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**When the Confederates Terrorized Maine:
The Battle of Portland Harbor**

Carter Stevens

April 26, 2013

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Introduction

[This] is a story of audacity and adventure that is not surpassed in dramatic interest, I think, by any event which occurred outside the distinctive field of warfare, during the War of the Rebellion...My imagination was so impressed by the incident that it seems to me worthwhile to bring it before a new generation, forty years after it happened; especially as in that great year of battles it escaped the nation's memory.¹

–Clarence Hale, at the Maine Historical Society (MHS), 1901

Saturday, June 27, 1863, dawned brightly over Portland, Maine. As the city's residents began to go about their weekend business, they suddenly realized that the *Caleb Cushing*, the United States Revenue Cutter (U.S.R.C.) which had been stationed in Portland Harbor on and off again since 1853, was missing. Rumors flew about a traitorous Southerner on board, the work of pirates on the coast, and more. Before the day was over, the revenue cutter would be destroyed and the Casco Bay area would be transformed forever, a victim of one of the northernmost events of the Civil War on the periphery.²

Although the “Battle of Portland Harbor” was a minor and peripheral event in the larger course of the war, for the New Englanders who experienced it, it represented a moment just as terrifying and important as any could imagine on the front lines. Other events on the Civil War's periphery, including the Saint Alban's Raid and bank robbery in Vermont, inspired similar feelings of fear and a sense of significance for the civilians and home guardsmen who participated in them. This battle represents an example of this war on the periphery, the power of newspapers to stir up panic and generate anxiety on the Union home front, and the tense divide which existed during the Civil War between private citizens and business on the one hand and the military and federal government on the other.

¹ Clarence Hale, “The Capture of the Caleb Cushing,” in *Collections of the MHS*, Vol. 1, Ser. 3, (Portland, Maine: MHS, 1904), 191.

² U.S. Department of the Treasury, *Record of Movements: Vessels of the United State Coast Guard, 1790 – December 31, 1933*, (Reprinted by Department of Transportation and United State Coast Guard, U.S.C.G. Headquarters, Washington, D.C., 1989), 389.

First and foremost, it is important to outline and detail the story of the battle, the circumstances leading to it, and its aftermath. This story that has been told slightly differently and in fragmented segments since the battle occurred, including as parts of biographies and larger works on the naval war. To truly understand its ramifications, it is necessary to address the battle in a more comprehensive manner as both an important event in Maine history as well as an opportunity to correct oft-repeated mistakes and frequent inconsistencies in these narratives.

Second, the newspaper accounts, the hysteria they raised, and their numerous editorials about the raid represented a clear picture of the fear-mongering, hatred, and divergence of opinion in the Union press and home front. These newspaper accounts occurred in two distinctive phases—during the commerce raiding and economic disruption before the battle and after the results and background to the battle became known.

Third, the raid embodied a larger debate raging through the Union at the time— where the line between civil and military or federal jurisdiction ended. This conflict can be seen in the responses of shipping corporations to the commerce raiding threat, both before and after the battle, and particularly in the deliberations over the legal status of the Confederate prisoners who were widely decried as treasonous pirates. Citizens all over the Union wondered whether these Confederates captured at sea would be tried as criminals under national piracy laws, and likely hanged, or held as enemy prisoners of war.

The Battle of Portland Harbor was one of the only incursions of an enemy vessel into a Union port during the Civil War and, as such, it was arguably the most audacious such operation carried out along the Northern coast. Just as Clarence Hale hoped to bring this story to the minds of Mainers who had started to forget its importance about forty years after it occurred, it is

important to remember— and correctly outline and detail— this enduring event as the U.S. marks the sesquicentennial of the Civil War and of the battle itself.

Section I: Background to the Battle

By June, 1863, the Civil War had been raging for over two years. Northern victory was by no means assured, although the Union had scored successes by occupying New Orleans and other major Southern ports. In the land war, Union General Ulysses S. Grant's Army of the Tennessee was engaged in a lengthy and bloody siege of the Confederate fortress at Vicksburg, which represented Southern defiance of U.S. Navy (U.S.N.) control on the Mississippi River. The siege showed no sign of breaking. Meanwhile, Confederate General Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia had invaded Northern territory in Maryland and Pennsylvania and seemed determined to keep the fight in the Eastern Theater out of the Confederate States of America (C.S.A). Lee's troops seemed unstoppable as they outmaneuvered and outfought pursuing Union forces. Similarly, many Northerners were pessimistic about the naval war where, despite massive Northern numerical superiority, the Confederates seemed to be outwitting the U.S.N. at every turn.³

At the start of the war, in April, 1861, the C.S.A. had issued the first letters of marque in hopes of defeating Union naval superiority through irregular warfare. The C.S.A. commissioned both warships and personal vessels to serve as commerce raiders on the high seas.⁴ These privateers were initially successful, scoring successes and sinking unarmed Northern ships with relative impunity in the first several months of the war. A former slave ship renamed for the Confederate President found easy success, as there was little U.S.N. protection for merchant

³ James M. McPherson, *War on the Waters: The Union and Confederate Navies, 1861 – 1865*, (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 153.

⁴ William Morrison Robinson, *The Confederate Privateers*, (Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 1990), 1.

ships near the Southern coast and less organization coordinating their actions. The *Jefferson Davis* captured nine Union ships during June of 1861 before it ran aground off the coast of Florida.⁵

Confederate Secretary of the Navy Stephen R. Mallory and his advisers recognized by the end of 1861, however, that the Confederate “navy” could not sustain this irregular campaign. The U.S.N. had become more powerful, more well-organized, and better supplied by the day. As the South became increasingly crippled by the U.S.N.’s total blockade in late 1861 and early 1862, the C.S.A. decided upon a new, two-pronged strategy on the oceans and waterways of the region: a focus on new weapons, particularly ironclad warships, and commerce raiding. The mission of commerce raiders was specifically to prey upon Union shipping outside of the blockade zone, to wreak havoc on the Union maritime economy, and to draw the U.S.N.’s attention away from the blockade or other operations in the South.⁶

Commerce raiding as a strategy had been pioneered by France, and so it bore the French name *guerre de course* (“war on commerce”). It had for some time been the conventional response of weaker states to more powerful ones, and, as historian Craig Symonds said, it “bore some resemblance to guerilla warfare at sea.”⁷ This approach relied both on privateers—the privately owned vessels operating under a letter of marque from their government, which the Confederacy relied on in the first months of the war—as well as specially designed warships commissioned and paid for by the government.⁸ Americans had a tradition of operations such as these, as naval strategy in both the Revolution and War of 1812 focused on destroying British

⁵ Spencer C. Tucker, *A Short History of the Civil War at Sea*, (Wilmington, Delaware: Scholarly Resources, 2002) Tucker., 112, and “*Jefferson Davis: Confederate Privateer Brig, 1861*,” *Naval Historical Center*, <http://www.history.navy.mil/photos/sh-us-cs/csa-sh/csash-hl/jefn-dvs.htm>.

⁶ Tucker, 111.

⁷ Craig L. Symonds, *The Civil War at Sea*, (Denver, Colorado: Praeger, 2009), 61.

⁸ Symonds, *The Civil War at Sea*, 61.

merchant shipping, and, in so doing, attempted to diminish the resolve of their enemy to keep up the fight. The Confederate States Navy (C.S.N.), built from the ground up, settled for essentially the same strategy. The C.S.N. hoped that if commerce raiders and privateers destroyed enough Union shipping, the merchants and seafarers of the Northern cities would sue for peace.⁹

With these dubious distinctions, there was always some confusion as to which ships were legally constituted “privateers,” those sanctioned as commerce raiders by the Confederate government, or actual pirates. In theory, privateers were considered to have “persons in private employment...under the authority of a letter of marquee,” but in practice this was nearly impossible to enforce. There was also the problem of what “tenders” or “prizes,” ships that a legally authorized commerce raider might capture and then assign a token prize crew to, were considered. Men serving on a prize crew were technically under the authority of the Confederacy but operated on a private vessel commandeered for what essentially amounted to piracy. The Northern press further contributed to these confusing distinctions by demonizing any ship on a mission even remotely resembling legal commerce raiding as a “pirate,” making all classifications quite blurry and confusing.¹⁰ Although the Confederates would continue to ascribe to a level of honor to their commerce raiding strategy, the swift accusation of piracy by Northerners painted the Southerners serving on board commerce raiders as some of the most dishonorable of the rebellion.¹¹

The most famous of the early Confederate raiders was Raphael Semmes, previously a U.S.N. lieutenant who had served in the Mexican-American War. During that conflict,

⁹ Tucker, 111.

¹⁰ Clement Anselm Evans, ed., “Parker, W.H.: The C.S.N.,” in *Confederate Military History: A Library of Confederate States History*, (Atlanta, Georgia: Confederate Publishing Company, 1889), Vol. 12: 99.

¹¹ There is ample evidence of this derogatory term being applied to the Confederates, and this is especially evident in the case of Portland Harbor. The Confederates were often simply referred to as the “pirate *Tacony*” and its crew called pirates.

interestingly, Semmes had argued that the crews of Mexican commerce raiders should be hanged as pirates. This was a position which the Confederates would later vehemently oppose and would inspire vitriolic debate in the Union as a clash between civil and military authority over prisoners captured at sea. In the Civil War, Semmes commanded C.S.S. *Sumter*, sailing from the American coast to the Caribbean and finally Europe, sinking Union ships and wreaking havoc as he went. Semmes's success struck fear into the hearts of merchants and Northern citizens as the war which raged largely in the South began to affect their vital economic interests and livelihoods for the first time.¹²

By early 1863, Confederate commerce raiders were in their prime, with several ships operating near the Union coast and others in far-off locations such as England and Brazil. Fearing the possible damage one of these ships could inflict if it operated nearby, Governor John A. Andrew of Massachusetts wrote to Union Secretary of the Navy Gideon Welles in April 1863, asking for official protection of Massachusetts Bay from these raiders. A small squabble ensued, as they frequently did between leaders of coastal states and the government Navy Department, because Welles did not see the Bay as a primary target for Confederate commerce raiders. Andrew then wrote to President Abraham Lincoln, and the matter was quickly decided in his favor, because the president was sensitive to any dissent within the states of the north. Welles dispatched several ships from the U.S.N. and U.S. Revenue Cutter Service (R.C.S.), the quasi-military organization run by the Treasury Department and a forerunner to today's U.S. Coast Guard, to assist Massachusetts as well as the rest of New England and to make them feel they were more protected from any privateering threat.¹³ As time would tell, in fact, even with these ships they were still unprepared. It was in this larger context that, on the morning of June 27,

¹² Tucker, 112 – 115.

¹³ David W. Shaw, *Sea Wolf of the Confederacy: The Daring Civil War Raids of Naval Lt. Charles W. Read*, (New York: Free Press, 2004), 60 – 61.

1863, citizens of the city of Portland, Maine, awoke to discover their very own revenue cutter, the *Caleb Cushing*, mysteriously absent from the harbor.¹⁴

Section II: The “Battle” of Portland Harbor

The early hours of June 27, 1863 were dark and quiet for Portland. Most of the residents of the Casco Bay area were sleeping soundly. However, a few Northerners, mainly seafarers up and about on their normal schedules noticed something decidedly out of the ordinary that morning—the puzzling departure of the *Caleb Cushing*. Moreover, the revenue cutter’s movement appeared quite difficult, as there was barely any wind to catch the ship’s sails.¹⁵

The *Forest City*, a passenger steamer of the Portland Steam Packet Company, entered the harbor ahead of schedule around 3:30 AM that morning. The steamer was making one of its regular trips between Boston and Portland. Reuben Chandler, the steamer’s baggage master, and the rest of the *Forest City*’s crew suddenly noticed the cutter leaving the harbor. They saw two rowboats attached by ropes to the front of the ship and clearly towing it out to sea around 3:50 AM. However, because there was no wind and towing a sailing ship in such a way was standard practice, the crewmen “thought nothing of it,” although it was somewhat unorthodox for the cutter to get under way before sunrise. Chandler and the *Forest City*’s crew noticed only two men on the cutter’s deck, but they weren’t close enough to see exactly who was on board.¹⁶

When the *Forest City* docked in Portland a few hours later, the steamer’s crewmen were understandably quite surprised to see the master-at-arms of the *Caleb Cushing* waiting for them at the dock. The master-at-arms was mainly responsible for discipline and order on the cutter,

¹⁴ Jedidiah Jewett, Cutting out and destruction of the U.S. revenue cutter Caleb Cushing, June 27, 1863, in *Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies in the War of the Rebellion*, Series I, 27 Vols., (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1894 - 1917), 2: 322 - 325.

¹⁵ “Portland Man Tells of a Civil War Battle in Harbor Here 60 Years Ago Today,” *Portland Press Herald*, June 27, 1923.

¹⁶ “Portland Man Tells of a Civil War Battle in Harbor Here 60 Years Ago Today,” *Portland Press Herald*, June 27, 1923.

and should have been present on any mission the vessel departed on. He was apparently unaware that his ship had set sail without him and may have been groggy after a night of festivities in Portland. According to Chandler, it was at that moment that suspicions began to flare and “the cat jumped out of the bag.” Before long, word of the mysterious departure spread “over the city like wildfire.”¹⁷

Jedidiah Jewett, the customs collector for Portland who supervised the R.C.S. and ultimately reported to the Treasury Department in Washington, D.C., learned that there was something amiss at 8:10 AM. A messenger outside his house announced that the *Caleb Cushing* had been sighted by the Portland Observatory about five miles off the coast at daybreak. The Observatory, which dominated Portland’s Munjoy Hill near Fish Point, was used primarily to track the arrival of merchant ships, had existed since 1807, and immediately became an important commander center in Portland that morning. Figure 1 shows a map of the Portland Harbor area.¹⁸ Without wasting time or waiting for orders from his superior, Secretary of the Treasury Salmon P. Chase, Jewett dispatched word to the men of the 17th and 7th Maine Volunteer Infantry Regiments, which were based at Fort Preble, in nearby Cape Elizabeth, and Camp Lincoln, in South Portland, respectively, to be ready for action. He justified this action because he came “to the conclusion that this was an exigency when I ought not wait for orders from [Secretary Chase], but [must] assume the responsibility of [the cutter’s] recapture for the Government.”¹⁹

¹⁷ “Portland Man Tells of a Civil War Battle in Harbor Here 60 Years Ago Today,” *Portland Press Herald*, June 27, 1923.

¹⁸ Figure 1 can be found in Appendix A, Images.

¹⁹ Report of U.S. collector of customs, Portland, Me., June 27, 1863, *Official Records*, Series I, Vol. 2: 323. Observatory information from “History of the Tower,” *Greater Portland Landmarks*, <http://portlandlandmarks.org/observatory/history/>.

The commander at Fort Preble, Major George Andrews, also received word around 8:00 AM that the *Caleb Cushing* had been towed out during the dark hours of the morning under suspicious circumstances. Immediately, he called together the men of the 17th Maine, under Captain Nathaniel Prime and artilleryman Lt. Edward Collins, to prepare them for action.²⁰ Nearly two-thirds of the men in the 17th hailed from Cape Elizabeth, where Fort Preble was located, and some had seen action at the larger battles of 1862, including Fredericksburg.²¹

John Mead Gould, a Portland resident who had served as an officer with both the 1st and the 10th Maine, wanted to have his photograph taken on the morning of June 27. As a veteran back in his hometown for a brief respite of peace, he was one of the few Portlanders who had met the Confederates face to face in battle. That morning, however, instead of peace and quiet, he found people going about “talking very loudly about the *Caleb Cushing*’s capture.”²² Gould noticed quickly that most Portlanders had little idea what was going on in their own harbor during the first part of the morning. Suspicions and stories spread around the city. Apparently, residents “believed...that the whole story...was a joke,” and that the men on board had taken the ship out for a bit of fun. The city “was thrown into a state of excitement, bordering on consternation” as such rumors ran wild about the *Caleb Cushing*’s disappearance. Quickly, however, this story died away, and the rumors began to focus more on the individual R.C.S. officers on board that morning.²³

²⁰ Report of Major Andrews, Seventeenth U.S. Infantry, June 29, 1863, *Official Records*, Series I, Vol. 2: 326.

²¹ Paul J. Ledman, *A Maine Town Responds: Cape Elizabeth and South Portland in the Civil War*, (Cape Elizabeth, Maine: Next Steps Publishing, 2003), 118 – 120.

²² Jordan, William B., ed, *The Civil War Journals of John Mead Gould, 1861 – 1866*, (Baltimore: Butternut and Blue, 1998), Entry for June 27. Gould was between enlistments at this time but would return to service with the 20th Maine after the incident at Portland.

²³ “The Rebel Pirates,” *New York Times*, 28 Jun 1863, *ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times (1851-2009)*, Web, 14 Dec. 2012, and “Capture by the Rebels of Revenue Cutter *Caleb Cushing* in Portland Harbor!” *Eastern Argus*, June 29, 1863.

This initial suspicion centered heavily on R.C.S. Lt. Dudley Davenport. Gould reported that these rumors centered on the fact that “the senior Lt. was a Southerner by birth and had probably concocted a plan to run the schooner out and furthermore he had done so.” Further rumors held that Davenport “had received assistance from some privateers which had got in here somehow or other.”²⁴ One of the popular rumors was that Davenport had “basely betrayed his trust” by sending away most of the cutter’s crew, those “whom he could not seduce to treasonable purposes,” and had then gone out to join the well-known *Tacony*.²⁵ Davenport’s superior, Customs Collector Jewett, also suspected the man’s involvement, writing in his official report and a telegram to Sec. Chase that his “suspicions...fell upon...Davenport as the party who had run off with her.”²⁶

The rumors were somewhat grounded in fact, as Davenport was indeed a Georgian, but there was no evidence to suggest he shared any sympathies with the C.S.A. However, due to a coincidental death, Davenport was ranking officer on board that morning. Early the day before, the *Caleb Cushing*’s captain, George Clark, had died of a heart attack. Captain Clark was a long-serving officer in the R.C.S., first receiving a commission on Feb. 9, 1833. During his time in the R.C.S., he had fought in the Seminole Wars of Florida, became a captain on Dec. 3, 1852, and had served on numerous ships around the East Coast. However, by the time the Civil War began, his health had deteriorated; Capt. Clark had taken several sick leaves, including one for two weeks in March 1862. His death coincidently on the same day the ship disappeared seemed damning for Lt. Davenport. This turn of events gave the lieutenant the means and opportunity to

²⁴ *Journals of J. M. Gould*, entry for June 27.

²⁵ “Capture by the Rebels of *Caleb Cushing*,” *Eastern Argus*, June 29, 1863.

²⁶ Report of U.S. collector of customs, Portland, Me., June 27, 1863, *Official Records*, Series I, Vol. 2: 323, and U.S. Coast Guard. Kern, Florence, ed, *The United States Revenue Cutters in the Civil War*, (Bethesda, Maryland: Alised Enterprises, 1990), 12-5.

have stolen the ship; many Portlanders were more than willing to ascribe him with a motive: alleged sympathy for his native South.²⁷

Captain Clark's ship, the *Caleb Cushing*, had been a U.S.R.C. since the beginning of President Franklin Pierce's administration. It was commissioned and launched on July 12, 1853, in Somerset, Massachusetts. At 152 tons and over 90 feet long, the cutter was one of the newest and largest sailing cutters in the R.C.S. The ship was stationed in Portland for most of its service, becoming a familiar sight to those living in Maine's largest city. On April 26, 1861, as the Civil War began, the ship was outfitted with a large 32-pound and smaller 12-pound cannon.²⁸ *Cushing* Cutterman Samuel Prince, in a later interview, explained that, strictly speaking, a revenue cutter was "not intended for a fight." Prince said instead that "[h]er duties correspond more nearly to those of a policeman than of a soldier" by "look[ing] after things on her beat generally." For this reason, revenue cutters were not usually armed, but the dangers of the Civil War convinced the Treasury Department to arm them, changing policy for the duration.²⁹ In the harbor, the *Caleb Cushing* had stood at anchor in the area near Munjoy Hill and Fish Point. Half the crew attended Capt. Clark's funeral and other events in Portland on Friday night, including parties on the islands of Casco Bay; the other half, under Lt. Davenport, had remained on board, adding to suspicions that Davenport had taken advantage of a skeleton crew to set sail for unknown Confederate allies.³⁰

Davenport had a lengthy service record in the R.C.S. himself, beginning with a commission in 1847. He had served on the *Cushing* since 1861, but the circumstances of the

²⁷ United States Revenue Marine Record of Officers, 1797 – 1870, Record Group 26, Entry 265 (NC-31), National Archives Building, Washington, D.C. (NA), Vol. 1, 130 – 131.

²⁸ Donald L. Canney, *U.S. Coast Guard and Revenue Cutters, 1790 – 1935*, (Annapolis, Maryland: Naval Institute Press, 1995), 23 for technical specs. Supplemental information from "Caleb Cushing," *U.S. Coast Guard*, <http://www.uscg.mil/history/webcutters/Cushing1853.asp>, and untitled article, *Portland Advertiser*, June 29, 1863.

²⁹ "The Capture of the CC: A Little Struggle with the 'Rebs' in Portland Harbor as told by one of the crew," *Lewiston Journal*, May 30, 1908.

³⁰ "Rebel Pirates in Portland Harbor," *Maine Farmer*, 2 Jul 1863, *ProQuest*, Web, 14 Dec. 2012.

Civil War worked to tarnish his record. Unlike many Southerners, Davenport had remained loyal to the Union and continued to serve in the R.C.S. when his state seceded in 1861.

However, this did not prevent both officers and men on board his vessel, as well as civilians on shore from questioning his real allegiance. Davenport's shipmate, and subordinate, Prince, would later say that "perhaps solely because of his Southern birth, he was unpopular both with his brother officers and the crew. It was sometimes whispered about that he was at heart in sympathy with the South, and would bear watching." This unjustified suspicion had made life difficult for Davenport in Portland.³¹

As the rumors spread and the citizens began searching for an outlet for their restless energy, volunteers soon began clamoring to help recapture the revenue cutter. For his part, Gould "buckled on [his] pistol and made good time for the wharf," then, "[h]aving 20 minutes to spare [he] called at the Bank and told Howard [his friend] to go up and get my Sharps carbine." Gould intended to be well-armed in facing down whoever had taken the cutter. Howard, like some Portlanders, was not interested in potentially sacrificing his life on the recapture of the cutter, however, claiming that "French leave [absence without permission] was surer than father's!"³²

Two ships, the passenger steamer *Forest City* which had arrived earlier that morning and the *Chesapeake*, prepared to chase down the runaway. Chandler, the baggage-man on the *Forest City*, watched the excitement from on board his ship. He reported that "[e]very man-jack [able bodied, unoccupied man] in Portland rolled up his sleeves and started for the dock armed with everything from ancient blunderblusses to cutlasses." The poorly armed civilians included "[f]ishermen and storekeepers, stevedores and bakers, undertakers and teamsters, doctors and

³¹ Samuel Prince, "The Capture of the Caleb Cushing: A Little Struggle with the 'Rebs' in Portland Harbor as told by one of the crew," *Lewiston Journal*, May 30, 1908.

³² *Journal of J. M. Gould*, entry for June 27.

one college professor” who were “all speaking at once and raring to go.” Commenting on the overall attitude of the Portlanders, Chandler said, “By cracky, they were mad as hornets.”³³

Within an hour from Jewett’s order, the men of the 7th Maine, under Colonel E. C. Mason and “including his [musical] band” were ready for whatever was required of them. The 7th was encamped at Camp Abraham Lincoln, a training center in South Portland’s Ligonía neighborhood. Jewett sent the tugboat *Tiger* to pick them up. A group of men from the 7th would remain posted on board this small tug throughout the course of the battle that would soon ensue.³⁴ Maj. Andrews had forty muskets prepared at Fort Preble for the civilian volunteers gathering to pursue the stolen ship, in addition to a 6-pound and 12-pound gun to be placed aboard the *Forest City*.³⁵

Jewett commissioned the *Forest City* around 9:00 AM for service. The steamer was under the command of Captain John Liscomb. Jewett ordered the vessel fitted out with weapons and for the steam tug *Casco* to head to Fort Preble to pick up the men of the 17th Maine stationed there. As Gould pointed out, the *Forest City* was “a passenger boat of 8 or 9 hundred tons” and had a “paddle wheel,” which would make the ship “high in the water and very vulnerable” to cannon fire. This made choosing the steamer an expedient choice for service, but the paddle wheel left the ship exposed if the *Cushing* were to put up a fight.³⁶ Benjamin Willard, a well-known captain and sailor in Portland, offered up his services to Capt. Liscomb as soon as he heard about the adventure. With the *Forest City* unable to steam directly up to Fort Preble due to

³³ “Portland Man Tells of a Civil War Battle in Harbor Here 60 Years Ago Today,” *Portland Press Herald*, June 27, 1923.

³⁴ Report of U.S. collector of customs, Portland, Me., June 27, 1863, *Official Records*, Series I, Vol. 2: 323, and The Tacony Burned: Her Officers and Crew Taken Prisoners,” *Portland Daily Press*, June 29, 1863.

³⁵ Report of Major Andrews, Seventeenth U.S. Infantry, June 29, 1863, *Official Records*, Series I, Vol. 2: 326.

³⁶ *Journal of J. M. Gould*, entry for June 27.

low tide, Willard offered the service of his own private ship to cooperate with the *Casco* to ferry troops and weapons to the larger vessel.³⁷

Capt. Liscomb, Chandler, and the rest of the steamer's normal crewmen had quite a challenge in keeping order amongst the many civilian volunteers gathered along the dock and clamoring to accompany the regular soldiers in pursuit of the revenue cutter. Chandler reported that Liscomb "had to argue some before he could convince...those warriors that too many would sink the [ship] and ruin a just cause." Even so, civilians angrily moved their way towards the steamer, Chandler and the other crewmen only able to keep them at bay by "turn[ing] the hose on them" and forcing them back. The steamer then set off towards Fort Preble.³⁸

First Lt. James H. Merryman of the R.C.S. returned through the crowd just in time to jump on board the *Forest City* as it set off after the captured cutter. Lt. Merryman had been a passenger on board the *Forest City* when it arrived in the city. Merryman had been ordered on June 24 to head to Portland and the *Caleb Cushing*, and then, following Capt. Clark's unexpected death, to assume command upon his arrival on June 27. Merryman had been in the R.C.S. since 1851, and had performed with distinction during the course of the war. His most recent assignment had been in San Francisco, where he had personally reported to high officials in the Department of the West. Because Lt. Davenport had been informed he would be "Awaiting Orders" on June 24, there is a strong likelihood that if Capt. Clark had not died and the Battle of Portland Harbor not transpired as it did, Lt. Merryman would have taken Davenport's place on board the cutter.³⁹

³⁷ Benjamin J. Willard, *Captain Ben's Book: A Record of the Things Which Happened to Capt. Benjamin J. Willard, Pilot and Stevedore, During some Sixty Years on Sea and Land, As Related by Himself*, (Portland, Maine: Lakeside Press, Engravers, Printers, and Binders, 1895), 78.

³⁸ "Portland Man Tells of a Civil War Battle in Harbor Here 60 Years Ago Today," *Portland Press Herald*, June 27, 1923.

³⁹ United States Revenue Marine Record of Officers, 1797 – 1870, Record Group 26, Entry 265 (NC-31), NA, Vol. 1, 233 – 234.

Merryman was understandably shaken about the disappearance of his ship. He inquired about it in the city and then raced back to take his position on board the *Forest City*. On board, he found Jewett's deputy, "Lt. Richardson, with the boatswain, gunner, and 14 seamen of the *Cushing*," and assumed command of these— who were, technically, under his authority— men. With the assistance of Willard and the *Casco*, the *Forest City* took on board two guns and around 40 muskets for the civilian volunteers.⁴⁰ By 10:00 AM, Capt. Prime was on board the *Forest City* with 28 men of the 17th Maine as infantry and 10 artillerymen under Lt. Collins prepared to man the two guns from Fort Preble.⁴¹

Chandler described a chaotic scene aboard the Boston steamer, reporting the ship's officers, Capt. Liscomb, and John B. Coycle, who was the *Forest City*'s agent-of-the-line and business manager, "stamping [around] the bridge and looking off to sea through long telescopes for all the world like John Paul Jones," the privateering hero of the American Revolution. On the main deck and all around, Chandler saw men of the "civilian army...taking pot shots at boxes and other things in the water to get into practice," but also adding to the overall cacophony of the situation. To protect the ship's vital areas from hostile fire, the crewmen stacked "a lot of baled rags" near the engine room and along the sides. After the weapons and men of the 17th Maine were transferred on board at Fort Preble, they "put on full steam and the old *Forest City* headed for sea with every plank in her groaning under the strain." See Appendix B for a full table of the crewmen, volunteers, and persons involved on the four major ships during the battle.⁴²

⁴⁰ Report of Lieutenant Merryman, June 29, 1863, *Official Records*, Series I, Vol 2: 325, and "The Rebel Pirates," *The New York Herald*, 28 Jun 1863, Web, 14 Dec. 2012.

⁴¹ Capt. Prime and Lt. Collins' reports as enclosures in Report of Major Andrews, Seventeenth U.S. Infantry, June 29, 1863, *Official Records*, Series I, Vol 2: 327 - 328.

⁴² "Portland Man Tells of a Civil War Battle in Harbor Here 60 Years Ago Today," *Portland Press Herald*, June 27, 1923.

Meanwhile, Portland's mayor, Jacob McLellan, had already moved to commandeer the other large steamer in the city, the *Chesapeake*. He had done this without consulting Jewett. Nevertheless, Jewett dispatched Col. Mason and most of the 7th Maine to serve on board the large steamer. Although the two men acted initially without consulting one another and as representatives of local and federal authority, they cooperated, in a way that the *Portland Daily Press* would later compliment: "[a]ll were active and yet there was no clash."⁴³ As Mayor McLellan moved to press the steamer into public service, however, Henry Fox, the agent-of-the-line for the *Chesapeake's* Emery & Fox owners, protested. He warned the mayor that if the steamer were damaged or destroyed, he would be disciplined and the company perhaps ruined. Eager to get under way, Mayor McLellan promised Fox the city's protection as well as his entire personal estate as collateral. Fox relented and allowed the government official to commandeer his private property. According to neighbors speaking after the fact, McLellan's instructions on the pursuit were simple: "Catch the damned scoundrels and hang every one of them."⁴⁴

The *Chesapeake* departed at 11:00 AM, but Gould described the level of preparedness of those on board as "half cocked." He commented that the ship was half-loaded with cargo, mounted with two sub-par guns, and with the ammunition "very light in quantity and the cartridges had to be made after we got the powder aboard." For volunteers, there were about 30 men of the 7th Maine and around 30 civilians "armed with State of Maine Enfield rifles and with their own guns and pistols," who Gould referred to somewhat derisively as "running around the vessel at large."⁴⁵

⁴³ Report of U.S. collector of customs, Portland, Me., June 27, 1863, *Official Records*, Series I, Vol. 2: 323, and "Indications of Public Feeling," *Portland Daily Press*, June 30, 1863.

⁴⁴ Hale, "The Capture of the Caleb Cushing," 198.

⁴⁵ *Journal of J. M. Gould*, entry for June 27.

The command and organization of the various volunteers, regular infantrymen, civilian crewmen, and sailors on board the *Chesapeake* made the situation even more chaotic. Col. Mason commanded the men of the 7th Maine on board, while civilian Captain Willett commanded the ship itself. William F. Leighton, the naval inspector supervising the construction of the gunboats *Agawam* and *Pontoosuc* in Portland, which were being built at Franklin Wharf, took overall command of the ship and the operation.⁴⁶ Col. Mason distributed a musket and ten shots to each of the volunteers, and also helped to load 10 kilograms of gunpowder and rations for up to 48 hours on board the steamer.⁴⁷ Gould reported that “bales of cotton [part of a cargo on board] were packed against the railing, the wheel house and safety valve” but that these hardly made them “a very mean antagonist.” He further reported that “[t]here were no gunners,” but that “an old tar, a 7th Mainer...and one of the cutters crew” stepped up to the challenge. This “old tar” turned out to be a veteran who had served with Admiral David Farragut on the Mississippi, but seemed a bit eccentric to Gould. Without trained gunners or proper coordination, the guns on board would be of little use in a battle with the *Cushing*.⁴⁸

The armed men on board the steamers *Forest City* and *Chesapeake* were an eclectic mix, including officially trained soldiers and sailors as well as common Portlanders, including almost every profession and social class in the city. Several reporters were in the mix as well, including E. O. Haile of the *Eastern Argus* and W. E. S. Whitman of the *Daily Evening Courier*. Harrison Bird Brown, a Portland artist renowned for his nautical and wilderness paintings, was also a

⁴⁶ *Journal of J. M. Gould*, entry for June 27.

