

Passed Midshipman Gavin MacKenzie joins the USS Cumberland in March 1862 in Hampton Roads, Virginia, in time for her destruction by the former USS Merrimack, converted into the powerful Confederate ironclad, the CSS Virginia. And he is the turret of the USS Monitor when the two ironclads revolutionize naval warfare.

Book Two

Duel at Hampton Roads

A Gavin MacKenzie Civil War Naval Adventure
by James A. Janke

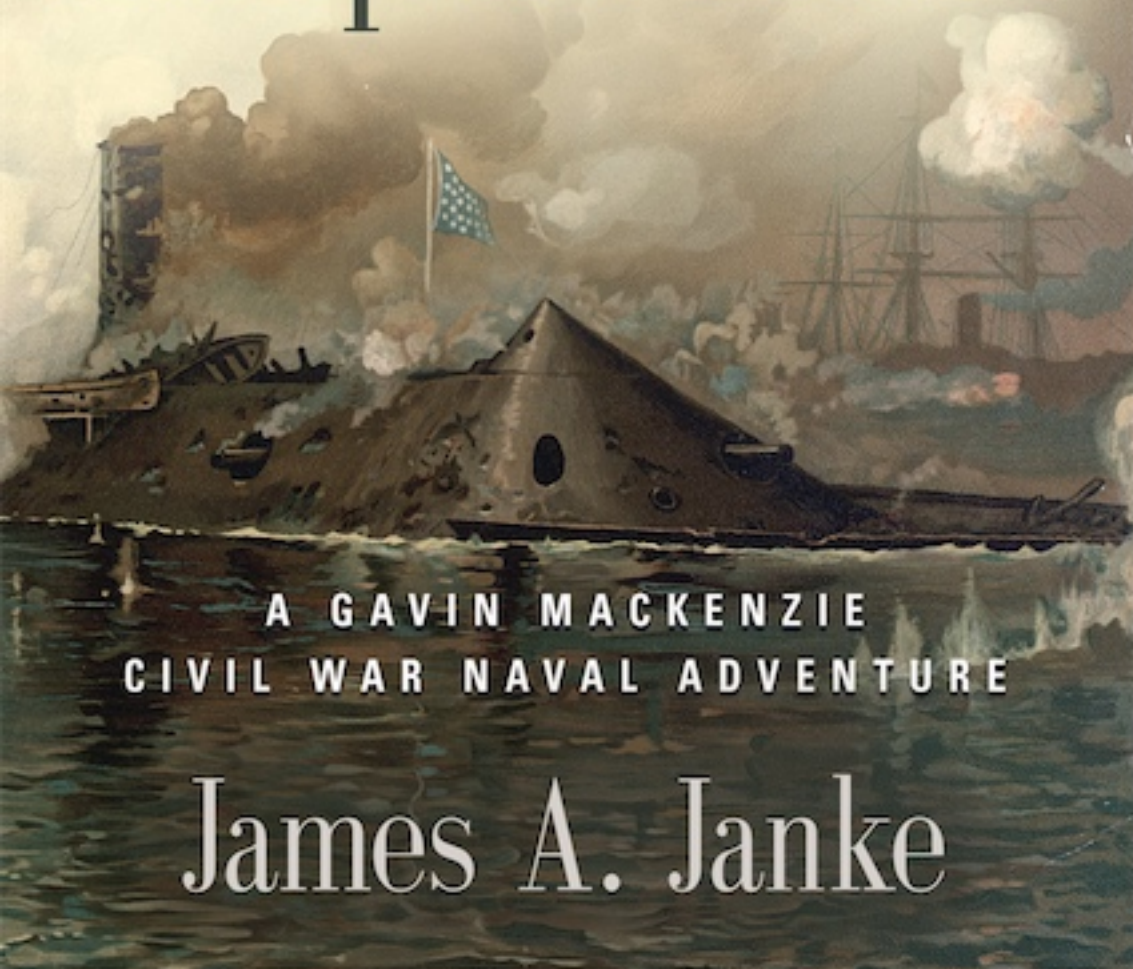
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B O O K T W O

Duel at Hampton Roads



A GAVIN MACKENZIE
CIVIL WAR NAVAL ADVENTURE

James A. Janke

BOOKS BY JAMES A. JANKE

WESTERNS

Jeremiah Bacon

Canyon Treasure

A Tin Star for Braddock

Blood on the Wind River Mountains

Last Boat to Fort Benton

Winter Kill

Last Stage to Laramie

Ten Percent to Tombstone

Hotel Deadwood

Oro Diablo

GAVIN MACKENZIE
CIVIL WAR NAVAL ADVENTURES

The Carolinas

Duel at Hampton Roads

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Chapter One

U. S. FLAG STEAMER PHILADELPHIA,
Off Roanoke Island, North Carolina, February 20, 1862.

Hon. GIDEON WELLES,
Secretary of the Navy, Washington, D.C.

. . . On the 18th instant I authorized Commander Rowan to take with him a number of our vessels and a regiment of the Army, proceed up the Chowan River, enter the Blackwater and Nottoway rivers, and destroy the two bridges of the Seaboard and Roanoke Railroad crossing these streams. . .

L. M. GOLDSBOROUGH,
Flag- Officer

§

Wednesday, February 19, 1862
USS Delaware
Chowan River, North Carolina

Passed Midshipman Gavin MacKenzie, United States Navy, had his elbows resting on the port railing of the gunboat's upper deck as it proceeded upriver at a moderate speed. The two other young officers with him, Midshipman Oliver Maxwell and Acting Master's Mate Josiah Hammond, each held a similar relaxed pose, one on either side of MacKenzie. None of them was on watch. They were simply enjoying the cruising; the Chowan River was charming, the temperature was mild, and the only breeze was that created by the *Delaware's* steaming northward.

Maxwell gave his head a single shake. "Sure doesn't seem like we're in a war."

"No," MacKenzie said. "This is very peaceful."

Hammond said, "Ironically, this is what the *Delaware* might have been doing anyway."

MacKenzie and Maxwell looked at him.

Hammond said, "I mean before the war. Taking some passengers on a leisurely afternoon river excursion." He straightened up and looked around at their vessel. "Why, where we're standing, the *Delaware* doesn't even

look like a warship. You can't see her guns from here."

The *Delaware* had been launched the previous year to serve as a passenger packet on Albemarle Sound and on the rivers that emptied into it. She was an iron-hulled, sidewheel steamer 161 feet in length with a beam of 27 feet. But the Navy had purchased her early in the war and reinforced her decks to carry the weight of heavy ordnance. With a draft of only six feet, she was perfect for wartime duties of patrolling shallow rivers. But she still *looked* like a passenger packet—except for the IX-inch Dahlgren smoothbore pivot cannon on her foredeck and the long 32-pounder smoothbore cannon mounted on a movable naval gun carriage on the afterdeck. She also carried a 12-pounder rifled boat howitzer.

Maxwell added, "Doesn't even seem like winter. Temperature's in the low 50s."

MacKenzie said, "Typical for North Carolina at this time of year."

Hammond said, "Gavin, how cold is it back home in Milwaukee right now?"

"At least twenty degrees colder than this, J.B." Hammond didn't care for his first name, so other officers called him by his first two initials. "And even colder than that farther away from Lake Michigan. The lake has a moderating effect on the temperature."

"Nice," Hammond said.

"Of course, the trade-off is that there is more snow in Milwaukee than farther inland, again because of the lake."

"Hm," Hammond said. "I think I could tolerate the snow better than I could stand the cold."

Maxwell said, "And don't forget the ice."

Hammond shivered. "Br!"

MacKenzie nodded. "My mother wrote that my sister, Amelia, likes to go skating with her husband, when they can find someone to watch their two small children."

"I wonder what that would be like," Hammond said.

Maxwell asked, "How about Christina, Gavin? Does she skate?"

Christina Williams was a beautiful, blonde, blue-eyed young woman living in Milwaukee. MacKenzie was confident he would marry her someday—eventually. It just seemed the natural denouement of a longtime friendship, which included their respective families.

MacKenzie said, "Yes, she likes to skate too. In fact, in her last letter Christina said she had just bought a new pair of skates. Sometimes she goes skating with Amelia."

Hammond said, "I assume you're going to be drawing her a sketch of this river for your next letter to her?"

MacKenzie smiled. "Assume? Or guess?"

