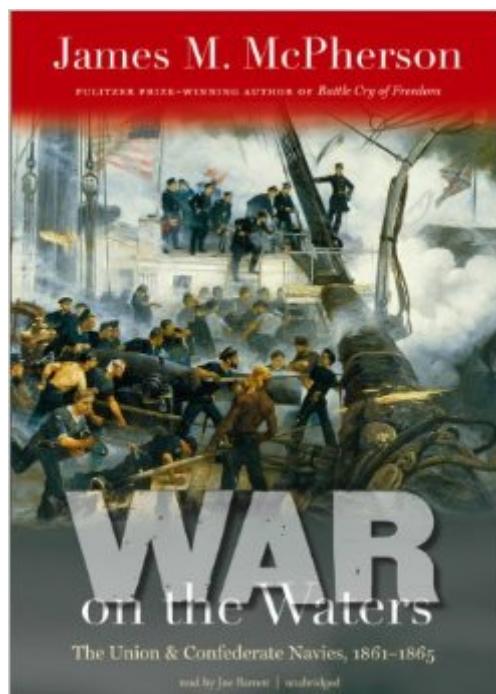


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# War On The Waters: The Union And Confederate Navies, 1861-1865 (The Littlefield History Of The Civil War Era)



## Synopsis

[Read by Joe Barrett] Although previously undervalued for their strategic impact because they represented only a small percentage of total forces, the Union and Confederate navies were crucial to the outcome of the Civil War. In *War on the Waters*, James M. McPherson has crafted an enlightening, at times harrowing, and ultimately thrilling account of the war's naval campaigns and their military leaders. McPherson recounts how the Union navy's blockade of the Confederate coast, leaky as a sieve in the war's early months, became increasingly effective as it choked off vital imports and exports. Meanwhile, the Confederate navy, dwarfed by its giant adversary, demonstrated daring and military innovation. Commerce raiders sank Union ships and drove the American merchant marine from the high seas. Southern ironclads sent several Union warships to the bottom, naval mines sank many more, and the Confederates deployed the world's first submarine to sink an enemy vessel. But in the end, it was the Union navy that won some of the war's most important strategic victories -- as an essential partner to the army on the ground at Fort Donelson, Vicksburg, Port Hudson, Mobile Bay, and Fort Fisher, and all by itself at Port Royal, Fort Henry, New Orleans, and Memphis.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

In his breadth of knowledge, lucid writing, and passion for his subject, James McPherson remains among the best of Civil War historians. For many years Professor of history at Princeton University, McPherson has the rare gift of appealing to both academic and lay readers. In his latest book, "War

on the Waters: The Union & Confederate Navies, 1861 -- 1865 (2012), McPherson focuses on the role of the navies in the Civil War. He argues persuasively that students of the war tend to underestimate the importance of the navies in the war's outcome. This is particularly the case, he argues, for the Union Navy. The book enhanced my knowledge of a sometimes overlooked aspect of the war. The focus of the book is on the Union Navy in that it was far larger than the Confederate Navy and ultimately more successful. Thus, McPerson begins by quoting Abraham Lincoln in 1863 on the navy's role in the Vicksburg campaign. "Nor must Uncle Sam's Web-feet be forgotten. At all the watery margins they have been present. Not only on the deep sea, the broad bay, and the rapid river, but also up the narrow muddy bayou, and wherever the ground was a little damp, they have been and made their tracks." In McPherson's book, the reader follows "Uncle Sam's Web-feet" in the oceans, rivers, swamps, and bayous. McPherson also praises the Confederate navy for its ingenuity and spirit and for doing much with little. Without the industrial resources of the North, the Confederacy led in the development of ironclad ships, torpedoes, and submarines. In its Secretary of the Navy, Steven Mallory, the Confederacy had a gifted and innovative leader whom McPherson obviously admires. In a relatively short book McPherson explores naval battles, large and small, on the sea and on the rivers. For both the Union and the Confederacy, he describes battles in which the navy had the sole responsibility as well as battles showing the cooperation, or its lack, between the navy and the army. The book describes naval leaders and heroes on both sides as well as the mixture of boredom and hard, dangerous fighting that awaited the sailors. McPherson also emphasizes the activities of the navies as they impacted politics and the conduct of foreign affairs. The Union instituted a blockade of the South at the outset of the war, and the effectiveness of the blockade has long been a subject of debate among students. McPherson argues that the blockade was a major factor in the Union's success, concluding that by isolating and weakening the South and depriving it of supplies, the blockade "may have been just enough to tip the balance to Union victory." The book is organized chronologically following, so to speak, the ebb and flow of battle. McPherson sees the history of the Civil War and of naval activity as falling into five overlapping parts, developed in his text: 1. a series of early Union naval victories in 1861-1862 on the Eastern seabord and the captures of Fort Henry and Fort Donelson which paved the way for Union success in the West, and Farragut's taking of New Orleans; 2. Successful Confederate resistance in 1862, including the construction of the Virginia, the development of torpedoes, and the use of commerce raiders, including the CSS Alabama, 3. The Union success culminating with the taking of Vicksburg, in which the navy played a critical role 4. Confederate victories in the Western theater and its development of the submarine. These successes were short lived given Farragut's