⁴⁷ “Capture by the Rebels of *Caleb Cushing*,” *Eastern Argus*, June 29, 1863.

⁴⁸ *Journal of J. M. Gould*, entry for June 27, and “The Tacony Burned: Her Officers and Crew Taken Prisoners,” *Portland Daily Press*, June 29, 1863.

volunteer, hoping to produce a sketch or painting of the engagement later.⁴⁹ The group even included Reverend J. Lovering, from Portland's Park Street Church, who busied himself making cartridges for the armed men aboard the *Chesapeake*.⁵⁰ Nearby Reverend Lovering was a man who, "in the language of the poet, 'Took a long and solemn draft, And wiped his rusty beard,'" but "the man of sin was not noticed by the pastor." To one reporter, this showed that the crowd of volunteers included both "the godly" as well as "some suspected to be among the unconverted." Untrained and unprepared, this collection of Mainers ventured out into the harbor to confront who they expected was a treasonous lieutenant.⁵¹

Soon, however, the pursuers learned that Lt. Davenport was not at all the man the Mainers were looking for. In fact, he had been handcuffed and kept below decks since early that morning, along with the men of the R.C.S. assigned to remain on board the night before. The officers of the *Forest City* learned these new facts from Albert Bibber, a Maine fisherman they picked up alone and in a small rowboat around 11:00 AM. Once on board the steamer, Bibber related a nearly unbelievable tale to the authorities on board—that he and a compatriot had been taken prisoner the day before by a band of mysterious men in a fishing schooner, forced at gunpoint to assist them in getting out of the harbor, and kept in the dark as to their identity. Bibber's swift report was the first real word the pursuers had heard of the involvement of another ship in the *Caleb Cushing's* disappearance.⁵²

⁴⁹ Harrison Bird Brown's presence is related in the chapter "Edward H. Elwell, Harrison Brown's Friend," in Earle G. Shettleworth, Jr., ed., *A Painter's Progress: The Life, Work, and Travels of Harrison B. Brown of Portland, Maine*, (Portland, Maine: Phoenix Press, 2005), and corroborated by contemporary newspapers listing names of the local volunteers.

⁵⁰ "Capture by the Rebels of *Caleb Cushing*," *Eastern Argus*, June 29, 1863.

⁵¹ Untitled Article, *Portland Advertiser*, June 29, 1863.

⁵² "Deposition of Albert P. Bibber, One of the Fishermen Captured by the Archer," first published July 13, 1863 in an unidentified newspaper, reproduced in Frank Moore, ed., *The Rebellion Record: A Diary of American Events*, (New York: D. Van Nostrand, 1864), 131 - 133.

Asked how he had gotten away, Bibber explained that, just a few minutes earlier, he had hoped the time was right to take leave of his captors before the pursuit turned hot. He reported that he simply “asked [the commander of his captors]...to be let go,” as he had pleaded for repeatedly earlier in the day. The commander replied that “he didn’t care,” and so Bibber took one of the *Cushing*’s small rowboats and headed frantically for the vessel of his Union friends. As he paddled away, the fisherman also remembered one of the men warning that he “had better row [carefully], for they should fire soon.” Although he couldn’t relate where these men had come from, Bibber did know that their schooner, where he had been kept before being transferred to the *Cushing*, was likely somewhere between Portland and Jewell Island.⁵³

At this point, however, there was no time to chase down the smaller schooner. The *Forest City* had made it to about fifteen miles out from the Portland Head Light by 11:20 AM. This meant that Captain Liscomb had entered the range of the *Cushing*’s 32-pounder, a weapon significantly more powerful than any of his own guns. Liscomb made a quick decision to attempt to run down and board the revenue cutter, which was not flying any flag, without waiting for the *Chesapeake* and the other ships. He hoped that Bibber’s captors, whoever they were, would surrender without firing a shot.⁵⁴

The *Forest City* quickly altered its course, however, as the captured ship opened fire upon it. Capt. Prime’s report gave a decidedly chaotic view of the situation. As the *Caleb Cushing* fired on them, Prime was hampered in his duty— setting up the cannons on board for an effective return volley— because “the steamer was filled with citizens without any knowledge of the responsibilities of the situation” of this war “and who apparently had left the harbor for a pleasure trip.” In the end, Capt. Liscomb held up because of the “accumulated advice and

⁵³ Bibber, “Deposition,” 133.

⁵⁴ Lt. Collins’s report as an enclosure in Report of Major Andrews, Seventeenth U.S. Infantry, June 29, 1863, *Official Records*, Series I, Vol 2: 328.

disjointed comments” of the volunteers, waiting for the *Chesapeake* and more support before steaming forward.⁵⁵ Lt. Merryman depicted the situation on board the *Forest City* as more organized, perhaps hoping to aggrandize his own role in the conflict by justifying Liscomb’s actions. Merryman reported that it was only when one of the shots fell within thirty feet of the *Forest City*’s bow that they halted, all in the hopes of advancing together with the *Chesapeake*. Merryman’s account included this information as an attempt to counter later charges that Liscomb proceeded too hesitantly at this stage of the battle.⁵⁶

Back in Portland, a large crowd of civilians had gathered in and around the Observatory on Munjoy Hill to see the battle. Enoch Moody, whose father had built the Observatory, used flags and other indicators to track the movements of the ships in the harbor and report on these to the crowd below. From there, word spread about what was happening on the sea spread throughout the city. Around this time, Portland learned that the *Caleb Cushing* had fired upon the pursuers. Moody then reported to the crowd that the *Chesapeake* had finally caught up with the *Forest City*.⁵⁷

Off the coast, the two steamers pulled up close together to discuss their strategy for retaking the cutter. Inspector Leighton, like Capt. Liscomb, hoped at first to talk to the men on board the *Caleb Cushing*, who he assumed were mutineers, but now understood that they “mean[t] business.” Gould recorded in his journal the subsequent and shouted discussion between the captains of the two steamers. Liscomb began by sharing the information he had learned from Bibber, with an estimate of “about 30 rebels aboard” the cutter. Asking each other what to do, Leighton proposed the two ships attack “immediately,” and, after Liscomb hesitated

⁵⁵ Capt. Prime’s report as an enclosure in Report of Major Andrews, Seventeenth U.S. Infantry, June 29, 1863, *Official Records*, Series I, Vol 2: 327 - 28.

⁵⁶ Report of Lieutenant Merryman, June 29, 1863, *Official Records*, Series I, Vol 2: 325.

⁵⁷ “The Tacony Burned: Her Officers and Crew Taken Prisoners,” *Portland Daily Press* June 29, 1863.

to lead the venture, Leighton declared, “follow us, we’ll take the lead and the boat too!” Gould wrote that this statement, followed by Inspector Leighton’s order to “[s]teer for her, and we’ll run her down [by ramming or boarding] or go to the bottom,” elicited three cheers from the men of both steamers and the other small boats that had followed. Gould, serving with Leighton, hoped to portray Liscomb and the *Forest City* as timorous with his description, an example of the post-battle rivalry between the men of the two ships, with both crews claiming that they deserved most credit for the pursuit. In reality, the Boston steamer was more exposed to danger because of its vulnerable side-wheel, justifying Liscomb’s caution to lead the expected assault.⁵⁸

In contrast, the *Eastern Argus*’s reporter, Haile, wrote that the cheering was inspired instead by Col. Mason, who told the volunteers on the *Chesapeake*, “[n]ow boys, you have got to fight; let every man keep cool and await orders, and we will take the cutter.” Haile said that the spontaneous cheers of these volunteers were there then echoed by the men on the *Forest City* and then by more cheering of the slogan “Stand by your flag.” According to Haile, this told the Confederates “plainer than words” of the “patriotism and determination of those on board our vessels.”⁵⁹ Heedless to the cheering or who started it, Haile’s rival reporter, Whitman, was sitting directly on top of the ship’s pilot house, “taking notes, undismayed and undisturbed by the excitement around.” As the article later explained, “[t]he guns from the cutter did not make his hand tremble as he chronicled the events passing.”⁶⁰

As the two steamers closed quickly on the *Caleb Cushing*, the cutter fired three more shots at them, the last being “ineffectual” grapeshot, but this did not slow down the Union

⁵⁸ “Capture by the Rebels of *Caleb Cushing*,” *Eastern Argus*, June 29, 1863, and *Journal of J. M. Gould*, entry for June 27. The conversation as reported in the *Eastern Argus* is slightly different.

⁵⁹ “Capture by the Rebels of *Caleb Cushing*,” *Eastern Argus*, June 29, 1863.

⁶⁰ “Incident, Anecdotes, and Facts, Relative to the Cutter,” June 30, 1863, unidentified newspaper clipping, in *The Caleb Cushing Affair*, Coll. S-1323, Misc. Box 63/6, MHS.

pursuers. See Figure 2 for a depiction of the ships throughout the course of the battle.⁶¹ By now it was almost 12:00 PM and, although they had been taking fire for almost an hour, Lt. Collins and the artillerymen on board the *Forest City* did not return fire, because the guns “were too light at that distance and [Collins] did not wish to show their small size.” Instead they hoped to “fire on her decks at the moment of boarding.”⁶² The volunteer gunners aboard the *Chesapeake*, however, fired a single shot in the direction of the cutter, although they were still far out of range. The eccentric veteran of Farragut’s fleet was likely involved, as he “slap[ed] his hands with delight” and then “embraced the gun and affectionately patted her as though she was a pet child” after the shot was fired.⁶³

Although the pursuers expected more shots from the cutter, the ship suddenly stopped firing. They saw a small boat push away from the *Cushing*, but were unsure who it contained. Lt. Collins on the *Forest City* hesitated to fire upon any boat leaving the *Caleb Cushing* because “it was impossible to distinguish the rebels from the prisoners in their hands.”⁶⁴ The small boat headed straight for the *Chesapeake*. The officers on board could see “men with blue jackets” on board, and then a white rag attached to a pole, probably as an indication of surrender. However, as this boat drew close, it sparked a frenzied reaction from the volunteers on board:

The citizen soldiery at this point became perfectly crazy. “Shoot ‘em, kill ‘em, hang ‘em!” they cried and commenced aiming their guns, fixing their bayonets and unfixing them and such a rumpus I never saw. They were kept from their evil intentions on the innocent fellows by some strong minded men, but I never saw any men so particularly anxious to do something.”⁶⁵

⁶¹ Report of Lieutenant Merryman, June 29, 1863, *Official Records*, Series I, Vol 2: 325. Figure 2 is located in Appendix A, Images.

⁶² Lt. Collins’s report as an enclosure in Report of Major Andrews, Seventeenth U.S. Infantry, June 29, 1863, *Official Records*, Series I, Vol 2: 328 – 29.

⁶³ “Capture by the Rebels of *Caleb Cushing*,” *Eastern Argus*, June 29, 1863, and “The Tacony Burned: Her Officers and Crew Taken Prisoners,” June 29, 1863, *Portland Daily Press*.

⁶⁴ Lt. Collins’s report as an enclosure in Report of Major Andrews, Seventeenth U.S. Infantry, June 29, 1863, *Official Records*, Series I, Vol 2: 328 – 29.

⁶⁵ *Journal of J. M. Gould*, entry for June 27.

Likewise, Captain Willard, in his own boat and approaching the *Cushing* from a different angle, faced the same difficulties in restraining his own civilian volunteers. Willard saw the rudimentary white handkerchief, a flag of truce, which the men in the small boat displayed on their paddle, but one of his men still “level[ed] his gun at them, saying that he ‘wanted one...’ [It was] with utmost difficulty that I could restrain my men.”⁶⁶ On board the *Chesapeake*, word had gone round to “[w]elcome them with bloody hands to hospitable graves,” and the volunteers were clearly agitated enough to oblige this request. Inspector Leighton finally took charge, shouting, “Hold! The first man that fires shall be shot; I am not a pirate to fire on a flag of truce!”⁶⁷

As they came up alongside, the men on board the *Chesapeake* noticed the small boat was full of the cuttermen of the *Caleb Cushing*. Lt. Davenport, in command, was “violently agitated,” and said bitterly that “[i]t is hard, after a man has been taken prisoner, ironed, and his life threatened by pirates, to be shot by his own friends!”⁶⁸ Although the officers stopped the civilian volunteers from shooting down the cutter’s legitimate crew, some were still frenzied. Gould saw one of the crewmen, Tom Hefron, with whom he had previously served in the 10th Maine, and went up to greet him. After Gould shook Hefron’s hand, one of the civilians “pushed [Hefron] down,” and Hefron, showing “good pluck as usual,” was “very indignant” about this treatment.⁶⁹

Cuttermen Prince summed up the angry feelings of the prisoners best— they were bewildered by the harsh treatment they had now received from both their captors and nominally friendly Union forces. Prince called their experience with these captors “a hard trying

⁶⁶ Willard, 78 – 79.

⁶⁷ “Capture by the Rebels of *Caleb Cushing*,” *Eastern Argus*, June 29, 1863.

⁶⁸ “Capture by the Rebels of *Caleb Cushing*,” *Eastern Argus*, June 29, 1863.

⁶⁹ *Journal of J. M. Gould*, entry for June 27.

time...surprised, and captured of a gang of men springing from we know not where...[and] manacled,” all before being fired upon and then forced off into a small boat between two larger armed ships. Although Prince and his fellow cuttermen expected “sympathy and condolence” from the men on the Chesapeake, they were “hissed and hooted at, and called traitors, and every degrading epithet in the language” before being taken below “and kept under a strong guard.”⁷⁰ For the cuttermen, it was simply too much to take, a situation that they “could not understand.”⁷⁰

Meanwhile, on board the *Forest City*, Lt. Merryman took his first good look at the revenue cutter he should have been commanding. As he watched, “two more boats left her,” and then Merryman noticed “smoke and flames...bursting from her.” The R.C.S. lieutenant saw no one moving on the decks of the cutter, and thought the other two boats must have contained the men who had captured the ship. Merryman assumed the cutter “was doomed to destruction” as he had learned from the cuttermen under his command that the “magazine contained 500 pounds of powder.” Instead of dangerously attempting to save his new command, Merryman advised Liscomb to head after the fleeing men in the two boats.⁷¹

The small rowboats had no chance to escape the steamers. The *Forest City* bore down on them and some of the civilians volunteers on board began aiming muskets at the presumed rebels, preparing to fire. One of the men put a white handkerchief atop one of the boat hooks in the small craft, hoping this would signify their intent to surrender. Luckily, one of the officers—likely Capt. Prime—leapt in front of the armed men, ordering them to stand down. Chandler later remembered that many of the civilian volunteers “wanted to string ‘em up to the smoke stack, keel haul ‘em, and what not,” mostly because they had “gone to all that trouble polishing up those old muskets...and wanted to get some action.” Cooler minds prevailed, however, and

⁷⁰ “A Little Struggle with the ‘Rebs’ in Portland Harbor,” *Lewiston Journal*, May 30, 1908.

⁷¹ Report of Lieutenant Merryman, June 29, 1863, *Official Records*, Series I, Vol 2: 325 – 26.

the prisoners were brought on board and carefully searched, one at a time. Each prisoner then had his “arms tied behind his back with a piece of rattling stuff and [was] placed under guard,” until all the prisoners were secured.⁷² At this point, Lt. Merryman accepted the ceremonial sword of a man who identified himself as Lt. Charles W. Read. The leader of the prisoners was a Southerner who claimed to a sailor of a sovereign state, the C.S.A., and therefore status as a prisoner of war. After an initial questioning, Merryman accepted Read’s story and legal status and turned the officer and his men over to Capt. Prime for safekeeping. Which jurisdiction the captured Confederates would be tried under immediately became a matter of debate amongst the military officers and civilians representatives on board.⁷³

As they saw the cutter starting to burst into flames, a few men on board the *Chesapeake* hatched a dangerous plan. The *Forest City* had stopped around three-quarters of a mile from the burning cutter when it took the prisoners, but the *Chesapeake* was just a half-mile away. Six men, including Capt. Henry Warren of the 7th Maine and the reporter Haile frantically asked Capt. Leighton permission to row out to the *Cushing* and attempt to save it, a request which the captain prudently denied. However, the men next went to Agent Fox, asking his permission, and, once the businessman gave them the go-ahead, slipped off in a small boat heading for the burning cutter. Two of the men quickly turned back when the sailors on the *Chesapeake* ordered them to do so, but the others continued on their quest.⁷⁴ Apparently, the men gave up their plan to extinguish the fire on board the cutter rather quickly, however, aiming instead to take the small boat tied to its back as a prize. Beneath the flames, which had spread “stem to stern” and

⁷² “Portland Man Tells of a Civil War Battle in Harbor Here 60 Years Ago Today,” *Portland Press Herald*, June 27, 1923 and “The Johnny’s Story,” Oct. 27, 1894, unidentified newspaper, in The Caleb Cushing Affair, Coll. S-1323, Misc. Box 63/6, MHS., and Read, “Portland Harbor-Caleb Cushing,” in Charles W. Read Collection, ECU Special Collections.

⁷³ Report of Lieutenant Merryman, June 29, 1863, *Official Records*, Series I, Vol 2: 326.

⁷⁴ “Capture by the Rebels of Caleb Cushing,” *Eastern Argus*, June 29, 1863.

soon to the sails, the men tried frantically to untie the boat, as they had no knife to cut the line.

Haile wrote that it “seem[ed] an age to wait while the fire is raging and crackling over us, and the cinders and rigging falling around us,” all the while expecting the ship to explode at any second, until they finally freed the small boat and towed it behind them back towards the *Chesapeake*.⁷⁵

They pulled away just in time. Around 1:50 P.M. the flames finally reached the powder magazine and the U.S.R.C. *Caleb Cushing* exploded in a tremendous fireball.⁷⁶ Because the vessel was carrying so much powder, the concussion was enormous, shaking homes in Portland and was heard all over the city.⁷⁷ Figure 3 is an artist’s rendition of the explosion. In his journal

Gould described the explosion:

[O]f all the sights. A volume of black and red flame shot up from the whole aft part of the schooner. It reached in a second of time its altitude and then with a lesser force expanded into one grand immense wreath of smoke, the debris commenced to fall and the fire to disappear. Simultaneously with this grand explosion came the report and the effect was beyond all description. Cheers went up from all the vessels in the vicinity and a hundred echoes came from the hundred islands of our bay.⁷⁸

Although the ship had been lost, the climactic nature of the event evoked this cheering from the

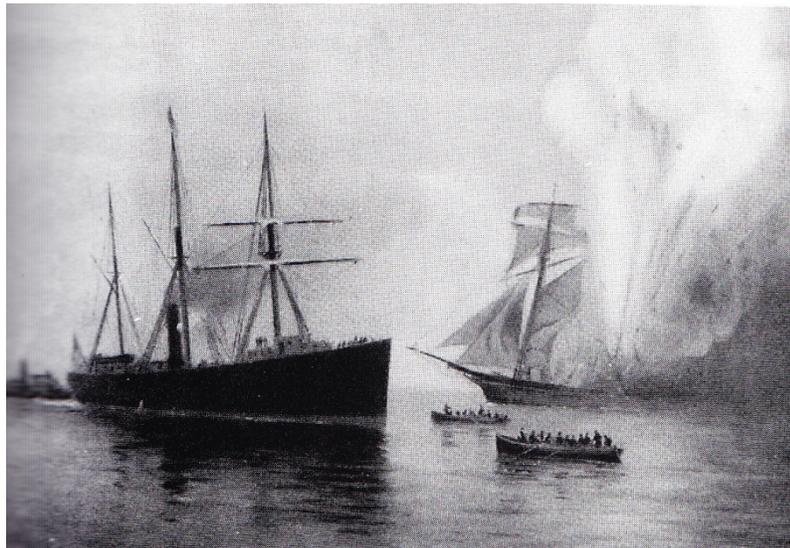


Figure 3: The *Caleb Cushing* explodes

⁷⁵ “Capture by the Rebels of *Caleb Cushing*,” *Eastern Argus*, June 29, 1863.

⁷⁶ *Journal of J. M. Gould*, entry for June 27, as well as news articles from *NYT*, MORE

⁷⁷ “The Rebel Pirates: The Last of the Bark *Tacony*,” *New York Times*, 29 Jun 1863, *ProQuest*, Web, 14 Dec. 2012.

⁷⁸ *Journal of J. M. Gould*, entry for June 27.

pursuers. Although their cutter was gone, they had won the day and captured whoever was responsible for the uproar. The Mainers who had seized the small boat from the *Cushing*'s stern watched as "fragments of shells, masts and spars, and blackened timbers were seen hundreds of feet in the air, falling all around." The particles of the ship were launched far and away from it as the flames reached the magazine. Next, according to Haile's description, "her stern disappears, the guns roll off the deck into the fathomless deep, she careens, then gives one lurch... The only remaining mast disappears, but soon rises some fifteen or twenty feet above the water, then sinks to rise no more."⁷⁹

The end of the *Caleb Cushing* did not mean that the battle was over, however. Even with the main group of the Confederates defeated, their schooner was still at large. The *Forest City* quickly pursued the ship, with Lt. Collins "fir[ing] a shot across her bows and [then] point[ing] another directly at her" before the skeleton crew of three, led by a man identifying himself as Masters Mate J.W. Matherson, "luffed up [stopped] and surrendered."⁸⁰ After the assorted Union forces boarded the ship, Lt. Merryman appointed Cutterman Lt. Richardson as commander for the short trip back into Portland Harbor.⁸¹ As the schooner, which the boarding party quickly identified as the *Archer* out of Southport, Maine, was being tied to the back of the *Forest City*, the *Chesapeake* came up alongside in case Liscomb needed any assistance. Liscomb suggested they head back into Portland Harbor, to which Inspector Leighton replied with the jibe, "Do you propose to take the lead this time?" According to Gould, the men on the

⁷⁹ "Capture by the Rebels of *Caleb Cushing*," *Eastern Argus*, June 29, 1863.

⁸⁰ Lt. Collins's report as an enclosure in Report of Major Andrews, Seventeenth U.S. Infantry, June 29, 1863, *Official Records*, Series I, Vol 2: 329.

⁸¹ Report of Lieutenant Merryman, June 29, 1863, *Official Records*, Series I, Vol 2: 326.

Chesapeake then “laughed a good deal at him,” poking fun at Liscomb’s perceived cowardice and unwillingness to lead the earlier assault on the cutter.⁸²

The triumphant flotilla returned to Portland amongst great pomp and circumstance. Gould wrote that the *Forest City*, towing the *Archer*, steamed back through White Head passage, between Peaks and Cliff Islands, while the *Chesapeake* simultaneously took the main route into the harbor. The crews of both steamers fired their cannons in excitement, “and the workmen...[at] Fort Preble thought that this was a good opportunity to touch off their blast” as well, creating “noise enough” for Gould with “cannonading and blasting and hurraing.”⁸³

The scene in Portland itself was madness. Chandler reported from the *Forest City* that “the shores were lined with people, and I never saw a larger crowd in one place in this city than there were at the dock when we tied up.”⁸⁴ People had gathered everywhere to watch the battle, and the crowd thronged to meet the returning ships. Gould called this mob “fierce and the hurraing grand enough.”⁸⁵ In the pandemonium, Gould met up with friends and helped them get off an account of the incident to the Associated Press, and therefore the rest of the country. Although he feared the volunteers would be chastised for the destruction of the revenue cutter, in fact the crowds were so excited by the sounds of the explosion out to sea that they hardly noticed. When Moody had announced the news from the Observatory, “all the town went mad with delight.”⁸⁶

Delight seems an odd reaction to the loss of the only armed government vessel in Portland Harbor, but, of course, there was some historical precedent for this strange excitement

⁸² *Journal of J. M. Gould*, entry for June 27.

⁸³ *Journal of J. M. Gould*, entry for June 27.

⁸⁴ “Portland Man Tells of a Civil War Battle in Harbor Here 60 Years Ago Today,” *Portland Press Herald*, June 27, 1923.

⁸⁵ *Journal of J. M. Gould*, entry for June 27.

⁸⁶ *Journal of J. M. Gould*, entry for June 27.

ringing through the city after the battle. The citizens had heard stories of the attack of October 1775, when British Captain Henry Mowat had burned what was then known as Falmouth to the ground, an event so incendiary that it was cited as a reason for separation in the Declaration of Independence. In fact, Mowat “laid his fleet before the city in almost the exact spot where eighty years after the ‘converted’ fishing schooner [the *Archer* would] anchor,” striking a note of historical concern amongst the citizens.⁸⁷ One newspaper noted that the Confederate incursion resembled previous battles outside Portland in 1775 and also in the War of 1812.⁸⁸ In 1813, U.S.S. *Enterprise* had engaged and decimated H.M.S. *Boxer* off the Maine coast at Pemaquid Point, and the Americans sailed both damaged ships into Portland Harbor after the fact. The *Portland Press Herald* held that until Read’s raid “there ha[d] not been so much excitement in this city” since “the fight between the *Enterprise* and *Boxer*.”⁸⁹

On top of this, the battle came at the end of a long series of events — and several weeks of— inspiring a growing fear. In that time the Portlanders, along with the rest of New England, had helplessly read in newspapers how the Confederates plying their coast seemed to be able to sink ships at will. The Portlanders must have found a certain catharsis in the massive explosion of their own revenue cutter because they had finally taken a stand against this fear. The day’s events seemed to them enough of a victory, so that they were willing to overlook the loss of the ship and celebrate. All this came despite the fact that they really had no idea how the Confederates involved in the action were connected to this lengthy period of worry. They were directly connected, however, as Portland’s authorities would shortly discover. It is a story which involved ships, events, and places far away from Portland Harbor, and which centered directly on one man— Confederate Lt. Charles W. Read. Between June 12 and 24, Read’s men had

⁸⁷ Hale, “The Capture of the Caleb Cushing,” 208 – 209.

⁸⁸ Untitled Article, *Portland Advertiser*, June 29, 1863.

⁸⁹ “The Tacony Burned: Her Officers and Crew Taken Prisoner,” *Portland Daily Press*, June 29, 1863.

burned or bonded nineteen ships in addition to the three ships Read had commandeered for himself.⁹⁰

Section III: Lt. Charles W. Read and Northern Winds to Portland Harbor

It is impossible to understand the Battle of Portland Harbor without understanding its architect, Charles W. Read. His life experiences and previous service to the Confederacy greatly influenced his command and decision-making, and therefore the entire course of the battle. The man who would one day infiltrate Portland Harbor on behalf of the Confederacy was born on May 12, 1840, in the tiny town of Satartia, Mississippi along the Yazoo River, an offshoot of the Mississippi.⁹¹

Read enrolled in the U.S. Naval Academy at Annapolis, Maryland, at the young age of sixteen in 1856. One of his classmates described Read as “spare in build, active in movement, generous and loyal in character, firm in his friendships, and decided in his opinions.” Despite his opinions or perhaps because of them, Read was not a stellar student during his time at Annapolis, doing poorly in his classes. His classmate wrote that this poor performance “arose from his lack of application to study.” Read was not much interested in learning in the classroom, it seemed, because he was constantly focused on being active and working on manual tasks.⁹² However, he learned his trade as a sailor quickly, participating in practice cruises during his time at school on the eve of the Civil War. These excursions allowed the cadets to experience the art of sailing and the rigors a combat position on a warship entailed. Read finally graduated, at the bottom of his class, in June 1860, and became a midshipman, the lowest commissioned rank in the U.S.N.

⁹⁰ Report of Lt. Read, July 30, 1863, *Official Records*, Series I, Vol 2, 654 – 55.

⁹¹ Thomas T. Campbell, *Sea Hawk of the Confederacy: Lt. Charles W. Read and the Confederate Navy*, (Shippensburg, Pennsylvania: Beidel Printing House, Inc., 2000), 1.

⁹² Winfield Scott Schley, in a description of Read attached to letter from Winfield M. Thompson to Nebraska C. May, Dec. 28, 1904, Charles Read Papers, East Carolina University (ECU) Special Collections.

and below the standard rank of ensign most Annapolis graduates received. Read at the time of his graduation can be seen in Figure 4.⁹³

Read's service in the U.S.N., however, was extremely brief, amounting to only around seven months. Indeed, Read "immediately tendered [his] resignation" in January 1861, when he learned that his native Mississippi had seceded. By March he had returned to the South. Once in Montgomery, Alabama, he met with both Sec. Mallory and President Davis. These officials questioned Read about his service, the current status of the U.S. fleet, and whether many other officers were following in Read's footsteps. This gave him a personal familiarity with the top naval officials of the Confederacy.⁹⁴



Figure 4: Charles W. Read at Graduation from Annapolis

⁹³ Campbell, 7 and 9.

⁹⁴ Charles W. Read, "Reminiscences of the Confederate Navy," *Southern Historical Society Papers*, 1876, vol. 1, no. 5, <http://www.csnavy.org/shsp/read,c,w,remijnscences,v1,p331.htm>.

Read's quick change of allegiance and decision to abandon his duties were atypical of Southern-born U.S.N. officers, many of whom took a longer length of time to consider their resignations and pledging allegiance to the Confederacy, and some of whom remained loyal to the organization they had already long served in.⁹⁵ Although Read abandoned his grandfather's strong belief in the Union and against secession, the same was true of the other young men of his family— all three of Read's brothers had already enlisted in the Confederate Army. Read and his brothers demonstrated an early, strong fervor and commitment to the C.S.A. before the Civil War had even begun.⁹⁶

By the time Fort Sumter surrendered, Read had returned home to Sartartia. He had already reported for duty, commissioned as a midshipman in the C.S.N. on April 13, 1861, and was first deployed to the defense of New Orleans. Lieutenants such as Read were regulated to wear “a frock coat of steel grey cloth” with one “strip of gold lace, looped, around the upper edge.” He served first in an artillery battery on Ship Island, Louisiana, firing upon the U.S.S. *Massachusetts* in an engagement on July 9.⁹⁷

By July 12, Read was deployed onto his first ship in his C.S.N. service, the C.S.S. *McRae*, one the Confederate ships stationed along the Mississippi River, and he remained there for most of the early part of the war. The *McRae* was engaged mostly in river patrol duties as part of a Confederate fleet aiming to keep the Union Navy out of this key Confederate waterway.⁹⁸ Read's first real test of leadership came here in late 1861, when retreating

⁹⁵ Thomas J. Scharf, *History of the Confederate States Navy: From its Organization to the Surrender of its Last Vessel*, (Original printing New York: Rogers & Sherwood, 1887), Reprinted, (Freeport, New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1969), 11 – 13.

⁹⁶ Campbell, *Sea Hawk*, 3.

⁹⁷ U.S. Naval War Records Office, *Register of Office of the Confederates States Navy*, (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1896), 161, and “Uniform and Dress of the Navy of the Confederate States,” from C.S. War Department, in Tom Henderson Wells, *The Confederate Navy: A Study in Organization*, (Tuscaloosa, Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 1971), 153 - 154. See also Cambell, 21.

⁹⁸ *Register*, 161.

Confederate troops stormed aboard the ship against orders as it docked for the night in a desperate attempt to evade Union pursuers. Reacting calmly, Read tried to reason with the troops, looking for their officers, but when none was forthcoming, he walked off the ship and into the crowd. A “big fellow” continued to defy Read, who was quite short, “with much profanity.” Unfazed, “Read’s sabre flashed out of its scabbard and came down on the head of the mutineer, felling him to the ground.” It is unclear if this man was killed or only wounded. Read then forced the other men into an orderly line and marched them slowly aboard. He maintained coolness in the midst of chaos here, a leadership and personality trait which would come in handy for him during the Battle of Portland Harbor when he was vastly outnumbered.⁹⁹

Read continued to serve in the river squadron until he assumed command of the *McRae* in a trial by fire on April 24, 1862, when his superior, Lt. Thomas B. Huger, was mortally wounded.¹⁰⁰ Although the *McRae* was lost a few days later, Read was honored for his service by Sec. Mallory, who mentioned the *McRae*, the crew’s conduct, and the fact that the ship did not pass into Union hands all as honorable achievements. Read had performed well in his first official received official commendation for it.¹⁰¹

Read was soon redeployed to serve aboard the ironclad C.S.S. *Arkansas*. This service pitted him, as part of the ship’s tiny crew, against the full might of Admiral David G. Farragut’s Mississippi River Squadron. This squadron was in the process of blocking Vicksburg off from resupply via the river on July 15, 1862, the day the *Arkansas* attempted a dangerous mission to

⁹⁹ James Morris Morgan, “Recollections of a Rebel Reefer,” *Documenting the American South*, <http://docsouth.unc.edu/fpn/morganjames/morgan.html#morgan60>, 69.

