

"DAMN THE TORPEDOES!"

THE Campaigns for Mobile 1864-1865



By LAND & By SEA



View of Mobile ca. 1860.

THE BATTLE OF MOBILE BAY

BY MICHAEL F. BEARD

By 1864, Mobile was the only open port on the Gulf of Mexico with both water and rail connections to the Confederate interior. It attracted more blockade runners than any other port in the Confederacy except Wilmington, North Carolina. Supplies brought into Mobile by these runners helped the Confederate armies in the field. In August 1864, Admiral David G. Farragut, the U. S. naval commander in the Gulf, launched a joint navy-army operation against Mobile

Bay. His objectives were to capture the forts at the entrance to the bay, destroy Mobile's Confederate naval squadron, and close Mobile to blockade runners.

The Union Controls the Gulf

The Union blockade of Mobile began in May 1861 when the *USS Pawhatan*, based at Fort Pickens (*Stop A*) on Santa Rosa Island opposite Pensacola, arrived off Mobile Bay. Though the Confederates held

Pensacola, the navy yard, and Fort Barrancas (*Stop B*) during 1861 and early 1862, Fort Pickens remained under Federal control throughout the war.

The U. S. Navy occupied Ship Island, the best anchorage on the Mississippi Sound, in September 1861. In December, 2,000 Union soldiers landed to garrison Fort Massachusetts (*Stop F*). After Farragut captured New Orleans in May 1862, he sent a naval squadron from Ship Island toward Mobile. Fearing an attack, the Confederates pulled their remaining troops out of Pensacola to reinforce Mobile. Troops from Fort Pickens occupied Pensacola on May 10, 1862.

Stop A Fort Pickens, built 1834. Union occupation kept the Confederates from using the harbor.

Stop B Fort Barrancas, built 1845. A Federal column marched on Mobile from here (1865).



Grants Pass. Note the pilings to the left of the island.

Stop F Fort Massachusetts, built 1859. Union movement against Mobile Bay began here (1864).

Confederates Fortify Mobile

In January 1861, the Confederates seized Forts Morgan and Gaines, masonry forts guarding the bay, and began building an extensive system of defenses around Mobile. Under C. S. (Confederate States) General Dabney H. Maury's direction, thousands of slaves, soldiers, and civilians erected earthen forts on the bay shore and on islands in the



The USS Tecumseh strikes a torpedo and is sunk.

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Source: Stern, The Confederate Navy: A Pictorial History • Estimated casualties in both sea and land operations: 327 U. S., 1,000 C. S.

Pollard, Buchanan's battle line consisted of only four ships, the ironclad ram *Tennessee*, and the gunboats *Selma*, *Morgan*, and *Gaines*. The Confederate naval squadron carried only 22 guns. These, plus the 46 guns of Fort Morgan, opposed Farragut's 199 guns. Even so, Buchanan was nothing if not game and stood ready to oppose the Federal's entrance into the bay.



Admiral David G. Farragut, U. S. Navy.

By Sea: The Battle of the Bay

Granger landed on Dauphin Island on August 3 to besiege Fort Gaines (26 guns) from the west. At dawn on August 5, the Union army opened fire with six guns on Gaines' water batteries and Farragut steamed into Mobile Bay. The *Tecumseh* and the other monitors, their cannon booming, sailed in single file under Fort Morgan's (*Stop C*) blazing guns. The *Brooklyn*, followed closely by the flagship *Hartford*, led the wooden steamers in on the left of the monitors. Lashed together in pairs, the wooden ships unleashed a furious fire on Fort Morgan. Smoke blew into the faces of the fort's gunners, impairing their effectiveness. Still, the fire from Mobile Point, especially from Morgan's water battery, was point-blank and deadly.

Buchanan, his flag aboard the *Tennessee*, positioned his squadron behind the torpedoes, intending to cross Farragut's "T." The *Brooklyn* slowed to avoid



Farragut's fleet passes Fort Morgan and enters Mobile Bay.

James Johnston, fearing his gun deck would soon be exposed to a deadly raking fire, surrendered.

Stop C Fort Morgan, begun 1834 but incomplete in 1861.

