



Percival Drayton
Captain U.S.N.

Carte de Visite from Civil War Library & Museum

One Northern Brother

John M. (Jack) Cleveland

In Memory of
PERCIVAL DRAYTON

Captain United States Navy

Born at Charleston August 26, 1812

Died at Washington August 7, 1865

Chief of Bureau of Navigation

A Naval officer for 38 years

Without a superior, above all sectional feeling

He distinguished himself in the service of the

Union, in command of a Frigate at Port Royal,

at Sumter in command of a Monitor

at Mobile Bay as Fleet Captain

and commander of the Flag Ship HARTFORD

A just MAN, true PATRIOT, and good CHRISTIAN.



So reads the inscription on a massive tablet in Trinity Church in the heart of New York City's Wall Street financial district. Of all southerners in the U.S. Navy, Percival Drayton rose to the highest rank, and he was destined for even greater heights had not death cut short his brilliant career at the age of 53.

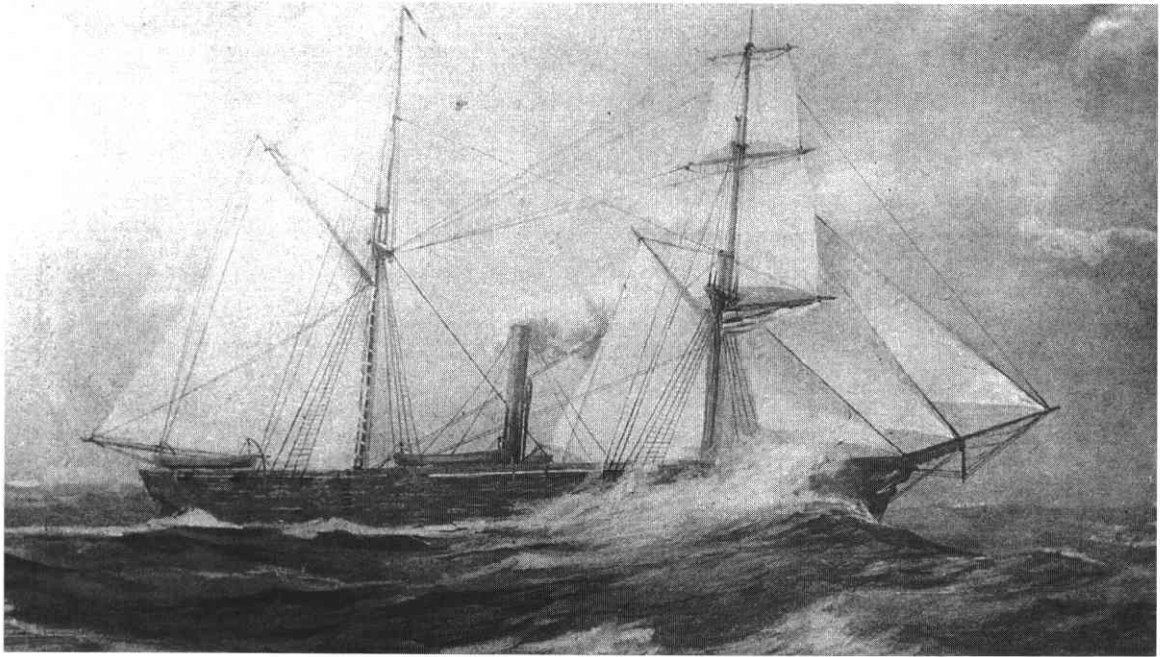
The Draytons were and are a distinguished Charleston family, and their great homes, Magnolia Plantation and Drayton Hall, remain as popular tourist attractions today. Magnolia Plantation was Percival's home, and that of his older brother, Thomas Fenwick, whence they went forth into military service as young men in the early 1800s. Thomas graduated from West Point in 1828 with Jefferson Davis, and a year earlier Percival had joined the navy as a midshipman at the age of 16. Little did they know that fate would have them exchanging fire—shore batteries versus naval guns—during the first year of the Civil War at Port Royal.

During his more than thirty years of service in the navy, Percival Drayton served on ships with such famous names as *Constitution*, *Enterprise*, *Yorktown*, *Columbus*, and *Independence*, and his tours of duty took him to South America, the Mediterranean, and the Orient. As the Civil War approached he was on duty as an ordnance officer at the Navy Yard in Philadelphia, which had been his home for many years. At the

outbreak of the war, being of strong Union sympathies, Commander Drayton insisted that his navy register be changed to read "Citizen of Philadelphia". For this, the Legislature of South Carolina officially declared him "infamous," to which the Union's Drayton retorted, "I am for crushing the rebellion if we come down to the original three million (people) of the first revolution in doing so, and I am quite willing that I should not be one of the survivors."

Detached from the Philadelphia Navy Yard in September of 1861, he was ordered to duty with the South Atlantic Blockading Squadron and became commander of the steam frigate *U.S.S. Pocahontas*. On this he participated in the bombardment and capture of Port Royal, S.C. as part of Admiral S.F. DuPont's fleet. Arriving a little late because of bad weather, the *Pocahontas* directed fierce enfilading fire on Fort Walker, situated on Hilton Head, which had a significant effect in the outcome of the battle.

Since Percival's brother, Major General Thomas Fenwick Drayton, was in command of the Confederate forces at Port Royal, it was here that one of the most famous encounters in the "Brothers' War" took place. As evidence that neither brother ever forsook family ties, it is said that after the fighting they exchanged messages in which they congratulated each other that both had done their duty as they saw it.



A painting of the *Pocahontas* by Clary Ray, 1896. U.S. Naval Historical Center.

