

The commodore transferred his flag to the *Falmouth* and early in December we sailed for Norfolk in company with the screw sloop-of-war *Princeton*, which vessel was sent with us as a matter of precaution.

The *Princeton* was the first screw steamer we had in the navy, and I sometimes think the *best*. She was commissioned in 1843, and during the entire war with Mexico was actively employed. I never served in her myself, but was in squadron with her for three years, and she was always ready for service. At the time of which I am writing screw ships were rare, and the appearance of the *Princeton*, with her sails furled, going along seven knots an hour—like the ship of the Ancient Mariner, “without or wave or wind”—used to excite much astonishment among the merchant craft.

We anchored on the 19th of December in Lynhaven Bay, just inside Cape Henry. The next day was too foggy to proceed up the bay. About noon a merchant schooner passed close to us, and I was sent in a boat to put some officers on board her. She had a fair wind and tide and it was some time before I caught her up. The captain told me he had not seen the land since leaving Boston, yet here he was in a thick fog steering directly for Norfolk.

I had some difficulty in finding the ship again and came near “losing the number of my mess.” Fortunately the captain ordered guns to be fired and the ship’s bell to be rung. When I heard the first gun I found I had passed the ship, and was pulling out to sea. It was nearly four o’clock when I got on board. We arrived at Norfolk on the 20th day of December and, contrary to our expectations, the ship was put out of commission and the crew discharged.

CHAPTER V.

RETURN TO THE FRIGATE “POTOMAC”—LIST OF HER OFFICERS—FIRST IMPRESSIONS—SAIL FOR VERA CRUZ—ARRIVAL—SACRIFICIOS ISLAND—SAN JUAN DE ULLOA—SAIL FOR BRAZOS SANTIAGO—LAND A FORCE AT POINT ISABEL—BATTLE OF PALO ALTO—BATTLE OF RESACA DE LA PALMA—GENERAL TAYLOR AND COMMODORE CONNER—AN ALARM—MAJOR RINGGOLD—CAPTAIN MAY—LIEUTENANT RIDGELEY—BOAT EXPEDITION UP THE RIO GRANDE.

THE *Potomac* was put into dock and the leak soon stopped. She was immediately re-commissioned, a new set of officers ordered to her, and a new crew shipped. Feeling sure that war with Mexico was imminent, I applied to return to her; and after some difficulty received my orders. I reported on board in February 1846.

As the *Potomac’s* officers and men took part in all the naval operations in the Gulf of Mexico during the war, I give a list of the officers so far as my memory serves me: captain, J. H. Aulick; lieutenants, Lockwood, Jas. Rowan, Humphreys, North, Frailey and Doyle; sailing-master, Noland; purser, Bryan; surgeon, Dodd; assistant surgeons, Baxter and Hamilton; marine officer, Garland; chaplain, Lewis, passed midshipmen, Moore, Abbott, Tattnall and Hopkins; midshipmen, Monroe, Carmichael, Powell, Pembroke Jones, McLane, C. Hunter, Murdaugh and Somerville. The forward officers I do not recollect. There were many changes in the ward-room during the cruise, but none among the midshipmen.

My first impressions were not agreeable. I was the last officer to report, and when I arrived I found the ship in commission and nearly ready for sea. Full of zeal, I barely stopped to get my breakfast at the hotel, and then slipping on my uniform I hurried over to the navy yard to report. Our captain

was known in the service as a *martinet* and I knew it would not do to delay.

After reporting I asked his permission to remain on shore a day or two to purchase my mattress, blankets, &c., and get my things together—it was quite usual to allow this—but the captain refused it; and indeed it was with some difficulty that I obtained permission to return to the hotel for my trunk.

Said he—after saying he would give me one hour to do so—
—“Sir, when I get a midshipman on board *my* ship I never let him go on shore until I know something about him,”—and I will do him the justice to say he was as good as his word: for I was with him sixteen months and was only allowed to go ashore on liberty *twice* in that time; and yet I was his aid and supposed to be a favorite!

