

Naval Illustrators



Frank Vizetelly: ‘Special Artist’ for *The London Illustrated News*

By Gary McQuarrie

FRANK (FRANCIS) VIZETELLY (1830-1883) worked for *The Illustrated London News (TILN)* (1861-1865) as a ‘Special Artist’ and correspondent during the Civil War. *TILN*, the only foreign pictorial newspaper with a ‘Special Artist,’ published 133 illustrations based on Vizetelly’s sketches and drawings, the eighth highest total for any identified ‘Special Artist’ among the illustrated newspapers during the war.¹ Though Vizetelly is principally known for his army-related illustrations, almost one quarter of his published illustrations in *TILN* involved naval-related subjects and scenes. Vizetelly initially covered the war from the Northern perspective, but beginning in mid-1862 he covered the remainder of the war in the South reporting from the Confederate perspective, the only ‘Special Artist’ to do so.²

Vizetelly was born September 26, 1830, in London, the youngest of five children and one of four brothers. His father ran a publishing house under the name of Vizetelly, Branston & Company. His older brother Henry, who



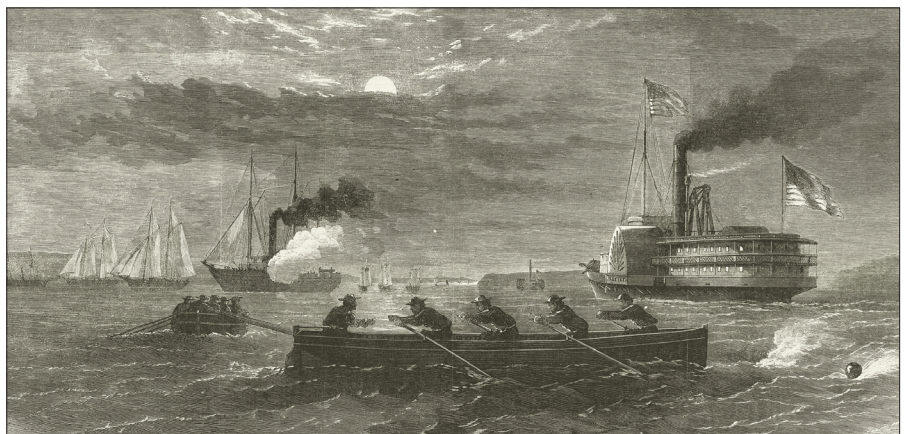
Frank Vizetelly, circa 1860-1865. Brady-Handy Photograph Collection. Library of Congress (LC-DIG-cwpbh-03483).

became a notable author and engraver, and the oldest brother James, who became a journalist, were pioneers in the development of the illustrated newspaper press in England. Henry noted that Frank “was brought up by me to newspaper work.” In his early 20s, Frank Vizetelly worked as an apprentice correspondent and artist for London’s *Pictorial Times*. In 1856, he became the Paris correspondent for the *Illustrated Times*. In 1857, Vizetelly and his brother Henry founded *Le Monde Illustré*, and he briefly served as editor. In 1858-1859, Vizetelly covered the war between Austria and Sardinia-Piedmont and sketched the battles for his paper and for the *Illustrated Times*. Now recognized for the quality of his sketches, in 1860 Vizetelly was employed by *TILN* to cover Guiseppi Garibaldi’s expedition in Sicily and Italy. After returning to England, he was assigned to undertake coverage of the emerging American Civil War. Vizetelly sailed from Liverpool aboard *Europa*, arriving in Boston; subsequently he traveled to New York City, arriving in early May 1861. His first report and illustrations appeared in the June 15, 1861 issue of *TILN* (Volume XXXVIII, No. 1093, p 563).³

Vizetelly spent the summer of 1861 into the winter of 1862 following Union forces in northern Virginia, along the Potomac River (where he illustrated some naval actions shown nearby) and at locations near Washington, DC, as the Confederates threatened the capital. He was present



The Civil War in America: Confederates Trapping a Boat's Crew of the Potomac Fleet.—From a Sketch by Our Special Artist [Vizetelly]. Illustration published in *TILN*, Volume XXXIX(Suppl), No. 1109, p 303, September 21, 1861. While cruising the shore of the Potomac River on August 15, 1861, near Persimmon Point, USS *Resolute* dispatched a boat to take possession of a scow stuck in the mud and laden with barrels of suspected gunpowder. Just as the bowman was preparing to hook the scow, Confederates hiding in nearby bushes opened up with a hail of musket fire, killing or wounding all but one of the crew members. With considerable difficulty, *Resolute's* boat was able to withdraw and *Resolute* shelled the woods but with uncertain retribution (p 325; *ORN*, Series I, Volume 4, p 609-610).



