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National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form

This form is used for documenting multiple property groups relating to one or several historic contexts. See instructions in How to Complete the Multiple Property Documentation Form (National Register Bulletin 16B). Complete each item by entering the requested information. For additional space, use continuation sheets (Form 10-900-a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer to complete all items.

New Submission Amended Submission

A. Name of Multiple Property Listing

EASTERN NORTH CAROLINA CIVIL WAR SHIPWRECKS, 1861-1865

B. Associated Historic Contexts

(Name each associated historic context, identifying theme, geographical area, and chronological period for each.)

The Civil War in North Carolina Sound Country, 1861-1865

C. Form Prepared by

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organization North Carolina Office of State Archaeology date 31 August 2017

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D. Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this documentation form meets the National Register documentation standards and sets forth requirements for the listing of related properties consistent with the National Register criteria. This submission meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60 and the Secretary of the Interior's Standards and Guidelines for Archeology and Historic Preservation. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature and title of certifying official Date

North Carolina Department of Natural and Cultural Resources

State or Federal agency and bureau

I hereby certify that this multiple property documentation form has been approved by the National Register as a basis for evaluating related properties for listing in the National Register.

Signature of the Keeper

Date

Table of Contents for Written Narrative

Provide the following information on continuation sheets. Cite the letter and the title before each section of the narrative. Assign page numbers according to the instructions for continuation sheets in How to Complete the Multiple Property Documentation Form (National Register Bulletin 16B). Fill in page numbers for each section in the space below.

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Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.).

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THE CIVIL WAR IN THE NORTH CAROLINA SOUND COUNTRY, 1861-1865

THE SETTING

North Carolina possesses in its rivers, estuaries, tidal marshes, great sounds, barrier islands, and the offshore Outer Banks one of the longest shorelines on the Atlantic coast of the United States. The dynamic and ever-changing Outer Banks formation, with its prominent capes--Hatteras, Lookout, and Fear--and their adjacent extensive shoals, creates a vast enclosed inland sea of seven connected sounds—Bogue, Core, Pamlico, Roanoke, Croatan, Albemarle, and Currituck. This watery region is the largest estuarine environment on the east coast of the United States, and the 2000-square-mile Pamlico River Estuary and Sound is for the east coast second only to Chesapeake Bay.¹ In addition, Albemarle Sound is the biggest brackish water sound in the country.² The great capes, the narrow sandy islands, and the fickle weather that spawns fierce northeasters and deadly hurricanes have combined to form the most treacherous stretch of coast in the country and indeed one of the most dangerous in the world. In his 1861 geological study of North Carolina, Edmund Ruffin wrote that the coast was “a terror to navigators, and is noted for the number of shipwrecks, and especially near Cape Hatteras.”³ The region today is aptly known as the Graveyard of the Atlantic.

For most people the Outer Banks' low dunes, dramatic capes and tall picturesque lighthouses epitomize the Carolina coast. Seen from above, the seemingly fragile blade-thin islands enclose Albemarle, Pamlico, and Core Sounds, which separate the barrier islands from the mainland by as much as forty miles. The Outer Banks in the mid-nineteenth century were pierced by four inlets—the historic Ocracoke and Beaufort Inlets and the newly opened Oregon and Hatteras Inlets, which were created by an 1846 hurricane. The inhabitants of these sandy strips waged a daily struggle for survival with the ever-encroaching sea. Yet the ocean provided in fish, other sea life, and wrecks to be plundered the means for the “bankers” to eke out a precarious existence clinging to the sands that were over time literally washing away beneath them. Isolation bred self-reliance, a spirit of independence, and strong character, while the watery world nurtured their skills in handling small boats. Each storm left the flotsam of newly sunken ships, including a diverse population of survivors from most of

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the nations of western Europe and western Africa, many of whom remained to settle there and leave descendants.

It was this unique combination of a dangerous outer coast, shallow sounds, winding creeks, and vast tidal marshes that honed the skills of small boat sailors and pilots without peer, and became a setting for privateering and blockade running. With some of the most complex navigable water on the globe and with port development stunted by a coast that was anchored by landmarks whose names, Lookout and Fear, evoked wariness and tragedy, there is little wonder that coastal North Carolina would be a setting for smuggling, piracy, blockade running, and naval conflict.

SCHOONERS AND STEAMBOATS ON THE SOUNDS

In the nineteenth century fishermen, schooner men, and steamboat captains peopled the workaday world of the broad sounds' small ports, coastal trade, and fishing. These men sailed craft peculiarly designed for the shallow and unforgiving waters and fashioned from local oak, juniper, and cypress in back yards and small boatyards across the region.

Regional ports on the sounds and their tributaries, including Elizabeth City, Edenton, Plymouth, Washington, Tarboro, New Bern, Kinston, and Beaufort, were connected to major ports on the Atlantic seaboard and the West Indies by schooners that sailed beyond the barrier islands. The coastal plain, a 21,000 square mile region stretching 100-150 miles inland, was the richest agricultural area in North Carolina. Rivers navigable into the interior fall line penetrated this region and connected it to its inland neighbors. Albemarle Sound was tied to the great Virginia port of Norfolk by the Dismal Swamp Canal, which had a terminus at Elizabeth City, head of navigation on the Pasquotank River. The parallel Albemarle and Chesapeake Canal, routed through Currituck Sound, provided a more direct route from Norfolk to the sounds and soon overshadowed the older canal. Other ports in the Albemarle region were Hertford on the Perquimans River, Winton on the Chowan River, and Plymouth on the Roanoke River. Commercial traffic by schooners and steamboats on the Pamlico-Tar River served Washington, Greenville, and Tarboro and on the Neuse River reached New Bern and Kinston.

The antebellum commerce of the rivers and sounds of eastern North Carolina was carried by an eclectic mix of indigenous wooden sailing vessels,

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usually schooner-rigged; wooden sailing vessels built elsewhere for similar environments; and wooden and iron-hulled steamboats, both side-wheel and screw-propelled. These craft plied the sounds and rivers with exports of bulk agricultural and forest products, returning to the river landings and small ports with imports of various manufactured household goods, staple goods, hardware, and tools. The agricultural plantation and small farm economy of eastern North Carolina was a dependent colonial economy that produced raw products of the field and forest and manufactured very little.

North Carolina-built centerboard schooners dominated the sailing vessels on the sounds. Three that survive as wrecks are the Scuppernong in Indiantown Creek off the North River, the Isabella Ellis in the Roanoke River, and the Black Warrior in the Pasquotank River at Elizabeth City. In the nineteenth century, schooner-rigged vessels dominated commercial traffic on the sounds as well as the coastal trade on the eastern seaboard to Norfolk, Baltimore, and New York and to the West Indies. The centerboard, which was ideal for the shallow waters of the sounds, was introduced to the region as early as 1817. The best documented of the above vessels, the two-masted Scuppernong, was built in Elizabeth City in 1853 for service on the Dismal Swamp Canal and in Albemarle Sound. It called at the small ports on the sound, made voyages to Norfolk through the canal, and carried a cargo of shingles to New York. The Roanoke River valley was one of the richest agricultural regions of the state, producing tobacco, corn, wheat, and fish. The great cypress and juniper forests of the Dismal Swamp produced timber, staves, and shingles. The original canal, constructed in the 1790s, was deepened in 1828 for sailing craft. In 1859 the Albemarle and Chesapeake Canal, which debouched into Currituck Sound, gave the Carolina sounds another avenue to Norfolk.⁴ The three-masted Isabella Ellis, built in New Bern in 1858, carried commerce on the sounds, and the two-masted Black Warrior, an armed transport, was built as the M. C. Etheridge in Plymouth in 1859.

The first steamboat on the North Carolina sounds was the side-wheel Norfolk, which the New Bern Steam Boat Company ran weekly from New Bern to Elizabeth City in 1818. The Norfolk did not prove profitable, and not until the Dismal Swamp Canal was deepened did steamboats begin to appear in numbers on the sounds. In the 1830s there were boats running up to the falls of the Roanoke River, and steamboats connected the ports on the sounds--Elizabeth City, Edenton, Plymouth, Washington, New Bern, and Beaufort. Service continued to expand until the outbreak of the Civil War.⁵

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Among the known shipwrecks on the sounds and rivers are examples of antebellum steamboats that became common in the 1850s. Near Tarboro on the Tar River are the remains of the Col. Hill, a military transport during the Civil War. In Croatan Sound near Mann's Harbor is the wreck of the Curlew, a Confederate gunboat sunk at the Battle of Roanoke Island. The Col. Hill, a wooden side-wheel 100 feet long, was built in Baltimore in 1846. Originally named the Oregon, it was the first vessel to sail through the newly formed inlet between Bodie and Hatteras Islands in 1848, which appropriately is known today as Oregon Inlet. The Oregon was active on the Pamlico and Tar Rivers with regular runs from Washington to Tarboro as well as voyages across the sound.⁶ The side-wheel, iron-hulled Curlew was built in Wilmington, Delaware in 1856. It was owned by the Albemarle Steamboat Company, which was based in Edenton and operated passenger and freight boats on the Albemarle Sound between the ports of Edenton, Hertford, Elizabeth City, and Nags Head. The Curlew was a prime carrier of vacationers to the beach at Nags Head, and later sailed on the Roanoke, Chowan, and Blackwater Rivers.⁷

The Neuse, Pamlico, Tar, and Roanoke Rivers transported enormous quantities of silt into the sounds where it was trapped by the offshore islands, creating the meandering and constantly changing channels of these shallow inland seas. By the mid-nineteenth century a network of navigation aids included lighthouses on the Outer Banks and on the sounds both lightships and screw pile lighthouses. Two antebellum lighthouses are still active today—Ocracoke (1823) and Cape Lookout (1859). A Roanoke River shipwreck is one of the early Pamlico Sound lightships—probably Long Shoals, built in New Bern in 1825. All of the screwpile lighthouses were destroyed during the war or were removed in modern times.⁸

Beaufort, with its inlet strategically located near the meeting of Core and Bogue Sounds, was the only Sound Country port with a direct connection to the sea. In 1860 the Atlantic and North Carolina Railroad reached Beaufort from Goldsboro, giving the port an interior link for the first time. The other sound and river ports could only be reached by ocean-going traffic through the three Outer Banks inlets—Oregon, Hatteras, and Ocracoke. From the inlets over sixty miles of the treacherous waters of Pamlico Sound had to be sailed before a schooner could drop anchor at the wharves of New Bern or Washington; yet these coastal voyages to northern ports and the West Indies were routine.

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NORTH CAROLINA SECEDES FROM THE UNION

The sectional issues and the slavery controversy, which had threatened the unity of the nation and had simmered for decades, finally exploded in the election of 1860 when the splintering of the Democratic Party paved the way for the election of Republican Abraham Lincoln. Although Lincoln advocated a moderate policy of gradual emancipation with compensation, he was unacceptable to the South, and his election triggered the promised secession of South Carolina on 20 December. The nation teetered toward disintegration when in January 1861 six more Southern states withdrew and met in February in Montgomery, Alabama, to form a new nation, the Confederate States of America.

North Carolina's secession was not a foregone conclusion. Located in the upper South, "The Old North State," according to historian Hugh T. Lefler, was "less extremely Southern" in its society and economy with fewer wealthy planters, more small farmers, and a stronger anti-slavery sentiment than neighboring states.⁹ There was considerable Union sympathy in the western mountain region where slavery barely existed, in the mid-state Piedmont where a sizable Quaker community had opposed slavery for generations, and in the port towns and fishing villages of the Sound Country which were tied to the North Atlantic maritime community and had little in common with the coastal plain planter autocracy. Public opinion changed drastically after the opening of hostilities at Fort Sumter in Charleston, South Carolina, on April 12-13. While many North Carolinians were reluctant to fight the United States, there were few who were willing to fight their brothers and sisters of the South.

South Carolina's secession was considered precipitous to most North Carolinians. Governor John W. Ellis, "an ardent secessionist,"¹⁰ realized that the state's citizenry was deeply divided and chose a moderate stance of "wait and see." When hotheaded militia seized Forts Johnston and Caswell on the Cape Fear River, the governor ordered them returned to Federal oversight. Conceding the possibility of confrontation, Governor Ellis prudently asked the legislature to fund 10,000 volunteer troops and to appropriate \$300,000 to purchase arms in the North. The General Assembly also authorized a statewide election on February 28, 1861, for delegates to a constitutional convention to consider the question of secession. North Carolina narrowly rejected the convention and secession.

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Six weeks later the guns at Fort Sumter and the April 17 secession of Virginia set North Carolina on a new course. Governor Ellis found that he had virtually the whole state behind him when he firmly refused President Lincoln's April 15 request for 75,000 volunteers to put down a rebellion. Ellis telegraphed Secretary of War Simon Cameron, "You can get no troops from North Carolina."¹¹ The same day the governor ordered the seizure of Forts Macon, Caswell, and Johnston, and two days later the Federal Arsenal at Fayetteville was occupied.

At the beginning of May the General Assembly ordered another election for a constitutional convention, and this time it passed. The convention convened in Raleigh on May 20 and unanimously dissolved the state's ties with the Federal Union. "The Old North State" had cast her lot with the Confederacy, according to historian William C. Harris, because they believed that the Federal government was determined "to make war upon the South" and that "their society was endangered by a tyrannical northern regime."¹²

THE CONFEDERACY CREATES A NAVY

The temporary Confederate capital, Montgomery, Alabama; was flooded in the spring of 1861 with southern naval officers who had resigned from the U. S. Navy where they were accustomed to service in a fleet of well-armed, blue-water sloops and frigates powered by sail and steam. One can imagine their letdown when they were faced with the flimsy tugboats, small river steamers, and harbor ferries armed with one or two cannon that the individual states and the Confederate government had managed to scrape together. The only bright spot which augured well for the future of the navy and shore defense was the Union's hasty abandonment and only partial destruction of the vast Gosport Navy Yard near Norfolk, which was seized by Virginia naval forces on 20 April.¹³ The ships and most of the buildings were in ruins, but much heavy equipment survived, as well as the great prize of some 1200 large naval guns. Although most of the cannon were obsolete smoothbores, many of them would be rifled and served the South well throughout the war. Certainly the Confederacy, which lacked a heavy industrial infrastructure, could not have produced this quantity of cannon in any reasonable length of time.

