Military Order of the Loyal Legion of the United States

COMMANDERY OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA.

WAR PAPER 35.

The Expedition for the Capture of the Forts at Port Royal, November 7, 1861, as seen from the U. S. S. Susquehanna.

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The Expedition for the Capture of the Forts at Port Royal, November 7, 1861, as seen from the U. S. S. Susquehanna.

PREPARED BY COMPANION

Acting Master

ALFRED L. B. ZEREGA,

Late U. S. N.,

AND

READ AT THE STATED MEETING OF MAY 2, 1900.

The Expedition for the Capture of the Forts at Port Royal, November 7, 1861, as seen from the U. S. S. Susquehanna.

The U. S. Steam Frigate *Susquehanna* had been on blockade duty off Charleston since October 19. Our Captain being the senior officer of the fleet stationed at that point very often we did not see our anchors for days at a time; and almost our only diversion was to occasionally try to get close enough to Fort Moultrie to send it our compliments in the shape of a shell or solid shot; but we were never successful, as the ship drew so much water that we could only get near enough to, now and then, land a solid shot on the beach. Our greatest excitement was when a strange sail or "black smoke" was seen on the horizon; whereupon one of the smaller vessels would be ordered to go in chase. If the strange sail proved a suspicious craft the gunboat would chase her beyond signal distance before capturing her, so that the prize money need not be shared with the rest of the fleet.

So as we had had the same experience whilst blockading off Hatteras Inlet and Fort Fisher we became pretty well used to seeing our prospective share of prize money disappear in smoke.

A new commanding officer, Captain James L. Lardner, had relieved Captain John S. Chauncey some little time before, and already all hands, fore and aft, had grown to like him very much, and that liking increased daily until he left us, at

Norfolk, the following May, to command the East Gulf Squadron. Our Executive Officer had also been changed, Lieutenant John R. Bankhead having been detached to command the gunboat *Pembina* and Lieutenant Jonathan Young taking his place.

It had been blowing quite hard during the last days of October, and the ship was very uncomfortable laying at anchor. November 1st came in with one of the worst gales experienced in all my "going to sea." With both anchors down and wheels turning ahead to ease the strain on the cables we were making such bad weather, diving bows under into the heavy seas, that Captain Lardner determined to try it under way, so getting up one anchor we buoyed and slipped the other and proceeded to make way seaward. As soon as we had severed connection with the ground, steaming ahead and taking the seas on the bow, the ship was much more comfortable.

On the morning of the 2d the storm broke, and in the afternoon we steamed in towards "Fort Sumter" picking up the buoyed anchor. That night we saw a number of lights from passing vessels well off shore, and when after daylight several passed close to us we boarded and found them part of a fleet of transports ordered to rendezvous off Savannah. All were feeling very grum and mourning over being kept "on blockade," when something interesting and exciting was about to take place. At dinner nothing seemed to taste just right, and afterwards while we smokers were congregated at our usual place each was ready to quarrel with the other on the slightest provocation and even with none.

Soon a vessel was reported in sight; and the signal officer made her out to be one of the new "gunboats." In a few minutes he reported that she had signaled "important de-

spatches for you." All began to feel better, and when Lieutenant Commander Daniel Ammen, of the *Seneca*, came aboard it required all our ideas of discipline to keep from crowding him and Lardner in order to hear the news. We speedily learned the *Susquehanna* had been ordered to immediately join Flag Officer S. F. Dupont off "Hilton Head," and all felt much better, and I know that Ammen's hand must have ached from having been so heartily shaken by everyone of our officers as he went over the side.

The *Seneca*, which had not come to anchor, had hardly headed round for the south when the welcome cry "All hands up anchor" rang through the ship. The men at the capstan bars did not need any music from the fifer to make the capstan fly round; on the contrary, the fifer had all he could do to raise wind fast enough to keep his tune in time with the men's feet.

Only the Captain and Executive Officer knew exactly where we were bound or what we were going to do, but all were willing to go anywhere and do anything to be relieved from the monotony of the blockade.

Steaming down the coast on morning of the 4th, at 9 o'clock we came in sight of a large fleet of "men-of-war" and "transports" at anchor off "Hilton Head." By 10 o'clock we had communicated with and anchored near the flagship *Wabash*.

