

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-

lory's and he should be entitled to reap the credit of the results, which I will show hereafter were much greater than were at that time anticipated. The ship was to be kept fully manned and armed, and to remain at anchor off Drury's Bluff to assist in the defence of the river when necessary. We made some alterations in her quarters, to enable her to accommodate the large number of midshipmen we expected; and in the fall of 1863, the First Session of the Confederate States Naval Academy opened with a full and very efficient corps of professors and about 50 midshipmen.

I have no notes; but I think the Academic Staff at this time was as follows:

Captain William H. Parker,	Superintendent.
Lieut. B. P. Loyall,	Commandant of Midshipmen.
"    W. B. Hall,	Professor of Astronomy, Navigation and Surveying.
Lieut. Davies,	Assistant.
"    Graves,	Instructor in Seamanship.
"    Billups,	Assistant.
"    Comstock,	Instructor in Gunnery.
Professor George W. Peek,	Mathematics.
"    Armstead,	Physics.
"    Huck,	English Literature.
"    Péple,	French and German.
"    Sanxey,	Infantry Tactics.

There were some changes among the lieutenants at different times, but the professors—all of whom had served in the army up to this time—remained until we broke up, which was not until the end of the war. The exercises of the school went on regularly through the exciting times of 1864-5, only interrupted by details of officers and men for the several cutting-out expeditions. A foremast with a complete set of yards and sails, was put in the ship; and the midshipmen were given as much instruction in practical seamanship as the circumstances would admit of. The senior classes were regularly graduated as Passed Midshipmen, and sent to the various ves-

sels in commission, where they rendered good service as ordnance and drill officers. They were all also skilful in the handling of boats. These young gentlemen were, at first, very loth to come to the ship and take up their books; but when they found that it resulted in their returning to their ships as passed midshipmen, eligible to promotion to the grade of lieutenant, they became reconciled to it. I need not say that we felt very much the want of educated junior officers in the Confederate Navy. The Volunteer Navy contained many lieutenants who had never been to sea—men who did not know a ship from a brig—who wrote in their logs such remarks as: "the moon was over the port bow, and the wind was hard a-starboard." These gentlemen were officers of the navy without being naval officers, a distinction which does not seem to be properly appreciated even at the present day.

The secretary of the navy took much interest in the School, as I have said, and our annual examinations were largely attended. We had an exceptionally good corps of professors; they were men before they became teachers. All who attended our examinations spoke highly of the school, and the graduates were much prized by their commanding officers. For my own part it has since very often been a subject of—I was going to say pride, but I only had a share in it—but I will say gratulation that the Naval School was established and carried on as well as it was under the almost insuperable difficulties in the way. It has often occurred to me that in all the losses of the war, here at least, was something saved in the education, partial though it was, of the Confederate midshipmen. After the war many of them went to sea and some rose to important commands, to which their school-ship education materially helped them. Only the other day one of them told me that immediately after the war he shipped before the mast in a vessel bound to Liverpool from Baltimore. Ambitious and determined to rise, he carried with him a sextant as part of his outfit. When the ship got to sea he

went up to "take the sun;" and at the sight of this unusual proceeding of a foremost-hand the captain sent for him to make some inquiries. My young friend told him he had never been to sea, but had learned some navigation on board the school-ship *Patrick Henry*. "Well" said this old salt, "you may know something about it *theodically*, but you don't know a d—d thing about it practically. This was true enough at the time; but he soon did know something of it practically, and in a few years had a much better command than his captain. During my service in the Pacific Mail Steamship Company, from 1865 to 1874, I met many of my former pupils in the Pacific, and all were doing well. Among them I may mention young Jeff Howell who commanded a steamer on the northern coast. He was drowned by his steamer being run down; but was as fine a seaman for his years as I have ever seen. Of my own knowledge I can name quite a number of our midshipmen who are now ministers, lawyers, merchants, etc. So, as I have said, *something* was saved from the Confederacy, and I had a share in saving it.

