“THE PRESTIGE OF SUCCESS:” THE NORTH CAROLINA CAMPAIGN OF 1862 AND THE ASCENSION OF AMBROSE BURNSIDE

A Thesis

by

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ABSTRACT

Historians have roundly criticized President Abraham Lincoln's appointment of Union General Ambrose Burnside to the command of the Army of the Potomac in the fall of 1862. Many have viewed Burnside, who subsequently suffered a severe defeat at the Battle of Fredericksburg, as an incapable general who should never have been elevated to this position. By the fall of 1862, however, Burnside was in fact the logical choice for the command. He had achieved a great deal of success in an independent command in North Carolina, a campaign that has far too often been ignored, and he had become a hero in the eyes of the Northern public and the Northern press. Therefore, this thesis draws on a vast array of previously untapped Union and Confederate archival documents, pertaining both to the military and civilian spheres, to illustrate Burnside's rise to prominence and high command, and demonstrate why Lincoln thought so highly of the general.

Because no Union generals had pre-war experience handling large armies, Lincoln's selection of commanders to lead the Army of the Potomac was not a simple process. He ultimately came to rely on two primary criteria: demonstrated success in the field and public opinion. Burnside's victories at Roanoke Island, New Bern, and Fort Macon in the first half of 1862 not only displayed military ability, but made the public think very highly of him. Therefore, it is essential that his rise to command be linked with his earlier successes. This thesis does so by providing one of the first archival based accounts of Burnside's 1862 campaign on the North Carolina coast (commonly referred

to as Burnside's expedition), and analyzing the Northern response to that campaign. It also examines Lincoln's decision making process in selecting commanders and thus sheds light on the complex restraints that wartime presidents are forced to operate under.

DEDICATION

For my parents, who showed the way, and my brother, who led by example.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

While failure can be the work of one person alone, rarely can the same be said of success. Such is the case here. The completion of this thesis owes a great deal to many people. A complete list would run as long as the thesis itself, but it would be most ungracious for me not to recognize those to whom my debts are most unpayable.

At the University of Connecticut, Dr. Robert Forbes and Dr. Robert Gross, who served as my undergraduate thesis advisor and my honors history advisor, respectively, did much to nurture a young historian whose work was passionate but extremely raw. Likewise, Dr. Allen Ward did all he could to make me a better writer, and by his exceedingly pleasant demeanor and unflagging care for a student whose interests in no way aligned with his own, set a shining example for how I could be a better man.

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Undoubtedly, I owe my largest academic debt to my graduate advisor, Dr. Lorien Foote. She has shown remarkable patience in working to shape me into a better historian, while still providing me ample leeway to both make and (hopefully) learn from my own mistakes along the way. She is a model of not only all that a historian should aspire to, but all that a teacher, a mentor, and a person should be. Though she still remains loyal to her beloved Oklahoma Sooners (one of our only sources of disagreement!), she nevertheless embodies the Aggie spirit and everything that makes Texas A&M such a special place.

Last but most importantly, it is a simple truth that I would never have made it this far without not only the support but also the example of my friends and family. From Stratford and Storrs, Connecticut, to College Station, Texas, and everywhere in between, I have been blessed to come into contact with the most extraordinary people. They are driven, they are inspiring, they are selfless, and they are, and always will be, close to my heart. They will hopefully forgive me for not mentioning them all by name, as I wish I could. If the past is any indication, they will, for they have forgiven many of my faults, for which I am eternally grateful. With them in my corner, it would be hard not to succeed.

As for my family, words cannot express how much I owe them or how much I love them. Their support, particularly that of my parents, Sally and David Makowicki,

has been unparalleled. Not many fathers would show such interest in reading their son's work, and not many mothers would silently trudge around Civil War battlefields in 100 degree heat. It is thanks to their love, and to the example of my brother, Daniel, who demonstrated how to stay humble and put in a hard day's work, that I am the man I am today.

To any I may have omitted, please know that I am truly sorry, and that I appreciate you as much as I do the rest. And to all: thanks and Gig 'em!

NOMENCLATURE

LHS	Litchfield Historical Society
LOC	Library of Congress
LV	Library of Virginia
O.R.	The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies
NA	National Archives
NCSA	North Carolina State Archives
RIHS	Rhode Island Historical Society
SHC	Southern Historical Collection
USAHEC	United States Army Heritage and Education Center

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Near the end of January 1862, President Abraham Lincoln and Major General George Brinton McClellan received a report on a Union military expedition that had been sent to the North Carolina coast. The expedition, under the command of Brigadier General Ambrose Burnside, had been struggling to cross into the North Carolina sounds and had been hit with violent storms that wrecked several vessels. While he listened to the report, McClellan took notes, but remained mostly silent. When Lincoln, however, learned of the setbacks, he was greatly disheartened. The President rose from his chair and exclaimed to the room, "I see. It is all a failure. This is very discouraging."[1] But within weeks, Burnside would provide ample evidence that his expedition was anything but a failure, by winning a complete victory at Roanoke Island, and thereafter following it with several others. Lincoln's despair would subsequently turn to gratitude, much of which he reserved for the general who had done so much to prove his gloomy prediction of failure wrong.

Up until February of 1862, the Civil War had not gone well for the North. After the Confederacy inaugurated the conflict by firing on Union-held Fort Sumter in April of 1861, little had happened to shake the South's belief that it could win independence. The Confederates had won the first major battle of the war at Bull Run in July, and achieved

[1] F. Sheldon to Ambrose Burnside, 2 February 1862, Record Group (RG) 94, Ambrose E. Burnside Papers, Box 1, Folder 4, National Archives (NA).

several smaller victories in both the Eastern and Western Theaters in the following months. Though the North's newly minted Army of the Potomac, under the command of McClellan, had been growing greatly in numbers and training religiously around Washington, McClellan had yet to unleash it, despite the urgings of many Northern citizens and newspapers. Every day made Northern politicians, soldiers, and citizens more restless for a significant military victory, but until Burnside thundered down upon the North Carolina coast, no such victory had yet been won.[2]

Nearly all Civil War historians have depicted Burnside as a strategically and tactically bankrupt Union general, who should never have received command of the Union's most celebrated fighting force, the aforementioned Army of the Potomac, in November of 1862. This conventional wisdom, which blindly regurgitates the criticisms of a select few other Union generals and early scholars of the conflict, distorts the historical picture because it largely overlooks the factors that actually influenced Lincoln to give Burnside the command. Between February and May of 1862, Burnside invaded North Carolina and captured the vital post of Roanoke Island, the harbors of New Bern and Beaufort, and a large swatch of that state's richest agricultural land on its eastern seaboard. Though the battles Burnside fought never involved more than 13,000 Union and 5,000 Confederate soldiers, they were clear-cut victories at a time when Union successes, particularly in the Eastern Theater, were sorely lacking. It was these victories

[2] Burnside's first victory happened almost simultaneously with General Ulysses S. Grant's taking of Forts Henry and Donelson in Tennessee. The connection between Burnside and Grant's successes will be explored in Chapter 3.

that catapulted Burnside to prominence, in the estimation of the army, of Lincoln, and, just as importantly, of the Northern press and public. A careful analysis of the military's and of the Northern public's understanding of and reaction to the North Carolina campaign (commonly referred to as "Burnside's expedition") shows that Lincoln's appointment of Burnside was not only understandable, but in fact it made perfect sense, once the decision was made to remove McClellan from his post.

Burnside's initial orders for the North Carolina campaign, as relayed by McClellan, who also served for a time as general in chief of the Union armies, were to seize Roanoke Island and capture its garrison, then descend upon the coastal town of New Bern. After taking that town, Burnside was to move south to Beaufort and open the port there by reducing Fort Macon, which guarded the seaward approaches.[3] Burnside's expedition set sail from Annapolis in January of 1862, and by late April, he had accomplished all of these tasks. Roanoke Island and its entire garrison of around 2,500 men surrendered on 8 February. Burnside then seized New Bern on 14 March after routing the Confederate defenders guarding the town, and on 26 April, he reduced Fort Macon and captured its defenders, leaving Union forces in control of a large part of North Carolina's eastern seaboard.

The primary reason the prevailing historical opinion regarding Burnside's appointment has been allowed to stand largely unchallenged is the lack of attention paid

[3] George McClellan to Ambrose Burnside, 7 January 1862, RG 94, Ambrose E. Burnside Papers, Box 1, Folder 3, NA.

to this expedition, and to the Northern public's reaction to its victories and to the general who won them. A careful analysis of Burnside's expedition, of its successes and results, and of the fervor it produced in the North proves that the existing historiography can and should be challenged based on a close reading of primary sources and a willingness to question what many historians have uncritically accepted.

Histories of the Civil War as a whole generally fall into two categories as regards Burnside's expedition: those that ignore it entirely, and those that give the battles cursory attention but fail to draw out their implications at any length. An example of the first is Russell F. Weigley's study of the war, which contains absolutely no mention of Burnside's expedition in over 450 pages of body text.[4] Conversely, historians such as Shelby Foote, James McPherson, Richard Beringer, and Donald Stoker have discussed the expedition as part of the Union's overall strategy and provided brief descriptions of the battles. These authors tend to praise the expedition for isolating Norfolk (home of the Confederacy's best navy yard), providing bases that strengthened the Union blockade, and threatening a number of key railroads the Confederacy relied on to supply its armies in Virginia, most notably the Wilmington & Weldon Railroad. This, in turn, helped to draw Confederate attention and troops away from Virginia to North Carolina, but these historians (not without reason) are largely critical of the Union's failure not to advance further into the interior of North Carolina and make stronger efforts to cut these very

[4] Russell F. Weigley, *A Great Civil War: A Military and Political History, 1861-1865* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 2000).

railways. All of their works, however, stop short of examining the campaign's effect on Northern morale and on Burnside's reputation.[5]

It would be entirely incorrect to assert that no historian has discussed at length elements of Burnside's expedition. Both John G. Barrett and Dan L. Morrill devoted significant portions of their books on the Civil War in North Carolina to Burnside's invasion of the state in 1862. Morrill's study, however, is a relatively straightforward operational history, which relies almost exclusively on secondary works and the *Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*. While the *Official Records* are undoubtedly a valuable source, they are limited mostly to official correspondence and are not adequate to tell the entire story of the campaign. Morrill's work is, in fact, backed by virtually none of his own archival research. And though it devotes chapters to Burnside's victories at Roanoke, New Bern, and Fort Macon, it is devoid of any discussion of the actual effects of these victories.[6] Barrett's work is more thoroughly researched, but it tends to lean heavily on Confederate documents and overlooks several key archival sources, most notably Burnside's own manuscript collections. Furthermore, its focus is largely confined to detailing the operational aspects of the expedition, as well

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[5] Shelby Foote, *The Civil War: A Narrative, Vol. 1, Fort Sumter to Perryville* (New York: Vintage Books, 1986), 222-232; James M. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 372-403; Richard Beringer, Herman Hattaway, Archer Jones, and William N. Still Jr., *Why the South Lost the Civil War* (Athens, Ga.: University of Georgia Press, 1986) 125-138, 205-211; Donald Stoker, *The Grand Design: Strategy and the U.S. Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

[6] Dan L. Morrill, *The Civil War in the Carolinas* (Charleston, S.C.: The Nautical & Aviation Publishing Company of America, 2002), 237-291.

as the expedition's immediate effects on the state of North Carolina. Because both historians' studies were centered on the war in North Carolina, they leave out any analysis of the results of Burnside's victories on the people of the North, or on the general himself.[7]

Other scholars have produced excellent works on individual aspects of Burnside's expedition. Robert M. Browning Jr. has written the definitive history of the North Atlantic Blockading Squadron, including its contributions to Burnside's victories, while also showing how Burnside's capture of Roanoke Island and the harbors of Beaufort and New Bern strengthened the Union blockade by providing ports which could be used as coal depots and repair stations.[8] Barton A. Myers has investigated how the Union Army's presence in North Carolina led to unregulated guerrilla warfare and retaliatory violence, which intersected with issues of race, political loyalty, and social order, and ultimately led to growing disaffection with the war among citizens in some of the eastern counties of the state.[9] Similarly, Judkin Browning has detailed how the Union occupation of eastern North Carolina forced Confederate citizens to choose allegiances and negotiate neutrality, while also examining the occupation's effects on slaves and on

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[7] John G. Barrett, *The Civil War in North Carolina* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1963).

[8] Robert M. Browning Jr., *From Cape Charles to Cape Fear: The North Atlantic Blockading Squadron during the Civil War* (Tuscaloosa, Ala.: University of Alabama Press, 1993).

[9] Barton A. Myers, *Executing Daniel Bright: Race, Loyalty, and Guerrilla Violence in a Coastal Carolina Community, 1861-1865* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2009).

the Union soldiers themselves.[10] Patricia Click too has produced a narrative history of the expedition's interaction with the black population of North Carolina, focusing particularly on the establishment, growth, and demise of the freedmen's colony founded on Roanoke Island in 1862.[11] Though these works are all very valuable in their own right, none discuss the effects of the expedition outside the state of North Carolina, nor do they trace how the success of the expedition affected Burnside's career trajectory.

Therefore, discussion of Burnside's rise to command of the Army of the Potomac is to be found mostly in studies of that army, or of Lincoln's dealings with his generals. Due to the fact that these works are divorced from analysis of the North Carolina campaign itself, which was in all actuality the reason Burnside eventually received the command, they provide an unclear picture of why Lincoln viewed Burnside as the right choice for the command. In large part because historians do not wed these two events, Burnside and Lincoln have received a great deal of historical censure related to this appointment. This criticism has been based primarily on Burnside's subsequent failure at the Battle of Fredericksburg in December of 1862. It also stems in part from Burnside's earlier refusals of the command of the Army of the Potomac. Historians have used these points to argue that Burnside himself believed that he was neither capable nor worthy of commanding the Army of the Potomac; Fredericksburg merely confirmed what all

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[10] Judkin Browning, *Shifting Loyalties: The Union Occupation of Eastern North Carolina* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011).

[11] Patricia C. Click, *Time Full of Trial: The Roanoke Island Freedmen's Colony, 1862-1867* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001).

should have already understood about Burnside's military ability (or lack thereof). To the detriment of history, discussion of Burnside's noted success in North Carolina in early 1862 rarely finds its way into these analyses, and when it does, it is too often given merely a passing mention.

After Burnside had suffered defeat at Fredericksburg, the Provost Marshal General of the Army of the Potomac, Marsena Patrick, expressed his belief that Burnside was "unfit to be in any separate command."[12] In making this assertion, Patrick completely ignored the significant successes Burnside had earlier won in such a separate command in North Carolina. The opinions of historians, however, have followed along much the same lines as Patrick's. In 1952, noted Civil War historian Bruce Catton charged in his lauded history of the Army of the Potomac that Lincoln made a great mistake in elevating Burnside to command of that army. As Catton saw it, "Burnside was about as incompetent a general as Abraham Lincoln ever commissioned…A man who moved from disaster to disaster." Catton's assertion that Burnside never demonstrated promise as a general completely overlooked the fact that by the fall of 1862, the Northern press, public, and even Lincoln saw Burnside as a rising star and the best choice to take the command.[13] Furthermore, Catton's claim that Burnside "apparently understood only one way of fighting: that was to put your head down and go straight forward, attacking the enemy where he was stronger" was based solely on the

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[12] Marsena R. Patrick, *Inside Lincoln's Army: The Diary of Marsena Rudolph Patrick, Provost Marshal General, Army of the Potomac*, ed. David S. Sparks (New York: Thomas Yoseloff, 1964), 311.

[13] Bruce Catton, *Glory Road* (New York: Doubleday, 1962), 19-20.

general's actions at Fredericksburg, and wholly discounted the rather innovative combined arms tactics and successful flank movements that Burnside used to secure his victories at Roanoke Island and New Bern.[14]

Warren W. Hassler Jr. was another historian who argued against the replacement of McClellan with Burnside, who Hassler saw as slow, blundering, and severely limited in tactical ability. Like Catton, Hassler ignored Burnside's success in North Carolina, and went so far as to incorrectly claim that the detachment of Burnside's division to the North Carolina shore actually hindered McClellan's operations on the Peninsula in the spring of 1862.[15] These views continue to hold prominence; in 2011, Albert Castel stated, "In twice declining command of the Army of the Potomac on the grounds that he was unqualified for the post, Burnside spoke the truth…Lincoln displayed poor judgment by in effect forcing him to assume command of the Army."[16] Like those before him, Castel paid virtually no attention to Burnside's earlier victories or to the North's reaction to them. Indeed, Castel completely eschewed any discussion of the effect of Roanoke, New Bern, and Fort Macon on Northern morale and on Burnside's growing reputation, choosing instead to claim that it was only General Ulysses S. Grant's seizure

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[14] Bruce Catton, *Reflections on the Civil War*, ed. John Leekley (New York: Doubleday, 1981), 90. Catton went on to claim, "The maneuvers, the flanking movements, the feints and passes, which enable a soldier to find a weak spot and then exploit it, weren't in Burnside's repertoire."

[15] Warren W. Hassler Jr., *General George B. McClellan: Shield of the Union* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1957), 77, 322. In actuality, McClellan saw Burnside's operations on the coast as a key part of his overall strategy to take Richmond, as evidenced by his orders to Burnside.

[16] Albert Castel, *Victors in Blue: How Union Generals Fought the Confederates, Battled Each Other, and Won the Civil War* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2011), 174.

of Forts Henry and Donelson that elated the North in the spring of 1862.[17] The opinions of these historians have colored the perception of Burnside to the present day. Indeed, even before Castel's book was published, Gary Gallagher pointed out that "Civil War scholarship reaches an almost perfect consensus about Ambrose E. Burnside's competence to command an army…Burnside lumbers through innumerable accounts as a well-meaning but pitifully inept officer."[18]

There are, however, a select few historians who have provided more nuanced views of Burnside's abilities and of Lincoln's appointment of him. One of the first to do so was T. Harry Williams, who contended that "Burnside had done well in North Carolina, and Lincoln thought well of him for it." Williams was right to point out that, in November of 1862, Burnside "seemed the best choice among the corps generals," because the others were either old, McClellan disciples, or junior in rank to Burnside himself.[19] But Williams failed to detail Burnside's record of success, merely stating that the general had "seized some points on the coast of North Carolina." By not discussing these victories in North Carolina, or their significant impact on Northern morale, Williams failed to show just why Lincoln thought so highly of Burnside, and therefore Burnside seems more like the choice by default. Furthermore, avoiding mention of Burnside's successes in North Carolina made it easy for Williams to revert back to the

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[17] Castel, *Victors in Blue*, 50-51.

[18] Gary W. Gallagher, ed., *The Fredericksburg Campaign: Decision on the Rappahannock* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), ix.

[19] T. Harry Williams, *Lincoln and His Generals* (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1952), 182.

standard interpretation that Burnside "did not have the brains" to command the Army of the Potomac, and that the general had therefore been right when he had twice previously declined the command.[20]

In his analysis of Lincoln as Commander in Chief, James M. McPherson, perhaps the most well-respected Civil War authority of his generation, claimed that "[i]n retrospect it appears that [Lincoln] made several wrong appointments to command the Army of the Potomac. Yet in each case the general he named seemed to be the best man for the job."[21] Like Williams, McPherson noted that Burnside had achieved success in independent command in North Carolina, and seemed the "logical choice" in November of 1862.[22] But McPherson too devoted almost no attention to Burnside's expedition. Though this was admittedly not the focus of his study, the result is that McPherson failed to demonstrate the importance of Burnside's earlier victories, or discuss how the press' and the public's reaction to them influenced Lincoln in naming Burnside to the command. Therefore, there is little evidence in McPherson's work to back up his lukewarm assertion that Burnside was the logical choice for the job. Furthermore, McPherson repeated the all too familiar argument that "Burnside genuinely believed that

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[20] Williams, *Lincoln and His Generals*, 110, 180.

[21] James M. McPherson, *Tried by War: Abraham Lincoln as Commander in Chief* (New York: Penguin Press, 2008), 266.

[22] McPherson, *Tried by War*, 266. Historian George C. Rable has made a similar claim, stating that Burnside's appointment "seemed prudent" and that in November 1862, "hardly anyone had anything bad to say about the general, at least publicly." But because Rable's focus was the Battle of Fredericksburg, he too did not detail Burnside's successes in North Carolina, nor provide evidence that made it clear why the promotion of Burnside to command of the army did seem, in fact, prudent. See George C. Rable, *Fredericksburg! Fredericksburg!* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 50-54.

he was unqualified to command so large a force as the Army of the Potomac."[23] While it is true that the general had twice previously declined the command and given this as the official reason, McPherson and others completely ignore any alternative potential motives for Burnside doing so, such as his excessive modesty and his strong friendship with the commander who he was asked to replace, McClellan. Though it is impossible to say just how sincere Burnside was in his conviction that he was not fit to handle a large army, simply claiming that Burnside's refusals are evidence that he should not have been placed in command perpetuate the myth of Burnside the incapable and also ignore the fact that Lincoln was willing to overlook what he perceived as Burnside's modest refusals because he fully believed that the general was capable of winning victories.

As may be expected, the most thorough analysis to date of Burnside's rise to command of the Army of the Potomac is that in the only modern scholarly biography of the general, written by William Marvel. Marvel, who is undoubtedly sympathetic to Burnside, argues that his reputation was poisoned by officers of the Army of the Potomac, most notably McClellan himself, and posits that Burnside "may be the most maligned figure of the war."[24] Although Marvel certainly devotes adequate attention to Burnside's expedition, his study is lacking in several key areas. He correctly notes that

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[23] McPherson, *Tried by War*, 113. In his Pulitzer Prize-winning history of the Civil War, printed 20 years earlier, McPherson had also pointed to Burnside's refusals as evidence that the general "considered himself unqualified to command the Army of the Potomac. This conviction would all too soon be confirmed." See McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 570.

[24] William Marvel, *Burnside* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), xii, 122-126, 134, 148-150.

Burnside's victory at Roanoke was the first significant Union success after a string of defeats, but his assertion that Grant's victories in the West overshadowed those of Burnside obscures the fact that the public saw these events as one turning point, and did not weigh them against each other, but rather gave a great deal of recognition to both. In addition, though he points out that Burnside's victories "precipitated [a] flurry of congratulations," he devotes less than one paragraph to this, and therefore largely ignores the accolades that the press, the Northern public, and the War Department heaped on Burnside, which were in fact driving factors behind the general's ascension to high command.[25] Indeed, throughout his discussion of Burnside's rise to command, Marvel appears more focused on blasting holes in the claims of the general's detractors than on proving just how influential the North Carolina victories were on Burnside's reputation.

One Civil War historian has recently lamented the notion that "[a]ny author who claims to proffer new information or a novel point of view regarding the Civil War is likely to appear naïve, if not arrogant and prone to braggadocio and hyperbole."[26] Yet this is a risk any good historian must be willing to run, as new or previously underutilized sources continually provide the means to present clearer, or more nuanced, pictures of the past. For despite both the longevity and support of the belief that Burnside was unfit for the command and that it was a mistake for Lincoln to appoint him

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[25] Marvel, *Burnside*, 77.

[26] Brent Nosworthy, *Roll Call to Destiny: The Soldier's Eye View of Civil War Battlefields* (New York: Basic Books, 2008), 7.

to such, this argument is ripe to be challenged. Primary sources, both archival and published, indicate that historians have been far too simplistic in condemning Burnside's appointment. Most importantly, they have read the merit of the appointment backwards, based on Burnside's defeat at Fredericksburg, rather than forwards, based on the success Burnside had experienced as an independent commander in eastern North Carolina in the early months of 1862. This study will show how the overwhelmingly positive response to Burnside's expedition catapulted the general to prominence and greatly elevated his reputation in the eyes of the press, the public, and of Lincoln and the War Department, and thus made Burnside the natural choice for commander of the Army of the Potomac in November of 1862.

Attention to the collective reaction to Burnside's victories in North Carolina has so far been the missing piece of the puzzle in historical analyses of his rise to command. Linking Burnside's victories on the battlefields of North Carolina to the response to them among citizens, newspapers, politicians, and soldiers of the North is essential because it connects the civilian and military spheres, which always interplayed throughout the war. As historians such as Gallagher and Kathryn Meier point out, "Any study of the Civil War that slights the fundamental importance of military affairs to Americans at the time can yield only a flawed understanding of our greatest national trauma." Therefore, attention to the battles themselves is important, but it is only one half of a two way street. While, as these authors note, "Victories and defeats and changes in leadership in national armies heavily influenced how people on the home front viewed the conflict and its likely outcome," so too did the Northern public's view

of the war's progress and of the capabilities of the generals entrusted to make that progress affect military affairs themselves.[27] More than once, Lincoln relented to public pressure when making military decisions; a perfect example of this was his ordering of General Irvin McDowell to engage the Confederate force at Bull Run in the summer of 1861, spurred on by the demand of Northern newspapers, despite McDowell's repeated claims that his army was not yet ready for battle.

Attention to the connection between the civilian, political, and military spheres in 1862 is also crucial because it provides insight into American history as a whole. By the end of Burnside's campaign, Daniel Reed Larned, the general's personal secretary, who handled the majority of his correspondence, was growing tired of all the suggestions he had received from civilians about what movements the expedition should make. As Larned contended, it was easy to watch events from a distance "and suggest and ask why this and that was not done, because you cannot tell what influences are brought to bear upon the different points."[28] Larned's assertion holds just as much weight when analyzing Lincoln's process in selecting Burnside for high command. As is true of all presidents, particularly during wartime, Lincoln had to weigh many influences as he made such important decisions as who would lead the Union's largest army. Though he ultimately retained the final say, it is undeniable that the Commander in Chief worked

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[27] Gary Gallagher and Kathryn Meier. "Coming to Terms with Civil War History," *Journal of the Civil War Era* 4, no. 4 (December 2014): 494, 501.

[28] Larned to Brother-in-law Henry, 16 May 1862, Daniel Reed Larned Papers, Vol. 2: Correspondence, 15 May 1862 – 24 October 1862, Library of Congress (LOC).

under certain constraints. Historians, writing with the benefit of hindsight, are far too fond of criticizing military judgments made by wartime presidents while ignoring the realities under which they operated. This, in turn, yields flawed understandings of those men who have had to lead the country during the most trying times of its existence. In the case of Lincoln, he did not base his choices solely on public opinion, but neither could he afford to ignore it entirely. And when it came to sizing up Burnside as a commander, Lincoln's thoughts on the general's capabilities actually ran parallel to what the Northern public, and particularly the press, was saying. Therefore, it would have been more surprising if the President had ignored the clamoring of the Northern newspapers and named someone other than Burnside to the command of the Army of the Potomac in the fall of 1862.

Fortunately, there are ample sources that provide a bridge of evidence which spans the distance between Burnside's early successes and his rise to command of the Union's largest army. Burnside's manuscript collections in both the Rhode Island Historical Society and the National Archives (under record group 94), as well as the manuscript collection of Larned, housed in the Library of Congress, contain ingoing and outgoing correspondence of both a military and a personal nature. This correspondence, particularly that from private citizens, sheds light on the elation felt in the North upon Burnside's victories, as well as on the general's growing military reputation. So too does an analysis of the major Northern newspapers and illustrated periodicals, particularly those printed in New York, the undisputable news hub of the Northern states. The accolades showered on Burnside by the *New York Times*, *New York Tribune*, *New York*

Herald, *Harper's Weekly*, *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, and others show that the general had become one of the unquestioned heroes of the Republic by the summer of 1862. They also helped to influence Lincoln's decision making process as he selected a commander to replace McClellan. These sources and others make it clear that the public not only thought highly of Burnside, but in fact lauded his appointment and expressed great pleasure with his military movements all the way up until his defeat at the Battle of Fredericksburg.

In order to present a nuanced, archival based account of Burnside's expedition, this thesis also utilizes multiple Confederate manuscript collections in addition to those of Burnside and Larned. The official and personal correspondence of Generals Daniel Harvey Hill and Richard Gatlin, who commanded in North Carolina, as well as that of the state's governor, Henry T. Clark, are invaluable in determining the state of Confederate defenses on the North Carolina coast in 1861-1862, how North Carolina and the Confederate government in Richmond tried (and failed) to stem the tide of Burnside's advance, and what the immediate effects of Burnside's victories were both on Southern morale and on the Confederate war effort. Attention to the Confederate side of the story is essential because it allows for a full understanding of Burnside's expedition and it demonstrates that it was not only those in the North who viewed Burnside's victories as significant military events. As these archival sources make clear, the loss of Roanoke Island in particular caused panic in North Carolina and Virginia, led to a Congressional investigation that resulted in the removal of the Confederate Secretary of War, and even forced Confederate President Jefferson Davis to use martial law for the

first time in the conflict, an action he had previously claimed that he would not take. Therefore, because this thesis incorporates a balance of Union and Confederate archival sources as of yet unmatched by any historian who has studied Burnside's expedition, it provides a new and more thorough view of this long underestimated campaign.

At the outset of Burnside's expedition, at a time when his fleet was being battered by storms off Hatteras Inlet and prospects appeared grave, one of his soldiers recorded a prophetic diary entry. As David L. Day, a private in the 25th Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry, postulated, "If the general, by the blessing of God, gets the expedition out of this scrape, and is successful where he strikes, it will give him great prestige, and he will be thought competent for any command."[29] This was, in fact, precisely how events came to pass. Therefore, this thesis will consist of two parts, each composed of two chapters. The first part is an in-depth narrative of Burnside's expedition that emphasizes not only the general's victories but also the conception of his campaign, as well as Confederate problems and decision-making in regard to the defense of eastern North Carolina. Therefore, the second chapter (following the introduction, which is listed as chapter one) will examine the background and formation of Burnside's expedition, as well as the state of Confederate defenses in eastern North Carolina in 1861-1862, and the back and forth debate between North Carolina and the Confederate government in Richmond over the importance of defending this region. An

[29] Entry for 23 January 1862, in David L. Day, *My Diary of Rambles with the 25th Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry* (Milford, Mass.: King & Billings, 1884), 26.

understanding of the difficulty Confederate commanders such as Generals Hill and Gatlin faced in preparing for an invasion they long expected is absolutely essential to an understanding of Burnside's victories. The third chapter will then detail the expedition itself and its successes, as well as its immediate results for both the state of North Carolina and the Confederacy more generally. These were numerous and far-reaching and ranged from a sharp drop in Southern morale, to Confederate fears for the safety of Norfolk and the vital Weldon Railroad, and even to the restriction of civil liberties in some areas of southern Virginia and eastern North Carolina.

The second half of the thesis shifts its attention from the South to the North, and discusses the consequences of Burnside's expedition in the Union, focusing primarily on how the reaction of the Northern press and public as well as of Lincoln's administration and the War Department to this campaign ultimately led to the ascension of Burnside to the command of the Army of the Potomac. The fourth chapter will discuss the Northern reaction to Burnside's victories, the general's growing prestige, and his first two refusals of command. Finally, the fifth chapter will address Lincoln's decision making process in selecting a commander, how Burnside fit the criteria Lincoln looked for, the bestowing of command on Burnside in November 1862, and the immediate reaction to this change in commanders, which was almost wholly positive.

Both those who write history and those who read it should always keep in mind the caveat provided by another Civil War officer, Confederate Henry Kyd Douglas: "History can never know the whole truth. The historian may analyze, investigate, and

speculate until he is weary…yet his conclusion will fall short of the truth."[30] Yet we must also pay heed to historian George C. Rable's contention that good military history "means treating the people involved as full human beings."[31] Judging the wisdom of Burnside's appointment strictly based on hindsight does not allow the historian to do this. Burnside was not an incapable dolt who received command of the Army of the Potomac simply by default, and Lincoln was not naïve in appointing a general he honestly believed had the best chance to lead Union forces to victory, based on Burnside's existing military record. The decision of Lincoln must be read in the context of the information that he had available in November of 1862, not that which revealed itself afterwards, via the disaster at Fredericksburg. Only in this way can a proper understanding be reached of both the general and the Commander in Chief.

On 26 December 1861, Lincoln sent Burnside, who was assembling his expedition, a short telegram. It stated, "It is of great importance you should move as soon as possible. Consumption of time is killing us."[32] Within a few weeks, Burnside would sail for the North Carolina coast. Yet the echoes of this movement reverberated far beyond the Carolina shore. In fact, they would culminate in Burnside receiving

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[30] Henry Kyd Douglas, *I Rode with Stonewall*, ed. Fletcher M. Green (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1940), 42.

[31] Rable, *Fredericksburg! Fredericksburg!*, 5.

[32] Lincoln to Burnside, 26 December 1861, in Roy P. Basler ed., *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln: Supplement 2* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1990), 39.

command of the Union's largest and most prestigious army less than a year later.

Therefore, it is to the conception and formation of the expedition itself that we now turn.

CHAPTER II

"THE WOLF IS AT THE DOOR": THE PERILOUS POSITION OF NORTH CAROLINA AND THE FORMATION OF THE BURNSIDE EXPEDITION

Throughout the turbulent summer of 1861, four men met frequently at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington D.C. As the Union field army around Washington, later to be known as the Army of the Potomac, prepared for what Northerners hoped would be a decisive confrontation with the principle Confederate force at Manassas, these men planned a strategy for a longer war. Alexander Dallas Bache, John G. Barnard, Charles H. Davis, and Samuel Francis Du Pont formed what would be known as the Blockade Strategy Board, and it was the recommendations of these men that would set in motion a course of events that would ultimately lead to the invasion of North Carolina by General Ambrose Burnside's Coast Division in the beginning of 1862.[1]

The primary purpose of the Blockade Board was to determine the best means to enforce Abraham Lincoln's blockade, which the President had proclaimed at the outset of the war in April.[2] Lincoln, particularly after the Union's defeat at the Battle of Bull

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[1] Robert M. Browning Jr., *From Cape Charles to Cape Fear: The North Atlantic Blockading Squadron during the Civil War* (Tuscaloosa, Ala.: University of Alabama Press, 1993), 8-10. Bache was the superintendent of the United States Coast Survey, Barnard the chief engineer of the Army Department of Washington, Davis another old member of the Coast Survey, and Du Pont a high ranking naval officer who had experience with blockades from his service in the Mexican American War. Bache had proposed the Board in May 1861, and Du Pont chaired it. See also Donald Stoker, *The Grand Design: Strategy and the U.S. Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 93-95, and Gustavus V. Fox to Samuel F. Du Pont, 22 May 1861, in John D. Hayes, ed., *Samuel Francis Du Pont: A Selection from his Civil War Letters, Vol. 1, The Mission: 1860-1862* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1969), 71.

[2] "Proclamation of a Blockade," 19 April 1861, in Roy P. Basler, ed., *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln, Vol. 4: 1860-1861* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1953), 338-339, 346-347. On

Run in July, wanted the blockade to be "pushed forward with all possible dispatch," and so the Board's tasks were to outline the hydrographic conditions along the coasts of the Confederacy, and recommend strategic points to be seized which would serve as bases and also interrupt the activity of Confederate blockade runners.[3] The Board would eventually go defunct in October 1861, but not before it pushed for the seizure of several key places on the North Carolina coast, among them Hatteras Inlet, Beaufort, and several towns along the Chowan, Roanoke, Pamlico, and Neuse Rivers.[4]

The North Carolina coast received particular attention from the Board because of its strategic significance, and the headaches it was causing for the Union Navy. Confederate President Jefferson Davis had issued his own proclamation in response to Lincoln's April call for 75,000 militia to put down the rebellion, urging privateers to apply for letters of marque and aid the Confederate government by attacking Union vessels anywhere they could be found.[5] As Confederate Secretary of State Robert Toombs explained, "It is only by the use of privateers that we can now encounter the

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19 April, Lincoln had declared a blockade of the ports of South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Florida, Mississippi, Louisiana, and Texas, and on 27 April had extended this blockade to cover the ports of Virginia and North Carolina.

[3] "Memoranda of Military Policy Suggested by the Bull Run Defeat," 23 July 1861, in Basler, ed., *Collected Works, Vol. 4: 1860-1861*, 457; Hayes, ed., *Samuel Francis Du Pont: A Selection from his Civil War Letters, Vol. 1, The Mission: 1860-1862*, lxviii.

[4] Stoker, *Grand Design*, 95; Browning Jr., *Cape Charles to Cape Fear*, 9-10.

[5] Davis, "A Proclamation," 17 April 1861, in James D. Richardson ed., *A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Confederacy, Including Diplomatic Correspondence 1861-1865, Vol. 1* (Nashville, Tenn.: United States Publishing Company, 1905), 60-61.

United States upon the high seas. It is the only weapon of maritime defense left to us."[6] Many of these privateers operated from the North Carolina sounds, particularly the harbor at Beaufort, which was protected by Fort Macon and viewed by North Carolina Governor John Willis Ellis as "the best, shortest, and most accessible refuge for privateers."[7] These privateers used the Hatteras lighthouse as a lookout for merchantmen and were protected by the dangerous coast and rough waters off Hatteras Inlet, thus ensuring them a large measure of success.[8]

But as time passed, the very success of these privateers made North Carolina a Union target. As Brigadier General Walter Gwynn, charged with the defense of the North Carolina coast, pointed out to the Secretary of the Military Board of the state, Warren Winslow, "The better [the privateers] do in taking prizes, the more likely it will become that an attack will be made." Those engaged in privateering well understood this; as one man from Beaufort wrote to Winslow, "As we are taking prizes and privateers from Wilmington and Charleston are coming here the U.S. will certainly make some effort to break up this nest; that is if they have not been bereft of their senses."[9]

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[6] Toombs to William L. Yancey, Pierre A. Rost, and William D. Mann, 18 May 1861, in Richardson, ed., *Messages and Papers of the Confederacy, Vol. 2*, 27. Yancey, Rost, and Mann were the Confederate commissioners to Europe at this time.

[7] Ellis to Jefferson Davis, 25 April 1861, in John W. Ellis, *The Papers of John Willis Ellis, Vol. 2: 1860-1861*, ed. Noble J. Tolbert (Raleigh: North Carolina Department of Archives and History, 1964), 678.

[8] Browning Jr., *Cape Charles to Cape Fear*, 7-8.

[9] Gwynn to Winslow, 28 June 1861, Record Group (RG) 109.9, Records of Confederate Military Organizations: Records of the Department of North Carolina, Ch. II, vol. 259.5, National Archives (NA); Citizen of Beaufort to Winslow, 7 July 1861, Governor Henry T. Clark Papers, G.P. 152, Folder 1, North Carolina State Archives (NCSA).

The commander of the forts at Hatteras, Major W.S.G. Andrews, tried to prevent the news of the numerous captures from spreading, but remarked that he was largely unsuccessful in doing so. Indeed, Governor Henry T. Clark, Ellis's replacement, grew increasingly worried that the success of the privateers had made the state more vulnerable.[10]

Because the vast majority of the North Carolina coast was shielded by a series of barrier islands which stretched from Cape Henry, Virginia down to Bogue Inlet, below Beaufort, penetrated by only a few inlets, the only way for Union forces to stop the privateering and blockade running was to gain control of the inlets and the interior waterways, particularly Albemarle and Pamlico Sounds. Both the stormy waters and the small size of the Union Navy at the outset of the war made it a logistical impossibility for the North to station an adequate number of vessels at each inlet, so the most effective way to deal with this problem was to capture them, particularly Hatteras, which was the only inlet navigable by large ships.[11]

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[10] Andrews to Clark, 2 August 1861, Governor Henry T. Clark Papers, G.P. 153, Folder 1, NCSA. See also Asa Biggs to Clark, 1 August 1861, in the same folder, in which Biggs states that a single privateer in the area had captured three prizes in just a week. These letters make it clear that by August 1861, Confederate privateers operating near Hatteras were securing prizes almost daily; Clark to Davis, 9 August 1861, in Jefferson Davis, *The Papers of Jefferson Davis, Vol. 7: 1861*, ed. Lynda Lasswell Crist and Mary Seaton Dix (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1992), 279. Clark had replaced Ellis as Governor when Ellis died of tuberculosis at the beginning of July.

[11] At the outset of the war, the Union Navy had only 42 commissioned vessels, and almost none were available for immediate service. Furthermore, the Union controlled only two naval bases in the South from which to operate, those at Hampton Roads and Key West. Therefore, any vessels on blockade duty would have to constantly leave their station for repairs, supplies, and coal. Though the Navy grew rapidly throughout 1861, ringing the whole coast of North Carolina remained impossible and the need for bases in the South only grew. See Stoker, *Grand Design*, 93-94; Browning Jr., *Cape Charles to Cape Fear*, 1-2; and James M. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 313-314, 369-370.

On the advice of the Blockade Board, the Union Navy prepared to do this. As Du Pont explained to a friend, the Navy Department, which he termed "hitherto the most rickety and stupid of all" had achieved "a vitality and energy never seen there before."[12] Flag Officer Silas H. Stringham, a veteran of both the War of 1812 and the Mexican American War, and commander of the Atlantic Blockading Squadron, was chosen to lead the naval part of the expedition, while the army contingent, comprising around 880 men, was put under the control of General Benjamin F. Butler.[13] Stringham assembled a flotilla of seven ships mounting more than 140 rifled guns, while two chartered transports carried the 9th and 20th New York Volunteers and a company of the 2nd United States Artillery. Secretary of the Navy Gideon Welles made clear to Stringham that "[t]here is no position off the coast which you are guarding…where well-directed efforts and demonstrations would be more highly appreciated by the government and country than North Carolina, which has been the resort of pirates."[14] The flotilla departed Hampton Roads on 26 August, and anchored off of Hatteras Inlet the next afternoon.

Hatteras Inlet was guarded by two forts, Hatteras and Clark, which had been completed only in mid-summer. Fort Hatteras was a square dirt fort, mounting 12 32-

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[12] Du Pont to Matthew Maury, 30 August 1861, in Hayes, ed., *Samuel Francis Du Pont: A Selection from his Civil War Letters, Vol. 1, The Mission: 1860-1862*, 138.

[13] Russell F. Weigley, *A Great Civil War: A Military and Political History, 1861-1865* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 2000), 73; John G. Barrett, *The Civil War in North Carolina* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1963), 36-37; Rowena Reed, *Combined Operations in the Civil War* (Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1978), 11-12.

[14] Barrett, Civil War in North Carolina, 36-37. The warships were the *Minnesota*, *Susquehanna*, *Pawnee*, *Monticello*, *Harriet Lane*, *Cumberland*, and *Wabash*, while the two transports were the *Adelaide* and the *George Peabody*.

pounder smoothbore cannons, while Fort Clark was smaller, located closer to the ocean, and armed with five of the same guns. The chief engineer for North Carolina's coastal defenses, Major W.B. Thompson, believed that the cross fire of the forts made the inlet "secure against any attempt of the enemy to enter it," but in actuality the forts were poorly manned, poorly armed, and lacking supplies.[15] Throughout the summer, Gwynn had complained that he did not have enough men to serve the batteries erected in the several forts along the coast, and had repeatedly made requisitions for ammunition, which netted him little.[16] Meanwhile, other military officials criticized Gwynn himself, accusing him of "intemperate habits" and "great inefficiency" in putting the coast in a proper state of defense. One letter to Clark from an officer serving at Fort Hatteras in particular must have caused the governor great alarm. This officer called Hatteras Inlet "the most important [point] on the whole coast of North Carolina, and the least defended," and accused the commanding officers at the forts of being "totally unfit…negligent of their duties…[and] drunken and rowdyish." The writer pointed out that the forts were so lacking in powder that they could not even fire a salute to the deceased Governor Ellis, and that the cannons were old fashioned smoothbores, "[S]o that any steamer of superior guns can shell our fort without endangering the loss of a

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[15] Barrett, *Civil War in North Carolina*, 33-34. Fort Hatteras had been completed in mid-June, and Fort Clark in mid-July. Fort Hatteras was protected by an outside of sand, sheathed by planks covered in turfs of marsh grass.

[16] For instance, see Gwynn to Winslow, 28 June 1861, and Gwynn to Clark, 18 July 1861, RG 109.9, Records of Confederate Military Organizations: Records of the Department of North Carolina, Ch. II, vol. 259.5, NA.

single spar." This opinion would too soon be proved correct, as would the belief that if the Confederates were driven from Hatteras, "[T]he lock and key of Carolina's coast will be broken, and the enemy can have an inlet to our main."[17]

Unfortunately for the Confederacy, the fight went almost exactly as this letter said it would. Stringham opened a bombardment of Fort Clark from out of range of the Confederate guns at 10:00 a.m. on 28 August, and before noon, over 300 of Butler's soldiers had made it ashore through the rough surf. Colonel J.C. Lamb, commanding at Fort Clark, spiked his guns and evacuated his men to Fort Hatteras, and Butler's force took possession of the deserted fort. At 7:30 a.m. the next day, the Union bombardment began again. In the words of one Confederate captain in Fort Hatteras, "Such a bombardment is not on record in the annals of war…It was like a hailstorm." Stringham's ships once again remained out of range of the Confederate cannons, and when a Union shell started a fire in the fort's magazine around 11:00 a.m., a council of war among the Confederate officers resulted in the surrendering of the fort, along with around 700 soldiers. Stringham and Butler's force had not lost a single man.[18] As Du Pont reported to a Northern Congressman, "The first fruits of the labor of my associates

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[17] Asa Biggs to Clark, 12 July 1861, and Officer at Fort Hatteras to Clark, 13 July 1861, both in Governor Henry T. Clark Papers, G.P. 152, Folder 1, NCSA. The latter writer concluded by stating, "Summarily, we have incompetent and drunken officers, inferior cannons, no powder, very few balls, no cartridges, no caps, an inadequate supply of men, no provisions, [and] no water."

[18] Barrett, *Civil War in North Carolina*, 39-45; Browning Jr., *Cape Charles to Cape Fear*, 12-14.

and myself [the Blockade Board] came out on the North Carolina coast – the first gleam of light from the ocean again as in 1812."[19]

The loss of Hatteras Inlet quickly sent shockwaves through North Carolina. Frantic letters and petitions poured in to Clark from towns and counties along the coast, such as the petition from Beaufort penned the day after Hatteras fell. The citizens of Beaufort were greatly concerned about the "imperfect character" of the coast defenses given the new Federal position at Hatteras, which they correctly pointed out provided a "free and unobstructed passage to this place."[20] Those in Martin County, further up the coast, sent a similar petition, which stated that "we the people of Martin since the disaster that has befallen our forces on our coast feel a deep sense of insecurity…we are greatly deficient in ordnance, ammunition, arms, and the proper fortifications to resist the enemy should they attempt to invade." These petitions always closed by asking Clark to send men, guns, and ammunition, which the governor was hard pressed to find.[21]

The private writings of citizens and soldiers make it clear that they were legitimately as alarmed as the petitions to Clark claimed. As Zebulon Vance, Colonel of the 26th North Carolina and future governor, wrote to his wife from the coast, "We are in

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[19] Du Pont to Henry Winter Davis, 4 September 1861, in Hayes, ed., *Samuel Francis Du Pont: A Selection from his Civil War Letters, Vol. 1, The Mission: 1860-1862*, 141. Du Pont also wrote that "[t]he coast of North Carolina has damaged us more than all else. I trust in God it will be closed now." See n. 3 on page 149.

[20] Petition from Citizens of Beaufort, 30 August 1861, Governor Henry T. Clark Papers, G.P. 153, Folder 2, NCSA.

[21] Resolutions of Meeting in Martin County, 1 September 1861, Governor Henry T. Clark Papers, G.P. 154, Folder 1, NCSA. For a similar petition from the citizens of Washington, see Washington, North Carolina Committee of Safety to Gov. Clark, 7 September 1861, in the same folder.

constant doubt here…where [the Union] will strike no one can say."[22] From Halifax County, one prominent female citizen described in her diary how "[t]he excitement was tremendous throughout the State…A thousand rumors, the last wilder than the first, were put in circulation…Now this town was reported burned, now that." Her frustration with the situation is evident in her admonition that "[i]f one half the misdirected energy now used in vain endeavors to 'shut' the stable door had been expended in preventing its being opened, the horse would never have been stolen."[23] Even in Richmond, citizens were disconcerted by the defeat at Hatteras, and what it portended. As famed diarist Mary Boykin Chestnut explained, "Here we have Hatteras on the brain. It is useless to try and interest anyone in anything else…The wolf is at the door. In it at North Carolina – and ready to prowl around us."[24]

Civil and military authorities in North Carolina proved just as alarmed as the citizens. The North Carolina House of Commons called for an investigation into the disaster at Hatteras, and demanded from Clark all of the information he possessed

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[22] Vance to Wife Harrietta Espy Vance, 17 October 1861, in Zebulon B. Vance, *The Papers of Zebulon Baird Vance, Vol. 1: 1843-1862*, ed. Frontis W. Johnston (Raleigh: North Carolina Department of Archives and History, 1963), 118. At that time, the 26th North Carolina was camped near Fort Macon.

[23] Catherine Ann Devereux Edmondston, *'Journal of a Secesh Lady': The Diary of Catherine Ann Devereux Edmondston, 1860-1866*, ed. Beth G. Crabtree and James W. Patton (Raleigh: North Carolina Division of Archives and History, 1979), 86-87. Edmondston and her husband lived on two plantations in Halifax County, and her diary is an incredibly intelligent and insightful source, demonstrating great awareness of political and military events and their corresponding consequences.

[24] Diary entry for 31 August 1861, in Mary Boykin Chestnut, *Mary Chestnut's Civil War*, ed. C. Vann Woodward (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), 182-183. Chestnut would later express her belief that "[t]hese coast inroads were our despair from the first."

relative to the incident.[25] Brigadier General Richard Gatlin, who had taken over control of the Department of North Carolina and the coast defenses from Gwynn, wrote to Clark urging large additions to the forces on the coast. Gatlin firmly believed that the defenses had been too long neglected, and thought that no less than five regiments were absolutely essential. He also recommended that two additional brigadier generals be sent to the department, and explained that he was attempting to restore confidence and control in the eastern portion of the state, where there now existed "an unhappy state of feeling among a portion of the citizens."[26] Henry K. Burgwyn, a military aide sent by Clark to inspect Fort Macon's defenses, complained that there was "not a single experienced gunner in the fort, not a rifled cannon nor mortar, only one ten inch and one eight inch columbiad, these in the hands of raw troops," while Asa Biggs, another military aide, expressed great concern over the strength of the fortifications at Roanoke Island, and urged Clark to send no more troops to Virginia, but instead to "*direct all the energies of the state for the protection of the state*," due to his belief that Union forces would soon advance into Albemarle Sound.[27]

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[25] Clark to William Theophilus Dortch, 11 September 1861, Governor Henry T. Clark Papers, G.L.B. 46, Part I, NCSA. Dortch was the Speaker of the House of Commons. In his response, Clark blamed the fall of Hatteras on the lack of long range guns, which he had unsuccessfully attempted to procure from Confederate authorities.

[26] Gatlin to Adjutant General Samuel Cooper, 18 September 1861 and 7 October 1861, and Gatlin to Clark, 15 September 1861, all in RG 109.9, Records of Confederate Military Organizations: Records of the Department of North Carolina, Ch. II, vol. 262.5, NA. Gatlin had assumed command of the Department of North Carolina on 21 August 1861. See Special Orders No. 130, by Command of the Secretary of War, 21 August 1861, Governor Henry T. Clark Papers, G.P. 153, Folder 2, NCSA.