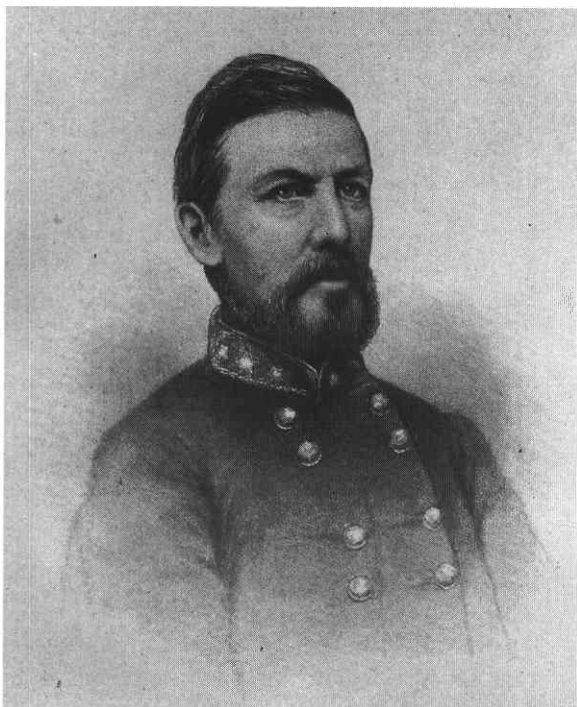
Admiral DuPont's brief report of the battle is of interest:

Battle of Port Royal, S.C. and capture of Forts Walker and Beauregard, by the United States Navy, November 7, 1861.

Flagship *Wabash*

Off Hilton Head, Port Royal Harbor, November 8, 1861

SIR: I have the honor to inform you that yesterday I attacked the enemy's batteries on Bay Point and Hilton Head, Forts Beauregard and Walker, and succeeded in silencing them after an engagement of four hours' duration, and driving away the squadron of rebel steamers under Commodore Tattnall. The reconnaissance yesterday made us acquainted with the superiority of Fort Walker,



Maj. Gen. Thomas Drayton, C.S.A. Carte de Visite from George Fistrovich collection.

and to that I directed my special efforts, engaging it at a distance of, first, 800, and afterwards, 600 yards. But the plan of attack brought the squadron sufficiently near Fort Beauregard to receive its fire, and the ships were frequently fighting the batteries on both sides at the same time.

The action was begun on my part twenty-six minutes after 9, and at half past two the American ensign was hoisted on the flagstaff of Fort Walker, and this morning at sunrise on that of Fort Beauregard.

The defeat of the enemy terminated in utter rout and confusion. Their quarters and encampments were abandoned without an attempt to carry away either public or private property.

The ground over which they fled was strewn with the arms of private soldiers, and officers retired in too much haste to submit to the encumbrance of their swords.

Landing my marines and a company of seamen, I took possession of the deserted ground and held the forts on Hilton Head till the arrival of General Sherman, to whom I had the honor to transfer its occupation.

We have captured forty-three pieces of cannon, most of them of the heaviest caliber and of the most improved description.

The bearer of these dispatches will have the honor to carry with him the captured flags and two small brass field pieces, lately belonging to the State of South Carolina, which are sent home as suitable trophies of the success of the day. I enclose herewith a copy of the general order which is to be read in the fleet to-morrow morning at muster. A detailed account of this battle will be submitted herewith.

I have the honor to be, very respectfully, your obedient servant,

S.F. DuPont

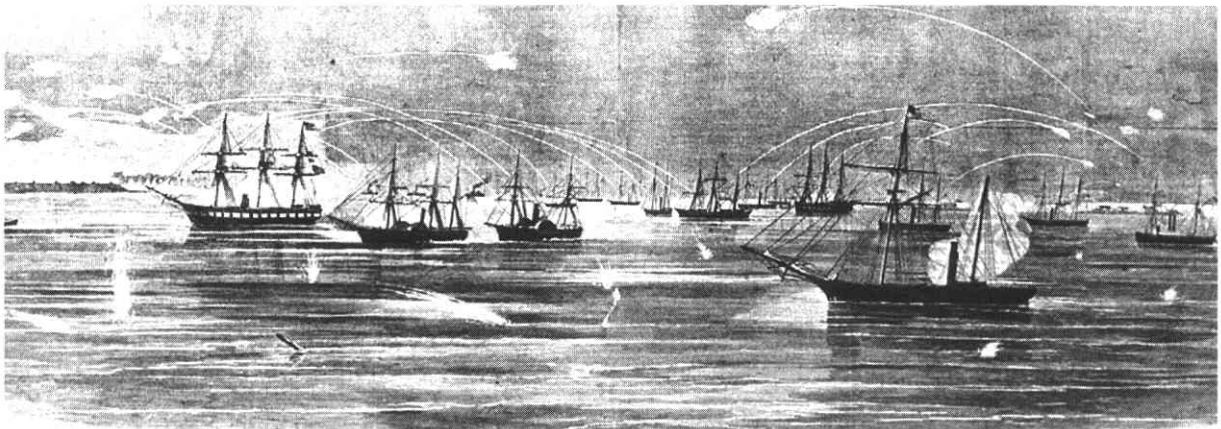
Flag-Officer, Commanding South Atlantic Blockading Squadron.

Hon. Gideon Welles,

Secretary of the Navy, Washington.