dramatic victory at Mobile Bay, Alabama. 5. The final months of the war, including the fall of Fort Fisher on the North Carolina coast. There is a good narrative thread in the story. For example, I always was puzzled about how the Union navy was able to run past the formidable batteries of Vicksburg prior to set up Grant's land campaign below the city. McPherson's discussion about running fortifications at Vicksburg and elsewhere earlier in the war, helped me understand what was at stake in this type of action. The book is also filled with details about naval actions I hadn't heard of before. For example, McPherson describes the Union's near disastrous 1864 Red River Campaign in Louisiana. Union Admiral Porter's fleet sailed up the Red River and almost became stranded when the water level of the river lowered. An Army Lieutenant Colonel, Joseph Bailey, who had built dams in logging operations in civilian life, was able to organize the building of a dam on the Red River which allowed the stranded ships to retreat safely. McPherson writes with flair, treats the characters in his book with respect, and illuminates the role of the navies in the conduct and outcome of the Civil War. The book will have most appeal to readers with a good broad overview of Civil War military history. It is an impressive, readable account of the importance of the Union and Confederate navies. Robin Friedman

Civil War history tends to mention the Navy only at Hampton Roads and Vicksburg. The blockade, usually noted in passing, gets credit for cutting the Confederacy from Europe. A person could forget that both sides spent considerable resources on their navy. This is a good introduction to naval operations during the war. As expected, an introduction will not contain details and nuances. Rather an introduction will cover the major considerations, personalities, operations and events. The author provides everything that we could reasonably expect in an introduction to Civil War Naval history. He manages to convey this in an interesting, intelligent prose that is as easy to read as it is enjoyable. Organization is a combination of theater, operations or years, which sounds confusing, but it works well. Depending on the subject, the reader can expect a history that is stand-alone or integrated into the war. This is not all "Damn the torpedoes". There is a good deal of technological, political and social considerations. We see the movement from wooden ships to ironclads, the racially mixed crews and how politics influences operations. With all of this, we still find time for the battles. Readers will not be disappointed with the military coverage. The author captures all major and many smaller actions and firmly places them in the overall structure of the war. We see how the result of past operations affects planning. The University of North Carolina Press always presents a professional book. This is no exception with a full set of maps, illustrations, endnotes, bibliography and index.

A very good concise survey of the naval history of the Civil War. Drawing on both primary research and a large body of secondary studies, this is a very well written book with decent illustrations and maps. McPherson covers both the broad contours of the war and all the major engagements/campaigns. Most of the book is about the Union Navy, but the Confederate efforts receive appropriate coverage. McPherson gives a particularly good idea of the challenges facing the Union Navy and its remarkable achievements. These include developing whole new riverine fleets and modes of warfare, the crucial blockade, and the equally crucial role in combined operations for the conquest of the South. The Confederate Navy receives its due coverage for its moderately successful commerce raiding and efforts to employ new technologies. I suspect that most, perhaps all, of the content of this book will be known well to the large body of readers interested in the Civil War, but this book covers the topic very well in a relatively short book. Excellent bibliography.

I have always wanted to know more about the brown water vessels of the Civil War. A time, or war, where the end of sail and beginning of steam overlap, with side wheel, screw prop, iron, timber and tin clad ships and monitors slug it out on the rivers of the interior, as well as the coasts. A great read, I just wish it had more pictures, as I had to jump to Wiki to view pictures of each belligerent ship. It should probably lose a star or two for this, but I am always in a generous mood after a good book.

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