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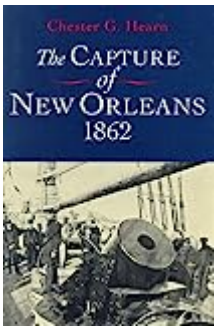


**Chester G. Hearn.** *The Capture of New Orleans, 1862.* Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1995. 292 pp. $26.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8071-1945-7.

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The fall of New Orleans to Federal forces in April 1862 was a devastating loss to the Confederate government and people. With Nashville, Tennessee, already in Union hands, the South lost not only its largest city and one of it most valuable ports, but an irreplaceable stock of men, ships, and supplies for the defense of the Mississippi River. The loss of New Orleans also continued the hemorrhaging of cities and troops that resulted in the end of Confederate control of the Mississippi Valley by 1863. In less than six weeks, Memphis, Tennessee, fell, leaving only Vicksburg and Port Hudson under Confederate authority on the river. Fourteen months after the fall of New Orleans, these last two Confederate strongholds fell to the Union army, and the Mississippi River was under Federal domination.

Although the strategic importance of New Orleans near the Gulf of Mexico appears obvious to most students of the war, the Rebel high command believed that the major threat to the city was from upriver. Confederate President Jefferson Davis and Secretary of the Navy Stephen R. Mallory failed to appreciate the city's vulnerability to an attack from the Gulf below. During the war's early days, the Southern high command repeatedly stripped Louisiana of its resources and men and shipped them north and east for service in Virginia and Tennessee.

When Louisiana seceded from the Federal Union, President Davis sent seventy-two-year-old Major General David E. Twiggs to take command of the military forces in the state, and Commodore Lawrence Rosseau was sent to build and command the naval force. At that time, the city's defense consisted of two masonry forts located seventy miles downriver. These works, Forts Jackson and St. Philip, were armed with antiquated smoothbore cannons, and neither one was in any condition to resist and repel an invasion. New Orleans, a city of considerable importance to the new Confederate States, was ill-prepared for the impending crisis.

Twiggs failed significantly to improve the city's defenses and, in October 1861, he was replaced by the younger Major General Mansfield Lovell. In spite of the apparent energy that Lovell brought to his new command, many New Orleaneans were skeptical of the former New York City deputy street commissioner, and they doubted his loyalty to the Confederate cause. Lovell, however, finding the city's defenses in disarray, was more disturbed by the neglect of his superiors to his new command's needs than he was by local opinion. Nonetheless, the new commander approached his task with energy and skill, and he soon earned the reluctant respect of most of the city's citizens.

In the North, preparations began early to capture and secure New Orleans for the Union. Secretary of the Navy

Gideon Welles appreciated the strategic importance of the city and the lower Mississippi. Northern intelligence was aware of the numerous fortifications the Confederates were constructing south of Cairo, Illinois, on the Mississipp, and they appreciated the problems they faced in the approach to New Orleans from either upriver or downriver. Welles chose two navy career foster brothers, Commander David Dixon Porter and Flag Officer David Glasgow Farragut, to lead the northern forces in from the Gulf and fight their way upriver to the city.

Pressure increased on the South when, on April 19, 1861, President Abraham Lincoln issued the proclamation that established the blockade of Southern ports. Weak at first, the blockade's effectiveness grew as the North mobilized its superior resources. While Confederate authorities struggled to build their river defense fleet and refurbish the old forts, Secretary Welles approved a plan that included constructing and outfitting a fleet of specially built mortar-bearing schooners. This innovative idea belonged to Commander Porter, who probably knew the lower Mississippi better than any other Union naval officer. Porter's plan called for Farragut's fleet to dash up the river after his mortar fleet had pounded the Confederate forts into submission, and then effect capture of the city.

The Union blockade grew stronger as each side worked to bring their forces and plans into action. Commercial traffic into and out of New Orleans diminished, and economic inflation drove prices to unprecedented highs as the city became even more isolated from the outside world. Citizens sought work as unemployment approached a critical mass. Some limited relief for the job shortage came when Confederate authorities announced plans to construct two iron-clad gunboats, as well as their intention to convert several existing steamers for a river defense fleet.

By April 18, 1862, Farragut's fleet had crossed the bar and had entered the Mississippi River from the Gulf, and Porter's mortars had begun their bombardment of the forts. The Confederate and Union forces had been skirmishing for weeks, and the northern fleet had been at considerable risk as it struggled to effect an entry of the river. A well-organized and directed attack by the Confederates at this time could have wreaked havoc on the Union fleet. Yet the Southern commanders seemed paralyzed, and they failed to make the bold stroke demanded by the crisis they faced. With Farragut's fleet across the bar, New Orleans's fate was sealed.

In opposition to the forty-four ships in the Union fleet, the South had assembled a mere twelve ships to assist the two forts. In spite of the odds against them, the Southern leaders were optimistic. The forts were well situated, and the Union forces would have to move upriver in single file. The river channel's width had been narrowed with obstructions so the number of forces engaged, at any one time, would be limited. The Confederate commanders also placed high hopes on the battery of guns mounted on the unfinished ironclad CSS *Louisiana*. Lacking mobility, the behemoth carried sixteen guns: two 7-inch rifled, three 9-inch shell guns, four 8-inch shell, and seven 32-pounder rifles. This floating iron-clad battery could pose a serious obstacle to the Union navy if it was well commanded.

On April 24, at 1:55 a.m., the signal was hoisted that put the Federal fleet into motion. By daylight, after a fierce and confusing river battle, Farragut was above the forts and in control of the river. New Orleans was occupied by Federal troops a few days later. The much-vaunted *Louisiana* had been little use to the Confederates. Although heavily outnumbered, the Southern forces had fought well, but they had been poorly led. Army and navy commanders never achieved a coordinated command structure, and the Confederate ironclads were either sunk or scuttled.

The Union victory continued the string of successes that began in early 1862 with the fall of Forts Henry and Donelson. The tremendous victory inflated northern morale while the South was devastated. Secretary of the Navy Mallory was shocked. Davis and other southern leaders sought answers. Chester Hearn, in this well-written and researched book, places the responsibility on Mallory. The navy secretary, Hearn charges, "failed to concentrate his limited funds on the resources available to him." Mallory was like a "semiskilled engineer," continuously "shifting gears, hoping to find the right one," as he attempted to build a credible naval force from nothing (pp. 260-61).

Hearn also places responsibility on President Davis. Davis is especially taken to task for the manner in which he handled General Lovell. Hearn insightfully evaluates New Orleans's loss relative to the Confederacy's desire to achieve intervention by England and France. Accepting James Morton Callahan's thesis (1901), the author posits that intervention would have been more attractive to the European powers if the Union Navy had failed at New Orleans.

*The Capture of New Orleans, 1862* is a valuable addition to Civil War historiography. The first book- length

treatise on the subject since Charles L. Dufour's *The Night the War was Lost* (1960), Hearn's work benefits from skilful use of primary and secondary sources; however, this reviewer would like to have seen more use of accounts by the enlisted soldiers and sailors. Genuine footnotes are definitely a benefit. The writing is clear and fast-paced, but never skimpy. In faulting Davis and Mallory, Hearn presents a cogent and logical argument. Nonetheless, he fails to give any but tacit recognition to the difficulties the southern leaders faced trying to build a navy from scratch. That aside, there is much to appreciate in this book.





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