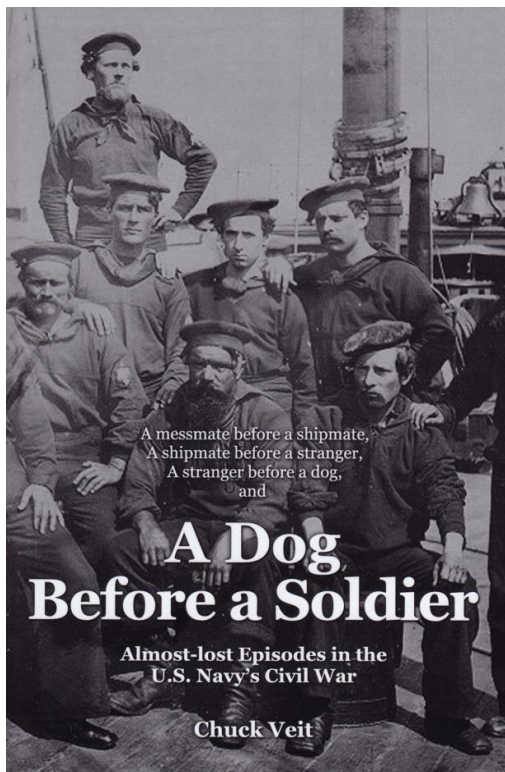


'A Dog Before A Soldier'

By Chuck Veit

Review by Rob Morgan

This book, *A Dog Before a Soldier* by Chuck Veit, published 2010, by Lulu.com (ISBN 978-0-557-37497-7), and priced at \$22.50 (I don't know if it's available in the UK or Europe yet), was reviewed and savaged by an academic in *The Mariner's Mirror* earlier this year. I wondered why, as it seemed to be unusual, and perhaps worthy of a little closer examination.



Having access to a review copy, thanks to the author and our own George Arnold, and having now read it, the book has turned out to be a different, and very rewarding, trip into the naval actions and shore activities of the Federal Navy during the Civil War between the States. It's written, not by a professional historian, but by a re-enactor, and has that viewpoint, which makes a change. Chuck Veit is president of the Navy & Marine Living History Association, a new organisation on me, not surprisingly, and this 200-page, neatly illustrated and mapped book, which also has battle plans and dispositions of immense use to the naval wargamer, is clearly the result

of years of active research. The six-page bibliography contains much in the way of primary sources especially, of which I was not aware, but many of you reading this review may well be more familiar with them.

The title comes from a sailor's statement of the order of his loyalties:

*"A messmate before a shipmate,
A shipmate before a stranger,
A stranger before a dog,
and a dog before a soldier."*

í a comment unfair to dogs, arguably, and it's subtitled:

öAlmost-lost Episodes in the U.S.Navy's Civil War.ö

Some are rather more ölostö than others! Nine separate naval episodes are recounted by the author, and in all but one or, at most, two cases, these can provide the background scenario for a decent ACW naval wargame, and in some cases a wargame of a very unusual format indeed. Several I will return to at a later stage, as specific table-top wargame scenarios. The models are readily available, in a range of scales, after all!

The book opens with a naval landing party encounter shortly before and near where a general action far better known to the ACW land wargamer, the Battle of Shiloh, later occurred. Shiloh, of course, was also the battle in which two Union gunboats, *Lexington* and *Tyler*, played a crucial, but often side-lined role. I've seen Shiloh wargamed, and written up as a wargame, with the Union gunboats omitted or given a slender, and non-firing presence, unless directly troubled by the Confederates!

Next, Viet deals with that amazing encounter at Hampton Roads, rarely referred to as a battle of course, but that's what it was before the *Monitor* turned up: An ironclad ram (*CSS Virginia*) with eight guns takes on ó what? -- over 200 guns on a Union fleet, which must have been regarded as powerful to say the least! This is a different approach to the later, first ironclad sea-fight, highly readable too.

One or two of the chapters in the book, and each has a detailed set of supporting footnotes and drawings, stand out as being of substantial interest. I'd never heard anyone mention öThe Raid that Wasn'tö until I read this. The Federal plan, involving 12 warships, including *Port Royal*, *Jacob Bell*, *Galena* and *USS Monitor*, was to destroy the Petersburg Bridge and limit supplies reaching Richmond. Since this was in support of the unfortunate Union General McClellan, odds must have been on failure! A solo wargame of tremendous potential.

The next chapter is equally fascinating and, though it would require a little more thought, as a war game it can be played. öThe Great Navy Cattle Drive,ö part of the astonishing and vigorous activities of the Confederates and the over-stretched Union flotillas along the unpacified Mississippi after New Orleans fell to Farragut in the Spring of 1862.

The account of öThe Navy at Fort Butlerö which follows, is perhaps less easy to transpose, but the lively activity of a single man o' war, *USS Port*

Royal, a captured blockade runner, and a small landing party or two, does offer some table-top ideas.

The Battle of the Straits of Shimonoseki took place in July 1863, and again the action of a single warship, *USS Wyoming*, engaged in hunting the *CSS Alabama* off the coast of Japan, provides so much for the naval wargamer. This is another potential scenario, neatly mapped and precisely described in the text, to return to at a later stage. The Federals scoured the world hunting, and even sometimes finding, the Confederate Navy's raiders, but this battle off Japan was unexpected.

The Federals didn't have it all their own way on the great rivers, of course. The 1864 Red River Campaign included a Confederate ambush of potentially immense implications for the large steamer squadron of tinclads under Admiral Porter, which was ambushed at Deloys Bluff in convoy down the river after the rather better known engagement in which *USS Eastport* was destroyed. This is a good gauntlet running action, and proves that shore attacks on warships in confined waters can be successful -- to an extent.

Again, a very useful solo scenario here.

The chapter entitled 'The Raid on Pitch Landing' deals with the numerous raids carried out by the gunboats of the US Navy against the many Confederate supply bases inland from Albermarle Sound. Here, small steamers were involved, such as *USS Chicopee*, as well as picket boats and numbers of US Marines for shore operations. Very interesting combined operations actions, small scale, sometimes only a handful of men by the sound of it, and a war reminiscent of Hornblower and Aubrey in the wars against Bonaparte! A very good map game I think, and maybe the odd conversion to the table top.

The last of the nine actions which are recorded in 'A Dog Before a Soldier' is a land trek, rather than a voyage. 'A Novel Naval Scout' deals with the attempts of a group of Union sailors to reach General Sherman with news of the capture of Wilmington. It's not a wargame in our terms, but it just goes to show what navies can do, when asked. You could, I suspect, play it out on a map.

The book ends with a very well written assessment of the Federal Navy's role in actually winning the Civil War for the Union -- the blockade and the fall of New Orleans being particularly examined. The Union Navy never faltered in its efforts to choke the Confederacy to death, and that truth is evident in every line of this book.

Chuck Veit concludes his text with a statement which might find a sympathetic reception among many ACW wargamers, on land and afloat:  while the Navy alone could not have won the war, the Union Army alone would almost surely have lost it.

This is an excellent, well written and well produced paperback volume, sadly unlikely to find its way onto the shelves of many British wargamers, but it really is worth reading, and in my case worth returning to as a source of newfound and rather intriguing solo wargame scenarios. Hopefully, a little more information will also crop up on the subject of the re-enactment group, which quietly lurks behind this matter too.