

New Bern Weekly Journal.

VOLUME XXVII.

NEW BERN, CRAVEN COUNTY, N. C., TUESDAY, AUGUST 16, 1904—FIRST SECTION.

NUMBER 35.

Nice Lot Harbey's Small Hams Just Received.

Very Finest Fresh Elgin Butter 80c lb, Received Fresh from the dairy every week. Harvey's Small Hams English Cured Shoulders and break fast strips. Complete stock staple and fancy Groceries of the very best quality.

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ANNOUNCEMENT

There will be no sale today.
We will be closed all day preparatory for a

Big Sale Tomorrow

We will tell you about it in the morning

CONFEDERATE HISTORY.

John Taylor Wood, C. S. N and Destruction of Gunboat Underwriter.

Unpublished History Connected With This Affair. By W F Clayton A Participant Correspondence and Explanatory Notes.

The following letter from Col. John D Whitford, explains the source from which the Journal has secured this most valuable account of the destruction of the gunboat Underwriter, which is now published for the first time. It is a record which might have been lost, and the Journal very gladly publishes it and so secures the history of those times, which were so momentous in events both for the people of this section and the entire country. Beginning with the extract from the Charleston News and Courier of July 23rd 1864, which follows Col Whitford's letter, there will appear in later articles personal letters telling in detail of the events which were connected with the capture and destruction of the Underwriter.

To Col. John D. Whitford, who has contributed many valuable historical articles to the Journal, this paper is indebted for these articles.—Editor C L S.

New Bern, N. C., Aug 13th.

Mr C L Stevens, Editor Etc. Journal, New Bern.

DEAR SIR:— Herewith you are handed some papers which I believe, would interest our citizens generally, therefore if you concur in the opinion, you would oblige me by printing them if not thus be preserved, the information given must soon be lost in the dim distance.

Yours Truly,
JOHN D. WHITFORD.

Charleston, S. C., News & Courier, July 23rd 1864.

To the Editor of The News and Courier: In your issue of this morning is a telegram from Halifax, Nova Scotia, announcing the death of John Taylor Wood. Having served under that gallant officer on more than one occasion, I feel it a duty to posthume to tell the manner of man he was.

The Secretary's register of the Survivors' Association of the Confederate States Navy has this:

John Taylor Wood, Halifax, N. S., born in Minnesota of Southern parents; resigned from U. S. navy as lieutenant; promoted to commander, C. S. N., for gallant conduct, August 23, 1863. Served on C. S. S. Virginia, (Merrimack) and participated in battles of Hampton Roads, March 8 and 9, 1863. Participated in Battle of Drewry's Bluff, May 15, 1863. Commanded expedition that boarded and captured the U. S. gunboats Satellite and Reliance, in the Rappahannock River, August 23, 1863. Commanded expedition that captured and burned the U. S. gunboat Underwriter, at New Bern, N. C., February 3, 1864. Commanded cruiser Tallahassee, a converted blockade runner, and ran out of the port of Wilmington, N. C., deputed upon American commerce from that point to the coast of Newfoundland, destroying several ships in sight of Sandy Hook, N. Y., and returned to Wilmington in safety.

And now the last entry as secretary I make is, "Died at Halifax, Nova Scotia, July 19th, 1904, aged 74 years."

If such an expression can be used in a republic John Taylor Wood came of royal blood. His grandfather, Zachary Taylor, was President of the United States, and his uncle, Jefferson Davis, was President of the Confederate States. His father was surgeon general of either the army or navy when the war broke out, in 1861, and remained North.

Commander Wood was retiring and modest in his disposition, quiet and easy in his manners, but in action a lion. In our estimation he was to the navy what Stonewall Jackson was to the army, ever on the alert to strike the enemy a blow, and his plans so matured and kept secret that every blow he struck resulted in victory.

He was a conscientious Christian, a member of the Episcopal Church. Nevertheless his memory lasts shall we forget the prayer he offered just as we went into action in the expedition that resulted in the capture of the Underwriter.

Out in the bay, several miles from New Bern, he called his ten boats together, and with hats off we all stood, officers and men, while he pleaded for the Divine blessing upon our expedition, and especially did he beseech of Heaven mercy for those who should fall.

Never in my life was I more impressed by a prayer. In that fight we lost two officers, and seven men killed and ten wounded out of 180, all told. We captured the ship and burned her under the guns of a large fortress, and the Underwriter, carrying four heavy guns and a crew of one hundred men.

