

"When James's Battery 'Opened The Ball'." "The First Shot of the War-- Dr. Robert Leiby tells the story of the beginning of the Bombardment of Fort Sumter".

"The News and Courier is indebted to Mr. A. S. Salley, secretary of the State historical commission, for the use of the following paper:

April 12, 1863 will be the thirty-second anniversary of the first shell fired at Fort Sumter, and is generally considered as the opening of the terrible struggle between the Northern and Southern sections of this great country--the one ostensibly for the preservation of the Union of these United States; the other for the maintenance of their rights under the Constitution of that Union, which they felt were being wrested from them by a fanatical element at the North.

Much has been written to prove the particular individual who fired the first shell at Fort Sumter, and thereby establish the fact of a questionable honor of having inaugurated the most momentous struggle in the history of the world, both as to its duration and the numbers engaged in it, and the tenacity with which the weaker section maintained themselves against the stronger, with the whole of Europe to recruit their armies from and all the resources which their open ports afforded.

I propose as a witness to this opening episode in the great drama, beginning April 12, 1861, to give my recollection of it, along with others who were on the historic spot of Fort Johnson, at that time, as there are but a few now left who were there, and witnessed what took place thirty-two years ago, in order that when the history of this gigantic struggle may be written in after years, some item may be obtained that would assist in its compilation.

In order that one not present on the spot should understand the situation of affairs at Fort Johnson at that time, I would state that there were two mortar batteries erected at Fort Johnson for the reduction of Fort Sumter. One situated on the front beach, midway between old Fort Johnson and the lazaretto point, and directly west of Fort Sumter, and known as the beach or east battery, (this was the most vulnerable and the weakest line of Fort Sumter,) and the other was located due northwest of the former, on a hill near some houses and contiguous to the present quarantine residence. The remains of this battery are still plainly visible and was known as the hill or west battery. The east or beach battery has been washed away by the sea, but I have saved the timber that was used in construction of the magazine. This comprises the topography of the offensive works at Fort Johnson for the reduction of Sumter on April 12, 1861.

The post of Fort Johnson, consisted, at that date, of these two batteries of mortars and a company of infantry as reserves, all under command of Capt. George S. James, South Carolina State troops.

The battery on the beach, or east, was under the immediate command of Capt. James, with Lieut. Henry E. Farley as lieutenant, and the battery on the hill, or west, was under the immediate command of Lieut. Wade Hampton Gibbs I think with Lieut. J. McPherson Washington as next, and the company of infantry as reserves were commanded by Lieut. Theodore A. Hayne, and were stationed near the old Martello Tower, about 400 yards in the woods, to northwest of the hill, or Gibbs battery.

I have been thus particular in the location of the battery and their officers for reasons that will be apparent hereafter, and they are facts that cannot be contradicted.

The first point to be established is from what battery was the first mortar shell fired?

Gen. Beauregard, Military Operations, page 42, last paragraph, says: "That from Fort Johnson's mortar battery at 4:30 A.M., issued the first shell of the war. It was fired not by Mr. Ruffin, of Virginia, as has been erroneously supposed, but by Capt. George S. James, of South Carolina, to whom Lieut. Stephen D. Lee issued the order."

Capt. Stephen D. Lee, an aide of Gen. Beauregard's, and who with Gen. Chestnut informed Major Anderson that fire would be opened on Fort Sumter, says "The first fire was from James's

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battery. (Vide Southern Historical Society papers, November 1883, and other papers of Gen. Lee.)

Mr. Edward H. Barnwell, of Charleston, who was present at Gibbs's battery at the opening says: "That the first shell fired at Sumter was from James's east battery (or the beach battery) the second was from the west (or hill) battery. I was at this battery among some houses, one of which our forces tried to blow up, being too near the battery, (Greer's house.) This was the battery under command of Lieut. W. H. Gibbs."

