OPERATIONS OF THE NAVY.

OUR NAVAL CORRESPONDENCE.

The Passage of the Pensacola Down the Potomac.

The Late Engagement at Fort Pickens.

A VISIT TO OUR BLOCKADING FLEET.

NAVAL AFFAIRS AT KEY WEST, &c., &c., &c.

OUR NAVAL CORRESPONDENCE.

UNITED STATES STEAMER PENSACOLA, FORTRESS MONROE, Jan. 15, 1862.

Passage of the Pensacola Down the Potomac—Precautions Taken—The Approach to the Rebel Batteries—A Moment of Suspense—Nearing the Batteries at Evansport and Shipping Point—A Lucky Mistake—Past all Danger—A Single Memento of the Firing—The Arrival at Fortress Monroe, &c., &c., &c.

The United States steamer Pensacola left her anchorage off Alexandria, Va., on the morning of the 11th of January. She had been delayed a few days by a dense fog, and it was feared that some of the plans for passing the batteries of the Potomac would be frustrated. The weather became fine on the afternoon of the 11th, and the ship was anchored off the White House, about seven miles above Indian Head, and out of sight of the enemy. She had already been painted black, even to the inside of her ports. Her gilt work, outside, was covered with black. The air ports were entirely closed upon the inside, and not a ray of light was allowed to be seen. Even the lights of the binnacles were completely covered, merely allowing the smallest place for the man at the wheel to read the compass.

At midnight of the 11th she weighed anchor and headed for the batteries down the river. The speed of the ship was so well timed that, when she neared the first battery on Cockpit Point, the moon went down and it was high water. She had not a foot of water under her keel at this point of the river. Two small tugs were lashed to her on the port side to provide against any accident. The suspense was great as she approached the batteries. The light of the battery was in full view, and soon it began to bear abeam, when it was suddenly extinguished, and the first shell came singing along, and passed a few inches above the smoke stack. The guns of the Pensacola had been kept trained upon the supposed position of the enemy, and the executive officer gave the order to the divisions to fire. Quicker than thought the captain, who was the very devil of coolness itself, countermanded the order, quietly observing that the enemy wished to draw our fire, in order to reveal our position. The men, lockstring in hand, obeyed the counter order. Then came another shell from the same point, passing clean over head, through the rigging, but a dead line shot.

The engines were now put to their best, and the ship moved at an eleven knot speed, as quiet as death. The tugs were compelled to keep down their steam, in order to keep them quiet.

A pause followed, and Cockpit Point battery was passed and became silent.

The great batteries of Evansport and Shipping Point were heard. Only the bluff of the land could be distinguished. We passed it abeam, and as it became quartering a sheet of flame lighted up the darkness of the land, and the shot and shell flew through the rigging and around the lower masthands and lower yards.

Observing this, we knew that the hull of the good ship was safe; for unless we fired the elevation of the enemy's guns could not be rectified. For all this, it was a severe trial for officers and men to stand with guns trained upon their assailants and not deliver a reply. There never was a ship in better train for a conflict, and never were men readier or better trained for a fight, or more deliberately governed by officers. We all knew that the government did not wish the ship to be crippled in the Potomac at any price, and we felt that she must be reserved for a battle ground where no shell would be thrown away in darkness.

The firing of the rebel batteries was certainly magnificent. The last shell fired was an eighty-pounder, rifle, and came direct astern, passing between the mizen topmast and the topmast rigging, barely clearing the main and fore in a direct line, and struck the water just a ship's length ahead.

The safety of the Pensacola is due to the precautions taken to conceal her hull, to the sound judgment and coolness of the officers who guided her through the passage, and to the simple but nautical skill in which she was handled. A single gleam of light or a puff from the steam pipes of the tugs would have drawn upon her beautiful hull the disarming shell of the enemy.

At half-past five on Sunday morning the ship was past all danger, and the only memento left by the rebel batteries, which had been six months erecting for her destruction, was a single musket ball, which landed upon her deck from a shrapnel that burst over her.

Such was the passage of the Pensacola down the Potomac past the boasted batteries of the enemy, and she now lies quietly at her anchor off Fortress Monroe.

UNITED STATES STEAMSHIP RHODE ISLAND, KEY WEST, Dec. 18, 1861.

The Cruise of the Rhode Island—The Old Brandywine Ready for Action—Affairs at Hatteras Inlet—Capture of the English Schooner Phantom—Arrival at Beaufort, North Carolina—The Mount Vernon—Release of the Phantom—Supplying the Blockading Vessels—Description of the Principal Ones—A Suspicious Conference—Port Royal—A Gale—Matters at Key West, &c., &c.

With the exception of a terrific gale during the 12th and 13th inst., off Port Royal, of which mention will be made below, nothing could exceed the pleasantness of our cruise thus far. I have noted the principal events of our voyage up to this date, that they may be duly chronicled in your journal. We steamed out of the harbor of New York at noon Wednesday, 4th inst., having on board immense quantities of fresh beef, provisions, letters, papers, packages, and several Parrott cannon, each and all to be distributed at their respective destinations by our officers and crew.

