"Digging All Night and Fighting All Day"

The Civil War Siege of
SPANISH FORT
and the Mobile Campaign, 1865

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SB

For my dad, Ken Brueske, and my uncles Raymond and Franklin.
I wish you guys were all still here to read this book.

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by Hal Jespersen

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Preface

When historians discuss the Civil War in the winter and spring of 1865, they understandably tend to focus on the events transpiring between the principal armies in Virginia and the Carolinas. Comparatively speaking, few books have been written on the 1865 Mobile campaign, and a dedicated book has never told the story of the often-overlooked siege of Spanish Fort.

The History of the Campaign of Mobile; including the cooperative operations of Gen. Wilson's Cavalry in Alabama (1867) by U.S. Brig. Gen. C. C. Andrews, a participant in the campaign, is a valuable primary source overview. Andrews incorporated reports and accounts from the commanding officers from both sides of the conflict. Published in 1867, the events were fresh on the minds of the participants who contributed accounts to Andrews. This book persists as the foundation upon which historians have built and expanded.

A hundred and twenty-four years after Andrews's book was published, Arthur Bergeron produced *Confederate Mobile* (1991). Bergeron's well-researched book provides an overview of Mobile's Confederate-controlled era. He succeeds in illustrating Mobile's continual importance after the South's loss in the battle of Mobile Bay. However, in its 198 pages, Bergeron's book dedicates only one 19-page chapter to the Mobile campaign.

Two years later came Chester Hearn's *Mobile Bay and the Mobile Campaign* (1993). As the title implies, Hearn's book examines the 1864 battle of Mobile Bay and the 1865 Mobile campaign. However, Hearn focuses most of his attention on the battle of Mobile Bay. He does an excellent job of pointing out that the siege of Mobile came late in the war when the technological and tactical nature of the war had evolved. Hearn asserts that the campaign foreshadowed the future of warfare. He reveals how ironclads, submarines, torpedoes, land mines, hand

grenades, advanced rifled artillery and repeating rifles, coordinated amphibious assaults, elaborate earthen fortifications, instantaneous electronic battlefield reports via telegraph, and skilled deployment of troops were utilized. Hearn's account however, provides only scant detail on Spanish Fort.

In *Mobile, 1865: Last Stand of the Confederacy* (2001), Sean Michael O'Brien chronicles the final Union efforts to capture Mobile. O'Brien concludes that this campaign was "completely unnecessary." He argues that Mobile's significance had already been "neutralized" with the Federal capture of the bay. O'Brien cites Grant's hindsight assessment that the campaign needlessly cost lives on both sides. While it is true that an earlier capture of the city might have altered the course of the war, O'Brien fails to recognize the city's continued significance after the battle of Mobile Bay. The city's logistical importance in 1865, however, made it an essential place for the Confederates to defend and the Federals to attack. *Mobile, 1865* provides a good overview of the Mobile campaign. However, those wanting more on tactics and the battles themselves will likely be frustrated by the lack of attention to detail.[1]

At only 89 pages, John C. Waugh's *Last Stand at Mobile* (2001) offers a brief overview of the battle of Mobile Bay and the 1865 Mobile campaign. This narrative is a concise account of the fighting around Mobile. It is not, however, an in-depth study. Only eight pages cover the events that unfolded at Spanish Fort.

Russell W. Blount's *Besieged, Mobile* (2015) provides an overview of the Mobile campaign. The book, however, is not an in-depth campaign study. Blount delivers a concise account but references only a small number of primary sources. Like O'Brien, Blount fails to acknowledge the logistical importance of Mobile late in the war when Union forces planned their expedition.

Christopher McIlwain's *Civil War Alabama* (2016) dedicates attention to the political history and understanding of the war's course and consequences in Alabama. McIlwain admittedly omits a detailed analysis of critical military components. He diminishes the siege to a lone sentence, "Canby was basically unmolested during his pounding, thirteen-day siege of Spanish Fort." This book, however, will show that the defense of Spanish Fort was more substantial than McIlwain suggests.[2]

John Sledge's *These Rugged Days: Alabama in the Civil War* (2017) provides a detailed study of the war in Alabama. Sledge's book is a must-read for anyone seeking an overview of Alabama's Civil War history. It is an excellent guide to the

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1 Sean O'Brien, *Mobile, 1865: Last Stand of the Confederacy* (Santa Monica, 2001), 233–234.

2 Christopher L. McIlwain, *Civil War Alabama* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2016), 262.

military actions occurring within the state. Sledge admittedly writes for a general audience and does not bog down the casual reader with tedious details regarding troop dispositions. Despite lacking original maps, Sledge delivers a well-written narrative history of Alabama's Civil War events, including a 22-page chapter on the Mobile campaign.

My first writing venture, *The Last Siege: The Mobile Campaign, Alabama 1865* (2018), presented an overview of the 1865 campaign for Mobile. *The Last Siege* and the afore mentioned books covered Spanish Fort to varying degrees. *"Digging All Night and Fighting All Day,"* however, is the first dedicated, detailed, and objective study of the siege of Spanish Fort, the events leading up to it, and its aftermath, which led to the final Confederate surrender east of the Mississippi River.

This book also seeks to illuminate the leadership of Spanish Fort's commander, Randall Lee Gibson, the unlikely 33-year-old Southern general who, at the beginning of the war, had no military experience. Gibson, nevertheless, developed into a distinguished and battle-hardened leader. As Confederate Maj. Gen. Dabney H. Maury put it: "General Randall L. Gibson had been in action in the Western army. He it was who closed an honorable record by his masterly command of the defenses near Spanish Fort, on the eastern shore of Mobile Bay, in the last great battle of the war between the States." At Spanish Fort, he led a garrison that resisted a Federal force that outnumbered his own ten to one. Maury declared Gibson's nearly two-week defense of Spanish Fort "one of the most spirited defenses of the war."[3]

As the late historian Richard Sommers once jokingly pointed out, the defense of Spanish Fort and Fort Blakeley enabled Mobile to hold out even longer than Richmond, the Confederate capital. The siege of Spanish Fort, indeed, ended up being one of the last battles of the Civil War. It proved to be an intense, pitched battle between two armies vastly different in size. The struggle occurred on the rough and uneven bluffs of Mobile Bay's eastern shore, mainly by veterans of the principal battles of the Western theater. Maury noted that these men "brought to it the experience of four years of incessant conflict, and in the attack and defense of that place demonstrated every offensive and defensive art then known to war." It was an intense and bloody siege, rife with acts of heroism that rivaled any battle of the war.[4]

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3 Dabney H. Maury, *Recollections of a Virginian in the Mexican, Indian, and Civil Wars* (New York, 1894), 149; Dabney H. Maury, "Defence of Mobile in 1865," *Southern Historical Society Papers*, vol. 3, no. 1 (Jan. 1877): 7.

4 Maury, "Defence of Spanish Fort," 130.

The battlefield now lies within a peaceful, suburban neighborhood known as Spanish Fort Estates. It is hard to imagine this suburban enclave being the former scene of such a desperate struggle. Sadly, much of the fort and earthworks have long since been destroyed, yet some traces remain discernible. Driving through Spanish Fort Estates, one can still see eroded breastworks in some yards. Over the years, property owners of the critical locations of the siege have allowed me to explore the same terrain and earthwork remnants where thousands of men fought and died nearly 160 years ago. There is no better way to experience faint, momentary glimpses of the past. Relic hunters, some of whom have scoured the battlefield for nearly 50 years, have shared valuable insight with me. Fort McDermott, the Confederate's most vital position, is maintained by the local Admiral Semmes Camp 11 of the Sons of Confederate Veterans and is open to the public. Also, the scene of the Federal assault is now a public green space complete with hiking trails. Old Spanish Fort, the Red Fort, and U.S. Battery #22 are on private property but remain in good condition.

Maury notes that the Spanish first built and occupied this earthen fort during the colonial period. Though it has long been held that the Spanish first erected the fort, no documentation of its construction during the 1780–1813 period has surfaced in Spanish archives. Whatever the exact origin of the name in the area's colonial days, the term Spanish Fort became etched in Civil War history due to what happened there in the spring of 1865. My intent in writing this book is to provide an impartial study that sheds further light on the struggle between the Union and Confederate armies during this understudied battle.[5]

Acknowledgments

5 See Appendix 12 for more information on the origins of Spanish Fort. Maury, "Defence of Spanish Fort," 133.

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"The defense of Spanish Fort was the last death grapple of the veterans of the Confederate and Federal armies."

— Major General Dabney H. Maury,
Confederate Commander of the District of the Gulf[1]

1 Dabney H. Maury, "Defence of Spanish Fort—Some Comment by the Confederate Commander on Mr. P. D. Stephenson's Article," *Southern Historical Society Papers* 39, no. 1, (Apr. 1914): 130.

