

The Civil War in Mason Neck and Vicinity, 1861-1865



Cover

The illustration was composed from *Map of N. Eastern Virginia and Vicinity of Washington*, 1862, (Library of Congress, lva00020) and Edwin Forbes' *On Picket in the Woods*, 1864 (Library of Congress, LC-DIG-ppmsca-20614).

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in
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(Adapted from Paul Y. Inashima, 2011, *Archeology of Mason Neck State Park*)

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The Civil War in Mason Neck and Vicinity, 1861-1865

Civil War Historical Background

Virginia seceded from the Union on April 17, 1861. The initial Union forays into Virginia occurred on May 23, 1861 with the taking of Arlington Heights and on May 24 with the occupation of Alexandria (Phisterer 1885:29). Although no major battles occurred within Mason Neck or its near vicinity (Figure 1), numerous military events took place during the war years. These events included the construction of military picket lines and fortifications; ambushes; skirmishes between troops; reconnaissances; the capture of suspected civilian enemy sympathizers; spying by contrabands, local citizens, and military personnel; aerial reconnaissance, mapmaking, and signaling by balloon; the rescue and extraction of civilians; the construction of a pontoon bridge across the Occoquan; amphibious landings; naval blockades; naval ship seizures; and naval bombardments.

1861

During the early months of the secession, the citizens of the Mason Neck vicinity were in a state of unease as indicated by an article in the *Alexandria Gazette* of May 1, 1861:

OCCOQUAN: We understand that during the late excitement in the neighboring counties of Virginia many citizens of Occoquan and vicinity fled from their homes, many of them first taking down the enclosures and turning the cattle into their fields of young wheat . . . Colonel Simms, of Virginia (late Lieut. Simms, U.S. Navy) who has been charged by Gov. Letcher with restoring quiet and protecting defenseless families, is actively engaged in that work of humanity, and lately visited Occoquan and promised the inhabitants the protection of the State.

Later that month, a correspondent signing himself DRAGOON wrote from Occoquan on the 15th to the *Alexandria Gazette* (printed May 20, 1861):



Figure 1. Mason's Neck in January 1862 (detail from Map of the Potomac River, Va. from Alexandria to Below the Occoquan, Robert Sneden, Library of Congress, vhs00309).

The Wise Dragoons, of Fauquier, (Capt. John A. Adams) have been quartered here for nearly three weeks. Previous to the arrival of the company, most of the leading Black Republicans had left, for, it is supposed, Washington city. The famous Jack Underwood is now in that city . . . one would be apt to imagine it [Ocoquan] was a complete hot bed of abolitionism; such I am glad to state is not the case,. . . Besides drilling twice a day, they [the Wise Dragoons] have sentinels posted at every accessible point during the night, and scouts constantly on the qui vive. This service is pretty hard, as nearly every man's turn for duty comes each alternate night . . . The orderly, Sergeant (F. Lewis Marshall, esq) is a grandson of Chief Justice Marshall . . .

On June 10, 1861, the 24th Virginia regiment marched from Davis' Ford on the Ocoquan River toward the village of Ocoquan (Johnston 1914:52-53):

On the 10th of June we struck tents, taking up the line of march for the village of Ocoquan, in the direction of the Potomac River. Our march was only about twelve miles,—hot, dry and dusty, through a country scarce of water. Many a scuffle at wells that we passed took place among the men famishing for water. Our march by the route step was rapid, much too rapid for troops unused to marching and carrying guns, accouterments, knapsacks, blankets and canteens, which, together, weighed from fifty to seventy-five pounds, and which, with our heavy, close fitting coats, made the march burdensome and cruel in the extreme; this in part because the commandant refused to halt for rest or to allow the men to get water. About sunset camp was reached, all hands broken down and exhausted. Next day we marched back, our boys in disgust . . .



Figure 2. David Emmons Johnston, circa 1861 (Johnston 1914).

In the area of Mason Neck by the late summer of 1861, Pohick Creek appears to have become the forward line of the Union forces, and the Ocoquan River, of the Confederate forces. By then, extensive Confederate earthworks had been constructed along the bluffs overlooking the mouth of the Ocoquan River and the town of Colchester. The zone between the Pohick and the Ocoquan including the neck became a buffer zone, initially occupied by the picket posts or forward guards of the Confederates (e.g., Figures 3 and 4).

After the war, Lieutenant William H. Beach (1902:60) of the 1st New York (Lincoln) Cavalry depicted the situation:

The Accotink creek flows into the Potomac below Mt. Vernon. The Ocoquan . . . is from two to three miles from the Accotink. The courses of the two streams are nearly parallel. The Confederates under Gen. [Louis T.] Wigfall were beyond the Ocoquan. The two streams were the picket lines of the respective armies. The region between was debatable ground. Scouting parties from either side would enter this ground. Small parties under cover of night would steal inside the opposing picket line. A few skirmishes had taken place.

(General Wigfall commanded a brigade consisting of three Texas regiments--the 1st, 4th, and 5th--and one Georgia regiment--the 18th (Wilson and Fiske 1889:499). He served in the Confederate army until his resignation on February 20, 1862. Prior to the Civil War, he had been a U.S. Senator from Texas.)

On August 4, 1861, a cutter from the *USS Thomas Freeborn* under Lieutenant Eastman captured the schooner

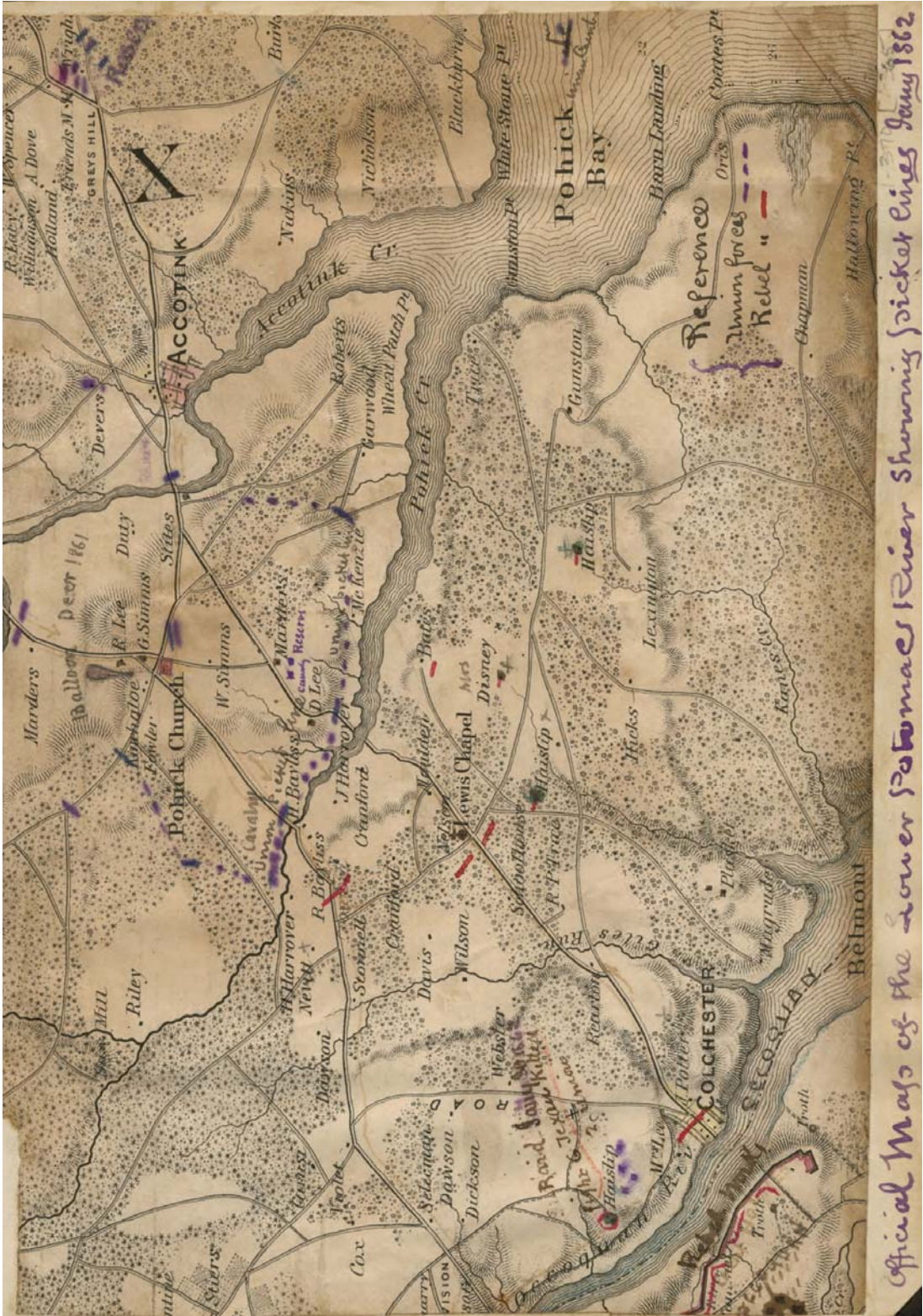


Figure 3. Official Map of the Lower Potomac River Showing Picket Lines, Jan'y 1862 (Robert Sneden, Library of Congress, vhs00068).

Pocahontas which was loaded with wood and the sloop *Mary Grey* in Pohick Creek (Naval History Division 1966; Rush and Woods 1896:598-599). (The *Thomas Freeborn* was a side-wheel steamer described as Fourth Rated; tonnage, 269; crew, 67; and guns, 2 (Rush and Woods 1897:XVI)). The *Pocahontas* belonged to John Haislip of Mason Neck (see John Haislip's Southern Claim's Commission case at the end of this chapter). The *Mary Grey* was thought to belong to Jonathan Roberts. In his report to Lieutenant T.H. Eastman, commanding *U.S.S. Freeborn*, J.W. Bogert, acting Master's Mate, added (transcribed in Rush and Woods 1896:599):

I saw a couple of armed men come down on a point it was necessary to weather, and sit down behind some driftwood. Thinking it more than probable they were going to fire into me on my rounding the point, and being alone in the sloop, I took the first shot myself, upon receiving which they left the hill. I then got the vessels out to the steamer and delivered them to you.

On August 18, 1861, Company C of the 1st New York Cavalry scouted to Accotink and engaged in a skirmish at Pohick Church (7.5) which was noted by the *Daily National Intelligencer* (August 20, 1861). In his report dated August 18, 1861, Captain William H. Boyd of Company C of the 1st (Lincoln) Cavalry posted at Camp Elizabeth, Alexandria, Virginia described the action (transcribed in Scott 1882:113):

At about 10 o'clock a.m., accompanied by Lieutenant Gibson, Second Dragoons, U.S. Army, Lieutenant Hanson, Dr. Herrick, and 46 of my own company, I proceeded towards Accotink interrogating all pedestrians and examining all houses and outbuildings on our way thither, until we reached Accotink, where we learned that a number of cavalry of the enemy were this morning at Pohick Church, whither we immediately proceeded. Our advanced pickets, upon nearing the church, thought they discovered a whole army, and immediately, retreated, communicating directly with the men instead of me, thereby causing a stampede. After a little delay I succeeded in rallying our men together, and immediately retraced our steps. The road being narrow, we were unable to proceed to much advantage. Being in advance myself, upon getting up to the main road I was suddenly brought face to face with the enemy, whom I should judge to have been about 20 strong. The enemy were the first to challenge, and were evidently prepared to meet us, as they were in line at the side of the road (they being apprised of our coming by our advanced pickets, who had been previously challenged). After the usual war salutations I gave the order to charge, and our men shouted, cheered, and charged.

Immediately beyond the church are cross-roads. The enemy separated on the three roads, and our men divided and followed in hot pursuit. One party pursued within a short distance of Occoquan, both parties shooting as they rode. At the cross-roads were three men in ambush, and it is believed that these were the men who fired on us. Our loss is one killed (Jacob Erwen, shot through the body), and two missing (Williams and Lancaster), who were thrown from their horses. We cannot say whether the enemy lost any or not, but it is said one of the enemy was shot in the arm, and another fell on his horse's neck, and seemed to be unable to manage the horse. The enemy were well mounted, had very superior horses, and were enabled to outfoot us, and thus make their escape Our dead we brought home with us.

The *Richmond Dispatch* (August 31, 1861) presented a different perspective on the events of August 18:

On Sunday, the 18th ult., Col. Stuart, of the Confederate 1st Regiment of Cavalry, ordered Lt. Southall, of the Amelia Dragoons, to go with twenty-eight men to the neighborhood of Pohick Church—a part of the country not hitherto visited by our pickets—and station pickets at such points as he might think advisable.

The Lieutenant . . . on the Braddock's road stationed eight (8) men; at Turner's station, on the Orange and Alexandria Railroad, four; and on the Pohick road, eight more. With the remaining eight he himself set forth on to the Pohick Church. Soon after arriving at the Church, fifteen Yankee Dragoons made their appearance from a piece of pines, and immediately our nine men charged on them



Figure 5. Pohick Church (Artist: Robert K. Sneden. Virginia Historical Society).

and put them to flight. It turned out, however, that these flying fifteen were only a small detachment of a large body of cavalry that were but a little distance off; and in a short time, they having joined the main body, the whole of them, amounting to seventy-five, returned towards our men.

Here, then, were seventy-five Yankees against nine Southerners—... The entire body of Yankees came within fifty paces of our little band, before they could distinguish them from friends. They were then commanded to halt . . . Thus, seventy five men were brought to a stand by nine. At length the valiant Yankees advanced at a charge . . . , firing a volley of shots . . . the only alternative left our men was to retreat . . .

The Yankee report . . . they encountered a superior force of our men, and killed twenty-seven (27) men. The truth, however, is not one of our men was touched . . . one Yankee was killed, two more wounded, and several horses killed, and this, too, by their own hands, as our men fired not a shot. Two prisoners were also taken. This statement is the one given by the citizens of the neighborhood, and confirmed by our men.