We made Hampton Roads late in the afternoon of the 6th, steaming direct to the side of the storeship Brandywine, where we remained at anchor all night. We delivered to her officers a large quantity of government stores, for the use of the vessels rendezvousing there. The many arrangements observable throughout the famous old Brandywine are very creditable to her officers. She is supplied with an effective battery, and is at present commanded by Captain B. J. Totten, United States Navy. Her location is such that her guns are readily brought to bear on Sewall's Point, the thundering o which the rebels will hear the first demonstration of an offensive character they make. During the morning of the 7th we discharged several cannon at the wharf near Fortress Monroe, and at ten minutes past two P. M. same day left there in fine style, to continue our voyage of Christian mission, in relieving the immediate necessities of those connected with the blockade, and cheering their hearts by the many letters we had in store for them.

SUNDAY, Dec. 8, 1861.

We reached Hatteras Inlet this morning at ten o'clock, finding several of our vessels lying quietly at anchor inside. We ascertained that Col. Hawkins, Ninth New York State Volunteers, had gone North to transact important business for the regiment. Among the vessels doing duty here is the gallant gunboat Stars and Stripes; the dimensions of which I have been enabled to collect. They are as follows:—Length on deck, 150 feet; breadth of beam, 34 feet 6 inches; depth of hold, 8 feet; draft of water with armament and stores, 9 feet 4 inches; tonnage, 407 tons; her hull is of white oak, chestnut, &c., and is square fastened with copper, iron and treenails; her floors are moulded 13 inches; sided 8 inches, and her frames are 24 inches apart from centres; she is fitted with vertical direct acting engines, having two cylinders 26 inches in diameter, and a stroke of piston of 2 feet 6 inches; she is also supplied with one tubular boiler, and her bunkers are of wood; her propeller is nine feet in diameter, with a pitch of 16 feet, and the blades, which are four in number, are all of cast iron; her armament consists of five guns of large calibre. The hull of the Stars and Stripes was built by M. C. Mallory, of Mystic, Conn., in 1861, and her machinery was constructed at the Delamater Iron Works, New York city. The gunboat Ceres came out to us for beef and provisions, and we at once relieved her wants. At one P. M. we left Hatteras, and at seven P. M. overhauled the English schooner Phantom, from Cuba, bound to New York, so her captain reports, with a valuable cargo of molasses and sugar. This latitude being very suspicious for her to be in, Captain Trenchard took her in tow for the purpose of handing her over to the senior officer at Beaufort. Many were the oaths and execrations heaped upon our devoted heads for this action; but our captain knew his duty in the premises, and performed it.

MONDAY, Dec. 9, 1861.

We anchored off Beaufort at thirty-five minutes past seven this morning, finding the steamers Mount Vernon and State of Georgia, and the barks Brazilera and Gemsbok, whose various wishes we immediately attended to. Several contrabands have lately reached the Gemsbok by means of small boats from the shore. The Mount Vernon has done excellent service since she was purchased by the national government. She carries four guns and is of the following dimensions:—Length on deck, 175 feet; breadth of beam, [illegible] feet; depth of hold, 9 feet 9 inches; depth of [illegible] gold to upper deck, 16 feet 6 inches; draft of water, with armament, &c., 11 feet; tonnage, 858 tons. Her hull is constructed of white oak and chestnut, and is square fastened with copper and treenails. Her floors are moulded 12 inches, sided 10 inches, and her frames are 24 inches apart from centres. These frames are not filled in solid, but they have iron straps diagonal and double laid 4½ by 4½ inches running around them. She is fitted with one vertical direct acting engine, with one cylinder 49 inches in diameter, and a stroke of piston of 8 feet 6 inches. She is also supplied with one return tubular boiler, located in her hold, and her propeller, which is of iron, is 12 feet in diameter. She was built in New York in the year 1859 by Mr. Samuel Sneden, and her machinery was constructed by Messrs. Pusey, Jones & Co., of Wilmington, Del.

From our position the town and portions of our forces located there could be distinctly seen. We have made a thorough search of the schooner Phantom, and discovering nothing that warranted her detention we started to sea with her in tow at twenty minutes past eleven A. M., and after taking her some distance east her adrift.

TUESDAY, Dec. 10, 1861.

