

PERSONAL NARRATIVES
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GUN-BOAT SERVICE

ON THE

JAMES RIVER.

BY

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In June, 1863, having been mustered out of service in the army, I entered the navy as an acting ensign and was ordered to the frigate *Savannah*, at that time a school-ship for officers at the Brooklyn navy yard, and from which details were made to the different vessels fitting out for service, mostly on our southern coast and rivers.

Having already seen good service and being well posted in gunning, I was less green than most of the other officers, and in July, when the riots broke out in New York, was placed in charge of the detachment of sailors, with two twelve-pounder howitzers, detailed for duty at the custom-house in Wall street.

When no longer needed there, I was ordered to the gun-boat *Adela* for temporary service, and we cruised up North river to be ready to give assistance in case of any outbreaks in the smaller places on the Hudson. Our only real service consisted in hauling down a rebel flag which we discovered flying from a staff near Spuyten Duyvel creek, showing that there was still "one unloyal heart left" in that part of the north. Later in the season I was ordered to the *Dawn*, a gun-boat recently returned from blockade duty down on the coast near Fort Pulaski and in Osabaw sound, and then refitting for further service wherever ordered.

Having already made up my mind to take my chances on a ship, that is, to go where ordered without endeavoring to get assigned to any particular vessel, I reported to the commanding officer and was soon acquainted with most of the other officers who were already attached. We went into commission, that is, received our crew on board and hoisted our colors, December 2, 1863, and on the ninth left New York for Hampton Roads to report for duty to Rear Admiral S. P. Lee, then commanding the North At-

lantic Blockading Squadron, to which we were to be attached. Putting a ship in commission is no small job, and embraces a good deal of work which has to be accomplished in a short space of time, especially if we are expected at once to go to sea. Even in a small vessel like ours, with only about one hundred men, it kept most of us officers busy and we had little time for farewells on shore, where, after some months' service at the navy yard, we had formed some pleasant acquaintances. Having, however, a good executive officer, who was not only a good sailor but had already had two years' experience in the navy under one of its crack old regular officers, the crew were soon stationed, the watch, quarter and fire bills all made out, and every man knew his place and duty on board the ship in a manner that did very well for the beginning of a cruise, but which was made much more perfect by the drill and discipline that immediately followed our departure. And now a word or two as to what and who we were. The vessel itself had been, previous to the war, a freight-steamer, plying between New York and New Bedford. She was purchased at the outbreak of the war

and altered into a gun-boat, and was about five hundred tons register, with a powerful engine and good boiler power, and she was more than ordinarily fast for a propeller. She had two masts, schooner rigged, with a square sail forward, and when refitted carried a battery of three rifled guns, one being an hundred pounder Parrott mounted amidships, the other two smaller, one forward, the other aft, and ready to work on either side. With the usual supply of muskets, pistols, cutlasses, boarding-pikes, etc., we were, take us all in all, quite a formidable craft for a little one; and when we consider that she could lie some three or four miles from a given point and drop one hundred pounder shells uncomfortably near it without much risk to ourselves, she was not a bad ship to be aboard of, I assure you. Then again, she was a comfortable boat, except in a seaway, and none are particularly nice there, especially propellers. The quarters for the men and officers were good and roomy, except that in winter they were cold, no way of heating by steam having then been devised, as was the case in the boats fitted out later in the war. An attempt was sometimes made in very cold weather

to heat the ward-room with a red-hot hundred-pound shot placed in a box of sand, but as a heater it was not much of a success.

We had a good condenser for supplying fresh water, however, and one of the very disagreeable restrictions of shipboard in general, viz., a limited supply of fresh water, was obviated, and there was never any lack of that article on board; and even when in fresh water we never used it except as it came from the condenser, well filtered and pure.

