

Louisiana's Military Heritage:

Vessels named CSS MAUREPAS



Grosse Tete is docked in the distance of this photo.

CSS MAUREPAS

In the short four-year history of the Confederate States of America (1861~1865), only one ship bore the name of MAUREPAS, one of the largest lakes and estuaries in the State of Louisiana.

The Confederate MAUREPAS (1858 ~ 1862):

CSS MAUREPAS was first built as a sidewheel wooden-hulled packet named GROSSE TETE. She was constructed at New Albany, Indiana, in 1858 for Mr. J.A. Cotton of New Orleans, Louisiana. Upon completion, she ran the New Orleans-Bends trade with Captain Isaac Hopper at the wheel. She operated for the Bayou Sara Mail Company in 1860 on the New Orleans-Coast run under Captain J. McQuoid.

With the outbreak of war in 1861, GROSSE TETE was purchased by the Confederates that same year in New Orleans and rebuilt into a gunboat. She was rechristened CSS MAUREPAS and assigned to duty with the fleet in the lower Mississippi River under Flag Officer G. N. Hollins, CSN. She operated with the fleet at Island No. 10 and New Madrid, Missouri, from March 12 to April 07, 1862. She was then sent up the White River with CSS PONTCHARTRAIN. On June 16, 1862, MAUREPAS was purposely sunk as an obstruction to blockade the river near St. Charles, Arkansas, along with the sternwheeler MARY PATTERSON and the small packet ELIZA G. Ship's Statistics

Class Gunboat

Built 1858

Commissioned November, 1861

Displacement 399 tons

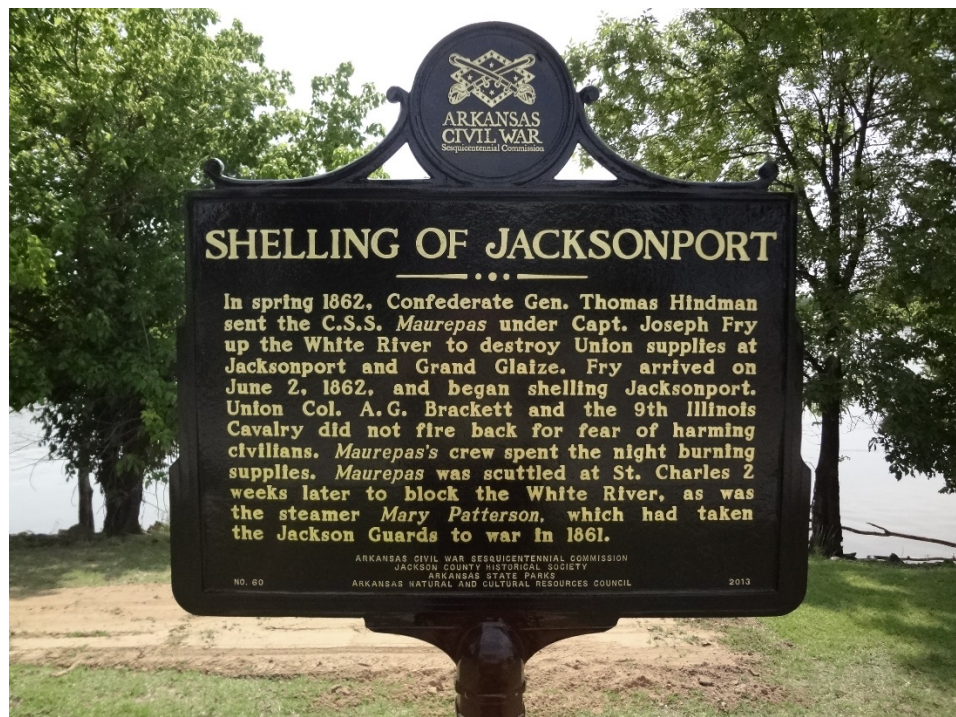
Length 180 ft.

Beam (width) 34 ft.

Draft (depth) 7 ft.

Propulsion Side-wheel steamer

Armament Five to seven guns (sources vary)



**Civil War Marker
Displayed at Jacksonport State Park**

“But They Made No Friends Here”

Throughout the Civil War, Jacksonport played a significant role in Northeast Arkansas. The town's location at the confluence of the Black and White Rivers made it an excellent occupation target for both Confederate and Union forces. Proud of their support of the Confederacy, the town gladly raised two regiments early in 1861, sending the Jackson Guards off in great splendor on May 5th. However, within a year of that day, the fortunes of Jacksonport changed significantly.

