

DONALDSONVILLE CANNONIERS.

A Gallant Louisiana Command Famous in the Civil War.

Recollections of Its Share in the Siege of Petersburg.

A Week's Bombardment in the Works on Chesterfield Heights.

How It Feels to be the Target for Accurate Artillerists—Sufferings of the Soldiers.

II

Sunday, June 19—The headquarters of General Beauregard being but a stone's throw from the bivouac, I had the pleasure to see our grand Creole quite frequently. Time and anxiety have worn many furrows in his brow. His hair and mustache have become white, while his eye lacks the luster of youth.

Desultory volleys of musketry to the north and east of the city are heard from dawn to dusk. A few shells fell in the town to-day. At 7 o'clock p. m. our rifled section was detached from the battalion and joined ten other Parrott guns under command of Colonel Cutts, acting chief of artillery of A. P. Hill's Corps. Proceeding down the Richmond and Petersburg turnpike about half a mile, we took the Clifton road to the east, and after two hours' travel were assigned to a position in the garden of Mrs. Archer's house, on the west bank of the Appomattox river, about two miles north of Petersburg. The commanding officer laid out a breastwork for piece No. 3, in the shape of an obtuse angle, the longer side being designed as protection against an enfilading fire. The work has a base of 16 feet, with 4-foot slope, and although we labored incessantly through the night, daylight found the work but half finished.

Monday—A cup of coffee (the precious berry of Arabia having been ditched from one of our box cars) helped our drooping spirits at dawn. We crept down to the river's bank to enjoy a wash, and felt decidedly refreshed ere the sun rose. A heavy fog which enshrouded the earth until 7 o'clock proved our good friend, as by that time we were enabled to almost finish the earthwork and open fire with the rest of the guns. Our position was partly masked on the left by the foliage of the scrub oaks which line the river bank, and commands a full view of battery No. 5 of the city defenses, which the enemy had captured last week, ere the Third Corps came up.

At the word of command the twelve guns opened simultaneously on the enemy, and for an hour made lively music. The Yankees were not slow to reply. The experiment proved that neither combatant was able to do material harm. As the firing had ceased by 11 o'clock the artillery men proceeded to invade the orchard attached to the deserted mansion, and in double quick time the cherries and raspberries had disappeared. We cooked the fruit with sugar, and made quite a palatable addition to our menu. An old drake was found in the parlor of the Jane Archer house, in contravention of the articles of war, and was condemned to death upon the spot. We cooked the ancient bird fourteen different ways, but could only enjoy soup seasoned by his carcass, as the flesh could not be separated from the bone.

At 5 o'clock p. m. the enemy moved a regiment of infantry to the left, and all our guns opened on them with short-fuse shells. At the first volley the enemy took to their heels, not stopping to care for their wounded, whom we could distinguish dragging themselves to shelter. Then the Yankee guns opened again on us, but without doing any injury. We counted four batteries engaged on their side. At dark other earthworks were laid out, the construction of which occupied all night, half the men working on a five hours' stretch. When the indisposition of the soldier to work is considered, the experience of the past two days is the very refinement of cruelty.

Tuesday—Our guns provoked a duel this morning, the enemy using 10 and 20-pounders from the river bank on our right, Beasley's farm on the left, and Battery 4, Petersburg city defenses beyond the City Point road, and immediately in front of our section. The affair lasted for two hours, the Yankees indicating in an unpleasant manner that they had the exact range of our works. Penick's Virginia battery on our left lost five men in as many minutes. Those were hot days on the lovely Chesterfield heights, when the passions of men turned a paradise into a hell. Along the line of earthworks stood the gunners, half naked, working like fiends, shouting words of encouragement or chanting the refrain of some patriotic song, while above the hoarse roar of the cannon rose the shrieks of the wounded, as the hot fragments of the iron shells tore ragged furrows in their tender flesh. The summer sun shone down fiercely on the green; hot metal monsters that hurled death and destruction to hundreds, while the sulphurous smoke settled down on the terrible scene as if to blot out the horror of the picture that so blurred the fair face of nature. Strong men, although inspired by the excitement of murdering their fellow-creatures, frequently fell, fainting from fatigue, at their posts, and were dragged away by detailed stretcher-bearers, to be placed under the shade of the trees. With lungs full of smoke, almost to the point of strangulation, the brave fellows swabbed the hot guns, stood like statues with thumb on vent, and as the command "Fire!" rang out, fell back of the axle, and there, with brawny arms, hurled the heavy gun back from its recoil, and shouted with the strange joy of action.

