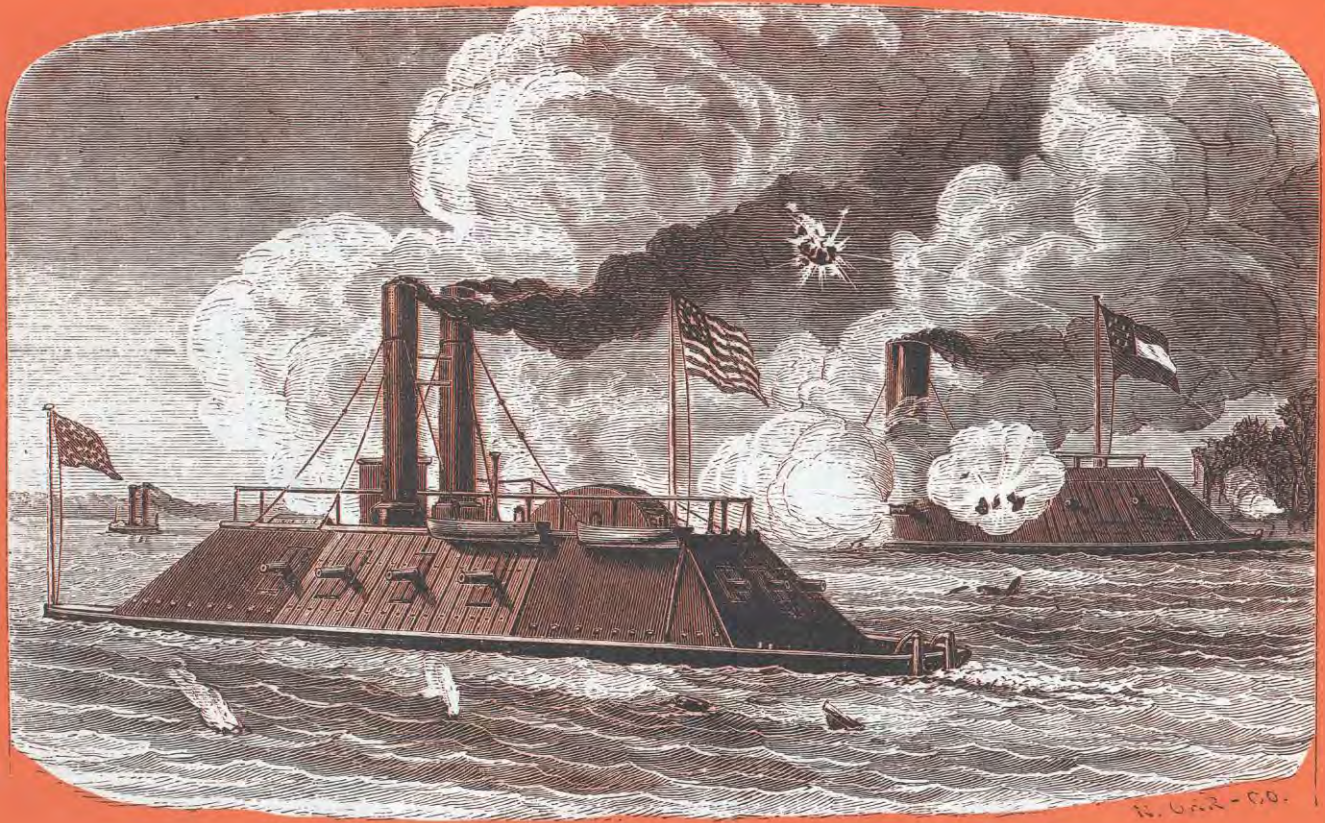


From the Editors of **Civil War Times ILLUSTRATED**

35 cents

# The Battle of ARKANSAS POST



Federal gunboats such as these were instrumental in the capture of Fort Hindman at Arkansas Post (*Battles & Leaders*)

