Fort Macon, 500 at Hatteras Inlet, and 1,000 at Roanoke [Island].” He did not even dispatch soldiers to occupy other smaller towns in eastern North Carolina such as Washington on the Pamlico River and Elizabeth City on the Pasquatank River.³

More than 8,000 soldiers were not needed to keep eastern North Carolina in Union hands. Gray-clad troops had no hope of reoccupying New Bern or Fort Macon as long as the U.S. Navy controlled Pamlico Sound. Furthermore, it would have been impossible for the Confederates to launch attacks on Roanoke and Hatteras islands as they no longer possessed any semblance of a navy in state waters. The majority of Burnside’s force needlessly served as provost guards, administrators, and peace keepers, filling the void left by fleeing Confederates and the breakdown of state authority.⁴

---
²Burnside to Stanton, June 24, 1862, and Abstract from Return of the Department of North Carolina, both in ORA, Volume 9, 403-404, 406.
³Williams to Burnside, May 21, 1862, ORA, Volume 9, 393.
⁴Burnside to Stanton, July 5, 1862, ORA, Volume 9, 408-409.
Capturing portions of eastern North Carolina was easy enough for the Burnside expedition. Within ten months of North Carolina’s secession from the Union, two-thirds of the coastal plain and New Bern, its second largest city, were occupied by Federal forces. Unfortunately for General Burnside and Foster, capturing this territory compelled the U.S. Army became the de facto governing body in the region. Army commanders were now responsible for both military administration and civil affairs of large areas and without clear instruction from Washington.

However, it is clear that Colonel Edmand had big plans for the Burnside expedition, and so did the general commanding it. Both officers were disappointed that the force was not allowed to advance into the interior of North Carolina while McClellan had most of the Confederate forces in the region occupied at the gates of Richmond. Were these expectations for the Burnside expedition realistic? Yes, they were. Vast areas of Confederate territory in North Carolina were either undefended or undermanned, but Union leadership in eastern North Carolina had additional responsibilities after the occupation than just offensive operations.⁵

Had Burnside invaded North Carolina with a clear cut political strategy to go along with General McClellan’s military planning, the expedition may have been more successful. The mass influx of escaped black slaves and poor refugee whites into the lines caught the Federals off-guard. Perhaps Burnside’s assault was more successful than Union strategists imagined because no plan of government was drawn up for the territories until well after they were captured.

The lack of political planning for what was destined to be a long Union occupation of eastern North Carolina was undoubtedly influenced by an exaggerated estimate of the number of Unionists in coastal North Carolina. Such wishful thinking did not allow General Burnside, General McClellan, or the Secretary of War to contemplate what would happen after Confederate opposition in eastern North Carolina collapsed. It was assumed that the peaceful people of eastern North Carolina would continue life as normal after being liberated by the U.S. Army. As would be the case 141 years later with the occupation of Bagdad, the truly difficult work began once the major fighting had ended.  

Problems administrating newly conquered territories began almost immediately for Burnside’s army. Soon after Roanoke Island fell to the Federals in February 1862, refugees descended on the small Union foothold enclave on Albemarle Sound. Many of them were escaped slaves who had served the Confederate army in the construction of Roanoke’s defenses. Some few slaves were the former body servants of Confederate officers. Ironically, some servants chose to remain with their masters who had been taken prisoners of war. Many others swarmed onto the island from the mainland. One group of twenty escaped slaves “from up the Chowan River, arrived on dingy,” landing in front of Burnside’s headquarters shortly after the island’s capture. Despite Roanoke’s remote

---

6 J. G. de Rouhla Hamilton, Reconstruction in North Carolina (Raleigh: Edwards and Broughton, 1906), 84.
location, more than a thousand African Americans were on the island within three months of its seizure by the U.S. Army.7

Burnside felt “great anxiety” about the sheer number of refugees, but he realized that it would be “utterly impossible,” even if he were “so disposed,” to try to keep them outside his lines. Some of them, in fact, had assisted military efforts. One escaped slave, Thomas R. Robinson, described as “intelligent, although illiterate,” had piloted Goldsborough’s flotilla to Roanoke Island. Burnside had little choice but to place the refugees under the army’s care. He appointed Sergeant Walter Thompson of the 9th New York Infantry to oversee their care. Thompson proved to be an able administrator, as did most of the officers in Burnside’s command.8

