

MOBILE BAY

MOBILE
BAY

ROUGH DRAFT

D. Historical Narrative

Mobile Bay is one of the conspicuous features of the northern shore of the Gulf of Mexico. As such it attracted the attention of Spanish explorers and appeared on their maps and reports as the Bay of Spirito Sancto (or Spiritu Santo). It was visited by Pineda in 1520, by Narvaez in 1528, by Maldando in 1539 and by Triston de Luna in 1559-1560. It is not improbable that the abortive attempt of the latter to establish a colony was made on its shores.¹

As time passed, the Spaniards, attracted by the wealth of Mexico and South America, let the northern gulf area fall into obscurity, and apparently almost forgot that it had been explored. When after a century of obscurity, it again became the arena of European activity, the French had supplanted the Spaniards. The Huguenots had early in the 16th century manifested some interest in the new world, attempting in the sixth decade to establish a colony in Florida. The colonists were massacred by Mendoza and little seems to have been accomplished until the founding of Quebec in 1606. Although this colony managed to survive, it did not receive adequate support until Colbert's advent to power in the 1660's.

This remarkable man was responsible, not only for sending colonists to settle the St. Lawrence Valley from Quebec to Montreal, but also for inspiring such men as Joliet, Marquette, and La Salle to make known the vast interior of the North American continent. The latter succeeded in sailing down the Mississippi to its mouth in 1680. Five years later he led an expedition directly from France to found a colony and thus establish an incontestable claim to the lands drained by the Mississippi.

La Salle, however, was unable to find the mouth of the river from the Gulf, and landed at Matagorda Bay, Texas. He attempted to lead his expedition along the coast to the Mississippi, but was murdered by one of his followers. Thus the first French attempt to establish a colony along the Gulf Coast failed.

Before another expedition could be organized, France had become involved in the War of the League of Augsburg, 1689-1697, and nothing more was done until the signing of the Treaty of Aix-La-Chapelle had ended the war.

During this war, which had its American as well as its European phase, a young Canadian, Pierre Le Moyne, Sieur d'Iberville, distinguished himself in a number of brilliant

naval engagements in Hudson Bay and along the New Foundland Coast. These exploits apparently brought him to the attention of the Naval and Colonial offices in Paris, and in 1698 led to Iberville being put in command of the expedition which after exploring the coast from Pensacola to the mouth of the Mississippi, and the latter as far as the mouth of the Red River, erected a fort on Biloxi Bay, near the present Ocean Springs, Mississippi, and named it after Count Maurepas, Minister of Marine and Colonies.

Fort de Maurepas, established by Iberville in 1699, became the first capital of Louisiana. Leaving Sauvolle in command Iberville returned to France for more supplies, and on a second voyage continued his explorations. He explored Mobile Bay and River, selecting as the site of a fort and town a place near Mount Vernon, Alabama, on the Mobile River, about twenty-seven miles from its mouth.² Here in 1701, Jean Baptiste Le Moyne, Sieur de Bienville, brother of Iberville, built Fort Louis, and laid out the town of Mobile, which was to be the administrative center of the French Colony of Louisiana until 1718.

The determining factor in the location of the fort was its proximity to the Indians with whom the friendliest relations were maintained as a basis for trade. At the same

time an unfortified establishment, warehouses, etc., were set up at the harbor of Massacre Island.

Scarcely had these things been done when Louis XIV became involved in the War of Spanish Succession, thus depriving the new colony, during the most critical years of its existence, of adequate support from home. Iberville after making a third voyage to Louisiana was called on to help fight the British, and while enroute to attack Charleston, S.C., took yellow fever and died. Isolated from the metropolis and deprived of the support of one of the most vigorous personalities of France, yet Bienville, acting governor since 1701, managed to keep the colony together. Food and supplies came only at infrequent intervals, and on occasions were completely lacking. So great was the distress in 1707 that Bienville was forced to send the garrison to live with the Indians.

In the spring of that year a flood inundated the village and destroyed the crops not only of the colonists, but of the Indians as well. In 1711 an even more devastating flood came. Later in the same year English pirates from Jamaica captured the port on Massacre Island, carried away a large amount of supplies, and burned the buildings. News of this event did not reach Fort Louis for four days.

These disasters made it seem desirable to relocate the fort, and in the same year, 1711, Fort Louis was moved to the present site of Mobile.

In October 1717 a tropical hurricane seriously damaged the warehouses and buildings on Dauphine, formerly known as Massacre Island. Worse still, it drifted sand into and filled up the harbor, and apparently closed the deepest channel by which ocean-going ships had been accustomed to enter the bay.

John Law had just taken over the destiny of Louisiana and, because of the ambitious scheme of development which he had in view, a better harbor was necessary. As a consequence, it was determined that the Ship Island harbor should become the main harbor where ocean-going vessels should discharge their freight from France and take on the products of Louisiana. Smaller vessels were to convey freight and passengers between Ship Island and Mobile, Biloxi, and New Orleans. In 1718 the capital was returned to Fort Maurepas where it remained only a year. The burning of the fort caused it to be moved to New Biloxi where it remained until its removal, in 1721, to New Orleans.

