major clearinghouse for imports, New Orleans was the wealthiest city in Dixie.[34] Despite its obvious importance, Richmond did little to defend the city--even going so far as to strip it of resources for the sake of the rebel army in far-off Tennessee.

This blindness to the vulnerability of the city may be explained by the land-oriented thinking common at the time. It was a malady that affected the governments on both sides as well as most people in the military. As Union Secretary of the Navy G. Welles recorded of a Nov. 1861 meeting with Lincoln in which the plan to take the city from the sea was discussed:

> The President was astonished. He had always thought in terms of moving down the Mississippi. His military advisers and the politically potent governors of the Western states had reinforced this strategic notion."[35]

Jefferson Davis similarly misidentified the Union armies in Tennessee as the main threat to distant New Orleans:

> In the early part of 1862, so general an opinion prevailed that the greatest danger to New Orleans was by an attack from above, that Gen. Lovell sent to General Beauregard a large part of the troops in that city.[36]

Neither chief executive realized the possibility of an attack upon New Orleans from the Gulf of Mexico. The difference is that, while Lincoln listened to Welles, Davis ignored the requests of Gen. M. Lovell, defender of the Crescent City. Contrary to the claims made in his memoirs, Davis had, in fact, repeatedly refused Lovell critical supplies and directed him to send veteran troops, artillery, and powder to Southern armies operating far to the north--which he did only after repeated protests.[37]

On the night of 24 April 1862, Adm. D. G. Farragut led his squadron upstream, blasting his way past the forts at the Head of Passes. The following day found New Orleans under the guns of the Federal fleet. On 1 May Farragut presented the city to Gen. Butler and the Union Army. Although it would be a year before the ramifications of this victory would be fully realized in the North, the South immediately understood the implications of "the night the war was lost." In far-off Richmond, Mary Boykin Chesnut recorded prophetically,

> New Orleans is gone, and with it the Confederacy! Are we not cut in two? The Mississippi ruins us if it is lost.[38]

This same realization spread through the rebel Army of Tennessee, which included many Louisianans. Gen. St. John Liddell wrote,

> The effect was disheartening to everyone. A growing impression of doubt as to our final success seemed to enter the mind of every reflecting man. It was perceptible that nothing short of superhuman efforts could save us the Mississippi River.[39]

The loss of New Orleans was very damaging to Southern morale, while its capture gave a boost to feeling in the North. Of even more import was the effect on England and France, which were on the verge of recognizing the Confederacy. Only the week before news of the capture reached Europe, the *Illustrated London News* wrote:

> The position of the Southern Confederacy has been much improved by the events of the last month, and it . . . will not be very long before there is an attempt made to terminate this fratricidal war by a mediation that will imply recognition.[40]

In France, rebel envoy John Slidell recorded in February that: "France is prepared... to recognize our government provided that Great Britain will consent to act simultaneously with her." In mid-April he warned Richmond that:

> ...much if not everything will depend upon the character of the intelligence we may receive within the next three or four weeks... Decided success of our arms would ensure early recognition...[41]

Good news was not forthcoming, and Slidell reported of a meeting with French Minister of Foreign Affairs Thouvenal following the news of the fall of the city:

> Although he did not directly say so, it left me fairly to infer that if New Orleans had not been taken and we suffered no serious reverses in Virginia and Tennessee, our recognition would very soon have been declared.[42]

Charles Lee Lewis, biographer of Farragut, believes

> There is good evidence that the failure of Napoleon III to recognize the Confederacy and take some positive step towards bringing the war to a close even without English cooperation was due to Farragut's capture of New Orleans. If Farragut had failed, it is not unlikely that, a few months later after McClellan's army suffered such a crushing defeat in Virginia, England, too, would have taken steps towards bringing about peace with the establishment of the Confederate States of America as an independent nation.[43]

The loss of New Orleans provided immediate benefit to the North. Its capture gave the Navy a base from which to operate up the Mississippi and complete the job, a year later, of splitting the Confederacy in two; conversely, it denied the Confederacy the use of the port as a haven for blockade runners and the import of valuable war materiel. The seizure of the city and the lower Mississippi cut off much-needed supplies of Texas beef and Louisiana salt to the eastern Confederacy, while making these available to the occupying forces. The loss of the Leeds Foundry reduced the modern manufacturing capacity of the Confederacy by 50%, while the destruction of the nearly-complete ironclads *Louisiana* and *Mississippi* removed a major threat to both the blockading fleet and the Union ships coming down the river. Commander D. Porter summed up Navy's incredible victory in a letter to Ass't Secretary of the Navy G. Fox:

