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# In Search Of My Son

By *S. K. Wightman*

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In 1865 a father went from New York to North Carolina to reclaim the body of his boy, killed in action. Here is his account of how the task was done

[S. K. Wightman](#) <sup>[1]</sup>

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On January 15, 1865, the United States Army and Navy bombarded, stormed, and captured Fort Fisher, the great Confederate strong point which guarded the outlet of Cape Fear River just below Wilmington, North Carolina. This battle closed the Confederacy's last port for blockade runners; it also cost the Federal Army and Navy some 1,300 casualties.

Among the men killed at Fort Fisher was Edward K. Wightman, of the 3rd New York Volunteer Infantry, who was shot to death in the attack on the northwest bastion of the fort. His father, a New York attorney named Stillman King Wightman (1803–1899), at once concluded that it was his sad duty to go to Fort Fisher, recover his son's body, and bring it north for proper burial. Despite grave obstacles, the father did this, and two months later, with the experience still raw and fresh, set down in writing his account of it.

In the long course of time—for Mr. Wightman lived to the age of ninety-six—the manuscript passed into the hands of his descendants. Through the courtesy of his grandson, Dr. Orrin Sage Wightman of New York, and of his great-grandson, Dr. Henry Booth Wightman of Ithaca, New York, we are privileged to publish it for the first time, verbatim. We are also in the debt of Robert T. Horn, assistant treasurer of Cornell University for his assistance.

Stillman Wightman was persevering. It was hard to reach Fort Fisher; harder yet to find the body of the dead soldier and to arrange matters so that the body could be brought back for burial in a Connecticut cemetery; still harder for the father to steel himself for the performance of a grim but necessary task. In his recital of this experience, Mr. Wightman somehow managed to speak for all of the men, in all times and lands, who have had to see a precious light go out under the smoke of battle. He opened the grave where his boy had been buried, looked upon what remained, satisfied himself that this was indeed the body of his son, lived through the harrowing job that then became necessary, brought the coffin back home—and then devoutly thanked God for the infinite mercy that had enabled him to do all of this.

There were hundreds of thousands of fathers and mothers in the Civil War who felt as this man felt, and there have been hundreds of thousands since then who have had to live with, and master, the grief he felt.

Because his artless narrative expresses something not merely timeless but ennobling and inspiring, AMERICAN HERITAGE presents it here as a haunting echo from the nation's terrible time of testing. —  
Bruce Catton

It was on Thursday morning the 19th of January, 1865, we found it announced in the Herald of that date, that "Sergeant Major Whiteman 3d N.Y.V. was killed" in the battle. Our house was immediately enveloped in sad mourning. I went down to my office and made inquiries, and soon came to the conclusion, after prayerful deliberation, that it was my duty to go to Fort Fisher. It was a great undertaking for me at that season of the year, and especially as I was not at the time in very good health, and I had not for many years been subject to so great exposure. I returned to my house and held a consultation with my family, and told them what I had thought of doing. They did not discourage me, but left the matter to my own sense of duty.

I accordingly resolved to go; and at seven o'clock on the evening of the same day, I started in the cars at Jersey City, and after riding through a cold, sleepless night, I arrived in Washington, D.C., at six o'clock the next morning. My object in going to Washington was to procure a pass to and from Fort Fisher. I was informed that it was difficult to procure such a pass; and so in order to be more certain of success, I first waited on Gideon Welles, Secretary of the Navy, an old friend of mine, who gave me a letter of introduction to the Secretary of War, which proved all sufficient in insuring me a pass. I forthwith presented the note to the War Department, and immediately obtained the pass; and at three o'clock in the afternoon of Friday, the 20th January, was on board a steamer lying at a wharf in the Potomac, and soon afterwards was sailing down the River in her for Fortress Monroe.

The vessel was crowded with soldiers and civilians, all of whom were strangers to me. For several hours—indeed until long after nightfall—our progress was much impeded with floating cakes of ice. I roamed about the boat until late at night, when being well nigh exhausted with fatigue, I laid myself down on two narrow chairs with my head on a cushion, and fell into a broken, fitful sleep for about two hours. We arrived at Fortress Monroe about 10 o'clock in the forenoon of Saturday the 21st January, and immediately went on shore.

Fort Monroe is a very strong fortification, and may be regarded as almost impregnable. There I was unavoidably detained, for want of a transport, until Tuesday following; during which time, it was very cold, and stormed almost incessantly. Having learned unexpectedly that there was a Capt Warren of Albany, belonging to the 3d Regiment N.Yk. Volunteers, who was then at the Chesapeake Hospital at Hampton, I lost no time in procuring a pass from the Provost Marshall, and walked a distance of about three miles on Sunday, in the face of a rain and a strong wind, to the Hospital, where, after some difficulty, I found him confined to his bed by sickness. I also saw Lieut Behan, belonging to the same Regiment, who had been wounded in the neck at the battle of Fort Fisher, and was under treatment in the same room with Capt Warren. They gave me the first reliable information I had been able to obtain respecting Edward.

"I regret to inform you," said the Captain to me, "that your son Edward was killed, being in the front ranks that commenced the attack in the storming of Fort Fisher. I had known him well for a long time. Edward was not rash, but was a bold man, and never flinched from danger. He was very correct and circumspect in all his habits and deportment. I never saw him drink any spirits. He was strictly temperate, and never used profane language. He was very social, kind and affable, and was held in great esteem by the men of the Regiment. Whenever engaged in battle, he was firm, cool and collected, and understanding his duty, he never failed to discharge it with promptitude and bravery. Perhaps," said the Captain, "the best description I can give of him, is, that I considered him a model soldier."

Lieut. Behan was present and attested to the truth of what the Capt had said to me.

