Franklin Matthews

With the Battle Fleet
Cruise of the Sixteen Battleships

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2013

CHAPTER I
FROM HAMPTON ROADS TO TRINIDAD

Run of the Battleships Down to the West Indies—The "Sweet Sixteen" Quick to Get Down to Business After the Sentiment of the Good-by—Formation of the Fleet—Difficulties of Maintaining the Proper Distances—Naval Routine—Gospel of Neatness—Neptune's Preparations for Celebrating the Crossing of the Line—Arrival at Trinidad. *On Board U.S.S. Louisiana, U. S. Battle Fleet,*

Trinidad, Dec. 24.

"I call 'em 'Sweet Sixteen', sir," said the bos'n's mate to the Sun correspondent as Admiral Evans in the flagship Connecticut led the battle fleet past the capes of the Chesapeake out to sea just before noon on December 16 and the gentle swells lifted and lowered the bows of one ship after another to nod their own farewells to the Mayflower at anchor near the Tail of the Horseshoe.

The officers and men had stood at attention to receive the good-by and godspeed of the President, and they had thundered their farewells to him from the throats of the 3-pounder barkers that spat fire and snorted out great puffs of smoke, but when each ship began to find herself she too made her good-by as only a dignified ship could make it, taking no orders from Admiral or Captain as to when and how often she should bow to the ship that carried the President.

A stiff northwest wind seized hold of the great streamers of smoke that poured over the tops of smoke-pipes, and as these streamers frayed themselves out against the blue sky and the bright sun the breeze seemed to lift them toward the southeastern heavens, where some power wove them together to pull the ships along and give them a fine sendoff. All of Monday and Tuesday whoever it was in the kingdom of Old Boreas that was doing the tugging on the ships made a good job of it, for practically every vessel in the fleet had to check speed constantly.

Admiral Evans had his own notions as to the way a great fleet should set sail on a prolonged voyage, and his commanding officers got down to business in a jiffy. All acted as if sending a fleet of sixteen battleships on a 14,000 mile cruise were a mere matter of ordinary routine. The officers of the deck on all the ships were concerned chiefly about keeping their proper distances, the navigators were taking bearings and already getting ready for figuring out latitudes and longitudes, the executive officers were going about to see that everything was in proper order for routine at sea and the captains were mostly on the bridges casting their eyes about and keeping their ears open, alert to correct any move that might mar the performance of their ships in the fleet formation.

Below decks in engine and fire rooms, and in all the other of the scores of places where men watch and work in a warship, routine was established quickly.

It was all very businesslike. Every ship was doing the same thing at the same time. True, the fleet had started for San Francisco, but that was a mere detail, so little has the matter of destination to do with perfecting drill on a warship.

The Fleet Leaving Hampton Roads

Getting away from Hampton Roads may have sent a lump into many a man's throat, but not one showed it. On every ship the band was playing the usual good-by medley composed of "Home, Sweet Home," "The Girl I Left Behind Me" and "Auld Lang Syne." The middle part of the medley brought thumping of many feet on the deck, but there was silence and stern looks ahead when the beginning and end were reached, over and over again.

A staff officer on the Louisiana showed the attitude of the naval man. He had told his wife and family exactly where to go in a remote but conspicuous place on the ramparts of old Fort Monroe so that he could distinguish them easily with his glass. He had told them he would be on the after bridge. When the ship came near the station of his family he stole far out on the bridge, fixed his glass on the family group and waved and waved his handkerchief. The answer came quickly and the flashes seemed to be wigwags, such as a naval officer's wife might be expected to know.

The officer stood it for about two minutes. Then he pulled himself together sharply, turned and walked away. He walked over to a group of his mates.

"Did you make out your people, Jones?" asked one of them who had noted what was going on.

"I believe they were over there somewhere in the crowd," was the reply with an apparently unconcerned smile.

He had finished with that side of his existence. From now on he knew no family; his duty was to his flag and ship. What was that signal at the forward truck? Had anybody made it out? His heartstrings were out of sight and he was thankful they were.

The business side of the start was another story. Orders had been issued to steam in exact column, that is, one ship directly behind its leader at a distance of 400 yards from masthead to masthead. Steam was up; engines, steering gear, annunciators, and all the rest of the modern contrivances had been tested; boats hoisted in and gangways unrigged, and then came the flagship signal to get under way.

