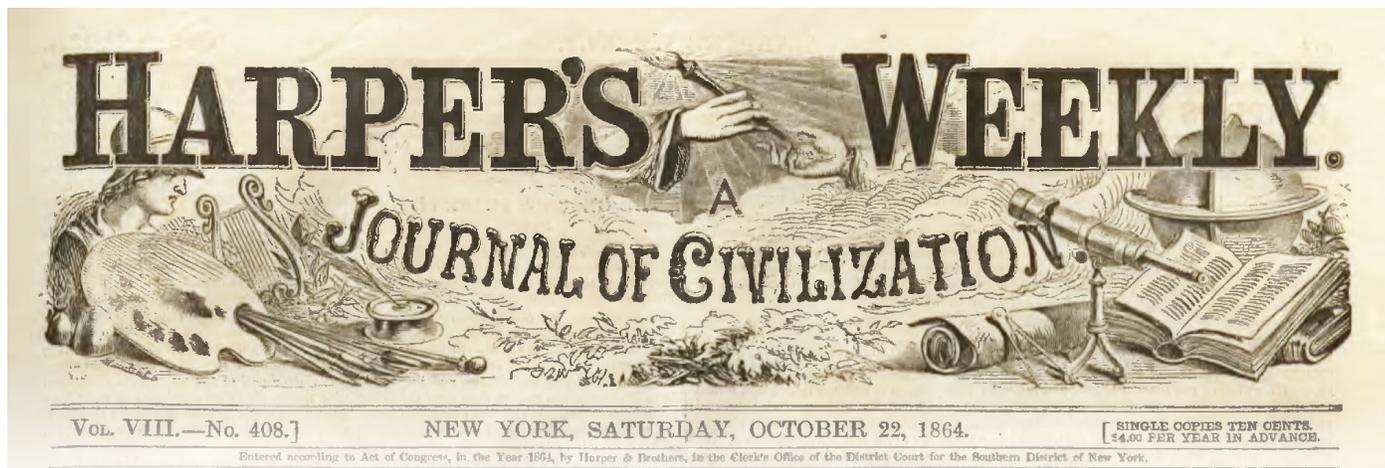


Naval Illustrators



Angelo Wiser: ‘Special Artist’ for *Harper’s*

By Gary McQuarrie

ANGELO WISER worked for *Harper’s Weekly* in 1861-1862 as a ‘Special Artist’ during the Civil War. During 1862, *Harper’s* published 17 illustrations based on Wiser’s sketches and drawings; though not a high total, Wiser is among only 28 ‘Special Artists’ who had at least ten illustrations published in the American illustrated newspapers during the war.¹ Wiser’s illustrations were all related to the Burnside Expedition (February to early June 1862), which he accompanied after being hired by *Harper’s* in late 1861.² By early 1862, Wiser’s fellow ‘Special Artists’ were among the most talented *Harper’s* hired and included Alfred R. Waud, Alexander Simplot, Henry Mosler, and Theodore R. Davis.

Very little biographical information on Wiser is available. He appears to have been born in 1839 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, the son of a well-known artist, John Wiser, who painted scenery for the prominent theaters of the city.³ The son apparently learned and developed his artistic talent under the instruction of his father.⁴ Before he was hired by *Harper’s* in 1861, Wiser was listed in the city directory

on Lombard Street in Philadelphia as an artist.⁵ His father painted theater scenery in the city for several decades before dying in 1873.⁶

At the time Wiser was employed by *Harper’s*, the illustrated newspaper was just beginning to credit many illustrations to the artists that provided the drawings; though some illustrations from Burnside’s Expedition were not credited to an artist in the captions or accompanying newspaper text, it seems likely that at least several were based on Wiser’s drawings despite the lack of direct attribution, given his travels with the expedition. In addition, Wiser’s submitted drawings in 1862 had to compete for space in *Harper’s* with several other major war actions in different theaters, including the capture of Forts Henry and Donelson, the Western Flotilla’s next moves down the Mississippi River, the Battle of Hampton Roads, the beginning of the Peninsular Campaign, the Battle of Shiloh (Pittsburg Landing), and the New Orleans Campaign, possibly limiting the relative number of illustrations from Burnside’s Expedition.



