

Soldiers and Sailors Historical Society
of Rhode Island

Personal Narratives

SEVENTH SERIES, No. 1

Reminiscences of the Burnside
Expedition.

By WILLIAM H. CHENERY

[Late Sergeant Company D, Fifth Rhode Island Heavy
Artillery; First Lieutenant Company F, Fourteenth
Rhode Island Heavy Artillery.]

335ER-301-8 JS
10⁰⁰

PERSONAL NARRATIVES

OF EVENTS IN THE

WAR OF THE REBELLION,

COMPLIMENTS OF

WILLIAM H. CHENERY

THE

SAILORS

SEVENTH SERIES.—No. 1.

PROVIDENCE:
PUBLISHED BY THE SOCIETY,
1905.

SNOW & FARNHAM, PRINTERS.



WILLIAM H. CHENERY,
Private Company D, Fifth Rhode Island Battalion of Infantry.
[Afterwards changed to Fifth Rhode Island Heavy Artillery.]

Reminiscences of the Burnside Expedition.

BY
WILLIAM H. CHENERY,
[Late Sergeant Company D, Fifth Rhode Island Heavy Artillery;
First Lieutenant Company F, Fourteenth Rhode Island Heavy Artillery.]

PROVIDENCE :
PUBLISHED BY THE SOCIETY,
1905.

Reminiscences of the
Expedition

[Edition limited to two hundred and fifty copies.]

REMINISCENCES.

At the commencement of the Civil War, when the earlier regiments from Rhode Island were organizing preparatory for active service in the field, I became infused with the military spirit. In December, 1861, I enlisted in Company D, Fifth Rhode Island Battalion of Infantry.¹ My principal reason for enlisting in this company was that my old school teacher, Henry R. Pierce, at that time principal of the Woonsocket High School, had accepted a commission as First Lieutenant in this company. He was afterwards killed by my side at the battle of New Berne.

Pardon me if I make a brief allusion here to this gallant officer:

¹ This battalion was afterwards recruited to a full regiment, and changed to artillery, and known as the Fifth Rhode Island Heavy Artillery.

² A few moments before Lieutenant Pierce was shot he had been encouraging us by his own noble example of bravery saying to the men near him: "Boys, if you love your country, now is your time to show it!" Hardly had these words been uttered when the fatal bullet struck him and he immediately expired.

Lieut. Henry R. Pierce was a man highly esteemed in the community in which he lived. When his untimely death was announced in Rhode Island the following fitting tribute to his worth (from which I make a few extracts), appeared in the Providence *Evening Press*, of March 20, 1862, written by his friend and associate in educational labors, Capt. William A. Mowry, late of Mowry & Goff's Classical School, in this city, and now a resident of Boston, Mass.:

"Among all the memorials of the fallen brave, few will be read with keener sympathy by a large circle of friends, acquaintances, and admirers, than these lines, in commemoration of the high, social, intellectual and moral character of him whose name stands at the head of this article. He was no mercenary soldier. He was not one who entered the ranks of the army simply for *glory*. He fought not for *glory*, but for his *country*. He was not born a soldier, or educated as one, but entered the service from pure motives of duty, of patriotism, of love for law and liberty.

"Born in a rural town in the Green Mountain State, and educated at Amherst College, he had engaged in the quiet pursuits of science and literature, devoting himself to the noble work of the instruction of youth in our system of public schools.

"Laboring in different fields in Massachusetts at the head of several of her public high schools, by a generous, sympathetic nature, high social qualities, a mind well stored and well disciplined, a noble, active, benevolent spirit, by an earnest and laborious devotion to his chosen work, and a firm and bold adherence to what he thought was truth and right, he had secured the confidence and esteem of all, and the affection and strong personal attachment of large circles of more intimate friends and acquaintances. Nor had he done less in Rhode Island.

"For nearly five years principal of one of our largest and most important high schools, he had won for himself a large place in the hearts of Rhode Island teachers and friends of public schools.

"That he should be the only officer of his rank that fell in that fatal battle, shows that he was brave and faithful in the hour of action."

When I had fully made up my mind to enlist, I went to a friend of mine to induce him to go with me. He invited me to room with him that night. I accepted the invitation. With all the arguments in my power I earnestly urged him to enlist, and wrestled with him like one of old until nearly day-break, when he finally consented.

The next day we proceeded to the camp of the Fifth Battalion of Infantry on the Dexter Training Ground in Providence. We entered our names on the enlistment roll, and were speedily furnished with the uniforms which Uncle Sam provided for his soldiers, doffed our citizens' attire for three years at least, "unless sooner discharged," or, as the boys would have it, "unless sooner shot."

Immediately after my enlistment I was granted a furlough for the purpose of visiting my relatives and acquaintances before leaving for the front. I recollect visiting my aged grandparents in the town of Medfield, Mass. When taking my leave of them my grandfather gave me this parting injunction: "Don't get shot in the back!" He had been a captain of militia himself, and his father a captain of

minute men in the War of the Revolution, responding with his company on the Lexington alarm, and serving under Washington at the siege of Boston, and with such examples to encourage me I certainly had no excuse to turn my back to the enemy.