How the men did step around and the anchor engines tug! The division officer watched until the anchor was clear of the mud, when he reported it to the executive officer, who takes a ship in and out of port. Finally the anchor was sighted, the "All ready" signal made, the engines began to throb and the ships turned on their heels and got under way.

It was a pretty manœuvre in the crowded Roads with the swift tide sweeping the ships seaward. In the chains the leadsman was swinging his plummet and calling out such things as "By the mark seven," "By the deep six," "By the quarter less six," while the ships slowly paraded down the bay. The channel was so shallow that the ships stirred up the mud and some of it got into the machinery, and there were hot bearings that were cooled down with the hose. It would not do to falter or make a blunder of any kind, for the President was looking on and no excuses would be tolerated.

It was a far different story from the old days. The old sloop of war Jamestown lay in the Roads, and if the fleet could have stopped to listen she would have spun a yarn on how they used to leave port. She would have remarked upon the change. When she set sail capstan bars would be shipped and all that part of the ship's company manning the bars would bring the anchor chain "up and down, sir," as the officer in charge of the fo'c's'le would report. The captain and First Luff (the executive officer who "had to have the ship working like a chronometer, no thanks if he did and his hide scorched by his superiors if he didn't") would stand on the quarter block on the weather side and the navigator and officer of the deck on the lee side.

Then would come the sharp commands, "Aloft light yardmen!" "Aloft topmen!" "Aloft lower yardmen!" "Lay out!" "Let fall!" and a cloud of snowy canvas would drop loose and limp. Then would come the commands, "Topsail sheets and halyards!" "To'gallant sheets and halyards!" "Set taut!" "Haul away!" with the shrill sound of the bos'n's whistle to the tramp of hundreds of feet.

When a band was on board there would be a martial air. If not the officer would shout "Stamp and go!" and this noise with the feet meant so much extra pulling, and the good ship was soon on her course. Sometimes a chanty would be sung instead of the "Stamp and go," and when the ship was bound for Rio, just as this fleet is, one could hear the light hearted, and the heavy hearted ones too, singing a refrain that the men of this fleet might well have sung if the days of the chanty had not gone to limbo:

Heave away for Rio!
Heave away for Rio!
My bonny young girl,
My head's in a whirl,
For I'm bound for the Rio Grande.

The old days have gone, but many a bluejacket's head (bluejacket, mind you; not Jackie, for many of Uncle Sam's tars and sea dogs don't like that term) was in a whirl over some bonny young girl, as witness the hundreds of letters that were sent ashore on the mail orderly's last trip.

And so the ships passed out to sea. The matter of fact officers occasionally cast their eyes about and when they had time to give expression to their feelings about all that one would hear from them would be:

"Mighty fine, sight, this. Wonder what they're doing back there? Distance seems wrong. Better get up his position pennant or the Admiral may get after him. What's that? We're fifty yards too close? Give her three revolutions slower. Only twenty-five now? Give her only one slower. Get her distance now? Standard speed."

And the signals to the engine room would quit jangling for a time while the Captain or officer of the deck looked around again and repeated:

"Mighty fine sight, this!"

It all depends on the way you look at it. You couldn't see much going down the Chesapeake Bay channel. There was a turn or two, but the smoke of the saluting obscured things and it was not until the ships headed out to sea and the Connecticut was past the whistling buoy, which also seemed to want to have a share in the sendoff, that it was possible to get a satisfactory look at the entire fleet that stretched away for more than three miles.

Then came a signal for open order. The Admiral's ship went right on. The next following bore out to port and the next to starboard. Then the ships paired off to port and starboard, making two lines, each a quarter of a point off the flagship, which had a lane to itself in the centre, giving the Admiral and his staff on the after bridge a view of all. Perhaps the formation may be understood better by the average reader by saying that it was a wing and wing formation.

Signals were passing along the line constantly and semaphores were throwing their arms about as if they were manikins performing for the amusement of the 14,000 men afloat. It was pretty to see a mass of flags fall to the deck simultaneously from time to time. It was impressive to see the flag of the country fluttering from the gaffs of mainmasts. It was fine to see the ships keeping in line.

The commanding officers might refer to the spectacle as a mighty fine sight, but the few civilians with the fleet shared the sentiment of a tar who sidled up to the Sun man and said:

"This makes you proud of your country. You know already that the country is big and great and all that, but when you see it reduced to this kind of business on the ocean you are sure your country is great. None but a great country could produce such a sight as this. I'm glad I've had the chance to see it."

