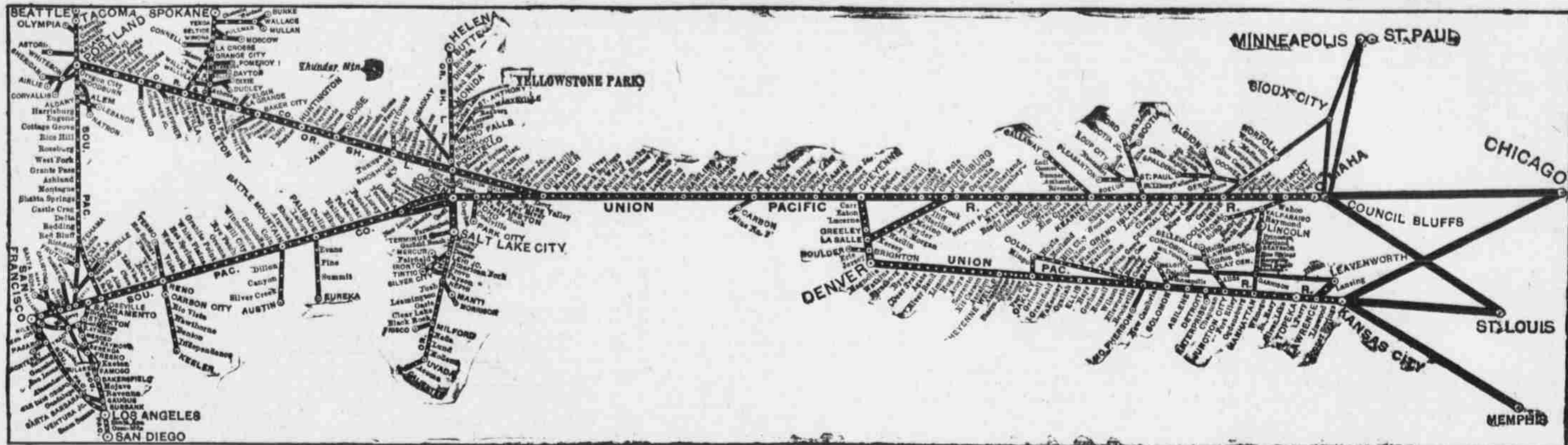


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FIGHTING OFF PORT ARTHUR

(Continued from Page Sixteen.)

excited when they saw the quarantine flag taken down, and wanted an explanation. I tried to pacify them as best I could. I also tried to distract their attention by pointing out to them the Japanese vessels on the horizon. They laughed at me and said they were only Russian vessels. No answer was signalled to the Columbia, but after awhile a naval officer came on board and requested us to move. The captain wanted to know if he might move to the Poo, but the officer said no; he had better not leave Port Arthur until permission was signalled to him from the shore. He might, however, have the kindness to move just a little out of the way, as a cruiser wanted to take up its position in the place the Columbia occupied. After saying something in a low tone to the soldiers the naval officer left the ship. Then Captain Anderson gave orders to get under way, and while the necessary preparations were being made I noticed a bright flash from the side of one of the Japanese vessels, and, pulling out my watch, saw that it was exactly a quarter past 11. The report came some seconds after, and about the same time a big shell, which I should say was a twelve-inch one, dropped into the small space of sea intervening between the torpedoed battleships and the group of frightened-looking torpedo boat destroyers. The shell was evidently intended for the

battleships, and it went so near its mark that it must have splashed them with spray from the big liquid column that shot from the sea at the point where the shell touched the water. All the Japanese ships now opened fire while running southwest in fine order, and the Russian vessels returned the compliment. The Novik and some other cruisers made a fine show, but the warships simply revolved without changing their position and seemed to be placed at a disadvantage by reason of the cramped space and of the consequent danger of running ashore. I must confess, however, that I was not calm enough to watch the fight with the amount of attention necessary to give a very detailed report of it. The reason of this was that we were running parallel with a Russian cruiser, which drew on us the fire of the Japanese. Our captain had mounted his biggest British ensign, thinking, perhaps, for drowning men grasp at straws, that the Japanese might refrain from firing on it out of friendliness and the Russians out of fear; but so far as the Japanese were concerned the captain was out in his calculations, for their shells fell very close. A fragment of a shell made a small hole in the deck forward, another fragment is said to have torn the flag, and the writer has a third fragment in his pocket at the moment of writing. Most of the officers are furnished with similar relics. In the Midst of Battle. Before the engagement began I had been reflecting with exultation that there was a chance of my getting to Che Foo before

