

HEROES of the TRANSPORT SERVICE

Glorious Story of American Sailors May Never Be Told

Many have told of the deeds of the destroyer men, for the exploits of those who drive the swift war boats to their double task of slaying and saving makes fine and joyous telling. To the credit of the killers of the U-boats and guardians of the convoy let it be said that a half of the splendid tale has not yet been told.

The men of the lean hunter craft are the pick of the navy and their ships come close to being the best in the world. They know it, their countrymen know it, and Fritz of the submarine is learning it to his own sorrow.

Much honor is also paid to the men of the grand fleet—the bluejackets who are waiting at some unnamed sea rendezvous for a chance to loose the destruction of their great guns upon the ships of Wilhelm, sea lord of the Kiel canal. These are our buckler, and our shield. They man the first line of the nation's defense. They are fighters, skilled in their appointed tasks, and eager for that battle that they believe cannot be so far off now.

No one tells of their brethren of the transport service. Only the brief official announcement gives their history, and this comes but rarely. Occasionally the powers at Washington lift the curtain of secrecy that hangs between our coast line and the Atlantic to announce that troops have been landed to an unmentioned number at an unnamed port in France. Only once so far has it named the ships that carried those troops.

To the average American mind the transports leave our shores and reach those of France, and that is all there is to it.

There is much more. Most of this probably will never be told. The endless chain of ships, most of them built in Germany, that carry men and supplies to the immediate rear of the war, and then return for more, have no history.

Yet the history is there, latent and waiting for birth. The fate of America's part in the war, perhaps the fate of the war itself, rests on the blue-jumpered shoulders of the transport men. Their business is not to fight, unless cornered. Their task is not to defend so much as to evade. They are responsible for the lives of thousands of temporarily helpless soldiers. They and their ship play a desperate game of tag, in which every U-boat the kaiser owns is "it" and they and their vessel the lone and unhappy taggee.

Day by day they come and day by day they go, and of their doings only the high lords of the navy know. Peril of storm and torpedo are theirs. Unrelaxed vigilance and eternal weariness are their duty. And they are doing their work. They are getting the men across. Up to the time this was written, no transport flying the Stars and Stripes and carrying her precious load of men and munitions to France has lost in her deadly game of tag. The Tuscania, it should be remembered, was a British ship.

That is what the men of the transport service, most of whom enlisted to fight and were chosen to run, are doing. How they are doing it is only a partly told tale, caught here and there from letters sent home from French ports by sailors, from descriptions of the trip over "Over There" recounted by soldiers, recovered from the terrible quailms of seasickness and filled with a new-found gratitude and admiration for their brothers in the navy blue who brought them safely across.

Let us call her the Ramapo, because that isn't her name. Let us say still further that she was formerly, before she hauled down the red, white and black and hoisted the Stars and Stripes, the Fuerst Adolph, which she wasn't, and one of the crack liners in the German merchant marine, which she was.

In the dusk of a winter afternoon she slipped down the river and out to sea, unobtrusive in her war paint. Several thousand troops were in the "troop spaces" below decks.

The troops were all kept below while the transport slowly slipped down the stream and the shores grew blurred behind her. Then her engines quickened. Her bow made its first courtesy to the ominous Atlantic swell, and she was on her way across. From now on, for day on day, a torpedo rightly placed might cause a greater loss than the attack of an army corps ashore.

Down in the troop spaces soldiers were singing to keep up their courage. In the quarters of a negro regiment at least a hundred crap games were already in progress. Up in the crew's nests lids only a few times at sea were already on the watch for submarines and seeing periscopes in every wave top.

That night, the storm hit them. All through the night, the section on watch had no time for peaceful thought. They progressed, puss-in-the-corner fashion across the heaving decks in the inky darkness, making fast davits that were wrenching free with the rolling, securing a hundred different objects that strove to burst away.

The phosphorescence of the wave tops was the only light they saw. Save for two or three exceptions there was absolutely no illumination on the boat.



Far up on the two masts, switching back and forth across the sky in great arcs, were the fore and main tops—the "crow's nests." In each of these four men were stationed—the eyes of the vessel. In a pent house at the foot of each mast dwelt the commanders of the fore and aft guns, in constant communication with the lookouts above.

Dawn broke over a thousand ranges of gray, rolling mountains. Behind the Ramapo, two other transports ducked and crashed through the waves. Before her the bulk of an armored cruiser showed now and again through the foam. Waves were breaking over her all the time. She plowed straight through. Sometimes to the men on the Ramapo it seemed as though only her funnels and masts were above the sea.