While encamped on the Dexter Training Ground our time was occupied in drilling and preparing for the stern realities of war awaiting us in the future. As I had not informed the captain of my company of the fact that I had acquired a little knowledge of the manual of arms and marching movements by reason of having been a member of the National Guards of Providence, an organization formed for the purpose of State defence or other emergency, I was assigned a place in the awkward squad. This position I accepted with good grace notwithstanding that only the evening before I had served as a corporal at a drill of the battalion of the National Guards held in the old Calender building on Sabin Street.

It is related that while here an Irish soldier in one of our companies, whom the boys had nicknamed "Dublin," upon his entrance into camp had

not been properly instructed in his duties. He was ordered out on dress parade with his company. When the command was given, "Without doubling, right face," which, according to the old Casey tactics, meant face to the right in two ranks instead of four, our comrade took a liberal construction of this order, and was proceeding towards his quarters when the captain shouted to him, "Here! where are you going?" The soldier replied: "And shure, captain, didn't you say, 'Right face, without Dublin?'"

Dec. 16, 1861, our battalion was mustered into the United States service. On the 27th we were reviewed by the Governor and staff. Tents had previously been struck and baggage packed. After the review the line wheeled into column, and the battalion marched to the depot, and immediately boarded the train, and proceeded on its way towards our destination, Annapolis. On arriving at Stonington we embarked on the boat for New York, reaching that city the next morning.

Crossing the ferry to Jersey City we boarded the cars and were soon speeding along towards the

"City of Brotherly Love." We arrived at Philadelphia after dark and marched to the famous "Cooper Shop," well known to every old soldier, and were bountifully supplied with refreshments for the inner man. As we marched through the streets to the Baltimore depot we were warmly greeted by the Union loving men and women of this patriotic city. On our arrival at Baltimore we proceeded to a building where a collation was provided for us. After our repast we again resumed our march for the depot, where we were to take cars for Annapolis. What a marked contrast this city presented to the one we had left a few hours before. Recollections of the warm(?) reception given to the Sixth Massachusetts Volunteers several months before were still vivid in our memories. Some of the individuals along the route did not seem particularly pleased with our appearance. One old lady appeared at an upper window like Barbara Frietchie, but unlike that patriotic dame she exclaimed: "I hope there won't one of ye come back!" There was no one of us so dull but comprehended by that remark what

cause our aged friend had espoused in the great conflict.

On arriving at Annapolis we encamped in the grounds of the Naval Academy. The troops that were assembling here were being organized into a Coast Division under the direction and command of Gen. Ambrose E. Burnside. It was composed of three brigades, commanded respectively by Generals Foster, Reno and Parke. It was surmised that an important expedition was to be fitted out to operate on the southern coasts, but its destination was simply a matter of conjecture among us, known only to General Burnside commanding the land forces, and to Commodore Goldsborough in command of the naval fleet.

While here our hearts were gladdened by the arrival of the Fourth Rhode Island Infantry. They came in the night, and our cooks immediately went to work and provided hot coffee and rations for our hungry comrades. Battery F, First Rhode Island Light Artillery, also joined us here, and we had occasion to remember this battery afterwards, for it was attached to our brigade in the Department of

North Carolina, and we say it without fear of contradiction that no better body of men ever took the field than "Belger's Battery," as it was familiarly called.

On the 5th of January, 1862, the troops assembled here began to embark on transports, but it was not until the 8th that the Fifth Battalion went on board the ship *Kitty Simpson*, Captain Hepburn, master. On the 9th we were taken in tow by a tug-boat, and proceeded to Fortress Monroe. Here we found a large assemblage of vessels. There were ferryboats changed into gunboats; old lake boats into transports; and not a few river boats appeared with extemporized portholes through which frowned a cannon's mouth. The guns of the rebel batteries on Sewall's Point could be seen in the distance.

On the 12th of January the fleet of gunboats and army transports set sail. As we passed out of Hampton Roads we saw the *Cumberland*, *Congress*, *Minnesota*, and other war vessels lying quietly at anchor, and little thought then of the fate that was to befall them a few weeks later in their encounter with the rebel ram *Merrimac*, nor how our gallant

little *Monitor*, the "cheese-box on a raft," as the rebels styled her, would prove more than a match for her great antagonist.

We proceeded on our way, enjoying the sail, and wondering where we were bound. Rations had previously been issued to us, and all went well until we began to feel the heavy swell of the ocean, and it was not long before some of our comrades began to experience what it was to be seasick. Several of them stepped or rather rolled to the rail and paid tribute to Old Neptune. I was inclined to hope that I might be spared that affliction. But it was not so to be. I was sitting on top of the cook's galley, making sport of my sick comrades, when a nauseous sensation began to creep over me, and suddenly without any warning, I deposited the remnants of my dinner on the head of a comrade on the deck below.

"A life on the ocean wave
And a home on the rolling deep"

had no charms for me just then. But this was only the beginning of the discomforts of this voyage.