By Land: Siege & Surrender

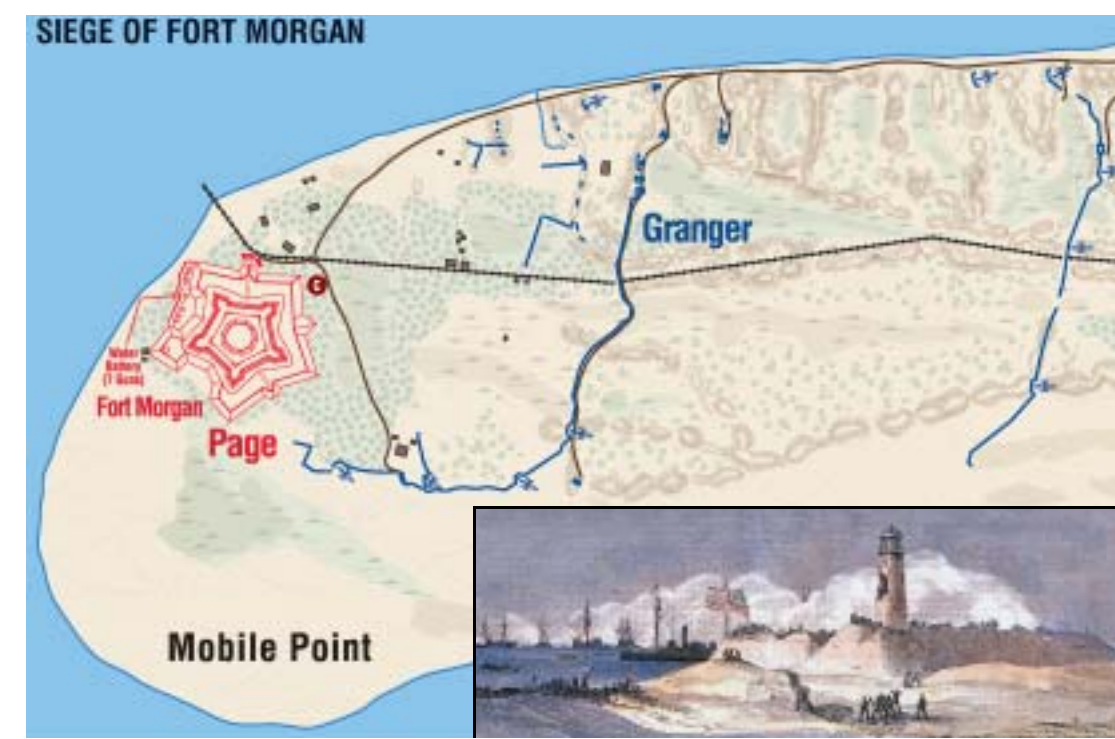
As Farragut passed Fort Morgan, five Federal gunboats shelled Fort Powell (*Stop E*) from the Mississippi Sound. Powell (18 guns) withstood this battering well enough, but in the afternoon was fired upon from the rear by the monitor *Chickasaw*. That evening, fearful that a shell would explode the fort's magazine, the garrison blew it up and withdrew to Cedar Point. Fort Gaines (*Stop D*), already under fire from Granger's guns, was attacked by the *Chickasaw* on August 6. On the 7th, Granger advanced his infantry works and set up six more guns. Under pressure from land and sea, Fort Gaines surrendered unconditionally the next morning.

Reinforced from New Orleans, Granger landed at Navy Cove on August 9 to besiege Fort Morgan. That afternoon U. S. army and naval artillery bombarded the fort for several hours, and Farragut demanded its surrender. C. S. General Richard L. Page, the fort's commandant, refused. On August 13, the navy's ironclads, including the captured *Tennessee*, began steadily shelling Fort Morgan. On August 22, all the vessels in the fleet joined with Granger's 25 cannon and 16 mortars, and for 12 hours threw 3,000 rounds into the burning fort. Page, most of his heavy guns now useless, ordered his powder destroyed and his remaining guns spiked by driving obstructions into their touchholes. Fort Morgan surrendered on August 23.

"Cannon were fired with the primer, a short, copper tube filled with powder, which was inserted into the gun's touchhole with priming wire. Spiking a gun to prevent its use by the enemy was frequently accomplished by driving priming wire, a long, thin copper wire, into the gun's touchhole and bending it with the rammer. Once the touchhole was blocked the gun could not be fired. At Fort Morgan, the touchholes were probably blocked with long, thin metal spikes which would have had to be drilled out."

Stop D Fort Gaines, begun 1848 but incomplete in 1861. Stop E Fort Powell, built 1862. C. S. engineers built the fort on a shell mound.

Farragut's triumph closed the Port of Mobile. An attack on Mobile itself, however, would have to wait because Farragut had too few soldiers to support an operation against the city. The Confederates had obstructed the main channel into the upper bay, closing it off to naval assault. This, and the strength of Mobile's defenses, would require an overland campaign to take the city.



