

J. Leer Diary

April – May 1864

(Extracts)

April

8. It rained very hard last night and it is still raining. We have charge of a seven gun battery.
11. There was a blockade runner came in last night. Weather pleasant.
12. I am on guard today. Weather pleasant. There was a blockade runner came in this morning. She was loaded with powder, lead and various things.
14. There is another blockade runner aground opposite the fort. She got off this morning about 10 o'clock.
17. Still. The blockade runner Denby went out last night. I am on guard today. There are about 150 negroes came here to work on the breastworks.

May

2. I am on guard today. There was two blockade runners came in last night, the Denby was one.
3. The Donigan [sic] went out last night. It is reported that Gen. Lee has taken Vicksburg. Very windy this morning. We have just fired a salute of 18 guns for the good news from the west.
4. We have just drawn guns. The Denby went out last night.
10. The blockade runner Donegal went out last night. The Mary undertook it but.[?]
14. The blockade runner Mary went out last night.
18. The blockade runner Denbiegh came in last night. It is reported the Tennessee is over the bar.
24. The Tennessee would have gone out last night only for it being so rough. The fleet came down this morning about 2 o'clock. The Tennessee leading the way,

the Baltic next in pursuit followed by the Morgan, Gaines & Selma. They have cast anchor & are lying quietly in the bay.

27. The Denby went out last night. Weather nice.

30. The blockade fleet threw a few shells at Battery Bragg.

J. Leer Diary
June- September 1864

(Original in Emory University Special Collections, Atlanta, GA)

June 1864

23. Weather nice. Nothing of importance
24. I received a letter from home this morning stating that Ma was very sick.
Weather nice.
25. We are all on police this morning. We, that is, my mess have a fine mess of beans and potatoes for dinner and I did it justice.
26. Hill, a private of our company died today. He has been sick about 23 days. He passed away very easy. Weather very hot.
27. We buried Hill with the honors of war. The Natches has just left. I was at work for some time unloading her with wood. It is now about 2 o'clock and I have just dined on corn bread and a small piece of bacon.
28. Weather pleasant or rather warm. I am on fatigue today.
29. I am on guard today at the warf.
30. I am off guard this morning. We have just mustered pay. The blockade runner Mary and Denby lay at the warf last night ready to go out but it was too still so they went back. Crassy, one of our men and two Alabama men deserted this morning. Jack Foster is under arrest for not reporting them.

July 1864

1. We had an alarm last night, a blockade runner was trying to come in. She beached about a mile from the fort. The Yankees are shelling her. Now we are replying at intervals. They have shot several times at the Fort. They shot one shell through our quarters.
2. We have just come in from the beach. We were up there all night. Ten of us went on board to guard her against Yankee launches. We had not been on board long before I discovered a Yankee steamer. I reported it to the officer in command who was one of the Navy Officers. As soon as he leveled with his glass he discovered two more and then he was in a perfect lather to get off. He ordered soldiers into the boat that I was in. We had not got far before she ran aground and had to lunge in and get out the best way we could. We started to wade, I

with a little more forethought than the rest pulled off my cartridge box and hung it on the end of my gun. We had not gone far when we went in to our necks. Well we made the shore after a while. We stopped awhile and we marched back with 8 more to accompany us we went on, scaled the sides which were about 12 feet. Stopped on board awhile and Lt. Cousins purposed to get some whiskey. They did so and all partook of it except myself and [not finished]. Well we went ashore lay in the sand awhile and came home and got breakfast. I came over to the quarters and found a letter there for me from Sister stating Ma was very ill but some better. She also said that they had received a letter from Uncle Porter. He was well as usual and still in Tupelo.