When our vessel was well out to sea our sealed orders were opened and we learned that our destina-

tion was Hatteras Inlet. There was considerable apprehension about this time in regard to rebel privateers, and the United States gunboats were constantly on the lookout for them.

An incident which happened that night we quote from the *History of the Fifth Rhode Island Heavy Artillery*:

"The ship's watch was startled by the sharp hail of 'What ship is that? Where bound?' coming from what seemed to be a gunboat that had come unpleasantly near in the darkness. Captain Hepburn was on deck at the time, and he answered: 'The ship *Kitty Simpson*—bound south!' With an oath the commander of the gunboat replied, 'I want a better answer than that!' and he called his crew to quarters and lighted his battle-lanterns. 'If you have any right to ask that question you know my destination as well as I do!' was the reply of the sturdy captain of the *Kitty Simpson*. Then he shouted to his own crew, 'Clear away that gun forward!' adding to those standing near, 'If they fire, I will!' He had a four-pounder iron gun forward with which to fire signals. By this time the gunboat had come so

near that it was seen that she was one of the armed ferryboats that belonged to the expedition, and the officer in charge of her apparently became satisfied that the *Kitty Simpson* was not the looked for rebel privateer, and bestowing some unsolicited advice on Captain Hepburn about answering hails more promptly in the future, he soon drew out of sight in the gloom of the night."

The next day a violent storm arose and the vessels of the fleet became widely scattered. As we neared Cape Hatteras we found many of the vessels had arrived before us, and some of a light draught were securely anchored in the smooth waters of Albemarle Sound, while the larger vessels were not so fortunate, and were experiencing great difficulty in passing over the bar. Our vessel was one of the number. It drew too much water. During the night an unusually heavy gale sprang up from the northeast and continued until the 16th. The next day we threw overboard a large quantity of ballast in order to lighten the ship. As the wind had not abated it was decided not to attempt to enter the sound until the following day. In the forenoon of

the 18th the propeller *Virginia* came to take us over the bar. We had proceeded but a short distance when we found our good ship aground, the hawser from the *Virginia* parted, and she left us pounding away at every sea, and it seemed to us as if we were surely going to pieces. In near proximity to us could be seen the wreck of the *City of New York*, which had gone down but a few days before, and though the crew and passengers after long exposure within sight of the fleet inside the bar were saved, the vessel and most of her cargo were lost. Our situation was indeed critical, and, as one of our comrades well said, "It seemed like being deathly sick, with a graveyard right under the window."

Several tugs came to our assistance, and one of them took a hawser, but it parted, and still left us hard and fast aground. In the afternoon a steamer came as near our vessel as it dared in that rough sea. An aide of General Burnside (Col. Archie Pell) was on board. He shouted to Major Wright commanding our battalion and directed him to order his men to jump from the deck of the ship to that of the steamer. Major Wright had the good

sense to forbid any of us from attempting such a foolhardy act, for not one-third of our battalion could have succeeded in boarding the steamer. Another hawser was passed to us and Captain Hepburn succeeded in getting his vessel afloat, a line from the steamer was taken on board, and the ship was towed over the bulkhead into the channel, amid the cheers of our men and the troops on the other vessels inside the Inlet.

Our quarters on board this vessel were extremely disagreeable. Most of the transports were provided with bunks for the men. But on our vessel the different companies of the battalion were assigned to positions between decks, and so limited were our sleeping accommodations that we were packed together like sardines in a box. The old familiar saying, "as snug as a bug in a rug" was no comparison. We were compelled to lie down spoon-fashion with no room to flop over. There was no danger of our falling out of bed. The place was dark and stifling, and a few ship lanterns were all the lights we had. The only resemblance that I ever read of was the "Dark Hole at Calcutta." It

was as much as a man's neck was worth to go on deck to obtain a breath of fresh air, for it was impossible to step without placing one's foot on a comrade's head or some portion of the body, and then you would be greeted with expressions that sometimes were anything but polite. Some nights when the weather was fair, a comrade and myself would take our blankets and get under a small boat on deck, preferring to sleep in the open air, although it was mid-winter, rather than lie down in the close and stifling atmosphere below.

The expedition was delayed at Hatteras Inlet for several weeks. While waiting here our rations became scarce, and we were limited to three crackers a day and a small ration of salt beef. This was not a very encouraging state of affairs for men who were just recovering from seasickness. We were also allowed for water. Three pints a day were doled out to us, and if we desired any coffee we were compelled to fall into line, march up to the cook's galley, and empty out a portion of our ration of water with which to make our coffee.

On the 3d of February our battalion was transferred from the ship *Kitty Simpson* to the steamer *S. R. Spaulding*, where General Burnside had established his headquarters. Here, although we had no bunks, we had abundance of room, which you may well believe we appreciated. While on board this vessel I discovered and captured my first grayback. For fear that some of my hearers may imagine we mean a rebel, we will say right here that we do not. We dislike calling names, so we will spell it out, l-o-u-s-e! It was rumored that some of our men had found these creatures, but I did not learn until afterwards that it was a general complaint. Even the officers were not exempt. I soon found out that although I had a warm regard for my mother's sons, these little insects stuck closer to me than any brother.