On September 10, 1861, the *U.S.S. Pocahontas* experienced a near encounter with a suspected smuggler. As described in a letter by Lieutenant R.H. Wyman of the *U.S.S. Pocahontas* dated September 11, 1861 and addressed to Captain T.T. Craven, commanding Potomac Flotilla (transcribed in Rush and Woods 1896:668):

When the moon went down last night I sent our launch in toward High Point with orders to keep a lookout that no boats passed close inshore. This morning the coxswain in charge reports that near midnight he discovered a large boat coming from the direction of the Occoquan River toward High Point. He pulled in and the boats crew seeing our launch pulled back. She pulled very fast, and though

he tried to get his gun to bear, she was out of sight inside the point before he succeeded. As you remarked a day or two since, should they attempt a crossing they would be likely to pull up close under the land to Hallowing Point [Va.], and then cross to the creek which makes up at Chapman's Point [Md.], within a very short distance of the road leading to Piscataway. The head of the creek is also a short distance from the head of Mattawoman Creek.

In a letter written by Lieutenant Wyman, commanding *U.S.S. Pocahontas*, written to Captain T.T. Craven, commanding Potomac Flotilla, and dated September 12, 1861 (transcribed in Rush and Woods 1896:669-670), it was reported that:

Above and over the sandy beach which makes inside of High Point toward Occoquan River, a longboat is visible, hauled up, and some six to eight men appear to be working on her.

Around this time, Thomas T. Craven, commanding Potomac Flotilla, complained to Gideon Welles, Secretary of the Navy, about the poor condition of the ships under his command (letter transcribed in Rush and Woods 1896:676):

Again, sir, I beg leave to remind the Department of the very inefficient condition of the vessels comprising this flotilla. With the exception of the *Pocohantas*, *Seminole*, *Penguin*, and *Union*, there is not [one] of the steamers that is not liable, in consequence of the exposed condition of their engine, to utter disability by even a musket ball; and besides all this there are almost daily complaints from some one of them of repairs needed to engines, strengthening of decks, etc.

On September 19, 1861, Lieutenant Wyman, commanding *U.S.S. Pocahontas*, observed (transcribed in Rush and Woods 1896:681), "About 2 miles up the creek (Pohick) there is a body of [Confederate] troops, but how many could not be ascertained."

Also, on September 19, 1861, Captain Craven, commanding Potomac Flotilla, reported to Commander J.A. Dahlgren, Commandant Navy Yard, that he was sending up thirteen contrabands (transcribed in Rush and Woods 1896:681-682). These individuals apparently had made their way to one or more of the vessels of the flotilla, having fled from the control of Dr. Stewart, Thomas Penny Grimes, Dr. Hooe, Mr. Fairfax, and Charles Mason, respectively. Secretary of the Navy Welles added the pencil endorsement, "I think these persons might be turned over to General McClellan, who wants their labor" (transcribed in Rush and Woods 1896:682).

On September 21, 1861, the 16th New York Infantry made an expedition to Pohick Church (Phisterer 1912).

On October 1, 1861, the Mozart Regiment (40th New York Volunteer Infantry) made a reconnaissance to Pohick Church and the vicinity (*Richmond Dispatch*, October 9, 1861). They found that the rebel encampments there had been deserted.

On October 4, 1861, detachments of the 16th, 26th, and 27th New York Infantry (Phisterer 1912) along with a detachment from the 5th Maine Infantry made an expedition to Pohick Church. Moore (1862b:40) noted:

October 4.—The Federal forces to the number of four hundred occupied Pohick church, sixteen miles from Alexandria, on the Fairfax road, Virginia. A force of rebel cavalry, which had held the place, retired hastily with the loss of several wounded. A reconnaissance was then made toward Occoquan, during which important discoveries were made.

A contemporary account of this expedition appeared in the *Utica [New York] Morning Herald* in a letter dated October 5, 1861 from the 26th [New York] Regiment at Camp Mary in Virginia:

Last Thursday night Col. Christian, with 300 Infantry and 50 Cavalry, was sent out to Pohick Church, to capture if possible, a body of rebel Cavalry, which was reported to be stationed there. A portion went out on the Richmond and a portion on the Mount Vernon road, and after a march of 14 miles, arrived at the Church about daybreak. The "body of Cavalry," however, proved to be a mere outpost of fifteen or twenty of the Hampton Legion, who, after exchanging a few shots, which resulted in wounding one of the rebel horsemen, made good their escape before they could be surrounded. The detachment,

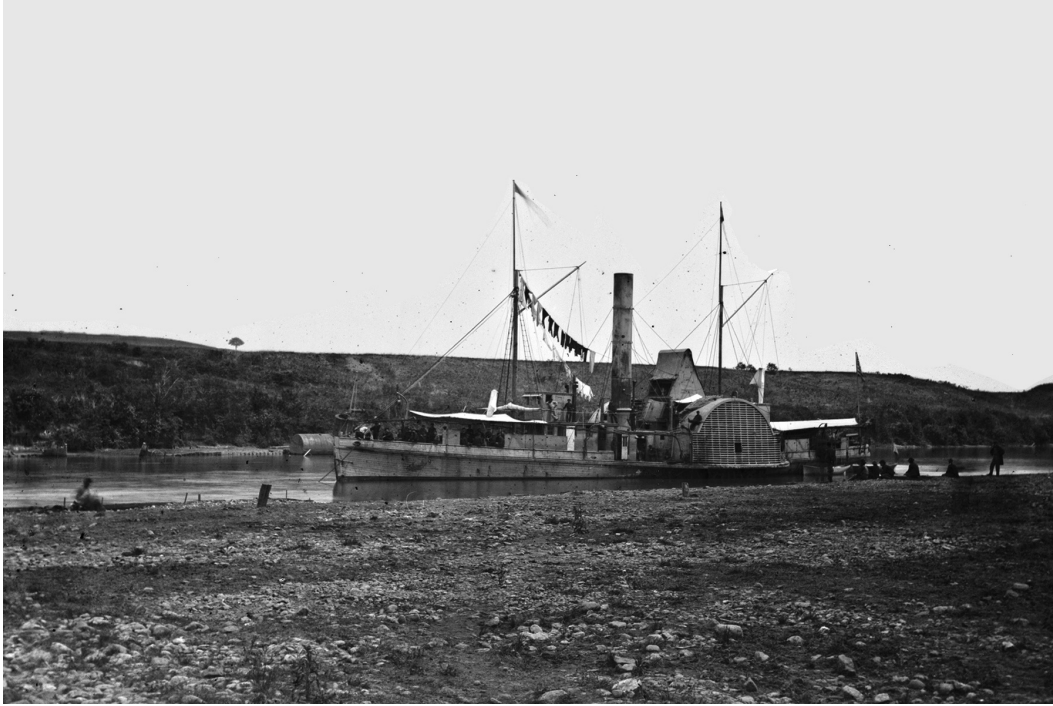


Figure 6. The Union gunboat *Yankee* at Fredericksburg, Virginia on May 19, 1864. (Photographer: James Gardner. Library of Congress, LD-DIG-cwpb-00338 DLC. Cropped and enhanced from original.)

after sacking the officers' quarters, and appropriating everything from whiskey "and other household furniture," down to their drums and morning rations, returned, having marched about thirty miles in fifteen hours, over a very rough country. Pohick Church is a very large, old-fashioned brick church, with a sort of marble floor, and a pulpit of the old English style, which is ascended with about as much difficulty as a light-house, by a spiral stairway. The soldiers who mounted this pulpit to try the effect of their features in the clerical point of view, could scarcely be seen below the eyes, in this quaint old structure. Near the altar is a wide aisle . . . [which] like the rest, was now filled with forage for the rebel Cavalry. A scout who came in camp this evening, reported that we "beat up their quarters" quite hurriedly, for a large body of Infantry and Cavalry came to the Church soon after we left. Our force was probably very near their main body, as they heard the long roll in their camp before they left.

A letter written by Thomas T. Craven, commanding Potomac Flotilla, to Gideon Welles, Secretary of the Navy, and dated October 11, 1861 indicates that the Occoquan River was being blockaded at that time (transcribed in Rush and Woods 1896:714). Earlier letters between the same two correspondents dated September 20, 1861 and October 3, 1861 and sent from the *U.S.S. Yankee* addressed from "Off Occoquan River" indicate that the blockade was in place by, at least, late September (Rush and Woods 1896:679, 702).

On October 12, 1861, the rebels had "advanced to Pohick Church . . . and barracaded [sic] the road with wagons; but our [Union] pickets paid no attention to them" (*Richmond Dispatch*, October 21, 1861).

Another letter from the 26th [New York] Regiment, this time from Camp Franklin, and dated October 15, 1861 was printed by the *Utica [New York] Morning Herald* and described the state of the citizens thereabouts:

It seems to me to be the very worst feature of war—the deleterious influence it must have on the morals of a people, for the distinction between military pillaging and stealing is often very fine and subtle.

Those families just between the two armies [such as those on Mason Neck] have really a dangerous and harassed life. They endeavor, of course, to take a neutral course, which only subjects them to occasional marauds from both parties, and sometimes skirmishes around their dwellings. Many wealthy families have been driven to very coarse living, owing to the stoppage of communication with the towns, and begin to realize the folly of Virginia in making her soil the battle ground. There is many an aristocratic family here who are secessionists, I believe just for the sake of keeping their reputation as F.F.V's [First Families of Virginia]. Many of these, by the way, own dilapidated, worn out old farms, and manage to keep up a sort of Turveydrop gentility only by selling negroes. However scarce the cash or shabby the servants, there must be a fine dwelling house with a spacious door-yard and very showy entrance. I have seen at least a dozen pianos, each of which was the first ever brought into Virginia, and numerous clocks which had once belonged to George Washington. I think the old General must have had a way of giving furniture to all of his old acquaintances, instead of locks of hair, when he was getting old, by the *souvenirs* I find. The Virginia gentleman is very hospitable, and if you'll only praise his horses, and not tamper with his negroes, he'll treat you finely, without asking your politics. At present this situation makes him very politic, and he treats officers of both armies out of the same bottle, and often the same day. So much for our "Secesh" acquaintances in Virginia. [Signed] ALIQUIS.

On October 18, 1861, the 2nd, 3rd, and 5th Michigan Infantry along with the 37th New York Infantry made a reconnaissance to the Occoquan River. On the next day, Brigadier General Israel B. Richardson reported on this reconnaissance to Brigadier General S.P. Heintzelman (transcribed in Scott 1882:249):

I left this camp yesterday at 3.30 p.m. to make a reconnaissance in the direction of Occoquan, my force consisting of two regiments of infantry, one half battery of artillery, and one company of cavalry. The command proceeded as far as Accotink Creek, taking the Telegraph road. On reaching this stream I came to a halt, and sent half a company of cavalry to Pohick Church, the other half to Accotink Village, and posed a company of infantry to our right on the road leading up the creek. The company on moving up the road fell in with the enemy's pickets, who immediately ran into their camp across the creek and gave the alarm. The long roll beat some 20 minutes from three different camps on our right, showing that they were in some force. After resting the command half an hour I sent to order in both detachments of cavalry, who soon came in, finding no enemy at the village or at the church. The enemy occupy the valley on the right of the road leading from the crossing to the church. From what I could learn, the road from Pohick Church to Occoquan is clear, and but few troops are left at the latter place . . . I took this opportunity of moving forward our pickets, who now occupy a direct line from Windsor Hill to the mouth of Dogue Creek.

In an indorsement to Richardson's report, Heintzelman on October 19 noted, "If there are any [Confederates] south of this [Telegraph] road it is not probable that they are in force." He, further, observed, "Accotink Village was abandoned, as well as Pohick Church, several days ago." The rebel forces were thought to be those of General Ewell's brigade.

On November 9, 1861, the *Daily National Intelligencer* reported that General Sickles had told a correspondent for the *New York Times* that "Our scouts have crossed the river about the mouth of Occoquan and have discovered no troops or pickets."

On November 12, 1861, the 4th Maine Infantry; the 2nd, 3rd, and 5th Michigan Infantry; Companies B, E, and G of the 1st New York Cavalry; the 37th New York Infantry; the 32nd, 41st, 61st, and 63rd Pennsylvania Infantry; and Battery B of the 1st Rhode Island Light Artillery made a reconnaissance to Pohick Church and the Occoquan River (reports transcribed in Scott 1882:413-421). On the day prior, Isaac Moses, Assistant Adjutant-General, had written from Fort Lyon to Brigadier-General John Sedgwick (transcribed in Davis, Perry, and Kirkley 1897a:504):

I am directed by the general [Brigadier General Heintzelman] commanding this division to inform you



Figure 7. Picket station on Potomac Creek. (Artist: Edwin Forbes, 1863. Library of Congress, LC-DIG-ppmsca-20575. Cropped from original.)

that a body of 400 cavalry were to-day at Accotink, and it is reported that there are two regiments of infantry going to encamp at Pohick Church. The general will send out a force on the two roads leading to Pohick Church. You will detach one regiment of your brigade, to be joined by one company of the Lincoln Cavalry, to proceed out on the old Fairfax road as far as the Accotink, then to halt and push forward a reconnoissance as far as the Pohick, if it is found safe, observing well the roads on the right flank. The men will carry one day's rations in their haversacks and return in the evening . . . P.S. Your regiment will march at 4 a.m.

The events of November 12, 1861 were covered in the *Daily National Intelligencer* (November 14, 1861) and were described in the official documents (Moore 1862b:366):

The rebels having made a demonstration against our pickets on the 11th November, General Heintzelman sent out two small parties of cavalry to reconnoitre. They returned with a report that the rebels, with four hundred cavalry and two regiments of infantry, were encamped near Pohick Church . . . On the 12th inst., at three A.M., Gen. Richardson's brigade, with company G of the Lincoln Cavalry, and Capt. Thompson's and Capt. Randolph's batteries of artillery, advanced upon Pohick Church by the telegraph road, followed, an hour later, by Gen. Jameson's brigade, and Company G. Lincoln Cavalry.

