

# EYEWITNESS TELLS OF THE FIRST BATTLE OFF PORT ARTHUR.

**New York Correspondent Was on British Ship Caught in Midst of the Fight.**

**Japs' First Stinging Blow Which Began Hostilities With the Russians—The Disabling of Some of the Czar's Finest Battle-ships in the Night Attack.**

The first story by an eye-witness of the sea fight between the Japanese and Russians off Port Arthur is here told. The narrator is Francis McCullagh, New York Herald correspondent. He was on the British merchant ship Columbia, which happened to be quarantined just outside Port Arthur harbor when the battle was in progress. He writes:—

On the night of Monday, February 8, I was lying just outside the entrance of Port Arthur harbor in the British ship Columbia, Captain Anderson. The Columbia had come from Chefoo on Sunday morning, but was soon informed that she was to be quarantined for twenty-four hours. Accordingly I had a good deal of time to watch the Russian fleet and to write about the impossibility of the Japanese ever attacking Port Arthur. The weather was particularly fine, the sun shining brightly and the temperature being sufficiently warm to admit of me strolling about the deck without an overcoat.

On Monday morning the Japanese consul at Chefoo was in the harbor on board a British steamer he had chartered with the object of taking all the Japanese away from Port Arthur. This news excited us somewhat, and we began to think that, despite the fact that things generally seemed to be in exactly the same position as they had been in for months past, something serious must have occurred.

By and by we noticed that the Russians partially cleared for action, and even sent ashore their boats in some cases. But as the day wore on and nothing more happened, we gradually forgot about these ominous signs and wondered if we would really get out of quarantine next morning or get an additional twenty-four hours. Toward dusk the three torpedo boats that had been in the habit of patrolling outside the fleet passed us, coming from the shore and making a noise that reminded us of the proverbial policeman's boots which give fair warning to evildoers for scores of yards ahead of him.

About 8 o'clock, just after we had finished dinner on board the Columbia, a sound of singing reached our ears, and, going outside, we heard the Russian sailors chanting their night prayers. The "Pater noster" in old Russian, the "Ave Maria" or a prayer in Chinese, and the favorite invocation of the Latin church, and finally a short prayer for the Tsar. Softened by distance, the chants from the various ships blended together in one harmonious whole and sounded so romantic, so reminiscent of convent schools, of old Spain and of medievalism generally that even the chief engineer, a Scotchman of the unromantic name of Smith, was near being affected.

The night was dark, and the numerous lights twinkling over the spacious bay marked the position of the Russian vessels. At 9 o'clock I sat down to finish the article about which I have already spoken, in which I had laid it down as a fundamental proposition that the Japanese would never attack Port Arthur. Somehow or other I had become more convinced on this point after having heard the sailors say their night prayers. The Russians had evidently the fullest confidence in themselves or they could not pray so beautifully, and I felt as safe lying on the edge of that mighty fleet as I would have felt in the heart of London.

What increased my feeling of confidence, though it ought not to have done so, was the fact that the Russians seemed to think it unnecessary to make any considerable use of their searchlights. Previously they used to annoy the officers of merchant steamers by the way in which they blinded them with the flashlight, either until they were out of sight on the way to Chefoo or until they had entered the inner harbor of Port Arthur.

**Flash of Searchlights.**

At exactly 11.30 I was preparing to retire to bed for the night when I heard three muffled explosions, followed almost immediately by the discharge of a heavy gun. Then arose from amid the blankets in an adjoining cabin the voice of Captain Anderson, the skipper of the Columbia: "War's declared!" were the words he uttered, and seldom have I heard words so brimful of bitter irony.

All the Russian vessels were now using their searchlights so that the sea around them shone like a sheet of silver. One or two searchlights carefully swept the shore, and especially the entrance to the inner harbor. One blazing eye glared at the Columbia for fully five minutes, making us all feel slightly uncomfortable,

as if a policeman's bull's-eye lantern had been flashed on our faces or as if we were standing for photographs.

Strong, however, in the conviction of innocence, the little group on deck bore that blinding stare unflinchingly, making at the same time uncomplimentary remarks about the owner of that particular searchlight.

