SIGNAL CORPS ASSOCIATION
1860 1865

Scribner's Magazine June 1881.

~ John Coddington Kinney A.S.O. ~

AN AUGUST MORNING WITH FARRAGUT

In the Department of the Gulf, as it was called, the year 1864 had passed with very few rays of sunshine for the Union cause. The only important military event had been the unfortunate attempt of General Banks to penetrate the Red River country to Shreveport, by the novel tactics of using his baggage-wagons as an advance guard. As a matter of course he was badly whipped, and the unhappy army wearily retraced its steps, while the soldier boys amused themselves with the refrain:

" In 1864 ~ We all skedaddlled from Grand Ecore."

The incidents of the advance and of the retreat, especially the latter, are worthy the pen, of a "modern Froude or Macaulay," and he will probably yet be found among some of the young, well-trained soldiers from New England, or in some Joaquin Miller or Bret Harte who was with the less-disciplined western men. After the army reached the Mississippi it went into permanent camp, a large portion of the troops were sent north to Sheridan, and affairs in the department became unusually dull and quiet. The only commander who had done anything worthy of special honor in that department, at any time, was Farragut, who had passed the forts below New Orleans, captured the city, and afterward had assisted General Grant to open the Mississippi. The soldiers in the department had endured hard and dangerous service, as difficult and as deadly as that of any army in the field, but owing to incompetent leadership, they had accomplished little in such results as would count in helping to suppress the rebellion. In important matters, like the taking of New Orleans, they had merely followed in Farragut's wake, and garrisoned the places, which the navy had captured. This, however, included nearly every southern sea-port, and, at the time in question, the only important point along the Gulf coast still held by the rebels was Mobile.

It was just after the Red River failure that I was detached from my regiment and ordered on duty with the Signal Corps, and my initiation into active work in this new branch of service was connected with the successful entrance into Mobile Bay.

On the morning of August 3rd, a steam-tug left New Orleans, having on board a dozen or more United States army signal officers and sergeants, with their detachments of two or three men each. They started with sealed orders from him who was lately known as "Old Probabilities," the lamented General Albert J. Myer, then in New Orleans as chief signal

officer on the staff of Major-General Canby, commanding the department. The orders, when opened, were found to contain instructions to report to the fleet tinder Admiral Farragut, then blockading the entrance to Mobile Bay. The command was in charge of Major F. W. Marston, senior officer, by whom assignments were made to special service. On the morning of the 4th, the fleet was reached, the command reported to the Admiral, and was at once distributed among the vessels of the fleet, as follows; - Major Marston and Lieutenant Kinney to the flag-ship *Hartford*, Captain Dencke to the *Brooklyn*, Lieutenant Adams to the *Lackawanna*, Lieutenant Dane to the *Richmond*, Lieutenant Jerome to the *Bienville*. Instructed non-commissioned officers were placed on the monitors and on the lesser wooden vessels.

The situation at that time was as follows: The Union fleet was riding at anchor in the Gulf, the wooden vessels being several miles from the forts at the entrance of the harbor. Mobile Bay is shaped somewhat like a funnel, gradually widening from the city to the Gulf, a distance of some thirty miles. The entrance is protected by a long, narrow arm of sand, extending from the main-land westerly, and having Fort Morgan on the extreme western point. Across the channel from Fort Morgan, and perhaps three miles distant, is Dauphin Island, a narrow strip of sand having Fort Gaines on its eastern end, directly opposite Morgan. A little further to the west is Shell Island, upon which stood little Fort Powell, commanding a narrow channel through which light draught vessels could enter the bay. A short distance out to sea, between Dauphin Island and Fort Morgan, and in front of the main entrance to the bay, is Sand Island, a barren slot, under the lee of which three of our monitors were lying. At the rear of Fort Gaines, General Granger had effected a landing, and had begun the work of laying siege to the fort. The army signal officers were sent on board the fleet, not with any intention of having their services used in passing the forts, but in order to establish communication afterward between the fleet and the army, for the purpose of co-operating in the capture of the forts. The primary objects of Admiral Farragut in entering the bay were, the moral effect of a victory, the complete closing of Mobile to the outside world, and the capture or destruction of the *Tennessee*; he also wished to cut off all possible means of escape from the garrisons of the forts; and to give his fleet, which had been tossed on the uneasy waters of the Gulf for many months, a safe and quiet anchorage. There was no immediate expectation of capturing the city of Mobile, which was safe by reason of a solid row of piles and torpedoes across the river, three miles from the city. Moreover, the larger vessels of the fleet could not approach within a dozen miles of the city, on account of shallow water. But the lower bay offered a charming resting-place for the fleet, with the additional attraction of plenty of fish and oysters, and an occasional chance to forage on shore.

