

**CLASSICS TO GO**

**REMINISCENCES OF  
TWO YEARS IN THE  
UNITED STATES NAVY**



**JOHN M. BATTEN**

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After having passed an examination before the Medical Board of the United States Navy, which was in session at the United States Naval Asylum, Philadelphia, Pa., Dr. James Green, President of the Medical Board, I received the following appointment:

NAVY DEPARTMENT, 22d March, 1864.

You are hereby appointed Acting Assistant Surgeon in the Navy of the United States on temporary service.

After having executed the enclosed oath and returned it to the Department with your letter of acceptance, you will proceed to Philadelphia without delay, and report to Commodore Stribling for temporary duty on board the United States steamer Princeton.

Very respectfully,

GIDEON WELLES, *Secretary of the  
Navy.*

Acting Assistant Surgeon John M. Batten, United States Navy, Guthrieville, Pa.

After bidding my relatives and friends good-bye, I proceeded to Philadelphia, Pa., and reported for duty on board the United States steamer Princeton, which was lying anchored in the Delaware river off Philadelphia, and which was the

same vessel on which Abel Parker Upshur, Secretary of State under President Tyler, was killed by the explosion of a monster cannon whilst visiting said vessel, in company with the President and other members of the Cabinet. The duty aboard this vessel was of an initiatory character, to prepare officers for clerical duties peculiar to each of their particular offices. I made the acquaintance on this vessel of Surgeon James McClelland, who was the Surgeon of the Princeton. He had entered the United States Navy when a young man, and had been in the service ever since. He was about fifty-five years of age. The first morning after sleeping aboard this vessel, I was awakened by what is always usual aboard a man-of-war, a large gun fired at sunrise. The concussion and reverberation from the report of the heavy gun shook the vessel till it creaked, and, in my half-slumbering condition, I wondered to myself whether it was not a real battle in which the vessel was engaged; but upon mature reflection and inquiry, I learned it was only the report of the sunrise gun.

One day, whilst on board the Princeton, a blank book in which were copied a number of choice prescriptions used by many of the old celebrated physicians of Philadelphia, fell into my hands. The book belonged to Surgeon James McClelland. I thought, as I had nothing else special to do, I would occupy the time in re-copying these prescriptions into a blank book of my own; and just as I was re-copying the last prescription, Dr. James McClelland came aboard. He noticed me engaged in writing, and came into the state-room where I was, and observed his book. He immediately asked me where I had got the book. I told him where I had got it.

"Why," said he, "I would not take any money for a copy of those prescriptions. I consider them very valuable, and

would not for any consideration let my best friend have a copy of them."

I told him that I believed it to be very wrong not to let prescriptions which have been found valuable in disease, be known. After reprimanding me for re-copying the prescriptions, he cooled down, and became very affable. I, however, got a copy of the prescriptions.

Another day, in rowing aboard the Princeton from the United States Navy Yard at Philadelphia, Pa., I acted as coxswain, and came very near capsizing the boat in the Delaware river. The river was very rough, and I got the boat in what the sailors call the "trough of the sea." I, however, arrived on board the Princeton safely, after running the boat "bows on" against the steamer. The officer of the deck said:

"Sir, why don't you bring that boat alongside in a sailor-like manner?"

"Why," I said, "I am glad to get aboard in any manner, even though there were a hole stove in the side of the Princeton by my boat; besides, sir, I know nothing about bringing a boat alongside in a sailor-like manner." I soon, however, learned to manage a small boat in water very well.

On receiving the following order:

NAVY DEPARTMENT, 5th April, 1864.

SIR: You are hereby detached from the Princeton, and you will proceed to Hampton Roads, Va., without delay, and report to Acting Rear Admiral Lee for duty on board the United States steamer Valley City.

I am, very respectfully, your  
obedient servant.

GIDEON WELLES, *Secretary of the  
Navy.*

Acting Assistant Surgeon John M. Batten, U.S. Navy,  
Philadelphia.

I left the Princeton, and after bidding my mother farewell, who was stopping with my sister, who resided in Philadelphia—this was a hard task, and it affected us both greatly; but separate we did, and whether we should ever meet again in this world was a question which time alone would determine—on turning a corner I looked back, and saw my mother standing on the steps of the doorway, weeping. It was to me an affecting separation. I journeyed to the Philadelphia and Baltimore railroad depot, located in the southern part of Philadelphia, Pa., and at 8 o'clock a.m. of a beautiful day I took the train for Baltimore, Md., arriving in that city at about noon of the same day. Having some time to view the city, I took advantage of the opportunity, and promenaded the principal thoroughfares. At 5 o'clock p.m., I took the steamer Louisiana for Fortress Monroe, and arrived there the next morning, and as soon thereafter as possible reported to Admiral Lee. On the back of my order I find:

Delivered April 6, 1864, C. K. Stribling, Commander.

Delivered April 6, 1864, John Calhoun, Commandant.

Flagship Minnesota, off Newport News, Va.

Reported April 8, 1864.—Apply to Col. Biggs, Army Quartermaster at Fortress Monroe, for transportation to Newbern, and then report to Captain Davenport in the sounds of North Carolina.

S. P. LEE, Acting Rear Admiral,  
Commanding North Atlantic Blockading  
Squadron.

Transportation will be given by first steamer bound for North Carolina.

HERMAN BIGGS.

April 9, 1864.

Reported April 14, 1864.