Some lights were directed upward at an angle of about 45 degrees and did not seem to be brought into requisition at all. I noticed that the lighthouse lamp burned brightly and that the guiding lights at the entrance of the harbor had not been extinguished.

Some war ships were, however, in complete darkness, and if I did not know that it was all make believe I should have considered their appearance as awfully sinister. They had ceased to be ships and become dreadful black blotches on the water, still as death, but liable to burst at any moment into manifestations of hellish energy.

**Sound of the Guns.**  
Meanwhile the firing of light guns—6 pounders, I should say—continued every two or three minutes, but the noise was nothing to what I had heard on other occasions of practice firing and the like. I began to feel that the sight was not worth the inconvenience it caused me. I therefore returned to the saloon, where the captain asked me to join in a whiskey and soda he and some of his officers were having.

"Let us drink to the war just begun," quoth the captain, in his most ironic tone—Captain Anderson is a master of delicate irony—and, laughing at the skipper's sally, we all drank to "the war just begun."

"Well, they're in desperate earnest to-night, anyhow," remarked the mate, as he turned to go. "You must have noticed that these three explosions were a submarine explosion, to an explosion that takes place above water."

"Yes," said the skipper, "they were submarine explosions right enough, these first three. Should say that one of their mines exploded."

The excitement of the Chinese crew caused us great amusement, and when the skipper discovered that one of them had lighted the compass and engine room telegraph—which are, of course, only lighted when a vessel is going to sea—and had taken up his position at the wheel as if we were going to sea, he immediately called out to the Chinese officers running merrily over the bay.

I also laughed myself when the joke was explained to me, and on going forward and seeing the lamp that showed the compass throwing its pale light on the frigate-like face of the Chinaman who had perpe-

trated the joke I laughed again. I also felt quite pleased with myself for knowing so much more than this ignorant Chinaman and tried hard to induce the two Russian guards we had aboard that war had been declared.

But, although also somewhat excited, they were too cunning for me. "No, it's only practice," they said, gruffly.

At 12 o'clock the firing slackened and I came to the conclusion that I had had enough of it for one night. Later I heard the firing recommence, and I now noticed that somewhat heavier guns were being fired. I also heard the whizz of shells. In the early morning the chief officer told me a Russian officer had come aboard and wanted to say something, but could not manage to make himself understood, as he spoke only Russian, a language which the chief officer is not acquainted with.

Without stopping to take breath, the chief officer went on to tell me that two big battle ships had taken up their position right opposite the entrance to the harbor.

"A most unusual thing," he added. "They must really have got a scare last night after all. The firing ceased, by the way, at about 3 this morning. These battle-ships I speak of came on board the Columbia at 1 o'clock. At about 1.30 a number of young naval officers came aboard of us, evidently very much excited, and one of them tried to talk to me in French, but as he always relapsed in his excitement into his mother tongue I could not make head or tail of what he said. He got so muddled up that he simply danced around the deck in pure madness."

There was no light in the cabin, but the reflection from the searchlights showed me that the officer's face was covered

The First Real Test of Modern Ironclads in Action; Battle of the Yalu River, 1894.

with perspiration. He seemed to be very much excited. I asked him if he could speak German, and he said he could, and then went on to speak to me in Russian.

His words were: "His excellency the vicey has issued a most extraordinary order. No commercial ships leave or enter the harbor of Port Arthur."

He repeated that twice, and then, apologizing for disturbing me, he turned abruptly and disappeared.

I cannot say that I was in the least disturbed by this occurrence, for I saw nothing but a light shining in the distance. By 1 o'clock some considerable time had passed, and the searchlights were still burning. The lights of the vessels were as busy as they had been the night before. The position of some of the vessels had been changed, and, true enough, as the chief officer had already informed me, there were two big men-of-war lying close to the mouth of the harbor, with all their lights burning and their flashlights playing around them.

**Breaking of the Day.**  
The lighthouse lamp had gone out, thought it was still dark, but the guiding lights burned brightly.

"I cannot for the life of me understand," said the mate, "what they mean by placing these warships in such a position. Most extraordinary position! Sure enough they must have got a bad scare last night."