¹⁰⁰ *Register*, 161.

¹⁰¹ C.S.N. Correspondence, *Official Records*, Series 2, Vol. 2: 241. Read also engendered the rage of then-Flag Officer David G. Farragut, who thought Read had betrayed a flag and intentionally sunk the *McRae*. Although this is still open for debate, it seems most likely that this was just an accident, as Read called upon local citizens to help him save the ship. However, Farragut became the first of many Union officers to rail against Lt. Read.

dislodge them.¹⁰² *Arkansas* was an ironclad, but only barely so. Read telegraphed Richmond after they completed the construction that the *Arkansas* was “very inferior to the *Merrimac* [a sailing vessel the C.S.N. converted into one of the first ironclad warships ever] in every particular” because “the iron...[was] worn and indifferent, taken from railroad track, and...poorly secured to the vessel.” At the same time, however, Read understood that not many materials were available; therefore, he called the ship “ready for service.”¹⁰³

Capt. Isaac N. Brown, the ship’s commander, had cobbled together the armor from virtually any scrap metal he could find at a tiny port on an offshoot of the Yazoo River, and yet he had made the ship relatively fit for combat against overwhelming odds. Brown “was untiring in his efforts” as he prepared the vessel on the Yazoo River over several months to take on the Union armada farther down the river. Read respected Brown, who would be promoted to captain for this work with the *Arkansas*, because Brown “took some stringent measures; imprisoned several people who were disposed to trifle with him; allowed no one under his command to be idle...[and so] work continued day and night.” It was the dogged and determined attitude Brown exhibited which Read admired most; how the officer forced his men to be the best they could be in readying an unprepared ship to take on an entire flotilla. Read himself would later demonstrate the same attitude against similar odds far away from the Mississippi.¹⁰⁴

Both Brown and Read shared optimism about this mission that retrospectively may seem irrational. Although Brown questioned the wisdom of the orders, consulting his superiors at first, he ultimately carried them out. During the mission, C.S.S. *Arkansas* took a pummeling

¹⁰² Shaw, *Sea Wolf*, 4 – 7.

¹⁰³ Read, “Reminiscences.”

¹⁰⁴ Read, “Reminiscences.”

from the Union fleet, inflicted modest damage, and then became bottled up at dock as it sought shelter under the protective guns of Vicksburg.¹⁰⁵

Brown's dashing move produced excitement throughout the Confederacy, and even amongst its leaders, with Mallory declaring that "[n]aval history knows few deeds of greater heroism or higher professional ability than this achievement." The hype, sensation, and local propaganda around this ultimately inconsequential run to Vicksburg made it seem like a great success, and may have done well to aggrandize Read's reputation and the other sailors' sense of their own importance.¹⁰⁶

C.S.S. *Arkansas* finally met its end on August 4, 1862, when it was blasted into oblivion while disabled by U.S.S. *Essex* near Baton Rouge. Read wrote a report of this action for Richmond which implied to the editors of the *Jackson Mississippian* that, "but for the misfortune of her engines the expedition would have been a most brilliant success," resulting in "the Yankees [being] driven from New Orleans in a few days." Liberating the Confederacy's largest city from Union troops was in fact only a pipe dream, and, although Read's report was not overly idealized, it glamorized the run the *Arkansas* had made, and especially exaggerated its importance to the greater war effort. Read would later pursue other grandiose projects and ambitions himself which had no real chance of success, notably at Portland, but he continued to promote their intrinsic value to the C.S.A. regardless.¹⁰⁷

After returning home to Mississippi in August 1862, Read was chosen in a tough selection process for duty on board C.S.S. *Florida*, a sailing cruiser commissioned by the Confederacy and constructed in England. Sailing to the Caribbean, this foreign-constructed ship

¹⁰⁵ J. F. Girault, Report of Brigadier-General Smith, C.S. Army, transmitting report of Lieutenant Brown, C.S. Navy, commanding C.S. ram *Arkansas*, *Official Records*, Series 1, Vol. 19: 66 - 67.

¹⁰⁶ Mallory, Extract from report of the Secretary of the Navy of the Confederate States dated August 16, 1862, *Official Records*, Series 1 - Volume 19: West Gulf Blockading Squadron (July 15, 1862 - March 14, 1863), 67 - 68.

¹⁰⁷ Statement made by Lieutenant Read, C.S. Navy, of the C.S. ram *Arkansas*, Series 1, Vol. 19: 131.

then forced its way past the Union blockade and into Mobile Bay, Alabama, for outfitting. The cruiser's captain was Commander John N. Maffitt, an officer with a long history of service in the U.S.N. Read reported to Mobile for duty on November 4, 1862.¹⁰⁸ Maffitt had requested Read because of his "reputation for gunnery, coolness, and determination." Read immediately and repetitively began to advocate that the ship leave port, seeming unconcerned about the danger of the U.S.N. blockading ships outside Mobile Bay that were lying in wait for them.¹⁰⁹ The *Florida* eventually did break the blockade and carried on a career of commerce raiding in the Caribbean and South Atlantic during the first few months of 1863. During Read's time on the ship, they captured and destroyed fourteen Union merchant vessels, introducing Read to this element of the naval war.¹¹⁰

Read, however, was unhappy with the *Florida's* mission. Although he understood the importance of commerce raiding and disrupting the Northern economy, he longed to be more actively engaged in attacking Union military targets. Years later, he recalled that Capt. Maffitt once asked him what he thought about shifting a focus to "the East Indies or China." Read replied that he would rather be a soldier in the Confederate army than "destr[oying] a few ships in a remote part of the world." As a compromise, Maffitt agreed to give him command of "the first small vessel he captured" so that Read could head back towards the C.S.A. Read, who had always chafed at inactivity, long to be on the front lines of the war instead of patrolling its periphery and preying on the unarmed merchantmen of the North. Ironically, it would be just this sort of peripheral action which would make him famous.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁸ *Register*, 161.

¹⁰⁹ Extracts from the journal of Lieutenant J.N. Maffitt, May 4 – Dec. 31, 1862, *Official Records*, Series 1, Vol 1: 768 – 69.

¹¹⁰ "An Interesting Letter from Lieut. Read," *New York Times*, 8 Jul 1863, *ProQuest*, Web, 14 Dec. 2012.

¹¹¹ Read, "Florida-Clarence-Tacony-Archer," document in Charles Read Papers, ECU Special Collections. This account is undated, but was probably written in the 1880s, in the twilight of Read's life. There are enough misplaced details to imagine that his memory was not what it used to be.

Fortunately for Read, the *Florida* captured such a ship on May 6, 1863, in the area off Cape São Roque in Rio Grande do Norte, the tip of Brazil closest to Africa. The vessel was the *Clarence*, a small sailing brig with a crew of seven.¹¹² Read proposed that he be allowed to take the ship north on a mission to target Hampton Roads, Virginia, by commandeering a ship there or burning portions of the harbor, a mission he wrote to Maffitt “there can be no doubt” of success. This was in spite of the fact that Hampton Roads was one of the best defended and most regularly patrolled regions of the East Coast.¹¹³ Maffitt tacitly approved of Read’s plans, praising his “patriotic devotion to the cause” but advising him to err on the side of caution. He concluded that “this is certainly the time when all our best exertions should be made to harm the common enemy and confuse them with attacks from all quarters.”¹¹⁴

Read and Maffitt hand-picked some of the best of the *Florida*’s sailors for duty on board the *Clarence*. Landsman A.L. Drayton, who was ambivalent about his selection, wrote in his diary that he overheard another man on the *Clarence* say after the transfer that “all the drunkards were [now] gone.”¹¹⁵

Read selected his officers based on their past performance, including Quartermaster and Master’s Mate John E. Billups, who had experience on prize crew duty having previously served as the Confederate commander of one of the *Florida*’s victims. Read also took along Engineer Eugene H. Brown, who had had a career in the U.S.N. and had severed alongside Read aboard the *Arkansas*, begging Maffitt, “to take...Brown and one of his firemen with me...[Brown] could be spared from this ship, as his health is bad, and you could obtain another engineer.”

¹¹² Drayton, Jan. 16 – June 26 1863, Ac. 2110, Library of Congress, Manuscripts Division, Washington, D.C., back table.

¹¹³ Letter from Lt. Read, May 6, 1863, *Official Records*, Series I, Vol. 2: 644.

¹¹⁴ Letter from Commander Maffitt, May 6, 1863, *Official Records*, Series I, Vol. 2: 645.

¹¹⁵ Drayton, Entry May 6.

(Ironically, Read would later describe Brown as “an idler on board.”)¹¹⁶ As a gunner, Read selected Nick B. Pryde, originally born in New York but who had lived in New Orleans and served initially in a Confederate infantry regiment. Later, in the C.S.N., he served on the ironclad C.S.S. *Virginia* off Hampton Roads, Read’s intended target. Read promoted Pryde to Acting Master’s Mate as soon as he took command of the *Clarence*.¹¹⁷

At 6:00 PM on May 6, 1863, the *Clarence* sailed away from the *Florida*, heading north with orders known only to Read and Maffitt himself, the crew wondering what exactly they were in for. They did know that Read and Maffitt had agreed to meet somewhere in the near future—off Nantucket around June 20— if both ships were able to do so.¹¹⁸ Fifteen years later, Dennis Matthews, a crewman on the *Florida*, remembered “that bright May day in ’63 when we parted off Capt St. Rogue.” It was a heroic moment enshrined forever in his memory.¹¹⁹ In all, Read set sail with twenty-one crewmen and a single, six-pound howitzer, a small gun which would provide no protection at all against a Union warship serving in the blockade. Read’s route during this time can be seen in Figure 5.¹²⁰

¹¹⁶ Letter from Lt. Read, May 6, 1863, *Official Records*, Series I, Vol. 2: 644, and Read, “Florida-Clarence-Tacony-Archer,” document in Charles Read Papers, ECU Special Collections, and *Register*, 15, and 23, on Billups and Brown respectively. There is no data on Billups’s place of birth or enlistment, although Brown is known to have enlisted in Virginia and Billups’s later arrest in the Cumberland County Sheriff’s Record lists Virginia as his home. However, the men’s previous careers in the U.S.N. suggest itinerant lifestyles. Billups had been in command of the *Matherson* as prize crew officer.

¹¹⁷ *Register*, 158, and the appendix in John V. Quarstein, *C.S.S. Virginia: Sink Before Surrender*, (The History Press, 2012), 402.

¹¹⁸ Abstract Log of the *Florida*, May 6, 1863, *Official Records*, Series I, Vol. 2: 679 – 80, and Shaw, 77.

¹¹⁹ Letter from Dennis Matthews, Editor of the *Peoples Tribune*, Jefferson City, MO, to Read, Jan. 31, 1878, Charles Read Papers, ECU Special Collections.

¹²⁰ Report of Lt. Read, July 30, 1863, *Official Records*, Series 1, Vol. 2: 654 – 55. Although Read’s account says that he sailed with only 20 men, the *Florida*’s log book and many other sources have this number at the more reasonable 22.

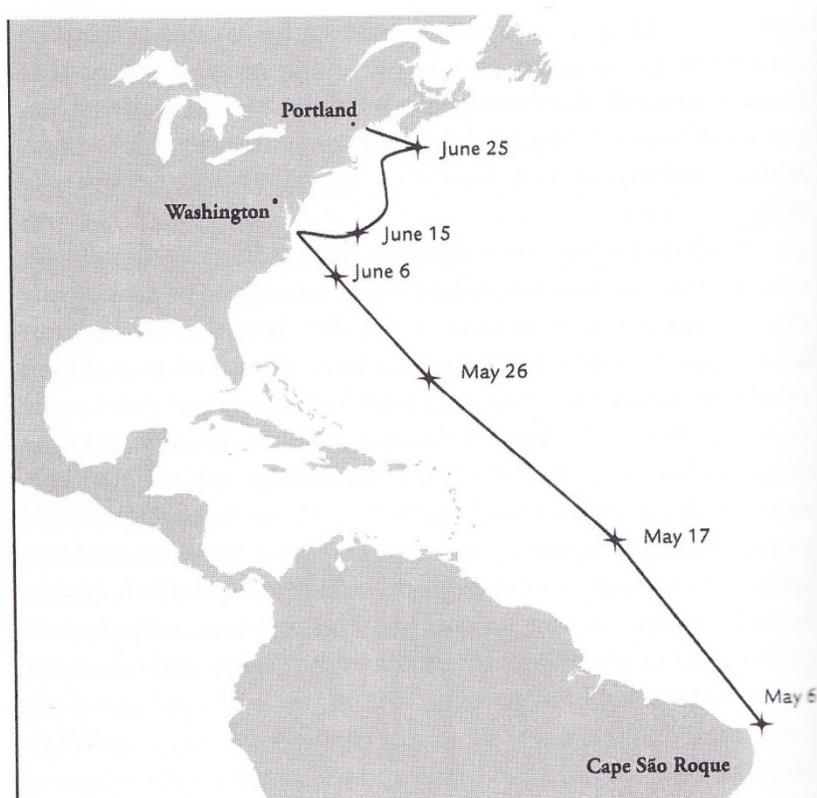


Figure 5: Plotting Read's cruise, May 6 (*Clarence*) to June 25 (*Archer*)

Read took his ship north from the Brazilian coast, chasing several other vessels off the Windward Islands and South America's northern coast, but "failed to overhaul them on account of [the Confederate ship's] inferior sailing qualities."¹²¹ It was an inauspicious start to the cruise and some on board began to question Read's abilities. Read remembered that "[o]ne night [he] heard one of the men ask another if he had any idea where we were going." Eavesdropping on his men, Read recalled that "[t]he old salt discharged a bit of tobacco juice to leeward and replied 'D--- me if I don't believe we are carrying the mail!'"¹²² However, Drayton also recorded some enthusiasm during their expedition, taking satisfaction that the "Yanks might as well give up" because "two vessels [bid] the Yankee nation defiance," with the *Florida* and *Clarence* apparently able to operate with impunity throughout the ocean. Drayton also commented that Northern seamen would likely embellish tales of their encounters with the commerce raiders and

¹²¹ Additional Report of Lt. Read, Oct. 19, 1864, *Official Records*, Series I, Vol. 2: 655 – 657.

¹²² Read, "Florida-Clarence-Taony-Archer," document in Charles Read Papers, ECU Special Collections.

become “heroes of their [little set] when they reach home,” emphasizing the fear which commerce raiders could spread amongst coastal communities.¹²³

Even early on, Lt. Read ordered his crew to be prepared for the end of their cruise at any moment, because he recognized just how dangerous the mission he had set out upon was. If they were overhauled by even the smallest of Union warships, they would be outgunned and almost certainly killed or taken prisoner. Drayton recorded that “[y]esterday we got our arrangements made to fire at a moment’s notice,” because “we intend to fire her if we find out that the [Union ships] are going to seize the vessel.” For Drayton as well as for Read, “it would be some satisfaction to know that we prevent them from making a recapture.”¹²⁴

A chance encounter with an English ship finally proved fruitful for the Confederates. They traded some of the ship’s coffee stores for several large spars, which Read and his men then painted black to resemble larger guns. With these “Quaker guns,” they hoped to fool merchant ships into stopping and surrendering themselves, but they were still no match for a Union warship.¹²⁵

Read made his first capture on June 6, 1863, when the *Clarence* overhauled and burned the Union bark *Whistling Wind*, which was carrying coal. Overhauling a ship involved the sometimes lengthy and dangerous process of firing a warning shot and it, waiting for the ship to indicate it was not attempting to sail away, which would have invited further shots, and then boarding and capturing it with a prize crew. Believing that he was getting lucky, Read boarded a schooner the next day, the *Alfred H. Partridge*, flying a Union flag, only to find that the vessel was “loaded with arms and clothing for our citizens in Texas,” and so Read “took the captain’s bond” and sent him on his way. On June 8, the *Clarence* captured and burned the Northern

¹²³ Drayton, Entry May 29.

¹²⁴ Drayton, Entry June 1.

¹²⁵ Read, “Florida-Clarence-Tacony-Archer,” document in Charles Read Papers, ECU Special Collections.

sailing brig *Mary Alvina*, carrying commissary stores from Boston to occupied New Orleans.¹²⁶ Read's crew took some satisfaction from these early captures, Drayton writing, "I think the Yanks will be astonished a little when they hear of us," and that "some of them will say d-d Rebel imprudence." See Appendix C for a full table of the Confederate captures during this time.¹²⁷

On June 10, Read realized that the approaches to Hampton Roads and Fortress Monroe, the Union Headquarters of the North Atlantic Blockading Squadron, would be nearly impossible to infiltrate: he learned from captured newspapers and his prisoners that travel into and out of the area was heavily restricted and "there were two boarding steamers" which would undoubtedly challenge and board the *Clarence* as it passed them. Even for Read and his penchant to challenge the odds, this seemed too risky. Lt. Read decided at that moment to change the stated purpose of his mission from burning ships in Hampton Roads specifically to "do[ing] all possible injury to the enemy's commerce" by continuing north on his cruise.¹²⁸

On June 12, the *Clarence* captured the Union ship *Tacony* off the area between Hampton Roads and Virginia Beach. Because the ship "was a much better vessel" in terms of its sails, construction, and overall speed, Read ordered the crew to "transfer everything aboard" and then scuttle the *Clarence*.¹²⁹ The ship had set out on a sailing expedition from Port Royal, Jamaica, to Philadelphia on June 7. When it was captured on June 12, Read unofficially took charge of writing in the *Tacony*'s log book, with his first entry on June 13 reading simply, "nothing

¹²⁶ Additional Report of Lt. Read, Oct. 19, 1864, *Official Records*, Series I, Vol. 2: 655 – 657.

¹²⁷ Drayton, Entry June 8.

¹²⁸ Report of Lt. Read, July 30, 1863, *Official Records*, Series I, Vol 2, 654 – 55 and "Additional Report of Lt. Read," Oct. 19, 1864, *Official Records*, Series I, Vol. 2: 655 – 657.

¹²⁹ Report of Lt. Read, July 30, 1863, *Official Records*, Series I, Vol. 2: 654 – 55.

unusual.”¹³⁰ The naval hero Admiral Winfield Scott Schley, who was also Read’s classmate at Annapolis, would later say that the lieutenant “possessed in high degree common sense, or ought I to say uncommon sense, as everyone does not possess it, that underlies success in every calling.” It was this “uncommon sense” which led Read to the tricky and evasive strategy he embarked upon with his crew on board the *Tacony*.¹³¹

William G. Mundy, the merchant captain of the *Tacony* when Read captured it, presented a more dastardly account of the proceedings of June 12. He described how the *Clarence* approached them asking desperately for water, how the Confederates then came aboard, drew their pistols, and then seized two additional ships in the area before departing. Mundy called Read “not disposed to be communicative,” but noted that he and his men were “treated with all the consideration possible under the circumstances.”¹³²

While the *Tacony* and *Clarence* were sitting dangerously close to Hampton Roads, Read did capture two other ships that sailed into the area. At this point, Read faced a conundrum in terms of the prisoners he carried, who would surely alert the press and U.S.N. authorities to their presence. Read determined to burn half of the gathered ships, putting the prisoners on board the captured *Kate Stewart*, bonding her— whereby he released the ship but expected monetary compensation for doing so from the Union to the Confederate government at the conclusion of hostilities— for \$7,000.¹³³ Once the crew and prisoners had completed their transfers, Read had the *Clarence* and the other captured ship, the *M. A. Shindler* set on fire, and then the Confederates sailed in the opposite direction of the flames and the spared *Kate Stewart*. After

¹³⁰ Log for the American Bark *Tacony*, Oct. 1862 – June 1863, Logs and Journals of American Privateers, State Navy, and Merchant Vessels, Record Group 45, Entry 609, NA. Data on *Tacony*’s weight, etc. came from Drayton, back table.

¹³¹ Winfield Scott Schley, in a description of Read attached to letter from Winfield M. Thompson to Nebraska C. May, Dec. 28, 1904, Charles Read Papers, ECU Special Collections.

¹³² “Statement of Capt. Mundy, of the bark *Tacony*,” *New York Times*, 15 Jun 1863, *ProQuest*, Web, 13 Dec. 2012.

¹³³ Additional Report of Lt. Read, Oct. 19, 1864, *Official Records*, Series I, Vol. 2: 655 – 657.

they were underway, Read called his crew to assemble together on the new ship's deck. There, he read out the orders to attack Hampton Roads that he had carried from Capt. Maffitt— those he himself had requested— a plan which Drayton called “bold, but I must say a reckless one, and I cannot approve of it.” Drayton even said that “it was impossible for anyone to conceive it,” implying a lack of confidence on the part of the Confederate crew for their young commander and his schemes.¹³⁴

The *Tacony* headed north, terrorizing coastal fishermen and seizing more vessels. Figure 6 depicts one such attack. Read reported that the crew would raise the Confederate flag and fire shells into large groups of fishing ships as scare tactic, since they had neither the means nor the desire to capture and sink every one of these ships. Read described this as “not only ‘rais[ing] cane’ but also the price of fish.”¹³⁵ As the Confederates continued north, indeed, their actions became more and more widely known and reported. Soon, the New England coast would be abuzz with fear and the name of the *Tacony*.

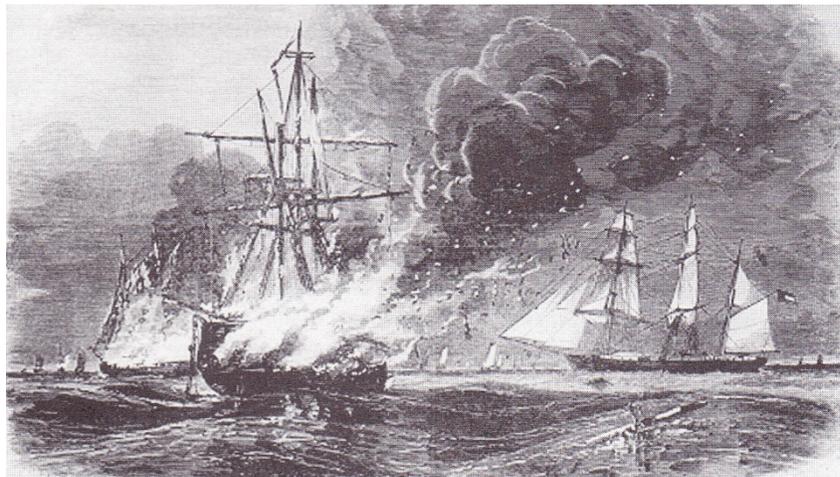


Figure 6: The *Tacony* burns a ship.

¹³⁴ Drayton, Entry June 12.

¹³⁵ Read, “Florida-Clarence-Tacony-Archer,” document in Charles Read Papers, ECU Special Collections.

Section IV: Newspapers and the Spreading Panic

It was not long before the U.S.N., its hand forced by widespread concern in Northern cities largely stirred up by newspaper accounts, began to treat the *Tacony* as a major threat and to track it with all possible ships. In early and mid-June, maritime merchants represented a significant and large portion of the Northern economy, and for this reason their complaints to the government received attention at the highest levels. Citizens and officials in cities and ports along the northeast coast began to fear that the privateers would not only decimate their shipping, but also threaten their very homes by entering and perhaps bombarding their harbors. The *New York Times* began to publish an almost daily account of Read's exploits starting with a June 15 listing of six vessels it was believed that he had taken. It also included information about his transfer of command from *Clarence* to *Tacony* as a commentary on the unpredictable and craftiness enemy the North faced.¹³⁶ On June 14, President Lincoln issued a communiqué to the vessels of the R.C.S. to assist Secretary of the Navy Gideon D. Welles in his search. He commanded all revenue cutters to "cooperate...with the Navy in arresting rebel depredations...and securing the rebels therein."¹³⁷

In response, Secretary Chase dispatched orders at once to U.S.R.C.s around the country, calling for an expansive and exhaustive operation to capture Read as his men. Chase asked these cutters to familiarize themselves with the descriptions widely published of the *Tacony*, and then set out with a determination to find the Confederates. They were to leave no stone unturned, as Chase ordered his cuttermen to "visit every [ship] you [stop], and satisfy yourself as to her true character," all the while anticipating Read's cunning and "not allowing yourself to be deceived by any device, such as change of vessel, rig, paint, or flag." Recognizing the difficulties of this

¹³⁶ "Doings of the Rebel Pirates," *New York Times*, Jun 15 1863, *ProQuest*, Web, 13 Dec. 2012 .

¹³⁷ Instructions from the President of the U.S. to the Secretary of the Treasury, June 14, 1863, *Official Records*, Series I, Vol 2: 278.

expansive mission, Chase cautioned the cutters to “respect neutral property,” as the Union had already suffered some international crises by boarding neutral ships, while giving them sweeping discretionary powers to “capture whatever is rebel, however disguised.” In accordance with Lincoln’s request, Chase had but the R.C.S. on a footing of total activity and vigilance.¹³⁸

But, as the newspapers would soon lament, Welles and Chase had overestimated their own resources and actual ability to track or capture the *Tacony*. In the next several days, the commanders of the Navy Yards in New York, Boston, and Philadelphia did put ships out to sea in search of the *Tacony*, under the orders of Sec. Welles, instructing their captains to “use all possible effort” to haul in the “freebooter.” Ironically, this included the deployment of the *Kate Stewart* from Philadelphia, the ship *Read* had only just recently captured and bonded. However, not all the men put to sea aboard these pursuit ships were “enlisted persons;” some were “day laborers who...volunteered for this service,” untrained and unprepared for the extensive search their mission required. This deployment of second-rate sailors untrained for actual war duty demonstrated the lack of manpower available in the coastal cities of the North.¹³⁹

Perhaps predictably because of this, the Union’s search for the *Tacony* quickly went nowhere. The ships assigned for the search were not the top-of-the-line vessels Welles might have hoped for, and this prompted some newspapers and civilians to criticize that the search was marred by incompetence. For example, a machinery problem took the New York ship *Cumbria* out of the search almost immediately. This reduced Union efficiency and ability to search the large areas of sea where the Confederates might be lurking. Some Union ships, like the *Dai Ching* commanded by Lt. Com. J.T. Chaplin, failed even to catch up and overhaul ships they

¹³⁸ Sec. of the Treasury to Captain McGowan...to proceed, June 14, 1863, *Official Records*, Series I, Vol 2: 278 - 279.

¹³⁹ Report of the Commander of the Navy Yard, Philadelphia, June 15, 1863, *Official Records*, Series I, Vol. 2: 282. The other reports are list reports and questions from New York and Boston Navy Yards, on pages 279-280 and 281 respectively.

sighted while patrolling. This made the *Dai Ching* “of little service” because it was “unable...under the most favorable of circumstances” to search suspicious vessels.¹⁴⁰

In fact, because they were carrying out such a wide-reaching search, several of the pursuing vessels actually found and overhauled *each other* during this time, instead of their Confederate targets. U.S.S. *Tonawanda* was boarded by no fewer than three other Union ships.¹⁴¹ By June 19, the search had only yielded the capture of one suspected blockade runner, the *Isabella Thompson*, although searchers had already overhauled scores of friendly Union ships.¹⁴²

As newspapers illuminated what seemed a frenzied deployment of the U.S.N. from New York, Philadelphia, and Boston throughout the month of June, Northerner’s fears became palpable. New York was ordered to “complete at once all crafts nearly ready for sea, and to dispatch immediately those in commission, and seaworthy” for the purpose of trailing Read and his presumed accomplices in the area.¹⁴³ The *Tacony* appeared to be a lone raider which apparently had the ability to be everywhere, destroying an impossibly large number of Northern ships, and also nowhere, because Union warships could not capture it. Although merchants and businessmen took a particular interest in Read’s depredations, average citizens and most newspapers in the northeast discussed the *Tacony*’s infamy. Erroneous reports popped up everywhere, with captains claiming that three separate Confederate vessels, including a steamer, were burning vessels in the Bay of Fundy. One report on even stated that the *Archer*, which

¹⁴⁰ Report of the commandant navy yard, New York, June 22, 1863, *Official Records*, Series I, Vol 2: 297, and Report of Lt. Com. Chaplin, June 20, 1863, *Official Records*, Series I, Vol 2: 294 – 95.

¹⁴¹ Enclosure in Report of the commander of the navy yard, Philadelphia, June 23, 1863, *Official Records*, Series I, Vol 2: 303.

¹⁴² Report of Lt. Commander Meade...while searching for the C.S. bark *Tacony*, June 19, 1863, *Official Records*, Series I, Vol 2: 293.

¹⁴³ “The Pirates and the Navy,” *New York Times*, 16 Jun 1863, *ProQuest*, Web, 13 Dec. 2012.

Read would actually commandeer later, on June 24, had been burned and sunk by these phantom vessels.¹⁴⁴

Additionally, a rumor circulated widely enough to be reported to Secretary Welles that it was not the *Tacony* at all but C.S.S. *Florida* itself carrying out the attacks along the coast. Apparently, this rumor stemmed from a conversation with the captain of the *Kate Stewart*, with someone claiming that no other than Commander Maffitt himself was on board the privateer, reinforced because this civilian “knew him personally from before the war.”¹⁴⁵ One paper, commenting on the rumors and poking fun at the inability of Union forces to find the commerce raider, wrote about the Confederate’s journey northwards:

It seems that the persistent little rebel pirate, *Tacony*, makes a rendezvous of Martha’s Vineyard, near which she is now committing the most audacious depredations. What is Martha about, all this time? We are afraid she is not a strong Union woman; otherwise she would have treated the *Tacony* to a dose of Grape from her Vineyard, ere now.¹⁴⁶

These reports indicated the widespread fear and concern Read’s actions had spread throughout the Northeast.

In the meantime, Read appeared to be making good on the Northerners’ fears. On June 20, eager to capture even larger ships, the Confederates boarded “a New York ship with passengers,” the *Isaac Webb*, which was carrying over 800 Irish immigrants. Read wrote that the captain of this ship was “of the rougher sort,” and that “he came on board the *Tacony* he was inclined to ‘bully’ me” by acting “in a very insolent manner.” Patronizing the captain, Read assured him that, as Master’s Mate Billups and most of his crew were in command of the passenger packet, he could expect to be treated well. Read insisted that his sailors were men of honor and not pirates. The Confederates tried in vain to capture another ship to put the many

¹⁴⁴“The Rebel Pirates: Further Depredations of the *Tacony*,” *New York Times*, 27 Jun 1863, *ProQuest*, Web, 14 Dec. 2012.

¹⁴⁵ Enclosure in Letter from Acting Rear-Admiral Lee...to the Sec. of the Navy, June 20, 1863, *Official Records*, Series I, Vol 2: 294. It is also mentioned in a report on page 291.

¹⁴⁶“Rebellious Martha,” *Vanity Fair*, 4 Jul 1863, *ProQuest*, Web, 14 Dec. 2012.

passengers on so that they could destroy the large ship itself. Finding none, Read eventually bonded the ship for \$60,000.¹⁴⁷ Drayton commented on the capture of the *Isaac Webb*, saying that “[t]he Irish will think it rather hard to meet the rebels before they have landed in the *Glorious Union*.” Drayton hoped that the Confederate actions could dissuade perhaps some of the large number of Irish immigrants from fighting in the Union Army.¹⁴⁸

The bonding of such a large ship prompted increased furor in Northern cities, and the panic continued to spread throughout New England. Governor Andrew of Massachusetts vocalized the concerns of many New England leaders in a scathing letter to Sec. Welles, which, although he did not receive it until July 1, encapsulated the June hysteria developing in the Bay State. Andrew complained that he was receiving requests and indications of concern from seaside communities across the commonwealth asking how they could prepare for a possible Confederate incursion, all because of “the recent exploits of the *Tacony*.” Gov. Andrew cautioned that the Confederates could “burn half the towns of Cape Cod” or shell “Salem, Marblehead, Beverly, Gloucester, Rockport, and Newburyport” because these harbors were not “defended...by a single gun.” According to the governor, Massachusetts’s best bet was “[t]he ignorance of the rebels as to our defenseless condition” because the Navy had not dispatched additional ships to the area. Despite the criticisms, Andrew recommended that a single “swift war steamer” stationed at Provincetown would do the trick and assure the defense of the Commonwealth.¹⁴⁹

Likewise, Mayor William H. Cranston of Newport, Rhode Island embodied the concerns of his citizens in a telegram to Sec. Welles. Fearing an incursion from the Confederate

¹⁴⁷ Log from the American Bark *Tacony*, NA, Drayton, rear table, and Read, “Portland Harbor-*Caleb Cushing*,” in Charles W. Read Collection, ECU Special Collections.