Thompson was much more successful than anyone could have imagined. Because of Thompson’s great concern for the African Americans in his charge, his comrades derisively called him the “Niggardier General” of Roanoke. Though his compassion and devotion to duty did not impress many of the soldiers in his regiment, the African Americans appreciated and respected him. It did not matter to the refugees that Thompson was not a senior officer. To them, Sergeant Thompson was the “biggest man” on Roanoke Island.9

---

Thompson was able to bring some semblance of order to the refugee problem on Roanoke Island, but Burnside was still unsure about what to do with the escapees. One temporary solution was to employ them as laborers, as had the Confederates. All able bodied refugees were immediately put to work strengthening the forts and batteries on the island. Unlike the compulsory work they performed for the Confederacy, each worker was now paid $8.00 per month.  

At first, the labor system was mutually beneficial to both the Federals and the island’s recent émigrés. Work was soon completed on a series of earthen defenses that enabled Roanoke’s small Union garrison to properly defend the position. In turn, the laborers used their money to take care of their desperately needy families. Things worked well until the number of workers outpaced the necessary military construction projects on the island. It soon became apparent that other arrangements would have to be made, so that the bulk of Burnside’s army could advance onto the mainland.

Dealing with refugees was not Burnside’s only issue on Roanoke Island. Like other military commanders early in the war, Burnside found that his army, even in victory, still suffered from disorganization. Officers found it difficult to stop soldiers from looting and pillaging homes on the island. Burnside described the practices as “irregularities.” Learning of Sir Walter Raleigh’s “Lost Colony” of 1587 soldiers spent time relic hunting for historic or valuable artifacts. One group of amateur archaeologists had fun at the expense of one of Roanoke’s inhabitants who had never heard of the

---

10Colyer, _Brief Report_, 6.  
“Raleigh expedition, but reckoned that [the] Burnside expedition was enough” for the beleaguered island.\textsuperscript{12}

Such instances frustrated General Burnside because the success of his expedition relied heavily on appealing to Unionist sentiment. Prevailing belief among the Federals was that eastern North Carolinians were by and large anti-secession, and viewed blue clad soldiers and sailors as liberators. Although the Federals would eventually be underwhelmed by the state’s Unionist sympathies, in February 1862 they were optimistic that their presence would allow the state’s citizens to express their true loyalty to the United States. General Burnside worried that unsavory actions among his troops would not endear them to the native population.\textsuperscript{13}

Ill-will created provoked by his soldiers’ actions led Burnside and his navy counterpart Commander S.C. Rowan, to issue a proclamation stating the Confederates were their enemies, not Union military personnel. Burnside assured North Carolinians that his army was not in the state to “damage your property [or] liberate your slaves.” As a display of good faith, Burnside promised that those whose Roanoke Island property had been stolen or damaged would be reimbursed. Burnside apparently considered Roanoke Islanders to be “ignorant and inoffensive” people who “aided this rebellion” under duress.\textsuperscript{14}

\textsuperscript{13}Burnside to McClellan, February 20, 1862, and Burnside to McClellan, May 19, 1862, both in \textit{ORA}, Volume 9, 364-365, 389-391; Sauers, \textit{A Succession of Honorable Victories}, 425, 430, 440.
\textsuperscript{14}Proclamation Issued to the People of North Carolina, February 16, 1862, and Burnside to McClellan, February 20, 1862, both in \textit{ORA}, Volume 9, 363-367.
General Burnside was not an abolitionist, radical, or revolutionary. Like his mentor George McClellan and many other prominent Northerners in the first months of the war, he believed that the war would end when the situation returned to ‘status quo antebellum.” To this end, he was willing to offer amnesty to anyone, including slave owners who would take the oath of allegiance. Though the general’s actions with regard to refugees and escaped slaves would seem to contradict his political views, he could not turn away them away for humanitarian reasons. He hoped his actions would not affect Unionist attitudes in the state, but Burnside would eventually have to admit that such sentiment was overstated anyway.\textsuperscript{15}

When he departed Roanoke Island to campaign with his army on the North Carolina mainland, Burnside was forced to leave behind an entire brigade for garrison duty; three regiments: the 9\textsuperscript{th} New York, the 89\textsuperscript{th} New York, and the 6\textsuperscript{th} New Hampshire, all under the command of Colonel Rush Hawkins. Burnside was fortunate that this brigade was not needed in his attack on New Bern. Besides further eroding Unionist sympathies in North Carolina by raiding and burning Winton, this brigade remained stagnant on Roanoke Island during the most productive stages of the Burnside expedition.\textsuperscript{16}