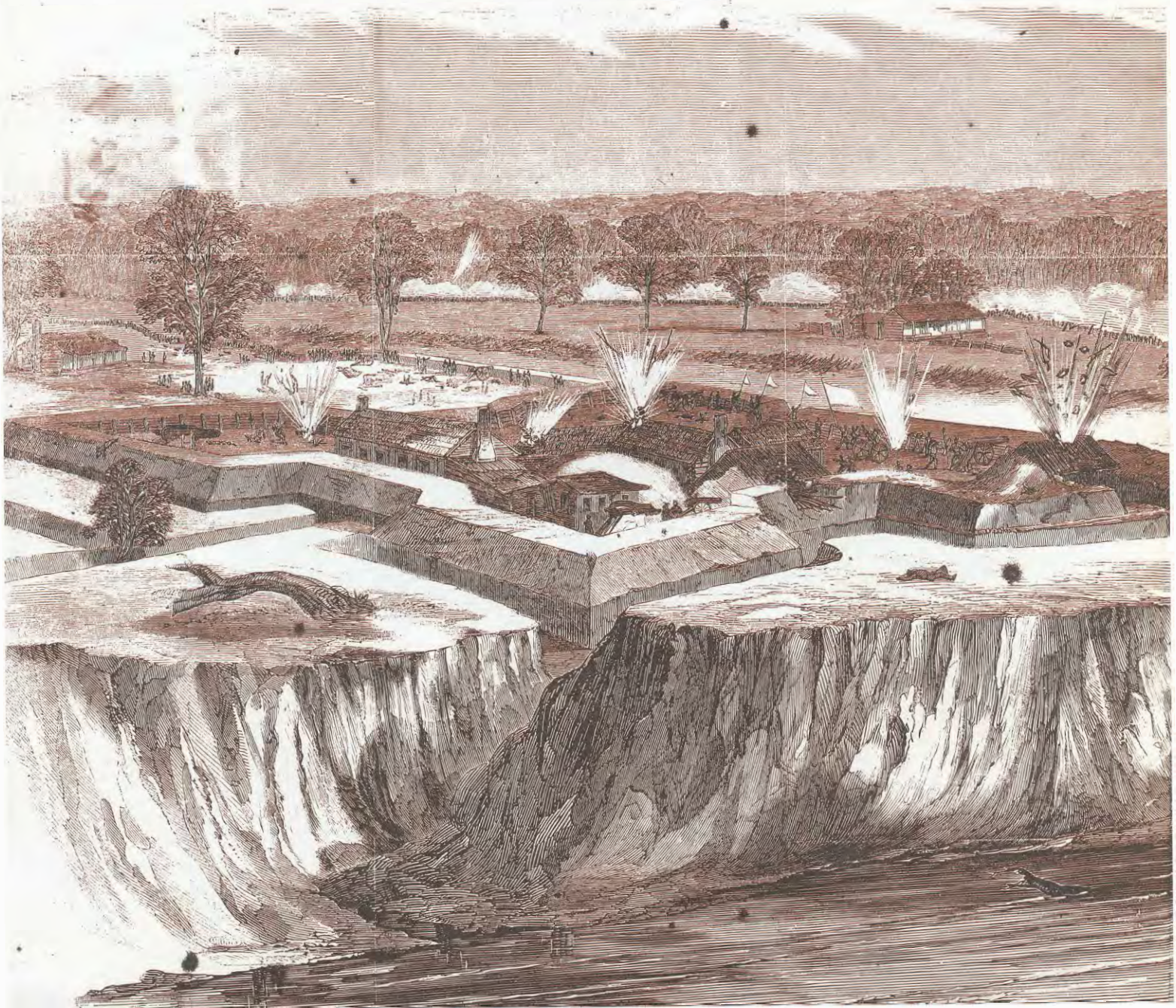
A Souvenir Booklet of the Land-Water Attack  
That Cost the Confederates an Important Fort



# POST OF ARKANSAS

*Here, on January 10-11, 1863, an important Confederate strongpoint on the Arkansas fell to a Federal amphibious force.*

