

CHAPTER 2

HISTORY OF THE USS *EASTPORT*: PACKET STEAMER AND IRONCLAD GUNBOAT

Introduction

The *Eastport*, while typical in many ways of the steamers operating on America's western rivers in the nineteenth century, had a most unusual career. This boat was built as a sidewheel packet in the early 1850s and began her working life in commerce on the Tennessee and Mississippi rivers during the height of the steamboat age. In the early months of the Civil War, the *Eastport* was acquired by the Confederacy and efforts were begun to convert her into an ironclad gunboat, one of the first of its type. Prior to the completion of this conversion, the *Eastport* was captured by Union forces and the United States government completed the work started by the Confederates, turning the *Eastport* into one of the largest warships to serve on the inland rivers during the Civil War. Although initially serving as the flagship of the Western Gunboat Flotilla, the *Eastport* spent most of the war in rather undistinguished service on the Mississippi River. In the spring of 1864, the *Eastport* was the largest of the naval vessels involved in the Red River Campaign, an ill-advised and unsuccessful effort by the United States to invade east Texas by way of the Red River. Apparently damaged by a Confederate "torpedo," or mine, the *Eastport* sank during the Union fleet's retreat down the Red River in April of 1864. Ultimately, the gunboat had to be abandoned and destroyed, ending her 12-year existence. The following narrative follows the life of the steamboat and, later, the gunboat, *Eastport* from her launching on the Ohio River

in December 1852, to her destruction on the Red in April 1864. Some aspects of the boat's history can be told in considerable detail, particularly her life as a military vessel when official documentation of her activities appears with frequency. However, many particulars of the career of the *Eastport* remain unknown; some may come to light in the future with the discovery of additional documents, others will never be learned.

Construction of the Eastport

The *Eastport* was a sidewheel steamboat built at New Albany, Indiana, in 1852. New Albany was one of several Ohio River towns important in the building of western river steamboats. The first official record of the *Eastport* is found in an enrollment document issued December 20, 1852, at Louisville, Kentucky, located just across the river from New Albany (Figure 2-1). Enrollments were official licensing documents required of all vessels of over 20 tons burden involved in commerce along America's coasts and on her navigable rivers. Similar documents, known as "registrations," were mandatory for American vessels involved in trade with foreign ports. The law establishing the requirements for these documents was passed by an Act of Congress in February 1793 and was one of the first laws passed by Congress, pointing out the importance of maritime and riverine trade to the fledgling United States (Act of February 18, 1793, c8; 1 Stat. at L305). Enrollments and registrations were issued by the Collec-

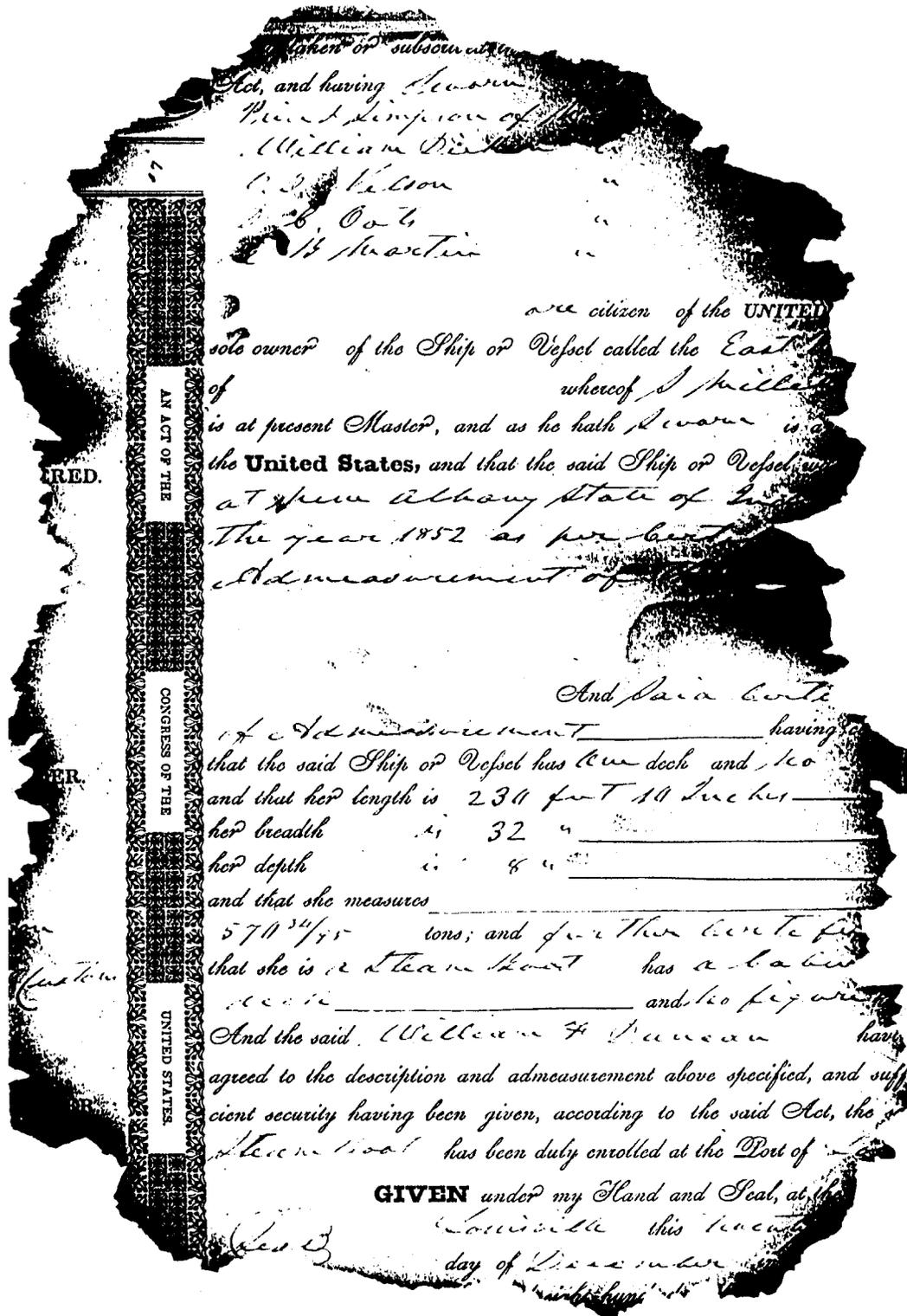


Figure 2-1. The first enrollment document issued for the steamboat Eastport, dated December 20, 1852 (BMIN 1852a).

tor of Customs in the numerous Customs Districts established within the United States. Most western river steamboats received enrollment documents, as did the *Eastport* in 1852, because they did not travel to foreign ports. Normally, a vessel was enrolled at the Customs District nearest to where it was homeported and boats had to obtain a new enrollment if they moved their homeport to another Customs District, if their ownership changed, if they were rebuilt and their dimensions altered, or if other similar significant changes occurred. Enrollment and registration documents are extremely valuable in historical research because they provide a variety of important information on a vessel. These include the name of the vessel, the owner or owners, the homeport, the place and date of build, the dimensions, and the rig, or type of boat.

The initial enrollment document for the *Eastport* (named “*East Port*” in the enrollment) reports that her wooden hull was 230 ft, 10 in long and 32 ft wide; she had a depth of hold of 8 ft, and her burden was 570 34/95 tons (Bureau of Marine Inspection and Navigation [hereafter cited BMIN] 1852a). These dimensions are accepted as accurate despite the fact that several authors have subsequently provided slightly different measurements for the *Eastport*. For example, the Lytle-Holdcamper List of American steamers (Mitchell 1975:59) and Frederick Way (1994:137) note that the steamer was 280 ft long, 43 ft wide (breadth), and 5 ft, 6 in deep. Way, apparently, derived his information from the Lytle-Holdcamper List. Silverstone (1989:156), in *Warships of the Civil War Navies*, provides the same length and breadth as Way and the Lytle-Holdcamper List, but gives a depth of 6 ft, 3 in; the same dimensions provided in *Civil War Naval Chronology, 1861-1865* (Naval History Division 1971:VI-223), which reflects information derived from *The Dictionary of American Naval Fighting Ships*. These measurements more closely reflect the *Eastport*’s dimensions after her various conversions during the Civil War and it is assumed that the measurements provided in the original enrollment document are accurate for her as-built dimensions. The *Eastport* was slightly larger than the average-sized steamboat for the period.

No description of the *Eastport* at the time of her launching has been found, although local newspapers commonly provided information on new steamboats when they were completed. For example, the *Louisville Daily Courier* gives descriptions of several steamboats built locally in 1852, sometimes so detailed as to including discussions of the types of

woods and the color of the carpets used in the cabins. These newspaper articles tended to appear just before a steamer departed on its first voyage. Both the *New Albany Ledger* and the *Louisville Daily Courier* report that there was a serious flood in the third week of December 1852, the time when the *Eastport* was enrolled and preparing to leave on her maiden trip. This flood was so severe and damaging that its discussion dominated much of the local news appearing in these newspapers. No descriptions of new steamers appear in these papers during this period and it is believed that the *Eastport* was simply overlooked as attention was directed toward the flood and its effects. Further, an examination of another important river town newspaper, the *Cincinnati Daily Commercial*, for the last few months of 1852 reveals no information on the construction or launching of the *Eastport*. However, brief mention of the *Eastport* was made in local papers while she was under construction. On November 11, 1852, under a column entitled “Boats Building at New Albany,” the *Louisville Daily Courier* noted the following: “Tennessee River Boat, Capt. Martin—283 feet in length, 35 feet beam, 7 1/2 hold, tonnage about 800.” No name is provided for this steamer, however, there seems to be little doubt that it was the *Eastport* because of the dimensions and because “Capt. Martin” was certainly E.B. Martin, the principal original owner of the *Eastport* and a long-time Tennessee River steamboatman. A short time later, on December 2, 1852, the *New Albany Ledger* published a “List of Steamboats” built at the town in 1852. This list included the following information: “Eastport, 515 tons for \$45,000 destined for Tenn. R. and N.O.” The reason for the discrepancies in the length and tonnage figures appearing in the earlier news account and those of the *Eastport* as she was actually built is unknown. It is possible that the earlier figures were simply rough estimates made prior to the start of construction or during its initial stages. Alternatively, the originally planned size of the boat may have been decreased for financial or other reasons. What these newspaper entries do reveal is that the *Eastport* was destined for trade on the Tennessee River and for the long-distance trade down the Mississippi River to New Orleans.

Some additional information on the appearance of the *Eastport* can be gleaned from her enrollment documents. The December 20, 1852, enrollment notes that the *Eastport* had “one deck,” a “cabin on deck” and “no figurehead” (BMIN 1852a). These were typical entries for steamboats of the period and simply indicate that the boat had a cabin built on the main

deck and had no elaborate figurehead at the bow. Frederick Way (1994:137) reports that the steamer had five boilers and was fitted with two high-pressure engines, each with a cylinder measuring 26 inches in diameter and with a 9-ft stroke. The *Eastport* would have resembled a typical, mid-nineteenth century western river sidewheeler, such as the *Buckeye State* shown in Figure 2-2. Built at Shausetown, Pennsylvania, in 1850, the *Buckeye State*, at 260 ft long, was slightly longer than the *Eastport*, but the two boats would have resembled one another in many characteristics (Way 1994:63). General construction techniques for steamboats followed well-established patterns and during the late antebellum period there was considerable uniformity in hull design and construction procedures. Other than size, variation was usually expressed in the superstructure rather than the hull, and standardized hull designs for western river steamers had developed by 1840. These hulls were flat-bottomed, shallow, long and narrow, specifically adapted to the shallow and often swift rivers found in the west. The bow and stern had varying degrees of sheer, while the sides were perpendicular to the bottom. Inside the hull

was a single or multiple series of longitudinal arches or braces. These were occasionally planked as bulkheads, extending almost the entire length of the vessel to provide strength to the long and relatively limber hull. Initially, steamboat hulls were built with heavy timbers, but as speed and shallow draft became more important so did lightness, and the timbers used decreased in size (Hunter 1949). By mid-century, standard hull construction used either 3-x-6-in or 4-x-5-in timbers with 2-in-thick oak hull planking. White oak, which grew in abundance in the Ohio River Valley region, was the standard timber and planking material for steamboat hulls. Lighter materials, such as pine, cedar, or poplar, were used for decking, superstructure, and cabin construction. Walls of the upper decks were often made of thin, 0.25- or 0.5-in-thick boards in an effort to reduce weight (Hunter 1949:80-82).

The largest deck on a steamboat was the main deck and this is the deck referenced in the statement about “one deck” in the *Eastport*’s 1852 enrollment (Figure 2-3). This indication that the *Eastport* had only a single deck is somewhat misleading, because it was a reference to decks attached directly to the

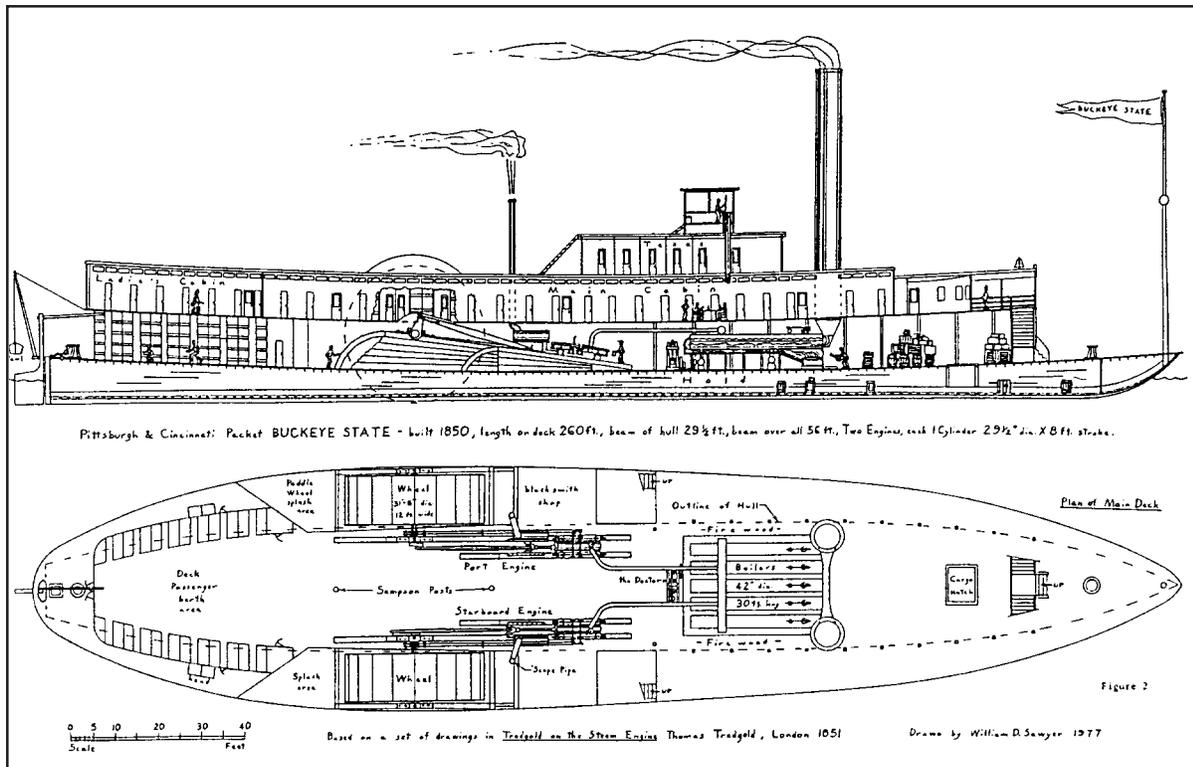


Figure 2-2. Plan and side views of the sidewheeler *Buckeye State*, built in 1850 (source: Sawyer 1978:Figure 2).

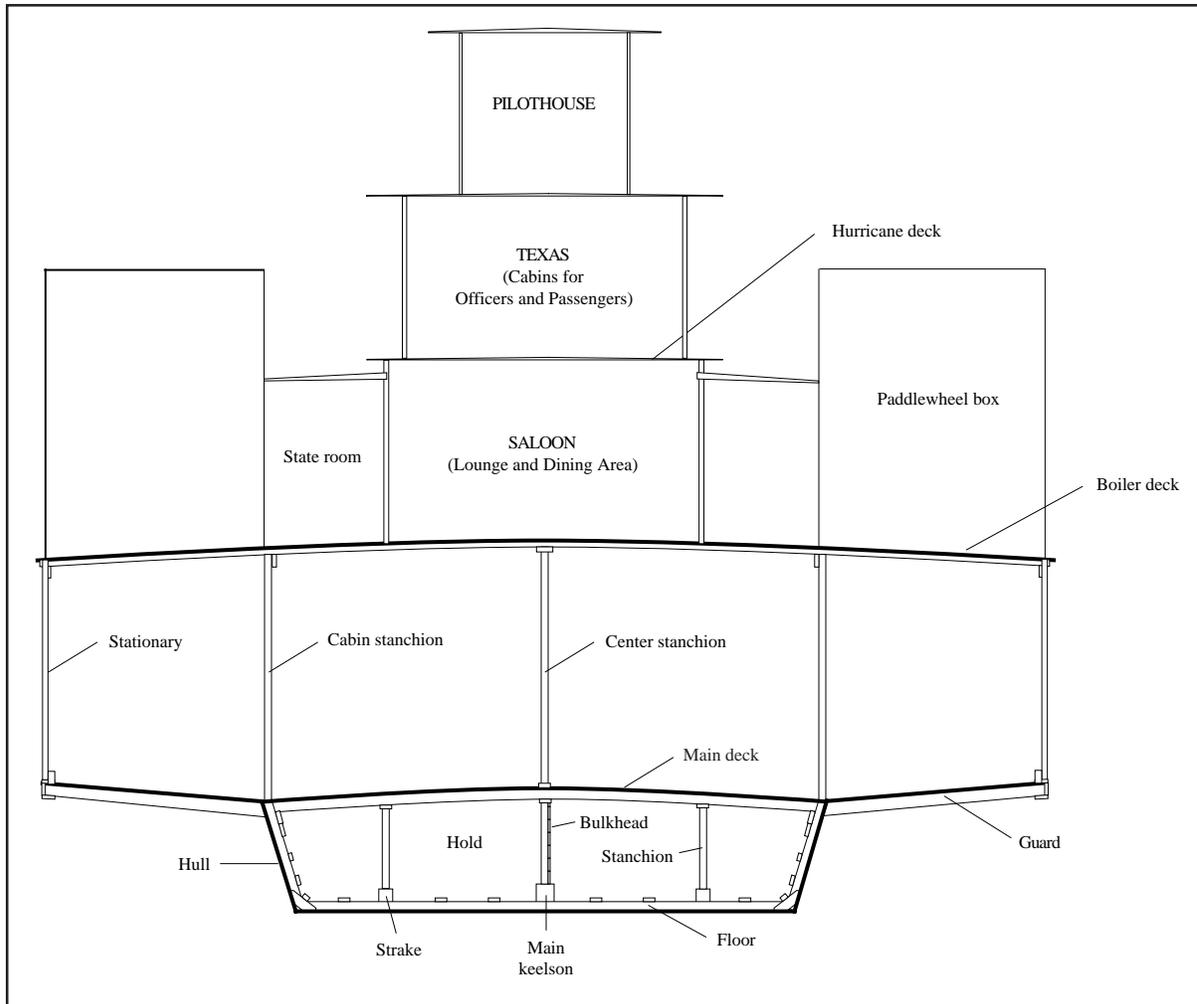


Figure 2-3. Section of the hull of a typical, large sidewheel steamboat showing features expected to be found on the *Eastport*.

hull of a vessel, a carry over from descriptions of larger ocean-going ships. On steamboats, the main deck was the only deck attached to the hull itself. The main deck, supported by stanchions and bulkheads within the hull, housed the engines, boilers and other machinery and served as the main storage area for cargo (see Figures 2-2 and 2-3). This was necessary because the hulls of steamboats were too shallow to accommodate this machinery, although some cargo could be carried in the hold. On sidewheelers the main deck extended well beyond the edge of the hull to encompass the paddlewheels (see Figure 2-3). These extensions, known as guards, were originally built to protect the side paddlewheels from injury and to provide an outboard support for the wheels (Hunter 1949:91). Also, the guards provided additional deck space for cargo storage, one

of the reasons they were found on many sternwheelers as well as sidewheelers. The guards were supported by stanchions extending up from the outside of the hull and, from the top, by iron rods known as “hog chains” running across the boat. A system of hog chains also ran the length of most steamboats to help prevent sagging, or “hogging,” of the long, narrow and relatively flexible hull. How wide the main deck on the *Eastport* was is unreported. The 32-foot breadth of the boat provided in the 1852 enrollment refers only to the width of the hull, not the main deck. Hunter (1949:93) notes that on western river steamers the overall width of the main deck “exceeded the width of the hull by 50 to 75 per cent.” Thus the main deck of the *Eastport* may have been as much as 56 ft across, meaning that each side paddlewheel would have been on the order of 12 ft wide.

On the typical western river steamer, the deck above the main deck was known as the boiler deck, because it rested above the boilers. Usually narrower and shorter than the main deck, the boiler deck housed passenger staterooms and, commonly, the main passenger saloons. Situated above the boiler deck were the hurricane deck, the texas, and pilothouse (see Figure 2-3). The hurricane deck was narrower than the boiler deck. On larger steamers, a range of cabins known as the “texas” stood on top of the hurricane deck. The texas commonly contained staterooms, officer quarters, and the steamer’s office. Most small steamers did not have a texas and some even lacked the hurricane deck (Hunter 1949:91-93). Surmounting the texas, was the pilothouse. While no contemporary description of the superstructure of the *Eastport* has been found, it is certain that she had a hurricane deck and a texas, as did most of the larger steamboats. Evidence for this is found in testimony presented in a claims case made by the family of one of the owners of the *Eastport* after the Civil War. J.B. Ogilvie, a carpenter, stated that the *Eastport* was overhauled at Paducah in August 1860 at which time the hurricane deck was extended “35 ft forward and 40 ft aft and two staterooms were added” (National Archives, RG 109, Vessel Papers, File E-115:1893). Unfortunately, Ogilvie’s testimony does not indicate the number of staterooms on the boat. Others who testified mentioned the steamer’s “texas” and her “pilot house.”

The number of boilers on a steamboat varied with its size. Boats of less than 250 tons normally had one to four boilers. Larger boats, like the *Eastport*, had more; Way (1994:137) noting that she had five. The boilers were located in the forward third of the vessel (see Figure 2-2). Prior to mid-century, the firebox doors usually faced forward to take advantage of the air draft when the boat was moving. With the introduction of air or steam pumps to help create forced air drafts around 1850, boilers were turned around so that the firebox doors faced aft. The bodies of boilers were made of thin (circa 0.25-in-thick), wrought iron plates riveted and bolted together. The ends of the boilers were of cast iron plate. Most western steamboat boilers had two or more tubular flues extending through the center and surrounded by water (Hunter 1949:155-160). Hot air from the firebox passed through these flues and heated the surrounding water, producing steam. Average-sized boilers ranged from 10 to 32 ft long and 13 to 47 inches in diameter. The boilers themselves were encased in a metal, brick-lined box containing the furnace. Cast iron water pipes carried freshwater to

the boilers. Boilers were interconnected to maintain an equivalent water level in all of them. Cast iron steam pipes, connecting the boilers at the top, ran to the engines, or cylinders, located toward the stern of the boat. Generally, water pipes were 2 to 3 inches in diameter, while the steam pipes had diameters of 3 to 5.5 in.

Early sidewheel steamers were driven by a single (one cylinder), low-pressure (20 to 30 pounds per square inch) engine drawing on one or more boilers for steam. By the late 1840s, most western river steamers were powered by two, high pressure, non-condensing cylinders or engines. On sidewheel boats these were located on the main deck just aft of center and just forward of the wheels and were bolted to heavy beams known as cylinder or engine timbers (Figure 2-4). As shown in Figure 2-2, some balance in weight distribution along the length of the hull of sidewheelers was obtained through the placement of the boilers, the engines, and the paddlewheels. The pistons which traveled inside of the tubular cylinders were attached to each sidewheel by connecting rods known as pitmans. Normally made of wood, the pitman was strengthened by metal bands and was attached to a crank on the inboard side of each side paddlewheel, or on each end of a long iron shaft on sternwheelers (Hunter 1949:113). The dimensions of the *Eastport*’s paddlewheels are unknown, but they were probably similar in size to those on the *Buckeye State* which were 12 ft wide and had a diameter of 31 ft, 8 in (Way 1994:63).

Steamboats were fitted with pumps used for a various purposes. Pumps were used to supply water to the boilers, to pump out the hull, to provide water for fire hoses, and to force air through the flues and chimneys to increase the draft. These pumps were generally powered by or off the main engines before 1850. After that date, they were often operated by small steam engines known as “doctors.” In the late antebellum period most large boats used these doctor engines to supply power for pumps, capstans, and hoists (Hunter 1949:162).

In her initial enrollment documents, the *Eastport* was rated at 570 34/95 tons burden. Tonnage was not a measure of weight but was a measure of a vessel’s internal space so that some estimate of carrying capacity could be obtained, largely for the purposes of assessing import duties and other taxes. The original method of determining tonnage was established in 1789 and continued until 1864 and required measurements of the length, beam and depth of hold of

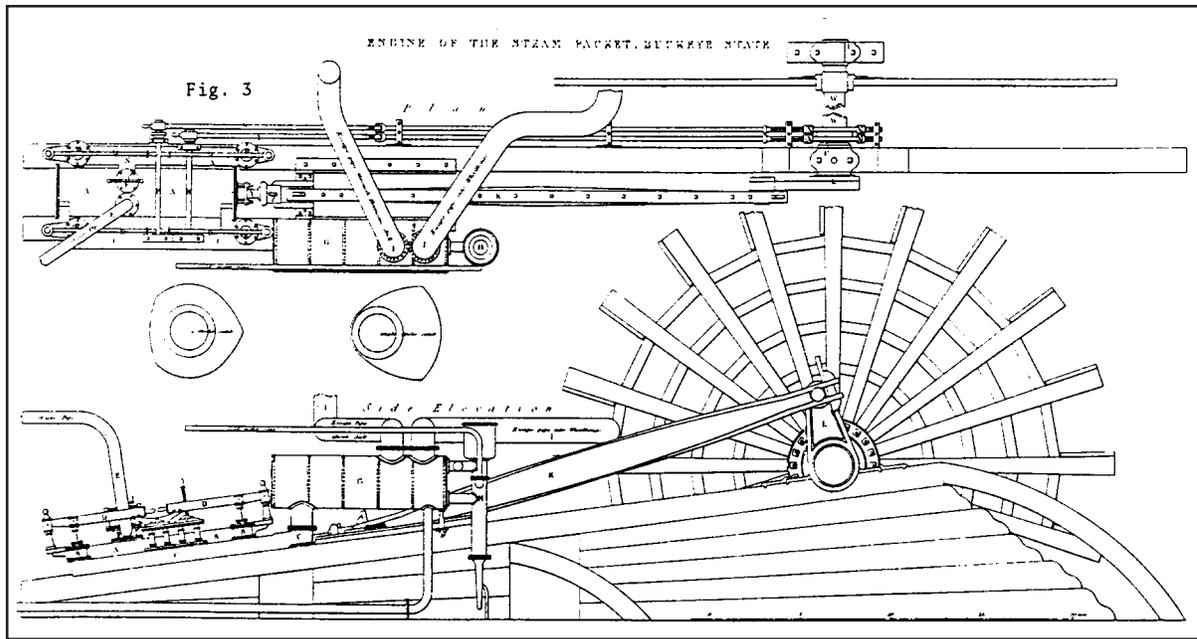


Figure 2-4. Plan and side views of the engine and paddlewheel of the sidewheeler *Buckeye State* showing the massive engine timbers on which the engine cylinder and the paddlewheel shaft rested (source: Sawyer 1978:75).

a vessel. The formula was: (length x $\frac{3}{5}$ beam) x (beam x $\frac{1}{2}$ depth), the product of which was divided by 95, the reason all tonnages prior to 1864 are given in 95ths. No uniform method for taking the required measurements was mandated, such that considerable variation could occur in the tonnages of nearly identical vessels (Gibson and Gibson 1995a:xxxii). In 1864, Congress passed new statutes that stipulated exact procedures for obtaining tonnage measurements (Act of May 6, 1864, C.83, Section 3, 13 Stat. 71, 72; in Gibson and Gibson 1995a). The new act was widely opposed by western steamboatmen because it resulted in a significant increase in the tonnage estimate for a typical steamboat. Hunter (1949:643) notes “the rules prescribed for determining tonnage were drafted without reference to the particular shallow-hull construction of western river steamboats. Among other things, the act required that any enclosed space above the main deck used for cargo or the accommodation of passengers should be added to that within the hull in calculating the vessel’s tonnage.” The newly calculated tonnage could greatly raise the fees and taxes levied on steamboats because of the commonly large area of enclosed passenger space they contained above the main deck. Steamboatmen were relieved somewhat by the Act of February 28, 1865, that stated that “no part of any ship or vessel shall be admea-

sured or registered entirely above the first deck, which is not a deck to the hull” (Hunter 1949:643). Even though the statutes were amended, tonnage measurements for steamboats became substantially greater; increasing approximately 45 percent under the new rules.

The greater the tonnage or capacity of a vessel the greater the profits for the owners. The larger boats were floating warehouses; the main deck, guards and hold contained enough space for hundreds or thousands of bales of cotton or other freight. Their broad beams and lightly built hulls allowed steamboats to carry huge cargoes in very shallow water. The larger boats could easily carry 2,000 tons or more of freight. Size, combined with speed, meant faster times between ports allowing for more trips during the year, which converted into more profits. In the famous race between the *Natchez* and the *Rob’t. E. Lee*, for example, the average speed between ports was thirteen miles per hour (Hunter 1949:609).

Throughout the nineteenth century, the vast majority of western river steamboats were constructed at yards along the Ohio River, with lesser numbers built along the middle Mississippi River. The Ohio River region had both the raw materials, and after about 1830, the skilled manpower and machinery

required to build steamboats. There was an abundance of good timber and there was coal needed to forge and cast metal parts. In the early years, the manufacture of highly specialized machinery and parts was centered near Pittsburgh, but soon other Ohio River towns began to produce these items. Some of the major centers of steamboat construction were Pittsburgh and Brownsville, Pennsylvania; Marietta and Cincinnati, Ohio, Louisville, Kentucky; New Albany, Jeffersonville, and Evansville, Indiana; and St. Louis, Missouri (Hunter 1949). Some boats were built elsewhere, such as at New Orleans and several surrounding communities, and at numerous small boat yards scattered along the tributaries of the Mississippi. But the output of these locations never came close to the yards along the Ohio.

New Albany, Indiana: Steamboat Town

Located on the north bank of the Ohio River just below the Falls of the Ohio and almost opposite Louisville, Kentucky, New Albany, Indiana, was a small, insignificant river settlement prior to the arrival of the steamboat in the west. Many citizens of New Albany saw the first steamboat on the Ohio River, the *New Orleans*, pass their town on her way to New Orleans in December 1811. It is reported that some were frightened by the noise of its screeching whistle and the heavy sound of its engines. Little did they realize that these “infernal machines” would be built in their own back yard within ten years (*New Albany Tribune* July 19, 1950). Ultimately, the steamboat building industry would play an important role in the town’s growth and prosperity (Figure 2-5). The first steamboats built at New Albany, the *Ohio* and the *Volcano*, were completed in 1821. The number of boats constructed at New Albany steadily increased through time, and in the boom years between 1847 and 1867, a total of 204 boats were built there. These boats sold for a total of \$7,347,000 (*New Albany Tribune* July 19, 1950). During this twenty-year-period, New Albany had the distinction of building one of the largest and most expensive steamboats built. The *Rob’t E. Lee*, launched in 1866, cost \$180,000 to build and had a burden of 1,456.31 tons (*New Albany Tribune* July 19, 1950; Way 1994:395). Another New Albany boat, the *Eclipse*, built in 1852, was much longer at 350 ft than the 285.5-ft *Rob’t E. Lee*, but at 1117 tons did not have the measured tonnage of the latter (Way 1994:138).

New Albany’s boat-building tradition started in 1818, when Joel McLeary began construction of the *Ohio*. With a burden of only 364 tons, the steamer

was about the size of a ferryboat and, reportedly, was not as “clean a model” as later boats. Some of the other early boat builders of New Albany were George Armstrong, John Evans, Martin Himes, D.M. Hooper, Matthew Robinson, Peter Tellon (*New Albany Daily Ledger* January 6, 1868) and Henry Shreve, among the most famous of the western river steamboatmen (Kiser 1975:1). New Albany had a good labor force of carpenters and other mechanics, who were experienced in woodworking; but lacked the mechanical knowledge needed to build steam engines. This lack of engine builders in the community was a shortfall of the early boat builders; however, it was not that difficult to obtain engines and other fittings from foundries and engine builders in other Ohio River towns. Many of the mechanics who worked in the New Albany shipyards came from the Atlantic seaboard. They, like their fathers, were shipwrights. They built their boats by “eye,” based on long years of experience and, as a result, few drafted plans for early steamboats exist. Kiser (1975:3) provides a New Albany example of this informal method of building steamboats, noting that “the plans for the hull of the ‘Robert E. Lee’ were drawn in the sand near the river bank by Captain Humphries, grandson of Joshua Humphries, builder of the famous frigate ‘Old Ironsides’! His sound judgment concerning proportions, lines and construction in boat building came from experience and not from technical training.”

By the mid-nineteenth century, the number of persons engaged in boat building in New Albany was large, representing a considerable percentage of the town’s total population. In addition to carpenters, there were the engine builders, painters, decorators, glaziers, furniture makers, blacksmiths and tin and coppersmiths. There were also smaller businesses dependent upon steamboat building, for example, the chandlers that provided the necessary articles to outfit the vessels.

In the early days, the New Albany boat yards were located on small streams near the river and city. This was done so logs could be floated down the streams, avoiding the arduous task of hauling them overland. As business grew and they became more successful, builders were able to operate larger yards along the riverfront and, by 1830, the major ship-building activity was located along the banks of the Ohio in front of the town. One important advantage for New Albany was the deep water just offshore, which allowed year round access to the bank and its boat yards. Another early advantage of the town

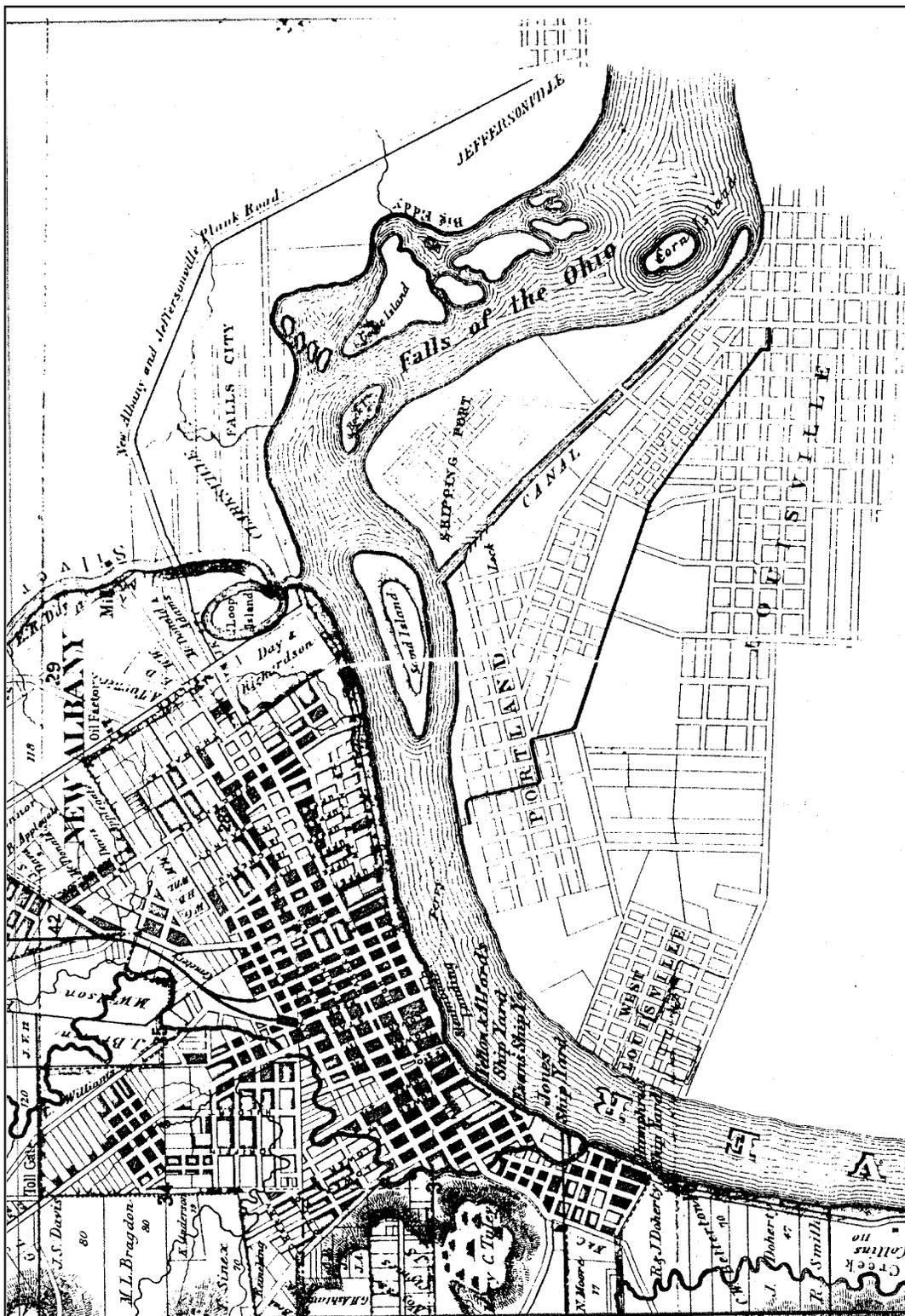


Figure 2-5. Detail of a map of Floyd County, Indiana, 1859, showing locations of cities along the Ohio River around the Falls of the Ohio. Note the identification of boat yards at New Albany (Map published by P. O'Beirne & Co., New York and Jersey City, N.J. 1859).

was that it lay at the foot of the Falls of the Ohio and builders did not have to worry about getting their boats over the falls during low water, as upriver towns did. The construction of a canal around the Falls in 1830 did not seriously dampen New Albany's steamboat building business which, by that time, was well established.

At the city waterfront was a low incline with a level terrace above, ranging from 700 ft to 1200 ft wide. This made the entire river front suitable for boat building. Most of the town's boatyards were similar and visually resembled lumberyards. Logs were brought in and hewed into timbers or sawn into planks; initially by hand but later by steam-driven saws. After it was milled, lumber was separated into special areas in the yard, dependent upon size and use. The shipways themselves extended to the water's edge, where cribs were supported by pillow blocks to form a level base on which to lay the keel and construct the hull. Most of the work on a steamboat involved carpentry and individual boards were adzed or planed to fit. Oak planks for the hull were commonly boiled to make them pliable to obtain a better fit. Large vats were often located near the ways so this work could be done quickly (Kiser 1975:3-4).

There tended to be few permanent structures at the boatyards and those that existed were set well back from the river, away from flood danger. These structures might include tool houses, wood finisher's shops, store rooms and, at some yards, separate blacksmith's shops. Also, most yards had small offices and drafting rooms. The firms who supplied machinery to the yards had large foundries located away from flood levels, but close enough to minimize hauling raw materials and finished products. Most of the foundries were more permanent and were made of brick. Located farther from the river and closer to town were the furniture builders and ship chandlers. They, also, were usually housed in brick buildings, where cabinetmakers made the furniture, and where carpets, kitchen utensils, furniture, cordage and staple groceries were stored (Kiser 1975:4-7).

For several decades, the waterfront of New Albany was full of activity with from four to seven yards in operation at a time. The size of the boats built varied, because each was constructed to meet the needs and conditions on certain rivers or in specific "trades." It was customary for the owners of the boats to come to the yards to discuss his needs,

approve plans (if there were any) and go over the costs. The major contract was for the construction of the hull. The hull builder would then sublet contracts to the engine builders, chandlers and cabin builders. The shipyard often built only the hull, finished the exterior and installed the machinery (Kiser 1975:1-4). Cabin work and other interior finishing were then undertaken elsewhere. For example, many of the boats built at New Albany were taken across the Ohio River to the town of Portland, Kentucky, where the interiors were completed (see Figure 2-5).

During the peak years of production (1840s and 1850s), New Albany ranked second behind Pittsburgh in the number of steamboats built. For example, in 1852, the year the *Eastport* was built, eleven boats were constructed at New Albany, representing a total tonnage of 7,686 tons. The value of these boats was \$620,000 (*New Albany Daily Ledger* January 6, 1868). There were nine boat builders at New Albany in 1852. These were: George Armstrong, Charles Wibble Company; the Stoy, Hart & Co.; D.M. Hooper; Humphrey and Dowerman; Wm. Jones & Company; Hill & Payne; Lee & Moore; Tellon & Co.; and John Evans (Kiser 1975:5-6). These firms constructed many boats during their periods of operation. For example, Humphrey and Dowerman built the hull for the *Belle Key* in 1849, the *Luna* in 1846 and the *Magenta* in 1861 (Way 1994:42, 229, 302). John Evans built the hull for the *A.L. Shotwell* in 1852. The *A.L. Shotwell* was one of the largest boats of the period, measuring 310 ft long and with a beam of 36 ft and a depth of 8 ft (Way 1994:2).

Another boat completed at New Albany during this period was the *Eclipse*, built by Humphrey and Dowerman at their yard. Her hull was "launched" in an unusual manner by floating her off on a natural rise in the river, instead of launching her from a set of marine ways (Way 1994:138). Details of the *Eclipse's* interior and furnishings are known and provide an indication of the opulence the owners and builders often lavished on their boats. Quoting a contemporary newspaper, Frederick Way (1994:138-138) notes:

Her proportions, symmetry and power are fully up to all of her other excellencies of construction. The pantryware was made in one of the most noted potteries in France, especially for her, while the pearl-handled cutlery was designed and manufactured at Sheffield, England, and all of the glassware for the tables, bar, and other parts of the boat were designed and made in Swit-

zerland. The carpet reaching from the gentleman's hall to the large mirror at the end of the ladies' cabin is seamless, and woven at Brussels, with eyelets at the sides, to be buttoned down instead of being laid permanently, consequently always spotlessly clean. . . . The cabin is Gothic and Norman styles. The ceiling is divided into diamonds and half diamonds by the crossing of Gothic arches, and at the points of intersection hang pendant acorns entwined with oak leaves of rich gilt, the whole giving the appearance of two vast, arched colonnades. The intervening spaces in the ceiling are decorated with frescoes; each state-room door is embellished with a landscape; and over the forward entrance to the cabin are two large paintings of the patron cities, Louisville and New Orleans. The large stained glass skylights above and the six massive and richly gilded chandeliers are objects of wonder . . .

Yards in New Albany, also, finished boats whose hulls were constructed elsewhere. According to Way (1994:227), "Hart & Story" (*sic*) finished the cabins for the *Isabella*, a boat built in 1849 by the famous Howard Ship Yard located at Jeffersonville, Indiana, just a few miles upriver of New Albany (see Figure 2-5). Another New Albany-built steamer, the *Empire*, exemplifies the common practice of several firms being involved in the construction of a single boat. Tellon & Co built the *Empire's* hull, Phillips, Hise & Co. manufactured her machinery, and her cabins were built by Stoy, Hart & Co. Completed in 1849, the *Empire* was a fairly large boat for her day at 245 ft long with a beam of 33.5 ft and a hold of 7.2 ft (Way 1994:151). In 1849, Phillips, Hise & Co. supplied engines for other boats built in New Albany. These included the *Nashville*, whose hull was built by Humphries & Dowerman, and the 275-ft *Oregon* built by Isaiah King & Co (Way 1994:336, 357). One of the most famous steamboats built at New Albany was the *Rob't. E. Lee* constructed by DeWitt Hill at the "lower yard" at New Albany in 1866 (Way 1994:395).

No records have been found that identify which yard built the *Eastport* nor who finished her. The *New Albany Daily Ledger* of December 2, 1852, reported that the boat cost \$45,000 to build, or about \$79 per ton. In 1851, thirty three steamboats built at Louisville, just across the river from New Albany, cost an average of \$84 per ton (Hunter 1949:110), slightly higher than the per ton cost for the *Eastport*. These 33 boats had an average burden of 324 tons, considerable less than the 570-ton burden of the

Eastport. Generally, smaller boats tended to cost less per ton to build, principally because less money was devoted to the decoration and finishing of their cabins. However, Haites et al. (1975:176) note that in 1850 the mean cost for building a steamer operating on a "tributary" river was \$77.86 per ton, close to the cost of the *Eastport*. "Tributary" rivers were all those in the Mississippi River drainage other than the Ohio River and the Mississippi itself and included the Tennessee River for which the *Eastport* was expressly built. Typically, more money was expended on the construction of steamers operating on the Ohio and Mississippi, where the mean cost in 1850 was \$91.97 per ton (Haites et al. 1975:176). This cost was related, largely, to the fact that many boats on the "trunk" rivers were more elaborately decorated. Often, a great deal of money was expended on the cabin decorations and furnishings of the larger boats; Hunter (1949:111) noting that the more handsomely finished steamboats could cost well over \$150 per ton to build, with up to half of this cost going to the cabin alone. What these various figures suggest is that the *Eastport*, a large boat costing only \$79 per ton to build, was probably rather typical of those constructed for use on tributary rivers (e.g., the Tennessee River) and was neither elaborately decorated nor finely furnished.

There were three major elements of expenditure in building a steamboat; the hull, the cabin, and the machinery. The hull was normally the least expensive of the three, except in the case of the very smallest boats. Some information is available on the costs of these various elements for steamboats built by the Jeffersonville, Indiana, Howard Ship Yard in the 1850s, which are probably comparable to those of the nearby New Albany yards and to the *Eastport*. In 1855 and 1856, the Howard yard launched several boats measuring over 200 ft in length. Cost estimates provided for building the hulls of these boats averaged about \$22 per ton and ranged from \$7,000 for a 200-ft-long boat destined for the upper Mississippi to \$11,500 for a 210-ft boat destined for New Orleans (Fishbaugh 1970:39). In 1860, the Howard Ship Yard built the hull of the 263-ft, 645-ton *Memphis* at a cost of \$14,000, also, about \$22.00 per ton (Fishbaugh 1970:194). That same year, Howard provided a cost for building a 225-ft steamer to well known steamboatman Captain J.M. White. The estimated costs were: \$16,000 for the hull; \$18,500 for the machinery (e.g., engine, boilers, paddlewheels, etc.); \$7,500 for the cabin; \$2,800 for the painting; and \$2,000 for the "iron work" (Fishbaugh 1970:42). The total estimated cost was \$46,800, close to the

\$45,000 it cost to build the *Eastport* and it is assumed that the proportional costs of the various elements of the two boats are roughly equivalent. During this period, the Howard Ship Yard normally required that one-half of the cost be paid up front in cash, with the balance due in 4, 6, and 8 months. This payment schedule was probably rather typical for steamboat builders, meaning that Captain Martin and his co-owners likely had to come up with about \$22,500 in cash to initiate construction of the *Eastport*.

It was not uncommon for the yards at New Albany to construct just the hull of a steamboat which was then launched and taken just across the Ohio River to Portland, Kentucky, where all of the superstructure was constructed and the finishing details were added. The *Eastport* may have been finished at Portland, but no documentation to indicate this has been found. This lack of documentation for such a large boat, particularly in the local newspapers, is somewhat surprising, but, as noted, it could be related to the severe flooding that occurred during this period, which may have diverted the attention of local reporters.

After the peak year in 1856, there was a decline in boat building at New Albany. There were several reasons for this, but the immediate cause was the financial difficulties of the builders. The yards were financed by a large scale system of credit and when serious money shortages occurred across the country in the form of the Panic of 1857, builders were unable to obtain the necessary credit to purchase timber supplies for their yards (Huston 1987). Construction costs rose and the demand for boats declined, and as a result, some shipyards closed. The Civil War created a revival for a short period of time, but the end was near. The last steamboat launched at New Albany was in 1870 (Kiser 1975:8).

Enrollment Documentation and Ownership of the Eastport

According to notices in the *New Albany Ledger* and the *Louisville Daily Courier*, the *Eastport* was built expressly for trade on the Tennessee and Mississippi rivers. Frederick Way (1994:137) reports that the steamer was initially operated by the Florence & New Orleans Packet Co., and ran between communities on the Tennessee and Ohio rivers and New Orleans. The boat's first enrollment document, issued at Louisville on December 20, 1852, is damaged and some information has been obliterated (see Figure 2-1). However, the list of owners is read-

able and they consist of the firm of Price & Simpson, William Dickson, O.O. Nelson, D.C. Oats (sic) and E.B. Martin (BMIN 1852a). Although part of the document is missing, it indicates that all of the owners are from the same location, apparently "North Alabama." Another person mentioned in the enrollment is William F. Duncan, who is listed as the individual verifying the information provided. The name of the boat's captain is partially missing, but it appears to be "S. Milliken." The owners of the *Eastport* named their new steamboat after the small, Tennessee River town of Eastport, Mississippi, located in the extreme northeastern part of the state.

Surprisingly, another enrollment was issued for the *Eastport* on December 21, one day after the first one. It is almost identical to the first except that it contains information on the proportional ownership of the parties involved. This information was not included in the December 20 enrollment and clarification of ownership may have been the only reason for the issuance of the new document. According to the December 21 enrollment, ownership of the *Eastport* was distributed as follows: the firm of Price & Simpson had a 1/10 share, William Dickson had 1/10 share, O.O. Nelson had a 1/10 share, D.C. Oates had a 1/10 share, and E.B. Martin was the principal owner with a 6/10 share (BMIN 1852b). Fortunately, the December 21 enrollment is undamaged and the name of the boat's master can be read. It is given as "S. Millekin" (possibly a misspelling of S. Milliken) and refers to steamboat captain Samuel Milliken. Also, the position of William F. Duncan is somewhat clarified in that he is listed as a resident of Louisville and was acting "as agent" for the owners.

The ownership of steamboats by groups of individuals was common in the nineteenth century (Hunter 1949:313). This arrangement provided a means of pooling the capital needed to purchase a boat, which could cost \$50,000 or more. A review of enrollment documents for the port of New Orleans (Work Projects Administration [hereinafter cited WPA] 1942) reveals that membership in these consortiums was commonly quite fluid. Sometimes one or several individuals would sell their ownership after only a short time or the proportional ownership of the vessel would shift among the owners; new individuals would buy into the group ownership; or an entirely new group may buy the boat. It was not unusual for the same group of individuals to own several steamboats. In some cases the part owners lived in the same town or area and it is presumed

that they shared business, social or family interests and relationships. In other instances, the division of ownership of a steamboat would be among men living in several principal river cities. This arrangement gave the venture representation in the various ports that the boat visited (Hunter 1949:313; Pearson and Wells 1999). The constant and rapid changes in ownership are seen as a reflection of the economics of the steamboat trade. A great deal of money could be made in a short period of time, if everything went right. However, many factors, such as boat accidents and losses, poor harvests, low water or bad weather conditions could produce drastic losses, driving individuals out of the trade. The typical life of a western river steamboat was short, averaging only about 5 years prior to 1860 (Hunter 1949; Pearson and Wells 1999). Because of this short life, many owners and masters worked their boats hard, squeezing as much profit out of them as quickly as possible. In addition, because of the possibility of great profits, competition on the major rivers was intense, decreasing the stability of the trade and promoting constant and often rapid changes among its participants.

The group that owned the *Eastport* in 1852 seems to have been typical of steamboat owners of the period. If Way (1994:137) is correct, they comprised the Florence & New Orleans Packet Co., although this seems to have been a loosely organized consortium. Most of these men were involved in the ownership or operation of other steamers serving the Tennessee River in the 1840s and 1850s and all lived in the vicinity of the Tennessee River towns of Florence and Tuscumbia in northern Alabama. Florence, located some 250 miles above Paducah, Kentucky, at the mouth of the Tennessee, was the head of navigation on the lower part of the river. Tuscumbia is situated on the south side of the river, just across from Florence. A series of shoals at Florence, the largest being Muscle Shoals (originally known as Mound Shoals), halted upstream boat travel and divided the Tennessee into two major navigation systems (Hunter 1949:186-187). Above the shoals, smaller steamers could operate on the upper Tennessee all the way to Knoxville. Florence and Tuscumbia, because of their location at the division point of navigation on the river, became important transshipment and regional commercial centers. Efforts were made as early as 1828 to bypass the shoals with locks and canals, but it was not until the late 1870s that these endeavors were successful (Hunter 1949:188). The town of Eastport, Mississippi, after which the steamboat

was named, is located not many miles down river of Florence and Tuscumbia.

The owners of the *Eastport* were planters and/or involved in various mercantile businesses, and their new steamboat was certainly used, in part, to carry their crops and supply their stores with merchandise and stock. Several of the original owners, also, were involved in other steamboats. A "W.T. Duncan," possibly related to or the same person as the William F. Duncan listed as agent on the *Eastport's* first enrollments, and E.B. Martin, the principal shareholder in the *Eastport*, had been part owners in the steamboat *Huntsville*, a sidewheeler built at New Albany in 1845 (WPA 1942:4:133). This boat, like the *Eastport*, was apparently involved in the Tennessee River-New Orleans trade, because she was enrolled in New Orleans in 1846, when Duncan and Martin are listed as two of a group of six owners (WPA 1942:4:133). The two, also, may have been among the *Huntsville's* owners in 1845, when the boat was first enrolled in Louisville. Duncan seems to have given up his ownership in the *Huntsville* by 1848, but Martin maintained his interest in the boat until 1851 or 1852 (WPA 1942:5:118). In 1852, the *Huntsville's* owners were L.H. Flernoy, Charles W. Harrison, James Pell (all of Paducah), George P. Frazer (Jefferson County, Kentucky) and George Warren (Alabama) (Way 1994:219).

In the 1860s, a "W. Duncan" is listed as a pilot, along with W. Davis, on the steamer *Ohio No. 3*. This boat was built at Marietta, Ohio, in 1858 and ran in the Marietta-Cincinnati trade (Way 1994:353). It is not known if this is the same individual mentioned in the *Eastport's* enrollments. A Wm. Duncan, possibly the same person involved with the *Eastport*, was employed as a steamboat pilot by the Union forces during the Civil War and was paid the sum of \$120 for 3 months work by Major T.H. Randolph, Jr. RG 109, National Archives, Citizens Files, n.d.). A W.T. Duncan appears in a Civil War-era claim concerning the steamer *Samuel Orr*. Captain J.E. Johnson made the claim on October 4, 1861. Johnson wrote the following to General Polk in Columbus, Kentucky:

Dear Sir,

This is to inform you that I was Capt. of the steamer W.B. Terry, running from the states Alabama, Mississippi, and Tennessee to Paducah, Kentucky. Carrying soldiers and their provisions, passengers and cargo of and on August 22 —

last whilst at Paducah one of Lincoln's gunboats seized the *W.B. Terry* and carried her away on same day. — myself and others took possession of Samuel Orr and brought her from Paducah in our southern states and placed her in the care of Col. of Fort Henry on Tennessee River. — Steamer was owned by R. W. Price of Alabama 1/4 and W. T. Duncan of Alabama 1/4, Walter Given and Co. of Paducah 1/4 and myself 1/4, and she was worth \$6,000 and there was on board of her in cash about \$200 and all her books and I had onboard the *Terry* articles to amount of \$300. There was also 20 Manard Rifles for care of Boone, Tennessee.

All of the above I can substantiate by the best proof my whole instructions in taking steamer *Orr* was to reinstate my losses and I hope I may be successful in the undertaking all of which I submit to your judgment.

J. E. Johnson
Eastport, Mississippi
[National Archives, RG 109, Vessel
Papers, File E-36]

Considering the indication that this Duncan was from Alabama, he is probably not the William Duncan listed in the *Eastport's* enrollments, but is presumably the individual involved with E.B. Martin in the steamer *Huntsville*. Way lists this steamer as the *Sam Orr*, built at New Albany in 1861. She was constructed for the Wabash River trade and named for an iron merchant from Evansville. The *Orr* was running in the Evansville-Paducah trade when she was seized by Captain Wythe Fowler and a group of Paducah citizens and taken up the Tennessee River into Confederate held territory. Subsequently, the steamer was burned to prevent her capture by Union forces (Way 1994:417).

The *W.B. Terry*, the other steamboat mentioned in Johnson's letter, was a small sternwheel boat of 175 tons. She was built at Belle Vernon, Pennsylvania, in 1856. Prior to the Civil War she ran the Paducah-Eastport trade on the Tennessee River. On August 21, 1861, the *Terry* was seized by the USS *Lexington* at Paducah "for engaging in traffic with the enemy and for flying the Confederate flag," apparently the first steamer apprehended by Federal forces in the west (Way 1994:474).

The *Eastport's* principal owner, E.B. Martin, was associated with several other steamers operating on the Tennessee and Mississippi rivers. Like the *Eastport*,

many of the boats Captain Martin was involved with were built at New Albany and it appears that he had a long business relationship with one or more of the town's boat builders. In 1848, E.B. Martin became part owner of the *Muscle No. 2*, a sidewheeler built at New Albany in 1846 and, apparently, involved in the Tennessee-New Orleans trade (WPA 1942:4:201). Enrollment documents for this boat note that E.B. Martin was from Florence, Alabama. Martin seems to have sold his interest in *Muscle No. 2* in June 1849 (WPA 1942:4:201). He owned one-half interest in the steamboat *Cherokee* from 1850, the year she was built in New Albany, until 1858, when the boat disappears from the New Orleans enrollment records (WPA 1942:5:46). The *Cherokee*, like the *Eastport*, was involved in the Tennessee River-New Orleans trade and among her owners was Simpson, McCallister & Co., of Florence, Alabama; almost certainly related to the firm of Price & Simpson that owned interest in the *Eastport* in 1852 (WPA 1942:46). New Orleans enrollment documents for the *Cherokee* show that Samuel Milliken was master in 1851. This is certainly the S. Milliken or S. Millekin who is listed as the master of the *Eastport* in her first enrollment documents.