The officers were all acting volunteers and consisted of a lieutenant, commanding, who had been promoted for gallantry in an iron-clad before Charleston, a master as executive officer, three ensigns and a master's mate for watch officers, all of whom wore a star on the coat sleeve above the stripes indicative of rank, to show that they were line officers and on whom devolved the command of the ship according to rank whenever the senior line officers were absent. An assistant paymaster, assistant surgeon, second assistant engineer in charge, together with three third assistants, and the usual complement of steerage officers and a good crew of sailors, lands-

men and boys, but no marines. The captain, as the commanding officer is usually called, whatever his real rank may be, had a good cabin to himself and was attended by his steward and a boy. The ward-room belonged to the other commissioned officers, which was attended to by the ward-room boys, one for each two officers, besides a ward-room steward and cook, and was the largest cabin on board. The steerage officers had their own servants and mess; the petty officers had their mess and cook. Then there was the ship's cook for the men of the crew, who were divided into messes, each with its own mess cook, who looked after the mess chests and cloths, prepared and carried food to and from the galley where it was all cooked. One peculiar custom was the discharging of a pistol loaded with a blank cartridge only, by the quarter gunner, up the funnel of the galley stove every Friday evening at six bells; the object being to keep it clear of soot that collected in large quantities.

As a general thing we lived well, especially if the caterer for the mess was well up in his business and not too much restricted as to expense by the mess

treasurer. We in the ward-room were pretty generally single men, and not having any families to provide for at home, had rather heavy mess bills to pay ; but we believed in living while there, for we did not know how long we were to be allowed to remain, or to speak plainer, how soon we might be called for, as the enemy, especially when up the James river, did not always keep such a long distance off as before mentioned. But to return to our cruise. After a pleasant run down the coast we arrived at Hampton Roads on the twelfth of December and immediately received orders to proceed up the James river on picket duty near White Shoal lighthouse, and to watch for and intercept boats crossing at that place from the mouths of two creeks, one on either side of the river. This latter service in open boats and at night was not very pleasant work. There is no great degree of comfort cramped up in a boat all night in the middle of winter, watching noiselessly at the mouth of a creek, not too far inland and yet near enough to keep good guard so as to intercept any boat that may be trying to steal in or out ; but such was our work, night after night, till another vessel

took our place and we were relieved for a while. The very first night we had of it, the boat on duty on the opposite side of the river from the one I was guarding was fired into from shore and one of her crew hit and no less than fourteen bullet-holes made in her sides.

The man who was shot was a landsman and had only recently entered the service. His very first night near the enemy he was wounded, when there were others of us out that night and in the boat with him who had already been under fire a dozen times, perhaps, and had not received even a scratch. But such occurrences were common all through the war, and no doubt familiar to all of us. During one of our turns at picket duty up the river we met, March 27, 1864, the rebel flag of truce boat that brought down Judge Ould, the rebel commissioner for exchange of prisoners, whom we took down to Fortress Monroe to confer with those appointed for that purpose on our side, and the result of which conference was the releasing of a large number of our boys then languishing in southern prisons.

During the oyster season we were stationed part

of the time off the mouth of the Nansemond to protect the fleet engaged in the business of taking oysters. It was our daily custom to make a tour of the fleet in a boat and let each oysterman throw a shovel-full of oysters into it, and by the time we had made the round of the fleet we were plentifully supplied for all hands on board.

One night while lying at anchor off Newport News a boat crept out from the rebel shore and succeeded in exploding a torpedo against the side of the flag-ship Minnesota, and though no material injury was done to the ship, it waked up the admiral to such an extent that he made it very uncomfortable for every one in the fleet by giving such strict orders that we hardly dared to close our eyes at night, for a time, lest we should be court-martialed and punished. A series of signals was established, different for different nights, consisting of colored lanterns to be displayed and whistles to be sounded, by which we were to distinguish friend from foe. The necessity for all the signals was that we were to keep under way at night, running about in a small space, and as often as we came near each other, we were to display

the proper colored lanterns the right number of times, they being kept ready for use in empty flour barrels; and give the requisite number of blasts with the steam whistle, which if not answered properly was to be the occasion of our opening fire at once from our batteries on the other vessel; and *vice versa*, in case we were in any manner remiss in regard to our business or in answering their signals. No one was allowed to remove his clothing at night—that is to say, we “turned in all standing,” and the men were kept almost constantly at the guns and on lookout. Such another whistling of steamers and display of lanterns was never before seen. The great wonder is that we did not fire into each other, and we would have done so in many instances, had we literally obeyed our orders. But when we felt morally certain we knew a vessel to be one of our own, we were hardly fools enough to fire into her, even if a red lantern was first shown instead of a yellow one, or two whistles blown in lieu of one, as we were passing, especially when we could often recognize the voice of the officer of the deck—or knew the peculiar sound of their whistle. But such vigilance soon ex-