It was the good fortune of the writer to be assigned to duty on the flag-ship, and his story will necessarily be chiefly of his own personal observations and experiences. On the afternoon of the day of our arrival, Admiral Farragut, with the commanding officers of the different vessels, made a reconnaissance on the steam-tender *Cowslip*, running inside of Sand Island, where the monitors were anchored, and near enough to get a good view of both forts. On the left, some two miles distant, was Fort Gaines, a small brick and earth work, mounting a few heavy guns, but too far away from the ship channel to cause much uneasiness to the fleet. Fort Morgan was on the right, one of the strongest of the old stone forts, and greatly strengthened by immense piles of sand-bags, covering every

portion of the exposed front. The fort was well equipped with three tiers of heavy guns, some of them of the best English make, imported by the Confederates. In addition, there was in front a battery of eleven powerful guns, at the waters edge on the beach. All the guns, of both fort and water-battery, were within point-blank range of the only channel through which the fleet could pass. The rebels considered the works impregnable, but they did not depend solely upon them. Just around the point of land, behind Fort Morgan, we could see that afternoon three saucy-looking gun-boats and the famous ram *Tennessee*. The latter was then considered the strongest and most powerful iron-clad ever put afloat; looking like a great turtle, with sloping sides covered with iron plates six inches in thickness, thoroughly riveted together, and having a formidable iron beak projecting under the water. Her armament consisted of six heavy guns of English make, sending a solid shot weighing one hundred and ten pounds - a small affair compared with the heavy guns of the present time, but irresistible then against everything but the turrets of the monitors. In addition to these means of resistance, the narrow channel in front of the fort had been lined with torpedoes. These were under the water, anchored to the bottom, and were chiefly in the shape of beer-kegs filled with powder, from the sides of which projected numerous little tubes containing fulminate, which it was expected would be exploded by contact with the passing vessels.

Except for what Farragut had already accomplished on the Mississippi, it would have been considered a fool-hardy experiment for wooden vessels to attempt to pass so close to one of the strongest forts on the coast; but when to the forts were added the knowledge of the strength of the ram and the supposed deadly character of the torpedoes, it may be imagined that the coming event impressed the person taking his first glimpse of naval warfare as decidedly hazardous and unpleasant. So daring an attempt was never made in any country but this, and was never successfully made by any commander except Farragut, who, in this, as in his previous exploits in passing the forts of the Mississippi, proved himself the greatest naval commander the world has ever seen. It was the confidence reposed in him, the recollection that he had never failed in any of his attempts, and his manifest faith in the success of the projected movement, that inspired all around him.

The scene on the *Cowsljp* that afternoon was a notable one, as she steamed along within range of the rebel forts. The central figure was the grand old Admiral, his plans all completed, affable and jolly with all, evidently not thinking of failure as among the possibilities of the morrow, and filling every one with his enthusiasm. He was sixty-three years old, of medium height, stoutly built, with a finely proportioned head and smoothly shaven face, with an expression combining overflowing kindliness with iron will and invincible determination, and with eyes that in repose were full of sweetness and light, but, on emergency, could flash fire and fury.

Next in prominence to the Admiral was the tall, commanding form of Fleet-Captain Percival Drayton, the man of all men to be Farragut’s chief-of-staff; gentlemanly and courteous to all, but thoughtful and reserved, a man of marked intellect and power, in whose death, a few years later, our navy lost one of its very brightest stars, and the cause of liberty and human rights a most devoted friend. When the State of South Carolina comes into full possession of its reason as a member of the Union, as it will some day,

it will honor the memory of Percival Drayton as one of its most illustrious sons. While he was always proud of his distinguished ancestry, he was a true patriot, who, in his love for his country, recognized no State lines and was swerved by no ties of kinship.

There were also the fire-proof Alden; Strong, whose name was an index of his character; Marchand, of excellent fighting memory; Stevens, fond of Shakspere and with a Shaksperian fondness for good things as well as for hard knocks; Mullany, soon to be robbed of an arm; Le Roy, Donaldson, Nicholson, Greene, and the younger but no less impetuous Jouett, Gherardi, McCann, Perkins and Watson.

As we steamed slowly along inside Sand Island, inspecting every hostile point, a rebel transport landed at Fort Gaines, and began discharging cargo. At a signal from the Admiral, one of the monitors, by way of practice, opened fire at long range, and, as the huge fifteen-inch shell dropped uncomfortably near, the work of unloading was stopped, and the transport suddenly left the last rebel transport that ever crossed the bay.

After completing the reconnaissance, and reviewing the monitors, the party retired to the flag-ship, where the final council of war was held. This was only noteworthy from the fact that it was here that Admiral Farragut was over-persuaded, by the unanimous solicitations of his captains, and gave up his original determination of taking the lead. This was very much against his own judgment, and the events of the next day proved that he was right. The Brooklyn, Captain Alden, was selected to lead, she being provided with an extemporized torpedo-catcher, projecting from her bow. The Admiral, in his official report, referred to the decision of the council, which was given because it was thought the flag-ship ought not to be too much exposed. He says:

> "This I believe to be an error; for, apart from the fact that exposure is one of the penalties of rank in the navy, it will always be the aim of the enemy to destroy the flag-ship, and such attempt was very persistently made, but Providence did not permit it to be successful."

