

THE LATEST NEWS.

OFFICIAL WAR GAZETTE.

PORTER-BUTLER.

The Union Fleet and Army
Near Wilmington.

BUTLER LANDS HIS TROOPS.

Rebels Consider it a Serious Matter.

WASHINGTON, Dec. 27. P. M.—Major-General Dix, New York.—The following extract from the Richmond papers of to-day, relative to the expedition against Wilmington, N. C., has been forwarded to the Department by General GRANT:—

"An official despatch from General BEAUREGARD, dated December 25th, and received yesterday, states: 'The fleet of the rebels, which reports that a force of the enemy's infantry, seamen and cavalry, had been sent from Savannah towards the Atlantic coast. General HARDEE has made the proper disposition to meet the enemy. His object is probably to destroy the Savannah, Albany and Gulf Railroad, its depots, &c.'

"No despatch has been received from General HOOD since November 20th."

"WILMINGTON, N. C., Dec. 27.—The enemy's fleet of over five vessels, including two monitors, several armed vessels and many heavily armed frigates and sloops of war, made a furious attack on Fort Fisher about one o'clock yesterday, and kept up an average fire of about thirty shots per minute until night."

"The attack was received at ten o'clock this morning, and has been very furious and continuous. There is no report of casualties today. Colonel LAMB, who is in command of the fort, replied to the enemy's fire slowly and deliberately."

"The enemy, under cover of the heavy fire, landed a boat train bridge, and now holds all above Fort Fisher. They were immediately engaged by a small force. The enemy held his ground at night."

SECOND DESPATCH.

"WILMINGTON, N. C., Dec. 28.—The enemy's infantry attacked Fort Fisher last night. They were repelled with considerable loss. There was a sharp engagement throughout the night. Prisoners report that the Twenty-third Corps of the Yankee army are present under BUTLER."

"From our Wilmington despatch it will be seen that the Yankee fleet attacked Fort Fisher about 3 P. M. on Saturday, and bombarded it heavily till midnight, renewing the bombardment at 10 o'clock on Sunday morning, and continued it throughout the day. Under cover of the heat of the battle the enemy landed an infantry force above Fort Fisher, which attacked the fort on Sunday night, and were repelled."

"Fort Fisher is situated on a sand spit of the right bank of the Cape Fear River, at its mouth, twenty miles below Wilmington."

"The enemy are presumed to have reached their position above the fort, not by passing up the river, where the gun boats of Fort Fisher are also well on the left bank, but by landing on the beach east of the mouth of Cape Fear River. The enemy having effected a lodgment above the fort is a serious matter. It will cost double the force to dislodge him that would have prevented his landing."

EDWIN M. STANTON,
Secretary of War.

DETAILS OF THE EXPEDITION.

"On BOARD STEAMER 'CONSTITUTION OF CUBA' OFF BEAUFORT, N. C., Dec. 18, 1864.—In order to afford your readers a clearer conception of the operations of the fleet, and to correct some inaccuracies incident upon hasty preparations of the latter which I saw you by the pilot, off Capt. Henry, I enclose to some extent the description I have given of the locality selected for the operations of the fleet, and the positions of the various vessels, as marked out on the chart enclosed for the occasion by order of Admiral POWERS."

The Point of Attack.

The main point of attack is Federal Point, the narrow srip of land which bounds the north side of New Inlet and forms a part of the east bank of Cape Fear River. Federal Point is held by a series of works, and is so situated as to give us a clear view of the port of Wilmington, and by cutting off Fort Caswell, which stands near the mouth of the river, render its possession by the Rebels no longer of any avail. Hence the importance of selecting New Inlet as the point of attack.

The principal work commanding New Inlet are the fortifications of Federal Point, the strongest being Fort Fisher, a casemated fort of great power, mounting, it is supposed, thirty-six heavy guns, some of them rifled having a range of over three miles. This work stands about two hundred yards from the shore. Following the line of the shore for about three-quarters of a mile, in a south-west direction, Fort Fisher runs a line of batteries, five in number, mounting twenty-four guns. These of these batteries are casemented and two others are open. The number of guns mounted in them is not known, but some of them are rifles of long range. Some three hundred yards northward of the terminus of this line of batteries stands what is designated as Battery Lemo, or Mount Battery, so called from its formation, it is an eminence round of earth some forty feet high, mounting four large guns, which are prominent objects to the eye.

A light-house is also situated on this mound, which is, doubtless, of great assistance to the blockade runners in making the inlet at night. The mound was thrown up, it is supposed, for the purpose of taking an elevation from which to throw grape and canister shot. The eight monitors should they attempt to come up the inlet, the gunners of this battery command the main chance, while most of the guns of Fort Fisher and of the intervening batteries command not only the main channel but also the Swash channel, which runs along the beach in a northeast direction. The latter work stands about the entrance of the Swash channel.

About two miles southeast from Fort Fisher, on Zeke's Island, which forms the southern shore of New Inlet, is another battery of some strength but fort Fisher and the adjacent works are evidently the key to the position and Federal Point is in our hands, screened by blockade running, at least so far as Wilmington is concerned.

The Point of Attack.

Notwithstanding the evident strength of these works, it is confidently believed that they cannot long withstand the terrible fire that can be brought to bear upon them.

The combined armament of the fleet numbers fully twelve hundred guns, most of them of the largest calibre, and in every armament the same to be expected in the annals of naval warfare. At least two hundred guns can be brought to bear upon the Point of Attack.

About three-quarters of a mile from the Point of Attack, the Federal Point is held by a fort, which is, doubtless, of great assistance to the blockade runners in making the inlet at night. The mound was thrown up, it is supposed, for the purpose of taking an elevation from which to throw grape and canister shot. The eight monitors should they attempt to come up the inlet, the gunners of this battery command the main chance, while most of the guns of Fort Fisher and of the intervening batteries command not only the main channel but also the Swash channel, which runs along the beach in a northeast direction. The latter work stands about the entrance of the Swash channel.

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