E.B. Martin and Price & Simpson were, also, part owners of the sidewheel steamer *Choctaw*, another New Albany-built boat, constructed in 1855 (Way 1994:86; WPA 1942:5:47). Martin and the Price & Simpson firm seem to have each held a 1/5 interest in the *Choctaw* from 1855 until 1859 or 1860 (WPA 1942:5:47). The *Choctaw* was eventually acquired by the United States government and, like the *Eastport*, was converted into an ironclad gunboat during the Civil War (Way 1994:86).

William Dickson, another of the *Eastport's* initial owners, held a 1/10 ownership in the steamboat *Mohican* in 1853, although when he first acquired interest in the vessel is unknown. The *Mohican* was built in New Albany in 1848 and Dickson may have been involved with the vessel from that date. New Orleans enrollment documents for the *Mohican* note that Dickson was from Buzzard Roost, Alabama, a small town situated just west of Tusculumbia and a few miles south of Eastport, Mississippi (WPA 1942:5:181). Most of the other owners of the *Mohican* in 1853 were from Florence and other towns along the middle Tennessee River, but one was from Paducah at the mouth of the Tennessee, one from Louisville, and one from New Orleans, reflecting the common pattern of boat owners residing in river towns where the boat traded and

where each could handle the business associated with the boat. The *Mohican* burned at New Orleans in February 1854 (Way 1994:327). Another of the 1852 owners of the *Eastport*, O.O. Nelson, is listed as a part owner and master of the steamboat *America* in 1854 New Orleans enrollment documents (WPA 1942:5:12).

On March 23, 1857, the *Eastport* was enrolled at the port of Paducah, Kentucky (BMIN 1857). This enrollment does refer to an earlier, now missing, enrollment issued in Paducah in February 1856 (Figure 2-6). In 1857, the owners of the *Eastport* were Charles W. Harrison (1/5), Price & Simpson (1/5), Simpson, McCallister & Co. (1/10), J.C. Terry (1/10), Samuel D. Weakley (1/10), Wm. R. McClure (1/10), O.O. Nelson (1/10) and D.C. Oates (1/10). Charles Harrison, also, is listed as the master of the *Eastport*. Price & Simpson, O.O. Nelson and D.C. Oates had been owners since 1852; the others represent new partners. Some of these new owners, also, were involved in other steamboats. R. McClure, listed as a resident of Wheeling, Virginia (now West Virginia), was part owner of the steamer *Colonel Woods* in 1842 (WPA 1942:4:54). The McCallister, Simpson & Co. (presumably the same as the Simpson, McCallister & Co.) were part owners of the *Choctaw* in 1858, along with *Eastport* owners Price & Simpson and previous owner E.B. Martin (WPA 1942:5:47).

Another of the *Eastport's* owners in 1857, Charles W. Harrison, gained a 1/5 ownership in the steamer *Huntsville* in 1851 or 1852 (WPA 1942:5:118). He may have acquired his interest from E.B. Martin who had given up his ownership in the *Huntsville* at about this time, possibly coinciding with his acquisition of the majority interest in the *Eastport* (WPA 1942:5:118). In 1853 or 1854 Harrison was part owner and master of the 261-ft *Huntsville No. 2*, apparently, placed into service after the original *Huntsville* was snagged and lost at Ste. Genevieve, Missouri, in the summer of 1854 (Way 1994:219; WPA 1942:5:120). Among the owners of the *Huntsville No. 2* was William R. McClure, possibly the R. McClure listed on the *Eastport's* 1857 enrollment (Way 1994:219). Way (1994:219) notes that Charles E. Harrison brought the *Huntsville No. 2* into New Orleans in February 1854 from Florence, Alabama, with the largest cargo carried by a steamboat to that date, consisting of 5,201 bales of cotton, 1,365 sacks of corn and 486 pieces of freight. In 1855, the *Huntsville No. 2* burned, with its cargo of 4,000 bales of

cotton, at Hamburg, Tennessee, on the Tennessee River (Way 1994:219).

It is not known if Samuel Weakley, D.C. Oates or J.C. Terry had any involvement with other steamboats; their names do not appear in the consolidated listing of enrollment documents available for the port of New Orleans. However, enrollment documents for other ports have not been thoroughly examined. In 1853 a William B. Terry is listed as a part owner of the steamer *Mohican*, along with several other Tennessee River residents, including William Dickson, one of the early owners of the *Eastport* (WPA 1942:5:181). Interestingly, William Terry was a resident of "East Port," Mississippi, the small Tennessee River town after which the steamboat *Eastport* was named. During the early part of the Civil War Samuel Weakley had organized the defense of the Tennessee River and he later reached the rank of General in the Alabama Militia (Cabaniss 1979:75).

The *Eastport's* 1857 enrollment expired and another one was issued at Paducah on March 23, 1858 (Figure 2-7). The 1858 enrollment is identical to the previous year's document except that the spelling of one of the owners was changed to "Simpson, McAllister & Co." as opposed to "Simpson, McCallister & Co." (BMIN 1858). On November 29, 1858, another enrollment was issued for the *Eastport* at the port of Paducah because of a change in ownership. The original of this document is missing from the National Archives, but it is referenced in a claim made after the Civil War by heirs of Hugh Worthington, one of the 1858 owners of the *Eastport* (National Archives, RG 109, Vessel Papers, File E-115, n.d.). The Worthington heirs were seeking compensation from the United States government for its seizure of the *Eastport* during the war. Captain Elijah Wood (sometimes given as "Woods") appeared before William Nolen, Surveyor of Customs at Paducah, to obtain the enrollment. He reported that the owners of the steamer were Chas. W. Harrison, with a 1/5 share; Mrs. A.O. Woolfolk, with a 1/5 share; and Hugh Worthington, with a 3/5 share. Elijah Wood was the master. All of these individuals were residents of Paducah. This was, apparently, the last enrollment issued for the *Eastport*, because in January 1866 F.M. Murray, then the Surveyor of Customs at Paducah, in testimony related to the Worthington heirs claim, stated that no records of subsequent enrollments or changes in ownership for the *Eastport* could be found (National Archives, RG 109, Vessel Papers, File E-115, n.d.).



No. 2. (Two.)

WHERE SURRENDERED.
Paducah

DATE OF SURRENDER.
23 day of March 1858

96
11
1857

CAUSE OF SURRENDER.
General

ENROLLMENT.

Enrollment in conformity with an Act of the CONGRESS of the United States of America, entitled "An act for enrolling and licensing SHIPS OR VESSELS, to be employed in the Coasting Trade and Fisheries, and for regulating the same;"

Charles W. Harrison
having taken or subscribed the oaths required by the said Act, and having sworn that he owns $\frac{1}{5}$, *Oliver & Simpson* $\frac{1}{5}$, *Simpson*, *H. G. Bullis* $\frac{1}{10}$, *J. G. Derry* $\frac{1}{10}$, *Saml. D. Westley* $\frac{1}{10}$, *Wm. H. G. Brown* $\frac{1}{10}$, *O. O. Nelson* $\frac{1}{10}$, and *D. G. Oates* $\frac{1}{10}$, and are

citizens of the UNITED STATES,
sole owners of the Ship or Vessel called the *Eastport*, of *Paducah* whereof *C. W. Harrison* is at present master, and as he hath sworn is a citizen of the UNITED STATES, and that the said Ship or Vessel was built at New Albany, in the state of Indiana, in the year 1852, as appears by her enrollment, dated at Paducah 25th February, 1856, numbered one, now surrendered on account of expiration.

And said Certificate having certified that the said Ship or Vessel has one deck and one mast and that her length is two hundred and thirty feet her breadth thirty two her depth eight and that she measures Two hundred and seventy $\frac{1}{2}$ tons; and that she is a steamboat has a cabin above deck and side wheel and pilot head.

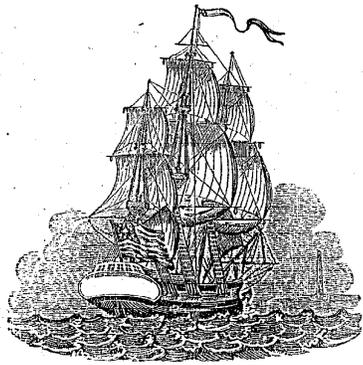
And the said *Charles W. Harrison* having agreed to the description and admeasurement above specified, and sufficient security having been given, according to the said Act, the said steamboat has been duly enrolled at the Port of Paducah

Given under my Hand and Seal, at the Port of Paducah this twenty third day of March in the year one thousand eight hundred and fifty seven.

William Allen
Surveyor of Customs

Figure 2-6. March 23, 1857, enrollment document for the Eastport.

ENROLMENT.



Enrolment in conformity to an Act of the CONGRESS of the United States of America, entitled "An act for enrolling and licensing SHIPS OR VESSELS, to be employed in the Coasting Trade and Fisheries, and for regulating the same,"

Wm. H. Harrison of Paducah having taken or subscribed the oaths required by the said Act, and having sworn — that he was $\frac{1}{5}$, John & Simpson $\frac{1}{5}$, Simpson, H. M. Allen $\frac{1}{10}$, J. C. Terry $\frac{1}{10}$, James D. Wadley $\frac{1}{10}$, Wm. B. M. Clark $\frac{1}{10}$, D. D. Nelson $\frac{1}{10}$, and D. C. Bates $\frac{1}{10}$; and are

No. 100. (2)

WHERE SURRENDERED.
Paducah, Ky.

DATE OF SURRENDER.
29th day of November 1858

CAUSE OF SURRENDER.
Change of owners.

ENROLMENT OF SHIPS OR VESSELS, TO BE EMPLOYED IN THE COASTING TRADE AND FISHERIES, AND FOR REGULATING THE SAME, IN ACCORDANCE WITH AN ACT OF THE CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES, PASSED MARCH 3, 1857.

citizens of the UNITED STATES, sole owners of the Ship or Vessel called the *Eastport* of Paducah — whereof *W. H. Harrison* is at present master, and as he hath sworn is a citizen of the UNITED STATES, and that the said Ship or Vessel was built at New Albany, in the state of Indiana, in the year, 1832, as appears by her Enrolment, dated at Paducah March 29th 1837, numbered two; and surrendered for Renewal:

And *Wm. H. Harrison* having certified that the said Ship or Vessel has now deck and no mast and that her length is two hundred and thirty feet her breadth "Twenty two" her depth "Eight" and that she measures Three hundred and seventy $\frac{84}{95}$ tons; and

that she is a sternboat has no cabins above deck, side ports and false head. And the said *Wm. H. Harrison* having agreed to the description and admeasurement above specified, and sufficient security having been given, according to the said Act, the said *Eastport* has been duly enrolled at the Port of Paducah

Given under my Hand and Seal, at the Port of Paducah this twenty third day of March — in the year one thousand eight hundred and fifty eight

William H. Harrison
Surveyor of Vessels

Figure 2-7. March 23, 1858, enrollment document for the *Eastport* (BMIN 1858).

The Eastport and the “North Alabama” Setting

Northwestern Alabama and the adjacent area of northeastern Mississippi was a prosperous and growing area in the early to mid 1800s. This was particularly true after 1840, by which time most of the Indians in the region, the Cherokees, Choctaw, Chickasaws, and Creeks had been removed to the west and their former lands opened to white settlement. These new emigrants brought with them their short staple cotton and black slaves and, soon, cotton agriculture rose to prominence.

Among the region’s early settlers were craftsmen, millers and millwrights. The numerous large creeks in the Tennessee Valley provided abundant water power for mills and, while the region was predominantly agricultural, the area around Muscle Shoals became one of the most heavily industrialized in the state by the 1850s. There were a number of sawmills and gristmills and a blast furnace. The most important commercial activity in the area was the growing of cotton. It was, therefore, only natural that cotton mills would be built. One of the earliest mills erected in the state was begun in 1821 in northern Alabama. In 1836 the Skipworth Cotton Mills were established (Sheridan 1979:24-25). The factory employed 112 people with an average wage of \$2.50 per week. The mill manufactured 10,000 yards of cotton osnaburg (coarse, canvas-like cloth), 300 pounds of batting and 10,000 dozen thread per week (Lancaster 1980:6)

A number of towns developed along the middle Tennessee River in the vicinity of Muscle Shoals to take advantage of the transportation benefits provided by the river and the industrial potentials of the shoals. Among these were the communities of Eastport in Mississippi and Tuscumbia and Florence in Alabama (Figure 2-8). The *Eastport’s* early owners were moderately important figures in the social, economic, and even political spheres of the region and their purchase and use of the *Eastport* was both a reflection and an extension of their already established business interests.

Eastport, Mississippi

Eastport, the town for which the steamboat *Eastport* was named, was founded at the mouth of Bear Creek in northeastern Mississippi, a crossroads where the Old Natchez Trace crossed the Tennessee River (Figure 2-8). The trace originated as part of a network of

trails used by Indians and this portion of the route was known originally as the Chickasaw Trace, where, after crossing the Tennessee it extended southward to the Chickasaw Nation near present-day Tupelo, Mississippi. Movements into the area by whites in the late 1700s prompted the establishment of a fort or trading post at the mouth of Bear Creek. Soon, traders, land speculators, and government officials were advocating settlement and development of the region. Treaties were negotiated with the Indians and a trading post was established on the west bank of Bear Creek (Kitchens 1985:11-12). Indians and white travelers alike utilized this trace route to reach the old Southwest territory. In the late eighteenth century, a growing number of boatmen also used the trace on their return trip north, having ridden their flatboats down the Mississippi River to New Orleans or other downstream ports. Carrying cargoes of tobacco, iron, hemp, flour and pork, flatboat traffic increased to the point that the number of boatmen using the trace quadrupled from 1790 to 1800. So many walked the trace north that it became known as the Boatman’s Trail (Kitchens 1985:14).

Between 1797 and 1800 George Colbert, a Chickasaw leader, began operating a ferry across the Tennessee River at Bear Creek. After the withdrawal of the Spanish from Natchez and the creation of the Mississippi Territory in 1798, the increase in traffic required improvements to the old trace. It was upon the advice of Colbert in 1801 that a new route crossing the river was established seven and one half miles upstream. Colbert also moved his ferry to the new site. The improved Natchez Trace now crossed the Tennessee River at Colbert’s Ferry and headed southwest over Bear Creek at Buzzard Roost (Kitchens 1985:14-17). Buzzard Roost became a flourishing community on the Natchez Trace. It had a post office, was a favorite stage stop, and had a large frame house that served as an inn. The house (or “stand”) became famous for its hospitality and fine food where the weary stage passenger could have some of “Aunt Betsy’s Waffles” (Leftwich 1965:112). Upriver of the mouth of Bear Creek a number of settlements sprang up along the Tennessee between 1816 and 1822, when large numbers of immigrants moved into the area. Among the most important were Tuscumbia, settled in 1815, and Florence, named for Florence, Italy, by the Italian engineer who surveyed and laid out the town in 1818. Alabama was admitted as a state in 1819 (Kitchens 1985:19-20).

Keelboats were the dominant mode of commercial transport on the Tennessee River up to the 1820s.

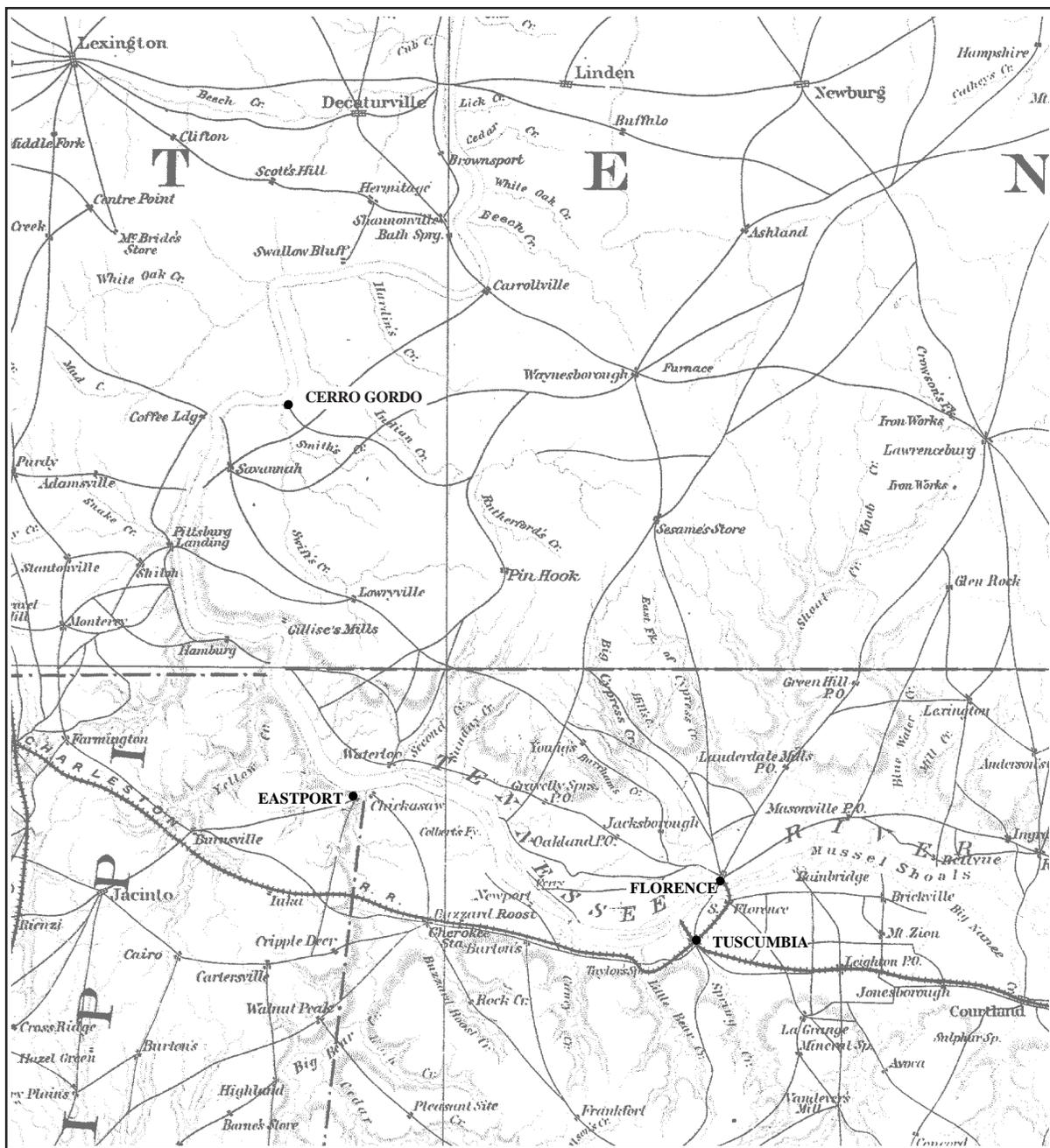


Figure 2-8. Detail of a Civil War-era map of northeast Mississippi, northwest Alabama, and southwest Tennessee showing towns and communities associated with the steamer *Eastport* and her owners. Included is Cerro Gordo, Tennessee, where the Confederate government began the conversion of the *Eastport* into an armed gunboat and where the vessel was captured by United States forces (source: Cowles 1983:pl. 149).

Ohio River keelboats could travel up the Tennessee only as far as Muscle Shoals, but smaller, local keelboats were used above that point. An 1824 newspaper advertisement by a local keelboat company formed to lighten vessels over the shoals stated:

The undersigned having engaged in the Cotton Freighting Business beg to leave to inform their friends and the public that they are prepared to receive cotton at Ditto's Landing where they have a very large and extensive warehouse, . . . They

have engaged boats of the best quality, a part of which have arrived. Their steersmen are those of long experience and sobriety. They will lighten cotton over the Shoals should the owners wish it sent on early in the season. They will receive cotton at any point on the Tennessee River [Kitchens 1985].

By the 1820s steamboats were ascending the Tennessee to the head of navigation at the foot of the shoals and keelboat commerce quickly declined and soon disappeared (Kitchens 1985:20-21). Steamboats were a great boon to the region's businessmen and farmers, as they were everywhere in the west. Steamboats cut the freight rate from \$5.00 per hundredweight to \$2.00 and reduced the time of upriver travel from New Orleans from the 3 months it took a keelboat to an astonishingly short 2 weeks. Steamboat traffic grew as the communities and businesses expanded in the region. A number of companies and partnerships were organized to build and operate steamboats and these vessels would soon become a factor in every major business transaction within the communities along the river (Leftwich 1965:85).

Eastport, with its meager beginnings as the location of an Indian trading post, grew in prominence as a thriving river port, becoming a primary trading point for the region (Figure 2-9). It was given the name, Eastport, because it was the eastern port for the many settlements in northern Mississippi. The other major ports for the northern part of the state were Chickasaw Bluff (present-day Memphis) on the Mississippi River to the west and Cotton Gin on the Tombigbee River to the south. Eastport, near the head of all year navigation on the Tennessee River, just below the shallow water at Colbert, Bee Tree, and Muscle shoals, was the port where farmers and planters brought their produce, chiefly cotton, by wagon from the plantations to the south and west. It was to Eastport that steamboats brought the manufactured goods from the northern markets and from New Orleans. The steamboat trade provided a flourishing business and attracted many merchants to Eastport, where they purchased lots and built stores. The town grew rapidly and in 1840 had a population of 6,681 whites and

828 black slaves. In 1849, a gentleman from Massachusetts named Josephus Wheelock laid off 50 lots south of town, which were later surveyed into blocks. Eastport at that time had "two churches, two schools, law offices, wholesale houses, grocery store, dry goods stores, a drugstore, cotton brokers, livery stable, warehouses, two inns or taverns, a newspaper office, carriage shops, and many homes. Many residents of Tishomingo County regarded the town as unsurpassed by any place short of Memphis." By 1850 the population had grown to 13,528 whites and 1,961 slaves (Kitchens 1985:39-41).

Several of the early owners of the steamboat *Eastport* were merchants or businessmen with connections to the town of Eastport. One of the larger merchants in Eastport was the company of John T. Oates and Brother, a wholesale and retail grocer and, also, a handler of dry goods. Among the items carried by the company were "sugar, coffee, spades and shovels, bagging and rope, molasses, whiskey, iron and nails, salt and mackerel fish, spun yarns, flour, bacon, leather, castings, candles, window glass, candy, cheese, and a large lot of ready-made clothing, all sorts and sizes" (Kitchens 1985:68). They seem to have been typical of the merchants who took payments in either cash or cotton, essentially acting the role of the traditional cotton "factor." Oates and Brother had a warehouse and large cotton shed, secure from the elements and animals, and they made advances to customers on the cotton that was stored there.

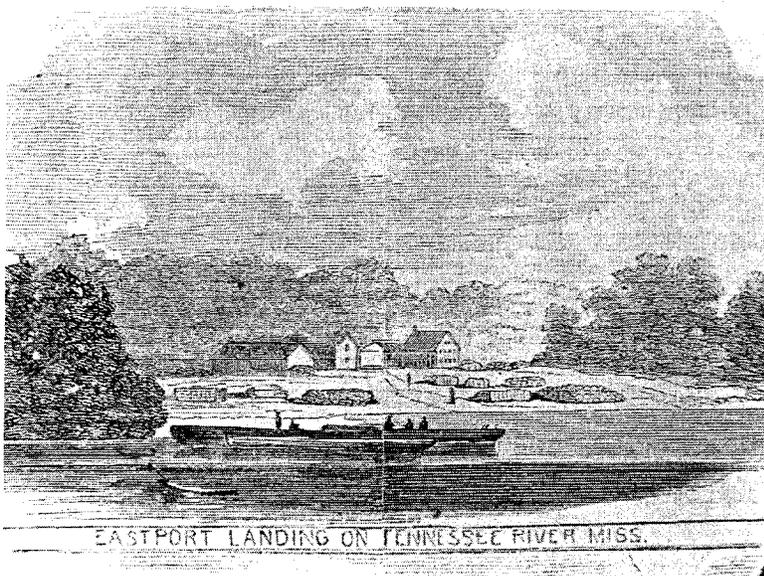


Figure 2-9. Eastport Landing, Mississippi, in 1862 (source: Kitchens 1985:142).

John T. Oates' brother, although not mentioned by name in local newspaper advertisements, may have been David C. Oates, one of the early owners of the *Eastport*. When the post office was started in the nearby community of Cherokee in December 10, 1856, David Oates became its first postmaster. Cherokee was not a river town like Eastport, but was established along the Memphis and Charleston Railway line (Leftwich 1965:112-13). In 1862 and 1863 D.C. Oates was a resident of nearby Tuscumbia and still involved in the grocery business as indicated by several extant vouchers for the sale of meat and cereals to the Confederate government (National Archives, RG 109, Citizens Files, Roll 752, n.d.). One voucher covering a six week period recorded the following sales by Oates: October 8, 1862, 305 lbs. of bacon for \$76.25; November 5, 2078 lbs. of beef for \$207.80; November 20, 1521 lbs. of beef for \$152.10 and 2 bushels of Rye for coffee for \$4.00 for a total of \$440.15. On September 30, 1863, Oates sold 489 bushels of corn for \$733.50 and 18,888 pounds of oats for \$472.20 (National Archives, RG 109, Citizens Files, Roll 752).

Another wholesale grocer in Eastport was the firm of Terry and Price, located on Main Street. In 1851, their list of merchandise included "100 barrels of flour, 50 whole barrels and 30 half barrels of whisky, 2000 cheese, a general assortment of castings from a wagon box to a 40 gallon kettle, a heavy stock of spun thread, Manella [*sic*] rope, bar soap, upper and sole leather, 10 boxes candy, 20 boxes candles, 10 boxes flasks, 4 Hatche's counter scales, a large lot of feathers, 4 barrels and 8 half barrels of crackers and butter bisquits [*sic*], and blacksmith's tools including bellows, anvils, vices, hammers, stocks and dies" (Kitchens 1985:43). Mr. R.W. Price joined George Campbell, who was in business by himself as a wholesale and retail dealer in dry goods and groceries. Campbell moved to Texas and Price took over the business and the complete stock of merchandise on December 25, 1853 (Kitchens 1985:72). The principals in the Terry and Price company may have been the J.C. Terry and the Price of the Price & Simpson firm, early owners of the *Eastport*.

Another Eastport businessman was Jonathan M. Nelson, possibly a relative of O.O. Nelson, one of the original owners of the *Eastport* and a resident of nearby Tuscumbia. Jonathan Nelson was an insurance salesman, dealt in real estate, owned a large general store and was part owner of the Eastport Ferry. The Eastport Ferry was begun in May 1843 by authorization from the board of police of Tishomingo

County. In 1851, the owners of the ferry were J.M. Nelson, Willey [William ?] B. Terry and Jno. McMechan. They ferried passengers, carriages, horses and livestock. A temporary corral was located near the ferry crossing to house hogs and other stock waiting to be driven to market (Kitchens 1985:76). One of the stores Jonathan Nelson advertised to sell as part of his real estate business was the storehouse previously owned by J.T. Oates in 1852. Jonathan Nelson was the local agent for the Mississippi Mutual Insurance Company of Aberdeen, Mississippi, and he sold a new type of insurance, one that advocated benefits to widows and their children. He, also, offered life insurance policies "to all classes of persons in securing families from want and dependence" (Kitchens 1985:73). Newspaper advertisements report that Nelson's general store carried items such as "Kentucky, Virginia, and Tennessee Tobacco by the box, half box, or at retail . . . Livingston's plows on consignment . . . a large lot of bureaus, bedsteads, tables, chairs and rockers, a large invoice of ladies', gentlemens', and boys' saddles, 2 tons of iron." Like John T. Oates and Brother, Nelson took cotton as payments for debts and in exchange for merchandise at his store (Kitchens 1985:73-74).

Eastport in the 1840s and 1850s was a center of trade and wealth for the region. In 1854 river transportation was still the primary means of sending goods to market. For Eastport, however, the expanding network of railroads was about to change that situation (Kitchens 1985:78). The first railroad in the Tennessee Valley was the Tuscumbia Railway Company. It was chartered on January 16, 1830, by an act of the Alabama legislature (McWilliams 1989:11) and was among the first railroads south of the Ohio River and west of the Appalachians. The line was completed in 1832 and initially stretched from Tuscumbia to the river, but was expanded eastward to Decatur, Alabama, to form the Tuscumbia, Courtland and Decatur Railroad. The first steam engine for the line arrived in June 1834 from Liverpool, England. The locomotive was known as the "Fulton" and Jack Lawson served as engineer. Lawson had been engineer on Stephenson's "Rocket," winning the famous race on the Manchester and Liverpool Road in England (McWilliams 1989:5, 12).

In 1847, the Tuscumbia, Courtland and Decatur was sold and reorganized under the name of the Tennessee Valley Railroad Company. On June 1, 1851, the Memphis and Charleston Railroad purchased the Tennessee Valley Railroad (McWilliams 1989:14). The Memphis and Charleston Railroad ran east and

west connecting the Mississippi River at Memphis with the Atlantic Coast at Charleston. Railroad officials offered stock in the company to towns along the proposed route in northern Mississippi. Eastport was such a thriving river town at the time that the town leaders saw no need to contribute the \$20,000 asked by the railroad. As a consequence, the route passed south of town, a move that initiated the decline of Eastport (Kitchens 1985:82-84).

Tuscumbia, Alabama

One of the “North Alabama” river towns associated with the early history of the *Eastport* was Tuscumbia. The history of the river landing that was to become Tuscumbia, began in 1787, as a French trading post on the Tennessee River at the mouth of Spring Creek. Michael Dickson, considered the first permanent white settler of Tuscumbia, came by keelboat up the Tennessee River in 1815. The town of Tuscumbia proper was situated about 2 miles away from the river; the associated boat landing on the Tennessee became known as Tuscumbia Landing. Regular steamboat service was established to the town as early as January 1825, when the New Orleans and Tuscumbia Steamboat Company was organized. Wagons were first used to connect Tuscumbia and the “Landing” itself, but in 1832 a railroad was built from the town to the river. A terminal building, measuring 75 ft long by 60 ft wide, was built at the river. The building was 3 stories tall to reach from the level of the river to the top of the bank. An inclined plane extended from the water’s edge, through the building and to the upper floor and a floating wharf was constructed to accommodate fluctuating river levels. From October 1833 to May 1834 over 13,000 bales of cotton were shipped from Tuscumbia Landing. A great variety of other goods, also, were loaded and unloaded at the Landing. These included “sugar, coffee, whisky, wines, brandies, peas, lead, shot, tobacco, cigars, candles, mahogany veneering, Ohio cheese, assortment of iron from Nashville, axes, rope, books, turpentine, sugar house molasses, nails, buckets, brooms and chairs” (Sheridan 1980:70-74).

During the Civil War, one of the few rifle factories in the South was established about 20 miles west of Tuscumbia at Buzzard Roost, location of the home of land owner and planter, William Dickson (Leftwich 1965:186-187). The rifle factory was established at the urging of Confederate President Jefferson Davis when he saw the great need for establishing armories in the South early in the war. To meet this need, he asked Governor Shorter of Alabama to contract

for the manufacture of rifles for Alabama soldiers. It was decided that the best way for Alabama to equip its troops with weapons was to contract with private firms. On December 7, 1861, the Alabama Legislature enacted a bill entitled “An Act to Encourage the Manufacture of Fire Arms and Munitions of War in this State” that appropriated money for the delivery of weapons, mostly Mississippi or Enfield designed rifles. Alabama’s first contract was with three distinguished gentlemen from northern Alabama, William Dickson, a prominent planter and businessman, Owen O. Nelson, attorney and state legislator, and Dr. Lewis H. Sadler, a physician with the financial means to support the endeavor. For two of the men, Dickson and Nelson, their business association, also, had extended to the ownership of the *Eastport* in the early 1850s. Their firm, Dickson, Nelson & Co, had been operating an iron foundry when they signed the contract with the state of Alabama on January 22, 1862, to supply 5,000 rifles (Sheridan 1979:27). In addition to his plantation and the foundry, Dickson owned a large general merchandise store in town (Leftwich 1965:112).

The arms contract with Dickson, Nelson & Co. seems to have been the only one executed by the state of Alabama. O.O. Nelson, president of the company, was urged to undertake the production of weapons at the insistence of Governor Shorter, who was a close political associate (Jones 1989:29-30). Based on a letter from Nelson to Governor Shorter on February 22, 1862, the plant was still under construction when the operation was moved to a safer location:

Hon. Jno Gill Shorter
Montgomery

My Dear Sir

In view of the fall of Fort Henry it will most likely become necessary that we should change the location of our Armory. The enemy now has full possession of the Tenn river to Florence and it is no doubt his intention to try and effect a landing at some point near our works to obtain possession of the Memphis and Charleston railroad. We are but about twelve miles from the river . . . I write to ask you to allow us to manufacture the guns for the state at any point we may think best, in or out of state . . . Have commenced our building, purchased lumber for the whole and contracted for building. I desire you will write me on receipt of this. I go to Memphis tomorrow to run off all machinery we have

finished. I consider Memphis in great danger. The clouds look dark that overhangs our young Confederacy but we should not be discouraged. It will require only a stronger effort on our part to accomplish all we set out to do. Every man capable of bearing arms should now turn out to meet and drive back the invader of our soil. Were it not for the gun business I should be off myself. One gun boat of the Lincoln fleet came up to Eastport two days ago. She returned without doing damage. I presume she was taking observations.

Hoping to hear from you at your earliest convenience, I am

Yours very truly,

O. O. Nelson
[Jones 1989:35]

By April 1862, Nelson had moved his equipment to Rome, Georgia, not making a single rifle in Alabama. Rome had machine shops, plus the Noble Brothers and Company, a foundry established by James Noble of Cornwall, England, in 1855. Noble had blast furnaces, lathes, drills, a rolling mill and other machinery. The only other rolling mill in the Confederacy was the Tredegar Iron Works in Richmond. During the war, the Noble Brothers made complete cannons with carriages and limbers. These were made in the O.B. Eve carriage plant, where they shared space with the Dickson, Nelson & Co. Dickson, Nelson & Co. was forced to move two more times in the next couple of years due to fires destroying their factories and Union troop movements. They moved to Adairsville, Georgia, in September 1862 and to Dawson, Georgia, in March 1864. They remained at Dawson until the end of the war, where they had occupied property of the Central of Georgia Railroad. In June 1866, the Dickson, Nelson & Co. sold its holdings to the Dawson Manufacturing Company, which for many years after the war operated an extensive lumber business. The manufacturing company would later change its name to the Dawson Variety Works, and became one of the largest lumber industries in the South (Jones 1989:31-34).

Before the war, Owen Nelson, in addition to his other ventures, operated a tailor shop in the Palace Drug Store building in Tuscumbia. The building was still standing in 1996 at the corner of Main and 5th Street in downtown Tuscumbia (John McWilliams, personnel communication 1996). Successors to the O.O. Nelson & Brothers business in Tuscumbia was the firm of McClune & Halsey. Prior to the Civil

War they purchased the stock of Nelson & Brothers and continued as dealers in dry goods, hardware and groceries. They advertised that they had a variety of goods for sale to “cash dealers and prompt customers.” Their goods included fresh lard, cheese, candles, no. 1 mackerel, fresh venison, hams, buck skins, spinning wheels, “Futrill” chairs, Swan Brand Whiskey and powder and lead shot for firearms (*North Alabamian* February 20, 1857).

Florence, Alabama

The other north Alabama town closely associated with the early years of the steamer *Eastport* was Florence. Originally known as Northport, the site of the town was laid off into lots in 1818. Across the Tennessee River was South Florence, or Southport, while the town of Eastport was not far down the river. One of the early settlers of Northport was John Simpson, who became involved in the mercantile business. This was the Simpson of the Price & Simpson firm that owned a 1/10 share in the *Eastport* during her early years of operation. Born in Tyrone County, Ireland, on September 30, 1794, John Simpson came to northern Alabama from Nashville and began working for a Mr. James Jackson as a clerk, but soon afterwards, bought out Jackson and established John Simpson & Company (Russel 1994:105). Shortly after this, Simpson went into business with Capt. Thomas Rapiere. Rapiere was one of the earliest settlers of Florence and ran a barge line between Florence and New Orleans. The name of the business became Simpson & Rapiere. In 1824, Simpson sold out his business and went back to Ireland where he married Margaret Patton (Garrett 1968:224). The Simpsons returned to Alabama in April 1825 and John went into the mercantile business again, this time in Southport. His business was known as “Simpson and Dickson,” however, it is not known if his partner was William Dickson who later would serve with Simpson as an owner of the *Eastport* (Leftwich 1965:43). In 1841, Simpson went into business with the father of John R. Price of Florence and opened in business as Price & Simpson (Leftwich 1965:43). By 1850, John Simpson was one of the wealthiest men in the county, owning over 2,000 acres of land and property valued at almost \$50,000. John Simpson retired in 1855 and put two of his sons up in the business after which the firm became Simpson, McCallister & Company, owners of a 1/10 share of the *Eastport* in 1857 (Russel 1994:105).

Florence resident Samuel Davies Weakley, who acquired an ownership in the *Eastport* in 1856 or

1857, was born on October 2, 1812, near Nashville in Davidson County, Tennessee. He was educated in Nashville and trained as a surveyor by his father. In 1831 he joined his brother, James H. Weakley, in Florence as assistant surveyor of public lands. S.D. Weakley soon became involved in a variety of business ventures. He established a mercantile business with James Martin known as Martin, Weakley & Co. and had some commercial relationship with John Simpson, although the details of this endeavor are currently unknown (National Archives, RG 109, Citizens Files, Roll 1082, n.d.). Weakley was a director of the Memphis and Charleston Railroad, was one of the original board of directors of the Florence Wesleyan University, was a trustee of the Florence Synodical College, and was organizer and first president of the Florence Insurance and Banking Company. His business dealings were quite successful and by the beginning of the Civil War, Samuel Weakley had become a very wealthy man. He married Eliza Bedford, the daughter of Dr. John R. and Isabella M. Bedford, on June 30, 1836. Dr. Bedford was the first physician of Lauderdale County and one of the four original settlers of Florence (Owen 1978:1733-34).

At the start of the Civil War Samuel Weakley helped organize the Alabama Militia, in which he held the rank of General. He was one of several local citizens who wrote Judah P. Benjamin, Confederate Secretary of War, on November 22, 1861, reporting on the efforts they were making towards the war effort:

The undersigned were sent from North Alabama and Northeast Mississippi to the military commander at Columbus, Ky., to inquire if the defense of the Tennessee River were safe, and to know if we could aid them in any manner. The answer from General Pillow, now commanding there, after conferring with General Polk, was that they were as good as the time allowed and the means afforded would permit, but that they were unsafe, and the force on that flank of the army resting on the river insufficient; that there was danger of the enemy ascending the Tennessee River and burning the railroad bridge across it just above Fort Henry and separating our army at Bowling Green from that at Columbus, and, of destroying the Mobile and Ohio and the Memphis and Charleston Railroads, for it is only 18 miles from the Big Bend of the Tennessee to their junction at Corinth.

The undersigned then determined to make an effort to improve the works on that river, and

send 5,000 volunteers, with their own guns to garrison them. General Pillow, to facilitate the work, appointed General Weakley, our chairman, a volunteer aide-de-camp, and specially charged him with the organization of the force; Mr. William Dickson, quartermaster, and Mr. John T. Abernathy, commissary for the force to be raised for this purpose. They are gentlemen of large wealth, patriotic and energetic. And, moreover, General Pillow authorized Col. Thomas J. Foster to raise a regiment, to be armed with their own guns, for twelve months.

We shall proceed immediately to raise their volunteers. We propose to organize a company of old men, armed, in each county in North Alabama, for 40 days. Our reason for this is that they are not only in general better marksmen than the generation now growing up, but the very fact of gray-headed men moving to the field will give an impetus to volunteering which we need just now.

From Columbus we requested the Governor of Alabama to ask the Legislature to pass a law for the purchase and impressment of arms similar to the one enacted in the State of Tennessee, and presume it has been done before this time.

We hope we may have your approval of these arrangements for the public defense. The bonds of Mr. Dickson, as quartermaster, and Mr. Abernathy, as commissary, will be sent, with sureties worth a very large amount under this date . . . [Garrett 1968:26-27].

This letter, again, brings out the varied and complex relationships that existed among the owners of the *Eastport*. William Dickson, one of the original shareholders in the steamboat, served as quartermaster in the state militia with Samuel Weakley and the request for an act of the state legislature to purchase arms mentioned in the letter refers to the contract ultimately made with the company owned by William Dickson and O.O. Nelson.

Following the war, S.D. Weakley's daughter eloped with a Capt. William Milliken of Paducah, an action which her father did not approve (Garrett 1968:57). This may be an intriguing situation, if William was related to Samuel Milliken, the first captain of the *Eastport*.

E.B. Martin, principal owner of the *Eastport* and prominent in the Tennessee River steamboat trade, appears in the 1850 census records of Lauderdale

County as 39 years old, married and with three children, ages from one month to three years old. His wife, Ellin, is listed as 27 years old. Martin was a native of Maine and the census lists his occupation as boat captain (Garrett 1968:C-64). Unlike the other owners of the *Eastport*, E.B. Martin seems to have had no business interests other than the operation and ownership of steamboats. In 1850, the Federal census reports that Martin owned real property valued at only \$1,000, but as noted above, through the 1840s and 1850s he served as master and held ownership in several steamboats.

The Eastport as Packet Steamer, 1852-1861

Patterns of Trade

The group of businessmen who purchased the *Eastport* placed her into service as a river packet running on the Tennessee, Ohio and Mississippi rivers. There is no doubt that these men used the steamer to carry their personal crops and merchandise, but the majority of the cargoes carried by the *Eastport* consisted of the produce of the region's numerous planters as well as goods and merchandise of all types destined for area merchants and citizens. Her down river cargo would have consisted mainly of agricultural products destined, primarily, for New Orleans, although some cargoes may have been dropped off at intermediate ports. As elsewhere in the South, cotton represented the principal commodity shipped out of the middle Tennessee River area, and over her years of operation the *Eastport* carried tens of thousands of bales of the fiber. Tobacco was the second most important crop transported down the Tennessee and Mississippi by the *Eastport* and other Tennessee River steamers, but the amount carried and its value was small compared to cotton. Other down river cargo included other products of the interior regions, such as flour, whiskey, pork, lard, hides, corn, rope, eggs, etc. The *Eastport* and other Tennessee River steamers, also, often carried iron and "osnaburg" cloth into New Orleans, derived from the cotton mills, blast furnaces and foundries established in the Muscle Shoals area.

The upriver cargoes of the *Eastport* and other western steamers were entirely different from those going down the river. Upriver cargoes consisted of supplies, building materials, farm implements, manufactured goods, food

stuffs, and other necessities for the towns and farms in the area. Prior to the coming of the railroads, area merchants received their stock primarily by steamboat, much of it coming up from New Orleans. In addition to various cargoes, the *Eastport* would have carried passengers, going both up and down the rivers.

In her activities the *Eastport* was generally representative of the majority of the steamboats working on the Mississippi River and its tributaries. She was just one of a number of boats serving the middle Tennessee River and the area of northern Alabama and Mississippi during the 1850s. However, during this period, the *Eastport* was one of the larger steamers on the Tennessee and for nine years she carried very large quantities of cargo out of and into the area. Thus, there is no doubt that she played an important role in the economic life of the region. Specific records of the *Eastport's* commercial activities, such as account books, have not been located. However, it is possible to obtain a reasonable idea of the *Eastport's* activities and her position in the regional economy by examining shipping information published in the newspapers of important river port cities. Newspapers in the river ports commonly contained specific columns and ran advertisements that reported on the activities of steamboats and other commercial vessels (Figure 2-10). Generally entitled something like "River News" or "River Intelligence," these columns often provided detailed information on steamboat activity. The typical information given would be the name and origin of a steamboat, its captain, its cargo and the name of the company or individual receiving the cargo. The advertisements provided information on the departures and destinations of specific boats and, commonly, included the name of the master and the agents to contact for obtaining passage or for shipping goods. By carefully examining various newspapers it is possible to determine

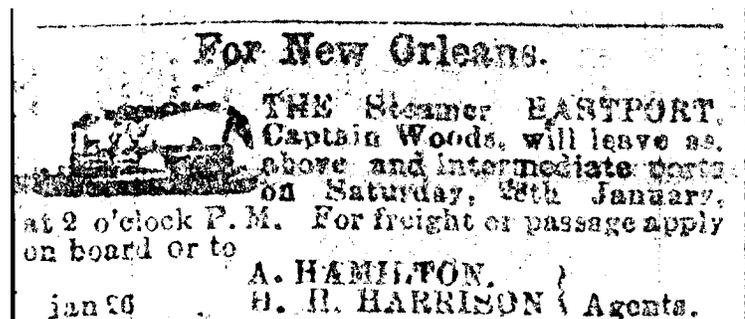


Figure 2-10. Advertisement for the *Eastport* bound for New Orleans (source: *Nashville Gazette* Jan. 27, 1860).

the types and quantities of cargo carried and, essentially, trace the commercial activities of a boat over time.

Unfortunately, the newspapers normally provided detailed information only on cargoes being carried into a port. Only occasionally did they give similar information on what steamers were taking away from a city. Thus, in New Orleans, for example, several newspapers list the arrivals of the *Eastport* and some present a detailed breakdown of the cargoes she carried into the city. However, when the steamer left the city, the only information normally given was her date of departure and destination (Figure 2-11). Also, many of the smaller towns and communities served by the *Eastport* had no newspapers or their papers carried no river news, such that the cargoes carried to and from these smaller communities are generally untraceable. While these shortcomings are recognized, the river news sections of several newspapers have been examined and used to compile, at least, a partial picture of the *Eastport's* commercial activities.

No record of the *Eastport's* maiden voyage from the Louisville area has been found in local newspapers, presumably because of the great attention being paid to the flooding of the Ohio River. It is known, however, that the owners immediately put the steamer into business. The first mention of the boat on this voyage appears in the *Cincinnati Daily Commercial* of January 4, 1852, although this is a second-hand account. In the "River News" section, the paper reported a "Memoranda of the Steamer Charleston," a boat which had arrived in Cincinnati on January 3 or 4 and, as was quite common, provided the River News reporter with information on her voyage. This "Memoranda" noted:

Left Memphis Wed. Dec 29th at 7 o'clock PM. Passed St. Paul at Paddy's Hen & Chickens. Thursday morning, the 30th, passed the Bride in the chute off Island 30; met several boats, names unknown; passed the Sacramento at Caledonia,

at 5 o'clock, AM; met the Eastport at Paducah, . . . [*Cincinnati Daily Commercial* January 4, 1852].

On December 30, then, the *Eastport* was at Paducah, on the Ohio River at the mouth of the Tennessee. It is likely that the steamer had gone up the Tennessee River immediately after her completion, probably to the towns of Eastport, Florence and Tuscumbia to pick up cargo. When sighted by the *Charleston*, the *Eastport* was probably on her way down river to New Orleans, because 6 days later, on January 5, 1853, she arrived at that city (*New Orleans Price Current* January 8, 1853). On this first voyage, the steamer carried a variety of freight, mostly agricultural products, to a number of merchants (consignees) in New Orleans as recorded in the "River News" column of the *New Orleans Price Current*:

EASTPORT, Milliken [master], from Tennessee River with 2787 bales cotton, viz. - 908 Bradley, Wilson & co - 584 S. O. Nelson & co - 221 Cherry, Henderson & co - 218 Fearn, Donegan & co - 177 J. J. McMahon - 98 W. B. Chrisp - 95 to Brady, Gorman & co - 58 Buchannon, Carroll & co - 19 R. Yeatman & co - 34 J & G Crumwell - 23 McGreger, Alloway & co - 12 S. Baker & co - 13 Pickett, Perkins & co - 5 J. H. Heald - 4 Hewitt, Norton & co - 9 Lusk & co - 3 J. M Pearsall & co - 261 to order - 27 hhds [hogsheads] tobacco. R. Yeatman & co - 1 do Cherry, Henderson & co - 3 do McGreger, Alloway & co - 6 do Burbridge & Adams - 4 do Turner, Wilson & co - 1 do Soery & Campbell - 2 do W. A. Johnson & co - 1 do Fellowes & co - 83 bbls [barrels] pork. Turner, Wilson & co - 3 bbls beans. W. A. Violett & co - 154 sks [sacks] corn Brady, Gorman & co. [*New Orleans Price Current* January 8, 1853].²

The *Eastport* was only one of a number of steamers arriving at the bustling port of New Orleans on that day. The cargo on the *Eastport* was generally typical of the period and of what she would carry for most of her career. It consisted principally of cotton, probably derived mainly from planters in the

² Goods were shipped in a variety of forms and in a variety of containers. The terminology used normally referred to a container of a specific size, but not always. A bale, when used to refer to cotton, normally weighed 400 to 450 pounds, but this weight did not necessarily apply to other commodities shipped as bales. A barrel normally had a capacity of about 30 to a little over 40 gallons; a hogshead was a larger cask, holding about 63 gallons; a tierce was a cask of inter-

mediate size, holding about 42 gallons, but it was also commonly used to refer to a barrel containing salted provisions; a keg normally applied to a small barrel with a capacity of 5 to 10 gallons. A cask often referred to a small, keg-sized barrel, but it could mean a barrel of any size. Leather and paper were sometimes shipped in rolls. The capacities of sacks, packages, boxes, and bundles varied considerably depending on the commodity.

Tennessee River.
 Leaves on WEDNESDAY, 14th inst., positively.
FOR TENNESSEE RIVER, DIRECT.
 The fine regular steamer EASTPORT, C.
 W. Harrison, master, will leave for East
 port, Florence and Tuscumbia, as above. For freight or
 passage apply on board, or to
LEWIS SNAPP & CO., 27 Front street,
 or **W. A. VIOLETT & CO.,**
 Fulton and New Levee streets.

Figure 2-11. Advertisement for the *Eastport* bound for Eastport, Florence and Tuscumbia on the Tennessee River (source: *New Orleans Daily Picayune* December 11, 1855).

Eastport-Florence-Tuscumbia area. The other goods carried, also, consisted of produce of the interior; tobacco, pork, beans and corn. It is probable that the *Eastport* also had passengers aboard, however, no record of this is provided in the newspapers.

The cotton in the *Eastport's* first cargo was destined for 17 different New Orleans commission merchants or factors, with one consignment of 261 bales destined "to order," which generally meant their sale or consignment would be taken care of by someone on board the steamer. This pattern of carrying cotton destined for a number of consignees was fairly typical and was followed by the *Eastport* over the years. One of the shipments, consisting of 584 bales of cotton, was to the New Orleans firm of S.O. Nelson & Co. S.O. Nelson was a brother of Owen O. Nelson, one of the owners of the *Eastport* who managed one end of the family business in Tuscumbia. An advertisement in the "Mercantile Card" column of the newspaper the *North Alabamian* in 1857 provides information on the business network of the Nelson brothers:

S. O. Nelson & Co., New Orleans. Walter, Nelson & Co., Memphis, Tenn. factors and Commission Merchants.

Will continue to keep an office in Athens, Alabama.

Mr. John T. Tanner will make Cash advances on consignments to us.

O. O. Nelson, Tuscumbia, Alabama, will act as our General Agent, and will make Cash advance on consignments of Cotton or other produce.

Oct 8, 1856 [*North Alabamian* February 20, 1857].

The standard arrangement in the southern cotton trade was for the individual planter to ship his cotton directly to an agent or factor in a major com-

mercial center, or for local merchants to buy cotton from area planters, or take cotton as payment for merchandise, and then ship it to the commercial center where it could be sold. For the entire Mississippi River drainage, New Orleans was that commercial center. The shipment to S.O. Nelson & Co. seems to represent the later two situations with O.O. Nelson acting as the local merchant involved in collecting and arranging for the shipment of the cotton. Other consignments on board are likely to have come

from individual planters. In New Orleans, an agent, generally known as a factor or commission merchant, normally handled the sale of the cotton of an individual planter. Factors were indispensable in the agricultural economy of the south and were key figures in marketing crops. They served as a combination banker, merchant, buyer and economic advisor for the planter. They provided an outlet for plantation produce and a source of credit, a necessity in the single crop system of cotton agriculture (Woodman 1968). A planter normally received income only once a year, when his crop was sold. While this sale could bring in a great deal of money over a short period of time, for the rest of the year the planter had to live entirely on cash reserves and credit, extended to him by a factor who was assured of handling his crop. Credit was usually supplied by the cotton factor as either an advance on the sale of that year's crop or as an extended credit with the following year's crop used a security. In addition to handling the sale of the cotton crop, the factor commonly made or arranged for the purchase and shipment of supplies, groceries, and equipment for the planter. The Tennessee River planter, far removed from New Orleans, had to depend on his factor for all of these transactions. A factor would deduct his expenses and the purchases made for a planter over the course of a year from the money received at the sale of the cotton crop. In the mid-nineteenth century, the standard factor's fee was about 2.5 percent of the gross receipts of the crop being sold (Woodman 1968:34-36).

The 2,787 bales of cotton carried by the *Eastport* represented a tremendously valuable cargo. The short staple cotton grown in northern Alabama and Mississippi was pressed into bales with an average weight of about 450 pounds, although the weight of individual bales varied considerably. Assuming an av-

erage of 450 pounds per bale, the cotton on the *Eastport* represented 1,254,150 pounds of the fiber. The amount paid for any consignment of cotton varied dependent upon its condition or grade and the general situation of the market at the time. New Orleans newspapers indicate that cotton of average grade ("middling") was bringing about 9 cents per pound during the early months of 1852, meaning that the over one million pounds of cotton on the *Eastport*, if of generally average quality, would have been worth an estimated \$112,873.50. While this is only an estimate of the worth of the *Eastport's* cotton, it is an indication of the very high value of the cargoes carried by the *Eastport* and other steamers. In the 1850s, New Orleans was receiving a tremendous amount of cotton from the Tennessee River-northern Alabama area by steamboat. *The New Orleans Price Current* reported that between September 1852 and August 1853, the period encompassing the beginning of the *Eastport's* activities, a total of 328,176 bales of cotton were brought into the city from "N. Ala. & Tenn" (*New Orleans Price Current* September 1, 1859). This represented an almost unbelievable 74,000 tons of cotton which, at 9 cents per pound on average, would have been worth over 13 million dollars. While the amount of cotton brought into New Orleans from the Tennessee River area in 1852-1853 was large, it constituted less than 20 percent of the more than 1.6 million bales of cotton imported into the city that year. These numbers are indicators of the size and tremendous economic importance of the southern cotton trade and they help emphasize the important position played by the carrier of the vast majority of this cotton, the steamboat. The great majority of the cotton brought into New Orleans was shipped overseas, primarily to Great Britain but, also, to other countries on the continent. A smaller quantity was shipped to New York and New England states where the country's cotton and cloth mills were centered.

Tobacco represented the second most important cargo on the *Eastport* when she reached New Orleans in early January 1853. On board were 45 hogsheads of tobacco consigned to eight different factors or commission merchants. Several of these factors also received consignments of cotton. A hogshead was a large barrel with a capacity of about 63 gallons which could hold approximately 1000 pounds of tobacco. Information in the commercial sections of the *New Orleans Price Current* indicate that there were two types of "Western" tobacco brought into the city. One of these was known as "Western Leaf" and the other as "Western Stemmed" (*New Orleans*

Price Current September 1, 1859). The prices brought by tobacco, like cotton, varied dependent upon the grade or condition and upon the market conditions at the time. In the 1850s, prices for Western tobacco varied considerably, ranging from as little as 4 cents per pound to as much as 9 cents per pound. Assuming a low value of just 4 cents per pound, the approximately 45,000 pounds of tobacco carried by the *Eastport* would have had a value of \$1,800, while at 9 cents per pound it would have a value of \$4,050. While certainly a valuable commodity, tobacco ranks a very distance second behind cotton in terms of its value as a cargo.

The other goods carried by the *Eastport* on this first voyage consisted of 83 barrels of pork, 3 barrels of beans and 154 sacks of corn. The typical barrel held about 30 to 40 gallons and a sack would commonly have held from 50 to 100 pounds of produce. The beans and corn were probably dried and the pork would have been cured in some manner, most likely salted or in brine (pickled). Although the *Eastport* and the other steamers commonly carried miscellaneous items such as pork and corn, these tended to be of insignificant value when compared to the principal cargoes, cotton and tobacco.

Over the next 10 years the *Eastport* regularly transported cargo and passengers along the Mississippi and Tennessee rivers, with New Orleans as her principal destination. Table 2-1 provides a complete listing of the *Eastport's* arrivals in New Orleans between January 1853 and April 1861 as derived from the *New Orleans Price Current*. This table includes the date of arrival, the origin of the trip, the number of cotton bales carried, the number of hogsheads and boxes of tobacco carried, and the name of the captain. Figure 2-12 presents graphically the information on the amounts of cotton carried into New Orleans by the *Eastport* monthly during her entire career as a packet steamer. These data offer insights into the pattern of trade of the *Eastport* and, by extension, of the steamboat trade between New Orleans and the Tennessee River area in general. The majority of the *Eastport's* arrivals in New Orleans occurred between the months of December and May. One arrival occurred in June, two in October and two in November. No arrivals at all occurred during the summer months of July, August and September over the entire 8.5-year-period of the *Eastport's* existence as a commercial steamer.