Even though Mobile ceased to be the capital of Louisiana in 1718, it continued to possess great importance for the colonial empire of France, and did not sink into obscurity as did Biloxi. As a provincial capital it had a vast area, the basins of the Tombigbee and Alabama Rivers dependent on it. Many Indians preferred to go to Mobile rather than New Orleans for their conferences with the French, and it was from this point that trade was carried on with the Choctaw, Alabama Appalachees, and smaller tribes.

When the French of Louisiana became involved in a war with the Chickasaw, Mobile became the principle base of operations. In 1736 Bienville assembled a force of more than 700 French troops which he led up the Mobile and Tombigbee to a point near Cotton Gin Port, Mississippi, where it was debarked, and after meeting a Choctaw force marched overland to make an attack on the Chickasaw villages near Tupelo, Mississippi. Here in May 1736 the combined force of French and Indians was disastrously repulsed, and compelled to retreat. This repulse, and a somewhat similar failure on the part of an even greater expedition via the Mississippi River and Fort Prudhomme, which Bienville led in 1740 against the Chickasaw, checked the French efforts to subdue this important tribe.

The fact that the French failed to bring the Chickasaw into their sphere of influence helps to explain their failure to bring the Ohio basin fully under their control. This in turn was to be an important factor in the outcome of the French and Indian War, 1754-1763, and in the loss of Louisiana as well as of Canada.

Although Mobile and Louisiana did not figure in the war which was actually fought in the Ohio, upper Mississippi, and St. Lawrence River Valleys, its fate was determined by the outcome. By the Treaty of Paris, 1763, Mobile, as a part of a vast territory which included Florida, all French possessions east of the Mississippi River, and Canada, was ceded to Great Britain. The lands between the Mississippi and Appalachicola Rivers, extending from the Gulf to the parallel of latitude running through the mouth of the Yazoo River, were organized as the province of West Florida with Pensacola as the capital.

During the period of British occupation extending from 1763 to 1780 Mobile was garrisoned by a small detachment of British soldiers. The fort was repaired, and renamed Fort Charlotte, but, because of a number of epidemics among the troops, was neglected and the city itself suffered. A number

of Indian conferences were held here by the British, and it continued to be the outlet for a considerable Indian trade.

In 1779 a remarkably able and energetic Spaniard, Bernardo de Galvez, was named governor of Louisiana. He immediately made preparations to make use of the opportunity of the British preoccupation in attempts to suppress the revolt of the thirteen most important of her numerous American colonies, and organized a campaign against West Florida. It was completely successful, and as a result Mobile was captured in 1780, Pensacola in 1781, while an expedition from Havana occupied peninsular Florida. When peace was made at Paris in 1783, England ceded both the provinces to Spain, and until 1813 Mobile remained under Spanish rule.

During the 33 years of Spanish rule Mobile remained as it had during 17 years of British rule, essentially a French town. Little change was made in the life of the inhabitants. The rule of both British and Spanish seems to have been mild, and, except for a few colonists, the Mobilians were left to their own devices. Enough trade came to enable them to continue a way of life that had developed during nearly three quarters of a century of French colonization and rule.

Although Mobile was for a time involved in the contest between English and Latin civilizations, the long struggle

apparently made only a slight impression on its development. But after the end of the War for American Independence conditions changed rapidly. After the sudden outburst of colonizing energy in the 1770's, the Spaniards sank back to their accustomed lethargy. Just at this time a new vigorous rival for the Gulf Coast appeared, the United States, which was in less than half a century to acquire the entire region and to substitute the bustling frontier civilization of the American West for that of the more easy-going Latins, the Spanish and French.

After the United States had acquired Louisiana in 1803, it claimed that West Florida had been included in the purchase, and for ten years sought through its diplomacy to secure the territory. The Spanish resisted the claim. This state of affairs continued until 1813 when the United States, having become involved in War with Great Britain, decided to occupy that part of West Florida lying west of the Perdido River. Thus Mobile came into American possession although Spain did not recognize the legality of the act until 1819.

In the act of annexation West Florida was added to the Territory of Mississippi, which, until the latter with its present boundaries was admitted to the Union in 1817, also included the present State of Alabama.

