

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

RECONNOISSANCE OF THE MONITORS IN THE NORTH EDISTO RIVER—I ORGANIZE A TORPEDO EXPEDITION TO ATTACK THEM—ARRIVAL AT ROCKVILLE—A DESERTER—SKILFUL AND ORIGINAL FLANK MOVEMENT—RETURN TO CHARLESTON—COMMANDER W. T. GLASSELL'S ATTACK ON THE "NEW IRONSIDES"—ADMIRAL DANIEL AMMEN—I AM ORDERED TO RICHMOND.

THE monitors went to the mouth of the North Edisto river, where they remained undergoing repairs. Commodore Tucker and I now had torpedo "on the brain," and I was sent down to the Edisto by land to reconnoitre. The monitors lay near the mouth of a creek, and could be plainly observed from the little village of Rockville, on the southern end of Wardmelaw island. Rockville had been built by the planters of the neighboring islands as a summer resort; it was deserted. Our pickets occupied the church steeple which overlooked the decks of the monitors; but now

"The sound of its church-going bell  
These valleys and rocks never heard;  
Never sighed at the sound of a knell,  
Or smiled when a Sabbath appeared."

At the time of my visit the pickets told me that the enemy would occasionally land in Rockville, and then our pickets would fall back from their posts until they left. I believe this was a tacit understanding between them and they did not fire on each other. Having carefully observed the position of affairs, I made up my mind that a small number of boats could go up Bohicket creek, abreast the monitors, and there await a dark and rainy night; then with their torpedoes ready they could make a dash at the monitors, which would be taken by

surprise, and the boats having but a short distance to row the chances were that some at least of the vessels would be destroyed. I returned to Charleston and reported the result of my observations to Commodore Tucker, and was directed to organize an expedition of six boats for the attempt. I took four of the best of Webb's boats, and one from the *Chicora* and *Palmetto State* each. The boats were well officered and manned by volunteers, and we took great pains in preparing them. The torpedo staffs were not fastened to the stems; but were carried about six feet below the keels of the boats. When rowing, the staff could be brought close up to the keel of the boat, and it could be raised and lowered at pleasure. By removing keys at the stem and stern posts it could be let go altogether. The boats made slow headway with the staff lowered, or indeed with it pulled up against the keel; but after exploding the torpedo the whole affair was to be detached to give the boat a chance to escape. I drilled the boats well before starting on this expedition, and satisfied myself that everything was in good working order, and that every officer and man understood what he was expected to do. We kept our plans to ourselves so that spies might not carry the news to the enemy. Our route was to be up the Ashley river to Wappoo creek; through Wappoo creek into the Stono river; up the Stono to Church flats; by Church flats to the Wardmelaw river; and down the Wardmelaw to the North Edisto river. The Wardmelaw empties into the Edisto about seven miles from its mouth. On the 10th day of May, 1863, we started from Charleston with six boats, in tow of an army tug which was to take us as far as Church flats. Lieutenant W. T. Glassell was my second in command. All hands were in fine spirits. Upon being cast off by the tug we took to our oars and pulled down the Wardmelaw river into the Edisto, which we reached about sunset. We landed at White Point, and hauling our boats up out of sight went into camp for the night. The Federal gunboats patrolled the river up to and beyond this point, and all the plantations were abandoned on both sides of the river.

The next day General Hagood (since Governor of South Carolina), came to my quarters for consultation. It was agreed that if we were successful in sinking the monitors that he would make an attack on the troops on shore in the neighborhood. He also agreed to have a company of infantry, a company of artillery, and a company of cavalry at the place on Bohicket creek, where I expected to land. The first two companies to protect us in case we were chased up the creek, and the last to act as scouts. All the day we remained quietly at White Point, keeping ourselves out of view of the enemy's vessels, which we could see very distinctly anchored near the mouth of the creek, in the vicinity of Rockville, distant five or six miles. About 10 o'clock that night we started down the river with muffled oars. Our object was to get up Bohicket creek without being discovered, and there await our opportunity. The night was clear, but there was no moon. The torpedoes were taken off the staffs and carried in the stern-sheets, and the staffs were carried over all,—so there was nothing to impede our headway.

