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The Civil War Gulf Blockade: The Unpublished Journal of a U.S. Navy Warrant Officer Aboard the USS *Vincennes*, 1861–1864

Robert M. Oxley¹

“July 12, 1861 Sailed from Boston, on a short cruise in search of the Rebel Privateer (Brig) *Jeff Davis*—said to be on a Rampage off this Port.” So begins the journal of Nicholas Lynch, Warrant Officer, U.S. Navy. Among primary documents providing insight into Civil War naval history, letters and personal journals written by on-scene observers are among the most intriguing. Such sources often provide details lacking in newspaper accounts of naval actions, or in the Official Records of the Navy (ORN) or ships’ logbooks, which tend to be factual in content.² More important, letters and journals are much more likely than these other sources to reflect an observer’s feelings and emotions. Such is the case with the journal of Nicholas Lynch.³

This paper attempts to (1) describe the unpublished journal of Nicholas Lynch, Warrant Officer (Sailmaker), U.S. Navy; (2) expand upon the most remarkable incident in the journal, the Affair at the Passes of the Mississippi River, a minor disaster for the Union navy in the first year of the war; (3) discuss the thoughts and moods of Sailmaker Lynch during the Union blockade from 1861 through 1864. The journal offers rare insights about naval warfare from the point of view of a sailor of the line. It also reveals that officers and crew were unable to maintain discipline and *esprit de corps* when faced with years of monotony and inaction on blockade duty aboard a sailing vessel.

LYNCH’S JOURNAL

Born in Baltimore, Maryland, in 1822, Nicholas Lynch was apprenticed to a sailmaker in his youth. He joined the U.S. Navy in 1859 at the age of 37, and received his warrant as a sailmaker in June 1861. From 1861 to 1877, Lynch kept a journal while on board ship, recording events that were out of the ordinary, his opinions and gripes, lists of equipment and supplies, and occasionally his moods. The autograph manuscript, never published, is written in a fine hand with few emendations. Pages 1–47 cover the Civil War period, 1861–1865, during which time he was aboard the USS *Vincennes* (1861–1864) and the USS *Colorado*. He was aboard the *Colorado* during the two bombardments of Fort Fisher (Wilmington, North Carolina) in December 1864 and January 1865.

Lynch does have a best friend whom he mentions often both during and after the Civil War—William Wilson, another warrant officer who was the ship’s gunner. After the war, the journal records Lynch’s experiences about the *Colorado*, the *California*, *Contoocook*, and other ships. His trips took him to France, Spain, Portugal, Italy, the Virgin Islands, and the Lesser Antilles, and to Honolulu by way of Cape Horn and the Straits of

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Magellan. A cheerful, energetic tone is maintained throughout the journal, except for the period described at the end of this essay.

The *Vincennes* never did find the privateer *Jeff Davis* during her eight-day search with which the journal begins. Within a few days of her return to the Boston Navy Yard, Secretary of the Navy Gideon Welles ordered the *Vincennes* to the Gulf of Mexico to help with the blockade.⁴ The Northern strategy, much debated early in the war, was to cut off Southern supplies by closing her ports. The *Vincennes* reached Fort Pickens (Pensacola) on September 3, 1861. One month later, she would participate in the disastrous battle at the Passes of the Mississippi River, along with the USS *Richmond*. The affair would almost sink the *Richmond* and would result in the captains of both ships being relieved of their commands.

