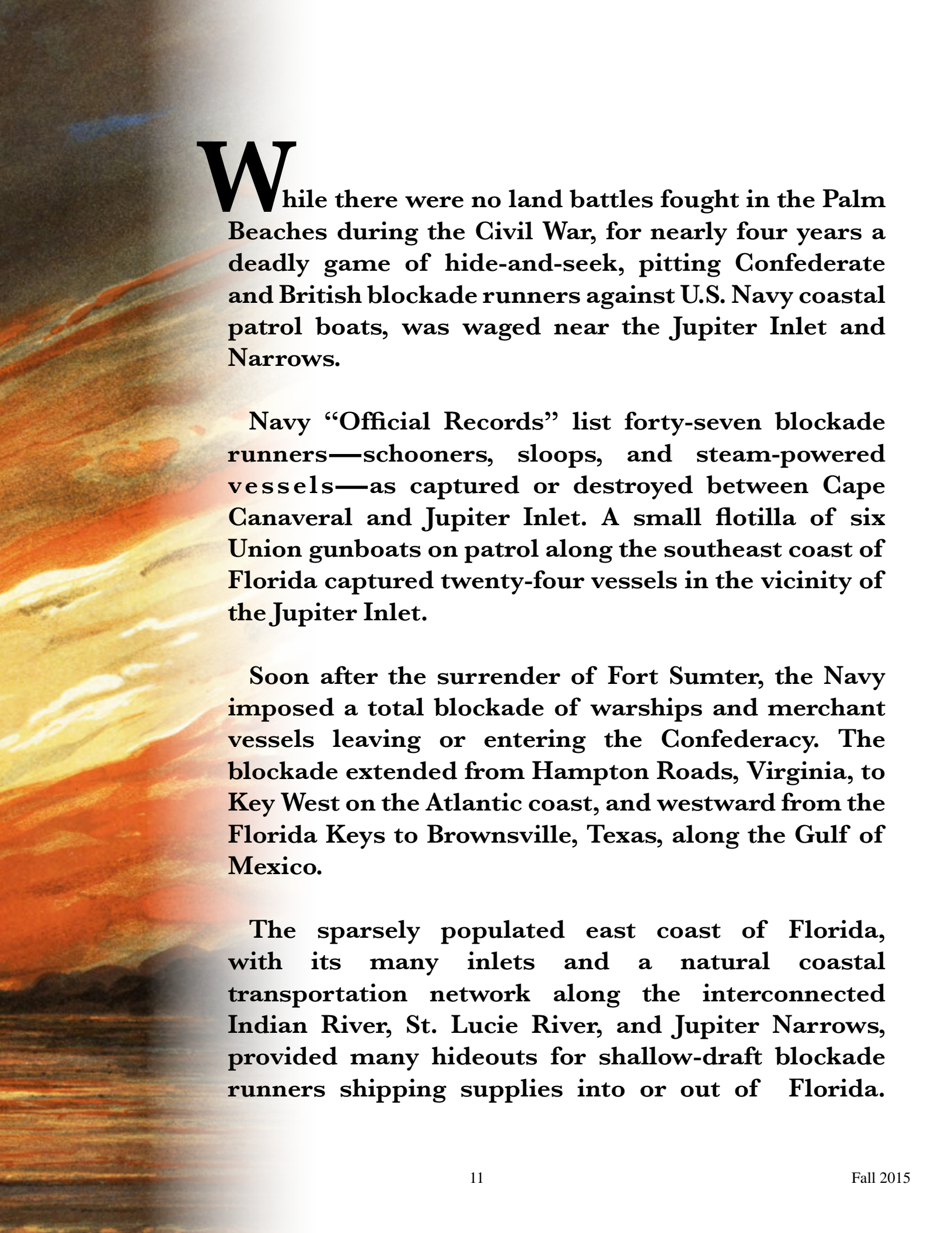


Civil War Blockade-Running at Jupiter Inlet: 1861-1865

By Robert I. Davidsson

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While there were no land battles fought in the Palm Beaches during the Civil War, for nearly four years a deadly game of hide-and-seek, pitting Confederate and British blockade runners against U.S. Navy coastal patrol boats, was waged near the Jupiter Inlet and Narrows.

