

CHAPTER X.

THE BOMBARDMENT.

The First Shot.—Defective Guns.—John Carmody's Exploit.—Destructive Effects of the Bombardment.—Burning of the Officers' Quarters.—Terrific Conflagration.

As soon as the outline of our fort could be distinguished, the enemy carried out their programme. It had been arranged, as a special compliment to the venerable Edmund Ruffin, who might almost be called the father of secession, that he should fire the first shot against us, from the Stevens battery on Cummings Point, and I think in all the histories it is stated that he did so; but it is attested by Dr. Crawford and others who were on the parapet at the time, that the first shot really came from the mortar battery at Fort Johnson.¹⁷ Almost immediately afterward a ball from Cummings Point lodged in the magazine wall, and by the sound seemed to bury it self in the masonry about a foot from my head, in very unpleasant proximity to my right ear. This is the one that probably came with Mr. Ruffin's compliments. In a moment the firing burst forth in one continuous roar, and large patches of both the exterior and interior masonry began to crumble and fall in all directions. The place where I was had been used for the manufacture of cartridges, and there was still a good deal of powder there, some packed and some loose. A shell soon struck near the ventilator, and a puff of dense smoke entered the room, giving me a strong impression that there would be an immediate explosion. Fortunately, no sparks had penetrated inside.

Nineteen batteries were now hammering at us, and the balls and shells from the ten-inch columbiads, accompanied by shells from the thirteen-inch mortars which constantly bombarded us, made us feel as if the war had commenced in earnest.

When it was broad daylight, I went down to breakfast. I found the officers already assembled at one of the long tables in the mess-hall. Our party were calm, and even somewhat merry. We had retained one colored man to wait on us. He was a spruce-

¹⁷ I have since learned that the shell from Fort Johnson was not a hostile shot, but was simply intended as a signal for the firing to commence.

looking mulatto from Charleston, very active and efficient on ordinary occasions, but now completely demoralized by the thunder of the guns and crashing of the shot around us. He leaned back against the wall, almost white with fear, his eyes closed, and his whole expression one of perfect despair.¹⁸ Our meal was not very sumptuous. It consisted of pork and water, but Dr. Crawford triumphantly brought forth a little farina, which he had found in a corner of the hospital.

When this frugal repast was over, my company was told off in three details for firing purposes, to be relieved afterward by Seymour's company. As I was the ranking officer, I took the first detachment, and marched them to the casemates, which looked out upon the powerful iron-clad battery of Cummings Point.

In aiming the first gun fired against the rebellion I had no feeling of self-reproach, for I fully believed that the contest was inevitable, and was not of our seeking. The United States was called upon not only to defend its sovereignty, but its right to exist as a nation. The only alternative was to submit to a powerful oligarchy who were determined to make freedom forever subordinate to slavery. To me it was simply a contest, politically speaking, as to whether virtue or vice should rule.

My first shot bounded off from the sloping roof of the battery opposite without producing any apparent effect. It seemed useless to attempt to silence the guns there; for our metal was not heavy enough to batter the work down, and every ball glanced harmlessly off, except one, which appeared to enter an embrasure and twist the iron shutter, so as to stop the firing of that particular gun.

I observed that a group of the enemy had ventured out from their intrenchments to watch the effect of their fire, but I sent them flying back to their shelter by the aid of a forty-two-pounder ball, which appeared to strike right in among them.

Assistant-surgeon Crawford, having no sick in hospital, volunteered to take command of one of the detachments. He and Lieutenant Davis were detailed at the same time with me; and I soon heard their guns on the opposite side of the fort, echoing my own. They attacked Fort Moultrie with great vigor.

Our firing now became regular, and was answered from the rebel guns which encircled us on the four sides of the pentagon upon which the fort was built. The other side faced the open sea. Showers of balls from ten-inch columbiads and forty-two-pounders, and shells from thirteen -inch mortars poured into the fort in one incessant stream, causing great flakes of masonry to fall in all directions. When the immense mortar shells, after sailing high in the air, came down in a vertical direction, and buried themselves in the parade-ground, their explosion shook the fort like an earthquake.¹⁹

Our own guns were very defective, as they had no breech-sights. In place of these,

¹⁸ In this he was an exception to most negroes. Those I have seen in the colored regiments in Texas have shown themselves to be among the best and most reliable men in the service for operations against the Indians. It was a line of negroes that charged over the torpedoes at Mobile.

