THE NEW YORK HERALD.

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IMPORTANT FROM THE GULF.

Movement of Rebel Troops Towards Port Hudson.

GENERAL BANKS AT BATON ROUGE.

Departure of Governor Hamilton from New Orleans for Washington.

LOYAL TEXANS AWAITING DELIVERANCE

Enormous Trade of the Rebels with Mexico.

Important Information for the Government.

REBEL TORPEDOES IN THE MISSISSIPPI.

THEIR TERRIBLY DESTRUCTIVE POWER.

NEWS FROM THE REBEL LINES,

&c., &c., &c.

The steamer Columbia, Captain Barton, arrived at this port yesterday. She left New Orleans on the 25th ult., and Havana on the 28th.

The steamer Roanoke, Captain Thompson, was to leave New Orleans on Wednesday afternoon, the 28th ult., at four o'clock, for New York via Havana.

The George Washington, Captain Gager, was to leave for New York direct on Tuesday morning, 27th ult.

The British sloop-of-war Rinaldo, Commander Hewitt, left New Orleans on Thursday morning, the 22d ult., bound for Havana via Galveston. The New Orleans *Bee* understands that Commander Hewitt has been promoted to the rank of captain. A nephew of Admiral Milne succeeds him in command of the Rinaldo.

We learn from the *Delta* of the 22d of January that the pilots of the Passes, who boarded the "290" on the 8th, are in arrest. There are eight of them. If, previous to this arrest, says the *Delta*, they had taken the oath of allegiance, they ought to be hanged.

New Orleans banks have lately refused Treasury notes on deposit. The latter are now par with city currency. General Banks has remonstrated with the bank directors, and they had consented to receive the notes on special deposit. Confederate notes were rising and in some demand, and seceeh more buoyant and happy.

The Columbia brings a good cargo and full passenger list. Among the latter are Captain Roe, United States Navy; Lieutenant Colonel Elliott and Major Dimon, United States Army; Mr. Greathouse, the defeated candidate for Congress from New Orleans; Mr. Wm. J. Reid, agent of the steamer, who was wounded by guerillas up the Mississippi river, and Paymaster Taylor, United States Navy.

The Alabama has not been heard from in the Gulf since the sinking of the Hatteras. As a number of vessels are cruising after her she probably finds it prudent to keep out of reach for a while.

Our New Orleans Correspondence.

NEW ORLEANS, Jan. 25, 1863.

Departure of Governor Hamilton from New Orleans—Supposed Reason for His Decision—What the Deans Expected of Him—Importance of the Rio Grande—Opinions of the Governor's Friends—Affairs in Mexico and, Texas—Rebel Commerce in Mexico—Enormous Extent of Their Trade—Treatment of Union Men—Mexicans on the Borders, &c.

The departure of Governor Hamilton, with a part of his staff, for Washington, on Tuesday last, was very sudden, and not known except to a few of his immediate friends at the time of the sailing of the steamer. In fact, the Governor's decision to go and his actual departure seem to have been nearly simultaneous. I believe, however, that he had some time previously determined to go in the event of positive refusal to send an expedition to Texas, and that soon as this answer was received he embarked on the steamer which was about to sail.

Governor Hamilton came here with the full expectation of an expedition to Texas would be immediately despatched from this port. He had in his pocket a commission as brigadier general of volunteers and Military Governor of Texas, and full authority from the War Department to raise a brigade of Texas cavalry. A considerable number of Texans who had taken refuge in this city had already formed themselves into companies, and had been mustered into the service, under the authority of Governor Hamilton and the officers provisionally commissioned by him. Colonel Davis had made good progress in raising his first regiment, as had also Colonel Haines in raising a second; and the friends of Governor Hamilton who still remain in Texas, and many who had taken refuge in Mexico, were eagerly waiting to join him the moment he should make his appearance upon the soil of that State. He had positive knowledge that such was the case, and knew to a certainty that thousands of loyal men, looking to him as their native leader, would enrol themselves in the ranks of the Union army the instant he should afford them the opportunity.

Hamilton had labored earnestly and faithfully several months in bringing before the Cabinet and the country the unhappy condition of the Union men in Texas, their unswerving loyalty, their eagerness to fight in defence of their homes and their rights, and the great importance of the Rio Grande, the possession of which has enabled the rebels to carry on an immense trade with Mexico, exchanging their cotton and receiving in return blankets, shoes and warlike stores. The government fully appreciated the importance of the subject, and the Governor left New York on the 4th of December in the full expectation that the day of deliverance for Texas had come, and that he would be enabled at once to gratify the longing wishes of the Union population of that State. But General Banks was unable to supply the men and materials for the expedition, and having informed Governor Hamilton of this fact on Monday night last, the Governor sailed for the North on the steamer the next morning. You will, of course, be informed of his intentions and efforts at Washington; but if I am not mistaken his friends will make a strong effort to have Texas set off as an independent department.

