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ANDREW HULL FOOTE

GUNBOAT COMMODORE

(1806 - 1863)

ALLAN KELLER

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By

ALLAN KELLER

Member, Connecticut Civil War Centennial Commission

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Engraved by J.C. Buttre N.Y.

A. H. Foote

COM. ANDREW H. FOOTE

Andrew Hull Foote was a paradox. He had the yearnings and aptitude for the ministry which his grandfather and great grandfather before him practised. Yet he turned to the sea, leaving the rocky hills of Connecticut behind him, seeking a career that kept him far from those he loved best. War, which he hated, carried him to fame, and yet, in this too, circumstances became so twisted that he fought his great battles, not on the limitless wastes of the ocean, but on the narrow rivers of the Midwest.

Historians remember best those Generals and Admirals who win acclaim through public recognition. Grant and Lee, Farragut and Sherman are household names. Yet Foote unlocked the first gate that permitted Union forces to cut the Confederacy in two. The battles in Virginia caught the public's fancy, but strategists know how important was the knife-like thrust that penetrated Kentucky and Tennessee and finally opened the Mississippi.

Almost alone, with a catch-bag of poorly built, flimsy gunboats, he captured Fort Henry on the Tennessee River and then covered the transport of Grant's troops so they could invest Fort Donelson on the Cumberland. Once these twin forts, only twelve miles apart although on different rivers, were seized, the South's great line of defense between the Alleghenies and the Mississippi was breached.

Three fighting men, early in the Civil War, saw the need for cutting the Confederacy in half. One was Grant, who lived to reap acclaim. Another was an aging soldier, Gen. C. F. Smith, who backed Grant's play with perfect understanding. The third was Foote, flag officer of the growing fleet built to fight the river war. Smith died of battle wounds within a few months of the first victory. Foote suffered a foot wound at Fort Donelson that permitted him to fight only one more battle before it brought death.

Today's army surgeons could have cured the relatively minor injury with antibiotics and septic surgery. Medical men a century ago lacked modern drugs, medicines and understanding. Only the unrolled scroll of fate holds the answer as to what heights Foote might have climbed had doctors healed his wound.

One thing is sure. Connecticut produced no greater sailor in the war between the states than Andrew Hull Foote — the deeply religious, indomitable patriot from New Haven.

Foote's forebears came to Massachusetts Bay Colony just a few years after the Mayflower. Nathaniel Foote helped settle the three river towns of Windsor, Hartford and Wethersfield and then moved to Branford. His

great grandfather and his grandfather between them held the pulpit in the Cheshire church for nearly a hundred years. One of his female antecedents was a girl named Lucinda who, at the age of 12, passed every test for entry into Yale College but one — that of sex. Ezra Stiles, then president of the college, tested her in Greek and Latin, Mathematics and Philosophy and found her fully qualified to join the freshman class. Her sex prevented this, however, and she turned to marriage, becoming the mother of ten children.

There was good blood and plenty of intellect in the men and women who produced Andrew Foote. There were a General of militia, justices of the peace, farmers and preachers. His own father was Governor of Connecticut for one term and a United States Senator for six years. As the Congressman who moved "Foote's resolution", he made possible the famous debate between Webster and Hayne, which many think first enunciated the differences that led to civil war.

The boy who was to grow into a great naval leader was born on September 12, 1806 in a house on the corner of Union and Cherry Streets in New Haven. He studied hard, played hard and, like most New England Yankees of the period, prayed hard. Not too much is known of his early days except a humorous incident involving a rotten apple aimed at a brother but which struck his father squarely in the bosom of his ruffled shirt, donned to make a good appearance while delivering a public address. On another occasion he saved a smaller brother from attack by a merino ram in a nearby pasture. John Foote, a brother who moved to Cleveland, said this was Andrew's first "ram fight".

In the early 1800's rules and regulations involving military service were not as strict as they are today. So young Foote went to West Point for a short time, entering in June and leaving in December, having won a transfer to the Navy. That was the end of the sailor's formal education. Appointed an acting midshipman, he was sent aboard the schooner Grampus of Commodore David Porter's squadron and what he learned from then on was picked up in the school of active duty.

Still in his teens he wrote of his eagerness for battle. Peace made for slow promotions, and Andy Foote had his eyes on high rank. He served on the Grampus, the Peacock and the frigate United States, seeing service in the Pacific, the South Atlantic and the West Indies. He rose in station, which everyone expected, but his mother back in Connecticut was most pleased to learn that on a moonlight night in the Caribbean he had made up his mind forever after to "act for God."

From that day forward, in the long cruises of peacetime and in the battles that came with war, Foote was a deeply religious leader. He liked to sing hymns, which nobody minded, but he also developed a tendency to "preach" in later years, and some of his companions found his voice harsh and grating, even if his enthusiasm was unchallenged.

On the quarter deck of one man-of-war after another Foote learned the art of sailing and fighting. He was everywhere, from Chile and Panama to Athens and Alexandria. In the sloop John Adams he circumnavigated the globe, fighting pirates off Sumatra, bombarding Asiatic towns where American merchant ships had been attacked and finally exerting his personal influence to correct inequities aimed at Protestant missionaries in the Sandwich Islands.

At the age of 33 he was in Tahiti where he was aware of the beauty of the women but astounded by the "sad fact that licentiousness to a frightful degree prevails". Mistaking cause and effect, or in some other way twisting history to suit his own needs, he wrote in his journal, "so seductive are these islands that one almost ceases to wonder at the mutiny on the Bounty."

After his sojourn in the South Pacific the then Lieutenant Foote served ashore as director of the Naval Asylum in Philadelphia. His duties were half with the hospital and half with the midshipman's school attached. He liked working with the young sailors, but the old salts in the hospital annoyed him with their drinking. They were such reprobates, in fact, that they drove him to take the pledge.

"I had made up my mind (earlier) that as a naval officer I could not be a temperance man," he wrote his brother John. "I met with persons of all nations. I was obliged to conform to their customs. But when I came here I found these old sailors dreadful drunkards. Whenever I gave them any privilege, they invariably got drunk. I could do nothing with them. At last I signed the pledge, and then they followed me."

About this time Foote married for the second time, his first wife having died after bearing two children. His second wife was a second cousin, Caroline Augusta Street of New Haven, whose father founded the art school at Yale College.

She bore to the naval officer five children, three sons and two daughters, but he was at sea so much their care and training fell almost solely into her hands. Mrs. Foote, like so many wives of naval officers and merchant masters, knew the painful loneliness born of two and three year cruises aboard sailing vessels.

A year after this marriage Foote was sent to sea in the flagship Cumberland, a fifty-gun ship, destined for duty in the Mediterranean. His own letters and his entries in his journal make it clear that he was more interested in winning the sailors and officers over to temperance than he was in shipboard matters.

"Who would have predicted thirty years ago," he asked, "that a ship, a frigate — flagship, too, of the squadron — would cruise for a year without the grog tub?"

On this cruise, serving as boat officer, he contracted ophthalmia from the dazzling effect of the bright sun on the waters of the Mediterranean. But it didn't slow him down. He invented a bow-propeller for steam-driven ships, the theory behind it being that such a bladed screw would create a partial vacuum or eddy that would reduce the resistance offered by the sea. It wasn't adopted, and the fact that it has not been used since indicates it wasn't practical, but it showed the naval officer was concerned with other things than temperance.

In 1849 Lieutenant Foote was given command of the brig Perry and ordered to help suppress the slave trade between Africa and the rest of the world. He wouldn't have chosen this duty, but in Washington at that time naval officials had learned that it was better to send a willing officer somewhere than a reluctant one. They had even come to say "Why, send Foote, he will go."

For two long years he patrolled the shores of the Bay of Guinea, braving hurricanes, gales, doldrums and pestilential landings. Despite the blazing sun that baked the ship by day and the malaria that was to be found in every port, Foote ran his ship so well there was not a death on that 24 month stretch.

It was dirty duty, hard duty, and Foote knew it. It was also tragic.

"If ever there were anything on earth which, for revolting, filthy, heartless atrocity, might make the devil wonder and hell recognize its own likeness, it was on one of the decks of an old slaver," he wrote.

It was seek and search, seek and search. Treaties had given some navies the right to overtake ships of their own nation and ascertain whether there was human cargo aboard destined for sale in the Americas. Britain started the suppression and the United States joined her. Between them they sent to sea the overwhelming number of men-of-war assigned to the malodorous duty. France sent a smaller number of vessels to the Bay of Guinea.

A man with less firmness could have floundered in the international intricacies of the work. Slavers carried many flags and sent aloft whichever one they thought would give them freedom from search. American-owned ships in particular engaged in ruses where ships were "sold" to Brazilian officers whenever a patrolling navy ship overhauled them.

Foote became debilitated by the murderous climate, suffered from his eye trouble and had migraine headaches that nearly blinded him, but he kept up his patrols. He went ashore and on a few occasions penetrated rather deeply into the jungle. It was no wonder he was ill.

Storms he called hurricanes swept off the mainland and punished the ships. The African harmattan, a strong wind that swept seaward from the great Sahara desert, carried sand and dust far at sea. Foote noted in his journal that "vessels far off at sea, sailing to the northward, are covered or stained on the weather-side of their rigging (that next to the Africa coast) with a fine, light-yellow powder — An instance of this occurred on board the Perry on her outward-bound passage when five hundred miles from the African coast."

Out of this experience came Foote's first real literary effort. He wrote a book called "Africa and the American Flag", after returning to the United States. It is an ambitious book, clearly accurate when dealing with matters about which he himself was informed, but given to heavy-handed conjecture about places he had never seen. It was full of details on the suppression of the slave trade and equally full of advice on how civilized nations should act to stamp out the traffic in human beings.

His entries in his diaries are actually better indices to Foote's activities and feelings than the book. He seldom let a day go by without putting down his thoughts together with the day's work. Some of his descriptions of weather at sea are better literature than he put in his volume on African duty, but all through the journal are evidences of his illness and his growing concern with his readiness for "a life after death".

For a fighting man, he was given to long lectures, private and public, on the evils of drink, the dangers that beset a sailor in foreign ports and the need for a religious rejuvenation among all peoples.

After his duty in Africa he had a long spell of shore service, was promoted to Commander, and labored to increase the efficiency of the naval bureaus and institutions. But he wasn't happy on land. He was devoted to his wife and children, but loved the open sea. He was de-

lighted when in 1856 he was given command of the sloop-of-war Portsmouth and sent to the East Indies station.

It was here that he tasted battle for the last time before finding himself fighting in a war that pitted brother against brother in his own homeland.

Trouble was brewing off the Chinese coast when he reached Java and he was ordered to Hong Kong and then Canton to protect American interests ashore. Chinese soldiers had erected four forts on the bank of the Whangpoa River and from these they fired upon both British and American ships. Foote's superior ordered him to take whatever steps were necessary to protect his fleet.

To Foote this command was carte blanche and, as the Chinese continued to fire upon his ships, he decided the best way to defend himself was to attack the forts.

Later this aggressive spirit was to be Foote's hallmark in the Civil War. He could hope for peace and pray for it, but he could fight like the devil when there was need.

Bright and early the next morning he landed a force of sailors from his own ship, the Levant, and the San Jacinto, numbering 287 men and officers, together with a small detachment of marines. They carried one howitzer with them and dragged it across the rice paddies in a flanking movement. Fire from the forts rained on them steadily but the enemy's aim was poor. Once they had to pass through a small village where snipers tried to block their progress, but Foote ordered the howitzer up and it cleared the streets with a few rounds of grape.