By Robert S. Huffstot



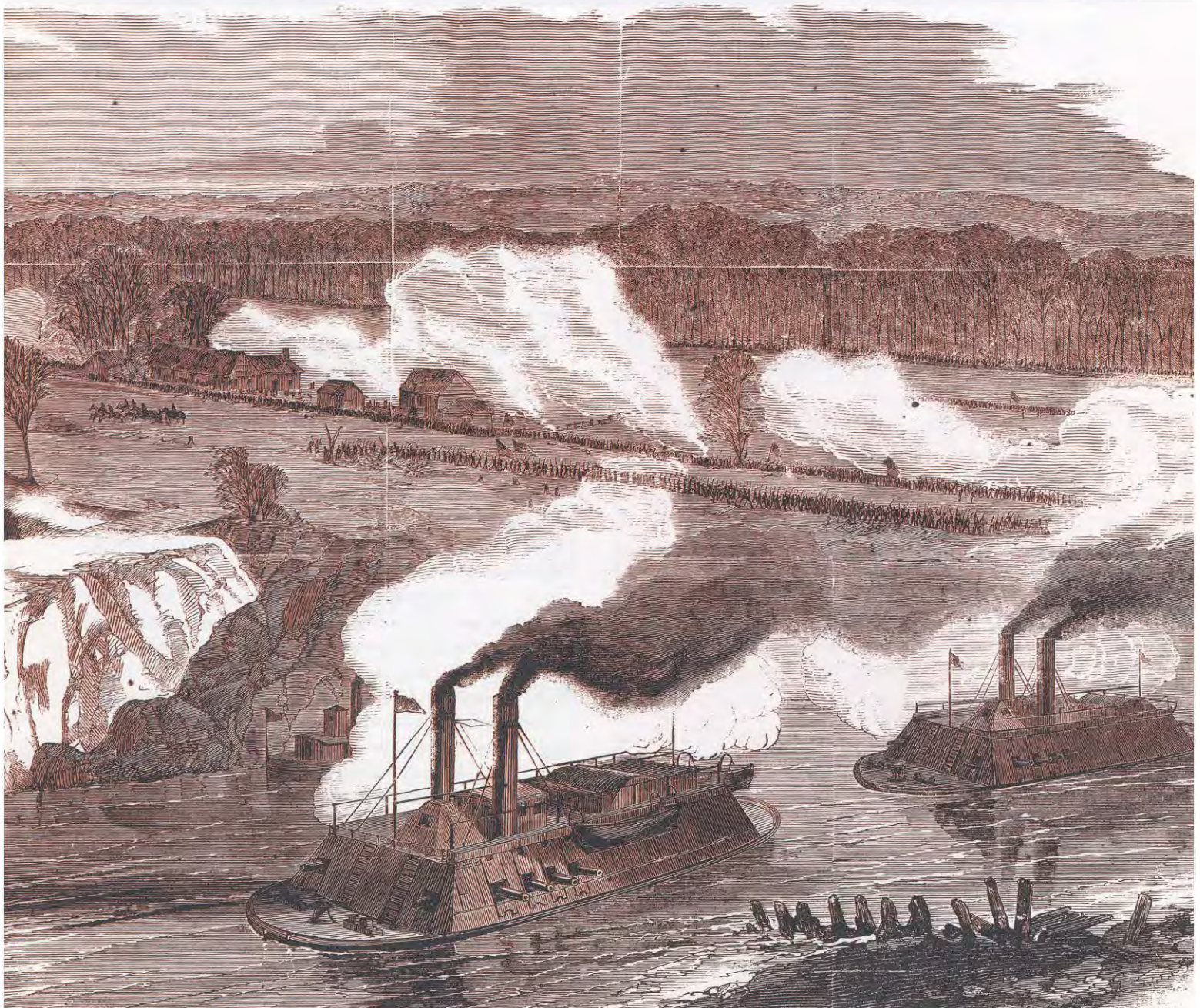


**R**IVERBOATS OF ALL KINDS clustered thick along the muddy banks of Milliken's Bend on the Mississippi River, just above Vicksburg. They rocked at their moorings while rain lashed the dark water and long fans of low-blowing smoke further deepened a gloomy night. In the cabin of the U. S. Navy's command boat, *Black Hawk*, three men regarded each other with wary eyes and planned what a later generation would call an amphibious operation. The date was January 4, 1863. The Federal Army and Navy were about to assault a Confederate garrison at an insignificant hamlet called Post of Arkansas.

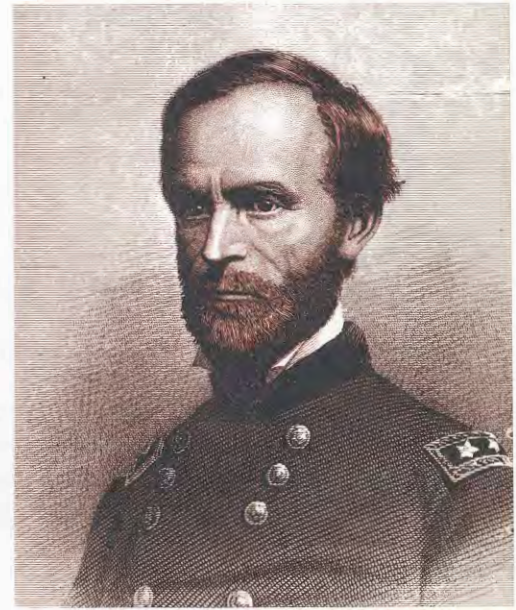
Major General John A. McClernand, tall and piratical in appearance, red-haired Major General William T. Sherman, and black-bearded Rear Admiral David D. Porter had at least two things in

common: each possessed a violent temper and nerves going raw under the abrasion of recent events. Their mutual presence at Milliken's Bend was a result of some complex political infighting that had begun in October of 1862. The Western Campaign had not produced the hoped-for results. Vicksburg, clearly the key to the area, had not fallen in the summer and a more extensive effort was obviously required. McClernand, recently on leave in Washington, had sought out President Lincoln and Secretary of War Edwin McM. Stanton with a striking proposal. Let him, he requested, recruit new regiments in Indiana, Iowa, and his native Illinois, then lead them to the capture

*The investment of Fort Hindman, Arkansas Post, by Federal troops under Major General John A. McClernand and the bombardment by Union gunboats, commanded by Rear Admiral David D. Porter. (Sketched by W. R. McComas for "Frank Leslie's")*







LEFT TO RIGHT: Rear Admiral David D. Porter, Major General Ulysses S. Grant, and Major General William T. Sherman.

Grant was over-all commander of Arkansas Post expedition, Porter commanded Naval forces, and Sherman led an army corps.

of Vicksburg. McClernand was not a trained soldier, but a powerful Democratic politician (a former Congressman) and an able recruiter. He had commanded a division at Fort Donelson and at Shiloh where he proved to be a bold and hard fighter. On balance, then, both President and Secretary had approved his idea and sent him west armed with secret orders to carry out the assignment. However, in a somewhat shamefaced acknowledgment that the procedure was irregular, they did not inform either the department commander, Major General Ulysses S. Grant, or General in Chief Henry W. Halleck.

THE operation could not, of course, be entirely concealed. Halleck soon knew enough about it to warn Grant that something was up. He also managed to pass along his impression that the question of an independent command for McClernand might be finessed. Washington was anxious to have the new troops and they were being forwarded to Memphis as fast as possible. When and if McClernand joined them, he would have to have a responsible post, of course. But in the meantime. . . .

This was warning enough for U. S. Grant and he had at once determined to make use of the troops while he could. His own Army of the Tennessee would go down the Mississippi Central Railroad towards Jackson. The Confederates, he reasoned, would have to concentrate against him. As soon as they did, Sherman, with the new regiments, would drop downriver, pick up Frederick Steele's division from Helena, Arkansas, and drive at Vicksburg from Chickasaw Bayou on the Yazoo.

The plan had misfired. Grant himself had been cut off when his supply lines and communications were devastated by two daring Southern cavalry raids. He had to fall back; and Sherman, although he knew of the loss of the Union supply base at Holly Springs, had determined to push on. He put his troops ashore at Johnson's plantation on the Yazoo on the day after Christmas, and on December 29 had been repulsed at Chickasaw Bayou with heavy loss. Sherman and Porter had tried hard to retrieve the disaster, but the weather turned bad and before they could mount a second effort McClernand had arrived, brandishing his secret orders and declaring himself commander of everyone at Milliken's Bend.