hausted itself, and by the time we started up the river in the spring, all such nonsense had been dropped, and we turned in at the end of our watch on deck, and were soon as fast asleep as any of the soldiers on the near shore, where quite a number were encamped during the winter. We were detailed for quite a delicate service at one time during the winter, experimenting in sub-marine blasting. The inventor of a peculiar process of igniting the powder, was sent on board with his apparatus, and we moved up near the piling that had been placed as a barrier across the channel below Norfolk and through which only a narrow way had as yet been made, and did some very efficient work in removing those obstructions. As the difference in process only consisted in the different manner of causing an electric spark at the powder, I shall speak more at length of the general effect of a blast in connection with a sketch which I will give at the close of this paper.

Always glad of a change, and ever ready to put to sea, our wishes were gratified one night on the receipt of orders to proceed to sea and overtake and capture a tug-boat said to have escaped from the

Chesapeake Bay, and gone off on a piratical cruise. A close search along the coast and inlets north of Cape Charles for two or three days resulting in finding no pirates, we returned to our anchorage in the fleet; but were soon off again up Chesapeake Bay for Baltimore, with the disabled steamer *Ceres* in tow for repairs. Shortly after this we towed an ordnance schooner down to Hatteras Inlet, where we learned of the death of Captain Flusser and the success of the ram *Albemarle*. Shortly after our return from this last trip and early in May, the fleet moved up the James river with the advance of General Butler. Different gun-boats were stationed along the river at intervals, and we were detailed to take station off Wilson's wharf, where a considerable body of troops were landed; we to form one of the cordon of gun-boats whose duty it was to keep open the entire river for the safe passage of transports up and down. The next military station was at Fort Powhattan, some seven miles above, at a sharp bend of the river, and on the opposite or south bank. At both of these points the soldiers immediately fortified themselves, and under cover of the gun-boats were soon well intrenched.

To those whose first trip up the river this was, it must have been quite an eventful day, but to us who had been running up and down more or less all winter, it was rather a tame affair, though by order all hands were at quarters, and ready to begin battle at any time. The only real duty we were called upon to perform, was landing a party of soldiers and assisting to capture a signal-station a short distance below our station. This service was successfully accomplished and reflected considerable credit upon the colored troops who were engaged in it, especially as it was their first undertaking before the enemy.

Though nominally stationed off Wilson's Landing, we were at liberty to go anywhere we could be of service. If firing opened above or below us, we at once got under way and went for it. We covered about twenty miles of the river and were moving about considerably.

The troops on shore soon had themselves well entrenched. These consisted of a colored brigade under General Wilde—who had already lost an arm in the service ; some troops from New Hampshire—with at one time General Marston, and a light battery

from New York under Captain Wheeler ; and a good battery it was, too. We had many a fine ride on their horses, and they often came on board, where they always seemed to enjoy a good square meal, which to them, as to soldiers in general, seemed quite a luxury. Though the weather was hot, we had an abundance of ice for the trouble of getting it from an ice-house a few miles below, which the considerate owner of the plantation had filled for us during the winter when we were guarding the mouth of the river. Fruit was also plentiful and good, and of course we often risked capture in going too far from the river to get it. The mail-boats passed up the river daily, and the captains would tie New York and Washington papers to a stick and then toss them to our boat, which was manned and waiting to pick them up if they fell into the water. When dried on the large head of the cylinder of the engine, we would read the news of what was going on at the front and in other parts of the country, and probably find out the meaning of that heavy firing we heard two or three days before, or why it was we saw so many transports with troops going down or up the

river—which latter event was so continuous and varied, later in the season, that we termed it “Grant’s circus,” and were always speculating as to the various movements of the troops up and down. May 24th, 1864, the works on shore were attacked by dismounted cavalry under Fitz-Hugh Lee, and there was hot work for us that day. Having learned that two of the colored pickets had been murdered in cold blood during the night, we were not surprised when the attack opened, though it was in the middle of the day and all were not expecting it just at that time. It so happened that the captain and executive officer were both on shore at the commencement of the fight, and I was in command of the ship by virtue of my rank. As we afterwards learned, the force that attacked us consisted of some twenty-five hundred men with three pieces of artillery, and that just previous to so doing, General Lee sent a flag of truce to General Wilde with a demand for his surrender, with the information that if he did so, all would be treated as prisoners of war; if not, he should not be responsible for the manner in which they would be treated by his men. But General