It is said here that General Banks' orders are such that he could not send out the Texas expedition without a violation of them. The friends of the Governor complain that he was deceived, and that to send him there without the means to go on would be an act of cruelty against the loyal men of Texas, whose hopes have been thus raised to a high pitch only to be disappointed. None of them can be more disappointed and pained than the Governor, whose heart is wholly in the cause of delivering Texas, and whose family are there, at the mercy of his enemies.

STATE OF AFFAIRS IN TEXAS AND MEXICO.

Through the kindness of a gentleman residing in this city I have been permitted to peruse private letters from perfectly authentic source, giving a highly interesting account of affairs on the southwestern borders of Texas.

REBEL COMMERCE IN MEXICO.

Few persons have any idea of the immense commerce which is carried on by the rebels across the Texan border. Its trade is by no means confined to the Mexicans; but hundreds and thousands of speculators from the North and from other countries are reaping a rich harvest of wealth by supplying the rebels with goods contraband of war, and by taking in exchange cotton and money. The Mexicans are hostile to the Southern confederacy; but the Mexican government is powerless to prevent this immense trade, which has already assumed colossal proportions. One of the letters to which I have referred, written from Monterey, says:—

Where is Colonel Hamilton? If in New Orleans, tell him the rebels are buying up everything that can be eaten or worn or used, to kill Union men. It is astonishing to see the enormous quantities of goods that go from here into Texas. Millions of dollars worth of cotton is here monthly, all of which is sent back to the rebels by their agents here, in the shape of powder, lead, shoes, blankets, shoes, rope, sugar, cotton goods of all kinds, and, in fact, everything that can be used by the rebels.

SIX HUNDRED THOUSAND REBEL BLANKETS.

An order is here now for six hundred thousand rebel blankets, all of which can be had, and with a sufficient amount of money to pay for them.

Agents are on the frontier, and as far in the interior as San Luis Potosi, buying up all the wheat and flour that can be had, and are sending it across the Rio Grande. Most of the goods going from here cross the river at Piedras Negras. * * * Until this trade is cut off Texas cannot feel the blockade, at least the western part. If a federal force could only be sent to Fort Brown it would have the effect to stop the trade almost entirely.

HOW UNION MEN ARE TREATED.

You can scarcely have an idea of the way Union men are treated in Texas. They are hung on the slightest suspicion, and by bodies of irresponsible men who, were they in a country where law was respected, would not be allowed outside of a prison yard. You have probably heard of the way that a small body of Union men were treated by the Texas rangers and a part of J. McDuff's company, at the head of the Nueces. I learn from a gentleman here, who had a conversation with an officer who was present at the massacre, that twelve passports from provost marshals of Western Texas were found on the bodies of the Union men killed, by which they were allowed to pass freely over any part of the frontier.

After the affair on the Nueces another party of twenty Germans were attacked on the Rio Grande as they were preparing to cross it by a large party of rangers. They (the Germans) succeeded in killing a number of the rangers and driving them back, only having in the party one man wounded slightly. They immediately crossed the river, leaving their horses with the Texans and throwing their guns into the water.

We have at present upon this frontier about one thousand men, who are only waiting for an invasion of Texas to get a chance to join the federal army.

A MEXICAN FORCE IN THE FIELD.

A more recent letter from the same source contains the following:—

There is up the river a large force of Mexicans, who have been driven from Texas, numbering about thirteen hundred, of whom one-half are well armed and mounted, but short of ammunition. They are being joined by a few Americans, and they now keep the frontier, as far as San Antonio, in a perfect ferment. The military commander of San Antonio wrote to Gen. Vidaurri a letter, which was published in the *Official Bulletin* of Monterey, that a large force of Mexicans belonging to towns in the State of Tamaulipas had armed themselves to invade the State of Texas, "induced and paid by the American Consul in Matamoras." Gen. Vidaurri made them a very evasive answer, saying that he had nothing to do with citizens of Tamaulipas, but that he had written to the Governor of that State, informing him of the fact.

The same writer states that refugees are constantly flocking over the border into Mexico, and that the rebels are very much frightened at the prospect of an invasion by a force under Gen. Hamilton.

Our New Orleans Correspondence.

NEW ORLEANS, LA., Jan. 25, 1863.

The Quiet Condition of the City—No Movement as Yet Against Port Hudson—The Opening of the Mississippi—Voluntary Exiles On Their Way to Dixie's Land—The Killed and Wounded at Berwick's Bay—Pleasant Prospects for Residents of New Orleans—The Rebels Cutting the Levees—The Office of Provost Marshal of New Orleans—Sales of Cotton, &c., &c.

