

U.S.S. TYLER AND MORTAR BOAT

[From *Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies in the War of the Rebellion*, Series 1, Volume 22, Page 644.]

THE WESTERN PENNSYLVANIA HISTORICAL MAGAZINE

VOLUME 21

DECEMBER, 1938

NUMBER 4

WILLIAM J. KOUNTZ, SUPERINTENDENT
OF RIVER TRANSPORTATION UNDER
McCLELLAN, 1861-62¹

THEODORE R. PARKER

WILLIAM J. KOUNTZ was born in the town of Wellsville, Ohio, in 1817. His father was the son of a Pennsylvania German who had served in the American army during the Revolutionary War and had moved into the West about 1800. By trade a potter, with an establishment in the vicinity of Wellsville, the father was more interested in adventure than in the routine life of a small frontier settlement. He fought Indians, served in the American militia during our second war with England, and made several trips down the river, leaving his wife, an Irish immigrant girl, with the care of a large family and responsibility for selling the pottery that he made on his periodic visits home.

The town of Wellsville was then an important trading point on the Ohio River, having daily service with Pittsburgh by steamboat. With this background it is not surprising that young William took to the river at the age of ten and set out for Pittsburgh to make his fortune. Five years later he was the captain of a large keelboat plying between

¹ Presented for the author at a meeting of the Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania on March 29, 1938. Mr. Parker is a lecturer in history at the University of Pittsburgh. *Ed.*

Pittsburgh and Cincinnati, and at nineteen the owner-captain of his first keelboat.² He continued to progress rapidly and by 1860 was acknowledged as one of the leading steamboat men on the western rivers, with a fleet of eight boats that included the "Crystal Palace" and "City of Memphis," two of the finest vessels on the Mississippi.³ He had established himself in a substantial house at 900 Arch Street, in what was then the city of Allegheny, and he counted among his business partners such influential men as William Thaw, William Magee, and Colonel James Andrews. He was not only an important figure in the Democratic party of the district but also part-owner and president of the Pittsburgh, Allegheny, and Manchester Street Railway. He had many business associates, friends, and customers up and down the Ohio Valley, among them, George B. McClellan of the Illinois Central and the Ohio and Mississippi railroads. It was through this friendship and association that McClellan, major general in command of the Department of the Ohio at the outbreak of the Civil War, selected Captain Kountz to assist him in the problems of river transportation.⁴

General McClellan was placed in charge of the Department of the Ohio on May 14, 1861. Within a few days he called upon Kountz for assistance and advice regarding river transportation and the conversion of river boats into vessels of war. Apparently their plans progressed to a considerable degree, as both complained loudly when Commodore John Rodgers of the regular navy was sent west under authority of the quartermaster-general to superintend the construction of, and to command, the contemplated "Flotilla on the Western Waters."⁵ However,

² For this account of his early life the writer is indebted to Captain Kountz's son, Mr. George Kountz of Pittsburgh.

³ The "City of Memphis" was probably the largest vessel on the rivers until 1861, and it is believed to have been the first steamboat equipped with a printing press and provided with a daily "news-paper" of its own containing a few news items, the gossip of the boat, and the daily menu.

⁴ "Records of Vol. Officers in Civil War," 3:55, in the Archives and Claims Branch of the Quartermaster Corps of the United States Army, at Fort Myer, Virginia. There, also, are to be found all other documents cited in this article, except as otherwise indicated.

⁵ Congressman James K. Moorhead of Pittsburgh, in a letter addressed to the secretary of war on May 27, complained of this change in plan and of the sending of Rodgers to supersede Kountz. *Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies in the War of the Rebellion*, first series, 22:281.

Commodore Rodgers apparently recognized the value of Captain Kountz and before the end of May dispatched him to Pittsburgh to charter and purchase steamboats for the government service, under the authority of Captain J. H. Dickerson, assistant quartermaster at Cincinnati.⁶ In this capacity Captain Kountz purchased the three vessels—the “Lexington,” “Tyler,” and “Conestoga”—that, rebuilt and refitted by Rodgers, formed the only federal naval force on the western rivers until the first ironclads were commissioned about the close of the year.

In the meantime, on May 26, General McClellan had begun his campaign against the Confederates in western Virginia with the attack on Phillippi, and Captain Kountz was charged with the maintenance of McClellan’s river communications. By July 1, from his headquarters at Marietta, Ohio, Kountz was successfully directing the operations of a whole fleet of river transports for the army. In the operations against Ripley, he commanded in person the two vessels employed and received recognition from Brigadier General William S. Rosecrans for his part in the expedition. Captain Kountz then returned to Pittsburgh, where on July 7, General McClellan notified him that he was thereby “appointed to the charge of the water transportation for the troops serving in Western Virginia,” and that all officers requiring means of transportation for troops or supplies were to make their requisitions upon him at Pittsburgh.⁷ Needless to say such additional powers placed in the hands of a civilian were in themselves enough to arouse the ire of the army officers of the quartermaster corps, even if Kountz had refrained from raising charges of corruption and bribery against many of them during the following months.

On the same day, General McClellan telegraphed Quartermaster-general Montgomery C. Meigs in Washington that he had urgent need for three or four additional light-draft vessels to be armed for patrol service on the upper Ohio and the Kanawha rivers. “It is probable that four can be had for \$30,000 dollars. Captain W. J. Kountz, my super-

⁶ “Records of Vol. Officers,” 3:551.

