

FORT AND FLEET.

Blockaders and Blockade Runners—Hardships on the Water and Deeds of Daring.

When President Lincoln issued his blockade proclamation it seemed like an empty threat. There was not naval power enough at that date to blockade one Southern port. The real blockade may be said to have begun in the spring of 1862. By this time the navy was thoroughly organized for work, many new vessels had appeared, and considerable valuable experience had been gained by numerous officers. From that date to the close of the war there were never less than six Federal blockaders off Charleston bar, and sometimes the number was increased to fifteen. One Wilmington might be guarded by two or three vessels, and the next by five or six, and it was the same at Smithville, Georgetown, Savannah and Galveston.

When a blockader arrived on the station, her first care was to discover what forts or batteries defended the harbor, and the range of their guns. The next was to survey the coast and map out the banks, shoals, channels and to locate beacons and bearings. The Confederates had of course removed all buoys, abandoned all light houses, and in many cases had cut down trees which had been familiar landmarks for years. Where it was possible to secure a negro who knew anything of the coast he was paid well and kept aboard.

When a blockader had done all this her real work had only begun. Plenty of pilots who knew all about Charleston bar in 1860 could tell nothing about it in 1862. New channels had been cut, old ones filled up, and the sea was making changes every month.

The Confederates were not to be shut up without exhausting every effort to prevent such a calamity. Forts and batteries mounting guns of the longest range were erected at the mouths of harbors and rivers, and the blockaders were forced as far off the coast as a cannon-ball would reach. During the day they would remain out of reach of the forts, but as night came on they would creep in and close up to watch for the daring runners.

Each blockader was a sentinel on post. Blow high or low, hot or cold, she must remain until relieved by fresh orders. It happened at least twenty times during the war that the entire fleet off Charleston had to cut sticks and run to sea to ride out the terrible gales. There were few days without adventure, and few nights without peril.

As the blockade-runners seldom ventured to make their appearance by daylight, the blockaders would either run in and have a brush with the batteries, or dispatch scout-boats up creeks and rivers. Again they would stand out to sea to watch for incoming runners, and with them it was eternal vigilance without much liberty to speak of. There was ever a fear of submarine torpedoes or "devils," and after the Confederate cruisers got afloat no one could say at what hour one of them might appear among the fleet. It was known that the Confederates were building rams and iron-clads, and their appearance might be looked for any day.

With the coming of night the vigilance must be increased, and the dangers were by no means diminished. Every runner that slipped in or out left a stain on the fleet, but men could have done no more than was done. No soldier on outpost used his eyes and ears more keenly than the lookout on board the blockaders. On a pleasant night the duty was not onerous, but in wild weather, and particularly during the winter months, much suffering was necessarily endured. No man aboard could turn in at night with a feeling of security. He realized that he was likely to be turned out at any moment, and once out there might be hot work with the guns, a pull in the boats, or a chase lasting for hours. A Confederate captain told me that he made Wilmington one night in a terrible snowstorm, and the night was so bitterly cold that all his crew were frost-bitten. He got into the harbor without a blockade, but there in a channel was a Federal gunboat at anchor. She could not be passed to port, and on the starboard side the distance from her rail to the beach was scarcely a hundred feet. The Confederate had a light draught steamer, and he edged up at quarter speed to squeeze through. He passed the gunboat within twelve feet, and as he passed he saw a look-out with his arms on the rail looking square at him. The Confederate expected an alarm, but it did not come. His craft crept forward like a snail, one of her paddle-wheels almost on the beach, and by and by was out of sight and safe in harbor. As was afterward learned in Wilmington, the look-out who seemed to be gazing with wide-open eyes was a dead man—frozen to death at his post of duty.

There was never a single moment in the twenty-four hours that a watch was

not maintained. One man, provided with the best of glasses was sufficient by day, but at night from two to four were on duty, according to the weather. During the first year the runners selected dark or stormy nights for their trips, but later on they could be looked on sort of night. Every rumor going out halted off Fort Sumter to get the report of the look-out who was maintained there. Every evening before dark this look-out having the best telescope gold could buy in Europe, noted the position of every blockader. He saw whether they had steam up, took notice of all signals, and if one or more were to leave during the night the look-out generally caught on to something to give him the cue. Sometimes the blockaders would change their stations as soon as night fell, but the look-out could often tell what positions they would take, being guided by the tides, currents and look of the weather.