Jacksonport's strategic location made it an ideal center for troops, and in February of 1862 Confederate General Van Dorn made his headquarters there and established a supply depot. The success of this depot was clear in a message from General Van Dorn which assured General Price that the depot could provide many of the items his forces wanted.ⁱ At the end of the month Van Dorn left the town and placed Major Cabell in command. At the beginning of April most of the troops left the town to march to the Battle of Shiloh. Major Cabell received orders to send all the supplies to Des Arc where Van Dorn's forces assembled, including all of the available corn in Jackson County. This removal left Jacksonport virtually undefended. Despite Van Dorn's orders, a large store of sugar, molasses, and cotton remained at the depot.

The Confederate withdrawal was the perfect opportunity for General Curtis' and General Steele's Union forces coming south from Missouri. False rumors of an invasion were common by this point, but this time they were real and imminent. On March 1st, General Steele received orders from General Halleck to proceed from Missouri to Helena. The troops were ordered to carry few supplies, but they could “partly supply [themselves] from the enemy's stores at Pocahontas, Jacksonport, and Batesville.”ⁱⁱ

The inevitable occupation of Jacksonport stood in stark contrast to the hospitality offered by the town to Confederate General Van Dorn's troops earlier that year. When Union troops marched into Jacksonport for the first time on May 4th, 1862, one day short of the anniversary of the Jackson Guard sendoff, the event struck the heart of the staunchly Confederate town. As a firsthand witness to the event, Dr. Charles Brackett of the 9th Illinois Cavalry reported that it was “An awful time for the secesh, [their] feelings [were] hurt that the “Mudsills” occupy the town of the Chivalry.”ⁱⁱⁱ It was clear in the days that followed that the Union troops would receive little support from Jacksonport citizens, who remained true to the Confederate cause despite problems they encountered with their own troops.

Dr. Charles Brackett, a surgeon with the Illinois cavalry, was among the first wave of troops to occupy the town. His journal entries and letters provide an excellent insight into the Union view of the occupation. The only resistance came in the form of an ambush which wounded a few of the Union soldiers, who were later reported to recover from their wounds. This small attack infuriated Miss Mary Tom Caldwell, whose “greatest indignation is... devoted to her own people who ran off without firing a gun except for a few in ambush...”^{iv} Abandoned by its own troops and invaded by the enemy, the town was a scene of “ruin and desolation, and they feel it, but how long they can stand it I do not know.”^v

The reactions of the occupation forces to Jacksonport were mixed. Albert O. Marshall wrote that the “soldiers considered it the meanest secesh place we have yet found.”^{vi} Dr. Brackett gave grudging admiration to the town's women, “who have more spunk than the men”^{vii}. He went on to

note: "A very pretty town is this [and the] secesh say we shall not hold it one week[;] they will die first."^{viii} *The Traveler*, a newspaper printed by the Union troops during this time, gave this report:

Jacksonport, on White River, is, or has been, decidedly a commercial point; at present however it presents a doleful appearance. Most of the inhabitants have left, and the better part of those who remain present a countenance resembling a person immediately after taking a dose of opiac.^{ix}

Despite this hostility, Southern hospitality showed through, even to the Union troops. Dr. Brackett stayed in the Caldwell's home and met Miss Mary Tom Caldwell, who showed him to his quarters. In a letter to his wife, Dr. Brackett described this interesting woman:

"She is a very ultra secessionist, though quite an engaging young lady in most respects. She gave up the house with a tolerable good grace leaving the slaves whom she directed to keep my room clean and to do as I ordered...She said to me today with tears in her eyes that when she first saw our troops coming in town she wished someone would cut off her head, or shoot her; she glories in being a Rebel and told me that she wished she had power to kill every Officer in our Army, and Old Abe especially; said that she would do it with more pleasure than she could express..."^x

Miss Caldwell's sentiments undoubtedly echoed those of her fellow citizens.

After the initial furor of Union troops occupying Jacksonport for the first time, it appears that life carried on as usual for the next few weeks. George Hand, of the Kane County Cavalry, reopened the office of the *Jacksonport Herald* and published an edition of *The Traveler*. This publication gives us a unique glimpse into the town during this moment in its history. J.W. Jones, a druggist, is noted in the paper. His unpopularity was apparent when the paper indicated that it might be better for the troops to "take possession of such drug stores as are found, detail a competent druggist, and...dispense the articles to privates at a fair price instead of allowing rampant secessionists to sell out their stocks at exorbitant prices."^{xi} The paper notes that fish was sold in the streets every day and that sugar and molasses (from the Confederate supply depot^{xii}) were abundant. Flour was \$14 per hundredweight, liquor \$4 per quart, bacon 30 cents a pound, cotton prints at 30 cents a yard, and calf boots were \$20 per pair. Dr. Brackett reported that there was no flour available before the Union arrived, and cotton cards were selling for \$15 a pair when they usually sold for 40 or 50 cents.^{xiii}

