

BATTLE OF MOBILE BAY

5 August 1864

Official Reports of Rear Admiral David G. Farragut, U.S. Navy, with the General Orders Published Prior to and
After the Battle

Source: U.S. Navy Official Records | Naval History and Heritage Command | Compiled for Echo & Chronicle

General Order of Rear-Admiral Farragut, U.S. Navy

GENERAL ORDERS, NO. 10

U.S. FLAGSHIP *Hartford*,
Off Mobile Bay, July 12, 1864.

Strip your vessels and prepare for the conflict. Send down all your superfluous spars and rigging. Trice up or remove the whiskers. Put up the splinter nets on the starboard side, and barricade the wheel and steersmen with sails and hammocks. Lay chains or sand bags on the deck over the machinery, to resist a plunging fire. Hang the sheet chains over the side, or make any other arrangement for security that your ingenuity may suggest. Land your starboard boats or lower and tow them on the port side, and lower the port boats down to the water's edge. Place a leadsman and the pilot in the port quarter boat, or the one most convenient to the commander.

The vessels will run past the forts in couples, lashed side by side, as hereinafter designated. The flagship will lead and steer from Sand Island N. by E. by compass, until abreast of Fort Morgan; then N.W. half N. until past the Middle Ground; then N. by W., and the others, as designated in the drawing, will follow in due order until ordered to anchor; but the bow and quarter line must be preserved to give the chase guns a fair range, and each vessel must be kept astern of the broadside of the next ahead; each vessel will keep a very little on the starboard quarter of his next ahead, and when abreast of the fort, will keep directly astern, and as we pass the fort will take the same distance on the port quarter of the next ahead, to enable the stern guns to fire clear of the next vessel astern.

It will be the object of the admiral to get as close to the fort as possible before opening fire. The ships, however, will open fire the moment the enemy opens upon us, with their chase and other guns, as fast as they can be brought to bear. Use short fuzes for the shell and shrapnel, and as soon as within 300 or 400 yards give them grape. It is understood that heretofore we have fired too high, but with grapeshot it is necessary to elevate a little above the object, as grape will dribble from the muzzle of the gun.

If one or more of the vessels be disabled, their partners must carry them through, if possible; but if they can not then the next astern must render the required assistance; but as the admiral contemplates moving with the flood tide, it will only require sufficient power to keep the crippled vessels in the channel.

Vessels that can must place guns upon the poop and topgallant forecastle and in the tops on the starboard side. Should the enemy fire grape, they will remove the men from the topgallant forecastle and poop to the guns below until out of grape range.

The howitzers must keep up a constant fire from the time they can reach with shrapnel until out of its range.

D. G. Farragut,
Rear-Admiral, Commanding West Gulf Blockading Squadron.

General Order of Rear-Admiral Farragut, U.S. Navy

GENERAL ORDERS, NO. 11

U.S. FLAGSHIP *Hartford*,
Mobile Bay, July 29, 1864.

Should any vessel be disabled to such a degree that her consort is unable to keep her in her station, she will drop out of line to the westward and not embarrass the vessels next astern by attempting to regain her station. Should she repair damages, so as to be able to reenter the line of battle, she will take her station in the rear as close to the last vessel as possible.

So soon as the vessels have passed the fort and kept away N.W., they can cast off the gunboats at the discretion of the senior officer of the two vessels, and allow them to proceed up the bay to cut off the enemy's gunboats that may be attempting to escape up to Mobile. There are certain black buoys placed by the enemy from the piles on the west side of the channel across it toward Fort Morgan. It being understood that there are torpedoes and other obstructions between the buoys, the vessels will take care to pass to the eastward of the easternmost buoy, which is clear of all obstructions.

So soon as the vessels arrive opposite the end of the piles, it will be best to stop the propeller of the ship and let her drift the distance past by her headway and the tide, and those having side-wheel gunboats will continue on by the aid of their paddle wheels, which are not likely to foul with the enemy's drag ropes.

D. G. Farragut,
Rear-Admiral.

Report of Rear-Admiral Farragut, U.S. Navy, Regarding the Battle of Mobile Bay, August 5, 1864

No. 335.

FLAGSHIP *Hartford*,
Mobile Bay, August 5, 1864.

Sir: I have the honor to report to the Department that this morning I entered Mobile Bay, passing between Forts Morgan and Gaines, and encountering the rebel ram *Tennessee* and the gunboats of the enemy, viz, *Selma*, *Morgan*, and *Gaines*.

The attacking fleet was underway by 5:45 a.m., in the following order: *Brooklyn* with the *Octorara* on her port side, *Hartford* with the *Metacomet*, *Richmond* with the *Port Royal*, *Lackawanna* with the *Seminole*, *Monongahela* with the *Kennebec*, *Ossipee* with the *Itasca*, and *Oneida* with the *Galena*. On the starboard of the fleet was proper position of the monitors of ironclads.