any other war correspondent, but when the shells began to ring through the air and raise huge pillars of water before, behind and close to both sides of the ship I forgot all about that matter, or if I reflected on it at all it was only to curse my luck at falling in a fight which was not mine. One of the ship's officers put it well when he said that he would not mind getting killed if he were a sailor on board one of the cruisers, but that it was a miserable death to be snatched by a stray shell. First of all I went as far aft as I could. I don't know why, but I had a kind of vague idea that if the front part of the ship were blown away I could hang on to the rear. Here I found Chief Engineer Smith, his face of quite unusual pallor, and one of the splashed with powder or same black stuff shot up by a shell that had burst near the screw, and the other glistening with perspiration. Mr. Smith did not seem to hear the consoling remarks I addressed to him, but in spite of his glassy stare and very preoccupied manner he showed he was aware of my presence by telling me in extremely emphatic language the sort of fool I was for not going ashore in the doctor's boat. The Chinese passengers and crew were crouched behind the little wooden structure that formed the saloon and the cabins, and they seemed to think that they were quite safe there. One of them said to the ship's officers: "Why you stand out there in an open? All right here," and seemed hurt and astonished when they said that none of us accepted the invitation to get under cover. Nevertheless I must say that I always breed and more freely whenever I got behind something, no matter what it was. But, of course, there was always present in my mind the terrible certainty that there was no longer any cover, no more protection. A glance at the terrific splashes made by the shells that fell around showed me that if one of these formidable missiles fell on the Columbia it would squelch the boat as effectually as a thousand tons of lead would squelch an egg. As the mate remarked, one of these things would come in at one end of the boat and go out at the other and a little yellow smoke would be all that would be left of the ship and its cargo. But in spite of this uncomfortable conviction I had at times the strongest possible inclination to go below, to get down to the very bottom of the boat. The chief engineer also seemed to have the same inclination, for I caught him once hesitating at the top of a ladder, which he clutched with a grasp of iron. Dodging the Shells. He did not descend, however. As he afterward told me, he saw there was no good in doing so, and that indeed there was a better chance on deck than below. Between the cabins aft and those forward there is an open space, and I suddenly took it into my head to traverse this space in order to join the other officers, who were all gathered together at the other extremity of the boat. I did so, running as quickly as my legs could carry me, as if I were running from one certain shelter to another and might be caught half way across if I did not hurry. Of course I did not reason about the matter. My legs simply ran off with me. Outside the saloon on the side facing the forts I found our two Russian soldiers crossing themselves at a great rate and praying fervently. A few minutes before they had gone forward with their rifles and wanted the captain to stop the boat, but I had explained to them that we were going just a little further to the east of the way of the shells; that in doing so we were only obeying the orders we had just received from the last naval officer who had visited

us, and that directly we rounded that point yonder we would drop anchor. This pacified the soldiers and probably saved the captain and some of his officers from being shot. The soldiers seemed to highly appreciate the idea of getting away from the shells, and when the latter fell like rain around us they were too much occupied in prayer to pay any attention to external things. After a while one of them completely disappeared, going down below, probably in obedience to that blind instinct of self-preservation which all of us found it so hard to struggle against and which the Chinese so cheerfully obeyed. He reappeared when all was over and we had almost lost sight of land, but neither he nor his companion caused us any further trouble. I shall go back, however, to my reaching the shelter of the forward set of cabins in the unprotected space in front of them. I found the captain and the rest of the officers grouped together, wide-eyed, pallid and silent. The quartermaster was at the wheel. The mate casually threw a rope end overboard with the object, as he afterward told me, of having something to hold on to in case the ship was struck. At the same time I conceived the brilliant idea of throwing some woodwork overboard and jumping into the sea after it. How fine it would be to swim ashore—we were running very close to the shore—with the assistance of this woodwork. Shells Dropping Near. As my imagination dwelt on this flattering prospect a large shell dropped on the spot where I imagined myself to be swimming and caused me to hastily abandon the idea. One of the officers said he thought it best to run the Columbia ashore, but as the shells were bursting more thickly on the beach and on the face of the cliffs than on the line we were taking this plan was not adopted. As a matter of fact, we did the best thing we could under the circumstances. We ran between two lines of shells, the shells intended for the Russian fleet, which went too far, and the shells intended for the forts, which fell short. One of the shells knocked off a funnel of the Askold, leaving that vessel with four funnels; another hit the Sevastopol at the base of one of the funnels, covering that vessel with a dense cloud of black smoke, from which, however, she seemed to emerge uninjured. Several other Russian vessels were struck, but none seemed to sustain any serious damage. So much for the first line of Japanese shells. As for the second line—that intended for the forts—a good many shells fell short, as I have already remarked, many bursting in the sea close to the shore and many striking the hillside and raising clouds of yellow dust or smoke. Three or four burst parallel to that which they had come. If I had been in a place of safety I should have admired their perfect order and the gracefulness with which they carried out their evolutions. On the other hand the Russian fleet seemed to maneuver clumsily, it fired enough, however, over the torpedoed battleships using their guns, but none of the Japanese seemed to be damaged. The forts did not fire very frequently, and did not, I think, do much damage. Whenever the sixty-three ton guns commanding the entrance to the harbor let fly at the Japanese there was a violent vibration in the air and a crackling sound, which was especially terrifying.

