

LIFE'S ANCHOR

By John F. Hall

There is an old hymn titled, "Will Your Anchor Hold in the Storms of Life." It was written by Priscilla Owens. These are her lyrics: "Will your anchor hold in the storms of life, when the clouds unfold their wings of strife? When the strong tides lift, and the cables strain, will your anchor drift or firm remain? We have an anchor that keeps the soul steadfast and sure while the billows roll, fastened to the Rock which cannot move, grounded firm and deep in the Savior's love. It is safely moored, 'twill the storm withstand, for 'tis well secured by the Savior's hand; and the cables passed from His heart to mine, can defy the blast, through strength divine. It will firmly hold in the straits of fear, when the breakers have told the reef is near; through the tempest rave and the wild winds blow, not an angry wave shall our bark o'erflow. It will surely hold in the floods of death, when the waters cold chill our latest breath; on the rising tide it can never fail, while our hopes abide within the veil."



Decades ago, I patrolled the roads of Ballard, Carlisle, Fulton and Hickman Counties that all shared their shore line with the Mississippi River. I would drive to the Columbus-Belmont Kentucky State Park and chat with the Park Ranger. The Park has a colorful history. The Confederate Army first built defensive earthworks on a bluff overlooking the Mississippi River above the town of Columbus, in Hickman County, in 1861. The Confederate General Leonidas Polk ordered the placement of 140 cannons on the bluff to sink any Union gunboat on the river. The soldiers named their fortifications Fort DeRussey.

I kept my conversations with the Park Ranger brief as I had a large patrol area to cover. I did not drive into the park. About a decade ago, I was invited to attend an outside wedding that was held in that State Park. It seemed like they picked the hottest day of the year for the outside wedding. The humidity was depressing, but they provided hand-held, old timey, paper fans. Thankfully, the reception was held inside the small, air conditioned convention center at the Park. After the reception, Paula and I drove to the bluff to look at the Mississippi River. We parked nearby a massive cast-iron anchor that is over 15 feet long with flukes that are over six feet.

In 1861, the anchor was buried 11 feet in the ground and was kept in place with 12-foot logs. The anchor held one end of a huge chain that was stretched across the Mississippi River. The chain was supported by pontoons at regular intervals across the River. The purpose of the chain was to slow down gunboats on the river, long enough for the cannons on the bluff to blow the gunboats out of the water. The current on the Mississippi River severed the chain a time or two. After a battle at the Fort, that both sides claimed they won, the Confederates withdrew from the Fort. The anchor is on display at the Park along with a section of the chain. See the picture on page two.

In what seems to me, to be another life, I was at another Fort DeRussey, this one is on the shore of the Pacific Ocean. The Merchant Marine ship that I was on had anchored.

The year was 1964, The ship's Captain gave our security team three days of shore leave. A skip took the team from the cargo ship to Waikiki Beach. I spent a few days sleeping on the warm sands of that beach. The Artillery District of Honolulu was established in 1909 and consisted of Fort DeRussey, Fort Ruger, Fort Armstrong and Fort Kamehameha. Fort DeRussey at that time was just a 71-acre piece of prime ocean front property with a coastal artillery fortification. That fortification had the equivalent of 30-foot thick, fortified concrete walls called parapets. It had two 14-inch disappearing rifled guns mounted on carriages. Each gun was capable of hauling a 1,600-pound projectile 14 miles out to sea.

In 1901, Lewis Jones wrote the hymn "I've Anchored in Jesus." These are some of his lyrics: "Upon life's boundless ocean where mighty billows roll, I've fixed my hope in Jesus, blest anchor of my soul; when trials fierce assail me as storms are gath'ring o'er, I rest upon His mercy and trust Him more. He keeps my soul from evil and gives me blessed peace, His voice has stilled the waters and bid their tumult cease, my Pilot and Deliv'rer, to Him I all confide, for always when I need Him, He's at my side. He is my Friend and Savior, in Him my anchor's cast, He drives away my sorrows and shields me from the blast; by faith I'm looking upward and beyond life's troubled sea, there I behold a haven prepared for me. ...".

Anchors are a nautical device that helps provide some stability to ships during severe storms. They help the ships from being tossed around at sea. The word anchor is mentioned in the Apostle Paul's voyage to Rome during a severe storm and subsequent shipwreck. In Acts, Chapter 27, Verses 13, 17, 29 and 40 are these words: "When a gentle wind began to blow, they saw their opportunity; so they weighed anchor and sailed along the shore of Crete...so the men hoisted it aboard. Then they passed ropes under the ship itself to hold it together. Because they were afraid they would run aground on the sandbars of Syrtis, they lowered the sea anchor and let the ship be driven along...Fearing they would be dashed across the rocks, they dropped four anchors from the stern and prayed for daylight...Cutting loose the anchors, they left them in the sea and at the same time they untied the ropes that held the rudders. Then they hoisted the foresail to the wind and made for the beach." Faith in Christ is an anchor that gives us stability in life's constant storms. It is a life jacket when we became too weary to swim.

John F. Hall

*Read other stories by John F. Hall and others at:

<http://www.ajlambert.com>