

AN EYEWITNESS STORY OF THE BATTLE OF ROANOKE ISLAND 77 YEARS AGO

Interesting History Revealed in a Copy of a Newspaper Printed in London, in 1862; the Correspondent For Illustrated News, Gives First Hand Account of Struggle

Of great interest to readers of this newspaper is a reprint from the London Illustrated News of the battle of Roanoke Island on the 7th of February, 1862. This account was written on February 28th and published March 22, 1862, which shows the long time necessary for news to travel from America to England in those days.

Washington, Feb. 28, 1862.

At last the tide of fortune has turned in favor of the North, and the success attending the formidable preparations of the past six months is now recompensing the Federalists for the enormous expenditure which has weighed heavily upon them. In former letters I have had occasion to notice the improvement in the discipline of the Union Army, which has been gradually progressing towards a state of efficiency under the guidance and supervision of the new Commander-in-Chief. To brigade regiments, form divisions, and appoint divisional generals, were among the first tasks which McClellan set himself to accomplish; and, having succeeded in these, he published a series of general orders for the better regulation and conduct of military matters, and providing for a more thorough and perfect state of discipline through every branch of the service.

The consequence is, that during all these apparently idle months the soldier's taskmaster, the drill-sergeant, has been aboard, and now as the time approaches for action the Federal Government finds it has an army to rely on for support or vindication, astounding in its numbers as the growth of only nine months, and wonderfully efficient considering the short period it has been in the field. The combinations of the General-in-Chief are now being seen and understood, and those who have arraigned him in judgment before the court of their displeasure are now compelled to acknowledge their error, confuted by the successes that have inaugurated the first part of a new campaign.

The victories in North Carolina, Kentucky, and Tennessee, have dealt a staggering blow at secession; while the Federal troops hitherto depressed by their early discomfiture, are now elated and confident, placing implicit reliance in their General, and being eager to carry the flag of the Union into the heart of Secession. I am no "Sir Oracle," so I will not attempt to prophesy a triumph for the Federalists; but seeing the improved condition in the morale of the Union forces, and feeling somewhat competent to give an opinion, I am inclined to believe that these first successes are not to be their last.

I have watched the Northern army almost from its first appearance in the field. I have seen it a stripling, and known it in its boyhood the prey of bullying politicians, who by their pernicious counsels are responsible for its earliest defeats. I now see it arrived at man's estate, and it should be ought to achieve for itself an honorable future.

On a Battleship in Pamlico Sound
My last letter was dated from

Pamlico Sound, North Carolina, on the eve of the departure of the expedition to which I was attached to attack Roanoke Island. The rumors of an impending advance of the army of the Potomac and the distant sounds of victory from the west reached us even there, and I determined, immediately Roanoke was taken, to hasten back to headquarters, ready to witness what must be the most decisive and important movement of the campaign—the attack on the Confederate centre at Manassas. And here I am, after a delay of some days, caused by the prevalence of fearful storms on the coast, heartily sick of combined naval and military expeditions, and thoroughly determined to have nothing more to do with them, unless I can first of all make a satisfactory arrangement with the clerk of the weather.

General Burnside Captured The Island

The telegraphic accounts of the success of General Burnside reached New York, and thence were dispatched to England long before I could send you sketches in connection with the capture of Roanoke, so I will not attempt to give any elaborate details, and will simply confine myself to a brief description of the incidents which from the subjects illustrated by my pencil.

On the morning of the 7th the fleet of transports and gun-boats which had laid off the entrance of Croatan Sound during the previous night weighed anchor, the latter forming into line of battle in three divisions. The entrance into Croatan Sound is by a narrow channel scarcely more than one hundred feet in width, the navigation of which is exceedingly difficult, as a sandbar lies immediately off the mouth. However, the entire fleet, with one exception, were safely through by 10 a. m., and at half-past the first gun was fired from the Confederate battery, evidently as a signal of some kind or other.

The mainland of North Carolina lay in our left, and this we had to hug closely for two miles or so, the deep water running there. Every moment I expected to see a puff of white smoke followed by a whiz come from among the tall brakes on the bank, but for some reason or other the Confederates had neglected placing a battery here, which appears to me the more astonishing from the fact that at any time during this two miles I could have almost thrown a biscuit on shore.

After the above distance the channel made a curve to the right towards Roanoke, passing under the guns of the first fort and continuing along the sands to the extreme point of the island, with two other forts commanding it at equal distances from the first, they being so arranged that a cross fire could be brought to bear on vessels attempting to force their way through. Between the first and second forts lay the Confederate steamers, seven in number, and the action was commenced at long range between them and the Federal gun-boats as the latter advanced steadily in line to the attack.