[27] Burgwyn to Clark, 6 September 1861, and Biggs to Clark, 10 September 1861, both in Governor Henry T. Clark Papers, G.P. 154, Folder 1, NCSA.

Clark was not blind to these deficiencies, and fought with Richmond to obtain the means to address them. As he made clear to Leroy Pope Walker, the Secretary of War, just days after the fall of Hatteras, "The recent successful invasion of our coast demand us to protect ourselves with all dispatch." Clark asked for five rifled 32-pounders, ten 8-inch shell guns, twenty 42-pounders, and twenty 32-pounders, which were not forthcoming.[28] Just days later, Clark wrote again to Walker, lamenting the fact that "[t]he possession of Hatteras gives the control of Pamlico Sound to the enemy, and they can on any day send out predatory expeditions on the surrounding country and up the navigable streams doing immense damage." Clark complained that North Carolina had sent almost all of its arms and men to Virginia, and "our liberality has exhausted our supply." Therefore, he urged the return of troops to defend Washington, New Bern, and Beaufort, which he claimed were "without a single soldier."[29] Clark thought the situation in the eastern counties so bad that discontent was "verging on Civil War," but Davis thought it "highly inexpedient to withdraw any of the N.C. troops from Virginia for the defence of [the] coast for many reasons, the chief of which is that it would assure the enemy of the success of his decided and avowed policy to weaken and demoralize the

[28] Clark to Walker, 1 September 1861, Governor Henry T. Clark Papers, G.L.B. 46, Part I, NCSA.

[29] Clark to Walker, 8 September 1861, Governor Henry T. Clark Papers, G.L.B. 46, Part I, NCSA. The same day, Clark wrote an almost identical letter to Adjutant General Samuel Cooper, reiterating his belief that "North Carolina has been very generous with her large lot of arms, but our supply is now nearly exhausted…We are threatened at so many places on the coast, and every point calls for arms and ammunition."

Army in Virginia."[30] For although the Confederate Congress had passed a resolution calling for information on Hatteras and inquiring what steps Davis was taking to put the North Carolina coast in a state of defense, Davis continued to argue that the necessary troops and guns were needed elsewhere.[31]

All of this meant that the defenses of the North Carolina coast remained in a poor state throughout the fall of 1861. The situation was so bad that the Confederacy was forced to abandon the forts at Ocracoke and Oregon Inlets.[32] Gatlin remained worried about the safety of Roanoke Island, a place he believed was "of such importance, that could I have done so, I should long since have reinforced it. But I am unable to send a soldier there without withdrawing them from points already insufficiently defended."[33]

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[30] Clark to Gatlin, 15 September 1861, and General Lawrence O'Bryan Branch to Clark, 17 September 1861, both in Governor Henry T. Clark Papers, G.L.B. 46, Part I, NCSA. Clark had sent Branch to plead with Davis for the return of North Carolina regiments.

[31] Davis to Confederate States Congress, 31 August 1861, in Richardson ed., *Messages and Papers of the Confederacy, Vol. 1*, 129.

[32] After the defeat at Hatteras, a council of war among the officers at Fort Oregon, which was still uncompleted and low on ammunition, decided to spike the guns and evacuate the post immediately. The senior officer commanding at Fort Oregon, Captain Daniel Linsey, wrote to James G. Martin, North Carolina's Adjutant General, justifying his decision by claiming that the force was isolated from the mainland, exposed to attack from sea and land, deficient in ammunition, and in danger of being cut off entirely. Therefore, "It was concluded that our continuance at the Post would result in the surrender of my command to the enemy and probably a severe loss of life on our side." The chief engineer at the fort, Elwood Morris, however, protested that "this evacuation of a strong fortress…just mounted with its armament, and not even threatened by the enemy, *was not justified by any military necessity*." Clark himself came to believe that Fort Oregon had been evacuated without orders and "under circumstances which cannot be approved," but the damage was done. See Linsey to Martin, 3 September 1861, and Morris to Warren Winslow, 5 September 1861, both in Governor Henry T. Clark Papers, G.P. 154, Folder 1, as well as Clark to Dortch, September 1861, Governor Henry T. Clark Papers, G.L.B. 46, Part I, NCSA.

[33] Gatlin to Cooper, 28 October 1861, RG 109.9, Records of Confederate Military Organizations: Records of the Department of North Carolina, Ch. II, vol. 262.5, NA.

Gatlin, Clark, and North Carolina citizens were right to be concerned, for plans were afoot in the North to use Hatteras as a base for further operations in North Carolina.

Butler's original orders had been to sink hulks in Hatteras Inlet, thereby blocking it for Confederate use, and then abandon the forts. But the general rapidly realized that Hatteras Inlet "was the opening to a great inland sea running up 90 miles to Newbern…[I]f we ever intended to operate in North Carolina and southern Virginia, we should operate by way of that inland sea." The War Department in Washington became quickly convinced of this fact, and ordered the forts held on 5 September.[34] This was a wise decision; as Union Admiral David Dixon Porter later remarked, the victory at Hatteras "gave us a foothold on southern soil and possession of the sounds of North Carolina…and ultimately proved one of the most important events of the war."[35]

Union authorities soon moved to make the success at Hatteras pay further strategic dividends. Shortly after the capture of the inlet, Major General George McClellan, the commander of the Army of the Potomac and soon to be general in chief of all Union forces, asked Secretary of War Simon Cameron for permission to create a "Coast Division." McClellan proposed to "organize a force of two brigades of five regiments each, of New England men…particularly adapted to coast service; the officers

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[34] Butler quoted in Barrett, *Civil War in North Carolina*, 46.

[35] Porter quoted in Barrett, *Civil War in North Carolina*, 47. The Confederacy also realized this, and made a weak and unsuccessful attempt to retake Hatteras, which they launched from Roanoke Island. This only further drew Union attention to that post. See pages 48-56, as well as Lee Thomas Oxford, *The Civil War on Hatteras: The Chicamacomico Affair and the Capture of the U.S. Gunboat Fanny* (Charleston, S.C.: The History Press, 2013), 122-168.

and men to be sufficiently conversant with boat service to manage steamers, sailing-vessels, launches, barges, surf-boats, [and] floating batteries." He foresaw this division operating in conjunction with naval forces against various points on the Atlantic coast.[36] The idea, however, was not originally his, but that of his old friend, Brigadier General Ambrose Burnside.[37]

Ambrose Everts Burnside was born on 23 May 1824, in Liberty, Indiana, the fourth of nine children. The Burnsides, who had emigrated from Scotland, had originally settled in South Carolina before moving north. Burnside's father, Edghill Burnside, was a court clerk, and the young man himself worked for a local tailor. In 1842, on the request of Edghill, 45 members of the Indiana Legislature signed a petition recommending Burnside for West Point, which was endorsed by the state's two senators, and so Burnside arrived at the Academy in June 1843. He eventually graduated 18th out of 38 in the class of 1847, accepted a commission in the 3rd U.S. Artillery, and was sent to Mexico, but arrived too late to see any action.[38] Burnside was well liked by his fellow officers and quickly became known for his openness, friendliness, and modesty. In 1852,

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[36] McClellan to Cameron, 6 September 1861, in George B. McClellan, *McClellan's Own Story* (New York: Charles L. Webster, 1887), 205.

[37] Stoker, Grand Design, 70; Shelby Foote, *The Civil War: A Narrative, Vol. 1, Fort Sumter to Perryville* (New York: Vintage Books, 1986), 227-228; William Marvel, *Burnside* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 32-33.

[38] Marvel, *Burnside*, 3-5. While at West Point, an administrative error permanently distorted Burnside's middle name from Everts to Everett. When Burnside's expedition departed for North Carolina, the *New York Tribune* would remark, "It is not an uninteresting coincidence that this general, whose heart and soul are so devoted to the great work of defending the liberties and restoring the Union of his country, should have been born at Liberty, in Union County [Indiana]." See "The Great Burnside Expedition," *New York Tribune*, 14 January 1862.

he was appointed to the command of Fort Adams in Newport, Rhode Island, a state that would become his adopted home. He did not serve at this post long, however, resigning from the army in 1853 to manufacture a rifle he had designed.[39]

The outbreak of the Civil War found Burnside working in the New York Office of the Illinois Central Railroad Company. Despite having left the army, Burnside was quickly offered command of the 1st Rhode Island Volunteer Infantry by that state's governor, William Sprague. Burnside accepted, and by July 1861 he had become a brigade commander. His brigade did hard fighting at the Battle of Bull Run, and due to his performance in this battle, Burnside received a commission as Brigadier General of United States Volunteers when the brigade subsequently disbanded. But for the time being, the newly minted general was without a command.[40] It was at this point that Burnside began to push the idea for an amphibious division on McClellan, while also asking the governors of New York and several states in New England to contribute troops to such a force.

McClellan and the War Department rapidly came to see the North Carolina coast as the most beneficial place to utilize this force. Stringham had in fact been replaced as commander of the Atlantic Blockading Squadron in mid-September because he had failed to advance further into Pamlico Sound, contending that he did not have enough

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[39] "General Burnside," *Harper's Weekly*, 29 November 1862. It was while at Fort Adams that Burnside met his wife, Mary Richmond Bishop.

[40] Marvel, *Burnside*, 14-31. Burnside received this commission from Lincoln on 6 August 1861.

light draft vessels to do so.[41] Meanwhile, other naval officers at Hatteras stressed to Secretary of the Navy Welles the strategic importance of a Union-held Roanoke Island, which would allow for command of the Albemarle and Pamlico Sounds and the Neuse River, and shortly thereafter, Colonel Rush Hawkins, commanding at Hatteras, penned to the War Department his belief that "seven thousand men judiciously placed upon the soil of North Carolina would…draw 20,000 Confederate troops from the state of Virginia."[42] Washington ignored Hawkins's letter beyond formal acknowledgement, but the correspondence of Du Pont makes clear that the Administration was seriously considering using Burnside's proposed force in North Carolina. Du Pont related the events of a 1 October meeting with Lincoln, Cameron, Secretary of State William Seward, and Assistant Secretary of the Navy Gustavus V. Fox, in which Fox puffed cigar smoke into Lincoln's eyes while the men discussed the expedition. While Lincoln denied any knowledge of an expedition to the cabinet, Du Pont claimed that "it was understood to be a pet enterprise with the President."[43]

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[41] Du Pont was highly critical of Stringham, who he claimed "did but one half his duty," and had "eleven ships in Hampton Roads and three ports uncovered." Stringham was subsequently forced to submit his resignation, which was officially accepted by Welles on 18 September. The Atlantic Blockading Squadron was then split into two separate squadrons, the North Atlantic and the South Atlantic, divided at the junction of North and South Carolina. Du Pont got the South Atlantic Blockading Squadron, and Louis M. Goldsborough got the North Atlantic Blockading Squadron. See Du Pont to Henry Winter Davis, 4 September 1861, and Du Pont to wife Sophie Du Pont, 17 September and 18 September 1861, in Hayes, ed., *Samuel Francis Du Pont: A Selection from his Civil War Letters, Vol. 1, The Mission: 1860-1862*, 141-142, 149, 151, as well as Browning Jr., *Cape Charles to Cape Fear*, 14-15.

[42] Stephen Rowan to Gideon Welles, 20 September 1861, quoted in Oxford, *The Civil War on Hatteras*, 38; Hawkins quoted in Barrett, *Civil War in North Carolina*, 59-60.

[43] Du Pont to Henry Winter Davis, 8 October 1861, in Hayes, ed., *Samuel Francis Du Pont: A Selection from his Civil War Letters, Vol. 1, The Mission: 1860-1862*, 162-163.

Du Pont, who was at the time commanding the South Atlantic Blockading Squadron and forming his own expedition to capture Port Royal in South Carolina, recommended that the Administration focus on one coastal attack at a time, and this the men agreed to.[44] Though the subject of an expedition to North Carolina was therefore shelved for a few weeks, it soon came back up. On 6 November, Hawkins traveled to Washington and spoke to Lincoln's Cabinet emphasizing the benefits of Union military action in North Carolina's interior waterways. The colonel also attempted to convince Lincoln that there was a great deal of Unionist sentiment on the coast of North Carolina, thus playing to Lincoln's desire to bring these loyal Unionists back under control of the government.[45] Shortly thereafter, Flag Officer Louis M. Goldsborough, the new commander of the North Atlantic Blockading Squadron, outlined a plan to Welles for a joint army-navy attack to secure Pamlico Sound, and preparations began in earnest.[46]

Burnside immediately devoted all of his energy to preparing the expedition he was to lead. Not only did he procure regiments from New York, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and Connecticut, but he also sorted through requests for appointments from

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[44] Du Pont's fleet would set sail in late October, and on 7 November it reduced Fort Walker, and took possession of Port Royal. This further increased fears along the Confederate coast. See Du Pont to wife Sophie Du Pont, 7 November 1861, in Hayes, ed., *Samuel Francis Du Pont: A Selection from his Civil War Letters, Vol. 1, The Mission: 1860-1862*, 222-224, as well as Foote, *The Civil War: A Narrative, Vol. 1*, 116-120, and Reed, *Combined Operations*, 23-32.

[45] Stoker, *Grand Design*, 70-71; Marvel, *Burnside*, 33-34. Marvel contends that Hawkins (who he describes as having "haughty pride and [a] condescending attitude") may have been less than forthright about the truth of this statement, but the colonel knew that "these were theories Abraham Lincoln desperately wanted to believe."

[46] Marvel, *Burnside*, 35.

engineers, railroad men, carpenters, and others whose civil occupation might bear fruit in the coming months. He personally made efforts to obtain arms, provisions, and light draft boats for his force, in the process of which he received appeals from companies peddling their military products for his use. One such letter came from the Delano Life Preserving Coat & Vest Company, which attempted to sell Burnside life preservers for use in landing soldiers through surf. As the letter claimed, "With these life preservers you may land any number of men without loss. The men who put them on, about to enter the surf boats to land, will have double courage and the commander will himself feel that his forces cannot drown."[47] Despite this strong exhortation, there is no evidence that Burnside purchased any of these garments.

The staging area for the expedition was Annapolis, and it was there that the regiments now attached to the general's command began to gather. As these men went through drills, inspections, and reviews, Burnside continued his work.[48] The general's new personal secretary, Daniel Reed Larned, wrote that Burnside seemed "worn to death" by all of the preparations, and though they progressed slowly, Larned attempted to convince his sister that "if you could see the amount of work to be done you would

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[47] See RG 94: Records of the Adjutant General's Office, Ambrose E. Burnside Papers, Box 1, Folder 2, National Archives (NA), which is full of requests for appointments and commissions and also contains correspondence from Burnside to various arsenals and transportation agents. For the quoted advertisement, see A.F. Ball to Burnside, 8 January 1862, RG 94, Ambrose E. Burnside Papers, Box 1, Folder 3, NA.

[48] David L. Day, *My Diary of Rambles with the 25th Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry* (Milford, Mass.: King & Billings, 1884), 10-16.

think it very strange if [the expedition] got away from here in two or three months, but General B[urnside] is a man that makes things move."[49]

Perhaps Burnside's most crucial decision during this time was his selection of men to command his three new brigades. Burnside chose three West-Point classmates who were both career officers and his close friends. John G. Foster, who was to lead the First Brigade, had graduated fourth in the West Point class of 1846, and had served with distinction in the Mexican-American War, being breveted twice for gallant and meritorious conduct.[50] Jesse L. Reno, commander of the Second Brigade, was a Virginian by birth who had grown up in Pennsylvania, and also graduated West Point in 1846. Like Foster, he too had been breveted twice in Mexico, and after that conflict, he had served as the Secretary of the Board of Artillery, and then with the Coast Survey and the topographical engineers in the West.[51] John G. Parke had graduated second in the West Point class of 1849, so unlike Foster and Reno he had not gained combat experience in the Mexican War. Yet Burnside was impressed by Parke's competence and

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[49] Daniel Reed Larned to Sister, 22 December and 24 December 1861, Daniel Reed Larned Papers, Vol. 1: Correspondence, 9 December 1861 – 5 May 1862, Library of Congress (LOC).

[50] Marvel, Burnside, 37; "The Burnside Expedition," *Harper's Weekly*, 1 March 1862. Foster was breveted first lieutenant for gallant and meritorious conduct at the battles of Contreras and Churubusco, and later in the war breveted captain. He then became a Professor of Engineering at West Point in 1854.

[51] "The Late General Reno," *Harper's Weekly*, 4 October 1862. Reno had been breveted first lieutenant for his actions at the Battle of Cerro Gordo, and then breveted captain for bravery at the Battle of Chapultepec. During the Civil War, he was one of the most well-respected officers in the Union Army. Upon his death at the Battle of South Mountain in September 1862, *Harper's* wrote, "Thus died one of the bravest generals that was in the service of his country; one of the bright gems in the crown of Burnside, and a man whom all respected and loved."

devotion to duty, and so gave him control of the division's Third Brigade.[52] All three men would prove to be competent combat commanders and excellent choices. Meanwhile, the leader of the naval portion of the expedition, the stout and red-bearded Louis Goldsborough, was a long-serving veteran who had entered the Navy during the War of 1812, had commanded multiple heavy ships, and had attained experience with blockading duties during the war with Mexico. While the rear admiral, known in the navy as "Old Guts," was not specifically selected by Burnside, he too would prove suitable for the task at hand.[53]

By the end of 1861, preparations were almost complete for the expedition to leave Annapolis. On 29 December, Burnside traveled to Washington to visit with the War Department, a trip Larned hoped would lead to a movement as soon as possible, as he was "heartily sick" of the secessionists in Annapolis, who antagonized the Union soldiers by espousing their pro-Southern views.[54] On 2 January, McClellan (by this time general in chief) requested a meeting with Burnside, at which Burnside reported his force ready, and five days later, McClellan gave Burnside written orders.[55] Burnside was

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[52] Marvel, *Burnside*, 37. Parke would so impress Burnside that he would become the general's chief of staff when Burnside rose to command of the Army of the Potomac.

[53] "The Burnside Expedition," *Harper's Weekly*, 1 March 1862; Browning Jr., *Cape Charles to Cape Fear*, 17-18; Richard E. Beringer, Herman Hattaway, Archer Jones, and William N. Still Jr., *Why the South Lost the Civil War* (Athens, Ga.: University of Georgia Press, 1986), 137. Goldsborough was six feet four inches tall, weighed over 300 pounds, and had a flaming red beard.

[54] Larned to Sister, 29 December 1861, Daniel Reed Larned Papers, Vol. 1: Correspondence, LOC.

[55] Seth Williams telegraph to Burnside, 1 January 1862, RG 94, Ambrose E. Burnside Papers, Box 1, Folder 3, NA. Williams was McClellan's assistant adjutant general. McClellan had officially been made general in chief at the beginning of November, after Lieutenant General Winfield Scott retired. See Lincoln to McClellan, 1 November 1861, in McClellan, *McClellan's Own Story*, 200.

to rendezvous with Goldsborough's vessels at Fortress Monroe, and then proceed to Hatteras Inlet and cross the bulkhead into Pamlico Sound. His first point of attack was to be Roanoke Island, where McClellan hoped he could capture the whole garrison. After this was done, Burnside was instructed to "make a descent on New Berne, having gained possession of which and the railroad passing through it, you will at once throw a sufficient force upon Beaufort and take the steps necessary to reduce Fort Macon and open that port." If the "temper of the people [and] the rebel force at hand" allowed it, Burnside was to conclude by seizing the Atlantic and North Carolina Railroad as far west as Goldsborough. McClellan urged Burnside to use great caution in regard to issuing any proclamations, and specifically told him to say "as little as possible about politics or the negro" to the people of North Carolina.[56]

McClellan clearly envisioned Burnside's expedition as part of his overall strategy to exert pressure on the Confederacy on multiple fronts. At least one historian has argued that the detachment of Burnside's Coast Division actually hindered McClellan's later operations on the Virginia Peninsula, but this estimate is wholly incorrect.[57] McClellan, in fact, believed that if Burnside took Roanoke and New Bern, and threatened the Wilmington and Weldon Railroad, this would aid the drive up the Peninsula (a strategy McClellan had been developing for some time) by forcing the evacuation of Norfolk, cutting off the flow of supplies to the Confederate armies in Virginia, and tying down

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[56] McClellan to Burnside, 7 January 1862, RG 94, Ambrose E. Burnside Papers, Box 1, Folder 3, NA.

[57] Warren W. Hassler Jr., *General George B. McClellan: Shield of the Union* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1957), 77.

Confederate forces in North Carolina.[58] As McClellan explained to the new Secretary of War, Edwin McMasters Stanton, Burnside would essentially form the left flank of McClellan's own operations.[59] Therefore, the general in chief saw the success of Burnside's expedition as crucial to the success of his larger plan. While McClellan and Burnside discussed strategy, the soldiers at Annapolis could sense that the long-awaited movement was afoot. As one private in the 25th Massachusetts wrote in his diary, "Things certainly begin to look like leaving; the harbor is full of vessels, transports, gunboats, and supply ships…Appearances indicate that somebody will hear it thunder somewhere along the Southern coast before very long."[60]

Unfortunately for North Carolina, its coast defenses were not at all prepared for the thunder Burnside would bring down on them. The new commander of the District of the Pamlico, which included Roanoke Island, was Brigadier General Daniel Harvey Hill.[61] D.H. Hill, as he was known, was a deeply religious West Point graduate and Mexican War veteran who had made his home in North Carolina before the Civil War,

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[58] McClellan, *McClellan's Own Story*, 203; Reed, *Combined Operations*, 39-40; Stoker, *Grand Design*, 88.

[59] McClellan to Stanton, 31 January 1862, in Stephen W. Sears, ed., *The Civil War Papers of George B. McClellan: Selected Correspondence, 1860-1865* (New York: Ticknor & Fields, 1989), 166-170. Stanton had officially replaced Cameron as Secretary of War on 20 January, 1862. See William Marvel, *Lincoln's Autocrat: The Life of Edwin Stanton* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015), 148-153.

[60] Entry for 1 January 1862, in Day, *My Diary of Rambles*, 16.

[61] Hill was assigned to this duty in North Carolina at the end of September, 1861, by Special Orders No. 166. He was charged with "the defenses of that portion of [North Carolina] lying between Albemarle Sound and the Neuse River and Pamlico Sound." See Gatlin to Cooper, 1 October 1861, RG 109.9, Records of Confederate Military Organizations: Records of the Department of North Carolina, Ch. II, vol. 262.5, NA.

and was the brother-in-law of General Thomas (Stonewall) Jackson.[62] He was a small man who suffered from dyspepsia, which may have contributed to what many viewed as his abrasive personality. A fellow Confederate officer would later describe him as a "capable, well-read soldier and positively about the bravest man ever seen…but of sharp prejudice," while a member of the Confederate government termed him "harsh, abrupt, [and] often insulting."[63] Hill's frankness and willingness to insult those he viewed as incompetent would be on full display during his time in North Carolina.

In September, Hill had claimed to his wife that he had "no fears of [an] expedition along the Southern Coast doing any serious mischief," but when he reached the North Carolina coast and inspected its defenses, his tune changed.[64] Hill quickly discovered a "terrible state of confusion, and an apathy among the people," which he found highly alarming. This caused him to state to his wife his opinion that there was heavy work before him, based on his notion that "the people have done nothing for the defense of their unprotected homes and firesides," a fact he viewed as "almost inconceivable." Throughout October, Hill continued to complain about the "very great defects in all our coast defenses" and the perceived laziness of North Carolinians. As he

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[62] Hill had been breveted captain during the war with Mexico for gallant and meritorious conduct in the battles of Contreras and Churubusco. The original copy of the commission is located in Daniel Harvey Hill Papers, P.C. 93.4, Folder 2, NCSA.

[63] G. Moxley Sorrel, *Recollections of a Confederate Staff Officer*, ed. Bell Irvin Wiley (Jackson, Tenn.: McCowat-Mercer Press, 1958), xv-xvi; Entry for 14 July 1863, in Robert Garlick Hill Kean, *Inside the Confederate Government: The Diary of Robert Garlick Hill Kean*, ed. Edward Younger (New York: Oxford University Press, 1957), 81.

[64] Hill to wife Isabella Morrison Hill, 18 September 1861, Daniel Harvey Hill Papers, Box 1, Folder 2, United States Army Heritage and Education Center (USAHEC).

exclaimed, "The utter worthlessness of such people is really incredible."[65] By the end of the month, Hill was correctly estimating that the expected Union attack would come at Roanoke Island, and though he was surprised that this assault had not yet taken place, he found refuge in his trust in God, who he believed would make all things well.[66]

Unfortunately for Hill, God could not supply him with the resources he desired to put Roanoke in a better state of defense. Instead, he was left to rely on Gatlin and Clark, who he termed an "imbecile Governor."[67] Clark urged Hill to direct all his requisitions for batteries and men directly to the Confederate government, as he had no arms at his disposal, and as the Confederacy, and not North Carolina, was technically in control of the defenses of the state.[68] So, Hill stressed to Confederate authorities his belief that the "all important island" would undoubtedly be attacked. In his eyes, "[E]verything depends on holding it [Roanoke]…I am confident that Manassas itself is not more important." Hill requested more powder and rifled cannons of heavy caliber, as well as four additional regiments, and correctly predicted that if he did not receive these, Roanoke Island would fall, followed by the towns of Washington and Plymouth.[69] Hill, however, received very little to work with, and although he began to relocate the forts on

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[65] Hill to Wife, 2, 7, and 17 October 1861, Daniel Harvey Hill Papers, Box 1, Folder 3, USAHEC.

[66] Hill to Wife, 25 and 26 October 1861, Daniel Harvey Hill Papers, Box 1, Folder 3, USAHEC.

[67] Hill to Wife, 16 November 1861, Daniel Harvey Hill Papers, Box 1, Folder 3, USAHEC.

[68] North Carolina Adjutant General James G. Martin to Hill, 14 October 1861, Daniel Harvey Hill Papers, Box 1, Library of Virginia (LV).

[69] Hill to Adjutant General Samuel Cooper, and Hill to Secretary of the Navy Stephen R. Mallory, both 18 October 1861, in Daniel Harvey Hill Papers, Box 1, LV.

Roanoke and construct more earthworks on the island, in mid-November he was ordered back to Virginia.[70]

Gatlin, like Hill, well understood the importance of Roanoke as the key to Albemarle Sound and the inland waters of North Carolina, but he too struggled to procure any aid from Confederate authorities.[71] Gatlin begged the new Confederate Secretary of War, Judah P. Benjamin, to send reinforcements to North Carolina at once, to no avail.[72] Meanwhile, Gatlin struggled to arm the regiments he did have under his command. He explained to Hill that he had "made so many requisitions on the Ordnance Dept. at Richmond for guns and powder without obtaining anything," and that Benjamin had forbidden any reinforcements being sent to the North Carolina coast "until we are certain where the enemy intends to attack." Though Gatlin tried to placate Hill by stating, "You cannot regret more than myself my inability to forward more troops to your district," and he assured Hill that he had urged Clark to send every available man to

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[70] Gatlin to Cooper, 19 November 1861, RG 109.9, Records of Confederate Military Organizations: Records of the Department of North Carolina, Ch. II, vol. 262.5, NA; Barrett, *Civil War in North Carolina*, 64.

[71] Gatlin to Cooper, 1 October 1861, RG 109.9, Records of Confederate Military Organizations: Records of the Department of North Carolina, Ch. II, vol. 262.5, NA.

[72] Gatlin to Benjamin, 24 October 1861, RG 109.9, Records of Confederate Military Organizations: Records of the Department of North Carolina, Ch. II, vol. 262.5, NA. Benjamin, previously the Confederacy's Attorney General, had been confirmed by the Confederate Senate as Secretary of War in early October 1861. See Eli N. Evans, *Judah P. Benjamin: The Jewish Confederate* (New York: The Free Press, 1988), 121.

the coast, he was still forced to conclude that "I have not a single soldier under my command…now in reserve."[73]

Clark, for his part, was fighting a losing battle with Confederate authorities, who were much more fixated on the military situation in Virginia than in North Carolina.[74] Though Benjamin assured the governor that "[t]he dangers which have threatened or may still threaten your state, have not escaped the solicitude of the government, and no effort has been spared…to provide against every attack," he consistently claimed that he was unable to fulfill Clark's requisitions for arms and men. Benjamin's justification that these arms had to go to commanders "in whose departments the danger of attack by superior force seemed most imminent" must have greatly irritated Clark, who was still constantly receiving letters from Hill, Gatlin, and North Carolina citizens detailing the inefficiency of North Carolina's defenses and the inevitability of a Union assault.[75] The deficiency of arms in the state was so great, in fact, that Clark could not even call out the militia, and he was forced to decline the acceptance of many volunteer companies. As he

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[73] Gatlin to Hill, 25 October and 28 October 1861, RG 109.9, Records of Confederate Military Organizations: Records of the Department of North Carolina, Ch. II, vol. 262.5, NA.

[74] Only days after the fall of Hatteras, Richmond had directed that Clark forward thirty 32-pounders for use at other spots along the coast. See Major Danville Leadbetter, Chief of Engineer Bureau, to Clark, 6 September 1861, Governor Henry T. Clark Papers, G.P. 154, Folder 1, NCSA. Clark replied by claiming that he was "at a loss to know to what guns you allude," and stated that "our extensive line of sea coast need every gun that we have there."

[75] Benjamin to Clark, 2 November 1861 and 21 November 1861, both in Governor Henry T. Clark Papers, G.P. 156, Folder 1, NCSA. In an earlier letter, Benjamin had stated to Clark, "It is true that we have not been able to furnish your state all the cannon powder you desire: and in this respect you share the fate of S.C., Georgia, Alabama, Louisiana, all of which make the same complaints…Pray consider that the war has recently assumed such formidable dimensions as to make it impossible that human beings can satisfy all the exigencies of all the people at every point that may be exposed or threatened with attack." See Benjamin to Clark, 29 September 1861, Governor Henry T. Clark Papers, G.P. 154, Folder 2, NCSA.

lamented to Gatlin, "When we can do no better we must fight with half arms or no arms."[76]

The most frustrating part of the situation for Clark was that, in his words, "The means as well as the management of this war belongs to the Confederate Government." Therefore, as troops mustered into service, they passed into Confederate control, and the state's guns were being constantly appropriated to other defenses.[77] As stated by its Constitution, the Confederate government had a duty to "protect each [state] against invasion," a duty Clark and other North Carolinians believed, with reason, that the authorities in Richmond were failing to uphold.[78] In a long letter to Benjamin, Clark attempted to make his opinion on North Carolina's plight clear:

> I have received various rumors of large fleets and expeditions fitting out at New York and Fortress Monroe supposed to be designed for our coast. I will make all preparations in my power to repel any invasion. But my resources are now restricted almost to the militia, and they are unarmed, undrilled, and some not yet organized…We feel very defenceless here without arms and I will not again report to you that this had been effected by our generosity to others…We see just over our lines in Virginia, near Suffolk, two or three North Carolina Regiments, well armed and well drilled who are not allowed to come to the defence of their homes…We are threatened with an expedition of 15,000 men. That is just the amount of our seaboard army extended along 400 miles of territory, and at no point can we spare a man and without the use of arms *can't increase it*.[79]

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[76] Clark to Benjamin, 3 October 1861, and Clark to Gatlin, 30 October 1861, both in Governor Henry T. Clark Papers, G.L.B. 46, Part I, NCSA.

[77] Clark to Captain Charles P. Jones, 17 October 1861, Governor Henry T. Clark Papers, G.L.B. 46, Part I, NCSA.

[78] See Article IV, Section 3, "Constitution of the Confederate States," in Richardson, ed., *Messages and Papers of the Confederacy, Vol. 1*, 51.

[79] Clark to Benjamin, 20 October 1861, Governor Henry T. Clark Papers, G.L.B. 46, Part I, NCSA.

This was not the last time Clark would rebuke Benjamin for refusing to allow North Carolina troops and arms to be used in defense of the state itself. Clark regarded North Carolina's right to these arms and men as "unquestionable," and assured Benjamin that North Carolina would not insist on this right were it not for an imperative necessity. Clark correctly predicted that Richmond's apparent willingness to let North Carolina wither on the vine would "awaken distrust and disaffection towards the Confederacy, and seriously impair our united counsels and action for the future." Yet Benjamin and Davis either could not or would not heed the Governor's warnings.[80]

On 18 November, Davis alluded to these issues in an address to the Confederate Congress, by stating that the war "has been constantly enlarging its proportions and expanding its boundaries," making it more and more difficult for the Confederacy to put every important locale in a good state of defense. Yet he remained firm in his belief that "sudden calls from the remotest points for military aid have been met with promptness enough not only to avert disaster in face of superior numbers, but, also, to roll back the tide of invasion."[81] This tide of invasion, however, would soon wash back up on North Carolina's shore, and despite Davis's proclaimed optimism, this time the Confederacy would not be able to avert disaster.

By the end of the first week of January, many of the soldiers of Burnside's Coast Division had been ordered aboard transports at Annapolis. Residents of the city crowded

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[80] Clark to Benjamin, 2 November 1861, Governor Henry T. Clark Papers, G.L.B. 46, Part I, NCSA.

[81] Davis to Congress of the Confederate States, 18 November 1861, in Crist and Dix, eds., *Papers of Jefferson Davis, Vol. 7: 1861*, 412-413.

windows, doorways, and streets to watch the men march through a fresh snowfall from their camps to the vessels. Though conditions on board the ships were cramped, the men being packed, according to one soldier, "like sardines in a box," the troops were in good spirits, having been paid before they embarked. They sang "John Brown" and "Dixie" as they debated among themselves where the expedition was bound.[82] And when the steamers actually began towing the rest of the vessels out to sea, the men gave six rousing cheers for Burnside, which the general came on deck to acknowledge with a raise of his hat.[83] By 11 January, the expedition had arrived at Fortress Monroe. As the steamer *Picket*, with Burnside on board, streamed into Hampton Roads, bands played the "Star Spangled Banner" and "Hail to the Chief." Burnside stood on the pilot house to receive this greeting, but soon returned to work, making final preparations with Commodore Goldsborough. Meanwhile, the bands continued to play into the night, music which one newspaper correspondent found "soul-stirring in the extreme."[84]

At this point, only Burnside, his brigadiers, and a few staff officers knew the expedition's destination. The captains of the vessels carried sealed orders, which they were not to open until the fleet had cleared Hampton Roads. This was achieved on 12

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[82] Entries for 6 and 11 January 1862, in Day, *My Diary of Rambles*, 18; Larned to Sister, 4 January 1862, Daniel Reed Larned Papers, Vol. 1: Correspondence, LOC; "The Burnside Expedition, *New York Herald*, 14 January 1862. This article was written on 8 January by one of the *Herald*'s correspondents at Annapolis.

[83] Entry for 9 January 1862, William J. Creasey Diary, Vol. 1, in the Southern Historical Collection (SHC) at the Louis Round Wilson Library, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill Archives.

[84] Larned to Sister, 11 January 1862, Daniel Reed Larned Papers, Vol. 1: Correspondence, LOC; "General Burnside's Expedition at Fort Monroe," *Harper's Weekly*, 1 February 1862.

January, as the fleet of about 70 vessels, with flags flying and bands playing, sailed south.[85] The armada Burnside had assembled presented quite the spectacle; as the *New York Tribune*'s correspondent with the expedition wrote, "Probably a more heterogeneous congregation of water craft was never collected on any waters at any one time."[86] As per McClellan's orders, the first stop was Hatteras Inlet, where the expedition would have to cross the bar before it could enter Pamlico Sound and advance on Roanoke Island. It was at Hatteras that the expedition would run into its first obstacles, which turned out to be far greater than Burnside, Goldsborough, or McClellan ever imagined.

Burnside's time in independent command almost ended before it really began. In an effort to foster courage and confidence among his men, the general had placed his headquarters aboard the gunboat *Picket*, which was the smallest craft in the expedition. When the expedition arrived at its destination on 13 January, as one soldier in the 23rd Massachusetts recorded, "Cape Hatteras was wide awake for us…and saluted us with a squall that very near upset us."[87] Another soldier, David L. Day, a private in the 25th Massachusetts, termed the ships tossing in the storm "the grandest, wildest scene I ever beheld," and described how "the water [was] rolling, foaming, and dashing over the

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[85] Marvel, *Burnside*, 42-44; Entry for 12 January 1862, in Day, *My Diary of Rambles*, 20.

[86] "The Great Burnside Expedition," *New York Tribune*, 14 January 1862.

[87] Larned claimed that "[t]he sea [was] so high no small boat could live for a moment." See Larned to Sister, 13 January 1862, Daniel Reed Larned Papers, Vol. 1: Correspondence, LOC; Entry for 13 January 1862, William J. Creasey Diary, Vol. 1, SHC; Marvel, *Burnside*, 43-44.

shoals, throwing its white spray into the air, as though the sea and sky met." The *Picket* was almost swamped by the rough seas, and though it stayed afloat, Burnside came down quite sick.[88] The steam transport *City of New York* was wrecked on the shoals, and could not be pulled off. Its captain and crew were forced to hang on in the rigging of the vessel. The next day Burnside went to their assistance in a tug; as Day explained, "The general is not one to see his men perish, and make no effort to rescue them." But Burnside could do nothing to stay the rough weather and turbulent seas, which kept the fleet at their mercy for days.[89]

The severity of the weather, force of the tides, Hatteras's numerous shoals and bars, and the fleet being crammed into the harbor all caused significant problems. All of these conditions caused the *New York Tribune*'s correspondent to term Hatteras a "libel upon honest harbors." The north-easterly gale continued on the 14th and 15th, causing the wrecking of the gunboat *Zouave*, which sprung a leak and could not be pumped out. More disheartening was the drowning of Colonel Allen and several other men of the 9th New Jersey, whose small boat was driven into the breakers on its way back from General Reno's vessel. As the *Tribune*'s correspondent lamented, "It has, in truth, been a sad, sad day, and a gloom is cast over the spirits of all."[90] Days later, the transport

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[88] Entry for 13 January 1862, in Day, *My Diary of Rambles*, 21; Larned to Sister, 13 January 1862, Daniel Reed Larned Papers, Vol. 1: Correspondence, LOC.

[89] "The Burnside Expedition at Hatteras," *Harper's Weekly*, 15 February 1862. *Harper's* article contained an account from the *New York Times*'s correspondent with Burnside's expedition; Entry for 14 January 1862, in Day, *My Diary of Rambles*, 21.

[90] "The Burnside Expedition," *New York Tribune*, 31 January 1862.

Pocahontas also ran aground, resulting in the loss of about 70 horses, which would be sorely missed during the coming campaign.[91]

The best thing for Burnside and Goldsborough to do was get the vessels out of the harbor and across the bar into the calmer waters of Pamlico Sound as quickly as possible, but both men quickly realized that this would prove much harder than they had anticipated, for a simple reason. Burnside had been informed that the depth of water on the bar at Hatteras Inlet was at least nine feet, but in fact it was only between seven and eight feet on the bulkhead.[92] Furthermore, several steamers had been purchased by government agents on sworn affidavits of owners that they drew under seven feet of water, but some in fact drew nine feet or more. This had been discovered while the fleet was at Hampton Roads, but Burnside was forced to proceed anyway and work with what he had.[93] As if these were not problems enough, Hawkins had told Burnside that he would find experienced local pilots at Hatteras who could guide the ships over the bar, but this turned out to be an entirely false hope. Indeed, as Larned explained in a letter home, he could not give a complete account of the many obstacles to progress, because it would fill far too many papers.[94]

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[91] "The Report of the Special Messenger from the Expedition," *New York Herald*, 29 January 1862.

[92] Larned to Brother-in-law Henry, 18 January 1862, Daniel Reed Larned Papers, Vol. 1: Correspondence, LOC; Foote, *The Civil War: A Narrative, Vol. 1*, 228-229; Marvel, *Burnside*, 45.

[93] "The Great Burnside Expedition," *New York Tribune*, 14 January 1862; "The Burnside Expedition," *New York Tribune*, 31 January 1862.

[94] Larned to Brother-in-law Henry, 18 January 1862, Daniel Reed Larned Papers, Vol. 1: Correspondence, LOC; Marvel, *Burnside*, 47.

As Burnside tried to figure out the best way to get his vessels across the bar, the fleet continued to take a beating. The boats constantly banged against each other in the tiny harbor. This caused significant damage and actually disabled some ships.[95] When the storm died down on 17 January, Day described the scene as one of "boats and vessels ashore all around us, in a partially wrecked or damaged condition." Unfortunately, another storm sprang up on 23 January, which was so bad that Day compared it to the storm through which Noah passed. As he saw it, the fleet was "going to the devil…A great many of the men are beginning to despond, and in fact the success of the expedition begins to look gloomy enough. Nothing but hardship and disaster has attended us since we left Fortress Monroe, and only God knows when it will end."[96] Burnside himself remarked to Montgomery C. Meigs, the Union's quartermaster general, "No one unless actually on the spot can for a moment conceive the difficulties I have had to encounter…all the elements have seemed to combine against our progress."[97]

The longer the expedition remained mired on the wrong side of Hatteras Inlet, the more difficulties arose. By 22 January, the troops, stuffed in the foul-smelling holds

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[95] Larned to Brother-in-law Henry, 18 January 1862, Daniel Reed Larned Papers, Vol. 1: Correspondence, LOC. See also Burnside to Montgomery C. Meigs, 1 February 1862, and Burnside to Major General John Wool, 5 February 1862, both in RG 94, Ambrose E. Burnside Papers, Box 1, Folder 4, NA, in which Burnside describes all of his difficulties.

[96] Entries for 17, 23, and 24 January 1862, in Day, *My Diary of Rambles*, 23, 26. Day remarked that Noah "had the advantage of us, as his was the only craft afloat, and had plenty of sea room." William J. Creasey of the 23rd Massachusetts evinced a similar opinion, recording in his diary, "It is still blowing a hurricane and what will become of us God only knows. We are in his hands." See entry for 23 January 1862, William J. Creasey Diary, Vol. 1, SHC.

[97] Burnside to Meigs, 1 February 1862, RG 94, Ambrose E. Burnside Papers, Box 1, Folder 4, NA.

of the transports, were short of rations, and almost entirely out of water. For a while they were forced to drink condensed sea water, which Day thought "might be made palatable by adding about nine parts whiskey to one of water."[98] But soon several vessels, including the transports *Cossack* and *Admiral* with hundreds of troops on board, were out of water entirely, and the gunboats had only water from the condensers. This situation was primarily caused by the fact that the schooners and colliers Burnside had arranged to supply water had been prevented from reaching Hatteras by the very storms that were wreaking havoc on his fleet.[99] Captain Benjamin Pardee of the 10th Connecticut aptly described the plight of the troops thusly: "No news to cheer us; disasters all around us; the skies black and unpromising…sickness on all the vessels, epidemics rapidly extending; deaths frequent; no comfort for the sick; scant foot for the well; water, tainted with kerosene, served out in limited quantity; our expedition a seeming failure!" Water remained scarce until 27 January, when a heavy rain fell, and three days later, four of the desperately awaited schooners finally arrived.[100] Lincoln, meanwhile, was clearly aware of Burnside's troubles. As the President's chief personal secretary, John G. Nicolay, wrote to his fiancée, "At last we have heard from the

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[98] Entry for 22 January 1862, in Day, *My Diary of Rambles*, 25; Entry for 23 January 1862, William J. Creasey Diary, Vol. 1, SHC.

[99] Browning Jr., *Cape Charles to Cape Fear*, 21; Marvel, *Burnside*, 48-49.; "The Burnside Expedition at Hatteras," *Harper's Weekly*, 15 February 1862.

[100] Pardee quoted in Matthew Warshauer, *Connecticut in the American Civil War: Slavery, Sacrifice, & Survival* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 2011), 72-73; Marvel, *Burnside*, 49. See also entry for 29 January 1862, in Day, *My Diary of Rambles*, 29.

Burnside fleet, but the news is not cheering. A great storm encountered, a fleet dispersed, a vessel wrecked, and a colonel drowned, the result doesn't sum up well at all."[101]

All of the difficulties caused Goldsborough to tell Welles that his patience was "well-nigh exhausted," and Burnside himself told McClellan that "elements of a decided failure look me square in the face…I think you have overestimated my ability, but [I] shall try not to disappoint you."[102] Yet while Burnside may have been entertaining some self-doubt, his suffering troops saw him as one of the only reasons for continued hope. Both his soldiers and the newspaper correspondents with the expedition heaped praise on the general for his unflagging work ethic and outward display of confidence. Larned claimed that Burnside worked long hours to get the vessels over the bar, and told his brother-in-law that "we have all been discouraged time after time, but a sight of [Burnside] and a few encouraging words from him works a speedy change." The secretary went so far as to state, "I can assure you if there is such a thing as victory it will rest on his arms."[103] Day wrote that Burnside was everywhere to be seen, always looking cheerful and confident and doing his best to encourage the men, and became

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[101] Nicolay to Therena Bates (fiancée), 30 January 1862, in Michael Burlingame, ed., *With Lincoln in the White House: Letters, Memoranda, and other Writings of John G. Nicolay, 1860-1865* (Edwardsville, Ill.: Southern Illinois University Press, 2000), 67.

[102] Goldsborough to Welles, 29 January 1862, quoted in Browning Jr., *Cape Charles to Cape Fear*, 22; Burnside to McClellan, 31 January 1862, in Sears, ed., *Papers of George B. McClellan*, 175 n. 1.

[103] Larned to Brother-in-law Henry, 18 January 1862, Daniel Reed Larned Papers, Vol. 1: Correspondence, LOC.

convinced that the general was a man of "indomitable energy, perseverance, and courage."[104] Meanwhile, the newspaper correspondents almost always used the phrase "night and day" when describing Burnside's work habits, and told their readers that the soldiers, despite the bad conditions, retained full confidence in the general. The correspondents saw Burnside's work as purposeful, if slow; as one contended, "So far from Burnside being one of your strutting, gold-laced Brigadiers, I challenge his worst enemy, if he has one, to point to a single instance of his having done anything for show." And while another correspondent thought that Burnside seemed weighed down by all of his responsibilities, he remained convinced that the general "seems as strong-hearted as on the day on which he set sail from Annapolis," and concluded by exclaiming, "With such a leader let no one despair of the result."[105]

Yet the same correspondent was fully aware that Burnside "is not the Almighty, to say to the winds, 'Be Still.'"[106] Nor could the general raise the water level on the bar. Therefore, Burnside had to rely on his own ingenuity to get the vessels which drew too much water into Pamlico Sound. This was made even more difficult by the fact that he initially had the use of only a few tugboats. The solution Burnside hit on was to unload the men and supplies from the larger transports at Hatteras so that they would draw less

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[104] Entry for 23 January 1862, in Day, *My Diary of Rambles*, 26.

[105] "The Report of the Special Messenger from the Expedition," *New York Herald*, 29 January 1862; "The Burnside Expedition," *New York Tribune*, 31 January 1862; "The Burnside Expedition at Hatteras," *Harper's Weekly*, 15 February 1862.

[106] "The Burnside Expedition at Hatteras," *Harper's Weekly*, 15 February 1862.

water, and then deliberately run them aground in the swash against the outgoing tide. The transports then dropped anchor, and the tugboats were used to hold them on the bar. As the strong current washed the sand from beneath the boats, they limped along toward the sound. It was a slow process, but it worked, eventually creating an eight-foot channel. Burnside commandeered the use of three light draft steamers that had been forced to put in at Hatteras on their way south to Port Royal, and on 31 January, five more tugs arrived from Annapolis. All of these were immediately put to use in dragging the rest of the transports over the bar. Though Burnside made clear to McClellan that "I have never undertaken a work that has presented so many obstacles," he managed to get almost all of the expedition's vessels into Pamlico Sound by the end of January.[107]

It had been roughly three weeks since the expedition had left Fortress Monroe, and in Burnside's own words, crossing the bar at Hatteras had taken "almost superhuman exertions" due to the litany of obstacles. Yet by 1 February, the general could pronounce the situation "much more cheering."[108] He even joked privately that he had "always known water was a most powerful element." When Burnside's own vessel, the steamer *Spaulding*, came across the bar on 29 January, the general had been welcomed by the blowing of steam whistles and the loud cheering of all the regiments on

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[107] Larned to Brother-in-law Henry, 18 January 1862, Daniel Reed Larned Papers, Vol. 1: Correspondence, LOC; Burnside to Meigs, 1 February 1862, RG 94, Ambrose E. Burnside Papers, Box 1, Folder 4, NA; "The Burnside Expedition," *New York Tribune*, 31 January 1862; Marvel, *Burnside*, 47-49; Browning Jr., *Cape Charles to Cape Fear*, 22.

[108] Burnside to Dr. Talmadge, 1 February 1862, RG 94, Ambrose E. Burnside Papers, Box 1, Folder 4, NA. *Harper's Weekly* would later contend to its readers, "Never has any expedition in the history of the world had to pass through a severer ordeal." See "General Burnside," *Harper's Weekly*, 1 March 1862.

the transports already across. The band of the 24th Massachusetts had serenaded him by playing "Hail to the Chief" and "Home Sweet Home," and Burnside responded by going to the upper deck of the *Spaulding* and doffing his hat to the men.[109]

The Northern press, meanwhile, was growing increasingly expectant to hear of any attack by Burnside, a feeling that was fueled by the correspondents with the expedition, such as that of the *New York Tribune*, who assured the readers that they could depend on the fact that, now that the fleet was over the bulkhead, "Burnside's blows on the enemy will be quick and sharp…There is every present prospect for a series of brilliant successes."[110] Though another storm blew up and delayed any advance for a few days, Larned and the rest of the men felt that the worst was over, and grew anxious to advance upon Roanoke Island. This sentiment was only increased by the reports of deserters and contrabands who had reached the fleet via their own small boats, and reported that the Confederate defenses on Roanoke were in a poor state.[111]

Much to the chagrin of Gatlin, Clark, and other Confederates, these reports were all too true. Part of the reason for this had to do with the fact that commanders for the defenses of the island had shifted so often. Both Gwynn and Gatlin had exercised control over Roanoke before Hill was put directly in command of the District of the Pamlico,

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[109] Larned diary entry, 29 January 1862, Daniel Reed Larned Papers, Vol. 1: Correspondence, LOC; Entry for 29 January 1862, William J. Creasey Diary, Vol. 1, SHC.

[110] "The Burnside Expedition," *New York Tribune*, 31 January 1862.

[111] Larned diary entry, 3 February 1862, Daniel Reed Larned Papers, Vol. 1: Correspondence, LOC; Entry for 31 January 1862, in Day, *My Diary of Rambles*, 30.

which included the island. But when Hill was ordered back to Virginia in mid-November, this district was split between two commanders. Though Gatlin strongly resented the loss of Hill, who he believed was close to placing Roanoke in a proper state of defense, he could not change Hill's orders.[112] Brigadier General Lawrence O'Bryan Branch received command of the New Bern region, while the new district of the Chowan, which included the defenses of Roanoke, would eventually come under the command of Brigadier General Henry A. Wise. This district was then incorporated into the Department of Norfolk, under the command of Major General Benjamin Huger, further confusing the situation and complicating the change of command.[113] This state of affairs would cause Wise, Gatlin, and Clark great headaches over the next month, and ultimately result in disaster for the Confederacy.

