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The Capture of Wilmington

A FORTIETH ANNIVERSARY WAR STORY

February 22, 1865

[Copyright, 1905, by G. L. Kilmer.] WILMINGTON, N. C., the last port of the Confederacy to be closed against blockade runners, fell Feb. 22, 1865, as a sequel to the Federal capture of Fort Fisher on Jan. 15. Before the collapse of Fort Fisher, the grim sentry at the mouth of Cape Fear river, General Schofield had been ordered to bring the Twenty-third army corps from Tennessee to North Carolina with a view to securing a base for Sherman, who was to march northward through the Carolinas. After the fall of Fort Fisher Wilmington's defense rested with Fort Anderson, on the west bank of Cape Fear river, and a force of Confederates, led by General Hoke, posted on the east bank below the city. Unting the victors at Fort Fisher, under General Terry, with his own men from the west, Schofield attempted to march up the east bank and cross near the city. Finding the route difficult owing to storms and high tide, he transferred two divisions, led by General Cox and General Ames, the last among the captors of Fort Fisher, to the west bank near the village of Smithville and below Fort Anderson. Admiral Porter's warships had from time to time bombarded Fort Anderson at long range and renewed their fire as the land force advanced. General Cox took the lead in the march upon the fort and on the 17th got within two miles of the outworks, his line resting upon Cape Fear river and in communication with the fleet. A reconnaissance revealed to General Cox a line of Confederate infantry well entrenched leading from the bank of the river to the foot of Orton pond, a lake several miles long. Owing to the protection of this body of water the trenches could not be turned except by a long march. The line was further protected by abatis and manned with field artillery, which kept up a rapid fire of shrapnel whenever the Federals showed within range. Two of General Cox's brigades were entrenched in front of Fort Anderson, and two others marched for the head of Orton pond, a distance of fifteen miles. It was night when the column reached the causeway at the head of the pond. The enemy resisted General

it consumed half a day to put two brigades across. During this movement Cox's sharpshooters on the south bank crept so close to the creek as to make it hot for the Confederates to show themselves above the parapet. The Whitworth gun in the works was disabled by artillery fire, and the Federal navy steamed up within range, compelling the Confederates on both sides of Cape Fear river to take positions out of reach. The Confederates behind Town creek made the mistake of thinking that the ground on the flanks of their position was impossible for the Federals to march over. General Cox didn't find the region picketed and soon struck the highroad two miles in rear of the works. The Confederates had begun a line of breastworks facing to the rear and turned about to meet Cox when they discovered his line moving down from Wilmington way. A single charge of the Federals broke the line, and the commander surrendered with 400 men and 3 cannon. Part of the Confederates escaped to Wilmington. During the night General Cox repaired the bridge over Town creek and, with his whole force, trains and artillery, set out for Wilmington. Meanwhile General Hoke's Confederates still held General Terry back on the east of the river. After a march of six miles Cox was again held up by Mill creek, an unfordable stream with its bridge burned. Two hours were passed in repairing the bridge, and the column marched on to Brunswick Ferry, in front of Wilmington. Here the railway bridge fired by the Confederates was still burning, but several boats of a pontoon bridge used by the Confederates had been overlooked, and with these the troops were poled across to Eagle island, midway of the river and about a mile wide. General Cox immediately began to repair the pontoon bridge and cross his column to the island. Meanwhile the detachment which had been ferried over marched on toward the city ferry and were met by a party of Confederates having a couple of cannon in position behind a rude work they had constructed to defend the road. While the riflemen of the Federal vanguard attempted to drive the Confederate gunners from their pieces General Cox opened with artillery from the west bank, and the explosion of the shells so close to the city warned the authorities that an enemy was at their gates. Persistent rumors had been afloat around Wilmington that the Confederate General Hardee, who had evacuated Charleston and moved north with several thousand men, was about to succor the threatened city. General Terry could make no headway in trying to push Hoke's Confederates on the east bank of the river, and it was supposed that Hoke had been reinforced. General Cox's story of the day is that the commanding officer of the expedition, General Schofield, ordered him (Cox) after he had secured a lodgment upon Eagle island to draw back and ferry his troops to the east bank of Cape Fear river to re-enforce Terry. Being convinced from what he had seen on the west bank, General Cox says that he purposely delayed obeying orders promptly, put one brigade in motion and reported the circumstance fully to his superior. The river bank being lined with swamps, it was midnight of the 21st before Cox's couriers reached his headquarters with fresh directions from Schofield. The chief approved Cox's action, although he had sent repeated orders to him to recross the river and support Terry in an attack on Hoke. These orders had been the more urgent the afternoon of the 21st because Hoke resumed the aggressive at that time as a cover to his retreat and the abandonment of Wilmington to its fate. General Hoke marched away during the night, and Terry's troops followed up, entering the city at the dawn of Washington's birthday. Wilmington having been secured as a base for Sherman in case of need, General Schofield turned his attention to securing a better one at Newbern, N. C., then in Federal possession, but cut off from Goldsboro, where Sherman was expected to halt by a Confederate post at Kingston. Leaving Terry in command of Wilmington, Schofield detached General Cox to Newbern to open the road to Goldsboro. This was effected after a stubborn battle at Kingston, and Schofield united the column under Terry with Sherman's army at Goldsboro, with communications open to both Newbern and Wilmington. GEORGE L. KILMER.



