

Mobile Bay Campaign Interpretation and
Preservation Conference Report

*Damn the Torpedoes,
Full Speed Ahead!*

A Report of the Issues and Recommendations
resulting from a 6-7 November 1997 Conference
in Orange Beach, Alabama

Planned and Prepared
by
The Blue and Gray Education Society
and
The American Battlefield Protection Program
for
Historic Blakeley Authority, Dauphin Island Park and Beach
Board, Alabama Historical Commission

June 1999

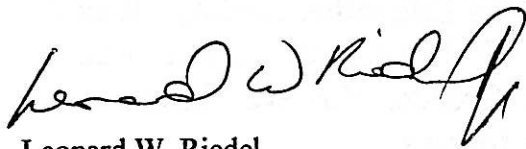
About the Report

The report which follows discusses the state of surviving Civil War resources relating to the 1864 and 1865 operations against the Confederate port of Mobile, Alabama.

Special thanks are due to Richard McMurry, and Winston Groom for encouraging me to undertake this project and for helping me develop a credible understanding of the sites. *I am firmly convinced that these resources are deserving of Alabama's special efforts towards preservation and educational presentation.*

Finally, I would like to thank Ms. Ginger Carter at the American Battlefield Protection Program and the site managers at Fort Gaines, Fort Morgan, and Fort Blakeley for having confidence in our ability to plan, organize, and conduct a meaningful conference on a campaign so visible and important--it is a pleasure to work with them.

Any mistakes in this document are the responsibility of the **Blue and Gray Education Society** alone. If the reader has any questions, please call 804-836-3291.



Leonard W. Riedel
Executive Director

Disclaimer

This material is based upon work under a cooperative agreement with the American Battlefield Protection Program, National Park Service, Department of Interior. Any opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this material are those of the BGES and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Department of the Interior. Under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, as amended; Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 as amended; and the Age Discrimination Act of 1975, as amended, the U.S. Department of the Interior prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, handicap, or age in its programs. If you believe you have been discriminated against in any program, activity, or facility of the U.S. Department of Interior, or you desire further information, please write: Director, Equal Opportunity Program, Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1849 L Street NW, Washington, DC 20240.

This is a public report prepared by the **Blue and Gray Education Society**. It may be reproduced and distributed without permission. NPS shall have a royalty-free right to republish any material generated by this conference. However, its use in any other report or document should be credited as follows

"Quoted from **BGES** report "Damn the Torpedoes, Full Speed Ahead" The Mobile Bay Campaign Interpretation and Preservation Conference Report June 1999, page xx. Please provide a copy of any usage to **BGES**, Box 129, Danville, Virginia 24543-0129.

Table of Contents

About the Report.....	ii
Disclaimer.....	iii
Table of Contents.....	iv
Introduction.....	1
Current Situation.....	4
Preservation Efforts.....	6
Education and Interpretation.....	7
The Orange Beach Conference.....	8
Conference Issues	
Issue #1: Development of a Cogent Regional Strategy for Presentation of the Mobile Campaign	8
Recommendations	
#1-#16.....	9
Issue #2: The Infrastructure and lands at Fort Morgan, Fort Gaines, and Fort Blakeley need repair, maintenance, and safety mechanisms put in place	11
Recommendations	
#17-#26.....	12
Issue #3: New Funding Strategies are Needed	13
Recommendations #27-#33.....	17
Summary.....	18
Agenda.....	A-1
Meeting Attendees.....	A-3

