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MILITARY OPERATIONS ON THE ST. JOHNS,
SEPTEMBER - OCTOBER, 1862
PART II
THE FEDERALS CAPTURE ST. JOHNS BLUFF

by EDWIN C. BEARSS

ALL OF BRIGADIER GENERAL John M. Brannan's Union soldiers and their arms, horses, and rations had reached shore by 9 p.m., October 1, 1862. Among the first units to land were sixty troopers of the 1st Massachusetts Cavalry. The horsemen spent the afternoon and early evening reconnoitering.

General Brannan, on questioning the troopers and several citizens of pro-Union proclivities, learned that the ground between the point of debarkation and St. Johns Bluff presented numerous barriers to the advance of a column of infantry and artillery. These obstacles were all but impassable swamps and several unfordable creeks. Realizing that a march up the south shore of the St. Johns was now out of the question, Brannan examined two alternative routes on the maps. Either he could turn his column inland, moving around the head of Pablo Creek, or he could re-embark his troops and make a second landing farther up the river "at a strongly guarded position of the enemy." The general preferred the second alternative, because the first called for a forced march of forty miles without artillery and wagons.¹

Brannan decided on a reconnaissance to see if a feasible landing site could be found above the mouth of Pablo Creek. Commander Charles Steedman made all the small boats of his squadron available to the army, and Lieutenant Commander Edward P. Williams, executive officer of the *Paul Jones*, was put in charge of them.

Brannan then ordered Lieutenant Colonel Tilghman H. Good, 47th Pennsylvania, to embark a battalion aboard the small craft. Quickly moving his troops to a previously designated point, Good

1. *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, 69 vols. (Washington, 1880-1901), Series I, Vol. XIV, 129. (Cited hereafter as *O. R.*)

reported to Commander Williams. He was delighted to learn that Williams had two boat howitzers manned by marines from the *Paul Jones* and *Cimarron*.

At a signal from Williams, the launches carrying the soldiers pushed off. They pulled into the mouth of Buckhorn Creek at 2 a.m. Finding the area swampy, Williams moved up the narrow, winding creek hoping to find a better place to put the soldiers ashore. Three-quarters of a mile up was Greenfield Plantation, where there was solid ground. Putting his force ashore, Williams returned to Mayport Mills and reported to General Brannan. Orders were issued for officers to form their commands.²

It had rained during the night. Company K, 7th Connecticut, found shelter in a leaky old warehouse "full of cockroaches, sand fleas, and several new species of insect life." According to one of the soldiers, "the volume of sulphurous language was above par, but nothing new in manner of expression. This was our first time of setting foot in Florida. Hard tack and smoky coffee for grub."³

As soon as 2d Battalion, 47th Pennsylvania, could be mustered, fed, and embarked, Williams' force headed up the St. Johns. It was about an hour after daylight when these troops reached Buckhorn Creek. The boats returned to pick up the 7th Connecticut.⁴

Meanwhile, Brannan had re-embarked the remainder of his force. Convoyed by warships, the transports had ascended the St. Johns to the mouth of Pablo Creek. Anchoring, they awaited the return of Williams' landing craft. This move would shorten the distance the sailors had to row the small boats, thus enabling the Federals to speed up the operation.

* * *

News that a strong force of Federals had landed at Mayport Mills quickly reached Colonel Charles F. Hopkins, commanding the Confederate post at St. Johns Bluff, and he promptly for-

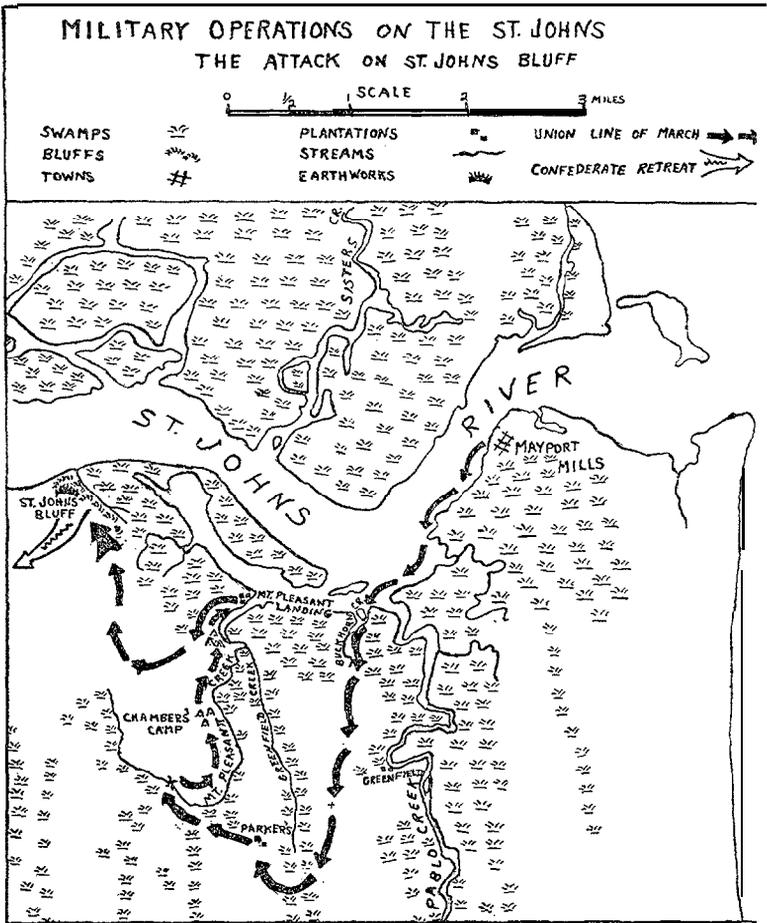
2. *Ibid.*, 129, 132; *Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies in the War of the Rebellion*, 30 vols. (Washington, 1894-1922), Series I, Vol. XIII, 363. (Cited hereafter as *O. R. N.*)

