

GRAPHIC STORY... OF ONE OF THE MOST FAMOUS SEA FIGHTS

Encounter of the Ram Tennessee with Farragut's Fleet in Mobile Bay, as Described by the Tennessee's Surgeon.

From the New York Sun.

On the staff of Admiral Franklin Buchanan of the Confederate navy as fleet surgeon on the ram Tennessee in his fight with Farragut's fleet in Mobile Bay was Dr. Conrad, now of Winchester, Va. Dr. Conrad recently told the following story of the experience inside the Tennessee on that occasion:

The bay of Mobile was of infinite use and importance to the Confederates, who guarded and held it by two forts, Morgan and Gaines. By holding it they held safe the city of Mobile from attack by water; it could only be captured by a combined army and navy attack, so it was a safe depot for blockade runners, easy to go out of and enter, and if it was such to the Confederates, how much greater was it to the Federals? For they were compelled to keep their large blockade fleet outside, exposed to all the storms of the Gulf. They could only be victualled and watered by going away, one at a time, to Pensacola, their only port; their ships had to be transported to the same place and the wear and tear both to vessels and crews was fearful, as a constant, vigilant and never-ceasing watch, both by officers and men, had to be kept up day and night.

The officers were in three watches, the men in two, guarding themselves against night attacks by torpedo boats or assault by the Confederate gunboats and seeing that no vessel came out and that none went in. All this had to be done on the river above the captured and held by the fleet. This was finally determined on by Farragut, and he only awaited the arrival of ironclads to make sure his end. Finding this plan determined on the Confederates bestirred themselves. At the harbor of Selma, on the river above, they built one ironclad on the plan of the Merrimac, their resources being exhausted to do even this. Slowly the wooden structure approached completion, then more slowly was it ironed all over above the water line, then towed down the river, where it was equipped with 8-inch rifle guns.

Then, when officers and men, provisions and water had been taken on board, all ready for action, she started down the bay, nearly thirty miles, to go outside in rough water and attack the enemy's wooden fleet before the ironclads arrived. On arriving at the bar of sand caused by Dog Run emptying into the bay, it was found that the bar had shoaled to such an extent that the ironclad, now christened the Tennessee, drew three feet more water than there was under her. The only expedient that offered itself which was safe and speedy was to build of huge square timbers two enormous airtight tanks, each as high as a two-story house, and to have them towed alongside of the ram and sunk to the water's edge by opening the valves. Then, all lashed together securely, making one vessel, as it were, of them, the water was pumped out of these tanks and, air entering, they, by their buoyancy, lifted the huge ship clear of the bottom. Then steam tugs towed her over the bar. This was done in May, 1864.

Finally one day we were towed over the bar down the bay. Then, casting loose, we steamed out to attack the Federal fleet. Reaching the passage between the two forts, we encountered rough water and found that, owing to want of buoyancy, we were in great danger of being waterlogged and sunk by the amount of water that swept inboard. The ram lay deep in the water, solid and motionless as a cast iron platform or raft, and every sea tumbling over her came inboard in such masses that the fires in the engine room were nearly put out and the pumps of vessel itself filled with salt water. Discomfited, we got back under the fort in smooth water, and all thought of attacking the fleet outside was dismissed. Then the defects which this short cruise of ten hours had developed were looked into. Our engines had been taken from an old river boat. They were weak and would furnish only force us through the water about two miles an hour. They could not be strengthened by any method. The rudder chains, by which the ship was steered, were found to be exposed to the enemy's shot, being in the whole length outside the iron deck; they were covered over by a slight coating of iron rail. The capacity of the ram inboard to accommodate her crew was fearfully deficient. All officers and men when the weather admitted, slept outside on top of the iron shields and decks, but in rainy times it was awful to endure such close quarters at night. We wore it in June and July, under the sloping sides of the shield, in shape like the roof of a square house about twelve feet in height and forty-eight in length. On July 25 Admiral Buchanan and staff came aboard, for, from his information, a fight was imminent.