The other two officers laughed at that. It was well known that MacKenzie and Commander Stephen Rowan, when the latter had been captain of MacKenzie's former ship, the USS *Pawnee*, had engaged in good-natured ribbing about assumptions versus guesses, an unusual familiarity between officers of such widely separated ranks. The point being you knew not to trust guesses, but assumptions could get you killed.

That light-hearted contest had continued even to the present. Rowan was now commander of the Union Naval Division in Albemarle Sound, part of Flag Officer Louis Goldsborough's North Atlantic Blockading Squadron. Rowan's flagship was the *Delaware*. And at the moment that officer was standing on the *Delaware's* bridge, the curved section of the upper deck just forward of the wheelhouse.

Two other naval officers were stationed on the bridge. Lieutenant Stephen Quackenbush was captain of the *Delaware*, and Captain's Clerk Edward Gabaudan, a recent new addition to the *Delaware*, was Rowan's aide and the *Delaware's* signal officer.

Also present on the bridge was Army Colonel Rush Hawkins, resplendent in his Zouave uniform of baggy red pants, short dark blue jacket, and tasseled red fez. He was the commanding officer of the 9th New York Volunteer Infantry Regiment, known as Hawkins' Zouaves. Several companies of his regiment were aboard some of the gunboats in the eight-boat flotilla Rowan was leading up the Chowan River on this bridge-burning mission. No troops were on the *Delaware* though.

One company was on the USS *Commodore Perry*, Lt. Charles Flusser commanding, plodding along about a mile behind the *Delaware*. She was a converted New York City ferry boat. Judged to be only marginally seaworthy, she had amazed everyone by making the trip down to North Carolina in a gale. She was squat, slow, clumsy, ugly, and vulnerable. But she had a very shallow draft, perfect for riverine warfare, and her extremely wide beam meant she made a very stable gun platform. She had twice the complement of guns the *Delaware* had.

Well behind the *Commodore Perry* were three other low-draft, converted ferryboats: the USS *Morse*, the USS *Hunchback*, and the USS *Commodore Barney*. Still farther back were the other gunboats in Rowan's present flotilla: the USS *Louisiana*, the USS *Whitehead*, and the USS *John L. Lockwood*.

“Well, J.B.,” MacKenzie said, “you assume correctly in this case. I’ll definitely add a sketch of the river in my next letter to Christina.”

Hammond asked, slowly, “And maybe one for my wife?”

Maxwell laughed and straightened up. “Ah, J.B., that’s why you mentioned him sending a sketch to Christina. So you could beg a sketch for yourself.”

Hammond looked a little sheepish. “Gavin, she loves your sketches I send her.”

MacKenzie smiled. “Sure, J. B., happy to do it. And I’ll stick you in the sketch—as usual.”

“Thanks, Gavin.” Hammond smiled.

Maxwell said, “Gavin, that’s what you get for being so talented with a pencil. Lots of requests.”

MacKenzie shrugged, stood up, and folded his arms casually. “I don’t mind. It’s really a nice compliment.”

Hammond added, “Lots of *orders*, too, besides requests. How many times have you had to supply sketches for reports to the Navy Department? Maps, boats, guns, forts, officers.”

Maxwell turned around and leaned his back against the railing. “And for the Army, too, J.B. General Butler had him make sketches for him after the Battle of Hatteras Inlet.”

MacKenzie said, “And sketches for Burnside after the Battle of Roanoke Island.” He nodded toward the *Delaware’s* bridge. “Col. Hawkins asked for sketches, too.”

Hammond said, “Oh, about your charge with the howitzer at the breastworks on Roanoke Island?”

MacKenzie had to smile at that. “No, about the 9th New York Zouaves that went with me. I drew Hawkins leading, even though he was in the middle of the column. And another sketch with Major Kimball in the lead, where he really was.”

Hammond said, “Well, I suppose they did contribute a little.”

MacKenzie chuckled. “Like, most of it. I never did get to fire the howitzer. It was a beast to drag forward.”

Maxwell said, “Didn’t matter. You and Kimball had a footrace to the breastworks, way ahead of the howitzer anyway.”

MacKenzie nodded. “Didn’t mean to. But the two of us even outran the soldiers. And my howitzer got left well back of the soldiers.”

“But it was your idea,” Hammond said. “To charge right up that causeway. I know. I was there.”

MacKenzie said, "Yes, it was my idea. But I left myself and the howitzer out of the sketches for Hawkins and Kimball."

Hammond said, "There's no justice. You're *too* accommodating."

Maxwell said, "*Harper's Weekly* is likely to have a lithograph of the charge, Gavin. You may be in that. Should be at least."

MacKenzie just shrugged. "Who knows." He had to admit though that he did hope there would be a *Harper's Weekly* engraving with him—and the howitzer crew—in it. Or maybe in *Leslie's Weekly*.

Hammond said, "You should send them some of your own sketches, Gavin. I'll bet they'd use 'em. Maybe even pay you for 'em."

Maxwell said, "Now, there's an idea, Gavin. I think your sketches are as good as the ones made by the newspapers' artists. No, better."

MacKenzie smiled. "Thanks, Oliver. And that is a thought." He shook his head once. "Funny how that seems like such a long time ago now. Yet it was just eleven days ago."

Maxwell said, "I told you it didn't seem like we were in a war."

MacKenzie nodded. "Yeah, no sign of the war here."

Maxwell said, "Not much sign of anybody, for that matter. Just a few blacks fishing. I don't think we've seen any white people all the way up the river. Even in those two small hamlets we passed."

"Ashland and Colerain," MacKenzie said.

"They looked deserted."

Hammond said, "Those two horsemen we saw a couple of hours ago were white."

"Well, okay, two," Maxwell allowed. "But just two. I guess after we took Roanoke Island, smashed the Reb's mosquito fleet, and captured Elizabeth City, the white folk around here took a real scare and cleared out."

Hammond swept a hand at the passing scene. "Anyway, Gavin, just how would you sketch that? I mean, it's a beautiful river, even in the dead of winter. But draw every tree? How do you draw water?"

MacKenzie thought about that. The Chowan River traveled through swamps and forests of pine and oak and other trees. Heavy underbrush grew all along the shores. The river was two miles wide at its mouth on Albemarle Sound, but now, about forty miles upstream, the width had narrowed to less than half a mile and promised to narrow further.

He said, "You have to draw in such a way that a little represents a lot. Notice all the oak trees? They don't lose their leaves in winter."

Maxwell said, "No. They drop off in the spring."

“So I’ll have to include that wall of oak leaves we see. But not every leaf. Just some circles to give the general idea. Your mind will fill in the rest.”

Hammond asked, “And the pine trees?”

“The pine trees I can represent with a gallery of short strokes. And maybe just a broad smudge at the river’s edge to represent all that thick underbrush you can’t see through.”

Hammond looked down at the water gurgling past the *Delaware’s* side. “The river has a funny color to it. Sort of like tea.”

MacKenzie said, “The Chowan is what they call a blackwater river. The swamps produce a lot of decaying vegetation, and that releases tannins into the water. Stains the water this color. Makes it acidic, too.”

Maxwell asked, “How do you know that?”

“Charles Franklin,” MacKenzie said. “Now, there’s a man educated well beyond his schooling. He’s a fount of information, on many subjects.”

Hammond said, “Ah, yes, Charles Franklin. Richest man in Elizabeth City.”

MacKenzie said, “Probably.”

Maxwell said, “Pity how his huge library was lost when someone burned down his mansion after we took Roanoke Island.”

“Yes, a real heartbreaker,” MacKenzie said. “I had spent many a pleasant hour in that library when I visited the Franklins.”

Maxwell said, “Wonderfully ironic, though. People in the city burning down homes and buildings so we Yankees can’t use ‘em, and then it turns out we don’t want to use ‘em anyway.”

“Yeah,” Hammond said. He looked at MacKenzie. “Think you and Jeremy Franklin will ever wind up shooting at each other again?”

MacKenzie shuddered a little. Jeremy Franklin was Charles Franklin’s son and his best friend since their days together at the Naval Academy. He still thought of Jeremy that way. But Jeremy had “gone South” and joined the Confederate Navy when North Carolina had seceded from the Union. Many Union Navy officers had resigned when their home states seceded. And twice in the last five months he and Jeremy had felt duty bound to try to kill each other, once at Hatteras Inlet and again at the locks at South Mills on the Dismal Swamp Canal. “God damn war.”

