

How I apnd communication with Sherman's Army
and became a Southern Planter.

At the time when General Sherman was chuck-
mating the movements of General Hood in the region
about Chattanooga, he easily saw how useless and
unprofitable was the game, nothing decisive being gained,
^{and} wrote to General Grant giving details of his plan of splitting
the Confederacy, and outlining his probable course when he should
sever connections with his other base of operations and set out on
his famous and ever memorable march to the sea.

In this dispatch he said: "I must have alternatives *** I can
take as execute a course that no general can guess at my
objection. Therefore, when you hear that I am off, have lookouts
at Morris Island S.C.; Ossabaw Sound Ga.; Pensacola and
Mobile Bay. I will turn up somewhere."

How the people of the North held their breath when the news
came to them that he was really off reached them, and they
knew not where to look for his disappearance, or even if the
fortune of war would ever give him back to them is not yet forgotten.
I suppose the same thought has come to many of those who
were at the front during the stirring times of '61 to '65 that they
wished they could have been at home and participated in
these mingled feelings of elation and despondency which were
evoked by the varying events of those fatal years.

We, who were on blockade duty off the southern coast, could not
fully ~~know these happenings~~ ^{see these happenings} as the fitful flashes of our mail brought
us news in blocks and it was difficult to correlate what had
happened with what had been reported or hoped for.

The ^{Ship} to which I was attached was stationed in St. Catherine
Sound just below ^{Ossabaw Island} one of the objective points named in the letter
quoted from. She was a bark taken from the merchant service,
and

and was given a battery of four 32 pds. broadside, and a 6 pds.² howitzer on top-gallant forecastle and another abaft the deck cabin, and carried a crew of about 125 men.

We were the only ship on the station; but, the channel being narrow, she commanded the only route through St. Catherine Sound formed by the island of the same name on the south, near which she lay at anchor, and Ossabaw Island on the north. We had surveyed the channel and properly buoyed it, and occasionally ran out to sea for practice.

Like the crews of many of our vessels on blockade duty we were harassed and kept in a more or less state of nervous tension by the rumors that occasionally reached us of boat and torpedo flotillas being organized to compass our destruction. To guard against this we had constructed torpedo nettings by rigging out spare timber or fifteen feet long, connected by a rope through their outer extremities from which depended a strong rope netting; and this was always lowered at night. Many were the torpedoes the bright lookouts discovered which proved on closer acquaintance to be sea birds or other objects - greatly harmless, but which, nevertheless, served to rouse us out of our bunks and hammocks to man the battery.

St. Catherine Island was a thriving plantation before the war sent the owner with all his able-bodied slaves to the mainland leaving behind him a dozen or more men and women whose days of usefulness as slaves were passed. The various fields for the cultivation of cotton were separated by the finest groves of live oaks I have ever seen, and the planter's house and negro cabin were in good condition. Cattle and hogs that were left behind had run wild, deer were plenty and the island was a hunting paradise. There were several interesting characters among these deserted slaves particularly "Uncle" Cudjo, a centenarian and "young" Cudjo who was parish minister.

By the 10th Dec. 64 Sherman had driven the enemy's forces within the defences of Savannah, his line of investment reaching from Savannah river to the Ogeechee. The swampy nature of the land made an attack from the land side extremely difficult. Kilpatrick crossed ~~across~~^{by pontoon bridge} the Ogeechee river to reconnoitre Fort McAllister on the southern side of the river. From here he ~~must have~~ sent a dispatch to Sherman, after an inspection of the situation, asking permission to attack the fort with his division of cavalry, for Sherman's reply - in the blank half-page of which Kilpatrick wrote a dispatch for me to forward to the fleet at Assabaw Sound - ~~repaed.~~^{repaed.} his request for the reason that he couldn't afford any loss of his cavalry force and stated that he would send Hagen's division to make the assault on the fort. The burned bridge over the Ogeechee was replaced very speedily and Hagen's division crossed on the 15th of Dec. Sherman himself being at Chavis river with on the opposite side where a battery ~~of~~ was posted firing occasionally at the fort at long range. About noon of that day they saw from the inland ^{inland?} fire from the fort that Hagen had begun his operations. It was feared that the carrying of the fort would be difficult and perhaps delayed for, besides its armament of 22 pieces it was protected by gneous abatis and ~~and~~ the approaches minned with torpedoes. Just as Sherman had signalled Hagen that it was important that the fort should be captured that day one of our armed tugs of the fleet guarding the mouth of the Ogeechee with which Sherman at once opened communication by signals. As the tug signalled: "Is McAllister?" Hagen's men could be seen pouring over the parapet of the fort and the reply in the affirmation was not long delayed Sherman soon after crossed the river in a boat to the fort and there was rowed to the tug "Dandelion". In his dispatch sent that night he said: "I regard Savannah as already gained."

