

ROSWELL SABIN RIPLEY:
"CHARLESTON'S GALLANT DEFENDER"

by C. A. Bennett, M.D.*

ROSWELL SABIN RIPLEY, REFERRED TO BY HIS CONTEMPORARIES as "Charleston's gallant defender,"¹ has fallen into historical obscurity. This interesting, though highly controversial, Confederate general is little known in Ohio, his birthplace, or in Ogdensburg, New York, his childhood home. Even in Charleston, South Carolina, where he lived, fought, and is buried, he has been largely forgotten. Despite Ripley's previous popularity in Charleston, the criticisms of his detractors have outlived the praises of his supporters.

Ripley's birthplace in Worthington, Ohio, is identified only as the Ripley House. On the sign in front of this house no mention is made of this 1843 graduate of the United States Military Academy, who later became a Confederate general. Many are unaware of the major role he played in the April 12, 1861, Confederate bombardment of Fort Sumter in Charleston harbor. Ripley fought enthusiastically for the Confederacy in the defense of Charleston and for a short time was a brigade commander with Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia. How did this northern-born rebel attain prominence in the Confederate Army and why was he so controversial?

Current writers have described Ripley negatively, claiming he was "irascible and at times hot tempered" with "an inability to get along with his superiors"; he has been called "even more contumacious than D.H. Hill: where Hill respected some superiors, Ripley was against them all."² This assessment is contradicted by the positive opinions of Ripley's contemporaries, such as that of George C. Eggleston, who for a time served in an independent battery at Charleston:

He was portly in person, of commanding and almost pompous presence, and yet, when one came to know him, was as easy and unassuming in manner as if he had not been a brigadier general at all....

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¹Charleston *News and Courier*, March 30, 1887.

²E. Milby Burton, *The Siege of Charleston 1861-1865* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1970), p. 64; Stewart Safakis, *Who Was Who in the Civil War* (New York: Facts On File Publications, 1988), pp. 545-546; Clifford Dowdey, *The Seven Days: The Emergence of Robert E. Lee* (Little, Brown and Co., 1964) p. 186.

He was not a good martinet, but he was a brave, earnest man and a fine officer, of a sort of which no army can have too many.³

A former staff officer, Colonel E. M. Seabrook, stated, "He always endeavored to bestow upon his subordinates, officers and men, the full measure of praise due them."⁴ His former West Point classmate Confederate General Samuel G. French remarked, "He was generous, openhearted, outspoken; harbored no resentments.... His cheerful presence dispelled all unnecessary solemnity.... [H]is generous and unselfish disposition formed friendships among his classmates that lasted through life."⁵

Following his graduation from the U.S. Military Academy in 1843, Ripley served nearly ten years in the artillery service. Brevetted twice for "gallant and meritorious conduct" during the Mexican War, Ripley ended his U. S. military career at Fort Moultrie, South Carolina, when he resigned on March 2, 1853.⁶ On December 22, 1852, Ripley married Alicia Middleton Sparks, the widow of William A. Sparks and daughter of John and Mary Middleton. Ripley is said to have "gone into business in Charleston as agent for a rifle company."⁷

While the United States drifted toward dissolution and war, Roswell Ripley attempted to help his adopted state of South Carolina prepare for secession. On March 3, 1860, Ripley sent letters to the governors of Alabama, Georgia, and South Carolina. He wrote regarding the "armament of the Militia and volunteers of the Southern States," and advocated the building of an armory.⁸

Ripley's efforts for South Carolina also included at least one trip north to buy arms. From the Continental Hotel in Philadelphia, on November 7, 1860, Ripley wrote to General States Rights Gist in South Carolina encouraging legislation for an armory, but stated, "what you want first is arms." He commented that he was delayed in Philadelphia "partially on business

³George C. Eggleston, *A Rebel's Recollections* (New York: Hurd and Houghton, 1875), pp. 164-165, 168.

⁴Col. E. M. Seabrook, *Address Delivered at the Unveiling of the Ripley Monument* (Charleston, S.C.: Daggett Printing Co., 1894), p. 12.

⁵Samuel G. French, *Annual Reunion of the Association of the Graduates of the USMA* (E. Saginaw, Mich.: Evening News Printing and Binding House, 1887), pp. 63-64.

⁶G. W. Cullum, *Biographical Register of the U.S. Military Academy, 1802 to 1890* (Cambridge, Mass.: Riverside Press, 1891), Vol. II, p. 157.

⁷Dumas Malone, ed., *Dictionary of American Biography* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1935), Vol. VIII, pp. 62526, s.v. "Ripley, Roswell Sabine" [sic] by J. G. deRoulhac Hamilton; W. A. Swanburg, *First Blood: The Story of Fort Sumter* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1957), p. 307.

⁸R.S. Ripley to W.H. Gist, March 3, 1860, Compiled Service Records of Confederate General and Staff Officers, R.S. Ripley, MC #331 Roll 212, S.C. Department of Archives and History, Columbia, S.C. (hereafter Compiled Service Records).



