

it was of the greatest importance at this moment that all the troops in this department should be concentrated for the grand conflict in Charleston or Savannah harbors. Either of these important cities taken, the whole state of Florida would be, as it were, flanked and the enemy compelled to abandon it instantly.

Jacksonville was occupied on the 10th of March by a negro brigade, under the command of Colonel Higginson. What they achieved, and how admirably, I have already written you, up to as late a date as the 25th instant. Before alluding to the events of today, it remains for me to fill up the interval from the 25th to the 29th. Ten days ago General Hunter, upon representations made to him, not by Colonel Higginson, but by several loyal men of much influence, long residents of Florida, decided to reinforce Colonel Higginson with two regiments of white infantry—the Eighth Maine, Colonel Rust, and the Sixth Connecticut, Colonel Chatfield. Colonel Rust, outranking Colonel Higginson, took command of all the forces in Jacksonville. Colonel Higginson had, by the severest labor his black troops could endure, so strengthened his position that he deemed himself sufficiently strong to hold Jacksonville against all the forces the rebel General Finegan could bring to bear against it.

The natural defenses of Jacksonville are very considerable. The only weak point was on the southwest, or in that portion of the city where the railroad enters it. To guard this point, Colonel Higginson erected two forts. To give range to the guns from these forts, a large forest of pine and oak trees had to be cut down and about fifty dwellings, mostly of an inferior class, destroyed. Fort Higginson not only commands the left of the railroad, but the approach on the south to Jacksonville, by the St. Johns River. All the work upon these forts was done by the black troops. I have seen about all the earthworks in Virginia, and do not hesitate to say that these hastily constructed works compare very favorably with the best ever thrown up by the Army of the Potomac.

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I am now writing on the deck of the fine transport ship, Boston. From this upper deck the scene presented to the spectator is one of most fearful magnificence. On every side dense clouds of black smoke are seen. A fine south wind is blowing immense blazing cinders right into the heart of the city. The beautiful Spanish moss, drooping so gracefully from the long avenues of splendid oaks has caught fire, and as far as the eye can reach, through these once pleasant streets, nothing but sheets of flame can be seen, running up with the rapidity of lightning to the tops of the trees and then darting off to the smallest branches. The whole city is being lapped up and devoured by this fiery blast.† One solitary woman, a horse tied to a fence between two fires, and a lean, half-starved dog are the only living inhabitants to be seen

†From his position on the river, this correspondent quite naturally obtained an exaggerated view of the fire. Fortunately, it was not as extensive as it appeared to him.