All three of these men took a similar view of the situation in eastern North Carolina in the winter of 1861-1862. They believed that the inland sounds would be attacked, starting with Roanoke Island; that, given its weak state, Roanoke would undoubtedly fall, which would be followed by the loss of other strategic points; and,

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[112] Gatlin had recommended the division of the district, believing it "impossible that one officer can give proper attention to the whole district." See Gatlin to Cooper, 19 November 1861, and Gatlin to Clark, 20 December 1861, both in RG 109.9, Records of Confederate Military Organizations: Records of the Department of North Carolina, Ch. II, vol. 262.5, NA.

[113] By Special Orders No. 272, Wise was assigned to command of the military district east of the Chowan River, including the counties of Washington and Tyrrell. The general did not arrive on Roanoke Island and take direct command of its defenses until 7 January 1862. See Special Orders No. 272, 21 December 1861, and General Orders No. 1, 7 January 1862, in U.S. War Department, *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies, Series 1, Vol. 9* (Washington D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1883), 123, 127. Hereafter cited as *O.R.*, all references to Series 1 unless otherwise indicated; Barrett, *Civil War in North Carolina*, 64.

perhaps most importantly and certainly most frustratingly for them, that the Confederate authorities in Richmond, as well as General Huger at Norfolk, were apathetic regarding the impending danger to North Carolina. A month before Burnside's expedition arrived at Hatteras, Clark made clear to Davis that "[t]he possession of Hatteras afford the enemy a position or nucleus to form expeditions almost without observation to radiate to different points," yet he could not succeed in turning the President's attention to the North Carolina coast.[114] Davis remained fixated on the Union threat to Richmond, and though he was not blind to the possibility of an invasion of North Carolina, he continued to believe that these Union expeditions were primarily attempts to disperse the already limited supply of Confederate troops and ammunition.

Clark's overall frustration spilled over in a mid-December letter to Gatlin, in which he rebuked the general by stating, "I am compelled again to call your attention to the situation of Roanoke Island. I am in constant receipt of intelligence of its neglected defences and critical position. I trust that you may have it in your power to repair them." Clark was particularly upset that nothing had been done to obstruct Croatan Sound, the channel between Roanoke Island and the mainland.[115] Two days later, Gatlin responded by stating that he would send an engineer to Roanoke and order piles to be driven into Croatan Sound, but he explained to Clark that he needed more troops for the defense of

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[114] Clark to Davis, 16 December 1861, Governor Henry T. Clark Papers, G.L.B. 46, Part II, NCSA.

[115] Clark to Gatlin, 18 December 1861, Governor Henry T. Clark Papers, G.L.B. 46, Part II, NCSA. Clark urged Gatlin to travel to Roanoke and make his own inspection, which he thought would, if nothing else, "satisfy the people of that important post that they are not entirely overlooked."

Roanoke, and that many of the island's defenders, such as Colonel J.V. Jordan's 31st North Carolina, were half armed, relying on home rifles and shot guns, and short of ammunition.[116]

Indeed, Gatlin's letters make clear that, despite Clark's hopes to the contrary, he did not have the means in his power to repair the deficiencies of the coast defenses. In fact, in early December, one of the regiments at Roanoke, the 3rd Georgia, which had been ordered to the island after the fall of Hatteras had aroused Confederate fears for its safety, had actually been sent back to Norfolk.[117] The letters that went back and forth between Clark and Gatlin reveal a vicious cycle; Clark would complain that Gatlin had not put the coast in a proper state of defense, Gatlin would reply by requesting more men, arms, and ammunition so that he could do so, and Clark would answer that he could not send these things because they were under the command of Confederate authorities, and he simply did not have them.[118] In this, Clark was not being deceitful. The dearth of arms in North Carolina was so bad that the governor was seriously

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[116] Gatlin to Clark, 20 December 1861, RG 109.9, Records of Confederate Military Organizations: Records of the Department of North Carolina, Ch. II, vol. 262.5, NA.

[117] Gatlin to General Joseph R. Anderson, 4 December 1861, RG 109.9, Records of Confederate Military Organizations: Records of the Department of North Carolina, Ch. II, vol. 262.5, NA. Anderson was the commander of the District of Cape Fear, including the defenses of Wilmington, in southern North Carolina.

[118] For Gatlin's requests, see, for instance, Gatlin to Clark, 3 January and 7 January 1862, both in RG 109.9, Records of Confederate Military Organizations: Records of the Department of North Carolina, Ch. II, vol. 262.5, NA.

considering arming cavalry companies with lances.[119] Clark was also doing his utmost to keep the gunpowder that was being produced by North Carolina powder mills (such as Waterhouse & Bowes) in North Carolina. Though Colonel Josiah Gorgas, the chief of the Confederate Bureau of Ordnance, ordered that all powder be sent immediately to Richmond, Clark forbid the execution of this order and tried to conserve the powder for North Carolina's coastal defenses, despite the fact that he knew he would be sanctioned by the Confederate government for his actions. As he explained to Gorgas, "The manufacture of powder was entirely for the use of the Confederate troops and therefore our objects are identical. But the batteries and fortifications of No. Carolina could never get a supply…[Therefore] I intended first to supply the defences of North Carolina who are more threatened everyday with invasions."[120]

There was no point more threatened than Roanoke, a fact Wise was well aware of when he took command of the island. Wise was not a career soldier but a former Governor of Virginia, who had recruited and led his own force, the Wise Legion, throughout the early part of the war. His performance thus far in the conflict had been less than stellar, including a disastrous stint in the Kanawha Department in western

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[119] For the shortage of arms, see, for instance, Clark to Cooper, 27 November 1861; Clark to Anderson, 6 January 1862; Clark to Archibald McClean (Mayor of Fayetteville), 16 January 1862, all in Governor Henry T. Clark Papers, G.L.B. 46, Part II, NCSA.

[120] Clark to Gatlin, 2 January 1862, and Clark to Col. Gorgas, 10 and 15 January 1862, all in Governor Henry T. Clark Papers, G.L.B. 46, Part II, NCSA. By this time, North Carolina powder mills were producing about 300 lbs. of powder per day. Yet Gatlin alone had requested 10,000 lbs. of powder for the coast defenses, and additional requests came from Anderson at Wilmington and Huger at Norfolk. Clark lamented to Gorgas that because of the shortage of powder, the cannons in the coast defenses were manned by volunteers who had never had the opportunity of practicing with them, a problem he believed would result "in the waste of ammunition and loss of guns whenever attacked."

Virginia, where his inability to get along with fellow general and ex-Virginia governor John Floyd seriously compromised the plans of Confederate General Robert E. Lee.[121] Yet Wise remained personally popular and at least one member of the Confederate government was convinced that the general would have no trouble defending Roanoke with half as many men as any attacking force.[122]

Wise himself was not so sure of this. Even before he reached the island, he was aware of the sad condition of its defenses, which he found disconcerting because he saw Roanoke as "the very key of the rear defenses of Norfolk." At this early juncture, and for this reason, Wise was confident that he would receive help from Huger; as he saw it, "Norfolk and the navy-yard may well then supply [Roanoke's] deficiencies, in order to save themselves." Therefore, Wise requested four boats armed with howitzers, as well as four rifled cannons and 30 days provisions for the defenders of the island.[123]

When Wise did reach Roanoke at the end of the first week in January, he found conditions even worse than he had anticipated. The driving of piles across Croatan Sound, which Clark and Hill had called for and Gatlin had said would be addressed, had not proceeded. Furthermore, Wise found that the map Huger had provided him of the

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[121] Wise to Davis (marked unofficial), 28 August 1861, in Crist and Dix, eds., *Papers of Jefferson Davis, Vol. 7: 1861*, 311. Wise complained that Floyd had personally and professionally offended him by assuming command "in a way that was any thing but regular, usual, respectful, or kind," and he described Floyd's conduct as "so stinging as to mar cooperation." The two men never did learn to work together, and in large part because of this Lee was ultimately forced to abandon his attempt to retake control of western Virginia from Union forces.

[122] Entry for 7 January 1862, in John Beauchamp Jones, *A Rebel War Clerk's Diary, Vol. 1*, ed. Howard Swiggett (New York: Old Hickory Bookshop, 1935), 104.

[123] Wise to Huger, 2 January 1862, *O.R., Vol. 9*, 126.

island's environs and defenses was "wholly inaccurate and incomplete."[124] Wise immediately took steps to put the island in a better state of defense, ordering a wharf to be constructed for the landing of troops and supplies, as well as banning all consumption of alcohol, forbidding the discharge of weapons to conserve ammunition, and seizing all the boats in the area to prevent any of the citizens from having communication with Union forces at Hatteras.[125] He also directed the 46th and 59th Virginia Infantry, of the Wise legion, to proceed as quickly as possible to Norfolk, and from there to Roanoke, and set out to secure boats and pile drivers from the navy yard at Norfolk to assist in the blocking up of Croatan and Roanoke Sounds. As Wise explained to the Colonel exercising direct command of the regiments at Roanoke, Henry M. Shaw, "[A]ttack is hourly expected and the camp must be in constant order and readiness."[126]

Wise's efforts to block Croatan Sound, however, proceeded at a glacial pace. Though he applied to Marshall Parks, president of the Albemarle and Chesapeake Canal Company, for steam pile-drivers and steam-dredging machines to be sent with their

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[124] Clark to Marshall Parks, 21 December 1861, Governor Henry T. Clark Papers, G.L.B. 46, Part II, NCSA; Wise to Col. Henry M. Shaw, 7 January 1862, *O.R., Vol. 9*, 126-127. Clark expressed to Parks, who functioned as North Carolina's navy and purchasing agent at Norfolk, his great surprise that "so little had been done towards the defence of Roanoke Island and particularly that no obstructions had been placed in the channel."

[125] The wharf was to "have an outer pier or platform large enough to bear upon it a four horse wagon, and to accommodate at least one large steamer, with a causeway connecting it from seven feet of water with the dry land." See Special Orders No. 2, 5, and 10, 9 January and 16 January 1862, in RG 109.9.3: Records of the Command of Individual Officers, Special Orders, General Henry A. Wise's Brigade, Ch. II, Vol. 323, NA, as well as *O.R., Vol. 9*, 130-131.

[126] Special Orders No. 8 and 10, 15 January and 16 January 1862, RG 109.9.3: Records of the Command of Individual Officers, Special Orders, General Henry A. Wise's Brigade, Ch. II, Vol. 323, NA.

crews to Roanoke, they took much longer to arrive than he had expected. Wise had ordered First Lieutenant William B. Seldon, performing engineering duty at Roanoke, to commence placing 24 foot poles 8 feet apart in Croatan Sound on 8 January, but for weeks Wise had the use of only one pile-driver. Benjamin claimed that this was the only one available, but Wise thought differently, arguing that there were three pile drivers that had been offered to his command by Parks and Dr. Thomas Warren of Edenton.[127] Wise used this one pile driver to drive 20 piles a day across Croatan Sound, but due to poor weather this work could only proceed on average three days a week. At the end of January, Wise was still desperately attempting to procure the additional pile drivers, and though they did arrive in the beginning of February and Wise ordered piling to go on "without cessation, day and night, during the period of moonlight nights," this would prove to be too little, too late.[128]

The setbacks in blocking Croatan and Roanoke Sounds, however, were not Wise's only problem. Wise constantly bemoaned his lack of men and supplies to Huger, who was idle at Norfolk with over 13,000 men and many pieces of artillery.[129] Officers

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[127] Special Orders No. 13, 30 January 1862, RG 109.9.3: Records of the Command of Individual Officers, Special Orders, General Henry A. Wise's Brigade, Ch. II, Vol. 323, NA; Wise to Seldon, 8 January 1862; Benjamin to Wise, 12 January 1862; Wise to Major F.D. Cleary, 28 January 1862, all in *O.R., Vol. 9,* 128, 132, 142.

[128] Wise to Benjamin, 15 January 1862 and Special Orders No. 13, 30 January 1862, both in *O.R., Vol. 9,* 135-136, 145; Special Orders No. 24, 5 February 1862, RG 109.9.3: Records of the Command of Individual Officers, Special Orders, General Henry A. Wise's Brigade, Ch. II, Vol. 323, NA.

[129] See Return of the Department of Norfolk, Major General Huger Commanding, January 1862, in *O.R., Vol. 9*, 38, which shows that Huger had 727 officers and 12,256 men present for duty, as well as 24 pieces of field artillery and 192 pieces of heavy artillery.

at Roanoke, including Shaw, had informed both Wise and Huger that the forts on the island were poorly sited, all being located on the northern half, and that they were desperately short of rifled cannon, meaning that Union naval vessels could shell them into submission from out of range, as they had done at Hatteras. Furthermore, the guns that did exist in the forts were mounted in exposed positions on poor carriages and could be easily disabled. As the commander of Fort Bartow, located on the northwestern portion of the island, explained, "My opinion of the battery in its present position is that it affords no protection to the defense of the sound." This opinion was echoed by Shaw, who called the defensive works on the island "altogether insufficient" to halt a Union attack.[130]

After hearing all of these reports, Wise put in a requisition to Huger for artillery and ammunition, as well as additional cannons and men. He believed strongly that Roanoke could not be defended unless batteries were erected on the marshes at the southern end of the island, to prevent gunboats from passing into Croatan Sound. As he told Huger, "At least 3,000 infantry are needed on the island, and a considerable force, say 1,500 more, are needed on the beaches…We need on the beach and on the island at least eight field pieces and the carriages and caissons necessary." Wise's own returns showed that the entire effective force on the island at this time was less than 1,500, and

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[130] Major G.H. Hill to Shaw, 29 December 1861, and Shaw to Huger, 30 December 1861, *O.R., Vol. 9*, 123-125. Hill went on to explain, "I am almost certain if an enemy were to come with a large force [of gunboats]…they would by a general pressure of steam pass our battery without receiving any perceptible injury."

that there were only three available pieces of field artillery.[131] Wise hurried back to Norfolk from Roanoke to meet with Huger, and in his words, "[M]ade in person the strongest verbal representations of the defenseless condition of the post." Yet Huger, who had never inspected Roanoke's defenses himself, was strangely indifferent to all of these problems. He told Wise in no uncertain terms, "I think you want supplies, hard work, and coolness among the troops you have, instead of more men," and expressed his belief that "I do not consider large forces necessary for the defense of this island."[132] All of this would cause Wise to later contend that if Huger "had promptly aided me, as he ought to have done, with men and munitions of war, I could, while in good health, have been preparing at Roanoke Island, and may have saved my command, if it had not been grossly neglected."[133]

Infuriated by Huger's unsympathetic attitude, Wise resolved to go over his head to Benjamin. In mid-January, he wrote to the Secretary of War pleading for men and powder, and stating that Roanoke "is now utterly defenseless. No preparations have been

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[131] Wise to Huger, 13 January 1862, *O.R., Vol. 9*, 133. Wise also complained that he had no horses and that none of the artillery companies on the island were trained; Shaw to Wise, 8 January 1862, *O.R., Vol. 9*, 127-128. The aggregate number of the entire command was 1,822, and the effective force minus those absent and sick was reported as 1,435 men.

[132] *O.R., Vol. 9*, 132; Huger to Wise, 9 January and 13 January 1862, *O.R., Vol. 9*, 114-115. Huger seems to have contradicted himself by stating, "If men can help you, you shall have them." Wise had made it abundantly clear that more men would help him, yet Huger never did allow him to have them.

[133] Wise to Burgess Sidney Gaither, 28 March 1862, *O.R., Vol. 9*, 121. The dispute between Wise and Huger was clearly well known throughout the Confederate government. As one clerk wrote, "The department leaves Gen. Wise to his superior officer, Gen. Huger, at Norfolk, who has 15,000 men. But I understand that Huger says Wise has ample means for the defense of the island, and refuses to let him have more men." See entry for 13 January 1862, in Swiggett, ed., *A Rebel War Clerk's Diary, Vol. 1*, 105.

made there at all adequate…We have very limited means, and not half time enough to prepare to meet an enemy who is now almost in our immediate presence in very formidable force." Benjamin's reply to Wise's pleadings, however, offered the general little comfort. As Benjamin explained, "[O]ur supply of cannon powder is very limited. At the first indication, however, of an attack on Roanoke Island a supply will be sent you. With the number of batteries now requiring a supply we have a very small reserve, that we can only part with to the point that may actually be attacked."[134] This seemingly ignored the fact that such an attack at Roanoke was expected daily, especially since Confederate military authorities had learned that the Burnside expedition had sailed south. Wise wrote back to Benjamin expressing his conviction that if and when Union gunboats arrived, they would pass Croatan Sound out of range of the batteries, silence the forts on the island, and cut off both Roanoke and Norfolk. As he saw it, "If we are to wait for powder from Richmond until we are attacked…that attack will be capture, and our defeat will precede our supply of ammunition…Delay is defeat now at Roanoke Island…[I] cannot guarantee successful defense for a day."[135] Nevertheless, Benjamin continued to deny Wise's appeals.

This was not entirely the Secretary of War's fault. Davis had appointed Benjamin to replace Walker in part because Benjamin was so personally loyal to the President himself. Davis essentially functioned as his own secretary of war, meaning that

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[134] Wise to Benjamin, 13 January 1862, and Benjamin to Wise, 12 January 1862, *O.R., Vol. 9*, 132, 134.

[135] Wise to Benjamin, 15 January 1862, *O.R., Vol. 9*, 135-136.

Benjamin was, in the words of historian Shelby Foote, "[q]uite literally the President's secretary for military affairs." Benjamin had been roundly criticized almost since the day he took office, primarily because he could not send men and supplies to all the points that so desperately needed these things.[136] In reality, Benjamin had almost no men, cannons, or powder to spare, but to admit this publicly would have been to reveal the Confederacy's military weakness and contradict the positive view of the military situation emanating from Davis. So, commanders such as Gatlin and Wise were left to think that Benjamin had the capability, but not the desire, to reinforce them.

Wise, however, was not one to give up easily. On 17 January, he risked court martial by leaving his post and traveling to Richmond to protest his situation face to face with Confederate authorities. Wise did manage to secure an interview with Benjamin, during which he complained that Huger had thousands of idle men at Norfolk, while Roanoke, "The key of the whole command," was desperately in need of them. But Benjamin refused to intervene and force Huger's hand.[137] Wise seemed hesitant to leave Richmond without accomplishing his purpose, so on 22 January, Benjamin was forced to directly order the general to proceed back to Roanoke Island. Wise was delayed in doing so by poor weather and a lack of transportation, but he managed to reach the island by the end of January.[138] By this time, Wise was so frustrated and worn that he physically

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[136] Foote, *The Civil War: A Narrative, Vol. 1,* 222; Evans, *Judah P. Benjamin*, 121, 146.

[137] *O.R., Vol. 9*, 134, 137.

[138] Special Orders No. 17, 22 January 1862, *O.R., Vol. 9*, 139. See also pages 140-142 for details of Wise's return trip to Roanoke.

broke down. On 1 February, he was seized with a violent attack of pleurisy, which would keep him prostrate in bed with a high fever at his headquarters on Nag's Head, across the sound from Roanoke, until the island was lost for good.[139]

Before Wise became sick, he fought one more losing battle. This was with Flag Officer William F. Lynch, who commanded Confederate naval forces in the region. Governor Clark had earlier accused Lynch of neglecting the naval defenses of North Carolina, a charge that Lynch strongly denied. Lynch argued that many of his vessels were under repair, and that of the rest, only one was trustworthy. By 16 January, he had brought the few ships he had to Roanoke, but he realized that this fleet would be little match for any Union naval force.[140]

Lynch's goal was to create what he termed a "mosquito fleet" of small steam vessels, each mounting a single 32-pound gun, which he thought "will annoy if it cannot overmatch the foe."[141] To do this, Lynch commandeered all but one of Wise's steam-tugs, which the general badly needed to bring in supplies and piles, move troops around, and help with the construction of works on the south end of the island. This naturally angered Wise, who believed Lynch had "hindered operations of the army materially,"

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[139] *O.R., Vol. 9*, 112, 145.

[140] Lynch to Clark, 3 January 1862, and Secretary of the Navy Stephen R. Mallory to Clark, 16 January 1862, both in Governor Henry T. Clark Papers, G.P. 157, Folder 1, NCSA. Lynch's letter to Clark also makes clear his annoyance that Clark was attempting to interfere in naval matters, a right Lynch did not believe the governor possessed. See also Clark to Mallory, 23 December 1861 and 13 January 1862, Governor Henry T. Clark Papers, G.L.B. 46, Part II, NCSA, in which Clark stated that he was not trying to interfere with the navy but still pointed out "the great need of every vessel and every gun at Roanoke Island."

[141] Lynch to Clark, 3 January 1862, Governor Henry T. Clark Papers, G.P. 157, Folder 1, NCSA.

and termed the officer's mosquito fleet "perfectly imbecile gunboats." Wise further charged that Lynch had taken men from the infantry to be used on his "worthless gunboat fleet," and though the general believed that "a braver, more earnest, and active officer is not to be found in either Army or Navy," he remained convinced that Lynch "was too vainglorious of the fleet," and meddled too much with his command. As he later wrote, "The truth is that the greatest assault upon the reputation of the Navy was the want of judgment and skill in getting up a tug-boat fleet of seven to meet a Burnside expedition of sixty vessels."[142] But try as he might, Wise never got the boats back from Lynch.

By the time Gatlin, Clark, and Wise learned of Burnside's fleet crossing the bar at Hatteras Inlet, they could see the writing on the wall. An escaped pilot from the area (presumably one of those Burnside had desperately hoped would aid him) had reported to Gatlin that the large number of gunboats and steamers were bound for Roanoke Island.[143] Though Gatlin hoped that the storms that blew up off the North Carolina coast, which had caused Burnside so much trouble, would delay any attack, he told Confederate authorities that "there can be no doubt that the Burnside expedition is intended to operate in our sounds" and therefore "it becomes a matter of vital importance to consider the means in our power to resist his advance." Gatlin called again for reinforcements for Roanoke, Washington, and New Bern, and again they were not

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[142] *O.R., Vol. 9*, 129, and Wise to Huger, 17 February 1862, 148-150.

[143] Gatlin to Cooper, Gatlin to Branch, and Gatlin to Clark, all 20 January 1862, RG 109.9, Records of Confederate Military Organizations: Records of the Department of North Carolina, Ch. II, vol. 262.5, NA.

forthcoming.[144] This caused him to complain to Hill, back in Virginia, that Richmond had "persisted, in the face of facts…to assure that the expedition was not intended for us…I feel very much discouraged at not having any suggestions of mine attended to, not even answered at times." And as he told General Joseph R. Anderson, commanding the District of Cape Fear, "[I] see plainly that North Carolina has to fight her own battles notwithstanding the larger force she has sent to Va., S.C., and Tenn. If we are invaded there is nothing for it but that we turn out to a man and drive off the invader."[145]

Clark, for his part, shared similar feelings of distress and anger. He pleaded with Benjamin to return the 5th North Carolina and several other regiments, serving on the Virginia Peninsula, back to their home state. Though he too hoped that the storm would delay Burnside's invasion, he knew that it had not changed its destination, which he correctly believed to be Roanoke Island, "the key of the Albemarle." Clark once again told Benjamin that the loss of this island would "inflict a blow on the whole Confederacy," because it would "give the enemy a ready march to our sea board Rail Road from Wilmington to Norfolk." In what was most likely an attempt to catch flies with honey, Clark told Benjamin, "I feel some reluctance in appealing to you again for reinforcements, knowing the great strain now pressing on you for aid from so many

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[144] Gatlin to Cooper, 24 and 30 January 1862, RG 109.9, Records of Confederate Military Organizations: Records of the Department of North Carolina, Ch. II, vol. 262.5, NA.

[145] Gatlin to Hill, 2 February 1862, Daniel Harvey Hill Papers, Box 1, LV. Gatlin went on to state, "I take it for granted [Burnside] will first attack Roanoke Island," and claimed he was so disgusted by the events taking place that he was seriously considering resigning his commission.; Gatlin to Anderson, 18 January 1862, RG 109.9, Records of Confederate Military Organizations: Records of the Department of North Carolina, Ch. II, vol. 262.5, NA.

quarters…I am sensible of the immense labors of your present position and the zeal and attention you devote to it."[146] Yet this approach too netted Clark nothing. Instead of more troops, Benjamin called on Clark to fill up North Carolina's quota for Davis's most recent call for soldiers.[147] Therefore, by early February, it was clear that Clark, Gatlin, and Wise would have to make do with what men, arms, and ammunition they had. It would not be long before their ability to do so would be tested. As one Confederate official noted in his diary, "Burnside has entered the sound at Hatteras with his fleet of gun-boats and transports. The work will soon begin."[148]

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[146] Clark to Benjamin, 31 January 1862, Governor Henry T. Clark Papers, G.P. 157, Folder 1, NCSA, and Clark to Benjamin, 1 February 1862, Governor Henry T. Clark Papers, G.L.B. 46, Part II, NCSA.

[147] Benjamin to Clark, 2 February 1862, Governor Henry T. Clark Papers, G.L.B. 46, Part II, NCSA. North Carolina still needed to furnish 32,548 soldiers to reach the quota of six percent of its total white population.

[148] Entry for 4 February 1862, in Swiggett, ed., *A Rebel War Clerk's Diary, Vol. 1*, 109.

CHAPTER III

"EVERY PATRIOT HEART WILL BE FILLED WITH GRATITUDE": BURNSIDE'S SUCCESSES IN NORTH CAROLINA

Roanoke Island, the site of Sir Walter Raleigh's "Lost Colony" and the birthplace of the first English child born in the Western Hemisphere, was as historic a place as any in America. But the small island, approximately ten miles long and between two and three miles wide, also had great strategic value. Pamlico Sound, which the Burnside expedition had entered at the beginning of February, was divided from Albemarle Sound by a low lying peninsula. At the eastern edge of this peninsula sat Roanoke, located north of all of North Carolina's barrier inlets, and aptly described by one historian as "a loose-fitting cork plugging the neck of a bottle called Albemarle Sound."[1] This sound granted access to several important towns along North Carolina's interior waterways, and also served as the watery backdoor to Norfolk and the navy-yard there, which was of vital importance to the Confederacy. It was at Roanoke that Burnside would land his first blow, and before three months were out, he would capitalize on his victory there by capturing a large part of North Carolina's eastern seaboard, including the important posts of New Bern and Beaufort. North Carolina had long dreaded such an invasion, and Northerners had long yearned for such victories, which had been scarce for Union armies. Before his expedition was over, Burnside's unbroken string of successes would

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[1] Shelby Foote, *The Civil War: A Narrative, Vol. 1, Fort Sumter to Perryville* (New York: Vintage Books, 1986), 225; James M. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 372.

make North Carolinians realize their fears while fulfilling the hopes of many in the Union, chief among them the War Department and Lincoln's administration.

As General Wise lay at Nags Head shaking with fever and spitting up blood, Burnside put his force in motion. On 4 February, Burnside reported his men ready to Commodore Goldsborough, and the next day, the 19 gunboats and roughly 50 transport vessels received orders to advance. The gunboats led the way, and the first day's sailing proceeded until 6:00 p.m. under a beautiful sunset. When Burnside, aboard the *Picket*, sailed past the rest of the fleet, the men gave him six rousing cheers. That night, the expedition came to rest at Stumpy Point, six miles from the entrance to Croatan Sound. The next day, the ships passed single file through the narrow channel entrance, and the advance continued until the fleet came within full sight of the island. The rigging of each vessel was filled with soldiers, looking, in the words of Larned, "like so many monkeys in the ropes." Though a thick fog came on and brought the fleet to a standstill, Burnside went out in a tug on a reconnaissance, and continued to formulate his plans for an attack.[2]

Burnside's soldiers were issued three days rations and forty rounds of ammunition in preparation for the attack. The men reported themselves in fine spirits, and though one private in the 25th Massachusetts admitted that "[t]he thing is being

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[2] Burnside to Adjutant General Lorenzo Thomas, 14 February 1862, in U.S. War Department, *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies, Series 1, Vol. 9* (Washington D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1883), 75; Larned diary entry, 5-7 February 1862, Daniel Reed Larned Papers, Vol. 1: Correspondence, LOC; Entries for 5 and 6 February 1862, William J. Creasey Diary, Vol. 1, SHC.

managed pretty cautiously," he was convinced that "when the show comes off, it will be ahead of anything we ever saw, not excepting Barnum's." As the men talked of booming guns, the rattle of infantry, splendid bayonet charges, brilliant victories, and deeds of courage, daring, and heroism, the bands filled the air with national music. This same soldier closed his 6 February diary entry by quoting a poem that pointed to the action ahead: "Then welcome war, our arms to brace/The standards planted face to face/Tho' death's pale horse leads on the chase/We'll follow there."[3]

Meanwhile, the Confederates on Roanoke were scrambling to do all they could to prepare for the coming attack. The island's primary defenses consisted of three forts all located on its northwestern side. Not one of the batteries in the marshes to the south, thought so important by Wise, had even neared completion. A little over half way up the island, at Pork Point, sat Fort Bartow, mounting nine guns, eight of which were heavy 32-pounder navy smoothbores of limited range. North of Fort Bartow was Fort Blanchard, mounting four of the same guns, and at the northwest tip of Roanoke, at Weir's Point, sat Fort Huger, armed with ten 32-pounders and two rifled pieces. Across Croatan Sound, on the mainland, was located Fort Forrest, which held seven smoothbore cannon and a few rifled pieces that would be out of range and contribute nothing to the coming battle. For field artillery, Colonel Shaw of the 8th North Carolina, in direct command with Wise sick, had only a heavy 24-pounder boat howitzer, a 6-pounder brass

[3] Entry for 6 February 1862, in David L. Day, *My Diary of Rambles with the 25th Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry* (Milford, Mass.: King & Billings, 1884), 32.

field piece, and an 18-pounder field gun that was a remnant of the Mexican war. None of these three guns had caissons, and Shaw had the use of only four mules to haul them about.[4]

Before he took sick, Wise had made desperate attempts to bring more cannons to the island. On 28 January, he had ordered Colonel C.F. Henningsen, commander of the Wise Legion's artillery, to bring the six guns in his possession, along with their carriages and caissons, to Norfolk, and then tow them down the Albemarle and Chesapeake Canal. At the same time, Henningsen's men and horses were to move by land over the sea bridge and down the beach to Nags Head. Wise was convinced that this route would allow the artillery to reach him by 1 or 2 February at the latest.[5] But his orders to Henningsen were countermanded by Huger, who claimed that he could not furnish water transportation for the cannons and caissons, and argued that the road along the beach would not allow for the movement of guns or men. Therefore, he rerouted the artillery, ordering it to proceed inland. Henningsen was forced to haul the six cannons to Elizabeth City, over forty miles away. The result of this was that none of the sorely needed guns reached Roanoke in time for the battle.[6]

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[4] Shaw to Wise, 8 January 1862; Report of Lieut. Daniel W. Flagler, U.S. Ordnance Department, 20 February 1862; Wise to Davis, 13 February 1862, all in *O.R., Vol. 9*, 81-82, 111-112, 127-128. Furthermore, Shaw had only 12-pounder ammunition to serve the 18-pounder field gun.

[5] *O.R., Vol. 9*, 118, 143.

[6] Henningsen found the view that the guns and men could not be transported along the beach to be "erroneous"; Wise himself felt that the beach road was "the very best and firmest road in all this section," and accused Huger of being "grossly ignorant of the routes." See Extract from Colonel Henningsen's Report, and Wise to Burgess Sidney Gaither, 28 March 1862, both in *O.R., Vol. 9*, 118-121, 143-144.

Nor could Wise and Shaw expect the arrival of more infantry. Though Governor Clark had commissioned and armed the 32nd North Carolina in the fall of 1861 with the express understanding that they were to be used to defend Roanoke, Huger had detained them at Norfolk, and they never arrived on the island.[7] Therefore, three North Carolina regiments (the 8th, 17th, and 31st), and the 46th and 59th Virginia of the Wise Legion were all the infantry that Shaw possessed, numbering in total a little over 2,000 men. The majority of these soldiers, particularly the North Carolinians, were poorly clothed and insufficiently drilled, and the armament of these men was even less adequate than that of the forts.[8] Many of the soldiers carried only fowling pieces, sporting rifles, or old flint muskets they had brought with them into the service. Though the North Carolina regiments had been awaiting new guns for some time, these had not yet arrived, much to the dismay of the soldiers who were well aware that they carried inferior weapons. As one man of the 31st North Carolina explained, "I would like to have some good guns for the company we could do a heap better fighting than we will with these." Yet though this soldier resigned himself to the fact that these weapons were not coming, he knew that

[7] Clark to Weldon N. Edwards, 17 February 1862, Governor Henry T. Clark Papers, G.L.B. 46, Part II, NCSA.

[8] Wise to Davis, 13 February 1862, in *O.R., Vol. 9*, 111-112, 129; Statement of Defenses of Roanoke Island, submitted to Gov. Clark, 30 January 1862, Governor Henry T. Clark Papers, G.P. 157, Folder 1, NCSA.

the regiment would have to go into battle nonetheless. As he concluded in a letter to friends, "Boys we will have to fight here."[9]

In short, the defenses of Roanoke on the eve of Burnside's attack were, in the words of Wise, "[A] sad farce of ignorance and neglect combined, inexcusable in any or all who were responsible for them."[10] Nevertheless, Burnside's task was not an easy one. He would still have to find a way to land his as-yet untested soldiers on the island in the face of Confederate defenders, while also neutralizing or bypassing the forts. To accomplish this, Burnside turned to Goldsborough and the navy, which would provide invaluable firepower over the coming two days. Though one of the leading scholars of combined operations in the Civil War has described Burnside's capture of Roanoke as "a regular infantry action, unsupported by the fleet," even cursory analysis demonstrates that Burnside relied heavily on Goldsborough's gunboats to drive away Flag Officer Lynch's mosquito fleet, soften the Confederate defenses, and cover the landing of the infantry.[11]

On the morning of 7 February, Goldsborough hoisted a signal on his flag ship, the *Southfield*. Echoing Admiral Nelson's famous exhortation at Trafalgar, it read, "Our country expects every man to do his duty." By midmorning, the fleet, led by the

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[9] Report of Lieut. Daniel W. Flagler, U.S. Ordnance Department, 20 February 1862, in *O.R., Vol. 9*, 82; George W. Barber (31st North Carolina) to Friend, 28 January 1862, Penney Family Papers, Box 1, Folder 2, SHC.

[10] *O.R., Vol. 9*, 129.

[11] Rowena Reed, *Combined Operations in the Civil War* (Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1978), 41.

steamers *Ceres*, *Putnam*, and *Underwriter*, had passed the southern tip of Roanoke, and Goldsborough's vessels were heavily engaged with the Confederate battery at Fort Bartow.[12] The army gunboats, including the *Ranger*, *Hussar*, *Vedette*, and *Pioneer*, all opened on the fort with their 30-pounder Parrott rifles, and as the day wore on and their shots began to tell, they moved closer and blasted away with 12-pounder and 6-pounder Wiard guns. The *Hussar* alone managed to fire 200 Parrott shells and 52 shots from the Wiard, which fell with great accuracy among the Confederate works. The gunboats continued this shelling until they received the order to cease fire around 6:30 p.m.[13]

Several of the naval vessels had been struck by the Confederate batteries, but none had suffered any serious damage. One of the tensest moments on board any ship occurred on the steamer *Valley City*, when a Confederate shell passed through the magazine and exploded in the locker. To prevent the resulting flames from setting off an open barrel of powder, gunner John Davis courageously sat on top of the barrel, thus shielding it with his own body and possibly saving the ship.[14] But if the shore batteries proved little threat to the Union vessels, Lynch's mosquito fleet proved none at all. Almost as soon as the gunboats engaged the forts, one sent a shot through the Confederate gunboat *Curlew*, which subsequently ran aground. The rest of Lynch's

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[12] Robert M. Browning Jr., *From Cape Charles to Cape Fear: The North Atlantic Blockading Squadron during the Civil War* (Tuscaloosa, Ala.: University of Alabama Press, 1993), 24-25; Burnside to Thomas, 14 February 1862, *O.R., Vol. 9*, 75; Larned diary entry, 7 February 1862, Daniel Reed Larned Papers, Vol. 1: Correspondence, LOC.

[13] *O.R., Vol. 9*, 90-92, 100.

[14] Browning Jr., *Cape Charles to Cape Fear*, 25. Davis was awarded the Medal of Honor for his actions.

vessels then precipitately withdrew up Croatan Sound and played no more part in the battle, thereby proving every bit as ineffective as Wise had always claimed they would be.[15]

While the gunboats chased Lynch's fleet away and pounded the Confederate forts, Burnside sent out a reconnaissance and sounding mission to find a good place to land his infantry. Burnside's topographical engineer, Lieut. W.S. Andrews, was greatly aided in this endeavor by Thomas Robinson, a slave who had earlier escaped from Roanoke. Robinson directed Andrews to Ashby's Harbor, about halfway up the island, which Andrews immediately recognized to be an ideal place to land troops.[16] This information was reported back to Burnside, who subsequently ordered General Foster to prepare to land with the First Brigade.[17]

Foster's men had been watching the gunboats shower Fort Bartow with shells, a scene many of the soldiers found mesmerizing. Shortly after 2:00 p.m., they were ordered to load their weapons and board barges headed for the harbor.[18] Foster had detected a concealed force of Confederate infantry in the woods adjacent to the harbor,

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[15] Browning Jr., *Cape Charles to Cape Fear*, 26. Union naval casualties at Roanoke were 6 killed, 17 wounded, and 2 missing; *O.R., Vol. 9*, 92, 100; Larned diary entry, 7 February 1862, Daniel Reed Larned Papers, Vol. 1: Correspondence, LOC.

[16] Larned diary entry, 7 February 1862, Daniel Reed Larned Papers, Vol. 1: Correspondence, LOC; Patricia C. Click, *Time Full of Trial: The Roanoke Island Freedmen's Colony, 1862-1867* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 24.

[17] Burnside to Thomas, 14 February 1862, in *O.R., Vol. 9*, 76.

[18] Entry for 7 February 1862, William J. Creasey Diary, Vol. 1, SHC; Entry for 7 February 1862, in Day, *My Diary of Rambles*, 33-34.

so he shifted the landing site slightly to the north. His landing was covered by the gunboats *Delaware* and *Picket*, who chased the Confederates away, allowing Foster to disembark his brigade without molestation.[19] As the barges and surfboats neared the shore, each one flying the national flag, Captain Pickett of Company A, 25th Massachusetts jumped off his boat and waded through waist deep mud and water to become the first Union soldier on the island. The rest of the 25th Massachusetts, along with the 23rd and 27th Massachusetts and the 10th Connecticut soon followed his lead, and by 5:00 over 1,500 men had been landed. These soldiers immediately set to work using rails and planks to build a road across the marsh so that artillery could come ashore.[20]

Reno's Second Brigade followed, the 21st Massachusetts and 51st New York coming in hot on Foster's heels aboard light-draught steamboats, trailed by the 9th New Jersey and 51st Pennsylvania. The 21st Massachusetts was sent to occupy the road and woods in front of the harbor, so that no Confederates would be able to contest the landing from cover. Meanwhile, Parke proceeded to land his four regiments. The 4th Rhode Island was transferred to the light-draught steamer *Phoenix*, which was run into the marsh, allowing the men to jump overboard and wade ashore. In tow of the *Phoenix* was a collection of surfboats and life boats bearing the 8th Connecticut, 5th Rhode Island,

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[19] Report of Brig. Gen. John G. Foster, 9 February 1862, and Burnside to Thomas, 14 February 1862, in *O.R., Vol. 9*, 75-76, 85-86.

[20] Entry for 7 February 1862, in Day, *My Diary of Rambles*, 34; Report of Brig. Gen. John G. Foster, 9 February 1862, in *O.R., Vol. 9*, 85-86. The 24th Massachusetts was not landed until the next morning, due to the fact that the steamer carrying the regiment, the *Guide*, had run aground.

and 9th New York, and by 11:00 p.m., Burnside had gotten his entire division ashore save one regiment, some 7,500 plus men in total. Additionally, six naval howitzers had been landed with their gun crews, artillery that would be put to good use the next day.[21] Thus, by judicious planning, use of combined arms, and a well-executed landing, Union forces had wrested control of the entire southern half of Roanoke without any significant fighting.

As the Union troops bivouacked on their arms near the harbor in a driving rain, Foster, who had assumed command on the island as the senior officer present, conducted a night reconnaissance with Parke and Reno. Despite the soggy conditions, he reported the men in excellent spirits, and ready for the coming fight. The commander of the 21st Massachusetts, Lieut. Col. Alberto C. Maggi, stated that the rain made it impossible for his soldiers to sleep, so every half hour he made the companies fall in to keep the men occupied. And though the colonel almost surely exaggerated when he testified that there was "not a word of grumbling, not an expression of weariness" among the soaked soldiers, morale did remain high as the troops anticipated their first battle.[22]

Despite Wise's and Shaw's shortage of infantry and artillery, the principal Confederate position on Roanoke was a naturally strong one. Only one road, a causeway, ran up the length of the marshy island, and the Confederates had constructed

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[21] Report of Brig. Gen. Jesse L. Reno, 10 February 1862, and Report of Brig. Gen. John G. Parke, 9 February 1862, in *O.R., Vol. 9*, 97-98, 105; Browning Jr., *Cape Charles to Cape Fear*, 26.

[22] Report of Brig. Gen. John G. Foster and Report of Lieut. Col. Alberto C. Maggi, Twenty-First Massachusetts Infantry, both 9 February 1862, in *O.R., Vol. 9*, 86, 100-101.

a strong series of earthworks directly across it, with both its right and left flanks anchored on what were believed to be impenetrable swamps filled with thick underbrush. It was here, about a mile from Ashby's Harbor, that Shaw placed his infantry as well as his three field pieces, and he had wisely cleared trees along the causeway for several hundred yards in front of the position to deprive any advancing Union forces of cover.[23] The terrain in this sector of the island was so bad that Burnside believed that it "precluded the possibility of any general oversight of operations on the field," so he left Foster, Reno, and Parke with a great deal of discretion in planning and fighting the battle.[24]

At daybreak on 8th February, Foster ordered his brigade to fall in and advance, with the 25th Massachusetts in the lead. These men skirmished with Confederate pickets before discovering the main enemy position astride the causeway. Foster immediately placed the six naval howitzers in the road, commanded by Midshipman Benjamin Porter and Acting Master J.B. Hammond, and supported them with the 25th Massachusetts, which advanced to within 300 yards of the earthworks and began firing on the Confederate center at 8:00 a.m. Foster then ordered the 23rd and 27th Massachusetts to "advance through the morass on our right and endeavor to turn the enemy's left."[25] John

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[23] Report of Brig. Gen. John G. Foster, 9 February 1862, and Wise to Davis, 13 February 1862, both in *O.R., Vol. 9*, 86, 112; Larned diary entry, 9 February 1862, Daniel Reed Larned Papers, Vol. 1: Correspondence, LOC; William Marvel, *Burnside* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 56-57.

[24] Burnside to Thomas, 14 February 1862, in *O.R., Vol. 9*, 77.

[25] Report of Brig. Gen. John G. Foster, 9 February 1862, and Report of Col. Edwin Upton, Twenty-fifth Massachusetts Infantry, 10 February 1862, both in *O.R., Vol. 9*, 86-87, 96.

Kurtz, the Colonel of the 23rd Massachusetts, marched his men across the face of the Confederate fire, through what one of his soldiers termed "the worst swamp in the South," to reach this position, but though the 23rd and 27th Massachusetts poured fire into the Confederate works, they could make but little headway in turning the enemy's left flank for the next two hours.[26]

Due to the narrow road to the battlefield and the woods and swamp to its right and left, Reno's brigade advanced slowly behind Foster's. After a quick survey of the field made clear that little progress was being made in the center and on the Union right, Reno informed Foster that he would move his regiments to the left and "endeavor to penetrate the woods and swamp, and thus turn [the Confederate] right." Therefore, the 21st Massachusetts, 51st New York, and 9th New Jersey all slogged through water and dense underbrush, which was so bad Colonel Edward Ferrero described the area as "a dense jungle," as they moved off the road. These men commenced oblique fire on the Confederate works and battery, which they kept up for two hours, but like Foster's regiments on the right, they found that the terrain greatly impeded their progress and prevented an immediate charge against the Confederate flank.[27]

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[26] Report of Col. John Kurtz, Twenty-third Massachusetts Infantry, 9 February 1862, and Report of Col. Horace C. Lee, Twenty-seventh Massachusetts Infantry, 10 February 1862, both in *O.R., Vol. 9*, 94, 97; Entry for 8 February 1862, William J. Creasey Diary, Vol. 1, SHC.

[27] Report of Brig. Gen. Jesse L. Reno, 10 February 1862; Report of Lieut. Col. Alberto C. Maggi, Twenty-first Massachusetts Infantry, 9 February 1862; Report of Col. Edward Ferrero, Fifty-first New York Infantry, all in *O.R., Vol. 9*, 98, 101, 103.

Parke's Third Brigade was the last to reach the battlefield, and the general had left the 8th Connecticut behind to hold the camp near Ashby's Harbor. By the time Parke arrived with the 4th Rhode Island and 9th New York, Reno was already heavily engaged on the left. Foster ordered Parke to support his own brigades on the right, and Parke promptly sent the 4th Rhode Island, Colonel Isaac P. Rodman commanding, to take position on the left of the 27th Massachusetts. As they moved into position, Rodman's regiment was exposed to a continuous fire of musketry, but the men, according to the Colonel, "[P]lunged into the swamp, nearly waist-deep with mud and water, and after almost incredible exertions succeeded in forcing [their] way through briers, cypress, and a dense mass of birch." The 9th New York, which had been waiting in the clearing by the road, was then ordered to follow.[28]

Burnside was content to let Foster, Reno, and Parke, who were all more familiar with the terrain than he was, exercise direct control over the battle. Nevertheless, he remained in constant communication with them, and itched to place himself in the thick of the fighting. As Larned explained, Burnside's "impatience was beyond all bounds and it was all we could do to keep him back." Burnside would eventually go to the front with an escort, but before he did, he made efforts to greet the wounded who were starting to stream back towards the camp. Larned described how the general came face to face with men who had "arms torn off at the shoulder, legs ragged and bloody, heads broken open

[28] Report of Brig. Gen. John G. Parke, 9 February 1862, and Report of Col. Isaac P. Rodman, Fourth Rhode Island Infantry, 10 February 1862, both in *O.R., Vol. 9*, 106, 108-109.

and feet torn off – and such looking faces." As Burnside spoke to and shook hands with these men, he drew tears from both wounded and witnesses. One of the wounded soldiers tried to bolster the general's spirits in turn by exclaiming, "They didn't kill me, General, only knocked me senseless. I'll be ready for them again in a few days." Yet the scene was still so gruesome that Larned believed that none could adequately describe its horrors, or the anxiety it caused among all at the rear.[29]

Anxiety among the Confederate defenders, however, was also growing. Shaw had less than 2,000 men in the works, which was enough to blanket the causeway with musketry. But the Union fire on the right and left flanks indicated that the swamp that the Confederates had perceived to be impassable was in fact being advanced through, albeit slowly. This spelled disaster for the Confederates, for although the 2nd North Carolina was on its way to the island, for the moment Shaw had no reserve to bolster his wings, and the fact that he had only four mules to move his artillery, several of which had already been hit, meant that repositioning his guns to combat any Union breakthrough on the flanks would be time consuming and most likely futile.[30]

The battle, however, was not yet won for the Union. The 25th Massachusetts had suffered heavily by the road from what its colonel termed an "incessant fire," and had by 10:30 completely exhausted its ammunition. In fact, several regiments were running low on ammunition, which was slow making it to the battlefield because it had to be carried

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[29] Larned diary entry and Larned to Brother-in-law Henry, both 9 February 1862, Daniel Reed Larned Papers, Vol. 1: Correspondence, LOC.

[30] Wise to Davis, 13 February 1862, *O.R., Vol. 9*, 112.

through the knee-deep mud on the shoulders of tired soldiers.[31] As the 25th Massachusetts withdrew, their place was taken by the 10th Connecticut, whose Colonel, Charles Russell, was soon after killed. Like the 25th Massachusetts, the 10th Connecticut took severe punishment, ultimately sustaining 55 casualties, the highest number in any Union regiment. Indeed, Foster would heap praise on these two regiments in his official report by claiming that he "never saw men stand up more gallantly under a hot fire."[32] But stand up though they might, these regiments could not advance against the Confederate center until more of the fire emanating from that position was diverted.

Therefore, the breakthrough would have to come on the flanks, and Reno was working hard to make such an event occur. He had continually shifted the 51st New York and the 21st Massachusetts to the left, until they were solidly astride the right of the Confederate line. These regiments then began to pick their way through the swamp directly towards the Confederates, and by 11:00 they were only 100 yards from the breastworks. Realizing this, the Confederate right wing began to give way, at which point Reno ordered these two regiments, supported by the 9th New Jersey in reserve, to charge and take the three-gun battery.[33]

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[31] Report of Col. Edwin Upton, Twenty-fifth Massachusetts Infantry, 10 February 1862, *O.R., Vol. 9*, 96; Larned diary entry, 9 February 1862, Daniel Reed Larned Papers, Vol. 1: Correspondence, LOC.

[32] Report of Lieut. Col. Albert W. Drake, Tenth Connecticut Infantry, 11 February 1862; Report of Brig. Gen. John G. Foster, 9 February 1862; Return of Casualties in the Department of North Carolina, all in *O.R., Vol. 9*, 85, 87-88, 93. Total losses for the 25th Massachusetts were 6 killed and 44 wounded, while the 10th Connecticut suffered 6 killed and 49 wounded.

[33] Report of Brig. Gen. Jesse L. Reno, 10 February 1862; Report of Lieut. Col. Alberto C. Maggi, Twenty-first Massachusetts Infantry, 9 February 1862; Report of Col. Edward Ferrero, Fifty-first New York Infantry, all in *O.R., Vol. 9*, 98, 101, 103.

