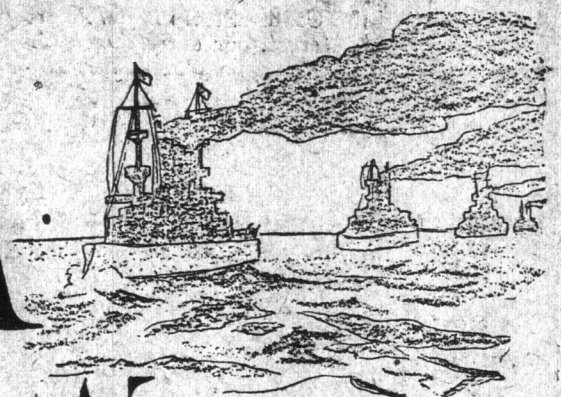


A British Impression of the United States Navy



I am speaking of the officers of the battleships and armored cruiser. Should I intimate that they were picked men I should lay myself open to much criticism. It is better to say that I am speaking of the spirit of the battleships, which brings us to the significantly weak link in the remarkably strong Annapolis system. Elimination of the idle and indifferent ends with the commission of a youth when his character is yet undeveloped. It is only natural that an officer who prefers easier lines should drift into easier berths and find small cruiser service to his taste. For the important tasks and places there is a kind of selection; there must be. But this can be carried only so far before it encounters the right, under the present regulations, of an officer to a position in keeping with his rank. The battle efficiency of the American navy today is, therefore, largely due to the young men. Usually the first lieutenant of a battleship entered the academy just as the first modern ships were building. He has grown with the navy. If the more radical of the young men had their way, I sometimes think that a ship would always be navigated from her conning tower at sea and always cleared for action. Rank does not interest them; opportunity for professional work does. When an order comes for shore duty they frequently apply to remain at sea when they are on a battleship. Recently the fleet ordnance officer of 16 battleships, expecting to be superseded owing to a change in admirals, expressed a wish to go as ship's ordnance officer so that he might continue at sea with the work he loved. However, the new admiral retained him.

At the suggestion that the president be given power to choose young admirals, the navy rebels against the very thing it has been asking for. It sees political influence, which is the goblin of its nightmare. When the president recommends selection, the opposition press is aroused to demand why a man who has served his country faithfully for 40 years should yield his place to a junior; and the more incapable officers are in their profession the larger the number of representatives in congress which they seem to know. An unbiased observer might ask why, in a service which pays its officers' schooling and a wage fit for a gentleman to live on, it is necessary to keep any one on the active service list for life if the nation is better served with him on the retired list. Without some reform in personnel it is hopeless for the American navy fully to realize the value of its excellent material or to reach that maximum of efficiency of which it is so evidently capable.

Then there is the question of the marines, who are also a heritage of the British service. The line, never abating its Annapolis solidarity, wishes them off the ships, where their only service is to supply orderlies and to man part of the torpedo defence guns. Admiral Evans even gave all the police patrol work in port to the bluejackets. Wherever they have been called on for soldier service the marines have distinguished themselves by gallantry and preparedness. They have much influence, and they have been able to increase their corps rapidly. But many marine officers now think that it would be wiser if the marines were made a special corps in barracks for use when infantry is needed for an advanced base or any sudden emergency over seas.

An old idea, which seems to die slowly, that the American man-of-war's men are mostly foreign born should be dismissed at once. In a previous article I have outlined the cleavage line between officers of the older and of the newer schools. With the rapid growth from a navy of insignificant cruisers to second place among naval powers the enlisted personnel has also undergone a complete change. Hardened seamen of early middle age are rare in the American service. The average age of the crews of the battleship fleet is little over 21. They enlist for a period of four years. Before the Spanish war the term was only three. Re-enlistment was then more common than now. The men were drawn mostly from the seaport towns, while the great middle and western states were untapped. There were many Swedes and Norwegians, some Germans and some British. Occasionally you will hear older officers sigh for these older seamen as boatswains, though not as gunners. Familiar with all the sailing seamen's business, they were more useful in a whaleboat in a heavy sea than in a turret. But they were accustomed to a harder life and harder food than the present generation will endure. With the idea of increasing the number of native Americans an apprentice system was at one time established, but has since been abolished. In one sense its purpose was served with the new class of recruits after the Spanish war; in another, the service was left entirely dependent on four-year men. Look over the roster of any ship today and you will find the names of

every nationality of the continent of Europe which has sent its stream of emigrants to America. But with few exceptions, whether ending in "sky" or "i," they are of the second generation and born in the United States. Recruiting parties now traverse the whole country. Officers generally agree that the best men come from the interior, and particularly from the farms and small villages. Many of them never saw salt water till they went to a navy yard. The absence of sea habits and sea training is, in the eyes of the younger officers, little disadvantage. A taste for mechanics is considered far more useful aboard a battleship, where seamanship is but an incident to gunnery. Though the average pay of all the different ratings is over £5 a month, that is not the prime, though an important, consideration with young Americans. Many of them come from families well-to-do in a small way. They go to sea to see the world and they are fascinated by the mechanical training, which many of them put to good use in after life. This brings a much more intelligent class of men, as a rule, than the army enlist. All of them have a good common school education.