“Yeah,” Maxwell said. “Friends shouldn’t have to fight each other. Or even stop being friends. I know you were good friends with all the Franklins, Gavin. Including his sister Rebecca.”

MacKenzie took a deep breath and let it out slowly. *Oh, my God.* He

hadn't thought about Rebecca Franklin for a good twelve minutes now. What a fabulously beautiful, passionate woman. Although he considered eventual marriage to Christina Williams both inevitable and highly desirable, Rebecca Franklin was one reason why he didn't think it was imminent.

How many times had he relived in his mind that late night back in August of 1860 after the garden party at the Franklins'? How Rebecca had come to his room and invited him to introduce her to the world of carnal pleasures. Such passion, such abandon, such a gorgeous, young female body with the softest, smoothest skin, a wonderfully filled out figure, with the most perfect, firm breasts he had ever seen on a woman or could even imagine. And he had fondled many and had a rich imagination to boot.

MacKenzie was a very frustrated man. He had not seen Rebecca again for a year and a half after the weekend of that garden party. Until he had walked into Elizabeth City nine days ago after the city had been seized by Union forces and he had found the Franklin mansion burned to the ground.

Rebecca was a ardent, devoted, articulate defender of the Confederacy, but she just couldn't think of MacKenzie as the enemy. And she made it clear in that brief meeting that she was eager to have him visit her. It gave him an erection just thinking about what their *next* visit—a leisurely, intimate visit—would be like. But he hadn't gotten back into the town since then.

For Elizabeth City had been captured but not occupied. Goldsborough and Burnside didn't want to bother with an occupation unless it became necessary. So instead of being moored regularly at the Elizabeth City wharf, the *Delaware* had often anchored offshore or even down near Roanoke Island. And sometimes she was off on a short mission somewhere in the Sound. And when the warship *had* docked at the Elizabeth City wharf, MacKenzie had never had the opportunity to go ashore.

For another matter, he wasn't even sure Rebecca was still in Elizabeth City. Her home was gone. Where would she stay? Perhaps she had gone down to Wilmington to stay with her father, who had gone down there to invest in blockade runners.

Someone nudged him.

"Hm?"

Maxwell said, "Where did you go off to?"

MacKenzie smiled a bit. *Can't tell you, Oliver, but it was powerfully distracting.* He noticed that Hammond was sauntering toward the bridge, and Maxwell looked like he was going to follow.

Maxwell said, "They've spotted someone waving a white flag on that landing up ahead. To port."

"Oh, okay." He followed Maxwell.

The three men stopped at the railing on the bridge in automatic order of rank, with MacKenzie nearest to Rowan, then Maxwell, and then Hammond.

Gabaudan was looking through a day telescope. "Looks like a Negro woman, sir."

Quackenbush said, "Wonder what she wants."

Rowan looked around. At this point the Chowan River was passing a steep bluff on the left that must have been forty feet tall. It was covered in a thick stand of pine and oak trees with a low wall of dense underbrush.

Rowan turned toward the wheelhouse. "Mr. Williams," he called. Nassa Williams was a local river pilot hired by Rowan. "I can't see over this bluff. Is there a village up ahead or just a plantation landing?"

Williams raised his voice. "A village, sir. Winton."

All anyone could see of the village was just a short road climbing a steep clay embankment up from the landing.

Quackenbush asked Williams, "Is it very big?"

Williams shrugged. "A couple of dozen buildings is all. But it's the county seat of Hertford County. So it does prosper some. A few stores, two hotels, I think, and some homes. And the courthouse, of course. A church. Things like that."

Rowan stuck out a hand for the telescope. Gabaudan handed him the instrument. Rowan put it up to his eye. "She looks middle-aged. Well, maybe not."

Hawkins said, "I don't think she's just trying to say hello. She's really waving that rag."

"No," Rowan said. "She's definitely trying to get our attention." He turned to Quackenbush. "Let's slow down for a bit. See if we can figure out what that black woman wants."

"Aye, aye, sir," Quackenbush said. He turned toward the wheelhouse again. "One bell, Mr. Williams."

Williams nodded. "Okay," he said. As a civilian he made it a point not to sound too naval. He reached for the engine room bell cord.

Hammond piped up. "Commander Rowan, sir. I've heard tell that there's a force of five hundred Unionists in the neighborhood who want to join Burnside."

"Yeah, I've heard that rumor, too," Rowan said. He didn't

sound impressed.

Hammond said, "Maybe they're camped out at Winton, and this woman is trying to get us to stop and talk to them."

Hawkins said, "I doubt there are *five* Unionists on the Chowan who want to join us, much less five hundred."

Rowan said, "I don't give those stories much credence either, Colonel."

MacKenzie said, "Besides, if there was a military force there wanting to get our attention, wouldn't there be an officer on that wharf instead of some Negro woman?"

Rowan nodded. "A reasonable assumption, Mr. MacKenzie."

MacKenzie couldn't resist. "An assumption, sir?"

Gabaudan looked at MacKenzie suddenly, his eyebrows raised. He glanced at Rowan, expecting the commander to lash out at the effrontery.

But Rowan only smiled. He nodded slowly. He looked at MacKenzie. "Score one for you, Mr. MacKenzie."

MacKenzie didn't respond. Gloating would be pushing his luck.

Rowan said, "So why don't you haul your ass up to the mainmast crosstrees. Maybe you can see into the village from there and figure out what this woman's problem is."

MacKenzie's shoulders slumped. *Oh, shit.* The *Delaware* was far too small to have a proper fighting top on the mainmast where a lookout could stand or sit. On the *Delaware* any lookout had to find an awkward perch on the crosstrees, with maybe a leg wrapped around a shorter trestletree for security.

But MacKenzie acknowledged immediately. "Aye, aye, sir."

Gabaudan grinned at him. As did Hammond and Maxwell. All three had a playful serves-you-right look on their faces.

MacKenzie shrugged a little as if to say it had been worth it. He stepped into the wheelhouse to retrieve another telescope from a bracket.

Rowan said, "Mr. Quackenbush, it'll be almost dark before we get to the Blackwater and the Nottoway. We'll have to anchor for the night short of them and let the rest of the flotilla catch up to us. We'll assault the bridges tomorrow. So let's talk to this woman and see what she wants. I think we'll have plenty of time. I'm curious."

"Aye, aye, sir," Quackenbush said. He turned to the wheelhouse. "Mr. Williams, dock the *Delaware* at that wharf."

"Will do," Williams said. He gave the wheel a good turn, and the *Delaware* headed for shore, which was only a few hundred yards away. The Chowan was narrowing swiftly.

MacKenzie descended to the lower deck. Although the mainmast was forward of the upper deck close enough that you could lean out and touch it from the bridge, a climber had to ascend the mast's rigging from the main deck.

MacKenzie hopped up to the starboard railing on the main deck and started to climb the rigging, hands grasping the shrouds and feet climbing the ratlines. He used one hand to hold the telescope.

It was slow work going up. The shrouds and ratlines wobbled as he ascended, and ratlines never gave solid footing to a climber.

He got his shoulders above the crosstrees and paused. He looked ashore. He could see into the village from that vantage point. He could see buildings and dirt streets, the steeple on a church, a short tower on a building that must have been the courthouse, given the Confederate flag flying from a pole on its roof. But no people, other than the black woman on the wharf. There certainly was no military unit waiting for them. And no one else was visible on the streets either. Not even any Negroes, who weren't apprehensive about the Union Navy.

He glanced to his right. From the wharf upriver, the bank was covered in pine, thick stands of oak, and that impenetrable underbrush like all the rest of the bluff at Winton. He saw no one there either.

He looked to his left as he started to scramble onto the crosstrees. He paused. He thought the underbrush there had an odd aspect to it, as if sun were reflecting off branches covered in ice. But it wasn't cold enough for ice. And there had been no rain to make branches even wet.

Without climbing all the way onto the crosstrees, he raised the telescope, clicked open the tubes, and brought the instrument up to his eye. "Well, let's see." He looked through the telescope, adjusted the focus, and study the underbrush.

His mouth dropped open, his pulse leaped, a shiver ran through his body. "Son of a *bitch*," he muttered. *Rifle barrels*. He swung the telescope rapidly down the rim of the bluff. *Hundreds of rifle barrels*.

He snapped his head down. High up on the mainmast he was almost directly over the men on the bridge. "It's a trap!" he shouted. "Sheer off, *sheer off*!"

Every man on the bridge jerked his head up. Rowan and Quackenbush both blurted, "What?"

