



W. B. CUSHING.

CHAPTER LII.
RECOVERY OF THE ATLANTIC COAST.

I. WILMINGTON.

Capture of Plymouth.—Lieutenant Cushing's Expedition for the Destruction of the Albemarle.—Naval Actions in North Carolina Sounds.—Organization of the First Expedition for the Capture of Wilmington.—Delays.—Butler's Powder-boat Strategy.—His Connection with the Expedition.—Explosion of the Powder-boat.—Bombardment of Fort Fisher.—Re-enforcements received by the Enemy.—Landing of Butler's Forces.—Weitzel advises against an Assault.—Re-embarkation and Withdrawal of the Troops.—Causes of Failure.—Butler relieved of Command.—The Second Expedition.—Terry in Command.—Plan of Attack.—Assault and Capture of Fort Fisher.—Explosion of the Magazine.—Schofield comes East with the Twenty-third Corps.—Assumes command of the North Carolina Department.—Operations against Wilmington.—Capture of the City.

At the beginning of 1865 only three important positions on the Atlantic and Gulf coasts east of the Mississippi were retained by the Confederates—Wilmington, Charleston, and Mobile. Of these, Wilmington alone afforded an outlet for even a partial and restricted commerce with Europe.

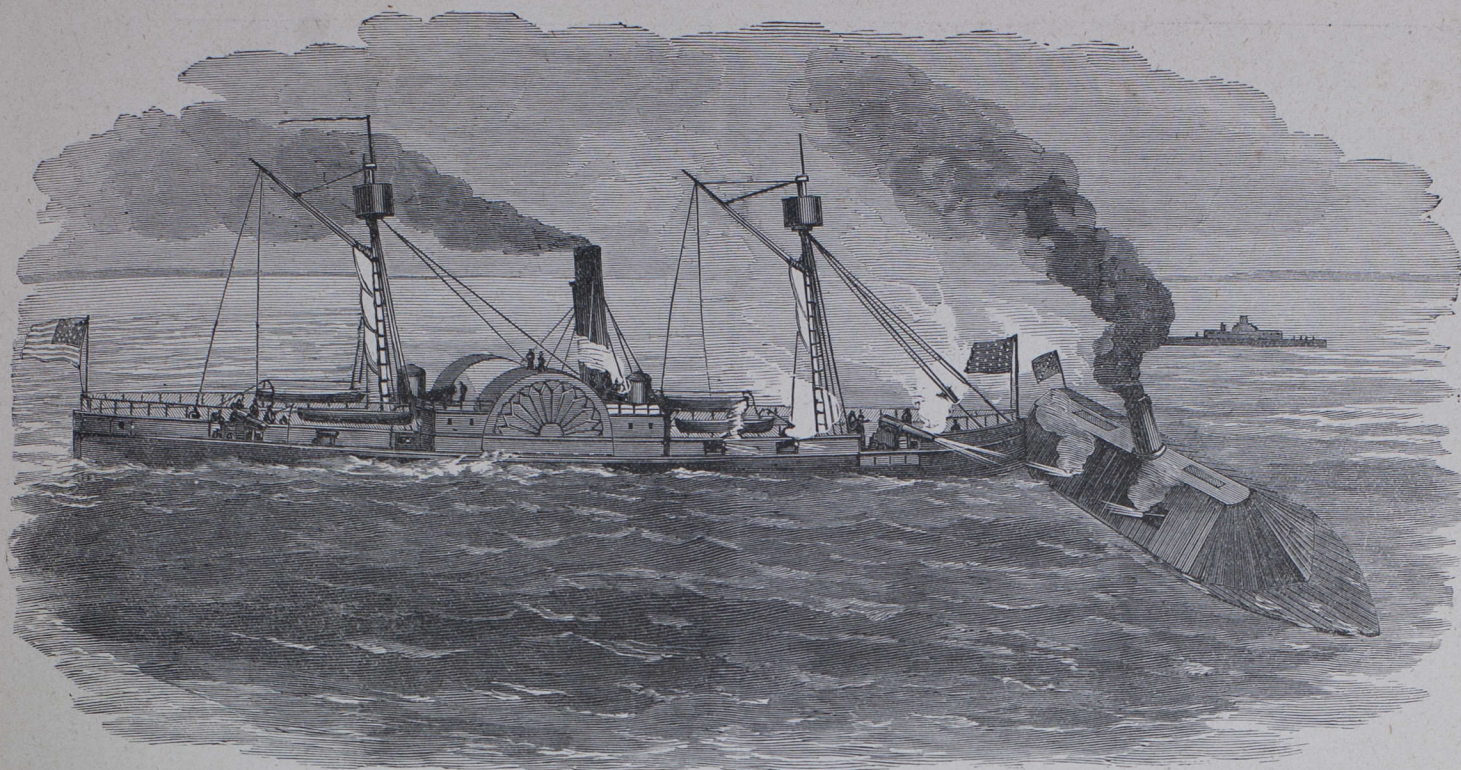
On the last day of October, 1864, Plymouth, near the mouth of the Roanoke River—a town which had been captured from the Federals early in the year—had been surrendered. Though the possession of this place was of no vital importance, yet the gallant exploit of Lieutenant W. B. Cushing,

which led to its surrender, is so memorable as an instance both of a heroism which has never been surpassed, and of a success which, gained as it was by a single hand, stands unparalleled in the annals of war, that it can not here be forgotten.

In the spring of 1864, the Federal forces had met with several reverses on the North Carolina coast. On the 1st of February, the Confederate General G. E. Pickett captured the Federal outpost at Bachelor's Creek, eight miles from Newbern, with a considerable number of prisoners. During the following night, a party of the enemy in barges captured the United States steamer Underwriter, lying in the Neuse River, and covering the Newbern fortifications. Surprising the garrison at Plymouth on the 17th of April, the Confederates, after a severe struggle, captured that town on the 20th. This was accompanied by the co-operation of the Confederate iron-clad ram Albemarle, which, descending the river, sunk the Federal gun-boat Southfield. The Miami, the only other national gun-boat off Plymouth, with-



THE CONFEDERATE RAM ALBEMARLE ATTACKING THE FEDERAL GUN-BOATS OFF PLYMOUTH.



THE SASSACUS RAMMING THE ALBEMARLE.

drew. General Wessels, thus cut off from communication with the fleet in Albemarle Sound, surrendered the town, with 1600 men and 25 guns, to General Hoke. Washington, at the head of Pamlico River, was evacuated by the Federals in the latter part of the same month, the town having been previously burned by some soldiers of the Seventeenth Massachusetts and Fifteenth Connecticut Regiments.