During the day a number of transports and gunboats came in, they having been pretty well scattered during the late gale. In the afternoon the frigate *Sabine* came in, having on board the survivors of the crew and of the battalion of marines under command of Major John Reynolds, that had started out on the steamer *Governor*, which was sunk during the gale, drowning several of the poor fellows. During the day some of our gunboats were cruising about locating shoals and plac-

ing temporary buoys in place of those removed by the Rebs. Some rebel gunboats, under command of Tattnal, a former officer of the U. S. Navy, were hovering round close to shore.

That night will never be forgotten by any who were there. None but the commanding officers knew what was to be attempted on the morrow. We had discovered, with glasses, that there were two strong earthworks, one on each side of the entrance, but just how strong they were we had no means of knowing. We had heard that the rebels had gobbled up some of the finest of the United States guns, and that they had managed to obtain some extra fine rifled guns from England. Also that they had improvised a number of iron-clads against which our guns would be of no account. Stories of floating torpedoes had often been told us. All we did know was that the forts were there and that we expected to engage them and either take them or be sunk trying to do so.

It was a most beautiful autumn night, with just enough breeze to make walking up and down the deck comfortable. The heavens seemed a vast canopy of shining stars; the stars reflected from the water; the numerous anchor lights from the fleet; the hushed murmur coming from the transports; the tinkling of the ships' bells every half hour marking the passage of time; the hoarse cry of "All's well" from the sentries on the men-of-war; the officers and men of the watch on deck passing back and forth thinking of—who can tell what their thoughts were! Some, no doubt, what the morrow would bring; some of home and the loved ones there; some of the glory that they would have after the fight was over; some how they would change their lives if able to commence again. The watch below reading, writing, sleeping, dreaming! but all more or less anxious for the morrow.

The morning of the 5th broke as fine as one could wish for.

The boatswain's pipes and the cry of "Up all hammocks" had hardly ceased before all were on deck and hammocks stowed; officers, as well as men, turning an anxious gaze towards the shore and especially to the flag-ship in expectancy of a signal; for we could see several of our gunboats close in shore laying buoys under fire of the rebel batteries. When no signal came from the flag-ship the usual routine of washing decks, scrubbing paint and brass work, and getting breakfast was gone through with. At 8:30 the flag-ship made general signal "Weigh anchor and take position in line of column;" and we were speedily under weigh, had swung round and took position close under the stern of the *Wabash*, the balance of the warships following us, and stood in towards the mouth of the harbor; and while passing through the line of the transports our men were kept quite busy manning the rigging to return the cheers that the soldiers gave us.

All moved along under half speed, feeling the way with the lead, the fleet being piloted by Mr. Boutell, of the Coast Survey steamer *Vixen*. Some few of the outer buoys had been replaced, but navigation was still quite intricate. About 4 P. M. the *Wabash* grounded on one of the shoals, but remained only half an hour and then floated without having sustained any injury.

The day being nearly spent and weather very threatening Flag Officer Dupont signaled for the fleet to haul off out of range and anchor; so we dropped down to just inside of the bar, about six miles from Fort Beauregard on Bay Point, and anchored.

All day on the 6th we lay at anchor, as there was quite a heavy northeast gale blowing, making a heavy sea, and it would not have been prudent to have attempted to manœuvre a fleet in so narrow a channel, especially such vessels as the *Wabash* and *Susquehanna*, which drew too much water.

The morning of Thursday, November 7, came in as fine as could be wished, with a pleasant temperate breeze from the northwest just strong enough to cause the flags to stand out straight. The sea was almost smooth. At four bells (6 A. M.) all hands were called, the ship cleared for action, and after a hearty breakfast officers and men went to quarters and awaited orders. At 8:10 flag-ship made general signal "Weigh anchor and take position as assigned." About 8:30 the warships were all under weigh, turned around (as they had been laying head to sea owing to the flood tide) formed in two columns and headed in towards the forts.