The ship lying with the other vessels of the squadron abreast Drury's Bluff, just above our obstructions in the river, made the officers and men feel that they were not withdrawn from active service. It was not like being shut up in a bomb-proof, for their vessel was performing the same duty as the others. A detail from the ship under the executive officer, Lieutenant Benjamin P. Loyall, went with Commander John T. Wood and assisted at the capture of the U. S. steamer *Underwriter*, February 2, 1864. The *Underwriter* was lying in the Neuse river above the town of Newbern, N. C. She was boarded by our party in boats and captured. As she could not be carried up the river she was burned. Palmer Saunders, one of our midshipmen, was killed in this affair. He was a mere boy, but a gallant one. The seaman who killed him—a petty officer of the *Underwriter*, and fine fellow himself—told a friend of mine after the battle that he very much regretted having to do so, seeing his youth; but Saunders and another midshipman

attacked him with such impetuosity that he was forced to cut him down in self-defence. Lieutenant Loyall for his gallantry upon this occasion was made a commander, and a few months later was sent to Kingston on the Neuse river to superintend the building of an iron-clad there. The vessel was built, and when about ready had to be burned to prevent her falling into the hands of the enemy. This was not Captain Loyall's fault; but somehow during the war it was the fate of a good many of the vessels built by our secretary. It would surprise even the Confederates if a list could be made out showing the large number of vessels we built in out-of-the-way places during the war. They were mostly burned. They were always finished just too late. The most noted case was that of the iron-clad ram *Mississippi* built at New Orleans and *nearly* ready when Farragut captured the city. She was the most powerful vessel built at the south during the war, and it is supposed would have been able to destroy Farragut's entire fleet; but she was not *quite* ready and was burned. Treason was said to be at the bottom of this affair; but I knew nothing about it myself. We felt the loss of Captain Loyall very much. A highly accomplished officer, a good disciplinarian, and much beloved by all, but especially by the midshipmen, he left us with our earnest prayers for his future success. They have been fulfilled, for the man who would grace the quarter deck of a vessel in any navy lives now in Norfolk a successful merchant and an honored citizen.

During the winter of 1864 we remained quietly attending to our duties; the monotony only being broken by the affair of the *Underwriter*. The squadron on the river at this time consisted of the iron-clads *Virginia*, *Richmond* and *Fredericksburg*, and the gunboats *Nansemond*, *Hampton*, *Drury*, *Roanoke*, *Beaufort* and *Raleigh*. The *Virginia* was a very powerful vessel. She, like the others, was after the plan of the *Merrimac* with the exception of the submerged ends. I think the *Virginia* had 6 inches of iron on her sides and 8 inches on her ends. The *Fredericksburg* was the lightest and weakest vessel of the

three. She had, perhaps, 4 inches iron. Each of these iron-clads carried four heavy Brooke rifle guns as well as I recollect. The squadron was commanded by Flag Officer French Forrest; an officer who had a fine record in the Mexican war. He was a man of undoubted courage and would have distinguished himself in this war had he had the opportunity. During the spring of 1864, as the winter broke up, we had fearful freshets in the river; and much as I had seen of the sea I do not know that anything ever impressed me with the power of water more than these freshets. Our ships made some narrow escapes of being wrecked on the obstructions by the floating masses of timber getting across their bows; but by hauling in close to the bank at Drury's Bluff we managed to hold on. Drury's Bluff is about six miles below Richmond on the right bank of the river; and a few miles below on the other side was a fort at Chapin's Bluff. Below these two fortifications the approaches were guarded by torpedoes. These torpedoes constituted the most formidable defence of the city of Richmond on the water side. Lieutenant Hunter Davidson had been in charge of this important branch of defence for about a year; he found it in an embryo state, and by his energy and perseverance he brought it to perfection. To him should be given much credit for the defence of the river in the summer of 1864. He had a small steamer in which he visited his batteries (for his torpedoes were exploded by electricity), and being a man of much ingenuity as well as untiring energy he kept everything in his department in perfect order; he had under him a small corps of intelligent and courageous men. During the winter he had had built in Richmond a small boat propelled by steam. She was a screw and was fitted with a torpedo. She was about 25 feet long and 4 wide, and carried four men, who were protected against musketry by a steel shield. The torpedo staff was about 15 feet long and was fitted to the stem; it could be triced up and lowered at pleasure. The engine was built in Richmond. I made several trips in this little boat, and when she was running at about

