

Report from the Joint Select Committee to Investigate the Management of the Navy Department.

Confederate States of America.

[Richmond, 1864]

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REBEL APPROPRIATIONS
REPORT

FROM THE

JOINT SELECT COMMITTEE,

To investigate the management of the Navy Department.

The Joint Select Committee of the Senate and House of Representatives, "appointed to investigate the administration of the Navy Department, under its present head, with power to send for persons and papers, and to report the result of said investigation to the two Houses, respectively," ask leave to report:

That, in accordance with the instructions contained in the resolution for their appointment, they have called before them many persons engaged in the naval and military service, as contractors and employees, as well as others in civil life, supposed to have knowledge of the matters to be investigated, and have examined many papers among the archives of the Navy Department, in order to inform themselves of the manner in which the department has been administered. They have sought information wherever they supposed it could be found, and have invited it from all who could give it. The large number of witnesses and voluminous records examined, protracted their sittings until near the close of the last session of Congress, when they found it necessary to print the testimony, that each member might review it before making a report, and that the two Houses might be enabled to decide whether the committee had formed a just judgment, and attained a proper conclusion. All the testimony deemed material and proper to be published will be found in a volume of nearly five hundred pages, printed during the last recess of Congress, which they herewith submit as part of this report. The various laws relating to the navy, the reports of the Secretary, (which have been confidentially communicated to Congress,) and the rules and orders given by him, although coming under the review of the committee, they did not think it necessary or proper to print.

The committee confined their examination to the domestic operations of the Navy Department. They intended to investigate its foreign operations also, and enquire who were sent as agents to foreign coun-

tries to purchase vessels, what instructions were given them, what funds were furnished them, what obstacles they encountered, and what were the results of their respective missions. But the Secretary and the President deemed it inconsistent with the public interest and the good faith of the Government to furnish such information, as its publication would imperil those in our service abroad, arrest their labors, and defeat their efforts to serve us; and the committee, concurring in these views, did not press such enquiries. It is due, in this connection, to state, that the Secretary of the Navy offered to send before the committee a gentleman who had charge of the foreign contracts, and of the correspondence relating to them, who could inform us, confidentially, of their character and results, and that he offered all information under his control, and every facility for obtaining it he could employ, touching the domestic affairs of the navy, whenever called for by the committee.

It will appear in the printed testimony, herewith submitted, that the committee have inquired into everything relating to the materials and the operations of the navy within the Confederate States; the means and resources for building a navy; the efforts to purchase or build vessels and to obtain ordnance and ordnance stores; the number and kind of vessels purchased or built, of whom purchased or by whom built, the contracts for them and how complied with; the contracts for war vessels now pending; the vessels owned by the Government when the Navy Department was organized, and the number and kind now owned by it; the naval defences of the Mississippi river and especially of New Orleans, of the Cumberland, Tennessee and James rivers, and of the city of Norfolk; the circumstances connected with the destruction of the Virginia, the Louisiana, the Mississippi, the Arkansas, and other gunboats; the causes of our naval disasters and of the failure of our navy to meet the public expectations.

The committee do not deem it necessary to review all the facts relating to these topics or to express their conclusion upon each of them, as the testimony is herewith presented and may be read by all who desire the information it furnishes. They think they will discharge their duty by expressing the general result of their investigations. They are gratified that they can state that, after long, patient and careful investigation, they have found nothing in the administration of the Navy Department that justifies any censure of Mr. Mallory.

Mr Mallory assumed the office of Secretary of the Navy at the beginning of the Provisional Government and organized its Navy Department. It then had no navy, no vessels of war, and, indeed, not a vessel of any kind. There were but two navy yards in the Confederate States, and but little ship timber in them. We had but a small number of ship-wrights or of persons possessing the skill or handicraft necessary to the construction of vessels of war. We had but few seamen, and no commercial school for training seamen. We were especially deficient in the machinery for propelling steam vessels and in the means for its construction. We had not the iron, the

iron works, the foundries or rolling-mills, the work shops or the skilled workmen, essential to the completion of formidable ships of war. But seven steam war vessels had been built in the States now forming the Confederacy since the war of 1812. Engines for but two of these were contracted for in these States, the heavy forgings of which were necessarily contracted for elsewhere. The entire machinery for such vessels had not been constructed in these States. Our means and resources for building a navy were so small and inconsiderable compared with the naval power and resources of the enemy, that many patriotic men doubted the wisdom of an attempt to construct a navy.

While our means of building hulls, engines and machinery, and of equipping and manning efficient ships of war were thus limited, the immediate and hourly demands upon all the workshops of the country for ordnance and ordnance stores reduced them still more. Thus the shops at Norfolk navy-yard, after they came under the control of the Secretary of the Navy, were largely engaged in the manufacture of gun-carriages, shot, shell, &c., for the army, and in mounting and supplying guns.