3. Jerome Tourtellotte, *A History of Company K Seventh Connecticut Volunteer Infantry in the Civil War* (1910), 46.

4. *O. R.*, Series I, Vol. XIV, 129, 132.

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warded the information to General Joseph Finegan. At the same time, orders were sent to Captain Joseph L. Dunham, Battery A, Milton Light Artillery Battalion, to move his entire command from Yellow Bluff to St. Johns Bluff. The dismounted cavalry companies which Hopkins had called for earlier arrived during the night.



Dunham was disturbed by Hopkins' pre-emptory call for his field artillery. At the moment the teams and caissons were not

with the guns. Dunham notified Hopkins that because of a shortage of transportation, it would be hours before his battery would be ready to move. Hopkins ordered Dunham to send whatever artillerists he could spare, and he would try to arm them, so they could fight as infantry.⁵

About daybreak, October 2, one of Captain William E. Chambers' troopers galloped up to Hopkins' command post to announce that the Federals had landed in force at Greenfield. Hopkins ordered Major Theodore W. Brevard, 2d Florida Battalion of Partisan Rangers, to form his infantry and be prepared to move out.

Posting himself at the observation station atop the bluff, Hopkins observed the enemy's movements. He watched Williams' boats, crowded with troops, leave the transports and disappear up Buckhorn Creek, and then return an hour or so later. This shuttling operation continued throughout the morning.

As soon as he noticed what was happening, Hopkins ordered Captain Chambers to harass the Federals, and, if possible, check their advance. Chambers deployed his men as skirmishers near Parker's plantation and waited.⁶

* * *

Acting under orders from General Brannan, Colonel Good assembled his regiment, and as soon as two companies had been deployed as skirmishers, the 47th Pennsylvania started for Parker's plantation. The skirmishers found the going difficult as they beat their way through dense underbrush and waded swamps. Some became so exhausted they had to return to the boats. When his force was about a mile from its destination, Good called a halt to wait for the 7th Connecticut.

The scouts, Captain Coleman A. G. Keck commanding, pushed on until they were within 1,200 yards of Parker's house. Apprised of this development, Colonel Good joined the skirmish line. A half dozen Confederates could be seen astride their horses about a half mile to the front. Climbing a tall tree, the colonel saw Parker's house and pinpointed Captain Chambers' Confederates.

5. *Ibid.*, 139. Hopkins failed to receive an answer to his 3 a.m. message to Dunham.

6. *Ibid.*

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The colonel planned to wait for the 7th Connecticut before trying to dislodge the Confederates. He paced the ground impatiently as time passed. By 10 o'clock, deciding to go ahead without them, he sent a squad of men to Greenfield to pick up a six-pounder boat howitzer. This gun had been mounted on a flat-boat, but because of the difficulty encountered in dragging it through the swamps, it was noon before the squad returned.

Meanwhile, covered by Keck's skirmishers, the Pennsylvanians closed in on Parker's. Captain Chambers saw that his company was greatly outnumbered, and after exchanging a few shots, he ordered the plantation abandoned.

The 7th Connecticut finally arrived, and at 1 p.m. the Union advance was resumed. Keck's skirmishers spearheaded the column as it pushed up the right bank of Mount Pleasant Creek. Except for an occasional glimpse of a horseman, the Federals saw no more Confederates until they reached the bridge near the head of the creek at 2 p.m. The Confederates had damaged the bridge, but in less than an hour the Federals repaired it.

Crossing the creek, Good moved onto the road leading to Mount Pleasant Landing. A mile advance brought Keck's skirmishers to a camp. Three men were seen quickly riding off. The Federals discovered many signs of hurried flight, including a large table set with "a sumptuous meal." On the center of the table was a "fine, large meat pie still warm from which one of the party had already served his plate." Inspecting the twenty-three tents, they also found a small quantity of commissary and quartermaster's stores.⁷

From his command post on St. Johns Bluff, Colonel Hopkins continued to watch the Federals shuttling men and materiel up Buckhorn Creek. Captain Chambers kept the colonel informed of the progress of Good's column, while Hopkins relayed to Major Brevard the information garnered from his observations. Chambers' scouts, spotting the boat howitzers, mistakenly believed the enemy had landed field artillery, and this news startled Hopkins.

About the time the Federals reached Parker's plantation, Brevard was preparing to use his infantry to try to halt the Union

7. *Ibid.*, 129, 132-133, 139-140; Tourtellotte, *History of Company K*, 48.

advance. A message from Chambers, however, revealed the Federals were moving in two columns - one (Good's) had reached the west side of Mount Pleasant Creek. Brevard was ordered to remain where he was.

