

DRAWN BY A. R. WAUD.

ON PICKET DUTY OFF MOBILE IN 1863.

THE BLOCKADE OF THE CONFEDERACY.

BY HORATIO L. WAIT,
Formerly Paymaster, U. S. N.

AT the beginning of the war in 1861, a perplexing question arose as to whether it would be best for the government to declare all the Southern ports of entry to be closed, or to proclaim a blockade. Many facts made public since the war indicate that this was the chief question that affected the European nations in their attitude toward us, and it certainly influenced the character of the struggle in our own country. The urgency of the case caused President Lincoln to act promptly. On April 19, 1861, six days after the surrender of Fort Sumter, he issued a proclamation declaring a blockade of the entire coast of the Confederacy, from South Carolina to Texas; and on April 27 extended it to cover Virginia and North Carolina, making a coast-line of over three thousand miles to be blockaded, greater in extent than the Atlantic coast of Europe—an undertaking without precedent in history.

During the war of 1812, with Great Britain, when that nation had over seven hundred naval vessels in commission, not a single port of the United States was thoroughly closed. When Mr. Lincoln issued this proclamation we had only forty-two ships in commission in our navy. Most of them were absent on foreign stations, and only one efficient war-ship, the *Brooklyn*, was available for immediate service. The days of paper blockades had long since passed away. The universally recognized rule of international law on this subject was that "blockades, to be binding, must be effectual. There must be a squadron lying off the harbor to be blockaded, and it must be strong enough to constitute an actual blockade of the port. The neutral must have had due notice of its

existence, and to affect a neutral vessel she must have been guilty of an act of violation, by passing, or attempting to pass, in or out of the port, with a cargo laden after the commencement of the blockade. The neutral must be ready to prove himself that which he professes to be; therefore he is subject to the right of visitation and search."

A more serious difficulty now presented itself. How was it possible to undertake such a blockade as this, along such a vast extent of coast, when so few ships of any kind were available, without its being open to the charge of being a mere paper blockade? In the early part of the century European powers had attempted to enforce paper blockades, but the same nations were now the first to make merry over the subject of our paper blockade. Some of the most prominent European statesmen publicly declared it a "material impossibility to enforce it." To avoid any chance of technical complications, a special notice was given by our vessels at the entrance of each port actually closed by them, in addition to the general diplomatic notice, so that for a time one warning was allowed every ship touching at a blockaded port before she was liable to capture. Thus each port was brought under the full operation of the proclamation only when it was actually blockaded by one or more armed vessels.

By degrees, as the blockading force was increased, and the blockade became more extended and stringent, it was assumed that the general notice rendered the special notice unnecessary; it was finally discontinued entirely, and capture took place without warning. The magnitude of the task of establishing and maintaining the blockade

was not realized by the people generally, public attention being absorbed by the raising of many large armies from the body of the people.

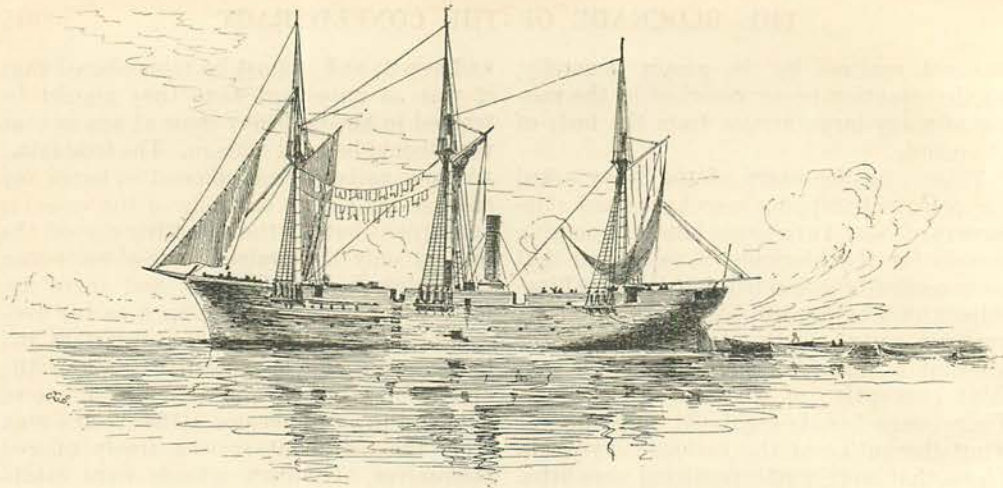
When the Secretary of the Navy asked the principal shipping merchants and ship-owners of New York to aid him in procuring vessels for the blockade, it is related that their committees decided that thirty sailing-ships would be needed. As it took over six hundred ships, mostly steamers, to do the work, it is manifest that they had a very faint conception of what was to be done. There were twenty-eight old ships of war lying dismantled at the various navy-yards. Those that were worth repairing were fitted for sea as rapidly as possible. All the available merchant vessels that could be made to carry a battery, including tugs and old New York ferry-boats, were purchased and converted into fighting ships as hastily as the limited facilities of the Northern ports would permit. The scanty resources of the navy-yards were inadequate. All the private ship-yards were crowded with work. There were not enough skilled workmen to meet this sudden demand, and the naval officers found it necessary personally to direct the unskilled artisans, or to assist with their own hands in fitting these nondescript vessels for the mounting and working of heavy guns. As fast as the vessels could be purchased, altered, and equipped, they were stationed along the coast or sent to sea. Many such vessels, by the tact and skill of the officers in charge of them, were made to do good service. One of the most important prizes captured, the steamer *Circassian*, was taken near the harbor of Havana by one of the old Fulton Ferry boats.

The lack of men was as great an embarrassment as the want of vessels. Three hundred and twenty-two officers of the old navy joined the insurgent forces, many of them having already distinguished themselves in service. One of these, Commander John M. Brooke, rendered very important services to the Southerners by converting the ten-inch columbiads captured by them into rifled guns. They proved to be very effective pieces, and were said to be the best converted guns ever made. He also aided in devising the simplest and best of the many kinds of torpedoes and fuses used by the Confederates, as well as in designing the ram *Merrimac*.

The total number of seamen at all the Northern naval stations available for immediate detail amounted to only two hundred

and seven; and it must be remembered that it was as important that they should be trained to handle heavy guns at sea as that they should be good seamen. The true sailor will soon make himself efficient on board any ship, as far as the handling of the vessel is concerned; but in the effective use of the battery only the trained man-o'-war's-man can safely be relied upon; and there are many other minor matters, such as the division of duties, the exercise at quarters and in boats, forming essential features of the system on a man-o'-war, that are unknown outside the naval service. Officers and men from the merchant service freely offered themselves. Gunnery schools were established at the naval stations for their instruction. As fast as the volunteers could be given an elementary training in the handling of heavy guns, they were sent to sea. This was continued for three years, by which time we had six hundred and fifty vessels and over fifty thousand men afloat.