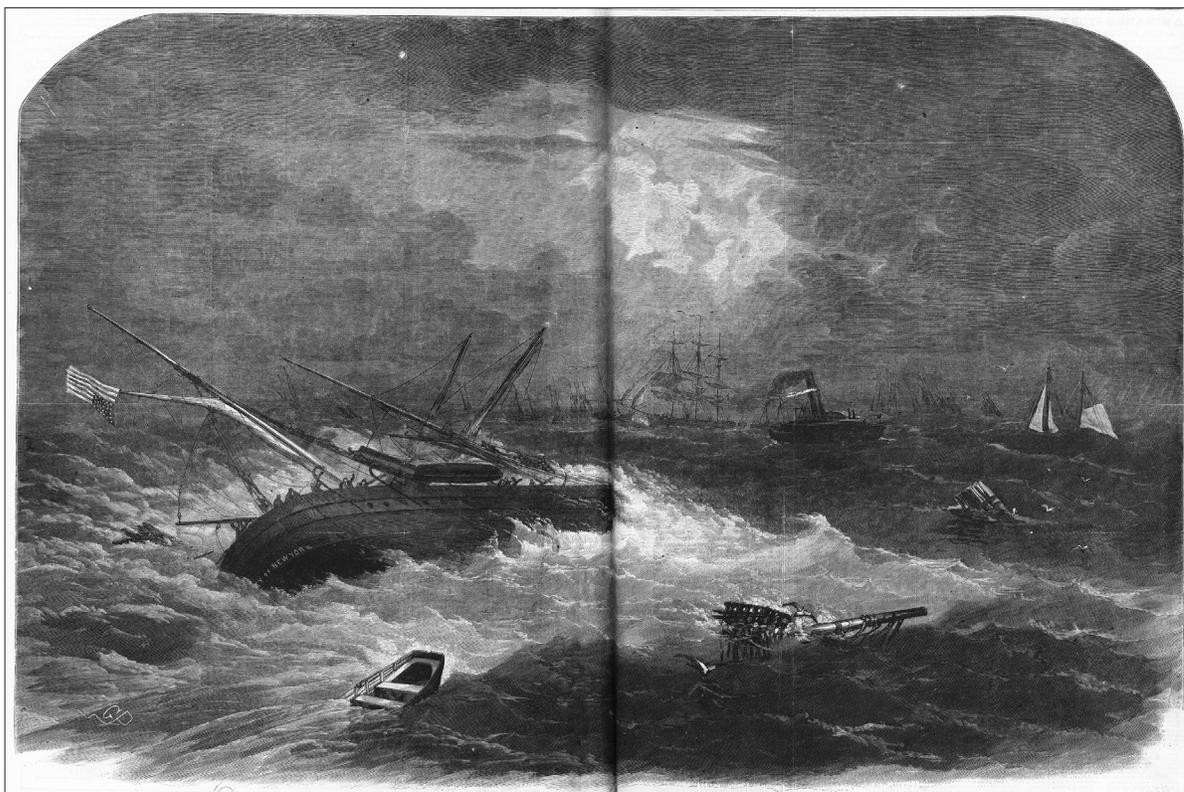
The Vessels of General Burnside's Expedition at Annapolis. — [Sketched by Our Special Artist, Mr. Angelo Weser (Wiser)]. Illustration published in *Harper's Weekly*, Volume VI, No. 264, p 37, January 18, 1862.

