On Board a Battleship

Intimate View of the Life of a Community of One Thousand Souls

By Captain Albert Gleaves, Commanding U. S. Battleship "North Dakota"

LIFE on board ship is but little understood by the general, and the ways of the service, if not past finding out, are a closed book to the majority of our fellow citizens. A more intimate contact between the people of the service and commercial people would benefit both, with the result that there would be less apprehension for the pocket-book when battleships are proposed, and less talk of the Angel of Peace hanging his head at the sight of a Building Program. On the contrary, if the Navy and the people knew each other better, the "sober citizen" would realize from personal knowledge that he is paying only a trifling insurance on his property for a very real and substantial protection, and the Angel of Peace, instead of protesting, would preen his wings for higher flights and chant the ringing notes of an *Io triumphe* as he soared.

Although the Atlantic fleet of twenty to twenty-five capital ships, and its accompanying auxiliaries, such as colliers, supply and store ships, and repair ships, represent an enormous outlay of public funds, the sum is insignificant when compared with the almost fabulous wealth that it protects, and the security that it affords. Some one who has a genius for statistics estimates the money value of every enlisted man as \$5,000, and places the value of the fleet at 300 millions. If a committee of citizens from all parts of the country could visit the fleet on the Southern Drill Grounds, when the ships are cleared for action and just as prepared to engage an enemy as they are to shoot up an irresponsible and insensate target, it would require no argument to prove the need of a navy, nor many arguments to demonstrate the absolute necessity of definite expansion in order to maintain a *sufficient* one. That task, however, is for others. The object of this article is to give some idea to the layman of the *vic intime* on board a battleship in the fleet, how the men live and what they do.

Due to perspective the first view of a battleship may be disappointing. She will probably not appear as big as she has been described; but, once on board, this delusion vanishes. She is a master piece of man's cunning and ingenuity that excites enthusiasm; but she must be studied much and long before she is fully comprehended. Viewed from the taffrail, looking forward and upward, there is nothing more impressive of the majesty and power of a ship. The eye catches, in one glance, the armored turrets, the searchlight towers, the broad-bellied funnels, the ponderous cranes, and towering above all, those prodigies of naval construction the lattice masts—the very latest thing in battleships—called by our sailors "haystacks," and by the English "scrap-baskets."

Each turret with its pair of 12-inch guns weighs about seven hundred tons, but in spite of the inertia of this mass, it is so nicely balanced that the guns can be laid to a hair's breadth on the target, and with no more physical effort than is required to turn a wheel or move a lever. The guns fire a shell of 870 pounds with a powder charge of 340, and they can be loaded, aimed and fired every thirty seconds, and with such marvelous accuracy and precision, that at a range of five miles, they can make twenty per cent of hits on the target, which at that distance appears in the telescope of the gun no bigger than an open umbrella.

A battleship comprises a community of approximately one thousand souls, in which a centralized and autocratic government prevails. The division of labor, exercises and drills, the rules that govern the hours of eating, sleeping and recreation, are the last words in routine and organization. Every man has his place and number, and there is not an article on board, from a torpedo to a water breaker, that has not its allotted space. Order and system are paramount, and the very atmosphere breathes of discipline. At no time is this so apparent as in an emergency; at every signal of danger, whether it be of fire, collision or man overboard, every man instantly jumps to his station, with a perfect knowledge of what is expected of him;

but until he gets there, he doesn't know whether it is the real thing or a drill.

The head of this community of sea-people is, of course, the captain. In battle his station is in the conning tower, and under his hand are all the latent Titanic forces of powder, gun-cotton and steam, which may be released only at his bidding. In matters of administration he is judge and jury, and daily at the mast the delinquents are brought before him; he listens to the evidence, and there is no law's delay in his judgments. He messes alone, and his life for the most part is a solitary one. A wise captain will not burden himself unnecessarily; if he would be happy, he must apply to his duties what the Romans used to say of the Praetor, *de minimis non curat*, leaving to others "the mere rude explicit details."

The wardroom mess is presided over by the commander or executive officer, and is composed of the staff officers and the lieutenants. And merry times they have when the rigid discipline of the day's work gives place to post-prandial relaxation of the evening. Then there are the junior officers' mess composed of midshipmen, and also the mess composed of warrant officers, those men of the rank and file who by faith-

plant. Every battleship has a branch post-office in charge of sailors appointed by the captain, which is under the same postal regulations that govern the shore stations. A complete telephone system connects all parts of the ship, and is supplemented by voice pipe communication, which is used principally in action. There is also a wireless installation, and officers as well as the operators are encouraged to become proficient in its use.

Those who are concerned especially for the moral welfare of the men will be interested in the "brig" as sailors call the prison, and they will perhaps be surprised at the spacious, not to say comfortable *pointe d'arret* of those who violate the Articles for the Better Government of the Navy. Down below the gun deck are the berth deck spaces, and still farther below are innumerable storerooms, the magazines and torpedo room, ammunition passages and dynamo rooms.