Key Commanders Referenced

Confederates

Lt. Gen. Richard S. Taylor, commander, Department of
Alabama, Mississippi, and East Louisiana

Maj. Gen. Dabney H. Maury, commander, District of the Gulf

Commodore Ebenezer Farrand, commander of Mobile's naval squadron

Brig. Gen. John R. St. Liddell, commander, Eastern Division of the
District of the Gulf, Commanding Officer of Fort Blakeley

Brig. Gen. Randall L. Gibson, commander of Spanish Fort

Brig. Gen. James T. Holtzclaw, commander,
left wing of Spanish Fort (3/31–4/8/65)

Brig. Gen. Bryan M. Thomas, commander,
left wing of Spanish Fort (3/26–3/31/65)

Col. Isaac W. Patton, Spanish Fort's Chief of Artillery

Lt. Col. Philip B. Spence, commander, 12th Regiment Mississippi Cavalry

Federals

Maj. Gen. Edward R. S. Canby, commander,
Military Division of West Mississippi

Acting Rear Adm. Henry K. Thatcher, commander, Western Gulf Squadron

Maj. Gen. Gordon Granger, commander, XIII Army Corps

Maj. Gen. A. J. Smith, commander, XVI Army Corps

Brig. Gen. Eugene A. Carr, commander, Third Division, XVI Army Corps

Col. James L. Geddes, commander, Third Brigade, Third Division

Brig. Gen. Cyrus B. Comstock, Aide-de-Camp to General Canby

Brig. Gen. James C. Veatch, commander, First Division, XIII Army Corps

Prologue

Battle of Mobile Bay, August 1864

Admiral David Farragut, commander of the U.S. West Gulf Blockading Squadron, struggled during the first three years of the war to stop the Confederate blockade-running in and out of Mobile Bay. So, on August 5, 1864, he launched what became known as the battle of Mobile Bay. The Federals defeated and captured the Confederate flotilla along with Forts Morgan, Gaines, and Powell, thus sealing the mouth of Mobile Bay and ending the blockade running.[1]

The capture of the forts at the entrance of Mobile Bay effectively ended the running of the Confederate blockade. Despite the significant victory, the city of Mobile remained in Confederate hands. As one U.S. Army officer summed it up: "The two great guards to Mobile Bay had fallen, the gallant fleet rode safely in the harbor, but the city of Mobile and its splendid land defenses did not yield."[2]

At the time of the battle, the Confederates had depleted Mobile's garrison to reinforce their armies elsewhere. The city had strong lines of earthen fortifications, yet few soldiers were available to defend them. Had the Federals known how few men defended Mobile, they probably could have captured the city with minimal loss.[3]

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1 Benjamin C. Truman, "The War in the Southwest," *New York Times*, Feb. 28, 1865, 1.

2 Truman, "The War in the Southwest."

3 Titus M. Coan to Hattie Coan, Jan. 14, 1865, Titus Munson Coan Papers, New York Historical Society, hereafter Letter, TNC to HC, Jan. 14, 1865; Arthur Bergeron, *Confederate Mobile* (Jackson, MS, 1991), 196; Christopher C. Andrews, *History of the Campaign of Mobile* (New York, 1867), 20.

Maury claimed that when the Federals commenced their attack upon the defenses of the lower bay in August of 1864, there were hardly any troops in Mobile's land defenses. "Even the artillery garrisons, consisting of the 1st Louisiana artillery and the 1st Mississippi light artillery, had been called away by General Stephen D. Lee to aid in repulsing the column which, under Maj. Gen. A. J. Smith had advanced from Memphis as far as Harrisburg," he remembered. Maury later speculated that with a demonstration by Farragut's fleet on the city artillery batteries, U.S. forces could have successfully landed near Dog River and then captured Mobile without severe loss.[4]

On August 15, 1864, Farragut performed a reconnaissance in the USS *Metacomet* within 3 ½ miles of Mobile. The strong defenses protecting the city, the main channel wholly obstructed, and a row of piles guarded by mighty forts deterred him. A naval attack alone could never take Mobile. Their drafts restricted Farragut's larger warships to the bar channel and the lower fleet anchorage, so they could not get within 20 miles of the barriers. The obstructions could not be removed under heavy fire from the Confederate batteries. Even the fleet's shallow draft ironclad river monitors could not reach the city of Mobile.[5]

With the surrender of Fort Morgan, Farragut felt he had accomplished enough for the time being. After all, he had sealed the bay to blockade running, his fleet enjoyed free movement throughout most of Mobile Bay, and he held the forts at the mouth of the bay. He determined that capturing the city itself was unnecessary and would prove difficult to hold with Granger's small land force. "If I did not think Mobile would be an elephant to hold," he stated, "I would send up the light-draft ironclads and try that city, but I fear we are not in a condition to hold it." Major General Edward Richard Sprigg Canby, commander of the U.S. Military Division of West Mississippi, concurred. He also felt it "unwise" to attack Mobile directly until he had a larger force. Farragut estimated that 20,000–30,000 men were needed to take the city. In fact, at that time, half that number might have been able to march up the bay's western shore and capture the city with little resistance.[6]

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4 Dabney H. Maury, "Souvenirs of the War," *New Orleans Daily Crescent*, Mar. 19, 1866, 4.

5 United States War Department, *Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies in the War of the Rebellion*, Series 1, vol. 21, pp. 529–530, 612, hereafter cited as *ORN*. All references are to Series 1 unless otherwise noted; Viktor Von Scheliha, *A Treatise on Coast-Defence: Based on the Experience Gained by Officers of the Corps of Engineers of the Army of the Confederate States* (London, 1868), 157. Monitors were ironclad warships with revolving turrets. They were designed for use in shallow harbors and rivers.

6 Loyall Farragut, *The Life of David Glasgow Farragut, First Admiral of the United States Navy, Embodying His Journal and Letters* (New York, 1879), 468–470; Andrews, *Campaign of Mobile*, 20; *ORN* 21, 523, 530, 612.
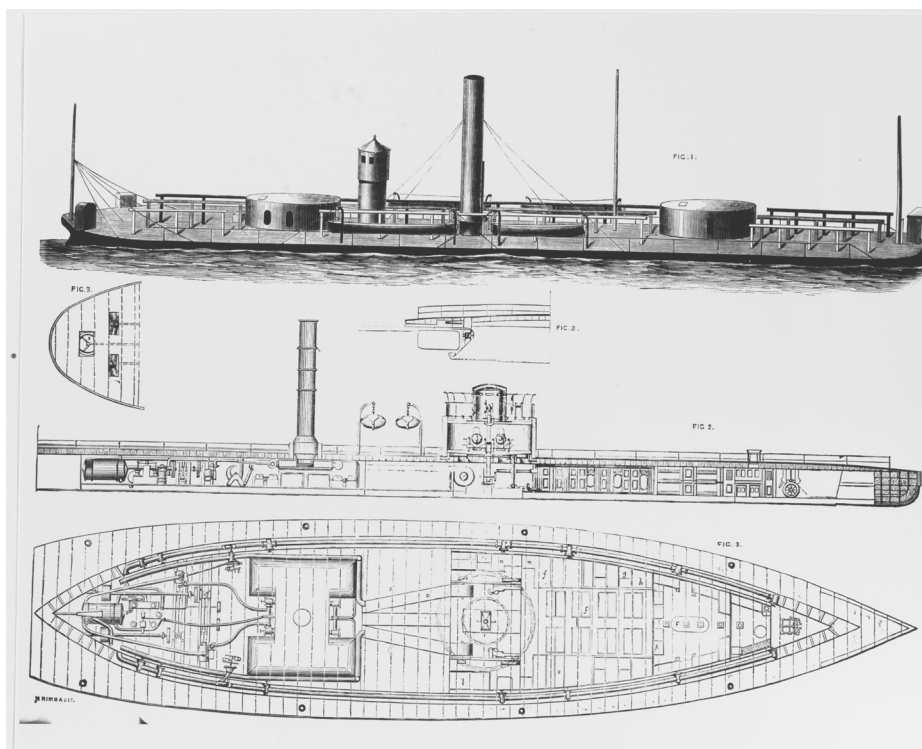
Thatcher's fleet utilized iron-clad river monitors to navigate the shallow waters of upper Mobile Bay. *Naval History and Heritage Command*

As more troops could not be spared, the U.S. naval fleet in Mobile Bay maintained a menacing presence in sight of the Confederates. Nearly eight months would pass before enough soldiers were available to launch the land campaign for Mobile. By that time, the Southerners could send in reinforcements to meet the threat from Canby's forces. Next to Richmond, Mobile endured as the second-largest city under Confederate control in 1865.[7]

Strategic Importance of Mobile

Why did General-in-Chief Ulysses S. Grant still deem the capture of Mobile important after the battle of Mobile Bay? The answer lies principally with the city's

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7 Charles J. Allen, *"Some Account and Recollections of the Operations Against the City of Mobile and Its Defences, 1864 and 1865," Glimpses of the Nation's Struggle—A Series of Papers Read Before the Minnesota Commandery of the Military Order of the Loyal Legion of the United States* (St. Paul, MN, 1887), 68–69; Andrews, *Campaign of Mobile*, 20.

value as a logistical center, with access to two navigable rivers and two principal railroads linking the Alabama-Mississippi theater to the Georgia-Carolinas theater. Federal authorities wanted to occupy southern and central Alabama, with Montgomery as the ultimate objective point of the 1865 invasion of Alabama. With its year-round river and railroad communication into the heart of Alabama, capturing Mobile would greatly facilitate that objective. Mobile remained essential for the Confederates to defend and the Federals to attack. The loss of Mobile would not only further dampen the Confederacy's waning morale but also deal it a mighty military blow.

