

The Other Union Navy

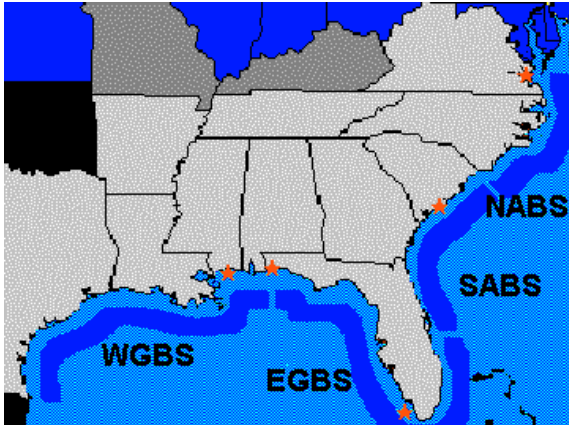
Geographical location, funding, and the attitude of the commanding officer created a blockading squadron unlike the others in the United States Navy during the American Civil War.

By Lewis L. Zervas 1/14/06 (rev 1/17/06)

Early in the Civil War, the U.S. Navy divided the nearly 3,500 miles of coastal area in the south into blockading squadrons. This was directly related to the “Anaconda Plan,” presented to President Lincoln by General Winfield Scott. Lincoln proclaimed the blockade on April 19, 1861. The idea was to strangle the Confederacy into submission by preventing exports, primarily cotton, and the import of war materials such as muskets, etc.

Dividing the Gulf Squadron

During the first year of the war, the entire U.S. coastal area of the Gulf of Mexico was under the jurisdiction of the Gulf Blockading Squadron. This was a massive area covering most of Florida (a large area in itself), Alabama, Louisiana,



Mississippi, and Texas.

On February 20, 1862, the Gulf Blockading Squadron was divided into two squadrons, West and East Gulf Blockading Squadrons.

Defining the Blockading Squadrons

Each blockading squadron was broken down into regional sectors with certain forces detailed to blockade each of the ports and the coastline in their sector. These forces generally reported to the most senior captain present at each location, who

in turn reported to the flag officer commanding that entire blockading squadron. In turn, the squadron commanders reported directly to the Navy Department.

The East Gulf Blockading Squadron

The East Gulf Blockading Squadron (EGBS) spanned from Cape Canaveral on the east coast of Florida (adjoining the South Atlantic Blockading Squadron), around the Keys, up to Pensacola on the panhandle of upper west Florida (adjoining the West Gulf Blockading Squadron). The area around Bahamas as well as Cuba and other Caribbean islands (well known stopping points for Confederate blockade runners) was also in this squadrons patrol area.

Headquarters for the EGBS was at Key West. In late July 1864 and for a brief period of about a month the squadron's headquarters was relocated to Egmont Key at the mouth of Tampa Bay. This was during a fever outbreak in Key West, while the squadron was under the command of Captain Greene.

The EGBS commanders (flag officers/admirals) were:

William W. McKean, 20 Feb 1862
J.L. Lardner, 4 Jun 1862
Theodorus Bailey, 9 Dec 1862
Theodore P. Greene, 7 Aug 1864 (pro tem)
Cornelius K. Stribling, 14 Oct 1864

After the Civil War, the EGBS was merged back into the Gulf Squadron (13 Jul 1865).

Flag Officer Theodorus Bailey

Probably the most significant change to the way the U.S. Navy handled the blockade in Florida was the appointment in November, 1862 of Theodorus Bailey (*photo*) as the squadron's Flag Officer. Despite poor health, Bailey had requested active duty for which he got this appointment. Until he left the squadron in the spring of 1864 due to failing health, Bailey set the squadron's policy which set it apart from the other squadrons.