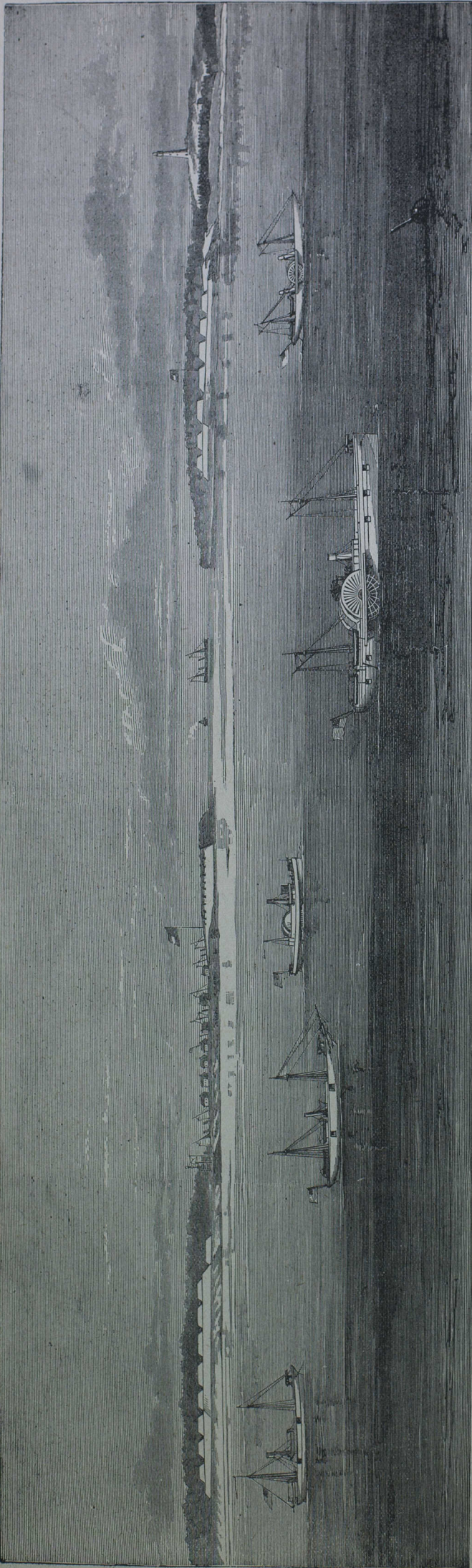
Albemarle Sound was still held by the national gun-boats. But besides the Albemarle, other Confederate rams were being prepared to recover the naval supremacy of the North Carolina sounds. Captain Melancthon Smith was accordingly sent to assume command in these sounds, with several double-enders. On the afternoon of May 5th the Albemarle came out of the Roanoke, followed by the Bombshell, a small armed tender, and engaged the national fleet collected together off the mouth of the river. A brisk little fight followed. The gun-boats succeeded in dodging the ram, but their guns made no impression. About five o'clock the Sassacus, watching her opportunity, struck the enemy behind her starboard beam, causing her to careen until her deck was washed by the waves. In this position the two vessels remained for some time, and prompt assistance on the part of one of the larger gun-boats might have accomplished the destruction of the Albemarle. Before this was effected the ram swung clear of the Sassacus, and, maintaining the fight until dark, retreated up the river, leaving her tender, the Bombshell, behind in the hands of the Federals. She appeared again on the 24th, but did not venture to renew the contest. The next day a bold attempt was made by a party of five volunteers from the gun-boat Wyalusing to destroy the Albemarle by means of a torpedo, but proved unsuccessful. Thus the affair rested, so far as the Albemarle was concerned, through the summer of 1864.

Notwithstanding the failure of the expedition to blow up the Albemarle in May, Lieutenant Cushing thought the thing practicable, and formed a scheme for accomplishing this object, which, having been submitted to Ad-

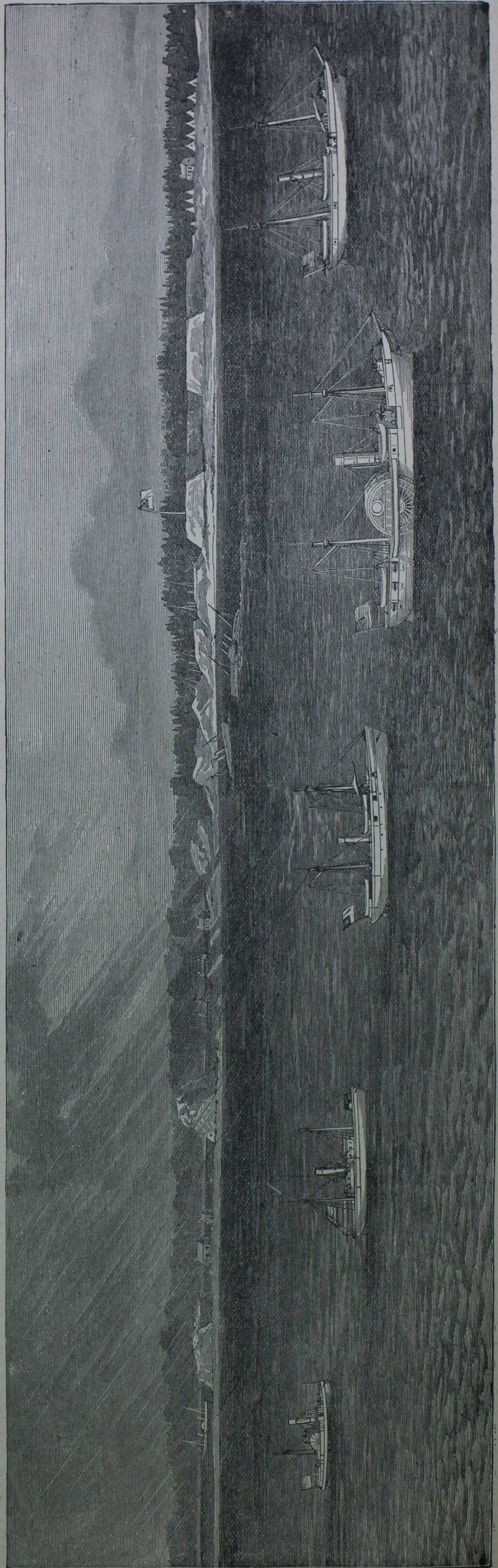
miral Lee, he was permitted to carry out. He had formed his plan in June, at which time he was commanding the Monticello. Proceeding to New York, he, in conjunction with Admiral Gregory, Captain Boggs, and Chief Engineer W. W. Wood, applied to one of the new steam pickets a torpedo arrangement, which had been invented by Wood, and then returned to the Sound. The Albemarle was lying off Plymouth at its moorings, and formed the defense of that town. On the night of October 27th, with a select crew of 13 men, six of whom were officers, he proceeded up the river with his engine of destruction. The distance to Plymouth was eight miles. Passing the Confederate picket stationed on the wreck of the Southfield, a mile below the town, without causing alarm, he found the ram protected with a boom of pine logs 30 feet from her side. As the party approached, it encountered a fire from the enemy's infantry on shore, to which the howitzer from Cushing's boat replied. Almost at the same moment the boat ran its bows against the logs guarding the ram. With his own hands Lieutenant Cushing fixed the torpedo in its proper position. "The torpedo boom," says Cushing, "was then lowered, and I succeeded in diving the torpedo under the overhang, and exploding it at the same time that the Albemarle's gun was fired. A shot seemed to go crashing through my boat, and a dense mass of water rushed in from the torpedo, filling the launch and completely disabling her. The enemy then continued his fire at 15 feet range, and demanded our surrender, which I twice refused, ordering the men to save themselves, and removing my overcoat and shoes. Springing into the river, I swam, with others, into the middle of the stream, the rebels failing to hit us." The ram had been destroyed by the torpedo, but the necessity of immediate flight had prevented Cushing from observing the extent and efficiency of his work. All but one of the party accompanying him met death or capture. Cushing escaped, with a bullet in his wrist, by floating down the river, hid himself among the woods on the bank, and finally found a skiff, in which, after eight hours paddling, he reached the Valley City on the



DESTRUCTION OF THE ALBEMARLE.



BLOCKADING FLEET OF WILMINGTON—OLD INLET.



BLOCKADING FLEET OF WILMINGTON—NEW INLET.

night of the 30th. The next day Plymouth was surrendered to the naval squadron.

The capture of Wilmington would have been undertaken in the earlier stages of the war if it could have been accomplished by a naval force alone. But military co-operation was indispensable, and the instant, ever-pressing need of the military forces on more important fields caused the expedition to be postponed until the autumn of 1864. In September—after the capture of Atlanta, and while the Federal army under Meade was besieging Petersburg, waiting its own opportunity and the accomplishment of Sherman's plans in the West—it was thought forces could be spared from Butler's Army of the James to co-operate with the Navy Department in the reduction of Fort Fisher and the capture of Wilmington.

The naval preparations were promptly made, and it was intended that Vice-Admiral Farragut, then operating on the Gulf Coast, should have command of this branch of the expedition. This was impossible on account of the impaired health of that distinguished officer, and the command was assigned to Rear Admiral Porter, who had been identified with the most important naval victories of the West. After considering the subject, Porter offered to take Fort Fisher in three days if he could have all the heaviest frigates, with 300 guns, and a co-operative military force of 13,000 men.¹ Upon consultation with Grant, the latter said he could not then detach so large a force, but could raise it within 24 hours after Porter had assembled his fleet. No definite time was fixed for the expedition, but it was expected to move by the middle of October. In the mean time Grant collected what information he could about Cape Fear River, with maps and charts, and placed this in the hands of General Weitzel, commanding the Eighteenth Corps, to whom, with General Butler's knowledge, the command of the military force was assigned. As the enemy had in some way been informed of the expedition, it was postponed, but the preparations for it were continued. The small force which Grant could detach rendered it necessary that the attack should be a surprise. The War Department had proposed General Gillmore as the military commander, but to this Grant objected on the ground that he had shown timidity on a former occasion, and appointed Weitzel.