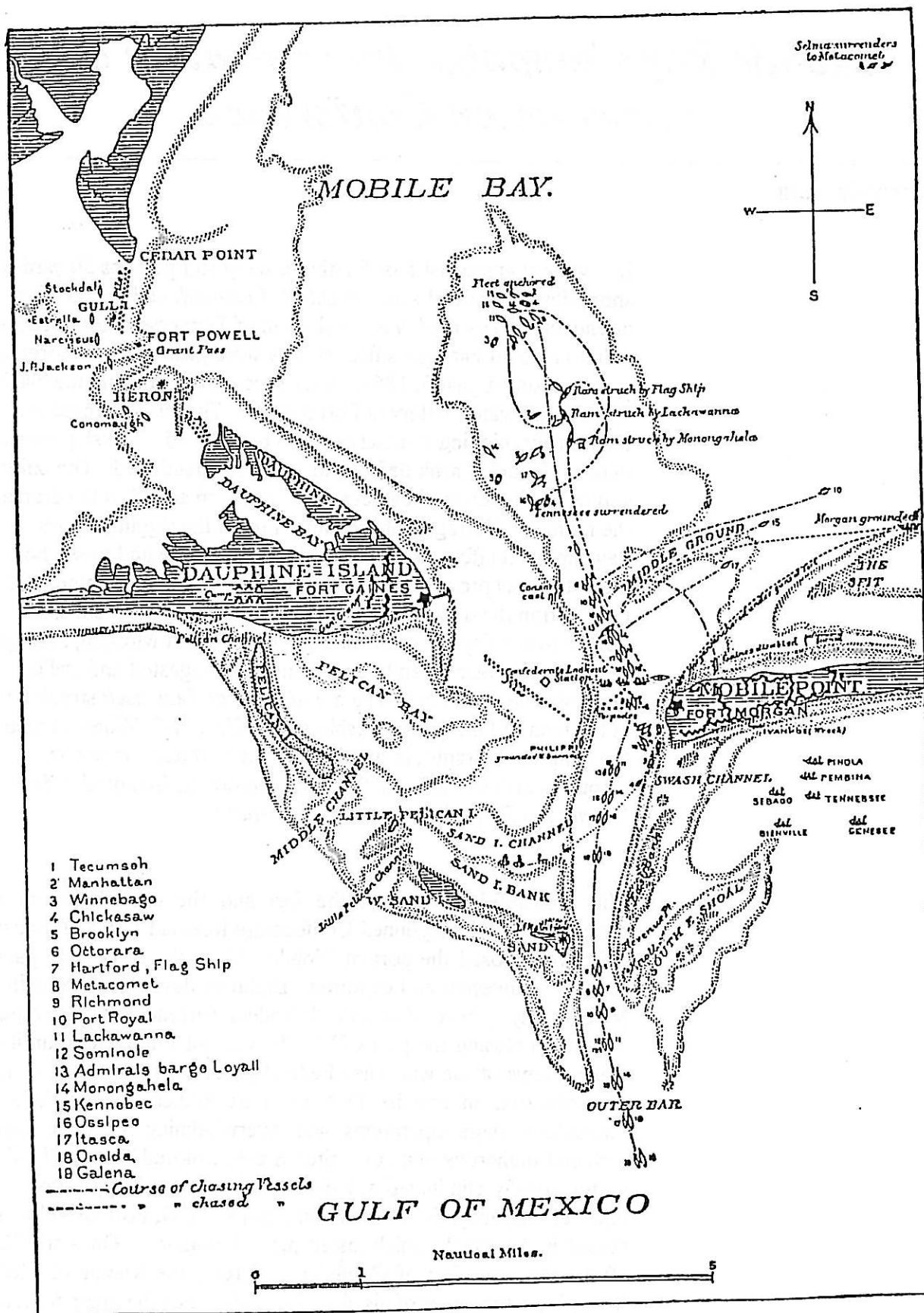
Mobile Bay Campaign Interpretation and Preservation Conference

Introduction

In a watery grave just 5 or 6 fathoms deep and perhaps 50 yards off shore lies the Federal ironclad *U.S.S. Tecumseh* and her 93 silent attendants. They died while in the van of Tennessee born, Federal Admiral David Farragut's fleet as they were passing Fort Morgan, Alabama on August 5, 1864. After successfully running the blazing guns of the water battery at Fort Morgan, *Tecumseh* strayed out of the narrow shipping channel and into a minefield. The ship struck a mine and quickly sank before she could be abandoned. The noise and confusion created by *Tecumseh*'s sinking added to the drama of the moment. Farragut placed himself upon the riggings of his flagship in an effort to get above the acrid smoke and to see how the battle was progressing. The guns of Fort Morgan hammered his fleet. Soon the discipline of his line of battle began to collapse. Rather than delay under the blazing guns of Fort Morgan, Farragut instructed his helmsman to go around the congested and stalled fleet into the mine field. The graphic fate of *Tecumseh* struck fear in the men of Farragut's flagship *U.S.S. Hartford*. When warned of the dangers, Farragut, in words which even today stir strong emotions in naval officers, firmly roared out his immortal orders: "*Damn the Torpedoes, Full Speed ahead!*"

