

Interesting Narrative of that Historic Event

ADMIRAL PORTER, THE AUTHOR OF THE NAVAL HISTORY OF THE CIVIL WAR. WITH THE STORY OF THE BATTLE OF HAMPTON.

The twentieth chapter of Admiral David D. Porter's Naval History of the Civil War, which is now in the hands of the printer, will be issued in May, in a form of profound interest. It tells in a rapid, stirring and yet thorough way, the story of the Confederate ram Merrimac's first appearance in Hampton Roads, her terrible work, including her destruction of the ships Congress and Cumberland, the fortunate arrival, in the night following that awful day, of "Erickson's Monitor," and the deadly grapple of the two giant iron clads on the day following. It is a narrative which will particularly interest the thousands of old soldiers who remember the alternate waves of despair or exhilaration which swept the land, as event after event of these contests were being belated, on which hinge, as he believed, the loss or recovery of the National Capital. Porter says: "While the Federal arms were so successful in the sounds of North Carolina, a great disaster overtook the Federal cause at Hampton Roads, filling the country with dismay, and even bringing to many of the Union people to doubt the success of the cause for which they had labored so hard."

Here follows a long detailed account of the construction of the ram Merrimac, from the hull of the S. Francis of that name, saved from the Norfolk Navy Yard conflagration, and an account of the building of the Monitor. The author, then Commander in the Navy, had been sent to New York to examine the Monitor, and had telegraphed the Navy Department: "This is the strongest fighting vessel in the world, and can whip anything afloat."

The ram Merrimac, sheathed with iron, was also of stupendous power, "a formidable vessel," was the author says. He continued: "On the 8th of March, 1862, the iron-clad (the Merrimac) got under way and proceeded down Elizabeth river, cheered by hundreds of people who crowded the banks, and who passed Craney Island and on through the obstructions, the ramps of the fort were lined with soldiers who shouted success to her until their throats were hoarse. Thus the Merrimac started off with all the glimmer of success, for there was no one on board who doubted that she could destroy the fleet then lying in the roads.

Buchanan and his officers knew the weak points of every vessel in the fleet, and the number and caliber of their guns. He knew that some of their shot could pierce the Merrimac and that he could choose his distance and fire with his rifled guns at the ships as if at target, should he think proper to do so. Instead of making it a "trial trip," as first intimated, Buchanan determined to make it a day of triumph for the Confederate Navy.

"At this time there was at anchor in Hampton Roads, off Fortress Monroe, the Minnesota, of forty guns, Capt. Marston; St. Lawrence, 50 guns, Capt. Purviance, and several army transports. Several miles above, off Newport News, lay the Congress, 50 guns, and the Cumberland, 30 guns. Newport News was well fortified and garrisoned by a large Union force.

"It was a beautiful day, following a storm. The water was smooth, and the vessels in the Roads swung lazily at their anchors. Boats hung to the swinging-booms, washed clean by the heavy showers, and it seemed as if an enemy was expected, and no one had, apparently, the least idea that the Merrimac was ready for service.

waves, and his gallant crew fighting to the last. During the whole war there was no finer incident than this, and the bravery of the officers and men of the Cumberland even won the applause of the enemy. "Of the Cumberland's crew one hundred and twenty-one were either killed outright or drowned, while, of those saved, a large portion were wounded.

"When the commanding officer of the Congress saw the fate of the Cumberland, and realized how little chance there was for him, he slipped his cable, set his foretop sail and endeavored to get closer in shore so as to have the assistance of the land batteries, but the ship ran ashore where she continued the unequal contest for more than an hour after the sinking of her consort; the Merrimac lying at a safe distance and bearing her through and through with her shells, and finally setting her on fire.

"Notwithstanding the heavy armor of the Merrimac, her loss in killed and wounded was twenty-one, showing the good use of their artillery made by the Union ships. The armor was, however, but little damaged by the shot, although the Confederates asserted that at one time they were under the fire of one hundred heavy guns afloat and ashore.

"Thus closed one of the most memorable days of the civil war, a day which carried gloom and sorrow to the hearts of all loyal citizens. The authorities at Washington were dismayed, and it appeared to those most familiar with the circumstances that this was the crisis of the union cause.

"All through the South there were scenes of rejoicing; bon-fires blazed on the hill-tops, and everywhere the Confederates expected that the next news would be the total destruction of the Federal fleet at Hampton Roads, and the advance of the Merrimac to Washington.

"The morning dawned clear and bright, and everything looked so calm and peaceful that it was hard to realize that two hundred and fifty men had the previous day given up their lives in defense of their flag in a contest hopeless from the beginning.

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