Nothing of importance has transpired since the date of my last letter. Indeed, so quiet is the city and vicinity, so devoid of stirring incidents, that it is with the utmost difficulty a newspaper correspondent can find matter for a letter; and as I have not the honor of being acquainted with those amiable gentlemen—the thugs, rowdies and gamblers—I am unable to get up a good murder, a free barroom fight, or even a swindling transaction on a scale of anything approaching respectability. Alas! that the Crescent City—the whilom haunt of thievocrats, lynchers and vigilance committee rascals should have to experience such degenerate days! Inactivity seems to prevail everywhere. There has been no movement against Port Hudson, as your army correspondent will, doubtless, tell you; and since the late affair at Berwick's Bay, when the rebel steamer Cotton was destroyed, and the gallant Lieutenant Commander Buchanan lost his life, no important movement of Weitzel's brigade has taken place. There is an impression abroad, however, that the present calm is one of those which portends a storm—an interim between a season of quiet and of the clash of arms, to be followed by deeds of bloodshed, which may have the most momentous effect on the issue of the present war, leading, probably, to the opening of the Mississippi and its tributaries, from the great delta connecting the river with the Gulf, to the various heads of navigation.

Some of the feeble and juvenile relatives of rebel soldiers have been availing themselves of the permission given by General Butler, in one of his general orders, to go into the Confederate lines, on condition of not returning. This order, it will be remembered, was temporarily suspended by General Banks on his taking command of the department. The order has been, subsequently, declared to be once more in force. Under its provisions, on Wednesday morning last, about one hundred and fifty women and children embarked on board the steamer S. H. Brown, at Dan. Hickock's landing, on Lake Pontchartrain, under charge of Col. Clarke, Provost Marshal General of the Department of the Gulf. The trip was a pleasant one, and is said to have resembled a picnic party rather than the departure of exiles from their native place. Each adult, in accordance with the order, was allowed to take only his or her personal clothing and fifty dollars in money; but each contrived to have a basket of substantial eatables, which were, of course, allowed to be taken. Colonel Clarke did the agreeable so well that, on his fair and youthful charges landing at Madisonville, a small town on the opposite shore of the lake, the ladies gave him three cheers—nothing is said about a "tiger"—but they did not forget three more cheers for Jeff. Davis, now that they were safe on secesh soil.

I append the official list of killed and wounded, belonging to the military, at the late fight at Berwick's Bay, or, more properly, Bayou Teche:—

LIST OF KILLED AND WOUNDED IN THE EXPEDITION OF GENERAL WEITZEL'S COMMAND AGAINST THE GUNBOAT COTTON ON BAYOU TECHE.

TWELFTH CONNECTICUT VOLUNTEERS.

Peter Richards, Co. A, wounded, hand.
Samuel A. Arment, Co. A, wounded, breast, slightly.

SEVENTY-FIFTH NEW YORK VOLUNTEERS.

Lieutenant J. E. Whiteside, Co. H, killed.
Privates Noble and Remmings, Co. G, killed.
Thompson, Co. G, killed.
Corporal Cayphes, Co. A, wounded.
M. V. S. Vaneten, Co. A, wounded.
Voslounge, Co. A, wounded.
Dwyer, Co. A, wounded.
Davenport, Co. C, wounded.
J. W. Riley, Co. B, wounded.
Dwyer, Co. B, wounded.
A. Michael, Co. C, wounded.
Hermon, Co. D, wounded.
McHolland, Co. E, wounded.
Sherman, Co. F, wounded.
Mitchell, Co. F, wounded.
Derby, Co. F, wounded.
Kennety, Co. F, wounded.
Evenden, Co. F, wounded.
Corporal Hitchcock, Co. G, wounded.
E. D. Bradley, Co. H, wounded.
B. Burbank, Co. H, wounded.
Phelps, Co. I, wounded.
Henry, Co. K, wounded.

ONE HUNDRED AND SEVENTH NEW YORK VOLUNTEERS

A. J. Schrondver, Co. F, killed.
Michael Abert, Co. C, wounded.
Solomon Rouff, Co. D, wounded.
G. Hanmark, Co. H, wounded.
W. H. Tibbs, Co. H, wounded.

FIRST MAINE BATTERY.

Thos. M. Thompson lost both arms.

COMPANY B, FIRST LOUISIANA CAVALRY.

Welsh, killed.

Total killed, 6—one commissioned officer and five privates. Wounded, 27.

By order of Brigadier General WEITZEL.
J. B. HUMBARD, A. A. General.

Colonel T. H. Thorpe, the City Surveyor, made a startling disclosure on Friday evening at a meeting of the Third District Union Association. The Colonel said the guerillas had cut great holes in the levee above the city, in order to train ordnance to bear on steamers passing up and down the river. The consequence was that levees had become dangerous in the event of a rise in the river, embracing no less than the complete flooding of the State of Louisiana, which is below the bed of the river when it is full, and a considerable portion of Mississippi and Arkansas. A pleasant prospect this for people living in New Orleans and places a thousand miles or so off. It may be remembered that at the commencement of the present outbreak at least one New York daily paper advocated the cutting of the levees, and the consequent drowning out of the rebels, for which the paper or papers were properly rebuked by the Herald for the want of humanity displayed in the suggestion. It was never thought at the time that the rebels themselves would perpetrate so suicidal an act. But we live and learn.