Their instructions were for Gen. Richardson to divide his brigade at Potter's house, just beyond Piney Run, he to follow the telegraph road, and the other two regiments, with a battery and a company of cavalry, to cross to Accotink and reach Pohick Church by the Accotink and Pohick continuation of the Alexandria turnpike, so to time his march as to have both his columns reach the church at the same time. Gen. Johnson's brigade followed an hour later on the telegraph road as a reserve. Gen. Heintzelman himself left head-quarters at daylight, and overtook the advance where they were halted, a short distance on the north side of the church.

It was soon ascertained that the rebel cavalry had left, having encamped at the church the night before. Our men advanced and occupied the ground, and sent out parties on the different roads. The

regiments under Col. Hayman took the road to Colchester. There are no signs of the enemy having been recently in that vicinity, nor were there any indications of their occupying the opposite bank of the Occoquan at that point.

Col. Terry, who commanded the troops which followed the telegraph road to Mrs. Violet's, learned that the enemy's pickets had left there two hours before. On the opposite side of the Occoquan there was seen a small force of cavalry and infantry . . . The cavalry pickets on the road toward Elsey's had also retreated very recently.

Having ascertained these facts, the troops returned to their camps . . . We were five hours at Pohick Church . . . all were back to their camps by nine P.M. . . . Colonel Berry's regiment . . . with Captain Todd's company of Lincoln Cavalry, marched at four A.M. on the old Fairfax road with orders to halt at the Accotink, and push forward a reconnaissance as far as the Pohick . . . By taking the road toward Pohick Church, his [Col. Berry's] scouts came in sight of our troops in advance of the church, and mistook them for the enemy drilling. Our skirmishers saw them, and reported the rebel cavalry and infantry on that road. Gen. Heintzelman advanced a force to meet them, but after sending forward no one could be discovered, and the troops were withdrawn. Of the Lincoln Cavalry Sergeant O'Brien is killed; Bugler Benton mortally wounded, since dead; Private Miller wounded, missing; Private Mitchell wounded slightly; Capt. Todd, missing; Private Johnson, missing; and seven horses missing. This loss was sustained by the negligence of the officers of this cavalry in permitting their men to straggle in the presence of the enemy, and to plunder.

On November 12, 1861, Confederate General J.E. Johnson wrote to Brigadier General Whiting (Scott 1882:949-950):

. . . . We have had another stampede to-day, caused by reports from Pohick again. Stuart made an expedition in that direction on Sunday, and this, I suppose, is retaliation.

and, further,

13th—Stuart reports from Lieutenant Colonel Wickham, Sixth Virginia Cavalry, that the expedition of yesterday of 1,500 infantry, a squadron and five field pieces, which went as far as Mrs. Violet's; a large part of the infantry going as far as Occoquan Creek, on Telegraph road, piloted by Joseph Stiles. Six hundred infantry went to Colchester, piloted by Jonathan Roberts. They are supposed to have bivouacked last night beyond Pohick.

On the Confederate side, a veteran recalled activities near Occoquan (Coxe 1922:461-462):

The weather becoming pretty cold about the middle of November, 1861, the [Hampton] legion broke camp at Maple Valley and moved down to a finely wooded country near the Junction of the Potomac and Occoquan Rivers and went into winter quarters. The villages of Occoquan, at the head of navigation of the Occoquan, and Colchester were on the opposite side of and a little lower down on that river near by. We remained in those snug winter quarters until March 8, 1862. The winter was rather severe and our duties somewhat exacting. Our business was to guard that country and build redoubts and breastworks along the Occoquan [Figure 3]. But we had a good time. Captain Beggs, our commissary, kept us plentifully supplied with rations, and the country round about was well stocked with poultry, butter, and such good things.

During this long winter [Col. Wade] Hampton frequently entertained his officers with good dinners at his quarters. He rode along the lines often and sometimes rowed a boat up and down the Occoquan. Our camp was on what was known as the old Telegraph Road between Alexandria and Fredericksburg One day during a snow storm Hampton called for a detail of twenty men from the different companies to go on a scout beyond the Occoquan in the direction of Pohick Church, where the advance lines of the Federals were established, and I happened to be on this detail. At headquarters we

found Hampton, Capt. S.D. Lee, and Major Conner, all accoutered and armed as we of the detail were, and all started out afoot. We crossed the Occoquan to old Colchester on a hill opposite in the large rowboat used as a ferry. At Colchester five or six Texas scouts had permanent quarters, and Hampton took two of them along with us. We marched along the old Telegraph Road in the thick falling snow till we reached the summit of a sort of ridge. Here the Texans advised that our rifles be loaded and capped ready for any emergency that might happen at any moment. The snow, driven in our faces by an east wind, rather blinded us so that we couldn't see very far ahead. Going down the opposite side of the ridge, we came to a small stream crossing the road at the bottom. On the other side of the stream the land sloped up and back showing as far as we could see cleared fields, except on the right of the road, where there were some woods. We halted at the stream, and our officers and the scouts went a little aside and consulted . . . Getting over the stream, we took position on high ground in a bunch of small timber. The Texans then went forward alone about three hundred yards. They returned in about twenty minutes and reported to our officers that they got in sight of a lone horseman, apparently a mounted picket, on the old road about half a mile ahead of us.

During another consultation between officers and Texans . . . a furious cannonade of heavy guns, apparently between us and our camp, broke loose . . . Captain Lee . . . thought it likely that the enemy had rushed up to the Junction of the Potomac and Occoquan a squadron of gunboats, which were shelling our camp. Then Hampton very quickly ordered a retreat . . . But the cannonade stopped long before we got back to old Colchester, where we learned that the cannonade . . . took place down at Freestone Point on the Potomac, where some Federal boats tried to run by our batteries.



Figure 8. "Coming into the lines. A party of slaves . . . have started for the Union lines." (Artist: Edwin Forbes, c. 1876. Library of Congress, LC-DIG-ppmsca-20762. Digitally enhanced from original.)



Figure 9. “The reliable contraband,” perhaps passing along information or serving as a guide to Union forces. (Artist: Edwin Forbes. Library of Congress, LC-DIG-ppmsca-20755. Digitally enhanced from original.)

Throughout the course of the war, contrabands (fugitive slaves) made their way from the Mason Neck vicinity either across land or by boat along the Potomac River to Union lines (Figure 8). Although no figures for Mason Neck itself exist, the *Richmond Times* estimated that by July 1865 “50,000 negroes in Virginia had deserted their homes and masters” (cited in Eggleston 1922:106). Some slaves who remained behind acted as spies (e.g., letter from Wyman to Fox, December 18, 1861, and letter from Wyman to Welles, February 23, 1862, cited below) and guides (e.g., *Richmond Times*, February 15, 1862, cited below) for Union troops (Figure 9). Others, beginning in 1863, joined or were conscripted into the Union army and navy (Harper 2007:88; Tomblin 2009; Williams 1888).

During this period, the number of free blacks in Fairfax County were relatively small. Starting in 1860, free blacks were required to register every five years with the county clerk (Jordan 1995:207). Despite this requirement, of the 672 free blacks, only 251 did so in that year. The following year, only 8 registered.

On November 15, 1861, Confederate General W.H.C. Whiting wrote (transcribed in Scott 1882:956-957):

Private Hanan, of Andrews’ battery, has just returned from Maryland, where he has been since October 24. He reports very much the same as all others as to force and intention of the [Union] enemy . . . He landed at Holland [Hallowing] Point, and informs me that he learned above Occoquan that they were building a pontoon bridge to cross the Occoquan, and the reconnaissance the other day was to select a place for it . . .

On November 20, 1861, Captain Simms of the Confederate Navy and commander of the *George Page* made a “land cruise” to Occoquan to destroy boats that were harbored there (*Richmond Dispatch*, November 25, 1861):

Leaving late in the evening, he made his way into the village and thence to the mouth of the Creek, where he found several boats belonging to the people of Occoquan. These were burned about 3 o’clock



Figure 10. “8th N.J.V. [winter] Camp near Matawoman [sic] Creek on the Potomac, Charles Co. Md.” (Artist: Arthur Lumley. Library of Congress, LC-DIG-ppmsca-20784. Digitally enhanced.)

this morning [November 21], and the light of the fires flashing through the dark caused considerable commotion across the river. Such others as were found in the vicinity, that were liable to seizure, were rendered useless. The gallant sailor returned this morning throughly disgusted with his land trip, and is now safely on board his steamer, on the lookout for new adventures.

In late November, the *Richmond Dispatch* (November 25, 1861) reported that:

A large body of [Union] men are engaged in cutting the wood between Pohick Church and Fairfax, and in hauling it to Washington and Alexandria. Hay, grain, and stock is carried off whenever found, and they are very vigilant in ferreting out anything that can be used by the army.

The November 22, 1861 issue of the *Richmond Dispatch* reported that 8 prisoners had been transported from the Occoquan area to the prison in Richmond. Two were caught trying to get to Washington. Six were arrested for “lacking in that fidelity to the South which should characterize all who go at large in Dixie.” Of the eight, one, Fielder Magruder, was a Mason Neck landowner; another, Jas. [Joseph] Plaskett was also a Mason Neck landowner (Figure 1). Magruder and Plaskett were neighbors and resided off Belmont Bay near Giles Run.

During the winter of 1861-1862 (Davis 1863:23), a detail of about twenty men from each of the Texas Regiments was stationed on the Occoquan “to watch the enemy’s movements, and annoy them in their advances.”

Around December 1, 1861, the infantry and artillery of the Hampton Legion went into winter quarters at Camp Wigfall near the mouth of the Occoquan River (McArthur and Burton 1996:127; Hattaway 1976:34). The camp lay opposite Colchester. The cavalry joined the camp on December 11. The 19th Georgia Infantry Regiment under the provisional brigade of General Hampton was stationed at the village of Occoquan and the Hampton Legion at Colchester (McArthur and Burton 1996:129fn2).

On December 8, 1861, Wade Hampton wrote from Camp Wigfall to General Joseph E. Johnston, commanding Department of Northern Virginia (Scott 1882:986-987):

I have been very busy making such defenses here as I could, but my supply of tools has been so limited,

that as yet only a small line of rifle-pits are completed. My main dependence here must be on rifles, for I suppose the enemy will bring such heavy guns, and so many of them, that my artillery cannot fight them very long I am sure that I can hold the position if attacked only in front for some hours at least, and if you want it held until re-enforcements can come up, I will do it. I have some apprehension that tugs may be able to run up close to the ferry, as there seems to be some considerable depth of water along the bay and river here We hear nothing from our scouts, except that the enemy come down almost every day to Pohick Church. Troops can be landed at Deep Hole, and there is a very large body of cleared land around that place.

On December 18, 1861, the 105th Pennsylvania Volunteer Regiment accompanied by a squadron of the New Jersey Cavalry and two sections of the artillery from the New Jersey Volunteers made a reconnaissance to Pohick Church (Scott 1882:470). In his report on December 19 to General Heintzelman, Colonel Amor A. McKnight described the mission (transcribed in Scott 1882:470-471):

We arrived at Pohick about 9 a.m.; was informed that the previous day the enemy had there a force of 200 cavalry, and also a regiment of infantry concealed in the woods to the west of the village. Remained at Pohick about two hours; sent a party down the Telegraph road and discovered, about a mile distant, a rebel picket 6 or 8 strong; fired at them and they fled, but did not pursue, as my instructions did not allow me to proceed beyond this point. Left Pohick Church between 11 and 12 a.m. and returned to camp at 3.30 p.m. Came by the village of Accotink, and was there informed that no rebel forces had been in the village for over a month.

On December 20, 1861, Colonel McKnight reported on further intelligence (transcribed in Scott 1882:470-471):

I have this moment learned from one of my command, who penetrated about a mile and a half beyond Pohick Church along the Colchester road, that he was informed by Mrs. Murray (a farmer's wife residing on the road) that about 10 o'clock a.m. of the 18th instant a force of the enemy numbering 500 cavalry and a regiment of infantry had passed along the road towards Pohick Church, and that about 6 p.m. of the same day another force of the rebel cavalry, 200 strong, had passed forward in the same direction. She did not see the party return . . . [I] believe they went back on the Telegraph road. The advanced enemy's pickets on this road are stationed on a run (name unknown) a few rods west of Mr. [D.] Lee's house [on Pohick Creek] and about one and three-fourths miles from Pohick Church.

On December 20, 1861, Lieutenant R.H. Wyman, commander of the U.S. Navy Potomac Flotilla, reported to G.V. Fox, the Assistant Secretary of the Navy (transcribed in Rush and Woods 1897:8):

The enemy's cavalry scout frequently as far as Pohick Creek, and show themselves on Hallowing Point, but have not lately been on the farms below. I have been informed by slaves that a gunning sloop has been in the habit of passing around into the Occoquan, and selling whisky, etc. Her name I could not ascertain, but the names of the men on her were said to be Thomas Hewitt and ----- Pearson.

From the same source, I am informed that the enemy's force does not extend on this side of the Occoquan River, but that they have built a fort a short distance below the Occoquan Mills (this I have seen myself some little distance from the road), and also that they are still working at fortifications.

Thomas Hewitt was captured shortly afterwards on January 2, 1862 by the *U.S.S. Harriet Lane* under the command of Captain Dahlgren (Davis, Perry, and Kirkley 1897b:332). He was sent to the Old Capitol Prison. He was transferred to the War Department on February 15, 1862 and was released on February 22, 1862. Pearson was perhaps Thomas Pearson of Mason Neck.