¹⁹ The troops and defenses on Morris Island were commanded by Brigadier-general James W. Simons. The artillery was under the command of Colonel Wilmot G. De Saussure, of the South Carolina Artillery Battalion.

Sullivan's Island was commanded by Brigadier-general John Dunovant, formerly an officer of the United States Army. His second in command was Lieutenant-colonel Roswell S. Ripley, of the South Carolina Artillery Battalion, formerly of our army.

Major N. G. Evans, assistant adjutant-general, commanded on James Island.

The battery at Mount Pleasant was under the command of Captain Robert Martin, of the South Carolina Infantry.

Seymour and myself were obliged to devise notched sticks, which answered the purpose, but were necessarily very imperfect.

Our fort had been built with reference to the penetration of shot when the old system of smooth-bore guns prevailed. The balls from a new Blakely gun on Cummings Point, however, had force enough to go entirely through the wall which sheltered us, and some of the fragments of brick which were knocked out wounded several of my detachment. None were seriously hurt except Sergeant Thomas Kirnan, of my company. His contusions were severe, but did not keep him out of the fight.

After three hours' firing, my men became exhausted, and Captain Seymour came, with a fresh detachment, to relieve us. He has a great deal of humor in his composition, and said, jocosely, "Doubleday, what in the world is the matter here, and what is all this uproar about?"

I replied, "There is a trifling difference of opinion between us and our neighbors opposite, and we are trying to settle it."

"Very well," he said; "do you wish me to take a hand?"

I said, "Yes, I would like to have you go in."

"All right," he said. "What is your elevation, and range?"

I replied, "Five degrees, and twelve hundred yards."

"Well," he said, "here goes!" And he went to work with a will.

Part of the fleet was visible outside the bar about half-past ten A.M. It exchanged salutes with us, but did not attempt to enter the harbor, or take part in the battle. In fact, it would have had considerable difficulty in finding the channel, as the marks and buoys had all been taken up. It was composed originally of the frigates *Pawnee*, under Commodore Rowan; the *Pocahontas*, under Captain Gillis; the *Powhatan*, under Captain Mercer; the steam transport *Baltic*, under Captain Fletcher; and, I believe, the steam-tugs *Yankee*, *Uncle Ben*, and another, which was not permitted to leave New York. The soldiers on board consisted of two hundred and fifty recruits from Governor's Island, under command of First Lieutenants F. M. K. Hudson, of the Fourth, and Robert O. Tyler, of the Third Artillery, and Second Lieutenant A. I. Thomas, of the First Infantry.

This expedition was designed by Captain Fox, in consultation with G. W. Blunt, William H. Aspinwall, Russel Sturges, and others. After the event much obloquy was thrown upon the navy because it did not come in and engage the numerous batteries and forts, and open for itself a way to Charleston; but this course would probably have resulted in the sinking of every vessel.

As far back as December I had written to New York that it was very difficult for a gun on shore to hit a small boat dancing on the waves in the daytime, and at night it is almost impossible. I suggested, therefore, that we might be re-enforced and provisioned by means of a number of small boats, supplied from several naval vessels as a base of operations. The same idea had occurred to Captain Fox; and on the present occasion he had brought thirty launches to be used for this purpose. They were to be manned by three hundred sailors, and in case they were assailed, the fleet was to protect them as far as possible by its guns. Unfortunately, the different vessels did not reach the rendezvous together. The *Pawnee* and *Pocahontas* arrived on the 12th, but lost a great deal of time in waiting for the *Powhatan*, which contained the launches and other arrangements, without which a boat expedition could not be organized. The *Powhatan* never appeared, having been unexpectedly detached, by order of the President, at the solicitation of Secretary Seward, and without consultation with the Navy Department. I think, the *Baltic* was detained by run-

ning upon Rattlesnake Shoal. The steam-tug *Uncle Ben* was driven into Wilmington by a storm, and the *Yankee* did not make its appearance until the 15th. The expedition was thus an utter failure. Nevertheless, a passing schooner was purchased and loaded up with provisions and soldiers, and an attempt would have been made to run in on the night of the 13th, but by that time it was too late. The fort had surrendered.