In single file for two hours the ships kept on their course. They were like so many Indians on a jaunt. Each ship stood for sovereignty. Each stood for brute strength. Each stood for the development of science and skill. Each stood for an impressive expression of patriotism. In that fleet of sixteen ships there seemed to be concentrated, according to some of those who looked at them, the entire power of the United States for good or evil.

When it came to estimating the brute strength of the fleet it grew bewildering. The mathematicians got busy. They figured out that there were nearly 1,000 guns of various kinds on the entire fleet and they talked about the weight of projectiles and charges and then got down to muzzle velocity in foot seconds and muzzle energy in foot tons and a lot of other terms that would make a landlubber's head dizzy. They told how the average muzzle velocity of those guns was 2,700 feet a second and that a 13-inch gun's energy was equal to raising 31,372 tons a foot, while that of a 12-inch gun, with which these ships are all armed, could lift, by the power of one discharge, 44,025 tons a foot. Then they got to figuring out how much all the guns could lift and how swift the things they shoot could go. This ran the figures up into the millions of foot tons just for one discharge.

When some one tried to figure out how many millions upon millions of foot tons could be raised if all the projectiles in the fleet were fired—the exact number of the thousands upon thousands of these projectiles it would not be prudent even to indicate—why, an amateur at figures, the simple addition, subtraction, multiplication and division man, got a headache.

Then the figure sharps got after the engine power, and they tried to show if one ship had something like 15,000 horse-power, more or less, what the combined ships must have and what could be done with it on land—that is, how many railroad trains, each a mile long, could be pulled so many thousands of miles; how many bridges like those across the East River they could pull down with just one tug at them; how many cities such power could light; how many great factories and mills could be run with that power, and even how much goods could be made out of it—well, after that the amateur began to wonder if he could add up two and two.

After that it was figured out that the displacement in tons for the entire fleet was more than a quarter of a million, and the weight of a lot of other heavy things in the world was estimated. By this time the amateur was clear flabbergasted, and all he could say, landlubber that he is and will be until Neptune has him ducked, was that if the fleet did displace 250,000 tons of water the ocean didn't show any signs of it and Uncle Sam would have to try many, many thousands of times if he expected to get the better of old Neptune by displacing water.

After the mathematical sharps had finished, what are known as the word painters and grainers became busy. Some of the word painters compared the long file of ships to a line of gray geese in a long follow-your-leader flight to the south for a warmer clime. The ships did look gray at times, according to the atmospheric conditions, but the gray geese analogy was voted not a success because geese haven't things sticking up in the middle of their backs resembling the smoke-pipes of battleships. Besides, geese do not give out black or any other kind of smoke.

The painters got out their vocabulary of magnificent, awe inspiring, formidable demons of war, bulldogs of the sea, peace compellers and all that string and began to weave them all together, and it was voted all right and probably appropriate, but it was said that these did not hit quite the right note.

That was that this fleet was going out for business of a different kind from that which any other American fleet had undertaken. The business in hand was the moulding of sixteen battleship units into one battle fleet unit, not sixteen times stronger than one unit, but with the strength increased in something like geometrical ratio. The problem, therefore, was to make this fleet a unit, not like a chain, strong only as its weakest link, but like a rope, far stronger than the multiplied strength of its various strands.

Charles H. Cramp, the veteran shipbuilder, nearly ten years ago pointed out in a paper read at the annual meeting of naval men and marine engineers in New York City that the greatest training need of the United States navy was what he called battleship seamanship. That meant not navigation merely, but the synchronizing of one battleship to others, the tuning up, so to speak, the team work, to use a football analogy, in sailing, manœuvring, shooting—all pulling together.

Two hours after clearing the Capes Admiral Evans gave the signal for one of his favorite cruising formations, that is, in columns of fours. The four divisions of the fleet drew up in parallel lines with an Admiral at the head of each line.

The five starred white flag, called the five of clubs, was run up at the fore truck of the Connecticut to indicate that that ship was the guard ship. The lines were run at intervals of 1,600 yards, and the ships of each division, still in wing and wing fashion, were at distances of 400 yards. To be strictly naval you must call the space between two lines of ships interval and the space between two individual ships in line distance.

Well, after the ships were spread out they covered an area of more than two square miles, and then one began to realize what all these ships meant. The circle of twelve or fourteen miles that hemmed them in and that expanded in front and contracted in the rear seemed practically filled with them. Distances were kept fairly well and the ships plodded along in the smooth sea nodding their approval of what was going on.

