

THE CAPTURE OF PLYMOUTH, N. C.

Additional Particulars.

Correspondence of the Petersburg Express.

Plymouth, N. C., April 21, 1864.

I embrace this opportunity to send you a brief account of the attack and capture of this place.

Plymouth, as your readers well know, is situated on the south bank of the Roanoke river, 8 miles from its mouth, in Washington county. It has been in the quiet possession of the Yankees for some time, and is one of the most strongly fortified places in North Carolina.

Twenty-three hundred prisoners, with the Brig General commanding, (Wessel,) large quantities of quartermaster, commissary and sutler's stores, and about twenty-five or thirty pieces of artillery, fell into our possession.

Our loss is small when we consider the terrific assault our forces had to make on the works of the enemy. We have to mourn the loss of some brave men and officers.

The town, surrounded by immense fortifications with a large square fort immediately in front, commanding all the roads, and containing five large guns. To the left of the town, approaching it, is situated another fort, with two guns commanding the country for a mile around.

All the trees have been cut down, and there remains an open plain to the range of their guns. Through this, our boys had to charge, capturing fort after fort in detail, and being exposed to the raking fire of their guns. The attack was well planned and as well executed, and reflects great credit upon Gen. Hoke, who has already won for himself a reputation in the army of North Virginia, and the capture of Plymouth adds another feather to his war-plum.

The attack commenced Sunday evening, the 17th inst., and ended Wednesday morning, the 20th, at 12 o'clock. Thus you see we had something to do. Gen. Wessel, who commanded the Yankees, stubbornly resisted, fighting from fort to fort, and the town was captured, retreated into Fort Williams, and only surrendered amid the booming of our guns.

The attack on the town was made by the brigade of Gen. Ransom, on the 20th, at day-light, and all joined in the praise of its gallantry and success, as they had to charge work after work, and fight hand to hand in the streets as they drove the enemy before them into their large stronghold, Fort Williams.

The Branch Field Artillery from Petersburg, (now Pegram's Battery) conducted itself nobly, and suffered from the terrific fire of the forts in the open field eight hundred yards distant. Eight of the horses were killed and seven wounded. The destruction of property in the town is awful to behold. Caissons are blown up, dead horses and men fill up the streets, and the place is completely riddled by cannon shot.

But before I close this desultory letter, I must do justice to the Navy, which so ably performed the part assigned to it. Capt. Cook, with his iron-clad Albemarle, out fought himself. He cleared out the river, sinking the gunboat Southfield, mounting six guns, and disabling two others, which finally escaped, besides capturing several tug boats and lighters.

Another Account.

Our forces arrived in front of Plymouth on Sunday afternoon, 17th April, about 4 o'clock, and succeeded in capturing most of the enemy's pickets, which were stationed a few miles from town, and felt their works, and finding them much stronger than was anticipated, the men being equipped by a long day's march, the attack was postponed until next day.

During the whole day Monday the artillery and sharpshooters were engaged with their gunboats and forts, which resulted in one of the former being sunk. At about dusk on the same evening, Fort Sanderson, a very strong earthwork, was assaulted and carried by storm, after a spirited resistance. During this assault a number of our men were killed by hand grenades in the ditch. After carrying the above-named fort our forces advanced close up to the main works of the enemy, on the west side of the town. On Tuesday morning at two o'clock the Albemarle, one of our iron-clad gunboats, commanded by Capt. Cook, came down the river and engaged the enemy's batteries and gunboats which were lying in front of the town. The enemy's boats attempted to board her, which attack was handsomely repulsed. They also attempted to trap her, having stretched a chain under water across the space that intervened between their boats; but instead of running between them Capt. Cook made direct for the largest, striking her amidships, and sank her in a few minutes, together with most of the officers and crew, only a few of whom were picked up. He immediately engaged the other, and pursued her some distance down the river, but not deeming it prudent to venture too far down the river, he returned to his former position in front of Plymouth.

After daylight on the same morning Gen. Hoke demanded a surrender of the place and its defenses, which demand the enemy declined to accede to. During the day their works were reconnoitered and felt at different points. Tuesday night the position of our troops was moved around through a very difficult route to the east or opposite side of the town. At daylight Wednesday morning they charged and carried the entire line of fortifications on the east side, driving the enemy at the point of the bayonet completely through the town to the opposite side, where some of our troops were left, who succeeded in capturing a large number of prisoners.