THE AFFAIR AT THE PASSES

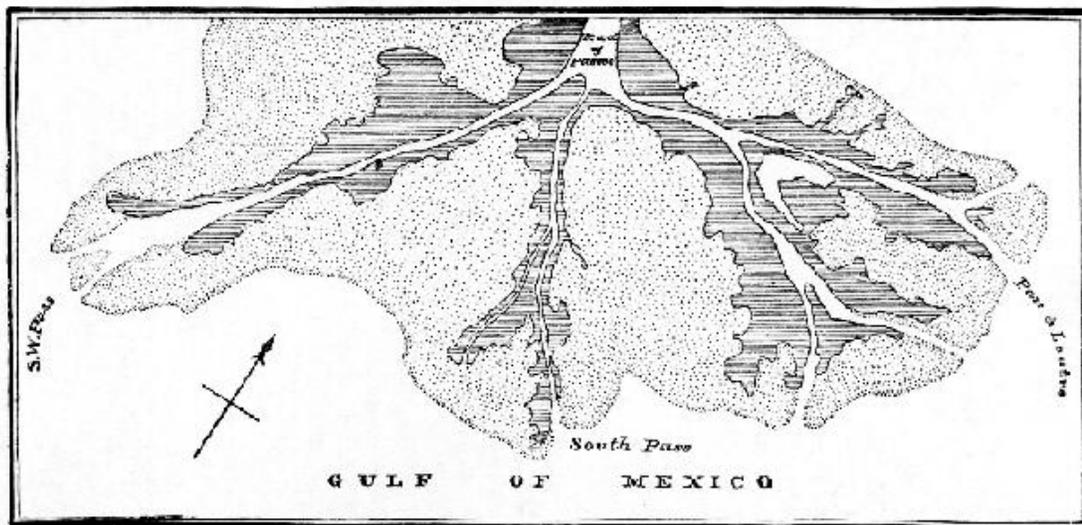
By early October 1861, sailmaker Lynch and his shipmates had joined a small squadron anchored in what is called the Head of the Passes at the mouth of the Mississippi River. Silt from the great river has built up at the mouth, forming a huge fan-shaped deposit that stretches for miles into the Gulf of Mexico, creating a barrier of shallow water impassible in all but a few places by deep draft ships. The blockade-running schooners from New Orleans, usually steam powered, gained access to the Gulf and thence to the Caribbean islands through two passes through the great barrier—Pass à l’Ostre on the east and the Southwest Pass. The Union strategists rightly concluded that the most effective and efficient way to blockade this area was to hold the Head of the Passes, where the outlets to the sea converge at the Mississippi’s mouth. At stake was all the shipping to and from the richest and largest city in the Confederacy, New Orleans, which lay one hundred miles to the north.

The four ships in the small squadron included the *Vincennes*, Commander Robert Handy, and the *Preble*, Commander French. Both the *Vincennes* and the *Preble* were sailing sloops of war with 16 to 18 guns. The *Water Witch*, Lieutenant Francis Winslow, a side-wheel steam gunboat with four guns, would prove to be the most intrepid, if the smallest, of the four. Finally, the magnificent, brand-new *Richmond* carried 22 guns and displaced almost four times the tonnage of the next largest ship in the squadron, the *Vincennes*.⁵

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Passes of the Mississippi.

Lynch records the following entry for 12 October 1861.

At 3 ½ a.m. general quarters were sounded. It was dark as Erebus at the time, and blowing a gale from the northward. In a few minutes, the guns of the fleet were blazing away. Fire ships were approaching in full blaze and the “devil” was raised generally. Got underweigh and proceeded down the S.W. pass, followed by the *Preble*, *Richmond* and *Waterwitch*. A short distance below Pilot Town, we grounded or rather ran our bows into about 10 feet of mud. The *Richmond* grounded about 400 yds below us. In the mean time, 6 of the Rebel vessels hove in sight and when at a safe distance opened fire. Now was a lively time, our position being such that we could use none but stern guns. Went to work and tore away the cabin and after a time, succeeded in getting two 8 inch guns to bear. After working them some time, and as we learned afterwards, with some effect, a signal was made by the *Richmond*, understood to be abandon ship, and it was commenced forthwith, about half of the officers and men leaving in the first boats. They were taken on the *Waterwitch* and afterward to the *Preble*. When the boats returned to the ship, the balance of us left and though the Rebel shot and shell were falling pretty thick around us, we succeeded in reaching the *Richmond*, having, previous to leaving, set a slow match to our magazine.

Remained on the *Richmond* about half an hour, and as the *Vincennes* did not “go up” as expected, we returned to her. In order to lighten her, threw 14 six-inch guns overboard, accompanied by all the solid shot.