Having explained this matter, we will now resume the narrative of our operations. For the next three hours a vigorous fire was kept up on both sides. A great many shots were aimed at our flag-staff, but nearly all of them passed above the fort and struck in the water beyond. I think we succeeded in silencing several guns in Fort Moultrie, and one or more in the Stevens battery.

When Seymour's three hours were up, I relieved him, and continued the firing. As our balls bounded off the sloping iron rails like peas upon a trencher, utterly failing to make any impression, and as the shot from the Blakely gun came clear through our walls, Anderson directed that the men should cease firing at that particular place. I regretted very much that the upper tier of guns had been abandoned, as they were all loaded and pointed, and were of very heavy calibre. A wild Irish soldier, however, named John Carmody, slipped up on the parapet, and, without orders, fired the pieces there, one after another, on his own account. One of the ten-inch balls so aimed made quite an impression on the Cummings Point battery; and if the fire could have been kept up, it might possibly have knocked the iron-work to pieces.

After my detachment had abandoned the casemate opposite the Blakely gun, to my great astonishment the battery I had left recommenced firing. I could not imagine who could have taken our places. It seems that a group of the Baltimore workmen had been watching our motions, and had thus learned the duties of a cannoneer. In spite of their previous determination not to take part in the fight, they could not resist the fun of trying their hand at one of the guns. It was already accurately pointed, and the ball struck the mark in the centre. The men attributed it to their own skill, and when I entered they were fairly in convulsions of laughter. One of them, in answer to my question, gasped out, "I hit it square in the middle." After this first attempt, each of them was desirous of trying his skill at aiming. The result was that we soon had them organized into a firing-party.

Finding one of my chests had been left in the officers' quarters, and that it would probably be knocked to pieces by the shells, I asked the mulatto, who still sat back against the wall, apparently asleep, to bear a hand and help me bring it out. He opened his eyes, shook his head dolefully, and said, "De major, he say, I muss not expose myself."

If I mistake not, Roswell S. Ripley, formerly a brevet major in our army, fired the second or third shot to bring down the flag under which he had served for so many years. Ripley was born in Ohio, appointed from New York, and educated at the Military Academy. He had, therefore, even on the Southern theory of State rights, no necessary affiliation with the South. In fact, they always despised a man who joined them to fight against his own State. In one instance, Jeff Davis himself had to use all his influence to induce the Southern troops to obey one of these Northern generals. Ripley had previously been engaged as an agent for Sharpe's Arms Company in Europe; and, having been unsuccessful there, came to Charleston, with the hope of repairing his shattered fortunes by selling guns to South Carolina. Through the influence of Colonel Huger, of our Ordnance Department, who was in the city at the time, Ripley failed in this, and, being entirely out of employment, accepted a commission from the Confederacy to fight against his old comrades. Being a man of talent, and a skillful artilleryman, he did us a great deal of harm. Like all

Northern converts, he thought it necessary to be overzealous in his new position, to do away with the suspicions excited by his birth and education. I was told at the time that for this purpose he took pains to denounce me as an Abolitionist, and to recommend that I be hanged by the populace as soon as caught.

The firing continued all day, without any special incident of importance, and without our making much impression on the enemy's works. They had a great advantage over us, as their fire was concentrated on the fort, which was in the centre of the circle, while ours was diffused over the circumference. Their missiles were exceedingly destructive to the upper exposed portion of the work, but no essential injury was done to the lower casemates which sheltered us.

Some of these shells, however, set the officers' quarters on fire three times; but the flames were promptly extinguished once or twice through the exertions of Peter Hart, whose activity and gallantry were very conspicuous.

The night was an anxious one for us, for we thought it probable that the launches, filled with armed men from the fleet, might take advantage of the darkness to come in with provisions and supplies. Then, too, it was possible that the enemy might attempt a night attack. We were on the alert, therefore, with men stationed at all the embrasures; but nothing unusual occurred. The batteries fired upon us at stated intervals all night long. We did not return the fire, having no ammunition to waste.

On the morning of the 13th, we took our breakfast—or, rather, our pork and water—at the usual hour, and marched the men to the guns when the meal was over.