While at the Inlet we often had an opportunity of seeing General Burnside as he moved about on the small gunboat *Picket* superintending the operations of the fleet of transports in their difficulties of entering the Inlet. Clad in his blue blouse and slouch hat his stalwart figure became familiar to us

all. His anxiety for the fate of his army was intense, and his solicitude and care for his men from that time on has ever endeared him to the soldiers of the Burnside Expedition and the Old Ninth Army Corps. And in the language of another we can truthfully say:

"Whatever record leaps to light
His never shall be shamed."

The object of our expedition was to attack the Confederate forces on Roanoke Island. This island is a barrier to the waters of Albemarle, Croatan, and Currituck Sounds, and if our forces captured that island the entire northeastern coast of North Carolina and the rear approaches to Norfolk and Portsmouth would be open to our invasion and conquest. The island was well fortified and manned. The Confederate forces there were under the command of Brig.-Gen. Henry A. Wise (formerly a Governor of Virginia), but owing to his illness at this time he was detained at Nag's Head, a narrow strip of land lying between Roanoke Island and the Atlantic Ocean, and the command devolved upon Col. H. M. Shaw, of the Eighth North Carolina Regiment.

On the morning of the 5th of February, 1862, the fleet, consisting of sixty-five vessels, moved in the direction of the island. The naval portion of the expedition, as has been stated, was under the command of Commodore Louis M. Goldsborough. Fifteen gunboats under the immediate command of Commander Stephen C. Rowan led the advance. Then followed the army transports, and the whole presented a spectacle such as had never before been seen in North Carolina waters. The next day was stormy and the fleet remained at anchor; but on the morning of the 7th the sun came out and Commodore Goldsborough ordered this signal hoisted: "This day our country expects every man to do his duty!" The gunboats being prepared for action moved towards the narrow entrance, scarcely more than two hundred feet in width, which is called Roanoke Inlet. It was supposed that the rebels had erected batteries to command this narrow channel, but the fleet passed through without meeting any opposition. As the Federal gunboats came within range fire was opened upon the rebel boats, and continued as the fleet moved up the Sound. The enemy's vessels soon re-

tired to the north, as if desirous that the attacking gunboats should be drawn within the fire of the rebel batteries near the northern end of Roanoke Island. Piles and sunken vessels obstructed the channel opposite the point where the batteries were erected in order to prevent the passage of the fleet, and to detain them under the fire of the forts. The rebel gunboats had passed these obstructions through another channel well known to themselves. Our boats did not attempt to pursue them but directed their fire towards the batteries. The principal one, Fort Bartow, was a strong work and armed with heavy guns. The fort replied vigorously to the fire of our gunboats, but the flag-staff was soon shot away, the barracks set on fire, and its walls of sand fell into a confused mass from the well directed fire of our guns.

While this bombardment was going on the transports passed safely through Roanoke Inlet into the sound. We could see the naval fight from our steamer. We saw General Burnside come upon the forward deck and proceed to observe the operations of the gunboats through his field glass.

The general was desirous of obtaining information concerning the most available landing-place for his troops on the island, and was fortunate in securing the services of a bright mulatto boy sixteen years of age named "Tom." He had escaped from his master on the island. He knew all about the island and the forts and forces there. "There were," he said, "The Overland Grays,' 'Yankee Killers,' 'Sons of Liberty,' 'Jackson Avengers,' and the 'O. K. Boys from North Carolina,' and others." He was asked if he knew of a good landing-place. "Oh, yes," he replied, "At Ashby's Harbor! I have been there many times!" He afterwards served as a faithful guide to our troops on the island.

About ten A. M. a detachment of men from our battalion commanded by Sergt. Charles Taft, of Company E, and under direction of Lieutenant Andrews, detailed from the Ninth New York to act as engineer on General Burnside's staff, were sent out to take soundings and reconnoitre for a suitable landing-place. They were accompanied by "Tom," the colored boy, as guide. They succeeded in landing and had proceeded but a short distance when

they were fired upon by a body of Confederates concealed in ambush, who rose up and delivered their fire into the midst of our detachment. Our men beat a hasty retreat to their boat, and then plied their oars vigorously until they were out of range of the enemy's fire. It was found that Corporal Charles Viall, of Company E, had been struck by a bullet in the centre of the chin, knocking out several teeth and carrying away a portion of the left lower jaw. Thus, Little Rhody had the honor of shedding the first blood from the land forces of the expedition. It is related as an instance of the grit of Comrade Viall, that when his wound had been properly bandaged he said to the surgeon: "Doctor! my face is spoilt for hard tack; isn't it?"

About four o'clock in the afternoon the fire from the Confederate batteries having slackened preparations were made to disembark the troops. Accordingly, about four thousand men from the several brigades of Foster, Reno, and Parke, were landed by means of light draught steamers, tugs, barges, and small boats. As they moved towards the shore the

scene presented was animated and striking beyond description.