Not expecting to be attacked from the land side, the men in the first fort fled to the next one. The fighting was maintained for several days, with the ships in the river aiding in silencing the 176 guns later counted in the four fortifications.

An army of several thousand, bivouacked in Canton, twice sallied forth to aid the forts but the marines, with better guns and sharper aim, turned back the force that outnumbered them almost fifty to one. In the night other Chinese tried to scale the walls of the first fort captured, using ladders and ropes, rockets and stink-pots, but the sailors who had invested it drove them off.

The worst difficulty that confronted the Americans were the heavy guns served by 120 Chinese sailors who had been trained on a foreign man-of-war and who served the guns with efficiency and courage. Only

the bravery of the marines and the superior guns of the ships in the river made it possible for Foote to capture the four barrier forts. When it was over about 250 Chinese were dead and Foote had lost seven killed and 22 wounded.

In his formal report the commanding officer had high praise for both sailors and marines, but he was particularly enthusiastic about the behavior of the latter.

"It may be seen in this report how efficient our marines are in service of this kind," wrote Foote, "and the inference is inevitable that an increase of that corps, and of the number of officers and men attached to our ships, would tend to insure success in like expeditions. In all the advances the men were ready, in perfect order and discipline, to respond to the call of their officers."

Foote's handling of this crisis so impressed the British that when his fleet dropped down river they sent men to man the rigging of their own flagship and gave three rousing cheers for the Yankees. In an unusual token of esteem for the British, who had been our enemies but a generation before, their bands played "Hail Columbia" and "Yankee Doodle".

The American Secretary of the Navy sent Foote a message of warm approval, mentioning that the attack on the American flag was unwarranted and deliberate and that his action to silence the attack was not only correct, but executed in a way to bring credit on the United States Navy and himself.

Nevertheless Foote was criticized in some circles. This bothered him not at all and his answer to one critic showed how he felt. He wrote:

"The fact of the trade of all nations being suspended; the fact that we are not at war with China; that the French armed boats as well as boats of different nationalities, were passing the 'barrier forts' unmolested, as they had a treaty right to do, before and after my own boat was fired upon, show your general views to be as crude as they are perverse where the honor of your country's flag is involved."

That was the sort of spirit Decatur and Oliver Perry had shown before. Foote liked to sing hymns but, when there was need, he was a fighter who never thought about the odds against him.

His wife, even half a world away, was ever in his mind as is shown in a long letter he wrote to her as he was about to leave the China coast on the way home. At the end he wrote:

"I wished myself to return to Hong Kong in order to buy some china, grass-cloth handkerchiefs and other things. But if we had gone back, it would have delayed us three months . . . You will receive a bill in my name for seven hundred dollars. I have certainly economized to the utmost on this cruise — hardly keeping up my position."

There was the Puritanical Yankee writing, tender of heart, straight-laced and thrifty.

When Foote returned from this exciting tour of the Orient he had put in more than 21 years of service with the Navy and he might well have been excused if he had asked to retire. But apparently he had no such thought. He would never go to sea again — at least on the high seas — but he had years of shore duty ahead of him. He served at the Brooklyn Navy Yard and on many courts of inquiry and justice. He spoke in many cities on the African problems, both slavery and colonization, and he was seldom quiet on the subject of temperance.

The months went by and Abraham Lincoln was elected President. To Foote this meant that war was going to be hard to avoid and he was deeply concerned at the way the navy had fallen away. Boats had been sold, abandoned or left unrepaired and the Connecticut sailor, now raised to the rank of Captain, feared for the service if war did come.

Actions by Southerners showed the feelings of those who wanted to maintain slavery and debates grew vitriolic as to what course of action the government should take. Foote struggled for a time to add his voice to the advocates of compromise but he soon sensed that there could be none. His own feelings were made clear in a sharp, blunt note to his brother.

"Well, brother John", he wrote, "do you mean to fight? If you don't mean to fight, then don't express your opinions so loudly. As for me, I intend to fight."

He didn't have long to wait.

Gideon Welles, Secretary of the Navy in the Lincoln cabinet, was an old boyhood friend. They had played together in school and each had a high regard for the other. It was no surprise to Foote, therefore, to receive orders to report to the department in Washington. There Welles told him he wanted him to take command of all the naval vessels in western waters. It was a rough assignment in one way because he was told frankly he would be operating under Army command, never an easy operation for one in another service. He was also told that he would

be limited in funds, men and materials because the Navy wasn't going to let anything interfere with the major work of blockading the Confederate states and shutting off all commerce with the rest of the world. Foote didn't mention it, but he knew that it would be no picnic working under General John C. Fremont, the Great Pathfinder, who, loyal as he was, was as tempermental as any prima donna in operatic history.

Foote stepped out of the frying pan into the fire when he went from the frenetic excitement of Washington, girding itself for a war it should have seen coming but did little to prepare for, to the frontier headquarters in St. Louis, where everything that was wrong in Washington was doubly wrong on the banks of the Mississippi.

Fremont was surrounded by a coterie of generals and advisers from civil life who varied from the deepest of patriots to the greediest of opportunists. Everything in the Department of the West, as it was called, was at sixes and sevens.

One historian described Fremont as "weak and unstable" and as showing the characteristics at one and the same time of maturity and extreme boyishness. "Lincoln," he said, "had sent a boy to do a man's work." The man who had done such important work in finding new routes to California surrounded himself with dandies who didn't know anything about waging war. He let contracts to crooked contractors. Things went from bad to worse and when Fremont himself emancipated the slaves in his territory Lincoln had to revoke the edict. Jessie Benton Fremont, daughter of the powerful Thomas Hart Benton, went to Washington to plead her husband's cause. It was a dramatic, stormy interview, but the peppery lady did little to help her husband in his time of crisis. About the best that can be said about Fremont's command in the West is that he personally made no profit from war graft, but everyone around him seemed to be doing just that.

When Foote reached St. Louis on September 6, 1861 all was in turmoil. The month before Fremont's forces, trying to stop an advance by scattered Confederate forces converging on St. Louis, had been whipped at Wilson's Creek. He was not in actual command but continued military reverses in southern Missouri led Lincoln to order his dismissal. He begged for more time and was hoping for a victory when Foote arrived.

The veteran sailor was not immediately involved in any of Fremont's tribulations but the disorder in the department had left him with nothing to take command of except three wooden vessels in commission, and nine iron-clad gunboats and 38 mortar-boats in course of construction. On

paper it may have seemed like a worthwhile armada. Actually the three wooden vessels were armed only as gunboats and the mortar-boats were barges, without power, intended to mount a single gun useful mostly for bombardment of shore points. The gunboats, named the Conestoga, the Lexington and the Taylor, had some armor plating forward to protect the bow, the engines and the wheel-house, but had only nine guns apiece.

Foote made no bones about his displeasure with conditions. In a letter to Gideon Welles he disclosed that the armor plating was too light and covered too small a portion of the ships' vulnerable sections. He said Fremont had ordered the mortar boats which he hoped might be useful. But a fighting sailor used to the open spaces of the ocean and plenty of sea-room had little affection for barges that had to be towed wherever they were needed and which carried but a single mortar.

In other reports Foote excoriated the workmanship that had gone into the vessels, saying that day laborers must have been used instead of carpenters and that every piece of construction was far behind completion schedules.

One thing played into the Captain's hands. Fremont won no military victory to gain new support and Lincoln decided to replace him. The General stationed cronies and armed forces all around him to prevent the service of the removal order but a courier who was a captain of volunteers disguised himself as a farmer and slipped through the palace guard to serve the removal order. Foote could expect a better man to take command and Henry W. Halleck was named. Halleck, later to be General in chief, was an indifferent field commander, but a good organizer and administrator. All this worked to Foote's advantage.

To understand Andrew Foote's dilemma something of the geography of the area has to be outlined.

Secession had carried the deep Southern states out of the union. But two others straddled the fence, with inhabitants almost equally divided between Northern and Southern sympathies. These were Kentucky and Missouri. The western section of Virginia, which became a state half way through the war, was also torn in allegiance. So the Federal government, eager to get at the rebellious states, found it necessary at times to walk with a light tread in Kentucky, Missouri and what was to become West Virginia.

Yet these states in effect constituted a northern barrier and Lincoln and his generals determined to slice through them on their way south.

The Ohio River was, in places, a veritable line of demarcation between forces. The Mississippi was in Rebel hands almost to the front door of Cairo, Illinois. Two other large streams, the Cumberland and Tennessee, which ran in a generally east and west direction from the Alleghenies to near the Mississippi, were the most formidable natural lines of defense the South had in the Middle West. By a fluke of topography the spot where the Ohio entered the Mississippi was close to that where the two latter streams also entered the Ohio and it was near this nexus of water routes that Foote took command.

One naval officer, studying his map at the time, decried the delay in building sufficient gunboats. Had there been enough, he claimed, the Confederates could not have built Forts Henry and Donelson on the Tennessee and Cumberland and could not have prepared other defense points.

"If they (the gunboats) had been finished two months earlier," wrote a Captain Pennock, "there would have been no Columbus, no Island No. 10, no Memphis, no Vicksburg and the western forces might all have gone east."

This may have been an oversimplification, but more haste in the completion of an inland navy for the great network of rivers converging on the Mississippi near Cairo might have saved untold months and thousands of lives.

Captain Foote, who had assumed the title of Flag Officer, moved with typical directness and vigor. But his assistants reported to him that shipwrights had left the finished ships unpainted, uncaulked, carelessly joined and without boats or boat davits. Boilers were unprotected by the iron bars and ties that the contracts had specified as deterrents to round shot. There wasn't money to pay the men nor even enough to start the officers' messes. If Foote had thrown up his hands and quit in disgust it would have been no more than right, but he wasn't that sort of officer.

Swiftly he ordered more haste in the gun-casting foundries of Pittsburgh, better and more armor-plating, and more and more mortars and shells. He seemed to sense that the navy he commanded was going to expend a lot of ammunition. All along the Ohio, from its beginnings at Pittsburgh to its confluence with the Mississippi at Cairo, the pace of the war effort increased under Foote's prodding.

James B. Eads, a St. Louis contractor, was successful in bidding for the contract to build the main vessels of Foote's "hybrid" fleet. The

Taylor, Conestoga and Lexington, which had started out as Ohio passenger packets, had been armored with oak bulwarks against musketry fire, but not armored with iron. Eads, in a hundred days, against the toughest of odds, put together the DeKalb, Carondelet, Cincinnati, Louisville, Mound City, Cairo and Pittsburgh. A few weeks later they had two and a half inch armor plating on them, capable of turning almost any round shot.

Work progressed on the mortar barges and a few smaller craft but Foote wanted something even more powerful for a flagship. He found it in a stout, very large boat called the Benton, used for hauling snags and trees from the upper reaches of the Mississippi. She was covered with iron, equipped with heavy guns and added to a squadron that aggregated 5,000 tons, could steam at nine knots and could operate in surprisingly shallow water.

No one could call them beautiful. They were built for a purpose and esthetic qualities were forgotten. Their main decks barely above water, they were so boxed in with sloping armor that they resembled a modern coal barge on the same rivers, with the coal trimmed at an angle to prevent spillage. The twin smokestacks protruded above the plating forward, the wheelhouse sometimes resembled a box on top of the main structure and sometimes was hidden underneath the armor. The muzzles of the heavy guns stuck out of ports along both sides and the forward slope of the plating. Sometimes the huge paddle wheels were protected by armor and sometimes only by oak sheathing.

