

**Thanks to
Rhoda Sneller
for hosting
our website**

**Des Moines
Civil War
Roundtable**

**May 2026
Headquarters District Iowa
General Order No. 510**

- The **Fifth meeting** of the Spring campaign will **May 27** at the **The Hoyt Sherman Place**
- The Program will open at 12 PM with the meal served at **5-7**.
- Our program *An Exploration of Baseball's History in Iowa* by *John Liepa*
- Meal choices **Chicken or Beef buffet style** at **\$30.00**
- **Reservations & payment** will be accepted until **May 20** and payment must be received by **May 20**.***(see below)

By command of Brigadier General Gordon McKenzie

Our web address www.dmcivilwar.com

Ronald R Nurmi
Colonel & Adjutant
email- dmcwrt@gmail.com
1424 E Walnut St #4 DM 50316

***** All reservations must be made, paid, and received by May 20.** This is to allow the Hoyt Sherman Place and the catered to be informed.

An Exploration of Baseball's History in Iowa

May 27, 2026 | 12:00 pm

Hoyt Sherman Place Foundation, in partnership with historian John Liepa and the Des Moines Civil War Roundtable, presents a special exhibit An Exploration of Baseball's History in Iowa. This exhibit is made possible by funding from Humanities Iowa and the National Endowment for Humanities.

Noon to 5:00 PM

Visit the art gallery for a free special exhibition featuring baseball items from the 1850s to the present, including Iowa's oldest known baseball card, the oldest known piece of Iowa baseball memorabilia, and hundreds of cards representing Iowa's seven Hall of Famers alongside many lesser-known players. To date, 227 Iowans have played in Major League Baseball, including seven who have been inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, New York.

5-7 Buffet style meal

7:00-8:15 PM

John Liepa will give his presentation, Baseball's Origins: The Civil War's Role in Spreading the Game to Iowa, which examines how the war accelerated the game's spread across the state while highlighting some of Iowa's earliest baseball pioneers. This presentation is free and open to the public. The exhibition will be available for viewing after the presentation.

Hoyt Sherman Place's origins connect directly to the formative era when baseball emerged as America's national pastime. Hoyt Sherman served as a Union Army paymaster during the Civil War, a period in which the game of "base ball" spread rapidly through military camps. Soldiers learned the game during downtime, carried it between encampments, and brought it home after the war accelerating the creation of organized clubs and laying the foundation for professional baseball, especially across the growing Midwest. Although Hoyt

Sherman Place was built after the war, the home stands as a cultural legacy of a civic leader whose life intersected with this pivotal moment in American history.

I will not be adjutant of the DMCWRT after the June meeting. If you are interesting in serving please contact either Brigadier General Gordon McKenzie or myself.