On December 25, 1861, Caleb S. Wright wrote Fox, the Assistant Secretary of the Navy, about his fears of a Confederate battery at Hallowing Point (transcribed in Rush and Woods 1897:11):

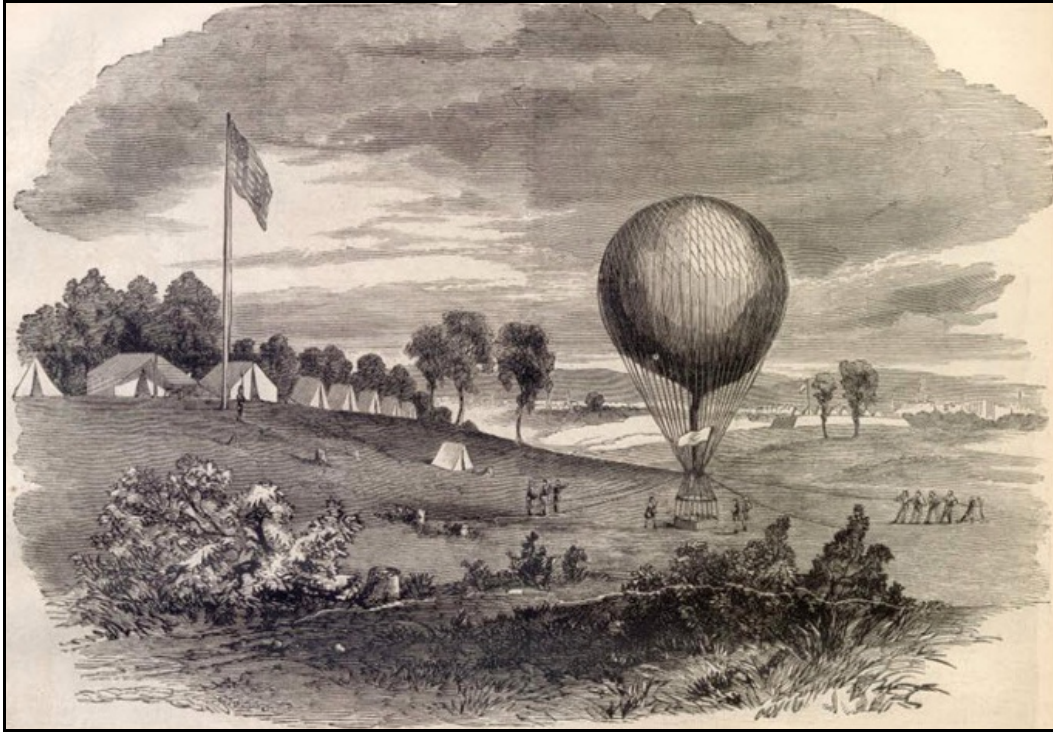


Figure 11. Lowe's balloon ascent from General McDowell's headquarters, Arlington Heights, Virginia (*Harpers Weekly* 5(252):679, October 16, 1861).

DEAR SIR: I am the owner of the steamers *Volunteer* and *Reindeer*, running daily from foot of Eleventh street to Rum Point, on Mattawoman Creek, but am in dread constantly of a rebel battery now or about to be erected at Hallowell [Hallowing] Point, 6 or 8 miles below Mount Vernon, they having possession there, as rebel cavalry and soldiers are seen there daily. It is the most dangerous point on the river, and would be a complete blockade of the river, as vessels drawing 6 feet are obliged to pass within a quarter of a mile of the shore. If the Government desires to land 1,000 men there to protect it, I will transport them from here or General Hooker's division for nothing, immediately, if they require it.

Also on December 25, 1861, the *Richmond Dispatch* (December 18, 1861) reported that:

... a large body of Federals, three thousand strong, came out in the direction of Pohick Church, and marched towards our lines, seemingly for the purpose of making a reconnaissance. After coming about a mile and a half of our pickets they halted, and soon after retired. Their movements were closely watched, and had they ventured some little impediments might have been thrown their way.

During December 1861, several Union balloon ascents were made near Pohick Church (Figures 3 and 4). These ascents formed the basis for Union maps prepared by Robert Sneden of the Mason Neck vicinity in January 1862. On one map (Figure 3), Sneden indicated Confederate picket lines at Lewis Chapel and Colchester and near the homes of Bayliss, Bates, and Disney. On a second map (Figure 4), Sneden noted Confederate pickets near Gunston Hall and the homes of Plaskett, Disney, Haislip, and two Trices.

1862

During January 1862, residents of the Mason Neck area were retained by both Confederate and Union forces on suspicion of conspiring with the enemy. Some of the “civilian sympathizers” who were arrested and mentioned in the January 1862 “Memoranda of Various Political Arrests—From Reports of Confederate Commissioners,” Robert Ould, Assistant Secretary of War, included (Davis, Perry, and Kirkley 1897b; U.S. Department of War 1896:1445-1446):

[William Weston] left [Washington] in company with F. [ielding] Magruder. Magruder bought a skiff in which he and Magruder escaped from Washington . . . the subsequent examination of F. Magruder satisfies me Weston was sick, and anxious to escape from Washington and I therefore recommend his discharge.

Joseph Plaskett.—Born in England. Lived in Fairfax nearly eight years. Has remained closely at home since the war began. Has only once in ten weeks been to mill. Says he is friendly to the Southern cause. Gave one valuable horse to a Fairfax company of cavalry; another impressed for the Southern army. Has had no communication of any kind with the enemy. Mr. Hunt and Mr. Thomas proved him to be a man of good character. I recommend his discharge on taking the oath of allegiance.

Elias Beach.—Says he was born in Fairfax. Lives two miles and a half from Occoquan within our lines. Passed our lines once to go to mill at Accotink. Has had no communication with the enemy. Has not been to Alexandria since the middle of June, when he went to bring from Alexandria the cousin of his wife, Alfred Beach. Alfred Beach was a soldier in the Confederate service. Messrs. Hunt and Thomas proved him to be a man of good character. I recommend his discharge.

Fielding Magruder.—Prisoner says he was born in Charles County, Md. Removed to the city of Washington in the year 1830. Was engaged there in keeping a wood and lumber yard. Twelve years ago he purchased land in Virginia on Occoquan Bay. Three years ago he started a steam saw-mill on this land and fixed his own residence there, going up to Washington every three or four weeks on Saturday night and returning on Monday. His wife and son reside in Washington. His son keeps a wood yard there. Prisoner considers himself now a citizen of Virginia. His place was within the Federal lines when he was taken . . . Prisoner says he was taken sick at his residence at Occoquan and called in Doctor Whitehead. The doctor remained with him several days and advised him to go to Washington where he could have the attention of his wife and be better nursed. He went to Washington, where he was sick three weeks, and after his recovery remained some weeks. He says he found the state of things in Washington so much worse and distasteful to him than it had formerly been that he did not apply for a passport, but determined to make his escape. He applied to several longboatmen to bring him down, but they told him they had been required to give bond and security in \$500 not to touch on the Virginia shore and would not take him. He met William Weston . . . , who had been sick in Washington, who agreed to escape with him. He purchased a skiff and in the night went down the river on the Maryland side until after they passed Alexandria, when they went over to the Virginia side. On the Monday after his return he wen to the picket at Mrs. Wiley’s and reported himself and was permitted to return home. Subsequently he was arrested with others, taken to Dumfrees [sic] where he lay several weeks in jail and thence was sent here. Is a slave-owner . . . he was a Southern man in his political feelings and opinions. I recommend his discharge on taking the oath of allegiance.

Other residents of the Mason Neck vicinity taken to Richmond as suspected sympathizers included Forest Olden (U.S. Department of War 1896:1452), Isaac Hall (U.S. Department of War 1896:1453), Abe Hamilton (U.S. Department of War 1896:1460), and Samuel Reeves (U.S. Department of War 1896:1460):

Forest Olden.—Born in Alexandria; lived near Colchester eighteen years; longboatman by profession. This spring made three trips to Washington in a boat belonging to Mr. Trice [of Mason Neck]. Stopped running when the governor's proclamation issued. When he stopped boating worked his garden until harvest. After harvest marketed to our camp; never had any intercourse with the enemy. Says the Southern pickets ate at his house and got fodder . . . As there is no evidence on which this man may be lawfully detained I must recommend his discharge on taking the oath of allegiance.

Isaac Hall.—Born in Fairfax County; lives near Occoquan; was always a Southern man; voted for secession; owns a farm and slaves. Never had any communication with the enemy. Yankees once stole one of his slaves but the boy escaped and returned home . . . I recommend his discharge.

Abe Hamilton.—Born in Washington. For seventeen years has been a fisherman and boatman on the Potomac . . . After the fishing season was over worked in Mason's Neck. Was taken there gathering fodder. Says he is friendly to the South and opposed to the North . . . Wishes to have nothing to do with the war, but if he goes in the army will go into the Southern army . . . This young man . . . has spent the summer in fishing for the enemy and in the vicinity of points important to us to keep the enemy from . . . At present I must advise he be retained as a prisoner.

Samuel Reeves.—Cripple; age twenty-four; born in Prince William, at Occoquan; arrested by Prince William Cavalry . . . His only occupation has been on wood boats and fishing. Has not been on a wood boat for a year. Has been fishing since the difficulties commenced with Captain Gray and Marshal Davis. Did not go out of Occoquan Bay but once, and then went only three-fourths of a mile out. Caught nothing but white perch. Met no boats except boats from Occoquan . . . Mr. Lynn . . . says [his father and his brother] are all men of truth and true Southern men. He knew less of the prisoner . . . [Lynn] says the village of Occoquan is purified from the Tories and the prisoner could not communicate with the enemy if he wished . . . I recommend his discharge on taking the oath of allegiance.

On January 5, 1862, Confederate Richard Habersham of the 3rd Virginia Infantry Regiment (McArthur and Burton 1996:133fn3) wrote to his sister about an incident near Occoquan:

A young man from the W.L. Infantry came very near being drowned while skating on a mill-pond yesterday & was saved only by one of the Georgia Rgt throwing a plank to him. A short time after he was taken out, the young man who saved his life was drowned within a few steps of the same place. He was taken out with grappling-irons, but his breath was entirely gone.

On January 9, 1862, Company H of the 5th Michigan Infantry Regiment made a reconnaissance toward Pohick Church (Sebrell 2004:54-55). Near Pohick Run, the lead group received fire from Confederates who had been hiding in the woods. As the rest of the company arrived, the rebels fled. During the skirmish, Private Rosencrans was killed.

On January 10, 1862, Confederate Colonel James B. Griffin wrote to his wife from his camp near Occoquan, Virginia (transcribed in McArthur and Burton 1996:135-136):

Head Qrs [Hampton] Legion
Camp Near Occoquan Jan 10th
1862

My Darling Leila

Many thanks to you My Darling for another kind letter . . . I am also delighted to hear that the Negroes are behaving so well . . . tell them they shall not loose anything by keeping it up. I hope . . . our new overseer [B.F. Spradley (McArthur and Burton 1996:130fn6)] may do well . . . Do ask him if he has a good stand of wheat and oats . . . Tell him to be economical with the corn . . . Still, I believe you would make a right managing Widdow. But excuse me—My Darling that is too serious a subject to joke about just now. I am pleased to hear that you have your garden in such fine order . . . How has Laura got—is she no better? Did she ever try the walnut root tea . . . My Darling we have had very

disagreeable weather for some days past . . . We had a sleet and snow about a week ago, and the weather is quite cold. The Occoquan River froze entirely over, and the ice so thick that men walked over it with impunity. We began to think . . . that the Enemy could walk across But, fortunately for us, night before last we had a pretty heavy rain My Darling I am really afraid that my letters are not very interesting to you but you must bear in mind that I have nothing else to write about Give my love to all the Children and kiss them for me

Your Jimmie

You asked me if I would like to have a pair of pants. Why, certainly I would be proud to wear them—spun wove and made by your own direction.

JBG

On January 13, 1862, Thomas H. Haislip was arrested by Union troops and sent to the Old Capitol Prison where he remained until his release on parole on February 15 (Davis, Perry, and Kirkley 1897b:337). On January 14, Richard H. Bayliss and Bushrod W. Bayliss were detained and sent to the Old Capitol Prison (Davis, Perry, and Kirkley 1897b:338). On February 15, both were transferred to the charge of the War Department. The records of the Old Capitol Prison record that Bushrod W. Bayliss and Matthew Plasket were arrested along with John W. Crawford on January 13, 1862 under the charge of “Alleged to be connected with the murder of U.S. troops near Pohick Run, Va.” (Davis, Perry, and Kirkley 1897b:271).

On January 15, 1862, it was reported in the *Richmond Dispatch* (January 20, 1862) that Southern sympathizers had been taken by the Union troops:

Six more prisoners were yesterday brought within the lines of General Heintzelman’s division. They were captured on Mason’s Neck, a mile and a half from Colchester, which is on the Occoquan, by the Sixty-third Pennsylvania Regiment, Colonel Hayes, in General Jameson’s brigade. The regiment has just returned from picket duty on the extreme left of our lines and front of the division. These make a dozen prisoners taken by the regiment within the last few days. Those arrested yesterday are Forrest Olden, John Heister [sic, Haislip], his brother [James Haislip], his son [Thomas Haislip], William Hicks, and A.C. Landstreet.

This Landstreet is the same who was captured by some of our soldiers at Falls Church in July last. He was then a member of Capt. Edward Powell’s Virginia cavalry company In December last, after five months imprisonment, he was released [from Old Point Comfort] on his parole of honor there appears to be sufficient evidence to prove that he has grossly violated his parole of honor. A month or more ago his wife, in company with another woman, came within our lines, and was detained, so that the husband and wife are now with us, while their children are among the rebels. The other five prisoners, like those arrested in the same vicinity the other day, are simply citizens of the county, who say that they have never been in the rebel army. They are the most shaggy, uncouth, indifferent, miscellaneous looking set of fellows one would wish to see. As to intelligence, taste or refinement, they are sorry specimens of the superior class of people which the “F.F.V.’s” [First Families of Virginia] are said to be. They all affect an almost total ignorance of everything regarding the operations of the rebels, near their own homes even. In fact in every look and touch they were perfectly indifferent to everything terrestrial and celestial, scarcely conscious, one would imagine, of their own existence.