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This extraordinary episode, in which Captain Handy ordered his officers and crew to abandon ship during the height of a battle, is described in naval histories and occupies many pages of the *ORN*.⁶

Official reports and naval histories flesh out what Lynch did not see or write down. The Union sailors knew that they were vulnerable to attack from upriver. They also knew that the Confederates were preparing a new weapon; whether or not they knew it was to be a ramming ironclad called the *Manassas* is in question. The ram *Manassas*, rebuilt from the tugboat *Enoch Train*, was 128 ft long. Virgil Carrington Jones describes her: “In making her over, the upper works were cut away, and a convex deck was constructed of white oak twelve inches thick and covered with inch-and-a-half bar iron. The bow was filled in solidly with timbers, forming a massive cleaver twenty feet long.”⁷

The convex deck barely broke the surface of the water, and no sailors or officers had to be on deck during maneuvers. In fact, the *Manassas* was barely visible. “All that appeared above water was a structure that resembled the back of a turtle, set off at the end by twin smokestacks.”⁸

At around 3:30 A.M. on Saturday, 12 October 1861, the *Manassas* and other ships including the CSS *Ivy*, with one long-range Parrott rifle, attacked the Union squadron in the dark of night. The blockaders had posted no smaller boats upstream to serve as lookouts and pickets, and the Confederate ships were drifting downstream in the strong Mississippi current. That is why no one saw or heard the *Manassas* until just seconds before it rammed the *Richmond*, tearing a hole in her starboard bow below the water line. Lynch must have been asleep during these moments.

Once the *Manassas* rammed the *Richmond*, all hell broke loose, or, as Nicholas Lynch reports, “The ‘devil’ was raised generally.” The *Manassas*, her engines crippled by the blow, turned sluggishly in the current and tried to ram the *Preble*, but missed. As it turned upstream to be hauled back up by a tugboat, it fired a bright flare to signal the other Rebel ships to attack. At that point, the Confederates set afire three large flatboats loaded high with flammable fatty pine, resins, tars, and other materials, and cast them loose to drift with the current down onto the small Union fleet. The blinding light of the fire rafts terrified the Union forces and made it more difficult to see upriver, but Captain Pope of the *Richmond* later reported seeing “several large steamers and a bark-rigged propeller” coming at them behind the fire rafts.⁹

During the retreat under fire, Commander Handy of the *Vincennes* misinterpreted a signal from the *Richmond*. What the signal actually was is in dispute, but Pope reported that his signal was “to get underway.” Handy thought it was “abandon ship,” which, after firing his guns for a while, he did. He astonished Captain Pope when he appeared on the deck of the *Richmond* with his ship’s flag wrapped around his torso. Captain Pope was furious,

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ordered Handy back to his vessel, and then was told that the *Vincennes* was about to blow. But, as Fowler puts it, “incompetence saved the day.”¹⁰ The slow match had gone out, and the captain and crew were ordered back to their ship.

In the end, the Confederate vessels, outgunned, turned back upriver some time around noon on 12 October. The *Richmond* and the *Vincennes* would be towed off the bar the next day, but nobody knew that at the time. Apparently they expected another Rebel attack, leading the crew—according to Lynch’s journal—to improvise a Rabelaisian repast from the victuals of the Officer’s Mess. All hands seem to have anticipated the imminent loss of their ship, aground with only her stern guns pointing upriver.

The Rebel vessels, before we returned, had very suddenly started up the pass, leaving us to work away unmolested. We then set to, and prepared to make a bonfire of the ship in the event of the Rebs making a call during the night. After which, we had a “general muster” of all the good things belonging to the officers’ messes, such as roast chickens, roast beef, green peas, pickled oysters, lobster and salmon, sardines, preserved sweetmeats, raisins and all other commodities calculated to please the taste, but murder digestion, and had a glorious blowout after which we topped off with several potations of ship’s whiskey and turned in on a soft plank for the balance of the night.

Lynch’s account of their evening “blowout,” during which the commissioned officers and the non-coms ate everything they could find in the officers’ messes, is related nowhere else in the literature—not in the naval records nor in any of the histories of the Navy. Nor is the following entry, which quaintly illustrates the Union sailors’ dread of Confederate rams.

Oct .14, 1861. The *Richmond*, having been struck by the Rebel Ram Manassas last night, sees in every star that rises a Rebel Signal. A signal of danger was run up on board of her at 2 AM and as “Rams” and all other infernal machines were expected, everybody went to quarters, and had a very large scare, all owing to [the planet] Venus getting up, red and rosy from a smooth sea in a clear sky.