When the State of Virginia seceded Wood resigned his position in the United States navy and tendered his services to Governor Detcher, who assigned him to a battery on the Potomac River, there being at that time no ships, and while on that service he matured his plans which bore fruit afterwards. He was a lieutenant on the Virginia, and afterwards

at Drewry's Bluff, and after that time he was given a roving commission.

His first independent command consisted of two ship cutters and thirty men with six officers. With these he proceeded down the Rappahannock River and attacked and captured the gunboat Satellite, carrying one gun and a crew of thirty-five men, and the gunboat Reliance, a sister ship, both doing guard boat service at the mouth of the river. In this fight he lost none of his crew killed, though several were wounded, and he succeeded in bringing his prizes and prisoners up to or near Fredericksburg.

It was for this action that he was promoted to be a commander. After that he, with one boat, captured a large merchant ship in the Potomac, and after a saving most of her cargo, very valuable to the Confederacy, burned her. He also captured another ship in the Chesapeake but finding she was owned entirely in Baltimore, he released her, some of her owners being Southern sympathizers.

After some torpedo service he organized the expedition that was to accompany Gen. Pickett in his attempt to regain Eastern North Carolina. Pickett did not succeed, but Wood did his part and captured after a stubborn fight, the United States gunboat Underwriter.

In the latter part of 1864 Wood converted the blockade runner Tallahassee into a cruiser, placing two small guns aboard. He ran the blockade at New Inlet, Cape Fear River, and proceeded up the coast burning several small vessels of the enemy. When off the harbor of New York he burned two or three large merchantmen, and aroused the whole navy of the United States and vessels were sent to overtake him from New York, Philadelphia and Boston. Passing an English ship, bound for New York, he boarded her and let it out that he was bound for Halifax, N. S. for coal. He kept his course until night, when he altered his course for the Bermuda Islands, where he obtained coal and ran back into Wilmington. The English captain gave out the news as soon as he reached New York and in less than twenty-four hours there were ten or a dozen United States war ships steering for Halifax. His ruse had succeeded.

On his return to Wilmington, the war being nearly closed, he went to Richmond, and left upon the evacuation, and escaped to Cuba, and after the war made Halifax his home.

One of his sons was killed in the Boer War, as a lieutenant in a Canada Regiment.

The writer never saw him after the year 1864, but as secretary of the Survivors' Association, C. S. N. has had several pleasant letters from him.

He did his duty while on this earth, and has gone to his reward. Being on the losing side, history discounts him, and few will ever know his record, but although it may be lost to time, eternally will stamp him as a man who in every sphere of life tried his utmost to love his God and his neighbor, and while no monument will recount his many virtues we who know him will carry with us the fond recollection of having been associated with him, and in that association enjoyed the society and the counsel of one of nature's noblemen.

W F CLAYTON

Florence, July 21

Reid Whitford

U S Assistant Engineer.

United States Engineers Office,

Georgetown, S. C., July 25th.

Mr W F Clayton,

Florence, S. C.

Dear Sir:

I was very much interested in your article published in the News and Courier July 23rd, on Captain John Taylor Wood.

Being a native of New Bern, North Carolina, I was attracted by your notice of the capture of the Underwriter. I have often seen the old wreck in the Neuse River, as a boy, after the war.

My father, Colonel John D Whitford, of New Bern, has often discussed this during set of Captain Wood and the men under him in the hearing of others as well as myself.

I think there is a man living in New Bern by the name of Hassel, or Hazle or some such name as that (Durand has left New Bern several years ago. He was recently met with at Norfolk, where he appeared sound and hearty, engaged in active work.—Ed) who was in one of the boats in the attacking party that night on the Neuse, and the cookswain of the boat Capt Wood was on. I have frequently heard this man speak of that night, and of the calm courage of Captain Wood.

I would like very much indeed to see a true and detailed account written of the taking of the Underwriter, before it is too late, when not one will be left to tell the tale.

It appears to me that you are the proper man to do this as you were with the Wood party that night, and you must have all the facts and details plainly in your mind. I hope you will consent to write this out in full and let me have a copy which I will send to New Bern and ask my father to have published in the local paper there for the information of the New Bern people. In that way, I will get in print what I have long desired to have kept in my papers. I hope I am not asking too much of you.

Yours truly,
REID WHITFORD.

United States Engineers Office,

Georgetown, S. C., July 30th.

Mr W F Clayton, Attorney at Law,

Florence, S. C.