⁷ Order, McClellan to General Jacob D. Cox, Dennison, Ohio, July 2, 1861, and report, Buchanan, West Virginia, Rosecrans to McClellan, in *“The War of the Rebellion: a Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies,”* first series, 2:197, 213; McClellan to Kountz, A.L.S., July 7.

intendent of river transportation, could purchase them readily. He will be at Pittsburgh, and should you authorize the purchase, please telegraph him and inform me at the same time." Two days later General Meigs telegraphed his approval to Kountz and ordered him to send the vessels to such places as General McClellan should direct. The speed with which this was executed is indicated by the fact that on July 20, the quartermaster-general wrote to Captain Kountz advising him that the papers for the vessels he had purchased under this authority would have to be signed by General McClellan before the department could pay for them. Other records of these four vessels are lacking, but one may suppose that they were delivered to McClellan on time or he would have made further requests in his reports to the department.⁸

General McClellan in the meantime was transferred to the East to command all the federal armies, and Kountz was left without military rank to carry on this task for an army officered largely by Republican political appointees. However, General Rosecrans, who succeeded McClellan, immediately reaffirmed Captain Kountz's position. This action, however, brought him no security, and on July 30, Congressman James K. Moorhead of Pittsburgh began a campaign to secure an adequate appointment for Captain Kountz as an officer in the federal army. Kountz continued to work under Generals Meigs and Rosecrans, but he did not receive a commission in the army until nearly four months later.⁹

On July 17, Captain Kountz learned that a new boat then building at Pittsburgh was the property of former United States Senator John Bell of Tennessee. Desiring to prevent the delivery of this vessel to the South, and at the same time secure her services for the federal forces, he wrote a confidential letter to Simon Cameron, the secretary of war, suggesting that this boat be attached and placed in the government service. After a delay of more than two weeks, he received word that no law provided for the confiscation of Confederate property, but that the case

⁸ McClellan to Meigs, A.L.S., Buchanan, West Virginia, July 7, 1861; Meigs to Kountz, July 9 and another undated, in "Letters Sent," 56:41-42, 95; report, Kountz to Meigs, September 12. The names of the four vessels were: "Mary Cook," "Glenwood," "Eunica," and "Silver Lake."

⁹ Several A.L.S., Moorhead to Meigs, Pittsburgh and Washington, beginning July 30, 1861, and many, Kountz to Meigs, beginning August 17.

would be referred to the quartermaster-general. On August 26, no action having been instituted at Washington, Captain Kountz telegraphed to General Meigs stating that there was less than five thousand dollars outstanding against the boat and that she was to be completed within a few weeks. Kountz added that he needed the services of such a vessel and asked for authority to take her over for the United States. General Meigs telegraphed back that he could not authorize the seizure of private property and that Kountz should refer the matter to General Rosecrans.¹⁰ When apprised of the facts in the case, Rosecrans acted upon Captain Kountz's recommendations and the vessel was confiscated by the government. This was about one week before she entered the service, following a delay of more than six weeks.

During the period of this controversy, Kountz had been conducting some private investigations regarding river transportation in the vicinity of Cincinnati, and when he had satisfied himself concerning the true condition of affairs, he reported the facts to the quartermaster-general. The most serious charges involved the chief clerk of Captain Dickerson, at Cincinnati, and his assistants, whom he accused of accepting bribes in return for granting transportation contracts at exorbitant rates to certain firms and individuals.¹¹ On September 6, General Meigs advised Kountz that he had sent the information and the charges to Captain Dickerson, and that he had also written to General Rosecrans, Kountz's superior officer.¹² Captain Dickerson received this information between September 9 and 11, and on the twelfth, A. Thomas Merritt, superintendent of engineers for the western gunboats then stationed at Cincinnati, wrote to General Meigs to the effect that Kountz had purchased an

¹⁰ Kountz to Cameron, A.L.S., July 17, 1861; Cameron to Kountz, A.L.S., August 3; telegram, Kountz to Meigs, August 26; telegram, Meigs to Kountz, in "Letters Sent," 56: 275.

¹¹ Memorandum, August 30, 1861, in "Letters Received."

¹² In one of his letters to Dickerson, Meigs advised him that "we are all liable to be deceived by persons in whom we trust," and that such charges against him, Dickerson's, subordinates "should not be lightly disregarded." A clue as to the real cause of friction between Kountz and Dickerson may be gleaned from Meigs's further observation: "If you think that Captain Kountz should be under your command, it is for General Rosecrans to so instruct him, and not for this department, which has no more authority to give orders to Captain Kountz than to your chief clerk." "Letters Sent," 56: 245-246.

old boat and "put it off on the Government." General Meigs at once demanded "all the particulars by return mail." Merritt lost no time in rectifying his error; on September 26 he wrote a lengthy letter to Meigs in which he stated that he had "no specific charge to prefer against Capt. W. J. Kountz, for in the absence of any personal knowledge of his transactions, I cannot make a charge and predicate it upon hearsay. I will very willingly give you the name of my informant . . . I gave to you the information as I received it . . . How correct this may be I cannot tell . . . Captain Rodgers . . . said that he did not believe it was true. He thought that some person . . . jealous of Capt. K's position gained satisfaction by impugning his honesty."¹³ Kountz heard of these charges within a few days, and before the end of September he had secured, from the former owners of all the vessels he had purchased for the government, affidavits testifying to his upright and honest character, to his ability in all things connected with river transportation, and to his patriotic energy and sacrifices. As nothing further was recorded against the character of Captain Kountz in this matter, the charges against him were apparently unfounded. On the other hand, the charges brought by Kountz were substantiated. Before the end of the year, the transactions of Captain Dickerson's chief clerk were investigated, and the clerk and his two assistants were dismissed from the service. For his trouble, Captain Kountz earned the undying enmity of Dickerson.