The "Blackhawk"



THESE Union commanders thus met on January 4 in an atmosphere charged with dissatisfaction and frustration. Sherman had not yet become the crisp, slashing tactician of the Atlanta Campaign. His record was spotted with events that to the public looked like failures: relief from an important command in 1862, surprise at Shiloh, and now blame for the bloody defeat at Chickasaw Bayou. Newspaper correspondents were fond of calling him "Crazy Sherman."

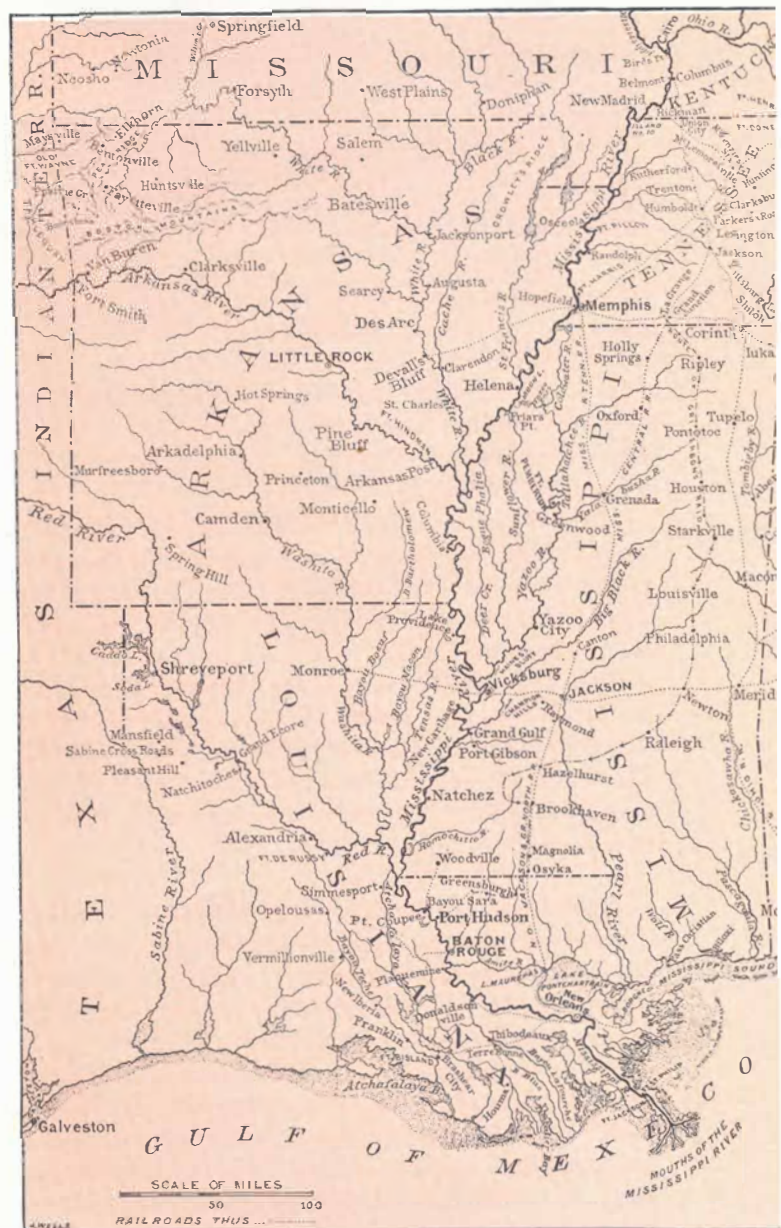
McClermand, for his part, was driven by an inordinate ambition to achieve military glory and was tense with a gnawing suspicion that he was being used. At the age of 51, he had just taken a wife and brought her down the river with him, which may have made him even more touchy. He was furious when he arrived at Memphis and found that his troops had been kidnapped for someone else's campaign, and he was determined to reassert his authority.

Contentious, opinionated David Porter had been promoted to the river command on October 15, 1862, over the heads of twenty-three seniors. He was well aware that his appointment was an experiment on the part of Secretary of the Navy Gideon Welles. To hold his post, he would have to produce results and, so far, the only visible ones were less than happy. *Cairo*, one of his precious ironclads, had been sunk by torpedoes in the Yazoo, and Lieutenant Commander William Gwin, the brilliant commander of *Benton*, had been killed in an attack on the Confederate forts at Drumgould's Bluff.

THE conferees agreed that some employment should be found for the 30,000 plus troops then on hand. McClermand vetoed in advance any immediate resumption of operations against Vicksburg itself. This, he pronounced, was "too big a boot." Sherman suggested that a useful accomplishment would be to reduce the Confederate fort located at the village of Post of Arkansas some fifty miles up the Arkansas River from its confluence with the Mississippi. This fort and its garrison menaced the Federal base at Helena, Arkansas and the river supply line down from Memphis. In recent weeks Rebels had attacked several steamers in the area; one vessel had vanished outright. Furthermore, the post covered Little Rock from attack up the Arkansas River, where it was rumored that a powerful ram was being built. Actually this report was false, but no one knew it at the time and, in view of the disruption wrought by the ironclad *Arkansas* the previous summer, no one was inclined to take chances. Post of Arkansas would have to be eliminated some day, Sherman concluded. With part of the troops and several Navy vessels, McClermand should be able to capture it without too much difficulty.

