

Cruise Of The (CSS) Clarence, Tacony-Archer Lt. Charles W. Read, Commanding

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(From the Richmond (Va.) Dispatch, Sunday, November 24, 1895)
Read's Daring Exploits.

HOW HE CARRIED TERROR TO THE NORTHERN PORTS.

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Left a Blazing Path--Desperate Federal Pursuit of the Little Rover--Capture of the Caleb Cushing--Evacuation of Richmond by the Confederates--The Origin of the Fires--Interesting Letters Bearing Upon the Subject--Running the Blockade--Chat with a Southern Naval Officer--Some Exciting Incidents.

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On the 6th day of May, 1863, the American *brig Clarence*, bound from Rio de Janeiro to Baltimore, with a cargo of coffee, was captured off the coast of Brazil by the *Confederate States steamer Florida*, Captain John N. Maffitt, Confederate States navy, commanding. Lieutenant Charles W. Read, Confederate States navy, an officer of the *Florida*, a young Mississippian, of scarce twenty-three years, filled with a patriotic devotion to the cause of the Confederacy, immediately proposed to take the *Clarence*, with a crew of twenty men, and proceed to Hampton Roads, Virginia, and there cut out a gunboat or steamer, with which it was his intention to go on a raid against the Federal commerce. Captain Maffitt granted his request, gave him a howitzer, with ammunition and equipments, and the necessary small arms for a crew of twenty men, and bade him God-speed. Read was accompanied by Second-Assistant-Engineer E. H. Brown, so that, altogether, he had twenty-one men, besides himself.

He immediately shaped his course for the capes of the Chesapeake Bay, drilling his crew, and preparing them for the arduous service which was expected of them. He also kept the men busy making wooden guns, as he sailed northward, to supply in appearance what he lacked in reality.

Off the Windward Islands he chased several weeks, but failed to overhaul them, on account of the inferior sailing qualities of the *Clarence*. On the 6th of June, in latitude 33 degrees, 39 minutes, north; longitude 71 degrees, 29 minutes, west, he captured and burned the bark Whistling Wind, of Philadelphia, bound to New Orleans, with coal for Rear-Admiral Farragut's squadron. This vessel had been insured by the United States Government for \$14,800. On the 7th of June he captured the schooner Alfred H. Partridge, of New York, bound to Matamoras, Mexico. As this vessel was loaded with arms and clothing for citizens of Texas, the captain's bond for \$5,000 was taken as a guarantee for the delivery of the cargo to loyal citizens of the Confederate States, and she was allowed to proceed on her journey. On the 9th of June the brig Mary A1-vina, from Boston to New Orleans, loaded with commissary stores, was captured and burned. From the prisoners and papers of the Whistling Wind and Mary Alvina, Read gained information which convinced him that it would be impossible for him to carry out his original intention, as no vessels were allowed to go into Hampton Roads unless they had supplies for the United States Government, and even then they were closely watched. The vessels lying at the wharf above Fortress Monroe were guarded by a gunboat and sentries on the wharf, whilst just outside of the fort there were two armed boarding steamers,

which inspected everything entering the bay, from a dug-out to a frigate. He then determined to cruise along the coast and try to intercept a transport for Fortress Monroe, and with her to carry out his original design.

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SUBSTITUTED THE BARK

On the morning of the 12th of June, in latitude 37 degrees, north; longitude 75 degrees, 30 minutes, west, almost in sight of the capes of the Chesapeake, the *bark Tacony*, in ballast from Port Royal, S. C., to Philadelphia, and the schooner M. A. Shindler, of Philadelphia, were captured. The latter was burned; but **Read**, who was as full of expedients and resources as Paul Jones himself, with the quick eye of a seaman, saw at a glance that the *Tacony* was a better sailor than the *Clarence*; so he determined to burn the latter and take the bark for his purposes. He immediately set to work to transfer his gun and his small arms to the *Tacony*, as time was short, and he was almost in the presence of the enemy. Any one familiar with the sea can appreciate the difficulties of such an operation on the rolling deep in a seaway. While the howitzer was being transferred, a schooner was discovered coming down before the wind. As she was passing near the *Clarence*, a wooden gun was pointed at her, and she was commanded to heave to, which, through fright, she did immediately. She proved to be the schooner Kate Stewart, of Philadelphia. As **Read** was then short of provisions, and had over fifty prisoners on board, he determined to bond the Kate Stewart and make a cartel of her. He bonded her for the "sum of \$7,000, payable to the President of the Confederate States, thirty days after the ratification of a treaty of peace between the Confederate States and the United States." He then burned the *Clarence* and M. A. Shindler, and gave chase to a brig, which proved to be the *Arabella*, of New York. This vessel having a neutral cargo on board, he bonded her for \$30,000.