Colonel Jonas H. French, in an order from General Banks, dated January 22, has been relieved from further duty of Provost Marshal of Louisiana, and Colonel Chas. C. Dwight, of the One Hundred and Sixtieth New York Volunteers, has been appointed in his stead. During his term of office Colonel French won all hearts—including the ladies'—through the uniform urbanity with which he discharged the arduous and often disagreeable duties of his office. Tall, well proportioned and of commanding presence, he always insured respect, while his handsome countenance has ever been a passport to the regards of the fair sex. And yet the Colonel knew how to be stern when sternness was necessary. Two or three days ago he fell in with a fellow who delighted in boasting of his rebel proclivities, and who had on at the time a military cap adorned with the rebel buttons. Stopping him in the street, Colonel French compelled him to doff his cap and cut off the buttons, to the delight of the few Union men around and the intense disgust of the rebel boaster.

Mr. Montgomery, an auctioneer doing business in Camp street, sold, the other day, thirteen bales of cotton at 81c. per lb. A few days before he sold fifteen bales at 56½c. per lb. Both parcels were received by way of the lake. What a commentary is this on the present state of affairs, compared with the former state of New Orleans before the demon of secession raised its hydra head.

Our Baton Rouge Correspondence.

BATON ROUGE, LA., Jan. 24, 1863.

The Visit of General Banks to Baton Rouge—His Inspection of the Troops—What Could He Visit Mean?—His Visit to Some Naval Vessels—Crevasse of the Mississippi—Danger of the River Overflowing—General Augur in Command at Baton Rouge—He Stops the Rebel Supplies—Dialogue with a Citizen—A Reconnoissance to Port Hudson—Infernal Machines in the River—Their Terrible Power Demonstrated—Affairs at Port Hudson, &c.

Since my last despatch to the HERALD from this city the event of greatest interest here has been the visit of General Banks and a portion of his staff, accompanied by Brigadier General Weitzel.

General Banks arrived here on board the government transport New Brunswick, on Wednesday morning, having left New Orleans the previous night. He was accompanied by Colonel Charles S. Holabird, Chief Quartermaster; Lieut. Colonel Strothers, Captain Abbott, Chief of the Engineer Corps, and Lieutenant Hartwell, all of his staff.

General Banks and party were met on the levee by several officers of General Augur's staff, and proceeded at once to the headquarters of General Augur, in Lafayette street. General Grover and staff soon after called upon the General, and the entire party then rode around the camps, inspecting the lines and the general disposition of the forces. There was no parade or review, or formal inspection of the troops; at the same time the General satisfied himself, by personal observation, of the condition of the men and the state of discipline in the division.

His coming, of course, was the cause of much speculation and many inquiries, and every one asked himself and his neighbor what it meant. Did the General credit the reports that have been circulating recently of an impending rebel attack? No, that could not have brought him up here, because these reports subsided several days ago, and there is a prevailing disbelief in the intentions of the rebels to come here and attack us. Was a movement about to be made on Port Hudson, and had the General come up to see that the dispositions had been properly made, or, perhaps, to command the expedition in person? That is a question that time must answer.

The General had several long interviews with his subordinate generals, in which, of course, the strength of the enemy at Port Hudson was discussed, and all the known facts were canvassed, as was also the feasibility and expediency of a movement. But the results of these consultations will be developed by time.

VISIT TO THE RICHMOND.

At three o'clock in the afternoon General Banks proceeded on board the sloop-of-war Richmond, where he was received by the flag officer, Capt. Alden. The usual courtesies were exchanged, and the General with much interest looked through the ship. Captain Alden and the General then proceeded together on board the Essex, an object of genuine curiosity with every one, not only because of her singular appearance, but because of her reputation and the many severe battles she has passed through.

During the interview a reconnoissance to Port Hudson was suggested. It was proposed that the Essex and Richmond should go up, and the General expressed a strong desire to take a look at the rebel batteries; but for want of time the project was abandoned.

VISIT TO THE CREVASSE.

On Thursday morning General Banks and party rode down to the break in the levee, about a mile and a half below this city, and on the same side of the river, to examine it.

This break in the levee, which has already been discussed in the HERALD, is the cause of much alarm among the planters of an extensive district, and is really of very great importance. The break was made last year, and resulted in flooding a considerable portion of the parishes of East Baton Rouge, that portion of Iberville which is east of the river, Ascension, St. James and St. John the Baptist, the water finally emptying itself into Lake Maurepas. It destroyed more than a million dollars worth of property, and cut a channel which, it is feared, will become a permanent outlet for the river. Many of the inhabitants were driven to the tops of their houses by the flood, and compelled to blow horns, beat tin pans and raise various other signals of distress for their more fortunate neighbors to come and take them off with boats.

The break in the levee is about eight hundred feet wide, and in order to repair it it is necessary to embank for about two thousand feet. The water is now within four and a half feet of the break, and is rising daily, and much apprehension is felt that the work will not be completed before the river is high enough to overflow it. General Grover has had a force of contrabands at work upon it, and General Banks ordered a still larger force to be employed at once. Every possible effort will be made to prevent a repetition of the flood. There is also a considerable break in the levee above Baton Rouge and on the opposite side of the river, about seven miles below Fort Hudson. This, of course, is beyond our lines; and men familiar with the subject say there is no doubt a large district west of the Mississippi will be flooded by this break.