The Civil War in America: Cutting Off a Confederate Despatch-Galley on the Potomac, near Freestone Point.—From a Sketch by Our Special Artist [Vizetelly]. Illustration published in *TILN*, Volume XXXIX, No. 1116, p 470, November 9, 1861. Confederates of Maryland maintained constant communication with their brethren on the Virginia shore of the Potomac River. One method was via swift galleys manned by four oarsmen and a coxswain, often making the dash across river at night hoping to escape the notice of the Federal blockaders. In this case, the galley was spotted and a boat from the blockaders gave chase while a nearby gunboat fired a shot from her bow gun; the Confederate boat was captured (p 485). Vizetelly’s original drawing (9.25 x 13.88 inches) was pencil, gray wash, and Chinese white on paper and is held at the Houghton Library, Harvard University.

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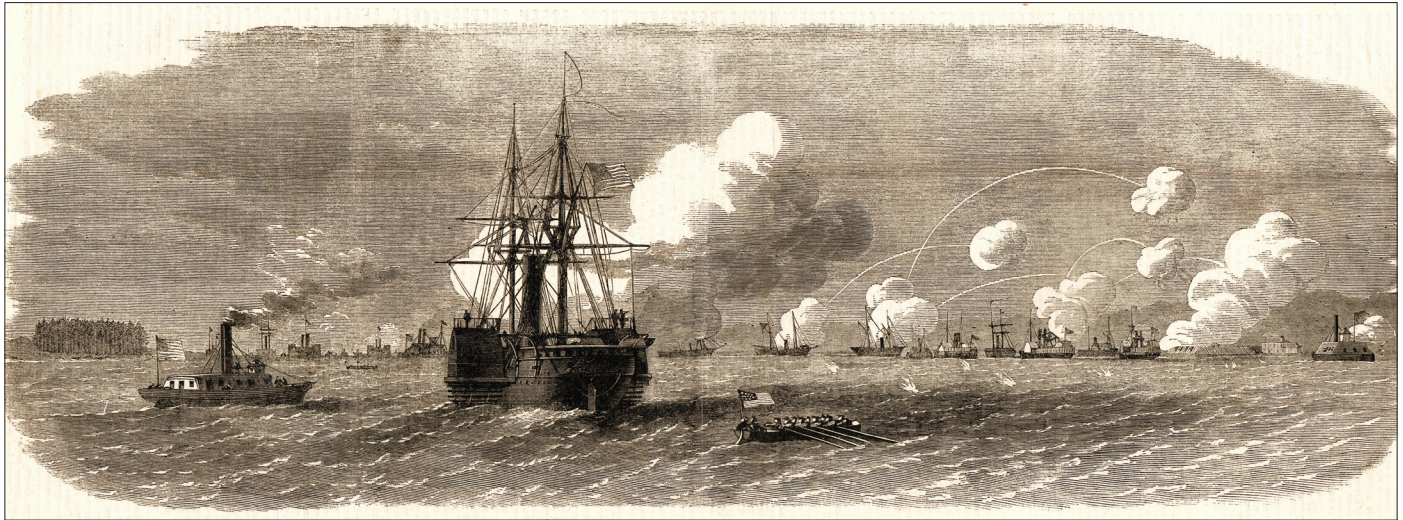
and observed the First Battle of Bull Run (First Manassass). In January, he obtained permission to accompany Brigadier General Ambrose E. Burnside's expedition to North Carolina. Vizetelly traveled aboard USS *Picket* to Fort Monroe where the flotilla was assembled. En route to Roanoke Island, the objective, the flotilla hit heavy seas off Cape Hatteras; Vizetelly produced illustrations of *Picket* in the stormy seas (shown nearby) and the resulting wreck of USS *City of New York* on the Hatteras Spit [Bodie Island] (not shown) in the February 22, 1862 issue of *TILN* (Volume XL, No. 1132, p 188). Vizetelly was allowed to accompany Burnside as he changed flagship vessels and produced an illustration of the Federal gunboats attacking the Confederate batteries on Roanoke Island for the March 22, 1862 issue of *TILN* (Volume XL, No. 1136, p 285, shown nearby). Vizetelly then returned

to Washington to cover pending Union army actions. Though he received an official pass to accompany General George B. McClellan's advance into Virginia, Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton revoked the passes of English reporters, fearing more negative publicity like that which followed the First Battle of Bull Run. Consequently, the very frustrated Vizetelly promptly left Virginia for Corinth, Mississippi, via St. Louis, Missouri, where he hoped his reportage would be more welcome.⁴

