

## CHAPTER XXII.

THE EVACUATION OF NORFOLK BY THE FEDERALS—ORDNANCE LEFT AT THE NAVY YARD—VESSELS BURNED—THE "MERRIMAC"—IS CONVERTED INTO AN IRON-CLAD—HER DESIGNER—HER CONSTRUCTION AND APPEARANCE—HER ARMAMENT—HER ENGINES AND SPEED—HER DRAFT.

As I have said before, the evacuation of Norfolk by the Federals on the night of April 20th, 1861, was one of the most extraordinary proceedings of the war. They were in possession of the navy yard with its large amount of ordnance stores; they had several vessels in commission, and were within 12 miles of reinforcements from Fortress Monroe. By keeping the *Pawnee* running between Old Point and Norfolk they could have prevented any attempt to obstruct the channel, and the corvette *Cumberland* with her broadside sprung upon the town would have kept the citizens quiet. The spirit of madness or folly prevailed, and I know of no better exhibition of it than the fact that while they were trying to get out, our people were actually trying to obstruct the harbor so as to keep them in.

During the seven days' fights around Richmond, after the Federals were driven to Harrison's Landing on the James river, I was one day in the Spottswood hotel. Officers were constantly arriving with the latest news; and the most wonderful rumors were put in circulation. We heard that "Lee was about to bag McClellan's entire army;" "that they could not get away;" "that they wanted to get away," etc., etc. An old planter, who had been driven from his farm on the river, after listening to all this, impatiently exclaimed: "then why, in God's name, don't we let them go."

One would have thought the people of Norfolk would have

looked upon the going of the United States vessels in the same light.

To say nothing of the other stores left at the Navy Yard and afterwards used by the Confederates, the following is a list of the guns as given in the report of Mr. Wm. H. Peters, who took an inventory by order of the Governor of Virginia:

1	11-inch	columbiad.
2	10-inch	guns.
52	9-inch	"
4	8-inch	90 cwt. guns.
47	8-inch	63 " "
27	8-inch	55 " "
1	8-inch	57 " "
4	64-pounders,	of 106 cwt.
225	32-pounders,	" 61 "
173	32-pounders,	" 57 "
44	32-pounders,	" 51 "
28	32-pounders,	" 46 "
116	32-pounders,	" 33 "
44	32-pounders,	" 27 "
235	61-cwt. guns,	old style.
50	70-cwt.	" "
44	40-cwt. Shubrick	guns.
63	42-pounder	carronades.
35	32-pounder	"

Here we have 1195 guns of large calibre!

The vessels destroyed or partially destroyed were the *Pennsylvania*, three-decker; the *Delaware*, 74; the *Columbus*, 74; the frigates *Merrimac*, *Columbia* and *Raritan*; the sloops-of-war *Germantown* and *Plymouth*, and the brig *Dolphin*. The old frigate *United States* was left intact, and was used by the Confederates as a receiving ship most of the war. Of these vessels the steam frigate *Merrimac* was scuttled and sunk, and burned to her copper-line and down through to her berth-deck, which, with her spar and gun-decks, was also burned. She was raised, and the powder in her magazine (put up in air-tight copper tanks) was found to be in good condition; and it was afterwards used by her in her engagements.



Who first proposed to turn the *Merrimac* into an iron-clad I am not prepared to say. It was claimed by Commander John M. Brooke and by Naval Constructor John L. Porter. I have previously stated whom I believe to have been the first officer in the Confederate Navy who fully appreciated the use of iron in naval warfare and advised its adoption, Lieutenant Wm. L. Powell. In the case of the *Merrimac*, the originality consisted in the design and not the use of iron. Lieutenant Catesby Ap. R. Jones says that on the 21st of June, 1861, the Hon. S. R. Mallory, Confederate Secretary of the Navy, ordered that the *Merrimac* should be converted into an iron-clad on the plan proposed by Lieutenant John M. Brooke, C. S. Navy.

The ship was raised as I have said, and what had previously been her berth deck became now her main gun deck. She was 275 feet long as she then floated, and over the central portion of the hull a house or shield about 160 feet long was built. This shield was of oak and pine wood two feet thick; the sides and ends inclined, according to Lieutenant Jones, 36 degrees, and the roof which was flat and perhaps 20 feet wide was covered with iron gratings, leaving four hatchways. Upon this wooden shield were laid two courses of iron plates two inches thick—the first course horizontal and the second perpendicular, making four inches of iron armor on two feet of wood backing. The iron was put on while the vessel was in dock, and it was supposed that she would float with her ends barely submerged. So great was her buoyancy, however, that it required some 800 tons of pig iron (according to boatswain Hasker in his account of her) to bring her down to her proper depth. I know myself that a quantity of iron was put on, though I cannot say how much. Now as this iron was put on, the whole structure sunk, and when she was ready for battle her ends, which extended about 50 feet forward and abaft the shield, were submerged to the depth of several inches and could not be seen. I have reason to recollect this, for I had occasion to go close alongside her several times in the *Beaufort* on the

8th of March, and I was always fearful of getting on top of her extremities. I could not see where she commenced or ended!