¹⁴⁸ Drayton, Entry June 20.

¹⁴⁹ Let[t]er from the governor of Massachusetts, July 1, 1863, *Official Records*, Series 1, Vol. 2: 340.

commerce raiders as well, Mayor Cranston reported “[a] rebel pirate, supposed to be the *Tacony*” attacking fishermen outside the city. Cranston went a step further than other cities because he both called for a fully-armed steamer and vied for preference in this over Boston or New York by describing Newport as “one of the most important [harbors] of the coast,” effectively selling out these larger commercial centers.¹⁵⁰

During Read’s cruise up to Portland, newspapers helped to spread fear and concern about the commerce raiders, who were demonized as menacing pirates, up and down the East Coast and into the homes of the average Northerner. Some contemporary reports had the total number of ships that *Tacony* had destroyed at 40 by this time, showing great exaggeration and demonstrating the widespread fear Read’s actions had had. Read actually never captured more than twenty-two ships, even including the *Archer* and *Caleb Cushing*. This fear and concern was clearly represented in these published accounts of Read’s exploits, the close scrutiny and complaints about the pursuit for the vessel, and the pleas of elected officials for more support in their home states.¹⁵¹

Section V: The Divide Between the Public and Private Spheres

Although the average citizen feared Confederate incursions near their homes, it was the concerns of businessmen, merchants, and the coastal elite which sparked renewed tensions and confrontations between the private sector and civilians on one side and the federal government on the other in late June, 1863. Seaman Drayton noted in his diary, correctly, that the Confederates were “striking [the Northern man] at the tenderest spot, his...Pocket.” The conflict represented a wider one in the Civil War, where companies and citizens frequently criticized

¹⁵⁰ Telegram, Newport, RI, to Welles, June 25, 1863, *Official Records*, Series 1, Vol. 2: 309.

¹⁵¹“Progress of the War,” *New York Observer and Chronicle*, 2 Jul 1863, Web, 14 Dec. 2012.

government policy. The presence of Confederates so close to Northern commercial centers was a strong catalyst for making these discussions more mainstream than they had ever been.¹⁵²

With complaints about the Navy's efficiency rising, civilians began to take matters into their own hands. On June 19, in New York City, the nearly formed "Harbor and Frontier Defense Committee" appointed Senator Edwin D. Morgan, formerly a governor and the first chairman of the Republican Party "to communicate with the authorities" and to assign an engineer to the harbor so fortifications could be properly shored up in the event of an attack. The committee also authorized Morgan to "take such measures as he shall deem necessary" to protect the city. These moves, sponsored mainly by New York businessmen, represented a complete lack of faith in the U.S.N. to adequately defend their business interests and New York Harbor.¹⁵³

Companies complained directly to Welles and other top officials. Nesmith & Sons, a shipping company, indicated in a scathing letter to Welles that the private sector could capture the *Tacony* far more easily than the Navy. They argued that, because "the pirate" was "so close at hand" and carrying "only two wooden guns and one brass," the Navy should have been able to easily stop its depredations. Instead, New Yorkers witnessed the ships sent out after it "returning, not having accomplished anything." Nesmith & Sons offered an interesting solution: if Welles put a bounty on the *Tacony*, "sufficient to create competition," and granted commissions similar to the Confederacy's letters of marque, the matter would swiftly be resolved. Nesmith & Sons closed its letter by noting a disconcerting phenomenon, reporting that

¹⁵² Drayton, Entry June 19.

¹⁵³ Enclosure in Letter from Hon. E. D. Morgan to the Sec. of the Navy, June 23, 1863, *Official Records*, Series 1, Vol. 2: 304 – 05.

“our glorious flag is gradually disappearing from the ocean, either by destruction or the large war insurance, obliging the sale of our ships to foreigners.”¹⁵⁴

New York Harbor did in fact provide a telling example of this incidence, reflecting the extent to which commerce raiders had disrupted, although not crippled, the Northern maritime economy. In 1860, there were 1,133 American and 662 foreign ships chartered for international trade in the city, a nearly 100 percent registration rate in favor of U.S. merchants. By mid-1863, that number had plummeted to 747 American and 1,450 foreign ships, a nearly 100 percent registration rate for foreign merchantmen. In all, a 200 percent change in the registration of American ships had occurred. This can be largely attributed to commerce raiding activities like those of the *Tacony*. Many companies switched the registration of their ships during the war, because the Confederates would not sink vessels registered under a foreign flag, particularly those of England or France, nations which the Confederacy courted as potential allies in their fight against the U.S.¹⁵⁵

Farther north, residents of Boston, as a maritime center, were also concerned about the *Tacony*'s progress. Although the Navy had already dispatched several steamers and armed other vessels to go after the ship, here, as in New York, private citizens began to develop their own solutions. A group of merchants and businessmen, angered by losses to their commercial fleets in Boston, offered a \$10,000 reward to anyone who captured the raider.¹⁵⁶ A. Hardy & Co., a shipping company, sent Welles a simple telegram, asking only, “Will you allow private vessels, at their own expense, to go for the pirate?” and “Will you give us guns from the navy yard?” A.

¹⁵⁴ Letter from Messrs. Nesmith & Sons to the Sec. of the Navy, June 22, 1863, *Official Records*, Series 1, Vol. 2: 300.

¹⁵⁵ “Commercial: The Effect of Rebel Privateering Upon Our Commerce,” *New York Observer and Chronicle*: 231, 16 Jul 1863, *ProQuest*, Web, 14 Dec. 2012.

¹⁵⁶ “The Rebel Pirates,” *New York Times*, 27 Jun 1863, *ProQuest*, Web, 13 Dec. 2012.

Hardy & Co. advocated a solution similar to Nesmith & Sons, but conceded that private citizens could not complete this task without the aid of weapons from government stores.¹⁵⁷

This company's idea nearly became policy when, at another larger meeting attended by Boston merchants, the attendees pledged to fund the arming and commissioning of their own privateers. These ships and their crews would be outfitted and paid for the purpose of tracking down the *Tacony* and the other Confederates presumed to be working with it.¹⁵⁸ Welles replied politely but firmly to A. Hardy & Co. and these others by affirming that “[a]ny vessels you may wish to send out...will be commanded by the U.S.,” with the Commander of the Boston Naval Yard in ultimate control of any expeditions. With this response, Welles indicated that the Navy would maintain control of the search. Welles was likely concerned about setting a precedent in this matter for private citizens to take matters into their own hands, and about the potential embarrassment to the U.S.N. if the *Tacony* were captured by an untrained volunteer instead of by a government vessel.¹⁵⁹

In spite of his open disagreements with these private officials, Welles did order that more steamers be commissioned and sent out from Boston, Philadelphia, and New York on the same day he curtly replied to A. Hardy & Co. Welles called for “all that can be sent in forty-eight hours” and “any other available vessel,” indicating that Welles was scrapping the bottom of the barrel¹⁶⁰ On June 25, another Boston shipping company, Howes & Crowell, wrote Welles requesting permission to equip two of their merchant ships with arms in order to protect the fishing fleet in the Gulf of Saint Lawrence. This time, two days later, on June 27, Welles relented, probably hoping the ships could protect the vulnerable fishermen and offering to have

¹⁵⁷ Telegram, Request A. Hardy & Co., June 24, 1863, *Official Records*, Series 1, Vol. 2: 306.

¹⁵⁸ “Measure Taken to Capture the *Tacony*,” *New York Times*, 25 Jun 1863, *ProQuest*, Web, 14 Dec. 2012.

¹⁵⁹ Telegram, Welles's response to A. Hardy & Co., June 24, 1863, *Official Records*, Series 1, Vol. 2: 307.

¹⁶⁰ Telegram, Welles to Boston, June 24, 1863, *Official Records*, Series 1, Vol. 2: 307, and several telegrams to Philadelphia and New York on page 308.

the Navy arm the vessels and provide pay later for a three month voyage for the officers and crew.¹⁶¹

Read's commerce raiding cruise up the East Coast, and the debates it engendered between private citizens and companies, was endemic of a larger discussion on the role of government in the wartime North. Many politicians, businesses and private citizens criticized President Lincoln and bureaucratic inefficiency during the war, in realms ranging from the draft to agricultural policy. To these critics, the inability of the U.S.N. to capture the *Tacony* was just another manifestation of this frustration, a task which could be better accomplished through private direction and ownership although there was absolutely no precedent for this. The greater struggle, that of civilian and military authority, would come to a head during discussions about the treatment of the Confederate prisoners in Portland.

Section VI: Giving them the Slip – Confederates in Portland Harbor

The Confederates, too, benefited from discussions of their infamy and tactics in the Northern newspapers. These helped the *Tacony*'s crew learn about what kind of and how many ships were pursuing them at any one time. Drayton called these papers "the best pulse of the Yankee nation" and important for their overall success.¹⁶²

The exhaustive search by Union ships had also pushed merchant captains to a level of frustration, causing many to let their guard down. When the *Tacony* sailed up alongside the Union ship *Byzantium* at dawn on June 21, for example, a Northern sailor, instead of trying to identify the ship, called out, "For the Lord's sake give us a rest about the rebel bark, we have been heaving to all night to hear about her!" Union pursuers were close, because the large ship

¹⁶¹ Two telegrams between Howes & Crowell and Welles, June 25 and 27, 1863, *Official Records*, Series 1, Vol. 2: 314.

¹⁶² Read, "Portland Harbor-Caleb Cushing," in Charles W. Read Collection, ECU Special Collections, and Drayton, Entry June 15.

had been hailed, boarded, and warned to be on the lookout for the *Tacony* “by four different gunboats” during the night, clearly to no avail. Perhaps the seaman’s frustration was justified because of this, but his mistake proved the end of the *Byzantium*, which Read promptly burned.

Three of the *Byzantium*’s crew, however, including Robert Hunt of Georgia, Englishman Thomas Butters, and Irishman James Kelley opted to join *Tacony*. All three were either sympathetic to or hailing from the C.S.A., and none relished the idea of becoming a prisoner. They may also have seen the successful raider as an easy way to make more money than they were in the merchant marine. This brought Read’s total crew to 25 men, including himself and his officers.¹⁶³

Although the Confederates were operating close to their Union pursuers, none proved able to actually catch them. Robert Hunt, the recent addition to the crew, would claim in the 1890s that a Union ship did indeed hail the *Tacony* one night. Apparently, its captain spoke with Lt. Read, who was able to convince the pursuers that they were a simple cargo ship. The pursuing captain let the Confederates sail on, as he likely had with others he had queried that night. In Hunt’s account, the Northern ship also warned Read that a Confederate privateer was operating in the area and to be on the lookout. Although the truth of this story is questionable, it is completely in the vein of the extensive but incomplete search many untrained captains were carrying out in the area during the end of June.¹⁶⁴

On June 22, the *Tacony* burnt four fishing schooners and “sent all the prisoners to New York” on a fifth so that they would not have to provide for these additional passengers. The next

¹⁶³ Read, “Portland Harbor-*Caleb Cushing*,” in Charles W. Read Collection, ECU Special Collections, and “Statement of Lieut. Reed,” *New York Times*, 29 Jun 1863, *ProQuest*, Web, 14 Dec. 2012.

¹⁶⁴ “The Johnny’s Story: How the *Caleb Cushing* was taken in Portland Harbor,” Oct. 27, 1894, unidentified newspaper *The Caleb Cushing Affair*, Coll. S-1323, Misc. Box 63/6, MHS. This article is a direct copy of Hunt’s speech before Confederate Veteran’s Association of Savannah, Georgia in the late 1890s. See United Confederate Veterans (UCV), *Addresses Delivered Before the Confederate Veterans Association, of Savannah, Ga: To which is Added the President's Annual Report*, (Savannah: UCV, 1895).

day, they captured and sank two more fishing vessels, the *Wanderer* and the *Adda*.¹⁶⁵ Drayton gained a grim sense of satisfaction when they burned the fishing ship *Adda*, out of Gloucester, Massachusetts. The boarding party learned that “the captain, the owner, worked for twelve years to get her,” only to see his ship burned by the commerce raiders. Drayton also wrote about the *Wanderer* that “the Capt. like the other had just cleared her after working 30 years through [storms] and all [kinds of weather]. [I]t is hard but honest as the saying goes.” Drayton considered these unfortunate events on a par with the suffering of his own family in the South, saying that “[the captains] and those belonging to [them] will now feel the effects of war at their own doors and in their family as well as we do.”¹⁶⁶

Although their work was hard, Read was not without a sense of humor, and on top of the second-to-last page he filled out in *Tacony*'s logbook, he filled in the “From/To” blocks with “From: Any Where To: Same.” At this time, on June 24, Read made perhaps the most valuable capture of his career, the 850-ton Union ship *Shatemuc*, which carried over 350 passengers, some of whom were again immigrants to the U.S. Moreover, the ship carried valuable war-related cargo. Read kept a prize crew aboard her for around 12 hours that day, hoping to find a way to both destroy the ship and protect its passengers. In the end, the Confederates bonded the ship for \$150,000.¹⁶⁷

Later on June 24, the *Tacony* made her final capture, the small fishing schooner *Archer* some 150 miles south-south-east of Portland, Maine.¹⁶⁸ Apparently, the *Archer*'s crew had just been sitting down to dinner when the Confederates came alongside, and the captain, a Mainer from Southport, offered them seats at his table as a symbol of courtesy before realizing their

¹⁶⁵ Log from the American Bark *Tacony*.

¹⁶⁶ Drayton, Entry June 23.

¹⁶⁷ Log from the American Bark *Tacony* and Drayton, back table.

¹⁶⁸ Log from the American Bark *Tacony*.

nefarious intent.¹⁶⁹ By this time, Read knew he had no ammunition left for the ship's gun. He resolved instead to "burn the shipping in some exposed harbor," or to "cut out"—commandeer—a steamer, actions which, if done correctly, would not require firing a single shot. A steamer would also dramatically increase his speed, armament, if the ship had any guns, and further confuse the pursuing New Englanders who would still be searching for the sailing bark *Tacony*.¹⁷⁰

In this light, Read determined it was time the Confederates to switch their ships once again. In his personal notebook, Read further explained that there were "over 20 gunboats" pursuing them, that the description of the ship was plastered all over the seaboard, and it was only a matter of time before the pursuers found them. Read had decided upon the *Archer* not only because it "sail[ed] well" and was "easily handled," but also because "[n]o Yankee gunboat would ever dream of suspecting us" because they blended in with other fishing vessels. The Confederate planned to outwit the U.S.N. once more. Read's captures can be seen in Figure 7.¹⁷¹

Drayton understood the situation as well as Read and the rest of the crew, and said that transferring from the *Tacony* onto the *Archer* was "necessary," since the many captures of the last few days had made things "pretty hot" for the commerce raider. Read spoke to the crew, confirming this, and telling them that "there were some twenty vessels after us," and that they would use the small ship to capture something "faster for us and too fast for them." The Confederates worked feverishly throughout the night to put everything aboard the fishing schooner, finally boarding her around 2:00 AM and then torching the *Tacony*. Read recorded the

¹⁶⁹ "The Johnny's Story," Oct. 27, 1894, unidentified newspaper, The Caleb Cushing Affair, Coll. S-1323, Misc. Box 63/6, MHS.

¹⁷⁰ Additional Report of Lt. Read, Oct. 19, 1864, *Official Records*, Series I, Vol. 2: 655 – 657.

¹⁷¹ An excerpt from Read's private notebook, recorded in a telegram from Headquarters, Fort Preble, Me., June 27, 1863, *Official Records*, Series I, Vol. 2: 329. Although it appears Maj. Andrews captured and read this notebook, it has apparently since been lost to history, as I could find no other references to it or archival collection of it. Figure 7 is in Appendix A, Images.

moment as “a bit sad,” and Hunt reported that the crew stood and watched the *Tacony* burn solemnly, as “[s]he was a smart vessel and we were sorry to see her go.” Things were cramped on board the *Archer*, and to Drayton “it seemed like coming from a large home into a very small one.” In their new “home,” the Confederates, now disguised as fishermen, plied the waters off the coast of Portland Harbor.¹⁷²

Between 10:00 and 11:00 AM on Friday, June 26, fishermen Albert P. Bibber and Elbridge Titcomb were hauling in their nets beyond Casco Bay, near Damariscove Island and Boothbay Harbor. According to Bibber’s later deposition, a larger fishing vessel came alongside, asking them to come aboard, a request they ignored. Bibber said that next the men sent a small boat to them, with everyone on board armed with pistols or knives, and these men forced them aboard the *Archer*. The fisherman claimed the captain, who did not identify himself, said they were “the Confederate Privateer *Alabama*,” although of course it was Read and the crewmen of the *Florida*.¹⁷³

Despite the fact that the Confederates aboard the *Archer* had forced Bibber and Titcomb on board, the two apparently thought them, as Read had hoped he would, “a pleasure party,” perhaps drunken fishermen pretending they were Southern raiders on a lark.¹⁷⁴ After all, Bibber claimed to have seen no more than eight men on deck, hardly a large enough crew for a man-of-war. Read then questioned both fishermen separately. Bibber explained that “[Read] asked...about the war, the fishery, the steamboats and the cutter” but “seemed principally to want to know the news about the war.” Bibber replied that he had little information to offer, being only a fisherman, although he thought he had seen the U.S.R.C. *Caleb Cushing* heading up

¹⁷² “Log from the American Bark *Tacony*,” Read, “Portland Harbor-*Caleb Cushing*,” in Charles W. Read Collection, ECU Special Collections, Drayton, Entry June 24 – 25, and “The Johnny’s Story,” Oct. 27, 1894, unidentified newspaper, MHS, “The Caleb Cushing Affair.”

¹⁷³ Bibber, “Deposition,” 132.

¹⁷⁴ Additional Report of Lt. Read, Oct. 19, 1864, *Official Records*, Series I, Vol. 2: 655 – 657.

towards Boothbay Harbor earlier that day. In reality he had not, as Captain Clarke had only just died of his heart attack that morning. Read then ended the conversation, telling Bibber that he wanted the fishermen to act as pilots by taking “this vessel in and out of Portland.”¹⁷⁵

In the end, it seems Read did not actually need either fisherman as a pilot, relying, according to Bibber, instead on charts to guide *Archer* into Portland Harbor, and neither were charged after the battle for assisting the Confederates. However, Read’s later report implicated both Bibber and Titcomb as “willingly consent[ing] to pilot us into Portland.” His later recollection was that both were unwilling at first to speak, but that “a drink of brandy, a cigar each and a couple of twenty-dollar gold pieces softened them perceptibly and loosened their tongues so that I readily obtained all the information I desired.” He also claimed to have learned about both the steamer *Chesapeake* and *Caleb Cushing*’s location in the harbor from the fishermen. Their complicity is discussed in more detail in the section “Collaborators,” but it is certainly a matter open for debate.¹⁷⁶

Drayton wrote about capturing the two fishermen with excitement in his last diary entry on June 26. He wrote that “there [would] be some excitement in Portland now if they knew that we were so close,” as well there would be the next morning. Taking pride in the accomplishments of his ship, Drayton also wrote that the men of the *Florida* would surely be jealous to hear of their successes. Although he called the raid a “dare devil operation,” he was more excited about the prospect of success than worried about the costs of failure in the operation. In fact, he seemed so imbued with faith in his commander that he concluded that, “[i]f Mr. Read is not promoted to a Captaincy, no man in the navy deserves it.” The last lines in his diary read that “if nothing turns up against us this night will be an eventful in the present war and

¹⁷⁵ Bibber, “Deposition,” 132.

¹⁷⁶ Additional Report of Lt. Read, Oct. 19, 1864, *Official Records*, Series I, Vol. 2: 655 – 657, and Read, “Portland Harbor-*Caleb Cushing*,” in Charles W. Read Collection, ECU Special Collections.

also in the history of every man [committed?] with us,” showing that men attached a great deal of importance to their infiltration of the harbor even before the next day’s battle. Drayton also commented that success would “astonish both the government and the people of the US” and “will be highly noticed by our government.” Drayton’s words on that Friday afternoon seemed to bring an ominous sense of finality to the expedition that had already ranged across so many miles of water in such a short span of time. In fact, they symbolized the high-water mark of Read’s career. Within twenty-four hours, he and his crew would be Union prisoners and their failure, not their success, would receive the attention of the entire country.¹⁷⁷

Read had learned that Portland Harbor presented him the perfect target. The only armed vessel was U.S.R.C. *Caleb Cushing*. In a security flaw, small vessels were not searched or boarded when they passed the city’s forts, so there was little danger of their nefarious purpose being discovered. In addition, Read knew the times at which the passenger steamers to Boston and Bangor entered and departed the harbor from Bibber and Titcomb, giving the Confederates plenty of time to position themselves in order to capture one or both of the ships with a surprise attack. In addition to few enemy ships standing in his way, Lt. Read had ample choices of vessels to burn or capture. Excited and nervous, the Confederates sailed the *Archer* past the guns of Fort Preble and down the main passageway into Portland Harbor around 3:00 in the afternoon of Friday, June 26.¹⁷⁸

Finally, they “came to anchor to the eastward of Pomeroy’s rock off Fish Point, Portland harbor, about a quarter of a mile from the rock” in the golden sun of that Friday evening. Read remembered a “clear and pleasant” night “with the moon shining brightly...a number of boats

¹⁷⁷ Drayton, Entry June 26.

¹⁷⁸ Log from the American Bark Tacony, Drayton, rear table, and Read, “Portland Harbor-*Caleb Cushing*,” in Charles W. Read Collection, ECU Special Collections.

and tugs plying about the harbor with music and pleasers.”¹⁷⁹ Bibber claimed that during this whole time, the Confederates remained dressed as fishermen, with the exception of Read, who “had on blue or black pants and a blue frock coat,” representing some seniority but “nothing on that looked like a uniform, either naval or military” of either Union or Confederacy to arouse their suspicion. The *Archer* had anchored in the same area as the *Caleb Cushing*.¹⁸⁰

Read planned to seize by surprise an enemy ship or to commandeer by force the steamer *Chesapeake* or the *Forest City*, which would arrive from Boston the next morning. Whichever ship he captured he would then take this out to sea. Official reports would also list the two gunboats which were being constructed in the port at the time as other possible targets for burning.¹⁸¹ Read instructed his men to construct oakum balls, incendiary devices made of shipbuilding tar, as soon as they came to rest. The crew prepared to burn some of these various targets.¹⁸²

However, the *Archer* never approached any of these other than the *Caleb Cushing*. Although there were no warships in the harbor, these objectives were either protected under the guns of Portland’s three forts or were docked in the downtown area, which was undefended but where the presence of a suspicious ship or crew was sure to be noticed.

These were barriers to Read’s original plan, but they were not the only factors dissuading an assault. Read eagerly discussed taking the steamer *Chesapeake* with Engineer Brown, who “expressed his doubts” about starting the ship’s cold engines— a difficult task for one man in any circumstance— in the narrow window of time that Maine summer nights offered to them. Brown therefore “declared himself incompetent to work the engines of the steamer, unless he

¹⁷⁹ Read, “Portland Harbor-*Caleb Cushing*,” in Charles W. Read Collection, ECU Special Collections.

¹⁸⁰ Bibber, “Deposition,” 133.

¹⁸¹ Report of U.S. collector of customs, Portland, Me., June 27, 1863, *Official Records*, Series I, Vol. 2: 322.

¹⁸² Drayton, Entry June 26.

had another engineer to cooperate with him.” Read does not mention whether or not he planned this cutting out of the *Chesapeake* in advance, consulted Brown at an earlier date about his ability to work the engines of a steamer, or indeed understood the complexities that might be involved in getting steam up on a vessel whose engine was cold and sat in the middle of downtown Portland. Frustrated and apparently convinced there was enough wind to make a quick getaway on a sailing ship, Read then abandoned this part of the plan and turned his full attention to the *Caleb Cushing*.¹⁸³

Around 9:00 PM, the Confederates began passing pistols, cutlasses, and other weapons up from the hold of the *Archer*. Bibber later claimed that this was the first sign he had seen of the schooner’s piratical intentions. He and Titcomb were confined below decks and told, “[D]on’t attempt to come upon the deck to-night. Make no noise or resistance, and it will be all the better for you,” solidifying their fears. “Aye, aye, sir,” Bibber replied, unable to stop the Confederate action already underway.¹⁸⁴

By all accounts, the night had been one of the warm, beautiful evenings in the Casco Bay area so often enjoyed by tourists and Mainers during the summer months. The sun set at around 7:30 PM. Cutterman Samuel Prince said the evening was “very warm and pleasant,” with fewer ships in the harbor than usual. Smaller, pleasure ships plied the waters, bringing young people to and from a party out on Peaks Island, which continued until around midnight. Between 10:00 PM and 12:00 AM, Prince was on guard duty on board the *Caleb Cushing*, watching over the revenue cutter and the increasingly peaceful harbor. Prince later remembered observing the *Archer* as “battered, poorly painted hull and patched and weather-beaten sails,” which

¹⁸³ “An Interesting Letter from Lieut. Read,” *New York Times*, 8 Jul 1863, *ProQuest*, Web, 14 Dec. 2012, and Additional Report of Lt. Read, Oct. 19, 1864, *Official Records*, Series I, Vol. 2: 655 – 657.

¹⁸⁴ Bibber, “Deposition,” 133.

“contrasted sadly with our trim and rakish appearance.” Around midnight, Prince turned guard duty over to the next cutterman in line and headed below to sleep after midnight.¹⁸⁵

Meanwhile, Read left three men, including Matherson as commander, aboard the *Archer* to guard the fishermen, and then ordered his men over the side of the fishing schooner. They took their places in two small rowboats. Read commanded the first while Billups directed the second. Using muffled oars— they had wrapped cloth around the metal and wooden parts of the oar to reduce the sound each stroke made— and armed with pistols, cutlasses, and handcuffs, the Confederates moved swiftly towards the *Caleb Cushing*. The actual timing of the capture is a matter of some debate, but likely occurred after the moon had set at midnight, so around 12:30 AM.¹⁸⁶ What is clear is that the Confederates soon positioned themselves alongside the revenue cutter, a sailor on watch calling out to ascertain the identity of the unknown boats. Before he could call again, the Confederates leapt aboard and aimed their pistols at the man on night watch, who quickly surrendered. Hunt said that it was but “a short struggle.”¹⁸⁷

After the man on night watch had been handcuffed, “a part of the attacking party rushed below and threatened to shoot the men asleep or just awakening, if they spoke.”¹⁸⁸ Lt. Davenport heard a scuffling on deck from his cabin and, going to investigate what was the matter, was seized by five men wielding pistols and identifying themselves as men of the

¹⁸⁵ “The Capture of the CC: A Little Struggle with the ‘Rebs’ in Portland Harbor as told by one of the crew,” *Lewiston Journal*, May 30, 1908. There are other reports which hold the “loud” party was on Cushing Island’s Ottawa House, and it is difficult to substantiate which reports are true. At any rate, noise from both islands would have drifted across the harbor to the area the two ships occupied. Sunrise/sunset data from U.S. Naval Observatory, Astronomical Applications Data, accessed online at http://aa.usno.navy.mil/cgi-bin/aa_pap.pl.

¹⁸⁶ Bibber, “Deposition,” 133, claims the 12:30 time most closely, while Read’s official reports says the Confederates boarded significantly later, around 1:30 AM. Jewett’s report says this occurred around 1:00 AM.

¹⁸⁷ “The Johnny’s Story,” Oct. 27, 1894, unidentified newspaper, MHS, “The Caleb Cushing Affair.”

¹⁸⁸ Report of U.S. collector of customs, Portland, Me., June 27, 1863, *Official Records*, Series I, Vol. 2: 323.

Confederate Navy. The Confederates then told Davenport that they did not intend to harm him or any of the crew if they surrendered peacefully.¹⁸⁹

Prince remembered lying in his hammock for what felt like half an hour. Around 12:30 AM, he heard the sound of people climbing aboard, but dismissed it as normal, thinking it was “the new captain...come to take command.” Soon Prince realized his mistake, however, when someone quite close to him yelled, “Surrender in the name of the Southern Confederacy!” Leaping up, he found the lower berth area crawling with men armed with pistols and cutlasses. The revenue cuttermen were gathered together and handcuffed into pairs, then forced into the front berth of the ship. Their officers were obliged to join them next. Acting in concert, it took only a few minutes for the Confederates to secure the cutter and handcuff the crew. Hunt described the surprise of the cuttermen, calling them “as surprised and foolish looking men as you ever saw in irons.” A Confederate who looked like he was in charge, likely Read, said next, “Now boys...what we want is the *Cushing*, not you Yanks. If you behave yourselves, we'll put you off on some island as we go out of the harbor. If you make trouble you'll be shot and thrown overboard.”¹⁹⁰

Read left two armed men to watch the prisoners and sent the rest on deck to prepare the ship to sail. Unfortunately for the Confederates, it was at this point that they began to run into trouble. Hunt outlined the situation, showing how precarious the position of the raiders actually was. They had to prepare the ship, which had sat at anchor all the previous day, to sail, only to discover that they were “aground,” because of the low tide, and there was “not a breath of wind” in the harbor.¹⁹¹ Because of all this, it took until 2:00 AM before the Confederates were actually

¹⁸⁹ Davenport's account in “Capture by the Rebels of *Caleb Cushing*,” *Eastern Argus*, June 29, 1863.

¹⁹⁰ “The Johnny's Story,” Oct. 27, 1894, unidentified newspaper, MHS, “The Caleb Cushing Affair,” and “A Little Struggle with the ‘Rebs’ in Portland Harbor,” *Lewiston Journal*, May 30, 1908.

¹⁹¹ “The Johnny's Story,” Oct. 27, 1894, unidentified newspaper, MHS, “The Caleb Cushing Affair.”

able to get the revenue cutter moving, and it was moving very slowly at that. The Confederates tied onto another, unoccupied, ship nearby, forcing themselves painfully forward with this support and twelve crewmen rowing the small boats ahead of the ship and therefore towing it forward.¹⁹² Below decks, Prince remembered thinking that “[t]here never was a gang of men more anxious to get to sea than they were.”¹⁹³

After the Confederates had finally started moving the *Caleb Cushing*, they began to search it for supplies and ammunition for its guns. As the prisoners watched, the invaders pulled open the compartments in the *Cushing*'s floor, but somehow, Prince says “by chance,” they critically failed to find the ammunition to fire from the ship's cannon. The cuttermen also insisted that there was no ammunition aboard, although the ship's hidden magazine was actually quickly well-stocked, misleading and confusing their captors. Nick Pryde, the Confederate gunner, found a large 32-pound shell in what was described as the “potato locker,” and was apparently satisfied that was all that the revenue cutter had aboard.¹⁹⁴ While rummaging through the *Cushing*'s rooms, the Confederates did find a watch and chain. Davenport informed Read and the others that it was his, and the raiders gave it to him, saying that they respected private property. Davenport later cited this as evidence that he was treated well as a prisoner of war.¹⁹⁵

Unaware of what was going on, Bibber was finally summoned above deck on the *Archer* after sunrise, which occurred early, around 3:30 AM, and saw “the cutter near us with all sail on and two boats towing...about an eighth of a mile east of Fish Point.” The Confederates then brought Bibber on board the *Caleb Cushing*, and he was left to his own devices for about an hour

¹⁹² Additional Report of Lt. Read,” Oct. 19, 1864, *Official Records*, Series I, Vol. 2: 655 – 657, and “The Johnny's Story,” Oct. 27, 1894, unidentified newspaper, MHS, “The Caleb Cushing Affair.”

¹⁹³ “The Johnny's Story,” Oct. 27, 1894, unidentified newspaper, MHS, “The Caleb Cushing Affair,” and “A Little Struggle with the ‘Rebs’ in Portland Harbor,” *Lewiston Journal*, May 30, 1908.

¹⁹⁴ “A Little Struggle with the ‘Rebs’ in Portland Harbor,” *Lewiston Journal*, May 30, 1908, and “The Johnny's Story,” Oct. 27, 1894, unidentified newspaper, MHS, “The Caleb Cushing Affair.”