3. I am on guard today. The enemy are firing at intervals. The weather is very hot.
4. I have just come of guard I was on post. The enemy threw up one rocket while I was on post. I have just received a letter from Father stating that Mother is very low. I fear she will not survive long, but I pray to God that He will assist her in recovering. The Yankees are firing very briskly. It is said the Tenn. Is going out to Sand Island this evening. The Yankees have struck the Fort several times. One or two shots struck the citadel. They are firing 200 pound Parrots.
5. I was on fatigue last night until twelve and then had to go to the new battery and stop until daylight.
6. Weather nice. We went up to the boat and stopped last night. The Yankees did not bother us.
7. I am on picket today or tonight rather.
8. The mosquitoes came very near eating me up last night. The Yankees came close by the shore, within twenty yards of the shore but we did not get there in time. The men at the boat fired on them and they think they killed some of them but I don't think they did anything of the kind.
9. The weather is very hot. Nothing of importance.
10. There was a blockade runner beached close to the Fort last night. We had to go out there last night. We are at work moving the cargo as the crew bring it ashore. It consisted of bloting and rope blankets, coffee and whiskey. The latter did more harm than good for we are continually taking men to the guard house.

I have just received a letter from home dated 6. Says Ma is much better and Uncle Porter is discharged from the army and that Mrs. Bell of Purdy is at Old ona.

11. Nothing of importance today. Weather nice.
12. This is my birthday. I am 19 years old today. I have just received a letter from Father. Ma is better.
13. I am writing Father a letter. I have just had a piece of watermelon.
14. Nothing of importance today. Forest is really expecting a fight. I have just purchased a [????]. It is fine.
15. I am on guard duty today and have got the bloody[?] no. 1 post.
16. Nothing of importance. Weather very warm.
17. Watermelons in abundance. Weather very warm.
18. It is reported here that Gen. Johnson is superceded [sic] by Gen. Hood
Weather warm.
19. We are making preparations for inspection.
20. I am on guard duty today. I have just received a letter from home. The family
Are well except Ma. She is still pretty low but is improving.
21. I am just off guard. We moved our quarters across the R. R. Two vessels one
Monitor and one sloop of war coming up the main channel and the rest of the
rest of the fleet are coming around to the Sawashie [sic] channel. They are
moving very slow.
22. We are on police this morning. A dispatch received from Gen. Maury to Gen.
Page says "Atlanta as of July 21st. The enemy attacked us on our left this
morning. They were met with a heavy fire of artillery and musketry causing
to waver. Hardee was then ordered to charge. He did so capturing twenty
pieces artry, and a large number of prisoners including Gen. McFurson and
killing another Gen. Officer and we are now driving the enemy before us.

24. Weather very pleasant. Nothing of importance today.
25. I received a letter from home yesterday. Ma is a little worse. A dispatch From the front says we captured 25 pieces of artry. 2000 prisoners and 200 wagons.
26. Weather nice. We were marched out to be inspected this evening but there came up a rain and we had to run to our quarters.
27. I received a letter from home. Ma is much worse. Father thinks she has Inflammation of the stomach.
28. Nothing of importance. The Yankees have been sounding this side of Sand Island.
29. The Yankees moved a small vessel around this morning.
30. The moved their mortars around this morning and several other boats.
31. Nothing of importance this morning only that Kirby Smith has crossed the River.

August 1864

1. The enemy has been at work of some kind moving mortar boats or something of the kind. They have brought several other monitors up within 3 or 4 miles of the Fort.
2. An order was issued last evening for most all the guns of the Fort to be manned all of our battery so that it took our whole company. The torpedo boat blew up a few night since, killing two and wounding two. Only one has come out since.
3. The boat is coming. I am going on. I expect a box from home. We had to drill this morning after coming off detachment. Capt. Johnston is getting worse to his company everyday. There was an alarm this evening. The steamers that passed Pascagola [sic] have arrived off Ft. Gaines.
4. The two companies of the 21st Ala. have gone to Ft. Gaines. Two have also come from Mobile. The enemy shelled Dauphin Island last night. I have just written home to Father and Peter.