Dr. W. H. Prioleau, surgeon of the post, who was at the east, or beach battery, when the first shell was fired states "That on the morning of April 12, 1861, as soon as orders were received to open fire on Fort Sumter, we repaired to our posts, and 25 or 30 minutes after 4 A. M., by my watch, which I held open in my hand at the time, the first gun was fired, this being the right-hand mortar in the battery on the beach. I cannot recollect who pulled the lanyard, but this gun was directly in charge of Lieut. Henry S. Farley, who as well as I can recollect sighted the gun. Capt. James giving the order to fire." Note this evidence.

Col. Henry S. Farley, now of Mount Pleasant, Military Academy, Sing Sing, New York, who was a lieutenant with James in the beach battery, states in a letter to me: "That the circumstances attending the firing of the first gun at Sumter are quite fresh in my memory. Capt. James stood on my right, with watch in hand, and at the designated moment gave me the order to fire. I pulled the lanyard, having already carefully inserted a friction tube, and discharged a thirteen inch mortar shell, which was the right of battery. In one of the issues of a Charleston evening paper, which appeared shortly after the reduction of Fort Sumter, you will find it stated that Lieut. Farley fired the first gun, and Lieut. Gibbs the second."

R. Leiby, M. D.: I will now give my personal recollections of the affair. I am a native, and was a resident and practicing physician of James Island at the time that the first gun was fired, and consequently was perfectly conversant with the topography of the location, and having been a college acquaintance of Capt. James, was invited by him the previous day, April 11, to be on hand if anything transpired to require my services. I accepted his invitation and remained to witness the first and last gun fired at Sumter at that time.

My recollection of the matter is that on the morning of April 12, 1861, about ten minutes before 4 A. M., Capt. S. D. Lee, with two other gentlemen, having just returned from Sumter, passed a group of four gentlemen, I among the number, and inquired for Capt. James's quarters, and when directed to the house occupied by Capt. James, remarked on passing, that the ball would soon be opened.

A short time elapsed, when Capt. James and others passed to the beach or east battery, and Capt. Lee and his party went on down to the wharf. I was midway between the houses on a bridge that connected the beach and the hill, where I could see the fire of either battery, and at 4:30 A. M. a shell was fired from the beach or east battery, commanded by Capt. James.

The second report heard was the blowing up of Green's house, contiguous to the hill battery, commanded by Lieut. W. H. Gibbs, and the second shell was fired from this battery under Lieut. Gibbs. The firing then became general around the harbor batteries bearing on Sumter.

We have, therefore, the concurrent testimony of Gen. Beauregard, who ordered the fire to commence; of Lieut. Stephen D. Lee, the officer extending the order; of Lieut. Farley, who was in the battery when the gun was fired, and the medical officer, Dr. W. H. Prioleau, who was on duty in the battery; also Lieut. Ed. H. Barnwell, who was present at the hill or Gibbs battery, and of myself, who all bear witness to the fact, that the first shell was fired from Capt. James's battery on the beach.

How then can any one claim that the shell was fired from any other point with this weight of evidence against it?

As to the question of who pulled the lanyard of the mortar from which issued the first shell, there are only two living witnesses that I am cognizant of who were in the battery at the time of the fire, viz: Col. Henry S. Farley and Dr. W. H. Prioleau. Col. Farley asserts in a

letter to me that he pulled the lanyard by Capt. James's order, and Dr. Prioleau asserts that Lieut. Farley had charge of the right gun of the battery, and that the first fire was from that gun, Capt. James giving the order to fire, and it is reasonable to conclude, therefore, that Farley pulled the lanyard. Certain it is that either James or Farley fired it, but, as Capt. James gave the order to fire, it must have been Farley, as James would never have given himself the order to fire. The order, therefore, must have been given to Farley. I, therefore, conclude that Lieut. Henry S. Farley, fired the first gun at Sumter by Capt. James's order.

Robert Leiby, M.D."

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I certify that the above is a true and correct copy of the original document.