Head Quarters Military Division of the Mississippi,

Boston July 15.

1866.

Mr. Geo. F. Hollis -

Dear Sir - I have
rec'd your note of this morning. and
regret that I cannot see and talk with
you. Probably before the receipt of this you
will have learned that we are off for
Portsmouth N. H. I notice what you
state in regard to your part of operations
connected with Sherman's Campaign. If
you happen to be in N.Y. within a short
time please call and see me at my house
at No 19. West 26th St. At all events
write to me there and give me all you
facts and the evidence and I will
make note of the same.

Very respectfully

Your obt. st.

S. M. Bowman

NAVY DEPARTMENT

Office of Naval War Records,

Washington, May 26, 1891.

Mr. George F. Hollis,

U.S. Consul, Capetown,

South Africa.

Sir:

Your letter of April 21st to the Secretary of the Navy, referring to your having been the first to communicate with General Sherman's army before the capture of Fort McAllister, and asking whether such a fact is on record in the Department, has been sent to me for search and reply.

I find a report from Admiral Dahlgren from which it appears that he had been in communication with General Sherman previous to the date you mention. The log book of the Fernandina has been consulted and shows the date of your leaving her, apparently for the purpose mentioned in your letter, although it is not distinctly so stated.

There is no report from your commanding officer in regard to it.

I enclose you copies of the documents referred to.

Respectfully,

J.M. Wise

Flag-Steamer Philadelphia,

Port Royal Harbor, S.C., December 12, 1864.

Sir: It is my happiness to apprise the department that General Sherman, with his army, is near Savannah, and I am in communication with him. In view of his probable arrival, I had stationed several steamers at different points, and have come down from the Tulifinny yesterday in order to be at hand. I had not to wait many hours.

This morning, about 8 o'clock, the Dandelion arrived ~~with~~ Captain Duncan and two scouts, Sergeant Myron J. Emmick, and George W. Quimby, bearing the following lines from General Howard:

Headquarters Department of Army of Tennessee,

Near Savannah Canal Georgia.

Sit: We have met with perfect success thus far. Troops in fine spirits and near by.

Respectfully,

O.O.Howard,

Major General, Commanding.

Commander U.S.Naval Forces,

In vicinity of Savannah, Georgia."

Captain Duncan states that our forces were in contact with the rebels a few miles outside of Savannah. He says they are not in want of anything.

Perhaps no event could give greater satisfaction to the

country than that which I announce, and I beg leave to congratulate the United States government on its occurrence.

It may perhaps, be exceeding my province, but I cannot refrain from expressing the ~~hope~~ that the department will commend Captain Duncan and his companions to the honorable Secretary of War for some mark of approbation for the success in establishing communication between General Sherman and the fleet. It was an enterprise that required both skill and courage.

servant,
I have the honor to be, very respectfully, your obedient
J.A.Dahlgren,

Rear-Admiral,

Commanding S.A. Blockading Squadron.

Hon. Gideon Wells,

Secretary of the Navy.

Extract from the log book of the U.S. bark Fernandina,
Commanded by Acting Master Lewis West.

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Monday, Dec. 12, 1864. At 6 p.m. the 1st and 3d cutters, with armed crews, in charge of Acting Master Geo. F. Hollis and Acting Master's Mate, W.C. King, left the ship on a reconnoitering expedition.

Tuesday, Dec. 13, 1864. At 7 a.m. the 1st and 3d cutters returned. From meridian to 4 p.m. Seven U.S. army officers came from Kilkenny to Ossabaw Point. 2d cutter, B.H. Chadwick in charge, was sent to communicate with them. All went back to Kilkenny at 2 p.m. At 3:30 p.m. 1st cutter Acting Master Geo. F. Hollis in charge, left the ship for Kilkenny. At 8 p.m. the 1st cutter, Acting Ensign B.H. Chadwick in charge, returned to the ship.

Wednesday, Dec. 14, 1864. From 8 to meridian. 1st cutter in charge of Acting Ensign C. Sawyer. left for Ossabaw with despatches. 1st cutter, Acting Master G.F. Hollis, returned to the ship.

U.S. Fernandina
St. Catherine's Island, Ga., March 1st 1865

Sir:

I have the honor to submit the following Monthly Report of the condition and efficiency of this vessel:

The ship continues tight and makes no water.