Captain Foote got the jump on the Confederates in some places, particularly the Cumberland and Tennessee rivers, but the Southerners had done some building of their own. They had made over several packets into gunboats, most of which were stationed in the Mississippi in the vicinity of the islands that lay in the river just below where the Ohio entered. These islands were given numbers instead of names, Island No. 1 being farthest north and Island No. 10 being farther south.

While the grand strategy for the war in the west was being worked out, Foote became impatient for action. He started sending his first-completed gunboats off on forays to test Southern defenses and to train the men. In twos and threes, and often singly, the boats nosed their way down the Mississippi and up the Cumberland and Tennessee. Foote was a good enough leader to know that training paid off in battle. Gideon Welles sent him a pitifully small handful of naval officers, only two or three to a boat. For the crews the new commander had to make do with

levies of soldiers who, lacking arms, had not been mustered into regiments. He knew it would take a lot of hard work and drill for these men to learn how to handle the gunboats under fire. As a matter of fact it took considerable time to instruct them in the simple business of operating the boats so they didn't get hung up on sand bars or go aground in the shallow sections of rivers that were beginning to fall after the summer drought.

The first battle in which Foote's Flotilla, as it came to be known, was engaged wasn't very important, but it made clear what a strange war he was going to have to wage. It would be a hybrid service, with gunboats pitted against land forts built on the banks of streams, against field artillery, horse-drawn and highly maneuverable on dry ground, and against the musket fire of soldiers who clung like mosquitoes to the heavily wooded shores, hoping to pick off any enemy who emerged from behind protective bulwarks. In some ways, it resembled the sort of war PT boats waged close inshore in the jungle covered islands of the south Pacific.

This first battle, known as the fight at Lucas's Bend, grew out of the Confederate effort to extend its lines as close to Cairo as possible. U. S. Grant, by then in command of the army, learned that enemy troops were lodging at Norfolk, eight miles below his own headquarters. This was too close for comfort and he sent troops down river to drive them off.

At his request, the Lexington and Conestoga churned downstream to lend a hand. Before they had gone more than seven miles they found they had kicked over a hive of bees. Shell fire from sixteen field pieces began to fall into the water around the two gunboats. Lieutenant S. L. Phelps, commanding this small segment of the flotilla, found that the Confederate artillery could fire a few rounds, hitch up the horses and move quickly to a new point, and fire again from an unexpected section of the shore.

Phelps tried to lure the enemy's artillery upriver where Grant's troops were, but the ruse didn't work. In the middle of his strange battle two Southern gunboats — one bearing the strange name of Yankee — steamed up the Mississippi to deal themselves a hand in the conflict. Rebel cavalry appeared on the Missouri shore at the same time and Foote's boats had their hands full with the multifold varieties of enemy. After several hours of the battle, spent in backing and filling to prevent becoming an easy target, Phelps decided to attack the Yankee and her companion. A well-aimed, or very lucky, shot from the Lexington's 8-inch

guns crashed through the Yankee's side, penetrating the wheelhouse and burst inside. The Southern gunboat, with only one engine working, retired under the batteries at Columbus, a Rebel stronghold, and her companion followed suit.

This was the Battle of Lucas's Bend, one that will never rank with Waterloo, Trafalgar or Antietam, and which is forgotten except by archivists and a few historians, but it was Foote's initiation into the vagaries of river war in the Middle West, a war for which he had never prepared, and in which he had no previous experience, except for the attack on the barrier forts near Canton. Even in that earlier engagement, he had used regular ocean-going ships of the navy with which he was entirely familiar, and had not relied on highly awkward gunboats operating without sufficient room in which to maneuver easily.

Some weeks later Fremont directed Grant and Gen. John A. McClernand to lead troops south to Belmont, where the Confederate force under Gen. Leonidas Polk numbered close to 40,000. They were put aboard transports and the Taylor and Lexington went along as armed escorts. Commander H. Walke was in charge of the naval craft.

A few miles above Belmont the Federal troops were put ashore and started their attack. Walke ordered the gunboats to silence several heavy shore batteries at Iron Banks. From 8 a.m. to noon the battle on land see-sawed back and forth and then Grant ordered his men re-embarked on the transports. It could have developed into a little Dunkirk. The Confederates closed in on the Union troops as they were going aboard and were in a poor position to defend themselves. Walke's gunboats moved in close to the bank, loaded their guns with grape and cannister, and showered the attackers with a hail of metal that drove them off.

The Battle of Belmont was a stand-off. Grant had acted on erroneous intelligence. Polk had many more men at his disposal so the retreat was not entirely the result of superior fighting. The Union troops had to get away by boat or be flanked by another force moved in behind them. Like the Battle of Lucas's Bend, it pointed up the value of the gunboats in amphibious warfare.

Foote was not in actual command on either occasion but his tactics, employed by his lieutenants on the scene, worked out perfectly for the North. Except for a few forays up the Ohio, Cumberland and Tennessee, where he traded a few shots with scattered Confederate land forces, Foote did no real fighting in 1861. He spent most of the balance of the year readying his new boats, buying supplies, training crews and pre-

paring for the drive southward that everybody knew was the best way to break through the Rebel advance positions and penetrate the mid-south.

The Connecticut-born Flag Officer, inherently thrifty himself, found he had to pinch pennies to get his flotilla into shape. Correspondence between the Navy Department, the Bureau of Ordnance, civilian contractors and Foote reveals he had to buy on time and on promise to pay in the future, had to reduce payments to single men in his command so as to provide enough for the married men to send money home to their families and had to follow the old Yankee adage of "Make it do, wear it out or go without."

There was a great deal of trouble with his guns. John A. Dahlgren, a naval officer famous for his contributions to American gun-power at sea, wrote to a superior about Foote's difficulties.

"I beg leave to call the attention of the Bureau (of Ordnance and Hydrography) to the fact that certain 9-inch guns have been sent to the Western flotilla which were made for the Navy in 1855, and rejected for want of strength. As one of these guns burst as low as 121 fires, it is evident they are unsafe. I am aware that at the time they were sent West there seemed to be an immediate need for some ordnance, and it not being possible to procure any others, there was a justification for the risk incurred. But this is no longer the case; and as the gunboats on which these guns are may be in action before long, I would urge the Bureau to lose no time in replacing the 9-inch guns sent West by others which have been fully proved."

Dahlgren's plea was acted upon and the foundries at Pittsburgh sent replacements along to Foote, one by one, as they were built.

As winter brought ice to the rivers field operations slowed down or were cancelled out altogether. But Grant, Gen. Smith and Captain Foote spent many a long hour in Cairo headquarters planning for action when the spring freshets raised the water level in the rivers. Foote not only made plans, but toiled ahead with the preparation of the flotilla.

"Weary days are my lot," he wrote to his wife back in New Haven. "If I could be fitted out at a navy yard, I would not care; but this fitting out vessels where no one knows anything is discouraging."

Grant was in the same fix. Troops came to Cairo without guns, blankets or training. Raw young men off the farms and from the city streets of the Middle West had to be whipped into fighting divisions. Pressure from Lincoln and Edwin M. Stanton, the War Secretary, seemed

to be intensified in direct ratio to the misfortunes in Virginia. Everyone wanted Grant to move South.

It wasn't all peaches and cream in the Confederacy either.

Even earlier than the North, the southern commanders sensed that they must maintain a line roughly following the Kentucky-Tennessee line from the Alleghenies to the Mississippi and beyond into Missouri. But implementing their desires was something else again. Polk was doing a good job at Columbus and Belmont and had blocked the Father of Waters just below Cairo. But on the Tennessee and Cumberland things were dragging. Sixty miles upriver from Paducah, at a point where the two rivers were only twelve miles apart, the South had started building forts, Henry on the Tennessee to the west and Donelson, on the Cumberland, to the east.

Grant and Foote agreed, poring over their maps by the light of coal oil lanterns, that these "gates" to the Confederacy had to be cracked open. Albert Sydney Johnston, in command of Southern forces in the area between the mountains and the Mississippi, sent an old West Pointer, Brigadier General Lloyd Tilghman, to strengthen the twin forts. He wasn't well and didn't like the looks of things when he reached Donelson, where he established headquarters, but he was a tough soldier and began whipping the forts into shape.

Donelson was situated on better terrain. Tilghman had 3,000 feet of breastworks built, tiers of abatis and a pock-marking of rifle pits scattered in front of the main defenses. Fort Henry worried him much more. In fact it worried him so much he lapsed into hyperbole to express his disgust.

"The history of military engineering records no parallel to this case," he wrote. "Points within a few miles of it possessing great advantages and few disadvantages were totally neglected, and a location fixed upon without one redeeming feature."

At least Fort Henry itself was built well, and after Tilghman improved the abatis and the rifle pits outside the bastions he started on a new project, the erection of another fort just across the river where a good elevation of land provided a natural site for a fort. He planned to call it Fort Heiman, to honor Colonel Adolphus Heiman of the Tenth Tennessee, who was commander at Fort Henry.

Fort Henry was a strong installation of earthworks, covering ten acres, with five bastions four to six feet high, with embrasures fitted

neatly together with sandbags. There were seventeen heavy guns, one of them a giant 10-inch columbiad (120-pounder), one a 24-pounder, and the others 32-pounders with a few smaller cannon. Although there was room for 15,000 men in the fort, the Confederate high command at Bowling Green had sent only 3,000 and most of these men were bivouacked in a camp outside the defenses. They were from Louisiana and Mississippi for the most part and were very unhappy about being marooned in a swampy, inhospitable part of the Middle West in the winter.

So these were the "gates" the North had to open and to Foote it didn't appear too tough an assignment. He sent his lieutenants, or went himself, on spying and scouting cruises to the very doorstep of both Henry and Donelson. Shots were exchanged, prisoners taken, and reports weighed from farmers and river men, all of which convinced Foote he could conquer the two forts, with or without the help of an army on land. Later he changed his mind a bit, either because of increased resistance on one of the last expeditions upriver, or to be more politic when asking permission to move against the Southern fortifications. Writing to General Halleck, then in charge of the entire western campaign, he said:

"General Grant and myself are of the opinion that Fort Henry, on the Tennessee River, can be carried with four ironclad gunboats and troops, and can be permanently occupied. Have we your authority to move for that purpose when ready?"

Halleck reacted much sooner than was usual for him. Foote made the request on January 28 and on the 30th "Old Brains" telegraphed a formal order to launch the attack.

What may have caused Halleck's consent after earlier attempts by Grant had been rebuffed was information from Virginia that Confederate General P. G. T. Beauregard, flushed with some measure of the victorious spirit arising from defeat of Union forces at Manassas, was on the way to Kentucky with 15 regiments. Halleck told his field commanders to make haste and strike while the Virginia troops were still on the road.

On Sunday, February 2, Foote left Cairo with the ships then ready. There were four ironclads and three wooden vessels. He didn't like beginning a military operation on the Sabbath, but he had learned the water in the rivers was falling again, so he held divine services on board the boats as he steamed for Paducah. That night he dropped anchor in the Tennessee River. He was unhappy and explained why in a letter to Secretary Welles mailed the next day.

He told Welles he was starting the expedition with four new gunboats, the Essex, Carondelet, St. Louis and Cincinnati and the old wooden vessels, Taylor, Lexington and Conestoga.

He explained he had stripped other vessels of their men to fill the ranks on those ready to move.

"It is peculiarly unfortunate," he added, "that we have not been able to obtain men for the flotilla, as they only are wanting to enable me to have at this moment eleven full-manned, instead of seven partially-manned gunboats, ready for efficient operations at any point."