5. Another monitor arrived this morning. She came up and gave us a couple of shots. Then the other monitor and two ironclads and the Hartford and several other frigates moved up. They started with their big monitor in front. We let them come in close before we fired but did no damage. They came on. We, that is Capt. Johnston's waterline battery still resumed fire until they were close, then we poured a heavy fire on to them. The foremost monitor was perfectly surprised when they saw our battery. The frigate Hartford then gave us broadside after broadside but stood to our work like men. Presently the front monitor bow started down, she went under in 15 seconds. Then we commenced on the Hartford and we perfectly riddled her but she had too many compartments. She was on fire once from a shell from the waterline battery was put out. They finally past. Then they came in contact with our fleet but none but the Tenn. were of much service. She butted them and shot them. It is reported and I suppose it is true for Gen. Page says so that she sank a vessel above here and also her rudder then she could not guide herself and the men were suffocating with smoke and Admiral Buchanan was wounded and she had to surrender. While all this was going on the Gaines was sunk or would have done so if she had not run ashore. The Selma run aground and was captured. Another vessel started up but run aground and was deserted. A launch from the gunboat Morgan went out and burned her. A flag of truce came in asking permission to carry their wounded with Admiral Buchanan to Pensacola on account of Admiral Buchanan being on board it was granted. Four Yankees swam ashore from the monitor and 98 were drowned. 8 others were picked up by a boat from the Hartford. Gen. Page complimented us very highly for our gallantry. I wrote a letter home and sent by Maj. H. Paul. Everything is quiet. We had one man killed. He was a cavalry man. We had several slightly wounded. Capt. Johnson was one of the number.
6. Ft. Powel was evacuated and burned last night. The gunboat Morgan started to Mobile and I suppose she got there. There has a flag of truce come in with one or two of our dead and a great many of their wounded and a few of ours including Admiral Buchanan. They have passed out for Pensacola.
7. The flag of truce I was told that went out with wounded came back this morning. I have written home today and sent it to Mobile by an officer going to that place. I also received one but it has been in the office several days. Our Signal Corps have been trying to attract the attention of the signal corps at ft.

Gaines but cannot. Gen. Page is going to send over a boat tonight to see what is the matter. I have just written a letter home.

8. Gen. Page went over last night himself. When he got there he found that the place had been under a flag of truce all day and that Col. Anderson was at that time at the Yankee fleet. He returned to the Fort this morning and raised our colors (for they had not been up before.) Presently the steamer Buckner came in near the warf and stopped there some time and at exactly 10 minutes to ten o'clock our flag was taken down and the (Grediron) hoisted in its place. The garrison at Ft. Gaines left on transports this afternoon. Gen. Page made a speech at 12 o'clock expressing his great mortification by the treacherous surrender of Fort Gaines and stating that we would have to wipe out the stain placed upon the 3rd. brigade by the treason of Fort Gaines. Maj. Gee made a few remarks complimenting us Tennesseans for our gallantry saying that we had shown them what we could and what we would do and asking if the Alabamians would ever fail to stand with us, they answered, No. Then came Capt. (Cary) he also complimented us Tennesseans. Then the soldiers called on Capt. Johnson. He replied that he preferred not speaking that he had rather answer the enemy with his guns but remarked that all we had to do was to stand by Gen. Page and we would go down in glory.
9. The enemy moved down and commenced shelling us with great accuracy but hurt no one. They threw one 15 inch shell into the sally port that did not explode. It had three fuses but none lit. We burned all of the out houses any distance from the fort. I am on Picket. The enemy have sent in a flag of truce demanding the surrender of the place. Gen. Page's answer was to Eat (?). Their pickets commenced to move down from (Navy Cove) for they have landed a great many there this morning. We have been ordered into the Fort that is the pickets and commenced fixing sand sacks for Sharpshooters.
10. It rained very hard last night while I was on Post. I could see a good many Yankees up to Battery Bragg. Around the fire John Murphy shot at one at the old Hospital. Two of our men left last night (Let them go we don't want men of their stripe.) Wash Kidd has just come in and says he saw Yankees up at the new hospital.
11. There has been no shelling to day. Last evening there was a detail for the sharp shooters made and I was chosen. The Yankees are working at camp

Bragg. Their sharpshooters have fired no shots today. We have been at work today building a warf in front of the hospital.