It is well known that every movement of our forces on the Potomac is immediately communicated to the enemy, One instance, within my knowledge, will show how information of our movements is conveyed to the rebels. Some days since, when a small scouting party went out to Pohick Church, between the period of the passage of the advance and rear guards, a Southern sympathizer was seen to put a piece of paper around a dog’s neck, clap his hands thrice, and then away went the dog at full speed with the intelligence towards secessiondom. Whenever our troops pass certain points, the inhabitants



Figure 12. The village of Accotink in 1862. (Artist: Robert K. Sneden. Virginia Historical Society, Collection No. Mss5:1: Sn237:1.)

of every isolated house manifest much interest in their movements. They count every man, and the news is speedily communicated to the rebels. Those arrested yesterday are persons know or believed to have been engaged in such disloyal business.

Forrest Olden was particularly unfortunate, having been imprisoned within a short period of time by both Confederate and Union forces.

In late January 1862, nine scouts, mostly from the 1st Texas Regiment, were stationed at a house near Accotink Mills (Davis 1863:23):

At a late hour, being led by a citizen, Lieut. Col. Burk, 37th N.Y., with 90 men and a detachment of cavalry, surrounded the house and demanded a surrender. The boys were aroused from sleep, and gathering their guns, immediately opened fire, which was briskly returned. After three rounds one of the men shouted, "Hurra, boys, Hampton's coming, I hear him on the bridge;" at which they took fright and left.—Next morning revealed the fact that they had killed as many as there were men of their own party, and through prisoners learned they had wounded as many more.

On January 24, 1862, Lieutenant R.H. Wyman, commanding Potomac Flotilla, wrote to Brigadier General Hooker, commanding U.S. Army Lower Potomac (Scott 1882:707-708):

... at present the force under my command consists of eleven steamers, scattered from Hallowing Point [on Mason Neck] to Point Lookout These are all light and extremely vulnerable boats. Their draught of water is from 7 to 9 feet . . . I am of the opinion that were it desired to cross the river the vessels, with the exception of the [two] ferry-boats, could render better service in towing launches, barges, & c., loaded with troops, than by taking them on their decks.

From Otterback's farm, above High Point, to . . . Cockpit battery . . . , these vessels can approach the beach within about 200 yards

The enemy appear to be in considerable force in the neighborhood of Occoquan Mill, and have constructed a fort on the southern side of the Occoquan River. A few weeks since they had a full field



Figure 13. Conflict near the Occoquan (*Harper's Weekly* 6(268):108, February 15, 1862).

battery at this point of about 9 to 12 pounders, rifled . . .

This morning I made a reconnaissance of Occoquan Bay. Their main encampment seems to be about 2 miles back from the bay, extending from Occoquan towards Neabsco Creek.

On January 29, 1862, Alexander L. McKenzie who lived along the north bank of Pohick Creek opposite Mason Neck was arrested by the order of General Heitzelman (Davis, Perry, and Kirkley 1897b:345). He was sent to the Old Capitol Prison. On February 15, 1862, he was transferred to the War Department. On February 22, he was released on parole under the condition that he not leave the District of Columbia.

Also, on January 29, an affair took place at Mrs. Lee's house (Figure 14) on Belmont Bay near Occoquan Bridge (Dyer 1908:1353; Federal Publishing Company 1908:556; Carnahan 1897:172; Phisterer 1890:166; *Daily National Intelligencer* January 30 and 31, 1862; Figure 13). Detachments of the 1st New Jersey Cavalry and the 37th New York Infantry encountered Confederate soldiers and sympathizers. The casualties included 1 slain and 4 wounded Union troops and 10 Confederates killed. The affair was described in Moore (1862c:19):

January 29.—At sundown last night General Heitzelman sent fifty of the New-York Thirty-seventh, under Lieutenant-Colonel John Burke, to capture some rebels, who were at Porter's [sic, Potter's], near Occoquan Bridge, Va. They had to march ten to eleven miles through mud, and reached there about one o'clock this morning. A dance was progressing in the house, which was frame, and covered with clapboards. A gun was fired, and they were ordered to surrender. They immediately refused, and opened fire on the National troops through a window, and then made port-holes through the sides, hoping that their firing would be heard by their comrades, and aid come to them. After considerable random firing, a whole platoon fired through the weatherboards, and in a few minutes afterwards the firing ceased, and some one cried out they had surrendered. On examination it was found that inside were bodies of nine privates and one major, of the Texan Rangers, and one civilian dead. The man of the house, Porter [Potter], about seventy years old, was taken up-stairs, with a musket, which he had been using from a window. The one who surrendered was a civilian, and he said he had been fiddling for a stag-dance; that he was a Union man, and did not fire a gun, but wanted them to surrender at first.

The Nationals had one man killed and four wounded. They had the advantage of darkness to cover them, and only could be seen when a gun flashed in firing, while they never put out their lights. Thus not a rebel escaped to tell the tale, unless they had some outside as pickets.

Following the affair, Brigadier General Heintzelman issued a commendation to Lieutenant Colonel Burke and the Thirty-seventh New York Volunteers for their actions “at Mrs. Lee’s house, on the banks of the Occoquan, and in sight of the rebel batteries” (transcribed in Moore 1862c:20).

From the Confederate side, a different view of these events was presented (*Richmond Dispatch*, February 6, 1862):

The truth is eight of General Whiting’s brave Texan scouts were surrounded at dead of night in Mrs. Lee’s house, by fifty or more of the enemy, and summoned to surrender.—They opened fire and drove off the cowards, three of whom were left dead on the ground; one, mortally wounded, died soon after . . . and some of their wounded were carried away. Only one

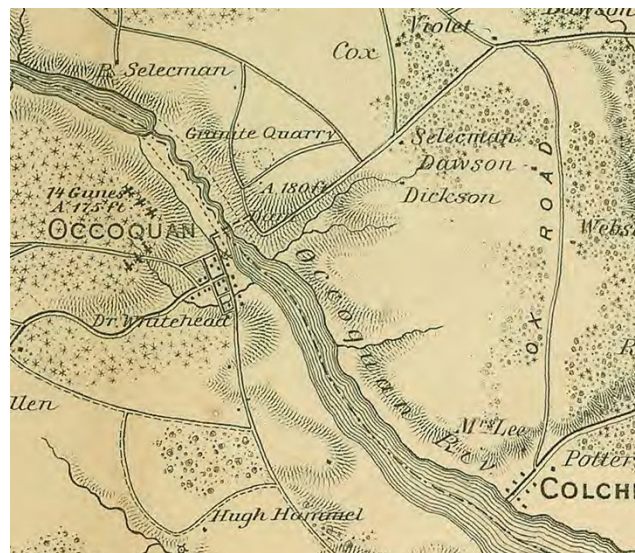


Figure 14. Detail of the Occoquan Village area from the *Map of N. Eastern Virginia* (Library of Congress, lva00020).



Figure 15. Thomas Henderson Eastman as a then midshipman, late 1850s (Polk County 2011; U.S. Navy Photo 17095, digitally enhanced).

Texan [suffered] . . . a slight flesh wound.

The prisoner taken by the enemy was Mr. Potter, residing at the time in another house, not far from Mrs. Lee’s; an inoffensive citizen, who had been on his place since the war began; who had no connection with the Texans, nor any share in their conflict. He was dragged from his house . . .

On January 30 after the incident, James Potter was arrested by General Heintzelman and committed to the Old Capitol Prison “charged with strong secession sympathies and aiding the rebels in arms against the Government” (Davis, Perry, and Kirkley 1897b:346-347). In the records of the Old Capitol prison, his offense was listed as “Spy and shooting Union pickets” (Davis, Perry, and Kirkley 1897b:271). On February 15, 1862 he was transferred to the War Department, and eventually was released on March 24.

On February 2, 1862, an amphibious naval force consisting of the *Stepping Stones*, the *Yankee*, the *Yankee’s* cutter, the *Anacostia* cutter, the *Wyandank* cutter, and the *Reliance* headed for Mason’s Neck from Indian Head, Maryland (*Richmond Dispatch*, February 15, 1862). Their

mission was to reach Otterback's home to apparently rescue him. Although as the events unfolded, the mission turned out otherwise. The ground troops under Lieutenant Commanding Eastman (Figure 15) of the *Yankee* landed below Sandy Point; his force consisted of 3 master's mates and 51 men. A few men remained on each of the boats under the command of a single master's mate. The force marched in line to Howard's log cabin (Figure 16) where he was detained and placed on board one of the vessels to prevent him from warning the rebels. His wife was assured that he would be returned once the expedition had been completed. A contraband or slave joined the party to lead the way. The force traveled about a mile to a house, possibly Otterback's, which was occupied by a woman. Finding no rebels, the force proceeded to Thomas Chapman's house; Chapman was a known Confederate. A search of his house revealed no rebels.

On the morning of February 3, a detail was left to guard Chapman's house while the rest searched through several fields near it. Three men in gray uniforms were spotted, after which, these troops fired upon the expeditionary force. A brief skirmish ensued before the call to return was signaled. Led by Eastman and guided by the contraband, the force moved to the beach and then along the beach upriver where they were picked up by the *Yankee* and the *Reliance*. The contraband had recognized one of the Confederates as Thomas Chapman, himself.

On February 3, 1862, Colonel Stephen G. Champlin, commanding the 3rd Michigan Infantry, reported to Isaac Moses, Assistant Adjutant General, on a reconnaissance to Occoquan Village (Scott 1888:503-504). The reconnoitering party consisted of 34 men from Company I and 44 men from Company H. At Williamson's house, the party commanded by Captain Lowing took the road which led down a ravine to the river. Ten men led by Lieutenant Brennan of Company I scouted ahead and "saw but few men in the streets [of Occoquan] . . . [who] appeared to be squads of unarmed recruits training." The scouts were detected and "armed men rushed out of the houses and opened a fire upon the party." The remaining party moved up, and "Three rounds were fired." After

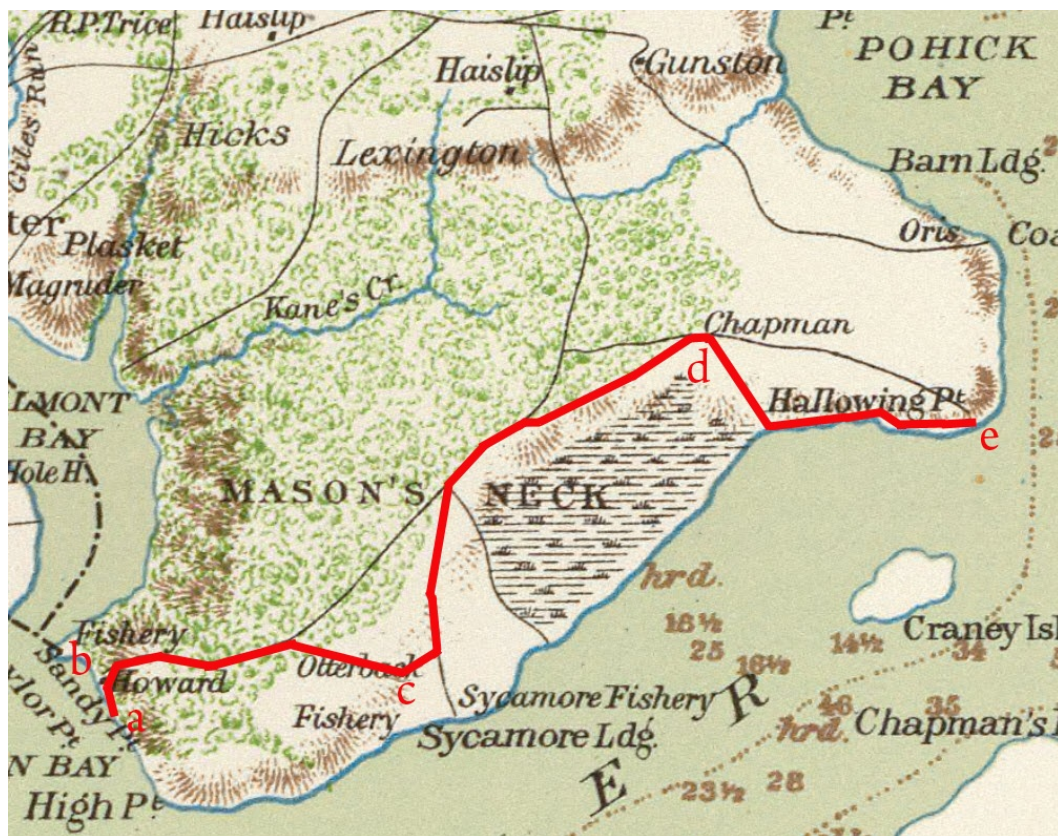


Figure 16. Possible route of the *Yankees'* expedition, February 2-3, 1862.

which, the party retired and returned to Pohick Church. Champlin noted:

The falling snow prevented objects from being distinctly seen. Four of the enemy were seen to fall, however, and were carried off by their comrades. Great confusion seemed to prevail . . .

A camp of the enemy was seen below Occoquan and on the south side of the river. No fortifications seen . . . At the corner near Mrs. Violet's house a cavalry picket post was discovered, but the pickets had fled up the old Ox road. They found a good common tent there, in which the pickets had sheltered themselves . . .

On the return, four of Captain Lowing's men becoming so exhausted that they could travel no further, he directed search to be made for horses . . . He found two horses in a barn near a deserted house. The owner . . . could not be ascertained, so he took these horses and mounted the exhausted men on them, and they rode them in . . .

