

CHAPTER VII.

CAPTURE OF TAMPICO—SLIPPING OFF TAMPICO IN A "NORTHER"—THE U. S. SHIP "HORNET"—VESSELS OF THE U. S. NAVY LOST BETWEEN 1841-61—PENSACOLA—YELLOW FEVER—SECOND ATTEMPT ON ALVARADO—ADMIRAL JOSHUA SANDS—ATTACK ON TOBASCO—DEATH OF LIEUTENANT CHARLES MORRIS—CAPTAIN FRENCH FORREST—INCIDENTS OF THE BLOCKADE OF VERA CRUZ—ANTON LIZARDO—NARROW ESCAPE OF THE "CUMBERLAND"—LOSS OF THE U. S. BRIG "TRUXTUN"—A MAN HANGED AT THE YARD-ARM OF THE U. S. SHIP "ST. MARYS"—VISIT PENSACOLA AND RETURN TO VERA CRUZ.

SHORTLY after this attempt on Alvarado the squadron sailed to attack Tampico, a town of about 7,000 inhabitants, on the Tampico river 210 miles north of Vera Cruz, and next to that city the largest and most important place on the coast. It was said that the wife of the American consul, who remained in the city, had long been in communication with Commodore Conner, and finally wrote him that the city would yield, without resistance, to the appearance of force. This must have been so; for we went there, and sending in the light steamers and gunboats, the town surrendered to us without a fight. I did not accompany the detail from our ship up to the city, and do not recall any incidents of interest in relation to the expedition.

The bar off the mouth of the Tampico river is considered the most dangerous on the coast, and many lives have been lost on it. Sharks are numerous in the vicinity, as though they knew of the dangers of the place and the probabilities of prey. We anchored off the bar in the *Potomac*, and remained for some time after the place fell. Tampico was immediately occupied by the Army, and the Army *may* have

co-operated with us in its capture; but I cannot say positively. I only know that there were troops there immediately after its capture, if not before.

It was the "Norther" season while we were there, and as vessels never attempt to ride these heavy gales out at anchor in the open roadstead, we had our topsails reefed before furling, and a slip-rope and buoy on the chain. These "Northers" spring up suddenly and blow with great violence along this coast from Galveston, Texas, to Alvarado; below Alvarado they do not, I think, blow *home*, as sailors call it.

One very beautiful evening we were all on deck watching the sunset and listening to the music of our band, when we saw a small steamer with troops (sick men I presume) coming out over the bar. She was a river-boat, and not intended for the ocean; but the exigencies of the times pressed into service many such "rattletraps" for the transportation of troops and stores. I did not wonder at hearing soldiers say they did not like "going to sea" when I saw the kind of vessels the quartermasters chartered to transport them from place to place during this war. Delightful as the sea is, especially off Cape Horn, in winter, a hard gale, with the hatches battened down and the water knee-deep in the steerage; or on the coast of Africa in a dead calm, thermometer at ninety degrees, and hatchways covered during a hard rain,—still, packed like herrings in an unseaworthy craft resembling what sailors call the ship "*Doodledeaddidee*, (I am not sure about the spelling of this tall word) *with three decks and no bottom*," is quite another thing. But "this," as Mr. Toots says, "is a digression."

The steamer crossed the bar safely and stood to the northward, bound to New Orleans. I do not know why, but we all watched this little vessel until she disappeared in the gloom of the night. I had no watch that night, and not feeling sleepy—which was an abnormal state for a reefer to be in—I passed the first watch with Hunter (familiarily known as

"Nag.") About eleven o'clock a light breeze sprang up from the northward and Hunter was directed to inform the captain, who immediately came on deck and ordered all hands called. It seemed to me that the wind increased to a gale like magic. As we had close-reefed the topsails we had only to sheet them home and slip the chain to be underweigh.

The *John Adams* and the British brig *Daring* were in company, and it was a grand sight to see them rearing and pitching in the heavy sea that was soon raised. I do not remember ever to have known it to blow harder than it did on this occasion. As soon as we got well clear of the land we furled the fore and mizen topsails and hove to under a close-reefed main topsail and fore storm staysail, with the ship's head off shore. We lost sight of our consorts and did not see them again until we returned to our anchorage off Tampico.