Vizetelly was able to obtain passage southward on the Mississippi River on a Federal vessel. One of his next illustrations was of Confederate guerrillas firing muskets at his boat from the Arkansas shore (front page of the June 14, 1862 issue of *TILN*, Volume XL, No. 1149, not shown). From a timing perspective, his travels to the Mississippi were serendipitous and he arrived on scene to witness the riverine naval engagement off Fort Pillow



The Civil War in America: The Picket Leading the Ships of the Burnside Expedition Over the Hatteras Bar in North Carolina.—From a Sketch by Our Special Artist [Vizetelly]. Illustration published in *TILN*, Volume XL, No. 1132, p 187, February 22, 1862.



The Civil War in America: Attack on the Confederate Batteries at Roanoke Island by the Federal Gun-Boats.—From a Sketch by Our Special Artist [Vizetelly]. Illustration published in *TILN*, Volume XL, No. 1136, p 295, March 22, 1862.

(Battle of Plum Point Bend or the Naval Battle of Fort Pillow) on May 10, 1862. His illustration of the battle appeared in the June 14, 1862 issue of *TILN* (Volume XL, No. 1149, p 607, shown nearby).⁵ He wrote of the engagement,

“...while sitting at breakfast, I was startled by a rapid cannoning all about me...As I rushed to the stern-gallery I saw four of their vessels [Confederate] advancing with a full head of steam on, and not firing a shot, though our boats as they slipped from their mooring to meet them were banging away with their eleven inches gloriously...They [Confederate gunboats] were iron-prowed, and handled as rams. In a few minutes they were both onto the *Cincinnati*, striking her with crushing force on her port quarter; before they could get clear she gave them the contents of those of her 10-inch guns that could be trained to bear, both of them drifting down stream, disabled Toward Fort Pillow. The *Cincinnati*, whose timbers were completely crushed in, was tossed to the shore and grounded to preserve her from sinking; while the *Benton* (flag-boat) advanced to meet the two remaining rams, supported by the *Carondelet*. She gave all her guns in succession to one of them and blew up her boilers, which caused her to drift after her consorts, the other making tracks at full speed. The balance of the Confederate fleet, which had held off, then retired...”

