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## **Blue Water, Brown Water, and Confederate Disloyalty: The Peculiar and Personal Naval Conflict in South Florida during the Civil War**

*by* Irvin D. S. Winsboro and William B. Mack

**A**s Florida's political leaders voted on January 10, 1861, to follow the secessionist lead of South Carolina and Mississippi, former Florida Territorial Governor Richard Keith Call observed the multiple and shifting solidarities of the state and warned the winning faction that "you have opened the gates of Hell." Call's premonition swayed few power-brokers in Tallahassee, yet his words proved prophetic. Only in recent decades have historians of Florida's Civil War probed past the traditional interpretations of the state's experience as a "trifling affair" to establish how disruptive and hellish the conflict was on and to the home front. Indeed, scholars such as George E. Buker, Robert A. Taylor, and Tracy J. Revels have opened new and critical windows onto the internally disruptive aspects of the conflict, especially upon those men and women seeking to preserve their limited opportunities in life and the wellbeing of their families. As a result of the war's miseries, numerous Floridians, particularly those in the backcountry far removed from the power and privilege of Middle

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Florida (the plantation belt), remained “Union men” or for other personal reasons abandoned the Confederates and cooperated with or sought the protection of local Union forces. By focusing on the peculiar blue-brown water naval operations in south Florida, the following study seeks to add new insight into how the personal disaffections of various groups of hardscrabble Floridians in that region influenced the course and conduct of Florida’s own “war within a war.”<sup>1</sup>

This subject demands examination because the sea-land campaigns of the Federals not only resulted in the fulfillment of military goals and objectives, but also spurred numerous disaffected or disloyal Confederates of “shifting solidarities” to gravitate to Union lines as recruits, refugees, informants, and local guides, thus furthering Union goals in unusually critical ways. Generally, historians have viewed these actions in terms of the ebb and flow of the war in Florida at large but not from the perspective of how the conflicted populace of the area—the “human factor”—took advantage of, and by so doing, influenced the sea-land war in south Florida. Investigating the Union naval campaigns and allied land forays in south Florida within the context of these types of “bottom up” actions illuminates peculiar and personal experiences in this corner of the state that affected the conflict in Florida and to a larger scale the Civil War.

The Federal blockading fleet that served in Florida contained a variety of ships ranging from barks, schooners, and sloops to side-wheel and screw steamers. Initially, the blockade fleet was split into two divisions, the Atlantic Blockading Squadron under Flag Officer Silas H. Stringham and the Gulf Blockading Squadron under Flag Officer William Mervine. In January 1862, the blockade forces were further split into four squadrons, the North and South Atlan-

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1. Herbert J. Doherty Jr., *Richard Keith Call: Southern Unionist* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1959), 158; George E. Buker, *Blockaders, Refugees, and Contrabands: Civil War on Florida's Gulf Coast, 1861-1865* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1993); Robert A. Taylor, *Rebel Storehouse: Florida in the Confederate Economy* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1995); Tracy J. Revels, *Grander in Her Daughters: Florida's Women During the Civil War* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2004); Irvin D. S. Winsboro, ed., *Florida's Civil War: Explorations into Conflict, Interpretations and Memory* (Cocoa: Florida Historical Society Press, 2007), especially i-iii, 215-19; Irvin D. S. Winsboro, “Give Them Their Due: A Reassessment of African Americans and Union Military Service in Florida During the Civil War,” *Journal of African American History* 92, no. 3 (2007): 327-46.

tic Blockading Squadrons and the East and West Gulf Blockading Squadrons. The administration of the blockade of Florida's coastline from Cape Canaveral on the Atlantic coast to a point just east of Pensacola fell to the East Gulf Blockading Squadron (EGBS). The lack of rail connections and other infrastructure in Florida meant that there were no major ports within the operational area of the EGBS, save Apalachicola and Key West (Union forces held Key West throughout the war). Tampa Bay and Charlotte Harbor were recognized as fine natural harbors, but the lack of rail links to them limited their economic and military potential. Because the U.S. Navy viewed this area as second- or third-tier operations, the EGBS often remained lowest on the navy department's list of priorities for receiving men and ships.

However, the EGBS operated in an unusual environment and fought the war in unusual ways. The squadron actively encouraged, supported, and recruited Union sympathizers (Unionists), Confederate apostates (Southerners disappointed by Confederate policies and demands), Confederate army deserters, and African Americans (escaped slaves and other blacks who aided the Union in the belief it would hasten the demise of slavery) along the lower Gulf coast, where the labor shortage and war fatigue were arguably more acute than in north Florida. Pockets of Union sympathy existed in other parts of the Confederacy such as the upland Appalachian regions of eastern Tennessee and western North Carolina, but south Florida and north Florida differed somewhat from those areas in that the region was still perceived to be a frontier where outside observers routinely noted the rugged individualism of its inhabitants.<sup>2</sup> The cooperation of residents in various war aims and goals in this isolated frontier stimulated the EGBS to undertake a particularly aggressive sea-land campaign, whereas in other theaters blockading forces more often sought blockade-runners on the open ocean.

In retrospect, the Confederate policies of conscription, impressment, and agricultural levies actually enhanced the EGBS's efforts to turn Rebel forces and loyalties in the eastern Gulf to its advantage.

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2. For the historiography on the Civil War in Tennessee and North Carolina, see Noel Fisher, *War at Every Door: Partisan Politics and Guerrilla Violence in East Tennessee, 1860-1869* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997); Stephen V. Ash, *When the Yankees Came: Conflict and Chaos in the Occupied South, 1861-1865* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995); and John C. Inscoe, and Gordon McKinney *The Heart of Confederate Appalachia: Western North Carolina in the Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000).

Unlike most of the state, there were also a number of refugee camps composed mainly of disaffected white settlers and fisher folk along the lower coastline of Florida, most notably at Egmont Key at the mouth of Tampa Bay and at Useppa Island near Charlotte Harbor. The EGBS routinely supplied these camps, whose refugees constituted a main source of intelligence about Confederate activity and provided recruits familiar with the local waterways. In the long run, Confederate policies in frontier south Florida drove sizable numbers of residents to seek refuge with the Federals, taking with them much-needed manpower and local knowledge that made the Union naval and land forces more effective in the theater.

Seizure of agricultural staples for the Confederate army particularly provoked locals in this region of the state. Reports recorded in the voluminous *Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* link the hardship brought about by the seizure of beef and other agricultural products directly to the rate of Confederate desertion in Florida. Many of these soldiers not only deserted the Confederate Army but also added their arms and knowledge to Union forces. Florida Governor John Milton reported, "The effect of the impressments . . . was the desertion of a large number of the troops . . . who, indignant at the heartless treatment of the rights of citizens, have joined the enemy." Milton requested that orders be issued forbidding interference with cows, calves and stock not fit for military beef and requiring civilian impressment agents to receive military rank to legitimize their status. Milton added, "I have reason to know that lawless and wicked conduct of Government agents in this State have produced serious dissatisfaction among the troops from this State . . . and unless the evils complained of shall be promptly remedied the worst results may reasonably be apprehended."<sup>3</sup>

A lack of manpower plagued the Confederacy throughout its existence. This problem was exacerbated by Confederate conscription policy, which particularly riled the hardscrabble fishermen and farmers in remote south Florida. Conscript officers found it difficult to balance the need for new soldiers with the need to maintain a productive force of agricultural workers. During the war, Governor Milton wrote to Jefferson Davis:

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3. John Milton to James A Seddon, January 26, 1864, U.S. War Department, *War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, ser. 4, vol III (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1880-1901), 45-46. Hereafter cited as *OR*.