Her upper works are quite rotten as has been previously reported; but the progress of the rot is slow.

Our sails have remained bent and exposed to the weather all winter; and the heavy sails - topsails and courses - can not be considered trustworthily; they will, however, answer for summer weather.

By the arrival of a draft of twenty \$20 men per U.S. Massachusetts, the ship is now placed on an efficient footing. The men appear strong and healthy.

The sanitary condition of the ship is,

and has been, most excellent. The
Surgeon has no cases on his list.

The tender "Lightning" has arrived
and will prove a great convenience.
I am building a road across the
island so as to communicate more
readily with the "Padona".

I have the honor to be
very respectfully

Your ob't serv'r
Geo. F. Hallis.

Actg' Master Cmdg' at int.

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Rear Admiral
J. A. Dahlgren
Cmdg' S. C. B. Squadron,

Consulate of the United States,
Lisbon:

I have your letter of the 26th May inclosing copy of letter of Rear Admiral Dahlgren and extracts from log of U.S.S. "Concord". You say that this report from the Admiral shows he had been in communication with Gen. Sherman previous to the date you (I) mention.

I contend that it simply shows that the account (Duncan whom I know) has confused in making the statement, not that the latter had succeeded in finding Sherman.

When I left the ship I determined to find the army if possible. The only landing place was a little shore break some 30 yds. long. At 10.30 A.M. with 2 sailors I crawled under cover of the rocks, and found deserted, which at any given me the idea that the guard that had been called in to protect the fort had deserted.

My orders from Repetition were written on an autograph piece of paper of L. Sherman (which was a reply to an offer of a favor to storm the fort with his force) saying that he should designate Major to attack the fort. My contention is that I made the offering connection, attached with as considerable risk, while the General only named a escort. *Hastily & fully etc.*

J. F. Morris,
Luis F. M. Morris, H. S. Gould
Library & Naval War Room,
Washington D. C.

How we opened communication
with Sherman's Army and became
Southern Planters.

At the time ~~when~~ General Sherman
was chickening out the movements
of the Confederate General Hood in the
region about Chattanooga, nothing
decisive being ^{gained} he easily saw how
unprofitable was the game, and wrote
to General Grant giving details of his
plan of splitting the Confederacy, and
outlining his probable course when
he should have severed his connec-
tion with his then base of operation
and have set out on his famous and
ever-memorable march to the sea.

In this dispatch he says: "I must have
alternatives &c & I can take so secret
a course that no general can
guess at my objective. Therefore, when
you hear that I am off, have
lookouts at Morris Island, S.C.;
Cesabow

Ossabaw Sound, Ga.; Pensacola and
Mobile Bay. I will turn up somewhere."

How the people of the North held their
breath when the news reached them
that he was really off reached them,
and they knew not where to look for
his reappearance, or, even if the fa-
tigue of war would ever give him back
to them, is not yet forgotten.

I suppose the same thought has come
to many of those who were "at the front"
during the stirring times of '61 to '65 that
they wished they could have been at home
and participated in those mingled feelings
of elation and depression which were
evoked by the varying events of those
fateful years. We, who were on block-
ade duty off the southern coast, could
not fully share in these experiences as
the fitful changes of our mail service
brought us news in blocks, and it was
often difficult to differentiate what had
happened

happened with what had been ex-
pected or hoped for.

The ship to which I was attached at
this time was the "Fernandina", stationed
in St. Catherine Sound, for some forty
miles below Savannah, just south of
Assabow Sound, one of the objective points
named in Sherman's dispatches.

The "Fernandina" was a ^{sailing} bark taken
from the merchant service and fitted
for war purposes with a battery of four
32 pds. broadside, ~~and~~ a 6 pdr. howitzer
on the top-gallant forecastle and another
aboard the deck cabin, and carried
a crew of about 125 men, a harmless
sort of craft as naval matters now run.

We were the only ship on the station; but
the channel ^{was narrow but} ~~was~~ ^{but} ~~narrow~~ ^{inten-}
side, commanded the only entrance to
the sound between Assabow and St.
Catherine Islands. We had surveyed
the channel and properly buoyed it,
and occasionally ran out to sea
to practice our crew in seamanship.

Like the crews of most of our vessels on blockade duty we were harassed and kept in a more or less state of nervous tension by the rumors that occasionally reached us of boat and torpedo flotillas being organized to compass our destruction. To guard against attacks of this nature we had constructed torpedo nettings by rigging out spar booms twelve or fifteen feet long, connected by a strong rope through their outer extremities from which depended a ~~strong~~ ^{close} rope netting; and this was always lowered into the water when the watch was off for the night. Many were the torpedoes the bright lookouts discovered which proved on closer acquaintance to be sea birds or other objects equally harmless, but which, nevertheless, served to rouse us out of our bunks and hammocks to man the batteries - and made some sleep.