"Edward and myself," he remarked, "were at the head of the Regiment, and among the first to attack the

Fort at the commencement of the battle. I," said he, "had got upon the parapet, and Edward was mounting the slope in front, and just upon the point of reaching the same parapet, near me, not far from the north west end of the Fort, when he was shot, as I think, in the left breast by a minie ball from a rifle, and fell while shouting to the Regiment to press bravely on to the charge. Some friend ran immediately and brought a cup of water and placed it to his lips; but his eyes were closed, and he never opened them afterwards."

The sad reality now came over me, that Edward was no more a living man in this World; and I left the Hospital with a heavy heart, and returned to the Fortress. My aim then was to speed my journey as rapidly as possible; and I spent Monday in unceasing, but fruitless efforts, to accomplish my purpose. Besides, I was obliged to stay nights at a miserable dining saloon, sleeping a short and broken rest on a sofa, taking irregular meals, and being very uncomfortable from exposure to the storm and want of suitable fires ...

At length on Tuesday morning I learned that the Transport Ellen S. Terry had arrived from New York the previous night, bound for Newbern, N.C., and was lying nearby at anchor in Hampton Roads; and as I knew her Captain, I resolved I would take passage on board of her. After much trouble, I finally found her master, Capt Chapin; and having procured a pass from the Provost Marshall, and paid for my transportation, I was taken on board of the vessel.

I found she had several horses and sixty head of cattle on her second, or under deck, that were to be taken to Newbern. Two of the cattle had died in the passage from New York, and had been thrown overboard, and another had just died in the harbor; and the stench that came through the hatches was at times almost suffocating. Nevertheless my courage was not abated, but I resolved to continue on board and share my chances with the passengers and crew. About eleven o'clock in the forenoon of Tuesday, the 24th January, the storm cleared away, and the Transport steamed out of the harbor, past the Rip Raps; and by meridian, we were ploughing old ocean with a stiff breeze and a heavy roll of the boat. The Capt threw overboard another dead ox, and then we went to dinner. The whole Transport was infected with the stench from dead animals; which affected my appetite for food as long as I continued on board the vessel. In my judgment she was far from being a good sea boat, as she rolled terribly, and her progress was slow, not more than seven or eight knots per hour.

At length we saw Cape Hatteras on our starboard, and the light house standing upon the Point; and having sailed Tuesday and Tuesday night, we entered Hatteras Inlet about ten o'clock Wednesday forenoon, the 25th Jany. There the vessel had the ill luck to get aground upon a bar, and remained aground until six o'clock in the evening, when, by the assistance of a steamship, she was got off and proceeded immediately on her way through Pamlico Sound and up Neuse River to Newbern, N.C., where we arrived about nine o'clock in the morning of Thursday the 26th Jany, just one half an hour too late for me to take the cars there that day for Morehead City opposite Beaufort, N.C.

Newbern must have been at the commencement of the War, a desirable place for business, and for the residence of gentlemen of leisure. Before the War, probably some ten or twelve thousand inhabitants were residents there; but since our army took possession, most of the inhabitants have abandoned their homes, and many of the buildings are occupied by our officers and troops for war purposes. Having leisure I spent Thursday in rambling through the town. Aside of officers, soldiers, horsemen, and heavy baggage wagons each drawn by a team of six mules, I saw very few persons in the streets, except Negroes who were very numerous. Although it was a severe cold day, I was surprised to find the tree tops filled with robins and other birds, chirping from limb to limb as if it were midsummer. I returned at night to the Ellen, satisfied from observation, that the place was ruined for the time being.

On Friday morning at 9½ o'clock, I took the cars at the depot for Morehead City. The cars proceeded on southerly over a thin, sandy, level soil, tintured occasionally with iron, and extensively covered with pine forests, until we arrived at Morehead City. Now and then I could see three or four Negro huts by the

wayside, and there were three or four military stations on the route, and a Fort about five miles north of Morehead City; but on the whole road, a distance of forty miles, I did not discover a single dwelling house. I was told the land was worth ten shillings per acre.

It was a very cold day, and having suffered severely with cold feet and frosty air while riding in the cars, I alighted with great pleasure on the wharf at Morehead City, opposite Beaufort, N.C., at 11½ o'clock, on the same day, Friday the 27th January, in the forenoon, and immediately went to the Quartermaster's office for information. There I was pleased to find E. R. Middlebrook, a brother of [the man at] the First Baptist Church, New York City, who kindly proffered me every assistance in his power. He was chief clerk in the department, and he and Capt Wheeler, the Quartermaster, insisted on my dining with them, to which I reluctantly assented; and after a full repast, resumed the prosecution of my business. Brother Middlebrook furnished me with a good pine coffin, ready made, for Edward, which I got put on board the Transport Montauk, then lying near the wharf, and went on board of her myself about five o'clock in the afternoon on my way to Fort Fisher. She was taking in supplies for the army nearly all the following night.

On Saturday morning, at 9½ o'clock, the 28th of January, the Transport Montauk, Capt Greenman, started for Fort Fisher. We had a moderately rough time during the day and ensuing night, and arrived at Fort Fisher about 7 o'clock on Sunday morning, the 20th January, and anchored within the bar, near the southern extremity of Federal Point, just easterly of where Cape Fear River empties into the ocean. Here we had a fine view of the river, which is about a mile in width, and of the Point, and Fort Buchanan, Fort Lamb, and Fort Fisher, and the headquarters of the army further north on the east bank of the river.

The sun was shining bright and clear, but the wind was cold and piercing. I felt well nigh worn out with want of rest, fatigue and exposure; but my anxiety was so great to learn further particulars of Edward's fate, that at about 9 o'clock on Sunday morning, the Capt at my request landed me on shore; and I proceeded immediately on foot toward Fort Fisher, the north eastern extremity of which was about two miles from the place of my landing. The whole distance was but a continuation of loose, deep sand or muddy salt marsh which was covered much of it with water by every flowing tide.