When General James Wilkinson occupied Mobile in April 1813 he decided that Fort Condé, or as it was called by the British, Fort Charlotte, was of no value in defense. He therefore selected Mobile Point as the proper site for fortification, and began erection of a fort which sometime later was named for Colonel John Bowyer. Nine of the heaviest guns from Fort Charlotte made up the armament for the fort.³

That the newly acquired town stood in need of even more defenses was soon demonstrated. The Creeks, incited by the British and Spanish, manifested hostility toward the scattered settlements of the interior during the summer, and had attacked isolated settlements. So acute had become the danger that some 500 men, women, children, and slaves had taken refuge at the well fortified residence of Samuel Mims. Seventy Louisiana militiamen under Major Daniel Beasley were sent to guard the fort. Inadequate precautions were taken, and as a consequence the Creek warriors led by their chieftan, William Weatherford, Red Eagle, attacked and massacred all except the slaves, and perhaps a dozen of the militia who managed to cut their way out and carried the news to Mobile.

News of this tragic affair electrified the entire frontier. Tennessee raised a citizen army, put Andrew Jackson in command. Acting with characteristic vigor, he began the campaign almost

immediately. By March 27, 1814, he had fought the Creeks in several pitched battles, and finally crushed them at the Battle of Tohopeka or Horseshoe Bend.⁴

After the successful conclusion of the Creek War in 1814, Andrew Jackson came to Mobile, and from here he, during the summer, directed the preparations to meet the British invasion which was expected in the fall or winter. Hasty repairs were made on Fort Bowyer. Major William Lawrence and a detachment of 160 men of the 2nd U.S. Infantry were instructed to hold the fort at "all hazards".

A British detachment of 130 men and 600 Creek Indians under Colonel Nichols was landed on the peninsular on September 12, 1814, with instructions to fortify and cut off the retreat of the garrison. Two days later a naval attack by four British vessels was made on the Fort. After severe bombardment, the Americans disabled one ship, the Hermes, which was abandoned by her crew, and destroyed by an explosion. The British then retired after having suffered a loss of 160 killed and 70 wounded, while the American loss had been only 4 killed and 4 wounded.

This attack made by an advance expedition was not followed up by Sir Edward Pakenham's main expedition which arrived in the Gulf some two months later. It had been

decided to make the main attack against New Orleans rather than against Mobile. Then followed the campaign which resulted in the disastrous defeat at Chalmette on January 8, 1815.

After the British had withdrawn from Louisiana Fort Bowyer was captured on February 6, 1815. The fort was attacked by 13 British war vessels from the channel, and simultaneously by 5,000 troops who had been landed a mile and a half to the east. After a spirited resistance Major Lawrence surrendered only after the enemy had by a series of parallels approached to within 40 yards of the fort. Since news of the signing of the Treaty of Ghent came shortly thereafter, the British withdrew in a short time, and the engagement was without great significance.⁵

Fort Morgan

In 1819 plans were made to construct a permanent fortification on Mobile Point, and construction began the next year. It was completed in 1834, and was called Fort Morgan in honor of General David Morgan. The history of the Fort was uneventful until the Civil War. It was occupied by Alabama troops on January 5, 1861, and it became one of the principle Confederate defenses of Mobile.⁶

In 1864, after the destruction of the Alabama, the Federal Government decided to close the last remaining Confederate ports, Mobile and Wilmington. To close the former, Admiral Farragut, with a fleet of eighteen war vessels and a force of 5,000 under General Gordon Granger, was sent to the mouth of Mobile Bay. The main entrance to the harbor was guarded by Forts Morgan and Gaines, while a considerable Confederate fleet commanded by Admiral Buchanan waited inside the Bay.

Admiral Farragut's attack was made on August 5. The fleet passed the forts, engaged and destroyed that of the Confederates. The forts were then assailed by land and water, Gaines surrendering on August 6, while Fort Morgan, the stronger of the two, put up a desperate resistance and did not strike its colors until August 23.

Mobile itself had been strongly fortified, and was defended by an army of 15,000 led by General Richard Taylor. Farragut's cooperating force was too small to attack such an army, and it was not until March 1865 that sufficient troops had been concentrated under the command of E.R.S. Canby. The attack was made by sending a part of the attacking force up the east side of Mobile Bay, another up the west side, while still another was to march from Pensacola. Strong

Confederate positions at Spanish Fort and Blakely at first repulsed the Union attack, but after desperately resisting in a campaign that lasted until April 11, the Confederates evacuated the city and left Canby's forces in undisputed control. This action coming just after Appamatox was thus one of the last engagements of the War.⁷

Fort Gaines

When the French established Mobile, the difficulties of navigation within the bay led them to establish a port on Massacre Island. Here the ocean-going ships loaded and unloaded their cargoes. As has been stated above, they did not fortify the post. Capture and destruction of the port in 1711 led to a decision to fortify the harbor. The nature of the fortifications is unknown. The sanding up of the harbor by a storm in 1717 led to the abandonment of the post. Nothing more seems to have been done in the way of fortification until after the end of the War of 1812.

