

Lewis H. West to R. West

Off Morris Island, South Carolina, 8 October 1863.

Autograph letter signed, 3 pages.

U.S.S. Ironsides

Off Morris Island

Oct 8th/63

Dear Ma

As I am at present fixed here I take the first opportunity of letting you know what has transpired since I left you. I sailed in the Paul Jones on Wednesday following my departure from Phil. and arrived at Charleston on Sunday. On reporting to the Admiral for duty [*inserted: the next day*] he ordered me to this ship, but on coming on board I found that her complement of officers was full. Capt Rowan said I had better go on board one of the Monitors, and that he would see the fleet captain about it. That night however a vacancy was made [*struck: by illegible*] rather unexpectedly. A short time after 9 P.M, just as I was turning in, the officer of the deck hailed something. The hail was followed [*inserted: instantly*] by two or three musket shots and a tremendous crash and explosion, that [*struck: she*] sounded as if the ship's timbers were all smashed in. The drum beat to quarters, and as I had not yet been stationed, I [*strikeout*] [*inserted: went*] on deck to see what was up. The marines were keeping up a heavy fire of musketry on some small object in the water, that in the darkness looked as much like a barrel as anything else. In a few minutes it drifted [2] out of sight or sunk. Many tons [*inserted: of*] water were thrown on deck by the explosion, but on examination the ship was not injured in the least, beyond having a few storeroom bulk heads demolished by the concussion. A man had his leg broken, and the officer of the deck was shot through the body, by a musket fired from the nondescript craft, just as he fired at it. The next morning we found that two men had been picked up by vessels near us, one of whom was recognized as an ex-naval officer. He turned out to be the commander of the infernal machine which tried to destroy us. He stated that she was a small steamer on the same principle as Winan's cigar ship, with an outrigger to her bows carrying the torpedo. She was so constructed as to be almost entirely under water, excepting a very low smokestack. On exploding the torpedo, which was done by simply running against the

side, an additional effect was produced which he had not counted on. The immense body of water thrown up came down his smokestack putting his [struck: fired] fires out, and entirely destroying his motive power. The vessel was also probably damaged by the concussion

Finding they could not get away they all [struck: to the] (five in number) jumped overboard to avoid the musketry which we were pelting them with. The other three are supposed to be shot or drowned, and the machine sunk. This is the rebs story and [3] it seems probable. It is not likely that a man of the coolness and daring to [struck: ex] perform such an operation, would jump overboard from his vessel unless she was sinking.

In consequence of Mr Howard (the officer of the deck at the time,) being disabled, I am to be kept here, which arrangement suits me very well, as the ship is certainly the most desirable one to be in, of the whole fleet, in all respects. Nothing can show her tremendous [struck: and] strength and power of endurance more than this fruitless attempt model, she would have been blown to pieces. We had the divers here yesterday to examine her under water, and they report that not a plate or bolt is started. We have lively times at night now, passing it nearly all the time, [inserted: at quarters] with orders to fire at every thing we see; so the New Ironsides is not a very nice place for visiting in the evening. If my first night's experience on board is a sample [struck: of] I certainly can no longer complain of monotonous duty.

Your Aff son

L. West