12. I was out on watch last night but saw no Yankees. One man deserted last night, several a few nights ago. One yesterday morning. A good many Yankees can be seen at any time around the new hospital. I will now try and take a nap.
13. I went out on the Glossa [sic] to sharpshoot. The balls came very close one knocked my mouth full of dirt. The Tennessee moved down this evening opposite our water line Battery and opened fire. We replied pretty briskly. We struck her several times, one or two shots bursting all to pieces. She moved back slow having several shots struck her and one cut her flag away. She went out of range of our battery or where we could not bring to bear on her. One of the other Iron Clads came down and opened and has been firing at intervals.
14. The Iron Clad is still firing. She has struck the Fort several times wounding one of our men very bad n the head. She has just thrown another shot and it exploded very close to our casemate killing several men. We have been at work all day fixing a traverse in front of our casemate. The enemy have opened a land battery on us. they cut our flag down this evening but another was hoisted immediately.
15. We were at work at our traverse last night and a shell came over and went into it and exploded but hurt no one very bad but it came very near striking Sergt. Bugg. He stood straight up by the edge of the casemate, the shell struck in the sand and exploded and blew the sand and pieces of shell all over our kitchen. It burnt Lt. Howel's face. We went to bed about 12 o'clock last night. When I woke this morning I heard someone taking on very much and I came to inquire what was the matter and they told me his brother was killed. Poor fellow he is better off than any of us. I got up and went in to get my breakfast while I was sitting at the table a shell came into the flank casemate striking about a foot above the far port hole, came through striking the wall on the opposite side and exploded wounding several, Dick Barber very bad in the head, also Mr. Hardaway in the head, Samuel Stewart in the shoulder. It knocked down almost every man (in the back part of the casemate) down. I immediately helped to carry one of the men to the hospital. His wound was found not the be dangerous. Oh, this is an awful time. If my poor mother only knew how things were going on she would be very uneasy. But I know she is uneasy as it is, poor creature, if I could only hear from her I could take things easier but I cannot so

I will have to do the best I can. I have some friends with me it is now about 10 o'clock. Two Monitors and four other vessels have put out for Mobile. The shelling has abated with the exception of a little parrot[sic] that is mounted up at Camp Bragg. It fires at intervals of about ½ an hour. They have struck the Fort every time except a few that went over. They struck the ten inch Columbiad on the Breech and knocked a good sized chunk out of it. I have been out sharp shooting this evening but saw nothing so did not shoot.

16. The Monitor opened again last night. The first shot she made she went through our kitchen again but there happened to be no one in there. Our guns opened with great desperation. They struck the Monitor once or twice our small guns at work on the land force. The enemy sharp shooters were very busy at or after the discharge of everyone of our guns. We kept up the firing at intervals all night. The enemy did not fire after ten o'clock until this morning the parrot has fired a few shots. I have been sharpshooting this morning. I made several good shots at them. The Yankees opened several more parrot pieces from their land battery. They have been firing with great rapidity and accuracy. They killed our lookout, a percussion shell from a parrot gun struck him in the breast and exploded tearing all to pieces. It blew his head up on top of a traverse and his arm one of them I don't know which, into the ditch and pieces of flesh all over the Fort for fifty or sixty yards around.
20. Newton Shelton died last night between 8 and 9 o'clock. He is gone, he passed away without a struggle. He was prepared to die. I think he did not seem to be afraid to die. Oh, we as soldiers and friends have much to lament. As a soldier there was none that could surpass him and as a man he was a true upright man.
21. Everything has been quiet today. I have been out sharpshooting this evening but a few showed themselves. We have made excellent shots at the distance of 200 yards and they have done the same. We tried to get the buggers to talk but they would not. We suppose they had orders not to talk for they were in nice distances to speak.
22. The enemy opened from several land batterys and 3 Monitors and several other vessels. The Hartford for one. They have been dropping their shells in they have Monitors and other guns at work. They have mounted some heavy guns within five hundred yards of the Fort. They have dismounted 3 guns this morning and slightly wounded several men. The bombardment has continued all day with

great desperation. The Citadel has been set on fire and the Fort has been knocked about very much. It was reported this evening that the enemy were making a charge. We were all at our posts and ready but they only wanted to get close enough to build other batterys which they did. Lt. Cousins with a squad of sharpshooters went up and gave them a round we think we wounded and killed several.