The next report told of the occupation of Chambers' camp, which placed the Federals within a few miles of Brevard's position and in the rear of St. Johns Bluff. Hopkins realized that his position had been turned.

There were only a few hours of daylight left when Hopkins ordered Chambers' troops to retire on Brevard's battalion. Since the Federals gave no indication of stopping, Hopkins wished to concentrate his force so as to protect the rear of the fortifications. Crews manning six of the ten guns were armed with small-arms, but many of these weapons were defective. Accompanied by Captain Stephens' troopers, a roadblock was established by the men on the road leading from Mount Pleasant Landing to St. Johns Bluff.

About dark, Hopkins was notified that the Federals had halted, and this gave him time to reflect on the situation. In view of the overwhelming force of the Federals, Hopkins decided he could not make a successful stand. Counting the armed artilleryists, he had a little over 500 men to hold off the enemy column which had crossed the creek and threatened the batteries from the rear. It had been raining since the previous night and the men's improvised cartridge-boxes were soaked and their ammunition useless. To make matters more discouraging, reports reaching Hopkins greatly magnified Brannan's strength.⁸

Hopkins decided not to try to hold St. Johns Bluff. Discussing the situation with Captain John C. Richard and Lieutenant Thomas O. Stuart, the officers of the batteries, it was agreed that Major Brevard did not have sufficient force to stop the Federal offensive. A courier was sent to inform Brevard of the result of the conference, and to ask for his recommendations. Before the messenger returned, information reached Hopkins that Brevard and his officers had already decided their position was untenable. At 9 p.m. Hopkins ordered St. Johns Bluff abandoned immedi-

8. *O. R.*, Series I, Vol. XIV, 140. Mr. Haynes, a man in whom Hopkins had great confidence, said the Federals had no less than 3,000 men. Captain Chambers estimated the strength of the Union force

ately. The Confederates left without even spiking their guns or blowing up the magazines.⁹

General Finegan, who had reached Jacksonville late on the 2nd, was enraged when he heard that the Bluff had been evacuated. He telegraphed Richmond the following day, "As at present advised I think we had sufficient force to hold the place, and that its abandonment by Lieutenant-Colonel Hopkins . . . was a gross military blunder, that may require investigation."¹⁰

In the meantime, Colonel Good's column, after setting fire to the tents, advanced a mile beyond Chambers' deserted encampment and occupied a second bivouac. Although Keck's skirmishers found no Confederates, they made a good haul of arms, accouterments, and camp equipage. It was dusk before Good's regiment reached Mount Pleasant Landing. Outposts were established and manned, and the men were allowed to take a break.¹¹ Lieutenant James S. Cannon's detachment of the 1st Connecticut Battery with two guns arrived about 9 p.m.

While the Northern infantry had been establishing a beachhead, Cannon's men had loaded their guns aboard the *Neptune*. The artillerists carried two days' rations of raw pork, salt junk, and hardtack. The instructions were to run the vessel up Buckhorn Creek to a predesignated landing place that would be pointed out by a Negro. The captain of the *Neptune* was drunk, however, and the Negro took over the wheel, but "if the captain was drunk, the Negro was incapable; for he ran the *Neptune* into a mudbank, where it stuck fast." It was impossible to wait for high tide, since General Brannan expected the battery to be ashore and ready to march by daybreak.

which established the beachhead at Greenfield at 2,500. During the ensuing four hours, Hopkins kept track of the movements of the small boat armada. Calculating that these boats were capable of moving 300 men per hour, he concluded that by the smallest estimate not less than 1,000 soldiers had landed after Captain Chambers retired from Greenfield. *Ibid.*, 140-141.

9. *Ibid.*, 140-141.

10. *Ibid.*, 138.

11. *Ibid.*, 133. Searching the deserted camp, the Federals found eighteen Hall's breech-loading carbines, twelve double-barreled shotguns, eight breech-loading Maynard rifles, eleven Enfield rifles, and ninety-six knapsacks. When they moved off, the Federals took these arms with them. Sixteen tents and a small quantity of commissary and quartermaster's stores were burned.

A number of small boats were sent to the cannoneers' rescue, and about 6 a.m. the artillerists landed in "one of those great Florida swamps and marshes, among rattlesnakes, copperheads, centipedes, alligators and many other poisonous reptiles and insects."¹² The Federals were now ready to continue their advance on St. Johns Bluff.

Brannan, on the morning of the 3rd, ordered the 47th Pennsylvania to hold its ground at Mount Pleasant Landing. He wanted to bring up the 7th Connecticut and determine Confederate strength. After questioning his scouts and local people, Brannan estimated the Confederates had 1,200 infantry and cavalry, and nine guns, two of them large columbiads, emplaced on the Bluff. Calling for reinforcements, he dispatched the master of the transport *Cosmopolitan* with a message to Colonel Rishworth Rich at Fernandina. He also ordered the *Patroon* to sail with the *Cosmopolitan*.¹³

