

Just Write

Gloucester County Library System

Logan Township Branch

Writers Group

Selections

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IT'S EASY

April 2016

Jane Harre

Years ago I experienced a moment of frustration which has ultimately become somewhat of a guideline for inter-relationships, and recently I added a new chapter.

At one time our front porch was bordered by ancient hydrangea bushes which I had grown to dislike. After a brief time of colorful blooming, the rest of the year they simply seemed to be a border of dead sticks. One day, when I complained to a visitor of their ugly out-of-season look, I was told, "You have to break off the dead." When I said I hadn't known that, the answer was, "Well, it's only common sense!" It wasn't common to me. Despite my farm upbringing, I have no natural gardening abilities, and the comment offended me. The exchange came back from time to time to needle me.

Why does this exchange still stand out to me? Because it made me recognize that everyone has areas of familiarity or expertise or even culture, which have become so second nature that they seem to be "only common sense," causing surprise at someone else's ignorance. In fact, nearly all information is somewhat esoteric.

My recent reminder happened one evening before dinner. A teen-aged gal staying in our home offered to help with preparations. After a chore or two, I asked if she knew how to make crescent rolls, indicating the pop-open tube. These "poppin' fresh" rolls are an everyday item in my world and their preparation has often been done by the younger folk in the household. "No, but I can look at the directions," she answered.

I lit the oven, gave my helper a baking sheet and space in which to work, while I went on with other tasks. After a few minutes, I glanced over; instead of the flat triangles smoothly rolled into curved crescent shapes, I saw lumpy globs of dough looking more like unfinished modeling clay!

What seemed easy and common sense to me—the unrolling of the sheet of dough to reveal perforations for separation into triangles for re-rolling--had not been understood. Because my friend was a bright gal, I had assumed the assignment would be an easy one.

Remembering the past, I quickly swallowed my surprise and we popped the creations into the oven. Life is often a learn-as-you-go endeavor.

Spring Contemplation

By Marian M. Fay

As I sit looking out the window of the computer room
I'm reminded of so many Springs that have come and gone
Some have swept through and left too soon
Others have started early and lingered long
This one has come early and is powering through
The winds the snow and the rain
Nature is blooming and continues anew
Despite Winter's efforts to remain

There's a lot we could learn from God's nature
Sometime we too must power through the pain
Our paths become slippery and so unsure
The losses seem to out weigh the gains
Remember that ahead lie eternal pastures
And through it all God's love remains
Yes many Springs have come and gone
Yet always God's love is unchanged.

Sunny With a Cool Spring Breeze

By Marian M. Fay

Wearing short sleeves and power motors whirring
Scooters, bikes and basket balls playing
Curtains fluttering, wind chimes singing
Heat turned off and music turned up
Cherry trees and magnolia trees swaying
Forsythia, hyacinths, and daffodils smiling
Sun through the clouds and cooling breezes
That's what this Spring Break day is about
Time to stop writing and go out!

The Tweens of the Season

By Marian M. Fay

It's winter, no it's spring, make up your mind!
Ah, the tweens of the season are upon us
Warm and beautiful or frigid winds unkind
Windy, scarf, gloves and hat a must
Sunny, tee-shirt and shorts as temperatures climb
Weather changing in the blink of an eye
Harsh cold and slush changing to pleasant and dry

The calendar says winter but the weather's not so sure
In the morning you may rid you windshield of ice
But by noon the heat in the car you can't endure
Or you wear a light sweater to work in the morning
By quitting time it could be snowing without warning
March does roar like the king of the beasts
March also purrs like a kitten snuggled into the sheets

In the January 2016 issue of Just Write, Henry J. Winser, Special Correspondent for the New-York Times, was introduced to our readership. The following article was written in the style and spirit of that distinguished Civil War journalist.