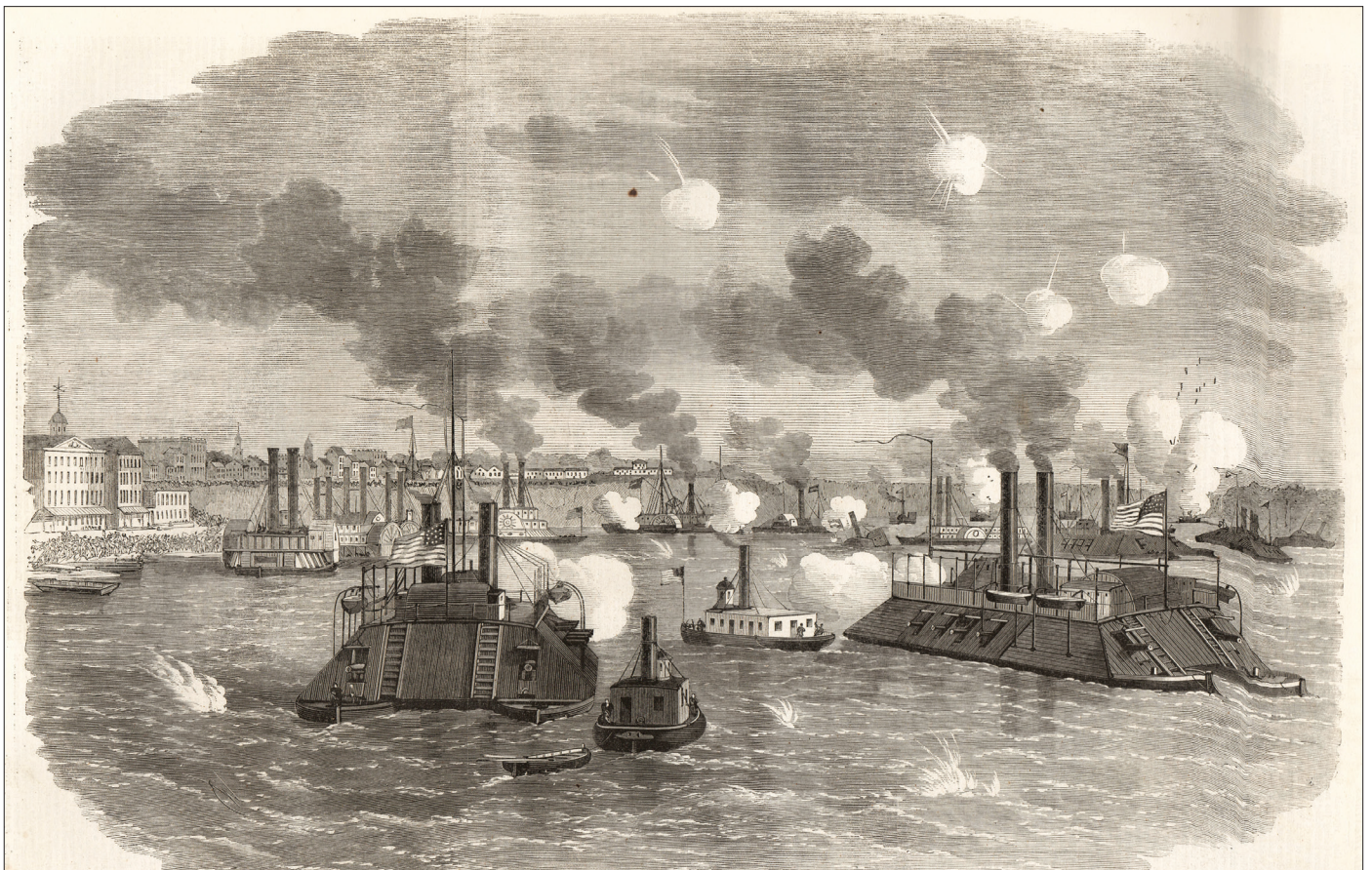
Still on the river the following week, Vizetelly experienced a terrific lightning storm on the river, writing that it was “the most violent storm I ever witnessed”—his illustration of the midnight storm and the Federal flotilla at anchor off Fort Pillow was published in the June 28, 1862 issue of *TILN* (Volume XL, No. 1151, p 655, not shown). After the Confederates withdrew from Fort Pillow in the early days of June, the Federal flotilla moved downriver to capture Memphis. On the morning of June 6, 1862, the Union naval flotilla engaged the Confederate naval flotilla just off Memphis and soundly defeated the rebel force, capturing the city (Vizetelly’s illustration shown nearby). While in Memphis, Vizetelly’s opinion of the Confederacy began changing from one of pessimism to one of growing admiration, noting:⁶

“I never saw anything of Southern people until I landed at Memphis...I believed from all I heard that the Secession movement was but skin deep after all, and that the people would willingly return their allegiance to the Government of the United States if the old flag were carried into their midst...I have been astounded at the unanimity displayed by all on the one subject of separation....”

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The Civil War in America: Engagement Off Fort Pillow, Mississippi River, Between Federal and Confederate Gun-Boats.—From a Sketch by Our Special Artist [Vizetelly]. Illustration published in *TILN*, Volume XL, No. 1149, p 607, June 14, 1862.



The Civil War in America: Destruction of the Confederate Flotilla Off Memphis.—From a Sketch by Our Special Artist [Vizetelly]. Illustration published in *TILN*, Volume XLI(Suppl), No. 1155, p 92, July 19, 1862.

Only days after the capture of Memphis, having heard that the War Department might grant him permission to join the Army of the Potomac on the James River, Vizetelly returned to Washington, DC; however, permission was not forthcoming and he grew weary of waiting. Frustrated again, he decided to cast his correspondent's fortunes with the Confederacy. He undertook a multi-day surreptitious journey, ultimately escaping across the Potomac in a dugout canoe and within a few days was in Richmond, Virginia. There, Vizetelly presented his credentials to the proper authorities and promptly left to join General Robert E. Lee's forces on the Rapidan River. After spending some time with the Confederates, he began to refer to the war as the "War Between the States" instead of the "American Civil War." His view of the war and the Confederacy was changing and evolving. Vizetelly would spend the balance of 1862 covering the Second Battle of Bull Run (Second Manassas), developing a close friendship with cavalry commander Major General J.E.B. Stuart, accompanying Lieutenant General James Longstreet through the Blue Ridge Mountains, and covering the Battle of Fredericksburg. Vizetelly became a very popular figure with the Confederate senior commanders and was widely welcome in the camps by those officers.⁷