I found the officers much discontented and all hands were prophesying an unpleasant cruise; but we had a set of midshipmen on board that even Captain Aulick could not put down. They were all on their second cruise and knew their duty well. Intelligent, gentlemanly and full of zeal it was hard for the captain to find fault with them. Then they were sworn friends, and all pulled together—indeed, the feeling among seven of them was more like that of brothers than friends, and to this day among the four who survive the tie continues as strong as in the days of our youth. Kept in three and sometimes even two watches; roused out at all hours of the night to take lunar observations; kept for hours in the tops; knocked about in boats, and “ridden down like a main tack” generally, all would be forgotten when we got to our own quarters and assembling round the mess table would join in the chorus: “It will never do to give it up so, Mr. Brown; it will never do to give it up so.”

The lieutenants were always our friends; and I cannot cite a better proof of the way these midshipmen performed their duties than by stating the fact that not one of them was ever punished during the cruise.

We sailed from Norfolk in March, 1846, and passing through

the Turk's island passage and along the south side of Cuba, arrived at Vera Cruz early in April.

We found the squadron under Commodore Conner anchored under Sacrificios island, a much better anchorage than under Green island, and the usual anchorage for men-of-war visiting Vera Cruz. Sacrificios island lies E. S. E. $3\frac{1}{4}$ miles from San Pedro Bastion, Vera Cruz; and is about 4 miles from the castle San Juan de Ulloa, which is 1600 yards N. N. E. from the same bastion. The island lies three-fourths of a mile from the main land, and the anchorage is between the island and the main; pretty close to the former for protection during the norther season.

The Spaniards under Grijalva landed on this island in 1518, and Bernal Diaz says of it: “Our people found on this last mentioned island two buildings of lime and stone, well constructed, each with steps, and an altar placed before certain hideous figures, the representations of the gods of these Indians. They found here also the bodies of five unfortunate persons who had been sacrificed on the preceding night, their hearts cut out, their limbs separated from the bodies and the walls and altars stained with their blood. This island was named *Isla de Los Sacrificios*. Opposite to it on the continent we landed, and constructing huts, remained some time in expectation of trading with the natives for gold.”

This landing place of Grijalva's followers was precisely the spot where General Scott landed his army in 1847.

In reference to the name of the castle of *San Juan de Ulloa*, Bernal Diaz says: “Our interpreter who showed some marks of intelligence being questioned as to the cause of these victims being put to death in that manner, made answer as well as he could, that it was done by the Indians of *Culva* or *Culchua*, meaning the Mexicans; but he pronounced this word *Ulua*, a name which ever after distinguished the place. It was called St. John partly because this was the day of St. John, and partly in compliment to our chief, Juan de Grijalva.”

The squadron at this time, as well as I recollect, consisted

of the frigates *Cumberland* (flag ship), *Potomac* and *Raritan*; the steam frigate *Mississippi*; the sloop-of-war *Falmouth*, *John Adams*, and *St. Marys*; the steam sloop *Princeton*; and the brigs *Lawrence*, *Porpoise* and *Somers*. It was largely reinforced from time to time as I shall mention.

About the first of May we were unexpectedly signalled to get underweigh, and most of the vessels named stood to the northward in company. As the men were kept constantly exercising with small-arms in obedience to signal from the flag ship, we knew "something was in the wind," though war had not been declared. We anchored off Brazos Santiago, in Texas, about seven miles north of the Rio Grande river on the 6th, and the next day landed some 1200 men, sailors and marines, under Captains Gregory and Aulick, to reinforce the garrison at Point Isabel. We arrived in the nick of time. Previous to our arrival General Taylor with his army had advanced to the Rio Grande, established a post and completed a fort opposite to Matamoras. He then returned to Point Isabel, leaving the 7th Infantry to garrison this fort, which was afterwards called Fort Brown, in honor of Major Brown, of the 7th, who so heroically held it against all the attacks of the Mexicans from the 3d to the 9th of May, and who lost his life in the defence.

