

## CHAPTER XX.

A VISIT TO NEWBERN—CHANGE OF OFFICERS—JOIN THE SQUADRON AT ROANOKE ISLAND—WISE'S BRIGADE—THE DEFENCES OF ROANOKE ISLAND—COMMODORE LYNCH'S SQUADRON—THE BURNSIDE EXPEDITION—FLAG-OFFICER GOLDSBOROUGH'S FLEET—AN EVENING WITH COMMODORE LYNCH—BATTLE OF ROANOKE ISLAND—INCIDENTS—RETREAT OF THE SQUADRON TO ELIZABETH CITY.

On the 24th of December I was sent by Commodore Lynch by rail to Newbern to appraise a small steamer bought by him for the Navy. I found Newbern in an excited state, fearing an attack from Hatteras, and the scene of constant alarms. Only the night of my arrival I was sent for by the colonel in command to whom I had offered my services, and informed that they had signalled from one of the posts below that the enemy was coming up the river. While we were waiting further news a captain came in and requested to be relieved from the command of a battery on the river. He said he knew nothing about guns, and if the enemy was coming up he wished to be relieved. He proposed that I should take his place. This did not look well, but I suppose it was an isolated case. Newbern made a good defence when the time came for it.

Upon my return to Norfolk I found the *Beaufort* nearly ready. Mr. Hopkins, my pilot, left me here and I secured another. Mr. Bain relieved Mr. Byrd as my clerk, and Lieutenant Johnson joined as executive officer. Johnson, who was from Fredericksburg, was a classmate of mine. He had been engaged in a duel, as second, while at the Naval Academy and was dismissed, as I have before mentioned. He went in 1848 to California, and though afterwards reinstated in the Navy declined to return. He told me he was living on his *ranche* in

California when he heard of the secession of Virginia, and that he turned the key in his door and left for home. He left me after the battle of Elizabeth City and was ordered to New Orleans. After the fall of that city he went to Wilmington where he was drowned while going to the assistance of a blockade runner. He was a very modest man, but a most determined and courageous one—every inch a gentleman he was as cool a man under fire as I ever saw.

About the middle of January I proceeded in the *Beaufort* to join the squadron at Roanoke Island. This island, which lies on Croatan Sound between Pamlico and Albemarle Sounds, was garrisoned by a regiment of North Carolina troops, in command of Colonel Shaw. The district was commanded by General Henry A. Wise, and his brigade was ordered to assist in the defense of the island. His brigade, as far as I have been able to find out, was distributed between Elizabeth City and Nag's Head. Nag's Head, which is abreast of Roanoke Island, on the sea shore, about three miles across, was General Wise's head-quarters. Why General Wise when he was ordered to the command did not establish his head-quarters on Roanoke Island, and order all his troops and artillery there, was what I have never been able to discover. Nag's Head itself could have been rendered untenable by the fire of one Federal gunboat.

Three forts had been constructed on the island to protect the channel. The upper one was on Weir's Point and was named Fort Huger. It mounted twelve guns, principally 32-pounders of 33 cwt., and was commanded by Major John Taylor, formerly of the Navy. About 1½ miles below, on Pork Point, was Fort Bartow; it mounted seven guns, five of which were 32-pounders of 33 cwt., and two were rifled 32-pounders. This fort, which was the only one subsequently engaged in the defense, was in charge of Lieutenant B. P. Loyall, of the Navy. Between these two points was a small battery. On the main land opposite the island, at Redstone Point, was a battery called Fort Forrest. The guns, which were 32-pounders, were mounted on

the deck of a canal-boat which had been hauled up in the mud and placed so that the guns would command the channel. The channel itself was obstructed a little above Fort Huger by piling. It was hoped that these batteries, with the assistance of Commodore Lynch's squadron, would be able to prevent the enemy's ships from passing the island. The great mistake on our part was in not choosing the proper point at which to dispute the entrance to the Sound. The fortifications and vessels should have been at the "marshes," a few miles below, where the channel is very narrow. I do not know who was responsible for the selection of the points fortified as I was not at the island when ground was first broken.