The main column was led by the flag-ship *Wabash* under command of Commander C. R. P. Rogers; the *Susquehanna*, Captain James L. Lardner; *Mohican*, Commander S. W. Godon; *Seminole*, Commander J. P. Gillis; *Pawnee*, Lieutenant Commanding R. H. Wyman; gunboat *Unadilla*, Lieutenant Commanding N. Collins; *Ottawa*, Lieutenant Commanding T. H. Stevens; *Pembina*, Lieutenant Commanding John P. Bankhead, and the sailing sloop *Vandalia*, Commander F. S. Haggerty, towed by the *Isaac Smith*, Lieutenant Commanding J. W. A. Nicholson.

The second or flanking column, on our starboard quarter, was led by the *Bienville*, Commander Charles Steedman; gunboats *Seneca*, Lieutenant Commanding Daniel Ammen; *Curlew*, Lieutenant Commanding P. G. Watmough; *Penguin*, Lieutenant Commanding T. A. Budd; *Augusta*, Commander E. G. Parrott.

The plan of attack of Flag Officer S. F. Dupont, as copied from his official report to the Honorable Secretary of the Navy, was as follows:

"To pass up midway between Forts Walker and Beauregard (receiving and returning) to a distance of about two and

a half miles north of the batteries. At that point the line was to turn to the south, round by the west and close in with Fort Walker, encountering it on its weakest flank and at the same time enfilading in nearly a direct line its two water faces; whilst standing to the southward the vessels of the line were head to tide, which kept them under command whilst the rate of going was diminished.

"When abreast of the fort the engines were to be slowed and the movement reduced to only as much as would be just sufficient to overcome the tide, to preserve the order of battle by passing the batteries in slow succession and to avoid becoming a fixed mark for the enemy's fire. On reaching the extremity of Hilton Head and the shoal ground making off from it, the line was to turn to the north, by the east, and passing to the northward engage Fort Walker with the port battery nearer than when first on the same course. These evolutions were to be repeated."

The *Susquehanna* was a side-wheel steamer, and between the paddle-boxes was a light deck, termed a hurricane deck, used as the bridge is now on men-of-war.

On this deck, besides Captain Lardner, was the Executive Officer, Lieutenant Clark H. Wells, who only joined on October 27; Acting Master George H. Bradbury, Signal Officer; Captain Philip R. Fendall, of the Marine Corps, and Paymaster Washington Irvin, acting as Aides to the Captain; also the Engineer Officer, Third Assistant Engineer E. R. Arnold, at the signal bell. Our armament consisted of fifteen 8-inch guns, divided in four divisions, viz: First Div sion, two 8-inch 106 cwt. pivot guns on the bow, under the immediate command of Lieutenant Jonathan Young; Second Division, forward of the paddles, six 8-inch 56 cwt. guns, under command of Lieutenant A. W. Weaver; Third Di-

vision, abaft the paddle-boxes, eight 8-inch 56 cwt. guns, under command of Acting Master George B. Livingston; Fourth Division, one 8-inch 106 cwt. pivot gun, mounted at the stern, under command of Acting Master Alfred L. B. Zerega.

At 9 A. M. flag-ship signaled "Close order," and we steamed in towards the fort, close behind the *Wabash*, going slow and feeling the way with the lead.

At 9:26 Fort Walker opened the engagement, and was immediately followed by Fort Beauregard, and the flag-ship promptly returned the fire. At 9:30 our bow pivots came into action and in a few minutes the after pivot joined in. As we drew up opposite the forts both of our broadside batteries were manned, and commenced pouring in 8-inch shells with 5-inch fuses, the engines moving just enough to give the ship steerage way. By 10 A. M. we had passed the shore batteries and began making the first turn to the southward. while turning, we were under a raking fire from Fort Beauregard and particularly so from a rifled gun that, to me, seemed to devote itself especially to the after pivot. Having made the turn we followed the *Wabash* and passed within 800 yards of Fort Walker, pouring in shell and canister as fast as we could load and fire. We stayed abreast of Fort Walker about twenty-six minutes engaging both forts, then steamed ahead again to take our position under the stern of the *Wabash*. By this time we were well east of Fort Walker close to the shoal water on the Fishing Ripps; then turned to the northward again, passing between the two forts and engaging both simultaneously.

The flanking column had followed us *en suite*, but then with some of the main column took position to the northward of Fort Walker and fired from there.