Shortly before noon, lookouts aboard the gunboats were wondering if something were amiss. They had been watching the bluff for hours and had noted little if any movement; the Confederates had not even hoisted their flag. Information reaching Brannan indicated the enemy might be evacuating and so he and Steedman ordered a "special reconnaissance." The *E. B. Hale* and the *Uncas* were sent upriver, with orders to proceed with caution.¹⁴ The warships first opened fire on the St. Johns Bluff earthworks, but there was no answer or any sign of life. Then Lieutenant Snell of the *Hale* ordered a gig to move into shore. There the Federals found that the Confederates had fled, leaving behind guns, ammunition, provisions, and camp equipage. After raising the American flag, the sailors returned to their ship.¹⁵

When he saw the flag, Steedman ordered the *Paul Jones* and the *E. B. Hale* to move upstream to Jacksonville. The *Water Witch* was to land a party to hold the fortifications on the bluff pending the arrival of the army.¹⁶

12. *Ibid.*; Herbert W. Beecher, *History of the First Light Battery Connecticut Volunteers, 1861-1865*, 200-201.

13. *O. R.*, Series I, Vol. XIV, 128, 130; *O. R. N.*, Series I, Vol. XIII, 355, 373.

14. *O. R.*, Series I, Vol. XIV, 130; *O. R. N.*, Series I, Vol. XIII, 363.

15. *O. R. N.*, Series I, Vol. XIII, 357, 363, 370. The guns abandoned by the Confederates included two 8-inch columbiads, two 32-pounder rifles, and four 8-inch siege howitzers.

16. *Ibid.*, 363; *Harper's Weekly*, October 25, 1862.

When the *Paul Jones* and the *Hale* reached Jacksonville at 7 p.m., Steedman learned that he was too late to halt the retreat of Hopkins' command. The Confederates had crossed the river several hours before. Steedman was also told that the 29th and 30th Georgia were scheduled to reach Jacksonville the next morning, October 4. Actually though news of the evacuation had caused the Georgians to turn back. Hoping that not all the Confederates had escaped, Steedman had the *Hale* drop downstream to guard the Panama Creek ferry while the *Paul Jones* remained at Jacksonville.¹⁷

As soon as he discovered that the Confederates had evacuated their works, General Brannan ordered his men to push ahead. Covered by a strong force of skirmishers, the Federals marched from Mount Pleasant Landing, taking the road paralleling the St. Johns.¹⁸

"I witnessed a sight which was interesting," a cannoneer recalled, "the naval fleet moving up the river and the land forces commencing their march. After a few shots were sent into the fort and no reply was made, up went Old Glory amid the huzzas of the land force and the blowing of whistles of the gunboats and transports. The enemy had got scared, as our bungling and loading and unloading so many nights had led them to believe that the whole Union army was coming."¹⁹

Occasional clashes occurred during the advance between the Union scouts and roving Confederate patrols. About two miles from the bluff, the left wing of Colonel Good's skirmish line came upon an abandoned encampment. Since it was starting to get dark, the Federals did not stop. Brannan's soldiers reached St. Johns Bluff at 7:30, relieving the sailors from the *Water Witch*.

Two companies from the 47th Pennsylvania were sent to examine the camp, where they found trunks and camp equipage scattered about. Papers in one tent identified the late occupants

17. *O. R. N.*, Series I, Vol. XIII, 363, 370. The 29th and 30th Georgia which were hurriedly pulled out of the Savannah defenses had reached Lake City by rail. *O. R.*, Series I, Vol. XIV, 616-617.

18. *O. R.*, Series I, Vol. XIV, 130, 133-134.

19. Beecher, *History of the 1st Connecticut Battery*, 202-203.

of the camp as members of the Milton Artillery.²⁰ A foraging party of Confederates, not knowing that the battery had been abandoned, came in soon after the Federals occupied the bluff and surrendered.²¹

The Federals had been warned not to "venture" into the swamp between the landing and the bluff. The cook from 1st Connecticut Battery selected a mess spot "near a large palmetto jungle" which he thought was safe. "I well remember," one of the gunners reported, "just as the fire was burning nicely, out crawled a huge rattlesnake from the palmetto grove. The heat of the fire had roused him from his lethargic sleep and the aromatic fragrance of the coffee was too much for him. Everyone who saw the reptile had a shot at him with pistols, making him surrender very quickly. He measured nine feet in length and had ten rattles."²²

Fatigue parties were organized and put to work dismantling the heavy ordnance and clearing up "a scrub patch on the bluff" to make camp.²³ The soldiers considered their effort wasted, however, since they spent the night "fighting sand fleas and mosquitos." General Brannan was impressed with the captured position. It was his opinion that a small party of determined men could have maintained this position for considerable time against even a larger force than was at his disposal.²⁴

The *Cosmopolitan* returned from Fernandina with 300 soldiers. Since there was now no need for reinforcements, Brannan

20. *O. R.*, Series I, Vol. XIV, 130, 133-134. At Camp Hopkins the Federals also found a small quantity of commissary stores-sugar, rice, half a barrel of flour, and one bag of salt, which they removed to St. Johns Bluff on the 4th. *Ibid.*, 134.