A man on shore bellowed, "*Fire!*"

The afternoon's tranquility was shattered by the crash of a volley of several hundred rifle muskets. It was all the louder for being totally

unexpected. And the *Delaware* was very close now, only fifty yards from the wharf.

Minié balls clattered angrily but uselessly against the iron hull of the *Delaware*, but the superstructure was wood. Splinters flew, bullets punched holes in bulkheads. All the windows on the port side shattered, including the two port windows in the wheelhouse. Bullets smacked into the *Delaware's* engine walking beam and twanged off the cannons fore and aft. The smokestack boomed as bullets perforated it. So many bullets struck the surface of the river around the *Delaware* that it looked like it was hailing.

Bullets thunked into the mainmast with an ominous angry *whack!* that reflected how much energy there was behind them at such a close range. Splinters flew from the crosstrees at MacKenzie's elbows. He flinched and lost his grip on the telescope, and it fell. It caromed off the ship's bell affixed to the front of the mainmast and clattered to the deck.

From the bluff: "Fire at will!"

MacKenzie frantically started back down the ratlines, his haste causing him to fumble. He stuck his foot between two ratlines. "*God dammit!*"

Initially, every man on the bridge flinched and ducked. But Hammond and Maxwell crashed through a door and threw themselves on the deck inside Rowan's quarters. Maxwell kicked the door shut.

The other four men on the bridge charged around the wheelhouse and dropped below the level of the windows.

Rowan dispensed with the chain of command. "Williams, get us the *hell* outa here! Sheer off, sheer off!"

But Williams hadn't waited for orders. On his knees he was already slapping the wheel and spinning it as fast as he could.

"Full speed, Williams," Rowan added.

Williams grabbed frantically for the engine room bell cord, missed, and had to try again.

On the bluff two 12-pounder field guns that MacKenzie hadn't even noticed fired. But atop the bluff they were so high that their two shells sailed over the top of the *Delaware*, ricocheted off the river's surface, and plunged into the forest on the other side, exploding there.

There had been a brief pause in the firing as the Confederates reloaded, but they were skilled, and it took them far less than a minute to reload their muskets. Firing resumed before MacKenzie could fumble his way very far back down. He could tell soldiers on shore were now aiming specifically for him; bullets hitting the mast descended right along with him.

A shroud parted, and several ratlines snapped. MacKenzie hurried but

he was amazed he hadn't been hit already. The thick bulk of the mainmast was the only thing protecting him, and it wasn't as wide as he was. And as the *Delaware* moved upriver, the mast would no longer shield him at all. He had to get down faster.

He was still well above the deck, but he decided it would be better to hit the deck by dropping himself than to have a bullet do it for him. He swung off the ratlines and grabbed a shroud with both hands. He gauged his swing, hoped he wouldn't hit anything on the deck, and let go.

The deck rushed up at him. He hit the deck hard and rolled, grimacing and gasping for the air that had been knocked out of his lungs. His feet hurt, his elbows and knees hurt, his shoulder hurt, his wrists hurt, his butt hurt. At least he hadn't hit his head. And he didn't feel like he had broken any bones.

He struggled to get to his hands and knees, gasping for a breath. He crawled over to the port bulwark. On the *Delaware* the iron bulwarks on the main deck were just a little over waist high. So MacKenzie snuggled up to the bulwark and kept his head down.

Rowan called down to him. "Mr. MacKenzie."

MacKenzie looked up at the bridge. He could see Rowan peering around the corner of the wheelhouse, on his knees. "Sir?"

"Are you hurt?"

"Nothing that won't heal in time."

"Anybody else on deck hurt?"

MacKenzie looked around at the rest of the crew huddled against the port bulwark. He saw the executive officer, Earl Chase, and James Spriggman, one of the *Delaware's* other acting master's mates. Several sailors were also there.

Chase called to Rowan, "It's a miracle, sir, but no one down here was hit."

"Thank God."

MacKenzie asked, "On the bridge, sir? Anyone hit? You, sir? Hammond or Maxwell?" He noticed that Rowan was rubbing his temples. He thought the commander was getting another of his frequent headaches.

Rowan said, "No. I don't think anybody was hit. Williams, were you hit?"

"A couple of scratches is all," Williams said. "From broken glass."

Rowan said, "I don't know how we could take that much fire and not have anyone hit. Must be a whole fucking regiment on that bluff."

"I think so, sir," MacKenzie called. "It looked like it."

Chase said to MacKenzie, "With so many of 'em, the Rebs must've thought they didn't have to aim. Probably figured a simple shotgun approach was bound to wreak havoc with us."

MacKenzie snorted. "Well, I'm pretty sure they were aiming at me as I was coming back down, God damn 'em."

Chase smiled. "You *were* the obvious target, Gavin."

"Well, I took it personal."

"It was."

Two cannons downriver boomed. Clearly much bigger guns than the two field pieces the Confederates had.

MacKenzie looked at Chase. "That must be the *Perry*."

Chase nodded. "Flusser didn't need any signal from Rowan. Probably ripping into those woods with grapeshot."

That caused the fire from shore to slacken considerably.

Shortly Rowan said, "All right, we're far enough upriver. Mr. Quackenbush, turn the ship around. We shall beat to quarters and clear those woods with our guns."

"Aye, aye, sir," Quackenbush said. "Mr. Williams, we will reverse course. Bosun? Where are you, bosun?"

"Here, sir," came a voice farther down the upper deck on the starboard side.

"Beat to quarters, bosun," Quackenbush ordered.

"Aye, aye, sir!" The bosun's shrill whistle brought the rest of crew scrambling up from below decks. The *Delaware* was too small to have a marine drummer aboard.

"Col. Hawkins," Rowan said. "Most of your regiment is on other gunboats that will take an hour or more to catch up to us. So the day is too advanced for field action. But tomorrow we'll come back, take this town, and teach it a lesson. Bastards. Sneaking, dishonorable bastards."

"Yes, sir!" Hawkins said.

"And find that black woman if you can," Rowan added.

"Yes, sir."

MacKenzie didn't think Winton was going to like Rowan's lesson.

Rowan called, "Mr. MacKenzie."

MacKenzie looked up. "Yes, sir?"

Rowan gave him a salute.

MacKenzie returned the gesture. Yes, assumptions could get you killed; don't trust 'em.

Quackenbush had the *Delaware* turned around. It wasn't

straightforward; they had to back and fill in the narrow channel.

The guns were manned. As the *Delaware* steamed slowly downriver, the guns fired grapeshot at the bluff and a few shells farther into the woods beyond it. The *Commodore Perry* kept up her firing as well. All firing from the bluff ceased.

About eight miles below Winton, Rowan anchored the *Delaware* in the middle of the river. The rest of his flotilla also anchored, strung out downriver from but close to the *Delaware*.

Rowan called all his captains aboard the *Delaware*. Together with Hawkins they had to make plans for the next day.

Chapter Two

Thursday, February 20, 1862

USS Delaware

Chowan River, North Carolina

It was 10:00 am before Rowan's flotilla headed upriver again from its overnight anchorage below Winton. The late start was not the result of laziness or inefficiency but of extensive preparation.

Plans had been developed, explained, and ordered. Signals prepared, troops shifted between vessels, the order of steaming changed. Gunboats had improvised more protection for the pilots, gun crews had been exercised, ammunition distributed, and the crews well fed. Some hasty minor repairs had been done to the *Delaware*.

On the day before, the flotilla had been strung out over many miles in a leisurely upriver boat trip characterized by nonchalance and, obviously, a decided and dangerous lack of vigilance. Today though the eight gunboats were in a taut, carefully planned formation, menacing, primed, expecting battle, eager for it—and angry.

First in line were the *Louisiana*, the *Whitehead*, and the *Lockwood*, three gunboats that were not converted ferryboats. Their task would be to lay down a preparative bombardment of the woods on the bluff and on the village itself.

Six companies of Hawkins' Zouaves were on the next three gunboats in line: the *Delaware*, the *Commodore Perry*, and the *Commodore Barney*. The *Delaware* would dock at the Winton wharf to disembark her troops. Since the wharf was only big enough for one boat to dock at, troops on the *Perry* and *Barney* would be landed along the bluffs with launches, their own supplemented with launches from other gunboats. Those three gunboats would contribute to the bombardment until they got close enough to shore to land their troops.

Lastly the *Morse* and the *Hunchback*, both converted ferryboats, would bring up the rear and provide covering fire for the troop landing.