General Taylor having made his arrangements for the defence of Point Isabel (his base of supplies) again left to meet the Mexican army, which was now between Fort Brown and Point Isabel, and threatening the latter point. So that, as I have said, we arrived just in time.

Point Isabel was fortified, and we of the *Potomac* were assigned to some heavy guns at one of the angles. All the men were armed with muskets, but had not been much drilled in their use. Indeed, at that day it seemed impossible to get a regular "blue-jacket" to perform a soldier's duty. The prejudice against the small-arm drill was so strong among the men that during the whole war they made but little progress in learning even the company drill. They were always

ready—*too ready*—to load and fire; but their awkwardness rendered them about as dangerous to friends as foes.

As soon as we got on shore at Point Isabel we expected we might have to march to join the army, so the lieutenants went immediately to work drilling their companies; and I thought the army officers who looked on would die of laughter at the sight. One lieutenant would persist in giving the order *double up*, when he wished to form two ranks; and we were all performing the most remarkable evolutions, none of which were laid down in Scott's Tactics.

The officers of the present day are so well instructed in infantry tactics at the Naval Academy, and the sailors are so well drilled, that they would find it hard to realize how very green we were at that day. However, we were all full of zeal and pluck, and were always able to hold our own in all our fights afloat or ashore. Each ship had a company of well-drilled and disciplined marines, and in our shore operations they formed a battalion, and this battalion formed the *nucleus* on which we rallied.

General Taylor met the Mexicans on the 8th of May, 1846, and fought the battle of Palo Alto. He stood on the defensive in this battle, and it was fought principally with artillery. He made good use of a siege train he fortunately had with him. I think it consisted of 18-pounders. The Mexicans made but one attempt to come to close quarters—towards the close of the day a body of lancers rode up as if about to charge, but were soon thrown into confusion by the 5th Infantry.

We at Point Isabel could hear the guns all day, and we knew by the sound that our army, if not retreating, was not advancing. As may well be imagined we were in a great state of excitement, and the sailors were dying to go to the assistance of the army. About 12 o'clock that night a negro camp-follower came in and informed Major Jock Monroe, who was the senior army officer at the post, that General Taylor was defeated with great slaughter, and that he himself had barely escaped with his life. Captain Gregory of the navy was imme-

diately called and begged to join the General with his men; and both he and Captain Aulick were keen to go; but Commodore Conner had to be consulted, and an express was sent off to him on board his ship. The commodore positively refused to send the men out; he said that unaccustomed as they were to the use of small-arms, and with no knowledge of formations, one regiment of cavalry could cut them to pieces, and that he would not risk crippling his squadron at the very beginning of the war; with many other good reasons no doubt, but here, in my opinion, he made his first mistake in this war:

“He either fears his fate too much,
Or his deserts are small,
That dares not put it to the touch
To gain or lose it all!”

If we had sent out a thousand men they would have reached General Taylor at daylight on the morning of the 9th of May when more than one officer thought help needed. It was afterwards said that General Taylor called a council of war on the night of the 8th, and after calling upon his officers for an opinion, which was to the effect *that the army should fall back on Point Isabel*, he broke it up with the remark: “Well, gentlemen, we will *advance* to-morrow morning at daylight.” This was characteristic of the General; but even he, I think, would not have been sorry to see a thousand American blue-jackets on the morning of the 9th.

It must be recollected that the Mexican army, under General Arista, consisted of six thousand men, while General Taylor had barely two thousand.

On the 9th of May General Taylor advanced upon the Mexicans at Resaca de la Palma and utterly defeated them. This battle was gained by an advance of our whole line, and as it was somewhat in the nature of a *scrimmage* the sailors would have given a good account of themselves, and it would have been said that the navy had saved the army. It was better for the army as it was; but the navy lost a glorious

opportunity. We were all much disgusted at not being permitted to march out; but as no more stragglers came in, but on the contrary dispatches were received to the effect that the army had held its own on the 8th, we were relieved of our uneasiness as to its safety.

On the 9th we found the sound of the guns becoming more and more indistinct and towards nightfall our hopes were confirmed by the news of a glorious victory.

