

# **Reminiscences and Memoirs of North Carolina and Eminent North Carolinians :**

## **Electronic Edition.**

### **Wheeler, John H. (John Hill), 1806-1882.**

Charles Frederick Tayloe, son of Colonel Joshua Tayloe, who represented Beaufort County, in 1844, in the Senate of the State Legislature, should not be forgotten. His short and eventful life, his chivalric and daring character, and his tragic end, make his history interesting.

He was born in October, 1828, near the sea, (his father being for years collector of customs at Ocracock Inlet,) and possessed naturally a love for the ocean, which became the ruling passion of his life, and eventually his grave.

At the early age of 16, he left home on his first voyage, and in 1848, he shipped as an ordinary sailor before the mast, on the United States steamer "Oregon," on a voyage from New York to San Francisco, via Cape Horn. His diligence, attention, and good conduct, were so marked that he was made first officer of the ship "Columbia," on the dangerous and then unknown coast of Oregon. When some days at sea, the ship was discovered to be on fire. She had on board 400 troops, under the command of General Wool. The coolness, intrepidity, and energy of young Tayloe, on this perilous occasion, contributed greatly to the saving of the ship, passengers and crew. This was expressed in the grateful thanks of the passengers by resolutions.

On his return to San Francisco, the war in Nicaragua was found to be the exciting question of the day, and offered allurements to the daring. He tendered his services to General Walker, and was assigned to the command of the fleet of steamers and gunboats on the Lake of Nicaragua. He more readily engaged in this expedition of "the gray-eyed man of destiny," since his younger brother, James, was an officer in Walker's army, and had borne a conspicuous part in many desperate battles from the breaking out of the war. It was then and here that I formed the acquaintance of these two gallant young men. I was at this time the Minister Resident of the United States near the Republic of Nicaragua, and I was much pleased with their modest and intelligent conduct. James fell in battle in the desperate endeavor to raise the siege of Grenada, thus relieving General Henningsen and his command, beleaguered by the troops of Guatemala. It may not be uninteresting to record here the true facts in relation to this expedition in which so many of our countrymen took part, and where so many and valuable and enterprising lives were sacrificed. The character and the objects of this expedition have never been understood or fairly stated. Now, when more than a quarter of a century has passed, and prejudice and passion subsided, the truth should appear. When I arrived in Nicaragua, I found the republic convulsed in civil war. War is the normal condition of Central America. The two parties, the Democratic, headed by General Castellon, and the Legitimists, by General Chamora, waged a fierce and bloody internecine contest. The Democratic party sent agents to California for men and arms. These engaged the services of General Walker and others, who became enlisted in their service, and Walker was placed in command of a regiment, and became a naturalized citizen of Nicaragua. He soon, by his energy and activity, trained the ragged, barefooted and half-naked natives to become disciplined troops, and as such led them to victory. He soon took the towns of San Juan del Sur, Virgin Bay, and the cities of Rivas and Grenada, the latter the capital and a city of 10,000 inhabitants. I witnessed this battle, which was of short duration, and which completed the conquest of the republic. The President of Nicaragua fled, and after a short interim, Walker was elected President. Americans from New York, New Orleans and California, and almost every State of the Union, flocked to "this El Dorado." Peace and prosperity for the time smiled on this beautiful country.

From the natural fondness of these people for war and revolution, the other republics of Central America (as Costa Rica and Guatemala) proclaimed hostility, and determined to drive the Americans from the country. They alone could not have effected this, but our Government, under lead of Governor Marcy

and others, denounced Walker, although President Pierce received Padre Vijil as the Envoy and Minister Plenipotentiary of Walker's government, and authorized Captain Davis, of the United States Navy, to take Walker and bring him to the United States; which was done. But soon Walker again returned to Central America, when, under orders, he was again seized by Commodore Paulding and brought to the United States. This act was pronounced by the President "a grave error," and severely denounced in Congress, and very generally by the press of the country as unjust and unconstitutional.

Walker again embarked for Central America, and landed with a few troops in Honduras, where, after some bloody and successful skirmishing with the Honduras troops, he encamped near Truxillo. While here a superior force, dispatched by Captain Salmon, of the British man-of-war "Icarus," under command of Alvarez, of the Honduras army, demanded of Walker his surrender. Walker then surrendered to the British officer, who delivered him to the Honduras authorities. The next day [12th September, 1860] he was shot. His fate was melancholy and undeserved. Doubtless Walker had faults, but he supplanted a government of ignorance, superstition, indolence, imbecility, and treachery. Had he succeeded, he would have rivaled the fame of Houston, and added to the area of human liberty and enjoyment. Compare the present condition of Texas and California now with what it was under the rule of Mexico. There is a destiny in the affairs of nations, as well as of men.

Captain Tayloe, after the failure of Walker, was ordered to conduct his command through a trackless and almost inaccessible route, from Rivas to Point Arenas, during which march they suffered every privation that famine, disease, savage foes, venomous reptiles, and a torrid climate could inflict. They reached Point Arenas worn down by exertion. He then embarked in a brig to Panama, and from thence on the regular steamer to California.

After remaining in San Francisco a few weeks to recruit his exhausted system, in 1857 he embarked for his home and his native land, a passenger on the steamer "Central America." This gallant ship had nearly completed her voyage, and was in sight of the home and birthplace of our hero, where his affectionate parents anxiously were awaiting the return of their "war-worn son" when the alarming discovery was announced that the ship had sprung a leak. Young Tayloe, although only a passenger, was the first to tender his services to the noble Herndon; and from that time until the brig "Marine" rounded to under her lea, he was foremost in relieving the steamer; working at the pumps until they were exhausted and useless. When all hope of saving the steamer was abandoned, he remained at his post, an example of coolness, of courage and seamanship. He was indefatigable in aiding the ladies, children and others in embarking on the relieving ship, and could have saved himself but for his attention to others. But on consideration with the officers it was decided that the ship would continue afloat till daylight, and as did Captain Herndon and our lamented John V. Dobbin, (brother of James C. Dobbin, Secretary of the Navy 1853-'57,) Captain Tayloe retired to his stateroom, seeking that repose that his continued labors demanded.

In the course of the night a huge wave swept with violence the ship's decks, and she went suddenly down with all on board.

Thus perished, off his native coast of North Carolina, near Cape Hatteras, one of her boldest, bravest sons.

The eternal sea in its dark waves have swallowed up the mortal remains of our gallant countryman; but neither sea nor time can bury his virtues and his gallantry from our memories, our sympathies, or our affections.

Toll for the brave!  
The brave that are no more;  
All sunk beneath the wave,  
Fast by their native shore.

Toll for the brave!  
Brave Tayloe! he is gone;  
His last sea fight is fought,  
His work of glory done.

Toll for the brave!

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