The crevasse, as was inevitable, produced innumerable cases of fever, and is justly dreaded on sanitary grounds.

Having visited this break and completed the informal inspection of the troops, and given such orders and directions as he deemed necessary, General Banks returned to New Orleans on the New Brunswick, which started at half past two o'clock on Thursday. The General stopped at Donaldsonville on his way down and forwarded a despatch to New Orleans by the telegraph.

Captain Charles S. Bulkley, the government telegraph agent, accompanied General Banks to make arrangements for completing the telegraph from New Orleans to this place, which is now working as far up as Donaldsonville. An examination showed that the wire had been broken down much of the way and some of the materials destroyed. Much remains, however, and it is probable that in a short time we shall have telegraphic communication with the Crescent City.

GENERAL AUGUR IN COMMAND.

General Augur assumed command of the forces here on Monday last, and issued the following order:—

GENERAL ORDERS—NO. 1.

HEADQUARTERS, BATON ROUGE, Jan. 19, 1863.

By direction of the Major General, commanding the Department of the Gulf, the undersigned assumes command of all the troops at this place.

The following named officers will constitute his staff, and they will be obeyed and respected accordingly:—

GENERAL STAFF.

1. Captain Geo. E. Halstead, Assistant Adjutant General.
2. Surgeon John H. Rauch, Medical Director.
3. Captain Justus Hodge, Chief Quartermaster.
4. Captain Henry D. Woodruff, Chief Commissary.

PERSONAL STAFF.

1. Captain Walter Cutting, A. D. C.
2. Captain Geo. S. Shaw, A. D. C.
3. Captain James Benhard, A. D. C.
4. Captain M. Ritchie, Acting A. D. C.

C. C. AUGUR,
Major General United States Volunteers.

General Augur has restricted communication and commerce beyond our lines, which have heretofore been carried on more or less under various pretexts and false pretences. Nothing was more common than for persons to come inside our lines and represent that they had large families, suffering for food and clothing, and ask permission to purchase supplies, all, of course, for their starving families. But no sooner would the rascals get outside the lines than their supplies were sold to the rebels at enormous profits. General Augur has pretty much stopped this, and allows nothing to be taken out except in the smallest quantities, and rarely at that. The following interview between a Louisianian and General Augur's Adjutant, Major Halsted, will illustrate the subject.—

CITIZEN—My family lives beyond the lines, sir, and are suffering for food and clothing, and I wish a permit to supply them with what they need.

MAJOR—Are you a Union man, sir?

CITIZEN—I do not belong to the Confederate army, and I was a Union man as long as I thought there was any "show" for that side.

MAJOR—What do you want to send to your family?

CITIZEN—Well, a barrel or two of flour, if you won't allow me to send more.

MAJOR—A barrel or two? My dear sir, we cannot allow anything of that sort.

CITIZEN—Well, I never was called a very bad man, and you will at least allow me to send a barrel?

MAJOR—No, sir. Ten pounds of flour (writing down the order) is all you can send. What else?

CITIZEN—Well, a little coffee.

MAJOR—How much?

CITIZEN—Well, my family is large, and we will say fifty pounds.

MAJOR—It can't be done.

CITIZEN—You will certainly allow me to send twenty-five pounds?

MAJOR—No, sir; not the half of it.

CITIZEN—But, sir, my family is large, and you won't think of saving less than twenty pounds?

MAJOR—You can send five pounds of coffee. What else?

CITIZEN—Shoes for my men.

MAJOR—You can't send any men's shoes. You may send a few ladies' and children's shoes if you wish—say two pairs.

The citizen looked on with great disappointment while the order was made out, and went away grieved in his heart.

RECONNOISSANCE TO PORT HUDSON BY THE ESSEX—AN "INFERNAL MACHINE" PICKED UP.

On Sunday last, the 18th inst., the gunboat Essex made a reconnoissance to Port Hudson, going within range of the enemy's batteries, but failing to draw their fire. Perhaps the rebels are too much disgusted with the Essex to waste powder by throwing shell at her, which never succeed in doing her any damage.

Reports have been received to the effect that the rebels had constructed infernal machines, or torpedoes, by which they were to blow the Essex out of water the next time she went up. This news was brought by contrabands, who stated that not less than twenty had been prepared. One negro, with a look of grave alarm, warned the captain of his danger as follows:—

"Cap'n you'd better be skeered at them fellers up there. They'se put fourteen oh dem are pictorials in de ribber."

Well, when the Essex was near the first water battery, the captain observed something floating in the water, which looked like an old barrel, and he immediately sent out an officer and boat's crew to examine it. The Lieutenant discovered a wire running to the shore, and commenced pulling at it. It finally occurred to him that this might not be safe, and so he cut the wire with his cutlass. He found that it was connected with the barrel, and that under this very barrel was the veritable infernal machine he was looking for.

