

it, according to Captain Stellwagen who commanded her, went through her diagonally, penetrating the starboard side, through the condenser, through the steam-drum of the port boiler, and exploded against the port side of the ship, blowing a hole in its exit four or five feet square. She did not fire a gun, and in a minute her commander hailed to say he surrendered. Captain Rutledge then directed him to send a boat alongside. When I saw the boat coming I went out on the after-deck to receive it. The men in it were half-dressed, and as they had neglected to put the plug in when it was lowered, it was half full of water. We gave them a boat-hook to supply the place of the plug, and helped to bail her out.

Lieutenant T. Abbott, the executive officer of the *Mercedita*, came in the boat. I conducted him through the port to the presence of Commodore Ingraham. He must have been impressed with the novel appearance of our gun deck; but his bearing was officer-like and cool. He reported the name of the ship and her captain, said she had 128 souls on board and that she was in a sinking condition. After some delay Commodore Ingraham required him to "give his word of honor, for his commander, officers and crew, that they would not serve against the Confederate States until regularly exchanged." This he did—it was a verbal parole. He then returned to his ship.

In the meantime the *Chicora*, under her dashing commander, had passed us and had become warmly engaged, and we in the *Palmetto State* were most impatient to be off. We were ready to exclaim with Horace:

"E'en whilst we speak, the envious Time  
Doth make swift haste away;  
Then seize the Present, use thy Prime,  
Nor trust another Day."

We ramméd the *Mercedita* at 4.30 A. M., and lost much valuable time while the commodore was deciding what to do with her officers and men. Our chance for making a great

success lay in taking advantage of the darkness. We knew that when day came the enemy would see they were contending with iron-clads, and would refuse battle—and we with our inferior speed could not force it. We finally stood out to the eastward and engaged the *Quaker City*, *Memphis*, and some other vessels, as they came up, but they sheered off as soon as they felt the weight of our metal. When day broke I got a chance to get up on the spar-deck. I first looked astern for the *Mercedita*, and not seeing her, asked our pilot where she was. He said she must have sunk; and that was the general impression on board; but I knew she was not in deep water, and seeing no masts sticking up, "I had my doubts."

The fact is we did not ram her quite hard enough. The panic on board her caused by the shell from our bow-gun was at first so great that they thought she was sinking. One boiler being emptied caused her to heel over, I suppose; but as we stood out to engage the enemy to the eastward, they got matters to rights, and finally went off to Port Royal where she arrived safely. (But this we learned afterwards).

Tucker, in the *Chicora*, as we ramméd the *Mercedita*, passed us to starboard and soon became warmly engaged with the *Keystone State*, which vessel came gallantly into action, with the intention to run the *Chicora* down. She soon received so much damage as to cause her to surrender by striking her colors.

As related to me by the officers of the *Chicora* the next day, the *Keystone State* struck her flag and they were about lowering a boat to take possession of her. Lieutenant Bier, the executive officer, observed that she was moving off by working her off wheel and called Captain Tucker's attention to it. The lieutenants begged the captain to renew the fire; but he not expecting any deception or treachery hesitated to fire on a ship with her colors down; and in a little while Captain Leroy who commanded the *Keystone State* hoisted his colors again, renewed his fire and escaped. He was soon after taken in tow by the U. S. steamer *Memphis* and carried to Port Royal.

Captain Tucker in his official report, dated the same day, in relation to this matter says: "We then engaged a schooner-rigged propeller and a large side-wheel steamer, partially crippling both, and setting the latter on fire, causing her to strike her flag. At this time the latter vessel, supposed to be the *Keystone State*, was completely at my mercy, I having a raking position astern distant some 200 yards. I at once gave the order to cease firing upon her, and directed Lieutenant Bier, first lieutenant of the *Chicora*, to man a boat and take charge of the prize; if possible to save her, if that was not possible to rescue her crew. While the boat was in the act of being manned I discovered that she was in the act of endeavoring to escape by working her starboard wheel, the other being disabled. Her colors being down I at once started in pursuit and renewed the engagement. Owing to her superior steaming qualities she soon widened the distance to some two hundred yards. She then hoisted her flag and commenced firing her rifled gun; her commander by this faithless act placing himself beyond the pale of civilized and honorable warfare."