From 4 to 6½ A.M. the enemy's fire was very spirited. From 7 to 8 A.M. a rain-storm came on, and there was a lull in the cannonading. About 8 A.M. the officers' quarters were ignited by one of Ripley's incendiary shells, or by shot heated in the furnaces at Fort Moultrie. The fire was put out; but, at 10 A.M. a mortar shell passed through the roof, and lodged in the flooring of the second story, where it burst, and started the flames afresh. This, too, was extinguished; but the hot shot soon followed each other so rapidly that it was impossible for us to contend with them any longer. It became evident that the entire block, being built with wooden partitions, floors, and roofing, must be consumed, and that the magazine, containing three hundred barrels of powder, would be endangered; for, even after closing the metallic door, sparks might penetrate through the ventilator. The floor was covered with loose powder, where a detail of men had been at work manufacturing cartridge-bags out of old shirts, woolen blankets, etc.

While the officers exerted themselves with axes to tear down and cut away all the wood-work in the vicinity, the soldiers were rolling barrels of powder out to more sheltered spots, and were covering them with wet blankets. The labor was accelerated by the shells which were bursting around us; for Ripley had redoubled his activity at the first signs of a conflagration. We only succeeded in getting out some ninety-six barrels of powder, and then we were obliged to close the massive copper door, and await the result. A shot soon after passed through the intervening shield, struck the door, and bent the lock in such a way that it could not be opened again. We were thus cut off from our supply of ammunition, but still had some piled up in the vicinity of the guns. Anderson officially reported only four barrels and three cartridges as on hand when we left.

By 11 A.M. the conflagration was terrible and disastrous. One-fifth of the fort was on fire, and the wind drove the smoke in dense masses into the angle where we had all taken refuge. It seemed impossible to escape suffocation. Some lay down close to the ground, with handkerchiefs over their mouths, and others posted themselves near the em-

brasures, where the smoke was somewhat lessened by the draught of air. Every one suffered severely. I crawled out of one of these openings, and sat on the outer edge; but Ripley made it lively for me there with his case-shot, which spattered all around. Had not a slight change of wind taken place, the result might have been fatal to most of us.

Our firing having ceased, and the enemy being very jubilant, I thought it would be as well to show them that we were not all dead yet, and ordered the gunners to fire a few rounds more. I heard afterward that the enemy loudly cheered Anderson for his persistency under such adverse circumstances.

The scene at this time was really terrific. The roaring and crackling of the flames, the dense masses of whirling smoke, the bursting of the enemy's shells, and our own which were exploding in the burning rooms, the crashing of the shot, and the sound of masonry falling in every direction, made the fort a pandemonium. When at last nothing was left of the building but the blackened walls and smoldering embers, it became painfully evident that an immense amount of damage had been done. There was a tower at each angle of the fort. One of these, containing great quantities of shells, upon which we had relied, was almost completely shattered by successive explosions. The massive wooden gates, studded with iron nails, were burned, and the wall built behind them was now a mere heap of débris, so that the main entrance was wide open for an assaulting party. The sally-ports were in a similar condition, and the numerous windows on the gorge side, which had been planked up, had now become all open entrances.

About 12.48 P.M. the end of the flag-staff was shot down, and the flag fell.*²⁰ It had been previously hanging by one halliard, the other having been cut by a piece of shell. The exultation of the enemy, however, was short-lived. Peter Hart found a spar in the fort, which answered very well as a temporary flag-staff. He nailed the flag to this, and raised it triumphantly by nailing and tying the pole firmly to a pile of gun-carriages on the parapet. This was gallantly done, without undue haste, under Seymour's supervision, although the enemy concentrated all their fire upon the spot to prevent Hart from carrying out his intention. From the beginning, the rebel gunners had been very ambitious to shoot the flag down, and had wasted an immense number of shots in the attempt.

While the battle was going on, a correspondent of the *New York Tribune*, who was in Charleston, wrote that the populace were calling for my head. Fortunately, I was not there to gratify them. My relations with the gentlemen of Charleston had always been friendly. The enmity of the mob was simply political, and was founded on the belief that I was the only "Black Republican," as they termed it, in the fort.

²⁰ It is claimed that this shot was fired by Lieutenant W. C. Preston, of South Carolina.