Guide to the Dabney Minor Scales Letter, 1862 July 31
MS0318

The Mariners' Museum Library
at
Christopher Newport University
DESCRIPTIVE SUMMARY

Repository: The Mariners’ Museum Library
Title: Dabney Minor Scales Letter
Inclusive Dates: 1862 July 31
Catalog number: MS0318
Physical Characteristics: 1 transcript and 1 stat (copy) of a letter (correspondence)
Language: English
Creator: Scales, D. M. (Dabney Minor), 1841-1920

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Dabney Minor Scales was born on June 1, 1841, near Holly Springs, Mississippi. His father Peter was a planter and was descended from a family which settled in colonial Virginia and North Carolina. He was appointed to the US Naval Academy and was in his last year at the Academy at the outbreak of the Civil War. He joined the Confederate Navy at the rank of midshipman and served initially on CSS Savannah in 1861 and 1862 and then on CSS Capitol on the Mississippi River. Capitol burned on 28 June 1862 and was sunk as an obstruction on the Yazoo River.

Scales was serving as a lieutenant aboard the CSS Arkansas at the time he wrote the letter in this collection in July 1862. CSS Arkansas was a twin-screw ironclad ram, whose construction was delayed by shortages of the war. Though construction began in late 1861, it was May 1862 when Lt. Isaac Newton Brown took command and supervised her completion. On July 14 she headed towards Memphis, intending to stop in Vicksburg for supplies. On her way down the Yazoo River she encountered the Union ironclad gunboat Carondelet accompanied by the side-wheel gunboat Tyler and the side-wheel ram Queen of the West coming up the river on a reconnaissance mission. The ensuing fierce action ended with Carondelet being disabled and forced ashore. Arkansas ran through fire from the Union fleet and found refuge under the Vicksburg batteries in a heavily damaged condition and with many casualties. On July 22 while anchored off Vicksburg, she was attacked by Queen of the West and the ironclad Essex but managed to withstand the assault. Finally on August 6, in a final encounter with Essex near Baton Rouge, she was unable to escape and was set on fire to avoid capture.

After the surrender of Vicksburg, Scales made his way to Port Huron, LA, and there manned a battery. He was appointed passed midshipman. He saw service protecting blockade runners along the Atlantic and Gulf coasts on the Confederate ironclad Atlanta off Savannah, GA between December 1862 and April 1863. He then was assigned to Europe and spent time in London and Paris regarding the outfitting and manning of ships constructed in England for the Confederacy. Finally in 1865, he served as Fifth Lieutenant on CSS Shenandoah.

After the Civil War, Scales went to Mexico for several months before returning to Mississippi. He began practicing law in 1869 in Memphis, TN, and married Mrs. W.D. Powell in Nashville, TN. They had 3 children. He was elected to the Tennessee legislature and served in the Senate. In 1884 he became a member of the Memphis
Confederate Historical Association and, as its president, was consequently Commander of Camp 28 of the United Confederate Veterans. He was commissioned into the United States Navy as a lieutenant during the Spanish-American War and was engaged in sea service during the entire conflict. He died on May 26, 1920.

**SCOPE AND CONTENT**
The collection consists of a Photostat copy and a typed transcript of a four-page letter from Confederate midshipman Dabney Minor Scales aboard CSS Arkansas to his father Peter Scales, in which he details the events in July 1862 on the Mississippi River. These actions include details of the July 22nd attack on Arkansas by Essex and Queen of the West. He also writes about the capture of a Union transport carrying military mails, and expresses his satisfaction and pride at the reports Union naval officers and sailors were sending home about the bravery of the Arkansas during the fight on the 22nd. Scales says that they “give us credit for the most daring deed performed during the war…” These stand in marked contrast to letters he saw that were written for publication, which he called “an infamous pack of lies.” The letter also contains both a small diagram of the river at Vicksburg and a sketch of the Arkansas, presumably done by Scales.

The collection is organized into 1 folder.

**ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION**

**Accession Number**
CA60

**Accession Date**
1961

**Restrictions**
The collection is open to all researchers.

**Publication Rights**
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**Preferred Citation**
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**Note to Users**
Due to the fragile and rare nature of the collection, researchers are requested to handle the materials with caution and in accordance with prescribed archival practices. When using these materials, please preserve the original order of the collection.
RELATED MATERIALS
The holder of the original letter is unknown.

Three other repositories hold correspondence or diaries of Dabney Minor Scales. The Library of Congress has letters from Scales to John Grimball in the John Grimball Papers, 1853-1918. Duke University’s Rubenstein Library holds Scales’s diary that he kept aboard CSS Atlanta in 1862-63. The Memphis Public Library & Information Center houses Photostats of 4 letters from Scales to his father Peter, including another Photostat of the July 31, 1862 letter referenced in this finding aid.

FILE GUIDE

BOX 1  Folder 1  Correspondence, 1862
   July 31, 1862: Confederate Steamer Arkansas off Vicksburg

   Transcript of letter

SOURCES CONSULTED
“Genealogy - Obituary of Dabney Minor Scales - W. D. Powell - Yate Wellford - G. W. Winchester - Memphis, Tennessee.”
http://www.confederatevets.com/documents/scales_tn_cv_11_20_ob.shtml

SUBJECTS
Arkansas (Ironclad ram : 1862)
Queen of the West (Sidewheel ram : 1862)
Essex (Gunboat : 1862)
United States-History-Civil War, 1861-1865-Naval operations, Confederate
United States-History-Civil War, 1861-1865-Naval operations
United States. Navy-Officers-Correspondence
Sailors-United States-Correspondence