It was raised out of the water and put on board the Essex, when an examination showed that the thing contained at least a barrel of powder, and that it was intended to be exploded by pulling the wire. It was supposed that the vessel running over the wire would explode it, or, if not, it could be fired by pulling the wire at the end on the shore. This wire was attached to a cork, and to the cork was attached another wire, running into the powder, and to pull out this cork was to set fire to the machine.

The torpedo was shaped like a demijohn, and was completely concealed by the barrel attached to its top.

It was brought down to Baton Rouge, and on Monday last taken ashore and placed on the west side of the levee. A strong rope was then fastened to the cork and thrown over the levee. A man then pulled the rope with a jerk, when the torpedo went off with a frightful explosion, tearing up the levee and making a hole in the ground more than twenty feet in extent. This was a sufficient demonstration of its power to blow any ship clean out of water, if it had been fired at the right time and spot.

FORT HUDSON.

The reported obstructions in the channel east of Profit Island will amount to little or nothing. The current in the river is very swift in the vicinity of Port Hudson, and it is well nigh impossible to construct any permanent obstructions. The island is very low, and when the river is at its height is nearly all submerged. The most that the rebels could accomplish would be to run light artillery over with which to annoy the approaching gunboats.

Two or three days since our pickets brought in a corporal and two privates of the Ninth Louisiana battalion, who had been sent from Clinton to arrest deserters near our lines. The corporal and his comrades thought it was a favorable opportunity to get home, and so came within the lines and were taken prisoners. They state that large bodies of troops are moving from Camp Moore, Mississippi, to Port Hudson, and that the rebel force at the latter place has been materially increased within the last few days. It is suspected, however, that these prisoners were sent in on purpose to spread false and exaggerated reports of the rebel strength at Port Hudson.

There are only fifteen guns now actually mounted on the river at Port Hudson, and five more are ready to be mounted. There is a great difference of opinion among the officers of the navy in relation to the strength of the place. One will tell you that Commodore Farragut's fleet could settle the question with the river batteries in half an hour without any trouble, and another will tell you that Port Hudson is as strong as Vicksburg.

PRISONERS.

Capt. McGee's cavalry occasionally pick up a wandering rebel soldier. A day or two since they brought in a young man by the name of Hunter, who belongs to Stuart's cavalry. He is the son of Capt. Hunter, who was the rebel Provost Marshal of Baton Rouge previous to Gen. Banks' occupation of the city. He said he was a soldier and was proud of it. He was dressed in citizen's clothes, and stated that every man furnished his own uniform and dressed as he pleased. He pretended to be totally ignorant of what was going on in the rebel camps, and stated that Stuart died about two weeks after he was wounded.

CLINTON.

There are now about two hundred and twenty five rebel soldiers at the village of Clinton, and the post is in command of Colonel Lee. There have been many desertions, and within two weeks the force has thus been reduced from three hundred to its present number.

INTERESTING STORY OF A REFUGEE.

A man by the name of Butler made his escape on Thursday morning and reached Baton Rouge in safety. He resided about two miles above Port Hudson, and, under cover of a fog, succeeded in passing all the batteries, in a skiff, without being detected.

Mr. Butler is a native of Louisiana, and says that when this war broke out he secretly took an oath that he would never take up arms against his country. He refused to enlist, and managed to escape the conscription, but this brought him under suspicion, and he was vigilantly watched by the rebel spies and informers.

A few months ago he bought a flock of twelve hundred sheep, investing in them all the property he owned in the world, and drove them down below Baton Rouge, secretly intending to get them within the Union lines if an opportunity offered. But this intention he did not whisper to any human being, and there was not the slightest legal evidence of any such design. Nevertheless, when about twelve miles below Baton Rouge and many miles from our lines, he was arrested by a number of planters, who came upon him armed—a self-constituted Vigilance Committee. He was taken before a tribunal of some sort and his property confiscated. The sheep were at once taken for the use of the rebel army, and Butler was thrown into prison. As there was no evidence against him, however, he was released after six months' incarceration, and after many weeks of waiting and watching, succeeded in making his escape.

He states that there are many Union men about Port Hudson, and that they mean to escape as soon as possible; that they all know each other and have secret signs of recognition. Said he—"I could start from Port Hudson and travel a thousand miles, and put up with a Union man every night." He was aided by friends in his escape. He started at two o'clock in the morning, and the fog on the river so completely concealed him that he had no trouble whatever in passing Port Hudson, notwithstanding the patrol on the shore.

The enterprising proprietors of Adams' Express have already sent an agent up here to open an office, and the friends of officers and soldiers here will henceforth be able to send boxes and packages to them directly to this city. The Express Company is doing an immense business in the way of forwarding money from the soldiers to their families.