By 11 we had moved up to our previous turning point and had commenced turning to make our third trip between the forts, when the flag-ship made signal to the fleet to "Get into and preserve stations," and at 11.15 signalled to follow the motions of the Commander-in-Chief. The *Wabash* and the *Susquehanna* again steamed slowly down abreast of Fort Walker, passing it within six hundred yards; the gun sights of the starboard batteries being adjusted at 550 yards, again engaging both batteries. At 11.30 the rebel flag on Fort Walker was shot away.

Flag Officer Dupont, in his official report, says: "The second fire with the starboard guns of the *Wabash*, and of Captain Lardner, in the *Susquehanna*, my second in command, who always kept so near as to give me the entire support of his formidable battery, seems, at this short distance, to have discomfited the enemy. The effort was increased by the shells thrown from the smaller vessels at the enfilading point."

Having again reached the shoal water by the Fishing Ripps, we turned to the northward, and for the fourth time passed between the two forts, engaging both at the same time. After passing, Flag Officer Dupont, having great regard for his officers and men, made signal to get something to eat. The mess and grog tubs were brought on deck, and all hands got a bite and a tot, we flying at the time our dinner pennant.

Whilst we were making the turn the *Wabash* dropped down nearly alongside, and hailing Captain Lardner, Flag Officer Dupont said: "We are going down abreast of Fort Walker; will anchor as close as possible and remain there until the fort is captured."

Just as all were steaming down towards Fort Walker, at 1.15 the flag-ship signaled that the enemy were running, and

in a few minutes the *Pembina* repeated the signal. We stood down to the fort, and from our tops the enemy could be seen in full flight. When abreast of it, Commodore John Rodgers of the *Wabash* went ashore, and at 2.20 hoisted the Stars and Stripes on the remnant of the flagstaff.

As soon as the United States flag was hoisted over Fort Walker the Flag Officer sent some of the small vessels to attend to Fort Beauregard, and it was soon discovered that it was also abandoned. The next morning the United States flag was hoisted over it by Lieutenant Commanding Daniel Ammen.

While all were waiting for the United States flag to be hoisted on Fort Walker signals were made to the Army transports, who immediately moved up and began landing troops.

During the little over three and a half hours under fire the *Susquehanna* was struck ten times in the hull and twenty or thirty times in the spars and rigging. One shot, a red-hot one, struck at the water-line just forward of the starboard paddle, and another struck just under our quarter, having been fired from Fort Beauregard as we were making the first turn.

I am glad to state that but two of our ship's company were killed; both by pieces of its iron smokestack guys carried away by a raking shot from one of the forts.

Before going into action Captain Lardner had distributed the marine guard amongst the various gun's crews, but having no need of their services at the after pivot, except when changing pivot, I directed those assigned to my crew to act as sharpshooters when not otherwise employed.

Having noticed a man in a red shirt at Fort Beauregard jump up on the rampart every now and then just before a rifled gun would go off and send a shell, as it seemed to me,

straight for my division, one of the marines sighted for him several times, then fired, and "Red Shirt" appeared no more.

At the beginning of the fight three or four rebel steamers were hovering about the head of the bay, one of them being filled with a lot of women who, we learned afterward, had come on an excursion from Savannah and Beaufort, to see the "Mud Sills" whipped and captured. By permission of Captain Lardner I loaded the pivot with a distant charge (16 pounds) of powder, rammed home a solid shot, and sent it with our compliments towards Captain Tattnal and his ladies. Don't think it did any damage, but be that as it may, the excursion party evidently did not like it, for the steamers quickly disappeared.

During one of the hottest periods of the fight I saw Jeremiah Harding, one of the quartermasters, who weighed close on two hundred and fifty pounds, coming from the hurricane deck, where he had been stationed at the lead, convulsed with laughter, and when he got close enough asked him what was the matter. He answered, as well as he could for laughing, "Captain Lardner told me to get off the hurricane deck, saying, 'the first thing you know one of those d—d rebel shells will hit you in the belly and spoil all my clothes.' " Jerry remained with my division the balance of the time. taking the place of my quarter gunner, who had been slightly hurt.