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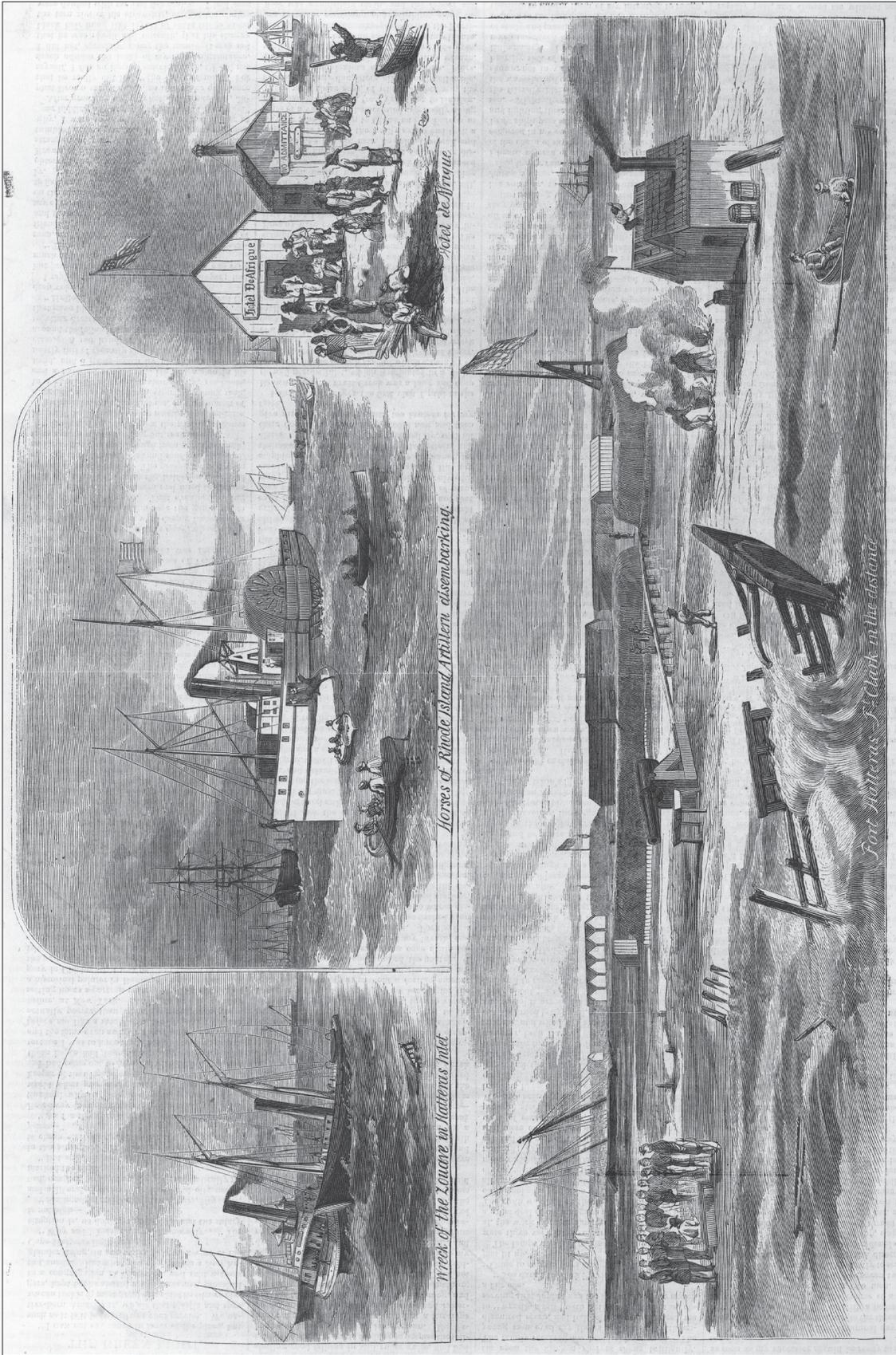
The first illustrations related to the Burnside Expedition were published in the January 18, 1862 issue and included scenes of a review of the expeditionary forces at Annapolis during the last week of December 1861 (not credited) and the vessels of his expedition at the city (credited, shown nearby). The following week’s issue contained Wiser’s illustration of expeditionary troops embarking the armed screw gunboat and transport *Huzzar* at Annapolis (credited, not shown). Burnside’s flotilla carrying troops and supplies departed Annapolis on January 9 and 10, to rendezvous at Fort Monroe. On the night of January 11, the flotilla began departing Fort Monroe for a rendezvous with Flag Officer Louis M. Goldsborough’s naval flotilla off Hatteras Inlet.⁷ On rounding Cape Hatteras on the 12th, the wind and seas picked up and a heavy fog set in, with a terrible gale developing that night. On the morning of the 13th, the

ships arrived off Hatteras Inlet and began crossing the bar. *City of New York*, laden with supplies and ordnance, grounded on the bar and became a total loss (illustration credited to Wiser, shown nearby). For almost the next two weeks, the weather was challenging and attempts were made to cross from the inlet into Pamlico Sound. The armed screw gunboat and transport *Zouave* also grounded on the bar; while there at anchorage on January 14, a swell brought her down on her own anchor, holing and sinking the vessel (credited to Wiser, shown nearby as one of several illustrations that appeared on a full page).