The squadron under Commodore Lynch consisted of the *Seabird* (flagship), Captain McCarrick; *Curlew*, Captain Hunter; *Ellis*, Captain Cooke; *Appomattox*, Captain Sims; *Beaufort*, Captain Parker; *Raleigh*, Captain Alexander; *Fanny*, Captain Tayloe, and *Forrest*, Captain Hoole. Of these vessels the *Seabird* and *Curlew* were side-wheel river steamboats; the *Seabird* of wood and the *Curlew* of iron. The others were screw tug-boats, built for the canal, and were similar to the *Beaufort*. The *Appomattox* and perhaps the *Fanny* were wooden—the others of quarter-inch iron. Each mounted one 32-pounder rifled gun, except the *Seabird* which had a smooth-bore forward and a 30-pounder Parrott gun aft. In addition we had a fine large schooner called the *Black Warrior*, armed with two 32-pounders and commanded by Lieutenant Harris.

The expedition under General Burnside and Flag Officer Goldsborough was assembling at Hatteras Inlet, and although we did not know positively that it was not intended to attack Newbern yet the chances were in favor of Roanoke island. About the 1st of February the *Curlew* and *Raleigh* were sent to Hatteras, and upon their return reported the enemy nearly ready to move. The commodore now held a council of war to determine whether the vessels should dispute the advance of the enemy's ships at the "marshes," or assist in the defence in conjunction with the forts. It was decided to adopt

the latter plan, though some of the captains favored the first. The majority thought it better not to divide our forces at the eleventh hour.

It was at nine o'clock on the morning of February 6th, 1862, that the enemy's fleet made its appearance. It consisted according to the report of Flag Officer Goldsborough, of the *Stars and Stripes*, *Louisiana*, *Hetzel*, *Underwriter*, *Delaware*, *Commodore Perry*, *Valley City*, *Commodore Barney*, *Hunchback*, *Southfield*, *Morse*, *Whitehead*, *Lockwood*, *Brincker*, *Seymour*, *Ceres*, *Putnam*, *Shawsheen* and *Granite*. These vessels were armed with 100-pounder rifled, 80-pounder rifled, 30-pounder rifled, 20-pounder rifled, 12-pounder rifled, and 9-inch, 8-inch and 6-inch smooth bore guns. Some of them carried four guns each. Their number of guns, exclusive of the *Commodore Perry*, and *Commodore Barney*, was forty-eight; if these two vessels carried three guns each, the total number of guns opposed to us was fifty-four. The enemy's fleet was accompanied by a large number of transports bearing the troops of General Burnside; and it was evidently his plan to silence our batteries—particularly the one at Pork Point—and land the troops under the protection of the guns of the ships.

The weather at the time the enemy made his appearance was cold, gloomy and threatening, and about 10 A. M. we observed that he had anchored below the "marshes." We had gotten underweigh and formed line abreast, in the rear of the obstructions, and we remained underweigh all day, as the weather was too thick to see very far, and we did not know at what moment the ships might commence the attack. The galley fires were out, and we could have no cooking done, and as the weather was cold with a drizzling rain at intervals, we passed considerably more than one *mauvais quart d'heure!*

About 4 in the afternoon Captain Sims in the *Appomattox* was sent down to reconnoitre. He went very close to the enemy, but was not fired at. Flag Officer Goldsborough says in his allusion to it: "She met with no opposition from us simply because we were not unwilling that she should accom-

plish her wishes." I presume he wanted us to know what we were to expect the next day. Sims gave a very correct report of the number of men-of-war in the fleet; the number of transports was what "no fellow could find out;" there were too many to count. At sunset, as we saw no disposition on the part of the enemy to move, we anchored and all hands went to supper. We kept guard boats out during the night to avoid a surprise. After getting something to eat I went on board the *Seabird* to see Commodore Lynch. I found him in his dressing gown sitting quietly in his cabin reading *Ivanhoe*. He expressed great pleasure at seeing me and said he had thought of signalling me to come aboard, but knew I must be very tired and he did not wish to disturb me; and I must say for the commodore that I never served under a man who showed more consideration for the comfort of his officers and men. We talked for a long time of what the next day would probably bring forth, and our plans for defence, &c. We neither of us believed that we would be successful, nor was there a naval officer in the squadron who thought we would. The force opposed to us both naval and military was too overwhelming. Ten thousand men to our two thousand on land, and nineteen vessels and 54 guns to our eight vessels with 9 guns on the water. After talking some time on the subject, we insensibly got upon literature. Lynch was a cultivated man and a most agreeable talker. He had made some reputation in the navy by his book upon the Dead Sea exploration. We commenced on Scott's novels, naturally, as he held one of the volumes in his hand; incident after incident was recalled and laughed over, and I never spent a more delightful evening. We were recalled to our senses by the ship's bell striking 8 (midnight). I jumped up exclaiming that I did not know it was so late and that I had not intended keeping my gig's-crew up so long. The commodore's last words to me at the gangway were: "Ah! if we could only hope for success;" "but," said he: "come again when you can." For my own part I looked upon it as an *adieu* and not an *au revoir*; for I had