The energetic and forward-thinking Confederate Secretary of the Navy, Stephen R. Mallory of Florida, had to create a navy almost overnight in a country that had little maritime heritage, scant commercial shipping, and only a nascent

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industrial infrastructure. Considering these obstacles, the Confederacy would amaze the world by building a sizable ironclad defense force, purchasing and outfitting a fleet of high seas cruisers, repeatedly penetrating the inexorable Union blockade, and pioneering successfully the development of novel and experimental submarines, mines, and torpedo boats.

Since ironclads in 1861 were still considered a weapon of the future, the Confederate navy initially proposed the construction of more than 100 wooden gunboats—by far the largest shipbuilding initiative undertaken. The naval world changed after the clash between the Monitor and the Virginia in March 1862, leaving the wooden gunboat program with few supporters. Consequently, not many of these vessels were laid down or launched. In the fall of 1861 naval constructor John Porter designed three classes of wooden gunboats, and contracts were authorized with Martin and Elliott at Elizabeth City and with Myers and Company and Ritch and Farrow, both of Washington, North Carolina. The Union invasion of the region forced the destruction of all of the North Carolina boats before they were completed.¹⁴

Between the War of 1812 and the Civil War significant changes had taken place in naval technology, ship building, and armament. When a sailor entered the navy in the 1830s, the sailing ships on which he served and the guns he handled had been designed in the eighteenth century. By 1861 the advent of steam power had so revolutionized sea transportation that most naval vessels were propelled by a combination of sail and steam, and the sailing vessels still in commission were considered obsolete. The smoothbore cannon were being replaced by ever-larger rifled cannon that could hurl an exploding shell with greater accuracy, range, and penetrating force, although vessels continued to be armed with a mixture of both smoothbore and rifled cannon. The armored warships or ironclads, introduced to the modern world by the French and British, were designed to be impervious to the new shell guns. Based on experience with armored floating batteries in the Crimean War, both the British and French navies had developed armored steam-sailing vessels just prior to the American Civil War, but none had seen battle.

The Confederate States government, with no navy of its own and few ships available of any kind, was in a position similar to that of the United States in its infancy when it had resorted to privateering to mount a significant naval presence. The fall of Fort Sumter and President Lincoln's call for troops to suppress the rebellion brought immediate response from Jefferson Davis, whose proclamation of 17 April 1861 on national defense encouraged citizens to apply

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for letters of marque and reprisal for "private-armed vessels." Davis's follow-up message to the Confederate Congress requested swift consideration of legislation that would authorize privateering, and Congress responded with a law on May 6.¹⁵

In the first months of the war, letters of marque were issued, and twenty-five privateers put to sea from several ports, most successfully from New Orleans and Charleston. Although Confederate privateering reached its apogee in the early months of the war and did result in some forty prizes, the ever-tightening noose of the Union naval blockade made it increasingly risky to sally out to sea and practically impossible to slip prizes back for condemnation proceedings in the diminishing number of open southern ports. As a result, any idled craft that were suitable were converted to blockade running, which, fueled by inflationary prices, became the most lucrative business in the Confederacy.

Even at this early date it was clear to Confederate leadership that the agricultural South would not have time to develop the heavy industrial infrastructure required to support modern technological warfare. The alternative was to use cotton to purchase arms and equipment abroad and import them through the Union blockade of Southern ports. Shipbuilders in Great Britain responded to the Confederacy's plight by constructing small, fast steamers made to order to run the blockade by short voyages from the transshipping points of Bermuda and Nassau.

Not being a seafaring nation, the Confederacy could barely comprehend how solid were the achievements of its tiny naval service of just over 5000 men—less than one-tenth the size of the Union Navy. In the final analysis, the stunning successes of the ironclads, the undersea warfare of mines and submarines, the commando raids, and the cruisers must be balanced against the failure to break the strangling grip of the blockade, the loss of the Mississippi valley, and the inability to protect the coast from invasion. With the realization that their defeats were due more to the nation's limited industrial capacity than to any failings of naval officers and sailors, the esprit de corps of the service remained high. But the few triumphs remind us of the truth of John N. Maffitt's observation, "The grand mistake of the South was neglecting her navy."¹⁶

THE STATE DEFENDS HER SHORES

President Lincoln declared a naval blockade of the Confederate coast on 19 April, and eight days later he extended the blockade to North Carolina and

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Virginia. While the blockade restricted egress from the larger southern ports, on the North Carolina coast the little-known Hatteras and Ocracoke Inlets became harbors for commerce raiding by the fledgling North Carolina state navy and privateers. Prior to secession, under Governor Ellis's prodding the state began preparing for war by raising troops and purchasing weapons and vessels that could be armed.

In April Governor Ellis appointed William H. C. Whiting, a West Point graduate and one of the U. S. Army's most talented engineers, as inspector general of the state, charged with overseeing its defenses. Whiting had been stationed in North Carolina prior to the war, and his wife was a Wilmington native.¹⁷ Although Whiting's tenure in the state was brief, he developed the coastal defensive strategy called the "Flotilla defense" of building fortifications at the inlets supported by warships operating on the sounds. He wrote to the governor just prior to being recalled to Virginia for field service that "Hostile occupation of the Sounds will be a most serious blow to the State as breaking up the largest corn trade we have, exposing the cities of Elizabeth, Plymouth, Edenton & Newbern to attack, while many isolated & distant Plantations might lose their slaves or be otherwise plundered."¹⁸

Defense preparations were made, including repairs to the existing Fort Macon at Beaufort Inlet and Fort Caswell at Cape Fear. New fort construction at Hatteras, Ocracoke, and Oregon Inlets was accelerated by the state's secession on 20 May 1861. At Hatteras Inlet two earthen forts, Clark and Hatteras, were built to protect the inlet. The small Fort Clark mounted five guns, while Hatteras had thirteen guns. On Beacon Island at Ocracoke Inlet a new timber and turf eighteen-gun fort called Ocracoke was erected on the site of an earlier fortification. At Oregon Inlet construction began on the earth-and-timber Fort Oregon, projected to mount eighteen guns. Both fortifications at Ocracoke and Oregon Inlet mounted heavier guns than the earthworks at Hatteras.¹⁹ The Convention authorized a military committee and divided the coast into two military departments split by the New River in Onslow County. The Sound Country was entirely within the northern department commanded initially by Brigadier General Walter Gwynn, an able civil engineer trained at West Point who had extensive experience in public works. After Ellis's untimely death in July the feverish pace of placing the state on a war footing continued unabated under the new governor Henry T. Clark.

The naval component of North Carolina's "Flotilla defense" came from a minuscule state navy that was charged with defending its long coastline,

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protecting its vast inland waters, and harassing enemy shipping at sea. As early as April, Governor Ellis had asked Norfolk resident Marshall Parks, President of the Albemarle and Chesapeake Canal Company, to search out and acquire appropriate vessels to be armed for defense of the state. Parks reported to the governor that "We have a number of Steamers running through the Canal belonging to the Company & others to Citizens of N. C. These Steamers can be equipped as gunboats at short notice and may render good service to the State at any time their services may be required."²⁰ Within three weeks Parks had sent the governor information on eighteen steamers operating in Albemarle Sound, that could navigate the Dismal Swamp and Albemarle and Chesapeake Canals and shallow Core Sound to Beaufort. These vessels had potential to be either gunboats or transports, and the state immediately acquired the first ships of its navy. Commander William T. Muse, who was the senior officer of the state navy, was in charge of outfitting and arming the vessels as warships.²¹

Known as the mosquito fleet, a motley collection of five shallow-draft commercial steamboats and canal tugboats went into action in late May at Hatteras and Ocracoke Inlets. Each vessel had at least one heavy cannon, usually a 32-pounder, and a few carried a second light gun. The first boat to be commissioned, the fast side-wheel steamboat Warren Winslow, proved most successful at chasing and boarding Union merchant shipping. It was capably aided by its consorts--the Raleigh, the Beaufort, the John W. Ellis, and later the Weldon N. Edwards. Although these vessels often have been labeled privateers, they were duly commissioned warships of the state navy. The state cruisers were so successful at taking prizes that they were soon joined by Confederate privateers.

Captured merchant ships were sailed to New Bern where on 16 July a Confederate district admiralty court convened for its first session. Prizes taken by the Winslow were the brigantine Hannah Balch and the schooners Transit and Herbert Manton. By August two brigs and two more schooners seized by the privateer Gordon were added to the court proceedings. Ships and cargoes were condemned by the courts as legal prizes and then sold at auction. The division of the proceeds after customs duties and court costs was an equal split with half being shared by the owners of the raider and half going to the vessel's crew. After the capture of Hatteras Inlet in late August, the court's business diminished quickly.²²

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THE CONFEDERACY TAKES OVER

By the end of July the state transferred her navy to the Confederacy, and the little fleet came under the command of Commodore Samuel Barron. With prizes accumulating, other privateers and Confederate naval vessels joined the "mosquito fleet." So far, the limited Union naval forces off the Outer Banks had done little more than observe the Confederate raiders, and their mounting frustration was expressed in a letter to Secretary of the Navy Gideon Welles from Lieutenant Thomas O. Selfridge on the frigate Cumberland, who wrote that "the coast of Carolina is infested with a nest of privateers that have thus far escaped capture, and, in the ingenious method of their cruising, are probably likely to avoid the clutches of our cruisers."²³

The thrust of Cape Hatteras out into the Atlantic placed Hatteras close to coastal shipping lanes, an ideal location for commerce raiding. Extinguishing the lighthouse lanterns enabled the 150-foot tower at Hatteras to be used as a superb lookout to sight Union warships and potential prizes for the state cruisers and Confederate privateers, which gathered chiefly at Hatteras but also at Ocracoke. Before long, Hatteras Inlet was crowded with shipping. The first state cruisers to use the anchorage at Hatteras were the two-gun Winslow and its smaller consorts Raleigh and Beaufort. In May the Winslow took a brig, the Lydia Frances, which was laden with sugar, and then in rapid succession captured the Linwood with coffee from Brazil, a schooner, a bark, and the Transit, a Federal transport. Early in July a schooner carrying a valuable cargo of sugar and molasses from Cuba to Massachusetts fell into rebel hands. The success of the Winslow attracted newly commissioned Confederate privateers, the York, the Gordon, and the Mariner.

On 21 July the Beaufort and the five-gun Union Albatross engaged in a brief and one-sided duel at Oregon Inlet, the first naval engagement of the war. The Beaufort's log for just the first week in August reflected the busy activities at Hatteras. The Beaufort was joined in operations by the Confederate naval vessels Edwards and Teaser, the military transports Post Boy and Col. Hill, and the privateers Mariner, York, and Gordon. On the fourth of August the naval contingent was increased by the arrival of the Ellis and the Junaluska, which brought the department naval commander Commodore Samuel Barron.²⁴

In early August a detained merchant captain observed that riding at anchor inside the inlet were twelve prizes, including three lightships used for

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storage, three brigs, and six schooners. Most of these ships had been taken by the Winslow, fastest of the raiders, which was at Hatteras along with two privateers, the Gordon and the Mariner. Despite the blockade, the isolated inlet, which was now the gateway to most of North Carolina's ports, was doing a brisk trade with ships regularly calling at Halifax, Nova Scotia, the West Indies, and Europe. Officials of major insurance companies in Philadelphia, alarmed over the rise in rates from privateering, pressured Secretary of the Navy Gideon Welles to send an expedition to end "piracy" on the North Carolina coast.

THE UNION INVADES HATTERAS

The humiliating defeat for the Federal Army at Manassas on 21 July prompted Washington authorities to seek a counter action to nullify the dampening effect on Northern morale. The privateering and trade at Hatteras Inlet had been a thorn in the side of the U. S. Navy, which had concentrated on major ports in its initial blockade of the vast southern coast. Public outcry in the north over the outrageous "nest of pirates"²⁵ at Hatteras and lobbying by northern commercial interests and marine insurance companies precipitated the Federal government's organizing a combined army and navy expedition, the first Union naval offensive of the war. Commodore Silas H. Stringham was given a 143-gun fleet of seven sail- and steam-powered men-of-war—the Minnesota, Wabash, Monticello, Pawnee, Susquehanna, Cumberland, and the revenue cutter Harriet Lane—accompanied by the armed tug Fanny and two transports bearing an army contingent of about 900 men commanded by General Benjamin F. Butler. Stringham's flagship was the powerful steam frigate Minnesota, which carried over 40 guns. Over two days, 28-29 August, Commodore Stringham's fleet, which possessed overwhelming superiority in ordnance, bombarded the two Hatteras forts, which mounted a total of 18 guns. The Union vessels incurred little damage from the outranged Confederate cannon. On the first day the exposed and battered Fort Clark was abandoned as Butler's troops were landed with difficulty in the high surf. The next day, despite reinforcements and the arrival of vessels of the Confederate fleet, Fort Hatteras was likewise pounded in a three-and-a-half-hour shelling. When fire threatened the powder magazine, Commodore Samuel Barron reluctantly surrendered his command, giving the North its first victory of the war and ending Confederate privateering on the Outer Banks.