Roswell Sabin Ripley. According to one contemporary, "He was portly in person, of commanding and almost pompous presence, and yet, when one came to know him, was as easy and unassuming in manner as if he had not been a brigadier general at all." Photo courtesy of the Massachusetts Commandery Military Order of the Loyal Legion and the U.S. Army Military History Institute.

of that nature."⁹ Following South Carolina's secession on December 20, 1860, and the evacuation of U. S. forces from Fort Moultrie to Fort Sumter in Charleston harbor, Governor Francis Pickens appointed Ripley major of ordnance at Fort Moultrie. When Major Robert Anderson moved to Fort Sumter he had ordered his men to spike Moultrie's guns and burn the gun carriages. At Fort Moultrie, Ripley's "indomitable energy and his great mental ability were exercised by day and by night, in repairing the guns and hotshot furnaces, and putting the fort in a condition to retain her ancient

⁹R. S. Ripley to S.R. Gist, March 22, 1860, Compiled Service Records.

name."¹⁰ On January 28, at the request of Governor Pickens, the South Carolina Senate confirmed Ripley's nomination for lieutenant colonel of the Battalion of Artillery.¹¹

By March 1, 1861, the Confederate States of America had assumed control of the military in Charleston and President Jefferson Davis selected General P. G. T. Beauregard to command the area. On April 11 the Confederates, learning that Fort Sumter would not be abandoned but would be resupplied and reinforced, demanded the fort's evacuation. At 4:30 a.m. the next day, a signal shell fired from Fort Johnson on the opposite side of the harbor opened the attack on Fort Sumter. Ripley's artillery began firing immediately. The artillery duel lasted throughout the day, slackened during the night, then resumed the next morning. As Ripley described the action from Fort Moultrie:

The shot, both hot and cold, crashed into the quarters of Fort Sumter and along the parapet, rendering the extinction of the flames difficult, and lighting up new places to windward. It became evident soon that the enemy was worsted, but to insure the result orders were passed to each of the batteries to redouble their fire.¹²

Abner Doubleday, then a U. S. captain at Fort Sumter, knew Ripley was in command at Fort Moultrie. According to Doubleday, "I was told ... [Ripley] took pains to denounce me as an Abolitionist, and to recommend that I be hanged by the populace as soon as caught." Doubleday spoke despairingly about Ripley joining the Confederacy, but added, "being a man of talent, and a skillful artillerist he did us a great deal of harm." Doubleday added:

About 8 A.M. the officers' quarters were ignited by one of Ripley's incendiary shells, or by shot heated in the furnaces at Fort Moultrie.... [T]he hot shot soon followed each other so rapidly that it was impossible for us to contend with them any longer ... the wind drove the smoke in dense masses.... It seemed impossible to escape suffocation.... Some ... posted

¹⁰Seabrook, *Address, Ripley Monument*, pp. 4, 5.

¹¹President of South Carolina Senate to Gov. Pickens, January 28, 1861, E.M. Law Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, N.C.

¹²*War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1880-1901), Series I, Vol. I (hereafter cited as *O.R., Series I* unless otherwise noted), pp. 260, 301, 41.

themselves near the embrasures.... I crawled out one of these openings, and sat on the outer edge; but Ripley made it lively for me there with his caseshot, which he spattered all around. Had not a slight change of wind taken place, the result might have been fatal to most of us.¹³

Following the surrender of Fort Sumter, the honor of occupying it was given to Ripley and the South Carolina Palmetto Guard. Under Ripley's command, the reconstruction of the badly damaged fort began immediately. Governor Pickens wrote to President Davis, stating, "Ripley is by far the most efficient and thorough officer here, and has been working night and day to put Sumter in fighting order.... I owe him more than any other single man, and the people of Charleston know it."¹⁴

SHORTLY THEREAFTER, RIPLEY'S PROBLEMS, DISSATISFACTION, and reputation as troublesome began. Previously, Ripley had been considered reasonable in regard to rank and command. In an early letter to Leroy P. Walker, the Confederate secretary of war, Ripley stated:

I have the honor to apply for the commission of Colonel or of Lieut. Colonel of Artillery in the Army of the Confederate States of America. I mention the second rank as I do not wish an application or claim of mine to interfere with those of an officer who has seen more active service in the artillery arm than myself.¹⁵

As the months passed following Ripley's efficient performance at Forts Moultrie and Sumter, he became increasingly frustrated by his lack of promotion. Late in July 1861 rumors circulated in Charleston that Ripley intended to resign for that reason. A letter to Ripley from "patriotic and representative citizens" of Charleston, dated July 29, 1861, stated in part: "This whole community would regard such resolution on your part as nothing less than a public calamity, we entreat you to pause, and, if possible, to refrain.... Our conviction is, that our indebtedness to your wisdom is beyond being measured." Ripley yielded to their request and remained in the service. By August 21 he had been promoted to brigadier general and was in command of the Department of South Carolina and its coast defenses.¹⁶

¹³Abner Doubleday, *Reminiscences of Forts Sumter and Moultrie* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1876), pp. 154-157.

¹⁴Burton, *Siege of Charleston*, p. 57; John Johnson, *The Defense of Charleston Harbor, 1863-1865* (Charleston, S.C.: Walker, Evans & Cogswell Co., 1890; repr., Freeport, N.Y.: Books for Libraries Press, 1970), p. 18; *O.R., Series IV, Vol. I*, p. 318.

¹⁵Ripley to Walker, undated, Compiled Service Record of R. S. Ripley.

¹⁶Seabrook, *Address, Ripley Monument*, p. 7; *O.R., Vol. 6*, p. 267.