The confusion, panic, and retreat of 12 October 1861 would be difficult for the Union Navy to live down for weeks to come. Confederate newspapers in Richmond and New Orleans had a great joke at the Navy’s expense.¹¹ Two weeks later, Captains Handy and Pope were relieved of their commands.¹² Lt. Samuel Marcy came aboard from the USS *Potomac*, a hospital ship, and took command of the *Vincennes*.¹³

Lynch’s narrative of the Affair at the Passes is told with wit, humor, and a certain satisfaction at having seen battle. He feels that the crew acquitted itself honorably and that their cannon fire had an effect. (It didn’t.) It was the last action Lynch would see

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aboard the *Vincennes*, however. The ship would spend most of the next three years anchored off the pestilential coast of the state of Mississippi, where little happened to it. Lynch's journal, which ends only in 1877 when he retires from the Navy, is almost always written in an energetic and humorous style. But as the months of blockade duty wear on, Lynch's mood would darken as his situation becomes almost intolerable.

A SAILMAKER'S THOUGHTS AND MOODS

Lynch's journal for the three-year period after the Affair at the Passes demonstrates a remarkable downhill slide in *esprit de corps* onboard the *Vincennes*. This downturn is not caused by the terrors of combat, but rather by being left out of the action. Lynch and his crewmates became subject to a vicissitude of modern warfare—they were rendered unimportant because of their obsolete equipment. That is, as a sailing vessel, the *Vincennes* could not chase and capture Confederate blockade runners powered by steam, so the crew had no hope for exciting chases or for prize money.

Oct. 24, 1862. We have now trailing astern, four sloop rigged boats, varying in size from two to ten tons. They are prizes to the *Jackson* and are sent here 'as usual' to be taken care of.

The ship could not sail up the Mississippi River to New Orleans, could not take part in the Battle of Mobile Bay. Steam-powered gunboats and ships would win those battles. The *Vincennes* could do little but to stand guard with its 18 guns or to act as a receiving ship. The resulting monotony, along with disease and with disturbing reports of murder and mayhem nearby, took their toll on both officers and crew.

After the Affair at the Passes, the *Vincennes* cruised to Galveston, New Orleans, Mobile, and Pensacola, Florida. But in October 1862, Admiral David Farragut ordered the ship to anchor at Ship Island.¹⁴ Lynch and his crewmates would remain there for the better part of two miserable years. He seems to dread the experience from the start.

Oct. 12, 1862. Arrived at Ship Island and anchored and a most miserable and desolate looking Pile of Sand it is, and no doubt a fit place for its resident population, consisting principally of mosquitoes, frogs, sand flies, and 'now and agin' an alligator or two.

Ship Island became a safe staging area for Union naval operations because it is located at the mouth of the Mississippi Sound, midway between Mobile Bay and the Passes of the Mississippi (about 100 miles from each). Rebel blockade runners and their protective gunboats would not be near. The crew's isolation would only occasionally be relieved. On 14 December 1862, Lynch writes that twenty steamers had arrived, "imparting something like life to ... this most miserable place." One of the steamers brought fresh

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cabbage, “the first we had tasted for 18 months. Enjoyed it amazingly.” Another time, a five-year-old girl appears onboard, among a group of refugees.

The following entries tell the story of “Little Anna;” Lynch must have missed his wife and nine children a great deal, judging by the attention he pays to the little refugee:

Mar. 27, 1862. Received onboard from the U.S. Schooner *Maria L. Wood*, seventeen persons, being a portion of the passenger and crew of a wrecked steamer, represented to be British. But as some of them hail from N. Orleans there are strong doubts as to their statements. They were picked up in a small boat at sea. Among them is a very pretty little girl, six years old, whose Father and Mother were in the wrecked vessel. The Father is supposed to have gone down with the vessel. The Mother was seen to jump overboard and supposed to have been picked up by one of the Boats. The name of the poor little girl is Alma Penniston and with her Parents were returning from a Tour of Europe. She is very intelligent and affords we poor devils of the Blockade a great pleasure to hear the little thing talk, being the only child we have seen or heard for eight Monotonous Months.

Mar. 30, 1862. Previous to the transfer of our passengers Gunner Wilson & myself were busy cutting and modeling garments for our little passenger, Alma.

April 10, 1862. We learn by Mobile papers found onboard of them that the father and mother of Little Alma had arrived in Mobile on their way to New Orleans. The wrecked vessel was the *Vanderbilt*, alias the Black Joker, and was a notorious blockade runner. The crew and passengers of the schooners are now onboard of us. To take care of them and captured vessels, seems to be our share of the prizes, as the *Kanawa* takes care never to capture any within signal distance.