GENERAL COX'S ATTACK IN PONTOON BOATS. Cox's advance across the swamp with cavalry, but this was finally outflanked, and the troops passed the swamp to high ground beyond. Throughout the day the fleet kept up a rain of fire upon Fort Anderson, and the Confederates abandoned the place during the night, leaving ten pieces of heavy artillery to the enemy. The garrison of Fort Anderson retreated along the river bank to a stream called Town creek, which flows at right angles with Cape Fear river, a few miles below Wilmington. On the east side of the river the Confederates under General Hoke also fell back and took up a position opposite the mouth of Town creek. General Terry followed up Hoke in his retreat, and General Ames' division crossed from the west bank of the river to the east to support Terry. General Cox pursued the garrison column to the banks of Town creek. Before evacuating Fort Anderson the Confederates built a strong line of works on the north bank of Town creek and manned them with a Whitworth rifled cannon and two field pieces. The creek was deep and unfordable. The planking was removed from the bridge over the creek, and guns in the works swept the long causeway over the marsh leading to the bridge. A single Confederate brigade led by General Hagood held the works at Town creek. General Cox's skirmishers worked their way through the marsh to the edge of the creek and picked up an abandoned flatboat which was used on the 20th to ferry troops across. As the boat could carry but fifty men,

pet, and then a bullet snaps the life-blood of a comrade whose elbow has touched yours day and night for forty hours. There is a limit to human endurance in these straits. - World's Work.

Anecdote of Gounod. Gounod was at one moment within an ace of taking holy orders, but on reflection he thought that the life of a priest would not suit him. He none the less remained a firm and devout Catholic and adored religious music. On this point a typical anecdote is told of him. It occurred during the rehearsal of his "Dramas Sacres" at the Vaudeville theater. The manager called on him one morning and asked permission to make a suggestion. "I think, mon cher matre," he said, "that there is something wanting in your sacre. For example, do you not think that the Barabbas incident might be improved by a little more orchestral effect?" Gounod, without replying, hid his head in his hands and after two or three minutes of meditation suddenly exclaimed: "No; decidedly no. Such a blackguard as that does not deserve more music."

Funeral Garlands. A custom prevailed and continued even down to recent years of making funeral garlands on the death of young unmarried women of unblemished character. These garlands were made sometimes of metal and sometimes of natural flowers or evergreens and commonly having a white glove in the center on which were inscribed the name and initials and age of the deceased. This garland was laid on or carried before the coffin during its passage to the grave and afterward frequently hung up in the church, generally being suspended from the roof. It was usual in the primitive church to place crowns of flowers on the heads of deceased virgins. - Westminster Gazette.

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