It was this problem of distance that kept the officers of the decks busy. When you think that each of these ships represented a weight of from 15,000 to 18,000 tons more or less, and that you had to move that ship at the rate of 10 knots an hour and keep it within 400 yards of a ship in front of you; when you consider how some ships move a trifle of an inch faster than another ship at the same number of propeller revolutions; when you think that one of the propellers of your own ship will do more work than the other at the same number of revolutions, and that this will throw you out of your course and make you steer badly if you don't correct it; when you think that your leader may vary in his speed; when you think of all this, you can begin to understand the problem of those officers on the bridge to keep the ships in line and at proper distances.

It took some time for each ship to determine how many revolutions were necessary to produce ten knots speed, according to the standard of the flagship. For example, the Louisiana's experts figured on sixty-seven revolutions. It was too much, for after an hour or two it was found that sixty-five would do the work. Some of the ships were between two numbers. All the time each ship was gaining or losing a trifle and this had to be corrected every minute or two. On each ship a young midshipman stood on the bridge beside the officer on watch looking through a little instrument of bars and glasses and wheels graduated to a scale of figures and called a stadimeter. He reduced the truckline and the waterline of the flagship to some mathematical basis involving triangulation—what's the use of trying to explain it? No one but a mathematician could understand it—and then he would say, "370 yards, sir," or perhaps the figures would be 325 or 460, or what not, and the officer of the deck would have to signal to the engine room to slow down or go faster.

It was to be watchful every minute of the hour. The midshipman often had to report distances every fifteen or twenty seconds and the corrections of speed were going on every two or three minutes.

When you got more than forty yards out of the way you had to fly a triangular pennant of white with red border and this was set down against your ship on the flagship, and that you didn't like, if you were the responsible officer.

And so the first day at sea wore on and the sun went down with a glow of gold in the west that seemed like a benediction. Just as it sank below the horizon the pink rays that were gathering reflected themselves on the starboard sides of the white ships and gave them a touch of color. Lights on the main truck on the foremast and at the stern and at the sides appeared instantly, and it was night-time on the fleet.

The black smoke rose straight in the air, other lights began to twinkle and soon, in the glow of the twilight and the gleam of the lights on the vessels themselves and the illumination of the moon close to the full, the ships took on an aspect such as lower New York assumes early in the evening of mid-winter days when office buildings are lighted. When the smoke smudged the sky or clouded the moon, however, it was like a city of factories and it was decided that there was just one expression that would give some idea of its beauty. It was this:

"Spotless town afloat."

Zest was added to the day's sendoff and work when the officers were gathered in the wardroom at dinner and a wireless telegram of good wishes from the Mayflower, received a short time before, was read. There were cheers for the President, especially on the Louisiana, which is called the President's ship because he sailed on her to Panama, and hundreds of the officers and crew feel that they know him personally.

"Good for the President!" shouted one of the officers in the waist of the table.

"So say we all," responded a man on the other side, "but I wish he had told us where we are going."

That man didn't have to wait long, for soon there was sent into the wardroom of every ship a message signalled from the flagship which said that after a brief stay on the Pacific Coast the fleet would come home by way of Suez. This is what Admiral Evans signalled:

UNOFFICIAL SIGNAL.

U. S. S. Connecticut

December 16th, 1907.

The President authorizes the Commander-in-Chief to inform the officers and men that after a short stay on the Pacific Coast it is the President's intention to have the fleet return to the Atlantic Coast by way of the Mediterranean.

Every man jumped at that news; every one wished his wife or sweetheart could know it at once. One of the puzzles about the fleet was settled.

There is no room in this first letter of the long cruise to go into detail about the thousand and one things—incidents, ceremonies and drills—that make up the routine and life on the warship. These will come afterward in other forms. One might tell how the men on guard at the side lights at night sing out after a bell is tapped: "Port light burning bright," "Starboard light burning bright," how "the 9 o'clock light is out, sir" report is made and received; how they "put the shirts on" the gun muzzles and mainmast; how the call to dinner to the officers is done on the Louisiana with a fife and drum, "rolling roast beef," they used to call it, and probably, do yet in the British navy, only the tune is different in ours, for it is "Yankee Doodle"; how "sweethearts and wives" are toasted once a week; how "make it eight bells" is said; how scores of these things, many of them well known, are done and why. Let it go for the present.

If there is one thing that impresses the civilian even more than the ceremonies or the peculiar routine of a warship it is the cleanliness of things. This applies as much to the men as it does to the remotest nook and cranny in the darkest and deepest part of the ship.