During this time with the Confederates, Vizetelly no longer could easily dispatch his sketches and reports to Washington and hence onward to his London editors. Vizetelly now had to send his work aboard blockade runners and hope it would reach London. A number of his sketches and reports were lost or stolen in transit. In January 1863, Vizetelly traveled to Charleston, South Carolina, and presented his credentials to General Pierre G.T. Beauregard. His illustration of the Confederate ironclad attack on the Union blockading flotilla was published on the front page of the April 4, 1863 issue of *TILN* (Volume XLII, No. 1197, p 365, shown nearby). Other sketches of the city and views from Confederate defenses, including Fort Johnson, also appeared in the April 4, 1863 issue (p 372-373, not shown). When Beauregard left Charleston to inspect Savannah's

defenses, Vizetelly accompanied him and on March 2 witnessed the Union gunboat attack on Fort McAllister (his illustration was published in the April 18, 1863 issue of *TILN* [Volume XLII, No. 1199, p 433, shown nearby]). Realizing the real threat of attack to be at Charleston, Beauregard (and Vizetelly) returned to that city. One of his subsequent illustrations was of Confederates sinking torpedoes in Charleston Harbor at night, which appeared in the May 16 issue of *TILN* (Volume XLII, No. 1203, p 532, shown nearby) and had been sent to London just before the Union naval attack on Fort Sumter on April 7, 1863.⁸

Starting in December 1862, some of Vizetelly's previous sketches began appearing in the American illustrated newspaper *Harper's Weekly*. The latter offered bounties to Union naval officers if they came into possession of his sketches aboard captured ships on the Potomac or out of Southern ports and were forwarded to the newspaper. In its December 13, 1862 issue (Volume VI, No. 311, p 796), *Harper's* reproduced Vizetelly's illustrations of the Confederate encampment and fort at Drewry's Bluff, crediting Vizetelly and noting he worked for a London newspaper. In its March 14, 1863 issue (Volume VII, No. 324, p 173), *Harper's* published Vizetelly's illustrations of Generals Lee and Jackson sketched in 1862, but at least the newspaper credited the artist and *TILN*. Other illustrations based on his sketches and published in *TILN* were re-engraved and published in *Harper's* May 2, 1863 issue (views of Charleston Harbor, Volume VII, No. 331, p 284, crediting Vizetelly but not naming his newspaper); in its June 13, 1863 issue (laying of torpedoes in Charleston Harbor at night, Volume VII, No. 337, p 380, with a credit "From a Drawing by an English Artist" and a statement of indebtedness to the artist correspondent, without identifying Vizetelly or an attribution to *TILN*); and three in its January 9, 1864 issue (Volume VIII, No. 367)—Confederate sharpshooters stampeding a Federal wagon train (*Ibid*, p 17), without naming Vizetelly ["Sketched by an English Artist"] or crediting *TILN* which had published the illustration in its own December 5, 1863 issue), plus two other of Vizetelly's

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The War in America: Attack of the Blockading Squadron Off Charleston by [Confederate] Iron-Clad Gun-Boats [CSS *Palmetto State* and CSS *Chicora*].—From a Sketch by Our Special Artist [Vizetelly]. Illustration published on the front page of *TILN*, Volume XLII, No. 1197, p 365, April 4, 1863. Vizetelly's original drawing (12.25 x 19.5 inches) was pencil, gray wash, and Chinese white on paper and is held by the Houghton Library, Harvard University.



The War in America: Attack by Federal Gun-Boats on Fort M'Allister, Ogeechee River, Near Savannah.—From a Sketch by Our Special Artist [Vizetelly]. Illustration published in *TILN*, Volume XLII, No. 1199, p 433, April 18, 1863.