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The Confederate naval units slipped away, evacuating the batteries at Ocracoke and Oregon Inlets as well as the military dependents at Portsmouth. Although the original Union objective was to block the inlet with sunken vessels and leave, Butler and Stringham both successfully argued for Union occupation and establishing a base for future operations. Butler wrote that the inlet "was the opening to a great inland sea...giving water communication to Norfolk."²⁶ The Union garrison left at Hatteras, comprised of several hundred troops from two New York regiments under the command of Colonel Rush C. Hawkins and three armed vessels, was barely adequate to retain the Union presence on the Outer Banks. However, the small flotilla of the ten-gun Pawnee, the five-gun Monticello, and the two-gun Fanny was more than a match for the more numerous but more lightly armed mosquito fleet.²⁷

The impact on Northern morale of the first Union victory of the war was significant. Admiral David Dixon Porter later wrote, "This was our first naval victory, indeed our first victory of any kind, and should not be forgotten. The Union cause was then in a depressed condition, owing to the reverses it had experienced. The moral of this affair was very great, as it gave us a foothold on Southern soil and possession of the Sounds of North Carolina if we chose to occupy them. It was a death-blow to blockade running in that vicinity, and ultimately proved one of the most important events of the war."²⁸

ACTION ON THE OUTER BANKS

The former North Carolina Navy had been turned over to the Confederacy in late July. Once in Confederate service, they were used not only to protect North Carolina waters but also as dispatch and supply vessels in Virginia. When the newly arrived Commodore Barron surrendered at Fort Hatteras, all of his naval vessels escaped. Captain William F. Lynch, fresh from success on the Potomac, replaced the captured Barron and took command of the North Carolina squadron. After extensive refitting, the Edwards was rechristened the Forrest.²⁹

The original Confederate flotilla of six steam-powered gunboats was augmented in the fall with the side-wheel Sea Bird, which mounted two guns—a 32-pound smooth bore and a 30-pound rifle, and the side-wheel Curlew with a 32-pounder and a 12-pounder smoothbore. The schooner Black Warrior supported operations as a supply transport. With this strengthened fleet Commodore Lynch retained control of the sounds by daily sending scouting

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patrols to keep tabs on Union activities and by occasionally firing a few harassing rounds at the Union garrison at Hatteras.

When Union reinforcements that doubled the garrison strength and two additional gunboats, the Ceres and the Putnam, arrived at Hatteras in mid-September, the energetic Colonel Hawkins began limited offensive operations to expand his beachhead. On 16 September Commander Stephen C. Rowan of the Pawnee led a foray to complete the destruction of Fort Ocracoke. To counteract the growing rebel threat from Roanoke Island, Colonel Hawkins moved a regiment of 600 troops, about half his force, up Hatteras Island to Chicamacomico and on 1 October sent the Fanny with ammunition and supplies for this base. The Confederates responded the same day when Commander Lynch determined to intercept the Union supply with the Curlew, the Raleigh, and the Junaluska. Off Chicamacomico the outnumbered Fanny was engaged by the rebel gunboats and was forced to surrender after a fifteen-minute action. This was the first capture of an enemy warship by either side in the war. On 5 October the emboldened rebels sent the Curlew, Raleigh, Junaluska, and newest gunboat Fanny with two transports of troops to eliminate the Union advanced base.³⁰

The ensuing action, known as the "Chicamacomico Races," involved a pell-mell Federal retreat to Hatteras to escape encirclement by the enemy troops and gunboats and then a reinforced Federal counterthrust supported by the Monticello, which forced the rebels into their own hasty retreat. After the noisy and exhausting "races," Hawkins kept his garrison at Hatteras, and the Confederates returned to Roanoke Island.

Throughout the fall and winter, the Confederates built up defenses in anticipation of a second Union expedition to the region. On 3 November the fleet, consisting of the flagship Sea Bird, the Ellis, the Curlew, the Forrest, and the Fanny, left the Neuse River below New Bern and steamed across the sound to test Union vigilance at Hatteras. The Sea Bird did fire two rounds at Fort Hatteras, but the mission was cut short by the breakdown of the wheezy vessels Fanny and Forrest, both of which had to be towed away. Three days later while reconnoitering Ocracoke Inlet, the squadron discovered a disabled French naval vessel, the Prony, which had run aground, and the Confederates rescued her crew. The next day, the Winslow struck a wreck in the inlet and was lost. The Curlew participated in rescuing the crew and salvaging equipment, and then burning the vessel. On 14 November the Curlew returned to Hatteras and briefly engaged the Union steam Corwin. During January the Confederates were busily constructing a line of obstacles designed to stop the anticipated enemy thrust

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into Albemarle Sound. Crews from the naval vessels were constantly towing and sinking derelict schooners and driving piles across Croatan Sound from Roanoke Island to the mainland.³¹

THE BURNSIDE EXPEDITION

Union occupation of the inlet fortifications ended Confederate privateering on the Outer Banks, but a sizable expedition would be needed to conquer the North Carolina Sound Country. A second incursion into the Carolinas came just a month later when Port Royal Sound, South Carolina, was taken by a large combined force which shelled the Confederate forts into surrender and brushed aside another lightweight "mosquito fleet" of river gunboats and tugs. The harbor at Port Royal Sound became a vital base for sustaining the Union blockade along the southeastern coast.

In the fall of 1861 Brigadier General Ambrose E. Burnside approached his friend and commander, Major General George B. McClellan, soon to be appointed Union general-in-chief, with the idea of a special coast division of at least 12,000 men to be recruited from mariners from the New England states. This unique unit would be deployed to establish beachheads in the South Atlantic Confederate States to secure inland waters and threaten the rail supply lines to Virginia. Having a better grasp of amphibious strategy than most Civil War commanders, McClellan readily approved the plan, and Burnside headed for New York to secure shallow draft steamboats and sailing vessels suitable for operations on the dangerous Southern coast. By mid-December Burnside had acquired what he described as "a motley fleet" of numerous barges, crew steamers, sailing vessels, tugboats, large passenger steamers, and ferryboats. These vessels were rapidly modified to include watertight compartments and strengthened decks to carry heavy ordnance. Hay bales, sandbags, and iron shielding provided protection on deck. Typical of the five New York double-end ferryboats in the fleet was the side-wheel Southfield, armed with a 100-pound rifle and three nine-inch smoothbores. With shallow draft, rudders at both ends, powerful engines, and spacious cargo decks, ferryboats were ideally suited for service in the treacherous sounds and rivers of eastern North Carolina. An example of the numerous commercial steamers that were acquired was the side-wheel Underwriter that mounted an 80-pound rifle, an eight-inch smoothbore, and two 12-pounders.³²

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Early in 1862 a fleet of nearly 80 ships under the command of flag officer Louis M. Goldsborough, gathered at Hampton Roads. On the evening of 11 January anchors were weighed for the voyage to Hatteras Inlet. There were so many complaints over the seaworthiness of the bulk of the fleet that Burnside temporarily abandoned his headquarters ship, the palatial passenger steamer George Peabody, for the fleet's smallest craft, the army screw-tug Picket. Fair weather turned foul at Cape Hatteras and the fleet was battered by a fierce gale that ushered in two weeks of heavy weather. The Picket led the flotilla through the inlet's heavy swells and rough surf into the protected anchorage behind the island. Although there were numerous groundings and near collisions, only three ships were lost on the voyage. After the last of the scattered fleet rendezvoused at Hatteras early on 5 February, the invasion of the sound country began with the ships moving to attack Roanoke Island, the key to subjugating the Albemarle Sound region and the back door to Norfolk, Virginia.³³

Over the winter the rebels, now commanded by Brigadier General Henry A. Wise, had been busy fortifying Roanoke Island with batteries, redoubts manned by some 2500 soldiers, channel obstructions, and the augmented mosquito fleet. The sound was traversed by a double row of pilings and sunken schooners. On the northwest side of the island facing Croatan Sound were three sand and turf batteries. The southernmost was the nine-gun Fort Bartow, and above it were Fort Blanchard of four guns and Fort Huger with twelve guns. Across the sound on the mainland was seven-gun Fort Forrest. A three-gun redoubt protected the rear approach on the main north-south road in the center of the island.³⁴

Commodore Lynch now had ready for battle eight river steamers, canal tugboats, and a transport schooner. Each of eight steamships had as main armament a thirty-two-pound pivot-mounted rifled cannon, and the schooner carried two guns. The Sea Bird, Lynch's flagship, also had a 30-pound Parrot rifle mounted on the stern. The remaining vessels of the mosquito fleet were the Curlew, the Ellis, the Forrest, the Appomatox, the Beaufort, the Raleigh, the Fanny, and the schooner Black Warrior. Not only were the Confederates facing a four-to-one disparity in cannon, but the Union guns were also of heavier caliber. Lynch arranged his squadron in battle formation across Croatan Sound behind the obstructions, anchored at either end by shore batteries on Roanoke Island and the mainland.³⁵

Late in the morning of 6 February, while the Confederates were hastily driving the last piles, distant black smudges above the water signaled the

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approach of the enemy. The Appomatox was sent down to reconnoiter and hurriedly returned with a report that over fifty enemy vessels were closing on them.³⁶ Goldsborough made no move to hinder the Appomatox's reconnaissance, expecting the rebels to be demoralized by the odds they were facing. Throughout the tense day and all during the night Northern ships converged on the lower end of Roanoke Island. On the island the ill-equipped garrison commanded by Colonel H. M. Shaw awaited the forthcoming attack.³⁷

Fog delayed the opening of hostilities on 7 February until 9:00 a.m. when the Union fleet moved up to engage Fort Bartow and the mosquito fleet, which hovered behind the pilings. The twenty naval men-of-war, which included the Underwriter and Southfield, mounted 54 guns. The army's contingent of armed ships consisted of nine screw steamers carrying 26 guns and five floating batteries. Commodore Goldsborough and General Burnside shifted their headquarters from the flagship Philadelphia to the Southfield, which had a shallower draft and was more heavily armed. The Union fleet moved up to engage the seven rebel steamers and Fort Bartow; cannon fire thundered all morning and into mid-afternoon. The Underwriter led the gunboats, including the Picket, assigned to cover the landing of Union troops at Ashby's Harbor well south of the main cannonade. A few rounds in the wooded shoreline dispersed the few Confederates in the area, and the invasion force swarmed ashore. Meanwhile most of the Yankee shelling was concentrated on Fort Bartow, the closer of the Confederate batteries. Although at the height of the bombardment the fort appeared to be "enveloped in the sand and dust thrown up by shot and shell," the casualties were light.³⁸

In the course of the engagement the Forrest was disabled, and late in the afternoon the Curlew, holed below the water line by a plunging shell from the Southfield, began to sink. The Curlew headed toward the mainland and grounded near Fort Forrest, blocking that battery's guns. Several of the Union warships were hit, but none were disabled. That night Lynch ordered the remainder of the Confederate fleet, having completely exhausted their powder and shot, to retire to Elizabeth City, hoping to be resupplied and to return to the battle immediately. Thinking that the island forts were secure, the commodore had no inkling that over 10,000 Union soldiers had landed and would the next day overwhelm the undermanned Confederate fieldwork blocking the interior road and outflank the forts, forcing the island's surrender.³⁹

With little ammunition available in Elizabeth City, Lynch sent the Raleigh to Norfolk with an emergency plea for powder and shot. As the southern terminus

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of the Dismal Swamp Canal, the river port was too valuable to give up without a fight. Enough powder and fuel was scraped up for the Sea Bird and the Appomattox to return to Roanoke Island the next day. Enroute, Lynch encountered a boat that brought the shocking news of the island's surrender. When the Confederates sighted Union ships steadily approaching, Lynch ordered a hasty retreat back to the Pasquotank River. At Elizabeth City Lynch distributed the meager supply of ammunition among his vessels. That afternoon, the five remaining ships, the Sea Bird, the Ellis, the Appomattox, the Beaufort, and the Fanny, formed a battle line diagonally across the river, flanked by a four-gun militia battery at Cobb's Point on the east side and the Black Warrior, now armed with two 32-pounders, on the west bank. Knowing that his fleet would be sacrificed, Lynch ordered his captains to fight as long as possible and then destroy their vessels.⁴⁰

Commander Stephen C. Rowan had been given fourteen heavily armed gunboats, including the Underwriter, and was charged with hunting down and destroying the remaining rebel ships. Following the Confederate vessels into the Pasquotank River, Rowan chose to anchor his fleet for the night about ten miles downriver from Elizabeth City. The next morning they were spotted just after daybreak steaming upstream. Lynch landed at the battery for a final consultation with the local militia commander and was horrified to find that it was deserted, with only a civilian and seven militiamen remaining. He sent word to Lieutenant William H. Parker of the Beaufort to garrison the battery, and he remained on shore to command it. A skeleton crew was ordered to take the Beaufort up the canal to Norfolk. Lynch expected the Federal gunboats to form a line and shell the battery; however, the bold Commander Rowan, well aware of his foe's weaknesses, determined to close rapidly and engage them. He believed that his fourteen heavily armed ships could easily overwhelm his enemy, and he also had too little ammunition for a lengthy bombardment. Rowan arranged ten of his vessels into two columns and kept four ships in reserve.⁴¹

When the Union squadron came in range, Lynch ordered his battle line to open fire. The Yankee gunboats plowed relentlessly upstream with "shot and shell passing over the vessels in advance and falling thick and fast among vessels in the main columns." At less than a mile Rowan ran up the signal, "Dash at the enemy," and then opened fire. The vanguard of the Union columns—the flagship Delaware, Perry, Underwriter, Morse, and Ceres—rapidly passed the fort and closed on the rebel fleet, creating disastrous chaos. The Black Warrior's panic-stricken crew set it on fire. The Perry rammed the Sea Bird, sinking the

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Confederate flagship. The Fanny was run aground, abandoned, and burned. The Appomattox was chased upriver by the Underwriter and Shawsheen and was scuttled and burned at the canal. The Forrest, on shore for repairs, was fired by its own officers, along with a gunboat under construction.⁴² Only the Ellis put up any real fight. As the Ceres came alongside it and boarders clambered over its rail, Lieutenant James W. Cooke met them, "cutlass in hand," and was shot and bayoneted in the swirling combat. Despite his refusal to surrender, the seriously wounded Cooke was overpowered and taken prisoner to Rowan's flagship, the Delaware. Some of his crew escaped by wading ashore into the swamp, but several were shot down in the water. Cooke had given the order to blow up the Ellis, but a black coal-heaver, deserting to the Union sailors, informed them and the fuse was cut. Within minutes the Confederate fleet ceased to exist and Elizabeth City was occupied. Lynch and about fifty of his men escaped to Norfolk.⁴³

Although it would appear that resistance was futile for the hopelessly outgunned Confederate squadron, the "boldness and unflinching attitude...in defying immense odds" won the admiration of friend and foe alike. Commander John N. Maffitt wrote of the naval battles at Roanoke Island and Elizabeth City that they "reflected much credit upon the personal courage of all the Confederate officers therein engaged. With mere abortions for gunboats, badly armed and sparse of ammunition, they confronted without hesitation the well-equipped and powerful vessels of the North."⁴⁴

Rowan followed his victory at Elizabeth City on 11 February by sending the Underwriter, Louisiana, Perry, and Lockwood to Edenton where a schooner was burned. On 18 February Rowan took eight gunboats up the Chowan River with a thousand men to destroy two railroad bridges upriver from Winton. A surprise encounter with a masked Confederate battery and militia at Winton left the Delaware riddled and the Union flotilla repulsed. The next day, 20 February, Rowan cautiously returned, shelling the town from long range and unleashing Col. Hawkins's troops to burn and pillage the deserted town. By achieving naval superiority on the sounds, the Union could interdict Confederate trade by occupying the small ports and seizing local schooners as prizes. Other Federal incursions were at Columbia on the south side of the sound, and a flotilla was dispatched to block the Albemarle and Chesapeake canal.⁴⁵

Having achieved his first objective of taking Roanoke Island and securing the Albemarle Sound region, Burnside turned south to regroup and move up the Neuse River to take New Bern, the most important port town off Pamlico Sound.

