THE GALVESTON AFFAIR.

Another Account of the Capture of the City and the Harriet Lane.

The Blowing Up of the Flag-ship Westfield.

A CASE CALLING FOR INVESTIGATION.

Full Particulars from Our Special Correspondent.

GALVESTON BAY, Texas, Thursday, Jan. 1, 1863.

One of the most desperate and at the same time disastrous actions, in the history of the present war, has just taken place at this point, which will cause the patriotic heart of the great North to thrill with horror, when the full particulars of the catastrophe can be ascertained.

I hasten to lay before your readers a short sketch of what I myself saw, leaving them to draw their own conclusions, and, if censure in the case is just, to censure whom they may think necessary.

The propeller *Mary E. Boardman* left New-Orleans on the 29th ult., loaded with commissary stores for troops that were stationed at Galveston, as well as for the relief of many hundred Texan refugees, who had congregated upon the wharves of Galveston, to receive protection from our gunboats stationed there. She had on board, as passengers, Maj. W. L. BURT and Capt. S. W. COZZENS, of Brig.-Gen. HAMILTON'S Staff, Military Governor of Texas, who were on their way to Galveston, to represent Gen. HAMILTON at that place.

We arrived off Galveston Bar about 4 o'clock on the afternoon of Dec. 31, and after signaling for a pilot, the U. S. flag-ship *Westfield*, W. B. RENSHAW, commanding, steamed out, and gave us her pilot, who took us safely over the bar, and anchored us in Bolivar Channel, so called, about one and one-quarter mile distant from the city, at a point near Pelican Island, and abreast of Bolivar Point Lighthouse.

About two o'clock in the morning a boat came off to the *Boardman* from the *Westfield*, which was anchored about eighty feet from us, asking for our pilot, the officers of the boat saying that four rebel gunboats were coming down the bay from the direction of Houston, and that the *Westfield*, in getting under way, had unfortunately got fast aground on Pelican Island Bar; still, as the *Harriet Lane*, the *Clifton*, the *Owasco*, and the *Sachem*, were all stationed there, no immediate danger was apprehended from the attack, notwithstanding the unfortunate position of the flag-ship.

The moon, which up to this time had lent its pale rays to enable us to distinguish friend from foe, set and one of the peculiar fogs so common in this portion of the country having arisen, the morning became intensely dark, so much so, that it was impossible to distinguish anything at the distance of a few rods, with the aid of a powerful glass, even.

About 3½ o'clock, a red and blue light from the *Harriet Lane*, which lay near the upper end of the town for the purpose of commanding the railroad track to Virginia Point, gave warning of an attack upon the town. Up to this time not a sound had been heard save the quick throbs of the powerful engines of the *Westfield*, in their vain endeavors to get her once more afloat. The flagship promptly answered the signal, at the same time signaling for the *Clifton* to come to her assistance. At this moment the boom of four six-pounders was heard from the shore, immediately followed by the heavy guns of the *Harriet Lane*, while a bright ball of fire from the bay, speeding upon its errand of destruction toward the *Harriet Lane*, marked the position of the rebel gunboats.

The cannonading now became general between the *Lane*, the *Owasco*, the *Sachem* and the rebel gunboats, while from the shore an incessant fire of light artillery and musketry was kept up upon the *Harriet Lane*. The position of the different boats could only be seen by the light from the flashes of the guns, and from the bursting shells in the air.

Just at this moment the guns of the *Harriet Lane* ceased entirely, and the *Clifton*, which had all this time been ineffectually endeavoring to extricate the *Westfield* from her unfortunate position, steamed down the channel, and around the island toward the city. When abreast of Fort Point, a battery stationed there opened fire upon her with 24-pounders. She immediately returned the fire with fearful precision, giving volley after volley with a promptness that showed her to be no mean antagonist. After effectually silencing the battery, she proceeded up toward the town. Matters remained in this position until the first faint streaks of morning light were discovered shooting athwart the sky through the dense fog, when the *Harriet Lane* was observed between two huge rams, whose decks were piled high with cotton bales, effectually sheltering their crews. At this time from our position all was uncertainty. Not a flag was to be seen flying from any one of our boats, and we could not tell whether the *Lane* had been captured or not. Our doubts were soon dissipated, for as the *Owasco* opened fire upon the three boats so mysteriously situated, a flag of truce was observed upon the *Harriet Lane*. A small boat now left her side containing one of her officers, who informed the *Clifton* that the *Harriet Lane* had been captured by boarding—the two rams having approached from opposite directions, and while she was engaged in repelling the attack upon the town, had poured in upon her decks hundreds of infuriated rebel soldiery, who, drawing their bowie-knives and revolvers, had so effectually and mercilessly used them that out of her crew of 130 men, only one officer and ten men were left alive, and that these had been huddled together upon the quarter deck for massacre whenever the fleet should open fire upon them.

