

HELL IN THE LOW COUNTRY:
THE CAMPAIGN AGAINST WILMINGTON, N.C., 1865*

Richard W. Iobst
Robins Air Force Base

Wilmington, North Carolina represented an important possession for the staggering Confederate States of America in January, 1865. It produced naval stores and war supplies and was a processing center for rice and cotton. The city, perhaps reflecting its strategic importance, was one of the most heavily fortified positions in the Confederacy. Between January 19 and February 17 1865, Union commanders launched a combination of five frontal and flanking assaults against Wilmington's defenses. The city fell on February 22. Superior resources and morale evidently produced the Union victory.

The defeat at Wilmington hurt the Confederacy in a number of ways. Since the city was the major blockade-running port in the South and a cog in the Confederacy's war industry machine, its fall cut off a source of crucially-needed military supplies. The capitulation of North Carolina's most heavily populated city inevitably lowered the state's morale. Over a thousand badly needed experienced troops were also lost in the contest. Furthermore, possession of Wilmington provided Union forces with easy invasion routes to other parts of the Tarheel State. Finally, the defeat at Wilmington denied the South crucial railroad links between Richmond and Petersburg and the lower South.

*Synopsis provided by the editors.