During all day Tuesday and Wednesday morning the Albemarle, with the gallant Cook in command, engaged the enemy's batteries, taking them in reverse. The town now being entirely in our possession, together with all the enemy's works, with the exception of the main fort, a demand was made for its surrender, which was refused, but as soon as our sharpshooters commenced to advance, the enemy began to desert by twos, threes and twenties, coming into our lines and throwing down their arms. The flag of the fort was then soon hauled down, which resulted in the surrender by Brig. Gen. Wessels of four regiments of infantry, one squadron of cavalry, a battalion of artillery, and two or three companies of N. C. "Buffaloes," together with the large amount of stores, provisions, siege guns, etc., previously reported in this paper.

Our loss in killed and wounded in the land fight was much larger than that of the enemy, owing to the fact that our troops were exposed to a raking fire, without protection of any kind, while the enemy were covered by their works. Our total loss was three hundred killed and wounded, while the loss of the enemy in this respect only amounted to one hundred. The number of prisoners captured was as follows: 2,500 whites and 300 negroes, a portion of the latter being women and children. A large number of negroes and "buffaloes" (fit associates) escaped by means of boats and canoes, while quite a number plunged into the river, a portion of whom never reached the opposite shore. The behavior of our troops throughout the whole affair was everything that could be desired, and where all did so well it would be next to injustice to discriminate. The gallant Colonel Mercer was killed while leading a charge, and thus sealed with his life-blood his devotion to his country. He was a native of Georgia, and the only field officer lost by us during the siege of Plymouth.

The Richmond Examiner gives the following facts concerning the fight and the victory, obtained from a participant: "We have had a conversation with George King, Sergeant in the 11th Virginia regiment, who participated in the battle, and who was sent on in a charge of some of the wounded men. He gives us an stirring version of the battle and some interesting details. He states that our troops started from Tarboro' on Friday and reached the cross-roads, three miles from Plymouth, on Sunday evening. Kemper's brigade, consisting of the First, Eleventh and Twenty-fourth Virginia regiments, was ordered to the front, and drove in the enemy's pickets at War Neck. The other forces, Hoke's and Ransom's brigades of North Carolina troops, and one regiment of Georgians, were subsequently engaged. Dearing's battalion of artillery, in which are the Fayette from Richmond, Latham's from Lynchburg, Branch's from Petersburg, and others, commenced cannonading the enemy Monday morning, and continued their fire at intervals during the day and night.

On Tuesday desultory firing took place between our forces and the enemy, who were protected by eight forts and five gunboats. During the day the troops on our right carried by storm one of the enemy's works which mounted four guns. The principal fort was Fort Williams, eight guns. This was regarded as the key of the position. Tuesday evening a flag of truce was sent to Fort Williams demanding the surrender of the enemy. The flag was taken by Colonel Dearing and another officer; and General Wessel, the Yankee commander, refused to treat with them, but requested a conference with the general commanding. At the interview which ensued the Yankee commander said to General Hoke that if he surrendered he would be sacrificed by his government, and he feared, would be retired from the service.

"Then," replied General Hoke, "I understand that you are fighting for your commission and for no other cause. If such is your reply, I have only to compel your surrender, which I will do if I have to fight to the last man."

The general assault followed Wednesday morning. It was made by all our forces. As our troops came within range of the artillery, they suffered very severely, as the ground in front had been surveyed and was staked off with target posts for artillery practice. Latham's battery had been placed just by one of the targets, and was shelled with such skill by the enemy that all his horses were killed. As our troops steadily advanced upon the enemy's works, the Yankees, not waiting for their charge, threw away their arms and rushed forward with cries and tokens of surrender.—There were white handkerchiefs suddenly unfurled at all parts of the enemy's lines. General Wessel and his staff were left alone in Fort Williams, the garrison having gone over to us under the white handkerchief display, and they thus fell into our hands as prisoners of war.

From the Richmond Sentinel.

THE GUNBOAT ALBERMARLE. The glorious victory over our enemy at Plymouth has excited a great deal of rejoicing in our land, but it does not seem to be generally understood that the country is mainly indebted for the victory to the efforts of the iron-clad gunboat Albemarle, and justice to Commander Cook and the brave officers and men under his command, requires that a fair statement of the facts should be made.

The Albemarle left her anchorage, three miles above Plymouth at 2 P. M., on Tuesday last, passed safely over the enemy's torpedoes and obstructions, passed by the fort at Warren Neck, mounting three heavy guns, one of which was a two hundred-pounder Parrot, and succeeded, also, in passing a fort in the town where another two hundred-pounder Parrot was mounted. Commander Cook then attacked two large gunboats, the Miama, ten guns, and the Southfields, six guns, sinking the latter at once and so disabling the former that she sunk after reaching Edenton, a point twelve miles distant.