The Price of Coal: The Potomac Flotilla in December 1862

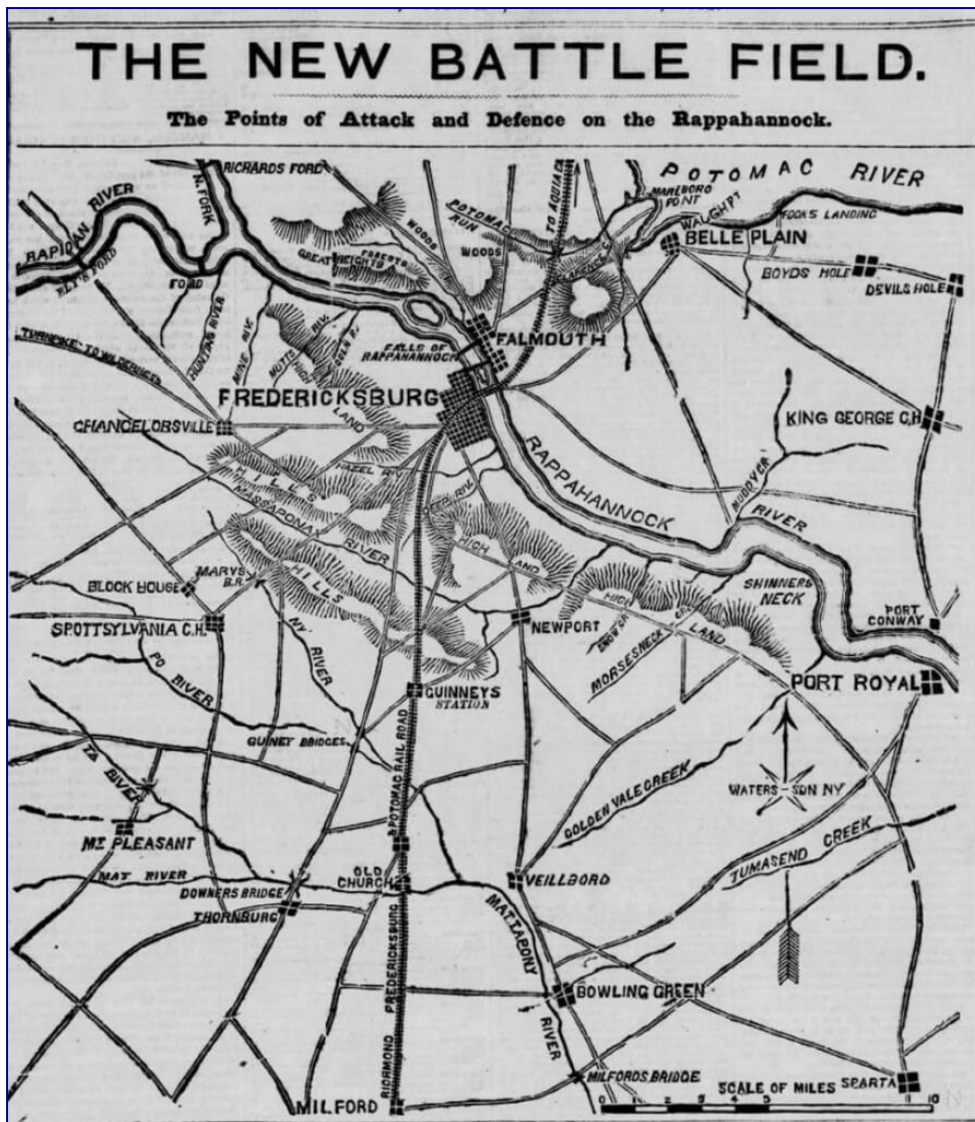
ECW welcomes back guest author Dean W. Chester. <https://emergingcivilwar.com/2026/04/28/the-price-of-coal-the-potomac-flotilla-in-december-1862/>

When Maj. Gen. Ambrose Burnside reached Falmouth, opposite Fredericksburg, on November 19, 1862, he learned the pontoon bridges needed to cross the Rappahannock River were still days away, upsetting his timetable for a rapid river crossing. Just four days into the latest campaign to capture Richmond, the Army of the Potomac was stalled on the north bank of the Rappahannock

On November 21, Secretary of the Navy Gideon Welles, in response to requests from Chief of the Army Maj. Gen. Henry Halleck and the Army's Quartermaster Brig. Gen. Montgomery Meigs, ordered Cmdre. A. A. Harwood's Potomac Flotilla to assist the army "in the neighborhood of Fredericksburg." The next day, Burnside telegraphed Welles requesting "two or three gunboats to proceed up the Rappahannock river to cooperate with [his] army."

Lieutenant Commander E. P. McCrea, commanding the flotilla's Second Division, received his orders on November 22. His main concern was coal. The flotilla's coal replenishments were three weeks overdue, and the gunboats and supporting ships were running low.

