

Another duty was the exchange of prisoners on arrival at City Point of the flag of truce steamer. Our men were sent out to a camp I had, and thence to their commands. I never went to the flag of truce boat in all this while but once, and then I did not go aboard of her. I dismounted and took a seat on a box. All was quiet. The staging from the main deck rested on the wharf. On this deck, by the staging, were posted two soldiers with arms aground. On the upper deck were three or four United States soldiers. Their clothing was clean, neat, and new, and they wore unsoiled white cotton gloves. The wharf was guarded by a lone Confederate soldier. On his head was a straw hat, his raiment was butternut in color, his shoes were low-quartered, his hair and beard long. In countenance he was dignified, and his eye bright. To protect himself from the cold north wind, a brown blanket was tied, or pinned, in front around his neck, and as he turned to the north, pacing to and fro in front of the stage, his blanket would swing now east, now west, and on returning wrap him in its folds. He heeded not the neat clad enemy on the steamer, but walked his post with the conscious conviction that he was their peer in every walk of life. None of the soldiers leaning over the railing and looking down on him were commenting on his garb, or laughing at him. Battle had taught them to respect him. Still the contrast in clothing and comfort was marked.

CHAPTER XII.

Telegram from Secretary of War—Go to Richmond—Declined Going to Vicksburg—Gen. Longstreet—He Starts for Suffolk—Suffolk—Capture of a Fort and Garrison—No Report Made of the Capture—Statement of Lieut. George Reese—Longstreet Ordered to Join Lee—Dispatches—Battle of Chancellorsville—Withdraw from Suffolk—An Impertinent Note—Court of Inquiry Asked for and Refused—Possible Result Had Longstreet Obeyed Orders—*Ten* Dispatches to Longstreet—Orders to Report to Gen. Johnston.

ON March 1, 1863, I received a telegram from the Secretary of War stating that he wished to see me in regard to a change of service. The day following I called at the office of the Secretary, Hon. J. A. Seddon, and he expressed a desire that I would go to the city of Vicksburg to assist in the defense of that place. I did not give my assent, preferring to consider the matter. On the 3d I rode around the line of defensive works that I had constructed around Petersburg with Gen. Longstreet, and did not get back until 3 P.M.

I have already stated that on my return from Wilmington on the 23d of February, 1863, I found Gen. Longstreet in Petersburg in command of the divisions of Gens. Hood and Pickett. The main object of his coming was to provision his troops and forage his animals (until active service commenced requiring him to join Gen. Lee or otherwise) from the supplies in the adjoining counties of Virginia and the counties of North Carolina in the northeastern portion of the State, and be in readiness to join Gen. Lee promptly, which he said was arranged before he left Fredericksburg. (See Longstreet's "Memoirs," page 329.)

That the trains might move in safety, it was necessary to confine the Federal forces in the works around Suffolk and Norfolk. Accordingly about the middle of April Longstreet moved with his two divisions and one of mine on Suffolk. The approach of our troops was not discovered until the advance was in open view of the defenses around the city. Their pickets were quietly captured, and the lookout sentinel in an observatory on a platform in the top of a large pine tree in front of the city might have been captured also had it not been for the desire of

one of the Confederates to take a shot at him while he was in the top, before any one had been sent near the base of the pine. The man came down as lively as a squirrel, and the alarm was given.

The circumvallation of the city, in part, was made by Pickett's division on the right, mine in the center, and Hood's on the left, and thus the siege of Suffolk began.

When Gen. Longstreet had been in Petersburg some time, he said to me one day that he purposed to attack Suffolk after his preparations were made, and to take the trains and send them down into the seaboard counties for provisions.

