

Before touching upon the part taken
by the Naval force in the reduction
of the fortifications at Roanoke
Island it will be interesting
to briefly review the contingent
of — what shall I call them?
war ships, but Craft which
the peculiar character of the
scene of operation placed
upon the Chief of the Navy Dept.
Not as much was known of
the inland waters of the N.C.
Carolina at our arrival
as was known upon our depart-
ure; but it was evident
enough that only vessels of
very shallow draft could
cross the "Backs" and "Swash".
There was not a vessel in
the whole navy that could meet
the requirement of the occasion, and
we were forced to buy right
and left for the vessels suitable
to the work in hand. You all remem-
ber was a sharp incursion made by

19

Considering the character of the vessels
which the exigency of the occasion
faced upon us we need not wonder
at the dismal prophecies foretold.
Well might soldiers and sailors,
too, look aghast as he gazed
upon what were apperitatively, if not
chicfully, characterized as coffins.
Our truth, there was far surer
chance of death by drowning
than there was of injury from
the shot and shell of the foe.
One can hardly but smile at the
notion of sending a modern
Ferry boat, built like an ad-
fashioned - meeting house, with
engines and boilers at the mercy
of any stray missile, and a large
to bombard a sand fort, with
the most invulnerable battery
incorruptible. And that the ferry
boat with its Saloon cabins
was a target for a blind man.
Our guns being mostly smooth bore
& 32 lbs we were obliged to get to
close quarters to make any fire
effective.

We pressed into use Ferry boats &
that timid people hardly considered
seaworthy for the dangerous trip from
N.Y. to Brooklyn: Tug boats of all
ages and fashions, side wheel
and screw; little coasting and
river steamers hardly fit to
voyage from Boston Cape Cod.
Thus strangely gathered together
this concourse flew set out
from its northern rendezvous
officers and men ignorant
of its destination, with sealed
instructions to be opened on the
high seas.

It was the lot of the Louisiana
& which I was attached, to command
one of the ferry boats, the
and I well remember the difficulty
that beset us when we encountered
the heavy sea in the neighborhood
of Nahant. Then times we found
our peace northwest facing list
the heavy seas would demolish a
craft so completely unfitted for such
encounters

8
The experience & a feeling of great
relief when we finally left the barrier
water of the Cape Astor of us, and entered
upon the passage of the inlet. With a
channel continually shifting the passage
through the channel was a task of no
ordinary difficulty to a pilot in
daily acquaintance with its varying
phases. Here we met our first
misfortune by running down the flanks
of another ship's anchor and hauling
a hole in a plate. We discovered
an accident when we found the
ship resting quietly in the sand.
But we found our troubles had only
begun. You all must have a lively
recollection of the severe storm that
came down upon us. A portion of the
fleet was still outside the beam with
several transports. As the storm progressed
in fury it seemed as if the expedition
was destined to destruction before
it had by the fury of the elements rather
than by the power of the enemy. Gloam
was every depicted in the faces of ashing
matchers matchers. On every hand could
be seen the evidence of the buffeting, our
were rearing, the water on all sides
was strewn with wreckage of every conceivable
kind. Signals of distress were flying

from two thirds of the fleet. On all sides of
suffering and want met the eye; and
the more fortunate were unable, by
reason of the heavy sea, to carry the
succor and relief so much desired.
It was amid such wild scenes
and in consequence of them that
confidence in our gallant com-
mander grew up in our hearts, and the
name of Burnside ~~was~~ ^{became} as dear
to us as to those ~~with~~ under his name
immediate command. Therefore
our faith in him grew stronger and
our pride in him grew stronger
as he led us on from victory to
victory.

The storm now all our energies
were directed to the work of repairing
damages, a work of no common
difficulty with the limited means
at hand. But our New England boys were
equal to the occasion and all hands
wonderful representations.
We faced our loss by the storm
to the

It had early been discovered that running
of our vessels drew too much water to pass
the Bulkhead and how to construct a
suitable channel was ^{unusually} not easily obtained.
Without dredging machines it seemed
an impossible task. It was found
however, that by running a vessel
firmly ashore at high water the rising
tide would speedily eat away
the sand from under her bottom and
thus by degrees deepen the channel.
By continuing this operation and the
frequent passage of craft with as
large a draft as possible a
passage was finally constructed that
would allow the fleet to proceed in its
way.

Battle of Roanoke Island

George Fearing Hollis Papers

1852 - 1903

MSS.0471

Box: 1 Folder: 19

**CIVIL WAR - Memoirs - Battle for
Roanoke Island, between 1862 and 1903**



Copyright: Public Domain

Use: This digital copy of the work is intended to support research, teaching, and private study.

Constraints: This work may be used without prior permission.