The political situation became even more problematic for General Burnside during the occupation of New Bern and other communities in the state’s coastal region. The flow of refugees to Roanoke Island paled in comparison to the number that entered

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{15}Brown, Edward Stanly, 206; Marvel, Burnside, 90-91; Symonds, ed., Union Combined Operations in the Civil War, 1; Burnside to Stanton, July 5, 1862, ORA, Volume 9, 408-409; Click, Time Full of Trial, 38.  
Union lines on the mainland. White slave owners fleeing the area in front of the advancing blue tide empowered slaves to flee in the opposite direction. Refugees willingly made the arduous trek across Albemarle Sound to get to Roanoke Island. To reach New Bern, on the other hand, escapees typically only had to traverse creeks and rivers. Slaves along Pamlico Sound had heard rumors about Burnside and the Roanoke refuges, which encouraged them to flee once Burnside’s army appeared in their area.\(^{17}\)

Mistakes made after the capture of Roanoke were repeated when New Bern was occupied. There was a period of anarchy in and around New Bern after the battle of March 14, 1862. The Federals did not actually move into the town and restore order until March 15. Part of the town was still burning before Foster’s Brigade extinguished the flames. In his initial report, Burnside blamed the conflagration on the Confederates, but five days later he claimed that “nine-tenths of the depredations on the 14\(^{th}\) were committed by the negroes before our troops reached the city.” Either way, the Federals should have anticipated chaos, confusion, and civil unrest in the area. U.S. forces may not have been responsible for the mayhem in New Bern, but the damage there was going to be blamed on them. According to some accounts, the first Federal soldiers and sailors in New Bern were just as guilty of pillaging the city as slaves and refugees. This did little to encourage Unionist sentiments in the state, but in fact, steeled the resolve of the Confederates.\(^{18}\)


Burnside wrongly blamed some African Americans for crimes actually committed by his soldiers in New Bern, but refugees did become an alarming problem for the general. The population of the town, including slaves, was approximately 5,000 in 1860. By the spring of 1862, an estimated 8,000 refugees inhabited the town. Burnside desperately needed instructions from Washington on how to deal with the issue. The Lincoln administration, however had not yet crafted an official policy on refugees. In early 1862 there was still hope that the war could remain limited, and be brought to a speedy conclusion without much social upheaval. Emancipation was not yet a Union war aim. Union commanders in occupied areas of the South therefore created their own policies with regards to “contrabands.”

General Burnside complained that “the status of the negro had not been well defined at the time [March, 1862], by the Government, and I was instructed to say as little as possible [about them].” Clearly frustrated, Burnside was compelled to devise his own plan to deal with the runaways and refugees, knowing that it might be overruled by his superiors. Faced with a similar conundrum, Generals J.C. Fremont in Missouri, and David Hunter in South Carolina both decided to simply free the slaves in their areas of command. President Lincoln subsequently censured both generals for their unauthorized actions, revoked their proclamations, and overrode their emancipation decrees. Burnside did not want to repeat Fremont’s and Hunter’s mistake, yet he could not bring himself to return escaped slaves to their owners.


Union field commanders were not officially authorized to declare slaves free, yet precedents allowing slaves to be confiscated as “contraband of war” were being established. In 1861, General Benjamin Butler, commanding Union forces in tidewater Virginia, seized slaves working for the Confederates. Butler referred to them as contraband, and not freedmen, his decree went unchallenged. Burnside employed a similar policy during the occupation of Roanoke Island with the stipulation that the contraband be paid for their services to the Union. He maintained this policy on the North Carolina mainland.\(^{21}\)

In his detailed report of May 19, 1862 to the Secretary of War, Burnside outlined four key principles to guide the handling of escaped slaves:

1) To allow all slaves who come to my lines to enter.
2) To organize them and enroll them, taking their names, the names of their masters, and their place of residence.
3) To give them employment as far as possible, and to exercise to old and young a judicious charity.
4) To deliver none to their owners under any circumstances, and allow none of them to leave this department until I receive your definite instructions.