To keep their gunboats on the Potomac, some captains had resorted to commandeering coal from vessels they intercepted or were escorting, including army vessels. Meigs informed Welles of this practice when he requested the navy's assistance, and Harwood ordered this activity be stopped.^[4] When his five gunboats arrived at the mouth of the Rappahannock, McCrea supplied them with as much coal as possible from two other flotilla vessels and then proceeded upriver to the sister towns of Port Royal and Port Conway, arriving on November 27. At Port Conway, on the northern bank of the river, McCrea and Lt. Cdr. Samuel Magaw established communications with Burnside's headquarters. Burnside ordered them to remain near Port Royal until he called for them. This was an easy order to obey because the limited coal supplies restricted the gunboats' movement on the river.



Map of Battlefield

and Surrounding Area. New York Herald, December 15, 1862, p.1.

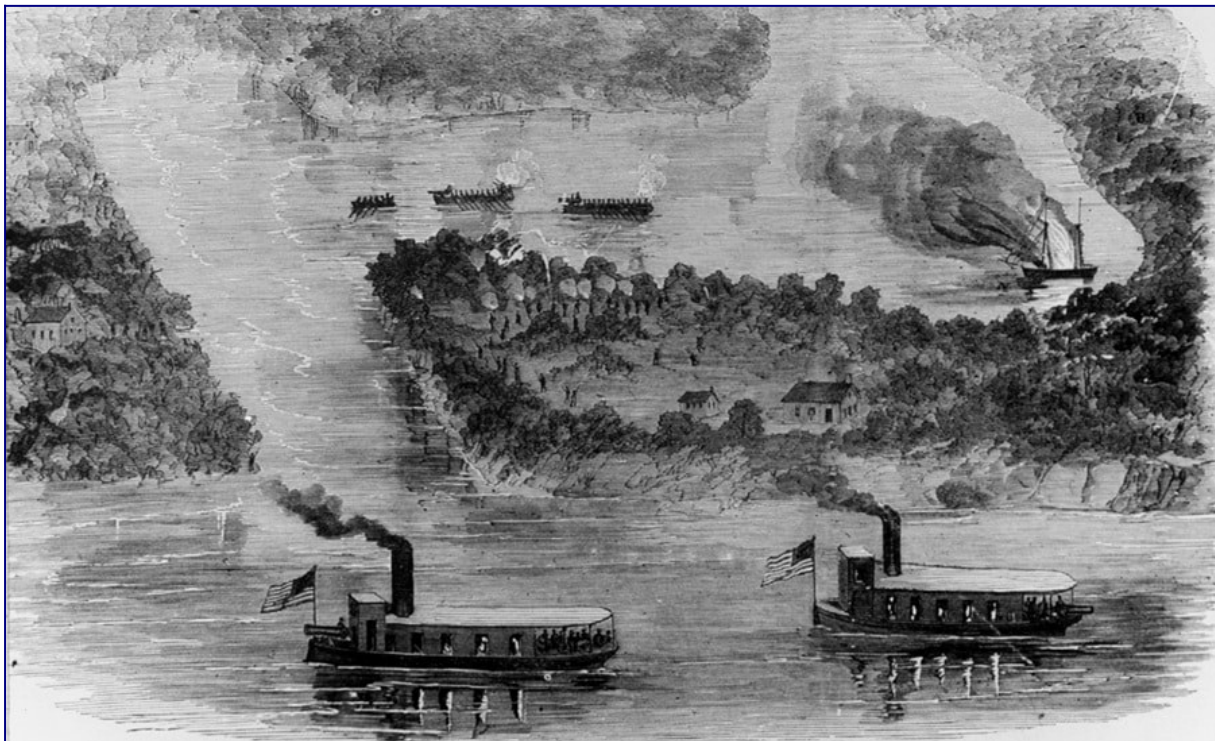
General Robert E. Lee learned of the gunboats' arrival at Port Royal on November 27. The warships' presence at Port Royal and the pontoon train near Burnside's headquarters forced Lee to consider the possibility of a crossing below Fredericksburg. Lee's concerns forced him to extend his right flank, under Maj. Gen. Thomas Jackson's control, 22 miles to Port Royal. Jackson placed Maj. Gen. D.H. Hill's division near Bowling Green and Port Royal.

