No. 2
Mine Sweeping With the M. L.'s

(Motor Launches)

By

A SEA SLUG,

British Service Name For Crews of Submarine Chasers.

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PROLOGUE.

The author of this series of four articles is a young American, who has spent most of his time since the war started with the British patrol fleet, taking an important part in helping to organize that branch of the service known as the Sea Slugs.

He has accumulated a remarkable collection of anecdotes incident to this exciting branch of the service, and many of these were personal adventures in which he took part and which make one of the stirring narratives to come out of the war. He recently returned to the United States to assist the American navy in organizing the same branch of the service and should be of great value because of his experience abroad. So far as known, he is the only American to serve with the British patrol prior to the advent of the United States destroyer flotilla in British waters. Of course some of his experiences, of military value to the enemy, cannot be related. At the request of the service publication of his name is withheld.

MAX HORTON, the man who torpedoed the German battle cruiser Moltke, was one of the most modest men I have ever met. I palled around for a couple of nights with Horton and another Sea Slug who had been only a short time out of the Hasda hospital, where he had recovered from wounds he received at Gallipoli. Horton, besides being the hero of the Moltke incident when in command of an E boat, had been the first man through the Dardanelles in his flimsy M. L., as the British call the submarine chasers, he being in that service before taking over a submarine.

M. L. stand for motor launch. The little craft are called a great many other things at times, both by the men in them when they don't run just right and by submarine commanders, German and British.

We were all at Portsmouth, which is one of the principal M. L. bases. Horton, his friend and myself had been out on a duty tour and on the way back stopped at The Knut for a couple of drinks, then at Monk's for oysters and finally landed at Tot's for dinner, which is about the program followed by the Sea Slugs when they can get ashore.

"They had the M. L.'s sweeping mines down at Gallipoli," said Horton in a very matter of fact way. "Lots of people think all we Slugs have to do is to cruise around and keep from drowning, but I want to tell you that chasing submarines is the easiest and safest thing expected of us.

"Tugboats and trawlers and mine sweepers weren't much good in the Dardanelles, because they furnished too big a target. Besides, everything that could float was getting shot to pieces, and before they dared send our ships in it was absolutely necessary to sweep the mine fields.

"We used to hook thousand foot cables between two M. L.'s and cruise down through the fields as fast as we could go. The cables were supposed to foul the mines, tip them over and explode them. They did it. Also the M. L.'s themselves tipped over several mines and exploded them, and after that there wasn't anything to hook that end of the cable to.

Work Under Point Blank Fire.

"The Turkish batteries on the cliffs were so close that as we drove down through the mine fields we were at point blank range. The ammunition wasn't so very good, and it didn't always explode on contact, but if ever one of the heavy shells smashed through a chaser there wasn't much of anything left but the hole it made on the way through—like a doughnut after you eat it.

"Of course the Turk guns firing into the fields detonated a lot of their own mines, but that didn't add to our comfort any, for many of them were right under some of the M. L.'s.

"One day we were sweeping in near shore. The sun was so hot that pitch just seemed to sweat out and run down the decks. The glare off the water was almost blinding, and it really didn't seem as if it could be much better in the other place to which we might go if one of those shells hit us. The Turkish batteries were hammering away at us, but the terrific heat was so uncomfortable that nobody minded the shells much. All of a sudden something went by my stomach so close I thought it had cut me in two. Just beyond my boat a shell splashed into the water.

"One of the smaller projectiles had grazed and seared me. I caved in so that I couldn't walk straight or erect for several days—and that is literally true. My stomach felt all the time as if some one was drawing a red hot knife across it."

"I got it worse than that," said the other chap, who had been in the hospital. "My best bumpoff a mine. I don't know how it is to get shot, but when that thing blew up right alongside of us it felt to me as though it was my own body exploding. It seemed like a sudden and terrific pressure from the inside of me that was going to burst me like a toy balloon.

"We finally got back to the tender under our own power. We had to shore up the bows a little, but we managed to make it. Mines do freakish things, and I don't believe there is a man living who can give any logical reason why we weren't blown into atoms."

"Plain luck, I guess," observed Horton placidly. "It's funny that a mine powerful enough to sink an ocean liner or a battleship will sometimes explode and fail to destroy a motor launch or a submarine that is almost alongside it. A lot of people think submarines are very easily put out of business. We Sea Slugs know it's different, especially the U boats. I saw one of our own down at Gallipoli which had hit a mine and came in with her bow patched up under her own power, just as you did in your chaser.