The War Department accepted these provisions and authorized Burnside to enforce them. At the same time, military operations were ongoing. One of Burnside’s three remaining brigades deployed for siege operations against Fort Macon while half of the remaining force under General Foster maintained order among the soldiers and refugees in New Bern.\(^{22}\)

---


Not all of the refugees and the destitute in New Bern were African Americans. Burnside was shocked by the number of poor whites in the town, including many residents who lost everything when New Bern fell. He instructed his commissioning officers to provide food and drink ordered for these poor whites as well as blacks. Burnside resented that they willingly accepted supplies from his army, but they would not disavow their Confederate allegiances. He later stated that it “seemed strange to me that these people would not perceive that this state of things has been brought about by their own injudicious and disloyal conduct.”23

Burnside appointed Foster as military governor, yet he still was personally responsible for the civil administration of Union occupied territories in coastal North Carolina. Burnside found it hard to plan his next offensive when refugees occupied so much of his time. So that he could concentrate on military affairs, Burnside appointed, on March 30, 1862, Brooklyn abolitionist Vincent Colyer as “Superintendent of the Poor.” At least at first, Colyer proved to be an ideal choice for the important post.24

Colyer had arrived in North Carolina as an employee of the YMCA. He did volunteer work in hospitals on Roanoke and in New Bern. After his appointment as Superintendent of the Poor, Colyer quickly concluded his work in the hospitals to pursue his true calling, aiding escaped slaves. One of his first tasks was to take a census, so that he would know how many laborers were on hand and mouths he had to feed. The report

23Burnside to Stanton, March 21, 1862, ORA, Volume 9, 199-201.
24Colyer, Brief Report, 6; Marvel, Burnside, 91; Click, Time Full of Trial, 38.
showed 7,500 refugees in New Bern, and 10,000 refugees in Union controlled areas of North Carolina.\textsuperscript{25}

Keeping the freedmen busy working was only part of Colyer’s efforts to keep order among the refugees. A devout Christian, Colyer also wanted to see to their spiritual wellbeing. He opened “black churches” in the city, where services were offered each Sunday morning, followed by “class meetings” (Sunday school), in the afternoon. Colyer also opened schools for the poor in his care, many and perhaps most of who were illiterate and ignorant. Colyer’s efforts initially brought almost better harmony between Union soldiers, civilians, and the escaped slaves in the occupied zone.\textsuperscript{26}

To ease Burnside’s political responsibilities Lincoln soon appointed a Union military governor for North Carolina. The president realized that his general officers could not effectively take the war to the enemy while simultaneously serving as civil administrators. His choice for the Old North State was New Bern native and former North Carolina Whig Congressman Edward Stanly. Although Burnside did not know Stanly personally, he appreciated the fact that he would no longer be solely responsible for both military and civil affairs in Union controlled areas of North Carolina. Burnside wrote in May 1862 that “The Arrival of Governor Stanley [sic] will, I hope, do a great deal of good.”\textsuperscript{27}

Stanly was a good choice to lead the government as it attempted to restore North Carolina to the Union. Stanly’s father had been a prominent citizen in New Bern, and

\textsuperscript{25}Colyer, \textit{Brief Report}, 5-6; Mobley, \textit{James City}, 5-7.

\textsuperscript{26}Colyer, \textit{Brief Report}, 36-39, 43.

\textsuperscript{27}Futrell, “Federal Military Government in the South,” 182; Burnside to Stanton, May 19, 1862, \textit{ORA}, Volume 9, 389-391.
Stanly a beloved son of the town. He eventually joined the Republican Party, even though he owned slaves for much of his life. His racist slaveholding views notwithstanding, Stanly was a devout Unionist who considered it a “mission of love” to bring North Carolina back into the Union. Most importantly, because of his absence during the 1861 secession crisis in the state, he remained relatively popular amongst North Carolinians despite being a Republican.28

Like Burnside before him, Stanly’s administration in North Carolina was severely hampered by the lack of guidance from Washington. The Lincoln administration hoped that the mere presence of Stanly in North Carolina would embolden Unionists, foster loyalty to the Union among tepid Confederates, and bring order from the chaos in occupied North Carolina. Authorities in Washington assumed that Stanly would be the best judge of affairs in his home state, with specific instructions deemed unnecessary. To be sure, Stanly had confidence in his own abilities, but realized that he had a monumental task in front of him. He informed Edwin Stanton that he had “great difficulties to overcome, greater than you suppose.”29