We have had to labor under the most untoward and embarrassing circumstances. Men have been employed as ship-wrights who had never served an apprenticeship, or built a vessel, or even worked on one, because skill and experience could not be commanded. All the labor and materials requisite to complete and equip a war vessel, could not be commanded at any one point of the Confederacy; but the machinery propelling it, or some part of it, or the ordnance or ordnance stores, had to be transported to the various and distant points, where the hulls were being built. Thus in the construction of the Mississippi at New Orleans, the labor, skill and resources of different parts of the Confederacy were necessarily invoked; her iron was rolled at Atlanta, portions of her machinery and equipments were made at Norfolk, while the main shaft and ordnance and ordnance stores were made at Richmond.

In order to sheath the hulls of gun-boats, we have been obliged to use such scrap iron, old and rejected sugar mills, and other discarded iron as could be gathered up; and, to propel them have been constrained to use the engines and boilers of dilapidated steamboats. Hence it has happened that some of our gun-boats have proven inefficient, because of the imperfection of their machinery and sheathing.

Besides the deficiencies and difficulties, we have been obstructed in our operations by the invasions of the enemy, whereby we not only lost our navy yards, and much of their machinery and ship timber, but were compelled to destroy gun-boats quite completed, and steamboats whose machinery might have served us, to prevent them from being captured by the enemy. Hence the destruction of the Virginia, Louisiana, Mississippi,* (the vessels in Lake Ponchartrain, Bayou St. John, the Yazoo and Mississippi rivers, and elsewhere.)

But, had we been able to command all the workshops and material,

* NOTE.—Some of the committee think the Mississippi was lost by want of energy and diligence of officers of the navy at New Orleans.

the artizans and seamen, requisite to construct a navy equal in size to that of our enemy, still we should have begun the war upon the most unequal terms. The enemy had a powerful navy to begin with; we had none. Under the United States Government the southern States had made great and generous sacrifices to promote the maritime interest of the North, while the great resources of naval wealth and power were ignored; and when we entered upon our struggle for independence, we found ourselves confronted, and our waters invaded by a powerful navy, which had, with our aid, been fostered and developed for over sixty years, and which, in addition to smaller vessels, readily converted to war uses, from a great commercial marine, comprised thirty-seven steamships, many of them the most formidable on the ocean, and thirty-seven sailing vessels, with an aggregate of two thousand one hundred seventy-eight heavy guns, all under the guidance of naval men and seamen whose professional attainments and nautical skill were unsurpassed. The enemy's vast naval resources, great commercial school for seamen, numerous artizans and vast workshops enabled him to augment this formible force with a rapidity unequalled in naval history, while the naval resources of the world were also opened to him. It would have required many years, even under the most favorable circumstances, for us to have built and equipped as many and such vessels as the enemy began the war with.

The committee make these observations merely in justice to the Secretary of the Navy, but to correct the public judgment, which has been founded, at least in part, upon an exaggerated estimation of our means, or undeserved disestimation of the Secretary or of naval officers or of contractors with the department. The testimony does not furnish any sufficient grounds for imputing, the short-comings, failures and disasters of our navy to the Secretary. On the contrary, it shows that he has been vigilant, industrious and energetic, in employing the means within his power to purchase and to build a navy. One of his first acts, after entering upon his duties, was to call the attention of Congress to the rapid and radical changes in naval warfare which had taken place within a few years, in displacing the "wooden walls" that had been relied on for attack or defence, with gigantic iron-clads. He early took means for constructing an iron-clad navy. An officer was sent throughout the Confederate States to examine and report, the means of manufacturing and preparing iron armor and heavy machinery. Others were sent to the United States, to Canada and Europe, to purchase or build suitable vessels for immediate use. The building of armored vessels was begun in the hope of compensating, by their individual strength, for our great inferiority to the enemy in the number of war vessels, and of seamen and marines. The time, labor and material necessary to construct a single heavy armored vessel may be judged of from the following example. The Merrimac, one of the ships sunk and partially destroyed by the enemy on abandoning Norfolk, was raised, and although the main part of the hull and the boilers and material parts of the machinery were uninjured, eight months of uninterrupted labor of as many workmen as could be advantageously be employed,