We arrived off Wilmington, N. C., at half-past one A. M., and supplied the bark Amanda, the only vessel there, with beef and provisions. This bark carries six guns, and her dimensions are:—Length on deck, 118 feet; breadth of beam, 28 feet; depth of hold, 12 feet. Her tonnage is 370 tons. At forty minutes past two A. M. we bade her adieu, and shortly after made fast to the frigate Sabine, off Georgetown, to whom, as well as the bark Gem of the Sea, we liberally gave the necessities of life, letters, packages, &c. The shore can hardly be seen from the decks of these vessels, so far out to sea are they. At twenty-five minutes past eleven A. M. we continued our voyage, and at noon spoke the United States steamer S. R. Spaulding, from Hampton Roads, with troops for Port Royal. We anchored off Charleston, that doomed city of the South, at half-past four P. M., finding the steamers Augusta, Florida and Alabama, and the bark Roebuck, on duty there. A few days before our arrival the Augusta captured a ship laden with arms, ammunition, &c., trying to run our blockade. She was at once sent North with a prize crew. The particulars of the dimensions of the gallant Augusta are:—Length on deck, 220 feet 8 inches; breadth of beam, 35 feet 4 inches; depth of hold, 13 feet; depth of hold to spar deck, 21 feet 10 inches; draft of water, with armament, &c., 13 feet; tonnage, 1,350 tons. Her hull is of white oak, live oak tops and ends, and chestnut, and is square fastened with copper. Her floors are moulded sixteen and a half inches, sided sixteen inches, and her frames are thirty-two inches apart from centres. Around these frames iron straps are diagonal and double laid, four and a half by three-quarter inches, thus rendering them very secure. She is fitted with an engine of the oscillating description, having one cylinder eighty-five inches in diameter and a stroke of piston of eight feet. She is also supplied with two ordinary return flue boilers, built in 1859, and her water wheels, which are of iron, are thirty feet in diameter. This vessel was built in New York in the year 1852, by Mr. Wm. H. Webb, and her machinery was constructed at the Novelty Iron Works, in the same city. By repeated inquiries and subjecting myself to much inconvenience, I have been enabled to collect the particulars of dimensions of a majority of the vessels we have met. I deem it a matter of importance to have them recorded, as many of them may play a very conspicuous part in the war in which we are engaged. The Florida is, length on deck, 214 feet; breadth of beam, thirty-five feet six inches; depth of hold, fourteen feet; depth of hold to spar deck, twenty-two feet; draught of water with armament, provisions, &c., twelve feet six inches; tonnage, 1,310 tons. Her hull is of white oak, locust and cedar, which is square fastened with iron, copper and treenails. Her floors are moulded sixteen inches, sided fifteen inches and her frames are thirty inches apart from centres. She is fitted with a side lever engine, having one cylinder, seventy-five inches in diameter, and a stroke of piston of eight feet. She is also supplied with two return flue boilers, and her water wheels are twenty-nine feet six inches in diameter. Her rig is that of a three masted schooner, and her bunkers are of iron. She was built in New York in the year 1850, by Mr. Wm. H. Webb, and her machinery was constructed at the Novelty Iron Works. The Alabama is a sister ship to the Florida in every essential respect, and both formerly belonged to Messrs. S. L. Mitchill & Co., of New York, running between New York and Savannah.

Whilst we were lying off Charleston, the English steam sloop-of-war Racer had a lengthy interview with a secession tugboat which emerged from the harbor, with an English flag and a flag of truce flying at her staffs. As soon as it was finished, the sloop-of-war up anchor and stood out to sea. What's up?

WEDNESDAY, Dec. 11, 1861.

This morning, at ten minutes past two o'clock we again left our friends and steamed out to sea, to continue our pleasant mission. Six hours after we were abreast of Fort Beauregard, at Port Royal, where we anchored near to the flagship Wabash. It would be impossible for me to enumerate the many vessels we found there. There were frigates, sloops-of-war, gunboats, barks, schooners, ferryboats, and the old whalers composing the stone fleet. Our vessel was literally besieged by the officers of the other vessels, and to many of their hearts we sent a thrill of joy by the good old letters we delivered them from their friends at home, hundreds of miles away. We have discharged a considerable quantity of our government stores here for the use of the different vessels. As you will receive later and more correct news from your correspondents here relative to current affairs I will not touch upon matters outside the ship. We leave here to-morrow for Key West, where we coal.

THURSDAY, Dec. 12, 1861.

We left Port Royal in the afternoon, but night approaching before we were enabled to cross the bar, we stopped our engines and came to anchor, intending to remain until next morning at daybreak. The evening was beautiful. The full orbed moon rose in splendor, and the sky overhead seemed to have more and brighter stars than ever before. Their combined silver light danced upon the waves, and myriads of water stars formed upon their tops as they rolled lazily towards the shore. But this was the calm before the storm, as suddenly, at half-past eleven o'clock P.M., a heavy squall came upon us, striking us with terrific force. You can have some conception of its tremendous power when I tell you it parted both our anchor chains as easily and quickly as a giant would snap a thread. Anticipating a pleasant night, we were under banked fires at the time, and our steam, as a matter of course, was very low. After losing our anchors our safety depended upon the time it required to raise sufficient steam to enable us to battle with the drifting force of the waves, which were fast sending us shoreward. Thanks to the promptness and efficiency of our worthy engineers, this was accomplished in the incredibly short period of thirteen minutes, and pushing our nose seaward we soon found ourselves in deep water again, where we considered ourselves comparatively safe.

FRIDAY, Dec. 13, 1861.

The squall has settled into a heavy gale, with ugly cross seas. Our engines are behaving splendidly, and we trust to weather it without further loss.