We went down the river in line ahead, Lieutenant Glassell with an experienced pilot leading, and the boats closed up to boat-length intervals. The men were armed with cutlasses, and the officers in charge had orders to board and carry any boat we came across, if we were seen by it. We pursued our way, not even whispering to each other,—passed the monitors without being discovered, and went up the creek. Here we found the companies anxiously awaiting our arrival. There was a deserted mansion here which we determined to use as our headquarters; so, hauling the boats close in under the banks, and stowing the torpedoes in an empty room, we all turned in for a nap, it being then about two o'clock in the morning.

Glassell and I had a field-bed in a room together; and shortly after daybreak I saw his coxswain come in and call him. After a few whispered words they went out together. I feared something was wrong, and got up; and while making

a hasty toilet Glassell returned and reported that one of his very best men could not be found, and he feared he had deserted to the enemy. Glassell had been out several times during the winter trying to blow up one of the vessels off Charleston, and this man had always accompanied him; consequently he knew all about our torpedo arrangements. I immediately sent the cavalry to scout the country in the hope of picking him up, and posted the artillery and infantry on the banks of the creek to be prepared to resist an attack by boats. Soon after this, one of the monitors got underweigh and anchored off the mouth of the creek, and a gunboat went up the river and shelled White Point, where we had bivouacked the night before. "Quoth Hudibras, 'I smell a rat.'"

A picket soon came in who had been occupying the church-steeple at Rockville during the night. He said that shortly after daylight he saw a boat from one of the monitors pull in to the marsh and take a *stake* from it. He said he remarked to his companion that he wondered at their doing so, as the stake must be wet and would not burn. That "stake" was our man. He had made a straight wake for the fleet, waded through the marsh to the water's edge, and waved his hat for a boat to take him on board. I sent Glassell up the creek with the boats, and told him to go up as far as he could, and awaited further developments. During the day the monitor fired some shell at our position, as well as I recollect; but I am not sure of this. I recollect the bank of the creek was high and we had only to keep under it to be perfectly protected, and I know that no one was hurt. In the afternoon General Hagood came down and we agreed that the expedition must be given up. Our hope of success lay in a surprise, and that was no longer possible. The point now was to save the boats and men; the loss of the latter would seriously impair the efficiency of our two iron clads at Charleston. To return by the way we came was obviously out of the question; so after some thought, I asked the general to send six army wagons, with their teams, to meet me at the head of the creek

next morning. This he promised to do. About sunset Glassell sent a boat down to see what had become of me, and I went back in it to rejoin my command. I found the party at a deserted mansion on Wardmelaw island. The furniture (much abused of course) was still in the house; the garden with its orange and lemon-trees, etc., was overgrown with weeds. All bore the imprint of cruel war. I cannot say I gave way to much sentiment myself upon the occasion. I think I had a pretty keen perception of what was to come when war was declared between the states, and I had made up my mind to bear up philosophically under all circumstances. Though disappointed at the result of our expedition, and somewhat anxious as to the saving of my men I remember to have enjoyed a cigar among the orange groves very much that night, after a hearty supper of hard-tack and salt pork.

The next morning, bright and early, six wagons, each drawn by four mules, made their appearance. We took the bodies off, hauled the fore and hind wheels farther apart, substituted the torpedo staffs for fore-and-aft pieces, and mounted the boats gallantly on top. The road was across a champaign country, through very high marsh grass, and the mules moved off so freely that some of the men sat in the boats and rode there. With flags flying, we formed line ahead, and struck out for the Stono—thus turning the Edisto and Wardmelaw rivers. Some of our soldiers who were at batteries on the opposite side of the river, said afterwards, that our appearance caused the greatest astonishment. The grass being very high, the mules could not be seen, nor the men walking alongside. To them the appearance was that of six boats, manned and with colors flying, sailing over the land in some mysterious manner. Macbeth was not more astounded when he saw "great Birnam wood approaching the walls of Dunsinane." But for making out our colors they would have given us a shot or two. We launched our boats in the Stono river and returned to Charleston, *via* Wappoo creek, as before. That night at midnight I

awakened Commodore Tucker, and informed him of the non-success of our expedition.