¹⁹⁵ Davenport's account in “Capture by the Rebels of *Caleb Cushing*,” *Eastern Argus*, June 29, 1863.

until someone, most likely Read although he did not specify, came over and gloated to him about the Confederate success, asking “What do you think of this? Did you think of this when we came in last night?” Bibber replied that he had not, and when Read asked what he thought about the whole situation, Bibber told him “it was a very daring act.” Next, a bit to the north of Fort Gorges, Read consulted Bibber on their course out of the harbor, which Bibber warned him was quite dangerous, especially at low tide. He said the same when *Caleb Cushing* began to pass between the narrow stretch of Cow and Hog (now called Great Diamond) Islands, to which Read snapped back curtly, “Don’t get this vessel aground.”¹⁹⁶ The route Read was taking, called Hussey’s Sound and running between Peaks and Long Islands, was “unprotected by any fortifications or battery” and so allowed for a quiet, slow escape that morning.¹⁹⁷

Read’s men were exhausted when they came back from their towing duty in the small row boats around 7:30 AM. The Confederates obliged the *Cushing*’s fifteen-year-old cabin boy to make coffee. The captors ate first before distributing some hardtack to the prisoners. Price said that “some of our number had little appetite even for that much.” The prisoners were confused now, and were “anything but a happy crowd,” sitting “[g]lum and sullen...in the dim light of the berth deck” and wondering who their strange Southern captors were. All the men of the *Caleb Cushing* knew was “that they were rebels...[w]here they had come from we could not guess.” They hoped to be called on deck and sent to an island at any moment, if the Confederates kept their word. At the same time, they were also terrified of being taken to a Southern prison, as “[w]e had no hope for being pursued and retaken, for we knew there was no

¹⁹⁶ Bibber, “Deposition,” 133.

¹⁹⁷ Report of U.S. collector of customs, Portland, Me., June 27, 1863, *Official Records*, Series I, Vol. 2: 323.

armed craft in the harbor.” The cuttermen had heard the horror stories about Southern prisons, and now it seemed to them they were likely to experience them firsthand.¹⁹⁸

Satisfied that they had escaped Portland Harbor itself, while still becalmed and unable to make much speed, Read left Hunt on deck to watch for pursuers and headed below to rest and eat.¹⁹⁹ Around 8:00 AM, Read sat down to have breakfast with Lt. Davenport. Learning that he was from Georgia, Read said, “I’m sorry . . . to meet you under these circumstances, but this is one of the fortunes of war. You, being a Southern man, ought to be ashamed of yourself!” Unfazed and undeterred, Davenport replied, “You have acted humanely, sir, and in case we are taken I’ll represent you favorably to the U.S. authorities.”²⁰⁰

In his official report to Richmond at the end of July, Read would claim that “[d]ay dawned before the cutter could be got out of the range of the forts” and that it was for this reason that his crew was unable to “fire the shipping in the harbor.”²⁰¹ However, the fact that the Confederates took the revenue cutter in the first place, and then focused all their energies on getting this vessel out to sea, instead of using the oakum balls and other incendiaries which they had constructed earlier in the day, indicates that Read’s plan had changed almost as soon as the *Archer* anchored in Portland Harbor. Although in his latest report, which he compiled after he was safely back in the C.S.A., he contended that “after getting under the guns of the forts” he planned “to return and fire the shipping.” Clearly, in the position the *Caleb Cushing* was by daybreak, it was unrealistic at the least that the Confederates could have gotten out of sight of land and then return during the day or the next night to attack the steamers in the harbor. As the

¹⁹⁸ “A Little Struggle with the ‘Rebs’ in Portland Harbor,” *Lewiston Journal*, May 30, 1908.

¹⁹⁹ “The Johnny’s Story,” Oct. 27, 1894, unidentified newspaper, MHS, “The Caleb Cushing Affair.”

²⁰⁰ Davenport’s account in “Capture by the Rebels of *Caleb Cushing*,” *Eastern Argus*, June 29, 1863.

²⁰¹ Report of Lt. Read, July 30, 1863, *Official Records*, Series I, Vol 2, 654 – 55.

furor and tumult in Portland raised over the revenue cutter's capture would show Saturday morning, the mysterious disappearance of one vessel was enough.²⁰²

Hunt was on duty around 10:00 AM when he called Read on deck to raise an alarm. They had just passed Cod Ledge. Both Hunt and Read could plainly see the *Forest City* leaving the harbor. Read assumed the steamer was simply making its return run to Boston, and went back below decks. An hour later, however, Hunt called him back, this time frantically pointing out the now visible *Chesapeake* and the soldiers he could clearly see aboard both steamers. Read immediately called all his men to the deck to prepare the ship's main gun for action against their Northern pursuers. As the Confederates frantically readied the *Caleb Cushing* for action, they scoured the cutter for ammunition. According to Hunt, Read cried out, "O for a six knot breeze and few shot or shell...we would give them some fun!"²⁰³

As the pursuing steamers drew closer, Read gave the order to fire. However, Quarter Gunner Pryde swiftly used up the small amount of ammunition the Confederates had found aboard. They were already using "solid shot," projectiles without explosive charges because none of the regular ordnance could be found, a problem both he and Lt. Read had already realized. According to Hunt, Read's response was to "give them a scare anyhow," and the Confederate crew cheered as it appeared for a time that the *Forest City* was turning back. Read's own account seems an admission that the Mississippian had apparently not investigated his new capture fully. He wrote that after "firing five rounds from the pivot gun [he] was mortified to find that all the projectiles for the gun were expended."²⁰⁴

²⁰² Additional Report of Lt. Read, Oct. 19, 1864, *Official Records*, Series I, Vol. 2: 655 – 657.

²⁰³ "The Johnny's Story," Oct. 27, 1894, unidentified newspaper, MHS, "The Caleb Cushing Affair."

²⁰⁴ Additional Report of Lt. Read, Oct. 19, 1864, *Official Records*, Series I, Vol. 2: 655 – 657, Read, "Portland Harbor-*Caleb Cushing*," in Charles W. Read Collection, ECU Special Collections, and "The Johnny's Story," Oct. 27, 1894, unidentified newspaper, MHS, "The Caleb Cushing Affair."

Of course, this was not true. The ammunition was hidden in a special compartment of the hold. Cutterman Samuel Prince and rest of the crew were being held close to it, knew where the ammunition was stored, but refused to tell their capturers. The Confederates had failed to discover it in their haste to get away from the harbor. Hunt later noted that the Confederates had plenty of powder, and if they had found the ammunition, then “the Yankee steamers would never have got back to Portland, or any other port,” making a strong tribute to the cuttermen who feigned ignorance to the location of the ammunition.²⁰⁵

After the final volley, Read called Davenport, Prince, and the other cuttermen on deck and ordered them into the ship’s small boats. They complied, scrambling into the boats, although they were still manacled. As they were about to push off, Prince called to the Confederates to throw down the keys to unlock the handcuffs, apparently as an afterthought. A crewman “threw down a handful that fell in a shower into the boat.” As it turns out, the sailors “didn’t stop to unloose the irons then,” however, but “pushed off and manned the oars as [they] were” in order to get away from the Confederates as swiftly as possible.²⁰⁶

With the prisoners safely away and worrying that the steamers closing in “intend[ed] to clear our deck with their sharpshooters,” Read ordered the *Caleb Cushing* destroyed and evacuated rather than risk his men in a small arms battle with the superior Union forces.²⁰⁷ Read later blamed his inability to carry on effective resistance on the “as usual, deplorable condition” of the “ordnance department of the cutter.” He still had no knowledge of the ample ammunition and over two months of supplies on board the U.S.R.C.²⁰⁸

²⁰⁵ Report of U.S. collector of customs, Portland, Me., June 27, 1863, *Official Records*, Series I, Vol. 2: 324, and “The Johnny’s Story,” Oct. 27, 1894, unidentified newspaper, MHS, “The Caleb Cushing Affair.” There was also a rumor of a secret compartment hidden behind a mirror in the captain’s cabin. Although there is no official evidence for this, it is entirely possible that some ammunition was hidden here as well.

²⁰⁶ “A Little Struggle with the ‘Rebs’ in Portland Harbor,” *Lewiston Journal*, May 30, 1908.

²⁰⁷ Additional Report of Lt. Read, Oct. 19, 1864, *Official Records*, Series I, Vol. 2: 655 – 657.

²⁰⁸ “An Interesting Letter from Lieut. Read,” *New York Times*, 8 Jul 1863, *ProQuest*, Web, 14 Dec. 2012.

Hunt and another unidentified Confederate sailor were assigned to serve as the scuttling party and headed down into the main cabin of the revenue cutter. There, they broke up furniture and compiled the bedding into a pyre, which the other Confederate drenched in camphene. Hunt criticized this man as “near[ly] causing me to be cremated with the cutter” because he also sprinkled the camphene on the stairway, the only access route to the deck from what was soon to become a bonfire. When Hunt set the cutter on fire next, he suffered singed eyebrows, a singed moustache, and burn blisters on his hands as he clambered up the stairs and onto the deck. Read collected his men together, advised them to hurl their pistols overboard, so they weren’t confused and shot as intending to fight the Northerners. He then distributed a few gold coins to the men to get by, should they make it to shore. As the cutter became enveloped in flames, the Confederates pushed away from it in two small boats, trying to row quickly to the nearest shoreline. They did not make it, quickly becoming prisoners on board the *Forest City* along with their comrades on the *Archer*. The Battle of Portland Harbor was over.²⁰⁹

Section VII: The Aftermath – Portland Picking Up the Pieces

In the days after the Battle of Portland Harbor, investigators and newspapers answered many of the questions about the origins and motivations of the *Caleb Cushing*’s captors. However, there were still many other questions to answer and other tasks left to accomplish in relation to the raid, including the future security not only of Portland Harbor but all of New England. The larger narrative of this peripheral event in the war has shown its relation to larger campaigns, programs, and arguments. It is now important to look at the battle’s aftermath as well as how it played an important in the larger debates raging throughout the Union.

²⁰⁹ “The Johnny’s Story,” Oct. 27, 1894, unidentified newspaper, MHS, “The Caleb Cushing Affair.”

Collaborators and Confusion

Although the battle was over, many Portlanders wondered exactly how that Saturday's events had transpired and exactly who was responsible for them. Many still cast suspicion on some of the supposedly loyal Unionists who were involved in the events, all of whom were detained at least initially for interrogation. This suspicion centered first and foremost on Lt. Davenport as well as his cuttermen, who were suspected for surrendering the vessel too quickly to the Confederates and perhaps working in league with them. Second, critics charged that Bibber and Titcomb had assisted Lt. Read in Portland Harbor, perhaps inadvertently or actively as pilots. Third, many Portlanders believed it was impossible that the Confederates had acted without intelligence from within the city, and they therefore suspected that a local spy or careless resident must have assisted them from shore.

Indeed, the initial report of the incident in the *Lewiston Evening Journal* on June 27 concocted an entirely false account of the raid, with Davenport as the main villain, showing how easily and quickly this negative story spread. The paper called him “[n]aturally a rebel” due to his Southern birth and accused him of acting “to get revenge on the government” as a result of the routine examinations he had failed. In this false report, Davenport sent all of his men to shore on leave, and then conspired with the crew of a mysterious steamer from St. Johns, Canada to sail out of the harbor. Davenport and his men were portrayed as dangerous traitors from the initial papers, which printed rumors as facts in a desire to profit quickly from the raid. This stigma proved hard for the cuttermen to shake.²¹⁰

Lt. Davenport's name was officially cleared when the full story unfolded, and soon he too received the praise of Portland's leaders. Indeed, Davenport's role in keeping Read from the ammunition was crucial—Collector Jewett, who at first suspected the Georgian, later lauded his

²¹⁰ Untitled reports and updates, 2nd Edition of June 27, 1863, *Lewiston Evening Journal*.

calmness in the face of capture. Jewett noted that, if Read had found the ammunition, “he would have fought it out,” a battle which would have resulted in more casualties and “the probable loss of the cutter’s crew.”²¹¹ Jewett finally reported to Sec. Chase on July 1 that he was “happy to say that...all grounds of suspicion against Lt. Davenport have been removed” because he “refused to show the captors the keys of the magazine or point out the shot locker, which they were unable to find.” He reported that Davenport was awaiting orders and also that he and his men had, like the Confederates, lost most of their clothing and belongings when the *Caleb Cushing* exploded.²¹²

Davenport’s men, incarcerated in the Portland jail, similarly endured scrutiny and harassment by the Portlanders before their names were cleared. Like Davenport, these men had cooperated to keep the Confederates from the cutter’s ammunition, and felt “much hurt that the citizens of Portland should so unjustly accuse them of traitorous conduct before the facts were known.” At the same time, however, the cuttermen pointed fingers at each other. The majority of the crew turned on two or three who they said “shew[ed] the white feather” to the Confederates. The only one named here was Byron S. Blish, who, according to a rumor, had actually taken an oath of allegiance to the Confederacy. It is unclear why Blish and the other were singled out, perhaps simply as easy scapegoats during a difficult time. Nine of these cuttermen, in fact, would request a discharge from the R.C.S. as a result of the incident, indicating that it impacted their ability to continue serving. Responding bitterly to the mob outside the jail, they asked reporters to “[t]ender our thanks to those fanatics who were so kind as to hiss and hoot at us and calls us cowards and traitors, as we were marched through the streets

²¹¹ Report of the U.S. collector of customs at Portland, Me., July 1, 1863, *Official Records*, Series I, Vol. 2: 329.

²¹² Report of the U.S. collector of customs at Portland, Me., July 1, 1863, *Official Records*, Series I, Vol. 2: 329.

as prisoners in charge of the authorities, to the jail.”²¹³ The men were held, interrogated, and then released the following Monday, June 29. Little is known about their fates or future careers after this date.²¹⁴

The actual role played by Bibber and Titcomb is more difficult to determine. Although Bibber seemed to contradict himself by claiming that his captors were both innocent-looking as well as armed and claiming to be from a Confederate commerce raider, he was not charged in the incident. Bibber also held that he did not assist in piloting the *Archer* into the Harbor on Friday or the cutter out of it on Saturday morning. Bibber said he had acted in the right because the only information he gave away was “while I so supposed that they were...a drunken crew of fishermen.”²¹⁵ However, the dialogue in Hussey’s *Sounds* which Bibber related in his deposition seemed to imply that Bibber was piloting the captured *Cushing*. Read’s later report also implicates him, referencing both information gathered from the two as useful in the raid and that they assisted him in piloting the *Archer* into the harbor. Read’s later recollection also notes that both men were “terribly frightened” when they found out that Read and his men “were Rebels,” since they had previously suspected that they were “only smugglers,” so it is entirely possible that the fishermen assisted who they knew were illegal characters, but then backpedalled when they discovered they were in fact treasonous. If this was the case, then they finally denied offering any assistance to cover their tracks in the aftermath.²¹⁶ However, most accounts hold that Titcomb himself was handcuffed and restrained when taken into custody aboard the *Archer*,

²¹³ “Compliments to Portland,” *Eastern Argus*, July 1, 1863.

²¹⁴ “A Little Struggle with the ‘Rebs’ in Portland Harbor,” *Lewiston Journal*, May 30, 1908; Price claims they were released on Sunday, June 28, while the official Cumberland County Sheriff’s Records show instead that they were released on Monday, June 29.

²¹⁵ Bibber, “Deposition,” 133.

²¹⁶ Additional Report of Lt. Read, Oct. 19, 1864, *Official Records*, Series I, Vol. 2: 655 – 657, and “Log from the American Bark Tacony,” Drayton, rear table, and Read, “Portland Harbor-*Caleb Cushing*,” in Charles W. Read Collection, ECU Special Collections.

and was therefore clearly an unwilling participant in the Confederate plan. It seems likely that Bibber at least was somewhat complicit in assisting the raiders.²¹⁷

Local papers and other accounts carried the rumor that collaborators, perhaps Southern agents or Canadians under the employ of the Confederate Secret Service, had aided Read and given him the information necessary to seize the *Caleb Cushing*. This was not so far-fetched; it was widely known that Confederate agents and operatives had extraordinary freedom in Canada. Some of these rumors included a story where Read himself, along with perhaps Brown and others, went ashore in Portland disguised as fishermen to survey the *Chesapeake* and the city's defenses. A short news clipping entitled "Who is the guilty party?" asked who had informed Brown "the position of the [cutter], rules and regulations on board, change of watch etc." Brown, in one of his interviews, had related as much to a reporter. Chandler told such a story in his 1923 recounting of the battle. However, only local papers included this rumor, and most acknowledged that it was only a rumor. There is no corroborating evidence for this story from the *Official Records*, Read's own personal accounts, or conclusively in any primary source. Contrary to the rumors, the Confederates seem to have acted without information from shore, but they certainly had luck on their side.²¹⁸

Fatality

The pursuers still had more work after the Confederates were incarcerated— the *Archer* had to be investigated for any clues it might provide about the Confederate's comrades, if there were any. Working with a man named Daniel Gould, of no relation to John Mead Gould, Captain Benjamin Willard and his men stripped the *Archer* of its contents and brought them over

²¹⁷ "A Little Struggle with the 'Rebs' in Portland Harbor," *Lewiston Journal*, May 30, 1908.

²¹⁸ "The Capture of the Cutter," unidentified news clipping, accessed in "The Caleb Cushing Affair," MHS, and "Portland Man Tells of a Civil War Battle in Harbor Here 60 Years Ago Today," *Portland Press Herald*, June 27, 1923.

to Portland's Custom House for safekeeping with Collector Jewett. Onboard, Willard's men uncovered the Confederate musket stash, locating about twenty-five in all and lining them up on the schooner's deck. Jewett reported also seizing the log book of the *Tacony* as well as chronometers from several missing ships on board the *Archer*, proving that these Confederates were indeed the same enemies who had been attacking ships off the New England coast.²¹⁹

As with the prisoners, a guard was placed around the *Archer* during the overhauling of the ship, which included itemizing the captured weapons and personal objects, identifying any papers aboard which would prove useful to Union intelligence, and checking for any secret compartments. Many of Portland's more curious residents turned out to see the captured vessel anyway. It was here that the only fatality associated with the events occurred, when a longshoreman named John Sidney slipped aboard the ship. According to Willard, Sidney was "[w]andering about to gratify his curiosity" when he grabbed one of the Confederate guns and, "thinking, as so many foolish men before and since have thought...that is was unloaded," pulled the trigger. It was high tide, and the *Archer*'s deck was level with the dock. Sidney's bullet passed through and seriously wounded a bystander, Albert Babb, and became lodged in Daniel Gould's leg. Gould died in the surgery to remove the bullet.²²⁰

Sidney was "committed for safekeeping" by the Portland police for "[d]ischarging a gun [and] accidentally and kill[ing] a man." Additionally, Albert Babb was reported in local papers as likely needing amputation due to the wounds he received, though they were not lethal.

However, it was clearly a case of negligence, and Sidney was released by July 6.²²¹ During the

²¹⁹ Willard, 79 – 80, and Report of U.S. collector of customs, Porland, Me., June 27, 1863, *Official Records*, Series I, Vol. 2: 324.

²²⁰ Willard, 80 – 81. This account is supported by "Portland Man Tells of a Civil War Battle in Harbor Here 60 Years Ago Today," *Portland Press Herald*, June 27, 1923.

²²¹"Cumberland County Sherriff's Office Records," Coll. 177, Entry June 28, 1863, MHS. Information on Albert Babb from Untitled Article, *Portland Advertiser*, June 29, 1863.

city marshal's investigation, Captain Willard testified that he knew Sidney to be a man of "kindly disposition," who had worked for both him and Daniel Gould, and that "the discharge of the musket was purely accidental." The tragic death was significant because it was the only one connected with a fortunately harmless skirmish. It also represented yet another failure in Portland's security apparatus, which had proven so unable to detect possible threats in the last several days.²²²

The Hunt is Off

In spite of the capture, there was still immediate concern that perhaps the *Tacony's* crew was not acting alone. Not unlike the worried leaders of other cities on the East Coast— although his city clearly had more reason than others to fear Confederate incursion— Mayor McLellan asked Sec. Welles for more protection on June 29. He claimed that the *Caleb Cushing's* destruction had left Portland Harbor "entirely unprotected as regards to any guns afloat." McLellan failed to note that Portland's lax security regulations before the battle had exposed it and allowed Read to enter the harbor. McLellan requested "a small gunboat, with a couple of guns or more and a crew of from 40 to 50 men," a significantly greater force than the revenue cutter had provided, "until our forts are completed." This statement helped to highlight the unpreparedness of Portland's coastal defenses. Fort Gorges, standing in the middle of the harbor and supposed to work in conjunction with Maj. Andrews' Fort Preble, was only partially built at this time, but held "18 guns...and...plenty of ammunition in the magazine." In spite of this, it

²²² Willard, 80 – 81. Although this fatality is reported differently by almost every one of the historians on the subject, including an account from A.A. Hoehling in *Damn the Torpedoes*, that Gould shot *himself* accidentally while aboard the *Forest City*, the primary evidence of the Cumberland County Sheriff's Records is backed up by personal accounts and articles in newspapers such as the *Maine Farmer*, Untitled Article 11, Vol. 2, 9 Jul 1863, *ProQuest*, Web, 14 Dec. 2012. Jewett's report to Sec. Chase also mentions "[t]he most unpleasant feature" of the raid being "the wounding of one man and the loss of life by another by the accidental discharge of one of the muskets...in the hands of a spectator," noting that Gould left a wife and two children. All of this evidence taken together gives the clear picture that Gould did not commit suicide, as some authors, including Hoehling, have written, but instead died from injuries from Sidney's accidental musket discharge.

had had “not a man to mount guard at night” during the Confederate raid. To remedy this situation, McLellan deployed civilian volunteers to garrison the fort, like he had done during the battle on board the *Chesapeake*, although they had no training with the complicated workings of the guns. In these regards and considering that its only armed vessel had been destroyed in the battle, Portland Harbor was more vulnerable than ever before.²²³

Sec. Welles was concerned that the situation was not, in fact, over. On June 30, when Mayor McLellan telegraphed his confidence that the threat was gone, Welles ordered the ships of the Boston Navy Yard to continue their hunt for Confederate raiders, because reports showed that “some of the *Tacony*’s crew are in other vessels.” In case this was true, Welles said the Navy “better look into all the ports to the eastward and be sure no pirates are amongst them.” Hedging his bets, he also recommended that port officials “discharge chartered vessels as they arrive” in case it was true that Northern merchants now had nothing to fear from Confederate commerce raiders. Welles was not taking any chances and retained many of the vessels he had sent out in search of the *Tacony* on a war-footing, while at the same time allowing those that returned to port to stop their search.²²⁴

In fact, there was not a Confederate warship or commerce raider within nearly a thousand miles of New England, making Sec. Welles’s concerns completely unfounded. Although many reports placed C.S.S. *Florida* close by, the ship was still in the Caribbean on the days immediately following the raid, but the newspapers had raised such a stir that Welles decided to maintain a high level of vigilance as a precaution. Indeed, Dennis Matthews, a crewman on the *Florida*, recalled that he and his shipmates had no idea what Read and the others had done until

²²³ Letter from the mayor of Portland, Me., June 29, 1863, *Official Records*, Series I, Vol. 2: 334.

²²⁴ Telegram, Welles to Commodore John P. Montgomery, June 30, 1863, *Official Records*, Series I, Vol. 2: 335.

they encountered U.S.S. *Ericson* off New York nearly a month later, in mid-July, and heard “of [Read’s] brilliant cruise...and capture in Portland.”²²⁵

Regardless and, in keeping with Mayor McLellan’s wishes, U.S.R.C. *James C. Dobbin*, a sister-ship of the *Caleb Cushing*, arrived for duty in Portland on July 13, 1863. The revenue cutter was under orders to protect the harbor and keep a look-out for Confederate raiders. The arrival of this ship returned Portland to the defensive status quo which had existed before the battle.²²⁶

Accolades and Trophies of War

Praise for all the soldiers involved in the battle was high, from their commanders as well as civilians. Although they were never in direct danger, Capt. Prime commended his men for “manifest[ing] coolness and determination” under fire and in spite of the clamoring group of untrained, armed, and angry men on board the steamer.²²⁷ Likewise, Lt. Collins called his artillerymen “perfectly cool under fire” and was confident that they would have, “in a more serious engagement[,] have acquitted themselves with credit.”²²⁸ Secretary Chase similarly gave credit to his men who were involved in the battle, Collector Jewett and Lt. Merryman, noting “how promptly...they acted” that day in pursuit of the *Caleb Cushing*.²²⁹ J.M. Gould said that

²²⁵ Letter from Dennis Matthews, Editor of the *Peoples Tribune*, Jefferson City, MO, to Read, Jan. 31, 1878, Charles Read Papers, ECU Special Collections. Dates and other information on the *Florida*’s cruise available in the *Official Records* and from Mackenzie J. Gregory, “Marauders of the Sea: Confederate Merchant Raiders During the American Civil War <http://ahoy.tk-jk.net/MaraudersCivilWar/CSSFlorida.html>.

²²⁶ U.S. Treasury, *Record of Movements*, 202.

²²⁷ Capt. Prime’s report as an enclosure in Report of Major Andrews, Seventeenth U.S. Infantry, June 29, 1863, *Official Records*, Series I, Vol 2: 327 - 28.

²²⁸ Lt. Collins’s report as an enclosure in Report of Major Andrews, Seventeenth U.S. Infantry, June 29, 1863, *Official Records*, Series I, Vol 2: 329.

²²⁹ Chase, *The Salmon P. Chase Papers: Journals, 1829 - 1871*, ed. John Niven, (Kent: Ohio, Kent State University Press, 1993), Vol. 1: 427.

Leighton, the naval inspector, was “the leading spirit [of the Mainers] and was in fact on that account the hero of the fight” for his shrewd, quick thinking in command of the *Chesapeake*.²³⁰

In the aftermath of the raid, Portland’s citizens also enjoyed displaying and observing trophies and trinkets taken from the captured Confederates. Collector Jewett used the main room of the Customs House to hang three banners taken from *Archer*, including “a white Confederate Jack,” “the new Confederate flag—” unfinished, the artisan undoubtedly interrupted by the abrupt end of the raid— and a flag from the *Tacony*, including the ship’s name emblazoned in red lettering.²³¹ Jewett also secured some important documents from the *Archer*, including Drayton’s diary, which he described as “humorous, but telltale” and as proving that the *Florida* intended to meet Read off the coast of Nantucket, lending credence to popular fears that other Confederate ships were in the vicinity.²³²

The intended explosive devices the *Archer* carried, described as “oakum dipped in spirits,” were also exhibited at the Merchant’s Exchange on Middle Street.²³³ One newspaper advertised these exhibits with the attention-grabbing title “Strung Up,” quickly noting that they referred “[n]ot [to] the pirates, but [to] the flags which they carried.” The advertisement also poked fun at the Confederacy by referring to it as the “Contheiveracy.”²³⁴ The brash Portlanders who had saved the rear boat of the *Caleb Cushing* from destruction named the small boat the “Trio,” after the three of them who had braved the flames for it. Within a few days the tiny “Trio” found a new home at the North Star Boat Club as a curiosity.²³⁵

²³⁰ *Journal of J. M. Gould*, entry for June 27.

²³¹ “Trophies of War,” another unidentified and undated newspaper of the time, located in a scrapbook collection, The Caleb Cushing Affair, Coll. S-1323, Misc. Box 63/6, MHS.

²³² Telegram, Jewett to Chase, July 1, 1863, *Official Records*, Series I, Vol. 2, 337.

²³³ “Fire Balls,” also from this MHS scrapbook collection, also undated.

²³⁴ “Strung Up,” in the unidentified MHS scrapbook collection.

²³⁵ “The Tacony Burned: Her Officers and Crew Taken Prisoners,” *Portland Daily Press*, June 29, 1863.

Not even the Confederates' personal belongings stowed aboard the *Archer* were immune from the rampant prize-making. From Fort Preble Read wrote in his report to Confederate Secretary of the Navy Mallory that "all of our clothing was distributed as relics to the people of Portland."²³⁶ Captured Confederate ordnance also became trophies to collect. Collector Jewett recommended to Sec. Chase that the City of Portland take the guns of the *Archer* and distribute them to the civilian volunteers "as a slight, but to them no doubt valued, token that the Government appreciates their zeal and promptness in the capture."²³⁷

There was also the question of a reward. As reported in the *New York Times* on June 27, a group of Boston shipping merchants had offered a \$10,000 reward to anyone who could end the *Tacony's* deprivations. This offer marked a high point in the frustration of private businessmen with the official channels of the U.S.N. However, the citizens of Portland as a whole began clamoring for this money through newspapers like the *Eastern Argus*, which argues they deserved the reward "as we have captured her substitute, her men, her munitions of war and everything appertaining to her." The article said that they trusted the "well known generosity" of their "Boston friends," implying an earnest desire to receive the money "to which we [are] justly entitled."²³⁸ The *Portland Daily Press* called for slightly less compensation, although still holding the Boston merchants accountable to Portland. It asked, instead, for half of the reward promised, and added the caveat that "if the Boston folks will send down *one quarter* of the amount to our Sanitary Commission [private relief agency], we will call it square...So poney up your dust gentlemen."²³⁹

²³⁶ Report of Lt. Read, July 30, 1863, *Official Records*, Series I, Vol. 2, 654 – 55.

²³⁷ Report of the U.S. collector of customs at Portland, Me., July 6, 1863, *Official Records*, Series I, Vol. 2: 330.

²³⁸ "Capture by the Rebels of *Caleb Cushing*," *Eastern Argus*, June 29, 1863.

²³⁹ "The *Tacony* Burned: Her Officers and Crew Taken Prisoners," *Portland Daily Press*, June 29, 1863.

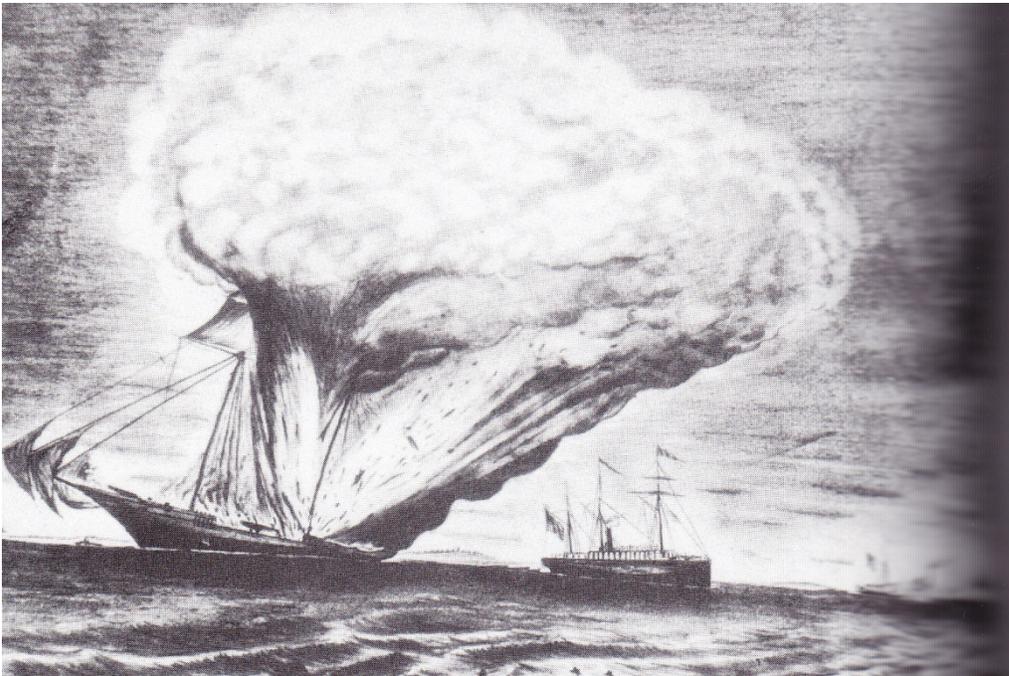


Figure 8: Harrison Bird Brown's sketch of the *Caleb Cushing's* explosion

In the end, these merchants did not pay out any reward. Indeed, perhaps Harrison Bird Brown, the Portland artist who had served as a volunteer on board the *Chesapeake*, profited perhaps more than any other individual from the Battle of Portland Harbor. In the days after the raid, Brown produced a quick black-and-white sketch of the engagement, with “[t]he cutter...seen at the moment of explosion, with flames and smoke belching upwards, as she almost leaps from the water; the *Chesapeake* is heading on, near at hand, while the *Forest City* is seen in the distance.” The sketch proved popular, as to many it represented “a spirited picture of that important event in the history of Portland,” and, by mid-July, “[p]hotographs of the sketch [we]re meeting with a ready sale.” The sketch, seen in Figure 8, would prove enduring, and is one of the few remaining artistic renditions of the Battle of Portland Harbor today.²⁴⁰

Reactions in Maine

The events in Portland prompted several strange, and ultimately untrue reports, up the coast in the days following the raid. There was a report from four fishing vessels that *forty* ships had been destroyed by a Confederate steamer off the area of Cape Sable, Nova Scotia, on June

²⁴⁰ “Edward H. Elwell, Harrison Brown’s Friend” in *A Painter’s Progress*, Entry July 18, 1863. This resource, as well as an original copy of Brown’s sketch, accessed via MHS.

