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MANILA TO GIBRALTAR TRIP, FEAT OF
FIVE CONDEMNED U. S. TORPEDOBOAT DESTROYERS.
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Antiquated Tubs, Relics of Spanish War Days, Make Journey Unprecedented in Naval History and Arrive Ready for Job Hunting U Boats.

In the gray dusk of 4 a.m., Aug. 1, 1917, five old American torpedo-boat destroyers slid away from the torpedo boat at Cavite, Manila Bay, on a hurry up trip across the bottom of the world to the war zone. At 9 a.m., Oct. 20, 1917, these five tin water snakes slid through the breakwater into the British dockyard at Gibraltar, proud and dirty and ready to stop cruising.

They had logged 11,008 miles in an actual steaming time of 39 days 14 hours and 50 minutes, out of a total elapsed time of 81 days and five hours, although they had outfitted for a six month's cruise, with enough additional stores aboard the mother ship to last them 10 weeks longer -- altogether, a cruise which has no equal in the history of destroyers. In the history of the United States Navy there has been nothing like it, except the cruise of the battleship OREGON which steamed from San Francisco March 19, 1898, to reach the Spanish American war, and dropped anchor May 26, 1898, off Sand Key Light, Key West, having done 14,700 miles.

The OREGON'S run was trumpeted throughout the country, from Tia Juana to Vaceboro, from Kew West's icy mountains to Juneau's coral strand. But only the Bureau of Navigation and a few of the wardrooms know how the Manila bunch finally managed to pop up here among us in the war zone. And the Bureau, after investing the division commander with another half stripe has filed it and forgotten it. And the wardrooms have other things to talk about.

BUT THEY DIDN'T STOP THERE

It may be interpolated here for Brother von Tirpitz's benefit, that the fact that their cruise stopped for the time being at Gibraltar, does not necessarily indicate that they are now based on Gibraltar. Not at all not at all.

What made their cruise the more unusual, was the fact that four of the five of them had been condemned as unseaworthy and ordered to remain within the three mile limit. Returning from Shanghai to Manila in 1916 they had run into a typhoon which knocked them about so badly that the fleet engineer in Manila had recommended their confinement thereafter to insular waters. But strangely enough, the four which had been sentenced to spend the rest of their natural lives as naval flunky craft around the Islands, are still doing their 4,000 miles a month on danger zone escort duty, while the fifth lasted barely a month in the war zone. On the black and dripping morning of Nov. 19, 1917, a British transport ran that vessel down and cut it in two. The stern sank like a stone in 972 fathoms carrying with it three officers and 18 men; and when the fireroom bulkheads let go a little more than an hour later, the rest followed.

BECAUSE THEY WERE NEEDED.

They came to the war zone because they were badly needed. The British Admiralty needed anything that would float and make seven knots -- a circumstance which explains the presence of many naval makeshifts among the danger zone escorts. In some instances, it has cost the Navy Department hundreds of thousands of dollars to make ready these makeshifts. And in an antisubmarine warfare which has resurrected ancient 10 knot tubs barely able to keep out of their own way (I know of one old gunboat which was dug up from the bottom of the sea and which now cruises with its quarter deck eaten full of worm holes), these five old torpedoboat destroyers are as good as any destroyers that ever took a salt water bath. They haven't the 33 knots that the new oilburners have, but high speed is likely to be a temptation. In fact, I have heard it said that the danger zone escort craft which lose fewest merchantmen are the very worshipful company of the trawlers, for the reason that their lack of high speed compels them to remain close to their convoys.

These are old -- very old -- but their value to the Allied navies as danger zone escort craft cannot be calculated in dollars. To date, they have helped to escort more than 1,000 merchantmen, and they have yet to lose their first merchantman.

TOO FRANKLY PURPOSEFUL.

They are of the old class of torpedoboat destroyers, but as you stand on the landing, looking away at them moored to buoys out in the stream, they look like any of those modern destroyers whose parents they are. There is nothing modest about them. They make no effort to conceal their purpose in life. Their four rakish stacks lift abaft their crouching bridge like the hair on the back of a snarling dog's back.