While we were under a raking fire from Fort Walker, the Executive Officer, Lieutenant Clark H. Wells, who had been round amongst all the gun's crews encouraging them and saying, "Men, keep perfectly cool, do your duty, and put your trust in God," came to my division, and, noticing some little excitement or hurry when the men were changing pivot, gave the order "attention," and then made them go through

"change of pivot" and loading as if on exhibition drill. The pivot guns of the *Susquehanna* were not at all protected by the bulwarks, excepting the string piece, which was about two feet high, so that we had a constant view of the enemy and they of us. I have no idea how those at the bow pivots felt, but know that at the after pivot I, for one, felt very much as if all the shots from both forts were aimed at and intended for me personally, and especially so when a shot struck the spanker boom just over my head and caused me to spill every drop of water out of the bucket from which I was drinking. You can imagine how glad I was when that rifled gun on Fort Beauregard exploded.

A drummer or fifer boy, 12 or 13 years of age, was stationed at the cabin companion-way when some of the mizzen topmast rigging was cut away by the enemy's fire and fell about him. The first time the boy bore it pretty well, but when a second lot came down the little fellow could not stand it any longer, and made a break forward. I started after him, but just as reaching out to grab him, tripped on one of the train tackles, fell, bumped my nose, and shed the only blood I had the honor of shedding during the war. The boy helped me up, and returning aft with me was put on as one of the train tacklemen to occupy his mind.

At general muster next morning the following general order of Flag Officer S. F. Dupont, which came enclosed in a personal letter to Captain Lardner, was read:

FLAGSHIP WABASH,
HILTON HEAD, PORT ROYAL SOUND,
November 8, 1861.

General Orders, No. 2.

It is the grateful duty of the Commander-in-Chief to make a public acknowledgment of his entire commendation of the coolness, discipline, skill and gallantry displayed by the officers and men under his command in the capture of the batteries at Hilton Head and Bay Point, after an action of four hours' duration.

The Flag Officer fully sympathizes with the officers and men of the squadron in the satisfaction they must feel at seeing the ensign of the Union flying once more in the State of South Carolina, which has been the chief promoter of the wicked and unprovoked rebellion they have been called upon to suppress.

S. F. DUPONT,
F. O., S. A. B. S.

The personal letter above cited was as follows:

U. S. S. WABASH,
OFF HILTON HEAD, PORT ROYAL, S. C.,
November 9, 1861.

MY DEAR LARDNER:

I enclose a general order to be read to the officers and crew of the *Susquehanna*, and I take the occasion to say that your noble ship throughout the whole of the battle was precisely where I wanted her to be, and doing precisely what I wanted her to do, and that your close support of this ship was a very gallant thing.

Truly your friend,
S. F. DUPONT.

Captain J. L. LARDNER,
Commanding Susquehanna.

From various official reports it appears that during the three hours and forty five minutes the engagement lasted the *Susquehanna* fired from her fifteen guns four hundred and seventy-four 8-inch shell, about twenty solid 8-inch (64 pounds), and some grape and canister.

The *Wabash* fired eight hundred and eighty shell and a few grape.

The *Seminole* fired forty-three 11-inch shell, eighty-two 32-pound shell, and sixty solid shot.

The *Pocahontas* fired twenty-four 10-inch shell, thirty-seven 32-pound shell, five 32-pound shot, and four 15-pound shell.

The *Bienville* fired eighty-four 32-pound shot, thirty-nine 32-pound shell, sixty-two rifled small shell.

The *Unadilla* fired thirty-three 11-inch shell, thirty-seven 20-pound rifled shell, most of them falling short or exploding prematurely.

The *Seneca*, sixty-three 11-inch shell, thirty-three 20-pound rifled shell, and twelve 20-pound shrapnel.

The *Isaac Smith*, thirty-one 30-pound shell.

The *Curfew*, one hundred and two solid shot, thirty-three shell.

During the action the *Pocahontas*, in command of Commander Percival Drayton, came in from Tybee Island and took part in the fight.

From the official report of Lieutenant John S. Barnes to Commander C. R. P. Rodgers, we learned that Fort Walker had twenty-three guns of heavy caliber, some rifled; Fort Beauregard had twenty pieces, some rifled.