This annual pattern of arrivals is reflective of two phenomena; the seasonal navigability of west-

Table 2-1. Arrivals of the *Eastport* in New Orleans (source: *New Orleans Price Current*).

| Date of Arrival | Arriving From | Cotton (bales) | Tobacco (hogsheads, boxes) | Captain |
|---------------------|-----------------|-------------------|-------------------------------|--------------|
| <u>Jan 5, 1853</u> | Tennessee River | 2787 | 45 hhd | Milliken |
| Jan 23 | " | 3004 | 24 hhd, 88 bx | " |
| Feb 16 | " | 2873 | 74 hhd, 101 b | " |
| March 13 | " | 2882 | 68 hhd, 12 bx | " |
| April 14 | " | 2839 | | " |
| May 9 | " | 1487 | 95 hhd | " |
| <u>Jan 24, 1854</u> | " | 2391 | | " |
| Feb 15 | " | 3261 | | " |
| March 10 | " | 3407 | 1 hhd | " |
| April 3 | " | 3250 | 50 hhd | " |
| April 29 | " | 2128 | 182 hhd | " |
| May 29 | " | 3544 | 14 hhd | " |
| Dec 5 | Paducah | 2019 | 44 bx | " |
| <u>Jan 27, 1855</u> | Tennessee River | 3445 | | " |
| March 2 | " | 3163 | | " |
| March 29 | " | 3631 | 5 hhd | " |
| April 20 | " | 3553 | 20 bx | " |
| Dec 10 | " | 2204 | | Harrison |
| <u>Jan 4, 1856</u> | " | 2631 | 5 hhd | " |
| Feb 18 | " | 2879 | | " |
| March 8 | " | 3183 | | " |
| April 5 | Eastport | 2898 | 159 hhd | " |
| April 27 | " | 3240 | 26 hhd | " |
| May 15 | Tennessee River | 2115 | 305 hhd | " |
| Dec 14 | " | 3256 | 51 hhd | " |
| <u>Jan 13, 1857</u> | " | 2592 | 5 hhd | " |
| Feb 16 | " | 3221 | 22 hhd | " |
| March 11 | " | 1558 | 443 hhd | " |
| April 1 | Eastport | 627 | 314 hhd | " |
| April 24 | Tennessee River | 2196 | 77 hhd | " |
| Dec 30 | " | 1522 | 29 hhd | " |
| <u>Feb 8, 1858</u> | " | 2302 | 155 hhd | " |
| March 7 | " | 2164 | 188 hhd | Harris (sic) |
| April 4 | " | 2344 | 216 hhd | " |
| April 28 | " | 779 | 478 hhd | " |
| May 15 | " | 1638 | 322 hhd | " |
| Dec 11 | Paducah | 400 | 71 hhd | Wood |
| <u>Jan 6, 1859</u> | Nashville | 1220 | 69 hhd | " |
| Feb 1 | " | 728 | 323 hhd | " |
| March 1 | " | 45 | 427 hhd | " |
| March 25 | " | 732 | 399 hhd | " |
| April 15 | " | 39 | 363 hhd | " |
| May 10 | " | 357 | 509 hhd, 44 bx | " |
| May 28 | " | 49 | 716 hhd | " |
| Nov 19 | Paducah | 1547 | | " |
| Dec 18 | Memphis | 3047 | | " |
| <u>Jan 19, 1860</u> | Nashville | 579 | | " |
| Feb 4 | " | 1602 | | " |
| Feb 27 | " | 808 | 270 hhd | " |
| March 20 | " | 184 | 489 hhd | " |
| April 7 | Paducah | 23 | 658 hhd | " |
| April 25 | Newburg | 229 | 266 hhd | " |
| May 15 | Paducah | 674 | 681 hhd, 21 bx | " |
| June 9 | Nashville | 15 | 812 hhd | " |
| Oct 9 | Paducah | 216 | 140 hhd | " |
| Oct 25 | Memphis | 2257 | | " |
| Nov 21 | " | 2885 | 5 hhd | " |
| Dec 5 | " | 2236 | 6 hhd | " |
| Dec 29 | Paducah | 2499 | 28 hhd, 72 bx | " |
| <u>Jan 20, 1861</u> | Nashville | 2349 | 146 hhd | " |
| Feb 17 | " | 756 | 385 hhd | " |
| March 8 | " | 703 | 279 hhd | " |
| April 8 | " | 671 | 574 hhd | " |

ern rivers and the availability of the cotton crop for shipment, and it is a pattern seen commonly in steamboat activity in the south (Haïtes et al. 1975:86; Hunter 1949:219-220; Pearson 1991; Pearson and Wells 1999). Generally, the Mississippi-Ohio river systems were characterized by two periods of high water when steamboat navigation was most likely. These occurred during the fall, when the rainy season commenced producing a rise in rivers and during the spring, when snowmelt plus rain produced a similar rise. The autumn rise would normally begin in September and would continue for several weeks to as long as several months (Hunter 1949:221). Beginning usually in December, low water, plus on some waterways, ice, began to restrict navigation until the spring thaw when rivers again rose. The spring rise began on the Ohio River as early as February and usually continued to June, and produced a navigation season on the Mississippi and its tributaries that was longer than the fall rise. During the late summer and into the fall, a lack of rain usually resulted in low water on western rivers which seriously restricted steamboat navigation, particularly the larger boats like the *Eastport* (Haïtes et al. 1975:86). Often these large boats “laid up” and simply did not run during low water seasons, such that the actual period during which boats were working, and making money, was less than the full year. Haïtes et al. (1975:176) estimate that the steamboats on the Mississippi and the Ohio rivers worked an average of just under 9 months a year, while those on “tributary” rivers worked closer to 10 months out of the year. Their estimates are based on the assumption that tributary river steamers were somewhat smaller than those on the “trunk” rivers, averaging 149 tons burden on the former and 381 tons burden on the later. At over 570 tons, the *Eastport* was a very large steamer, particularly for a tributary river, and it is likely that she had to be taken out of service during some low water periods. This was particularly true when she was operating in the Tennessee River-New Orleans trade and the New Orleans newspaper’s indications that, with the exception of the year 1860, the *Eastport* carried freight into the city only 7 months out of 12 is seen as a true reflection of her seasonal activities (Figure 2-12).

The growth and harvest season of crops also influenced the annual pattern of cargoes carried by steamboats. The cotton harvest began in September or October and could extend into January. The time-consuming process of cleaning, ginning and baling the crop meant that the bulk of the cotton was not ready for shipment for some time after picking. Thus,

shipments by steamboat would generally begin in December and would extend through April and May, by which time most of the crop would have been carried to market. Relatively little cotton was available for shipment during the summer months. Haïtes et al. (1975:86) note that the tobacco harvest in Tennessee typically took place in August and September, meaning that some of the crop could have been available for shipment during the fall rise. However, most tobacco had to be cured and dried for some period of time, meaning that its availability for shipment to market corresponded closely to that of cotton.

During her first several years of operation, the *Eastport* arrived in New Orleans about 6 times per year; usually about once every 25 to 30 days during the cotton shipping season. The *New Orleans Price Current* notes that most of these trips originated from the “Tennessee River,” although the towns of Paducah and Eastport are mentioned a couple of times (Table 2-1). Haïtes et al. (1975:143) indicate that steamers operating in the Louisville-New Orleans trade in the 1850s made an average of 12 round trips to New Orleans, considerable more than the number made by the *Eastport*, except in the year 1860. The longer distance to the north Alabama area of the Tennessee River certainly contributed to fewer trips, but it is not known if the number of annual round trips made to New Orleans by the *Eastport* was typical for Tennessee River steamers of the period.

Prior to 1857, the *Eastport* tended to carry large quantities of cotton on every voyage, with the average being close to 3000 bales per trip (see Figure 2-12). The largest amount of cotton reported to have been carried into New Orleans was 3631 bales on March 29, 1855. On this trip, the *Eastport* also carried 87 sacks of oats, 1 bag of feathers, 5 hogsheads of tobacco, and 91 bags of “pea nuts” (*New Orleans Price Current* March 31, 1855). Beginning in 1857, the amount of cotton carried on individual trips often was quite small and the average carried per trip, also, tended to decrease. For example, in 1857 the average number of bales carried was 1952, in 1858 it was 1605, in 1859 it was 863, in 1860 it was 1093 and in 1861 it was 1120. The financial difficulties produced by the nation-wide economic crisis known as the Panic of 1857 may have been responsible for the decrease in the size of cargoes carried by the *Eastport* in the two following years, although the southern cotton trade in general was less impacted by the panic than were other businesses and industries (Huston 1987:133-134).

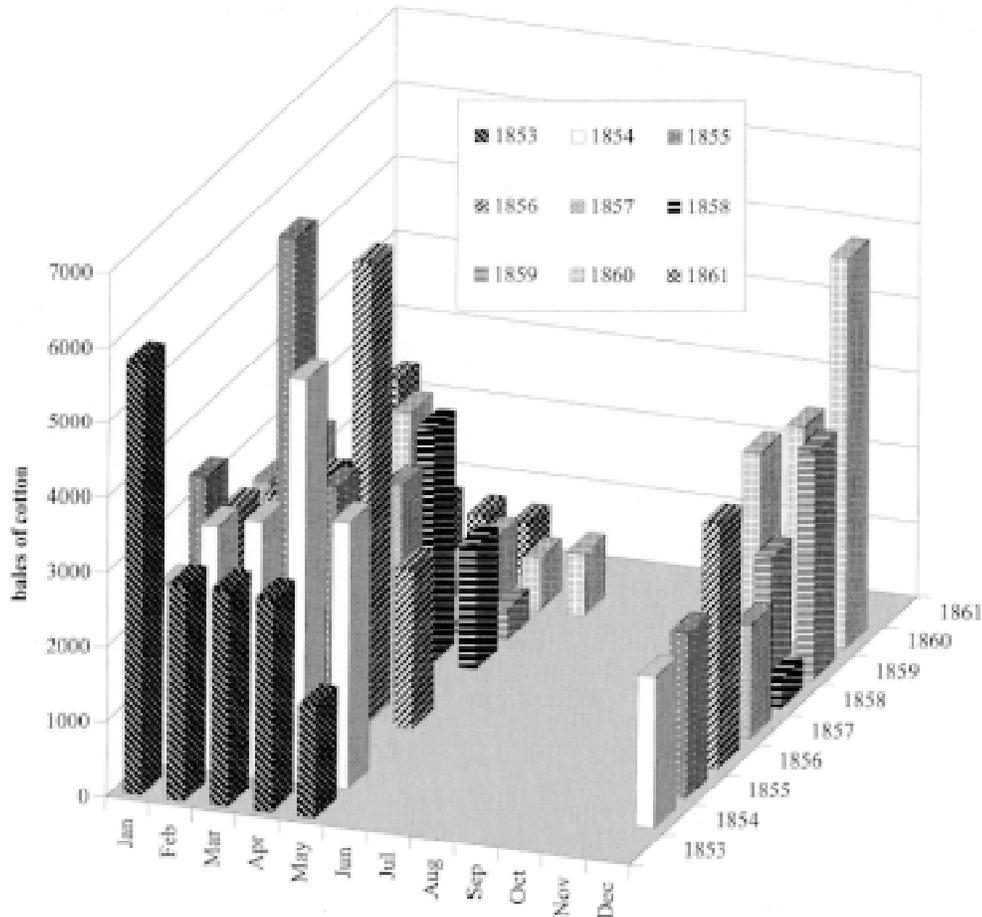


Figure 2-12. Cotton carried into New Orleans by the *Eastport*, 1853-1861.

On June 9, 1860, the *Eastport* arrived in New Orleans with only 15 bales of cotton and on April 7 she arrived with only 23 bales. These represent the smallest amounts of cotton the steamboat is recorded to have brought into the city and these must have been financially disappointing trips. To some extent, however, the decrease in cotton as cargo was compensated by an increase in other items, particularly tobacco. Beginning in 1857, and through 1861, the *Eastport* carried increasingly larger quantities of tobacco, in addition to other regional products, into New Orleans. For example, when the *Eastport* arrived in New Orleans from her namesake, Eastport, Mississippi, on April 1, 1857, her cargo included 627 bales of cotton, 314 hogsheads of tobacco, 836 barrels of pork, 50 bales of "osnaburgs," 79 coils of rope, 22 rolls of leather, 55 barrels of eggs and 80 reams of paper (*New Orleans Price Current* April 4, 1857). In another example, on April 28, 1858, the steamer arrived in New Orleans with only 779 bales of cotton, but she also carried 478 hogsheads of to-

bacco as well as 28 rolls of leather and 8 kegs of lard (*New Orleans Price Current* May 1, 1858). On June 9, 1860, when the *Eastport* came into New Orleans with her smallest cargo of cotton, 15 bales, she also had on board the largest cargo of tobacco she ever carried, 812 hogsheads representing an estimated 812,000 pounds of leaf, possibly worth as much as \$73,000. Somewhat unusually, the steamer had no other cargo on board, except for "sundries for order" (*New Orleans Price Current* June 16, 1860). Even though the *Eastport* tended to carry more tobacco during its later years of activity, and, on a very few voyages, the value of tobacco was greater than that of cotton, overall, the monetary value of the tobacco and other cargoes carried was considerably less than that of cotton.

The decrease in cotton cargo and the increase in other types of items correspond with changes in ownership of the boat and the origin of her voyages. In March 1857, the *Eastport* was enrolled in Paducah

with some change in ownership. The new owners included Charles W. Harrison (also the master), a resident of Paducah, and R. McClure, a resident of Wheeling, Virginia (now West Virginia). This ownership change may have occurred as early as February 1856 when the *Eastport* was enrolled in Paducah, but that enrollment document is missing and her ownership at that time is unknown. With the change in ownership there appears to have been a slight shift in the area of the *Eastport's* activities, primarily reflected by an increased amount of tobacco as cargo (see Table 2-1). A more obvious shift in the *Eastport's* trading activities began in late 1858, after a major change in ownership. On November 29, 1858, the *Eastport* was enrolled in Paducah with Charles W. Harrison, Mrs. A.O. Woolfolk, and Hugh Worthington as owners and Elijah Wood as master. All of these individuals were residents of Paducah and only one, Harrison, had an earlier ownership in the steamer. The "northern Alabama" connection with the *Eastport* was now entirely ended, and the information in the New Orleans papers

suggests that the steamer no longer served that area. Beginning in December 1858, the "Tennessee River" never again appears as a point of origin for the *Eastport*, rather she now arrives, with Elijah Wood as captain, from Nashville on the Cumberland River (Figure 2-13), Paducah on the Ohio and Memphis on the Mississippi (see Table 2-1). The shift in trade away from the middle Tennessee River may have been related to the business contacts and relationships of the new owners, or it is possible that the northern Alabama traders and planters purposefully took their trade away from the *Eastport* after her acquisition by "outsiders," possibly transferring trade to another boat owned by local interests.

After her apparent shift in area of trade and, to a lesser extent, cargoes, the goods carried into New Orleans by the *Eastport* continued to be consigned to a fairly large number of merchants, although new names now appear in this group. For example, the *New Orleans Price Current* provides the following information on the *Eastport's* arrival on January 6,

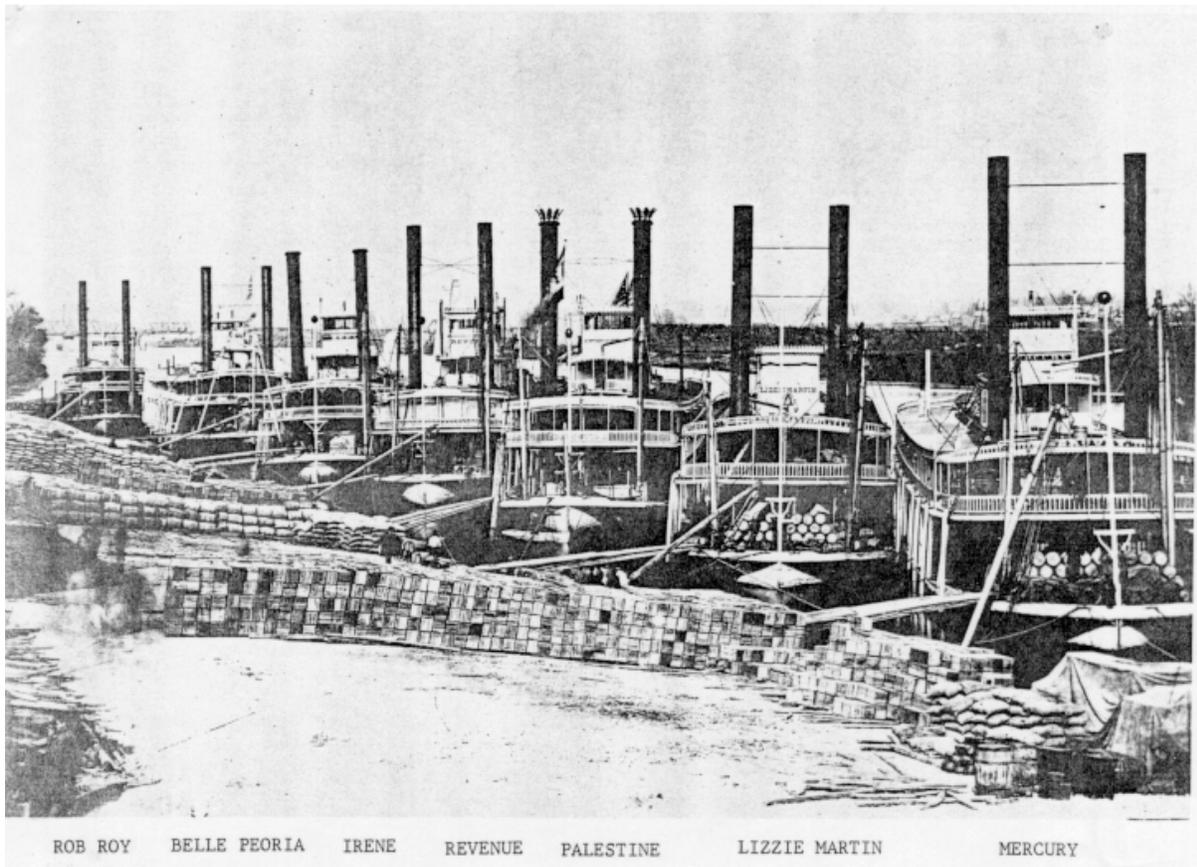


Figure 2-13. View of steamboat landing at Nashville, Tennessee, on the Cumberland River in 1862 (source: *S&D Reflector* 1973).

1859, shortly after her sale by the northern Alabama group:

Eastport, Woods, from Nashville, with 1220 bales cotton,
 viz. - 126 J. Williams & Co. - 662 W.A. Johnson & Co. - 91 McGreger & Bankhead- 252 A.D. Henkel & co. - 18 Robson & Allen- 7 Brabley, Wilson & Co. - 56 Hewitt, Norton & co. - 8 Fellowes & co. - 4 hhds tobacco. McGreger & Bankhead - 2 ditto Hewitt, Norton & co - 10 do J. Turner - 3 do Moore & Van Calin - 9 do B.F. Lotspeich & co - 9 do R.H. Short & co - 18 do Given, Watts & co - 7 do Campbell, McKee & co - 3 do W. Soery & co - 1 do Moise & Levy - 2 do Clark, Thieneman & co - 1 do Fraser & co - 83 bbls flour. Hewitt, Norton & co - 367 tcs lard 790 bbls pork Fellowes & co - 61 bundles paper Phillips, Nixon & co - 25 sks flour, C.W. Phillips & co - 20 tcs lard 40 bbls flour, Moore & Van Calin - 83 do B.F. Lotspeich & co - 60 do 500 sks bran Graham & Boyle - 105 bbls 11 hhds pork 15 tcs 1 bbl lard 96 do flour, Given, Watts & co - sundries, to order.
 Total. 69 hhds tobacco.
 [New Orleans Price Current January 8, 1859].

The new owners of the *Eastport* kept her in the New Orleans trade through April 1861. While there was a general overall decrease in the amount of cotton carried after 1857 (see Figure 2-12), there was a slight increase in cotton carried in 1860, possibly a reflection of the very large cotton crop produced throughout the south that year (Donnell 1872). Also, as shown in Table 2-1, the greatest amounts of cotton were carried when the point of origin was Memphis, no doubt representing crop derived from the rich cotton growing areas of western Tennessee, northwestern Mississippi and, possibly, eastern Arkansas.

The other types of cargoes carried by the *Eastport* after 1859 represent, primarily, the agricultural and manufactured products of the Ohio River region and the Midwest. For example, when the steamer arrived in New Orleans from Paducah on October 9, 1860, in addition to a small quantity of cotton and tobacco, she carried 20 bundles of leather to Robeson, Witherell & Co.; 235 coils of rope to J.A. Hagerty & Co.; 97 barrels of apples to West & Netteleton; 181 barrels of whiskey to J. Robertson; 434 containers of bran, 100 of flour and 118 of onions to Halliday, Graham & Co. (*New Orleans Price Current* October 10, 1860). Other cargoes during this

period commonly included pork shoulders and hams, bacon, lard, and flour; products derived from farms along the Ohio and Cumberland rivers.

Notices in the Nashville, Tennessee, newspapers provide small bits of additional information on the *Eastport's* activities after 1858. For example, the *Nashville Daily Gazette* of January 4, 1860, reported that "The Eastport is up for New Orleans today. She is a comfortable boat, with good and experienced officers" (*Nashville Daily Gazette* January 4, 1860). The February 28, 1861, edition of the paper noted that "The big Eastport leaves for New Orleans this evening at 4 o'clock, in command of Capt. Wood. She has excellent accommodations for both freight and passengers" and on March 22 the paper contained the following endorsement for the Eastport: "The Eastport is advertised for New Orleans today. She has excellent accommodations for passengers and is among the best freight steamers on the river" (*Nashville Daily Gazette* February 28, 1861, March 22, 1861).

The *Eastport* certainly carried passengers, but other than these mentions that it was a "comfortable boat," and had "excellent accommodations" no information has been found as to how many staterooms she had nor the number of passengers they could accommodate. The accommodations on steamboats varied, and river travel was not without its hazards, as boats sank, exploded or burned. Still, it became a standard way of life to travel by steamboat for both pleasure and business. Most travel by steamboat must have been enjoyable, with time for relaxation. Women travelers could wile away the time viewing scenery, sewing, gossiping, or taking snuff. Men might spend much of their time conversing about the latest political happenings, gambling, or drinking. At meal time the cabin passengers might sample thirty or more varieties of food displayed on the table at the same time. Dinner on one of the first-class boats in the 1850s might feature "soup, six kinds of boiled meat, five of fish, eleven entrees, including such delicacies as fricasseed kidneys, and spice pig's head, nine roasts, five kinds of game, potatoes, rice, corn, etc., fifteen pastries and desserts, fruits, nuts, and decanters of whiskey and rum" (Donovan 1966:108). These types of fares, however, were the exception and it is unlikely that the *Eastport* served such elegant cuisine.

When not dining, resting in their berths, or relaxing on the hurricane deck, cabin passengers might retreat to the saloon, the most luxuriously appointed

part of the steamboat. During the antebellum years the saloon's length increased from about 40 to 100 ft. Its purpose was to startle passengers with its "steamboat Gothic" decor featuring gingerbread carving. Although many passengers thought the saloon to be the ultimate in luxurious decor and furnishings, some Easterners and Europeans found the scenery to be gaudy and distasteful. One traveler remarked that there was "an indefinable sham splendor all around, half disgusting and wholly comical. The paint and gilding, the velvet and Brussels, the plate and the attendants show bravely by lamplight, but the honest indignant sun puts all the dirty magnificence to shame" (Donovan 1966:107). While some steamers were very ornately furnished, most were more simply outfitted.

Decor contributed to the unique ambiance associated with steamboating, as did gambling, profane language, and drinking. An eastern minister lamented:

... usually on board these western steamboats whiskey is used just as freely as water. All drink. The pilot — the engineer — the firemen — all drink. The whiskey bottle is passed around several times a day, and then the dinner table is loaded with decanters. I am satisfied that more than two-thirds of the disasters that occur on board these steamboats are attributable to the use of ardent spirits [Donovan 1966:109].

Although travelers could expect drinking, cussing, and gambling on any steamboat, they found that the quality of food and lodgings on most steamboats to be inferior to that of the top-of-the-line boats. Also, not all of the steamboat lived up to the standards they advertised. Many probably resembled the one described by John James Audubon when traveling from Louisville to St. Louis in 1843:

... the very filthiest of all filthy old rat-traps I ever traveled in; and the fare worse, certainly, much worse, and so scanty withal that our worthy commander could not have given us another meal had we been detained a night longer [Donovan 1966:108-109].

Another traveler described his boat as:

... a crazy, dirty little craft, which was provided with but twelve berths or sleeping shelves, furnished with scanty and dirty bedding; fare coarse

and badly cooked and berths intolerable; the boat was crowded with passengers and almost sinking with freight, wet, dirty and uncomfortable; the food was detestable — salty meats, rancid butter, coffee and tea without milk [Donovan 1966:108-109].

While they may not have always been up to standards, the accommodations and services extended to cabin passengers stood in sharp contrast to those provided deck passengers. In exchange for their ticket, deck passengers were guaranteed only the right of passage without benefit of room, board, or lavatories. The boat's officers took on as many as could pay and they were crammed into the steamboats like cattle in rail cars. In the winter they suffered exposure to cold weather, making them particularly vulnerable to epidemics of cholera and other diseases. When they died, the captains tossed them overboard or had them buried along the bank. When boats sank or their boilers blew up, the deck passengers suffered higher casualties than cabin passengers. A large number of deck passengers were foreign immigrants or flatboatmen making their way back up the Mississippi to their homes in the Ohio River valley.

One of the greatest impacts of the steamboat was the shortening of travel times up and down the rivers. By the 1850s, steamboats on the Mississippi were averaging about 14 miles per hour (Hunter 1949:23-24). Some information on the traveling speed of the *Eastport* can be gained by looking at her times of departure from Nashville, provided in the *Nashville Daily Gazette*, and her arrival in New Orleans, as derived from New Orleans newspapers. Table 2-2 presents this information and shows that her travel time on these down river trips ranged

Table 2-2. Travel Times For the *Eastport* From Nashville to New Orleans.

| Date of Departure from Nashville | Date of Arrival in New Orleans | Number of Days |
|----------------------------------|--------------------------------|----------------|
| Dec 29, 1858 | Jan 6, 1859 | 8 |
| Jan 5, 1860 | Jan 19, 1860 | 14 |
| Jan 28, " | Feb 4, " | 7 |
| Feb 19, " | Feb 27, " | 9 |
| March 13, " | March 20, " | 7 |
| Feb 8, 1861 | Feb 17, 1861 | 9 |
| Feb 28, " | March 8, " | 8 |
| March 23, " | April 8, " | 16 |

from 7 to 16 days. The direct down river trip from Nashville to New Orleans was down the Cumberland River to Smithland, Kentucky, on the Ohio, and then down the Ohio to where it meets the Mississippi at Cairo, Illinois, and then down the Mississippi to New Orleans, a total distance of about 1300 miles. Assuming the boat ran continuously, the shortest time of 7 days represents an average speed of almost 8 miles per hour. No specific information on the *Eastport's* time of travel on upriver trips has been found, but steamboat speeds upriver were slightly slower than those going down (Haite et al. 1975:143).

Of course, the *Eastport* was not involved in continuous travel on these trips; stops were made at major ports and, often, at smaller town and plantation landings to put off and pick up cargo or passengers. An advertisement for the *Eastport* appearing in the 1860 *Nashville Daily Gazette* noted specifically that the “Steamer EASTPORT,” bound for New Orleans would stop at “intermediate ports” (see Figure 2-10). However, the large boats tried to take on a full cargo at their point of origin and, because New Orleans tended to be the destination for most down river cargo, they were hesitant to stop at very many intermediate ports because it took up so much time. By the 1850s, most steamboats ran even at night, however, low water, thick fog and other adverse weather conditions could force a steamboat to stop and wait for better conditions. Thus, when actually running on the river, the *Eastport's* speed was considerably greater than 8 miles per hour.

As shown in Table 2-1, during her trading season, the *Eastport* arrived in New Orleans approximately every 25 to 30 days. The computed average round-trip time over her entire career was 27 days. The longest period between arrivals in New Orleans during a season was 54 days between December 5, 1854, and January 27, 1855, while the shortest round trip was made in 15 days. This fastest round-trip occurred between November 25 and December 5, 1860, and was made between New Orleans and Memphis, a much shorter distance than the boat was normally traveling during her earlier years of operation. Steamboats tended to take on cargo and passengers as rapidly as they could, desiring to spend as short a time as possible in port. This is particularly true in New Orleans, because upriver cargoes tended to be much less lucrative than those brought downstream. It was simply not worth waiting in New Orleans for a full cargo when a “paying load” of cotton could already be accumulating on the Tennessee River. For example, the December 11, 1855,

New Orleans Daily Picayune noted that the “fine regular steamer Eastport” intended to depart for the “Tennessee River” on the “12th inst., positively.” The boat had arrived in New Orleans on December 10, meaning she would layover in the city for only 2 days. On April 21 of that year, the newspaper noted that the *Eastport* was departing, just one day after her arrival from the Tennessee River (*New Orleans Daily Picayune* April 21, 1855). To enable such a short layover, agents in New Orleans lined up cargoes and passengers and had them ready to load and board on a boat’s arrival.

Thus, it can be assumed that most of the average of 27 days between arrivals in New Orleans was spent in travel down river (about 9 days) and travel upriver (about 10 to 12 days). Some time would have been spent on the Tennessee River at Tuscumbia, Florence or Eastport taking on cargo and passengers. This time would be lengthened if necessary because the downstream cargo was most critical to the financial success of the boat. As noted above, a minimum amount of time, often just one or two days, would have been spent in New Orleans between arrivals and departures.

Speed was an important consideration to steamboatmen. Fast boats could make more trips and, thus, could make more money. Also, fast boats attracted business and newspapers were full of advertisements touting the speed of a particular steamer. There is no record that the *Eastport* was a particularly fast boat, but her speed was noted in newspaper advertisements. For example, the *New Orleans Daily Picayune* for April 21, 1855, carried an advertisement reporting the departure of the steamer: “FOR TENNESSEE RIVER, FLORENCE, Eastport, Tuscumbia, and all intermediate landings – The new, light draught, fast running steamer EASTPORT, S. Milligan, master.” The quest for speed and the competition among steamboat captains eventually lead to races between steamboats. The *Eastport* may have been involved in races, but the only record found suggesting this possibility is equivocal. On February 11, 1860, the *Nashville Daily Gazette* noted that “A telegraphic dispatch from Memphis yesterday informs us that the E. Howard had passed that point and would arrive here Sunday night. A dispatch to some other parties states that the Howard, James Woods and Eastport were on a race, and the former was ahead” (*Nashville Daily Gazette* February 11, 1860). The following day a different report appeared: “In our river report of yesterday, we mentioned that the E. Howard, James Woods and Eastport were on a race.

Since that time we have learned that the Howard left New Orleans on Sunday, the Eastport on Tuesday, and the James Woods on Wednesday or Thursday. These boats all belong to the same line, and the owners would never consent to racing by either of them” (*Nashville Daily Gazette* February 12, 1860).

Western steamboats faced a variety of dangers during their travels. River obstructions, such as logs and snags, could easily penetrate the wooden hull or boilers could explode. In the nineteenth century, large numbers of steamboats were damaged or sunk by these hazards and many lives were lost. It is unknown if the *Eastport* was ever damaged by a river snag, but the steamer did experience another of the great dangers of steamboat travel, fire. On April 12, 1853, the *Eastport* caught fire while traveling down the Mississippi below Memphis (*De Bows Review* 1854:306). It was reported that 200 bales of cotton were destroyed. Apparently the steamer escaped serious damage and arrived safely in New Orleans two days later (see Table 2-1).

The *Eastport*, also, encountered more unusual difficulties on her voyages. On February 9, 1861, the *Nashville Daily Gazette* reported that “The Eastport did not get off until yesterday, in consequences of not being able to get under the bridge. Her chimneys had to be lowered, and caused considerable delay.” The bridge mentioned was the wire bridge over the Cumberland River at Nashville. It was built in the summer of 1850 and was considered one of the “handsomest structures” of its kind in the United States. The bridge was 700 ft long and was 110 ft above the low water mark (*Nashville City and Business Directory* 1860:56).

The last arrival of the *Eastport* in New Orleans occurred on April 8, 1861, with the steamer coming from Nashville under the command of Captain Elijah Wood (see Table 2-1). She carried 671 bales of cotton, 574 hogsheads of tobacco as well as corn, paper and flour (*New Orleans Price Current* April 10, 1861). As was typical, the boat probably took on passengers and cargo as quickly as possible and began her return voyage up the Mississippi. Just two months earlier, the new Confederate States of America had been formed at a meeting of representatives from seceded states in Montgomery, Alabama. Steamboat commerce between the United States and the new nation continued for a while, but the firing on Fort Sumter on April 12 brought this to an end. With the outbreak of hostilities, the Federal government instituted a blockade of the Mississippi River at Cairo

to prevent steamers from reaching the Confederacy. The *Eastport* had, by this time, returned to the Ohio or Cumberland rivers and, with other boats, was prevented from traveling down river to trade with southern states. In testimony presented with the Hugh Worthington claim after the Civil War, J.B. Ogilvie, carpenter on the *Eastport* as well as brother-in-law to the captain, Elijah Wood, and George Cowling, who worked as pantryman on the steamer, testified that the *Eastport's* last commercial trip occurred in May 1861. On this voyage, the *Eastport* carried 840 hogsheads of tobacco from Nashville and Clarksville on the Cumberland River to Paducah. Captain Wood, apparently, intended to take the cargo down the Ohio River to the Mississippi and on to New Orleans, but the Federal blockade prevented this so he carried the tobacco up the Ohio to Evansville, Indiana, to sell (National Archives, RG 109, Vessel Papers, File E-115:1893).

The Financial Operation of the Eastport

Income

It is impossible to determine with specific accuracy the overall financial workings of the *Eastport* as a river packet. However, certain aspects of her economic operations, as well as more general trends, can be ascertained with the data presently available. Of particular importance in this endeavor is the rather complete information collected on the *Eastport's* arrivals in New Orleans from which can be extrapolated figures on the value of her various cargoes. In addition to deriving some specific dollar figures for various items of income and expenses for the *Eastport*, this examination provides an opportunity to look at some broader aspects of the economic operations of steamboats in the mid-nineteenth century.

The profitability of any given steamboat or steamboat line is now often difficult to assess because of a lack of records. However, as noted earlier, the general assumption was that the steamboat could be, and often was, very profitable. Haites et al. (1975) indicate that profits were very high in the earliest years of steamboating, with rates of return near 30 percent. However, these profit margins declined over time such that after the 1830s profits in the steamboat business were comparable to those in other antebellum businesses. A major reason for the decrease in profits was the tremendous increase in competition resulting from the large number of steamers entering the business (Haites et al. 1975:35). The increased competition resulted in a 50 percent de-

cline in freight rates in the early 1840s, detrimental to some steamboatmen but certainly good for shippers (Fishbaugh 1970:21).

Steamboat revenues were derived principally from two sources; freight and passengers. After about 1840, freight tended to be the most important source of income for steamboats in general (Hunter 1949:373-374). On some boats relatively substantial incomes could be derived from mail contracts, but there is no evidence that the *Eastport* held such a contract. For the *Eastport*, then, income would have been derived from fares for passengers and from freight charges on cargo. Pertinent information on the fiscal aspects of the *Eastport's* activities can be obtained from newspaper accounts of the cargoes she carried into New Orleans. No information on the boat's income as derived from cargoes carried upriver from New Orleans nor from passenger traffic has been found, but the *Eastport* did carry passengers as well as upriver cargoes and income from these would have contributed to the boat's receipts.

Cotton was by far the most valuable commodity carried by the *Eastport*. Over her 9-year career as a river packet, the newspaper records indicate she carried 119,863 bales of cotton into New Orleans. This number of bales represented approximately 54 million pounds of cotton which, at even a very conservative average price of 9 cents per pound, would have been worth about 4.9 million dollars. The value of the tobacco carried by the steamer is more difficult to determine, primarily because it is unknown how much tobacco was carried in a "box," many of which were shipped on the *Eastport*. Assuming that a box carried about 1000 pounds of tobacco, as did a hogshead, then 11,371,000 pounds of tobacco are reported to have been carried by the *Eastport* into New Orleans. Using 7 cents as an average per pound price for all of the tobacco carried, then during her 9 years the *Eastport* carried about \$796,000 worth of tobacco into the Crescent City, a substantial amount but only 16 percent of the value of the cotton carried. The values of the steamer's other cargoes are difficult to determine, but they certainly were far less than cotton and probably less than tobacco.

Income to the *Eastport* from cotton and other cargoes would have been in the form of freight charges, usually computed upon a given weight of cargo but normally applied on the container in which a commodity was packed, such as a bale of cotton or a barrel of pork or a hogshead of tobacco. Freight charges changed over the 1850s, reflecting market

forces and the level of competition among steamboats. Also, freight rates changed seasonally with increases commonly occurring during low water seasons when fewer boats could run. Hunter (1949:659) notes that during the period 1840 to 1850, the average freight rate in the Tennessee River trade between Florence and Louisville was 50 cents per 100 pounds. This rate, actually, was somewhat higher than found on other rivers, reflective of the long distance over which cargo was carried and, possibly, to greater difficulties in navigating the Tennessee or to lesser competition on the river. During the same period, rates on the Ohio and Mississippi rivers between Pittsburgh and St. Louis averaged from 28 to 37 cents per hundredweight for the 1100-mile journey. In the 1850s, freight rates between Louisville and New Orleans ranged widely, from as little as 20 cents to as much as \$1.50 per hundredweight. Haites et al. (1975:151-152) have carefully examined the steamboat freight rates in the Ohio River-to-New Orleans trade and have found that during the decade of the 1850s the overall average downstream rate was 32.5 cents per hundred pounds.

Freight charges, of course, depended heavily upon the distance that cargo was carried and we have no way of knowing exactly where the *Eastport* picked up her cargoes. As noted above, boats in long distance trades, such as the *Eastport*, started their voyages as fully loaded as possible, commonly waiting until a full or "paying" load was obtained before departing (Haites et al. 1975:159). While these boats sometimes did stop at intermediate landings, it was primarily to drop off cargo, or to pick up and drop off passengers. Haites et al. (1975:159) argue that stopping at intermediate ports to drop off cargo was uncommon for the larger boats, particularly on down river trips; it was simply too much trouble and took up too much time. During the *Eastport's* first several years of operation it appears as if most of the cotton and tobacco she carried came down the Tennessee River from the northern Alabama-Mississippi area, or down the Cumberland from Nashville, meaning the rates would have been higher than those which Haites et al. determined for goods originating at Ohio River ports. An overall average rate of 45 cents per 100 may be a conservative figure, but is used here to estimate the freight income derived by the *Eastport* from the cotton and tobacco she carried between the Tennessee and Cumberland rivers and New Orleans. In her first year of operation, 1853, the *Eastport* carried 15,872 bales of cotton into New Orleans, representing an estimated 7,142,400 pounds of cotton assuming a weight of 450 pounds per bale. Using freight charges

of 45 cents per hundredweight, this would represent an income of \$32,140 for the cotton carried. In 1853, the *Eastport* carried a combined 507 hogsheads and boxes of tobacco which, at 1000 pounds apiece, represented 507,000 pounds of tobacco. Assuming freight charges of 45 cents per hundredweight, this tobacco would have brought in revenues of \$2,282. Using the same freight rate and weights per bale of cotton and hogshead and box of tobacco, income figures have been obtained for the years 1854 through 1859, as shown in Table 2-3. After 1859, the *Eastport* began to carry cargoes from locales other than the Tennessee and Cumberland rivers and freight rates are likely to have been so different as to make comparisons with earlier years inappropriate, even at the inexact level attempted here.

These figures represents freight revenues from cotton and tobacco cargoes only; lesser amounts would have been derived from the other merchandise the steamer carried, although for these it is generally impossible to arrive at meaningful weight figures, and thus to extrapolate to freight costs. Over the seven years considered here, income from cotton is estimated to have been \$204,803, while that from tobacco was \$29,427. Almost one-half of the estimated income from freight on tobacco was derived in 1859, the only year included in Table 2-3 when revenues from tobacco were even close to those of cotton.

Although not included in Table 2-3, in 1860, the *Eastport* carried a reported 3448 hogsheads and boxes of tobacco into New Orleans, the largest amount she transported in any year. Much of this tobacco did originate in Nashville, but some was loaded at Paducah or Memphis, meaning the freight rates are likely to have been quite variable and not realistically comparable to earlier years. The Memphis rates, in particular, are likely to have been lower. Assuming rates of about 35 cents per hundredweight for the shipments from Memphis and a rate of 45 cents per hundred pounds for the other shipments, then the 14,207 bales of cotton carried in 1860 would have garnered \$25,449 in freight revenues, while the 3,448,000 pounds of tobacco would have brought in \$15,406 in freight income. Even in 1860, then, freight revenues from cotton are estimated to have been greater than those derived from tobacco. It is apparent from these figures that the non-cotton cargoes of the *Eastport*, while certainly important to the financial success of the boat, never brought in anything near the income derived from transporting cotton.

The *Eastport*, also, would have carried cargoes upriver on its departures from New Orleans, however, record of these has not been found. Generally, the upriver cargoes consisted of a wide range of manufactured goods and equipment, prepared foodstuffs, and foreign produce and goods. Although no information on her upriver cargoes has been found, the *Eastport* did advertise in the New Orleans papers that she would carry freight upstream to the Tennessee River and to intermediate landings. For example, the *New Orleans Daily Picayune* of April 21, 1855, carried an advertisement noting that the *Eastport* would be leaving for the Tennessee River, Florence, Eastport, Tuscumbia, and that "Freight will be taken for Hickman, New Columbus and Paducah." Interested parties were to apply to the agent for the boat, Lewis Snapp, at 37 Front Street (*New Orleans Daily Picayune* April 21, 1855).

Most sources indicate that steamers traveling upstream, on average, carried less cargo than downstream, plus freight rates for upstream cargoes tended to be lower than downstream rates (Haite et al. 1975:152). Haite et al. (1975:158) indicate that during the 1850s, the freight revenues from upstream cargoes averaged only 5.4 percent the downstream revenues for boats in the Ohio River-New Orleans trade, however, they note that steamers operating on tributary streams charged considerably higher freight rates. Presumably, steamers involved in trade on "tributary" rivers, like the *Eastport*, also, carried cargoes of lesser value when going upriver. However, relatively few steamers were involved in the long-distance trade between the Tuscumbia-Florence region and New Orleans, such that the competition for upriver freight may not have been as great as was found on the "trunk" streams (i.e., the Ohio and Mississippi rivers). This would mean that the *Eastport*, and the other Tennessee River steamers, probably carried greater volumes of upriver freight than many other boats and, therefore, received proportionally more upstream income than Haite et al. (1975) estimate for steamers operating on the trunk streams. In light of this assumption, upstream revenues for the *Eastport* are computed at 10 percent of downstream freight revenues.

Table 2-3 provides information on the estimated freight revenues derived from the *Eastport's* upstream voyages for the years 1853 to 1859 using the figure of 10 percent of downstream freight revenues. These upstream income estimates are based only on the freight income derived from cotton and tobacco carried into New Orleans. Cotton and tobacco freights con-

Table 2-3. Estimated Annual Incomes for the *Eastport* From Freight on Cotton and Tobacco and From Passenger Fares, 1853-1859.¹

| YEAR | COTTON BALES | DOWNRIVER FREIGHT INCOME ON COTTON ² | TOBACCO HHDS/BXS | DOWNRIVER FREIGHT INCOME ON TOBACCO ³ | ESTIMATED UPRIVER FREIGHT INCOME ⁴ | ESTIMATED DOWNRIVER PASSENGER FARES ⁵ | ESTIMATED UPRIVER PASSENGER FARES ⁶ | ESTIMATED ANNUAL INCOME ⁷ |
|------|-----------------|--|---------------------|---|--|---|---|---|
| 1853 | 15872 | \$32,141 | 507 | \$2,282 | \$3,442 | \$7,722 | \$10,296 | \$55,883 |
| 1854 | 20000 | \$40,500 | 291 | \$1,310 | \$4,181 | \$9,009 | \$12,012 | \$67,012 |
| 1855 | 15996 | \$32,311 | 25 | \$113 | \$3,242 | \$6,435 | \$8,580 | \$50,681 |
| 1856 | 20202 | \$40,909 | 546 | \$2,457 | \$4,337 | \$9,009 | \$12,012 | \$68,724 |
| 1857 | 11716 | \$23,725 | 890 | \$4,005 | \$2,773 | \$7,722 | \$10,296 | \$48,521 |
| 1858 | 9627 | \$19,495 | 1430 | \$6,435 | \$2,593 | \$7,722 | \$10,296 | \$46,541 |
| 1859 | 7764 | \$15,722 | 2850 | \$12,825 | \$2,855 | \$11,583 | \$15,444 | \$58,429 |

Notes

- Based only on trips into New Orleans and the known amounts of cotton and tobacco carried into the city derived from the *New Orleans Price Current*.
- Other trips which the *Eastport* may have had made are not included.
- Freight income based on freight rates of 45 cents per hundred pounds and on cotton bales weighing 450 pounds.
- Freight income based on freight rates of 45 cents per hundred pounds on hogsheds and boxes weighing 1000 pounds.
- Upriver freight income presumed to be 10 percent of that derived from downriver cargo as derived from data discussed in Hunter (1949) and Haïtes et al. (1975).
Here, only the income from cotton and tobacco shipped downriver is considered.
- Figures assume *Eastport* carried an average of 66 cabin and 99 deck passengers on each trip paying \$15 and \$3 per trip respectively.
Derived from figures presented in Haïtes et al. (1975)
- Figures assume *Eastport* carried an average of 88 cabin and 132 deck passengers on each trip paying \$15 and \$3 per trip respectively.
Derived from figures presented in Haïtes et al. (1975)
- Estimated Annual Income is based only on the data in the table. Income derived from non-cotton and tobacco freights and from trips that did not extend to New Orleans cannot be determined, but could add substantially to the figures presented here.

stituted the bulk of the boat's downstream income; however, other cargoes were carried which produced some income, meaning that both the downstream and upstream incomes presented in Table 2-3 are likely to under-represent the actual amounts brought in.

It must be emphasized, of course, that the data discussed here represent only cargoes carried into New Orleans and estimates on those carried back upriver. Other activities could have produced revenue from freight charges. For example, on her down river trips to New Orleans, the *Eastport* may have dropped off some cargoes at intermediate stops; however, it is likely that all, or the vast majority, of the agricultural produce carried by the *Eastport* would have been conveyed to New Orleans. The *Eastport* may have made some trips that did not carry her down to the lower Mississippi and the cargoes involved in these voyages will not be accounted for here. However, the *Eastport* seems to have been built expressly for trade to New Orleans and it is presumed that the bulk of her business was with that city. It seems reasonable, then, to believe that the incomes derived from freight charges on the cotton and tobacco carried into New Orleans constituted the greater part of the revenues produced by the boat.

Steamboats also derived income from passenger traffic and, for some boats, this could be a considerable amount. The seasonal fluctuation in passenger fares was less than that of freight rates, but fares did vary greatly from boat to boat dependent upon the accommodations offered. New and elaborately furnished boats could charge much higher rates than those steamers which had average accommodations. For example, just prior to the Civil War, "first class" boats charged from \$20 to \$30 for cabin passage between Louisville and New Orleans, while lesser boats charged half this amount (Haite et al. 1975:161). Cabin passage on a steamer included a stateroom and meals for the course of the voyage. Deck passengers were given a minimal amount of room on the deck and normally had to fend for themselves when it came to meals, although a stove was usually made available to them for cooking (Haite et al. 1975:161). Deck fares were considerably lower than cabin fares, commonly about one-fourth as much.

Haite et al. (1975:162) have developed estimates for passenger fares in the Louisville-to-New Orleans trade which are generally applicable to the *Eastport*. During the period 1850 to 1860 the average cabin fare in this long-distance trade was \$15 while the deck fare was \$3. These figures applied to down-

stream as well as upstream passage. It is unknown what the passenger capacity of the *Eastport* was, nor how fully loaded she was on any given trip. However, Haite et al. (1975:162-164) provide figures of the average number of passengers carried by steamboats per tons of burden, plus the average numbers of passengers carried by typical steamboats by decade prior to 1860. They note that the average number of passengers carried upstream by steamboats in the period from 1850 to 1860 was 0.40 per ton of burden. When this figure is applied to the 570-ton *Eastport*, it suggests she could have accommodated 228 passengers. The number of downstream passengers carried by steamers during this period tended to be about 25 percent lower. Hunter (1949:421-422) reports on the numbers of passengers carried by 60 steamboats arriving in Cincinnati in the late 1840s and early 1850s. These boats carried an average of 96 cabin and 150 deck passengers, not too different from the 228 estimated for the *Eastport*. These and other figures suggest that cabin passengers constituted about 40 percent of the total (Haite et al. 1975:164). Thus, at full capacity, it can be projected that the *Eastport*, on her upstream voyages, would have carried about 220 passengers, of whom 88 would have been cabin passengers, while the remaining 132 would have traveled as deck passengers. On downstream trips it can be estimated that the *Eastport* carried about 75 percent of these totals, or 66 cabin and 99 deck passengers.

These figures are very rough estimates, but they do provide a beginning point for estimating the types of revenues garnered by the *Eastport* from passenger fares. Assuming that on her trips to New Orleans the *Eastport* carried 66 cabin passengers and 99 deck passengers, each paying fares of \$15 and \$3 respectively, then her downstream income from passengers would have averaged \$1,287 per trip (see Table 2-3). The *Eastport* made 6 trips into New Orleans in 1853, her first year of operation, meaning her annual income from passengers carried into the city can be estimated at \$7,722. Relying on the same assumptions, the 13 trips the steamer made to the Crescent City in 1860 would have brought in \$17,589 from passenger fares. As noted, however, several of the 1860 trips were between Memphis and New Orleans, meaning passenger fares may have been lower than those used here. In fact, the passenger fares of \$15 and \$3 used in Table 2-3 are probably slightly lower than those charged for passengers traveling all the way from the Florence-Tuscumbia area, where many of the *Eastport's* trips originated during her early years of operation.

Assuming the *Eastport* carried 88 cabin and 132 deck passengers on each of her upstream voyages, and using the fares of \$15 and \$3, upriver passenger fares would have represented an income of \$1,716 per voyage. Thus, in 1853, the annual income from passenger fares on the steamboat's 6 upriver trips would have been \$10,296. Table 2-3 provides passenger fare information for the *Eastport* through 1859.

Haites et al. (1975:164) suggest that the average total passenger income per year for a steamboat operating in the 1850s was \$23,600. Relying on assumptions about passenger traffic and fares noted above, it can be seen that in 1853 the *Eastport* derived a total income of \$18,018 from passengers. In 1854 this total is estimated to have been \$21,012 (see Table 2-3). These numbers are not too far below the average given in Haites et al., plus, as previously noted, it is possible that the passenger fares for trips from the Tennessee River to New Orleans were slightly higher than those used in the computations presented here.

The total annual income for the *Eastport* in 1853, as derived from estimates of revenues from passenger traffic, freight on cotton and tobacco shipments into New Orleans and on upstream cargoes would have been \$55,883 (see Table 2-3). It is assumed that these income figures are lower than the *Eastport's* actual annual earnings, primarily, because freight revenues from non-cotton and tobacco cargoes are not included in the estimates developed here. Haites et al. (1975:176) report that in 1850, the mean freight revenues per ton of burden for steamers operating on "tributary" streams (such as the Tennessee River) was \$176.10. Using this number, the 570-ton *Eastport* should have brought in \$100,377 from freight charges, well above the estimates obtained here. Haites et al. (1975:176), however, do show a great range around the mean income figure of \$176.10, plus their data seem to rely on boats that were making, on average, more trading trips than the *Eastport* was.

Costs

Steamboatmen faced a number of costs and expenses in operating their vessels. The largest, of course, was the initial cost of the vessel itself. Fortunately, we do have seemingly reliable information that the construction cost for the *Eastport* was \$45,000 (*New Albany Daily Ledger* December 2, 1852). As discussed above, this represents a cost of \$79 per

ton, very close to the average cost of \$77.86 per ton of steamboats operating on "tributary" streams in the 1850s (Haites et al. 1975:176). Other costs to operating a steamboat included depreciation, interest, maintenance, insurance, wages and fuel. Some of these expense elements can be calculated or estimated for the *Eastport* to provide a general idea of how much it took to keep the steamer in operation (Table 2-4).

The value of steamboats depreciated rapidly, primarily because they had such a short life span. In the mid-nineteenth century the average life span of antebellum steamboats operating on the western rivers was only about 5 or 6 years (Fishbaugh 1970:21; Haites et al. 1975:136; Hunter 1949; Pearson and Wells 1999). This short life span meant that captains and owners commonly worked their boats very hard in order to make money while they could. The *Eastport* was somewhat anomalous in that her almost 9-year life span as a working river packet was almost twice the average life of steamers operating on tributary rivers in 1850 (Haites et al. 1975:176; Pearson and Wells 1999). In computing depreciation costs for the *Eastport*, it is assumed that the initial cost of the steamer should be recovered over its lifetime. Thus, the average annual depreciation cost for the *Eastport* is computed as \$5,300, calculated by dividing her initial cost of \$45,000 by 8.5, the number of years the steamer worked. While depreciation was a cost to steamboat owners, it was

Table 2-4. Estimated Average Annual Operating Costs for the *Eastport*.

| Cost Item | Monthly Cost | Annual Cost* |
|------------------------------------|--------------|--------------|
| Depreciation | | \$5,300.00 |
| Repairs and Maintenance | | 5,400.00 |
| Insurance | | 2,025.00 |
| Wages | | 11,880.00 |
| Fuel | 3,295.00 | 17,088.00 |
| Crew Provisions | 925.00 | 5,550.00 |
| Passenger Provisions | 2,331.00 | 13,986.00 |
| Other Expenses | 1,043.00 | 6,258.00 |
| Total (not including depreciation) | | \$62,187.00 |

* Assumes an average of 6 months of operation during the year.

not an actual out-of-pocket expense; therefore, while considered, it is not included in the total annual operating cost in Table 2-4.

Repairs and maintenance were important items of expense. Making minor repairs was a constant activity on steamboats, and most could be handled without significant costs or delays to the boat's operations. However, major repairs had to be undertaken periodically which could involve a long stay in a boat yard and, commonly, include pulling the boat out of the water on ways. These types of repairs could be expensive. Testimony in the Hugh Worthington case does indicate that major repairs were made to the *Eastport* at least once. J.B. Ogilvie, a carpenter, stated that the *Eastport* was given a "thorough overhauling" at Paducah in August 1860 at which time the hurricane deck was extended and two state-rooms were added (National Archives, RG 109, Vessel Papers, File E-115:1893). Ogilvie went on to note that the work "made her pretty nearly as good as new – because we nearly rebuilt the whole boat . . . her wheels was all new, and her bridge trees and gallows frames . . ." We have no information as to what these major repairs cost, nor do we have information on the day-to-day maintenance costs for the *Eastport*; in fact such numbers are generally unavailable for most steamboats. Some sources, however, do provide information on average repair costs to steamers and these are summarized in Haites et al. (1975:138). For example, in the late 1840s, the annual repair cost for a \$20,000 steamboat was \$1200, or 6 percent of the original cost. The scant available data indicate that annual repair costs in earlier years tended to be proportionally greater, up to 18 percent of the initial cost of the steamboat. In their study of steamboat finances, Haites et al. (1975:138) use 12 percent of initial cost as the average annual cost of repairs for boats operating in the Louisville-New Orleans trade. This figure may be somewhat high, but is used here for the *Eastport* because no other data are available. This means that the average annual repair costs to the *Eastport* would have been \$5,400.

Another cost to operating a steamboat was insurance. Insurance rates for steamboats tended to be high because of their short life span and the often hazardous conditions under which they operated. In part, because of these high rates, not all steamboats carried insurance and Haites et al. (1975:138) indicate that, after 1850, only about 55 percent of western steamboats had insurance coverage. During this period, various accounts indicate that the annual insurance premiums for boats ranged from 8

to 18 percent of the value of the boat. Haites et al. (1975:139) use 9 percent of the original construction cost of a steamboat as the cost for full insurance coverage during the 1850 to 1860 period. Coverage customarily extended only over the season of activity of the boat, which for the *Eastport* was between 5 and 8 months. Although it is not known if the *Eastport* carried insurance, it is probable that she did, at least during her early years of operation. Using the 9 percent estimate provided by Haites et al., this means that annual insurance premiums for the *Eastport* would have cost about \$4,050, assuming the boat operated throughout the year. As can be seen in Table 2-1, however, over its 8 and one-half years of operation the *Eastport* is known to have been working an average of 6 months per year. It is assumed that the insurance premium would have been pro-rated, such that the actual insurance costs to the owners of the *Eastport* are estimated to have been \$2,025 per year.

Wages tended to be the highest monthly expense for steamboats. A number of sources provide information on average crew sizes of western steamboats. Crew sizes ranged from about 7 crewmen per hundred tons of burden to about 19 per hundred tons. Haites et al. (1975:140) note that in 1850 a 360-ton boat in the Louisville-New Orleans trade carried 44 crewmen, or about 8 crew per hundred tons of burden. Using this figure, it is estimated that the *Eastport* would have had a crew of about 46 individuals. The composition of a steamboat's crew varied somewhat but it generally "fell into three groups: officers, cabin crew and deck crew. The minimum staff of officers on most steamboats included, in addition to the captain, a clerk, two pilots, two engineers, and a mate" (Hunter 1949:443). Larger boats often carried a cook, a steward and a carpenter, and it is probable that these individuals were included in the *Eastport's* crew. In fact, in the Hugh Worthington case mentioned earlier, J.B. Ogilvie stated that he was the "carpenter" aboard the *Eastport*. (National Archives, RG 109, Vessel Papers, File E-115:1893). Normally, the deck hands comprised about one-half of the entire crew, while the cabin crew was about one-half the size of the deck crew. The deck crew consisted of those hands who did the heavy physical labor on a boat; the "roustabouts" who handled the cargo and the firemen who stoked the fires for the boilers. The cabin crew was comprised of stewards, waiters, cabin boys, and chambermaids who tended to all of the needs of the passengers. One of the cabin crew of the *Eastport* was George Cowling, who worked as "pantryman" on the steamer (National Archives, RG 109, Vessel Pa-

Table 2-5. Estimated Crew Composition and Average Annual Labor Costs of the *Eastport*.

| Crew Member | Number | Monthly Salary | Annual Salary ¹ |
|---------------------|--------|---------------------|----------------------------|
| Captain | 1 | \$1500 ² | \$1500 |
| Clerk | 1 | 900 ² | 900 |
| Engineer | 1 | 100 | 600 |
| 2nd Engineer | 1 | 50 | 300 |
| Pilot | 2 | 150 | 1800 |
| Mate | 1 | 75 | 450 |
| 2nd Mate | 1 | 50 | 300 |
| Steward | 1 | 45 | 270 |
| Cook | 1 | 40 | 240 |
| Carpenter | 1 | 45 | 270 |
| Deck and Cabin Crew | 35 | 25 | 5250 |
| Totals | 46 | | \$11,880 |

1. Based on an average operating year of 6 months for the *Eastport*, although most steamers operated for 7 to 9 months.
2. Annual salaries; all other figures are monthly wages.

pers, File E-115:1893). Together these two groups comprised three-quarters of the entire company on a steamboat, meaning that the *Eastport* would have had a deck crew of 23 and a cabin crew of 11 or 12, comprising a total compliment of 34 or 35 crewmen. This means that the boat would have carried 10 or 11 officers. Relying on data provided in Haites et al. (1975:141) these officers would have consisted of: a captain, a clerk, an engineer, a 2nd engineer, 2 pilots, a mate, a steward, a cook and a carpenter. A large boat like the *Eastport* may have carried an extra mate, engineer or engineer's assistant (Hunter 1949:443). The majority of a steamboat's crew worked only during the 7 to 9 months most steamers were operating and were paid accordingly. The captain, clerk, and often the mate, remained with a steamboat during the entire year, even during the off season, and, thus, received annual salaries. Table 2-5 provides information on the estimated monthly and annual salaries of the crew of the *Eastport* relying on the assumptions on the make up of the crew as discussed above and on average salary data for the 1850s provided in Haites et al. (1975:141).