Source: The Official Military Atlas of the Civil War, Plate LXIII.

Inset: Fort Morgan after its surrender.

Order of Battle FOR SIEGE OF FORTS

U. S. MILITARY FORCES

Maj. Gen. Gordon Granger

20th Iowa Infantry 38th Iowa Infantry 94th Illinois Infantry 20th Wisconsin Volunteer Infantry 5th U. S. Artillery 2nd Illinois Light Artillery 1st Indiana Heavy Artillery

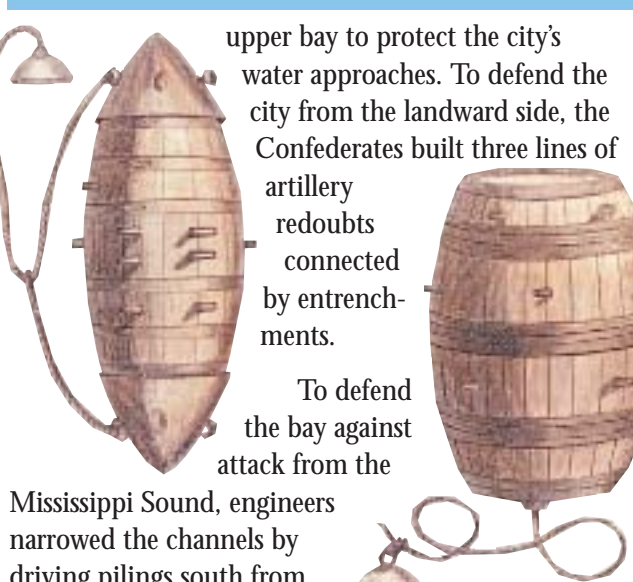
C. S. MILITARY FORCES

Maj. Gen. Dabney H. Maury

Fort Gaines: Col. Charles D. Anderson
21st Alabama Infantry (6 companies) 1st Alabama Artillery Battalion (2 companies)
Local Defense Troops & Marines

Fort Powell: Lt. Col. James M. Williams
21st Alabama Infantry (2 companies) Culpeper's South Carolina Battery

Fort Morgan: Brig. Gen. Richard L. Page
21st Alabama Infantry (1 company) 1st Alabama Artillery Battalion (5 companies)
1st Tennessee Heavy Artillery (2 companies)



Torpedoes of the kind that sank the *Tecumseh*.

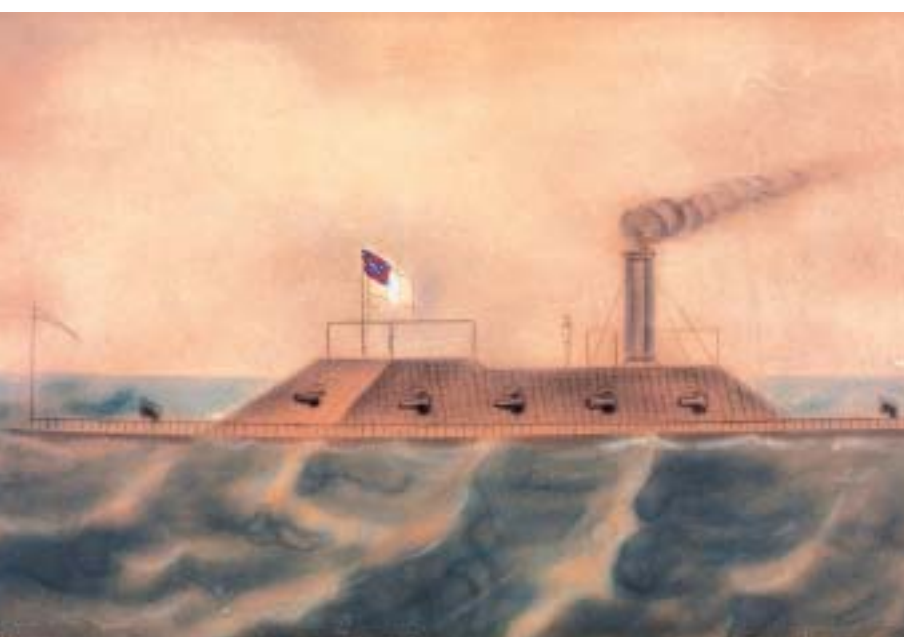
Prelude to Battle

In January 1864, Farragut learned the Confederates had strengthened Mobile's fixed defenses and completed a large ironclad, the *Tennessee*. Farragut would not attack until he had ironclads of his own. The monitor *Manhattan*, the first of four ironclads to join Farragut's fleet of fourteen wooden steamers, sailed into position on July 20. To support his combined operation, the army could spare Farragut only 1,500 men, supported by thirteen gunboats, commanded by U. S. General Gordon Granger. Granger joined the admiral on August 2. By August 4 the last monitor, the *Tecumseh*, arrived to bolster Farragut's fleet. Farragut was now ready to attack.

