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## PORT HUDSON. ITS HISTORY, FROM AN INTERIOR VIEW, AS SKETCHED FROM THE DIARY OF AN OFFICER

[CONTINUED.]

### **Continuance of the Siege.**

On the 18<sup>th</sup> of June the mortar boats brought their bombardment to a close. After the 24<sup>th</sup> of May they had adopted a slow and regular system of throwing shells, each boat firing in turn, except on certain occasions of extra exertion, but now they gave it up altogether. The true reason of this we could not, of course, know; but supposed the order to stop the bombarding had been issued in consequence of learning, from our deserters, that it had created little or no damage. In a city, or the small compass of a stone fort, mortars may be very destructive engines of warfare, but it could hardly pay to throw them into such a large enclosure as Port Hudson, where the troops were so "few and far between" that it required more acuteness than a shell is possessed of for one of these missiles to find any one to injure. The bombardment effected one thing, however; it made the lands of Port Hudson valuable as an almost inexhaustible iron mine.

An informal kind of truce was arranged between the men of both sides on our extreme right on the 16<sup>th</sup>, which lasted about a week, during which both sides stopped sharpshooting and gazed at each other with some curiosity. How this anomalous state of affairs was first brought about is not known, but it appeared to be a mutual understanding, and both sides having perfect confidence that the firing would not be recommenced without proper warning, they would get up in full view and often carry on conversations.

In some cases soldiers would meet each other half way between the hostile lines and make exchanges, in which the Federals showed much liberality, making presents of tobacco, coffee and newspapers, at times getting small quantities of sugar and molasses in return. This was carrying the courtesies of war to an unusual extent, and as soon as it came to the knowledge of our superior officers it was stopped, although the informal armistice was not interfered with for awhile.

During this time we strengthened our work on the point (battery 11) considerably, our men working during the day in full view of the enemy, who were also busily engaged in constructing their marine battery opposite. The men who were working would occasionally exchange words with each other regarding their respective avocations, as amicably and jovially as if the siege was only a joke and the contending parties were the best of friends. One day an officer on our side brought a large spy glass to examine their operations, and laid it on the top of the parapet to take a sight through. To the Federals, who were many of them regarding us through glasses at the same time, this appeared to be a hostile demonstration, and some of them jumped into their rifle pits and dodged behind the trees with more speed than grace, greatly to the amusement of others of them who had distinguished a spy-glass from a rifle. At another time the

accidental discharge of one of our guns into the air caused a similar stampede, until they heard us laughing at their display of agility, when some of them reappeared and joined heartily in the laugh.

#### **Incidents as they Occurred.**

At 3 o'clock on the morning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Lieut. Bankston, of Miles's Legion, went out with fifty men, and deploying them to the right and left in front of our fortifications, drove in the enemy's skirmishers, greatly superior to him in number. At the same hour on the morning of the 23<sup>d</sup> two of the enemy's regiments attempted to approach our right centre at the sally port of the Plains Store Road, but were discovered and driven back.

The enemy were now bringing their approaches very close to us in front of the First Mississippi's position, and every preparation was made to meet an expected onslaught there. In front of the salient angle to our line Lieut. Dabney planted a large number of stakes, slightly inclining outward, the points of which were sharpened with a drawing knife. Among these wires were stretched, at the height of a foot and a half from the ground, so as to trip an advancing line of men; and torpedoes were also placed at proper positions.

These precautions were only taken to delay and retard an assaulting party, should they attempt to charge in the night time from their ditches and carry our work by surprise. We were confident of our ability to hold the place without any aid except that of the bayonet while daylight showed us our enemy. And the troops well knew that all the artillery and all the engineering in the world cannot capture a fortified place. They can batter down and blow up walls and parapets; but, after all, the bayonet is the only thing which carries the position—all else are but adjuncts. The fact kept in mind, our troops were not demoralized by the formidable works in progress around us, but waited eagerly and confidently for the next assault, which must, at last, crown all the engineering, feeling, as certain as ever before, of their ability to meet and repel it.

The enemy were digging their approaches under cover of cotton bales, which they rolled over in front of them as they advanced. On the 25<sup>th</sup> Corporal Skelton, of the First Mississippi, volunteered to go out and destroy this cotton. Under the deadly sharpshooting which was constantly kept up this was, indeed an adventurous undertaking, but he made it and was successful. The first time he made the attempt he reached the cotton, but could not fire it with the burning brand which he carried. He therefore returned within the lines, and getting a port fire from the artillery, went forth again, set the cotton bales in blaze, and returned unhurt. For his courage and devotion he was complimented by General Gardner in an order of the day.