My Dear Sir—

Yours of July 26th, giving a detailed account of the capture and burning of the U S Gunboat "Underwriter" at New Bern, N. C. in reply to my request, received. Permit me to thank you with all my heart for your kindness. I certainly appreciate your prompt and full reply. I enjoyed reading the article immensely, and am delighted to have a true account of this daring act at my old home, which I do not think has ever been written before. I shall send a copy of the article, in letter form, as you suggest, to my father at New Bern, and requested him to have it published in the local press there. I will take pleasure in having a copy of the paper containing the article sent to you. I only wish you would visit New Bern and see the city. There have been many changes since that February night you write about. There were two forts on the banks of the Neuse, just above the city limits, one at the mouth of Jack Smith Creek which has been leveled and consequently disappeared in the agricultural pursuits of the country. The other fort was nearer New Bern at a place called Stevenson's pond. Traces of that fort still plainly remain. Whether it was this one or the other, whose guns fired upon you that night, I am unable to say. (It was Stevenson's fort, they were also fired upon by artillery, on the old fair grounds.—Ed.) But it was perhaps Jack Smith Creek fort as I have often seen the wreck of the Underwriter between the two forts. I believe the wreck has now disappeared. The boiler from the Underwriter was removed from the wreck and remained for years on one of the wharves at New Bern. You must have been very close to the guns of the fort that night, and it is a wonder to me that all your boats were not sunk. The more wonderful that more of you were not killed in coming up alongside of the Underwriter. I do not think that the wharf where the Underwriter was lying could have been much over a quarter of a mile from the fort, and if she was at one of the fort wharves, then she was not more than five hundred feet from the guns. I was surprised to read in your article that you went down as far as the Trent, and found no vessels of war in the harbor, the first night. I know every foot of that water perfectly, having swam in it and sailed over it as a boy, and afterwards surveyed it. I have been from Kingston to New Bern, myself in a row boat. The distance is fifty miles. I was a boy at Goldsboro when you passed with your boats going to Kingston, our family having fled there when New Bern was captured by Burnside.

I remember distinctly the hanging of the sixteen "Buffaloes" at Kingston. I think they were all hanged on one gallows. I also remember the Confederate Gunboat "Neuse," which was an iron clad and built at Kingston for the purpose of co-operating with Pickett in his attempt to recapture New Bern. But unfortunately the Neuse drew too much water and never could get over the shoal at Kingston. She was abandoned and burned there by the Confederates. The wreck can be seen on the sandpoint of the river even now, just below the town. If Captain Wood with you all could have gone down the Neuse to New Bern on that craft you would have silenced the forts and recaptured New Bern without the aid of Pickett. Of course you know Pickett's advance was made in a half hearted sort of manner—not pressing forward with any vigor and really running before he was whipped. That night if he had attacked New Bern by land simultaneously with you all at the Underwriter, the city would have undoubtedly been taken.

When you were down there my father was Ordnance Officer of North Carolina and active in the State for the Confederate States. He was also President of the Railroad that carried your boats to Kingston from Goldsboro, and was general superintendent of transportation of troops and munitions of war through North Carolina (and was in a few miles of New Bern when the Underwriter was blown up. Was with Capt Wood that afternoon before for some time.—Ed.) He is still living at New Bern and though getting old is in good condition mentally and physically. If you decide to go to New Bern, I will be glad to give you a letter of introduction to him.

I hope I may have the pleasure of meeting you myself. Again thanking you and assuring you that I will always be glad to hear from you, I am,
Sincerely yours,
REID WHITFORD.

P S—My understanding was that when Pickett made his advance on New Bern, the city was garrisoned at that time by only about six hundred troops. What a mistake it was thought at that time he made by turning back.

R. W.

Florence, S. C., July 26, 1904

Reid Whitford,

U. S. Ass't Engineer,

Georgetown, S. C.

DEAR SIR:—

It affords me much pleasure to comply with your request for particulars of the capture of the U. S. Gunboat Underwriter, at New Bern, N. C.

As I only got a glimpse of New Bern, by the glare of the burning ship and the flash of the Fort guns, I have an inclination to visit the place and see the surroundings of one of the most desperate hand to hand fights, of a desperate war. Perhaps some day I may see the city, at least that is my hope.