Just before Captain Lowing returned, and when he was in the neighborhood of Pohick Church, heavy firing of musketry was distinctly heard in the direction of Parker's, on the Pohick road. The firing lasted several minutes.

In the *Baltimore American* on February 6, 1862, the same skirmish at the Occoquan by elements of the 3rd Michigan Regiment was described (transcribed in Moore 1862c:24):

This afternoon [February 3] a skirmish occurred near the banks of the Occoquan, on the Potomac, Va. It was reported in the morning that a body of rebels was at Pohick Church. Captain Lowing, of the Third Michigan regiment, then on picket-duty in front of General Heintzelman's Division, took thirty-four men, under command of Lieutenant Brennan, from Company F, and forty-four under Lieutenant Bryan, from Company H, and went to meet them. Arriving at Pohick Church, no rebels were seen. The party, however, proceeded to the banks of the Occoquan, opposite the town of that name. Arriving there early in the afternoon, a few unarmed men were observed drilling. They gave the alarm, when a number of rebels came from the houses and fired on the National soldiers. A brisk skirmish took place. Four of the rebels were seen to fall, and were carried off by their comrades. No injury was sustained by the National party, except by one man, who was slightly bruised by a spent ball.

An account in the *Richmond Dispatch* (February 8, 1862) added further details:

The enemy was about sending a large party across the Occoquan, when our men retired to their picket posts. Near Mrs. Violet's house [Figure 1] they discovered a tent, which was used by a rebel picket and destroyed it. When they had reached Pohick Church on their return they heard four volleys and several separate shots, fired nearly two miles distant, bearing to the left. As none of our party were out at the time, it is supposed that the rebels had sent over a couple of squads to attempt to capture our men, and meeting with each other had by mistake fired upon their own men.

On February 15, 1862, R.H. Wyman, commander of the Potomac Flotilla, wrote to G.V. Fox, Assistant Secretary of the Navy, reporting on the rescue of Philip Otterback and his wife (transcribed in Rush and Woods 1897:21):

POTOMAC FLOTILLA, February 15, 1862

SIR: I have forwarded Mr. Philip Otterback, jr., and his wife to Washington from their farm in Virginia, he having claimed our protection. Mr. Otterback states that both himself and wife are Union people, as also both their families; that he has remained as long as possible on his mother's farm in order to protect their property; that he has not aided or assisted the rebels in any manner. Now the rebels threaten his life, having burned some of his outbuildings a few nights since. I have directed Lieutenant Commanding Eastman to go to the Department with Mr. Otterback and to report to yourself.

I am, sir, very respectfully, your obedient servant.

R.H. WYMAN,
Lieutenant, Commanding.

G.V. FOX,

Assistant Secretary of the Navy.

Although Otterback's mother, also, had a farm which was situated at Quantico Creek and which "was destroyed by the rebels" during the following month (noted in a letter from R.H. Wyman to G.V. Fox, dated March 24, 1862; transcribed in Rush and Woods 1897:29-30), the Otterback farm mentioned in the letter appears to have been the property and fisheries on Mason Neck which formerly had been owned by John Mason.

On February 15, 1862, Matthew Plaskett, Forrest Olden, William Hick, John Haislip, and James Haislip were transferred to the charge of the War Department (Davis, Perry, and Kirkley 1897b:339). Forrest Olden was ordered released on February 21 and was paroled on February 22. William Hick was released on parole on February 22 and was ordered not to leave the District of Columbia. John Haislip similarly was paroled on February 22 and was ordered not to leave the District of Columbia. James Haislip was ordered released on February 21; on February 22, parole was refused.

In 1862, Union parolees were required to take either of two oaths (Davis, Perry, and Kirkley 1897b:245). As reported by E.J. Allen on February 23, 1862, the first oath was a simple pledge of loyalty:

----- -----, 1862

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA, County of Washington:

I, ----- -----, of -----hereby give my parole of honor that I will render no aid or comfort to the enemies in hostility to the Government of the United States.

Forrest Olden took this oath before being paroled. The second oath added the stipulation that the parolee had to remain within the boundaries of the District of Columbia:

----- -----, 1862

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA, County of Washington:

I, ----- -----, of -----hereby give my parole of honor that I will render no aid or comfort to the enemies in hostility to the Government of the United States, and that I will not leave the District of Columbia without permission from the provost-marshal.

John Haislip, William Hick, Richard H. Bayliss, and Thomas H. Haislip took the second oath. Bushrod W. Bayliss, Matthew Plaskett, and James Haislip "refused to subscribe to said last-mentioned parole and are accordingly still detained in custody in the Old Capitol Prison."

During the morning of February 20, 1862, an engagement occurred between the Union gunboat *Stepping Stones* and a five-gun Rebel battery stationed at Occoquan, Virginia (Moore 1862c:195). The *New York Herald* provided a lengthy account of the action (transcribed in Moore 1862:195-196):

Quite a brisk little action has just taken place in Occoquan Bay, between the *Stepping Stones* and a rebel field-battery of five guns.

This morning we ran alongside the Yankee, now the flag-ship, when a rifled twelve-pounder, belonging to that vessel, was put on board . . . placed on a field-carriage, in view of our high bulwarks . . . We then cast off, towing the launch Decatur, with a full crew from the Yankee . . .

. . . Occoquan Bay was to be reconnoitred. We ran up three or four miles, when the launch was cast loose, and proceeded toward the shore to search some houses near the beach. We threw in one shell from the rifle, under cover of which the landing was effected. The *Stepping Stones* then stood toward a schooner, lower down the creek . . . a four-horse wagon was seen making its way along, a little above the beach. We lay to for a short time, when the launch again came alongside, and was made fast astern. The officers and crew had found nothing suspicious in the houses. We then stood for Freestone Point, the launch having been again sent on shore on the way down for another domiciliary visitation, but nothing was found . . . [on the way back up the bay] when, on arriving abreast of the schooner, a little above Freestone Point, several men were seen moving about a little way from the beach. Fire was

immediately opened from our rifle, and seconded by our smooth-bore twelve-pounder, which was within range, as we were only five hundred yards from the shore. The shells went right into the sand. Capt. Eastman then ordered the launch to open fire . . . Several shells had been thrown in when the enemy opened fire on us. His shots, at first, fell very short At length, when we had got the proper range, one of our shells burst right in the midst of the enemy This was followed by successive shots which exploded in the right place. The enemy's fire now waxed fast and furious We had now moved off to such a distance that the smoothbore of the launch and our own were now no further use, and had to cease firing; but still the shells from the rifle were thrown with wonderful precision, those from the enemy falling short and skipping along the water. At length the enemy opened fire from a gun of much larger calibre than the rest, sending a shot which whizzed over our quarter-deck, right over the heads of the men working the rifle With one solitary serviceable gun, at that range we were no match for the enemy with his five, but still the unequal contest was kept up . . . till the exhaustion of our ammunition compelled us to retire.

The last shot we fired was at the distance of two miles from the enemy, but he continued to blaze away at us We used percussion-shells The number of shells fired by us was between twenty and thirty, while the rebels must have thrown much over a hundred. We were not struck, and none of our men were hit, while there is every reason to believe that several of the enemy were killed, or, at least, wounded.

(The *Stepping Stones* was a side-wheel steamer described as Fourth Rate; tonnage, 226; crew 21; and guns, 1 (Rush and Woods 1897:xvi).)

Also on February 20, 1862, Captain Heine of the Topographical Engineers of General Heintzelman's staff captured two Confederate rebels, W.P. and E.P. Bryan at Hallowing Point (*Richmond Dispatch*, February 25, 1862). He had been on an expedition along the Potomac shore at the time. E.P. Bryan was identified as a signal officer. The records of the Old Capitol Prison in Washington, D.C. list these prisoners as William P. Bryan and E. Pliny Bryan, with a date of arrest of February 21, 1862 (Davis, Perry, and Kirkley 1897b:272). William's offense is stated as "Spy and unquestionably employed by rebel Government." E. Pliny's offence is stated as "Spy; belonged to rebel signal corps."

On February 23, 1862, Lieutenant R.H. Wyman, commanding the Potomac Flotilla, wrote to Gideon Welles, Secretary of the Navy (transcribed in Rush and Woods 1897:23):

SIR: Three laboring men, who reside in the vicinity of Hallowing Point, in Virginia, came off to-day, and claimed an asylum, which I have given them. They represent that they are hunted by a body of Texan Rangers on account of their having given information which led to the capture of two men by our pickets a few days since. [The laboring men may have been contrabands. The two captured men were perhaps the Bryans.]

On February 24, 1862, a detachment of the 37th New York Infantry engaged in a skirmish at Lewis Chapel on Mason Neck (*Confederate War Journal* 1894:1 (11):173; Dyer 1908:628; Phisterer 1890:166). This affair is described as a picket attack. Union forces incurred 2 killed and 1 wounded. The *New York Herald* described the skirmish in its issue of February 26 (transcribed in Moore 1862c:39):

February 24.—A slight skirmish took place at Mason's Neck, in the neighborhood of Occoquan, Va., between a body of Texas rangers and a party of National troops. The rangers fired from a house in which they took refuge. Two of the Nationals, belonging to the New-York Thirty-seventh regiment, were killed, and another man was wounded. The loss of the rebels was not ascertained.—*N.Y. Herald, February 26.*

On March 1, 1862, T.S.C. Lowe, the Chief Aeronaut, U.S. Army, was directed by General Heintzelman to take a balloon to Pohick Church (Ainsworth and Kirkley 1899:270). From Pohick Church on March 5, he reported to

Captain Moses, Assistant Adjutant-General, at Fort Lyons, Virginia:

Have just made two ascensions with the balloon. It is fully inflated, and will take up two persons with all the ropes. If to-morrow is a fine day it would be a good time for the general to go up. I can see camp-fires on the Occoquan.

Also, on March 1, 1862, the Confederate 18th Georgia moved up to Pohick Church (Davis 1863:23). There they engaged Union troops, killing a Colonel, a Quartermaster, a Captain, and 11 privates. After the skirmish, they fell back.

On March 3, 1862, the *Richmond Dispatch* announced that among the political prisoners released from the Old Capitol Prison in Washington were Calvert Beach, William Ward, Olden Forrest, Mat. Plaskett, John Haislip, James Haislip, W. Hick, Thomas W. Baylis, and B.W. Baylis.

On March 5, 1862, a detachment of the 63rd Pennsylvania Infantry engaged in skirmishes at Pohick Church and the Occoquan. Carnahan (1897:172) listed the Union casualties as 2 dead and 2 wounded. Moore (1862c:50) described the event:

—A reconnoitring party of the Sixty-third regiment of Pennsylvania, Heintzelman's division, was ambushed this morning beyond the Occoquan, Va., two or three miles in advance of the Union pickets, and received the fire of a part of concealed rebels, who instantly fled through the woods. Capt. Chapman and Lieut. Lyle were killed, and two privates were wounded, one of them mortally.

Writing to Brigadier-General Marcy, Chief of Staff, Army of the Potomac, on March 6, 1862, Lowe noted:

I made two ascensions last evening. Saw fires at Fairfax Station; some on the road near the Occoquan. This morning cavalry scouts are visible on this side of the Occoquan below Sandy Run. There are large smokes on the other side of the Occoquan, commencing at the ford below Wolf Creek and extending to the Potomac If the force here could be advanced across Pohick Creek on the heights, I should have no difficulty in getting very near the exact number of the enemy, as well as all their fortified places.

Later that same day, Lowe again wrote to Marcy (Ainsworth and Kirkley 1899:271):

I ascended at 5 this p.m. and remained until 6 o'clock. It was calm and clear, many of the enemy's camps were visible, and the smoke ascending straight gave a good idea of the enemy's position I am greatly in need of that map that I spoke about yesterday to enable me to name places and distances more correctly. The one I have is small and inaccurate.

Between March 7 and March 9, Confederate forces withdrew from their lines along the lower Occoquan.

On March 7, General Berry ascended several times at Pohick Church and noted the evacuation of the Occoquan by the Confederates (Ainsworth and Kirkley 1889:271).

By the spring of 1862, the Confederate forces had vacated the area between Pohick Creek and the Occoquan River. As described by Robert Sneden (Bryan and Lankford 2002:22) in his diary entry of March 8:

With Captain Heine I went down on a reconnaissance toward Occoquan. Got to Mason's plantation [Figure 17] about 11 a.m., thence to Pohick Church, where . . . two balloons making observations from a height of 2,000 feet. Professor Lowe and lot of scientific men were here also from Washington. The enemy had withdrawn all their picket lines along our whole front from Munson's Hill to Colchester. From the balloon large volumes of smoke was seen over the woods in several places down river, which shows that the enemy are falling back toward Manassas and Centreville and are burning their log house camps. Scores of Negroes from below the Occoquan are daily coming into our lines, who declare that the whole Rebel army has moved south. We found many of the inhabitants in the region of Accotink and Pohick who had left their houses with their Negroes and gone with the Rebels. So the chances now are that the bushwhackers won't trouble us for a while. Old Capitol Prison at Washington is nearly full of Rebel sympathizers and bushwacking farmers.

A squadron of Averell's cavalry was pushed to Occoquan and beyond who met none of the enemy's



Figure 17. *Map of Mount Vernon and Vicinity, March 1862.* (Artist: Robert K. Sneden. Library of Congress, vhs00002.)

forces. All the earthworks and batteries on the other side of the Occoquan and on its steep banks had been deserted. In Colchester very few people were seen, and these only old men . . . Many houses on the road were entirely deserted. Fences were few. No live cattle of any kind were seen. Doors were

hanging by one hinge and the whole country looked deserted everywhere outside the villages of Colchester and Accotink.