The officer would take you into some corner where you had to bend your back and almost go on your hands and knees and show you that it was as clean as the most exposed parts of his bailiwick. The fleet had not been out two days before the executive officer issued an order about cleanliness.

The men were cautioned to keep themselves and their clothes clean on penalty of going on the scrubbing list. It did not mean that there were men on board who were slack in this respect, but there were a lot of youngsters who had never been to sea before and they needed to be broken in. What the scrubbing list is was well explained by an old time sailor on board. He said:

"Man-o'-war cleanliness is different from any other that I know. I distinguish it from all other kinds because it is the most searching and far reaching thing of the kind in the world.

"It really begins on the inside of a man, at his soul, although I am sorry to say you can't always see the effect of it there, and it works its way out to his skin, clothing and surroundings. All must be immaculately clean, and this habit is so thoroughly ingrained in the men that to maintain it they will even commit crime.

"I mean just what I say. Let me give you an instance:

"In one of the old ships in which I sailed fresh water—it was the case of all of 'em, sir—fresh water was a scarce article even to drink. No fresh water could be had to wash our clothes. Salt water does not clean clothing properly, no matter how you work over your duds.

"So our men in the old days actually used to steal the water out of the breakers, the small casks kept in the boats at all times in case of emergency, such as shipwreck. That is what I mean by committing crime. We actually used to steal from the most important supply on the ship just for the sake of keeping ourselves clean.

"For uncleanliness a man would be stripped naked and his skin scrubbed with sand and canvas—no man ever forgot it who experienced that—and sometimes with ki-yar brushes, by two husky bos'n's mates. All hands soon got the habit of being clean."

There was much interest on the ships as to how the wireless telephone would work out. The system has been in operation only a few months and is largely in the experimental and almost the infantile stage.

All of the battleships are equipped with the apparatus and there was no doubt about it, you could talk to any ship in the fleet from any other and at times the sounds of the voice were as clear as through an ordinary telephone. At times they weren't, and there was a division of opinion among the officers as to the real value of the invention.

As is the case with the wireless telegraph only one ship of a fleet can use the telephone at one time. While one ship is talking to another all the other ships must keep out of it and even the ship to which the message is being sent must keep still and not break in. The receiver must wait until the sender has got all through with what he has to say and then he can talk back.

The sending and receiving machines use part of the apparatus of the wireless telegraph outfit. If an attempt is made to use the telegraph while the telephone is in use the telephone goes out of commission at once because it is absolutely drowned out. The telegraph apparatus uses so much greater power that it is like a loud voice overwhelming a soft one.

The operator at the telephone would sound a signal with some sort of a buzzer that had the wail of a lost cat in its voice and then he would put a little megaphone into the mouthpiece of the telephone and would say, sharp and clear:

"Minnesota! Minnesota! Minnesota! This is the Louisiana! This is the Louisiana! This is the Louisiana! We have a press message for you to send to the beach. We have a press message for you to send to the beach. Do you hear us? Do you hear us? Minnesota! Minnesota! This is the Louisiana! Go ahead! Go ahead!"

Sometimes the message would fail. Sometimes the wireless, one kind or the other, would be working on other ships. Sometimes the answer would come at once and the operator would write down the reply and hand it over to you.

When connection would be established fully the operator instead of reading off your press message would click it off by a telegraph key to the Minnesota's operator. That was to make sure that he would get it correctly. Peculiarly spelled words employed in cabling could not be made out by the ordinary operator and it was taking chances to spell them out with the voice, and hence they were sent with the key, the operation really being a combination of the wireless telephone and telegraph, yet not at all complicated in practical operation.

Everyone of the electrical experts with the fleet is convinced that the wireless telephone is going to be of value. Most of them have talked with it clearly for distances of at least twenty miles. One difficulty is in keeping it tuned up because the wireless telegraph apparatus is also on board.

Some of the experts seemed to think that one service dropped in efficiency if the other was kept keyed up to its best. All were confident that as soon as certain difficulties were overcome, difficulties no more serious, they said, than the ordinary telephone encountered in the beginning, the apparatus would be workable as readily as a telephone on land. Give it time, was the way the situation was summed up.

Speaking about wireless telegraph, have you heard the latest wrinkle in it, the most up to date use of it? Of course you haven't. It remained for the voyage of this fleet to disclose it.