St. Catharine's Island was a thriving plantation before ^{the war} sent the owner with all his able-bodied slaves to the mainland, leaving behind a dozen or more men and women whose days of usefulness as slaves, in his eyes at least, had passed. The various fields for the cultivation of cotton were separated by the finest groves of live oaks I have ever seen, and the planter's house and the negro cabin were in good condition. Cattle and hogs that were left behind in the planter's flight had run wild, deer were plenty, and the island was a hunter's paradise. There were several interesting characters among these abandoned slaves, particularly Uncle Cudjo, a centenarian; young "Cudjo," nearly as old, and the old "Cunties" from long acquaintance seemed to belong to our ship's family. They stored up money enough by their sales of truck and washing to set their old master on his feet at the close of the war when he was in sore straits.

Stretching along the banks of the channel separating the islands from the mainland was a wide marsh with an occasional creek by which one could reach the mainland. The one nearest our station lead up to a place called H~~L~~ Kenny Bluff, which was well protected by confederate rifle pits. All about it was deep mud. Though our orders bade us keep a sharp lookout for Sherman's army we were cautious against exposing a boat's crew to the risk of capture, several of which had been so lost by venturing too far away from support of their ships. One morning late in Nov. '64 we were surprised to see a boat coming down this creek and soon made out she was a "dugout" with two men at the paddles. The boat was soon alongside and the two negro occupants brought to the deck. The tale they had to tell us was to this effect:

That the rebels were impressing all 7
the negroes to work on Fort McAllister
and that some two hundred men, women
and children had collected in a swamp,
in which they had secured a big rice scow,
which could be reached by boats from
the creek down which they had come.
They had come down to the ships to beg
that we would send boats up that night
to tow the rice scow, which would hold
them all, down the creek to land them
on one of the islands.

This looked reasonable and seemed to be a
plausible story. Sherman's army might
be approaching and the necessity of
strengthening Fort McAllister would call
for the imprisonment of all the negroes
of the neighborhood. Then again it might
be a clever plan to entrap them in four
of our boats' crews. But they declared their
willingness to stand the risk of being shot
at the first evidence of foul play, and I final-
ly decided to undertake the job and dis-
charged one of our big guns which was
the

the signal they had agreed should be made in case we consented to attempt their rescue.

As night closed in the crews were selected and four boats manned, under two officers, started forth under cover of the darkness. Of all the anxious nights of four years service in blockade duty this I think, was the worst. The capture of the boats' crews would surely be my undoing, and I walked the deck all night anxiously awaiting the coming of the dawn.

As the morning light broke glasses were glued to the eyes of the watchers on deck, and soon we made out four little black specks with a large one in the rear showing on the tawny surface of the marsh, and knew that our boats' crews were safe and that the expedition was successful.

It was a bright Sunday morning when the boats with their tow of a couple of hundred "contrabands"

"Contrabands" pulled by the ship in their way to the landing on the Island. The refugees were voicing their joy of emancipation in a stirring song of which the refrain was: "It's a Sunday morning, a Sunday morning and we'll all go to heaven on a Sunday morning." They were speedily housed, and land was allotted to the various families. My recollection is that we only issued to them from the ship one bbl. biscuit and one bbl. condemned (rasty) pork.

Following up the idea first entertained that the near approach of Sherman's Army was causing anxiety to the garrison of Fort McAllister I took two boats' crews of five men each with one officer and set out for a night scout. Upon approaching the fortified landing place previously noted, I left the boats in the tall grass and crawled through the mud to the rifle pit, instructing the officer in the boat to await my signal of an owl's hoot before moving up.

Finding the place deserted, the boats were

called up. Leaving two boat keepers in each boat securely hidden in the bushes, we set out on our march into the country. Our house stood alone at the landing and was apparently deserted, though we did not make very careful examination. At the few plantations that we passed we got into communication with some of the slaves, told them of their approaching liberation and left written directions to be given to any of our forces how signals could be made to us from Killenry Bluff, our landing place.