Then we tried to warm ourselves by walking up and down the deck. The moon was now shining. There was a light southerly breeze and a whitish mist lay on the horizon. The peacefulness of nature was in strong contrast to the agitation of man. It was long after the day had dawned before the Russian vessels ceased using their searchlights, and by that time the practiced eye of one of the officers of the Columbia had detected something unnatural in the position of the two war ships lying at the harbor mouth. He was not very long in coming to a conclusion.

It took us some considerable time to realize that two of Russia's best and biggest battle-ships lay helpless almost within a stone's throw of us. Then we all exclaimed simultaneously: "What will the Japanese do when they hear this?"

And the answer each of us gave was that Japan would declare war at once if she heard it. By and by somebody suggested that perhaps the vessels had been torpedoed or had run on submarine mines, but that view was soon abandoned. The general opinion was that there had been a collision.

Never was there such unanimity of opinion on board a ship. It was so perfect that nobody listened to anybody else. Each jerked out explanations absolutely identical with those jerked out by his neighbor, and then, after brooding over his own remarks for a few moments in silence and taking yet another long, searching look at the disabled battle-ships, he repeated the same remark in another form. It did not seem to strike any of us at the time that this was an absurd form of conversation.

When the lights became stronger we could see that the forts had been manned during the night, rather a strange thing, we thought. In some places where there were galleries long lines of men were visible, and the heads of officers peering above the breastworks showed that all the fortifications must have turned out.

On the higher point of Golden Hill, Port stood a large group of men, probably high officers, all scanning the horizon with their eyes fixed on the sea. They were looking out all the anxious hours that followed as long as the Columbia remained in Port Arthur. One of the group turned to me, but on account of the distance I could not say for certain.

**Japanese Ships Seen.**  
I afterward found that one of the Japanese passengers on board the Columbia arrived independently at the same conclusion.

By and by the sun rose, and, owing to the light mist that lay upon the water, it was very round and red, looking for all the world like a red-hot cannon ball.

"That's an ominous sign," I remarked (the rising sun being the flag of Japan), but nobody took any notice of this attempt at witicism.

The sun revealed a strange sight, namely, four vessels lying about five miles off and apparently cruisers. These could not be Russians; what on earth were they? The ship's telescope soon conveyed to us the astounding information that they flew the flag of the Rising Sun. They were calmly lying there, probably trying to find out through their glasses the exact amount of damage that the torpedo boats had done.

I became fully convinced, after a few moments' consideration, that these vessels could not be supported by Japanese cruisers, that had come to do damage and then rush off. And apparently they had done damage, for it could be seen that the torpedo boats were no longer important parts of a formidable fighting machine; they were a

**Picture of the Destruction Which the Morning Sun Showed Yellow Men Had Wrought.**

**Attack on Ships and Port by Japanese Fleet Resumed With Daybreak—Fritter Passed Safe Through Lines of Death-daling Shells.**

As found it so hard to struggle against and which the Chinese so cheerfully obeyed.

He repeated when all was over and we had almost lost sight of land, but neither he nor his companion could say any further trouble.

I shall go back, however, to my reaching the shelter of the forward set of cabins. In the unpracticed space in front of them I found the captain and the rest of the officers grouped together, wild-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 true 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 thought. 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 Admiral, 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 unharmed. 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 hillsides and raising clouds of yellow dust or smoke. Two or three burst on the very summit of the forts. One exploded a magazine on Gold Hill fort, raising an enormous column of smoke.

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 manoeuvre clumsily. It fired enough, however, even the torpedo boats using their guns, but none of the Japanese seem to be damaged. The forts did not fire very frequently, and did not, I think, do much damage. Whenever 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 lifted as I approached.

We had on board three Japanese passengers, one of whom was from Dalny, spoke some Russian and was, I should imagine, from his cast of countenance, one of the many Japanese tourists 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 soldier's self-respect. The Russian soldier is the simplest and most glibly 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 Chefoo by another boat which was passing. I prepared my message and called a sampan, or Chinese boat, and guards

forbade this boat to approach, so I had to resort to a little stratagem.

**His Dispatch Sent.**  
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