By February 4, the entire flotilla had passed into the sound and orders were given to advance on Roanoke Island (guarding the Albemarle Sound), the first military objective.⁸ The joint operation attacked on February 7 and by the next day, the Confederates surrendered.⁹

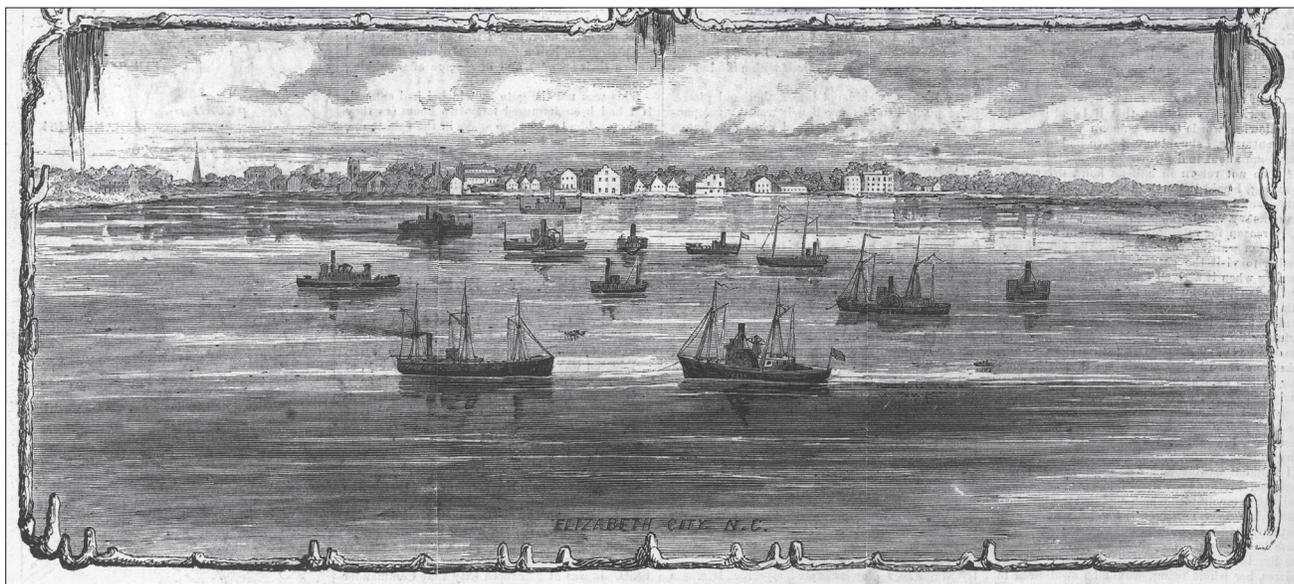


The Wreck of the “City of New York,” of the Burnside Expedition, Off Hatteras Inlet. Illustration based on sketch by Wiser (credited on p 111) published in *Harper’s Weekly*, Volume VI, No. 268, p 104-105, February 15, 1862. On January 13, *City of New York* ran aground on the bar attempting to enter Pamlico Sound via the inlet, but because of severe weather and want of small boats, no assistance could be rendered her. The crew was saved after hanging onto the rigging for 40 hours, but the valuable cargo of gunpowder, rifle muskets, shells, tents, and hand grenades was totally lost.



The Burnside Expedition at Hatteras Inlet. Sketched by Mr. Angelo Wiser. Illustration published in *Harper's Weekly*, Volume VI, No. 268, p. 101, February 15, 1862. The original graphite on wash paper drawing for this illustration is held at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Massachusetts (Accession No. 54.1756).