In early November 1861 Robert E. Lee assumed command of the coasts of South Carolina, Georgia, and East Florida, Beauregard having been transferred earlier to Virginia. At this time Union naval forces were concentrating off Beaufort and Port Royal, South Carolina. On November 7 they launched an overwhelming attack and captured the Confederate installations at Port Royal Sound. Ten days later, in the reorganization of the coastal defenses, Lee reduced Ripley's command to that of the water and land defenses of Charleston.¹⁷

In late November differences arose between Lee and Ripley as to the proper defense of Charleston and the coast. Robert E. Lee was not yet the revered figure he would become in Confederate history and until then had participated only in the rather unsuccessful western Virginia campaign. Therefore, it does not seem remarkable that Ripley might disagree with Lee. On November 26 Ripley advised Lee of the capture of two coastal islands, Otter and Fenwick's, by Union forces. This would allow Ashepoo and Paw Paw river access to the Federals. Proceeding inland, they could then threaten the important railway connecting Savannah and Charleston. Lee's assistant adjutant general, T. A. Washington, responded immediately to Ripley. "The commanding general directs me to say that the enemy can land on all the islands he can approach with his armed vessels, but he will hardly find it to his advantage to hold them after they have been pillaged." Lee instructed Ripley to obstruct the Ashepoo and Edisto rivers, but this response indicates significant differences of opinion regarding the importance of controlling coastal islands in the defense of Charleston. Responding to Lee on December 5, Ripley stated, "it seems to me as far forward as we can go with safety from Charleston the better we are for its defense."¹⁸

On December 10, from his headquarters at Coosawhatchie, Lee divided the coast of South Carolina into five military districts. He placed Ripley in command of the Second District with his headquarters in Charleston. The Fourth District, extending from the Ashepoo to the Port Royal entrance, was under the command of the recently arrived Brigadier General John C. Pemberton. His headquarters were with Lee at Coosawhatchie. On January 14, 1862, soon after arriving in South Carolina, Pemberton was promoted to major general, thus outranking Ripley.¹⁹ While the differences between Ripley and Lee primarily involved Charleston's lines of defense, Pemberton's promotion certainly did not help the situation.

At about that time a dispute developed involving Ripley's junior officers and Governor Pickens. In a letter to Lee on December 31, 1861, Pickens stated:

¹⁷O.R., Vol. 6, pp. 309, 311-312, 323.

¹⁸Shelby Foote, *The Civil War* (New York: Random House, 1958), Vol. I, pp. 127-130; O.R., Vol. 6, pp. 329, 336.

¹⁹O.R., Vol. 6, pp. 344-345; Sáfakis, *Who Was Who*, p. 497.

I regret to hear and to know of the unpleasant feeling amongst the officers under General Ripley, particularly of the junior officer in the artillery. Appointments cannot be made to please all, ... besides I thought it would be very agreeable to all to appoint a son of General Beauregard.... Why these appointments should create such excitement among the junior officers in Fort Sumter I am at a loss to understand.²⁰

Apparently appointments had been given to Beauregard's son and to others, appointments to which officers under Ripley believed they were entitled. If this "unpleasant feeling" involved Ripley, it exemplifies Seabrook's statement, quoted earlier, regarding Ripley's support for his officers and men. On January 7, 1862, Governor Pickens wrote a somewhat contradictory letter to President Davis:

... I fear the feeling of General Ripley towards General Lee may do injury to the public service. His habit is to say extreme things even before junior officers, and this is well calculated to do great injury to General Lee's command. I do not think General Ripley means half what he says in his energetic way, but others construe it differently.²¹

The controversy over the defense of Charleston and the coast of South Carolina began to focus on Cole's Island. On February 19, 1862, Lee wrote to Ripley:

I am in favor of abandoning all exposed points as far as possible within reach of the enemy's fleet of gunboats and of taking interior positions....

If they [the batteries on Cole's Island] can be reached in great force by the enemy's gunboats they might be suppressed, and the Stono seized as an avenue of approach. If it is necessary to maintain these batteries, they should be made as strong as possible.²²

Obviously, Lee was not committed to abandoning Cole's Island.

However, in early March President Davis ordered Lee back to Virginia, and Pemberton assumed command of the Department of South Carolina and Georgia. Two weeks later, apparently discounting the significance of Cole's Island, Pemberton ordered the complete withdrawal of troops and

²⁰O.R., Vol. 6, pp. 363-364.

²¹Ibid., p. 366.

²²Ibid., p. 394.

batteries from that island.²³ Although Ripley had disagreed with Lee over lines of defense, subordination to Pemberton's injudicious orders was very difficult. W. Porcher Miles, the South Carolina congressman who chaired the Confederacy's Committee on Military Affairs, received a long letter on March 10 from William H. Trescott, a Charleston native who had been assistant secretary of state in the Buchanan administration. Trescott stated in part:

Gen. Lee has been relieved and Gen. Pemberton is now in command. Subordination to Lee is one thing, subordination to Pemberton an entirely different thing....

Whatever Gen. Pemberton's reputation and whatever he has done (unknown here certainly) to be made Major General, it is a great and crying injustice to allow him to [outrank?] Ripley in this military district.²⁴

Trescott followed this letter with another on April 3:

Pemberton has ... interfered most injudiciously not only to Gen. Ripley's great dissatisfaction, but to the universal discontent of the whole country....

Every spot of land, every marsh, every island, every creek has been examined, measured, sounded by Gen. Ripley and those under his command: time, money, labour, energy have been expended in preparing these defenses and now General Pemberton is to ride over this country at a hard gallop, look over a map which he can't understand, and all must be abandoned....

I have seen him [Ripley] constantly and closely and I can bear my honest testimony to his energy and ability. I care not what his faults may be, his work stands there to prove his capacity and his fidelity...