Several times we caught sight of rocket signals but could not determine whether they proceeded ^{from} our forces or ^{from} Confederates. The last place visited was the plantation of Dr. Johnson, and, as his boys said he was inclined somewhat our way, we routed him out and had a chat before day-break. He proved to be quite friendly, which let me to regret, when discovery was made

made, that the men had cleaned out
his poultry house. The doctor told me
afterward that he was glad we got the fowls
before the army reached his plantation,
but was awfully sorry to lose the ancient
~~game~~ cocks that were among the lot.
From remarks overheard later the men
also wished they had left them behind.
As we approached the deserted house
where we had left our boats we had a
disagreeable feeling that we were trapped
after all for we noticed a dim light
shining through the lower windows.
Without looking to see whether our boats
were safe I passed King my companion,
at the front of the house bidding him to
break and enter at my signal. But the
sight that greeted my eyes when I peered
through the rear window was anything
but warlike. Crouched before the fire in the
open fireplace, ~~around~~ which were lying

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them or from half dressed children, in the endeavor to light her pipe with a live coal, was a white woman, as haggard and dirty creature as my eyes had ever seen. The sudden revulsion of feeling can be imagined. She said she had heard nothing from her husband since he went to the war, and if her conversation with him was like unto that with which she regaled us, there was little to call him home. She was a tough specimen of the poor white and could have given points in profanity to any of the troopers.

Hardly had we reached the ship on our return than the quartermaster on duty reported that signals were being made from Kil-Kenny Bluff, and fresh crews were hustled into the boats, which pulled with a will when told that we would probably meet our comrades of the army. We found, sure enough, that they were waving our flag; and soon we made out the uniforms, and knew for certain that the long suspense was over, and that Sherman's march to the sea was an accomplished fact.

The men proved to ^{be} part of Kilpatrick's division of cavalry, and we soon had the

the pleasure of grasping him by the
hand amid mutual congratulations.

The first thing necessary was to send a
dispatch to ~~the~~ Admiral Dahlgren who
was at Charleston, which could only be
done by sending one of our boats to the
mouth stream up the coast. No paper
could be found, but finally Kilpatrick
wrote a brief dispatch on the unwritten
page of a dispatch he had just received
from Sherman. How well I remember
Sherman's dispatch. It was evidently
a reply ^{in part} to a request from Kilpatrick
to be allowed to storm Fort McAllister;
for Sherman wrote that he could not
afford to lose cavalry and would assign
the duty to Gen. Hazen's division.

Sherman had already driven the enemy
within the defenses of Savannah, his line
of investment reaching from the Savannah
river to the Ogeechee on which was McAllister.
The swampy nature of the land made an
attack

attack from the land side extremely difficult. Rieplpatrick had crossed the Oquachee on a pontoon bridge in an endeavor to find means to communicate with the navy and, finding one of the written directions we had left, had come to Kickanny Bluff. Dec. 12 '64.

~~On December~~ The next day, Hagen's division having replaced the burned bridge over the Oquachee, crossed the river and proceeded to invest the fort. Sherman at the time being at Churic^{the name} on the opposite side, where a battery was posted which fired occasionally at long range, and from which a view of the field of separation could be had. It was found that the carrying of the fort would be difficult and perhaps delayed for beside its armament of 22 pieces, it was protected by garrison abattis and the approaches mired with torpedoes. Just as

Sherman

Thurman had signalled Hagen that it was important that the fort should be captured that day one of the small steamers of the Oyachin station now in sight with which Sherman at once open'd communication. As the tug signalled: "Is M^cAllister ours", Hagen's men could be seen pouring over the parapets of the fort, and the question was answered almost as soon as asked. With an open sea connection Sherman could then say to Washington: "I regard Savannah as already gained."

With nothing to worry us our attention was now wholly given up to our colon't & wards. We got information that nearly a thousand bushels of corn were concealed ~~on~~ ^{gathered it in} an island in the swamp, and thanks to our big scow we ~~scooped it~~ and made the stores of the settlement secure. Lending word to Boston friends soon brought us a great quantity of garden vegetables seed and

and we soon had every one at work in the field, each family cultivating its own particular tract, and great rivalry existing as to which would show best results.

We remained on the station till the latter part of March and all hands felt keen regret at leaving our experimental farm under nautical supervision.

I believe this was the first sea island settlement of refugee negroes, and I am quite sure it was the least expensive to the government which was only, as I have said, one bbl. condiment port and one bbl. biscuit.

During our "Fugravity" not a single case ever came up before us for settlement, and all worked together for the common weal. The old boat flag that met Sherman's army and brought a people out of bondage is now one of my most cherished possessions.

Geo. S. Hollis

George Fearing Hollis Papers

1852 - 1903

MSS.0471

Box: 1 Folder: 20-21

**CIVIL WAR - Memoirs - How I Opened
Communication with Sherman's Army and Became
a Southern Planter, between 1865 and 1903**



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