The next thing I knew, April 9, he put his command in motion, and took from me a division and a number of batteries, and was on his way to Suffolk without informing me in any way of his designs, or of his wishes.* The next day I put a staff officer in charge of the department headquarters, and with my other staff officers rode to Suffolk and took command of my own troops there that had been removed without sending the order through my office as courtesy required. No doubt the object of such proceedings was to give the command of a division to Gen. M. Jenkins, a worthy and gallant officer, who had distinguished himself in the seven days' fight around Richmond. On the morning of the 13th I took command of my own troops, the brigades of Pettigrew, Jenkins, and Davis, and my batteries. I found Gen. Longstreet down near the front, where there was considerable artillery firing and skirmishing on the advanced line. Longstreet asked me to accept the command of all the artillery, which I refused to do. I told him I did not intend to give up the command of my division to any one, but that I was willing to give all the assistance I could, personally and through the

*This was a violation of military usages that both Gens. Andrew Jackson and Z. Taylor denounced. Here is an extract from the order of Gen. Jackson:

HEADQUARTERS DIVISION OF THE SOUTH, }
NASHVILLE, April 22, 1817. }

The commanding general considers it due to the principles which ought and must exist in an army to prohibit the obedience of any order emanating from the *Department of War* to officers of this division unless coming through him as the proper organ of communication. The object of this is to prevent the recurrence, etc.

Here we see Jackson forbidding obedience to any order to troops or officer in his command unless it was communicated to him first for his action.

chief of my artillery, to place in position guns to prevent gunboats going up and down the river; and, although my diary does not mention it, all the artillery was ordered to report to me. I assigned all the batteries belonging to them to the *command of the respective divisions*, and thus it was scattered along the line for several miles, leaving me some spare batteries and a few siege guns in charge of my chief of artillery. But I will copy from my diary:

Tuesday, 14th. Heavy skirmishing; rode to Pickett's Division and to the extreme right of the line, and met Gen. Armstead there.

Wednesday, 15th. Started down the river with some artillery to endeavor to destroy the gunboats; found but one in the river, and it was too far below. After getting guns in position withdrew them. Day very rainy.

Thursday, 16th. Rode down the river and examined it for positions for defense; met Longstreet at Mr. Riddick's place; then went to Mr. Le Compte's house. We were invited to stay for dinner, but before it was ready a gunboat opened fire on the house while we were resting in the yard behind it and while the family were in it. After the second shot, which went through it, we rode out into the field by the side of the house in open sight. They did not fire at us (myself and four of my staff), but all the while continued the attack on the dwelling, and over the heads of the little children, who were on the lawn in front waving white handkerchiefs. The dwelling was built of brick, and was riddled with large holes. The wonder to me was how the children escaped. As we were leaving the field and the doctor had his hands on the latch of the gate to open it, it was opened by a three-hundred-pound shell striking the post that the gate was hung to, demolishing it.

17th. Last night I gave my consent that two guns from Stribbling's battery be put in an old work that was to be garrisoned by two companies of Gen. Law's Brigade, and some guns from Martin's battery were put in another work. A gunboat came up and opened fire on the fort where the two Alabama companies were, without damage.

18th. Passed all day down the river. Got the two thirty-two pounders in position, ready to open to-morrow.

19th. This forenoon the gunboats came up, and the thirty-two pounder fired on them and drove them back. They were also attacked by some sharpshooters.

Just before sunset the gunboats and several batteries of artillery opened a very severe cross fire on the *fort* and over the plain in the rear of the fort, where the two guns from Stribbling's battery had been placed to aid the garrison. Pending this attack the enemy landed a strong infantry force, under cover of some timber, on our side of the river, carried the place by a sudden assault, and captured the *garrison*, consisting of Companies A and B, Forty-Fourth Alabama Regiment, and a squad of artillerymen.

I heard the distant firing about sunset, and at 9 P.M. I heard in camp that one of the forts in Hood's command had been captured. I went over to Longstreet's headquarters, and he asked me to go down and take command. On arrival I found on the ground there Gens. Hood and Law with Robertson's Brigade and Connelly's Fifty-Fifth North Carolina Regiment, and took command as I was ordered. The Fifty-Fifth North Carolina Regiment was advanced, but it was driven back in the darkness by the cross fire of the gunboats and the enemy in the captured works. It was so plain to any one who had a knowledge of the art of war that the enemy would not hold an isolated work on our side of the river, that I was not inclined to make an assault which would have sacrificed so many lives uselessly. Yet such was the order given by Longstreet.

20th. Remained in position till morning, when Longstreet arrived. Both Gens. Hood and Law strenuously insisted that no attack should be made to capture the works while the troops would be subjected to the severe cross fire over the neck of land from the enemy's fleet of vessels and the troops in the redoubt and artillery opposite on the other side of the river.

