

# Merchant Ships and Yankee Gunners

Thrilling Battles With U-Boats Revealed by Records of the Navy Department

By RALPH D. PAINE.

IF AMERICAN armed merchant ships really sinking any German submarines? If you care to believe the waterside rumors and fo'castle yarns, one of these devilish marauders is rammed or blown up on every voyage across the Atlantic. In saloons where merchant seamen seek haven and pound the bar with hairy fists strong liquors magnify the tales, and one concludes that the Kaiser's undersea fleet must be wiped out by now. The navy's records are less fanciful, strictly adhering to the motto of the man from Missouri.

Here is the account of an action fought by a cargo steamer which leaves no room for doubt that one very busy U-boat was suddenly removed from the active list of the Imperial German navy. It is advisable to omit the name of the chief boat-swain's mate who commanded the gun crews. He was promoted to warrant rank as a reward for the feat and is now stationed ashore, but he may go to sea again in charge of another lot of gunners, and if he should be taken prisoner the enemy would not love him for what he did to a missing submarine. In his official report he states:

"Weather hazy. Saw a submarine firing on a topsail schooner, which shortly after blew up. Changed course to bring the submarine on our starboard beam about 5,000 yards distant and lost sight of her in haze. Continued on this course for two hours and then resumed our original course. At 2:55 p. m. the submarine appeared out of the haze at 2,500 yards on our starboard beam. She immediately opened fire. We changed course to bring her three points to the starboard quarter and returned the fire.

"The engagement lasted 35 minutes, during which time the submarine fired about 40 shots, scoring one hit under our port counter a foot from the water, and causing a leak. We fired 27 shots. The twenty-sixth shot was seen to hit her just forward of the forward gun, and a cloud of flame and dark gray smoke burst from the hatches. The crew of the submarine left the gun and ran aft. Almost instantly the submarine sank bow first, the stern lifting high out of the water, so that the propellers could be seen revolving. The steamer was leaking and temporary repairs were made by the crew."

When the ship reached her foreign port of destination and reported the victory an official inquiry was ordered by the French government. A naval lieutenant conducted it with great care and confirmed the verdict of the American gunners. The steamer fought with the American flag flying, he stated in his written opinion, firing 27 shots in half an hour. The distance increased about 100 meters for each shot. The twenty-sixth shot exploded, producing a thick black smoke, which was visible to all on shipboard. Such an explosion must have been produced in the submarine itself. He said, in summing up the evidence:

"The result of the inquiry is that the fight has been very well conducted and that the men have shown a very fine spirit, doing honor to the American navy. The conclusion may be drawn that the submarine was hit and probably sunk."

This was first-class shooting, the submarine steadily drawing away until when struck she was 5,000 yards, and more, or three land miles from the steamer. Binoculars and telescope sights enabled the gunners to distinguish her with clearness and to note the effects of the shell which ended her wretched career. It was her commander's intention to move beyond range and continue the action on the chance that he had the bigger guns, but he miscalculated, and paid the price.

It seemed a cruel slant of fortune that this American steamer, which so brilliantly bagged a submarine, should have accidentally burned at sea on her next voyage. There was no time to stretch hose or muster the crew. A blaze in an instant, she was one vast furnace while the men raced for the boats with death at their heels. All hands got away, including the navy gunners, and their cruise in open boats was made without severe suffering. It was all in the day's work.

Very similar to this successful encounter was the adventure of the steamer Silver Shell. In this instance also the French ministry of marine added its opinion that the submarine had probably been hit and sunk. The chief gunner won promotion shortly after this statement was issued by Secretary Daniels:

"William J. Clark of New York, chief turret captain and commander of the naval gun crew of the Silver Shell, is deserving of promotion, which we are now considering. All the other members of the crew, as well, and what they have done, deserve great credit and distinction. The chief turret captain is a very capable man. He is an enlisted man who has seen nearly 12 years of service in the navy and has won successive promotions by proven capacity. For his work he deserves the very best that can be done for him."