It is with the utmost difficulty and most active exertions that the families of soldiers now in the Confederate service can be saved from starvation in many portions of this State; and I do not hesitate to say that if all [men] between the ages alluded to [18-45], and now engaged in agriculture, shall be called into camps of instruction that it will be utterly impossible to save the poor of the State from starvation the next year, even if it be possible to do so during the current year.<sup>4</sup>

The governor expressed his belief that there was little need for additional troops to defend the state and that agricultural workers should remain in the fields if at all possible. Milton made no presumptions as to the need for conscript replacements in other theaters, though he was aware of the unpopularity of the removal of state troops among the citizenry. The Commandant of Conscription for the state, Colonel William Miller, supported the governor's position. Miller noted the particular resentment in south Florida inasmuch as that region was an economic backwater of the state, which, consequently, had a peculiar need to produce its own subsistence.<sup>5</sup> In this case, Richmond acquiesced to the governor's plea; however, in most cases the need for fresh troops trumped all appeals, leaving wives and children to fend for themselves.

Moreover, many of the local fishermen and "crackers" of south Florida had fought alongside Union troops during the recent Seminole War and manifested no discernible support for secession. The Confederate command took a dim view of such men. As one Seminole War veteran noted about the notion that Union men and sympathizers could remain above the fray in south Florida, "What a delusion!" One Federal commander observed early in the conflict, "Union men they threaten to hang, and do shoot, as we have lamentable proof."<sup>6</sup> While calculated to result in service and loyalty, these Confederate policies actually had the effect of convincing a number of men in south Florida that the only way to protect fam-

4. John Milton to Jefferson Davis, May 7, 1864, *OR*, ser. 1, vol. LIII, 347-48.

5. *Ibid.*; William Miller to C. B. Duffield, May 7, 1864, *ORN*, ser. 1, vol. LIII, 348-49.

6. John E. Johns, *Florida During the Civil War* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1963), 161; J.C. Howell to Gideon Wells, September 3, 1862, U.S. Navy Department, *Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies in the War of the Rebellion*, ser. 1, vol. 17 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1891-1927), 309. Hereafter cited as *ORN*.

ily and to secure provisions was to move toward Union spheres of influence. Predictably, south Florida became contested ground between settlers of both stripes. As noted by one contemporary of these events, "in fact, it was a war distinct from the real war. They [south Floridians] had a war among themselves."<sup>7</sup> This looming reality led many men in the wilderness of the lower peninsula to question or jettison their Confederate loyalties as the more pressing local concerns of family and livelihood moved to the forefront of their worldview. Union naval and contingent land forces on the lower Gulf Coast perceptively reached out to such men (estimated to be up to 800) in efforts to undermine Confederate morale and effectiveness in the southern tier of Florida.<sup>8</sup> For the Confederate command, the Union efforts proved all too successful.

In September 1861, the Union navy implemented plans to blockade and disrupt the Confederate coastline, including the unusually long and porous coastline of south Florida. Union naval commanders noted that the Florida Keys commanded ingress and egress to and from the Confederate states ringing the Gulf of Mexico. Upon closer examination of the region, the U.S. Navy concluded that Forts Taylor and Jefferson, in Key West and the Dry Tortugas respectively, could secure their duty area "against any but a first-rate naval power." It was noted that holding these positions ensured the control of commerce and the wrecking and salvage industry, and the operation of an admiralty court in the region. Military records disclose that the navy noted the potential for actions at the two "beautiful bays" at Charlotte Harbor and Tampa and that Cedar Key, while inferior as a natural harbor, took on added significance because of its rail link. The navy's early plans called for garrisoned forts at each of these points and "one or more gunboats plying up and down the coast, with the occasional call of supply vessels."<sup>9</sup>

7. F.C.M. Boggess, *A Veteran of Four Wars: The Autobiography of F.C.M. Boggess, A Record of Pioneer Life and Adventure and Heretofore Unwritten History of the Florida Seminole Indian War* (Arcadia, FL: Champion Jobs Room, 1900), 69.

8. Report by General Woodbury, December 14, 1863, in Samuel Proctor, ed., "Florida A Hundred Years Ago" (Coral Gables, FL: Florida Library and Historical Commission, and Civil War Centennial Committee, 1965), 3.

9. Second Report Conference for the Consideration of Measures for Effectually Blockading the Coast Bordering on the Gulf of Mexico, September 3, 1861, *ORN*, ser. 1, vol. XVI, 651-54.

Over the course of the war, this plan proved inadequate because it projected only open-ocean “blue water” operations along the island and inlet-dotted “brown water” coast of south Florida. The Federal navy had acknowledged the numerous barrier islands and the brown-water bays and inlets along the irregular and broken coastline of the region but failed early in the conflict to recognize the haven they would offer for “wildcat” blockade-runners and for disaffected Confederates and local Unionists. By 1862, the so-called wildcat runners regularly avoided the large, deep-draft, blue water blockading vessels by traveling south through the brown-water network of the Gulf coast in small, shallow-draft vessels before making a dash to Havana or Nassau, where they would offload cargo and onload lucrative staples to unload back in Florida. The brown waterways along the Gulf coast proved especially advantageous to these agents of contraband, as the exceptionally high number of barrier islands, creeks, and river mouths offered concealment that often allowed them to slip past the Union blockaders unnoticed. This soon confounded the local contingent of the Union navy.

As early as July 1861, Union commanders recognized that a new strategy and ship deployment were needed in the lower Gulf region to interdict the contraband trade of the coastline’s blockade-runners. Flag officer William Mervine, who commanded the Gulf squadron prior to its split, wrote to the Secretary of the Navy, “I beg leave to suggest, sir, that in order to establish a rigid blockade, it will be absolutely necessary to employ small steam vessels of light draft to cruise in the shoal water and numerous inlets on the coasts of Florida . . . where a large coasting trade is carried on, beyond the reach of our heavy vessels.”<sup>10</sup> This request was not, however, acted upon for some time because of the navy department’s persistent low-priority status for this region. By 1862, blockade running in south Florida had increased to the point that Federal commanders could no longer ignore the significance of the illicit trade in the lower Gulf.

As a result, the irregular coastline of south Florida and the economically marginal fisher folk and agrarians who inhabited the region lost their advantage of isolation and became new pawns in the war. Moreover, new Union intelligence disclosed that numerous Union sympathizers, conscription evaders, and other Confed-

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10. William Mervine to Gideon Welles, July 1, 1861, *ORN*, ser. 1, vol. XVI, 565.



erate "layouts" inhabited the coastline and inland areas and might be persuaded to the Northern cause if its forces assumed a more aggressive presence there. In his report on the subject, Mervine suggested, "a sufficient force to effectually blockade the coast [that] would give quite enough employment to a separate command."<sup>11</sup> Thus, as the Union forces in south Florida faced yet a second year of service in the inhospitable environs of the east Gulf, they assumed a new strategy and profile based on the realization that human factors there might well be turned to their advantage.

