

MERCHANT SHIPS and YANKEE GUNNERS



LAST PRACTICE BEFORE DEPARTURE

MERCHANT SHIPS AND YANK
The Story of Their Deeds Afloat in
the War Against Germany

(From the Records of the Navy
Department)
By RALPH D. PAINE.

(This is an article in which Mr. Ralph D. Paine, the noted writer of sea stories, has presented from official data the first comprehensive account of the armed-merchantmen campaign. When the history of American participation in the war comes to be written, it will be recorded that this— the arming of our merchant ships and the successful fighting of their way through the Atlantic sea lanes—was the first element of American action. Mr. Paine has had access to the official records of the Navy Department and has been given other exceptional opportunities to familiarize himself with the records made by the American gunners.)

SOME EARLY BATTLES

It was difficult for the American gunners aboard the armed merchant vessels to realize that they had to fight a foe whose operations were shrouded and unseen. A submarine had to poke her periscope above water, they argued, to take a sight of her quarry, and they rather expected to shoot the eye out of her. If she emerged and cleared her guns for shell fire, two could play that game. It was known that England had so large

a number of ships to arm, besides a navy actively engaged, that the average gun crew was smaller than the American. Our bluejackets had reason to hope, therefore, that they might be more successful in beating off attacks. How accurately the Germans were able to detect the approach of a steamer and at the same time remain invisible was a matter of guesswork, however, and the knowledge was gained by tragic experience.

To be sunk with never a chance to fight was a bitter dose. It happened often during those early months of the game, while the gunners were learning the tricks of the submarine and before the owners were aiding them with smoke boxes, camouflage paint, and anthracite coal in the war zone. There was no loss of life on the navy list until the freighter Astor was torpedoed without warning, early in April. She was a slow ship, laden deep with merchandise. It was then that John I. Eopolucci, boatswain's mate, met his death by drowning while in the service of his country. A tried man with three enlistments, unknown until then, he won remembrance because he was the first to go. His parents were Italian immigrants flung into the melting pot, and he was a true American. To his mother, who suffered her loss with Roman dignity and fortitude, the Secretary of the Navy wrote this personal letter:

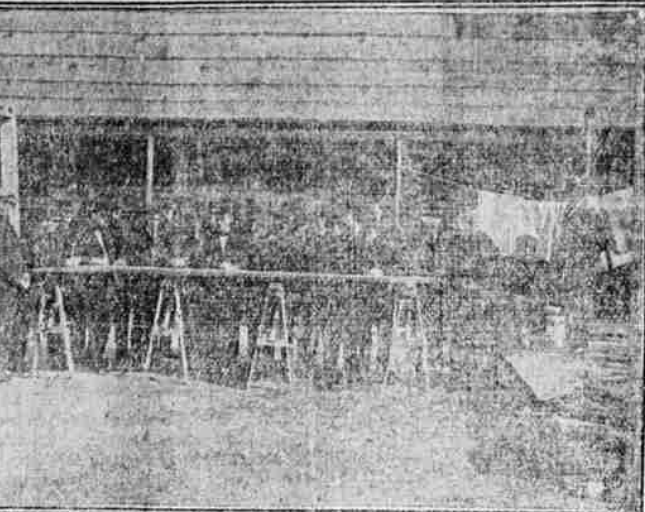
"It is with the deepest regret that the department must inform you of a report from France to the effect that

all of the enlisted men of the navy who formed the armed guard of the steamship Astor, of the Oriental Navigation company, sunk by a German submarine on April 1, are safe, except John I. Eopolucci, boatswain's mate first class, who is still missing. When last seen, he was in the second boat that left the ship. The department does not yet give up hope that he may have been saved, but must frankly admit that the possibilities are remote.

"The sympathy which I feel for you cannot lessen the sorrow which has come to you. You can only be consoled by the knowledge that your son bravely volunteered for this dangerous duty and was the first man to give up his life for his country in the present struggle."

Akin to this episode was the loss of the tanker Vacuum in April. The disaster was commonplace enough to the bestial annals of the German submarine campaign, merely that scores of men were set adrift in open boats and many of them perished of cold and exhaustion. Commanders of Imperial U boats were winning iron crosses for such deeds as this.

The tanker was torpedoed in the morning before the lookouts had a glimpse of a periscope. Two minutes after the explosion tore the steel hull apart, the stern of the ship settled under water, throwing the after gun crew overboard. These men were picked up by the captain's first boat. Somehow two other boats were



SPOTTING BOARD PRACTICE

dropped and pulled clear before the steamer dived to the bottom. In the afternoon one boat capsized twice in the heavy seas, losing four men who failed to hold on to the gunwales while the others were righting it. Eighteen men had been in the boat when it left the others. Besides the four drowned, eleven more died upon the thwarts or awash in the icy water that had filled the boat. Among these were Lieutenant Clarence C. Thomas, commanding the armed guard of the United States navy, the first officer to die in the war, and whose name will be coupled with that of Ensign Worth Bagley, who led the honor roll of the navy dead in the Spanish war.

