

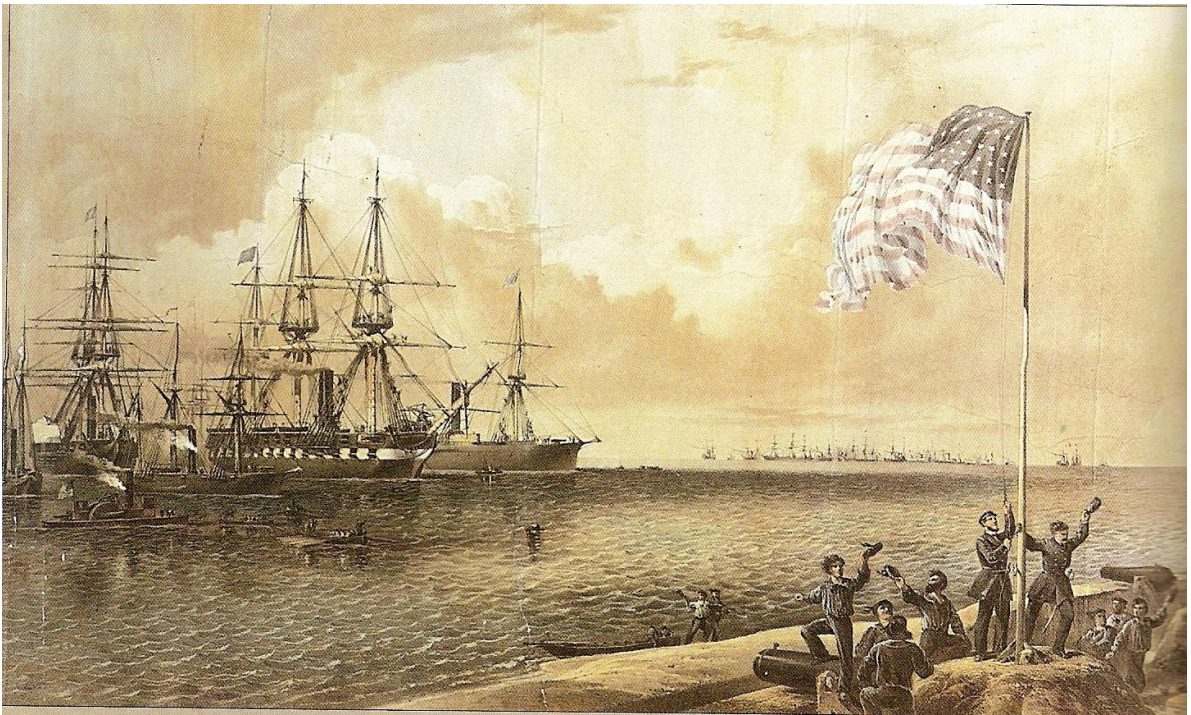
Monroe County Civil War Roundtable

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A Great Naval Expedition of the War



Federal soldiers and sailors give three cheers as they replace the palmetto banner of South Carolina with the Union flag over Fort Walker on Nov. 7, 1861.

This campaign and victory for the Union greatly aided in reviving Northern spirits after a first summer of the war filled with demoralizing defeats.

[This information is from the Time-Life book *The Coastal War*.]

In late October of 1861, a massive fleet of 66 warships and transports carrying 12,000 troops set sail from Fort Monroe with orders to secure Port Royal Sound, a strategic anchorage midway between Charleston and Savannah. Though the Federal ships were scattered by a gale off Cape Hatteras, all but four managed to rendezvous opposite Forts Walker and Beauregard, the two strongholds guarding the entrance to the sound.

At 9:30 am on November 7, fifteen warships under Flag Officer Samuel F. DuPont steamed into the sound. General Thomas Drayton, the Confederate commander at Port Royal, noted that “there was not a ripple upon the broad expanse of water to disturb the accuracy of fire from the decks of that magnificent armada”. The ships sailed around the bay in an ellipse, riddling the two forts with up to 24 shells per

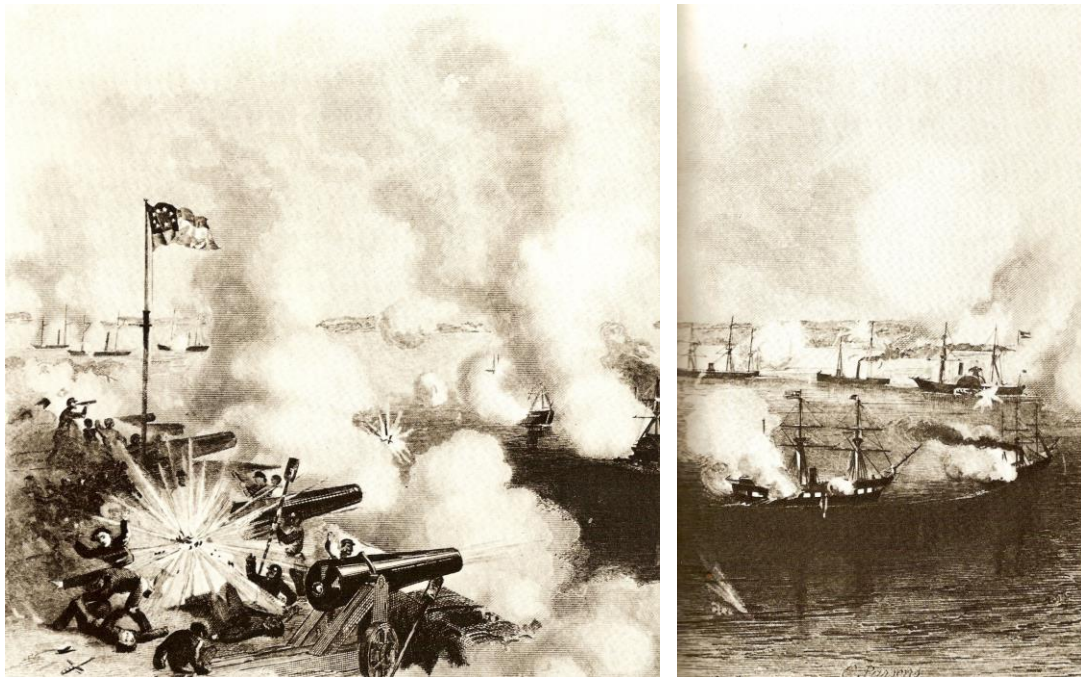
minute. The rounds fired by the frigate *Wabash*, reported a shipboard observer, kicked up pillars of smoke on shore that looked “as if we had suddenly raised from the dust a grove of poplars” .