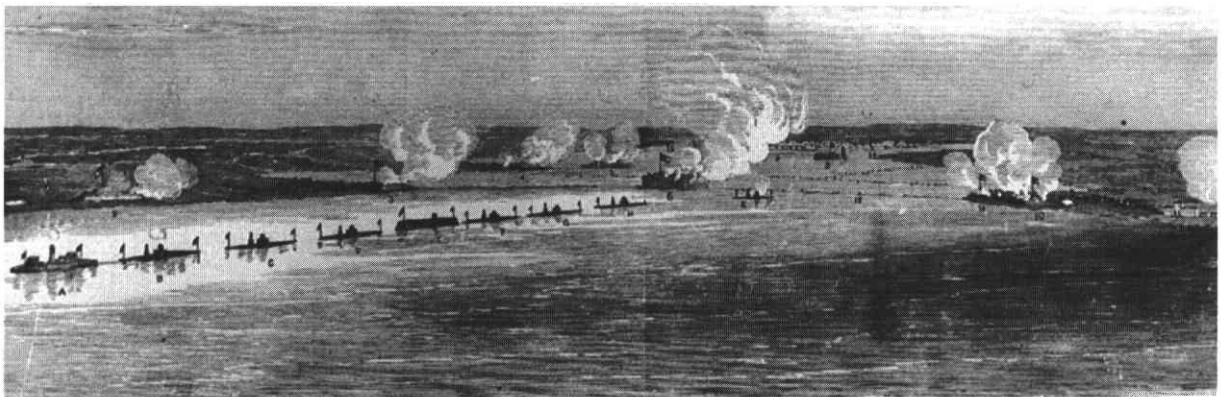
P.S.—The bearer of dispatches will also carry with him the first American ensign raised upon the soil of South Carolina since this rebellion broke out.

S.F. DuPont



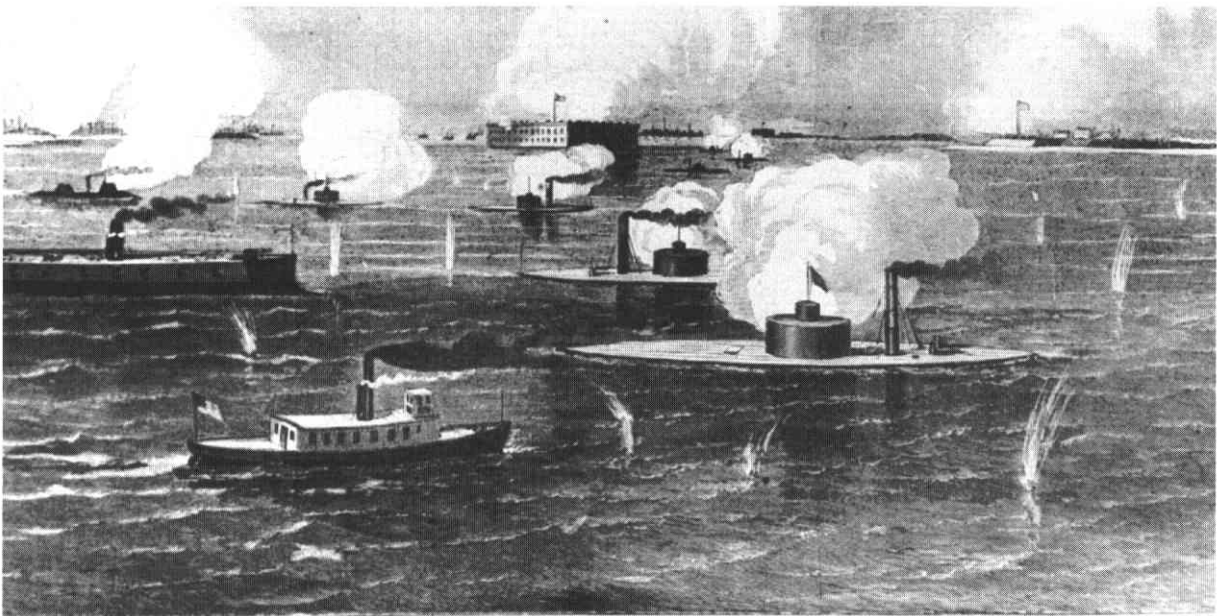
THE BOMBARDMENT OF FORTS WALKER AND BEAUREGARD IN PORT ROYAL INLET, SOUTH CAROLINA, NOVEMBER 7, 1861.—REPRODUCED BY THE SPECIAL ARTIST BY ILLUSTRATION "MEXICUS"—[SEE PAGE 142]

The bombardment of Forts Walker and Beauregard – Port Royal Inlet, with *Pocahontas* in foreground. *Harpers Weekly*, 1861. U.S. Naval Historical Center.



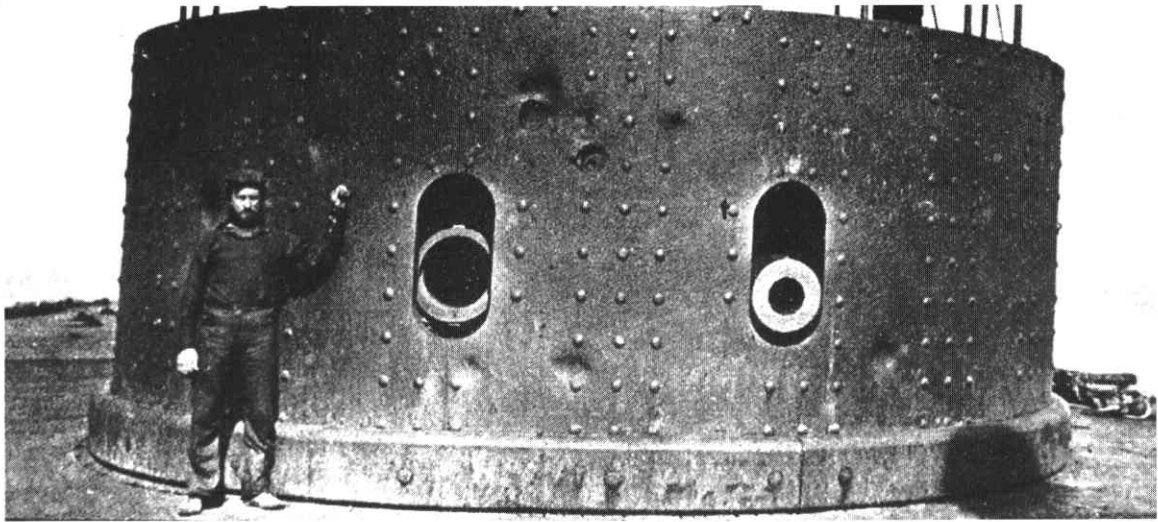
Ketchikan, B. Jackson, C. Natchez, D. Cahill, E. Franklin, F. Putnam, G. Montez, H. Phoenix, K. Westgate — CONFEDERATES—1, Morris Island Sand Battery, 2, Fort Wagner, 3, Battery Mason, 4, Fort Ripley, 5, Fort Sumner, 6, Charleston City, 7, Castle Pinckney, 8, Fort Moultrie, 9, Fort Mifflin, 10, Fort Moultrie, 11, Moultrie House, 12, Fort Beauregard, 13, Harbor Obstruction, 14, Cooper River.
PANORAMIC VIEW OF CHARLESTON HARBOR.—ADVANCE OF IRONCLADS TO THE ATTACK, APRIL 7TH, 1863.