The service to be performed by this hastily improvised force was as unique as the fleet itself. The entire outer coast-line of the Confederacy was 3549 miles in extent, with several large seaports. To guard the ordinary entrances to these ports was comparatively a simple task. There was, however, a greater difficulty to be met; for the outer coast-line is only the exterior edge of a series of islands between which and the mainland there is an elaborate network of navigable sounds and passages, having numerous inlets communicating with the sea. These inlets were frequently changing under the influence of the great storms; new channels would be opened and old ones filled up. As soon as we closed a port, by stationing vessels at the main entrance thereto, the blockade-runners would slip in at some of the numerous remote inlets, reaching their destination by the inside passages; so that blockade-running flourished until we were able to procure as many blockaders as there were channels and inlets to be guarded. The extreme diversity of the services required of these blockading vessels made it difficult to obtain ships that could meet the varying necessities. They must be heavy enough to contend with the enemy's rams, or they would be driven away from the principal ports. They must be light enough to chase and capture the swift blockade-runners. They must be deep enough in the water to ride out in safety the violent winter gales, and they must be of such light draft as to be able



DRAWN BY XANTHUS SMITH.

UNITED STATES STEAMER "MERCEDITA," CAPTURED OFF CHARLESTON.

to go near enough to the shallow inlets to blockade them efficiently.

The blockading fleets of all the important harbors were composed of several very heavy ships, with a few vessels of the lighter class; the rest of the fleet represented some of the other classes needed. But it was impossible to do this along the entire coast, and it sometimes happened that the Confederate ironclads perversely attacked the lighter vessels, as in the case of the rams at Charleston selecting for their victims the *Mercedita* and the *Keystone State*, instead of the heavier ships; while, on the other hand, the swift blockade-runners disclosed themselves most frequently to the ponderous and slow-moving ships that were least able to catch them.

Vigorous remonstrances were made against the blockade by some of the foreign nations, on the ground that it was ineffectual, and that it was impossible to maintain a blockade in front of such a coast-line. But the British government, after making a careful official investigation of the subject, and having before its officers a list of vessels that had evaded our fleets, did not venture to pronounce the blockade insufficient. They reluctantly, but with candor, admitted in their official statements that the proofs of the efficiency of the blockade were conclusive; that in no previous war had the ports of an enemy's country been as effectually closed by a naval force; and they stated the rule of law governing the matter as follows:

Her Majesty's Government are of the opinion that, assuming the blockade is duly proclaimed, and also that a fleet of ships is stationed and remains at the entrance to a port, sufficient in force to prevent access to it, or to create an evident danger in entering or leaving it, and that these

ships do not voluntarily permit ingress or egress, the fact that various ships may have successfully escaped through it will not of itself prevent the blockade from being an effective one by international law.

Notwithstanding the fact that a considerable trade was carried on through some of the blockaded ports until very near the close of the war, by means of swift vessels constructed specially for the purpose, this conclusion of the British government was adhered to, and the decisions of the prize-courts maintained the same principles. Many of the islands controlled by foreign governments, and lying conveniently near our coast, had good harbors that afforded admirable places of rendezvous for the blockade-runners, where they could safely refit, and remain unmolested until a favorable time came for them to slip out and make a quick run over to the forbidden port; and if unsuccessful in their illicit attempt, they could return as quickly to the protection of the neutral port. As soon as the attention of the naval authorities was drawn to the port of Nassau as a place likely to become the main depot of the contraband trade, Lieutenant-Commander (afterward Admiral) Temple was sent over there privately, in the guise of a civilian, to ascertain the attitude of the officials, the state of public sentiment, and to obtain all the information possible as to the prospects of the blockade-running business. While there he managed to be present at a dinner attended by the local diplomats. There were many indications that the feeling of hostility to the United States was very general. When the old French consul was called upon to express his views, he jumped up, overflowing with an intense de-

sire to express himself in a vigorous manner; but in spite of his profound emotions, all he could manage to utter was: "Ze American people zey sink zey are somewhat, but zey cannot!" This terse presentation of his views was received with such uproarious applause that Temple was no longer in doubt as to which way the wind blew in that place.

Nassau had been a quiet, old-fashioned settlement, whose inhabitants supported themselves by fishing, and occasionally by acting as wreckers; but as soon as the blockade-running business began, the place and the people underwent as sudden transformation as that witnessed in California at the time of the discovery of the gold-mines. The quiet bay became crowded with vessels of all descriptions. There were the heavy freight-steamers from the Continental ports, the bluff-bowed Englishmen that had brought cargoes of war supplies from Europe, lying side by side with the swift, rakish schooners and the fast steamers that were to endeavor to carry this contraband material into the blockaded ports. The fishing-boats and canoes of the harbor were kept busy day and night plying between this vast fleet and the shore. The ancient wharves were entirely inadequate to this sudden demand made upon them, being hidden under the mountain-like piles of cotton-bales, clothing, muskets, and gunpowder. The landing-places, the beach, and the streets were thronged with an eager, excited crowd of men absorbed in the details of their perilous traffic. Nassau became the chief depot of contraband supplies for the South, as well as the port to which most of the cotton was shipped, because it was so much nearer our coast than the other island harbors that it was easily accessible to the light-draft blockade-runners, all of whom carried Bahama Bank pilots, who were familiar with every channel; while our fastest men-of-war, who cruised after the blockade-runners, having no Bahama pilots, and drawing more water, were obliged to be very cautious about approaching the Banks at all.

Supplies were brought to the South from various sources, but principally from European ports. At the beginning of the war the blockade-running was carried on from Chesapeake Bay to the mouth of the Rio Grande, by vessels of all sorts, sizes, and nationalities. The steamers formerly engaged in the coasting-trade, that had been interrupted in their regular business by the war, were at first the most successful. The small sailing-vessels did well for some time before the blockade

became vigorous; but as the number of our war-ships increased, the earlier groups of blockade-runners were either captured, destroyed, or drawn off. This diminished the volume of supplies to the Confederates just at the time when the demand was greatly increased by the emergencies of warfare, causing general distress and embarrassment in the Confederacy. Prices reached an unprecedented height. Cotton was as low as eight cents a pound in the Confederacy, as high as sixty cents a pound in England, and over one dollar a pound in New York. The moment this state of affairs became known, the science, ingenuity, and mechanical skill of the British seemed to be directed to the business of violating our blockade. Stock companies were formed, by whom the swiftest steamers in the European merchant service were quickly freighted with the supplies that would bring the highest prices in the Confederacy. Officers of rank in the royal navy, under assumed names; officers of the Confederate navy, who had but just resigned from the United States navy; and adventurous spirits from all quarters, flocked to this new and profitable, though hazardous, occupation. The Confederate government also embarked in the business, procuring swift steamers from English builders, officered with Confederate naval officers, and sailing under the British ensign. They also shipped merchandise in other vessels on government account.

The first ship to run the blockade solely on the Confederate government account was the *Fingal*, a steamer built on the Clyde, having a speed of thirteen knots, armed with steel rifled guns, and prepared to fight if intercepted. She carried a cargo of arms and ammunition, and was commanded by Captain J. D. Bulloch, an officer of our old navy, who had served under Farragut. He subsequently acted as Confederate agent in Liverpool.

The *Fingal* ran into Savannah very easily, but she tried in vain for many months to slip out through the blockading fleet with a cargo of cotton. Finally the attempt was abandoned; then she was cut down to be used as the hull for an ironclad ram, and rechristened the *Atlanta*. On June 17, 1863, the *Atlanta* came out from Savannah to raise the blockade. She was accompanied by two steamers crowded with spectators from the city to see it done. She attacked the monitor *Weehawken*. After a sharp fight of a quarter of an hour she was disabled and captured by the *Weehawken*, Captain John Rodgers com-

manding. The steamers carrying the spectators were allowed to escape.