Report to Acting Master J. A. J. Brooks, Commanding U.S. steamer Valley City.

H. K. DAVENPORT, Commander  
U.S.N.,  
Senior Naval Officer, Sounds of N.C.

Reported April 15, 1864.

JOHN A. J. BROOKS, Acting Master,  
Commanding U.S. steamer Valley City.

It being late in the evening of April 8, 1864, when I reported on board the United States steamer Minnesota, and there being no opportunity to return ashore, I was compelled to remain aboard the Minnesota till the following morning, April 9, 1864. Being very much fatigued, I retired early, and soon fell soundly asleep. About 1 a.m., I was aroused from my slumbers by a noise; I could not for the life of me tell from

whence it came or whither it had gone; but it was sufficient to arouse and bewilder me, for it made the vessel tremble. I soon arose from my sleeping couch, put on my clothes, and made my way, in the darkness, through the ward-room to the forward hatchway, and to the gun deck. There I found Admiral Lee, with his officers and men, on deck in their night clothes. I soon learned what was the cause of the excitement. It was an explosion of a hundred-pound torpedo under the bottom of the Minnesota, which had been borne thither by a torpedo-boat manned by Confederates from somewhere up the James river. The officers and men on deck, in the gloom of the night, were discussing in a subdued but excited tone the possibility of capturing the torpedo-boat; but, owing to the fires in the picket-boats to the Minnesota being out, nothing could be done till the steam in them was raised; and in the meantime the torpedo-boat was allowed to return up the James river. The damage to the Minnesota was considerable, though no hole was made in her hull. Her guns were dismounted, her partitions were broken down, her doors were jammed, her chairs and tables were upset, and crockery-ware broken. After the excitement of the occasion was over, I returned to my berth, and slept soundly till morning.

After a few days spent in visiting the important places in the vicinity of Hampton, one of which was Fortress Monroe, I took passage on a boat through the Dismal Swamp Canal to Albemarle Sound, and from thence through the sounds of North Carolina to the Neuse river, up which we steamed to Newbern, where I reported to Commander H. K. Davenport, on board the United States steamer Hetzel, who ordered me to report for duty to Acting Master J. A. J. Brooks, aboard the United States Steamer Valley City, which was lying off Hill's Point, near Washington, N.C., on the Tar river. Dr. F. E.



Martindale, Surgeon aboard the Valley City, the gentleman whom I was to relieve, met me at Newbern, N.C., and accompanied me to that vessel.

It was 5 a.m. of April 15, 1864, when I reported to Captain J. A. J. Brooks for duty. I was ushered into the ward-room of the Valley City and introduced to the officers, some of whom were not up. James M. Battin, the engineer, one of the officers who had not yet arisen, on hearing my name mentioned, thought that letters directed to him were being called, and he sprang suddenly out of his berth; but it was only to be introduced to a person of the same name, yet an entire stranger. Dr. Martindale had been expecting his relief for some weeks; being anxious to return home to his family, he left for Newbern in the same boat (the Trumpeter) which brought us hither from that place.

Washington is a small town, situated on the left bank of the Tar river, thirty miles from its mouth. It was occupied by about fifteen hundred Federal troops. The United States steamer Louisiana, the vessel on which the powder was afterwards exploded off Fort Fisher, was lying immediately off the town. Below Washington, N.C., on either side of the river, there was timber. On the right bank, just below the town, was Rodman's Point; three miles farther down the river, on the same side, was Hill's Point, and still farther down on the same side was Maule's Point—places which the Confederates had fortified previous to their falling into the hands of the Federals.

Newbern on the Neuse river, Washington on the Tar river, and Plymouth on the Roanoke river, lie in a circle which might be described from a point somewhere in Pamlico Sound—the former and latter towns being each about thirty miles from Washington, the latter town being in the middle;

so that the report of heavy artillery could be heard at Washington from either of the other two places.

Saturday, April 16, 1864, my diary states that Plymouth was attacked by the Confederates. Firing continued every day till Tuesday, April 19, 1864, when the place fell into the hands of the Confederates. Lieutenant-Commander Charles W. Flusser made a remark early in the morning of April 19, 1864, that he would either sink the rebel ram Albemarle before night, or he would be in ——. Captain Flusser commanded the United States steamer Miami, and Captain French the ill-fated Southfield. These two vessels had been lashed together at their sterns early in the morning, for the purpose of inducing the Albemarle to come between the vessels, and in this manner, if possible, sink her. The rebel ram, early in the morning of April 19, came floating down the Roanoke river with the current, past the batteries on the right bank of the river above Plymouth, and bore down upon the United States steamers Southfield and Bombshell, and sunk them. It is supposed that Captain Flusser, in the excitement of the moment, exposed himself unnecessarily, and was shot by a sharp-shooter from the Albemarle. When it was noised among the Federal army and naval forces at Plymouth that Flusser was killed, the Federal forces became more or less demoralized, and the place fell into the hands of the Confederates. Captain Flusser was a brave and daring officer. He was interred in the cemetery at Newbern, and on a board that marked his resting place, in the fall of 1864, was inscribed his name, and below it, "Peace to his ashes."

On Wednesday, April 27, 1864, an attack was made by the Confederates on Washington, N.C. There is great excitement among the residents of the place, so that some of them are leaving by every possible route. We hear the firing quite plain off Hill's Point. At 12 m. all is quiet. Preparation is