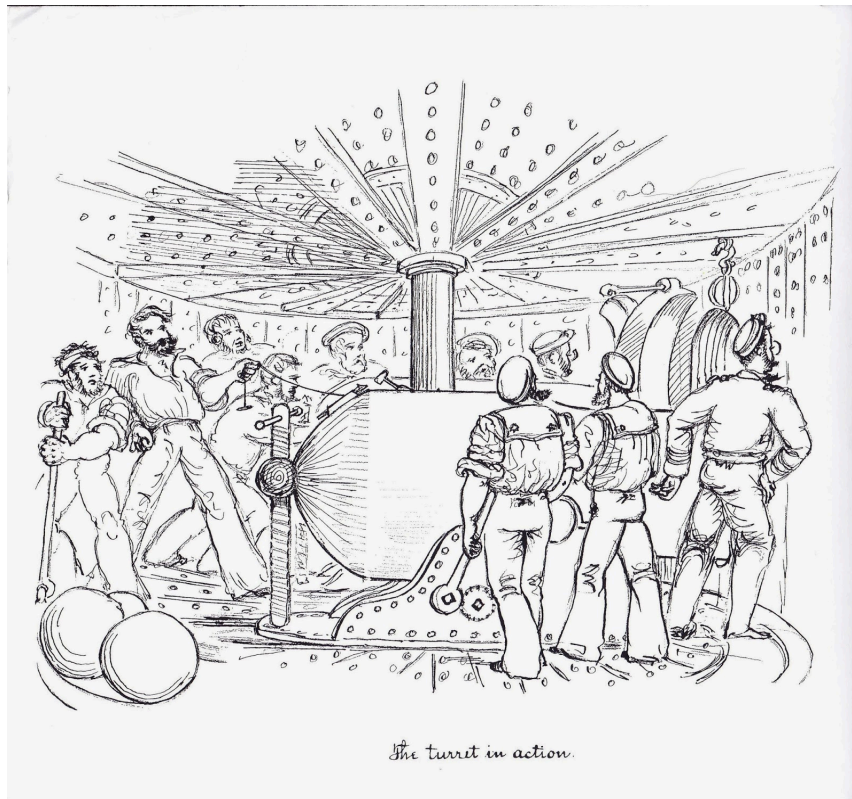
Life On Board a Monitor of the South Atlantic Blockading Squadron

By Ben Carlton

Your reporter was recently granted special permission to visit a monitor-type vessel in the performance of her duty, namely, interdicting the flow of commerce in and out of the Port of Charleston, South Carolina, now the infamous "Cradle of Secession." This correspondent was given a grand tour of one of the Navy's newest and most formidable vessels, the USS *Lehigh*, Captain Bryson commanding. She is a single screw steamer of the Passaic class of sea-going ironclads, mounting one massive 15-inch Dahlgren smoothbore in her revolving turret alongside a powerful eight-inch Parrott rifle. Despite her slow rate of fire, the *Lehigh* packs a devastating one-two punch as the crumbling ramparts of Fort Sumter can well attest. Yet, like a lumbering pugilist, the unwieldy *Lehigh* must cut off the ring of fire, as it were, to close with the enemy fort before delivering her dreaded "haymakers," all the while absorbing blows from the enemy's guns that would have surely knocked out a vulnerable wooden gunboat. Thus the *Lehigh* with her shallow draught and her sister monitors are positioned at the forefront of the blockade in depth, closest to the entrance of the harbor, and closest to the enemy.