Everything was new and strange to me. Fort Buchanan was on the Point, an earth work perhaps 50 feet in height, somewhat in the shape of a cone. Fort Lamb was situated about three quarters of a mile easterly on the shore of the sea, being another earth work of conical form, of much greater magnitude, rising perhaps 70 feet from its base. Upon both these forts were heavy ordinance. And then near Fort Buchanan, were the offices of the Commissariat, the Quartermaster, and the Captain of the Port; and interspersed between Fort Buchanan and Fort Fisher were encampments of some of our troops.

None of these novelties however, hindered me in my progress toward Fort Fisher. The travelling was irksome, the wind was cold and cutting, and came sweeping from the northwest over Cape Fear River, and the salt marsh and sand beach with an irresistible rush; and by the time I had walked one half the distance, my frame began to quiver, and I felt that the days of my youth were gone. I had travelled over eight hundred miles, by land and by sea, had been subjected for ten days and nights to great exposure, and had made every inquiry I could, but had only learned that Edward was shot and killed at the battle of Fort Fisher on the 15th of January.

There was an explosion of a magazine in the Fort on Monday the 16th January, and many had been killed or buried in the ruins. Whether Edward's body had been buried at all, or had been covered in the ruins, or whether I should ever be able to find or identify his remains, was to me a matter of entire uncertainty; especially as I was told it was a custom where many were killed, to bury the bodies in trenches, sometimes three or four deep, and when buried in separate graves, there were comparatively but few instances where the name of the deceased was to be found indicating his identity.

These doubts and difficulties, and my well nigh exhausted condition, all had a strong tendency to almost

dishearten me, until the pressure of my feelings began to find vent in tears. At first I thought I would sit down and rest, but I was in the midst of a salt marsh, and that was impracticable. Next, I sought for some spot where I might be partially shielded from the cold, cutting wind; but there was not any place any where near me to afford the least relief. It was at this time that my heart broke forth in prayer to God, to strengthen and nerve my mind and body, and enable me to perform what I had undertaken, if it could be consistent with His holy will. Almost at the same instant, the promises of God came into my thoughts with great force and energy. "As thy days, so shall thy strength be." "Fear not, for I am with thee." "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee."

Other passages of similar import came into my mind, until I was comforted, and became joyful, and exclaimed aloud in the language of the Psalmist, "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want;" and then I commenced and sang the hymn—

The Lord my shepherd is I shall be well supplied, Since he is mine and I am His, What can I want beside.

I would walk and sing till my breath began to fail, and then stop and rest, and then again, walk and sing.

Meanwhile I had reached the more immediate region of the battleground of Fort Fisher, which was strown with shells broken and unbroken, with balls, shot and shrapnell, and diverse other missus and implements of death. Torpedoes, broken cannon, and fragments, wheels and carriages, and other evidences of destructive warfare arrested my vision in various directions; while the massive earthworks before me and on the right, rising to an elevation of about 25 feet, with traverses or mounds of earth on the parapet rising perhaps 20 feet still higher, and the whole extending from north to south more than half a mile, and then from south to west almost a like distance, until nearly reaching Fort Lamb, lay just before me and on my right in fearful grandeur.

All the front of the Fort not bordering on the sea had a ditch at its base, filled with water from the tide, and also a strong stockade outside the ditch, built of the bodies of small pine trees placed in juxtaposition about 12 feet in height with sharpened points at the top and holes cut through in near the ground for the use of sharpshooters. The Fort in front and rear, rose almost perpendicular from its base. It embraced about 70 acres of land, and to the eyes of a civilian, would seem absolutely impregnable.

I passed through a gateway cut in the stockade at the north extremity of the Fort, and crossing a small bridge, turned to the right, and came immediately upon a plain of sand that stretched southward to the sea, and northward perhaps two or more miles to a pine forest, and westward, with salt marsh, to the banks of Cape Fear River. I was now in front of the northwest end of the Fort, and within about 250 feet of the stockade. Here the fierce, cold wind made a rushing sweep, raising at times clouds of dust.

With the exception of a single soldier strolling near me, I was alone. I inquired of him if there were any graves in that region, of soldiers killed in the battle of the 15th January. He replied there were, and that some of them lay at a short distance from me on a slightly elevated knoll of sand in front of the Fort. Thither I repaired alone immediately where I saw perhaps thirty graves, the most of which were left without any indication of the name or identity of the person buried. Extending my vision northward, I saw several other places where there were many graves at convenient distances, but most of them without any identification.

I began to feel alarmed lest, after all my long, wearisome journey and constant anxiety and hopeful anticipations, it might be my sad lot to fail in the accomplishment of my purpose; and yet I could not delay a moment in my eager efforts. I commenced with the nearest grave to the Fort, about 250 feet northerly of the stockade. It had no indications of identity. The next grave had a small, narrow pine board erected at the head of it. I turned my back to the wind, to keep off the flying dust, and leaning over the grave and looking through my spectacles, read the following words, legibly written with a small lamp-black brush

upon the board:—"Sergt Major 3d N. Y. V.—E. K. Wightman." !!!

O, how my heart leaped with joy! No tongue nor pen can describe my feelings. Within perhaps three or four hundred feet of the spot in the parapet where Edward was killed, with the evidence before me, I could not hesitate in the belief that his body was buried there, and that I was standing beside his grave, which gave me unspeakable satisfaction. All his life came up before me, and how beloved he was by his parents and brothers and sisters, and what an interest we had felt and manifested in his welfare and happiness,—and there I stood alone and mourned and wept.

I found that I was almost transfixed to the spot, until a reference to my watch warned me of my duty to proceed to headquarters. I made three efforts to leave the grave, and in each instance, after having walked away some distance, found myself back again, engaged in reading the inscription. At length, I started for headquarters, distant about a mile northerly from the Fort. I passed large numbers of rifle pits and breastworks, that had been hastily dug and thrown up by our forces, in their approaches to attack Fort Fisher; and soon came to camps of soldiers, and finally first to the headquarters of General Ames, and then just beyond, to the headquarters of General Terry, which were situated on a sandy soil, somewhat elevated above, and a few rods easterly of the easterly side of Cape Fear River.