[T]his command should be his fully and entirely.... I did hope that Gen. Lee would take this view, but I have been disappointed.²⁵

Within three weeks, Trescott redirected his efforts on Ripley's behalf. On April 22, 1862, he urgently telegraphed Miles, "Ripley is very anxious to be relieved and allowed to go [to] Virginia with the troops taken from him for that neighborhood. I am sure his place here cannot be supplied, but it is only justice to him to give him power equal to his responsibilities or let him take

the field."²⁶

The Confederate government accepted Ripley's request to be relieved of duty in the Charleston area, and he was given command of the Fifth Brigade of General D. H. Hill's division in Virginia. Ripley's brigade participated in the battles of Mechanicsville, Gaines Mill, and Malvern Hill during the Peninsular Campaign. In September 1862 Ripley's brigade crossed the Potomac into Maryland as part of Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia and was engaged at the battle of Boonesborough. It became heavily involved early in the battle of Sharpsburg (Antietam) on September 17, 1862; there, Ripley was wounded while reforming his brigade.²⁷ According to D. H. Hill, "Brigadier-General Ripley received a severe wound in the throat from a Minieball, which would have proven fatal but for passing through his cravat. After his wound was dressed, he heroically returned to the field, and remained to the close of the day with his brigade."²⁸

During this time, the situation in Charleston deteriorated for John C. Pemberton. Pressure mounted for his removal and on August 29 Beauregard was sent back to South Carolina to relieve him. Shortly after his arrival, leading men of Charleston urged Beauregard to obtain the services of Roswell Ripley. Following the battle of Antietam, Ripley had expressed interest in returning to Charleston and had written to Beauregard, "I would not like the defense of Charleston to go without being in & as we had such good results formerly I really hope that should we be associated again we should be as fortunate. I shall I trust be fit for duty in a few days." In mid-October Ripley arrived in Charleston. As commander of the First Military District, he was to direct his attention "to the defenses of Charleston Harbor, which must be placed in as complete condition for immediate service as circumstances will permit."²⁹

In early November Beauregard and Ripley began to have difficulties with Major F. L. Childs of the Charleston Arsenal. General Beauregard had decided he must quickly "rifle and band" as many heavy artillery pieces as possible. Citing the unacceptably slow work of Childs, Beauregard placed the project under Ripley's control and Childs was later arrested for not complying with Ripley's orders. Beauregard and Ripley were in agreement regarding this matter and worked well together with no evidence of discord.³⁰ In February 1863 Beauregard wrote the following in support of

²⁶Ibid., April 12, 1862.

²⁷O.R., Vol. 11, Pt. II, pp. 485, 647; Vol. 19, Pt. I, pp. 1032-1033.

²⁸Ibid., p. 1027.

²⁹O.R., Vol. 14, p. 601; Alfred Roman, *Military Operations of General Beauregard* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1884), Vol. II, p. 26; Ripley to Beauregard, September 29, 1862, Compiled Service Record of R. S. Ripley; O.R., Vol. 14, p. 641.

³⁰O.R., Vol. 14, pp. 689-692.

²³Ibid., pp. 400, 402, 420.

²⁴W. H. Trescott to W. P. Miles, March 10, 1862, E. M. Law Papers.

²⁵Ibid., April 3, 1862.

Ripley's promotion:

In his present command, as important if not more so than is now entrusted to any Major General in the service, he is daily giving the Country and myself the benefit of his administrative talent and services, and of his untiring energy and zeal in the discharge of his duties as commander of the 1st Military District of South Carolina embracing all the works for the defense of the City and Harbor of Charleston. In numbers his command is that of a Major General.³¹

Serious problems between Ripley and Beauregard's staff developed in early May when Ripley determined that the construction of defensive works on Morris Island had been lagging. This was a major concern with Union forces now on Little Folly Island, in striking distance of Morris Island. Unfortunately for Ripley, he criticized the engineer department of Beauregard's friend, Major D. B. Harris. Harris previously had been on Beauregard's staff, and had been chosen by Beauregard to head that department. There ensued charges and countercharges regarding the lack of supplies, transportation, and inadequate or ineffective utilization of labor.³² Ripley expressed his frustration on June 6, 1863, to General Thomas Jordan of Beauregard's staff, citing two to three months of "carelessness and inattention of engineer officers."³³ After the war, Ripley published correspondence on this topic. He noted that after June 21, Beauregard reaffirmed that the defensive works were to be supervised by engineer officers, not by Ripley. "Little was attempted," he wrote, "and little accomplished. The enemy attacked and carried the point about three weeks [later]."³⁴ Ripley was referring to early July 1863 when Federal forces successfully landed on the southern tip of Morris Island. In August Secretary of War James A. Seddon angrily confronted Beauregard and W. P. Miles regarding a letter from Miles which claimed this Union success resulted from Beauregard's lack of forces to defend the island. Seddon replied, "According to my conception, it was not the want of infantry force ... [but], the want of adequate works of defense at the lower end of the island."³⁵

In *The Siege of Charleston*, E. Milby Burton blames Ripley for initiating Seddon's reply, although evidence indicates it followed Miles's letter.