As a result of the experiences of the War of 1812, the Federal Government decided to erect a series of fortifications to defend the entire coast line of the country. In 1818 work was started on Fort Gaines. It continued until 1821, and was suspended until 1848 when the present fort was laid out. Progress

was slow, but it seems that it was practically completed before 1861 when it was occupied by Alabama state troops. Later the Confederate government took it over, and held it until after a severe bombardment when it was surrendered to the Federal forces on August 6, 1864.⁸

Spanish Fort

The history of this site dates from the early history of Mobile. About 1704 a fugitive band of Apalachees, driven from their Florida homes by the English, were invited by Bienville to settle on the Mobile River. Later they seem to have settled in the vicinity of the Tensaw River and Bayou Minette. The remnants of the tribe migrated to the Red River in 1763.

Le Clerc Milfort, a French traveler, reported that in 1787 the Spanish retook and rebuilt the fort of the Apalachees. The remains of the fort are still to be seen. The place was fortified by the Confederates and was the scene of desperate fighting in March and April 1865. The capture of the place by Union forces preceded by only a few days the fall of Mobile.⁹

Once Mobile had come in the possession of the Americans its real development as a commercial center began. The Federal Government abandoned Fort Charlotte in 1820. The fort was razed shortly thereafter, and the land on which it had been situated was sold as city lots. This event, while depriving Mobile of its most significant historical structure, was of great benefit to the city as it made room for the extraordinary commercial expansion that was to come during the next few decades.

The most significant event in the commercial history of Mobile was the introduction of the steamboat into Western waters. It was in frequent and common use by 1830, and introduced the period of most rapid growth and greatest prosperity. From a sleepy village of 2,672 persons in 1820 it grew to be a bustling metropolis of 31,120 in 1860, exporting more cotton than any other American port except New Orleans (approximately 870,000 bales in 1860). When the Union Blockade was imposed it suffered as did other sections of the South. As other Confederate ports were captured it enjoyed something of a revival and until 1864 was the center of the Gulf blockade runners. So great was this prosperity that Mobile enjoyed a population growth between 1860 and 1870 about three times greater than that of the preceding decade.¹⁰

Notes

1. Peter J. Hamilton, "Was Mobile Bay the Bay of Spiritu Santo", Publications of the Alabama Historical Society, (cited hereafter as PAHS), IV, 72-93.
2. The background of French colonization in North America, and of the founding of Fort de Maurepas, is briefly discussed in Dawson A. Phelps, "Research Report on Fort de Maurepas, Mississippi", October 1939, pp. 1-17. Files, Historic Sites Survey, National Park Service.
3. The foregoing narrative is based on Peter J. Hamilton, Colonial Mobile.
4. Eron Rowland, Andrew Jackson's Campaign Against the British, 94-105.

Marquis James, Life of Andrew Jackson, 170.
5. A. La Carriere Latour, Historical Memoir of the War in West Florida and Louisiana, 208-212, 215, 219, CI, XXVI, IXXXIII, IXXXVII, and XCVIII.
6. Ruth Graham, (Compiler) "Fort Morgan", National Park Service, Historic Sites Survey files.
7. The operations in Mobile Bay are described in the reports of the Union and Confederate officers, Official Records, Series I, vol. XXXIX, pt. I, 403-457. The operations just preceding the capture of Mobile in ibid., Series I, vol. XLIX, pt. I, 87-322.
8. Thomas McAdory Owen, History of Alabama, I, 640, II, 1019.
9. Erwin Craighead, Mobile Fort and Tradition, 140.
10. Hamilton, op.cit., 66, 111, 56, 547, also Erwin Craighead, Mobile, Fact and Tradition, 140.

W. Brewer, Alabama, 384; also Owen, op. cit. II, 1019.

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MOBILE, ALABAMA

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(Mobile, Ala.)

Mobile, Alabama

History

Mobile was second only to New Orleans in importance in French Louisiana. Its significance was derived largely from its location on Mobile Bay, one of the conspicuous features of the northern shore of the Gulf of Mexico. The bay was probably visited by Pineda in 1520 and by subsequent Spanish explorers. The Spaniards, attracted by the wealth of Mexico and South America, let the northern gulf area fall into obscurity. When it again became the arena of European activity, the French had supplanted the Spaniards.

The French, eager to establish their control over the interior of North America, established Fort de Maurepas on Biloxi Bay, near the present Ocean Springs, Mississippi, in 1699; it became the first capital of Louisiana. In 1701, however, Jean Baptiste Le Moyne, Sieur de Bienville, built Fort Louis and laid out the first town of Mobile, situated near what is now Mount Vernon, Alabama, on the Mobile River, about 27 miles from its mouth. Located much more favorably than Fort Maurepas with respect to the Indians with whom the friendliest relations were maintained as a basis for trade, Mobile superseded the former capital as the administrative center of Louisiana. At the time Fort Louis and the first town of Mobile were laid out, an unfortified establishment, warehouses, and other fort facilities were set up at the harbor of Massacre or Dauphine Island in Mobile Bay. This harbor became the port of entry for ships from France.