After the council, and just before sunset, the *Richmond*, Captain Jenkins, arrived from Pensacola, escorting the ill-fated monitor *Tecumseh*, Captain Craven, arriving last at the field to be the first to die.

At sunset, the last order had been issued. Every commanding officer knew his duty, and unusual quiet prevailed in the fleet. The waters of the Gulf rested, for a time, from their customary tumult, a gentle breeze relieved the midsummer heat, and the evening closed upon us as peacefully as if we had been on board a yachting squadron at Newport. During the early part of the night, the stillness was almost oppressive. The officers of the *Hartford* gathered around the capacious ward-room table, writing what they knew might be their last letters to loved ones far away, or giving to friends messages and instructions in case of death. There were no signs of fear, but, like brave and intelligent men, they recognized the stern possibilities of the morrow and acted accordingly.

But this occupied but little time, and then, business over, there followed an hour of unrestrained jollity. Many an old story was retold and ancient conundrum repeated.

Old officers forgot, for the moment, their customary dignity, and it was evident that all were exhilarated and stimulated by the knowledge of the coming struggle. Captain Heywood, of the marines, proposed a final “walk-around”; Tyson solemnly requested information as to “Which would you rather do or go by Fort Morgan?” and all agreed they would prefer to “do”. LaRue Adams repeated the benediction with which the French instructor at the naval academy was wont to greet his boys, as they were going into examination: “Vell, fellows, I hope ye vill do as yell as I hope ye vill do.” Finally Chief Engineer Williamson suggested an adjournment to the forecastle, for a last smoke, and the smoking club went forward; but, somehow, smoke had lost its customary flavor, and, after a few whiffs, all hands turned in, to enjoy what sleep would come.

The gray glimmer of dawn was just beginning to struggle through a dense fog when we were roused, at three o’clock next morning, and the work of forming line was begun. A hasty lunch of sandwiches and coffee was served, the Admiral proposing to have breakfast inside the bay at the regular hour. The precautions necessary for maneuvering through the fog made an unavoidable delay, for it was the Admirals intention to have the fleet close to the fort before sunrise. It was a weird sight as the big ships balanced to partners, the dim outlines slowly emerging like phantoms in the fog. The vessels were lashed together in pairs, fastened side by side by huge cables; the *Brooklyn* and *Octorora* leading, the flag-ship *Hartford* and the *Metacomet* following. The remaining vessels were paired as follows, the one named first in each instance being on the starboard and most exposed side: - *Richmond* and *Port Royal*; *Lackawanna* and *Seminole*; *Monongahela* and *Kennebec*; *Ossipee* and *Itasca*; *Oneida* and *Galena*.

All the vessels had been stripped for the fight, the top-hamper being left at Pensacola, and the starboard boats being either left behind or towed on the port side. The Admirals steam launch, the *Loyal*, named after his son, steamed alongside the flag-ship on the port side.

In addition to the seven pairs of wooden vessels, there were four monitors, the *Tecumseh* and *Manhattan*, single turreted, with two fifteen-inch guns each; the *Winnebago* and *Chichasaw*, of lighter draught, with double turrets, and with eleven-inch guns. The monitors, being very slow-gaited, were started in advance, the intention being to have them on the right flank of the line, in front, to partially shield the fleet from fort and ram.

It was fifteen minutes of six o’clock before the whole fleet got under way, and it was just one hour later when the first gun was fired. About sunrise, while the line was being formed, a light breeze sprang up and scattered the fog, leaving us a bright and beautiful day, which on land must have been extremely hot. Indeed, it was found uncomfortably warm at sea before breakfast was served. The fleet presented a magnificent sight as the stately ships moved on, each with the stars and stripes flying from every mast-head, and the men gathered at their guns ready for work.

As the writer only designs giving the story of the fight as witnessed by himself, he has to refer here to an interval of twenty minutes, just as the fight opened, during which he was absent from the deck. On the previous night the Admiral had issued orders that the army signal officers were not to be allowed on deck during the fight, but were to go into the cock-pit on the lower deck and assist the surgeons. The reason assigned was that

these officers would not be needed during the passage of the forts, but would be wanted afterward to open communication with the army, and that therefore it would be a misfortune to have any of them disabled. The two officers on the *Hartford* disrelished this order exceedingly, and, after consulting together, decided that in the confusion of the occasion their presence on deck would probably not be noticed, and that they would evade the command if possible. In this they were successful until shortly before passing Sand Island and coming within range of Fort Morgan. Then the lynx-eyed executive officer, Lieutenant-Commander Kimberly, who, as they afterward discovered, never allowed anything to escape his attention, came to them very quietly and politely, and told them the Admirals order must be obeyed. We were satisfied from his manner that the surgeons had need of us, and, without endeavoring to argue the matter, made our way to the stifling hold, where Surgeon Lansdale and Assistant-Surgeon Commons, with their helpers, were quietly sitting, with their implements, bandages, and other paraphernalia spread out ready for use.