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It also was the gateway to Goldsboro, a key junction on the Wilmington and Weldon Railroad, the crucial supply artery from Wilmington to Virginia that was rapidly becoming the most important rail connection in the Confederacy.

After the debacles at Roanoke Island and Elizabeth City, the Confederates rallied and concentrated their forces at New Bern, but the command of General Lawrence O'B Branch was a mixed bag of 4,000 mostly untested and newly raised troops. Nevertheless, the Confederates in a relatively short time created extensive entrenchments on the west bank of the Neuse, blocking the main road and rail line from the coast, and erected seven forts and batteries and obstructed the water approach with hulks, pilings, and mines. Commander Rowan described the diabolical river defenses as "very formidable," consisting of lines of pilings, some of which were "iron-capped and pointed piles inclined at an angle of about 45 degrees down the stream." Nearby was "a row of thirty torpedoes, containing about 200 pounds of powder each."⁴⁶

Despite his successes, which heartened Northern morale, Burnside's expedition was rapidly being overshadowed by greater events on the main stage in Virginia. On 8 March the Confederate ironclad Virginia debuted with the destruction of the Cumberland and Congress at Hampton Roads, and Commodore Goldsborough was recalled to take command of the Chesapeake defenses. The next day came the world-changing first battle between the ironclads Virginia and Monitor. Within ten days General McClellan set in motion his plan to take Richmond by transporting the Army of the Potomac down the bay and landing them on the peninsula, flanking the defenses of the rebel capital.

Upon Goldsborough's recall the capable Rowan became the fleet commodore in North Carolina, and on 11 March a convoy with 11,000 troops protected by fourteen gunboats including the Underwriter and Southfield began the movement up the Neuse River to New Bern. Under cover of a naval bombardment the troops began landing on 13 March, at first finding abandoned earthworks too extensive to be manned by the understrength rebels. On 14 March the Federals slogged forward, covered by a steady close support rolling bombardment. Rowan then ordered a characteristic dash through the obstructions to the city. Although two of the gunboats were temporarily tangled in the pilings, none touched off the mines, and the fleet arrived at the waterfront of a panicked New Bern. At the Confederate defenses downriver Burnside's troops launched a series of hard-fought probing assaults, found a gap in the center, and cracked the rebel lines, creating a rout and abandonment of New

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Bern. The Union army and navy occupied the port, which became the headquarters of the Union occupation of eastern North Carolina.⁴⁷

Following the capture of New Bern, a naval flotilla with an accompanying transport of soldiers landed unopposed on 21 March at Washington on the Pamlico River where the Federals established a permanent fortified post. Union soldiers destroyed one of the two wooden gunboats under construction on the stocks in the shipyard. Confederates took the other upstream to a tributary, Chicod Creek, and burned it to the waterline. Two Confederate transports, the Col. Hill and the Governor Morehead, steamed upriver to Tarboro.⁴⁸

Responding to rumors of a Confederate shallow-draft ironclad being built at Norfolk that might be brought down the canals to Albemarle Sound, Burnside ordered an operation to close the Dismal Swamp Canal above Elizabeth City and the Albemarle and Chesapeake Canal at Currituck Sound. Brigadier General Jesse L. Reno was given command of about 3000 men to proceed to South Mills and destroy the canal locks. At South Mills Reno's harried troops encountered a small but stubborn Confederate force under Col. A. R. Wright, and in four hours of hard fighting the Union soldiers were stopped and the next day retired, leaving the locks intact. The navy did sink a schooner to block the lock at Currituck Sound, but the operation soon became redundant when the Confederates abandoned Norfolk. A flotilla commanded by Lieutenant Charles W. Flusser occupied Plymouth on the Roanoke River in June.⁴⁹

Burnside now concentrated his forces to take his last coastal objective, Beaufort, which had a spacious harbor that would be an ideal support base for the blockade and a staging area for naval operations against Wilmington. Beaufort Inlet was protected by the masonry Fort Macon, which had been completed in 1833. After being seized by the Confederates, it was repaired and supplied with 43 guns and a garrison. The Union army, artillery, and naval warships converged on Fort Macon from the sea and from the interior, taking Morehead City and Beaufort from the rear, effectively isolating the fort. Union batteries were erected east of the fort on Bogue Banks, and on 25 April the bombardment opened. The gunboats were hindered by heavy weather, but the land batteries pounded the fort with over a thousand shot and shell that wrecked about half of the fort's battery. When cracks appeared in the outer wall near the fort's magazine, the Confederate commander surrendered his post.⁵⁰

Again events in Virginia intervened, effectively ending significant Union operations in North Carolina. Before Burnside could complete his key and final objective, that of cutting the Wilmington and Weldon Railroad, he and about

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8,000 of his troops were recalled to bolster the defeated McClellan who had been forced to retreat from the James River peninsula in heavy fighting in the Seven Days' Battles orchestrated by the new Confederate commander General Robert E. Lee. The greatly reduced Union garrison of nearly 10,000 men was left in charge of Major General John G. Foster, who had little choice but to go on the defensive and hope that the Confederates did not reinforce their few troops in the region.

Key to the Union strength, which enabled them to hold onto a vast and valuable region, was the naval contingent. The Union gunboats were a disparate lot of ferryboats, commercial steamers, small naval vessels, revenue cutters, tugboats, and schooners. To many naval officers, at first glance the vessels they commanded seemed no better than the vanquished rebel mosquito fleet. These shallow-draft, highly maneuverable craft, however, were ideally suited for the sounds, marshes, rivers, and creeks of eastern North Carolina. Perceptive commanders soon realized that there were simply no better-adapted vessels for these dangerous waters than the mismatched collection of craft on hand. The gunboats' roles in the warfare on the sounds were many and varied. They provided support for military thrusts and raids into the interior, handily swept the Confederate naval and commercial vessels from the sounds and rivers, collected intelligence and forage, destroyed Confederate supplies and bridges, disrupted trade, and protected the Union garrisons in fortified enclaves scattered throughout the region.

Typical of the Confederate raids that began when the Union weakness became apparent was one at Washington in September. In June 1862 at Washington the Louisiana was reinforced by the Picket, now armed with four guns—a hundred-pounder, two 32-pounders, and a howitzer. Throughout the summer the Picket was active on reconnaissance and foraging trips upriver. On 6 September a Confederate cavalry raid surprised the Washington garrison, racing into town at 4:30 a.m. under cover of a fog. Peppered with musket fire, the Louisiana responded with intense fire of grape, solid shot, and shell. The Picket fired only one round before its magazine exploded, killing Captain Nichols and eighteen crewmen, and sinking the vessel. Despite this disaster, by 8:00 a.m. the town had been cleared of the rebel cavalry.⁵¹

Other Federal setbacks piled up in the fall, demonstrating the folly of an undermanned defense. In November Lieutenant William B. Cushing, one of the most daring Union officers of the war, took his command, the Ellis, on a raid up the New River to Jacksonville. There he destroyed some military stores and took

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several prizes. On the return, however, the Ellis ran aground and was destroyed by Confederate battery fire. On 10 December a Confederate cavalry raid surprised and routed the Plymouth garrison, briefly occupying the town and disabling the Southfield with artillery fire.⁵²

In response to General Foster's pleas, reinforcements were sent, and in November and December the Union commander was able to mount two sizable raids in the Roanoke and Tar River region and toward Goldsboro. Early in November a 5,000-man raid commanded by Foster marched up the Roanoke to Williamston and Hamilton and then crossed to the Tar River to threaten Tarboro. Turned back short of Tarboro, the raid ravaged the region and disrupted rebel activity. A month later Foster was able to advance from New Bern to Goldsboro with 10,000 infantry on an extended raid. The Confederates contested the Union marauders at Kinston, Goldsboro, and Whitehall, but Goldsboro was temporarily occupied and the railroad bridge burned and track torn up. The damage was repaired within days.⁵³

THE FALLBACK DEFENSE: TORPEDOES AND IRONCLADS

Batteries, Obstructions, and Torpedoes

With their gunboats swept from the sounds the Confederates had to rely temporarily on an interrelated static defense of batteries, obstructions, and a new form of warfare—torpedoes, or mines. Although mines had appeared by the 1850s in China and in the Crimean War, the Confederacy became the first nation to use extensively this new weapon that was considered by many to be barbaric. For a country waging an increasingly desperate war for survival against an enemy possessing superior land and naval forces, the torpedo was a practical foil that could block potential invasion routes, especially on interior waterways. In North Carolina from Albemarle and Pamlico Sounds the navigable Chowan, Roanoke, Pamlico-Tar, and Neuse Rivers gave egress for miles into the interior coastal plain all the way to the Confederate lifeline—the Wilmington and Weldon Railroad.

The Confederates had used pilings and sunken vessels in the initial defense of the sounds. After the Union occupied the ports at the mouths of the rivers—Elizabeth City, Edenton, Plymouth, Washington, and New Bern—the rebels continued to resort to driving wooden pilings and sinking block ships, usually the ubiquitous schooners, all of which had to be covered by supporting

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shore batteries. When the Confederate ironclad threat began to develop, the Union occupiers, who had sufficient unarmored warships, also resorted to pilings and sunken vessels to prevent the perceived powerful ironclads from descending the rivers. North Carolina had not yet seceded when Governor Ellis was corresponding with General Gwynn about submarine batteries, a term describing electrically detonated mines.⁵⁴ However, in the early campaigns which secured the Outer Banks and the sounds it does not appear that torpedoes were available.

Central to the development of Confederate torpedoes were the brilliant oceanographer Commander Matthew Fontaine Maury and a North Carolinian, Brigadier General Gabriel Rains, who pioneered booby traps and land mines. When fellow officers criticized Rains for the use of crude land mines in the Peninsula Campaign in Virginia, his answer was, "Deception is the art of war."⁵⁵ After Maury successfully detonated an underwater explosion at Richmond in the summer of 1861, the government formed the Naval Bureau of Coast, Harbor, and River Defense. Torpedoes were used in the Mississippi River and became an essential element of the defense of the James River in Virginia. When Maury was dispatched for European service, Naval Lieutenant Hunter Davidson continued the bureau's work in cooperation with General Rains. In September 1862 Rains was assigned to Wilmington to enhance the naval defenses of eastern North Carolina. The next month each service organized its own program—the Naval Submarine Battery Service and the army Torpedo Bureau—both of which operated under a cloak of secrecy. Marine torpedoes were manufactured at Tredegar Iron Works in Richmond and the Naval Yard at Charlotte, North Carolina. Soon river obstructions in eastern North Carolina were draped with torpedoes, and by the last year of the war Confederate mines were so numerous in the Roanoke River that the sinking of two warships by torpedoes, infantry snipers, and an artillery battery defeated a Union naval expedition before it reached the formidable Fort Branch.⁵⁶

In the course of the war about fifty ships on both sides were damaged or sunk by underwater mines or attacks by torpedo boats and a submarine. Of the 43 Union vessels affected, mines sunk 28, including Otsego and Bazely and two more on the Cape Fear River. In contrast, Confederate naval vessels, ironclads and cruisers, sank a total of four Union warships in surface action. Only one Confederate vessel, the ironclad Albemarle, was sunk by a Union torpedo boat, and Lieutenant William B. Cushing's daring exploit changed the course of the war in the Roanoke River valley.⁵⁷ Effective defense of Confederate harbors was

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integrated with heavily fortified batteries, obstructions, flotillas, and submarine mines, but it was the mines that took the highest toll of ships and engendered the deepest fear in the Union navy.

Ironclads to the Rescue

The key element in the Union stranglehold on the region was the extensive flotilla of shallow-draft, well-armed gunboats that dominated the North Carolina sounds. Unlike the vanquished Confederate mosquito fleet, whose nine small vessels mounted but ten guns, the Yankee gunboat horde, many of which were converted ferries and passenger steamers, were bigger, faster, and armed with numerous large-caliber cannon. By 1864 in Albemarle Sound alone, the North concentrated eight ships, mounting a total of fifty-two heavy guns; moreover, other vessels were stationed at fortified enclaves at Washington, New Bern, Beaufort, and the inlets. Since naval gunfire was murderous to unprotected infantry, the only hope the Confederates had to wrest control of the region from the North was to build a new fleet. There was neither time nor the industrial infrastructure to match the numbers of conventional Union gunboats, but a few ironclads built especially for shallow waters might successfully challenge Federal superiority. Among the innovations sponsored by the energetic Secretary Mallory was the creation of an ironclad fleet, particularly shallow-draft vessels for defense of the interior waters. Fortunately, the Confederacy's chief naval constructor was the talented John L. Porter, who had shared responsibility with ordnance expert John M. Brooke for the construction of the ironclad Virginia. For river defense, Porter designed a class of flat-bottomed, armored rams, 150 feet long, about forty feet wide, that would draw less than ten feet. They would mount newly cast, heavy-caliber Brooke rifles.