Here was a man fit and ready for his job, and he knew how to put his own spirit and experience into the team play of his gunners. An American naval officer of high rank detached on special duty at a French post conducted an inquiry and found pleasure in writing to Washington that "the master of the Silver Shell was particularly enthusiastic over the splendid work of the turret captain and the entire naval gun crew; he also states that his

whole crew displayed a most commendable spirit during the battle."

This is precisely as it should be, bluejackets and merchant seamen standing together, fighting the enemy as one intrepid American crew, and the Stars and Stripes hoisted at the first shot by order of the skipper. Chief Gunner Clark had the honor to report to the navy department:

"As the submarine displayed no flag and was coming nearer, we fired a shot. The submarine, which was then about 7,000 yards away, replied immediately with what seemed to me, on account of the range, a six-inch gun. Her first shot fell amidships about 100 yards short. We changed our course due west, increasing speed. The submarine followed us, keeping up fire. The fight lasted from 6 o'clock until about 7:30 p. m. We fired 25 shots. The submarine fired over 30, including some shrapnel toward the end, which exploded astern of our ship too high to do any damage.

"Our last two shells seem to have hit the submarine in the forward part. A few seconds later her bow jumped up, and she went down, stern upward at an angle of about 45 degrees. The submarine did not come up again, and I believe it was sunk then and there. No damage was done to our ship, and there were no casualties."

The steamer was still within effective range of the big guns of the submarine, which could have had no other reason than a sudden attack of acute illness for vanishing in this abrupt manner. It seems fairly conclusive that a shell blew her partly out of water, and then she went lunging and foundering into the depths. The steamer did not stop to search for traces of the disaster, but sensibly continued along on her course. Tankers filled with millions of gallons of gasoline do not linger in the war zone.

The American passenger liners, maintaining their service almost as regularly as in time of peace, would naturally run the gauntlet much oftener than the same number of cargo boats. They sail on an express schedule and spend little time in port. It is no secret that they are fast and well armed, able to whip a submarine in a fight with guns. The deadly torpedo is another matter, but speed has so far been a saving factor. It is what the gunners on board call "the sporty life," nor can it be recommended to people with nervous systems as a restful vocation. For example, one of these liners, during the first six months of war, made only one perfectly tame and routine voyage. During all her other trips across there were fights with submarines or escapes from torpedoes.

Extracts from the navy department's reports of these stemmers may be chosen almost at random as interesting reading with a thrill in it. These are fair samples of what it means to make the Atlantic voyage, which is no longer a commonplace, soothing "ocean ferry."

"The lookout in the lower crow's nest, a coxswain of the naval guard, picked up an oil slick ahead, which veered off to port at right angles to the ship's course. Following the slick, which was about the width of a ship, he suddenly saw the periscope of a submarine appear at the end of it, about one foot out of the water. He instantly sung out, 'Periscope,' and the next moment, 'Torpedo,' for the submarine had been exposed scarcely more than a second when she fired a torpedo. The enemy was then about 900 yards from the ship and three-fourths point forward of the beam.

"The torpedo was running straight, but apparently having trouble in maintaining its depth, for when about 200 yards off I saw a streak, then at a depth of about five feet. It dived and passed under the ship about 30 feet from the stern. Soon after heading away from the submarine we picked up an abandoned lifeboat two points off the starboard bow. The submarine had apparently been lying near the life boat, and on seeing us approach had headed off to assume a position for attack on our port side, probably expecting us to pick up the lifeboat and thus miss seeing him. Fortunately, however, the oil slick was sighted first.

"The old hands among the gunners paid no attention to the torpedo, which was coming right for them, but made every effort to get the guns on the target, which was the submarine's periscope."

What might be called a close shave befell another steamer on the return voyage.