SATURDAY, Dec. 14, 1861.

Last night was perfectly terrific. All hands were on duty and all eyes watchful. Sea after sea made complete breaches over us, and one of terrible size and force struck the vessel at eight o'clock, clearing the decks, and causing many to think their time had come to bid farewell to terrestrial matters; but our gallant craft withstood the shock, and went manfully on. At the period of my writing (nine o'clock A. M.) the clouds are breaking, and the god of day again beginning to shine, indicative of an abatement. That it may be so is the earnest prayer of all on board.

SUNDAY, Dec. 15, 1861.

The storm ceased last night, and the sun rose in unclouded splendor this morning. A fairer day never dawned upon the deep, and with a fair wind we are again on our course, bowling along at the rate of thirteen knots an hour. We anticipate reaching Key West in the morning, where we shall remain two or three days.

MONDAY, Dec. 16, 1861.

We arrived at Key West this morning at daylight. The yacht Wanderer is here, acting as guard boat. In this duty she is assisted by the Beauregard, a prize to the United States ship Anderson. The Santiago de Cuba is in port. She lately took two prizes, viz: the schooner Victoria, with an assorted cargo of wool and several passengers, and the schooner Eugenia. They are both here, and will be taken care of. This place is under martial law, and consequently very quiet. Major Hill is in command, and we to him who is caught breaking any of the laws; his destination will certainly be Fort Taylor. The work on this fort is progressing admirably under the supervision of Captain Hunt, of the Engineer corps, United States Army.

WEDNESDAY, Dec. 18, 1861.

Her Majesty's steamer Plover arrived here to-day. The schooner E. Churchill, Gray, has been chartered to convey Captain Burgess' company, Wilson's Zouaves, from here to Tortugas. The river steamer John Hart, designed for service along the coast of Central America, arrived here to-day. Her dimensions are:—Length on deck, 160 feet; breadth of beam, 23 feet 6 inches; depth of hold, 10 feet 8 inches; draft of water, 5 feet. Her frame is of white oak and chestnut, and her tonnage is 220 tons. She has a crosshead engine, with one cylinder of 36 inches in diameter, and a stroke of piston of 9 feet. She has one flue boiler, and her water wheels are 25 feet in diameter. Her hull was built by Mr. Samuel Sneden, of New York, and her machinery was constructed in the same city by the Neptune Iron Works.

I have to-day been on shore, gathering together a quantity of limes, oranges, &c., to give some of the loyal boys we will find sweltering in the heat far down the coast, there doing blockading duty for the national government. The weather here is very hot, differing materially from what you are now experiencing, I presume.

We shall visit all our vessels along the coast as far as Galveston, and will return to the North about the last of January. The Rhode Island will then go into Philadelphia, there to be converted into a gunboat, a procedure not at all in unison with my feelings, as I think it will destroy forever the beauty and usefulness of as gallant a craft as ever breasted the waves of the old Atlantic.

KEY WEST, Jan. 3, 1862.

Arrivals and Departures of Government Vessels—Naval Officers at Key West, &c.

The United States ship Nightingale, Lieutenant Delano commanding, arrived off this harbor on the 25th ult., and anchored near the outer buoy, coming up to the town on the 26th. She has a full cargo of stores for the navy, which she is now discharging at the naval wharf.

The store transport ship George Green, Captain Griffin, having procured a full supply of water, &c., sailed on the 27th ult. for Ship Island. Seventeen of the horses had died before her departure.

The United States steamship Santiago, Captain Ridgely commanding, arrived on the 28th ult. from a cruise.

The United States gunboat Mercedita, Lieutenant Steelwagon, from New York, arrived on the 28th.

The United States steamer Sciota (new gunboat) arrived on the 28th from Philadelphia, having in tow the Spanish steamer Primera. She had fallen in with the P. off Bahia Honda, in distress, and gave her assistance and towage to this place.

The United States gunboat Itaska, Lieutenant Caldwell, from Philadelphia, arrived on the 29th.

The United States gunboat Saganore arrived on the 29th from Boston; also three masted gunboat Kittatinny, Captain Welch, from Philadelphia.

The United States gunboat Winona arrived on the 30th from New York.

The United States gunboat Mercedita sailed on the 30th for Fort Pickens.

The United States gunboat Winona sailed on the 2d inst. for Fort Pickens.

UNITED STATES SHIP PORTSMOUTH, KEY WEST, Jan. 7, 1862.

Vessels in Harbor at Key West—Strength of the Secession Element—Large Number of Mechanics on Board the Portsmouth—Improvement of Officers and Men in Naval Drill—Sea Sickness—French Vessels for Mexico, &c., &c.