On December 4, Hill ordered rifle pits dug along the riverbank, and two batteries positioned below and behind Port Royal. A little after 4 p.m. the Confederates began shelling the gunboats. The gunboats exchanged shot, shell, and canister with the Confederates until darkness was descending. Hill reported one dead and one wounded. The Richmond Enquirer later claimed 11 buildings were damaged by the gunboats' cannonade.

The gunboats anchored below Port Conway and the crews checked their ammunition, powder, and coal supplies. The gunboats had fired at least 63 rounds during the battle, and one gunboat had 1½ tons of coal remaining, barely enough for one more day.

Over the next six days the gunboats were joined by four more, including three small armed steamers. They took turns returning to the mouth of the Rappahannock to obtain coal from supply ships or passing vessels. By December 10 there were six gunboats anchored or patrolling near Port Royal. Their coal had been replenished by two coal schooners that had joined the flotilla and were anchored near-by. Two other gunboats were down river.

About 3:00 p.m. Hill's guns opened fire on the anchorage. The first vessel struck was the coal schooner Sarah Minge, wounding one person aboard. Teaser went to the aid of the coal schooners and towed them downriver. As the batteries found the range, the Union vessels moved frequently, resulting in a game of chase.



The

Potomac Flotilla contained smaller gunboats capable of patrolling the Chesapeake Bay, Potomac River, and other inland waters of Virginia. Naval History and Heritage Command.

At 4:00 p.m. Currituck was struck by a 30-pounder Parrott shell about two feet below her starboard waterline. The crew quickly plugged the hole while Currituck continued to fight. About 4:30 p.m. the Union boats were ordered to cease fire. Moments later a second shell struck Currituck starboard “aft [of] the main rigging, going through into the fire room and exploded injuring [four] men . . .” and damaging the blower and steampipe gauge. That shot ended the engagement. The gunboats had fired at least 106 rounds and suffered two killed and three wounded or slightly injured.

Currituck started down the Rappahannock early on December 11. Temporary repairs slowed the leak, but didn't stop it. She was escorted by Satellite and the coal schooners. Jackson recalled Hill's division late on December 12 and after a 20-mile night march they reached Fredericksburg. Hill served as Jackson's reserve during the battle on December 13. The remaining gunboats stayed near Port Conway awaiting Burnside's orders. They learned of his defeat, but did not receive any orders until December 20, which returned them to duties on the Potomac. After twenty-three days on the Rappahannock, cooperation with the army was no longer needed.

The man wounded on Sarah Minge, S.A. Simmons, died. He was master of the other coal schooner, Kadosh. He was not a soldier or a sailor; he was a private coal seller whose vessel and cargo had been seized and towed to the anchorage because he had what the gunboats urgently needed, coal! The price of coal was high on December 10.

Simmons' death had a profound effect on the officers and men of the flotilla. Commodore Harwood sent a letter to Welles reporting the death and the "liberal subscription" the flotilla had collected for his "indigent family;" he also asked that the case be put before Congress to consider possible assistance. The December 22 edition of the Baltimore Sun reported Simmons' body was "deposited in the Congressional burying-ground."

The Potomac Flotilla's cooperation with the army had no effect on the outcome of the battle of Fredericksburg. However, in the days leading up to the battle, nine vessels at Port Royal—the optimum location to cross the Rappahannock south of Fredericksburg, and reports in the press of pontoon bridges headed for Port Royal forced Jackson to place 17,500 men, 48 percent of his corps, in close proximity to Port Royal, just in case!

Dean W, Chester supports battlefield preservation and education through local and national trusts and foundations. Mr. Chester lives in Northern Virginia.