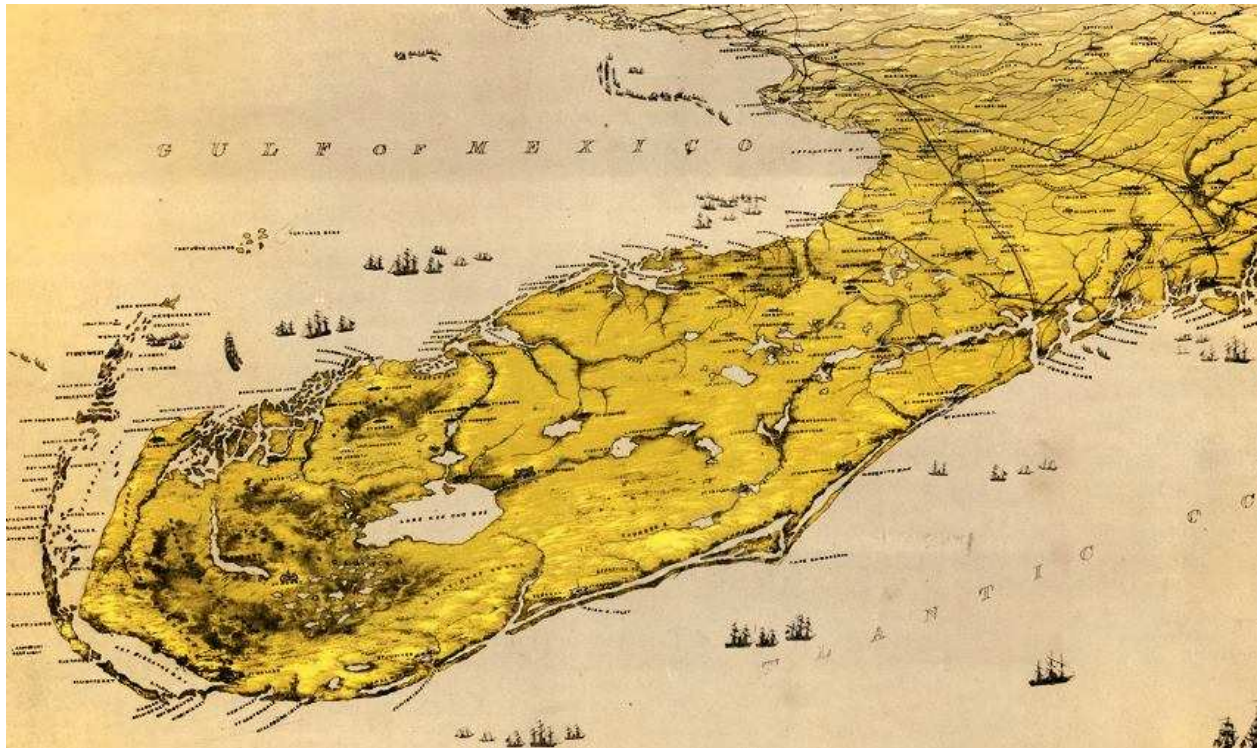


Bailey, joining the Navy at the age of 13 as a midshipman, brought with him some impressive credentials, one of which was the way he handled the surrender of New Orleans (*drawing, right*). Bailey also had a very impressive history in the U.S. Navy, going back to well before the Civil War.



Florida's Coastal Areas

Many visitors to Florida today do not see the Florida that existed in the mid-1800's. There are still remote areas virtually untouched by development, but they are off the beaten path. Wide sandy beaches with a backdrop of multi-story condos and hotels are what many visitors now see.



To understand what most of Florida looked like during the Civil War, one would have to look at one of the remote areas. The population of Florida was 140,000 (1861). Even the current day major seaport and city, Tampa, had a population of only 3,500.

Florida's coastline (472 miles of Atlantic coastline and 674 miles of Gulf coastline) is lined with islands, some natural islands, but most are barrier islands. Almost all of the islands are low lying, many having an elevation of only three or four feet above sea level. Most of the natural beaches on the Gulf of Mexico are narrow (distance from the water's edge to the vegetation). On the Atlantic side, the beaches are somewhat wider.

The most common vegetation includes palmettos, pine trees, palm trees, and mangroves. There are also grasses and other low vegetation, often with barbs causing havoc with those going barefoot.



Traveling through these islands as well as the coastal mainland was difficult. The heavy vegetation included palmettos, plant that ranged from a few feet up to six to eight feet in height. Palmetto plants had leaf stems have fine barbs pointing toward the base of the plant.