The blockade of Savannah River and other places was at first maintained by our sailing men-of-war. When the weather was so calm that the sailing-ships could not be manœvered, the Confederate steamers would come down and shell them with their rifled guns, keeping beyond the range of the smooth-bore guns of the sailing-ships. Therefore these ships were replaced by steamers as rapidly as possible. As fast as we captured swift blockade-runners that were adapted to the service, they were converted into gunboats to be used in looking out for the other blockade-runners. The number of vessels stationed at the principal Southern ports was soon so largely increased that blockade-running became once more hazardous, and the English capitalists found it necessary to study our coast more closely, and to construct a new class of steamers that could enter our shallow inlets, having engines powerful enough for ships four times their size, and developing a higher rate of speed than had ever been obtained up to that time. The *Owl*, one of these improved steamers, is said to have run at the rate of seventeen knots an hour in the harbor of Nassau.

When the blockade-running was at its height, in 1863, a Confederate officer stated that the arrivals and departures were equal to one steamer a day, taking all of the Confederate ports together. Prior to this no such attempts had ever been made to violate a blockade. The industrial necessities of the principal maritime nations stimulated them to unusual efforts, in return for which they looked forward to a rich harvest. The British especially had abundant capital, the finest and swiftest ships ever built, manned by the most energetic seamen. They felt confident that they could monopolize the Southern cotton and the markets of the Confederacy; but when it was found that neither swift steamers, skilled officers, nor desperate efforts could give security to their best investments of capital, and that the perils to their beautiful vessels and precious cargoes increased as fast as their efforts to surmount them, ultimately becoming even greater in proportion than the enormous gains of the traffic when successful, they were at last driven off from our coast entirely, and kept at bay, though armed and supported by the greatest of foreign powers. They finally gave up the business, admitting that the blockade was a success. A Confederate officer stated that when Fort Fisher

fell their last port was gone, and blockade-running was at an end.

This signal defeat of that extraordinary development of our Civil War has been spoken of as one of the great moral lessons of our struggle. After the war British officers frankly stated to our naval officers that they considered the blockade and its enforcement the great fact of the war. This was the first time in the history of naval warfare that a steam navy had been kept at sea for so long a period. The Confederates menaced the blockading fleets with nine ironclads which would have been a match for any ironclads in the French or English navy afloat at that time; therefore it becomes manifest that a fleet which could hold in check ironclads, as well as shut out blockade-runners that were the swiftest steamers built at that time, must have combined speed and power to an extent never before displayed in naval warfare.

The extent of this contraband trade cannot be ascertained with accuracy. It was said that fifty vessels left Havana in a period of ninety days, to run the blockade; and in 1864 six steamships left Bermuda within twenty-four hours, bound for Wilmington. Only one of them, however, succeeded in running in. The rest were either driven off or were run ashore to avoid capture. Sometimes as many as six steamers would leave Nassau in a night, bound for Charleston or other ports. Those engaged in the trade realized enormous profits, sometimes making great fortunes in a few months. The occupation seemed to have the fascination of a desperate game of chance. An old merchant at Nassau said that if a steamer had the luck to run into Charleston with merchandise twice, and to run out with cotton twice, the Yankees were welcome to her after that. Another said that if one cargo in three ran in safely, it paid; and if one in four slipped in, it saved them from being out of pocket. An old captain, who had made sixteen trips successfully, said his profits had been at the rate of eight hundred per cent. A clear profit of \$300,000 for a round trip was not uncommon. One of the most successful vessels was the *Giraffe*, afterward called the *Robert E. Lee*, owned by the Confederate government, and commanded by Captain John Wilkinson, who had been an officer in the United States navy before entering the Confederate navy. She was a Clyde-built iron steamer, having a speed of thirteen and a half knots, being considered, when new, the fastest steamer afloat. She cost, in 1862, \$160,000 in gold, and ran the blockade twenty-one times before

she was captured. During that period she carried out seven thousand bales of cotton, worth \$2,000,000 in gold. The Confederate government owned three more steamers and a share in several others; and during the latter part of the war all steamers were compelled to carry out a part of their cotton, and bring in a part of their cargo of supplies, on government account.

The freight and passenger rates on the vessels engaged in the contraband trade were naturally very high. From \$300 to \$500 in gold was paid in advance for a passage on one of them; and \$2500 in gold was paid as freight-money from Bermuda to Wilmington on a box of medicines that was small enough to be put in the cabin of the steamer *Whisper*.

When the blockade became complete, none but the best steamers could succeed in passing it; a superlative degree of skill and daring was required in the men in charge of them, and they were paid very high wages. The captains usually received about \$5000 in gold, and the pilots from \$2000 to \$5000 in gold, for a round trip. Three or four days were usually occupied in making the run between the coast and Nassau. The steamers frequently carried a Charleston pilot as well as a Wilmington pilot, so that, if they were unable to run in at one of these ports, they might immediately attempt to run in at the other. They usually chose dark or stormy nights; and as they had to run through the fleet of blockaders at full speed, it is easy to see that much skill was required to avoid the shoals and the men-of-war, particularly when the weather was so thick that the usual landmarks or signals could not be seen. In one instance, when a blockade-runner was feeling her way with the lead, on a dark night, just as she was nearing the bar a violent northeast gale suddenly arose. She did not have coal enough to put to sea again, so she anchored in five fathoms, which was as near the bar as was prudent. This brought her right in the middle of the blockading fleet; and occasionally during the night, by the flashes of lightning, she could see the men-of-war rolling and pitching around her. The moment daylight came she slipped her chain to run for the entrance. The bar was a sheet of foam. The surf breaking heavily entirely across the channel, she was in danger of foundering if she entered it; but the alternative was destruction by the enemy, so she kept right on, ran through successfully, and in a few moments was safe inside.

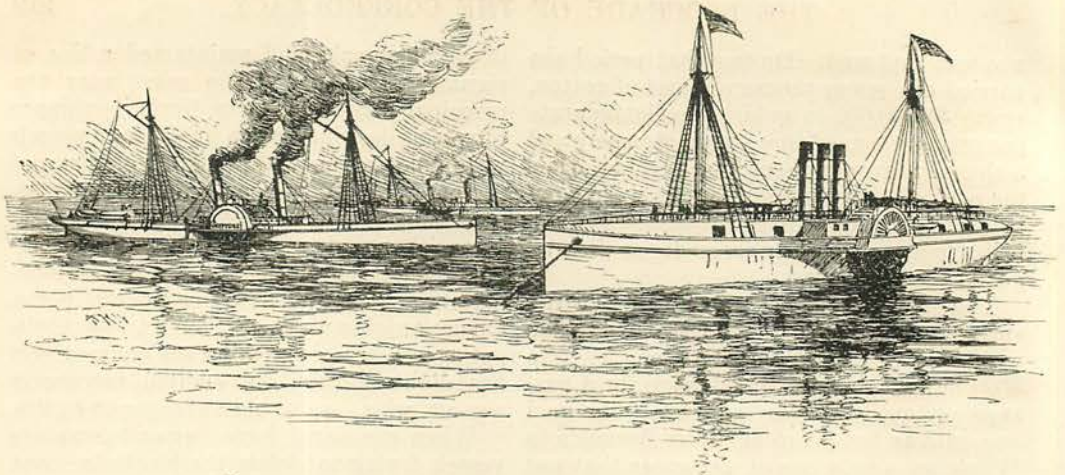
The Confederates contrived a regular code

of night signals, and maintained a line of signal-stations along the coast near the principal ports and inlets, for the guidance of vessels desiring to run in. If such vessels were able to run within signal distance of the coast, they could communicate, thus ascertaining their whereabouts and other facts essential to their success. This code of signals could be obtained from the British consul at Havana and at other neutral ports. On dark nights we used to run in toward the outposts, where, by making the conventional flash-light signals, we elicited responsive signals, which we would endeavor to utilize.