The expedition left the School Ship "Patrick Henry" the last day of January

1864, to co-operate with General Pickett in his attempt to regain eastern North Carolina, which had been a granary for the Confederacy. As Richmond was infested with spies, we had to act with caution, lest our plans be disclosed. None of us knew where we were bound, save Commander Wood. There were ten boats, each carrying twelve oarsmen and two masts, besides two officers, a Lieutenant and a Midshipman. There was one boat that had only a Midshipman, that boat I had the honor of commanding, being the senior Midshipman present. When the sun was about an hour high we let go, and pulled down the James as though our mission lay in that direction; when darkness had clothed the earth we increased our speed and entering Appomattox at City Point, we reached Petersburg before daylight, and putting our boats on flat cars, were well away in the direction of Goldsboro before day dawned. Arriving at Goldsboro we were switched on the road to Kingston, and passed through that town in the wee sma hours, launched our boats in the Neuse River, and pulled down some ten miles below the town where we halted and took a rest. At this point Captain Wood made known his plans, and called upon any who were not willing to take the risk to return, not a man spoke, but in each face was seen a determination that meant victory or death. It was Captain Wood's idea that we would probably find two U. S. Gunboats at New Bern, these he expected to capture, probably get their signal book, and run down with the captured craft at once to Morehead City and capture the rest of the U. S. fleet in those waters. The scheme was feasible, and the plans well laid, but the sequel will show that while man proposes, God disposes. We expected to be joined at Kingston, by Lieutenant Gift with two launches, carrying a six pound howitzer each, with crews made up from Charleston and Wilmington, but as they had not arrived we left without them about 2 o'clock in the afternoon, and continued our course leisurely down the river, reaching New Bern about 3 o'clock in the morning; we pulled about in front of the town for some little time and finding no gunboats, entered the mouth of Trent River, and still finding no enemy, and being warned that daylight was not far off, we pulled back into Batchelors Creek and hid for the day. At the dawn we could hear Pickett's guns, and we knew that the land fight had begun, and as the sound drew nearer and nearer towards New Bern, we felt assured that he was driving the enemy, but as we were inside of the Federal lines, and only about six miles from New Bern, we had to lie close. Occasionally sending an officer up into a tree top to view the surroundings and report, thus the day wore away. When about an hour to sun, smoke was discerned by the lookout, down the Bay, and soon a steamer hove in sight and steamed rapidly for the city, where she soon moored alongside (Stevenson's) Pond Fort wharf as stated by Col John D. Whitford of New Bern, N. C., in a letter dated Aug 5th 1904.—Ed), so that her port battery could sweep the road leading from the direction of the fighting into the city.

She had a line from her quarter to one of the wharves, her starboard anchor down, and thus swung across the stream and was moored directly below a Fort. Our Pilot, who was a New Bern man a large man with long black whiskers whose name has escaped me, made her out to be the Underwriter, and then we knew what a formidable craft we had to tackle, she mounting four heavy guns and carrying a crew all told of about 135 men and officers, but some fifty of this complement were away, either in the hospital or on special duty, this we did not at the time know.

While resting in camp awaiting a propitious hour, the sentry reported the approach from up the river of two boats which proved to be "Gift" and the Launches. Between twelve and one a. m., Captain Wood outlined his plan of attack as follows: We were to attack in two columns, Wood leading the starboard and Lieutenant Ben Loyall leading the port column, each column comprised five boats, and Gift was to act as a support for either, and if the steamer succeeded in getting underway use his howitzers on her, and attempt to disable her machinery. Pulling out of the creek, Wood assembled all the boats and offered up a fervent prayer, then with muffled oars we went on our way.

The moon, about half on the wane from full, was well over to the westward and high up in the heavens, showing herself as the rifts of cloud for a moment parted and the phosphorescent light in our wake so brilliant as to cause fear of detection, but silently we proceeded.

When the bell of the Underwriter spoke five, "half past 2 o'clock" in the morning, and as the Quartermaster turned from the bell his attention was drawn to the phosphorescent light and he hailed, "Boat Ahoy!—Silence prevailed.—Again Boat Ahoy! Still no reply. When he sounds the rattle which summons his crew to quarters. Then it was that Wood rose to his full height and gave the command, "Give way with a will boys," and with a will did those hearty sailors bend to their oars. When the first half rang out over the Bay, we were about 300 yards away and in a short time this space had been covered and the first and second boats were alongside, where they were met by a small arm fire that illumined the waters

(Continued on 4th page.)

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The steamer Neuse will be withdrawn temporarily from the route on July 15th for her annual repairs.

During her absence the steamer Oronoke is scheduled to sail from New Bern for Beheven, (instead of Elizabeth City) at 6 p m on Monday, Wednesday and Friday.

Until further notice there will be no steamer sailing on Tuesday, Thursday or Saturdays.

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