The pay of the men varies from twenty to one hundred and fifteen dollars per month, depending upon the rate, length of service and conduct. Those who wish to save their money may deposit it in the bank with the paymaster, and the government pays four per cent interest. As the term of enlistment is for four years, it is not difficult for a man to save as much as fifty or sixty per cent of his pay during his cruise.

On Sundays after inspection, the bugler sounds the church call, and the church pennant, a blue cross on a white triangle, is hoisted *above* the national colors. Attendance at church is of course not compulsory, but in the words of the Articles of War, "it is earnestly recommended to all officers, seamen and others in the naval service diligently to attend at every performance of the worship of Almighty God." The altar is rigged below decks, and apprentices selected from the Catholic lads act as acolytes, the priest in his vestments conducts the services with all the rites of bell, book and candle, as if on shore. A large percentage of the crew are usually Roman Catholics, and so the temporary church is always crowded.

Of course the whole idea of a ship and its reason for being is to fight, and until a captain can feel that his ship is ready at all times for battle, his task remains incomplete. The nearest approach to action at present is the semi-annual target practice,

and the rivalries of the Derby and the Ascot are as nothing compared with the competition between ships for the coveted gunnery pennant and the bronze trophy, that Ark of the Covenant which is the final *cachet* of efficiency and achievement. During the period of preparation immediately preceding the practice, when "days are full of labor and nights devoid of ease," and everybody is under a strain like that of the first public speech, one hears nothing in the mess rooms and about the decks but discussion and arguments relating to "hits per gun per minute," this or that system of fire-control, and the latest suggestions for "plotting and tracking." The ships lose their smart appearance, for there is no time for the paint brush and the holy-stone; men and officers are rarely out of dungarees; they live in the turrets, working day and night to perfect the adjustment of every detail of the mechanism for loading, training and firing. When the day arrives for which the months before have been a training, the ship is cleared for action, and stripped of all superfluous articles until she looks as sleek as a race horse clean groomed from the paddock. The scheme, generally speaking, is this: The ship steams to the firing line far away from the target, then rounds to, and makes the "approach" at full speed. When she comes within range, fire is opened at the target, which looks like a blur in the haze. If a division of four ships are engaging a string of targets towed in tandem, it is a sight never to be forgotten. Broadside follows broadside with astonishing rapidity; the thunder of the guns is deafening and would be absolutely destructive to the ear drums, were it not for ear protectors. The people in the turrets and in the conning tower experience no inconvenience from

Of this most effective corps, each battleship carries two officers and sixty to seventy men.

THE MARINES

ful service have become gunners, boatswains and machinists. Cheeks and Chips as described by Marrayat are as dead as Henry IV. The old stories of the wind jammers have passed into oblivion, and the service to-day is unconsciously working out new traditions that will be handed down to the coming generation of sea folk.

Forward of the mast there is a big household, which requires \$75,000 per month to care for, clothe and feed in their ten-million-dollar home. Nearly all trades are represented in this little kingdom of the sea: Tailors, shoemakers, photographers, jewelers, barbers, and musicians; for the most part a man is allowed to ply his trade so long as there is no interference with his military duties. Regular prices are established by the captain, and as there is no competition, each has a large *clientele*. The galleys have the best possible system of cooking, supplemented with electric potato peelers, electric meat choppers and electric dish washers. The bakery provides bread at all times instead of hard-tack, which was formerly supplied, and furnishes seven hundred loaves daily; there is a laundry, which has a fine equipment of machines run by electricity, and is handled by sailors who are excused from all other work except battle and fire stations; a cold storage with a capacity for provisions for one month for the entire ship's company, and a hospital or sick-bay, well lighted and well ventilated, which is located in a comfortable part of the ship. The hospital contains a sick ward proper with bunks for a score of patients, the isolation ward and the operating room. The last is fitted with every convenience known to modern practice, including an adjustable operating table and a sterilizing

this cause, but out on the deck in the open, the shock is tremendous, so much so that a broadside of ten guns heels a 20,000-ton ship four degrees. When the firing begins, hot blasts from the guns flick the air, a flame-slitted reddish brown smoke spurts in thick clouds from their "rude throats," but dissipates almost instantly, and the air is filled with the pungent odors of burnt gases. The spotters aloft watch anxiously for the geyser-like splashes, that show where the shot struck, and the sight-bar ranges are quickly changed until the gun-pointers are "on."

There are other drills and many of them; abandon ship, fire, and collision, signals and boats, and in addition there is the never-ending work of the care and upkeep of the ship, which must go on constantly.

But besides being sailormen by profession, the bluejackets are given something more than an elementary instruction in soldiering; they drill as companies, regiments and brigades; they make practice marches, and when occasion offers they go into camp as at Guantanamo.