Panoramic view of Charleston Harbor: advance of the ironclads to the attack, April 7, 1863. U.S. Naval Historical Center.



THE BOMBARDMENT OF FORT SUMTER, APRIL 7, 1863.—FROM A SKETCH BY AN EYE-WITNESS.—[SEE PAGE 179.]

Bombardment of Ft. Sumter, April 7, 1863. *Harpers Weekly*. U.S. Naval Historical Center.



Part of the turret of the *Passaic*, showing dents from hits. Civil War Library and Museum.

In the detailed report the Admiral comments on the part played by the *Pocahontas*:

The *Pocahontas*, Commander Percival Drayton, had suffered from the gale of Friday night so badly as not to be able to enter Port Royal until the morning of the 7th. He reached the scene of action about 12 o'clock and rendered gallant service by engaging the batteries on both sides in succession.

Commander Drayton's own report of the battle reflects his modesty and matter-of-fact attitude toward the whole matter:

U.S.S. Pocahontas

Port Royal Harbor, November 9, 1861

SIR: In obedience to your order I beg leave to state that on the morning of the 7th instant I found myself a few miles from Tybee lighthouse, and at once commenced steaming for Port Royal entrance. Soon after I stood off in pursuit of a schooner, which I thought intended breaking the blockade, but which proved to be laden with coal for the squadron. As my stock was reduced to one day's supply, and it was reported to me that the fleet was at anchor outside, I thought it a good opportunity to replenish, while towing the vessel to our mutual destination, and this I was doing, when about 10 o'clock I heard the beginning of a cannonade. I immediately cast off the schooner and stood for the scene of action, which I reached at a little after 12 o'clock. In passing, I engaged the batteries on Bay Point and Hilton Head, but getting out of range of the former, I directed my fire on the latter until signal was made, about 2:30, to cease firing.

During this time, I expended 24 X-inch and 37 32-pounder shell and 5 32-pounder shot, and 4 15-pounder rifle shell. I could have fired much more frequently, but as there were evident signs toward the last that the enemy were leaving, I thought it well to spare the ammunition. The only injuries received were a shot through the mainmast and the boom topping lift and several small pieces of rigging cut away.

I am, very respectfully, your obedient servant,

P. Drayton,

Commander, commanding *Pocahontas*.

Flag Officer S.F. DuPont.

Commanding South Atlantic Squadron, Port Royal Harbor.

In August of 1862 Percival Drayton was promoted to the rank of Captain, and after a brief period as commander of the *U.S.S. Pawnee* he was placed in command of the new monitor class ironclad, *U.S.S. Passaic*. On this ship he was to have several adventures, the most noteworthy of which was Admiral DuPont's abortive attempt to take Fort Sumter in Charleston Harbor with a fleet of ironclads.

In the attempt to capture Fort Sumter as an opening to Charleston the Union squadron took a fearful pounding from the land batteries, and this experience compelled Drayton and the other commanders to recommend strongly against further attempts on Charleston with the monitors. A similar assault on Wilmington, N.C., was also opposed by Drayton for the same reasons. Excerpts from his detailed report on the Sumter attack make clear the reasons for his thinking:

U.S. Ironclad *Passaic*

Off Morris Island, S.C. April 8, 1863

When opposite the center of the fort we came pretty close to some obstructions which seemed to extend the whole way from Fort Moultrie across. Here I stopped, as the *Weebawken* had done just before. At the fourth shot from the XI-inch gun I was struck in quick succession on the lower part of the turret by two heavy shot, which bulged in its plate and beams, and, forcing together the rails on which the XI-inch carriage worked, rendered it wholly useless for the remainder of the action, several hours being necessary to put it again in working order. Soon after it was discovered that there was something the matter with the turret itself, which could not be moved, and on examination it was found that a part of the brass ring underneath it had been broken off and, being forced inboard, had jammed; on clearing this, the turret could again be moved, but for some time irregularly.

A little after a very heavy rifle shot struck the upper edge of the turret, broke all of its eleven plates, and then, glancing upward, took the pilot house, yet with such force as to make an indentation of 2 inches, extending nearly the whole length of the shot. The blow was so severe as to considerably mash in the pilot house, bend it over, open the plates, and squeeze out the top, so that on one side it was lifted up 3 inches above the top on which it rested, exposing the inside of the pilot house and rendering it likely that the next shot would take off the top itself entirely.

The only really serious injuries were the ones mentioned above, although the vessel was struck thirty-five times, as follows: outside armor, fifteen times, which it has been too rough to examine; deck, five times, once very badly; turret, ten times; pilot house, twice; smoke pipe, once; flagstaff over turret shot away, and boat shattered.

