

## Picket, USS <sup>[1]</sup>

### Picket, USS

by Paul Branch, 2006

The USS *Picket* was a small Union [gunboat](#) <sup>[2]</sup> that



Engraving labeled "The Burnside Expedition - Landing of the national troops on Roanoke Island, under cover of the Union gunboats Delaware and Picket." Image from [Archive.org](#).

<sup>[3]</sup> fought during the [Civil War](#) <sup>[4]</sup> in the sounds and rivers of North Carolina until September 1862, when it was sunk in the Tar River at [Washington, N.C.](#) <sup>[5]</sup> The Union had purchased this civilian vessel for use in an expedition along the coast of North Carolina led by Maj. Gen. Ambrose E. Burnside. The exact origin of the *Picket* was obscured by the existence of a larger, side-wheel steamer of the same name that also served during the war. The two vessels are sometimes confused in existing records.

The smaller *Picket* was one of seven armed propellers accompanying the [Burnside expedition](#) <sup>[6]</sup> when it sailed for North Carolina in January 1862. The ships were collected in haste and formed a motley fleet that inspired skepticism among Burnside's officers and men as to their seaworthiness. Therefore, to demonstrate his own confidence in the vessels, Burnside chose the *Picket* (the smallest ship in the fleet) as his flagship for the voyage. After the Burnside expedition began operations in North Carolina waters, the *Picket*, with its shallow draft, proved to be particularly valuable for covering the landing of Union troops at [Roanoke Island](#) <sup>[7]</sup>, New Bern, and [Fort Macon](#) <sup>[8]</sup>.

On the morning of 6 Sept. 1862, as the *Picket* lay with the navy gunboat *Louisiana* in the Tar River at Washington, N.C., a Confederate force made a surprise attack on the town. Both gunboats went into action to shell the advancing Confederates, but the *Picket* was able to fire only one gun before it exploded and [sank](#) <sup>[9]</sup> in the river, killing its captain, Sylvester D. Nicoll, along with 18 crewmen and leaving 6 others wounded.

#### References:

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Robert U. Johnson and Clarence C. Buel, eds., *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War*, vol. 1 (1887-88).

#### Additional Resources:

Simms, Scott. "Sinking of The Picket." *The Sag Harbor Express*. September 7, 2012. <http://sagharborexpress.com/sinking-of-the-picket/> <sup>[10]</sup> (accessed October 11, 2012).

dcbh. "22 February 1862: Illustration, 'The 'Picket' leading the ships of the Burnside expedition over Hatteras Bar.'" *The Civil War Day by Day* (blog). Louis Wilson Round Special Collections Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. <http://www.lib.unc.edu/blogs/civilwar/index.php/2012/02/22/22-february-1862-3/> <sup>[11]</sup> (accessed October 11, 2012).

"Picket." Community Images Researchable by Computer Access NC East, George H. and Laura E. Brown Library; Beaufort County Community College. <http://circanceast.beaufortccc.edu/Brown/Picket/picket.htm> <sup>[12]</sup> (accessed October 11, 2012).

Gaines, W. Craig. "Picket (James E. Winslow) (Launch No. 5) (USS Picket) (Picket Boat No. 5)." *Encyclopedia of Civil War Shipwrecks* Louisiana State University Press. 2008. <http://books.google.com/books?id=90d2LcmfpCcC&lpg=PA225&ots=fdVDLLaDX&dq=%22uss%20picket%22%20civil&pg=PA127#v=onepage&q&f=false> <sup>[13]</sup> (accessed October 11, 2012).

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"The Burnside Expedition - Landing of the national troops on Roanoke Island, under cover of the Union gunboats Delaware and Picket." *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*. March 8, 1862. p. 245. <https://archive.org/stream/franklesliesilluv1314lesl/page/n239/mode/2up> <sup>[3]</sup> (accessed October 11, 2012).

#### Subjects:

[Civil War \(1861-1865\)](#) <sup>[14]</sup>

[Military](#) <sup>[15]</sup>

[Ships](#) <sup>[16]</sup>

#### Authors:

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#### From:

[Encyclopedia of North Carolina](#). University of North Carolina Press. <sup>[18]</sup>

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## Links

[1] <https://www.ncpedia.org/picket-uss> [2] <https://www.ncpedia.org/gunboats-wooden> [3] <https://archive.org/stream/frankliesilluv1314lesl#page/n239/mode/2up> [4] <https://www.ncpedia.org/history/cw-1900/civil-war> [5] <https://www.ncpedia.org/washington-nc-attack> [6] <http://www.nccivilwar150.com/history/burnside.htm> [7] <https://www.ncpedia.org/roanoke-island-battle> [8] <https://www.ncpedia.org/fort-macon> [9] <http://books.google.com/books?id=aU-0X45vbS4C&pg=PA1838&ots=a1ppm9nXHL&dq=Sylvester%20D.%20Nicol%2C&pg=PA1838#v=onepage&q=Sylvester%20D.%20Nicol,&f=false> [10] <http://sagharborexpress.com/sinking-of-the-picket/> [11] <http://www.lib.unc.edu/blogs/civilwar/index.php/2012/02/22/22-february-1862-3/> [12] <http://circanceast.beaufortccc.edu/Brown/Picket/picket.htm> [13] <http://books.google.com/books?id=90d2LcmfpCcC&pg=PA225&ots=fd-VDLLaDX&dq=%22uss%20picket%22%20civil&pg=PA127#v=onepage&q&f=false> [14] <https://www.ncpedia.org/category/subjects/civil-war> [15] <https://www.ncpedia.org/category/subjects/military> [16] <https://www.ncpedia.org/category/subjects/ships> [17] <https://www.ncpedia.org/category/authors/branch-paul-jr> [18] <https://www.ncpedia.org/category/entry-source/encyclopedia->