Devastating floods which inundated the village of Mobile and destroyed the crops induced the French to relocate Fort Louis, which, in 1711, was moved to the present location of Mobile. In 1717, a tropical hurricane seriously damaged the buildings on Dauphine Island and filled the harbor with sand, forcing the French to use Ship Island off the Gulf Coast at Fort Maurepas as the port of entry.

Although Mobile ceased to be the capital of Louisiana in 1718, it continued to possess great importance for the colonial empire of France, and did not sink into obscurity as did Biloxi. As a provincial capital, it was the administrative center of the vast area covered by the basins of the Tombigbee and Alabama Rivers. Many Indians preferred to go to Mobile rather than to New Orleans for their conferences with the French, and it was from this point that trade was carried on with the Choctaw, Alabama Appalachees, and smaller tribes. During the period of the 1730's when the Chickasaws were at war with the French, Mobile was the principal base of operations against them. Fort Louis, renamed Conde, was rebuilt in stone and was the most formidable fortification in Louisiana.

The defeat of France in the French and Indian War, 1756-1763, involved the cession of Mobile to Great Britain, which occupied it until 1780. The British renamed the fort Charlotte. But both it and the town were neglected, although Mobile continued to be the outlet of a large Indian trade. During the American Revolution the Spaniards seized Mobile and for 33 years it remained under their rule. The town, however, continued to be essentially French.

With the American occupation in 1813, Fort Charlotte was abandoned and the erection of Fort Bowyer on Mobile Point was begun. This fort was the key to the successful American defense against British attack in September 1814.

Sole outlet for the rich cotton and timber lands of Alabama, Mobile enjoyed heavy commerce during the early part of the nineteenth century. In spite of destructive fires and yellow fever epidemics, the city became a leading port of the South.

In 1820 the construction of a new and much stronger fort at Mobile Point was begun. Completed in 1834 and named Fort Morgan in honor of General David Morgan, it was a powerful unit in the system of coastal fortification. It had an uneventful history until the War Between the States, when it became one of the two principal Confederate defenses of Mobile. The other was Fort Gaines on Dauphin Island, begun in 1848 and virtually completed by 1861. Unlike most Southern seaports, Mobile was prosperous during the War Between the States. As one Confederate fort after another fell into Union hands, Mobile's commerce mounted. By the summer of 1864 it was the center of Gulf blockade runners and, with the exception of Wilmington, North Carolina, the only Southern port still open to commerce. On August 5, 1864, a strong Union fleet under Admiral Farragut entered the harbor, and the following day assailed the forts by land and sea. Fort Gaines surrendered on the 6th, but Fort Morgan, the stronger of the two, held out until the 23d, when it was no longer tenable.

Historical Evaluation

As a site that was second in importance only to New Orleans in early Louisiana, and as a city that possesses interesting architectural survivals illustrating French and pre-Civil War architecture and important fortifications of the War Between the States, Mobile is an extremely significant city from an historical standpoint.

Status

A number of houses reflecting French influence in their design have survived. Among these are the so-called "Oldest Building" or "Spanish Dwelling," a small Creole-style structure of brick covered with stucco, probably built about 1800; the French type Double House on South Conception Street, one of the only two remaining examples in Mobile of this type of building; the McMahon House ("Creole House"), a faithful example of Creole architectural style. The Emanuel Home, built in 1836, is likely the outstanding early Mobile residence; its three stories are well-proportioned and the entrance portico railing is one of the finest pieces of wrought-iron work to be found anywhere. Among other important structures are the Mobile County Courthouse, Christ Episcopal Church, the Old Federal Building, and Barton Academy.

The first Fort Louis site has been marked by a monument erected by the State of Alabama. That of the second Fort Louis (Conde) is now occupied by various types of commercial structures. A bronze plaque marks its site.

The Spanish Fort areas on the eastern shores of Mobile Bay have few historic remains except those associated with the Civil War and are

largely privately owned.

Fort Gaines is owned by the city of Mobile and is being repaired by the CCC. It is in fairly good condition. Located on Dauphine Island, it is not very accessible to visitors and will not be unless a bridge is built to connect the island with the mainland.

Fort Morgan is a part of the Alabama State Park system. It has been repaired by the CCC and the State of Alabama, with the assistance of the National Park Service. Work done includes sloping the parapets of the fort, clearing the parade ground and restoring the grounds to their original level, clearing and restoring the dry moat, repairing casemates and the bastion, and restoring and sloping the outer parapet.

Among existing structures at Mobile, Fort Morgan has already been approved by the Board as an eligible site under the Historic Sites Act.

Recommendation

It is recommended that the National Park Service encourage and assist the city of Mobile and the State of Alabama in making plans for the protection and development of the historical aspects of the Mobile region, insofar as the resources of the Service permit.