Indeed, the Mobile & Ohio and the Mobile & Great Northern Railroads were essential to moving Confederate forces and supplies throughout Mississippi, Alabama, and much of Georgia. The Mobile & Great Northern Railroad terminus was opposite Mobile on Mobile Bay's eastern shore. This rail line connected to the Alabama & Florida Railroad at Pollard, Alabama, providing Mobile rail access to Montgomery and beyond. The Mobile & Ohio Railroad (M&O) served as the primary supply line for Gen. John B. Hood's Tennessee campaign. The M&O remained crucial to the Confederate war effort throughout the conflict. Federal raiding parties damaged the M&O line during Maj. Gen William T. Sherman's Meridian campaign in early 1864, and again by Brig. Gen. Benjamin H. Grierson's U.S. Cavalry raid later in December of that year. However, the Confederates repaired it in time to send the Mobile garrison reinforcements and supplies. Mobile's railroad access still allowed the uninterrupted transportation of much-needed reinforcements and ordnance stores in early 1865.[8]

Mobile's location at the outlet of one of the most considerable river systems in the South made its possession important to both sides. The Mobile River, formed by the merger of the Alabama and Tombigbee, flows into the bay in front of the city. The Tombigbee and Alabama Rivers were essential to the Confederacy, especially as large steamers navigated them to Montgomery. The Federals still considered the capture of Mobile, with its year-round railroad and river access into the interior, one of the keys to subduing the state of Alabama and the Deep South. "In our possession, the entire territory of Middle and Northern Alabama and Middle and Northern Mississippi is at our mercy," the *New York Times* reported.[9]

8 Andrews, *Campaign of Mobile*, v, 9, 32; Lucius F. Hubbard, "Civil War Papers," 618, Library of Congress; Allen, "Operations Against the City of Mobile," 55; Andrews, *Campaign of Mobile*, 10; *ORN* 22, 41; "Grierson's Great Raid," *New Orleans Times Picayune*, Jan. 20, 1865, 1; United States War Department, *War of the Rebellion: Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, Series 1, vol. 45, part 2, p. 753, hereafter cited as *ORA*. All references are to Series 1 unless otherwise noted.

9 Andrews, *Campaign of Mobile*, 9; Allen, *Operations against the City of Mobile*, 55; "The War in the Southwest," *New York Times*, Feb. 26, 1865.

Mobile Bay Area
1865
0   miles   8
Hal Jespersen

Chickasaw R.

MOBILE & OHIO RR

Mobile R.

Grand Bay

Tensas R.

Fort Blakely

Spring Hill • Mobile

Bty Tracy
Bty Huger

Blakely R.

Halls Mill •

PINTO ISL.

Spanish Fort

Batteries

D'Olive Cr.

Fort Sidney
Johnston

obstructions

• Village

Dog
R.

RAGGED
POINT

• Deer Park

• Alabama
City

Bellefontaine •

GREAT
POINT
CLEAR

Dannelly's
Mills ■

Fish R.

Mobile Bay

Weeks
Bay

Fowl R.

CEDAR
POINT

Grants Pass

Bon Secour
Bay

Fort Powell

DAUPHIN ISL.

Fort Gaines

PELICAN ISL.

Fort Morgan

Gulf of Mexico

After the battle of Nashville on December 15–16, 1864, the Federals could finally spare enough troops and vessels to attack Mobile. Even though the Confederates could no longer use the city as a port, U.S. Maj. Gen. Henry Halleck

still recognized its logistical value. He believed Mobile would make an ideal base to operate against Selma and Montgomery, where the Southerners had a large stockpile of supplies and ammunition. Halleck figured the war's end could be accelerated by destroying the railroads in the region and capturing Selma. He also knew an invasion of south Alabama "would prevent any of Hood's force from being sent against Sherman, and the capture of Selma would be as disastrous to the enemy as that of Atlanta." He advocated invading Alabama from the south because, as he put it: "Mobile was less swampy, and, moreover, the operating army could be supplied by steamers on the Alabama River." On December 30, 1864, he suggested to Grant to send elements of the Army of the Cumberland to the Gulf Coast to aid Canby in taking Mobile.[10]

Grant—who had wanted to take Mobile earlier in the war—agreed with Halleck's assessment. Taking Mobile would hasten the end of the war as he saw it. On January 18, 1865, he ordered Canby to move against Mobile, Montgomery, and Selma and destroy roads, machine shops, and anything useful to the Confederate war effort. Grant also ordered Maj. Gen. James H. Wilson to launch the largest cavalry raid the continent had ever seen from Tennessee into central Alabama. Capturing the Confederacy's military-industrial complex at Selma remained the ultimate objective. Wilson's raid and Canby's expedition were mutually supportive operations. Wilson's cavalry incursion would keep Lt. Gen. Nathan B. Forrest occupied, thus preventing his cavalry command from reinforcing Maury at Mobile.[11]

Mobile had long been a source of frustration to the Federals—Mobile and Galveston were the last Gulf Coast cities of significance to fly the Confederate flag—yet it became one of the last major cities of the South to feel the heavy hand of war. That would not have been the case had Grant had his way earlier in the war. Ever since the fall of Vicksburg in the summer of 1863, Grant wanted to capture Mobile to prevent it from benefiting the Confederacy as a blockade-running port; by the following year, he also sought access to Mobile's rail lines and rivers to supply Sherman's invasion of Georgia.[12]

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10 *ORA* 45, pt. 2, 419–420.

11 George S. Waterman, "Afloat-Afield-Afloat," *Confederate Veteran* VII, (Nov. 1899): 490; Ulysses S. Grant, *The Personal Memoirs of U. S. Grant*, vol.2 (Mount MacGregor, New York, 1885), 583; James H. Wilson, *Under the Old Flag; Recollections of Military Operations in the War for the Union, the Spanish War, the Boxer Rebellion, Etc.*, vol. II (New York, 1912), 237–238. Wilson's book indicates Selma as the second largest military industrial base in the Confederacy next to the Tredegar Iron Works in Richmond, Virginia.

12 Phillip D. Stephenson, "Defence of Spanish Fort," *Southern Historical Society* 3, no. 1 (Jan. 1877): 123; Grant, *The Personal Memoirs of U. S. Grant*, 2:545–548, 584.

After capturing Vicksburg, Grant urged his superiors to allow him to do more before the Southerners could recover, and "while important points might be captured without bloodshed." Grant suggested a campaign against Mobile to then General-in-Chief Halleck, starting from Lake Pontchartrain. Halleck declined Grant's request, reasoning that the 'possession of the trans-Mississippi region was a more significant priority than moving against Mobile. Instead, Grant remained on the defensive as he had been a year before in Tennessee.[13]

 Had Grant been allowed to attack Mobile earlier, some argue that the bloody battles around Chattanooga would never have occurred, nor would Sherman have had the arduous and costly task of fighting his way to Atlanta. "It would have been an easy thing to capture Mobile at the time I proposed to go there. Having that as a base of operations, troops could have been thrown into the interior to operate against General Bragg's army," Grant later lamented. The Confederate forces in the interior depended on supplies shipped in from the port of Mobile. Grant believed Bragg would have had to detach portions of his forces to meet this threat in his rear. If he had not done this, the Federal army from Mobile could have inflicted inestimable damage upon much of the region. Convinced capturing Mobile would hasten the end of the war, he continued to push the importance of capturing the city. Halleck, however, refused all his requests.[14]

Maury's recollections support Grant's notion that taking Mobile would have been easier earlier in the war. The city had been put in a state of defense from the onset of the war. Maury, however, remarked that in May of 1863, the defenses around Mobile were "not nearly completed." With the fall of Vicksburg, the anticipation of Grant's forces attacking Mobile aroused anxiety. Confederate authorities tried to provide enslaved laborers to complete and strengthen the defenses around the city. By the winter of 1863, the earthen fortifications were so strong that some officials estimated a garrison of 10,000 troops in them would compel the enemy to devote 40,000 troops and ninety days to capture the place. One Federal officer even declared the earthworks around Richmond "trifling compared with the fortification to protect Mobile."[15]

Though short-handed, the extra time allowed Maury to strengthen his defenses until the Federal advance in 1865. Mobile became the best-fortified city in the Confederacy next to Richmond. However, immediately after the battle of Nashville,

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13 *Personal Memoirs of U. S. Grant*, 2:340–341.

14 Isaac H. Elliott, *History of the Thirty-Third Regiment Illinois Veteran Volunteer Infantry* (Gibson, IL, 1902), 48; *Personal Memoirs of U. S. Grant*, 2:340–341.