This Was The Fort "At Head-quarter"

At half-past eleven Fort Bartow chimed in as the Federal squadron came within its range, and it was now that the Spalding, on board which ship I was, with the General and his staff, opened fire from her rifled parrot. In a few minutes the plan of action was somewhat changed, the Confederate steamers retiring behind some obstructions placed in the channel, and moving up towards the entrance to Albemarle Sound, evidently with the purpose of drawing a portion of the Union vessels through the narrow opening left, and immediately under the guns of the second fort. This was seen and understood by Commodore Gouldsborough, who detached half a dozen of his boats to block their passage back again, and to engage them as nearly as the obstructions in the channel would admit.

This is the period of the action I have chosen for one of my sketches. About two p. m., the Confederate fleet retired out of range, the largest vessel, the Curlew, being so damaged that they had to run her ashore under the shelter of a battery near the upper point of the main land to prevent her sinking. She was afterwards burnt by her crew, and the battery blown up to prevent it falling into the hands of the Federalists.

At 3 p. m., the troops commenced landing, protected by the guns of the Picket and Delaware, who shelled from amongst the pines the force that had been drawn up to oppose the debarkation. At six the firing ceased between the Federal gun-boats and Fort Bartow, and by

THE BATTLE OF ROANOKE ISLAND, FEBRUARY 7, 1862



THESE pictures by the artist of the Illustrated London News in 1861, show scenes off Pork Point, in Croatan Sound. The top pictures show the attack made on the Confederate Batteries of Forts, by the Yankee gunboats. To the left is the mainland, off Fleetwood Point, the channel running up to Albemarle Sound. The large vessel is General Burnside's ship, the Spalding, and on the right is Fort Bartow on Roanoke Island, traces of which remain. The bottom pictures show Fort Bartow after its capture by the Federalists, who went ashore and commanded the old home we know as the John Berry Home, and other houses, for quarters for the officers.

midnight upwards of 9,000 men had been safely put on shore without accident.

Went Through Deep Swamp

The difficulties the troops had to contend against in landing were great, the place chosen being a perfect swamp, which extended inland a distance of a quarter of a mile, and in which the men sank to their knees and waists. To make matters more uncomfortable, a thin cold rain fell throughout the night, the soldiers having no other shelter than what they stood in, and many of them were completely benumbed by daylight. Nothing disturbed the stillness of the dark hours save one solitary report of a gun which heralded the death of a Massachusetts soldier who was thrown out in the forest as a picket; this was the only collision that occurred during the night. There was something peculiarly impressive in gloom of the dark pine woods with the knowledge that perhaps within a dozen yards lurked the enemy, and that at any moment the watcher might be sent to his last account.

Day broke cold, damp, and miserable; and, after a drink of water and a biscuit to each man, the Federal force prepared to advance into the interior, following a path which led to the main artery running through the island. About ten the first collision took place between the opposing forces, at the point where the pathway alluded to above intersects, the main road.

hive had been overturned in the neighborhood.

At midday the clearing was reached by the head of Reno's column, and its appearance was saluted by roundshot and grape from the field-work already mentioned. During this time Foster and Parke were each pushing on through immense obstacles to outflank the battery, the latter getting up two of his regiments first, the 9th New York, or Hawkins' Zouaves, and the 21st Massachusetts.

Confederates Were Routed

General Parke, immediately he reached the flank of the breastwork, ordered the above two regiments to charge, which they did in the most brilliant manner, dashing through the swamp and over the stumps of the pine-clearing, and into the battery which the Confederates were hastily leaving.

One officer alone, Lieutenant Selden, of the Richmond Blues, remained to dispute its possession.

In my sketch he is seen falling back from the parapet, dying as a gallant soldier should, with his face to the enemy. All could see him to the very last proud and erect, waving his sword and encouraging the men to stand. But his example was lost upon them, their panic was complete, and Lieutenant Selden, whose gallantry had been unavailing, I saw laid carefully in a shelter spot ten minutes after he fell.

The Confederates now retraced to the upper portion of the island, hastily pursued by Reno, who had

told, 1500 having got across Roanoke and retired to Currituck with old General Wise, whose son was fight at their fieldwork the number might have been quadrupled. I am inclined to think that the latter, with 4500 men and their strong natural positions, should have held at bay the Federal force brought against them; but more "kidos," therefore, is to be allowed the victors.