This was my last torpedo service; but Glassell who had been an enthusiastic "torpedoist" from the beginning, afterwards made a daring attempt to destroy the *New Ironsides*. He went down Charleston harbor in a steam torpedo boat on the night of October 5, 1863. He had with him a pilot, an engineer and two men. Applying the rule I have given in chapter 13 of this book I find that on that night the moon was 24 days old, and consequently would not rise until about 3 o'clock in the morning. The *Ironsides* was lying off Morris island at anchor, and about 9.15 P. M. Glassell struck her with his torpedo, and as he did so he fired with a rifle and killed the officer of the deck, Acting Ensign Howard. The explosion of the torpedo threw up a column of water which swamped the boat. Glassell and one man jumped overboard and swam to a coal schooner near by and were made prisoners. The engineer, Mr. Tombs, and the pilot and another man clung to the boat, and as she drifted up the harbor with the flood tide they succeeded in getting into her and raising steam again. They got back safely to Charleston. Glassell was sent to Fort Warren, and was exchanged in 1864. He was promoted for his services in the *Ironsides* affair. After the war I met him in California, where he died about 1875. He was a zealous officer and a gentleman born and bred. The *New Ironsides* was not materially damaged by the explosion of the torpedo.

At the time I went down to the Edisto to attack the monitors my old friend and shipmate, Rear Admiral Daniel Ammen, was the senior officer in command of them. After the war, when I was commanding the Pacific Mail Steamship Company's steamship *Colorado* running between San Francisco and Panama, he took passage with me to Panama being then on his return home from China. In a trip of fourteen days we naturally fought our battles o'er again. He told me all about my deserter, and said he had given him very accurate information, as I supposed he would do.

Upon my return to Charleston I received a letter from Mr. Mallory, our Secretary of the Navy, directing me to make out an estimate for books, apparatus, &c., necessary for the establishment of a naval school. I accordingly did so, and sent it as instructed to the house of Fraser & Trenholm who were to direct their agent to purchase the articles required in England. Soon after this I received orders to report in person at the Navy Department in Richmond. I parted with my shipmates in the *Palmetto State* with much regret. Lieutenant Philip Porcher succeeded me as her executive officer. These two fine iron-clads, the *Chicora* and *Palmetto State*, assisted in the defence of Charleston until it was evacuated by the Confederates, February 18th, 1865. They were then set on fire by their captains and blown up.

## CHAPTER XXIX.

ORGANIZATION OF THE CONFEDERATE NAVAL ACADEMY—THE SCHOOL-SHIP "PATRICK HENRY"—CAPTURE OF THE U. S. S. "UNDERWRITER"—THE IRON-CLADS "VIRGINIA," "RICHMOND" AND "FREDERICKSBURG"—THE DEFENCE OF JAMES RIVER BY TORPEDOES—CAPTAIN HUNTER DAVIDSON—HIS ATTACK ON THE U. S. S. "MINNESOTA"—OPENING OF THE CAMPAIGN OF 1864—GENERAL BUTLER'S LOST OPPORTUNITY—BATTLE OF DRURY'S BLUFF—I AM ORDERED TO COMMAND THE IRON-CLAD "RICHMOND"—TRENT'S REACH.

I WAS not unwilling to leave Charleston for the James river, because I thought the enemy would not make another attempt there for some time, and I thought there would be a better opportunity to see service on the James river; but hardly had I reported to the Secretary in Richmond when we got news that the iron-clads had reappeared off Charleston, July 10th, 1863.

This was in fact the beginning of the combined operations of General Gilmore and Admiral Dahlgren on Morris island, which finally led to the evacuation of Fort Wagner. This was about all that General Gilmore and Admiral Dahlgren did do towards taking Charleston. The evacuation of Fort Wagner was most skilfully performed; and Captain William Henry Ward, of the *Palmetto State*, superintended the handling of the boats on that occasion; though I believe he has never received credit for it.

Upon hearing the news of the arrival of the monitors off Charleston, I was inclined to insist upon returning to the *Palmetto State*; but the Secretary declaring that he particularly wished me to remain on the James river, I gave it up. It was now determined that the steamship *Patrick Henry* should be converted into a school-ship—this was a pet scheme of Mr. Mal-