Grant's troops came up the Ohio on transports, waited with the gunboats until morning, and then were convoyed up the Tennessee. Out of range of the big guns at Fort Henry, the soldiers, who belonged to McClernand's and Smith's divisions, were put ashore to start the assault from the land side of the fort.

Foote had spent many a long night poring over maps and his orders to his gunboat commanders made it clear he had planned for virtually every eventuality. He was a meticulous man, but, more important, he knew that detailed instructions often paid off in the excitement of battle. Just one portion of his orders dealing with gunnery shows this clearly.

"The flagship will, of course, open the fire first, and then others will follow when good sight of the enemy's guns in the fort can be obtained," he wrote. "There must be no firing until correct sights can be obtained, as this would be not only throwing away ammunition, but it would encourage the enemy to see us firing wildly. The captains will enforce upon their men the absolute necessity of observing this order; and let it be also impressed upon every man firing a gun that, while the first shot may be either of too much elevation or too little, there is no excuse for a second wild fire, as the first will indicate the inaccuracy of the aim of the gun. Let it be reiterated that random firing is not a mere waste of ammunition, but it encourages the enemy when he sees shot and shell falling harmlessly.

"The great object is to dismount the guns in the fort by the accuracy of our fire, although a shell in the meantime may occasionally be thrown in among a body of the enemy's troops."

In subsidiary orders to the gunners on the wooden boats Foote warned them to stay out of danger because of their lack of protection but urged them to fire when within range. But they too were urged to conserve ammunition. This unwillingness to waste powder and shell was

an obsession with the Yankee Flag Officer. It was bred of the same thrifty spirit that forced him to husband his pay in the Orient so he could send more home to Mrs. Foote and the children.

With the troops landed, Foote's flotilla moved cautiously up the Tennessee. It wasn't only proximity that induced this caution. Torpedoes were noticed in the stream, bobbing about in the current and idling lazily in the eddies and backwater.

Phelps was given the ticklish chore of eliminating this new hazard. With the wooden gunboat Taylor, which was highly maneuverable, he started fishing the floating mines from the river. By now he was ahead of the balance of the boats, about opposite Panther Island, just downstream from Fort Henry. The torpedoes which the enemy had sent downstream were cylinders of sheet-iron, five and a half feet long, pointed at each end. In each was a canvas sack of 75 pounds of gunpowder and a simple device for exploding the charge when a lever — or feeler — extending outside the canister, was activated by contact with a vessel. A few of the mines were anchored just below the surface. Phelps, who was the sort of lieutenant any flag officer is lucky to have on his staff, did a good job and either found and exploded every torpedo the Confederates had planted, or cleared a wide enough channel so no other boat had to worry about them.

It took the better part of the day and, as Foote had to wait for Grant's divisions to move upstream through heavy timber and occasional marshy ground, he took no offensive action that afternoon except to fire at a few likely spots where it was feared there might be hidden batteries.

But that night, the night of the 5th of February, a storm swept in from the west, lashing the gunboats and drenching the Union force on land. In a matter of hours woods that had been fairly dry and easy to traverse became quagmires and the little creeks and inlets turned the banks of the Tennessee into a swamp. Even the Tennessee itself rose several feet from the downpour. This sudden rise of water tore other torpedoes from their moorings and they started floating down past the Union flotilla.

In the morning these were seen and the Taylor and Conestoga were asked to handle the menace. Meanwhile, Foote, who had gone aboard the Cincinnati from the Taylor, invited Grant to a council of war. The two commanders were in a cabin on the upper deck looking over maps and studying reports from scouts, when the Conestoga came alongside and put a captured mine on the Cincinnati's fantail. The weapon was a rel-

atively new device and both Grant and Foote wanted to inspect it at close range. They left their maps and went down to where an armorer was waiting to disarm the torpedo. The fantail was barely ten feet wide and the ladder to the gun deck went up on the outside of the armor plating at one side of the small work space.

The armorer, avoiding the trigger or tripping device, started to open the other end. As he removed a section of sheet-iron with pliers and wrench the observers could see a cap with a screw head on it inside. The worker turned the cap. There was a sudden rush of gas through the opening. The hissing noise sounded lethal and some of the men threw themselves prone to the deck expecting an explosion. Foote, who was sixteen years older than Grant, made a flying leap for the ladder and started climbing. Before he had gone halfway Grant was at his heels.

On the gundeck, out of danger, Foote felt a little sheepish but carried it off by asking Grant:

"General, why all the haste?"

"To keep the Navy from getting ahead of me," laughed Grant.

Back at their conference, both officers decided to attack the next morning, storm or no storm. So, before dawn on the 6th, McClernand's division moved ahead on the east bank of the Tennessee, to be ready for any of three eventualities: to await the arrival of Confederate troops from Donelson, to help in the attack on Henry from down the river, or to cut off a retreat by Southern forces. Smith's division moved up the western bank of the river to make a frontal assault on Fort Heiman from the upstream side — the side away from the attacking gunboats.

Smith's men had a devil of a time because of the storm the night before. Time and again rough timber bridges had to be built to carry the guns across little streams that had turned into small but furious torrents. It was such back-breaking work that although the men had only five miles to go they were still a mile or more from the fort when they heard the sound of Foote's gunboats opening the attack.

One of Smith's divisional commanders was General Lew Wallace, who was later to write one of the world's all-time best sellers, "Ben Hur", and who was already adept at turning a phrase. Writing of the first moments of the attack he said:

"Not more than seven hundred yards separated us from the great shells, in their roaring, fiery passage. Without suffering from their effect,

we had the full benefit of their indescribable and terrible noise. Several times I heard the shots of the fort crash against the iron sides of the boats. You can imagine the excitement and martial furor the circumstances were calculated to inspire our men with."

The Confederates were not surprised by the attack.

All through the night scouts had come in with word of the approaching land force and the flotilla. Union cavalry had been spotted and Heiman was sure the main road connecting Henry and Donelson was already cut. But he sent couriers through the woods to Tilghman, asking for permission to evacuate the unfinished bastion bearing his name, since he was sure he couldn't hold it, and urging that reinforcements come up post haste.

Tilghman moved up with an escort and long before dawn had brought most of the men from Fort Heiman into the ramparts at Henry. He left a cavalry patrol and a few scouts behind. All the fancy trenchworks and rifle pits that had been laid out during the winter to help in the defense of the fort were abandoned. Tilghman had expected to have 15,000 men with which to hold the place, but on this morning, when the chips were finally down, he had less than 3,000, many of them ill or weakened by fatigue born of the cold and miserable winter. Numbers alone didn't tell the whole story, for all these men were untried, raw, poorly-equipped soldiers with the exception of two companies, the Fourth Mississippi and the Tenth Tennessee. Many of the recruits were armed only with squirrel guns or shotguns and the Tenth Tennessee carried flintlocks which had seen service in the War of 1812.

Off in the woods to the rear of the Confederate stronghold was one body of troops that already bore itself like veterans and which would gain a great name and fame before the war ended. It was a body of cavalry headed by Colonel Nathan Bedford Forrest, one day to become one of the greatest guerrilla leaders in American history.

Scouts brought in word to Tilghman that the gunboats were only an hour's steaming time away and that a fleet of transports — obviously empty now — was tied up further down the river. These were identified as the Chancellor, Iatan, Emerald, Aleck Scott, City of Memphis, Fanny Bullitt and January. There was even a dispatch boat, the Spitfire.

All this, plus what Forrest's cavalrymen had seen in their scouting forays, convinced Tilghman he was up against better than 25,000 Union troops. Outnumbered better than seven to one, he was in a precarious spot, but he knew how important Fort Henry was to the Confederacy's

defense line and he was determined to make a fight for it. As if to test his resolution, scouts came in with word that Grant with 12,000 men was coming up the east bank of the Tennessee and Smith, with 6,000, was marching a parallel course on the west bank. There was no attempt to hide the advance. Bands were blaring, men singing and artillerists swearing at their teams, which were struggling to pull the field pieces through mud one observer described as "the consistency of soft porridge of almost immeasurable depth."

And always in the background, like an orchestral overtone, was the sound of the gunboats, laboriously puffing their way against a flooding current carrying on its surface rubbish swept into the stream by the night's cloudburst. There were uprooted trees, fence rails, lumber from flooded lumber yards and even a few outhouses.

Foote, annoyed by the trash borne on the rushing waters, and fearing that a tree might penetrate the hull of one of his boats, was, on the other hand, relieved at the thought that high water would prevent his flotilla from going aground on the sand bars that existed all along the double channel at Panther Island.

Tilghman had corralled all the men he was going to have on hand for the battle by mid-morning when Foote's boats came into sight, churning past the island. But by then the lower areas of the fort had been invaded by the flooding Tennessee, and Tilghman sent the bulk of his troops cross-country to Donelson. Against at least 18,000 enemy troops, the less than 3,000 could hardly serve a worth-while purpose so he thought it better to save them for a more advantageous battle. The old West Pointer, with only 200 men to man the heavy guns, waited for the on-coming gunboats.

Except for the thought of impending battle and death, it must have been a spectacular sight, especially from the Confederate position. It was now about eleven o'clock. The sun was high in the heavens, which had been scrubbed clean by the night's storm. A strong wind was blowing out of the west, sending black smoke scudding shoreward from the twin stacks of Foote's gunboats. The flag officer had steamed into his pre-arranged line of battle, with the four ironclads abreast, his flagship, the Cincinnati, in midstream, with the Essex on one side and the Carondelet and St. Louis on the other. Several hundred yards astern of the armored boats came the Taylor, Lexington and Conestoga. Sunshine was reflected by the gleaming brasswork of the gunboats and by the wakes churned up by the splashing paddlewheels.

Twenty-seven minutes after noon, when he was 1,700 yards from the fort, Foote gave the signal to open fire. The 9-inch guns barked and thundered, sending both solid shot and explosive shells into the Confederate bastions. Almost at once the Southern guns answered. In an earlier exchange of fire with some of Foote's boats the biggest gun in the fort, the columbiad, had burst its bands but had been repaired in time for today's battle. Its shells arched high over the river and splashed into the river like great geysers. When they struck the armored gunboats the sound was deafening. The twenty-four pounder added her voice and hardware, and as her barrel was rifled, she did considerable damage to the oncoming flotilla.

Once the firing commenced, Foote behaved as if he were somewhere on the far stretches of the ocean. He gave no thought to Grant's men, still slogging their way forward through the mire. With complete single-mindedness of purpose, he acted as if this were a struggle between the fort and his boats alone. Inexorably he moved closer, until he was only 600 yards from the nearest enemy guns. At this range Union and Confederate gunners were virtually looking down their gun barrels at each other. It was — for an hour or so — like a heavy-weight prize fight with two titans standing toe-to-toe, trading blows and never giving an inch. At this range, too, all of the lighter Confederate guns could fire and the shooting was disastrously accurate in the first minutes of the battle. In a relatively short time, however, the Union gunnery got the upper hand. The squat, black gunboats poured such a heavy fire into the fort one of the Confederate officers said later it was like nothing he had ever witnessed before. Solid shot ploughed great ruts and trenches through the earthworks, cut down trees nearby as if with monster scythes and dismounted or crippled the Southern guns.

It wasn't all one-sided.

The Cincinnati, which was spotted as the flagship because of her broad pennant, seemed to attract enemy fire. Shells tore through her smokestacks and her superstructure. One shell pierced the pilot house, and continued straight through the rear bulkhead, missing Foote by inches. But the steering apparatus was wrecked and she backed out of range for a time.