At 1 P.M. I turned the command over to Hood, or rather left him in command of his own troops, advising him to wait and let the enemy abandon the place, which they did. Soon after this Capt. Cussons, commander of Law's scouts, with a few men and a loud "yell," ran in the enemy's pickets, and entered the works with them. They went on out, and left Cussons to hold the empty fort.

22d. If that redoubt, which gave support to our left flank (that otherwise would have been "in air"), was worth a great sacrifice of life to recapture it, as ordered by Longstreet, then certainly it was in accord with the science of war to place two guns on the works to strengthen and protect the left flank of his army.*

* Longstreet reiterates the story of the capture of the battery in his book, but is silent about the garrison or the capture of the redoubt. Therefore I will append a statement handed to me by George Reese, an honored citizen of Pensacola, Fla. My account is from my diary; his is from memory. He writes:

"I was a lieutenant in Company A, Forty-Fourth Alabama Infantry, Law's Brigade, Hood's Division, Longstreet's Corps, and was with my command at the investment of Suffolk in 1863. On the 18th day of April, while in line, Companies A and K received orders, about 8 P.M., to move. I think we numbered fifty men, all told. We were marched about two miles to the left of Longstreet's army.

We arrived at an old fort, or rather redoubt, exposed on the land side, but protected by a high embankment on the river side. In this fort we found two guns of Stribbling's battery, with their complement of gunners. This whole force, with the two guns, was captured on the 19th of April, near 6 P.M. About 1 P.M. the enemy opened a terrific fire on the fort from a great number of guns massed on the opposite side of the river and from the gunboats and infantry. Under cover of this fire a transport landed about a thousand men behind a point of land extending into the river just above the fort, concealed by thick undergrowth. They were within one hundred yards of the fort when discovered. It was natural that the infantry should blame Gen. Longstreet for thus placing so small a force so far away from support, and loud complaints were heard from both men and officers. We were taken to Suffolk the same night and next morning to Norfolk, and two weeks after exchanged.

GEORGE REESE, *Lieut. Co. A, Forty-Fourth Alabama.*

"Pensacola, Fla., March 1897."

I am tired of *volunteering* against gunboats any more, and declined having anything to do with the line defended by Gen. Hood because of a communication received from the general commanding saying I was "in charge of the river defenses." To have charge of the river defenses involves more or less the command of all the army. I really had officially nothing to do with the river defenses, only I *voluntarily placed* two large siege guns in position to be used in attacking any boats passing up or down the river. Connally's Regiment was a support for these two guns.

23d. Confined myself to the immediate command of my division, and took no more interest in Hood's line, and ordered Connally's Regiment to join his brigade.

24th and 25th. There was some skirmishing.

26th. Rode down with Gen. Longstreet to the Whitmarsh road. Gone all day. The line there is commanded by Gen. Armstead.

And now come the Richmond papers proclaiming: "From Suffolk—Gen. French lost Stribbling's battery." Mark you, no mention of the capture of the *fort*; no mention of the capture of the *two companies* that garrisoned it. It would not do to have it reported that the Yankees crossed the Nansemond yesterday and captured a fort on our side of the river by assault. The garrison, composed of two companies of the Forty-Fourth Alabama Regiment of Law's Brigade, Hood's Division, were taken prisoners and the two guns were lost. But it will not do to let this be known. No, no; write it down thus: "Yesterday Gen. French lost Stribbling's battery." The world is too busy to inquire, and the world will believe it. The truth is, I was never in the fort, *never saw it*. I had no authority over the garrison, and I was in no way responsible for the loss of the redoubt, the garrison, or guns.

The most remarkable feature of this little affair is the persistency with which headquarters proclaimed that "French lost Stribbling's battery," and were silent about the infantry garrison captured, etc. I will give two letters here from the War Records:

HEADQUARTERS NEAR SUFFOLK, April 21, 1863.

Maj. Gen. D. H. Hill, Goldsboro.