The crews of all the gunboats went to quarters as soon as the flotilla headed upriver. But that wasn't much different from their alert status all night long, wary of another ambush.

The *Louisiana* waited until it was within a quarter of a mile of the Winton wharf before it started the action. It fired grapeshot into the trees and brush along the top of the bluff. It was a little before 11:00 am.

The *Whitehead* and *Lockwood* quickly joined in, also firing grapeshot. The tree line shivered and sent up a shower of dust, oak leaves, and branches.

On the crowded main deck of the *Delaware* Hammond said, "Oak leaf salad, anyone?"

Men laughed.

Maxwell said, "No response from the bluff."

MacKenzie said, "No one there today."

Hammond commented, "Very prudent of 'em, I'd say."

MacKenzie grinned. "Indeed. They knew they wouldn't fool us a second time."

The three officers were looking over the *Delaware's* port railing on the main deck. Behind them stood two 12-pounder boat howitzers, tubes already affixed to their respective iron gun carriages. The *Delaware's* rifled howitzer had been supplemented by a howitzer from the *Commodore Perry*. Rowan wanted a two-gun battery landed swiftly. MacKenzie would have command of the detachment, and he had picked Hammond and Maxwell to command a gun each.

The *Delaware* would use a spar attached to the mainmast as a derrick and drop the mounted guns directly onto the wharf, ready to be wheeled into action. The *Delaware's* howitzer already had a sling under it. Two gun crews waited behind the howitzers.

The executive officer, Earl Chase, was in command of the forward pivot cannon, and its crew was ready, the gun aimed several points to the left of the bow. On the afterdeck, Spriggman was in command of the 32-pounder there. It was pointed directly abeam.

The rest of the main deck—fore, aft, and on either side—was crammed with soldiers of Hawkins' Zouaves. There were more on the upper deck and even belowdecks. So the *Delaware* was a crowded boat, and the same applied to the two *Commodores* tagging close behind.

Another three-gunboat salvo of grapeshot ripped into the woods on the bluff.

MacKenzie looked up to the crosstrees of the mainmast. It was the turn of Acting Assistant Paymaster Frederick R. Curtis, Quackenbush's aide, to sit uncomfortably and precariously on the crosstrees this time. He was peering intently through a telescope at Winton and the bluffs.

"Mr. Curtis," MacKenzie called. "What do you see in the village? Any infantry? Any guns?"

Curtis answered, "Nope." He lowered the telescope from his eye and

looked down. "In fact, I think the village is completely deserted."

Maxwell said, "No sign of Rebs at all? No Negroes?"

Curtis shook his head. "No sign of *anybody*."

Chase fired the pivot IX-inch Dahlgren cannon. The 32-pounder on the afterdeck followed suit.

The rest of the flotilla stretching downstream, whose guns were loaded with shells, took that as the signal to commence firing as well. Some of the shells were directed into the woods on the bluff, but most were aimed to sail over the trees to drop into the town. Aboard the *Delaware* they could hear the loud cracks as the shells exploded.

Curtis called down his report to Rowan on the bridge as the *Delaware* headed for the wharf. Rowan ordered Gabaudan to send up flags to signal cease firing; there was no point to a bombardment if there was no enemy to receive it. All the gunboats quickly complied.

The *Delaware* pulled up to the wharf. Sailors jumped off with lines fore and aft and secured the gunboat to pilings.

A gangplank was lowered to the wharf's deck. Major Edgar Kimball drew his sword and waved it in a circle over his head. "Ninth New York, charge!" He trotted down the gangplank, his sword pointed high and forward. He headed for the short muddy road leading up the embankment.

Two companies of Zouaves pounded down the gangplank after him, a stream of baggy red pants, blue jackets, and red fezzes. Renowned veterans of the bayonet charge in the Battle of Roanoke Island, the Zouaves were eager to augment their fierce reputation. "Zou, Zou, Zou!"

MacKenzie got the shivers listening to that ominous cry. He figured Confederates would be a great deal more intimidated. The Zouaves were coming!

MacKenzie waited until the last of the soldiers had surged off the *Delaware* and cleared the wharf. Then he gave orders, and the first howitzer was lifted into the air and swung over the railing and toward the dock.

MacKenzie ordered, "Man your gun, Mr. Maxwell."

"Aye, aye, sir!" Maxwell said. He waved his gun crew toward the gangplank.

Each man in the gun crew had a leather pass case on a strap over his shoulder. Each pass case held one projectile. Four men carried the two heavy ammunition boxes containing 18 projectiles each. Each man in the gun crew was armed with a pistol and a cutlass, as were MacKenzie, Maxwell, and Hammond. MacKenzie also had field glasses on a strap

hanging about his neck.

Maxwell supervised the untying of the sling on his howitzer. He waved it off.

Ordinarily the two ammunition boxes would have been mounted on the brackets on the axletree of the gun carriage by matching up holes in the boxes with the prongs on the brackets. But the gun had to be hauled up a steep hill, and the ammunition would have added great weight to the gun and its carriage. Besides, the howitzer would be deployed as soon as it was on level ground atop the bluff.

The ammunition boxes for Maxwell's rifled howitzer contained shot and shell but no canister, as the latter was hard on the rifling of a howitzer.

On the wharf Maxwell ordered the drag rope deployed and men to take their places at it. He turned to the *Delaware*. "Number one howitzer ready, sir," he called.

MacKenzie acknowledged. "Wait for the other gun, Mr. Maxwell."

"Aye, aye, sir."

MacKenzie cocked an ear. He heard no gunfire from the village, though he could still hear the Zouaves yelling. Maybe Curtis's report was completely accurate. Maybe the Confederates had evacuated the area. But maybe not. No, don't *assume* they had left. So he needed to get his howitzers up the hill as quickly as possible.

The second howitzer, a smoothbore cannon, was off lifted to the wharf. This howitzer's crew carried some canister as well as shot and shell.

"Mr. Hammond, man your howitzer."

"Aye, aye, sir!" Hammond signaled his gun crew, and they headed for the gangplank.

MacKenzie followed Hammond's gun crew off the *Delaware*.

Hammond saluted. "Number two howitzer ready, sir."

MacKenzie drew his cutlass and pointed up the bluff. "Howitzers, up the hill!" he shouted. "Number one gun first. Give a yell."

The two gun crews cheered. Maxwell ordered his crew forward. They started out smartly at first, but it quickly became a slow, steady effort to get the 870-pound bronze cannon and its carriage up the steep hill. Hammond and his crew fell in behind Maxwell's gun.

Heading up the path MacKenzie took a quick look to the left. He saw Zouaves landing from the launches from the *Perry* and the *Barney*. The easy route for those soldiers would have been to trot along the shoreline to the wharf and then up the road to the top. But that would have been too easy. They were charging straight up the steep bluff. "Zou! Zou! Zou!"

MacKenzie hurried ahead of his gun crews; he had to know where to deploy them as they reached the top of the hill. He reached the top well before Maxwell's crew had gotten there. He stopped and looked around. He was panting. That run up the steep hill had been strenuous for a naval officer; there was little chance for exercise aboard ship.

One company of Zouaves had been deployed in a firing line at the top of the bluff. MacKenzie saw that the rest of the soldiers had fanned out through the village and were going through buildings. He saw one company melting into the woods on the far side of Winton. There was no gunfire. The yelling had stopped. The attack had faltered for lack of opposition.

MacKenzie sheathed his cutlass and walked up to the company commander of the soldiers deployed there. "Captain," he said.

The captain looked at him. "Hello, Navy," he said.

MacKenzie said, "No Rebels, huh?"

"Nope. They skedaddled. Damned disappointin'. We were itchin' for a good fight."

MacKenzie surveyed the village. "I think the Rebels knew that."

"Yeah."

The two howitzers reached the top of the hill. Hammond and Maxwell halted their crews and hurried over to MacKenzie.

Maxwell, looking around, said, "Nothing happening?"

"Nope. The Rebels left." MacKenzie raised his field glasses and started studying the town. "And I think everybody in town did, too."

Hammond said, "Where should we deploy, sir?"

MacKenzie continued traversing the scene with the field glasses for a few moments. "Well, I don't see a better vantage point than right here. We can cover the whole village from here." He lowered the field glasses. "Put one gun on each end of this firing line. That suit you, Captain?"

The infantry officer nodded. "Glad for the company. I doubt they'll get anything to shoot at though."