half or three-quarter speed the engine made absolutely no noise. Her speed was ten miles per hour.

In this boat Davidson went down the river, and on the night of April 9, 1864, he rammed the U. S. frigate *Minnesota*, lying off Newport's News. He struck her just abaft the port main-chains, and exploded the torpedo. The frigate was not much damaged, but when it is considered that Davidson was more than one hundred miles outside of our lines, and that the *Minnesota* was guarded by tug-boats, having one towing astern at the time in fact, the boldness of the act will be appreciated. He was made a Commander for it. The little boat did not suffer at all from the shock; and the torpedo staff was not even splintered.

Speaking of torpedoes reminds me of a laughable incident. Our river steamers went down to City Point occasionally with prisoners to exchange. As we had torpedoes in the river anywhere from Drury's Bluff to Trent's reach, and below, their captains ran great risks. On one occasion two of our boats were returning from City Point, fortunately with no passengers, when one of them struck a torpedo and immediately went down. A boat went from the other steamer and found the captain struggling in the water, with a Webster's Unabridged Dictionary in his arms. As he was pulled into the boat he said: "I did not have time to get it on." He thought he had seized a life-preserver!

The campaign of 1864 opened with the battles in the Wilderness between General Lee and his new opponent, General Grant. Drury's Bluff was at this time commanded by Captain Sidney Smith Lee, a brother of the General, and I spent many evenings with him talking over the news from the battle fields. I confess that I did not like the look of things from the beginning: it seemed to me that if it had been McClellan, Burnside, or any of the other generals who had been in command of the Federal Army, that the two or three first battles would have ended the campaign for that year—such having been my observations of the previous ones—but when I found General Grant holding on with bulldog tenacity, in spite of his

heavy losses, knowing as I did his powerful supports and reinforcements; and knowing equally that we had given General Lee pretty much all the men we had, I began to fear for the safety of the capital. Many others did also, I presume; but we never acknowledged it to each other—all preserved a cheerful countenance.

On the 5th of May, 1864, Major Frank Smith, temporarily commanding the post at Drury's Bluff in the absence of Colonel Terrett, came on board the *Patrick Henry*, about 2 o'clock in the afternoon. Captain Robert Pegram happening to be in Richmond, I was the senior officer on the river. Walking into my cabin, the major showed me several dispatches from the signal officers on the river below City Point to the effect that a "large number of gunboats and transports were coming up the river." Whilst I was reading the dispatches a messenger came off from the shore with another, saying the enemy were landing at Bermuda Hundred. We saw at once that Drury's Bluff was threatened, and we had hardly any troops there. I went on shore with all the sailors we could spare from the squadron, and we manned the inner line of the defences. We had not men enough to attempt to hold the outer lines.

We soon knew that a large force was landed at Bermuda Hundred, only twelve miles below us, and with a good road to Drury's Bluff and Richmond, we expected to see the head of their column at any moment. As our signal officers had now fallen back from their stations at Bermuda Hundred, we had to rely upon our scouts for information; and as these were men who had been long in garrison their work was imperfectly done, and our dispatches became very unreliable. We could get no authentic information as to the number of the enemy and their movements. Dispatches were sent to Richmond and to General Lee stating our situation and asking for reinforcements. We remained all night in this condition, expecting an attack at any moment, and knowing we had not men enough to resist it. Drury's Bluff overlooks the river,

and our vessels lying under it could render us no assistance as they could not elevate their guns sufficiently to bear.