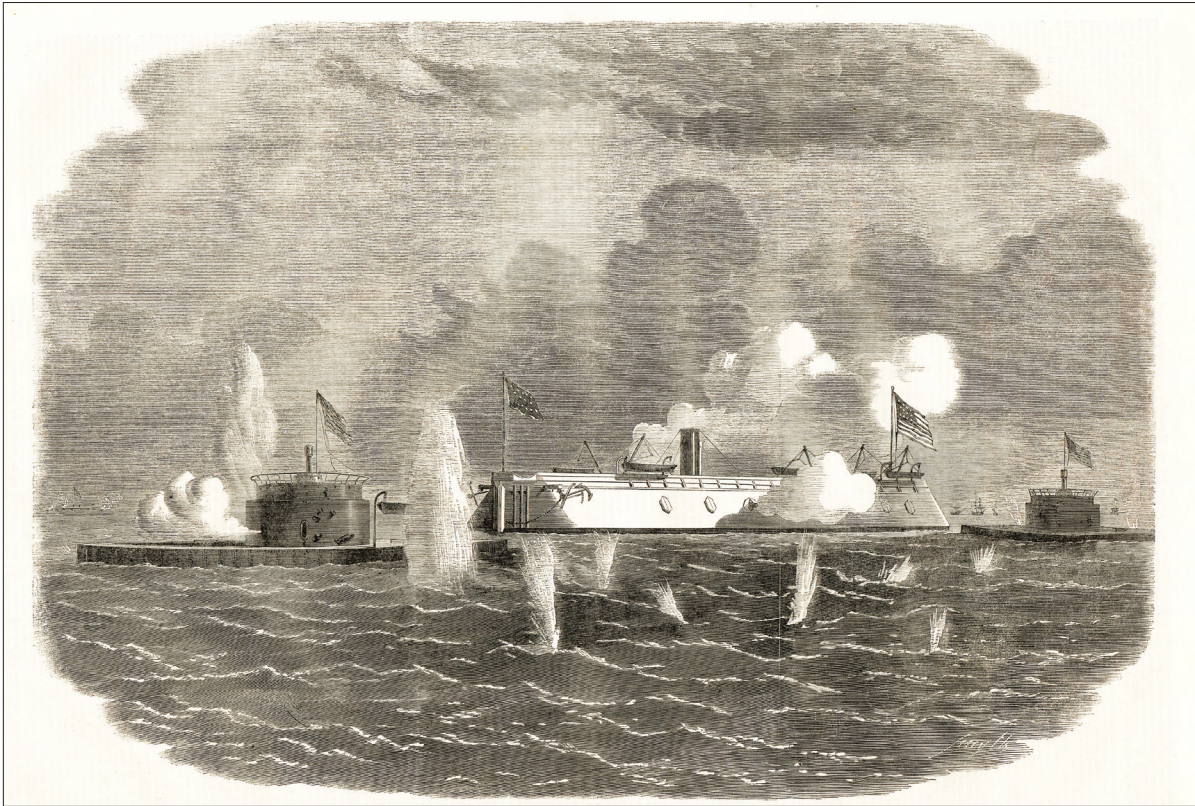
The Civil War in America: Confederates Sinking Torpedoes by Moonlight in the Harbour Channel, Charleston.—From a Sketch by Our Special Artist [Vizetelly]. Illustration published in *TILN*, Volume XLII, No. 1203, p 532, May 16, 1863. This illustration was also re-engraved and published in *Harper's Weekly*, Volume VII, No. 337, p 380, June 13, 1863; the illustration was credited "From a Drawing by an English Artist" and *Harper's* offered a statement of indebtedness to the artist correspondent without identifying Vizetelly nor an attribution to *TILN* (p 375).

previously published illustrations—a shell bursting in the streets of Charleston with no mention of Vizetelly ["Sketched by an English Artist"] (*TILN*, Volume XLIII, No. 1234, p 561) and of the interior of Fort Sumter after bombardment from Morris Island ["Sketched by an English Artist"] (*Ibid*, p 564) (both illustrations on p 28 of *Harper's* issue). Toward the end of the war, *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* also re-engraved and published a Vizetelly illustration of a camp of Federal prisoners at Belle Isle, in Richmond, in its March 25, 1865 issue (Volume XX, No. 495, p 4) without crediting the artist or *TILN*.⁹ In most of these instances, both American illustrated newspapers simply ignored publishing etiquette and did not disclose the original sources to their audiences of readers, probably because the newspapers were a strong Northern voice and they did not want to credit an artist with known Southern sympathies by name on their pages.