Fuel costs, also, were a significant expense of steamboats. It is assumed that the *Eastport* burned wood, as did most steamboats of the period, although some boats did burn coal, particularly after 1850. Wood was readily available along the entire route

between the Tuscumbia-Florence area and New Orleans, while coal could be difficult to find or prohibitively expensive, particularly along the lower Mississippi River (Hunter 1949:268-269). Steamboats burned a tremendous quantity of wood, which they obtained from wood yards that, by the 1850s, lined the rivers traveled by steamers. For example, in 1850, the 481-ton *Bostona* on a round trip between Louisville and New Orleans which involved 11 days of running time, burned 660 cords of wood (Hunter 1949:650). This represents a daily fuel consumption rate of about one cord of wood for every 8 tons of burden, an average which Haites et al. (1975:145-146) suggest applies to the entire 1850s. Using this figure, it is estimated that the *Eastport* would have consumed approximately 71.25 cords of wood a day when she was running. Assuming that the steamer ran for 18 or 19 days during a round trip to New Orleans, she would have burned as much as 1282.5 to 1353.75 cords of wood per trip.

Wood cost an average of \$2.50 per cord in the 1850s (Haites et al. 1975:146), meaning that the *Eastport's* fuel costs per round trip to New Orleans would have been about \$3,295.30, assuming she consumed an average of 1318.12 cords. Since the boat normally averaged one round trip every 27 days, this figure also represents her monthly fuel costs (see Table 2-4). The *Eastport* only operated from 5 to 8

months per year, meaning that her annual fuel costs would have ranged from \$16,476.50 to \$26,362.40. Because of its large size, the *Eastport's* fuel costs were likely to have been considerably higher than those of the average boat of the period. For example, Haites et al. (1975:146) indicate that in 1850 the mean fuel costs for steamers operating on tributary streams was \$4.21 per ton per month. If this number is used, then the *Eastport's* monthly fuel costs can be estimated to have been about \$2,399.70, or about 27 percent less than the figure obtained using a consumption rate of 71.25 cords per day. It is probable that the actual fuel costs for the *Eastport* fell somewhere between these two figures (\$3,295.30 and \$2,399.70), and an average monthly fuel cost of \$2,848 is used in Table 2-4.

Other expenses for steamboats were the cost of food for passengers and crew, plus the costs for all of the various supplies used aboard, ranging from paint, rope, and tar to linen, dishes, utensils, receipt books, etc., plus miscellaneous costs such as advertising, wharfage fees, and the like. Haites et al. (1975:176), recognizing that little hard data on these types of expenses are available, have developed general estimates for these costs for steamboats operating on tributary streams in 1850. They note that the mean cost for feeding the crew was \$20.10 per person, the provisioning of passengers was \$4.09 per ton of burden and they group other miscellaneous costs under "General expenses," which was \$1.83 per ton. When these figures are provided to the *Eastport* it can be estimated that the average monthly cost for feeding the 46-person crew was \$924.60, the cost for feeding passengers was \$2,331.30, while other costs would have been \$1,043.10.

Relying on these various estimates of expenses, it cost an estimated \$62,187 annually to operate the *Eastport*, as shown in Table 2-4. When comparing the estimated annual costs of operating the *Eastport* with the estimated annual income for the boat, as presented in Table 2-3, it would appear that the *Eastport* lost money on five of its first 7 years of operation. However, as has been discussed above, many of the numbers used in calculating these annual figures are based on incomplete data or poorly verified estimates. The income for the boat is likely to be seriously underestimated, primarily because figures for freight income are based only on the amounts of cotton and tobacco carried by the boat. Also, the upriver freight income for the *Eastport* is based on estimates provided in Haites et al. (1975) which principally rely on steamers operating in long-distance trades on the

Mississippi and Ohio rivers. Relatively few steamers were involved in the long-distance trade between the Tusculumbia-Florence region and New Orleans, such that the competition for upriver freight may not have been as great as was found on the "trunk" streams. This would mean that the *Eastport*, and the other Tennessee River steamers, probably carried greater volumes of upriver freight than many other boats and, therefore, received more income from their upriver voyages than is estimated in Table 2-3. Also, the average freight rate of 45 cents per hundred pounds used in the computations here may be lower than the actual rates charged in the Tennessee River-New Orleans trade.

Hunter (1949:362) suggests that during the period 1830 to 1860 the annual operating expenses of a steamboat were from 1.25 to 2 times the boat's original cost. Using these figures, we would presume that the annual costs for running the *Eastport* would range between \$56,250 and \$90,000. The figure of \$62,187.00 developed for the *Eastport*, using individual cost items, represents 1.38 times the boats original cost, well within the range suggested by Hunter. Haites et al. (1975:148) suggest that annual operating expenses for steamboats during the decade of the 1850s averaged \$52,677, somewhat lower than those given by Hunter and lower than that obtained for the *Eastport*. The estimates developed by Haites et al. rely on vessels that are somewhat smaller than the *Eastport*, possibly accounting for some of the difference. Despite the imprecision of the data used in their development, the estimated annual expenses for operating the *Eastport* developed here are not far out of line with estimates developed by others and, thus, they are considered reasonably reliable.

It is in the area of income that the figures developed here for the *Eastport* are so divergent from what would be expected. As noted earlier, for example, Haites et al. (1975:176) indicate that the mean freight income for tributary river vessels was \$176.10 per ton of burden, while the mean passenger income was \$107.90 per ton. These figures would mean that the total annual income for the *Eastport* should be \$161,880, of which \$100,377 would be derived from freight charges and \$61,503 from passenger fares. These figures are much higher than the annual income estimates obtained for the *Eastport* (see Table 2-3). There is no evidence in the historical record that would indicate that the boat was a money loser. The *Eastport* certainly seems to have made fewer trips than the average steamboat considered by Haites et al., but this fact does not seem to be sufficient to

create the great disparity in incomes developed here and those mean annual income figures for tributary river steamers presented by Haites et al. Until additional or more reliable data on income for the *Eastport* are found, it is assumed that several factors contribute to the low income figures developed here. The most important of these are: 1) the use of 45 cents per hundredweight as an average freight rate which may be much lower than the rates charged by the *Eastport* when in the Tennessee River trade, 2) a reliance only on cotton and tobacco to estimate freight income, and 3) an underestimate of the volume, and thus income, of upriver cargoes.

The Eastport and the Civil War

Introduction

When the Civil War began many of the steamboats operating on the Tennessee River were owned by Northerners or, at least, individuals with sympathies for the Union. A large number of these boats were withdrawn to home ports or blockaded from reaching Southern ports. The result was that there were relatively few steamers available on inland rivers which the South could use for the development of an adequate river naval force. In fact, an overall lack of ships, money, armament, and personnel were the daunting obstacles faced by Stephen Russell Mallory, the man named as Secretary of the Navy of the new Confederate Navy Department on February 21, 1861 (Still 1985:6). The naval strategy developed by Mallory and the Confederacy was largely a defensive one, arising out of several circumstances, including: 1) the overwhelming, in fact, total dominance by the Union in almost every aspect of naval warfare, including number of ships, personnel, material and naval facilities; 2) the natural environment of the Confederacy and the conditions it imposed on developing and using a Southern navy; and 3) new technologies related to naval warfare (Luraghi 1996:61). The natural environment of the Confederacy, particularly its long coastline and its numerous navigable rivers which could allow access into the South by enemy forces, stipulated the quick development of land and naval defensive forces. The vulnerability of the Mississippi River and other southern rivers, especially the Tennessee and Cumberland, was recognized, and the Confederacy quickly developed defenses along them. To protect against Union incursion into the states of Tennessee, Alabama and Mississippi, Fort Henry was constructed on the Tennessee River and Fort Donelson on the Cumberland River (Figure 2-14). Secretary Mallory, also, intended

to make use of recent advances in naval technologies, most importantly armored ships, rifled naval guns, and submarine weapons (mines or “torpedoes,” as well as primitive submarines themselves) (Luraghi 1996:69). With the advent of powerful and long-range rifled guns, Mallory recognized that wooden-hulled warships were becoming extremely vulnerable. One way in which he made use of the new gun technology was through commerce raiders, well-armed ships which the Confederacy deployed over the oceans of the world to destroy Union shipping. This strategy was partially successful.

Stephen Mallory knew that the Confederacy could never develop a navy to match that of the Union in terms of size and armament, either through foreign purchase or construction. He, therefore, advocated the construction of a small number of ships armored with iron and fitted with powerful batteries; a task which the South could be expected to undertake with her limited financial and material resources. Within a short time after becoming Secretary of the Navy, Mallory was advocating the construction of these ships. On May 10, he wrote Charles N. Conrad, president of the Committee on Naval Affairs:

I regard the possession of an iron-armored ship as a matter of the first necessity. Such a vessel at this time could traverse the entire coast of the United States, prevent all blockades, and encounter, with a fair prospect of success, their entire Navy. If to cope with them upon the sea we follow their example and build wooden ships, we shall have to construct several at one time; for one or two ships would fall an easy prey to her comparatively numerous steam frigates. But inequality of numbers may be compensated by invulnerability; and thus not only does economy but naval success dictate the wisdom and expediency of fighting with iron against wood, without regard to first cost [*Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies in the War of the Rebellion* (hereinafter cited ORN) Series II:Vol. 2:67-69].

The Secretary’s idea of winning the war with a single armored ship was totally unrealistic, but his confidence in the utility of armored vessels and his exhortations to the Confederate Congress led to the construction of a number ironclads for use on the coast and on inland rivers. On July 11, 1861, Mallory met with his staff in Richmond where it was decided that the *Merrimack*, a 3200-ton screw steam frigate that had been partially burned and destroyed by Union

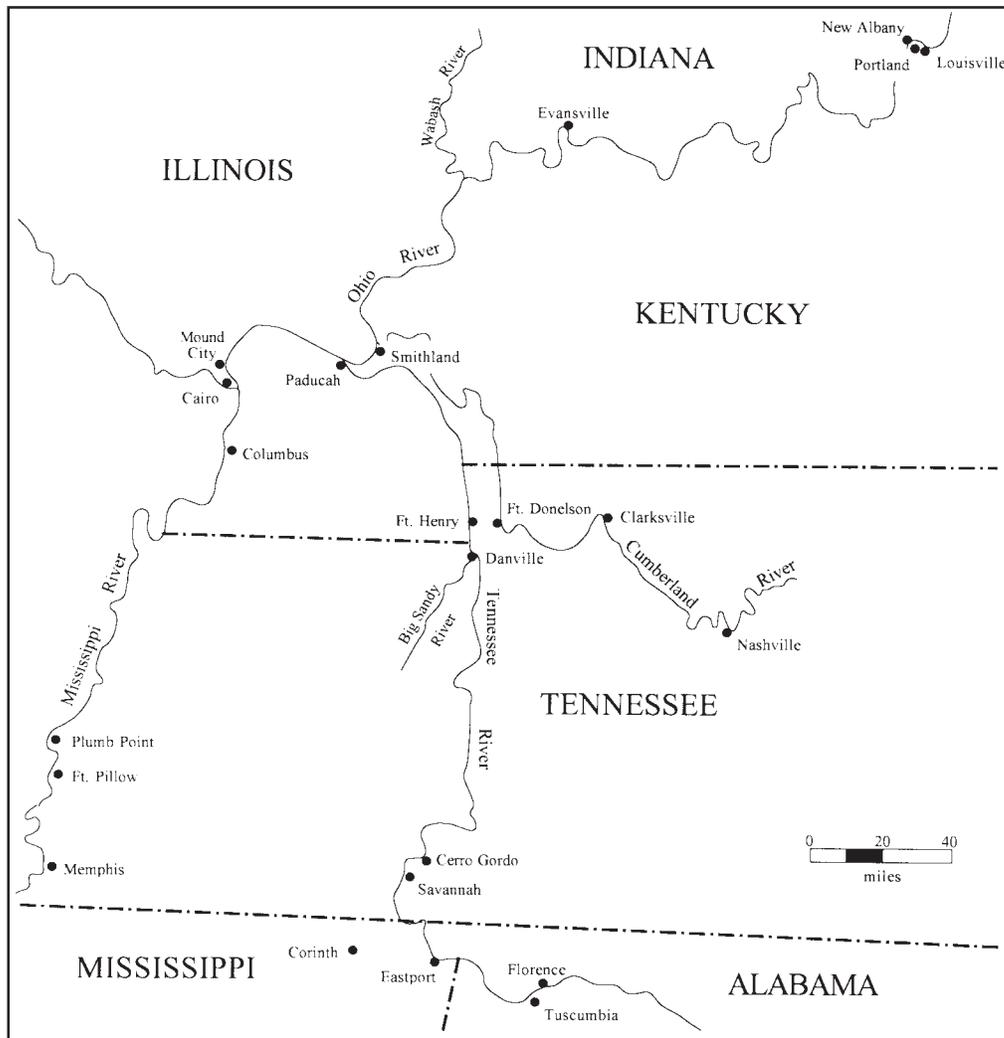


Figure 2-14. Map of the Tennessee, Cumberland and Ohio rivers area.

forces at the Gosport Navy Yard in Norfolk, would be rebuilt as an ironclad. This action initiated the construction of ironclads in the Confederacy (Still 1985:4). The *Merrimack*, to be renamed the *Virginia*, was reconstructed on plans developed by Lieutenant John M. Brooke, later to be head of the Confederate Bureau of Ordnance and Hydrography, and constructed under the direction of naval constructor John L. Porter, chief engineer William P. Williamson, and Flag-Officer French Forrest, commandant at the Gosport Navy Yard (Still 1985:13-15).

During the summer of 1861 came news that the Union, too, was beginning to build ironclads, some destined for service on the inland rivers. The western states were greatly disturbed by this news and several urged the building of armored boats for service on the Mississippi and other rivers in the west.

On June 24, 1861, the Tennessee State Legislature sent a request to the Confederate government asking for \$250,000 to thwart the threat of invasion up the Cumberland and Tennessee rivers, while parties in Louisiana urged the construction of a navy for service on the Mississippi (Still 1985:15). In late August 1861, the Confederate Congress authorized funds for the construction of two ironclads at Memphis for defense of the Mississippi River and an appropriation of \$800,000 “for floating defenses of New Orleans.” By September 1861, the Confederacy had five ironclads under construction, two at New Orleans, two at Memphis, and the *Virginia* at Norfolk.

In addition to the construction of new ironclad vessels, the Confederacy began to acquire steamboats and convert them into armored warships. The *Eastport* became one of the first boats selected for

this purpose in the west when Confederate Major General Leonidas Lafayette Polk purchased her in October 1861. Thus, the *Eastport*, a rather typical western river steamboat, was selected to play a part in the innovative naval strategy put forth by Stephen Mallory and the young Confederacy.

***The Eastport as Confederate Ironclad,
October 1861-February 1862***

Some unique information on the *Eastport's* final days as a packet steamer and her acquisition by the Confederacy is found in what are known as the "Vessel Papers," a portion of the War Department Collection of Confederate Records. The Vessel Papers are documents that relate to vessels that had dealings with the Confederate government during the Civil War. These documents were captured and collected by Union forces during and after the Civil War and are now in the National Archives. The Vessel Papers contain two files on the *Eastport*, one consisting of a few pages relating to her initial purchase by the Confederacy and the other which contains a series of legal papers, testimonies, depositions, copies of enrollments, etc., associated with a claim made against the Federal government after the war by one of the last owners of the *Eastport*, Hugh Worthington. Worthington's widow and daughter pursued this claim into the 1890s.

Testimony presented in the Hugh Worthington case, as discussed above, reveals that the *Eastport's* last commercial trip was in May of 1861 when she carried over 800 hogsheads of tobacco from Nashville and Clarksville, Tennessee, to Evansville, Indiana, on the Ohio River (National Archives, RG 109, Vessel Papers, File E-115). J.B. Ogilvie, carpenter, and George Cowling, pantryman, testified that after this trip the *Eastport* was unable to work because of the turmoil created by the start of the war and, specifically, by the blockade of the Ohio River at Cairo by the Federal government. As a result, the boat was laid up at Paducah until August 1861. While in Paducah, J.B. Ogilvie remained aboard as watchman and, also, claims to have made a number of repairs to the vessel (National Archives, RG 109, Vessel Papers, File E-115). In late August, the steamer's captain, Elijah Wood, suddenly and without warning, took the steamboat up the Tennessee River to Fort Henry, then occupied by Confederates. Subsequently, Wood carried the *Eastport* farther up the Tennessee, to the mouth of the Big Sandy River and then to Danville, well behind Confederate lines (see Figure 2-14). Testimony given in the Worthington

case deals extensively with Captain Wood's actions in taking the *Eastport* up the Tennessee. This was because the Worthington heirs were trying to make the case that Hugh Worthington, who was the principal owner of the steamer, knew nothing at all about Captain Wood's conduct and, essentially, the boat had been stolen. Because of their interest in establishing this point, some fairly detailed information on the activities of the *Eastport* just prior to her acquisition by the Confederacy was presented in the legal proceedings initiated by the heirs.

The two crewmen on the *Eastport*, J.B. Ogilvie and George Cowling, both testified that Captain Wood took the steamboat from Paducah on August 22, 1861, the same day that the steamer *W.B. Terry* was captured by the Union gunboat *Lexington* at the town (National Archives, RG 109, Vessel Papers, File E-115). The *Terry* was known to have been trading with the Confederates and was the first vessel seized on the Ohio after the initiation of the blockade of the river.

There seems to be no doubt that Wood was a southern sympathizer and wanted to move his boat into the Confederacy before the Union, also, took it. Ogilvie (who was Captain Wood's brother-in-law) stated that the capture of the *Terry* "got up a pretty considerable excitement, and Capt. Woods came down and ordered me to get up steam on the *Eastport*, which I did, and as soon as we had steamed up, why then he came aboard, brought his engineer, and we just untied from there and started up the Tennessee River" (National Archives, RG 109, Vessel Papers, File E-115). The *Eastport* towed the steamer *Dunbar* up the Tennessee when she went. The *Dunbar* was a small, 213-ton sidewheel steamer working in the Evansville-Paducah trade (Way 1994:134). Elijah Wood, apparently, owned or was part owner of the *Dunbar*. In describing the *Eastport's* "escape" up the Tennessee River, J.B. Ogilvie noted:

We went on and ran up to Fort Henry, run just above the fort I suppose some 50 or 100 yards, and we tied up there and staid there I suppose some three or four days. Then we left there and moved up to the mouth of Big Sandy river; that was 4 miles above Fort Henry. We staid there about a day, maybe two days, and Capt. Woods came down in the evening and said that the Federals had taken Paducah and that we must get up steam and get away from there and go up to Danville. That was late in the evening, and next morning we got up steam and run up to Danville and tied

up there at Danville at the bridge and staid there about a day, maybe two days; and Capt. Woods brought his family aboard and told me about his leaving Paducah with his family and leaving his house, ne'er a door shut and everything open; . . . [National Archives, RG 109, Vessel Papers, File E-115].

The *Eastport* stayed at Fort Henry for “three of four days” because the Confederate commander at Fort Henry initially refused to allow Captain Wood to move his two steamers above the fort. Consequently, on August 25, 1861, Elijah Wood wrote to Major General Leonidas Polk, commander of Confederate forces in western Tennessee, requesting permission and assistance to move the *Eastport* and *Dunbar* farther up the river (National Archives, RG 109, Citizens Files, Roll 1136). Captain Wood’s letter leaves no doubt as to his political sympathies:

Dear Sir,

I am a resident citizen of Paducah Ky, and own two large and valuable steam Boats, “Eastport & Dunbar” and to avoid the gun boats of the enemy stationed at Cairo, have run my boats up the Tennessee river, into the Confederate states, and [they] are now under the protection of the Confederate guns at Fort Henry – The commandant of the fort (Col. Hindeman [?]) refuses to permit me to move my boats higher up the stream. Now dear sir, all I ask is that instructions be given to Col Hindeman, to permit me to use my boats above or below the Fort, as I may think best for the interest of the Confederate states & myself, holding them at all times to serve the South in the present struggle

Respectfully
– Capt. E. Wood

[National Archives, RG 109, Citizens Files,
Roll 1136]

The commanding officer of Fort Henry at this time was Brigadier General Lloyd Tilghman and the second in command was Colonel A. Heiman of the Tenth Tennessee (Porter 1899:18). Colonel Heiman is no doubt the “Col. Hindeman” mentioned by Captain Wood. General Polk seems to have granted the request, allowing the boats to travel up to Danville as indicated by J.B. Ogilvie.

Exactly what happened to the *Eastport* over the next several weeks is unrecorded. Most of the crew aboard when the steamer ran up the Tennessee seem

to have soon returned to Paducah, but Elijah Wood stayed in Tennessee, in fact, he had his family and furniture removed from Paducah to Paris, Tennessee, where they resided for a short period of time, before returning to Paducah. Testimony in the Worthington case suggests that many thought that Captain Wood was sympathetic to the Confederacy, at least at the start of the war, and one person stated that Wood had served in the Confederate Army, although no documentary proof of this was presented in the case. Testimony did reveal that Hugh Worthington was living in Metropolis, Illinois, when the *Eastport* was taken by Captain Wood and seemed to know nothing about the episode until after the fact (National Archives, RG 109, Vessel Papers, File E-115). In addition to verifying that Worthington resided in Metropolis and that he was a “Union man,” the depositions attempt to provide information on the condition of the boat and its worth when Captain Wood took her up the Tennessee. All agreed that the boat was in very good shape and estimates of her worth ranged from \$25,000 to \$40,000 (National Archives, RG 109, Vessel Papers, File E-115).

There is circumstantial evidence to suggest that Captain Wood’s fear that the *Eastport* would be taken by Union forces was real. First, the various individuals testifying in the Worthington case seem to have believed that Elijah Wood was a southern sympathizer and, if this fact were widely known, it could have put him, and his boat, in danger of being seized. Additionally, as is noted earlier, the steamer *W.B. Terry*, whose seizure was the impetus for Wood taking his boat out of Paducah, seems to have been closely associated with the *Eastport*. The *Terry* was a Tennessee River boat which, when captured by Federal forces, was owned by individuals who, also, had close ties to the *Eastport*. In the letter written by the *Terry*’s captain, J.E. Johnson, to General Leonidas Polk, noted earlier, Johnson states that the owners of the *Terry* included R.W. Price and W.T. Duncan. W.T. Duncan was involved in the ownership of steamboats with Captain E.B. Martin, the original principal owner of the *Eastport*. R.W. Price was a merchant in the town of Eastport presumed to have been associated with firm of Price & Simpson, among the early owner’s of the *Eastport*. R.W. Price, also, was involved in business in Eastport with an individual named Terry, possibly William B. Terry, after whom the steamboat was named, or a relative. The *W.B. Terry* was seized because she was actively engaged in commerce with the Confederacy. No evidence has been found that the *Eastport* was so engaged, but the actions of Captain Wood, and his letter to General Polk

blatantly offering his services to the Confederacy, suggest that he may have been involved in, planned to be involved in, or, at least, was suspected of involvement in clandestine activities.

The next we hear of the *Eastport* is on October 31, 1861, when General Polk telegraphed Secretary of the Navy, Stephen Mallory, from Columbus, Kentucky, stating that the *Eastport* was available for purchase and her price was \$12,000. On the same day, Judah P. Benjamin, Acting Secretary of War and, later, Secretary of State, telegraphed Polk authorizing the purchase (National Archives, RG 109, Vessel Papers, File E-36). Leonidas Polk was among the early proponents of using ironclad gunboats on inland rivers and his intention in acquiring the *Eastport* was to convert her into an armored vessel. Several months earlier, in August 1861, he had endorsed a proposal submitted to the Confederate government by John T. Shirley to build armored gunboats in Memphis (Still 1985:16). In April 1862, General Polk wrote to General Albert Sidney Johnston, reporting on the state of the defenses of the Tennessee and Cumberland rivers when he had taken command. In this report, Polk noted his advocacy for building gunboats, stating “The importance of gunboats as an element of power in our military operations was frequently brought to the attention of the Government” (*The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* [hereinafter cited *Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (ORA)] Series I:Vol 7:924). Apparently, the *Eastport* provided Polk his first opportunity to proceed with the idea of placing armored gunboats into service on the Tennessee and Cumberland rivers. Exactly why General Polk chose the *Eastport* for this service is not known, but the reasons can be surmised. Captain Wood’s letter of August 25 stated outright that the *Eastport* was available for service, plus, and probably most importantly, she was a big boat, certainly much larger than the average steamer operating on western waters and quite possibly the largest steamer on the Tennessee River inside of Confederate territory. As a large boat, the *Eastport* could be relatively easily modified to support the weight of iron needed to armor her, plus she could carry relatively heavy armament, either in number or size of guns. In addition, large armored boats, of the size of the *Eastport*, were the type generally favored by Secretary Mallory and others.

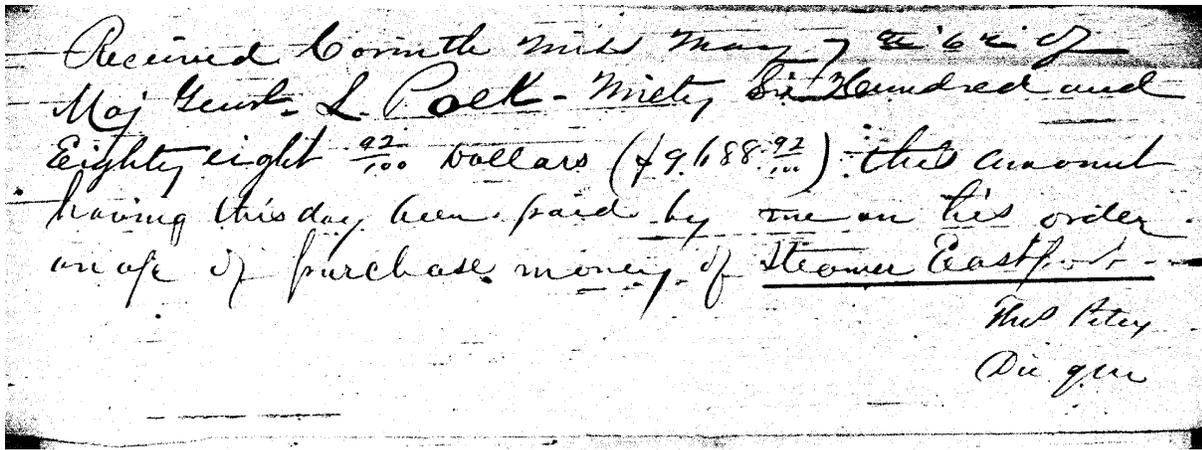
Elijah Wood was certainly anxious to offer the services of his steamer to General Polk, and he apparently conveyed to the General a desire to sell her

to the Confederacy, although documentation of such an offer is lacking. It does not appear that Polk paid the full \$12,000 approved for the purchase of the steamer by J.P. Benjamin. A statement of various dispersals made by General Polk in 1861 and/or 1862 contains the entry: “. . . expended in purchase of Steamer Eastport as per receipt of Maj. Thos Peters A.Q.M herewith marked No. 1. \$9688.92” (National Archives, RG 109, Vessel Papers, File E-36). The fact that Captain Wood accepted less than \$10,000 for a boat that most agreed was worth on the order of \$40,000, insinuates his eagerness to sell. Interestingly, this same document contains two entries, listed immediately before the *Eastport* entry, for charges “by me [General Polk] on Secret service a/c.” One of these charges is for \$1,000 and the other for \$2,000. When these “Secret service” charges are added to the actual amount expended on the *Eastport*, the total is pretty close to \$12,000; the amount that Polk requested from the Secretary of Navy to acquire the vessel. One wonders if it is possible that Elijah Wood was the receiver of all, or some, of the “Secret service” monies; payment for bringing the *Eastport* into Confederate hands and, possibly, for information he could provide on Federal activities in Paducah and on the Ohio River.

A copy of the receipt for the \$9688.92, signed by Acting Quartermaster Peters, is found in the Vessel Papers. This receipt is dated May 7, 1862, at Corinth, Mississippi (Figure 2-15). Why it took so long to disperse the money is unknown, but on January 28, 1862, Captain Wood had written another letter to Major General Polk complaining that he had not yet received payment for the *Eastport*. Wood wrote: “I would like to get some money on the purchase of the Eastport . . . so each ones can get his own money then I will not Be too Bled with matters any more the parties need their money . . .” (National Archives, Citizens Files, Roll 1136). Wood wrote this letter from Columbus, Kentucky, where he had traveled to buy cotton for caulking the deck of the *Eastport*. He wrote:

I had come to Columbus to see a bout the coton for the gunboat Eastport I am redy for to use it I am gettin on with the deck as fast as posible. the weather has put us back some and men is hard to get thair is a corker in Capt Jacksons Batry that I would like [National Archives, RG 109, Citizens Files, Roll 1136].

It is not known which owners of the *Eastport* received payment from the sale to General Polk. One document in the Vessel Papers is a sworn statement



Received to witth this day May 7 1862 of
Maj Genl L Polk - Ninety Six hundred and
Eighty eight $\frac{92}{100}$ dollars (\$9,688. $\frac{92}{100}$) - this amount
having this day been paid by me on his order
in a/c of purchase money of Steamer Eastport -
Wm Peter
D. J. M.

Figure 2-15. Receipt for payment for the *Eastport* by Confederate General Leonidas Polk, May 7, 1862 (source: National Archives, RG 109, Vessel Papers, File E-36).

signed by George W. Woolfolk naming the owners of the *Eastport*. This affidavit, dated November 25, 1861, was witnessed by a Confederate officer at “Headquarters of the Western Department” in Columbia, Kentucky, and was, presumably, required at the sale. Woolfolk stated that he owned one-fifth; Charles Harrison owned one-fifth and Elijah Wood and Hugh Worthington each owned one fifth and half of one fifth (National Archives, RG 109, Vessel Papers, File E-36). The last enrollment document known for the *Eastport* is dated November 29, 1858, and shows Harrison, Woolfolk (actually Mrs. A.O. Woolfolk) and Worthington as owners, but not Elijah Wood (National Archives, RG 109, Vessel Papers, File E-115). It is possible that Wood acquired a part ownership from Hugh Worthington and the enrollment document containing that information has been lost. This seems reasonable, because it is unlikely that Woolfolk would affirm that Hugh Worthington held any ownership in the *Eastport* at all if the boat actually had been stolen by Captain Wood and if the intention was to eliminate Worthington from receiving any payment.

George Woolfolk’s appearance before Confederate authorities to make this affidavit seems to suggest that he received some of the money paid out by General Polk. Presumably, Elijah Wood, also, received part of the payment. Hugh Worthington’s descendants argued that he knew nothing about the sale and received nothing from it (National Archives, RG 109, Vessel Papers, File E-115). It is not known if the other owner, Charles Harrison, was ever paid anything for his one-fifth ownership.

In a letter to General Albert Sidney Johnston in Columbus, Kentucky, dated November 28, 1861, General Polk wrote: “I have under the authority of the Secretary of the Navy, bought the steamer *Eastport*, and [am] now having her converted into a gunboat on the Tennessee River; the work will be done above the bridge” (ORA I:7:306). General Polk had moved the *Eastport* to a navy yard established at the small town of Cerro Gordo on the Tennessee River for the conversion (see Figure 2-14). In the same letter, Polk noted that he was “contracting for another boat on the Cumberland, to be converted into a gunboat at Nashville” (ORA I:7:306). In December, General Polk asked Secretary Mallory to provide a naval officer to oversee the conversion of the *Eastport*. Later in the month, Mallory assigned Lieutenant Isaac N. Brown this task. Brown, born in Kentucky, had spent nearly 28 years in the United States Navy, resigning to join the Confederacy in June 1861 (Figure 2-16). Lieutenant Brown had a reputation for efficiency and was considered a man of great drive and determination (Still 1985:64). His first assignment as a Confederate officer was with the Army of the West, where he was to aid in the defenses of the Mississippi River. He helped arm several land positions on the Mississippi River and then was sent to Nashville to supervise all naval construction on the Tennessee and Cumberland rivers (Scharf 1978:306). With \$50,000 that the Confederate Congress had appropriated for the construction of gunboats on these rivers, Brown purchased the steamboats *James Wood*, *James Johnson* and *Dunbar*, authorized the conversion of two steamers offered for sale by the mayor of Nashville, and began the conversion of the *Eastport* (Melton 1968:111). With the withdrawal



Figure 2-16. Lieutenant Isaac N. Brown, the man charged with converting the *Eastport* into a gunboat for the Confederacy (source: Slagle 1996:260).

of Confederate forces from the lower Cumberland and Tennessee rivers after the fall of Forts Henry and Donelson in February 1862, Isaac Brown was sent to New Orleans where he was to superintend the construction of four ironclad gunboats at the town of Algiers (Scharf 1978:306). These boats were not complete when New Orleans fell to Union forces in April 1862 and in May Brown was ordered to Greenwood, Mississippi, to take command and complete the outfitting of the ironclad *Arkansas*. Subsequently, he commanded the *Arkansas* on her run down the Yazoo River to the Mississippi where she engaged Union vessels at Vicksburg. Injured during the fighting, Brown was away on sick leave when the *Arkansas* continued on down the Mississippi where, on August 6, unable to move because of mechanical problems, she was blown up by her own crew just above Baton Rouge (Still 1985:75-78).

When Brown was assigned to superintend naval construction on the Tennessee and Cumberland, the *Eastport* seems to have been the only vessel being worked on. However, within a month, he had negotiated the purchase of other steamboats at Nashville for conversion (Still 1985:42). Brown's specific actions relative to the *Eastport* are unknown, although, apparently, he was primarily responsible for design-

ing as well as directing her conversion. No official records have been found that would reveal Brown's specific plans for the *Eastport*, but it certainly involved removal of all of the steamer's upper works and the construction of an armored casemate on the main deck. Brown began to collect lumber and armor for the conversion and, apparently, had a sawmill constructed on the river bank to saw and mill the necessary timber. Reportedly, by the end of January 1862, the *Eastport's* superstructure had been removed down to the main deck and a slanting timber casemate frame had been built to receive iron armor plating (Gibbons 1989:14). The Reverend T.M. Hurst, born in the town of Savannah, Tennessee, not far from Cerro Gordo, wrote that his father "had the contract for building the 'bulkheads,'—putting on the armor plate and mounting the guns" on the *Eastport* (Hurst 1921:134). He also noted that "she was to be protected by railroad iron" and that four of the guns for the *Eastport* were "on the way" when the partially completed gunboat was captured by the Federal Navy (Hurst 1921:134). What types of guns these may have been is unknown.

The Confederate government was slow in providing General Polk the funds needed to undertake the *Eastport's* conversion. On January 5, 1862, Polk wrote J.P. Benjamin restating the fact that "By virtue of the authority from the War Dept. of Oct 31st - I bought the steamer "Eastport," and informing him that the *Eastport* "is now undergoing the necessary alterations to convert her into a gun boat." Polk requested \$60,000 to cover the cost of the conversion "as well as the amount due for the purchase," supporting Elijah Wood's complaint later in the month that the *Eastport's* owners had not yet been paid for their boat (National Archives, RG 109, Vessel Papers, File E-36). Polk's letter brought action, and on January 16 Secretary Benjamin telegraphed Polk that "I shall order the necessary funds forwarded at once for the 'Eastport'" (National Archives, RG 109, Vessel Papers, File E-36). General Polk received the monies and records indicate that he drew "a check on Br. Bank of Tennessee at Memphis now located at Atlanta, Geo. to the order of Sec. of Treasury" for \$50,191.08. This represented what was left after deduction of the purchase price for the *Eastport* (\$9,688.92) and a fee of \$120.00 that was charged by the Bank of Tennessee for handling the transfer of funds (National Archives, RG 109, Vessel Papers, File E-36).

Although General Polk strongly supported the conversion of the *Eastport* and the building of ironclads

in general, he seems to have recognized that the effort, on the Tennessee River at least, was too little, too late. In April 1862, in a report on his activities as commander of the Western Department, he wrote "One transport boat, the *Eastport*, was ordered to be purchased and converted into a gunboat on the Tennessee river, but it was unfortunately too late to be of any service" (ORA I:7:924).

The Union Captures the Eastport

In the months following the start of the Civil War, the United States formulated a military strategy to combat the South. The plan included the complete blockade of southern coastal ports and capturing the interior transportation arteries of the Mississippi River and its tributaries. This strategy, originally proposed by General in Chief of the Army Winfield Scott, would restrict Confederate troop movements and disrupt movement of important supplies. The importance of this strategy was emphasized in 1861 when Abraham Lincoln said that "The Mississippi is the backbone of the Rebellion, it is the key to the whole situation." To implement the plan on the inland rivers, Union commanders would utilize a combination of Army troops and river warships (Still 1985:41). The United States, with its significantly greater resources, was able to move more quickly than the Confederacy in the construction of gunboats on inland rivers. In June 1861, Commander John Rodgers was sent to Cincinnati where he immediately began to purchase and convert steamers into gunboats. The first three of these river gunboats were the *A.O. Tyler*, the *Lexington*, and the *Conestoga*, all sidewheel steamers that were converted at Louisville and armored with 5-in-thick oak planking (Silverstone 1989:158-160; Stern 1992:77). These "timberclads," as they were called, were ready for service late in July. Meanwhile, James B. Eads of St. Louis had presented plans for iron armored gunboats to the United States Secretary of the Navy, Gideon Welles. In July, Eads received a contract to build seven ironclad gunboats designed by himself and by navy constructor Samuel Pook. Eads agreed to build them within 65 days and was able to launch the first one, the *St. Louis* (later the *Baron De Kalb*), at St. Louis in less than 45 days. The other boats, known as City Class or Cairo Class gunboats, were completed shortly afterwards at yards in St. Louis and Mound City, Illinois (Silverstone 1989:151). These were the *Carondelet*, *Cincinnati*, *Louisville*, *Mound City*, *Cairo* and *Pittsburg* (Figure 2-17). Eads, also, converted a snagboat into the heavily armed *Benton* (Figure 2-18) and the steamboat *New Era* into an

ironclad renamed the *Essex* (Stern 1992:76-77). Early in the war, all of these gunboats were under the jurisdiction of the Army, although United States Navy personnel commanded them.

Federal commanders learned that Confederates were converting and building warships on the upper Tennessee River, and in September 1861 General Ulysses S. Grant moved to gain control of the Tennessee before any vessels could be completed. Low water in the fall and winter months of 1861 and the Confederate defenses at Fort Henry prevented Union forces from penetrating deep into the area. However, numerous patrols of the lower Cumberland and Tennessee were made, particularly by the recently completed timberclads. At the beginning of 1862, United States forces were not faring well on the battlefield. The North at first thought that the "rebellion" would last only a few months. So, with continuing setbacks, the Union needed a "decisive battle" to turn the tide in their favor. General Grant was instructed to move against the fortifications on the Tennessee and Cumberland rivers in hopes of achieving a desperately needed victory. With the completion of the first of the ironclads (*Essex*, *Carondelet*, *St. Louis*, and *Cincinnati*) in January 1862, and with the arrival of high water, Flag-Officer Andrew H. Foote, who had replaced John Rodgers as commander of the naval forces on the western rivers, proposed to Grant that a combined army and navy assault on Fort Henry was feasible. On February 6, 1862, the combined forces of General Grant and Flag-Officer Foote, consisting of 7 recently constructed gunboats and 17,000 men, attacked Fort Henry on the Tennessee river near the Tennessee-Kentucky border (see Figure 2-14) (Kitchens 1985:86). The bombardment of the fort was to commence simultaneously with a land attack, but Grant's forces were delayed by rain-soaked ground. Foote attacked with the firepower from the ironclads *Cincinnati*, *Carondelet*, *St. Louis*, and *Essex*, and the wooden gunboats, *Lexington*, *Tyler*, and *Conestoga*. The gunboats opened fire at 12:30 p.m. from a distance of 1,700 yards, and gunfire from the fort commenced soon after. The boats slowly steamed toward the fort, and at a distance of 600 yards, the intensity of fire increased both from the boats and the fort. The *Essex* received a shell to her boilers, which resulted in the wounding of several men, and she was unable to continue the bombardment. The other boats continued approaching the fort with increasingly destructive fire, and after 1 hour and 15 minutes had secured a victory, forcing Confederate commander Brigadier General Lloyd Tilghman to surrender (Stern 1992:77-78).

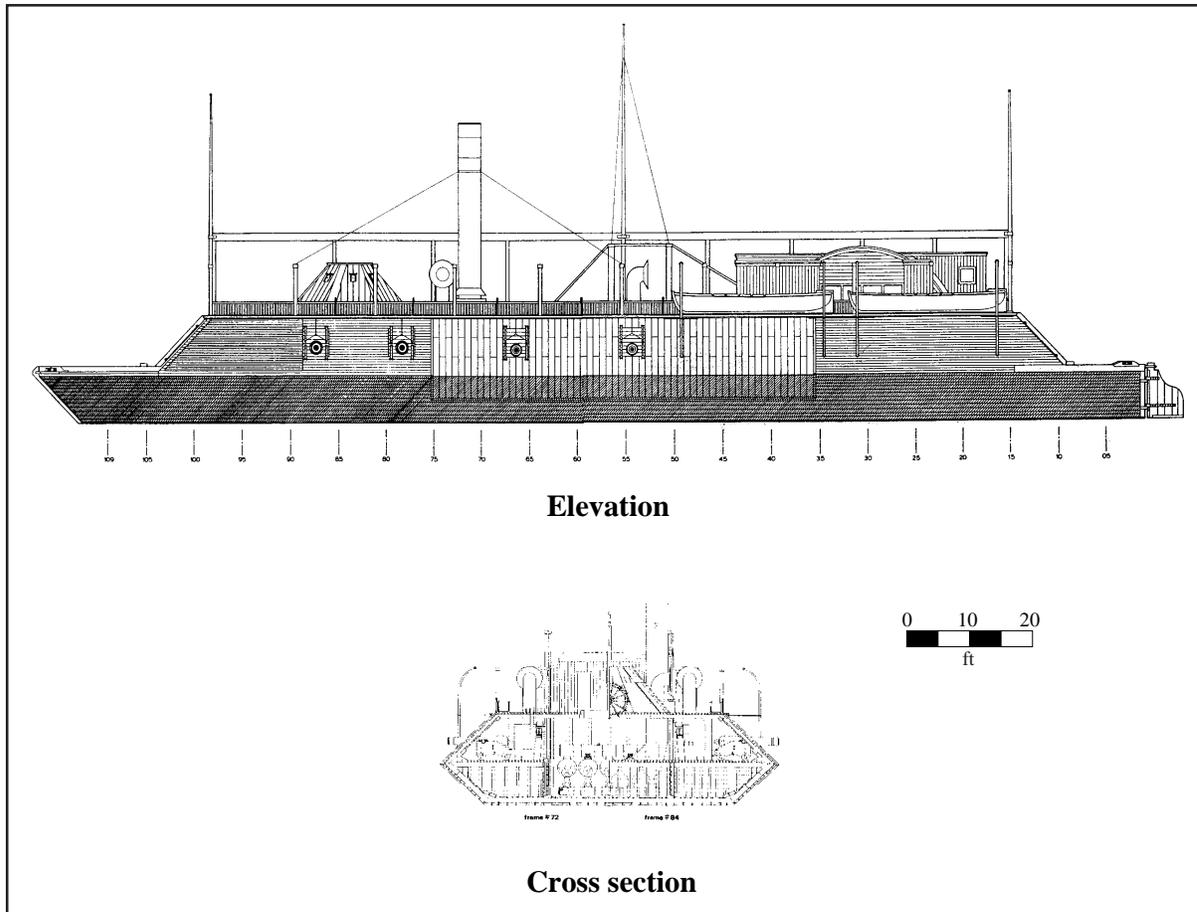


Figure 2-17. Elevation and cross section of the City Class gunboat *Cairo*. The elevation shows the gunboat’s vertical armor plating only in the central portion of the vessel and on the pilothouse (source: Canney 1993:49, 50; originals drawn by the National Park Service).

Immediately after the fall of Fort Henry, the gunboats *Lexington*, *Tyler* and *Conestoga*, under the command of Navy Lieutenant Seth Ledyard Phelps, captain of the *Conestoga*, continued up the Tennessee River in pursuit of the Confederates with specific orders to capture Rebel boats. The Confederate forces burned six steamers, including the *Samuel Orr*, *Appleton Belle* and *Lynn Boyd*. Phelps was able to capture three boats; the steamers *Sallie Wood* and *Muscle*, and the partially completed gunboat *Eastport*, the latter captured on February 7 (Naval History Division 1971:II-20).

Well prior to the attack on Fort Henry, rumors of the conversion of the *Eastport* into a powerful warship were being heard. On December 10, 1861, Lieutenant Phelps, who was involved in patrols on the lower Cumberland and Tennessee with the

Conestoga, reported to Flag-Officer Foote that he “had employed a man” to examine the purported gunboats and report on their condition and armament. Phelps indicated that one of these gunboats was “the *Eastport*, which when new, was one of the fastest vessels running upon the Mississippi. It is 280 feet in length, and if properly fitted up, could carry a most formidable battery. The others are much smaller vessels” (ORN I:22:458). Just before the attack on Fort Henry, Flag-Officer Foote had sent Lieutenant James W. Shirk, captain of the timberclad gunboat *Lexington*, up the Tennessee to reconnoiter the area around the fort. On the afternoon of January 19, 1862, Shirk reported that he had seen “the rebel gunboat *Dunbar*” on the river below the fort and had given chase, but as the *Dunbar* was “a very fast boat” he was unable to catch her (ORN I:22:520). Captain Shirk proceeded up the Tennessee until he

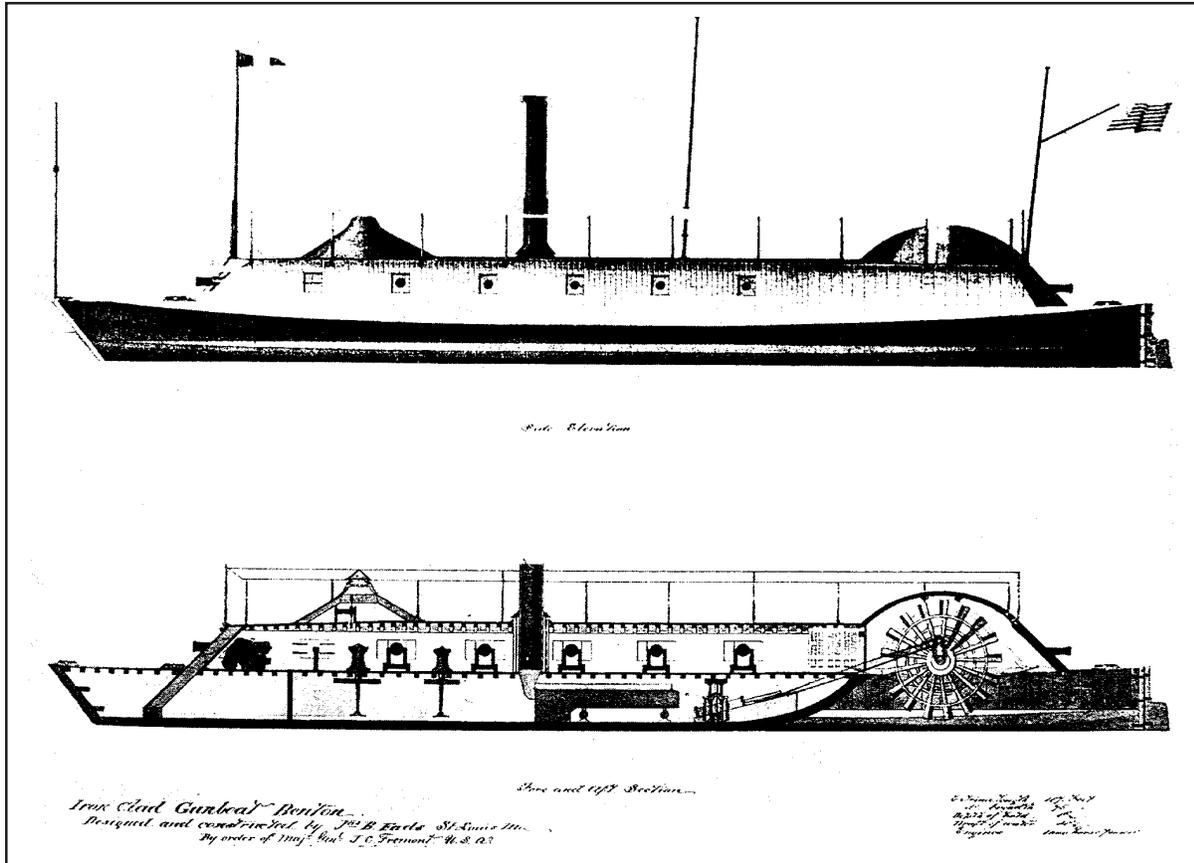


Figure 2-18. Plans for the ironclad gunboat *Benton*, converted from a snagboat by James Eads (source: Canney 1993:43; original plans at the Naval Historical Center and the Smithsonian Institution).

was within sight of Fort Henry, where he saw the *Dunbar* and “another steamer.” He noted that the *Dunbar* was reportedly armed with two “brass pieces,” but that she had not yet been altered: “She has no bulwarks, and has still her upper cabin or saloon in its place. She is painted white and looks like any other river steamer” (ORN I:22:521). The *Dunbar* was the small sidewheeler that Captain Elijah Wood had taken up the Tennessee with the *Eastport* and which Isaac Brown purchased for the Confederacy. Captain Shirk stated that he “presumed” the other steamer at the fort was the *Eastport*. This steamer was painted black, but the Federals were “not able to see how she was built up” (ORN I:22:521). It seems unlikely that this actually was the *Eastport*, since by all accounts she was far upriver at Cerro Gordo being converted, and had been there since the previous November.

Lieutenant Phelps submitted an official account of his movement up the Tennessee and of the events

surrounding the capture of the *Eastport* to Flag-Officer Foote on February 10 (ORA I:7:153-156). The report notes that on moving up the river, Phelps’s boats encountered the Memphis, Louisville & Clarksville Railroad bridge at Danville, about 25 miles above Fort Henry, with the draw closed (see Figure 2-14). They could see several rebel steamers escaping upstream above the bridge, and at the Danville landing was Elijah Wood’s small steamer *Dunbar*. Now in Confederate government service under the command of Captain Gus Fowler, the *Dunbar* had stayed behind to act as a rear guard (Slagle 1996:162). One round from one of the *Conestoga*’s 32-pounders sent the *Dunbar* up the river behind the other steamers. Phelps wanted to pursue, but it took his men an hour to get the draw bridge opened so his gunboats could pass through (ORA I:7:153). Leaving the slow-moving *Tyler* behind to destroy some of the railroad trestle, Phelps steamed rapidly upriver with the *Lexington* and *Conestoga*.

Men from the *Tyler* found remnants of a Confederate encampment near the railroad bridge where they recovered a number of papers left behind by Lieutenant Isaac N. Brown, whom Phelps noted was “formerly a lieutenant in the Navy, now signing himself ‘Lieutenant, C.S.N.’” Seth Phelps knew Isaac Brown well, they had both served in the United States Navy for many years and had been shipmates on the steam frigate USS *Susquehanna* in the late 1850s (Slagle 1996:166). The captured papers gave “an official history of the rebel floating preparations on the Mississippi, Cumberland, and Tennessee,” and contained letters between Secretary Mallory and Lieutenant Brown concerning the purchase of steamers for the government. Unfortunately, these documents are lost (ORA I:7:154), but some were reprinted in the *Cincinnati Daily Gazette* soon after their discovery (Slagle 1996:166). In the letters, Brown did note that the captain of the *Eastport* (Elijah Wood) was happy to turn the *Eastport* over to him (Brown) for service in the Confederate Navy.

With the *Lexington* and *Conestoga*, Phelps soon caught up with the fleeing steamers, forcing the rebels to abandon and set three of the boats afire (ORA I:7:154). These were the steamers *Sam Orr*, *Appleton Belle*, and *Lynn Boyd* (Slagle 1996:164, 166). Later in the day, the *Tyler* caught up with the other two timberclads and that evening the three gunboats arrived at the landing at Cerro Gordo, about 8 miles down river of Savannah, Tennessee (see Figure 2-14). Confederates on shore fired small arms at the boats, but they were soon dispersed with shells from the *Conestoga* and *Tyler*. The gunboats lowered their cutters and these headed for the riverbank where they discovered the partially scuttled *Eastport* and evidence of hasty departure by the men who had been working on her. In his account of the finding of the *Eastport*, Phelps wrote:

At night on the 7th we arrived at a landing in Hardin County, Tennessee, known as Cerro Gordo, where we found the steamer *Eastport* being converted into a gunboat. Armed boat crews were immediately sent on board and search made for means of destruction that might have been devised. She had been scuttled and the suction pipes broken. These leaks were soon stopped. A number of rifle shots were fired on our vessels, but a couple of shells dispersed the rebels. On examination, I found that there were large quantities of timber and lumber prepared for fitting up the *Eastport*; that the vessel itself – some 280 feet long – was in excellent condition, and al-

ready half finished. Considerable of the plating designed for her was lying on the bank, and everything at hand to complete her. I therefore directed Lieutenant-Commander Gwin to remain with the *Tyler*, to guard the prize, and to load the lumber, &c., while the *Lexington* and *Conestoga* should proceed still higher up [ORA I:7:154].

This was Seth Phelps’s first encounter with the *Eastport*, a vessel he considered his “prize,” and one which he was to be intimately associated with during much of the Civil War. Phelps would be the strongest proponent for converting the *Eastport* into an ironclad gunboat for the United States fleet on the rivers; he assisted in overseeing the conversion of the *Eastport* into an ironclad; he served as her only commander for her entire gunboat career and, ironically, Phelps, the man responsible for saving the *Eastport* from demolition by the Confederates, in the end was the person who destroyed the stranded *Eastport* with explosives on Red River in April 1864.

Captain John A. Duple, a steamboatman who provided testimony in the Hugh Worthington case, was master of the timberclad *Conestoga* and present at the capture of the *Eastport*. He indicated that the Confederate efforts to scuttle the boat were minimal and ineffective. Duple testified that:

. . . there were three scuttle holes in her, and in fifteen minutes we had stopped them. The size of the holes were from 12 to 18 inches long and the width of one plank about 6 inches wide, between her top timbers. Ten dollars would pay to repair the whole expense caused by scuttling [National Archives, RG 109, Vessel Papers, File E-115].

Confederate reports of the destruction of the *Eastport*, however, were more optimistic. Brigadier General Gideon J. Pillow, commander at Fort Donelson on the Cumberland River, reported on February 10, 1862, that “The *Eastport*, which we were converting into a gunboat, was burned and sunk” (ORA I:7:292). None of the Union reports indicate there had been any attempt at all to burn the *Eastport*.

After capturing the *Eastport*, Lieutenant Phelps continued up the Tennessee, seizing two more steamers, the *Sallie Wood* and the *Muscle*, just above the town of Eastport, Mississippi. The *Sallie Wood* was loaded with iron destined for the Tredegar Iron Works in Richmond, Virginia. Phelps detailed a prize crew, under the command of Second Master Charles Noble,

to take the captured vessels back to Cerro Gordo (Slagle 1996:167). Phelps continued on upriver and at Florence, Alabama, the Union gunboats came upon three other steamers, the *Julius Smith*, *Time* and *Sam Kirkman* which were prevented from going farther upriver by the bridge of the Memphis & Charleston Railroad. These boats were set afire by their crews while two other Confederate boats, the *Dunbar* and *Alfred Robb*, had steamed out of town to find some place to hide. Phelps reported that his men were able to recover a considerable amount of military stores from the burning boats before they were completely destroyed (ORA I:7:154). The Federal boats could not proceed above Florence, because of the shoals and the railroad bridge. General Albert S. Johnston had ordered the bridge destroyed so that the Confederate steamers could escape upriver, but the citizens of Florence had refused to burn the bridge, which they had paid for and built. A delegation of town citizens approached Lieutenant Phelps's gunboats with a flag of truce and asked him to spare their town and their bridge. Phelps informed them that he had no intention of destroying their town and, because he was prevented from continuing upriver by the shoals, he would not destroy the railroad bridge (Slagle 1996:169). His men did, however, search the warehouses in the town, where they found supplies for Fort Henry and recovered more iron plating "intended for the *Eastport*" (ORA I:7:154). After loading these captured goods, the gunboats turned around and proceeded down river, arriving at Cerro Gordo and the *Eastport* on the night of February 8.

Phelps reported that by the time he returned to the *Eastport*, Captain William Gwin of the *Tyler* had gotten his men to move on board the prize "an immense amount of lumber" and other materials that had been at the landing for use on the unfinished gunboat. Phelps set the crews from his other two boats to work helping load captured goods, noting that "we have brought away probably 250,000 feet of the best quality of ship and building timber, all the iron machinery, spikes, plating, nails, &c., belonging to the rebel gunboat, and I caused the mill to be destroyed where the lumber had been sawed" (ORA I:7:155).

Lieutenant Phelps was an aggressive commander and was not content with simply attacking the enemy on the river. He had already heard from locals and from intercepted telegraph messages that his raid had created a great disturbance and a call to arms throughout the area. Jefferson Davis, himself, had urged units gathering at Huntsville, Alabama, to proceed

to the Tennessee River and destroy the gunboats, stating that the raiders "should never be allowed to tread upon our soil and return" (ORA I:17:867). Encouraged by his success, Phelps decided to attack the encampment of Lt. Colonel James M. Crew, located near the town of Savannah, Tennessee. Using the *Conestoga* and *Tyler*, Phelps steamed up to Savannah landing where he sent ashore a force of 130 sailors and marines under the command of Captain Gwin. The rebels had deserted their camp, but Gwin's force captured a quantity of military material and arms (Slagle 1996:170). Phelps returned his men and the captured goods to the boats and proceeded back to Cerro Gordo to make preparations to convey his prize vessels down river. Placing the *Lexington* and *Tyler* on either side of the *Eastport*, and using the *Conestoga* to tow the captured *Sallie Wood* and *Muscle*, Phelps departed Cerro Gordo on the night of Sunday, February 9. During this passage, the *Muscle* sprang a leak and had to be abandoned "with a considerable quantity of fine lumber" (ORA I:7:155).