MacKenzie said, "Mr. Maxwell, you to the left. Mr. Hammond, to the right."

Hammond and Maxwell both said, "Aye, aye, sir." They sounded disappointed. They headed back for their respective howitzer crews.

But Maxwell stopped and turned around. "Sir, could we at least fire a shell or two into the woods on the far side of the town? Seems a shame to haul the gun up that damn steep hill for nothing"

MacKenzie chuckled.

The captain did too. But he said, "You'll hit our men instead of

any Rebels.”

MacKenzie agreed. “No, Mr. Maxwell. I understand your frustration, but no firing unless I say so.”

“Aye, aye, sir.” Maxwell walked slowly toward his crew.

MacKenzie called, turning from one man to the other, “Mr. Maxwell, Mr. Hammond, I am going to find Col. Hawkins. You stay here. Cooperate with the captain here, if the Rebels suddenly fall upon us. He can direct your fire.”

“Aye, aye, sir.”

MacKenzie started walking forward.

The buildings nearest the river were small warehouses, boathouses, and wood and ironworking shops. A few small boats were on stocks. Winton obviously had a minor boatbuilding and boat repair industry as well as serving as a port for neighborhood commerce.

The main street wasn’t long. It had half a dozen stores, a few offices, including one for a doctor.

There were two hotels in the small village, both advertising good food. Being the county seat did have its advantages: lots of visitors.

Prominent on the street were the small post office and the surprisingly large courthouse. Confederate flags boldly flew atop both buildings. MacKenzie was sure those flags would be coming down quickly.

Back of the main street were homes and small outbuildings. He saw the steeple of a church at the far end of the town.

He saw little damage from the bombardment. Fired blindly, the shells had found few targets by luck. He spotted many shallow craters in the street, and one store had its front blown off, but that was all.

MacKenzie found Kimball standing in the middle of the street. A few officers and soldiers surrounded him, and other officers and runners were reporting to him and then dashing off again.

“Maj. Kimball, sir,” MacKenzie said.

“Ah, Gavin,” Kimball said. The two officers were familiar with each other; they had bonded closely since their reckless footrace on Roanoke Island.

“Where’s Col. Hawkins, sir?”

Kimball jerked a thumb toward the courthouse. “Over there. Lookin’ for anything that might be useful.”

MacKenzie nodded. “Bit of an anticlimax, isn’t it? Finding no Rebels.”

“Yes, damn ‘em. And not a single resident either, white or black. Though I’m havin’ our boys go through this village with the proverbial

fine-toothed comb.”

“You would think *somebody* would have stayed behind. Or been left behind,” MacKenzie said.

“They seem to have left in a big hurry,” Kimball said. “Why, in some of the homes, breakfast is still on the table. Guess they hadn’t expected us to come back today. Then they took off when word got back from downriver that we *were* comin’. They had to figure we were mad as hell.”

“Still, why would the residents leave?”

“Maybe they heard about the fires in Elizabeth City and figured we were gonna do the same to them. Burn their homes down around their ears.”

“But we didn’t set those fires,” MacKenzie pointed out. “The residents there and the retreating Rebel troops set those fires.”

“Winton people probably didn’t believe that. Not that it matters. I’m pretty sure there’ll be some retribution here anyway. That courthouse, for example. It’ll make a nice bonfire. Damned Rebel flag and all.”

MacKenzie nodded, looking at the substantial building. Although burning that impressive edifice, the seat of the local Confederate government, seemed a shame, he could accept it as an appropriate punishment for the ambush.

There was a commotion behind them. They looked around and saw four Zouaves approaching with three captured Negroes. Their raggedy clothes contrasted sharply with the bright uniforms of the Zouave soldiers.

“Ah,” Kimball said, “found some people at last.”

MacKenzie noted the soldiers weren’t using the points of bayonets to push the men along but were more pulling them with their hands. The small group stopped in front of Kimball and MacKenzie.

One Negro said, “Suh, I tol’ dis sojer and tol’ ‘im agin, we didn’t shoot at dem Yankee boats yestiday.”

Kimball held up a hand. “Stop.”

The Negro stopped talking. The other two said nothing.

Kimball said, “Are you slaves or free men?”

“We’s slaves, mastah. Good slaves.”

“Well, you’re free now,” Kimball said.

The three Negroes’ faces lit up. “Free, mastah?”

Kimball nodded. “Yep. Contraband of war. So we’re confiscatin’ you. You’ll come along with us when we go back downriver.”

MacKenzie said, “The best cook on the *Delaware* is Achilles. He was a slave from Elizabeth City. Tagged along with us when I was scouting on

Cobb's Point the night before we destroyed the Rebels' mosquito fleet."

Now a second Negro spoke. "Oh, but, mastah, we don' lives here. We's from Murfeesbur."

Kimball said, "Murfreesboro. About ten miles from here."

"Yas, suh."

"So what are you doing here?"

"Mastah hire us out. Sent us here."

Kimball shrugged. "Well, no matter. You'll come along with us anyway."

Two of the three Negroes looked stricken.

The first Negro said, "But we's got wives in Murfeesbur."

"And chillun, too, suh," the second one said.

"Ah," Kimball said. "And you don't want to leave 'em. Not even for freedom?"

"No, suh. Not even for dat."

Kimball nodded. "I guess I can understand that."

"Thank ya, suh."

Kimball said, "Well, then, head back for Murfreesboro." He swept a hand down the street. "But before you go, load up your arms with whatever you want from those stores."

The two Negroes looked at the stores, wide-eyed, and then back at Kimball. "Ya not gwan shoot us, if we do dat?"

Kimball shook his head. "Nope. Help yourself. I'll even send guards with you." He turned to some of the soldiers standing nearby. "You and you," he said, pointing. "Go with these fellows and make sure everybody knows they're actin' with my permission."

"Yes, sir."

Broad smiles spread on the faces of the two Negroes. "Thank ya, suh. Thank ya!" They broke into a run toward the stores.

The two designated guards yelled, "Hey, wait, wait." They jogged after the Negroes, laughing.

Kimball laughed too. "Like it was Christmas."

MacKenzie smiled. "I can understand them. They have to be dirt poor."

Kimball said, "While their owners grow rich off of 'em. A few armloads of goods won't come close to fair compensation." He looked at the third Negro man standing in front of him. "How about you? Want to come with us? You can work in camp for one of the companies of the 9th. Or maybe on a gunboat." He looked at MacKenzie.

"Certainly," MacKenzie said.

The Negro said, "Ah'll come wid ya, suh. Thank ya, suh."

"Good," Kimball said.

"Uh—kin I take somethin' from dem stores, too?"

Kimball laughed. "Why, sure, help yourself. Then meet us down on the wharf."

"Thank ya, suh!" And he took off at a run.

Two soldiers came running up. They stopped and saluted Kimball. Kimball returned the salute.

One soldier said, "Sie, we found an old white woman sittin' in front of a house, sir. Real old. But real talkative, she is."

"Good. Maybe she can explain what's been going on around here. Bring her here," Kimball said.

The other soldier said, "Oh, we tried that already, sir, but she took to us with her cane." He smiled. "She may be old, but she's one feisty bitch." He laughed. So did the other soldier.

Kimball laughed too. "Okay, I'll go to her. Lead the way."

"This way, sir."

Kimball said to the second soldier, "Go find Col. Hawkins in the courthouse. Lead him to the same house."

"Yes, sir."

MacKenzie said, "Mind if I come along?"

"No, come along. Could be interestin'." Kimball started off.

The soldier led the way to a home well back of the main street. It was a dilapidated structure in the shadow of huge oak trees surrounding it. Moss grew on the wood shingle roof that needed repair. The whole building sagged. Weeds in the yard were three feet high. There was no porch. But there was a large shell crater ten feet in front of the house.

On the ground in front of the home sat an elderly woman gently rocking back and forth in a rocking chair, her right hand resting on the handle of a cane. Her eyes looked straight ahead, watching Kimball and the others approach. Half a dozen Zouaves were gathered around her, smiling and laughing. She ignored them.

Kimball and MacKenzie stopped in front of her.

Kimball said, "Good afternoon, ma'am."

The old woman spit on the ground. "Fuck you, Genr'l." She stopped rocking and lifted her cane and took a swipe at Kimball.

Kimball quickly leaned back to avoid the cane. "Whoa." He took a step away from the woman.

MacKenzie smiled. The soldiers laughed.