Navy “Official Records” list forty-seven blockade runners—schooners, sloops, and steam-powered vessels—as captured or destroyed between Cape Canaveral and Jupiter Inlet. A small flotilla of six Union gunboats on patrol along the southeast coast of Florida captured twenty-four vessels in the vicinity of the Jupiter Inlet.

Soon after the surrender of Fort Sumter, the Navy imposed a total blockade of warships and merchant vessels leaving or entering the Confederacy. The blockade extended from Hampton Roads, Virginia, to Key West on the Atlantic coast, and westward from the Florida Keys to Brownsville, Texas, along the Gulf of Mexico.

The sparsely populated east coast of Florida, with its many inlets and a natural coastal transportation network along the interconnected Indian River, St. Lucie River, and Jupiter Narrows, provided many hideouts for shallow-draft blockade runners shipping supplies into or out of Florida.



The Union Navy's Unadilla class gunboats were built specifically for blockade duty. Constructed in only ninety days, the shallow-draft, oceangoing vessels were able to operate close to shore. They could not enter most of Florida's shallow inlets, so thirty-foot cutters were used to patrol inland waters. Courtesy Library of Congress.

To enforce the blockade of the Confederacy, the Union Navy established the "East Gulf Coast Blockade Squadron" in 1861. The headquarters of the small fleet was Fort Zachary Taylor at Key West. Flag Officer William McKeon was assigned the daunting task of patrolling coastal waters south of Cape Canaveral on the east coast, and north to Apalachicola Bay along the Gulf coast of Florida.

During the 1860s, there were no ports between St. Augustine and Key West. Union gunboats faced long patrols in dangerous coastal waters with frequent storms, the powerful currents of the Gulf Stream, and poorly mapped inlet shoals and reefs.

The blockade runners they pursued not only displayed the "Stars and Bars" of the Confederacy, but about forty percent of the captured vessels flew the "Union Jack" of Great Britain. Sloops and schooners often used the Bahamas and occasionally Spanish Cuba as bases to smuggle supplies into Florida.

While Britain and Spain remained neutral during the American Civil War, the Royal Navy did little to interfere with British flagged ships attempting to break the Union blockade. Union captains readily captured British vessels violating the blockade in Florida coastal waters, but took care not to kill or injure English crewmen in order to avoid international incidents.

The Confederacy did not station any heavily armed commerce raiders, such as the CSA *Florida* or CSA *Tallahassee*, along the southeastern coast of Florida. Blockade runners were lightly armed, usually manned by civilian crews, and opted to either flee or ground their vessels when confronted by Union gunboats.

There was little loss of life in these encounters.

Salt was a Florida resource in high demand by both Confederate armies and the civilian population. Union patrol boats were on constant alert for smoke plumes which indicated salt boilers were in use. Cotton bales and turpentine were the main exports from Florida for markets in Europe. There were profits to be made by daring merchant captains who avoided the blockade.

Profit also was an incentive for Union gunboats. Under existing rules of the U.S. Navy, captured Confederate vessels (prizes) were sold at auction in Key West with Union officers and crew recovering most of the proceeds from the sales.

Following reports that the Jupiter Inlet was a hideout for Confederate shipping, the Union intensified its blockade off the coast in January 1862. The task was shared by six small warships based in Key West - the USS *Sagamore*, *Gem of the Sea*, *Roebuck*, *Honeysuckle*, *Beauregard*, and *Union*.

USS *Sagamore*

The most successful of the Union gunboats on patrol off the Jupiter Inlet was the USS *Sagamore*. The *Sagamore* was one of the mass-produced "90-day gunboats" built especially by the U.S. Navy for blockade duty. It was a two-masted schooner powered by a steam engine and armed with five rifled guns.

The *Sagamore* was assigned to the East Gulf Coast Blockade Squadron in November 1861. The commanding officer of the gunboat was Lt. Earl English, with Master Mate Henry Crane as the leader of a special landing force approved by the

Navy to seek and destroy Confederate coastal installations. They were the Navy SEALs of the 19th century.

Crane was a Floridian who enlisted in both the Second and Third Seminole Wars. He was familiar with the Jupiter Inlet and adjacent waterways. As a Tampa resident, he entered the Civil War as a Confederate colonel in the local Florida militia. However, when a pro-Union friend was murdered, he decided to change his allegiance and volunteered to serve with the U.S. Navy.