"There were several other ships in the vicinity," runs the report, "including two tankers and a destroyer and two or three tramps. Suddenly a periscope was sighted a quarter of a mile away, showing up plainly in the streak of moonlight on the water. The submarine seemed to be just coming up and had probably misjudged the speed of the steamer, having seen her some time earlier. Before a torpedo could be fired or the guns manned, the steamer was right on top of the submarine, which submerged. The chief officer threw the helm hard over and went straight for him, hoping

to ram him. But no shock was felt when the ship passed over the spot, so in all probability the submarine was able to dive deep enough to escape being hit."

There was precious little room to spare in this adventure, but it was surpassed by a liner, formerly a favorite ship among Atlantic pilgrims, now carrying cargoes to the allies. A blanket of fog covered the sea in the early morning. It lifted a trifle, and a very much surprised submarine popped up dead ahead of the lunging prow. She let fly a torpedo in a wild flurry, at the steamer's side with out exploding. A moment later the submarine itself went bumping and scraping along the other side of the vessel, whose officers, sailors, and gunners stared straight down at it and uttered the deep and hearty curses of the sea. They would have swapped their souls for a few bombs to drop in remembrance. Grimy stokers poked their heads through the open ports and spat at the conning tower, or passionately scrambled for lumps of coal and slice bars to heave at the blankety-blank thing. Then the fog swallowed it up and the incident was closed.

For hard fighting and the dogged courage that we rightly ascribe to the men of the American navy, the story of the Moren and Chief Petty Officer Andrew Copassaki, commanding the armed guard, is one of those which shines undimmed in defeat. German sailors cheered him and his men from the deck of a submarine when he finished with his ship on fire and a cargo of gasoline about to blow him to Kingdom come. He was made a warrant officer for devotion to duty and determination to fight as long as she floated. A summary of his report to the navy department was given out shortly after it was received.

For wanton brutality there is the report of the loss of the American schooner Childe Harold off the French coast. Unadorned, the episode is thus described:

"At daybreak an object reported by the mate was believed to be the square sails of a ship hull down. The glasses showed it to be the superstructure of a submarine one mile away. (The Childe Harold was unarmed.) The submarine opened fire, and the shells ripped through the schooner's hull and sails. The master ordered the crew into the motorlaunch and lowered away. This was plainly visible to the submarine, which had come much nearer. She continued to fire, however, evidently at the boat in the water, which escaped being hit. The captain and his crew were ordered aboard the submarine and noticed that the cap ribbons of the sailors bore the letter 'U-17' and 'U-17.' Two of the officers spoke excellent English, and Captain Byrne of the schooner informed them that the firing was totally unnecessary and that he had not expected such dastardly treatment from any white men.

"The conversation developed the fact that the commander of the submarine knew the date of sailing of the Childe Harold from an American port and was on the lookout for her. He had also received information of the departure of the four-master Alcha B. Crosby and the three-master A. V. Sherman on the same date, all three vessels having passed out to sea together. He wanted to know where the other schooners were. According to his schedule they should have shown up by this time.

"The Germans looted the Childe Harold and seemed very hungry. They had only coffee and dry bread for breakfast aboard the submarine. After fetching all the stores in the launch, they put the captain and his crew in the boat again, which was stove and half full of water. The schooner was set on fire. Her people were rescued by a steamer. Captain Byrne is anxious to try it again."

A robust American shipmaster, this skipper of the Childe Harold, who told the Germans to their faces what he thought of them and was eager to have another fling at it!

## AN ATOM A SMALL WORLD.

In a paper concerning the functions of the minute electrical charges in the chemical combination of atoms, delivered by Prof. William Albert Noyes of the University of Illinois, before the National academy at Washington, he said that for a century the atom was the ultima thule of smallness for scientists. Now they know that each atom is a complex system similar to our sun and its planets, that is, with a central body and from one to a hundred smaller bodies revolving around it. The differences between hydrogen, oxygen, iron, gold, radium, etc., are all in the electrical charge of the central nucleus and in the number and arrangement of these little satellites of their atoms.