The Tampa Bay area offered a particularly instructive example of how the Union sought to implement its new strategy. Even though Confederate sentiment in Tampa was generally strong, many locals resented Confederate policy and remained loyal in spirit to the North. One such person who gravitated to the Union for this very reason was John Whithurst, who lived on the bay some eight to ten miles from Tampa. He sought the protection of the Union bark *Ethan Allen* in early 1862, "stating that he was in fear for his life from the secessionists at Tampa, for the reason that he refused to join the Southern Army and had expressed his intention of fighting for no flag but the one he was brought up and had always lived under."<sup>12</sup> Lieutenant William Eaton of the *Ethan Allen* reported that Whithurst and "some thirty-eight of his neighbors and friends . . . are Union men, and have positively refused to render any aid to the secession cause, for which reason they have suffered every possible persecution and have lost much of their property."<sup>13</sup>

Before contacting the navy, Whithurst had gathered intelligence on blockade running and Confederate activities around Tampa Bay. It is likely he did so out of a desire to impress Eaton with his potential as an intelligence operative and to prove that he was not a Confederate spy. He informed the blockaders as to the position and armament of the shore battery protecting Tampa and the entrance to the Hillsboro River, the size and morale of the Confederate force occupying the town, and the location of the equipment removed by Rebels needed to make the lighthouse on

11. Ibid.

12. William B. Eaton to William W. McKean, January 18, 1862, *ORN*, ser. 1, vol. XVII, 84-86. In another report, Whithurst is erroneously referred to as "Whitehurst."

13. Ibid.

Egmont Key operative once again. Whithurst also collected information on the nine blockade-runners in the bay and shared knowledge useful for navigation of the brown-water channels that runners frequented. As Eaton reported, "provisions of all kinds are scarce and high in Tampa and throughout Florida, and large numbers of the people are beginning to become disgusted with so hopeless a struggle . . . Mr. Whithurst gave me some very timely information." Whithurst also directed Eaton to another non-aligned comrade, Frank Girard, a pilot with twenty-five years of experience and "intimate knowledge of all the channels and of the whole bay." Girard volunteered to act as a pilot if called upon and stated that he could guide the *Ethan Allen* to the gateway of Tampa. In his report, Eaton also noted the "utter destitution" of residents in the area.<sup>14</sup>

On February 17, Whithurst's intelligence culminated in a raid to "cut out" blockade-runners in the Tampa area. The *Ethan Allen*, while towing the sloop *Mary Nevis*, attempted to contact and secure the services of Girard as pilot for the raid. Due to heavy surf, the Union raiders were unable to cross the bar at Bayes Pass to reach Girard's home and were thus compelled to wait until daybreak. The fact that they had delayed their attack in order to secure Girard as a pilot suggests the importance naval officers placed on local residents' knowledge. In the Union commander's mind, Girard's services were needed for success because the pass was "very narrow and extremely difficult of access, except to a person who is well acquainted with the passage."<sup>15</sup>

Even with Girard piloting the ship, the passage proved treacherous. The *Ethan Allen* crossed the bar but the *Mary Nevis* grounded. Whithurst and two sailors were left aboard the grounded sloop while the *Ethan Allen* proceeded and captured a schooner and two unoccupied sloops, presumably enemy vessels. Being left aboard the grounded *Mary Nevis* implies that Whithurst had now gained the full trust of the Union blockaders. Even though it had only been one month since he first made contact with the navy, the fact that he was given such responsibility suggests his value to local naval operations. After recrossing the bar, two of the prize vessels grounded and remained there until the next high tide. The vessels later proceeded to the mouth of Tampa Bay, where they took

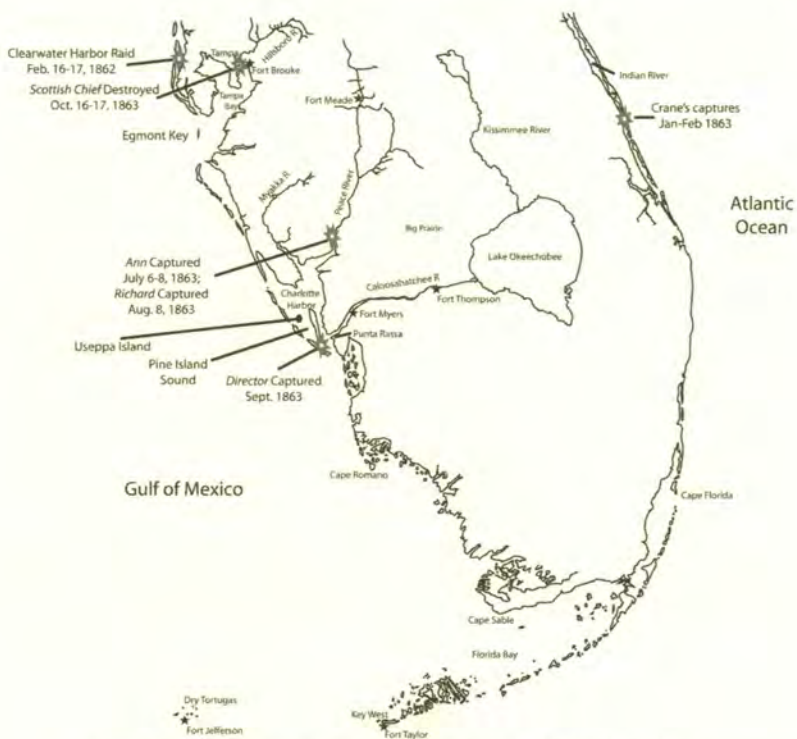
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14. Ibid.

15. George W. Frost to William B. Eaton, February 21, 1862, *ORN*, ser. 1, vol. XVII, 132-33.

## BLUE WATER, BROWN WATER

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Naval Actions in South Florida During the Civil War, 1861-1865.

*Map provided by authors.*

Whithurst's family and a few other like-minded people on board for transport to a new Union camp at Egmont Key for refugees and others who had forsaken the Confederate cause for personal reasons.<sup>16</sup> A camp similar to the one on Egmont Key was later established farther south on Useppa Island near Charlotte Harbor.

In the *Ethan Allen* action, the Federals relied heavily on the services of local Union sympathizers. As General David P. Woodbury, Commander of the U.S. Army's Department of the Gulf, noted in his correspondence on the subject, "Mr. Girard . . . the pilot, showed himself to be a true man, and by his ready willingness to do anything in his power, proved his loyalty to the Union. We were bountifully supplied by Mr. Griner, another Union man, with such provisions as they had to give us, and had it not been for

16. *Ibid.*

[them] we should have suffered from want of food."<sup>17</sup> It was not unusual for blockaders to acquire supplies from farmers near the coast. The presence of the navy offered a local market for farmers, cattlemen, and fishermen who otherwise might not have been able to sell or trade their produce. Late in the war, the Union reoccupied the former Seminole War installation at Fort Myers, partly to supply beef to blockaders and deprive the enemy of the foodstuff as well. It should also be noted that the *Official Records* disclose little about the planning of cutting out parties. The fact that many Union actions succeeded with little planning may be indicative of the quality and timeliness of intelligence and provisions supplied by the local refugees and escaped slaves.

By the fall of 1862, the Union had consolidated its position in south Florida and began construction on a battery at Egmont Key. The installation included three 8-10 pound cannons which the Union located there in attempts to seal Tampa Bay from current and future blockade-running. The island soon offered haven for people of pro-Union sentiment like Whithurst. The island's new inhabitants of dislocated south Floridians looked to the Union forces to supply their needs and to protect them from Confederate raids and reprisals.<sup>18</sup> In return, they provided intelligence on Confederate activities and local water routes and also served as a pool of recruits for active or temporary Union service.