There was a little motion, and in consequence some of the outside shots are low down. Several boltheads were knocked off and thrown into the pilot house and turret, and the former might have done serious injury to those inside had they not been stopped by a sheet-iron lining which I had placed there while at Port Royal. Owing to the delays caused by the various accidents ending in the entire disabling of one gun, I was only able to fire four times from the XI-inch and nine from the XV-inch gun. There was some loss of time also from the necessity of using the sectional rammer, as the fire was all around and required the ports to be kept closed.

On account of the dense smoke I was not able to see the effect of my own shots, but except a few scars, I could not perceive, either yesterday or this morning, when I had a very good view of its lower face, that the fort was in the least injured, and I am satisfied that our limited number of guns, with their slow fire and liability to get out of order, were no match for the hundreds which were concentrated on them at distances perhaps scarcely anywhere beyond a half mile, and nearly as well protected against injury from shot as were ours.

I was more than usually incommoded by smoke during the action, owing, no doubt, to the difficulty of keeping the blower bands in working order with such an amount of water as has been for days pouring over them through the lower part of the turret – a most serious evil, and which I think calls for a remedy if the turret is to be kept up in any but the smoothest water.

My experience at Fort McAllister satisfied me that the decks were not strong enough, and this of Fort Sumter that the pilot house is not capable of withstanding heavy shot for any length of time, and even throws a doubt on the turret itself, or at least its machinery.

This certainly shows how much battering our ironclads escape by being so low on the water. You probably observed yourself in the *Ironsides* the great difficulty of managing these vessels and keeping them clear of each other and the bottom with the limited power of vision which the holes in the pilot house afford, and then to this is added the smoke. I consider it a piece of great good luck that none of us got ashore or received injury from collision.

The defeat of the Federal ironclads at Charleston brought about considerable Confederate gloating, as is reflected in these lines from a letter by S.R. Mallory, Secretary of the Navy, C.S.A. to Commander J.D.

Bulloch, who was in charge of Confederate ship building in Liverpool, England:

I know nothing in the history of naval warfare so humiliating to a proud people as DuPont's recent defeat at Charleston.

He deliberately selected an ebb tide for his attack, showing thereby that he was thinking more of the discomfort of his ships and their drifting safely away from the works than he was of pushing by the forts and entering the harbor. After a paltry five hours' effort and the loss of but a single ship, and with some 10 or 20 only killed and wounded, this ironclad fleet, which had been preparing for twelve months to capture Charleston, and which had gone forth upon its mission with all the Yankee bravado, disgracefully withdrew. If DuPont had but possessed a spark of that flame which animated Exmouth at Algiers, Nelson at Copenhagen, or Hope at the Pei-ho, he might still have failed, but he could not have been disgraced. Personally he kept at a most respectful distance, some 1,500 yards, pent up within what the Yankees boast of as the impregnable *Ironsides*.

I am, respectfully, your obedient servant,

S.R. Mallory
Secretary of the Navy

May 7, 1863

After the fruitless endeavor at Charleston, Captain Drayton was appointed Superintendent of the Ordnance Department of the New York Navy Yard, where he served for over six months. On December 12, 1863, he was ordered to duty as Fleet Captain of the West Gulf Blockading Squadron, with which he was to see much action, culminating in the famous Battle of Mobile Bay.

Since the primary responsibility of the great Federal fleets in the Atlantic and Gulf was to cut off the flow of supplies from Europe to the Confederacy by intercepting the swift blockade runners, reports on the destruction of one, later determined to be the *Ivanhoe*, near the mouth of Mobile Bay in the summer of 1864 by the West Gulf Squadron, are interesting:

Chasing ashore of the steamer *Ivanhoe* at Fort Morgan, June 30, and her destruction by boat expedition, July 6, 1864.
Report of Rear-Admiral Farragut, U.S. Navy.
Flagship *Hartford*, July 2, 1864.

SIR: It gives me pleasure to be able occasionally to announce to the Department the destruction of a blockade runner.

On the night of the 30th ultimo, at 11 p.m., a steamer attempted to pass into Mobile, but the vessels had been placed in anticipation of it, and the little dispatch boat *Glasgow* was in the Swash Channel, and so soon as the eastern boat made the signal, "Vessel running in," the *Glasgow* ran for the beach, soon discovered her, and fired five shots at her when the fort opened upon the *Glasgow*, but the blockade runner was aground. In the morning I sent the gunboats in to shell her. I presume they have gotten her cargo out of her, but the vessel still lies on the beach and I hope effectively to destroy her.



Admiral David Farragut, U.S.N. Civil War Library

I do not know what vessel it is, but they say it is not the *Denbigh*.

Very Respectfully, your obedient servant,

D.G. Farragut,

Rear-Admiral, Commanding West Gulf Blockading Squadron.

Hon. Gideon Welles,

Secretary of the Navy, Washington, D.C.

Report of Captain Drayton, U.S. Navy,
regarding the destruction of the steamer:

Flagship *Hartford*

Off Mobile, July 6, 1864.

SIR: I beg leave to report that it being important to destroy the blockade runner which has chased on shore near Fort Morgan on the night of the 1st instant, and the fire of our vessels having apparently failed to accomplish this object, Flag-Lieutenant Watson offered to go in and set her on fire.

For this purpose he was given, last evening, three of the *Hartford's* and one of the *Brooklyn's* boats, which were towed into position after Lieutenant-Commander McCann, these vessels afterwards covering the movement.

About 1 a.m. this morning the blockade runner was boarded and set on fire in two places, from the effects of which she has, I should say, been rendered utterly useless. The boats then returned to the covering vessels and were towed off to the fleet.....