The first night, when the Ramapo behaved more like a drunken scrobbler than a stately ship, was merely the forerunner of worse things to come. All winter, storms have ranged up and down the sea lanes of the Atlantic. Calm days on the trip across are always a rarity in December, January and February. This year they have been unique.

There were windstorms when the vessel rolled in an arc of 82 degrees. There were days of ice when the spray froze wherever it struck and men came off watch, cased in mail. There were days of snow that lashed the lookouts' faces like whips. There were days of tremendous seas that reached up 60 feet from the water line to rip lifeboats from their davits.

There was little time free of hard work and no leisure for the seamen. To sleep one had to clutch the sides of his bunk, and usually when he relaxed as slumber overtook him, he fell out with a dismal crash.

Day and night, they fought the seas, making fast, repairing, defending their vessel against the unending assault of the waves.

A petty officer was going through the mess hall, progressing cautiously, never letting go of one stable object until he had grasped another, when his grip slipped. He was thrown the whole length of the hall, and was carried a limp piece of bloody wreckage to the sick bay.

They had to operate to save his life, the surgeon said. That in a storm that was making the Ramapo behave like an outlaw horse. But the navy cares for its own and they operated, and the man is still alive. The wind was from the north and was making the ship roll terribly. They turned her bow into the gale and faced into it for two hours, because the motion that way was easier.

The cruiser and her convoy passed on down over the horizon. The storm got worse. For two hours the Ramapo steamed slowly into its teeth, alone on the ocean, she and her thousands of men waiting, while in the operating room the surgeon balanced himself to the more regular plunge of the vessel and saved the man's life.

The ordeal of the never-ending series of storms was sufficient to try men's souls, occupied by other worry. But over the Ramapo hung another threat—the menace that envelops any vessel that faces out across the Atlantic.

"Watchful waiting"—the men of the Ramapo grew to know the true inward agony of the word. Always to watch. To stand for a four-hour watch in the crew's nest until your eyes ached from scanning the battling waves for the sight of the white periscope trail. To tread the deck, your ears ever strained for the dull boom below that might tell of a torpedo driven home. To sleep, with one-half of you wide awake, ready to jump to your appointed post while the vessel dropped swiftly away beneath your feet.

The thing got them. For the first day or so they talked and joked about it. Then into the talking came a note of defiance, as though each man were telling his fellows that he wasn't afraid. Then they stopped talking about it entirely.

Then one morning the section that awoke to the twitter of the boatswain's pipe caught a new emphasis in the old navy cry:

"Third section on deck, relieve wheel, lookout, speed cone and ammunition."

Especially the lookout. They had reached the far-flung limit of the war zone.

The Ramapo and her consorts and the armored cruiser were all zig-zagging now. Navy men know how long after a vessel has been sighted it takes to aim and discharge a torpedo. Say that it takes five minutes. Every four minutes the vessels changed their courses, dodging back and forth from an unseen foe that might not be there at all, interminably.

The lookouts were ordered to report everything they saw. Not a bit of driftwood or a patch of floating seaweed was to be missed. Almost every minute a call came down from the tops to the fore or aft gun control.

All at once down the speaking tube to the forward fire control came an excited voice:

"Fore top, fore top, fore top."
"Aye, aye, fore top."
"Steamer at 185 degrees; range, 2,000 yards."
"Aye, aye, fore top."

There was a steamer, and she was coming down fast, smoke boiling out of her single stack, her bow driving white bursts of foam along ahead of her. The cruiser charged toward her. The gun crews on the Ramapo were fighting to bring their pieces to bear.

"It's a German raider," the whisper ran about the ship.

"She hove to only a few hundred yards away," relates a member of the crew. "All of our guns were on her. You could see their gray muzzles rise and dip as the ship rolled and the gun pointers held them true on their mark. All at once I realized I loved those guns and the men who were handling them. It was funny I'd never thought of them at all before. Now they seemed to be the biggest thing in the world to me."

There was a sudden gasp of relief all over the ship. The tramp had broken out the British flag. On her bridge someone was semaphoring frantically. The Ramapo men picked up the hysterical message.

"Submarine encountered one hour direct east. Believe it is pursuing. Advise caution."

Then the smoke came bursting from her funnels again and she went blundering on her way over the sea, like a frightened duck.

