

**THE
REBELLION RECORD**

A DIARY OF AMERICAN EVENTS

WITH

**DOCUMENT, NARRATIVE, ILLUSTRATIVE INCIDENT,
POETRY, ETC.**

EDITED BY

FRANK MOORE

SIXTH VOLUME

Pages 385-389

LOSS OF THE QUEEN OF THE WEST

Official Report of Colonel Ellet

United States Steamer Era No. 5

Below Vicksburg, Miss. February 21

Admiral: I have the honor to report to you that I left the landing below Vicksburg, in obedience to your written instructions, on the night of the tenth instant, taking with me the De Soto and Coal-barge, and proceeded down the River. We passed Warrenton without interruption and reached Red River the following evening. I destroyed, as you directed, the skiffs and flatboats along either shore. I ascended Red River, on the Atchafalaya. Leaving the De Soto and Coal barge in a secure position, I proceeded down the stream six miles from its mouth. I met a train of army wagons returning from Simsport. I landed and destroyed them. On reaching Simsport, I learned that two rebel steamboats had just left, taking with them the troops and artillery stationed at that point. They had left on the bank several barrels of government beef, which I broke up and rolled into the river. I pursued another train of wagons for some distance, but they retreated into the swamps and escaped. One of their wagons, loaded with ammunition and stores, fell into our hands, and was destroyed.

On her return at night, a party of overseers and other civilians, fired into the Queen from behind a levee, and immediately fled under cover of the darkness. First Master J. D. Thompson, a gallant and efficient officer, was shot through the knee.

Anchoring at the mouth of the Atchafalaya, I waited until morning, and then returned to the spot from which we had been attacked. All the buildings, on three large adjoining plantations, were burned by my order. I started up the Red River, on the same day, and reached Black River by night. On the morning of the fourteenth, when about fifteen miles above the mouth of Black River, a steamboat came suddenly around a sharp bend in the river, and was captured before she could escape. She proved to be the Era No. Five, laden with four thousand five hundred bushels of corn. She had on board two rebel lieutenants and fourteen privates. The latter I at once paroled and set ashore.

Hearing of three very large boats lying at Gordon's Landing, thirty miles above, I decided on making an effort to capture them, intending to return if I should find the battery at that point too strong, and ascend the Washita. I left the Era and coal-barge in charge of a guard. We reached the bend just below Gordon's Landing, before dusk; the dense smoke of several boats, rapidly firing up, could be seen over the tops of the trees as we approached. I ordered the pilot to proceed very slowly, and merely show the bow of the Queen around the point. From the sharp bend which the river makes at this place, there was no apparent difficulty in withdrawing out of range of the enemy's guns, whenever it might be desired. The rebels opened upon us with four twenty-three pounders, the moment we came in sight. Their guns were in a fine position, and at the third shot I ordered Mr. Garvey, the pilot, to back the Queen out. Instead of doing so, he ran her aground on the right-hand shore.

The position at once became a very hot one. Sixty yards below we would have been in no danger. As it was, the enemy's shot struck us nearly every time. The Chief-Engineer had hardly reported to me that the scope-pipe had been shot away, when an explosion below, and a rush of steam around the boat, told me that the steam pipe had been cut in two.

Nothing further, of course, could be done. I gave orders to lower the yawl at the stern of the Queen, to carry off Captain Thompson, who lay wounded in my state-room. Some persons had already taken the yawl, however, and it was gone. The other yawl was on the De Soto, a short distance below. Fortunately, the cotton-bales with which the Queen was protected, afforded an avenue of escape, and a majority of the men and officers succeeded in reaching the De Soto. I order this boat to be brought up as far as it was practicable without being struck, and sent her yawl to the Queen. Lieut. Tuthill and Third Master Duncan, bravely volunteered for the purpose. I remained on the De Soto over an hour picking up men and cotton-bales. Lieut. Tuthill barely succeeded in escaping from the Queen, the rebels boarding her in skiff's as he escaped. The Queen could easily have been burned, but this could not be done while Capt. Thompson was on board, and it was impossible to remove him. All the passages had been blocked up with cotton; the interior of the boat was intensely dark, full of steam, and strewn with shattered furniture. The display of a light enabled the batteries to strike her with unerring certainty. To have brought the De Soto alongside would have insured her destruction as the light of the latter's furnace would have rendered her a conspicuous mark.