21. Tourtellotte, *History of Company K*, 48.

22. Beecher, *History of the 1st Connecticut Battery*, 201.

23. *O. R.*, Series I, Vol. XIV, 130. Describing the works in his "After Action Report," Brannan observed, "I found the late position of the enemy on St. Johns' Bluff to be one of great strength, and possessing a heavy and effective armament, with a good supply of ammunition, . . . the works being most skillfully and carefully constructed and the position greatly enhanced by the natural advantages of the ground, it being approachable from the land by but one route, which would lead the attacking party through a winding ravine immediately under the guns of the position, and from the narrowness of the channel at this point and the elevation of the bluff rendering the fighting of the gunboats most difficult and dangerous."

24. *O. R.*, Series, I, Vol. XIV, 130; Tourtellotte, *History of Company K*, 49.

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ordered them to return to their base. After dropping the soldiers at Fernandina, the *Cosmopolitan* was to continue to Hilton Head with dispatches for General Mitchel and Admiral Du Pont, including a request of Commander Steedman for a light-draft coal vessel and additional ammunition for his big 100-pounder Parrotts.²⁵

* * *

On the morning of October 4, small boat parties from the *Paul Jones* and the *E. B. Hale* were ordered to destroy all the skiffs and flatboats on the reach of the St. Johns between Jacksonville and Panama Creek. Such drastic action, Steedman reasoned, would keep the Confederates from shifting men and materiel from one side of the river to the other.

About noon, Steedman took the *Paul Jones* and returned to Mayport Mills. The *E. B. Hale* at the same time was ordered to make a sweep up the St. Johns to Mandarin Ferry. Steedman informed General Brannan that he had seen many cornfields on his run up the river. The general, an exponent of economic warfare, immediately proposed to carry off or destroy the corn. Other action against the East Florida Confederates was planned. It was decided to send a fast moving task force up the St. Johns. The *Cimarron* and the *Water Witch* would proceed to Jacksonville, and together with the *Hale* would ascend the St. Johns as far beyond Palatka as possible "for the purpose of destroying all the boats and flats on the river, to prevent the enemy crossing."²⁶

Because of a defective steering mechanism, the sailors had trouble getting the *Cimarron* up river. Severely buffeted by the currents, the gunboat anchored five times. According to Commander Woodhull, "we literally made the passage going stern first." It was 9 p.m. when the *Cimarron* and the *Water Witch* arrived at Jacksonville, and joined the *Hale* which had returned from Mandarin Ferry.²⁷

25. *O. R.*, Series I, Vol. XIV, 128; *O. R. N.*, Series I, Vol. XIII, 355, 357. The *Cosmopolitan* could tow the coaler on her return to the St. Johns.

26. *O. R. N.*, Series I, Vol. XIII, 363, 370; *O. R.*, Series I, Vol. XIV, 128.

27. *O. R. N.*, Series I, Vol. XIII, 367, 370. During the day the small boat parties from the *E. B. Hale* had destroyed nine boats and one scow. *Ibid.*, 370.

On the morning of October 5, the *Water Witch*, with Commander Woodhull aboard, and the *Hale*, started up the St. Johns. Frequent stops were made during the day and landing parties were put ashore. A great number of small boats and barges were destroyed, and at Magnolia Springs, as well as at several other points, Woodhull had copies of Lincoln's September 22 Emancipation Proclamation posted. The two gunboats spent the night anchored off Madison's Point, about five miles below Orange Mills.

Thinking it unsafe to take the *Water Witch* (which drew 11 1/2 feet) over the bar, Woodhull transferred to the *E. B. Hale* and proceeded on to Palatka, reaching there at 10 a.m. As the gunboat approached Palatka only two people were visible, all others having fled. On anchoring, Woodhull sent a boat ashore to pick up the two men, one of whom was William D. Moseley, former governor of Florida, who said that recent Confederate reverses in Maryland and the capture of St. Johns Bluff had greatly alarmed the people of East Florida.²⁸ Woodhull, having seen only three white men since leaving Jacksonville, wondered where they all were.²⁹ Moseley told him that they "had all fled to the bush, as a report had been circulated by the flying troops from Fort St. John that it was the purpose of . . . [the] 'vandals' to seize every white man and either execute him at once or send him to a Northern prison."

Woodhull also learned that about fifty Confederate cavalrymen from St. Johns Bluff and twelve mules had crossed the river at Palatka after abandoning their wagons at Deep Creek. He urged Moseley, when he returned to shore, to ask the people "to return to the town, and . . . to inform them that . . . they had been deceived by their own people; that it was not . . . [the Federals'] purpose to molest unarmed men and that the future existence of their town would depend on their own peaceful conduct."³⁰

28. *Ibid.*, 367-368, 370. On September 16 and 17, General Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia fought the Battle of Antietam. Although Lee escaped defeat, his losses were so great that he was compelled to abandon his position and retire across the Potomac into Virginia.

29. *Ibid.*, 368. Besides Moseley and his companion, a white man was seen at Magnolia.

30. *Ibid.*

The man with Governor Moseley identified himself as Mr. Blood, a Northerner. When he expressed fear of "being seized and made to ornament a pine tree for his well-known Union views and attachment to the United States Government," Woodhull ordered an armed party to bring Blood's family and property aboard the gunboat.