Local Sentiment Divided

With regard to the sentiment of the people on the island, it appears to me to be quite as much one way as the other. I think all they want is to be let alone by both parties. The following were more especially the sentiments of a Mr. Jarvis, farmer and fisherman, whose house had been taken possession of by the Zouaves; he was a perfectly bewildered individual. His family was in one of the negro shanties, and he was outside, mourning over the events of the day. He had "nothing agin the North," and had sold a great many shad to them. But, the troops had killed one of his killed in the engagement at the fieldwork. Thus was Roanoke Island captured by the Federalists, their success giving them the command of all the inland waters of North Carolina, and a capital basis for operations on the mainland, which will be commenced immediately. The entire loss of the Unionists does not exceed 260 killed, wounded, though had the Confederates shown anything like a

RESCUE OF THE CREW OF STEAMSHIP VIRGINIA ON THE DIAMOND SHOALS OFF CAPE HATTERAS

A Thrilling Tale of Adventure With the Coast Guardsmen on the Diamond Shoals and How Some of the Seamen Were Drowned; Compiled From Records of the Coast Guard in Washington

Data Secured From Government by Congressman Lindsay C. Warren

The fourth disaster of the year in the vicinity of Cape Hatteras, within the scope of the operations of the Life Saving Service and attended by loss of life, was the wreck of the British steamship, Virginia, which stranded and broke up at once on the Outer Diamond Shoals, Wednesday afternoon, May 2, 1900.

The Virginia was a steel vessel of 2314 tons burden, bound from Daiquiri, Cuba, to Baltimore, Md. She carried a cargo of iron ore, and was in charge of Capt. Charles Samuels, of London, England. Her crew—all told—comprised twenty-four men, and there was also on board one stowaway.

About 2 o'clock p. m. on the day of the wreck, the captain, being aware that he was approaching the latitude of Cape Hatteras, caused the lead to be thrown, and finding no bottom at 50 fathoms, changed his course to northwest by west and proceeded on his way. For three hours and a half after the lead was cast the steamer held her course, having neither seen nor heard anything to indicate danger, when suddenly the cry of "breakers ahead" came from the lookout on the bow. The wheel was instantly thrown hard astern, and the ship promptly responded, soon having the broken water on her port beam, but a few moments later she grounded heavily. Her location at this time, as afterwards ascertained, was on the southeast point of the dreaded Outer Diamond Shoal, 9 nautical miles southeast by south from the Cape Hatteras Life Saving Station and about the same distance east southeast of station at Creed's Hill.

The master quickly ordered both anchors let go and himself ran forward to superintend operations, but before he could get back to the bridge the vessel broke in three pieces and sank to the rail, giving him barely time to leap for his life to the amidship section. Without further ado, he ordered the boats out and all hands to abandon ship. As the sequel proved, it would have been better otherwise, but the situation was alarming to the last degree and speedy action of some sort must have seemed imperative.

The crew hastily attempted to launch the two starboard boats, but both were smashed to pieces. Then the men rushed to the port lifeboat, which was safely lowered away and manned by fifteen persons, Second Mate Moore in charge. Mr. Moore states that it was his purpose to return to the ship and stand by the master, but that it was impossible to do so, and therefore he ordered the oarsmen to pull away straight out for the open sea. The port long-boat was now put into the water with seven men in it, but before it could be cleared from the ship's side it was rolled over and six of its occupants were quickly drowned. Mate Wyness, who was in charge, was hauled back on board the steamer by means of a bowline thrown to him by one of the four men who still remained on deck, but had intended to go in the boat.

There were now five on board, and as then seemed to them, in far worse plight than the boat's crew who had pushed out aimlessly and unprovisioned into the ocean, about them was the impenetrable haze of fog. The survivors turned their thoughts to means of making a signal of distress. Night was close at hand, they knew that they could not be discovered from the shore before morning.

Therefore, throughout the night, they waited and shivered with the cold. When daylight they could perceive no signs of land. The master still had it in mind to make the first possible attempt to reach some oil and kerosene stored in the fore-cabin head, and as the forenoon wore and the tide fell he concluded as favorable an opportunity as should ever have had arisen.

Therefore, at very great personal danger, he jumped from the bridge and swam forward with all power, beset by a strong current and with the sea continually breaking across the fore-cabin. However, he reached the goal and, encouraged by his success, the chief followed. By the aid of a rope thrown by the master, he succeeded, also, and together the two men explored the dark repository of treasure upon which their lives seemed wholly dependent. Throughout the entire day the haze continued, but when night came on two officers eagerly set a fire to their signal. In the meantime, however, the tide had risen, as well as the wind and sea, so that with the greatest difficulty the blaze be kept up.