Animals in Florida included the alligator, panther, bear, wild pig, and deer, as well as various smaller animals. Snake varieties included the diamond back rattler (often well over six feet in length) and water moccasins. Lastly, the multitude of insects, including the infamous "no-see-ums," to make life uncomfortable.

Most of the ports in the EGBS area had shallow water many less than six feet in depth. (Today's seaports in areas such as Miami and Tampa have been dredged to accommodate large ships.) Key West and Egmont Key, both under Union control, were able to have large ships dock at the port.

Tampa Town was under the Confederate flag for most of the war, but often attacked by the Federals. Larger ships were able to navigate some

distance up Tampa Bay, but could not dock at the mainland.

Living History and the EGBS

A unique opportunity exists for those groups involved in living history events and reenacting when portraying expeditionary forces ashore along the coast of Florida.

By comparison, many of the land attacks by the U.S. Navy in the other states in the South, generally consisted of large numbers. Forces were often made up from the crews of many ships forming a Naval brigade. Many of the expeditions were in conjunction with U.S. Army units, constituting a massive force.

With a relatively small population in Florida, the EGBS was proportionally small both in the number of ships, the size of the ships, and the number of men. Likewise for the U.S. Army. Much of the Army's fighting force was formed in Florida with a significant number of men that were "contrabands" (former slaves).

Raiding parties from gunboats composed the majority of raids in Florida. These expeditions could be as short as a few hours, overnight, or lasting up to almost a week away from their ships.

Some raids were in conjunction with the small local forces of the U.S. Army, and other raids the U.S. Navy provided the transportation for the Army to and from skirmishes with the Confederates.

The Navy also stationed men at various points along Florida's coast for short periods of time. Several of the barrier islands along the coast became home to Unionist citizens, army units, and key observation points for sailors.

There is no detailed information on exactly how the crews were stationed ashore. Some of the islands had a few small buildings, usually associated with lighthouses. According to some diaries, small towns were created, consisting of a few small buildings and tents.

The natural channel at Cedar Key allowed all but the larger ships to dock at the port. This area was under Confederate control early in the war, but as time went by, the town gradually came under Federal control. Cedar Key was the only port in the EGBS that had a railroad terminus.

Shallow water surrounded the island and mainland along entire west coast of Florida, with the exceptions of a few channels described at the ports above. This was an advantage for the Confederates smaller blockade runners, but

limited the Union's gunboats to staying well off shore.



Ships and Men

The geographical location of this squadron, its location in a highly unpopulated state, had an influence on funding. The EGBS was rightly so lower on the priority list for ships, both in size and quantity. There were no capital warships, and no ironclads.

For the most part, the squadron consisted of gunboats and supply ships, as well as assorted smaller, former Confederate blockade runners purchased at the prize court.

Some of the gunboats were converted steam powered commercial ships (i.e., ferry boats) as well as a few of the war-built gunboats of the Senneca class, and a few sailing ships (drawing of the bark U.S.S. *Ethan Allen*, right). Most of the supply ships and tenders were sailing ships.



The crews were made up of enlisted sailors, and a number of local "contrabands" as well as other civilians that were either pilots or assisted in shore expeditions as they knew the area. A few of the ships had small contingents of marines stationed on board, often about five to ten marines.

Unlike the Army, The U.S. Navy was integrated. Almost every ship had African Americans (*photo, right*) serving on board. Many had joined the navy in the North, and others (often "contrabands") were taken on board the local patrol areas.



There have been instances where young boys became crew members of ships. One instance took place in the Tampa Bay area in 1862. The crew of the U.S.S. *Tahoma* took on Christopher Whitehurst (13) and his brother Winfield (10) after their father John was killed by Secessionists.



Expeditionary forces from the ships on blockading duty were quite common. As most of the gunboats had too deep a draft, the usually did not come close to shore. The expeditionary force was made up of members of the crew and sent in the ships launches. If more than one gunboat was on the locations, the force and launches usually came from both ships. (Up to about half of the crew could be used for these forces.) Some forces were as few as a half dozen men. If there were any Marines on board, they were usually used for these expeditions.