15 Clement A. Evans, *Confederate Military History: A Library of Confederate States History*, vol. VII (Atlanta, GA, 1899), 43; Maury, "Souvenirs of the War," 4.
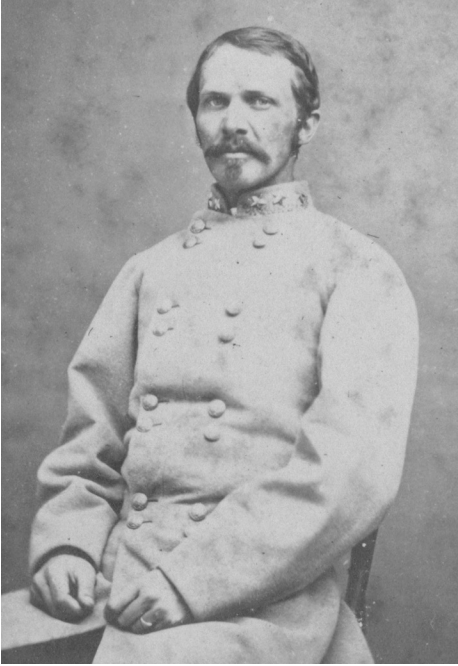
Brigadier General Randall Lee Gibson, commander, Spanish Fort. *Library of Congress*

U.S. forces in the West finally turned their attention toward Mobile.[16]

After the devastating setback at Nashville, Confederate Lt. Gen. Richard S. Taylor, the commander of the Department of Alabama, Mississippi, and East Louisiana, realized the South had little hope of winning the war. Nevertheless, he remained resolute in trying to protract the struggle to secure the best terms possible at the negotiating table. "The duty of a soldier in the field is simple— to fight until stopped by the civil arm of his government, or his government has ceased to exist," Taylor asserted in his memoir. The men who fought at Spanish Fort demonstrated this commitment to duty. They were as stubborn and gallant as soldiers anywhere and performed their duty as if the war's outcome depended on them.[17]

Randall L. Gibson exemplified this fierce determination. In 1861, he was a young, highly educated, wealthy, well-connected Louisiana lawyer and a slave-owning planter. He lost his bid for a congressional seat in Louisiana's newly formed secessionist state government. The following month, he enlisted in the Louisiana state forces and soon became an officer in the 1st Louisiana Regular Artillery Regiment. In April, the Confederate Army fired on Fort Sumter, thus beginning the Civil War. Little did Gibson know the critical role he would play at Spanish Fort, one of the war's last battles.[18]

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16 Maury, "Souvenirs of the War," 4; "The Attack on Mobile," *New York Times*, Apr. 7, 1865, 1.

17 Richard Taylor, *Destruction and Reconstruction: Personal Experiences of the Late War* (New York, 1879), 206, 218; Wilson, *Under the Old Flag*, 237–238; "In Mobile Bay," *Osage City* [KS] *Free Press*, Nov. 29, 1888, 2. Taylor was the son of former President Zachary Taylor.

18 Mary G. McBride, *Randall Lee Gibson of Louisiana: Confederate General and New South Reformer* (Baton Rouge, LA, 2007), 60, 66–68. McBride's biography is suggested for further reading. Before joining the Confederate Army, Gibson sold his 31 slaves, livestock, and cane crop to his father Tobias.

Chapter 1

"Time Is Everything to Us Now"

Confederates

*O*n May 19, 1863, Maj. Gen. Dabney H. Maury took command of the District of the Gulf with headquarters at Mobile. The Confederate military leadership burdened the 43-year-old with the monumental task of leading the defense of the Mobile Bay area. He was, however, well qualified for the job. He was born into a prominent Fredericksburg, Virginia family. His uncle, Matthew Maury, the noted oceanographer and naval cartographer, raised him after his father died of yellow fever. A West Pointer, Maury graduated in 1846 with Civil War notables such as Confederate generals Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson, A. P. Hill, George Pickett, and future U.S. General George McClellan—a close friend. He served in the Mexican War and remained in the U.S. Army until the Civil War. Before he arrived in Mobile, the Virginian had commanded divisions in the Pea Ridge, Iuka, and Corinth battles. President Jefferson Davis wanted Maury at Mobile, presumably for his experience supervising heavy artillery against gunboats at Vicksburg.[1]

Soon after Maury assumed command at Mobile, Lt. Col. Arthur James Lyon Fremantle of the British Army visited the city on his tour of the Confederacy. While sightseeing the defenses of Mobile Bay, the ubiquitous Englishman overheard Maury remark: "Well, I never should have believed that I could have lived to see the day in

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1 Bergeron, *Confederate Mobile*, 28–29; Ezra J. Warner, *Generals in Gray: Lives of the Confederate Commanders* (Baton Rouge, LA, 1959), 215–216; Taylor, *Destruction and Reconstruction*, 202.

Major General Dabney H. Maury, commander of the District of the Gulf.

Library of Congress

which I would detest that old [U.S.] flag." Fremantle described Maury as a "very gentlemanlike and intelligent but diminutive Virginian."[2]

Indeed, he was small—only about five feet three inches tall. Some of his men called him "puss in boots" because his large cavalry boots seemed to cover a good portion of his person. Despite his diminutive appearance, many regarded him as a gallant and efficient leader.[3]

On August 15, 1864, Lieutenant General Taylor took command of the Department of Alabama, Mississippi, and East Louisiana, and thus Maury's District of the Gulf. Taylor described Maury as "intelligent, upright, and devoted to duty." Taylor noted that he had gained the respect and confidence of the people of Mobile, enabling him to supplement his force with the local militia. He recalled: "It was a great comfort to find an able officer in this responsible position, who not only adopted my plans but improved and executed them."[4]

Lieutenant Colonel James M. Williams, 21st Alabama, did not share Taylor's sentiments. Williams had evacuated the dangerously exposed Fort Powell to save his garrison after Farragut's fleet entered the bay in August 1864. Disgusted with Williams's decision, Maury temporarily removed him from command. Disgruntled by what he perceived as unjust treatment, Williams harbored resentment toward his commander. In an October 1864 letter to his wife, he grumbled: "I am coming to

2 Sir A. Fremantle, *The Fremantle Diary: Being the Journal of Lieutenant Colonel James Arthur Lyon Fremantle, Coldstream Guards, on His Three Months in the Southern States* (London, 1956), 103–104; Sidney Adair Smith and C. Carter Smith, eds., *Mobile: 1861-1865* (Chicago, 1964), 19.

3 Philip Daingerfield Stephenson, *The Civil War Memoir of Philip Daingerfield Stephenson, D. D.: Private, Company K, 13th Arkansas Volunteer Infantry, and Loader, Piece No. 4, 5th Company, Washington Artillery, Army of Tennessee, CSA*, ed. Nathaniel C. Hughes (Conway, 1995), 358359.

4 Taylor, *Destruction and Reconstruction*, 202.

Lieutenant General Richard Taylor, commander of the Department of Alabama, Mississippi, and East Louisiana. *Library of Congress*

Gen. Dick Taylor

have a perfect contempt for the corrupt and imbecile administration of our military department here." In a letter written a few months later, Williams claimed that Maury had "been irreverently dubbed the Lord of Panic" by some for his belief that Mobile would be attacked at any moment.[5]

Fall 1864

Despite Williams's cynicism, intelligence reports made it clear to Maury that Mobile would be next in line for an attack. He knew that grand-scale preparations were being made to capture the city. After all, it was the only Gulf Coast city of magnitude remaining under Confederate control, east of the Mississippi River. Within sight of the Confederate camps, Federal gunboats anchored in Mobile Bay were constant reminders of the pending attack. Maury did all within his power to prepare for the Federals. "We could only bide the time when he was ready to move inland," remembered Brig. Gen. St. John R. Liddell, commander of the Eastern Division of the District of the Gulf. Meanwhile, the Graybacks kept throwing up defensive earthworks and preparing to give the U.S. Army a "warm reception."[6]

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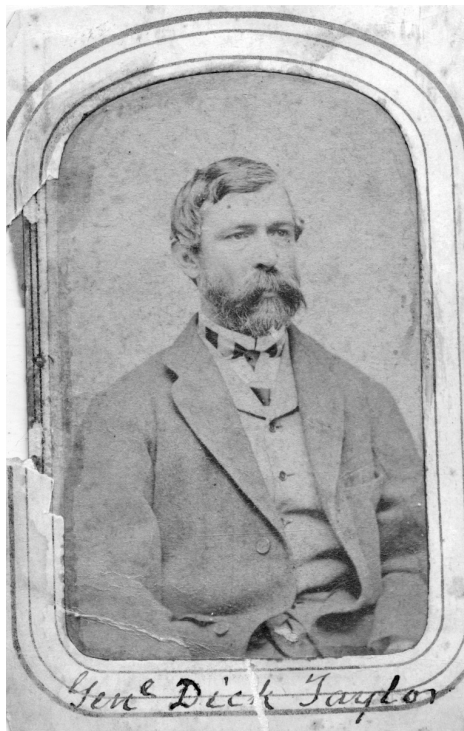
5 James M. Williams, *From That Terrible Field: Civil War Letters of James M. Williams, Twenty-first Alabama Infantry Volunteers*, ed. John Kent Folmar (Tuscaloosa, 1981), 147,157. Maury temporarily relieved Williams of command after the battle of Mobile Bay for evacuating Fort Powell. Maury felt Williams prematurely retreated, that he should have continued to fight his guns despite being greatly exposed to the Federal gunboats in his rear in Mobile Bay. The military court exonerated Williams, but he evidently resented Maury for the treatment he had received.