Sixteen Dead In Launch.

"I never had the bad luck to bump a mine myself, but I've had my share of being shot up. I had one end of a cable in a mine sweeping stunt at the Dardanelles one night when the Turkish batteries got the range. The fire they poured into us is almost unbelievable. I don't see how a stick lived through it. We were practically under water all the time, the shells were falling so close and spraying us so steadily.

"Every once in awhile one came on board, but they were not exploding right—that is, not right from the Turkish point of view. We were perfectly satisfied to have them fail to go off.

"The other chap, though, the fellow who had the far end of my cable, was getting it pretty badly. He was in terrible shape, and after a particularly vicious burst of fire his engines stopped and he began to drift. I ran over to him. We couldn't sweep with only one end of the cable in motion.

"Of the eighteen men in the other M. L. I found two alive. They weren't conscious, but they were still alive. The sixteen others were dead. We took these two aboard our launch and got back to the base. That night was hell."

I have quoted the stories told me by these two men as nearly in their words as I can remember them to show a phase of the submarine chasers' work which is seldom thought of. As Horton said, most people think the M. L.'s do nothing but cruise around in comparative safety looking for submarines. This is only one of their duties.

Most of the Sea Slugs have been taught to operate machine guns, and as a result they were frequently used for landing parties at Gallipoli, running in under the Turkish guns and trying to hang on, by their finger nails almost, to the cliffs. Some of the Sea Slugs were on shore for a long time and served in the trenches. One of them told me a bad feature of the fighting there was trying to keep clean. There wasn't water enough to drink, to say nothing about washing, and the only way they could clean their shirts was to lay them on the ant hills. Even at that if they left them there too long the shirts themselves would disappear.

Another job the M. L.'s had down there was boarding all the fishing smacks and other apparently noncombatant vessels and searching them for ammunition and mines. I talked to one man named D., a brother of the officer I told about in my first article who rammed one of his own submarines, mistaking her for a German, who had a fight with two Turk aeroplanes while he was visiting a number of such vessels.

Fought Planes With Rifles.

"We are just running over to a fishing smack to search her," said D., "when I hear the throbbing of an aeroplane engine. A few seconds later the roar of another engine cuts in, and presently I locate them with my glasses. It never occurs to me that they are after such small fry as my little M. L.

Bang! Goes One Not Thirty Feet Off My Starboard Bow.

"Round and round they circle just over our heads, getting lower and lower all the time, until at last they start dropping bombs.

"Bang! goes one not thirty feet off my starboard bow, and we are sprayed with the foam she throws up. But the target is too small, and the planes are traveling so fast they can't get us with bombs, so they veer off and come skimming back very low in a straight line dead for us. They are so close to our heads that I feel like ducking, just as one does going under a doorway that is actually high enough to walk through upright, but which looks too low.

"Suddenly they begin to spray us with machine gun fire. Two of my men are hit, and the decks are flying into splinters. All I have on board is a couple of 30-30 rifles, and I begin firing with one, while my first officer uses the other. The three pounder can't be elevated enough to use it as an air gun.

"We can shoot rapidly, but nothing like the fire of that cursed spew of lead spraying from those machine guns.

"Once they drive straight over us, and now they are coming back. If we don't stop them this time we are gone. I squint along the sights of my rifle. I take a deep breath. I let part of it out and hold the rest, so that my shoulder will not be moving as I squeeze the trigger.

"I am sighting right for the pilot's chest. I fire. He veers off like a wounded bird. His plane wabbles. It looks as if it was going to fall, but he gets it straightened out and flies away. Both of us begin to fire at the other machine. It rises. The pilot does not dare to fly straight into the rifle fire. From aloft he contents himself with dropping more bombs, but he must be within range of our rifles, for presently he flies away and does not bother us any more.

"If he had been a German air man the end of the story might have been different."

Sea Slugs Are Fighters.

The crews which officer and man the submarine chasers are not trained navy men. They don't know overmuch of the king's regulations, and the discipline they maintain is most certainly not that to which one is accustomed on board ship.

But—and I want to emphasize this strongly—they are scrappers. They fight in their own way. They may not know how to do it according to the book, but they are among the gamest men afloat. Many of them are wealthy and formerly owned and operated their own boats. They are a hard fighting, hard riding crew, and the devil himself can't scare them.