Even with the protection and provisions supplied by the navy, Whithurst and his compatriots could not meet their needs without returning to the mainland to gather crops, thus exposing themselves to Confederate reprisals. On one such trip, Rebels ambushed John and Scott Whithurst as they departed the mainland to return to Egmont Key with potatoes and beef. Scott Whithurst suffered mortal wounds and John Whithurst sustained critical wounds, but nevertheless managed to pull his boat out of the fire. Whithurst lay wounded in his boat and drifted in Tampa Bay for two days. The Union vessel *Tahoma* eventually rescued him, but he died shortly thereafter. Whithurst's last wishes were that his three sons, all of them younger than thirteen, would someday join the Union navy.<sup>19</sup>

17. Ibid, 134; Daniel P. Woodbury to Charles P. Stone, December 17, 1863, *OR*, ser. 1, vol. XXVI, pt.1, 874-75; Daniel P. Woodbury to Charles P. Stone, January 22, 1864, *OR*, ser.1, vol. XXXV, pt.1, 460-61.

18. "Egmont Key Occupied by Union Troops," *New York Times*, August 15, 1861; "West Coast of Florida," *New York Times*, November 17, 1862.

19. J.C. Howell to Gideon Welles, September 3, 1862, *ORN*, ser. 1, vol. XVII, 309; Buker, *Blockaders, Refugees, and Contrabands*, 33.

Tampan Henry A. Crane's Civil War career is perhaps the best example of a Confederate turned Union sympathizer, who rose from the bottom to contribute to the war effort in the expanses of south Florida. Crane had served in the Seminole War and edited a Tampa newspaper in the antebellum period. With the outbreak of hostilities, Crane initially joined a Confederate-aligned home guard unit but switched allegiances in late 1862. Historian George E. Buker contends that Crane's support for the Confederacy waned after his compatriot from the Seminole War, the previously mentioned John Whithurst, and his son were slain by Confederates for their support of the Union. Crane would later prove to be a valuable asset to the Union forces as he rose through the ranks in this theater of the war.<sup>20</sup>

Crane gathered like-minded neighbors from the Tampa area and set out across the lower peninsula for the Indian River, where he recruited a few locals and waited for a blockade vessel to appear. He then presented himself to the captain of the USS *Sagamore* and offered his services. He was taken to Key West, where he proposed a plan to Admiral Theodorus Bailey to cut out blockade runners using the Indian and St. Johns River systems to offload goods smuggled from the Bahamas. Bailey endorsed the plan, made Crane and his compatriots supernumerary volunteers, and ordered the *Sagamore* to transport them back to the Indian River, allowing Crane the use of a boat to complete the mission. Crane's men provided their own arms in order to remain less conspicuous, for they planned to sail up the brown water into enemy territory to capture prize vessels. The trip would have required travel through Confederate territory for an extended period of time.<sup>21</sup>

Crane's party set out on January 3, 1863, and soon captured a number of enemy craft. Reaching Indian River Narrows after dark, Crane's men captured the schooner *Pride* out of Nassau. They destroyed its contraband cargo of 188 bushels of salt. Crane returned to the mouth of the river with his prize and its crew as prisoners and turned them over to the U.S. bark *Gem of the Sea*. Crane set out again, this time accompanied by a small cutting out

20. Buker, *Blockaders, Refugees, and Contrabands*, 60-61.

21. Theodorus Bailey to Earl English, January 2, 1863, *ORN*, ser. 1, vol. XVII, 344-45; Earl English to Henry A. Crane, January 3, 1863, *ORN*, ser. 1, vol. XVII, 345; Theodorus Bailey to Gideon Welles, March 10, 1863, *ORN*, ser. 1, vol. XVII, 369-70.

party from the *Gem of the Sea*. He captured a small boat and two Rebel spies on January 7, and destroyed the unmanned enemy schooner *Flying Cloud* at St. Lucie River two days later. On the 16th, Crane's men destroyed 45 sacks of salt at a nearby location and captured two men in a small boat the next day. The following day they destroyed 4 bales of cotton and 130 bushels of salt near Jupiter.<sup>22</sup>

On January 23, Crane and his men spotted a Rebel schooner sailing downriver and concluded from the number of men onboard that they were planning to attack a U.S. Navy ship at the mouth of the river. Under cover, Crane and his party waited until midnight to mask their disparity of manpower and "pounced suddenly upon them," surprising and capturing the schooner's crew. Almost immediately, Crane spotted an unmanned lighter and captured it as well. Crane now had twelve prisoners, but only seven men to sail three boats. Fearing that the prisoners might overpower his small party, Crane placed two men aboard the captured lighter and placed the prisoners aboard his own boat with two armed men and towed it behind the prize schooner, which he manned with his two remaining men. This limited his party's exposure and allowed the two men aboard the boat to keep their weapons covering the prisoners at all times. On January 28, much to the Union Command's satisfaction, Crane delivered his prize vessels and prisoners to the *Gem of the Sea* at the mouth of the Indian River.<sup>23</sup>

Admiral Bailey felt newly empowered by Crane's success and reported to the Secretary of the Navy, Gideon Welles, that he had curtailed blockade running from the Indian River on the lower Florida coastline. He wrote Welles that Crane and his followers, "have been of efficient service in clearing out the Rebels from Indian River and in breaking up their connection with the lawless traders of Nassau; and it is scarcely too much to say that without the local knowledge and personal acquaintance possessed by these

22. Henry A. Crane to Earl English, February 7, 1863, *ORN*, ser. 1, vol. XVII, 363-64. Salt was an essential commodity for the preservation of foodstuffs in the days before refrigeration. It was in short supply in the Confederacy and therefore was a profitable import for blockade-runners.

23. "How to Dispose of Prisoners," *New York Times*, March 29, 1863. This article was written by a correspondent aboard the *Gem of the Sea* and, even though somewhat confusing as to the disposition of the prisoners to boats and arms, this explanation makes the most sense to the authors. Buker, *Blockaders, Refugees, and Contrabands*, 62-63; Henry A. Crane to Earl English, February 7, 1863, *ORN*, ser. 1, vol. XVII, 363-64; Henry A. Crane to Earl English, March 4, 1863, *ORN*, ser. 1, vol. XVII, 372-73.

men it would have been nearly impossible to effect this very desirable object."<sup>24</sup> Bailey would thereafter focus his forces on the lower Gulf and routinely factor into his strategy the particular usefulness of such disaffected Confederates. Indeed, blue water, brown water, and local Union sympathizers and refugees would now become a central theme of the conduct of the war in the lower peninsula.

Bailey in short order commissioned Crane as a Volunteer Acting Master's Mate aboard the *Sagamore* and transferred him along with the ship to the lower, east Gulf coast, where he nettled the local Confederates by leading shore party raids and attracting substantial numbers of disaffected locals. Per military records, the success of Crane's raids on both coasts of south Florida notably increased the credibility of citizen-supplied intelligence and abilities in the minds of Union leaders. "Union men" and Confederate layouts now moved to the core of the Federal's plans to interdict blockade running and Confederate supply lines in south Florida. Moreover, Union commanders increasingly recognized the ability of such men and their presence in the lower peninsula to attract blacks to the Northern cause and away from labor contributions to the enemy. Although little discussed in the literature, this new black service included not only army actions but also enlistments in and service to the Northern navy.

While scholars have documented the black contribution to the U.S. Army in Florida, few have noted the rich story of black seamen in the state. In reality, a number of freedom-seeking blacks—mainly former bondsmen—gravitated to the U.S. Navy in the east Gulf region out of their desire to cripple the enemy, to end slavery, and to prove their mettle under fire.