Gen. Longstreet is closely engaged to-night, and he has asked me to write you briefly the particulars of the affair of Sunday night which resulted in the capture by the enemy of Stribbling's battery. Several batteries had been planted on the Nansemond to hold the river against the passage of gunboats and transports. Stribbling's occupied an old unclosed work on Hill's Point, a tongue of land a little above the confluence of Western Branch and Nansemond. About dark on the evening of the 19th the enemy opened a severe fire from his field batteries planted opposite, and his gunboats above and below the fort, entirely sweeping with a cross fire the plain in the rear of the work. Under cover of this fire and

darkness they landed a force, not more than one hundred and fifty strong, a very little distance from the fort, rushed upon its rear, and surprised and captured its garrison.

The artillery on the river was directly under the management of Maj. Gen. French. There were five guns, fifty-five artillerists, and seventy infantry (sharpshooters) in the fort, which all fell into the hands of the enemy.

The affair is regarded as a most remarkable and discreditable instance of an entire absence of vigilance. A regiment (Fifty-Fifth North Carolina and seven hundred strong) which Gen. Longstreet had particularly ordered to the vicinity for the protection of the battery was not posted in supporting distance. No official report of the affair has yet been received from Gen. French. The captured guns were carried across the river. It is some consolation that *only* the guns and ammunition chests were lost. The horses and ammunition carriages, being considerably in the rear of the battery, were saved. We are otherwise quite comfortable here. The quartermasters and commissaries are actively engaged in getting out supplies.

I am, General, very respectfully your obedient servant,
G. M. SORREL, Assistant Adjutant General.*

This letter comes from the headquarters of Gen. Longstreet, and should be a careful account; whereas it contains errors in stating occurrences well known at the time it was written. I will point out some of the errors:

1. Only a small part of Stribbling's battery was captured by the enemy.
2. Stribbling's battery was not in the redoubt, as stated, in numbers.
3. The estimate that the enemy's force was not over one hundred and fifty differs very much from that of Lieut. George Reese, who was an officer of one of the companies forming the garrison that was captured, who writes it was near one thousand.
4. "The artillery on the river was directly under the command of Maj. Gen. French" is an error, as I declined it the day of my arrival, only I voluntarily offered to assist in checking the gunboats passing up or down the river.
5. It states that "there were *five guns*, fifty-five artillerists, and seventy infantry captured by the enemy;" whereas it was known to the entire army by the 21st, the date of this letter, that only *two guns and about eighteen artillerists* were lost when

*See Vol. LI., Part 11. Serial No. 108, War Records, page 692.

the redoubt fell by the capture of the garrison. No horses, caissons, harness, forge, etc., were in the fort. They were in camp.

6. Gen. Longstreet did not particularly order the Fifty-Fifth North Carolina Regiment to that vicinity for the protection of the battery. It was one of the regiments of my command, and I sent it down to support two thirty-two-pounders that Col. Cunningham had mounted at a place we had selected farther down the river. Tho "protection" to the two guns at the fort was *the garrison Hood sent to the fort* and such other as he directed. The better explanation is, the guns were asked of me to aid the garrison.

7. The statement that "no official report of the affair has yet been received from Gen. French" is misleading, and a report from me would have been supererogatory. The report of that "affair" was strictly a matter between the general commanding and Gen. Hood, who commanded the division and placed the garrison in the fort to protect his extreme left, then "in air."

8. When headquarters announced that "it was some little consolation that only five guns and ammunition chests were lost," it may have been joyous that *only* the garrison was lost instead of the whole of Hood's Division, of which it formed a part.

9. I must give Gen. Longstreet's adjutant general the manliness to be the only officer in Longstreet's Corps who has, in any manner or form, put on record the fact, directly or indirectly, that there was a garrison placed in that redoubt by order of Longstreet, or Hood, or both, and it was captured by the enemy, and with the garrison went the two guns. To the world has the publication gone that Gen. French lost Stribbling's battery.

10. If it be creditable for headquarters to publish that "this affair is regarded as a most remarkable and discreditable instance of an entire *absence* of vigilance" on my part, then I claim it is proper for me to remark that this effusion from the head of this army may be also "regarded as a most remarkable and discreditable instance of an entire *absence* of correctness in stating that affair."

There was no doubt a want of vigilance; and if Gen. Longstreet had desired, he could have learned whether the commander