Governor Stanly’s apprehension was understandable. His general orders called for him to reestablish “the authority of the Federal Government in the state of North Carolina,” while providing “the means of maintaining peace and security to the loyal inhabitants of the state until they shall be able to establish a civil government.” Although Stanly was given no specific instructions on how to accomplish these goals, he was successful in rallying some Unionists, and causing anxiety among Confederate authorities

---

28Brown, Edward Stanly, 203, 205.
29Stanton to Stanly, May 20, 1862, and Stanly to Stanton, June 12, 1862, both in ORA, Volume 9, 397, 399-401; Barrett, The Civil War in North Carolina, 127.
in the state. The establishment of a close working relationship between Stanly and Burnside, whose troops were responsible for enforcing Stanly’s orders, was key to this success.30

Unfortunately, the refugee problems eventually destroyed the Stanly administration in North Carolina. Since his instructions were to simply bring North Carolina back into the Union, Stanly decided to enforce North Carolina law. This occasionally involved returning escapees to their former masters who were avowed Unionists. By enforcing state laws with regards to slaves, Stanly soon ran afoul of abolitionists in Washington, New England, and more importantly, New Bern. The foremost of these abolitionists in North Carolina was Vincent Colyer.31

Within two days of arriving in New Bern, Stanly recommended to Colyer that his schools for refugees should be temporarily closed. Stanly had no personal animosity toward African Americans, but he determined that Colyer’s schools were illegal by North Carolina law. Educating African Americans was counterproductive to Stanly’s mission to reunite North Carolina with the United States, as it might be interpreted by whites as paving the way for emancipation of slaves. For his administration to work, Stanly could not afford to be seen as an outsider determined to dramatically change North Carolinians’ way of life.32

An indignant Colyer closed all of his schools, both black and white, and returned north to report Stanly’s actions to his abolitionist friends and supporters. Foremost among

30Brown, Edward Stanly, 203; Stanton to Stanly, May 20, 1862, and Burnside to Stanton, May 28, 1862, both in ORA, Volume 9, 393-394, 397; Marvel, Burnside, 90-91.
31Stanly, A Military Governor Among Abolitionists, 12;
32Stanly to Stanton, June 12, ORA, Volume 9, 399-402; Sauers, A Succession of Honorable Victories, 419.
them was Senator Charles Sumner of Massachusetts, who had previously clashed with Stanly in Congress during the 1850s. Sumner and abolitionist newspaper editors vehemently attacked Stanly. Sumner demanded a meeting between Colyer and Lincoln to discuss Stanly, and also pushed for an investigation in Congress.33

Stanly found himself in a no-win situation. If he failed to enforce the North Carolina law, he risked alienating his fellow North Carolinians. If, on the other hand, he tried to enforce North Carolina’s slave code, he faced vilification by abolitionists. Stanly tried to find middle ground, which predictably satisfied no one. The governor angered both his fellow Tar Heels, as well as anti-slavery New England soldiers stationed in the state. Concerned for his personal safety, Stanly requested that the army provide him with a body guard.34

Even in this untenable situation, Stanly persevered as governor for several months. The last straw for him, however, came when President Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation in September of 1862. Some historians claim that Stanly resigned in protest, but that may not be entirely true. Stanly’s qualifications to be military governor of North Carolina were based in large part on his good reputation in the state. Washington hoped that Stanly’s pro-Union views would encourage like-minded Tar Heels to rally. When emancipation became part of the Union’s national strategy for winning the war, Stanly realized that Unionist support in the state simply did not exist. In a parting shot to his Northern detractors, Stanly informed them that “had the war in North

Carolina been conducted by soldiers who were Christian and gentlemen, that state would long ago have rebelled against the rebellion. Instead they literally robbed the cradle and the grave. Against the brutal and beastly barbarities, who has ever heard the voices of Sumner and Colyer raised?” \(^{35}\)

Since Washington decided to replace Governor Stanly, General Foster once again assumed duties as military governor of North Carolina. Foster’s second stint as political administrator was made all the more difficult because of his military duties as commander of the department in the wake of Burnside’s transfer to Virginia. Indeed, Foster assumed control of the civil administration in January 1863, just as he and Admiral S.P. Lee planned a combined operation on Wilmington. For a brief time, Foster technically served as military governor of North Carolina while stationed with the army in South Carolina.