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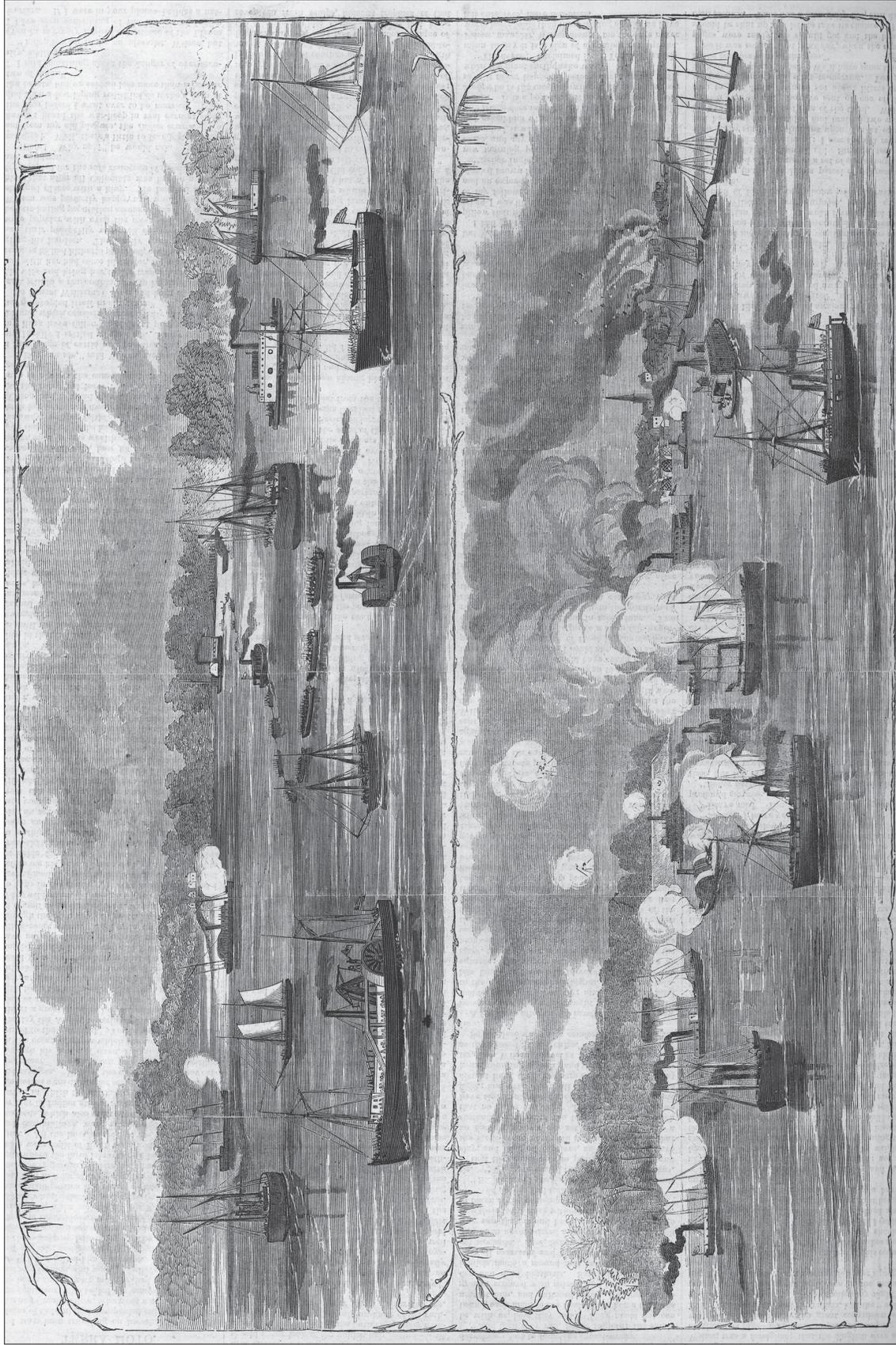


The Burnside Expedition.—Sketched by Mr. A. Wiser and Others. Detail from illustration published in *Harper’s Weekly*, Volume VI, No. 272, p 172, March 15, 1862. These scenes were on a full page of illustrations, and the caption and accompanying text of the newspaper attributed the drawings principally to Wiser.

On February 10, the remaining Confederate flotilla (the so-called “Mosquito Fleet”) was rapidly defeated by the Union flotilla just below Elizabeth City in the Pasquotank River.¹⁰ *Harper’s* March 1 issue published several illustrations including relevant maps of the theaters of action, an army scene of the battle on Roanoke Island, and a scene of the Confederate flotilla destruction, but interestingly, none were credited to Wiser. *Harper’s* March 16 issue published a full page of illustrations of scenes at Elizabeth City and nearby Edenton, most of which were credited to Wiser (one shown nearby).