Three days out, every ship got wireless messages from Father Neptune warning it to be ready to receive him on crossing the line. The message was genuine because it was posted up and a copy sent to the executive officer as soon as it was received. An orderly brought it to him with an unusually stiff salute while the wardroom was at mess.

It served notice on all "landlubbers, pollywogs and sea lawyers" that they must be initiated and it appointed one Fore Topmast as "official representative of his Most Gracious Majesty Neptune Rex, Ruler of the Royal Domain." It called for a meeting of the "faithful subjects" to arrange for the ceremonies of his visit.

The meeting on the Louisiana was held in No. 12 casemate, on the port side of the gun deck aft. The proceedings were secret, but it was soon known that royal policemen, royal barbers, royal judges, royal counsel and a lot of other royal functionaries were appointed. The word went through the ship that the ceremonies were to be pretty strenuous; that no one who had not crossed the Equator would escape.

To show how serious this was here is a copy of one of Neptune's messages and the order that followed its reception:

NOTICE.

The following wireless was received at 11 p.m., December 19, 1907:

Fore Topmast, Official Representative on Board the Good Ship Louisiana of His Majesty Neptune Rex, Ruler of the Royal Domain.

At the time the Thomas W. Lawson turned turtle many of my trusted police were on board, and as a result they were more or less injured and all of the regulation uniforms carried by them were lost. Therefore it will be necessary for me to designate many of my royal subjects on board the good ship represented by you to act in their stead, and you are authorized to make the selection from among the most faithful of those who belong to the royal realm.

In making the appointments you will consider their qualifications as to severity, alertness, seadogness, their knowledge as to the interior plans of the ship and their ability to follow the trail of any landlubber, pollywog or sea lawyer who endeavors to escape the initiation as prescribed by me.

You will report to me by wireless the names of the subjects selected, the position assigned and the proficiency of each in order that I may forward their commission at once.

You will have the regulation uniforms made up at once and will carry out all orders in this connection.

Your Majesty,

Neptune Rex,

Ruler of the Royal Domain.

GENERAL ORDER NO. 3.

In view of the above I have this day, the 20th of December, 1907, selected from among the royal subjects on board the good ship Louisiana the trusted police as directed by his Majesty, and those selected have been notified of their appointment, all of whom have accepted. The attention of all the royal subjects is invited to paragraph X, article VIIX, regulations of the royal realm, relative to police duty and to the punishments prescribed for those who fail to perform their duty properly and to the landlubber, pollywog or sea lawyer who tries to avoid the initiation as prescribed by his Majesty.

As noted in the wireless message from his Majesty many of the uniforms were lost, the trusted police selected will at once visit his Majesty's tailor, the sailmaker's mate, and be measured for the uniform to protect him from the crabs, eels and sharks.

Fore Top, O. R. H. M. N. R.

Two days later this wireless was received and an order issued complying with directions:

NOTICE.

The following wireless was received at 1 a. m., December 21:

Fore Topmast, Official Representative of His Majesty Neptune Rex, Ruler of the Royal Domain, on Board the Good Ship Louisiana.

It has been reported to me by a member of my secret police on board of the good ship on which you are my representative that there are several landlubbers, pollywogs and sea lawyers who intend to escape the initiation as prescribed by me by stowing themselves away; of course this is folly on their part, as there is not a hole or corner on board the good ship Louisiana that my faithful police and subjects are not familiar with, and it is therefore impossible for any one to avoid escaping the royal initiation. Those who do try to escape the initiation in this manner will of course be apprehended, and when brought before me on the day of the ceremonies they will not soon forget the trick they endeavored to play on the royal realm, and the dose they get will be more severe than any I have as yet prescribed. Referring to the secret code of the royal realm, the following landlubbers, pollywogs and sea lawyers have been reported to me as mentioned above: Gabnokto, Thnruowk, Mawjtrqmorptzs, Wqquopbchr and Ybxquotrdhgle. You will therefore at once issue orders to the chief of police to attend to these crabs and to put his best men on their trail, and if the above is true they will so report to me upon my arrival on board.

Your Majesty,

Neptune Rex,

Ruler of the Royal Domain.

GENERAL ORDER NO. 4.

This is to inform the members of the royal realm on board the good ship Louisiana that I have this day issued orders to the chief of police to place five of his best men on the trail of the men as mentioned in his Majesty's wireless and whom you will all know by referring to the royal secret code which you have in your possession. You will also keep track of these animals and report to me any out of the way move which they should make. You will also be on the lookout for any other of these who happen to be on board, and should they make a false move I will make a special report to his Majesty with recommendations which will cover all defects.