Foster tried to make use of the army to solve some administrative problems in eastern North Carolina. He authorized the enlistment of black soldiers into the army, and made active use of the 1\(^{st}\) North Carolina Union Volunteers, a white regiment, to try to increase patriotism along the coast. He also authorized the creation of a freedmen’s colony on Roanoke Island, Jamesville, and in areas around New Bern. Unionism was still valued in North Carolina, but the Stanly experiment taught the Federals that they could not let the enticement of Unionists shape their occupation policies. \(^{36}\)


\(^{36}\) Harris ed., *In the Country of the Enemy*, 80-81, 161; Mobley, *James City*, 16.
Much of Foster’s success as a civil administrator was due in large part to improved communications with Washington. Unlike Foster, General Burnside and Governor Stanly were forced to craft their own policies. They were in charge during a period when the war was about restoring the “Union as it was,” but the Emancipation Proclamation broadened Union war aims. This allowed Foster and other Federal commanders more options in regards to refugees.37

“West Pointers, brave on the battle-field, even ferocious against armed rebels, never tarnished their fame by stealing, trophy-finding, or robbery of unoffending citizens. But it was impossible for them to watch the enemy and take care of [abolitionists].” Although writing specifically about the unscrupulous actions of a few soldiers, Edward Stanly could have easily been referring to inability of the military to keep order in their newly occupied territories. Even though he proved to be a capable administrator, General Foster was a soldier, not a governor. His successes at bringing stability to the political situation in eastern North Carolina by 1863 came at a time when the Federals had all but given up hope of continuing offensive operations in the state. If these successes could have been attained in 1862 under Burnside or Stanly, it may have helped the Union army move into the interior the state. Instead, too many valuable Federal troops that might otherwise have been used for offensive operations were required to keep order in eastern North Carolina. The failure of the Federal government to have an effective early-war policy regarding the governing of newly acquired territories limited the effectiveness of offensives such as the Burnside expedition. In no place was this failure felt more deeply

than North Carolina where opportunities for success were squandered because Union strategists assumed the population was almost exclusively Unionist, and that the effect of escaped slaves would be minimal. They were wrong on both accounts, much to the detriment of an offensive that had the potential to affect the outcome of the war.38

CHAPTER FIVE

“The Burnside Expedition Has Passed Into History:”

Conclusion

On two separate occasions, in the summer of 1862 and the winter of 1862-1863, Union armies prepared to attack strategically important towns in North Carolina were instead transferred to other theaters of war. Just as General Ambrose Burnside was set to advance in July of 1862 on Goldsboro, a vital hub on the Wilmington and Weldon Railroad, he and most of his army were transferred to Virginia to aid General George B. McClellan’s beleaguered army on the Virginia Peninsula. Likewise, Burnside’s successor in North Carolina, General John G. Foster, was ordered in January 1863 to transfer most of his occupation forces to South Carolina, just as he was in the final stages of an impending assault on Wilmington, the Confederacy’s most important blockade running seaport.¹

Unfortunately, both Burnside’s and Foster’s forces were mismanaged after being transferred. Instead of landing on the Peninsula to assist McClellan, Burnside’s transports were rerouted to Aquia Creek and later Falmouth, across the Rappahannock River from Fredericksburg, Virginia. His force was deployed to Falmouth so it could either cooperate with McClellan or General John Pope’s Army of Virginia near Washington. Being deployed halfway between both armies, the “Coast Division” was not able to effectively cooperate with either McClellan or Pope. Burnside and his men remained at Falmouth while Pope was soundly defeated by Robert E. Lee’s Army of Northern Virginia near

Manassas on August 30, 1862. Burnside’s command was not fully engaged until the Battle of Antietam three weeks later on September 17. Instead of being allowed to go after Goldsboro as he had planned in early July, Burnside and his men were transferred to Virginia, where they remained idle for two-and- a half months.²

The reassignment of most of Foster’s army to Charleston in January 1863 fared little better. Foster had been reinforced in North Carolina, and together with Admiral S. Phillips Lee, was formulating plans for attacking Wilmington. Instead, most of Foster’s army was dispatched to South Carolina because the public clamored for an attack on Charleston. After moving south, Foster clashed with both Department of the South commander General David Hunter and commander of the South Atlantic Blockading Squadron Admiral S.F. Du Pont. Both Hunter and Du Pont thought that Foster overstepped his authority in their territory of command. The result was that the three officers spent more time bickering than trying to capture Charleston, which did not fall until 1865. Foster eventually returned to North Carolina, but was forced to leave his troops in South Carolina, essentially ending any chance for offensive operations in the Tar Heel state.³