"Then all at once a whisper ran through the ship. It was repeated as those on the walls of Lucknow must have told of the advancing British column. The destroyers were coming. Somewhere out of that gray, cruel sea the American war boats were sweeping down on the convoy. Our destroyers, our men, they were coming to see their brethren safe through the war zone.

"I shall never forget the way they came. It was a gray afternoon, when the maintop reported the flicker of a blinker signaling far out over the waves. We didn't see them when they came. They seemed to materialize suddenly out of nothing."

"All at once, we saw the first one. She was only a few hundred yards off our bows, and we had to watch her closely to see her at all. That sounds foolish; but it is literal fact. She was camouflaged—streaked and dotted and splashed in a dozen colors, and she melted away into the background of the sea as though she weren't made of steel, but of mist."

"Then we realized that they were all around us. Eight of them. All dappled and harlequin-patterned, all practically invisible at half a mile."

"Their flagship hung for a moment on a wave, then there was a spurt of white at her stern and she came flying down on us. There was no foam by the bow. There was no smoke from the short, rakish funnels, only the quiver of heat from her oil fires. She slipped through the water like a fish, and as she passed us, slim, high bred, with her razor bow and her lean curving flanks, driving through the water like an express train, with no visible effort and as smoothly as a canoe, she broke out the American flag on her stern. We broke out ours, and that was our greeting—that and the yells of the soldiers who were acting like madmen. As she flashed by we caught a glimpse of her guns, all cleared for action and the depth bombs ready at her stern. One of her men, his feet braced to her roll, looked up at us, grinned and then yawned. We knew that was only showing off. He couldn't shame the troops by being blasé. They acted like a bunch of kids."

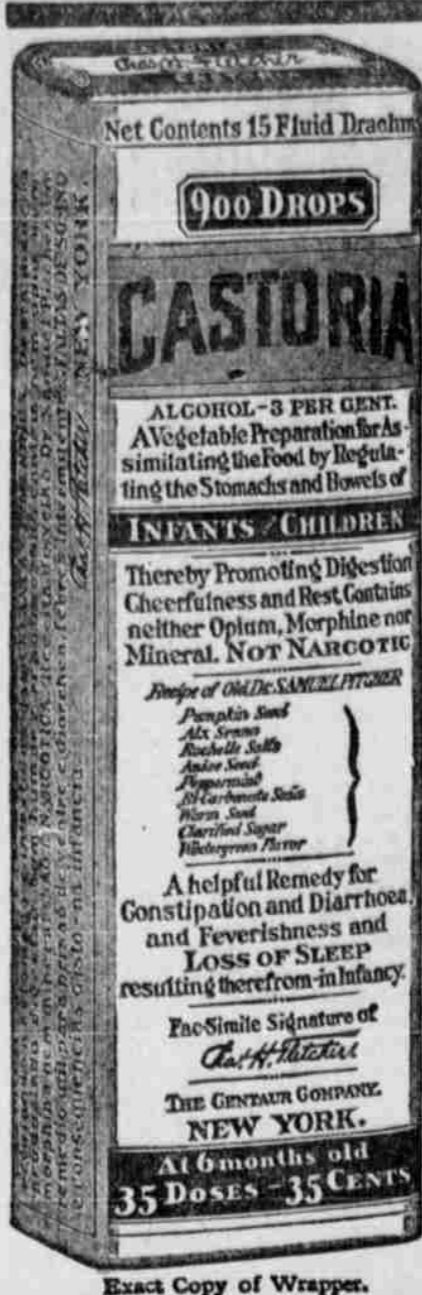
The worst of the war zone was ahead of them, but they didn't worry any longer. They knew the destroyers were on the watch. They ranged here and there. They shot away for a mile or so and came back to swim circles about them. They were all new boats—the best ever built. The British will tell you so, too. They are modeling their new boats on ours.

The submarine couldn't trouble the transports' men now. If one started to worry, all he had to do was to look over the side, and the picture of the destroyers, running the hills of the sea like hounds, was full comfort to him.

A few days later the Ramapo and her consorts were shepherded by the destroyers into the harbor of "A Port in France."

"The troops stood at the rail and cheered and laughed and shouted, but we didn't. We were too tired, just plain worn out. Anyone who has been on a transport's crew knows all there is to know about the agony of anticipation. We just sat and looked at the green hills and the green roofs and the green waters of the bay, and presently those who weren't on watch went to their bunks and had a good sleep."

"They had brought their men across safe, which has come to be a habit of the transport service. Somehow, I was glad that they put me on a transport, instead of a dreadnaught. It seems as though we were doing more to help win the war, somehow, even if no one ever hears about us."