But it is not all work on board ships; there is some beer and skittles. The routine keeps every one busy pretty much all the time; still there are intervals between drills, and on certain afternoons, when there are no drills at all and the men may smoke and mend their clothes, or get down to their ditty boxes, and spend an hour or so with old letters and photographs. Smokers are a feature of life on board, and there is nothing like the quarter deck of a battleship for the *mise en scene* of a wrestling bout, a boxing match, a song and dance, juggling, slack wire performance, or any other stunts for which there is ample talent in a crew of one thousand men. Then the tops of the turrets are crowded with the bleachers, and officers and crew gather together around the improvised ring. Usually the athletic officer or the chaplain is the master of the revels. It is astonishing how much genuine talent is found in a ship's company, and the artists are always ready to contribute to the entertainment of their shipmates.

In the evening after supper when the band plays, the men dance and sing or gather around the turrets and "gam" until nine o'clock, when it is pipe down and all hands must turn in. Sometimes there are moving picture shows on the quarter deck; the films are all carefully selected, and as each ship passes hers to the next, there is a great variety in the fleet. Those of dramatic and romantic character are the most popular, and always draw rounds of applause. Recently on one ship, when thirty miles at sea, butterflies blown off by the land breeze had fluttered around the ridge-ropes and life-lines all day; but the finishing home touch was given at night, during one of the moving picture shows, by the chirping of a cricket hidden somewhere in the cork fenders.

Very little of the old navy is left in the new, either in equipment, manners or customs. There is even a new terminology. The bow-legged type of sailor with coppery nose, groggy eyes and a

collar of whiskers around his face, survives only in the penny-dreadfuls and comic operas. He has given place to bright-eyed lads, lean in the flank, well groomed, quick and ready to meet any emergency. It is worth noting that the average age of the ship's company is less than 25 years. The man-of-war's man of

was no instance where they did not return to their ships, and for the most part on time. The appearance of our men drew forth from an English writer a sneering article commenting on their lankness, lack of physique, and, tell it not in Gath, in some special cases, their kid gloves and eye glasses. A French artist in

Paris was not more complimentary in his cartoons. However, it is good to see ourselves as others see us, and as we are not responsible for foreign spectacles we may afford to be amused. There is another point. The Honorable Herbert Satterlee recently referred to the United States Navy as the Great American University. The comparison is apt and just. It is a university whose students number 48,000 youths and men from all parts of the country. This ocean university costs the Government 130 millions annually, but in it is taught that which above all things is the corner stone of every great nation, respect and obedience to constituted authority. The hundreds of sailors who yearly leave the navy with honorable discharges, and go out in every-day life become—it may be unconsciously—missionaries for the service. They return to their people with the story of those who "live between sea and cloud," who pursue

their occasions on the sea in craft as different from the ships of yesterday as the ark differed from the Navy of Tarshish. In time their knowledge of the service will spread, and gradually the people will come to have as much pride in their navy as the British people have in theirs; and when that time comes there will be no fear or apprehension as to our future security on the seas. For those who believe that the navy as it is to-day, is all that the nation requires, it will be well to recall what Emerson said of our civilization: "We think it near its meridian; but we are yet only at the cock-crowing and the morning star."

The Cooling of Ammunition Rooms

THE unparalleled catastrophe by which the French battleship "Liberté" was sunk has brought the question of the temperature of the ammunition rooms once more into prominence. The report of Vice-Admiral Bellue upon the temperature of the ammunition rooms of the battleship "Jules-Michelet" during the period from April to October has now been published. The Minister of the Navy considers that the temperature of 30 deg. Cent. at which the powder remained in some of the rooms is altogether too high. The temperature is now to be kept below 25 deg. Cent. Upon some of the battleships, such as the "Danton" and "Voltaire," the Leblanc refrigerating system, which was installed, has been giving very good results.

In view of the tragic results which may follow from the deterioration of modern smokeless powders, it is gratifying to remember that our own naval powder has shown a marked stability, and that our own methods of cooling and ventilating the ammunition rooms are giving satisfaction.

The complement of our latest battleships is one thousand and officers and men of whom the greater part are seamen.

THE SEAMEN

to-day is a self-respecting, intelligent citizen (only about four per cent are aliens) who reflects credit on the flag wherever he may go. In the cruise of the Atlantic fleet to Europe last winter, 12,000 men visited London and Paris, and there were only a few instances of serious misconduct, and although leave was granted to visit Norway, Sweden, Germany and Ireland, there

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This remarkable photograph, taken from the bow of the "Connecticut," shows only one-third of the total complement of 980 officers and men. Admiral Osterhaus, commander-in-chief of the Atlantic fleet, is the central figure in the second line.

ON THE FO'CAS'LE DECK OF THE U. S. FLAGSHIP "CONNECTICUT"