Wilde, even with the memory of Fort Pillow fresh in mind, sent back word that he would "try it first," and the soldiers bravely bore him out in his determination. The rebels evidently thought they could walk right through those twelve hundred "niggers," even though they were behind their own works; but the sequel showed different. We went at once to quarters on hearing the long roll on shore, and by the time the captain reached the ship every thing was cleared for action. Awnings were furled, guns cast loose and provided, and anchor at the bow, which with a well drilled and willing crew is but the work of a few minutes. We all seemed to feel that there was work before us for that day. Out went the galley fire, and the half cooked dinner for all on board was left unattended as the cooks hied to their stations on the berth deck, ready to pass powder from the magazine which had been opened by the gunner's mate, the keys of which had been brought from the captain's cabin, where they were always kept. The carpenter was on hand with his sounding line and shot plugs, and the master-at-arms had seen the fire tubs filled with water, over which the

empty passing boxes were to be shook to catch any fire that may have got into them before returning them to the magazine to be replenished. Whenever the magazine is opened the utmost precautions are necessary to prevent accidents which would at once result in our instant annihilation. Screens are put up around the hatch leading to it, and no one ever goes into it without first removing his shoes and putting on the magazine dress and putting away everything metallic he may have about him. Meantime, the ward-room has been converted into an hospital, and there stands the surgeon and his steward with their instruments spread out on the dining-table, ready to make a clean job of any jagged limb that may have been roughly amputated by a cannon ball. The paymaster is looking out for signals. The different officers are in command of their respective divisions—with us, each ensign having one gun and the master's mate having charge of the powder division. The executive officer takes the deck, and the captain has charge over all. All being in readiness on board, we proceeded at once to the point just below the fort and off the mouth of a ravine, which

position commanded a wood in front and to the right of our works on shore, the ranges of which we well knew, and which we at once shelled heavily. After a time, perceiving a party of the enemy occupying a point just above our works, annoying and preventing the landing of a steamer with reinforcements from Fort Powhattan, we ran over there and engaged them ; and for a short time had pretty lively work with them, our decks being very much exposed, especially for the men at the other two guns ; we only worked on the one-hundred-pounder at this place, not deeming it necessary needlessly to expose all the crews, and so effectual was our fire from that gun that after a few well-directed discharges into their midst they were soon glad to beat a retreat from the river bank and allow the steamer with the troops on board to make a landing. In her attempts to do this, she had been pretty severely handled by the riflemen on the shore, and several of the men were wounded and the pilot shot dead at the wheel. Acting Ensign ———, of the Pequot, being temporarily on board at the time, at once took the wheel and finally succeeded in getting her to the wharf.

Meantime the Pequot had run down from above and joined us in the fight against the rebels. By this time the battle was at its height. On shore the troops were doing their utmost to beat off the attacking columns, and we were both pounding away with our heavy batteries at our utmost. Whether we succeeded in killing many I cannot say, but I do believe we scared some of them pretty badly, for the moral effect of nine-inch and one-hundred-pounder shells had been well demonstrated long before that occasion. To judge from the appearance of the trees where the shell had ploughed through them, over and amongst the rebels, and the excavations in the ground made by their bursting, our firing must have had considerable to do with causing the enemy to withdraw, upon finding it impossible, after two or three assaults, to carry our works.

The troops in the fort fought with a determination never excelled. Knowing full well what to expect in case of defeat, they stood up nobly to their duty, and did fearful execution among the enemy, who must have suffered severely. Judging from the number of their dead left on the field, nearly thirty,

the wounded taken away with them must have been considerable. On our side in the works, the loss was four killed and twenty-five to thirty wounded.