6 William R. Plum, LL. B., *The Military Telegraph During the Civil War in the United States: with an Exposition of Ancient and Modern Means of Communication, and of the Federal and Confederate Cipher System; also a Running Account of the War Between the States* (Chicago1882), 297; St. John R. Liddell, *Liddell's Record*, ed. Nathaniel C. Hughes (Baton Rouge, LA, 1985), 189.
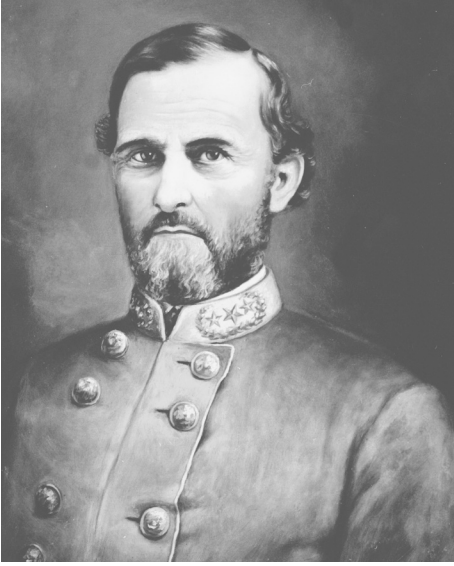
Brigadier General St. John Richardson Liddell, commander of the Eastern Division of the Gulf District. *Confederate Memorial Hall*

Shortly after the battle of Mobile Bay, Maury assigned Liddell, 50 years old, the command of the Eastern Division in September of 1864 with headquarters at Blakeley. Liddell owned a plantation near Harrisonburg, Louisiana, before the war. He had briefly attended West Point before being removed in 1835 for poor academics and an alleged fight with two classmates. Although he lacked extensive military training, Liddell proved to be a capable and hard-nosed brigade and division commander at Chickamauga, Perryville, Murfreesboro, Missionary Ridge, and Red River. His biographer Nathaniel C. Hughes described him as "active and often violent, a doer, a fully engaged human being." Maury entrusted him with affairs on the eastern shore of Mobile Bay in preparation for Canby's expected expedition.[7]

After U.S. forces captured the lower defenses of Mobile Bay in August 1864, the Graybacks anticipated an attack on the city. In the months preceding the campaign for Mobile, Confederate authorities continued to fortify their defenses and send in reinforcements to the city. Though some considered Mobile's western shore defenses as strong as any place in the South, engineers recognized the vulnerability of the eastern shore. They determined strong land fortifications on the bluffs of the Blakeley River were needed to protect the two existing artillery batteries, Huger (pronounced *HU-gee*) and Tracey. The two batteries were located in the marsh at the Apalachee and Blakeley Rivers junction to prevent the U.S. fleet from gaining access to the rivers. The land fortifications would also be used to threaten Federal columns advancing from the east.

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7 Warner, *Generals in Gray*, 187; Liddell & Hughes, *Liddell's Record*, 8; "U.S. Federal Census, 1860, Slave Schedules," FamilySearch, accessed February 7, 2023, https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:33S7-9BSC-9CFW?i=10&cc=3161105&personaUrl=%2Fark%3A%2F61903%2F1%3A1%3AWK27-WW6Z. In 1860, Liddell enslaved 88 people in Catahoula Parish, Louisiana.

Recognizing the imminent threat facing Mobile, Taylor sent the highly regarded Col. Samuel Lockett, the chief engineer for the Department of Alabama, Mississippi, and East Louisiana, to oversee the construction of the defenses. An 1859 graduate of West Point, Lockett designed Vicksburg's defenses, where he surrendered with the garrison on July 4, 1863. The two principal earthen fortifications in Baldwin County—Spanish Fort and Fort Blakeley—were thus hurriedly thrown up under his supervision.[8]

Besides Fort Gaines and Fort Morgan, Mobile's fortifications were made of earth. With advancements in artillery, earthen fortifications offered better protection than masonry. In his book *Treatise on Coast Defense*, Mobile's chief engineer, Viktor Von Scheliha, argued: "Earth, especially Sand-works, properly constructed, is a better protection against Modern Artillery than permanent Fortifications built on the old plan." Scheliha noted that when the U.S. Navy continually bombarded the earthen Fort Powell from February 22–March 2, 1864, "not a single gun had been dismounted, not a single traverse had been seriously damaged, nor had the parapet and the bomb-proof lost any of their strength, all damage done by the exploding shells being at once repaired by throwing sand-bags in the opened craters."[9]

Batteries Huger and Tracey were the first fortifications built near the eastern shore long before Colonel Lockett arrived in Mobile. One artillerist posted at Huger stated: "It is not such a place as I would select for a summer residence, but then it will do under the circumstances." The Confederates had long recognized that Federal vessels might attempt to pass up the Blakeley River or the Apalachee River and then come around through the Tensaw, arriving in Mobile. The two marsh batteries were built on low ground near the river to close this route, with piles driven for a foundation. At the Blakeley and Apalachee Rivers junction point, Huger featured four bastions and was open at the north end. Battery Tracey, an enclosed fort on the west side of the Apalachee River, was about 1,060 yards north of Huger. Huger was just over 3,100 yards from Spanish Fort, Tracey about 4,190 yards. To further obstruct access, piles were driven across the Apalachee and Blakeley Rivers; many torpedoes were anchored in different parts of the bay.[10]

8 "The Attack on Mobile," *New York Times*, Apr. 7, 1865, 1; Allen, "Operations against the City," 59, 69; *ORA* 45, pt. 2, 779–780; accessed Sep. 2, 2017, http://battleofchampionhill.org/lockett1.htm.

9 Viktor Von Scheliha, *A Treatise on Coast-defence: Based on the Experience Gained by Officers of the Corps of Engineers of the Army of the Confederate States* (London, 1868), 29, 36.

10 Mark Lyons to Amelia Horsler, Mar. 30, 1865, War Letters of Mark Lyons, Alabama Department of Archives and History, hereafter ML to AH, Mar. 30, 1865; Waterman, "Afloat-Afield-Afloat," 22; *Liddell's Records*, 190; Maury, "Defence of Spanish Fort," 133; Andrews, "Campaign of Mobile," 70–71. Period estimates of the distance from Huger and Tracey to Spanish Fort varied between 1700–2500 yards. Modern maps reveal the distance between Huger and Spanish Fort to be about 3,075 yards. A fort (Tracey) is a closed structure, while a battery (Huger) is open-backed.

Colonel Samuel Lockett, Chief Engineer, Department of Alabama, Mississippi, and East Louisiana. *Alabama Department of Archives and History*

The two marsh batteries supported each other and commanded the Apalachee and Blakeley Rivers. They boasted powerful artillery pieces. Huger featured 11 guns, including two massive 10-inch columbiads mounted in the center on a 25-foot high bombproof; Tracey had five 7-inch rifled guns.[11]

The prevailing reason for the two batteries' location was their distance from the hills on the eastern shore. In a January 12, 1865, letter to Confederate headquarters at Richmond, Lockett opined that these works should have been located closer to Fort Blakeley. Still, there had already been too much time and labor expended to justify abandoning them. "I have scrupulously avoided making any material alterations in work at this point," he explained, "as this policy has already been pursued almost to a ruinous extent, resulting in a great increase of expense and retardation of operations that long since should have been completed."[12]

Maury feared the U.S. Army might occupy the site of the 18th-century Spanish Fort and silence Huger and Tracey. His engineers decided to build a fortification there to protect the two river batteries from bombardment from the eastern shore and to threaten Federal columns that might advance in that vicinity from Pensacola, Fort Morgan, or other points from the east. On August 11, 1864, while the Federals besieged Fort Morgan at the bay's mouth, plans to construct earthen fortifications were pushed forward around the old Spanish Fort. The

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11 *ORA* 45, pt. 2, 779–780; Waterman, "Afloat-Afield-Afloat," 22; Gordon Thrasher, *Selma Brooke Guns of Mobile* (Ozark, AL, 2022), 4. The Selma Naval Gun Foundry and Ordnance Works logbook indicates they shipped a Brooke S-125, an 11-inch rifle for Battery Huger—the only one of its kind— to Mobile on March 17, 1865. It is not clear if the cannon made it to Huger.

12 *ORA* 45, pt. 2, 779–780.

Confederates built Fort Blakeley, about four miles upriver, to protect their line of communication with Spanish Fort and the two marsh batteries.[13]

On August 10, 1864, Col. John H. Gindrat proposed building the new and improved Spanish Fort around the remnants of the existing colonial fort; Scheliha wholeheartedly agreed. "A sufficient number of hands have arrived to justify us in making the most earnest endeavors at securing that important position permanently," Scheliha informed Gindrat the following day, "and, if time be allowed, there can be no doubt of our success." Gindrat supervised the construction of the fortifications under tremendous pressure. "Time is everything to us now, and we have to make the best use of the short respite the enemy seems willing to grant," Scheliha pointed out. "You know our wants as well as I do. Please push the work and call for any assistance you may require." Work began on Spanish Fort around August 19, 1864, about the same time Colonel Lockett arrived in Mobile.[14]

In early September, Gindrat assumed command of all engineering operations on the eastern shore, including Spanish Fort and Fort Blakeley, and the strengthening of the existing marsh batteries, Huger and Tracey. He worked tirelessly and with a sense of urgency. Within a month, his enslaved labor force had nearly built Redoubt 2 and commenced erecting Redoubt 3. They also cleared timber in front of and between these works to provide a clear field of fire. Gindrat reported that his laborers cut the timber for bombproofs and magazines.[15]

Maury and Lockett, however, determined no bombproofs should be constructed at the eastern shore forts in early October. Lockett reasoned the construction of bombproofs for the protection of the garrison to be "inexpedient" and would require more workforce than circumstances allowed. He believed the main attack on these works would be infantry and light artillery combined with a long-range bombardment from the gunboats in the bay, so bombproofs were not essential. Lockett reported to Richmond: "I have had no bombproofs for the garrison made, as I think experience in this district indicates very plainly that such temptations to the garrison to leave its post on the parapet are extremely dangerous, or, at least, of doubtful propriety."[16]

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13 Maury, "Defence of Spanish Fort,"133; *ORA* 39, pt. 2, 772; Allen, "Operations against the City of Mobile," 72. A line of communication refers to the route that connects an operating military unit with its supply base. Supplies and reinforcements are transported along the line of communication.