23. They, the enemy, opened fire on us this morning about seven o'clock. Gen. Page sent out a flag of truce and the firing ceased. Commd. Officer came to terms. The sick and wounded were landed and sent to Mobile and the remainder of us were to be allowed our private baggage and leave at 2 o'clock P.M.
24. We surrendered yesterday evening , the Navy and land forces combined. We got on the steamer Bienvill [sic] and started for New Orleans. We have had breakfast this morning it consisted of coffee hard tack and pickels, the latter was very nice. We passed Fort Jackson this evening and Oh, it is disgracing the Federal Flag for it was hoisted by negroes and several times as we were passing up the river, Negroes would cheer the ship and shout hurrah for our side.
25. We arrived last night about 9 o'clock and anchored in the middle of the river and were moved on shore this morning. When we came on shore the first man that met my gaze was one of the men that deserted at Fort Morgan. I felt ashamed for him. If he did not have the countenance to do it himself. We were marched about 3 miles to prison. The side walks and pavement were crowded with people of some stripe or other. It was very warm. Some of the boys gave out one fainted but I myself made it like a knife but there was a nice shower and that refreshed the boys that were about to give out. Well we arrived, answered to our names and marched in, rested a while and had supper which consisted of crackers and a small piece of meat then we were ready for sleep. There were not bunks enough for all of us but I was very fortunate as I was looking about a young man belonging to the Pelham cadets called to me and said, Here is a bunk you can have, it is the only vacant one in the house. It suits me exactly for I am not fond of sleeping on the floor.
26. I have just had breakfast. Same as supper. I slept very well last night.
27. Nothing of importance, transferred today only the sick and wounded that were left at Fort Morgan to be paroled arrived here today. They were not paroled. Lt.

Lea made his escape. I hope he will go home and let Father know that I am well.

28. This is the first Sabbath that I ever spent in prison. I would like to know how my dear mother is.
29. Nothing of importance has occurred today.
30. Weather very warm. There has been some more prisoners brought in. Some of them are very nice men. They are Texians and Louisianians.
31. Everything is going on as usual. No news of importance. It has been reported here several times that the Fort Gaines prisoners were exchanged but I don't believe it.

September

1. We had a nice shower last night. It has refreshed everything very much.
2. Some more prisoners came in today. They are nice men and appear to be good soldiers. Weather very warm.
3. I am now preparing to write home. I have written home.
4. This is the second Sabbath I have spent in prison. I don't feel very well. I have a raising on my head. It hurts me very much.
5. I did not rise till late this morning. There was a search made yesterday for arms and they found several pistols and knives. One of the blue gentlemen stole a pocket book and a hundred dollars from me. The sentinels are all drunk this morning. They killed a man outside.
6. Weather very warm. No news of importance.
7. Everything going as usual. I have still heard nothing from home. I am very anxious to hear from there for I am uneasy about my mother.

8. It is reported here today that Hood evacuated Atlanta, but it is not believed by the prisoners.
9. Grub is rather scarce among us and I am more than ordinary hungry. Everything is going on as usual. They still report that Atlanta is evacuated.
10. Weather very warm but we have nothing to do. I wish we did have something to do, for it would be better for our health. I am very angry just now for some one has stolen my meal that I intended for dinner so I have to do without and I am very hungry.
11. This is the third Sabbath I have spent in prison. Oh, many and desperate are the thoughts that occupy my mind at present but it is best to keep them to myself. We have had preaching this evening by a minister from the City. His text was as follows: Weeping my last for a day but joy cometh in the morning. I think it very much adapted.....