Before they are assigned to boats the men are given about a ten day course in navigation, for they must sometimes cruise out of sight of land and at night. Many amusing and sometimes almost tragic incidents arise from their inexperience.

I was out once in an M. L. commanded by a subaltern named C. All he knew about navigation had been taught him in ten days. He got lost, was ashamed to say so and admit that he didn't know how to get his location. He figured for two days trying to find out where he was. He'd get his sun observations, and by the time he had the readings calculated he'd be so far away that he had to do it all over again.

He figured for two days, and all the time he was getting shorter in provisions and fuel. For the last half day he followed a destroyer, thinking she was running into port. He wouldn't signal her and ask for instructions or for his location, so he just trailed along after her as though he knew where he was going. He was too proud to ask the road home.

The sun was under clouds, but it came out just before sunset, and he discovered that he had been running right away from England. We got back off Portsmouth at night. But our signal box had been lost overside, and we couldn't reply to the signal at the entrance to the harbor, which came within inches of costing us our lives, as our own batteries fired a couple of 4.7's at us, and we had to run out and cruise around the rest of the night to save our skins. However, we hung in sight of the harbor so as not to get lost again.

This same chap, though he was short on the science of navigation, was long on fight. When cruising at night the M. L.'s, of course, show no lights, and it is very hard to maintain an absolutely even speed and keep just the proper distance from the other craft.

Steam engines can be controlled right down to the inch, but the gas engines which drive the M. L.'s are not so readily regulated. A single notch increase or decrease on the throttle may make a difference of a whole knot in speed.

Well, C. lost track of the other chasers in his squadron one night, and he didn't dare signal to them. They were out searching for submarines, and to show lights would only give the whole thing away. He couldn't take a chance on sending up a rocket or tooting his whistle, for secrecy is everything. So he just laid a course the way he thought he ought to steer and kept it up hell bent all night.

Just after daylight he discovered that he was off the Belgian coast, having crossed the channel. As the early morning mist lifted he sighted a big vessel astern flying the German flag. She didn't look like a regular warship—more like a converted yacht—but she mounted one gun forward, and C. could see others aft.

He had a regulation three inch piece himself.

"Well, boys," he said to his crew, "we may be rotten navigators, but we don't need to know navigation to give that tub a fight. What do you say?"

There was only about one chance in a hundred that any of them would come out of the scrap alive, and C. didn't like to order his men into it. The M. L. was so fast she could have run, but the crew was game, so C. put about and began to loop around in order to cross her bows, thinking to cut loose a few raking shots into the craft.

The gun was loaded and ready to fire, and C. was only waiting for what he thought was the best position before giving the order to shoot.

"We ought to fly our flag if we're going into battle," suggested some one in the crew.

"By Jove, you're right," C. agreed, and in a jiffy the British ensign was run up at the M. L.'s stern.

Like a shot the German flag at the stern of the war vessel came down, and the Union Jack took its place. Simultaneously from the masthead the stranger broke out a private British navy signal, and C. replied.

He had come within an ace of firing into one of his own vessels which had been flying the German flag in order to decoy any German craft that might

He Sighted a Big Vessel Astern Flying the German Flag.

sight her. It shows, though, that the Sea Slugs are ready to go into action any time and that they don't have to have the odds in their favor either.

A Matter of Luck.

As I said before, the catching of a submarine and its destruction is greatly a matter of luck. Sometimes the M. L.'s cruise around for days without seeing one, and then perhaps a U boat will pop to the surface within a couple of hundred yards. The most important adjunct to luck is an all seeing eye. One never knows where the periscope is going to stick out above the surface, and you must be ready at any second to make it out at any point of the compass.

Just how many submarines were "got" while I was in England I am not at liberty to say, but I can go on record as stating that they are not easy to get, and the captives are fewer than generally supposed. A vast number of units are necessary to combat them with any degree of success. Besides being invisible almost at will, the submarines are manned by men of nerve.

The idea prevalent among some people that submarine crews are more or less only sneaks, who strike in the dark or when there is no danger for themselves, should be dispelled. The submarines are operated by men who fear death not at all and who sometimes take staggering chances. If the British develop one trick that bags a single submarine they consider it a success. News of English ruses spreads rapidly in the under water gossip.