We arrived here on the 5th inst., after a quick and unusually pleasant passage, and found in port the gunboat Raska (waiting for the return of some of her machinery from Havana, where it had been sent for repairs), the quondam slaver Nightingale, and the famed yacht Wanderer. The steamer Rhode Island arrived about three hours after us, and will take our mails North to-day. The steamer Flambeau came in yesterday morning from Nassau, and brings the intelligence that the Gladiator, loaded with arms and munitions of war, is now lying there, waiting for an opportunity to run the blockade. The secession feeling is strong in Nassau, and when the officers of the Flambeau first went ashore they were insulted by boys running before them waving secession flags. The Flambeau also states that there were two privateers at Nassau, and that one of them went to sea, in hopes that they would give chase and enable the Gladiator to leave. The Flambeau remained until her coal was nearly all gone, and had barely enough to last her here, and when she returns in all probability there will be nothing there. We have been very fortunate in having had pleasant weather our entire passage; for if we had had any heavy storm I think it extremely doubtful whether I should be writing this letter, unless there are accommodations for doing so at the bottom of the briny deep, and a submarine mail running to New York. Our crew is very much like the Massachusetts regiment in which were to be found mechanics of every description, with only this slight difference between the two—the Massachusetts men were good workmen, and made better soldiers, while ours are miserable mechanics, and make worse sailors. Owing, however, to the untiring and unceasing efforts of our First Lieutenant (than whom no better officer or more perfect gentleman ever trod a ship's quarter deck), our crew now begin to act more like sailors than they did; so that before long this unpromising material will be moulded into some sort of order, and I hope if we have an opportunity to participate in the festivities of a bombardment none of them will be found to have an antipathy to gunpowder.

Our officers, with the exception of the captain, first lieutenant, master and one midshipman, have never been in a man-of-war before, and are consequently green in the ways of the service. I, myself, although I had made it my especial study to become perfectly conversant with naval etiquette, and congratulated myself on my proficiency, was guilty of the heinous offence of appearing on the quarter deck in a straw hat, instead of a cap, and was requested to remove it, and array myself in the regulation head covering, the inventor of which regulation cap may congratulate himself on having made the ugliest and most uncomfortable skull protector possible; and it is well for him that the prayers of the wicked avail little, or our anathemas would consign him to a place considerably warmer than Key West. I in vain pleaded the excessive heat and the necessity of keeping my head perfectly cool, as I had a strong predisposition to brain fever; so I was obliged with a regretful tear to consign my obnoxious straw hat to oblivion. Nothing worthy of note occured on our passage down, except the frequent visits of that never welcome guest, sea sickness. Only those who have been to sea can appreciate the intense gratification afforded to an old stager by seeing the agonizing struggles of some poor unfortunate not to appear sick, until, finding the task too Herculean for him to accomplish, in an agony of despair he wishes himself dead, and can fully enter into the feelings of the person who wrote:—

A life on the ocean wave:
The man who wrote it was green;
The author had never been to sea,
And a storm he never had seen.

Almost all of our crew, and I am sorry to say some of the officers, so far forgot themselves as to indulge in this amusement; but now they are all sailors, and when they get home will talk about the poor devils that were sea sick, as if they had never been troubled with the affection themselves. On the 3d instant we passed one large ship-of-the-line, four frigates and two gunboats, all of which showed French colors, and proved to be part of the fleet destined for Vera Cruz to have a little conversation with the Mexicans. They were all steam vessels and carried powerful batteries; so that if the Mexicans are not very agreeable the visit may lead to unpleasant results. We will remain here only long enough to take in water, and then go immediately to Pensacola, to report to the Commodore. I cannot see what possible use a sailing vessel can be on this station, as vessels constantly run the blockade even where steamers are stationed, and if we should have a calm we could do nothing. I hope when next I write to be able to have something interesting to tell you about; but as yet we have done nothing and seen nothing, and each day is but a repetition of the former. The weather is uncomfortably hot, and as my sheet is full I shall not spin my yarn any longer—till next time.

UNITED STATES STEAMER ALABAMA, OFF CHARLESTON, S. C., Jan. 12, 1862.

Three Months' Experience as a Blockader—A Specimen of Southern Shots—Arrival of Contrabands—Tuinall's Mosquito Fleet—New Orders—The Irregularity of the Mails—Treasury Notes in Demand—An Unsuccessful Ruse, &c.

It would seem as if Flag Officer Dupont's report to the department, eulogizing the services and efficiency of the Alabama, and other steamers of the same class, is well deserved; for during three months that she has been in commission she has assisted in blockading the different ports and harbors between Charleston and Fernandina, besides capturing two and destroying one valuable vessel and cargo, not to mention "toteing" stone frigates from port to port. We have, in fact, been kept upon the constant go, and, were it not for bright anticipations concerning prospective prize money, blockading upon such a cheerless, dead-and-alive looking coast as this would prove excessively humdrum and monotonous. As it is, we would like to have an occasional hand in some of the more exciting expeditions that are now and then fitted out; but that work is generally entrusted to the new contract gunboats, whose light draft of water and long range guns render them peculiarly adapted to the operations upon the Southern coast. Mails very seldom come direct, and when a steamer is expected to go North we have our letters already written, often several days in advance, ready to send away at a moment's warning. Hence the abrupt termination and closing up of some of my communications.