Unlike the segregated Northern army, black sailors often served alongside whites aboard ship. The navy offered higher pay than the army and the chance for blacks to serve in a more meaningful service than the construction and labor work routinely assigned to them in the army. African-American sailors comprised about 20 percent of total Union navy strength during the war, or nearly 19,000 men who offered valuable service to their comrades at sea.<sup>25</sup>

24. Theodorus Bailey to Gideon Welles, March 10, 1863, *ORN*, ser. 1, vol. XVII, 369-70.

25. Spencer C. Tucker, *Blue and Grey Navies: The Civil War Afloat* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2006), 7-8; Barbara B. Tomblin, *Bluejackets and Contrabands: African Americans and the Union Navy* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2009), 147.

Naval vessels encountered an increasing number of escaped slaves, commonly referred to as “contrabands,” during the early war years. Secretary of the Navy Gideon Welles determined that they could not be sent back to their masters nor could they be compelled to work without compensation, so he authorized commanders on the blue water to enlist contrabands into the service “under the same form and regulations as apply to other enlistments.” Contrabands quickly signed up for the Union navy and offered valuable service, but were allowed no higher rating than “boys” (cabin boys). Even so, newly enlisted contrabands helped to fill the labor shortage of the bluejackets at sea by mid-1862, and this included service in or near Florida waters.<sup>26</sup> Of the 255 black sailors from Florida, most appeared in the records as former slaves or farmers, but thirteen were recorded as tradesmen (the preponderance as carpenters) and ten were enumerated as watermen or as once having served in related occupations. Enlistment ages ranged from fourteen to sixty.<sup>27</sup> Although data on contraband enlistees in the *Official Records* remain relatively scarce, naval records in the National Archives in Washington, D.C. disclose that many of the black sailors enlisting in the Union navy (usually mustered in as former farmers) did so in actions and aboard ships in south Florida (although the majority of Florida slaves resided in the slave belt of the panhandle). Once the Union navy established itself as a permanent presence along the coast of south Florida, bondsmen in or brought to the area certainly must have recognized its presence as a beacon to freedom and an opportunity to serve their own “special cause” of destroying slavery.

Little detail on contraband enlistees’ actual engagements is in the *Official Records*. For instance, a typical entry reads, “On the 30<sup>th</sup> [of July, 1863] Jacob Parker (contraband) came off to this ship and I have shipped him.”<sup>28</sup> By September 1862, naval officers were informed that Congress had passed a law forbidding the return of contrabands. They were instead instructed to enter

26. Gideon Welles to William W. McKean, September 25, 1861, *ORN*, ser. 1, vol. XVI, 689; Gideon Welles to James L. Lardner and David G. Farragut, July 2, 1862, *ORN*, ser. 1, vol. XVII, 269.

27. Figures and percentages derived from National Park Service, Civil War Soldiers and Sailors System, African-American Sailors in the Civil War Project, in conjunction with Howard University, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

28. Charles L. Willcomb to Theodorius Bailey, July 31, 1863, *ORN*, ser. 1, vol. XVII, 523.



only the name of the slave and that of the owner or claimant into the ship's log.

More detailed information was sometimes communicated when contrabands supplied timely intelligence. Indeed, their information was often explicit and valuable. The captain of the USS *Ethan Allen* reported that two contrabands informed him that "the schooner *Kain* lay 8 miles up the . . . Bay. Her cargo of cotton had been discharged [and the] schooner has been stripped of all light spars, sails, and rigging, and lay at anchor in the stream with nothing on board. Lower masts and bowsprit standing."<sup>29</sup> George, another self-liberated bondsman formerly belonging to one Eli Ramsey, reportedly traveled seventy miles from the interior and made contact with the USS *Tahoma* on February 14, 1862. He informed the crew that 400 Confederates occupied Way Key and that a train had recently arrived bearing a heavy gun. George may have been sent back to reconnoiter the island, since on February 19, he reported that the enemy had deserted the key.<sup>30</sup>

Although the trade had been outlawed by Washington, a number of slave ships were captured prior to and during the war. In the spring of 1860, the USS *Mohawk* overtook the slaver *Wildfire* and towed it into Key West, where its 350 captives were quartered in special barracks until they could be returned to Africa. The *Mohawk* captured four more slave ships bearing 530 Africans off the north coast of Cuba in 1861. Another ship, captured in June 1862, had reportedly landed 750 slaves before being overhauled by a Union navy vessel. The report did not specify whether the slaves landed in Florida or Cuba, but similar reports often suggested an ongoing illicit slave trade between Cuba and the peninsula. In the late summer of 1861, an informant reported to a Union officer that a slaver ship/privateer was outfitted and ready to sail from its berth twelve miles up the Caloosahatchee River as soon as it received its complement and Confederate letters of marque. In the summer of 1862, the USS *Amanda* captured a "slave prize"

29. Charles L. Willcomb to Theodorus Bailey, July 31, 1863, *ORN*, ser. 1, vol. XVII, 523; J.C. Howell to William W. McKean, February (no date) 1862, *ORN*, ser. 1, vol. XVII, 135-36; S.F. DuPont to C. Steedman, September 15, 1862, *ORN*, ser. 1, vol. XIII, 327-28; I.A. Pennell to Theodorus Bailey, February 7, 1863, *ORN*, ser. 1, vol. XVII, 363.

30. J.C. Howell to William W. McKean, February (no date) 1862, *ORN*, ser. 1, vol. XVII, 134-36.

in south Florida waters.<sup>31</sup> Given its long and porous coastline, its proximity to Cuba and Caribbean slave ports, and the Southern need to fulfill its labor shortage through any means possible, black sailors of the EGBS must have derived a special pride from identifying and capturing ships with illegal human cargo. Moreover, black service in their own special cause and the larger Union cause arguably provided a sort of "middle passage" from slave to citizen based on their wartime experiences, including those present as the war dragged on in Confederate and non-Confederate south Florida. Throughout much of this action, Union conventional and unconventional efforts, in conjunction with local Unionists, sympathizers, refugees, African-Americans, and Confederate turncoats would come to characterize the war on the local blue and brown waters, especially in regard to crippling or ending Confederate and privateer blockade running.

Naval officers learned in October 1863 that two blockade-runners, the steamer *Scottish Chief* and the sloop *Kate Dale*, were taking on cotton and preparing to run the blockade from the Hillsboro River near Tampa. Concerned that they would escape the blockaders due to their light draft, the Union officers decided to destroy them where they were fitting-out in the river. On the 16<sup>th</sup>, the *Tahoma* and *Adela* ran abreast of the battery protecting Tampa and shelled it to divert attention from the real object of the expedition. That night a cutting out party, consisting of sixty men from the *Tahoma* and forty from the *Adela*, and under the command of Acting Master T. R. Harris and with Henry Crane and J. A. Thompson as local scouts, landed at Ballast Point where they traveled on foot to where the ships were located and engaged them. The whereabouts of the blockade-runners was probably provided by the Union recruit Thompson, since his worth to their cause was proved

31. "The Africans of the Slave Bark 'Wildfire,'" *Harper's Weekly*, June 2, 1860, 344-46; "Arrival of the Mohawk," *New York Times*, February 8, 1861; William H. French to William W. McKean, July 20, 1861, *ORN*, ser. 1, vol. XVI, 592; Emily Holder, "At the Dry Tortugas During the War: A Lady's Journal," *The Californian Illustrated* (February 1892), 183; N. Goodwin to J. L. Lardner, June 18, 1862, and Joseph E. Jones to N. Goodwin, June 18, 1862, *ORN*, ser. 1, vol. XVII, 265-66; "From Key West," *New York Times*, June 29, 1862; William Mervine to Gideon Welles, August 17, 1861, *ORN*, ser. 1, vol. XVI, 638-40 (the second report states the ship in the Caloosahatchee was a privateer); James Mooney, *Dictionary of American Naval Fighting Ships* (Washington, DC: Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, Naval History Division, 1969), vol. 4, 408; Paul Silverstone, *Warships of the Civil War Navies* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1989), 93.

by their carrying him on a litter throughout the fourteen-mile march. Whether or not Thompson supplied the intelligence, it is clear that his presence was considered vital to the mission because Harris deemed it necessary to bear the non-ambulatory Thompson into enemy territory.