With us on board ship the casualties were very light, and though it was in the middle of the day and very warm, none of us seemed to suffer seriously from the heat, except perhaps our captain, who had a sort of habit of going below when it began to get warm on deck, but that may have been only because he was used to fighting in an iron-clad, and preferred cover. But one thing he could do, and that was write good reports, and as a result we all got favorable mention for our conduct during the day, and some of us were recommended for promotion. That of the acting ensign of the Pequot came very soon, and well he deserved it, but the others were not so promptly attended to.

Somehow, later in the season we began to hear heavy firing to the north of us, and knew that General Grant and the Army of the Potomac were nearing us. Soon afterward the firing ceased altogether, and word came that a portion of the army were quite close. at Charles City Court House, and some of my

friends with the army sent greetings to me, by those who went out to visit them, but before I got a chance to go on shore, we moved up river to where the army crossed, near which place we lay until all were on the south side of the river

About the first of August our captain was ordered to another vessel, but not to the command of it, however ; leaving our ex-officer in command of the Dawn, and I, being next in rank, became ex-officer, which position I retained until the end of the cruise in June, 1865.

August third, being at anchor off Fort Powhattan, one of our gun-boats, the Miami, passed up the river, going above to report for duty. She had scarcely got out of sight around the bend, when we heard heavy firing in that locality, and getting at once underway, soon found her engaging a battery, which had opened on her from the north shore, where it had been laying in wait for some defenceless transport. The beauty of it was, however, that having mistaken the Miami for one, she being one of the double-enders, and without any top-masts standing, they caught a Tartar, so to speak.

Going at once to quarters, she proceeded to reply to their fire in a manner they were little prepared for, and by the time we had run into range and dropped a few of our shell into their midst, they were ready to draw off to the woods out of sight. They handled the Miami rather roughly, however, for two or three were killed and several of her crew wounded. She remained at anchor near there that night, and the next morning, soon after quarters, the battery again opened on the S. R. Spaulding on her way down the river, with wounded soldiers on board, and flying the hospital flag, and did some considerable damage before we succeeded in driving them away again.

From that time on we remained in that vicinity, and no more batteries on shore molested any of our transports. About this time, having received orders to rig out a torpedo netting ahead of us, I went on shore for the purpose of procuring the necessary timbers from a large warehouse standing near the water, when having started off the boats with two that we had obtained, I was surprised to see my picket running in, who informed me that a large body of cavalry were swooping down towards us, and not being

able to cope successfully with such a land force, we took to our boat at once, and very narrowly escaped capture. Of course, by the time we were out of their reach they were seen from the ship, and the latter opened on them at once with the guns ; but had they come upon me unawares, all the guns in the navy would not have saved us from Libby prison that day. As it was, we not only succeeded in getting what we were after, but soon had two long girders rigged out ahead of us with a cross-piece, from which was suspended a large netting, which we kept lowered into the water to intercept any of those harmless looking things, which sometimes were sent floating down the river, and which were calculated to do mischief untold, in case one of them exploded under our bow. We caught one of them, and towed it ashore and buried it, without letting our curiosity get the better of our judgment, by trying too hard to learn of the particular construction of the fuse, as it had rusted in and did not readily yield to our efforts to unscrew it.

Part of our service about this time consisted in intercepting deserters from the army then in front of

Petersburg, who came down the river in all sorts of ways. Some on logs, some in batteaux, but mostly on shore walking along the river bank. In either case, we would at once down boats and after them, and generally succeeded in catching them, too.

On a certain occasion one of our men, in searching around for one he knew was not far off, accidentally fell into a hole right on top of his man, who had crawled into the hole, and, as they say down south, had "pulled the hole in after him." Not being able to repress a loud groan, when so much extra weight was precipitated upon him, he thereby discovered himself, and to our amusement was soon extricated and taken on board. They were generally well supplied with bounty-money, and as "jumpers" they met with little sympathy from any of our men. We turned them over to the provost-marshal at Harrison's Landing, by whom they were sent again to the front.

During the winter of '64 and '65, and late fall, we lay directly off the wharf at Harrison's Landing, and many a fine gallop did we have over the country on some of the battery horses, a section of which

was stationed there at this time. All the time we were within sound of the firing about Petersburg, and knew pretty well what was going on up there. Occasionally we could get a day off, and take a run up there and out on the railroad, and visit some of the camps, to see how the boys were getting on up nearer the enemy. We often run up to City Point and as far as we could get, on some pretext or other, always eager for the front and for something to do, though generally doing just as important and necessary service where we were.