However, destroyers were built long before destroyer captains became the darlings of the gods. These five were authorized as a result of the Spanish-American War in 1898, and when Neafie and Levy launched them at Philadelphia in 1900, the seas were kept by what the Navy calls the battle-wagons and a destroyer command was held to be a harmless way of killing time. The Department banished them to the Asiatic Station in 1903 and if the Department supposed they were headed for the scrapheap, doubtless the Department was justified.

NOT BUILT FOR RAMMING.

Today, however, each of them is loaded down with deck torpedo tubes, depth charges, five officers and 94 men, and the officers go to sea either in khaki or in old uniforms whose gold braid is green with mould, after the manner of uniforms which have been too long on the Asiatic Station. Each has four Thornycroft boilers which have been fed for years on good Posakontas coal, and each has four stubby stacks which, in return, have spewed cinders all over the deck, so they are black with grease, but except up topside they are too fragile for a chipping hammer and even a scraper has been known to go through their engine room plates.

They are as fragile as any other destroyers; if one of them ever rammed a submarine, it would be quite likely to sink itself as the submarine.

Of course their engine-rooms, bit by bit, have been entirely replaced, but they buckle a few more plates every time they hit heavy weather, and they have tunneled sterns which, at full speed astern in a seaway, afford excellent facilities for smashing the steering gear. The crew has no place to wash except at a bucket on deck. Each is a cross between a steamkettle and greased oel.

LESSON FOR THE EAST.

Their cruise, too, visualized to the Far East the entry of the United States into the bonds of international alliance. At Singapore, Colombo, Bombay and Aden, the Far East responded by lavishing its welcome and "bon voyage" on the Stars and Stripes.

Between stops, they enjoyed one continuous month of sou'west Monsoons all the way from Singapore to Aden, but they didn't lose a man. Six hundred miles out of Bombay for Aden, one of them rolled its foremast out, and another was so badly banged up it had to be towed, with salted boilers and a leaking condenser, into Khorya Morya Bay, a lonely shelter on the Arabian Coast; all five had begun the cruise with towing bridles ready, but this was the first and last time they had to be used.

This boat was banged up again last its foremast and one boat 30 hours out of Naples and Gibraltar, in a night bow which also dismasted and carried away boats on others of the division. One of them sustained the only accident of the trip: bending a propeller when it hit a log, coming into Singapore. It had to dock at Colombo.

COALING THE FLEET.

Another pulled off the bravest feat of the cruise, when it opened a steam line just out of Aden coming up the Red Sea, and the chief engineer a tall, timid youth, but standing a watch five days long with the mother ship standing by wanting to give a tow, finally managed to get the vessel into Suez under its own steam with a ton-and-a-half of coal in bunkers and the doctor standing watch.

I said this one pulled off the bravest feat of the cruise, but possibly more credit should go to still another which had no mishap whatever. And they all went to "General Quarters" six hours out of Malta for Naples, to attack an enemy submarine lying on the surface with his awnings up and his crew on deck, at 16,000 yards range.

Two colliers and a 4,000 ton mother ship attended them, and they didn't ask the beach for coal until they reached Malta.

The little U.S.S. X--, a former merchantman with two officers and a native crew, fed them Pocahontas in Marudu Harbor, British North Borneo and then turned back to Manila. The U.S.S. X--, a Navy Collier, proceeding independently at seven knots, fed them more Pocahontas at Singapore, Colombo and Aden, and then, too, turned back to Manila. But the mother ship was a converted Run which had interned at Manila. It proceeded independently to Singapore, where it became the division commander's flagship -- a flagship with a cargo of rice for Italy, besides coal, provisions

and stores in the cargo holds, and a lathe, drill presses, shaper, forge, etc., in temporary deckhouse.

OFF TO THE WAR.