Fore Top,

Official Representative of His Majesty.

After one day's steaming in four columns the fleet was deployed into two columns. For one day the speed was increased to 11 knots. The little tender Yankton, which is to be used as the Admiral's yacht in port and for short journeys and which has been running with the fleet off the starboard side of the flagship, was sent on ahead to get a good start. One day's steaming at 11 knots brought her back to us and then the fleet resumed the slower speed.

The weather was fine throughout. When the trade wind belt was encountered about 300 miles north of St. Thomas the ships pitched a good deal, but there was little rolling. Sea legs had been acquired by that time and few on board were incapacitated. There was a squall now and then in the Caribbean with a dash of rain for five or ten minutes, but that was nothing.

On Friday, December 20, the Missouri was detached from the fleet to take a sailor sick with peritonitis to San Juan, and later that night the Illinois was sent to Culebra with a sailor who had pneumonia. Of course both could have been treated on board ship, but Admiral Evans thought that it would be more humane to give these men the best treatment that could be had on shore and so did not hesitate. Two great warships were sent away from the fleet formation, all for the comfort of two men. The ships joined the fleet again late on Saturday.

There were only one or two slight mishaps to ship machinery reported on the journey down, really nothing worthy of note, a pump or something of that kind being out of order. The fleet went along in splendid style. Three days out the intervals and distances were almost perfect at all hours of the day and night. The voyage soon became a double procession of warships, with just the ordinary routine going on.

On Sunday, December 22, the first death on the fleet was reported. It was that of Robert E. Pipes, an ordinary seaman on the Alabama, enlisted at Dallas, Tex., in August last. He died of spinal meningitis. Nothing was known of the death on the fleet until eight bells were sounded at 4 P.M. Admiral Evans had gone ahead of the fleet at noon to make a four or six hour test of the new fuel called briquettes, and his ship was out of sight. Admiral Thomas on the Minnesota was in command. His ship was leading the second squadron, 1,600 yards to port.

The men on watch saw the national colors being raised on the mainmast. There was a scurry on every ship to get up the colors. Every one wondered whether land or a ship had been sighted. Slowly the colors went up and then down to half mast. All colors on the other ships went to half mast. The order for half speed was given and then came a signal to stop. The rails of the ships were crowded at once. Up and down the columns the men looked and then it was seen that the quarterdeck of the Alabama was crowded. The order had been given there: "All hands aft to bury the dead!"

The captain read the burial service. An opening in the lines of the men on the lee side was made and Pipes's body, sewed in a hammock and weighted with shot, was slipped gently over the side. It made very little splash. Three volleys were fired by the marines, taps were sounded, the colors were run up to the gaff on the mainmast on all the ships and standard speed was ordered again as the flags came down. The ceremony occupied exactly nine minutes and Admiral Thomas sent a wireless telegram to Admiral Evans notifying him of what had been done. The burial cast a gloom for a few minutes on all the ships.

Much to the regret of many officers and men, Admiral Evans took the Virgin instead of the Anegada passage into the Caribbean and then headed straight for Trinidad. Many had hoped that he would sail along the chain of islands and that they might catch a glimpse at least of Martinique and some of the other historic places. But business is business on a fleet as well as on shore. Coal must be saved, and the way to go to a place is to go on the shortest possible line consistent with safety.

So it was that on Monday, December 23, Trinidad, just off the Venezuelan coast, came in sight, the ships entered the Dragon's mouth into the Gulf of Paria and swung around the point and anchored in the roadstead off Port of Spain just before sunset.

The first leg of the journey was over. It was merely the warming up stage. To-morrow will be Christmas. A bunch of mistletoe is already hanging in the Louisiana's wardroom. Some of the ships brought their Christmas trees and greens along. There'll be sports of all kinds—boxing, rowing by officers and men, athletic contests on ship—good cheer generally.

Just fancy a Christmas with the thermometer at 90 degrees!

CHAPTER II.
CHRISTMAS WITH THE FLEET

Gay Day on the Battleships off Port of Spain—"Peace on Earth" the Motto on the Big Guns—Officers' Reception on the Minnesota—Boat Races and Athletic Sports for the Crew—How the Fleet Charged Into Port—Men on Their Good Behavior—Official Visits—Coaling Day. *On Board U.S.S. Louisiana, U. S. Battle Fleet,*

Port of Spain, Trinidad, Dec. 28.