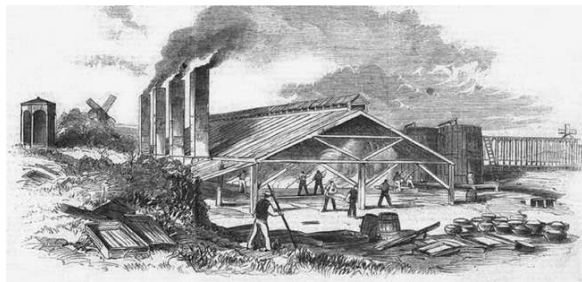


The expeditionary force might be out for the day, overnight, or perhaps several days. One expedition with men from two gunboats lasted five days and covered 75 miles. Most often, they would patrol the waterways, going up river

looking for Confederates and/or blockade runners. If they went ashore, they usually did not travel far inland unless there was a specific objective. One raid was about 15 miles over land, to reach a specific location to destroy ships on a river.

There are also reports where navy personnel went ashore to stay for several days, camping near the water. They would set up a defensive area. It is not known to what extent these forces built their camp as to any shelter such as tents or lean-tos, use of canvas, etc.

The need for salt in the South caused “salt works” to be a frequent target for the Union Navy. Two resources, salt water and pine trees were used to generate the salt. The abundant salt water



was boiled using the nearby pine trees for fuel.

These “works” were located along the coasts, more often in the shallow bays out of site of the blockaders. Word of the location of these works was usually brought to the attention of the navy by the Unionist citizens. Early in the war, the navy would send a raiding party ashore to destroy these works. However, they soon became a trap for the raiding sailors, so the navy changed their policy on how to destroy them. They simply shelled the works and adjacent areas before sending larger, well armed forces ashore. Once on the site and cleared of the enemy, the crews destroyed all of the buildings, wagons (used to transport the salt), water troughs, kettles, and other fixtures. They set fire to what could be burned, used heavy sledge hammers to destroy equipment, and move what could not be manually destroyed to deep water.

For the most part, the Confederate States did not have any warships operating in this area. The primary duty of the blockaders, to prevent operations of blockade runners by capturing them on the sea was minimal. Most of the blockade runners in this area were smaller ships, most under sail power. Being small, the blockade runners had the advantage of many inlets and

broad bays, most of which was inaccessible by the deep draft gunboats of the Union Navy.



The blockade runners had a major disadvantage, that of sail versus steam. Many of these small blockade runners were overrun and captured by the Union Navy and others driven ashore. Others were found in the bays on the rivers by the expeditionary forces of the navy, most being destroyed at their anchorage, often loaded with cargo.

Naval Stations

In addition the headquarters at Key West, the U.S. Navy’s EGBS had several other stations in its area. Egmont Key at the mouth of Tampa Bay, for example, was located on an island. At the beginning of the war, it had a lighthouse and a small building. As the war progressed, additional buildings were constructed as the navy saw a need for using Egmont Key as a supply station. It was ideally situated far enough from the Confederate held mainland. By 1864, the Navy built a short pier, as the nearby natural channel was deep enough to accommodate any ship the Navy had.

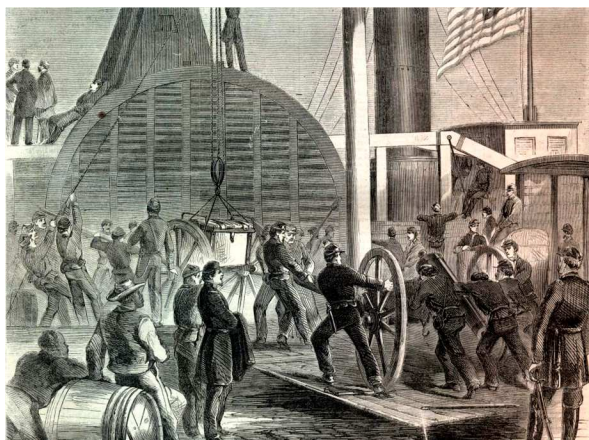
The Navy utilized the lighthouse at Egmont Key as well as the one on Seahorse Key as an observation post, watching for blockade runners. There is no mention as to where the sailors stayed while ashore, but it could likely be that they used the small buildings that had been home to the lighthouse keepers prior to the war. (Most of the lights were deactivated by the Confederates at the beginning of the war.)