During its 1863 patrol near the Jupiter Inlet, the *Sagamore* raided Confederate commerce by both land and sea. Beginning on January 8, the *Sagamore* seized the British ship *Julia* ten miles north of Jupiter Inlet.

Using one of the *Sagamore's* longboats while the ship was on patrol, Crane surprised the Confederate schooner *Pride* in the Jupiter Narrows. They dumped its cargo of 188 bushels of salt into the river. On January 8, the unmanned schooner *Flying Cloud*, registered in Nassau, was burned by the raiders.

Four days later, Crane led his team to the inactive Jupiter Lighthouse, where they seized a catch [cache] of supplies including 150 gallons of whale oil and 200 bushels of salt. The crew of the *Sagamore* also rescued survivors of the Union troopships *Lucinda* and *Sparkling Sea* which were driven ashore south of Jupiter Inlet.

On January 16, a shore party from the *Sagamore* found forty-five sacks of salt at "Couch's Bar" near Jupiter Inlet. Crane's raiders also seized seven bales of cotton February 3 in the Jupiter

Narrows, and an additional fifty-eight sacks of salt with a catch [cache] of tools February 5 during a return visit to the Jupiter Lighthouse.

Crane's most successful raid was the destruction of a hidden Confederate shipyard located at Blue Hole Creek near the Indian River Inlet. During the February 22 attack, ship repair facilities, supplies and docks were destroyed.

Before completing his successful 1863 patrol, Lt. English and the *Sagamore* also would capture the blockade runner *East Yarmouth* off Jupiter Inlet on January 25. The *Sagamore* caught the schooner *Agnes* and sloop *Ellen* making a dash out of the Jupiter Inlet on February 28. They carried a cargo of cotton and turpentine.

The same eventful day, the British sloop *Elizabeth*, based in Nassau, was intercepted at the mouth of the inlet. The crew ran their ship aground before surrendering to the *Sagamore*.

USS *Gem of the Sea*

The USS *Gem of the Sea* was commissioned on October 15, 1861. The gunboat, under the command of Lt. J.B. Baxter, was ordered to the East Gulf Coast Blockade Squadron for a tour of duty off the southeast coast of Florida.

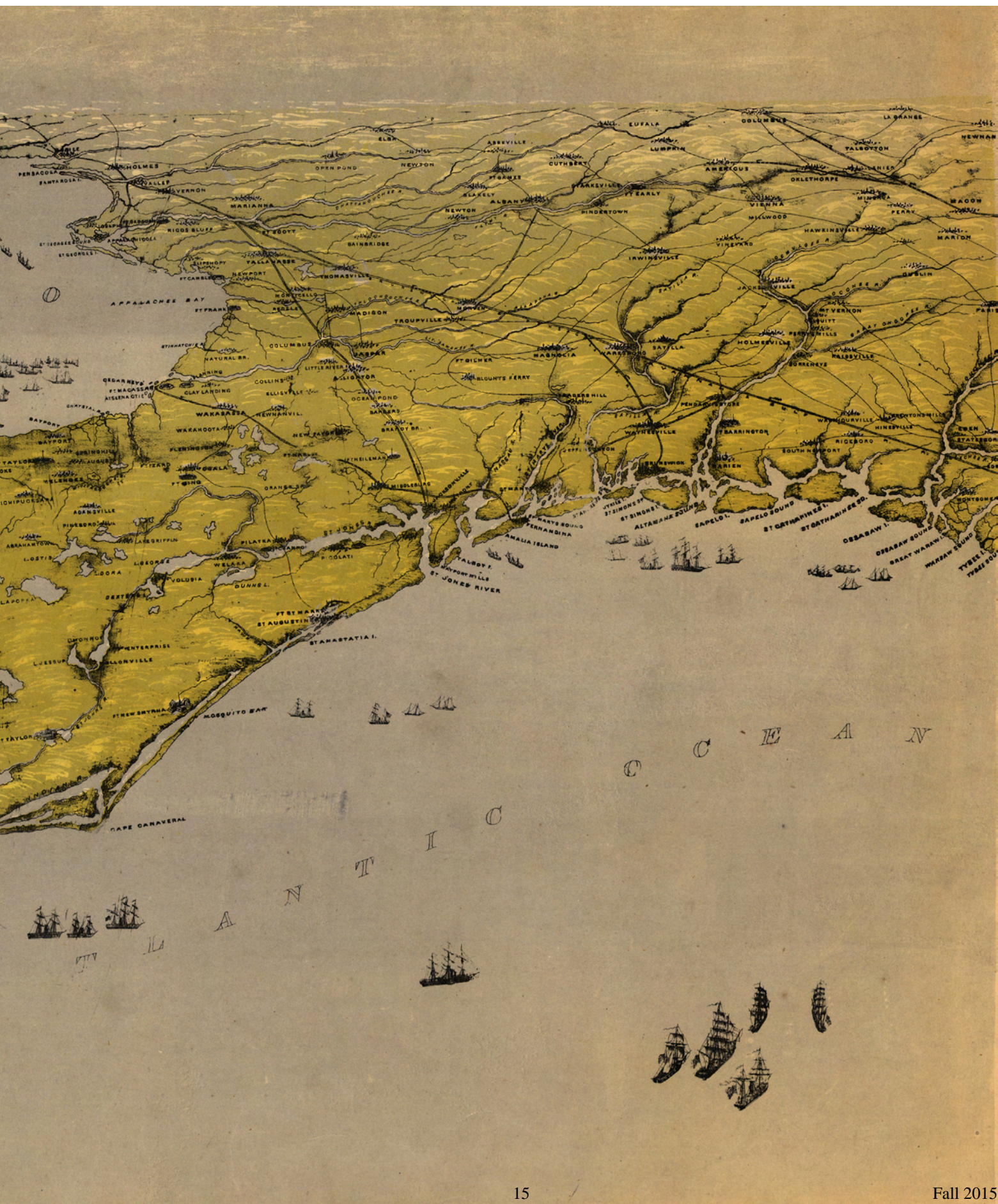
The *Gem of the Sea* captured and scuttled the blockade-running sloop *Ann* six miles from the Jupiter Inlet. The Confederate cargo of seventy-six bags of salt was destroyed during a December 1862 patrol.