Another disagreeable feature connected with the blockading service is the fact that laundresses, tailors and shoemakers are not at present indigenous to our cruising grounds, and the gradual diminution in the supply of clean linen has caused the practice of many ingenious deceptive little artifices (known only to the initiated) to remedy and conceal the want.

I wish that some of the people who imagine that "secesh" furnish their troops with good, comfortable clothing could see the soldiers' shoes taken from a schooner burned near Cumberland by the Alabama. They were a very coarse, ungainly arrangement, manufactured from common half tanned yellow Spanish leather, with single thin sole, and neither lining, binding nor heels, evidently cesting not more than twenty cents a pair. On Sunday, the 5th instant, while lying in Warsaw Inlet, we observed a number of contrabands making signals on the beach abreast of us; and, although it was raining at the time, two boats put off from the Seminole and took them off to that vessel, together with four canoes in which they (eight in all) had paddled all the way up from Brunswick, Ga., a distance of about seventy miles. The next day we picked up a very intelligent yellow fellow who had made his escape from Savannah, and professed to be the servant of a captain in one of the forts. The stories that he told differed from those of some of the others; for he stated that Tuinall was at Savannah, with the mosquito fleet of seven steamers, among which were the Everglade, Sampson, Columbus, Huntress and Uncle Sam, the former being one of those that came down Augustine river every day, to communicate with the fort at the head of Warsaw Sound. Free negroes are made to work on the fortifications, but slaves are hired from their masters, and if they attempt to leave and get caught, death is their inevitable portion. Rebel officers and slaveholders will not allow either soldiers or servants to gain correct information or news with regard to their battles or other operations, but stuff them up with stories that although the federals are too much for them afloat, when they come into collision on shore the Yankees are invariably beaten. On the 7th the gunboat Pembina came in with orders for the Alabama to proceed to Port Royal for stores; but before leaving the harbor we came to abreast an abandoned rebel breastwork near its entrance, and sent our boats on shore to raft off some secesh timber left behind by them in their haste to get out of the range of Uncle Sam's cruisers. While they were thus employed we had some very pretty target practice with our battery upon the wreck of a schooner, half buried in a sand bank just outside, and, in company with the captain of the Pembina, I observed an army officer going ashore, doubtless to examine the sand battery as to the feasibility of mounting guns and occupying it.

Arriving at Port Royal, we filled up with clothing and other stores from the Release, with the expectation of returning to our former cruising ground; but on the following day we got orders to sail, and accordingly just before dinner the anchor was hove up and the Alabama stood out of the bay, steering to the northward and eastward. In the evening we anchored in the line with the Seminole, Penguin, Pocahontas and Roebuck, off Charleston; but now that the stone fleet is sunk in the southern channels our duties are much easier than formerly.

On the 9th the steamer Connecticut came down and stopped here for a short time, furnishing us with a supply of fresh meat and vegetables, and, what was still more acceptable, a few letters and newspapers. But in connection with this subject, let me remark that there is a singular eccentricity observed in the manner in which our mail matter is conveyed and distributed. Letters, with postmarks a month old, come to hand after travelling with a roving commission up and down the coast; and from them we learn that packages of newspapers were supposed to accompany them, but that mysterious "somebody" will pertinaciously persist in asserting his prior claim to them.

It is next to an impossibility to procure Treasury notes down here, either for love or money, and the want is severely felt by those who have families at home to provide for, but have not the facilities for transmitting specie to them.

To-day a schooner came out from Charleston and ran down Morris Island, firing guns to entice some of the blockading squadron under the fire of shore batteries; but the dodge was, classically speaking, "played out," and only excited laughter on our side.

UNITED STATES STEAMER WYANDOT, OFF TYBEE, Ga., Jan. 1, 1862.

The Celebration of the New Year at Fort Pickens—Remembrance of Home, Sweet Home—Drill of Colonel Rose's Regiment—Encampment of the Seventh Connecticut Regiment—Scarcity of News, &c., &c.

The advent of the new year was heralded by the Forty-sixth New York regiment, Colonel Rose, after the manner peculiar to the brave fellows that compose it, clearly evidencing that they claimed the faderland as their birth place, although battling bravely for the country of their adoption. Just before midnight of yesterday the horizon was lighted up by the glare of a hundred fires, which somewhat puzzled us, until we remembered that the burial of the old year was about to take place, while the echo of men's voices broke the stillness of the hour and carried us back to the happy firesides where good cheer and pleasant interchanges of feeling were filling up the time. The commemoration of the day was in no wise abated after daylight, for the booming of guns in rapid succession caused many on board to turn out, and gave the impression that the enemy had actually opened fire from Pulaski.