General Butler took a great interest in this affair. It was to be carried out by his own troops, and within the limits of his own department. General Grant preferred that he should not participate in the expedition, but did not choose to interfere, though strict military propriety would have dictated Butler's remaining with the larger portion of his army instead of following a detachment which had been already assigned to an able commander. General Butler's chief interest in the affair was connected with a novel experiment which he had suggested for blowing up Fort Fisher by the explosion near it of 200 or 300 tons of powder. He had heard of the destruction caused by the explosion of a large quantity of gunpowder at Erith, England. The remarkable effect of this explosion for many miles around led him to speculate as to the possibility of destroying military fortifications by similar means. He had first proposed this matter to General Grant in connection with Charleston, which he wanted to blow up with a vessel loaded with 1000 tons of powder. But Grant was skeptical as to the effect of such an experiment. About the time the Fort Fisher expedition was ready to start, Butler again broached his gunpowder plot. Some high authorities had come to his support. Grant referred the matter to Colonel Comstock, of his staff, who reported that the explosion of 300 or 400 tons of powder out at sea would do no damage. General Delafield, Chief Engineer, said the explosion would have about the same effect on the fort that firing feathers from muskets would have on the enemy. The Navy Department and Admiral Porter looked upon the scheme with more favor. General Butler himself was perfectly confident of success. Grant therefore consented to the experiment, but would have no waiting for the powder-boat.

Sherman was at this time in the heart of Georgia, and the enemy, having nearly recovered from his apprehensions of an attack on Wilmington, had left a very small force at Fort Fisher in order to assist in impeding Sherman's march. This was the time to strike. Butler having determined to join the expedition to see that the powder-boat was properly exploded, General Grant ordered him to get off with 6500 men, General Weitzel to have the immediate command. Still Grant had no idea that Butler would go with the expedition until the latter passed his headquarters on the way to Fortress Monroe.² Of course, as a matter of military courtesy, all orders

for Weitzel had passed through General Butler. On the 4th of December Grant had telegraphed to the latter to get the expedition off without delay, with or without the powder-boat. Instead of moving directly, Butler opened a telegraphic correspondence with Porter about their "little experiment." He issued his orders for the movement to General Weitzel on the 6th. The next day thirteen of the transports were ready. Four—and those the largest—were yet to arrive. On the 10th Butler had reached Fortress Monroe, and telegraphed to General Grant that he was waiting for the navy. Porter was waiting at Norfolk for the powder-boat. He left Hampton Roads on the 13th. The powder-boat had on board 200 tons of powder, and was to receive 90 tons more at Beaufort. "She has delayed us a little," writes Porter to Butler before starting, "and our movements had to depend on her." Butler's transports arrived off Masonborough Inlet, eighteen miles from Fort Fisher, on the 15th. The next day Porter reached Beaufort, and off that point wrote to Butler that he would start for the rendezvous (twenty-five miles east of Cape Fear River) the next day, and, in case of fair weather, would be able to blow up the powder-boat on the night of the 18th. Butler was not ready to land, and the weather did not promise favorably; it was therefore agreed to postpone the explosion. In the mean time, Butler returned to Beaufort for a fresh supply of coal and provisions. Porter remained with the fleet at the appointed rendezvous, and rode out the gale, which was one of unusual violence. His vessels, however, seem to have got in sight of Fort Fisher, for on the 20th their presence was reported to General Hoke. But for the delay occasioned by the powder-boat, the three days of fine weather (the 16th, 17th, and 18th) would have been improved, the troops would have been landed without difficulty, the enemy surprised, and Fort Fisher captured.



THE POWDER-BOAT LOUISIANA.

Finally, the mountain gave birth to the mouse. On the night of the 23d the powder-boat was exploded at a distance from Fort Fisher of 830 yards. Not a Federal gun-boat or transport dared venture an approach nearer than to a point twelve miles from the scene, and even at a much greater distance the steam in the boilers was lowered to prevent disaster. But, after all, the effect was insignificant. It is true, the explosion was heard at the fort, but it was there supposed that some unfortunate gun-boat had got aground, and been blown up to prevent its falling into the hands of the enemy. The Louisiana had been chosen for this experiment, and had on board, at the time of the explosion, 235 tons of powder. Commander A. C. Rhind had charge of the affair, and associated with him in this perilous service were Lieutenant Assistant Engineer A. T. Mullan, of the *Agawam*, Paul Boyden, acting master's mate, and seven men. Undoubtedly the effect of the explosion would have been very great if the powder had been properly confined, and if the fuses could have been so arranged that the ignition of the whole mass of powder would be instantaneous. As it was, there were four distinct explosions, and a large amount of the powder was blown away before it ignited.¹ But, in any case, the experiment ought to have been incidental; and Butler and Porter, in making it so prominent a matter, disregarded General Grant's instructions.

It was designed that the troops should be ready to land as soon as possible after the powder-boat explosion. But General Butler was delayed in collecting water, coals, and other supplies, and did not come up until the evening of the 24th, and then with only a few of his transports. Admiral Porter had that morning (11 30 A.M.) commenced the bombardment of Fort Fisher from a fleet of naval vessels, surpassing in numbers and equipments any which had assembled during the war.² The attack was made

¹ *Butler before Committee*, p. 11. This explanation would never have been given if Butler had not felt its necessity to account for his presence with the expedition. It is a conclusive corroboration of Grant's statement that he was surprised to see Butler on the way to Fort Fisher.

² See General Butler's and A. C. Rhind's testimony before the Committee.

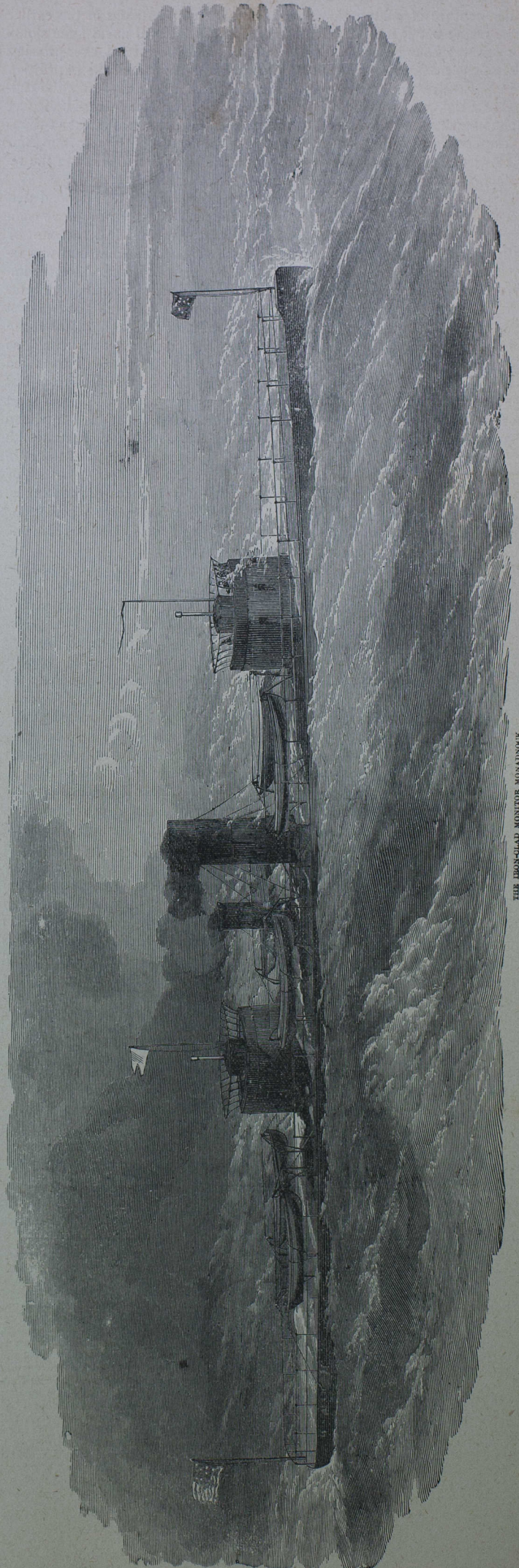
³ Porter's haste in exploding the powder vessel, and in commencing the bombardment on the morning of the 24th, before the land force was ready to co-operate, gave rise to considerable feeling. On the night of the 23d Butler sent his staff officer, Captain Clarke, to visit Porter, and inform the latter that the transports would arrive the next day. General Weitzel, in his testimony, says: "Captain Clarke returned just before we left the harbor, and reported that the admiral had said he would explode the powder vessel during the night of Friday, and commence the attack as soon thereafter as possible. It was a question of discussion between us, while sailing toward New Inlet, whether the admiral would commence the attack before we were there to co-operate with him. Several—I think General Butler among the number—doubted that he would do so. I did not doubt it, having been with the admiral on two or three previous expeditions. . . . I know the opinion expressed on board our vessel by several officers when it was found that the navy had made the attack as they did. There was one officer who particularly surprised me by expressing the opinion he did. He said that he believed Admiral Porter made the attack in the way he did because he believed he could knock the fort all to pieces, and would thus get all the credit of taking it to himself. This officer is generally very quiet in the way of expressing his opinions."