It was under precisely similar circumstances that the U. S. sloop-of-war *Hornet*, Captain Norris, slipped from her anchorage here in September, 1829, and she has never been heard of since—foundered with all hands on board! She had previously touched at Havana, and while firing a signal gun her first lieutenant, the late Commodore Young, was so much injured by the recoil of a gun as to require the amputation of both of his legs. He was sent home from Havana and lived for more than forty years after the loss of his ship.

During my twenty years' service in the U. S. Navy the following vessels were lost at sea, and never afterwards heard of: Schooner *Grampus*, Lieutenant Commanding Albert Downes, on our coast, in 1841; brig *Porpoise*, Lieutenant Commanding Bridge, off the island of Formosa, in 1853 or 4; sloop-of-war *Albany*, Commander Gerry, in the West Indies, in 1855; and the sloop-of-war *Levant*, Commander William Hunt, near the Sandwich Islands, about 1860. Nothing has ever been heard of any of these vessels.

Upon our return to Tampico we heard that the little steamer I have mentioned put back as soon as she encountered the gale, and in attempting to cross the bar was lost with all hands

on board. No wonder we watched her with so much interest the evening she sailed:

"'Tis the sunset of life gives me mystical lore,
And coming events cast their shadows before,"

sings Campbell.

We had many of these "Northers" during the cruise, and I remember I rather liked them. Our hammocks were not piped up during their continuance, and we midshipmen had fine times below, sleeping as late as we pleased and skylarking. One of our amusements was to turn the mess-table bottom up, get on it, and slide to and fro as the ship rolled. Much we cared for gales of wind in those days!

From Tampico the *Potomac* went to Pensacola for provisions and water, and we arrived there in July, 1846. The yellow fever prevailed in the town and navy yard at the time; but we had only two cases on board, of which I was one, as I have previously stated. We remained here only a few weeks and were busily engaged in provisioning the ship during that time. Midshipmen Monroe, Carmichael, Somerville, Powell and Murdaugh left us here to report at the Naval Academy, Annapolis, for examination; so McLane, Pembroke Jones, Nag Hunter and I were left to "battle the watch" alone. Upon our return to the squadron at Vera Cruz we heard of the loss of the brig *Somers*, an account of which I have already given. We heard, too, that in our absence a second attempt had been made upon Alvarado. On this occasion the commodore had a larger force than upon the first. The force was divided into two divisions, each consisting of small steamers having in tow gunboats and cutters; and the intention was to make a dash across the bar and storm the place with the men in the boats.

Commodore Conner was on board the steamer *Vixen*, Captain Joshua Sands; his division had crossed the bar, and was nearly under fire when he saw that the second division, under Captain French Forrest, had grounded. "Well, Sands, what is to be done now?" said the commodore. "Go ahead and

fight like h—ll," answered Sands. Unfortunately the commodore did not take his advice, but turned back, when if he had gone a cable's length farther the Mexicans would have surrendered. So ended the second attempt on Alvarado, and the papers sent up a howl of derision over its failure.

Captain Joshua Sands commanded the steamer *Vixen* throughout the war. The *Vixen* was a sister ship to the *Spitfire*, Captain Tatnall, and was in all the engagements with her. Sands' name was not so frequently heard, perhaps, as Tatnall's, but he proved himself a gallant officer on all occasions. He is now an admiral on the retired list, and the oldest officer in the navy.

When he was a lieutenant returning from a long cruise in the Pacific in the *Franklin* 74, bearing the flag of Commodore Charles Stewart, while she was lying to in a gale of wind off Cape Horn, under a close-reefed main topsail, a man fell overboard. Sands was under "suspension from duty" at the time and not allowed to go on the quarter-deck, but as the lee-quarter boat was being lowered to save the man, he sprang into it through one of the main-deck ports. The boat was lowered and got away from the ship's side when they found there were in it but Sands, the sailing master E. Peck, and two men. Peck who had been a foremast hand was a fine practical seaman, and getting an oar out aft he managed to keep the boat's head to the sea until the ship picked them up, which singularly enough under the circumstances, she managed to do. I forget whether the man was saved or not. Upon the return of the party on board Commodore Stewart put Sands under arrest for "leaving the ship without permission!" This anecdote was told me by Admiral Sands himself only a few years ago; he said Peck saved his life.