Maury, forced to transfer troops for the defense of Atlanta, had scarcely 5,000 soldiers available to defend the approaches to Mobile. Of these, only about 1,040 manned Forts Powell (140), Gaines (400), and Morgan (500). The rest occupied positions in the upper bay and guarded the railroad at



Admiral Franklin Buchanan, C. S. Navy.



Buchanan's flagship, the *CSS Tennessee*.

hitting the *Chickasaw* and threw the Federal fleet into confusion. Then the *Tecumseh* turned into the torpedoes to engage the *Tennessee*, struck one, and sank within minutes. *Brooklyn's* captain reversed engines, stalling the fleet in front of the fort. Farragut, lashed to the *Hartford's* main mast rigging, saw his casualties mounting and exclaimed, "Damn the torpedoes! Full speed ahead!"

Buchanan crossed the Federal "T," engaging the *Hartford* as she sailed into the lower bay. But he lacked the firepower and speed to stop the Federal advance, which quickly broke his formation. The *Gaines* taking on water, limped toward Fort Morgan. Her crew set her afire and escaped in boats as she sank. The *Selma*, pursued by the *Metacomb* and the *Port Royal*, surrendered. The *Morgan* fled to the safety of Mobile Point and escaped to the upper bay that night. The *Tennessee* ran firing down the line of Farragut's ships and pulled up on the east side of the channel near Fort Morgan. Farragut sailed up the bay and anchored opposite Grants Pass.

Two hours later, Buchanan declared, "Now I am in the humor, I will have it out," and ordered the *Tennessee* forward. Alone, she attacked and found herself beset by every Federal ship that could bring guns or bows to bear. Ramméd three times, her stack and rudder chain shot away, many of her gun port shutters jammed, she lost way and took shot after shot on her stern shield, which was all but shattered. Buchanan was wounded and her captain, Commander



Source: Manuscript Map, Library of Congress.



Mobile: The Overland Campaign, March - May 1865

By Michael F. Beard

taking 23 prisoners, but could not overcome Canby's superior strength. Canby advanced his lines until, on April 8, his 53 siege and 37 field guns began a final, massive bombardment.

Late on the 8th, with the Federals only 30 yards from the fort on his left, Gibson fired all of his forty-six guns to test Canby's capabilities. The Union gunners quickly responded, suppressing the defenders' lighter guns. Under cover of their hellish cannonade, U. S. Colonel James Cozzie's 8th Iowa (Stop 9) broke through on Gibson's left and moved to flank "his entire northern defenses." Gibson counterattacked but, under cover of night, spiked his guns and withdrew along a narrow trestleway to Fort Huger.

Stop 7 Fort McDermott, except for its water battery, was Spanish Fort's strongest bastion. Stop 8 8th Iowa line. The decisive attack of the siege started near here.



Canby's troops storm Fort Blakeley, April 8, 1865.

The Vice Tightens Around Blakeley

Steele approached Blakeley (Stop 9) on April 1, driving Liddell's skirmishers into their works, a line of nine redoubts connected by rifle-pits and palisades. Turning back a Confederate probe the next morning, he entrenched a half mile from the fort. Supported by two of Canby's divisions, Steele encircled Blakeley on the 4th and advanced his lines "under an unceasing fire from the enemy's sharpshooters and occasional fire from their gunboats and batteries."

Liddell maintained a stubborn defense for nine days. Firebats shot from coehorn mortars kept the defenders' fire accurate after dark. He launched desperate sorties against Steele's skirmishers on the 6th and 7th, but on the 8th Spanish Fort fell and Union guns drove away Liddell's naval support. Then, late on the 9th, two lines of skirmishers led Steele's final attack. Though "impeded by fallen timber," Steele's 18,000 soldiers captured forty guns and 3,700 officers and men in thirty minutes.

Stop 9 Blakeley. The park has a self-guided tour.

