

The Battle Of Sandy Point

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the early part of the year 1865 that he was feeding at least one-half of Lee's army as a result of the successful running of the federal blockade, which was then being vigorously pressed by the northern fleet against all sound and other inland waterways of the eastern section of the state.

There were four military operations of primary importance within the state, namely the federal conquest and retention of the sound region of the Albemarle country; the capture of Fort Fisher and nearby Wilmington; Stoneman's raid and Sherman's invasion on his march to the sea.

Having due cognizance of the great strategic importance of the sound region, the North dispatched strong and well equipped naval and military forces under the commands of Generals Benjamin F. Butler and Ambrose Burnside, for the conquest of these points, all of which were poorly defended, due primarily to the fact that the great bulk of the soldiers from these sections had hurried to Richmond and joined Lee's army.

Consequently, the federal forces met with little difficulty in capturing the weakly defended Hatteras Inlet (August 29, 1862); Roanoke Island (February 8); New Bern (March 14); Washington (March 21); Fort Macon (April 26) and Plymouth on December 13 following.

By these actions the federal forces were enabled to control practically all of the coastal area of North Carolina throughout most of the period of the conflict. This furnished the northern forces an excellent base from which to conduct raids, as a consequence of which the southern forces considered the position of Norfolk to be so vulnerable to attack that it was subsequently evacuated by the Confederate defenders.

Moreover, this strategy on the part of the federal forces constituted a continuous threat to the remainder of North Carolina, as well as to the Wilmington & Weldon Railroad and likewise to Lee's army in Virginia, which so desperately needed supplies over this route.

Being unable to send adequate land forces to North Carolina for about two years, the North could not fully exploit the strategy and

inestimable value afforded by their bases in this state. Consequently, the Confederate forces were able to hold back the Northern forces sufficiently to insure Lee's safety, but they did not have the necessary sinews of war to drive them from the state, despite the fact that the civil population was suffering untold hardships by reason of the federal occupation.

As a result, sharp criticism was directed to President Jefferson Davis of the Confederate States, and so loud were the demands for the return of sufficient North Carolina troops from Virginia "to drive out the Yankee invaders" that Davis and Lee, in 1864, ordered General Hoke to clear the state of the enemy.

Hoke formulated his plans and in a surprise move captured the town of Plymouth in a brilliantly executed engagement on the 24th of April, 1864.

Meanwhile, the Confederate ram "Albemarle" was being secretly built at a place called Edward's Ferry, up the Roanoke River. Having a length of 152 feet, with a beam of 45 feet, she was covered with armor plates of iron measuring two inches in thickness.

It was the strategy of General Hoke that his army recapture Plymouth, while the ram Albemarle drive the federal ships of war down the Roanoke River, bombarding the fort erected at points along the river, and subsequently to rid the Albemarle Sound and other coastal waters of the Yankee fleet.

Commanded by Captain J. W. Cooke, the "Albemarle" steamed down the Roanoke, fitting her guns in place as she proceeded on her urgent mission. The federal fleet "got wind" of this plan to break their blockade and withdrew their warships to the Albemarle Sound a few miles to a point opposite Edenton Bay, where they confidently expected to destroy her when she entered the sound.

Meanwhile, there were some old cannon which were brought to Edenton during the Revolutionary War from France on the vessel named Holy Heart of Jesus, commanded at that time by a Captain Borritz in the year 1776. These were ordered by Thomas Benbury and Robert Smith, acting as agents of Gov-

ernor Caswell, but were never used during that period.

The cannon were mounted on the water front at Edenton to command the Edenton Bay entrance to the harbor in 1862, but were spiked by the federal forces by breaking off their trunnions, rendering them useless, since they could no longer be swiveled, or turned in different directions.

However, during the spring of 1864, in order to delay any more on the part of the federal fleet, the men of Edenton again mounted some of these old cannon on the water front overlooking Edenton Bay for the dual purpose of preventing or discouraging the landing of northern troops for occupation on Edenton, as well as to otherwise occupy the attention of the Yankee naval forces until the ram Albemarle could arrive in the sound and give them battle.

After several days, the federal forces landed a party of Marines on Hayes Plantation near Edenton, who accordingly marched into town. They were much chagrined to learn upon arriving at the site of the cannon that they could not be fired, for the reason that there was no one remaining in town save old men and the women folk, all young men of military age having gone to Richmond where they joined Lee's army. Also, that there was no ammunition. The officer in charge of the Marine contingent remarked that the cannon were more dangerous to the men behind them than to those marching in front.

This ruse proved very effective, for it bought time so badly needed by the Albemarle, which fought its way down the Roanoke River and emerged into the Albemarle Sound, where it engaged the federal squadron of seven gunboats and double-enders in a furious battle opposite Sandy Point, about five miles east of Edenton at the place where the present highway bridge connects the counties of Chowan and Washington.

This battle, on the afternoon of May 5, 1864, raged unabated for about three hours in a strange combat between the iron and the wood. Some of the federal men of war, as well as the Southern ram Albemarle were equipped with long sharp booms which extended out beyond their bow, whereby the attacking vessel might ram a hole in the defending ship.

The federal ship Sassacus attempted to ram the Albemarle,

then to engage her crew in a man-to-man struggle, with the intention of sinking her by means of a torpedo and, finally, to throw a keg of gunpowder down her smokestack.

These plans proved of no avail, due to the armor plates on the Confederate ship, which inflicted crippling punishment upon the enemy vessels by means of her heavily armored prow, as well as her guns. The ram smashed and sank one Union gunboat, set fire to another with her cannon, forcing the remaining ships to flee in great haste and disorder.