Thus, Lynch shows his humanity in a lonely environment. He didn't like hearing about the atrocities of war, either. Lynch records the following instance of chaos with but little comment:

Jan. 11, 1863. The *Jackson* came down the sound and reports having found the bodies of Captain Chase and two men late of the *M.L. Wood*, who some six weeks since went on shore on Horn Island for the purpose of gunning.¹⁵ It was supposed at the time that they, with the rest of the boat's crew, were taken prisoners. It has since transpired that they were murdered by their comrades, who escaped in the boat to the mainland, and were afterwards seen in Mobile. ... Capt. Chase's body as well as the men's were covered with bayonet wounds, and the left arms of both the men were cut off and could not be found. Such are some of the horrors of Civil War.

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Most of the deaths that Lynch reports are the results of disease, treachery, or accident, none of which serve a positive purpose in warfare. Lynch sees many of his comrades buried on Ship Island, and he reacts with melancholy:

Jan. 25, 1863. ...Took a stroll on [Ship] Island, and visited the graves of our soldiers and sailors, some hundred of whom are buried here, the victims of three or four months exposure to the inclement air and poisonous water of this Miserable Island of Desolation. I noticed two graves, side by side, the head boards of which denoted a soldier of 73 years and a comrade of 16 years of age, of the same company and same regiment, Maine Vol. Thus had Age and Youth shouldered their muskets for the Union. Thus had they miserably perished. Got the double refined Blues for my walk, and returned to the ship.

Lynch shows a sense of humor when the crew is plagued by clouds of mosquitoes, writing of the episode as if it were combat against “the Enemy.” He even understates his disgust with the ship’s new chicken coop:

Nov. 20, 1863. As the number of Wardroom Officers is rather slim at present, a stateroom has been appropriated for a chicken coop, in which there are some two dozen confined, and the Crowing, Cackling, and Effluvia coming from that quarter is anything but agreeable. What is the Navy coming to when the ward rooms are turned into chicken coops? Democracy forever.

What bothers Lynch the most is not the uncomfortable conditions, but rather his frustrations with his officers, one of whom, A. E. Hart, often goes ashore to gamble. He writes of his officers’ violations of Navy custom—they treat captured Confederate officers “scurvily,” they refuse to relieve the morning watch officer for a few minutes so that he can wash up, and so on. With the ship at anchor most of the time, the officers were absent for days at a time, and this seems to bother Lynch particularly.

August 27, 1863. Capt. Adams was relieved today by Lieut. Chas. H. Greene. No demonstration by the men, Capt. Adams having made himself very unpopular by the number of courts martial ordered by him during the time he had command. Mr. W— left for N. Orleans today and I was called on as usual to keep his watch. He is certainly the most accomplished Loafer it has been my good fortune to find as yet on the blockade where there are so many of them. He has always something the matter with him, making it apparently necessary to be on the sick list, and when not there, some other excuse is found in order to shirk his duty as Watch Officer. But as he was taken from the important position of a boarding house runner to fill the important one of Acting Master in the U.S. Navy, who wonders at it. Viva Uncle Sam.¹⁶

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Sept. 12, 1863. ...Mr. W— returned from N.O. and relieves me from doing his duty....

Oct. 24, 1863. ...Reported Acting Master W— today for trying to pull wool over my eyes by altering the ship's timepiece, setting it ahead in his watch and back in mine. As this was not the first time I caught him at his dirty tricks, and not feeling disposed to keep a five hour morning watch, I put a stop to any further tricks on me accordingly.¹⁷

May 6, 1864. The Warrant Officers, although standing watch, have no power to act in cases of emergency and yet they are entrusted at times with the entire control of the ship. So much for Congressional wisdom in refusing positions to those who have earned and understand them, and conferring them on boarding house runners, Cape Cod fishermen, and blubber hunters.

From December 1863 through September 1864, the journal records many days of “all sorts of bad weather,” including freezing rain (“ice-making”), heat, and squalls. Lynch's mood rarely lightens during this period. Finally, the appearance of smallpox seems to spur a decision.

April 16, 1864. The tug *Narcissus* came down the sound, bringing us to take care of a man affected with Smallpox. Our boat and crew were sent to convey him onshore.... How long this ship will remain in her present healthy condition it is hard to say, if the present reckless manner of doing business is persevered in.¹⁸

April 17, 1864. Got vaccinated today among the rest of the ship's company. Having been nearly three years on the Blockade and being completely disgusted with the general proceedings onboard, made up my mind to apply to be relieved. Goodsoe and Wilson did the same.