My first object was to get an introduction to General Terry. I went to his headquarters and found he was absent, but would return soon. Meanwhile I had a conversation with his chief clerk, and he became interested in my behalf. After a time General Terry came in, and at my request I was introduced to him. He shook hands and treated me in a gentlemanly manner. But I felt that I must enlist his sympathy.

"General," said I, "were you not formerly a practicing lawyer in New Haven, Connt, and a clerk of Court?" "I was," said he. "Well," I continued, "I am a practicing lawyer in New York City; but I once resided, near five years, in New Haven, while I was at Yale College, and studying law, and I subsequently practiced law in Connecticut, until I removed to New York City in 1843."

"Is this," said the General, "Stillman K. Wightman?" I replied, "It is." "Give us your hand," said he. "How are you. I have, a long time, known you well by reputation. Anything that I can do for you, shall be done with the greatest pleasure." Whereupon orders were forthwith given to me, directed to General Ames, to afford me all the facility in his power, in the removal of the body of my son, and to the Chief Quartermaster, Capt Lamb, to furnish me with every facility for the removal of the body by government transport.

With these orders I proceeded to the headquarters of General Ames, presented my authority, and made known my wishes. He treated me very kindly, and sent for the Surgeon general Dr. Washburn, and other officers, who soon appeared, and thereupon we held a conversation. I first made a brief statement when and where I had been informed Edward was killed, and that I believed I had found his grave; and spoke of my desire to procure his remains and take them home with me. Surgeon Washburn enquired if I had a lead coffin. I replied no, it was simply made of pine, and was all I could obtain at Morehead City.

"I think," said he, "it is too late for you now to take up the body and carry it away with only a pine coffin; and my advice to you would be to abandon the idea for the present. At some future time, you might perhaps send a lead coffin, eight or ten months hence, and obtain the remains of your son." A chaplain of a regiment was there, and he approved of the Surgeon's views, as did others present. I felt that it was an important moment with me; and if I could not get their approval, I would probably fail in the whole object of my journey. Thoughts whirled through my mind with great rapidity, during which time not a word was spoken by anyone.

At length I broke silence, and addressing myself to General Ames, "General," said I, "a long and tedious journey from New York City I have just performed to this place, to obtain the body of my son. I have the affections and feelings of a kind father. I have left at home his mother and several brothers and sisters, all

of whom loved Edward; and if I were to return home without his remains, when they are evidently so near within my reach, it would be a sad disappointment to all of us. It has been a never-failing rule with me hitherto, never to abandon a thing I have undertaken, until it is accomplished, provided it be an object worth pursuing. This is an object eminently worthy of my utmost efforts, and I must say, without intending to give offence, that if it be not counter to God's will, I will never leave Federal Point without taking the body of Edward with me."

Here another pause ensued. "Well," said the General, "I will cheerfully aid you all I can; but we are as yet in a very unsettled condition." Others present proffered their services. "It is possible," said Surgeon Washburn, "if the body were deposited in the coffin, and the residue of the space filled with salt and rosin, you might be able to carry the remains north in tolerable safety at this season of the year." Having arrived at this favorable point, I did not deem it advisable to press the matter further for that day; and so I bade them good afternoon.

The night was approaching and I was three miles from the Point, and was obliged to be there about sunset, or I might fail to get them to send me a boat from the Montauk, where I was forced to go and stay nights, as there was neither food nor lodging of any kind for me on shore. So I commenced and waded through quicksands and salt marsh to the Point, where, in about a half an hour afterwards, they sent me a boat, and took me on board the Montauk. I had had no food since morning; my excitement had been very great, and my frame was weary. After supper I sat awhile, and then went to the after cabin, where, after thanking the Lord for His mercy and goodness to me, and praying for the success of my enterprise, if consistent with His will, I lay down in my berth and slept soundly and sweetly through the night.

On Monday morning the 30th January, I again went ashore at the Point, and saw Capt Lamb, the Quartermaster, and gained his sympathies in my behalf, with his promise to aid me all in his power. The wind blew severe from the north or north-east, and was accompanied with some rain, and it was uncomfortably stormy and cold. But I drew my overclothing around me, and started again on a pilgrimage to headquarters, not forgetting to stop at Edward's grave on my way.

Having arrived at General Terry's headquarters, I obtained an interview with Doctor Barnes, a physician, and inquired if he knew where I might obtain salt or rosin. General Terry remarked that he could furnish me with plenty of salt; and Doctor Barnes said there was no rosin to be found there, but he expected to go to Smithville, across Cape Fear River, the next day, and if he could find any rosin he would bring some over on his return. With these assurances, I found myself obliged to be content for the day. I saw that the business must take time for its accomplishment; and too much haste might defeat my purpose. So I spent the rest of the day in roaming through the camps, among the soldiers, and in examining critically the rifle pits and breast works, and Fort Fisher, and Forts Lamb and Buchanan, and in holding sundry conversations with officers and soldiers.

During the day I found an officer who told me that he had three bodies taken up last June at Newbern, N.C., that had been buried three months. That he procured tent-cloths, and covered the cloths with hot pitch, and wound them around the bodies, and put hot pitch on the inside of the coffins, and deposited the bodies in the coffins, and sent them to Brooklyn, New York, where they were buried in Greenwood Cemetery; and no fault was found, or complaints made; and he kindly offered me his assistance if I should need it. I then went to General Ames' headquarters, and saw Surgeon Washburn, and reported the facts to him; and he thought the plan a better one than he had suggested the day before.