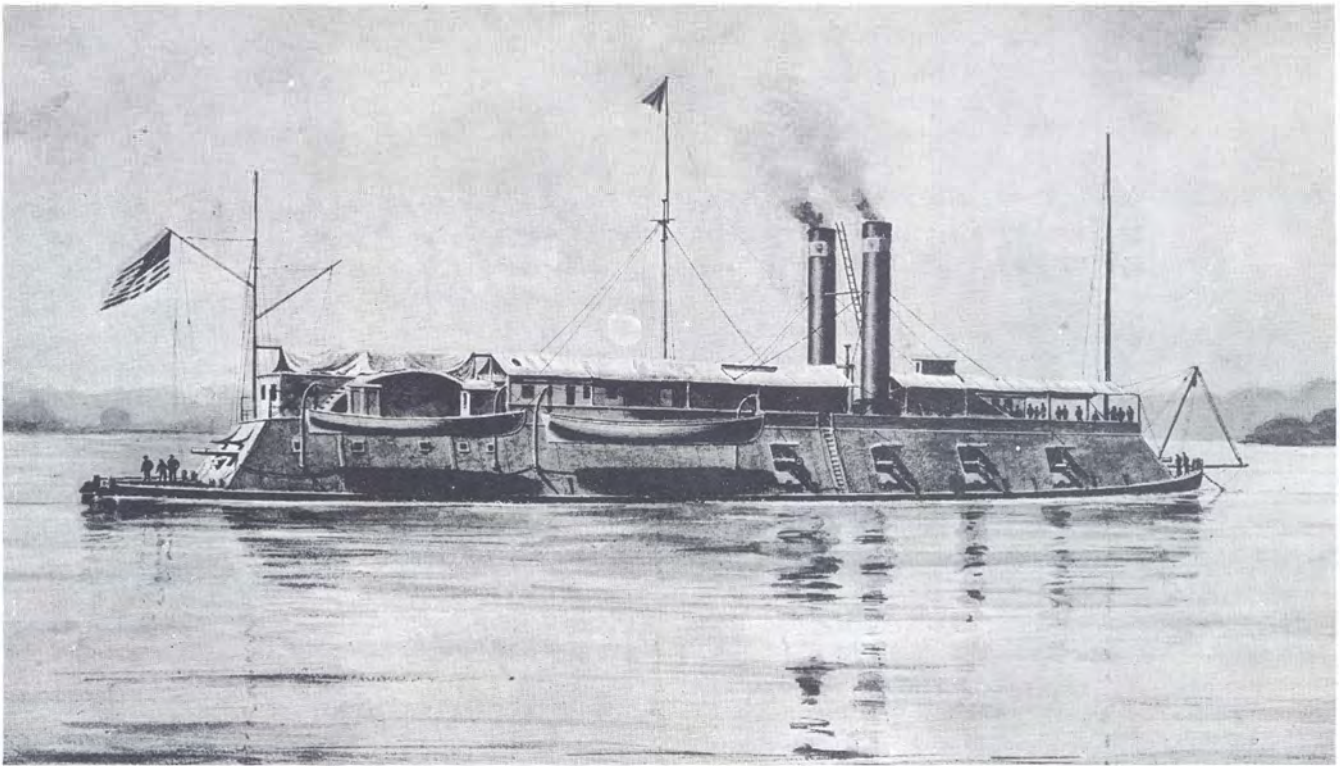
McClermand, while en route from Memphis, had stopped off at Helena on December 30. There he had discussed with Brigadier General Willis Gorman and his staff the threat to Union communications posed by the Confederate stronghold at Post of Arkansas. Thus, even before his meeting with Sherman and Porter, McClermand had been thinking about leading his "army" against the Post, and thus was ready to act on Sherman's suggestion. Post of Arkansas was a "boot of the right size," he said. He would command the expedition and they would take the entire army. He expected the Navy to cooperate fully.

This was scarcely what Sherman had had in mind; and Porter's manner became so frosty that Sherman drew him aside on some pretext to ask what was the matter. He had met McClermand in Washington, said



Mississippi Valley, showing location of Arkansas Post.





U.S.S. "Louisville." (Reproduced from "Official Records")

Porter, had a low opinion of his abilities, and was disgusted by his bragging. Sherman, although he bore his supplanter no great affection, nevertheless urged Porter to put aside personal feelings for the good of the enterprise. The admiral agreed that he would try, whereupon the conferees resumed planning the operation.

McClermand organized his new "Army of the Mississippi" into two corps under Sherman and Brigadier General George W. Morgan, each corps having two divisions. The assignment of Morgan was distasteful to Sherman, who felt that Morgan was the least deserving of the division commanders who had served under him on the Yazoo. He would have preferred Brigadier General Andrew J. Smith. In addition to the 30,000 infantry, the force contained 1,000 cavalry and forty guns. Sixty river steamers were used as transports.