In his official report to Admiral Dupont, dated same day, Captain Leroy does not mention the fact of his having struck his colors; but an extract from the log of his vessel says: "About 6.17 A. M. a shell entering on the port side forward of the forward guard destroyed the steam chimneys, filling all the forward part of the ship with steam. The port boiler emptied of its contents, the ship gave a heel to starboard nearly down to the guard, and the water from the boiler, and two shot holes under water led to the impression the ship was filling and sinking, a foot and a half water being reported in the hold. Owing to the steam men were unable to get supplies of ammunition from forward. Ordered all boats ready for lowering. Signal books thrown overboard, also some small arms. The ram being so near, and the ship helpless, and the men being slaughtered by almost every discharge of the enemy, I ordered the colors to be hauled down, but finding the enemy were still

firing upon us directed the colors to be re-hoisted, and resume our fire from the after battery."

The vessels in our vicinity having put off under all steam to the southward, our two vessels stood to the northward and eastward to meet the vessels coming from that direction. We exchanged a few shots with the *Housatonic* at very long range, but she soon also withdrew. Commodore Ingraham in his report says: "I then stood to the northward and eastward, and soon after made another steamer getting underweigh. We stood for her and soon after fired several shots at her, but as we had to fight the vessel in a circle to bring the different guns to bear, she was soon out of our range. In this way we engaged several vessels, they keeping at long range, and steering to the southward. Just as the day broke we made a large steamer (supposed to be the *Powhatan*) on the starboard bow, with another steamer in company, which had just got underweigh. They stood to the southward under full steam, and opened their batteries upon the *Chicora*, which was some distance astern of us. I then turned and stood to the southward to support the *Chicora*, if necessary, but the enemy kept on his course to the southward." (The italics are mine.) "I then made signal to Commander Tucker to come to an anchor, and led the way to the entrance to Beach channel, where we anchored at 8.45 A. M., and had to remain seven hours for the tide, as the vessels cannot cross the bar except at high water." The commodore took the *Housatonic* to be the *Powhatan*—the *Powhatan* was at Port Royal that day.

We anchored off Sullivan's island, as the commodore says; the enemy's ships had all gone off to the eastward, and southward and eastward. It was useless to pursue with our inferior speed,—and they very wisely declined fighting iron-clads with wooden ships. The enemy's ships went off to the southward and eastward, and there they remained, hull down, for the remainder of the forenoon; their masts could be seen by using the spyglass. The *Housatonic* and some others some time during the afternoon took up a position more to the eastward, but remained a long distance off.

Soon after we anchored some of the foreign consuls were brought off to show them that the blockade had been raised, and General Beauregard and Commodore Ingraham issued a proclamation to that effect, I thought the "proclamation" ill-advised. The fact is that during the entire war the southern people attached too much importance to the recognition of the Confederacy by the English Government. Many thought that a recognition amounted to a declaration of war against the United States, and that England and France would become our allies. Entirely too much sentiment was wasted on this subject.

Admiral Dupont and his officers found fault with the proclamation and bitterly resented it. The captains of the vessels drew up a joint letter, denying pretty much everything,—but they confounded a newspaper statement with the terms of the proclamation. The proclamation said: "At about the hour of 5 o'clock this morning (January 31, 1863), the Confederate States naval forces on this station attacked the United States blockading fleet off the harbor of the city of Charleston and sunk, dispersed, or drove off and out of sight for the time the entire hostile fleet."