Until the winter of 1864-1865, it was the Confederates who were the aggressors in eastern North Carolina. A gray-clad army commanded by Major General D.H. Hill put “Little Washington” in Beaufort County under siege in spring 1863. A force led by Major

---

³Stackpole, “The Department of North Carolina Under General Foster,” 98-99; Dupont to Fox, March 2, 1863, ORN, Volume 13, 720; Naglee to Hunter, February 11, 1863, General Order No. 13, February 11, 1863, Hunter to Naglee, February 12, 1863, Foster to Naglee, February 9, 1863, Special Order No. 127, March 5, 1863 and Foster to Thomas, March 2, 1863, all in Correspondence, Orders, Etc., 3-11, 13, 33-36.
General George E. Picket the following January launched an complex but unsuccessful attempt to recapture New Bern. This was followed by Major General Robert F. Hoke’s capture of Plymouth on April 20, 1864, and the forced abandonment of Little Washington by Union forces ten days later. Only an order from Richmond, that transferred Hoke and a sizable portion of his army back to Virginia, prevented another Confederate assault on New Bern. For a brief period, even the C.S. Navy was on the offensive in North Carolina. Much more formidable than the “mosquito fleet” that had been destroyed near Elizabeth City in 1862, the Confederate ironclads Albemarle and Raleigh attacked Union gunboats on the Roanoke River and at the mouth of the Cape Fear River respectively. A sister ship to the Albemarle, the CSS Neuse, was to participate in an attack on New Bern but ran aground near Kinston on April 22, 1864.4

The Confederate offensives failed to drive the invaders from North Carolina, but their assaults kept the U.S. Army and Navy on the defensive for much of the remainder of the war. Indeed, the Federals did not close Wilmington to blockade running until they captured Fort Fisher on January 15, 1865, and the town itself six weeks later on February 22. Goldsboro held out a little longer, but was ultimately abandoned by the Confederates on March 21, as William T. Sherman’s massive army was bearing down on the town. These successes were made possible because of an influx of additional Federal troops in the state. Union war planners finally considered North Carolina important again.5

---

Such successes should have been possible earlier in the war. Less than three months after North Carolina seceded from the Union, Hatteras Island on the Outer Banks was captured in a combined operation by the U.S. Army and Navy, on August 29, 1861. This victory was followed by the Burnside expedition, which captured Roanoke Island the following February, New Bern and Beaufort in March, and Fort Macon in April 1862. These strategic targets had been recommended by the “Blockade Strategy Board,” an ad hoc committee in Washington comprised of officers from the U.S. Navy, the U.S. Army, and the Coast Geodetic Survey. Major General George B. McClellan also advocated offensive operations in North Carolina, considering incursions into the Tar Heel state to capture Beaufort, and the Wilmington and Weldon Railroad at Goldsboro, part of his “grand design” for bringing the war to an early close.6

After their initial successes, Union operations ground to a halt in North Carolina by April 1862. Although the Confederates did little to prevent additional Federal incursions into the state, Burnside decided that it was prudent to wait for reinforcements after he captured Fort Macon on April 26. Shortly after his troop strength was increased, Burnside was recalled to Virginia because of McClellan’s failed Peninsula Campaign. This left his successor in North Carolina, John G. Foster, awaiting reinforcements before he felt confident about advancing. After additional units finally arrived in the autumn of 1862, his army, too, was transferred south to cooperate in a politically motivated assault on Charleston.7

---

7 Ambrose Burnside, “The Burnside Expedition,” in Personal Narratives of Events in the War of
There were other reasons why the Union did not capture the important towns of Goldsboro and Wilmington in 1862. The chief advocate of these operations, George McClellan, was removed as commanding general after his ill-fated Peninsula Campaign. President Lincoln did not fully appreciate the strategic importance of North Carolina at the time. Lincoln’s replacement for McClellan, Henry Halleck, also neglected operations in the Tar Heel state in favor of the headline-grabbing targets of Richmond and Charleston.8

