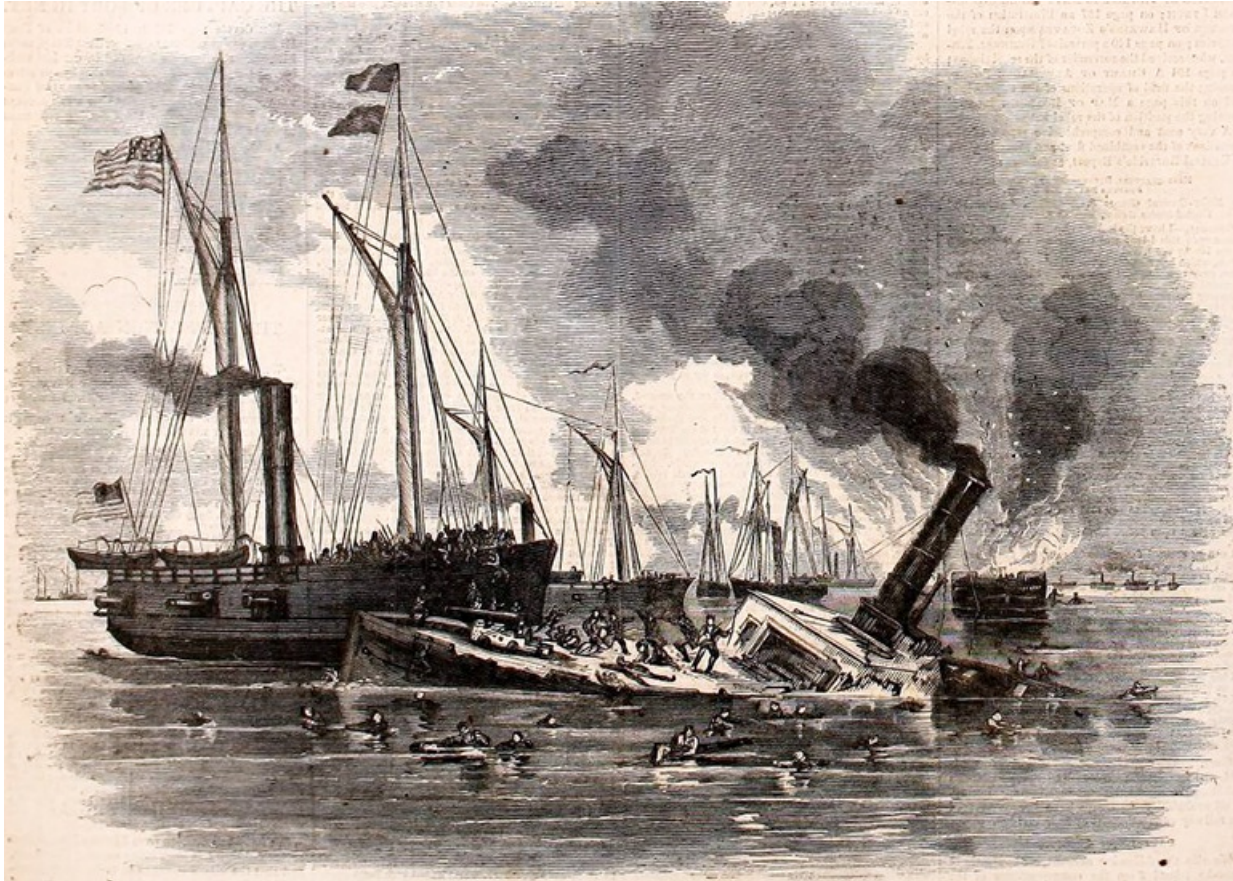# Mosquito Fleet [1]

Mosquito Fleet

by John G. Barrett, 2006

The Mosquito Fleet was the whimsical nickname

An engraving from Harper's Weekly titled 'The Destruction of Commodore Lynch's Fleet by Union Gunboats,' 1862. Image from Archive.org.

[2] for the four small steamers [3] that comprised the North Carolina Navy at the beginning of the Civil War [4]. The ships were under orders not only to defend sounds and rivers but also to seize Union ships moving along the coast. The side-wheeled steamer *Winslow* was the first ship to be commissioned, followed by the *Beaufort*, *Raleigh*, and *Ellis* -all propeller-driven, small river boats originally designed for canal [5] use. The latter three mounted only one gun apiece. Instead of veteran sailors, this diminutive fleet of small boats was manned primarily by soldiers and farmers with no seagoing experience. Nonetheless, the success of these vessels, especially the *Winslow*, along with that of the Confederate privateers [6], drew Union strikes at the North Carolina coast in 1861 and 1862. Even though the small gunboats were no match for the enemy ships, Union authorities maintained that landing on the North Carolina mainland first required absolute control of the sounds, an impossibility until the state's navy was destroyed.

With the capture of Roanoke Island [7] by Union forces in February 1862, Confederate commander W. F. Lynch, in an effort to save his vessels (now six in number), moved them to Elizabeth City [8] on the Pasquotank River, but to no avail. At Cobb's Point a short distance downriver, a Union flotilla under Cdr. S. C. Rowan disposed of the mosquito fleet except for the *Beaufort*, which escaped to Norfolk.

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John S. Carbone, *The Civil War in Coastal North Carolina* (2001).

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Additional Resources:

"Destruction of the Rebel Fleet." *Harper's Weekly*. March 1, 1862. p. 135.

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"The Destruction of Commodore Lynch's Fleet by the Union Gun-boats."*Harper's Weekly.* March 1, 1862. p. 136. Image from Archive.org. https://archive.org/stream/harpersweeklyv6bonn#page/136/mode/2up [2] (accessed September 26, 2012).

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