At daybreak on the 17th, Harris discovered the *Scottish Chief* and *Kate Dale* on the opposite bank of the river. The shore party moved parallel to the ships, took them under aim, and hailed the unsuspecting crew. They ordered boats to their bank; during the crossing, two of the blockade-runner's crew escaped and alerted a nearby Confederate garrison. Both vessels were destroyed along with the 167 bales of cotton they contained as the shore parties returned to their ships. The sailors encountered several armed parties near their embarkation point, charged, and captured two prisoners.<sup>32</sup>

While waiting for the arrival of the *Tahoma's* boats, a mixed unit of Confederate cavalry and infantry advanced. As two-thirds of the shore party embarked on the boats, the Confederates, estimated to be seventy to eighty in number, opened fire. The remaining sailors spread out to avoid presenting a mass target and returned fire, while the *Adela* shelled the woods in which the Rebels secreted themselves. The remainder of the shore party defended itself for fifteen to twenty minutes: "This rear guard stood nobly to their post, protecting the retreat under an extremely severe fire from a concealed enemy—loading and firing with the coolness of target practice, and finally leaving quietly at the word of command, bearing with them their wounded."<sup>33</sup>

In this action, the Union suffered three killed, ten wounded, and five taken prisoner. The wounded were taken to the Federal camp at Egmont Key, where the *Tahoma's* surgeon treated them. The Confederate casualties were six killed in addition to the five blockade-runners and two soldiers who were transported to the *Tahoma* as prisoners. The Rebel commander, James Westcott, stated that the sailors who had been killed on shore fought so bravely that he intended to give them the best funeral he could provide.

32. Theodorus Bailey to Gideon Welles, October 24, 1863, *ORN*, ser.1 vol. XVII, 570-72; "The War in Florida," *New York Times*, November 12, 1863.

33. Theodorus Bailey to Gideon Welles, October 24, 1863, *ORN*, ser.1 vol. XVII, 570-72; Thomas R. Harris to A. A. Semmes, October 18, 1863, *ORN*, ser. 1, vol. XVII, 574-76.

Both the *Tahoma* and *Adela* crews raised cash to help their captured shipmates pay their way through "Dixie."<sup>34</sup>

Casualties notwithstanding, Admiral Bailey praised the results of the expedition. He called it a "brilliant little affair" and believed it was typical of the similar actions that would demoralize or otherwise disrupt the Rebel blockade-runners. He wrote, "The lesson taught to the Rebels by this expedition, that their movements can be watched and thwarted by the daring of our seamen, even when carried on at a distance of several miles up a river whose mouth is protected by a fortified town, is of no small importance, and is calculated to depress them in proportion to the audacity and discipline displayed by our men." Union converts Crane and Thompson were described as "excellent" guides, and Crane was praised for "gallant conduct" by the commanding officer of the expedition.<sup>35</sup> The presence of such local guides must have added some measure of assurance for the other men during a raid in enemy territory. They would have avoided going astray, known where to find help if needed, and they would also have known of areas and people to avoid. This knowledge further solidified the Union commanders' positive view of the service of south Florida personnel, both in the field and upon the extensive blue and brown waters of the region.

For residents of the lower east Gulf who made their living on those waters, life during the war proved difficult. Confederate officials were wary of contact between the fishing fleet and blockaders. By 1862, the Rebel commander at Tampa, Major W.L.L. Bowen, had determined to "break up the nefarious trade and communication" between fishermen and the blockading force. He chartered and armed a local ship with a six-pound gun and set about harassing the fishing fleet. Within a few weeks, he had captured nine smacks and three schooners. Sixty-eight prisoners, "some Yankees . . . some Key Westers," were taken to Tampa. Even after the blockade was well established, the broken coastline made it difficult for the navy to protect friendly fishing operations. In December of 1862, the oyster schooner *Charles Henry* was fishing in Pine Island Sound south of Charlotte Harbor when pursued by a "Rebel sloop

34. J. H. Gunning to A. A. Semmes, October 20, 1863, *ORN*, ser. 1, vol. XVII, 574; "The War in Florida," *New York Times*, November 12, 1863.

35. Theodorus Bailey to A. A. Semmes, October 28, 1863, *ORN*, ser. 1, vol. XVII, 577-78; Thomas R. Harris to A. A. Semmes, October 18, 1863, *ORN*, ser. 1, vol. XVII, 574-76.

of very light draft, having five men aboard." The captain and mate of the *Charles Henry* ran ashore on Pine Island and escaped to the home of a friend who alerted the captain of the USS *Penguin*. Two armed boats from the *Penguin* spotted and pursued the Rebels but lost them among the innumerable islands and shoals during the night. They were able to salvage the *Charles Henry* even though the Confederates had scuttled it.<sup>36</sup> Once again, Florida locals of various backgrounds and dedications were able to turn the tide of the clash in favor of the Federal forces.

As the war progressed, blockade running evolved into a private enterprise with runners preferring cargo that returned a quick, handsome profit. Outbound cargoes such as cotton or turpentine from the lower peninsula were sold or exchanged in Havana or Nassau for scarce wartime goods such as liquor or coffee that could be sold at enormous markups at home. Necessities such as salt and valuable commodities like coal also commanded high prices. For instance, blacksmith's coal that could be acquired for \$20 per ton in Nassau or Havana sold for \$500 per ton in the Confederacy.<sup>37</sup> Although engaged in risky business, blockade-runners pursued such profits, even in the face of opposition from both Union forces and local Union collaborators. As a matter of practicality, many of these would-be runners found south Florida and its island coast and secluded inlets their most productive base of operation.

By mid-1863, as the blockade of major ports expanded, remote coastal estuaries such as the Charlotte Harbor system became especially attractive to blockade-runners as bases of operation. Runners at Charlotte Harbor preferred small, fast-sailing vessels, preferably with retractable centerboards rather than fixed keels, in order to access the shallowest of bays and brown waters. In the spring of 1863, the commanding officer of the blockading vessel at Charlotte Harbor, the *James S. Chambers*, had received reports from "reliable sources" that numerous small craft were operating out of the Caloosahatchee River and the Punta Rassa area south of Charlotte Harbor. The report noted that there were many islands and waterways

36. "Rebel Operations in South Florida," *New York Times*, December 31, 1861; J. C. Williamson to Theodorus Bailey, December 29, 1862, *ORN*, ser. 1, vol. XVII, 338.