The party had been gone about fifteen minutes when Woodhull saw about forty or fifty armed horsemen riding toward the area where Blood's house was located. He immediately ordered the boats recalled and the anchor weighed. "General Quarters" sounded, and the ship's guns began firing over the town, toward the oncoming horsemen. At first, the Confederates pressed on, hoping to reach the cover afforded by nearby houses, but they were not successful. After three or four men had been unhorsed, the rest gave up and retired into the bush. The landing party returned and succeeded in moving Blood's family to the gunboat. About thirty Negroes who had helped pilot the Union ship up the St. Johns were also brought off, together with their families.³¹

Meanwhile, a deputation of women assembled on the wharf, and one of them, Mrs. Boyd, informed Commander Woodhull that "the men had fled to the swamps; that a part of the disorganized cavalry were in the neighborhood; that they were uncontrollable, and she begged . . . [Woodhull], as they were unable to help themselves or prevent violence of the men, not to shell the town."

Woodhull did not agree that the women had no influence with the men, "It was a well-known fact that this war had been mainly kept alive by the violence and the influence of the women brought to bear on their fathers, husbands, and sons." He did promise, however, that "if the force back of the town was immediately removed, and the quiet citizens left undisturbed . . . [he] would not then shell the town." Otherwise, his men would open fire in two hours.

Mrs. Boyd had anticipated Woodhull, and had already sent a message to the commander of the partisans, asking him to evacuate the locality. Shortly afterwards the partisans moved out, Mrs. Boyd informed Woodhull, who pretended to believe it was

31. *Ibid.*

her "influence that had sent those gentlemen to the right about, but at the same time did not change . . . [his] belief in the compelling power of our shells." ³² That afternoon the two gunboats returned to Orange Mills, where Woodhull and the Blood family transferred to the *Water Witch*, and the following morning they sailed to Jacksonville. The *E. B. Hale* returned to Palatka. ³³

* * *

In the meantime, General Brannan and his staff aboard the *Paul Jones* and two infantry battalions on the *Ben De Ford* moved up the St. Johns on the morning of October 5. ³⁴ It was about 2 p.m. when the vessels reached Jacksonville. As soon as the soldiers landed, Brannan, leaving a reserve at the dock, moved his troops into town.

As the troops were pressing forward toward the outskirts, suddenly there was a rattle of musketry. The captain of the reserve force left at dockside hurriedly ordered his men into formation, and about that time Brannan and his "gold-laced Staff" came pounding down the street, "their coat-tails elevated and extremely careless of following precedence in rank."

The reserves, Company K, 7th Connecticut, moved off on the double toward the scene of the firing. Turning up the railroad track, the Federals joined their comrades, who were deployed in line of battle. The clash was with a small mounted Confederate detachment that was encamped just outside Jacksonville. As soon as Company K arrived, the column pressed on, pushing up the main street. In the face of this advance, the Confederates pulled back. When a naval lieutenant arrived with a boat howitzer and some sailors, the reinforced Federals marched on to a road junction about a mile outside town, where they established a perimeter covering the approaches to the city. ³⁵

32. *Ibid.*, 369.

33. *Ibid.*, 370. Following his return to Jacksonville, Commander Woodhull made out his report and handed it to Commander Steedman. He reported he found the corn crop average, and in his opinion it should suffice to take care of the Floridians' normal consumption. Woodhull was also an early advocate of economic warfare. He thought the greatest blow which the Federals could administer to the Southern economy would be to destroy the sugar crop and the small salt works along the coast and rivers of eastern Florida. *Ibid.*, 369.

34. *Ibid.*, 363; *O. R.*, Series I, Vol. XIV, 130-131.

35. Tourtellotte, *History of Company K*, 49-50.

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On the morning of October 6 a transport with additional companies of the 7th Connecticut came up river. To keep the men off the streets, the provost marshal ordered them to remain aboard ship. This was unwelcomed news, because the men of Companies A and K reported that the town was a pleasant place with many pretty girls.³⁶

The provost guards fell down on their responsibility. There was plundering of private property, with the sailors the worst offenders: "Their wide-collared, capacious sailor shirts were crammed with plunder, their leather belts preventing any slipping down below the waist line."³⁷

* * *

An "intelligent contraband," formerly a pilot aboard the Confederate steamer *Governor Milton*, asked (on the morning of October 6) to see Commander Steedman and General Brannan. He informed them that an expedition sent up the St. Johns could capture the *Governor Milton* and other vessels which the Confederates had hidden.

Commander Williams was ordered to place two 24-pounder howitzers from the *Paul Jones* on the steamer *Darlington*. As soon as Acting Master Charles G. Loring and twenty-four sailors from the flagship and Captain Charles H. Yard and 100 sailors from the 47th Pennsylvania came aboard, the *Darlington* started up the St. Johns.³⁸ Passing the *Water Witch* north of Orange Mills, she reached Palatka where she rendezvoused with the *E. B. Hale*. Before resuming her run up the river at 8 a.m., October 7, a fatigue party from the *Darlington* was put ashore to gather wood. Afterwards the two gunboats left Palatka, and at noon they tied up at Welaka.

The water at the entrance to Lake George was too shallow for the *Hale* to pass, so Williams ordered Lieutenant Snell to remain behind with his gunboat and blockade the mouth of Ocklawaha River. The *Darlington* moved on through Lake George to Volusia where a landing party went ashore to question the inhabitants. A ferryman, brought aboard the *Darlington*, re-

36. *Ibid.*, 52.