I knew Commodore Conner well; I was his aid for some time. He had served with distinction in the war of 1812, and was in the *Hornet* when she captured the *Penguin*; where he was badly wounded. He was an educated man and a brave officer; but during the war he always seemed to be too much afraid of risking his men; he lacked moral courage, and would not take the responsibility his position imposed upon him. Consequently he failed.

After General Taylor had defeated the Mexicans at Resaca de la Palma and relieved Fort Brown he returned to Point Isabel and had an interview with Commodore Conner. The newspapers in describing this interview pictured the commodore as appearing in a gorgeous full dress: cocked hat, epaulettes, &c., while the general was represented as being in an old coat and straw hat and very shabby. As well as I recollect the commodore wore a jacket on that occasion. I know he generally wore one, for he had very little of the “fuss and feathers” in his dress, though always scrupulously neat. But some persons have the idea that heroes must necessarily be dirty and cannot be disabused of it. Just as I have observed that passengers on board ship judge of a captain’s qualifications by his size. Only those who are fat, with full round stomachs, are considered “fine old seamen!” Why if I were a ship owner I would not have a captain in my employ who weighed less than two hundred and fifty pounds and a large stomach should be a *sine qua non* if the vessel carried passengers.

But to return to my story. Although we knew on the 9th

that General Taylor had gained a victory that day we were still on the *qui vive*, for it was thought that the Mexican cavalry might get round to the rear of our army and make an attack on Point Isabel; and considering that it was the base of General Taylor's supplies and the Mexicans must have known it was feebly garrisoned, it did seem reasonable. That night there came up a hard storm, with rain in torrents. In the midst of it the report was circulated that the picket guard had been driven in; and all was alarm and confusion. We of the *Potomac* manned our heavy guns, and I, being Captain Aulick's aid, was sent to a distant part of the post to call him. In performing this duty I had to pass through the encampment of the *John Adams'* crew, and just at this time the men commenced to discharge their muskets to see—as they explained—"if they would go off!" The balls whistled around me like hail, and how I escaped being hit is more than I can tell. I always regarded it as my narrowest escape during the war. However I got to the captain's quarters all right, and returned with him to our battery, which we reached about daylight. I shall never forget the appearance of things there. It seems it was the lowest part of the encampment, and the water had drained into the enclosure until it was knee-high. In the darkness our fellows had lost their clothing, hats and arms—everything that would float did so—and when we arrived all hands presented a pitiable, not to say comical, sight.

Now it is usual in a man-of-war to receive the captain with a certain amount of ceremony, and upon this occasion the "officer of the guard," Midshipman Murdaugh, did the best he could under the circumstances. Seeing the captain coming he managed to get on a pair of white trowsers and throw an old cloak over his shoulders, but he had no hat. One of the passed midshipmen had a straw one, but declined to loan it, (bless his stingy soul) saying it made no difference, seeing the general condition of affairs in the camp. "But it is just for the sake of *appearance*," said Murdaugh earnestly, and putting it on he received the captain in due form.

This became a by-word with us in the steerage, and Murdaugh never heard the last of it. If a midshipman had to keep an extra watch, go in a boat, or do anything disagreeable, he would remark that he only did it "for the sake of appearance." The incident was even commemorated in a song, one of the verses of which ran as follows:

"And then when we landed at Point Isabel,
To Taylor's assistance to go,
Buck Murdaugh appeared in a battered straw hat,
And an old ragged cloak, and 'twas borrowed at that,—
'For the sake of appearance,' you know!"

When General Taylor returned to Point Isabel after his victories, he was received with great enthusiasm, especially by the sailors, who were generally drunk. They had gotten the run of the sutlers' stores by this time, and knew where to get whiskey; but even without sutlers' stores they would have known where to have found it. I heard a lieutenant say that he once sent a watch of sailors ashore for recreation on an uninhabited island in the middle of the Pacific ocean, and they all came back drunk! I don't know anything about *that*, but I know that our men were drunk, and when General Taylor arrived the sailors almost carried him in their arms and could hardly be kept out of his tent. The General was very tolerant of them; and here as well as at Vera Cruz afterwards, when we were thrown much with the regular army officers, I noticed that they made a pet of Jack, and allowed him all kinds of liberties. They looked upon him as a sea-dog who should not be held responsible for anything he did on shore.