Finally, after a day of anxious care, I returned to the Point, and went on board the Montauk. At supper we had at the table Capt Ainsworth, the harbor master, and also the Capt of the small steamer Howard, which was accustomed to run from the Point up the River to a wharf abreast of General Terry's headquarters, and was engaged in other harbor service. I inquired of them, as I did of many others, for information where I might obtain pitch, or rosin, or tent-cloth. No one could tell me where I could obtain either of the articles.

The soldiers needed all their tent-cloths; and, as for pitch, or rosin, they did not know where they could be found.

The next morning, Tuesday the 31st January, I went ashore again at the Point, and waded through sand and salt marsh until I reached Fort Lamb; and from there to the north easterly extremity of Fort Fisher I made thorough search, throughout the whole rear of the Fort, for pitch, and rosin, inquiring of every person I saw, if they knew of any such articles; to which, I received the uniform answer, that they had no knowledge respecting it. Finally, observing a rising knoll of sand lying in the rear near the tide water of the River, I repaired thither, and with the fragment of a pick-axe I went to work, picking at a slight mound of sand; when, to my astonishment, I found a whole barrel of rosin there, buried in the sand! I was affected, even to tears, and thanked the Lord and took courage.

I then sought for and found a large sand-bag, and emptying out the sand, I commenced filling it with large lumps of rosin; and having obtained from 25 to 30 pounds, and seeing a large four-wheel wagon, drawn by a team of six mules, just passing me, I begged the privilege of depositing the bag of rosin in the wagon-which was freely granted, and the rosin was thus carried to a point within half a mile of headquarters. There I took the load upon my back, and carried it through deep sand, to the headquarters of General Ames, and left it in charge of a soldier for the ensuing night.

The same day I had the coffin sent ashore, and saw Capt Lamb, and by his orders the coffin was forwarded and left in charge of another soldier near the same headquarters. I got a permit and obtained a sufficient quantity of boards to make a box to inclose the coffin, and had coffin and boards left in front of Capt Gordon's tent, who promised, the next morning, to detail a carpenter, and have the box made, and in the meantime to have the coffin and boards properly guarded and not taken away. It was now near nightfall, and I was greatly fatigued.

I could find only two men belonging to the 3d Regiment N.Y. Volunteers, and they did not know where Edward was buried. The rest of the Regiment had been sent to a place in or near Smithville, on the western shore of the sea, near the mouth of Cape Fear River, 10 or 12 miles distant; and I could not see them without getting a pass and spending two days, which I did not feel at liberty to undertake to do, in view of the delay that must ensue; for, I found nothing would be done unless I was constantly present, attending to the business myself, and the body was, every day, becoming undoubtedly more and more decomposed and unfit for transportation.

It seemed to me I could not walk back to the Point in season to get on board the Montauk; and so, after a moment's reflection, I moved slowly toward an officer standing near General Ames' headquarters. I had conversed with him the day before, and he had known Edward, and felt an interest in my success. Addressing myself to him, in a half mournful, half jovial tone, I said, "Pity the sorrows of a poor old man, whose trembling limbs have borne him to your door! I am quite fatigued," said I, "and yet I must be at Federal Point by sunset, or perhaps lose my night's rest on board the Montauk."

Turning round to an orderly he said, "Orderly, take your horse and another, and go with this gentleman to the Point." And in less than five minutes, I was on horseback, with the orderly by my side, and away we galloped to the Point, where the orderly took my horse and returned, and I went aboard the Montauk for the night.

I went ashore at the Point early on Wednesday morning the 1st February, and again waded, as usual, through sand and salt marsh, in the face of a keen, cold wind, until I arrived at the spot where I had before found the barrel of rosin; and now commenced making search for pitch. I critically examined every place where I thought there was any probability of success. Finally, I betook myself to the edge of the tide from Cape Fear River, which was beginning to ebb; and there, after a short search, I discovered what I judged to be a barrel of pitch, embedded in the sand under the water. This unexpected good fortune enlivened my



hopes, and gave me a fresh impulse, and encouraged me to persevere.

I then proceeded immediately to General Ames' headquarters, and told him of my labors the day before, and that it was necessary for me to procure assistance in endeavoring to obtain the pitch, and more rosin than I had been able to carry through the deep sand on my back. He very kindly reproved me for not asking for assistance, instead of carrying the rosin myself; and ordered a detail of men and a team forthwith, to be at my disposal. In a few minutes I was provided with a heavy four-wheel wagon, drawn by six mules, with a driver, and three men; and on we moved to the places where were the rosin and pitch. We gathered a further quantity of rosin, and then went for the pitch.

The tide had receded, and in digging around what I supposed was a barrel, we found it was only three barrel staves, which, however, had pitch on the inside about two inches thick. This, we concluded, would not be sufficient, so, while one of the men was severing the pitch from the staves, we strolled over southward, beyond the barrel of rosin, into the central part of the rear of the Fort, and there found a barrelhead, covered with pitch from 4 to 6 inches thick, embedded in the sand; which was all and more than I needed. I felt extremely elevated in this sudden and unexpected discovery. We carried it with the rest of the pitch and the rosin, to the wagon, and went and deposited the whole at General Ames' headquarters.

I next repaired to Capt Gordon's tent, to see what progress had been made in finishing the box, and found the lumber had not been touched by a carpenter. The coffin was there, but the boards had been removed some distance to a pile of joists. I sought out Capt Gordon, and respectfully remonstrated. He went with me immediately to the only joiner there was there, and ordered him to leave all other jobs and make me the box. The carpenter obeyed, and I stood by him and helped him, every way I could, for about five hours, when, it being near nightfall, and seeing that the work was about done, I walked from headquarters to the Point, very much fatigued, and again went aboard the Montauk, and slept sweetly through the night.

Thursday morning the ad February I again went ashore at the Point, and walked, as usual, to headquarters. It was cold and the wind blew very hard from the northwest. I called upon General Ames, and told him the progress I had made, and now all I wanted was a tent-cloth. He said I would have to go to General Terry for that. I immediately repaired to General Terry's headquarters, and told him what I needed; and by his direction I was furnished with an order on the physician at the hospital, a mile above, to deliver to me a tent-cloth to wrap the body in, and a detail of men, and a team, to take up and remove the body. He also ordered me a horse, to be at my disposal during the day.