aided by the workshops of Richmond, were necessary to get her in fitting condition as an iron-clad. Work upon her, under orders of the navy department, was commenced on the 11th of July, 1861, and she fought the memorable battle of Hampton Roads—a battle which at once revolutionized naval warfare—on the 18th of March of 1862, before she was entirely completed. And yet Constructor Porter says: “The yard at Norfolk was worked up to its fullest capacity. Everything was properly organized, and the officers were constantly on the spot directing operations and pushing forward the work. The Secretary of the Navy, in order to stimulate operations, offered inducements, by way of additional pay or rewards to work after dark and on Sundays. In short, he offered every encouragement that was calculated to excite them to more zeal and energy. By letters and by telegrams he urged the officers of the navy at New Orleans and other important points to spare neither men nor money, and to work day and night in completing gunboats, preparing ordnance stores, and getting ready to attack or to meet the enemy. The credit of the Navy Department, at New Orleans, was impaired for a short time for the want of money to pay the employees; but this is not imputable to Mr. Mallory. His requisitions were made upon the treasury in due time to have supplied all just demands against the department. The causes of this financial embarrassment are explained in the correspondence between himself and the Secretary of the Treasury, which is embodied in the testimony. It does not appear by the testimony that work on any vessel, or for the navy, at any time or place, was delayed or suspended by the default of the Secretary of the Navy. He has ordered courts of inquiry in every instance where there was probable cause for attributing our defeat or disaster to the deficiency or delinquency of an officer of the navy. He has invited contracts for building gunboats wherever they could be soonest and best built, and most advantageously employed. His contracts seems to have been judicious, and to have been properly enforced. Contractors have, in some cases, failed to complete their work within the time stipulated, whereby the expectations of the Secretary have been disappointed and his plans defeated. But, on inquiry, it has been shown that they failed to comply with their engagements in consequence of unforeseen causes beyond their control, and not through any infidelity or want of diligence

Inasmuch as there has been much misrepresentation and crimination of the Secretary of the Navy, and of the Messrs. Tift, because of their failure to complete and to save the Mississippi, it is but sheer justice to say, that these gentlemen are not related by blood or marriage, in any degree, to Mr. Mallory; that they undertook to construct their vessel without pecuniary reward, and prosecuted the work on it with rare industry and energy and with extraordinary dispatch; that their loyalty, patriotism and integrity, are unquestionable; and that neither they nor the Secretary are censurable for the incompleteness of that vessel when the enemy reached New Orleans, or for its destruction.

Their operations were delayed from a want of iron which the Navy Department could not possibly supply as fast as it was demanded. In

deed, neither the Government nor the people of the Confederacy have been able to meet and satisfy the great demands of the army and navy for iron. The Navy Department has, for a long time past, employed agents in many parts of the country, to gather scrap iron in cities and on plantations, to relieve, in some measure, its necessities.

The reports of the Secretary of the Navy have not been published, from motives of sound policy, and hence the operations of that department are not generally known. It is not deemed proper now to publish all the facts which should be presented in order to a full knowledge and just appreciation of the management of the Navy Department. But it is not improper to state, that the department has erected a powder mill, which supplies all the powder required by our navy; two engine boilers and machine shops, and fine ordnance work shops. It has established eighteen yards for building war vessels, and a rope-walk, making all cordage, from a rope yarn to a nine inch cable, and capable of turning out eight thousand per month.

Of vessels not iron clad, the department has purchased and otherwise acquired and converted to war vessels, 44.

Has built and completed as war vessels, 12.

Has partially constructed and destroyed to save from the enemy, 10.

And has now under construction, 9.

Of iron-clad vessels, it has completed and has now in commission, 14.

Has completed and destroyed, or lost by capture, 4.

Has in progress of construction and in various stages of forwardness, 20.

It has, also, one iron-clad floating battery presented to the Confederate States by the ladies of Georgia; and one iron-clad ram partially completed and turned over to the Confederacy by the State of Alabama.

Taking into consideration the poverty of our means and the formidable naval power and boundless resources of our enemy at the beginning of this war, our people have no sufficient cause for shame or discouragement in the operations of our navy. What has been and is being done to resist the enemy on the waters of our rivers and on the sea, should inspire confidence and excite strong hope that our navy will yet prove an efficient and worthy ally of our noble armies in achieving our independence. It has already won the admiration and applause of neutral nations for its gallant and glorious achievements. And if we should succeed in getting into service the war vessels completed and in progress of construction, the committee believe that our naval triumphs will yet rival the heroic and brilliant achievements of our land forces.

Since the last session of Congress, one of the members of this committee on the part of the Senate, the Hon. R. L. Y. Peyton, has died; and, as the testimony had been taken before his death, it was not deemed necessary or proper to ask the appointment of another Senator

to fill his place. This will explain why this report is signed by only four Senators.

E. BARKSDALE,
JAMES LYONS.

Reserving my judgment upon much of the general course of reasoning adopted in the report, I desire to express my full concurrence in the conclusion arrived at favorable to the Secretary of the Navy.

WM. W. BOYCE,
On the part of the House.

C. C. CLAY, JR., *Chairman,*
THOS. J. SEMMES,
A. E. MAXWELL,
JAMES PHELAN.