On the morning of February 10, the boats arrived at the Memphis, Louisville & Clarksville Railroad bridge at Danville, where U.S. troops had already arrived and taken up positions to protect it. While trying to get the prizes through the bridge, the *Eastport* got stuck. Phelps had to call on two companies from the 14th Missouri Volunteers, who were at Danville, to help his gunboat crews pull the large steamer through the draw (Slagle 1996:172). The *Eastport* was successfully pulled through, and the three gunboats and their prizes continued down river toward Cairo. Before arriving, they were met by the gunboat *Carondelet*, whose captain, Henry Walke, told Phelps to come with him to Fort Donelson as had been ordered by General Grant. Phelps, who had been commanded to meet Flag-Officer Foote at Cairo, refused to go with Walke, and continued on toward Cairo. On February 12, Phelps met Flag-Officer Foote with a squadron consisting of the gunboats *St. Louis*, *Pittsburg* and *Louisville* on their way to Fort Donelson. Foote ordered Phelps to turn his gunboats around and join him, except for the *Lexington*, which was in need of repairs and which continued on down river (Slagle 1996:175-176). Apparently, the *Eastport* was left at Paducah and remained there until the middle of March when she was taken to the Federal naval yard at Mound City, Illinois, several miles up the Ohio from Cairo (*Cincinnati Daily Commercial* August 23, 1862).

The extant records include several descriptions of the condition of the *Eastport* at the time of her

capture that convey some idea of what the Confederates had accomplished in their thwarted conversion of the steamer. Lieutenant Phelps provided a report on the condition of the *Eastport* to Flag-Officer Foote on February 18, just 10 days after her capture. He noted:

Her machinery is complete and is of first quality, while the boilers have been dropped into the hold. The hull is sheathed with oak planking and the bulkheads, both fore and aft and thwartships, are also of oak, and all of the best workmanship. The side timbers of the casemate are complete [ORN I:22:615].

Several individuals testifying in the Hugh Worthington case, also, provided descriptions of the partially converted steamer after her capture. John Duple noted that when captured “[the *Eastport*’s] upper works were partly cut away, but her hull, machinery, wheels, and guards were all complete.” Several others saw the *Eastport* soon after her capture when she was brought down river to Mound City. George Cowling, who observed the *Eastport* from a distance, stated that it looked like “there was a frame all around her, if I remember; that is, the pieces of heavy studding and everything. . . . timbers and uprights.” Charles P. Farrow, who had been involved in the steamboat business prior to the Civil War, saw the *Eastport* at Mound City the day after she was brought there in mid-March 1862 and provided the following description:

Well, she was brought by the Federals to Mound City and landed at the lower end of the marine railway docks there at that place. She had been captured up the Tennessee River, and they had commenced making a gunboat of her. They [the Confederates] had taken off some of her upper works and erected partially-built inclined batteries or woodwork on her to make her into a gunboat. They had her at the time loaded with yellow pine lumber, material, and boxes, sundries, and scrap railroad iron. Whether that was captured on her or not, or whether put on her after she was captured, I don’t know. It was taken off there at Mound City. All the loose material was taken off for to draw her out of the water on to the ways, in order to get her out on to the dock’s ways. Her hull was in very good condition; in fact her sides and timbers were sound. They didn’t displace them in making a gunboat out of her, they placed other timbers attached to the broadsides. It was so sound, such good material, they

didn’t take it off to replace it with other material; they took and built out new timbers on the old sides and planked it over [National Archives, RG 109, Vessel Papers, File E-115].

Farrow went to reiterate that the “. . . wheelhouse . . . ; the pilot house and all those upper works was taken off [by the Confederates],” but that the *Eastport* still had all of her machinery aboard. However, he did state that the:

. . . boilers was aboard, but they wasn’t in position. . . . I think they aimed to put them down in the hold when they made it into a gunboat; they aimed to get it [boilers] off the main deck down into the hold, the way they had the deck cut where the boiler was going to be placed in the hold by the rebels [National Archives, RG 109, Vessel Papers, File E-115].

Charles Farrow, also, stated the *Eastport*’s “chimneys” [smokestacks] were not up when he first saw her. J.B. Ogilvie, who, as the former carpenter on the *Eastport* would have been very familiar with the boat, also, saw the steamer as she was brought into Mound City soon after her capture. He disagreed with Farrow’s testimony about the boat’s smokestacks and stated that “as well as I recollect” they were still up when she was captured. Ogilvie agreed with the other testimony that all or most of the boat’s upper works had been removed, noting “her cabin was partly off, and her wheelhouse was stripped off; the siding was stripped off getting ready to put sheet iron on, or plating.” He went on to note that “her wheels, her shafts, and all were there, but the arms and buckets, they were off.” Ogilvie, also, said he saw all manner of material, including iron plating, lying on the deck of the boat when she arrived at Mound City; “the whole outfit for fitting her up,” as he stated (National Archives, RG 109, Vessel Papers, File E-115).

The available information on the extent of the Confederate conversion of the *Eastport* is scanty; however, it does show that conversion was well underway. The accounts of eyewitnesses all agree that all, or most, of the steamer’s superstructure had been removed (i.e., cabin, texas and pilothouse) plus all, or most, of a framework for an armored casemate had been constructed on the main deck. More specifically, this framework was “inclined.” It appears as if the casemate framework was ready to be sheathed with iron. Most of those testifying in the Worthington case seem to agree that the armor for the boat was

to be “sheet iron, or plating,” a large quantity of which was captured with the steamer. This is in conflict with the account of T.M. Hurst, who said that the boat was to be armored with railroad iron (Hurst 1921:134), plus Charles Farrow did mention that he saw “scrap railroad iron” on the boat at Mound City. If, as several eyewitnesses stated, the armor was iron plate, no information has been found as to where it came from. Several accounts indicate that the original machinery was on the boat when captured, although, the boilers may have been disconnected and placed in the hold, or were in position to be put into the hold.

It is impossible to know what Isaac Brown intended the completed *Eastport* to look like; no plans, drawings or descriptions of the planned gunboat are known to exist. Most of the large ironclads built by the Confederacy were constructed from the keel up, only a few were converted vessels. Even so, Still (1985:93) notes that it is “nearly impossible to generalize” about the Confederate ironclads, because each was different. However, he points out that one structural characteristic they all shared was an iron-plated casemate or shield with slanting sides placed on a hull with very low freeboard. We can assume that Brown intended to construct such a casemate on the main deck of the *Eastport*, and the available descriptions of the partially converted vessel support this assumption. According to the report by Lieutenant Phelps, Brown, also, intended to lower the boilers into the hold of the boat, where they would be somewhat protected, plus this would open up main deck space for guns. It is presumed that the Confederates intended to keep

the paddlewheels on the *Eastport* and use them for propulsion, although the testimony of J.B. Ogilvie that the “arms and buckets” had been removed from the wheels suggests that some type of modification was planned. The majority of the ironclads constructed by the Confederates were powered by propeller (Still 1985:101); however, it seems very unlikely that there was any plan to convert the *Eastport* to a screw-powered boat. Secretary Mallory seems to have favored the building of sidewheel ironclads, but construction was begun on only three and just one of these was completed, the *Nashville*. If the *Eastport* had been completed, it is possible that she would have resembled the *Nashville* (Figure 2-19).

Construction of the *Nashville* was begun at Montgomery, Alabama, in 1863 and in June of that year her hull was towed to the navy yard in Mobile for completion. The hull was 271 ft long; 62 ft, 6 in wide and 19 ft, 9 in deep (Silverstone 1989:209). While similar in length to the *Eastport*, the great width and depth of the *Nashville* reveals that she was not constructed along the lines of the typical western river steamboat; in fact, she is described as a “side-wheel steam sloop” (Naval History Division 1971:VI:275). A slanted-walled casemate was constructed on the deck of the *Nashville* and a contemporary drawing shows that this casemate occupied the central portion of the boat, leaving long fore and aft decks (Figure 2-19). A lack of iron plate for armor seriously delayed the completion of the *Nashville* but, eventually, armor came from the ironclad ram *Baltic*, which had been declared unfit for service and dismantled in 1864 (Silverstone 1989:209).

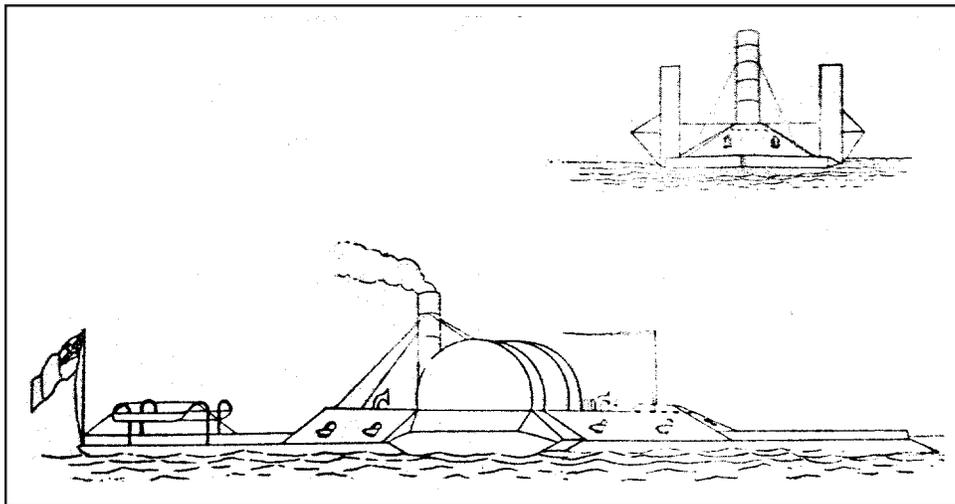


Figure 2-19. The Confederate sidewheel ironclad *Nashville* (source: Still 1985:108).

Although never entirely completed, the *Nashville* was reportedly armored with three layers of 2-in-thick iron plate forward and around her pilothouse, but with only a single thickness of plate aft (Naval History Division 1971:VI:275; Silverstone 1989:209). The gunboat, also, was fitted with a bow ram. Lieutenant George W. Gift of the Confederate Navy visited the *Nashville* and wrote that she would be “able to whip any Yankee craft afloat. . . . Her officers’ quarters are completed. The ward-room . . . is six staterooms and a pantry long” and “it requires all her width, fifty feet, to place her boilers” (Naval History Division 1971:III-134). Gift also reported that the *Nashville* was to be fitted with 14 guns; although she seems to have never carried more than four. Ultimately, the *Nashville* and other gunboats were forced to move inland to escape Union forces occupying Mobile Bay. In May 1865, the *Nashville* was on the Tombigbee River where she surrendered to United States forces (Naval History Division 1971:V:97).

It seems reasonable to conclude that Isaac Brown intended the *Eastport* to have a slanted-walled, armored casemate occupying one-half to two-thirds of the steamer’s main deck. He almost certainly would have planned to armor the paddlewheels in some manner, although if iron plate was in short supply, as it tended to be in the South, this could have been accomplished with heavy wood sheathing. If she had been completed, the *Eastport* may have outwardly resembled the *Nashville* (see Figure 2-19), but there is no evidence that there were any plans by the Confederates to fit the *Eastport* with a ram.

USS Eastport, Federal Ironclad Ram

On February 14, 1862, Union army and navy forces attacked Fort Donelson on the Cumberland River. Under heavy fire from the Federal gunboats, and unable to escape because of Grant’s army on land, the fort surrendered on February 16. Phelps’s gunboats, the timberclads *Conestoga*, and *Tyler*, participated in the attack. During the battle, a 32-pound shot struck the pilothouse of the flagship, the ironclad *St. Louis*, penetrating the 1.5-in-thick iron armor and its 15-in-thick timber backing, sending out a shower of shrapnel and splinters. Flag-Officer Foote was struck in the left ankle, an injury that forced him to relinquish command several months later (Naval History Division 1971:II-22).

The battles of Forts Henry and Donelson gave the Union a tremendous boost and further enhanced the standing of using ironclads in battle. Secretary

of the Navy Gideon Welles wrote to Foote on February 13, 1862, that “the services you have rendered in creating the armed flotilla of gunboats on the Western waters, and in bringing together for effective operation the force which has earned such renown, can never be overestimated. . . .” Soon, the *Eastport*, former packet steamer and almost Confederate ironclad, would join Foote’s gunboat fleet.

Rebuild at Mound City, Illinois

Lieutenant Phelps considered the *Eastport* his personal prize and he foresaw that the conversion started by the Confederates could be easily completed by the Union, turning the boat into the largest and most powerful gunboat in the Union river fleet; a gunboat that he personally wanted to command. On February 18, while aboard the *Conestoga* at Fort Donelson, Phelps wrote to Flag-Officer Foote giving his thoughts on converting the *Eastport*, drawing on his already considerable experience in gunboat warfare:

The *Eastport* is beautifully modeled, the hull is in excellent condition, and she can be made capable of enduring the fire of the batteries, while her speed and manageable qualities will render her specially useful in this river service. Such a gunboat is very much needed, as the iron-plated boats are very slow and the old side-wheel boats are mere shells, liable to be disabled by a single shot from a fieldpiece while off on dispatch or reconnoitering service. I, therefore, respectfully recommend that the *Eastport* be at once completed and fitted out [ORN I:22:615].

Seth Phelps desperately wanted command of the *Eastport* after her conversion, and he made his desires known to Flag-Officer Foote on several occasions. Foote was impressed with Phelps’s actions as a commander and he liked him as a person. The two would become quite close during their association in the gunboat service and Foote placed a considerable amount of reliance on Phelps in the operations of the gunboat flotilla. Ultimately, Foote would give Seth Phelps command of the *Eastport* and would provide him support in other matters throughout the war.

Andrew Foote “fully concur[ed] in opinion with Lieutenant Commanding Phelps, as we want a fast steamer capable of resisting shot, which we have not” and he immediately requested authority from Secretary Welles to continue the conversion of the

Eastport. On March 1, 1862, Foote telegraphed his intentions to Washington, noting:

I have applied to the Secretary of the Navy to have the rebel gunboat, *Eastport*, lately captured in the Tennessee River, fitted up as a gunboat, with her machinery in and lumber. She can be fitted out for about \$20,000, and in three weeks. We want such a fast and powerful boat. . . . I should run about in her and save time and do good service. Our other ironclad boats are too slow. The *Eastport* was a steamer on the river, and she, being a good boat, would please the West [ORN I:22:651].

H.A Wise, Assistant Inspector in the Bureau of Ordnance, Navy Department, telegraphed Foote the following day noting that “The President instructs me to inform you that you have his authority to fit the Steamer *Eastport* according to the plan proposed in your telegram to me dated yesterday”(ORN I:22:655).

The demands of operating and maintaining a fleet of warships on the inland water were apparent to the United States Navy and one of Andrew Foote’s first acts after becoming commander of the Western Gunboat Flotilla in September 1861 was to establish a ship repair depot at Cairo, Illinois. The depot was placed in Cairo because of its location on a peninsula between a railhead and river port. But Cairo soon revealed its inadequacies due to limited space and lack of facilities. The navy yard was full of floating stores, blacksmith shops, wharf boats, and tugs in the beginning, because there was no government-owned land. This situation did provide ready access to ships, but there were still limitations. However, just a few miles upriver, at Mound City, were privately owned facilities that offered many advantages for the repair of ships. Soon, Foote had the repair facilities moved to Mound City and placed under the command of Captain Alexander M. Pennock (Figure 2-20).

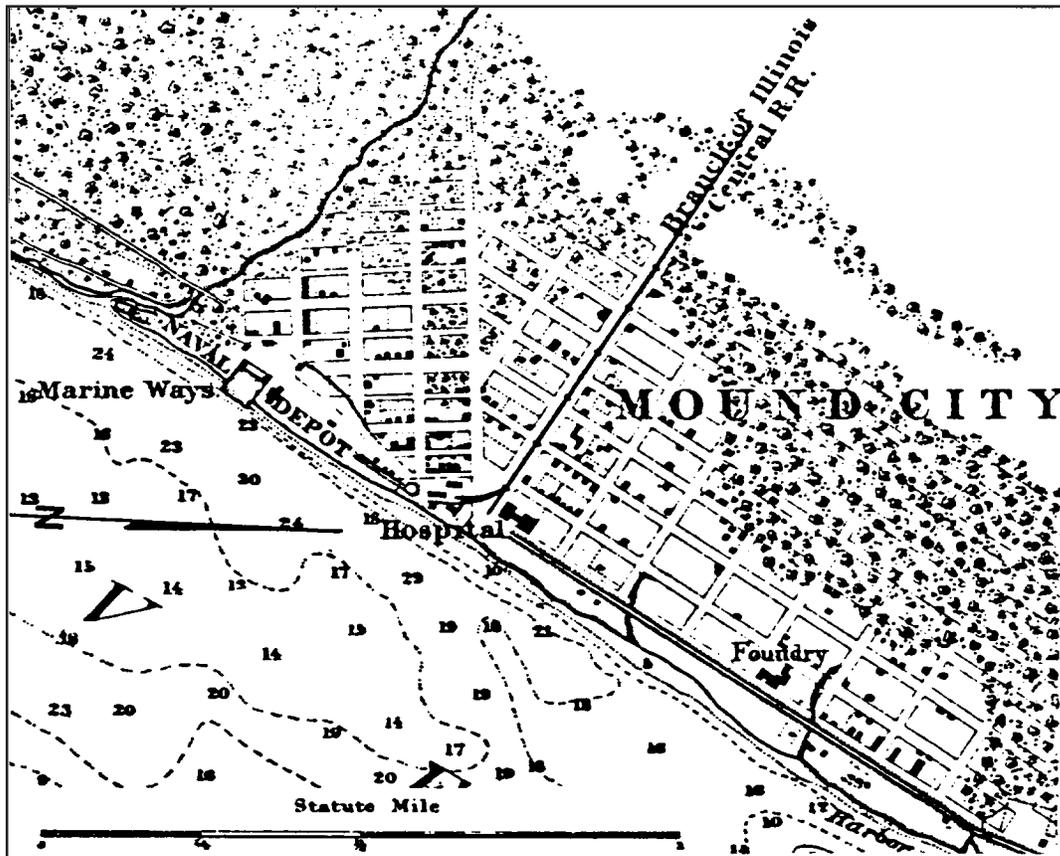


Figure 2-20. Mound City, Illinois, 1864 (source: *Map of the Ohio River between Mound City and Cairo*, F.H. Gerdes 1864, National Archives, Record Group 23, Chart 2030).

The government acquired 10 acres of land at Mound City and the facilities there proved ideal for ship repairs and alterations. Mound City was conveniently located at the center of the Mississippi Valley near the confluence of the Mississippi and Ohio Rivers and there were abundant timber resources in the nearby Cache River Valley. There was even a “marine sawmill” located there that supplied lumber for repairs. In 1858 and 1859 several steamboats were partially constructed at Mound City, although completed at other cities that had greater access to machine shops and heavy industry for the actual building of vessels. Mound City contained a number of commercial buildings suitable for hospitals and ordnance storage, plus it had a marine ways capable of handling large vessels. Moses M. Rawlings and the Emporium Company had developed plans for the construction of the marine ways prior to the Civil War. The ways were completed in 1859 and the first steamboat pulled up the ways was the 602-ton *H.R.W. Hill* (Goodwin and Jones 1986:48-49). In 1862, the *Pittsburg* became the first ironclad gunboat to be pulled up the ways and confirmed the advantages Foote had seen in using Mound City as a site for watercraft repairs and rebuilding (Goodwin and Jones 1986:48-49). At the height of activities, 1,500 men were employed at the naval facility. In addition to repairing ships of the gunboat flotilla, several gunboats were constructed at Mound City, the most important being three Cairo class ironclads designed by James Eads. These were the *Cairo*, the *Cincinnati* and the *Mound City* (Bearss 1980; Silverstone 1989:151).

The testimony of several eyewitnesses in the Hugh Worthington case reveals that the *Eastport* was well on its way toward conversion when captured. It is suspected that the first order of business at Mound City was to complete the casemate framework and reinstall the boat’s machinery. Details of the work conducted are unknown, nor have any plans been found that would indicate specifics of the conversion. Reportedly, she was built “without elaborate drawings and specifications,” but Lieutenant Phelps did submit “a few rough general ideas” to Captain Pennock, who supervised the construction (*Cincinnati Daily Commercial* August 23, 1862). Apparently, some drawn plans for the conversion were made as indicated in a June 1, 1862, report by Captain Pennock to Flag-Officer Charles H. Davis stating that “The plan of the gun and upper deck of the *Eastport* will be sent to you as soon as possible”(ORN I:23:113). In April 1862, Captain Charles H. Davis had replaced Andrew Foote as acting-commander of the Union’s

river gunboat fleet, officially known in early 1862 as the Western Flotilla, Mississippi River. Foote had been incapacitated and placed on medical leave because of the injuries he received at Fort Donelson, and, when it was apparent that he could not return to duty, Davis, as Flag-Officer and “Acting-Rear Admiral,” was put in command of the Flotilla. Davis, himself, was relieved of command of the Flotilla on October 1, 1862, when Commander David Dixon Porter (ORN I:23:388) replaced him.

Lieutenant Phelps probably had some very definite ideas about how the conversion of the *Eastport* should proceed, because he had previously demonstrated an interest in armored gunboat design. In July 1861, not long after he had been assigned to the Western Flotilla, Phelps had submitted his own plans, and a model, for a “river war steamer of iron” to Commander John Rodgers (National Archives, RG 92, Quartermaster Records, 1861). His plans were for a 175-ft-long, 40-ft-wide steamer driven by 2 propellers. The boat had a 55-ft-long casemate with sides inclined at 45 degrees positioned on the main deck slightly forward of center. Phelps’s plans called for the casemate to be covered on the sides with 4.5-in-thick iron plate backed by 12 in of oak. This 4.5-in-thick casemate armor was to extend 2.5 ft below the water line, while the top of the casemate would be covered with 2-in-thick plate. The interior of the gunboat would be strengthened with numerous iron and wood beams, stanchions, frames and diagonal ties. The gunports for the 6 guns would have covers consisting of 2 pieces hinged at the bottom which pivoted away from the gunport to open (National Archives, RG 92, Quartermaster Records, 1861). Phelps estimated that it would cost \$153,500 to build his gunboat. Seth Phelps was just one of many individuals to present plans for naval vessels to the government during the Civil War. Apparently, Phelps’s plans, like most of those submitted, were never acted on; however, he may have incorporated some of his ideas into the *Eastport*.

Intending to get the *Eastport* ready for combat as soon as possible, Foote began to make requests for ordnance for the gunboat even before the conversion started. On March 10, 1862, he telegraphed the Chief of Bureau of Ordnance in Washington requesting “four Dahlgren rifled guns of 8,000 pounds weight, fitted complete with carriages and all” for the *Eastport*. H.A. Wise of the Bureau of Ordnance replied that no Dahlgren rifles of the weight Foote wanted were available and suggested that “9-inch guns would be better” (ORN I:22:664-665).

Work on the *Eastport* seems to have progressed on schedule through March. By March 25, a 32-pounder and two 50-pounder rifles for the *Eastport*, in addition to ordnance, were at Mound City ready to be placed in the boat (ORN I:22:669, 672). However, Flag-Officer Foote's estimate of three weeks for the conversion work proved overly optimistic and delays began to be experienced. The delays were the result of a variety of causes, including shortages of manpower and material, the constant need to keep other vessels in the fleet in repair, and bad weather. Letters and reports by Pennock, Foote, Davis and Phelps all make note of the delays and of their frustrations with them. Everyone was particularly anxious about the slow progress in completing the *Eastport* because, from the very first, the plan seems to have been to use this boat as the flagship of the western river fleet. Additionally, all were of the opinion that the *Eastport* would be the fastest, best armed, and most fearsome of the Union's river gunboats.

The earliest indications of potential difficulties in finishing the boat on time appears in a March 31 report by Captain Pennock in which he notes "I am doing all that I can to push the work forward on the *Eastport*, but the high water is very much against us. I do not think she will be finished short of six weeks." Pennock, also, mentioned another potential problem, cost overruns; noting that the conversion costs would "not be less than \$30,000 or \$35,000," well above the figure of \$20,000 first mentioned by Flag-Officer Foote (ORN I:22:684).

Sometime in early April a decision was made to modify the *Eastport* into a ram, in addition to being ironclad. Who made the decision to add the ram is unknown, but it is likely that Phelps and Foote together came up with the idea. On April 2, Foote notified the Navy Department that the addition of the ram, plus the fact that the *Eastport* was not "in as good condition as was supposed" would increase the cost of converting the steamer to about \$56,000 (ORN I:22:760). Washington approved the addition of the ram and the extra expenditure of monies and H.A. Wise notified Foote that "the President directs me to say that he approves of your action with reference to the *Eastport*, and believes that whatever you do will be right" (ORN I:22:761). In addition to the extra cost, it is likely that the building of the ram also contributed to the delays in completing the gunboat.

Captain Pennock expressed his anxieties in completing the gunboat on April 22, writing Foote and

asking if he should begin to "secure good masters and pilots for the *Eastport*" so that no time would be lost in manning her when she was completed (ORN I:23:72). Seth Phelps, who, in essence, considered the *Eastport* his boat, was concerned not only about the steamer, but also about the health of the wounded Andrew Foote. On May 11, Phelps had written to the convalescing Foote that "I count off the days, anxious for them to roll around, when you will return, and the *Eastport*, with some power, come to the squadron with your flag flying" (ORN I:23:19). Phelps anticipated that Foote, his mentor, would return to the fleet, writing to him on June 23 that "I have arranged our quarters on board of her [the *Eastport*] so as to promise the greatest amount of comfort" (ORN I:23:224). Foote's wound, however, left him so debilitated that he was unable to return to the gunboat fleet.

Despite everything, delays continued through the spring of 1862. On May 14, Flag-Officer Charles Davis urged Pennock "to advance the progress of the *Eastport*. With the latter vessel the squadron should be prepared for any emergency" (ORN I:23:95). On June 3, Captain Pennock reported to Davis that he would not have the *Tyler* "hailed out" at Mound City and worked on because it would result in a "very serious detriment" to work on the *Eastport* (ORN I:23:115). Subsequently, Pennock sent the *Tyler* to St. Louis for repairs. On June 16, Charles Davis wrote Pennock at Cairo, noting that "I hope above all things that you are not obliged to suspend work upon the *Eastport*" (ORN I:23:210) and on July 2 Davis requested of Pennock "Can you send me an encouraging word about the *Eastport*? We long to be on board of her" (ORN I:23:248).

Lieutenant Phelps, now captain of Flag-Officer Davis' flagship *Benton*, was becoming increasingly concerned over the slow progress on the *Eastport*, the gunboat that he expected to command. Writing Foote on May 22, Phelps expressed his frustrations, stating:

It is strange how that inevitable month in the case of the *Eastport* drags its slow length along, never beginning, always one day in advance of present time. To-day's mail informs us that she will be ready in one month: so did the mail on the 22d of April last [ORN I:23:26].

His continued frustrations are expressed in a letter he wrote Foote on July 6 noting "The *Eastport* will be ready in time [for action on the Yazoo River], if

enough be given” (ORN I:23:235). Phelps, and others, were particularly worried because of their fear of Isaac Brown’s ironclad *Arkansas*, which was expected to soon come down the Yazoo River and attack the Union fleet on the Mississippi near Vicksburg. The thought was that the one boat that could stop the *Arkansas* was the *Eastport*, ironically, the first of the ironclads that Lieutenant Brown had designed and worked on.

In July, the men at the Mound City naval yard received a scare when Confederate “guerrillas” commanded by John H. Morgan moved into Kentucky and attacked the town of Henderson on the Ohio River. At the time, all of the gunboats were down the river and the yard at Mound City was unprotected. Captain George D. Wise, Assistant Quartermaster at the U.S. Naval Station at Cairo (and brother of H.A. Wise of the Bureau of Ordnance in Washington), reported that he placed some howitzers on two of the steam tugs at the yard and that Captain Pinnock had made preparations to “set fire to the *Pittsburg* and *Eastport*, both on the ways” if it became necessary. Wise’s preparations were not needed as no Confederate attack was attempted (ORN I:23:266-267).

By the end of July, Captain Pinnock was becoming confident that the conversion was nearing completion. In a telegram to Secretary Welles on July 30, he reported “*Eastport* ready for service in two weeks; will require 150 men” (ORN I:23:270). Charles Davis, now sometimes designated in letters as “Commodore, U.S. Naval Forces on Western Waters,” reported on August 19 that the *Eastport* “is at last approaching completion” and, finally, on August 27 he wrote Gideon Welles that “I go down the river in the *Eastport* to-day” (ORN I:23:295, 305). It had taken six and one half months to complete the conversion of the *Eastport*, a conversion which most had initially thought would take only about one month.

A detailed description of the newly completed gunboat was reported in a Cincinnati newspaper on August 23:

The New Gunboat Eastport — The Intended FlagShip of the Mississippi Flotilla — A Strong Vessel, Fast Sailer, and Powerful Ram — Who Planned Her, and How She Was Built — Her Dimensions, Armor, Armament, &c., &c.

CAIRO, August 18.

With this I send you a view of the new Fed-

eral ram gunboat Eastport, now about ready to join our Mississippi flotilla, of which she is to be the flag ship. In every particular of a war-ship she is vastly the superior of the old lumbering Benton, which has hitherto borne the Commodore’s pennant. In the matter of strength, the Benton, as compared with the Eastport, is but a mere egg shell, while the latter will be a fast sailer and powerful ram, besides being a larger and more commodious ship. Indeed, aside from the Monitor, I doubt if there is a vessel afloat of equal strength and invulnerability with the Eastport. There certainly is no boat in our navy that has been built with so much care. There is no contract work upon her. Every timber has been sawed and every nail driven by day’s work, under the immediate supervision of Fleet-Captain Pinnock [*sic*]. Not a sheet of iron, nor a rivet, nor a piece of timber has entered into her construction that was not first examined and approved. And, added to all, she has grown from a mere hull into a powerful vessel of war without elaborate drawings and specifications. A few rough general ideas were submitted by Lieut. Phelps at the outset, the spirit of which was caught by Captain Pinnock, to which all details have been made to harmonize, as his own intimate acquaintance with the necessities of such a ship suggested.

As the Eastport is now a finished vessel, some general account of her may not be amiss, though any particular description could [not] under the circumstances, be permitted.

The hull of this vessel was secured by Lieutenant Commanding Phelps, on the occasion of his brilliant reconnaissance up the Tennessee river to Florence, in February last, immediately after the capture of Fort Henry. She was found at the village of Eastport, near the southern boundary of Tennessee, where the rebels were busily engaged in transforming her into a gunboat. For this purpose her boilers were being lowered into her hold, a bulkhead had been built entirely around the interior of the hull, some four or five feet within the outer wall, and appearances indicated that she was to be finished after the general plan of the Sumter, Price, and others of their gunboats. A large amount of prepared lumber was piled upon and near her, ready for use, and her engines were already aboard. In this condition she was towed down to Paducah, where she remained till the middle of March, and was then taken to the Government ship-yard at Mound City, near Cairo, and taken out of water by the marine railway at that place, and work immediately com-

menced in finishing her up. The plan upon which she had been commenced was abandoned, and a new one, designed by Lieutenant Phelps, adopted. This plan increased her length, and somewhat changed her model, giving to her greater speed and less draught of water, and, in the finishing of her upper works, greater strength. Her dimensions, as now completed, are:

Length, 260 feet;

Breadth on deck, 40 feet;

Depth of hold, 8 1/2 feet.

She is driven by two powerful side-wheels, each twenty-eight feet in diameter, with twelve feet buckets.

Her hull is of immense strength, having walls of heavy gum timber of great thickness, sufficient to repel any ordinary cannon shot, and encased with heavy plate iron extending four feet below the water line. The exact measurements of her thickness, and of the thickness of her armor, are not permitted to be published, for very obvious reasons.

She is finished with sharp prow, rising five feet above the water line, and having an immense solid wrought-iron ram, weighing *fifty-seven hundred pounds*, so shaped that, in coming in contact with any opposing body, it will hit first directly at the water line, which is also the thickest portion of this ram. The ram sets against solid timbers, crossed and bolted together into one compact mass, extending back thirty-four feet. The force of a blow struck by such a huge mass of iron and timber can scarcely be estimated. With any reasonable degree of momentum, the blow would be irresistible. Running at a rate of ten miles an hour, it would penetrate and pulverize a solid rock.

This powerful ram is further strengthened by three fore-and-aft bulkheads, extending the length of the vessel. These are again braced by cross bulkheads, water tight, by which her hull is divided into twenty-eight compartments. [?] in addition to the strength imparted, her [?] side may be stove in by a ram, or she may be [?] or even "riddled" by cannon shot, and still she would float. The filling of any two or three of these compartments, would by no means cause her to sink. Indeed, she can scarcely be sunk unless literally blown up first.

Her main deck is open forty feet back from the front, and thirty feet forward from the stern. From these points the casemates inclosing the gun-deck commence. These casemates, like those on the old gunboats, rise at an angle of forty-

five degrees with the deck and eight feet high. They are of heavy gum timber, and plated entirely around with iron. She is pierced for eight guns — two on each side and end.

The boilers are four in number, thirty two feet each in length, and forty two inches in diameter. They are placed ten inches clear below the water line, and are entirely surrounded by coal bunkers, so that the possibility of a cannon ball reaching them does not exist.

She has two high-pressure engines, having twenty-six inch cylinders each, and eight feet stroke. They stand on the main-deck, but are so situated as to be secure from chance shots. She is also furnished with pumping engine and auxiliary steam apparatus for repelling boarders.

Her pilot house is a six sided cone, its sides having an angle of forty-five degrees with the main-deck. They are of heavy timber, and securely plated with iron.

All her decks, wherever exposed, are covered with three-quarter inch iron, besides being strong in timber and planking themselves. The wheel-houses are covered with iron on the sides to a line even with the hurricane deck, and on the ends are protected from fore and aft shots by extra iron clad casemates, having the same inclination as the sides of the vessel.

The quarters for officers and men are on the main deck. Aft of the wheel houses the inclosed portion of this deck is divided into rooms for the several officers' messes. The crew will swing their hammocks on the gun deck, forward of the wheels. Two ranges of apartments are built on the hurricane deck, between the wheel-houses one on either side of the boat, which will be occupied for offices for the Flag Officer, Paymaster, and Executive Officer, and for kitchens, closets, pantries, etc.

In point of speed, the Eastport is intended to be the most rapid of the fleet. As her wheels, at this writing, have never been turned, her rate of speed is merely calculation. She is designed, however, to make from ten to twelve knots an hour.

Like all naval vessels, she is painted black throughout, and looks trim and neat in every respect. Her hull, rising five feet above the water at the bow and stern, and two and a half feet amidships, gives her a graceful water line, and sets her up in a more ship shape style than the old mud turtles we have hitherto had [*Cincinnati Daily Commercial* August 23, 1862].

The newspaper article emphasizes the care and concern involved in the construction of the *Eastport*, possibly one of the reasons it took so long to complete her. In light of the fact that “There was no contract work upon” the *Eastport*, it is probable that no contracts exist that might provide details on the cost of construction and the materials used. Receiving authorization for funds to convert the *Eastport* seems to have been no problem. However, actually getting payments for the *Eastport*, and the gunboat service in general, seems, at times, to have been difficult. Part of the problem was the disorganized command system, in which the fleet was under the auspices of the Army (Quartermaster General in the War Department), but the individual vessels were commanded by naval officers. Evidence of this problem is seen in correspondence between Secretary of the Navy Welles and Brigadier General M.C. Meigs, Quartermaster General of the Army. In late April 1862, General Meigs wrote Welles specifically asking for Navy funds to be transferred to the Army to help in the conversion of the *Eastport*. Gideon Welles refused to do this, noting that “no authority exists with me to transfer funds for its expenses. The “Eastport” has not been reconstructed by direction of this Department” (Welles to Meigs May 2, 1862).

Andrew Foote had initially estimated it would cost about \$20,000 to convert the *Eastport*. In late March, this estimate had risen to \$35,000. On April 15, Captain George Wise wrote to General Meigs “There is required for the use of the Gun Boat Flotilla and especially for the reconstruction and repairs of the captured Gun Boat, “Eastport,” Fifty Six Thousand Two Hundred & Thirty Dollars (\$56,230.00)” (Wise 1862a). Wise went on to note that the conversion had already been approved by the President. In accounting returns for monies expended on the “Gun Boat Flotilla, Western Waters” through April 30, 1862, Captain Wise reported the same amount (\$56,230.00) as the “estimated expenses of New Gun Boat Eastport.” In the same return, he noted that repairs to the ironclad *Essex* were estimated to cost \$20,000 (Wise 1862b). Washington was slow in providing payment to Wise. He had not received payment for the work on the *Eastport* by June 5 when he, again, wrote to Meigs asking for the funds, noting “She is nearly completed, and her claims must be met” (Figure 2-21) (Wise 1862c). The money had still not appeared by July 9, when Wise once more wrote to Meigs asking for the *Eastport* payment and, also, noting that the refitting and repairs of “gunboats and steamers captured from rebels” would cost at least an additional \$100,000 (Wise 1862d).

It is not clear if the *Eastport* work is included in this added cost.

The actual final cost for rebuilding the *Eastport* is unreported. Wise’s official estimate of \$56,230 may be the most reasonable, but Gibbons (1989:14) reports that \$55,230 were expended on the conversion, and Goodwin and Jones (1986:84) indicate the cost was \$45,127. In a 1938 Cairo newspaper article, Robert Hurst, using information from contemporary newspapers, provided some details on the cost of labor and materials in the conversion. He indicates that over 7,640 man days at \$2.75 per man day and 1,000 man days at \$1.50 per day were expended on the *Eastport*. Materials used included a total of 63,984 ft of lumber, 27,207 bolts, 24,403 spikes and \$106.60 worth of washers. The bill for iron was more than \$8,800 (Hurst 1938:7c). Apparently, some, if not most, of the material used in the conversion had been captured with the boat.

The *Eastport*, now the USS *Eastport*, was intended to be one of the most heavily armed gunboats in the west. Flag-Officer Foote had planned that four of the guns on the ironclad would be 8,000 pound Dahlgren rifled guns. However, the Bureau of Ordnance did not have these weapons on hand and suggested that 9-inch guns be used instead. On March 15, H.A. Wise of the Bureau of Ordnance notified the “Gunboat Flotilla” in Cairo that the armament for the *Eastport* was ready to be shipped and consisted of:

- Two 50-pounder Dahlgren rifles, 5,000 pounds each.
- Two 30-pounder Dahlgren rifles, 3,000 pounds, each.
- Six 32-pounders, 33 hundredweight.

The guns would be shipped with “carriages, equipment, and projectiles complete” (ORN I:22:666). The Cincinnati newspaper account states that the boat was to be fitted with 8 guns, although Wise indicated he was shipping ten. Why ten guns were shipped is unknown, because later accounts of the vessel’s armaments indicate that she normally carried 8 heavy weapons. On May 10, 1862, J.P. Sanford, Ordnance Officer of the Flotilla, notified Flag-Officer Davis that the armament for the *Eastport* would consist of four 32-pounder smoothbores, four 50-pounder Dahlgren rifles, and one 12-pounder howitzer. The howitzer was probably a wheeled field gun that could be moved around on deck. By June 16, the armament planned for the *Eastport* had changed. The guns to be placed on the gunboat would now consist

REPRODUCED AT THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES

U. S. Naval Depot
Cairo Ill. June 5th 1862

To Brig. Gen. M. C. Meigs
Quartermaster Gen. U. S. A.
Washington D. C.
Sir.

There is required for the expenses of the
Gun Boat Flotilla, Western Waters, for remainder
of Fiscal Year ending June 30. 1862; Four
Hundred thousand Dollars (\$400,000).

This does not include the amount
of Requisition of April 15th for \$56,230 for
Repairs to Captined Gun Boat "Eastport".
She is now nearly completed, and her claims
must be met.

I am, Very Respectfully
Your Obedt. Servt.
Geo. D. Wise
Capt. & a/s. Q. M.

Figure 2-21. June 5, 1862 letter from Captain George D. Wise, Assistant Quartermaster, to Brig. General M.C. Meigs requesting funds for the *Eastport* and the Gunboat Flotilla (Source: Wise 1862c).

of four 32-pounders (33 hundred weight), two Navy pattern 30-pounder Parrott rifles and two 50-pounder Dahlgren rifles (ORN I:23:215-216). These guns may have been the initial armament for the *Eastport*, but the types of guns she carried changed over her career.

During the course of rebuilding the *Eastport* it was realized that the United States government needed

to establish legal ownership of the vessel. To satisfy this a libel suit was filed in the Southern District Court of Illinois on July 17, 1862, "against the steamer *Eastport*, boats, tackle, apparel and furniture, in a cause of condemnation and forfeiture." It was stated in the suit that the "steamer was used by and with the knowledge and consent of the owners in aiding the present rebellion against the United States." David L. Phillips, U.S. Marshal, had seized the *Eastport*

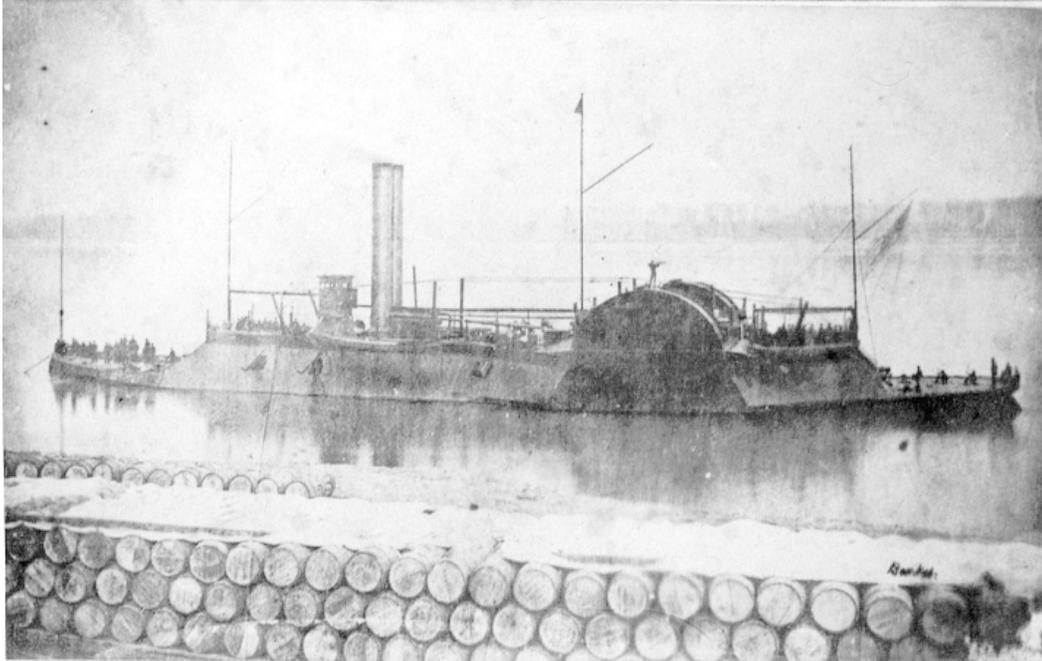


Figure 2-22. Photograph of the USS *Eastport* reportedly taken at Helena, Arkansas, in 1863 (source: Arkansas Historical Commission).

and the United States filed suit so that any persons or owners having any claim could appear in court for a final disposition of the vessel. There is no record of any response to the suit in the court files. Subsequently, Assistant Quartermaster, Captain George Wise, bought the *Eastport* at public auction for \$10,000 on October 4, 1862, and turned the vessel over to the Western Flotilla (National Archives, RG 21, U.S. District Court Files, Case File 199). After the war, the descendants of Hugh Worthington brought a suit against the government claiming that he had never received any payment for his ownership in the *Eastport*. The government used the records of the July 1862 libel suit and the October public sale to demonstrate that proper action had been taken to protect the interests of any owners of the *Eastport* and, because Hugh Worthington had not appeared to establish his ownership, he had no claim.

When completed, the *Eastport* was a strange looking warship, as born out by two known photographs of her (Figures 2-22 and 2-23). The photograph shown as Figure 2-22 was reportedly taken at Helena, Arkansas, in 1863. Helena is located on the west bank of the Mississippi River and the river stretching behind the *Eastport* seems too wide to be any stream but the Mississippi. Additionally, it is known

that the *Eastport* was frequently stationed in the vicinity of Helena in 1862 and 1863. The rows of barrels along the bank do suggest the location was at a landing or supply point of some sort, as Helena was. Also, the line extending from the bow argues that the boat is anchored facing upstream. The bow line appears to be taught, even though the flags and smoke indicate a breeze from the stern, suggesting a fairly strong current in the river. All of this suggests the photograph could very well have been taken from the landing at Helena, looking east across the Mississippi River. Where the photograph shown as Figure 2-23 was taken is not recorded. However, it may have been on Red River, considering the small size of the stream the boat is in. If so, this would mean the photograph was made in the spring of 1864. Although neither photograph is extremely clear, fortunately, they were taken from slightly different angles and from either side of the vessel, meaning that almost all parts of the gunboat can be seen. Interestingly, a man sighting with a telescope is standing atop a paddlewheel housing in each photograph. This certainly appears to be a staged pose, even though it seems apparent that the photographs were taken at two different locations. It is possible that the same photographer made both photographs. One photograph does have a name written in the lower left

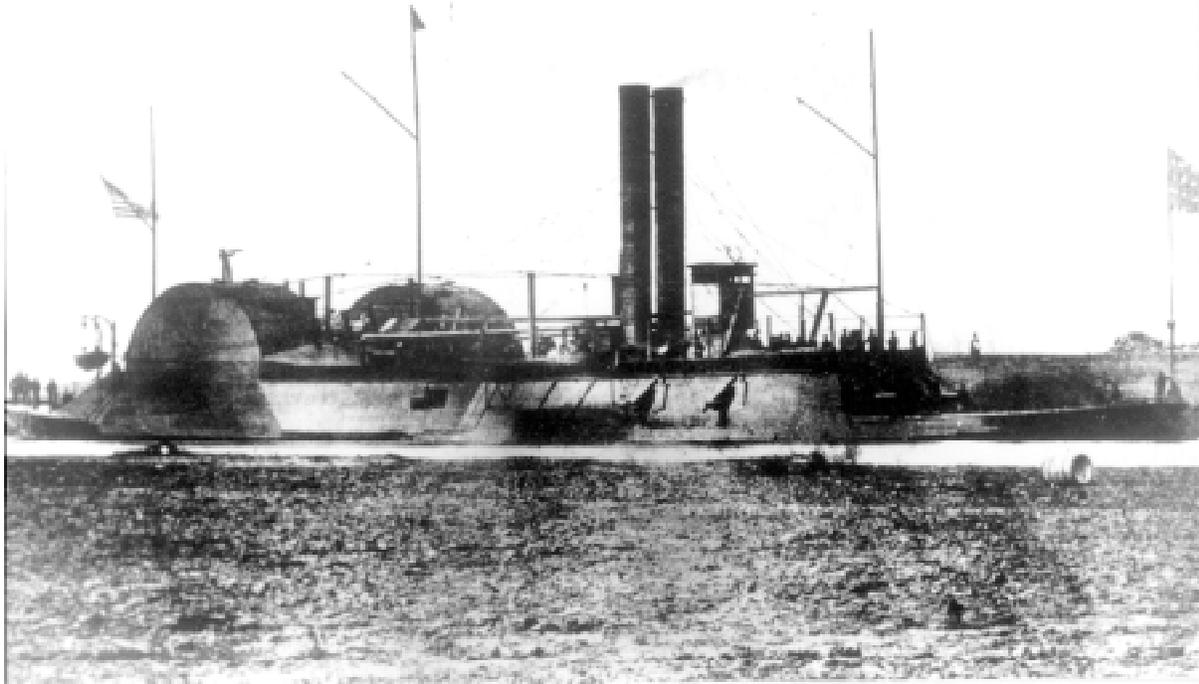


Figure 2-23. Photograph of the USS *Eastport*, probably taken on the Red River in Louisiana in 1864 (source: National Archives).

hand corner. The name appears to be “Banks” or “Barker,” although who this was is unknown. Figure 2-24 presents drawings of side and front views of the *Eastport* based on the two photographs.

The conversion changed the *Eastport*'s original dimensions slightly, since many records indicate her dimensions as a gunboat were: length = 260 to 280 ft; width = 40 to 43 ft; and depth = 6 ft, 3 in to 8 ft. 6 in (*Cincinnati Daily Commercial* August 23, 1862; Silverstone 1989:156; Way 1994:137). The apparent increase in length by as much as 50 ft over her as-built length of 230 ft is almost certainly due to the modification of the bow as a ram. The presence of the ram is not obvious in either of the photographs of the gunboat, although in Figure 2-22 the bow seems to bulge forward near the waterline. This conforms to the *Cincinnati Daily Commercial*'s description that the 5700-hundred pound bow ram was designed to “hit first directly at the water line” (*Cincinnati Daily Commercial* August 23, 1862). All of the *Eastport*'s superstructure had been removed and her twin stacks rose high above her casemated gun deck. Her paddlewheels, armored by wood and iron, produced two odd-looking projections on either side of the vessel (see Figure 2-23). The main steam pipes can be seen rising from the boilers just behind the stacks, ex-

tending toward the stern and returning down into the casemate to where the engines were located forward of each paddlewheel. Exposed as they were made the steam pipes vulnerable to damage by enemy fire, but placing most of the steam pipe outside of the cabin lessened the terrible danger of scalding faced by crew members should a steam pipe be damaged or broken. Both photographs show the timber bracings and iron rods of the hog chains extending down either side of the boat.

A box-like pilothouse juts above the casemate forward of the stacks. This house sits on top of an angle sided structure, probably the “six sided cone” mentioned in the *Cincinnati Daily Commercial* (Figure 2-24). The upper pilothouse looks exposed and vulnerable and it is possible that personnel moved down into the lower “cone” during action. A set of antlers top the pilothouse in one of the photographs (see Figure 2-23). The walls of the *Eastport*'s casemate seem to incline at a 45 degree angle and rise about 8 ft above the deck, as indicated in the *Cincinnati* newspaper article (see Figure 2-24). The casemate was reportedly armored with 1-in-thick plate, rather thin for a gunboat. On either side of the boat, the casemate extends very close to the water line, apparently projecting slightly beyond the line of the hull, thus

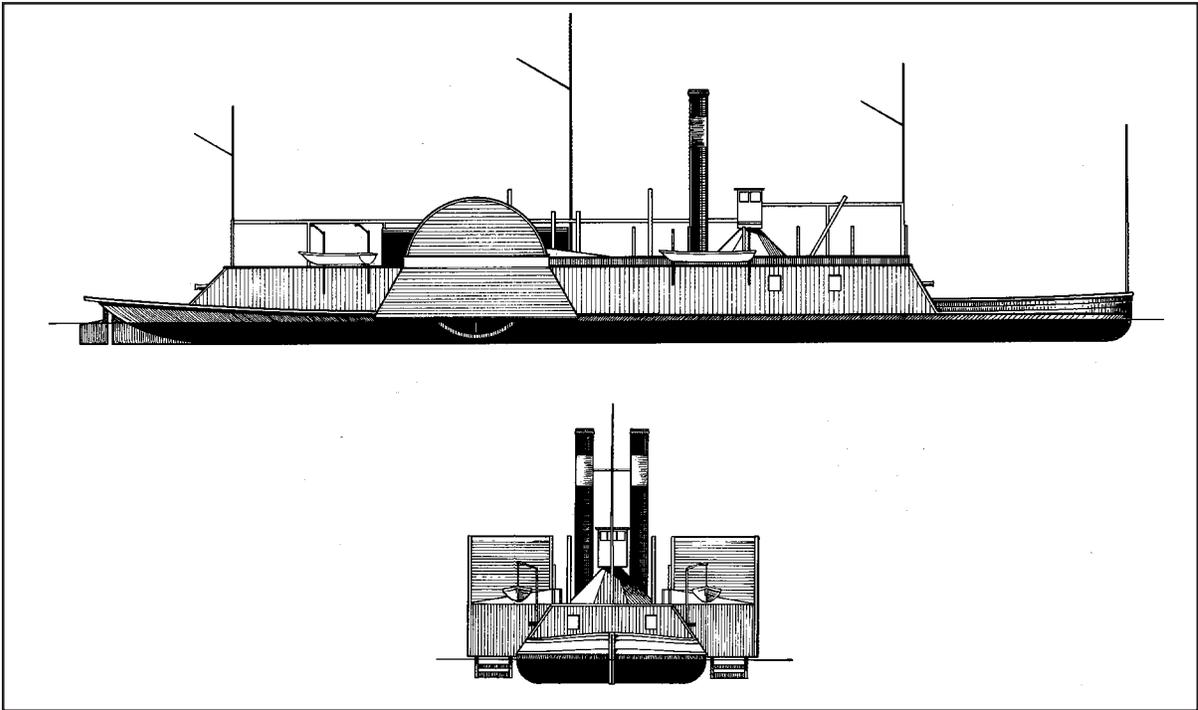


Figure 2-24. Side and bow views of the USS *Eastport* based on the two known photographs of the gunboat (drawn by the Vicksburg District, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers).

providing protection in the form of an armored “overhang.” Although not particularly clear, it does appear in Figure 2-23 that the casemate armor consists of long, narrow plates laid vertically. The open main deck extending fore and aft of the casemate is clearly obvious and, in both photographs, sailors are taking advantage of these decks, certainly desirable to the cramped, often stifling, quarters inside the boat. One photograph (see Figure 2-22) shows a number of men on top of the casemate just aft of the paddlewheels. This area appears to be covered by an awning, and may have been reserved primarily for the gunboat’s officers, particularly since “apartments” and “offices” for senior officers were supposedly located between the wheel houses just forward of this awning. Neither photograph clearly shows the cabin between the paddlewheels, but some sort of structure can be seen here in Figure 2-23. Both photographs also show men on the deck atop the casemate forward of the pilohouse. A pole or timber seems to extend above this deck area, from the forward mast to the front of the pilohouse. This may have acted as a ridgepole for an awning and many photographs of the river gunboats show awnings of this type (see Silverstone 1989).

Both photographs do show a straight-sided structure rising above the casemate just aft of the smokestacks. Steam pipes appear to be running into this structure and it probably protects some of the boat’s steam equipment, possibly the steam drum or the pipes leading to it. Two air funnels can be seen adjacent to the smokestacks. These funnels provided the necessary air supply to the boiler fires and their location presumably marks the position of the fireboxes. It is assumed that the fireboxes were at the forward end of the 32-foot-long boilers which would have extended aft from the stacks, as was typical for steamers of the period (see Figure 2-2). Photographs of other Union river ironclads (see Silverstone 1989) show air funnels at other locations, certainly placed to provide fresh air into the interior cabins and gundecks. The *Eastport* is likely to have been fitted with similar funnels, and what might be one can be seen just forward of the paddlewheels in Figure 2-23. One of the *Eastport*’s launches can clearly be seen hanging from davits just aft of the starboard paddlewheel box in Figure 2-23. Another launch hangs on the opposite side of the boat, but it is only barely evident in Figure 2-22. Although not clearly shown, a launch also appears to be hanging

on each side of the casemate, just aft of the side guns (see Figure 2-24).

The photographs show the *Eastport* with three masts with gaffs, plus a “jackstaff” at the bow. The gaffs were almost certainly to aid in flying signal flags, important during her role as flagship. Photographs of the *Benton*, which for a time served as the flagship for the Western Flotilla, show three, tall gaffed masts very similar to those on the *Eastport* (Silverstone 1989:154). Similar masts are not commonly seen in extant photographs of other gunboats in the fleet. A ball can clearly be seen on the jackstaff at the bow in both photographs. Commonly known as the “nighthawk,” this ball, with the jackstaff, was used by the pilot as a sighting device for steering the boat. The ball could be raised or lowered on the jackstaff to a position most advantageous to the pilot to gauge his position relative to the riverbank and landscape.

In both photographs the *Eastport* is flying the American flag at her stern and her identifying pennant at the peak of her central mast. In Figure 2-23, she is also flying the Navy’s “Union Jack” at the bow. Each vessel in the gunboat fleet had a distinguishing pennant as well as a night signal. Capt. William R. Hoel kept a record of these identification pennants and signals. Hoel, a longtime steamboatman, joined the Western Flotilla as a civilian pilot in 1861, first serving on the timberclad *Lexington*. Later, he entered navy service and became First Master of the ironclad *Cincinnati*, served as commander of the captured *Little Rebel*, was aboard the *Eastport* for a short time, and, ultimately, became commander of the ironclad *Pittsburg* (Hoel 1973; Rutter 1996a, 1996b). Hoel left a diary of his Civil War activities, plus other documents including a volume entitled “Copies of Rules and Regulations, Forms for Requisitions, Reports &c” which includes paintings of the pennants and night signals used by the Mississippi Squadron. Figure 2-25 shows the identification pennants for the “First Division, Large Vessels,” which, just prior to the Red River Campaign of March and April 1864, included the *Eastport*. After the loss of the *Eastport* in 1864, her pennant was assigned to the *Winnebago*. In one of his notebooks, Hoel shows the *Eastport*’s pennant as blue, yellow and red; however, elsewhere he indicates that the yellow may have been white. The night signals for each boat in the fleet consisted of three lights set in a triangle. The *Eastport*’s signal consisted of a red light at the peak, with green lights below on either side (Figure 2-26).

First Division Large Vessels

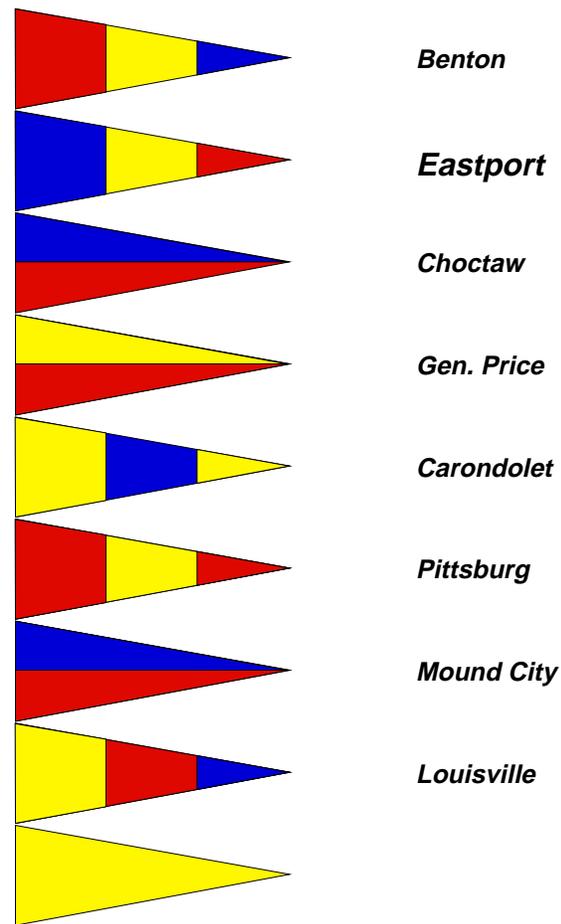


Figure 2-25. Identification pennants of the First Division, Mississippi Squadron (adapted from drawings by Captain William Hoel, William R. Hoel Papers, Inland Rivers Library, Cincinnati).

