

## French Forrest

(4 Oct 1796 – 22 Nov 1866)

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*The Evening Star, November 23, 1866*

### Death of Admiral Forrest

Admiral French Forrest, formerly of the United States Navy, late of the Confederate Navy, died at a quarter to 2 o'clock p.m., on the 22d inst. after a short but painful illness of typhoid fever, in the 71st year of his age. Admiral Forrest fought bravely in the War of 1812; he was in the naval engagement under Commodore Perry; also fought valiantly in the Mexican war; he was appointed at that time Adjutant General of the land and naval forces, and the responsible duty devolved upon him of having the forces transported into the interior of Mexico. When Virginia seceded, he joined the fortunes of the Southern Confederacy, and was given the position of commander-in-chief of the naval forces of Virginia, and commanded at the Norfolk Navy Yard, and was afterwards appointed to the command of the James River Squadron, and then acting Assistant Secretary of the Navy. A kind and affectionate husband and father, and a true and sincere friend, beloved and respected by all who knew him. His funeral will take place from the residence of his brother, Bladen Forrest, No. 78 1st street, Georgetown, on Saturday, the 24th instant, at one o'clock p.m.

Commandant of the Navy Yard. Officer U.S. Virginia and Confederate States Navies. Commander of the Norfolk Navy Yard. Pulled the Merrimack off of the sand bar during the battle with the Monitor.

*(Source to be determined)*

Naval officer. Born in St. Mary's County, Maryland, Forrest entered the U.S. Navy as a midshipman in June 1811. He was aboard USS Hornet when it fought HMS Peacock in 1813 and claimed service in the Battle of Lake Erie. Rising to the rank of captain in 1844, he commanded the landing operations of Gen. Winfield Scott's American army at Vera Cruz during the Mexican War. From 1855 to 1856 he was the head of the Washington Navy Yard.

Resigning his commission after Virginia's secession, Forrest joined the state navy of Virginia as a captain in April 1861. He accepted a commission at the same rank in the Confederate navy in June, making him its third-ranking officer. He had commanded the navy yard at Norfolk while in Virginia service, and he remained in that position when he entered the Confederate navy. His primary task was the reconstruction of the ineffectively scuttled USS Merrimack into the ironclad ram CSS Virginia. Command of the vessel, however, went to Franklin Buchanan, much to Forrest's disappointment. Forrest was replaced at Norfolk three months after the Battle of Hampton Roads to become the head of the Office of Orders and Details. There he was responsible for ensuring the flow of correspondence and orders within the Confederate Naval Department.

In March 1863 he took command of the James River Squadron. Frustrated by this squadron's relative inactivity, Secretary of the Navy Stephen R. Mallory replaced him with Commdr. John K. Mitchell in May 1864. Since his name disappears from the roster of Confederate naval officers by June, he apparently was dismissed from service. After the war, he returned to his home in Alexandria, Virginia, and died in Washington, D.C., in November 1866.

### Bibliography

Forrest, Douglas French. *Odyssey in Gray: A Diary of Confederate Service 1863-1865*. Richmond, Va., 1979

Johnson, Allen, and Dumas Malone, eds. Dictionary of American Biography, New York, 1931  
Still, William N., Jr. Iron Afloat: The Story of the Confederate Armorclads. Nashville, TN, 1971.

*Civil War Biographies*

**Forrest, French (1796-1866)**

Already 65 by the outbreak of the Civil War, French Forrest failed to measure up as the commander of the Confederacy's James River Squadron. The Maryland native was a veteran of five decades in the navy including the War of 1812 battle of Lake Erie and service at Alvarado and Vera Cruz during the Mexican War. He joined the Southern war effort in 1861, and his assignments included: captain, Virginia Navy (1861); commanding Norfolk Navy Yard (ca. April 25, 1861 - ca. May 9, 1862); captain, CSN (1861); chief, Office of Orders and Detail (1862-63); and commanding James River Squadron (1863-ca. May 1864). When the Union fleet abandoned Norfolk, Forrest was dispatched by the Virginia authorities to take charge of the naval equipment and stores there. During the famous fights of the Virginia and Monitor in Hampton Roads he was aboard the tugboat Harmony. After the fall of Norfolk he was made a bureau chief in the Navy Department and then took charge of the small flotilla on the James. During 1863 the squadron's poor behavior was blamed on Forrest who was relieved by John K. Mitchell in early 1864. While Forrest's name had appeared on the naval register of January 1, 1864, it was missing from that of June 1, and it must be assumed that he had been dropped from the rolls. In any event he barely outlived the war.

*The National Intelligencer, Oct. 13, 1846*

**List of Officers of the United States Frigate Command**

. . . French, Forrest, captain