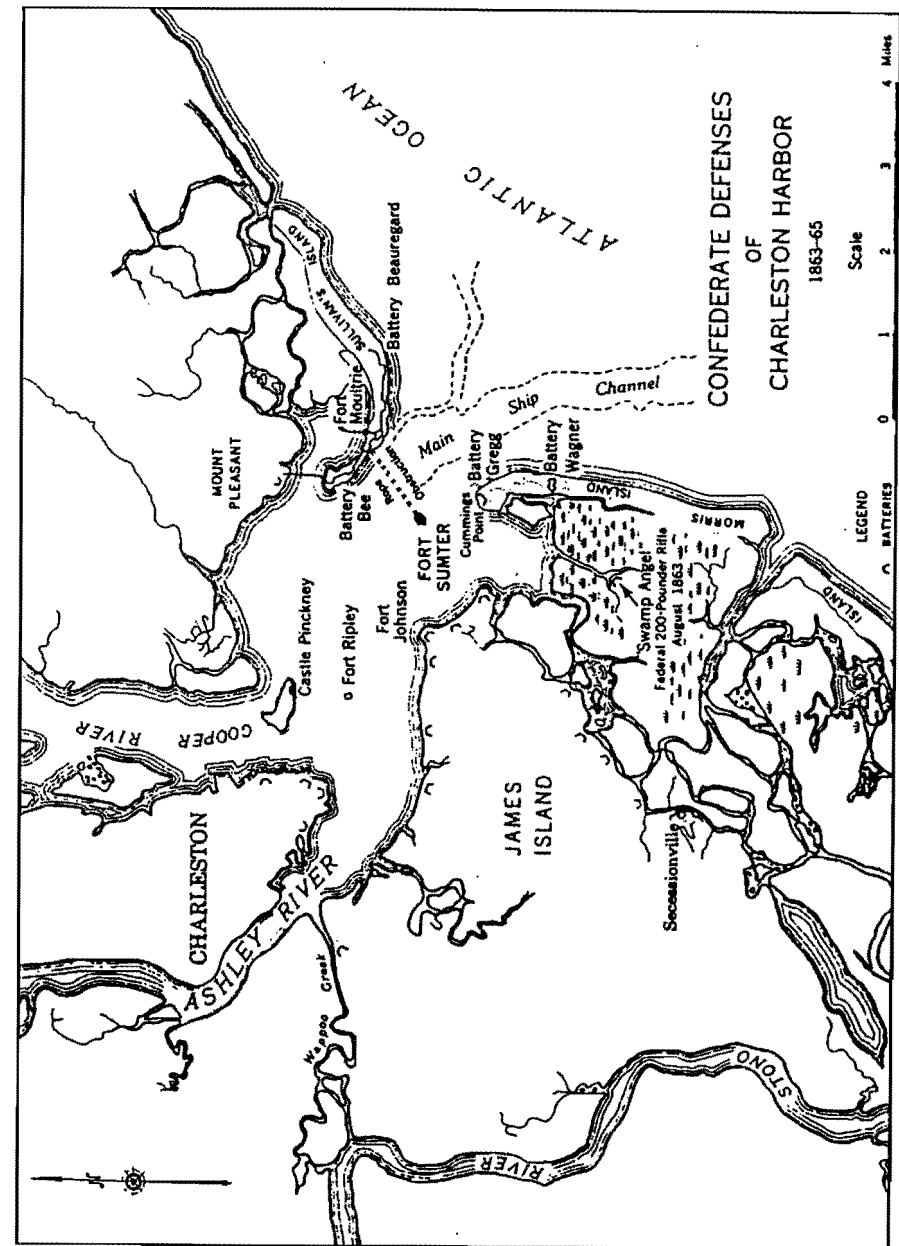
³¹P. G. T. Beauregard to S. Cooper, February 7, 1863, Compiled Service Record of R. S. Ripley.

³²O.R., Vol. 14, pp. 938, 956-957, 642, 957-959.

³³O.R., Vol. 14, pp. 1024-1025.

³⁴R. S. Ripley, *Correspondence Relating to Fortification of Morris Island* (New York: John J. Caulon, Printer, 1878), p. 23.

³⁵O.R., Vol. 28, Pt. II, pp. 186, 342-343, 297.



"Every spot of land, every marsh, every island, every creek has been examined, measured, sounded by Gen. Ripley and those under his command," wrote William H. Trescott. Among Ripley's biggest concerns were Morris Island, which was taken in June 1863, and Sullivan's Island. Map courtesy of the National Park Service, from the handbook, *Fort Sumter* by Frank Barnes.

Unfairly criticizing Ripley, Burton states that although Beauregard warned him, Ripley was unprepared for the Morris Island attack. However, it must be remembered that it was Ripley who had continually warned Beauregard of the poor defenses on the island's southern end. Union infantry attacks on the island's last stronghold, Fort Wagner, were repelled, but a continuous bombardment forced the defenders to evacuate the island.³⁶

Possibly generated by this Morris Island controversy, there appeared the first concerns about what Lieutenant Colonel Arthur J. L. Fremantle described as Ripley's "occasional rollicking habits." Fremantle, a British officer, spent three months in 1863 touring the Confederacy. He visited Charleston in early June and gave this description of Ripley:

He is a jovial character, very fond of the good things of this life; but it is said that he never allows this propensity to interfere with his military duties, in the performance of which he displays both zeal and talent. He has the reputation of being an excellent artillery officer, and although by birth a Northerner, he is a redhot and indefatigable Rebel.... Nearly all the credit of the efficiency of the Charleston fortifications is due to him.³⁷