A dense fog sprang up as we started down in the De Soto, and she lost her rudder by running into the bank. Drifting down fifteen miles, I took possession of the Era, and scuttled and burnt the De Soto and barge, knowing that the rebels would lost no time in pursuing. I pushed on down through the fog, throwing the corn off to lighten her. We reached the Mississippi at dawn, opposite Ellis's Cliffs. Mr. Garvey ran the Era, a boat drawing less than two feet of water, hard aground, actually permitting her wheels to make several revolutions after she struck, and it was with the utmost difficulty she could be gotten off. The disloyal sentiments openly expressed by Mr. Garvey, a few hours previous to this occurrence, rendered it necessary for me to place him under arrest, and fix upon me the unwilling conviction that the loss of the Queen was due to the deliberate treachery of her pilot. It is to be regretted that the unfortunate illness of Mr. Scott Long, who piloted the Queen past Vicksburg, rendered it necessary for me to intrusts the Queen to the management of Mr. Garvey.

The next morning, a short distance below Natchez, I met the Indianola. Captain Brown thought that he might be able to ascend Red River, and destroy the battery at Gordon's Landing, and I accompanied him down in the Era, leading the way. I had not gone three miles, when a break in the dense fog disclosed a steamer rapidly moving up-stream, about a mile ahead. I at once rounded to, and caused the whistle to be blown to warn Capt. Brown of her presence. As soon as the rebel steamer, which was undoubtedly the Webb, perceived the Indianola, she turned and fled. The latter fired two shots at her, but without effect. I learned afterward, that three other armed boats had been sent in pursuit of the Era, and had been turned back by the Webb on her retreat. They all went back up Red River. On reaching this stream, Captain Brown decided not to ascend it, and I thought it best to return at once. Thinking we might be attacked on the way up, I seized a hundred and seventy-five bales of cotton, and protected the Era's machinery as far as practicable. At St. Joseph I landed and seized the mails, and learned from them that Col. Adams was waiting for us at Grand Gulf with two pieces of artillery. Thirty-six shots were fired at the Era while passing the point, none of which took effect.

On reaching Island One Hundred and Seven, a body of riflemen opened a heavy fire upon the Era from the Mississippi shore. Suspecting it to be a ruse to draw us to the other side of the river, I decided on keeping the right of the Island. The furnaces of the Era became so clogged at this point, I found it necessary to stop and have them cleaned out—a delay of twenty minutes being caused by this. The Era had barely passed the Island, when a battery of three guns opened upon us from the Louisiana shore. Forty-six shots were fired, but did no injury. At Warrenton the rebels opened fire upon the Era with two rifle twenty-pounder guns. They fired twenty-four shots, but did not succeed in striking her. Extraordinary as it may appear, there is every reason to believe that no one was killed on the Queen. It is probably attributable to the fact that those below got into the hold through the numerous hatches, and thus escaped the effects of the steam. Mr. Taylor, of the engineers, is reported by a deserter from the Webb, to be badly scalded. Twenty-four men were taken prisoners, ten of whom were civilians employed on the boat. Assistant Surgeon Booth was the only commissioned officer captured.

Very respectfully, your obedient servant,
Charles R. Ellet
Commanding Ram Fleet

Rear-Admiral David D. Porter
Commanding Mississippi Squadron

The Career of the gallant Queen of the West is ended. Her crew are dispersed; some are wounded, some are killed, and more are taken prisoners. A small remnant, so far escaped from death and capture, are now twenty miles from the mouth of Red River, moving as rapidly as Providence permits, from the scene of one of the most thrilling incidents of the rebellion, toward the far-famed city of Vicksburg.

We had intended to leave on Monday, the ninth instant, but certain repairs were, at the last moment, found necessary, and we were compelled to remain over the succeeding day.

Col. Ellet decided to run the batteries by starlight, and just at dark the chimneys of the Queen of the West and the De Soto began to vomit forth huge columns of dense black smoke, and we knew that the time of our departure was approaching. Precisely at nine o'clock we swung into the stream, the De Soto, around whose boilers and machinery bales of cotton had been placed, and on whose bow was mounted a huge thirty-two pound rifle, toward the batteries, the Queen of the West next and the coal-barge on the outside, all lashed together. In this position we floated down the river. At the risk of being considered a coward, that regard for truth, which I am proud to say has always been a distinguishing feature of my correspondence, compels me to write that I sought the starboard side of the Queen of the West, where the thickness of four bales of cotton and four feet of wood might reasonably be supposed to insure comparative safety.