It was the intention of General Burnside to make a landing at Ashby's Harbor, but when General Foster, who was with the advance detachment on the *Pilot Boy*, saw an armed force of the enemy with artillery at that point, he wisely changed his course and disembarked his men without opposition a little to the north of Ashby Harbor and in front of the Hammond House. Between this place and Ashby's lay a marsh impassable for artillery.

Each boat on approaching the landing-place seemed to vie with the others in its endeavors to be the first to land, and, as they grounded, the soldiers jumped overboard and waded through the marsh till they reached firm ground, and formed in a field near the Hammond House.

The Fifth Battalion landed in two detachments. The first went ashore about eight o'clock in the evening. Those of us that were in the second detachment laid down and made preparations for staying on the steamer all night. About ten o'clock we were aroused and ordered ashore. The *Union*

or *Wheelbarrow* as the soldiers of the Burnside Expedition will remember, was brought into requisition at this time. It was an old stern wheel steamer of light draught, that had made a long voyage (for such a craft), from the Kennebec River, and had arrived safely at the Inlet, and did good service in the subsequent operations of our expedition. The boys would have it that all that was required was a heavy dew, and it would then go wherever it was propelled. That night our detachment was transferred from the *S. R. Spaulding* to the *Wheelbarrow* and immediately started for the landing-place. On reaching the shore and disembarking, we endeavored to find solid ground for the soles of our feet, but like Noah's dove, we sought and found none. We stumbled and floundered through the mud and mire knee-deep until we reached *terra firma* and there joined the other detachment of our battalion. We laid down and endeavored to snatch a few hours' sleep, but a cold northeast rainstorm having set in made it an impossibility to do so. Towards daybreak I went to a well for the purpose of filling my canteen with

water, but before this was accomplished the long roll sounded and I hastened to join my battalion. We then heard picket firing on our front.

Nearly our whole division had landed during the night, and we were now ready to move upon the enemy. Our only artillery was six twelve-pounder boat howitzers, brought from the naval launches and commanded by Midshipman B. F. Porter. General Foster's brigade led the advance, followed by General Reno's. Our brigade under Parke was held in reserve in the early part of the action. The Confederates were entrenched in a strong earthwork in the centre of the island manned by a battery of three guns. The road approaching this battery being swampy and fringed with woods the march was slow and cautious. Soon we heard firing ahead, which to my mind resembled the popping of corn. This was followed soon after by the continuous roll and rattle of musketry intermingled with the roar of heavy guns. We then knew that our first brigade was at work.

To most of us this was our first engagement, and you could tell it by the stillness in our ranks. No

time or inclination for jokes now. The question has been often asked of soldiers: "How did you feel when going into battle?" I think the large majority of my comrades here present will say that they did not enjoy it to any great extent. It is my opinion that the men are few in number that can truthfully say they love the excitement of the battlefield. Perhaps Gen. Philip Kearny and some others may be exceptions to this rule. We can well appreciate the story told of the Duke of Wellington, who remarked of an officer who was leading a line into action, "He is a brave man!" "I should say," said an aide, "from his deathly-white face, that he is a coward!" "He is a brave man," repeated the duke, with emphasis, "He realizes his danger, and firmly accepts it. Such a man will always do his whole duty!"

It is related of a man in our regiment that he was accustomed to remark "That he had just as lives fight as eat," but I am informed that this astounding statement was made after he had retired from the service for his country's good, in consequence of a surgeon's certificate of disability. One of the big-

gest fellows in my company when on the Dexter Training Ground was wont to boast what he would do when he got into battle. He had an insatiate desire for gore then. I observed when the firing commenced at Roanoke that he was still as a mouse, and from what we saw of him afterwards he would have dropped out of the ranks then if he had dared. Probably he was not familiar with that passage of Holy Writ where it says: "Let not him that girdeth on his harness boast himself as he that putteth it off!"

Early in the action our battalion was formed in line on the road and awaited orders. As we stood there momentarily expecting to go into action the wounded began to pass by us to the rear; those more severely wounded being carried by on stretchers, while those who had received slighter wounds were passing by on foot. One of the sights I recall was seeing a first sergeant severely wounded borne to the rear on a stretcher. He lay quiet and motionless, and apparently dead. Such scenes as these are the severest ordeals to which a soldier can be subjected; to be compelled to stand silent in the

reserve expecting every moment to go into action, and yet not allowed to participate with his comrades on the firing line. If there is anything more trying to the nerves of a raw recruit I do not know what it is. The Fourth Rhode Island Infantry and the Ninth New York (Hawkins Zouaves) of our brigade passed us and we followed them. The first brigade under General Foster came upon the rebel battery about a mile and a half from the Hammond House. This battery completely commanded the road. For the protection of their flanks the enemy relied upon the swamps and underbrush on either side of the road, which they considered impenetrable. The Federal troops, however, did not halt on account of these obstacles. While General Foster was engaging the enemy directly in his front, General Reno came up with his brigade and struck into the swamp on the left, for the purpose of turning the enemy's right. Subsequently General Foster advanced two of his own regiments through the morass to the right of the road for the purpose of turning the enemy's left. General Parke's brigade next appeared, and the latter gen-