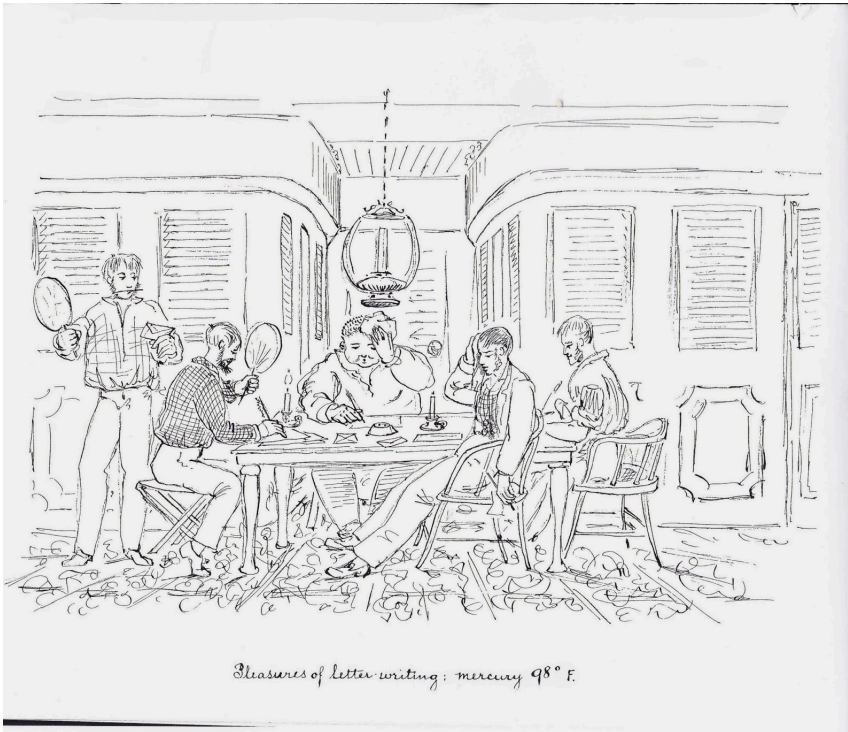
Even when relieved from her station, life on board the *Lehigh* is no walk in Central Park for her complement of 75 officers and men. The crew must endure the extreme heat of a southern summer encased in iron, much of the time confined in close quarters below the main deck. Although she is 200 feet long and 46 feet abeam, descending to the berth deck of the *Lehigh* is like a descent into the nether regions, especially upon approaching the engine room aft, where shirtless coal heavers and sweating firemen toil like begrimed demons to keep the ship moving forward at a top speed of seven knots. Although your correspondent has grown rather accustomed to finding himself in "tight spots" since the commencement of the Rebellion, the confining atmosphere below left him feeling somewhat disoriented and slightly light-headed. Surrounded by boilers, gears, wheels, vibrating engines and clanking machinery of all types, as well as an endless tangle of steam pipes running for

and aft, this writer was frankly bewildered by the intricate, inner workings of the *Lehigh*, submerged as we were well below the surface of the sea, and with the afternoon temperature recorded in the ship's log at 98 degrees Fahrenheit. The extra racks for solid shot with explosive ordnance packed into every available corner of the vessel added to the general feeling of claustrophobia. With what little ventilation that could be discerned coming down from the turret and hatchways, one begins to ponder one's lung capacity and the ability of the blowers to keep enough oxygen circulating for the entire crew plus one invited guest. Gladly ascending a ladder to the main deck, one is immediately greeted by a sweet draught of much-welcomed fresh air; however, the iron deck is not a safe place for a journalist or any other landlubber to linger when the ship is underway as the deck plates are almost completely awash by even a moderately choppy sea.



The pilot house atop the turret is cramped with room only for the Captain, helmsman, and pilot. And there is certainly no available space for a nosey reporter. Communication with the engine room and turret below is achieved through means of a speaking tube. The revolving gun turret immediately below the pilot house is the monitor's most visible and distinguishing feature. Inside it is a dark and foreboding place with dim light entering only through two gun

portals. When aiming, the gunner must sight his guns by peering out through a small peephole. When fired, the deafening concussion of the guns is felt throughout the entire ship as the turret fills with sulfurous, choking smoke.



The only place of relative comfort to be found on an ironclad is the Captain's cabin and the wood-paneled ward room where the officers commune and take their meals. Despite the elegant furnishings, the heat encroaches upon officers and crew alike, making all unbearably miserable.

Despite her shortcomings and the hardships endured by her brave sailors, the *Lehigh* is one of the newest and most sophisticated vessels in the Navy's arsenal of warships. She is most feared in "Rebeldom" as the Confederates have no ironclad ram capable of standing toe-to-toe with our armored heavyweight. Instead, the enemy must rely upon disintegrating forts, obstructions, and the dreaded infernal torpedoes to keep the Union fleet at arm's length. It is only a matter of time for the crushing blockade to sever the rebels' tenuous supply line of foreign aid, and the birthplace of the rebellion will ingloriously fall like a rotten peach.

-HJW/bc

Ed. note: The USS *Lehigh* was built by Reaney, Son, & Archibold, Chester, Pa., and launched 17 January 1863. She was subsequently commissioned at the Philadelphia Navy Yard 15 April 1863.

(For more information, see: Konstam A. *Union Monitor 1861 - 65*; Field R. *Confederate Ironclad vs Union Ironclad*; and Hunter AF. *A Year on a Monitor and the Destruction of Fort Sumter*.)

Photos: Hill, Jim Dan. *The Civil War Sketchbook of Charles Ellery Stedman*. Presidio Press, San Rafael CA, 1976.

Just Write

Meetings Held 2nd & 4th Wednesdays @

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