The army engineers laughed at this wide-browed, unassuming man when he suggested building a dam so as to release Admiral Porter's fleet imprisoned by low water above the Falls at Alexandria at the close of the futile Red River expedition in 1864. Bailey had been a lumberman in Wisconsin and had there gained the practical experience which taught him that the plan was feasible. He was Acting Chief Engineer of the Nineteenth Army Corps at this time, and obtained permission to go ahead and build his dam. In the undertaking he had the approval and earnest support of Admiral Porter, who refused to consider for a moment the abandonment of any of his vessels even though the Red River expedition had been ordered to return and General Banks was chafing at delay and sending messages to Porter that his troops must be got in motion at once. Bailey pushed on with his work and in eleven days he succeeded in so raising the water in the channel that all the Federal vessels were able to pass down below the Falls. "Words are inadequate," said Admiral Porter, in his report, "to express the admiration I feel for the ability of Lieut. Colonel Bailey. This is without doubt the best engineering feat ever performed. . . . The highest honors the Government can bestow on Colonel Bailey can never repay him for the service he has rendered the country." For this achievement Bailey was promoted to colonel, brevetted brigadier general, voted the thanks of Congress, and presented with a sword and a purse of $3,000 by the officers of Porter's fleet. He settled in Missouri after the war and was a formidable enemy of the "Bushwhackers" till he was shot by them on March 21, 1867. He was born at Salem, Ohio, April 28, 1827.

This powerful gunboat, the Lafayette, though accompanying Admiral Porter on the Red River expedition, was not one of those entrapped at Alexandria. Her heavy draft precluded her being taken above the Falls. Here we see her lying above Vicksburg in the spring of 1863. She and her sister ship, the Choctaw, were side-wheel steamers altered into casemate ironclads with rams. The Lafayette had the stronger armament, carrying two 11-inch Dahlgrens forward, four 9-inch guns in the broadside, and two 24-pound howitzers, with two 100-pound Parrott guns astern. She and the Choctaw were the most important acquisitions to Porter's fleet toward the end of 1862. The Lafayette was built and armed for heavy fighting. She got her first taste of it on the night of April 16, 1863, when Porter took part of his fleet past the Vicksburg batteries to support Grant's crossing of the river in an advance on Vicksburg from below. The Lafayette, with a barge and a transport lashed to her, held her course with difficulty through the tornado of shot and shell which poured from the Confederate batteries on the river front in Vicksburg as soon as the movement was discovered. The Lafayette stood up to this fiery christening and successfully ran the gantlet, as did all the other vessels save one transport. She was commanded during the Red River expedition by Lieutenant-Commander J. P. Foster.