The Fall of Mobile

The losses incurred at Spanish Fort and Blakeley left Mobile indefensible. Maury evacuated the city on April 10-12. To cover his retreat, Forts Huger and Tracy fired on Canby's batteries until late on the 11th when both garrisons abandoned their works and blew up their magazines.

By then, two divisions of the XIII Corps had gone to Starke's Landing (Stop 10), where they embarked for Mobile. On

April 12, they crossed the bay, landed at Dog River Point (Stop 11), and marched to Mobile. Mayor R. H. Slough met the Federals on Bay Shell Road and surrendered the city at noon.

Stop 10 Starke's Landing was Canby's supply depot during the campaign.

Stop 11 Dog River Point. The Federals landed near Magnolia Race-track.

Pursuit & Surrender

Maury's rear guard retreated up the Mobile & Ohio Railroad on the 12th, burning railroad bridges behind them. On the 13th, U.S. Colonel Henry Day's brigade, led by the 91st Illinois, pursued them past the M & O Machine Shops in Whistler and stopped Maury's cavalry from burning the bridge over Eight Mile Creek (Stop 12). The combatants exchanged a sharp fire for five minutes; then twenty Union skirmishers rushed onto the bridge and chased the Confederates away.

Stop 12 Mobile & Ohio Railroad Machine Shops, one mile southeast of the Eight Mile Creek skirmish site.

By April 30, Taylor knew the Confederacy was finished. C. S. Generals Robert E. Lee and Joe Johnston had surrendered Virginia, Georgia, and the Carolinas. The recent Federal capture of Selma and Montgomery made further resistance pointless. Determined to stop the bloodshed, Taylor took a handker from his headgear and handed it to the Union soldiers, signaling the end of the war.

Washington disallowed their agreement as being too easy: "You must surrender within 48 hours or face renewed hostilities." Undaunted, Taylor again travelled south on the railroad and again met with Canby, this time at Cuba Station (Stop 14), where he formally surrendered on May 4, 1865. So fell the Confederate army east of the Mississippi River.

Stop 13 McGee Farm. Cease fire site.

Stop 14 Cuba Station. Surrender site.



A Confederate crank hand car, ca. 1855.



Union ammunition box, Museum of Mobile.

Even as Farragut tightened his grip on Fort Morgan, C. S. General Maury strengthened Mobile's defenses. C. S. General Richard Taylor, commanding in Alabama and Mississippi, regarded Mobile's lines of communications vitally important to the Confederacy and supported Maury's preparations. However, no Federal attack would come before the spring of 1865, when the U. S. commander in the Gulf, General Edward Canby, received the resources to begin.

The Bon Secour & Fish River Raids

The most Canby could do in late 1864 was launch raids against the Mobile command. On September 9, two navy gunboats and an army transport landed 250 men near Salt House Point on the Bon Secour River (Stop 3). The raiders destroyed all the strategic salt works on both sides of the river, dismantled Camp Anderson, and carried away 30,000 feet of lumber.

On the 11th, the same force steamed up Fish River to Smith's Mill (Stop 5) where they confiscated 60,000 feet of lumber and Smith's engine. On their return after dark, a force of 70 Confederates blocked the river with pine trees and hit the raiders at Peter's Bluff with rifle fire. Answering with canister, shell, and rifles, the trapped Federals broke through the obstructions and withdrew with few casualties.

Stop 3 Vicinity of salt works & Camp Anderson. Stop 5 Vicinity of Smith's & Dannelly's Mills.

Mustering of Forces

Maury bolstered the upper bay obstructions, mounted heavier guns in Forts Huger and Tracy, and began building earthen forts at Blakeley and Spanish Fort. In January 1865, Taylor dispatched all the troops he could spare to Mobile, including 3,000 infantrymen and 1,500 gunners. By March, Maury had 231 guns and 10,000 soldiers at his disposal.

U. S. General Ulysses S. Grant sent Canby 18,000 infantry and 5,000 cavalry in December, and ordered him to capture Mobile quickly or push past the city and take Selma and Montgomery. In February and March, Canby concentrated 45,000 men at Forts Gaines (Stop 1), Morgan (Stop 2), and

Siege & Battle: Spanish Fort

Canby crossed D Olive Creek on the 27th and advanced to within a half mile of Spanish Fort. Held by 1800 men under C. S. General Randall Gibson, the fort was unfinished and vulnerable on the left where the ground was flat. At 3:00 a.m. Gibson threw out a strong skirmish line to gain time to improve his defenses. Surprised, the Union pickets retreated. Later that day, Canby advanced under fire and drove back the Confederates. Canby surrounded the fort after dark. Gibson launched several sorties against Canby. He attacked the Union line in front of Fort McDermott (Stop 7).