37. C. H. Rockwell to Gideon Welles, June 11, 1864, *ORN*, ser. 1, vol. XVII, 716-17. This discrepancy in prices likely also reflects the rampant inflation of Confederate scrip as merchants in Cuba or the Bahamas may have demanded specie and buyers in Florida may only have been able to pay with scrip.

in the area that afforded blockade-runners the cover to land cargo unobserved and requested the use of a small craft of light draft, but of sufficient size to carry a howitzer, in order to patrol the islands and interior brown waters that his ship could not access.<sup>38</sup>

Admiral Bailey had recently requested authorization from the Department of the Navy to acquire from the admiralty court at Key West vessels condemned as prizes of war that would suit the particular nature of the naval conflict in south Florida. He noted in his report that many of the desirable craft captured running the blockade were being re-acquired by Confederate interests and put back into service: "Unfortunately, as the matter is at present managed, interested Confederate agents stand ready to purchase all the light-draft, swift-sailing vessels when sold under the decree of condemnation of the court . . . to be again used in the evasion of the blockade."<sup>39</sup> Certainly, it now had become obvious to naval officers on station that the tactics of blockade-runners were changing and that Federal sea forces needed to adapt accordingly. Intelligence supplied by residents of the area would play a large role in the changing tactics needed to combat these proliferating wildcat runners. In the summer of 1863, the EGBS acquired small, light-draft ships to work in conjunction with the main blockading vessels. The larger ships would be utilized more as a mainspring of operations for the smaller tenders that would now take the fight to the Confederates in the shallow coastal and riverine systems.<sup>40</sup>

Locally supplied intelligence initiated virtually all riverine captures of blockade-runners in the Charlotte Harbor-Pine Island Sound area that appear in the *Official Records*. In the course of making a living or foraging for supplies, Union sympathizers and similar small forces spent more time upriver or in the interior than the Federal navy did. Their dissatisfaction with Confederate policy, good relations with Federal crews in the area, and perhaps the lure of prize money, must have motivated many of them to report sight-

38. L. Nickerson to Theodorus Bailey, March 7, 1863, *ORN*, ser. 1, vol. XVII, 381; Irvin D. Solomon, and Grace Erhart, "The Peculiar War: Civil War Naval Operations at Charlotte Harbor, Florida, 1861-1865," *Gulf Coast Historical Review* 11, no.1 (Fall 1995): 59-78; Irvin D. Solomon and Grace Erhart, "Steamers, Tenders, and Barks: The Union Blockade of South Florida," *Tampa Bay History* 18, no. 2 (Fall/Winter 1996): 5-17.

39. Theodorus Bailey to John Lenthall, January 12, 1863, *ORN*, ser. 1, vol. XVII, 350.

40. William R. Browne to Theodorus Bailey, July 10, 1863, *ORN*, ser. 1, vol. XVII, 487-88.

ings and to render other forms of assistance. With more eyes and a greater ease of movement than that of the navy, local Federal sympathizers witnessed Confederate and blockade-running activities that the blue-water fleet would otherwise have missed. All these factors contributed to the Union Navy's embracing new tactics and craft to counter the blockade-runners' brown-water havens. Also somewhat peculiar to south Florida was the navy's practice of allowing local Union commanders the freedom to act on their own initiative to carry out brown-water raids. The flexibility given to officers, the acquisition of shallow-water vessels, and the steady source of local intelligence were certainly important factors in Union successes in this zone of the war.

The USS *Rosalie* proved to be one of the most effective shallow-crafts stationed in south Florida. A sloop of a mere 28 tons, the *Rosalie* was 45 feet long and had a beam of 17 feet, yet its draft was only 3½ feet. It was armed with a single 12-pound smoothbore cannon. The USS *Octorara* of the West Gulf Blockading Squadron had captured it running the blockade on March 16, 1863. Admiral Bailey petitioned the admiralty court to obtain the *Rosalie* specifically for blockade duty in south Florida, since it was well suited to operations in that brown-water environment. Bailey purchased the sloop for \$1,500 in May 1863, and assigned it as tender to the bark *Restless*, then blockading Charlotte Harbor.<sup>41</sup>

Two collaborators, Henry Thompson and Milledge Brannen, approached the *Restless* on July 6, 1863, to report the presence of two blockade-runners secreted up the Peace River who were preparing to sneak their cotton-laden boats past the blockaders. W. R. Browne, captain of the *Restless*, sent thirty-three men in two launches to order the *Rosalie* to proceed upriver to capture the two runners. With the two local men acting as pilots, the launches made contact with the *Rosalie* near the mouth of the river.<sup>42</sup>

The three small boats then proceeded upriver and spotted the runners just as the *Rosalie* ran aground. The blockade-runners, observing the disabled *Rosalie*, slipped anchor and moved farther

41. Statistical Data of Ships, *ORN*, ser. 2, vol. I, 194; *United States v. The Sloop Rosalie and Cargo*, Admiralty Final Record Books of the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of Florida (Key West), 1829-1911, RG 21, National Archives, 136 (hereafter ARB-SDF, NA); Paul H. Silverstone, *Civil War Navies, 1855-1883* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2001), 38,109.

42. William R. Browne to Theodorus Bailey, July 10, 1863, *ORN*, ser.1, vol. XVII, 487-88; Charles P. Clark to William R. Browne, July 8, 1863, *ORN*, ser.1, vol. XVII, 488-89.

upriver. By morning, sailors succeeded in freeing the *Rosalie*. It continued upriver to capture the runners now ensconced in the shallows of Horse Creek. Unoccupied and loaded with cotton, the two runners' ships were the schooner *Ann* of Nassau and an unnamed sloop. By means of towing, poling and sailing, seamen moved the vessels to Punta Gorda, where they anchored for the night.<sup>43</sup>

The next morning Browne received the prizes aboard the *Restless*, now positioned in Charlotte Harbor. He ordered the *Ann* to the admiralty court at Key West, where the judge valued it at \$195 and its 13 bales of cotton and other cargo at \$3,104.40, for a total of \$3,299.40. Court and auction fees of \$308.22 left \$2,991.18 to be divided as prize money among the crewmen of the *Rosalie* and *Restless*.<sup>44</sup> It is reasonable to assume that the two local pilots, Thompson and Brannen, also shared in the prize money, although that is not specified in the court records. Indeed, financial gain in hardscrabble south Florida, rather than ideology, may have been a little-discussed incentive for refugee informants. Admiral Bailey subsequently hinted at this factor in his report of the *Rosalie* and *Restless* affair: "Enterprises of this sort, when successfully accomplished, are of far greater value than the mere amount [prize payments] of the capture, by disheartening the enemy and encouraging our own men." Within a month of its deployment, the *Rosalie*, under Acting Ensign Charles P. Clark, had captured four more vessels in the Charlotte Harbor area. Bailey thereafter promoted Clark to Acting Master and the distribution of prize money began anew.<sup>45</sup>

The bark *Gem of the Sea* relieved the *Restless* at Charlotte Harbor soon after the capture of the *Ann*. The *Rosalie* remained at Charlotte Harbor, now as the tender for the *Gem of the Sea*. In late July 1863, local Union sources of intelligence reported a small schooner and sloop lying at anchor in the Caloosahatchee downriver from Fort Myers. The *Rosalie* captured the two vessels and also secured the Rebel schooner *Georgie*, which had been concealed in a small creek near the fort.<sup>46</sup> A few days later, the *Rosalie* captured a small boat and three men at Punta Rassa. The

43. William R. Browne to Theodorus Bailey, July 10, 1863, *ORN*, ser.1, vol. XVII, 487-88.

44. *Ibid.*; Theodorus Bailey to Gideon Welles, July 18, 1863, *ORN*, ser.1, vol. XVII, 489-90; *United States v. The Schooner Ann and Cargo*, ARB-SDF, NA, 388.