Colonels Ferrero and Maggi led the charge, with the 51st New York to the left of the 21st Massachusetts. These two regiments arrived inside the Confederate works almost simultaneously, and as Captain Wright of the 51st New York planted the American flag on the ramparts, the 21st Massachusetts did the same with its state and regimental flags. Reno himself stated that the charge was gallantly executed, and Maggi exclaimed in his official report that "I never saw better behavior by any soldiers, young or veterans, and I do not believe it was possible in such a ground – if a continual swamp and ponds of water can be so called – that anyone could have surpassed the brilliant and gallant conduct of all my command."[34] Though Shaw attempted to shift his three artillery pieces to confront the advance of Reno's regiments, all of his mules had been killed, making this impossible.[35]

Nor would this have done the Confederates much good, for increased pressure came not just from the flanks, but now from the causeway as well. About the same time as Reno ordered his men forward, Foster had ordered the 9th New York Zouaves, led by Colonel Hawkins, to charge directly up the road at the battery. This regiment had originally been ordered to follow the 4th Rhode Island into the swamp on the right, but

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[34] Report of Brig. Gen. Jesse L. Reno, 10 February 1862; Report of Lieut. Col. Alberto C. Maggi, Twenty-first Massachusetts Infantry, 9 February 1862; Report of Col. Edward Ferrero, Fifty-first New York Infantry, all in *O.R., Vol. 9*, 98, 101, 103. Like Maggi, Ferrero was highly complimentary of the conduct of his men, stating his belief that "the men and officers under my command behaved with a coolness that was really surprising for men who were under fire for their first time."

[35] Wise to Davis, 13 February 1862, *O.R., Vol. 9*, 112. Wise also claimed to Davis that the Union forces had deceitfully advanced under a white flag of truce. The confusion here may stem from the fact that at least one of the Massachusetts regiments carried a predominantly white state flag, which may have been mistaken by the Confederates for such a flag of truce.

the terrain had so impeded their progress that Foster and Parke had decided to detain them near the road. Shortly before 11:30, Foster bellowed his order to Hawkins: "This is the very moment. Zouaves, storm the battery!" Led by a brave major, the Zouaves made for the Confederate center at a run, their own yells mixing with the cheers of the Union troops who watched their advance.[36] The weight of this charge, combined with the success of Reno on the Union left and with the creeping advance of the 23rd and 27th Massachusetts on the right was too much for the Confederate defenders, who spiked their guns and fled in great confusion towards the northern tip of the island.

Before 15 minutes had passed, Foster and Reno had organized a pursuit. This was led initially by Reno's 21st Massachusetts and the 9th New York, which was ordered to the eastern edge of the island to round up the Confederates trying to escape in small boats from Shallow Bag Bay to Nags Head. The Zouaves captured 40 prisoners around the bay, including the mortally wounded Captain O. Jennings Wise, the son of General Henry Wise and commander of the Wise Legion in his absence. When the 21st Massachusetts began to outpace the other regiments, Fostered ordered them to halt, and the advance was then led by the 24th Massachusetts. This regiment had not been landed on the island until that morning and arrived on the battlefield just after the battery had been captured. Company B and Company H of the 24th Massachusetts rounded up roughly 160 Confederate soldiers hiding in the woods, while the rest of the force

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[36] Report of Brig. Gen. John G. Parke and Report of Brig. Gen. John G. Foster, both 9 February 1862 in *O.R., Vol. 9*, 87, 106; Marvel, *Burnside*, 58-59.

advanced steadily north. Meanwhile, Parke took the 10th Connecticut and 4th Rhode Island along a narrow road to the west for a mile to take control of Fort Bartow at Port Point, which the Confederates had abandoned during their retreat. These regiments found the guns at the fort spiked and the gun carriages all severely damaged from the naval bombardment.[37]

As the national colors were raised over Fort Bartow, Foster rode in to announce the surrender of the rest of the Confederate force. The 24th and 21st Massachusetts had skirmished briefly with Confederate troops near Fort Huger at Weir's Point before Lieut. Col. Fowle of the 31st North Carolina had approached Foster with a flag of truce, asking for terms of surrender. Foster replied that the terms were "none but those of unconditional surrender," and Shaw, quickly realizing the hopelessness of his position, was forced to accept these. This was all the more unfortunate for the Confederates, as the 2nd North Carolina had just landed on the island and was also forced to lay down its arms. Furthermore, Fort Forrest, on the mainland opposite Weir's Point, was hastily burned and evacuated, its garrison fleeing precipitately inland.[38]

Burnside and his brigadiers had won a complete victory. At the cost of 264 casualties, Burnside's division had captured 2,675 Confederates, along with 4 forts, 3,000 small arms, and 42 pieces of artillery, and secured Union possession of the crucial

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[37] Report of Brig. Gen. John G. Parke, 9 February 1862 and Report of Col. Isaac P. Rodman, Fourth Rhode Island Infantry, 10 February 1862, both in *O.R., Vol. 9*, 107, 109. Captain Wise died shortly thereafter, but Burnside had his body returned to the Wise family.

[38] Report of Brig. Gen. Jesse L. Reno, 10 February 1862; Report of Brig. Gen. John G. Foster, 9 February 1862; Burnside to Thomas, 14 February 1862, all in *O.R., Vol. 9*, 79, 87-88, 99.

island, and therefore of Albemarle Sound.[39] The next day, Burnside issued a congratulatory order to his victorious troops, praising them for their "brilliant and successful occupation of Roanoke Island." Burnside lauded Foster, Reno, and Parke for their conduct of the battle, and proved prescient in estimating that the courage and steadiness of the soldiers was a "token of future victory." Each regiment was to inscribe on its flag "Roanoke Island, Feb. 8th, 1862." Burnside also wrote directly to McClellan announcing his capture of the island and the Confederate garrison, and stating his belief that "[t]he expedition begins to look like a success."[40]

The events of the next two days would only make this opinion appear all the more correct. While Union soldiers dried out their wet clothes over fires, sipped a whiskey ration, mingled with Confederate prisoners, and searched for trophies of the battle to send to loved ones at home, the navy attempted to put the finishing touches on the victory by destroying the remainder of Lynch's mosquito fleet, which had retreated up Albemarle Sound to Elizabeth City.[41] On 9 February, Goldsborough ordered Commander Stephen Clegg Rowan in pursuit with 14 vessels mounting 37 guns. Though Lynch's force numbered only six weak boats, the naval bombardment of Roanoke had

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[39] For a complete breakdown of Union casualties in each brigade and regiment, see Return of Casualties in the Department of North Carolina, *O.R., Vol. 9*, 85; Burnside to McClellan, 14 February 1862, RG 94, Ambrose E. Burnside Papers, Box 1, Folder 4, NA.

[40] General Orders No. 5, 9 February 1862, and Burnside to McClellan, 14 February 1862, both in RG 94, Ambrose E. Burnside Papers, Box 1, Folder 4, NA.

[41] Entries for 9, 10 and 11 February 1862, William J. Creasey Diary, Vol. 1, SHC. Creasey himself secured a double barreled shot gun as relic of the battle; Entry for 9 and 10 February 1862, in Day, *My Diary of Rambles*, 37-38. Day reported the Confederate prisoners as a "motley looking set, all clothed (I can hardly say uniformed) in a dirty looking homespun gray cloth…no two men were dressed alike."

greatly depleted Rowan's ammunition, to the point where he had less than 20 rounds on average for each of his guns. Rowan later termed this "the most trying hour of my life," but he decided to give battle nonetheless. That night, Rowan informed his officers that the advance was to be a reconnaissance in force, to be converted into a full attack if he deemed it prudent.[42]

Lynch's boats were ostensibly under the protection of the battery at Cobb's Point above Elizabeth City, which mounted four 32-pounders. The battery, however, was poorly cited, and described by one of the captains of Lynch's vessels as a "wretchedly constructed affair." Instead of remaining aboard his flag ship, Lynch actually went ashore to direct the fire from this battery.[43] On the morning of 10 February, Rowan's vessels advanced, led by the steamers *Underwriter*, *Commodore Perry*, and *Morse*. When the fleet closed to within two miles, the Confederates opened fire, but most of the shots passed harmlessly overhead. Rowan determined to have his ships hold their fire, pass the fort, and "smash old Lynch up," and when the Union vessels moved within a mile of the mosquito fleet, Rowan gave the signal "dash at the enemy." As the commander described it, "We opened fire and at the same time the throttle valves. It was a pretty sight."[44]

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[42] Rowan to Samuel F. Du Pont, 14 April 1862, in John D. Hayes, ed., *Samuel Francis Du Pont: A Selection from his Civil War Letters, Vol. 2, The Blockade: 1862-1863* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1969), 3; Browning Jr., *Cape Charles to Cape Fear*, 28.

[43] Captain William Harwar Parker quoted in Browning Jr., *Cape Charles to Cape Fear*, 28.

[44] Rowan to Du Pont, 14 April 1862, in Hayes, ed., *Samuel Francis Du Pont: A Selection from his Civil War Letters, Vol. 2, The Blockade: 1862-1863*, 4-5.

The ensuing battle was brief. The superior firepower of Rowan's vessels quickly overwhelmed the Confederate force. The crew of the *Delaware* boarded and captured the Confederate gunboat *Fanny*, while the Confederates were forced to abandon the *Black Warrior* and set her on fire. The *Ellis* also fell into Union hands. Meanwhile, the flag ship of the Confederate fleet, the *Sea Bird*, tried to flee to the Dismal Swamp Canal, but was forced to surrender, and soon after sank when the *Commodore Perry* accidentally smashed into her. Only one Confederate steamer, the *Beaufort*, escaped, as did Lynch, who fled the fort and left his fleet to its fate.[45] The Confederates then set fire to Elizabeth City, and many citizens evacuated the town. It was Rowan's sailors who helped put out the flames, which Rowan believed "must have its effect in teaching our deluded countrymen a lesson in Humanity and Civilization."[46] But whether Confederates drew this lesson or not, one thing was clear: with Rowan's victory, the naval arm of Burnside's expedition had secured complete control of the sounds of North Carolina. Union vessels would in fact operate relatively undisturbed in these sounds for the remainder of the war.

The Union soldiers at Roanoke were naturally elated when they heard of Rowan's success, completing as it did their own hard-fought victory. McClellan too wrote that he was rejoiced to hear of the capture of Roanoke Island and the destruction

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[45] Browning Jr., *Cape Charles to Cape Fear*, 28-30.

[46] Barton A. Myers, *Executing Daniel Bright: Race, Loyalty, and Guerrilla Violence in a Coastal Carolina Community, 1861-1865* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2009), 39-41.

of Lynch's gunboats.[47] And though it was Rowan who had destroyed the Confederate fleet and Generals Foster, Reno, and Parke who had primarily directed the land action on 8 February, this in no way diminished Burnside in the eyes of his division. As Larned explained, "The General is already nominated for the Presidency in [18]64."[48] But while Northerners celebrated and praised the victorious general, Southerners were going through a wholly different ordeal. Shockwaves of fear and anger immediately reverberated out from North Carolina all along the Atlantic coast. Both Confederate civilians and soldiers began to despair and heap blame on the government in Richmond for failing to protect Roanoke, and the Davis administration itself took a grim view of the defeat, coming as it did at the same time as the loss of Forts Henry and Donelson in Tennessee.[49] The majority of Confederates, in fact, saw these battles as a linked string of defeats that cast a pall over the optimism they had harbored for success in 1862.

While Burnside's expedition was crossing the bar at Hatteras in late January, the *New York Herald* asserted its belief that "some telling blows from Burnside will be known throughout every rebel camp from Manassas to Mobile, and in every town and

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[47] McClellan to Burnside, 12 February 1862, RG 94, Ambrose E. Burnside Papers, Box 1, Folder 4, NA.

[48] Larned diary entry, 10 February 1862, Daniel Reed Larned Papers, Vol. 1: Correspondence, LOC. The Northern reaction to Burnside's victories, and the rising reputation of the general himself, will be explored fully in the following chapter.

[49] Historian such as Foote and Marvel have correctly noted that Burnside's victory "aroused the immediate apprehension of every rebel posted within gunshot of salt water" (Foote) and that "as vital a strategic consideration as Roanoke was, its loss had disproportionately serious effects on Southern morale" (Marvel), but neither provided substantial evidence to support their claims. See Foote, *The Civil War: A Narrative, Vol. 1*, 230, and Marvel, *Burnside*, 60-61. For accounts of Grant's capture of Fort Henry on 6 February and Fort Donelson on 16 February, see pages 181-215 of Foote's work, as well as McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 390-403.

hamlet of the South."[50] Roanoke was the general's first blow, and the results were exactly what the *Herald* had predicted. Citizens of North Carolina understandably panicked, as they knew full well that Burnside's control of Albemarle and Pamlico Sounds, as well as the eradication of Lynch's mosquito fleet, meant that Union forces could land at any point they chose along North Carolina's interior waterways. As one wealthy plantation owner from Halifax County in northeastern North Carolina put it, "Albemarle Sound and its tributaries are now open to inroads and incursions of all kinds. Wherever their gun boats can go they will be masters." This same citizen immediately commenced packing up valuables to move inland, but before she left, she attended a dinner party, which turned out to be quite a somber affair. As she explained, "We thought of little else save Roanoke Island and tho' I made an effort to throw off the gloom and talk of other things yet it all seemed hollow and artificial…Union now means conquest, and conquest, confiscation [of slaves]. So we go!"[51]

Governor Clark immediately began receiving petitions both from citizens asking that their counties be put in better states of defense, and from North Carolina regiments requesting that they be transferred back to the state, so that they might, in the words of one colonel, "[D]efend to the last extremity…our patriotic and beloved old

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[50] "The Condition of the South," *New York Herald*, 26 January 1862.

[51] Entries for 10, 11, and 13 February 1862, in Catherine Ann Devereux Edmondston, *'Journal of a Secesh Lady': The Diary of Catherine Ann Devereux Edmondston, 1860-1866*, eds. Beth G. Crabtree and James W. Patton (Raleigh: North Carolina Division of Archives and History, 1979), 114-116.

county…[and] be enabled to look after our wives children and property."[52] Many were worried that Burnside would immediately advance on the Weldon Railroad; in light of this, Archibald McLean, the Mayor of Fayetteville, requested a regiment and a battery of six guns, while the North Carolina Convention passed a resolution demanding that Clark report as early as possible what force could be sent to the Roanoke River to protect the Weldon Bridge in that area.[53] Clark, in fact, received so many reports of disaffection among citizens and military officials of the state that he felt the need to issue a strongly worded proclamation exhorting North Carolinians not to despair, but to instead enlist in the army. It read, in part:

> North Carolinians! Our country needs your aid for its protection and defence against an invading foe…Our own boarders are invaded by the enemy in force, now threatening an advance to deprive us of liberty, property, and all that we hold dear as a self-governing and free people. We must resist him at all hazards and by every means in our power…North Carolina has always proved true, constant, and brave in the hour of trial and of danger. Never let it be said that in the future she has failed to maintain this high renown…The enemy is redoubling his efforts and straining every nerve to over-run our country and subjugate us to his domination…*Fellow Citizens*! Your first allegiance is due to North Carolina. Rally to her banners.[54]

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[52] Colonel of 1st North Carolina Drafted Troops to Clark, 11 February 1862, Governor Henry T. Clark Papers, G.P. 157, Folder 2, NCSA. This colonel referred to his home county, Martin, as "entirely defenseless." See also Robert W. Cole, 22nd North Carolina, to Clark, 19 February 1862, in the same folder. Cole stated that the majority of the men in the regiment "will not reenlist unless they can remain in N.C.," because they desired "above all a chance to fight our common enemy on the soil of our native state."

[53] McLean to Clark, 21 February 1862, and Resolutions Passed by the North Carolina Convention, 14 February 1862, both in Governor Henry T. Clark Papers, G.P. 157, Folder 2, NCSA. Clark responded that he had ordered the 34th and 38th North Carolina to Weldon after the fall of Roanoke. See Clark to Convention President Weldon N. Edwards, 16 February 1862, Governor Henry T. Clark Papers, G.L.B. 46, Part II, NCSA.

[54] Proclamation Issued by Gov. Clark, 22 February 1862, Governor Henry T. Clark Papers, G.L.B. 46, Part II, NCSA.

Yet although there was a short-lived increase in enlistments in North Carolina, many citizens remained disenchanted with a Confederacy they believed had failed to protect their state.[55]

It was not only in North Carolina, however, that citizens were troubled by the loss of Roanoke, and the manner in which it fell. In Richmond, Thomas Bragg, Davis's Attorney General, noted a great deal of discontent, causing him to remark that the capital was in a state of "general panic," and to record in his diary his opinion that "our cause is hopeless."[56] And from the same city, Robert Garlick Hill Kean, the soon-to-be head of the Confederate Bureau of War, listed Roanoke alongside Fort Henry as disasters that had befallen the Confederate Army, and penned his belief that "[d]angers close us round on every side. The timid will begin to croak, the half-hearted to quail and suggest submission, [and] the traitorous to agitate."[57]

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[55] For evidence that enlistments did briefly spike, see Clark to Benjamin, 17 February 1862, Governor Henry T. Clark Papers, G.L.B. 46, Part II, NCSA. Clark informed the Secretary of War that seven companies had tendered themselves in the previous two days alone.

[56] Bragg quoted in Paul D. Escott, *Many Excellent People: Power and Privilege in North Carolina, 1850-1900* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 37; For similar views of the situation from other Confederates, see John M. Morehead to Thomas Ruffin, 10 February 1862, in Thomas Ruffin, *The Papers of Thomas Ruffin, Vol. 3*, ed. J.G. de Roulhac Hamilton (Raleigh: Edwards & Broughton Printing Co., 1920), 213-214. Morehead was a delegate in the Confederate Congress who had governed North Carolina from 1841-1845, and Ruffin had served as the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of North Carolina from 1833-1852. Morehead claimed that the capital was in gloom due to the "calamity" of the defeat at Roanoke. See also diary entry for 11 February 1862, in Mary Boykin Chestnut, *Mary Chestnut's Civil War*, ed. C. Vann Woodward (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), 286, in which Chestnut lamented that "bad news is killing me."

[57] Entries for 12 and 20 February 1862, in Robert Garlick Hill Kean, *Inside the Confederate Government: The Diary of Robert Garlick Hill Kean*, ed. Edward Younger (New York: Oxford University Press, 1957), 24-25.

Confederate military figures were just as disgusted and worried by the loss of Roanoke as Southern citizens. D.H. Hill, who had for months attempted to get Confederate authorities to realize the importance of the island, was disheartened by its fall as well as that of Fort Henry, and wrote to his wife from Virginia, "We are losing ground rapidly…This will be a year of blood and of awful reverses to our arms." Hill could not help adopting an I-told-everyone-so tone, arguing that "I have not made a single mistake in my calculations of what the enemy would do," and blaming the defeats on those who were too busy "stupidly crowing over past victories" instead of preparing for the future. He was convinced that Roanoke "could have been made impregnable;" the fact that it was not made him "ashamed of the South." Indeed, the general thought the military situation so bad that he told his wife that "we will be conquered in three months, probably sooner."[58]

Hill was not alone in these sentiments. General Robert E. Lee, at the time commanding the Department of South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida, told his own wife that the news from Tennessee and North Carolina "is not at all cheering, and disasters seem to be thickening around us." Lee was, in fact, so awed by the achievements of the

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[58] Hill to Wife, 9 February 1862, Daniel Harvey Hill Papers, Box 1, Folder 4, USAHEC; Hill to Wife, 19 February 1862, Daniel Harvey Hill Papers, P.C. 93.1, Folder 4, NCSA. For further evidence of despair in the Army of Northern Virginia, see Major Thomas Goree to uncle Pleasant Williams Kittrell, 15 February 1862, and Goree to sister Mary Frances Goree Kittrell, 18 February 1862, both in Thomas J. Goree, *Longstreet's Aide: The Civil War Letters of Major Thomas J. Goree*, ed. Thomas W. Cutrer (Charlottesville, Va.: University Press of Virginia, 1995), 73-76. Goree was the aide-de-camp to General James Longstreet. He wrote that he, like many in the Army of Northern Virginia, felt "low in spirit and despondent from the bad news that had been pouring in on us," and also stated that the Confederacy "must determine to have no more Hatteras, Port Royal, Roanoke, and Fort Henry affairs, every one of them an eternal disgrace to our arms."

Union gunboats at Hatteras, Port Royal, and Roanoke that he told General Roswell Ripley, commanding at Charleston, S.C., that he was in favor of abandoning that position and retreating into the interior, where the Confederates could meet the Union forces on more equal terms. Indeed, the fact that Lee entertained the possibility of evacuating such a key post shows just how much an impression Burnside's and Goldsborough's victories had made.[59]

All of this despondency and anger led to a great deal of censure of the Confederate government. Edward A. Pollard, the editor of the *Richmond Examiner* during the war, later called Donelson and Roanoke part of a "thread of Confederate disaster," but stated that it was in fact the loss of Roanoke that "dated the period when public censure towards the Richmond Government appeared to have first awakened." As Pollard explained, "Heretofore the administration of that Government had gone on almost without inquiry…But such a disaster…in which improvidence stared out, and in which an army had been put, as it were, in a mash-trap –in a condition in which it could neither hope for success nor extricate itself from a besetting peril – provoked public inquiry." Pollard contended that no one who lived in Richmond during this period "could ever forget these gloomy, miserable days," and made clear his belief that the defeats were not accidents nor a hand of providence, but rather that they could be

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[59] Lee to Roswell Ripley and Lee to James H. Trapier (commanding the District of Florida), 19 February 1862; Lee to wife Mary Anna Custis Lee, 23 February 1862; See also Lee to daughter Annie Lee, 2 March 1862, all in Robert E. Lee, *The Wartime Papers of Robert E. Lee*, eds. Clifford Dowdey and Louis H. Manarin (New York: Da Capo Press, 1961), 116-118, 121.

"distinctly and sufficiently traced to human causes."[60] To Pollard and many other Confederate citizens, these "human causes" were Jefferson Davis and Judah P. Benjamin.

Diarist Mary Chestnut, for one, wrote that North Carolina newspapers constantly criticized Davis for ignoring the defenses of their state, while citizens everywhere, angry with Benjamin, referred to him regularly as "Mr. Davis's pet Jew."[61] In Congress, Henry S. Foote of Tennessee railed against those he saw as responsible for the losses of Forts Henry and Donelson in his home state, as well as of Roanoke Island, exclaiming, "Leave us now, and go to your own vocations; leave us; you have done us harm enough; go your way, you are utterly incompetent." A clerk in the Confederate War Department, John Beauchamp Jones, also noted that Benjamin was denounced "as the sole cause of the calamities which have befallen the country."[62] But Jones erred in this regard: criticism of Benjamin was naturally linked to criticism of Davis, who was closely associated with his Secretary of War and widely believed to be the real hand behind military affairs. Indeed,

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[60] Edward A. Pollard, *The Lost Cause: A New Southern History of the War of the Confederates* (New York: E.B. Treat & Co., 1866), 210, 212-213, 215. Pollard's work is flawed in many respects as a history of the conflict, but it is valuable in determining how Confederates felt about their defeat and to what factors they ascribed this defeat in the immediate post-war years.

[61] Diary entry for 13 February 1862, in Woodward, ed., *Mary Chestnut's Civil War*, 288-290.

[62] Speech of Henry S. Foote, 20 February 1862, quoted in Richard E. Beringer, Herman Hattaway, Archer Jones, and William N. Still Jr., *Why the South Lost the Civil War* (Athens, Ga.: University of Georgia Press, 1986), 125; Entry for 3 April 1862, in John Beauchamp Jones, *A Rebel War Clerk's Diary, Vol. 1*, ed. Howard Swiggett (New York: Old Hickory Bookshop, 1935), 118.

Davis was not exaggerating when he told his brother he was the object of special malignity.[63]

Any sympathy Benjamin may have clung to most likely evaporated when the funeral for O. Jennings Wise (whose remains had been returned by Burnside) was held at St. James Episcopal Church in Richmond. The event, according to Jones, who was in attendance, "saddened the countenances of thousands." Benjamin, who the Wise family was furious with and who they in essence charged with Jennings's murder, was forced to watch the procession through his window at the War Department, not daring to attend the ceremony.[64] This was not, however, the end of the Secretary of War's troubles.

In late February, a congressional committee was set up to investigate not only the causes of defeat at Roanoke Island, but who was at fault for the disaster, and it was chaired by Burgess Sidney Gaither, a North Carolina representative. Over several weeks, the committee took a great deal of testimony, interviewing Shaw, Wise, Huger, Benjamin, and many others, as well as receiving written statements from Clark. Many in Richmond generally, and those on the committee specifically, at first laid the blame for the island's quick surrender at the feet of the North Carolina regiments, who Wise had

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[63] Davis to Joseph E. Davis, 21 February 1862, in Jefferson Davis, *The Papers of Jefferson Davis, Vol. 8: 1862*, eds. Lynda Lasswell Crist and Mary Seaton Dix (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1995), 53.

[64] Swiggett, ed., *A Rebel War Clerk's Diary, Vol. 1*, 110; Eli N. Evans, *Judah P. Benjamin: The Jewish Confederate* (New York: The Free Press, 1988), 147-148. Jennings Wise's son, John Wise, later wrote a book entitled *The End of an Era*, published in 1899, which was heavily critical of Benjamin. The work became a best seller of its time, going through 27 printings. For Burnside returning the body, see Burnside to Wise, 12 February 1862, RG 94, Ambrose E. Burnside Papers, Box 1, Folder 4, NA.

claimed in his initial report to Davis "did not fight…except a few companies."[65] Gaither told Clark that Colonel Shaw's and Colonel Jordan's regiments had been slandered, but he succeeded in gathering from the Governor detailed information on the large number of troops and arms North Carolina had sent away to the defense of other states. Gaither then pointed out to the committee that hardly any troops, arms, or money from other states went to the defense of the North Carolina coast, and therefore, as he claimed to Clark, he was able to "repel the taunts and disparaging remarks of others" and show the committee that the North Carolina soldiers "fought bravely for more than four hours at great disadvantage," only succumbing to "overpowering numbers."[66]

In the light of this information, it quickly became clear to the committee that Roanoke was insufficiently supplied with men, arms, and powder, but as Gaither explained, determining who was responsible for this neglect was expected to prove a more difficult challenge.[67] But when it was Benjamin's turn before the committee, he provided them with a much-needed scapegoat. The Secretary of War, whose loyalty to Davis had not wavered, stated directly "I take personal responsibility for the decision at Roanoke." As he later explained to Colonel Charles Marshall, an aide-de-camp to Lee, "I consulted the President whether it was best for the country that I should submit to

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[65] Entry for 25 February 1862, Judah P. Benjamin Diary, Records of the Confederate States of America, LOC; Gaither to Clark, 27 February 1862, Governor Henry T. Clark Papers, G.P. 157, Folder 2, NCSA; Wise to Davis, 13 February 1862, in *O.R., Vol. 9*, 112.

[66] Gaither to Clark, 18 March 1862, Governor Henry T. Clark Papers, G.P. 157, Folder 3, NCSA.

[67] Gaither to Thomas Ruffin, 1 April 1862, in Hamilton, ed., *The Papers of Thomas Ruffin, Vol. 3*, 226.

unmerited censure or reveal to a congressional committee our poverty and my utter inability to supply the requisitions of General Wise." To reveal such would have alerted both Confederate citizens and Northern military authorities to the powerlessness of the Confederacy to properly defend any of its exposed positions, which would certainly have caused great anxiety among the former and renewed exertions among the latter. Therefore, according to Benjamin, "It was thought best for the public service that I should suffer the blame in silence."[68] And suffer the Secretary did, becoming the object of a great deal of scorn.

Ultimately, the committee determined that the blame for the Roanoke disaster should rest on Huger and Benjamin.[69] Benjamin was charged with a failure to adequately supply the island's defenders, and he was removed as Secretary of War. In accordance with the reason for which he had claimed responsibility before the committee, he never attempted a defense of this charge, and therefore it remained on the public record. Davis, however, appointed the disgraced Benjamin to replace Robert M.T. Hunter as Secretary of State. Given his organizational ability and internationalist background, this was a post Benjamin was well suited for. But Davis's willingness to shift his much maligned friend (who had, in the words of Pollard, been charged with "a matter of the gravest offense known to the laws and the interests of the country") to a position of equal magnitude in

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[68] Benjamin quoted in Evans, *Judah P. Benjamin*, 147, 148.

[69] Huger, however, remained in command at Norfolk, and when the Confederates finally evacuated it, he received command of a division in the Army of Northern Virginia. His poor performance during the Seven Days Battles in June-July 1862 caused Lee and Davis to finally lose patience with the general and banish him to the Trans-Mississippi Department.

his cabinet only hurt the President's popularity.[70] As one resident of Richmond made clear, "This act on the part of the President, in defiance of public opinion, was considered as unwise, arbitrary, and a reckless risking of his reputation and popularity." Likewise, Gaither wrote back to North Carolina that "The president does things pretty much in his own way, without consulting anyone…[I] do not feel that we have the men here to ride upon the whirlwind and direct the storm."[71] Nevertheless, Benjamin would serve ably as Secretary of State until the end of the war.

Davis himself could not escape the gloom Roanoke had cast over both Richmond and, in a larger sense, Confederate optimism regarding the military situation. The President attempted to defend himself to William W. Avery, another North Carolina congressional representative, by writing that the Confederacy's ability to defend the coast "is limited by the supply of arms, powder, and other munitions of war," and claiming that Roanoke, had it been better served by its commanders, should have entertained "a reasonable hope of successful resistance to any force the enemy could then bring to bear against it." Yet in the same letter, Davis admitted that the island's fall was "disastrous…our signal defeat."[72] Unfortunately for Davis, he knew that he would

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[70] Entry for 12 April 1862, in Swiggett, ed., *A Rebel War Clerk's Diary, Vol. 1*, 119; Pollard, *The Lost Cause*, 213; Entry for 19 March 1862, Judah P. Benjamin Diary, Records of the Confederate States of America, LOC. According to Benjamin's diary, Davis had actually sent Benjamin's name to the Senate for the position of Secretary of State two weeks before the committee officially censured him.

[71] Sallie Ann Brock Putnam quoted in Evans, *Judah P. Benjamin*, 155; Gaither to Thomas Ruffin, 1 April 1862, in Hamilton, ed., *The Papers of Thomas Ruffin, Vol. 3*, 227.

[72] Davis to Avery, 18 February 1862, in Jefferson Davis, *Jefferson Davis, Constitutionalist: His Letters, Papers, and Speeches, Vol. 5*, ed. Dunbar Rowland (New York: J.J. Little & Ives Company, 1923), 195-196. Davis told Avery that he had ordered Huger to reinforce Roanoke "to the extent of his means," but he was as yet uncertain if Huger had done this.

soon have to discuss the Roanoke debacle in a more public forum, for he was to be inaugurated as President under the Confederacy's permanent constitution on 22 February, and therefore had to make an inaugural address.

As if the atmosphere in Richmond was not depressed enough, the day brought a torrential rainstorm so fierce that Jones remarked in his diary, "The heavens weep incessantly. Capitol Square is black with umbrellas." Yet an immense crowd still collected to hear Davis give his speech.[73] The President could not ignore the current military setbacks; as he told the people, "we have recently met with serious disasters." Davis in fact termed it "the darkest hour of our struggle," and admitted that "the tide for the moment is against us."[74] Three days later, he would tell the Confederate Congress in a separate address that "events have demonstrated that the Government had attempted more than it had power successfully to achieve," and call the surrender at Roanoke "deeply humiliating."[75] But Davis also went to pains to point out to those assembled for his inauguration that "there has been no act on our part to impair personal liberty or the freedom of speech, of thought, or of the press. The courts have been open, the judicial functions fully executed, and every right of the peaceful citizen maintained as securely

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[73] Entry for 22 February 1862, in Swiggett, ed., *A Rebel War Clerk's Diary, Vol. 1*, 111; Pollard, *The Lost Cause*, 215. Pollard, like Jones, wrote that 22 February "was memorable for its gloom in Richmond. Rain fell in torrents, and the heavens seemed to be hung with sable."

[74] Davis, "Inaugural Address," 22 February 1862, in James D. Richardson ed., *A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Confederacy, Including Diplomatic Correspondence 1861-1865, Vol. 1* (Nashville, Tenn.: United States Publishing Company, 1905), 186-188.

[75] Jefferson Davis to the Congress of the Confederate States, 25 February 1862, in Crist and Dix, eds., *Papers of Jefferson Davis, Vol. 8: 1862*, 58-59. Davis also referred to the defeats at Roanoke and Donelson as "the bitter disappointments we have borne."

as if a war of invasion had not disturbed the land." Thus far, Davis had avoided any use of martial law, unlike Lincoln, who had proclaimed it in several areas. To Davis, this was proof of the Confederacy's "sincerity of our purpose to maintain our ancient institutions."[76] The panic stemming from the Roanoke disaster was so bad, however, that it put this supposed sincerity to the test.

Confederates had long understood that Roanoke Island was the key to defending Norfolk; this was, in fact, the primary reason Wise believed throughout January that Huger should have been more willing to help him defend the island, if only out of self-interest.[77] Indeed, only two days after the garrison at Roanoke surrendered, Huger wrote to Richmond claiming that he was worried about the safety of Norfolk and that it was urgent that he be reinforced. He immediately ordered the 6th Virginia to Currituck Bridge to block the outlet of the Chesapeake and Albemarle Canal, and ordered two other regiments to fall back to South Mills and protect the canal locks. Other companies were instructed to block up the Blackwater River, which flowed from Albemarle Sound.[78] But with reinforcements slow in coming, and Burnside's force at Roanoke appearing more menacing by the hour, the citizens of Norfolk began to panic. Wise only made this worse. In a great anger, the general made his way from Nag's Head to Norfolk, and undermined any existing confidence in Benjamin by making statements like "I intend to

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[76] Davis, "Inaugural Address," 22 February 1862, in Richardson, ed., *Messages and Papers of the Confederacy, Vol. 1*, 184-185.

[77] For evidence of this, see Wise to Huger, 2 January 1862, in *O.R., Vol. 9*, 126.

[78] Reports of Maj. Gen. Benjamin Huger, 10 February 1862, in *O.R., Vol. 9*, 110.

'accuse' General Huger of nothing! nothing!! nothing!! That was the disease which brought disaster at Roanoke Island."[79]

Davis soon began to receive letters from Confederate officers detailing the "painful excitement" existing among citizens in Norfolk who were concerned about its defenses, as well as a request from the mayor of the city for 20,000 additional troops. Davis thought the alarmism so bad that on 27 February, less than a week after he had bragged to the Confederate people that the government had never restricted their civil liberties, he ordered the establishment of martial law in Norfolk, Portsmouth, and the surrounding area. Davis instructed Huger that all citizens who would embarrass the city's defense in the event of a siege were to be evacuated. Furthermore, all citizens had to give up their arms, the entire male population was to be enrolled for military service, and all persons "against whom there is well-grounded suspicion of disloyalty" were to be imprisoned.[80]

Though some historians have attributed Davis's first use of martial law to the Confederate defeats in Tennessee, both the timing of the President's proclamation and the location affected make clear that it was, in fact, the affair at Roanoke and the resulting effects that caused Davis to ultimately utilize this measure.[81] And once Davis

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[79] Wise to Gaither, 28 March 1862, in *O.R., Vol. 9*, 121.

[80] William W. Lamb to Davis, 26 February 1862, and Davis to Huger, 27 February 1862, both in Crist and Dix, eds., *Papers of Jefferson Davis, Vol. 8: 1862*, 65-66; Davis, "A Proclamation," 27 February 1862, and Benjamin to Huger, 5 March 1862, both in Richardson, ed., *Messages and Papers of the Confederacy, Vol. 1*, 219.

[81] For example, see Russell F. Weigley, *A Great Civil War: A Military and Political History, 1861-1865* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 2000), 222. Given the fact that Weigley never mentioned

finally resorted to this tactic to quell public unrest, he began to use it liberally. Two days after he had put Norfolk under martial law, Davis did the same with Richmond, and a week later Petersburg and the country surrounding it suffered the same fate.[82] In fact, by 1 May, Davis had extended martial law over at least fifteen counties in Virginia and North Carolina, as well as over entire military departments in eastern Tennessee and coastal South Carolina.[83]

Davis's adoption of martial law clearly indicates just how scared the Confederate government and military were of Burnside's victorious division. The report given by Colonel Charles Dimmock to the Virginia House of Delegates in late February is further illustrative of this fear. Dimmock stated that he regarded a Burnside-led attack on Richmond as "imminent." As the Colonel saw it, "Burnside has obtained a permanent landing on the North Carolina coast, at which he is getting re-enforcements. With 15,000 or 20,000 men he can ascend the Roanoke [River], march to Petersburg, thence to Manchester, and from the commanding hills there shell this city…This he can do in ten days." Benjamin too believed that it was evident that Burnside would soon advance on Norfolk, and therefore he ordered the only 2,000 men he could spare to go to the aid of

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Burnside's expedition in his 450 page study, it is not surprising that he misunderstood the factors behind Davis's first use of martial law.

[82] Davis, "General Orders No. 8," 1 March 1862, and Davis, "A Proclamation," 8 March 1862, both in Richardson, ed., *Messages and Papers of the Confederacy, Vol. 1*, 220-222. In both environs, citizens were forced to deliver up their arms, and the sale of spirituous liquors was prohibited.

[83] See Davis, "General Orders No. 15," 14 March 1862; "General Orders No. 18," 29 March 1862; "General Orders No. 21," 8 April 1862; and "General Orders No. 33," 1 May 1862, all in Richardson, ed., *Messages and Papers of the Confederacy, Vol. 1*, 222-226.

Huger.[84] Burnside's force provoked such anxiety that Davis wrote to General Joseph E. Johnston, commanding the principal Confederate army in Virginia, complaining that Richmond was liable to "isolation and attack in rear, should we be beaten on the lines South and East of Richmond." Therefore, Davis instructed Johnston to make dispositions which would enable the general to quickly come to the capital's aid in the event of disaster. Two weeks later, Johnston evacuated the position at Manassas that his army had held since the previous summer.[85]

Despite the Confederate worries, Burnside had to attend to several tasks before he could contemplate any further advance. First, the general had to figure out what to do with all of the Confederates he had captured. Burnside actually told Larned that he "didn't know what on earth to do" with the over 2,500 prisoners.[86] The general determined that the most expedient course of action was to parole the prisoners until they could be formally exchanged, which he hoped would increase Unionist sentiment among the people of eastern North Carolina, as well as remove the necessity of guarding these men. Therefore, Burnside proposed to Huger to send the prisoners to Elizabeth City upon the condition that an equal number of Union prisoners held in the South be

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[84] Colonel Charles Dimmock Report, 28 February 1862, and Benjamin to Huger, 5 March 1862, both in *O.R., Vol. 9*, 47-48, 55-56. Dimmock was the Colonel of Ordnance of Virginia.

[85] Davis to Johnston, 28 February 1862, and Johnston to Davis, 13 March 1862, both in Crist and Dix, eds., *Papers of Jefferson Davis, Vol. 8: 1862*, 67-68, 96-98.

[86] Larned to Brother-in-law Henry, 9 February 1862, Daniel Reed Larned Papers, Vol. 1: Correspondence, LOC.

released on parole.[87] On 13 February, Major General John Wool, commanding Union forces at Fortress Monroe, also communicated to Huger that the Union was willing to exchange the Confederate prisoners "on fair terms of exchange, man for man, and officer for officer, of equal grade…all the prisoners of either side to be discharged on parole with the agreement that any prisoners of war taken by the other party shall be returned in exchange as fast as captured," a proposition Wool believed to be "in the interests of humanity." When Huger agreed to this arrangement, Wool instructed Burnside not to send any of the Confederates north.[88] Burnside then officially informed Huger of his intention to release the prisoners on 20 February, requesting that Huger act in good faith by releasing at once the same number of Union prisoners.[89] Despite Huger's assurances that none of the Confederates would take up arms until formally exchanged, historian Barton A. Myers has uncovered ample evidence that a number of these men, particularly those from Pasquotank County, soon joined partisan ranger companies.[90]

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[87] Burnside to Huger, 12 February 1862, RG 94, Ambrose E. Burnside Papers, Box 1, Folder 4, NA.

[88] Wool to Huger, 13 February 1862, and Wool to Burnside, 15 February 1862, both in RG 94, Ambrose E. Burnside Papers, Box 1, Folder 4, NA.

[89] Burnside to Huger, 20 February 1862, RG 94, Ambrose E. Burnside Papers, Box 1, Folder 4, NA. Huger was to release the Union prisoners that had been held in confinement the longest first. For the complete breakdown of the commutation of ranks proposed by Burnside, see Burnside to Huger, 16 February 1862, in the same folder.

[90] See Myers, *Executing Daniel Bright*, specifically Chapter 2, "The Work of Evil Minded Citizens: Divided Loyalties and the Origins of Guerrilla War in the North Carolina No-Man's Land," pages 31-75. Myers's work is an excellent study that focuses on the interplay of guerrilla violence, race, political loyalty, and power in Pasquotank County in northeastern North Carolina, though Myers eschews any real discussion of how Union soldiers managed to establish a foothold in North Carolina in the first place.

The Confederate prisoners, however, were not the only men Burnside had to decide how to handle. Though many of Roanoke Island's inhabitants had fled before the battle, some did remain. From his new headquarters near Fort Bartow, now renamed Fort Foster, Burnside had the oath of allegiance administered to any of these citizens who desired to take it; by late February, around 60 had done so. The general found the majority of those who came forward "ignorant and inoffensive."[91] But a more pressing issue for Burnside was what to do with the slaves who were now fleeing in scores to the island from places such as Elizabeth City, Plymouth, and Edenton. While the *New York Tribune*'s reporter with the expedition could pen lofty sentiments such as his belief that "[t]here is something truly touching in the spectacle of these people risking all and leaving all for the sake of liberty," Burnside, who had been instructed by McClellan to interfere with slavery as little as possible, had to approach the situation much more pragmatically.[92]

Burnside was by no means an abolitionist, but he also evinced little desire to return escaped slaves to their masters, several of whom came to Roanoke Island to reclaim the contrabands. Indeed, Vincent Colyer, the man Burnside soon appointed to superintend contrabands in North Carolina, reported that the general "had too much

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[91] Burnside quoted in Click, *Time Full of Trial*, 25; "Operations in North Carolina: Our Roanoke Island Correspondence," *New York Herald*, 24 February 1862. This article was written by one of the *Herald*'s correspondents traveling with Burnside's expedition.

[92] Click, *Time Full of Trial*, 32-33; "From the Burnside Expedition," *New York Tribune*, 14 March 1862; For McClellan telling Burnside to avoid interfering with slavery see McClellan to Burnside, 7 January 1862, RG 94, Ambrose E. Burnside Papers, Box 1, Folder 3, NA.

sagacity to despise the services of blacks" and "was too large hearted a man to love slavery."[93] Burnside's opinions in this matter may have been influenced by letters he received from his friends, which attempted to convince him of the value of conciliating the slaves. One such letter made the case thusly: "He who has not the confidence of the Negro *cannot win this game of war*…To take from the enemy is to deprive the enemy of valuable persons, who feed the army while fighting against us, who are more useful to them than many of their fighting men…To save the Union and the Constitution we must take from traitors *all they have*." This particular friend reminded Burnside that he held these sentiments despite the fact that he was an old Tammany Democrat.[94]

The First Confiscation Act, passed in August 1861, allowed Union military commanders to seize all property, including slaves, used in the Confederate war effort, and Burnside's policies indicate that he acted accordingly. As historian Patricia C. Click has determined, the general "established a four-point policy with respect to the runaways." Burnside allowed them to enter Union lines, took their names and former places of residence, gave them work and charitable support, and refused to hand them back over to their owners. By mid-March, Burnside had over 130 contrabands employed on Roanoke Island, laboring not only on the fortifications but also as dock workers, carpenters, blacksmiths, coopers, and guides. Less than a month later, this number had

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[93] Colyer quoted in Click, *Time Full of Trial*, 38. Burnside appointed Colyer, a member of the Christian Commission, to be Superintendent of the Poor in the Department of North Carolina on 31 March 1862; "From the Burnside Expedition," *New York Tribune*, 14 March 1862.

[94] Friend to Burnside, 17 January 1862, RG 94, Ambrose E. Burnside Papers, Box 1, Folder 3, NA.

jumped to 250.[95] Male contrabands received $10 monthly, along with soldier's rations and a clothing allowance, while women received $4 monthly plus rations and an additional monetary allowance equal to the male clothing allowance. Union soldiers and officers were ordered to treat all of these contrabands "with great care and humanity," and Burnside ordered the creation of Camp Burnside, where the contrabands could be assembled and taught by the chaplains and soldiers.[96]

While the contrabands labored, Burnside's soldiers did their best to occupy themselves. The regiments set up camps near the barracks of Fort Huger (renamed Fort Reno) and Fort Blanchard (now Fort Parke). A rousing salute was fired from these forts when the men learned of the fall of Forts Henry and Donelson, and Larned claimed that the echo of the cannonade was "by far the greatest thing I ever heard."[97] Though Larned, the staff, and the generals enjoyed good food, including turtle soup, broiled fish, roast goose, duck, boiled ham, corn, beets, tomatoes, potatoes, sweet potato pudding, and apple fritters, the rest of the men got by on much simpler rations, although they occasionally found some pigs in the woods, which they promptly appropriated for

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[95] Click, *Time Full of Trial*, 33, 36-38. Click's work is the definitive narrative history of the establishment and growth of the freedmen's colony on Roanoke Island, from its beginnings as a camp to its development as a model colony, and finally to its post-war demise; Colonel Rush Hawkins to Burnside, 16 March 1862, RG 94, Ambrose E. Burnside Papers, Box 1, Folder 5, NA.

[96] Hawkins, General Orders No. 2, 12 March 1862, RG 94, Ambrose E. Burnside Papers, Box 1, Folder 5, NA; Larned diary entry, 26 February 1862, Daniel Reed Larned Papers, Vol. 1: Correspondence, LOC.

[97] Larned to Brother-in-law Henry, 23 February 1862, Daniel Reed Larned Papers, Vol. 1: Correspondence, LOC.

dinner.[98] All of the forts had been put back in good order and the guns repaired, and under their barrels the men drilled during the day and anxiously waited for letters from home in the evening. Three hospitals were established on the island, all containing stationary beds, fireplaces, dispensaries, surgeon's rooms, and cookhouses, and though the division suffered a few cases of typhoid fever, the health of the men was generally good. Those who did pass away were buried in a new cemetery the men had dedicated with a religious service. The plots of ground were divided among the regiments, and each soldier who was laid to rest here had his name, age, regiment, and date of death inscribed on a headstone.[99]

This cemetery may have served as a grim reminder that the division had much work before it. Though Burnside remained unready to make any major movement throughout February, he did send the 9th New York and 4th Rhode Island up the Chowan River to Winton. The gunboat *Delaware* drew fire from a Confederate force on the shore, but when the Union force reached the town on 20 February, they found the enemy gone and the American flag flying. Colonel Hawkins and Commander Rowan, leading the expedition, then ordered all military stores that could not be removed to be burned, but shifting winds carried the flames to some empty houses. Rowan and Hawkins soon discovered, however, that the river had been barricaded by felled trees, rendering it

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[98] Larned diary entry, 26 February 1862, Daniel Reed Larned Papers, Vol. 1: Correspondence, LOC; Entry for 9 February 1862, William J. Creasey Diary, Vol. 1, SHC.

[99] Entry for 20 February 1862, William J. Creasey Diary, Vol. 1, SHC; "Operations in North Carolina: Our Roanoke Island Correspondence," *New York Herald*, 24 February 1862; "From the Burnside Expedition," *New York Tribune*, 14 March 1862.

impassable, so they returned to Roanoke. The raid, however, still left an impression on the Confederates, demonstrating as it did their inability to defend towns along the rivers and sounds in North Carolina. As Burnside explained, "The enemy is very much distracted by these frequent dashes on their coast, and seem to have but little idea where the next blow will be aimed."[100]

Burnside was, in fact, planning this next blow. Though McClellan did ask Burnside to "gain all possible information as to the possibility of attacking Norfolk from the south," he thought it best that Burnside stick to the original plan, which called for an advance on New Bern. The taking of this city would provide the Union Navy with a key harbor that would aid in its blockade of the North Carolina coast, which was still less than effective. It would also give Burnside a base he could use to advance on Beaufort or move into the interior of the state and threaten the Weldon Railroad and thus the supply line to the Confederate forces in Virginia. To aid in this, McClellan had sent Burnside 30 maps of the southern states; three were colored, for his personal use, and the rest were to be distributed among the colonels.[101] This advance was delayed throughout February and early March by bad weather, as well as Burnside's shortage of coal and forage. The incoming correspondence Larned handled indicated that many in the North were anxious for Burnside to follow up his victory, but as the secretary explained to his brother-in-law:

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[100] Burnside to Lorenzo Thomas, 23 February 1862, RG 94, Ambrose E. Burnside Papers, Box 1, Folder 4, NA.

[101] McClellan to Burnside, 25 February 1862, RG 94, Ambrose E. Burnside Papers, Box 1, Folder 4, NA.

> You may all think us slow…but when you remember that there are some 10,000 mouths to feed and care for, and some 70 or 80 vessels to coal and water and provision, with a scanty supply of material, the island to guard and the plans of the campaign in an enemy's country to arrange, with the possibility of meeting a larger force than we have yet met, you will see this can not be done in a moment.[102]

But by 5 March, Burnside was able to report his force ready to McClellan, and told the general in chief that he would "move at once upon New Bern." Though bad weather again postponed the advance, this cleared on 9 March, and Burnside seized his opportunity.[103]

While Burnside waited for supplies and clear weather, Confederate General Lawrence O'Bryan Branch, commanding the District of the Pamlico, was busy at work. Branch had been hastily improving the defenses at New Bern, and though he explained to Clark that his progress was retarded by the want of tools to work with, by late February the town appeared to be in a good state of defense. Fort Thompson, situated on the Neuse River four miles below New Bern, anchored the left of Branch's main line. This line extended a little over a mile to the west, with the extreme right resting on a brickyard alongside the Atlantic and North Carolina Railroad. Below the fort Branch had constructed an additional four gun battery "to prevent vessels from taking such a position as to shell that work out of range of its guns." Six miles further down the Neuse,

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[102] Larned to Brother-in-law Henry, 27 February 1862, Daniel Reed Larned Papers, Vol. 1: Correspondence, LOC.

[103] Burnside to McClellan, 5 March 1862, in George B. McClellan, *McClellan's Own Story* (New York: Charles L. Webster, 1887), 244; Larned to Sister, 10 March 1862, Daniel Reed Larned Papers, Vol. 1: Correspondence, LOC.

Branch had strengthened another line of fortifications originally constructed by D.H. Hill between Otter Creek and the swamps to the southwest, and known as "Croatan breastwork." Branch, however, complained to Clark that, though his troops were "in a fine state of discipline and animated with the best spirit," their numbers "ought to be increased – doubled if possible." As it stood, he could count on only six infantry regiments and one militia battalion to hold his extensive defensive line.[104] Having already lost Roanoke, North Carolinians could ill afford for New Bern to fall as well. As one concluded, if God and the general somehow managed to stop Burnside, "What a hero Gen. Branch will be."[105]

Burnside, of course, preferred a much different outcome. On 11 March, he had gotten his expedition underway from Roanoke Island, and by 11:00 a.m. it had passed into Pamlico Sound. The weather was good and the sailing proceeded smoothly, with one exception. The steamer *Louisiana*, loaded with troops, ran aground trying to get out of the sound, which the general believed was no accident. Burnside, suspecting the loyalty of the *Louisiana*'s captain, ordered him arrested. The next day, the gunboats led the way into the Neuse River. Union soldiers crowded the rigging of the vessels and yelled jokes and salutations back and forth. The banks of the Neuse were covered with pine woods, scattered farm houses, and a few large plantations, and all along them, the soldiers could spot bonfires burning on the shores, undoubtedly Confederate signals of

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[104] Branch to Clark, 23 and 24 February 1862, Governor Henry T. Clark Papers, G.P. 157, Folder 2, NCSA; Marvel, *Burnside*, 64. Branch had only 6,000 men to defend his entire district.