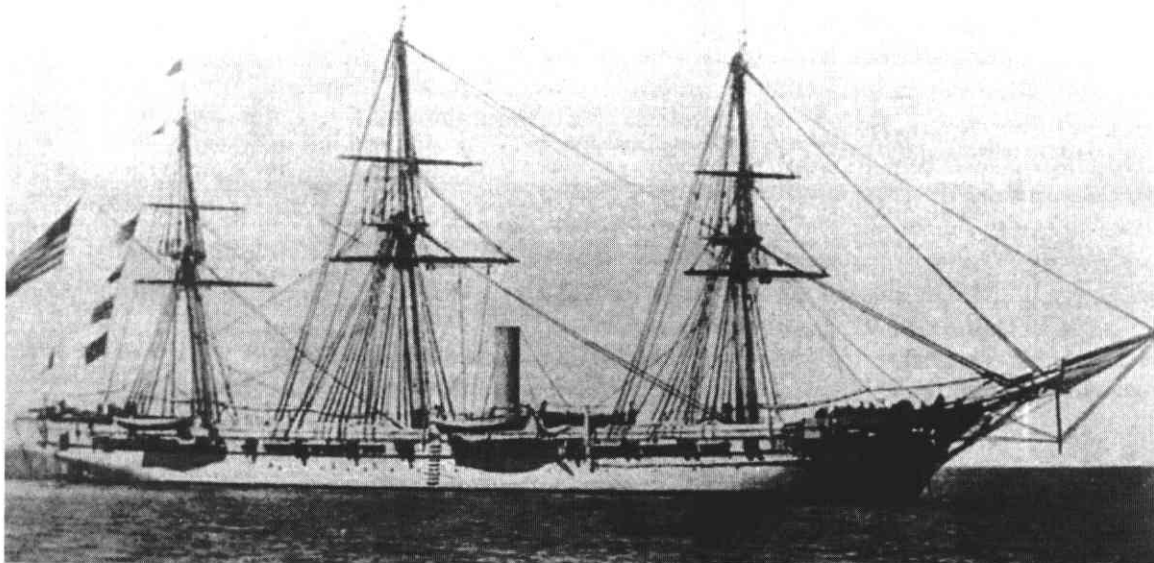
Very respectfully, your obedient servant,

P. Drayton,
Captain.

Rear-Admiral D.G. Farragut,

Commanding West Gulf Blockading Squadron, off Mobile.

One month later, on August 5, 1864, the famous Battle of Mobile Bay was fought. After deciding that this last Confederate port in the Gulf of Mexico had to be closed, the Federal forces prepared an attack for several weeks. The Bay was patrolled by the great ram *Tennessee* and a small fleet of gunboats under the command of Admiral Franklin Buchanan, and the



The U.S.S. *Hartford*, a deep-draft ocean-going vessel armed with 24 guns.



A far less dignified Farragut in the rigging. *The Civil War*, Time-Life Inc.



Quartermaster John Knowles. U.S. Naval Historical Center.

entrance was guarded by powerful Fort Morgan. With Admiral Farragut in the rigging of his flagship *Hartford* and Captain Drayton on the deck, the awesome Union fleet entered the mouth of the Bay just a short distance from where the *Ivanhoe* was destroyed. It was during the exchange with the guns of Fort Morgan that Percival Drayton ordered Quarter-master John Knowles to lash the Admiral into the rigging with a lead line lest he fall and be killed. A few minutes later, as the ships approached the torpedo (mine) field, Farragut gave the order which has become a household saying; the exact words as recalled by Flag Lieutenant John C. Watson were, "Damn the torpedoes! Full speed ahead, Drayton!"

Although many writers have described the Battle of Mobile Bay in colorful language, perhaps the most impressive account is Captain Drayton's report of the action to Admiral Farragut written on the evening of that memorable day:

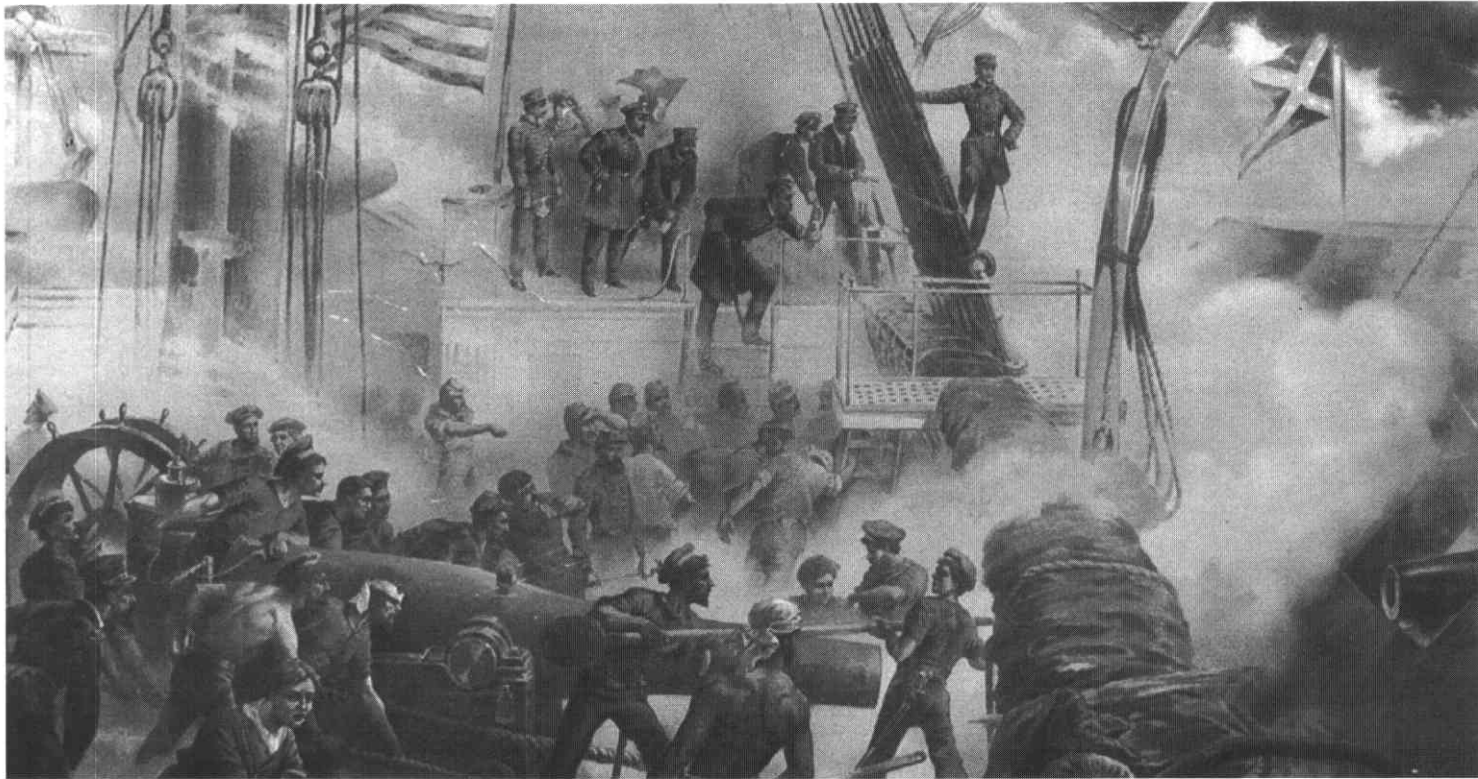
Report of Captain Drayton, U.S. Navy, commanding U.S. flagship *Hartford*, with enclosures.

