



STRANGLING THE CONFEDERACY: Coastal Operations in the American Civil War

Kevin Dougherty

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A selection of the Military Book Club While the Civil War is mainly remembered for its epic battles between the Northern and Southern armies, the Union was simultaneously waging another campaign—dubbed “Anaconda”—that was gradually depriving the South of industry and commerce, thus rendering the exploits of its field armies moot. When an independent Dixie finally met the dustbin of history, it was the North’s coastal campaign, as much as the achievements of its main forces, that was primarily responsible. *Strangling the Confederacy* examines the various naval actions and land incursions the Union waged from Virginia down the Atlantic Coast and through the Gulf of Mexico to methodically close down every Confederate port that could bring in weapons or supplies. The Rebels responded with fast ships—blockade runners—that tried to evade the Yankee fleets, while at the same time constructing formidable fortifications that could protect the ports themselves. While Union troopships floated offshore, able to strike anywhere, mobile Confederate forces were kept at hand near crucial points, albeit in smaller numbers, to resist Federal irruptions into their homeland. In the final analysis, the Union’s Navy Board, a unique institution at the time, undertook the correct strategy. Its original decision to focus on ten seaports that had rail or water connections with the Confederate interior—from Norfolk to Charleston to Mobile to New Orleans—shows that the Navy Board understood the concept of decisive points. In a number of battles the Federals were able to leverage their superior technology, including steam power and rifled artillery, in a way that made the Confederate coastal defenses highly vulnerable, if not obsolete. On the other hand, when the Federals encountered Confederate resistance at close-quarters they often experienced difficulties, as in the failures at Fort Fisher, the debacle at Battery Wagner, the Battle of Olustee, and in other clashes. What makes this book particularly unique is its use of modern military doctrine to assess and analyze the campaigns. Kevin Dougherty, an accomplished historian and former career Army officer, concludes that, without knowing it, the Navy Board did an excellent job at following modern strategic doctrine. While the multitude of small battles that flared along the Rebel coast throughout the Civil War have heretofore not been as well known as the more titanic inland battles, in a cumulative sense, Anaconda—the most prolonged of the Union campaigns—spelled doom for the Confederacy.

REVIEWS

“...an excellent short history of the blockade, its campaigns and expeditions, and its successes and failures. It is also an excellent exposition of how the elements of operational design for conducting warfare and their applications have not changed over time. The trick is how to apply them. Dougherty has produced an interesting volume for someone who wants to learn about the Union blockade and for students of the Civil War’s grand strategy and operations. It is highly recommended for both. “Civil War News, 11/2010“For some time there has been a need for a comprehensive analysis of the joint Army-Navy operations conducted by Union forces off the Confederate Atlantic and Gulf coasts. . . . In this volume Kevin Dougherty, a former

Army officer . . . examines the role of joint operations through the prism of modern joint-forces doctrine. . . . Evident rivalry and dysfunction between the Union Army and Navy notwithstanding, Dougherty argues that the coastal campaigns constituted ‘a major step in the evolution of joint warfare and planning in U.S. military history’.—U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings“...a dry, witty and ultimately educational account of Union coastal operations against the Confederate Army...”Defence Web, 12/15/2010“...a very well written overview of the major coastal campaigns conducted during the war. The author has excellent knowledge of the subject coupled with an in depth knowledge of the subject military history and procedures. In addition, he can communicate this in an understandable and readable manner.”James Durney, 02/011“...discusses in detail the impact of combined arms, modern weapons(especially long range rifled artillery), and ironclads on strategy and tactics....useful entry into a complex subject. “CHOICE, March 2011 “It came to be known as the “Anaconda Plan”. It was a simple concept: block all the major southern ports and render their armies useless....In the end the strategy worked. Like the anaconda itself, the Union Navy squeezed the lifeblood out of the South.”Military Heritage, 06/2011“,,,recommended to all American Civil War students, as it covers an area of the naval war usually buried in complete histories of naval operations and seldom addressed in a stand alone volume on the subject....I highly recommend this book to anyone interested in the history of the Civil War blockade.”Mataka.Org“...an excellent short history of the main Federal operations that helped blockade the Confederate coast... very well structured... well written with a real feel for the period”Wargamer.com“a nicely written and tightly worded book summarizing the Union Naval/Military operations against military targets along the Confederate coast...”Journal of America’s Military

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