The wind was light from the southward and westward; the sky cloudy with very little sun.

Fort Morgan opened upon us at six minutes past 7, and soon after this the action became lively. As we steamed up the Main Ship Channel there was some difficulty ahead and the *Hartford* passed on ahead of the *Brooklyn*. At forty minutes past 7 the monitor *Tecumseh* was struck by a torpedo and sank, going down very rapidly and carrying with her all of her officers and crew with the exception of the pilot and 8 or 10 men, who were saved by a boat that I sent from the *Metacomet* alongside of me.

The *Hartford* had passed the forts before 8 o'clock, and finding myself raked by the rebel gunboats I ordered the *Metacomet* to cast off and go in pursuit of them, one of which, the *Selma*, she succeeded in capturing.

All the vessels had passed the forts by 8:30 o'clock, but the rebel ram *Tennessee* was still apparently uninjured in our rear.

Signal was at once made to all the fleet to turn again and attack the ram, not only with the guns, but with orders to run her down at full speed. The *Monongahela* was the first that struck her, and, though she may have injured her badly, yet did not succeed in disabling her. The *Lackawanna* also struck her, but ineffectually, and the flagship gave her a severe shock with her bow, and as she passed poured her whole port broadside into her, solid IX-inch shot and 13 pounds of powder, at a distance of not more than 12 feet. The ironclads were closing upon her and the *Hartford* and the rest of the fleet were bearing down upon her when, at 10 a.m., she surrendered. The rest of the rebel fleet, viz, *Morgan* and *Gaines*, succeeded in getting back under the protection of the guns of Fort Morgan.

This terminated the action of the day.

Admiral Buchanan sent me his sword, being himself badly wounded with a compound fracture of the leg, which it is supposed will have to be amputated.

Having had many of my own men wounded and the surgeon of the ram *Tennessee* being very desirous to have Admiral Buchanan removed to a hospital, I sent a flag of truce to the commanding officer of Fort Morgan, Brigadier-General Richard L. Page, to say that if he would allow the wounded of the fleet as well as their own to be taken to Pensacola, where they could be better cared for than here, I would send out one of

our vessels, provided she would be permitted to return bringing back nothing that she did not take out. General Page assented, and the *Metacomet* was dispatched about o'clock.

The list of casualties on our part as far as yet ascertained are as follows:

Vessel	Killed	Wounded
Flagship Hartford	19	23
Brooklyn	9	22
Lackawanna	4	2
Oneida	7	23
Monongahela	—	6
Metacomet	1	2
Ossipee	1	7
Richmond	—	2
Galena	—	1

In all, 41 killed and 88 wounded.

On the rebel ram *Tennessee* were captured 20 officers and about 170 men. On the *Selma* were taken about 90 officers and men.

I will send a detailed dispatch by the first opportunity. Enclosed is a list of killed and wounded on board the *Hartford*.

Very respectfully, your obedient servant,
D. G. Farragut,
Rear-Admiral, Commanding West Gulf Blockading Squadron.

Hon. Gideon Welles,
Secretary of the Navy, Washington, D.C.

Detailed Report of Rear-Admiral Farragut, U.S. Navy, with Enclosures

No. 343.

U.S. FLAGSHIP *Hartford*,
Mobile Bay, August 12, 1864.

Sir: I had the honor to forward to the Department on the evening of the 5th instant a report of my entree into Mobile Bay on the morning of that day, and which, though brief, contained all the principal facts of the attack.

Notwithstanding the loss of life, particularly on this ship, and the terrible disaster to the *Tecumseh*, the result of the fight was a glorious victory, and I have reason to feel proud of the officers, seamen, and marines of the squadron under my command, for it has never fallen to the lot of an officer to be thus situated and thus sustained. Regular discipline will bring men to any amount of endurance, but there is a natural fear of hidden dangers, particularly when so awfully destructive of human life as the torpedo, which requires more than discipline to overcome.

The attacking fleet steamed steadily up the Main Ship Channel, the *Tecumseh* firing the first shot at 6:47. At 7:6 the fort opened upon us and was replied to by a gun from the *Brooklyn*, and immediately after the action became general.

It was soon apparent that there was some difficulty ahead. The *Brooklyn*, for some cause which I did not then clearly understand, arrested the advance of the whole fleet, while at the same time the guns of the fort were playing with great effect upon that vessel and the *Hartford*. A moment after I saw the *Tecumseh*, struck by a torpedo, disappear almost instantaneously beneath the waves, carrying with her gallant commander and nearly all her crew. I determined at once, as I had originally intended, to take the lead, and after ordering the *Metacomet* to send a boat to save, if possible, any of the perishing crew, I dashed ahead with the *Hartford*, and the ships followed on, their officers believing that they were going to a noble death with their commander in chief.