On the Essex it was worse. Her guns were spouting furiously when suddenly she trembled as if shaken by a massive earthquake. Then she staggered drunkenly, lost way, and circled helplessly. A shot, probably from the Confederate twenty-four pounder, had plunged into her depths

and exploded the middle boiler in the engine room. Steam and scalding water shot from the broken boiler clear across the forward gun deck. White-hot steam, deadly as a massive knife blade, roasted to death the steersman, Marshall H. Ford, so swiftly that his body was found, still erect, standing at the wheel, one hand on a spoke, the other on a signal bell rope. Gunners were cut down by the steam. Others, scalded, leaped into the river in their agony. On its way into the engine room the shell decapitated S. B. Britten, Jr., master's mate, and mortally wounded David Wilson, the gun captain. William D. Porter, Captain of the Essex, was caught by the engulfing cloud of live steam and badly scalded. When the final count was made it was found that one shell, hitting where it did, cost 32 lives and wounded many others. Out of action, the Essex withdrew, her place taken by the Cincinnati which had meanwhile repaired her steering machinery.

While this was going on in the front rank of ironclads, the three wooden gunboats steamed closer and added their fire to that of their armored sisters. It was too much for the men inside Fort Henry.

The columbiad's vent closed and couldn't be forced open. Soon after this behemoth was silenced, the best gun the Southerners had, the rifled twenty-four pounder, exploded like a firecracker, wounding or killing every man serving it. The lighter guns were outclassed, both in calibre and in effectiveness. Their gunners were forced to use a type of ammunition intended for other guns and soon five of these pieces had exploded or broken down, too.

An hour and twenty minutes after Foote's first shell had ripped into the earthern ramparts of the fort, the Southern colors came down. Fort Henry had been pounded into submission by superior force and better gunnery, but the end came like an odd bit of action in an opera bouffe.

The Confederate engineer officer, seeing the havoc that was being done by Foote's guns, suggested to Colonel Heiman that he surrender to prevent further bloodshed. Heiman agreed but deferred to Tilghman.

Tilghman was thunderstruck by the idea. He wanted to hold on as long as possible to give his troops a chance to rejoin those defending Fort Donelson. Although there were dead men all around the guns he asked why some of the cannon were silent. Told that the gunners had no replacements, Tilghman tore off his coat, leaped to the breech of the closest gun and shouted:

"I'll work the gun myself. Heiman, assign fifty men from your regiment to assist the gunners."

Poor Heiman, brave enough, but sensible to the true situation, saluted and legged it off into the woods after the Tenth Tennessee, already on its way to Donelson. As he ran along the muddy, rutted road, past field pieces that had been abandoned in the retreat of infantrymen and their regimental artillery, he could hear the awful din from the gunboat's cannonading and the sporadic answering fire from the fort. But then he noticed that the Southern guns went quiet. A few minutes later the Union firing ended and a strange stillness settled over the river valley. Heiman raced back toward the fort and saw that the Stars and Bars had been lowered from the flagstaff. He reported to Tilghman, who seemed both fatigued and excited. The General shouted that Heiman had not been present at the time of surrender and should rejoin his men. Heiman saw no reason to argue with a man as upset as Tilghman. He left for Fort Donelson.

As soon as he saw the flag at Fort Henry come down Foote ordered his gunboats to anchor in line, their broadside guns still trained on the battered bastions. Five minutes later a group of Confederate officers was spotted walking down to the river bank and the Flag Officer sent a small boat to bring them to the Cincinnati. As the little boat was rowed to the flagship cheers broke out among the ironclads. Foote, happy at the clear-cut victory, made no attempt to stop it.

Tilghman, who had recovered none of his composure, climbed up to where Foote and his staff were standing on the gun deck. The Union officer, noting that the Confederate officer was wringing his hands, moved forward.

"I am in despair," said Tilghman, "my reputation is gone forever."

"General," replied Foote, "there is no reason that you should feel thus. More than two-thirds of your battery is disabled, while I have lost less than one-third of mine. To continue the action would only involve a needless sacrifice of life, and, under the circumstances, you have done right in surrendering. Moreover, I shall always be ready to testify that you have defended your post like a brave man."

Tilghman hesitated but Captain Foote took him by the arm.

"Come, General," said the Union naval commander, "you have lost your dinner, and the steward has just told me that mine is ready."

Together, the two men walked into the Captain's cabin.

The battle of Fort Henry, although it was fought deep in the American Middle West, was, to all intents and purposes, a naval victory.

Except for a few shots fired at retreating cavalrymen or scouts, Grant's good-sized force played no part in the conflict. Foote's naval guns, protected by the sloping, armor-plated sides of the gunboats, had pounded the Confederate stronghold to pieces.

In his report to Gideon Welles, the Flag Officer commanding naval forces in western waters summed up the victory.

"The armored gunboats resisted effectively the shot of the enemy when striking the casemate," wrote Foote. "The Cincinnati (flagship) received thirty-one shots; the Essex fifteen; the St. Louis seven and the Carondelet six; killing one and wounding nine in the Cincinnati, and killing one in the Essex; while the casualties in the latter amounted to twenty-eight in number. The Carondelet and St. Louis met with no casualties."

Although his count of deaths was too hasty or he was in error in recording them, the naval commander was accurate in his interpretation of the victory. The iron plating on the gunboats had made the difference.

Many more words have been written about the significance of the contest between the Monitor and the Merrimac in Hampton Roads which took place a few weeks later, but to the student of warfare, the action at Fort Henry preached its own sermon for all to hear who would. The day of wooden warships was over.

As it turned out, the victory at Fort Henry was the critical one in the breaching of the Confederacy's first line of defense. By it the railroad connecting Bowling Green, Johnston's headquarters and main encampment, with the powerful force under Polk at Columbus was severed. Halleck boasted the victory placed the flag of the Union in Kentucky where it would never be taken down. Psychologically it was a most important success for the North. Before it the battles had all gone to the South. Fremont and Halleck had done nothing of importance in the Mid-West until Foote captured Fort Henry. Eastern armies had been beaten badly by Confederate forces in Virginia and the West Virginia mountains. Fort Henry was a bright ray of sunshine in the gloom that had hung over the Union since the first shots fired at Sumter.

Halleck took claim for the victory but Grant never did. It was Foote's battle and he won it handily. In doing so he revealed again, as he had at the Chinese barrier forts, that he knew how to fight. First he planned with scrupulous care and attention to every predictable eventuality. But once the battle was joined he attacked with tigerish elan, getting in as

close as possible to bring the greatest weight of shell on the enemy. The Connecticut sailor was meticulous in his planning but almost foolhardy in his bravado once the struggle was joined. One of his biographers likened his technique of driving straight for the enemy and then slugging it out toe to toe to a fierce "death hug" from which the enemy had no chance to escape.

Although he was busy with his reports to Welles, Halleck and other leaders, Foote didn't forget to speed Lieutenant Phelps on a mission that had been detailed two days before with Foote's typical attention to different angles. Phelps took the three wooden gunboats, which had been spared any harm in the battle, past the battered fort and on up the Tennessee to do as much damage as possible before the South caught its breath. Forcing open the swing bridge carrying the tracks of the Memphis, Louisville and Clarksville Railroad, Phelps' men then destroyed it with fire and explosives. At the mouth of Duck Creek a little farther on three Confederate vessels burst into flame as the Union flotilla bore down upon them. The Samuel Orr was loaded with floating mines and submarine torpedoes which went off in a tremendous upheaval when the flames reached them. Phelps had wisely backed water, fearing exactly what happened, and the northern sailors watched as the Appleton Belle, another packet, exploded with a similar blast. Flames from these two boats set off the third, the Lynn Boyd. The detonations of mines and bursting torpedoes were so fierce that skylights in the Conestoga were shattered and glass fell into the engine room.

When the fireworks had died down Phelps cruised on between the still burning packets. At Cerro Gordo he saw the scuttled hulk of the steamer Eastport, which the Confederates had been readying for armor plating. Stacks of iron sheets lay on the river bank and Phelps realized that had the vessel been armored she would have been a most formidable foe. Fairly new, 280 feet long, and with powerful boilers and engines, she could have handled any two of Foote's flotilla.

On the 8th Phelps reached Chickasaw, Mississippi, where he found the Sallie Wood and the Muscle, the latter loaded with iron destined for the Tredegar Iron Works in Richmond, which had been partially scuttled. Phelps hung around long enough to get them afloat again and sent them down river before proceeding into Alabama. Near the foot of Muscle Shoals, beyond which navigation was impossible, Foote's lieutenant found three more Southern boats going up in flames. They were the Sam Kirkman, Time and Julius, each loaded with vital war supplies. Citizens sent a delegation to Phelps at the dock pleading that he spare the women and

children and that he not destroy the bridge carrying the railroad across the Tennessee. Feeling charitable, he agreed to the requests, although he had never intended harm to the non-combatants anyway. Just why he was so generous about saving the bridge isn't as clear.

Turning downstream again, Phelps started his return voyage, happy at the knowledge he had caused the destruction of six boats and had captured three others. He had rounded up a mass of iron plating, spikes, clothing, shoes, camp equipment and other war supplies and loaded it on the three captured vessels. On the way back to Cairo the Muscle sprang a leak and sank, but her cargo was lumber, the least valuable of the entire haul.

Phelp's foray deep into the very vitals of the Confederacy shocked the Southerners. Citizens demanded more troops from Richmond and Bowling Green. Johnston himself was so shaken he sent word to his superiors that Foote could take Fort Donelson any time he wanted, and without the aid of an army. Realizing that without the defense line's hinge on the Tennessee, Bowling Green was too far advanced, Johnston led his troops into Tennessee. Kentucky was virtually abandoned. Now a new defense line — much deeper into secessionist territory — had to be built up, running from Island No. 10 and Memphis on the Mississippi, through Pittsburg Landing and on to Chattanooga. In the meantime, feeling that the withdrawal of Confederate troops south of the Cumberland was fraught with danger, Johnston ordered Fort Donelson held at all costs, and sent the divisions of Simon Bolivar Buckner and John B. Floyd cross-country from Bowling Green to the fort.

While this regrouping of forces was going on as a result of the defeat at Fort Henry, Foote was getting messages from all over the North on board the flagship Cincinnati. They came from officials in Washington, Congressmen, military leaders and private citizens. But the one that tickled him most was penned by General McClernand. It bore as the point of origin a new place-name, Fort Foote. The telegram read:

"Dear Sir: As an acknowledgment of the consummate skill with which you brought your gunboats into action yesterday, and of the address and bravery displayed by yourself and your command, I have taken the liberty of giving the late 'Fort Henry' the new and more appropriate name of 'Fort Foote'.

"Please pardon the liberty I have taken without first securing your concurrence, as I am hardly disposed to do, considering the liberty which you took in capturing the fort without my cooperation."

Less felicitous, but much more cogent, was the message of congratulation from Gideon Welles.

"I most cordially and sincerely congratulate you and the officers and men under your command on these heroic achievements, accomplished under extraordinary circumstances and after surmounting great and almost insuperable difficulties," wrote Welles. "The labor you have performed and the service you have rendered in creating the armed flotilla of gunboats on the Western waters, and in bringing together for effective operation the force which has already earned such renown, can never be overestimated. The Department has observed with no ordinary solicitude the armament that has so suddenly been called into existence and which under your well-directed management has been so gloriously effective."

There is an apocryphal anecdote that will not die, even after a hundred years, that indicates that Grant, fearing his superiors would not acquiesce in the move, sent a telegram stating he was moving overland at once toward Donelson, and then cut all telegraph communications behind him.