(Captain Heine was probably Peter Bernhard Wilhelm Heine, a German-American artist. He had earlier accompanied Commodore Matthew Perry as official artist on Perry's expedition to Japan during 1853-1854. During the Civil War, he was appointed by the Secretary of War as a Captain on December 9, 1861 and served as a Topographical Engineer (Wilmer, Jarrett, and Vernon 1898:61). He was promoted from Colonel, 103rd New York Volunteer Infantry Regiment, to Brevet Brigadier General on March 13, 1865. Wilhelm Heine and Robert Sneden collaborated on several maps while assigned to the Topographical Engineers of the 40th New York Volunteers, including the *Official Map of the Union Works in Front of Yorktown, Va.* and *Map of the Lines at Yorktown, Virginia*, both dated April 1862.)

Interestingly, on the map (Figure 17) ostensibly prepared after Sneden's reconnaissance, George Mason of Spring Bank's home is mistakenly identified as "Gunston Hall." Gunston Hall, itself, in its proper location is not depicted on "Gunston Point."

Moore (1862c:53) described that on March 8, 1862:

—The rebel troops, composed of three Texas, one Georgia, and one Mississippi regiment, and the Hampton Legion, formerly encamped back of and below Occoquan, Va., evacuated that place, destroying everything they could not carry on their backs. The National troops took possession, and were welcomed by a part of the inhabitants with great joy. Every boat in the vicinity, and anything that would float, was destroyed. The rebels told the villagers they were going to fall back to the Rappahannock.

By March 15, the balloon at Pohick Church was being prepared for moving (Ainsworth and Kirkley 1889:272).

On March 15, 1863, the *Daily National Intelligencer* quoted a correspondent of the *Philadelphia Inquirer* in describing the entry of Union troops into Occoquan:

Our troops received quite a welcome yesterday from the citizens of Occoquan village. Food, clothing, and even money was offered to the soldiers; but everything was refused except milk and boiled eggs.

With a few exceptions, the people seemed much gratified at beholding the flag of the Union once more.

During March 1862, a test of visual signalling between military balloons was conducted between Lowe's balloon at Pohick Church and another at Budd's Ferry (Haydon 2000:326, referencing letters dated March 6, 1862 from Lowe to Marcy and March 6, 1862 from Lowe to Seaver).

On March 21, 1862, Confederate Colonel Wade Hampton reported on his evacuation from the mouth of the Occoquan to General Whiting, commanding division (Scott 1882:533):

... one regiment (the Nineteenth Georgia) was placed near Occoquan Village, ... the Legion was opposite Colchester, 2 miles lower down ... the Legion [had] seven [wagons]. The teams, with the exception of those with the Legion, were in wretched order, and the roads were almost impassable.

... on Friday, the 7th instant, ... My own movement was delayed by an attack of the enemy on my pickets at Colchester. I marched the Legion down to repel this attack, and as soon as I thought it safe to do so they were withdrawn and put in motion.

On the same date, Confederate Major Stephen D. Lee, commanding artillery battalion, reported to Lieutenant T.G. Barker, acting assistant adjutant general of brigade (Scott 1882:535):

... under my immediate command ... two pieces with the Legion at Colchester ...

On March 22, 1862, Confederate Brigadier General W.H.C. Whiting, commanding division, Occoquan, Virginia, provided a status report to Major General Holmes, commanding Aquia District (Scott 1882:528-530):

Hampton's brigade in advance, consisting of four regiments and three batteries. Of this, ... the Legion, with one battery, at Colchester, and one regiment near the village of Occoquan, at the forks of the Telegraph and Brentsville roads. This line was 10 miles in extent. In support the Texas brigade,

Colonel Archer One squadron of cavalry and the legion of cavalry picketed the Potomac from Evansport to Colchester and the Occoquan in front.

To maintain this force provisions and forage had to be hauled over the worst of roads . . . Regimental and brigade teams had during the whole winter been in constant requisition to maintain even the daily supply, which exhausting labor had greatly weakened them. I had finally to resort to pack-mules, and often to half rations, on account of the roads.

. . . The enemy was in force in front and on the river, and daily skirmishes took place

. . . [Union] Balloons had been up every day for some days previous on both sides of the Potomac, and from the activity of the enemy and the fact that the country people and negroes had got suspicion of the move it was considered certain that the enemy would attack at once.

On September 23, 1862, the *Alexandria Gazette* reported that "It is said a party of Confederate cavalry came into Occoquan on Sunday last. There have been reported movements of troops in that direction for some days past."

On October 30, 1862, the Union gunboat *Yankee* captured the schooner *George Washington* in Pohick Creek (*Alexandria Gazette*, November 3, 1862). (The *Yankee* was a side-wheel steamer described as Fourth Rated; tonnage, 328; crew, 48; and guns, 2 (Rush and Woods 1897:xvi).)

On November 2, 1862, a detachment of the 1st New York Cavalry engaged in a skirmish at Occoquan Ferry, Virginia (Phisterer 1890:185). After this encounter, one Union enlisted man was reported missing (Phisterer 1890:296). Subsequently, it was learned that John Lutes had been captured by the enemy (Beach 1902:563).

On November 5, 1862, the *Alexandria Gazette* reported on the capture of suspected Confederate smugglers who had been operating out of Pohick Creek:

A few nights since Master's Mate Walters, of the *Reliance*, seized at the Alexandria wharf, a sloop called the *Pointer*, with a lot of dry goods, whiskey, & c. The crew consisted of John Otis, Samuel Otis and Wm. Turner, who hailed from Pohick; they were taken at the same time and are now at the Navy Yard.

On November 12, 1862, Colonel Spaulding received orders to transport materials for a pontoon bridge from Harpers Ferry to Washington (Scott 1888:149):

The bridge at Berlin, Maryland was dismantled in rafts . . . and a train of 36 boats and material was made up in rafts in the [Chesapeake and Ohio] canal and on its way to Washington.

At 10:30 the next morning a train of 40 more boats and all the remaining bridge material, except the river bridge, had been loaded and was on its way to Washington, the boats and most of the material by canal, and the wagons and a small amount of material by land, the whole accompanied by the remainder of his command.

On arriving in Washington, Spaulding was directed by General Woodbury (Scott 1888:149):

. . . to make up two trains of 24 boats each, in rafts, to go by water, a train of 20 boats, with transportation for 40, to go by land . . .

Their destination was Fredericksburg. The land train departed Washington on November 19 (Scott 1888:795) and headed to the Occoquan (Scott 1888:150):

On the afternoon of the 22d [November 1862], the [pontoon] train [on wheels] reached the Occoquan. Colonel Spaulding built a pontoon bridge of 280 feet to take the train over the river, and camped on the other side that night. Early the next morning, the 23d, this bridge was dismantled, made up in rafts, all the bridge material loaded on the rafts, and the animals sent by land . . . he also took the pontoon wagons apart and loaded them on the rafts. Although the Occoquan was some 12 feet deep where he bridged it, it was so shallow on the flats near the mouth that his rafts got aground, and it was only by taking advantage of the highest tide, at 4 o'clock on the morning of the 24th, that he was enabled to pass out into the Potomac. He found the steamer [which he had requested from Alexandria] waiting for him some distance below, and he rowed to it.

From there, the steamer proceeded to Belle Plain as part of the preparations for the Battle of Fredericksburg.

On November 20, 1862, a German soldier, Private Friedrich Schmalzried, wrote his brother from Occoquan, Virginia (transcribed and translated in Kamphoefner and Helbich 2006:90-91):

Aquitang [Occoquan, Virginia] November 20, 1862

Dear brother,

There are only sick soldiers left in the camp, the others have all left. The first group is at the front near Culpepper, the 2nd near Aquitan, there's a *Cavalry Picket Line* between the army and the Infantry Picket Line near the fort on the Potomack. These pickets are there to catch deserters and stop all the Contraband [escaped slaves]. No one can pass our line unless they have a pass from General Heintzelman [Samuel Heintzelman] or McClelland [George McClellan]. We're on duty every 4 days, otherwise there's nothing for us to do. There are men from our regiment, from 1st Virginia and 2nd Pennsylvania, we're all mixed up together, and the rest are being sent to various places, and a large number from my regiment have enlisted as regulars [. . .]

The captioned text appears in the transcribed text. Friedrich was a German immigrant from Münchingen near Stuttgart who had emigrated to Michigan in 1849 to reside near his brother Conrad in Ann Arbor (Kamphoefner and Helbich 2006:90).

On December 6, 1862, Colonel G.L. Willard, commander of the 125th New York Infantry, wrote from Wolf Run Shoals, Virginia (Scott 1888:833) that "The country south of the Occoquan and east of Telegraph road is constantly patrolled by the enemy's cavalry."

Fighting renewed in the Mason Neck vicinity towards the end of 1862. On December 19, detachments of the 10th New York Cavalry and the 17th Pennsylvania Cavalry engaged in a skirmish along the Occoquan. This skirmish was described in reports by Colonel Josiah H. Kellogg of the Seventeenth Pennsylvania Cavalry, General Robert E. Lee of the Confederate States Army, and Brigadier General Wade Hampton of the Confederate States Army (Scott 1888:693).

Colonel Kellogg of the 17th Pennsylvania Cavalry reported on December 19, 1862:

GENERAL [Slough]: Cavalry of Hampton's Legion, 150 strong, at Snyder's Ford, and 100 at Occoquan Ferry, destroyed the boat at Occoquan. We have driven them from both places, and they then retreated toward Dumfries. They left precipitately and left the trains that they had captured.

Subsequently, on December 27, Kellogg reported about the events of December 19 to Colonel Meysenberg, Assistant Adjutant General of the Eleventh Army Corps (Scott 1888:693-694):

Having been informed by the commanding officer of the detachment of Second Pennsylvania Cavalry doing duty at Accotink, Va., that his pickets extended to the river at Occoquan, I was marching at the head of my column, on Friday, 19th December 1862, about half a mile from the river Occoquan, on the ferry road, when I was fired into by the enemy's pickets. I had been informed but five minutes before by our own pickets on the road that all was quiet in front. I halted the column long enough only to send forward an advance guard and flankers, and then pushed on to the river. When I reached it I found the ferry-boat sunk and the enemy's carbineers, who occupied the town on the other side, made the road to the ferry very warm. As it was impossible to cross here, I withdrew my men around the bend of the road, out of fire.

The enemy had been busy up to the time I arrived at the spot in ferrying over the river a Government train and some sutlers' wagons. The presence of my command saved the wagons, which had not yet been crossed, consisting of 9 Government wagons and 3 sutlers' wagons, making 12 in all.

On account of not knowing the country and roads, and my regiment being so new, never having been drilled, and having their arms only three or four days . . . I could not effect as much as I might have done with older men; besides, there is not a carbine in the regiment, and consequently in a wooded country

I was obliged to move carefully. I scouted the country in all directions some 5 or 6 miles, and my advance guard ran into the enemy's rear guard, at about dark, on the road from Occoquan towards Dumfries. The enemy were then retreating at a gallop. As soon as it was quite dark, I deemed it advisable to recross the river and go into camp The enemy burned one of the Government wagons in the town of Occoquan

. . . it was reported to me that the picket was taken at or near the Neabsco Creek, half way between Occoquan and Dumfries, and that it consisted of a lieutenant and 30 men of the Tenth New York Cavalry . . . 5 men of the Second Pennsylvania Cavalry were captured at the ferry.

General Robert E. Lee reported to James A. Seddon, the Confederate Secretary of War, on December 21, 1862 (Scott 1888:694-695):

General Hampton, who was sent to the rear of enemy, penetrated Occoquan He captured 30 of Sigel's wagons, 20 others on the road, 200 prisoners, and brought off nearly everything.

Confederate Brigadier General Wade Hampton reported to Major Norman R. Fitzhugh, Assistant Adjutant General, on December 22, 1862 (Scott 1888:695-696):

At daylight the next morning [December 18th], I was at Kanky's store, on the Neabsco Creek, where there was a post of the [Union] enemy. Surrounding these and the post above them, the whole party was captured, together with 8 wagons, only 2 having any stores in them. In approaching this post, Colonel [John] Black [First South Carolina], who had the command of his regiment, the Phillips and Cobb Legions, advanced down the Telegraph road, while Lieutenant-Colonel Martin [of the Jefferson Davis Legion] came up in command of the rest of the detachments. Dividing my force here, I sent Colonel Martin with his legion, the Second South Carolina, and the First North Carolina, by the river road to Occoquan, which was entered first by Colonel Martin, who found a train of wagons belonging to Sigel's corps in the act of crossing the river. Dismounting some men, he forced the wagon guard, who were on the other side of the river, to surrender and come over in the ferry-boat.

In the mean time Major Delony [Cobb's Legion] had swept all the picket posts on the Telegraph road, capturing every man who was there (about 20 in number), with 2 wagons, and had joined me near the town. Having heard that 2,500 cavalry were on the march from Alexandria and about to cross at Selectman's Ford, 1 1/2 miles from Occoquan, I hastened to the village and dispatched Captain [T.H.] Clark [Second South Carolina], with 40 sharpshooters from his regiment and from the Phillips Legion (chiefly the latter), to hold the ford until I could bring the wagons across the river. To accomplish this there was but one small boat, and the approaches to the river were very bad. While engaged in bringing over the wagons, the enemy appeared in some force coming down the river. My sharpshooters soon drove them back, and the work of ferrying the wagons over continued. The enemy again attempted to cut off the men engaged in this work, but were again driven back in confusion.

In the mean time the largest force of the enemy was endeavoring to force a passage at Selectman's Ford Knowing this, I thought it prudent to take off the wagons already brought over and to withdraw. Sending these to the rear with Colonel Black, I ordered Colonel Martin to call in his men and to follow as a rear guard, while Captain Clark was instructed to hold the ford for one hour longer . . . As soon as he withdrew the enemy followed him, but he charged them gallantly and drove them back across the river. He then followed me, skirmishing with the enemy for 2 miles and holding them in check until the wagons were well on the way

The next day's march brought me safely home without the loss of a man. I brought back about 150 prisoners, besides 7 paroled, 20 wagons with valuable stores in them, 30 stand of infantry arms, and 1 stand of colors . . . I captured every man on the picket line (41 in number) from Kanky's to Occoquan, 8 miles. One lieutenant is among the prisoners, and in the town I took John Underwood, a noted

Abolitionist and traitor.