[105] Entry for 13 March 1862, in Crabtree and Patton, eds., *'Journal of a Secesh Lady,'* 135.

the fleet's approach. That evening, the ships came to anchor in the Neuse off of Slocum's Creek under a bright moon, and the regimental bands filled the night air with music. Many soldiers sang along with this music, and the scene was such a well-spirited one that, in the eyes of the *New York Herald*'s correspondent with the expedition, "[N]o one would have ever supposed that the fleet lying so peacefully there meant anything other than mild measures."[106] Burnside had left Hawkins in command at Roanoke, with the 9th New York and two other recently arrived regiments. The general was careful to instruct Hawkins that Roanoke held "great value…as a base for military operations," and therefore the safety of the island should not be hazarded under any circumstances.[107] Burnside, however, need not have worried, for the Confederates lacked the strength in North Carolina to protect the positions they did hold, never mind to launch an attack on a well-defended post.

Like at Roanoke, Burnside saw naval support as crucial to his plans for the coming battle. Rowan was in temporary command of the naval arm, as Goldsborough had been recalled to Hampton Roads shortly before the fleet sailed for Pamlico Sound. Burnside and Rowan determined to land the Union troops at the mouth of Slocum's

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[106] Entries for 11 and 12 March 1862, William J. Creasey Diary, Vol. 1, SHC; Larned to Mrs. Burnside and Larned to Richard Fellows, both 11 March 1862, and Larned to Sister, 18 March 1862, all in Daniel Reed Larned Papers, Vol. 1: Correspondence, LOC; Burnside to Stanton, 10 April 1862, Ambrose E. Burnside Collection, Box 1, Letter Book, March-June 1862, Rhode Island Historical Society (RIHS); "Still Another Victory – New Bern, North Carolina Taken by General Burnside," *New York Herald*, 19 March 1862.

[107] Burnside to Hawkins, 10 March 1862, Ambrose E. Burnside Collection, Box 1, Letter Book, March-June 1862, RIHS.

Creek, several miles downstream from the Croatan breastwork and therefore more than 15 miles south of New Bern. The gunboats would then advance up the Neuse to take the Confederate works in flank, paralleling the march of Burnside's own force on the shore. Burnside and Signal Officer Albert J. Myer even coordinated signals with Rowan, so that the naval vessels could be informed of the division's progress and therefore shell the woods and road in advance of the march without hitting any of Burnside's own soldiers. This plan was solidified at a council of war held between Burnside, Foster, Reno, Parke, and Rowan on Rowan's flag ship, the *Philadelphia*, on the night of 12 March.[108]

The morning of 13 March dawned dark and rainy. As one soldier in the 25th Massachusetts opined, "It always rains where we go; first at Hatteras, then at Roanoke and now here. I think we are rightly named a *water* division." Yet the overwhelming sentiment, according to the *Herald*'s correspondent, was that "the iron was hot, and now was the time to strike with force."[109] Burnside certainly felt this way, and began to land his force shortly after 7:00 a.m. As gunboats shelled the woods on the west bank of the Neuse, the signal "land your forces" was given from Burnside's vessel, the *Alice Price*. In hardly any time at all the whole river was alive with boats filled with men. Light steamers, towing surfboats and launches brimming with soldiers, were grounded about

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[108] Myer to Burnside, 27 March 1862, RG 94, Ambrose E. Burnside Papers, Box 1, Folder 5, NA. Myer's letter requested a return note from Burnside "officially recognizing the importance of signals," as a bill was before Congress pertaining to the establishment of a Signal Corps. This Corps, however, would not become an official army organization until March 1863; Browning Jr., *Cape Charles to Cape Fear*, 31-32; Marvel, *Burnside*, 65-66.

[109] Entry for 13 March 1862, in Day, *My Diary of Rambles*, 42; "Still Another Victory – New Bern, North Carolina Taken by General Burnside," *New York Herald*, 19 March 1862.

ten yards from shore, and the color bearer of the 51st New York immediately leapt overboard, waded through waist deep water, and planted the Star Spangled Banner on dry land. "If the enemy was within six miles," according to Larned, "they heard the rousing cheers of our men, among the loudest of them was General B[urnside]."[110]

Slocum's Creek was soon full of men who followed the color bearer's example and waded ashore as fast as they were able, urged on by the 23rd Massachusetts' regimental band's playing of "Hail Columbia." Burnside himself made it ashore at 10:00.[111] Over the next several hours, the rest of the regiments disembarked at the mouth of the creek, on ground so soggy one private in the 25th Massachusetts termed it a "mud hole." Several of the regiments, including the 23rd and 27th Massachusetts, were forced to land one company at a time owing to the shortage of small boats, but by 3:00 p.m. the entire division had come ashore. Meanwhile, steamers brought the horses as close to land as possible, then dumped them overboard and let them swim the remaining distance.[112] Throughout this whole affair, Burnside's force suffered no molestation.

The gunboats proceeded up the river first, throwing shells into the woods to break up any Confederate force wishing to challenge the Union advance, as Rowan and

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[110] Larned to Sister, 18 March 1862, Daniel Reed Larned Papers, Vol. 1: Correspondence, LOC; "Still Another Victory – New Bern, North Carolina Taken by General Burnside," *New York Herald*, 19 March 1862.

[111] Larned to Sister, 18 March 1862, Daniel Reed Larned Papers, Vol. 1: Correspondence, LOC; Entry for 13 March 1862, Henry K. White Diaries, Vol. 1: 1861-1863, SHC.

[112] Report of Col. Horace C. Lee, 27th Massachusetts, and Report of Col. John Kurtz, 23rd Massachusetts, both 15 March 1862, in RG 94, Ambrose E. Burnside Papers, Box 1, Folder 7, NA; Entry for 13 March 1862, in Day, *My Diary of Rambles*, 42; Entry for 13 March 1862, William J. Creasey Diary, Vol. 1, SHC.

Burnside had planned. This was actually quite an innovative tactic; indeed, historian Robert M. Browning Jr. has pointed out that it was in fact "one of the first uses of a creeping barrage."[113] The movement of the regiments began before all the troops had been landed, but progressed at a slow pace, as the ground was saturated and therefore the new rainfall had turned the road into a quagmire. One man in the 51st Pennsylvania described how the men were forced to use ropes to drag the artillery through the "muddiest mud ever invented." The rain soon stopped, but that only brought an oppressive heat, which, combined with the mud, caused many men to fall out on the march.[114] The 21st Massachusetts of Reno's brigade took the advance, followed by the 24th Massachusetts of Foster's. These regiments threw out skirmishers and an advance guard, which led the way up the county road. Before long, they encountered their first sign of Confederate soldiers in the area; a deserted camp. There, the Union soldiers found evidence of a hasty retreat. Breakfast, half eaten, sat near fires, while the road was strewn with blankets, clothing, and other camp equipage.[115]

Despite the fact that the Union soldiers were tiring from their exertions, they did not stop at this camp, but instead, in the words of the *Herald*'s correspondent, "pushed on with a determination and energy surprising in soldiers who had not before

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[113] Browning Jr., *Cape Charles to Cape Fear*, 32.

[114] Soldier quoted in Marvel, *Burnside*, 68; Entry for 13 March 1862, in Day, *My Diary of Rambles*, 42.

[115] Report of Brig. General John Foster, First Brigade, 20 March 1862, and Report of Col. Thomas Stevenson, 24th Massachusetts, 16 March 1862, both in RG 94, Ambrose E. Burnside Papers, Box 1, Folder 7, NA; Larned to Sister, 18 March 1862, Daniel Reed Larned Papers, Vol. 1: Correspondence, LOC.

experienced the hardship and fatigue of a rapid march."[116] In the early afternoon, the Massachusetts regiments reached the Croatan breastwork, which they discovered abandoned. Foster found these works to be well-constructed and imposing, ranging one mile from the Atlantic and North Carolina Railroad to a fort on the Neuse River. Though he was glad to be able to give his weary men a rest, the general was surprised that the Confederates had evacuated this seemingly strong position.[117]

The responsibility for this rested primarily with Colonel James Sinclair of the 35th North Carolina and his superior officer, Colonel R.P. Campbell. On 12 March, Branch, having been apprised of the advance of Union vessels up the Neuse River, had ordered Sinclair to Fisher's landing, several miles south of the main line of defenses but north of the Croatan breastwork. Sinclair reached the landing by 6:30 p.m. that evening, and posted his men in rifle pits and entrenchments. The next morning, Sinclair's men began receiving fire from the Union gunboats, which Sinclair interpreted as evidence that the enemy was about to land in his front. For this reason, and because he had not been ordered to advance any further south than Fisher's landing, Sinclair did not attempt to contest Burnside's landing at Slocum's Creek, nor did he defend the Croatan breastwork. Campbell himself came to believe that the naval gunfire was preparatory to another Union landing in rear of the Croatan breastwork, so shortly after 10:00 a.m. he

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[116] "Still Another Victory – New Bern, North Carolina Taken by General Burnside," *New York Herald*, 19 March 1862.

[117] Report of Brig. General John Foster, First Brigade, 20 March 1862, RG 94, Ambrose E. Burnside Papers, Box 1, Folder 7, NA.

ordered Sinclair to fall back to the Fort Thompson line. Campbell shared his fears with Branch, who therefore thought that Union troops had landed in the rear of the Croatan breastwork, and so the general decided that the best course of action was to "instantly [throw] behind the Fort Thompson breastworks every available man under my command." The result of all this was that Burnside encountered no resistance on his march to New Bern.[118]

Branch had previously recognized, however, that the Fort Thompson defensive line was itself inadequate. His initial breastworks had extended only from the river to the railroad, but the terrain to the west of the Atlantic and North Carolina Railroad was firm enough for infantry to advance over it. Branch therefore decided to extend his line another mile to the right, ending at a swamp near the Weatherby Road, where the general placed a battery. Realizing that he had limited time to complete these works, Branch chose to use Bullen's Creek, which ran west-east from this road to the railroad, as a natural part of his line. Though this expedited the completion of the works, Bullen's Creek intersected the railroad roughly 150 yards north of the brickyard, where the Fort Thompson line ended. Thus, there was a dogleg in the center of Branch's line. Furthermore, Branch could spare only one regiment, the 26th North Carolina, to defend the new sector. This meant that the regiment, as its Colonel and the future Governor of North Carolina Zebulon Baird Vance explained, "[C]overed almost as much ground as

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[118] Report of Col. James Sinclair, 35th North Carolina, 19 March 1862, and Branch to Gatlin, 15 March 1862, both in RG 109.9.1: General Records Relating to Military Commands, Battle Reports 1862-1864, Box 99: 1862, NA. Campbell's own battle report fails to mention any events that took place on 13 March.

all the rest of [our] troops together." And as if this was not bad enough, the crucial brickyard, which covered the gap in the two lines, was protected only by a poorly armed militia battalion.[119] Though Gatlin, still in overall command in North Carolina, had ordered the 18th and 35th North Carolina to New Bern to help Branch man his now extended breastworks, neither of these regiments arrived in time to take part in the battle.[120]

After stopping for a brief rest at the Croatan breastwork, Burnside resumed the advance. Foster's brigade took the county road, followed by Parke's, while Reno's brigade moved up the railroad to the west. Along their march, Union soldiers were greeted by many contrabands, who emerged from the houses and woods along the road. Larned, following along with the leading regiments, provided the soldiers some much needed entertainment. When they came across the house of a wealthy secessionist, Larned found a piano, sat down, and began to play "America." The soldiers marching by took up the tune, and according to the secretary, the woods rang with the noise.[121] This march continued until 8:00 p.m., by which point the three brigades had bivouacked within a mile of the Fort Thompson line. A driving rain fell throughout the night, but

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[119] Report of Col. Zebulon B. Vance, 26th North Carolina, 17 March 1862; Report of Col. James Sinclair, 35th North Carolina, 19 March 1862; Report of Col. H.J.B. Clark, Clark's Battalion of Militia, 17 March 1862, all in RG 109.9.1: General Records Relating to Military Commands, Battle Reports 1862-1864, Box 99: 1862, NA.

[120] Gatlin to General Joseph R. Anderson, 14 March 1862, RG 109.9, Records of Confederate Military Organizations: Records of the Department of North Carolina, Ch. II, vol. 262.5, NA.

[121] Larned to Sister, 18 March 1862, Daniel Reed Larned Papers, Vol. 1: Correspondence, LOC.

stragglers continued to trickle into the camp, and the men worked to drag the six naval howitzers through the mud. By 3:00 a.m. these guns had been positioned in range of the Confederate earthworks.[122]

Branch's final defensive dispositions consisted of the 27th North Carolina stationed next to Fort Thompson, with the 37th, 7th, and 35th North Carolina extending this line to the railroad on the right. These regiments were supported by two field batteries, as well as the guns of the fort. But although the fort itself mounted 13 32-pounders, only four of these faced landward. Vance's 26th North Carolina held the ground behind Bullen's Creek to the west of the railroad, and the task of holding the intervening space, consisting of the brickyard, fell to Colonel. H.J.B. Clark's poorly armed and poorly trained militia. The 33rd North Carolina, stationed 400 yards to the rear of the brickyard, functioned as Branch's reserve.[123]

Burnside had his force up and moving shortly after 7:00 a.m. the next day. Though the morning was cloudy and the soldiers were drenched from the preceding night's rain, Burnside attempted to animate them by riding along their lines. This worked

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[122] Report of Col. John Kurtz, 23rd Massachusetts, and Report of Col. Horace C. Lee, 27th Massachusetts, both 15 March 1862, RG 94, Ambrose E. Burnside Papers, Box 1, Folder 7, NA; Entry for 13 March 1862, Henry K. White Diaries, Vol. 1, SHC; Marvel, *Burnside*, 70; Browning Jr., *Cape Charles to Cape Fear*, 33.

[123] Report of Col. R.P. Campbell, 7th North Carolina, 28 March 1862; Report of Col. Zebulon B. Vance, 26th North Carolina, 17 March 1862.; Report of Major John A. Gilmer, 27th North Carolina, 16 March 1862.; Report of Lt. Col. Robert F. Hoke, 33rd North Carolina, 18 March 1862.; Report of Col. James Sinclair, 19 March 1862.; and Report of Col. H.J.B. Clark, Clark's Battalion of Militia, 17 March 1862, all in RG 109.9.1: General Records Relating to Military Commands, Battle Reports 1862-1864, Box 99: 1862, NA; Report of Brig. General John Foster, First Brigade, 20 March 1862, RG 94, Ambrose E. Burnside Papers, Box 1, Folder 7, NA.

to good effect; in the words of a soldier in the 23rd Massachusetts, "[S]uch enthusiasm as was kindled by the sight of Old Glory, as we called him, was cheering in the extreme."[124] The general, however, was still as of yet uncertain as to the extent of the Confederate line, believing it to reach only to the railroad. Therefore, he planned to have Foster's First Brigade move up the county road and attack the entrenchments extending from Fort Thompson, while Reno's Second Brigade would swing to the left of the railroad and flank the Confederate force. Parke's Third Brigade, as at Roanoke, was to function as a reserve, and it was placed astride the railroad directly to the left of Foster's.[125]

Rowan's gunboats opened the engagement by proceeding up the Neuse to shell the Confederate works. To do this, the vessels had to pass a line of pilings and sunken vessels stretching almost the entire width of the river. The *Commodore Perry* and the *Stars and Stripes* were impaled on these piles, but the rest of the ships managed to pass the obstructions. This, however, was not the only obstacle that threatened Rowan's vessels. In addition, the fleet was menaced by 30 torpedoes the Confederates had sunk in the Neuse months before. Each of these was constructed with a wooden frame, weighed down with boxes filled with stones, and capped by an iron cylinder containing a shell filled with 200 pounds of powder. The shells rested on springs, so that any pressure was

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[124] Entry for 14 March 1862, William J. Creasey Diary, Vol. 1, SHC; Larned to Sister, 18 March 1862, Daniel Reed Larned Papers, Vol. 1: Correspondence, LOC.

[125] Burnside to Stanton, 10 April 1862, Ambrose E. Burnside Collection, Box 1, Letter Book, March-June 1862, RIHS. This letter is Burnside's initial report to the Secretary of War on the battle.

supposed to cause them to instantly discharge. Rowan was aware of these, and feared them. As he later reported, "Every minute I expected to see some of my gingerbread crafts go up in the air."[126] Yet, due most likely to a combination of careful maneuvering, luck, and ineffectiveness of the long-submerged torpedoes, not one exploded. Therefore, Rowan was able to advance up the river and throw five, ten, and fifteen-second shells at the Confederate works, many of which landed among the 27th North Carolina, the regiment closest to the river bank. But the dense fog made it difficult for Burnside to communicate with Rowan via the prearranged signals, and because of this, some of the shells actually fell among the advancing Union soldiers. This, however, did not deter Rowan. As he explained to Goldsborough, "I determined to continue [the shelling] till the general sent me word. I know the persuasive effect of a 9-inch shell, and thought it better to kill a Union man or two than to lose the effect of my moral suasion." Indeed, Rowan kept his ships firing for over three hours.[127]

While Rowan attempted to soften the Confederate defenses, Foster's brigade moved forward. The advance was led by the 25th Massachusetts, which moved up the county road on the extreme right of the Union line. To this regiment's left were the 24th,

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[126] Rowan to Samuel F. Du Pont, 14 April 1862, in Hayes, ed., *Samuel Francis Du Pont: A Selection from his Civil War Letters, Vol. 2, The Blockade: 1862-1863*, 5; Browning Jr., *Cape Charles to Cape Fear*, 32-34; "The Great Victory at Newbern," *New York Herald*, 20 March 1862.

[127] Rowan to Goldsborough, in Secretary of the Navy, *Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies in the War of the Rebellion, Series 1, Vol. 7* (Washington D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1894-1922), 111, 117; Burnside to Stanton, 10 April 1862, Ambrose E. Burnside Collection, Box 1, Letter Book, March-June 1862, RIHS; Report of Major John A. Gilmer, 27th North Carolina, 16 March 1862, RG 109.9.1: General Records Relating to Military Commands, Battle Reports 1862-1864, Box 99: 1862, NA.

27th, and 23rd Massachusetts, which formed in column and marched through the woods along the road until they were within sight of the Confederate entrenchments. These regiments drew fire from both the Confederate line and from the guns in Fort Thompson, which opened on them with grape and canister. Scouts of the 25th Massachusetts soon determined that the earthworks here were supported by a three gun battery on the county road, in addition to the cannons in the fort. In response, the Massachusetts soldiers formed line of battle and began to pour what the Colonel of the 24th termed "an incessant and well directed fire on the enemy" for over two hours, supported by the navy howitzers which had been positioned astride the road. Nevertheless, Colonel Edwin Upton of the 25th Massachusetts reported that, exposed to a fire from the front and right, the regiments were in great danger of being badly cut up. Lt. Col. Henry Merritt of the 23rd Massachusetts was killed, and Foster's brigade began to take heavy losses. All the while, the shells from the gunboats, according to one soldier, "were coming dangerously near, splintering and cutting off the trees, and ploughing great furrows in the ground directly in front of us." Foster, sensing the strength of the Confederate earthworks in this sector, decided against an all-out assault but ordered his men to continue to lay fire on the Confederate line from their position, now only about 150 yards away. When the 23rd and 27th Massachusetts subsequently ran low on ammunition, he allowed them to retire in good order and commanded the 11th Connecticut, of Parke's Third Brigade, to take their place.[128]

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[128] Report of Brig. General John Foster, First Brigade, 20 March 1862; Report of Col. Edwin Upton, 25th Massachusetts, 27 March 1862; Report of Col. Thomas Stevenson, 24th Massachusetts, 16 March 1862;

Progress, therefore, would have to come to the west of the railroad. By 8:30 a.m., Reno had sent the 21st Massachusetts to attack the brickyard, while the 51st New York and 9th New Jersey engaged the extreme right of the line held by Vance's 26th North Carolina. Though many of the men's weapons were unusable due to the rain of the night before, the 21st Massachusetts did manage to capture part of the enemy works. But they soon drew fire from all along the Confederate line and, with their ammunition almost expended, were forced to retreat. Vance's outnumbered regiment, supported by two companies of the 19th North Carolina, had more than held their own against the 51st New York and 9th New Jersey, inflicting significant losses from behind the redans and felled trees along Bullen's Creek. The colonel watched proudly as, time after time, the Union forces were "driven back in confusion by the most deadly and well directed fire from our lines."[129]

So far, Clark's Battalion of Militia had also remained steady, firing by file with "coolness and determination," according to the Colonel. Yet their inadequate short-range weapons, their lack of experience, and the fact that the smoke so obscured the battlefield in this area that Clark claimed he was unable to anticipate any Union movements made

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Report of Col. Horace C. Lee, 27th Massachusetts, 15 March 1862; Report of Col. John Kurtz, 23rd Massachusetts, 15 March 1862, all in RG 94, Ambrose E. Burnside Papers, Box 1, Folder 7, NA; Entry for 14 March 1862, in Day, *My Diary of Rambles*, 43-44.

[129]Burnside to Stanton, 10 April 1862, Ambrose E. Burnside Collection, Box 1, Letter Book, March-June 1862, RIHS; Report of Col. Zebulon B. Vance, 26th North Carolina, 17 March 1862, and Report of Col. Spinell, 19th North Carolina, March 1862, both in RG 109.9.1: General Records Relating to Military Commands, Battle Reports 1862-1864, Box 99: 1862, NA; Marvel, *Burnside*, 72-73.

the militia a threat to break at any time.[130] Lt. Col. William S. Clark, commanding the 21st Massachusetts, sensed this. When his regiment was forced to retreat from the brickyard by the fire of the 35th, 7th, and 37th North Carolina on the Confederate left, he found Colonel Rodman of the 4th Rhode Island, Parke's Third Brigade, which had been ordered forward and to the left in support of Reno. Clark informed Rodman that another attack on this position would most likely meet with success, so Rodman immediately sent an aide to Parke stating that he was taking responsibility and launching an assault on the brickyard.[131] At the same time, Burnside ordered Parke to flank the batteries to the east of the railroad, which were causing Foster's First Brigade a good deal of trouble. Parke, realizing that the taking of the brickyard would accomplish this, approved the course of Rodman, and ordered the 8th Connecticut and 5th Rhode Island, which composed the remainder of the reserve, to Rodman's support.[132]

In his post-battle report, Rodman described what happened next: "I then gave the order to charge. Passing quickly by the rifle pits (redoubts on our left flank), which opened on us with little injury, we entered in rear of the intrenchments, and the regiment in a gallant manner carried gun after gun…The national flag of the Fourth Rhode Island

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[130] Report of Col. H.J.B. Clark, Clark's Battalion of Militia, 17 March 1862, RG 109.9.1: General Records Relating to Military Commands, Battle Reports 1862-1864, Box 99: 1862, NA.

[131] Report of Lieut. Col. William S. Clark, Twenty-first Massachusetts Infantry, 16 March 1862, and Report of Col. Isaac P. Rodman, Fourth Rhode Island Infantry, 17 March 1862, both in *O.R., Vol. 9*, 226, 238.

[132] Report of Brig. Gen. John G. Parke, U.S. Army, Commanding Third Brigade, 22 March 1862, in *O.R. Vol. 9*, 234; Burnside to Stanton, 10 April 1862, Ambrose E. Burnside Collection, Box 1, Letter Book, March-June 1862, RIHS.

was planted on the parapet." This charge broke the enemy center at the brickyard, where the dogleg in the works was located, and captured nine brass field pieces at little cost. Indeed, the 4th Rhode Island suffered only 11 men killed and 25 wounded in the entire battle, while the supporting regiments, the 5th Rhode Island and 8th Connecticut, lost only 16 men combined.[133]

The success of Rodman's charge, which occurred shortly after 11:00 a.m., had a lot to do with the behavior of Clark's Battalion of Militia. When confronted with this advance, the militia came to believe that they had been outflanked, and, in the words of Clark himself, "At this moment…a panic seized my command and part of them broke ranks." Clark, certain that he could not reform his ill-trained troops under fire, then tried to conduct an orderly retreat, but this was instead "succeeded by a stampede of most of the command." As his soldiers streamed north towards New Bern, Clark found, much to his chagrin, that his influence as a commander was completely gone.[134] The colonel was entirely unable to halt the flight of his men or to do anything to plug the large gap that now existed in the Confederate line along the railroad.

The results of the actions of the militia were devastating for the rest of the Confederate line. One by one, the regiments to the east of the railroad realized that they

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[133] Report of Col. Isaac P. Rodman, Fourth Rhode Island Infantry, 17 March 1862, and Return of Casualties in the Department of North Carolina, at the battle of New Berne, N.C., 14 March 1862, both in *O.R., Vol. 9*, 211, 238.

[134] Report of Col. H.J.B. Clark, Clark's Battalion of Militia, 17 March 1862, RG 109.9.1: General Records Relating to Military Commands, Battle Reports 1862-1864, Box 99: 1862, NA. The low number of killed and wounded in the militia battalion, four and fifteen respectively, points to how quickly Clark's unit broke under Rodman's attack.

had been flanked. The closest, and therefore first to see that they were about to be rolled up, was Colonel Sinclair's 35th North Carolina. Sinclair ordered his regiment to retire, but as he explained, "This created somewhat of a panic as the enemy was firing upon us from the Railroad and the brickyard." Sinclair's lieutenant colonel deserted the regiment, and though his men conducted as orderly a retreat as possible back to New Bern, they were now out of the fighting.[135] This, in turn, left Colonel Campbell's 7th North Carolina wholly without support on its right. Campbell complained that Sinclair's men, despite the latter's claims, "left the field in confusion," exposing the batteries in that section of the line. Though Campbell ordered a charge that briefly stemmed the tide of the Union advance, he too had to fall back under a heavy fire, although he remained convinced that his men had behaved with coolness and bravery, while the militia and the 35th North Carolina "left the field too early in the action for me to say anything about them."[136]

Next to go were the 37th and 27th North Carolina, which had occupied the extreme left of the Confederate line and had fought well in holding off Foster's brigade for over three hours. Colonel Charles Lee, commanding the 37th North Carolina, tried to aid Campbell's regiment, but when he observed it moving rapidly to the rear, he found Campbell and demanded to know what was happening. Campbell promptly informed him that he was in full retreat, and Lee, "Feeling assured that the regiments which were

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[135] Report of Col. James Sinclair, 35th North Carolina, 19 March 1862, RG 109.9.1: General Records Relating to Military Commands, Battle Reports 1862-1864, Box 99: 1862, NA.

[136] Report of Col. R.P. Campbell, 7th North Carolina, 28 March 1862, RG 109.9.1: General Records Relating to Military Commands, Battle Reports 1862-1864, Box 99: 1862, NA.

retreating could not be rallied," ordered his command to fall back to New Bern. When the 27th North Carolina saw this, they too began to retreat to the railroad bridge leading to the city, first spiking all the guns in Fort Thompson. As one member of the regiment said of the retreat, "[S]uch a mess I never saw."[137]

Foster quickly ascertained what was happening in his front, and reacted accordingly. When he noticed the Confederate fire begin to slacken shortly before noon, he ordered an advance along his whole line, which was promptly led by the 10th Connecticut and 24th and 25th Massachusetts. In the words of a lieutenant in the 10th Connecticut, "From the curtain of the woods up sprang thousands of blue coats – a glittering wave of steel flashing in front – and rushed forward with loud huzzahs, and invincible line."[138] In less than ten minutes, the troops had braved one final volley from the 27th North Carolina, scaled the parapet, and planted the American flag among the Confederate works. Another flag was then placed in Fort Thompson to signal Rowan's gunboats to stop shooting, at which point the Union soldiers halted to give nine cheers

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[137] Report of Col. Charles Lee, 37th North Carolina, and Report of Major John A. Gilmer, 27th North Carolina, both 16 March 1862, RG 109.9.1: General Records Relating to Military Commands, Battle Reports 1862-1864, Box 99: 1862, NA; Lieut. James A Graham, 27th North Carolina, quoted in Christopher M. Watford, ed., *The Civil War in North Carolina: Soldiers' and Civilians' Letters and Diaries, 1861-1865* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Company, 2003), 40.

[138] Report of Brig. Gen. John Foster, First Brigade, 20 March 1862, RG 94, Ambrose E. Burnside Papers, Box 1, Folder 7, NA; Lieut. Joseph Converse, 10th Connecticut, quoted in Matthew Warshauer, *Connecticut in the American Civil War: Slavery, Sacrifice, & Survival* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 2011), 74; A similar description of the charge was advanced by Creasey of the 23rd Massachusetts, who claimed that "Burnside knows no retreat and when the order came to charge the regiments altogether moved forward with a hurrah which made the enemy tremble." See Entry for 14 March 1862, William J. Creasey Diary, Vol. 1, SHC.

for their victory. Foster himself reported that the enemy "retreat[ed] with great precipitation" up the county road towards New Bern.[139]

Foster did not allow his brigade to revel long in their victory, but instead sent them in pursuit of the Confederates. The 10th Connecticut and 23rd, 24th, and 25th Massachusetts quickly advanced up the county road towards the railroad bridge over the Trent River. Two companies of the 25th Massachusetts, however, were ordered to support Parke's and Reno's brigade to the west of the railroad.[140] Here, Vance's 26th North Carolina, and Colonel Avery's 33rd North Carolina, which functioned as Branch's reserve, were still holding out. The 33rd North Carolina did manage to fend off several attacks, but Avery was shot and then taken prisoner. When Vance realized that Foster's brigade had occupied the Fort Thompson works and was advancing up the county road and the railroad, he understood that all the troops on the field were in full retreat except for his own command, and therefore the colonel felt that there was "no alternative left me but to order an immediate retreat or be completely surrounded." Because Union troops now stood between these two North Carolina regiments and New Bern, Vance and Lieut. Colonel Robert F. Hoke, now in command of the 33rd, were forced to retreat not north, but west across Bryce Creek. Initially, only one boat could be found, so many

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[139] Report of Brig. Gen. John Foster, First Brigade, 20 March 1862; Report of Col. Thomas Stevenson, 24th Massachusetts, 16 March 1862; Report of Col. John Kurtz, 23rd Massachusetts, 15 March 1862, all in RG 94, Ambrose E. Burnside Papers, Box 1, Folder 7, NA.

[140] Report of Col. Thomas Stevenson, 24th Massachusetts, 16 March 1862; Report of Lieut. Col. Albert Drake, 10th Connecticut, 15 March 1862; Report of Col. Edwin Upton, 25th Massachusetts, 27 March 1862, all in RG 94, Ambrose E. Burnside Papers, Box 1, Folder 7, NA.

men, including Vance, had to swim across the creek, which was too deep to ford. Vance eventually secured three more boats and got the majority of his regiment to safety, but lost all of his baggage. These two regiments then made a forced march to Kinston, some 40 miles away, arriving two days later.[141]

The rest of the Confederate regiments, which retreated north to the town, were by this point in a state of panic, fed by a false report that they were being pursued by 700 Union cavalrymen. Therefore, the Confederates decided to burn the railroad bridge over the Trent River, but they did it in such haste that some men were left behind on the south bank. Shells from Union gunboats, however, prevented the regiments from regrouping in New Bern, and so a decision was made to burn all the cotton and military stores in the city. This order was carried out by the 19th North Carolina, which had only recently arrived on the battlefield and had taken almost no part in the fighting. The fire grew out of control and spread to many houses, but the broken and frightened Confederate regiments were too busy continuing the retreat to Kinston to do anything about this.[142]

Therefore, when the leading Union regiments reached the Trent River, they found the bridge destroyed and the city on fire. Burnside ordered Foster and Parke to have the troops carried across the river to New Bern on Rowan's vessels, a slow but

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[141] Report of Col. Zebulon B. Vance, 26th North Carolina, 17 March 1862, and Report of Lieut. Col. Robert F. Hoke, 33rd North Carolina, 18 March 1862, both in RG 109.9.1: General Records Relating to Military Commands, Battle Reports 1862-1864, Box 99: 1862, NA.

[142] Report of Col. Spinell, 19th North Carolina, March 1862, and Report of Col. John A. Gilmer, 27th North Carolina, 16 March 1862, both in RG 109.9.1: General Records Relating to Military Commands, Battle Reports 1862-1864, Box 99: 1862, NA.

ultimately effective process. The majority of these two brigades were ferried across the Trent by 5:00 p.m., too late to pursue the retreating enemy, so they took possession of the old Confederate camp at the town's fair grounds, which was strewn with pitched tents and camp equipage of all types.[143] The scene that met the soldiers' eyes of a city on fire, terror-stricken citizens fleeing in every direction, contrabands wildly celebrating the Confederate defeat, and general chaos left a great impression on many. One in the 23rd Massachusetts claimed that "[t]he burning of the tar and buildings, the black smoke ascending the dark clouds, and the booming of the cannon, was a sight and sound which can be imagined better than described." But the most evocative depiction came from a Union officer, who concluded, "As I looked upon [the town], I could think of nothing but Sodom and Gomorrah."[144]

Burnside immediately took steps to bring the situation under control. Most of the townspeople had fled, leaving their valuables, and some of the soldiers and sailors, as well as the slaves, were ransacking the houses. To prevent this, Burnside ordered that only military goods could be appropriated, and he had guards posted at the wealthy residences. He also put the soldiers to work extinguishing the flames, which they

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[143] Report of Brig. Gen. John Foster, First Brigade, 20 March 1862; Report of Col. John Kurtz, 23rd Massachusetts, 15 March 1862; Report of Col. Thomas Stevenson, 24th Massachusetts, 16 March 1862; Report of Lieut. Col. Albert Drake, 10th Connecticut, 15 March 1862, all in RG 94, Ambrose E. Burnside Papers, Box 1, Folder 7, NA.

[144] Entry for 14 March 1862, William J. Creasey Diary, Vol. 1, SHC; For a similar description of the scene Union soldiers witnessed entering New Bern, see entry for 14 March 1862, in Day, *My Diary of Rambles*, 45-46; Union Officer quoted in Marvel, *Burnside*, 76.

succeeded in doing. Within days, he had named Foster military governor of New Bern, and had begun distributing army rations to the poor whites and contrabands in the city.[145]

Despite the brief chaos that ensued, there was no doubt among the Union soldiers that Burnside had won another complete victory. Larned was convinced that it was "the greatest victory yet;" likewise, another soldier recorded his belief in his diary that it was "one of the greatest victories of the war."[146] Though these men, having participated in the victory, were surely biased, their claims were not altogether without basis. At a cost of 90 men killed, 380 wounded, and 1 missing, Burnside had captured 41 heavy guns, 19 field pieces, over 1,000 small arms, and, in his estimation, "[T]he second commercial city in the State of North Carolina."[147] Furthermore, he had inflicted more than 570 casualties on Branch's force (over 400 of these being prisoners), and forced the Confederates to retreat all the way west to Kinston. Though the casualty numbers for the two sides were not drastically different, in reality Branch lost over 15 percent of his effective force, while Burnside lost only 5 percent of his command. Once again, despite the fact that there was no interservice authority and therefore Burnside was prohibited from giving final orders to any officers in the navy, he had managed to utilize Rowan's vessels to great effect in pulling off a combined arms victory. In fact, Burnside made

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[145] Larned to Mrs. Burnside, 15 March 1862, and Larned to Sister, 18 March 1862, both in Daniel Reed Larned Papers, Vol. 1: Correspondence, LOC; Marvel, *Burnside*, 77.

[146] Larned to Brother-in-law Henry, 20 March 1862, Daniel Reed Larned Papers, Vol. 1: Correspondence, LOC; Entry for 14 March 1862, William J. Creasey Diary, Vol. 1, SHC.

[147] Burnside to Stanton, 10 April 1862, Ambrose E. Burnside Collection, Box 1, Letter Book, March-June 1862, RIHS.

clear to Stanton that a "perfect understanding and co-operation has existed between the two arms of the service since we joined the naval fleet at Hatteras Inlet."[148] Though private William J. Creasey of the 23rd Massachusetts believed that 14 March was "a day never to be forgotten," those historians who are critical of Burnside's appointment to command of the Army of the Potomac appear to have forgotten, or willfully ignored, just how complete a victory Burnside won at New Bern.[149]

Many Confederates, and North Carolinians in particular, probably wished they could have forgotten the 14th of March, but the defeat weighed on their minds much as the defeat at Roanoke had. The loss of New Bern and the Confederate retreat to Kinston left the portion of the Atlantic and North Carolina between New Bern and Goldsboro unprotected. If Burnside advanced in this direction and captured Goldsboro he would cut the Weldon Railroad which ran all the way from Richmond down to Wilmington, and which the Confederate Army of Northern Virginia relied on for supplies. Davis feared this, as evidenced by his letters to Clark pleading with the governor to do all he could to protect that railroad. Many Confederate citizens and military figures also understood the importance of the Weldon Railroad. As Chestnut wrote from South Carolina, "Now there stands Goldsboro. One more step and we are cut in two. The [Weldon] Railroad is

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[148] Complete casualty breakdowns for the Union and Confederate forces can be found in Return of Casualties in the Department of North Carolina, at the battle of New Berne, N.C., 14 March 1862, and Return of Casualties in the Confederate Forces at the Battle of New Berne, N.C., 14 March 1862, both in *O.R.*, *Vol. 9*, 211, 247; Burnside to Stanton, 10 April 1862, Ambrose E. Burnside Collection, Box 1, Letter Book, March-June 1862, RIHS; Marvel, *Burnside*, 76-77.

[149] Entry for 14 March 1862, William J. Creasey Diary, Vol. 1, SHC.

our backbone…No wonder we are downhearted." [150] Indeed, it was the danger to this railroad that caused General Lee in Virginia to tell Davis that "another disaster in North Carolina would be ruinous," and the President of the State Convention of North Carolina to express that he was mortified at the aspect of affairs around Kinston and New Bern.[151]

Blame for the defeat was placed primarily at the feet of Branch and his department commander, Gatlin. As one North Carolinian explained, "Gen. Branch is the object of universal animadversion. He is the best abused man in N.C. just now. Gen. Gatlin too has his full share. 'Incompetent' and 'inefficient' are the mildest terms [they] get…We must have a 'Scape Goat.'" Clark himself seemed to think that this defeat was the last straw for Gatlin, and he wrote to Benjamin (still, at this time, Secretary of War) complaining of the general's "entire neglect and inattention to the coast defenses of his command." Fair or not, all of these criticisms resulted in Gatlin being relieved of his command within a week of the battle.[152] Even this, however, did not placate Hill, who always seemed to have something to say about events on the coast he had so ardently labored to put in a better state of defense. As the general complained to his wife, "Our whole system of defense had been pitifully foolish. A child ought to have seen this. It was as evident to me six months ago that these troubles would come. What I said was as

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[150] Davis to Clark, 8 April 1862, in Crist and Dix, eds., *Papers of Jefferson Davis, Vol. 8: 1862*, 137; Diary entry for 15 March 1862, in Woodward, ed., *Mary Chestnut's Civil War*, 309.

[151] Lee to Davis, 21 March 1862, in *O.R., Vol. 51, Pt. 2*, 512; Weldon N. Edwards to Thomas Ruffin, 23 March 1862, in Hamilton, ed., *The Papers of Thomas Ruffin, Vol. 3*, 225.

[152] Entry for 13 March 1862, in Crabtree and Patton, eds., *'Journal of a Secesh Lady,'* 138; Clark to Benjamin, 15 March 1862, Governor Henry T. Clark Papers, G.L.B. 46, Part II, NCSA.

little regarded as the preaching of Noah…before the flood." In fact, after the defeat at New Bern, Hill could come to no other conclusion but that "[t]he affairs of our country are desperate, desperate." [153]

Meanwhile, in New Bern, the chaplain of the 25th Massachusetts held a sermon at the Old Presbyterian Church, preaching that "He that ruleth his own spirit is better than *he who taketh a city*." As far as the Union cause was concerned, however, the taking of the city would do just fine, but now that Burnside had captured New Bern, he set about putting it in a good state of order and defense.[154] The city, not withstanding its recent burning, was quite picturesque, finely laid out with many modern buildings and a waterfront that contained ample wharfage for shipping and warehouses. Indeed, several of the Massachusetts soldiers expressed their conviction that New Bern looked much like a New England town. These soldiers passed their time by drilling, attending church services, and listening to the regimental bands, which both serenaded and honored Burnside by playing music they composed and dedicated to the general.[155] Nevertheless, Burnside's time was occupied not by listening to music, but by dealing with the challenges his new conquest had brought him.

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[153] Hill to Wife, 19 March 1862, Daniel Harvey Hill Papers, P.C. 93.1, Folder 4, NCSA.

[154] Larned to Mrs. Burnside, 23 March 1862, Daniel Reed Larned Papers, Vol. 1: Correspondence, LOC.

[155] Entry for 14 March 1862, William J. Creasey Diary, Vol. 1, SHC.; Entries for 16 and 20 March 1862, in Day, *My Diary of Rambles*, 47-48; Larned to Sister, 30 March 1862, and Advertisement for Concert by 24th Massachusetts Regimental Band, April 1862, both in Daniel Reed Larned Papers, Vol. 1: Correspondence, LOC.

First and foremost among these was what to do with the contrabands who were fleeing by the hundreds into New Bern. Close on their heels were their former owners, who came to Burnside asking for the return of the escaped slaves, and complaining that those that did remain on the plantations now considered themselves free and were impossible to control. Larned remarked that this crowd was "perfectly despondent over [the loss of] their negroes, and entirely helpless without them." The secretary was so disgusted with these citizens that he described them as "the most contemptible set I ever looked on."[156] Staying true to the policy he had established at Roanoke, Burnside refused to return any of the contrabands, which only made even more slaves seek out the protection of his division. Indeed, within four months, there were more than 10,000 contrabands living under Union occupation in North Carolina.[157]

Burnside employed the contrabands to the best possible advantage by organizing them into gangs and having them labor on the fortifications he was building, particularly a fort to the southwest of the city. Others were set to work in the hospitals and on the wharf, unloading ships. These men received army rations and $8 per month, and wore a white band on their hats labeled with the words "United States Service."[158] Burnside,

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[156] Larned to Brother-in-law Henry, 20 March 1862, and Larned to Mrs. Burnside, 23 March 1862, both in Daniel Reed Larned Papers, Vol. 1: Correspondence, LOC; Entries for 15 and 25 March 1862, in Day, *My Diary of Rambles*, 46, 51. Day stated that "[t]here are swarms of negroes here. They are of all sexes, ages, sizes, and conditions," and claimed that the Union regiments would send out patrols to recruit contrabands to unload vessels.

[157] Click, *Time Full of Trial*, 10-11.

[158] Burnside to Stanton, 27 March 1862, Ambrose E. Burnside Collection, Box 1, Letter Book, March-June 1862, RIHS; Larned to Mrs. Burnside, 23 March 1862, and Larned to Sister, 30 March 1862, both in Daniel Reed Larned Papers, Vol. 1: Correspondence, LOC; "The Burnside Expedition: Our Newbern Correspondence," *New York Herald*, 12 April 1862.

however, also provided rations and clothing for some of the poorer whites in New Bern, many of whom were the families of Confederate soldiers. Though some Union officers argued against this, Burnside contended that if he did not aid them the people would starve, and therefore "humanity requires it, as well as good policy." According to Larned, when news of this policy spread it caused more deserters to come in, and also changed the opinion of many of New Bern's citizens, who stated that they were surprised at "the good order and quiet behavior of the Yankees," who they claimed had been grossly misrepresented by the Southern newspapers.[159]

The sooner the fortifications could be completed, the sooner Burnside could hold New Bern with a small force while taking the rest of his division to fulfill McClellan's initial orders by reducing Fort Macon and capturing Beaufort. Though Burnside did push pickets towards Kinston and Goldsboro, he determined that it would be unwise to advance into the interior of North Carolina without considerable reinforcements. Burnside requested from Stanton a regiment of cavalry, two batteries of artillery, and "enough regiments of infantry to make a division out of each one of my brigades," but these were slow in arriving. Nevertheless, though the general told McClellan that if his force was increased to 40,000 men he could "do almost anything," he was not content to simply sit around and wait for aid. Within a week of his victory, he had sent Parke's Third Brigade (minus the 11th Connecticut) to "invest and if necessary besiege Fort Macon," which was located on the eastern edge of Bogue Banks, directly across from

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[159] Larned to "Dear Nancy," 28 March 1862, Daniel Reed Larned Papers, Vol. 1: Correspondence, LOC.

Beaufort, which was itself 35 miles southeast of New Bern. Parke was to "demand an unconditional surrender of the place and in case of refusal begin his work at once."[160]

Parke's progress was slowed by the fact that the Confederates had burned the Atlantic and North Carolina Railroad bridge at Newport, as well as most of the cars and engines. He still, however, managed to capture Carolina City on 21 March and Morehead City two days later. That same day, Parke sent a flag of truce and a demand for surrender to Colonel Moses White, who was in command at Fort Macon, in order to "save the unnecessary effusion of blood." Parke contended to White that, "Having an intimate knowledge of the entire work and an overwhelming force…with the means for reducing the work," the fort's fall was "inevitable." Though White's command numbered less than 600 men, he declined to surrender. As Parke subsequently told Burnside, "We now have but one course to pursue, and that is to invest the place." Parke admitted that it would be a slow operation because he had to repair the bridge and locate engines before he could bring his siege artillery up. Until then, he would be forced to rely on his wagon train for supplies, which had to travel back and forth from Slocum's Creek. Nevertheless, he remained confident that he would ultimately reduce the works.[161]

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[160] Burnside to Stanton, 21 March 1862, Ambrose E. Burnside Collection, Box 1, Letter Book, March-June 1862, RIHS. Parke's brigade departed New Bern on 19 March, 1862. Burnside almost certainly chose this brigade to move on Beaufort because it had suffered by far the fewest casualties at both Roanoke and New Bern, and therefore was the closest to full strength; Burnside to McClellan, 15 March 1862, in McClellan, *McClellan's Own Story*, 244-245.

[161] Parke to the Commander of Fort Macon, White to Parke, and Parke to Burnside, all 23 March 1862, RG 94, Ambrose E. Burnside Papers, Box 1, Folder 5, NA; See Lieut. Col. John L. Bridges to Clark, 16 April 1862, Governor Henry T. Clark Papers, G.P. 158, Folder 1, NCSA, for the size of Fort Macon's garrison.

Parke immediately ordered officials in Morehead City to cease all communication with the fort, and though they expressed fear that if they cooperated with Union forces Col. White would shell the town, they had no choice but to comply. The general reported that the people in the city were greatly frightened, but that his own command remained in good health and spirits. Though he requested the navy's cooperation in cutting off the fort, they were prevented from acting in concert with his brigade by the wind, tide, and shoals, or as Parke termed them, "[O]ur old friends." By 27 March, Parke had three companies in Beaufort, but as this stretched his force thin, he requested reinforcements as soon as practicable.[162] But Parke, like Burnside, was not going to idle away time waiting for more men, and before the month was out he had completely invested Fort Macon by taking full control of Beaufort, seizing all boats in the vicinity, and landing soldiers on Bogue Banks. Furthermore, by this point the Newport Bridge was fully repaired, and several Parrott guns had reached Parke's brigade via the railroad.[163]

Fort Macon was a masonry fort, built as part of the coastal defense system following the War of 1812. It had been completed in 1834, but by the Civil War, improvements in artillery, which the Union had showcased in taking Hatteras and Port Royal, meant that the fort was woefully out of date. The fort boasted a seemingly

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[162] Parke to Burnside, 24, 25, and 27 March 1862, all in RG 94, Ambrose E. Burnside Papers, Box 1, Folder 5, NA; Larned to Brother-in-law Henry, 26 March 1862, Daniel Reed Larned Papers, Vol. 1: Correspondence, LOC.

[163] Parke to Burnside, 31 March 1862, RG 94, Ambrose E. Burnside Papers, Box 1, Folder 5, NA.

impressive 54 guns, but the vast majority of these were 24 and 32-pounder smoothbores of limited range, the same type of guns that had failed to protect any of the Confederate forts on Roanoke Island. Worse yet, none of the guns had adequate ammunition. Lieutenant Colonel John L. Bridges, second in command at Fort Macon, wrote to Governor Clark describing that the several rifled cannon the fort did possess had only 18 rounds each. Bridges requested three more columbiads of heavy caliber with ammunition, as well as 10,000 pounds of cannon powder, but Clark was not able to send any of this before the fort eventually capitulated.[164] Meanwhile, the garrison inside the fort was in a state of both poor health and discontent. One-third of White's men were on the sick list, and the rest constantly complained to the commander about their rations, about being confined in the fort, and about being shut off from their friends and relatives in Morehead City and Beaufort. This grew so intense that the men actually threatened to hand the fort over to the Union unless White increased their rations. All of this caused several desertions, such as on the night of 8-9 April, when eight men escaped the fort in a canoe and made their way to Beaufort. At least one gave himself up to the Union forces, and informed Parke of the "great dissatisfaction among the men" as well as of his own belief that many more would desert if they knew that Union pickets would not fire on them.[165]

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[164] Burnside to Stanton, 29 April 1862, Ambrose E. Burnside Collection, Box 1, Letter Book, March-June 1862, RIHS; Bridges to Clark, 16 April 1862, Governor Henry T. Clark Papers, G.P. 158, Folder 1, NCSA.

[165] Parke to Burnside, 10 April 1862, RG 94, Ambrose E. Burnside Papers, Box 1, Folder 6, NA; Report of Col. Moses J. White, C.S. Army, 4 May 1862, in *O.R., Vol. 9*, 293.

Though bad weather in the second week of April hindered Parke's operations, his men continued to labor on the siege works at Bogue Banks. The Union soldiers used both the sand dunes and the nighttime as cover, and persistently moved their trenches closer and closer to the fort. Their original camp was eight miles west of the fort, but by 10 April they had driven in White's pickets and were constructing batteries a little over a mile from Fort Macon, just out of the range of its guns. White attempted one sortie to slow the progress of the working parties, but the companies he sent out were quickly forced to retire. Not having any mortars, the colonel resorted to mounting 32-pounders on a 40 degree incline, for the purpose of throwing shells over the sand dunes and into the Union works, but this proved ineffective.[166] Parke's men were able to construct four batteries: four eight-inch mortars 1,200 yards from the fort, four ten-inch mortars 1,600 yards from the fort, three 30-pounder rifled Parrott guns 1,300 yards from the fort, and a 12-pounder Dahlgren rifled boat howitzer, positioned 1,200 yards from the fort. By 17 April, these batteries were far enough along that Parke wrote to Burnside stating "[a]s soon as the guns and mortars are in position, and magazines are completed I propose opening fire upon the fort in conjunction with the blockading fleet." Burnside himself, upon hearing this from Parke, made the prescient prediction that the fort would be reduced within ten days.[167]

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[166] Report of Col. Moses J. White, C.S. Army, 4 May 1862, in *O.R., Vol. 9*, 293; Parke to Burnside, 10 and 17 April 1862, both in RG 94, Ambrose E. Burnside Papers, Box 1, Folder 6, NA.