When our naval force began to capture vessels trying to violate the blockade, many of our navy officers were disinclined to claim prize-money, feeling that the natural tendency of so doing would be toward the obscuring of the higher and more becoming incentives to duty in a service that obviously called for the greatest endurance and would be very trying even to the best of men. Upon the capture of the first prize by our ship, Commander Bankhead and the ship's company decided that they would not send in a prize-list; but afterward, when it became manifest that blockade-running was to increase to enormous proportions and assume the character of a desperate kind of commercial enterprise, all began to feel that the little prize-money that could be made out of it was a well-earned compensation for the extreme hardships endured and the unusual efforts that became necessary to suppress the business.

During the war our navy captured or destroyed 1504 blockade-runners, besides causing many valuable cargoes to be thrown overboard by the long-continued and close pursuit of fugitives, who escaped capture by resorting to this expedient to lighten the vessels. A Confederate officer stated that all the approaches to Wilmington harbor were as thickly paved with valuable merchandise as a certain place is said to be with "good intentions." This assertion would apply to some other harbors.

The value of prizes captured was \$31,000,000. The most valuable prize taken was the English steamer *Memphis*, which brought \$510,000. She was captured early in the war by the steamer *Magnolia*. The captor was herself a prize-vessel that had been bought by our government and fitted out as a gunboat. The least valuable was a sloop captured by the gunboat *Tahoma*, called the *Alligator*, which brought \$50. Many of the most important prizes were taken by mere



DRAWN BY A. R. WAUD.

"Neptune."

"Vesta."

"Alliance."

TYPES OF BLOCKADE-RUNNERS.

chance, or when least expected; while many a long and hard chase resulted in the overhauling of an empty vessel, the cargo having been thrown overboard in the efforts to escape.

Before the refinements of the blockade-running system began, the men-o'-war as well as the contraband vessels were all painted the conventional black; but as black objects are readily seen on the water at night, the blockade-runners were soon painted various neutral tints. Our naval authorities at once caused experiments to be made with boats painted different colors. The tint that was least conspicuous under the greatest variety of conditions was selected, and called "Union color." It was a bluish gray; and a formula for its preparation, together with the necessary materials, was at once distributed among the blockading fleets. It was very difficult to see a vessel of this color.

On one occasion, when our ship occupied the eastern station off Mobile, an officer went in at nightfall with our first cutter to picket the beach channel, returning to the ship just before daylight, running off to her by compass and lead. It was very dark, though not a foggy night. Upon reaching the position where the ship had been left, not a man in the boat could see her. Just then the swash of the water round her propeller became visible as her stern rose on the swell, almost within hailing distance of the boat. It frequently happened that the presence of the blockade-runners was made known by the faint gleam of their wake in the darkness, when the hull and spars were invisible. Many thus betrayed were driven off or captured.

When our ship was ordered to the West Gulf Squadron, and had reported for duty to Admiral Farragut, we expected the usual official visit of inspection from him. Under the old usage, the flag-officer would inform the commander of a vessel that he would pay him a visit of inspection at a designated time; but Admiral Farragut did not follow this custom, and we awaited the ceremony of inspection until we concluded that it was to be omitted. One day our signal quartermaster reported that the admiral's barge was showing off from the flag-ship, and those on watch carefully noted his movements. The admiral passed our ship, going in another direction, then suddenly changed his course, ran alongside of us, and skipped nimbly over the side before the captain of the ship could be informed and get on deck in time to receive him. The admiral smilingly said: "Beat to quarters, captain, and I will inspect your ship." This was immediately done. The thoroughness and diligence of our executive officer was so great that everything was found as it should be, not so much as a rope-yarn out of place. This seemed to be as much of a gratification to the admiral as it was a cause of thankfulness to the rest of us.

The blockading service off the port of Mobile was difficult, because there were so many entrances to the harbor that could be used by the light-draft blockade-runners, while the blockaders were obliged to lie at a distance from the land, owing to the shoal water, as violent gales spring up very suddenly. Blunt's "Coast Pilot," in the edition in use at the beginning of the war, states that "those off Mobile should recollect the necessity of getting an offing as soon as there are

appearances of a gale on shore, as destruction is inevitable if you come to anchor outside Mobile Bar during the gale." Yet we maintained a fleet there, without the interruption of a single hour, for over three years. This was made possible by our having very staunch vessels, and using heavy ground tackle. Our ship rode out several southeast winter gales while lying at the inshore station just at the edge of the bar, and close to the breakers, which with an unbroken wall of foam entirely hid the shore from our sight. We would listen to their ominous roar, as our ship strained at her cables and labored through the foaming surges that swept by her, while we anxiously watched the drift lead to see whether her anchors held, and calculated how much more force she could resist before she would begin to drag. Once we shipped a sea that swept our decks and stove the bulwarks, but sustained no other damage.

Admiral Farragut cared as little for danger as any prudent man ever did; but in one of his letters written from the Gulf he says: "It is storming now. I suppose it is the true equinoctial gale, and these are the times that try the commander of a squadron. I could not sleep last night, thinking of the blockaders. It is rough work lying off a port month in and month out."

The admiral was usually considerate as well as cheerful, and even when obliged to be severe, he was apt to temper his sternness with some shrewd idea or oddity. Once a steamer was captured off Mobile, whose captain stoutly protested that he was not liable to capture, so he was taken on board the *Hartford*. The admiral recognized him as a person he had known before the war. He produced his ships' papers, claiming that he was bound on a voyage to Matamoros, and was therefore not liable to seizure. Farragut said: "If you are bound to Matamoros, what are you doing here off Mobile?" He replied that he had been blown out of his course. Farragut said: "Well, then, that settles it. I shall have to hold you for being guilty of such very bad navigation."

Soon after the establishment of the blockade off Mobile Bar, the Confederates were busily employed in putting in place a line of obstructions across the entrance to the bay. These obstructions and the torpedoes were constantly broken away or damaged by the storms, but were repaired or renewed, and were still in place when the fleet passed the forts and captured Mobile. The iron-clad ram *Tennessee*, constructed by the Confed-

erates at Mobile, was one of the most formidable vessels of her class ever completed by them.

The cruisers of the British and other foreign navies frequently visited the blockaded ports, entered the harbors, and examined critically into the sufficiency of the blockade. Of course, they usually communicated with the senior officer of the blockading fleet before entering port. The Confederate cruiser *Oreto*, or *Florida*,¹ was built in England for the Confederacy. She was the exact counterpart in appearance of the British men-of-war that had visited the blockading fleets, and owing to this circumstance she was enabled to run the blockade into Mobile by flying the British naval ensign, and manœuvring as if she were a man-o'-war intending to communicate with the fleet. This successful ruse caused the blockaders to be very anxious to catch her when she attempted to run out from Mobile.