Up to this time the Federal Government had no knowledge that **Read** was off the coast destroying the commerce of its citizens; but, on the 13th of June, Captain Munday, of the *bark Tacony*, having been landed from the cartel Kate Stewart, on the coast of New Jersey, took the train to Philadelphia, and arriving there at 3 P. M., reported that there was a pirate off the coast, and all the scenes which he had witnessed the day before. The news was at once telegraphed to the Navy Department at Washington, and immediately the telegraph-wires waxed warm with orders to Admiral Lee, commanding the North Atlantic blockading squadron, and to the commandants of the Boston, New York, and Philadelphia navy-yards, to send out vessels in pursuit of the "pirate." It may be well to explain here that this was the generic name used by the Federal Government and its citizens for all Confederate cruisers. It was a misnomer, for a pirate is *hostis humani generis*, while the Confederates only made war on the United States Government and its citizens. However, it matters little what you call your enemies in war-time, so that you do not treat them when they fall into your hands according to the hard names you call them.

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GIVING CHASE

Nothing illustrates better the power and splendid resources of the United States Government at this time and the magnificent discipline of the Navy Department than the fact that, notwithstanding they were blockading with an iron cordon a coast of three thousand miles, and occupying the inland rivers to the extent of five thousand miles, and had twenty-five cruisers in search of the *Confederate steamers Alabama and Florida*, in

less than three days from the reception of the news of the appearance of the *Clarence-Tacony* on the coast there were thirty-two armed vessels out on the high seas in search of her. Four left Hampton Roads on the night of June 13th; five left New York on the morning of the 14th, and the remaining twenty-three got out from Boston, New York, Philadelphia, and Hampton Roads on the 15th and 16th; and in the next ten days (till June 26th) there were fifteen more vessels sent out after her in obedience to the urgent appeals, petitions, and clamors of the owners, underwriters, and chambers of commerce of the various seaboard cities along the northern coast, whose commerce was being destroyed.

ALMOST A PANIC

To understand fully the almost-panic effect in these cities, it might be well to say that they had been comparatively free from such a visitation so close at home for about two years; not since the *privateer Jefferson Davis* was off the coast. But lately rumors had been threatening an attack on the New England coast by the *Alabama and Florida*. Moreover, this period was the climax of the Confederacy. It was straining every nerve in one grand effort. Stonewall Jackson had made his last, but splendid, march around Hooker's right flank at Chancellorsville, doubling him up, and leaving him hors de combat, and General Lee, with his victorious legions, was marching triumphantly into Pennsylvania. The *ironclad Atlanta* had been sent out from Savannah, Ga., with a view to raising the blockade and making a raid on the Northern cities, and demonstrations were being made in various directions to tighten the tension and prevent reinforcements from being drawn off to oppose Lee's advance.

No wonder, then, that affairs looked dark and gloomy, and that the pulse of the Northern cities beat uneasily.

Meantime, the *Tacony* played havoc along the coast. On the 15th of June, in latitude 37 degrees, 40 minutes, north, longitude 70 degrees, 51 minutes, west, she captured and burned the brig *Umpire*, from Cardenas to Boston, loaded with sugar and molasses. On the 20th, in latitude 40 degrees, 50 minutes, west, and longitude 69 degrees, 20 minutes, west, she captured the fine packet-ship *Isaac Webb*, from Liverpool to New York, with 750 passengers, and the fishing-schooner *Micawber*. The latter was burned, but **Read** being unable to dispose of the large number of passengers of the *Webb*, she was bonded for \$40,000, and sent in as a cartel to New York. On the 21st, in latitude 41 degrees, north, longitude 69 degrees, 10 minutes, west, the *Tacony* captured and burned the clipper ship *Byzantium*, loaded with coal, and the bark *Goodspeed*, in ballast. On the 22d, the fishing-schooners *Marengo*, *Florence*, *Elizabeth Ann*, *Rufus Choate*, and *Ripple* were captured, and all burned except the *Florence*, which, being an old vessel, was bonded and sent in as a cartel with seventy-five prisoners.

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ANOTHER WALL

On the same day (June 22d) news of the capture of the *Isaac Webb* reached New York, and another wail went up along the line for protection. Senator Morgan, of New York, on the 23d of June, at the instance of the New York Harbor and Frontier-Defence Commission, wrote to the Secretary of the Navy, requesting that "ironclads might be spared for defending the harbor of New York." "Our people," he said, "are uneasy at the boldness of the pirates, and they will not rest much longer without efforts for more adequate protection for this harbor. On the 22d instant I wrote you in relation to the frigate *Roanoke*, and hope to hear that she can now be spared for the defence of the port