25. This may be an exaggeration of some of *Archer's* actions in the area or simply a frightened account of some other anomaly. At any rate, *Read's* was the only Confederate ship off the Maine coast at the time. Another report listed up to three Confederate ships operating in the area off Cape Sable, further spreading fear amongst the coastal communities north of Portland.²⁴¹

Following the battle, Maine's coastal towns wasted no time preparing their own defenses. The Mayor of Bath sent a steamer quickly up the Kennebec River on the night of Sunday, June 28, to gather "cannon and other military supplies at the U.S. Arsenal" in Augusta, in order to defend both Bath and the river entrance itself.²⁴² These guns were to be installed at Fort Popham, which covered the approaches of the Kennebec but was not well-armed. The lack of armament at the fort had prompted fear amongst those towns situated along the river.²⁴³ Farther up the coast, the garrison at Fort Knox, which defended the mouth of the Penobscot River, tested its guns to be sure they could meet any possible Confederate threat.²⁴⁴

The raid was also an important part of discussion at the Maine Republican Party Convention, convened during the first few days of July. In the process of nominating Samuel Cony as Republican candidate for Governor of Maine, a speaker from Bangor "said that Portland had honored herself by capturing the first rebels on the coast of Maine." Eager to hear a personal account of the battle, convention members forced John T. Gilman, a writer for the *Portland Daily Press*, on stage. After he finished speaking, "three hearty cheers were given for Portland."²⁴⁵

The attack also inspired the imaginations of Maine's children along the coast. A resident of Deer Island reported that the Confederate commerce raiders "were a terror to Yankee sailors,"

²⁴¹ "Evening Edition," untitled story, *Lewiston Evening Journal*, June 29, 1863.

²⁴² "War News of the Week," *Augusta-Kennebec Journal*, July 3, 1863.

²⁴³ "Defense of the Kennebec," *Lewiston Evening Journal*, June 29, 1863.

²⁴⁴ From the *Bangor Whig*, in untitled article, *Lewiston Evening Journal*, June 30, 1863.

²⁴⁵ "The Convention," *Augusta-Kennebec Journal*, July 3, 1863.

and that everyone on the island referred to them derisively as “pirates.” Semmes and the *Alabama* were already famous in the summer of 1863, and a girl from Oceanville recalled that “[e]very unknown ship was a pirate ship,” and that “the sight of a sail out in the bay would send us scurrying for home, whimpering with fright.” Apparently, these children had heard horrific tales about “Semmes and his pirates,” including “how they hanged people, ran them through, made them walk the plank. Through these stories and concerns, the raid and its repercussions had a daily presence in the lives of coastal Mainers.²⁴⁶

Section VII: The Conflict Between Civilian and Military Jurisdiction

POWs or Pirates?

Back in Portland, the most immediate question was how the prisoners were to be treated during their stay in Maine. Were they prisoners of war under military jurisdiction or pirates at the mercy of Maine state and U.S. federal law? The military commanders of the two steamers quickly interred the Confederates at Fort Preble, under armed guard, while the cuttermen were sent to Portland jail for questioning. However, both these actions sparked a great deal of debate and rekindled a feud between federal, military authority and that of civilians.

In a confusing turn, many local papers reported that Read’s command included just 22 men, and, when listed out in papers as they were, included both men from the *Caleb Cushing* as well as the *Archer*’s skeleton crew.²⁴⁷ However, Capt. Prime’s report of the prisoners as Read, Brown, Billups, Pryde, Matherson, and 20 men, meant a total— the accurate number— of 25 prisoners. The discrepancy in reporting came from the fact that there were 22 sailors who had originally departed from the *Florida* as legitimate sailors of the C.S.N. and the three volunteers, including Hunt, who had joined from the *Byzantium*. The legal status of these three men as

²⁴⁶ From an account in Vernal Hutchinson, *A Maine Town in the Civil War*, (Freeport, Maine: The Bond Wheelwright Company, Publishers, 1967), 63 - 64.

²⁴⁷ Article 1, *The Friend; a Religious and Literary Journal*: 352, 4 Jul 1863, *ProQuest*, Web, 14 Dec. 2012.

prisoners was more questionable and, in the minds of many Portlanders, these three men, at the very least, were not to be given the same status and protection as prisoners of war. The civil authority instead intended to try them as pirates.²⁴⁸

As a whole, the Mainers treated none of the prisoners with dignity. As the Confederates were marched under guard to Fort Preble, they were surrounded by a jeering crowd of Portlanders—men, women, and children—hurling insults at them. Some asked, “How do your necks feel, Johnny Reb?” while others shouted “Hang the pirates!” Chandler, the *Forest City*’s baggage master, remembered that the crowd “wanted to mob those fellows right off” as a detachment of soldiers from the 17th Maine escorted them to the fort, with only their fixed bayonets keeping the Portlanders at bay. Hunt remembered that the prisoners “breathed a great deal easier” once they were safely behind the walls of Fort Preble.²⁴⁹ Maj. Andrews had Read’s men searched as they arrived, finding the appointment papers of the officers and Read’s “private notebook—” which later disappeared, no doubt a casualty to the hysteria of the time— but which according to Andrews included “a very interesting journal of his movements during the past six months.”²⁵⁰ Bibber and Titcomb, too, were taken into custody at Fort Preble, where they recorded depositions and accounts of what had occurred before being released.²⁵¹

By this time, whatever problems had divided the Confederate crew back in May were long past, and they acted as a cohesive and well-bonded unit during their imprisonment. During various interviews with the authorities and reporters, the crew members smiled each time they announced, in answer to a question about the fate of a ship feared lost to the *Tacony*, that they

²⁴⁸ Capt. Prime’s report as an enclosure in Report of Major Andrews, Seventeenth U.S. Infantry, June 29, 1863, *Official Records*, Series I, Vol 2: 327 - 28.

²⁴⁹ “The Johnny’s Story,” Oct. 27, 1894, unidentified newspaper, MHS, “The Caleb Cushing Affair,” and Portland Man Tells of a Civil War Battle in Harbor Here 60 Years Ago Today,” *Portland Press Herald*, June 27, 1923.

²⁵⁰ Report of Major Andrews, Seventeenth U.S. Infantry, June 29, 1863, *Official Records*, Series I, Vol. 2: 327. I have not found any record of Read’s notebook save a single portion— believed to be the final entry— excerpted in both the *Official Records* and several local newspapers.

²⁵¹ Bibber, “Deposition,” 133.

had “burnt her.” Remarking on this, a reporter from the *Eastern Argus* said “they were all determined” and “they loved their commander...anything he told them to do would be done at the risk of their lives.”²⁵² Their spirits were high, and each of the Confederates appeared convinced not only that their Southern comrades would soon hear and be proud of their exploits, but that they would swiftly be exchanged and returned to the C.S.A. This affection for Read was likely due to the unprecedented successes the crew had had over the past several days and the popular attention that they received. They also must have hoped that, as relatively famous prisoners, Richmond would push for their swift exchange and protect them from any potential legal consequences in the North.²⁵³

Many in the city hoped to prevent this, eager to hold the Confederates accountable and try them for their deeds. Even Gould, who kept a level head and criticized the trigger-happy civilian volunteers as dangerous amateurs, seemed to wish that the Confederates suffer a ghastly end, lamenting that they had not been captured by the *Chesapeake* instead of the *Forest City*. He said that in a position of authority “[he] would not have restrained the fanatics that were aft and so anxious to shoot somebody.”²⁵⁴

This clash of civil and military authority occurred for publicly that evening, after local newspapers announced the Confederates’ internment in Fort Preble under military command and as prisoners-of-war. City Marshal John S. Heald led a group of police, which Gould called a “posse,” to the gates of Fort Preble. They claimed to operate in the service of Mayor McLellan, although it is unclear whether McLellan ordered them there in the first place.²⁵⁵ The police officers arrived on Saturday evening to “demand the prisoners in behalf of the civil authorities.”

²⁵² “Capture by the Rebels of *Caleb Cushing*,” *Eastern Argus*, June 29, 1863.

²⁵³ “Interview with the Rebels,” June 29, 1863, *Portland Evening Courier*.

²⁵⁴ *Journal of J. M. Gould*, entry for June 27.

²⁵⁵ “Incident, Anecdotes, and Facts, Relative to the Cutter,” June 30, 1863, unidentified newspaper clipping, in *The Caleb Cushing Affair*, MHS.

Maj. Andrews firmly opposed them, not allowing the police to have contact with Read's men, as he feared an altercation.²⁵⁶ Although Hunt's report of Andrews's words may be embellished to lionize the Union officer seeming most friendly to the Confederates, the sentiment they express is certainly reflected in the major's official reports to his superiors:

[Major Andrews's] answer to them was as follows: "Those men are my prisoners; they are prisoners of war; they are gallant men, and I will protect them with my life, if necessary. You see that gun?" said he, pointing to a twelve-pound howitzer in the sallyport, "It is loaded, and woe be to you if you attempt to enter. If you take those prisoners you will take them over my dead body."²⁵⁷

The *Portland Daily Press* reported the next day, June 28, that it was fortunate the prisoners had been landed at Fort Preble for, the article asserted quite clearly, "they would have been murdered had they been brought up to the city... such was the indignation [at the depredations] of our citizens."²⁵⁸

Customs Collector Jewett, as ranking Treasury official, commented on this debate as well. He asked Secretary Chase how the Portlanders should be treating the Confederates, and recommended they be moved to the Portland jail if they were to become civilian prisoners. Evidently, there was tension between Maj. Andrews and Jewett, as the fort commander commented that the collector controlled the captured *Archer* and its cargo, although it should have been his duty as ranking military officer to investigate these. Andrews said he would not try to interfere because this would further "increase the excitement" in the city.²⁵⁹ Tensions were high, and the major recommended that "the prisoners be sent from here as quietly and expeditiously as possible," because he feared for their safety if they remained "in the custody of the citizens." Concerned about the arrival of another police posse, or, worse, a civilian mob,

²⁵⁶ "The Rebel Pirates," *New York Times*, 28 Jun 1863, *ProQuest*, Web, 14 Dec. 2012.

²⁵⁷ "The Johnny's Story," Oct. 27, 1894, unidentified newspaper, The Caleb Cushing Affair, MHS.

²⁵⁸ "The Tacony Burned: Her Officers and Crew Taken Prisoners," *Portland Daily Press*, June 29, 1863.

²⁵⁹ Report of U.S. collector of customs, Portland, Me., June 27, 1863, *Official Records*, Series I, Vol. 2: 324, and Report of Major Andrews, Seventeenth U.S. Infantry, June 29, 1863, *Official Records*, Series I, Vol. 2: 327.

Maj. Andrews felt “obliged to mount so large a guard that one-half of my force [were] on duty every night,” a situation he said would quickly exhaust the Fort Preble garrison of the 17th Maine.²⁶⁰

The Confederate prisoners spoke well of their treatment in spite of this struggle, saying that “we were treated like men...[Maj. Andrews] was a gentleman and a soldier.” Their cells were locked at night, but during the day Andrews and the guards allowed them to exercise and walk about in the fort’s parade ground. During their roughly month and a half in captivity at Fort Preble, they were also not entirely abandoned by their comrades, Hunt reporting that each prisoner received twenty dollars in gold coins from Richmond so that they could purchase new clothes and other necessities. Andrews allowed this because most of the men’s belongings had been ransacked under Jewett’s authority on board the *Archer*, symbolic of the relatively lenient treatment the Confederates received in Portland.²⁶¹

. Not all the Confederates were treated equally in their internment, however. Billups, Hunt, Thomas Butters of England, and James Kelley of Ireland were all transferred to Portland jail on July 26 for safe-keeping facing charges of “piracy.” Hunt, Butters, and Kelley were probably charged because they joined the Confederates in the middle of their cruise and without official enlistment in the armed forces of the C.S.A., as the others had. However, it is unclear why Billups, as a Confederate officer, was treated in the same way. Read’s recollections show this to be part of an ongoing battle between the civilian and military authorities in Portland the

²⁶⁰ Report of Major Andrews, Seventeenth U.S. Infantry, June 29, 1863, *Official Records*, Series I, Vol. 2: 327.

²⁶¹ Letter from Robert Hunt to Mrs. Nebraska C. May, Oct. 12, 1894, Charles Read Papers, ECU Special Collections, “The Johnny’s Story,” Oct. 27, 1894, unidentified newspaper, MHS, “The Caleb Cushing Affair,” and Read, “Portland Harbor-*Caleb Cushing*,” in Charles W. Read Collection, ECU Special Collections.

“*Tacony* pirates,” and that the civilian side had finally managed to incarcerate at least a few of the Confederates under its jurisdiction.²⁶²

Hunt claimed all four were “treated in the most shameful manner” and “were kept in close confinement the entire time we were in the jail.” While there, they “received the same treatment as the common convicts by the Authorities.” Billups and Hunt, “enduring abuse quietly,” were mostly left in their cells, but apparently Butters endured “unmerciful flog[ing]” as he was “inclined to be sassy.” Read claimed that he received a secret account of their treatment and sent this along to General John A. Dix, the New York commander responsible for putting down the City’s Draft Riots in July 1863. Read claimed that the secret account was instrumental in their eventual transfer to Fort Warren.²⁶³ If these accounts are to be believed, then some of the *Tacony*’s crew underwent physical and psychological torture during their internment in Portland at the hand of civilian authorities. This was a period of time Hunt claimed to be “ten long months,” but the Cumberland County Sheriff’s Office records show that he, Kelley, and Billups were discharged on September 25 and sent to Fort Warren, a military prison, and thereafter again treated as prisoners of war. Butters was apparently held in Portland jail far longer, until May 5, 1864, when he too was sent to Fort Warren, but it is unclear why this is the case.²⁶⁴

Combating Commerce Raiding

The raid also reinvigorated the larger debate in the Union about how to deal with privateers in a military sense— if there was any way to effectively do so. Just as businessmen and government officials had spared over authority during the *Tacony*’s cruise, the course of the

²⁶² “Cumberland County Sherriff’s Office Records,” Coll. 177, Entry July 27, 1863, MHS and Read, “Portland Harbor-*Caleb Cushing*,” in Charles W. Read Collection, ECU Special Collections.

²⁶³ Letter from Robert Hunt to Mrs. Nebraska C. May, Oct. 12, 1894, Charles Read Papers, ECU Special Collections. Although Read makes these claims it is difficult to determine whether or not the transfer occurred because he complained to General Dix. I cannot find any information on this.

²⁶⁴ “Cumberland County Sherriff’s Office Records,” Coll. 177, Entry July 27, 1863 MHS.

battle became a hot topic of discussion. After all, it now appeared that “the... five hundred and thirty ships...of the great [U.S.N.]” were “slow...and helpless” in comparison with “the alert Yankee courage of the people of Portland, Maine.”²⁶⁵

One commenter called the raid “the mad prank in Portland Harbor, which was so nearly a complete success,” with Read representing a new, dangerous model of warfare *any* rebel government— not merely the Confederacy— could easily adopt and use to great effect against the relatively defenseless merchant marine. The *Tacony* “is a recent and wholly unannounced craft,” the article noted, adding that “the first we hear of her she springs, full armed, into the midst of the lesser craft of our coast, and plunders and burns with an audacity and prodigal destructiveness that appalls our shippers and confounds the national authorities.”²⁶⁶

Following the battle, many felt that the solution to this issue lay not with the federal government, but instead with private companies and individuals. An article in the *Portland Daily Press* called upon the federal government and U.S.N. to authorize “private enterprise” to free Northern waters from the scourge of Southern commerce raiders. The *Press* argued that, because “[o]ur commerce is being swept from the ocean, our fishing fleet is being destroyed, [and] our brave seamen, thrown out of employ, are smarting with resentment and itching for an opportunity to redress their wrongs,” there was not only the cause but also the free body of men to carry out a privatized war against the Confederates in the area. This cause would, as the paper eloquently described it, be to “sweep to the bottom of the ocean the freebooters who are preying upon our peaceful commerce and our hardy fishermen.”²⁶⁷

Local leaders also had to contend with these criticisms and issues. Portland’s Mayor McLellan telegraphed Sec. Welles on June 30 that he was confident he now held the entire

²⁶⁵ “General News: End of the Tacony’s Career,” *The Independent*: 8, 2 Jul 1863, Web, 14 Dec. 2012.

²⁶⁶ “How to Clear the Seas of Privateers,” *New York Times*, 30 Jun 1863, *ProQuest*, Web, 14 Dec. 2012.

²⁶⁷ “Indications of Public Feeling,” *Portland Daily Press*, June 30, 1863.

crew of the *Tacony* and had “no information of any other pirates being off this coast.” This message, at odds with McLellan’s earlier request for U.S.N. support, was Portland City Hall’s response to another telegram sent to Welles, this one sent from the president of the city’s Board of Trade. The telegram had superseded McLellan’s authority by asking the secretary whether or not the Confederate threat was over. The Board of Trade had just passed a resolution creating a “vigilance committee” in the harbor and recommending that private ship owners arm their vessels before going out to sea, and McLellan likely wanted to assert his authority and the local government’s control of the situation. In Portland, as in other cities in the northeast, the role of government authority as opposed to corporate or civilian power remained open and fluid after the battle.²⁶⁸

Others, focusing on the broader economic scale of such attacks, offered more of a compromise. One writer suggested, instead, that “fast steamers [of the U.S.N....could...have a fair chance” against the Confederate privateers. In addition, this author advocated “issu[ing] letters of marquee” to American merchantmen, a plan which, if undertaken, he promised would, in “two years would see every rebel craft swept from the seas,” a hybrid response involving both U.S.N. ships and private enterprise rather than one or the other.²⁶⁹

Another commenter criticized the Navy’s failures while defending overall government policy in an editorial called “How to Clear the Seas of Privateers.” In it, he decried the “vain hope” the Eastern seaboard had put into locating the *Tacony* and stopping its attacks. The author called the U.S.N., even with its great size and scope, “impotent” in stopping the privateer, and that the attacks “cost our Government and people as much as a great campaign by land.” Instead

²⁶⁸ Telegrams, from the actors specified above, June 30, 1863, *Official Records*, Series I, Vol. 2: 336, and Untitled article, *Lewiston Evening Journal*, June 30, 1863.

²⁶⁹ “Commercial: The Effect of Rebel Privateering Upon Our Commerce,” *New York Observer and Chronicle*: 231, 16 Jul 1863, Web, 14 Dec. 2012.

of advocating a private enterprise solution, however, the author says that only the subjugation and defeat of the Confederate government in Richmond— a federal solution— could truly bring an end to this piracy. This debate, and sniping between partisans on all sides of the issue, would continue without any effective resolution until the last days of the war.²⁷⁰

Section IX: Newspapers and Reactions At Home and Nationwide

Read's raid made national headlines, became the subject of many editorials, and was used as a rallying cry by those Northerners exasperated at the pace of the war and what they perceived as burgeoning, inefficient bureaucracy in Washington. To these Unionists, the swift actions of a group of Mainers represented the best of the Union war effort, an example their soldiers and especially officers and politicians should follow. These newspapers contributed, on the whole, to a chaotic atmosphere in the northeast and served, as they had during Read's cruise, to stir up trouble in unexpected places. In spite of this, nearly every account agreed on one thing: the Portlanders deserved praise for their quick thinking and actions during the battle.

The Great Criticism of Bureaucracy

The papers from cities in New England and especially New York were perhaps the most laudatory, as this praise came from many of the same journalists who had spent the last few weeks writing about the *Tacony's* seemingly unstoppable progress. Many of these authors had a vested interest in the commerce raider's capture and so heaped commendations on the Portlanders for their stand not only against the Confederates but against Washington's inefficiency.

One of the strategies to criticize government bureaucracy involved portraying the Portlanders as American heroes through direct or indirect comparisons to the Revolutionary War. By June 30, the *New York Herald* had described "the noble Portlanders" who were "burning to

²⁷⁰ "How to Clear the Seas of Privateers," *New York Times*, 30 Jun 1863, *ProQuest*, Web, 14 Dec. 2012.

catch the marauders, steamed on amid the fire of shot, shell, and grape, determined to board and capture her.” The *Herald* summed up this praise by saying that “[t]he old spirit of the sons of 1776 and 1812 was clearly demonstrated” in a “glorious day for the Portland boys.” In another article, the *Herald* went further, proclaiming that the “audacity and dash of the raid made in the harbor of Portland has not a parallel in the history of the present war,” putting Portland on a remarkably high pedestal in both a historical and contemporary context.²⁷¹

Other papers made more direct contemporary references, particularly to Lee’s invasion of Pennsylvania. On June 30, the *New York Express* called the battle a “gallant and noble act” and one which was “worthy of imitation.” Connecting the raid with the situation in Pennsylvania, the *Express* declared that the Battle of Portland Harbor “contrasts with the conduct of some of our frightened neighbors” who are “so forgetful of their duty as patriots and men.”²⁷² The *Herald* carried this theme as well, arguing that “[i]f the people of Pennsylvania had exhibited half the spirit and energy” seen in Portland “the invaders would have been driven from their soil long before this, and without the assistance of other states.” Although comparing the twenty-odd men of Read’s command and the entirety of Lee’s army is an extreme stretch, the success of a civilian effort in Maine came as welcome news to Northerners angered at the Confederates’ continued advances in Pennsylvania. These newspapers unrealistically called out the Pennsylvanians for their perceived complacency and exhorting them to do something more.²⁷³

Other criticisms were more direct. The *Boston Advertiser* called for everyone to let the Portlanders “enjoy the well-earned laurels” of their victory because “they wasted no time in passing resolutions and making speeches” before setting out after the *Cushing*. The *New York*

²⁷¹First *Herald* quote published in “Compliments to Portland,” *Eastern Argus*, July 1, 1863, while the other *Herald* comments were republished in “Indications of Public Feeling,” *Portland Daily Press*, June 30, 1863.

²⁷³ *Express* comments in “Compliments to Portland,” *Eastern Argus*, July 1, 1863, and *Herald* reproduced in “Indications of Public Feeling,” *Portland Daily Press*, June 30, 1863.

Herald noted that “[n]o red tape, no squabbling about rank or party jealousies” had hindered the Portlanders from “retak[ing] their property.” Precisely because they did not consult Welles or other Navy superiors, the *Herald* called them “men determined to right themselves” in a “volunteer navy,” scolding the U.S.N. for its inability to capture Read.²⁷⁴

Two Boston papers expressed similar sentiments. The *Boston Journal* wrote that, in any city other than Portland, “the quiet disappearance of a revenue cutter” would have only spurred rumors, not action, on the first day. The article argued that it would have taken the citizens a second day—and then only the slow bureaucratic communications between the authorities and Washington—to act. As did almost every other account, the *Journal* advocated that Portland should therefore serve as an example for others to follow. The *Boston Courier* reported simply that, “[t]he Mayor of Portland is a trump...[w]ould he were in the Navy Department,” making the opinions of its editors quite clear.²⁷⁵

Most Maine papers echoed the statements of the Boston and New York press. The *Augusta-Kennebec Journal* called the Portlanders “daring,” and insisting that “[t]he steamers would undoubtedly have carried the cutter by boarding.” The *Journal* also expressed the view that “the activity, promptness and pluck of the Portlanders...is worthy of all praise, and is an example which every other sea-coast town should lay to heart, and emulate, if necessary.”²⁷⁶ The *Oxford Democrat*, out of Paris, Maine mentioned the lack of bureaucratic maneuvering the preceded the pursuit as a positive, as other papers had done, and noted that the Portlanders had “acted [w]ith less of red tape than attends the firing of a gun on a blockading vessel.”²⁷⁷

²⁷⁴ *Advertiser* comments in “Compliments to Portland,” *Eastern Argus*, July 1, 1863, and *Herald* reproduced in “Indications of Public Feeling,” *Portland Daily Press*, June 30, 1863.

²⁷⁵ *Boston Post* and *Boston Courier* reproduced in “Indications of Public Feeling,” *Portland Daily Press*, June 30, 1863.

²⁷⁶ “A Hopeful View” and “War News of the Week,” *Augusta-Kennebec Journal*, July 3, 1863.

²⁷⁷ “A Pirate in Portland,” *Oxford Democrat* (out of Paris, Maine), July 3, 1863.

The *Portland Daily Press* published the longest Maine treatise in this area, praising the Portlanders' abandonment of bureaucracy, as "[r]ed tape was no where" and "[n]o one raised questions or order...[or whether] the short-cut was in accordance with the constitution." This was laudable to the *Press* because "[t]he city, harbor and state had been invaded, property had been stolen, the public feeling had been outraged," and, therefore, the only course of action was "to rescue the property and bring the wrong doers to justice." The article made some bold assertions, recommending, as the national papers had done, that "the powers that be— or should be— at Washington" take note of the actions of these intrepid Northerners and "learn a lesson from the manifestations of public sentiment." Similar actions would "affect the public mind" and "put new life into the sluggish blood of the people," presumably in a way which could bring about victory.²⁷⁸

Other papers explicitly called out the government in Washington by name, criticizing its actions and advocating against the Republican administration. The *Boston Post* applauded the speed of Portland's actions, calling it a "good example for the [Lincoln] Administration" to follow, advocating an impractical solution: that the North should use its immense industry to put to sea a two-gunned warship for each one-gunned Confederate raider. The *Post* argued that bravery similar to the Portlanders' should be more commonplace because the "North has the pluck, the power, and the intellect to end this monstrous rebellion decently and successfully," and that, perhaps, Lincoln and his Republicans did not have the means or political will to do this. "[I]f the present men in office have not the ability to direct its energies properly," the *Post* declared, in no uncertain terms, "another set will be found, who can." The article closed by once again praising Maine, saying the state was "worthy of her motto— 'Dirigo [I lead].'"²⁷⁹

²⁷⁸ "Indications of Public Feeling," *Portland Daily Press*, June 30, 1863.

²⁷⁹ *Boston Post* reproduced in "Indications of Public Feeling," *Portland Daily Press*, June 30, 1863.

The *New York Tribune* similarly glorified the actions of the Portlanders, saying that “[t]here [wa]s no naval hero who would not be proud to have accomplished their daring feat” and that every Northerner should learn a lesson “from the decision and courage of these heroes,” a lesson that was “so obviously and irresistibly suggested” that it “must occur even to the naval and military authorities at Washington.” Regardless of the bravery the Mainers showed, however, the *Tribune* made this argument and suggestion to Washington based on some flawed data. The “quick Yankee wit” did not in fact “guess...that Rebel pirates” were responsible, as the article claimed. Instead, most Portlanders placed the blame on a loyal cutterman of the R.C.S. The article also claimed that there was no “naval-officer who had any legal authority to do anything” in port, clearly an incorrect statement, as Inspector Leighton, although not specifically designated to work on harbor defense, had quickly assumed control of the operation over the civilian officials. Many of these articles co-opted the praise they heaped on the Portlanders, coupled with false information intended to bolster their arguments, to launch political attacks on President Lincoln and his administration.²⁸⁰

The Celebrities

Newspapers added greatly to the image of the Confederate prisoners as celebrities while they were held at Fort Preble. As the most interesting people in town, the prisoners were frequently visited by reporters, officials, and other notables. The Confederates relished in this, entertaining the nearly constant crowd gathered outside Fort Preble by singing Southern songs like “Way Down in Alabama” and became quite an attraction.²⁸¹

²⁸⁰ “Honor to the Brave Men of Portland!” undated, *New York Tribune*, accessed in The Caleb Cushing Affair, MHS.

²⁸¹ “Incident, Anecdotes, and Facts, Relative to the Cutter,” June 30, 1863, unidentified newspaper clipping, in The Caleb Cushing Affair, MHS.

The press focused on both the personality of the prisoners as well as their stories. Some papers made describing the physical characteristics of the captured Confederates a top priority, indulging the curiosity of the Portlanders in real, live Southerners. Billups appeared as “tall and well proportioned, with quite a high forehead” and “[a] merry twinkle constantly play[ing] about his eyes.” Pryde was “tall” and “slim,” while Matherson, who had commanded the skeleton crew aboard the *Archer* during the battle, was “thick set” with a “very dark complexion” and “a keen penetrating black eye.” Because of this, the *Portland Evening Courier* suggested that Matherson “a desperado.”²⁸²



Figure 11: Engineer Brown

Engineer Brown, Figure 11, and a few talkative crewmen told reporters most of the stories, laughing as they described how they had taken *M. A. Shindler* using a Quaker gun and without firing a shot.²⁸³ Brown also gave a full picture of what the Confederate plan had been when they first entered Portland Harbor, including burning the two gunboats as they were being built, Portland’s downtown area, and other ships in the harbor.

After the sabotage, they had planned to capture the “Boston steamer [*Forest City*]” as it sailed into port. Brown also added the contingency plan that, had they failed to pass Fort Preble, they would have simply returned and shelled the city. However, it is unlikely that Read knew about the gunboats that were being built, or that he seriously planned to seize the *Forest City*, and it was even less likely that he would attempt to go past Fort Preble in the stolen revenue cutter, as it would be easily identified and liable to arouse a

²⁸² “Interview with the Rebels,” June 29, 1863, *Portland Evening Courier*.

²⁸³ “Incident, Anecdotes, and Facts, Relative to the Cutter,” June 30, 1863, unidentified newspaper clipping, in The Caleb Cushing Affair, MHS, and Read, “Portland Harbor-Caleb Cushing,” in Charles W. Read Collection, ECU Special Collections.

commotion.²⁸⁴ Still, continuing in his loquacious way, Brown entertained reporters and their readers with the story that the Confederates had not feared only being pursued by the *Forest City*, and that they only became concerned when both steamers closed in on them. Unconcerned about giving away the secrets of their voyage, Brown relished the attention the reporters lavished upon him.²⁸⁵

Reporters quickly realized that the other officers were more reserved, with Billups and Read himself appearing more concerned and withdrawn than their men. Read was described as “decidedly inoffensive and reserved in his manner,” a reporter saying he was “the very last person one would suppose willing to embark on the hazardous expedition in which he has been the leading spirit.”²⁸⁶ Read, this reporter claimed, “was very quiet and gentlemanly,” but “not disposed to communicate any more than he was asked.” This reporter noted that this “reticence...showed much shrewdness” when compared to his men, who were very talkative and “smiled as the particulars of their cruise was given.” Read’s “reticence” was likely due to his fears of exposing, as the diehard Confederate he was, vital military information to his enemies. Although he had never been to Maine before, let alone Portland, Read told reporters “he was well acquainted with the harbor, and knew where to put his hands on everything.” Although Read’s men were remarkably open and glib about their mission and their purpose, Read still attempted to mislead his captors as he had for the past several weeks, in the hopes to continuing tying down Union forces in pursuit of Read’s false accomplices and therefore keep them away from his comrades on the *Florida* and in the South.²⁸⁷

²⁸⁴ “Capture by the Rebels of *Caleb Cushing*,” *Eastern Argus*, June 29, 1863.

²⁸⁵ “Interview with the Rebels,” June 29, 1863, *Portland Evening Courier*.

²⁸⁶ “Interview with the Rebels,” June 29, 1863, *Portland Evening Courier*.

²⁸⁷ Incident, Anecdotes, and Facts, Relative to the Cutter,” June 30, 1863, unidentified newspaper clipping, in The Caleb Cushing Affair, MHS, and “The Rebel Pirates,” *New York Times*, 28 Jun 1863, *ProQuest*, Web, 14 Dec. 2012.