Nearly every man had his watch in his hand and waited for the first shot. To us, ignorant of everything going on above, every minute seemed an hour, and there was a feeling of great relief when the boom of the first gun was heard. This was from the monitor *Tecumseh,* at forty-seven minutes past six o'clock. Presently one or two of our forward guns opened, and we could hear the distant sound of the guns of the fort in reply. Soon the cannon-balls began to crash through the deck above us, and then the thunder of our whole broadside of twelve Dahlgren guns kept the vessel in a quiver. But as yet no wounded were sent down, and we knew we were still at comparatively long range. In the intense excitement of the occasion it seemed that hours had passed, but it was just twenty minutes from the time we went below, when an officer shouted down the hatchway: "Send up an army signal officer immediately: the *Brooklyn* is signaling." In a moment the writer was on deck, where he found the situation as follows: The *Brooklyn*, directly in front of us, had stopped, and was backing and signaling; the tide was with us, setting strongly through the channel, and the stopping of the *Brooklyn* threatened to bring the whole fleet into collision and confusion; the advance vessels of the line were trying to back to prevent a catastrophe, but were apparently not able to overcome the force of the current, and there was danger not only of collision, but of being drifted on shore.

Meanwhile, the almost stationary fleet made a splendid point-blank target for the fort and for the four rebel vessels, all of which were doing their utmost, giving us a terrible raking, making cruel havoc among the men, and ugly holes in the sides of the ships. Running to the forecastle, I took the message of Captain Alden of the *Brooklyn*, which was: "The monitors are right ahead; we cannot go on without passing them." Transmitting the message to the Admiral by an aid, he replied at once: "Order the monitors ahead, and go on." As the message was sent, the starboard bow-gun of the *Hartford*- a one-hundred-pound Parrott rifle, in charge of Ensign Whiting- opened fire on the ram *Tennessee*, and the great volume of smoke following each discharge hid the *Brooklyn* from view, and made it impossible to receive or transmit messages from that part of the ship, while the smoke from the other guns made it equally difficult from any other part of the deck. What the writer ought to have done, probably, was to have requested that the forward bow-gun be silenced until the signaling was over, but this did not occur to him at the time. Instead, as the smoke hung low in the air, he

thought it best to try and get above it, and accordingly ran up the rigging to the foretop. But the *Hartford* had a howitzer in her foretop, which was hard at work, under the management of half a dozen sailors, throwing grape and canister into the water-battery in front of the fort, and making it as difficult to signal here as it was on deck. So, not knowing what else to do, the officer kept on up the rigging to the top-gallant cross-trees, where there was just room to sit, holding on with the left arm around the peak of the top-mast. From this point, above all smoke, the scene was indescribably grand and terrific.

The fight was at its hottest. The Union fleet had reached the line, the crossing of which meant victory, and the result depended on the next few minutes. Just at this moment, to the horror of all, the monitor *Tecumseh*, a few hundred yards in the advance, seemed to stagger for a moment, then suddenly careened, and almost instantly disappeared beneath the water, carrying with her, her noble commander, Captain Craven, and one hundred and twenty officers and men, hopelessly imprisoned in their iron coffin. It has always been believed that she was sunk by a torpedo, although the rebels claimed that a shot from one of their heavy guns penetrated her armor at the waters edge and caused the disaster; the suddenness of her disappearance, however, can hardly be accounted for, except as the result of a torpedo explosion. The pilot leaped from the pilot-house, and some half-dozen men in the turret managed to jump through the ports, and were drawn down into the whirlpool made by the sinking ship. They were rescued by a cutter from the *Metacornet*. This boat, flying the Union flag, put out in charge of a little ensign (now Lieutenant-Commander Nields), and, regardless of the missiles flying in deadly showers, rowed up under the guns of the fort, coolly picked up the drowning men, and rowed back to the lee of one of the following ships. It seems, perhaps, an incident of little moment now, but in that day of brave deeds it was not excelled as an act of conspicuous individual bravery in obedience to orders.

