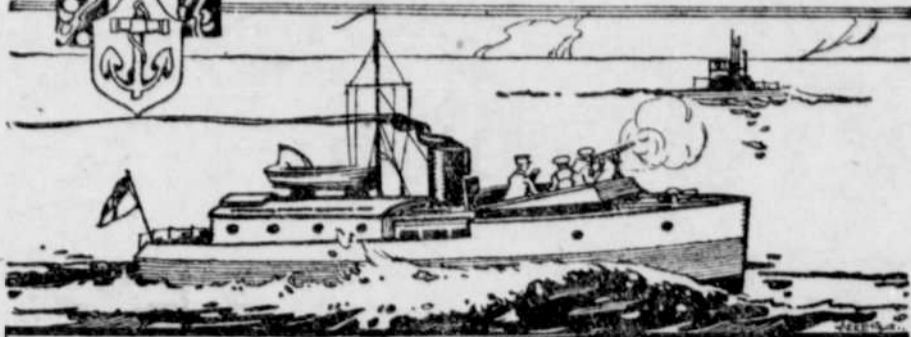


SEA SLUG STORIES



Thrilling Tales of U Boat Hunting, Told by an American Boy Who Served For Months With the British Patrol and Who Did the Thrilling and Perilous Work That Is Now Being Done by Hundreds of Other American Boys.

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 palmed 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 recently. "My boat jumped 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 fall 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 fall 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

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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 non-combatant 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 aero-



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

plane 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.

"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 wobbles. 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 sometime 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 overboard, 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

Continued on last page.

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