Flagship *Hartford*,

Mobile Bay, August 6, 1864

SIR: I have the honor to offer the following report of the part which this vessel took in the action of yesterday:

According to previous arrangement, the *Metacomb* was lashed alongside of us at 4:30 a.m., and at 5:30 we got underway, following the *Brooklyn*, which led the line. After some little delay, which was required to allow of all the vessels getting into position, we moved on in the direction of Fort Morgan, which opened on us at about 2 miles distance at 7:06. The enemy's fire was at once answered by that of our bow 100-pounder rifle, the only gun that could be brought to bear until about 7:30, when we commenced firing the broadside guns with great rapidity, which was continued as long as they could be of use. About 7:35 I heard the cry that a monitor was sinking, and looking on the starboard bow saw the turret of the *Tecumseh* just disappearing under the water, where an instant before I had seen this noble vessel pushing on gallantly in a straight line to attack the enemy's ram *Tennessee*, which had apparently moved out to give her an opportunity.



Battle of Mobile Bay. Louis Prang & Co., Boston. Civil War Library and Museum.

As our boats could not be lowered, by your direction one was sent which was towing astern of the *Metacomet*, the vessel lashed to us.

The rapidity of our fire, together with the smoke, so completely disordered the enemy's aim that we passed the fort with no great injury or loss of life, a shell which came through the side and exploded a little abaft the mainmast, killing and wounding a large portion of No. 7 gun's crew, being the only one that caused much destruction. As we, however, were getting by the shore batteries we came directly under the fire of the gunboats *Selma*, *Morgan*, and *Gaines* and the ram *Tennessee*, and being only able to direct our fire on one of them at a time, the shots from the others were delivered with great deliberation and consequent effect, a single shell having killed 10 and wounded 5 men at Nos. 1 and 2 guns.

The *Tennessee* also followed us for some distance, throwing an occasional shot; but finding that she did not come up, and we being now a mile ahead of the remainder of the fleet, she turned and ran down to them, not wishing, I suppose, to be entirely cut off from Fort Morgan.

At this time, by your order, the *Metacomet* was cast off and directed to chase the *Selma*, which, keeping on our bow, had annoyed us excessively with her three stern guns, which we could not answer, owing to our rifle-gun carriage having been destroyed by a shell.

She was just sheering off as the *Metacomet* was loosed from us, and being followed into shallow water, was overtaken and captured by the latter vessel after an exciting running fight of an hour. The other two gunboats, the *Morgan* and *Gaines*, also got into shallow water, and not being followed by any of our light-draft vessels, escaped to Fort Morgan, where one was run ashore and afterwards burned, and the other, the *Morgan*, got to Mobile during the night by keeping close inshore.