About dusk next evening Lieut. McKenna, of the Sixteenth Arkansas, with thirty men of his regiment, who volunteered to accompany him, went out and captured, at the point of the bayonet, an earthwork on the Clinton road which was being made at some distance from our lines. They took an officer and several men prisoners and brought them safely within our works, with their guns and a number of sand bags out of which they had emptied the earth.

#### **Running the Gauntlet.**

An event of great note among the besieged was the arrival, during the night of the 26<sup>th</sup>, of Capt. R. S. Pryme, of the Fourth Louisiana regiment, with dispatches from General Johnston to General Gardner, and full news from the outer world for the garrison, the latter being immediately published in newspaper form and circulated among our men. Capt. Pryme was one of those who had been sent out with dispatches by Gen. Gardner during the siege, and the only one of them who returned.

He had floated down the river supported by a dozen canteens, well corked and tied together to form a life preserver, with his dispatches secured in an india-rubber army pillow. As he passed the Richmond the current carried him uncomfortably close to her, and he distinctly heard a voice, probably that of the officer of the watch to one of the sailors exclaim: "Look out sharp to that object and see what it is." It can easily be imagined how motionless he lay in the water as he floated down, and in the darkness of the night, he was taken for a log, and opinion which was, under the circumstances, as satisfactory to him as it was uncomplimentary.

In returning Capt. Pryme took a somewhat similar route. After getting into Point Coupée he made his way through the enemy's position on the river opposite Port Hudson, crawling on his hands and knees nearly a quarter of a mile through an open space, where he saw then all around him, and then taking to the water he swam across and was picked up in front of one of our batteries, seemingly none the worse for his watery experience.

Up to his time it may be safely said that the general belief among the garrison of Fort Hudson was that they would be relieved by a force being sent from the interior to raise the siege. This conviction, which had been a pleasant one to hold and cherish, was now dispelled in nearly every mind, and the effect was to instill even a deeper spirit of resistance into the soldiers' hearts.

The knowledge that they were to rely upon themselves alone, and could expect no outside assistance, did not by any means discourage them. They felt a greater pride in the success of their own fighting, and never for a moment despaired of holding the place so long as the provisions and ammunition held out. It was known that the beef was nearly all consumed, and the eating of mules and horses was commonly discussed, and men were calculating how long these animals would last. There were no ideas of surrendering entertained by any, but a proposition for the commanding general to call for volunteers and undertake to cut his way through the investing lines, after the provisions were exhausted, was very favorably received and discussed.

#### **Hot Work at the Point.**

The marine battery having been finished, the enemy started to dig a ditch straight up to our bluff on the extreme right, by running it along the river bank. This was discovered as early as the 22d, but the enemy did not make much progress, although, from our position, we could not materially interrupt them in the prosecution of their work. At four o'clock on the afternoon of the 26<sup>th</sup> of June a terrific fire was concentrated on this point, which was kept up until dark, the fleet taking a prominent part. The Richmond came up and poured in her broadsides two or three times, but did not maintain her position. During the firing our flag was shot down four times, the staff being shattered to pieces every time, and the bunting torn to shreds. Each time it was raised by Lieut. Schirmer, of DeGournay's artillery who was himself killed soon afterward by one of the enemy's sharpshooters.

The enemy now paid their special attention to our lower point, where stood battery 11, which could hardly be termed a "citadel," as it was an ordinary breastwork and enclosure of earth. From the 25<sup>th</sup> to the 30<sup>th</sup> the concentration of fire on this place was fearful, though our loss was not as heavy as could have been expected, because we kept there no more men than were actually required to hold it in the event of an assault until reinforcements could be thrown in.

Our parapet there was breached every day, but our men would repair the damage every night, although under a constant fire of shells, grape and canister. While superintending these repairs, Lieut. James Freret, of the Engineer corps, was badly wounded. The enemy had worked their way steadily up until they had effected a lodgment on the end of the same bluff with us, and

not more than thirty yards from our work. Their sharpshooters were crowded around this battery, keeping up a constant fire even when they could see no one to shoot at.