37. *Ibid.*

38. *O. R.*, Series I, Vol. XIV, 131; *O. R. N.*, Series I, Vol. XIII, 364, 366.

ported that several steamers had recently passed Volusia, and Williams ordered the chase continued.

At Hawkinsville, where the *Darlington* arrived after dark, Williams put a detachment ashore. Although they searched the houses, the Federals were unable to find any inhabitants. Unmistakeable signs, fires and turned down beds, indicative of a hurried departure, were plentiful. Letters were found which led Williams to believe that the *Governor Milton* was hidden in a nearby creek. Fearing that the townspeople might have sent a party to burn the vessel, Williams ran the *Darlington* up the creek as far as the pilot could take her. The ship's small boat carrying sixteen men and two officers was lowered. Towing a small canoe with six soldiers, the boat started up the creek. Within a half mile, the Federals caught sight of the *Governor Milton* moored to the bank. She was boarded without incident, and the engineers guarding her meekly surrendered. The fires were stoked and within fifteen minutes of her capture Williams had the prize underway. They returned to the St. Johns, but Williams saw that the *Governor Milton* could not keep up. He ordered it anchored in mid-channel to await the *Darlington's* return.

People at Lake Beresford reported a steamer had passed the previous afternoon. Reasoning that the vessel had already reached Enterprise, Williams thought it would take his men a day or two to find her. Rations were running short, and the commander was afraid the Southerners might block the river behind him by felling trees in the channel. Consequently, he decided not to press on.³⁹

Early on the 8th the *Darlington*, followed by her prize, started down the St. Johns. Stopping at Hawkinsville and Volusia, landing parties were put ashore to appropriate supplies and destroy property. The *E. B. Hale* was encountered at Welaka, and Mr. Allen and his effects were transferred from that vessel to the *Darlington*. Escorted by the *Hale*, Williams' expedition continued down river, and tied up at Jacksonville at daybreak, October 9.⁴⁰ Commander Steedman was delighted to see the *Governor Milton*, and he asked General Brannan to leave it be-

39. *O. R. N.*, Series I, Vol. XIII, 366-367.

40. *Ibid.*, 367. Allen had collaborated with the Federals and wanted to leave the area to escape the vengeance of his neighbors.

hind when the army returned to Port Royal. He planned to arm the prize and use her to search out Confederate salt works. ⁴¹

* * *

The *Cosmopolitan*, which had been sent to Port Royal for supplies, returned to the St. Johns on October 7. In crossing the bar, she grounded, knocking a hole in her bottom. Repairs would have to be made before the vessel could go to sea again.

With the *Cosmopolitan* out of action, Brannan, seeing that the army's work on the St. Johns was completed, decided to shuttle his command back to its base. Orders were issued for Colonel Joseph R. Hawley, 7th Connecticut, to embark his regiment aboard the steamer *Boston*.

Before the regiment left Jacksonville, Quartermaster Sergeant Edgar M. Woodford died of malaria and was buried in the yard of the Episcopal Church on the outskirts of town. Since there was some fear that Woodford might have also had yellow fever, Brannan ordered the embarkation expedited. He also wanted the *Boston* to be returned as soon as possible to assist in transporting the remainder of the brigade to Beaufort. ⁴²

The *Boston* crossed the bar early on the 8th. The sea was rough and many of the soldiers became seasick. There were a number of contrabands on board, including "some very pretty quadroon girls who had been house servants in Jacksonville." The *Boston* reached Port Royal at 11 p.m., but the health officers, because of the yellow fever scare, would not let the steamer tie up at the pier until 10 o'clock the next morning. ⁴³

Upon the return of the *Darlington* on the 9th, Brannan pulled the rest of his soldiers out of Jacksonville, utilizing the *Ben De Ford* and *Darlington* to transport the troops to St. Johns Bluff. At the bluff, Colonel Good and his fatigue parties placed all the captured heavy ordnance aboard the *Neptune*, demolished the earthworks, and prepared the magazines to be blown up. On October 11, Brannan sent Cannon's section of the 1st Connecticut Battery and one company of the 47th Pennsylvania aboard the *Darlington* and the vessel sailed for Hilton Head by way of

41. *Ibid.*, 358-359; *O. R.*, Series I, Vol. XIV, 131.

42. *O. R.*, Series I, Vol. XIV, 131, 386-387; Tourtellotte, *History of Company K*, 52.

43. Tourtellotte, *History of Company K*, 53.

Fernandina. After exploding the magazines, Brannan loaded the remainder of his troops, except one company of the 47th Pennsylvania, on the *Ben De Ford* and the *Boston*. The detached company remained behind to guard the damaged *Cosmopolitan*. On the 13th, the crowded transports steamed past Hilton Head.⁴⁴

* * *

When the army left Jacksonville, Steedman divided his squadron. Commander Woodhull with the *Cimarron*, *Water Witch*, and *E. B. Hale* remained at Jacksonville, while the remaining vessels patrolled the river between Jacksonville and Mayport.