This new vessel type was ideally suited for the torpid rivers of the North Carolina coastal plain, and by the fall of 1862 three contracts were let by the Navy Department to private shipbuilding firms for construction of armed rams. Howard and Ellis of New Bern would build a vessel at Whitehall on the Neuse River above New Bern. Martin and Elliott of Elizabeth City would construct vessels at Tarboro on the Tar River upstream from Washington and near Tillery on the Roanoke River above Plymouth. The Navy Department transferred Flag Officer Lynch from Mississippi to North Carolina to superintend and expedite the projects. Although Lynch had more command and combat experience on the

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North Carolina sounds than any other high-ranking naval officer, he was faced with a nearly impossible task--overseeing the simultaneous construction and outfitting of numerous vessels, plus recruiting and training their crews. Ship construction in the agrarian South, which had few experienced engineers, mechanics, or foundries, was always difficult. Furthermore, Lynch was deficient in the tact and diplomacy needed to dampen interservice rivalry and maintain good relations with the testy North Carolina Governor Zebulon B. Vance.⁵⁸

The contract for the ironclad at Whitehall (now Seven Springs) on the Neuse was let on 17 October 1862, and construction began immediately. Thomas S. Howard was an experienced shipbuilder from New Bern, and his partner was Elijah W. Ellis, a dealer in naval stores—pine tar, pitch, and turpentine. The keel was laid on the north bank of the river across from the village of Whitehall. Timber was cut in the swamp on the site, and soon the raw framing of the hull was visible. The contract called for the hull to be complete by 1 March 1863, and through the winter Howard kept his workers on a tight schedule. Commander James W. Cooke was assigned by the navy department to expedite construction of both the ironclads being built on the Neuse and the Roanoke Rivers. Cooke's initial inspection of the Whitehall site left him with apprehension over the safety of the vessel. He believed that for its location so close to New Bern it was weakly protected, and in mid-December his fears were realized when General Foster led a strong raid up the Neuse to Goldsboro that passed Kinston and Whitehall. The Union forces arrived on the south bank on the fifteenth but were prevented from crossing by Confederate defenders. During the fighting the next day the vessel suffered minor damage by shelling, but work was resumed as soon as the enemy left the area. In mid-March 1863, only two weeks behind schedule, the ship was launched and christened the Neuse. The hull was taken downstream to Kinston where the final fitting out, engine installation, and armor plating would take place.⁵⁹

The work now sputtered nearly to a halt as delays mounted in acquiring the engines, the shaft and propellers, the iron fittings, the armament, and particularly the iron armor plate. Iron armor was scarcer than gold in the Confederacy where scrap iron was at a premium and only a handful of mills could roll armor plate. Tredegar Iron Works in Richmond was the chief source, although there were new mills in Atlanta and Selma, Alabama. Of the score of ironclads under construction across the South, six were underway in North Carolina alone—three at Wilmington, the Neuse, the Albemarle on the Roanoke

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River, and one at Tarboro. Nevertheless, by the end of the year the interior carpentry was nearly finished and some of the armor had been installed.

Commodore Lynch, based in Wilmington, was department commander with responsibility for all of the naval construction in North Carolina. His was a task that would be overwhelming to the best of officers, but Lynch naturally focused on the Cape Fear vessels. His tactless coping with interservice and political rivalries raised so much opposition in the state that he finally was removed from supervision of the Neuse and the Albemarle, leaving Commander Cooke to report directly to the navy department in Richmond. The dilemma of the incomplete North Carolina ironclads became the concern of President Davis, General Lee, and Secretary Mallory as the Confederacy responded to state pleas for troops to recover the coastal plain. General Lee, who had been on the receiving end of the power of the United States Navy in the campaigns around Chesapeake Bay, was rightly convinced that operations in North Carolina could not succeed without a naval contingent. When his forebodings were confirmed by the failure of General Pickett at New Bern in early February 1864, the new Confederate commander, North Carolina General Robert F. Hoke, scoured the army for carpenters and mechanics, producing nearly 150 skilled and unskilled laborers for the final work on the Neuse. Since Hoke and his troops were based at Kinston, he could respond readily to the needs of the vessel's commander Lieutenant William Sharp. Also in February a naval liaison from Richmond, Lieutenant Robert Minor, was assigned to assist in the project, which was now seen to be delayed entirely "for want of iron." Minor reported after his arrival in Kinston that there were 170 men working on the site in two shifts—a twelve-hour day shift and an eight-hour night shift—a total of twenty hours every day.⁶⁰

The new commander, Lieutenant Benjamin Loyall, who was assigned to the Neuse at the end of February, became primarily engaged in installing the two Brook 6.4-inch rifles and training a crew recruited largely from the army. The incomplete armor, however, continued to be an apparently insurmountable problem.

General Hoke kept his options open on the objective of his planned offensive until he knew which ironclad would be able to cooperate. When it became obvious that the Albemarle would be ready first, he shifted his attack from New Bern to Plymouth. Nevertheless, despite the falling water level the Neuse was ordered to cooperate, and on 22 April 1864—without army support—

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it steamed downriver, running hard aground almost immediately about half a mile below Kinston. It remained aground for about three weeks and then returned to Kinston. Without Hoke's army, which had been recalled to Virginia, there was no hope that it would venture out again.

The war finally caught up with the Neuse at the end. Although the ironclad could not steam to battle, the Union army came to it in March 1865. A Federal thrust toward Goldsboro of 13,000 men under General J. D. Cox defeated Hoke's division east of Kinston on 10 March, and the Confederates fell back toward Goldsboro. When Commander Joseph H. Price was ordered to cover the Confederate withdrawal, the Neuse went into action, shelling the Union cavalry and advance units. As the Confederate infantry support melted away, Price ordered the Neuse scuttled and burned.⁶¹

The ironclad on the Roanoke River would be the product of the talented genius Gilbert Elliott, who at the age of nineteen would take on construction of an ironclad ram and an armored battery on the Roanoke River. Despite his youth, he already had extensive experience in the shipyard at Elizabeth City, which had been destroyed by the Union invasion back in February. The Navy Department secured a furlough for Elliott, and he set up a shipyard near Tillery on the Roanoke River seven miles below Halifax to begin work on a four-gun armored floating battery, which was designed for river defense, and a steam-powered ironclad ram.

Commander Cooke was originally ordered by Secretary Mallory to expedite the accumulation of the scarce iron and armor plating. Cooke was then living in Warrenton, North Carolina and would be based out of the Halifax Navy Yard. This initial assignment evolved into Cooke's becoming the official liaison from the navy to all four of the ironclad vessels being built on the Neuse, Tar, and Roanoke Rivers. Cooke and Elliott, who were kindred spirits, met in October and formed an unshakable bond of friendship that made possible a close collaboration for the next two and a half years, through three construction projects and shared combat.

By March 1863 with the floating armored battery well under way, Elliott decided to move his shipyard downstream to a cornfield at Edward's Ferry near Scotland Neck in Halifax County. A nearby neighbor was Peter Evans Smith, a man with a local reputation as a "mechanical wizard" who had a fully equipped forge on his farm. Elliott scoured the countryside for forges, portable sawmills, tools, and laborers. The keel was laid for the ironclad in April, and as the yellow

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pine frame began to rise the country folk came to gawk, never before having seen such a curious vessel on their riverbank. Similar in size to its sister ship being constructed on the Neuse, the new ram was small by seagoing standards. It was thirty-five feet wide on its beam and 158 feet in overall length, including the ram, a beak of solid oak covered with two inches of iron plate. The sixty-foot-long casemate that housed the gun deck was sloped at an angle of thirty-five degrees. With headroom of seven feet, the top of the casemate was an open steel grate about sixteen feet wide which allowed light and ventilation—and rain—into the gunboat. The casemate was armored with layers of pine and oak onto which four inches of iron was bolted. The deck was covered with one inch of armor, and the sides of the hull were plated with two inches of iron to two feet below the waterline. The vessel would be armed with two pivot-mounted 6.4-inch Brooke rifled cannon and would be powered by two 200-horsepower engines driving two propellers. Completely outfitted and armored, the gunboat would weigh 376 tons and draw only eight feet of water.⁶²

From the outset, Elliott said, “No vessel was ever constructed under more adverse circumstances.” The energy, drive, and creative talents of Elliott and Smith were concentrated on the vessel, and almost by sheer force of their will it began to take shape. With six ironclads simultaneously under construction in North Carolina, there was intense competition for skilled laborers, machinery, timber, iron, and armament. Cooke’s role in the project expanded from administrative oversight to acting as the primary provider of iron for the armor plating. He personally searched the countryside, scrounging every bit of iron that he could find to be shipped to the Confederacy’s foundries, chiefly Tredegar Iron Works in Richmond, which rolled the iron into armor plates. His friend Commander Maffitt wrote, “his greed for iron became amusingly notorious.” The workmen at the Tredegar Works in Richmond and the Clarendon Foundry at Wilmington rather enjoyed the periodic visits of this single-minded officer whom they labeled the “Ironmonger Captain.”⁶³

The premium scrap iron was worn-out railroad rails, and there was constant bickering among the Navy Department, the state government, and the rival naval officers for the precious commodity. Cooke’s chief problem was Wilmington-based Commodore Lynch, whose priority was the Cape Fear River ironclads, even though Lynch had official administration over all of the North Carolina vessels. After Lynch interfered in October by ordering a premature launching of the gunboat and delaying shipment of armor plating, Cooke was detached from his command. In January 1864 Cooke was assigned to the Navy

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Department, taking his orders directly from Secretary Mallory and charged with completing the Roanoke River ironclad.⁶⁴

The newly christened ram Albemarle and the floating battery were towed upstream to Halifax to be completed. At the naval yard Cooke superintended the ironclad's fitting out, installing the shafts and propellers forged at the Charlotte Naval Yard, the twin steam engines, and the armor plate. Plans laid in Richmond to use the ironclads to retake eastern North Carolina gave a new sense of urgency to the project, and Secretary Mallory intervened to establish the highest priority for the Albemarle and its sister ship the Neuse. Neither vessel was ready for General Pickett's half-hearted demonstration at New Bern in early February, but the remaining troops in North Carolina were left in the capable hands of General Hoke, who was confident that with the aid of the Albemarle he could retake Plymouth.

UNION RESPONSE TO THE IRONCLAD THREAT

Rumors and reports were soon circulating down the rivers to the Federal navy, which, possessing no ironclads, was alarmed at the prospect of facing several of the powerful craft at once. Since Elliott was building the floating battery and the ironclad at the same time, the Roanoke River intelligence reports were the most garbled. Little could be done about the Roanoke vessels because of elaborate obstructions, mines, and the formidable battery at Fort Branch on Rainbow Bluff about forty miles downstream.

There were so few Confederate defenses on the Tar River that in July 1863 Brigadier General Edward G. Potter led a virtually unopposed cavalry raid from New Bern toward Greenville, Tarboro, and Rocky Mount. Designed to disrupt Confederate activity in the area, the raid had as its chief objective to destroy the Rebel ironclad under construction at Tarboro. undefended Greenville was occupied briefly on 19 July. The Tar River bridge was burned and the town looted. Early the next morning the Union cavalry rode into Tarboro and burned the frame of the ironclad as well as railroad cars, cotton, military supplies, the bridge, and the two Confederate steamers Col. Hill and Governor Morehead. On the return to New Bern Potter linked up with his detachment that had been sent to Rocky Mount where they had destroyed a train, a railroad bridge, mills, warehouses, a machine shop and an enormous amount of supplies.⁶⁵

By November 1863 the Union command was sufficiently disturbed by the ironclad leviathan nearing completion up the Roanoke River that they attempted

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to block the river above Plymouth completely by sinking derelict enemy transports and prize vessels to supplement the piling and chain barrier in place one and a half miles upriver from the town. Seven miles upstream at the mouth of Broad Creek late in 1863 and as late as April 1864 the Union forces sank seven schooners and lightships and then festooned them with contact fuse torpedoes or mines. One of the schooners was certainly the three-masted Isabella Ellis built in New Bern in 1858. Another was likely the prize Comet built in Carteret County in 1853 and seized on 10 April 1862 on New Begun Creek off the Pasquotank River. One of the lightships, built in New Bern in 1828, had been on Long Shoals on Pamlico Sound, and another was probably from Brant Island Shoal. In November 1863 the Whitehead was raising sunken schooners and lightships at New Bern. The Comet and two lightships were towed to Plymouth. Initially the Comet was thought to be too small for a blockship and was used as a hospital ship, but on 13 April, five days before the Albemarle appeared, it joined the other schooners and the lightships at Broad Creek.⁶⁶

CONFEDERATE COUNTERATTACKS

April 1863: Demonstrations at New Bern and the Siege of Washington

The new year of 1863 brought a major Union buildup in Beaufort of about 12,000 men, ostensibly to be used to take Wilmington from the rear. The situation in Virginia was so threatening that General Lee answered the clamor for help with General Daniel H. Hill, a native North Carolinian with a reputation as a fighter. The tension in North Carolina eased when Charleston was chosen as the Union objective and 10,000 soldiers were sent south to Port Royal. In February General James Longstreet was named commander of the Department of Virginia and North Carolina. Longstreet quickly moved to protect the supply lines from the south and mounted a major foraging expedition in southeastern Virginia. Hill was similarly ordered to forage in eastern North Carolina and to pin down the Union garrisons with demonstrations. Committed to throwing the Northerners on the defensive, Hill moved forward with operations against the Union headquarters at New Bern and against Washington.

The Confederates marched toward New Bern from Kinston and invested the port with three columns, opening the attack on 13 March. The initial frontal assault by General Junius Daniel's brigade drove the Federal troops from the

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outer trenches, but the attack bogged down when General Beverly H. Robertson's cavalry failed to cut the railroad. General James J. Pettigrew's investment at Fort Anderson on the Neuse was bungled by delays, and then the concerted firepower of the Union gunboats Hunchback, Hetzel, Ceres, and Shawsheen broke up the Confederate attack.