Their fates were very different. Young Bagley went into Cardenas Bay in the destroyer Winslow against heavy odds and fought his guns until he died in his tracks. It was give and take between honorable foes, and Bagley's finish was such as a brave sailor would choose for himself. The Spanish played the game like gentlemen, afield and afloat, and if you are fond of comparison, set an Admiral Cervera beside an Admiral von Tirpitz.

Lieutenant Thomas perished of cold, struggling to right an overturned boat in drenching seas. He had been under orders, in the line of duty, to protect his ship against unlawful attack upon the high seas. The submarine commander who launched the torpedo waged not warfare but murder. That he slew an American naval officer, together with four of his gunners, was a matter of accident. There would have been more "frightfulness," of the brand made in Germany, if the boats had been filled with women and children.

There was one young seaman of the armed guard in whose arms a comrade died while they were still afloat in the water-logged boat. He lived long enough to be cast ashore on a lonely island of the Hebrides, off the western coast of Scotland. There he died, but meanwhile his mother has written this letter to the navy department:

"Will you kindly let me know immediately if it is true that the steamer Vacuum was sunk on Saturday by a torpedo? If so, please tell me that my boy, my only son, is safe. He was a gunner on that ship. His name is Frank Loree. Oh, for God's sake, tell me he is safely rescued and on his

way home. You will greatly oblige and relieve an almost distracted mother."

The boy was dead, but there was this consolation, that in his last hours he was cared for by a Scotch mother and daughter who dwelt at a light-house on a headland of the Hebrides. They were of the Clan Macdonald, whose ruined strongholds on Mull and other islands near by recall the days of their ancient forays against the MacLeans. To the mother of the seaman these good women wrote to tell of their sympathy and how they had tried to keep him alive. He wore a ring, they said, but the room was small and he tossed about on the bed and it slipped from his finger and was lost out of the door or window, so they could not send it home to America.

The Secretary of the Navy was not too busy to send to the Hebrides his own message of thanks to Mrs. Angus Macdonald and her daughter, saying:

"The department has received a report that you received into your home an American seaman, Frank Loree, who was dying of exposure and exhaustion following the sinking of the steamer Vacuum, on which he was a member of the armed guard. The navy department and relatives of the deceased greatly appreciate your trouble and care which were thus thrust upon you and your household."

After the seaman's mother had received the letter from the Macdonalds she poured out her heart to the navy department, "thanking each one and all from the depths of my heart and offering most sincerely my appreciation for their kindness to my dear boy, my only son, who was one of the first to give his life for our country, though the giving was a great loss and sorrow to me and his two sisters who are left. We mourn his loss deeply, but are sincerely thankful that he fell among kind hands and loving hearts, a lonely boy far from his own loving mother's care in the last hours of his life. Let me thank you once again, and all who were interested in my boy's care."

What Good Wind Breaks Are

In the December Farm and Fireside a writer says:

"A windbreak is desirable wherever an orchard is exposed to strong winds. Pine trees and Chinese arbor vitae planted years ago now constitute the best windbreaks. Objections are often made to the red cedar on account of the fungus, one stage of which spreads to apple trees. The damage from this source is probably overestimated."

LOCAL MARKETS

(La Grande Retail Prices.)
FRUIT—Bananas, 35¢ @ 40¢ per doz; grapes, 15¢ per lb.; 2 lbs. for 25¢; apples, 10¢ to 5¢; lemons 4¢ doz; oranges, 25¢ @ 60¢ per doz.
VEGETABLES—Beans, white 15¢, colored 15¢; dry onions, 5¢ per lb.; celery (California), 15¢, 2 for 25¢; cabbage, 4¢ per lb.; cucumbers (hot-

THE FORUM

A Word of Praise.

La Grande Observer,
La Grande, Oregon.
Gentlemen:—

Since writing you the other day we have read several more of your editorials and news items in support of the Christmas Membership Drive and cannot refrain from dropping you this line in further appreciation of the patriotic cooperation you rendered.

With a spirit like this it is no wonder that Union county went over the top and seems to be going strong still.

Yours very truly,
C. C. CHAPMAN,
State Chairman.

THE PLAY OF "HAMLET."

Does It Always Make the Dams and the Gravedigger Enemies?