14 *ORA* 39, pt. 2, 772; Janet Hewitt, ed., *Supplement to the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, Part I, vol. 7 (Wilmington, NC, 1994), 940.

15 *ORA* 39, pt. 2, 815, 819, 842. A redoubt is a small fort, an enclosed defensive work. Bombproofs are underground shelters for protection against artillery fire.

16 *ORA* 39, pt. 3, 792; *ORA* 45, pt. 2, 779–780.

The Confederates built a heavy battery at Redoubt 1, also known as the old Spanish Fort. Designed to prevent gunboats from ascending the river and removing torpedoes and obstructions, Redoubt 1's commanding position over the Blakeley River made it nearly impossible for the U.S. Navy to reduce Batteries Huger and Tracey, which Scheliha believed were their most important works.

Fort McDermott (Redoubt 2) undoubtedly occupied the strongest position of the Spanish Fort's defenses. The Confederates built McDermott 800 yards away from Redoubt 1 on a 145-foot hill. The fort overlooked Redoubt 1, with an elevation difference of 58 feet. Engineers determined that Fort McDermott had to be fortified to prevent the U.S. Army from mounting artillery there and subduing Old Spanish Fort. Scheliha believed this lunette-shaped work to be the key to the whole position and could not be made too strong.[17]

Due to a shortage of labor, materials, and tools, strengthening the fortifications around Mobile posed a challenge. Concerned about the slow progress of the works around the city, Taylor made the controversial decision to send a detachment of United States Colored Troops (USCT), captured by Forrest in Tennessee, to be employed as laborers at Mobile. These soldiers of color, some of whom were once reportedly enslaved in Mobile, were dressed in standard-issue blue U.S. uniforms. [18]

Federal authorities considered the formerly enslaved men to be soldiers and expected them to be treated as prisoners of war. Under a flag of truce, Granger sent a letter of protest to Maury over the use of captured Black soldiers to labor upon the fortifications of Mobile. Granger threatened that an equal number of prisoners in their hands would be similarly employed if Maury allowed the practice to continue. Maury's response confirmed that 200 USCT prisoners captured by Forrest were laboring upon the fortifications of Mobile, "just as other slaves are and have been almost since the commencement of the war employed by both the Governments of the United States and the Confederate States." He made the Confederacy's position clear: they were legal property and not considered prisoners of war at the date of their capture. He further defended this stance by pointing out that they operated by Confederate law and "the Constitution and laws of the United States." The Virginian dismissed Granger's threat: "The employment, then, of white men, prisoners of war, whose social and political character is that of freemen, is not justified by the circumstances, and is neither fair nor in accordance

17 Hewitt, *Supplement to the Official Records*, pt. 1, vol. 7, 956; *ORA* 39, pt. 3, 796; "General Orders 120," *Mobile Advertiser and Register*, Mar. 28, 1865. Maury ordered the redoubt to be named in honor of 2Lt. Edward J. McDermott who was killed on Lake Maurepas, Louisiana, while leading an attack during a special mission on March 13, 1865.

18 Taylor, *Destruction and Reconstruction,* 210; *ORA* 49, pt. 1, 957; "Mobile Items—A letter from Mobile," *Richmond Dispatch*, Oct. 18, 1864, 1.

with the established usages of warfare." Maury claimed that the prisoners themselves declared that they were taken away from their homes and their lawful owners in Confederate territory by invading parties of U.S. forces, placed in the army, or employed for other military purposes against their will. "These negroes are well fed and provided for and generally content in their present situation," Maury replied. "They express the utmost reluctance and indisposition to be returned to the dominion of the United States, and restored to involuntary service with their armies, and are earnest in their desire to return to their lawful owners, from whom they were unwillingly taken away." He added that he intended to restore them to their lawful owners, who would receive just compensation for the labor of these enslaved men.[19]

Winter 1864–65

In December, earth and sod were transported to Huger and Tracey to strengthen their magazines. Lack of powder and shipping of stores from Corinth delayed torpedo manufacture. Progress on the eastern shore fortifications had slowed considerably due to the lack of hands available.[20]

Maury received an ominous dispatch on Christmas day. From his Meridian headquarters, Taylor wired him of General Hood's "severe reverse" in Tennessee and conveyed his grim belief that Mobile would be seriously threatened as soon as Canby received reinforcements. He urged Maury to make "steady and energetic preparations" for the anticipated attack, instructing him to "push forward with all possible vigor, and, if necessary, you should employ your soldiers" to complete the works.[21]

The Confederate military leaders did not want to risk the capture of the Spanish Fort garrison. Unknown to most of the common soldiers, officers took measures to withdraw them if all hope for further defense was lost. Toward the end of December 1864, instructions were received to begin the construction of a narrow wooden treadway bridge from the rear of Spanish Fort across the marsh to communicate with Huger and Tracey. The plans called for small piles driven in the swamp by hand, with light cross pieces joining them together. Observers described the narrow bridge as 18 inches to four feet wide and three or four feet above the marsh. The Confederates did not complete the roughly mile-long treadway until

19 *ORA*, Series 2, vol. 8, pt. 1, 354–355.

20 *ORA* 45, pt. 2, 678, 735.

21 Ibid., 734.

March 30, after the siege began. Just before the investment of Spanish Fort, Maury sent 1Lt. John T. Elmore of his staff to Gibson to manage the completion.[22]

Colonel Isaac W. Patton, commander of the 22nd Consolidated Louisiana Regiment, commanded the small garrison at Spanish Fort during its construction in mid-August of 1864. Born in Fredericksburg, Virginia, on February 4, 1828, Patton came from a distinguished military family. Early colonist Hugh Mercer, his great-grandfather, later became a general in the Revolutionary War, losing his life at the battle of Princeton. Patton had five brothers who faithfully fought for the Confederacy. One of his brothers, Col. George S. Patton, commanded the 22nd Virginia Infantry Regiment of the Army of Northern Virginia and is the grandfather of the famous World War II general.[23]

Educated at the Fairfax Institute near Alexandria, Patton first gained military experience as a second lieutenant in the 10th United States Infantry under Gen. Zachary Taylor during the Mexican War. After his stint in the U.S. Army, he moved to Louisiana in 1855 to become a cotton planter. In early 1862, the Virginian joined the Confederate Army and participated in the organization of the 22nd Louisiana. When the Federal fleet opened its attack below New Orleans in April 1862, Patton's command manned the artillery at Chalmette. They fired the first shots and fought until they exhausted their ammunition. Forced to fall back to New Orleans, Patton's command then dispersed and headed to Vicksburg, where they manned heavy artillery. He commanded the largest and most important fort on the Confederate line at Vicksburg. During the siege, he suffered a severe wound to the hip and became a prisoner of war.

In early 1864, after the fall of Vicksburg, Gen. Leonidas Polk created the 22nd Louisiana Consolidated Regiment by merging several Louisiana units—the remnants of the 3rd, 17th, 21st, 22nd, 27th, 29th, and 31st Louisiana regiments. They received the designation 22nd Louisiana because most of the men came from that regiment. Patton's command rarely numbered more than 250 men. After Vicksburg, he went to Mobile to serve as Maury's artillery commander, staying the remainder of the war.[24]

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22 *ORA* 45, pt. 2, 746; *ORA* 49, pt. 1, 317; Maury, "Defence of Spanish Fort," 131; *ORA* 49, pt. 2, 1129; John T. Elmore, Compiled Service Records, RG 109, NARA; Hewitt, *Supplement to the Official Records*, pt. 1, vol. 7, 942.

23 Andrews, *History of the Campaign of Mobile*, 70; "Col Isaac W. Patton (CSA), Mayor of New Orleans," Geni_family_tree, last modified June 29, 2019, https://www.geni.com/people/Col-Isaac-W-Patton-CSA-Mayor-of-New-Orleans/6000000004088656026.

24 Andrews, *History of the Campaign of Mobile*, 70; "Col Isaac W. Patton"; Arthur W. Bergeron, Jr., "They Bore Themselves with Distinguished Gallantry: The Twenty-Second Louisiana Infantry," *The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association* 13, no. 3 (Summer 1972): 264–282.