Beauregard and Vizetelly returned to Charleston and were present when the U.S. Navy attacked Fort Sumter on April 7, 1863. Vizetelly received permission to travel aboard a small transport with Brigadier General Roswell S. Ripley that afternoon, traveling first to Battery Bee on Sullivan's Island, then to Fort Moultrie, and later that evening to Fort Sumter where he spent the night. Vizetelly described the day's attack,

"And it was not till the vessels [Union ironclads] had got fairly between the two upper points of Morris Island and Sullivan's Island, which are about a mile apart, and were rounding to make the entrance of the harbour, that the ominous stillness was broken. Fort Sumter opened the ball with her barbette guns; Fort Moultrie took up the loud refrain. The various batteries joined in the deafening chorus, and the ironsides found themselves within a circle of fire, concentrated from all the rebel guns that could be brought to bear upon the point... The engagement...

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The Iron-Clad Frigate, New Ironsides, and Two Ericsson Batteries Going into Action at Charleston.—From a Sketch by Our Special Artist [Vizetelly]. Illustration published in *TILN*, Volume XLII(Suppl), No. 1202, p 517, May 9, 1863.

lasted two hours and twenty-five minutes... There were eight turreted ironclads, including the boasted double-turreted Keokuk and an immense plated frigate known as the Ironsides. All these marine monsters were armed with eleven and fifteen inch guns. They were all struck by the forts repeatedly; and after maintaining the fight for the time I named, they steamed away, evidently much damaged. This morning we have ample evidence of the fact... Clothes clotted with blood have been picked up that floated from the Keokuk, and there can be little doubt that she was pierced through and through, and that the loss of life on board her has been severe.”

Vizetelly’s illustrations of the ironclads attacking Fort Sumter were published in the May 9, 1863 (Volume XLII[Suppl], No. 1202, p 517, shown nearby) and May 16, 1863 issues of *TILN* (Volume XLII, No. 1203, p 532-533, not shown), while an illustration of the partially sunk

USS *Keokuk* on a sandbar outside Charleston Harbor the day after the attack was also published in the May 16 issue (p 533, not shown). A scene he witnessed inside Fort Moultrie on April 7 was published on the front page of the June 6, 1863 issue of *TILN* (Volume XLII, No. 1207, not shown).¹⁰

In late June, Vizetelly left Charleston to travel west to Vicksburg (which had come under siege) with regiments ordered to report to General Joseph E. Johnston; at Jackson, Mississippi, he did join up with Johnston and was there for the reoccupation of the city by the Confederates. After Vicksburg fell, he returned to Charleston and was there in July and August when the Union forces assaulted Battery Wagner, his sketches of which were published in the September 26, 1863 (Volume XLII, No. 1223, front page, not shown) and December 5, 1863 (Volume XLII, No. 1234, p 564, not shown) issues of *TILN*. In September, Vizetelly traveled



Illustrations of the War in America, By Our Special Artist [Vizetelly]: Howlett's Battery, on the James River, Engaging the Federal Monitors. *TILN*, Volume XLV, No. 1284, p 409, October 22, 1864. Howlett's Battery was on the south bank of the James River. Obstructions visible in the river were placed by the Federals to prevent the Confederate flotilla from descending the river. Consequently, long-range shots were often exchanged between the Confederate battery and Federal vessels.

to Georgia and Tennessee and was present for the Battle of Chickamauga. During the battle, Vizetelly, a gifted horseman, rode several messages from Longstreet to the front lines. Afterwards, Longstreet named him an "honorary captain" in the Confederate army. In October, he returned again to Charleston, staying briefly before traveling to Richmond via Wilmington, North Carolina. As Christmas neared, Vizetelly was invited to spend the holiday with General J.E.B. Stuart at Orange Courthouse, northwest of Richmond.¹¹

While in Richmond, Vizetelly decided to return to England. At the end of January 1864, he left for Wilmington and once there booked passage on the blockade runner *Hansa* bound for Nassau. After returning home, Vizetelly wrote an article in April 1864

for *The Cornhill Magazine* (London) describing his time spent in Charleston in 1863, providing additional historical details of his experience beyond his earlier reports published in *TILN*. But it was not long before he missed covering the Civil War and promptly sailed for Bermuda. There, he boarded the blockade runner *Lilian*, captained by John Newland Maffitt and bound for Wilmington. Arriving there on June 4, he left for Virginia where he joined Longstreet's corps at Petersburg. After Petersburg, he traveled in the Shenandoah Valley to cover Confederate army actions. Just before Christmas, Vizetelly left to cover the action at Fort Fisher, North Carolina. During the second attack, Vizetelly made a watercolor sketch from inside the fort's northeastern salient that documented the significant impact of the Union fleet's bombardment from the