[167] Parke to Burnside, 17 April 1862, RG 94, Ambrose E. Burnside Papers, Box 1, Folder 6, NA; Burnside to Stanton, 29 April 1862, and Burnside to McClellan, 17 April 1862, both in Ambrose E. Burnside Collection, Box 1, Letter Book, March-June 1862, RIHS.

Burnside, determined to take no chances, decided to go to Parke's aid with several regiments. He felt comfortable doing this because by mid-April, the earthworks and forts at New Bern had been completed and mounted many heavy cannon.[168] In addition, he had finally received his long-requested reinforcements: four full-strength regiments, the 17th Massachusetts, 2nd Maryland, 103rd New York, and 3rd New York Artillery. Burnside distributed these regiments among Foster's and Reno's brigades and by a general order made all his brigades into divisions. He subsequently awarded each of his brigadiers the rank of "acting major general," commensurate with their new commands.[169]

On 22 April, Burnside departed New Bern. On the way to Fort Macon, his steamer, the *Alice Price*, ran aground and had to be saved by several contrabands who came out to help pilot the ship. On the afternoon of 23 April, the *Alice Price* dropped anchor off of Bogue Banks, but apparently too close to the fort, for it was instantly fired upon, the shot striking within a few yards of the vessel. The steamer then moved to a safer position, and Burnside went ashore to talk to Parke. Thereafter, Burnside sent a captain with a flag of truce and a letter to Col. White, which stated, "I have arrived here with additional means of attacking your position…I deem it my duty to again summon you to surrender the place in its present condition in which case you and your garrison

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[168] Burnside to McClellan, 17 April 1862, Ambrose E. Burnside Collection, Box 1, Letter Book, March-June 1862, RIHS.

[169] Burnside to Stanton, 3 April 1862, and Organization of Troops in the Department of North Carolina, 30 April 1862, both in *O.R., Vol. 9*, 375-376, 381; Larned to Mrs. Burnside, 1 and 2 April 1862, Daniel Reed Larned Papers, Vol. 1: Correspondence, LOC; Marvel, *Burnside*, 81-82.

will be allowed to return to your homes on parole." Though Burnside made clear to White that "[t]his proposition is made with a view to saving human life. Should you not accept these terms the consequences of an attack and an assault must rest upon you," White was unmoved. He declined to surrender, but the captain, who had known White from their West Point days, convinced him to come to a conference with Burnside the next morning. White agreed, and at 6:00 a.m. on 24 April, his boat approached the *Alice Price*, bearing a white flag. Sailors on the *Alice Price* then strung up the steamer's cabin sheet as their own white flag, and Burnside and White landed and conferenced on Shackleford Banks, to the east of Bogue Banks. This meeting, however, lasted only 15 minutes, and achieved nothing. White again refused to surrender his command.[170]

The bombardment would have to proceed, and Burnside ordered Parke to open it as soon as possible on the 25th. Parke did so at 5:00 a.m., pouring shot and shell into the fort from his batteries. At 7:30, several naval vessels came into action and fired on the fort, but before long they were forced to withdraw due to high winds and rough seas. Despite the briefness of their actions, Burnside claimed that the fire from these vessels "was well directed and was of material aid in the reduction of the fort." White's men returned the fire of Parke's batteries, but the fort's guns, which had to fire through very narrow embrasures, could inflict little damage. Parke's fire was much more effective; White termed it "vigorous and accurate," and described how it set about "dismounting

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[170] Burnside to Stanton, 29 April 1862, Ambrose E. Burnside Collection, Box 1, Letter Book, March-June 1862, RIHS; Burnside to White and White to Burnside, both 23 April 1862, RG 94, Ambrose E. Burnside Papers, Box 1, Folder 6, NA; Larned to Mrs. Burnside, 25 April 1862, Daniel Reed Larned Papers, Vol. 1: Correspondence, LOC; Report of Col. Moses J. White, C.S. Army, 4 May 1862, in *O.R., Vol. 9*, 293-294.

guns, disabling men, and tearing the parade, parapet, and walls of the fort." Parke continued the bombardment until 4:00 p.m., throwing over 1,100 rounds at the fort.[171]

At that time, White, who because of the damage to guns, loss of men, and general fatigue of the rest of his soldiers only had two pieces of artillery left firing, hoisted a flag of truce on the fort's parapet. A party was sent out bearing a white flag, but Parke stated that the only terms would be unconditional surrender. When White again refused this, Parke relented, and arranged a cease fire until he could discuss the matter with Burnside. Upon consultation, Burnside and Parke, according to the former, agreed "that if an unconditional surrender was demanded the enemy would in all probability stand one day more bombardment thereby causing an additional destruction of property in the fort." Burnside also reasoned that, because many of the men in the fort were from the surrounding counties, paroling them "would create a better impression in the community and thereby strengthen our cause."[172] Therefore, Burnside and Parke decided to take this course of action. Larned later explained to a relative that both Burnside and the captain whom he had sent to ask White to surrender on the 23rd knew White and thought him to be "a man of the most intense passion and the most desperate character," and believed

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[171] Burnside to Stanton, 29 April 1862, Ambrose E. Burnside Collection, Box 1, Letter Book, March-June 1862, RIHS; Report of Col. Moses J. White, C.S. Army, 4 May 1862, in *O.R., Vol. 9*, 294. White did claim that it was in fact the accurate fire from the fort that forced the naval vessels to retire.

[172] Burnside to Stanton, 29 April 1862, Ambrose E. Burnside Collection, Box 1, Letter Book, March-June 1862, RIHS; Report of Col. Moses J. White, C.S. Army, 4 May 1862, in *O.R., Vol. 9*, 294; Larned to Mrs. Burnside, 27 April 1862, Daniel Reed Larned Papers, Vol. 1: Correspondence, LOC.

that White was "as likely to blow up the fort as to surrender it."[173] White himself was of the opinion that "[t]wo days more of such firing would have reduced the whole [fort] to a mere mass of ruins," so he agreed to the more lenient terms.[174]

The next morning, White and Parke went on board Burnside's vessel, and the terms of capitulation were drawn up by Larned. The fort was to surrender, along with its armaments and garrison, but the officers and men were to be "released on their parole of honor not to take up arms against the United States until properly exchanged, and to return to their homes, taking with them their private effects." The garrison of the fort subsequently marched out and stacked arms as White lowered the Confederate flag. As Burnside looked on, an American flag, found in the fort, was hoisted in its place. This created wild enthusiasm among the men. Larned claimed that he "never wanted to cheer the old flag more," but Burnside, in consideration to White, ordered that no cheering was to be allowed. The secretary also reported that White behaved admirably during the surrender ceremony, but the fort's garrison "seemed perfectly delighted to get away."[175]

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[173] Larned to Sister, 15 May 1862, Daniel Reed Larned Papers, Vol. 1: Correspondence, LOC. Larned was writing in response to complaints that Burnside had paroled the Fort Macon prisoners out of sympathy for Colonel White. Larned strongly disputed this, claiming, "Sympathy for a [West Point] classmate had no more to do with it than your big toe…It was [Burnside's] desire to save life and property that induced him to offer the terms he did…His course has been approved by the Department at Washington, and outsiders may howl as long as they chose."

[174] Report of Col. Moses J. White, C.S. Army, 4 May 1862, in *O.R., Vol. 9*, 294. White's report gives the time of the truce on 25 April as 6:00 p.m., but the time from Burnside's official report, which gets more of the other details of the battle correct, is used here.

[175]Terms of Capitulation for Fort Macon, Signed by General John G. Parke and Colonel Moses J. White, 26 April 1862, RG 94, Ambrose E. Burnside Papers, Box 1, Folder 6, NA; Burnside to Stanton, 29 April 1862, Ambrose E. Burnside Collection, Box 1, Letter Book, March-June 1862, RIHS; Larned to Brother-in-law Henry, 26 April 1862, and Larned to Mrs. Burnside, 27 April 1862, both in Daniel Reed Larned Papers, Vol. 1: Correspondence, LOC.

At the cost of one man killed and two wounded, Burnside had captured 54 guns, more than 400 prisoners, 500 small arms, and secured the use of one of the best harbors on the Southern coast, and the only one in North Carolina that could accommodate ships drawing over 12 feet of water. Indeed, within three weeks, Lincoln issued an order ceasing the blockade of Beaufort and reopening it to commerce. Burnside attributed his most recent success largely to Parke, claiming that "[t]he result proves that the [siege] was conducted by the right man."[176] The day the fort surrendered, Burnside read a general order to his divisions, expressing his thankfulness to Parke, as well as to the men, "[F]or the patient labor, fortitude, and courage displayed in the investment and reduction of Fort Macon." The regiments and artillery companies engaged were to place the words "Fort Macon, April 26, 1862" upon their flags, and Burnside assured them that "every patriot heart will be filled with gratitude to God, for having given to our beloved country such soldiers."[177] Jefferson Davis, conversely, could not have felt less gratitude. After Fort Macon's fall, he issued a proclamation to the Confederate people, strikingly somber in tone. In contrast to the euphoria of Burnside's soldiers and the North more

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[176] Burnside to Stanton, 29 April 1862, Ambrose E. Burnside Collection, Box 1, Letter Book, March-June 1862, RIHS; "Proclamation Raising the Blockade of Certain Ports," 12 May 1862, in Roy P. Basler, ed., *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln, Vol. 5: 1861-1862* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1953), 210; Confederate casualties during the bombardment were 7 killed and 18 wounded (2 mortally). See Report of Col. Moses J. White, C.S. Army, 4 May 1862, in *O.R., Vol. 9*, 294.

[177] Ambrose Burnside, General Orders No. 29, 26 April 1862, RG 94, Ambrose E. Burnside Papers, Box 1, Folder 6, NA. Fort Macon just so happened to surrender on the anniversary of Burnside's wedding, and to commemorate the occasion, the general ordered a $150 diamond ring for his wife from Tiffany & Co. See Larned to Sister, 2 May 1862, Daniel Reed Larned Papers, Vol. 1: Correspondence, LOC.

generally, Davis lamented that "recent disaster has spread gloom over the land, and sorrow sits at the hearthstones of our countrymen."[178]

Though, true to his nature, Burnside was willing to disperse credit for the capture of Fort Macon, he himself had been eminently successful in conducting the entire expedition. As Larned concluded, "The taking of Fort Macon finishes the program laid down for the general [by McClellan] before we left New York." Burnside was fast becoming a hero in the eyes of the men he had led to victory. When he arrived back in New Bern on 1 May, he was greeted by the ringing of bells and the blowing of the whistles of all the vessels in the harbor. General Foster, on horseback, met Burnside at the wharf and escorted him through crowds of cheering soldiers to headquarters.[179] Burnside's own soldiers, however, were not the only ones who were elated by his three complete victories on the North Carolina coast. Northern citizens, Lincoln's administration, the War Department, and the Northern press shared similar sentiments, and it is therefore to their reaction to the campaign, and to the general who waged it, that we now turn.

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[178] Davis, "A Proclamation, to the People of the Confederate States of America," 3 May 1862, in Richardson, ed., *Messages and Papers of the Confederacy, Vol. 1*, 228. The "recent disasters" mentioned by Davis included the fall of New Orleans, which had been lost to the Confederacy in late April.

[179] Larned to Brother-in-law Henry, 26 April 1862, and Larned to Mrs. Burnside, 1 May 1862, both in Daniel Reed Larned Papers, Vol. 1: Correspondence, LOC.

CHAPTER IV

"BURNSIDE IS A TRUMP": THE NORTHERN RESPONSE TO BURNSIDE'S EXPEDITION

By the conclusion of April, Burnside had experienced a great deal of success as an independent commander in eastern North Carolina. Roanoke, New Bern, and Fort Macon were clear-cut victories at a time when Union successes, particularly in the Eastern Theater, were sorely lacking. It was these victories that catapulted Burnside to prominence, in the estimation of the army, of Lincoln, and, just as importantly, of the Northern press and public. Burnside's victories combined with those in the West to produce elation in the North, and led many citizens, soldiers, and politicians to feel that he had exceptional capabilities as a military commander. In fact, the legacy of Burnside's accomplishments in North Carolina was so strong that his two subsequent refusals of command did not divest Lincoln of the belief that Burnside was the best man to lead the army.

Though none of Burnside's battles were large, they were judged to have important strategic results. This was particularly true of the victory at Roanoke Island, a vital point the military importance of which was recognized by both Union and Confederate military and political figures. As D.H. Hill explained, "Roanoke Island is the key to one third of North Carolina," and its possession by Burnside's forces enabled him to threaten the Wilmington and Weldon Railroad.[1] The loss of Roanoke not only

[1] D.H. Hill to Stephen R. Mallory, 18 October 1861, Daniel Harvey Hill Papers, Box 1, LV.

endangered the railway, but meant the loss of the possession of Albemarle Sound, which had served as a haven for blockade runners and privateers and provided access to North Carolina's interior waterways.[2] The importance of the Albemarle was well understood by Governor Clark, who had repeatedly attempted to call President Davis's attention to the fact that Union possession of the sound "would entail one of the heaviest calamities of the war not only to North Carolina but to the Confederacy."[3] After Roanoke was lost, the island's commander, Wise, remained firmly convinced that it was "the key to all the rear defenses of Norfolk," and he lamented that its capture "unlocked two sounds, eight rivers, four canals, and two railroads" to Union forces.[4]

Wise's estimate of Roanoke's value was echoed by the Northern press. The *New York Herald* was explicit about the fact that if Burnside secured Roanoke's capture, he would "put a stop to the inland coast navigation of North Carolina" of Confederate privateers and blockade runners, because Roanoke commanded "all the water communications along the whole North Carolina Coast." The *Herald* saw the isolation of Norfolk as the most important result of Roanoke's fall, but relayed to its readers that this also placed "all the seaboard defenses of North Carolina, all the cities, towns, and

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[2] Robert M. Browning Jr., *From Cape Charles to Cape Fear: The North Atlantic Blockading Squadron during the Civil War* (Tuscaloosa, Ala: University of Alabama Press, 1993), 7-8; Walter Gwynn to Warren Winslow, 9 July 1861, RG 109.9, Records of Confederate Military Organizations: Records of the Department of North Carolina, Ch. II, vol. 259.5, NA.

[3] Henry T. Clark to Jefferson Davis, 16 December 1861, Governor Henry T. Clark Papers, G.L.B. 46, Part II, NCSA.

[4] Wise believed that the island "should have been defended at the expense of 20,000 men and of many millions of dollars." Quoted in Patricia C. Click, *Time Full of Trial: The Roanoke Island Freedmen's Colony, 1862-1867* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 20-21.

villages of Albemarle and Pamlico Sounds, and the navigable rivers emptying into them…and the most important railroads of the State, completely at the mercy of the Burnside expedition." Therefore, the paper concluded that the victory "secure[s] to us the speedy restoration of [North Carolina] to the Union."[5]

Likewise, the *New York Times* believed that Burnside's taking of Roanoke made Norfolk's surrender "simply a question of time," and proved prescient in predicting that the victory at New Bern would lead to the capture of Fort Macon and the harbor of Beaufort.[6] And *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* felt strongly that "[t]he importance of Newbern as a point d'appui cannot be overrated," because its position upon the Neuse River allowed troops stationed there to threaten Goldsboro and thus the Atlantic and North Carolina Railroad, which was the only direct rail route to another crucial North Carolina port city, Wilmington.[7]

The advantages conferred by Burnside's succession of victories were not lost on his superiors. Both Lincoln and McClellan rejoiced to hear of Burnside's victory at Roanoke, and delighted in the fact that he had "pushed the enemy so rapidly and so far."[8] Furthermore, McClellan believed that the capture of New Bern and Beaufort gave

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[5] "The Burnside Expedition," *New York Herald*, 10 February 1862; "The Brilliant Victories for the Union," *New York Herald*, 15 February 1862. A day later, the paper echoed these same themes, remarking that the success at Roanoke "will result in the cutting off of Norfolk from supplies without firing a gun, and…expose the whole of North Carolina to be overrun by the Union legions." See "The Triumph of the Union Arms," *New York Herald*, 16 February 1862.

[6] "Burnside at Roanoke Island – Norfolk Threatened," *New York Times*, 12 February 1862; "Another Glorious Victory," *New York Times*, 19 March 1862.

[7] *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, 8 February 1862.

[8] McClellan to Burnside, 14 February 1862, RG 94, Ambrose E. Burnside Papers, Box 1, Folder 4, NA.

"the double advantage of preventing blockade running at those points and of enabling us to threaten or attack the railways near the coast, upon which Richmond largely depends for supplies."[9] Though circumstances in Virginia would ultimately prevent Burnside from attacking these railways, it is clear that at the time his victories were judged to have significant strategic ramifications.

Burnside's string of victories also had an important effect on international diplomacy. Before he learned of Burnside's successes, Thurlow Weed, serving at the time in London as a political advisor to Secretary of State William H. Seward, wrote that the British Parliament was becoming increasingly anxious to attack the Union blockade on the basis of its inefficiency, and therefore, he was fearful that if nothing came of Burnside's expedition, "[I]t will be impossible to hold Europe from intervention." But when he learned of the fall of Roanoke, as well as the taking of Fort Henry on the Tennessee River by General Grant, Weed expressed his conviction to Seward that "the successes will keep all right."[10] Though the seizure of Roanoke, New Bern, and Beaufort did not make the blockade of North Carolina's coast airtight, it did seal off two ports of entry and create a danger for any vessels entering or leaving the remaining ports.[11] The

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[9] George Brinton McClellan, *McClellan's Own Story* (New York: Charles L. Webster, 1887), 203.

[10] Weed to Seward, 5 March 1862, in Frederick W. Seward, ed., *Seward at Washington: A Memoir of His Life, with Selections from His Letters, 1861-1872* (New York: Derby and Miller, 1891), 62, 75. Like Weed, *Harper's Weekly* had worried that if Union military efforts in early 1862 should fail, "John Bull will begin to clear his throat preparatory to saying, 'You can't do the work, and I recognize 'em.'" See "The Van of Victory," *Harper's Weekly*, 1 February 1862.

[11] By the Declaration of Paris of 1856, nations were not bound to respect "paper blockades." Therefore, for a blockade to be legal, it had to be effective. However, Union naval officers had realized since early in the war that this could be effected by blockading or shutting the major ports of entry, as opposed to ringing the whole coast. See Samuel F. Du Pont to Henry Winter Davis, 1 June 1861, in John D. Hayes, ed., *Samuel*

European response to Grant's and Burnside's simultaneous victories is made clear in the writings of the two principle Confederate ministers abroad. From London, James Mason wrote that "[t]he late reverses…have had an unfortunate effect upon the minds of our friends here," while in Paris John Slidell bemoaned the fact that the defeats produced unfavorable public sentiment, meaning that "the declaration of the inefficiency of the blockade, to which I had looked forward with great confidence at no distant day, will be indefinitely postponed."[12]

The strategic and political implications of Burnside's victories were magnified by the fact that they were some of the first significant Union successes on land. After the surrender of Fort Sumter in April 1861, Union forces had suffered a debacle at the battle of Bull Run in July, a stinging defeat at Wilson's Creek in Missouri in August, and an embarrassing rout at Ball's Bluff in Virginia in October. All of these defeats, in conjunction with McClellan's inactivity, caused consternation in the North.[13] At the

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Francis Du Pont: A Selection from his Letters, Vol. 1, The Mission: 1860-1862 (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1969), 74 n. 2, 75-76. The British basically assented to this view. In February 1862, Lord Russell, the British Foreign Minister, wrote to Lord Lyons, the British Minister to the United States, that if "a number of ships are stationed and remain at the entrance of a port sufficient really to prevent access to it, or to create an evident danger on entering it or leaving it," the Union blockade would be recognized as an effectual one. See James D. Richardson ed., *A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Confederacy, Including Diplomatic Correspondence 1861-1865, Vol. 1* (Nashville, Tenn.: United States Publishing Company, 1905), 286.

[12] Slidell to R.M.T. Hunter, 10 March 1862, and Mason to R.M.T. Hunter, 11 March 1862, both in Richardson, ed., *Messages and Papers of the Confederacy, Vol. 2*, 193-194, 199.

[13] Union forces under Grant also barely escaped disaster at the Battle of Belmont, in Missouri, in early November. For brief descriptions of these battles, see James M. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil war Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 335-347, 351-352, 362, and Russell F. Weigley, *A Great Civil War: A Military and Political History, 1861-1865* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 2000), 58-61, 66, 101, as well as 82-85 for Northern frustrations at McClellan's inactivity.

close of 1861, George Templeton Strong, a prominent New York Republican and founder of the United States Sanitary Commission noted in his diary, "Poor old 1861 just going up. It has been a gloomy year of trouble and disaster." But on 12 February 1862, having learned of Burnside's victory at Roanoke, Strong was possessed to exclaim that it was "[t]he best day we have had since [the] war began."[14]

Strong was by no means alone in these sentiments. Historians, however, have often ignored the reaction to Burnside's victories in favor of focusing on Grant's seizures of Forts Henry and Donelson in Tennessee, both of which took place within a week of Roanoke. A prime example is Castel, who contends that Grant's capture of these forts "provided the North with its first major victory of the war…It constituted the greatest triumph gained by either side so far." Even Burnside's most favorable biographer, Marvel, claimed that Grant overshadowed Burnside's victory at Roanoke by taking Fort Donelson.[15] But Northern citizens, generals, politicians, and the press rarely weighed the victories against one another. Instead, they viewed them as a linked string of successes that portended ultimate Confederate defeat, and therefore constantly referenced them side by side in their writings.

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[14] Strong began the diary entry for 12 February 1862 with the phrase "Laus Deo," Latin for "Praise be to God." Allan Nevins and Milton Halsey Thomas, eds., *The Diary of George Templeton Strong, Vol. 3, The Civil War 1860-1865* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1952), 198, 206.

[15] Albert Castel, *Victors in Blue: How Union Generals Fought the Confederates, Battled Each Other, and Won the Civil War* (Lawrence, Kans.: University Press of Kansas, 2011), 50-51; William Marvel, *Burnside* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 60.

The linkage of these events was very prominent among members of Lincoln's administration. After hearing of the fall of Fort Donelson (which surrendered on 16 February 1862), Secretary of the Treasury Salmon P. Chase wrote to the editor of the *Cincinnati Commercial* that this blow, combined with what he termed the "splendid triumphs under Burnside," would knock the underpinning out of the rebellion. A similar view was evinced by Seward, who told Weed that this "magnificent series of triumphs" was "auspicious of the restoration of the Union."[16] Yet another member of the Administration, Secretary of the Navy Welles, was certain that Burnside's victories "come to swell the current of cheerful tidings that reach us from the West." Even Lincoln's chief personal secretary, John G. Nicolay, was convinced that all of these military operations made it certain that "[u]nless some great calamity befalls us, we shall conquer [the Confederates]."[17]

It is perhaps less surprising that McClellan, who as general in chief was in command of all Union military movements, would see the victories as parts of a whole. It was he who informed Burnside on 12 February of the fall of Fort Henry, but in the next sentence he assured Burnside that, "your success seems to be the most brilliant yet." McClellan's thoughts are even clearer in a 17 February draft of an address to the Army

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[16] Chase to M.D. Potter, 17 February 1862, in John Niven, ed., *The Salmon P. Chase Papers, Vol. 3: Correspondence, 1858 – March 1863* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1996), 135; Seward to Weed, 19 February 1862, in Seward, ed., *Seward at Washington*, 64.

[17] Gideon Welles to Commodore Louis Goldsborough, 14 February 1862, RG 94, Ambrose E. Burnside Papers, Box 1, Folder 4, NA; Nicolay to Therena Bates (fiancée), 17 February 1862, in Michael Burlingame, ed., *With Lincoln in the White House: Letters, Memoranda, and other Writings of John G. Nicolay, 1860-1865* (Edwardsville, Ill.: Southern Illinois University Press, 2000), 70-71.

of the Potomac, which he wrote but never issued. After announcing the "glorious victories" gained by those in North Carolina and Tennessee, he expressed his belief that "Roanoke, Fort Henry, & Fort Donelson will hereafter be the pride of all true Americans, & will cause the hearts of all loyal men to throb with joy."[18] Burnside himself, after learning of the situation in the West, came to believe that rebellion was strongly on the decline.[19]

Prominent newspapers in the North saw the victories in much the same light. The *New York Times* was firmly convinced that Burnside's victory at Roanoke, along with Grant's at Fort Henry, "[O]ffers that conclusive argument against [European] interference – entire military success."[20] Less than two months later, after Burnside had emerged victorious at New Bern and Fort Macon, the *Times* proclaimed that "[w]e have met [the enemy] this year already on twenty fields…we have conquered him behind his intrenchments at Donelson and Roanoke. In no instance has he stood the onset of our columns, or the contact of the bayonet." The *New York Tribune* felt similarly, declaring, "The cause of the Union now marches on in every section of the country…The rebels themselves are panic-stricken or despondent. It now requires no far-reaching prophet to

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[18] McClellan to Burnside, 12 February 1862, RG 94, Ambrose E. Burnside Papers, Box 1, Folder 4, NA; "To the Army of the Potomac" (address not issued), 17 February 1862, in Stephen W. Sears, ed., *The Civil War Papers of George B. McClellan: Selected Correspondence, 1860-1865* (New York: Ticknor & Fields, 1989), 183-184.

[19] Burnside to Brother, February 1862, RG 94, Ambrose E. Burnside Papers, Box 1, Folder 4, NA.

[20] "Prospects of Intervention," *New York Times*, 12 February 1862. Similarly, the *New York Herald* expressed that after the taking of Fort Henry and Roanoke, "[W]e have ceased to entertain any troublesome thoughts of European intervention." See "The Rebellion Downward – Solemn Advice to the South," *New York Herald*, 12 February 1862.

predict the end of the struggle."[21] And from the West, the *Vincennes Gazette* (Indiana) made similar pronouncements, remarking that "the rebel forces are dispirited and demoralized and fleeing in every direction…Everything indicates that the rebellion is about at an end."[22]

Likewise, the *New York Herald* paid great attention to Burnside's victories, which it believed exposed the Confederacy as "a giant of brass upon legs of clay," which "reels and staggers and is at its wit's end, like a drunken man." The *Herald* continually linked Roanoke with the triumphs in the West, remarking that Burnside's and Grant's successes "caused great rejoicing throughout the country," particularly in New York, where "a general confidence was felt that the backbone of the rebellion was broken."[23] Indeed, the *Herald* asserted that "[n]ever before has there been such a truly intense demonstration of joy as on the occasion of the receipt of the Roanoke Island capture." In the *Herald*'s estimation, this was due to the fact that "[i]n importance this victory in the waters of Pamlico and Albemarle Sound has not been equaled by anything which our armies have yet achieved, and taken in connection with the victory in Tennessee, at Fort Henry…the affair at Roanoke Island acquires a double value."[24] Another such

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[21] "The Pending Battles," *New York Times*, 7 April 1862; *New York Tribune*, 12 February 1862. It is telling of the impact of the Roanoke victory that this latter article was written before the fall of Fort Donelson on 16 February.

[22] "The Rebellion," *Vincennes Gazette*, 22 March 1862.

[23] "Our Brilliant Victory in North Carolina," *New York Herald*, 13 February 1862; "The Triumph of the Union Arms," *New York Herald*, 16 February 1862; "Popular Enthusiasm – The News of the Successes of Burnside," *New York Herald*, 16 February 1862.

[24] "The Victory at Roanoke Island," *New York Herald*, 14 February 1862; "The Situation," *New York Herald*, 15 February 1862. The last article claimed that "[t]he brilliant success of the Union arms at

demonstration of joy would occur on 22 February, the anniversary of George Washington's birthday. As the *Herald* relayed, "Never in the history of our country" had the day been celebrated "with more universal and earnest interest," a result of "the achievements of the heroes of Forts Donelson and Henry and the exploits of the Burnside expedition," which had served to "buoy up our spirts and point to a speedy termination of the great war."[25] Finally, after Burnside was again successful at New Bern, the paper exclaimed, "The cause of the Union is riding proudly onward upon the swelling waves of victory…the sustaining spirit of the rebellion, from repeated defeats, is utterly broken…It is all over with [Jefferson Davis] and his Southern Confederacy."[26]

Harper's Weekly and *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* could not have been more in agreement with these sentiments. *Harper's* pointed to all of the recent Union victories as evidence that "the heart of the difficulty has been pierced…nothing now remains for it but to bleed to death."[27] And like the other papers, *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* linked Roanoke with Fort Henry and Fort Donelson, and catalogued all of the recent Union successes for its readers so they could see that "everywhere the giant arms of the Nation are closing around this most unholy rebellion."

Roanoke Island forms the principle point of our news," and boasted that the *Herald* devoted a full 18 columns of space to the victory.

[25] "The Day of Celebration," *New York Herald*, 24 February 1862.

[26] "The Swelling Tide of Victory – The Capture of Newbern, North Carolina," *New York Herald*, 19 March 1862.

[27] "Daybreak," *Harper's Weekly*, 8 March 1862.

Burnside, having taken Roanoke, now hung "like a surcharged thunder-cloud on the flank of the Rebellion."[28] By the time Burnside had captured Fort Macon, the paper was asserting that unless an unexpected and severe reverse occurred, Northern citizens could "count on the complete extirpation of the rebellion before midsummer." *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, however, went further than linking the victories in North Carolina with those in the West. Instead, it linked both with the victories of the American Revolution: "The men of Donelson, Roanoke…and Newbern stand beside the departed heroes of Washington's day in the estimation of the world. The victory of Burnside at Newbern shows that in the determined fighting element, the men of '62 are not a jot behind those of '76."[29]

In part because of what they read in the papers, the morale of Northern citizens skyrocketed. From Washington, Seward observed that, after Roanoke, "All America is ablaze with bonfires, and regards the insurrection as practically a failure." As if to prove Seward's point, one New York resident wrote to Burnside on 6 March, congratulating him on his victory, and expressing his conviction that it "puzzles the traitors of Richmond; the idea of a Southern army surrendering after 'dying in the last ditch'…is preposterous." This flood of enthusiasm did not stop after Roanoke; shortly after the

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[28] "Post the Books," *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, 8 March 1862; "Long Live the Nation!," *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, 1 March 1862.

[29] "Summary of the Week" and "The Landing of the U.S. forces at Slocum's Creek, Near Newbern," *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, 5 April 1862. As evidence of the valor of Union soldiers, the paper cited specifically the debarkation of Burnside's forces at Slocum's Creek, prior to the Battle of New Bern, an event it believed was "full of daring incidents."

Battle of New Bern on 14 March, Burnside received another letter from New York informing him that "[y]our latest victory has produced a thrill of joy throughout this community."[30]

These feelings were certainly not limited to New York. Towards the conclusion of Burnside's campaign, the mayor of Newport, Rhode Island, told the general that "[w]e all rejoice over your success…It is very evident that the great & wicked rebellion is nearly crushed out." He went on to express his hope that all of the Union's soldiers would soon be able to return to their homes and firesides.[31] Naturally, those soldiers who were a part of Burnside's expedition felt much the same way. Larned, Burnside's close confidant as well as his secretary, became firmly convinced that "the repeated defeats [the Confederates] have suffered, and the *closing in process* all round must have the most disastrous effect on the spirit of their troops."[32] In the light of this evidence, it must be concluded that Burnside's victories were a primary (albeit not singular) factor in boosting Union morale in the spring of 1862. To Lincoln's administration, the press, the Northern public, and Union soldiers, it mattered not that Burnside (or, for that matter,

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[30] Seward to Weed, 19 February 1862, in Seward, ed., *Seward at Washington*, 64; Letter from New York Office of the Illinois Central Railroad Company to Burnside, 6 March 1862, and Jennings to Burnside, 22 March 1862, both in RG 94, Ambrose E. Burnside Papers, Box 1, Folder 5, NA.

[31] William H. Cranston to Burnside, 13 May 1862, RG 94, Ambrose E. Burnside Papers, Box 1, Folder 7, NA.

[32] Daniel Reed Larned to Brother-in-law Henry, 5 May 1862, Daniel Reed Larned Papers, Vol. 1: Correspondence, LOC.

Grant) had greatly outnumbered his Confederate opponents. What mattered was that victories, almost nonexistent during 1861, were finally being won by Union forces.

This fact in itself, however, does not necessarily prove that people associated the rise in Union fortunes directly with Burnside. This is another link in the chain of Burnside's rise to command of the Army of the Potomac that has long been overlooked. Careful analysis of the archival papers of Larned (who handled a great deal of Burnside's personal correspondence) and of Burnside himself, as well as of contemporary Northern newspapers, illuminate the fact that citizens, military officials, and the press did directly link the victories in North Carolina to the general. These sources not only demonstrate that Burnside had become a household name, but also that many in the North began to think very highly of his military ability.

Shortly after the Roanoke victory, Larned explained to his brother-in-law that congratulations for Burnside were coming in "thick and fast." Larned, who was charged with answering many of these letters, may have been peeved by their sheer volume. Unfortunately for him, over the next two months, the flood of letters would not recede. Much of the correspondence showed a personal devotion to Burnside. For instance, he received numerous letters asking permission to name male heirs after him.[33] As one citizen wrote:

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[33] Larned to Brother-in-law Henry, 27 February 1862, Daniel Reed Larned Papers, Vol. 1: Correspondence, LOC; In a mid-January article, the *New York Herald* had related details of Burnside's upcoming expedition, "upon which so much of the public interest has been concentrating for some time past." The truth of this statement regarding the public's attention to the campaign would be proven over the next several months. See "The Situation," *New York Herald*, 14 January 1862.

> The *glorious* news of your success has just reached here…and [at] the same time, in my humble dwelling, there came a '*ten pound shell*' – different only from those which you shelled Roanoke Island – in that your shells were filled with powder & shot, and this one contained '*flesh and blood*' – had arms & legs.' It is proposed, with your permission, to call this little fellow in honor of your victory, by your *own full name*. If he lives the boy shall be shown your autograph, and taught to emulate your patriotism.[34]

Others neglected to ask the general's permission, and only informed him they had named their offspring for him after the fact. One such resident of Newport did so on 23 April, describing that his infant had been taught to wave a Union flag, and sending Burnside a picture of the boy.[35]

Union citizens did not stop with requests to name children after the general. One lady sent Burnside a hand-stitched quilt to commemorate his victory, while another from Philadelphia sent a cake, which was decorated with orange blossoms and lilies of the valley and in the center iced with a depiction of the American flag and the words "General Burnside" and "Roanoke & New Bern."[36] Oliver Ditson & Company, one of the major music publishing houses of the era, issued new piano sheet music commemorating the general's victories.[37] In addition, Burnside received many requests for autographs, was constituted an honorable member for life of the American Board of

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[34] Resident of New York to Burnside, 13 February 1862, RG 94, Ambrose E. Burnside Papers, Box 1, Folder 4, NA. This writer even included a postage paid return envelope.

[35] Resident of Newport to Burnside, 23 April 1862, RG 94, Ambrose E. Burnside Papers, Box 1, Folder 6, NA. The picture has not been located among Burnside's papers.

[36] Larned to Sister, 4 May 1862, Daniel Reed Larned Papers, Vol. 1: Correspondence, LOC.

[37] "New Music," *The Liberator*, 21 March 1862. The particular musical piece mentioned in this article was entitled "Gen. Burnside's Victory March."

Foreign Missions, and was sent a poem by Oliver Wendell Holmes entitled "The Two Armies," commemorating his victories.[38] But it was a separate poem, published in a Massachusetts newspaper and titled simply "Burnside," which evinced the strongest sentiments regarding the general: "We thank thee Burnside: proudly hast though won/The guerdon of thy country's gratitude/We have no words to bless thee as we would/But O, we love thee for what thou hast done." The poem concluded by exclaiming "For thee, the great guns boom – the air is rent with cheers/Stand up, proud Hero, with the Nation's noblest peers."[39]

This press too directly connected the Union's increasingly bright prospects with Burnside. First and foremost, all of the papers referred to the North Carolina campaign as "Burnside's expedition," ensuring that the public would not fail to recognize who was responsible for the positive results in the Old North State. All of the major New York papers, including *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* and *Harper's Weekly*, were able to relate particulars of the campaign to the public because they sent correspondents with Burnside's Coast Division to cover the general's movements, a fact which aptly demonstrates the connections between the public, the press, and military events.[40]

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[38] American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions to Burnside and Oliver Wendell Holmes to Burnside, both 30 March 1862, in RG 94, Ambrose E. Burnside Papers, Box 1, Folder 5, NA.

[39] J. Hal Elliot to Burnside, 12 February 1862, RG 94, Ambrose E. Burnside Papers, Box 1, Folder 4, NA. It is unclear what newspaper the poem was published in, but the clipping is preserved in Burnside's papers.

[40] For evidence that these papers had correspondents with Burnside's expedition, see, for instance, "The Battle of Roanoke," *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, 8 March 1862; "Our Artists at the South," *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, 5 April 1862; "The Battle of New Bern," *Harper's Weekly*, 12 April 1862; "The Situation," *New York Herald*, 4 May 1862; "The Burnside Expedition," *New York Tribune*, 10

Larned was tasked with dealing with these reporters, a job of which he soon grew tired. After Roanoke, he referred his brother-in-law to the report of the *New York Tribune*, because "their reporters have their account direct from the Generals themselves…so it may be relied on." But less than two weeks later, Larned termed the reporters "a perfect nuisance," and claimed that he had "turned the cold shoulder on them." And by the end of February, he was complaining that the reports in the papers were full of errors, and stated that "if the wishes of the staff were carried out, the whole batch of reporters would be annihilated."[41]

Despite Larned's objections, the reporters remained, and they ultimately brought Burnside's expedition into the public eye and turned the general himself into a national figure. J.H. Schell, a combination sketch artist and correspondent, covered the campaign for *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, as did Angelo Wiser for *Harper's Weekly*. Both men provided their publications with numerous images of Burnside and his achievements. These sketches depicted everything from the fleet crossing the bar at Hatteras Inlet, to the landing of troops on Roanoke Island, to the captured rebel fortifications at New Bern, and finally Fort Macon and Burnside's bombardment of it.[42]

February 1862. J.H. Schell covered the expedition for *Frank Leslie's*, Elias Smith for the *New York Times*, Angelo Wiser for *Harper's Weekly*, and a Mr. Bentley for the *Philadelphia Inquirer*.

[41] Larned to Brother-in-law Henry, 9, 23, and 27 February, Daniel Reed Larned Papers, Vol. 1: Correspondence, LOC.

[42] "General Burnside," 1 March 1862; 8 March 1862; 19 April 1862; 24 May 1862, all in *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*. *Harper's Weekly* included sketches of the Burnside expedition in essentially every issue it produced in the Spring of 1862. See, for example, the issues of 15 February 1862, 1 March 1862, 5 April 1862, 12 April 1862, 17 May 1862.

Two of Schell's sketches from the battle of Roanoke in particular stand out as the most stirring. The first depicted the charge of the 9th New York Zouaves on the Confederate breastworks, which the paper claimed "decided the fortunes of the day." The second was accompanied by an article that stated, "The first blow of the Burnside Expedition has fallen with terrific force on the enemy's flank," and depicted an indeed forceful looking Burnside, bellowing orders from the rigging of one of the naval vessels. It is unclear if Schell purposely attempted to make Burnside look like Father Neptune in the sketch, but the resemblance is uncanny.[43]

Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper was also fond of providing its readers with detailed maps, including Pamlico, Albemarle, Currituck, and Roanoke Sounds, which it believed would "enable our readers to follow the operations of the great Burnside Expedition."[44] The *New York Herald*, *New York Times*, *New York Tribune*, and *Harper's Weekly* did this as well; indeed, a large portion of the front page of the *Times* on 12 February was occupied by a huge map showing the scene of operations on the North Carolina coast, while the *Herald*'s 15 February edition provided two maps of Roanoke Island and the North Carolina sounds.[45] And though the illustrated periodicals

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[43] "The Battle of Roanoke," *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, 8 March 1862; "The Victory at Roanoke Island," *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, 1 March 1862.

[44] "Map of Pamlico, Albemarle, Currituck, and Roanoke Sounds," *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, 8 February 1862.

[45] "Burnside's Expedition," *New York Tribune*, 13 February 1862; *Harper's Weekly*, 1 March 1862; "The Situation," *New York Herald*, 15 February 1862; "The Situation," *New York Herald*, 25 March 1862; "The Burnside Expedition," *New York Times*, 12 February 1862. In later papers, the *Times* would include large maps of Roanoke Island, as well as Newbern and its approaches. See "The Battle of Roanoke," 13 February 1862, and "Another Glorious Victory," 19 March 1862.

undoubtedly had the best sketches, this did not stop the *Herald* from trying to provide its readers with similar visuals. In February the paper carried scenes of Roanoke Island, while a March edition contained sketches of multiple places that Burnside had conquered, such as Elizabeth City.[46]

While the maps and sketches helped the public follow the campaign, the articles in these papers ensured that readers would link it directly to Burnside. *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* began habitually referring to the general as "the gallant Burnside," whom it claimed had brought the North "the most stirring news."[47] It also began carrying advertisements for large ambrotype pins of the general, as well as for "Burnside vest chains." Furthermore, it proposed that New Bern be renamed "New Burnside" in honor of the general's victory there.[48] The *New York Herald* frequently reprinted Burnside's full reports, and on 15 February carried a biographical sketch of Burnside and his brigadier generals, Foster, Reno, and Parke, in which it explained that, when it came to Burnside, "Next to the young chieftain of the Union armies [McClellan], no general enjoys more fully the esteem and affection of his officers and men. He is…truly a leader."[49]

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[46] "Brilliant Operations at Roanoke Island," *New York Herald*, 13 February 1862; "What General Burnside Has Accomplished," *New York Herald*, 25 March 1862.

[47] "Summary of the Week," *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, 5 April 1862.

[48] For advertisements, see, for example, *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, 19 April and 24 and 31 May, 1862. For the proposed name change, see 24 May 1862.

[49] "Sketches of the Generals," *New York Herald*, 15 February 1862. Likewise, *Harper's Weekly* carried lengthy biographies of both Burnside and Foster in its 1 March 1862 issue.

For its part, the *New York Times* often carried stacked headlines placing the general's name next to his accomplishments, like the one that read "Overwhelming success of the Burnside Expedition/Roanoke Island and Elizabeth City Captured/The National Forces Pushing On."[50] But the paper also remarked positively on Burnside's refusal to lose heart when his expedition faced delay and disaster at Hatteras Inlet, terming it "well for the country" that Burnside was a far better man than the "croakers" on the home front."[51] *Harper's Weekly* depicted the general in a similar, noble light. After the victory at Roanoke Island, the paper carried an anecdote from the Battle of Bull Run in which General Irvin McDowell, the commander of the Union Army at that time, rose in his saddle during the heat of the battle and asked earnestly, "Where is Burnside?" As *Harper's* explained, now the entire country was asking this question, and "from the heart of the enemy's country…comes the quiet voice of the leader, 'Here, where I meant to be!'" As if to leave no doubt of Burnside's increasing popularity, the paper concluded, "And now if you ask again, 'Where is Burnside?' the answer rings from the lips of millions of grateful countrymen, 'Fast in our hearts forever.'"[52]

During this time, Burnside also received more formal congratulations. The General Assembly of the State of Ohio passed a resolution thanking him, along with the naval commander of the expedition, Goldsborough, for their "brilliant victories in

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[50] "The Battle of Roanoke," *New York Times*, 13 February 1862.

[51] "A Lesson to Croakers," *New York Times*, 18 February 1862.

[52] "Where is Burnside?" *Harper's Weekly*, 1 March 1862.

Eastern North Carolina," and stated that these victories were the beginning of the "speedy end of the 'great rebellion.'" Governor Oliver P. Morton of Indiana, Burnside's birth state, requested that Burnside send him a photograph or steel plate portrait, which was to be placed among a collection of Indiana's greatest generals.[53] And Rhode Island, Burnside's adopted state, passed a joint resolution of its legislature directing that a Tiffany sword be sent to Burnside "as a testimonial for your conduct and success," to commemorate his victory at Roanoke, which it termed "one of the most brilliant exploits of the war."[54]

A committee was appointed to select this sword, and the one they chose would be described by *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* as "a poem in sculpture, which cannot be too highly commended." The hilt of the sword contained a statuette of a winged victory, six inches in height, her right arm holding above her head a chaplet of laurel, while a flag floated over her right shoulder. The hand guard was ornamented with an elegant scroll bearing Burnside's initials, and the scabbard, made of sterling silver, contained laurel garlands, heraldic ribbons, a shield emblazoned with the arms of the commonwealth, and a pendant inscribed 'Roanoke.'[55]

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[53] State of Ohio to Burnside, Resolution Passed 17 February 1862, Ambrose E. Burnside Collection, Box 2, Folder 15, RIHS; Private Secretary of Oliver P. Morton to Burnside, 16 May 1862, RG 94, Ambrose E. Burnside Papers, Box 1, Folder 7, NA. It is unclear if Burnside ever sent the picture.

[54] Governor William Sprague to Burnside, 10 April 1862, RG 94, Ambrose E. Burnside Papers, Box 1, Folder 6, NA.

[55] "Rhode Island to Burnside," *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, 31 May 1862. The article was accompanied by a sketch of the magnificent sword. The total cost of this ceremonial gift was $800.

In June, delegates from the Rhode Island General Assembly traveled to New Bern to present the sword to Burnside. On 18 June, Burnside's men, outfitted in their finest parade dress, formed a hollow square in the midst of a rain shower around a wooden platform erected on caissons. As the infantry, cavalry, and artillery of his expedition looked on, Burnside proceeded to the platform while cannons rang a 15-gun salute. General Maurau, representing Rhode Island, met Burnside on the platform and presented him with this token of Rhode Island's thanks, at which point, according to a newspaper correspondent with the expedition, "[A] cheer was raised by the men that rivaled in force the salvos of artillery that heralded the approach of the much beloved commander…it was repeated and repeated, the woods throwing back the echo, until one would almost fancy a whole state had raised up its voice." As Burnside received the sword, the rain shower ended and a rainbow appeared; a (perhaps too) perfect metaphor for those who believed that the darkest days of the Union were behind them, now that they had found a general who could win.[56]

Indeed, there were many who believed that Burnside was just the man to defeat the Confederates. As Burnside's brother informed him, his movements had been eagerly watched by the whole country, and a large number of people concluded that they liked what they saw in the general. Even before learning of the victories at New Bern and Fort Macon, the Forest City Union Association of Cleveland, Ohio, passed a resolution

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[56]"The Burnside Expedition," *Harper's Weekly*, 19 July 1862. *Harper's* included a sketch of the sword presentation, with the rainbow clearly visible in the background. A description of the sword presentation can also be found in Marvel, *Burnside*, 94.

stating that "[w]e have full and unlimited confidence in the ability, energy, zeal, and patriotism of Gen. Burnside, and we are confident that while the command of our National Forces is in such able military hands, the success of our cause in this great struggle will be certain."[57] The rest of the campaign only added to this conviction. In late May, Amos D. Smith, a leading citizen and wealthy textile investor in Providence, Rhode Island, assured Burnside that his name was "spoken by all patriots, both here and in New York and Philadelphia, and wherever I have been, as one of our bravest, and most energetic and judicious commanders." Evidence of the truth of this claim was present in one of the sermons of Bishop Clarke of Rhode Island, who told his congregation that "Roanoke has bowed before the powers of that noble man…The Lord of Hosts is with him – the God of battles is his refuge." But it was Newport's mayor who summed up the general feeling best, when he succinctly stated the belief that "Burnside is a trump."[58] Multiple citizens even wrote saying that they were eagerly awaiting news of the general's next victory, which would give a "coup de grace" to the rebellion.[59]

A significant part of Burnside's appeal as a commander was the almost fanatical level of devotion he inspired in the soldiers who served under him. Even before the

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[57] Benjamin Burnside to Ambrose Burnside, 2 March 1862, and A.T. Goodman to Burnside, 8 March 1862, both in RG 94, Ambrose E. Burnside Papers, Box 1, Folder 5, NA.

[58] Amos D. Smith to Burnside, 22 May 1862, and William H. Cranston to Burnside, 13 May 1862, both in RG 94, Ambrose E. Burnside Papers, Box 1, Folder 7, NA; Sermon of Bishop Clarke printed in "Incidents of the War," *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, 26 April 1862.

[59] See, for example, New York Office of Illinois Central Railroad Company to Burnside, 21 March 1862, RG 94, Ambrose E. Burnside Papers, Box 1, Folder 5, NA. It is this letter which uses the phrase "coup de grace."

expedition sailed, Larned told his sister just how much he liked the general, stating that he "would not be afraid to follow him anywhere."[60] Those who knew Burnside best, like Larned, were amazed at his kindness, cheerfulness, and work ethic. The very sight of Burnside was enough to inspire confidence. When the expedition had trouble crossing the bar at Cape Hatteras and endured several severe storms, many of the soldiers began to despond. But Burnside's presence and cheerfulness helped the men weather the storms. As one soldier in the 25th Massachusetts explained, Burnside was "everywhere to be seen, flying about among the boats and vessels, encouraging his men and looking as cheerful as though everything was going to suit him…He knows no such word as fail, and is bound to overcome all obstacles."[61] The soldiers were fond of cheering the general and referring to him as "Old Glory." Likewise, the bands of the regiments frequently played "Hail to the Chief" whenever Burnside appeared on the deck of his vessel.[62] Larned proved prescient in estimating that "[t]he untiring energy, patience, & perseverance of the General…will in the end accomplish great things."[63]

This devotion only increased when the fighting began. This was particularly true after the Union victory at New Bern. Burnside had been at the front throughout the

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[60] Larned to Sister, 24 December 1861, Daniel Reed Larned Papers, Vol. 1: Correspondence, LOC.

[61] Entries for 15 January and 23 January 1862, in David L. Day, *My Diary of Rambles with the 25th Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry* (Milford, Mass.: King & Billings, 1884), 22, 26.

[62] The most prominent regimental band in the expedition was that attached to the 24th Massachusetts. See Larned diary entry, 26 January 1862, Daniel Reed Larned Papers, Vol. 1: Correspondence, LOC; Entry for 14 March 1862, William J. Creasey Diary, Vol. 1, SHC.