of New York." The president of the Chamber of Commerce of New York, in writing to the Secretary of the Navy on the same subject, said: "It may not be amiss to state that the war premium alone on American vessels carrying valuable cargoes exceeds the whole freight in neutral bottoms." Governor Andrew, of Massachusetts, wrote: "I am receiving representations daily, both oral and written, from towns and cities along the Massachusetts coast, setting forth their defenceless condition." The wealthy and patriotic citizens of Boston offered to send out private vessels at their own expense in search of the "pirate," if they could obtain guns from the navy-yard. Mayor Cranston, of Newport, R. I., telegraphed on June 25th: "A rebel pirate, supposed to be the *Tacony*, destroyed several fishing vessels outside our harbor yesterday. Will you not give us an armed steamer? Our harbor is one of the most important of the coast." To all these and other pressing calls for help the Navy Department responded with a willing hand; offering to the merchants arms and officers for any vessel which they might wish to send out, and ordering the commandants of the yards to "charter more steamers and send them after the *Tacony*," until by the 26th of June there were forty-seven armed vessels scouring the seas in every direction for this bold little rover. Even the practice-ships from the Naval Academy, with the midshipmen aboard, were sent out. Many of these vessels crossed and recrossed her track, and some are said to have passed close to her in the night, while others were several times only separated from her by a fog, but none were fortunate enough to find her.

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STILL PURSUED HER CAREER

Still the *Tacony* pursued her career unharmed. With almost every new capture **Read** learned through the newspapers on board of the great number of vessels that were after him, but this did not seem to annoy him, for he appears to have fairly revelled in his career of destruction. On the 23d of June he destroyed two fishing schooners. On the 24th the ship *Shatemuc*, from Liverpool to Boston, with a large number of emigrants, was captured and bonded for \$150,000. The same night the *schooner Archer* was captured. As by this time he knew that the enemy had a full description of the *Tacony*, **Read** now thought it was about time to change the rig and appearance of his vessel, in order to avoid suspicion and detection, so he destroyed the *bark Tacony* on the 25th of June, and with the *schooner Archer* proceeded along up the coast, with the view of burning the shipping in some exposed harbor, or of cutting out a steamer. The morning of the 26th of June found him off Portland, Me., where he picked up two fishermen, who, taking them for a pleasure party, willingly consented to pilot them into Portland. From the fishermen he learned that the revenue-cutter *Caleb Cushing* was in the harbor, and the passenger steamer to New York, a staunch, swift propeller, would remain in Portland during the night. He at once determined to seize the cutter and steamer that night, and at sunset entered the harbor and anchored in full view of the shipping, in the innocent guise of a fisherman. Little did the fair city of Portland dream of the excitement and commotion in store for it the next day. He explained to his men what he expected to do after dark, but his engineer expressed his doubts as to his ability to start the engines of the steamer proposed to be captured, without the assistance of another engineer, and as the nights were very short, it was evident that if they failed to get the steamer under way, after waiting to get up steam, they could not get clear of the forts at the entrance of the harbor without being discovered. Under these circumstances he decided to capture the revenue-

cutter, and after getting from under the forts to return and burn the shipping. At 1:30 A. M., June 27th, having dispatched the *schooner Archer* to sea, with three men on board, he (**Read**) boarded the cutter Caleb Cushing, commanded by Lieutenant Dudley Davenport, of the United States Revenue Marine Service, with two boats containing nineteen men, who, instantly presenting revolvers to the heads of the watch on deck, captured her without noise or resistance. The cable could not be slipped, so it was 2 o'clock before he could get under way. By this time the wind was very light, and the tide was running in. In this emergency, having put the cutter's officers and crew in irons; he put two boats out ahead with his own men to tow her, and succeeded in getting just beyond the range of the guns of the fort as day dawned. Of course, it was now too late to return and burn the shipping, so he decided to put to sea, and abide his time.

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PREPARATIONS FOR PURSUIT

By 8 o'clock A. M. the news was spread abroad in the city of Portland that the cutter had been captured. The collector of the port, Jedediah Jewett, immediately made preparations for pursuit. He sent messengers to Major Andrews, Seventeenth United States Regulars, commanding Fort Preble, for guns and men, and to Colonel Mason, commanding the Seventh Maine Volunteers, at Camp Lincoln, for men to be ready to embark in steamers at once. With great promptness he chartered the fine, large steamers Forest City and Chesapeake, and a small steam tug. The Chesapeake took on board fifty bales of cotton as barricades, two brass six-pounder guns, the greater portion of Seventh Regiment, Maine Volunteers, and fifty citizens volunteers, who had armed themselves and repaired on board. The Forest City took on board, besides her regular crew, Lieutenants Merryman and Richardson, of the United States Revenue Service, and fourteen seamen belonging to the Caleb Cushing, who happened to be ashore that night, three officers, and thirty-eight men, with one six-pounder and one twelve-pounder howitzer, and forty armed volunteer citizens. This formidable array was ready and under way in the incredibly short time of one hour. They stood out to sea in pursuit, the Forest City and tug some distance in advance. About fifteen miles off the coast they discovered the cutter and immediately stood for her.