The guns on the *Eastport* can be seen in both photographs, however, there has been some confusion as to their placement. For example, Silverstone (1989:157), apparently using only the photograph shown as Figure 2-23, writes that the *Eastport* was fitted with “two guns forward and three on broadside.” When both photographs are examined, it is apparent that the *Eastport* had a 2-gun broadside, as is indicated in the *Cincinnati Daily Commercial* article. Both photographs clearly show the two side guns ports and projecting gun muzzles in the forward third of the casemate. The gunport

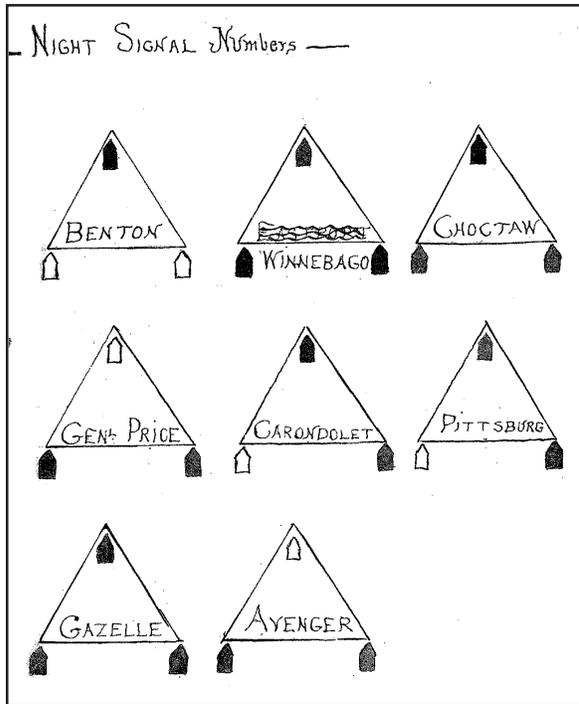


Figure 2-26. Distinguishing night signals of some vessels in the Mississippi Squadron drawn by Captain William Hoel. Note that the *Eastport's* name has been crossed out and replaced with that of the *Winnebago*. For the *Eastport/Winnebago*, the top light is red and the two bottom lights are green (source: William R. Hoel Papers, Inland Rivers Library, Cincinnati).

closures appear to consist of two sections of armor that swing to the sides from pivots above the port opening, not too dissimilar to those that Lieutenant Phelps proposed in his plans for a river gunboat. The photographs, also, show another opening in the side of the casemate about half way between the smokestacks and the paddlewheels (see Figures 2-22 and 2-23). This opening does appear to have an armored closure and Silverstone has, apparently, confused it for a gunport, but it is not believed to be one. This opening is set slightly higher than the other two side gunports and its dimensions are different. In addition, the closure for this opening appears to be different from those on the obvious gunports in that it consists of a single sliding or pivoting plate, rather than two. It is more likely that this opening was to permit light and fresh air into the engine room, which would have been located in this area. Figure

2-23 clearly shows the two forward guns, presumably 100-pounder Parrott rifles, projecting from the casemate. These gunports appear to have the same style of two-piece closures seen on the side gunports. The projecting muzzles of the two stern guns can be seen in Figure 2-22 and are shown in the drawings presented in Figure 2-24.

The *Eastport's* armament varied over time. On August 26, 1862, Flag-Officer Davis submitted a report to Secretary of the Navy Gideon Welles providing information on the 23 vessels then comprising the "Western Flotilla" (ORN I:23:323-324). He noted that the *Eastport* was armed with 8 guns: four 32-pounders (smoothbore); two 30-pounder Parrott rifles; and two 50-pounder Dahlgren rifles (ORN I:23:324). In addition, she carried 2 rifled 12-pounder howitzers, probably wheeled field guns placed on deck. One month later, on September 29, Davis reported that the *Eastport* retained the same cannon "exclusive of howitzers," but that her armament was to be changed (ORN I:23:386).

Gibbons (1989:14) indicates that in October 1862 the *Eastport* was armed with two 50-pounder Dahlgren rifled cannon, four 32-pounders, three 100-pounders, and two 12-pounder rifled howitzers. In January 1863, the *Eastport* reportedly had two 100-pounder Parrott rifles and six 9-inch Dahlgren shell guns. The following July the gunboat reportedly mounted two 100-pounder Parrott rifles, four 9-inch Dahlgren shell guns and two 50-pounder Dahlgren rifles (Gibbons 1989:14; Silverstone 1989:156).

The Parrott rifles on the *Eastport* had been developed in the 1850s by Robert P. Parrott. Parrott's guns were characterized by a wrought iron band shrunk around the breech to strengthen the cannon at the point of highest pressure (Figure 2-27). The Parrott was patented and was adopted as standard in 1861 (Peterson 1969:95). Projectiles for the rifled cannon were usually of the kind that was loaded loosely and then expanded upon firing. The Reed type of projectile was one of the first used and had a wrought iron cup in the base of the shell. The cup was forced outward by the propellant gases and took the rifling to rotate the shell. This type of projectile was used in the early Parrott rifles, while a later Parrott projectile was made with a brass or copper ring cast into the base that expanded upon firing. The 100-pounder Parrott had a bore diameter of 6.4 inches, weighed 9,700 pounds and had an effective range of about 2,250 yards (Table 2-6) (Peterson 1969:106, 110).

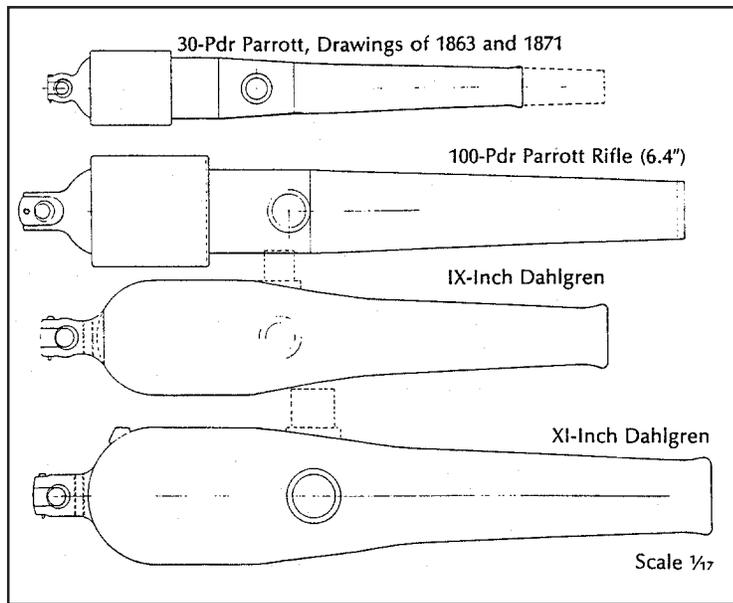


Figure 2-27. Parrott and Dahlgren guns of the type on the *Eastport* (source: Tucker 1989:Fig. 110).

The Dahlgren guns had been designed by John A. Dahlgren, a career naval officer who served as chief of Naval Ordnance in 1862 and 1863 and, as Admiral, was Commander of the South Atlantic Blockading Squadron from 1863 to 1865 (Ripley 1984:87). John Dahlgren had begun to design and build guns for the Navy in 1847 and by the Civil War his weapons were in common use on naval vessels. He developed his 9-inch smoothbore shell gun in 1850, and by 1860 it was popular in broadside batteries (Figure 2-27). The famous ironclad *Monitor* was fitted with two, 11-in Dahlgrens. The 9-inch shell gun weighed 9,000 pounds, had a range of about 3,450 yards, and required a crew of 17 to man (Figure 2-28; Table 2-6) (Ripley 1984:370). The large number of men required to man the guns was the principal reason naval vessels had such large crews. The Dahlgren iron smoothbore guns had a distinctive shape, with a gradually swelling breech that earned them the name “soda-water bottles,” as can be seen in Figures 2-27 and 2-29 (Ripley 1984:93). The 50-pounder Dahlgren rifle had a bore of 5.1 in and measured almost 9 ft long. Some of the guns on the *Eastport* were probably mounted on Marsilly carriages as shown in Figure 2-29.

Nothing is known about the internal layout of the *Eastport* beyond the minimal descriptions provided in the *Cincinnati Daily Commercial* article. That article noted that the quarters for officers and

men were on the main deck; the crew swung “their hammocks” on the gun deck while the officers apparently had quarters aft of the wheelhouses. In addition, two ranges of cabins for senior officers as well as closets, pantries, etc., were located on the hurricane deck between the wheelhouses on either side of the boat. Figure 2-30 presents drawings of the ironclad, river gunboat *Lafayette* that show internal features which might have resembled some of those on the *Eastport*. The *Lafayette* had a series of cabins on the main deck between the paddlewheels, possibly equivalent to the officer’s quarters and messes on the *Eastport*. However, the *Lafayette* does not appear to have been fitted with any cabins on the hurricane deck, as is reported for the *Eastport*. Like the *Eastport*, the *Lafayette* was a gunboat converted from a sidewheel packet steamer, in this instance the 296-ft-long *Aleck Scott* (Canney 1993:101). Slightly longer than the *Eastport*, the *Lafayette* had been converted under the supervision of Commodore William D. Porter, brother of Admiral David Dixon Porter. The *Lafayette*, again like the *Eastport*, was fitted with a ram and her casemate was covered with 2.5 in of iron armor, which, reportedly, was laid over a layer of “India rubber” or “gutta-percha” (Canney 1993:101-102). The use of rubber under iron armor had been tried on other ironclads, but was not successful.

With the conversion complete, the *Eastport* was placed in service in what was known as the Western Flotilla or Western Gunboat Flotilla and, later, the Mississippi Squadron. The *Eastport* was the tenth ironclad to be included in the fleet (Goodwin and Jones 1986:86). The Western Flotilla was initially under the control of the United States Army, specifically, the Quartermaster Department, although the vessels were commanded by specially attached Naval officers. In October 1862, most of the boats of the flotilla were transferred to the Navy and eventually became commissioned naval vessels (Silverstone 1989:147). The *Eastport* was not commissioned as a U.S. Navy vessel until January 9, 1863 (Silverstone 1989:156). Flag-Officer Charles Davis placed his flag aboard the *Eastport* in late August 1862, making her the flagship of what was then still officially known as the Western Flotilla. The selection as flagship was made because the *Eastport* was roomier than

Table 2-6. United States Naval Civil War Ordnance, 1862 (source Tucker 1989:Table 31).

| U.S. NAVY CIVIL WAR ORDNANCE, 1862 | | | | | | | |
|---|----------------|----------|--------------|----------|------|-------------|------------|
| | Average Weight | Crew | CHARGE (LBS) | | | Shell (lbs) | Shot (lbs) |
| | | | Distant | Ordinary | Near | | |
| <i>Pivot Guns</i> | | | | | | | |
| XI-in | 15,700 lbs | 25 | 15.0 | — | — | 135 | — |
| X-in | 12,000 lbs | 20 | 12.5 | — | — | 100 | — |
| IX-in | 9,000 lbs | 17 | 10.0 | — | — | 72 | — |
| 8-in | 63 cwt | 17 | 9.0 | 8.0 | 6 | 51 | 64 |
| <i>Side Guns</i> | | | | | | | |
| 64-pdr | 106 cwt | 16 + boy | 16.0 | 12.0 | 8 | — | — |
| IX-in | — | 17 | 10.0 | — | — | 72 | — |
| 8-in | 63 cwt | 14 + boy | 9.0 | 8.0 | 6 | 51 | 64 |
| 8-in | 55 cwt | 12 + boy | 7.0 | 7.0 | 6 | — | 64 |
| 32-pdr | 61 cwt | 14 + boy | 10.0 | 8.0 | 6 | — | — |
| 32-pdr | 57 cwt | 12 + boy | 9.0 | 8.0 | 6 | — | — |
| 32-pdr | 42 cwt | 10 + boy | 6.0 | 6.0 | 4 | — | — |
| 32-pdr | 33 cwt | 8 + boy | 4.5 | 4.5 | 4 | — | — |
| 32-pdr | 27 cwt | 6 + boy | 4.0 | 4.0 | 3 | — | — |
| <i>Parrott Rifled Guns (on ordinary carriages, or as side guns)</i> | | | | | | | |
| 100-pdr | 9,688 lbs | 16 + boy | 10.0 | — | — | 100 | 84 |
| 30-pdr | 3,520 lbs | 10 + boy | 2.5 | — | — | — | — |
| <i>Parrott Rifled Pivot Guns</i> | | | | | | | |
| 200-pdr | 16,000 lbs | 25 | 16.0 | — | — | 155, 200 | — |
| 30-pdr | — | 12 + boy | — | — | — | — | — |
| 20-pdr | — | 10 + boy | — | — | — | — | — |

Source: Lieutenant Edward Barrett, *Gunnery Instructions* (New York: D. Van Nostrand, 1862), 21–23.

the other boats in the flotilla, and she was expected to be faster than the other ironclads.

***Seth Ledyard Phelps,* Captain of the Eastport**

The captain of the *Eastport* when she was launched in late August 1862 was “Lieutenant, Commanding” Seth Ledyard Phelps (Figure 2-31). Lieutenant Phelps had led the small flotilla of gunboats that captured the *Eastport*, he had strongly pushed for her conversion into an ironclad, he, apparently, contributed to her design, and he was to be her one and only Civil War commander. Seth Phelps was born on June 13, 1824, in Parkman, Ohio. He was named after his grandfather, an army officer in the Revolutionary War who had served with the American Light Infantry under Major General “Mad” Anthony Wayne. After the war, the elder Phelps joined the migration

of Americans westward as lands were opened up to settlement, ultimately moving to Connecticut’s Western Reserve, which was to become part of the state of Ohio in 1803 (Slagle 1996:9). Seth Phelps’ father, Alfred, had fought in the War of 1812 and in 1820 married Ann B. Towsley. He had a law practice and farmed land east of Cleveland, near Lake Erie. With his family’s long history of military service, and growing up hearing stories of America’s victories on Lake Erie, it is not too surprising that Seth Phelps sought an appointment as a midshipman in the United States Navy. He was appointed on October 24, 1841, and left for New York in January 1842 where he was assigned to the 74-gun ship USS *Independence*. Shortly after, however, he was transferred to the USS *Columbus*, another 74, and sailed with her to the Mediterranean. Seth Phelps would spend the next 19 years in the Navy, serving on several ships in the Mediterranean, Brazilian and African squadrons. Phelps

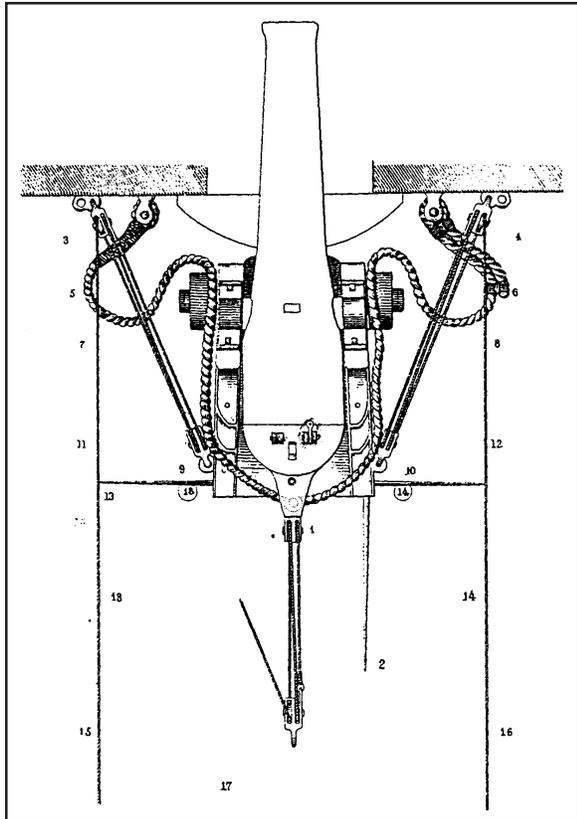


Figure 2-28. A 9-inch Dahlgren gun showing the specified positions for guncrew members (source: Tucker 1989:Fig. 97).

was involved in patrolling for slave ships while aboard the USS *Jamestown* in the African Squadron, but he wrote his family that his commander was not aggressive enough in pursuing slavers, noting “Far from annoying the honest slaver, it begins to look like we’re his friend . . . We don’t bother him” (Slagle 1996:40).

In early 1846, Acting Midshipman Phelps received orders to the Naval School at Annapolis, which had been established only the year before. However, with the outbreak of the Mexican War he was sent to the river schooner USS *Bonita* in June. Carrying a single 32-pounder, the *Bonita* and several other armed schooners served along the east coast of Mexico. Here, Phelps’ schooner was used in patrol and blockading activities and, on several occasions, was involved in action, including the landing at Veracruz led by Major General Winfield Scott. After the Mexican War, Phelps spent some time at home convalescing from an “enlarged liver” and in

January 1848 reported back to the Naval School. After passing his examinations, Phelps was sent to Chile, assigned to an astronomical expedition. After almost 2 years in Chile, Phelps was assigned to the Naval Observatory in Washington to help prepare the data collected for publication. While in Washington he married Lizzie Maynadier, daughter of an army officer. In 1856, the results of the Chilean expedition now published, Seth Phelps, promoted to Lieutenant, was assigned to the sidewheel, steam frigate USS *Susquehanna*. The First Lieutenant on the ship was Isaac Newton Brown, who would be the first man to try to turn the *Eastport* into an ironclad; Phelps being the second. Phelps liked Isaac Brown, but noted that he was “Cold, cautious, quick to see an advantage, and not slow to avail himself to it” (Slagle 1996:81).

Aboard the *Susquehanna*, Lieutenant Phelps served along the Nicaraguan coast and in the Mediterranean. While his ship was in the Mediterranean, Phelps moved his wife Lizzie and their daughter Sally to Italy, where his ship would be stationed. In 1857, the *Susquehanna* was sent to England to aid in laying the first transatlantic cable and, later, in October 1857, the ship was ordered back to Nicaragua to try to stop the group of American “filibusters” headed by William Walker who intended to set up their own government in that country. The following year, the *Susquehanna* returned to New York and Phelps, because promotion in the Navy was almost impossible at the time, planned to resign (Slagle 1996:101). However, before he acted on this decision, he was sent to Panama in November 1858 to report aboard the corvette USS *St. Mary*. Phelps spent several months helping get the *St. Mary* in order and in other activities, including taking command of the passenger steamer *Washington* and sailing her from Panama to San Francisco for her owners, the Pacific Mail Steamship Company. Late in 1860, Phelps sailed home to join his family in Washington.

On April 19, 1861, after the fall of Fort Sumter, Lieutenant Phelps, still in Washington, was ordered aboard the screw sloop *Pawnee* which steamed down the Potomac with a force of men to the Gosport Navy Yard at Norfolk, Virginia. Phelps and the others were to retrieve government property at the yard if possible, or to burn and destroy everything they could. One of the ships that Phelps personally set afire was the *Merrimack*, soon to be rebuilt as the first of the Confederate ironclads (Slagle 1996:5). In June, Lieutenant Phelps was ordered West to serve in the gunboat flotilla then being developed there. He was

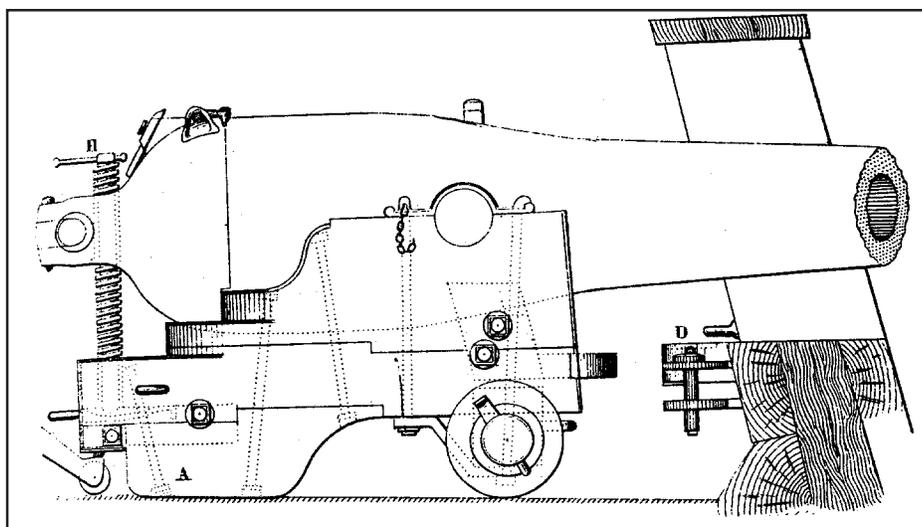


Figure 2-29. A 9-inch Dahlgren shellgun on a Marsilly carriage (source: Tucker 1989:Fig. 96).

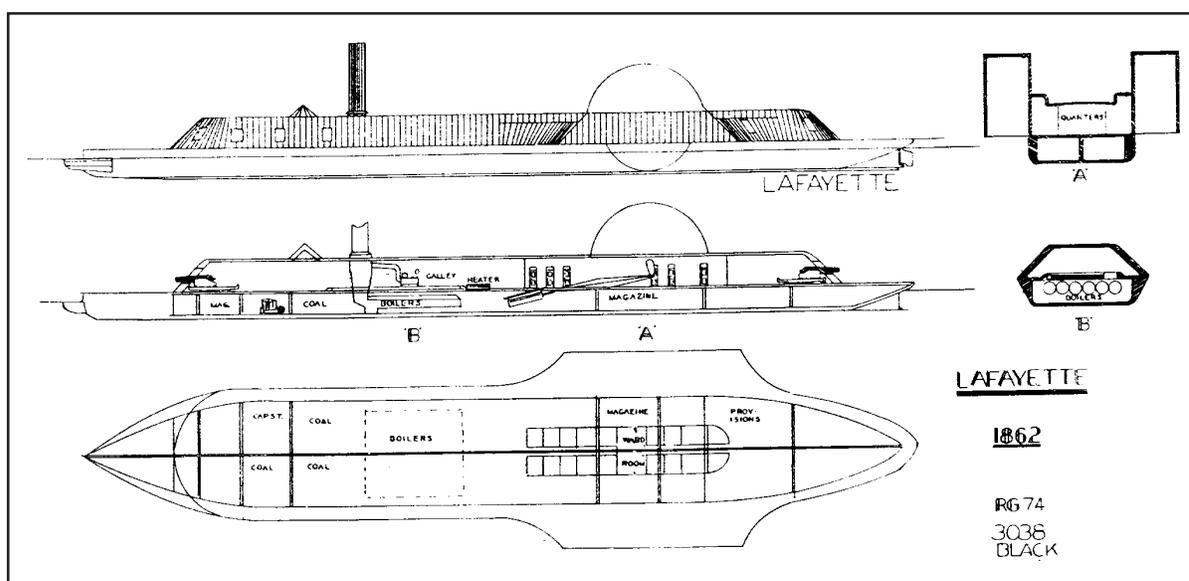


Figure 2-30. Drawings of the ironclad gunboat *Lafayette* showing some internal features that may have been found on the *Eastport* (source: Canney 1993:101).

one of the first officers to be assigned to the flotilla and his initial task was to bring the three steamers, *Tyler*, *Lexington* and *Conestoga*, down river to Cairo where their conversion into “timberclad” gunboats would be completed. The boats were at Portland, Kentucky, across from New Albany, Indiana, and were unable to descend because of low water. Eventually succeeding in getting the boats over the bar at Portland, Phelps was given command of the *Conestoga*,

becoming one of the first gunboat commanders on the inland waters. He oversaw the final conversion of the *Conestoga* during which he apparently began to develop ideas on how a river gunboat should be constructed. Phelps served on the *Conestoga*, taking part in most of the important river engagements, until March of 1862 when he took command of the flagship of the Western Flotilla, the ironclad *Benton*. On July 15, 1862, the *Benton* was one of the vessels



Figure 2-31. Lithograph of Seth Ledyard Phelps taken from an 1873 photograph (source: Slagle 1996:387).

that engaged the Confederate ironclad *Arkansas* at Vicksburg as the latter ran out of the Yazoo River into the Mississippi. During the fight, a round shot from the *Arkansas* reportedly passed so near Phelps as “to take the nap from his coat.” The *Arkansas* was commanded by Phelps’ old shipmate Isaac Brown and Phelps later noted “So much for the favors of my friend Brown” (Slagle 1996:269). Phelps was promoted to Lieutenant Commander after the action at Vicksburg and he served on the *Benton* until he took command of the *Eastport* in August 1862.

Seth Phelps was a favorite of Fleet-Officer Andrew Foote, and Foote placed a great deal of confidence in the Lieutenant and made many efforts to further Phelps’s career. For example, when Foote first had to take leave because of his injured ankle, he named Phelps Acting Commander of the gunboat flotilla, even though Phelps was not the senior officer in the fleet. With the departure of Fleet-Officer Charles Davis in the early fall of 1862, Phelps had hopes of obtaining permanent command of the flotilla and contacted several western politicians to help him in Washington. Ultimately, Phelps did not get the command, it went to David D. Porter. Naval Secretary Gideon Welles wrote a personal letter to

Phelps explaining why he did not get command of the flotilla, plus Welles noted that he was very disturbed by Phelps’s attempt to use political pressure to obtain the position (Slagle 1996:294-298). Ultimately, Admiral Porter divided the gunboat flotilla into two divisions, giving Phelps command of the First Division.

Admiral David Dixon Porter

Admiral David D. Porter, who was to take command of the western river fleet, was well known to naval men (Figure 2-32). His father, Commodore David Porter, had served in the Navy during the war with Tripoli and the War of 1812 and become famous for his exploits (Hearn 1996:xvii). Born in 1813, David Dixon Porter went to sea aboard his father’s frigate *John Adams* in 1824, when he was only 10 years old. Just before the start of the Civil War, Lieutenant Porter had received an offer from the Pacific Mail Steamship Company to take command of one of its steamships and he was seriously considering the offer when the war started (Hearn 1996:34). Interestingly, Seth Phelps had been made a similar offer at about the same time and, also, was considering taking it. With the outbreak of hostilities, Porter was given command of the USS *Powhatan* and charged with a secret mission to prevent Fort Pickens in Pensacola Bay, Florida, from falling into Confederate hands and to recapture the Navy Yard on the mainland. The Federals never captured the yard, and in May 1861 Porter became involved in blockading duty off the mouth of the Mississippi River, after which he spent time in an unsuccessful pursuit of the Confederate raider *Sumter* commanded by Raphael Semmes. In early 1862, Porter was selected by his foster brother, Admiral David Farragut, to command the fleet of mortar schooners in the naval attack up the Mississippi River to take New Orleans. The success of this operation greatly advanced Porter’s career. After the fall of New Orleans, Porter was put in charge of a small flotilla involved in blockading activities along the Gulf between the Mississippi River and Pensacola. Later, he served in the Union’s first, but unsuccessful, attempt to take Vicksburg in the summer of 1862. In July, he was sent with several mortar boats to Hampton Roads, Virginia, where he was to support Army forces. While on route to Virginia, Porter had heard about the success of the Confederate ironclad *Arkansas* in running past the Union fleet at Vicksburg. He placed much of the blame on Fleet-Officer Charles Davis of the Western Gunboat Flotilla, noting in a letter to Assistant



Figure 2-32. Admiral David Dixon Porter in 1863 (source: Hearn 1996:frontispiece).

Secretary of the Navy, Gustavus V. Fox, that Davis “deserves to lose his command” (Hearn 1996:138). On his arrival in Virginia, Porter was removed from command of his mortar boats and recalled to Washington. Porter thought he was to be reprimanded, but Secretary Welles, who was very impressed with Porter’s abilities, informed him that he was naming him commander of the Mississippi Squadron, the new name for the Western Gunboat Flotilla, a promotion to the rank of acting rear-admiral (Hearn 1996:142-143). On October 15, 1862, Porter arrived in Cairo and relieved Charles Davis of his command.

The Eastport’s Crew

The commanders of the Western Flotilla commonly faced problems in obtaining men for their gunboats. Western rivermen were not enthused about serving in gunboats, which they saw as dangerous and “potential coffins” (Gibson and Gibson 1995a:60). John Rodgers, the first commander of the Western Flotilla, reported that he was able to obtain pilots, engineers, and masters, but it was difficult because they wanted higher pay than the Navy normally authorized (ORN I:22:298). Many of the navy officers sent West to command gunboats looked down

on the western rivermen as unprofessional and non-military. There is no doubt, however, that they relied heavily on these men, particularly, the pilots and engineers, who had vast experience in running boats on the western rivers. Flag-Officer Foote did recognize the value of the rivermen, as indicated in his September 19, 1861, report to Washington asking that the Navy Department “not send any engineer here, as the Western engineers, from their experience, can better perform their duty” (ORN I:22:342). Ultimately, a number of civilian rivermen were hired for the gunboats and many of these were taken into the Navy about the time the gunboat fleet transferred to Navy control in October 1862.

Prior to the Navy taking over the flotilla, many, if not most, of the crewmen on the gunboats were Army personnel. In early 1862, General Grant had issued a circular to commanders on the Ohio and upper Mississippi asking them to submit lists of “river and seafaring men who are willing to volunteer to the gunboat service” (Gibson and Gibson 1995a:60). A number of crewmen were obtained from western Army units, plus Army and Navy men were shipped west from Washington. Some of these recruits are mentioned in a telegram from G.V. Fox, Acting Secretary of the Navy, sent to Andrew Foote on September 11, 1861. Fox reported that “Dahlgren” was drilling seamen for Foote and soon would be able to “send you fifty, well instructed” (ORN I:22:332). In November, the Navy Department dispatched to Flag-Officer Foote 500 men, and in December Secretary Welles informed Foote that he had as many as 1200 soldiers that could be transferred to man the river fleet (Ringle 1998:11).

However, Washington was often unable or unwilling to transfer men from elsewhere. For example, on August 23, 1861, Gideon Welles notified Commander Rodgers that his request for personnel from elsewhere was denied and he would “have to obtain . . . men from the West” (ORN I:22:304). As a result, several recruiting stations were set up in the West to collect crews for the gunboats. In September 1861, Flag-Officer Foote ordered Lieutenant Leonard Paulding to Chicago to “open a rendezvous and ship crews for the gunboats building on the Mississippi.” Paulding was also authorized to “ship men at different points on Lake Erie” (ORN I:22:331). Ultimately, a number of the men aboard the *Eastport* came through the Chicago recruiting station. Private citizens, also, helped to supply recruits for the services, at a cost. In the same month that Foote sent Lieutenant Paulding to Chicago, two men, Jos.

L. Weatherly of Cleveland and Carlton R. Moore of Philadelphia contacted the Flag-Officer about providing recruits. A number of civilian recruitment agencies or contractors operated during the war that sought recruits for the military for a commission (Ringle 1998:18-21). These men may have been associated with one of these agencies. Weatherly, apparently, claimed to be able to provide 1,000 men within one month. Foote informed him that the Government would pay him “\$2 for each man, who is by a surgeon considered to be in a sound physical condition” (ORN I:22:337). It is not known how many men Foote obtained from these private recruiters, but the same day he wrote Weatherly (September 17), he also wrote to Lieutenant Paulding, then recruiting in Chicago, and told him there was no need to “ship” as many men as anticipated because “other arrangements for getting men” had been made (ORN I:22:337).

At Mound City, Captain Andrew Pennock expressed concerns about manning the *Eastport* as early as April 22, 1862, although what action was taken at the time is unknown. In correspondence to Cairo on July 30, Pennock stated that the “*Eastport* is ready for service in two weeks; will require 150 men” (ORN I:23:270). Most other authors have used this number as the compliment of the *Eastport*, although Phillip Norman (1942:510) indicates that the *Eastport* had a crew of 110. Where he derived this figure from is unknown. A sufficient crew to man the *Eastport* seems to have been available when she was finally launched in late August 1862 because she immediately went into service. No crew lists seem to exist for the gunboat’s first year of operation, but muster rolls of enlisted personnel for the *Eastport* are extant for 1863 and 1864 that provide information on the men serving aboard her (National Archives, RG 24, Records of the Bureau of Naval Personnel, Muster Rolls of the *Eastport*). These muster rolls are provided as Appendix A. In addition, there are several lists of officers serving on the *Eastport* at various times. The earliest of these lists, dated September 23, 1862, is obviously incomplete, giving the names of only the 14 officers holding “acting appointment” (Table 2-7). Some, if not most, of these men may have been originally hired as civilians and, later, were taken into the Navy. None of the names of regular naval officers (e.g., Ensigns, etc.) are included in this list. The most complete list of officers known, dated June 27, 1863, gives 20 names and this is probably close to the full compliment of officers serving aboard the gunboat (Table 2-8). A third list provides the names of 12 “Volunteer Officers” on the *Eastport*.

Table 2-7. List of Officers Holding Acting Appointment, Attached to the United States Flag Steamer *Eastport*, September 23, 1862 (source: National Archives, Record Group 45, Lists of Officers, *Eastport*, Entry 96).

| Mississippi River off Helena, Ark. 23 September 1862 | | | |
|---|--|-------------------------|--------------------------|
| Names | Rank | State Appointed from | Date of Appointment |
| Joseph L. Avery | 2d Master | Ohio | 14 Aug 1862 |
| Robert B. Smith | 3d Master | Ohio | 9 Aug 1862 |
| Thomas Cadwell | 4th Master | Indiana | 7 Aug 1862 |
| Phineas R. Starr | 4th Master | Pennsylvania | 30 Aug 1862 |
| Edward W. Clark | 4th Master | New York | 11 Aug 1862 |
| William C. Turner | Masters Mate | Rhode Island | 27 June 1862 |
| William H. Gilman | Paymaster | Mass | 10 July 1862 |
| Henry Hartwig | Chief Engineer | Kentucky | 28 May 1862 |
| Thomas Hebron | 1st Asst. Engineer | Kentucky | 2 June 1862 |
| Joseph W. Morehead | 2d Asst. Engineer | Ohio | 28 June 1862 |
| James Venzant | 3rd Asst. Engineer | Ohio | 6 June 1862 |
| Jesse McMahan | 4th Asst. Engineer | Ohio | 26 July 1862 |
| Albert Allingham | Carpenter | New York | 23 Aug 1862 |
| A.S. Post | Masters Mate | New York | 23 June 1862 |
| Approved: | S.L. Phelps Wm. Gilman Lt. Commander | Acting Paymaster | US Flag Steamer Eastport |

Based on the latest “Date of Appointment” given in this list, it would have been made sometime after April 1863 (Table 2-9).

Except for Phelps, only two names appear on all three of these lists; William H. Gilman, Paymaster, and Henry Hartwig, Chief Engineer. In his letters, Phelps often refers to Paymaster Gilman as “Fat Gilman,” presumably a reference to his physical appearance (Slagle 1996). Most of those serving as Masters, Masters Mates, and Engineers were from western states, such as Ohio, Illinois and Kentucky, and it is assumed that most were former steamboatmen. Henry Hartwig, Chief Engineer, a native of Denmark and resident of Kentucky, was, at 42, the oldest of the officers in the single list providing age of birth (Tables 2-7 and 2-9).

Little else is known about the other officers on the *Eastport*, but the officer contingent was prob-

ably rather typical for gunboats in the flotilla. William S. McAllister, Acting Ensign in June 1863, had formerly been a “third master,” (equivalent to Masters Mate), having been recommended to that position by Andrew Pennock, “Fleet Captain” in command at Cairo (ORN I:23:229). Serving under Chief Engineer Hartwig were three or four Assistant Engineers (see Tables 2-7 and 2-8). Engineers had become more numerous in the Navy as steam power became more common, and in the 1850s they obtained officer status, although they were considered “staff” officers, somewhat lower in status than “line” officers, who were eligible to receive regular commissions. Engineers had to pass examinations to move up in rank and the Chief Engineer, normally, had a number of years of experience on steam vessels. The engineers were responsible for the maintenance and operation of the steam machinery on a vessel with the Chief Engineer in overall charge. Regulations mandated that the engineering staff in-

Table 2-8. List of Officers Attached to USS *Eastport*, June 27, 1863 (source: National Archives, Record Group 45, Lists of Officers, *Eastport*, Entry 96).

List of Officers Attached to USS *Eastport* - Cairo, Ill., 27 June 1863

| | |
|---------------------------|--------------------|
| Lieut Commander | S.L. Phelps |
| Acting Master | Lymen Bartholomew |
| Acting Ensign | Richard Westcott |
| Acting Ensign | John Treat |
| Acting Ensign | R.M. Williams |
| Acting Ensign | W.S. McAllister |
| Acting Masters Mate | Lazar A. DeCamp |
| Acting Masters Mate | John W. Litherbury |
| Acting Masters Mate | Chas. W. Botten |
| Acting Asst. Surgeon | Chas. E. Vaughen |
| Acting Paymaster | Wm. H. Gilman |
| Paymasters Steward | Charles Speer |
| Surgeons Steward | C.A. McHenry |
| Acting Chief Engineer | Henry Hartwig |
| Acting 1st Asst. Engineer | Thos. Ackerman |
| Acting 2nd Asst. Engineer | George N. Heisel |
| Acting 3rd Asst. Engineer | Oliver Graham |
| Acting 3rd Asst. Engineer | Wm. Baxter |
| Acting Gunner | John Riblett |
| Acting Carpenter | James Rouse |

clude a Chief Engineer and enough assistant engineers to insure the proper mechanical operation of a steam vessel at all times (Canney 1998:151).

The rank of Master in the American Navy represented the lowest commissioned officer grade until 1862, when the rank of Ensign was established below it. In 1883, the Master rank was discontinued and retitled Lieutenant Junior Grade. The Master and the various Masters Mates were responsible for the overall condition and technical operations of a ship, including steering and piloting. As noted, on the *Eastport* most of these men were from the West and it is likely that many were experienced steamboatmen. Lymen Bartholomew, Acting Master on the *Eastport* in June of 1863 (see Table 2-8), was captured by Confederate guerrillas in early November 1863 when he boarded the steamer *Allen Collier* (ORNI:25:536-537). John Litherbury, Acting Masters Mate in June 1863, is likely to have been associated with the John Litherbury Company (also Litherbury & Lockwood) of Cincinnati who were steamboat

builders (Way 1994:59, 436). One of the steamers built by the Litherbury company was the ill-fated *Sultana* which exploded and burned on the Mississippi River above Memphis on April 26, 1865, with the loss of at least 1,547, most of whom were Union soldiers recently released from southern prisons (Way 1994:436). Phineas Starr, the “4th Master” (equivalent to a Masters Mate) on the September 1862 list of officers later became a steamboat captain. Starr had been appointed 4th Master in August 1862 by Fleet-Officer Davis because of the “activity and intelligence and unwearied zeal” he had displayed in getting the *Eastport* free from a grounding (ORNI:23:331). Immediately after the Civil War, Starr was sent to investigate the possibility of raising the gunboat *Cairo* sunk in the Yazoo River, and determined that it was not feasible. Years later, at the close of the Spanish-American War, Captain Starr took the U.S. Engineers steamer *John R. Meigs*, to the mouth of the Mississippi River to remove mines that, apparently, had been laid as a deterrent to a possible Spanish intrusion up the river. The *Meigs* accidentally struck

Table 2-9. Statistics of the Volunteer Officers of the U.S. Steamer *Eastport* (source: National Archives, Record Group 45, Lists of Officers, *Eastport*, Entry 96).

Lieut Commander S.L. Phelps, Esq. Cmdg.

| Name | Office | Date of Appointment | State Where Born | State of Which a Citizen | Date of Birth |
|---------------------|-------------------------|---------------------|------------------|--------------------------|---------------|
| R.T. Westcott | Acting Ensign | Oct 14, 1862 | England | Penn | 18 May 1830 |
| John L. Treat | Acting Ensign | Jan 1, 1863 | Maine | Ohio | 11 Sep 1830 |
| Russell M. Williams | Acting Ensign | Jan 24, 1863 | Ohio | Kansas | 27 Sep 1828 |
| Charles E. Vaughan | Asst. Surgeon | Apr 11, 1863 | Maine | Mass | 18 Aug 1836 |
| William H. Gilman | A.A. Paymaster | July 10, 1862 | NY | Mass | 29 July 1826 |
| Henry Hartwig | Chief Engineer | May 28, 1862 | Denmark | Kent | 23 Apr 1821 |
| Thomas Ackerman | Act. 1st Asst. Engineer | Oct 8, 1861 | Mich | Missouri | 29 Sep 1831 |
| George N. Heisel | Act. 2nd Asst. Engineer | Jan 19, 1863 | France | Ill | 18 Aug 1841 |
| Oliver Graham | Act. 3rd Asst. Engineer | Jan 21, 1863 | Ill | Ill | 29 Mar 1842 |
| E.A. Decamp | Masters Mate | Dec 19, 1862 | Ohio | Ohio | 23 Mar 1845 |
| John W. Litherbury | Masters Mate | Dec 19, 1862 | Ohio | Ohio | 1 Sep 1843 |
| C.H. Botten | Masters Mate | Jan 26, 1863 | Ohio | Ohio | 23 Aug 1842 |

S.L. Phelps

a mine and the explosion killed all but two on board (Way 1994:254). Captain Starr was among those killed and the *Meigs*, except for the battleship *Maine*, represented one of the worst naval losses during the war.

Assistant Surgeon, Charles E. Vaughan (or Vaughen) and his Steward, C.A. McHenry (Table 2-8), were critical personnel on the river gunboats, most of which saw violent action and had numerous men wounded and injured. Charles Vaughan was almost certainly a surgeon in civilian life.

Four “complete” and one partial muster rolls of enlisted personnel are extant for the *Eastport*. The complete rolls are dated June 27, 1863; September 1, 1863; December 31, 1863; and March 31, 1864 (Appendix A). The partial roll is dated July 3, 1863, and was made to provide additional information on 24 men whose names only appeared in the June 27 muster. The earliest muster roll, dated June 27, 1863, shows an enlisted crew of only 89, however, for some reason no petty officers are listed on this muster. The other rolls do include the names of petty officers and show the following crew numbers: Septem-

ber 1863 - 90; December 1863 - 102; and March 1864 - 120. Thus, the entire compliment of officers and enlisted men known to have been aboard the *Eastport* ranged from about 110 to 140. Because some muster rolls are missing, it is unknown if the gunboat ever manned a crew of 150, as was initially projected for her.

Some characteristics of the crew of the *Eastport* can be derived from the information provided in the musters. Although the musters from other gunboats have not been examined, it is assumed that the crew of the *Eastport* was rather typical of those serving in the Mississippi Squadron. The muster rolls provide information on a sailor’s “rate” or rank, date and place of enlistment, age, where born, state of citizenship, occupation, and physical characteristics. In the June 27, 1863, muster, the earliest one known to exist, the ratings and number of men in each are: Seamen - 43; Ordinary Seamen - 10; Landsmen - 10; 1st and 2nd Class Boys - 5; and Firemen - 7. As noted, for some reason no petty officers are given in this muster. Except for Firemen, the ratings are derived out of the old, sailing, salt water navy, even though many of the duties of men on a steam-pow-

ered river gunboat would have been very different from those of men serving at sea. The enlisted personnel comprising the bulk of the crew on the *Eastport*, or any naval vessel, were known as the “ratings,” or simply “seamen.” Boys were the lowest category (or “rating”) of these enlisted personnel and generally consisted of young boys, under 17, who acted as servants and assistants to officers and petty officers while learning basic naval skills. Landsmen were unskilled personnel, usually new recruits over 17 years old, who had no naval experience and were assigned the most menial tasks on board. Ordinary Seaman was the next highest rate among the common deck crew and these were men with some time in service who possessed basic naval skills and could be assigned moderately difficult and responsible tasks. Usually, after several years as an Ordinary Seaman, a sailor who demonstrated the necessary skills would be promoted to Seaman, probably the most important of the enlisted ratings. Seamen were the skilled and well trained persons on a ship who understood all aspects of a sailor’s life and duties (Ringle 1998:40-41).

In 1862, a Seaman earned \$18 per month, an Ordinary Seaman \$14, and a Landsman \$12. Ships’ Boys earned \$8 to \$10 per month (Canney 1998:121). As shown in Table 2-10, these rates had increased slightly by 1864. Naval pay tended to be somewhat lower than civilian wages of the period. Ordinary day laborers made \$1 to \$1.50 a day at the time, or about \$25 to \$30 per month. Skilled workers, such as carpenters and blacksmiths made up to about \$45 per month. Naval men, however, did receive clothing, food, accommodations, and medical treatment at no cost, plus those disabled in the line of duty and the survivors of those killed received payments and pensions (Canney 1998:121-122; Ringle 1998:92). These extra benefits provided some compensation for the lower pay.

Firemen and Coal Heavers were considered Engineer ratings, as opposed to the Deck ratings of the seamen discussed above. Coal Heavers required no experience and were responsible for the hard and dirty task of handling the coal on board. They, also, handled wood when coal was not available as fuel. Firemen occupied a somewhat higher position since their duties required some training and experience. They were responsible for firing the boilers and oiling the machinery under the supervision of the various engineers on board (Canney 1998:129). As shown in Table 2-10, these ratings received slightly higher pay than did the average seaman.

Beginning with the September 1863 muster, the petty officers on the *Eastport* are listed (Appendix A). Petty officers occupied the position between officers and the common enlisted members of the crew. The best of those rated as Seamen were commonly promoted to petty officers by the commanding officer. The Boatswain’s Mate was probably the most important of the petty officer positions. This was the person responsible for passing on the commands of officers and insuring that they were carried out. He generally oversaw the day-to-day operation of a vessel. On the *Eastport*, the position of “bo’sun” was held by William Tice whose previous occupation is given as “photographer,” somewhat surprising considering the naval experience required for a boatswain. This experience, normally, was 7 years, of which one had to be spent as a petty officer. In the June 1863 muster, Tice is listed as a Seaman, and his promotion to Boatswain’s Mate by

Table 2-10. Monthly Pay for Enlisted Ratings, 1864
(source: Ringle 1998:Table 8-1).

| Engineer ratings | |
|-------------------------|------|
| First-class fireman | \$30 |
| Second-class fireman | 25 |
| Coal heaver | 20 |
| Deck ratings | |
| Carpenter’s mate | 30 |
| Master-at-arms | 30 |
| Chief Quartermaster | 28 |
| Gunners mate | 25 |
| Quarter gunner | 25 |
| Quarter master | 25 |
| Coxswain | 25 |
| Captain of forecastle | 25 |
| Captain of afterguard | 25 |
| Captain of hold | 25 |
| Ship’s painter | 22 |
| Armorer | 22 |
| Carpenter | 22 |
| Seaman | 20 |
| Ordinary Seaman | 16 |
| Landsman | 14 |
| Boy | 10 |
| Captain’s steward | 35 |
| Captain’s cook | 30 |
| Officer’s steward | 30 |
| Ship’s cook | 26 |
| Yeoman | 35 |

September suggests he had demonstrated to Phelps the qualities and abilities requisite for the promotion. However, at only 25 years of age, it would seem impossible for Tice to have had the 7 years of sea experience normally expected for this position. The partial muster made on July 12, 1863, indicates that William Tice was tattooed on the right arm with "Sailors return," certainly suggesting previous ship experience, despite the indication that he had been a photographer.

Other petty officers on the *Eastport* were the Ship's Corporal, Captain of Forecastle, Master at Arms, Coxswain, Carpenter's Mate, Armorer's Mate (a position held by Henry Pringle, former blacksmith), and Yeoman. The Yeoman was responsible for all clerical duties on a vessel, and the importance of the position is reflected in the fairly high monthly salary of \$35.00 (see Table 2-7). Frederick Pratt, one of the older members of the crew and, apparently, an experienced sailor was serving as Yeoman in September 1863, promoted from Seaman since the previous June. By December 1863, a second Yeoman had been added. This was John Heinmiller, a former printer from Columbus, Ohio, who, also, had been promoted from Seaman. Additionally, the Captain's Steward, Officer's Steward and Ship's Painter seem to be included as petty officers, in light the numbers given in the "Recapitulation of Crew" (Appendix A). By March of 1864, the list of petty officers included Captain of After Guard, Gunner's Mate and Quarter Gunner. These positions may not have been officially filled earlier, but some seaman certainly would have performed their duties. This is particularly true of the Gunner's Mate, since this position was of utmost important on a gunboat, possibly second only to the Boatswain's Mate among the petty officers. In March 1864, all of these positions, Captain of After Guard, Gunner's Mate and Quarter Gunner, were occupied by men who seem to have been experienced seamen (Appendix A). Archibald Bonney, from New York, was the Captain of After Guard; William Kewish and Richard Pigeon, both from Britain, were the Quarter Gunners, and 24-year-old Richard Lambert, coincidentally, from Eastport, Maine, was the Gunner's Mate. Pay for some petty officer rates was based on level of responsibility and for others was dependent upon the class of vessel on which they served. Pay ranged from about \$20 per month upward to about \$50 per month for the Boatswain's Mate.

The musters provide evidence that some of the *Eastport's* crew showed promise and ability and were

promoted for it. For example, John W. Mahoney was serving as Coxswain in September 1863, but by March 1864 18-year-old Daniel Curren of Boston held this position. Curren appears in the June 1863 muster, but he is given no rating; by September he is listed as a "Seaman 1st Class" (?), by December a Quarter Master, and by March 1864 he was the gunboat's Coxswain. Curren must have proven himself to Captain Phelps and others aboard the *Eastport* to have risen so fast in the ranks, despite the notation in the musters that the "tops of 2d and 3rd [fingers] of left hand cut off."

A number of the men aboard the *Eastport* in June 1863 had some experience on boats or ships. Twenty-four of the crewmen had their previous occupations listed as sailor or seaman. Some of these were Navy men transferred out West, while others may have served as civilian sailors on ocean-going merchant vessels. In addition, 9 individuals had occupations that appear to be related to steamboating. These occupations included steamboatman, boatman, fireman, and, in one instance, pantryman. There were others whose former occupations would be valuable to the operations of a gunboat. These included Danl. Weaver a "machinist" and resident of Indiana, Peter Emery, a "ship carpenter" from Chanflay River, Canada; and H.J. Pringle, born in England and resident of Ohio who had been a "blacksmith" (Appendix A). Only six of the men on the *Eastport* in June 1863 had been "farmers," a seemingly small number considering the rural nature of the country at the time and the number of people engaged in that livelihood. The *Eastport* was like the Navy in general in having few farmers among its crew and quite different from the army, which was joined by large numbers of young men who had been farmers (Ringle 1998). Former occupations for the rest of the *Eastport's* crew in 1863 were quite varied, and included clerk, accountant, painter, tobacconist, baker, printer, painter and artist.

On the June 1863 muster, one man, 2nd Class Fireman Thomas Oliver, had been a "chair maker" prior to his service. In addition, Thomas Oliver, was a black man, as indicated under "Personal Description." Oliver was one of eight, or possibly nine, members of the crew in June 1863 who can be identified as African American or "mulatto." Two of these men had previously worked as sailors or boatmen. These were Isaac Sellers and William D. Thomas, whose former occupations were given as steamboating and boating. Other pre-service occupations given for the blacks serving aboard the *Eastport* included cook, moulder, laborer, tobacconist and farmer;

while no former occupation is given for Isaac Williams (listed as “colored man”). There is every reason to believe that all but one of these men were free at the time of their enlistment; most were from northern or border states and had presumably joined to serve their country. In fact, during the early days of the war, because of the great need for additional manpower, navy officers actively recruited free blacks to serve. A law limiting blacks to 5 percent of the naval force was lifted at the start of the Civil War, and large numbers of free African Americans citizens volunteered for naval service in 1861 (Ringle 1998:12).

One of the African Americans on the *Eastport* in June 1863, however, was certainly a recently freed slave, or “contraband.” This was 14-year-old Henry Augustus, whose former occupation is, in fact, given as “slave.” Extant musters show that Augustus, from Holly Springs, Mississippi, was in service aboard the *Eastport* through, at least, March 31, 1864, and it is presumed that he was aboard when the gunboat was scuttled on Red River in late April of that year. He was rated as a 3rd Class Boy in June 1863, and on the March 1864 muster he is listed as a “coal heaver,” plus it is noted that he was a “contraband.” The ratings for the rest of the identified blacks in the June 1863 muster included Seaman, Ordinary Seaman, Landsman, and Fireman.

In late April 1862, before the *Eastport* was completed and launched, Gideon Welles had instructed naval officers that they should take the opportunity to enlist “freely into the Navy” escaped slaves who were then “flocking to the protection of the United States flag” (ORN I:23:80-81). Welles noted that the approach of “the hot and sickly season” in the South would likely incapacitate many naval personnel and the contrabands would provide an acclimated labor force. Contrabands who enlisted were to be rated as “Boys” and would be paid “\$8, \$9, or \$10” per month, the standard wage for this rating (ORN I:23:81). Chronic crew shortages on boats in the Mississippi Squadron meant that many commanders jumped at the chance to enlist former slaves. Still facing a shortage of men, in December 1862 Secretary Welles lifted the ban on limiting contraband recruits to the “Boy” rating, noting:

Persons known as “contraband” will not be shipped or enlisted in the naval service with any higher rating than landman, but if found qualified after being shipped, may be advanced by the commanding officer of the vessel in which

they served to the rating of seaman, fireman, or coal heaver . . . and will be entitled to the corresponding pay [ORN I:5:210].

Unlike the Army, freed blacks entering the Navy received the same pay as whites in equivalent ratings.

Apparently, young Henry Augustus was the only contraband in the crew of the *Eastport* in June 1863. With the other blacks aboard, all of whom are thought to have been free men when they enlisted, African Americans comprised just over 10 percent of the crew. However, this was to change through time. By March 1864, there were 33 African Americans serving on the *Eastport*, representing 27.5 percent of the total crew. Also, the majority (n=24) of these men are specifically identified as contrabands. Additionally, most of them are rated as Boys, Firemen, or Coal Heavers. None of the blacks on the *Eastport* in March 1864 served above the rank of Landsman, indicating the lower ratings that freed slaves were given in the service; in part because of their lack of experience, but, also, no doubt, because of their color. The number of blacks serving on board individual naval vessels in the Civil War has not been fully examined, but by the end of the war there may have been as many as 23,000 black sailors in the United States Navy, representing about 20 percent of the entire force (Ringle 1998:14). The *Eastport*, with just over 27 percent of her crew consisting of black sailors, was probably not too different from the other boats serving in the West in the last two years of the war.

While the freed slave Henry Augustus was the youngest crewman on the *Eastport* in June 1863, the oldest were two 43-year-old Seamen, Joseph Canaby and Frederick Pratt. Canaby was from Gibraltar and Pratt from the Prince Edward Islands and both men had been sailors prior to coming to the *Eastport*, possibly in the U.S. Navy. A “dancing girl” tattooed on Canaby’s right arm and the word “Liberty” on Pratts’ are obvious expressions of their sailor’s life. The average age of the *Eastport*’s crew in the June 1863 muster was 22.9 years and only 12 men were over 30. A year later, as shown in the March 1864 muster, the average age of the crew was almost 25 years and 20 men were over 30. However, the 1864 muster includes petty officers, men who generally had more naval experience and tended to be slightly older than the average sailor aboard.

In the Army, many units were composed of men who came from the same community, county or state.

Ships in the Navy, however, had very heterogeneous crews. The *Eastport's* June 1863 muster indicates that crewmen came from 21 different states and 10 foreign countries; although many of those from foreign countries had taken up residence in the United States and may have become citizens. In fact, during the first three years of the war congressional legislation prohibited foreigners from serving in the Navy, however, the Navy Department ignored this law and allowed their recruitment (Ringle 1998:16). England and Ireland produced most of the foreign-born on the *Eastport*, while the states of Ohio, New York and Pennsylvania provided the largest number of native-born crewmen among the states given as place of origin. During the war, New York provided more men to the Navy than any other state; 35,164 men representing almost 35 percent of the total naval force (Ringle 1998:24). By March 1864 the percentage of foreign-born crewmen aboard the *Eastport* had decreased slightly, from 33 to 26 percent of the total number, while 25 different states are given as the place of origin of the native born. The slight increase in the number of states as place of origin is related, primarily, to the increase in the number of contrabands in the crew, with most of these former slaves coming from southern and border states not represented in the earlier musters. Among the states listed as place of origin, Ohio and New York still provided the largest number of men, but the border state of Tennessee was third, with six crewmen giving it as their place of birth.

Ringle (1998:20) argues that early in the war most naval recruits signed up for three years. This may have been true for the Navy in general, but it does not appear to be the case for the *Eastport*. The available musters reveal that the majority of the men serving aboard the *Eastport* had enlisted for one year; relatively few had three-year enlistments or were in for the "war." Most of the men came to the *Eastport* from the steamer *Clara Dolsen*, a 273-ft-long sidewheel steamer captured from the Confederates on June 14, 1862 (Way 1994:99). The *Clara Dolsen* was serving as a "receiving ship" at Cairo where men reported prior to being given specific assignments in the flotilla. The length of stay on board the *Clara Dolsen* varied, but the incoming men often did receive some training while there. Soon after he took command of the Mississippi Squadron, Admiral Porter reported that he had established "a school of drill" on board the receiving ship (ORN I:23:441). In all but the June 1863 enrollment, a few men were taken aboard the *Eastport* from "Hospital Pinkney," the naval hospital established at the former U.S. Navy

yard in Memphis after its capture in the first week of June 1862. A few men were transferred to the *Eastport* from other boats in the Mississippi Squadron and the March 1864 muster shows that several men reported aboard from the timberclad *Conestoga*, Phelps' old command, which had sunk after a collision with another boat on the Mississippi River on March 8 (Silverstone 1989:158).