A short time after the Alvarado affair an expedition was fitted out to make an attack on Tobasco, a town on the Tobasco river, seventy-five miles above its mouth. Tobasco contained about 5,000 inhabitants, and the troops of the state were assembled there under the command of General Bravo, a bold

and enterprising officer. I believe General Bravo had sent several messages to Commodore Conner inviting him to make an attack on Tobasco, and we knew pretty well that there would be an obstinate defence on his part. Indeed the Tobascans prided themselves on their courage and they were anxious to emulate their brethren of Alvarado. There is no doubt but that the native Indian of this part of Mexico is physically brave.

The river Tobasco was first visited by the Spaniards, under Grijalva in 1518. Cortez stopped here in 1519, and had a desperate encounter with the inhabitants. Bernal Diaz says that after his fight they dressed the wounds of the men and horses with the *fat of Indians!* I think the town called at that time Tobasco is the present Frontera, for Bernal Diaz says: "Our troops proceeded to the shore and disembarked at the Point of Palmare, which was distant from the town of Tobasco about half a league." Cortez changed its name to *Santa Maria de la Vittoria*.

Our expedition was commanded by Commodore M. C. Perry, who had lately joined as second in command and who had his flag on the good old steamship *Mississippi*, a ship that did more hard work in her time than any steamer in the Navy has done since—and she was built as far back as 1841.

Commodore Perry's command, consisting of small steamers, gunboats and cutters arrived off the Tobasco river one afternoon, and dashing across the bar captured the town of Frontera, near its mouth, almost before the Mexicans knew they were there. Two river boats plying between Frontera and Tobasco were lying at the wharf; one of them with steam up and the supper table spread. The town and vessels were taken possession of without opposition, and the supper was enjoyed by the captors. In one of these steamboats I recognised the old steamer *Champion*, a boat that once ran between Richmond and Norfolk. She was very fast, and under the command of Lieutenant Lockwood, was very useful to the squadron afterwards as a dispatch boat. The commodore went up the river to Tobasco

with his little fleet and captured a large number of small vessels lying off the town. The authorities, however, would not capitulate, and at the prayer of the foreign consuls the commodore forbore to bombard the place. The soldiers had evacuated it, and the commodore spared the town from motives of humanity, though I do not think the Mexicans appreciated it. While our men were taking possession of the various prizes the Mexicans kept up a fire from the banks by which Lieutenant Charles Morris, a son of the distinguished Commodore Charles G. Morris, lost his life. He was standing up in his boat when a musket ball pierced his heart. He was a very fine officer, and his death was much deplored by us all.

Commodore Perry finding the Mexican military had fallen back a short distance only from the town determined now to land a force and fight the enemy wherever he could find him. The landing party of marines and sailors was under the command of Captain French Forrest, a man who literally did not know the meaning of the word fear. He had a programme written out and after getting on shore was very particular in seeing that every officer and man took his position in accordance with this programme. This it took some time to do, and as the party was under a dropping fire of musketry the men became very impatient to advance, but Forrest would have his own way: all of a sudden he called out impatiently: "Where is that base drummer, where is that base drummer?" then pausing a moment he said quietly: "Oh! I forgot, he broke his drum-head this morning and couldn't come."

Before Captain Forrest had everything arranged to his satisfaction the commodore concluded it would be better not to send the men out from the cover of the guns of his squadron. He thought the game was not worth the candle, and it assuredly was not. The landing party was recalled and the commodore proceeded down the river with his prizes. As the town of Tobasco was not occupied by us the inhabitants affected to consider this a victory for their side, and became correspondingly "cheeky;" but we took the conceit out of them a few months

after as I shall relate. This expedition to Tobasco took place while the *Potomac* was temporarily absent from the squadron. We were all very sorry not to have had a hand in it and to have been on what was known as Forrest's program-me. When we got back to the squadron we resumed the blockade of Vera Cruz, sometimes remaining some days under sail, and then again anchoring under Green island. While the vessels were at anchor they sent their boats out at night to cruise in the channel between Green island and the main. The service was arduous and dangerous. While out on this duty the launch of the *Mississippi* in charge of Midshipmen Pillsbury and Bridge capsized one night and Midshipman Pillsbury and some men were drowned. The survivors clung to the boat all night and were picked up the next morning in a pitiable condition. Bridge was afterwards drowned in the U. S. brig *Porpoise* off the island of Formosa. He was in command of her at the time. The *Porpoise* separated from the sloop-of-war *Vincennes* in a typhoon and has never been heard of since. This was in 1853-54.