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BATTLE OF
MOBILE BAY

THE BATTLE OF MOBILE BAY

Following the Secession Convention the Confederate Government made plans for strengthening the fortifications on Mobile Bay. Fort Gaines and Fort Morgan guarding the narrow channel were reinforced and garrisoned;¹⁴ the construction of Fort Powell was quickly completed for the purpose of defending Grant's Pass;¹⁵ and in the Channel innumerable piles were driven and torpedoes laid, forcing the passage of every vessel within close range of Fort Morgan's batteries. In the winter of 1863~~1864~~¹⁸⁶⁴ the iron-clad vessel, Tennessee, had been built at Selma, towed to Mobile to be armored with plating varying in thickness from five to six inches, and floated across Dog River Bar on long wooden tanks, called "camels", into Mobile Bay. The ship was 209 feet by 48 feet with an immaran projecting beyond her bow at a depth of two feet below the water line and six Brooks rifled cannon throwing projectiles of from ninety-five to 110 pounds weight. This vessel was commanded by the admiral of the Confederate navy, Franklin Buchanan, and was manned by a picked crew. It was the boast and pride of the Confederacy as the most formidable iron-clad afloat. In addition, the harbor was protected by three wooden gun-boats, the Morgan, the Gaines and the Selma.

Although Union vessels had attempted a blockade since May 1861, it was not until the strongholds on the Mississippi had been reduced and the

14. Owen, op. cit., vol. I, p. 640; vol. II, p. 1051.

15. Foxhall A. Parker, op. cit., pp. 9-10.

16. Oliver A. Batcheller, "The Battle of Mobile Bay, August 5, 1864," in Flag Papers of Maine Loyal Legion, vol. I, p. 51.

river opened that enough vessels could be spared to maintain this blockade with any effectiveness.¹⁷ Even then, it was difficult to prevent the passage of small swift vessels with supplies for the Confederate army. Obviously an efficient blockade necessitated the seizure and occupation of Mobile and in the early summer of 1864 Admiral Farragut made plans to this end.

The plans contemplated simultaneous investment of the Ports by land and sea. However, the failure of General Banks' Red River expedition had encouraged the Confederates to assume the offensive and General Canby, his successor, instead of being able to make a demonstration against Mobile was rather hard pressed to hold his own. Also 5000 men of his command had been ordered to Washington, then threatened by the Confederate General Early, so that only 1, 500 men under General Gordon Oranger could¹⁸ be spared.

On July 12, Order 10 was issued to the Union Fleet to strip for the conflict; vessels were sent to Pensacola to fill up with coal and ammunition; to land all spare parts and rigging and to protect the engine and boilers with chain cables and sand-bags.¹⁹ News arrived that the monitor Manhattan had left for Mobile, followed by the Tacamahoc, and later still that two Upper Mississippi light-draft monitors, the Winnebago and Chickasaw²⁰ were to be added to the fleet. It was believed all would be in readi-

17. Ibid., p. 61.

18. Foxhall A. Parker, op. cit., p. 17.

19. See General Order #10 in Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies in the War of the Rebellion, Series I, vol. XII, pp. 397, 398.

20. Hatcheller, op. cit., p. 63.

21

ness by August 3rd. The river iron-clads had arrived from New Orleans, and in the afternoon of the 3rd, under cover of the flotilla guns, General Granger's troops were landed on Dauphin Island to invest Fort Gaines. Action was delayed until the following morning, however, by the late arrival of the Tecumseh. Repeated inquiries show the Admiral's ²²impatience on that day.

"I have lost the finest day for my operations. I confidently supposed that the Tecumseh would be ready in four days [from her arrival in Pensacola] and here we are on the sixth and no signs of her, and I am told has just begun to coal. I could have done very well without her, as I have three here without her, and every day is an irretrievable loss.

"The soldiers, by agreement, are landing today back of Dauphin Island, and could I have gone in this morning, we could have taken them by surprise. Four deserters came off from Gaines last night and they say they do not expect any landing there; but they are working like beavers on Morgan."

The July 12 Orders instructed the vessels to run past the forts in couples, lashed side by side, so that if one or more of the vessels were disabled, their consort could carry them through, or if that was impossible, the next astern could render the required assistance. These Orders were modified on July 29th to the effect that the crippled vessel, if unable to keep her position, must drop out of line to the westward so as not to embarrass the vessels astern by attempting to regain her station. ²³ On August 4th the diagram for battle formation was given as fol-

21. Official Record (Naval), op. cit., p. 402.

22. Ibid., p. 403.

23. Ibid., p. 398.

24

Lower

Wooden Vessels

Monitors

Brooklyn and Octorara
 *Hartford and Metacombet
 Richmond and USS Royal
 Lackawanna and Seminole
 Menongahela and Kennabec
 Ossipee and Itasca
 Onida and Galena

Tacumseh
 Manhattan
 Winnebago
 Chickasaw

This changed the position of the flagship Hartford from the lead in previous orders to second-place. In his report to the Secretary of the Navy,

25

Farragut says of this change:

"It was only at the urgent request of the captains and commanding officers that I yielded to the Brooklyn being the leading ship of the line, as she had four chase guns, and an ingenious arrangement for picking up torpedoes, and because, in their judgment, the flagship ought not to be too much exposed. This I believe to be an error, for apart from the fact that exposure is one of the penalties of rank in the Navy, it will always be the aim of the enemy to destroy the flagship, and, as will appear in the sequel, such attempt was very persistently made, but Providence did not permit it to be successful."