Colonel Isaac W. Patton, 22nd Consolidated Louisiana, commander of Spanish Fort's Artillery. *Admiral Semmes Sons of Confederate Veterans Camp 11*

Patton's lieutenants attempted to reinforce Fort Gaines during the battle of Mobile Bay. The machinery on their steamboat transport did not work properly and was delayed. They arrived at the lower bay in time to witness the naval engagement but had to make a hasty retreat back to Mobile. Had they come an hour earlier, they would have been doomed to capture with the rest of the garrison of Fort Gaines.[25]

On January 21, 1865, Lockett notified Patton that all hands constructing fortifications at Spanish Fort were to be transferred to Mobile to put up new works there. Lockett wrote, "I hope your lines are now secure, or, at least, in such condition that the troops can finish the necessary work." However, storms during the middle of January interfered with having the earthworks sodded. Much work was still needed to prepare the fort to repel a U.S. Army attack. Lockett arranged tools for Patton's small garrison to continue with the work required to strengthen Spanish Fort. He directed Patton to have his men plant sub-terra shells in front of Redoubt 2, place head-logs on infantry parapets and make fascines to replace sandbags, and then use the sandbags to make loopholes out of which the infantry could shoot.[26]

Spanish Fort occupied the high ground with an estimated length of about two miles. Its southern flank rested on the Blakeley River; it's left on Minette Bay. The

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25 W. H. Tunnard, *A Southern Record. The History of the Third Regiment Louisiana Infantry* (Baton Rouge, LA, 1866), 304–305.

26 *ORA* 45, pt. 2, 803. Fascines are a bundle sticks, bound together used for strengthening the sides of embankments, ditches, or trenches.
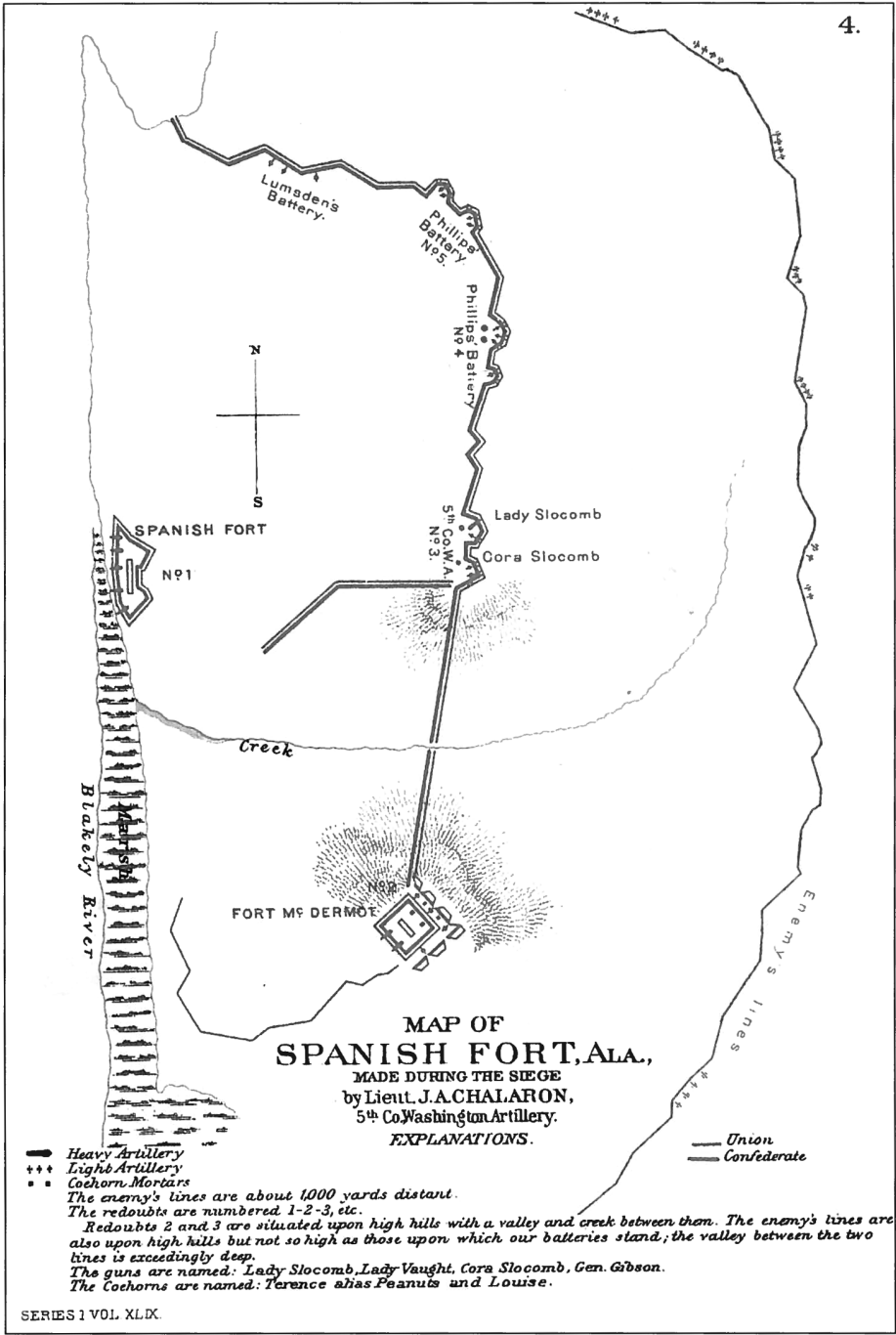
1Lt. Joseph A. Chalaron, 5th Company, Washington Artillery, drew this map during the siege. *History Museum of Mobile*

breastworks ran in a semi-circle around the inside rim of the highland. The fort looked a lot like "a horseshoe pressed open."[27]

Officers on both sides considered Spanish Fort the key to Mobile. The importance the Confederates placed upon its position in the city's defenses was evident by the superior engineering skill displayed in its construction and the numerous heavy artillery pieces it brandished.[28]

Although the earthworks were indeed substantial in many places, they were not complete when the siege began. Maury later admitted that the ground was difficult to defend. "The works were badly placed," Maury observed, "they were light and incomplete." On the extreme left, for example, a section of the fort remained sparsely protected by works, owing to the marshy character of the ground. Some of the Confederates recognized it as their weak point. However, in a sense, it was also a strong point. The Confederate engineers felt the dense swamp would be sufficient to deter an attack. Only a picket line would be placed there.[29]

The breastworks were made of logs piled three to four feet high. The Confederates dug dirt from the 5-foot-deep trench before the logs and packed it down on top of them. Breastworks had to be packed down. Otherwise, hit by an artillery shell, the falling or splintering logs might cause more damage than the projectile. Head-logs were placed along the top of the works to protect the men's heads "from the missiles of the Yankee pickets." Head-logs were placed a few inches off the top of the breastworks by smaller limbs so that the defenders could aim and shoot at the enemy while minimizing their exposure. A formidable ditch in front of the breastworks added to the strength of the place. It was five feet deep and eight feet wide, but the ditch in front of Fort McDermott was even deeper and broader.[30]

Large trees in front of the fort were cut down for a few hundred yards, providing a clear field of fire. "Every ravine had borne a heavy growth of hardwood, which having been slashed made, with the underbrush and vines, an almost impassable obstruction," noted one U.S. soldier. In front of the main works were numerous advanced rifle pits for skirmishers. Along the entire front existed an elaborate

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27 *ORA* 49, pt. 1, 314–315; Allen, "Operations against the City of Mobile," 72.

28 Sanford Huff, M.D., *The Annals of Iowa* (Iowa City, 1866), 948.

29 Stephenson, "Defence of Spanish Fort," *Southern Historical Society* 3, no. 1 (Jan 1877): 123; Richard L. Howard, *History of the 124th Regiment Illinois Infantry Volunteers: Otherwise Known as the "Hundred and Two Dozen," from August, 1862, to August, 1865* (Springfield, IL, 1880), 295; Hewitt, *Supplement to the Official Records*, pt. 1, vol. 7, 964.

30 J. S. E. Robinson, "Reminiscence of the War between the States," Auburn University Montgomery Library, Archives and Special Collections; A. A. Stuart, *Iowa Colonels and Regiments: Being a History of Iowa Regiments in the War of the Rebellion* (Des Moines, IA: Mills & Company, 1865), 191; Howard, *124th Regiment*, 295.
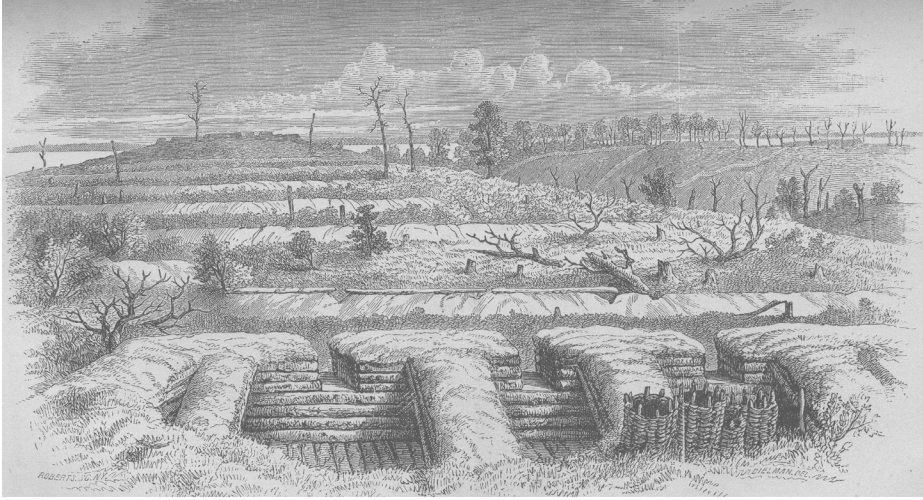
Fort McDermott from the Union XIII Corps' position. *Alabama Department of Archives and History*

line of abatis fifteen feet wide. The tops of the fallen trees were pointed outward, trimmed, and sharpened, forming a continuous brush fence. A line of *cheval de frise*, medium-sized logs wired together at the ends with sharpened stakes passed through them, intervened between the ditch and the abatis.[31]