Some diaries of Floridians mention that several of the small islands off the coast were used to house Unionists (pro-union citizens) and contrabands, often in tent towns. There is mention of U.S. Army companies stationed there as well as the occasional naval forces. Keep in mind that the deep draft gunboats could not dock directly at many of these islands.

The Supply Route

Little has been told about the Navy's supply lines that existed during the Civil War. Many of the ships that were on patrol duty would remain within their small patrol sector for a month or more. Steam powered ships required coal. All ships required food and fresh water for the crews, as well as replenishing the needs of the ship, including ammunition.

Larger ships in the sectors had a tender assigned to them. The tender was usually a sailing ship, and carried additional coal for the steamers. The tenders would routinely travel for replenishment. Mail, payroll, and orders were usually carried by the supply ships, for distribution to those on patrol.



In addition to Navy supply ships, private transports operated, both for profit and under Navy contract. They would carry paying passengers as well as cargo for the Navy and Army. Some of these ships were steamers, others sailers. The runs frequently were off "schedule" due to breakdowns with the steam machinery, and wind with the sailing ships.



Florida feeds the Confederacy

Florida was sometimes called the "Breadbasket of the Confederacy" or the Confederacy's Warehouse." The state's major contribution to the Confederate war effort was the supplying of much-needed beef, pork, corn, and molasses to feed the southern armies.

The relatively sheltered nature of the state's northern interior, free from most large federal raids, allowed cattle to be raised and food crops to be grown. The other commodity that Floridians produced was salt, which was necessary to preserve meat. The south's economy and military efforts were closely tied together, since much of the economic activity directly supported the Confederate war effort.

Southern economic targets in Florida were attacked in small Union military operations, such as cavalry raids in south Florida to seize cattle, navy raids against saltworks along the coast, and the Union naval blockade to prevent the import and export of goods. To protect cattle in south Florida, southern authorities formed small military units called the "cow cavalry."

Unionists in Florida

When Florida seceded from the Union, a number of citizens knew that it was a grave mistake. Loyalty to the Union continued among some citizens. Business people and merchants who relied on northern trade feared a disruption of commerce. Farmers and cattle grazers were often more concerned with supporting their families than with the political issues of the North or South. The Confederate government forcibly drafted these men or confiscate parts of their herds or crops and turned some against the Confederate cause.

Florida's "Unionists" were usually forced to leave their homes and flee as refugees to coastal towns that were occupied by federal troops. There, authorities organized pro-Union supporters into two regiments of cavalry (designating them the 1st and 2nd Florida Cavalry) and a unit of artillery.

Army Operations in Florida

In January 1861, as Florida seceded from the Union, U.S. Army officers stationed at Pensacola and Key West moved quickly to ensure that two

key forts in Florida would remain in Union hands.

By securing and holding Fort Pickens near Pensacola and Fort Taylor in Key West, along with Fort Jefferson in the Dry Tortugas, the Union had access to strategic outposts in the deep South.



Over the course of the war, the Union army increased its occupation of most of Florida's coastal forts and towns. Unlike other areas in the South, Florida saw minimal large-scale fighting. With the exception of the Olustee campaign and several small expeditions into the interior, the Union army usually remained near its forts and occupied cities.



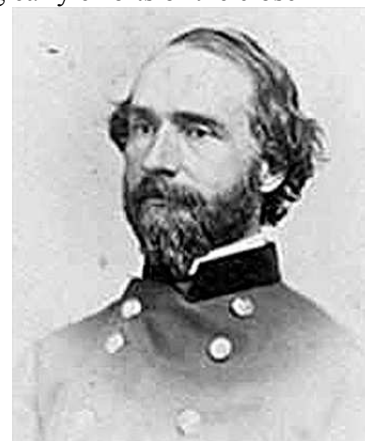
A variety of northern units served in Florida, from the New York Zouaves to the Union army's African American regiments. In the latter two years of the war, an increasing number of black units were involved in the Union operations in Florida.