> New Orleans' falling seems to have made a stampede in 'Secessia.' You may put the rebellion down as 'spavined,' 'broken-backed,' and 'wind-galled.'[44]

Less than a year after the beginning of the war, the Navy had captured the largest and most important city in the South. Popular attention, however, was focused on Virginia; throughout the war, the primacy of the eastern campaigns in the popular imagination minimized the importance of the western theater. The magnitude of the victory only slowly became apparent.[45]

Conclusion

The dedication, heroism, and sacrifice of the men in the armies is beyond question, but the above data and testimony of participants indicates that the US Navy played a more critical role in winning the war for the Union than is generally acknowledged. The blockade severely impacted the South's ability to supply its armies and feed its people, contributing to lost opportunities on the battlefield, dissatisfaction at home, and massive desertion. The fact that this was a bloodless campaign does not mean it was irrelevant. At Shiloh and Malvern Hill small numbers of Navy gunboats played a crucial part in saving important Union armies from annihilation; such episodes of naval support were replayed dozens of times on a lesser scale throughout the war. The independent Navy victory at New Orleans marked the beginning of the end for the Confederacy; much hard fighting remained, but the tide was turned by Farragut's squadron. How did these contributions--recognized at the time by soldiers and civilians alike--fall from our history books and public awareness? The answer may lie in the fact that there were so many more participants ashore than afloat.

With a ratio of 26 soldiers to every sailor, the volume of diaries, letters, articles, and unit histories was weighted in favor of the armies from the start. After the war the number of eyewitness accounts exploded, followed by more than a century of secondary works. The horrific land battles that affected so many lives (soldier and civilian) were the experience of the vast majority of the population, and eclipsed the naval aspect of the war. In the engagements at Shiloh and Malvern Hill, the Navy's contribution was out of all proportion to the number of actual USN combatants: the crews of *Tyler* and *Lexington* at Shiloh comprised roughly 100 men as opposed to 103,000 soldiers (1030:1 ratio) while those of *Galena*, *Jacob Bell*, *Mahaska*, and *Aroostook* at Malvern Hill were similarly outnumbered by the 175,000 soldiers involved. Post-war publishers, with an eye towards profits and not necessarily preservation, naturally sought to print accounts that would sell well; the majority of readers either having been in the armies or related to someone who was, such stories made more money than could the narrower experiences of sailors and marines.

As later generations focused on the massive base of soldiers' writings, the idea that the Navy had played a minor role became "received wisdom."

No conflict in our history arouses passions among modern Americans as can the Civil War. And yet many of the perceptions we hold as truths developed after the fact and would appear foreign to the people of the time. Salient among these is the idea that the U.S. Navy played a secondary role in deciding the issue. The testimony of history is at odds with this perception. While the Navy alone could not have won the war, the Union Army alone would almost surely have lost it.

The Navy's problem: Numbers

Sailor Michael Harlow makes certain the camera sees him among the 26 soldiers of the Prentiss M. Whiting GAR Post in North Attleborough, Mass'tts about 1890. That ratio of 26:1 is accurate for the entire Navy. (Despite the rigors of life at sea, Harlow survived all of them, passing in 1939).

The U.S. Naval Landing Party is an American Civil War living history group portraying the activities of Union sailors and marines landed for duty ashore. Primarily active in the Northeast, the USNLP does recruit nationwide and has members in many states. For information about the group, please refer to the unit website at www.usnlp.org. The USNLP is a member of the Navy & Marine Living History Association.

The Navy & Marine Living History Association is a nationwide 501c(3) non-profit organization dedicated to promoting an awareness and understanding of America's nautical heritage through the medium of living history. Our member units portray sailors and marines of a variety of navies from all periods of American history. NMLHA provides original and historic naval research at www.navyandmarine.org. On this site can also be found information about our involvement with the modern Navy and NOAA on the *Alligator* Project—the research and search for the Civil War's first submarine!