The appearance of the *Merrimac* was that of the roof of a house. Saw off the top of a house at the eaves, (supposing it to be an ordinary gable-ended, shelving-sides roof), pass a plane parallel to the first through the roof some feet beneath the ridge, incline the gable ends, put it in the water and you have the *Merrimac* as she appeared. When she was not in action her people stood on top of this roof which was in fact her spar deck.

Lieutenant Catesby Jones says: "The prow was of cast iron, wedge shaped, and weighed 1500 pounds. It was about two feet under water, and projected two feet from the stem; it was not well fastened." I may mention that it was so badly fastened that the best judges said it would certainly break off when used. It will be seen hereafter that perhaps it was as well that it was not well fastened. Lieutenant Jones says: The rudder and propeller were unprotected. The battery consisted of ten guns; four single banded Brooke rifles, and six 9 inch Dahlgren guns. Two of the rifles, bow and stern pivots, were 7-in. of 14,500 pounds; the other two were 6. 4-in. 32-pounder calibre, of 9,000 pounds, one on each broadside. The 9-in. gun on each side nearest the furnaces was fitted for firing hot shot. A few 9-in. shot with extra windage were cast for hot shot. No other solid shot were on board during the fight. The engines were the same the vessel had whilst in the U. S. Navy. They were radically defective and had been condemned by the U. S. government. Some changes had been made, notwithstanding which the engineers reported that they were unreliable. They performed very well during the fight, but afterwards failed several times, once while under fire. Commodore Tatnall commanded the *Virginia* (*Merrimac*) forty-five days, of which time there were only thirteen days that she was not in dock or in the hands of the navy yard. Yet he succeeded in impressing the enemy that we were ready for active service."



The chief engineer of the *Merrimac*, Mr. H. Ashton Ramsay, had been a shipmate with me in the last cruise of the *Merrimac* in the Pacific. He was then a passed assistant engineer. He knew the engines well, and I doubt if another man in the Confederate Navy could have gotten as much out of them as he did. He deserved all the credit Admiral Buchanan afterwards gave him. The draft of water of the *Merrimac* upon her first appearance in Hampton Roads was about  $21\frac{1}{2}$  feet. After she was docked on the 9th of March and more iron put on, she drew about one foot more. When she went down to the Roads on the 8th of March she steamed about seven knots an hour. Ramsay and I agreed that she steamed quite as well as when we made our cruise in her. After docking, her speed was reduced about one knot per hour. She carried a full complement of officers and 320 men—among the latter were not many regular man-of-war's men. She was christened the *Virginia* by the Confederate authorities and was officially known by that name; but I shall continue to call her by the name which has become historical.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

THE FEDERAL SHIPS IN HAMPTON ROADS—THE "MERRIMAC" AND HER CONSORTS LEAVE NORFOLK—THE BATTLE OF HAMPTON ROADS—THE SINKING OF THE "CUMBERLAND"—ARRIVAL OF THE JAMES RIVER SQUADRON—THE BATTERIES AT NEWPORT'S NEWS—THE FRIGATES "MINNESOTA," "ROANOKE" AND "ST. LAWRENCE" COME UP FROM OLD POINT—THEY GET AGROUND—SURRENDER OF THE "CONGRESS"—FIRE FROM TROOPS ON SHORE—INCIDENTS OF THE BATTLE—THE FEDERAL LOSS—THE CONFEDERATE LOSS—THE RAM AND IRON-CLAD—CONFEDERATE GUNBOATS—SERVICES OF THE WOODEN VESSELS IN THIS BATTLE.

ABOUT the 6th of March, 1862, the *Merrimac* being ready to go out, the Norfolk papers published an article to the effect that she was a failure, and would not be able to accomplish anything. It was intended, of course, to deceive the enemy, who we knew regularly received our papers. The Federal squadron then in Hampton Roads, consisted of the following vessels, viz.: the *Congress* and *Cumberland*, lying off Newport's News; and the *Minnesota*, *Roanoke* and *St. Lawrence*, at anchor below Old Point. There were also at Old Point the store-ship *Brandywine*, the steamers *Mt. Vernon* and *Cambridge*, and a number of transports and tugs; these, however, took no part in the subsequent engagement. The *Congress* was a sailing frigate of 1867 tons, mounting 50 guns, principally 32-pounders, and a crew of 434 men; the *Cumberland* was a large corvette (a *raze*) of 1700 tons, mounting 22 nine-inch guns, and a crew of 376 men; the *Minnesota* was a steam frigate of 3200 tons, mounting 43 guns, of 9-inch and 11-inch calibre, and a crew of about 600 men. The *Roanoke* was similar to the *Minnesota*, and the *St. Lawrence* to the *Congress*.

Newport's News is  $6\frac{1}{2}$  miles from Old Point and 12 miles from Norfolk. It is on the left bank of the James river, and above Old Point. The enemy had a large number of guns