Documents showing close coordination between the army commander and Foote reveal, however, that plans were going ahead for an attack with full approval from the War Department. Others show how Foote, back at Cairo, was working with his ordnance officer, J. P. Sanford, to hurry completion of other gunboats and the arming of flatboats called mortar vessels.

On the Sabbath, however, he took time out from his many chores to attend divine services at the local Presbyterian Church. It was the first Sunday after his stunning victory at Fort Henry and he wanted to give thanks in the House of the Lord. In full uniform, he arrived at the church just before services were due to start, but he found there was no minister on hand, although there was a full congregation. Foote went to the deacons and urged one of them to conduct the service, but none of them wanted to do so. This irked the Flag Officer. Finally, seeing no one willing to act, he himself mounted to the pulpit. He read from the Scriptures, said a prayer and then preached a sermon on Jesus' words, "Let not your hearts be troubled; ye believe in God, believe also in Me."

His audience, apparently delighted, listened attentively.

After church was over an Army chaplain, who had come in very late, commended the naval officer on his action and on the sermon. Foote, turning the compliment off with a pleasantry, said the chaplain should have

stepped forward and conducted the service himself. Often, on later occasions, he said that had been his last attempt at lay-preaching.

The peace of the Sabbath was barely over when Foote received a telegram from Halleck. "Old Brains" was so imbued with joy over the victory at Fort Henry he wanted another at Fort Donelson. He was also a good enough strategist to know that Grant and Foote should strike while the iron was hot, and before the Confederates could move too many defenders into the fort on the Cumberland. As a matter of fact, Southern troops were already gravitating there from many points. So, too, were Southern generals.

Johnston, in overall command in Kentucky and Tennessee, was overgenerous with generals. Not wanting to leave Donelson under the command of Colonel Heiman, Johnston sent General Gideon Johnson Pillow, who had been head of Tennessee militia, to take over. Then Johnston sent John B. Floyd, who had been Secretary of War under President Buchanan, to lend a hand. Floyd had been a hot-head supporter of southern Congressmen long before the war broke out and was even at that moment under grand jury indictment in Washington for misconduct in office. He was alleged to have sent military supplies south to arsenals and armories where secessionist forces could get at them more easily, but he was later officially cleared. Finally Johnston sent Simon Bolivar Buckner along with more troops. As an afterthought he ordered Colonel Nathan Bedford Forrest to Donelson with his cavalry regiment.

These men, who would have to face Grant and Foote, were a strange mixture. Pillow was more of a politician than a general and troubled by indecision. Floyd also was a politician, without as much experience as Pillow, who had won acclaim in the War with Mexico, but he was the senior officer at the scene. Buckner, as later events were to show, was the ablest general but the youngest. He was a West Pointer, had taught tactics there, retired to amass a considerable fortune in Chicago real estate, and done his best to effect some compromise to avoid the civil war. He was offered command by both the Union and Confederacy, but turned them down until Fremont invaded Kentucky, his home state, from Cairo and Polk moved in to Columbus from the South. Then he offered his sword to General Johnston. Forrest later proved himself the ablest of them all but as a colonel he could only champ at the bit and bide his time.

While these high ranking officers and their troops were gathering at Donelson, Foote sent Captain Henry A. Walke in the Carondelet up the Cumberland to look the situation over, gather in a few prisoners if pos-

sible, and prevent enemy gunboats from operating in the vicinity.

Walke moved cautiously upriver only to find that Grant, who had moved his troops over from Fort Henry, — or Fort Foote, — had launched an attack. On the morning of February 13th, with no other naval assistance, the Carondelet went into action at Grant's request. The Cumberland was at flood stage, with a swift current running, and Walke had to maneuver in such a way that only his bow guns were available. Despite this handicap he fired 138 shots at the fort and at Confederate troops. A few hours later a 128-pound shot from an enemy gun penetrated one of the ports and injured her machinery. She withdrew for a time but showed up again in the afternoon to lend more aid to the Federal army.

Fighting on land was indecisive, but it was severe. Grant had wanted to wait for more troops, particularly the newly formed Third Division that had been created at the last minute and given to General Wallace. But McClernand, who had more spirit than military wisdom, attacked one of Donelson's redoubts and before he knew it was in the middle of a fierce fire fight. That was when Grant called on Walke for support.

While all this was going on Foote with the ironclads St. Louis, Pittsburg and Louisville and the faithful old wooden gunboats, Conestoga, Lexington and Taylor, was steaming along the Ohio and Cumberland with no thought the battle had been joined.

When he was 35 miles away from Donelson Foote saw the tiny steamer Alps, which had been used as a courier boat, coming down river belching steam and black smoke from both stacks. Without slacking speed, the Alps ran through the flotilla with the skipper bellowing at the top of his lungs. Foote, in dismay, made out the words.

"They're fighting like hell at Donelson," yelled the master of the Alps, leaning half out of the pilot house.

To Foote this was half heresy and half madness. He had thought Grant would hold back until the full flotilla was at the scene. He had no way of knowing McClernand had forced Grant's hand.

It had been raining hard since about 6 p.m. and the channel was not too well defined but Foote ordered his captains to pour on the coal and drive ahead at their top speed. As the belching, churning steamboats raced upriver the rain changed to sleet, mixed with rain and a little snow. The wind veered to the north and the men on deck felt its bitter, knife-like edge. The barometer and temperatures both fell. On the gunboats the pilot house and iron sheathing gave the men protection but out in the

woods the soldiers, soaked to the skin by the rain, and then whipped by the wind, had no place of refuge. There were no fires, since fires would do no good to men on the march. The Confederates, through bad management of supplies, had no overcoats. The Union soldiers had been issued heavy coats, but had left them at Fort Henry when told to march overland to Donelson. All through that bitter night, tortured by the freezing sleet and the merciless wind, Northern and Southern soldiers suffered together, knowing in their hearts that neither side had the advantage. Men lay on the frozen ground, waiting for the coming of daylight, torn between hope dawn would bring warmer weather and fear that battle might bring injury or death.

A few minutes before midnight Foote's flotilla tied up alongside the battered Carondelet, which was still licking her wounds. Off in the distance the naval commander could hear sporadic firing as patrols stumbled upon each other in the darkness.

Foote drew up his plans as best he could, not knowing just where the Union force was. From Walke he had received detailed information on Donelson's topography and he decided the navy would concern itself first with what the Confederates called their water batteries, those on the river bank, under the main ramparts of the fortification. With instructions sent to his captains, he went to his cabin and tried to sleep.

Dawn was a cheerless lightening of the sky that revealed two inches of snow blanketing the frozen earth. The mercury stood at 10 degrees. Wind still whistled around the rigging as the Flag Officer breakfasted on the St. Louis. At 6 a.m. a number of packets arrived from Cairo and Paducah bringing another 10,000 Union troops. Foote fidgeted impatiently for four hours as the soldiers disembarked and marched off into the woods to take up position.

Grant came aboard the flagship and conferred with the naval commander for an hour. He agreed that the gunboats should first try to overpower the water batteries and then move past the upper works on the bluff in order to enfilade the guns in the main bastions. Grant left to see how his three divisions were making out in their attempt to flank the enemy.

About 3 p.m., on a signal from shore, Foote weighed anchor and moved to the attack, the flagship in the lead, followed closely by the armored vessels Carondelet, Pittsburg and Louisville. To the rear steamed the wooden gunboats, the Lexington, Conestoga and Taylor.

Obeying Foote's injunction to move in fast, the flotilla steamed straight into the teeth of the enemy guns. Within minutes the engagement became a furious fire-fight. Shot and shell from the boats upended guns in the water batteries, dismounting some and killing the gunners at others. But Fort Donelson was not Fort Henry. Confederate artillerists got the range on the bobbing gunboats and blasted away with shot and explosive shells. The guns on the bluff in particular were in an advantageous position and lobed their 128-pound shot down on the Union vessels with such impact that even the iron armor-plating gave way.

One historian said that never had a small squadron been subjected to such murderous shellfire. With twenty heavy guns delivering this plunging fire, Foote found himself in trouble, as only twelve of his main guns could fire at a time.

The Carondelet, battered from the earlier shelling, took one shot on her anchor which broke and sent pieces of iron over the deck like shrapnel. Another shell blew her stack away. Then a lucky shot tore away the davits of the gunboat's lifeboats, dropping them into the river, and still another ripped into the wheelhouse killing one pilot and wounding others.

Foote refused to back away, blasting at the water batteries from less than 400 yards away. But the punishment the flotilla absorbed was frightening. A shot from the bluff fell in the Louisville's rudder-chains, leaving her unmanageable, so she drifted with the current down river and out of action. Minutes later a shot tore the St. Louis's wheelhouse to pieces, ripping through it like tin shears through a sardine can. She, too, drifted aimlessly in the current and away from her sisters, with Foote himself, wounded in the arm and foot, at the wheel. When a rifled cannon on the Carondelet exploded, damaging her beyond any hope of immediate repair, Foote ordered a withdrawal. Some of his men wrote home that he wept openly as he issued the command to quit the battle.

If he had known what was going on inside Fort Donelson he might have ordered a suicide stand with what was left of the battered squadron. But this is only conjecture, a hundred years after the event. The fact is, however, that Pillow, Floyd and Buckner were so distracted by the naval bombardment that order and discipline had nearly disappeared.

Pillow himself telegraphed to the Governor of Tennessee:

"The Federal gunboats are destroying us. For God's sake send us all the help you can immediately. I don't care for the land force of the enemy; they can't hurt us if you can keep those iron hell-hounds in check."

While he was calling on a political figure to keep the ironclads off his neck, his own gunners, refusing to give up, turned the trick themselves. With almost half of their cannon disabled, they blasted away at the Federal boats until they withdrew, defeated for the first time in western waters.

Foote looked out over his flotilla and saw a sight that saddened him. The flagship, where he had commanded the assault, had been hit fifty-nine times. The Louisville had taken thirty-seven hits, the Carondelet twenty-six and the Pittsburg twenty. Even in the act of retreating, misfortune struck at the little fleet. The Pittsburg, turning on the order to leave the scene, misjudged the power of the river current and sideswiped the luckless Carondelet, breaking her starboard rudder. On every one of the ironclads the decks were slippery with blood. Land-based artillery, with the added advantage of much greater elevation, had been too much for the armor-clad gunboats.

In his formal report to the Secretary of the Navy, Foote made two points very clear. First, he said the attack was launched before he was ready. (Grant wasn't ready either, for that matter.) Second, he stated his conviction that if the two vessels had not lost the ability to steer, they could have fought on for fifteen minutes more. These fifteen minutes, he was convinced, would have brought victory because he could see Confederate gunners running from their guns.

In his initial report, telegraphed on the 15th before quitting the area of battle, he did not mention his own wounds. The next day, however, in a wire sent to his wife from Cairo, he gave the details of how he was hurt. He said he had stepped into the pilot house to speak to the wheelsman when a solid shot sent splinters of iron into his left shoulder and a piece of the spent shell into his left foot. He told her he was on crutches but reassured her by adding "I will be running about in less time than a week."

Foote was not present when Grant launched the land attack that captured Fort Donelson, the day after the naval assault.

Pillow and Floyd, unwilling to face the Union assault, handled the problem of retreat like a hot potato, finally ordering their junior, Buckner, to take over and haul down the flag after they fled with the bulk of the troops. Forrest, in disgust, led his troopers through the swamps and kept the Confederate cavalry in shape to fight again. It was nothing the South could be proud about.