Army – Navy Relationship

If there is one thing that set the EGBS apart from the other squadrons it was the cooperation between the U.S. Navy and the U.S. Army. This was evident at the upper command level as well as down to the Army company commanders and gunboat captains.

The squadron's commanders knew of the civil strife, especially along the west coast of Florida during the Civil War. Unionists fueled the fire. Their loyalty to the Union and the knowledge of local waters and terrain aided the Navy greatly. A number of Unionists were employed by the Navy as guides and pilots. Some joined the Navy and later transferred into the local Army regiments.

Perhaps to most unusual thing the EGBS did was to create the Army's 2nd Florida Cavalry (U.S.). Following early efforts of the close communication between the squadron's commander, Admiral Bailey, and the Army's commander, General Woodbury, (photo, right) various expeditions were conducted in southwest Florida.



Through the support of the squadron, the Army supplied men as well as Unionist refugees, creating the Florida Rangers, (Bailey called them "Refugee Rangers"). Important to the success of any operation of the Army in Florida was that of the Navy providing supplies and transportation.

Although there was a number of people involved in the creation of the 2nd Florida, including a number of U.S. Navy officers and Navy employed civilians, perhaps one name stands out, that of Acting Master Edmund C. Weeks. Weeks, requested by General Woodbury, was released by Admiral Bailey, appointed to the rank of Major by General Woodbury, and given command of the 2nd Florida Cavalry, which consisted of 739 men.

Week's was experienced as a soldier in as much as being able to fight on shore, set up

perimeters, post skirmishers, and many of the other duties of an experienced Army officer. This also held true to a number of naval officers in this squadron.

Conclusion

Living History Information

The main focus of this document is how the United States' military operations in Florida were conducted. For the most part, historical reference to events have not been included herein. The object here is to focus on how the EGBS operated.

- What we have learned here is that with the exception of the Olustee Campaign, no other major conflicts took place. (This being defined as a significant number of troops involved on both sides, usually resulting in some significant number of casualties.)



- We also see that all U.S. Army troop movements were made through the use of U.S. Navy ships. This holds true from the beginning of the war through to the end.
- Battles and skirmishes took place with various combinations of U.S. Forces, Army only, Navy only, or both as a single force. Most of these conflicts took place on coastal areas of Florida's rivers.
- The U.S. Navy's gunboats often sent expeditionary forces (sailors and marines) ashore in ship's launches. Often these small forces were made up of men from one gunboat, but there was a number of occasions when two or three gunboats amassed an expeditionary force. These raids could last with the crews being away from their ships anywhere from several hours to almost a week. All documentation points to that then men were always transported to the shore in launches due

to the deep draft of the gunboats in addition to prevent them from enemy fire from the shore or even capture.

- Raids were conducted for several reasons: Destroy facilities such as fortifications and salt works; search for blockade runners on bays and rivers; attack known encampments. Much of the information supplied to the Navy came from Unionists or escaped slaves.
- While on raids, the naval force would destroy enemy works, spike guns or move them to deep water, and take important papers.
- On some of the raids, the landing force was known to take fresh water, animals (live and preserved), and crops, both stored or reaped.
- Sailors and marines spent overnight on expeditions, most likely sleeping in the launches. However, documentation on several of the raids describe some sort of defenses were put up, especially for encampments that would be overnight or planned extended stays of several days.



- Naval ships were used for transportation for Unionists and escaped slaves as well as transporting prisoners. Captured prizes (blockade runners) were usually sent to Key West to prize court.
- Several of the stations under Federal control had tent towns for the Unionists, local Army units, and also housed supplies for the inhabitants. Navy ships often visited these areas and provided transportation to civilians on certain occasions. Navy personnel also manned several areas as observation posts and security where Army troops were not available. Most notably were the lighthouses at the entrances to several of the key bays and channels. - Lew