The Confederates gamely returned fire but found their armament unequal to the task. Some guns were fouled by outsized shells, bowled over by their own recoil, or blown apart by defective fuses; several batteries simply ran out of ammunition. Worst of all, the enemy’s circling tactic deprived the gunners of fixed targets.

Within five hours the defenders were fleeing to the mainland. General Thomas Sherman’s forces then landed to take over the forts. Private Charles Caldwell marched with the Federals into Fort Walker to discover that “many of the dead were half-buried where they fell; guns were dismounted, army wagons smashed. Knapsacks, blankets and rifles lay in confusion all around”.

The U.S. Navy had secured a choice supply base for its blockading squadron, and the army now controlled a string of coastal islands from which it could threaten the Confederates’ interior and additional strong points along the Atlantic shore. [End of quote.]

Incumbent in all this drama was that presenter David Wiley’s beloved 8th Maine was one of the forces on these warships and participated in not only this campaign, but moved on down the coast and eventually assisted in the burning of Jacksonville, Florida, a significant port for the Confederacy. Lincoln’s daring and even controversial decision to blockade the Southern ports would eventually result in one of the larger success stories of the Union during the early years of the war in the eastern theater.



Confederate defenders in Fort Walker (left) trade cannon fire with Federal warships circling in Port Royal Sound (right).

Among the warships was the U.S.S. *Pocahontas*, whose captain, Commander Percival Drayton, was the brother of the Confederate commander, Brigadier General Thomas F. Drayton, yet another instance of brother vs. brother.

Several Upcoming Events at the Indiana Historical Society in Indianapolis

There is an especially rich selection of programs at the IHS over the next few weeks that are directly related to the Civil War:

Jan. 27 2-4 pm Noted Lincoln scholar Harold Holzer will discuss his new book, *Abraham Lincoln in the*

Collections of the Indiana Historical Society. FREE

Jan. 28 4-6 pm Sharon Kirk Clifton explores the impact of the war on women in *At Home and In Harm's Way: The Role of Indiana Women in the Civil War*. \$12 public, \$10 members

Feb. 12 7-8:30 pm Examine the 16th president through images from the IHS collection in *Building an American Icon: Creation of the Lincoln Legend*. FREE (This program is held in the White River Library, Greenwood, Indiana.)

Ongoing thru March 30 *The Faces of Lincoln: Lincoln's Assassination and Trial of Conspirators*. Photo and artifact exhibit, 4th floor gallery. FREE

For more info, call 317-323-1882 or go to www.indianahistory.org

Supporting Our Soldiers

Member and hospitality chair Deborah Cronin was so moved by the recent Bloomington Herald-Times articles on returning soldier Dustin Jolly after a tour of duty in Iraq that she just picked up the phone and called him. As a group, those attending the January meeting signed a card to Dustin expressing our thanks for his service and for his safe return, and our wishes for a return to normalcy now.

Deborah has proposed that the roundtable pursue this form of troop support with others in our community who have or are serving in foreign wars. The idea was heartily approved by the members attending. If you know someone, have a comment or suggestion of your own or would like to assist Deborah in exploring this form of troop support, please contact her at the number to the right.

A Message from Your Roundtable President

As the end of our second year as a formal group approaches, it should be noted that the election of a new slate of officers is scheduled for the April meeting. The bylaws adopted last year limit the term of an officer to two years, and the end of that term is approaching for me and for all of us on the "board".

I cannot begin to express the satisfaction and sheer fun that being your president has been for me. Not only have I learned a great many things and met some truly wonderful and endlessly interesting people along the way, but the experience has provided me a springboard from which I have branched out into other areas of local and regional history pursuits.

I encourage any of you who have enjoyed this roundtable as I have to consider stepping up and helping us move it forward. While I do not intend to "abandon ship", it is time for someone with perhaps some fresh ideas to take the reins. I will assist in any way I can, both in a transition period and down the road as a plain, old member.

Our officer "corps" is small, as indicated in the box below, and those of us who have been working together have developed, I believe I can safely say, a respect and appreciation of each other that extends beyond the confines of "second Tuesdays".

If you feel that you might consider a position on the executive board, please let us know. We will be happy to answer questions, explain the "rules of the road" and give our honest and considerably biased opinion of the MCCWR.

Steve Rolfe

Contact Information

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Call any of the above people for questions, suggestions or comments regarding the Roundtable.