So I mounted the horse and galloped away, through clouds of dust and sand, to the hospital, and saw the physician, who politely informed me that he could not furnish a team, nor a detail of men; but he would send a tent-cloth to General Ames' headquarters, where the rest of my materials were deposited. He gave me an order on an officer at General Ames' headquarters, for a team, and detail of men. Consequently I had to ride back to those quarters; and there the officer gave me an order for a team, and detail of men, on another officer three quarters of a mile above the hospital.

I found the box, and coffin, rosin and pitch, and subsequently the tent-cloth, all deposited together at General Ames' headquarters. I then galloped off in the eye of the keen wind, with my mouth, eyes and ears filled with dust and sand, to the station above the hospital, and presented my order to the officer. He ordered up a team, and a detail of four men, besides a driver.

Thus equipped, we moved forward, and arriving at General Ames' headquarters, we loaded in the coffin, and box, and tent-cloth, and rosin, and pitch, and started for Edward's grave. On the way I conversed freely with one of the men, a Lieutenant, who was the most intelligent, and did the most important part of the work. He said his father was an undertaker.

Having arrived at the grave, we selected a spot about five feet below the top of the knoll, just west of where Edward was buried; and then while they were digging a hollow place and lining it with large stones, and procuring pine wood for a fire, I rode around into the rear of the Fort, and there I found an old iron pot partially broken, and a bit of an old iron sauce pan, which we carried to the place; and putting on fuel upon the stones and starting a fire and fixing the pot thereon, we threw in a plenty of pitch, with a little rosin, and when it was boiling hot, we put it on with an old brush and swab, and covered the inside and top board of the coffin, so that it appeared to be air tight. We pitched the inside and top of the box in the same manner—always filling the cracks and seams of box and coffin. We then covered one side of the tent-cloth with pitch, so that it appeared water tight.

We then repaired to the grave, and the men began to dig. By this time, including straggling soldiers, there were about twenty standing around the grave. I stood at the foot, anxiously watching every particle of sand that was removed. When they had dug down about four feet, they came to his body. They carefully removed the sand.

He was lying partly on his back and partly on his right side, with his face inclining toward the East. He was buried in his military dress, just as he appeared when he was shot on the parapet. The collar, or rather cape, of his coat had been drawn up, and each end of it folded over his face. When they came to move aside the collar, or cape, revealing his countenance, I was sadly struck with the sight. His face was white and very much swollen; his eyes had evidently been in some way injured, his chin dropped down very low, and his upper teeth were very prominent. However, his forehead and eyebrows and hair and ears were very natural, his hands were unmistakable, and his limbs,—all were evidently his remains. In addition to this, he had on his left shoulder the badge of Sergt. Major.

I saw the holes made by the ball that was the cause of his death. It had passed through the muscles of his right arm, about equidistant between the shoulder and elbow, and entered his right breast, perhaps five inches below the collar bone. He had evidently been shot while fighting with his sword in his right hand, by a minie ball, from the rifle of a sharpshooter. He was shot while on the southeast verge of the top of the first mound at the northeast extremity of the Fort at about five o'clock in the afternoon. His legs gave way under him, and he dropped down where he was shot. He had marched with his Regiment across the bridge about four o'clock in the afternoon, when they climbed up around and on the top of the mound and fought there, often hand to hand with the enemy until he was killed. He was the fifth man that first entered the Fort.

The morning after the battle, Capt John Knowles, his tent mate, and who was near him on the same mound when he fell, went and found Edward's body lying under three other dead bodies on the top of the mound in the same spot where he was shot, with his pockets turned inside out and his watch stolen. Capt Knowles removed his body from the mound which was covered with the dead, and buried it where I found it. As he lay in the grave, his left arm was lying across his body, and his right arm was extended at an angle of forty five degrees from his body, with the hand open and fingers curved inward. His left knee and left foot rested upon his right knee and right foot, his legs being akimbo and drawn up toward his body. He had his military shoes on; otherwise, he had no blanket or covering other than his ordinary military dress. The grave had evidently been dug about five feet in length and about four feet in depth. I still stood at the foot of the grave, and looking at everything critically, wishing to satisfy myself entirely that it was, beyond a doubt, the body of Edward.

Observing a manifest disposition to proceed in the removal, I requested the men to delay a short time, as it was my desire to become first fully convinced of his identity.

“And ye can have no doubt about that,” said a rough son of Erin, “for sure now he greatly resembles ye.”

On some other occasion, such an Irish bull might have provoked a smile in me; but it passed unheeded.

Edward had been in the two expeditions to Fort Fisher. The first had occupied near 24 days, and he had written us that he had lost flesh. The second, though of shorter duration, was accompanied with storms and high winds. He had had no rest, was sea sick, and had taken a severe cold; yet when he landed with the rest of the forces on the 13th January, he was in comfortable health. He was evidently thin in flesh when he was killed. He had been about two and a half years in the service, and had been in fifteen battles, some of them very severe engagements.

I stood in silence looking at his remains. His whole life rushed upon my memory; his affection for father and mother and brothers and sisters and relations, his finished education, his judgment and intelligence, and the hopes he entertained, in common with all of us, that when he had honorably served out the term of his enlistment for three years, he would return to his welcome home, and quietly resume his wonted avocations in civil life; gazing upon his lifeless remains before me, the wreck of all his and our fond anticipations, and feeling that I his father was standing there alone, a stranger in a strange land, far away from my family, with no one present heartily to sympathize with me in the loss, my emotions overcame me, and for a brief time my cheeks were wet with tears. No one can conceive of the agony of my trials on that occasion.