Now as we supposed the *Mercedita* was sunk at the time this was written, and as the fleet was certainly dispersed and driven off, I cannot see what great objection there could be taken to the wording. The point in question was as to whether the fleet had been driven entirely out of sight. I have already given my recollection of it. Captain Tucker in his report says: "We pursued them six or seven miles seaward;" and again: "At 7.30 A. M., in obedience to orders, we stood in shore leaving the partially crippled fleeing enemy about seven miles clear of the bar, standing to the southward and eastward."

While still outside the bar, and with the foreign consuls on board, Commodore Ingraham penned the following dispatch which was carried to Charleston by their boat and telegraphed to Richmond:

"On board the 'Palmetto State,'  
January 31, 1863.

"I went out last night. This vessel struck the *Mercedita* when she sent a boat and surrendered. The officers and crew have been paroled. Captain Tucker thinks he sunk one vessel and set another on fire, when she struck her colors. The blockading fleet has gone to the southward and eastward out of sight.

D. N. INGRAHAM.  
*Flag Officer Commanding.*"

Captain Wm. Rogers Taylor of the *Housatonic* was the senior officer of the blockading fleet, and the letter of the captains seems to have been based upon his report and the remarks in that vessel's log book.

Captain Taylor says (the italics are mine): "I now determined to go to my former station to pick up the anchor, *but was unable to get hold of any landmarks*, on account of the haze over the shore, until about 3 o'clock. *I would state that at no period from daylight up to that time had the land been anywhere distinctly visible.* On approaching my anchorage the two rams were seen lying in Maffit's channel, close to the shore, some distance to the northward and eastward of Fort Moultrie."

The *Housatonic*, however, did not anchor, as her log shows. Here are some extracts (italics mine):

"From 8 to meridian. At 8 A. M. secured the battery. *The two enemy's steamers out of sight towards Fort Sumter*; it being very hazy around the horizon, could not see into the harbor."

"At 11 A. M. the haze cleared sufficiently to enable us to see Fort Sumter, but we could not see into the harbor."

"Waiting for the haze to clear *to run in* and pick up our anchor. During the watch the following steamers communicated with us viz.; United States steamers *Quaker City, Augusta, Flag, Stettin and Unadilla.*"

"From meridian to 4 P. M. Ship lying off and on in five fathoms water."

"From 4 to 6 P. M. Ship underweigh all the watch."

"From 6 to 8 P. M. Ship underweigh, lying to; head east-southeast."

I do not think the letter of Colonel Leckler helps the captains' case much in reference to the distance the vessels were driven off—he says: "By the aid of a glass a fort said to have been Sumter was visible!" The fact is the captains in their letter to Admiral Dupont attempted to prove too much. I do not think it necessary to insert it here. It can be found in the Secretary of the Navy's report for 1863, and I am willing to place their statement and my narrative in the hands of any unprejudiced man and abide by his decision in the case—"what we want," said Mr. Gradgrind, "are facts." It will be observed that all the Federal officers speak of the haze; they say "a thick haze was prevailing;" Colonel Leckler says: "The morning was somewhat hazy." My recollection is that it was a very clear day, and the night was one of the brightest I ever remember. Still there may have been a haze over the land as seen from their vessels outside. An analysis of the reports on both sides, taken in connection with my own recollection, convinces me that the following were the facts: After day broke, the Federal vessels retreated to the southward and eastward and southward, until they were hull down as seen from the decks of our ships; the rams gave up the pursuit, their slow speed rendering it impossible to overtake the enemy; they anchored off Sullivan's island to await the afternoon's tide; during the afternoon the Federal vessels took up a position more to the northward, where they remained at a distance of eight or ten miles watching our movements—it being a case where "distance lent enchantment to the view," for no man can blame them for not fighting two heavily armored iron-clads with their wooden vessels.

