

Pvt. Robert B. Tarpley Diary
1st Tennessee Heavy Artillery

Source Unknown

.... Our Armies are all in good position in Va & Ga. As long as they can hold their places they have great advantages. The Enemy has big scope of country in their rear to look after. Forest gained one of the greatest cavalry victories of the war a few days ago in North Miss. The weather is getting very warm here. But we have splendid bathing.

We are blessed with plenty of fleas. The breed in the sand by Bussshels.

July 4th We have had some excitement here for the last three days & nights. Four nights ago there was a blockade runner [sic] beached about a mile from the fort. We have saved her cargo but fear the vessel [sic] is a total loss. The Enemy have been firing [sic] at her at long range, but have done no harm so far. There is a detachment sent to her every night to keep the Enemy from boarding her with their launches. They have made several attempts but have failed so far.

The news from both armies in Va & Ga is good. They feel confident they can drive the Enemy back from both places. I hope they can prove successful and drive them in the Potomac & Ohio rivers.

July 26th Since writing [sic] last there has been another vessel [sic] beached. She is now afloat again. the other vessel that beached is a total loss except the machinery. The news is not good from the front. Johnson has been relieved and Hood placed in command. This is a great dissatisfaction with many. The Enemy are now throwing shells into Atlanta. If the Enemy succeed in getting [sic] Atlanta and surrounding country it leaves us in a bad fix in this department.

The Enemy now have a large fleet off this place. There is one monitor in the fleet. They are (no doubt) waiting for a land force to cooperate with them to attack [sic] this place. If they could take this place there would be but little trouble in taking [sic] Mobile as this is the main defence. There is a very small force at Mobile at this time and the defences near the city are not the best in the world by a long ways.

Aug 6th Since last writing [sic] the Enemy has been reinforced by three Ironclads. A few days ago they landed infantry on Dolphin [sic] Island. Our boys have been skirmishing with them for two days. One of the Iron clads opened on Fort Gaines [sic] yesterday she done no damage. This morning at six o'clock two monitors two Iron clads and twelve sloops of war advanced stedly [sic] on the fort. The long roll was beat and all went to their guns amidiately [sic] Our guns opened when they were in eight hundred yards they continued to advance. They now opened on us from their wooden vessels. The monitors never fired a shot but with closed ports continued to advance. The Fort now opened in earnest. The fleet gave us broadside after broadside. It was the heaviest [sic] firing [sic] I ever heard. When they came in range our water guns we gave to them with a vengeance

[sic]. One monortor [sic] went down with all on bord [sic] excep [sic] they were made prisoners there were one hundred and fifty men aboard [sic]. All the others went by except one wooden vessel wich [sic] we burned. This was the grandes [sic] display in the way of an artillery duel I ever saw or expect to see. Our shot riddled the wooden crafts but they are still afloat. We could see the affects of the shot in their rigins [sic] as well as the hull. Our little Navy took a very conspicuous [sic] part in the fight. The Enemy took one of our wooden vessels (Selma) after they got in the bay. Our Gunboat Tennessee [sic] (Iron) made the most galant [sic] fight on record. She went in the midst of the fleet giveing [sic] her broadsides right and left. But she could not stand it long. The Enemy shot away her stack and the smoke strangle the crew so they could not stand it besides the commander is badly wounded after her stack was knocked off she could not make steam so she was bound to raise the white flag. It was but a few minutes before the Stars and Strips [sic] were floating over her. The Engagement lasted with the fort one hour and ten minutes and with the vessells [sic] one hour and fifteen minutes. In the fort we had one man killed and several wounded.

Aug 7th Our forces blowed [sic] up Fort Powell last night. They done this because they had no defence on they bay side. They left and went to Mobile. The Enemy sent in a flag of truce for permishion [sic] to pass the fort with their wounded the request was granted. They sent by a vessell [sic] this morning and she was crouded [sic] from stem to stern with their wounded. One of the Iron clads opened yesterday on Fort Gains [sic]. The fort replied with her long range guns. It is surposed [sic] that one shot struck the Enemy for she soon withdrew without fireing [sic] another shot. I heard yesterday that Gen Murray [sic] sent Gen Page orders to hold this place until the last moment. If this is true we may be prepare [sic] for another long sege [sic], and finely [sic] (perhaps) be surrendered as prisoners of war. But I hope some change will take place (not far off) for the best. Just at this time Peace would be glorious news to our little command provided it was on the right terms. But I fear no such good news is in store for us yet awhile. I do not look for it for the next 8 months.

Aug 8th Our General was trying all day yesterday to get dispatch from Fort Gains [sic]. No signals were ansered [sic]. Last night he went over himself. It is reported that the commander of the fort was making overtures to the Enemy for surrender. This morning at nine oclock the Star's and Bars were lowed [sic] and the Strips [sic] were raised in their sted [sic] over Fort Gains [sic]. The Enemy are at this time fireing [sic] salutes in honor of the surrender. There is something very strange in this affair. The commander of Fort Gains [sic] (Col Anderson 21st Ala) must be a rank coward or trater [sic] or a natural born fool or he would not have surrendered the fort with so little resistance. Fort Gains [sic] is so situated that it could have held as long as rations and amunition [sic] would last with this fort to cooperate with it.

I hope we have a better commander here. I believe we can hold three or four months and perhaps longer.