The soldier who had retrieved Kimball said, "See what I mean, sir?"

"Yes," Kimball said. He chuckled. "Now, granny, I'm just—"

"Ah ain't your grandma, Genr'l, ya dumb prick."

Kimball smiled. "I'm not a general; I'm a major, ma'am."

"A major pain in mah ass, if ya ask me," the woman said.

MacKenzie had to smile again. Yes, feisty was right. But he was having a little trouble understanding her speech; she obviously had no teeth, but she did have about the thickest accent he'd ever heard.

"An' don't ma'am me," she said. "Mah name's Foster. *Mrs.* Foster to ya, ya damn Yankee."

Kimball nodded. "Very well, Mrs. Foster."

"Not so very well," Foster said. She pointed to the shell crater. "Look at thet. Broke mah window, ya did."

All the men looked at the window in the front of the house. All the panes were shattered. But MacKenzie wondered how long ago the window had been broken. After all, broken glass lay on the ground in *front* of the window.

MacKenzie asked, "Were you sitting there when the shell landed?" He wondered why shrapnel had not killed her.

"Nah," she said. "Ah was in the shithouse in back."

Kimball said, "Well, my apologies, Mrs. Foster. But yesterday we were fired on by troops from this village."

Foster cackled gleefully. "Them North Carolahna Volunteers give ya a good whippin' yesterday, didn't they?" She laughed again.

"Is that who they were?" Kimball asked.

"Yup. Colonel William Williams' boys. How's thet for a name, huh? William Williams. Oh, some others, too. Uh—cannon boys on horses they called themselves."

"Mounted artillery," Kimball suggested.

"Virginia boys," Foster said. "But they didn't have no horses."

They were joined by Col. Hawkins and still more officers and soldiers.

Hawkins said, "So that's who they were."

Foster looked at Hawkins. "Another goddamned genr'l."

Hawkins raised his eyebrows.

Kimball said, "Mrs. Foster here is a bit outspoken, Colonel."

"I can see that. Well, Mrs. Foster, why didn't they stay and fight today?"

"With all them big guns on your boats? No, suh. We partied late last night to celebrate, didn't think ya was comin' back. When ya started

upriver agin this morn, everbody lit off. Not me. I don't move so good anymore."

"Cowards," Hawkins said.

Foster said, "No, suh! They's not cowards; they's bein' smart."

"And it was cowardly of them to ambush us yesterday. Dishonorable."

She laughed. "Oh, bullshit, Genr'l."

"I'm a colonel, Mrs. Foster."

"Thet was just good war makin'. Fooled ya, was all. Surprise! Thet's fair in war."

MacKenzie had to agree with her. Surprise was certainly a time-honored and effective military strategy. It had been a clever plan the day before, foiled only because Rowan had ordered him up the mainmast.

Foster went on. "Yep, better to run and faht another day. Like ya'll will find at them bridges ya mean to burn."

MacKenzie was taken aback. How could she know about that?

Hawkins played dumb. "What bridges?"

Foster laughed once more. "Hellfire, wah else would all them ships of yours be goin' up the Chowan? Nothin' else for ya to attack."

Hawkins didn't say anything.

Foster said. "But they'll faht ya then. They toppled trees in the wahter and sunk boats too. Stop ya and then kill ya, they will. All o' ya."

MacKenzie, Kimball, and Hawkins all exchanged glances. They didn't have to say anything; they knew the mission to burn those two bridges was now doomed.

A soldier from behind them called, "Colonel!"

They looked back. Three soldiers were bringing a Negro woman toward them. This woman had resisted, for two soldiers had her arms grasped tightly in their fists. They stopped when they reached Hawkins. Tentatively, the soldiers released their hold on her.

Hawkins pointed a finger at her. "God dammit, you're the woman from the wharf who lured us in with that cowardly, dishonorable white flag of yours."

MacKenzie thought the woman was about thirty years old, younger than they had thought back on the *Delaware* the day before. And she wasn't very dark. He thought she was probably a mulatto.

Foster leaned to the side to look around the officers at the woman. "Ah, Martha Keen. She's a hero, she is. What da ya call a female hero?"

Keen glared at Foster. "*Miz Louisa*," she growled.

MacKenzie was surprised at Keen's rudeness. He didn't think a slave

would ever talk like that to a white woman.

Hawkins said, "That your name? Martha Keen?"

"Yas, suh." Keen said.

Foster laughed. "Well, talkin' like a—"

Keen snapped, "Shush up, Miz Louisa." She glared at Foster again.

Foster sat back in her chair and smiled. "Awright, chile."

MacKenzie glanced at Foster. He was surprised at how calmly the old white woman took Keen's outburst.

Hawkins said to Keen, "Yesterday you could have gotten everyone on the *Delaware* killed." He jabbed a finger at her. "Your actions were perfidious, the height of treachery."

Behind him Foster said, "Probably killed only half of ya. Woulda got all of ya, if ya hadn't run off. Talk about cowards."

Hawkins, annoyed, looked at Foster. "None of us were killed, Mrs. Foster."

"Oh, bullshit," Foster said. "Thet close? Bullshit. Your decks must've been red with blood."

Hawkins turned back to Keen. "The Rebels have run off, but, by God, we've got you, damn you. I think'll string you up from a tree right now."

Keen's eyes widened. "But Ah was forced to wave that flag, suh. I had no choice."

MacKenzie asked, "Are you a slave?"

"Yas, suh," Keen said. "Ah belongs to Captain Keen."

Foster started rocking again. "It's true. She belongs to Silas Keen."

"Oh," Hawkins said. "That is a point."

Keen said, "He forced me to wave thet white flag. Ah swears it, suh. Ah didn't want to do it. He forced me."

Kimball looked at Hawkins. "Definitely a good point, Colonel."

Hawkins grunted. "Yes, maybe so."

Keen dropped to her knees. She folded her hands in supplication. "Please, Mistah Genr'l, don't hang me, don't shoot me. Ah had no choice, Ah swears it."

Hawkins reached down and grabbed her arm. "Oh, get off your knees."

Keen stood up. "Please, suh."

Hawkins shrugged. "Yes, well, uh—" He took a deep breath, paused. "Oh, just run along."

Keen smiled broadly. "Thank ya, suh. Thank ya!" She glanced around, took a few steps away, and then broke into a run for the woods.

Hawkins chuckled. "I didn't mean that literally."

MacKenzie and Kimball laughed.

Hawkins took a few steps away from the house, looking over the village. Soldiers stood around in groups, sergeants and junior officers watching them, and everyone watching Hawkins, waiting.

MacKenzie stayed back near Foster and some soldiers.

Kimball said, "Your orders, Colonel?"

Hawkins said, "Major Kimball, I've finished my survey."

"Yes, sir."

"Kill any livestock you find."

"Yes, sir."

"Burn the courthouse."

"Yes, sir," Kimball said.

"But there are two prisoners in the jail in the basement. Release 'em."

"Are they *our* prisoners now?"

Hawkins shook his head. "Nah, just let 'em go."

"Yes, sir."

"Burn the post office too but gather up all the mail first."

"Yes, sir."

"I want to destroy all the shops and boats near the river."

"Yes, sir."

MacKenzie felt like whistling. Hawkins had more in mind for punishment than MacKenzie has expected.

"I also want you to burn any structure that was used to quarter Rebels or their equipment."

MacKenzie felt alarmed at that. There had been almost a full regiment of Confederate troops the day before. Was there a structure in the village that hadn't been used by them? He doubted it.

Kimball must have done the same calculation. "Col. Hawkins, the Rebs must have used just about every building in the town to quarter that many troops."

Hawkins nodded. "I believe so, Major. So you'll probably have to burn 'em all."

"Son of a *bitch*," MacKenzie muttered to himself.

Foster screamed, "Burn mah house, ya damn Yankee?" She struggled, tried to get to her feet.

Hawkins turned to look at her. "Not your home, Mrs. Foster. Though it might teach you to have a civil tongue in your head."

Foster slumped back down into her chair. "Damn ya to hell, Genr'l. Damn ya."

“Probably,” Hawkins said. “Well, so be it. Major Kimball, just burn unoccupied buildings.”

Kimball pointed at Foster. “I think her home is the only one not unoccupied, Colonel.”

“So her home survives,” Hawkins said. “Burn all the rest. All the buildings.”

MacKenzie was aghast. Burn the whole town in retaliation for what was a legitimate military tactic?