During the war "there was a semblance of social life" in Charleston and certain of these affairs may have gotten somewhat out of control. By June 24 Beauregard had been anonymously informed that "a portion of this community are much concerned at the conduct of the brigadier general commanding the First Military District on the occasion recently, as it is represented, of a drinking frolic, either in the city or on a vessel in the harbor."³⁸ District Judge Alfred Magrath and Robert B. Rhett, Jr. interviewed Ripley and assured Beauregard that he would "not be intoxicated, ... or influenced by liquor so as at any time to interfere with the proper discharge of his duties."³⁹ Despite these problems, in early October Beauregard again requested a promotion for Ripley which was also denied. "General Ripley," he wrote, "is ... an officer of unquestionable professional ability and attainments — an artillery officer of the largest experience, he has exercised a Divisional command for nearly a year, and I believe his sphere of usefulness would be enhanced by this promotion."⁴⁰

In November 1863 the lack of progress on defensive works being

³⁶Ibid., pp. 297-298; Burton, *Siege of Charleston*, p. 209.

³⁷Arthur J. L. Fremantle, *Three Months in The Southern States, April -June 1863* (Edinburgh: W. Blackwood and Sons, 1863; repr., Time-Life Books Inc., 1983), p. 179.

³⁸Burton, *Siege of Charleston*, p. 263; O.R., Vol. 35, Pt. II, p. 634.

³⁹O.R., Vol. 35, Pt. II, p. 634.

⁴⁰P.G.T. Beauregard to S. Cooper, October 2, 1863, Compiled Service Record of R. S. Ripley.

constructed on Sullivan's Island precipitated additional charges by Ripley. Citing months of interference, inactivity, faulty dispositions, and a waste of labor, Ripley again criticized the engineers and D. B. Harris. Harris, he wrote, "pursues a course of action looking much like obstruction. That is, being unable or unwilling to effect the necessary purpose, it is endeavored to prevent others from doing it."⁴¹ Others charged with the defense of Sullivan's Island, Brigadier General Thomas L. Clingman, Colonels D. H. Hamilton and L. M. Keitt, supported Ripley with their endorsements. On January 6, 1864, refusing to hear Ripley's complaints, Beauregard's chief of staff returned Ripley's paper stating "the subject matter in the main cannot legitimately enter into communication from him [Ripley] to these headquarters."⁴² Undeterred, on April 9 Ripley again wrote of engineering deficiencies and faulty construction, this time concerning the mortar batteries on Sullivan's Island. Ripley stated, "I remained quiescent under the system adopted, and saw the works progressing slowly.... Returning from a leave of absence ... I found ... that the condition of things had not materially altered during my absence." Ripley's typically thorough report included extensive and meticulously detailed memoranda concerning all the batteries on Sullivan's Island. He concluded, "The low places on Sullivan's Island west of Fort Moultrie have not been filled up or drained to any extent, which is to be regretted, as the summer season will bring sickness if the matter is not attended to."⁴³

In another change of command, Major General Samuel Jones replaced Beauregard on April 20, 1864. Jones increased Ripley's command, adding the Fifth Military District to Ripley's First. This followed Ripley's performance in the repulse of the monitor attack on Fort Sumter in May which, according to Ripley, "proved a failure to the enemy and demonstrated the power of our heavy batteries, and the skill of our artillerists, officers and men." Ripley and Jones apparently worked well together and had no significant difficulties as of late August. Jones, in his report of August 22, 1864, described the action of the July 1-10 attack on James Island and Fort Johnson: "General Ripley's lines were not attacked, but they were constantry [sic] exposed to attack, and the reduction of his forces to reenforce General Taliaferro imposed greatly increased vigilance on him and his officers, which was met by them with alacrity."⁴⁴

One month later, a letter from Ripley to Adjutant and Inspector General Samuel Cooper precipitated a series of devastating events for Ripley. He requested a decision from Cooper which he hoped would prevent recurrence of a recent problem involving Major John F. Lay, a former inspector

⁴¹O.R., Vol. 28, Pt. II, pp. 515-519.

⁴²Ibid., p. 520.

⁴³O.R., Vol. 35, Pt. II, pp. 409-422.

⁴⁴Ibid., pp. 445, 500; Vol. 35, Pt. I, pp. 138, 126.

of cavalry on Beauregard's staff, who at that time was an assistant to General Jones. Ripley also stated, "Major Lay had been reported once in writing and several times orally for taking unauthorized and irregular actions as a staff officer." Ripley questioned orders issued by Lay which Ripley thought to be unauthorized by General Jones. Though he had been absent, Jones supported Lay and a bitter confrontation ensued.⁴⁵

In late September 1864 Beauregard, Colonel D. B. Harris, and Lieutenant Colonel Alfred Roman were ordered to return to Charleston to investigate the dispute. Over a year later, Beauregard had just filed his official report covering the action at Charleston during July-September 1863, which included the loss of Morris Island. Although his relationship with Ripley had been strained, in his report of September 18, 1864, Beauregard still praised Ripley: "I have to express my acknowledgements of the valuable services rendered by Brig. Gen. R. S. Ripley.... He was invariably active, industrious, and intelligent and carried out his important duties to my entire satisfaction."⁴⁶