The successful passage of the fort and the capitulation of the out-manned and outgunned Confederate ironclad *C.S.S. Tennessee* effectively closed the port of Mobile. Once the forts were passed each were invested and captured. Eighteen days after the battle of Mobile Bay, Fort Morgan's defenders surrendered. Farragut's success in closing the port of Mobile was not followed up until the waning days of the war when Federal ground forces moved against the twin sites of Spanish Fort and Fort Blakeley. The Federal's meticulous siege operations and overwhelming strength, which included numerous units of United States Colored Troops (USCT), systematically eliminated any chance of successful opposition. On April 8th, Spanish Fort fell and on April 9, 1865, Fort Blakeley was seized in an attack which lasted just 15 minutes. On April 12th, after the evacuation of Confederate forces, the Mayor of Mobile offered the surrender of his city. The balance of the great American

The Battle of Mobile Bay Aug 5, 1864



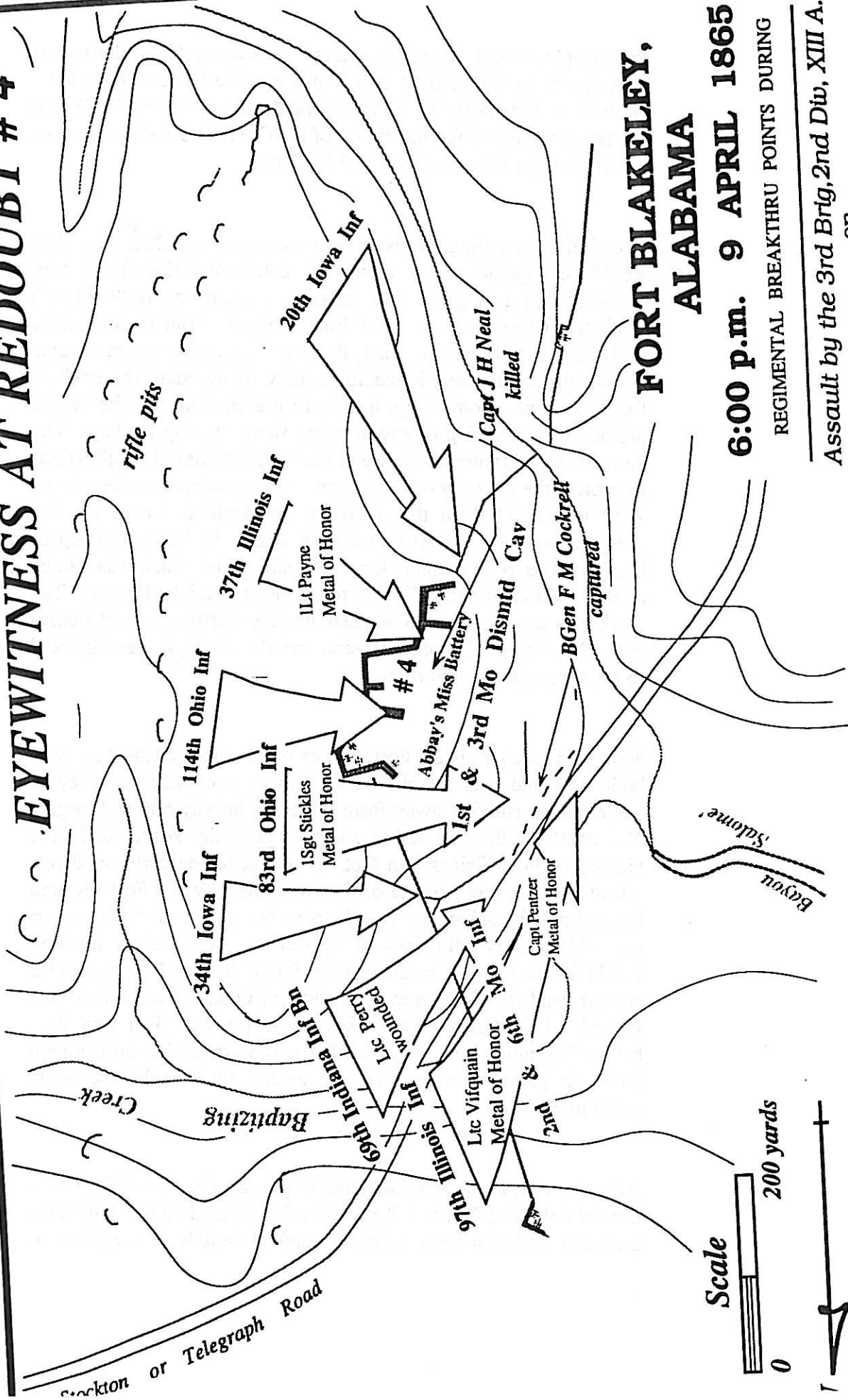
tragedy played out when the young Confederate General Richard Taylor, son of a former United States president Zachary Taylor, married to the daughter of the Confederate president (Jefferson Davis), surrendered the remainder of the Confederate forces east of the Mississippi River to General E.R. Canby.