“Yes, sir,” Kimball said. “How about the church, sir?”

“No, no, not the church. For Christ’s sake, Edgar, not the church.”

“Yes, sir.”

MacKenzie thought Hawkins’ specific profanity was apropos, though he didn’t think the colonel’s cleverness was intentional. But sparing only the church and Foster’s home seemed to MacKenzie as an outright atrocity.

“Col. Hawkins,” he blurted.

Hawkins looked at him. “Hm?”

MacKenzie hesitated. Now, just why had he spoken up? Challenging the orders of a superior officer was a really bad idea. He knew it. His years in the Navy had taught him that. But his strong, instinctive sense of rightness made him suddenly reckless. But cautiously so, if that made sense.

He stepped carefully up to Hawkins. “Sir, if I may, sir. Burning the whole town seems a bit—a bit extreme.”

Hawkins stiffened. He squinted at MacKenzie. “The decision is not yours to make, Mr. MacKenzie.”

“No, sir, of course not, sir. But, sir, burning—”

“I didn’t ask for any input from you,” Hawkins growled.

Kimball, out of the side of his mouth, said, “Gavin, for crissakes.”

MacKenzie was taking deep breaths now, his heart was pounding. His instinct, his training, his experience warned him. But he plunged on. “Colonel, this is harsh. Does Commander Rowan know of your intentions? Sir?”

Kimball rolled his eyes. “Gavin!”

Hawkins stepped closer to MacKenzie and leaned toward him until his face was just inches from MacKenzie’s face.

Perforce, MacKenzie leaned backwards.

Hawkins said, “*Mister* MacKenzie, I know you are audacious. You proved that on Roanoke Island with the 9th. But now you have gone too far.”

MacKenzie gulped. "Sir—"

Hawkins said, "I don't have to answer your question, but I will. Because of my respect for you that you earned on Roanoke Island. Yes, Commander Rowan is in full agreement with whatever punitive measures I feel warranted, including the generous use of fire."

"Yes, sir," MacKenzie said. His heart was thumping.

"And I would advise you that interfering above your rank can be hazardous to your career, to say the least. Do it again, and I'll have you arrested."

"Yes, sir," MacKenzie said. He gulped.

Hawkins straightened up. He glared at MacKenzie for a moment, then turned away. "Major Kimball, to your duties."

Kimball saluted Hawkins. "Yes, sir."

Hawkins returned the salute, then strode off.

Kimball stepped quickly over to MacKenzie. "You're outa your fuckin' mind, Gavin."

MacKenzie bobbed his head a little. "Yeah, well—" He had to agree with Kimball.

Kimball hurried away, calling for other officers. The soldiers in front of the Foster residence also left.

MacKenzie let out a long breath. Now he felt really stupid. What had he gained? Nothing. Instead he had lost. At a minimum he had lost valuable rapport with Hawkins. And he didn't want to think about any maximum.

He looked to his left. Martha Keen had disappeared into the woods already. "Huh."

Foster said, "Better to run and faht another day."

MacKenzie looked at her. She was rocking. "What?"

She said, "Martha Keen."

Irritated, MacKenzie said, "I know who you were referring to. I just didn't understand your point."

"Martha belongs to Silas Keen, awright, but he ain't no cap'n. He lays bricks."

MacKenzie said, "Her owner is a bricklayer?"

Foster laughed. "Ya stupid Yankee. Ya let *Mrs.* Keen get away." She laughed again.

"Son of a *bitch*," MacKenzie said. They had been fooled a second time. Keen hadn't been forced to wave that flag after all. He said, "Damn. She wasn't Keen's slave; she was his wife."

Foster shrugged. "Slave or wahfe, same difference."

MacKenzie had to chuckle at that. He waved a hand at her. "It's been—interesting meeting you, Mrs. Foster."

"Go to hell, ya damn Yankee."

MacKenzie nodded. "Yes, yes."

MacKenzie started walking slowly back toward the river.

Foster yelled after him, "Fuck all ya. Hope ya'll die at dem bridges."

MacKenzie simply shook his head. He watched the soldiers gleefully going about their destructive duties. Already he could see smoke and flames in some buildings.

He noted that soldiers were plundering as well as burning. He didn't know if Hawkins or Kimball had ordered it, but he could see that neither Army officer was trying to stop the looting.

Soldiers were carrying off whatever struck their fancy: household goods, clothes, framed pictures, small furniture items, dishes, tools, blankets. He saw one soldier struggling with an armload of books. MacKenzie thought saving books from a fire at least had a touch of the noble in it.

He walked on back to the edge of the bluff where the howitzers were deployed. Zouaves were trooping down the path to the wharf or down the bluff to boats from the *Perry* and the *Barney*.

Maxwell and Hammond gathered beside him as he turned to watch the destruction. The gun crews were also transfixed by the growing inferno. He thought the Zouaves on the firing line were disappointed that they didn't get a chance at plunder.

Hammond said, "I don't feel good about this, Gavin."

Maxwell said, "Christ, Gavin, burning a whole town. What will the country say about that?"

MacKenzie said, "The charge of the 9th on Roanoke Island made the regiment famous. The burning of Winton could make it *in-famous*."

Hammond said, "This is uncivilized, Gavin."

Maxwell said, "The Rebs tried to blame us for the fires in Elizabeth City. They were wrong about that. But we'll have to take full blame for this one."

MacKenzie said, "If they didn't hate us before this, they surely will now."

Hammond said, "What worries me most is that this could become routine."

MacKenzie nodded. "Civil wars are the most terrible of wars."

The conflagration created a windstorm of its own. The fires roared and

crackled louder and louder, out of control. The flames reached high above the village. Smoke rose hundreds of feet into the air. They could feel the intense heat even at the edge of the bluff.

The smell of smoke was nauseating. But not entirely. Maxwell sniffed at the air. "Well, at least something smells good."

Hammond said, "Yeah. It's bacon." He chuckled, took a deep breath.

MacKenzie said, "Must have been a storehouse of rations for the hundreds of Rebel soldiers." He sniffed at the air himself. It *did* smell good. It made him feel hungry. But it made him feel ashamed that he found anything good about the terrible fire.

Maxwell said, "God, I hope it's bacon and not live pigs burning."

MacKenzie and Hammond looked at him.

"Wish you hadn't said that," Hammond said.

"Sorry."

From where they were standing MacKenzie could see Mrs. Foster's home. He was chagrined to see that falling embers had set her roof on fire. The house would soon be engulfed in flames. Two soldiers were carrying her in her rocking chair away from the house—while she slashed at them with her sharp tongue and tried to hit them with a poorly-aimed cane. The soldiers were laughing, amused at her protests and antics. Several other soldiers were carrying a few bits of rickety furniture and some mismatched dishes from the house. She would not have much left.

MacKenzie watched soldiers torching the boathouses and the shops and the few boats on stocks. "That does it. The whole town is going to burn."

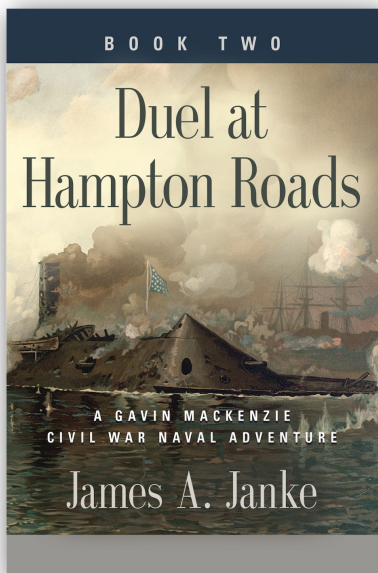
Hawkins and Kimball came past, heading for the *Delaware*. Hawkins said, "Mr. MacKenzie, return the howitzers to the ship."

"Aye, aye, sir!"

The drag ropes of the howitzers were used to hold the cannons back as they were rolled slowly down the slope. On the wharf the guns and their carriages were hoisted back aboard the *Delaware*.

By 2:00 pm the flotilla was headed back down the Chowan River.

The Methodist Church never did catch fire.



Passed Midshipman Gavin MacKenzie joins the USS Cumberland in March 1862 in Hampton Roads, Virginia, in time for her destruction by the former USS Merrimack, converted into the powerful Confederate ironclad, the CSS Virginia. And he is the turret of the USS Monitor when the two ironclads revolutionize naval warfare.

Book Two

Duel at Hampton Roads

A Gavin MacKenzie Civil War Naval Adventure
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