The first aim of the runners was to get safely in and out. When it was realized that this was impossible, the object was to prevent vessel or cargo from being of any benefit to the Federals. The runner would be headed for the beach, three or four fires kindled on board, and, in the majority of instances, the crews escaped, and vessel and cargo were consumed. When the war closed, the bones of at least thirty runners could be counted within ten miles of the mouth of Charleston Harbor.

When a runner headed for the shore, it was out boats and pull for her. Now and then one was overhauled and the flames subdued, but in many cases the boat's crew were driven off by the infantry sent to the spot from the nearest fort.

In August, 1863, a negro paddled off to the blockader Shockokon, stationed off Wilmington, and gave information that a schooner was lying in Topsail Inlet seven or eight miles from the sea. It turned out that this was the blockade runner Cooper, which had slipped in and out three or four times, and would have got to sea again within three or four days had not her presence been betrayed. An expedition from the blockader started out to advance up the inlet from the sea, but was driven back by a battery, the presence of which was entirely unsuspected.

After taking a few days to survey the situation the commander of the blockader one night ran up the coast to a point beyond the spot at which the schooner was lying to load. Between the sea and the inlet was a neck of land a mile wide. Two boat's crews were sent ashore, and while one boat was left on the beach, the men carried the other across the neck and launched it, and then seven men started down the inlet to capture the schooner. The Confederates did not dream of such a Yankee trick as this, and apprehended danger only from the opposite direction. The boat's crew of seven approached without discovery, charged and carried the Confederate camp on shore, and in ten minutes had possession of schooner and all, without having a wounded man.

It may be a bitter pill for certain people to swallow, but it is nevertheless a solemn fact, that this same schooner ran at least three cargoes direct from New York and Philadelphia into blockaded ports, each time being furnished a cargo by men who were making themselves hoarse by hurrahing for the glorious Union and against traitors.

All sorts of ideas were worked to draw the blockaders off the station or give them a scare, and many of the put-up jobs were successful. One night the hull of a vessel was driven down with the tide and produced the greatest consternation for a time. It drifted down on a blockader, being almost a board before it was discovered. All hands were called up to repel boarders, the guns turned loose, and as the "dreaded monster" drifted away the whole fleet took a hand in and finally sent her to the bottom "with every soul on board." It was believed for many hours that a "rebel Merimac" had been done for, but during the next forenoon a negro made his escape to the fleet in a skiff, and not only revealed the true character of the "monster," but stated that two runners got out during the excitement.

Another plan was to drift a raft down after having set up a couple of sticks for masts; and in one case at least it was so arranged that smoke and sparks issued from a smoke-stack. As soon as the raft was sighted the fun began, and runners were always on hand to take advantage of position by the fleet.

While the blockade runners trusted to speed and dodged instead of fighting, there was danger to be apprehended from the desperate daring of nine-tenths of the captains. They often made a dash for it when discovered, and several times off Charleston they rubbed against blockaders in a way to make the splinters fly. A wooden steamer buzzing along at the rate of twelve miles an hour would have sunk the largest iron-clad in the navy if striking her right.

There were some blockade runners

who were thoroughly determined not to be captured, and to fight if cornered. One captain had a spar and a torpedo attached to the bow of his craft, and both were in position whenever he ran in or out of Charleston. His intention was in case a blockader barred his path, to push straight at her and give her the benefits of the torpedoes. Curiously enough, he made seven or eight trips without even being hailed by a blockader.

It is doubtful if any blockade ever recognized by the world was more strictly enforced or of more damage to the blockaded. No one expected that it could be made so stringent that nothing could slip through. That was the aim, of course, but the federals labored under many burdens. In the first place the confederates purchased the very fastest crafts afloat. In the next, bad weather was an advantage to them. Again, they would take such desperate chances as dumb-founded brave men. In a dozen instances they came down the harbor at a speed of fourteen or fifteen miles an hour, and plunged straight through the fleet and took the chances. Some were not even hit by the hot fire instantly opened, while others took from three to six cannon balls into Nassau as relics. Federal history fawns upon the admirals, puffs the commodores, and pats the commanders on the back, but it stops there. There is never a word of praise for the thousands who endured the hardships and braved the dangers of the blockading stations. Indeed, but for an occasional magazine article or newspaper sketch, the country would have forgotten that we had anything afloat except a few iron-clads.