Nov 26th, 1864, Thanksgiving day, our surgeon, having become melancholy and deranged in mind, took the opportunity, while the captain was on shore and everyone else enjoying a sort of holiday, to shoot himself, and thus put an end to his life. Two of us were playing chess in the ward-room within three feet of his room door, when hearing the report we forced open the door and found him outstretched with a bullet-hole near his heart. He lingered along for more than a week before we could send him to the hospital, where he soon died from his wound. Though he had never been much of a favorite with

us, we could but mourn his loss and miss him from among us. The real cause of his melancholy we never were able to find out, though it had been coming on him for quite a little time, and exercise on shore, which we encouraged him to take oftener, did not seem to do him any good. During the summer we had received orders from our new Admiral, Porter, to give attention to the study of navigation, and to practice with the sextant and artificial horizon, and for a time we in the ward-room were all engrossed in mathematical calculations, and all our talk was of lunars and altitudes, arzimuths and parallax, preparatory to a threatened examination which all were to undergo, but which few were ever called upon to pass through. Now this was in mid-summer, and one of us had been recommended for promotion in the report upon the battle at Wilson's Landing, and he at least rather expected to be ordered for examination at once. But time rolled on and preparatory studies had long since been dropped and almost forgotten. It seemed as though all that cramming had been for nothing. During the winter, chess and backgammon were all the rage with us in the

ward-room. At times I had to be on deck nearly all night, as for ten days the ice formed quite heavily and it was necessary to keep backing around in a small space to prevent being frozen in fast, and amidst it all no thought was ever given to either examination or promotion. In fact, the whole business was to me getting rather dull and stupid, and I was very seriously considering whether I should not accept a captain's commission in the army again, which, as the result of some former correspondence upon the subject, had just been sent me by my old commander, Colonel Howard, then commanding the Thirteenth Artillery, New York Volunteers; when, one day, as all was quiet up at the front, and everything seemed more than ordinarily dull with us, along came orders for Acting Ensign William B. Avery, of the United States steamer Dawn, to report at once for examination for promotion on board the United States steamer Massasoit, then lying up near Dutch Gap Canal. Hastily gathering up my manual on gunnery, I jumped on board the despatch steamer and that night slept, or tried to sleep, on board the Massasoit. I say tried to sleep, for having been provided with a

cot, which was slung in the ward-room for me by one of the contrabands doing service as a ward-room boy, who made fast the lanyard to a hot steam pipe, by which it became so much weakened during the night that it gave way, at one end, and down I went—not on to the deck, however, but on to the table, over which it was slung. In that position I preferred to remain than rouse the steward on a strange ship, and passed the time in vainly endeavoring to give in detail the stations and duties of the crew of an eleven-inch pivot gun, manned by twenty-four men and a powder-man. Doubtless the anxiety in regard to the next day's ordeal had as much to do with my wakefulness as the inclined position of the cot, for immediately upon reporting on board, I found that nothing could be learned from any of the officers in regard to the extent or character of the examination. They were as mum and mysterious about it as though they had never heard of such a thing, but at the same time one knew how they were enjoying them at our solicitude on the subject. But I had little time to be annoyed at this, for the first thing after breakfast I was taken in hand by the doctor for

the physical examination, as though a man who was physically capable of being an ensign was not also good enough to be a master. Then I went before the board of examiners proper, and—well, they put me through everything for about five long hours,—from truck to keelson in regard to a ship, and from a, b, c, to French and Spanish concerning my literary attainments. Finally at the end, I was semi-officially informed that having received rather more than the necessary percentage, my examination was satisfactory and would be reported upon favorably, and that I might in due time expect my promotion. But alas! for expectations. That promotion never came to hand. Before those official records were forwarded by the senior officer, the rebel rams came down from Richmond, and among other things destroyed by them, or by the commanding officer from fear of them, was that report of my examination. I simply remark that the knowledge of the fact that he was afterwards court-martialed for cowardice on that occasion went a little way toward soothing my disappointed hopes and aspirations, and though I never added the stripe to my arm, the satisfaction of

having merited it was, to me, quite a source of gratification and pleasure.