But little has transpired of any moment during the past ten days. A portion of the squadron, composed of the Pawnee (flagship), Commander Drayton; the Vandalia, sloop-of-war, and the Wyandot, are holding this point, while the Flag, the Seminole, the Alabama and Henry Andrews are blockading Warsaw passage. On Monday evening, under instructions from the commanding officer on this station, both cutters were despatched, with volunteer crews, to board all strange vessels in the offing and report the result. The first cutter did not return until this morning, having been carried out by the wind and tide, and her crew taken on board the Alabama, off Warsaw passage. In company with a number of my brother officers, I this morning went on shore, witnessing a very efficient regimental drill of Colonel Rose's regiment, who invited us to his quarters (the lighthkeeper's former residence), where we were cordially welcomed by his staff and handsomely entertained. Major Zimmer, who has seen much service in Continental Europe, was particularly kind, and afforded us much interesting information. The Forty-sixth deserves much praise for its proficiency in drill, and reflects great credit upon its commanding officer. It numbers about seven hundred and fifty men, who have all the energy and determination which characterize their countrymen. The Seventh Connecticut are also encamped here, and cannot fail to attract attention from their soldier-like bearing and efficiency on parade.

General Wright is in command of the brigade, to which the two regiments are attached. Officers and men alike complain of the masterly state of inactivity to which they are obliged to submit. The feeling attains to a great extent in the squadron, nor can I learn that any strategic movement is contemplated by the government. Vessels of light draught are much needed in the service; they are more effective than those carrying heavier batteries and drawing more water, and are of immense advantage in a reconnoissance or in ferreting out the enemy's works in bays and inlets where the water is shoal. Intelligence was received here this morning that Prince Albert had deceased, and that the British government was on the point of declaring war against the United States. I shall wait for news more reliable to confirm the latter statement. I have seen but one newspaper, and that the HERALD, since we have been on the station, now over a fortnight. Mail matter comes to hand but rarely, as its transmission is entirely by United States vessels to Port Royal. The vessels belonging to the Quartermaster's department of the army carry the army mail only. It would be well if some arrangement could be made by which the two arms of the service would accommodate each other in this respect. More anon.

UNITED STATES STEAMER MOUNT VERNON, OFF WILMINGTON, N. C., Jan. 1, 1862.

Burning of a Light Vessel Under the Guns of Fort Caswell, N. C., by the Boats of the United States Steamer Mount Vernon, Commander O. S. Glisson—Details of the Operation—Gallantry of the Men Engaged—Boldness of the Plan of Attack—Successful Movements, &c.

We have been blockading off this port since the 11th of December last, having come here from Beaufort, N. C. On our arrival here, we saw that the rebels had taken the light vessel which was formerly on the Frying Pan shoals, and anchored her close to Fort Caswell, where she served as a beacon for vessels going in and out of the harbor; they also used to hoist lights on board of her at night to annoy us.

Captain Glisson determined to destroy her, if possible, to prevent the rebels making use of her for any purpose. He accordingly planned an expedition to go in and set fire to her. Every officer and man being a volunteer for this service, the only difficulty was to determine who should remain on board. He selected Acting Masters Aleck Allen and H. L. Sturgess, Mr. J. P. Foote, coast pilot; one boatswain's mate, one quartermaster and nine men to perform this hazardous duty; and at midnight on December 30 the party left the ship in two boats, divided as follows:—The cutter, under command of Acting Master Aleck Allen, with Mr. J. P. Foote; David H. Thayer, chief boatswain's mate; William Bental, Quartermaster, and three men. The gig, under command of Acting Master H. L. Sturgess, with six men. The cutter was provided with combustible materials, and the crew were well armed, as were also the crew of the gig, which boat, having a compass, led the way into the harbor, and on the cutter going alongside of the light vessel laid off on her oars, ready to support her in the event of an attack being made. The boats pulled quietly into the entrance of the harbor, where the cutter took the lead, and when she had got the light vessel between her and Fort Caswell she pulled gently down for her with two oars, and got on her starboard quarter without discovery. Luckily a rope was found hanging over the quarter, by the aid of which Acting Master Allen climbed on board. He was quickly followed by Mr. Foote; the boatswain's mate and Quartermaster A. Hasling were then sent down for the combustible materials.

After a careful examination it was discovered that there was no one on board; but there were evidences of carpenters having been recently employed in putting up berths and cutting gun ports. The vessel was pierced for eight guns, and the fighting bolts were in the deck and everything was nearly ready for mounting her battery. The rebels doubtless intended to use her for harbor defence. There being no ladders shipped, the Quartermaster was lowered down the after hatchway, where he soon collected a fine heap of boards, to which were added the combustibles brought in the boat. After well saturating the whole with turpentine he set fire to it. The party then retreated to their boat, which shoved off directly. Both boats pulled their hardest in the direction of the ship. Nor were they any too soon in doing so; for, owing to there being side lights in the vessel a light could be distinctly seen on shore, and just before the pile was fired we heard the sentries on shore giving the alarm, by calling out "Watch." They were too late. A little better watch on their part would have saved the embryo Confederate war vessel; for she was anchored only a short distance from the ramparts of the fort. The fort commenced firing her heavy guns in the direction of the boats; but they were out of harm's way.

Immediately on seeing the fire Captain Glisson hoisted position lights and made the Mount Vernon's number by Coston's colored signal lights.