Early on the 10th, the *Hale* was sent on another sweep up the St. Johns. The little gunboat stopped at Forresters Point where she destroyed two scows and several small boats, and at Orange Mills she burned a large mill owned by Dr. Mays. When she returned to Jacksonville the *Hale* carried thirty-nine contrabands and towed two large scows and several smaller craft.⁴⁵

The *Uncas* was anchored off Yellow Bluff on the evening of the 10th, when the watch reported lights on shore. Studying the lights, Acting Master Crane was convinced the Confederates were "doing something to cause an interruption of the river." As soon as it was light, Crane reported what he had observed to Commander Woodhull, who wondered if the Confederates planned to reoccupy Yellow Bluff and mount guns in the emplacements there. His landing parties had secured information recently which reinforced his fears. According to reports, a Confederate force was operating on the St. Augustine road and General Finegan still had enough guns to emplace an impregnable battery. Moreover, the *Cimarron* was running short of coal, and provisions and ammunition were getting low. Thus lightened, she was almost unmanageable. Should big guns be mounted on Yellow Bluff, Woodhull believed his position would be precarious.

He accordingly dispatched a message to Commander Steedman, urging that forces be put ashore at Yellow Bluff to level earthworks, burn houses, and fell the nearby timber. This dispatch was carried by Commander Pendergrast of the *Water Witch*, who was to scrutinize the shore as he passed the bluff. If he saw anything suspicious, he would have his gunners fire.⁴⁶

44. *O. R.*, Series I, Vol. XIV, 131.

45. *O. R. N.*, Series I, Vol. XIII, 361, 364, 370.

46. *Ibid.*, 360-361.

Meanwhile, the *Uncas* returned to her station off Yellow Bluff. Not seeing anything out of the ordinary, Pendergrast held his fire as the *Water Witch* dropped down the St. Johns. Steedman, on learning the *Cimarron* was short of coal, ordered the *Uncas* to carry fuel to Woodhull. He wanted to use the *Patroon*, but her crew had become "so demoralized and insubordinate as to render her totally inefficient," and she was returned to Port Royal.⁴⁷

Believing that the Confederate threat on the St. Johns had been nullified, Captain Sylvanus W. Godon, temporary commander of the South Atlantic Blockading Squadron, decided to cut his commitments in the area. There were several reasons for this decision. First, with the capture and destruction of fortifications on the St. Johns, it would be possible for vessels assigned to blockade the river to operate inside the bar. Sweeps could be made up the St. Johns at frequent intervals to harass planters and keep the Confederates from mounting additional guns on the bluffs. Second, warships would be required to support an action in South Carolina which was planned for the near future.

On October 16, Commander Steedman was ordered to return to Port Royal with his flagship and the *Uncas* and *Water Witch*. Woodhull would remain with the *Cimarron*, the *E. B. Hale*, and the *Governor Milton* to enforce the blockade. The next morning Steedman crossed the bar and started on his run up the coast.⁴⁸

The days immediately following the departure of Steedman were not uneventful. The *Cimarron* took position off Mayport Mills, while the *E. B. Hale* and the *Governor Milton* patrolled the river to a point above Yellow Bluff. On October 20, fifty marines from the *Cimarron* came aboard the *Governor Milton*

47. *Ibid.*, 359-360, 380. On doing so, Steedman sent along a note stating that he did not believe Acting Master Urann was "to blame for the disreputable condition of affairs on board of his vessel." Charges and specifications prepared by Urann against four members of the *Patroon's* crew (Walter Harrington, William Williams, William McIntyre, and James Waltzingford) were also forwarded to the admiral.

48. *Ibid.*, 393. The *Uncas* carried a number of contrabands who were to be put ashore at Fernandina. As soon as the Negroes were landed, the *Uncas* was to "proceed with all dispatch to Port Royal." The hole in the *Cosmopolitan's* hull having been repaired, she also sailed at this time.

and they proceeded up Sisters Creek to Cedar Point. There the marines discovered and destroyed a large salt works. By night-fall, the vessel was back on the St. Johns. Satisfied with destruction of the salt manufactory, Woodhull wanted reinforcements so as to expand his operations and patrol the river as far as Lake Beresford.⁴⁹

The gunboat *Seneca* arrived off the bar on October 21 with dispatches for Woodhull, denying his requests for additional vessels. In fact, his command was being reduced. The *Governor Milton* was to proceed immediately to Port Royal for appraisal by a prize court.⁵⁰

Naturally, Woodhull was disappointed. Several times during the past week mounted partisans had been sighted, although the Confederates had kept well beyond the range of the *Cimarron's* guns. If he were allowed to keep the *Governor Milton*, Woodhull wrote Captain Godon that he wanted to send her up the small tributary streams to check on the strength of these patrols and destroy them if possible.⁵¹ This dispatch was given to the master of the *Neptune*. But because of other commitments the navy was unable to listen to Commander Woodhull's plea.

49. *Ibid.*, 398.

50. *Ibid.*, 406. The 24-pounders were transferred to the *Cimarron*, while fuel and provisions to last for a week were placed aboard the *Governor Milton*. For protection on her run up the coast, the crew of the prize steamer would rely on one of the *Cimarron's* 12-pounder boat howitzers.

51. *Ibid.*, 406-407. The *Neptune* had reached the St. Johns on the 21st. Woodhull turned out working parties to load the steamer with lumber and a number of other "valuable articles" which had fallen into the Federals' hands at Mayport Mills.