I gave the men directions to remove him from the grave, and place him in the coffin. This was soon done. They spread out the tent-cloth with the pitch on the outside, and laid his body in the cloth, upon his back; and stretching his legs, and folding his arms over his body, and winding the cloth around him, deposited the body in the coffin, which proved to be just the right length and size for his remains. I then requested them to nail down the top of the coffin and pitch the seams on the outside with hot pitch, and then deposit the coffin in the box prepared to receive it, and nail down the top and pitch the outside seams in the same manner.

Meanwhile I mounted my horse (for I could not bear to hear the driving of a nail) and rode rapidly to Fort Lamb, and there obtained from an officer an order or permit to have the body deposited in a bomb-proof, under guard, until it should be transferred to a transport. On my return to the grave, I found the work was completed; and we went immediately and examined some of the bomb-proofs, and came to the conclusion not to deposit the box there, as it was large and very heavy, and would take from four to six men to carry it; and I determined to send it to and deposit it in a building on and near the head of the wharf in Cape Fear River, abreast of General Terry's headquarters—where it was accordingly carried and deposited, and remained under guard during the ensuing night.

The sun was near setting. I rode to headquarters, and General Terry's brother directed an orderly to go with me, and we rode, with great speed, to the Point, where the orderly took my horse and returned to headquarters, and I went on board the Montauk. I sat down at the table, almost completely exhausted, but after supper felt revived. Perhaps it had been to me, the most painful day that I had ever experienced. As I was very weary, I soon betook myself to my berth, and slept soundly through the night.

Friday morning the 3d February, I again went ashore at the Point, and first visited the headquarters of Capt Lamb, the Quartermaster, and was told that he was at the headquarters of General Terry. I then had to wade through the sand and marsh to General Terry's headquarters, and was there informed that Capt Lamb had gone to the Point. I found the box in the building on the wharf, under guard.

Soon afterwards I had a long, pleasant interview with General Terry in his private room, by special invitation. I told him I must see Capt Lamb, and that it was my wish to return to New York at the earliest possible moment. He ordered me a horse, and that an orderly should go with me to the Point to see Capt Lamb; and in a short time I was galloping, with an orderly by my side, back to the Point, where we soon arrived. Capt Lamb was not there, and I had to wait for him a long time; and so I sent the orderly back to headquarters, but kept my horse for further use.

When Capt Lamb came, I told him the body was ready for transportation, and inquired of him if there was any vessel there, bound for the Port of New York. He replied, no; but the Transport North Point was lying at anchor near the Montauk, and she would sail for Fortress Monroe that afternoon or early next morning. I told him where the box was. He said the Howard would soon go from the Point up the River to the wharf, and if I were there the box could be put on board and carried by the Howard and put on board the North Point.

While we were talking, the Howard came sailing around the Point up the River, on her way to the wharf. Seeing that this was possibly the only chance in my power for expedition, I mounted my horse and ran him as fast as I could make him run, until I reached General Terry's headquarters. Meanwhile the boat had arrived at the wharf and was lying there.

I gave up my horse, and went immediately to the wharf, and had the box put on board the Howard; and shortly afterwards we were sailing down to the Point. On our right, over on the west side of the River, lay Admiral Porter's flagship, two or three Monitors, and about twenty gun boats, quietly in the stream. We passed the Point, and soon came to the North Point, where the box was put on board of her ...

On Saturday about 12 o'clock at noon the 4th February, we sailed out of the harbor, past Fort Fisher, across the bar, and then were detained two hours, awaiting dispatches from headquarters. On their arrival we put to sea, and I bade farewell to Fort Fisher. Our transport had no cargo on board, and having no side wheels, we were liable, at any time, to become the sport of the waves. However, we sailed very well through the night; and the forenoon of Sunday, the 5th February, was extremely pleasant and refreshing.

For two hours I sat upon a hatch and chatted with passengers. The sea was quite smooth, the sun was warm, the sky clear, and the air was bland. About 2 o'clock in the afternoon, we changed our course, and began to steer in a more northerly direction. Presently clouds began to gather in the east and northeast, and the wind grew strong from the northwest, which continued to increase until it blew a heavy gale. The waves ran very high, the vessel rolled and plunged and tumbled. The air became very keen and cold, and there were no places on board for comfort or accommodation. The Captain (Capt Kerwan) was sick with neuralgia, and two of his crew were confined with fevers.

Night came on, the most uncomfortable I ever witnessed. Down to this time I had not been sea-sick during my journey. I stayed up till 10 o'clock at night in the Pilot House, and then went to my berth. Night came on, the most uncomfortable I ever witnessed. Down to this time I had not been sea-sick during my journey. I stayed up till 10 o'clock at night in the Pilot House, and then went to my berth in the rear cabin. It was impossible to walk the deck, or take a step, anywhere, without holding on to something. I went to my berth, a nasty, filthy place, unfit for a human being to sleep in, small in dimensions, and full of confined air peculiar to forecastles in sea vessels. The vessel was tossing at a terrible rate, and I very soon became seasick. I did not regret it, for I knew it would do me good. After I had got near exhausted, I fell over on my back, and went to sleep. During the night the North Point rolled tremendously. On one occasion the Captain was thrown out of his berth prostrate upon the floor.

We arrived at Fortress Monroe and anchored in Hampton Roads about 9 o'clock in the morning of Monday the 6th February. I immediately went on shore, and after much trouble and delay, went out in a steam tug and got the body from the North Point, and had it brought and deposited at the head of the wharf. I then started and went to the Chesapeake Hospital, to see Lieut. Behan. I found him and Capt Warren as before. Lieut Behan said he was not positive whether Edward was shot in his right or left breast, but he knew it was one or the other. This was all I wanted to know from him.