## UNACCOMMODATING WELLS.

In the desert of western Australia there are wells which yield water only at night. Before the water begins to flow, weird hissing and the sound of rushing air may be heard. The phenomenon is believed to be due to a change in the form of the rocky channel through which the water flows, and to the extreme change in temperature between day and night which occurs in this region. The hissing is due to the escape of air before the advance of the water.—Popular Science Monthly.

## HOME TOWN HELPS

### MORE HOME GARDENS NEEDED

Necessity Will Be Greater Coming Year and Organization and Co-Operation Should Be Begun Now.

Co-operation has been suggested as a solution of many problems in farm production, and now J. T. Rosa, Jr., of the University of Missouri college of agriculture suggests co-operation as a means of reducing production cost for the vacant lot gardener. The average city gardener is not in position to plow and prepare a garden plot himself. Mr. Rosa suggests that a number of gardeners in a given neighborhood employ a man and team to prepare their gardens. In this way the expense can be divided among them and the man and team can be kept busy throughout the day. If the community garden movement is extensive enough men and teams may be hired by the day or week, and each gardener's plot can be fitted in turn. In this way the work can be done more cheaply than where such gardener hires his plot prepared by the job. A great deal of trouble can also be eliminated. Other advantages, such as purchasing fertilizers, manure, seeds, plants and other garden supplies can be had through co-operative effort.

Since the spring garden should be planned in the fall, Mr. Rosa suggests that organization be effected immediately. The advantages of fall plowing and fall manuring have been demonstrated. The work should be done while the weather permits.

Co-operation will also provide efficient means of marketing the surplus products. Mr. Rosa suggests that every town have an organization of this sort. If the project is not supported by some other civic organization, the municipal authorities, or some industrial concern, the community garden movement should be organized on an independent basis. If the movement is large enough a technically trained man or woman might be employed to superintend the work. This would be advisable only where the community garden plan was extensive and where the gardeners were well organized. While it may not be possible to organize the whole town, it is entirely possible for neighbors to obtain some of the benefits of the organization by co-operating in preparation of their garden plots. The necessity for home gardens will be greater than ever in 1918, and plans should be made immediately, so that the garden work will be more efficient and give better results during the coming season.

## WINTER STOPS THE INSECTS

Black Ground Beetles and Others Not Killed, But Merely Experience Suspended Animation.

With the coming of the frosts and freezing weather the insects are silenced, and as long as the temperature holds below 50 degrees Fahrenheit they are rendered also inactive, according to a writer. Above that the harder beetles and grasshoppers, along with a few spiders, are moving about, and when the sunshine warms the air more and more certain moths and butterflies and two-winged flies, including the gnats, are on the wing.

Some species of insects feel the effects of cold far less than others, and this does not seem to be influenced by sturdy bodies, hairy coverings or the situations in which they are found. The gnats are among the most fragile species, but they and the slim-bodied water striders are found active later in the autumn and earlier in the spring than any other creatures, excepting perhaps the mourning-cloak butterfly and the wasps, all of these creatures responding to the sunshine on the warmer, thawing days of winter. The black ground beetles also are quickly resuscitated by slightly warmer airs.

This proves the fact that most insects are not normally killed by cold, but merely experience suspended animation, and are ready to resume their activity after any length of time.

## Hidden Seas.

In boring for oil, it is a common experience for the drill to strike enormous flows of salt water. Formerly this salt water was supposed to be rain water, which soaked through beds of salt on its way down to some chasm in the bowels of the earth, says Rochester Union and Advertiser. The latest scientific opinion is inclined to believe that the salt water comes from prehistoric oceans, buried in the earth by geologic changes, in much the same way that buried forests gave rise to the coal beds. These hidden oceans are not conceived as lying in a subterranean space or hollow, but as filling the billions on billions of crevices in beds of porous rock.