As the sun slowly sank into the west as a great ball of fire, a fantastic contrast to the flames shooting from some of the federal ships, the ram Albemarle proudly made her way in the closing twilight back up the Roanoke River and Plymouth, having to utilize bacon and lard as fuel, it's supply of wood being exhausted.

Meanwhile, with the federal blockade of the inland waters of the area having been broken by this brilliant action on the part of the ram Albemarle. General Hoke's Confederate troops were enabled to recapture Washington, North Carolina, and launched an attack on New Bern when his army was summoned to Virginia to assist General Lee in his losing struggle with Grant's forces.

In the hope of preventing this eventuality and the resulting loss of the region's water and rail facilities, the federal forces made desperate efforts to rid themselves of this seagoing "monster," but all in vain. Finally, a young Yankee lieutenant named William Barker Cushing appeared with a vow that he would "get another stripe or I'll get a coffin." He suggested that he would destroy the ram Albemarle with a torpedo projected some 14 feet in front of his boat by means of a hinged spar, or boom.

Cushing's proposal was approved, whereupon he secured a small steam launch about 30 feet long. The boom was attached and a 150-pound mine was fastened to the end of same. To successfully explode the mine, it was necessary that the launch run up close to its intended target, lower the boom and the mine under the hull of the enemy ship and trigger the explosive, thus creating an exceedingly hazardous, if not fatal situation for the attacking crew of the launch. To survive at all de-

pendent upon their sneaking upon the Albemarle without being detected.

Selecting the night of October 27, 1864, for his hazardous and, as many believed, suicidal attempt, when the Roanoke River was shrouded in a dense fog from the great swamps bordering the river for most of its approximate eight miles from Plymouth to the mouth of the river, which empties into the upper Albemarle Sound, the launch, containing himself and 14 volunteers silently made its way past a guard post and arrived within a few yards from the Confederate ram.

The crew of the Albemarle had chained boom logs around their ship as protection against floating mines, which might rush down the river by means of the swift tide which is usually prevalent. Feeling thereby a sense of security, all but a few guards had gone ashore. About this time someone lighted a large bonfire on shore, to the consternation of Cushing and his crew.

A guard on the Albemarle, detecting the presence of the federal launch, gave the alarm. A hail of bullets and buckshot began riddling the small boat, tearing the clothing of Cushing and even ripping his shoe. Undaunted, he ordered the launch full speed ahead, forcing her on top of the boom logs, sliding over them, thus placing his boat sufficiently close whereby he was able to lower the boom and push the mine under the ram. Cushing then pulled the lanyard, exploding the mine with a thunderous noise, which shook every timber in the Southern ship.

Both the Albemarle and the launch sank almost immediately. All of Cushing's crew, except himself and one other, perished either by the explosion or drowning. Cushing and his remaining crewmen swam across the river, which is very narrow, then trudged their tortuous way along its shore through almost impenetrable swamp and marsh until daybreak. They were then picked up by another federal launch and taken to their ship. For his great and daring feat, he was promoted to the rank of lieutenant commander, thus achieving his avowed intention of "getting another stripe." He was only 21 years of age at the time.

North Carolina was reluctant to secede from the Union, only

joining the Confederacy after President Lincoln had issued his call for troops to fight against the South, a great many of her citizens considering it an unnecessary and tragic mistake, believing that a common ground for resolving their differences could be found short of war.

However, when the die was once cast, the people of this state made every possible sacrifice for the Southern cause. Her troops were at the forefront in every major battle from Bethel on June 10, 1861, to Johnston's surrender in April, 1865. Some historians once said that Tar Heel troops were "First at Bethel, farthest at Gettysburg and Chickamauga and last at Appomattox."

Many deeds of heroism were never recorded. There were cases of father being arrayed against son, and brother against brother in what has come to be known as the greatest tragedy, and the only cloud upon the history of our great and beloved nation.

During the Battle of Roanoke Island in Dare County on February 8, 1862, an event occurred which one might call the irony of fate. A Confederate soldier named Absalom Williams — a great-uncle of this writer — was captured by the federal Marines. He was taken aboard their ship, with a number of other prisoners and forced to carry wood from the deck to the hold of the gunboat for use as fuel. In the course of his enforced labor, a shell from one of his own shore batteries landed on deck, killing him instantly.

Such is warfare, but Sherman had a more vivid description for it, as was witnessed by those in his path on his famous march to the sea, when he adopted a policy of the scorched earth. He claimed that by creating such great hardships on the populace, the end of the struggle would be hastened.

This article is respectfully dedicated to those brave men and women on both sides of the historic and tragic struggle, for the courage of their convictions, right or wrong, and who were willing to lay down their lives for the cause in which they honestly believed.

Therefore, none should view this centennial as one of glorification, but rather in humble and reverent commemoration of an historic event, to the end that

the recollection thereof might be an ever present reminder that all differences should be resolved around the conference table, rather than upon the battlefield.

Very Unkind

A very small man married a widow who was unusually tall and large. A few weeks after the wedding one of his friends came upon him looking very glum.

"What's the matter?" asked the friend. "Isn't your new wife agreeable?"

"She's kindness itself," said the small one sadly.

"Isn't she a good housekeeper — a good cook?"

"None better in the world," said the groom drooping a little more.

"Then, what's the matter?"

"I'd be perfectly happy," blurted the little man, "if people didn't call me the widow's mite."



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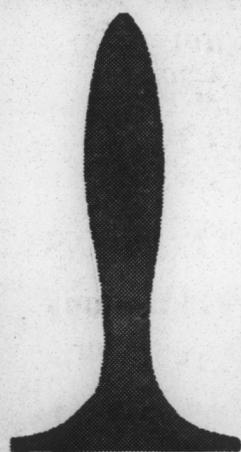
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