Our boats caught a brig one night attempting to run the blockade, and brought her to us at Green island. We found several military-looking men among her passengers, and Captain Aulick sent for them to come on board the *Potomac*. They had a long interview with him in the cabin and finally were allowed to return to the brig, and it was understood by us that the brig was to be permitted to return to Havana, which was the port she had sailed from. She got underweigh that afternoon with the sea breeze, stood to the northward a short distance, and then putting her helm up, she squared away for Vera Cruz under all sail, and got safely in under the castle. We sent boats to chase her, and pretended to fire on her; but it was evidently a "put-up job." There was some *shenanigan* about it, but our captain never referred to it again. No doubt he had secret instructions.

It is well known that we permitted General Santa Anna to return to the country (from which he had been banished in

1845) during the war. He landed at Vera Cruz with his staff in an English mail steamer; our boarding officer permitted him to land by order of the commodore. This was a wonderful stroke of policy on the part of our Government. It was thought that Santa Anna would immediately bring about a peace with us. He commenced his operations in that way at Buena Vista, and followed them up at Cerro Gordo, Contreras and Chapultepec!

It was some time in the summer of 1846 that Commodore Conner determined to make the anchorage at Anton Lizardo the general rendezvous for his fleet, which now began to assume large proportions. Anton Lizardo is twelve miles S. E. of Vera Cruz. The harbor is an excellent one, and is formed by the coral islands lying off the point, and which make a lee from the "northers." There are passages between the islands to the northwest and southeast, and as well as I can recollect, the anchorage is perfectly safe in all winds. It is a pity Vera Cruz had not been located there.

The frigates *Cumberland*, *Potomac* and *Raritan*, with some sloops-of-war and numerous small craft started in company for this place one day, leaving the *Mississippi* and some other vessels on the blockade off Vera Cruz. Our station was immediately astern of the flag-ship *Cumberland*, and it soon became evident to Captain Aulick that we were not steering for the proper passage between the coral islands. He hauled his wind somewhat which brought him on the port quarter of the flag-ship. The commodore was warned by his pilot and others that he was attempting the wrong passage, but he was obstinate and held on until he brought up on the reef hard and fast aground. It is a wonder his masts did not go over the bows, but they held. When it was seen that the *Cumberland* had struck an amusing scene occurred. It reminded me of a large boy getting into trouble and being deserted by his friends. The vessels scattered in every direction. Our captain hauled on a wind and stood away to the northward as though he intended making for Pensacola, and even the little

gunboats, which only drew six feet, steered for the open sea. The effect upon the commodore was to make him furious. He immediately made general signal to "anchor near the flag-ship;" but it took a verbal order, communicated by the flag-lieutenant, to bring the *Potomac* down within hail of the flag-ship. As it was we found a sunken rock not very far astern of us.

Signal was at once made to the *Mississippi*, and about ten o'clock she came to the commodore's assistance. The night was employed in taking out the *Cumberland's* stores to lighten her—fortunately the weather remained good. The first thing Captain Aulick did the next morning was to take a boat and sound round his ship. I accompanied him, and it being very rough and before breakfast, I was seasick for the first and only time in my life.