After about half an hour of the sort of experience that I have been trying to describe, the Columbia got clear of the rival fleets. The whole engagement lasted about forty-three minutes. Both Sides on Board. For some time after we had got out of reach of the shells we still felt uneasy, for a shot from the forts or a Russian torpedo boat might still overtake us; but when a considerable interval had elapsed and nothing of the kind happened we began to pluck up courage and to think that we were very fine fellows after all. The Russian soldiers still remained with us, of course. There had been some talk of putting them ashore somewhere in a boat, but as they did not object to being carried away, why, we did not trouble ourselves any more about them. I felt sorry for the poor fellows, however, and went to see them. They were sitting on the deck with stolid, expressionless faces, across which a smile fitted as I approached. We had on board three Japanese passengers, one of whom was from Daloy, spoke some Russian, and was, I should imagine, from his cast of countenance, one of the many Japanese touts that are to be found in Liao Tung. This Japanese was speaking to the Russian soldiers when I came along. What he was saying I do not know, but it is a significant fact, which I might mention here, that this Japanese used to amuse himself with these soldiers while we were in quarantine in a way that did not say very much for the soldiers' self-respect. The Russian soldier is the simplest and most glib individual on earth. Anybody, even an enemy, can make a fool of him. I shall give an instance of what I mean. When I found myself in quarantine in the Columbia I determined to send a message to Che Foo by another boat which was leaving. I prepared my message and called a sampan, or Chinese boat. The guards forbade this boat to approach, so I had to resort to a little strategy. His Dispatch Sent. It was the simplest kind of strategy, such as would not for a moment deceive the dullest soldier in Japan. I engaged one of the soldiers in conversation and gave him a cigarette. One of my friends gave the other some liquor, which he went below to drink. While our two guards were thus employed my letter was flung overboard in an empty cigar box containing a little money; the "sampan" man approached with impunity, got the letter, took it to its destination and brought back a receipt for it without the soldiers suspecting anything. Why the man I was conversing with did not suspect anything passes my comprehension, for no less than four Chinese "boys" came to him on one occasion to tell him that his breakfast was ready below, although it was not breakfast time and although these "boys" had never before shown themselves so pressing. After our escape I approached these soldiers and pointed out to them that they were going to Che Foo and that they could go to their consul there. They did not seem to know what a consul was, and they innocently asked if there were Russian soldiers in Che Foo. This was the last I saw of them. I believe that the British consul at Che Foo explained the fact of their appearance in Che Foo on board a British steamer to his Russian colleague, with the object of preventing, if possible,

their being treated as deserters on their return to Port Arthur; but I am afraid that consular recommendation will have little weight with the Russian military authorities. All these things came under my own observation on February 8. I have since, however, heard other things that might be given a place here. I have just seen a man who was on board the Petropavlovsk when the torpedoing took place. He heard the submarine explosion, went off deck, and was laughed at by the officers when he asked what had happened, "it's only practice," they said. He told me that the Japanese in the torpedo boats chased us as they went away. They had good reasons to do so. FRANCIS McCALLAGH

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