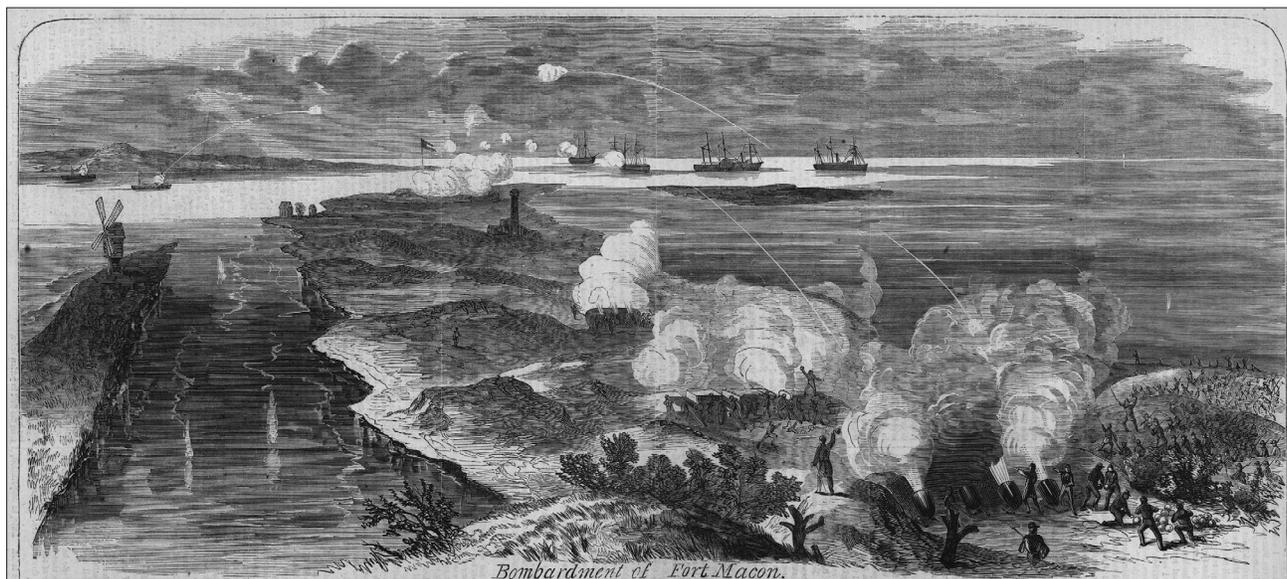
Part of Burnside’s forces were left at Roanoke Island for protection, with the remainder returning to Hatteras Inlet to rendezvous with naval forces. On February 12, the combined force left for New Bern and anchored off the mouth of Slocum’s Creek approximately 14-16 miles below the city for the night.¹¹ On morning of the 13th, the troops were put ashore to begin a march to the defenses of New Bern—a series of entrenchments, a battery mounting four heavy guns (bearing on the river), a large fort (Fort Thompson) of breast works along the shore of the Neuse River about four miles below the city,

and the earthwork Fort Dixie also on the river six miles below the city. On the 14th, the Union troops attacked Fort Thompson on three approaches, meeting fierce resistance, while naval forces bombarded the fort and other defensive positions. After a few hours of fighting, the defensive line was broken through near the middle and Union forces quickly advanced their whole line and possessed the fort that afternoon, capturing large numbers of prisoners and ordnance. The Battle of New Bern had been sharp but brief.¹² New Bern was occupied by Union forces on the 14th. Accounts of the battle and accompanying illustrations were published in *Harper’s* April 5 and 12 issues. The April 5 issue had three illustrations, only one of which was credited to Wiser in the accompanying text (not shown). The April 12 issue carried three illustrations related to the battle, all of which were credited to Wiser (two shown nearby). On March 21, an expedition of Union forces captured the nearby town of Washington (slightly north of New Bern) on the Pamlico River in hopes of recovering the lens of the Cape Hatteras lighthouse which had been removed and hidden in the town. The April 19 issue of *Harper’s* published a full page of illustrations of six scenes at New Bern and Washington credited to Wiser (not shown).



The Burnside Expedition—Troops Landing Below the Rebel Forts Near Newbern, North Carolina.—Sketched by Mr. A. Wiser (top illustration). Bombardment of Newbern, North Carolina.—Sketched from the [Steam Gunboat] "Vidette" by Mr. A. Wiser (bottom illustration). Illustrations published in *Harper's Weekly*, Volume VI, No. 276, p. 229, April 12, 1862.

