

The Crescent City Falls to the Union

<http://civilwar150.longwood.edu>

New Orleans, Louisiana was the largest city in the Confederacy at the start of the Civil War. Its position near the mouth of the Mississippi River contributed greatly to its strategic importance for both Confederate forces protecting it and Union forces who wished to seize it. As an international port, New Orleans was a midpoint for the shipping of domestic goods and the importation of foreign products. Confederate defenses of the city were focused downriver at Forts Jackson and St. Philip. Sandbars that stood at the various mouths of the Mississippi also provided a natural defense from any Federal ships trying to capture New Orleans.

Naval commander David Dixon Porter had already attempted an attack on New Orleans in 1861 that had proved unsuccessful. Following that failed attempt he created a new plan for taking the city, which Secretary of Navy Gideon Welles and President Lincoln approved. Porter proposed utilizing a fleet of gunboats and mortar boats to bombard Forts Jackson and St. Philip, and a 6,000-man army under General Benjamin Butler to occupy the city. As commander for the operation, Porter chose his adoptive brother Captain David Farragut. The southern-born Farragut had served in the navy since the War of 1812 and had remained loyal to the Union following the secession of his native state of Tennessee.

By the time Farragut's flagship the U.S.S. *Hartford* arrived off the entrance to the Mississippi on February 20, 1862, the Confederates had placed 74 guns at Ft. Jackson and an additional 52 on St. Philip. Eleven rebel ships offered protection to the forts. While ten of those ships were little more than converted riverboats and steamers, the other was an ironclad named the C.S.S. *Manassas*. Another ironclad, the C.S.S. *Louisiana*, was not combat-ready and

remained moored in the river during the battle. In addition, eight hulks were chained together in the river to obstruct any movement by Federal ships.

The rest of the Federal fleet arrived over the course of the next two months as Farragut made preparations to launch his attack. By April 23, Farragut's force had bombarded the two Confederate forts for several days and the Federals had cut a gap in the hulk obstructions, allowing Union ships to advance. As the mortar fleet was running out of ammunition, Farragut decided to race past Jackson and St. Philip on the morning of the 24th and head for New Orleans. The Federal ships, including Porter's own U.S.S. *Hartford* battled through continuous fire from the forts and opposition from the Confederate fleet. Casualties from the fighting included 186 Federals and 104 Confederates. Eight Confederate vessels were lost while the Union lost one. Farragut and the fleet left the forts behind and arrived in New Orleans on April 25. With the city largely undefended and at his mercy, Farragut sent a small party ashore to accept the city's surrender. An unruly mob of citizens threatened the Federals, and when they met with New Orleans Mayor John Monroe, he claimed that he did not have the authority to surrender the city. Confederate commander General Mansfield Lovell also would not formally surrender, but informed the Federals that his men were in the process of evacuating New Orleans.

Meanwhile, on April 28, the defenders of by-passed Forts Jackson and St. Philip surrendered to Farragut's men, and on the following day Union officers unfurled the American flag over the New Orleans Customs House and city hall. The Confederacy had lost its biggest city, main port and most importantly control of the lower Mississippi. The capture of New Orleans, coupled with the Union victories at Island No. 10 and the occupation of Columbus far to the north, had broken both ends of the Confederate river defenses. Within a few months the

Federals would threaten the last major Confederate position on the river at Vicksburg, Mississippi.

Picture URLs:

-Battle of New Orleans

<http://civilwarss.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/08/Battle-Of-New-Orleans-Civil-War.jpg>

-David Porter

<http://poorwilliam.net/pix/porter-david-dixon.jpg>

-Forts Jackson and St. Philip

http://americancivilwar.com/pictures/Fort_Jackson_Naval_Battle.jpg

-David Farragut

http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/f/f8/Admiral_Farragut2.jpg/200px-Admiral_Farragut2.jpg

-Fort Macon, N.C.

<http://www.lib.unc.edu/ncc/pcoll/civilwar/81-884upper.JPG>