The newspapers also went to work poking fun at, describing, and, in some cases, demonizing, Read's personal character. One editorial described his actions during the *Florida's* capture of the *Jacob Bell*, where the editorial claimed that "Reed" ordered the plundering of a trunk belonging to the wife of a prominent citizen, Curtis Noves, and absconded with these goods back onto *Florida*. The editorial said that "[i]f a criminal could blush for shame to treat a lady thus, he might have abundant occasion." The *Lewiston Evening Journal* gloated over Read's imprisonment, writing that he would "learn a valuable lesson" while in captivity. It listed the adage, "I was well, I would be better, I took medicine, feel sick, and died" with a new, personal twist: "I was smart, I wanted to be smarter, I stole revenue cutter, was caught, and am in jail." Another paper also poked fun at Read, dismissing a fear expressed on one occasion in the *Boston Post* that the Confederates would burn Provincetown by saying, "He can't do it. He has got his hands tied behind him over at Fort Preble."²⁸⁸

Although they made much of the Confederate's personalities, Maine papers appeared to honor, if not their actions, at least their bravery. One paper called the raid "[o]ne of the most daring ventures of the present rebellion" while at the same time demonizing the sailors themselves as pirates.²⁸⁹ One paper lauded the "audacity" of the Confederates, saying, however, that this audacity was "not equaled by their acts" and that they "shew[ed] more cunning than bravery."²⁹⁰ The *Portland Daily Press*, having gained access to Drayton's diary through Jewett, published various excerpts, explained them, and commented on life for the raiders aboard the Confederate vessels.²⁹¹ However, the Confederates were still degraded, portrayed as "shabbily

²⁸⁸ "From the Rebel States: Lieut. Reed of the Tacony," *New York Times*, 3 Jul 1863, Web, accessed 14 Dec. 2012, Untitled article, *Lewiston Evening Journal*, June 30, 1863, and Untitled Article, *Portland Advertiser*, June 29, 1863, respectively.

²⁸⁹ "Local and State News: Capture of the *Caleb Cushing*," *Lewiston Evening Journal*, June 29, 1863.

²⁹⁰ Untitled Article, *Portland Advertiser*, June 29, 1863.

²⁹¹ "Peep into a Rebel Pirate's Diary," *Portland Daily Press*, July 1, 1863.

clad—” obviously, most of their clothes had been confiscated on board the *Archer*— and as having a “foreign brogue.” This led one Portland paper to dismiss their claim of Southern origin entirely and to paint all the prisoners as foreigners intent on disrupting the success of the U.S.²⁹²

The Confederates received a large number of visitors during their internment at Fort Preble. At one point, a few weeks after their capture, Inspector Leighton and “a Mr. Hallett of Hyannis, Massachusetts” arrived together. Hallett had apparently been a passenger on the *Tacony* when the Confederates, then operating from the *Clarence* captured it on June 12. As luck would have it, Engineer Brown and Leighton recognized one another immediately. Both had served on separate U.S.N. ships in “the Paraguay expedition in 1859,” a gunboat diplomacy expedition to the Rio de La Plata. Hallett was seeking some of his property apparently lost in the transfer of prisoners from the ships, and found one of the Confederate prisoners wearing his watch, which he retrieved. Hallett later found “about one half of his possessions” in the stack of items that was confiscated from the overhauled *Archer*.²⁹³

Their most famous visitor was Charles Farrar Brown, a Maine humorist and writer who used the pen and stage-name “Artemus Ward.” By 1863, Charles Brown had become one of President Lincoln’s favorite authors and was embarking on a career of travelling around the country, standing on stages, and joking with people— perhaps as the first American stand-up comedian. In a few years time, Brown would inspire another humorist named Samuel Clemens, who of course would go on to become the famous “Mark Twain.” Read called Brown’s visit “very pleasant” and noted that he “highly appreciated” both the “gallon of good whiskey” and “copy of his book” that Brown gave him. Brown likely came to see them out of curiosity,

²⁹² “Interview with the Rebels,” *Portland Evening Courier*, June 29, 1863.

²⁹³ “Interview with the Rebel Pirates,” in an unidentified newspaper clipping, The Caleb Cushing Affair, MHS.

perhaps to use the story in his future comic speeches, but he was not yet famous enough for the newspapers to report on this visit.²⁹⁴

Fear and Rumors in New England

As they had during Read's cruise, newspapers were responsible for spreading misinformation and apprehension throughout Portland and all of New England in the days and weeks following the battle. Newspapers spread confusion by reporting spuriously or vaguely about where the Confederates came from, whether or not they were alone in their actions, and the dangers the Portlanders had actually faced during the battle.

First, there was the question of the Confederates' origin. Although the authorities quickly discovered that they were the *Tacony* raiders and originally from the *Florida*, papers reported the wrong information. At least one publication reported that their identification as the former crew of *Tacony* had to be ruse, intended to cover up the fact that that commerce raider was still active and at large.²⁹⁵ Another reported that "Lieut. Reed and Engineer Brown styled themselves as officers of the Confederate steamer *Florida*," when, of course, they had been.²⁹⁶

Second, this confusion led directly into a widespread fear of other commerce raiders—and perhaps even still the *Tacony*—in the immediate vicinity. The *New York Times* reported Captain Liscomb's conviction that there were "three or more schooners with rebel crews on board, on our coast, destroying our fishermen." Liscomb also advised that these would be lightly armed, like *Archer*, which had only a single howitzer, and should be easily taken. The paper also published a report from the *Cushing*'s crew that ten Confederates had left early in the morning of the 27th aboard a boat, and were still at loose in the Casco Bay area.²⁹⁷

²⁹⁴ Read, "Portland Harbor-*Caleb Cushing*," in Charles W. Read Collection, ECU Special Collections.

²⁹⁵ "Late News: Daring Exploit," *Circular*: 71, 2 Jul 1863, *ProQuest*, Web, 14 Dec. 2012.

²⁹⁶ "The Rebel Pirates," *New York Times*, 28 Jun 1863, *ProQuest*, Web, 14 Dec. 2012.

²⁹⁷ "The Rebel Pirates," *New York Times*, 28 Jun 1863, *ProQuest*, Web, 14 Dec. 2012.

Similar reports were repeated in other papers, which variously cited three more schooners operating in the area targeting fishermen, while some even declared that a Confederate steamer was nearby. Several times, papers reported the story that the *Forest City* had seen a “suspicious” looking steamer early that morning as she came up from Boston. The *Portland Daily Press* reported Bibber’s own suspicions that there were at least three other Confederate ships operating in the area. This contributed to a feeling of general hysteria in the city and the region for days following Read’s capture.²⁹⁸ As a result of these reports, the *Portland Advertiser* took up the concerned cries of Mayor McLellan and Collector Jewett, warning that “unless our forts are immediately put in efficient fighting condition...there may be an attempt on the city itself.” The *Advertiser* also called upon Portlanders and Northerners in general not to look upon the raid as a “curious incident” but rather as a wake-up call, showing “the skill, information, and boldness of the rebel privateers.”²⁹⁹

Such reports helped to keep Portland in a frenzied and frazzled state. Following the battle, Maj. Andrews commented this general atmosphere, saying that “[r]umor follows rumor in rapid succession” and that no one from outside the city could understand what was transpiring. The confused reports in the newspapers contributed to this atmosphere. Above all, the fear of another attack pervaded the Portlanders’ perspectives. Vicious rumors and tales of other privateers in the area circulated freely, as they had in the newspapers. One rumor even held that the *Florida* had never actually existed, being in fact just the *Tacony*. These reports, rumors, and panic all culminated in several tremendous false alarms on Monday, June 29.³⁰⁰ Two warnings that morning, one of two apparently enemy schooners aiming to attack the city, and one from

²⁹⁸ “The Rebel Pirates,” *The New York Herald*, 28 Jun 1863, Web, 14 Dec. 2012, and “The Tacony Burned: Her Officers and Crew Taken Prisoners,” *Portland Daily Press*, June 29, 1863.

²⁹⁹ Untitled Article, *Portland Advertiser*, June 29, 1863.

³⁰⁰ Report of Major Andrews, Seventeenth U.S. Infantry, June 29, 1863, *Official Records*, Series I, Vol. 2: 327, and “Capture by the Rebels of *Caleb Cushing*,” *Eastern Argus*, June 29, 1863.

Cape Elizabeth about a “gunboat” landing men below Fort Preble, were reported in the early morning hours. With excitement aroused, Maj. Andrews and Fort Preble went on high alert, the alarm went out to nearby towns, and militiamen began to arm as they had the previous Saturday.³⁰¹

It had all started when George Stone, who lived in Cape Elizabeth near Fort Preble, claimed he was awakened by a “heavy rap” on his door, and poked his head out the window to see a man who appeared to be a sergeant outside. The man warned him “that there was a gunboat inside [of Portland Head Light] landing troops,” and to prepare his neighbors to be on the lookout. Stone took it upon himself to head out of his house and warn others, including fisherman Andrew Murray. As Murray was preparing to go fishing at around 2:30 AM Stone told him about the Confederate troops being landed nearby, offering the story of the soldier coming to his door as evidence. As Stone continued around Cape Elizabeth warning people about the new threat, Murray took his boat and a group of men over to Portland itself, where he met three police officers and told them what he had heard from Stone. The alarm continued to spread and soon all of Portland was awake and worried about this new enemy.³⁰²

J.M. Gould mentioned this alarm in his journal retroactively, but couldn’t remember what he had done that morning. Fortunately, his sister Elizabeth Gould, later Elizabeth Rowland, kept a better account of the reactions of civilians and Portland’s women to the whole event. She remembered waking up to the sound of bells early that morning, assuming there was a fire in the city. Gould remembered “a nameless dread fill[ing their] hearts,” the fear of a confederate attack which had been whipped into a frenzy by newspaper reports and rumors. A man in the street finally report to Gould and the others, who were hanging out their windows waiting for news,

³⁰¹ “The Affair at Portland,” *New York Times*, 30 Jun 1863, *ProQuest*, Web, 14 Dec. 2012.

³⁰² “Incident, Anecdotes, and Facts, Relative to the Cutter,” June 30, 1863, unidentified news clipping, in *The Caleb Cushing Affair*, MHS.

that there wasn't a fire, but instead "the rebels are this side of Portland Light!" Springing to action, the family dressed, J.M. Gould strapped on his weapons, and their father headed to the bank in case the Confederates attempted a robbery there. The rumors continued to spread, and soon Elizabeth heard that "the *Alabama* was off the coast and some men had landed from her on Cape Elizabeth." She remembered the women talking frantically, wondering if they should prepare to flee the city or stay and "prepare for death. Elizabeth's mother, who "found Congress street a distance that taxed all her strength," advocated they leave quickly, and with their valuable pictures for Freeport or Gorham. By dawn, they learned that it had all been a false alarm, and, as Elizabeth explained it, "[s]omebody had seen a tug-boat and thought it was a rebel craft."³⁰³

This fearful attitude pervaded Portland into July, and extended beyond civilians into the soldiers of the 17th Maine at Fort Preble. When U.S.R.C. *James C. Dobbin* arrived in Portland Harbor on July 13, on a mission to protect the harbor, soldiers in the fort fired twice at the vessel. Although the revenue cutter was clearly marked and its captain stopped immediately to identify himself, these soldiers had opened fire because they did not recognize the ship and were still very much on edge after the battle.³⁰⁴

Third and finally, instead of embarking on the difficult job of determining just how the Confederates had entered the harbor without being confronted or the very real dangers that the pursuers faced, most of the press ignored these issues and simply glamorized the Union success. In this, Portland and Maine newspapers failed to adequately address key issues which continued to face their coastal cities. The most artistic writing about the event, a poem about the battle published in the *Portland Evening Courier* called "Nabbed" and attributed to one G.A.,

³⁰³ "Civil War Episode: The Capture of Cutter CC in Portland Harbor," undated and unidentified news clipping (probably 1890s), in *The Caleb Cushing Affair*, MHS.

³⁰⁴ U.S.C.G.. Kern, Florence, ed, *The United States Revenue Cutters in the Civil War*, 12-7.

represented these failures. The poem noted the bravery of the Portlanders and idealized their actions during the battle in congratulatory prose. It exemplified the positive aspects of the raid—that the Portlanders reacted with speed and decision at a difficult time— instead of referencing the fact that the careless security around the harbor was a decisive factor in Read’s near success. Although the poem described the Confederates fleeing like startled birds, they had no need to do this because there was little evidence of a Portland prepared to defend against their maritime incursion in the first place.³⁰⁵

Likewise, these newspaper accounts reflected a distinct lack of understanding of the danger *Caleb Cushing* posed to the Mainers who pursued her. Many reports talked about the capture of the ship in a self-aggrandizing way, failing to recognize that the revenue cutter’s main gun was far heavier than anything on board the pursuing vessels, and that these were manned mostly by untrained volunteers. They reported that “[t]he steamers would undoubtedly have carried the cutter by boarding” because “all on board the steamers, sailors, soldiers and citizens, were anxious for the hand to hand fight” since they had “nothing to match the big guns on board the cutter.”³⁰⁶ This failed to note that the cutter, with its large main gun, could have destroyed the exposed and crowded decks of both steamers if the Confederates had found the stored ammunition before the pursuers got close enough to attempt a boarding.

In addition, some Portlanders understood the risks involved as the event was transpiring. The barber John Todd had refused to participate because he thought it would have to be “marvelous or providential” for the passenger steamers to survive a battle with an armed

³⁰⁵ “Nabbed,” June 1863, *Portland Evening Courier*, accessed in Caleb Cushing Affair, MHS.

³⁰⁶ “The Tacony Burned: Her Officers and Crew Taken Prisoners,” *Portland Daily Press*, June 29, 1863.

cutter.³⁰⁷ An account published about ten years after the raid made clear that the pursuit was both a “clever” and “dangerous...and almost foolhardy enterprise, since a single broadside, or a single heavy shot, might have sent [the pursuers to the bottom] or swept her decks of nobody knows how many fathers.”³⁰⁸ Furthermore, boarding would have resulted in a bloody skirmish between untrained civilians on one side and trained Confederates sailors on the other, likely resulting in heavy losses. The *Forest City*’s Captain Leighton planned to ram into the *Cushing* or board her, both actions which would have put many lives at risk aboard his own ship. As a whole, the Portlanders were extremely lucky the cuttermen kept the Confederates from the ammunition, or the whole affair could have ended much more bloodily, but almost every newspaper failed to recognize this.³⁰⁹

Conclusion

J.M. Gould wrote in his journal that “the whole story reads [more] like a romance than a fact.” Several later sources, both Northern and Southern, both also described the serendipity of the raid, claiming that it seemed “like chapters of a romance” or “sound[ed] like a romance.” It was true that everyone was incredibly fortunate: the Confederates who boarded and took the *Caleb Cushing* while its crew was in mourning and at half-capacity, the Mainers who benefitted from the lack of wind and low tide in their harbor, and perhaps both sides enjoyed the bloodless resolution of the battle because Read could not locate the cutter’s ammunition. But the battle was more than just a romantic episode, more than just a gentleman’s conflict idealized in a war

³⁰⁷ John M. Todd, *A Sketch of the Life of John M. Todd: Sixty-Two Years in a Barber Shop and Reminiscences of his Customers*, (Portland: William W. Roberts Co., 1906),

http://archive.org/stream/sketchoflifeofjo00todd/sketchoflifeofjo00todd_djvu.txt.

³⁰⁸ John Neal, *Portland Illustrated*, (Portland: W.S. Jones & Publishers, 1874),

http://www.archive.org/stream/portlandillustra00nealiala/portlandillustra00nealiala_djvu.txt.

³⁰⁹ “The Rebel Pirates,” *New York Times*, 28 Jun 1863, *ProQuest*, Web, 14 Dec. 2012.

otherwise filled with senseless carnage. The battle's origins, conflict itself, and its aftermath represented larger problems and themes in the divided United States³¹⁰

As a whole, the Battle of Portland Harbor was a small, insignificant military event occurring at the time of great battles and decisions in Vicksburg and Gettysburg. Strategically, it did little to alter the course of the war—the Union lost only a revenue cutter, which it easily replaced, and the Confederacy was down one determined, cunning, and extraordinarily lucky commander and his men, all of whom were exchanged and returned to service a little over a year later. No, the battle was not a military turning point in the Civil War, but it was perhaps in the minds of the Northerners who experienced it as a part of the cruise of the *Clarence-Tacony-Archer*. For these civilians and businessmen, the *Tacony* was a powerful enemy capable of striking anywhere along the coast from Baltimore to New York to Providence and Boston and—as Read proved— even farther north than these commercial hubs. In these ways, the battle was a clear representation of the Civil War on the periphery, where small events occurred away from the great battlefields and yet held great significance locally and regionally.

It is clear from Read's cruise and the narrative of the battle's aftermath that newspapers played a large role in stirring up great fear, and even panic, amongst Union communities. Both nationally syndicated papers as well as Portland's local "dailys" and "weeklys" were in part responsible for this alarm. Their accounts made the fear of an attack on Northern ports palpable, despite the strategic impracticality of such operations for the C.S.N., all without mentioning the oversights which had allowed the *Archer* to infiltrate Portland in the first place. This heightened

³¹⁰ *Journals of J. M. Gould*, entry for June 27, and "Capt. Charles W. Read, The Paul Jones of the Confederacy Passes Away: His Death at Meridian after a Long and Painful Illness," unidentified New Orleans newspaper clipping, Jan. 25, 1890, ECU, and "Lt.-Commander Chas. W. Read: A Gallant Officer of the Confederate Navy," *The Mississippi Educational Advance*, 23, ECU Special Collections. This second article is undated.

state of apprehension was responsible for false alarms like the one in Portland and continued tensions in coastal communities throughout the northeast.

The battle also provoked and abetted newspaper editorials and general arguments which encapsulated the anger many Northerners directed at Washington and the U.S.N., which seemed powerless to prevent the depredations of a single Confederate commerce raider. As these raiders drove economic costs unacceptably high for most businessmen, the success of armed citizens in Portland, apparently without any federal support, helped to drive a wedge between the average citizen and the Lincoln administration. Businessmen and merchants who lost or feared losing ships to these Confederates responded to reports of the raid by once more begging Sec. Welles to allow them to deal with the “pirates” by deploying their own, untrained, privateers.

Read’s incursion into a Northern harbor under the very noses of a Federal fort evoked a singular fear and remained a powerful image throughout the course of the war and afterwards. It was this lasting memory that prompted Elizabeth Gould to note in the 1890s that one should “[a]sk some of the heavy, elderly men of Portland if they ‘went down after the *Tacony* pirates’ and see if you don’t get a story worth hearing.” The Battle of Portland Harbor was and certainly still is a story worth hearing and a story worth telling to new generations 150 years after it happened.³¹¹

Epilogue: “To Sweep the Coast of Yankee Land”

The Success of Commerce Raiding

The Battle of Portland Harbor played an important role in the Confederacy’s overall commerce raiding strategy in the Civil War. The memory of the raid remained clear in the both the minds of the merchants affected by commerce raiders and the Navy Department which

³¹¹ “Civil War Episode: The Capture of Cutter CC in Portland Harbor,” undated and unidentified news clipping (probably 1890s), in *The Caleb Cushing Affair*, MHS.

continued to combat them. In November 1863, many of the wealthiest New England merchants signed a petition to Secretary Welles “refer[ring] to the great loss of individual wealth” as well as the “injury inflicted upon a valuable source of material power, to the endangering of the very existence of our mercantile marine, and to the mortification of our National pride as ‘citizens of the first naval power on Earth,’ by ‘a couple of indifferently equipped rebel cruisers.’” The merchants complained, that, although the U.S.N. held a continually growing superiority in terms of naval strength and economic might two and half years after the start of the war, small Confederate raiders were still able to decimate their commercial interests. Welles dismissed this criticism by citing the raid on Portland Harbor as an anomaly, calling Read the “only privateer that has had the impudence to attack our flag at the entrance of our harbors.” Welles told the merchantmen they were exaggerating the threat and could continue to rely on the Navy to protect their interests. Bitter and unconvinced, the merchants countered that it had required private Portlanders to subdue the *Caleb Cushing*, not the dozens of U.S.N. and chartered ships Welles had sent after them. This reopened the debate between public and private authority and put the Battle of Portland Harbor back into the spotlight.³¹²

In this regard, Read’s raid was a high-water mark of the South’s commerce raiding, an event so notable that both sides cited it as a justification for their arguments. In all, Read’s cruise and raise did play an important part in the C.S.N.’s overall commerce raiding effort. Between May 6 and June 27 Read captured, sank, or commandeered 22 Union merchant ships, disrupted maritime commerce, confused and eluded the pursuers that were sent after him, and tied down Union vessels which would have otherwise been serving elsewhere. As a part of the overall commerce raiding war, this 22-ship tally racked up by Read was impressive. In total, Confederate commerce raiders sank 257 Union ships between 1861 and 1865. Read and his

³¹² “The Rebel Privateers and our Commerce,” *New York Times*, 18 Nov 1863, *ProQuest*, Web, 14 Dec. 2012.

men, therefore, were alone responsible for around 8.5 percent of this total. In the end, commerce raiding cost the U.S. \$3,325,000 in losses, the service of 77 U.S.N. ships, and 23 other vessels—in addition to any other privately commissioned ships— chartered to assist in the various searches for commerce raiders.³¹³

Fates of the Confederates

The war did not end in Portland Harbor for most of the Confederates involved in the battle. By August 1863, most of the prisoners held at Fort Preble had been sent south to the large prisoner-of-war camp at Fort Warren, on George’s Island in the middle of Boston Harbor. The prisoners were treated quite well and were allowed to receive supplies and letters from home.

However, this treatment was not enough to subdue Read’s desire to continue serving the Confederacy. While at Fort Warren, Read became a close confidant of Joseph W. Alexander and James Thurston, Confederate sailors who had served aboard C.S.S. *Atlanta*. Together with another prisoner, these three men conspired to escape and return, via Canadian contacts, to the South. On August 17, Alexander found that he could squeeze through some of the small loopholes in one of Fort Warren’s walls, and from there sneak past the sentries to the beach. Read recommended that Pryde and another prisoner swim to a nearby island and acquire a boat, since none of the four original officers were strong swimmers. Pryde and the other man would then return to help all six men now involved in the escape. Figure 9 depicts the George’s Island area, from where the prisoners launched their escape.³¹⁴

³¹³ Tucker, 135. This 257 ship number was only about 5% of the entire U.S. merchant fleet, but may not actually include ships which were not considered part of that fleet, i.e. private fishing vessels, warships, etc. Because Read destroyed several fishing ships at the revenue cutter *Caleb Cushing* which would not then be included in this tally, this number may not actually be representative of the total number of Union ships lost to Confederate commerce raiding action during the Civil War, but serves as an effective guide.

³¹⁴ Joseph W. Alexander, “How We Escaped from Fort Warren,” *New England Magazine*, Oct. 1892, Vol. 13, Issue 2, [http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/ncps:@field\(DOCID+@lit\(AFJ3026-0013-40\)\)](http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/ncps:@field(DOCID+@lit(AFJ3026-0013-40))), and “Escape from Fort Warren,” *Harper’s Magazine*, Vol. 28, Issue 168: May 1864, 697 – 701, <http://books.google.com/books?id=CRUwAAAAMAAJ&pg=PA697&lpg=PA697&dq=escape+from+fort+warren&>

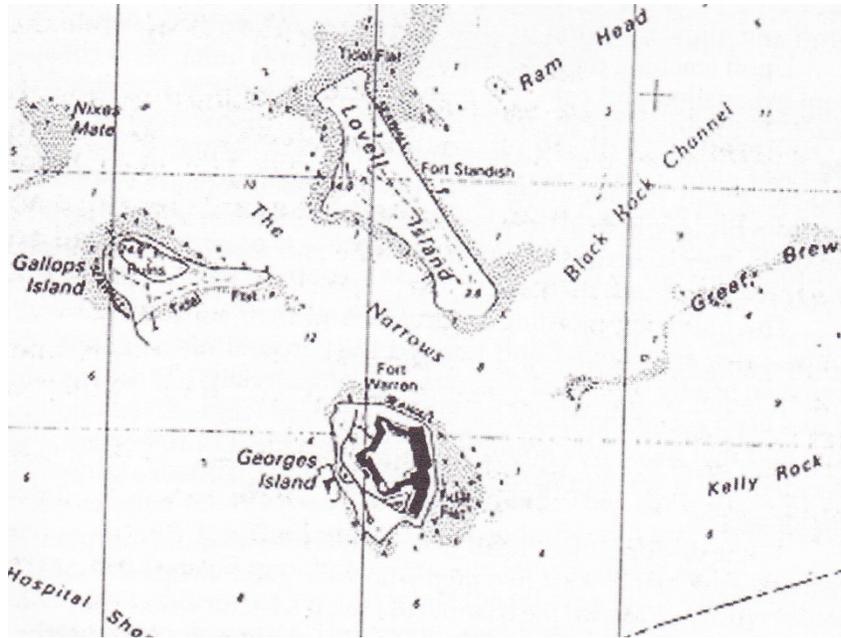


Figure 9: Fort Warren, on Georges Island, and the surrounding area, including Lovell Island

The Confederates made it past the guards to the beach on the night of August 18, concealing themselves in the weeds and waiting. Pryde and the other man then set off swimming for nearby Lovell’s Island. No one ever heard from Pryde or his accomplice again, and it is likely that both drowned while swimming between George’s and Lovell’s Islands—a difficult channel in the best of times. The weather was stormy that night, and they had on few clothes, so it is unlikely that even the best swimmer could have made it without an aid.³¹⁵ However, Hunt later noted that Pryde did indeed manage to escape to the British Provinces. An escape from Fort Warren on the incorrect date of August 10, 1863, is corroborated by several sources, but no subsequent details of his journey can be found. It is more than likely that the two died in this escape attempt.³¹⁶

[source=bl&ots=-uGocHqOiH&sig=w1GawEynVCOHVBjaBE4jgY63e1Y&hl=en&sa=X&ei=bt5FUb6FMdOn4AOH8YCYBA&ved=0CFwQ6AEwCA#v=onepage&q=escape%20from%20fort%20warren&f=false](https://www.gutenberg.org/files/1863/1863-h/1863-h.htm#source=bl&ots=-uGocHqOiH&sig=w1GawEynVCOHVBjaBE4jgY63e1Y&hl=en&sa=X&ei=bt5FUb6FMdOn4AOH8YCYBA&ved=0CFwQ6AEwCA#v=onepage&q=escape%20from%20fort%20warren&f=false).

³¹⁵ Alexander, “How We Escaped from Fort Warren,” and “Escape from Fort Warren,” *Harper’s Magazine*.

³¹⁶ Letter from Robert Hunt to Mrs. Nebraska C. May, Oct. 12, 1894, Charles Read Papers, ECU Special Collections, *Register*, 158, and Quarstein, *The C.S.S. Virginia*, 402 all suggest the Pryde and his accomplice, a man

Alexander and Thurston, growing impatient when Pryde and the other man did not return for them within a few hours, constructed a rudimentary raft from a wooden marker, which Alexander called a “target,” floating directly off the beach. They intended to use this as buoy to paddle out to Lovell’s Island themselves. They were frustrated in this because two guards quickly noticed the missing target and began investigating. In fact, one of the guards poked his bayonet into the shallow water where Read was waiting for the men, letting it rest “just under him.” Read, demonstrating his characteristic determination and coolness, “never moved a muscle but remained perfectly quiet” while the soldier’s bayonet was only inches from him. Alexander said that moment was “the bravest thing I saw during four years of the war.”³¹⁷

The soldier did not harm Read in the end, fearing his bayonet would rust if it touched the salt water, and the two sentries continued their patrols, assuming the wind had carried the target away. Alexander and Thurston made it to Lovell’s Island after an exhausting crossing of the channel and stole a small sailboat and a rowboat. Fearing that they would be noticed in the dawn’s light, the two men headed north instead of returning for Read and Saunders. Realizing their situation, Read and Saunders then attempted to re-enter the fort through the same slits they had slipped out of, but were noticed and captured by sentries and their escape attempt became known.³¹⁸ Hunt remembered that once he arrived at Fort Warren, he was not able to see Read because the lieutenant was in confinement and “kept pretty close on account of his attempt to escape with several others” before they had arrived.³¹⁹

identified as a foreigner, Thomas Sherman, survived their escape attempt. Both Alexander and the *Harper’s* article directly suggest or imply that they drowned.

³¹⁷ Alexander, “How We Escaped from Fort Warren.”

³¹⁸ Alexander, “How We Escaped from Fort Warren,” and “Escape from For Warren,” *Harper’s*.

³¹⁹ Letter from Robert Hunt to Mrs. Nebraska C. May, Oct. 12, 1894, Charles Read Papers, ECU Special Collections.

News and rumors that some of the *Tacony*'s crew had escaped Fort Warren spread concern throughout New England, and particularly in Portland, where Jewett immediately dispatched the *James C. Dobbin* to capture the fugitives. Alexander and Thurston proceeded up the coast, acquiring some supplies from a coastal home near Rye Beach, New Hampshire, on the night of the August 19. The *Dobbin* was remarkably successful in its search and captured both Alexander and Thurston the next day, August 20, off Portland. Although they pretended to be lost fishermen, the same story they had told their benefactor the night before, Confederate money in Thurston's pocket revealed their true identity. They were interred in the Portland jail on August 21, listed as residents of the "Southern Confederacy."³²⁰

Once again, the presence of Confederates into Portland caused great excitement in the city, and Alexander commented that "[t]he jail was crowded with visitors to see the two Rebel prisoners, or pirates, as we were generally called," the lasting impact of Read's raid making the appearance of any Confederates sailors seem an event on par with the battle. Alexander said the Portlanders observed and commented on Thurston and himself "as if we were a species of wild animal." He remembered one incident where a girl watching them exclaimed, "Oh Susan, he is reading!" while Susan replied, "Pshaw, this one's writing." In all, Alexander said kindly Mainers brought them "some few books," but in general "the people were very bitter, and told us plainly that they thought we ought to be killed." Kept in Portland jail for about a month, Alexander and Thurston again conspired to escape, noticing that, if they had fit through the slits at Fort Warren, they could slip through the windows in the jail's washroom once the iron bars

³²⁰ "Escape from Fort Warren," *Harper's*, Cumberland County Sherriff's Office Records," MHS, Coll. 177, Entry Aug. 21, 1863.

had been removed. However, they were transferred back to Fort Warren before they could they could try out this theory.³²¹

³²¹ Alexander, "How We Escaped from Fort Warren."

Back at Fort Warren, Alexander and Thurston joined Read and Saunders in isolation from the other prisoners, all of them refusing an offer from the Union guards to allow them to return to the general population if they promised not to attempt another escape. Read is depicted at Fort Warren in Figure 10. In fact, they spent the next several months removing bricks from the chimney in this room until a man could stand inside it and work his way up to the top of the fort.



Figure 20: Read (number 21) and other Confederates at Fort Warren. Alexander is the man labeled number 24 and Saunders is number 18.

However, a sentry posted in this area made any new escape attempt impossible. Read and these comrades continued to escape the entire time they were imprisoned at Fort Warren out of a sense of duty and obligation to the C.S.A.³²²

Read, Billups, Engineer Brown, Matherson, and most of their men, including Hunt, were paroled at Fort Warren on September 28, 1864, and exchanged in Cox Wharf, Virginia, on October 18. They were immediately redeployed, Billups and Hunt continuing to serve under Lt. Read on various James River batteries, including Battery Wood, and under overall command of

³²² Alexander, "How We Escaped from Fort Warren."

General Lee. Eventually they were all a part of a torpedo boat group in the James River Squadron in 1865.³²³

Engineer Brown went in another direction entirely, serving in the “Semmes Naval Brigade,” a division of sailors commissioned in the spring of 1865 by General Lee as an infantry unit—under the command famous commerce raider Raphael Semmes—to burn Confederate ships in Richmond and aid the Army of Northern Virginia in its retreat from the capital. When it became clear Lee’s army was lost, the “Naval Brigade” joined General Joseph E. Johnston in North Carolina, where Brown was eventually captured and paroled.³²⁴

Some Confederate prisoners, however, were not transferred along with the rest. Alexander Stewart, one of Read’s seamen, remained in captivity until early 1865, when he applied for and took the Oath of Allegiance to the Union on January 21, 1865. Stewart’s low rank had made him an unlikely candidate for exchange. Many of the rest of the *Tacony*’s crew, including her dogged commander, would take the same oath before the year was out.³²⁵

In Read’s last command, he led C.S.S. *W. H. Webb*, a large ram, in an attempted running out of the blockade near New Orleans, in the same area where he had started his career in the C.S.A. in 1861. Once again, Billups had served as one of Read’s officers on this expedition. Read adeptly ensured that the Union flag on his ship flew was at half-mast as he passed the forts, like all the other vessels in mourning after President Lincoln’s assassination. However, the plan did not work, and Read was forced to scuttle yet another ship under his command and was captured off New Orleans on April 24, 1865. Imprisoned once more at his despised Fort Warren,

³²³ *Register*, 161 and 15, and Read, “Notes on James River Duty,” document in Charles Read Papers, ECU Special Collections.