eral pushed his command forward to the right also. In consequence of the water and the dense underbrush the progress of the troops was slow; but finally, after three hours or more hard fighting, General Reno ordered his command to charge, and the appearance of a portion of Foster's brigade on the opposite flank, aided by the Ninth New York of Parke's brigade who charged directly up the road in front, the enemy were compelled to abandon their works, leaving their guns unspiked, the dead and some of their wounded in the battery. The colors of the Twenty-first Massachusetts and Fifty-first New York were the first to be planted in the rebel battery.

While this was taking place our battalion had been ordered to proceed to the Ashby House, and occupy the place. General Parke had also directed Major Wright to throw out skirmishers and hold this position, and if attacked he promised him that he should be supported. When we arrived at the Ashby House skirmishers were deployed, but resulted in finding no enemy. We had been here but a short time, when we heard cheering in the direc-

tion of the rebel battery. There was no mistaking the sound of that good old Union cheer. Who that ever heard that shout on the battlefield will ever forget it. We then knew that our troops were victorious.

After the Confederates had been driven from the battery our forces followed, and the pursuit was continued to the head of the island where the entire rebel force on the island had concentrated, and where, after a slight engagement, the rebels surrendered to Generals Foster and Reno. The force that surrendered consisted of 159 officers and over 2,500 men. Colonel Hawkins, of the Ninth New York, after taking possession of a deserted battery on Shallowbag Bay, captured about 60 Confederates who were seeking a chance to escape from the island by Nag's Head. We gained by this victory complete possession of the island, with five forts, mounting thirty-two guns and 3,000 stand of small arms. Our loss was as follows: 37 killed; 214 wounded; and 13 missing. I believe the Confederates reported our loss as over 900 or more in killed and wounded.

Soon after our battalion had taken possession of Ashby House it was converted into a hospital, and our Assistant Surgeon Dr. Albert Potter, was placed in charge. With others of my battalion I was detailed to proceed to the battlefield and gather up the wounded. This was by no means a pleasing duty. After the wounded had been cared for, we returned to the field to remove the dead. While engaged in this duty I had an opportunity to visit the rebel battery. Several of the Confederate dead were lying inside the works, covered with blankets. I remember that two ladies living on the island were there for the purpose of identifying their slain relatives, as many of the rebel soldiers who had taken part in the battle belonged to North Carolina regiments. This was, indeed, a sad spectacle, and one that can never be effaced from my memory.

We found some of our Union dead lying in the swamps with their bodies partially in the water. I have seen the swamps of Louisiana, but as I recollect now I do not believe they can compare with those of Roanoke Island. Owing to the marshy nature of the shore at our landing-place, not a horse

was landed during the action, and the general, staff, and field officers performed their duties on foot. Ammunition was carried to the troops by hand. We carried our dead comrades to their last resting-places. Very soon after the trenches had been dug for the bodies of our poor fellows, they commenced to fill with water, and as we lowered them into their watery graves the lines of the poet came to my mind:

“No useless coffins enclosed their breasts,
Nor in sheet, nor in shroud we wound them.”

Among the Confederate dead was Captain O. Jennings Wise, of the “Wise Legion,” of Virginia, and son of Gen. Henry A. Wise. He commanded the companies of skirmishers at the battery who were thrown out to resist our advance on the morning of the battle. He was shot while endeavoring to make his escape in a boat from the island. He was captured, however, and died the next morning, defiantly expressing his regret that he could no longer live to fight against the Union. He was buried on the island. His body was afterwards exhumed and conveyed to Richmond.

The occupation and victory achieved by the Union arms on Roanoke Island, greatly cheered the hearts of the loyal people of the Union, as it was one of the first substantial victories gained by the Federal troops in the early period of the war.

I cannot forbear quoting an extract from General Burnside's official report to the War Department:

He says: "When it is remembered that for two months our officers and men had been confined on crowded ships during a period of unusual prevalence of severe storms, some of them having to be removed from stranded vessels, others in vessels thumping for days on sand banks, and under constant apprehension of collision, then landing without blankets or tents on a marshy shore, wading knee-deep in mud and water to a permanent landing, exposed all night to a cold rain, then fighting for four hours, pursuing the enemy some eight miles, bivouacking in the rain; without tents or covering for two or three nights, it seems wonderful that not one murmur or complaint has been heard from them. They have endured all these hardships with the utmost fortitude, and have exhibited on

the battlefield a coolness, courage, and perseverance worthy of veteran soldiers."

General Burnside also caused this order to be published to the troops on the island:

"HEADQUARTERS, DEPT. OF NO. CAROLINA,
ROANOKE ISLAND, Feb. 9, 1862.