Despite these difficulties, Kountz had continued to discharge his regular duties efficiently. During the first half of September, he commanded a fleet of six supply vessels and transports sent to assist the federal forces then operating in central West Virginia.¹⁴ Returning from this expedition, he made a hurried trip to Washington to lay before the quartermaster-general a plan for the more efficient transportation of army stores. He condemned as expensive and unnecessary the constant use of packet boats for such duty, except in cases of emergency, and suggested that the government make use of the numerous coal towboats

¹³ Memorandum, September 17, 1861, in "Letters Received," v. 47; Meigs to A. Thomas Merritt, September 19, in "Letters Sent," v. 56; Merritt to Meigs, A.L.S., September 26.

¹⁴ This expedition earned for Kountz the unofficial title of "Commodore," which he kept the rest of his life.

and barges then available for army use along the Ohio Valley. He believed that adequate planning could overcome the resulting loss of speed, and that freight costs to the government would be reduced by half. He also argued that this plan would require fewer able, loyal pilots, and would release the remainder for service on the gunboats then under construction; as a matter of fact the scarcity of pilots became a serious problem as the gunboat flotilla increased in size. During the next two weeks he went to St. Louis to purchase coal for the gunboats and again reported to General Meigs that he had unearthed "important information which I wish to communicate to you in person. I will be in Washington Monday evening (October 7) if nothing prevents."¹⁵ Unfortunately, this information does not appear in the subsequent records now available in the files of the department.

Kountz was displaying too much activity and energy, and meddling in too many things, to be ignored any longer by the quartermaster-general's office. An investigation of his activities was ordered about the middle of September. The replies to the department's questions were unanimously favorable to Kountz, especially as to his ability and honesty. Captain J. A. Ekin, the quartermaster at Pittsburgh, spoke very highly of him, as did several other *regular army* officers. The most reassuring reply came from General McClellan's adjutant, Colonel Williams, who in recommending Kountz to the department suggested that he be given charge of all steamboat transportation on the Mississippi River. Williams pointed out that Kountz "had charge, during the General's Western Virginia Campaign, of the transportation of all troops and supplies on the Ohio River under the General's direction, and he takes pleasure in bearing testimony to the zeal and efficiency with which Capt. Kountz discharged the trust confided to him." Except in one respect General Meigs was more than satisfied with the reports he had received concerning Kountz. In his letter to Kountz, October 15, he warned him in no uncertain terms: "You show one defect. You are too apt to quarrel with the officers of the United States. If you can not work harmoniously with those above you, you will be obliged to quit

¹⁵ Kountz to the War Department, "To whom it may concern there," A.L.S., September 18, 1861, and to Meigs, A.L.S., about October 3.

the service."¹⁶ Kountz, an obstinate person, had decided upon the proper manner in which to conduct this aspect of the war, and so long as he was concerned with it, he intended to follow his own ideas. In the words of his son, "Once he had made up his mind, nothing under the sun could move him from his course of action." It was this refusal to accept the usual practices of the day that led to his many difficulties and eventually forced him out of the army.

During the remainder of October and the first half of November, Kountz was busily engaged in transporting supplies and munitions between Pittsburgh and St. Louis.¹⁷ In the meantime he had applied for a commission in the army. On November 16, he was notified that the application had been accepted, and he was ordered to St. Louis to await further orders, but weeks passed before he was given any assignment. This was the worst possible situation for a man of his temperament. He saw inefficiency on all sides, and even though he had no orders from Washington, he wasted no time. Between requests to Meigs for specific assignments, he was busily engaged in prying into the numerous leaks and weak spots of the government supply service, and in writing letters to all his friends who occupied positions of power. A week after his arrival he wrote to McClellan: "There has been a number of boats discharged within a few days from Gov. Service & a great Many More will be so soon as I get controle of Matters . . . I called on Maj. Allen, Qr. Master here, who told me he was anxious for a change in river operations. He is in my opinion a good business man and working for the interest of the Government." He complained of the inefficiencies to Representative Moorhead, and because of his desire to reform the transportation system, he doubted if the government intended to use his services.¹⁸ The next day he wrote again to Moorhead that, according

¹⁶ Ekin to Meigs, A.L.S., Pittsburgh, October 10, 1861; Williams to Meigs, A.L.S., Washington, September 19; Meigs to Kountz, October 15, in "Letters Sent," 57:94.

¹⁷ Kountz to Colonel Thomas A. Scott, the assistant secretary of war, A.L.S., Louisville, October 22, 1861. Colonel Scott was one of Kountz's bondsmen, among whom were also numbered William Thaw and Joshua Hanna.