During all this time the *Brooklyn* had failed to move ahead, and now she delayed to signal back the fact already too well known: “Our best monitor is sunk.” The message was sent to the admiral by an aid, Lieutenant Yates, and the brief answer was returned, “Go on!” But still, for some mysterious reason, perhaps fear of the torpedoes, perhaps misapprehension of orders, the *Brooklyn* halted, and the delay was every instant more threatening and dangerous. It was the decisive moment of the day. Owing to our position, only our few bow-guns could be used, while a deadly rain of shot and shell was falling on us, and our men were being cut down by scores, unable to make reply. The sight on the deck of the *Hartford* was sickening beyond the power of words to portray. Shot after shot came through the side, mowing down the men, deluging the decks with blood, and scattering mangled fragments of humanity so thickly that it was difficult to stand on the deck, so slippery was it. The old expressions of the “scuppers running blood,” “the slippery deck,” etc., give but the faintest idea of the spectacle on the *Hartford*. The bodies of the dead were placed in a long row on the port side, while the wounded were sent below until the surgeons’ quarters would hold no more. A solid shot coming through the bow struck a gunner on the neck, completely severing head from body. One poor fellow (afterward an object of interest at the great Sanitary Commission fair in New York) lost both legs by a cannon ball; as he fell he threw up both arms, just in time to have them also carried away by another shot. At one gun, all the crew on one side

were swept down by a shot which came crashing through the bulwarks. A shell burst between the two forward guns, in charge of Lieutenant Tyson, killing and wounding fifteen men. The mast upon which the writer was perched was twice struck, once slightly, and again just below the foretop by a 120-pound shell, from a Blakely rifle on the rebel gun-boat *Selma*. Fortunately the shell, which was about two feet long by eight inches in diameter, came tumbling end over end, and buried itself in the mast butt-end first, leaving the percussion-cap protruding. Had it come point first, or had it struck at any other part of the mast than in the re-enforced portion where the heel of the top-mast laps the top of the lower mast, this contribution to the literature of the war would probably have been lost to the world, as the distance to the deck was some one hundred feet. As it was, the sudden jar would have dislodged any one from the cross-trees had not the shell been visible from the time it left the *Selma*, thus giving time to prepare for it by an extra grip around the top of the mast. Looking out over the water, it was easy to trace the course of every shot, both from the guns of the *Hartford* and from the rebel fleet.

Meanwhile, the men were working the guns that could be used, as though the sight and smell of blood had sharpened their appetites. There was no skulking; in fact, there was no chance to skulk, if there had been such a disposition. They stood to their work, white and black side by side. There was no thought of social differences then; and whenever a shot was believed to have been well placed, the cheers of the men rang out above the roar of the guns. As our poet laureate, the Admirals secretary, Harry Howard Brownell, of Hartford, sang of the fight, in the most graphic and truthful description ever written of it:

> ”Never a nerve that failed,
> Never a cheek that paled,
> Not a tinge of gloom or pallor.
> There was bold Kentucky grit,
> And the old Virginian valor
> And the daring Yankee wit.
> * * * * * *
> There were blue eyes from the turfy Shannon,
> There were black orbs from the palmy Niger,
> But there, alongside the cannon,
> Each man fought like a tiger.
> One only doubt was ours,
> Only one fear we knew:
> Could the day that dawned so well
> Go down for the darker powers?
> Would the fleet get through?
> * * * * * *
> And ever the shot and shell
> Came with the howl of hell
> The splinter-clouds rose and fell,
> And the long line of corpses grew.
> Would the fleet go through?”

Happily for the fleet and for the country, there was a man in command that day equal to the emergency – a man whose eagle eye grasped every detail of the fight, while he possessed the skill to direct and the nerve and ability to execute. There was no time for doubt or delay. Had he hesitated, the fortune of the day must have been against

us. The Admiral was standing in the futtock shrouds, under the main-top, -a position above the smoke, from which he could take in the whole situation, and could communicate with the pilot in the main-top, and with the fleet-captain and executive officer on the deck beneath. For several years, there has been a discussion in the papers and magazines of the country as to the Admirals being "lashed to the rigging." The writer has no light to throw on the subject. Farragut was standing in the shrouds, as described, when the writer went on deck, and he remained there until the *Hartford* had passed beyond the range of the fort; but there were not more than two or three persons on board who knew anything about his being fastened in place. The first heard of it in the fleet was some three or four weeks after the fight, when the New York papers were received. Various rumors have been circulated as to the fact, one of which was that the Admiral took a ropes-end with him when he went aloft, and secured it so as to prevent his falling on deck in case of accident. This is the story which was current on shipboard at that time, and was generally believed. Since the incident has been under discussion in the papers the "real facts" in the case have been made known, and will stand in history on the unquestioned authority of Fleet-Captain Drayton and of Flag-Lieutenant J. Crittenden Watson, of the Admirals staff. This is to the effect that Captain Drayton, seeing the Admiral in the rigging, and fearing he might be killed by a fall on deck in case he were wounded, ordered an old quartermaster to take a ropes-end and secure it around him, so that he would be prevented from falling. The writer is disposed to believe that the Admiral was so absorbed in watching the fight that he did not know at the moment the precautions taken for his safety by his fleet-captain. But whatever doubt may attach to this particular incident, of which so much has since been made, while so little was thought of it at the time, there is no chance for doubt as to the Admirals action. Finding that the *Brooklyn* did not start ahead, he hurriedly inquired of pilot Freeman, in the main-top, if there was depth enough for the *Hartford* to pass to the left of the vessels in front. Receiving an affirmative reply, he said, "I will take the lead," and immediately ordered the ship "ahead fast."