¹ "I think it was about the 20th of September last that I was on my way to Cairo to resume my command of the Mississippi squadron. Secretary Welles sent me word to meet him that evening at Mr. Blair's. I had arranged to leave for the West the next morning. I went to Mr. Blair's, and found Secretary Welles and Assistant Secretary Fox, who had a number of charts of Cape Fear River, which were spread out for examination. Secretary Welles said that he thought it most important that some attempt should be made to get possession of Cape Fear River; that he had always been in favor of making the attempt, and had, time and time again, invited the co-operation of the army for that purpose, but had received no encouragement. He said he thought there was then a prospect of getting troops for that purpose, and asked me what was my opinion about the matter. I told him I had never seen Cape Fear River, and knew nothing about the defenses the rebels had erected there. He said he would put me in possession of all the papers he had from Admiral Farragut, Admiral Lee, and others who had investigated the subject, and then let me give my opinion about it. I read over carefully all the papers, and examined the charts. Admiral Lee decided most positively that the place could not be taken with 50,000 men, it was so strong; and Admiral Farragut decided that we had not ships in the navy to do any thing with it. Under these circumstances, I told the secretary that I should require time to consider this matter. I went back to the secretary the next morning, and told him that if he would give me the force I named, I would promise to take the fort in three days. That was encouraging to him, for his whole heart was bent upon the matter. . . . I told him I wanted 300 guns on board ship, and all the heaviest frigates. . . . that it would require 13,000 men to land with intrenching tools."—*Porter's Testimony before the Committee on the Conduct of the War: Fort Fisher*, p. 88.

² At City Point Butler met Grant, and explained his presence with the expedition. He said: "This expedition is a matter of very grave responsibility. (I had known Admiral Porter somewhat in the Mississippi River. General Weitzel and himself, I had understood, had some little difference upon the report as to the damage done by Admiral Porter's bombardment to Fort Jackson and St. Philip.) General Weitzel is a very able general, but a very young man. I am anxious to see this powder experiment go on and succeed, for it is a very grave one; and I think I had better go with the expedition, to take the responsibility off General Weitzel, being an older officer."



FORT FISHER.



THE IRON-CLAD MONITOR MONITOR.

with thirty-seven vessels, five of which were iron-clads; and, besides these, there was a reserve force of nineteen vessels.¹ The main attack was made with the iron-clads and seven other vessels on the land face of the fort. The fleet had upward of 500 guns.

Fort Fisher is situated on Federal Point, on the north bank and at the mouth of Cape Fear River, 20 miles below Wilmington. The original plan of the expedition, as proposed in September, 1864, contemplated the passage of the fleet by the fort up the Cape Fear River. This had been abandoned on account of its impracticability. The channel was intricate, and was commanded by strong forts. It was also full of torpedoes. It was extremely difficult to cross the bar except at high tide, and even when this was accomplished it was unsafe for the vessels to enter without good pilots, or until the channel had been buoyed and the torpedoes removed. The only way in which the fort could be reduced was to land troops north of the work, and then either assault or lay siege to it. It was an earth-work mounting over 40 guns, and though the latter might be dismantled or silenced, the work itself could not be materially injured by a bombardment.² This fort, probably the strongest which had been attacked during the war, was manned on the 18th of December by a garrison of 677 men, under General W. H. C. Whiting; Colonel Lamb, who had himself erected the greater portion of the work, being second in command. Within five miles of the fort, at Sugar Loaf, was a reserve force of 800 men.³ On the 20th the alarm had been given, and on the 22d the advance of General Hoke's division reached Wilmington, and re-enforcements were rapidly sent to Sugar Loaf. Thus, on the 23d, the garrison of the fort was increased to 1087 men.⁴

Very little damage was done to Fort Fisher by the bombardment on the 24th. Twenty-three of the garrison were wounded, all but three only slightly. Five gun-carriages were

The distance between Fort Fisher and Beaufort Harbor was about seventy miles. Porter's explanation of his prompt attack is this: "Captain Clarke said he could make fourteen miles an hour. This would bring him in five hours to Beaufort, with information to General Butler as to the precise time of the explosion of the powder-boat (1 30 A.M. on the 24th). Butler would therefore have plenty of time to reach Fort Fisher before the commencement of his attack, at 11 30 A.M." But it seems Butler, although starting from Beaufort when Clarke returned, did not reach the fleet until night. It is clear, therefore, that Admiral Porter took too much for granted. If he had waited till the night of the 24th for the explosion of the powder-boat, and given Butler prompt notice of this—as he could have done through Captain Clarke—then Butler would have been on hand with the transports, and the attack, taking place on the 25th, would have been a combined one of the navy and army. The reader, however, should understand that, as the affair turned out, this lack of combination on the 24th had nothing whatever to do with the failure of the expedition.

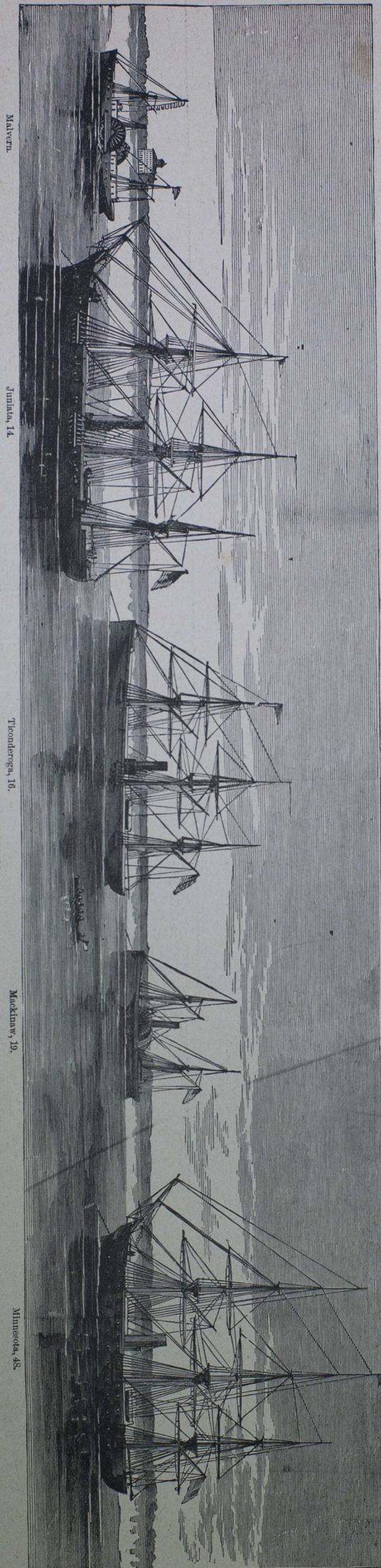
¹ The five iron-clads were the New Ironsides, Canonicus, Monadnock, Saugus, and Mahopac. The four last were turreted monitors.

