

## **Federal Victories in Missouri and North Carolina**

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This week in the Civil War, Federal forces advanced in both the east and west, capturing New Madrid, Missouri; and New Bern, North Carolina. In mid-March 1862, Confederate forces still reeled from the loss of Forts Henry and Donelson, and the evacuation of Columbus, Kentucky. “We have suffered great anxiety because of [the] recent events in Kentucky and Tennessee,” Confederate President Jefferson Davis wrote to General Albert Sidney Johnston, hoping that the famed commander might be able to retrieve southern fortunes in the west.

After he had evacuated Columbus at the beginning of March, General Leonidas Polk sent part of his command under General John McCown southward to reinforce the garrisons at New Madrid and Island No. 10 on the Mississippi River. These positions soon faced a threat from Union General John Pope, who had been given orders by General Henry Halleck to organize an expedition to capture them. New Madrid was defended by several thousand troops, as well as about fifty heavy cannon and “small fleet of gunboats.” By early March, Pope had moved his army near New Madrid, and by the thirteenth he had commenced siege operations. Believing that his garrison might be cut off by Pope’s advance, McCown evacuated the town for a position south across the river. His timidity led to his removal from command, as another important Confederate defensive position along the river fell easily into Union hands. After taking New Madrid, Pope then began operations against Island No. 10, which he would capture the following month, securing control by Union forces of the entire length of the upper Mississippi north of

Fort Pillow. With the Federal capture of New Orleans in late April 1862, northern forces had breached the Confederate defenses guarding each end of the Mississippi.

Coinciding with these events on the Mississippi, far to the east Federal forces under Ambrose Burnside continued their successful operations along the North Carolina coast. In early February a combined army-navy operation captured Roanoke Island after a futile Confederate defense. Burnside subsequently moved against New Bern, the second largest town in North Carolina, located on the Neuse River. The Union force numbered around 12,000, transported and protected by a sizeable naval fleet.

Confederate Brigadier General Lawrence Branch only had about 4,000 men, some of whom were untrained militia, at New Bern to resist Burnside's attack. They manned a series of fortifications about six miles south of town and awaited the Yankees. On March 14, the Federals launched a series of attacks that eventually overwhelmed the Confederate defenders, who withdrew hastily. In the aftermath, Burnside occupied New Bern, which Branch's men had evacuated. During the fighting the Federals suffered nearly 500 casualties, while Confederate losses were about 165 killed and wounded and more than 400 captured.

Over the next several months, Burnside's forces occupied a number of other towns in North Carolina, until the Federals controlled much of the coastal areas and sounds, except for the region near Wilmington. Burnside's successes gave the north several important bases in the state, and raised his prominence to new levels. By the end of the year he would be appointed commander of the Army of Potomac, which he would lead with disastrous results at Fredericksburg that December.

While the capture of New Madrid and New Bern raised morale in the north, these events would soon be overshadowed by much larger operations, as this same week saw the opening stages of the Shenandoah Valley campaign and the movement of General George McClellan's army to the Virginia Peninsula in preparation for his operation to capture Richmond.