Dawn came again and appeared without any hope for the unfortunate men. But their forlorn signal had been seen. Keeper Pat Eberidge (who was the father of Walter G. Etheridge of Manteo), the Hatteras station had seen his telescope toward the wreck where the light had been observed. The weather was still a little bit but at 7 a. m. it lighted up, and a telescope then revealed the funnels and masts of the wreck. Eberidge quickly ordered out the Monomoy surfboat, called up Keeper Homer Styrton of Creed's Hill Station, requested him to start at once to the Outer Diamond, as the Hatteras crew was about to do. The boats of both stations got away at about the same time, and as soon as they cleared the beach made sail. The wind was now blowing a gale from the northward, and the sea was running high, but there was faint heart among the life-savers although they all knew full well the peril of their undertaking.

It was a perilous trip, but before the lifeboats reached the wreck after great difficulty, the men on board were taken off. Sail was then made and both boats started for shore, where they arrived about five o'clock in the evening, having performed one of the most noteworthy rescues ever effected in the vicinity of stormy Cape Hatteras.

Had the entire ship's company remained on board none would have perished. Happily the fifteen men who put to sea in the port lifeboat were sighted and picked up twenty-four hours after they went away by the steamer El Paso, bound from New York to New Orleans, where they were landed and properly cared for by the British consular agent.

THE CIVIL WAR BATTLE OFF BURNSIDES, IN CROATAN SOUND



AN EYE WITNESS drew the above picture and it was sent to England and published in the London Illustrated News in March 1862. Roanoke Island people well remember the little hill that stood on the Battleground, and was known as the breast works. When the highway was cut through the island, the irrelevant men with scoops and mules, dragged the hill down to make a roadbed. The picture shows the 99th New York (Hawkins' Zouaves), and the 21st Massachusetts taking the Confederate fieldwork, on Roanoke Island at the point of the bayonet. This part of the battle was fought at the intersection of the road to Nags Head with the north and south road on Roanoke Island. Full details of this battle are published in The Times.

Foster's brigade was the first to move forward, and he deployed his men to the right of the road in the woods, engaging the enemy's skirmishers as he felt his way step by step through the breast-high swamp. I followed this force. General Reno, then occupied the road with his brigade, forming the center, while General Parke forced an opening through the roads and swamps on the left, contending against the same difficulties that Foster and his men were encountering on the right. General Burnside directed the whole of the movements.

From the cross road to the clearing, in which the Confederates had three guns in a fieldwork, there was a continuous rattle of musketry, the fire from the concealed Secessionist skirmishers cutting up the Union men severely; in fact, even I, who you may be sure kept in a pretty safe place, heard the bullets humming around as though a bee-

with him but a small portion of his force. Foster also passed on with his men towards the rear of the water battery that had engaged the gun-boats throughout the previous day, and, coming up an intersecting path that led to it, he ordered the 4th Rhode Islanders to advance at all double and take it, which they proceeded to do with a deafening cheer. On rushing into the works they found, to their astonishment, the place deserted and guns spiked. The garrison, hearing of the defeat of their force in the centre of the island, and foreseeing an attack in the rear, had evacuated the place and retired in the same direction as their beaten comrades.

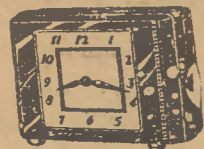
Three Thousand Surrendered

At Camp Georgia the entire Confederate force that had not succeeded in making its escape by way of Nags Head was come up with by General Reno, and, after firing a few shots, they surrendered in a mass, numbering nearly 3,000 all

pigs, and his wife had lost her temper and her flat irons. "Do you own any negroes, Mr. Jarvis" queried I, "Well, I did, but three of 'em went to Hatteras last week, two more have run away, I don't know where, and there's one in the kitchen I'll give away if anybody wants him." It was a clear case of unmistakable collapse. He was assured by one of the Staff who was present, that his remaining property should be protected, and that all deficiencies should be made good if he was loyal.

I shall now send you some interesting subjects of the difficulties of transport, and the cause of the delay in the advance of the army of the Potomac, owing, as it is, entirely to the dreadful state of the Virginia roads. The first sign of dry weather will be hailed with delight by the men, who know they are to move from the camps where they have passed six months of monotonous existence.

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