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"Our Special Artist [Vizetelly]," On Board the *Lillian* [sic], Running the Blockade into Wilmington Harbor, North Carolina [on the morning of June 4, 1864]. Illustration published in *TILN*, Volume XLV, Nos. 1268, 1269, p 60, July 16, 1864. Vizetelly sketched himself into the drawing (apparently the gentleman in the dark coat with a spyglass standing near the smokestack of the vessel). The Houghton Library, Harvard University, also holds another slightly different version of this scene by Vizetelly drawn in pencil and brown wash on brown paper (9.75 x 13.88 inches).

Confederate perspective (*TILN*, Volume XLVI, No. 1306, p 249, March 18, 1865, not shown). After the fall of Fort Fisher, Vizetelly had no seaports from which to send his sketches to London. He returned to Richmond and then again joined Johnston's army at the Battle of Bentonville. In mid-April, Vizetelly joined President Jefferson Davis and his entourage as they attempted to evade Union forces. As the only correspondent accompanying Davis, he made numerous historical sketches and was with Davis until just two days before the Confederate president's ultimate capture at Irwinville, Georgia. Vizetelly booked passage and returned to England taking his sketches of the Davis travels with him back to

his editors (*TILN*, Volume XLVII, No. 1322, p 625, July 1, 1865; *TILN*, Volume XLVII, No. 1325, p 64-65, July 22, 1865, not shown).¹²

Vizetelly married Sara Martha Read in 1853 in London. Together they had four sons. After the Civil War ended, Vizetelly traveled to Ireland and France on reporting assignments. In 1866, he covered the war between Prussia and Austria. In May 1867, Vizetelly and his older brother James started a short-lived London weekly periodical called *Echoes from the Clubs: A Record of Political Topics and Social Amenities*, for which he drew satirical feature cartoons. In 1868, he covered the Spanish Civil War. Afterwards, he "retired" to a life on

the coasts of France, sketching famous chateaux and vineyards. Years later, he was drawn to the Mahdist's insurrection against Egyptian rule in Sudan in 1883, and traveled there to cover the war for the London *Graphic*. The newspaper stopped receiving his reports and it was believed that he was captured and killed at the massacre of British soldiers at the Battle of Kashgil in November of that year. In 1888, Vizetelly and other war correspondents who had perished in the discharge of their reporting duties were memorialized in a large tablet in St. Paul's Cathedral in London.¹³

The Houghton Library at Harvard University holds 31 of Vizetelly's original wartime sketches and drawings (including a half dozen that were apparently not published), and 50 of his wartime illustrations published in *TILN* are in the New York Public Library Digital Collection. *TILN* is available at more than 50 academic libraries in the U.S., and many wartime volumes can be viewed online at hathitrust.org or archive.org, though with variable quality of digitization. *TILN* is also viewable by paid access at gale.com or in the Alexander Street Press digitized collection "Illustrated Civil War Newspapers and Magazines."

Vizetelly was already a well-recognized, very talented sketch artist and correspondent before he covered the American Civil War. His coverage of this conflict only enhanced his reputation worldwide, and many of his illustrations came from the Confederate perspective, a unique body of pictorial work and reporting. His reportage and artwork were substantial, and his changing perceptions and opinions of the Confederacy were widely communicated to his English readers and perhaps swayed some public opinion in his home country. Vizetelly had been welcomed and embraced by Southerners during his time spent in the Confederacy, sharing their victories and losses, and he came to admire their military duty and bravery. While most of Vizetelly's published illustrations were of army-related scenes, his travels afforded him opportunities to sketch and report on some significant riverine and naval

actions of the war. Indeed, Vizetelly established himself as one of the war's most talented and intriguing 'Special Artists,' one who is often somewhat overlooked and underappreciated when considering the 'Special Artists' of the war, most likely because he was a foreign correspondent and so his work went largely unseen and unread by most Northerners and Southerners during the war.

Acknowledgment

The author thanks contributor and subscriber Walter E. Wilson for providing most of the high-resolution digital images of illustrations used in this article.

Sources

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5. Hoole, p 39-40; Bostick, p 70-73; "The Civil War in America," *TILN*, Volume XL, No. 1149, p 607-608, June 14, 1862.
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