The contrabands now here number over two thousand. They have prayer meetings every Sunday evening, which abound in the wildest exhibitions of negro peculiarities. Their hymns are extraordinary, and but for the ignorance and simplicity of these people some of them would be considered blasphemous in the extreme. Yet they are sung with all the fervor and earnestness of devotion, and one hearing them instinctively excuses the seeming irreverence of the words. The following is one of their hymns, which they sing with great unction, to the air of "Gideon's Band":—

CONTRABAND HYMN.

I went down to de gates ob hell,
I went down to de gates ob hell,
I went down to de gates ob hell;
An' dar I bids 'em all farewell.
Oh! play on de harp of golden strings, &c.

Oh! if you'd make old Satan run,
Oh! if you'd make old Satan run,
Oh! if you'd make old Satan run,
Den jist fetch out the Gospel gun!
Oh! play on de harp ob golden strings, &c.

I cast my eyes down to de ground,
I cast my eyes down to de ground,
I cast my eyes down to de ground,
I ask the Lord to kick me round.
Oh! play on de harp ob golden strings, &c.

I cast my eyes up to de sky,
I cast my eyes up to de sky,
I cast my eyes up to de sky,
I ask de Lord to kick me high
Oh! play on de harp ob golden strings, &c.

RESIGNATION OF COLONEL TURNBULL.

Colonel Charles S. Turnbull, of the One Hundred and Thirty first New York (First Metropolitan) regiment, resigned his commission a few days since on account of ill health. At the earnest solicitation of the officers of his regiment, however, and of his superior officers, he reconsidered his purpose and withdrew his resignation before it had been forwarded to Washington. He has applied for a leave of absence, in the hope of recruiting his shattered health, and there is no doubt it will be granted. He will probably go to New York by the next steamer, and hopes to be able to resume the command of his regiment.

IMPORTANT FROM CHARLESTON.

The Union Gunboat Isaac P. Smith Captured by the Rebels.

The Reported Crippling of Another Gunboat in Stono River.

SKETCH OF THE I. P. SMITH,

&c., &c., &c.

Acting Rear Admiral Lee has sent the following telegram to the Secretary of the Navy—

NEWPORT'S NEWS, Jan. 31, 1863, }
VIA FORTRESS MONROE, Feb. 1—8 A. M. }

The Richmond *Examiner* of Saturday contains the following despatch:—

CHARLESTON, Jan. 30, 1863.

The federal gunboat I. P. Smith, carrying eleven guns and two hundred and thirty men, surrendered unconditionly to our forces this afternoon, after a sharp engagement at Stono river. The enemy's loss is heavy. Only one man was wounded on our side. Another gunboat escaped in a crippled condition. Our forces were under command of Lieutenant Colonel Bates.

SKETCH OF THE VESSEL.

The I. P. Smith is doubtless the Isaac Smith, a propeller formerly used in this harbor as a towboat, and since transformed into a gunboat and enlarged. When employed in this harbor she was rated No. 2 at Lloyd's, and was of 350 tons burthen. She then drew but seven feet of water, and had but one deck. She was built of oak at Williamsburg, in 1860, copper and iron fastened; has a beam engine, with a cylinder of forty-four inches in diameter and five feet stroke of piston. She was then owned by H. Smith, and commanded by Captain John Smith. She was of medium model, with freight house and cabin above, and was surveyed in New York in April, 1861. She was repaired at the New York Navy Yard during last fall, and was enlarged to 453 tons burthen. She was then armed with nine guns, which have since been increased to eleven.

The News in Washington—The Isaac P. Smith Aground When Captured.

WASHINGTON, Feb. 1, 1863.

The Navy Department has a despatch announcing that the Gunboat Isaac P. Smith, one of the purchased gunboats, Lieutenant Connover commanding, got aground on Stono Inlet and was captured by the enemy. The details had not yet been received.

THE ARMY OF THE POTOMAC.

Everything Quiet in Camp—Return of General Hooker—Prospects of Another Storm, &c., &c.

HEADQUARTERS, ARMY OF THE POTOMAC, Feb. 1, 1863.

There is nothing of special importance to communicate in regard to affairs of this army.

There are indications of another storm, which will tend further to increase the depth of mud which already so seriously impedes army movements.

General Hooker returned from Washington this morning, where he has been for two or three days past to arrange matters connected with the reorganization of the army.

IMPORTANT FROM SUFFOLK.

A Reconnoissance in Search of the Enemy—Visit of Native Virginians to the Late Battle Field—The Reported Interview Between Generals Peck and Pryor, &c., &c.

SUFFOLK, Feb. 1, 1863.

A reconnoissance of the First Mounted New York Rifles went to Zuni, also in the direction of the Isle of Wight to within half a mile of the Blackwater bridge, but could not find the enemy anywhere in that neighborhood.

Over two hundred Virginia natives to-day were on our late victorious battle field. They were engaged in securing curiosities and relics. Some of these visitors came from quite a distance.

Corporal Coleman, of Company D, Sixty-ninth New York Volunteers, died in hospital to-night of his wounds.

Three of the Eleventh Pennsylvania cavalry, reported as wounded, have since died of their wounds.