It is rather singular that the reports of the captains of the *Quaker City*, *Augusta*, *Flag* and *Stettin* are not to be found in the Secretary of the Navy's report with the others. The Charleston papers said: "The British consul with the commander of the British war steamer *Petrel*

had previously gone five miles beyond the usual anchorage of the blockaders and could see nothing of them with their glasses." I do not understand that General Beauregard and Flag Officer Ingraham endorsed this foolish statement in their proclamation. The *Petrel* was not there. In this engagement the Federals lost 4 killed and 3 wounded on the *Mercedita*, and 21 killed and 19 wounded on the *Keystone State*; total killed and wounded 47, and two of their vessels surrendered, but afterwards escaped to Port Royal. Our vessels were not even hit, and we had no casualties to report.

At 4 P. M. we got underweigh and returned to Charleston by the Beach channel, and were honored with salutes from Forts Moultrie, Beauregard and Sumter, and the acclamations of the citizens of Charleston: but I candidly confess I did not participate in the general joy. I thought we had not accomplished as much as we had a right to expect. As we entered the harbor, the Federal vessels closed in towards their old stations and resumed the blockade. It would not have been prudent for us to remain outside the bar during the night, as in case of a blow the vessels would have foundered. As to the proclamation in regard to the blockade being broken, I looked upon it as all bosh. No vessels went out or came in during the day, except our own river boats. Our only chance of any great success lay in a surprise under cover of the night. After ramming the *Mercedita*, we should have remained a little outside and near her with the *Chicora*; then, as the enemy's vessels came up in succession, we should have captured them: which it is reasonable to suppose we would have done. When a vessel struck, she should have been directed to run in and anchor near the *Mercedita*. By adopting this plan I think we would have retained the *Mercedita* and *Keystone State*, and probably have captured in addition the *Quaker City*, *Augusta* and *Memphis*. By that time daylight would have revealed to the other ships "what manner of men" they were contending against, and the fight would have ended. We could have sent our prizes in by the main ship channel, and returned ourselves

in the afternoon by either channel. I am constrained to say that this was a badly managed affair on our part, and we did not make the best use of our opportunity.

I think it was on the evening of the next day that the British steamer *Petrel* came in. Her executive officer came on board the *Palmetto State*, and told us of the safe arrival of the *Mercedita* at Port Royal. Our fellows said nothing; but, like the Irishman's parrot, "they kept up a devil of a thinking."

A question arose as to the *status* of Captain Stellwagen and the *Mercedita*. It was truly an exceptional case. We claimed that he paroled the ship with her crew; and that she should be given up to us. My opinion was, and is, that the officers and men, being paroled, could not be recaptured. They were in honor bound not to serve until regularly exchanged; and I have heard that Captain Stellwagen held the same opinion. With the vessel it was different; she had been captured, but not taken possession of; she could, therefore, be recaptured. Attempts were afterwards made by both governments to compare the case of Captain Stellwagen and his officers to that of the officers and men of the *Alabama* when captured by the *Kearsarge*. The cases were not at all similar. The *Mercedita's* officers and men were paroled prisoners. Those of the *Alabama* were captured, but not taken possession of. Their case was precisely similar to that of the officers and men of the *Congress*. When a general surrenders, all of his army escape who can; but a man once paroled and sent to the rear, cannot be recaptured.

I will close this long chapter by saying that in the battle I have attempted to describe, the pilots of our vessels did their duty well and manfully. Mr. Gladden, our chief pilot, was highly commended by Commodore Ingraham.

NOTE I.—The *Princess Royal*, a captured blockade runner, was among the vessels off the harbor the morning we went out. Some stress is laid upon our not capturing her, in the various Federal accounts. I have a dim recollection of seeing this vessel scuttling away some time after sunrise, but cannot speak with certainty as to the hour. We did not capture her for

the same reason we did not bring the *Housatonic* and other ships to close action—we could not catch her!

NOTE II.—Since writing this chapter, my friend Admiral Ammen U. S. N. writes me in reference to Captain Stellwagen, his officers and men:—"Their parole was observed, and they were regularly exchanged, I think, the following April."

I had not known this fact before, and am glad to have the opportunity to record it.