Silently we floated by, every moment expecting to hear the scream and hiss of shot and shell, every moment looking for the explosion of the ugly missiles over our heads. We were abreast of the batteries, and began to wonder at their reticence. We were at point-blank range, the night was fine, why did they not fire? The suspense was terrible. Presently some one sang out: "We are out of danger, we are below batteries." It is wonderful how this announcement affected us. Some who were crouching in abject terror became valiant in an instant. They mounted the hurricane-deck and snapped their fingers for joy. What cared they for rebel batteries?

It was at the mouth of Old River that we tied up Wednesday night, sending the De Soto to do picket-duty a mile in advance. The night passed quietly and at daybreak Thursday we started up Old River, moving cautiously and calling at the plantations on the way. At nine o'clock we entered the mouth of the Atchafalaya. Four miles down the river a long train of heavy army wagons, driven by negro teamsters and guarded by a squad of soldiers, was discovered moving along the river-bank. We halted them, landed, and took possession. The soldiers escaped to the forest skirting the plantations. A detachment of Federal soldiers commenced the work of destruction. Mules were unharnessed and turned adrift, harnesses were thrown into the river, and a few of the wagons cut down and rendered worthless. The rest were left until evening. The Queen then moved down the river to Simmsport, four miles below, where Col. Ellet had heard of a rebel transport.

We arrived too late to capture her, but not too late to seize seventy barrels of beef belonging to

the Valverde battery, which the Minerva in her anxiety to escape had left behind. This was destroyed by cutting the hoops of the barrels and tumbling their contents into the river. Colonel Ellet also captured a rebel mail and important letters and dispatches at Simmsport, from one of which he learned of the occupation of Berwick Bay by Commodore Farragut. A few confederate cavalry were quietly watching our movements from the bayou to the rear of the village, but a shell from our rifled Parrott bursting over their heads caused them to hunt their holes. From Simmsport we moved down the river a few miles, and came in sight of another heavily laden train, which the negroes from the bank said also, belonged to the Texas battery. Upon our approach the teamsters turned into the swamps just within reach of our shells. We had not men enough, scarcely twenty all told, to send them after the fugitives, and were compelled to fire at them from the boat. This we did till the shades of evening began to gather, with what effect as regards wounding and killing we were unable to learn. One wagon laden with ammunition and officers' baggage fell into our hands. This was burned.

Night was approaching, and we turned the steamer's prow again toward Old River, where during the day the De Soto had waited for us. Just as we had reached the bend where the wagons were captured, and where we intended this evening to destroy them, while the most of us were at supper, all at once we heard the sharp report of musketry, and immediately First Master Thomas fell to the deck seriously wounded; a musket-ball had passed upward, breaking his shin-bones, and making its exit through the knee. From one of the brass-guns on deck we replied, and also fired several rifle-shots, but, protected by the levee, the rascals escaped injury. We abandoned our intention of landing, and kept on up the river, the Colonel muttering threats of vengeance.

On Friday morning a person came aboard the Queen and informed Col. Ellet that the firing the preceding night was done by the citizens living along the Atchafalaya, between its mouth and Simmsport. Col. Ellet accordingly determined to pay them a visit. He rounded to near Simmsport, and calling at the plantation of one Graves, who almost acknowledged that he fired at us, he allowed him time to remove his family and furniture, and then burned the house, sheds; and quarters to the ground.

The next plantation had, beside the dwelling house and negro quarters, a magnificent sugar mill upon it. These buildings were also burned.

The third belonged to an old gentleman, who with his son and two daughters, carried on the farm and worked the niggers. One of the young ladies admitted that the brother had fired upon the Queen, and only wished the one had not been a dozen. She abused the Colonel, and betrayed the Yankees. When she discovered that her abuse failed to move Colonel Ellet, just as the flames began to curl around the house-top, like a brave and gallant girl, as she was, she sang, in a ringing, defiant tone, the "Bonnie Blue Flag," until forest and river echoed and reechoed with sweet melody.

Colonel Ellet, on leaving the Atchafalaya, announced his intention to go down the Mississippi and attempt to open communication with Commodore Farragut, below Port Hudson; but on reaching the mouth this intention was abandoned, and we turned our vessel into Red River. The air was as balmy as June in our northern climate, the trees were decking themselves with green, men were walking about the hurricane-deck in their shirt-sleeves as we entered the Red. We

could not help coal-fires and freezing—"on ice." When we returned we would willingly have exchanged positions. Late Friday night we anchored at the mouth of Black River, as before, the De Soto thrown out as our advance picket.