A Union naval vessel chases after a Confederate blockade runner. *Harper's Weekly*, 1864. Courtesy Florida State Archives.

Bird's-eye view of Florida and part of Georgia and Alabama, showing the Union naval blockade, 1861. Courtesy Library of Congress.





During a second patrol, the *Gem of the Sea* intercepted the British schooner *Inez* north of the Jupiter Inlet [on] April 18, 1863, while it was sailing to a rendezvous with the Confederates within the Indian River Inlet. A load salt in its cargo hold was destroyed.

USS *Beauregard*

Ironically, the USS *Beauregard* began its Civil War career as a privateer in the service of the Confederate Navy. It was commissioned as a CSA warship in October 1861. The gunboat was armed with one 24-pound rifled gun, and carried a crew of forty.

The *Beauregard* was captured in the Florida Straits by the Union blockade squadron on November 19, 1861, and taken to Key West as a prize. The gunboat was purchased by the U.S. Navy February 24, 1862, and became part of the very same East Gulf Coast Blockade Squadron that captured it from the Confederacy.

The USS *Beauregard* was officially commissioned in Union Navy March 28, 1862, and while under the command of Acting Master David Stearns, the gunboat would capture eleven rebel blockade runners. Three of its prizes were seized near Jupiter Inlet.

On August 26, 1863, the *Beauregard* seized the Confederate schooner *Phoebe* outside the Jupiter Inlet. It was towed to Key West as a prize and sold. The *Beauregard* boarded two Confederate ships, the *Lydia* and *Hope*, offshore of the Jupiter Narrows. They carrying cargos of cotton and turpentine for sale in Europe.

USS *Honeysuckle*

Tropical storms, barrier reefs and enemy ships were not the only dangers encountered by the seamen of the East Gulf Coast Blockade Squadron. The crew of USS *Honeysuckle* was decimated by [an] outbreak of yellow fever while the ship was in use as the fleet's dispatch vessel.

The *Honeysuckle* was a swift 240-ton steam-powered ship purchased by the Navy in 1863. It was armed with two 20-pound guns. After commissioning, it was ordered to Key West and joined the blockade squadron January 8, 1864.