What is often overlooked in the assaying of this great victory early in the western theater of war is Foote's role as the one who "softened up" the defenders at Donelson. Official dispatches make it clear that Southern commanders lost their starch under the pounding of the gunboats' fire. Long before the Union army moved to the assault, Pillow and Floyd had decided to retreat. No military strategist worth his salt doubts that Grant would have won without Foote's flotilla, but the cold fact is that Foote's valor in steaming into the very teeth of the enemy emplacements, and the expert gunnery of the Union cannoneers, destroyed any real Confederate will to fight.

There is another very important facet of this victory that must be taken into consideration when assigning weight to the various arms of war on the Donelson battlefield. Grant, who later proved himself the greatest expert in the handling of large bodies of men the war between the states produced, expected victory on the banks of the Cumberland. But he certainly didn't expect it to come with blinding speed. He made full preparation for an investment of the fort, moved men into position to cut off escape or reinforcement, had them build abatis to frustrate Southern counter-assaults and waited until all available troops had reached the lines before even thinking of attack.

Further study of the facts shows how unexpected was the Southern collapse.

On the morning of the 15th, as the Union gunboats prepared to quit the scene, patrols of infantry ran against each other in the frozen forest and started firing at each other. These encounters blossomed into full scale battle and by mid-morning thousands of men were engaged in the struggle. But Grant, thinking it would be a long time before crucial decisions would have to be made, left the mushrooming conflict in the hands of his lieutenants, and went out to confer with Foote on the flagship. The latter was on crutches and in considerable pain. Grant asked that whatever available gunboats were left be assigned to aid in the continuation of the battle. He felt he would need all the artillery support he could get, regardless of whether it came from land or water. Foote readily offered all he had and went off to Cairo, leaving the flotilla in the command of Commander Benjamin M. Dove. In response to Grant's plea for immediate assistance, Dove ordered his battered gunboats to attack again. When the general got back to his headquarters, he found the Confederates had thrown his right wing back on his center and that both were on the verge of giving way. He corrected the

situation by moving in reserves and when night fell Pillow, then in nominal command of the fort, withdrew his men to the trenches and bastions.

In the middle of the night of February 15-16, Pillow and Floyd made their exit from the scene and the next day Buckner sent word of his desire to surrender. From then on it was Grant's victory, and a lot of northerners forgot Foote's role in the decisive battle. Lew Wallace didn't. He wrote of the "awful ironclads" and the value of their fire-power, using the word "awful" in its correct sense.

Foote himself was frugal with words in his official dispatches, making no claims. But in his letters to his wife, where he felt he could take his hair down, he revealed his innermost feelings.

In one note he said:

"I telegraphed at the close of the fight at Fort Donelson, where we so demoralized the rebels that the fort fell a prey to the army the next day . . . A rebel colonel told one of our officers today that the army never could have taken the forts had it not been for the gunboats."

Later he wrote:

". . . but I am satisfied and rather glad that the army did take the fort, as they have fought like tigers and lost almost two thousand men."

In the same letter he mentioned a later conference with Generals Grant and Smith and used these revealing words:

"We are all friendly as brothers."

Honest appraisal of the battle makes it clear that Foote could not have hoped to conquer Donelson with only his flotilla. It is equally clear that Grant expected heavy losses and prepared for a long siege. Abler Confederate generals might have delayed the northern victory — or even prevented it — but the plunging shellfire from the little ironclads in the river broke the defenders' spirit long before Grant applied the crusher.

Yet fairness compels the historian to mark Donelson as a defeat for the Naval arm. It had to retreat out of range of the fort's guns. It took a merciless amount of punishment at the very hour its own shells were convincing Pillow and Floyd that flight was wiser than valor. It was the Union Navy's first defeat in western waters, but neither Foote nor his men had reason to feel any shame, knowing what they had done to help buy victory for the North.

Foote remained in Cairo only a few days as surgeons tried to patch up the wounds in his foot. It wasn't a serious injury in one sense. Many a wounded man recovered from much worse damage. With today's antibiotics and asepsis, modern surgery and advanced medical knowledge, it would have healed in a few weeks.

Two days after the battle the Flag Officer wrote Mrs. Foote from his new flagship, the Conestoga.

"I hope in a week or two to throw away my crutches and be well again," he said. "My two little wounds at the gun and the pilothouse would give me no trouble if one of them had not been on the foot."

Before closing he added a line that gives some indication of the futile treatment on which he was relying:

"I shall have a good sleep tonight with a wet cloth on my left foot, and I hope to be rid of its bother soon."

His injury didn't interfere with Foote's desire to get on with the war. He urged Halleck to let him take his flotilla clear up to Nashville and strike at the Confederate stronghold before the South recovered from the double defeat at Forts Henry and Donelson. But Halleck refused. Instead Foote took a portion of his force on up to Clarksville, a fortified position at the junction of the Cumberland and the Red Rivers. It fell to the navy without a shot.

Halleck then left East Tennessee in the hands of General Don Carlos Buell and called all his gunboats back to Cairo. There Foote found letters and telegrams of high praise from all over the country. Friends in the Navy Department were ecstatic about the services of the ironclads. The man in the street was no less proud. In Foote's home town, New Haven, people stormed to the doors of Mrs. Foote's house, presented her with a flag, and cheered her husband's success.

The taste of victory was sweet, but there was a long way to go before Foote could put aside his sword. He knew the need for opening the Mississippi to Northern forces, and he knew the gunboats would play a major role in the effort.

In a letter to a relative he mentioned the inconceivable "magnitude" of his duties as he directed work on a new and much more powerful flagship, the Benton, and the arming of many mortar boats. This letter also discloses that despite the plaudits he had won, there was a growing bitterness over the public's tendency to award the laurels to army

leaders. Foote referred to this as a "bitter cup, and I can hardly drink it." He complained that Halleck had prevented him from attacking Nashville and had given all the credit for that city's seizure to the army.

"Oh, how I long for this war to terminate," he wrote. "I have had enough of it, and I think the South will also have been taught to respect Yankee pluck."

This rather emotional outburst was probably born, not so much by the friction between the services, as by the continuing failure of the wound in his foot to mend. He was still on crutches, hobbling about Cairo, getting the ironclad Benton ready for battle, hurrying the builders of the mortar boats, urging haste with repairs on the gunboats damaged at Donelson. The Benton was something of a disappointment. Planned as a formidable craft with heavier plating than that on any other vessel on the Mississippi, she was slow-footed and unwieldy. The armor over her guns, pilot-house and rudder machinery was so heavy she could hardly breast the current in the Ohio during her shakedown runs. But her guns would be invaluable, Foote knew, and he wanted her ready before the first moves were made to start opening the route to the Gulf.

The first Confederate cork in this bottleneck consisted of the fortified town of Columbus. It lay on the river bank in the small corner of Kentucky closest to the confluence of the Ohio and Mississippi. Lieutenant General Leonidas Polk, the West Pointer who had put aside his uniform for the robes of an Episcopal Bishop, and then doffed those to don Confederate garb, commanded at Columbus. But Polk and the war department at Richmond knew this was not an effective stopper. So when Foote sent a flotilla down on reconaissance the Southerners decided the climate was more salubrious further south. Thousands of men left the old anchor of the first Confederate line of defense, made untenable by the loss of Henry and Donelson, and retreated to Island No. 10, forty miles down-river.

Island No. 10 had the looks of an impregnable position. It lay in a sharp bend of the Mississippi in an area of swamps and impassable marshes. To attack it from land was unthinkable. Halleck proposed to send a Union army to capture New Madrid, Missouri, just below the island and to put men across the river on the Tennessee shore to cut off retreat. Then Foote could blast the fortifications into submission with the gunboats and mortar boats. On paper it looked like a workable plan.

But General P. G. T. Beauregard, no novice at defensive warfare, had scattered batteries all about the high island, which commanded the

river for miles in both directions, and had even found enough solid ground on the river bank to install a few guns for enfilading enemy boats. All around this small Gibraltar were bayous, backwaters and snake-infested creeks and swamps.

Halleck decided to isolate Island No. 10 by taking New Madrid, which lay around the first bend below the island. Most of Polk's men from Columbus had been sent to New Madrid, and they had put in their time erecting breastworks and abatis. By the first of March they had done surprisingly well, but more than half of the Southern soldiers were ill with dysentery or malaria. The position, therefore, was a cardboard fort, weak within and not too strong without. To take this fort Halleck sent General John Pope and a good sized force down from Cairo. He also ordered Foote to lend a hand with his gunboats.

Halleck was an irascible man, given to sending short, angry telegrams to his subordinates, brooking few delays and unable to understand that movements that looked simple on paper at headquarters were not so easy to perform in spots where roads were nonexistent and where swamps and rivers impeded troops.

So soon after the 1st of March he asked Foote to start down river. Foote was just as adamant, and said he wasn't ready. He could remember how gunboats had been knocked out of service by shells hitting pilot-houses and steering gear. He wanted plating over these vunerable spots. Halleck's haste was understandable as he wanted John Pope's force to get done with New Madrid so he could use them to help Grant on the move up the Tennessee. The western commander sent Foote a telegram on the 6th demanding that the flotilla sail from Cairo. The injured Commodore — he had won higher rank because of his success at Fort Henry — wired back he wouldn't be ready before the 14th, and that if he were ordered to move before then Halleck could expect "the most disastrous consequences to the flotilla."

Pope fumed in the woods outside New Madrid. Halleck could hardly contain himself. Washington sent a blizzard of telegrams urging speed, but the Connecticut Yankee ignored the pressure in order to get his boats ready. Then on the morning of the 14th — the very day he said he'd be ready to move — he started down the river with seven ironclad gunboats and ten mortar boats. The Louisville's boilers sprung a leak and she was sent back to Cairo for repairs. The flotilla went on and two days later preliminary bombardment of the defenses on Island No. 10 was commenced.

By then, however, Pope had achieved his first victory. He had brought up siege guns before New Madrid, sent in a few rounds of heavy shells and readied his 20,000 men for an assault. But there was no battle on land. The Confederates pulled out in great haste, leaving guns and supplies, tents still up and wine on the tables in the officers' quarters. A makeshift fleet of steamers armed with small guns and protected with bales of cotton and a little armor plating withdrew down river too.

It wasn't much of a victory. It left Pope on the wrong side of the river, with no means of getting across to exert pressure on the rear of the Confederate position. He yelled for help. If Foote would send a few gunboats past the batteries on Island No. 10, he suggested, he could execute the desired transfer. But Foote was up against stout resistance. For several days he bombarded the island batteries which numbered more than two score. Compared to conditions at Henry and Donelson, that on the Father of Waters was a dozen times more difficult. The river was in flood and it was all Foote could do to keep his under-powered gunboats from being swept by the current into the very jaws of the enemy batteries.

The Benton — so strong in gunpower and so well armored — was an ornery craft to manage. Foote solved this problem by lashing the flagship between the more maneuverable steamers Cincinnati and St. Louis and letting them drift down until within extreme long range of the Southern batteries. The Benton, on which Confederate gunners seemed to center their attack, was struck repeatedly. One shell hit the armor plating, ricocheted along the deck, penetrated a weak point, crashed into a cabin and finally came to rest in a drawer of Foote's desk, "depositing itself in the drawer as quietly as possible." The Benton took four shots in all. A rifled gun on the St. Louis burst, killing and wounding fifteen officers and men. The Cincinnati's engines were damaged and she retired to Cairo. But it wasn't only enemy shellfire that worried Foote. His own ammunition was almost as dangerous to the flotilla as the enemy's.

"Our shells bursting prematurely, we have to drown them before loading the guns," he wrote to the Secretary of Navy. "The fuses — many of which, I am informed, were made before the Mexican War — ought to have been condemned."