Saturday morning, at daylight, we raised anchor and proceeded up the river. We had heard that the enemy had lately constructed fortifications at Gordon's Landing, eighty-five miles from the mouth, called Fort Taylor. We had heard also that there were heavy guns at Harrisonburgh, near the head of navigation on Black River, and for a time Colonel Ellet was undetermined which to attack. He finally settled upon the former, and we moved as rapidly as the tortuous nature of the stream and the ignorance of our pilots would admit, in the hope that we should reach the position and commence the attack before nightfall.

The steamer Louisville, we also learned, had, just before we reached the mouth of the Black, passed up the Red with a thirty-two pounder rifled gun, intended for the gunboat W. H. Webb, then lying at Alexandria.

We had, therefore, incentives for speed. At ten o'clock the look-out reported a steamer descending the river, and shortly after the Era No. 5 hove in sight. She saw us as quickly as we discovered her, and was half turned around, as if attempting to escape, when Col. Ellet ordered a shot to be sent after her. This took effect in her stern, passing through the cook-room, demolishing a stove and slightly wounding the negro cook. The officers and passengers then came on deck, hoisted white sheets and waved white handkerchiefs in token of surrender. The Queen ran alongside and took possession. The Era No. 5 is a fine boat of a hundred and fifty tons burden, belonging to the Red River Packet Company, and heretofore engaged in transporting supplies for the Confederate army. At that time she was laden with four thousand five hundred bushels of corn, intended for the Quartermaster's Department at Little Rock. This was to be taken to Camden, Arkansas, and to be transported thence by army wagons. Among the passengers were fifteen privates of the Fourteenth Texas Cavalry, and three belonging to the Twenty-seventh Louisiana, Lieut. Daly, of the Fourteenth Texas. The citizens on board were set on shore without parole, the soldiers were set on shore without parole, the soldiers were set on shore with parole, and the officers were retained. Among the parties retained was a German Jew named Elsasser, who had upon his person thirty-two thousand dollars in Confederate money. Col. Ellet thought he was a confederate quartermaster, although he strongly insisted to the contrary, and brought him along. One man dressed in citizen's clothing and claiming to be a non-combatant, and on that account released without parole. We have since learned that he was one of Gen. Hindman's brigadier-generals. His name I did not learn. Our prisoners being thus disposed of, the fleet, now numbering three steamers, moved toward Gordon's Landing. Four miles from the Landing, in a direct line across the country, but fifteen miles as the river runs, we left the Era with three or four men to guard the boat and prisoners.

We moved slowly up the channel, making the bend with considerable difficulty, until we reached the point below the negro quarters where the land is cleared, when we discovered a long line of dense black smoke moving up the river beyond the fort, indicating the hasty departure of a transport. Our gun upon the bow was immediately placed in position, and two percussion-shells were sent in that direction. These exploding in the vicinity of the transport, which we afterward learned was the Doubloon coming down the river with corn, caused her to disappear toward

Alexandria.

The land makes out into the river on the point, leaving an extremely shallow place twenty feet or more from its extremity, which pilots are careful to avoid. Our pilot, whether designedly or otherwise I know not, ran the Queen aground, and at the same instant the batteries opened fire upon us. Recollect, we were not four hundred yards from the fort, and immovable. The pilots tried in vain to back her off, but she would not budge an inch. Shot were flying, shell were bursting, and, worse than all, we could not reply. The enemy had our exact range, and every explosion told worth fearful effect. Your correspondent sought the pilot-house, thus became an unwilling witness of the terrible affair. Three huge thirty-two pounder shells exploded on the deck, and between the smoke-stacks, not twenty feet from our heads.

The air was filled with fragments and exploding shells, which flew before, behind, and all about us. Soon we heard a crash among the machinery below. Word was passed up that the lever which regulates the engines was shot away. Another crash, and we learned the escape-pipe was gone. Still another, and the steam-chest was fractured. The whole boat shook with the rush of the escaping steam which penetrated every nook and cranny. The engine-room was crowded with engineers, firemen, negroes, and prisoners, who had sought that place under the impression that it was the safest. All this time, while we supposed we were blown up, and looked every moment to be launched into eternity, the batteries played upon the unfortunate vessel, and pierced her through and through. Men crowded to the after-part of the vessel. Some tumbled cotton-bales into the river, and getting astride of them, sought to reach the De Soto a mile below. The yawl was tied to the stern, and a man stood there with a loaded pistol threatening to shoot the first one who entered it. The cry was raised for Col. Ellet, and men were sent forward to look after him. The negroes in their fright jumped overboard and many of the poor creatures were drowned. Some of our men were scalded. Word was sent to the De Soto to come alongside to remove us. She came as near as she dare, and sent her yawl, but before it returned, she herself was compelled to move down the river out of range.