On board a war steamer the engines are directed by the tap of a bell, the wires connected with which lead to the quarter-deck. One stroke of the bell means "go ahead"; two, "stop"; three, "back"; and four, "go ahead as fast as possible." Leaning down through the shrouds to the officer on deck at the bell-pull, the Admiral shouted, "Four bells, eight bells, SIXTEEN BELLS! Give her all the steam you've got." The order was instantly transmitted, and the old ship seemed imbued with the Admiral's spirit, and, running past the *Brooklyn* and the monitors, regardless of fort, ram, gun-boats, and the unseen foe beneath, dashed ahead, all alone, save for her gallant consort, the *Metacomet*.

As we ran clear of the fleet, we became the target for the rebel vessels which were lying across the channel in front. We were moving over what is called the middle ground, with shallow water on each side, so that it was impossible to maneuver the ship from right to left, for fear of running aground. Taking advantage of the situation, the rebel gun-boat *Selma* kept directly in front of us, where, in consequence of our projecting bow and our inability to turn, it was impossible to bring a single gun to bear on her, while she raked us, fore and aft, with terrible effect, doing, in reality, more damage than the rest of the rebel fleet. The two other gun-boats, the *Gaines* and the *Morgan*, were on our starboard bow, fighting in rather a timid manner; while the ram *Tennessee* made for us as

though intending to strike us amidships. At the same time, the water-battery and a portion of the guns of the fort had a fine chance at our side. To quote again from Brownell:

> ”Trust me, our berth was hot!
> Ah, wickedly well they shot!
> How their death-bolts howled and stung!
> And the water-batteries played,
> With their deadly cannonade,
> Till the air around us rung.
> So the battle raged and roared.”

We were now at the second period of the fight, when success seemed trembling in the scales. The *Hartford* and her mate had reached about a mile beyond the fort and the same distance in advance of most of the fleet, which were still under the guns of the fort. Had the ram kept on, it could have hardly failed to sink us, as our shot glanced harmlessly from its side, and we were unable, on account of the narrow channel, to move out of its way. But, for some reason, the rebel admiral changed his course, and made for the fleet at the fort. Perhaps the water between us was too shallow, or perhaps he thought us an easy prey for his leisure, and considered it more important to prevent other vessels from getting inside. Whatever the reason, his course was changed, and we were safe. Our greatest annoyance now was from the three rebel gun-boats, particularly from the *Selma*, which was handled with great ability. Three times Captain Jouett, commanding our light-draught consort, the *Metacomet*, the fastest vessel in the fleet, requested permission from the Admiral to leave us and tackle the *Selma*, but the Admiral replied “Wait a little longer.” But finally we emerged from the narrow channel into the deep water of the bay, and then the desired order was given. Already men had been stationed with sharp axes, ready to cut the cables which bound the two ships together, and the Admiral had hardly waved his hand to Captain Jouett before the ropes were severed, and, as the crew gave three hearty cheers, the *Metacomet* darted forward after the *Selma*. The latter did not care to wait, but endeavored to escape up the bay. A brisk chase ensued, but the *Metacomet* was too much for her adversary, and, when one of her shots wounded the captain and killed the first lieutenant, a speedy surrender followed, and in half an hour Jouett returned with the saucy little rebel in tow. Meantime, the guns of the *Hartford* had crippled the *Gaines*, and she was run aground near Fort Morgan, deserted, and set on fire. The other gun-boat, the *Morgan*, which had kept at a safe distance during the fight, retreated under the guns of Fort Morgan. And the great ram, after making an unsuccessful effort to sink or injure any of the Union vessels, and after receiving a heavier blow from the *Monongahela* than it had inflicted, also retired to the fort. The other vessels of the fleet, each with its own special record of bravery, followed the *Hartford* past the fort and joined us in the bay.

The roar of the battle was now over; the fleet came to anchor, and preparations were made to give the hungry men some breakfast. Those of us who had been perched aloft came down on deck, and, as if by a general understanding, the officers of the *Hartford* who could be spared from immediate duty hastened to the ward-room to ascertain how it had fared with their mess-mates. One, Ensign Heginbotham, of the Admirals staff, was mortally wounded. Lieutenant Adams was slightly wounded; all the rest had escaped unhurt. Of the crew, nineteen mangled bodies were lying in a ghastly

row on the port side of the deck, and some thirty wounded were being cared for below. The first thought was of wonder and thankfulness that of the eighteen officers of the ward-room but one was fatally hurt. Each had a story of marvelous escapes to tell, and there was a general and hearty hand-shaking, as after a long separation.