News and local items of interest were not the only features printed in *The Traveler*. This small and decidedly pro-Union newspaper included articles supporting the northern cause and northern supremacy. Comments such as this were common throughout the paper: "The PEOPLE of the South may as well understand now as at a future day, that a separation of this government is a contingency that God Almighty never made a provision for. The idea never was entertained in the north, and in the south, with all the assistance it has received from hell and other sympathizing powers, has not succeeded in making the idea universal at home."^{xiv} Already compelled to live with the enemy in their midst and house officers, comments such as these did little to endear the citizens to their occupiers.

Despite the support of the Confederacy by Jacksonport citizens, destruction by their own troops also made life difficult. The Confederate depot had a very large supply of sugar, and to prevent the incoming Union troops from using it the Confederate troops destroyed what they could before leaving. They rolled the barrels into the streets and emptied them, until sugar was “two or three inches deep in the principal street for a distance of one or two blocks.”^{xv} Some of these stores must have been left untouched, as *The Traveler* reported that there was no shortage of sugar and molasses. Further damage was done by local Confederate troops who burned unguarded cotton bales stored at Jacksonport during the occupation. Destroying cotton near enemy lines was a practical but unpopular Confederate order designed to prevent the valued resource from falling into Federal hands.

The largest amount of destruction caused by the Confederate forces during this time at Jacksonport involved the gunboat *Maurepas* in June of 1862. By that time, the Union troops had largely left the town and settled at Camp Taylor at the fork of the Black and White Rivers. Several days before the attack, the camp received word that a gunboat was making its way downriver to shell their encampment. The troops retreated to Galloway’s Plantation a few hours before the gunboat arrived.

Citizens in Jacksonport were overjoyed to see the vessel, despite the fact that it fired several shells into the town believing it was occupied by Union troops. Dr. Brackett reported: “All the City was out cheering and waving flags, and handkerchiefs, the men directing the gunners where to fire to reach our tents.”^{xvi} Despite this enthusiasm, Dr. Brackett reports their only casualty was a man who drowned by the river, and when a mule team went down to bury him a shell burst nearby and caused the team to bolt, “throwing the wagon over and breaking things.”^{xvii} Young Sarah Wood’s letter to her friend tells a slightly different story: “You never seen anything run like they [the Federals] did when the gun boat [came]. Some would jump over [their] horse head and leave it standing in the street.”^{xviii} Union commander Col. Albert Brackett’s report states he did not return fire for fear of harming the women and children in the town.

The gunboat’s orders were to destroy the supplies at Jacksonport and Grand Glaize, which it did with great efficiency. The troops came ashore and destroyed “about a thousand bales of cotton, rolled off in the river all the sugar and molasses they could roll...and stove in the rest. The town now is perfectly sour with the stench of commingled Sugar, Cotton, and Molassas [sic].”^{xix} While Dr. Brackett’s accounts of the “Wail of Sorrow, Anguish, Fear, and Anger [which] went up in one Grand Chorus”^{xx} at the loss of these goods was probably exaggerated, it could not have been pleasant for the inhabitants to see these resources destroyed.

An interesting event occurred during the attack of the *Maurepas*. The founder of Jacksonport, Thomas Todd Tunstall, watched the gunboat from Paraquet Point at the meeting of the Black and White Rivers. According to Dr. Brackett, Mr. Tunstall was “a perfect Union man” and therefore a “special target”^{xxi} for the approaching gunboat. One of the shots cut off the branch of a tree above his head. Mr. Tunstall “took it coolly enough and brought a bit of a splinter (which hit him) home.”^{xxii}

The destruction of supplies was not the only measure taken against General Steele’s troops during their May occupation. Col. Albert Brackett reported at the end of the month that one of his men was found dead in a swamp, and he believed it was murder. From Brackett’s other writings, it is clear this was not an unheard of or isolated incident. The Confederates intended to fight back whenever possible.