¹⁸ "Records of Vol. Officers," 3:552; letters and telegrams, Kountz to Meigs, St. Louis, November 23, 27, December 10, 15, 1861, and others; Kountz to McClellan, A.L.S., about November 25, and to Moorhead, A.L.S., St. Louis, November 28.

to Major Allen, Frank Blair¹⁹ had prevented his appointment to supervise river transportation and that "Captain Able and his accomplices are still in power, and so robbing the Govt. continues. I can assure you that the Govt. has been defrauded out of at least 100,000 in river transport, so far." Kountz also insisted that Blair had interfered with an appointment that General McClellan had tried to secure for him. But he was not ready to give up his crusade. "I can reduce the cost of Government's River Transportation 1500-2000 per day," he wrote, "and I will stay here and expose all such stealing I can find out."²⁰

On December 1, Kountz wrote again to Moorhead that Major Allen had sent him to Cairo on a trip of inspection. He reported the "same system of robbery here as at St. Louis, but I will save the Govt. all I can." Yet, in this same letter, he expressed for the first time a desire "to be home and out of it all. . . . I am told that Frank Blair will defeat me yet." This was no idle rumor, for on December 7, General Meigs wrote to Blair that he would suspend the issuance of all orders to Captain Kountz until Blair had had time to talk over his case with General McClellan.²¹ Certainly some unseen hand was opposing the appointment of Kountz to any responsible position where he could control important operations involving large sums of money. Perhaps he was too forthright. Undoubtedly, he was too quarrelsome and too inflexible in his ideas to suit the demands of the army as it was then organized. Yet, there he was, continually meddling and demanding real work to do.

Major Allen had sent Kountz to Cairo at the suggestion of General Meigs, who gave a rather lengthy and fair history of his case in the communication. He warned Allen that it would probably be best not to give Kountz too much power, but that "properly controlled and encouraged by confidence I believe he will save the United States much

¹⁹ Francis P. Blair, Jr., one of the most powerful western politicians of the Civil War period.

²⁰ Meigs to Allen, copy, in "Letters Sent," 57:323; Kountz to Moorhead, A.L.S., St. Louis, November 29, 1861. Meigs had never heard of Captain Able, but "Captain Kountz makes serious charges against him which should be investigated."

²¹ Kountz to Moorhead, A.L.S., Cairo, December 1, 1861; Meigs to Blair, Washington, December 7, in "Letters Sent," 57:382.

money, and we must overlook faults of temper or judgement or manner for the sake of economy." He recommended that Kountz be charged "with the direction of Steam boats chartered on the Mississippi and at Cairo . . . and authorized to discharge all boats not needed." These instructions were certainly adequate. However, before Kountz had more than entered upon his new duties, he was recalled to St. Louis, and on December 15, he wrote to General Meigs expressing much regret that he had just learned that no orders were to be issued to him until further instructions from Washington.²²

However, nothing could prevent Kountz from expressing his views on the proper use of steamboat transportation by the army. While he was thus being investigated, he prepared for General Meigs a comprehensive statement of the many weaknesses of the service as it then existed and of what changes should be made. The thesis of the report was the need for an intelligently organized bureau to assume responsibility for all the river transportation in the West. Under such a scheme the government would be able to establish uniform rates for chartering vessels, equal rates of pay for similar ranks on these vessels, and the elimination of many duplications in the actual use of the vessels chartered. Kountz proposed to establish agencies at all the important river ports in the West, which would report directly to the central office and be responsible for the enforcement of these regulations. Why, asked Kountz, should an engineer employed on a government vessel at Wheeling receive sixty dollars a month, and another, doing the same work, receive one hundred twenty-five and his board just because he was employed at St. Louis? "There certainly is no more reason why Steamboat men should be paid more wages at Saint Louis, than there is that Officers and soldiers should have differences made in their wages." Kountz complained that "not one Qr. Mr. in fifty knows anything about the running of steamboats or their fitness for special purposes."²³ Yet in each port, the local quartermaster was responsible for the selection and chartering of the vessels he might

²² Meigs to Allen at St. Louis, November 29, 1861, in "Letters Sent," 57:323; Kountz to Meigs, A.L.S., St. Louis.

²³ Kountz to Meigs, A.L.S., St. Louis, December 16, 1861.

need to transport accumulating supplies to various points without any consideration for using the vessels on their return trips. Without doubt the contentions of Kountz were valid. A review of the organization of the mercantile marine by the government during the recent World War would prove the soundness of his plans.²⁴ But here again he had done more to antagonize his superiors than to prove his point, as his whole plan was predicated upon the idea that he was the only person who had the knowledge or experience necessary to direct such important work. He left no doubt about this: "General, I am satisfied that if you knew me personally, Knew my ability and willingness . . . you would make me the most usefull agent the Government has in the West." The answer was not long delayed. General Meigs acknowledged that many of his ideas had "certain merits," but that it was impracticable to put too much power in the hands of one man, "even if he is absolutely perfect."²⁵

Apparently, Blair's investigation of Kountz was concluded in a hurry, and not unfavorably. Kountz was probably back in Cairo on or before December 19, for on that day, the commanding general of the post, John A. McClernand, issued rather comprehensive orders concerning his duties to his acting chief quartermaster Captain R. B. Hatch. The latter was informed that Captain Kountz had been sent from St. Louis to "examine into all River Transportation" and to estimate the probable needs of the command for the months of January and February. Hatch was ordered to make available all books, records, reports, estimates, and other papers that would assist Kountz in carrying out his orders. Kountz lost no time in stirring up a hornet's nest, and immediately complaints began to flood the St. Louis office. In apparent desperation Major Allen wrote to General Meigs on December 20: "I am at a loss to know what to do with Capt. Kountz. He may understand steamboats, but he knows nothing about [*illegible*] business. He may know how to spy out a rascal but he don't know how to be gentle-

²⁴ *Final Report of General John J. Pershing to the Secretary of War*, 23 ff. (Washington, 1921).