During the early part of September, 1864, and while we were at the station off Wilcox's Landing, orders one day came for us to run down to Fortress Monroe, there to take on board Mr. Hayden, the sub-marine engineer, and proceed to sea in search of the bark Greenland, which was reported to be sunk some seventy-five miles southeast of Cape Henry, whose topmast heads were just out of water and dangerous to shipping. She was one of the victims of the rebel cruiser Florida, which had audaciously run up into our waters and sunk vessels almost under our very eyes. We went to see about dark, and having shaped our course about right, next morning shortly after breakfast we discovered the wreck as had been reported, and at once prepared to demolish it. While our vessel lay to at a safe distance, I took Mr. Hayden, with the powder and his battery, in our largest boat to the wreck itself, and proceeded to lower the powder in cans to the deck of the bark. There was quite a high sea at the time, and as we were desirous of planting the cans as near 'midships

as possible. It was considerable of a task on us, but we finally succeeded in placing both of them near the foot of the main-mast on her deck, and had all ready to move off. To each can ran two wires attached to the battery, and by bringing the ends together in the boat, closed the circuit and produced a spark in the powder, thus igniting it and causing it to explode. While at work it was surprising how clearly we could see the wreck at the bottom; and hovering above and about her were some twelve or fifteen large sharks, sailing around in the water, as though keeping guard over her, and ready to go for any one of us who might be so unfortunate as to fall overboard. The old salts in the boats shuddered as they looked down at them, and chuckled at the thought of what was in store for them, their inveterate enemy. As the bright tin cans were lowered into place, one of these grim monsters of the deep would approach and seem to survey them with a critical eye, and then move off to give place to another, who would do the same thing; and thus they kept moving about, all unconscious of what was about to happen, though seemingly suspicious, as they always are, of some

trap that may be placed for them. But we did not linger long to watch them, though the sight was extremely interesting. Having placed the cans to suit us, we rowed off and paid out the wires from the coils as we went. At first all went well, but shortly one of the wires fouled, and rather than run the risk of hauling the powder from its good position and thus destroy the effect of the blast, we decided, though still too near, to close the circuit and risk it. Immediately there arose an immense column of water just astern of us, and to the height of over one hundred feet, which in its descent deluged us all and partially filled our boat. Considering ourselves fortunate to escape without being swamped entirely, instead of receiving only a ducking, we bailed out our boat, proceeded to make fast a hawser from the ship, and returning on board towed the spars and floating fragments clear of the wreck, and felt well satisfied with our work. The blast had split the hull wide open, shattered all the spars to pieces, and either killed or scared to death all those sharks, for we could not see a live one anywhere, though we still kept a sharp look-out for them

as we cruised about. And this was only one of the many merchant and whaling vessels sunk by rebel cruisers during the war, and whose ribs are now rotting at the bottom of the ocean, the hiding places of the sharks and other denizens of the mighty deep.

Returning to our post up the river again, we felt refreshed from our run to sea and sniff of salt air; and entered once more on our fresh water duty, with renewed zeal and energy

In the latter part of March our captain was ordered to another vessel, and a new captain, our third, was ordered to command the Dawn. At the same time we were ordered to Norfolk for a few slight repairs to our engine, after which we proceeded down to the coast of North Carolina, where we remained till the end of the cruise on blockade duty

Having frequently been asked which I liked best—the army or the navy—perhaps a few words on that point may not be out of place in closing this paper. Aside from the natural taste of “a life on the ocean wave” that is almost inborn with many persons, I am rather inclined to the opinion that, generally speaking, the army is preferable to the navy To a

person of an active turn of mind, life on board ship is terribly dull. The routine is monotonous, and the want of change is dispiriting. But when you come to solid comforts, then the navy looms up to advantage. No dust or mud, plenty of good food well cooked and served, and when one's watch on deck is over, a good berth to sleep in. But the knowledge of the fact that one has to turn out of a good warm berth at midnight to stand a four-hour watch in the storm on deck, often leads to the wish that it might be better to have all night in, even under a shelter tent on shore. But as for me, personally, having tried all three, give me the one having a mixture,—the comforts and delights of the navy, with the activity and excitements of the army,—The Marine Artillery