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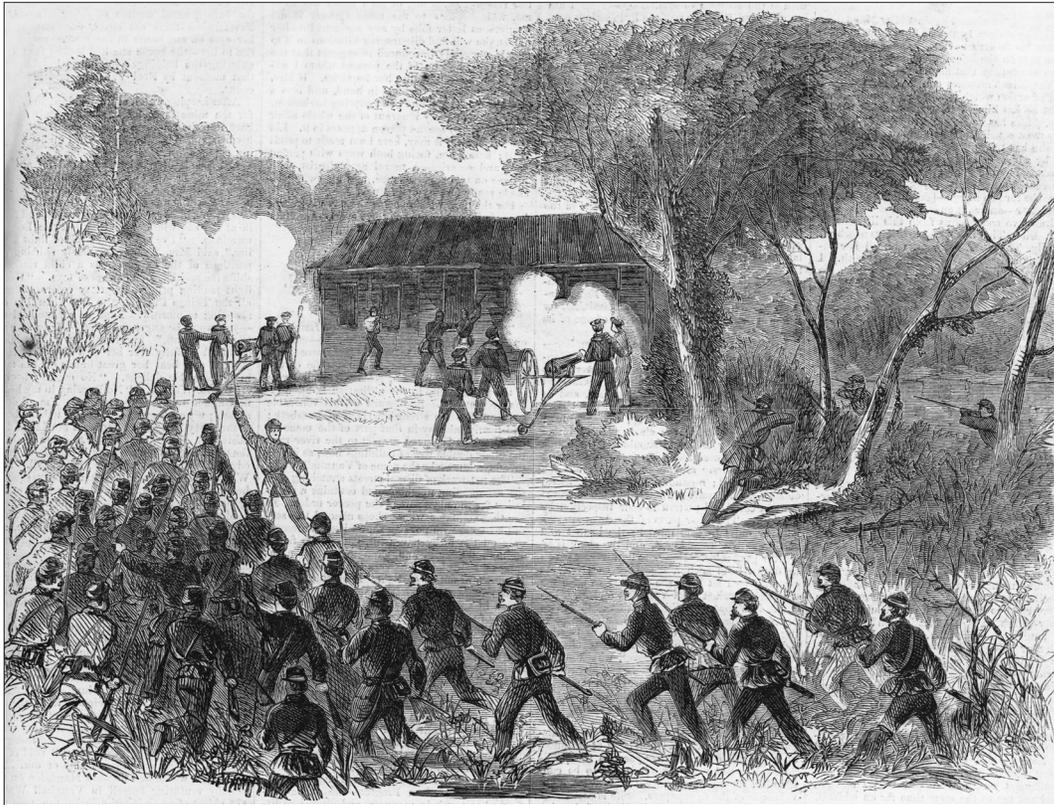
Fort Macon Repossessed.—Sketched by Mr. A. Wiser. Illustration of the bombardment of Fort Macon by Union army and naval forces on April 25, 1862. The illustration was one scene of a full page with scenes of the bombardment and after the capture of the fort published in *Harper’s Weekly*, Volume VI, No. 281, p 316, May 17, 1862.

Burnside’s next objective was the reduction of Fort Macon, an old-style stone and casemated work of considerable strength, located on the eastern end of Bogue Island at Beaufort, that commanded the channel from the Atlantic to Beaufort Harbor and also guarded Morehead City and the Atlantic and North Carolina Railroad.¹³ After a reconnaissance on March 18, Morehead City and Beaufort were occupied by Union forces, as well as a few related positions, by March 25. On March 29, operations to besiege the fort were undertaken. By April 23, the fort was entirely cut off from outside communications. On April 25, the fort was bombarded vigorously and accurately by army and naval forces, and surrendered the following day.¹⁴ *Harper’s* May 17 issue published a full page of scenes of the bombardment and after the capture of the fort, credited to Wiser (one shown nearby).

Other skirmishes, engagements, and expeditions of the Burnside forces occurred during April, May, and June. The final significant action was a short engagement at Tranter’s Creek on June 5.¹⁵ *Harper’s* June 28 issue published an illustration credited to Wiser of some of the action. Other illustrations credited to Wiser appeared in *Harper’s* June 14 (arrival of released

Union prisoners at Washington) and July 19 issues (ceremonial scenes of the appointed Military Governor of North Carolina, Edward Stanly, at Washington and the presentation of a sword to Burnside at New Bern for services at the Battle of Roanoke Island) (not shown). The last of two of these illustrations were the final ones credited to Wiser in *Harper’s*. By the end of June, Burnside was ordered to take available troops and proceed north to assist Major General George B. McClellan and the Army of the Potomac in Virginia. Burnside was officially assigned to the IX Corps, Army of the Potomac, on July 20.