As I have before stated, I was in the pilot-house when the explosion occurred, and took the precaution to close the trap-door, thus keeping out a quantity of steam. There was still enough to make breathing almost impossible that came through the windows in front of us. I had sufficient presence of mind to cram the tail of my coat into my mouth, and thus avoid scalding. Shortly we discovered that to remain would induce suffocation, and we opened the trap-door, and, blinded by steam, sought the stern of the vessel. Groping about the cabin, tumbling over chairs and negroes, I sought my berth, seized an overcoat, leaving an entire suit of clothes, my haversack, and some valuable papers behind, and emerged upon the hurricane-deck. The shell were flying over my head, and here was obviously no place for me to remain. Looking over, I saw the woolly pate of a negro projecting over the stern below me, and, calling to him to catch my coat, I swung myself over by a rope, and landed directly upon the rudder. At this time it was suggested that a boat be sent to hurry up the De Soto, and among those who entered it was your correspondent. We reached it in about ten minutes, passing on the way several men on cotton-bales among them Col. Ellet and McCulloch of the Commercial. Almost exhausted, the occupants remained behind, while another crew was sent up to pick up survivors.

The yawl had reached the boat and was busily engaged in picking up the crew, when three

boatloads of Confederate soldiers cautiously approached the vessel and boarded her. Of course there was no resistance, and our boys became their prisoners.

The De Soto hearing several men shout from the shore, "Surrender," was allowed to float downstream, picking up as she floated several who had escaped on cotton-bales. When she reached a point ten miles below, the yawl overtook her with others who had been similarly preserved.

We reached the Era No. 5 and found her all right. Our coal-barge was leaking badly and hard aground. Of course, we had to leave it. The De Soto had unshipped both rudders and became unmanageable, and it was concluded to destroy her, lest, with her valuable gun, she should fall into the enemy's hands. Her pipes were knocked out, a shovelful of live coals placed in her cabins, and she was soon destroyed.

It was now ten o'clock Saturday night, and if we would escape more intimate acquaintance with Southern society and Southern prison life, we must make every exertion now. With a sigh for the poor fellows left behind, and a hope that our enemies would be merciful, the prow of the Era was turned toward the Mississippi. The night was a terrible one, thunder, lighting, rain, and fog. I doubt it under another other circumstances Red River would be deemed navigable. All hands were set to work to throw overboard the corn, to lighten her up, and we are slowly crawling down the river. We know to a certainty that we shall be pursued. The gunboat Webb is lying at Alexandria, and we know that she will start in pursuit of us whenever she learns of the destruction of the Queen and of the escape of a portion of her crew. Our only hope lies in reaching the Mississippi quickly, whence we shall make the best of our way to Vicksburg. The Webb is a model of speed, and can make fourteen miles an hour against the current. If we do not get aground, and if our machinery does not break, we hope to outrun her. If I am captured, a visit to Vicksburg will be my portion. We shall see.

The following is the loss by the capture of the Queen of the West, as far as I can ascertain: Prisoners—Cy. Eddison, Second Master; Henry Duncan, Third Master; David Taylor, Engineer, (scalded;) D. S. Booth, Surgeon; First Master Thompson, (wounded on the Atchafalaya;) Adjutant C. W. Bailey; one blacksmith, name unknown; George Andrews, James Foster, carpenters; L. C. Jarbou, Thomas Williams, David McCullom, Charles Launer, Carrol Smith, Ed. Hazleton, Charles Faulkner, John A. Bates, Norton F. Rive, Wm. Brown, Geo. W. Hill, soldiers; Mr. Anderson of the Herald, and about thirty negroes.

Killed—George Davis jumped overboard from the De Soto, and is supposed drowned.

The above list are the names of those who floated down the river and were not picked up by the De Soto. They will probably be captured by the next confederate steamer in these waters, probably the Webb, as she pursues us.