About daylight we were very much relieved by the arrival of General Bushrod Johnson, with his fine brigade of Tennesseans. He assumed the command; but at 10 o'clock the same morning he received orders to move off in the direction of our right flank; and although this left us again exposed to an attack by the river-road, he did not feel at liberty to remain, and at noon he moved out. Captain Pegram and Colonel Terrett had by this time arrived and resumed their commands. I had gone on board my ship to dinner when a messenger came in hot haste from Captain Pegram requesting my return to the Bluff. In answer to my question he informed me that the enemy were close at hand, and that our troops had abandoned the attempt to hold the intrenchments and were assembling inside Fort Drury, an enclosed earth-work that commanded the river principally, though there were some guns pointing landward. Upon getting on shore I found such to be the case, and I went into the fort with my crew intending to share the fate of the garrison. Provisions and ammunition were hastily put in. Captain Pegram made arrangements by which we could communicate with the vessels and be supplied with provisions in the case of an investment. He himself returned to his ship as he did not think it proper that he should run the risk of being cut off from the squadron—nor did I.

We waited for some hours but the enemy did not appear. General Butler lost his opportunity. Had he advanced immediately upon landing, or even the next day, Richmond would have been in his possession by the afternoon of the 6th of May. We had no troops to oppose the movement successfully, and although the iron-clads and gunboats might have operated on his flank and annoyed it considerably, they could not have prevented his advance. I know it now, and I knew it then. Twenty-four hours after the landing at Bermuda Hundred the Federal army could have been in Richmond. With

Drury's Bluff and fortifications in the hands of the enemy we could not have prevented their fleet from raising and passing the obstructions. Our iron-clads could not resist the 15-inch shot, as I have good reason to know, and would have been overpowered and captured. The Federal fleet would soon have been off the city. But all this was not to be. During the night of the 6th troops came pouring in, and by the next day we felt able to hold Fort Drury and all the fortifications in connection with it.

While Butler's troops were landing at Bermuda Hundred, Admiral S. P. Lee, who was in command of the Federal fleet on the river, sent his small steamers up above City Point to drag for torpedoes. While engaged in this work the steamer *Commodore Jones* was blown up by one of them near Four mile creek. It was discharged from the shore by electricity. This made the enemy very cautious in their advance by the river. Admiral Lee in a dispatch to the Secretary of the Navy, dated May 13th, says: "General Butler asks for monitors above Trent's reach. Torpedoes, commanded by rebels on the left bank, which commands our decks, and shoal water, by chart several feet less than the monitors draw, make difficult the advance which I shall push to-morrow morning." This goes to corroborate what I have before said in regard to the efficiency of Captain Davidson's work; though if, as the admiral says, there was less water by several feet in the river than the monitors drew, the torpedoes might as well have been anywhere else. General Butler having failed to avail himself of his grand opportunity now advanced to invest Fort Drury; but General Beauregard was in command there, and had collected men enough not only to hold the fort but to justify an advance. He accordingly attacked General Butler on the 16th of May and drove him back in the direction of City Point again. The failure of a column from Petersburg to co-operate prevented General Beauregard from gaining the great victory he would otherwise have done. As it was he took many prisoners and drove Butler back until his right rested on the river at How-

lets on Trent's reach, and there it remained till the close of the war. Our forces threw up a battery at Howlets to command Trent's reach, and held it until Richmond was evacuated. While this fight between Beauregard and Butler was going on our vessels remained inactive on the river, not being able to render any assistance. I recollect being very much astonished at the noise made by the musketry firing on this occasion. I had never witnessed a great battle on shore before, and it seemed to me that a million of men could not have made more noise. The prisoners sent in to the Bluff were Germans. I think we captured the whole of Benker's brigade. It was hard to find a man in it who could speak English.