² The following description of the fort is given by General Grant's engineer, Colonel Comstock:

"The land front consists of a half bastion on the left or Cape Fear River side, connected by a curtain with a bastion on the ocean side. The parapet is 25 feet thick, averages 20 feet in height, with traverses rising 10 feet above it and running back on their tops, which are from 8 to 12 feet in thickness, to a distance of from 30 to 40 feet from the interior crest. The traverses on the left half bastion are about 25 feet in length on top. The earth for this heavy parapet and the enormous traverses at their inner ends, more than 30 feet in height, was obtained partly from a shallow exterior ditch, but mainly from the interior of the work. Between each pair of traverses there was one or two guns. The traverses on the right of this front were only partially completed. A palisade, which is loop-holed and has a banquette, runs in front of this face, at a distance of 50 feet in front of the exterior slope, from the Cape Fear River to the ocean, with a position for a gun between the left of the front and the river, and another between the right of the front and the ocean. Through the middle traverse on the curtain is a bomb-proof postern, whose exterior opening is covered by a small redan for two field-pieces, to give flank-fire along the curtain. The traverses are generally bomb-proofed for men or magazines. The slopes of the work appear to have been reveited with marsh sods or covered with grass, and have an inclination of 45 degrees or a little less. . . . There were originally on this front 21 guns and three mortars. . . . The sea front consists of a series of batteries, mounting in all 24 guns, the different batteries being connected by a strong infantry parapet, so as to form a continuous line. The same system of heavy traverses for the protection of guns is used as on the land front, and these traverses are also generally bomb-proofed."

³ The Confederate Department of North Carolina was under the command of General Bragg, as it had been since October.

⁴ These facts were stated by General Whiting after his capture.





TRANSPORT FLEET OFF FEDERAL POINT.



THE MONITORS IN A GALE.

disabled, but this and every other injury done to the work was repaired during the night.

The next day, the 25th, was at once Sabbath and Christmas. The bombardment was renewed in the morning, and was more effective. The casualties in the fort were 46, three men being killed and nine mortally wounded. Four gun-carriages and one 10-inch gun were disabled. While the bombardment was going on, and under cover of the fleet, the landing of the troops began about noon. About this time Admiral Porter's flag-ship came alongside Butler's. After an exchanged greeting, the admiral hallooed through his speaking-trumpet, "There is not a rebel within five miles of the fort. You have nothing to do but to land and take possession of it."

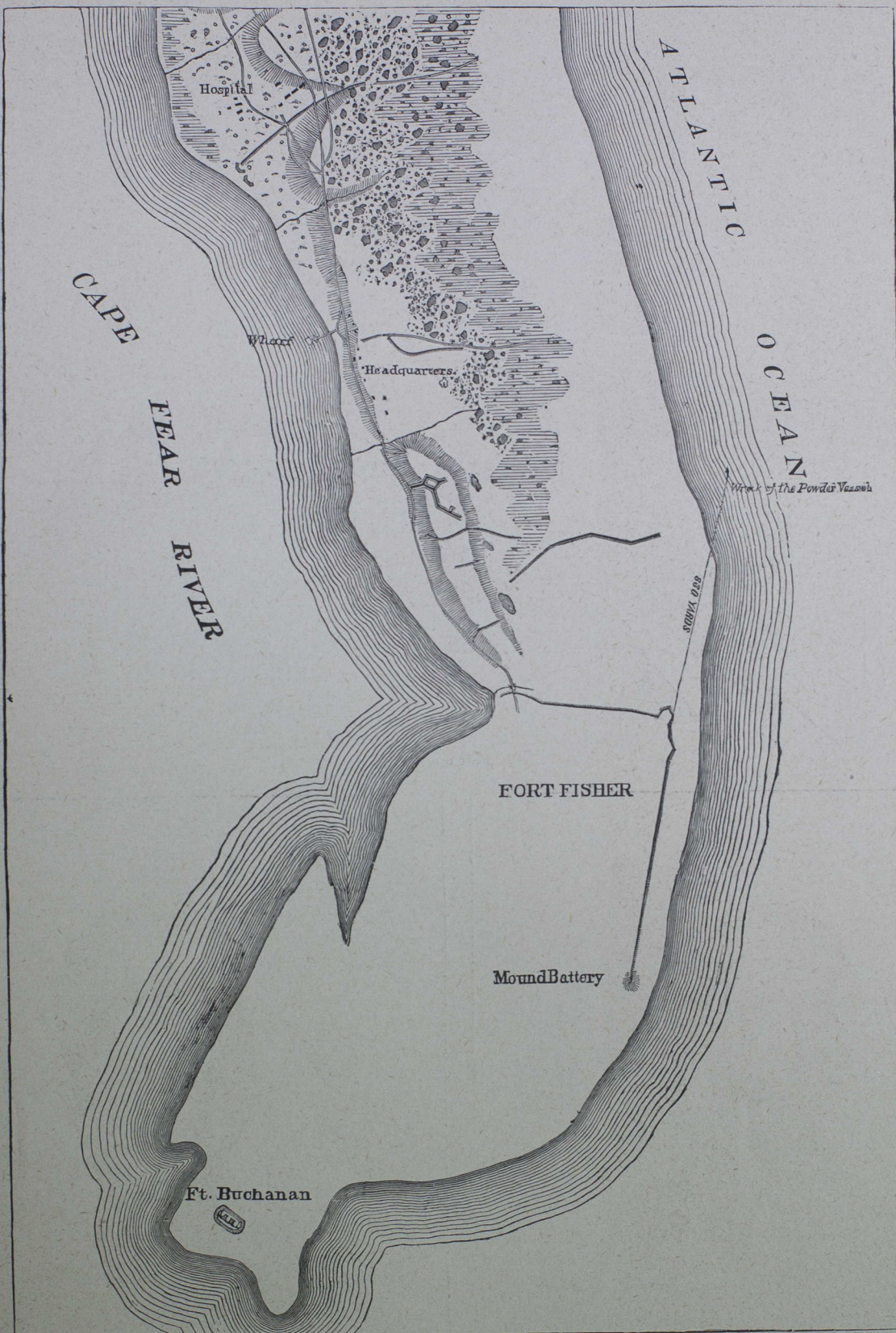
The military force was 6500 strong, consisting of General Ames's division of the Twenty-fourth Corps, and General Paine's division of the Twenty-fifth. Paine's division consisted of colored troops. Between 2100 and 2300 men were landed. General Weitzel went with the first 500 (General Curtis's brigade of Ames's division) to reconnoitre. In advancing upon the fort about 300 prisoners were captured by the reconnoitring column. The skirmishers were pushed up by General Curtis to within 150 yards of the fort. Weitzel mounted an artificial knoll, and took a view of the fort. As a defensive work, it did not appear to be injured by the terrific bombardment which it had sustained, and which was still going on. He counted 16 guns, all in proper position, on the land face. Even the grass slopes of the traverses and parapet remained unbroken, and their regular shapes undisturbed. The row of palisades in front of the ditch presented no opening. "It was a stronger work," he says, "than I had ever seen or heard of being assailed during this war." Weitzel remembered Fort Wagner; he recalled his experience in regard to assaults upon works not nearly so strong as this, and which had all proved failures; he remembered, also, that he had been appointed by General Grant to command the expedition instead of Gillmore on the ground that the latter had once shown timidity; that he himself had just been appointed to a major generalship, and that his confirmation depended largely upon his present conduct. He had every possible motive for boldness. Yet he considered that it would be murder to assail the fort, which, if skillfully defended (as he must assume it would be, knowing nothing to the contrary), ought to repulse any attack which he could make; and he advised General Butler against an assault. In the mean time another brigade had landed, and Curtis's skirmishers advanced boldly up to the par-



ADELBERT AMES.