U boats have run in a few scant miles from shore and sunk all sorts of craft, and they have even tackled destroyers. The British had some very sad experiences in sending destroyers on rescue work, after which they used the M. L.'s for this purpose. These make smaller torpedo targets. The Germans are supposed not to risk U boats unduly; but, believe me, they do.

I talked with the chief engineer and one of the crew of a British sugar ship from the West Indies who had been rescued after being torpedoed.

"We were just making Havre," said the engineer, "and we were mighty glad to get in. The day was remarkably clear, and the water was oily smooth. We were so close to land we didn't think there was a chance of anything attacking us when just at 1 o'clock in the afternoon a submarine appeared off our port bow and signaled us to stop.

"We were armed with a 4.7 gun on our stern and had navy gunners on board, so instead of obeying we turned sharply to starboard to present as small a target as possible for a torpedo and opened fire.

"The first two shots fell short, and the third went over the U boat. The way some people talk you would have expected the submarine to run away. She didn't do anything of the kind. She opened up on us with a gun that must have been at least a three inch piece, and the second shot hit one of our gun mounts.

"One man disappeared—actually disappeared. Either he was knocked into the sea and sank, or he must have been literally blown to pieces. Another poor fellow was killed—just about torn in two—and two other men were put out cold. The captain had to stop then, because there was nothing left to fight with.

"We were so near port that the firing must have been heard, and it was almost certain something would come out to investigate, but the U boat went about finishing the job very methodically.

"The German commander ordered us into our boats. While we were lowering away he signaled the captain and the chief engineer, myself, to come alongside the U boat. The first thing he did was to have our wounded brought aboard, and his surgeon attended to them. Then he used our boat to send men over and place bombs in the ship to blow her up.

"As the day was drawing to a close, it was becoming colder, and, seeing that the men had not brought coats with them, the German commander gave us all sweaters and towed us toward shore for half an hour or so. Three destroyers passed out, but they were so far away that the U boat simply submerged until she was awash, and they never saw a thing. It was almost sunset when she finally disappeared after maneuvering around as though playing like a porpoise at sunset almost within range of shore batteries."

The story of this armed merchantman shows that simply placing guns on steamships is not going to protect them against submarines. There has got to be a sort of craft to fight them on something like equal terms, and the swift, seaworthy, low lying M. L.'s seem to be the ones to do it. But great numbers of them are needed, and great numbers of trained men are needed to operate them.

Song of the Sea Slugs.

The Sea Slugs in England sing a song which pretty well covers everything in the line of their life and duty. Some of the verses were written by one man, some by another. The one referring to Uncle Sam is my own and will be understood when I say that the first M. L.'s were built in America and that the British took some time to learn just how to use them:

Sing me a song of a frail M. L.
(Lord, have mercy upon us!)
Rolling about on an oily swell
(Lord, have mercy upon us!)
Out on a highly explosive spree,
Petrol, lyddite and T. N. T.,
Looking for U boat 3 3 3.
(O Lord, have mercy upon us!)

Sing me a song of a bold young "loot"
(Lord, have mercy upon us!),
Skillful mariner and nut to boot.
(Lord, have mercy upon us!)
So ship the cable and heave the lead,
Hard a-starboard and full ahead.
The detonators are in my bed.
(Lord, have mercy upon us!)

Sing me a song of a smart young "sub"
(Lord, have mercy upon us!),
An insubordinate, half trained cub.
(Lord, have mercy upon us!)
Of the king's regulations I know not one.
I have left undone what I should have done.
But, oh, my aunt, when I fire that gun!
(Lord, have mercy upon us!)

Sing me a song of C. M. B.
(Lord, have mercy upon us!),
Bred in a garage and sent to sea.
(Lord, have mercy upon us!),
Taken away from the motor trade,
Seasick and sorry, sore, dismayed,
But a h— of a nut on the "grand parade."
(Lord, have mercy upon us!)

Sing me a song of Uncle Sam
(Lord, have mercy upon us!);
Built five hundred and don't care a d—n.
(Lord, have mercy upon us!)
Nobody knows what they built them for.
Every one prays that they'll build no more.
But such are the horrors of "bloody war."
(Lord, have mercy upon us!)

Sing me a song of a North sea base
(O Lord, have mercy upon us!),
A dirty, forgotten, one horse place.
(Lord, have mercy upon us!)
When the wind blows west, how brave we are!
When the wind blows east, it's different, far.
You'll find us safe in the "harbor bar."
(Lord, have mercy upon us!)