The Union gunboat captured the British blockade runner *Fly* off Jupiter Inlet during a patrol along the east coast of Florida. After the crew recovered from the yellow fever epidemic at Key West, the *Honeysuckle* continued patrols along the west coast of Florida.

USS *Union*

The USS *Union* was a large 1,114-ton steam-powered vessel first chartered by the Navy in April 1861, then outfitted as a warship and commissioned on January 20, 1863. It carried one 12-inch rifled gun for armament. Due to its size the *Union* also was used a fleet gunboat tender.

The first prize captured by the *Union* after joining the blockade squadron was the Confederate sloop *Caroline*. The blockade

runner was seized at the Jupiter Inlet on June 10, 1864.

Seven days later, the *Union* experienced an unusual encounter with a blockade runner sailing under a Spanish flag. The crew of the *Union* boarded the Havana-based schooner *Emma* as it sailed twenty-four miles northwest of Jupiter Inlet. The ship was towed to Key West and impounded.

USS *Roebuck*

During the winter of 1863-64, the USS *Roebuck* became the scourge of Confederate blockade runners operating out of Jupiter Inlet. The *Roebuck* was launched in 1856 as 455-ton sailing bark rigged as a clipper ship for additional speed.

The warship was armed with four 32-pound guns, and manned by a crew of sixty-nine seamen. The *Roebuck* joined the East Gulf Coast Blockade Squadron in September 1862 with Acting Master Joseph Barclay in temporary command.

After completed a patrol along the Gulf coast of Florida, the gunboat was reassigned to southeast Florida, under the command of Capt. John Sherrill. The first ship captured by the *Roebuck* while on patrol outside the Jupiter Inlet was the British schooner *Ringdom*, bound for the Bahamas with a cargo of coffee and salt.

While continuing its patrol, the *Roebuck* seized the Confederate sloop *Maria Louise* January 10, 1864, near Jupiter Inlet. The next day the British blockade runner *Susan* (i.e. Suzan) was captured in the Jupiter Inlet. The crew armed the *Susan* as a Union vessel and used it to patrol along Jupiter Island.

On January 14, the *Roebuck* chased the British sloop *Young Racer* ashore north of the inlet on Jupiter Island. The English ship was transporting sacks of Florida salt in its cargo compartment.

Armed boats from the *Roebuck* chased and seized the Confederate sloop *Caroline* off Jupiter Inlet on January 18. The next day, armed boats were once again used to capture the British blockade runner *Eliza* and Confederate sloop *Mary* inside the inlet. A total of fourteen bales of cotton was impounded.

During a second patrol six months later in the Florida Straits, the *Roebuck* was credited with the capture of the Confederate schooners *Eliza* and *Rebel*, the sloops *Two Brothers*, *Nina* and *Last Resort*, and the Nassau-registered schooner *Terrapis*. The *Roebuck* ended the war as a supply ship stationed in Tampa.

War at Sea Ends

Several Confederate ships intercepted near the Jupiter Inlet were never identified in Navy logbooks. For example, two "unknown schooners" were encountered by the USS *Sagamore* on December 5, 1862. One was boarded and captured by the crew. The second vessel was sunk.

The East Gulf Coast Blockade Squadron ended the war with a tally of 300 Confederate-allied vessels captured or destroyed along both coasts of Florida. Maritime experts estimate more than 250 Florida blockade runners avoided detection or capture by the Union patrols.

At right: An 1861 map of Scott's Anaconda Plan to blockade Confederate ports. Courtesy Library of Congress.

Both sides could claim minor victories in a nautical theater of war where the only true victors were the seamen who escaped death in the tropical waters of Florida.

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Robert I. Davidsson, a resident of the Palm Beaches since 1962, managed the Palm Beach County Library System's Government Research Service (GRS) section from 1992 until his retirement in 2014. He formerly worked as a reporter and news editor for the Suwannee Democrat, Florida Keys Keynoter, Boca Raton News, and Palm Beach Post and Evening Times. He is author of the book *Indian River: A History of the Ais Indians in Spanish Florida*, and related articles about Florida's past. He is the winner of the Florida Historical Society's 2001 "Best Local History Monograph Award" and the 2006 Florida Genealogical Society's "Outstanding Achievement Award" for his work in electronic family history research. For more information about Palm Beach County history, please visit Davidsson's blog, <http://pbchistory.blogspot.com>.