On the night before August 1, the five tin water snakes lay off Cavite just as they had lain on hundreds of summer nights. The only difference from the usual routine was that all leave was up by 8 p.m., and even that wasn't new. Some of the officers went up to Manila to buy some things in the afternoon and, after stopping for a drink around the big mahogany table in the Army and Navy club, came back to Cavite. There were no farewells. The Navy doesn't brandish its orders with farewells. It merely stops at a tobacconist's, lays in a half dozen tins of cigarets and goes on down to the landing.

At 4 a.m. Aug. 1, 1917, they formed in column with the division commander leading at 400 yard intervals. With Corregidor light still revolving, they moved out the south channel at 15 knots, and the seas slapped their plates as the lights of Manila diminished astern. As for the crews, they took it for granted that they were off on another cruise to the Southern Islands. As long as they were condemned to the ladylike lassitude of the Islands for the duration, one place was about as dull as another.

A HAPPY CREW.

Five miles out, the five tin water snakes stood to the south'ard and the captains called their crews to quarters to tell them, in substance, this:

"WE SHAN'T SEE MANILA AGAIN UNTIL AFTER PEACE IS SIGNED. WE'RE GOING TO WAR."

What happened then?

"Oh, nothing much," said one of the captains, "except that everybody let out a yell."

After that things moved swiftly. They dropped the Islands the next day. They shaped a course across the Sulu Sea, and early on the afternoon of Aug. 3, they picked up the green hills of British North Borneo. A mile and-a-half off Kudat town in Marudu Harbor, they went alongside the collier one by one, to take aboard their 180 tons apiece.

Three days later they slid out in column formation, steering for Singapore over a sea smooth as a frogpond.

FETED IN SINGAPORE.

At Singapore they tied up to buoys close inshore, and the division commander hoisted his guide flag and pennant on the mother ship. Between coaling and being feted on the beach, they had their hands full. But five

days later, the mother led the little column of tin flivvers out through the Malacca Straits. Before the British occupied Singapore in 1819, the Malacca Straits were infested with some of the worst pirates that ever walked a plank, but now the straits are as safe as Long Island Sound.

The Singapore-Colombo run was too much for their bunkers, so they bore west by south for the Nicobar Islands, a lonely spot which none but surveying ships ever see. Here they anchored a mile off a sandy beach coaled, and allowed the crew to ramble around the beach in sight of the ships.

On the morning of Aug. 19, they stood out into the Indian Ocean which, according to Kipling, "Sits an' smiles" but which they found to be in such a hilarious mood that they had to take the for'd guns' crews up into the bridge wings.

Early on the fourth day out, the British examination tug picked them up and piloted them through the swept channel into Colombo

ARRIVAL AT BOMBAY.

Aug. 28, they left for Bombay, standing well out from the coast to avoid mines. At the spot marked on the charts as the entrance to Bombay channel, they waited along with a crowd of freighters from the Persian Gulf, transports from East Africa and hospital ships from Mesopotamia, for the little black sweepers that escorted them through the buoyed channel into a harbor crowded with tankers, transports, barges, tugs, launches and pulling boats. They tied up alongside miles of low, black freight sheds in Alexandria Dock, and because there was bubonic plague about, they discarded the usual tin ratguards on their mooring hawsers substituted a smear of oil and tar, and ordered the crews to stay out of the native quarter.

At noon on Sept. 6, they left Bombay on the longest leg of the cruise, a 2,100 mile run into Aden. At the start it was doubtful whether they could make it, so the division commander settled on Khorya Morya bay for a refit, a lonely harbor on the Arabian Coast.

They made 600 miles of the run without incident, but a bad blow, which hit them and split up the little column. One destroyer ran short of coal; another, whose bunkers were also running short, lost its foremast; a third broke down completely and had to be taken in tow, with a leaking condenser and salted boilers. So, while two of them proceeded to Aden, the mother ship with its tow and the other two limping astern altered course a few points and went into Khorya Morya Bay.

REPAIRS AT ARABIAN PORT.