A few months afterward we learned, from prisoners and others, that the *Oreto* was ready for sea, and would try to run out at the first favorable opportunity. Soon after, one of the severe storms called northers began to blow, during which, on the evening of January 16, 1863, we saw her spars standing out in bold relief against the northern sky behind Fort Morgan. The norther blew so violently that we were in doubt as to whether she would attempt to cross the bar. After dark, in obedience to orders, our ship ran in, anchoring at the entrance of the main ship-channel. We expected that she would come out when the tide was most favorable, which was about midnight. Most of the officers and men remained on deck, in spite of the violence of the gale. We watched and waited until long after midnight, but as the force of the gale had greatly increased, concluded that she was afraid to make the attempt; then those not on watch went below. Two of our officers and our signal quartermaster possessed unusual powers of vision, being able to discern objects at night when no other persons on the ship could see them. One of these, Ensign Chester, volunteered to take the watch. At about three o'clock in the morning he sent for the captain, saying he could see a vessel coming out. The captain, with the best glass, could see nothing, and being afraid of giving a false alarm, sent for Rogers and Seymour, the other keen-eyed men; and sure enough, they also were able to see the vessel coming out. The fury of the gale had somewhat

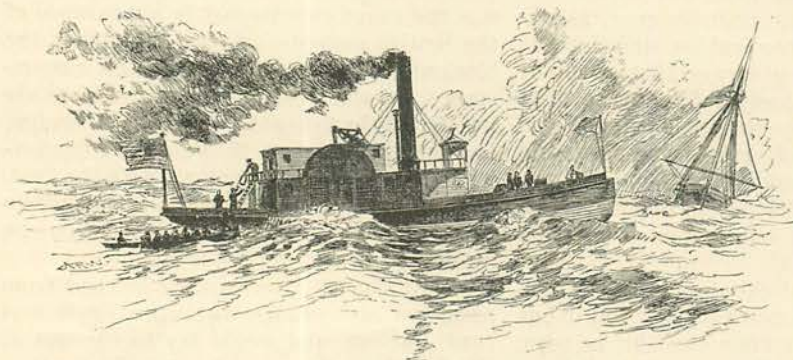
¹ See page 417 of the July CENTURY.—EDITOR.

abated, so we felt sure it was the *Oreto*. We immediately burned the Coston signal indicating "A steamer coming out," slipped our chain, hoisted our running lights, two red lights at the mizzen-peak, and ran in to head her off. By this time she was visible to all on deck, as her sails could be seen against the sky, though her hull could not be discerned. She changed her course so as to run across our bows before we could reach her. We were rolling so violently that we could

stack overboard. All the smoke-stack guys parted, but we rigged preventer-guys, which held. We returned to our station off Mobile Bar, where we subsequently learned from a captured blockade-runner that the *Oreto* escaped from the *Cuyler*, reaching the West Indies in safety. She attained a speed of fourteen knots while running out, which was greater than any of the blockading fleet was capable of reaching, except the *Cuyler*. In smooth water the *Cuyler* could have caught

her; but in the very heavy wind and sea that prevailed, the greater spread of canvas gave the *Oreto* the advantage—all of which had been carefully considered by Captain Maffitt before he ventured out with the *Oreto*.

About the same time an incident occurred showing the superiority of sail power over



DRAWN BY A. R. WAUD.

RECEIVING THE MAIL OFF MOBILE.

not cast a gun loose,—if we had, it would have gone overboard,—so we followed her. When her stern settled in the trough of the sea, we could see the light in her binnacle, which was the only light she carried. As she ran under the stern of the flag-ship, the latter fired her after pivot-gun at the *Oreto*; but the shot went through the *Oreto's* rigging, without doing any serious damage. The two fastest ships of the fleet, the *Cuyler* and the *Oneida*, had been detailed to chase the *Oreto* when she should come out, our written orders being to chase only in case of need, then to return to our station as soon as possible. We kept on after the *Oreto*, under all sail and steam, expecting the *Cuyler* and the *Oneida* to pursue her, as all knew that our ship could not overtake her. The *Cuyler* soon overtook and passed us; but as the *Oneida* did not appear, we kept on. Soon the pursuer and pursued passed out of sight in the darkness; but we still kept on, and at daybreak we discerned them, hull down, ahead of us. We could just see the tops of the *Cuyler's* smoke-stacks and the topgallant-sails of the *Oreto*. As it was useless for us to chase any longer, we started back for the fleet again. The gale had raised a very heavy sea. As we came into the trough of it in turning, we rolled away our main-gaff, and came near rolling our smoke-

stack in heavy weather, which resulted in favor of the blockaders. One stormy night in January, 1863, a large steamer tried to run by the station of the blockading steamer *Pocahontas* off Mobile Bar. The *Pocahontas* slipped her chain and got under way so quickly that she was enabled to intercept the stranger, who at once gave up the attempt, heading offshore, pursued by the *Pocahontas*. There was such a heavy sea running that the stranger found it necessary to keep before the wind and sea. This enabled the *Pocahontas* to use all her canvas, though under any other circumstances it would have been considered imprudent to carry so much sail. Her engines were driven to their utmost capability. The pursuit continuing during the night and the forenoon of the next day, her limited supply of coal was soon exhausted. Everything combustible, including furniture, doors, and bulkheads, went into her furnaces; then they began burning her provisions. The salt pork made steam so freely that she soon neared the chase, so that she could send a shell over her, when the stranger hove to, proving to be the British steamer *Antona*, a very valuable prize.

The outward-bound blockade-runners sometimes made use of cotton saturated with turpentine to keep up their steam to

the maximum, though they preferred anthracite coal, as it made less of the telltale smoke that betrayed their presence when the vessel herself was invisible. This hard coal they found it difficult to obtain; so they economized by limiting its use to the times when they were attempting to run through the blockading fleet. They would keep out of sight until they had run their steam up to the highest point, then make a dash at full speed through the fleet. For the rest of the voyage they would use the common British coal. The horizon was unremittingly scanned by watchful eyes on the blockaders, day in and day out, for indications of the suggestive black smoke. It happened several times that our ship saw steamers attempting to run past us in time to intercept them. On their putting to sea again, we would give chase. This was always at night, and usually when the weather was thick. We would pursue for hours, usually seeing enough smoke to be sure of the position of the vessel, though her hull could not be distinguished. The smoke would gradually increase in volume and distinctness, as if the pursued steamer were forcing her fires to the utmost; then we would do all we could to increase the speed of our ship. Suddenly we would come to the end of the line of smoke, drifting off to leeward. No more smoke and no vessel could be seen. We could only conjecture as to the course taken by the steamer, without being able to discover any trace of it.

We afterward learned from a captured officer that when pursued under such circumstances they would gradually increase the volume of smoke emitted from their smokestacks until it became quite dense, and then, when so far from the pursuer that their hulls and spars were invisible in the darkness, they would suddenly close their dampers, shut off the smoke entirely, changing their course to one nearly at right angles to that previously steered. This information convinced us that our conjectures as to the tactics of the steamers that had escaped us were correct.

Once when we intercepted a vessel just at the break of dawn, she ran ashore under a battery east of Fort Morgan. We steamed within five hundred yards of the beach, and destroyed her with percussion-shells, in spite of a continuous fire from the battery. Several blockade-runners were thus driven ashore and destroyed; one, the steamer *Ivanhoe*, was burned by the blockaders close under the guns of Fort Morgan.