General Orders, }
No. 7. }

The general commanding congratulates his troops on their brilliant and successful occupation of Roanoke Island. The courage and steadfastness they have shown under fire is what he expected from them, and he accepts it as a token of future victory. Each regiment on the island will inscribe on its banner, "Roanoke Island, February 8, 1862."

The highest praise is due to Brigadier-Generals Foster, Reno, and Parke, who so bravely and energetically carried out the movement that has resulted in the complete success of the Union arms.

By command of Brig.-Gen. A. E. BURNSIDE,

LEWIS RICHMOND,
Asst. Adjutant-General.

The loss of Roanoke Island was a severe blow to the Confederacy, and caused bitter recrimination between Maj.-Gen. Benjamin B. Huger commanding the Department of Norfolk, and his subordinate, Brig.-Gen. Henry A. Wise, who had immediate command of the island. General Wise fully appreciated the importance and value of the position in a military point of view. He claimed that it was the key to the rear defences of Norfolk, and should have been defended at the expense of 20,000 men, and of many millions of dollars. He complained that General Huger and the War Department at Richmond ignored his appeals for aid in the defence of the island. He demanded an investigation from the Confederate Congress, which was granted him. The Investigating Committee of the House of Representatives concluding their report to that body, said:

"General Wise, finding that his written appeals for aid in the defences of the island to headquarters at Norfolk and to the Department at Richmond were neglected and treated with indifference, repaired in person to Richmond and called upon the

Secretary of War, and urged in the most importunate manner the absolute necessity of strengthening the defences upon that island with additional men, armament, and ammunition. The Secretary of War replied verbally to his appeals for re-enforcements that he had not the men to spare for his command.

"It is apparent to the committee from the correspondence on file of General Wise with the Secretary of War, General Huger, his superior officer, the Governor of North Carolina, and others, that he was fully alive to the importance of Roanoke Island, and has devoted his whole time, energies and means to the defence of that position, and that he is in no way responsible for the unfortunate disaster which befell our forces upon that Island on February 7th and 8th.

"But the committee cannot say the same in reference to the efforts of the Secretary of War and the commanding officer at Norfolk, General Huger. It is apparent that the island of Roanoke is important for the defence of Norfolk, and that General Huger had under his command at that point upward of

15,000 men, a large supply of armament and ammunition, and could have thrown in a few hours a large re-enforcement upon Roanoke Island, and that himself and the Secretary of War paid no practical attention to those urgent appeals of General Wise, sent forward none of his important requisitions, and permitted General Wise and his inconsiderable force to remain to meet at least 15,000 men, well armed and equipped. If the Secretary of War and the commanding general at Norfolk had not the means to re-enforce General Wise why was he not ordered to abandon his position and save his command. But, upon the contrary, he was required to remain and sacrifice his command, with no means in his insulated position to make his escape in case of defeat.

"The committee from the testimony, are therefore constrained to report, that whatever of blame and responsibility is justly attributable to any one for the defeat of our troops at Roanoke Island on February 8, 1862, should attach to Maj.-Gen. B. Huger and the late Secretary of War, J. P. Benjamin.

"All of which is respectfully submitted.

"Signed by B. S. GAITHER, *Chairman.*"

The only comment we have to make upon this report is, that it was not very difficult for the Confederate authorities to criticize and explain how all these matters *might* have been adjusted, but the fact remains that General Burnside and Commodore Goldsborough, with the forces under them, did whip the rebels out of a well fortified position, captured the larger portion of the rebel army there, and the Confederates never regained possession of Roanoke Island.

Late in the afternoon on the day of the battle a soldier from the Twenty-fifth Massachusetts, an old schoolmate of mine came to visit me, and brought with him a good dish of baked beans, which he had managed to secure from the vessel on which his regiment had been quartered. You may be assured that in my hungry condition the "old army bean" was appreciated on that occasion. This comrade of mine was afterwards a captain of colored troops, and at the Battle of the Mine, in Virginia, he was severely wounded and taken prisoner. He was subsequently exchanged and returned home, but al-

though of stalwart frame, he never recovered from his wounds, and died soon after reaching the North.

On the night of the battle at Roanoke I did not get much rest, having volunteered to stand guard at the hospital for one of my comrades who was completely exhausted and unfit for duty. This was one of the saddest tasks I ever performed, and as the cries and groans of the poor fellows inside the hospital resounded in my ears it greatly detracted in my estimation from the romance of war.

The next day several of us built a hut made of pine tree branches, and our couch the succeeding night was comfortable compared with what we had experienced for several weeks previous. We slept so sound that I believe it would have required a vast amount of shaking to have aroused us, we were so completely worn out with fatigue and loss of sleep.

We had been confined on shipboard and had subsisted on our simple rations of hard bread and salt beef for such a great length of time that when the battle was over the men could not be restrained from shooting every stray pig or chicken that came in their way. And the sweet potatoes! what a de-

licious flavor they had! As the song runs, they literally "started from the ground" at our approach. We found them buried in large heaps of dirt to protect them from the frost. In my boyhood days I was accustomed to read a book entitled the "Life of General Marion," of Revolutionary fame. It speaks of General Marion at one time dining with a British officer, where the bill of fare consisted of only baked sweet potatoes. If they had the flavor of those we confiscated on Roanoke Island, I can readily understand how the general and his guest made a full meal on that dish alone.