In his "Notes on Shakespeare's Workmanship" Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch says that "Hamlet" was written "not for an audience of Gentles and Cavaliers, but for an audience of ordinary men and women," and, speaking of its popularity, he says that to this day a traveling company of [British] actors, thrown on their beam ends for lack of money, having acted this or that empty house, always as a last resort advertise "Hamlet." . . . When an actor takes a benefit, "Hamlet" is the piece most commonly chosen. . . . But why does the gentleman who enacts the first gravedigger also choose "Hamlet" for his benefit-night?

I was once assisting at a dress rehearsal of "Hamlet" when the first gravedigger came of the stage in a jacket. In the greenroom it exploded. "Why," he wished to know, "should I be treated like a dog by this conceited fool?"—meaning our Hamlet, of course. "The temper gets over at every rehearsal. Surely, after alighting his vanity through four acts, he might be quiet with I have my little say?"

"Hush you, sir," answered an old dresser. "It's always like that. In those forty years I've helped dress, I dare say, all that number of Hamlets, and Hamlet and the First Gravedigger always fall out. It's a regular thing. I've known 'em to come to blows. Hamlet and the gravedigger! When

you've said that you've said oil and vinegar."

KEEPING TREES IN HEALTH.

Roots and Crowns Must Be Made to Balance Properly.

Well nourished, healthy trees are less liable to the attacks of insects than those that for lack of sufficient plant food are making a slow and uncertain growth. To keep trees well fertilized and in a vigorous condition is the best possible insurance against insect depredations and all forms of disease.

A soil which supplies abundant nutriment and moisture is the prime requisite for successful tree culture. In the forest natural conditions are favorable in this respect, but in the open field or town they are frequently quite the reverse. The roots are robbed of the required moisture and air by heavy sod or pavements. To grow trees under such conditions requires scientific care in the way of fertilizing and pruning to maintain proper balance between the roots and the crown or top.

If the nourishment received by the roots is scanty the judicious thinning out of the branches of a tree has much the same effect as soil improvement. A heavy top cannot be adequately nourished by a stunted root growth, and if not pruned the effect is quickly indicated by dying branches here and there, nature's way of maintaining the right balance between root and crown. It is better for the tree to forestall nature in this respect by timely and careful pruning. Dead branches are not only unsightly, but the scars thus left are slow to heal and invite disease and decay.—Tree Talk.

Caroline Herschel.

Among distinguished women who have helped to shed light upon astronomic subjects was Caroline Lucretia Herschel, the noted astronomer. She was the daughter of a musician of Hanover. Her early education was designed to lead to a musical career. She accompanied her brother, William—afterward the illustrious Sir William Herschel—to England. Brother and sister soon turned their attention to astronomy, and in 1785 Caroline published a "Catalogue of Stars." Until Sir William died in 1822 she was content for the most part to be known only as his assistant, but later she engaged in many original and independent investigations. She devoted special attention to the discovery of comets, and claimed priority in the discovery of at least five.

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house), 15¢; fresh tomatoes, 15¢ per lb.; parsnips, 4¢ per lb.; lettuce, 10¢; potatoes, \$1.75, 2¢ per lb.; turnips 3¢ per lb.; beets and carrots, 4¢ per lb.; sweet potatoes 4 lbs. for 25¢; green peppers, 20¢ per lb.; squash, 3 @ 2 1-2¢ per lb.; pumpkins, 3 @ 2 1-2¢ per lb.; rutabaga, 4¢ per lb.

BUTTER—Fancy creamery, 60¢, \$1.15; ranch butter, 55¢, \$1.05.

EGGS—64¢ per doz.; storage, 50¢ per doz.

HONEY—20¢.

FLOUR AND FEED—Best of the Best (patent), \$2.75; Jersey Cream, \$2.80; Bluestem flour, \$2.85; Royal

Patent, \$2.86; Invincible, \$2.90; Snowdrift \$3.00; Upper Crust \$3.00; None-to-Equal, \$2.80; Sea Foam, \$2.75; Best of the Best (straight grade), \$2.75; yellow corn meal 75¢; rye 80¢; 10-lb. oats, 75¢.

FLOUR IN 10-LB SACKS—Germs, graham, whole wheat and Royal Patent, 75¢; rye flour 80¢; hominy 80¢; cornmeal 75¢.

CHICKENS AND FOWLS—Spring chickens 14¢ per lb; ducks, live 10¢ 12¢; turkeys, live 20¢ @ 24¢; geese, live 10¢ @ 12¢; hens, live 14¢; spring chicken and hens 20¢; ducks 20¢; turkeys 26¢; geese 20¢.

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