One night when there was a fresh breeze

blowing we saw a schooner that had run in far to the eastward of the fleet to communicate with the shore by signals. We gave chase under steam and sail; but she was so fast a sailer, and could lie so much closer to the wind than we, that she gained steadily on us. There were only three persons in the ship who were able to see her, and they took turns in keeping their glasses on her all through the night. She was so entirely invisible to the rest of the ship's company that we began to think they must be mistaken; but when day broke, there she was, sure enough, right ahead. When the sun rose, the wind shifted enough to head her off a little; then we quickly gained on her enough to throw a shell over her from our Parrott rifle on the forecastle, when she hove to. She proved to be the schooner *Joe Flanner*. She had run the blockade sixteen times before. Her captain said that he usually ran out on foggy or dark nights by lowering his sails and drifting out with the current; that he had thus drifted past the flag-ship several times. He could see the large ship readily, but his low hull and slender spars were invisible to those on the flag-ship.

One of the vessels built especially to run the blockade was the steamer *Neptune*. Her paddle-wheels had feathering buckets driven by an engine powerful enough to propel a much larger hull. She was two hundred feet long, and very narrow. Her deck amidships was only three feet above the water. She was modeled like a race-boat, and in smooth water not one of our men-of-war could have caught her; but when she tried to run the blockade at Mobile, there was so much wind and sea that the superiority of sails over steam was again shown. She was pursued and captured by the steam sloop-of-war *Lackawanna*, a vessel having full sail power.

The blockade of Charleston, South Carolina, was maintained under greater difficulties than that of any other point. In winter that coast is subject to storms of great severity. Before the war, vessels that could not gain an offing in season were almost invariably driven ashore. We found in a Confederate newspaper a copy of a letter written in Europe by an old officer, a native of Charleston, wondering how it was possible for the Yankees to maintain their fleet so long on that coast, and expressing the belief that before long one of the old-fashioned gales would drive the whole fleet ashore.

The bar was a difficult one to blockade; for, in addition to the natural obstacles, the

active and skilful defenders of the harbor were so aggressive in the use of their torpedoes, torpedo-boats, and other novel devices that the calm weather brought more causes of anxiety to the blockaders than even the most violent gales. Through the long hours of the night watches the anxious officers and the alert lookouts were speculating whether they would next be called upon suddenly to contend with an iron-clad ram, a torpedo or torpedo-boat, or a swift blockade-runner at full speed. A good reason for this anxiety is found in the statement of General Gabriel J. Rains, chief of the Confederate Torpedo Service, who reported that they had destroyed fifty-eight of our vessels by torpedoes during the war.

The fleet at first kept about four miles from the land; but after the evacuation of Morris Island the ironclads remained inside the bar. There were vague rumors at the time of an attack on the monitors by torpedo-boats. In the book, "Recollections of a Naval Officer," by Captain W. H. Parker, an ex-Confederate, the explanation of this is given. He states that he was ordered to organize a fleet of torpedo-boats to blow up the monitors. He accordingly collected fifteen boats, with spar-torpedoes, and assembled them near Fort Sumter, awaiting the approach of darkness before starting out to attack the monitors. While engaged in preparing for the attack, an officer informed Captain Parker that the monitors were all leaving; and, to his surprise, he saw the seven monitors under way, crossing the bar going to the southward. They had been ordered by Admiral Du Pont to St. Helena Sound for repairs. Captain Parker goes on to state that, with the aid of Lieutenant Glassell, he then took his fleet of torpedo-boats through Wappoo Cut and the inland passages down to St. Helena Sound, intending to attack the monitors there; but just on the eve of his attempt his chief torpedo-man deserted to the enemy, so he gave up the plan. He adds that Lieutenant Glassell had been out several times in one of the torpedo-boats at night, trying to blow up the vessels of the fleet; but on every occasion he was discovered, making his hasty retreat necessary.

Our most discreet officers had doubts as to the prudence of keeping the monitors in the channel off Morris Island. It was confidently asserted by the foreign naval officers and the Confederate officers that they could not be continuously maintained there. But when Admiral Dahlgren relieved Admiral

Du Pont in the command of the South Atlantic Squadron, he made the attempt, and succeeded in keeping them there until they went up into Charleston harbor. It was, however, a very difficult thing to do. The channel was narrow, with dangerous shoals on all sides. The current swept across the channel diagonally; and when there was a strong wind against the tide, eddies or counter-currents were formed that increased the risk of running aground. The monitors were very hard to steer in a current. If an eddy gave them a sheer one way or the other, the rudder could not check them within the limited space to which they were restricted; consequently there were many narrow escapes from serious damage by grounding. During the heavy gales they were kept pretty well covered by the seas that broke over them. The enemy sent torpedoes of various designs at the monitors so frequently that it became necessary to surround them all with a heavy torpedo-netting of ropes supported by spars projecting from their sides. The sailors called them hoop-skirts.

Admiral Dahlgren was punctiliously exact in the performance of every detail of duty, in spite of wind or weather. Every Sunday the church pennant was hoisted on the flagship, and divine service held, all the officers and crew not on duty voluntarily attending, though frequently the deep tones of the reader's voice could scarcely be heard amid the roar of the elements or the jarring din of the heavy guns.

It had been found impossible for the outer line of vessels to stop blockade-running. Steamers would manage to slip in or out at every favorable opportunity. But the presence of the monitors enabled us to maintain a more strict blockade. There were two instances where the swift blockade-runners, when headed off by blockading steamers, deliberately tried to sink the blockaders by running into them. One of these was the *Chameleon*, commanded by Captain John Wilkinson. While running at the rate of thirteen knots, she tried to run down the steamer that sought to intercept her, the intercepting vessel barely escaping the intended collision by a dexterous manœuver. Another instance was furnished by the blockade-runner *Ella and Annie*. This steamer tried to run down the *Nippon*, which sought to stop her. When the captain of the *Nippon* saw that a collision was inevitable, he changed his course, so that the blow struck was a glancing one; then at the moment of contact he led a boarding party

over the bow of the *Ella and Annie*, capturing her and her crew.

The blockaders were in the habit of sending up rockets as signals when steamers tried to run in or out, the rockets being thrown in the direction in which the blockade-runner was going, so as to indicate the course to the pursuers. Very soon the Confederates procured rockets of exactly the same kind, and when the pursuers would send up the signal rockets, the pursued vessel would send up other rockets in the opposite direction, so that the fleet would be misled, even if the blockader who discovered the chase was not so thrown off the pursuit.

The increasing difficulties of evading the blockade made it necessary for the Confederates to establish a powerful signal-light on Fort Sumter. This, with beacons along the shore, enabled them to direct the movements of the steamers attempting to run in. So great was the vigilance necessary to prevent it that in one case a vessel was intercepted when the only indication of her presence was the passage of her slender spars across the line of the light on Fort Sumter.

One dark night the steamer *Georgiana* tried to run through the fleet. She was seen and fired into by the outer vessels; then a gunboat intercepted her. She stopped, showed a light, and hailed the gunboat, saying she surrendered. Upon this the blockaders ran toward her slowly, while in the meantime the *Georgiana* changed the direction in which she was heading, and before the gunboat could head her off again she suddenly started for the shore, but in her haste she ran on the bar. The blockaders tried to haul her off, but she filled so rapidly that she was set on fire and abandoned. The steamers *Presto* and *Celt*, and many others, were driven ashore or destroyed in a somewhat similar way.

The *Vesta* (see page 920), the longest and sharpest steamer we had ever seen, succeeded in running into Charleston. For months we could see her at anchor in the harbor, waiting for a good chance to run out. One morning, after a foggy night, we saw that she had disappeared, and concluded that she had slipped by us during the night. A few days afterward a coal-ship arrived at Port Royal, having picked up six men adrift on a piece of wreck. They were the survivors of the crew of the *Vesta*. She had been caught in a gale offshore, during which she broke in two amidships.