Life's Mockery.

Reine McCloskey's voice is husky with grief, and over the dimpled cheek that looks so fair and white in the moonlight the blushes are chasing each other in rapid succession. To her right are the Catskills, their summits bathed in a flood of silvery light, while at their base lies the placid Hudson, its shimmering surface reflecting the twinkling stars that are looking down in all their silent splendor from the azure zenith. Directly in front of the girl, and lending to the tout ensemble a soft warmth of coloring not otherwise obtainable, is a large jar. Immediately behind it stands Hercules Perkins.

"I am going away," he says. The girl does not reply. The shadow of the jar conceals the look of haunting fear that passes across her face, and the white lines around the drooping mouth are not seen by the one whose words have caused their presence.

"Shall you miss me?" he said. The little white hand that rests upon the back of a chair is trembling now, and in the deep brown eyes there are hot tears of sorrow and pain. Suddenly Reine speaks.

"Go away," she says in agonized tones. "Go away before I tell you that which had best remain unsaid," and sobs choke her utterance. A great light breaks upon Hercules. Stepping quickly to the girl's side he places his arm around her. "Tell me truly, sweetheart," he says, "do you love me?"

For answer she places a soft white arm around his neck, and as he bends over to kiss her the other hand reaches forward, feels cautiously around for an instant, and then, with a wild cry of agony, Reine McCloskey falls forward in a swoon.

The doughnut jar is empty.—Chicago Tribune.

A Lie that Takes the Pantry.

Bill Nuckles, a prospector, says the Denver Tribune, fell down a prospect shaft forty feet right into a nest of black snakes. Most men would have died of fright, but Nuckles was not that sort of a man. He tied several snakes together and started them up the side of the shaft tying on a fresh snake as fast as the rest went up. Pretty soon the head of the snakes got over the edge and started down hill. Nuckles kept tying on fresh reptiles until he had used up a couple of hundred—every snake there was in the shaft. By this time the crowd of snakes on the outside was strong enough to pull him out of the shaft, and he soon reached Mad's ranch, safe and sound.

Barnabee's Joke.

Barnabee, the unsurpassed humorist of the Boston Ideal Company, seems to be particularly favored in his efforts to entertain his friends on all occasions. Saturday evening while he was singing one of Buntherne's gems in "Patience," the piping voice of an infant child was heard just about the time when he was reaching the lines of his part—"This is a little thing of my own." The interruption by the child created a little audible ripple of amusement which rapidly increased to the wildest uproar of merriment, when the quick-witted Barnabee skipped the lines before the words mentioned, and with a comical expres-

sion and gesture peculiar to himself he waved his hand gracefully to the cherub in the gallery and said: "This is a little thing of my own." It was several moments before the audience was quieted, and at intervals ladies and gentlemen burst into a hearty laugh which became general again as soon as Barnabee added the lines of the part—"but I won't publish it." Nothing funnier has ever occurred in the opera house, and many laughed until they suffered. The father, mother and child looked inquiringly about, not having heard the words of "Bunthorne," and they had no idea of the fact that they had involuntarily assisted in making a very pat hit for Mr. Barnabee.

The Heathen Chinese.

A Chinaman thus describes his experience at draw poker: "I draw three cards, get flo ace, bet five dolla, nobody clam in. Next time, I draw two cards, get flo flush, bet fifteen dolla, everybody clam in, Chinaman busted."

Benefits of Accuracy.

A dwarf kangaroo has been discovered in Texas with fore legs only two inches long, and hind legs only eight inches in length. The report also says that it is a marsupial. We are glad to know this, as it throws a flood of light on anatomical structure of the animal, which will be duly appreciated by the intelligent reader, who at first blush might have imagined that it was a conubial, or a mandamus, or a habeas corpus, or idiosyncrasy. In newspaper reporting the young man will invariably err on the safe side if he uses plain, unvarnished language, which will appeal even to the nominal intelligence of a sleeping-car conductor.

The Private Citizen's Mistake.

When an editor makes a mistake in his paper all the world sees it and calls him a liar. When a private citizen makes a mistake nobody knows it except a few friends, and they come around and ask the editor to keep it out of the paper. When the private citizen dies the editor is asked to write of all his good qualities and leave out the bad. When the editor dies the private citizen says: "Now that old liar will get his deserts."—Oil City Derrick.

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