The James river squadron was now re-organized. Flag Officer John K. Mitchell was placed in command of it. Captain R. B. Pegram was placed in command of the *Virginia*; Captain T. M. Rootes of the *Fredericksburg*; and I was given the command of the *Richmond*. The *Patrick Henry* was left in charge of the executive officer, as the secretary intended that I should resume the command of her at the close of the summer's campaign. Captain Rootes was an old shipmate of mine; he was the executive officer of the *Yorktown* when she was wrecked September 5, 1850. Captain Pegram who was assigned to the *Virginia* was a gallant officer. He distinguished himself in China in 1855 in an attack on Chinese pirates, in conjunction with a British force under Captain Fellowes R. N. Lieutenant Pegram, with two boats and 120 men, and Captain Fellowes, with three boats and 60 men, attacked a large number of junks carrying, it was supposed, 100 guns and over a thousand men. They captured or destroyed most of them. For this service Captain Fellowes was promptly promoted by his government. Our Secretary of the Navy rewarded Pegram by writing him that the correspondence between Admiral Sterling, R. N., and himself in reference to the affair, "should be put on file." The State of Virginia, with a better appreciation of his conduct, presented him with a sword. Pegram, with a party under his command saved all the powder in the

Norfolk magazine for the confederacy. He afterwards made a run to England and back in the Confederate cruiser *Nashville*. In the British Channel he burned the American ship *Harvey Birch*.

All of our vessels on the James river, iron-clads and gun-boats, had torpedoes attached to their bows this summer. We used occasionally to have exercises under steam, somewhat after the style of the "Georgia Theatricals," to show how we could have "fout!" The first time we tried it two of the gun-boats collided and punched holes in each other; fortunately, the torpedoes were not loaded. It must be remembered that the river was very narrow, and this calls to mind what I have previously said concerning the monitor class of vessels. Their not having to manœuvre gives them great advantage in narrow channels. The monitor, in fact, is a movable fort, and is specially valuable for harbor defence.

It was now decided to remove the obstructions sufficiently to permit the passage of our vessels; and at the end of May the entire squadron went through and anchored off Chapin's Bluff. Our vessels should have been sent below some time before this. The enemy were dragging the river above Trent's reach for torpedoes with their tugs and small boats; and our gun-boats should have been on hand to prevent it. They all had long-range guns, and could have rendered good service in this way. But the fact is, the authorities were very reluctant to remove the obstructions.

We were very much surprised to find on the 15th of June that the enemy himself had obstructed the river at Trent's reach, abreast of General Butler's right flank. There were several monitors anchored in the reach at the time. It reminded me of a circumstance I had read of in the war of 1812: After the capture of Washington by the British under General Ross, our forces retreated across the great bridge into Virginia; and we broke down our end of the bridge so that the British should not cross in pursuit; and they broke down their end so that the Americans should not return to attack them.

The Federal naval officers were mortified at this act, as they thought it had the appearance of their not being willing to meet our iron-clads. I believe General Grant himself insisted upon its being done, as he felt the necessity of absolute security to his base of supplies at City Point.

There was much "fencing" between Admiral Lee and General Butler as to which should bear the responsibility of closing the river. The correspondence between these two officers on this point is very curious reading. Admiral Lee, in a letter to the Secretary of the Navy, June 7, 1864, says: "The navy is not accustomed to putting down obstructions before it, and the act might be construed as implying an admission of superiority of resources on the part of the enemy. The object of the operation would be to make the river more secure against the attempts of the enemy upon our vessels by fire and explosive rafts, followed by torpedoes and iron-clad vessels and boats. Of course, myself and officers desire the opportunity of encountering the enemy, and feel reluctant to discourage his approach. But the point of embarrassment with me is the consequences that would follow a failure of the campaign, should the novel plans of the enemy succeed in crippling the monitor force."

All of which reads as though it were a case of:

"He can and he can't, he will and he won't;  
He'll be d—d if he does, and he'll be d—d if he don't."

These obstructions in Trent's reach remained until the end of the war, and the monitors never went above them until that time.