## Petroleum From Shale Banks.

An important new process for extracting petroleum from the enormous banks of oil-bearing shale of certain western states is indicated in announcements from Nevada. Such a process if successful would help greatly in solving the gasoline problem. The new process, which is now being tested, was developed by a prisoner in the Nevada state prison. A special pardon was granted him to give him an opportunity to continue his chemical work.

## TWO DOLLAR WHEAT

This Price Will Hold For Some Years.

A well advised commercial authority gives it as his opinion, "in a slow, descent may be counted on in the prices for grain when the war ends—it may take several years to restore the world's stock of foodstuffs to normal—there is good ground for confidence in the outlook for rapid development in agriculture."

If this be correct, it follows that the profession of farming will materially increase its results in the next few years.

Today, the price of wheat is set by the United States government at \$2.24 per bushel, and in Canada the price has been set at \$2.21. This, of course, is less freight and handling charges which brings the average to the farmers at about \$2.00 per bushel. This price will pay so long as land, material and labor can be secured at reasonable prices. It remains for the would-be producer to ascertain when he can secure these at prices that will make the production of grain profitable. He will estimate what price he can afford to pay for land that will give him a yield of wheat which when set at \$2.00 per bushel, will return him a fair profit. Local and social conditions will also enter into the consideration. Finding what he wants he would be wise to make his purchases now. Land prices in some portions of the country are low, certainly as low as they will ever be. City property and town property will fluctuate, but farm property will hold its own. The price of grain is as low as it will be for some years. Therefore it would be well to look about, and find what can be done.

There are doubtless many opportunities in the United States, especially in the Western States, to purchase good agricultural lands, that will produce well, at reasonable prices. If the would-be buyer has the time to investigate, and that is needed, for those lands do not exist in any considerable area, he would be well repaid. Not only will his land certainly increase in value, the increased increment would be an asset—while under cultivation he can do nothing that will give better results. He will at the same time be performing a patriotic act, a needful act, one that would meet with the food controller's plea to increase agricultural production and assist in reducing the deficit of 75 million bushels of wheat reported by the controller.

In addition to the vacant lands in the United States which should be brought under cultivation, Western Canada offers today the greatest area of just the land that is required, and at low prices—prices that cannot last long. Even now land prices are increasing, as their value is daily becoming more apparent, and their location desirable.

As to the intrinsic value of land in Western Canada, hundreds of concrete cases could be cited, which go to prove that at fifty and sixty dollars per acre—figures that have recently been paid for improved farms—the crops grown on them gave a profit of from twenty to thirty per cent and even higher, on such an investment. One instance, is that of a young Englishman, unaccustomed to farming before he took his seat on the sulky plow with which he does most of his work, after allowing himself \$1,000 for his own wages last year, made a profit of \$2,200 on a \$20,000 investment. His total sales amounted to \$5,700 and his expense, which included the \$1,000 wages for himself, was \$3,500. The interest was 11 1/2 per cent.

To the man who does not care to buy or who has not the means to purchase, but possesses wealth in his own hardihood, his muscle, and determination, there are the thousands of free homesteads of which he may have the pick on paying an entry fee of ten dollars. These are high class lands and adapted to all kinds of farming. Send to your nearest Canadian Government Agent for literature, descriptive of the splendid opportunities that are still open in Western Canada. Adv.

## Safe.

Little Richard's mother took him for a visit to his grandparents. When bedtime approached he was instructed to kiss each of his relatives good-night. He hesitated when he came to his grandfather, who wore a long, heavy beard.

"Aren't you going to tell grandfather good-night, dear?" his mother asked. "No, mother, I can't," was the reply; "there isn't any place to tell him."

"They tell me Jones is dead." "Ah! That's probably why we see him so seldom."

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Resolve not to be poor; whatever your earn, spend less.—Dr. Johnson.

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