**ADMIRAL** Porter may have been less than enchanted at the prospect of cooperating with the bridegroom-general, but once committed, he clearly meant to give no cause for complaint regarding his degree of participation. The hard core of the naval force he assembled for the expedition consisted of three of the "city class" Eads ironclads: *Baron De Kalb* (ex-St. Louis), *Cincinnati*, and *Louisville*. They would do the actual battering with the help of the Rodgers timberclad *Lexington*, which had no iron armor, but mounted several heavy guns in her battery. The Ellet ram, *Monarch*, was not armed at all,

Major General John Alexander, McClernand, glory hunter, considered *Arkansas Post* as a "boot of the right size."





but furnished insurance against the unlikely appearance of the reported Rebel ram. The splendid big *Black Hawk* had been recently converted, and during the late months of 1862 there had been added to the fleet the first contingent of shallow-draft, boiler-plated "tinclads." The vessels that would later become the famous Light Draft Division 1 were at hand. Porter added four of them to furnish fire support for the infantry: *Forest Rose*, *Glide*, *New Era*, and *Rattler*. This was giving the expedition plenty of firepower. *Lexington* and the three "Pook Turtles" carried a total of forty-four guns, of which fourteen were VIII-inch or larger. *Black Hawk* and the tinclads added another thirty, half a dozen 32-pounder smoothbores, the same number of 30-pounder Parrott rifles. The remaining cannon were mostly 24-pounder howitzers.

The expedition got under way on January 5 with the three ironclads riding tow-lines. They were short of coal and could not steam against the current when burning wood. As a deceptive measure, the fleet steamed past the mouth of the Arkansas to the White River, a little farther north, then up the White River a short distance of twenty miles where an old cutoff led back to the Arkansas.

**THE** defensive works at the Post of Arkansas were well sited, but scarcely a match for the force moving against them. The river, running east at this point, made a sweeping "S"-shaped bend, first south, then north, then east and south again. The fort lay on the left bank near the top of the last bend, with a chain of fieldworks downstream and another line running west part way across the neck to a boggy stream. The fort was a square-bastioned trace three hundred feet along the crest of each face. The armament consisted of three heavy guns and eight or ten of field caliber. The smaller guns seem to have been moved about from time to time, and the records are not clear as to which pieces were permanently installed. In the northeast bastion was a 9-inch columbiad in a square casemate walled with forty-two inches of oak timber. Above a flat splinter-ceiling was a gabled roof of the same thickness as the walls, faced with  $\frac{7}{8}$  x 3-inch bar iron. An 8-inch columbiad, also casemated, occupied the east curtain. Both fired straight down the east-running reach at the top of the bend. In the southeast bastion were a 10-pounder Parrott and, in the salient, a 9-inch columbiad mounted "en barbette" to point either east or upstream to the south. A line of piles and railroad-iron obstructions stretched from the right bank two-thirds of the way across the river at this point. The other light pieces were mounted to protect the north face of the fort and the fieldworks west of it.

Brigadier General Thomas J. Churchill commanded the garrison of about 5,000 officers and men, mostly



*Brigadier General Thomas J. Churchill commanded the slim Confederate force defending the fort at Arkansas Post.*

dismounted Texas cavalry with a sprinkling of Arkansas and Louisiana troops. His force was divided into three slim brigades. Those of Colonels Robert W. Garland and James Deshler held the lines. The fort itself was under the charge of Colonel John W. Dunnington, a former naval officer, and, as such, the most experienced artilleryman.

**AT** 5 p.m. on January 9, the Federal fleet pulled in at Notrebe's Landing on the left bank three miles below the fort and at Fletcher's Landing, nine miles below Notrebe's, and the troops started going ashore in stormy twilight. But it was 11 a.m. the next day before the last of Sherman's people had disembarked. Churchill's scouts (three troops of cavalry who still had horses) watched the debarkation and came back round-eyed to report that half the Yankees in the West were after them. The Confederates had expected to be attacked, but not by such overwhelming odds. Churchill at once notified his department commander, Lieutenant General Theophilus Holmes (at Little Rock), and asked for instructions. The reply ordered him to hold out to the last man, that help was on the way.

It is difficult to see what reinforcements Holmes had in mind. His disposable force at Little Rock was less than 10,000 troops, largely untrained and poorly equipped. These were insufficient to offset the Federal numerical superiority, and were too distant to reach the beleaguered post in time. But Churchill





the fort; Steele on the far right occupied part of the old Southern camp against Post Bayou. The morning passed in preparation; then, at 1 p.m., the infantry went forward and the gunboats came bellowing upstream once more. An hour's firing reduced the fort's east face to heaps of earth and timber and the three big defending guns fell silent.

The Federal army was making slower headway against the rifle pits. Their advance was across cleared ground where Garland's and Deshler's men had good fields of fire. For a time the attack hung while a vicious small-arms fight crackled up and down the lines. But the defenders were in even worse straits. The fort had been virtually destroyed, with every

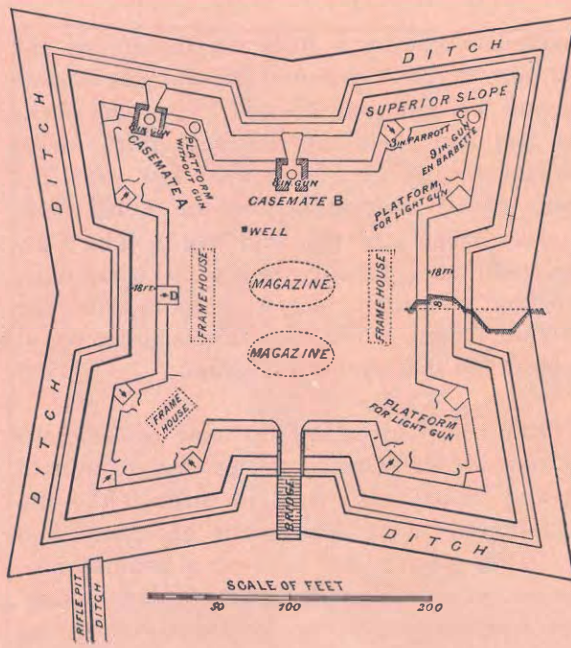
gun disabled except for a little six-pounder on the north curtain. Porter had moved the tinclads in close by now, and was pumping 32- and 24-pounder shells over the fort and along the trenches. *Rattler* tried again to run through the obstructions and, when she succeeded, gained position behind the Rebel flank with a clear enfilade of the field works. The Confederates could neither maneuver nor make any reply to the deluge of artillery fire winging in from the river. About 4 p.m., white flags began going up at various points in the Southern position.