made up my mind that it would be death or a prisoner before the next day's sun had set; but as I rowed back to my vessel I thought what strangely constituted and happily constituted beings we are after all. Here were two men looking forward to death in less than 24 hours—death, too, in defeat not victory—and yet able to lose themselves in works of fiction. Well may Scott be called the Wizard of the North! Unknown to ourselves it must be as Campbell writes: "Hope springs eternal in the human breast!"

At daylight the next morning the *Appomattox* was dispatched to Edenton, and as she did not return till sunset and the *Warrior* did not take any part in the action, this reduced our force to seven vessels and eight guns. At 9 A. M. we observed the enemy to be underweigh and coming up, and we formed "line abreast" in the rear of the obstructions. At 11.30 the fight commenced at long range. The enemy's fire was aimed at fort Bartow and our vessels, and we soon became warmly engaged. The commodore at first directed his vessels to fall back in the hope of drawing the enemy under the fire of forts Huger and Forrest; but as they did not attempt to advance, and evidently had no intention of passing the obstructions, we took up our first position and kept it during the day. At 2 P. M. the firing was hot and heavy, and continued so until sunset. Our gunners had had no practice with their rifled guns, and our firing was not what it should have been. It was entirely too rapid and not particularly accurate. Early in the fight the *Forrest* was disabled in her machinery, and her gallant young captain (Lieutenant Hoole) badly wounded in the head by a piece of shell. She got in under fort Forrest and anchored. Some time in the afternoon, in the hottest of the fire, reinforcements arrived from Wise's brigade, and were landed on the island. The Richmond Blues, Captain O. Jennings Wise, were, I think, part of this force.

Pork Point battery kept up a constant fire on the fleet, and the enemy could not silence it. The garrison stood to their guns like men, encouraged by the spirited example of their

instructor, Lieut. B. P. Loyall. Forts Huger and Forrest did not fire, the enemy being out of range; but the small battery between Pork Point and Weir's Point fired an occasional gun during the day. Towards 4 o'clock in the afternoon a shot or shell struck the hurricane-deck of the *Curlew* in its descent, and went through her decks and bottom as though they had been made of paper. Her captain, finding she was sinking, started for the shore, and as he passed me, hailed; but I could not make out what he said, and he being a very excitable fellow (the North Carolinians called him Tornado Hunter) I said to Johnson that I thought there was nothing the matter with him. "Oh, yes there is," said J., "look at his guards." And sure enough he was fast going down. I put after him in the *Beaufort*, but he got her ashore in time. Hunter put his vessel ashore immediately in front of fort Forrest, completely masking its guns, and we could not fire her for fear of burning up the battery, which, as I have said, was built on an old canal-boat. As it turned out, it did not much matter. To show what an excitable fellow Hunter was: he told me afterward that during the fight this day he found to his surprise that he had no trousers on. He said he could never understand it, as he had certainly put on a pair in the morning. I told him I had heard of a fellow being frightened out of his boots, but never out of his trousers. Poor Hunter; he served gallantly during the war, and was second in command at the battle of Sailors Creek, where he was made a prisoner. He dropped dead as he was taking an evening walk, a few years after.

We in the *Beaufort* did our best in maintaining our position, and I had reason to be proud of the way in which every officer and man performed his duty. Johnson as staunch as the mainmast, the two midshipmen full of zeal, and my clerk, Mr. Bain, standing by me on the hurricane deck coolly taking notes of the fight. The first shell that exploded over us scattered the pieces over our decks. Midshipman Mallory, a youth of 18, brought some of the pieces to me with much glee; he looked upon the whole proceeding as great fun. Poor boy! he met

with a sad end at last. After serving with me in three engagements he was ordered to the gunboat *Chattahoochee* at Columbus, Ga., and lost his life by the explosion of her boiler. He was from Hampton and was an honor to his birth-place; had he lived and had the opportunity he would have become a great naval officer. My men worked their gun coolly and deliberately, and as the captain of it, Jack Robinson, was an English man-of-wars man, trained on the gunnery ship *Excellent*, I think we did some good firing. My gunner's mate, John Downard, was also from the same ship and knew his duties thoroughly. Both of these men had the Crimean medal. I must not forget to mention my engineer, Mr. Hanks, who was always ready with his engine.

