

Gloucester County Library System

Logan Township Branch

Writers Group

Selections

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Freeholder Director, Robert M. Damminger | Freeholder Library Liaison, Lyman Barnes



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SILENCE

A vacuous inane mindless thought
Crept to mind; the silence close by
Here in sight's surrounding. Can silence be heard?
I listened. Tinny pulses of commitment came about.

As these were arrows of sound.
The trees, the grasses, the shrubs
Were not silent. More like happy
Joyous chatterings. Dumbfounded I heard.

My vacancy of thought brought me here
To hear my beliefs expounded and thought.
No sooner had this answered
The spell broken by a dog and human on a golf cart.

The memory implant
Simply as ease
Thank You Lord
It's my lot.

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Swedesboro Native Commands USS *Monitor*: Commodore William N. Jeffers of the United States Navy

By Ben Carlton

(Continued from the April 2017 issue of *Just Write*.)

Her standoff with the Virginia finally over, the *Monitor* was ordered to take on coal and advance up James River in company with the USS *Naugatuck* to a rendezvous at James Island with the Navy's second experimental ironclad vessel, USS *Galena*, rushed into completion and fresh off the ways. A more conventionally designed steamer than the *Monitor*, the *Galena* had lighter armor plating but boasted more firepower with eight 9-inch Dahlgren guns and two 100-pounder Parrott rifles.

After rendezvousing at Jamestown Island, the *Monitor*, *Galena*, *Naugatuck*, and three wooden gunboats proceeded cautiously upriver before dropping anchor for the night at the mouth of Kingsland Creek, three miles below Drewry's Bluff. There the Confederates had erected Fort Darling, a half-finished earthen fort situated on a bluff 110 feet above a sharp bend in the river. The fort's arsenal featured three big cannons, one a 10-inch Columbiad, and five naval guns. Among the hodge-podge contingent of Rebel artillerymen manning the guns of the fort was the former crew of CSS *Virginia*, eager to greet their old familiar foes from the *Monitor* with lethal salvos from their pieces.

Commodore John Rogers aboard his flagship, *Galena*, had been ordered to sail to Richmond to bombard the Confederate capital into submission. Only Fort Darling stood in the way. On 15 May Rogers led the Union flotilla to within 400 yards of a double line of obstructions in the river below the fort. Rebel sharpshooters along the riverbanks kept up a continuous fire. One of the marksmen picked off the leadsman of the *Galena* as the unfortunate sailor took soundings off the bow; another well-aimed shot wounded the *Port Royal's* captain.

When Fort Darling opened up with its big guns, *Galena* was immediately holed twice by plunging shot as Rogers maneuvered in the narrow river to bring the ship's broadside to bear against the bluff. Once in position, she dropped her stern anchor and fired full broadsides at the fort. The other gunboats began to fire as well, but the *Naugatuck* had to drop out of the fight when her lone gun burst. The Rebel gunners atop the bluff kept up a furious fusillade, despite suffering their own self-inflicted mishap when the Columbiad recoiled off its platform. (The gun crew had mistakenly loaded the big gun with a double charge of powder.) Meanwhile

the roar of the cannons rattled windows – and nerves – in Richmond, eight miles away.

With Confederate batteries directing their fire at the struggling *Galena*, Jeffers attempted to relieve the pressure on the flagship. He reported, “I endeavored to pass ahead of [the *Galena*] to take off some of the fire, but found my guns could not be elevated sufficiently to point at the fort.” Jeffers then had to drop downriver to fire at longer range. As the battle wore on, Lieutenant Jeffers observed that when the gunboats fired broadsides into the fort, the Rebels would take cover but would soon reemerge whenever the fleet’s fire slackened.

Maintaining a deliberate fire, the temperature inside the *Monitor’s* turret reached 140 degrees by Jeffers’ estimation. As many of the gunners grew faint and collapsed from the heat and sulfurous fumes, Jeffers took the *Monitor* out of the fight for 15 minutes to give the men some respite from the tainted air. Jeffers later wrote, “It was impossible to reduce such works, except with the aid of a land force.” But this fight was an all-navy affair.

After three and a half hours the *Galena* was out of ammunition and Rogers ordered a withdrawal to Kingsland Creek. The attack had failed miserably. The Confederates cheered as the battered flotilla limped downriver. With 11 dead and 13 wounded, the *Galena* had clearly borne the brunt of the battle. She sustained 28 hits while the *Monitor* received only three solid shots that clanked off her iron plating – one eight-inch cannonball had struck squarely on the turret without penetrating the armor plating. The other two shots had bounced harmlessly off her sides forward of the pilot house. Rebel gunners had evidently stopped aiming for her realizing their shots could inflict little damage.

Though the *Monitor* had once again proven herself impervious to shot and shell, her other deficiencies were glaringly apparent. Jeffers gave a detailed, written analysis of the *Monitor’s* faults to the Navy Department, citing, in particular, her lack of firepower (such as the failure of her 11-inch shots to pierce the *Virginia’s* armor back on 9 March). Her other deficiencies were readily apparent: her engines were woefully underpowered; she was hard to steer and highly vulnerable to swamping in rough seas; poorly ventilated – causing the near suffocation of the gun crew during her most recent battle with Fort Darling – and her most innovative feature, her revolving turret, would frequently jam. Jeffers proposed suggestions for improvement that were mostly ignored by the Navy Department; however, all future ships of the monitor class would be equipped with 15-inch guns. The Federal government did not want it known by the public at large,

nor by the enemy, that its latest wonder weapon was not as wonderful as perceived.

After the Drewry's Bluff engagement, Jeffers and the *Monitor* remained on blockade duty in the James River. General George McClellan's Peninsula Campaign had ended ingloriously with his "change of base" from the gates of Richmond to Harrison's Landing on the James, where the army huddled under the protection of the navy's gunboats.

(To be continued in the next edition of *Just Write*)

ANOTHER BLANC SHEET

When I put pen to paper
I cannot wait to see
What will the discourse to be
Often the page remains blank.

Thus permitting a travel back to the tank.
The Brain that is / in that pot.
Then behaves as if knowing a lot.
Letting me know that thoughts and words remain
aloft.

Many call this writers block.
I / call it a printer sock
Or is that a sprinter's clock.
Hoping for the paucity to end; well / just have it
amend.

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Just Write

Meetings Held 2nd & 4th Wednesdays @

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