The "Remarks" section of the various musters mainly provides information on distinctive physical characteristics of sailors, but also some information on discharges, transfers and desertions. Tattoos, in particular, are listed, such as the "Man & Wife, she holding the English Jack" appearing on the left arm of 25-year-old Seaman Henry Swift and the "Anchor on right hand & star on left hand" of 35-year-old Seaman Thomas Fitzsimmons. Other distinguishing marks, such as scars or "pitted" faces, also, are noted. A few notations for desertion appear, such as that of Thomas Logue and Martin Welsh, two Seaman who seem to have deserted together at Helena, Arkansas, in August 1863. It is unlikely, however, that the musters contain a complete record of the desertions that occurred. The September 1863 muster shows a number of men being discharged by medical survey or being transferred to Hospital Pinkney because of illness. In addition, this muster noted the drowning of two men in the summer of 1863, Charles James and John L. Berry, the latter a young 16-year-old farmer from McDonough County, Illinois. Both men had been in the navy less than two months when they died.

Operations of the "Ironclad Ram" USS Eastport

The first service for the *Eastport* was as an escort for transports carrying Confederate prisoners for exchange. This exchange of prisoners resulted from a meeting at Haxall's Landing on the James River in July 1862 between Union Major General John H. Dix and Confederate Major General Daniel H. Hill. The meeting resulted in what became the Dix-Hill agreement. This provided, at the time, for "all prisoners of war now held on either side and all prisoners hereafter taken shall be sent with all reasonable dispatch to A.M. Aiken's, below Dutch Gap, on the James River, Virginia, or to Vicksburg, on the Mississippi River, in the State of Mississippi, and there exchanged or paroled until such exchange can be effected" (Bearss 1980:81). Confederate prisoners west of the Appalachians were to be placed aboard transports in Cairo and carried down river for the transfer.

Flag-Officer Charles Davis gathered his flotilla of gunboats to convoy the transports at Cairo for the trip down the Mississippi River to Vicksburg. Trains carried 3,900 Confederate prisoners to Cairo where they were loaded on four transports. Davis sailed on August 28, 1862, aboard his new flagship, *Eastport*, which was serving as escort (Bearss 1980:81). Commanding the *Eastport* was recently promoted Lieutenant Commander Seth Ledyard Phelps. Phelps had been promoted, in part, because of his gallant service in command of the *Benton* during the fighting at Vicksburg in July. The armed ram *Queen of the West*, commanded by Captain Bradford Scribner, was serving as the other escort of the convoy. On this same day, Commodore Davis sent the first communication addressed from "Gunboat Eastport." This was a General Order that specified the signals and lanterns to be carried by all vessels in the service of the squadron (ORN I:23:329).

On the trip south, Davis provided flags of truce to the other members of the convoy and told them to fly them in "a conspicuous place" to demonstrate their non-military intent. On September 1, near Island 30, Commodore Davis reported that the *Eastport's* "boilers began to leak freely and it was necessary to let off the steam," slowing the flagship's speed. Repairs were made, but the problems for the *Eastport* were only starting. The gunboat would be plagued by difficulties during her entire career and the early predictions of her becoming the finest gunboat in the fleet would never be realized.

In addition to boiler problems, the *Eastport* ran aground several times during her trip down river because of low water. Davis feared that the numerous groundings may have injured the vessel (ORN I:23:338). Ultimately, the *Eastport* could not get below Helena, Arkansas, and remained there while the transports proceeded to Vicksburg escorted by the gunboat *Louisville* and the ram *Monarch*. In September, on the return trip upriver, loaded with about 1,000 Union prisoners, the convoy encountered another fleet headed south with Confederate prisoners. This fleet, carrying 6,000 soldiers under a flag of truce, was escorted by the gunboats *Lexington* and *Cairo*. While at Vicksburg, Thomas Selfridge, commander of the *Cairo*, had a chance to observe activities of Confederate working parties clearing timber for a field of fire for the big guns at Wyman's Hill (Bearss 1980:81-82). This was an early indication that among the next engagements for the Western Flotilla would be action at Vicksburg, whose capture was necessary for control of the Mississippi River.

While Commodore Davis and his flagship were stranded at Helena, he received information from Washington on the reorganization of the Western Flotilla and its transfer from the War Department to the Navy Department as of October 1, 1862 (ORN I:23:348-352). These instructions indicated that the name of the flotilla would "hereafter [be] the Mississippi Squadron" and they provided regulations for officering and manning vessels, and established requirements for reports and record keeping. As a result of the new reporting requirements, on September 23, 1862, the list of officers holding acting appointments was approved by Lt. Commander S.L. Phelps with William Gilman as Acting Paymaster (see Table 2-7). As noted, this list does not include commissioned officers. For example, it is known that William R. Hoel was serving as Lieutenant aboard the flagship at this time, because on October 6 he was transferred from the *Eastport* to take command of the ironclad USS *Pittsburg* (ORN I:23:391).

On September 15, Commodore Davis, while aboard the *Eastport* at Helena, received notification of his appointment as Acting Rear Admiral (ORN I:23:377). Charles Davis, no doubt, assumed that he would now take command of the newly reorganized flotilla of western gunboats. However, with the transfer, Commander David Dixon Porter was named to command the Mississippi Squadron (ORN I:23:388), although Porter did not assume his command at Cairo until October 15.

The low water now prevented the *Eastport* from traveling back upriver and she remained trapped at Helena. In late September, Charles Davis had to catch the steamer *De Soto* upriver to Cairo to attend the transfer of command of the flotilla; the *Eastport* still "confined to her present position by the state of the water" (ORN I:23:380). When he left for Cairo, Davis, apparently, did not know that he was to be replaced in his command. On his departure, Davis left "Flag Captain" Phelps in charge of that division of the squadron operating around Helena. On October 7, just prior to the arrival of Porter, Davis transferred his flag from the trapped *Eastport* to the ironclad USS *Carondelet* and on October 15 he reported to the Secretary of the Navy that he had struck his flag and transferred command to Rear-Admiral Porter (ORN I:23:392, 395). The *Eastport's* short-lived service as flagship of the western gunboat fleet was over.

When Porter took command, the newly named Mississippi Squadron consisted of 17 fighting vessels, most of which had seen long and hard service

and many of which were out of repair. Porter recognized that the number of gunboats was too small to hold the Mississippi and he immediately began a program of construction and conversion. By the summer of 1863, he had added 54 vessels to the fleet, together carrying 324 guns (ORN I:23:396).

The *Eastport* was still trapped at Helena on October 14, but she apparently started upriver soon after because on October 18 Porter ordered her “to go down” to Helena if the river was high enough to allow it (ORN I:23:423). Major General S.R. Curtis had telegraphed Porter from Helena requesting gunboats because he feared an attack on his force there. Despite Porter’s request, the *Eastport* did not return south. She continued upriver and continued to have difficulties. At a sandbar near Island No. 25 the *Eastport* had to be helped across by the *Conestoga* (ORN I:23:482). From there, the gunboat proceeded on upriver to Cairo.

When Porter ordered the *Eastport* back to Helena, he also sent the gunboat *Carondelet*, requesting that her commander, Henry Walke, find out where cotton was stored or hidden while on his way down river (ORN I:23:423). Although he doesn’t say it in his letter to Captain Walke, Porter was obviously interested in the cotton as a prize of war, to which the U.S. Navy was entitled and for which commanders could be awarded considerable sums of money. The potential of prize money was one factor in attracting recruits into the Navy; however, very few enlisted men ever received substantial amounts. The proceeds from captured prizes were distributed as shares among a ship’s officers and men as well as among squadron and fleet commanders in specific proportions established by law. During the war, the capture of blockade runners often proved extremely lucrative to the capturing ship, however, the value of the prize was ultimately adjudicated by a prize court, which often assessed low values on prizes. For example, the steamer *Fair Play*, captured by Seth Phelps while commanding the *Benton* in the summer of 1862, was valued by Commodore Charles Davis at between \$300,000 and \$500,000, however, the court at Springfield, Illinois, set the value of the boat at only \$35,546.62 (Slagle 1996:402). Even though the *Fair Play* did have a large number of arms aboard when captured, Davis’ estimate does seem to have been inordinately high, particularly, when the steamer was estimated to be worth only \$8,000 in September 1862, just two months after her capture (Gibson and Gibson 1995b:557). Cotton, if

it belonged to the Confederate States Government or to an individual “in rebellion” against the United States, also, could be claimed as a prize of war. In the spring of 1864, during the Red River Campaign, a large amount of cotton was captured by Admiral Porter’s men, but the evaluation of the cotton and distribution of the prize money took many years. The *Eastport* was initially awarded \$11,618.39, but the figure was revised upward in later years. This money was divided among the *Eastport’s* crew, of which Seth Phelps, as captain, received a total of only \$860.85 (Slagle 1996:402). Fleet and squadron commanders reaped the greatest benefits from prize monies. Admiral David Porter received \$12,372.77 as his share of the captured Red River cotton, only a portion of the total of \$91,528.98 in prize money he was to be awarded during the war (Slagle 1996:402).

Ships, also, received prize money for gallantry in action, dependent largely on the presumed monetary loss suffered by the enemy. For example, when Seth Phelps was her commander the gunboat *Benton* was awarded prize money for her part in the capture of Memphis. The gunboat received \$18,527.42 as her share, with Lieutenant Phelps getting \$1,465.34, while a Seamen received \$40.89. The other members of the crew received intermediate amounts. Flag-Officer Charles Davis, who was using the *Benton* as his flagship at the time, received \$3,715.52 (Slagle 1996:402).

The *Eastport* arrived in Cairo from Helena in late October, where it was discovered that her bottom had been damaged during her travel on the low river, just as Commodore Davis had thought. Fifteen feet of the boat’s bottom had “given way” and the keel was arched up. It was determined that she would have to go on the ways to be repaired. While the *Eastport* lay at Cairo waiting for the river to rise so she could be pulled out at Mound City, Porter ordered her to be used as a receiving ship and he had her crew dispatched to other vessels (ORN I:23:457). Two months later, the *Eastport* still had not been pulled out and a frustrated Porter wrote Captain Pennock, who was in charge of the Navy’s yards at Cairo and Mound City, stating:

Get the *Eastport* on the ways as soon as the water is high enough; reduce the iron on her in such places where it can be spared, to lighten her and enable her to carry four IX-inch guns. Mr. Hambleton says there is an immense weight of unnecessary iron [ORN I:23:625].

The Mr. Hambleton mentioned by Porter was Captain William L. Hambleton of Hambleton, Collier and Company, of Mound City and builder of the hulls for three of the City-Class ironclads, the *Cairo*, *Cincinnati* and *Mound City* (Bearss 1980:191-192).

On December 26, 1862, Pennock reported to Porter that the *Eastport* would go “on the ways tomorrow” and that the repairs would take 3 to 4 weeks (ORN I:23:658). Admiral Porter was anxious to have the *Eastport* repaired quickly so she could aid in the campaigns on the Mississippi and he instructed Pennock to get her outfitted and on her way to the mouth of the White River (e.g., Helena) as soon as she was off the ways. It is obvious that the gunboat had to be lightened to reduce the grounding problems that plagued her and, while her bottom was being repaired, some of her heavy iron armor was removed. Porter, also, wanted to strengthen the battery on the *Eastport*, telling Captain Pennock that “If any 100-pounder rifles come to Cairo, put two of them in the bow ports of the *Eastport*; if not, pin the IX-inch in” (ORN I:24:131).

The *Eastport*'s problems coincided with a deterioration in Lieutenant Commander Phelps's health. Considering the great hopes and expectations that Phelps had for the *Eastport*, it is possible that her trouble-plagued performance, plus his failure to be appointed to command of the gunboat flotilla, contributed to his illness. At first, Phelps refused to take medical leave, despite urgings from others. Finally, while the *Eastport* was waiting to be repaired, Dr. Edward Gilchrist, Fleet Surgeon, examined Phelps and recommended that he take immediate leave because of liver disease (Slagle 1996:315). Phelps, who was extremely ill, traveled to his home and family in Chardon, Ohio, to recover. By December, he had recovered sufficiently to travel to Washington to temporarily serve on a review board looking into prize awards. At the request of Admiral Porter, he also traveled to Springfield, Illinois, to discuss prize awards with U.S. attorneys there (Slagle 1996:315, 319).

Phelps returned to Mound City in late December and personally oversaw the repairs to the *Eastport*. He was anxious to get his gunboat ready for the impending attack on Vicksburg and she came off the ways on January 14, 1863. The repairs, which cost \$6,600, included the addition of 14-in-thick beams across the boat's bottom for strength, plus the removal of some armor plating. Phelps had recommended that the boat, also, be braced with thwartship hog chains, but the contractor said these were not

needed and in his anxiety to get the boat ready, Phelps conceded to leave them off (Goodwin and Jones 1986:84; Slagle 1996:319). Phelps did attend to making his quarters aboard more comfortable. In a letter to his wife Lizzie, he wrote that a “new Brussels Carpet” was being made for his cabin and, when completed, “No officer in the Squadron will have such quarters” (Slagle 1996:323).

The launching of the *Eastport* did not go well; the hull was severely twisted and may have been damaged (ORN I:24:313-314). On January 18, Captain Phelps reported to Porter that the *Eastport* floated “8 inches lighter by stern” because of the removal of iron plating and that she would be able to carry two 9-inch guns aft (ORN I:24:178). Porter sent a message to Phelps at Cairo the same day:

Sir:

I shall be glad to see you down in the “Eastport”. I hope you have made her so strong that she won't bend doubly any more. Don't get too many IX inch guns on her. I think four IX inch, two 100 pdr Rifles, and the 50 pdr will be as much as she will stand or require. Do the best you can about men. We are using contrabands to haul on the side tackles. We leave for Vicksburg tomorrow. If the coal is ready when you come, convoy it down [Phelps January 18, 1863].

While waiting for the *Eastport*'s crew to be collected and for her battery to be taken aboard, Phelps was ordered to take the gunboat *Lexington* up the Cumberland River on patrol. While there, his boat was fired on by Confederate guns and struck several times. However, Phelps returned fire and dispersed the enemy (Slagle 1996:322).

On January 24, Captain Pennock reported that the guns for the *Eastport* were being taken aboard. Snow had made the work difficult, but Lieutenant Commander Phelps was “driving ahead with his usual energy and dispatch” (ORN I:24:192). Phelps had planned to put the two, 100-pounder Parrott rifles as bow guns on pivot carriages, but because of insufficient room on the forward gun deck he had to mount them on modified 9-inch gun carriages. Even with these modifications, when these guns were “run in” on the gundeck they almost hit the forward broadside guns, a reflection of the very confined spaces found on even the largest gunboat (Slagle 1996:324).

On January 29, 1863, Admiral Porter ordered the *Eastport*, now a commissioned U.S. Navy ves-

sel, to join the “second division of ironclads,” a group of six gunboats that would operate under the command of Lieutenant Commander Phelps. In addition to the *Eastport*, the gunboats of the second division consisted of the *Benton*, *Tuscumbia*, *Indianola*, *Mound City* and *Tyler* (ORN I:24:192, 202). Porter was anxious to get the gunboats down river, writing to Phelps in Cairo:

On your arrival at this place, you will take command of the 2nd Division of ironclads. . . . Captain Walke will command the 1st Division, composed of the *Lafayette*, *Louisville*, *Baron De Kalb*, *Cincinnati*, *Carondelet*, “*Chillicothe*”, *Lexington* and *Conestoga*.

. . . You may if you desire it, take the *Choctaw*, when she is finished. although I think the *Eastport*, with her new battery one of the most desirable ships in the Squadron.

I desire the Commanders of each division to have a Ram, also a manageable vessel, that he may be moving about, regulating the positions of his division. Let me know your wishes on this subject and I will accommodate you. The *Choctaw* will not be ready for a month yet and I think you will like the *Eastport* the best. I want you here as soon as possible. Don't wait for paint. I will have you greased as soon as you arrive [ORN I:24:207].

The *Eastport* and several other boats were to depart Cairo before February, but a fire aboard the *Glide* had delayed the departure. Accompanied by the *General Lyons* and *New National*, the *Eastport* finally departed Cairo on February 2, 1863, but that very evening the *Eastport* struck a sandbar and broke several timbers in her bottom allowing water to rush in. To keep her from sinking, Phelps was forced to run the gunboat against the shore. There, he unloaded shot and shell and other heavy items onto barges and lightened the boat sufficiently to get her afloat and then he steamed back to Cairo. Inspection of the damage revealed that ten timbers along the hull beneath the boilers had been broken; this was the very same area where repairs had just been made. Phelps placed some of the blame on the lack of the thwartship hog chains which he had argued should be installed, but which the mechanics at Cairo had rejected as unnecessary. He, also, noted that the engineers were unable to keep up the required 140-to-150-pound head of steam needed to maintain steerage on the rapid river. He attributed

this to the poor design of the boilers, plus the “poor character” of the firemen (ORN I:24:312-313). At Cairo, it was estimated that these repairs, including the installation of new boilers, would take 4 to 6 weeks and would cost \$20,000 to \$25,000 (ORN I:24:314).

By this time, Seth Phelps was becoming despondent and dejected with the ill-fated *Eastport*. In his February 5 report on the accident, he told Admiral Porter that his pride was “somewhat touched with respect to the bottom of this vessel” and later, on February 7, he wrote Porter that “I can't divest myself of the prejudice belonging to our calling so as to shake off the idea of ill luck being the attendant of this vessel” (ORN I:24:314, 315). Phelps, however, retained confidence that, with the necessary repairs, the *Eastport* would be “the best vessel of the fleet” (ORN I:24:316). Captain Pennock ordered Phelps on February 10, 1863, “to proceed to St. Louis, MO. by first opportunity for the purpose of contracting for repairs to the boilers of the USS ‘Eastport’.” Two days later, Pennock ordered Phelps “to proceed to Cincinnati, Ohio, for the purpose of contracting for repairs to the boilers &c of the ‘Eastport’.” Having performed the duty assigned you, you will return to Cairo” (Phelps February 12, 1863).

Jay Slagle, in his biography of Seth Phelps, suggests that David Porter was friendly with Phelps, but never close (Slagle 1996). Some of Porter's correspondence, however, seems to indicate a serious concern for Phelps's feelings and the difficulties he was having with the *Eastport*. On February 14, Porter wrote Phelps:

Faint heart never won fair lady - so you must not get faint hereafter over the broken bottom of the “Eastport”. Go ahead and try it again. Get her up to St. Louis.- . . put the “Eastport” to rights.- Take off some of the iron on her and fit her thoroughly.- fill out her sides.- put in a new bottom and make her as good as new.- You will yet be in time for the grand finale.- If I had had the “Eastport” three weeks ago I could have made a name for her.- I pushed the “Indianola” past the batteries at Vicksburg last night under a heavy fire.- She finished what the Ram began and sunk the “Vicksburg”.- She will have a good time up Red River [Phelps February 14, 1863].

Porter, also, provided suggestions as to how to put the *Eastport* into fighting trim. On March 4, he wrote Phelps:

I am no admirer of the 50 pounder Parrot [sic] and would not have them if I could get anything else; but they are light guns and fire well when they go off. I studied the shape of the Eastport when I saw her, and she has too much iron on the weakest point, which is my objection to overloading her by strengthening her on the sides with wide "spandings", you may be able to make her bear weight, but not otherwise; this will take from her speed- You may do as you like about the stern guns,- though I would put 30 pounder Rifles there if they are to be had; the army 30 pounders-

She had better be tried with a lighter battery, say the 2-100 pound rifles, and four IX inch. Her best feature is her Ram power, which makes her I think the best vessel we have.- Do the best you can with her, but do lighten her...If you ever meet with Mr. Hart you can tell him that his mortar boats were perfect failures, not built at all according to my directions, and not strong enough for a 32 pounder;- much less a 13 in mortar. They leaked at the first fire, and after a few hour's fire were full of water- everything about them is badly arranged [Phelps March 4, 1863].

Admiral Porter had concerns about the other boats in the fleet as well and wrote to Phelps about them:

I have examined the "Lafayette" closely.- She is a great failure.- has no speed. and cannot handle. all because there is no clearance to her wheels. nor can we get any. without taking everything out of her.- She is a mass of iron and no Ram.- Any two quick working vessels would soon knock her to pieces.- We may remedy this in the "Choctaw". by only putting on iron where it is absolutely necessary.- If we cannot keep the wheels out of water. we must do without iron aft- . . .

It is too late to make any material alteration now on the "Choctaw." such as raising her guard. which none but a stupid would have placed under the water to impede her speed. when the great requisite for a Ram is speed.- The "Lafayette" is ironed in places where a shot would not likely hit once in a century.- In fitting out the "Choctaw" do not fill her with anchors and chains. I think the "Lafayette" has double allowance.- She has an extra wheel house on her weighing some tons. Her bell is enormous [Phelps March 6, 1863].

The *Choctaw*, *Lafayette* and *Eastport* were the three largest gunboats in the Mississippi Squadron. Like the *Eastport*, the other two boats were large, sidewheel steamers that were converted into ironclads (see Figure 2-30). Although all had problems, it seems that the *Eastport* was the most favored. She was thought to have the speed, armament, agility, and size necessary for success on the Western rivers. Interestingly, the 245-ft *Choctaw*, like the *Eastport*, was a New Albany-built boat that had served in the Tennessee River-New Orleans trade before the Civil War. In fact, among her pre-war owners were some of the same Florence-Tuscumbia men who owned the *Eastport*. In 1858, these included E.B. Martin, and the firms of Price & Simpson and McAlester, Simpson & Co. (WPA 1942:5:47). While Phelps was waiting for the *Eastport* to be repaired, Porter sent him to examine the construction of the *Choctaw* and *Lafayette*, apparently, assuming that Phelps experience with the *Eastport* would give him insight into any problems to be encountered. Admiral Porter, himself, already had ideas about the two boats, primarily, to make them as light as possible by keeping the armor to a minimum. Phelps reported that the civilian contractor was doing as well as he could on the two boats, and that any problems were coming from the naval officer overseeing the construction (Slagle 1996:327). This naval officer was Commodore William "Dirty Bill" Porter, brother of Admiral David Porter.

During part of the time the *Eastport* was laid up, Phelps was reassigned to the armed, sternwheel steamer *Champion* and, as commander of the naval forces on the Tennessee River, took part in activities against Confederate guerillas and in support of various Federal military actions. In addition, for a period of time he relieved the ill Captain Andrew Pennock as commander of the naval station at Cairo. Phelps was kept extremely busy during this period, directing operations on the Tennessee River, examining and purchasing steamers for the fleet, looking into questions about prize monies, relieving Andrew Pennock, in addition to keeping an eye on the repairs to the *Eastport*. Pennock, as well as Porter, placed heavy reliance on Phelps; Pennock writing Porter that Phelps had done so well on the Tennessee River that he thought he (Phelps) should be permanently assigned to that command and detached from the *Eastport* (ORN I:24:679).

The repairs to the *Eastport* required that all of her guns and ammunition be removed, a laborious

and time-consuming operation. Low water and shortages of labor, also, delayed the repairs and the boat did not go on the ways at Mound City until sometime in May and was not off until June 15. On June 16, 1863, Phelps reported that the “*Eastport* was safely launched last evening. Draft, forward 5 1/2 feet; aft 6 feet 3 inches. With all on board, will require just about the same water as the Pook’s” (ORN I:25:183). Phelps, finally, was pleased with the operation of the *Eastport*, writing:

I came down with the *Eastport* yesterday, making 7 miles in 36 minutes. I consider her a great success, and she is a better looking craft than ever. . . . I shall very soon be on the cruising ground between here [Cairo] and Helena [ORN I:25:183].

The almost 12 miles per hour reported by Phelps certainly would have made the *Eastport* among the fastest of all the gunboats. There were some unfinished repairs on the *Eastport* and Pennock ordered Phelps to St. Louis to “examine into the cause of the delay in the manufacture of the port blinds ordered some two months ago for the ‘Eastport’ . You will take such steps in the premises as you think advisable, and will then return to Cairo” (Phelps June 21, 1863). The work on the port blinds was being done by the American Iron Mountain Company of St. Louis. As of August 21, the company had charged over \$ 4,612 for building and fitting the blinds on the *Eastport* (Figure 2-33). The owner of the American Iron Mountain Company was the firm of Chouteau, Harrison and Valle. Jules Valle was the grandson of Col. Jean Baptiste Valle, Sr., the last Spanish and French commandant of the port of Ste. Genevieve. Jules Valle was one of the pioneers in developing the mineral resources of Iron Mountain in southeastern Missouri. Iron Mountain, measuring 200 ft high and covering 500 acres, had the largest mass and purest form of iron ore in the state. In 1852, Valle became one of the owners of the Iron Mountain Company and a partner in the Chouteau, Harrison & Valle firm. Another partner, James Harrison, had prospected over much of Missouri and knew of its immense mineral wealth before he moved to St. Louis in 1840. In 1843, Harrison became part owner of the Iron Mountain property and in 1845 organized the Iron Mountain Company (Scharf 1883:1264-1269; Walker 1992:7-19).

Admiral Porter kept Phelps in command of the naval forces along the Tennessee River (the Tennessee Division) and, also, placed him in command of

the Second Division of the Mississippi Squadron, responsible for patrolling the Mississippi as far south as Helena, Arkansas. On June 27, 1863, shortly after the *Eastport* left the ways at Mound City, a list of officers and a muster roll of the crew was posted. The muster of enlisted men is included in Appendix A, the list of officers, which is the most complete available for the *Eastport*, is provided in Table 2-8.

The *Eastport* left Cairo on July 3, and began operations on the Mississippi below Memphis with the other vessels of the Second Division. She was involved in few engagements, mainly serving in patrol, convey and support roles on the Mississippi around Helena, Memphis, New Madrid and Laconia. Captain Phelps very much wanted to put his gunboat into a major engagement, which he thought would occur in the area around Helena, which was an important supply base for the Union. He resisted taking the *Eastport* upriver to New Madrid to support the army in action against Confederate forces there, until he was directly ordered to do so (Slagle 1996:335). While Phelps was upriver at New Madrid, Vicksburg fell and there was, as he had expected, an attack on Helena. The action of the timberclad *Tyler* had helped save the Union defenders at Helena and Lieutenant Commander Phelps, who came down with the *Eastport* as soon as he heard of the battle, was angry at having missed it. In August, Porter ordered a reorganization of the Mississippi Squadron, placing the *Eastport* in the “Sixth District,” as the area between Cairo and Helena was now designated.

Lieutenant Commander Phelps was still in charge of the naval operations on the Tennessee River and during the summer and fall of 1863 was often involved in activities there, leaving the *Eastport* to its patrolling on the Mississippi. In October, Phelps was ordered by Porter to move up the Tennessee River as quickly as possible to aid General William T. Sherman, who was attempting to get his Army corps across the Tennessee near Tuscumbia. Taking the light draft gunboats *Hastings* and *Key West*, Phelps immediately started toward Tuscumbia, despite very low water on the Ohio and Tennessee. He had to resort to “grasshoppering” (using spars extended down over the bow to “vault” the boat forward) his two boats over sandbars, but he made it to Sherman’s headquarters on October 24. Sherman, whose army had been ordered East, was having a very difficult time in getting his men across the now-rising river. Phelps used his gunboats and coal barges to move the army and its wagons, horses and mules across the river. General Sherman was pleased and impressed

Office of
CHOUTEAU, HARRISON & VALLE,
 -AND-
AMERICAN IRON MOUNTAIN COMPANY,

St. Louis, Aug 22nd 1863

Capt. J. L. Phelps
 Cairo Ill
 & Co?

235

Enclosed we hand you the following bills for work furnished for several gunboats as follows:

| | | |
|---|--------|---------|
| U.S. Gunboat Tennessee May 24 th | 485 62 | |
| | 22 | 1007 92 |
| U.S. Gunboat Ebenezer June 6 th | | 1493 54 |
| U.S. Gunboat Eastport Aug 21 st | | 1853 3 |
| | | 4612 7 |

also Vouchers for same amounts, which please certify & put in proper shape.

We also enclose herewith the Bill of Marshall to showing the items of the charge for fitting Put down comprised in the account of Bill of U.S. Gunboat Eastport.

If you are not the proper party to certify to the inclosed Vouchers, please do us the favor to have it done for us & return them at your earliest convenience.

Truly Yours
 Chouteau, Harrison & Valle
 per [Signature]

Figure 2-33. Bill from the firm of Chouteau, Harrison & Valle for work on the USS Eastport (source: Phelps August 22, 1863).

with Phelps, stating "All I have he can command . . . We are as one" (Slagle 1996:340).

Seth Phelps returned to the Mississippi River and through the winter of 1863-1864 continued his task of patrolling. This work involved harassing Confederate guerillas and, also, trying to stop illicit trade, primarily in cotton, between the North and the South. Stopping the illegal trade was difficult, and it was commonly thought that some northern army officers were involved in the smuggling, or at least, aided it (Slagle 1996:340-

341). In November, while near Laconia, Mississippi, Acting Master Lyman Bartholomew and several crewmen from the *Eastport* boarded the steamer *Allen Collier*. A group of Confederate guerrillas attacked the *Collier*, captured the *Eastport's* men and set fire to the steamer. The ultimate fate of these men is unknown, but Porter wrote to Phelps that the "stupid fellow Bartholomew" was at fault and had gotten what he deserved (ORN I:25:536-537). This event occurred while Phelps was away, tending to his command responsibilities on the Tennessee River.

Table 2-11. List of Officers Attached to USS *Eastport*, January 1, 1864 (source: Porter 1984:548-549).

| | |
|----------------------------|---|
| Acting Assistant Surgeon | M.L. Gerould |
| Acting Assistant Paymaster | W.H. Gilman |
| Acting Ensigns | S. Poole, R.M. Williams and E.H. Qualding |
| Acting Masters' Mates | R.A. Day, R.A. Treat and B.W. Herr |
| Engineers: Acting Chief | Henry Hartwig |
| Acting First Assistants | T.F. Ackerman and John S. Moore; |
| Acting Second Assistants | G.N. Heizel |
| Acting Third Assistants | W.T. Baxter and J.F. Liddell; |
| Acting Gunner | J.F. Riblet; |
| Acting Carpenter | James Rouse |

On January 1, 1864, as part of the reorganization of the Mississippi Squadron, Phelps prepared a list of the officers of the *Eastport* for Captain Andrew Pennock (Table 2-11). A comparison with the other lists of officers shows that only two men remained from the first list posted at Helena in September 23, 1862. They were the Paymaster William Gilman and Chief Engineer Henry Hartwig.

The *Eastport* remained on station above Helena through February 1864. During the early part of 1864, the river gunboats were involved in monotonous patrol activity, and morale was low. The bored men got into trouble. While the captain of the ironclad *Mound City* was away, her remaining officers took the boat on a pillaging expedition, stealing from citizens along the river. Admiral Porter was outraged and had the perpetrators court-martialed. In Lieutenant Commander Phelps's Second Division one of the gunboats took on board some "ladies of Memphis" and steamed to the nearby town of Commerce where "they had high old doings, playing the devil on board and threatening the citizens country about" (Slagle 1996:346). In February the boredom ended as the fleet began to prepare for a major expedition up the Red River in Louisiana which was to begin in the late winter or early spring when the Red was high enough for the gunboats.

The Red River Campaign, March-April 1864

The last major campaign involving the *Eastport*, and the Mississippi Squadron as a whole, was the Red River Campaign in the spring of 1864. The Red River Campaign was a joint Army-Navy expedition

under the command of Major General Nathaniel P. Banks and Rear Admiral David D. Porter. The campaign evolved out of complex and constantly changing strategic decisions made during the winter of 1863 and 1864. With the fall of Vicksburg and Port Hudson in July 1863, the Union essentially controlled the Mississippi River and had the ability to cut off Confederate supplies from west of the river. With this control, Union commanders now had the luxury of making a choice as to what should be the next major objective of the war. General Ulysses S. Grant, commander of Union forces in the trans-Mississippi west and Maj. General Nathaniel P. Banks, commander of the Department of the Gulf, believed that Mobile, Alabama, should be the next objective. They were supported in this by Admiral David Farragut. Others, however, disagreed, including President Lincoln and General of the Army Henry W. Halleck. They argued that control of Texas was more important in advancing the defeat of the Confederacy. One element in their argument was their concern over what would happen in Mexico, which had just been successfully invaded by French troops. Their fear was that Ferdinand Maximilian Joseph, Louis Napoleon's puppet ruler in Mexico, would make some sort of alliance with the Confederacy, possibly giving France control over the Confederate states west of the Mississippi (Robinson 1991:1; Slagle 1996:343-344).

An additional factor considered by President Lincoln and his supporters was cotton. Huge quantities of cotton lay baled up at farms, plantations, and warehouses throughout Texas, western Louisiana and southwestern Arkansas. These stores of cotton had accumulated because of an inability to ship it to

market during much of the war. By early 1864, there was a cotton shortage in the North, the price had risen to well over \$1.00 per pound and northern mill owners were complaining. The capture of the Louisiana and Texas cotton would help satisfy the demands of the mills, it would bring millions of dollars into the Federal treasury, plus there was a possibility of making Texas a cotton-growing area for the North. It, also, would deprive the Confederacy's Trans-Mississippi Department of its major source of income for supporting the war effort (Johnson 1958; Slagle 1996:344).

General Grant was so opposed to the Red River plan that he had some of his staff officers to write Charles A. Dana, an assistant secretary of war, asking him to intercede with Secretary of War Edwin Stanton to overrule the plan for the campaign. Ultimately, however, Grant and the other western commanders acceded to President Lincoln's arguments and a plan was developed to carry out his wishes (Johnson 1958:44-45). In essence, the plan was to send a strong force up the Red River into northwestern Louisiana as far as Shreveport and then into East Texas (Figure 2-34). The planners thought that the campaign could be made quickly, leaving time for

an assault on Mobile in the summer. In fact, General Grant demanded that some of the army units being sent to Red River had to be returned to Memphis by April 15 to participate in the Atlanta campaign, even if it meant abandoning the Red River effort (Hearn 1996:244, 248). From the outset, the planned expedition had problems. The two commanders, Banks and Porter, did not like one another and Porter, in particular, thought that General Banks was incompetent. Their feelings of animosity increased during and after the campaign. In addition, the command structure of the campaign was not clearly established such that neither Banks nor Porter was in overall command. This created some confusion during the course of the expedition.

The Red River Campaign was a very complicated one that involved bringing together a number of forces from widely dispersed areas. The Union proposal called for a powerful column of 22,000 soldiers based in New Orleans to advance to the Red River from the south under the command of General Banks. Other forces under General Frederick Steele were to march from Little Rock, Arkansas, and join Banks' army on the upper Red River; plus, a third force, commanded by Gen-

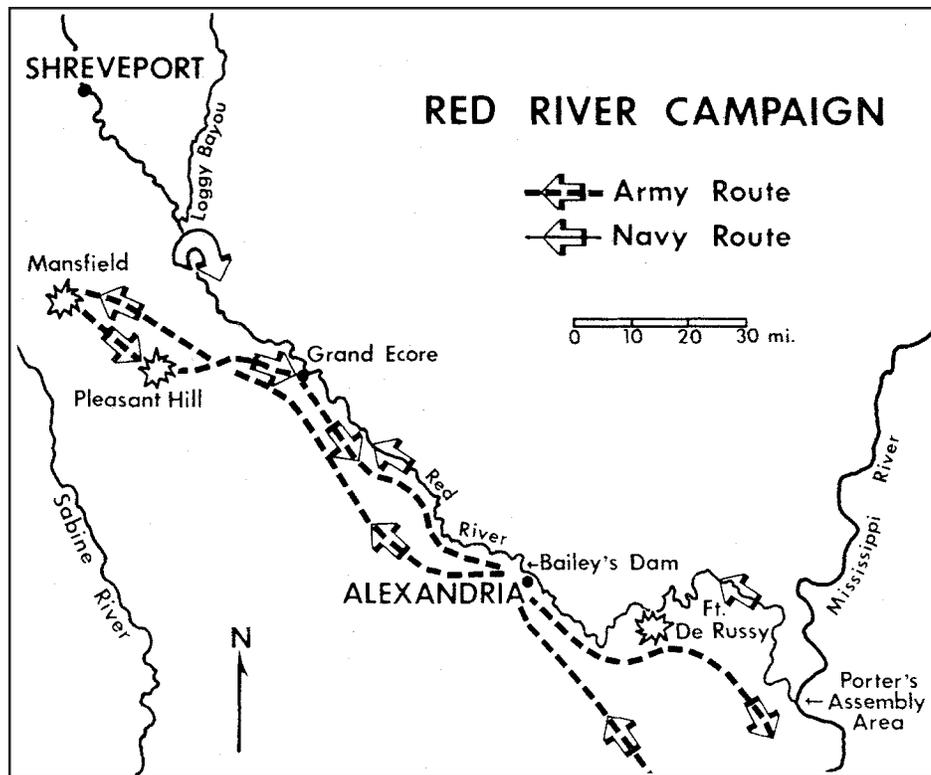


Figure 2-34. Map of the Red River Campaign (source: Smith and Castille 1986:3).

eral A.J. "Whiskey" Smith, and consisting of 11,000 soldiers detached from Sherman's army at Vicksburg, was to come by transport down the Mississippi and join Banks' army as it moved up the Red River. These land forces were to be accompanied by a major naval fleet composed of 25 gunboats, plus transports and supply vessels of the Mississippi Squadron led by the *Eastport* and under the command of Admiral Porter.

Opposing the Union were Confederate forces of General E. Kirby Smith's Trans-Mississippi Department under the command of Lieutenant General Richard Taylor (Johnson 1958:346-347). Taylor was the son of President Zachary Taylor and brother to Sara Knox, Jefferson Davis' first wife. Taylor fought with Stonewall Jackson in the Shenandoah Valley and was considered a capable and imaginative soldier (Johnson 1958:347). However, Richard Taylor was notoriously difficult to get along with and the animosity that developed between the two senior Confederate commanders was probably greater than that between the Union commanders, Banks and Porter. Taylor reportedly developed "an abiding dislike and contempt" for Kirby Smith and his policies (Johnson 1958:88).

Taylor had only about 6,000 troops scattered throughout his District of Western Louisiana, but neither he nor Kirby Smith believed that Grant would actually commit a large Union force up the Red River. As late as March 13, General Kirby Smith had written Taylor "that the enemy cannot be so infatuated as to occupy a large force in this department when every man should be employed east of the river" (ORA 34:489). When it became obvious that Federal forces were going to move up the Red, Taylor quickly began to gather his dispersed forces to oppose the advance while waiting for reinforcements from Texas so he could eventually make a stand (Smith and Castille 1986:4). He, also, pushed forward the completion of Fort De Russy on the lower Red River, although he was not confident of its ability to stop the Union advance (Johnson 1958:88)..

The Union Army commander for the expedition, Major General Nathaniel P. Banks, was a Massachusetts politician, former governor of the state and former Speaker of the United States House of Representatives. Even though he had initially opposed the Red River expedition, the idea of capturing large amounts of cotton was certainly amenable to him because he was closely tied to northern textile mill owners, in fact he was derisively called "Bobbin Boy Banks."

Banks had no prewar military experience and as commander of the Department of the Gulf in New Orleans he had been tasked with the political reorganization of Louisiana, because of his political background. While in New Orleans, Banks did attempt to secure as much Confederate cotton as possible for the benefit of the Federal treasury. Although not in exact compliance with the law, General Banks made it a practice to sell all of the products of the country capture by his troops in various campaigns in Louisiana and Texas. Between May 1863 and May 1864 he was able to bring in about one million dollars from this practice, using the money to defray his departmental expenses (Johnson 1958:55). The Navy commander, Rear Admiral Porter, although very hesitant about committing his vessels far up the shallow, and often dangerous, Red River to Shreveport, also, was anxious to obtain the abundant supplies of cotton stored there as a prize of war. For Porter, the capture of cotton would bring personal financial reward.

Although the Red River Campaign was a military failure, in fact almost a disaster, the Navy was successful in capturing large amounts of cotton. In late 1864, congressional hearings were held to ascertain why the Red River expedition had been such a debacle. A considerable amount of the testimony at the hearing was related to the activities of both the Army and Navy in trying to obtain cotton (Johnson 1958; Landers 1936). Testimony revealed that during the campaign Porter's men roamed the countryside collecting cotton. It was reported that they stenciled the letters "CSA" on bales of cotton to falsely show they belonged to the Confederate government and then added the letters "USN" to demonstrate the cotton's capture by the United States. Captain Thomas Selfridge, of the ironclad *Osage*, admitted that his men, in fact, did mark cotton with such stencils. The Navy's efforts to capture cotton were so blatant that one testifier before the committee noted that these stenciled letters stood for "Cotton Stealing Association of the United States Navy" (Hearn 1996:247; Landers 1936:173). Captain W.W. Withenbury, a long time Red River pilot and steamboat captain, was with the expedition as a pilot and he stated he personally saw sailors plying the stencils and knew that much of the cotton marked actually belonged to private planters who did not necessarily support the Confederacy (Landers 1936:175). General Banks even stated that Porter sent men "from the vessels to put cotton-gins in operation and to gin cotton. This was done under the prize-laws" (Landers 1936:172). Admiral Porter denied all of these charges and stated that all of

the cotton captured by the Navy as a prize of war was “right on the river bank” (Landers 1936:171).

Expressive of General Banks’ and the Army’s interest in obtaining cotton during the expedition is the report that the steamboat which Banks came to Red River on “was loaded with cotton speculators, bagging, roping, champagne and ice” (Landers 1936:164). Landers (1936:162) notes that Banks may have been a supporter of the Red River Campaign all along, possibly with his eye on the capture of cotton. In January 1864, Banks had responded in agreement to General Halleck’s plans for the expedition up Red River and it was only later that he claimed to have always been against it. The congressional hearings did ascertain that a number of cotton speculators went to Red River during the campaign with authority to acquire cotton, but there was great argument over who gave that authority. Some stated that they saw documents signed by the President himself; Admiral Porter testified that he saw at least one permit to collect cotton signed by General Banks. Many indicated that General Banks was tied in with a “ring” of speculators and politicians who intended to profit from the seized cotton. However, Banks would not personally profit from the capture of cotton because, unlike the Navy, the Army had no legal rights to captured goods under prize laws. But he would achieve publicity and fame for bringing millions of dollars into the public treasury when the cotton was sold by the government (Johnson 1958:47). Ultimately, Admiral Porter summarized the entire Red River expedition as “a big cotton raid . . . I know that cotton destroyed the whole expedition. If there had been no cotton we could and probably would have gone to Shreveport” (Landers 1936:174).

The Campaign Begins, March 1864

In mid-February, the Mississippi Squadron commanders received special orders (Figure 2-35) from Admiral Porter to prepare to start up the Red River anytime after the 25th of February. The size of the naval force is reflected in Porter’s statement that he intended “to take along every iron-clad vessel in the fleet” (Phelps February 13, 1864). To prepare for the campaign, Phelps was replaced in his command of the Tennessee Division by Lieutenant James Shirk. On February 25, the *Eastport* was at the mouth of the White River, but word was that the Red had still not risen, so there was no rush to get down the river. Towing a barge of coal, the *Eastport* arrived at Natchez on March 1, where James Greer, captain of the gunboat *Benton*, reported seeing her with several other

vessels waiting for the water to rise on Red River (Slagle 1996:348-349). On the trip down, Phelps noted that the *Eastport* was “running even better than anticipated” (Slagle 1996:349). He, also, seemed to feel his crew was well prepared and he wrote his wife that he very much liked his new First Lieutenant, Acting Ensign Sylvester Poole (Slagle 1996:350).

On March 5, Phelps received word from Porter to hurry down the Mississippi, the water on the Red had risen. On the 11th, Admiral Porter’s fleet rendezvoused at the mouth of Red River, the most powerful gathering of river gunboats since Vicksburg. The vessels included the armored monitors *Ozark*, *Osage*, and *Neosho*; the gunboats *Eastport*, *Black Hawk*, *Champion*, *Ouachita*, *Fort Hindman*, *Tyler* and *Cricket*; the armed rams *Choctaw*, *Lafayette*, and *Price*; and the ironclads *Benton*, *Carondelet*, *Chillicothe*, *Essex*, *Louisville*, *Mound City*, and *Pittsburg*. Some of the gunboats, such as the *Eastport* were true ironclads, but others, such as the *Fort Hindman*, *Champion* and *Cricket*, were lightly armored vessels, known as “tinclads.” Alfred Phelps, younger brother of Seth Phelps, commanded one of the gunboats in the flotilla, the sternwheel, tinclad USS *Champion*. There were also other vessels in the fleet, including quartermaster boats, Army transports and other support vessels such as tugs and pump boats. Joining Porter’s fleet on March 11 were 20 transports carrying General Smith’s 11,000 veteran and battle-tested troops of the First and Second Divisions of the Sixteenth Army Corps and the First and Fourth Divisions of the Seventeenth Corps from Vicksburg (Flinn 1887:93). (Johnson [1958] notes that Smith had 10,000 men on 21 transports and Hoel [1973] reports Smith’s troops came on 18 vessels.) Ulysses Grant, who had opposed the entire Red River operation, was promoted to general-in-chief of the Union Army on March 12, the day after Porter’s fleet gathered at the mouth of the Red. But the campaign had already been set in motion and Grant made no attempt to halt it at such a late date (Johnson 1958:80).

William Hoel, commander of the ironclad *Pittsburg*, has left a diary of the Red River Campaign. According to Captain Hoel, he proceeded to the mouth of the Red River from Natchez on Saturday March 5, 1864, and:

Arrived at the mouth of Red River at 1 a.m. [March 6] where we found the BLACK HAWK (flag ship), CHOCTAW, OZARK, OSAGE, CHILLICOTHE, MOUND CITY, LEXINGTON, FORT HINDMAN, CRICKET, GENL. BRAGG,

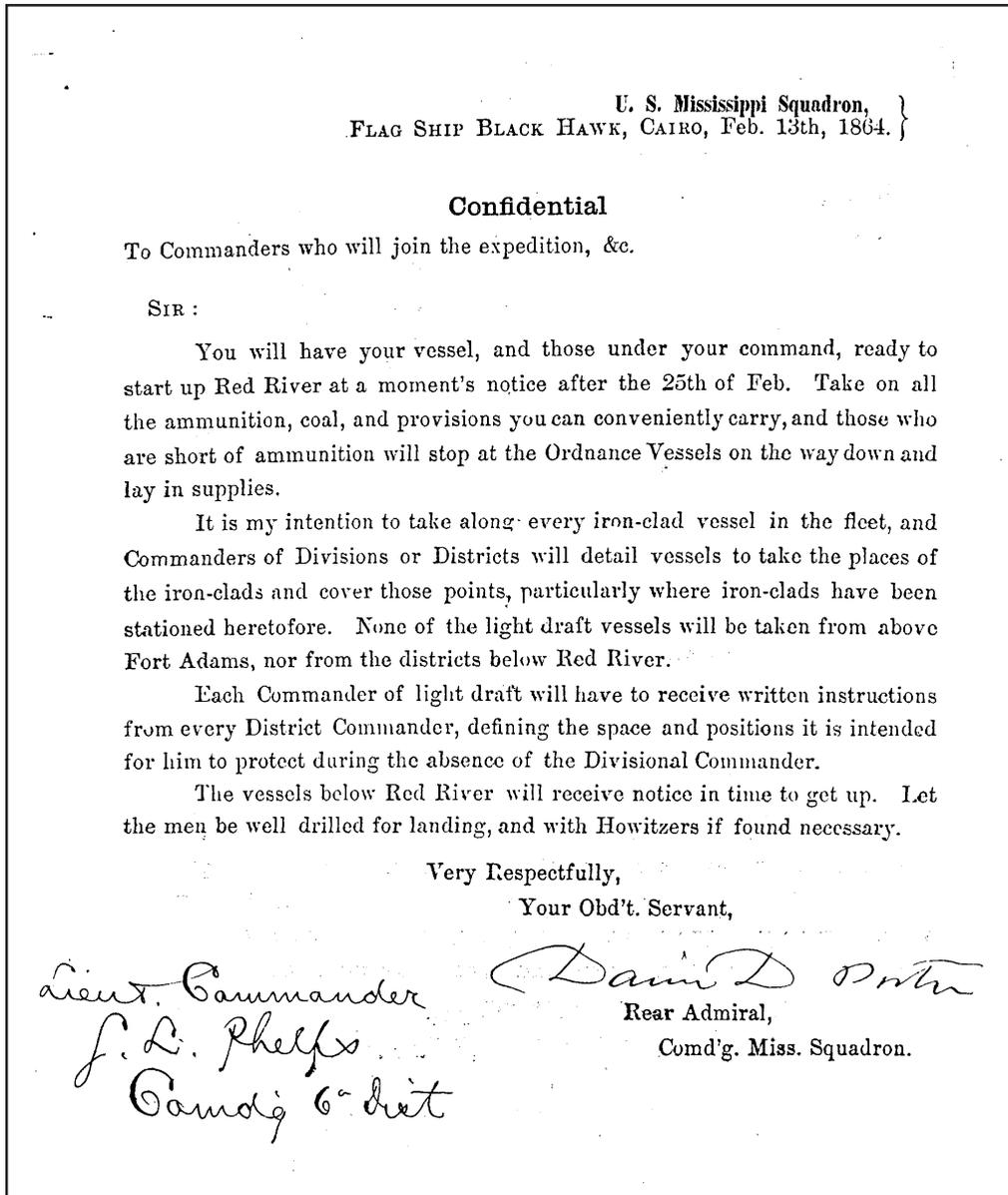


Figure 2-35. Official Orders from Rear Admiral David D. Porter, Commanding Mississippi Squadron, to all commanders to prepare for the Red River Campaign (source: Phelps February 13, 1864).

and LITTLE REBEL. During the day the EASTPORT, LAFAYETTE, and GENL. PRICE arrived. Breakfasted with the Admiral. . . . The LOUISVILLE arrived [Hoel 1973:11].

On Friday, March 11, Hoel noted that "Genl. A.J. Smith arrived with 18 transports full of troops. Received orders to be ready to leave for Red River early in the morning" (Hoel 1973:11). The stage was now set for the start of the campaign. General

Banks' troops, led by General Franklin, were on the move from New Orleans along Bayou Teche and through Opelousas, Louisiana, to join with the naval forces at Alexandria (Flinn 1887:93).

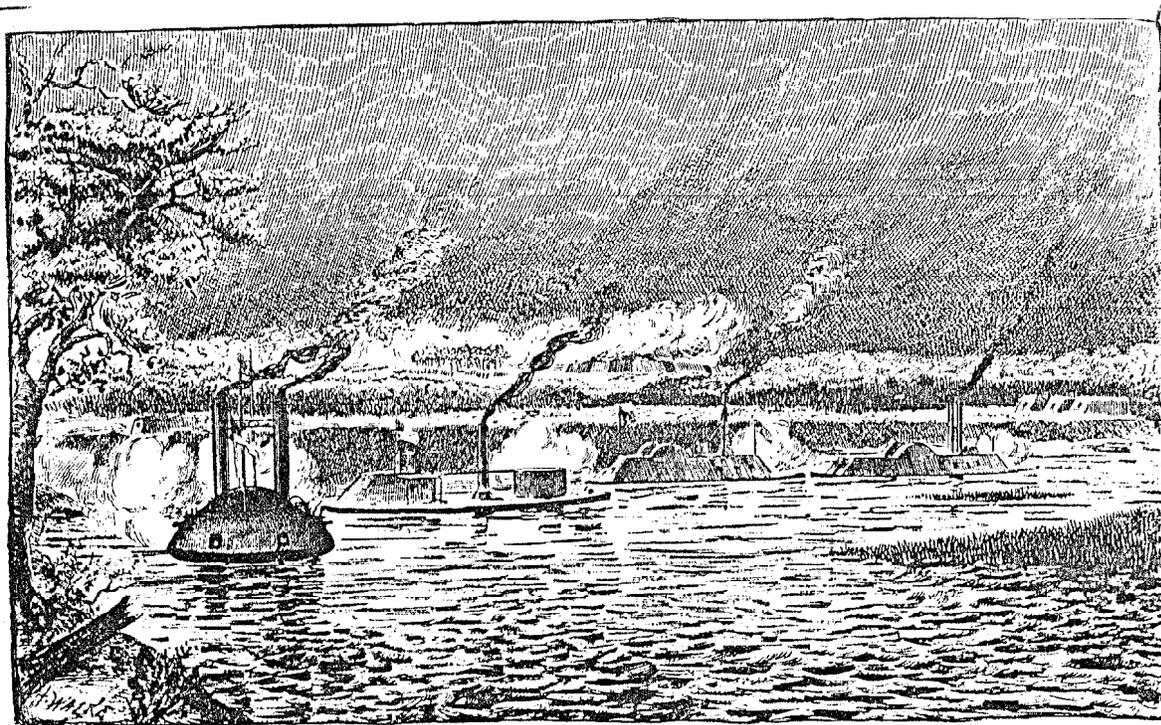
At 10 a.m., Saturday, March 12, the fleet got underway and moved up Red River. Captain Hoel (1973:11) notes that they arrived at the small town of Simmesport on the Atchafalaya River in the early afternoon where General Smith's men disembarked.

Smith would take his men overland and attack Fort De Russy, the only significant Confederate fortification on the lower Red River, from the rear. The flotilla then proceeded on up the Red; the *Eastport* taking the lead. Lieutenant Commander James Greer, captain of the *Benton*, who was the senior officer present when the second wave of gunboats moved up the river on March 13 cautioned his commanders to “Show no lights to-night, beat no drums, and as long as I am senior officer do not strike the bell” (ORN I:26:24).

The first military objective of the Federal forces was Fort De Russy, a small Confederate fortification on Red River near the town of Marksville (see Figure 2-34). The fleet had to break through obstructions that the Confederates had built across the river a few miles below the fort. Phelps, who was leading the fleet with the *Eastport*, described the obstructions as consisting of “piles, driven across the river, supported by a second tier of shorter ones, on which rested braces and ties from the upper ones. Immediately below these is a raft of timber well se-

cured across the river and made of logs.” Phelps used the *Fort Hindman* to remove part of the obstruction then, taking advantage of the *Eastport*’s heavy ram, he drove the gunboat hard against the pilings, tied a large hawser around the piles and backed off. Alternately ramming and pulling, it took most of the day of March 14 for the *Eastport* to tear away the obstruction. When the obstruction was removed, the *Eastport* and the ironclad monitor *Neosho* were the first vessels through. At sunset, *Eastport*, *Osage*, *Fort Hindman* and *Cricket* reached Fort De Russy (Figure 2-36) (ORN I:26:25, 30). The fort, defended by only about 350 men, was already under attack by Smith’s land forces and the *Eastport* fired only a few well-placed rounds to let the defenders know the gunboats were present and ready. The Confederate defenders soon surrendered.

Some of the land forces reboarded transports at Fort De Russy, and the Army and most of the Navy vessels continued up the river; some boats having been left on the lower Red and on the Atchafalaya. The *Eastport* arrived at Alexandria late on the after-



MASKED BATTERY. "BENTON," FLAG-SHIP. GEN. A. J. SMITH'S ARMY ASSAILING THE FORT. MONITOR "OSAGE." FORT. GUN-BOAT. "FORT HINDMAN." IRON-CLAD. RAM "EASTPORT." CASEMATED FORTS AND RIFLE PITS.

CAPTURE OF FORT DE RUSSY.

Figure 2-36. Capture of Fort De Russy. The *Eastport* is shown as the lead gunboat on the far right (source: Porter 1984:498).

noon of March 15 and Phelps landed a small force of sailors and marines to occupy the town (Slagle 1996:357). Phelps had hoped to cut off the retreating Confederates, but Taylor had already abandoned Alexandria and the last of the Confederate steamers were seen going upriver when the first Federal boats arrived. Most of the other members of the Union fleet arrived in Alexandria on March 15 and 16 and the land forces, also, began to arrive, but the last infantry units did not get to Alexandria until March 26, having been delayed by rain. General Banks had arrived by steamboat on March 24. When all of the expedition assembled at Alexandria it numbered nearly 30,000 troops with 90 guns; 13 ironclads, four tinclads and five other armed vessels, mounting a total of 210 guns; plus about 40 assorted Army transport and quartermaster vessels (Johnson 1958:100; Smith and Castille 1986:4). This force represented the greatest military gathering that the southwest had ever seen.

The Red River was still unusually low when the fleet arrived at Alexandria, and Porter and his captains were worried about crossing the rapids that stretched across the river just above the town. The rapids, formed by ridges of siltstone, had always been an impediment to navigation above Alexandria and, during low water, large vessels were unable to pass over them (Pearson and Wells 1999). Captain Hoel was ordered to examine the conditions at the rapids and found only 6 ft of water over the rocks (Hoel 1973:12). However, the river was making a slight rise because of rain and, by March 26, Hoel was able to report 8 ft of water at the rapids. While the fleet waited for the river to rise, Lieutenant Commander Phelps kept the *Eastport* on the north side of the Red at the town of Pineville opposite Alexandria. He found “a big disgust from the doings of the army” and wanted to stay away from the “political generals” (i.e., General Banks). While anchored at Pineville, Phelps gave food from the *Eastport*’s mess stores to some of the needy families he met, acts which he wrote got him in trouble with his cook, Louis Jacoby (Slagle 1996:359).

Despite Phelps complaints about the Army, it was during the fleet’s forced delay in Alexandria that Porter had his sailors collect over 6000 bales of cotton and load it on transports to carry to Cairo as prize of war. General Banks reported that on the day he arrived in Alexandria, he found Porter’s sailors already hauling cotton from the countryside. Raw cotton was brought to gins near the river where sailors ginned and baled it; Admiral Porter reportedly saying “Jack

made very good cotton bales” (Johnson 1958:102). Captain Deming Welch, assistant quartermaster at Alexandria, reported to his superior in New Orleans that “The navy is seizing all the cotton they can get hold of. . . . Every gun-goat is loaded with cotton, and the officers are taking it without regard to the loyalty of the owners. It looks to me like a big steal” (ORA 34:655). Outside of Alexandria, Taylor’s troops and local citizens began to burn cotton to keep it out of Union hands. General Banks was outraged by the entire spectacle, in part because it was demoralizing to the Army troops who could not participate in prize of war payments. But, also, Banks had hoped to personally obtain the cotton for the benefit of the government treasury. As a further complication, Banks was pressured by the number of cotton buyers, brokers and speculators who had come to Red River with hopes of becoming involved in cotton purchases as agents for the government. Banks, apparently, never gave any of these speculators any special privileges, but he had no control over those who had obtained permission from higher authorities to buy cotton, including some with permits supposedly signed by the President (Johnson 1958:105).