The attacking fleet steamed up the Main Ship Channel at 5:40, the wooden vessels two abreast and lashed together; the Monitors were to their right; the Tacumseh slightly in the lead. At 6:47, the Tacumseh fired the first shot; then Morgan opened fire at 7:06; the Brooklyn replied and the action became general. The narrow channel forced an oblique approach, so that the Fort was able to maintain a raking fire on the fleet, only effectively answerable for the brief moment when the vessels passed abreast the Fort and the full broadside could be brought to bear. By 7:30 the Tacumseh was well up with the Fort and drawing slowly by the Con-

26

24. Ibid., p. 404.

25. Ibid., p. 417.

26. Batcheller, op. cit., p. 64.

Confederate Tennessee leaving her on the port beam. A deadly fight at close quarters was expected between the iron-clads, when the Tacumseh struck a torpedo and sank rapidly with a heavy loss of officers and crew. Seeing this appalling disaster and also a row of torpedoes directly ahead, the Brooklyn hesitated and backed, throwing the head of the line into confusion. Farragut did not wait; the Hartford and consort Metacomb were ordered to swing clear of the Brooklyn, assuming the lead. As he passed the Brooklyn, her captain reported a "heavy line of torpedoes ahead." Farragut believed, however, that the sunken torpedoes were probably innocuous from having been for some time in the water and made his famous reply:
27
"Damn the torpedoes. Go ahead."

By 8:45 all the vessels had passed the Forts and cast off from their consorts. Signal was then given to attack the uninjured iron-clad, Tennessee, not only with the guns, but by running her down at full speed.
28
The Monongahela, the Lackawanna, and the flagship gave her several severe, but comparatively ineffective, shocks. The heavier vessels came down on her again and again. Finally, a missile sent from the Manhattan succeeded in penetrating her armor although not breaking entirely through. Then the smokestack and steering gear of the Confederate ship were shot away; and the constant running prevented her demoralized crew from standing to their guns. The Quincy was in position to strike at her, when she hoisted the white flag and at ten o'clock "Old Buck", Admiral Buchanan, surrendered.
29
In the meantime the rebel gunboat, Salam, had been pursued to

27. Ibid., p. 69.

28. Official Records (Naval), op. cit., p. 417.

29. Foxhall A. Parker, op. cit., p. 37.

successful capture, although the Morgan and Gaines had succeeded in gain-
ing the protection of the Forts.³⁰

About midnight Fort Powell, under constant fire from DeSaff's
flotilla anchored in Grant's Pass, was evacuated and blown up.³¹ The gar-
rison escaped to Cedar Point, leaving all the guns, eighteen in number,
in excellent condition for immediate service. The following day prepara-
tions were made for a general bombardment of Fort Gaines and the Chick-
saw commenced fire. On the morning of the 7th, however, a parley was
held, at which Colonel Anderson, commanding the Fort, surrendered to the
Admiral and General Granger.³² The Fort was occupied, according to agree-
ment, at 7 a.m., August 8th.

After the surrender of Fort Gaines, a message was sent to Gener-
al Page at Fort Morgan advising similar action. But the General express-
ed his determination to defend his post to the last extremity. Accord-
ingly, General Granger moved his command across the Bay to Navy Cove, four
miles distant from Fort Morgan, from which point a steady advance was made
in and towards the Fort. By the 22nd Fort Morgan was completely invested
by land and sea and receiving furious bombardment. With walls breached,
almost every piece of ordnance disabled and the citadel on fire, the Fort
finally surrendered, August 23rd.³³

30. Official Records (Naval), p. 417.

31. Ibid., pp. 524-525.

32. Ibid., pp. 536-537.

33. Foxhall A. Parker, op. cit., p. 43.

UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
WASHINGTON

SPANISH FORT, FORT MORGAN, FORT GAINES.
Mobile Bay, Alabama.