THE officers of the battleship Minnesota gave a reception Christmas Day on board their ship to all the officers of the other ships. The visitors were received at the gangway by the officer of the deck, who had the usual side boys stationed there for the guests to pass by. The visitors were first presented to Capt. Hubbard, after which they paid their respects to Admiral Thomas. Then, turning around on the beautifully decorated deck, they saw depending from the great 12-inch guns of the after turret a board festooned with greens, and on it painted in large letters:

"Peace on earth; good will to men!"

The first effect on the visitor was to startle him. What place was there on a warship, whose primary purpose is destruction, for such a motto and in such a place? Some of the more thoughtless visitors thought it was satire, or perhaps a naval man's idea of a grim joke.

Those who thought it a mockery, a satire or a joke were never more mistaken. The sentiment was made the most prominent decoration on the ship in all sincerity. Scores of naval officers pointed to it with pride and said it exemplified truly the spirit of the American Navy. All declared that if there was one thing more than any other which American naval officers and all true Americans wished for it was world-wide peace and brotherly love. It was declared that no better place outside a Christian church could be found for its display than on an American warship. Many an officer said he hoped it would always be prominent on our warships at the Christmas season.

Certainly good will to man was exemplified at the Christmas celebration on this fleet. It was the most impressive Christmas festival that the nine civilians with the fleet ever saw. Here was a city of 14,000, exclusively of men, some rough, some refined, some educated, some illiterate, some Christian, some with no religion, celebrating the season of good cheer on sixteen battleships in a foreign port five miles from shore. Port of Spain might as well have been 5,000 miles away, so far as its influence was concerned. More than one-half of the American Navy was holding its Christmas festival in its own way, with none else to look on. From first to last its spirit was kindly; from colors in the morning until the last serenading party, gliding over the smooth water in a floating city that had a Venetian aspect, singing songs to the accompaniment of guitars and mandolins, disappeared at midnight, the celebration was in absolute keeping with the sentiment of the day. All was merry and all were merry.

Perhaps a song sung by the Vermont's officers who were towed about the fleet at night in a sailing launch as they called on every warship best reveals the tone of the occasion. They came to the Louisiana on their last call just before midnight. They allowed none of the Louisiana's officers who had gone to bed to dress, and pajamas were almost as common as dress clothes in the company that assembled in the wardroom. When the visitors were going away the last song which came across the water, a song which they sang as they came up the gangway strumming their instruments and lifting up their voices, was this:

Merry Christmas! Merry Christmas! We're happy and well; Here comes the Vermont, Say, don't we look swell? We're a highrolling, A lob-e-dob crew, Merry Christmas! Merry Christmas! Merry Christmas to you!

Probably that lob-e-dob crew sang that song two hundred times that night. It was adapted from a new Naval Academy song. It has a merry tune and the jingle and the swing of it was infectious. The crew was highrolling only in a naval sense, the rolling wave sense, and in five minutes after they first sang the song to their hosts the hosts were joining in with them. It meant merry Christmas to everybody. Certainly this fleet had one.

For two days boating parties had gone to the heavily wooded shores of this beautiful island and had brought in greens for Christmas. They were mostly palms and bamboo, with trailing vines in profusion. When darkness came on Christmas eve the work of decoration began. Late into the night some of the men toiled. When daylight came every ship was dressed in greens. From truck to water line, on signal yards, rigging, turrets, gangways, there were branches of trees and festoons of vines. Inside the ships the wardrooms and cabins were elaborately decorated. Every wardroom had its Christmas tree and around it were grouped gifts for all. No one was overlooked. Christmas boxes, brought from home with orders not to be unsealed until Christmas Day, were broken open in every part of the ship.

Then came a day of visiting, of sports—rowing in the morning, athletics aboard ship in the afternoon and boxing in the evening—of the big reception on the Minnesota and of the merriest kind of dinner parties with the distribution of Santa Claus gifts in the evening. The gifts were mostly trinkets, but they had hits and grinds in them, and the presentation elicited shouts of laughter. Although the matter of rank was not ignored, apparently the high and low officers, from Admiral and Captain down to midshipman, were seated on the good fellowship basis and as equals. The Fourth Ward at the foot of the table went out of business for one night. The middies and ensigns could burst into song when they chose, and if any one forgot to say sir no one thought it strange. Here on the Louisiana ten minutes after we sat down to dinner came an instance of the feeling that makes the whole world kin on Christmas. The youngsters had been singing the Louisiana song, the chorus of which runs thus: