

THE BATTLE OF MOBILE BAY.

(From the Army and Navy Journal.)

The commander of the rebel iron-clad *Tennessee*, during the naval engagement in Mobile harbor, sends the following account of that affair to a Southern paper, *The Plan tation*:

On the morning of the 5th of August, 1864, it was discovered at about six o'clock that the fleet under command of Admiral Farragut, which had been lying at anchor some three miles outside the entrance to Mobile bay, were under way, steaming into the entrance. This fleet consisted of six first-class sloops-of-war, eight gunboats and four iron-clad monitors—carrying an armament of two hundred and two guns and an aggregate force of three thousand men. The squadron under command of Admiral Buchanan was composed of three small gunboats and the ram *Tennessee*, whose total defences were twenty two guns and about four hundred and seventy men. The wooden vessels of the enemy were lashed together in couples, and formed in line ahead with the monitors leading. When they approached within easy range of the guns of Fort Morgan General R. L. Page, who commanded that work, opened fire upon them, but without serious damage to any of the vessels. They soon entered the bay, where they were met by the *Tennessee* and the three gunboats under Admiral Buchanan—all of which had commenced firing at the approaching fleet at about the same moment with Fort Morgan, and had inflicted severe injury upon their men by the effect of a raking fire with percussion shells. The superior speed of the wooden vessels soon placed them ahead of the monitors, and as their leader (the *Hurford*, Admiral Farragut's flag ship) pressed into the bay, an effort was made by the *Tennessee* to run her down, or sink her by a blow from her prow, but this was easily avoided by a slight turn of the helm, as her speed was nearly double that of her pursuer. Failing in this attempt, it became instantly necessary to stop and turn the head of the ship in an opposite direction, with the hope of success in the same design upon the other vessel; but this was also frustrated by the great disparity of speed between them and the *Tennessee*, and they steamed away from her with all the speed they could command, until they reached a point nearly 4 miles above the entrance of the bay, where they anchored in deep water. The monitors, meanwhile, were left to engage the *Tennessee* and the Confederate gunboats were dispersed and attacked singly by three times their number of much heavier vessels, their lashings having now been cast off and each one left to fight to the best advantage. The gunboat *Morgan*, under the command of Commander Harrison, finding herself too hotly pressed by this largely superior force, placed herself immediately under the guns of Fort Morgan, where she remained till nightfall, and then steamed up to Mobile. The *Gaines*, under Lieutenant Commander Bennett, having received several shots under the water line, was run on to the beach to prevent sinking, and the *Selma*, Lieutenant-Commander Murphy, surrendered to two of the enemy's gunboats, each of superior force. The monitor *Tecumseh*, while steaming toward the *Tennessee*, with the view of sinking her by the use of her prow and fifteen-inch guns, was suddenly struck by a torpedo and sunk in deep water immediately abreast of Fort Morgan—only eight men, out of a crew of one hundred and twenty-five, having been rescued from a watery grave. She had not fired a shot, but was

reserving all her energies for the encounter with the *Tennessee*, which vessel was now in hot pursuit of the invading fleet which had sailed so gallantly up the bay.

As soon as Admiral Farragut discovered her design, by her reopening the action when within range of his vessels, he got his fleet under way and attacked her with as much of his force as could bring a gun to bear upon her without danger of injuring each other; and not content with using his guns alone, he ordered several of his heaviest vessels to run into the *Tennessee* at full speed, with the hope of sinking her. She received five tremendous shocks from vessels whose speed could not have been less than ten miles per hour, without apparent injury to herself, but greatly to their own, while the constant shower of eleven inch solid shot, fired from the distance of only a few feet, produced no other effect than a slight indentation of the iron plating, and a few splinters from the inside of the shield.

The only pilot on board the *Tennessee* having been seriously wounded early in the action, it became a source of great anxiety to her commander lest she should be grounded, and thus placed at the mercy of the enemy; but the result proved that this unfortunate condition was to be occasioned by a very different cause, and one which he had long apprehended. The steering apparatus of the ship was defective from the first, and it seemed almost impracticable to protect it against the inevitable destruction which awaited it in such an engagement. The enemy having discovered, when running into the ship, that the chains leading to the rudder-head were exposed on the after-deck turned his attention especially to their destruction, which was, of course, easily effected at such close quarters. At about the same time, the smoke-pipe, which had been riddled by shot, was broken close off to the top of the shield, or upper deck, by the concussion produced by the ramming process adopted by the heavy vessels of the enemy, and the smoke and heat issuing from the broken pipe came down upon the men at the guns with almost insupportable effect.

The ports of the ship were covered, when the guns were run in for loading, by heavy iron covers, which revolved on pivots, but it unfortunately happened that those of the bow and stern ports were so jammed against the side of the shield by the enemy's shot that it became impossible to move them; and it was while superintending a mechanic who was endeavouring to hack out one of these pivot bolts, so as to bring the stern gun into action again, that Admiral Buchanan received a wound in his leg, which disabled him completely. The poor machinist was crushed by the same shot so that his remains had the appearance of sausage-meat, and one of the gun's crew was also killed by an iron splinter. After the wheel chains leading to the rudder head were destroyed, the "relieving tackles" were used to steer the ship, but she was not long permitted to avail herself of this expedient, a shot having taken away blocks and tackle both only a few moments after they were resorted to.

When Admiral Buchanan was wounded, the commander of the ship was immediately informed, and went from his station in the pilot house to receive his orders. The admiral greeted him with, "Well, Johnson, they've got me—you'll have to look out for them." Hastening to the after or stern gun where the catastrophe had just occurred, it was discovered by the commander for the first time that the gun had been changed to the broad side, and returning immediately forward he found that the same course had been adopted with the bow gun, and for the

same reason—the port cover being fastened against the side of the shield by the enemy's shot, so as to render it immovable except by hacking out the pivot-bolt.

The enemy was not slow in perceiving the helpless condition of the *Tennessee*, with her smoke-pipe gone, her rudder rendered useless, and her battery powerless to inflict any injury upon his vessels, which had now stationed themselves immediately ahead and astern of the ill fated "Ram." When the condition of things was fully realized by her commander, and had continued for nearly an hour, during which she was unable to fire a gun, he went to the lower deck where the wounded admiral had been taken for surgical attendance and reported it to him, upon which he replied: "Well if you can do the enemy no further damage you might as well surrender—there's no use of lying here for a target"—or words of similar import. The commander immediately returned to the gun-deck and gave the order to "cease firing," simply to let the crew understand that the ship was to be surrendered, and as the enemy's shot were falling rapidly upon her stern and bow, he then proceeded to the top of the shield to haul down the flag, which he found had been seized on to a boat-hook handle and then lashed to the grating, forming the cover of the shield. While engaged in removing the flag several of the enemy's shot struck the boat, but the commander was so fortunate as to escape unhurt: and while he remained there one of the heaviest of the enemy's vessels ran into the ship, though at slow speed, and endeavouring to avoid the collision after discovering that she had surrendered. As she rebounded her commander appeared on the fore-castle and exclaimed: "This is the United States steamer *Ossipee*. Halloo, Johnson; how are you? Le Roy, don't you know me? I'll send a boat alongside for you." Captain Johnson simply replied, "Aye, aye, sir," and went below to await the coming boat, in which he was taken on board the *Ossipee*, and met at the gangway by an old personal friend, and a gallant officer although so lately engaged in deadly conflict, with a cordial greeting, and the kindest manner was exhibited toward him during the six days he remained on board his vessel as prisoner of war.

Captain Johnson paid a brief visit subsequently to his late command for the purpose of ascertaining what damage had been inflicted upon her shield. Not a single shot had penetrated its almost invulnerable sides although struck several hundred times at the closest possible range. She was struck but once by a 15-inch shot, which caused the iron to bend and the timber to bulge about a foot, but failed to penetrate, although fired from a distance of less than one hundred yards, and notwithstanding the fact that it struck in the weakest part of the shield gave the greatest evidence of the effects of the terrific bombardment she received, being considerably shaken, and the plating in many places torn from the bolts.

Four of the principal vessels of Admiral Farragut's fleet were so seriously injured as to render it necessary for them to return to the North for repairs, and the steam-pipe of one of them was cut, by which several of her crew were scalded to death and otherwise seriously wounded. The admiral's official report acknowledged the killing and wounding of nearly as many as composed the entire force under Admiral Buchanan, and the fact that several of the invading fleet were not sunk is mainly attributable to the slow rate of speed of the *Tennessee*, a defect which has yet to be overcome in the construction of iron-clad vessels.