The burning vessel, the guns from the fort, the boats, with their crews straining every nerve, and the colored signals of the Mount Vernon, formed a most magnificent spectacle.

The work was most effectually done. Whether the rebels ever attempted to stop the flames or not we cannot learn; but this we do know, that after burning for over thirty hours not a vestige of her remained.

The very boldness of the plan insured its success. The rebels never for one instant imagined that the "Yankee pirates" (as they politely style the federal navy) would have the audacity to come between the wind and their nobility, and burn a vessel lying in one of their ports, within hail of a fort mounting sixty guns; therefore they thought it quite superfluous to place any guard on board. Had they done so, I am afraid that I should have another account to give, as not one of the little band would ever have lived to tell the tale.

It is to be hoped that the Navy Department will recognise the important service rendered by Captain Glisson, and give him a larger vessel, which his zeal, his patriotism and his standing in the navy so well entitle him to.

UNITED STATES STEAMER RHODE ISLAND, HAMPTON ROADS, Jan. 16, 1862.

Lengthy Cruise of the Rhode Island—Rejoicings in Charleston to Commemorate the Secession of South Carolina—Experience of Rough Weather—Capture of a Prize—The Celebration of New Year's Day—Security of Pickens—Vessels Spoken at Sea, &c., &c.

Owing to various circumstances we have this time been out rather longer than usual. We left Hampton Roads on the 7th December for Port Royal, stopping at Hatteras Inlet, Beaufort, Wilmington and Charleston. We reached the last named place on the 10th, and as we approached we heard the reports of heavy guns and could see the smoke from Fort Sumter; and as several vessels were off the bar we thought from appearances that the ball had opened, and made preparations for entering the lists should such prove to be the case; but no such glory awaited us, as the firing was by way of salutation to an English man-of-war, and had been going on all day to commemorate the secession of South Carolina, and keep it before the people that the Palmetto State had, by the voice of her sovereign people, one year since, shaken off the tyrannical yoke of United States despotism, &c., &c. A small steamer, bearing the English flag at the peak and a flag of truce forward, had come out from Charleston with the English Consul, to communicate with the man-of-war, and was about returning as we arrived.

We reached Port Royal next morning, and remained until five P. M., when we stood out; but being overtaken by darkness before we could get outside, we anchored for the night and banked fires. About midnight a gale from the northeast came up suddenly, parting the starboard cable as soon as the squall struck the ship. The fires were at once spread and the port anchor let go; but after dragging that anchor for a few minutes, the port chain parted, leaving us helpless until steam could be raised, which was, however, accomplished in an unusually short time, and we headed for sea, trusting to Providence to keep us in the channel, as we could not see the buoys. We cleared the bar, and were soon safely out, excepting the loss of both our bower anchors. During the next day experienced a heavy gale and a very rough sea, much to the disgust of a certain disciple of Esculapius, who is emphatically not a seafaring man, and whose nervous [illegible] of foul play on the part of old Neptune were only equalled by his astonishment at the lamentable depravity of his well picked messmates, who beheld the warring of the elements with such apparent unconcern. As we make it a point to ascertain the character of every vessel we meet, we had our hands full for two days before arriving at Key West. Most of the vessels were fruiters, and we revelled in luscious oranges, bananas, &c.; finely flavored Havanas were not unfrequently among the trophies brought by the boarding officer on his return.

Arrived at Key West Dec. 16; and after replacing our lost anchors and coaling ship, &c., we left for the Gulf squadron, finding everything quiet at Pensacola and Mobile. On the morning of the 26th we took a prize, viz. the rebel schooner Venus, loaded with copper, tin, lead and wool, bound for any port where she could get in. Arrived off Galveston on the 27th, where the frigate Santee is blockading, leaving Lieut. Hart, late of the Vinceennes, to assume the duties of executive officer on board that vessel, in place of Lieut. Jewett, who was detached to take command of the steamer Montgomery. On our return we were unable to find the steamer De Soto at her station off Barrataria, but learned the cause when we arrived at the Southwest Pass. She came in collision the night before with a French steamer, and was towing her to Ship Island, as she was so disabled that she could not go by herself. The De Soto had somewhat marred the symmetry of her wheels, but was not materially injured. On the 31st an expedition left Ship Island for Biloxi, consisting of the Water Witch, gunboat New London and steamer Lewis. When we left, that evening, we had not learned fully the result of the expedition, but it was considered no failure. The rebel gunboat Florida—the same that had an engagement with the Massachusetts—is in the habit of attacking our vessels occasionally, and then running away. She attacked the Wissahickon off Horn Island, and the Huntsville off Mobile, but was unable to stand the Huntsville's battery.

New Year's Day was celebrated by another bombardment at Pensacola. We arrived there at half-past three P. M., and they had just commenced. The rebels sent a steamer down to the Navy Yard, and Col. Brown fired upon her as soon as she was within reach, to which the rebel batteries replied, and the firing was kept up on all sides until seven P. M., when Col. Brown gave the order to cease firing and