Despite previously boasting that he could take his fleet “wherever the sand was damp,” Admiral Porter was reluctant to move his boats above the rapids because of the low water and his fear that they could not come back down (Johnson 1958:107). General Banks, however, insisted that the gunboats were essential to reaching Shreveport and Porter agreed to try to move his fleet over the falls. The *Eastport* was the largest vessel in the fleet and Porter decided to send her across first. The admiral wanted his most formidable gunboat across first because reports indicated that the Confederate ironclad *Missouri* was somewhere above. Porter believed that the *Eastport*’s ram and 100-pounder Parrott guns would be more than a match for the Confederate gunboat. Seth Phelps, also, very much wanted to be across first, anxious to get his gunboat into real action. Experienced local pilot, Wellington W. Withenbury, assigned to take the *Eastport* across, told Porter that the river was still too low and the boat would ground. Porter, however, ordered him to try, and Withenbury’s concerns were born out. At noon on March 26, the *Eastport* started across the rapids and soon ran aground in the main chute through the rapids, blocking the channel (Hoel 1973:12; Landers 1936:165). Using steam tugs and some of the lighter gunboats, as well as troops pulling on lines, it required two and a half days of hard work to haul the large gunboat over

into deeper water. The remaining ironclads, unwieldy in the rapid current, were all successfully towed across the rapids by the end of March. The hospital ship *Woodford* was so battered in attempting to cross the rapids that she sank. Eventually, Porter was forced to leave part of his squadron behind and proceed upriver with 12 gunboats and 30 transports (Smith and Castille 1986:5).

On March 29, the *Eastport*, *Louisville*, *Osage* and *Pittsburg* got underway and started up the Red. Low water seriously slowed the boats' progress and they only traveled 10 miles the first day (Hoel 1973:12). As the fleet proceeded upriver, Phelps noted that black smoke filled the sky, coming from cotton which the retreating Confederates were burning. By this time, the fleet had expended its coal supply and had to rely on wood for fuel. In the evenings, boats would stop and men were sent ashore to gather fence rails (National Archives 1864b). Captain Selfridge of the *Osage* noted that the boats were so dependent on fence rails that the Confederates would have been better off to burn fences rather than cotton (Johnson and Buel 1888:4:463).

The Red had still not experienced its traditional spring rise and low water continued to plague the fleet; Captain Hoel writing that boats ran aground many times as they proceeded upriver. General Bank's land forces reached Natchitoches, about half way between Alexandria and Shreveport, on April 1 and Porter's reduced squadron began to arrive at Grand Ecore, the nearby river landing, two days later (see Figure 2-34). Porter, himself, had remained in Alexandria and Phelps was temporarily in charge of the fleet. In his diary, Captain Hoel noted that the Confederates had placed "torpedoes," or submerged mines, in the river hoping to disable or sink Union ships. On April 2, Landsman James Powell, who was keeping the *Eastport's* log on the 8 a.m. to 12 noon watch, noted that Masters Mate R.A. Day had taken the second cutter out to "sweep the river for Torpedoes" (National Archives 1864b).

By April 4, some of the vessels had moved above Grand Ecore; Porter had arrived the day before aboard the flagship *Cricket* and resumed command of the squadron. On his arrival, Porter wrote to Phelps ordering him to take the *Eastport* upriver and take command of those vessels that had gone on ahead (Figure 2-37). Porter was still extremely worried about the low water, telling Phelps to "Keep your lead going all the time from the time you start" (Phelps April 3, 1864). The deck log from the *Eastport* records

that the boat got underway from Grand Ecore at 5 a.m. on April 4, but that "the great number of sand bars & points and low stage of water make it very difficult to proceed" (National Archives 1864b). The big gunboat grounded at noon and the current swung her across the channel. Finally, on the following morning (April 5) the transport steamers *South Western* and *Sioux City* were able to pull the *Eastport* free and she continued upriver (National Archives 1864b). By noon, the *Eastport* had grounded again. That afternoon, the steamer *Brown* took a line and was able to pull the *Eastport* off, and this time the gunboat turned back toward Grand Ecore; Phelps had determined that she could proceed no farther up the river. The *Eastport* arrived back at Grand Ecore that evening, having run aground again in the afternoon. The river continued to fall and many were afraid the ships would be trapped; Captain Hoel noted that there was "a fair prospect of remaining here the coming summer" (Hoel 1973:13).

During the entire voyage upriver, the Union vessels were plagued by Confederate rifle and artillery fire from groups of soldiers hidden along the banks of the Red. On April 6, Hoel wrote "Learned of the death of Capt. Couthuoy, of the *Chillicothe*, who had been killed on the 4th by a rebel bushwacker, who had shot him from the bank of the river while the vessel was underway just below Campte" (Hoel 1973:13).

Because of the falling river, Porter decided to leave his larger gunboats at Grand Ecore, including the *Eastport*, and proceed toward Shreveport with only six light-draft gunboats and a number of transport steamers. The gunboats consisted of the river monitors *Neosho* and *Osage*, the tinclads *Cricket* and *Fort Hindman* and the timberclad *Lexington*. The admiral planned to rendezvous with the army at Shreveport. Phelps remained behind at Grand Ecore in command of the heavier gunboats. On April 8, two days after leaving Natchitoches, the land units of General Banks forces were attacked near the community of Mansfield by General Taylor's forces (see Figure 2-37). Bank's troops retreated in some disorder to Pleasant Hill, leaving behind over 2,000 men, 156 wagons, and 20 pieces of artillery. The next afternoon Taylor attacked again and this time, after initial success, the Confederates were beaten back by a counterattack from the seasoned veterans under General A.J. Smith. Despite an apparent victory, Banks decided to retreat that night to Grand Ecore. General Banks was later criticized for his actions during the Red River Campaign and even-

Report to Capt Phelps also apt. 25th
 dated March 24th
 n 24th

Mississippi Squadron
 Flag Ship Cricket
 April 3rd 1863

755

Sir

You will proceed up river at daylight
 and take command of the forces sent on
 ahead, sounding as you go up and
 examining every bar as you go up
 carefully, before it is crossed.
 Have the bar dragged all the way across,
 after getting through the worst place, and
 running not over (40) forty miles; send the
 Hindman to report.
 Keep your ~~best~~ head going all the time
 from the time you start.

Very Respectfully,
 Your Obedient Servant
 David D Porter
 Rear Admiral.

Lieut. Commandr }
 "V. L. Phelps" }
 Comdr. Eastport. }

Figure 2-37. Admiral Porter's April 3, 1864, order sending Lieutenant Commander Phelps with the *Eastport* above Grand Ecore. The letter is misdated "1863" (source: Phelps April 3, 1864).

tually eased out of his field command (Johnson 1958).

During this time, Admiral Porter was slowly working his way upstream toward Shreveport, unaware of Bank's problems. By April 10 he had reached Springfield Landing, about 30 miles below Shreveport. Proceeding above the landing, about a mile upriver of the entrance to Loggy Bayou, he found that the Confederates had sunk the large, 301-ft-long

steamboat *New Falls City* across the Red River, completely blocking the channel. The Rebels had left a note on the *New Falls City* inviting the Yankees to a ball in Shreveport (ORN I:26:60). As Porter prepared to remove the obstruction, he received dispatches from General Banks telling him of the previous days fighting and that the army was retreating to Grand Ecore. Porter notified his captains that they had to turn their vessels around and start down river. The descent proved more difficult than the trip upriver

because the Confederate forces now felt strong enough to line the high banks, directing musket and artillery fire on the gunboats and the accompanying transports. In a report to the Secretary of the Navy, Admiral Porter described the harassing fire of the Confederates, noting:

... as we proceeded down river they increased in numbers . . . they could cross from point to point, and be ready to meet us on our arrival below. On the left bank of the river a man by the name of Harrison, with 1,900 cavalry and four or five pieces of artillery, was appointed to follow us down and annoy us [ORN I:26:51].

Porter went on to describe a particularly nasty incident on April 12 when his boats were attacked by a large group of Confederates (Figure 2-38) that he said were “flushed with victory or under the excitement of liquor” (ORN I:26:52). The *Osage* opened fire on the “poor deluded wretches,” but they kept coming to the edge of the bank “only to be cut down by grapeshot and canister” (ORN I:26:52). This fighting broadened to include other Confederate troops and the other gunboats. In the battle, Confederate General Thomas Green was beheaded by a shot from one of the Federal gunboats. Porter claimed that when they later inspected the bodies of the dead Confederates they smelled of “Louisiana rum.”

A pontoon bridge was placed across the Red at Grand Ecore and some of General Smith’s troops crossed the river to try to clear the harassing Confederates from the east (north) bank. The deck log of the *Eastport* noted that the vessel had loaned a “small kedge anchor to anchor [the] bridge with” (National Archives 1864b). The forced wait at Grand Ecore, while other boats of the fleet were in action up the river, certainly irked Lieutenant Commander Phelps, and the constant and seemingly never ending problems of the *Eastport* must have worn on his crew. Tensions among the crew flared on April 13 when Thomas Atwell, Ship’s Corporal, struck Surgeon’s Steward William Root. Phelps had Atwell “confined in double irons on bread and water” for his attack (National Archives 1864b).

Porter’s flagship *Cricket* reached Grand Ecore on April 13 and the rest of the boats had arrived safely by April 15. By this time the river was falling steadily and Porter realized that he had to quickly move his boats below the rapids at Alexandria or risk having them trapped. Admiral Porter, also, had no confi-

dence in General Banks. Porter expressed his concerns in a letter to General William T. Sherman: “I am not sure that Banks will not sacrifice my vessels now to expediency; that is, his necessities. I only wish, dear general, that you had taken charge of this Red River business” (ORN I:26:58).

Porter gave orders to his captains to start dropping down the river. On April 13, Red River pilot William Thompson had come aboard the *Eastport* and the following afternoon at 1 o’clock the boat cast off and “steamed down the river” (National Archives 1864b). The journey wasn’t very long; the *Eastport* ran “hard aground” after about one mile. Captain Hoel of the *Pittsburg* recorded the event, noting that he moved “a couple of miles” below Grand Ecore on April 14, and “got over the bar without difficulty but rubbed hard; the *Eastport* in following me stuck fast” (Hoel 1973:14). Hoel spent that evening on board the grounded *Eastport* with other captains of the fleet.

All hands worked to get the *Eastport* free and she finally crossed the shallows at 10 o’clock on the morning of April 15 (National Archives 1864b). Porter realized the problems for the big gunboat and on the 15th sent Phelps the message that he was “getting the gun-flat ready to send down to you in the morning so you can put the guns on her. Distribute the weight very carefully on the flat” (Phelps April 15, 1864). Phelps cautiously steamed down river that afternoon, at about 3:30 passing the *Ozark*, which was aground. Shortly afterwards, the deck log of the *Eastport* noted:

... at 4:20 [p.m.] discerned water in our fore hold - rigged our syphon pump and 3 hand pumps on the forecastle - At 5 o’clock U.S.S. “Lexington” came alongside and ran her syphon on board of us - she also rigged a hand pump for us - all hands at the pumps [National Archives 1864b].

The speculation was that the *Eastport* had struck a submerged “torpedo,” or mine, although the explosion had not been obvious to most on board and it had not stopped the boat’s headway. In a report on April 16, Admiral Porter noted:

The damage was slight, and the shock only noticed by a few persons on board, and it was not for some time after they found water in her hold. She was five hours sinking, but we had no pumps that could save her. The captain forgot

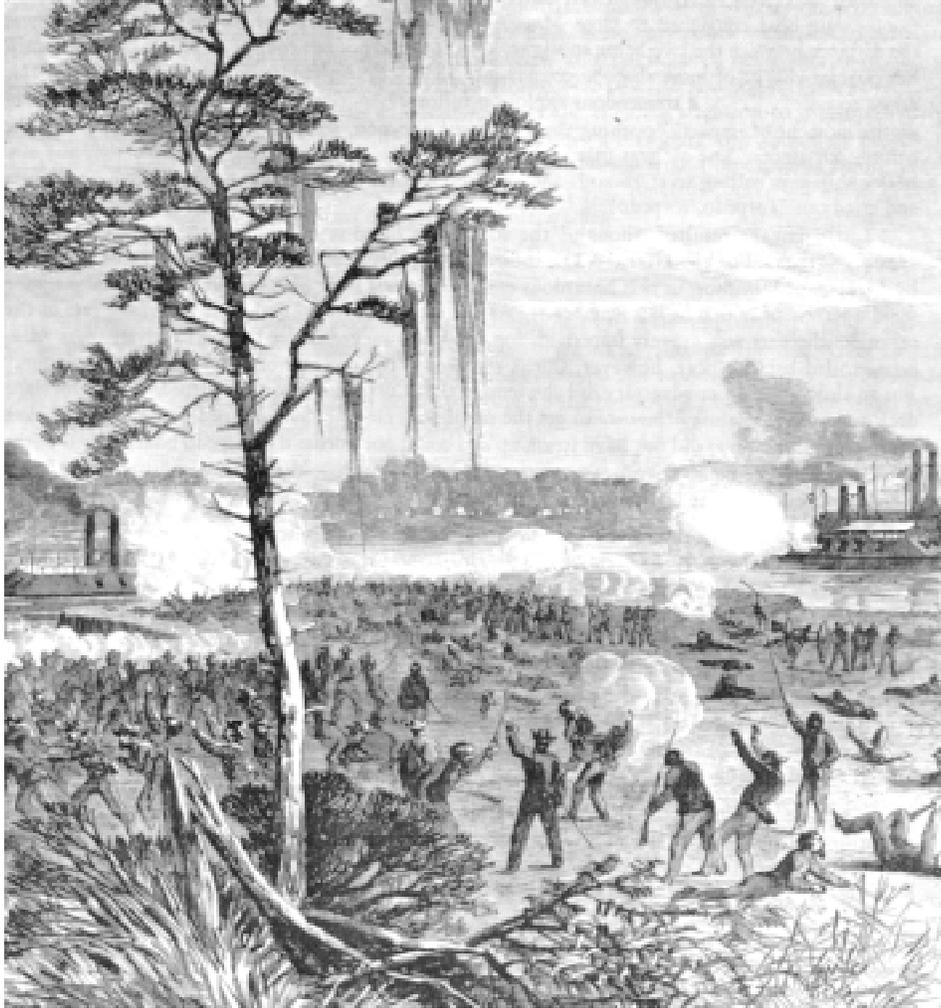


Figure 2-38. Confederate troops attacking Porter's gunboats from the banks of the Red River (source: Naval History Division 1971:IV-40).

to put canvas under her bottom, which would have saved her [ORN I:26:62].

Porter's criticism of Phelps for not putting "canvas under her bottom" represents one of the few times that the admiral ever voiced any disapproval of the *Eastport's* captain. In subsequent comments, Porter always praised Seth Phelps for all of his actions, including his efforts to save his vessel. In a report to Admiral Porter in late April, Phelps more carefully described the incident:

At the time of the accident the vessel was drifting over shoal water (1 foot more than her draft), the wheels not turning, and the headway scarcely more than the current. The shock forward threw the leadsman from his

balance, and he was near falling overboard, while in my cabin aft I scarcely felt it, and only noticed it as a peculiar trembling sensation. We had already burst three of the enemy's torpedoes in the vicinity, two of them by small boats, neither of which were injured by the explosion, and in neither case was there much, if any, report.

The *Eastport* was of great strength in her bottom, and it is impossible that she should have been so torn by drifting upon snags. The severe character of the blow at the injured extremity and its slight character elsewhere, together with the fact of her headway not having been checked, nor the direction of her course altered, are proofs that it must have been one of the small torpe-

does that did the damage. After raising her we had additional proof in the shattered condition of the bottom [ORN I:26:78].

“Torpedoes,” as they were commonly called in the Civil War, would today be described as mines. The Confederacy began developing and using mines early in the war; in July 1861 mines were set in the Potomac River to try to destroy Union boats (Perry 1965:3). Ultimately, some 50 ships would be sunk by mines during the war, only one of which was a Confederate ship sunk by a Federal mine. In fact, Confederate mines sank more Union naval vessels than did all the warships of the Confederate Navy. The first torpedoes to be built were crude, but much more sophisticated models of these “infernal machines” were developed over the course of the war. A variety of types of mines were made; some had internal, mechanically operated friction primers and were set off when they were struck by a boat or when a connecting wire was pulled by a boat; others were operated by wires from land, using friction primers or were electrically detonated with galvanic batteries. The ironclad gunboat *Cairo*, a member of the Mississippi Squadron, struck two mines on the Yazoo River on December 12, 1862, and sank; the first Union vessel to be sunk by Confederate torpedoes (Perry 1965:199). Although many have argued that electric mines sunk the *Cairo*, Perry (1965:330) argues that the mines consisted of a pair of wicker-covered glass demijohns in wooden boxes connected together by a wire. The mines were floating just beneath the surface of the water and were ignited by friction primers.

The type of torpedo struck by the *Eastport* is not reported. Phelps wrote that the other torpedoes found in the river were “small” and did not produce much “report.” The Confederates laid a number of mines in the Red River to try to stop Porter’s boats and two individuals are known to have figured prominently in this activity, E.C. Singer and J.R. Fretwell. By July 1863, these two Texans had developed a simple and dependable torpedo that became one of the most commonly used by the Confederacy. The Fretwell-Singer torpedo consisted of a floating tin cone two-thirds filled with gunpowder. The mine was exploded by a simple and dependable firing mechanism relying upon the action of a strong spring. Perry (1965:44) describes this mechanism:

An iron rod with a plunger and the spring extended through the case and an equal length below it. The weight of a saucerlike iron plate

falling from the deck of the cone yanked a pin safety, thus releasing the spring-driven plunger which smashed a percussion cap inside the body of the torpedo.

The Fretwell-Singer mine was activated when it was struck by a vessel, which knocked the “saucerlike iron plate” loose. The mine was anchored and floated in the water, usually just below the surface, and it did not require an onshore monitor, as did most of the electric torpedoes.

Singer and Fretwell had first used their mines along the Texas coast after which they were sent to Mobile to a torpedo workshop there. Subsequently, they traveled to Shreveport from where they supervised the mining of the Red River in advance of the Union fleet. The two men, reportedly, placed about thirty of their tin torpedoes in the Red below Grand Ecore in March 1864 (Perry 1965:47), and it is probable that the *Eastport* struck one of these Fretwell-Singer torpedoes. It is not known how many of the mines set in the river were found and destroyed by Porter’s men, but the *Eastport*, apparently, was the only boat damaged by one. Union commanders had heard that mines had been placed in the river well before they left Alexandria and the fleet had kept a careful watch for them. The fear generated by the torpedoes is expressed in an order issued by Admiral Porter on March 20 stating that any Rebel caught “planting a torpedoes, or floating them down, or with any of these inventions in their possession” would be “shot on the spot” (ORN I:26:184).

Late on April 15, Phelps eased his damaged boat out of the main channel so she would not block the river. In addition to the siphon pump and hand pumps, he organized the rest of the crew into bailing parties. Even with additional pumps supplied by the gunboat *Lexington* and the towboat *B*, the crews could not keep ahead of the rising water in the hold, so Phelps sent a tug to Alexandria to bring back two steam pump boats. The efforts to keep the *Eastport* afloat failed, and about 5 hours after striking the supposed torpedo, she sank at Hutchinson Landing about 12 miles below Grand Ecore. When her bow came to rest on the bottom, the water only just covered the forward gun deck, so there was hope that the boat could be refloated. However, the crew had a hard time finding the leak. The double hull and the numerous bulkheads installed to produce numerous watertight compartments, made inspection and repair very difficult.

After conferring with Admiral Porter, Captain Phelps, in a desperate effort to raise his stricken vessel, began to lighten the boat by removing her guns and other heavy items. Neither Phelps nor Porter wanted to lose one of the largest and most powerful gunboats in the United States Navy. The *Eastport's* deck log for April 16 records that the crew was preparing to lighten ship by 8 o'clock in the morning and by noon Phelps had "All hands employed taking off the Port blinds and preparing to take out the Guns" (National Archives 1864b). Men from the timberclad *Lexington* came aboard to help remove guns and that night the port 9-inch gun was removed and loaded in a barge. The next day, April 17, the steamer *Champion* came alongside to help and before noon, two "after IX inch Guns and gear" were transferred to the *Ozark* and all hands were working to transfer the forward guns to a barge (National Archives 1864b).³ By 4 o'clock in the afternoon all of the guns had been removed and transferred to barges and steam pumps were working to remove the water in the hold. The *Champion's* pumps were added to those of the *Eastport* and the water in the hold gradually began to fall (National Archives 1864b).

Pumping by hand and with steam engines continued the following day, April 18. During the morning, the *Lexington* and the tinclad *Juliet* came alongside and added their siphon pumps. That afternoon, the *Eastport's* crew, with the help of men from these two boats, began to remove ordnance stores, loading them onto the *Juliet* and a barge. That night, the *Eastport's* deck log for the 8 to midnight watch noted that the pumps were "gaining slowly on the water" (National Archives 1864b).

On the morning of April 19, the largest steam pump broke down, but the steamer *New Champion* (also known as the *Champion No. 3*, a Quartermaster Department steamer used for transport and towing) came alongside and set her pumps to the task (National Archives 1864b). Also, that morning the sidewheel, tinclad *Fort Hindman* came alongside and took the barge containing the *Eastport's* guns down river, plus the flagship *Cricket* with Admiral Porter arrived, stopping for half an hour before proceeding on upriver, and then re-

turned later in the afternoon. Porter was obviously anxious about getting the *Eastport* and his other boats down the river as quickly as possible. Phelps's crew continued to lighten the gunboat and began to remove the "shutters." With the *New Champion* helping to pump, the water in the *Eastport* continued to slowly recede.

The *Eastport* was not the only vessel in Porter's fleet having trouble getting down river to Alexandria. The Red River was so low that many boats were dragging bottom or running aground and a great amount of effort and time was being spent in getting boats free. William Hoel, captain of the City Class gunboat *Pittsburg*, noted that his boat was "rubbing" the bottom at many shallows and on April 16 he ran aground several times below the town of Montgomery. Hoel's men spent most of April 17 working the *Pittsburg* free from numerous groundings but the boat successfully reached Alexandria on the following day (Hoel 1973:14). Captain Hoel noted that over the next several days gunboats and transports arrived in Alexandria, having slowly worked their way down the shallow river. By April 21 all of the Army transport steamers had safely made it to the anchorage above the falls at Alexandria, only the *Eastport* and the several vessels helping her remained up the river (Hoel 1973:14).

The first entry in the *Eastport's* deck log for April 20, for the 12 midnight to 4 a.m. watch, was "Still engaged in trying to raise the ship" (National Archives 1864b). Through the day, pumping continued and the boat slowly began to empty. The leak appeared to be in the bow, and Captain Phelps set Carpenter's Mate Henry Debaun and his men to work building a bulkhead across the forward part of the vessel. Acting Master George Rodgers came over from the gunboat *Pittsburg* to supervise the repairs (Slagle 1996:366). Admiral Porter would later praise Rodgers for his work, noting that he "worked at the bulkheads of the *Eastport* up to his middle in water for eight days" (ORN I:26:77). That afternoon the tinclad *Gazelle* came alongside to help, and at 5 o'clock in the afternoon the *Eastport* was again afloat and by 7 that evening a line was gotten ashore (National Archives 1864b).

³ There is some confusion as to which *Champion* this was. There were three boats named *Champion* with Porter on Red River. These were the sternwheel, tinclad *Champion* commanded by Seth Phelps' brother Alfred and which had been a commercial packet named

Champion No. 4 prior to the Civil War; the sidewheeler *Champion No. 3*, a Quartermaster Department transport also called *New Champion*; and the sidewheeler *Champion No. 5*, a steamer serving as a pump boat and transport.

While everyone was working feverishly to free the *Eastport*, there was the continuing danger of attack by Confederates. Frank Church, a marine aboard Porter's flagship *Cricket*, wrote that on the night of April 20 he placed some of his men on shore to "act as pickets over the Eastport" (Jones and Keuchel 1975:51). On April 22, Admiral Porter issued special orders stating:

Commander of the Eastport will have his small arms ready, and a crew stationed all night at the howitzer to fire cannister. If the Hindman is along side the Eastport in case of an attack she will drop off into the stream and fire shrapnel & shell as the case may require, being careful not to fire into the Eastport. Efforts will be made all night to get the Eastport off [Phelps April 22, 1864].

By this time, General Banks, who had kept his troops at Grand Ecore while efforts to float the *Eastport* were underway, had decided to move his army down to Alexandria. This left the *Eastport* and the boats assisting to free her unprotected from land, except by the Navy and Marine pickets.

In the morning on April 21, a steam pump from the *New Champion* was transferred to the forecastle of the *Eastport* and, with the boat beginning to float, the stern was swung downstream. With the "'Champion' made fast alongside" the *Eastport* made steam and slowly began to descend the Red River (National Archives 1864b). However, she ran aground again late in the afternoon before being pulled off by the *Fort Hindman* at 7:15 that evening. Once freed, the *Eastport* tied up to the "Starboard" bank (presumably the west bank) and continued to pump. Phelps may have thought things were coming under control, since he sent all of the sailors helping on the *Eastport* back to their respective boats. Pumps were kept working all night, but when an attempt was made to move down river the next morning (April 22), the boat was aground. A hawser was passed to the steamer *Champion No. 3* which tried unsuccessfully to pull the *Eastport* free. By that afternoon, the pump boat *Champion No. 5* and the *Fort Hindman* had come to help try to tow the *Eastport* into deeper water. At 3 a.m. on the morning of April 23 the *Eastport* came free and "steamed slowly down the river with the Steamer "'Champion No. 5' alongside [and] two steam pumps at work" (National Archives 1864b). Porter had written Phelps from the *Cricket* on the 22nd that:

Everything must be got out of her and off of her even to destroying the casemates and throwing them overboard, or sacrificing everything to get the hull & machinery down safely You will commence by getting the iron plates off the upper deck - don't stop to save anything except hawsers & provisions. Take off coal, anchors, chains - officers quarters may be left to the last. Leave nothing in the vessel that can add a pound to her weight - cut away everything on the upper deck - throw the woodwork into the furnace Pass what can be saved to the *Champion* - but don't attempt to save the iron - there is plenty more where that came from . . . and I hope you won't have any feeling about destroying, what you have spent so much time in fitting together.

I take all the responsibility, and give you this written order to commence the work without delay.

Don't lessen your efforts to get over this present difficulty, which can only be done by getting the *Champion* close into the bank, and then dropping you both through with stern & quarter lines [Phelps April 22, 1864].

At 4:30 a.m. on April 23, the *Eastport* was aground again. The crew worked all that day trying to get the boat free and, finally, the *Fort Hindman* was able to pull the *Eastport's* stern around and get her afloat and at 10:50 that night the gunboat was, again, made fast to the bank. Phelps's crew had now worked tirelessly for eight days to keep the *Eastport* moving down river and the men were worn out. That night, he let all but the 2nd watch turn in for much needed rest.

The difficulties with the *Eastport* were beginning to seriously endanger the rest of the fleet. On the 23rd, Admiral Porter made a report to Secretary of the Navy Gideon Welles in which he commented on his predicament:

. . . the *Eastport* got out of the channel, and it seems impossible to move her ahead. Everything that man can do has been done, and I shall persevere until attacked here, or until falling water endangers other vessels. There will be but one course for me to pursue, that is to perform the painful duty of destroying the *Eastport* to prevent her falling into the enemy's hands. I have no certainty of getting her down as far as Alexandria; the water has fallen too much to leave her here, with our army retreating to Alexandria,

and with 25,000 rebels (if victorious) assailing us at every point [ORN I:26:69].

The *Eastport* took on wood for her boilers the night of April 23, and then continued down river just after midnight. Pilots had been sent on the transport USS *No. 50* to sound out the channel ahead of the ship. Despite the soundings, the *Eastport* ran aground several times before daylight on April 24. In getting free at one spot the rudder was unshipped and time had to be taken to reattach it (National Archives 1864b). Above the town of Montgomery, the pilots, McBride and Thompson, were again sent to sound the channel. They reported 8 ft of water, and the *Eastport* began to steam down the river. At 8 o'clock in the morning she ran hard aground, but a line was run to the *Fort Hindman* and the *Eastport* was worked free in an hour and a half. At this point the deck log notes that the ship was tied to the bank and some of the crew began to load coal from the steamer *Champion No. 3*, while others began to gather "clay for the purpose of stopping the leak" (National Archives 1864b). In attempting to swing around, the *Eastport* grounded again. All day was spent trying to free the vessel with help from the *Fort Hindman*, *Champion No. 3* and *Champion No. 5*. In the evening, the boat was gotten afloat, but immediately grounded again.

The Destruction of the USS Eastport, April 26, 1864

Superhuman efforts had been made to keep the *Eastport* afloat, but those efforts would end on April 25. Just after midnight of April 24, the hawser running to the *Juliet* and *Champion No. 5* parted as the two steamers attempted to pull the *Eastport* off. At 7:40 in the morning the *Eastport* was finally pulled free and began to steam down river with pumps working. During the 8 to 12 morning watch, the *Eastport* ran aground again, having moved only a short distance from her last grounding. The *Fort Hindman* and *Champion No. 3*, with lines run to their capstans, tried to pull the stricken ship free and finally succeeded at 2:15 in the afternoon (National Archives 1864c). The *Eastport's* deck log notes that after getting afloat she took on board "a large quantity of rails," referring to wooden fence rails for use as fuel (National Archives 1864b). At 3:50 that afternoon she again got underway, but she was scraping bottom, hitting rocks and logs, and at 4 o'clock she grounded in five and one half feet of water just below the river town of Montgomery. The *Eastport's* deck log (Figure 2-39) notes that two 6-in hawsers were taken aboard the *Fort Hindman* to be used to

pull her off, but this was unsuccessful. By 10:30 that night, the continuous pulling on the *Eastport* had swung her bow out into the river (National Archives 1864c). Admiral Porter reported that the "gunboat *Fort Hindman* . . . succeeded with her steam capstan in moving her bow, but only enough to get into a worse position right across the channel, with a bed of logs under her, and from that place it seemed that no human power could move her" (ORN I:26:73-74). That afternoon, Admiral Porter sent men from the *Cricket* to the *Fort Hindman* to help throw overboard a large number of bales of cotton that had been captured at Grand Ecore (National Archives 1864c). David Porter had held onto the prize cotton until the last possible minute.

In a last effort to get the *Eastport* free, at 12:15 on the morning of April 26 a line was run from the gunboat's bow to *Champion No. 3*, but this effort to pull her off also failed (National Archives 1864b). Discouraging news, also, came from the pilots whose soundings had revealed a raft of sunken logs and shallower water just downstream, possibly, the same shallows that had grounded the ironclad *Pittsburg* ten days earlier (Hoel 1973:14). It was apparent to all that the end was at hand; with great effort the *Eastport* had been brought about 60 miles down river from Grand Ecore, but there was still 60 miles to go. The *Eastport* was stuck fast and now that General Banks had retreated to Alexandria, the Confederates would be able to turn their attention toward the stricken gunboat and those helping her.

Lieutenant Commander Phelps realized that all was lost for the *Eastport* when he made these observations:

At Montgomery, nearly two days - during which time we were on both logs and rocks - were spent in getting a distance of 3 miles, where we finally grounded upon logs.

Careful soundings taken by experienced pilots made it apparent that it was a hopeless labor we were engaged in, and that we could not get the ship below where she was lying. For the first time hope left me. The river was falling steadily and the pilots reported too little water for her draft on the bars below. My crew was worn out by labor beyond its power of endurance . . . [ORN I:26:79].

In consultation with Admiral Porter, Phelps decided to blow up the *Eastport*. Porter, on board the *Cricket* about two miles below Montgomery, wrote

| LOG OF UNITED STATES | | <i>Gunboat Eastport</i> | | Commanded by Lieut-Comdr <i>J. L. Phelps</i> | | | | | | |
|----------------------|-------|-------------------------|---------|--|-------|--|-------------|-------|-----------|---|
| H. | Knots | Pathway | Course | Wind | | Weather | TEMPERATURE | | Barometer | REMARKS on this <i>25th</i> day of <i>April</i> 18 <i>64</i> |
| | | | | Direction | Force | | Air | Water | | |
| A. M. | | | | | | | | | | |
| 1 | | | 12 to 4 | | | Weather clear and mild. At wind 12.30 got the | | | | |
| 2 | | | | | | champion to 5 pulling at a hawser able to pull | | | | |
| 3 | | | | | | up the stream. Put a hawser after three or four | | | | |
| 4 | | | | | | tempts. At 4.00 run a 6 inch hawser ashore from | | | | |
| 5 | | | | | | her bows to a tree and back on board and took | | | | |
| 6 | | | | | | it to the champion to 5. Captain and have a | | | | |
| 7 | | | | | | strain upon it. | | | | |
| 8 | | | | | | | | | | <i>W. L. Holcomb</i> |
| 9 | | | 4 to 8 | | | Clear and warm. At wind at 6.30 got a spar | | | | |
| 10 | | | | | | and have our stern out from the Fort Hindman | | | | |
| 11 | | | | | | at the same time having her head in shore. At | | | | |
| 12 | | | | | | 7.40 got the ship afloat 800 Pumps at work. | | | | |
| | | | | | | | | | | <i>J. Howell</i> |
| | | | | | | Distance per Log | | | | |
| | | | | | | Latitude, D. R. | 8 to 12 | | | |
| | | | | | | Longitude, D. R. | | | | |
| | | | | | | Latitude observed | | | | |
| | | | | | | Longitude | | | | |
| | | | | | | Current | | | | |
| | | | | | | Variation | | | | <i>C. P. Howley</i> |
| P. M. | | | | | | | | | | |
| 1 | | | 12 to 4 | | | Weather clear and warm Wind fresh S. W. Succeeded | | | | |
| 2 | | | | | | in getting afloat 2.15-3.30 took on board a large | | | | |
| 3 | | | | | | quantity of rails 3.40 Signals 1241-8248 from the | | | | |
| 4 | | | | | | Flag ship. 3.50 got underway for down river | | | | |
| 5 | | | | | | | | | | <i>W. L. Holcomb</i> |
| 6 | | | 4-6 | | | Clear and warm Light breeze from S. W. At 4 | | | | |
| 7 | | | | | | grounded on the flat water. Put our two 6 inch hawsers | | | | |
| 8 | | | | | | on board the Fort Hindman | | | | |
| 9 | | | | | | | | | | <i>J. Howell</i> |
| 10 | | | 6-8 | | | Clear Wind S. W. All hands engaged in trying | | | | |
| 11 | | | | | | to get the ship afloat. | | | | <i>C. P. Howley</i> |
| 12 | | | | | | | | | | |

Figure 2-39. Entry of April 25, 1864, in the log book of the USS Eastport (source: National Archives 1864b).

Phelps a lengthy letter on April 25 describing what should be done to destroy the gunboat:

The time has come at last when we must perform the most painful duty that can devalue upon an officer of the navy viz.: - destroy the

ship which he has so long commanded, and connected with which are so many associations. You have done all that a brave & zealous officer could do to save your vessel . . . For six days and nights, you, your officers, and crew have worked with zeal & ability worthy of a better fate, and

you have only consented to abandon the vessel, & destroy her, to prevent her falling into the hands of the enemy, when a hope or possibility no longer existed of getting her to Alexandria. I have waited with you patiently, hoping that you would succeed in getting your vessel below, after you had so successfully raised her from the bottom, and I deeply regret after bringing her 50 miles down the river, performing the most arduous labor I have witnessed, that your efforts were not crowned with success. I feel that I have already risked more vessels in the attempt to save this one, than prudence would justify . . .

Now that the vessel cannot be ours, she must never be used by any one else, and must be destroyed so effectually that she will only remain a troublesome wreck for our enemies. Did I know anything of our army, or its movements, I might hope still to let her remain as she is until a rise of water came, but in a few days her back will be broken, and the reports from our army are so unfavorable that there seems no prospect whatever, of their ever making a stand again. This campaign has been so disastrous that I can hope for no help from our military forces . . . Under all these circumstances you will prepare to blow your vessel up, and then set her on fire so that she will burn to the water's edge, and be of no more use . . . and you will make such distribution of the powder as I may indicate with any additional plans of your own.

You will though, at once, transfer all the stores & moveable material to the two Champions (pump boats) and the officers & crew to the "Fort Hindman", with the exception of two officers & ten men to work the howitzer on board the "Champion No. 5".

I sympathize with you deeply at the calamity that has befallen us, and the uncomfortable predicament in which we are placed, but it is the fortune of war, and we must submit patiently and with stout hearts...

Destroy what machinery you can before leaving her [Phelps April 25, 1864].

From aboard the *Cricket*, but using stationary from the "Mississippi Squadron Flag Ship *Black Hawk*," David Porter sent Phelps a brief order to destroy the *Eastport* (Figure 2-40):

Your Pilots give a bad account of the water below 6 feet is the most to be found – If we cant jump the Eastport over, there is but one thing remaining to be done viz to destroy her. – You

will at once transfer all the affects of officers and men to the Champion, and make your preparations for this last alternative [Phelps April 25, 1864].

At 2 a.m. on the morning of April 26, Lieutenant Commander Phelps "called all hands to Muster & informed them that the ship must be destroyed by blowing her up" (National Archives 1864b). Phelps then put his crew to shifting all moveable property from the *Eastport* to other vessels. While men were transferring material, Confederates on the bank began to fire on the boats. The Rebels made a charge from the west bank to try to board the *Cricket*, but the flagship opened fire with grape and canister shot, and by 11:30 in the morning had quieted them (ORN I:26:74). The Confederate commander, General Richard Taylor, reported the event, noting that Colonels Likens and Harrison led the Confederate attack on the gunboats and that many of the enemy were killed, although Union accounts make no mention of deaths on their side (ORN I:26:169). Taylor also noted that "a small party of General Liddell's command cooperated from the opposite bank," this places Liddell's men on the eastern side of the river and Taylor on the western side. Liddell would later proceed with his troops down the eastern side of the Red to Pineville and attack Union forces at that location.

General Taylor reported that the "heavy iron-clad, casemated boat" destroyed by the enemy at Montgomery blocked the channel (ORA I:34:583-584). The position of the *Eastport* was confirmed by comments from the Union forces under Bank's command. They stated that the *Eastport* was "in a position right across the channel" and "lying tied to the bank." They also noted that the Confederate guerrillas opened fire from the right bank (i.e., the west bank) and tried to board the *Cricket* (Flinn 1887:122). Lieutenant George M. Bache of the gunboat *Lexington* noted in his log that on April 26 the enemy opened fire on their boat at 11:45 "from the bluffs opposite with a battery of four pieces" (ORN I:26:790). The "bluffs" mentioned by Lieutenant Bache are the Tertiary uplands that extend along the eastern side of Red River near Montgomery. Admiral Porter described the action as:

Gangs of guerrillas began to hover on the left bank of the river, and just previous to blowing up the *Eastport* we were attacked by a heavy force on the right bank. This vessel was lying tied to the bank, and I was backing out from the *Eastport* in the *Hindman* to give the former a

**MISSISSIPPI SQUADRON, }
FLAG SHIP BLACK HAWK. }**

Cochit April 25 1864.

Sir

You Petto give a
bun account of the water
below to but is the most
to be found of we coast jump
the Eastport over, there is but
one thing remaining to be done
viz to destroy her. - you will
at once transfer all the effects
of officer and men to the
champion, and make your
preparations for this last atten-
-tion

Respectfully
David D. Porter
Rear Admiral

Figure 2-40. Admiral David D. Porter's letter to Lieutenant Commander Seth Phelps giving the order to destroy the *Eastport*, April 25, 1864. This letter is believed to be in Porter's own hand (source: Phelps April 25, 1864).

chance to blow up without injury to anyone; the rebels selected this moment to make their attack . . . made rush to board the *Cricket*. The enemy . . . was repelled, and the *Cricket*, dropping out from the bank . . . the rebels were routed in five minutes. After this we blew the *Eastport* up and proceeded down the river [ORN I:26:74].

Everything that was moveable was taken off the *Eastport*; the *Cricket's* log noted that she received a cook stove and 3 battle lanterns from the stricken boat (National Archives 1864a). By 10:30 in the morning, Captain Phelps had removed everything he could, and his crew and officers were transferred to the *Fort Hindman*. Phelps then obtained 24 cases

of gunpowder from the *Fort Hindman* to use in destroying the *Eastport*. In his description of the event, Phelps noted:

I took off everything movable and of value and then placed a prepared can and 8 barrels of powder under the foot of her forward casemate, which an operator attempted to explode by electricity. Failing in his attempts, a similar amount of powder was placed in her stern and other barrels of powder were put about her machinery, so as effectually to destroy her, and trains were laid fore and aft the vessel, which, on being ignited, rapidly spread fire throughout her, exploding the different mines in quick succession, utterly destroying her [ORNI:26:79].

The powder exploded at 1:55 in the afternoon and “the ship blew up setting her on fire completely destroying her” (National Archives 1864b) (Figure 2-41). The log of the *Fort Hindman*, commanded by Acting Volunteer Lieutenant John Pearce, described the destruction:

At 12:40 steamed up to the *Eastport* and made fast to her stern. The admiral, with Captain Phelps, together with her officers and men, went on board. Sent on board 3,055 pounds of powder to blow her up. Lieutenant ———, of the Army, made two attempts to fire the magazine with a galvanic battery, but both failing, we returned, and, under the direction of Admiral D. D. Porter, laid trains of cotton, tar, etc., to the

several magazines, and at 1 cast off and dropped down river, Captain Phelps and a boat’s crew remaining alongside to fire off the train. At 1:25 Captain Phelps fired the train, shoved off from the *Eastport* when the first explosion took place, followed by others, until she was completely destroyed. At 2 p. m. steamed up to the wreck. The admiral and Captain Phelps in a boat rowed around the *Eastport*. At 3:15 the admiral went down to the flagship; Captain Phelps returned on board. At 3:20 proceeded down river in rear of all the boats [ORN I:26:786].

The log of the flagship *Cricket* provided a much more cryptic description of the destruction of one of the largest gunboats in the United States Navy, noting for the afternoon of April 26: “2:10 blew the U.S. Steamer *Eastport* up. 3:20 Admiral returned. Steamed down the river” (National Archives 1864a).

Admiral Porter reported that Lieutenant Commander Phelps was the last to leave the *Eastport* :

He had barely time to reach the boat when the *Eastport* blew up, covering the boat with fragments of wood. Seven different explosions followed, and then the flames burst forth in every direction. The vessel was completely destroyed, as perfect a wreck as ever was made by powder. She remains a troublesome obstruction to block up the channel for some time to come.

All her stores, etc., were removed and such parts of the machinery as could be made avail-

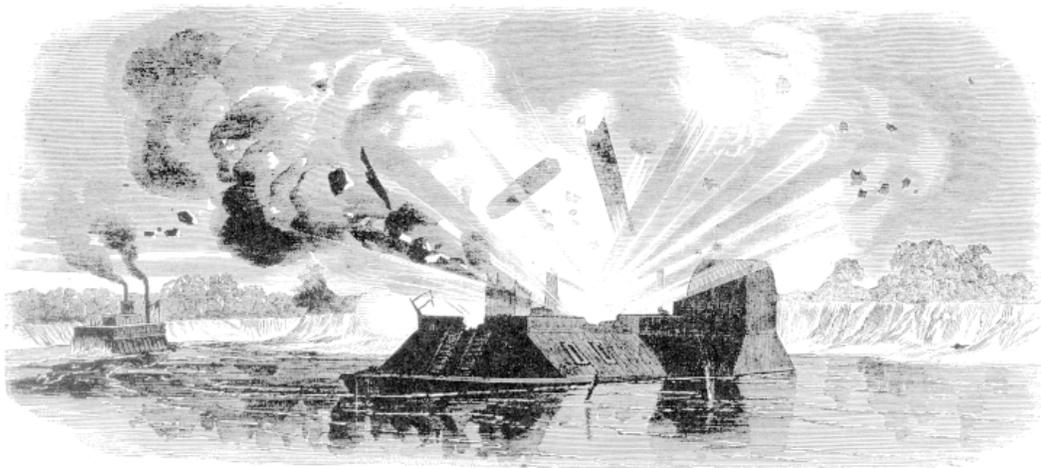


Figure 2-41. Illustration of the explosion of the USS *Eastport* showing the USS *Fort Hindman* proceeding down river. In the original 1864 publication of this illustration the *Eastport* was misidentified as the *Covington* (source: Huber 1975:179).

able by the rebels.

There was nothing but the iron plates left behind, which finally fell inside the hull; some fell outboard, as the fire burned away the wood to which they were attached, and will soon disappear under the sands [ORN I:26:74].

After the destruction of his gunboat, Phelps wrote to Porter:

The command of the *Eastport* has been to me a source of great pride, and I could not but deplore the necessity for destroying her. The act has been the most painful one experienced by me in my official career. She was the finest vessel of your squadron and one of the best possessed by the Government. Your order to me to proceed to destroy her, in which you commend the zeal displayed by myself and the crew in our efforts to save her, not only relieved me from all responsibility, but was also grateful to my feelings, both as a man and officer [ORN I:26:79].

Evidently, everything of value was not removed from the *Eastport*. Confederate General Taylor reported on April 27 that "The iron-clad blown up by the enemy yesterday is ascertained to have been the *Eastport*. She had a small transport lashed to her, which was destroyed with her. Two very fine pumps had been removed from her to the captured transports, and will prove useful in some of the departments at Shreveport" (ORAI:34:585). General Taylor's report that a transport was destroyed with the *Eastport* is clearly incorrect.

Having destroyed his ship, Phelps and his men traveled on down the river aboard the several vessels that had remained behind. The *Cricket*, with Admiral Porter, took the lead, followed by the *New Champion* (the *Champion No. 3*), *Champion No. 5* and *Juliet*. The *Fort Hindman*, now commanded by Phelps, brought up the rear. The Confederates had been able to move some forces down river ahead of the boats and Captain Florian Cornay had positioned a battery of 6-pounders on a bluff on the western side of the Red several miles above the mouth of Cane River. In addition, several hundred infantry were hiding in the woods along the bank. Porter, sitting in a chair on the open deck of the *Cricket*, saw movement on the bank as the boats moved down river and ordered the captain to fire. When the *Cricket* opened fire, the Confederate artillery and infantry immediately responded with a withering attack. The *Cricket* was struck 38 times by cannon fire as she

passed by the bluff and was raked by rifle and musket fire. The *Cricket's* engines stopped and Porter himself went below and found the chief engineer had been killed and had fallen on the steam lever, shutting it. Porter reopened the valve and the boat was able to move down river to safety. However, the devastating Confederate fire had killed or wounded 25 men on the *Cricket*. In the confusion resulting from the attack, the pump boat *Champion No. 3* collided with the *Juliet* and shells struck the *Champion No. 3's* boilers, losing live steam. Aboard the *Champion No. 3* were about 175 blacks who had been picked up from plantations along the river. Almost 100 of these former slaves were scalded to death by the escaping steam, and many more died later from their injuries. Porter makes no mention of the terrible deaths of these men, women and children in his official report of the incident (Johnson 1958:239). Crewmen began to jump overboard to escape and the *Champion No. 3* drifted against the bank where, ultimately, it was captured by the Confederates. The *Champion No. 5*, despite damage, was able to tow the now-disabled *Juliet* upriver under protective fire from the *Fort Hindman*.

Phelps kept his three boats (the *Fort Hindman*, *Juliet* and *Champion No. 5*) above the Confederate battery through the night, working to repair the damage sustained by the *Juliet* and *Champion No. 5*. Porter decided it was too dangerous to try to take boats upriver to Phelps' aid, he had already lost one vessel running by the Confederate forces. On the following morning, April 27, Phelps decided to take his three steamers by the battery. The *Fort Hindman* led the way, towing the damaged *Juliet*, while the *Champion No. 5* followed in the rear. The *Juliet* struck a snag, puncturing her hull, and Phelps had to take his steamers back upriver to make repairs. The leak repaired, Phelps again headed downstream, firing as he went. Captain Cornay's guns unleashed another terrific barrage as the boats ran by. The *Fort Hindman's* tiller rope was shot away and she lost steerage, but she and the *Juliet* made it past. The *Champion No. 5* was disabled by fierce fire from the Confederate artillery and drifted to the east bank of the river, opposite the battery. Here she was abandoned, but her crew managed to escape. The *Juliet* lost 2 killed and 13 wounded in passing. The *Fort Hindman* was struck 19 times by cannon shot and had 2 killed and several wounded. Most of the men from the *Eastport* were on the *Fort Hindman* and some were included among the casualties. Louis Gillespie and L.W. Strong, seamen, were wounded and Acting Ensign Sylvester Poole, who was serv-

ing as the *Eastport's* First Lieutenant and whom Phelps had written his wife about, was killed (ORN I:26:75-76, 81-84, 169, 176).

Porter's small squadron, minus the two *Champions*, continued to Alexandria where the rest of the fleet had gathered. There, the Admiral found the water so low that he was unable to get the larger boats across the rapids. Things looked so desperate that on April 29 Porter called all of his commanders together and told them that it looked like they would be compelled to destroy the gunboats. He ordered them to make preparations to do so (Hoel 1973:15). The ten gunboats trapped above the falls (the *Lexington*, *Fort Hindman*, *Osage*, *Neosho*, *Mound City*, *Louisville*, *Pittsburg*, *Chillicothe*, *Carondelet*, and *Ozark*) constituted the backbone of the Mississippi Squadron and their destruction would be a massive blow to the Navy and the country as a whole and it would mean the end of Porter's professional career. However, Lieutenant Colonel Joseph Bailey, of the Wisconsin 4th Cavalry, an engineer by profession, approached Porter with an idea for an ingenious set of dams that would raise the water sufficiently to float all of the trapped boats across the rapids. Bailey was familiar with techniques used by loggers to quickly raise rivers with temporary dams and the previous year he had used these to successfully free two steamers from Thompsons Creek during the Port Hudson campaign. Many were doubtful of "Bailey's Dam," including Porter who remarked that "if damming would get the fleet off, he would have been afloat long before" (ORA 34:402-403). But the Admiral was in no position to reject any scheme that might work, and on April 29 Colonel Bailey was given permission to go ahead. Construction started immediately, and by May 8, the dam had raised the river enough to get some of the smaller gunboats over the rapids. By May 12 all of the gunboats had crossed the rocks into deep water on the lower side (Johnson 1958:249, 262-264; Robinson 1991; Smith and Castille 1986). Porter, who very likely would have lost many of the most powerful boats in his fleet if the dam had not been successful, claimed that Bailey's Dam was "without doubt the greatest engineering feat ever performed" (ORA I:34:220). The following day, the fleet and the army began to move down the Red and by the 15th the fleet was at the Mississippi; the Red River Campaign was over.

The Red River Campaign had been a failure; it had not succeeded in its objectives, and much of the Mississippi Squadron had come close to being trapped and captured by the Confederates. Some have ar-

gued that the campaign lengthening the war, because the diversion of troops and equipment to the Red River postponed for 10 months an attack against Mobile, Alabama (Johnson 1958). The Red River expedition had cost the Union army 5,200 men and 21 artillery pieces, four transports and a hospital boat and the navy had lost over 200 men, two transports, two tinclads, and one of the largest ironclads in the fleet, the *Eastport* (Johnson 1958:277; Smith and Castille 1986:25).

Lieutenant Commander Seth Phelps, who had experienced almost nothing but trouble as the one and only commander of the *Eastport*, mustered her crew for the last time in Alexandria on April 28. He thanked the men for their service and then they were dispersed among other boats in the fleet. While in Alexandria, funeral services were held for Ensign Poole. Phelps came to accept the fate of the *Eastport* and his actions in her destruction. In a letter to his wife Lizzie, he wrote:

I was the first to go up Red River as I was the last in the descent to Alexandria. No amount of pay could induce me to pass through those two weeks of care and labor again. . . . It is a terrible thing to destroy one's ship but while I felt sad I felt no sense of humiliation. We succumbed to the fiat of heaven & not to the power of an enemy. Where there was not water we could not float her. . . [Slagle 1996:381].

Phelps returned to Cairo where, for a short time he was involved with the District Court for the Southern District of Illinois in sorting out the prize awards from the cotton captured on Red River. For its part in the campaign, the *Eastport* received \$11,618.39 in prize money, out of a total of \$225,751.08 awarded to the Mississippi Squadron (Slagle 1996:402). Navy Secretary Welles, also, called Phelps to Washington to get a private and personal report of the debacle on Red River. In his account to Welles, Phelps was particularly harsh toward General Banks (Slagle 1996:383). In June 1864, Phelps's youngest daughter, Lucy, died from measles, but naval duties prevented him from returning home. He continued to serve with the Mississippi Squadron at Helena and on the White and Arkansas rivers. While on the White River aboard the tinclad *Hastings*, musket fire from the shore produced "no less than 6 holes" through the pants Phelps was wearing.

The river war was now beginning to wind down and Phelps had little hope of promotion and was dis-

tressed to see several other junior officers receive fame or advancement. One of these was John Winslow, captain of the *Kearsarge* which had sunk the Confederate raider *Alabama*. Winslow had served in the gunboat flotilla, but had been transferred out in what Phelps called “disgrace” because of his poor qualities as a commander. Winslow had requested a transfer to shore duty after witnessing the harsh fighting at Plum Point on the Mississippi, an act which Phelps and others seem to have attributed to cowardice. Phelps wrote that “hardly a week passes but some vessel in this squadron goes through with more exposure to shot in five minutes than the *Kearsarge* did in more than an hour” (Slagle 1996:386). Phelps was certainly correct in his observation that the hard-fighting inland river navy received much less public attention and official recognition than did the sea navy.

Phelps wrote Gideon Welles complaining about the promotion of junior officers above him and he became even more upset when he learned that Congress had passed a law stating that captures on inland waterways would not be considered prizes of war. He requested a transfer to the blockading squadron, where the personal dangers were much less but where it might be possible to distinguish himself in action. Admiral Porter was given command of the North Atlantic Blockading Squadron in September 1864, but he did not ask Phelps to join him there. A thoroughly dejected Phelps, after 23 years of service in the navy, tendered his resignation and was released from the United States Navy on October 27, 1864.

Seth Phelps immediately accepted a position with the Pacific Mail Steamship Company, who had been trying to secure his services for several months. He managed the company’s office in Acapulco for a while and was eventually promoted to vice president. In 1874, he left the company when he was appointed by President Grant to the Board of Commissioners overseeing the government of the District of Columbia. In the late 1870s, he became involved with a group pushing the construction of a canal route from the Atlantic to Pacific through Nicaragua. This route was not selected in the end, and in 1883 President Chester Arthur appointed Phelps to be minister to Peru. Seth Phelps died in Peru from fever on June 24, 1885. His body was returned to Washington and is buried at Oak Hill Cemetery (Slagle 1996:395).

The Eastport After Scuttling

Little is known about what happened to the remains of the *Eastport* after April 26, 1864. At 280-ft-long and extending across the river, the wreck certainly represented a hazard to river navigation as evidenced by the fact that several steamers are reported to have been damaged when striking the remains. On June 23, 1865, the transport steamer *Ed F. Dix* struck the wreck of the *Eastport* and sank within 20 minutes, coming to rest on top of the gunboat. The *Ed. F. Dix* was carrying Union troops and supplies up Red River in support of some of the last Federal operations of the Civil War. Eight days later, the *Iowa*, another transport steamer carrying military goods, struck the wreck of the *Eastport* (now including the remains of the *Ed. F. Dix*) and managed to travel an additional 2 or 3 miles before sinking (*St. Louis Missouri Democrat* July 10, 1865). The *Iowa*, reportedly, was subsequently raised (Birchett and Pearson 1995:35). Additionally, an unpublished listing of Red River steamboats made early in this century by Dr. Milton Dunn notes that two other steamers struck the *Eastport*. In 1868, the sternwheeler *Irene* is supposed to have snagged on the remains of the *Eastport* and, shortly after, sank well up river at what was known as Lattier’s Kinks (Dunn n.d.). In addition, Dunn wrote that the sternwheel steamer *Hesper* “snagged on Eastport” and sank, apparently just above the gunboat (Dunn n.d.). The sinking of the *Hesper* occurred on November 7, 1872, and is reported in several sources, although none except Dunn mention the fact that the boat struck the wreck of the *Eastport* (Norman 1942; Way 1994:214). Dr. Dunn, who died in 1924, collected much of his information from former and still active steamboatmen, plus he himself was a long-time resident of the Red River area and was familiar with many of the steamers operating there. Portions of Milton Dunn’s library are at the Cammie Henry Research Center, Eugene P. Watson Memorial Library, Northwestern State University, Natchitoches, Louisiana, and in the margins of a 1921 article from the *Tennessee Historical Magazine* which mentions the gunboat *Eastport*, Dunn has written “I am the last living Confederate that saw the *Eastport* destroyed and now I have a piece of the armor (?) of the ‘Eastport’ - in the hearth of the ‘congo cabin’.” This suggests that Dunn was very familiar with the *Eastport* and is likely to have known if the *Irene* or *Hesper* struck her remains. If, in fact, the *Hesper* struck the *Eastport* in 1872, it

means that, at least, portions of the wreck were still exposed eight years after the scuttling.

Efforts to salvage material from the *Eastport* would have been undertaken if at all possible. Way (1994:344) notes that the *New Falls City*, the large steamer that blocked the Red River and stopped the Union fleet above Grand Ecore, was one of several wrecks to be removed from the river by Captain John Bofinger of St. Louis in 1880. Other wrecks that Bofinger was under contract to remove included the *Eastport*, *Dix* and *Emma*. The information on these three boats comes from Frederick Way, Jr.'s personal notes in the files of the Sons & Daughters of Pioneer Rivermen (Mr. J.W. Rutter, personal communication 1996). There is no evidence, however, that Bofinger actually removed, or even found, the wreck of the *Eastport*. It is likely that the remains of the *Eastport* and the *Ed. F. Dix* began to be covered by river sand and silt soon after their sinking. Historic maps show that by the 1890s, the Red River had shifted to the west

below the town of Montgomery and the wrecks now lay east of the actual channel, presumably covered by many feet of accretionary bankline sediments. If the *Hesper* did strike the *Eastport* in 1872, it means some of the wreck was still exposed in the river channel at that time. However, beginning in the early 1870s, the Corps of Engineers instituted widespread navigation improvements along the Red River that included the removal of a large number of steamboat wrecks. Records of this activity mention many steamboat wrecks, some dating to the Civil War (Pearson and Wells 1999). None of the Corps of Engineers documents, however, mention the wreck of the *Eastport*, suggesting that the boat was not a significant navigation hazard by the mid-1870s. The wreck may have been entirely buried by this time, with the channel of the Red River now west of the wreck site. Thus, within 10 years of her destruction, the huge gunboat had disappeared from view, buried by Red River sand and mud. The *Eastport* would remain buried for the next 120 years.