After Burnside’s Expedition was concluded in North Carolina, the call to patriotic service from Pennsylvania apparently drew Wiser back to his home state. He resigned from *Harper’s* and volunteered on August 25, 1862, for a 3-year enlistment and was mustered into the newly and rapidly formed 15th Pennsylvania Cavalry (also known as the Anderson Cavalry), 160th Regiment, Company K, on August 30 as a private.¹⁶ (At some point later, he was transferred to the regiment’s Company H.) The volunteers initially trained at Camp Alabama in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, but then traveled by railroad to Louisville, Kentucky, in early



The Battle of Tranter's Creek, near Washington, North Carolina, on June 5, 1862.—Sketched by Mr. A. Wisner. Illustration published in *Harper's Weekly*, Volume VI, No. 287, p 413, June 28, 1862. The original pencil on paper drawing for this illustration is held at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Massachusetts (Accession No. 55.895). The illustration shows the New York Marine Artillery in action, with two Wiard howitzers manned by sailors at the battle.

November to join the Army of the Cumberland.¹⁷

At Louisville, the regiment undertook additional drills and was mounted and equipped; however, there was widespread discontent with a lack of leadership ranks and clear indication of the regiment's purpose when it was sent to Nashville in early December.¹⁸

On December 26, the regiment was ordered to march with the army towards Murfreesboro to assist in action at Stones River; however, hundreds of the enlisted men refused to leave camp on the grounds of insufficiency of officers and incomplete organization, with Wisner among those refusing.¹⁹ Almost two dozen new officers were temporarily appointed two days later and the regiment again ordered to the front; it appears that Wisner returned to duty at this point, though many others still refused and were confined, along with others who had returned from the front days later and refused to obey orders.²⁰ After the Battle of Stones River (Second Battle of Murfreesboro), the regiment was reorganized with new

officers over the next several months and came to earn a reputation for bravery and its achievements during the remainder of the war.²¹ The regiment was active during the war in Pennsylvania and Maryland and in every Southern state east of the Mississippi River except Florida and Louisiana.²² From June 1863, the 15th Pennsylvania remained in the Department of the Cumberland, with Companies B, H, and K (Wisner served in two of the companies) tasked as escort for the department headquarters.²³ Wisner was subsequently promoted to corporal on June 4, 1863, and to sergeant on May 4, 1864.²⁴

In the fall 1864, Wisner was detailed to the Topographical Engineers Office in Washington.²⁵ He was apparently then assigned by brigade headquarters to sketch maps of the 1st Cavalry Division's line of march beginning at Huntsville, Alabama. Wisner came into the possession of a small blank, black leather-bound notebook once belonging to William T. Hardy, captain and assistant

Only few of Wiser's original sketches and drawings for *Harper's* are known to exist. The Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Massachusetts, holds three of his drawings. At least one other of his drawings (Raising of the Wreck of the Sidewheeler "Flushing" at Hampton Roads 1862, graphite on cream woven paper) is owned privately.³⁶

Wiser served as a 'Special Artist' for *Harper's* for less than a full year, but provided the illustrated newspaper with key illustrations involving Burnside's Expedition, an important joint operation relatively early in the war, helping to establish *Harper's* as an important news source for pictorial war reporting. His brief but successful postwar artistic career was curtailed prematurely by his early death.

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7. Burnside, p 662-663.
8. *Ibid*, p 664-666.
9. Burnside, p 667-668; Hawkins, p 640-645.
10. Hawkins, p 645-647.
11. Burnside, p 668; Hawkins, p 647.
12. Burnside, p 668-669; Hawkins, p 649-652.
13. Hawkins, p 652.
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22. *Ibid*, p 9, 629-639.
23. *Ibid*, p 211-212.
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35. "Short Stops: Angelo Wiser," *Daily Missouri Democrat* (St. Louis, MO), April 16, 1875, p 4, col 1.
36. Raising the wreck of the steamer Flushing at Hampton Roads, Virginia, Rob Zanger Rare Books, LLC, Middletown, New York, Angelo Wiser drawing for sale at abebooks.com. The drawing may have been for consideration by *Harper's*, but was never published in the newspaper.