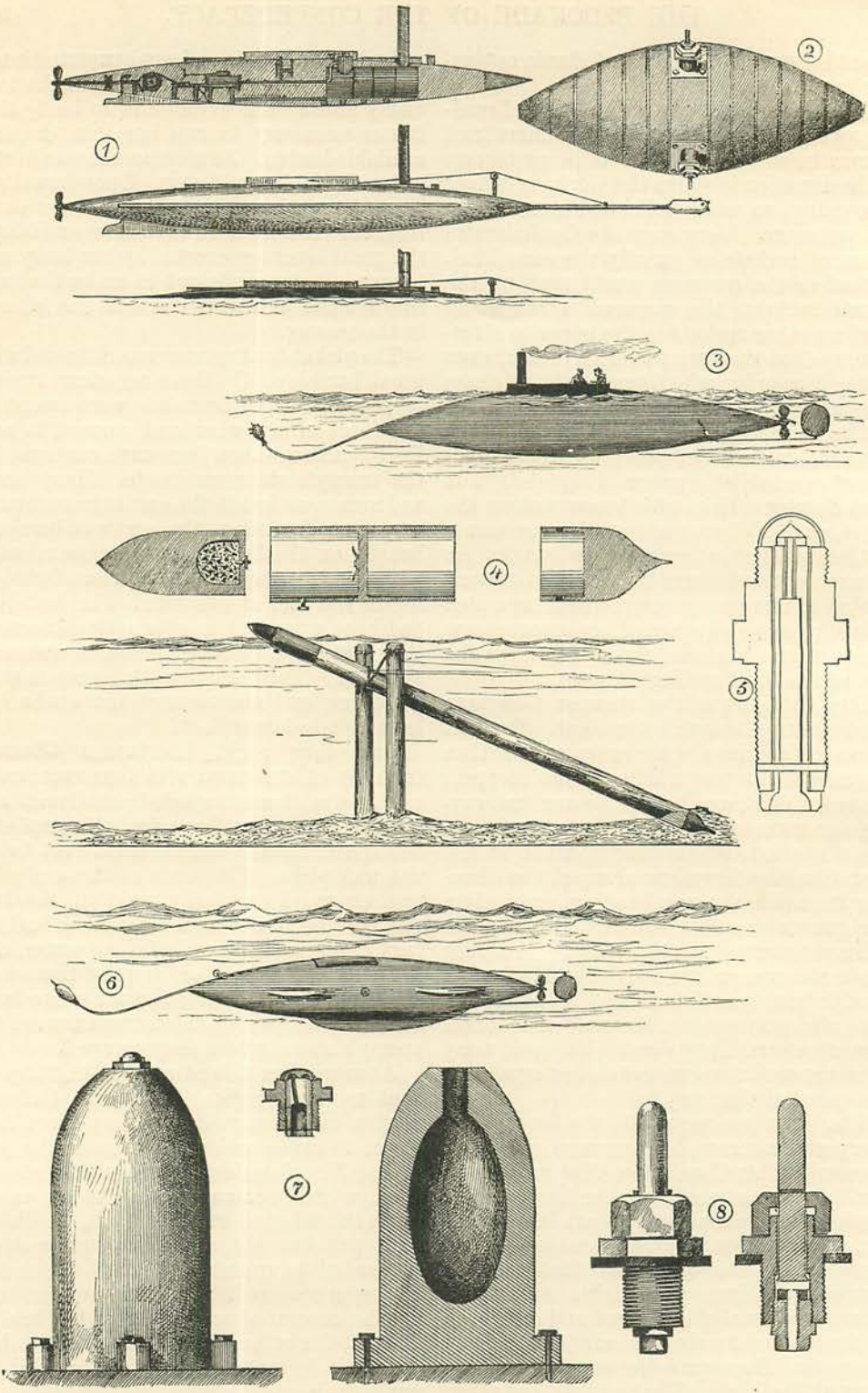
One of the swift steamers captured by us, called *Let Her Rip* by the enemy, was

named by us *Wando*, and was converted into a blockader. Whenever she was caught in a heavy seaway she would leak so badly that it was necessary to run her into the first available harbor. As soon as she was in still water the leak would stop. Upon investigation, it was found that the leakage came from the rivet-holes in her plates amidships, the great leverage exerted by her long, narrow ends being sufficient to make the midship seams leak at the rivets as she labored in the seaway.

The picket-boat service was attended with great hardship. On three occasions twelve- or fourteen-oared launches were swept by the force of the wind and current in past Fort Sumter, where they were captured by the enemy's steamers inside. Many boats and men were lost in the surf in crossing the bar. One day, when the sea was breaking heavily on the bar, there were four boats, with twenty-four officers and men, floundering in the surf at one time. The first boat had been swamped in attempting to cross; the other three went to her aid, but were all swamped. Then Admiral Dahlgren sent in his barge, and she rescued those who had been able to keep afloat.

One dark night Lieutenant Glassell, formerly of our navy, with four men, came out in the steam torpedo-boat *David*, and attacked the *New Ironsides*. He exploded a torpedo against her side, six feet below the water-line. The force of the explosion was expended vertically, so that the hull was not broken through. The *David* had her fires extinguished by the falling water, and her crew abandoned her. Two of them were captured; the other three swam to the boat, which was drifted by the current toward the enemy's shore, where they escaped.

As soon after this attack of the torpedo-boat as was practicable, some of the submarine divers were brought up from Port Royal to make an examination of the hull of the *New Ironsides*, to see what external damage had been sustained. At low water, when the tide had ceased to ebb, the divers' boat was brought alongside, and a diver descended to examine the hull where the explosion occurred. Finding no serious damage, he concluded to pass under her keel to look at the other side. Just after he had done this, he noticed that the ship had begun to swing to the incoming flood-tide, and was about to drift against a sandy ridge on the bottom of the channel. This would of course cut off his air-tube, as well as the hoisting- and signal-lines. With all the



DRAWN BY E. T. MEEKER, FROM SKETCHES BY HORATIO L. WAIT.

1. CONFEDERATE TORPEDO-BOAT "DAVID." 2. CONFEDERATE TORPEDO. 3. CONFEDERATE TORPEDO-BOAT, AS DESCRIBED BY A REFUGEE. 4. CONFEDERATE SPAR-TORPEDO. 5. FUSE OF A BARREL-TORPEDO FOUND IN THE ST. JOHN'S RIVER. 6. CONFEDERATE SUBMARINE TORPEDO-BOAT, AS DESCRIBED BY A REFUGEE. 7. CONFEDERATE VOLCANO-TORPEDO. 8. CONFEDERATE TORPEDO-FUSE.

speed possible to a man incased in submarine armor and encumbered with his gear, he instantly rushed for the quickly narrowing space between the keel of the ship and the sand ridge. He succeeded in getting his head and body under the keel in time; but his arm, with the lines and air-tube, was caught in the sandy ooze on the side of the ridge. By a desperate effort he wrenched them clear; then, giving his signal, he was hauled up, but with his arm so badly crushed that he was disabled for a long time.