From the repulse at New Bern, Hill moved immediately on Washington. The Pamlico River port was besieged on 30 March by batteries constructed up and down river and obstructions in the river below the town. The siege was conducted primarily as an artillery duel involving the land batteries and the Union gunboats Commodore Hull, Ceres, and Louisiana. Overland Union relief columns were turned back, but naval supply ships finally ran the batteries by mid-April, breaking the siege. Hill withdrew from Washington but kept a vigilant eye on the Federals, suppressing their raids until he was recalled to Virginia in the summer.⁶⁷

February 1864: An Army Fiasco and a Naval Triumph at New Bern

The recovery of the occupied rich agricultural region of northeast North Carolina once again became a Confederate objective in the winter of 1864. Under prodding by General Lee, plans had been developed for another attack on New Bern. Since the last assault on New Bern in the spring of 1863 had failed largely because of fire from Union gunboats, Southern naval support was considered essential. Since neither of the ironclads under construction on the Neuse and Roanoke Rivers was ready for an attempt in January, Commander John Taylor Wood was assigned to cooperate with the army commanded by General George E. Pickett by capturing one of the enemy gunboats during the planned attack. Some 13,000 Confederate troops were concentrated at Kinston when the campaign began on 31 January.⁶⁸ Awaiting them was General Foster's well-entrenched 4000-man Union garrison. Pickett planned a complicated three-pronged offensive that required a high level of coordination.

Wood gathered his naval contingent at Richmond. Orders went out to squadrons at Charleston, Wilmington, and Richmond for boat crews to be selected for a special operation under his command. Lieutenant George W. Gift was sent to Wilmington to gather the southern units and bring them by rail to the rendezvous at Kinston. From the James River Squadron sailors, marines, and boats commanded by Lieutenant Benjamin P. Loyall were ordered to meet Wood by the end of January on the Neuse River at Kinston.

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When Loyall's men arrived Wood wasted no time having the boats promptly unloaded, dragged to the Neuse River, and launched. Lieutenant Gift's Wilmington unit followed in two large launches which carried a total of ninety men and were armed with boat howitzers. Since the thirty-mile overland journey to New Bern was twice as far by the winding river, the boats hurriedly set out, rowing silently with muffled oars. All the next day the crews rowed steadily through dense, deserted woodland. Reaching a point above New Bern about eleven o'clock in the evening, Wood had the boats drawn into a secluded creek to rest his exhausted men. About 3:30 a.m. on 1 February, distant firing signaled the beginning of General Pickett's demonstration, and the three gunboats present--the Lockwood, the Underwriter, and the Commodore Hull--responded by moving into position to protect the Federal earthworks. The Lockwood steamed up the Trent River, leaving the Commodore Hull and the Underwriter in the Neuse. The Commodore Hull ran aground, leaving only the four-gun Underwriter in its position moored close to shore with guns trained inland to contest any rebel assault.⁶⁹

During the day Lieutenant Gift and Lieutenant Philip Porcher from Charleston arrived with the launches, and the entire contingent of some 250 sailors and marines was gathered. Wood established contact with General Pickett and made final preparations for the attack, locating a gunboat, the Underwriter, on a reconnaissance after dark. About midnight the raiders shoved off. The ship's bell tolled five times for 2:30 a.m., guiding the silent raiders stealthily to their prey. From the darkness the hull loomed up suddenly discernible, and twice a hail, "Boat ahoy!" went unanswered. An alarm rattle was sounded and the Union crew rushed on deck. The rebel raiders rowed with all their strength and the boats fairly flew over the last yards to the enemy's side. A boat howitzer and a volley from the rebel marines was fired as the boats ran alongside their target. Grapnels were thrown over the sides, and as the rebels boarded, they were met with bursts of musketry from the crew. The raiders, armed with cutlasses and pistols, gave a yell and rushed madly into the Union sailors. Thomas J. Scharf wrote that "the onslaught was furious," and the Southerners forced the Yankees "pell-mell" off the deck and down below. The cost was high. The Underwriter's captain, Jacob Westervelt, lay dead along with two more of his men, and a number were wounded, two mortally. Six of the raiders were dead or dying, and twenty-two were wounded.⁷⁰

The bloody ten-minute struggle ended with a Confederate triumph. Unsurprisingly, however, the hellish din of the fight had alerted the Union

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garrison. As retrained guns in the adjacent batteries opened fire at pointblank range, a shocked Wood learned from his engineer that he could not raise enough steam pressure to move the vessel. With shells exploding around them, there was not even time to cut the anchor cables and tow the prize. After such human sacrifice it was an appalling choice, but Wood gave the order to secure the prisoners and abandon and burn the prize. All of the wounded who could be found were gathered, the guns were loaded and pointed toward the town, and minutes after the raiding party pulled away from the Underwriter it was a "mass of flames." The Southerners rowed away in a hail of musketry with about two dozen prisoners. Taking one last look at their handiwork from the safety of the darkness, the Confederates saw "the lurid light flaming in the sky" and heard "the dull, heavy booming sound" of the guns and shells exploding.⁷¹

Although the raid had been a spectacular success, Wood had failed to capture a gunboat. Since the flanking attacks had already failed, General Pickett, who had been lukewarm about the campaign from the beginning, used this excuse to withdraw. The more aggressive General Robert F. Hoke, who had planned the operation and was convinced that a vigorous assault would carry the Union lines, reluctantly retreated. The Southern public blamed the failure to take New Bern on the army and Pickett's lack of nerve, while Wood and the navy won new laurels.⁷² Union Admiral David D. Porter wrote, "this was rather a mortifying affair for the navy."⁷³ To the Federal Assistant Secretary of the Navy Gustavus V. Fox, who had been reading up on the British naval tradition of cutting-out, Wood's exploits were "disgraceful to us," and he hoped that a commander of Wood's ability and inclination would emerge in the U. S. Navy.⁷⁴

April 1864: The Recovery of Plymouth and Washington

The first Federal victories in North Carolina, which had so bolstered Northern morale, had been overshadowed as the two nations locked in a titanic struggle for the Confederate capital of Richmond. The Union occupation of northeast North Carolina's fertile Roanoke River valley in 1862 had deprived the Confederacy of badly needed provisions and manpower, and over the next two years the Union army, deserters, and sympathetic guerrillas had pillaged the region repeatedly. Although Federal forces in New Bern, Washington, and Plymouth lurked within easy striking distance of the Wilmington and Weldon Railroad, they had failed to capitalize on the strategic importance of cutting "the life line of the Confederacy" that funneled essential war materials to the Virginia battlefields. North Carolina had slipped into the background with both sides

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content with the status quo. By 1864 the disgruntled and influential Raleigh editor William W. Holden's stream of peace editorials were appealing to a broader audience in a war-weary state that had contributed more soldiers to the conflict than any other southern state. Also rampant in North Carolina was a keen sense of being neglected by the Richmond authorities who had made such paltry provisions for the region's defense two years earlier and had repeatedly failed in half-hearted attempts to recover the occupied territory. The double risk of losing the general support of North Carolinians and jeopardizing the most vital supply line in the Confederacy motivated President Jefferson Davis, at the suggestion of General Robert E. Lee, to authorize yet another campaign in North Carolina during the winter lull of 1864. An earlier effort to retake New Bern in March 1863 had been foiled chiefly by the accurate fire of Union gunboats, but Southern leaders believed for the first time that the Confederate Navy could neutralize their effect, having nearly completed two ironclad warships--the Neuse on the Neuse River and the Albemarle on the Roanoke River.

Determined to try again to force the Federals out but realizing that he had to act before his troops were recalled to Virginia in the spring, General Hoke was convinced that he must have one of the ironclads to support his operation. Upon learning that the Albemarle was further along, he chose Plymouth on the Roanoke as his objective.

By 1 April the Albemarle had been moved downriver to Hamilton where it awaited the last of her armor plate. Extensive entrenchments, redoubts, and forts protected the Union garrison of 2800 men at Plymouth commanded by Brigadier General W. H. Wessells. Four gunboats under the command of Lieutenant Charles W. Flusser guarded the river. The Miami, Southfield, Ceres, and Whitehead were armed with twenty-two heavy guns. Meeting Cooke at Hamilton, Hoke pleaded urgently for the ironclad's participation in the coming attempt on Plymouth. Despite his misgivings, Cooke agreed to have her at Plymouth on the eighteenth.

Opening his campaign on 17 April, Hoke advanced to within five miles of the town. Artillery fire was exchanged that day, and the next morning Confederate guns bombarded the Federal earthworks, also striking the transport Bombshell, which sank at the dock. Although the Albemarle had not arrived, nor had the anxious Hoke heard from Cooke, an assault was ordered in the afternoon against the outlying redoubt. The day ended with the Confederates in good position to resume the attack, if only the ironclad would appear. But the question remained, where was the Albemarle? On the afternoon of the

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seventeenth, Cooke commissioned the Albemarle and cast off from Hamilton, headed downstream stern first, dragging heavy chains to slow her down. Blacksmiths manned portable forges, and workmen scrambled over the vessel busily applying the last of the plate armor. The green crew ran through gun drill to the sound of hammering and the shouts of mechanics.⁷⁵

At Williamston a gala welcome awaited the huge ram from a large crowd, complete with band, gathered on the riverbank. The Albemarle stopped briefly for the ceremony and offloaded the extra workmen and equipment. During the night two breakdowns delayed the ram a total of ten hours, but by mid-morning of the eighteenth it was underway again. At ten o'clock that evening the ironclad was three miles upstream from Plymouth above the Union river obstructions. Initial reconnaissance by one of the officers reported that it could not pass the obstacles, but Gilbert Elliott, who was aboard as a volunteer, personally reconnoitered the pilings and found that there was indeed just sufficient depth for the ram to proceed. At 2:30 on the morning of the nineteenth the Albemarle cleared for action and silently passed the Union batteries, which opened fire that sounded to the crew like "pebbles thrown against an empty barrel."

With no armored vessels under his command Lieutenant Flusser had devised a plan of loosely lashing together his strongest gunboats—the eight-gun Miami and the six-gun Southfield—to entrap the Albemarle between them and pound it into submission at point-blank range. The Union gunboats awaited their adversary about a mile below Plymouth. When Cooke sighted his enemies, he evaded the trap by turning into the starboard bow of the Southfield and driving the massive ram some ten feet into the side of the enemy vessel. He reversed engines, but the Southfield sank so quickly that it dragged the forward deck of the ironclad under. As water poured into the forward ports, the shaken crew was poised to abandon ship. At the last moment, the Southfield struck bottom, rolled slightly, and released its mortal foe. Flusser brought the Miami alongside the Albemarle and opened fire. Fearing boarders, Cooke ordered his marines topside to engage the enemy with rifle fire. Suddenly, Flusser was killed at his bow gun, apparently when one of his own shells ricocheted off the sloping casemate of the ram and exploded over his gun. The damaged Miami fled downstream into the darkness, leaving the Albemarle as uncontested ruler of the river.⁷⁶

While the ram lay offshore below Plymouth in the predawn, Elliott established personal contact with Hoke, and the Albemarle moved in to batter the Union fortifications from the rear while Hoke's men attacked. Hoke accepted the surrender of the town on the twentieth, capturing over 2400 prisoners, tons of

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supplies, forty guns, and, most important to Cooke, some 200 tons of coal. Hoke received a meritorious promotion to major general, and the Confederate Congress voted a joint resolution of thanks to Hoke and Cooke for the "brilliant victory." For the beleaguered South awaiting the onslaught of General Grant, the victory in North Carolina was welcome news indeed. By the end of the month, the Federal forces evacuated Washington after pillaging and burning much of the town.⁷⁷ The reoccupation of Plymouth and Washington stand as the only recovery of Confederate territory taken by Union forces in the entire war.

After the victory at Plymouth, Cooke and the Albemarle ventured down to Albemarle Sound, but the Union picket boats always kept their distance. Continuing his reconquest, General Hoke moved south to threaten New Bern. With the hapless Neuse aground in the low Neuse River since 22 April, Hoke once again had to rely on the Albemarle. This time it must steam two days through hostile waters, running a gauntlet of Union gunboats that were being concentrated in Albemarle Sound to destroy her. Uneasy about the hazards of the voyage, Cooke nevertheless responded that he and the ironclad were ready. As Hoke advanced on New Bern in the first week of May, Cooke prepared the Albemarle, the steamer Cotton Plant, and the Bombshell, the former Union transport which had been raised by the Confederates, for the momentous voyage.⁷⁸

On 5 May the Confederate flotilla cast off and entered Albemarle Sound by mid-afternoon. The Union vessels watching the river mouth fled down the sound for ten miles. Sighting the gunboat fleet approaching, Cooke signalled his consorts to retreat. The Cotton Plant, laden with troops, responded immediately, but the better-armed Bombshell continued in company. Forming his fleet of seven ships into two battle lines, the able commander of the Union squadron, Captain Melancton Smith, was eager to avenge the loss of the Southfield. Smith's fleet carried a total of fifty heavy guns, but he expected the brunt of the fight to be borne by the Sassacus, ten guns; the Miami, eight guns; the Wyalusing, eight guns; and the flagship Mettabesett, ten guns. His captains had orders to unleash broadsides as they passed, to attempt to ram, and to ensnare the ironclad in a net to foul its propellers.