We were just beginning to feel the reaction following such a season of extreme peril and excitement, when we were brought to our senses by the sharp, penetrating voice of executive officer Kimberly calling all hands to quarters, and a messenger-boy hurried down to us with the word, "The ram is coming." Every man hastened to his post, the writer to the quarter-deck, where the Admiral and fleet-captain, were standing. The cause of the new excitement was evident at once. The *Tennessee,* as if ashamed of her failure, had left the fort and was making at full speed directly for the *Hartford*, being then perhaps a mile and a half distant. The spectacle was a grand one, and was viewed by the rebel soldiers in both forts, who were now out of range of our guns and lined the walls. Few audiences have ever witnessed so imposing a sight. The great ram came on for a single-handed contest with the fleet. She was believed to be invulnerable, and had powerful double engines by which she could be easily handled, while our monitors were so slow-gaited that they were unable to offer any serious obstacle to her approach. Farragut himself seemed to place his chief dependence on his wooden vessels. Doubtless the crowd of Confederate soldiers who watched the fight expected to see the *Tennessee* sink the Yankee vessels in detail, and the chances seemed all in. its favor. The Admiral wished to order the whole fleet to attack the ram, but to do this by the cumbrous naval code of signaling would occupy some moments of valuable time. It would be necessary first to send up to the mizzen-peak a signal-flag calling the attention of the fleet, and when this was answered (by each vessel sending up and hauling down a flag), a set of signals followed, each flag representing an arbitrary number, the meaning of which was ascertained by consulting the signal-book. The army signal service, on the contrary, consists in telegraphing by motions of a flag to the right and left, and is as rapid and instantaneous as sight, or the electric telegraph. So, while the quartermaster was preparing to send up the flags for the general order, the Admiral desired me to use the army code in starting the fastest and most formidable vessels. This hardly required as many seconds as the other method did minutes, with the advantage of saying precisely what was wanted. For example, the Admiral said: "Order Captain Strong, of the *Monongahela*, to run down the ram." The nearest approach to the message by naval signal would have been a special one, prepared and entered in the signal books for this occasion, namely: "Destroy the enemy's principal vessel by running her down"; which would have required precious moments to transmit and translate. The *Monongahela* was lying, with all steam up, on our port quarter, perhaps an eighth of a mile distant. Facing toward her, I made the letter "M", her call, which was instantly responded to by the signal officer on board, for every eye in the fleet was on the flag-ship, waiting for instructions. To send the message: "Capt. S. - Run down ram. - Ad. F.," took less than twenty seconds, and before the signal officer had finished acknowledging the message, we could see the *Monongaliela* moving forward, not waiting to raise her anchor, but slipping her cable. The same message followed to Captain Marchand, of the *Lackawanna*, and to the monitor. Meanwhile, the general signal, "Attack the enemy," had gone up to the peak of the *Hartford*, and there followed a

general slipping of cables and a friendly rivalry to see which could quickest meet the foe. The *Monongahela*, with her artificial iron prow, was bravely in the lead, and struck the rebel craft amid-ships at full speed, doing no damage to the ram, but having her own iron prow destroyed and being otherwise injured. Next came the *Lackawanna*, with a like eesult. The huge iron frame of the *Tennessee* scarcely felt the shock, while the wooden bow of the Union ship was badly demoralized. For an instant, the two vessels swung head and stern alongside of each other. In his official report, Captain Marchand naively remarks:

> "A few of the enemy were seen through their ports, who were using *most opprobrious* language. Our marines opened on them with muskets; even a spittoon and a holystone were thrown at them from our deck, which drove them away."

The *Tennessee* fired two shots through her bow, and then kept on for the *Hartford*. The two flag-ships approached each other bow to bow. The two admirals, Farragut and Buchanan, had entered our navy together as boys, and up to the outbreak of the war had been warm friends.(*) But now each was hoping for the overthrow of the other, and had Buchanan possessed the grit of Farragut, it is probable that moment would have witnessed the destruction of both vessels. For had the ram struck us square, as it came, bows on, it would have plowed its way half through the *Hartford*, and, as we sank, we should have carried it to the bottom, unable to extricate itself. But the rebel admiral was not desirous of so much glory, and, just as the two vessels were meeting, the course of the *Tennessee* was slightly changed, enough to strike us only a glancing blow on the port bow, which left us uninjured, while the two vessels grated past each other. He tried to sink us with a broadside as he went by, but only one of his guns went off, the primers in all the others failing. That gun sent a shell through the berth-deck, above the water-line, killing five men and wounding eight, the last hostile shot which has ever touched the *Hartford*. The muzzle of the gun was so close that the powder blackened the ships side. The *Hartford* gave the ram a salute from ten heavy guns, each loaded with thirteen pounds of powder and a solid shot, but the balls merely dented her side and bounded into the air. The scene on the Hartford during the moment of contact was of intense excitement. The Admiral coolly stood on the port quarter-rail, holding to the mizzen rigging, from which, at one time, he almost could have jumped to the deck of the ram. Flag-Lieutenant Watson, seeing him in this exposed position, secured him to the rigging by a ropes-end with his own hands; so that during the day he was "twice lashed to the rigging." As the ships came together, Captain Drayton ran to the bow of the *Hartford*, and, as the ram sheered off to avoid striking a square blow, he shook his lorgnette at it, and ex-claimed, "The cowardly rascal; he's afraid of a wooden ship!"