Aug 10th We are now completely cut off from the world. The Enemy landed an infantry force yesterday. They opened fire with their navy and fired an hour and a half. Then they sent in a flag of truce demanding the unconditional [sic] surrender of Fort Morgan. No doubt they were disappointed [sic] they thought this would be as easy a thing as Fort Gaines [sic]. But they must wait a while for without peace or something else extraordinary come to pass we will hold our own four or five months. It is reported they only have a small land force. If this be true they will have a happy time storming the works. I expect we will have hard times here before the end of the sege [sic].

The Enemy have it in their power to make this a hot place if they try. But I hope they will keep quiet and let us rest for it is only a matter of time when we eat all we have there is nothing left but to rase [sic] the white flag. This would be too good they will be shure [sic] to spoil the masonry of the old fort. We expect a warm time.

Aug 14th The Enemy has been very quiet up to yesterday. About four oclock the gun boat Tenn came up in one thousand yards of our guns and opened fire on our works. Our guns replided [sic] with spirit but had no affect our ten inch shot when they struck her crumble like chalk thrown against a brick wall. One of our guns hit her near the water line after wich [sic] she took a respectful distance from us. The monotor [sic] opened fire about sundown and fired at intervals of thirty minutes up to the present time. Three of our men have been wounded very severely. One belonging to our company by the name of Lewis Cook he has a very severe wound over the right eye. There has been some sharp shooting on both sides, no one hurt on our side yet.

Aug 15th The Enemy kept up a continual fire all last night from a 15 inch gun. They ceased about 9 oclock this morning. They have planted a gun on land about a mile from the Fort. They have been fireing [sic] from this gun all day so far it has done little or no damage. This morning early two monaters [sic] and several wooden vessels left for Mobile. We can now hear their guns very distincly [sic].

Aug 17th Night before last our guns opened on the land forces with grape canister and shell. Their guns were soon very quiet. One man was killed yesterday with a rifle shell while on post. They disabled one of our 10 inch guns yesterday about dark. They opened on us last night about 8 oclock with one of their heavy guns from one of the monaters [sic] and kept it up untill [sic] mid night. All the harm done was to dismount a 32 pounder. Our heavy guns fired a few shots at the monater [sic] and a few at the land forces.

Aug 18th Last night was long to be remembered by the men in Fort Morgan. This morning the Fort is one mess of rubbish completely torn to peaces [sic]. About dark yesterday the enemy opened on us with 8 or 10 morters [sic] on land and several Parrot [sic] guns. All the vessels in the bay and Gulf did the same. It was one continual roar. The shot and shell came like hale. They dismounted every gun we had on the works and tore them in to many pieces after they were dismounted. About 9 oclock they set our citadel on fire with

shell. We could not stop the flames. This gave them a good target to shoot at. And they did shoot with a vengeance [sic]. Cry now arose that the Yanks were tareing [sic] the magazine down very fast. The flames from the citadel were laping [sic] over the magazine. We received orders to pour all the powder in the cisterns. This was a terrible job the powder was in kegs, these we had to rool [sic] under the flames of the citadel and knock the heads in then pour the contents in the cisterns all this time the Enemy kept up a continual fire from land & sea, their shell bursting all around us. By one oclock we had all the powder under water. There was not enough dry powder to shoot a musket. It is horable [sic] to think of the risk we run. If we left the powder in the magazine we were in great danger of being blown in to eternity in a moment and in roleing [sic] it to the cisterns if a shell or a fragment was to strike one of these kegs it was as bad, and if a spark from the burning citadel had fell in one of the kegs when the head was bursted [sic] in, it would be all up with us. But thank God none of these things happened. There were several men killed during the night and some wounded by the fragments of shell. This morning we are Prisoners of war. We raised the white flag at sun up. We were kept in the fort until 3 oclock this evening. This was almost death. In August on the Gulf of Mexico in a pile of bricks with the ruins of a citadel all in a live coal of fire with no water to drink no one knows what we suffered. Why we were kept here so long I cannot see. When we had orders to march out, we went without the second bidding. It is hard to tell wether [sic] we were Negroes or white men were all so powder bismersed [sic] from head to foot. We are now on a U.S. man of war bound for New Orleans.

U. S. Prison

N. Orleans La Aug 20th 1864 We arrived here yesterday this is an old cotton press it covers about an acre of ground the walls are of brick and 20 feet high. We get very little air. It is a dredful [sic] hot place. Several of our boys were sunstruck yesterday comeing [sic] down the levy. We were landed at the upper end of the levy and had to march to the lower end where this prison is situated. This marching was done between 11 and one oclock in the day. The sun shone down with great force.

Aug 31st I cannot brag on our treatment here. Our rations are very short and very inferier [sic]. I wrote a letter home several days ago. We get no news of any kind from any where. There are a good many of our Boys sick. As for myself I never was in better helth [sic]. If I had to live on the rations we receive I would not do so well. I have been playing poker by moon shine with the Yanks and have been very lucky. With money I can get anything to eat I want. It is positively against orders to let the prisoners have anything but their rations. But you can do what you please with a Yank if you have money enough. If I had forty dollars in green backs I could have a suit of cloths [sic] brought to me and a free pass to walk out of the prison and no questions be asked.

Sep 15th On board steamer Casandrew bound for N. York. We were marched out of prison yesterday onto this craft. I feel greatly relieved for we have escaped from a hard place.

We cannot fare worse and hope we will do better. We are now leaving the mouth of the Miss river will soon be on the Briney deep. I enjoyed myself very much the best part of last night. When we were placed aboard [sic] we were stored in the hole, with three decks between us and the sky. When we were all down we heard the cry "look out below." Down came several boxes of hard tack....

(All of the Tarpley diary that Fort Morgan has)