Colonel R. Butler Price, commander of the 2nd Pennsylvania Cavalry Brigade, reported (Scott 1888:708-709):

On Saturday evening [December 27], about dark, an orderly reported at the reserve camp of the picket line, extending from Occoquan to Wolf Run Shoals, that a detachment of the Seventeenth Pennsylvania, on its march from Occoquan to join Colonel Kellogg, had been driven back by a rebel cavalry force. One company of the Second Pennsylvania Cavalry was sent to re-enforce the picket at Selectman's Ford, and 100 of the same regiment to the ferry at Occoquan. The rebels were at the time in the village, but preparing to retire, which they did soon after.

At dawn of day on Sunday, 28th instant, Captain Chauncey crossed the Occoquan at Selectman's Ford with 150 men of the Second Pennsylvania Cavalry, and about the same number of the Seventeenth Pennsylvania, under Major Reinhold. They followed the tracks of the enemy for 5 miles, and, entering a thick wood at that point, were attacked by a large body of cavalry. The command was routed and followed across the Occoquan 2 miles by the rebels, who destroyed a few tents in the reserve camp and then withdrew. The wagons, with one exception, had been removed, and thus saved.

The Second Pennsylvania Cavalry lost in killed and missing about 50 men and 3 officers. One of them, the surgeon, remained, voluntarily to take charge of the wounded.

Of the enemy's loss I have no detailed account, except of the death of 2 officers, one of them a major, who was shot by officers of the Second Pennsylvania Cavalry during their retreat. Several of their men were shot while crossing the ford, but the number of them could not be ascertained, as they either carried them off or secreted the bodies.

1863

On January 9, 1863, the *Alexandria Gazette* reported "There are reports, in town, to-day, of another advance of the Confederates, in the neighborhood of Occoquan."

On January 24, 1863, the *Alexandria Gazette* noted that "Rob. S. Stonell of Occoquan, had been arrested and required to give bail, for 'using [sic] seditious language and abusing President Lincoln.'"

The army correspondent of the *Philadelphia Inquirer* from the Stafford Court House wrote in a letter reprinted in the *Alexandria Gazette* on February 3, 1863:

On Wednesday as three of the Federal cavalymen were scouting beyond Dumfries they were attacked by Confederate cavalry scouts, outnumbering them five to one. The Confederate scouts not only took the horses and arms from the Federal soldiers, but compelled them to divest themselves of their clothing.

Not satisfied even with this, the spurs were taken from their boots, and then the pleasant information was given to them that if the weather were more moderate their boots also would have to be given up.

They were paroled on the spot, and sent back on foot, shivering in their shirt sleeves.

During the past week eight sutler's wagons were captured between Dumfries and Occoquan. Many of them loaded with valuable stores, which, no doubt the Confederates prize very highly.

The cause of their capture is probably owing to the bad state of the roads, the mud being in some places from six to eighteen inches deep; whilst stalled there, it was very easy for the Confederates to send their cavalry upon a sudden dash and take them.

On February 11, 1863, the *Alexandria Gazette* reported:

A letter in the *Philadelphia Inquirer* says: During the early part of last week the establishment of the

sutler of the Eight New York was captured at Occoquan. The Confederates not only took his goods, but appropriated to their use his horses and wagon.

On March 26, 1863, the *Alexandria Gazette* republished a correspondence in the *Philadelphia Inquirer* titled, "Skirmish near Accotink":

ACCOTINK, Va.: March 23—The Second Pennsylvania Cavalry Regiment has for some time been doing picket duty on the fords and ferries of the Occoquan, a creek dividing portions of Fairfax and Prince William counties.

At present the regiment is under the command of Captain William P. Brinton, of Lancaster, Pa. Early last Sunday morning the Picket Headquarters (some seven miles from those of the regiment) were attacked by a band of [Confederate] guerrillas, numbering some fifty or sixty men; they succeeded in capturing ten men out of thirty stationed there, and some seven horses, not, however, without some hand-to-hand fighting, which resulted in the loss to the Second Pennsylvania of three men wounded, one mortally, and to the Confederates of two wounded, one of them the Captain, Captain Farrand, of South Carolina.—From there they move to Selectman's Ford, some two miles and a-half distant where being challenged by the sentry n post, and giving an evasive answer, he shot, which, alarming the picket post (situated on the slope in woods some distance above the ford,) drew the retiring Confederates the fire of five carbines, unseating and seriously wounding two riders, whom the Confederates in their haste to place themselves beyond the pursuit were compelled to leave . . . a vigorous pursuit was ordered, headed by Captain Brinton in person, which lasted until night, ut without success.

On May 18, 1863, the *Alexandria Gazette* reported that the Marshal of the District of Columbia acting under the Confiscation Act of 1861 had seized the property of Thomas D. Allen of Occoquan who was "now in the South."

On July 23, 1863, the *Alexandria Gazette* referring to a *Washington Star* report printed that "a number of guerillas are now about Mason's Neck . . ."

The *Alexandria Gazette* reported on August 27, 1863 that blockade runners had been apprehended in Occoquan Bay:

We noticed yesterday the arrest of H. Clay Emerson and J.C. Athey as blockade runners. They were captured in a small boat in Occoquan bay, and the *Washington Star* says, "had about \$100 worth of hats and medicines, and were on their way to Richmond."

On September 5, 1863, Commodore Andrew A. Harwood, commander of the Potomac Flotilla, wrote to Acting Master W.G. Morris, commander of the *Coeur de Lion* and Senior Office Station A, Potomac River about smuggling in the area of the Occoqan (transcribed in Rush and Woods 1897:348):

SIR: I enclose a scrap by which you will perceive that smuggling is reported as going on in the vicinity of Occoquan.

You will occasionally look into the mouth of Occoquan Bay and be particular as to overhauling all vessels going into that river, seeing their papers, and looking carefully into the character of their cargoes. Enclosed you will find a list of vessels authorized by my permits to go into Occoquan River. No other vessels are permitted to go there, and those having papers are now obliged to renew them every month.

On September 15, 1863, the *Alexandria Gazette* noted a "Guerilla Hunt" had taken place:

An expedition left Alexandria on the morning of the 13th instant, consisting of a company from the First District of Columbia Infantry, commanded by Captain Robert Boyd, Assistant Provost Marshal of Alexandria. They scoured the whole country around the Occoquan, making no captures of rebels, but picked up a deserter from the 91st New York volunteers. Guerillas were seen in the Occoquan region on the 11th instant.

The *Alexandria Gazette* reported on September 16, 1863 that Union forces had made an amphibious landing at Colchester:

On Saturday evening last a detachment of 50 members of the First District regiment, under command of Capt. Robert Boyd and Lieut. Stiles, acting under orders of Gen. Heintzleman, started down the Potomac in a tugboat and protected by a gunboat, on a scout. About midnight on Saturday they arrived at Colchester, and seeing a light near by proceeded to land; and reached the shore after wading through water up to the waist.

They discovered that guerillas had been in the neighborhood, but had left about two hours previous to the arrival of the boats.—They however, marched [sic] a good distance into the country in search of the guerrillas, but did not succeed in finding them, although a sacked sutler wagon and evidences of the robbery of a citizen showed that they had been about. They therefore returned to their boats and proceeded on down the river, landing at different times at all sorts of out-of-the-way places, and on Sunday landed at Occoquan where they captured one guerrilla.

They left Occoquan on Sunday morning . . .

These guerrillas are an independent gang. They are mostly deserters from various regiments in the Confederate army, while a few from the Federal army have joined them.

Dr. Mead, of the 1st D.C. and Mr. Thomas Smoot, a well known Virginia scout, accompanied the party and rendered good service.

Late into 1863, the Confederate government, still, was retaining suspected Union sympathizers from the Mason Neck area. On September 14, 1863, the *National Daily Intelligencer* reported “Judge John C Underwood, of West Virginia, was captured on Friday by a party of rebel guerrillas near his former residence at Occoquan. He is to be sent to Richmond.” Several days later on September 19, the *Alexandria Gazette* reported that Underwood “has been released by order of the Confederate commander at Fredericksburg, and returned to his residence at Occoquan.” Interestingly, less than a month later, Underwood was “appointed United States Marshall for the Eastern District of Virginia” (*Evening Union* October 6, 1863). On October 16, the *Alexandria Gazette* reported that Mr. Augustin Grimsley had been taken by a party of Confederates near his home in the neighborhood of Pohick Church. On October 31, the *Alexandria Gazette* noted that “Mr. Haislip, Marshal Davis, and Thomas Bohanan, captured by the Confederates at or near Occoquan, are still in confinement in Richmond.” On November 5, the *Alexandria Gazette* reported “Mr. Haislip, of Occoquan, lately arrested and carried to Richmond, has been released on his parole.”

On November 7, 1863, the *Alexandria Gazette* noted “It is reported that a squad of Confederate cavalry came down the Occoquan road, on Tuesday night, as far as Dr. Mason’s former residence, and captured some dozen negroes.”

1864

During the spring of 1864, the *Coeur de Lion* was operating between Liverpool Point and Hallowing Point according to the April 1, 1864 report of Commander Parker commanding the Potomac Flotilla while on board the *USS Ella* (transcribed Rush and Woods 1897:408).

On July 11, 1864, the *USS Dragon* (log entry transcribed in Rush and Woods 1897:596):

From 4 to 8 p.m. shelled the different points from Occoquan to Potomac Creek, expending two 15-second and thirteen 10-second shells from 30 pounder and three shell and two shrapnel from 24-pounder.

1865

On January 9, 1865, ex-Senator and Mrs. Foote were captured by two Confederate cavalymen at Mr. Hammel's house near the Occoquan (*Richmond Dispatch*, January 19, 1986). This was probably Hugh Hammel who resided south of the village. The Footes had been hoping to escape across the Potomac to Maryland, having secured the services of some slaves to take them across on the upcoming Tuesday. Mr. Foote was taken back to Richmond while Mrs. Foote was allowed to remain at Occoquan until arrangements could be made for her transport. In the meantime, Colonel Welles at Alexandria hearing of the capture sent a cavalry force to Occoquan to escort her safely to Washington.

Henry S. Foote was a former U.S. Senator (1847-1852) from and later Governor (1852-1854) of Mississippi (Gonzales 1960:137). He defeated Jefferson Davis for the governorship. Subsequently, he served from Tennessee in the First and Second Confederate Congress (1861-1865).

On January 27, 1865, the *Alexandria Gazette* noted that "It is said that 'a number of [Confederate] guerillas made a raid into Occoquan on Tuesday last, and carried off property belonging to Messrs. Haislip, Smoot, Hammill [Hugh Hammel], and others.'"

On May 18, 1865, Brevet Major General C.R. Woods, commander First Division of Fifteenth Army Corps, wrote to Lieutenant Colonel Max Woodhull, Assistant Adjutant General, Fifteenth Army Corps (Davis, Perry, and Kirkley 1895:527-528):

COLONEL: I respectfully report that at 4 a.m. to-day I left my camp beyond Aquia Creek, and moved on the road toward Alexandria, continuing on the road thus taken, which led my columns through Dumfries. I marched as far as the Occoquan River, going into camp with my troops on the river-bank just above the town at 3 o'clock in the afternoon. There was no crossing over the river. When the laying of the pontoon bridge was completed, which was toward evening, I moved the Second Brigade of my division, together with my artillery, over the river, encamping them about three-quarters a mile beyond the stream on the Alexandria side. My headquarters are in the village of Occoquan, near the pontoon crossing.

Civil War Damage Claims

The Southern Claims Commission was established by Congress on March 3, 1871 under sections 2 to 6 of the Army Appropriations Act (National Democratic Committee 1880:334). The act covered "all citizens of the United States who, during the ware of the rebellion, were loyal adherents to the cause and the government of the United States." It provided for restitution for:

... claims for stores or supplies taken or furnished for the use of the army of the United States in states proclaimed as in insurrection, and claims for the use and loss of vessels or boats while employed in the military service of the United States in states proclaimed in insurrection.

A May 21, 1872 act extended its jurisdiction to "claims for stores or supplies taken or furnished for the use of the navy of the United States in states proclaimed in insurrection." Between the 42nd and 46th Congress, a total of \$4,536,313.01 had been allowed by the commission. The term of the commission expired in 1880. At which time as reported to Congress on March 9, 1880, some \$55,000,000 in claims had been disallowed (U.S. Congress 1892:150). The War Claims Committee under the Bowman Act forwarded several hundred of these rejected or disallowed cases to the Court of Claims for further review. In total, there were thousands of rejected or not prosecuted cases; by 1892, over eight thousand had been referred to the Court of Claims.

Over the two years during which claims could be filed, 22,298 had been presented (*The Republic* 1876:69-70). As of 1876, 9,222 claims had been examined, with about half reported to Congress for payment. The value of all claims was \$60,258,150.

After the Civil War, John Haislip of Mason Neck filed two claims with the Southern Claims Commission: (1) Commission No. 14553, Office No. 798, Report No. 7 in 1877, Status A and (2) Commission No. 14555, Office No. 1546, Report No. 9 in 1879, Status D (Mills 1994:245). The status codes were A for allowed and D for disallowed. Under the second claim (summarized in Mauro 2006:121), Haislip claimed that the boat, *Pocahontas*, of which he was part-owner had been taken in August 1861 and that this had deprived him of income which he derived from shipping wood to Alexandria and Washington, D.C. Furthermore, at the cessation of the conflict, the *Pocahontas* had been discovered lying in ruins at Fort Washington. Haislip's second claim which had not been approved initially was forwarded by Representative Lee for review by the Court of Claims in 1887 (U.S. House of Representatives 1888:1421).

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