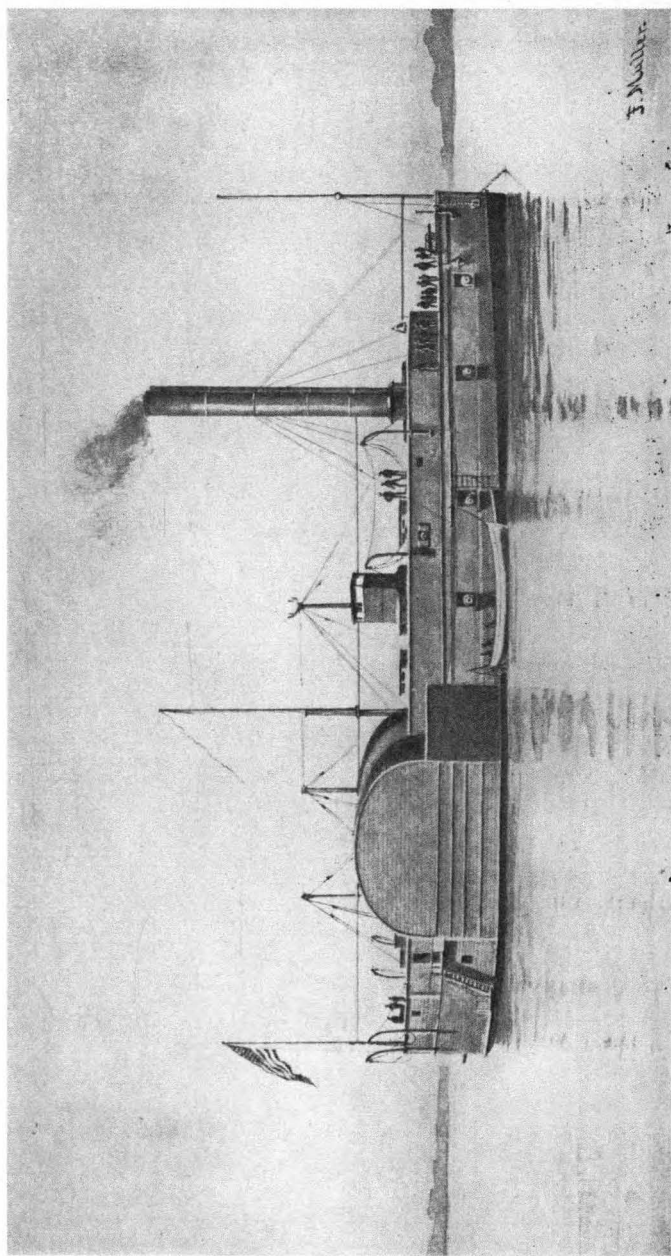
²⁵ Kountz to Meigs, A.L.S., St. Louis, December 16, 1861; Meigs to Kountz, December 26, in "Letters Sent," 57:477.

man." He did know his business, and he was able to detect all kinds of fraudulent practice, but in doing so he antagonized even those who were putting forth their best efforts for the government.²⁶

Kountz lost no time in making the most of this opportunity. With tireless energy he made a complete study of the transportation problems of Cairo, and on December 23 he submitted a more comprehensive report to McClernand than he had to General Meigs on the sixteenth, commenting on various irregularities, and concluding that the government would be able to save seventy-five hundred dollars monthly under his proposed new system. General McClernand, another "War Democrat," was very favorably impressed with the report of Captain Kountz, and he immediately forwarded it with high recommendations to General Grant, the commander of the district in which Cairo was situated, asking that they meet and discuss the situation at length that same evening.²⁷ The meeting was a success so far as Kountz and General McClernand were concerned, and before retiring for the night McClernand wrote to Major Allen that he believed Kountz to be a good man: "He can render valuable service to the Government if he is placed in charge of river transportation at this port." This offer did not require repetition. Judging by the speed with which he accepted it, Major Allen welcomed the opportunity to send Kountz away from St. Louis permanently. Three days after McClernand wrote his recommendation, Allen notified Meigs, Kountz, and McClernand that the appointment had been made. Kountz continued his work with real spirit, and two days after his appointment, General McClernand was able to tell Allen that the "new superintendent of River Transportation seems to be doing a good job, and in addition has offered to take over the job of post quartermaster." There is no doubt that he was effective from the point of view of the interests of the government, for on the