Beauregard arrived in Charleston and began investigating Ripley. Reopening the old issue, he asked junior officers P. C. Warwick and J. L. Fraser (of Jones's staff) whether they had personal knowledge of Ripley having been intoxicated after June 30, 1863. Both officers stated they believed him to have been so on July 2, 1864, which Fraser determined "from his boisterous manner, excited tone, and general appearance." This despite General Jones's positive endorsement of Ripley for that period, cited above. Warwick confirmed the report filed by General Jones, that on September 17, 1864 (in Jones's absence) Ripley went to Jones's headquarters looking for Lay, "very much excited, and in a violent, rude, and insulting manner and language, accompanied with threats to Major Lay, refused to obey or receive orders from [Jones's] headquarters." Sentiment against Ripley increased as General Cooper and Secretary Seddon sided with Jones. Reporting to President Davis, Beauregard recommended that Ripley be relieved of duty in Charleston, "which offers such great temptations and facilities for indulging in his irregular habits." Beauregard wanted Harris appointed to succeed Ripley, and Ripley sent to Petersburg to command Elliott's brigade. He also stated that Jones knew of the accusations by Fraser and Warwick:

But from his conversation with them as to the particulars of General R's manner and conduct, his knowledge of the general, and his experience as judge advocate ... he was satisfied that a charge to that effect [intoxication] could not have been sustained

⁴⁵Ibid., Vol. 35, Pt. I, p. 549; Vol. 35, Pt. II, pp. 162, 628-629.

⁴⁶Ibid., Vol. 35, Pt. II, p. 630, Vol. 28, Pt. I, p. 91.

before a court, and therefore thought it best not to prefer the charge.⁴⁷

Changes in command occurred before this problem could be resolved, and on October 2, 1864, Beauregard assumed command of the two western departments previously under Generals John B. Hood and Richard Taylor. Lieutenant General W. J. Hardee was appointed to replace Jones who was ill, and the Second South Carolina subdistrict was given to Ripley. The newly arrived Hardee was unable to replace Ripley with Harris, as Harris had died of yellow fever. One wonders if the undrained areas on Sullivan's Island, reported previously by Ripley, played a part in this epidemic.⁴⁸

By this time the Ripley-Jones dispute had reached President Davis, who concluded, "If General Ripley had learned from the staff officer before the order was issued that it did not emanate from General Jones, he was not bound to obey it."⁴⁹ In November, news of Beauregard's efforts to relieve Ripley reached the citizens of Charleston. In protest, representatives of the city and adjoining parishes petitioned Secretary of War Seddon and President Davis. Endorsed by Governor M. L. Bonham and presented by Senators Orr and Barnwell, the petition stated, "General Ripley in his services for the defense of Charleston has evinced marked military capacity, knowledge, energy, sagacity, and judgement.... [T]he undersigned respectfully say that they would regard his removal as a public calamity." Senator Orr stated Ripley had been placed on furlough.⁵⁰

Conditions were becoming cataclysmic for the Confederacy. In September Union forces captured Atlanta and by Christmas they occupied Savannah, preparing to invade South Carolina.⁵¹ Yet in December 1864, despite the impending demise of the Confederacy and all of Ripley's other problems, he managed to join with some prominent Charleston citizens to form a land-development company. The company was to develop 917 acres of "high land with marshes attached" in St. Luke's Parish, Beaufort District. Ripley purchased one share of the company, which was capitalized at \$165,000, with thirty-three shares at \$5,000 each. A list of the twenty-two other investors includes members of the Bee, Ravenel, Rhett, Heyward, Eason, Gregory, and Claussen families. There is no recorded fate of the company, but for obvious reasons the company most surely failed.⁵²

⁴⁷O.R., Vol. 35, Pt. II, pp. 629-633.

⁴⁸Roman, *Beauregard*, Vol. II, p. 278; O.R., Vol. 35, Pt. II, pp. 643-644, 649-650, 639, 422.

⁴⁹O.R., Vol. 35, Pt. II, p. 630.

⁵⁰Ibid., pp. 646-647.

⁵¹E. B. Long, *The Civil War Day by Day: An Almanac 1861-1865* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Co., 1971), pp. 565, 613-614.

⁵²Charles Cummings, "Seven Ohio Confederate Generals: Case Histories in Defection," unpublished dissertation, Ohio State University, 1963, pp. 734-735.

Ripley's problems escalated in 1865. In early January Beauregard, who was now in Montgomery, ordered Ripley to report to General Hood. Ripley, on furlough and departing for Virginia, requested an extension of his leave, and asked not to be assigned to a command under Beauregard due to Beauregard's "personal motives of hostility." The next day Ripley's leave was revoked.⁵³

On January 28 Major General D. H. Hill, then in Augusta, received a communication from Beauregard's staff ordering Ripley, if he was there, to report to General Cheatham for assignment to Gist's brigade.⁵⁴ Evidently, Beauregard did not know Ripley was on leave in Virginia. Twenty years later, in a *New York World* interview, Ripley related that in December 1864, he had written to Governor Magrath of South Carolina regarding the state's defenses against Sherman's approaching army. Governor Magrath "advised me to go to Richmond," which he did.⁵⁵ Early in February 1865 Union forces began their march into South Carolina. Beauregard, then in Columbia, still had not found Ripley and expressed his frustration to Hardee. "Should General Ripley be still in Charleston," he wrote, "inquire for [what] reason he has not joined his brigade in Augusta, and order him there forthwith, via Columbia. Should he disobey, send him in arrest."⁵⁶ On February 13 Beauregard finally learned that Ripley was in Virginia. After many favorable reports and twice recommending Ripley for promotion, Beauregard responded vehemently: "Brigadier-General Ripley is active, energetic, intelligent, ambitious, cunning and faultfinding. He complains of every commanding officer he has served under, and has quarreled (or had difficulties) with almost every one of his immediate subordinate commanders."⁵⁷ In his anger Beauregard grossly overstated Ripley's problems. While he did differ with Lee over Charleston's defenses, he was not alone in his vigorous objections to Pemberton. With Jones and Beauregard, his "complaining" concerned not them, but their subordinates Lay and Harris. Ripley's staff referred to him positively during and after the war.