In the middle of the heavy fighting in front of the island's guns, a courier handed Commodore Foote a telegram from New Haven. It was from his wife and bore the tragic news that their second son, William

Leffingwell, had died at the age of thirteen. Death had come just as Foote led his fleet down the river from the base at Cairo.

Without quitting his post of duty, the Commodore wrote out a short wire in answer.

"May God support us," he said. "The shock stuns me in midst of fight. Thy will be done to us and ours."

Two days later he had time to compose a letter. It showed his deep religious faith, but it revealed his sorrow too.

"It is all right, my dear; for God, our kind, heavenly Father, has done it," he told his wife. In a postscript he added what might be called his philosophy of life:

"I do not feel myself in special danger. Still, should I fall, it will be in a holy cause, and I shall die content. So do not mourn on my account. You know my feelings. I have never kept anything from you, and God will provide for you and yours. While I talk thus, I do not consider myself in any more danger than I have been before. Still we are at war, and I am under fire. Again I commend you all to God and his grace."

Hobbling about on his crutches, his hair, which had not yet shown a trace of grey, blowing in the breeze, and his coal black eyes noting every detail of the battle, Foote continued with the task of silencing Island No. 10. Days dragged by and Pope demanded the Navy send a few gunboats in a dash past the fort to aid him down the river. Foote called a council of war with all his officers and only one man thought such a move safe. The commanding officer even considered running the blockade alone in the Benton, because she was so much better protected than any of the other vessels, but he decided against it, knowing that the loss of gunboats would weaken the North in its approaching advance up the Tennessee and other rivers leading into the Confederate heartland.

Halleck agreed with him for once, writing him to conserve the flotilla for later operations and to continue the bombardment with the mortar boats. These craft were odd weapons in the armory of war. Little more than timber-protected barges, they were inched forward along the river bank and tied up to trees. Their mortars weighed 17,280 pounds and fired a shell thirteen inches in diameter. A derrick on the bank dropped the huge shell into the mortar, and 23 pounds of powder were required to send the flaming shot in a great parabola toward the enemy bastions.

The gunners had to retreat behind the timbered shields each time the mortars were fired because of the blast and concussion. Some idea of the character of the weapon can be gained from a description Foote wrote for his wife.

"We are throwing mortar-shells into the forts at night," he said, "which, showing the burning fuse, makes a beautiful sight, like a shooting star in a parabola."

After a while pressure built up for a more active assault. It was all right to blast away at the fort, knowing that eventually Southern supplies would run short, but Halleck wanted to move deeper into the Confederacy. Pope fretted for a way to move his men across the river for an assault from the island's rear. Foote, too, wanted to get on with the war.

A partial solution came by fortuitous circumstance. The very thing that made Island No. 10 almost impregnable made possible its defeat. The swampy land lying all around was traversed by meandering rivers and bayous. Army engineers discovered that with a little dredging and widening of natural channels a canal could be cut linking two bends in the Mississippi and by-passing the island fort. Colonel Josiah Bissell, an Army engineer, was given the assignment. He found an old logging road that was now under water because of the flooded conditions. With dugouts and canoes he followed its route and emerged a few thousand yards above New Madrid. Soldiers went to work with axe and saw; teams of horses floundered about with scrapers and finally a channel was created that would take shallow-draft craft. Thousands of trees had to be cut down and dragged away but the job was completed. It took fifteen days, but the miracle was achieved. Soldiers had to work in relays from dawn to long after dark and strange rigs had to be created to cut tree trunks where there was no footing for the men, but rafts solved this problem and steam winches supplied the necessary power.

All this delay nearly drove General Pope out of his mind. He wired and wrote long letters to Foote asking for an attempt at running the blockade. After some time it obviously got under Foote's skin and he accepted the offer of one of his captains, Walke, to make the first try. Commander Walke piled cord wood around the Carondelet's engine room, wound an 11 inch hawser around and around the pilot house, and put loose lumber all over the deck to absorb the impact of plunging shells. Anchor chains were spread above vital spots and timbers were erected on the side facing Island No. 10 — the port side. Finally a coal

barge loaded with baled hay and coal was lashed alongside the gunboat on the same exposed side.

Walke altered the pipes so the steam would escape through the pilothouse instead of making the sound it usually did. Hoses were rigged up to the boilers so scalding water could be aimed at anyone trying to board the vessel. Side arms and cutlasses were issued to the men to repel boarders. Then everyone in the Union flotilla waited for a foggy night.

On the night of April 4 a thunderstorm swept over the area and Foote and Walke decided the time was ripe for running of the gantlet. Twenty sharpshooters from the 42nd Illinois Regiment went aboard the Carondelet and the lines were cast off.

For a mile or more the gunboat churned down stream unnoticed. Then shells started to fall about her. The red glow and sparks from the boilers, escaping from the twin stacks in the darkness, had given her away. Signal rockets went up from shore and from the island. Guns barked and the sky was illuminated by exploding shells and signal bombs.

Walke ordered full steam ahead. Concussions from shells striking close by in the water couldn't be distinguished from the reverberations of thunder overhead. Realizing that the enemy gunners could aim only in the instant when a flare or shell lit up the sky, Walke maneuvered his boat to alter course as often as possible. Shells whizzed and screamed above the gallant little gunboat and the captain sensed there was safety close to the island's shore. This would prevent the enemy from reaching him because they could not depress their guns sufficiently.

The man most responsible for the Carondelet's safety was Captain William R. Hoel, borrowed for the occasion from the Cincinnati. Before the war he had piloted packets on this stretch of the Mississippi for twenty years and boasted he knew every bend and sand bar between Cairo and Memphis.

Soaked to the skin and without any protection from storm or shell splinters, Hoel stood on the bow of the gunboat, peering into the darkness, shouting directions to the wheelsman.

Once, yawing from the effect of the coal barge tied at her side, the Carondelet went aground on a bar, but the engines threshed and she was cleared. Minutes ticked by and grew into hours but at 1 a.m. the next morning, April 5, to the sound of cheers and the light of glowing bonfires, the Carondelet tied up to the dock in New Madrid.

The next night the Pittsburg made the same run in another thunderstorm, avoiding all damage. With these two naval craft, Pope was at last happy. He used them to silence field artillery the Confederates had wheeled into place to prevent a crossing by the transports. Then, the way cleared, he started his troops across to the Tennessee bank.

With these forces behind them, the defenders of Island No. 10 gave up the battle. On the morning of April 7, long before dawn, they sent a boat and a flag of truce to Commodore Foote's flagship, surrendering the island to him. Later Foote sent sailors and men from a regiment which had been sent to cooperate with him over to take possession in the name of the Navy. It was, for the man limping about the Benton's deck on hated crutches, a glorious victory.

It is true that digging and widening of the auxiliary channel through the swamp would ultimately have supplied Pope with the boats needed to put his men behind the island. But it didn't work out that way. Foote's steady and galling bombardment of the fort, and the success in running the blockade, made it clear to the defenders that they could no longer call the tunes.

Foote, his army aide, Colonel Napoleon Bonapart Buford, and Pope between them rounded up more than 7,000 Confederates, including three generals. It was a loss the South could ill afford, and it showed conclusively that there was little hope the Confederacy could keep the Mississippi closed against the combined operations of Union armies on shore and Union gunboats on the river.

It was Foote's last real fight. He didn't wait for encomiums of praise after the surrender at Island No. 10. He steamed on downstream, eager to make a rendezvous with Farragut who was working upstream from New Orleans. But at Fort Pillow the South had a considerable force of men, a well emplaced number of guns and nine armed gunboats, three of which were ironclads. At the critical moment when Foote and Pope were planning an assault much like the one that overcame Island No. 10, the Army general received an order to march with all his force, save two regiments, to Shiloh. There was nothing Foote could do except to stand off from the shore and keep Fort Pillow under desultory bombardment.

His success in battle was not accompanied by similar good fortune in his effort to get well. His foot was growing more painful every day. On April 24, while on the Benton off Fort Pillow, he wrote a personal,

unofficial note to his old friend Gideon Welles, revealing how ill he really was. The last paragraph hinted at tragedy to come:

"Entre nous, Colonel Fitch, who is a celebrated surgeon, and commands the small force left here by General Pope, examined my case yesterday, and said that a suppuration might take place in my foot, which would probably permanently injure or destroy it. I feel discouraged about it, and it has taken most of the energy out of me . . ."

Each passing day increased Foote's misery. There were times when the pain was so acute he could not concentrate on military matters at all. Other doctors inspected the ailing foot, and finally it became evident that Foote would have to be relieved of command. He himself thought a temporary absence from the scene, with a chance for better care and rest, might turn the trick and he recommended that Captain Charles Henry Davis take over his flagship as his successor. But by the time the actual transfer of command took place in the Commodore's cabin on the Benton, Foote must have realized he would never again walk the deck of a man-of-war in battle.

In the log of the flagship, under date of May 9, this entry tells most of the story:

"Flag Officer A. H. Foote took leave of his officers and men. At four p.m. Flag Officer Foote went on board the transport De Soto. As the De Soto was leaving the U.S. gunboat Benton, the officers and men gave three cheers for Flag Officer Foote."

But it didn't mention the scene on the De Soto where Foote, sitting in a chair on the after deck, held a palmetto leaf fan before his face so none of his old comrades in arms could see the tears coursing down his cheeks.

The Flag Officer went to Cleveland to his brother's home hoping to return to duty within a few weeks. He was still technically in command of all naval units in western waters. But the foot injury did not improve and his flesh wasted away under the attacks of pain, diarrhoea and malaria. At his own request, after another medical team reported he was unlikely to be fit for action for a long time, he was detached from command of the flotilla.

Welles sent him a warm letter, expressing concern for his health, and warning him to rest so as to make a fast recovery.

"Most sincerely do I regret the necessity which compels you to seek rest, and ask to be detached from that command which you have so

much honored," said Welles, "but I am consoled with the belief that you will be able in a brief period, with vigor and renewed health, to again elevate your flag and render additional service."

It was brave talk.

Foote left Cleveland and went home to New Haven, where weeks later he was appointed Chief of the Navy's Bureau of Equipment and Recruiting. He couldn't go to Washington and the Navy Department was willing to wait until he could. On the 30th of July he received word that he had been promoted to the rank of Rear Admiral, and in the midst of his pain and suffering, it made him very happy.

Fate was not done with the ailing officer. In October two of his daughters died within ten days of each other, so that he had lost three children in half a year. Courageously he continued with his duties, moving his family to Washington before the end of 1862. By summer of 1863 it had been agreed in Washington that Foote was the right man to take command of the South Atlantic blockading squadron. He went home to New Haven to await orders and was examined by another board of physicians. They discovered he had Bright's disease. It didn't deter the Yankee admiral. He hurried to New York after a sad farewell and took a room at the Astor House on lower Broadway. He expected to go aboard his flagship, the Tuscarora, but the vessel was delayed and Foote impatiently remained at the hotel. There he was stricken with his last illness. Pain overpowered his courage and at times he was in a coma. He told friends he knew his disease was fatal but that he put all his faith in the Lord. Doctors came and did what they could and his family gathered at his bedside. At the end he was unconscious for 36 hours, dying in his sleep at a little past 10 o'clock on the evening of Friday, the 26th of June.

A navy surgeon was standing at the foot of the bed with the Admiral's brother when the 56 year old fighter breathed his last. The words he spoke to the survivors could, with justice, have been engraved on Andrew Hull Foote's tombstone:

"Your brother has literally worn himself out in the public service. He is as truly a victim of this war as if he had perished on the battlefield."