View of Fort McDermott from the earthworks of the XIII Corps.



The skirmish at Eight Mile Creek was one of the last of the war.



Mobile & Ohio Railroad Machine Shops at Whistler.



Mobile's U.S. Ordnance Depot exploded on May 25, 1865, destroying eight city blocks near the waterfront.



Mobile cadet's uniform jacket, Museum of Mobile.



Mobile's mayor surrendered the city on Bay Shell Road.

Order of Battle

U. S. MILITARY & NAVAL FORCES

Maj. Gen. E. R. S. Canby
 Maj. Gen. Gordon Granger (XIII Corps)
 VEATCH: Slack Dennis Kinsey
 ANDREWS: Bertram
 BENTON: Grier Day Krez

Maj. Gen. A. J. Smith (XVI Corps)
 McARTHUR: McMillen Hubbard Marshall
 GARRARD: Rinaker Gilbert Harris
 CARR: Moore Ward Geddes

Maj. Gen. Frederick Steele
 HAWKINS: Pile Scofield Drew
 ANDREWS: Spicely Moore (XIII Corps, detached)
 LUCAS (cavalry)

Rear Adm. H. K. Thatcher
 Monitors: Chickasaw Kickapoo Milwaukee Osage Winnabago
 Wooden Steamers: Althea Ida Metacomb Octovora Rodolph