³²⁴ *Register*, 23.

³²⁵ Alexander Stewart. Subject File of the Confederate States Navy, 1861 – 1865, RE 21, Jan. 1865, (NA Microfilm Publication M1091, Roll #44, NA. This roll focused on commerce raiding, but this was the only file related to the Clarence-Tacony-Archer Cruise.

Read finally abandoned his die-hard Confederate beliefs and finally petitioned to take the Oath of Allegiance on May 14, 1865. In his letter to President Andrew Johnson on June 21, Read wrote that he was “led to believe that Mississippi had ceased to be one of the United States” in early 1861 and, so, resigned his commission in the U.S.N., and had gone on to become a first lieutenant in the C.S.N. in the course of the war.³²⁶ This worked, and Read was paroled for the second time on July 24, 1865, while Billups was likely released around a similar time.³²⁷

Read returned to Mississippi, where he became a civilian ship’s captain, serving in the Royal Mail Line on the *City of Dallas* and making frequent trips to British Honduras, today’s Belize, and, according to the R.C.S., was also likely involved in illegal activity by running gunboats to both sides in Colombia’s own civil war.³²⁸ He married twice, Rosa G. Hall in Raymond, Mississippi, in 1867, and Nebraska Carter May in Meridian in 1884.³²⁹ When his health began to deteriorate, the Governor of Louisiana appointed him to serve as one of New Orleans’s harbormasters, “of which body he was president at the time of his death.”³³⁰ Read died in Meridian on Jan. 25, 1890, under the care of a doctor who was his good friend, after a series of illnesses including “the prevailing influenza” and “pneumonia.”³³¹

Fates of the Unionists

Records on the men on the Union side are much less extensive, since many of those involved did not reach a level of fame even nearly as enduring as Read’s. Lt. Davenport, for

³²⁶ Read, “Letter to Pres. Johnson,” in Charles Read Papers, ECU

³²⁷ *Register*, 161 and 15.

³²⁸ “Capt. Charles W. Read, The Paul Jones of the Confederacy Passes Away: His Death at Meridian after a Long and Painful Illness,” unidentified New Orleans newspaper clipping, Jan. 25, 1890, ECU Special Collections, and U.S.C.G.. Kern, Florence, ed, *The United States Revenue Cutters in the Civil War*, 12-7.

³²⁹ “Read, Charles William (May 12, 1840 – Jan. 25, 1890),” *Dictionary of American Biography*, Scribners & Sons, 1936, Vol. 15, excerpt and handwritten notes from May E. Read at Charles Read Papers, ECU Special Collections.

³³⁰ “Hero of the Week: Death of Capt. Chas. W Read Yesterday Morning, A Gallant Officer of the Confederate Navy,” *The News*, Jan. 26, 1890, ECU Special Collections. Although this paper is labeled *The News* and comes ostensibly from Mississippi due to its content, there is not name of the actual paper or its location and no record by which to identify this.

³³¹ Information gathered from both newspaper accounts cited earlier about Read’s death.

one, continued to await orders from the time the *Cushing* sank until July 13, when he was granted a leave of absence in order to prepare for his next examination, presumably a physical one. Davenport had already been granted several leaves of absences from the R.C.S. and had failed two examinations already. In January, Davenport returned to active service aboard the *Isaac Toucey*, also stationed in Maine, this time at Castine. However, in July 1864, he again failed his examination and had his commission revoked. Davenport's later position in the R.C.S. as an Acting First Lieutenant aboard the *Hector* in Oswego, New York, began in September 1864; it lasted until he again failed an examination in February, 1865. His service record in the R.C.S. ends there, and little is known of his life afterwards. He died around 1896, the year his widow, Mary F. Davenport, applied for and was granted a pension in his name.³³²

Lt. Davenport's ignominious exit from the R.C.S. does not reflect the great praise he and his cuttermen deserve for keeping the Confederates from the *Cushing's* magazine. Although this action potentially saved the lives of hundreds aboard the pursuing Maine ships, their names have faded into history. John M. Todd, a Portland barber who wrote about the raid in his memoirs, called these men "noble...patriots who would not [help Read]...even when [they were] in irons and with pistols placed at their heads." Todd argued that these men should be recognized alongside the volunteers, who in their lifetimes achieved great local notoriety, but Todd sadly could not even learn the cuttermen's names from the Customs House records. Their story is one that remains both important and untold today.³³³

In contrast, Lt. Merryman went on to a long, distinguished career in the R.C.S. By July 7, 1863, he was on board another ship, the *Campbell*, in New London, Connecticut, and became Captain Merryman in July 1864. He served on various ships, including as captain of the

³³² United States Revenue Marine Record of Officers, 1797 – 1870, Record Group 26, Entry 265 (NC-31), NA, Washington, D.C. (NA), Vol. 1, 135.

³³³ Todd, *A Sketch of the Life of John M. Todd*.

U.S.R.C. *McCulloch*, and as a leading member of the R.C.S. Examining Board in Washington, D.C., into the 1870s.³³⁴ As “Inspector of the Life Saving Service,” Capt. Merryman had, in his later life, authority over the life-saving arm of the R.C.S. all along the East Coast, with a headquarters in New York.³³⁵

There are even fewer records on the fates of the civilian volunteers, but J. S. Winslow, who had served on board the *Chesapeake*, went on to have a distinguished career as a merchant “prince,” with the “largest fleet of sailing vessels on the Atlantic Coast” by the time of his death in 1904. Harrison Bird Brown, the artist, became a painter renowned nation-wide for his natural and maritime themed works.³³⁶

Capitalizing on the Story

Perhaps surprisingly, the Northern newspapers which profited and wrote so much about the raid of the *Tacony* in 1863 did not seem very concerned about preserving its memory or talking with those who remembered the raid after the raid, at least before the 1890s. This was likely due the large number of war stories in that period and the fact that most people knew the stories from first- or second-hand accounts, a situation which continued until veterans started to pass away. This prompted a renewed look at events of the war by veterans themselves, who did not want their stories to disappear, as well as younger locals interested in learning more about what the Civil War had been like for their neighbors or in their hometowns.

Hunt discovered this situation himself when he wrote to several Maine papers in the early 1890s, hoping to get them to publish an account of the event he had participated in, but he was

³³⁴ United States Revenue Marine Record of Officers, 1797 – 1870, Record Group 26, Entry 265 (NC-31), NA, Vol. 1, 233 – 234, and Record of the Revenue Cutter Service, U.S. June 1868, Ship’s Rosters, Record Group 26, Entry 196 (NC-31), NA, 277.

³³⁵ John Carroll Power, “Early Settlers of Sangamon County,” 1876, <http://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GSln=Merry&GSiman=1&GScid=107259&GRid=24492908&>.

³³⁶ William David Barry, “Edward Souther Griffin: Portland’s Finest Ship Carver?” *DownEast*, Nov. 1984, Vol. 31, No. 4: 48 – 51.

unsuccessful. He paid a paper two dollars for an account of the raid and was disappointed to receive “scarcely more than a half dozen lines,” while the *Eastern Argus* itself claimed to keep only one report of the raid. The editors offered to send Hunt a lengthy copy of this, but charged him five dollars for the expense. This was an amount Hunt “could not afford,” and so the veteran worked on creating his own memoirs, which were ironically later republished in several Maine newspapers after he delivered it to the Confederate Veterans Association in Savannah in 1895.³³⁷

Other Northern publishers, however, were quite interested in the raid and particularly Read’s story. Winfield M. Thompson, a writer for the *Rudder*, a yachting and boating magazine first published in 1891, was eager to publish an account of the Battle of Portland Harbor, probably as a means to increase the profits of that paper with a story likely to be popular to Portland’s older readership. In late 1904 he wrote Nebraska C. May, Read’s widow, hoping to get access to Read’s biography or another handwritten account of the raid. He claimed his account would be “in a spirit of admiration for [Read’s] character.” Thompson’s article in the end was a sensationalized and laudatory account of Read’s career, published in two separate editions of the *Rudder* for maximum readership.³³⁸

Southern newspapers applauded Read from the start, often glamorizing his service to the Confederacy as a means of promoting their own political purposes. Dennis Matthews, who served aboard the *Florida* and was editor of the *People’s Tribune*, a paper in Jefferson City, Missouri, in 1878, wrote to Read asking him to send details of the events for him to publish. Matthews aggrandized Read’s successes by saying he remembered the day that the *Clarence*

³³⁷ Letter from Robert Hunt to Mrs. Nebraska C. May, Oct. 12, 1894, Charles Read Papers, ECU Special Collections.

³³⁸ Letter from Winfield M. Thompson (Boston, Mass.) to Nebraska C. May (Jackson, Miss.), Dec. 28, 1904, Charles Read Papers, ECU Special Collections.

sailed off on a noble quest “to sweep the coast of Yankee land.” Matthews paid Read a further tribute by saying that “[h]istory furnishes nowhere a parallel” to his service, that the cruise and battle were “a succession of events that have never been equaled.” Although Matthews was clearly flattering Read in order to profit from his story, his lofty praise of Read embodied a growing trend in the South to idealize Confederate veterans.³³⁹

This praise became both more popular and more public when Read died in 1890. Local newspapers in Mississippi and throughout the South put Read on such a pedestal that they made it nearly impossible for anyone to deny his heroism. One Mississippi paper portrayed him as mighty until the end, a “brave spirit [who] had often faced death in its varied phases,” but who “at last yielded to the grim messenger and made [his] last voyage to that haven of rest prepared for the good, the noble, the brave.”³⁴⁰ In no less grandiose terms, a New Orleans paper wrote that “the Great Commander had...decided to call the brave sailor home to his reward.” This admiring obituary declared that Read’s death “will be read with regret by many” because he was “honored all over the broad land for his valor,” and because he was a “fearless soldier...and a loyal citizen.”³⁴¹ Other Southern newspapers focused on the effectiveness of Read’s naval career, saying that “[t]he whole coast of New England was alarmed” because “the sea was lighted almost nightly by the lurid glare of some burning vessel.” In all, after his death, Read

³³⁹ Letter from Dennis Matthews to Read, Jan. 31, 1878, Charles Read Papers, ECU Special Collections.

³⁴⁰ “Hero of the Week: Death of Capt. Chas. W Read Yesterday Morning, A Gallant Officer of the Confederate Navy,” *The News*, Jan. 26, 1890, Charles Read Papers, ECU Special Collections. Although this paper is labeled *The News* and comes ostensibly from Mississippi due to its content, there is no name of the actual paper or its location and I have not found a record by which to identify this.

³⁴¹ “Capt. Charles W. Read, The Paul Jones of the Confederacy Passes Away: His Death at Meridian after a Long and Painful Illness,” unidentified New Orleans newspaper clipping, Jan. 25, 1890, Charles Read Papers, ECU Special Collections.

became a symbol for the Lost Cause movement in the former Confederacy, an example of one its heroes who had defied all odds and was able to strike a stunning blow against the Union.³⁴²

This idealization of Read and his successes continued long after the 1890s, however. A 1970 publication from the United Daughters of the Confederacy upped his final “nett[ing]” of Union vessels to an inexplicably high 47, and, amongst this and other inaccuracies, declared that he was captured by the “U.S.S. *Forest City*.” It would be quite an honor for the Boston-Portland passenger liner to be remembered as a chartered warship! This publication showed that the memory of Read and the battle had been obfuscated by the exaggerations of neo-Confederate organizations.³⁴³

The greatest manifestation of this reinterpreted memory came in 1979, when the Sons of Confederate Veterans posthumously awarded Read the Confederate Medal Of Honor. This private group of Confederate descendents honored Read’s “mission to wreak havoc on the commercial shipping interests of the enemy.” During that mission, the citation declared that Read’s captures and actions “spectacularly disrupted...shipping along the Atlantic coast.” Although Read’s actions did generate significant interest and fear from coastal communities as discussed above, they hardly disrupted Northern shipping, let alone in a “spectacular” way. Furthermore, the citation commended Read’s entering Portland Harbor “despite the disadvantage of tide and flood” and continuing to fire his guns “until his ammunition was exhausted.” C.S.N. members were neither proud of Read’s inability to quickly commandeer the *Caleb Cushing*, largely a result of poor planning on Read’s part to take these environmental factors into account, nor his inability to locate the major stores of ammunition on board. Read’s Confederate Medal

³⁴² “Hero of the Week: Death of Capt. Chas. W Read Yesterday Morning, A Gallant Officer of the Confederate Navy,” *The News*, Jan. 26, 1890, Charles Read Papers, ECU Special Collections.

³⁴³ David Knapp, Jr., “Lt. Read and the CSS Webb,” *The United Daughters of the Confederacy Magazine*, March 1970, Charles Read Papers, ECU Special Collections.

of Honor citation was created by a neo-Confederate organization to aggrandize the man as a hero to suit their own ends and contained significant historical inaccuracies.³⁴⁴

Since his death, historians, editors, and others have ascribed a wide array of titles for Read as a means to continue to interpret his story and legacy. Several of his biographies have memorable titles including *Sea Hawk of the Confederacy*, *Sea Wolf of the Confederacy*, and *Confederate Corsair*, all creative titles describing Read. He appears in various collections of interesting Civil War stories with titles such as *Sea Dogs of the Sixties*. Many writers also draw connections between Read and other famous commerce raiders, most notably the American Revolutionary hero John Paul Jones. Other accounts have described Read as “the Confederate von Lückner,” in an anachronistic reference to a First World War German commander who equipped a sailing vessel for a successful cruise against Allied shipping.³⁴⁵

Lasting Legacy

The Battle of Portland Harbor was a complicated and dramatic affair when it occurred, and its memory has become much more complicated and convoluted since then. The overall significance of Read’s attack has been disputed frequently. During some periods of history, the raid was considered more important than during others. The late 1890s and early 1900s proved to be a time when many Mainers, particularly Portlanders, re-explored, exaggerated, and capitalized on the Battle of Portland Harbor. In his memoirs written during this period, Benjamin Willard said “[t]he story of the daring seizure and subsequent recapture is familiar to those acquainted with the history of the Civil War, but may be new to some of my readers,” implying that it was almost taken for granted that a great many of his readers knew about it.

³⁴⁴ “Confederate Medal of Honor Citation,” in Shaw, xv. Information the date the Medal of Honor was awarded from Jones, 174.

³⁴⁵ Thompson, “A Confederate Raid” *The Rudder*, 1905, 249, accessed in Caleb Cushing Affair at MHS, and Raimondo Luraghi, *A History of the Confederate Navy*, translated by Paolo E. Coletta, (Annapolis, Maryland: Naval Institute Press, 1996), 229 – 230, and all the books with titles listed (see Bibliography).

Willard summed up the raid's importance by saying it was "[a]mong the most notable incidents of the Civil War."³⁴⁶

Clarence Hale, a Portland resident, lawyer, and later federal judge, delivered a talk before the Maine Historical Society in 1901, commemorating the battle and praising his city's participation. He thought it deserved a place in posterity, saying that history "will certainly give its just praise to the dash and daring of the little band of Southern seaman" who captured the Caleb Cushing without "firing a gun." But more importantly "[h]istory will...give its full measure of praise to Portland men" who showed "resolute promptness" in their actions and "bringing victory out of disaster." Hale's address promoted the significance of the battle to both the Portland area and as a part of the Civil War.³⁴⁷

In spite of Hale's confidence, however, between 1901 and the late 1980s, very little was written about either Read or the battle itself. The Confederate lieutenant appeared only as one of several naval persons of interest in a few books such as *Sea Dogs of the Sixties* in 1935 and *Nine Men in Gray* in 1963. The battle itself appeared only in short articles in local Portland or Mississippi newspapers, on anniversaries or simply when editors stumbled across the story. It was not until the 1990s and 2000s that both Read's life and, therefore, the battle, came back into mainstream study. Between 2000 and 2006, researchers published four different biographies of Read. Since then and as a result of the biographies, the battle has become more widely covered and discussed.³⁴⁸

Most recently, in his 2012 book, James McPherson called Read's raid "a low point in the war for the Union navy— and the Union cause." At the time it occurred, "[t]he *Alabama* and *Florida* remained at large. Charleston remained untouched and defiant. The Army of Northern

³⁴⁶ Willard, 74 and 81.

³⁴⁷ Hale, 209 - 210.

³⁴⁸ All of the books referenced in this section can be found in the Bibliography section.

Virginia was in Pennsylvania. Vicksburg and Port Hudson still held out.” McPherson also mentioned Read’s tally of conquests and “[o]rders...from Philadelphia to Portsmouth, New Hampshire, to ‘send out anything you have’ to ‘search for this wolf that is prowling so near us.’” Read’s raid corresponded with the lowest point of Union confidence in President Lincoln and the government in Washington. McPherson’s comments on the raid, although brief, indicate its significance in the larger picture of the war, where the struggle to maintain Union morale was almost as decisive as that on the battlefield. This paper has attempted to contribute to that goal by explaining the wider significance of this peripheral event of the Civil War.³⁴⁹

Appendix A: Images

³⁴⁹ McPherson, *War on the Waters*, 153.

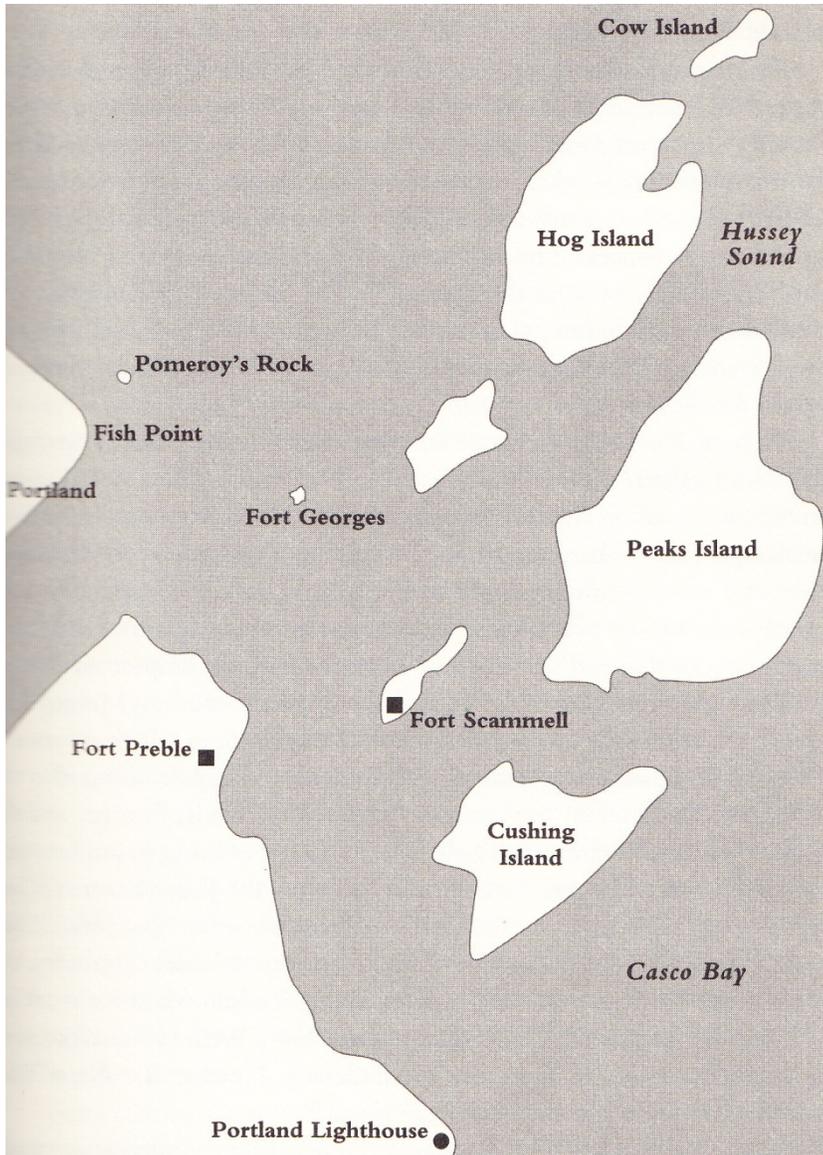


Figure 1: Map of Portland Harbor at the time of the battle

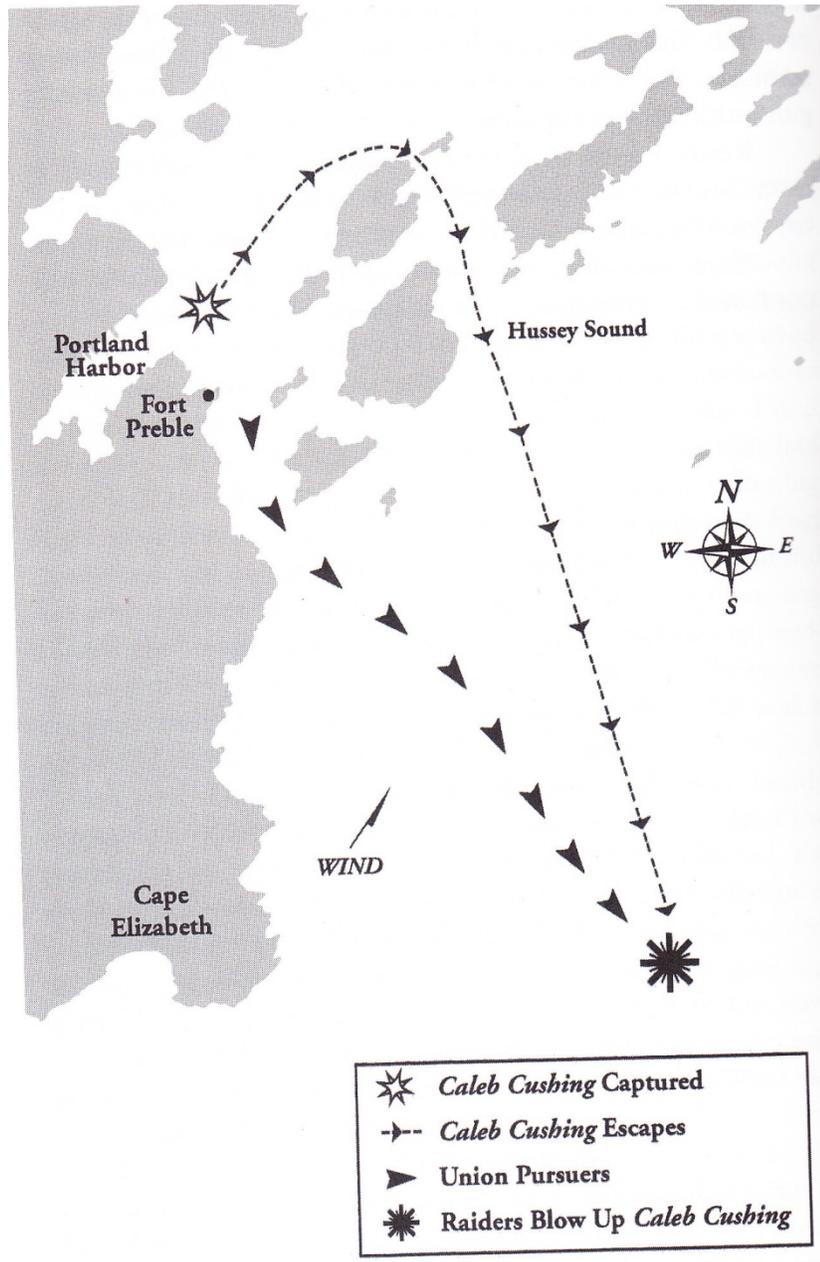


Figure 2: Course of the Battle of Portland Harbor

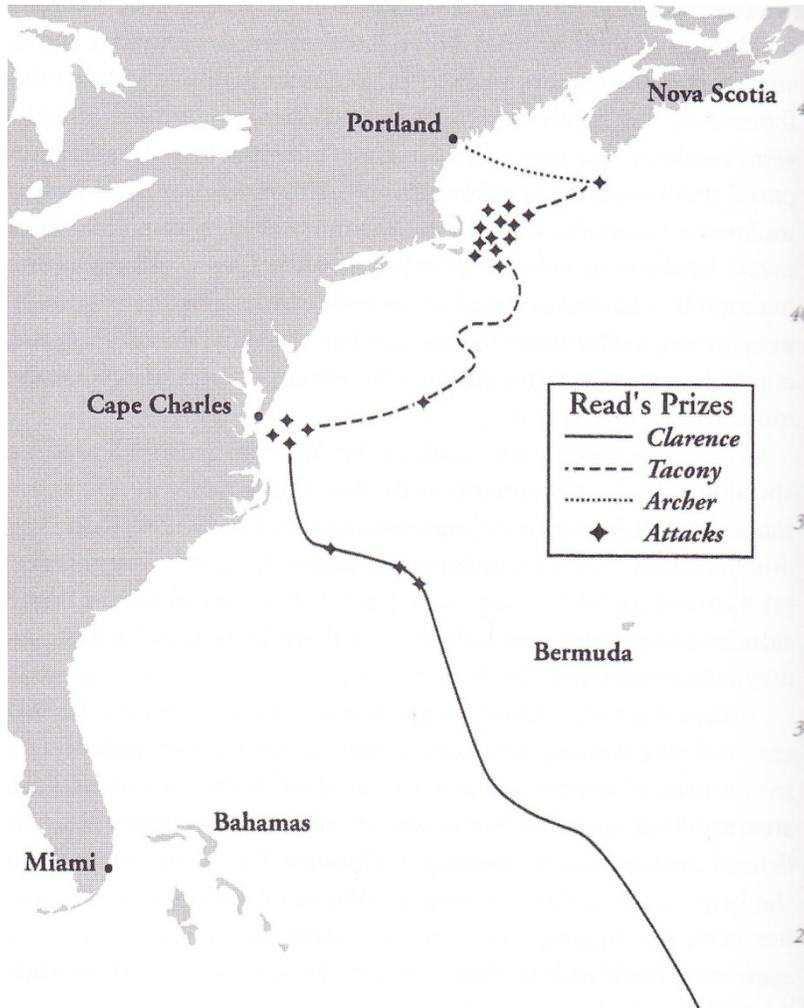


Figure 7: A chart of Read's captures

Appendix B: Battle of Portland Harbor Ships, Crew, and Volunteers

	<u>Confederate Crew (C.S.N.)</u>	<u>Original <i>Caleb Cushing</i> Crew (U.S.R.C.S.)</u>	<u>Pursuers aboard <i>Forest City</i></u>	<u>Pursuers aboard <i>Chesapeake</i></u>
Commander:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lt. Charles W. Read 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capt. George Clark, (deceased June 26) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capt. John Liscomb 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Naval Inspector William F. Leighton
Second-in-Command:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Masters Mate John E. Billups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lt. Dudley Davenport 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capt. Willet (civilian captain)
Officers or Persons of Military Significance:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Masters Mate J.W. Matherson (on board the <i>Archer</i>) • Quarter Gunner Nicholas B. Pryde • Engineer Eugene H. Brown 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seaman Byron S. Blish (accused of taking an oath to Confederates) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lt. James H. Merryman, U.S.R.C.S. • Lt. Richardson, U.S.R.C.S. (not captured) • Capt. Nathaniel Prime, 17th Maine (as Army commander) • Lt. Edward Collins, 17th Maine (as gunner) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Col. E. C. Mason, 7th Maine • “Old tar” (veteran of Farragut’s fleet and gunner)
Other Military Accounts:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seaman Robert Hunt (joined from <i>Byzantium</i>) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seaman Samuel A. Prince 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • John M. Gould, on leave
Civilians of Significance or with Accounts:	N/A	N/A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reuben Chandler, baggage master 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mayor Jacob McLellan • E. O. Haile, <i>Eastern Argus</i> • W. E. S. Whitman, <i>Daily Evening Courier</i>
Other Civilians:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Albert P. Bibber Bibber (prisoner) • Elbridge Titcomb (prisoner on board <i>Archer</i>) 	N/A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • John B. Coycle, agent-of-the-line 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Henry Fox, agent-of-the-line • John Trefethen, pilot
Others:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seaman Thomas Butters (joined from <i>Byzantium</i>) • Seaman James Kelley (joined from <i>Byzantium</i>) • 17 other enlisted C.S.N. sailors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 17 other enlisted cuttermen 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Civilian volunteers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Harrison Bird Brown, artist • Reverend J. Lovering, Park Street Church • John Green

Appendix C: Read's Captures on Cruise of *Clarence-Tacony-Archer*

<u>Ship Name</u>	<u>Class</u>	<u>Tons</u>	<u>Crew</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Cargo</u>	<u>Sailing From</u>	<u>Sailing To</u>	<u>Value (\$)</u>	<u>Fate</u>	Stevens 132
<i>Clarence</i>	Brig	250	7	May 6	250 sacks coffee, bales spun	Rio de Janiero	Baltimore	30,000	Commandeered (ultimately burned June 12)	

<i>Whistling Wind</i>	Bark	350	8	June 6		Philadelphia	New York	23,000	Burned (prisoners sent away)
<i>Mary Alvina</i>	Brig	250	8	June 8	Government Stores	Boston	New Orleans	50,000	Burned (Prisoners to <i>Kate Stewart</i>)
<i>Kate Stewart</i>	Schooner	about 200	7	June 12				7,000	Bonded (took away prisoners)
<i>M.A. Shindler</i>	Schooner	200	7	June 12		Port Royal	New York		Burned (Prisoners to <i>Kate Stewart</i>)
<i>Tacony</i>	Bark	450	10	June 12	Ballast	Port Royal	Philadelphia		Commandeered (ultimately burned June 25)
<i>Arabella</i>	Brig	225	6	June 12	Hides, [?], Coffee, to General Cargo	Aspinwell	New York	30,000	Bonded (American ship carrying cargo of a neutral owner)
<i>Umpire</i>	Brig	250	9	June 15	Sugar, molla[?]	S?	Boston		Burned
<i>Isaac Webb</i>	Ship	12.100	35	June 20	(740- 800) passengers	Liverpool	New York	40,000-60,000	Bonded
<i>Micawber</i>	Schooner	65	10	June 20	Fish	N/A	N/A		Burned, "Crew took their boats and went ashore...though our captain did not wish it"
<i>Byzantium</i>	Bark	1.050	14 - 22	June 21	1.000 tons coal	London	New York		Burned? (three crew member joined Confederates)
<i>Good Speed</i>	Bark	1.050	14	June 21		Londerry	New York		Burned
<i>Marengo</i>	Schooner	65	10	June 22	Fish	N/A	N/A		Burned (prisoners to <i>Florence</i>)
<i>Florence</i>	Schooner	65	10	June 22	Fish	N/A	N/A		Bonded (took 75 prisoners to New York)
<i>Ripple</i>	Schooner	65	10	June 22	Fish	N/A	N/A		Burned (prisoners to <i>Florence</i>)
<i>Rufus Choate</i>	Schooner	65	10	June 22	Fish	N/A	N/A		Burned (prisoners to <i>Florence</i>)
<i>Elizabeth Ann</i>	Schooner	65	10	June 22	Fish	N/A	N/A		Burned (prisoners to <i>Florence</i>)
<i>Adda</i>	Schooner	65	10	June 23	Fish	N/A	N/A		Burned (prisoners to <i>Shatemuc</i>)
<i>Wanderer</i>	Schooner	65	10	June 23	Fish	N/A	N/A		Burned (prisoners to <i>Shatemuc</i>)
<i>Shatemuc</i>	Ship	850		June 24	350 Emigrant Passengers	Liverpool	Boston	150,000	Bonded ("Very valuable vessel, sorry we could not burn her")
<i>Archer</i>	Schooner	65	10	June 24	Fish	N/A	N/A		Commandeered (ultimately captured by Union in Portland Harbor June 27)
<i>Caleb Cushing</i>	Revenue		30	June 27	N/A	N/A	N/A		Commandeered (ultimately scuttled)

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Figure 3: Maine Historical Society Library, Photograph from *The Rudder*. In Jones.

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