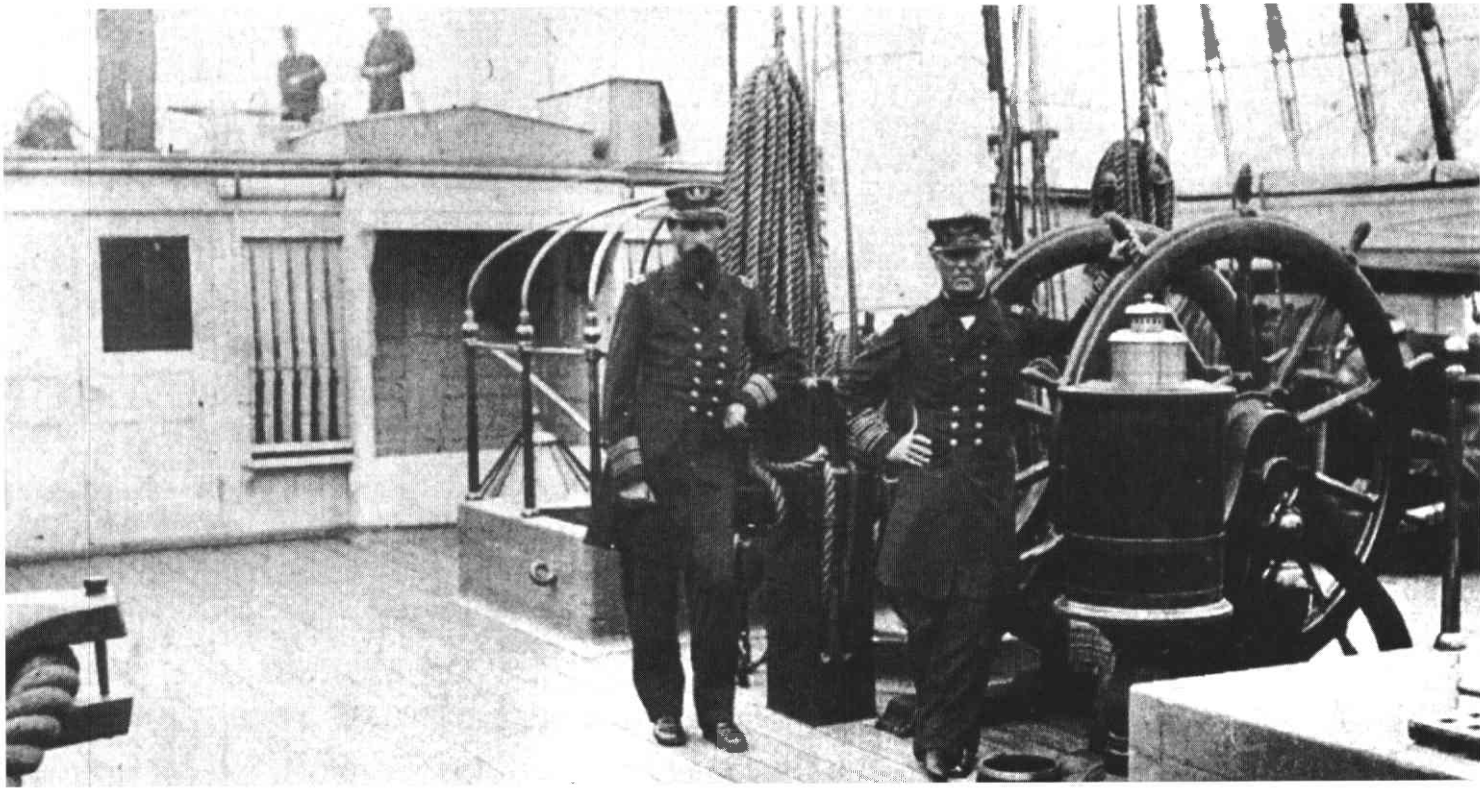
The fight appearing to be now over, we anchored and made signal to the fleet to do the same, supposing that as

the *Tennessee* had got under Fort Morgan, she would remain there, when a quarter of an hour later it was reported that she had come out and was steering toward us. I could not, however, believe in such temerity at first; but its truth becoming soon evident, by your order I commenced heaving up the anchor and should have slipped had it not been for the jamming of a shackle pin; but the ship was soon underway again and steering straight for the ram, which we struck with great force, although not on her beam, as she turned toward us as we approached. After striking, we dropped close alongside and delivered our broadside of solid IX-inch shot with 13 pounds of powder, at a distance of perhaps not more than 8 feet from her side, as I believe, however, from subsequent observation, without doing any injury. The ram at the time had only two guns in broadside. One missed fire several times, as we could distinctly hear. The shell from the other passed through our berth deck and exploded just inside, killing and wounding a number of men, and the pieces broke through the spar and berth decks, even going through the launch and into the hold where were the wounded.

We then stood off and were making another circuit to run into the ram again when in mid-career the *Lackawanna* struck us a little forward of the mizzenmast, cutting us completely down to within 2 feet of the water. This caused a detention of perhaps five minutes; but finding that we were not sinking, the ship was, by your order, pointed again for the ram, and we were going for her at full speed when it was observed that a white flag was flying. This ended the action, and at 10:10 we had again anchored at about 4 miles distance from Fort Morgan.

(It was learned later that severe damage to the steering mechanism of the *Tennessee* caused her to surrender.)

Although history has made Admiral Farragut one



Drayton and Farragut aboard the *Hartford* after the battle of Mobile Bay. U.S. Naval Historical Center.

of America's great military heroes, Captain Drayton played no small part in the drama of Mobile Bay, and Farragut's comments about him in his detailed report of the battle (August 12, 1864) give ample evidence of the Admiral's high regard for his Fleet Captain:

The *Hartford*, my flagship, was commanded by Captain Percival Drayton, who exhibited throughout that coolness and ability for which he has long been known to his brother officers. But I must speak of that officer in a double capacity. He is the Fleet captain of my squadron, and one of more determined energy, untiring devotion to duty, and zeal for the service, tempered by great calmness, I do not think adorns any Navy. I desire to call your attention to this officer, though well aware in thus speaking of his high qualities I am only communicating officially to the Department that which it knew full well before. To him, and to my staff, in their respective positions, I am indebted for the detail of my fleet.

Two days over a year after the Battle of Mobile Bay, Percival Drayton died in Washington, D.C. at the age of 53. He was then serving as Chief of the Bureau of Navigation, at that time the highest position held by a southerner in the U.S. Navy.

It is difficult to really know a man through history's written word, but this tribute by John Coddington Kinney as it appears in *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War* (Vol.IV, p.383) perhaps does justice to Captain Percival Drayton:

Next in prominence to the admiral was the tall, commanding form of Fleet-Captain Percival Drayton, the man of all men to be Farragut's chief of staff, gentlemanly and courteous to all, but thoughtful and reserved, a man of marked intellect and power, in whose death, a few years later, our navy lost one of its brightest stars, and the cause of liberty and human rights a most devoted friend. I have digressed to this extent to pay my humble tribute to one of the bravest and most patriotic men I have ever met, and to a native South Carolinian of bluest blood, and proud of his ancestry, who in his love of country had learned to look beyond state lines and to disregard the ties of kinship.

John Coddington Kinney
1st Lieutenant U.S. Army

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