The strategic importance of Mobile Bay, extending thirty-five miles in from the Gulf of Mexico, forced its conspicuous role in early colonial history, the War of 1812 and Civil War military and naval campaigns. From 1699-1722 Mobile was the capital of French Louisiana, a territory which embraced all the Mississippi valley from the Alabama-Tombigbee Basin to indefinite claims west. By the Treaty of Paris in 1763, France ceded Mobile country to Great Britain, while Spain acquired possession of New Orleans and Louisiana west of the Mississippi. Friction between the British and Spanish colonies, brought to a head with Spain's declaration of war on England in 1779, resulted in the organization of an expedition under the young Spanish Governor, Bernardo Galvez, against the British. Reinforcements for the British came too late; Mobile was captured; and the British defeated on the eastern shore. Shortly thereafter, England ceded West Florida to Spain. Whether or not the cession of Louisiana by Spain to France in 1800 and subsequent purchase by the United States in 1803 extended to the Perdido River was not clear, as the exact metes and bounds of the territory were not prescribed. The

1. Peter J. Hamilton, Colonial Mobile, pp. 39-121.

2. L. S. Newcomb Comings and Martha M. Albers, A Brief History of Baldwin County, p. 25.

United States claimed the Mobile country, however, from this period on; the territory was occupied during the War of 1812 following the surrender of the town on April 13, 1813;³ and title finally acknowledged in the Adams-Onís Treaty of 1819 on the cession of Spanish Florida to the United States.

Spanish Fort

Old Spanish was erected after the British defeat in 1779 on the eastern shore of Mobile Bay. On January 7, 1781, the Fort was attacked by a force of British in their final attempt to maintain supremacy in this section by force of arms against Spain. Several unsuccessful attempts were made to carry the fort by assault. The losses were heavy on both sides and included the British commander. After the fight the English withdrew to Pensacola and in May of the same year surrendered to Galvez,⁴ the Spanish commander.

The Fort was a bastioned work built on a bluff rising precipitously from the water.⁵ Its parapet, on the bay side was made by excavating the earth from the side of the bluff to a thickness of thirty feet. During the Civil War a continuous semicircular line of breastworks and redoubts enclosed the Fort, with Fort McDermott on the highest and most prominent bluff at the extreme right of the line and Red Fort to the north. At the present time, little remains of the Confederate works to identify the spot.⁶

3. Peter J. Hamilton, Mobile of the Five Flags, p. 190.

4. Prescott A. Parker, Story of the Tensaw, p. 7.

5. C.C. Andrews, History of the Campaign of Mobile, pp. 46, 47.

6. L.S.N. Comings and W.M. Albarr, A Brief History of Baldwin County, p. 45.

Fort Gaines

About 1712 the French constructed a palisaded fort on Dauphin Island, called Fort Tombigbee.⁷ On the ruins of this early Fort, the United States contracted for the construction of another fortified post in 1813. Work was begun and continued until 1821, when suspended for lack of funds. In 1848, a brick fort was laid out, but progress was slow and it was not completed until the Civil War, when garrisoned by Confederate troops. The Fort was built of brick, in the form of a star with semidetached scarp⁸ five feet thick, and small works, in angles, for flank defence. In 1864 when invested by General Granger, thirty guns were mounted, of which three were columbiads and the rest thirty-two and twenty-four pounders. Its garrison consisted of forty-six officers and 818 men. It is believed the old brick casemate is still in a good state of preservation. Present fortifications date between the years 1901-1904.⁹

Fort Morgan

At Mobile Point, Baldwin County, controlling the narrow entrance to the Bay, Fort Bowyer was erected by order of April 20, 1813. On September 15, 1814, it was garrisoned and used in Andrew Jackson's campaign, resisting the first British attack successfully on September 15, 1814, but the following February an attempt to relieve the Fort having failed,¹⁰ Major Lawrence, its commander, surrendered to the British. At the close

7. Thomas McAdery Owen, History of Alabama and Dictionary of Alabama Biography, vol. I, p. 640.

8. Foxhall A. Parker, The Battle of Mobile Bay, p. 9.

9. Owen, op. cit., p. 640.

10. Conings and Albers, op. cit., p. 59.

of the War plans were made to replace this wooden structure with stouter material.. The new fort, called Morgan, in the process of construction¹¹ for a number of years, was finally completed in 1837.

Fort Morgan was a pentagonal brick-bastioned work, the lime for its mortar having been extracted from the oyster shells of Dauphin Island and vicinity¹. Within the Fort was a citadel, containing quarters for soldiers, whose walls, loop-holed for musketry were four feet in thickness; the outer scarp wall was fourfeet eight inches thick. At the time of the passage of Farragut's fleet the Fort was mounted with eighty-six guns of various calibres; the most formidable defense, the "water battery", bore two rifled thirty-twos, four ten inch columbiads and one eight inch Hook's rifle. The garrison of the Fort, including officers¹² and men numbered 648.

Following the Civil War, Fort Morgan was allowed to fall into disrepair, until 1898 when with the fear that the Spanish fleet might attack the Gulf coast, new and modern fortifications were erected and the old defenses renovated. During the World War, the Fort was garrisoned and used¹³ for concentration purposes and training camps.

11. Hamilton, op. cit., pp. 224-225.

12. Foxhall A. Parker, op. cit., p. 8.

13. Owen, op. cit., p. 59.