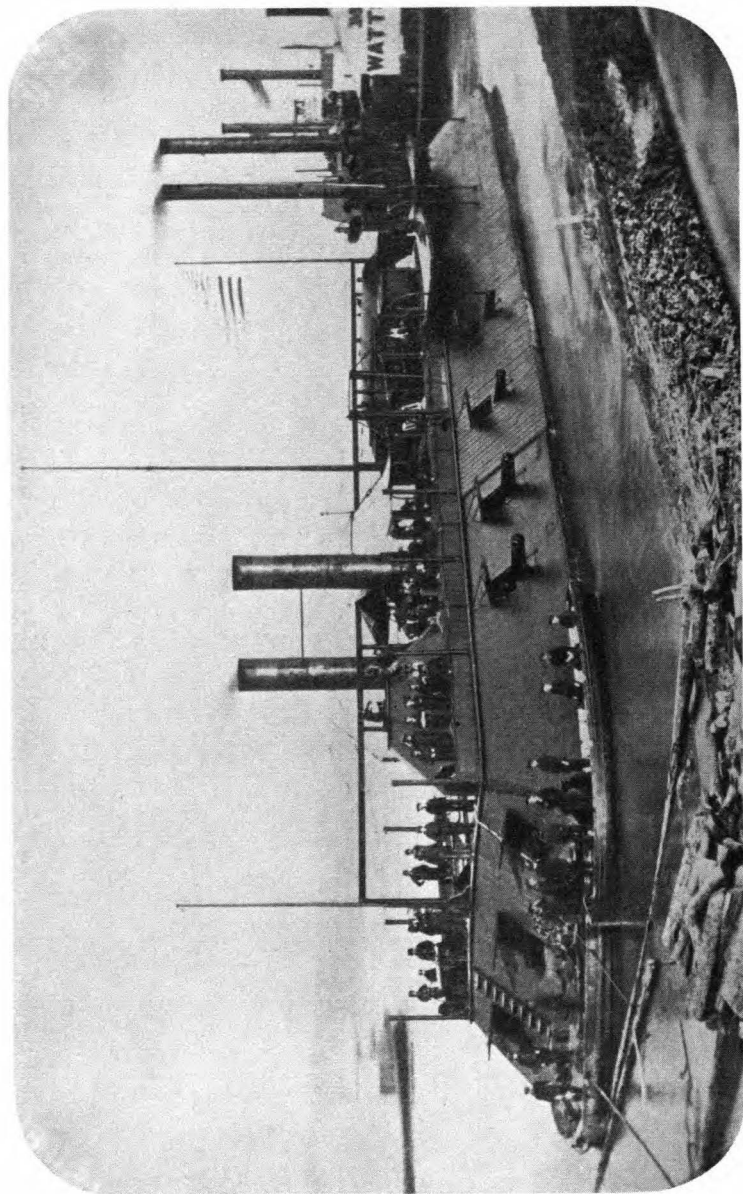
²⁶ Manuscript copy of an order, McClernand to Hatch, December 19, 1861, in the J. A. McClernand Collection (Illinois State Historical Library); several references to the complaints of "unjust treatment" by the new superintendent of transportation at Cairo, in the Charles Parsons Collection (Missouri Historical Society); Allen to Meigs, A.L.S., "Unofficial," St. Louis, December 20.

²⁷ Manuscript report, with tables, Kountz to McClernand, December 23, 1861, and manuscript copy of a letter, McClernand to Grant, with endorsement and notes, December 23, in the McClernand Collection.



U.S.S. LEXINGTON

[From *Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies in the War of the Rebellion*, Series 1, Volume 25, Page 348.]



U.S.S. CAIRO, AT CAIRO, ILLINOIS, JANUARY, 1862

[One of the seven ironclads built by James B. Eads and commissioned at Cairo in December, 1861. From a photograph in the possession of Mr. C. M. Ritchie of Louisville, Kentucky, whose grandfather, O. B. Jolly, was a pilot on this vessel.]

same day he advised the quartermaster-general that shipments of coal, represented by vouchers to be 88,823 bushels, were grossly in error, and he suggested payment be deferred until he could check the records. During the next three days he found time to go to Paducah, Kentucky, and report that the coal barges that had been used by the army to form a bridge across the Ohio River were no longer needed there and were not being properly cared for. He estimated them to be capable of transporting thirty thousand troops down the river, and he urged the department to retrieve them for the transportation of freight.²⁸

Kountz was only one of the many critics of the laxity of the Grant administration at Cairo following the battle of Belmont. Cairo had been a "key position" in the West since the beginning of the war. It was the center from which the long-heralded expedition "down the river" was to leave, and supplies for the army had been accumulating there for many months. It was also the base of the gunboat flotilla, which, by the first of the year, included more than fifteen vessels. Steamboats arrived and departed every day in preparation for the spring campaigns. The numerous large purchases of supplies and raw materials made it an easy prey to war profiteers. Kountz had plenty of opportunity to expose rascality, but in doing so he came into open conflict with General Grant. Kountz lacked the tact necessary for such a delicate task. And yet, later events proved the validity of at least some of his charges.²⁹

The first clash between General Grant and Captain Kountz must have taken place about December 20, 1861, as a result of Kountz's private investigations. The next day Grant called him to task for making inquiries pertaining to his command without having reported to him and shown his authority for such activities: had Kountz reported him-

²⁸ McClernand to Allen, A.L.S., Cairo, December 23 and 28, 1861; Allen to Kountz, A.L.S., with copies to McClernand and Meigs, St. Louis, December 26; Kountz to Meigs via Allen, A.L.S., Cairo, December 28, and to the quartermaster department, A.L.S., Cairo, about December 31.