Ripley's activities from late February until the end of the war are not well documented. According to Seabrook, "General Ripley ... reported to General Johnston on the evening of the Battle of Bentonville.... [H]e was again ordered to South Carolina for duty. Arriving at Chester, South Carolina he heard of the surrender of the Confederate armies and the fall of the Confederacy."⁵⁸

⁵³O.R., Vol. 47, Pt. II, p. 1001, 1030-1032.

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 1051.

⁵⁵*New York World*, "A Talk with Gen. Ripley," March 17, 1885.

⁵⁶O.R., Vol. 47, Pt. II, pp. 1158.

⁵⁷Ibid., p. 1031.

⁵⁸Seabrook, *Address, Ripley Monument*, p. 12.

INFORMATION CONCERNING RIPLEY'S ACTIVITIES AFTER THE war also is not abundant. After leaving Chester, it is reported that:

He joined his family at Society Hill, South Carolina, and after a short time went with them to England, and obtained employment in a manufacturing establishment in London....

[T]he French Government ... offered him a lucrative contract for a large number of rifles ... [but] the machinery was claimed by the United States Government as property of the Confederacy, and this caused the failure of the contract. General Ripley returned to New York.... Having cast his fortunes with the Confederacy, he bore the consequence of defeat bravely, and manfully, without repining.⁵⁹

In New York City Ripley lived "at the New York Hotel for some years, ... [and] made one of that coterie of men — ex-Federals and ex-Confederates — who distinguished themselves in that struggle and who have since made the New York Hotel their headquarters." At this hotel, on the morning of March 19, 1887, Roswell Ripley suffered a stroke and died later that night.⁶⁰

"The Sad and Sudden End of Charleston's Gallant Defender" was reported on the front page of the *News and Courier*. Upon learning that Ripley had requested burial in Charleston, Mayor W. A. Courtenay responded that the city "would esteem it a high privilege to carry out the last wish of the superb old soldier, who, while he lived, loved Charleston."⁶¹

On Sunday, April 3, Ripley's funeral and burial service took place in Charleston. With all city and port flags at half-mast, the bells of St. Michael's tolled from 8:00 a.m. until 10:00 a.m., the hour of the funeral service at St. Luke's Church. Johnson Hagood, former Confederate general and post-war governor of South Carolina, attended as did the cadets and staff of The Citadel. Pallbearers included former Ripley staff officers Colonels Alfred Rhett and E.M. Seabrook, Lieutenant Colonel P. C. Gaillard, and Major T. A. Huguenin, and former war-time governor A. G. Magrath. As reported in the *News and Courier*, "The City of Charleston ... paid its debt of gratitude to its heroic defender.... It has been many years indeed, since an event of so much significance has taken place in this old city."⁶²

Seven years later, Colonel Seabrook gave the dedication speech at Magnolia Cemetery for the unveiling of the Ripley Monument. The Survivor's Association and other Charleston citizens erected the monument of polished Carolina granite. It reads:

⁵⁹Ibid., p. 12.

⁶⁰*New York World*, March 30, 1887.

⁶¹*Charleston News and Courier*, March 30, 31, 1887.

⁶²Ibid., March 31, 1887.

IN MEMORY OF
BRIG. GEN R. S. RIPLEY, C.S.A.
IN RECOGNITION OF HIS MILITARY SKILL
AND HIS
DEVOTED SERVICES IN THE DEFENSE OF CHARLESTON HARBOR⁶³

Henry Timrod, the Charleston-born poet later known as the "Laureate of the Confederacy," had written a poem in honor of Ripley, two stanzas of which are on the monument:

Rich in red honors that upon him lie
As lightly as the Summer dews
Fall where he won his fame beneath the sky
Of tropic Vera Cruz;

Gay Chieftain! on the crimson rolls of Fame
Thy deeds are written with the sword
But there are greater thoughts which with thy name
Thy country's page shall hoard.⁶⁴

Most modern writers have been excessively critical of Roswell Ripley. Unsubstantiated claims that Ripley was unable to "get along" with both his superiors and his subordinates have been repeated until they have now assumed mythical proportions. Ripley's years of dedicated, productive Confederate service have been forgotten or ignored. Ripley would not tolerate inefficiency or incompetence. His "complaining" was directed against those who were inept or negligent in their duties. His timely, meticulously detailed official reports are indicative of the perfection for which he strived and are contrary to the charges that his performance was impaired by his "irregular habits." Admittedly Ripley had faults and shortcomings. However, the citizens of Charleston still continued to express their appreciation and unwavering devotion at the time of his death, some twenty years after the fall of the Confederacy. There were many who participated in the defense of Charleston during the War for Southern Independence, but one of the most constant and devoted was Roswell Sabin Ripley.

⁶³Seabrook, *Address, Ripley Monument*, p. 13.

⁶⁴H. T. Thompson, *Henry Timrod, Laureate of the Confederacy* (Columbia, S.C.: The State Company, 1928); P. H. Hayne, *The Poems of Henry Timrod* (New York: Arno Press, 1972) pp. 99-100; personal visit to Magnolia Cemetery, Charleston, S.C.