**PORTER**, who had picked up some of Lindsey's brigade from the right bank, ran his tinclads over to the fort and himself clambered in through the embrasure followed by a detachment of sailors and infantry. They found the interior a shambles of wreckage and dead artillery horses. Colonel Dunnington came forward to give up his sword, expressing

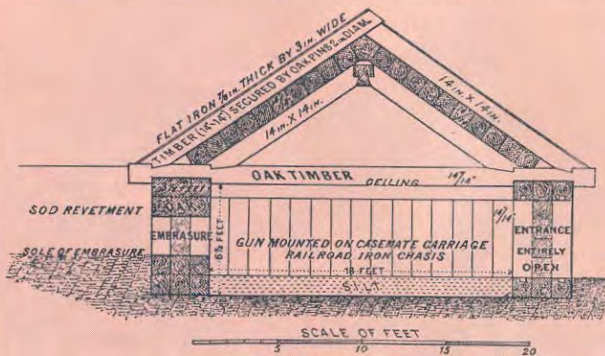
*The capture of Arkansas Post, showing Brigadier General Stephen G. Burbridge, accompanied by his staff, planting the Stars and Stripes on the Confederate Fort Hindman, January 11, 1863. From a sketch by W. R. McComas.*



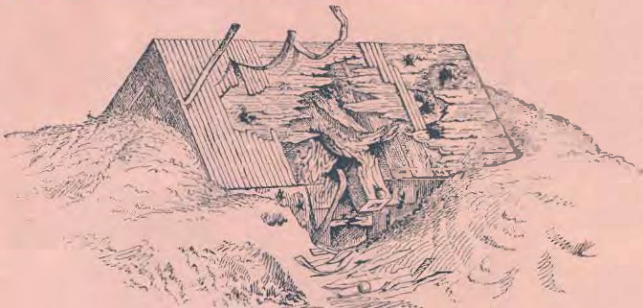




Plan of Confederate Fort Hindman at Arkansas Post.



Section of casemate, Fort Hindman, showing construction.



The battered casemate on the eastern curtain of Fort Hindman shows effect of heavy shot from Union gunboats.

the meager satisfaction that he could at least surrender to his old comrades of the Navy. Sherman's troops meanwhile had reached the trenches where the Union general sought out General Churchill to formalize the surrender proceedings. Churchill immediately became embroiled in a bitter argument with Colonel Garland concerning the white flags. Garland insisted that he had been ordered to surrender, while Churchill denied giving any such instructions.

Before this wrangle was resolved, Colonel Deshler arrived, angrily declaring that *he* had not surrendered at all and intended to renew the battle. Sherman finally ended the argument with the curt reminder that the entire question was academic. On all sides the position was swarming with blue-clad infantry, briskly disarming the defenders. This, Sherman pointed out, was a process impossible to reverse even had he wished to do so. Meanwhile, one more act in the drama of capitulation was being played at the fort. Shortly after Porter's arrival a Federal staff officer came pelting in and furiously (but vainly) ordered the Navy to vacate at once, so that General A. J. Smith could take possession.

Sherman came aboard *Black Hawk* Sunday evening to find McClernand pacing his cabin in what, for that usually dour man, amounted to transports of delight. "Glorious! Glorious!" he cried, "My star is ever in the ascendant. Now, on to Little Rock," and, harking back to his tree-top observer, said, "I had a man up a tree!"

McClernand's report was in a similar vein, advising that he now intended to march for the state capital, call in Brigadier General Samuel Curtis' army from northwestern Arkansas, and then sweep rebellion from the Trans-Mississippi. It praised his Army subordinates, but practically ignored the role played by the Navy. Porter, however, had anticipated something of the kind. He had fired off his own account of the action by the fastest available steamer, and his report was thus on the wire first.

**GENERAL** Grant has been accused of deprecating the expedition as long as he thought it to be exclusively McClernand's idea, then reversing his stand to save Sherman's face. This seems to be taking his message to Halleck that "McClernand has gone off on a wild goose chase" somewhat out of context. Grant had no quarrel with the legitimate objective of the campaign, only that it represented an extravagant use of force. He was horrified over the prospect that his rash, glory-hunting subordinate had vanished into the southwestern wilderness with a Caesar's half of the department's available manpower. Within hours he sent peremptory orders to McClernand to return forthwith to the Mississippi, and bring back all his troops.