One of the startling incidents of the blockade off Charleston was the sinking of the iron-clad monitor *Weehawken*, December 6, 1863. She had just returned to the fleet from Port Royal, where her hull had been cleaned and her stores replenished. Commander Jesse Duncan had taken command of her on the previous day, and was on board our vessel, receiving his final instructions from Admiral Dahlgren. During the forenoon a northeast gale began to blow; about noon, while we were at dinner on the flag-ship, the signal quartermaster reported that he thought the *Weehawken* was sinking. We all hurried on deck. There we saw the sea washing over the forward part of the *Weehawken*, breaking heavily against her turret. This was no unusual thing. The sea was even then washing over the decks of the other monitors. But we could see by the flag-staff at her bow that her deck was several feet lower than it should be, and was then steadily sinking. She was anchored abreast of our vessel, and distant only a few ship's lengths, so that everything done on her could be plainly seen. An officer who was with the signal quartermaster on her turret began to hoist the signal of "Captain needed on board"; but they hauled it down, and brought out and began to bend on the numbers for the signal, "Assistance needed." We read the signal the moment we saw the order in which they were about to bend on the flags, and hoisted our answering pennant. Immediately after the sea broke over the turret, driving them off. The admiral's barge, the first cutter, and the whale-boat, our only boats fit for such service, were immediately lowered; simultaneously all of the best sea-boats from the other ships of the fleet were lowered, and were dashing through the foaming seas toward the sinking ship with a quickness that was surprising, even when the extreme urgency of the case was considered. As the bow of the *Weehawken* sank, her stern was elevated until it was about twelve feet out of water. Then she careened to starboard until her deck was inclined toward us

at an angle of about forty-five degrees, when she sank out of sight. At the first alarm we saw the officers and men coming on deck through the few small openings that could be used to get up from below. A portion of them found refuge in her cutter, which was made fast at her stern. When the cutter was thus loaded with all she could carry, she was cast adrift. The rest of those left on deck sprang overboard to get clear of the sinking ship; they were nearly all picked up by the boats that went to the rescue, and brought on board our ship. The *Weehawken's* navigating officer was Lieutenant-Commander J. H. Read, formerly of Chicago. He kept afloat by clinging to a hatch-hopper until rescued; but he was afterward drowned, with Admiral Bell, in the surf at the mouth of the Osaka River, Japan. After the gale, when the divers examined the wreck of the *Weehawken*, they found that two of the crew had become jammed in the narrow hatchway below the turret, thus preventing the escape of the rest of the crew, who went down with the ship.

A submarine torpedo-boat, built of boiler-iron, was made by the Confederates to attack the fleet off Charleston.¹ She was to be worked by hand-power. Lieutenant Payne of the Confederate navy, with eight men, started in her; but she was swamped by the sea, and they were all lost. The boat was raised, refitted, and started a second time. She was again swamped by the sea near Fort Sumter. This time six men lost their lives in her. She was again raised, and a third attempt was made. She sank again, and all her crew were lost. After the lapse of some time she was once more raised. Then Lieutenant Dixon and eight men made a fourth attempt. This remarkable persistence in such a desperate undertaking shows the determined spirit of the men we had to contend with. Lieutenant Dixon ran out to the steam-sloop *Housatonic*, on the outer blockade, about nine o'clock at night. The officer of the watch saw a ripple on the surface of the water, that looked in the darkness like a moving plank. He slipped the chain, started the engine, and opened fire with small arms; but before the *Housatonic* could gather headway, Dixon exploded his torpedo under her, and she sank in twenty-eight feet of water. The torpedo-boat also sank—from what cause is not known. Captain Gray of the Confederate Torpedo Corps, in his report, wrote: "I am of opinion that she went into the hole made in the *Housatonic* by the explosion of the torpedo, and did not have power

¹ See also the June CENTURY, page 299.—EDITOR.

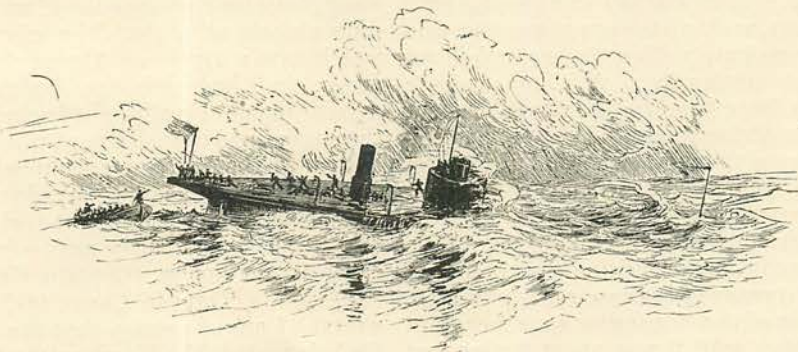
sufficient to back out, and consequently sank with her." But our divers, who went down to examine the wreck of the *Housatonic* some time after, found the torpedo-boat lying on the bottom, at a distance of many yards from the *Housatonic*.

The ordinary duties of the blockading operations were liable to be disturbed by numerous accidents or incidents, and no service ever required more foresight in preparation, or more perseverance in performance. The most careful precautions and sustained watchfulness were sometimes unavailing. On the night of June 3, 1864, the blockading steamer *Water Witch* was anchored inside the bar at Ossabaw Sound, below Savannah. The weather was so thick and hazy that objects could not be seen at any distance. Her boarding-nettings were up. There was steam enough on to work the engines, and there were the usual number of lookouts at their stations. An attacking party of about double the number of the crew of the *Water Witch* came down from Savannah in eight cotton-barges, commanded by Captain Pelot, formerly of the United States navy. At about three o'clock in the morning they drifted noiselessly toward the *Water Witch*, approaching within forty yards of her before they could be seen by the lookouts. The moment they were seen and hailed they dashed alongside. The engines were started ahead, but the ship did not gather headway soon enough to prevent the enemy boarding her. The crew went to quarters, and made the best fight they could under the circumstances; but being so largely outnumbered, and half of them—the watch below—asleep in their hammocks at the moment of the attack, the resistance was ineffectual. Some of the attacking party gained the engine-room, overpowered the

engineers, and stopped the engine. The few men who were not overcome retreated to the quarter-deck. The officers were all below, except the two on watch, and, rushing on deck, were obliged to snatch ship's cutlasses from the racks to defend themselves. Then ensued a hand-to-hand contest with cutlasses. Paymaster Billings of the *Water Witch*, who was an expert swordsman, killed Pelot; and soon after the captain of the *Water Witch* fell with three cuts on the head. The executive officer, Buck, fell, stunned by blows and loss of blood. The unequal contest was prolonged for fifteen or twenty minutes, by which time the boarding party had obtained entire control of the ship. The Confederates afterward ran the ship aground, as they were unable to get her out of the sound. She was subsequently destroyed.

This was simply an instance of a force stealthily surprised during thick weather and captured by overwhelming numbers. There were many cases to offset it, where our men, in very small force and in the face of vigorous opposition, accomplished important results. A notable illustration of this was the case of Lieutenant Cushing pushing eight miles inside the enemy's lines, in an open boat, and, in the face of a heavy fire of great guns and small arms, attacking and sinking the iron-clad ram *Albatross*.

In the war of 1812, as well as in our Civil War, officers who had been trained in our navy used the insufficient means furnished them with such ingenuity and audacity that they were enabled to overcome superior force well provided with the best-known appliances. It does not seem reasonable, however, that a prosperous nation like ours should presume on these facts, and rely on the extra personal efforts of individual officers in emergencies.



DRAWN BY A. R. WAUD.

SINKING OF THE MONITOR "WEEHAWKEN" OFF CHARLESTON, DECEMBER 6, 1863.