Even if this were the only history of note to occur at these sites they would be legendary sites worthy of commemoration. Each site; however, has a long and rich history. As early as 1699, French soldiers fortified the area near Fort Morgan. The reasons were fairly easy to understand. First, if the Indians in the region became particularly aggressive, it would be easy to evacuate the soldiers from the area. Conversely, a military presence on the site would provide early warning of any invading ships entering the bay. The American government recognized the need for coastal fortifications to protect the integrity of her shores. The experience of the War of 1812 convinced them that masonry fortifications would provide adequate security against unwelcome ships. In 1818, a group of brick masons were commissioned to build a fort which was named after the Revolutionary War hero, General Daniel Morgan. The work was completed in 1834. Like its sister fortifications at Pensacola, Charleston, Hampton, Boston and elsewhere, it was expected to serve as a strong deterrent.

Morgan's smaller sister, Fort Gaines on Dauphin Island had been built later and was established to provide a crossfire to prevent vessels from steering away from the more heavily armed Morgan. The depth of the bay varied and was generally shallower in the vicinity of Fort Gaines. In fact, the Confederacy early on determined to force any passage of the two forts towards Fort Morgan by creating the shipping channel under her guns and closing other navigable waters with lines of torpedoes. Fort Gaines function would be to provide crossing fires for both Fort Morgan and a smaller sand fortification in the middle of Grant's Pass called Fort Powell. Fort Gaines' vulnerability was proven when two days before Farragut's passage Federal troops were landed on Dauphin Island in preparation for the land assault that would eventually result in her capture.

After the war, both forts continued to play a role in the US military coastal defense scheme. Like many other forts, they were modernized and batteries were added to defend Mobile Bay as late as

EYEWITNESS AT REDOUBT # 4



World War II. Most of these modifications are still visible at the forts. This makes the sites particularly instructive as a living history of US coastal fortifications.

Fort Blakeley sits within the largest National Register site east of the Mississippi River. While noteworthy as the site of one of the last battles of the War Between the States, it has a rich heritage independent of the war. Remains of the old city of Blakeley suggest that there may be archeological artifacts yet to be uncovered. Ancient Indian mounds dot the landscape and a nature preserve attracts naturalists. Many of these and other people use the site for camping. Hiking and biking trails make this site a pleasant experience for those who use it.

Today the spirit of Farragut lives as the Alabama Gulf Coast prepares to push ahead with a visionary and creative partnership to capture a larger share of the heritage tourism dollar. The region, which includes the Gulf Coasts of Mississippi, and Florida, is blessed with an abundance of historical and cultural resources which are unmatched within 150 miles. Visionary planners face a number of obstacles; however, a successful outcome can be achieved through a decisive and resolute commitment by the sites and their partners.

The **Blue and Gray Education Society** in cooperation with the **Dauphin Island Parks and Recreation Board**, **Historic Fort Blakeley Foundation**, and the **Fort Morgan State Historical Park** successfully applied to the **National Park Service's *American Battlefield Protection Program*** for funds to plan and execute a preservation, planning and interpretive conference for the sites relating to the battles for Mobile Bay and Mobile. The immediate catalyst of the effort was a threat of incompatible development on 65 acres of unprotected land at Fort Blakeley. The immediate threat dissipated with the sale of the property; however, the issue is not yet completely resolved.

The **BGES** worked to construct a suitable conference (attachment 1). A March 1997 site survey was conducted in anticipation of a September event. **Hurricane Danny**, in July 1997, caused widespread damage at the sites and the event was rescheduled for November 6-7, 1997. Nearly 30 representatives from various agencies and groups participated (attachment 2). This is an assessment of the current situation around Mobile Bay and a report of the conference.

Regional Map of Mobile Campaign