Here they repaired and coaled. It is a lonely spot, which no steamer ever sees, with high sandhills and camel trains on the beach. A few officers who ran the surf to bang into a few shore birds with a shotgun found a few Arab shark catchers and scores of stinking shark rotting in the sun along the sand.

At Aden, the division collected again in a good harbor with buoys in it and coaled from a collier, after which it bade them "bon voyage" and stood out for Manila. It seems, the wardrooms reflect sadly, that there are still some poor devils stuck in Manila, as completely out of the war as rats on a raft.

Here they first ran into the food scarcity, the no treat system and the war. They could see the flashes of the guns from the decks after night and when they motored out some 15 miles to the trenches, they found the British didn't want them to go into the desert and the Turks didn't want Aden, anyway; so both sides did some banging away at each other in the cool of the evening and then called it a day.

Early Sept. 19, they started up the Red Sea, and almost at once one of the five dropped out, with the mother ship standing by. It had a leak somewhere, but the chief couldn't find out where. He worked for five days and nights, snatching a few winks of sleep in a chair or on the fidley. He found finally that his steam line was blowing badly, but he couldn't get at it on account of the heat. However, he got the vessel through to Suez without a tow, patched up his leak, and four hours later, left with his division for the 85 mile run through the canal.

Sept. 25 they anchored off Port Said and cleared for action. For the Mediterranean now is a great big ocean for men only, with "sink-me-quicks" in it. They took down awnings, got all the woodwork off the decks and everything else that would splinter, strung lifelines in their places and overhauled guns. In the matter of heart to heart talks with a Hun, they were like Barkus: "willin'."

They went out into the Mediterranean Oct. 1, zigzagging in smooth weather with no moon, and drawn up in a new formation with their towering 4,000 ton mother in the center and her five tin water snakes drawn up around her, the leader dead ahead, two off the bows and two off the quarters. And in five hours they picked up their first "allo".

They made the dockyard at Malta early on the morning of Oct. 6, without incident. Here they tied up to buoys and coaled from the beach and every hour the chief came up topside and said he wanted 20 tons more and they begged him to go below and find the hole in his bunkers. They worked the Maltese so hard that they struck and the chief had a fight with one of them, and in the end they got a very good tally. But the best tally they ever got was long afterward at Marseilles (they were the first American craft to escort a French troopship, where they went alongside the dock and the French told them to go to it. The French and the Admiralty are still fighting out that tally!

THE FIRST "U" BOAT.

On the morning of Oct. 8, they left Malta for Naples, where the mother ship was to discharge its cargo of rice.

Six hours out, a foretop picked up a submarine eight miles away and they went to their first real "General Quarters" with a reception

committee of guns ready to wait upon the Hun.

One boat chased him and another sent out the allo. You could see him with the glasses, his bow rising and falling in the sea, his awnings up and his crew loafing on deck. And when the first fired one shot at long range, you could see him submerge in a hurry.

At Naples, the mother ship discharges its cargo and some of the officers went up to Rome.

Oct. 15, they weighed anchor for the final leg of their long cruise. The next night, they ran into the worst bow they had encountered. Two boats each lost a mast and two had boats carried away. But they lived through it, and at 9 a.m., Oct. 20, they steamed into the dockyard at Gibraltar, proud and dirty and ready to wait for their mail to catch up with them. The king's harbourmaster found room for them at the Trot moorings and the division commander went ashore to report his arrival to the American Admiral.

"Well," said the admiral, "I suppose you'll want to dock now. How much time will you need before you are ready for duty?"

The division commander hemmed and hawed for a moment.

"How much time will it take the yard to get us 180 tons of coal and 30 tons of water apiece, sir?"

"About ten hours," said the admiral.

"We'll be ready for duty in 10-1/2 hours, sir," said the division commander.

There are not so many two-and-a-half strikers who enjoy such an opportunity of administering a delicate call down to an admiral, but those who have say it is a moment to be marked with a white stone.

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