The wounded in the two battles soon commenced to come in, and upon visiting the hospital it struck me as odd to see our soldiers and the Mexican soldiers lying alongside each other so sociably. Poor Major Ringgold of the Flying Artillery was brought in desperately wounded, and soon after died. We all attended his funeral. He introduced the drill of the flying artillery in the army, and commanded the first battery organized.

When General Taylor came in his escort was commanded by Captain Charles May who charged the Mexican artillery at Resaca de la Palma, and captured General La Vega who commanded it. He was the hero of the hour; six feet in height, and with his hair hanging over his shoulders, he was the picture of a dashing dragoon.

Just as May was about to charge the Mexican batteries, Lieutenant Randolph Ridgeley, commanding Ringgold's battery of artillery, and beyond a doubt the most distinguished officer at the battle of Resaca de la Palma, called out: "Hold on, Charley, until I draw their fire;" which he did, and May then charged. For his services May received two brevets; and Ridgeley but one, which he declined to accept. It was not May's fault, but there was much feeling on the subject among those who knew what Randolph Ridgeley's services really were at both Palo Alto and Resaca. When May returned home there was a dinner given him at New Orleans, and upon his rising to respond to a toast, a voice from the lower end of the table called out: "Hold on, Charley, till I draw their fire!"

In the interview between General Taylor and Commodore Conner it was agreed that there should be a combined attack upon a place called Burrita, on the Rio Grande. Colonel Wilson, with the First Infantry, was to march by land and we were to send a boat expedition up the river. We accordingly weighed and anchored off the mouth of the Rio Grande; but there being rather a heavy swell on the bar the commodore would not risk the boats. We waited two days, and on the third the expedition started under Captain Aulick. When he got to Burrita he found the First Infantry in quiet possession of it—so here was another disappointment to the navy and another opportunity lost.

CHAPTER VI.

WAR DECLARED—BLOCKADE OF THE COAST—RIVERS AND TOWNS ON THE GULF OF MEXICO—BLOCKADE OF VERA CRUZ—GREEN ISLAND—THE PIRATES OF THE "FALMOUTH"—PASSED MIDSHIPMAN HYNSON—BURNING A VESSEL UNDER THE CASTLE OF SAN JUAN DE ULLOA—MIDSHIPMAN ROGERS—LOSS OF THE BRIG SOMERS—UNLUCKY VESSELS—AFFAIR AT THE RIO ANTIGUA—THE GUNBOAT REEFER—FIRST ATTEMPT ON ALVARADO—THE BRITISH FRIGATE "ENDYMION."

THE war with Mexico was caused by the annexation of the independent State of Texas (which was once a part of Mexico, and had separated by means of a revolution) to the American Union. The advance of the American army to the Rio Grande brought about the first clash of arms. It now became the duty of our squadron to blockade all the ports on the Gulf until such time as we were prepared to take possession of them. These ports were *Matamoras* on the Rio Grande; *Tampico* on the Tampico river; *Tuspan* on the Tuspan river; *Vera Cruz* on the Gulf; *Alvarado* on the Alvarado river; *Coatzacoalcos* on the Coatzacoalcos river, and *Tabasco* on the Tabasco river. This latter town is also called *San Juan de Bautista*. All these rivers—save the Rio Grande—are insignificant streams, and all have very bad bars at their mouths. Vera Cruz is the only one of the places named that has anything like a harbor. The others, are for vessels of any size, simply open roadsteads.

There are some ports in Yucatan, such as Laguna and Campeachy, but I think our vessels only visited them for the purpose of buying cattle during the war. To the best of my knowledge the State of Yucatan, though belonging to Mexico, took no part in the war. It *may* have been in a state of revolution at the time, but I do not know.