At 4:40 p.m. the Albemarle opened fire as it turned to the starboard, and as the Yankee battle lines passed they replied. Leading the Union battle line, the Mettabesett steamed past the ram and engaged the lightly-armed Bombshell, which maneuvered away. The Albemarle was soon surrounded and being pummeled unmercifully by the Sassacus, the Wyalusing, and the Mettabesett,

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but the shot from the Union gunboats were seen to “bound away in the air like rubber balls” off the slanting casemate. Returning to the battle, the Bombshell peppered the Sassacus with her twenty-pound Parrott gun and her three howitzers. A broadside from the Yankee gunboat quickly compelled the Bombshell to strike her colors. The Sassacus, now some distance away, turned and at full steam charged back into the battle, ramming the Albemarle and riding up on its after deck. As the Sassacus struck, the ironclad’s damaged stern gun was fired point-blank into the bow of the Union vessel. The redoubtable Commander Francis A. Roe of the Sassacus drove his vessel harder against the ram, hoping to force it under. Cooke ordered his helmsman to swing the ram to port, and it broke free from the Sassacus, firing another shot which crippled the enemy gunboat, striking the boiler and filling the engine room with steam that horribly scalded many of the crew. The Sassacus ground across the rear deck of the Albemarle and drifted off, apparently sinking. The Miami came up, attempting to explode a spar torpedo under the ironclad, but was foiled by Cooke’s maneuvering. The hail of heavy shot and shell striking the Albemarle created an incredible din, causing concussions among most of the crew, who were bleeding from nose and ears. By 6:30 p.m. the smokestack of the ironclad was so riddled that it began to lose power as the boiler fires faded. With her coal nearly gone, Cooke ordered the furniture and bulkheads dismantled to keep his vessel moving. The fires finally began to blaze, raising steam pressure, when the ship’s lard, ham, and bacon were tossed into the furnaces. Cooke fired a last shot at his antagonists as they slowly retreated down the sound, and the Albemarle steamed laboriously back to Plymouth.⁷⁹

In the nearly three-hour engagement, the Albemarle had fired twenty-seven rounds, many of which had struck home, and had been the target for 557 rounds, most of which missed its slow profile. Except for damage to the after gun and the smokestack, the ram was in good shape. Most of the Union gunboats suffered damage, and the Sassacus, which Cooke thought was sunk, was severely disabled. There were no Confederate casualties, but thirty-seven men from the Bombshell were taken prisoner. The Union suffered a total of eight killed and twenty-one wounded, with the majority of the casualties on the Sassacus. The Confederates could claim a tactical victory over great odds, but the Union gunboats had achieved their strategic objective of stopping the Albemarle, forcing her to return to her river haven. Hoke’s troops, on the verge of taking New Bern, were ordered back to Virginia, and the liberation of eastern North Carolina was again left unaccomplished. In retrospect it would seem that had the

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Albemarle and the Neuse been able to act together to support the aggressive Hoke, eastern North Carolina could have been completely cleared of Union forces in a short time; however, it was not to be.⁸⁰

After the battle on Albemarle Sound the ironclad remained close to Plymouth, occasionally sallying out into the sound, but neither side was eager to renew battle. Cooke received meritorious promotion to captain and was summoned to take charge of the inland naval defense of North Carolina, with headquarters at Halifax.

The whole region was shaken on 28 October by the disastrous news that the Albemarle, now under the command of Lieutenant Alexander F. Warley, had been sunk at its moorings by a torpedo launch in one of the most daring naval raids of the war. During the night Lieutenant William B. Cushing, who had earned a reputation for audacious commando action, succeeded in driving his boat over the Albemarle's protective log boom and detonating a charge under the hull. Cushing escaped back to the Union navy, with the welcome news that the dreaded ram was no more.⁸¹

On 29 October Commander William H. Macomb on his flagship Shamrock led a powerful fleet of eight gunboats and two armed tugboats, including Otsego and Bazely, upriver to retake Plymouth. Under fire from Confederate shore batteries, the initial thrust ended almost in sight of Plymouth at the wreck of Southfield where the rebels had effectively blocked the river with sunken schooners covered by well-sited batteries. With the front door shut, Macomb sent Valley City to reconnoiter the back way through the Middle River, which was found to be open. The fleet reversed course and passed through the middle passage, shelling Plymouth across the cypress swamps invisible to the rebel gunners. That evening the fleet anchored in the Roanoke River above Plymouth. On the morning of 31 October the Union flotilla steamed downriver and engaged the Confederate batteries and infantrymen in a spirited duel for about an hour. When an onshore magazine exploded, the rebels abandoned the shattered town and Union soldiers swarmed ashore.⁸²

THE FINAL UNION CAMPAIGN ON THE ROANOKE

Fort Branch at Rainbow Bend, the stronghold guarding the upper Roanoke River valley, had developed in 1862-1863 after the occupation of Plymouth to protect the construction of the Confederate ironclad Albemarle. In its final form

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the earthen fort crowned a seventy-foot high bluff in a river bend that dominated a three-quarter-mile stretch of the river located about two miles downstream from Hamilton. In June 1862 a Union flotilla commanded by Lieutenant Flusser passed the bluffs and briefly occupied Hamilton after meeting only light opposition.

The earthworks were begun at the end of October 1862 but had to be abandoned immediately under pressure from a large Union reconnaissance of over 5000 men led by the department commander, Major General John G. Foster, supported by a flotilla of five gunboats. The incomplete fort was razed. Confederate work resumed on the site in November, and by February 1863 it was ready with eleven guns, the heaviest of which was a 32-pound rifle. By the time the fort was evacuated there may have been as many as fifteen guns. The river obstructions consisted of pilings, a chain, and a minefield of twenty-three torpedoes.⁸³

Although several raids had penetrated the valley in 1863, the ironclad Albemarle had held the Federals at bay in 1864 from April to October when it was destroyed by Lieutenant Cushing's torpedo launch attack. Plymouth subsequently fell to the Union navy. When rumors were heard that Captain Cooke was once again working on an ironclad, an expedition upriver was organized in early December. A brigade of infantry, about 1500 men, left Plymouth on 9 December under Commander William Macomb, supported by a flotilla of six vessels, including three gunboats—the Wyalusing, Otsego, and Valley City—and three tugs. Near Jamesville on the ninth the Otsego unknowingly anchored in a torpedo nest, touched off two torpedoes and sank in minutes. The next morning as the tug Bazely maneuvered alongside the sunken gunboat, another torpedo exploded, killing two of the crew and sinking the tug. Thereafter the naval contingent barely made any headway since they were constantly dragging for torpedoes. The slowly creeping ships now came under musket fire from rebel troops concealed in the woods and were surprised on 21 December at Poplar Point by a hidden battery of rifled cannon that damaged Valley City. Bedeviled by the constant sniping and the dozens of torpedoes that infested the river and knowing that the army contingent had already been turned back to Plymouth, there was nothing more that the gunboats could do except to retreat. Commander Macomb reluctantly gave the command to turn back on 23 December, ending the frustrating two-week effort to destroy the new ram. Not until the Confederate government had completely collapsed was Fort Branch finally evacuated and the Roanoke River opened to Halifax.⁸⁴

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CONCLUSIONS

Over the four years of the Civil War the coastal waters of the North Carolina Outer Banks and Sound Country were the scene of virtually every form of naval warfare of the period practiced by nearly every type of vessel that could be adapted to the shallow maritime environment. While North Carolina remained a secondary theater for both sides, it was a significant region of military activity that illustrated the importance of combined operations—the close cooperation between land and sea forces. The sounds and rivers were also an arena where the new and diabolical torpedo, or mine, warfare was practiced effectively by both of the antagonists. Whoever achieved naval superiority dominated vast inland seas and rivers that allowed penetration many miles into the interior. With control of the water, military power could be projected or concentrated anywhere in the region, and trade could either be protected by the defenders or interdicted by the invaders.

In no other theater of the war were combined operations so crucial to maintaining military control from 1861 to the end of the war. The only comparable region is the Mississippi River valley, which had only a riverine setting where the conflict was virtually over with the fall of Vicksburg in mid-1863. Only in North Carolina were sustained combined operations conducted from the first year of the war until the last. In most other theaters after an invasion or campaign involving land and sea forces was finished the services went their separate ways. In North Carolina the dominant Union fleet allowed a small number of Union soldiers based in fortified enclaves to control a huge region and deny the hard-pressed Confederates significant natural, agricultural, and human resources. The Albemarle demonstrated what one powerful ship when well used could achieve if properly supported by an army, but alone it simply was not enough to offset the overwhelming numbers of Union warships and heavy guns. In most of the few instances when either side attempted a movement without cooperation between land and sea forces, it failed. In the end, it all came down to a matter of ships and guns, and although the Confederates could achieve a temporary superiority in land forces, they could not match the naval forces arrayed against them.

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Endnotes

¹ Orr and Stuart, North Carolina Atlas, 313-15.

² Turner, "Scuppernong," 1,

³ Ruffin, Agricultural Sketches, 115.

⁴ Turner, "Scuppernong," 4, 13, 22, 24, 30.

⁵ Watson, "Steam Navigation," 32-33, 35-36.

⁶ Lawrence, "Tarboro Wreck," 6-7.

⁷ Olson, "Curlew," 62, 64.

⁸ Stick, Lighthouses, 21-24, 31.

⁹ Lefler and Newsome, North Carolina, 415.

¹⁰ Powell, North Carolina, 343.

¹¹ Tolbert, Ellis Papers, 2: 612.

¹² Harris, Coming of the Civil War, 56.

¹³ The navy yard is located in Portsmouth across the river from Norfolk, but even in the nineteenth century it was commonly referred to as the Norfolk Navy Yard.

¹⁴ Still, Confederate Navy, 43, 45. Holcombe, "Gunboats," 1-2, 5-8.

¹⁵ Robinson, Privateers, 13.

¹⁶ Quoted in Civil War Naval Chronology, 5: 118.

¹⁷ Powell, Dictionary, 6: 189; Tolbert, Ellis Papers, 2: 654.

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¹⁸ Tolbert, Ellis Papers, 2: 744. Whiting ultimately became a major general and was responsible for the defense of the Cape Fear.

¹⁹ Browning, From Cape Charles, 12; Mallison, Outer Banks, 25-26, 40, 43-46; Barrett, Civil War, 33-34. Although the fort on Beacon Island also was known as Morgan, it was more commonly called Ocracoke, a name that has survived to the present.

²⁰ Tolbert, Ellis Papers, 2: 614.

²¹ Tolbert, Ellis Papers, 2: 733-34, 821; Tredwell, "North Carolina Navy," 5: 299.

²² Robinson, "Admiralty," 133-35.

²³ ORN, Series 1, 6: 72. All references to the naval records will be to Series 1 unless otherwise noted.

²⁴ Robinson, Privateers, 102-110.

²⁵ ORN, 1: 60.

²⁶ Barrett, Civil War, 46.

²⁷ Hawkins, "Coast Operations," 634. Silverstone, Warships, 41, 93, 237.

²⁸ Porter, Naval History, 47.

²⁹ ORN, 6: 784; Silverstone, Warships, 122, 239.

³⁰ Stick, Outer Banks, 130-36; Hawkins, "Coast Operations." 634-38; Olson, "Curlew," 90, 93-97.

³¹ ORN, 6: 784-89. Olson, "Curlew," 98-99.

³² Silverstone, Warships, 87, 102.

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³³ Burnside, "Expedition," 660-63; Marvel, Burnside, 42-46.

³⁴ Barrett, Civil War, 73-74; Stick, Outer Banks, 141-42.

³⁵ Mallison, Outer Banks, 64, 71.

³⁶ ORN, 6: 789. Parker, Recollections, 242-46.

³⁷ Barrett, Civil War, 80-81.

³⁸ ORN, 6: 594; Browning, From Cape Charles, 25; Parker, Recollections, 248-50; Stick, Outer Banks, 136-48.

³⁹ Olson, "Curlew," 110-12; Mallison, Outer Banks, 75-78; Barrett, Civil War, 77.

⁴⁰ Parker, Recollections, 254-55; Barrett, Civil War, 85-86.

⁴¹ ORN, 6: 606-7; Barrett, Civil War, 85.

⁴² ORN, 6: 596, 607-8; Parker, Recollections, 258-59; Scharf, History, 391. The Appomattox was burned when it was discovered to be too wide for the canal locks.

⁴³ ORN, 6: 597; Maffitt, "Reminiscences," 500; Mallison, Outer Banks, 78-80; Sauers, Burnside Expedition, 210-14. .

⁴⁴ Maffitt, "Reminiscences," 500-501.

⁴⁵ Barrett, Civil War, 92-95. Parramore, "Winton," 18-31.

⁴⁶ Rowan is quoted in Angley, "Eastern North Carolina," 31.

⁴⁷ Browning, From Cape Charles, 32-34; Barrett, Civil War, 90-107; Sauers, Burnside Expedition, 233-307.

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⁴⁸ ORN, 7:151; Browning, From Cape Charles, 34; Forest, "Chicod Creek," 3-4.

⁴⁹ Hawkins, "Coast Operations," 655-58; Barrett, Civil War, 110-113.

⁵⁰ Barrett, Civil War, 113-120; Branch, Fort Macon, 148-166; Hawkins, "Coast Operations," 652-654.

⁵¹ Barrett, Civil War, 134.

⁵² Barrett, Civil War, 134-37.

⁵³ Barrett, Civil War, 139-148.

⁵⁴ Tolbert, Ellis Papers, 2: 742-43.

⁵⁵ Waters, "Rains," 29.

⁵⁶ Waters, "Rains," 33-34, 39, 41, 51; Perry, Infernal Machines, 5-6, 15-17, 31, 148-52.

⁵⁷ Perry, Infernal Machines, 4, 200-01.

⁵⁸ Still, Jr., Iron Afloat, 150-51.

⁵⁹ Bright and others, Neuse, 6-9, 150n.

⁶⁰ Bright and others, Neuse, 9-11.

⁶¹ Bright and others, Neuse, 14-17.

⁶² Elliott, "Albemarle," 5: 316-17; Elliott, Ironclad, 88, 273-74. The dimensions given by Gilbert Elliott, the builder, in 1880 differ from those listed by the United States Navy surveyors in 1865; but the surveyors' figures, taken from measurements made by professional naval officers, should be more accurate than Elliott's memory fifteen years later. Also see John L. Porter's plans in Elliott, Ironclad, 160-61.