[1] Public awareness of the Navy's role is usually limited to *Monitor* & *Virginia* and, perhaps, the blockade.
[2] Accurate numbers are impossible to agree upon. These come from Livermore's *Numbers & Losses in the Civil War* (Indiana U Press, Bloomington, 1957). What's important is the imbalance between land and sea forces.
[3] The use of cruisers to raid Northern shipping might be construed as an offensive campaign in that it drew Union warships away from the blockade in pursuit, but this was not conducted in conjunction with efforts on land.
[4] *Divided Waters: The Naval History of the Civil War*, D. Musicant, Harper Collins, New York, 1995, p. 55.
[5] *Confederate Purchasing Operations Abroad*, S. B. Thompson, The Univ. of N. Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, 1935, p. 44-47.
[6] *Divided Waters*, p .369.
[7] Ibid., p. 104.
[8] *Confederate Purchasing Operations*, pp. 97-98.
[9] *Salt as a Factor in the Confederacy*, E. Lonn, W. Neal Pub., NYC, 1933, p. 43.
[10] Confederate Coinage: A Short-lived Dream, by V. Samant at www.pcgs.com/articles/article3187.chtml, August 2003.
[11] *Official Records of the Union & Confederate Navies in the War of the Rebellion*, Gov't Printing Office, Washington, 1894-1922, vol. 12, p. 772.
[12] Many of the runners were owned by English firms and officered by British navy officers on "leave." Their stake in the war was purely monetary.
[13] Gen. Grant's Description of the Battle of Shiloh, From his Memoirs, at www.swcivilwar.com/GrantMemoirsShiloh.html, August 2003.
[14] P.G.T. Beauregard's Report of the Battle of Shiloh, at www.swcivilwar.com/BeauregardShiloh.html, August 2003.
[15] *Combined Operations in the Civil War*, R. Reed (U.S. Naval Institute Press, Annapolis, 1978), p. 206.
[16] Grant's Description.
[17] P.G.T. Beauregard's Report.
[18] Swett knew Lincoln from their days on the Illinois circuit court in the 1850s. Alexander McClure observed, "Of all living men, Leonard Swett was the one most trusted by Abraham Lincoln" (in *Lincoln's Lost Speech: The Pivot of His Career*, E. Crissey, Hawthorn Books, New York, 1967, p. 296.)
[19] *Official Records, Navies*, vol. 22, p. 766.
[20] *Ships vs Shore*, D. Page, Rutledge Hill Press, Nashville, 1994, p. 282.
[21] *Official Records, Navies*, vol. 7, p. 532-533.
[22 & 23] Ibid., p. 533-534.
[24] *Eye of the Storm*, R. Snedan, The Free Press, New York, 2000, p. 96-97: "He was off with Commodore Rodgers selecting a new and safer position for the army for the morrow! When the enemy attacked us yesterday he was safe aboard the *Galena*! Today he is safe enough where there is no enemy, thus depriving all his corps and division commanders of his abilities and counsel... The army was saved in spite of General McClellan's ignorance of the situation in front of the battle."
[25] *Sinews of War*, B. W. Bacon, Presidio Press, Novato, 1997, p. 62.
[26] Civil War Naval Hist., navyhistory.com/cwnavalhistory/July1862.html, 8/03.
[27] *From Cape Charles to Cape Fear: The N. Atlantic Blockading Squadron*, R. M. Browning, Jr., Univ. of Alabama Press, Tuscaloosa, 2003, p. 56.
[28] The James River & Naval Warfare below Richmond, at www.geocities.com/virginiasrevenge/battleonthejames2.html, August 2003.
[29] *USMC in the Civil War, The Second Year*, D. M. Sullivan, White Mane Publishing, Shippensburg, 1997, p. 45.
[30] *Ships vs. Shore*, p.40.
[31] G. Wolseley: *A Month's Visit to the Confederate Headquarters*, Blackwood's Magazine, 1863, p. 12.
[32] *Combined Operations*, p. 181.
[33] The Tredegar Iron Works in Richmond being the other.
[34] *Sinews of War*, p. 37.
[35] *Gideon Welles*, J. Niven, Louisiana St. U. Press, Baton Rouge, 1973, p. 381-2.
[36] *Night the War Was Lost*, C. Dufour, U. of Nebraska Pr., Lincoln, 1990, p. 350.
[37] Davis went to great lengths during the war and in his memoirs to shift the blame for the loss of New Orleans onto Lovell. Every claim was refuted by documents that Lovell had saved and presented at his inquest.
[38-44] *The Night the War Was Lost*, p. 331-335.
[45] *Sinews of War*, p. 46.

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