From 5 July to 26 July 1864, Lynch says he “had to strike my colors and go on the list, very sick.” Finally, on 25 August, a sailmaker named George Thomas arrived onboard to relieve him. After a blockade life of three years and two months, Nicholas Lynch makes his way to Pensacola, where he is joined by his friends Gunner Wilson and Goodsoe. They arrive in New York on 20 September “after a very pleasant passage.”

An indication that Lynch is preoccupied with his own problems is that he doesn't even mention the heroic actions of Admiral Farragut and his fleet in Mobile Bay, in August 1864. Recovering from what probably was typhoid, sick to his soul of the monotony and lack of officers' discipline, the big story to him is his being relieved of duty. Yet surely there was a celebration of that great victory, as was customary among the sailors, who climbed into the rigging and cheered on other occasions of good news.

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Lynch would ship again in November 1864 on the steam frigate *Colorado*, and would participate in action at Fort Fisher. His journal continues until 1877. Never again would it sink into the almost despondent tone it took as the months wore on during the Gulf Blockade.

¹ The author wishes to thank Virginia W. Oxley for conceiving of this paper and for her ideas, research, and support in studying Lynch's journal. He thanks Nancy Connors, Washington, DC, for her help in the National Archives. He acknowledges and thanks Rodney Rogers, Ph.D., Associate Professor of Aeronautical Science, Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University, for his helpful suggestions. Support for research was provided by the Humanities and Social Sciences Department of Embry-Riddle and is also gratefully acknowledged.

² U.S. War Department. *Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies in the War of the Rebellion*. 31 vols. (Washington, DC.: Government Printing Office, 1894–1922; CD-ROM version, Carmel, IN: Guild Press of Indiana, Inc., 1999). This work is hereafter abbreviated as *ORN*. See also National Archives, Washington, DC, Record Group 24, Bureau of Navigation: B. Log Books of U.S. Vessels.

³ Journals, diaries, and letters often tell a different story than do official ships' logbooks. Official log entries are made every four hours, and they stick to the facts. The 1861 logbook of the *Vincennes*, Lynch's first Navy ship, comprises a large volume, currently in the National Archives. Its pages are printed with headings and columns to record the time, knots, fathoms, courses, wind direction and force, weather, air and water temperatures, barometric pressure, distance traveled, current, and longitude and latitude. Less than half of each page is left blank for "Remarks," and often the watch standers made only cursory remarks. By contrast, the Civil War journals and letters this author has seen include many narratives, descriptions of shipboard life, and comments that reflect the writers' attitudes toward, for example, runaway slaves (called "contrabands"), refugees, spies, the food, and the behavior of officers.

⁴ *ORN*, I.16.547.

⁵ USS *Preble*: Sloop of War launched 1839; tonnage 566; length 117'; beam 32'; depth 15'; armament 16 32-pounders.

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USS *Richmond*: Wooden Steam Sloop of War launched 1860. Tonnage 2604; length 225'; draft 17'4 1/2"; armament one 80-pounder Dahlgren rifle, twenty 9" Dahlgren smoothbores, one 30-pounder Parrott rifle.

USS *Vincennes*: Sloop of War launched 1826. Tonnage 700; length 127'; beam 33'9"; draft 16'6"; armament 18 guns. First American naval vessel to circumnavigate the globe; the first to call at Guam; the flagship of the Wilkes expedition of discovery through the South Pacific islands and to Antarctica.

USS *Waterwitch*: Sidewheel Steamer (gunboat) launched 1851; tonnage 378; length 150'; beam 23'; draft 9'; depth 11'6".

Source: *Dictionary of American Naval Fighting Ships*, edited by James Mooney, vols. 1–8 (Washington, DC: Naval Historical Center/GPO, 1959–81).