[63] Daniel Larned to Brother-in-law Henry, 18 January 1862, Daniel Reed Larned Papers, Vol. 1: Correspondence, LOC.

battle, and had met many of the wounded and shook hands with them. When he rode inside the captured Confederate lines, according to Lieutenant William J. Creasey of the 23rd Massachusetts, "Such a cheering as was given…never was heard before in the woods of the pine tree state." Creasey fully believed that "[t]o see him was enough to pay for that day's work."[64] After this battle, even family members of those serving in Burnside's expedition wrote to the general describing "the very strong expressions of attachment to you by all who are so fortunate as to comprise a portion of your Army."[65] Moreover, the "courage, coolness, and determination" of Burnside's soldiers, in addition to their personal loyalty to him, inspired *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* to claim that Burnside's Coast Division was the counterpart of Napoleon's famed 'Old Guard.' When the men received news of Burnside's nomination for a Major Generalship thereafter, many of them were overjoyed, not just for Burnside, but for the fortunes of the Union cause.[66]

As evidenced by this promotion to Major General after his victory at New Bern, Burnside's military prowess caught the eye not only of his soldiers and of civilians, but

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[64] Entry for 14 March 1862, William J. Creasey Diary, Vol. 1, SHC. In his entry for 16 June, Creasey would describe Burnside as a "gentleman and a soldier in every sense of the word." Burnside had also met a good number of the Union wounded on the field at Roanoke, drawing tears from many. See Larned diary entry, 9 February 1862, Daniel Reed Larned Papers, Vol. 1: Correspondence, LOC.

[65] Letter from Father of Soldier in Burnside's Expedition to Burnside, 11 April 1862, RG 94, Ambrose E. Burnside Papers, Box 1, Folder 6, NA.

[66] "The Battle of Newbern," *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, 5 April 1862; Larned to Sister, 10 March 1862, Daniel Reed Larned Papers, Vol. 1: Correspondence, LOC. Two weeks later, Larned would proclaim that "Major General Burnside is no greater man than Brigadier General Burnside was; but he is one of the *best* men on the face of the earth."

of McClellan and the War Department. The Union's Adjutant General made known to Burnside that both Lincoln and Secretary of War Stanton were highly pleased with the bravery and skill displayed by him in achieving successes "at once brilliant and fruitful." Stanton later communicated the "highest satisfaction" of both himself, the President, and the whole nation for Burnside's distinguished service.[67] Meanwhile McClellan, who was more inclined to accept accolades rather than give them out, wrote to his mother that "Burnside has so far done splendidly, & I am sure will continue in the same path."[68]

All of these sentiments echoed what was being said by the Northern press, which was doing its best to tout Burnside as one of (if not the) best generals the Union possessed. On a tactical level, *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* was impressed with the fact that, although it expected the landing of troops on Roanoke Island to be "hotly contested" by the rebels, "[S]o admirably had Gen. Burnside made all his arrangements, that our entire force was disembarked from the transports without a single casualty." But the paper was also won over by Burnside's "untiring energy and attention to the duties of his position."[69]

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[67] These letters were published and read by Burnside to his soldiers in General Orders No. 23, issued 2 April 1862, and can be found in RG 94, Ambrose E. Burnside Papers, Box 1, Folder 6, NA.

[68] George McClellan to Elizabeth McClellan, 16 February 1862, in Sears, ed., *Papers of George B. McClellan*, 183.

[69] "The Battle of Roanoke," *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, 8 March 1862; "Rifle Practice Near Newbern, N.C. Among Gen. Burnside's Characteristics," *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, 5 July 1862. The latter article described how Burnside had performed tests on a new rifle design himself, which the paper believed demonstrated "the care he takes to inform himself upon the minutiae of military science."

The *New York Herald*, meanwhile, termed Burnside's victory at Roanoke Island "the most complete achievement of the war," and grew certain that the "brilliant conduct" of Burnside and his army would accomplish nothing less than the speedy restoration of North Carolina to the Union.[70] By the end of Burnside's campaign, one of the *Herald*'s war correspondents felt comfortable asserting that Burnside's "name alone is a tower of strength," because it was "so greatly feared by the rebels," and concluded that "[i]t is certain that wherever Gen. Burnside makes a strike, let his forces be what they may, it will be decisive and brilliant."[71] This opinion was shared by a correspondent for the *New York Tribune,* who remarked that Burnside, having less manpower than all of the other Union generals, had still managed to achieve "more important and brilliant results than any other commander."[72]

Burnside's accomplishments were made to appear even greater because the papers often exaggerated the strength of the Confederate forces in North Carolina. For instance, *Harper's Weekly* termed Burnside's victory at New Bern "in many respects the most brilliant affair of the war" due in part to the mistaken belief that Burnside had defeated an enemy equal in number to his own army. Therefore, *Harper's* lavished praise on Burnside for completely routing this force in the space of a few hours.[73]

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[70] "Our Brilliant Victory in North Carolina," *New York Herald*, 13 February 1862; "The Brilliant Victories for the Union," *New York Herald,* 15 February 1862.

[71] "Interesting from the Peninsula: Our Army Correspondence," *New York Herald*, 15 July 1862; "News from McClellan: Our Fortress Monroe Correspondent," *New York Herald,* 28 July 1862.

[72] "Arrival of Gen. Burnside," *New York Tribune,* 12 June 1862.

[73] "The Battle of Newbern," *Harper's Weekly,* 5 April 1862.

Undoubtedly, however, it was the *New York Times* that had the best things to say about Burnside's military ability. Burnside's successes were almost always termed "complete," in contrast to the victories McClellan claimed, which seemed barren of results and often left the enemy in possession of the field.[74] When the *Times* learned that Burnside's force was about to depart from Roanoke, it opined that "Burnside is just the man to give [the Confederates] all the fight they can stomach," and therefore speculated (correctly) that "we may look out for warm work and a brilliant bulletin shortly."[75] And after receiving such bulletins containing news of Burnside's victory at New Bern and Brigadier General Parke's investment of Fort Macon, the *Times* thundered that "Gen. Burnside is not satisfied with one, two, or three successes, so long as more work remains to be done." Indeed, all of this caused the paper to express the conviction that Burnside's campaign in North Carolina had "illustrated his invaluable skill and steadiness as a general." Given this, the *Times* called the fact that Burnside had not yet been given a larger role in the war a "military mystery."[76] Little did the paper know that Lincoln would soon attempt to give the general just such a role.

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[74] See, for instance, "Burnside at Roanoke Island – Norfolk Threatened," 12 February 1862; "The Battle of Roanoke," 12 February 1862; and "Another Glorious Victory," 19 March 1862, all in the *New York Times*.

[75] "Burnside Moving," *New York Times*, 9 March 1862. The title of this article may have been a subtle dig at McClellan: "Burnside Moving," as opposed to the General of Army of the Potomac, who never seemed to be.

[76] "The Rebellion," *New York Times*, 25 March 1862; "Burnside in Banishment," *New York Times*, 22 April 1862.

While Burnside prosecuted the war in North Carolina, McClellan was busy conducting his own campaign on the Virginia Peninsula, which many Northerners believed would lead to the capture of Richmond. In a series of battles in late June and early July of 1862, however, McClellan was defeated by General Robert E. Lee and forced to retreat down the Peninsula.[77] With McClellan's advance stalled, and Lincoln and the War Department growing increasingly restive, Burnside was ordered to Washington and arrived on 22 July. In a closed conference with Lincoln and Stanton, Burnside was offered McClellan's command. Burnside, however, turned it down, arguing that McClellan was the better general and that if he was allowed to renew his campaign, he would produce results. Lincoln did not force the matter and for the time being allowed McClellan to remain at the head of the Army of the Potomac.[78] McClellan became aware of what had transpired, which did nothing to assuage his poor relationship with the Administration. As he explained to a friend, "The command was for two days persistently pressed upon a General Officer [Burnside] who happened to be a true friend of mine, & declined the offer. I know that the rascals will get rid of me as soon as they dare."[79]

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[77] These were the Seven Days Battles, fought from 25 June to 1 July, 1862. For an excellent history of McClellan's campaign, see Stephen W. Sears, *To the Gates of Richmond: The Peninsula Campaign* (New York: Ticknor & Fields, 1992).

[78] Marvel, *Burnside*, 99-100. The exact date Lincoln offered Burnside the command has not been determined, though it was clearly between 22 and 27 July, 1862. Dispatches from the *New York Herald*'s war correspondent at Fortress Monroe indicates that it had happened by 25 July. On that date, he wrote to the paper, "Major General Burnside arrived this morning [on the Peninsula] from Washington, where he had been in close consultation with the War Department." See "News from McClellan: Our Fortress Monroe Correspondence," *New York Herald*, 28 July 1862.

[79] McClellan to Samuel Bartow, 30 July 1862, in Sears, ed., *Papers of George B. McClellan*, 376-377.

One measure that Lincoln and Stanton did take was to consolidate several military departments in the Shenandoah Valley and bring Major General John Pope east to take command of this newly created Army of Virginia.[80] Pope had captured New Madrid in Missouri in March and then surrounded and forced the surrender of Island No.10 on the Mississippi River in early April. Thereafter, he commanded the left wing of General Henry Wager Halleck's army in the taking of the vital railroad junction of Corinth, Mississippi.[81] Once brought east, however, Pope fared no better against Lee than McClellan had, and suffered a disastrous defeat in the Second Battle of Bull Run at the end of August. As Pope's broken army streamed toward Washington, it was combined with McClellan's, which had been shifted from the Peninsula over the preceding month. When the War Department learned that Lee was preparing to cross the Potomac to invade Maryland, Burnside was again called to the White House, and on 5 September he was offered command of the field army which was to be used to combat

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[80] It is important to note that Pope was given command of a newly created army, not of the Army of the Potomac. McClellan remained in command of that army, though some of his corps were siphoned to Pope. Pope officially received this command on 26 June. See James M. McPherson, *Tried by War: Abraham Lincoln as Commander in Chief* (New York: Penguin Press, 2008), 95, and T. Harry Williams, *Lincoln and His Generals* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1952), 119-122.

[81] William Marvel, *Lincoln's Autocrat: The Life of Edwin Stanton* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015), 205-206. Apart from these military qualifications, Marvel points out that Pope was attractive to the Radical Republicans because he was a Republican (unlike McClellan), and that he was personally known to Lincoln, whose father had been friends with Pope's father.; See also Weigley, *A Great Civil War*, 115-117. Pope forced the surrender of 3,500 Confederate soldiers at Island No. 10. Union forces took control of Corinth in late May, 1862.

this incursion into the North. But Burnside once again declined, reiterating a belief that he could not manage so large a force.[82]

Though historians have focused solely on the official reason Burnside gave to Lincoln for refusing the command, several other factors heavily influenced Burnside's decision. One was undoubtedly his friendship with McClellan, which predated the war. After Burnside resigned from the regular army in 1853, he had gone broke when the government failed to make good on its promise to purchase a breech loading carbine he had designed. At this low point in his life, it was McClellan, his old West Point classmate, to whom Burnside turned. McClellan offered Burnside a job with the Illinois Central Railroad, which he thankfully accepted. This was a favor Burnside would not soon forget. He earned an annual salary of $2,000, half of which he used to pay off his creditors, until he was debt free.[83]

There is abundant evidence of the strong friendship between the two men in their correspondence during Burnside's expedition. Burnside continually addressed McClellan as "My dear Mac," while McClellan frequently prefaced his letters with "My

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[82] Marvel, *Burnside*, 110-111; Marvel, *Lincoln's Autocrat*, 233; Williams, *Lincoln and His Generals*, 163-164; Edgar T. Welles, ed., *The Diary of Gideon Welles, Vol. 1: 1861-1864* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1911), 124. Welles's exact phrasing is that Burnside "declared himself unequal to the position."

[83] Marvel, *Burnside*, 5, 11-14; "Sketches of the Generals," *New York Herald*, 15 February 1862; "General Burnside," *Harper's Weekly*, 29 November 1862. Burnside believed he had secured a $90,000 contract from Secretary of War John Floyd in 1857, but Floyd reneged on the agreement, and Burnside, who had already expended much of his capital setting up factories to produce the weapon, was forced to liquidate his business assets and assign all of his property to his creditors. The *Herald* asserted that the carbine was "possessed of peculiar and superior merit," and that Floyd "gave assurances it would be adopted," but instead gave the contract to another inventor with whom he agreed to split the profits.

dear Burn."[84] Burnside's official report on his victory at New Bern spoke glowingly of McClellan, although it was Burnside who had planned and fought the battle. This report, naturally, made McClellan very happy, and he replied by writing Burnside what Larned termed a "beautiful letter." When Burnside read it, he confided to Larned, "I love him [McClellan]."[85] This report did not escape the notice of McClellan's friends, several of whom expressed great pleasure with it, and explained that it had caused the New York newspapers (specifically the *Post* and the *Tribune*) to stop berating McClellan, whom they had previously "abused beyond endurance."[86] As Burnside's victories piled up, McClellan acknowledged them by expressing his opinion to Burnside that "I can never forget the debt I owe you."[87]

Nor did Burnside forget the debt he believed he owed McClellan. Burnside's assertions to Lincoln that McClellan was a great general who would produce results if given time were not simply a measure to avoid taking the command himself. Larned's papers make clear that Burnside possessed genuine confidence in McClellan, a confidence which he attempted to impart to his staff. As Larned explained during

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[84] See, for example, Burnside to McClellan, 15 March 1862, in McClellan, *McClellan's Own Story*, 244-245, and Larned to Sister, 4 April 1862, Daniel Reed Larned Papers, Vol. 1: Correspondence, LOC.

[85] Larned to Sister, 4 April 1862, Daniel Reed Larned Papers, Vol. 1: Correspondence, LOC.

[86] Letter from New York Office of Illinois Central Railroad Company to Burnside, 21 March, 1862, and Jennings to Burnside, 22 March 1862, both in RG 94, Ambrose E. Burnside Papers, Box 1, Folder 5, NA.

[87] McClellan to 'My Dear Burn,' 19 April 1862, in RG 94, Ambrose E. Burnside Papers, Box 1, Folder 6, NA. The friendship between the two men did not escape the attention of the Northern press. For instance, *Harper's Weekly* asserted that Burnside and McClellan "loved and trusted each other." See "General Burnside," *Harper's Weekly*, 29 November 1862.

McClellan's Peninsula Campaign, Burnside "has *perfect* confidence in [McClellan]…He says he is working slow because the time has not yet come for him to make *the dash*…he has not the slightest doubt as to the result." That this confidence stemmed in large part from Burnside's personal relationship with McClellan is evident in another of Larned's letters, in which he stated to his sister, "The General has known [McClellan] for many years as an intimate and *confidential* friend. He is acquainted with all his characteristics…He has the utmost confidence in him as a *man* and a military leader."[88] Therefore, Burnside's refusals of command may have had less to do with a belief that he was the wrong man for the job, as opposed to his conviction that McClellan was, in fact, the right man for the job.[89]

Another underlying reason for Burnside's refusals of command, which has escaped the notice of historians, was his excessive modesty. Burnside shared a vast amount of his credit not only with McClellan, but with his brigade commanders as well. Burnside had hand-picked Brigadier Generals Foster, Reno, and Parke, all of whom were his friends at West Point, to lead his three brigades.[90] In General Orders No. 5, issued after the victory at Roanoke, Burnside praised the bravery and energy of these three

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[88] Larned to Brother-in-law Henry, 1 May 1862, and Larned to Sister, 4 May 1862, both in Daniel Reed Larned Papers, Vol. 1: Correspondence, LOC.

[89] One historian who does mention Burnside's friendship with McClellan is Williams, who noted that "Burnside was extremely loyal to McClellan," and in July 1862, "Burnside saved McClellan." Williams, however, failed to provide any evidence that actually demonstrated the friendship between the two men, or the reason for it. See Williams, *Lincoln and His Generals*, 144.

[90] Marvel, *Burnside*, 37.

men, which, he claimed, "resulted in the complete success of our arms." Burnside was more direct in his initial report to McClellan, stating unequivocally, "I owe everything to Genls. Foster, Reno, & Parke."[91] In his report to Stanton on New Bern, Burnside again mentioned the unflagging bravery of the brigadiers, asserting his belief that "[t]o them and their brave officers and men the country owes every success which has been obtained during this campaign." Nor did Burnside slight the contributions of the Union Navy, citing their perfect cooperation as a major reason for the victory.[92] In fact, Burnside almost always mentioned the Navy's role in his reports, a fact which was appreciated by naval officers connected to his campaign, such as Commander Stephen Clegg Rowan.[93] In none of Burnside's reports on any of his three battles did he claim any special credit for the victories, which he may well have done.

Even when he was being personally honored, Burnside remained determined to credit almost everyone except himself for the laurels he had won. The speech he made upon being presented the sword from Rhode Island is indicative of this; as he asserted to his gathered army:

> Without the skill, courage, patience, and fortitude of the general officers, field and staff officers, company officers, non-commissioned officers, and privates of this corps d' armee, together with the full and hearty

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[91] General Orders No. 5, 9 February 1862, and Burnside to McClellan, 14 February 1862, both in RG 94, Ambrose E. Burnside Papers, Box 1, Folder 4, NA.

[92] Burnside to Stanton, 10 April 1862, Ambrose E. Burnside Collection, Box 1, Folder 1, Letter Book: March-June, 1862, RIHS.

[93] For evidence of this, see Rowan to Samuel F. Du Pont, 14 April 1862, in John D. Hayes, ed., *Samuel Francis Du Pont: A Selection from his Civil War Letters, Vol. 2, The Blockade: 1862-1863* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1969), 6-7.

> cooperation of our gallant navy in these waters, the state of Rhode Island would have been deprived the pleasure of giving, and I debarred the proud satisfaction of receiving, this elegant sword.[94]

Utterances like these certainly endeared Burnside to those serving in his expedition, but they also gave the general a reputation for modesty that was virtually unmatched at the time.

Indeed, the Northern press picked up on and lauded this modesty. After Roanoke Island fell, the *New York Herald* noted that Burnside "does all honor to Generals Foster, Reno, and Parke."[95] But the modesty of the general was best embodied in his report on the New Bern victory. *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* reprinted Burnside's 16 March report to Adjutant General Thomas, citing the fact that it was "brief and modest" as evidence that it was "a model of this class of compositions."[96] The *New York Times* went even further, claiming that "[i]f anything were wanting to perfect the claims of Gen. Burnside to public respect and admiration, it would be supplied by his official narrative of the victory at Newbern. To proofs of well-contrived strategy [and] cautious and successful leadership…Gen. Burnside adds evidence of rare modesty."[97] Undoubtedly, these papers portrayed Burnside to their readers as a modest man of noble character.

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[94] "The Burnside Expedition," *Harper's Weekly*, 19 July 1862.

[95] "The Situation," *New York Herald*, 15 February 1862.

[96] "The Battle of Newbern," *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, 5 April 1862.

[97] "Burnside and McClellan," *New York Times*, 20 March 1862.

This portrayal led the papers to overlook Burnside's assertion that he was not capable of handling so large a force as the Army of the Potomac. *Harper's Weekly*, for one, specifically stated that this was simply part of Burnside's "characteristic modesty," and went so far as to contend that "[t]here is nothing finer in history than the lofty example of patriotism and self-sacrifice thus given by General Burnside." *Harper's*, therefore, saw Burnside's disinclination to take the command as less of an honest self-evaluation than as a refreshing case of a general who paid little heed to his personal ambition but rather was willing to surrender his own interests for the public good.[98]

It is quite probable that Lincoln saw the situation in a similar manner, and attributed Burnside's refusals of command less to a sincere belief that he was not qualified to lead the Army of the Potomac, than to his typically noble manner.[99] In fact, it is likely that this influenced Lincoln in placing Burnside in command, as Lincoln may well have been tiring of dealing with arrogant generals who failed to back up their talk with victories. Throughout the summer and early fall of 1862, Lincoln had clashed with McClellan, who was notoriously boastful. Indeed, when McClellan had originally been made general in chief, and Lincoln expressed his concern that this would entail a vast labor, McClellan had confidently replied, "I can do it all." As historian George C. Rable explains, the choice of Burnside as McClellan's potential replacement "reflected

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[98] "Good Examples," *Harper's Weekly*, 18 October 1862.

[99] Marvel, who is undoubtedly sympathetic to Burnside, makes this point as well, but he fails to provide examples of how Burnside's noble character had manifested itself throughout his expedition. See Marvel, *Burnside*, 100.

Lincoln's growing frustrations with generals who offered unsolicited policy advice without winning victories."[100]

Pope too had appeared a braggart to the Administration; in his first address to the Army of Virginia after coming east, he had claimed that his armies in the West had always seen the backs of their enemies.[101] And Joseph Hooker, another name thrown around by the Administration for command at the time, was also known to be cocky and overly ambitious. Throughout the fall of 1862, Hooker schemed to elevate his own name while casting doubt on the ability of his superiors, a fact that was not a well-kept secret.[102] Indeed, Lincoln would later remark to newspaperman and close confidant Noah Brooks that "the most depressing thing about Hooker" was that he was overconfident.[103] In comparison to McClellan, Pope, and Hooker, Burnside appeared a noble officer with a record of success, and therefore the best man to lead the army.

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[100] McClellan quoted in Williams, *Lincoln and His Generals*, 44. Both McClellan's official and personal correspondence, as reprinted in Sears, ed., *Papers of George B. McClellan*, are full of his belief that he was the only man who could defeat the Confederates; George C. Rable, *Fredericksburg! Fredericksburg!* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 432.

[101] For Pope's cocky and conceited demeanor upon coming east, see Williams, *Lincoln and His Generals*, 123.

[102] For proof that Hooker's name was discussed in relation to command of the Army of the Potomac, see Chase to Chandler, 20 September 1862, in Niven, ed., *Salmon P. Chase Papers, Vol. 3*, 275. For Hooker's constant scheming for command, see Bruce Catton, *Glory Road* (New York: Doubleday, 1962), 3-11. Catton terms Hooker "inordinately ambitious," a man who was "completely capable of taking a cold and calculating view of things."

[103] After he had finally received command of the Army of the Potomac in late January of 1863, Hooker became cockier than ever, and grew fond of using expressions such as "When I get to Richmond" or "After we have taken Richmond." See Noah Brooks, *Washington in Lincoln's Time*, ed. Herbert Mitgang (New York: Rinehart & Company, 1958), 56. Brooks was a reporter for the *Sacramento Union*, who had made Lincoln's acquaintance in 1856 in Illinois and grew increasingly close to Lincoln during the war, meeting with him several times a week from December 1862-1865 (see pages 3-7).

One of the reasons that historians fail to acknowledge this is undoubtedly Burnside's performance at the Battle of Antietam. Burnside's actions on 17 September have received a great deal of scrutiny, the majority of which stems from McClellan's rendering of Burnside's role in the battle. McClellan, who had retained command of the Army of the Potomac after Burnside's second refusal of command, essentially pinned the army's (and by extension his own) failure to win a decisive victory at Antietam on Burnside. A careful reading of the evidence, however, makes clear two crucial facts: McClellan was dishonest in his disparaging of his loyal friend, and, more importantly, his strong censure of Burnside did not take place until 1863, and therefore would have played no role in Lincoln's decision to give Burnside command of the Army of the Potomac in November of 1862.

After Burnside had turned down the command of the army, McClellan made him commander of the right wing, composed of Burnside's Ninth Corps (which included two of his brigades from the North Carolina expedition) and Hooker's First Corps. Burnside remained very popular with the soldiers who had served under him in the preceding months and now followed him into Maryland; as one officer explained, "Vociferous cheering, first heard in the distance and increasing in apparent volume as it came nearer, was recognized as the sure announcement of the coming of Burnside."[104] But just prior to the battle, McClellan (supposedly temporarily) removed Burnside from wing

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[104] Officer quoted in Marvel, *Burnside*, 114. For McClellan conferring wing command on Burnside, see page 111, as well as McClellan to Lincoln, 6 September 1862, in Sears, ed., *Papers of George B. McClellan*, 436.

command and left him in charge only of the Ninth Corps, for reasons that are not altogether clear. As McClellan planned his attack on Lee's Army of Northern Virginia (scattered around the town of Sharpsburg) on 16 September, he positioned Burnside on the Union left, facing Confederate General Robert Toombs's brigade across Rohrbach's Bridge, which spanned Antietam Creek.[105]

McClellan's plan was to assault the Confederate left with Hooker's First Corps, on the northern edge of the battlefield, while several other corps made ready to attack the Confederate center in support. Burnside, too, was ordered to be ready to strike the Confederate right, but both the timing of this attack, and its ultimate purpose, have become sources of heated controversy. In his memoir, McClellan claimed the he had a lieutenant of the topographical engineers deliver an order to Burnside at 8:00 a.m. on 17 September to carry the bridge (known afterwards as 'Burnside's Bridge'), and to "gain possession of the heights beyond, and advance along their crest upon Sharpsburg." When Burnside made little progress during the morning, McClellan sent another order to take the bridge "at all hazards." According to McClellan, Burnside once again failed to do this, so McClellan had a third order delivered, which commanded Burnside to "push forward his troops without a moment's delay, and, if necessary, to carry the bridge at the

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[105] Marvel, *Burnside*, 129, 132; James Longstreet, *From Manassas to Appomattox: Memoirs of the Civil War in America* (Philadelphia, Pa.: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1903), 257-258; Jacob D. Cox, "The Battle of Antietam," in Robert Underwood Johnson and Clarence Clough Buel, eds., *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War, Vol. 2* (New York: Castle Books, 1956), 631-633. Cox, who commanded one of the divisions of the Ninth Corps, believed that Hooker had succeeded in getting out from under Burnside's control due to "Hooker's solicitation and…desire, openly evinced, to be independent in command."

point of the bayonet."[106] Finally, after a delay of around four hours, Burnside carried the bridge at 1:00 p.m.

With this accomplished, McClellan directed one of his aides to inform Burnside that he was to "push forward his troops with the utmost vigor and carry the enemy's position on the heights," and that "we must not stop for loss of life, if a great object could thereby be accomplished."[107] Burnside did eventually carry these heights, but his subsequent advance on Sharpsburg was stopped by darkness and the arrival of Confederate reinforcements. McClellan contended that if Burnside had accomplished his mission two hours earlier, "a position would have been secured upon the heights from which our batteries might have enfiladed the greater part of the enemy's line, and turned their right and rear." He went on to state, in no uncertain terms, that "[o]ur victory might thus have been much more decisive," and that "if [General Fitz John] Porter or [General Winfield Scott] Hancock had been in Burnside's place the town of Sharpsburg would have been ours."[108]

Much like his memoirs, McClellan's official report heavily censured Burnside for failing to understand that he was to throw a strong force against the Confederate right in conjunction with Hooker's attack on the enemy's left. It essentially blamed the lack of a clear cut victory on Burnside, who had failed to accomplish the seemingly simple task

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[106] McClellan, *McClellan's Own Story*, 603.

[107] McClellan, *McClellan's Own Story*, 603.

[108] McClellan, *McClellan's Own Story*, 604, 608.

of crossing the bridge and securing the heights in the rear of Sharpsburg.[109] McClellan's rendering of events, however, should not be accepted uncritically for several reasons. One is that this official report was not written until August of 1863 (after he had been removed from command), and it did not line up with his original report written on 15 October 1862, shortly after the battle. In that initial report, McClellan stated:

> The design was to make the main attack upon the enemy's left – at least to create a diversion in favor of the main attack, with the hope of something more, by assailing the enemy's right – and, as soon as one or both of the flank movements were fully successful, to attack their center with any reserve I might then have in hand.[110]

This clearly indicates that McClellan initially planned to use Burnside's attack on the Confederate right only as a diversion, and this is indeed how Burnside seems to have understood the attack. Thus, it is one factor that helps explain why Burnside did not attempt to throw an overwhelming force across the bridge early in the morning, but it is not the only one.

The timing of McClellan's first order to attack the Confederate right is another point that has been heavily disputed. Burnside's post-battle report, dated 30 September, gave the timing of the order as 10:00 a.m., a full two hours later than McClellan's later official report. McClellan's initial report, however, explicitly stated that the order to

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[109] Cox, "Battle of Antietam," in Johnson and Buel, eds., *Battles and Leaders, Vol. 2*, 633; Marvel, *Burnside*, 134.

[110] Reports of Maj. Gen. George B. McClellan, U.S. Army, 15 October 1862, in U.S. War Department, *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies, Series 1, Vol. 19, Part 1* (Washington D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1887), 30-31; See also Cox, "Battle of Antietam," in Johnson and Buel, eds., *Battles and Leaders, Vol. 2*, 633.

Burnside to attack was communicated at 10:00 a.m.[111] McClellan's later revised statement that the attack order was communicated at 8:00 a.m. has been accepted in part because it was supported by the letters of Colonel Delos B. Sacket, the aide McClellan sent to Burnside to order him to carry the bridge at all hazards. Sacket claimed that Burnside snapped at him, "McClellan seems to think I am not trying my best to carry this bridge, you are the third or fourth one who has been to see me this morning with similar orders."[112] If this were true, it would certainly support the contention that Burnside had been receiving orders to cross the creek since early in the morning. Yet Sacket's claims, much like McClellan's, are suspect.

Sacket's letters were not published until years after the war, and they were added posthumously to McClellan's memoir. The validity of their content has been disputed both by Marvel, and by Major General Jacob D. Cox, who commanded one of Burnside's divisions. Cox acknowledges that Sacket did deliver Burnside an order to attack at 10:00 a.m., but in his estimation, "The manner in which we had waited, the free discussion of what was occurring under our eyes and of our relation to it, the public receipt of the order by Burnside in the usual and business-like form, all forbid the supposition that this was any reiteration of a former order." This led Cox (who, it should be noted, had no prior attachment to Burnside), to conclude that "the emulative evidence

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[111] Reports of Maj. Gen. Ambrose E. Burnside, U.S. Army, of Operations September 7-19, 30 September 1862, and Reports of Maj. Gen. George B. McClellan, U.S. Army, 15 October 1862, both in *O.R., Vol. 19, Part 1*, 31, 419; Cox, "Battle of Antietam," in Johnson and Buel, eds., *Battles and Leaders, Vol. 2*, 647 n.1; Marvel, *Burnside*, 134.

[112] Sacket quoted in Marvel, *Burnside*, 139.

seems to prove conclusively that the time stated by Burnside, and by McClellan himself in his original report [10:00 a.m.], is correct."[113] Additionally, as Marvel notes, Sacket's claims about being the fourth messenger at that hour contradict even McClellan's later writings. Marvel goes so far as to term Sacket "either McClellan's unflagging supporter or an obsequious flatterer."[114]

A final point of importance is the way in which McClellan portrayed the difficulty (or lack thereof) of Burnside's assignment. As Cox points out, McClellan's official report treated the attack "as little different from a parade or march across, which might have been done in half an hour."[115] This was a serious misrepresentation by McClellan. Though Burnside faced only Toombs's brigade of the 2nd, 20th, and 50th Georgia regiments, about 550 men in total, this force was well dug in on the heights and strongly supported by Confederate artillery.[116] Both the banks of the stream and the woods behind it were covered with Confederate rifle pits; furthermore, any advance across the bridge could be made only by a narrow column with a front of eight men at most. Nor could the Confederate position be softened by artillery fire, as the steepness of

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[113] Cox, "Battle of Antietam," in Johnson and Buel, eds., *Battles and Leaders, Vol. 2*, 649, 649 n.1.

[114] Marvel, *Burnside*, 446 n. 21.

[115] Cox, "Battle of Antietam," in Johnson and Buel, eds., *Battles and Leaders, Vol. 2*, 650. Compare this to McClellan's initial post-battle report, in which he stated, "The valley of the Antietam at and near this bridge is narrow, with high banks. On the right of the stream the bank is wooded, and commands the approaches both to the bridge and the ford. The steep slopes of the bank were lined with rifle-pits and breastworks of rails and stones. These, together with the woods, were filled with the enemy's infantry, while their batteries completely commanded and enfiladed the bridge and ford and their approaches." See Reports of Maj. Gen. George B. McClellan, U.S. Army, 15 October 1862, in *O.R., Vol. 19, Part 1*, 31.

[116] Longstreet, *Manassas to Appomattox*, 257-258.

the heights and the curve of Antietam Creek made it impossible for such fire to reach the Confederate line. As Cox concluded, "[T]he Confederate position was virtually impregnable to a direct attack over the bridge."[117]

Burnside himself recognized this, and ordered Brigadier General Isaac P. Rodman's division to try to ford the river at a bend in the Antietam below the bridge. Rodman met with sharp resistance, and this, combined with the difficult terrain, thwarted his effort. Though another of Burnside's brigades would later locate a ford north of the bridge, this did not happen until early afternoon, and therefore Burnside was forced, in the end, to carry the bridge directly.[118] Shortly after 1:00 p.m., the 51st New York and 51st Pennsylvania of Brigadier General Samuel D. Sturgis's division succeeded in crossing the bridge, but it was 3:00 before Burnside could replenish the division's ammunition and move two other divisions across the bridge to consolidate his new position.[119] Burnside then advanced on Sharpsburg, driving General D.R. Jones's Confederate division before him, but McClellan failed to support the attack with the Union reserve (Porter's Fifth Corps). Therefore, when General A.P. Hill's Confederate division arrived on the field from Harper's Ferry between 3:30 and 4:00, it was able to

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[117] Cox, "Battle of Antietam," in Johnson and Buel, eds., *Battles and Leaders, Vol. 2*, 649-650; Marvel, *Burnside*, 135-137. Marvel may go too far in terming the bridge "a modern Thermopylae." For the strength of the Confederate position, see also McClellan's 15 October report, footnote 115 above.

[118] Cox, "Battle of Antietam," in Johnson and Buel, eds., *Battles and Leaders, Vol. 2*, 650-651. Cox points out that, as Rodman was wounded on the field and died shortly after the battle, he was never able to submit a full report detailing the resistance he faced; Longstreet, *Manassas to Appomattox*, 259.

[119] Cox, "Battle of Antietam," in Johnson and Buel, eds., *Battles and Leaders, Vol. 2*, 652-654; Marvel, *Burnside*, 140-141; Longstreet, *Manassas to Appomattox*, 260.

concentrate enfilade fire on Burnside's left flank. As Confederate General James Longstreet explained, this attack "seemed to spring from the earth…outflanked and staggered by the gallant attack of Hill's brigades, [Burnside's] advance was arrested."[120] Thus ended the day's battle.

Burnside's performance during the battle was by no means perfect. He failed to personally reconnoiter the fords of Antietam Creek, and it is possible that if he had done so, he could have found a place to cross one of his divisions and outflank the Confederate line. But the serious charges leveled against him by McClellan, which have influenced historical opinions of Burnside's aptness for command, ring false. McClellan's inference that Burnside could have advanced across the bridge at any time was misleading; his later assertions that the attack was not originally planned as a diversion, and that Burnside ignored an 8:00 a.m. order to assault, are contradictory to his initial report and appear downright false. It is only by ignoring these facts that historians such as Warren W. Hassler Jr. can claim that "[Burnside's] inexcusable procrastination, despite McClellan's specific and repeated orders, cost the commander a crushing victory over Lee."[121]

Regardless of the merit of McClellan's charges, it is clear that they did not arise until 1863, after McClellan had been removed from command and was searching for

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[120] Longstreet, *Manassas to Appomattox*, 261; McClellan, *McClellan's Own Story*, 605-606; Cox, "Battle of Antietam," in Johnson and Buel, eds., *Battles and Leaders, Vol. 2*, 654-656; Marvel, *Burnside*, 142-145.

[121] Warren W. Hassler Jr., *General George B. McClellan: Shield of the Union* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1957), 291. It should be noted that Hassler's biography of McClellan is perhaps the most sympathetic one that exists.

scapegoats to detract notice from his own performance. As Marvel points out, Burnside, who by the time McClellan's official report was published had suffered a disastrous defeat at Fredericksburg, made an easy target. Indeed, Marvel claims that McClellan "gathered his best rounds [of criticism] from the banks of the Rappahannock River [Fredericksburg]."[122] Cox too came away with a "profound conviction that the …criticisms upon [Burnside] in relation to the Battle of Antietam were unjust."[123] True to character, Burnside never publicly defended himself against these criticisms. Moreover, in the fall of 1862, he would not have had to, as they did not yet exist. There is, in fact, a complete lack of evidence demonstrating that Lincoln, Stanton, or any of the members of the War Department or the Administration felt any differently about Burnside's military ability after the battle than they had before it.

Nor did the Northern press change its opinion of Burnside as a result of the general's actions on 17 September. *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* spoke highly of Burnside's conduct, and laid the blame for the failure to achieve a complete victory on McClellan, whom it believed allowed Porter's corps to "remain perfectly passive with 17,000 men, while Burnside was struggling with overwhelming numbers at the bridge."[124] Even the *New York Herald*, which was a strongly Democratic (and therefore

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[122] Marvel, *Burnside*, 134, 148-150.

[123] Cox, "Battle of Antietam," in Johnson and Buel, eds., *Battles and Leaders, Vol. 2*, 647 n.1. Cox termed the attempt to hold Burnside responsible for the lack of a decisive victory "a hot partisan effort."

[124] "General Fitz-John Porter," *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, 25 October 1862. The paper, in an earlier article, quoted McClellan as justifying his failure to support Burnside's corps with Porter's by stating, "I can do nothing more. I have no infantry." See *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, 18 October 1862.

pro-McClellan) paper, acknowledged that Burnside "had to encounter the most determined opposition in successfully executing that part of McClellan's plan to which [his corps] had been assigned." Admittedly, the *Herald*'s optimism was due in part to the fact that the paper viewed Antietam as a battle won, but it was Burnside's "vigorous attack and steady advance" that it cited as ultimately deciding the engagement.[125] And while moderate censure of Burnside for his initial failure to throw overwhelming force against Rohrbach's Bridge was present in the *New York Times*, the paper was far more critical of McClellan, when it stated that "more unfortunate in its results was the total failure of [the] separate attacks on the right and left to…in any manner cooperate with each other." The *Times* actually compared Burnside's performance favorably with that of other corps commanders such as William B. Franklin and Edwin V. Sumner.[126]

While both the press and the Administration found little fault in Burnside's actions, they did continue to doubt that McClellan was the right man to lead the Army of the Potomac. Prior to Antietam, McClellan had been left in command of the army much to the displeasure of certain members of the Administration, such as Stanton. Though a pre-war Democrat, Stanton had aligned himself with influential Republicans since

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[125] "The Battle of Antietam," *New York Herald*, 21 September 1862. The article was penned by one of the *Herald*'s war correspondents who was with the Army of the Potomac at Antietam. See also "Highly Important: The Great Battle of Antietam," *New York Herald*, 20 September 1862, which stated, "If the greater obstacles constitute the post of honor on a field of battle, General Burnside may justly claim to have had that post in Wednesday's battle."

[126] "Latest Reports from Headquarters," *New York Times*, 20 September 1862. The *New York Tribune* held essentially the same view as the *Times*. See "The Contest in Maryland," *New York Tribune*, 20 September 1862.

becoming Secretary of War, and had grown increasingly hostile to McClellan. More than once, Stanton had made statements about McClellan expressing his belief that the general "doesn't intend to do anything." Stanton had gone so far as to submit to Halleck in late August (who by that time had been made general in chief) a list of questions that were designed to cast doubt on McClellan's obedience and loyalty.[127]

Chase was another man who was angered by McClellan's continued presence in command. In a September letter to Republican Senator Zachariah Chandler, Chase made clear that "the action of the President in placing General McClellan in command…was not prompted by me." Chase went on to name several officers who he believed were better suited to the command, including Burnside.[128] Chandler himself, who was an influential member of the Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War, hated McClellan, going so far as to say privately that McClellan should be shot.[129] In the end, however, Lincoln retained the ultimate authority in selecting a commander, and he sidestepped both Stanton's and the Radical Republicans' objections in retaining McClellan in command after Burnside had rejected his second offer.

But during the month following Antietam, Lincoln too became fully convinced that he needed a new man for the job.[130] McClellan had failed yet again to deliver a

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[127] Marvel, *Lincoln's Autocrat*, 168-169, 229-231. For details of Stanton's courting of the Radicals and falling out with McClellan, see specifically Chapters 8-10, pages 148-233.

[128] Chase to Zachariah Chandler, 20 September 1862, in Niven, ed., *Salmon P. Chase Papers, Vol. 3*, 275.

[129] Chandler to Wife, July 1862, quoted in Marvel, *Lincoln's Autocrat*, 211.

[130] The military and political factors surrounding McClellan's final removal as commander of the Army of the Potomac are extensive and have generated a great deal of historical debate. A thorough examination of

stinging defeat to Lee's army, which he outnumbered two to one. He remained out of step with Republicans on the issue of emancipation, which he did not believe should be a goal of the war, and he irked the Administration by consistently blaming his defeats on their supposed failure to cooperate with his plans. Throughout October, he continually submitted requests for more supplies and troops, while ignoring Lincoln's prodding to advance.[131] Lincoln grew increasingly frustrated with this, and on 13 October wrote McClellan a pointed letter stating, "You remember my speaking to you of what I called your over-cautiousness. Are you not overcautious when you assume that you cannot do what the enemy is constantly doing? Should you not claim to be at least his equal in prowess, and act upon the claim?"[132] McClellan finally got the Army of the Potomac moving at the end of October, but his glacial pace allowed Lee to block his advance.[133] Therefore, by the beginning of November, Lincoln felt that the general had outlived his usefulness; as Nicolay explained to his fiancée, "The President's patience is at last

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these factors would have to date back to at least the fall of 1861, and are beyond the scope of this study. Those who wish to learn more about this topic would do well to consult the several excellent biographies of McClellan, such as Stephen D. Sears, *George B. McClellan: The Young Napoleon* (New York: Ticknor & Fields, 1988), and Ethan S. Rafuse, *McClellan's War: The Failure of Moderation in the Struggle for the Union* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 2005). Illuminating primary source material pertaining to said topic is located in many sources, the most valuable of which are McClellan, *McClellan's Own Story*; Sears, ed., *Papers of George B. McClellan*; Niven, ed., *Salmon P. Chase Papers, Vol. 3*; and Roy P. Basler, ed., *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln, Vols. 5 and 6* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1953).

[131] Marvel, *Lincoln's Autocrat*, 250-258.

[132] Lincoln to McClellan, 13 October 1862, in Basler, ed., *Collected Works, Vol. 5:1861-1862*, 460-461.

[133] Rable, *Fredericksburg! Fredericksburg!*, 8-9.

completely exhausted with McClellan's inaction and never-ending excuses."[134] This meant that Lincoln had to once again cast his sights around for a new man to lead the Army of the Potomac.

[134] Nicolay to Therena Bates, 9 November 1862, in Burlingame, ed., *With Lincoln in the White House*, 90-91.

CHAPTER V

"THE LAST THING ON WHICH I WISH TO BE CONGRATULATED": BURNSIDE TAKES COMMAND

For Abraham Lincoln, selecting a general to lead the Army of the Potomac successfully had proved no easy task. By the fall of 1862, McClellan had failed to deliver results for the second time, and he would soon be cast aside like McDowell and Pope before him. Clearly, Lincoln had yet to find the right commander for the Union's most prominent army, but as war-weariness grew in the North, the necessity for him to do so became more and more pronounced. Some of the conditions that made his decision of whom to place in that important command so difficult were not of his own making. Most notably, the vast expansion of the volunteer army at the start of the conflict meant that many officers rose to the rank of general very quickly, but none of these newly minted generals had previous experience handling or fighting large bodies of troops.[1] Because of this lack of experience with high command by all Union generals, Lincoln came to rely on two basic criteria for selecting a commander: public opinion and demonstrated success in the field.

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[1] The regular army at the start of the war was only 16,000 strong; by 1862, the Army of the Potomac had over 100,000 men. McPherson does well to point out that most officers, even those who had served in Mexico, knew little of strategic theory, due to the fact that the curriculum at West Point favored the study of engineering, fortification, and army administration. See James M. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil war Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 331, and T. Harry Williams, *Lincoln and His Generals* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1952), 4-10. Williams bluntly asserts that, "There was not an officer in the first year of the war who was capable of efficiently administering and fighting a large army." On the Union side, this problem would persist into the war's second year.

As historians such as Gary Gallagher and Kathryn Meier have pointed out, the fact that the Union was a democratic republic guaranteed links between citizens, politics, and military affairs. Throughout the course of the war, citizens in the North were fixated on military events, which dominated the attention of the press. One of the topics which captivated their attention most were changes in leadership in the national armies.[2] Lincoln well understood the extent to which the public followed the war; indeed, in his Second Inaugural Address, he acknowledged that, "The progress of our arms, upon which all else chiefly depends, is as well known to the public as to myself." But he also understood the importance of swings in public opinion. As he had famously stated in one of his 1858 debates with Stephen Douglas, "Public sentiment is everything. With public sentiment, nothing can fail; without it nothing can succeed." Therefore, "[H]e who molds public sentiment, goes deeper than he who enacts statutes or pronounces decisions."[3] Given this stance, Lincoln could not afford, nor was he likely, to completely ignore how the public felt about certain generals' aptness for command.

Lincoln's own understanding of public sentiment was that it was (somewhat paradoxically) both heavily influenced and represented by the press. As Lincoln scholar

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[2] Gary Gallagher and Kathryn Meier, "Coming to Terms with Civil War History," *Journal of the Civil War Era* 4, no. 4 (December 2014): 493-494. As one piece of evidence that citizens were obsessed with military affairs, the authors point to the fact that over 80% of *Harper's Weekly*'s front page illustrations during the war years featured "military-related subjects and individuals." *Harper's* was one of the two leading American illustrated newspapers, along with *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*.

[3] "Second Inaugural Address," 4 March 1865, in Roy P. Basler, ed., *Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln, Vol. 8: 1864-1865* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1953), 332; "Lincoln-Douglas Debate at Ottawa," 21 August 1858, in Basler, ed., *Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln, Vol. 3: 1858-1860*, 27.

Harold Holzer makes clear, by the era of the Civil War, newspapers and politicians had become "mutually dependent and totally inseparable."[4] Developments such as Samuel F.B. Morse's invention of the telegraph and the formation of the Associated Press (which the *New York Times*, *Herald*, and *Tribune* had all joined by 1850) allowed news to be distributed both faster and wider than ever before. One New York newspaper went so far as to term the AP "the most potent engine for affecting public opinion the world ever saw."[5] The national press was dominated by the New York papers, particularly Horace Greeley's Republican *Tribune*, James Gordon Bennett's Democratic *Herald*, and Henry J. Raymond's moderate-Republican *Times*, as well as two relatively new illustrated publications, *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* and *Harper's Weekly*. By 1860, the *Tribune* had a circulation of nearly 200,000, with the *Times* not far behind. And while the *Herald* claimed only 84,000 subscribers, it had the widest European circulation of any American newspaper. Other papers routinely reprinted articles that originated in the New York newspapers, especially during the war years. For instance, the *New York Tribune*'s original report on the Battle of Antietam eventually appeared in 1,400 papers nationwide.[6]

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[4] Harold Holzer, *Lincoln and the Power of the Press* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2014), xvi. The analysis of Lincoln's connections to the press in this work is heavily indebted to Holzer's book.

[5] Holzer, *Lincoln and the Power of the Press*, 74, 146-147.

[6] Holzer, *Lincoln and the Power of the Press*, xxvii-xxviii, 198, 206, 303, 326. *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* was founded in 1852, *Harper's Weekly* in 1857; by 1861, *Harper's* claimed 200,000 subscribers. For newspaper information and circulation numbers, see also J. Cutler Andrews, *The North Reports the Civil War* (Pittsburgh, Pa.: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1955), 8-10, and Harold Holzer and Craig L. Symonds, eds., *The New York Times Complete Civil War 1861-1865* (New York: Black Dog & Leventhal, 2010), 8-11.

The influence of these newspapers only grew as the war gave Northern citizens an insatiable appetite for news from the front. Oliver Wendell Holmes Sr. expressed the general feeling when he stated, "We must have something to eat, and the papers to read. Everything else we can give up."[7] Due to this sentiment, the number of correspondents Northern newspapers sent to cover the war was larger than had ever been sent to the front in any nation up to that time. Historian J. Cutler Andrews identified 350 different Northern war correspondents, and many more probably existed; the three major New York papers all had around 20 war correspondents in the field at any given time. These papers spent large sums of money on this war coverage, and routinely included maps of the scenes of military action and sketches from the front so that citizens could both follow and feel more connected to the war effort.[8]

Therefore, it is not surprising that Lincoln paid heed to, and made an effort to cultivate, what the newspapers wrote. His belief in the power of the press to shape public opinion is illustrated by several incidents that took place before the war. While Lincoln served in Congress in 1848, he religiously read the *New York Tribune*, and began a correspondence with the already influential Greeley.[9] Eleven years later, after his failed

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[7] Holmes Sr. quoted in Holzer, *Power of the Press*, 324.

[8] Andrews, *North Reports the Civil War*, 751-759; Holzer, *Power of the Press*, 324-329. The *New York Herald* later estimated that it spent between $500,000 and $750,000 on war coverage. Telling is *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*'s description of its own publication as one which "brings home to everyone the history of the week, graphically illustrated and described…The war pictures are universally allowed to be the most truthful and interesting sketches every published of contemporary events, and form a complete gallery of this great crisis of our history." See *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, 29 November 1862.

[9] Holzer, *Power of the Press*, 96. Lincoln's stepmother would later recall that he had been an avid reader of newspapers since the 1820s (see pages 5-6).

run for Senate, and with his political career stalled, Lincoln attempted to enhance his prospects by bailing out a German-language weekly newspaper in his hometown of Springfield, the *Illinois Staats-Anzeiger* ("State Advertiser"). Though Lincoln never officially owned the paper, the contract he had the publisher sign stipulated that the paper would be shut down if it ever printed anything "designed to injure the Republican Party." As Holzer explains, Lincoln "expected his reward solely in political capital," as evidenced by the fact that he allowed the paper to go out of print after he won the 1860 presidential election.[10] Furthermore, Lincoln consistently called on editors of Illinois newspapers to curry favor and talk politics, and he subscribed to the *Chicago Tribune* and began corresponding with its Republican editor, Joseph Medill. Given all this evidence, it is no surprise that Lincoln's law partner and close confidant William H. Herndon once remarked that Lincoln "never overlooked a newspaper man who had it in his power to say a good or bad thing of him."[11]

In fact, upon being elected President, Lincoln made John Nicolay his chief personal secretary in part because Nicolay had journalistic experience, having served both as the editor of the *Pike County Free Press* in Illinois, and as a correspondent for the *Missouri Democrat*.[12] Throughout the war years, Lincoln consistently strove to maintain a good relationship with the press, particularly with the New York editors.

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[10] Holzer, *Power of the Press*, 186-192.

[11] Holzer, *Power of the Press*, xv, 202-204. Medill would later claim (according to Holzer, not implausibly) that Lincoln's 1860 presidential campaign was "hatched in his newspaper's own office."

[12] Holzer, *Power of the Press*, 244-245.