I steamed through between the buoys where the torpedoes were supposed to have been sunk. These buoys had been previously examined by my flag-lieutenant, J. Crittenden Watson, in several nightly reconnoissances. Though he had not been able to discover the sunken torpedoes, yet we had been assured by refugees, deserters, and others of their existence, but believing that from their having been some time in the water, they were probably innocuous, I determined to take the chance of their explosion.

Just after we passed the fort, which was about ten minutes before 8 o'clock, the ram *Tennessee* dashed out at this ship, as had been expected, and in anticipation of which I had ordered the monitors on our starboard side. I took no further notice of her than to return her fire.

Having passed the forts and dispersed the enemy's gunboats, I had ordered most of the vessels to anchor, when I perceived the ram *Tennessee* standing up for this ship. This was at 8:45. I was not long in comprehending his intention to be the destruction of the flagship. The monitors and such of the wooden vessels as I thought best adapted for the purpose were immediately ordered to attack the ram, not only with their guns, but bows on at full speed, and then began one of the fiercest naval combats on record.

The *Monongahela*, Commander Strong, was the first vessel that struck her, and in doing so carried away his own iron prow, together with the cutwater, without apparently doing her adversary much injury. The *Lackawanna*, Captain Marchand, was the next vessel to strike her, which she did at full speed, but though her stem was cut and crushed to the plank ends for the distance of 3 feet above the water's edge to 5 feet below, the only perceptible effect on the ram was to give her a heavy list.

The *Hartford* was the third vessel which struck her, but as the *Tennessee* quickly shifted her helm, the blow was a glancing one, and as she rasped along our side we poured our whole port broadside of IX-inch solid shot within 10 feet of her casemate.

She was at this time sore beset. The *Chickasaw* was pounding away at her stern, the *Ossipee* was approaching her at full speed, and the *Monongahela*, *Lackawanna*, and this ship were bearing down upon her, determined upon her destruction. Her smokestack had been shot away, her steering chains were gone, compelling a resort to her relieving tackles, and several of her port shutters were jammed. Indeed, from the time the *Hartford* struck her until her surrender she never fired a gun. As the *Ossipee*, Commander Le Roy, was about to strike her she hoisted the white flag, and that vessel immediately stopped her engine, though not in time to avoid a glancing blow.

Admiral Buchanan was wounded in the leg, 2 or 3 of his men were killed, and 5 or 6 wounded. Commander Johnston, formerly of the U.S. Navy, was in command of the *Tennessee*, and came on board the flagship to surrender his sword and that of Admiral Buchanan.

As I had an elevated position in the main rigging, near the top, I was able to overlook not only the deck of the *Hartford*, but the other vessels of the fleet. I witnessed the terrible effects of the enemy's shot and the good conduct of the men at their guns, and although no doubt their hearts sickened, as mine did, when their shipmates were struck down beside them, yet there was not a moment's hesitation to lay their comrades aside and spring again to their deadly work.

The commanding officers of all the vessels who took part in the action deserve my warmest commendations, not only for the untiring zeal with which they had prepared their ships for the contest, but for their skill and daring in carrying out my orders during the engagement.

Very respectfully, your obedient servant,
D. G. Farragut,
Rear-Admiral, Commanding West Gulf Blockading Squadron.

Hon. Gideon Welles,
Secretary of the Navy, Washington.

General Order of Rear-Admiral Farragut, U.S. Navy

GENERAL ORDERS, NO. 12

U.S. FLAGSHIP *Hartford*,
Mobile Bay, August 6, 1864.

The admiral returns thanks to the officers and crews of the vessels of the fleet for their gallant conduct during the fight of yesterday.

It has never been his good fortune to see men do their duty with more courage and cheerfulness, for although they knew that the enemy was prepared with all devilish means for our destruction, and though they witnessed the almost instantaneous annihilation of our gallant companions in the *Tecumseh* by a torpedo, and the slaughter of their friends, messmates, and gunmates on our decks, still there were no evidences of hesitation in following their commander in chief through the line of torpedoes and obstructions, of which we knew nothing except from the exaggerations of the enemy, who had given out that we should all be blown up as certainly as we attempted to enter.

For this noble and implicit confidence in their leader he heartily thanks them.

D. G. Farragut,
Rear-Admiral, Commanding West Gulf Blockading Squadron.

GENERAL ORDERS, NO. 13

U.S. FLAGSHIP *Hartford*,
Mobile Bay, August 7, 1864.

The admiral desires the fleet to return thanks to Almighty God for the signal victory over the enemy on the morning of the 5th instant.

D. G. Farragut,
Rear-Admiral, Commanding West Gulf Blockading Squadron.

Source: Official reports of Rear Admiral David G. Farragut, U.S. Navy, 5 and 12 August 1864, with General Orders Nos. 10–13. Naval History and Heritage Command, Washington, D.C.