Despite Lockett's earlier directive, Patton set his men to work making bombproofs and ammunition magazines behind their breastworks. Some of these bombproofs were as large as 16x20 feet and 10–12 feet deep. The artillerists encamped at Spanish Fort cut down large trees and rolled the trunks over the hole. They put a layer of brush and dirt, then another layer of heavy logs crosswise, and then a layer of scrub and soil until the roof was as high as eight feet. Bombproofs proved indispensable to the garrison.[32]

Artillery of all kinds and calibers bristled along the walls. All the batteries were on a high and commanding ground. The real strength of the Spanish Fort consisted of two firmly enclosed and bastioned forts, the Old Spanish Fort (Redoubt 1) and the most vital position, Fort McDermott (Redoubt 2). This fort was heavily armed, including columbiads and Brooke rifled guns.[33]

31 Howard, *124th Regiment*, 295–296; Elliott, *Thirty-Third Regiment*, 228. Abatis is a defensive obstacle formed by felled trees with sharpened branches facing the enemy.

32 Stephenson, "Defence of Spanish Fort," 121–123; Waterman, "Afloat-Afield-Afloat," Vol. VIII, Jan. 1900, 24.

33 Howard, *124th Regiment*, 296; "Later From Spanish Fort," *The Times Picayune*, Apr. 5, 1865, 4.

The total number of guns inside the Spanish Fort amounted to 46 pieces. Moreover, Huger had 11 guns, while Tracey had five seven-inch rifled guns.[34]

Several of the guns were received during the siege. "Hence we had more to contend against," recalled one soldier of Carr's Division of the XVI Corps, "providing the earthworks were equally strong and well manned than at Vicksburg, where the enemy had but little artillery which he could make effective against us."[35]

The Brooke guns were made in the Confederate Naval Ordnance Works at Selma. The iron came from Bibb and Shelby Counties, Alabama. General Maury declared that Brierfield, Alabama, produced "the best iron for making cannon in the world." The Selma Brookes were rifles (11-inch, 7-inch, and 6.4-inch calibers) and smoothbores (11-inch, 10-inch, and 8-inch calibers). Four twenty-four-pounder bronze howitzers at Spanish Fort were captured from a Federal gunboat on the Yazoo River.[36]

Coehorn mortars were freely used at Spanish Fort. Maury had the mortars cast at the Skates & Company Foundry in Mobile. He also had wooden mortars made of gum tree stumps, hollowed out to eight and ten-inch calibers. They were hooped with iron and lined with sheet iron. These wooden mortars could only be used at short range and with minimal charges.[37]

The Confederates incorporated numerous innovations to defend the city against the imminent Federal attack. In case their cannons were silenced, they placed sub-terra shells, also known as torpedoes, in front of the breastworks of Spanish Fort to prevent an assault. In the weeks preceding Canby's arrival, the

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34 *ORA* 49, pt. 1, 150–151; Waterman, "Afloat-Afield-Afloat," Vol. VIII, Feb. 1900, 55.

35 Howard, *124th Regiment*, 296; *ORA* 49, pt. 1, 314.

36 Maury, "Spanish Fort," 133; Maury, "Defense of Mobile," 4; Thrasher, *Selma Brooke Guns of Mobile*, 3–5; *ORN* 21, 881–882; Maury recalled about a year before the siege of Spanish Fort, six 24-pounder bronze howitzers were captured from a Federal gunboat on the Yazoo River. Ross's Brigade of Texas Cavalry along with Owens' Arkansas Light Battery operating in Mississippi along the Yazoo River opened on the gunboat, causing her to surrender. Having no boat available to receive the surrender of the ship, several Confederates stripped down nude and swam out to receive the crew's formal surrender. Six twenty-four pounder bronze howitzers were removed from the vessel and sent to Mobile, where their carriages were changed to suit land defense. Four of them were mounted in the works of Spanish Fort. There was an 11-inch Brooke rifle sent to Mobile, the only one of its kind. Maury erroneously claimed not one of the Selma Brooke guns "was ever bursted or even strained" during the defense of Mobile. However, Lt. Col. James M. Williams, 21st Alabama, reported that a defect in a 7-inch Selma Brooke gun at Fort Powell caused it to burst on February 29, 1864.

37 Maury, "Souvenirs of the War," 4; Confederate Papers Relating to Citizens or Business Firms, complied 1874–1899, documenting the period 1861–1865," NARA-Confederate Citizens File. [Online version, www.fold3.com/image/52052683, Dec. 31, 2020.] The only extant invoice for them is one from Skates & Company Foundry, for ten 24 pounder mortars, dated Nov. 1863. The wooden coehorn mortar had simple design: a tube, often copper or bronze alloy, bolted to a wooden bed set to a 45-degree angle. Straps on each side enabled the weapon to be picked up by 2–4 men to be moved around the lines.

small garrison at Spanish Fort planted torpedoes along the ground in the woody marsh in their front and on the roads approaching the fort. "We planted our front pretty thoroughly with mines, consisting of large shells buried with caps that would explode at the touch of a foot on a trigger," recalled one soldier of Lumsden's Battery. The torpedoes in front of the fort were marked by little stakes and pieces of white cloth to alert their comrades.[38]

The subterranean shells were typically 7-inch, 8-inch, and 11-inch explosive shells with percussion fuses fixed on top. They were placed lightly under the soil so the slightest pressure would trigger an explosion.[39]

"The torpedoes were the most striking and effective of the new contrivances for defense which were used during these operations," Maury later touted. Submarine torpedoes (submerged mines) littered the water approaches to Mobile. The Confederates innovatively built their best torpedoes from beer casks charged with gunpowder. An iron chain linked to a mushroom-shaped concrete block anchored and concealed the deadly mines about two feet below the water's surface. These torpedoes prevented vessels drawing three feet of water from getting within cannon range of the city's defenses.[40]

In addition to powerful artillery and torpedoes, several other military innovations were incorporated into the defense of Spanish Fort. Screens, "made by plates of steel"—or "mantlets," as the soldiers called them—shielded their cannon embrasures. Made of "wrought iron," these plates were about two feet by three feet square and half an inch thick; these "mantlets" protected cannoneers against enemy sharpshooters. They were secured to the inner faces of the embrasures and were quickly lowered and raised as the gun ran into the battery or recoiled from the embrasure upon firing.[41]

Sandbag embrasures protected the sharpshooters in the rifle pits. Before the siege began, General P. G. T. Beauregard gave Maury the model of a wooden

38 Howard, *124th Regiment*, 296; Elliott, *Thirty-Third Regiment*, 228; Stuart, Iowa Colonels, 191; George Little and James Maxwell, "A History of Lumsden's Battery, C. S. A," Gutenberg, accessed July 2, 2020, https://www.gutenberg.org/files/26455/26455-h/26455-h.htm; John N. Chamberlin, *Captaining the Corps d'Afrique: The Civil War Diaries and Letters of John Newton Chamberlin* (Jefferson, NC, 2016), 110.

39 "Mobile," *New York Herald*, Apr. 9, 1865, 1. Land mines were referred to as sub-terra shells or torpedoes. There are numerous accounts of sub-terra shells at Spanish Fort. One long time relic hunter that has metal-detected Spanish Fort for decades, however, told the author that he doubts these reports. He noted that neither he, nor anyone he knows, has ever found any physical evidence of sub-terra shells at Spanish Fort.

40 Maury, "Spanish Fort," 133.

41 Dabney H. Maury, "Defence of Mobile in 1865," *Southern Historical Society Papers* 3, no. 1 (Jan. 1877): 11–12; Waterman, "Afloat-Afield-Afloat," 53; Hewitt, *Supplement to the Official Records*, 942.

embrasure to be used by sharpshooters. Sandbags in the rifle pits covered these embrasures. The old veterans of the Army of Tennessee found them far superior to the head-logs, but demand for them exceeded Maury's ability to provide them.[42]

An invention of Maury's chief of artillery, Col. William E. Burnet, greatly facilitated the maneuvering of siege guns. His innovation dispensed with eccentrics entirely, thus allowing the heaviest cannon to be moved into a battery with one hand.[43]

Although the Federals commonly believed they would not meet much resistance, the Confederates had no intention of giving up Mobile without a fight. Despite limited manpower and time, the capable Confederate engineers: Lockett, Gindrat, Scheliha, and the men under their direction worked tirelessly to construct the best defensive system possible.

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42 Maury, "Spanish Fort," 135; Maury, "Defence of Mobile in 1865," 11–12; *ORA* 49, pt. 2, 1179.

43 Maury, "Souvenirs of the War," 4; Maury, "Defence of Mobile in 1865," 12.