²⁹ *New York World*, December 5 to 16, 1861, *Pittsburgh Post*, December 17 and 31, and other newspaper accounts of the period, August, 1861, to January, 1862; Adjutant General's Office, "Letters Sent & Rec'd, Dist. W. Tenn.," 2:120ff., 138-139, 4:119-120; *Official Records*, Navy, first series, v. 22. Captain Hatch and his chief clerk were arrested by order of the quartermaster-general and were eventually prosecuted and dismissed from the service.

self properly on his arrival, he would have been assisted in every possible way. But, Grant warned, "to say the least you have acted in a manner displaying great ignorance of military usage in not reporting to the commanding officer the object and authority of your visit." The meeting of December 23 seems to have allayed the general's immediate misgivings, and for many days Kountz was primarily engaged in the duties of his office. Other friction must have occurred, because on January 10 Kountz was ordered to report to Captain Baxter for all future orders. But a mere order from the commanding general was not enough to stop the ever-vigilant captain, and on January 12 Grant wrote to Kountz reprimanding him for having discharged from the government service a steamboat belonging to Mr. V. B. Horton. At the same time Grant wrote to Horton assuring him that his vessel would "be returned in the service."³⁰ This was the worst possible thing Kountz could have done, as he had thereby interfered directly with the movements of the army into Kentucky. All available vessels were being used to transport troops and supplies, and even so, considerable difficulty was experienced in maintaining adequate lines of communications between Cairo and Fort Jefferson and the other points along the Kentucky shore.³¹

In this controversy General Grant undoubtedly acted with the best interests of the government foremost in his mind. Captain Kountz should have admitted his error and attempted to rectify the damage. General Grant could have explained his reversal of the captain's orders and thereby soothed the disposition of his irrepressible subordinate, but military usage did not admit of such treatment and General Grant seldom explained anything to anyone unless it was absolutely necessary.

³⁰ Letters and orders, "Dist. W. Tenn.," in the archives of the Adjutant General's Office, as follows: Grant to Kountz, Cairo, December 21, 1861, and to Horton, January 12, 1862, in "Letters Sent & Rec'd," 1:160, 192; order, Grant to Kountz, January 1, 1862, and letter, Kountz to Grant, January 12, 1862, in "Letters Rec'd and Gen. Orders," 3:29, 159; orders, Grant to Kountz, January 1, 3, 9, 1862, in "Special Orders," 4:111, 114, 118. The last is interesting in that it ordered Kountz to fill the crews of all the river vessels, with the understanding that those who refused to serve, unless otherwise employed, "will be forced to serve as prisoners and without compensation."

³¹ Letters and orders written in attempts to overcome these troubles, January 9-14, 1862, in the McClernand Collection.

As a result, Captain Kountz declared a private, personal war on the man who had invaded his special field of operations.

His first attack was directed at Grant's reputed taste for strong spirits. A later account describes Kountz as a total abstainer, and a man who could not "tolerate a drinking man in his presence. This peculiarity brought about a tilt between Gen. Grant and Commodore Kountz that resulted in General Grant's arrest." Kountz presented his side of the controversy in a letter to Representative Moorhead: "I have preferred charges against Gen. Grant for drunkenness and conduct unbecoming a gentleman or officer—he on Three different occasions when visiting Columbus Drank with traitors until he became beastly drunk At an other time was so drunk at the Hotel for 3 days he was not fit to attend to business." The general was not slow in retaliation, and on January 14 he reported to St. Louis that "Capt. Kountz, who was recently sent here as master of transportation, from his great unpopularity with the river men, and his wholesale denunciation of everybody connected with the government here as thieves and cheats, was entirely unable to get crews for the necessary boats."³² Grant complained bitterly about the friction Kountz had occasioned between himself and the river men, and he even accused Kountz of trying to get the government to hire vessels in which he had a personal interest.³³ The climax of the quarrel came when Kountz was arrested and confined to the limits of the St. Charles Hotel in Cairo. There he remained for one week when the limits of his confinement were extended to include all of the city of Cairo.³⁴

A few days later Captain Kountz wrote at some length to McClelland's adjutant explaining that he had been under arrest for ten days and had just received liberty to leave the hotel. "Why am I confined like

³² *Pittsburgh Commercial Gazette*, April 4, 1904; Kountz to Moorhead, A.L.S., Cairo, January 26, 1862; Grant to J. C. Kelton, St. Louis, *Official Records*, Army, first series, 7:551-552.

³³ Practically all of Kountz's steamboats had been in the service since early in the autumn, and they continued so until the latter part of 1865.