45. Theodorus Bailey to William R. Browne, July 18, 1863, *ORN*, ser.1, vol. XVII, 489; Theodorus Bailey to Gideon Welles, July 18, 1863, *ORN*, ser.1, vol. XVII, 489-90. On the issue of prize adjudication, see General Order of Acting Rear-Admiral Bailey, U.S. Navy, January 1, 1863, *ORN*, ser. 1, vol. XVII, 341-43.

46. Irvin B. Baxter to "Senior Officer," August 10, 1863, *ORN*, ser. 1, vol. XVII, 527-28.



three prisoners stated that they were from Manatee and had traveled to the Caloosahatchee for the purpose of evading Confederate conscript officers. Their evasive actions previous to capture raised suspicions that they were either Confederate spies, blockade-runners, or saboteurs. Henry Thompson, Milledge Brannen, and another disaffected Confederate named "Cason" were consulted. The three men knew two of the prisoners, William Addison and William Curry. They confirmed that Addison lived in the vicinity of the Myakka River, owned a large stock farm and about 1,000 head of cattle, and was thus exempt from the Confederate conscript law. The Union sources stated that Curry had run the blockade twice and that both men were "traitors to the United States Government." The ubiquitous Henry Crane, now serving aboard the *Gem of the Sea*, vouched for the third man, but because this captive refused to take the oath of allegiance to the United States, he was classified as a Rebel as well. Had Union sources in the area not been present, these "traitors" may well have succeeded in their goals.<sup>47</sup>

Shortly after this incident, local Union allies informed Irvin B. Baxter, commander of the *Gem of the Sea*, of yet another cotton-laden blockade-runner anchored fifteen miles up the Peace River. Baxter immediately sent a boat and cutter manned by twenty of his men and piloted by Union refugee Henry West of Useppa Island to capture the vessel. The crew appears to have been ready to attempt a run through the blockade as it was captured at the mouth of the Peace River rather than secreted upriver. The prize turned out to be the *Richard*, a sloop of about 5 tons and loaded with almost 9 bales of cotton. The only remaining crewmember was a black man who may have seized the moment as an avenue to freedom.<sup>48</sup>

In early September, Baxter learned that, in retaliation for the capture of the *Richard*, a group of Confederate "regulators" assembled in the vicinity of the Peace River for the purpose of capturing Union refugees and collaborators and destroying the *Rosalie*. In order to preempt the Confederate guerrillas, Baxter sent ashore party of twenty-one sailors and Union refugee Henry West to intervene. He ordered them to proceed with caution throughout the area and destroy all boats or contraband they found as well as burn

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47. Ibid.

48. Irvin B. Baxter to Gideon Welles, September 3, 1863, *ORN*, ser. 1, vol. XVII, 545-46.

the home and storehouse of "the notorious Rebel and blockade-runner [Robert] Johnson." Baxter stated that these buildings were sites used as depots for blockade-runners and as councils for guerrillas. The shore party succeeded in destroying four boats, burning Johnson's buildings, and returning to base without casualties. Baxter commended Henry West for his zeal and reported, "I think this expedition will have a tendency to break up the blockade running and stop the regulators from coming down here to molest the refugees in this vicinity."<sup>49</sup>

Thereafter, Confederate guerrillas mounted no attack on any of the refugee camps in Charlotte Harbor, but blockade running attempts continued. In the fall of 1863, the *Rosalie* captured the Rebel schooner *Director*. The lookout of the *Rosalie* spotted the *Director* "coming out of Terraceia [sic] Creek and making for the entrance to Sanibel [Caloosahatchee] River" and gave chase.<sup>50</sup> The schooner was loaded with 20 bags of Bahamian salt and 1 barrel of rum. However, the real prize was the capture of the schooner's captain, Robert Johnson, the well-known "notorious Rebel" and frequent blockade-runner. He had been captured prior to this incident, once at Philadelphia and once at Key West, and paroled both times. Useppa Island refugees Wade S. Rigby and Enoch Daniels informed Baxter that Johnson had broken his parole both times and was also responsible for the capture of the U.S. supply schooner *Laura* in December 1862.<sup>51</sup> Baxter deemed the report so significant that he sent Johnson in chains to Key West and sent Rigby there as well to serve as a witness against Johnson.<sup>52</sup> This time, with the notable assistance of south Florida counter-Confederates, Johnson would not again dupe the Union.

With the consequential arrest and incarceration of Johnson, a new quiescence swept south Florida waters. Although the hell of war and its emotions continued to pervade the area, military records reflect few other major blockade-running efforts and continued substantial alliances between those locals who had gravitat-

49. Irvin B. Baxter to Theodorus Bailey, September 5, 1863, *ORN*, ser. 1, vol. XVII, 547.

50. *Ibid.*, 562-63; Terra Ceia Creek is located in Manatee County, more than one day's sail from the Caloosahatchee via the inland passage.

51. To U.S. authorities, this probably changed Johnson's status from enemy prisoner of war to a suspected pirate, liable to execution.

52. Irvin B. Baxter to Theodorus Bailey, October 3, 1863, *ORN*, ser. 1, vol. XVII, 562-63.

ed to the Union for sundry personal and ideological reasons and the Union's superior presence along the coast. While certain military actions erupted periodically—specifically the land actions and counter-actions over open-range cattle in the area and the Union's reoccupation of the former Civil War post of Fort Myers—local support and intelligence and superior Federal naval power relegated south Florida generally to a Union sphere. Florida's war within a war did rage on, but most of those incidents and actions thereafter occurred in north and not south Florida.<sup>53</sup>

### Conclusion

Confederate policies created an unusual environment in back-water south Florida by alienating "Union men" and producing sizable numbers of other dissidents who sought Federal refuge, cooperation and, at times, even retribution against Southern elements. These local residents, who gravitated to the Union under various motivations, supplied critical knowledge of the terrain and both blue- and brown-waterways. They also proved to be useful Union resources in terms of their familiarity with the sentiments of other locals, which ensured their value to Federal forces and lent an unusual "personal factor" to the conflict. Moreover, demoralization of the south Florida populace was often a key aim in Union efforts because it dulled Rebel zeal to resist. It, moreover, helped produce an environment in which more Union men, sympathizers, disaffected Confederates, escaped slaves, and other refugees from the burden of war were willing to trust and aid Federal forces, which in itself resulted in an unexpected Confederate adversary along south Florida's coastline and adjacent brown waters and islands. Although not common to the war in north Florida, the peculiar service of these men added a new dimension to the struggles, strategies, and tactics employed by both Union and Confederate partisans in the lower peninsula.

For their part, Union commanders realized early in the conflict that the presence of such Union men and refugees along the south Florida coast—including eager black recruits—was a valuable source of manpower and intelligence. Union forces quick-

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53. For more insight into these events, see Irvin D.S. Winsboro, ed., *Florida's Civil War*.

ly utilized them as a “fifth-column” resource. The recounting of these events reveals a critical episode in how south Florida and its inhabitants played an unconventional role during Florida’s Civil War within a war. As historians continue to explore the meaning and memory of that divisive era, certainly reconceptualization of peculiar local actions and personal motivations such as those during the course of the troubling conflict in south Florida will lead to a better understanding of the war itself.