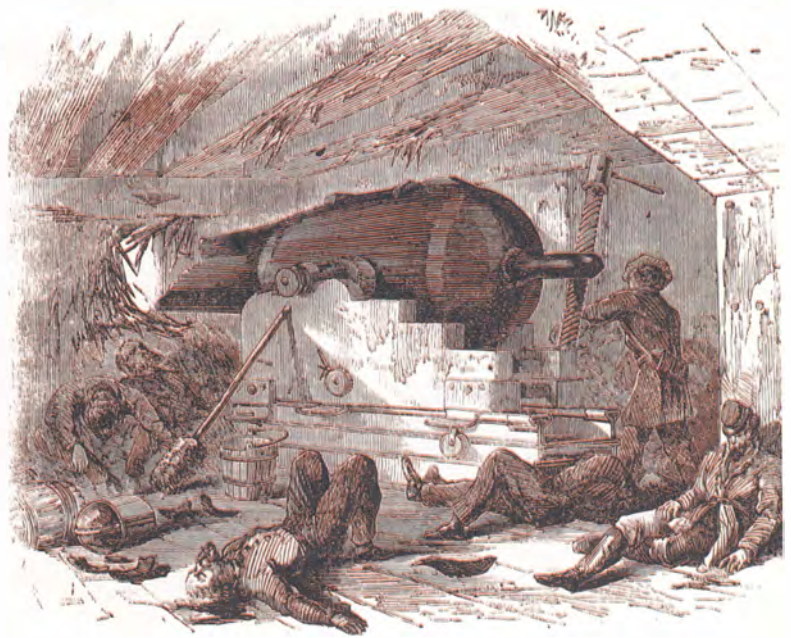


Grant's resolve for future operations now crystallized. The campaign against Vicksburg would move straight down the river, since Washington had willed it so. But to leave McClernand there with a free hand would be to invite disaster. Therefore Grant himself would have to go and take command, and he made immediate preparations to do so. McClernand's army of the Mississippi went out of existence on January 19, only two weeks after its formation, and its erstwhile leader became a corps commander in the reorganized Army of the Tennessee. He took the demotion with ill grace, writing to President Lincoln, "My success here is gall and wormwood to the clique of West Pointers who have been persecuting me for months." The tragedy of John McClernand was that he never learned from his mistakes and refused to take advice, especially from West Pointers. He demanded instant glory and, when it was denied him, his persistent insubordination was to cost him his place in the army.

**THE** Post of Arkansas battle was decisive in assuring the safety of Grant's right flank. Considering the disparity of force there could be little question concerning the outcome, though the outnumbered and outgunned Confederates made a stout defense. Federal casualties were 134 killed, 898 wounded, 29 missing, plus a few in the fleet. The defenders suffered surprisingly few losses from the intensive bombardment. Churchill reported, "sixty killed, seventy-five to eighty wounded." These figures are probably an underestimate, since he also said he had only 3,200 men on hand, while the Union reports listed 4,791 prisoners by name, rank, and organization. These men represented a sizeable percentage of the Confederate strength in Arkansas.

Coupled with the Southern defeat at Prairie Grove, losses at Post of Arkansas seriously crippled Holmes's forces at a critical period for the Trans-Mississippi Confederates. And the battle's moral effect helped greatly to restore the wavering confidence in the Union war effort. Its most profound influence, however, was that the political maneuvering resulted in Grant's all-out commitment to the reduction of Vicksburg via the river line, and thus contributed to his final victory.

*Robert S. Huffstot, a regular contributor to this magazine, is Managing Director-Secretary of the St. Louis, Mo., Safety Council. Some of the sources used in preparing this article are: "Battles and Leaders of the Civil War"; Earl Schenck Miers, "The Web of Victory"; Fletcher Pratt, "Civil War on Western Waters"; Shelby Foote, "The Civil War," Vol. 2; and William Fletcher Johnson, "William T. Sherman."*



*A shattered 9-inch Dahlgren gun in the principal casemate of Fort Hindman, Arkansas Post. (Sketch from "Frank Leslie's")*

## UNION FORCES

ARMY OF THE MISSISSIPPI: Maj. Gen. John A. McClernand

### I Corps (so designated—before and after the expedition, XIII Corps)

Brig. Gen. Geo. W. Morgan

1st Division—Brig. Gen. Peter J. Osterhaus: 1st Brigade—Col. Lionel A. Sheldon; 2d Brigade—Col. Daniel W. Lindsey; 3d Brigade—Col. J. F. DeCourcy; Division Artillery—2 batteries.

2d Division—Brig. Gen. Andrew J. Smith: 1st Brigade—Brig. Gen. Stephen G. Burbridge; 2d Brigade—Col. J. W. Landrum; Division Artillery—2 batteries.

### II Corps (so designated—before and after the expedition, XV Corps)

Maj. Gen. William T. Sherman

1st Division—Brig. Gen. Frederick Steele: 1st Brigade—Brig. Gen. Francis P. Blair, Jr.; 2d Brigade—Brig. Gen. Charles E. Hovey; 3d Brigade—Brig. Gen. John M. Thayer; Division Artillery—3 batteries.

2d Division—Brig. Gen. David Stuart: 1st Brigade—Col. Giles A. Smith; 2d Brigade—Col. T. Kilby Smith; Division Artillery—3 batteries.

The cavalry was distributed as headquarters detachments to army, corps, and division H. Q.

## CONFEDERATE FORCES

Garrison Commander—Brig. Gen. Thomas J. Churchill

1st Brigade—Col. Robert R. Garland; 2d Brigade—Col. James Deshler; 3d Brigade—Col. John W. Dunnington.





BETWEEN DECKS—SERVING THE GUNS.  
After a drawing by Rear-Admiral Walke.