The *Mississippi* now got her stream cable fast to the *Cumberland*, and during the morning she got her afloat; and if the *Mississippi* had not been at hand, I do not think the *Cumberland* would have been gotten off. That afternoon the squadron anchored at Anton Lizardo, which ever afterwards was our headquarters. The *Cumberland* was so much damaged that it was found necessary to send her home to be docked, and as the *Raritan* had been a long time in commission and the times of her men were out, it was decided to exchange the officers and crews of the two vessels. This was accordingly done, and the *Cumberland* sailed for Boston under Captain Gregory, and the *Raritan*, Captain Forrest, became the flag-ship. Upon reflection I think that this occurred in the summer of 1846, not very long after the return of the vessels from Point Isabel, and I think the capture of Tampico must have been in the fall of that year, after the visit of the *Potomac* to Pensacola, and not before as I have stated. In fact the "northers" only blow in the fall and winter.

We were lying at Anton Lizardo when we heard of the loss of the U. S. brig *Truxtun*, Captain Carpenter. The news was brought by Lieutenant Bushrod Hunter. The *Truxtun* was

blockading the port of Tuspan, some 120 miles northwest of Vera Cruz, and got ashore near enough to the land to be under the fire of some small guns which the Mexicans brought down to the shore. The captain sent a boat under Lieutenant Bushrod Hunter to report the disaster to the commodore, and soon after determined to surrender. This was, I believe, opposed by his officers and crew. It was said afterwards that the quartermaster on duty positively refused to obey the order to haul down the flag. Either before this was done or immediately after Lieutenant Otway Berryman left with a boat's crew and got safely to the ships blockading Vera Cruz. The remaining officers and men were made prisoners by the enemy and sent to Vera Cruz, and the brig taken possession of. As soon as we got the news Captain Engle with the *Princeton* was sent there and he made short work of it. He drove the Mexicans out of the brig and burned her; not, however, before they had gotten some of her armament and stores on shore. The guns of the *Truxtun* were mounted by the enemy in the forts built to protect Tuspan; but we recovered them eventually as I shall mention.

Early in the winter of 1847 the *Potomac* went to Pensacola again for provisions and water. During our absence from the fleet a man was hanged on board the *St. Mary's* for striking an officer—he stepped from his gun at evening quarters and knocked down the lieutenant commanding the division. He was tried by a court martial and sentenced to be hanged. The commodore thought the discipline of the squadron required that the sentence should be carried into effect, and he was right. When this man was hanged at the yard-arm of the *St. Mary's* the crews of all the other vessels were mustered on the decks of their respective ships to witness it. He acknowledged the justness of his sentence, and was, at his own request, attended in his last moments by the very lieutenant he had assaulted. As soon as we got back from Pensacola in the *Potomac* we took up the blockade of Vera Cruz again as usual.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE FORTIFICATIONS OF VERA CRUZ—WHAT ADMIRAL FARRAGUT THOUGHT OF THEM—CAMPAIGN OF GENERAL TAYLOR—LOBOS ISLAND—ARRIVAL AT VERA CRUZ OF GENERAL SCOTT'S ARMY—A RECONNOISSANCE—LANDING OF THE ARMY OF GENERAL SCOTT AT VERA CRUZ, MARCH 9TH, 1847—REMARKS ON—INVESTMENT OF THE CITY—SERVICES OF THE NAVY—OPENING OF THE BOMBARDMENT—A HEAVY NORTHER—INCIDENTS CONNECTED WITH—SAILORS ON SHORE—AFFAIR AT MEDELLIN.

THE city of Vera Cruz contained at this time probably ten thousand inhabitants. Like all the old Spanish towns it is a walled city, and defended by numerous fortifications to resist an attack either by land or sea. There was a strong fort on the northern point of the city, and another on the southern point, with guns principally pointed seaward, and a number more along the walls for the land defence. About half a mile off the city lies the castle of San Juan de Ulloa, a well constructed fortification, built on a coral island of soft coral stone. The island is surrounded by reefs on the north-eastern, eastern and southern sides, and cannot be approached nearer than three-fourths of a mile; but on the face next the city vessels can go close up to the walls of the castle. The castle mounted it was said about one hundred guns of all calibres. There were a few mortars throwing a ten-inch shell, but the guns were, I think, principally 18 pounders. The water battery was considered very powerful—between it and the citadel or main fort was a wide and deep moat with a drawbridge. If the water battery was carried by assault the citadel commanded it. This is in accordance with my recollection of the castle as it looked to me after its surrender. The castle of San Juan de Ulloa was taken by a French squadron under Admiral Baudin,