apert. One man crept through the palisade and brought off the flag of the fort, which had been shot down and fallen outside the parapet. But this exploit did not change Weitzel's opinion. He knew that a portion of an assaulting column might even enter a fort, and yet the main body be repulsed. Curtis's advance had not been resisted, but this might be due either to the severity of the bombardment or to a deliberate design on the part of the garrison to tempt an assault. Even if it was due to the bombardment, the latter must cease at the moment of assault, and the garrison would spring again to its guns. General Curtis thought that, if allowed to advance, he could capture the fort. But as there was no well understood and skillfully arranged plan of attack, and no feint to cover his operations, it is very

General Butler thereupon proceeded to re-embark his troops. He gives two reasons for taking this step. In the first place, a storm was approaching, and he feared that it would be impossible to supply his troops on the shore. In the second place, a considerable force of the enemy was on his right flank at Sugar Loaf, and he thought that, under these circumstances, the position was untenable. There was nothing in the way of his landing the remainder of his force, and nothing prevented the landing of supplies until midnight.¹ The fleet would probably outride the gale, and would see to it that his force was supplied and protected against attack. Besides, General Butler had been ordered by General Grant to remain if he effected a landing. The question of immediate assault was left to his discretion; but,



MAP OF FORT FISHER.

probable that, if General Curtis's force had even entered the fort, every man of it would have been captured.¹

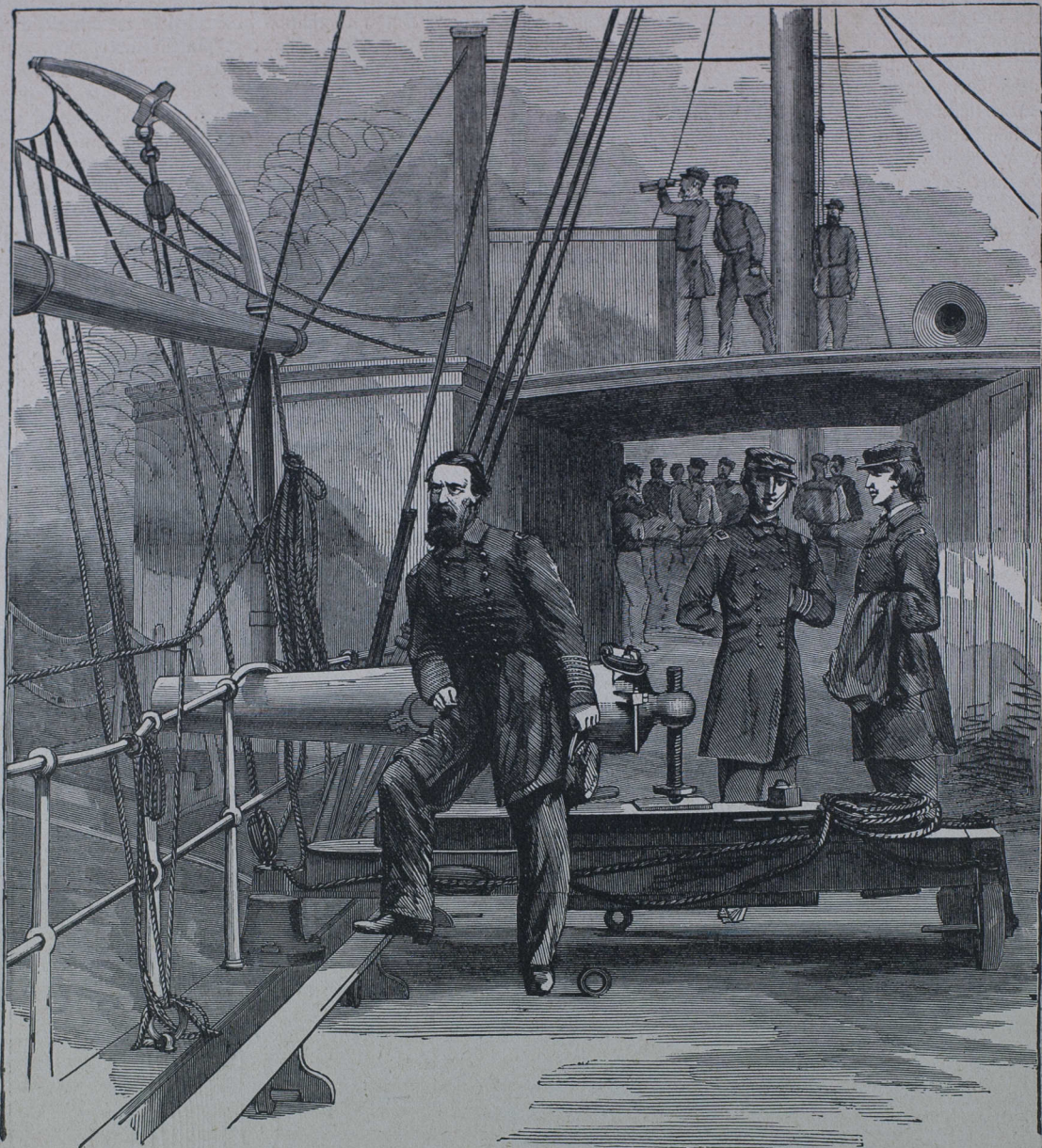
¹ The statement made by General Whiting, who was captured in the second attack on Fort Fisher, certainly confirms the wisdom of General Weitzel's opinion. He says that "the garrison was in no instance driven from its guns, and fired in return, according to orders, slowly and deliberately, 662 shot and shells;" that on the land front 19 guns were in position, and the palisade was in perfect order; and that, while it was possible that 3000 or 6000 men might have carried the work by assault, such an event was not probable. "The work," he adds, "was very strong, the garrison in good spirits, and ready; and the fire on the approaches (the assaulting column having no cover) would have been extraordinarily heavy. In addition to the heavy guns, I had a battery of Napoleons, on which I placed great reliance. The palisade alone would have been a most formidable obstacle."

In his official report he says: "During the day [the 25th] the enemy landed a large force, and at half past four advanced a line of skirmishers on the left flank of the second curtain, the fleet at the

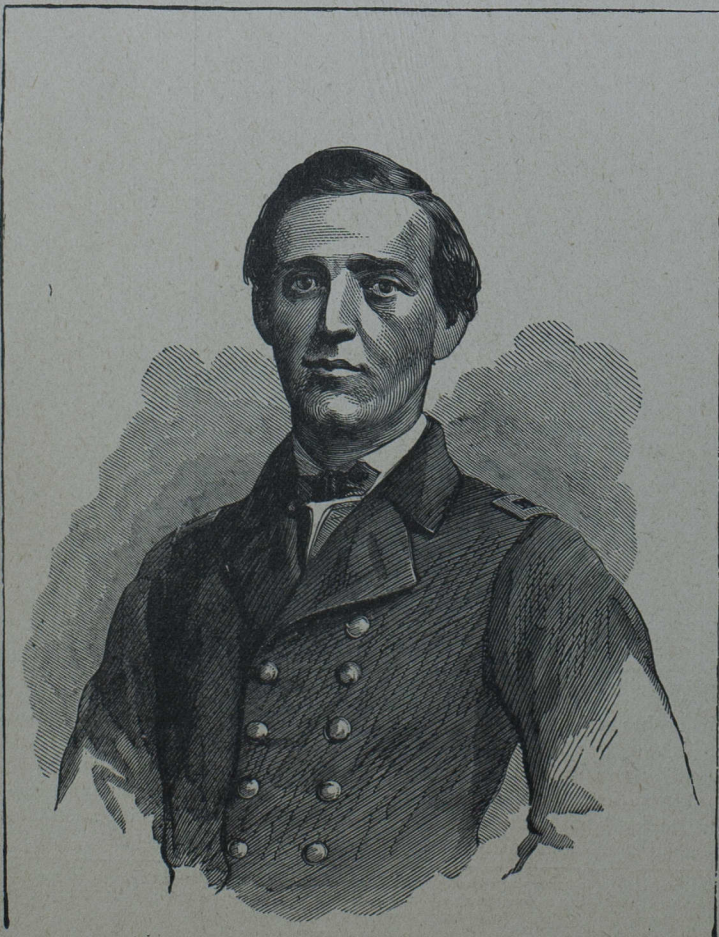
giving due weight to the reasons alleged by Butler for the re-embarkation of his troops, it was clearly a disobedience of orders. It is a curious fact that, although Weitzel was understood to have the immediate command of the expedition, he never saw the orders issued by General Grant for its conduct, and was not aware, until some time afterward, of Grant's intention that the land force should maintain its position after landing.²

same time making a concentrated and tremendous enfilading fire upon the curtain. The garrison, however, at the proper moment, when the fire slackened to allow the approach of the enemy's land force, drove them off with grape and musketry; at dark the enemy withdrew."