The *Tennessee* now became the target for the whole fleet, all the vessels of which were making toward it, pounding it with shot, and trying to run it down. As the *Hartford* turned to make for it again, we ran in front of the *Lackawanna*, which had already turned and was moving under full headway with the same object. She struck us on our starboard side, amidships, crushing half-way through, knocking two port-holes into one, upsetting two Dahlgren guns, and creating general consternation. For a time it was thought that we must sink, and the cry rang out over the deck: "Save the Admiral! save the Admiral!" The port boats were ordered lowered, and in their haste some of

the sailors cut the “falls” and two of the cutters dropped into the water wrong side up, and floated astern. But the Admiral, nearly as cool as ever, sprang into the starboard mizzen-rigging, looked over the side of the ship, and, finding there was still a few inches to spare above the waters edge, instantly ordered the ship ahead again at full speed, after the ram. The unfortunate *Lackawanna*, which had struck the ram a second blow, was making for her once more, and, singularly enough, again came up on our starboard side, and another collision seemed imminent. And now the Admiral became a trifle excited. He had no idea of whipping the rebels to be himself sunk by a friend. “Can you say, ‘For Gods sake’ by signal?” he inquired, “Yes, sir,” was the reply. “Then say to the *Lackawanna*, For Gods sake get out of our way and anchor!” In my haste to send the message, I brought the end of my signal flag-staff down with considerable violence upon the head of the Admiral, who was standing nearer than I thought, causing him to wince perceptibly, but I could not apologize until I finished signaling. It was a hasty message, for the fault was as much with the *Hartford* as with the *Lackawanna*, each being too eager to reach the enemy, and it turned out all right, by a fortunate accident, that Captain Marchand never received it. The army signal officer on the *Lackawanna*, Lieutenant Myron Adams (now pastor of Plymouth Congregational Church, in Rochester, N. Y.), had taken his station in the foretop, and, just as he received the first five words, the wind flirted the large United States flag at the mast-head around him, so that he was unable to read the remainder of the message. As he had found himself a target for the muskets of the marines on the ram, he concluded that the message was a personal one, directing him to get out of the top, and acted accordingly.

The remainder of the story is soon told. The ram was unable to strike a single one of the Union vessels, while the concentration of fire upon it tore away everything except the solid iron. First, the rebel flag-staff fell; then the smoke-stack was shot away, and finally a well-placed shot from the monitor *Chickasaw* broke the rudder-chain, so that the great ram would no longer mind the helm, and she lay like a huge monster at bay. Already a fifteen-inch solid shot from the *Manhattan* had crushed through the iron armor and let the daylight into her, and finally a shell exploded in one of her port-holes, and a fragment seriously wounded the rebel admiral. And then, up through the iron grating of her deck came a staff, bearing a white flag. The firing ceased, and from vessel after vessel of the victorious fleet rang out such cheers as are seldom heard and never forgotten - cheers which meant victory after a hard and very doubtful struggle. And, as the cheering ceased, a dim echo seem to come from below, where the wounded and dying, knowing the day was at last won, joined in the shouts of triumph, rejoiced that their sacrifice would not be in vain. So ended the fight.

(*) In a letter to the Hon. Gideon Welles, Secretary of the Navy, acknowledging the receipt of the official thanks of the Department and of the Government for the success at Mobile Bay, Farragut writes of Buchanan: He, though a rebel and traitor to the government that had raised and educated him, had always been considered one of its ablest officers, and no one knew him better or appreciated his capacity more highly than myself, and, I may add, felt more proud of overcoming him in such a contest, if for no other reason than to prove to the world that ramming and sinking a helpless frigate at her anchor is a very different affair from ramming steamers when handled by officers of good capacity. It is worth mentioning, that the officer sent in command of the guard for the captured *Tennessee* was Captain Heywood, of the marine corps, who was one of the survivors of the frigate *Cumberland*, sunk by Buchanan in Hampton Roads. Although a modest and unassuming gentleman, Captain Heywood could not resist the opportunity of informing the rebel admiral that they had met before, and that he, at least, was exceedingly glad of the second meeting.