On Aug. 1, 1864, we saw a decided increase in the Federal fleet, which was then lying at anchor outside of Fort Morgan, in the Gulf. This reinforcement consisted of ten wooden frigates, all stripped to a "fighting" and clean for action, their topmasts sent down on deck and devoid of everything that seemed like extra rigging. They appeared like prize fighters ready for the ring. Then we knew that trouble was ahead, and wondered not ourselves why they did not enter the bay. On Aug. 3 we noticed another addition to the already formidable fleet—four strange looking, long, black monsters, the new ironclads, and they were what the Federals had been so anxiously waiting for. At the distance of four miles their long, dark lines could only be distinguished from the sea, on which they sat motionless, by the continuous volume of thick smoke issuing from their low smokestacks, which appeared to come out of the ocean itself. These smoke-looking craft made their advent on the evening of Aug. 4, and then we knew that the "rage of battle" was offered.

We had been very uncomfortable

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for many weeks on board the Tennessee, in consequence of the prevailing heavy rains wetting the decks, and the terribly moist, hot atmosphere, which was like that oppressiveness which precedes a tornado. It was, therefore, impossible to sleep inside, besides from the want of properly cooked food and the continuous wetting of the decks at night, the officers and men were rendered desperate. We knew that the impending action would soon be determined one way or the other, and every one looked forward to it with a positive feeling of relief.

At this juncture the enemy's leading vessel "backed water" and steered to one side, which arrested the progress of the whole squadron. But at this supreme moment the second vessel, Admiral Farragut's flagship, the Hartford, forced ahead, and Farragut, showing the nerve and determination of the officer and the man, gave the order: "Damn the torpedoes! Go ahead!"

"That's my lookout, sir!" And now began the second part of the fight. It may as well explain why he did this much-criticized and desperate deed of daring. He told me his reasons long afterward, as follows: He had only six hours' coal on board, and he intended to expend that in fighting. He did not mean to be trapped like a rat in a hole and made to surrender without a struggle. Then he meant to go to the lee of the fort and assist General Page in the defence of the place.

As she lay nearly motionless, her rudder having been shot away with grape in the fight. We knew that we were hopelessly disabled, and that victory was impossible, as all we could do was to move around very slowly in a circle, and the only chance left to us was to crawl under the shelter of Fort Morgan. For an hour and a half the monitors pounded us with solid shot fired with a charge of sixty pounds from their 11-inch guns, determined to crush in the "shield" of the Tennessee. Thirty pounds of powder was the "regulation amount." In the midst of this continuous pounding the port-shutter of one of our guns was jammed by a shot, making it impossible to work the piece.

You'll have to look out for her now; it is your fight." "All right," answered the Captain, "I'll do the best I know how." In the course of half an hour Captain Johnson again appeared below and reported to the Admiral that all the frigates had "hailed off," but that three monitors had taken position on our quarters. He added that we could not bring a gun to bear and that the enemy's solid shot were gradually smashing in the "shield," and not having been able to fire for thirty minutes the men were fast becoming demoralized from sheer inactivity, and that from the smashing of the shield they were seeking shelter, which showed their condition mentally.

The next morning, at my suggestion, a flag of truce was sent to General Page, commanding Fort Morgan, representing our condition, sending the names of our dead and wounded men, the great number of Federal dead and wounded on board, and asking, in the name of humanity, to be allowed to pass the fort and convey them to the large naval hospital at Pensacola, where they all could receive the same treatment. To this request General Page promptly responded, and we passed out, and in eight hours were all safely housed in the ample hospital, where we were treated by old naval friends in the warmest and kindest manner. Medical Director Turner was in charge, and we remained there until December, when Admiral Buchanan, being able to hobble around on crutches, was conveyed to Fort Warren, with his aides, and I was sent back to Mobile, in Capt. Jouett's ship under a flag.

Daily with the admiral in the hospital at Pensacola for four months he explained his whole plan of action to me of that second fight in Mobile Bay, as follows: "I did not expect to do the passing vessel any serious injury. The guns of Fort Morgan were thought capable of doing that. I expected that the monitors would then and there surround me and pound the shield in, but when all the Federal vessels had passed up and anchored four miles away, then I saw that a long siege was intended by the army and navy, which, with its numerous transports at anchor under Pelican Island, were debarking nearly 10,000 infantry. Having the example before me of the blow-

Continuation of the 'Encounter of the Ram Tennessee' story, detailing the battle's progression, the role of the monitors, and the final outcome of the engagement in Mobile Bay.