Under this situation of affairs, what was to be done? Capt. LEWIS, of the *Clifton*, immediately came off to the flagship in a small boat, and after a brief interview with Commodore RENSHAW, returned to the *Clifton*.

The Commodore immediately sent a boat to the *Mary E. Boardman*, asking of Capt. WIZE permission to transfer the men, ship's furniture, personal effects, &c., of the *Westfield* to the *Boardman*. This was of course granted, and the effects hurriedly transferred, it soon being apparent that Commodore RENSHAW had determined to destroy the flagship rather than see her fall into the rebels' hands.

It was now 10 o'clock in the morning; the crew (and their baggage) of the *Westfield* had been entirely transferred to the *Boardman* and the *Saxton*, a United States transport lying in the harbor near by. The Commodore's gig, with its crew, was lying alongside of the *Westfield*, while the Commodore, his First Lieutenant and Chief Engineer, had remained on board to make sure of her destruction. Barrels of turpentine had been poured over the decks, the safety valve of her boiler had been chained down, the magazines had been opened, the trains laid, and everything in readiness for the application of the match. The officers of the vessel, save the Commodore, had taken their seats in the gig; the Commodore's tall form was alone seen upon the deck of the ill-fated *Westfield*. The match was applied, when from some unexplained cause, horrible to relate, the forward magazine exploded with a terrific report, instantly destroying the entire forward part of the vessel, and sending high into the air a cloud of dense black smoke, sheets of iron, planks, shells and missiles of every conceivable form and kind.

The scene that ensued beggars description. The Captain's gig was discovered floating, but not a soul to be seen in her. The crew of the first cutter, which had been quietly resting upon their oars near by, had also entirely disappeared. The water was covered with the ruins of the boat, while on the deck of the *Boardman* were some seventy of the officers and crew of the ship, indulging in the most frantic manifestations of grief and despair.

Oh! it was terrible to see these brave old tars, who would have cheerfully died in the defence of this ship and her commander, so entirely unmanned as they seemed to be by this terrible catastrophe. The guns of the *Westfield*, which had been double-shotted in her preparations for the engagement, now began to discharge themselves, by reason of the intense heat from the burning boat, and the shot and shell flew around us in a most terrific manner. This, together with the fact that the rebels were observed planting a very formidable battery of five guns upon Fort Point, near which we would certainly go in leaving the harbor, decided Capt. WIZE to leave for outside the bar, which we succeeded in reaching shortly after 1 o'clock, followed by the entire fleet stationed at this place.

There were on shore at the time of the attack three companies of the Forty-second Massachusetts Volunteers, Col. BURRILL who had been landed on the 29th ult. from the *Saxton*. These men were encamped in one of the large warehouses upon the wharves under the protection of our gunboats—who were also protecting several hundred Texan refugees who had come down to this point for protection. Of this force on shore it was ascertained that some twenty of the soldiers had been killed and wounded while the rest were taken prisoners.

The result of the disaster to our arms then may be briefly summed up as follows.

The loss of the City of Galveston, and the capture of the *Harriet Lane*, together with the code of signals &c., of the vessel.

Capt. WAINWRIGHT, First Lieut. LEE, and acting Masters HAMILTON and MUNROE were killed, and it is reported some one hundred and twenty of the crew either killed or wounded.

The flag-ship *Westfield* blown up; Commander W. B. RENSHAW; First Lieut. CHARLES W. ZIMMERMAN, and Chief-Engineer W. R. GREEN, with some 20 of the petty officers and crew, were destroyed with the vessel.

Of the Forty-second Massachusetts Volunteers, there were 20 killed and wounded, Col. BURRILL and the remainder being taken prisoners.

The rebels also captured the bark *Cavillo*, of New-York, and the bark *Elias Pike*, of Portsmouth, loaded with coal.

The fate of the Texan refugees it is impossible to ascertain.

That there has been gross and unpardonable negligence or incapacity somewhere, no one can or will presume to deny. Upon whom rests the responsibility of this disaster, a Court of Inquiry must determine. Your correspondent from his stand-point could see no reason for the destruction of the *Westfield*; she was not immediately menaced by the rebels, and had she been, the *Clifton*, the *Owasco* and the *Sachem*, could have been easily brought round to her defence until the tide should have floated her. By whose directions the long bridge connecting Galveston with the mainland was spared, thus enabling the rebels to precipitate themselves at any time into the city, your correspondent cannot say.

The neglect to destroy it has lost to us not only the city of Galveston and the pride of our navy, but hundreds of brave men whose blood cries for vengeance.

This has been a sad New-Year's day, and this hurriedly written scrawl will only give you the facts as your correspondent actually saw them. Your readers must embellish them as they desire.

Among the officers who were conspicuous in this prompt and energetic action, as well as coolness and judgment, were Sailing Master SMALLEY and Acting Ensign J. B. JOHNSON, of Brooklyn, both of the ill-fated *Westfield*. Had all those in charge upon that day, manifested the same earnest desire to fulfill their duties to each other as well as to their country, the result would have been different.

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