Despite the difficulties faced by Jacksonport from General Steele's forces, they paled in comparison to the hardships imposed upon them when General Curtis' entire Army of the Southwest overran the county during the last week of May 1862. At that time, from 10,000 to 15,000 Union troops terrorized the county for almost two weeks. A letter written from Jacksonport to the *True Democrat* on July 31, 1862 by "One of the People" went into great detail concerning these outrages, and reflected the indignation of the writer. The letter opened with anger at the troops who "extorted [oaths] of allegiance under the penalty of death, imprisonment and destruction of property."^{xxiii}

The withdrawing Confederate forces took all the available corn with them, severely depleting the town's supply. This made the damages done to the food supply all the more hard to bear. Union troops pastured their horses on planted fields and took whatever food was available without compensation, despite the professed beliefs of the injured party. According to "One of the People": "It was in vain to tell them that they would starve women and children. They said that was the way that they expected to crush the rebellion."^{xxiv}

They took anything of value with them, including livestock, horses, buggies, and even raiding trunks and stealing bedclothes. Even the slaves suffered this abuse, and any bedding or clothing that the troops could not use was torn apart. Apparently, even "the sanctity of the grave was no bar to their rapacity." In several instances they exhumed the dead in search of treasure. Despite a previous order issued by General Curtis that no fugitive slaves would be taken in by the army, the letter states that the Union troops took approximately "500 negroes" with them. "It was evident that it was not love for the negroe [sic] that prompted them to emancipation. They carried away the negro for the purpose of weakening our resources and also because they wanted them to perform the menial tasks in camps." In Jacksonport, they broke into stores, "fired the town repeatedly," and burned a livery stable, a gunsmith shop, and a blacksmith shop.^{xxv}

These seemingly outlandish reports were corroborated by several other local sources. Mary Tom Caldwell reported her experiences during this time in an interview. "While all those ten or fifteen thousand Yankees—Dutch Yankees --- were encamped here...they took our house for their hospital. They went into my room and dangled my clothes, making fun of them. They took our house and all we had and insulted our women folk. They accused me of poisoning the well and of being a spy. They spoke Dutch, we couldn't hardly understand them."^{xxvi}

From a once proud town which could boast enough supplies to support Van Dorn's and Pickett's forces in the spring, Jacksonport had difficulty finding food for its own people by midsummer. On August 3rd, 1862, Sarah Wood wrote to a friend that "the feds [ruined] most everything that everybody had" and that she was "tired of corn bread [too] for I don't get anything else."^{xxvii} "Of the People" provided a fitting, though understated, assessment of the situation: "When the Yankees reached here they addressed our people in honied words. They said they came here not as enemies, but to make friends, not to annoy and offend, not the destroyers of property but as the protectors...But they made no friends here."^{xxviii}

ⁱ *War of the Rebellion*, Series I, Vol. VIII, p. 752.

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- ii *War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (70 vols.; Washington: Government Printing Office, 1880-1901), Series I, Vol. VIII, p. 579.
- iii Dr. Charles Brackett, *Surgeon on Horseback*, ed. James Wheaton (Guild Press of Indiana, 1998): 113-114.
- iv Brackett, 118.
- v Brackett, 118.
- vi Albert O. Marshall, "Army Life From a Soldier's Journal", (Chicago Legal News Company, Joliet, Ill., 1884) in *Stream of History* 19:3 (December 1982): 21.
- vii Brackett, 114.
- viii Brackett, 114.
- ix *The Traveler*, Jacksonport, Arkansas, May 9, 1862.
- x Brackett, 115-116.
- xi *Traveler*, 1.
- xii Letter from Charles Whitson in "Letter from Jacksonport, Written May 8, 1862," Lady Elizabeth Luker, ed. *Stream of History* 26 (Winter 1989): 9.
- xiii *Traveler*, 1.
- xiv George Hand, "The Union," *The Traveler*, May 9, 1862, 1.
- xv General Isaac H. Elliott, *History of the Thirty Third Illinois Volunteer Infantry Regiment in the Civil War, 1861-1865*, (Gibson City, Illinois: Association, 1902) in "Journal Written by a Union Soldier in Major General Frederick Steele's Division in the Spring and Summer of 1862," *Stream of History* 19 (December 1982): 28.
- xvi Brackett, 133.
- xvii Brackett, 133.
- xviii Letter from Sarah Wood to Elizabeth Board, August 5, 1862. Jacksonport State Park Collection.
- xix Brackett, 133-134.
- xx Brackett, 134.
- xxi Brackett, 134.
- xxii Brackett, 134.
- xxiii *Arkansas True Democrat*, Little Rock, September 10, 1862 in Lady Elizabeth Luker, *Fight and Survive* (Newport, Arkansas: Craig Printing Company, 1996), 38-40.
- xxiv *Arkansas True Democrat*, 38-40.
- xxv *Arkansas True Democrat*, 38-40.
- xxvi Sallie W. Stockard, *The History of Lawrence, Jackson, and Independence and Stone Counties of the Third Judicial District of Arkansas* (Little Rock: Arkansas Democrat Co., 1904), p. 72 in *Fight and Survive*, 38.
- xxvii Letter from Sarah Wood to Elizabeth Board, August 3, 1862.
- xxviii *Arkansas True Democrat*, 38, 40.