⁶ Most of the official reports on this affair are found in the *ORN*, Series I, vol. 16, 703–731. Secondary sources about the affair include “Richmond,” *Dictionary of American Naval Fighting Ships* 8:102–103; Bern Anderson, *By Sea and River: The Naval History of the Civil War* (originally published in New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1962; New York: Da Capo Press, 1989), 117; William M. Fowler, Jr., *Under Two Flags: The American Navy in the Civil War* (New York: Avon Books, 1990), 101–102; Virgil Carrington Jones, *The Blockaders*. vol. 1 of *The Civil War at Sea* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, Winston, 1960), 240–248; A. T. Mahan, *The Gulf and Inland Waters*, vol. 3 of *The Navy in the Civil War* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1885), 5–8; Howard P. Nash, Jr. *A Naval History of the Civil War* (New York: A. S. Barnes and Co., n.d.), 70–72; James Russell Soley, *The Blockade and the Cruisers*, vol. 1 of *The Navy in the Civil War*, subscription edition, 1885 (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1890) In *Campaigns of the Civil War*, CD-ROM, Carmel, IN: Guild Press of Indiana, Inc., 1999), 126–132; Richard S. West, Jr. *Mr. Lincoln’s Navy* (New York: Longmans, Green and Company, 1957), 130–133.

⁷ Jones, 241.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 241.

⁹ *ORN* I.16.703–704.

¹⁰ Fowler, 102.

¹¹ See *ORN* I.16.725–730 for copies of news articles about the affair. The self-serving, defensive reports written by Handy and Pope make for very interesting reading. See *ORN* I.16.703–731.

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¹² *ORN* I.16.705–706.

¹³ *ORN* I.16.706–708. Three months later, Lt. Marcy would be dead. The official log of the *Vincennes* states, “24 January, 1862. From 12 to 4 P.M. At 12, the launch and gig, with the Captain, went in shore to the wreck. At 12:45 sent the 1st cutter in shore for water. At 3, the gig returned, the Captain having had his thigh fractured by the howitzer breaking adrift in firing. At 3:30 the 1st cutter returned with 600 gallons of water. At 3:45 furling sail. E. H. Batcheller” (National Archives, Record Group 24 B, Log Books of U.S. Vessels). Three days later, the ship’s log notes simply that Lt. Marcy had been buried.

Nicholas Lynch tells a better story and provides a comment:

Jan. 24, 1862. At 4AM discovered a vessel on fire in the mouth of the south pass. Sent a boat, found her to be a three masted schooner, square rigged forward and cotton loaded and name painted over. Short time after, saw another smoke, farther south, which afterward proved to be another cotton loaded schooner. At 12 M manned and armed the launch and proceeded to the nearest. Found every part of her on fire, and merely kept afloat by her copper bottom. For the purpose of sinking her, fired several rounds of shell into her from a twelve pound Howitzer. Captain Marcy, who accompanied us in the Gig, did some of the firing, and I am sorry to write it, received injuries, from the recoil of the gun, which in a few days, terminated in his death. Thus fell in the too anxious discharge of his duty, an Officer whose place will not easily be filled, and one whose loss will be deeply felt by the Nation at this particular time. Brought off several spars, and some sails which we found alongside the wreck. They had tried to run during the night, got aground, and rather than let the vessels fall into our hands, set fire to them.

Cornelius Marius Schoonmaker, in a letter to his grandmother, comments on Lt. Marcy’s death as well. “The vessel that carries this letter takes home the remains of Lt. Samuel Marcy who died in the Gulf from injuries received by the recoil of a gun. He was very attentive to Father and Mother at the time I entered the Naval Academy” (Cornelius Marius Schoonmaker Papers, Library of Congress Manuscript Room, 14 February 1862). See also the surgeon’s report in *ORN* I.17.78–79. Marcy’s leg bones, knee, and thigh were shattered by the recoil of the howitzer.

¹⁴ *ORN* I.19.252.

¹⁵ Cornelius Marius Schoonmaker, like another journal writer, L.G. Billings, also had time for hunting and gathering food. “Some of the small islands around here are literally made of oysters, and of a good quality. Consequently I send a boat for them everyday, and we generally have four meals of them. We catch plenty of crabs also and shot quite a

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number of wild ducks of which these waters are full. I killed the first one” (Schoonmaker Papers, 3 March 1862; see also the Luther Guiteau Billings Papers, Library of Congress Manuscript Collection).

¹⁶ This day’s official log entry for 6:00 to 8:00 P.M. is signed by “N. Lynch.” From now on, he signs many of the *Vincennes*’ logbook entries.

¹⁷ Master W— is probably O. B. Warren, who signed the logbook entry this day for 8:00–12:00 noon, immediately after Lynch’s 4:00–8:00 A.M. watch. See the logbook of the *Vincennes*, National Archives.

¹⁸ See Ringle, 117–118, for a description of smallpox and its treatment.