² See Captain Alden's testimony.—*Committee Report*, p. 60.
³ See General Weitzel's testimony. He says (*Committee Report*, p. 79): "The order of General Grant to General Butler, which I saw published in the papers—I never saw the original of the



DAVID D. PORTER.



BENJAMIN H. PORTER.



SAMUEL W. PRESTON.



LANDING OF TROOPS ABOVE FORT FISHER.

Thus the expedition failed, and the failure was due to mismanagement. It had been delayed, in the first place, until the enemy had gained time for re-enforcement. There was no well-arranged plan of attack. And there was no attempt made to maintain the position secured by the military force on Federal Point.¹ The loss in life, however, had been slight. Upward of forty casualties occurred in the navy from the bursting of 100-lb. Parrott guns on several of the vessels. The loss thus caused was greater than that inflicted by the enemy.

The popular disappointment which followed the failure of an expedition from which, chiefly on account of the extent of the naval force, so much had been expected, was diversified with the mutual recriminations between the army and navy commanders. But these find no proper place in history. The Committee on the Conduct of the War (Benjamin F. Wade, chairman) investigated the affair, and acquitted General Butler of blame. But General

order—stated that in certain cases he was to intrench and hold his position, and co-operate with the navy in the reduction of the fort. General Grant said to me the other night that when he ordered the expedition to sail he knew that Wilmington and the works there were nearly devoid of troops, and he thought if we moved down there and landed quickly, the mere effect of landing the troops, together with the presence of such a fleet, would be to compel them to surrender. But in consequence of the delay the enemy got troops down there. But he said that his intention was, after we had made a landing there, finding that it was not possible to assault, that General Butler should intrench there.”

Question. “What was there to prevent compliance with such an order?”
Answer. “There was nothing to prevent a compliance with it. There would have been difficulties to contend with at that season of the year. The landing of supplies would have been one difficulty; the annoyance from the rebel gun-boats in the river would have been another. But they might, and probably would have been driven off by our artillery. . . . If I had had the instructions that General Grant gave to General Butler . . . I would have intrenched and remained there. . . . No matter what the difficulties were, that order would have covered him from any consequences.”

General Grant testifies (*ibidem*, p. 54): “There is no question that General Butler could have remained, in obedience to my instructions; but I do not think he was guided by them; I do not think he paid any particular attention to them.”

¹ The following correspondence passed between General Butler and Admiral Porter just after the re-embarkation:

General Butler writes: “Upon landing the troops and making a thorough reconnoissance of Fort Fisher, both General Weitzel and myself are fully of the opinion that the place could not be carried by assault, as it was left substantially uninjured as a defensive work by the navy fire. We found seventeen guns protected by traverses, two only of which were dismantled, bearing up the beach and covering a strip of land, the only practicable route, not more than wide enough for a thousand men in line of battle.

“Having captured Flag-pond Hill Battery, the garrison of which, sixty-five men and two commissioned officers, were taken off by the navy, we also captured Half-moon Battery and seven officers and 218 men of the Third North Carolina Junior Reserves, including its commander, from whom I learned that a portion of Hoke’s division, consisting of Kirkland’s and Haygood’s brigades, had been sent from the lines before Richmond on Tuesday last, arriving at Wilmington Friday night.

“General Weitzel advanced his skirmish line within fifty yards of the fort, while the garrison was kept in their bomb-proofs by the fire of the navy, and so closely that three or four of the men of the picket line ventured upon the parapet and through the sally-port of the work, capturing a horse, which they brought off, killing the orderly, who was the bearer of a dispatch from the chief of artillery of General Whiting to bring a light battery within the fort, and also brought away from the parapet the flag of the fort.

“This was done while the shells of the navy were falling about the heads of the daring men who entered the work, and it was evident, as soon as the fire of the navy ceased because of the darkness, that the fort was fully manned again, and opened with grape and canister upon our picket line.

“Finding that nothing but the operations of a regular siege, which did not come within my instructions, would reduce the fort, and in view of the threatening aspect of the weather, wind rising from the southeast, rendering it impossible to make farther landing through the surf, I caused the troops, with their prisoners, to re-embark, and see nothing farther that can be done by the land forces. I shall therefore sail for Hampton Roads as soon as the transport fleet can be got in order.

“My engineers and officers report Fort Fisher to me as substantially uninjured as a defensive work.”

To this Porter replies:

“I beg leave to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of this date, the substance of which was communicated to me by General Weitzel last night.

“I have ordered the largest vessels to proceed off Beaufort and fill up with ammunition, to be ready for another attack, in case it is decided to proceed with this matter by making other arrangements.

“We have not commenced firing rapidly yet, and could keep any rebels inside from showing their heads until an assaulting column was within twenty yards of the works.

“I wish some more of your gallant fellows had followed the officer who took the flag from the parapet, and the brave fellow who brought the horse out from the fort. I think they would have found it an easier conquest than is supposed.

“I do not, however, pretend to place my opinion in opposition to General Weitzel, whom I know to be an accomplished soldier and engineer, and whose opinion has great weight with me.

“I will look out that the troops are all off in safety. We will have a west wind presently, and a smooth beach about three o’clock, when sufficient boats will be sent for them.

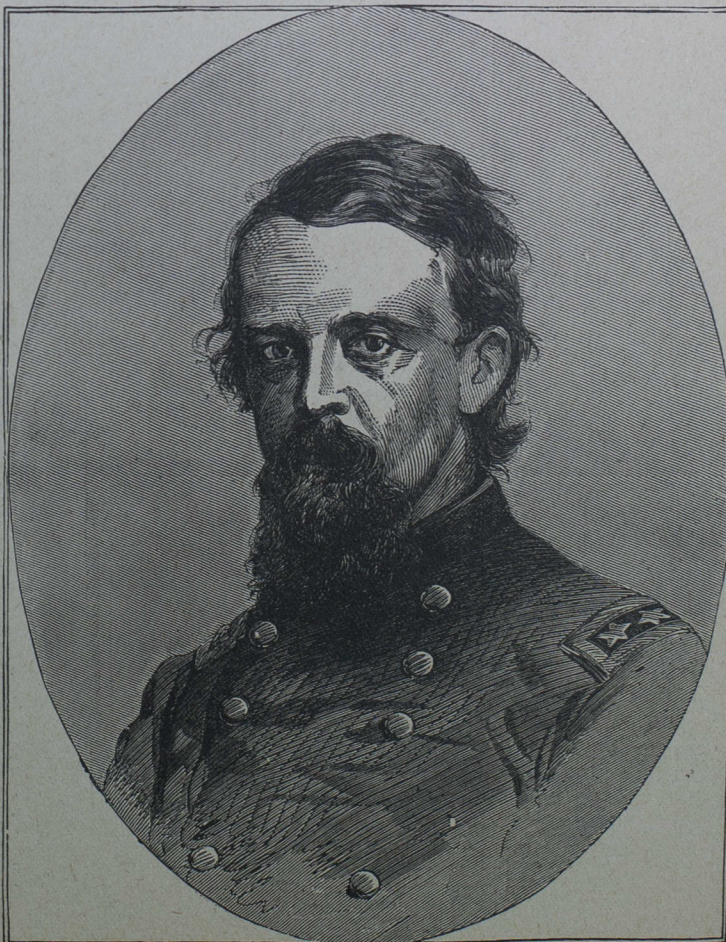
“The prisoners now on board the Santiago de Cuba will be delivered to the provost-marshal at Fortress Monroe, unless you wish to take them on board one of the transports, which would be inconvenient just now.”

Grant gave his own decision in another way by relieving General Butler of his command of the Army of the James.