I returned to Fortress Monroe, and having procured an order of transportation from the quartermaster and a pass from the Provost Marshal, I succeeded, at 5 o'clock in the afternoon, in getting the box and myself on board the steamer Alida which soon set sail up the Chesapeake Bay for Baltimore. The vessel was

crowded with civilians and soldiers, some of whom were sick, having but just left the hospital. I sat up all night, sleeping about two hours in an arm chair. During the night, two soldiers died of sheer exhaustion. One of them fell down on the deck and died in five minutes after calling in vain for some kind of spirits to revive him. He had not a friend on board.

We arrived at the wharf in Baltimore at 7 o'clock on Tuesday morning the 7th February. At 9 o'clock I had got the body transferred and put on board the cars, when we started in the New York train for New York. There came up a storm of snow which caused some delay, and I did not reach the depot in New York until about 8 o'clock in the evening, where I left the body in charge of the baggage master for the night. I arrived at home about 9 o'clock in the evening, having travelled about sixteen hundred miles in less than three weeks, and in better health than when I first started on my journey.

On Wednesday morning the 8th February, the body was brought to our house, No 65 East 14th Street. The box was found to be air tight. The funeral was attended at our house on Friday the 10th February at 3 o'clock in the afternoon. Relatives and numerous friends were present, and the services were solemn and appropriate. Saturday morning about half past 7 o'clock, the body was taken to the depot at 27th Street. There we had it put on board a car, and myself and three sons, Frederick, James, and Charles, proceeded with it in the cars to Middletown, Connt., where we arrived at about 2 o'clock in the afternoon.

We had previously written to friends in Middletown and Cromwell, of our wish to bury the body that day in Cromwell. We found several warm hearted friends waiting for us at the depot, and a carriage and hearse and all things in readiness. From there we went to Cromwell and to the cemetery, where we had the body buried in our family burying ground. Edward's remains were deposited beside the grave of his little sister, who died, at about two and a half years of age, and was buried in 1832. The funeral services at Edward's grave were appropriately performed by Revd Stephen Topliff, the only surviving brother of Mary Butler deceased, widow of James Butler, deceased, the brother of my wife.

Before I left the grave, I went back and took a long last lingering look at the box, containing the remains of a son that was near and dear to me. Many friends attended the burial, and services at his grave. "And there," said I, "his body lies, and I trust will be permitted to lie, in peace till the morning of the resurrection."

I came away feeling that all my care and toil was nothing, compared with the satisfaction of knowing that his remains had been taken up from a grave in an enemy's land, and had been safely transported to the land of his birth, and peacefully buried in our family cemetery.

After the burial, we stopped a short time at the house of our friend, Bulkley Edwards, and then came to the City of Middletown and spent a couple of hours with our old and tried friend Nathaniel Smith and wife and family, where, after partaking of a rich repast, we went to the depot, and starting in the cars at half past 7 o'clock in the evening, arrived home in New York shortly before midnight. The day had been clear and cold and the night was frosty. On the following day we were visited with a severe snow storm.

I herewith append a rough sketch, made by me with a pen, of Fort Fisher and its surroundings. [It appears on page 70.]

In the foregoing narrative I have endeavored to state facts with a view of being clearly understood, wholly regardless of style or diction. And now, in bringing this sketch to a close, I desire to express my gratitude to Almighty God, for all the way in which He led me through all the scenes which I have so imperfectly described.

It was at first uncertain whether Edward had been killed or wounded. Yet my impressions were irresistible that it was my duty to go after him or his body immediately. On arriving at Washington, although I was detained the whole forenoon in obtaining a pass, I nevertheless left in a steamer at 3 o'clock in the

afternoon, and could not have left before, for Fortress Monroe. On arriving at Fortress Monroe, I was detained over three days and nights in that military strong-hold. Yet it proved for my benefit—for, during the detention, I was enabled to obtain critical information of Edward's death, and manner of death, from an eye witness, which I afterwards found I could not obtain from any other source.

The way did not seem to open for me to go direct from Fortress Monroe to Fort Fisher, and I grew uneasy. In the midst of the delay the Ellen S. Terry anchored in Hampton Roads, driven in by stress of weather, bound for Newbern; and as I was acquainted with the Captain and principal owner, I went on board of her, and sailed to Newbern. On arriving at Newbern I felt unpleasant that I was detained there for a day and a night; and yet the delay gave me a fine opportunity to ramble through the place and notice the inhabitants. Besides, on reaching Morehead City the next day, I found, if I had been there the day before, no transport would have been ready to sail for Fort Fisher. If I had gone direct from Fortress Monroe to Fort Fisher, I must have gone without a coffin; whereas on my arrival at Morehead City, our kind brother Middlebrook furnished me with a coffin already made, and the next morning I started with it for Fort Fisher.

After landing at Federal Point on Sunday morning, I feel that I was led by Him who knoweth all our thoughts and ways, in the most direct route to Edward's grave; and in all my subsequent efforts to effect the removal of his remains, and the almost marvellous manner in which I discovered, from time to time, and obtained the necessary materials to carry out my purpose, I recognize, and, with gratitude, record, my acknowledgments of, the superintending care and goodness of God in dealing so graciously with me in the midst of my fiery trials. So far as I know, not a transport left Fort Fisher after my arrival there, until I was ready to return home; and then, the very next day the North Point started for Fortress Monroe, which was more agreeable to me than to think of coming all the way home by sea at such an inclement season of the year. Moreover, notwithstanding all my exposure and fatigue, I found myself improving in health. My return homeward was rapid; and after my arrival in New York, everything worked favorably until we had deposited Edward's remains in their resting place and we had returned to our home.

I believe that the bounds of our lives are fixed by our Creator, and we cannot pass them. Edward's time to depart from us had come; and while I mourn his loss, (for I loved him tenderly) I feel it my duty to yield submissively to the will of the Most High, and to acknowledge that He hath done all things well. Blessed be His holy name. I feel that I am reconciled to this dispensation of his providence, and can say "The Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away, and blessed be the name of the Lord."

Department

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