The correspondent of the Herald would state that it is a fact that General Pryor said he had heard of a late engagement near Savannah. You are mistaken in publishing that General Peck and General Pryor had an interview.

General Pryor made his statement to a native Virginian, who imparted the intelligence he had received to us. General Peck then communicated it to General Dix. These are the facts of the report.

The fighting near the Blackwater is all over, and the rebels are driven beyond that river.

Visit to the Fortifications of New York Harbor.

Major General Wool and staff have had the revenue steam cutter Winnata placed at their disposal by Surveyor Andrews, for the purpose of visiting the fortifications and defences of New York harbor. The General and staff will commence this important duty on Tuesday, by visiting the forts at the Narrows and other localities.

News from San Francisco.

SAN FRANCISCO, Jan. 31, 1863.

Arrived, ship Agra, Boston.

THE FLORIDA.

The Reported Destruction of the Rebel Privateer Off Cuba.

WHERE SHE WAS LAST SEEN.

The Pursuit of the Florida by the Union Gunboats.

Heavy Firing at Sea Heard at Cardenas and Matanzas.

THE EXCITEMENT IN HAVANA,

&c., &c., &c.

A passenger by the Columbia from Havana brings the intelligence that a supposed reliable rumor of the destruction of the rebel privateer Oreto or Florida was current in that city, and that the rumor was somewhat confirmed by the arrival of the Creole from New York.

The following is his statement in brief:—

The First News at Havana.

On Tuesday, January 27, it was reported in Havana that heavy firing had been heard at Matanzas and Cardenas, as if coming from vessels of war engaged in a serious contest at sea. It was also stated that the Oreto or some other rebel vessel had been chased by several Union gunboats, but with what result had not been learned. It was then believed at Matanzas that the firing and chasing were connected with the same vessel.

The Creole Confirms the News.

The Creole, from New York, arrived at Havana at between twelve and one o'clock P. M. of the 28th. She brought news that she had been spoken by the Union gunboat Cayuga, which vessel reported that she (the Cayuga) had observed a steamer on fire, supposed to be the Oreto, and that three other vessels were firing into her with great rapidity. The locality of this engagement was not definitely stated, but that it was in the vicinity of the Cayes off Cardenas and Matanzas.

Our Havana Correspondence.

HAVANA, Jan. 28, 1863.

The Excitement About the Florida—The Destruction of American Vessels Taken by Her—The Last News About the Florida, &c., &c.

The Florida excitement continues. Daily we are hearing all sorts of rumors about vessels destroyed, and even naval actions between the dreaded rebel and the Union vessels supposed to be in pursuit of the marauder. War steamers come and go continually, and everybody is on the *qui vive*. The United States vessels Tioga and Sonoma came in yesterday, and I believe they are already gone out again. The R. R. Cuyler got ashore for an hour or so going into Cienfuegos. She has, with the Santiago de Cuba, sailed again.

The Florida has certainly burned a number of vessels along the coast. We have heard of her at Cardenas, Cienfuegos and other points. The names of the destroyed vessels are hard to get at, but you will learn them in time. One, called the bark Corris Ann, laden with timber, &c., was burned off Cardenas.

The very latest news of this rebel privateer is that just brought by a sailing vessel, the captain of which reports having seen a steamer, painted white and with one chimney, chasing another *with two chimneys*, on the Bahama bank. This latter is supposed to be the Florida.

The News by the Columbia.

HAVANA, Jan. 28, 1863.

We have had no reliable information of the Florida since the departure of the Eagle. Of course there are many rumors. One gives her whereabouts as off the Grand Inagua; another places her on the Bahamas, off Abaco; others that she had a fight with a Union gunboat, was on fire off Abaco, was being chased off the banks by a war steamer painted black, &c.

A War Steamer Chasing Another.

[Translated for the New York HERALD from the Havana Diario of the 27th ult.]

The captain of a vessel which arrived at this port yesterday states that when near the Bahama Banks he saw a war steamer, painted white, and having one chimney, giving chase to another painted black and having two chimneys. *The latter was rapidly gaining on the former*, but night coming on the captain alluded to could not see the result of the chase.

Why the Report May Be True.

The steamship Eagle, which left Havana on the 24th ultimo reported that the rebel steamer Florida (Oreto) left Havana on Thursday morning, the 22d, having coaled during the night. She had arrived at that port on the 21st. She had pushed onward towards Matanzas, and had destroyed four vessels between there and Havana. This account brings the certain news of the arrival of the Florida in the vicinity of Matanzas.

Captain F. A. Small, of the Corris Ann, writes that on the evening of the 22d his vessel was burned by the rebel steamer Florida in the very harbor of Cardenas. There was no doubt as to the identity of the rebel steamer, and this report shows her position on the night of the 22d.

The captain of a vessel arriving at Havana on the 26th reports a war steamer painted white in full chase of another painted black, and with two smokestacks. This answers the appearance of the Oreto, or Florida, which fact could hardly have