Our battalion remained at the Ashby House but a short time, and then proceeded to Fort Bartow, afterwards named Fort Foster, in honor of the gallant general of the first brigade, and entered upon our duties here as a garrison to the fort, and also performed guard service at the headquarters of both Generals Burnside and Parke. I recollect that my first tour of duty was as a guard at the headquarters of General Parke.

This distinguished officer served as chief of staff to General Burnside when he took command of the

Army of the Potomac. He participated in the movement of the Ninth Corps into Kentucky, and commanded it on the march to Vicksburg, arriving before the surrender. In the reoccupation of Jackson, Miss., he was in command of the left wing of General Sherman's army. In the East Tennessee campaign he was engaged at Blue Spring in the defence of Knoxville, and in the following operations against General Longstreet, after General Burnside resumed command of the corps, he led one of its divisions, and in the Richmond campaign of the Army of the Potomac he was engaged at the battle of the Wilderness and the combats around Spottsylvania, but was then disabled by illness until Aug. 13, 1864, when he resumed command of the Ninth Corps before Petersburg. He was brevetted major-general in the United States army for repelling the enemy's assault on Fort Steadman, and took part in the pursuit of Lee's army until it surrendered.

On the 19th of February a joint expedition consisting of the Fifth Rhode Island Battalion on our old friend the ubiquitous *Wheelbarrow* and three naval launches under direction of Captain Jeffers

of the navy, proceeded up Currituck Sound, for the purpose of reconnoitering the shores and destroying some salt-works that were reported in operation on the coast. We were soon steaming along in the quiet waters of the Sound. These waters have always been the resort of pleasure fishermen. The wild duck abounds here, and the officers and men would occasionally exhibit their skill by firing at them with pistols and muskets. Everything progressed favorably until we reached the "Narrows," where, owing to the shallowness of the water and the very narrow and crooked channel we ran aground.

The following account is given of this in the history of the Fifth Regiment:

"We thought our boat could steam over any part of the State in a heavy dew or on a wet day; but this crooked ditch of mud and sand held a better hand than the *Wheelbarrow*, and 'trumps to spare.' Every expedient that Yankee ingenuity and sailor skill could devise was made use of. Cables and anchors were carried out on shore, and we tried to warp around the bends. We moved backward and then we moved forward. The steamer's bow was

jammed into one bank, while the wheel at the stern threw up the thick black mud of the other. We got in so far that we had quite as much labor and trouble in getting out; and then we tried to go through with the launches, only to find that they drew more water than the steamer. Darkness coming on, we managed to get back into the Sound, where we cast anchor for the night."

Volunteers were called for to go ashore that night and destroy the salt-works. We lay down that evening expecting every moment to be called up and sent out on what we supposed to be a perilous mission; but our services were not required. It was ascertained later that the importance of the salt-works was very much exaggerated. A few iron kettles were found there, owned by different individuals, which had been used from time to time to boil down the sea-water to obtain a supply for immediate or local use. On our way back to Roanoke Island a landing was made on the main land, where we found a small schooner that had been used by the rebel troops to escape from Nag's Head on the day of the battle. We sunk the schooner and then continued on our way.

While on the island one of the soldiers of my company had a singular adventure. An unexploded shell which had been fired from one of our gunboats on the day of the bombardment was lying in the woods near our camp. This soldier thought he would have some fun with it, and so he did—more than he had bargained for. He saw some loose powder lying around but never dreamed that the shell was loaded. He thought he would startle the guard near by, and he would then laugh at his discomfiture. But the laugh was on the other side, as we shall see presently. He struck a match and the explosion which followed was deafening, making a deep hole in the ground. Our comrade was not injured in the least, but very much frightened. It was a ludicrous sight as he came running out of the woods towards our camp with his hands to his ears. Pieces of the shell went flying in all directions, and some were found in the camp of a neighboring regiment some distance away. It is safe to say our comrade never again meddled with loaded shells.

Many of the soldiers of the Fifth Battalion will remember when a detail was made one night to un-

load some sutlers' stores under cover of the darkness from a vessel moored to a floating wharf which extended a short distance out into the Sound. The men went out to the vessel and brought in all the provisions they could handle. A certain place on shore had been designated where the provisions were to be deposited. The men ostensibly unloaded their burdens at this place, but in reality not all the provisions were so deposited, for the next morning under the floors of many of the tents in the battalion might have been seen provisions and liquors sufficient to have stocked a good sized country store. Our major that morning found to his intense wrath and utter amazement a row of bottles encircling his tent, placed there by some of the wags of the battalion. If he could have found out who the culprits were he doubtless would have made it warm for those luckless individuals.

Our battalion remained on Roanoke Island about six weeks, and afterwards took part in other operations in North Carolina, which do not come within the scope of this paper.