The Caleb Cushing had one thirty-two-pounder and one twelve-pounder howitzer on board, and when **Read** saw the three steamers bearing down on him he knew what was up, and clearing his little vessel for action, prepared to give them a warm reception. When the leading steamer, the Forest City, arrived within about two miles of him, he dropped a well-directed thirty-two-pounder shot within a few feet of her. Approaching still nearer, another shot dropped still closer to her, which somewhat dampened the ardor of her captain and the citizen volunteers, who had come out as if for a frolic, and considering discretion the better part of valor, the captain put his vessel about, and hauled off out of range, to wait for the co-operation of the Chesapeake. It is but just to state that officers and soldiers were anxious to continue on and run the cutter down, but the accumulated advice and disjointed comments of the bewildered citizens and the fear for the safety of his vessel were too much for her captain, and he put her about. When he met the Chesapeake they held a council of war, and again started for the Cushing, with the intention of running her down. Coming within range, Read again opened fire on them, and fired three shots, but unfortunately for him at this time, his ammunition (all he could find) gave out, and his prisoners would not tell him where the ammunition was stowed.

There were 500 pounds of powder and ninety solid shot for the thirty-two-pounder gun on board. Had he found this, there would have been some warm work before the day was over. That he did not make this his first search when coming on board was very singular, and cannot be accounted for on any ground, except that he had been under such a severe nervous strain for the last few weeks that he was almost entirely exhausted.

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HE FIRED HER

Seeing that there was no further chance for him in so unequal a contest now, he nevertheless determined not to let the cutter be recaptured, and deliberately set to work to destroy her, first putting his prisoners in a boat and throwing them the keys to their irons, so that they could release themselves. The few well-directed shots had made the steamers cautious about approaching him very rapidly, so he had ample time to set the cutter on fire fore and aft, and then took to his boats. **The coolness and deliberation of this act are worthy of the highest praise in a naval officer.** As soon as they had left the cutter the flames burst from her in many places, and the steamers were afraid to approach her, fearing the explosion of her magazine. They, however, bore down on **Read** in his boats, and, as further resistance on his part was now useless, he surrendered himself and party as prisoners of war. After picking up Lieutenant Davenport and his crew, they then stood out to sea a little farther and captured the *schooner Archer*, which only had three men on her. The cutter blew up about 12 o'clock. Thus ended the cruise of the *Clarence-Tacony-Archer*. **Read and his gallant little band** were taken back to Portland, where the excitement was terrific, and put in prison. Major Andrews, in making his report of their affair, said: "You can form but a faint idea of the excitement now existing among the citizens of Portland and vicinity. Rumor follows rumor in rapid succession, and just before daylight this morning (June 29th) some one from the vicinity of the post went to the city with a fresh rumor, which set the whole city in a ferment. The bells were rung, and men, women, and children soon filled the streets, and were rushing hither and thither in aimless fright. I would respectfully suggest that the prisoners be sent from here as quietly and expeditiously as possible, as I do not think it safe for them to be placed in the custody of the citizens."

Lieutenant Read, in a letter written from Fort Warren to the Confederate Secretary of the Navy, says: "As all our clothing was distributed as relics to the people of Portland, I beg that you will, if possible, remit to **Assistant-Paymaster Nixon** a sufficient sum of money to purchase my men a change of clothing."

Such is war, and men who enter into it must take the consequences. **Read and his crew** were kept in prison for a little over a year, when they were exchanged as prisoners of war.

The lessons to be drawn from this little episode of the war on the sea are many and valuable, not only to the naval officer, but to the country at large, and especially to those members of Congress who oppose an increase in the navy and never stop to think that the commerce of the nation is the life of the nation, and that the destruction of that commerce is the clipping of the arteries of its wealth. That one small vessel, with twenty-two men and one gun, and a sailing-vessel at that, should have created such havoc and consternation in the days of steam, whilst forty-seven vessels (mostly steamers) were scouring the seas in search of her, is enough to make old Virgil rise up from his ashes and

exclaim, "Mirabile dictu!" But what could a modern fast cruiser of twenty-five knots, commanded by a resolute officer, and accompanied by a fast supply-vessel, do on our defenceless coast? And how are we prepared for such an emergency in case of war with a maritime nation? These subjects I leave to the consideration of those who have the fighting to do, and those who have to provide the fighting-machines. Sufficient is it to say that the country which has such officers as the commander of the *Clarence-Tacony-Archer* to depend on will not lean upon broken reeds.

ROBERT H. WOODS,
Chief Clerk, Office Naval War Records, Washington, D. C.