The crew of the Southfields consisted of one hundred and seventeen men, only eight of whom are thought to have escaped drowning. The Albemarle then took position one mile below the town, and shelled the enemy's batteries until the following morning, when the army participated in the attack, and with the invaluable aid of the Albemarle, succeeded in capturing the town.

A gentleman who was on board the Confederate ram Albemarle, informs us that she struck the Southfields amidships, cutting into her about ten feet, the Yankee vessel sinking rapidly, and being fastened so tightly to the Albemarle as to bear her bow under till the water ran into the port-holes. In endeavoring to clear her of the wreck, the crew had a hard hand fight with the Yankees, using pistols and cutlasses, in which we lost but one man, although the Miama was pouring shot after shot into them. When the Southfields sunk, the bows of the Albemarle picked up eight men, one of whom has since died, which are all that were saved out of a crew of one hundred and seventeen. The Albemarle did not succeed in striking the Miama with her ram, but damaged her so much with her guns that she afterwards sunk. It is said that one shot from the Albemarle killed and wounded twenty of the crew of the Miama.

Col. James M. Whitson killed by Buffaloes.—By letter we are informed of the death of this brave and meritorious officer. He was at home, in Currituck county, on furlough; his house was surrounded by "Buffaloes" at night, and he attempted to make his escape, when he was shot and struck by three balls, and killed. This was about the 14th or 15th of April.—Raleigh Confederate.

THE WHEAT AND OAT CROPS.—We learn from the farmers of this section that the wheat crop has improved wonderfully within the last few weeks, and that the oat crop is promising for an abundant harvest. Let us look for better times and warmer weather.—Greensboro Patriot.

In this section, the wheat crop is looking as good as usual at this season.

FORT PILLLOW.

As might have been expected, the capture of Fort Pillow by the Confederates, with its attendant train of retributive deeds, has sent a howl of horror through the North.

From President Lincoln down to his veriest minion, there is a burst of virtuous wrath over one of those events of war which has prematurely swept into the hell that was awaiting them a horde of uncompromising and unrepentant miscreants. We are glad that the act has occurred, and only sorry that, for the first time in three years of ruthless carnage, our enemies have been made to feel the terrible earnestness with which our people have been carrying on the struggle.

One would suppose from this development of Yankee passion that we alone are to blame for all the outrages which have blotched the page of American history during this cycle of bloodshed. But the impartial observer will discover, that when the Federal authorities saw calmly down before the city of Charleston, and with Greek fire, attempted to destroy its people; when they sacking of that city and the murder of our President; when civilians and soldiers throughout the length and breadth of the land are seized and hung to the nearest tree; when negroes are incited to every act of brutality conceivable by heart-steeped in crime; and when rapine and slaughter are stalking hand in hand—we repeat, that when the impartial observer recalls these atrocities, he will discover that the Federals themselves are responsible for all the retribution visited upon their heads, and for this our final adoption of a plan of warfare, which means speedy death to all invaders.

Gen. Forrest, however, has not overstepped the boundaries of military rule. Twice he summoned the officer commanding Fort Pillow to surrender; twice the summons were refused; then making the assault over the bodies of his own brave men, he seized that which was not voluntarily yielded before, and visited righteous punishment on the miscreants who, while behind their breastworks, were too ready to kill, and when conquered were too glad to surrender. But the acts need no apology. It stands applauded by the whole country. We are fighting highwaymen, burglars, criminals, who, having broken into our fair home, would brain every man, woman and child to accomplish what remains of their desperate task. In other words, they have invaded our land, blockaded our ports, starved our people, occupied our cities, in loathsome dungeons imprisoned our sons and daughters, pillaged, burnt and ravished, violated every rule of legitimate warfare, and carried their devilities as far as devils dare. Nature, precedent and example suggest what we should do in retaliation; but, unfortunately, the laws of modern war have been too tenderly regarded by our authorities, while ignored by our foes; and not until Gen. Forrest dared to take swift-handed justice on his dusky blade have the enemy been made to feel the deadly animus which underlies every loyal heart in the Confederacy. We hope the lesson may be repeated, and that this closing year of the revolution may witness a succession of just such victories and just such shouts of horror as are ringing through the North at the present moment.—Columbia Carolinian.

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