When Bennett was initially critical of Lincoln's call for 75,000 troops to put down the rebellion, Lincoln sent Republican politician and New York political boss Thurlow Weed to smooth talk Bennett into supporting the war. This tactic worked; Bennett thereafter assured Lincoln that the *Herald* would be "unconditionally for the radical suppression of the rebellion by force of arms, and would advocate and support any war measures by the Government."[13] Later that same month, when Raymond began condemning what he saw as a lack of supposed firmness on the part of the Administration, Lincoln invited the disgruntled editor to Washington and charmed him. The President even assented to some of Raymond's patronage recommendations. For the remainder of the war, Raymond would remain firmly in Lincoln's camp; Lincoln even began referring to him as "my Lieutenant General in politics."[14]

Clearly, Lincoln was well aware of the influence these editors wielded, through their shaping of public opinion, on military affairs. The premature Union advance on (and subsequent defeat at) Bull Run in the summer of 1861 was largely a result of the Northern public's clamoring for action. This had been heavily influenced by Greeley, whose *Tribune* had, for eight straight weeks in the early summer of 1862, ran the banner headline "The Nation's War Cry: Forward to Richmond! Forward to Richmond!"[15] As

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[13] Bennett quoted in Holzer, *Power of the Press*, 304.

[14] Holzer, *Power of the Press*, 304-306. Raymond had printed an article in the *New York Times* in late April which read, "When we see results, we know that a hero leads. No such hero at present directs affairs. The experience of our Government for months past has been a series of defeats." See *New York Times*, 25 April 1861.

[15] For instance, see *New York Tribune*, 26 June 1861.

Weed later asserted, Greeley's message had such a powerful effect that the editor essentially "assumed command of our armies."[16] This was a lesson Lincoln would not soon forget, and thereafter he attempted to obtain greater influence with the New York editors (mainly, through political patronage and public correspondence), and to use the press to help prepare the Northern public for his decisions, both on military matters and on emancipation.[17] Clearly, Lincoln was not exaggerating when he concluded in 1864 that "the press has no better friend than I am – no one who is more ready to acknowledge…its tremendous power for both good and evil."[18]

But Lincoln also made an ardent effort to gather his own war news. He haunted the War Department's telegraph office, especially while his armies conducted active campaigns. As the manager of the office, David Homer Bates, explained, Lincoln "seldom failed to come over late in the evening before retiring, and sometimes he would stay all night… [He] almost lived at the telegraph office when a battle was in

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[16] Weed quoted in Holzer, *Power of the Press*, 314.

[17] The manner in which Lincoln prepared the Northern public in the summer of 1862 for his Emancipation Proclamation through his public correspondence with Greeley is illustrative of this. Lincoln knew his letters would be widely reprinted, and so he moved cautiously to link emancipation to the war effort and thus soften its blow for Democrats. Lincoln's late August response to Greeley's "Prayer of Twenty Millions" (which called for immediate emancipation) stated famously that "If I could save the Union without freeing any slave I would do it, and If I could save it by freeing all the slaves I would do it; and if I could save it by freeing some and leaving others alone I would also do that." This message was well received in the North, even among those who were anti-emancipation. See "The Prayer of Twenty Millions," *New York Tribune*, 20 August 1862, and Lincoln to Greeley, 22 August 1862, in Roy P. Basler, ed., *Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln, Vol. 5: 1861-1862* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1953), 388-389. For a full discussion of how Lincoln used the press in relation to the emancipation issue, see Holzer, *Power of the Press*, Chapter 12: "Slavery Must Go to the Wall," 376-415.

[18] Lincoln quoted in Andrews, *North Reports the Civil War*, 55.

progress."[19] And when bad news came in, Lincoln's first thought was often of the public reaction. When the President learned of Hooker's defeat at Chancellorsville, his friend Brooks, who had read Lincoln the news, described how he "walked up and down the room, saying: 'My God! My God! What will the country say?'" Lincoln knew much of this information (that which was not overly sensitive in nature) would find its way into the papers, and therefore he wanted to get it first. As Bates makes clear, this was all a part of Lincoln's "skillful leading of public opinion."[20]

There are several instances in which Lincoln, or a member of his cabinet, explicitly made the connection between the press, public opinion, and military affairs in writing. Lincoln explained his later elevation of Hooker (despite Hooker's intrigues for command) to Raymond by pointing out that Hooker "is stronger with the country today than any other man."[21] But in November 1862, Hooker's popularity was not yet what it would become over the next few months. In fact, in the words of Secretary of the Navy Welles, it was Burnside who "would make an acceptable and popular" general.[22] Lincoln himself could not have been more aware of the need for such a general. As he later

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[19] David Homer Bates, *Lincoln in the Telegraph Office: Recollections of the United States Military Telegraph Corps during the Civil War* (New York: The Century Co., 1907), 7, 42.

[20] Noah Brooks, *Washington in Lincoln's Time*, ed. Herbert Mitgang (New York: Rinehart & Company, 1958), 61; Bates, *Lincoln in the Telegraph Office*, 409.

[21] Lincoln quoted in A. Wilson Greene, "Morale, Maneuver, and Mud: The Army of the Potomac, December 16, 1862-January 26, 1863," in Gary W. Gallagher, ed., *The Fredericksburg Campaign: Decision on the Rappahannock* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 211.

[22] Edgar T. Welles, ed., *The Diary of Gideon Welles, Vol. 1: 1861-1864* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1911), 182.

explained to Brooks, "I kept McClellan in command after I had expected that he would win victories, simply because I knew that his dismissal would provoke popular indignation and shake the faith of the people in the final success of the war."[23] But by the fall of 1862, it was just this lack of victories that was shaking the public faith, and so Lincoln resolved to find a new commander.

Privately, Lincoln could complain that "the most trying thing of this war is that the people are sanguine; they expect too much at once," but by this point in the war he could not afford to ignore the public's expectations.[24] After Antietam, Northern citizens and particularly the press began to despair of victory, due mainly to the ineffectiveness, and now inaction, of the Army of the Potomac. As the *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* pointed out, "[A]nother winter of delay will be something terrible to contemplate."[25] Greeley felt much the same way, and surely believed he was expressing the opinion of the *Tribune*'s 200,000 plus readers when he bemoaned the fact that "the country cannot endure another month's inaction in our Armies…[the war] must be fought out speedily and resolutely or it will die out. Defeat will be a calamity, but delay is a ruin."[26]

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[23] Brooks, *Washington in Lincoln's Time*, 26. According to Brooks, Lincoln made this remark in April of 1863.

[24] Lincoln made this statement to Brooks in June of 1864. Brooks, *Washington in Lincoln's Time*, 138.

[25] *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 31 October 1862, quoted in George C. Rable, *Fredericksburg! Fredericksburg!* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 36.

[26] *New York Tribune*, 8 November 1862. Ironically, this article was printed the day after McClellan was removed from command, but before the news had reached the public.

Meanwhile, non-partisan *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* was consistently critical of "our slow-moving generals" (read, McClellan), and, in a possible attempt to grab the Administration's attention, expressed its belief that "[n]ations, like individuals, are amenable to the sentiment of the community to which they belong. Disregard of that sentiment can only spring from ignorant and dangerous conceit or from blind recklessness."[27] Upset with the lack of a clear-cut victory at Antietam, the paper lamented that the Northern public was fighting the war "under a Government in which it has no confidence, and under generals whose incompetence has been proved so often as to become a scoff and a proverb" (again, this was primarily a shot at McClellan). In reference to public opinion, the paper believed that "the only thing that can shape it favorably [is] the success of our arms!" Therefore, it specifically recommended that Lincoln give the command to Burnside, and in doing so, "[I]nspire the nation anew."[28] Just as telling of Burnside's prominence at this juncture is the fact that even the pro-McClellan *Herald*, while defending the general and arguing that he would soon be involved in active operations, admitted that "Burnside is one of our most successful and prominent officers."[29]

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[27] "Summary of the Week" and "Maintaining the National Dignity," *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, 11 October 1862.

[28] "The Requirements of the Nation," *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, 20 September 1862.

[29] "The Grand Review," *New York Herald*, 7 October 1862. Also indicative of Burnside's celebrity by November 1862 is the fact that Barnum's American Museum had chosen to display a wax figure of him along with those of the nation's "most distinguished national soldiers," including Halleck, McClellan, and Commodore Henry Foote. See Barnum's advertisement under "Amusements," *New York Tribune*, 1 November 1862.

Therefore, Lincoln needed to choose a general that demonstrated military ability and the will to act, but also had the confidence of the Northern people. As has been demonstrated, Burnside had a great deal of public support, but he also had something that almost no other Union general had - battlefield success in an independent command.

Though McClellan's 7 January orders laid out the ultimate objectives of Burnside's expedition (the capture of Roanoke, New Bern, and Beaufort), Burnside had a tremendous amount of discretion in planning and executing his movements. In fact, Burnside even had a great deal of leeway in assembling his Coast Division. He worked tirelessly to recruit the type of seafaring men he believed he needed for an amphibious operation (namely, troops from New England who had grown up or worked around the water), and it was he who had set about the task of securing ferry boats, steamers, and surf boats, as well as rations and arms, for his force.[30] Once the expedition was in progress, Burnside did not rely on direct orders, but instead formulated his own plans and informed McClellan of their details after the fact. Burnside's discretion is evident in McClellan's letters, which, instead of directing movements, made statements such as "I think you are making the best use of your time."[31] Therefore, Burnside's successes were

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[30] Correspondence relating to Burnside's preparations for his expedition is found in RG 94, Ambrose E. Burnside Papers, Box 1, Folders 2 and 3, NA. Of particular interest are Burnside's letters to the New York Arsenal and to U.S. transportation agent Lt. John Tucker, 9 December and 15 December 1861, respectively. For Burnside's efforts to procure New England regiments, see William Marvel, *Burnside* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 32-33.

[31] McClellan to Burnside, 19 April 1862, RG 94, Ambrose E. Burnside Papers, Box 1, Folder 6, NA. For evidence that Burnside would typically submit his plans and McClellan would approve them after the fact, see Adjutant General Lorenzo Thomas to Burnside, 4 March 1862, RG 94, Ambrose E. Burnside Papers, Box 1, Folder 5, NA.

largely and justifiably judged to be his own, as evidenced by the public's strong identification of the victories directly with him.

By November 1862, there was no other Union general who had Burnside's combination of popularity and battlefield success. This is, in fact, the greatest weakness of the historical criticisms of Burnside's appointment: these historians consistently fail to offer the name of any general who was a better choice at the time. Castel bypasses the issue entirely; Catton claims that Hooker was the "individual hero" of the Battle of Antietam and that he "had reason" for thinking he was the man best suited to command the Army of the Potomac, but stops short of arguing that Hooker should have been elevated over Burnside.[32] It is all too easy for historians who ignore Burnside's North Carolina victories, such as Catton, to claim that Burnside "was never anything resembling a great general." A similar opinion was evinced by Hassler, who pointed to Antietam as proof that Burnside had "glaring limitations" and was "probably the most incompetent of all the generals then serving with the Army of the Potomac."[33] But it is inherently more difficult for these historians to demonstrate that Lincoln had a better option (which they fail even to attempt). The majority of other generals discussed for command by the Administration and the War Department, such as Hooker and Franklin,

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[32] Bruce Catton, *Glory Road* (New York: Doubleday, 1962), 6-7. As evidence that the Administration and the War Department thought highly of Hooker, Catton cites Hooker's being commissioned a Brigadier General in the Regular Army after Antietam.

[33] Catton, *Glory Road*, 20; Warren W. Hassler Jr., *Commanders of the Army of the Potomac* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1962), 100-101; Warren W. Hassler Jr., *General George B. McClellan: Shield of the Union* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1957), 322.

had never commanded more than a corps, and had never achieved any independent success. Furthermore, Franklin was a McClellan disciple, and Hooker was both junior in rank to Burnside and had damaged his reputation by being openly hostile to McClellan.[34]

In actuality, the only other Union general who had won notable victories with an independent command was Grant. But despite the fact that Grant's reputation had risen after his capture of Forts Henry and Donelson in February of 1862, it took a hard hit after the Battle of Shiloh in early April. Shiloh was viewed at the time as, at best, a bloody draw, and rumors had circulated in the press that Grant's army had been caught by surprise (true) and that Grant had been drunk (false). General Ethan Allen Hitchcock, who served as an adviser to Stanton as well as Chairman of the War Board, wrote that Washington regarded Grant as "absolutely disgraced and dishonored" for being caught off guard.[35] This situation was exacerbated by the fact that Halleck, Grant's Department Commander, had submitted official complaints about Grant both before and after the battle. As McPherson concludes, "A hero after Donelson, Grant was now a bigger goat than Albert Sidney Johnston had been in the South after his retreat from Tennessee."[36]

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[34] Williams, *Lincoln and His Generals*, 182. Williams points out that, for reasons of army morale, Lincoln was hesitant to appoint a man such as Hooker, who was "an open enemy of the idolized 'Little Mac' [McClellan]." Thus, "Burnside was an ideal compromise" because he was not hostile to McClellan, but had operated largely independently of him. For additional evidence that Hooker's reputation as an intriguer was well known to Lincoln, see Rable, *Fredericksburg! Fredericksburg!*, 50.

[35] Hitchcock quoted in William Marvel, *Lincoln's Autocrat: The Life of Edwin Stanton* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015), 181. Marvel contends that Shiloh "resurrected lingering distrust in Grant."

[36] Marvel, *Lincoln's Autocrat*, 181-182; McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 414; Williams also points out that it was General Halleck who claimed the lion share of credit for Grant's victories. This was one of the reasons why Halleck was made general in chief in July 1862. See Williams, *Lincoln and His Generals*, 134-135.

All of this left Burnside as the logical choice for the command of the Army of the Potomac.[37]

On the night of 7 November 1862, Burnside, who had retired early, was awoken by Catharinus P. Buckingham, Stanton's Adjutant General. On orders from Lincoln, Stanton had summoned Buckingham to the War Department two days before and had handed him two envelopes, one addressed to Burnside and the other to McClellan. Buckingham arrived at Burnside's headquarters in the village of Waterloo, Virginia on the Rappahannock River, by special train from Washington. The envelope Buckingham carried for Burnside contained General Orders No. 182, issued by the War Department and dated 5 November, which read: "By direction of the President of the United States it is ordered that Major General McClellan be relieved from the command of the Army of the Potomac, and that Major General Burnside take the command of that Army." Stanton had instructed Buckingham to visit Burnside first; if Burnside steadfastly refused to take the command, Buckingham was to return to Washington without delivering the other envelope to McClellan.[38]

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[37] The few historians who do acknowledge this, such as Williams, McPherson, and Marvel, present either flawed or incomplete arguments. See the introduction to this paper for an overview of these author's works.

[38] General Orders No. 182, 5 November 1862, RG 94, Ambrose E. Burnside Papers, Box 3, Folder 4, NA; Larned to Mrs. Burnside, 9 November 1862, Daniel Reed Larned Papers, Vol. 3: Correspondence, 25 October 1862 – 16 July 1863, LOC; Williams, *Lincoln and His Generals*, 179; Marvel, *Burnside*, 159-160; Rable, *Fredericksburg! Fredericksburg!*, 43, 52. Rable makes clear that the choice of Burnside was, in fact, Lincoln's, as he did not consult the Cabinet before making the decision.

For the third time, Burnside did attempt to refuse, citing his conviction that he was "under very great personal obligation to McClellan" and that it was poor military policy to change commanding generals "at this place and at this season of the year," particularly as the army was beginning an active campaign.[39] Buckingham then explained to Burnside that if he refused the command, it would go to Hooker, whom Burnside strongly disliked.[40] When Burnside learned of this, he conferred with several members of his staff, including Parke and Lewis Richmond, for an hour and a half. What the tenor of the conversation was is unknown, but in the end Burnside did agree to take the command. He and Buckingham then mounted their horses in a driving snowstorm and rode to Salem, where they caught a military train for Rectortown, the site of McClellan's headquarters. There they entered McClellan's tent at 11:00 p.m. and found the general still awake and working.[41]

McClellan would later claim that he divined the two men's purpose immediately. To his credit, he surrendered the command gracefully, merely stating "[w]ell, Burnside, I turn the command over to you." Privately, McClellan unsurprisingly felt that the change in commanders was a grave mistake; as he lamented to his wife, "Alas for my poor

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[39] Burnside to War Department, 9 November 1862, RG 94, Box 3, Folder 4, NA; Marvel, *Burnside*, 159; Rable, *Fredericksburg! Fredericksburg!* 43. As Burnside later explained, "I then assumed the command in the midst of a violent snow-storm with the army in a position that I knew but little of."

[40] Marvel claims that Burnside found Hooker "arrogant, devious, and dangerously selfish;" Rable that Burnside saw Hooker as "a dangerous and unprincipled intriguer." See Marvel, *Burnside*, 159-160, and Rable, *Fredericksburg! Fredericksburg!*, 43. Rable refers to the threat that the command would go to Hooker as Buckingham's "trump card." Additional evidence to support this claim is found in Marvel, *Lincoln's Autocrat*, 258-259, and Williams, *Lincoln and His Generals*, 179.

[41] Marvel, *Burnside*, 160; Marvel, *Lincoln's Autocrat*, 258-259; Williams, *Lincoln and His Generals*, 179.

country!"[42] True to character, Burnside behaved with great dignity during the visit, causing McClellan to express to his wife the belief that "[Burnside] never showed himself a better man or truer friend." McClellan was also firmly convinced that Burnside was "as sorry to assume command as I am to give it up."[43] Indeed, one correspondent for *Harper's Weekly* reported that Burnside, when congratulated by an acquaintance on receiving the command, remarked, "That, Sir, is the last thing on which I wish to be congratulated."[44]

McClellan did graciously consent to stay with the army for several days to help Burnside get his bearings. On 10 November, Burnside organized one last review of the army for the commander who was now ordered to retire to his home in Trenton, New Jersey. Men lined up in droves to bid farewell to McClellan, and cheered, wept, and broke ranks as the general passed by them; as he rode away, men were heard to yell, "Come back to us, come back to us McClellan!" That evening, McClellan was overcome by the men's reaction, and wrote that "[t]he scenes of to-day repay me for all that I have endured."[45]

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[42] George Brinton McClellan, *McClellan's Own Story* (New York: Charles L. Webster, 1887), 651-652.

[43] McClellan to Mary Ellen McClellan, 7 November 1862, and McClellan to Mary Burnside, 8 November 1862, both in Stephen W. Sears, ed., *The Civil War Papers of George B. McClellan: Selected Correspondence, 1860-1865* (New York: Ticknor & Fields, 1989), 520-521.

[44] "General Burnside," *Harper's Weekly*, 29 November 1862.

[45] "McClellan's Farewell," *New York Herald,* 12 November 1862; Marvel, *Burnside,* 161; Rable, *Fredericksburg! Fredericksburg!*, 48; McClellan, *McClellan's Own Story*, 661. The *Herald*'s article contained a long and vivid account of McClellan's final review of the Army of the Potomac, which depicted strong feelings of affection on the part of soldiers and officers for their deposed commander.

In his farewell address, McClellan expressed his love and gratitude for an army he justifiably believed had grown up under his care. He concluded the address by exclaiming, "We shall also ever be comrades in supporting the Constitution of our country & the nationality of its people."[46] Indeed, there is a great deal of evidence to support the contention that a good number of soldiers in the army felt similarly and remained loyal to McClellan. Brigadier General John Gibbon was one such soldier, going so far as to state that, in removing McClellan, "The Government has gone mad."[47] Nevertheless, many soldiers (and quite possibly some of the same soldiers) expressed great confidence in Burnside's ability. Burnside delivered his first address to the Army of the Potomac on 9 November, the day he officially assumed command. In it he stated:

> Patriotism and the exercise of my every energy in the direction of this army, aided by the full and hearty cooperation of its officers and men, will, I hope, under the blessing of God, ensure its success. Having been a sharer of the privations and a witness of the bravery of the old Army of the Potomac in the Maryland campaign, and fully identified with them in their feeling of respect and esteem for General McClellan, entertained through a long and most friendly association with him, I feel that it is not as a stranger that I assume their command…With diffidence for myself, but with a proud confidence in the unswerving loyalty and determination of the gallant army now entrusted to my care, I accept its control with the steadfast assurance that the just cause must prevail.[48]

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[46] McClellan to the "Officers and Soldiers of the Army of the Potomac," 7 November 1862, RG 94, Ambrose E. Burnside Papers, Box 3, Folder 4, NA. The date indicates that McClellan either penned this address immediately upon being notified of his removal from command, or backdated it.

[47] Gibbon quoted in Rable, *Fredericksburg! Fredericksburg!*, 45. For the wide range of emotions related to McClellan's removal, see pages 44-48.

[48] General Orders No. 1, 9 November 1862, Daniel Reed Larned Papers, Vol 3: Correspondence, LOC.

On that very day, Burnside submitted a plan of campaign to the War Department.[49] The Army of the Potomac, now his army, would soon begin to move, and soldiers, politicians, the press, and citizens alike could not help but express confidence in the new commander.

Those soldiers who knew Burnside best, like Larned, voiced the highest praise. When Burnside called his staff together to thank them for their service and tell them that he was still as approachable as ever, Larned came away deeply impressed. As he wrote to his brother-in-law, "Our general behaves like a hero, and every one of his staff admire him more than ever…There was not one [at the meeting] who would not gladly have told him how much they loved him." But Larned also stated that the changing of commanders "increases my hopes of a rigorous & speedy termination of the war."[50] Meanwhile, one of the commanders of Burnside's naval vessels during the North Carolina expedition penned a letter to congratulate the general and remarked that "I have been anxious to see you placed in [command] ever since we parted at New Bern." And from Rhode Island, Father Thomas Quinn, who was a chaplain during the expedition, did his best to convince Burnside that "anyone who has served with you, no matter in what capacity, must necessarily rejoice at your elevation."[51] While it is not surprising

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[49] Burnside to War Department, 9 November 1862, RG 94, Ambrose E. Burnside Papers, Box 3, Folder 4, NA.

[50] Larned to Brother-in-law Henry, 13 November 1862, and Larned to Mary Burnside, 9 November 1862, both in Daniel Reed Larned Papers, Vol. 3: Correspondence, LOC.

[51] S.F. Hazard to Burnside and Thomas Quinn to Burnside, both 12 November 1862, RG 94, Ambrose E. Burnside Papers, Box 3, Folder 4, NA.

that those who had been under Burnside's command were happy to see him elevated, there were many soldiers who had no connection to the general who evinced the same sentiment.

Several soldiers in the 2nd Connecticut Heavy Artillery are examples of this, and both based their beliefs in Burnside on his North Carolina victories. One private wrote home that all were satisfied with the new general and claimed "[t]here is more confidence felt in the army now than there was a month ago," due to the opinion that "for what old 'Burny' undertakes to do, if let alone, he is pretty sure to accomplish." Another commented that Burnside "tries more energetic than McClellan," and expressed his conviction that Burnside would win in Virginia just as he had won in North Carolina.[52] Around the same time, an officer in Hooker's First Corps claimed that the 19th Indiana was very pleased with Burnside's promotion, despite the fact that Burnside's primary rival for the command was Hooker himself. Other Indiana soldiers even wrote to their hometown newspapers expressing "great confidence in Gen. Burnside."[53] Even Herman Haupt, the Union's railroad general, asserted, "I like Burnside very well…I feel more encouraged than I have for a long time."[54] Loyalty to

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[52] Lewis Bissell to Father, 13 November and 30 November 1862, in Mark Olcott and David Lear, eds., *The Civil War Letters of Lewis Bissell* (Washington, D.C.: The Field School Education Foundation Policy, 1981), 29-32, 49-50; Charles Adams Jr. letter, 16 November 1862, in Adams's Family Papers, Box 1, Subseries 5, Folder 5, Helga J. Ingraham Memorial Library, Litchfield Historical Society, Litchfield, Connecticut (LHS).

[53] Marvel, *Burnside*, 162; "From the 14th [Indiana] Regiment," *Vincennes Gazette*, 22 November 1862.

[54] Haupt quoted in Marvel, "The Making of a Myth: Ambrose E. Burnside and the Union High Command at Fredericksburg," in Gallagher, ed., *The Fredericksburg Campaign*, 2.

McClellan never fully died away among those in the Army of the Potomac, but as a war correspondent for the *New York Herald* summed up, while the army "lose McClellan with regret, they receive Burnside with satisfaction. He succeeds to their popularity as no other man could."[55]

Members of Lincoln's administration were more cautious in their optimism. Chase had preferred Hooker for the command, largely because Hooker had pandered to Radical Republicans in trying to attain the position. But he still believed that Burnside "has some excellent qualities and I hope too he may possess all that he needs for his trying post." Welles too felt that Burnside was an acceptable choice, but worried that he might never become a great general. Nevertheless, he hoped that Burnside's patriotism and character would be enough to improve the Union's fortunes.[56] Politicians outside of the Administration, however, were less restrained. Governors Sprague and Morton both wrote directly to Burnside to tender their congratulations. Morton applauded Burnside's patriotism and "professional efficiency," and assured him of "my high appreciation of your ability as a leader and entire confidence in your success in the execution of the important task committed to your hands." Sprague, for his part, stated his belief that Burnside's "well known energy, skill, and patriotism" would "secure confidence to a

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[55] "The Army of the Potomac: Our Warrenton Correspondence," *New York Herald*, 14 November 1862.

[56] Chase to General Benjamin F. Butler, 14 November 1862, in Niven, ed., *Salmon P. Chase Papers, Vol. 3*, 319; Entry for 3 December 1862, in Welles, ed., *Diary of Gideon Welles, Vol. 1*, 182. Welles's opinion may have been influenced by Burnside's actions during his first month in command, but the 3 December diary entry was Welles's first since the command had changed.

disheartened people, and lead them to expect active operations & the speedy success of our brave army in suppression of treason & rebellion."[57]

Indeed, feelings of growing confidence were visible among the war-weary Northern public. A resident of New York sent Burnside a letter that stated, in no uncertain terms, that the news of Burnside's acceptance of the command had "revive[d] the drooping spirits of those whose hearts are devoted to the triumph of our arms." The writer felt confident in asserting, "I know that I express the general sentiment of the loyal people of the North, when I say that your ascension to your present high position, gave immediate confidence and hope to every friend of the National cause."[58] Letters also arrived from other states, such as Pennsylvania, one of which included a poem extolling Burnside's virtues, and concluding with the lines "For Liberty will he stand/And fight the Rebels on sea & land/His motto shall ever be/Union, Union and Liberty." This evidence points strongly to the fact that many citizens looked to Burnside with the hope that he would be the man to end this terrible war. As the sister of one of the soldiers in the Army of the Potomac explained, "To you under God we now look as our leader…O sir cannot this be brought to a close now?"[59]

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[57] Morton to Burnside, 22 November 1862, RG 94, Ambrose E. Burnside Papers, Box 3, Folder 5, NA; Sprague telegraph to Burnside, 10 November 1862, RG 94, Ambrose E. Burnside Papers, Box 3, Folder 4, NA. Sprague went on to state, "Rhode Island regards your appointment with unfeigned pride and pleasure."

[58] Resident of New York to Burnside, 20 November 1862, RG 94, Ambrose E. Burnside Papers, Box 3, Folder 5, NA.

[59] Resident of Schuylkill Haven, Pennsylvania, to Burnside, 16 November 1862, RG 94, Ambrose E. Burnside Papers, Box 3, Folder 5, NA; "A Sister of one of your Soldiers" to Burnside, 10 November 1862, RG 94, Ambrose E. Burnside Papers, Box 3, Folder 4, NA. The last lines of this letter were "God Bless General Burnside." Rable is one of the few historians who has acknowledged the general confidence felt

The high hopes of Northern citizens reflected the unrestrained optimism of the Northern press. One of the *New York Tribune*'s correspondents with the Army of the Potomac was elated that that army was now led "by a favorite General, of energy, daring, and promptness in following up victories." In its own article covering McClellan's removal from command, the *New York Times* pointed out to its readers that Burnside "has shown thus far during the war great military ability."[60] *Harper's Weekly* too pointed to Burnside's "brilliant triumphs" at Roanoke, Newbern, and Fort Macon to justify its belief that Burnside united "exalted character" and "the greatest military skill" with "dash, energy, and the prestige of success." Therefore, the paper viewed Burnside's appointment upon McClellan's removal as simply "a matter of course," as well as a "source of unmixed satisfaction." *Harper's* even insisted to its readers that Burnside's appearance and temperament made him "the very beau-ideal of a soldier."[61]

If the *Times* and *Harper's Weekly* were happy with the change in commanders, *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* was overjoyed. The paper boldly announced to its readers that "Gen. Ambrose Burnside, the victor of Roanoke and Newbern, the soldier 'sans peur et sans reproche' ["without fear and without reproach"], is commander of the

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in Burnside on his promotion to command of the Army of the Potomac. As he states, "In November 1862, hardly anyone had anything bad to say about the general, at least publicly." See Rable, *Fredericksburg! Fredericksburg!*, 54.

[60] "A Change of Base and of Commanders – The Future," *New York Tribune*, 12 November 1862; "The Removal of General McClellan," *New York Times,* 10 November 1862.

[61] "The Removal of General McClellan," *Harper's Weekly*, 22 November 1862; "General Burnside," *Harper's Weekly,* 29 November 1862. The latter article carried alongside it a biography of Burnside and a nearly full-page photograph of him taken by Matthew Brady.

Army of the Potomac." The paper acknowledged the difficulties Burnside faced, which it largely blamed on McClellan for wasting the autumn months. Now, Burnside would have to conduct a winter campaign, "[I]n which he must cross half a state, through the sodden soil of which McClellan never succeeded in penetrating so far as to be out of sight of the dome of the Capitol…[and] carry the flag of his country victoriously over fields whence it lately recoiled in dishonor." Nevertheless the paper believed firmly, "Of one thing the nation may be sure – our army will not be permitted to waste away in inaction."[62]

Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper could not resist taking parting shots at McClellan, whom it seemed to blame almost entirely for the Union's unhappy state of affairs. It even printed an epigram that read: "When driven back, from place to place/ 'Twas wise in Mac, to change his base," a scathing reference to McClellan's retreat down the Virginia Peninsula in the summer of 1862. But the paper did more than disparage McClellan; it encouraged its readers to take hope, now that "a soldier is at last (and Heaven grant it may not be too late!) at the head of the Army of the Potomac."[63] Unsurprisingly, William Lloyd Garrison's abolitionist newspaper, *The Liberator,*

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[62] "The New Commander," *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, 22 November 1862. This article also remarked on Burnside's character by pointing out that "[t]wice his present position has been offered to him, and twice with the modesty of true greatness he has declined it."

[63] *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, 29 November 1862, and "Lessons of the Elections," *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, 22 November 1862. For the paper's extremely harsh view of McClellan, see also "Removal of General McClellan," 22 November 1862, which categorically listed all of McClellan's failures and referred to him as "the incubus which has so long weighed down the Army of the Potomac."

evinced similar sentiments. The paper contended that with the removal of McClellan and the elevation of Burnside, "A nightmare has passed from the Northern breast." And like *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, *The Liberator* put Burnside up as a man of action, as opposed to McClellan, whose strategy "has turned out to be like that of the frog in the well – jumping up two feet, and falling back three."[64]

Bennett's *New York Herald*, which supported McClellan to the end, was naturally upset that he had been removed from command. The *Herald* believed that McClellan "has fallen a victim to the machinations of the radical abolition faction" because of his "persistent refusal to make the cause of the Union secondary to the cause of negro emancipation," and continued to blame the Administration for his supposed military failures. Yet it still believed that "[t]he promotion of General Burnside may prove to be a step in the right direction," due to the fact that the general "has shown himself, in every position in which he has been tried, a courageous, energetic, and able officer. His operations in North Carolina, emblazoned with the victories of Roanoke Island, Newbern, and Fort Macon, have proved that his qualifications to conduct the invasion of a difficult, hostile country are of a high order."[65] The Democratic *Herald*,

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[64] "Removal of Gen. McClellan," *The Liberator*, 14 November 1862.

[65] "The Removal of General McClellan – The Demands of the Radicals and the Position of the Administration," *New York Herald*, 10 November 1862; "General McClellan's Removal – The Administration and the War," *New York Herald*, 11 November 1862. Like *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, the *Herald* also reflected positively on Burnside's character by asserting that "no general has assumed command of an army with more disinterestedness or greater absence of motives other than those of serving his country." See "The Army of the Potomac: Our Warrenton Correspondence," *New York Herald*, 14 November 1862.

like the Republican *Times* and the non-partisan *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* and *Harper's Weekly*, invoked memories of Burnside's successful expedition to relay the message to its readers that Burnside was the right choice for the command of the Army of the Potomac. But the *Herald* also proved prophetic when it looked to the future. As the paper recognized, "General McClellan having been suspended on the charge of being too slow, General Burnside will understand that his policy is immediate action."[66]

Despite the high hopes of the army, politicians, the people, and the press, Burnside's tenure in command would not last three months. He quickly moved the army to Falmouth, with the intention of crossing the Rappahannock River at Fredericksburg before Lee could get his army into position. Burnside arrived at Fredericksburg on 19 November, but the pontoon trains that his plan called for were delayed for over a week. Burnside refused to cross without them, and by the time they reached his army, Lee had concentrated General James Longstreet's and General Thomas Jackson's corps and taken a commanding position on the heights on the opposite bank of the river. As Burnside explained to Halleck, "Had the pontoon bridge arrived even on the 19th or 20th the Army could have crossed with trifling opposition – but now the opposite side of the river is occupied by a large rebel force…I cannot make the promise of probable success with the faith that I did when I supposed that all the parts of the plan would be carried out."[67] Having been put in command in part as a result of McClellan's constant foot-

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[66] "General McClellan's Removal – The Administration and the War," *New York Herald*, 11 November 1862.

[67] For Burnside's initial plan and the failure of the pontoon bridges to reach the army in a timely manner, see Burnside to War Department, 9 November 1862, RG 94, Ambrose E. Burnside Papers, Box 3, Folder

dragging, Burnside felt that he had to attack regardless. On 11 December, in the words of Nicolay, Burnside "let slip his dogs of war" at Fredericksburg, thus sparking a battle which was to last three days.[68]

Meanwhile, the Northern press' opinion of Burnside and his initial movements was almost wholly positive. *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* admitted that Burnside had encountered difficulties, but thought they were "not greater than those overcame by persistence and energy in his celebrated expedition to Roanoke and Newbern."[69] The *New York Times* believed that "[n]o general ever had a firmer hold of his men; few armies ever had greater devotion to their leader," and agreed with Burnside's military movements, claiming that "the proper route to Richmond [is] by Fredericksburg."[70] And from the Army of the Potomac, a *New York Tribune* correspondent claimed that Burnside had "inspired the army to a marvelous extent" by his swift movements. As the correspondent made clear, "[T]he old formula of 'All quiet along the lines' is among the things that were."[71]

4, NA and Burnside to Halleck, 22 November 1862, RG 94, Ambrose E. Burnside Papers, Box 3, Folder 5, NA; See also Marvel, *Burnside*, 165-167 and Williams, *Lincoln and His Generals*, 194-199. The best account of the beginning of the campaign, however, is Rable, *Fredericksburg! Fredericksburg!*, particularly Chapters 3-5, pages 42-99. As Rable explains, "[N]obody in Washington appeared to grasp the importance of the pontoons," 87.

[68] Nicolay to Therena Bates, 11 December 1862, in Michael Burlingame, ed., *With Lincoln in the White House: Letters, Memoranda, and other Writings of John G. Nicolay, 1860-1865* (Edwardsville, Ill.: Southern Illinois University Press, 2000), 95.

[69] "The Situation," *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, 6 December 1862.

[70] "General Burnside," *New York Times*, 22 November 1862.

[71] "A New Spirit in the Army," *New York Tribune*, 21 November 1862.

Even though the *New York Herald* had consistently defended McClellan's movements, it concurred with the view of the other papers, asserting, "In every point of view the present movements for Richmond are immeasurably stronger and better organized than those of last spring." Furthermore, the *Herald*'s special correspondent with the Army of the Potomac relayed that he found "on every side the greatest willingness to push on, and the most unbounded confidence in the…new commander." As Burnside provided more and more evidence that he was a "live" general, the correspondent became more and more convinced that "[t]he prospect of an early and crushing defeat of the rebels was never so good as now." He finished by stating that he hoped he would soon be writing back to the *Herald* from Richmond.[72]

Despite all of this optimism, by all accounts the Battle of Fredericksburg, fought on 11-13 December, was a disaster for the Army of the Potomac. Before the attack took place, a Confederate cavalry officer asserted his belief that "it is a mere question of how many dead [Burnside] will leave for us to bury."[73] In fact, Burnside would leave over 1,200 Union soldiers dead on the field. All told, the army suffered around 12,600 casualties to the Confederacy's 5,300 in attempting to dislodge Lee's forces from perhaps the strongest position they ever held. Burnside's effort to use Franklin's Grand Division to turn the right of Lee's line failed, as did futile Union charges up Marye's

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[72] "The Army of the Potomac," *New York Herald*, 19 November 1862; "News from Burnside's Army," *New York Herald*, 21, 22, and 23 November 1862. For additional evidence that public confidence in Burnside remained high, see Chapter 9: "Preparations," in Rable, *Fredericksburg! Fredericksburg!*, 143-155.

[73] Confederate officer quoted in Rable, *Fredericksburg! Fredericksburg!*, 147.

Heights.[74] On 14 December, Burnside's corps commanders persuaded him against leading a final charge up the heights in person, and, on 15 December, choking back tears, the general ordered the Army of the Potomac to retreat back across the Rappahannock.[75]

Both Lincoln and the Northern public were greatly disheartened by Burnside's defeat. In a rare moment of despair on 18 December, Lincoln confided to a friend, "We are now on the brink of destruction. It appears to me the almighty is against us, and I can hardly see a ray of hope."[76] Meanwhile, journalist Brooks described how in Washington, there were "signs of woe on every hand," and lamented that "the great heart of the nation was oppressed with discouragement and anxiety."[77] Northern newspapers produced a string of panicked editorials; as *Harper's Weekly* pronounced, "We are indulging in no hyperbole when we say that these events are rapidly filling the heart of the loyal North with sickness, disgust, and despair." This grew so bad that the War Department

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[74] Marvel is one of the few historians who, while not absolving Burnside of blame, attempts to defend his conduct of the battle and lay blame on Franklin; see Marvel, *Burnside*, 174-200, and Marvel, "The Making of a Myth: Ambrose E. Burnside and the Union High Command at Fredericksburg," in Gallagher, ed., *The Fredericksburg Campaign*, 1-25. Rable too criticizes Franklin for "hopelessly bungl[ing] his assignment," and states that "Franklin's timidity…foiled Burnside's plans," but heavily censures Burnside for failing to adjust to the realities of the situation and turning "persistence into sheer obstinacy" in throwing forces against Marye's Heights. See Rable, *Fredericksburg! Fredericksburg!*, 244, 254. Though both authors raise salient points about the failings of Franklin on the Union left, an analysis of the Battle of Fredericksburg is beyond the scope of this study. Readers wishing to learn more about the battle should consult Gallagher's edited volume or Rable's masterful work, which is the most complete account of Fredericksburg that exists to date.

[75] Rable, *Fredericksburg! Fredericksburg!*, 272-282.

[76] Lincoln quoted in Rable, *Fredericksburg! Fredericksburg!*, 331.

[77] Brooks, *Washington in Lincoln's Time*, 48.

attempted to prevent newspaper correspondents with the army from telegraphing any further details of the battle. Many of the papers, however, pointed the finger not at Burnside but at Lincoln, Stanton, and Halleck, who they believed had forced Burnside into the attack. When Burnside learned of this, he immediately decided to, in his words, "[P]ut a stop to that."[78] As he reportedly stated to a fellow officer, "I understand perfectly well that when a General meets with disaster, he alone is responsible; and I will not attempt to shift that responsibility upon anyone else."[79]

In an 18 December meeting with the Committee on the Conduct of the War, Burnside indeed took full blame for the defeat; he did the same in a letter to Halleck in which he stated:

> To the brave officers and soldiers who accomplished the feat of thus re-crossing [the Rappahannock] in the face of the enemy I owe everything. For the failure in the attack I am responsible…The fact that I decided to move from Warrenton on to this line, rather against the opinion of the President, Secretary of War, and yourself, and that you left the whole movement in my hands, without giving me orders, makes me responsible.[80]

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[78] For instance, see "The Reverse at Fredericksburg," *Harper's Weekly*, 27 December 1862, and "News from the Rappahannock," *New York Herald*, 19 December 1862. In the latter article, one of the *Herald*'s correspondents with the Army of the Potomac stated, "Nobody hereabout believes that General Burnside made the movement across the Rappahannock on his own responsibility and judgment." See also "The Situation," *New York Herald*, 17 December 1862, which stated, "It is but just, perhaps, to General Burnside to say that the advance movement upon Fredericksburg was not undertaken in accordance with his own judgment, but was peremptorily ordered by the military authorities in Washington, who, of course, are alone responsible for the result."; Rable, *Fredericksburg! Fredericksburg!*, 325, 351.

[79] *New York Tribune*, 24 December 1862. The quote was relayed by the *Tribune*'s correspondent with the Army of the Potomac, who allegedly overheard the conversation.

[80] Burnside to Halleck, 17 December 1862, Ambrose E. Burnside Collection, Box 1, Folder 3, RIHS; "The Army of the Potomac," *New York Herald*, 23 December 1862. The *Herald* termed this letter "very remarkable, very curious, very generous, and very naïve."; See also Rable, *Fredericksburg! Fredericksburg!*, 349-352, and Greene, "Morale, Maneuver, and Mud," in Gallagher, ed., *The Fredericksburg Campaign*, 173.

Burnside contrived the letter after a 20 December meeting with Lincoln, in which Lincoln expressed great thanks that the general was willing to take some of the responsibility from the President's shoulders. Burnside backdated the letter 17 December and Lincoln and Stanton had it sent to the Associated Press; it was thereafter reprinted in several Northern newspapers, including the *New York Times, New York Tribune,* and *New York Herald.*[81] The *Herald* in particular devoted a great deal of attention to the letter, complimenting Burnside for "accepting the whole responsibility" for the defeat, but also stating that the letter "evidences the generosity of the writer's nature with more force than it does his judgment as a military commander."[82]

Unfortunately, the remainder of Burnside's stay at the head of the Army of the Potomac did not go much better. While several generals, including Hooker, attempted to increase the now growing discontent with Burnside in Washington, Burnside worked hard on plans for another campaign. As he explained to his old assistant adjutant general from the North Carolina expedition, "Not withstanding my late reverse I hope by God's help to, yet, do something for our noble cause." His efforts to do so, however, culminated in the disastrous "Mud March" of 20-23 January 1863, in which abysmal

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[81] *New York Times*, 23 December 1862; "From General Burnside's Army – Letter from Major-Gen. Burnside," *New York Tribune*, 23 December 1862; "General Burnside's Report on the Fredericksburg Disaster," *New York Herald*, 23 December 1862; Rable, *Fredericksburg! Fredericksburg!*, 351-352, 559 n. 61.

[82] "The Situation," *New York Herald*, 23 December 1862. Likewise, the *New York Tribune* opined that "[s]uch a man may not be a Napoleon; but he is at least great in his moral courage and his integrity." See *New York Tribune*, 24 December 1862.

weather mired the Army of the Potomac in mud one soldier referred to as "ass deep," and eventually forced the army to return to camp.[83] By this point, many soldiers had little faith left in Burnside, though some believed his failure was not totally of his own making. As one in the 100th Pennsylvania put it, "We think Burnside did all he could do… [He] appeared much like Washington to the troops that knew him best." But on 25 January, Lincoln relieved Burnside of command and put Hooker in his place.[84] As Larned wrote, "Thus endeth the drama of 'Burnside and the Army of the Potomac.'"[85]

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[83] Hooker traveled to Washington in early January, where he made known to anyone who would listen his lack of faith in Burnside and his own suitability for the command. Meanwhile, Franklin, according to First Corps Artillery Chief Charles S. Wainwright, "[T]alked so much and so loudly…that he has completely demoralized his whole command." For a thorough analysis of the intrigues against Burnside, the worsening state of morale in the Army of the Potomac, and the Mud March, see Rable, *Fredericksburg! Fredericksburg!*, Chapters 23-24, pages 389-426; Burnside to Lewis C. Richmond, 12 January 1863, Box 2, Folder 5, RIHS.

[84] Soldier quoted in Greene, "Morale, Maneuver, and Mud," in Gallagher, ed., *The Fredericksburg Campaign*, 213. Greene's chapter is a perceptive analysis both of the state of the Army of the Potomac after Fredericksburg, and of various generals' intrigues to get Lincoln to remove Burnside from command. See also Rable, *Fredericksburg! Fredericksburg!*, 419-422.

[85] Larned to Mrs. Burnside, 28 January 1863, Daniel Reed Larned Papers, Vol 3: Correspondence, LOC.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION: "THE HADES OF LOST REPUTATIONS"

While the Battle of Fredericksburg was raging, Welles wrote in his diary that "Burnside is on trial."[86] Burnside certainly has been on trial among historians, as has Lincoln for appointing him. But so far the testimony has been mostly one-sided. Historians such as Catton, Castel, and Hassler have excoriated Lincoln for giving command of the Army of the Potomac to a general they believe had little or no military ability. This opinion is predicated largely on the disastrous results of Fredericksburg, and to a certain extent on a flawed understanding of Burnside's actions at the Battle of Antietam. In fact, the *Richmond Daily Dispatch*, a popular Confederate newspaper, proved remarkably prescient when it asserted in late November 1862 that, should Burnside be defeated at Fredericksburg, he would "enter the Hades of lost reputations."[87] Indeed, the large majority of existing historiography that pertains to Burnside receiving command of the Army of the Potomac indicates that this is precisely what has happened.

In fact, this backwards reading of history began almost before the blood had frozen on the fields of Fredericksburg. A week after Burnside's defeat, the *New York Herald* lashed out against Lincoln, Stanton, and Halleck for appointing Burnside to the command of the Army of the Potomac. Although the *Herald* admitted that Burnside had

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[86] Entry for 14 December 1862, in Edgar T. Welles, ed., *The Diary of Gideon Welles, Vol. 1: 1861-1864* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1911), 192.

[87] *Richmond Daily Dispatch*, 19 November 1862, quoted in George C. Rable, *Fredericksburg! Fredericksburg!* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 79.

been successful at Roanoke, New Bern, and Beaufort, it contended that "the highest number of men under his command was 20,000 and it does not follow that he would be equally fortunate with an army numbering 50,000 or 75,000 men, much less that he would be equal to the task of commanding so large an army as that which he hurled against the enemy entrenchments at Fredericksburg." Though Burnside took the blame for the defeat, the *Herald* believed that this "does not exonerate from responsibility to the people those who appointed General Burnside," because "they had no proof that he was capable of leading in battle an army of 150,000 men."[88]

In actuality, Lincoln, Stanton, and Halleck had no proof that any Union general (including McClellan) was capable of successfully leading so large an army, and so they had to go with the best choice available. But the *Herald* was further deceitful in its pretended ignorance of the fact that it had, prior to the battle, fully believed that the best choice was Burnside. On 13 November, the paper had stated unequivocally that Burnside's "admirably managed and eminently successful campaign in North Carolina furnishes many evidences of his good qualities as a military leader…We are entirely satisfied…that General Burnside is the best selection that could have been made to fill the place of General McClellan." The *Herald* went so far as to conclude that "[n]ever did the Union cause look more promising nor that of the rebellion more hopeless."[89] Yet a month later, after Burnside had been defeated, there was no talk of North Carolina or of

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[88] "General Burnside's Report on the Fredericksburg Disaster," *New York Herald*, 23 December 1862.

[89] "General Burnside and the New Campaign in Virginia," *New York Herald*, 13 November 1862.

Burnside's attributes or accomplishments; instead, there was merely a stinging rebuke of those who elevated a general who, supposedly, lacked the qualifications to command.

Historians have primarily echoed the *Herald*'s post-Fredericksburg, as opposed to pre-Fredericksburg, assessment of Burnside. These assertions of Burnside's unfitness for command by Catton, Hassler, Castel, and others, however, wholly ignore both Burnside's earlier successes in North Carolina, and the Northern public's, the army's, the Administration's, and, perhaps most importantly, the press's reaction to them. After Burnside's victories in North Carolina, many Union soldiers, Northern citizens, the Northern press, and even members of Lincoln's cabinet became firmly convinced that Burnside was the right man to lead the Army of the Potomac. Lincoln could not afford to ignore these varied sentiments, most of all that which emanated from the press and did so much to shape public expectations of the war effort. As his personal secretary John Hay explained, "There has never been an age so completely enthralled by newspapers as this. They have begun to be taken as the absolute reflex of the will of the people and the earnest thought of a nation."[90]

By November 1862, the press (and therefore, in Lincoln's mind, the public), thought Burnside should be the next commander of the Army of the Potomac. Thus, once the ultimate decision was made to remove McClellan, Burnside was undoubtedly the logical choice for command, given both his popularity and his record of battlefield

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[90] Hay quoted in Harold Holzer, *Lincoln and the Power of the Press* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2014), 486.

success. Indeed, after he had been removed from the command in late January 1863, the *New York Times* explained just what the country had seen in the general: "He had a reputation for activity, courage, skill, hearty devotion to the cause, and honest greatness, excelled by no man in the army. Above all, he had the prestige of success."[91]

Linking Burnside's campaign in North Carolina to the Northern reaction to both the victories and the general himself demonstrates exactly why Lincoln elevated Burnside. Historians who have ignored these victories or given them only passing attention misrepresent the factors Lincoln took into account when he made this decision. Like all wartime presidents, Lincoln weighed many influences, ranging from his own military judgment to public sentiment. To gloss over these is to unfairly judge from hindsight the difficult and all important job of Commander in Chief. In the case of Burnside, Lincoln's own estimation of the general's capabilities actually mirrored what Northern newspapers and citizens were saying about him. Lincoln, the Northern public, and even the Confederacy (as evidenced by the widespread fear in North Carolina and Virginia and Davis's first use of martial law) recognized Burnside's string of victories as highly significant. In light of this, many Northerners thought Burnside the best hope to save the Union. To downplay or ignore this is to distort the realities under which wartime presidents are forced to operate.

The overall point is not that Burnside was the best Union general, or even that he was a better general than McClellan. It is, rather, that if one reads Lincoln's decision to

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[91] "The Change of Commanders," *New York Times*, 27 January 1863.

appoint Burnside to the command in the context of what happened prior to November 1862, and not in the context of what happened thereafter, Burnside was the natural choice. The fact that Burnside ultimately failed to win a victory at the head of the Army of the Potomac does not change this fact. Events would prove that Burnside did not have the ability to defeat Lee on the battlefield or to adroitly play politics with those in Washington who could unmake a general as fast as they elevated him. But as Burnside observed upon being removed from command, the Administration and the War Department would "find out before many days that it is not every man who can command an army of one hundred and fifty thousand men."[92] Hooker's own subsequent failings at the Battle of Chancellorsville provided a bloody illustration of this truth. As the noted military historian Carl von Clausewitz wrote, "In war, as in life generally, all parts of a whole are interconnected and thus the effects produced…must influence all subsequent military operations. Their possible influence on events has to be established and allowed for."[93] It is time that historians recognize the influence that Burnside's victories in North Carolina, and the public attention devoted to those accomplishments and to the general himself, had on his ascension to the command of the Army of the Potomac

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[92] Burnside to Colonel of the 7th Rhode Island, quoted in Rable, *Fredericksburg! Fredericksburg!,* 423.

[93] Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), 158-159.

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