C. S. MILITARY & NAVAL FORCES

Lt. Gen. Richard Taylor
 Department of Alabama, Mississippi, & East Louisiana

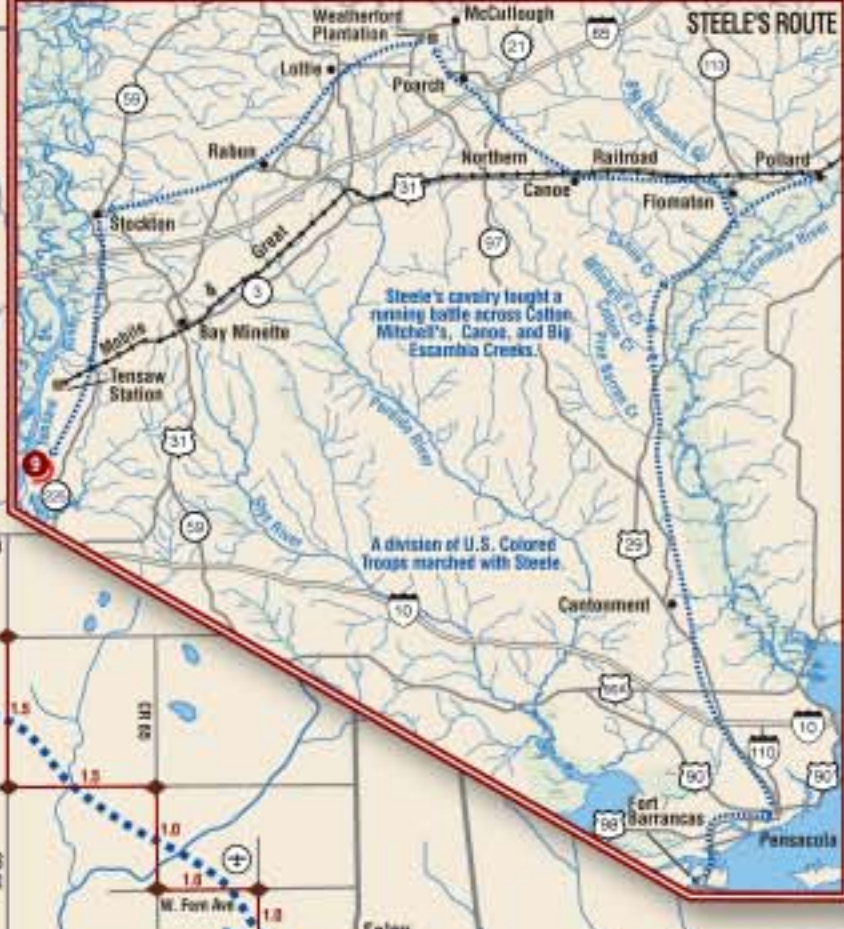
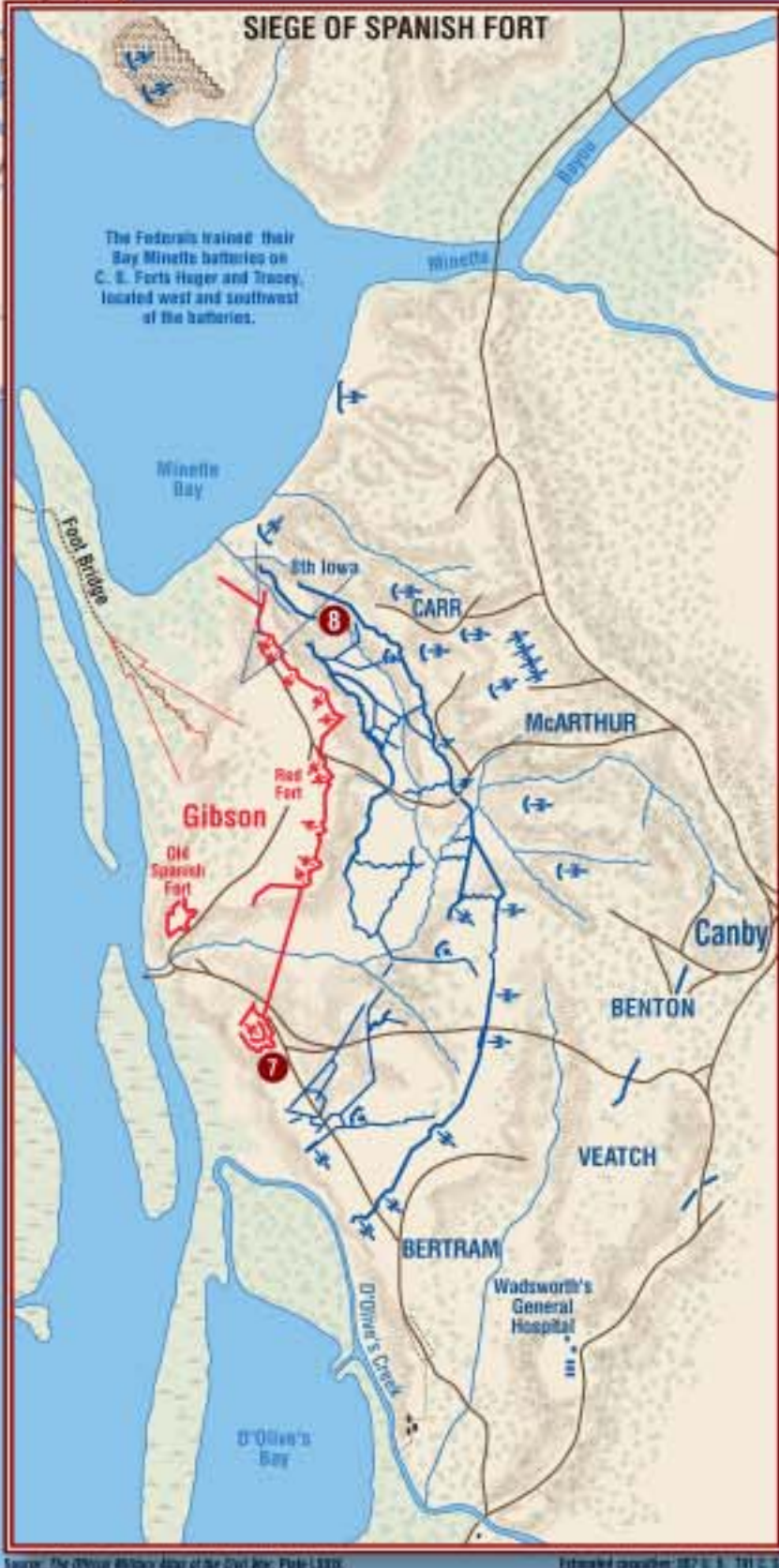
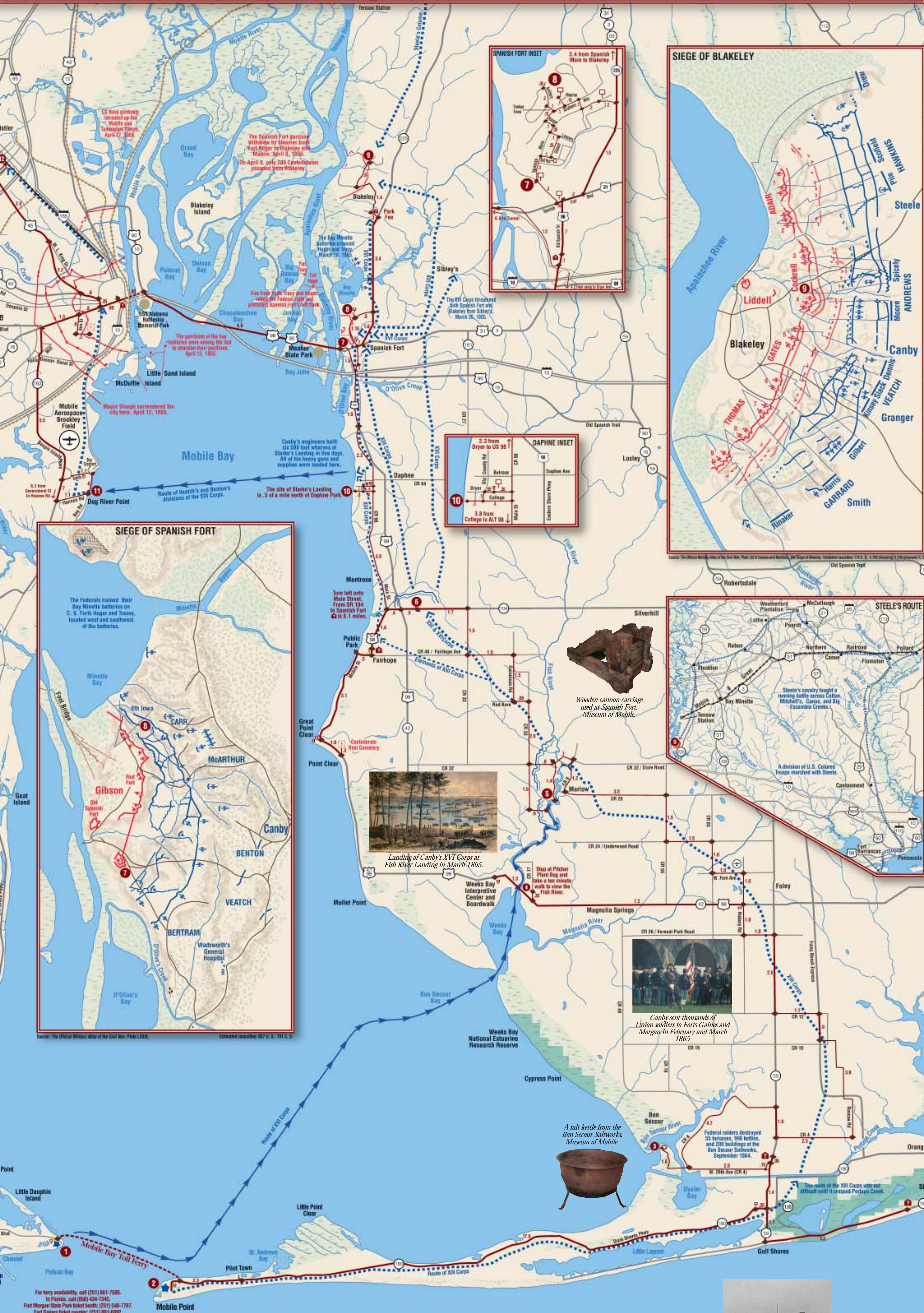
Maj. Gen. Dabney H. Maury
 Commanding HQ, Mobile

Brig. Gen. St. John Richardson Liddell
 Commanding HQ, Blakeley

Spanish Fort: Brig. Gen. Randall Gibson
 COLEMAN HOLTZCLAW THOMAS ZACHARIE.

Blakeley: Brig. Gen. Francis M. Cockrell
 ADAIR GATES THOMAS GRAYSON (artillery)

Commodore Ebenezer Farrand
 Ironclad Rams: Nashville Tuscaloosa
 Sidewheel Steamship: Morgan



Landing of Canby's XVI Corps at Fish River in March 1865.



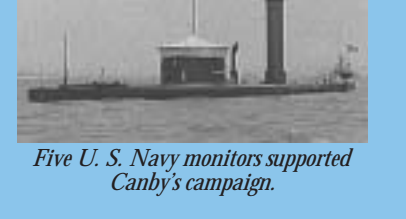
Wooden cannon carriage used at Spanish Fort, Museum of Mobile.



Canby sent thousands of Union soldiers to Forts Gaines and Morgan in February and March 1865.



A salt kettle from the Bon Secour Saltworks, Museum of Mobile.



Five U.S. Navy monitors supported Canby's campaign.