³⁴ Grant to Kelton, January 14, 1862, "Letters Sent & Rec'd, Dist. of W. Tenn.," 2:140-141, and order, January 23, "Special Orders," 4:121, in A. G. O. Archives; Colonel N. B. Buford to McClelland, January 15, in McClelland Collection. See also *Pittsburgh Post*, January 23.

this? I am entitled to and demand an investigation, and copy of charges." But Major Brayman had been absent with General McClernand in Kentucky when the arrest was made and consequently was unable to help Kountz. "There is no copy of charges against you in our office, and I personally know nothing of your situation." Kountz then took his trouble directly to General McClernand, who on January 29 wrote to General Grant requesting particulars. Grant's reply was characteristic. No charges had been preferred against Captain Kountz, but if and when they were McClernand would get his copy of them. "I want as few courts martial at this time for the good of the service as possible. . . . I have confined Captain Kountz to the limits of the city and have referred his whole case to General McClellan at Washington." General Grant made no explanation other than that Captain Kountz had been guilty of "disobedience to orders," "disrespect to superior officers," and "conduct wholly subversive of good order and military discipline." He concluded by saying, "I simply requested that . . . he be sent to some other field of usefulness."³⁵ This was the situation when Generals Grant and McClernand sailed up the river with most of the army for the campaigns against Forts Henry and Donelson. Apparently Kountz was left in Cairo, forbidden to depart, powerless to act, and literally at the mercy of the enemies he had made.

The position of this modern Don Quixote was not enviable. He had condemned and accused everyone whom he judged guilty of misconduct. Even threats against his person, after he had lost all power to act, failed to divert him from his self-appointed mission. About this same time he was writing to Congressman Moorhead that men who professed to be his friends had told him of a plot against his life: "I find all of these friends implicated in some way in the frauds Connected with the steam boating business. I have discovered where a boat was Chartered at \$1200, double what she was worth, and returned to the Qr. Master at St. Louis [*in the reports*] at 1800 per month. Another at 900 &

³⁵ Kountz to Brayman, A.L.S., January 24, 1862; Brayman to Kountz, copy of A.L.S., January 24; McClernand to Grant, copy of L.S., January 29; Grant to McClernand, A.L.S., January 29—all in McClernand Collection.

returned at 1350. Coal bought at 10 cts. & put into the Gov. at 12 cts. . . . I could cover ten pages giving you details of the reason why they do not want me at Cairo. There was a man by the name of G. W. Graham who was removed for these dishonest returns, placed in my place as soon as I was removed. There is a ferry boat that was sold here over a year ago for 900\$, is chartered at 1350\$ per month."³⁶

The immediate effect of this and similar letters was to secure his release from confinement³⁷ and to give him freedom to continue his investigations, but *without* authority. On March 10 his commission was confirmed by order of the secretary of war, and he was sent to Paducah, apparently in the hope that he would give no further trouble to the department. But Kountz was probably the most tenacious crusader who battled the profiteers of the West during the whole struggle, for a few days later he wrote a long letter directly to the secretary of war indicating that steamers and transports were being chartered with absolutely *no* regard for economy. "I know of some that are making 3,000 to 4,500 clear every month, while the boats themselves are not worth over 12-20,000\$. The chartering agent at Louisville represents more steamboat stock than any other man in the U. S., & owns a boat supply house as well."

This was the last of his letters to the government. For some reason or other he was induced to resign within a few days thereafter, and on April 2 his name was officially dropped from the army rolls. During the following winter General McClernand apparently made an effort to have Kountz join his command preparatory to his assuming charge of the "Army of the Mississippi." An appointment in blank as an assistant quartermaster of volunteers was sent to him on November 1, 1862. This was followed by several form letters until January 28, 1863, when he was ordered to report to General McClernand in person. Finally the

³⁶ Kountz to Moorhead, A.L.S., Cairo, January 26, 1862. Other records seem to substantiate the statement about Graham, although not by direct statement. He was removed in October, 1861, but by the latter part of the following January he was on the job again. See *Pittsburgh Post*, February 1, 1862, p. 1, and February 4, p. 3.

³⁷ He was released by order of General Henry W. Halleck dated March 3, 1862. See telegram to Halleck, v. 1, A. G. O. Archives; *Pittsburgh Post*, March 6.

appointment was revoked on May 18, 1863, after Kountz had refused to comply with General Meig's orders.³⁸

This incident terminated the military career of Captain Kountz. Although he remained active as a civilian until the end of the war, he refused to re-enter the army. He had offered the generals the benefit of his long experience: he had even tried to force it upon them. They had not only refused but had added injury to insult. He knew how their transportation needs on the rivers could best be managed, and he had offered to reduce corruption and perfidy to a minimum. His good services had been shunned. Obstinate he had retired to his steamboats. Yet, the army was not solely to blame. Kountz was a valuable man, but wholly unsuited by temperament and disposition to work with the military commanders. An ardent crusader, he set out to destroy the many-headed dragon that was preying on the strength and efficiency of the Northern armies. He had the courage and compulsion to expose fraud when and where he found it. He refused to compromise with anyone, and his inability to work with other people thwarted his efforts to reduce the evils he detected with such avidity. As a result, he was able to contribute but little of permanent value, other than to denounce those profiteers with whom he clashed during his brief period of service.

³⁸ Kountz to the secretary of war, A.L.S., Paducah, March 19, 1862; orders and reports, offices of the adjutant general and the quartermaster-general, March 29 to April 2; "Letters Sent," 63:544, 66:9; "Letters Received," 51:900; "Misc. Letter Book," v. 3, February 11, 1863; "Records of Vol. Officers," 3:552.