Moreover, Federal commanders in North Carolina were unduly cautious. Though disorganized and stretched thin after capturing so much territory in 1862, the Federals still outnumbered the Confederate defenders in the state. Instead of sequestering his army at New Bern, Burnside should have pushed on to Goldsboro, as the Confederate defenders there were few in number and disorganized. General Foster moved on Goldsboro in December 1862, but quickly returned to New Bern after destroying the Wilmington and Weldon Railroad bridge at the town. After Foster’s raid, his army was supposed to cooperate with Admiral S.P. Lee for a strike on Wilmington. Unfortunately, the army and navy commanders could not agree on how to attack the seaport and its ring of protective forts. The delay caused by the lack of cooperation cost Foster most of his troops, and Lee his most formidable ships in favor of operations against Charleston.9

---

8 Stoker, The Grand Design, 144, 179; Reed, Combined Operations in the Civil War, 43, 191-192, 222, 322.
9 Barrett, The Civil War in North Carolina, 129; Foster to Lee, January 4, 1863, and Welles to Lee, January 13, 1863, both in ORN, Volume 8, 399-400, 420; Foster to Halleck, January 17, 1863, ORA, Volume 18, 520.
Burnside and Foster may have been more aggressive in eastern North Carolina if they had entered the state with predetermined policies to administer newly acquired territories, and to deal with fugitive slaves. Instead, the Lincoln administration vacillated at a time when definitive instructions to commanders concerning “contraband” slaves was crucial. Thus commanders in the various theaters of war were left to form their own, often contradictory policies. War planners gave little thought to administering conquered portions of North Carolina, because it was assumed that the state’s citizens were by and large Unionists and would welcome Northern troops as liberators. Since the state’s citizens were considered mostly loyal to the United States government, there was little reason to expect a large influx of African American refugees into Union lines. It was assumed that slaves would remain with their masters since abolition was not yet a war aim. They were dead wrong. Plantation owners for the most part sought refuge in Confederate lines, leaving behind thousands of slaves in eastern North Carolina. The occupying Union army soon became responsible for these refugees, causing Burnside “great anxiety.”

Lincoln tried to alleviate the pressure that Burnside felt to general and govern simultaneously, by appointing North Carolina native Edward Stanly as military governor of the state in May 1862. The following September he issued the preliminary Emancipation Proclamation, now giving field commanders a concrete refugee policy. Stanly favored enforcing prewar North Carolina laws, thus he bristled at Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation. He also clashed with the many New England abolitionist

---

10Burnside to Stanton, March 21, 1865, and Burnside to Stanton, May 19th, 1862, both in ORA, Volume 9, 199.
missionaries in the state. Governor Stanly eventually resigned in January 1863, just as Foster was gearing up for the Wilmington attack, which was eventually aborted. Civil authority in North Carolina once again devolved to the military commander, further complicating offensive operations in the state.\textsuperscript{11}

Although the U.S. Army and Navy made great gains in eastern North Carolina early in the Civil War, their campaigns can be considered at best only partial victories. Hatteras and Roanoke Islands, New Bern, and Beaufort were all great successes for the Federals in 1861-1862. Yet the capture of these areas had little effect on the outcome of the war, causing historians to traditionally consider eastern North Carolina as a backwater theater. The Union expedition to North Carolina never fulfilled its real objectives, which were Goldsboro and Wilmington. Because of the railroad junction at Goldsboro and the port facilities at Wilmington, the capture of either of those places would have had serious consequences for the burgeoning Confederacy in 1862-1863. Not coincidently, the Confederacy would collapse within a few short weeks after the capture of these towns in early 1865.

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{11}Futrell, “Federal Military Government in the South,” 182; Stanly, \textit{A Military Governor Among Abolitionists}, 35; Brown, \textit{Edward Stanly}, 249.}
BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Sources:

Allen, George H. *Forty-Six Months with the Fourth R.I. Volunteers, in the War of 1861 to 1865: Comprising a History of its Marches, Battles, and Camp Life*. Providence: JA and RA Reid, Printers, 1887.


Frank M. Parker Papers, North Carolina State Archives, Raleigh, NC.


Naval Records Collection, Office of Naval Records, Record Group 45, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

*New Bern Weekly Progress*

*The New York Times*
Oliver S. Coolidge Papers, Special Collections Library, Duke University, Durham, NC.


Secondary Sources-