June 22—While cooking breakfast the enemy opened on us from battery No. 4 with rifled 32-pounders; simultaneously the guns from their river and Bowman house batteries raked our position in enfilade. This game continued for an hour, and we were not allowed the satisfaction of responding to the challenge. Cummings, formerly of the "Shreveport Grays" (Dreaux's Battalion) was a crack gunner in the Irving (Va.) Artillery. With a shell from his gun he struck the Captain Reid house on the east side of the river, and caused a stampede among the "blue jays." As they streamed out of the house my gun placed five shells where they did lots of good. After night-fall I ran the blockade into town in time to see four guns and 1,500 prisoners brought to the rear, escorted by details from their captors, Wilcox's and Anderson's Divisions of our corps. All the inhabitants were on Sycamore street to view the sight, and the negroes of both sexes seemed to take pleasure in chaffing the prisoners.

I traded some coffee for sugar, gave out some washing, and got back to the guns in time for guard duty.

June 23—The enemy again interrupted our preparation of the morning meal by a brisk bombardment along our entire line. I had just lifted the pot of pork and beans from the fire when a solid shot raked out the fireplace. A new battery of heavy guns, located east of Beasley's house, paid its compliments this morning. So accurately has the enemy secured the range of our position that our

boys, when not in action, keep close down behind the traverse works. A shell knocked a spoke from the wheel of my gun, exploding beyond the works, and another destroyed a blanket that had been laid out to dry on top of the works. The weather is excessively hot. Desultory firing by the enemy continued throughout the day. Our No. 6 piece was dismounted by a shell striking the wheel; half an hour later one of the guns of Cutts' Battery was struck and disabled. The fire from the new enfilading battery is annoyingly accurate. The boys are disgusted at having to lie low and take bombardment without responding in kind. Despite the continuous iron compliments of the enemy, not one of the men of my battery has been seriously wounded, so the boys think Pleasant Hill a lucky spot to fight from. While off duty the boys found time to bathe in the river at the base of the hill, and thus kept fresh and cheerful. After dark the enemy fired at our camp fires, opening with two new guns from battery No. 5, of the old Petersburg city defenses. The lighted fuses looked like hugh fireflies as they whizzed just over our heads and cut the limbs from the beautiful trees in the rear of our position.

Saturday, the 25th—At 10 o'clock the enemy opened on the city with 32-pounder siege guns, and Beauregard's order was transmitted by signal flags, "Fire on the heavy guns." The rifled guns to the right and left of Archer's house commenced firing. In a few minutes the existence of yet another opposing battery was developed on Captain Pace's farm, directly in our front. The new opponent consisted of four 10-pound Parrott guns, which were admirably served. An hour's firing convinced us that the enemy could shell the city at his pleasure, and the artillery duel ceased. We were right glad of the opportunity to roll on the lawn and refresh ourselves at the expense of Mrs. Archer's icehouse. Boiled beans formed our dinner, the bacon having been consumed yesterday, but we find that beans fill "the empty, aching void" effectually. Early in the afternoon the new battery established by Mr. Yank opened on us fiercely. The four guns kept up a terrific bombardment. More beautiful practice was never seen. Each shot struck some object in the immediate vicinity of our guns. Every minute a shower of dirt overwhelmed us as the earthworks were repeatedly bored and the shells exploded. A solid shot penetrated thirteen feet of earth, and mortally wounded Lieutenant James, of Cutts' Battery. This bombardment continued until dark, and the enemy viciously sent a few shells in the direction of our camp fires, just for "lagnappe," as it were. At 9 o'clock all the short range pieces were withdrawn from Chesterfield heights, and their places supplied by guns of heavier caliber. Our section went into bivouac in a field on the Port Clifton road, a mile in the rear of Pleasant Hill.

EUGENE H. LEVY.