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- ⁶³ Elliot, "Albemarle," 5: 315; Maffitt, "Reminiscences," 502; ORN, 8: 844.
- ⁶⁴ ORN, 9: 799-800.
- ⁶⁵ Barrett, Civil War, 164-66.
- ⁶⁶ ORN, 7: 736; 9: 316, 329, 610.
- ⁶⁷ Bridges, Maverick General, 172-78.
- ⁶⁸ Barefoot, Hoke, 105-8, 111; Barrett, Civil War, 202-6.
- ⁶⁹ ORN, 9: 441-42; 452-54; Scharf, History, 395-96; Castlen, Hope, 163-64.
- ⁷⁰ ORN, 9: 440-41; 452-54; Scharf, History, 398-99; Loyall, "Capture," 329-30; Conrad, "Capture," 95-96; Castlen, Hope, 165-66.
- ⁷¹ ORN, 9: 441, 452, 458; Scharf, History, 400-401; Conrad, "Capture," 97-98.
- ⁷² ORN, 5: 346.
- ⁷³ Porter, Naval History, 472.
- ⁷⁴ ORN, 9: 589.
- ⁷⁵ Elliot, "Albemarle," 318; Elliot, Ironclad, 166-67; Barefoot, Hoke, 127-28, 136-37; Barrett, Civil War, 213.
- ⁷⁶ ORN, 9: 639-40, 644, 656-58, 772; Elliot, "Albemarle," 5: 319-21; Nichols, "Fighting," 79-82; Elliot, Ironclad, 168-83.
- ⁷⁷ Barrett, Civil War, 215-21; ORN, 9: 658; Barefoot, Hoke, 148-50, 155-57, 159.
- ⁷⁸ Elliot, Ironclad, 189-90; Barefoot, Hoke, 157-58, 160-65.

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⁷⁹ Elliott, "Albemarle," 5: 321-322; Holden, "'Albemarle' and 'Sassacus,'" 4: 629-32; Elliott, Ironclad, 194-210; Still, Iron Afloat, 160-63.

⁸⁰ Elliott, Ironclad, 211-12; Elliott, "Albemarle," 322-23.

⁸¹ Cushing, "Destruction," 634-41; Warley, "Note," 641-42; Roske and Van Doren, Lincoln's Commando, 221-42.

⁸² ORN, 11: 12-15; Thomas, Divided Allegiances, 145; Roske and Van Doren, Lincoln's Commando, 243.

⁸³ Shiman, Fort Branch, 1, 9-10, 27-29, 37, 49, 52-54, 81.

⁸⁴ Perry, Infernal Machine, 148-50; Shiman, Fort Branch, 72, 76-78, 80; Jackson, "Management Plan," 9-10, 13-14.

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ASSOCIATED PROPERTY TYPES

To qualify for inclusion in this multiple property listing, the property must be a shipwreck directly associated with naval warfare on the sounds and rivers of eastern North Carolina during the Civil War (1861-1865). Naval warfare activities include vessels lost through naval combat by gunfire or mines, vessels intentionally burned and scuttled as prizes or to avoid capture, and vessels sunk as navigational obstructions. The vessels that meet these requirements can be broken down into three functional subtypes.

Subtype: Military vessels

During the Civil War, both the Union and Confederate navies constructed armed gunboats designed to operate in shallow water environments, such as the sounds and rivers of eastern North Carolina.

On the Union side, a prime example is USS Otsego, a double-end third-rate gunboat. Otsego, and other vessels of its class, were designed to meet the needs of service in interior coastal shallow water sounds and narrow, twisting rivers where they would be unable to reverse course by turning. Otsego struck Confederate mines and sank in the Roanoke River in December 1864.

Confederate military vessels include the Macon-class wooden gunboats under construction in Washington, North Carolina. Confederate forces destroyed one of those unnamed gunboats near Washington in 1862, to prevent capture by the approaching Union navy. The Confederate navy also built and launched two iron-clad gunboats in the rivers of eastern North Carolina: CSS Neuse and CSS Albemarle. Heavily armored and equipped with 6.4-inch Brooke rifled cannon, the iron-clads were formidable weapons that commanded the attention and concern of Union naval commanders stationed in North Carolina. Albemarle was sunk in the Roanoke River by a commando raid at Plymouth in 1864. The crew of Neuse destroyed the vessel near Kinston in 1865 to prevent its capture.

Subtype: Civilian vessels converted for use as gunboats

Throughout the war, the Union and Confederate governments were hampered by a shortage of military vessels. To meet this challenge, both sides acquired civilian vessels and converted them for use as gunboats.

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Examples of converted gunboats brought to eastern North Carolina by the Union navy include USS Underwriter, a former New York city tugboat and USS Southfield, a former New York City ferryboat. Underwriter was destroyed by a Confederate commando raid on New Bern in 1864 and Southfield was sunk by the CSS Albemarle at Plymouth that same year. Another example is the U.S. Army Gunboat Picket, which was an iron hull barge converted into a screw propeller steam tug, with a wood hull encasing the original iron. Picket was lost when its magazine exploded during an engagement with Confederate troops attempting to recapture Washington, North Carolina, in 1862.

The Confederate navy in North Carolina was commonly referred to as “the mosquito fleet” because of the small size and light armament of the fleet’s vessels. Examples include CSS Curlew and CSS Black Warrior. Curlew was an iron-hull, side-wheel steamboat that transported cargo and passengers in the Albemarle Sound region prior to the war. Armed with a rifled 32-pounder and a 12-pound smoothbore, Curlew was lost during the naval battle at Roanoke Island. Black Warrior (formerly M.C. Etheridge) was a wood-hull, two-masted schooner built in Plymouth, North Carolina, in 1859. Confederate forces armed Black Warrior with two 32-pounders and the schooner was destroyed by its crew to avoid capture during the battle of Elizabeth City.

Subtype: Civilian vessels used for military purposes

In addition to arming civilian vessels as gunboats, both navies used steamers, schooners, and other vessel types for transporting troops and cargo. The Confederates, for example, acquired the steamboat Oregon, which operated on the Tar and Pamlico rivers prior to the war. Renamed Col. Hill, the steamer was used by the Confederate Navy as a transport and supply ship for the Confederate Mosquito Fleet. Col. Hill was eventually sunk in the Tar River near Tarboro during a Union cavalry raid on that town in 1863.

Throughout the war, both Confederate and Union forces intentionally sank civilian vessels, primarily wooden schooners, to block navigation channels. Early in the war, fearing an imminent invasion, the Southerners placed sunken vessels in a number of strategic locations including the channel in Croatan Sound, the Chesapeake and Albemarle canal, and Neuse River below New Bern. Likewise, the Union navy, worried by reports that the CSS Albemarle was nearing completion up the Roanoke River, created a blockade of sunken schooners and lightboats seven miles upriver from Plymouth.

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Significance

Shipwrecks included in this multiple property listing are historically and archeologically significant at the state level because of their involvement in Civil War naval activities in the sounds and rivers of eastern North Carolina. All shipwrecks qualify for listing under criteria A (associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history), and criteria D (have yielded or may be likely to yield, information important in history or prehistory). In addition, those shipwrecks with sufficient structural integrity meet criteria C (embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction).

Under Criterion A these shipwrecks meet registration requirements for their association with a significant military event: naval offensive and defensive actions in the sounds and rivers of eastern North Carolina during the Civil War (1861-1865). In addition, many of the shipwrecks are rare or unique examples of Civil War military vessels or of vessel types that were important to antebellum commerce and transportation in the North Carolina sounds and rivers and in the Mid-Atlantic states.

Under Criterion C, those shipwrecks sites that include extant hull remains represent a wide range of mid-nineteenth century shipbuilding techniques and contain a record of architectural details, construction materials, and hull design and shape that reflect the time and place of their construction. Of particular importance are naval wooden and ironclad gunboats constructed for use on the sounds and rivers of eastern North Carolina and schooners of local construction that represent rare examples of indigenous design, illustrating the evolution of ship design adaptation to the shallow waters in the eastern North Carolina sound country.

Finally, these shipwrecks qualify under Criterion D, representing significant underwater historical archaeological resources as examples of mid-nineteenth century military and commercial ships. In addition to being sources of information for answering questions about commercial and naval ship construction and crew daily life, these remarkably well-preserved vessels provide important comparative data about combat destruction from all of the naval tactics and weapons of the era—mines, land-based and sea-borne artillery, ramming, accidental explosion, and intentional scuttling.

The shipwrecks included in this multiple property listing have enormous potential to stimulate historical and archaeological research about the neglected secondary theater

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of operations in the eastern North Carolina riverine and sound regions, illuminating the little-known combined army and navy operations, interior fleet actions, innovative commando tactics, construction of defensive aquatic obstructions, and mine warfare. In addition to being associated with significant Civil War naval operations, most of these vessels were dominant in antebellum commerce and transportation and are a priceless historical archaeology resource for the nation.

Registration Requirements

To be eligible for listing in this multiple property nomination, a shipwreck must be located in the sounds and rivers of eastern North Carolina and there must be clear historical and archaeological evidence that the shipwreck was lost as a result of naval activity during the Civil War. The shipwreck site must contain sufficient integrity for archaeological investigation to answer the following research questions:

- Does the shipwreck's location match the location of a historically documented Civil War shipwreck?
- Do the physical remains of the shipwreck coincide with the historical record in terms of dimensions, construction material and techniques, and means of propulsion?
- Are the condition of the remains consistent with the historical accounts vessel loss (e.g. burning, explosion, gunfire, and scuttling) and reported post-depositional activities such as channel clearing and salvage?
- Does the artifact assemblage associated with the shipwreck site reflect the correct time period and use of the historically documented shipwreck?

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GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

The “sound country” of tidewater eastern North Carolina includes the contiguous rivers west to the fall line and excludes the Cape Fear Basin, which was previously nominated to the National Register as the Cape Fear Civil War Shipwrecks.

This vast maritime region, the largest estuarine environment in the eastern United States, encompasses seven sounds—Bogue, Core, Pamlico, Croatan, Roanoke, Albemarle, and Currituck—and the associated major rivers of the White Oak, Neuse, Pamlico/Tar, Roanoke, Chowan, and Pasquotank, as well as many smaller streams. The region is bounded on the south by Bogue Sound, on the west by the fall line of the Neuse, Pamlico/Tar, and Roanoke Rivers, on the east by the Outer Banks offshore island chain, and on the north by the North Carolina-Virginia border.

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SUMMARY OF IDENTIFICATION AND EVALUATION METHODS

The multiple property listing of the Civil War shipwrecks of eastern North Carolina is based on archaeological survey and examination conducted over a thirty-year period by the Underwater Archaeology Branch (UAB) of the North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources. To date fourteen shipwrecks involved in Civil War Union and Confederate naval campaigns and battles in eastern North Carolina have been identified. Shipwrecks normally are neither visible nor intact but are known by local tradition, by historical documentation of the wrecks, and as navigation hazards. Since the vessels in this survey are associated with Civil War naval operations, the most significant maritime historical event to occur in the region, the general locations were common knowledge among the local population and among research specialists in that historical era. These ships were lost during military activity that was well documented from published histories and contemporary reports and narratives. Although low visibility from silt and turbid water prevented specific site identification without extensive survey, the UAB searched for these wrecks despite the restrictions of limited time and budget. The Curlew, Scuppernong, Col Hill, four schooners, Otsego, and Bazely were all found as the result of projects conceived, initiated, and conducted by the UAB. Black Warrior, U.S. Army Gunboat Picket, and Underwriter were found and reported by sport divers, and East Carolina University nautical archaeologists discovered and reported the Southfield. Local residents found the Chicod Creek Wreck. Without exception, these vessels were lost in military action through combat, mine warfare, or intentional burning or scuttling.

The historical context of these shipwrecks is Civil War naval warfare on the North Carolina sounds and rivers. The naval campaigns in this secondary theater of operations are not so well known as warfare in the Chesapeake Bay or the Mississippi River Valley but are equally significant. The Hatteras Campaign in the fall of 1861 was the first important Union victory of the war and bolstered northern morale. General Burnside's brilliantly executed invasion in the spring of 1862 in a series of land and sea victories resulted in the permanent occupation of about two-thirds of the fertile coastal plain of North Carolina, denying the Confederacy a significant source of supplies and threatening rail communications from Virginia to the Confederacy's most valuable blockade running entrepôt of Wilmington. These operations and Confederate countermeasures illuminate important sub-themes in Civil War naval conflict, including interior fleet operations, combined amphibious operations, both defensive and offensive riverine operations, mine warfare, innovative naval commando tactics, the adaptation of civilian commercial craft to

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naval vessels, the construction of shallow-draft gunboats for inland waters, and the construction and deployment of Confederate riverine ironclads. Vessels related to this nomination illustrate these historical military themes. Craft which were civilian commercial vessels prior to the war illuminate not only military and maritime historical themes but also the themes of commerce and transportation. As historical archaeological sites these wrecks possess enormous potential for information about the antebellum maritime commerce of the region, riverine commercial navigation, and indigenous mid-nineteenth century construction of craft particularly adapted to the environment of North Carolina's rivers and sounds.

Requirements for wreck integrity are based on expectations for underwater archaeological sites subjected to the natural vagaries of weather, current, and flooding. Disturbance of the sites has been largely by the Corps of Engineers in the late nineteenth century through the process of navigation improvement by dredging and partial removal of remains. There may be limited artifact recovery by sport divers, but for the most part wrecks which meet the integrity requirement have lain virtually undisturbed and are remarkably intact.

Research of nominated properties has involved historical documentation, compilation of contemporary plans and illustrations, archaeological survey, and in some cases limited excavation and recovery of artifacts, which have been conserved at the UAB lab and are either stored at the Fort Fisher facility or displayed in appropriate museums. All nominated properties associated with this multiple property nomination were researched by UAB staff, and some were examined in field schools conducted by the Program in Maritime Studies of East Carolina University in Greenville. Archaeological reports and site plans are filed with the UAB at Fort Fisher, and graduate theses are catalogued at the library of East Carolina University.

The archaeological research on the initial set of vessels included in this multiple property nomination spans the period from 1963 to 2005, with most of the work taking place in the last two decades. Archaeological documentation has been conducted by the UAB staff, by the graduate students and faculty of East Carolina University (ECU), and by qualified investigators under permit by the UAB. The research process at each site is defined by a standard classification developed by UAB:

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Level 1 – Includes remote sensing or other archaeological survey to locate the site and a diver investigation to confirm the presence of vessel remains and a general assessment as to the nature and scope of the archaeological site. This level of investigation involves only limited measurements (overall site dimensions) and sample artifact recovery.

Level 2 – Includes detailed site mapping, test excavation, and controlled artifact recovery.

Level 3 – Includes extensive or complete mapping and excavation and major artifact recovery.

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