Admiral Porter determined to remain until a more efficient military commander should be sent to co-operate with him. He even proposed to take the fort with his sailors.

While the altercation occasioned by the first attack on Fort Fisher was going on, a second expedition was organized, in which the command of the military force was assigned to Major General Alfred H. Terry, who, after the death of General D. B. Birney, stood next to Weitzel in the Army of the James. His command was the same as that with which Butler had sailed, with a single brigade added, bringing its number up to about 8000 men. General Terry, though not a graduate of West Point, had carefully studied the art of war theoretically and practically.

Porter, after experimenting on Fort Fisher for two or three days subsequent to Butler’s departure, had returned to Fortress Monroe, where he was joined by Terry before the middle of January. On the 12th of that month the combined expedition reached New Inlet, and the next day the troops were landed. General Whiting and Colonel Lamb still commanded the garrison, which now numbered 2500 men, more than double the force which had confronted Butler. At 2 P.M. on the 13th the debarkation was completed, and the bombardment commenced again, and was more precise and effective than in the first attack. The garrison were driven from their guns, which were soon silenced, and many of them disabled. All night the bom-



ALFRED H. TERRY.

bardment went on, giving the enemy no opportunity to repair injuries. On the 14th the fleet continued the battle with the silent fort, its efforts being chiefly directed to dismount the guns. In the mean time preparations were made for the assault, which was to take place on the afternoon of the 15th. Up to this time shot and shell from 500 guns had been beating upon the earth-work, doing the work itself little damage, but breaking the palisade and dismounting its guns. About 1400 sailors and marines had landed, and were to participate in the assault, the plan of which had been most skillfully arranged. The marines and sailors were to attack the sea-face of the fort, while Terry's three brigades should carry the land front. The assault by the sailors was to be covered by an entrenched party on the beach. A perfect system of signals was agreed upon between the military commander and the admiral. No precaution was neglected, no measure overlooked which would assist in securing success.

At 3 P.M. the preconcerted signal was given for the commencement of the assault, and the admiral turned his guns from the parapet and against the upper batteries (on the centre mound). The attack by the marines appears to have been mistaken by the garrison for the main assault. The entrenched party of sharpshooters did not well cover the advance of the sailors, and the latter were repulsed, losing Lieutenants Preston and Porter, who were bravest among the brave.¹ In the mean while the soldiers had gained the northeastern rampart. The guns of the fleet were turned upon the traverses, while the brave men of Terry's command fought their way from traverse to traverse,² overpowering the garrison, and driving it back to the Mound Battery. Both Generals Whiting and Lamb had been wounded. Dispirited by the loss of their leaders, the Confederates were easily driven from their last refuge, and the entire command surrendered, with 75 guns. The fighting had been desperate, and had lasted from 3 o'clock till 10 P.M. The

¹ K. R. Breese thus alludes to the death of these gallant officers in a special report:

"North Atlantic Squadron, U.S. Flag Ship Malvern, off Fort Fisher, January 18, 1865.

"ADMIRAL,—In my report of the assault on Fort Fisher I have scarcely mentioned the names and services of Lieutenant S. W. Preston, your flag-lieutenant, and Lieutenant B. H. Porter, your flag-captain, thinking that by a little delay I might the more do justice, yet I seem to feel that impossible in me. Preston, after accomplishing most splendidly the work assigned him by you, which was both dangerous and laborious, under constant fire, came to me, as my aid, for orders, showing no flagging of spirit or body, and returning from the rear, whither he had been sent, fell among the foremost at the front, as he had lived the thorough embodiment of a United States naval officer. Porter, conspicuous by his figure and uniform, as well as by his great gallantry, claimed the right to lead the headmost column with the Malvern's men he had taken with him, carrying your flag, and fell at its very head. Two more noble spirits the world never saw, nor had the navy ever two more intrepid men. Young, talented, and handsome, the bravest of the brave, pure in their lives, surely their names deserve something more than a passing mention, and are worthy to be handed down to posterity with the greatest and best of naval heroes.

"Were you not so well acquainted with their characters I should deem it my duty to speak of their high merits; but as chief of your staff, to which they belonged, I must speak of their wonderful singleness of purpose to do their whole duty; always most cheerful and willing, desirous of undertaking any thing which might redound to the credit of the service, giving me at all times the most ready assistance in my duties, combining with their intelligence a ready perception as to the best mode of accomplishing their orders, the country has lost two such servants as could ill be spared, and your staff its brightest ornaments.

"Very respectfully, your obedient servant,

K. R. BREESE,

"Fleet Captain, North Atlantic Squadron.

"Rear-Admiral DAVID D. PORTER, Commanding North Atlantic Squadron."

² "These traverses," says Admiral Porter, "are immense bomb-proofs, about sixty feet long, fifty feet wide, and twenty feet high—seventeen of them in all, being on the northeast face. Between each traverse, or bomb-proof, are one or two heavy guns. The fighting lasted until ten o'clock at night, the Ironsides and Monitors firing through the traverses in advance of our troops, and the level strip of land called Federal Point being enfiladed by the ships to prevent re-enforcements reaching the rebels."

Federal loss in Terry's command was 110 killed and 536 wounded, including among the latter all three of the brigade commanders engaged in the assault—Generals Curtis, Bell, and Pennybacker. The casualties in the fleet amounted to 309, making a total loss of nearly 1000 men.

In a great degree this success had been due to surprise, or rather to an attack made in an unexpected quarter with the main column. This column, advancing out of the woods, suddenly approached the western extremity of the land front, and one brigade (Bell's) charged along a narrow causeway in the face of four guns.¹ Nothing, however, was accomplished by the second expedition which might not, under good management, have been as well accomplished by the first.

The next morning a sad event occurred, which to some extent marred the cheer of victory. By some culpable negligence, the soldiers were allowed to approach the magazine with lighted candles. In this way an explosion was occasioned, resulting in the loss of about 200 men. Among the severely wounded was Colonel Alonzo Alden, of the One Hundred and Sixty-ninth New York regiment.

As a result of the fall of Fort Fisher, the surrounding work—Fort Caswell, a large work at the West Inlet, mounting 29 guns, all the works on Smith's Island, those between Caswell and Smithville up to the battery on Reeves's Point, on the west side of the river, were abandoned. Including the guns taken at Fort Fisher, 169 were captured in all.

The same day that Fort Fisher was assaulted and carried by Terry's troops, Major General Schofield, with the Twenty-third Corps, 21,000 strong, left Thomas's army for the East. In February Schofield was appointed commander of the Department of North Carolina, just created. He then commenced a campaign, the ultimate object of which was the occupation of Goldsborough, in order to prepare for the arrival of Sherman's army by opening railway communication from that point with the sea-coast, and accumulating supplies. Wilmington was to be captured first, because it would be a valuable auxiliary base to Morehead City if Sherman should reach Goldsborough, and absolutely necessary in the event of Sherman's concentrating his army farther south.

Schofield, with the Third division (J. D. Cox's) of his corps, reached the mouth of Cape Fear River on the 9th of February, landing near Fort Fisher. Terry and Porter had already made the port of Wilmington useless to blockade runners. The former, still retaining his command, and having the co-operation of the North Atlantic Squadron, held a line across the peninsula two miles above Fort Fisher, and occupied Smithville and Fort Caswell. The Cape Fear had been entered by a portion of the fleet, so that both of Terry's flanks were secure. The enemy, under General Hoke, still covered Fort Anderson on the west bank, and the immediate defenses of Wilmington, in position impregnable against a direct attack. The Confederate line must be turned either on its left by the fleet passing above Masonborough Inlet, or by a march of the army around the swamp covering its right. The

¹ Admiral Porter says in his report:

"I have since visited Fort Fisher and its adjoining works, and find their strength greatly beyond what I had conceived. An engineer might be excusable in saying they could not be captured except by regular siege. I wonder even now how it was done. The work, as I said before, is really stronger than the Malakoff Tower, which defied so long the combined powers of France and England; and yet it is captured by a handful of men, under the fire of the guns of the fleet, and in seven hours after the attack commenced in earnest."



PORTER'S FLEET CELEBRATING THE CAPTURE OF FORT FISHER.