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NEIGHBORS COME IN FORCE

Their General Calling Rather a Matter of Surprise Until Little Etta Explained Things.

Little Etta and her parents had moved into a new neighborhood, and the child had expressed the hope to her mother that the new neighbors would be friendly and call on them soon. Mother assented and expressed the same hope. Baking day arrived the latter part of the week, and mother baked the customary cake and bread and rolls.

In the afternoon, much to her surprise, a number of the neighbors arrived in a sort of take-it-for-granted, expectant manner. Little Etta appeared on the scene and was greeted more like a friend than a stranger. The delight and satisfaction she evinced over the presence of the visitors puzzled her mother, fond of company as she knew the child to be. One word brought another until the full explanation came forth: Etta had broken a piece of mother's cake, as it stood "cooling" under a paper on the pantry table, early in the afternoon while mother was taking a nap upstairs. She visited the homes of neighbors and gave them a piece of cake, saying she wanted them to come over and see her and be friendly with her.

"And my mamma wants you to come and call on her, too," she had added innocently and persuasively, the callers explained to the surprised and embarrassed hostess.

The Kaiser's Dream. "The kaiser's dream," said a senator the other day, "was a dream of world domination, but he has already begun to experience a rude awakening."

"The kaiser is now in exactly the same position as Wash White. Farmer Cornelius Husk heard a noise in his chicken house one night, tiptoed down with a shotgun, and discovered Wash in the act of filling a burlap bag with chickens.

"Wash, you rascal, what are you doing there?" said Corny Husk.
"It's all right, sah," Wash replied. "I'm here on account of a dream I had, sah."
"A dream? You black scoundrel, what are you talking about?"
"Well, sah," said Wash, "I dreamed I was going to have chicken for dinner tomorrow; but I see now it ain't true."

Her Good Taste. "Say, listen!" uttered Claudine of the rapid-fire restaurant. "The fortune teller told me last night that I was going to be married next month."
"Gee!" breathed Heloise of the same establishment. "Who to?"
"Aw, I didn't think it was just exactly proper to ask his name. You see, I ain't got my divorce from Silver yet."
—Kansas City Star.

Quite True. "They say the packers are preparing to make a corner in eggs."
"What a plot to hatch."

SAVED SOLDIER FOR FRANCE

Sympathy of American Red Cross Woman Worker Restored Lost Courage to Downcast Pollu.

Forbes Watson, driving an ambulance in France, dropped into one of the canteens which the American Red Cross is operating in France one evening, he says in the Red Cross Magazine:

"Opposite me was a Pollu with the saddest face I have ever seen. He spoke to no one. Some personal loss hung over him, too poignant for me to approach. He took away his bowl for some more coffee, and at a counter which had become a little less congested I saw him in conversation with one of the American women. He talked to her as he never would have talked to a man, because she knew how to talk to him. Later I asked her his story. He had lost four brothers in the war, the youngest recently."

"Two weeks later he wrote her a letter telling her that her sympathy had torn apart the black veil that seemed to have settled down forever between him and life. And he wrote simply to thank her for having given him back the courage to go on. 'Vive l'Union Franco-Américaine!' he wrote. Was it an exaggeration to say that these American Red Cross women are the front ranks of our diplomacy?"

Camouflage Saves Rabbit. On the prairies of Kansas camouflage is being made use of by the Kansas Jackrabbit. Two residents can testify that at least one "jack" in Barton county owes his life to the fact that he knew the value of this art.

"The two men were hunting on a farm near here when close at hand a Russian thistle jumped up and started off across the pasture at a 2:30 gait. When the thistle had got out of range, a rabbit emerged from its protecting cover and loped off nonchalantly, while to the bewildered hunters slowly came the realization that they had been victims of a clever camouflage on the part of a western Kansas Jackrabbit.—New York World.

Heroic Rescue. Father—Come right out in the back yard, my son; I'll make you see stars.
Son—Are you going to make an American flag, father?
Father—What do you mean, you young rascal?
Son—Why, I'm going to provide the stars, while you furnish the stripes.
Father (falling on his neck)—Where did you inherit this brilliancy? Off with your coat, son, I must save you or perish in the attempt.

Paternal Piquancy. "Say, pop, do airplanes fight in the war zone?"
"No, my son; they fight in the ozone."
They love their land because it is their own, and scorn to give nught other reason why.—Hallock.

What has become of the good old stock of men who went through the school of hard knocks?

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