About 4 P. M. I observed that the enemy's troops were landing to the southward of Pork Point under the guns of a division of their fleet, and could not perceive that any successful resistance was being made to it. A little after sunset the firing ceased on both sides, and as we felt sure the enemy would not attempt to pass the obstructions by night as he had declined to attempt them by day we ran in and anchored under fort Forrest. We lit our galley fires, and as we had been fighting all day were glad enough to get something to eat. Upon the whole I was rather surprised to find myself alive, and congratulated myself upon having one night more before me. I directed my steward to serve out the cabin stores to the men and let them have a good supper—that was about what I thought of what would be the result of the next day's fight.

During the afternoon when the battle was at its height I ordered the engineer to send me all the men he could spare from the fire-room to work at the gun; one of the men sent up was my green coal-passer, who evidently did not like the appearance of things on deck. However he went to the side tackles of the gun as ordered; after awhile a shell bursting overhead I called to the men to lie down, and when it was over I ordered them to jump up and go at it again. All promptly obeyed but the coal-passer, who still lay flat on his stomach. "Get

up," I called to him from the hurricane deck just above him: he turned his head like a turtle and fixed his eye on me, but otherwise did not move. "Get up," I said, "or I will kill you," at the same time drawing a pistol from my belt and cocking it. He hesitated a moment and then sprang to the gun, and behaved well during the rest of the engagement. As I went aft to my cabin after the battle, my steward being busy forward, I called to the engineer to send a man to make a fire in my stove. I had just seated myself before it when who should come in but my friend the coal-passer—he kneeled down in front of me and commenced blowing up a fire. Knowing that the man had not the slightest idea of the discipline of a man-of-war, and wishing to encourage him, I remarked, "Well, my man! I am glad you did your duty so well at the gun after I spoke to you." He blew awhile, and then looking back he said: "I tell you what, captain, I was mighty skeered;" "but," said he after another blow, "I saw you were going to kill me so I thought I *mout* as well take my chances with the enemy." After a few minutes more blowing, he said: "I warn't much skeered after that; it's all in getting *used to it*, Cap." Well, I thought, you have got at the philosophy of it, after all.

I do not remember our loss in the squadron in this day's engagement; but Lieutenant Hoole was dangerously wounded, and lost an eye, and Midshipman Camm of the *Ellis* lost an arm.

Soon after we anchored signal was made by the flag ship for the captains to report on board. Upon my entering the cabin I was informed by Commodore Lynch that we must retreat from Roanoke Island. Much surprised and mortified, I asked why, and was told that the vessels generally were out of ammunition. A council was held as to whether the vessels should retreat to Norfolk through the Chesapeake and Albemarle Canal, or go to Elizabeth City on the Pasquotank river. We would have saved the vessels by going to the former place, but the commodore's orders were to do his utmost to defend the waters of North Carolina; so we decided to go to the latter,

where it was understood a fort had been built to protect the town. Elizabeth City was the terminus of the Dismal Swamp Canal, and we hoped to get ammunition that way from Norfolk in time to act in conjunction with the fort. I was sent to Roanoke Island to communicate all this to Colonel Shaw, and confess did not relish my mission. It looked too much like leaving the army in the lurch; and yet to have remained without ammunition would have been mere folly. I took an officer on shore with me who had gotten on board the *Seabird* somehow—probably he had come in the *Appomattox* from Edenton—he had just been released from a northern prison, and here he was going to meet the same fate again, as we all knew—but he did what he considered his duty. I think he was a Major Dinwiddie,—a noble fellow, whatever his name.

I met Colonel Shaw at his quarters, and stated the facts in relation to the vessels, and then returned to the *Beaufort*. All lights were now extinguished, and the squadron got underweigh for Elizabeth City, the *Seabird* taking the *Forrest* in tow. It was one of the darkest nights I ever knew, and as none of the vessels showed a light it was difficult to avoid a collision. My pilot got confused early in the evening and I had to do the best I could alone; and, considering I had but a faint idea of where Elizabeth City was, I did remarkably well. We fell in with some vessels carrying reinforcements to the island on our way—I think it was Green's battalion—and the *Beaufort* had the credit of colliding with them. This was not true, however,—for while I was speaking one of the schooners, another of our gunboats carried away her head booms.

I anchored in the mouth of the Pasquotank river some time during the night, and the next morning went to Elizabeth City, where I found the remainder of the squadron. This was on Saturday, February 8th.