As one may gather from the song, many of the Sea Slugs were formerly chauffeurs, and, although the M. L.'s

The German Commander Ordered Us Into Our Boats.

use gasoline for fuel, there is some difference between navigating one of them and an automobile.

Sitting Over a Volcano.

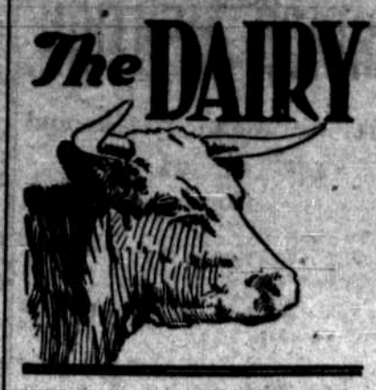
The "detonators under the bed" is literal. There isn't overmuch room on an M. L., and about the only place to keep the detonators is under the bunks. These little craft carry sufficient explosives to blow up several first class warships, and if you want to know how it feels to sit over a volcano with the lid about to be blown off you want to ride in one of them, especially when somebody begins potting at you with shells that may blow up every ounce of ammunition you've got on board any minute.

The third article of this series will appear soon. It is entitled

No. 3.—A Motor Launch Raid on the Belgian Coast.

In which the little submarine chasers crossed the mine fields by night, fired on the German gunboats and land batteries and escaped across the mine fields once more. How the British monitors, which are named after American generals, bombarded the German coast until the Germans devised a method of locating them even though the fog was so thick they could not see them.

The DAIRY



UTENSILS FOR FARM BUTTER

Shotgun Can Is Much Preferred to Crocks and Other Styles of Vessels Used.

(Prepared by the United States Department of Agriculture.)

The following equipment is needed for butter making on the farm:

1. Milk Pails—They should be of the type commonly known as covered-top, should be heavily tinned, and have all seams flushed with solder so that they can be cleaned easily.

2. Cream Separator—Any make is satisfactory if it skims clean and can be thoroughly cleaned and sterilized.

3. Shotgun Cans—As a cream container the style of can known as the "shotgun can" is much to be preferred to crocks and many other types of cans and pails commonly used. This can usually measures about 8½ inches in diameter and 20 inches high. These cans are easily handled, covered, and cleaned.

4. Cream-Cooling Tank—Where there is an abundance of cold water any tank, properly used, will be effective. In very warm climates or where

Working the Butter.

cold water cannot be run through the tank several times daily, or where ice is used, it is advisable to use an insulated tank.

5. Churn—The barrel type of churn is simple, inexpensive, easy to operate, and easily cleaned.

6. Butterworker—The lever and the table butterworkers are very satisfactory. The former is simpler and less expensive. When making large quantities of butter a table worker or combined churn and worker is frequently used.

7. Thermometer—A floating dairy thermometer should be used.

8. Cream and Buttermilk Strainer—A strainer similar to a colander or a strainer dipper is frequently used for straining both the cream and buttermilk. A hair sieve is sometimes used as a buttermilk strainer because butter does not stick to it as it does to tinware.

9. Cream-Stirring Rod—A rod with a four or five-inch disk on one end is more effective in stirring cream than a spoon or other implement. Stirring rods should be well tinned and smooth so that they may be cleaned easily.

10. Wooden paddle.
11. Wooden ladle.
12. Tin pails.
13. Half gallon tin dipper.
14. Hand butter printer.
15. Scrub Brush—A stiff fiber brush is preferable to one with soft bristles.

TAKING CARE OF SEPARATOR

Machine Should Be Cleaned Thoroughly Immediately After Each Time It Is Used.

(Prepared by the United States Department of Agriculture.)

Like all other milk utensils, the separator should be cleaned thoroughly immediately after each time it is used. Merely flushing the bowl with warm water after use and taking it apart for washing but once a day is a filthy practice and must be condemned. All parts of the separator bowl, together with the other tinware, should first be rinsed with lukewarm water, then thoroughly scrubbed with a brush in warm water in which washing powder has been dissolved. Soap or soap powder are liable to leave a soapy film on the utensils and should not be used. Soda ash or one of the commercial dairy cleansing powders is satisfactory, as either is easily rinsed off. The utensils should then be sterilized by means of the farm steriliser or boiled for five minutes.