Though Americans will enlist without number in time of war—for in no country is the volunteer and militia idea so strong—they have little interest in playing the professional soldier or sailor in time of peace. In popularizing the navy President Roosevelt has played a continuously important part ever since he was assistant secretary of the navy at the outbreak of the Spanish war. The recent high tide of prosperity in the States, with labor of all kinds in demand, sent few men to the recruiting office in search of a livelihood. Hard times and an army of the unemployed have helped the celebrity of the fleet's cruise to fill the ranks to overflowing; and the standard of physical and moral excellence of the enlisted men is higher than ever before. Desertion is at a minimum, and desertion was a serious matter indeed four or five years ago. When these young men who had come to see the world tired of routine and discipline, shore liberty meant that many remained where "a job" was not hard to find. They saw no particular disgrace in time of peace in an act which a sense of patriotic honor, let alone fear of punishment, would not have permitted in time of war. Comparatively little effort is made to follow up and arrest deserters. The American public takes a lax view of the subject, perhaps, while the naval officers are inclined to think that a man who will desert is not worth having.

Probably 70 per cent of the men in the battleship fleet would not re-enlist in any circumstances except war. Many are boys of only 18 or 19 years. Some are scarcely full grown. They will be back in civil life early in the 20's, with the perfect confidence of success which characterizes young Americans. As a rule the navy man succeeds in civil life. The very discipline to which he objects, as a free American, serves him well. He has been taught habits of temperance and industry. But, according to the principle of "being as good as anybody," he has no taste for saluting superiors all his life. A few years after leaving the navy he may have as large an income as the admiral and ride in an automobile. Everything is possible, including Harvard or Yale for his son. He feels less than any foreign man-of-war's man could—for he does not come from a designated "class"—were they both civilians, the sense of any social dividing line, which aboard ship is rigidly enforced. Sons of enlisted men, in fact, have received appointment to Annapolis and have been good officers.

The officers' relations with their men are simple and unaffected. Discipline which may seem slack in the formalities works out into a pretty severe system. The officers' higher training in mechanics makes it easy for them to win the natural respect of men mechanically inclined, which is more valuable than mere military form. As a rule, the watch officers, though young, have the shade of a few years of age over those whom they command. In all my experience with the fleet I saw no instance of a man showing surliness in receiving an order, let alone talking back, though there were such instances, as I knew by the records, and the culprits were most summarily dealt with. The American, whatever his position, is inclined to "play the game." "I wouldn't re-enlist for a thousand a month and no desertion for mine, either. I'm in for it, and I'll see it through right up to the mark, according to Hoyle. But me for good old home and running a lathe for \$2.50 a day when I take my hammock and beat it," said one bluejacket, in his expressive American slang. "But say, I wouldn't give up the experience for two thousand."

That same desire of any young American of the working class to get a place to run a machine rather than work outdoors makes the American bluejacket keen on the guns. For qualifying as a gun pointer he gets £5 additional a month. Turret crews get prizes. The whole system of ratings looks to monetary rewards and honors and is based on every possible form of competition to keep up interest toward the field day, where the year's work tells, at the annual target practice. Nobody likes to win better than the American. He keeps his eye on that, sometimes to the expense of general efficiency, critics may say. Gun is set against gun and turret against turret, and the guns' crews are always ready to bet against one another.

In gunnery there is the intensity of sporting interest which the whole practice of the American navy induces. Drudgery without reason, simply because it is the rule, seems to be as unnatural to the American youth as it is natural to the Germans and the Japanese. The American seaman wants to know why he does things. It is no business of his to ask his officer, but if he cannot see why, he gets listless. Naturally alert and quick, it does not take him long to understand "what the game is" in the modern system of target practice. One has only to realize the length of time it takes to train even men with an inborn fondness for mechanics, which is totally lacking in some people, in the ways of battleship life and then consider that as soon as the man is well trained his enlistment term is up, to understand how hard-driven the officers are in teaching fundamentals. But they anticipate that more and more men will re-enlist, in which the event seems to bear them out, and consequently in a few years they will have a nucleus of seasoned and trained personnel.

In food and in comforts the American seaman is the best off of any in the world. Cleanliness of ships and men is remarkable. No disagreeable odors ever assail the nostrils on an American man-of-war. Fresh water ad libitum for washing seems to be accepted as a necessity, along with ample bathing facilities. For one thing, it is easy to keep the ships clean, because they spend relatively little time in cold climates. In the hot summer of the Atlantic coast they are off Cape Cod preparing for target practice; in winter they are at Guantanamo, in Cuba, preparing for battle practice. With a drop in the thermometer the steam heat is turned on and the ship becomes as warm as an American hotel or railroad train. Ample cold storage facilities preserve supplies of fresh fish and meat. In fact, Jack lives better than he usually does at home. If he did not, enlistment would fall off. A winter in the English Channel or the North Sea with an unheated ship would be a positive hardship to him. Moreover, he must be amused. He is no automaton to do nothing but drill. When desertions were heaviest and he was rarely given shore leave a new policy was begun under Admiral Evans, who could have the satisfaction of knowing, when he hauled down his flag in San Francisco, that he was leaving a "contented fleet." A fleet athletic officer was attached to his staff to make the development of sports and arranging of games his special duty. When Jack goes ashore in numbers at every port for his national game of baseball, bats and balls and gloves are furnished by the nation. Frequently midshipmen who were crack players at the academy play in the nines, without any of the prejudice to discipline that was at first feared by older officers. Boxing has been promoted under strict regulations of six rounds, with younger officers as referees, who decide strictly on points. For most of the men a good bout is the best show they know. In any difficulties ashore they always use their fists. A man who drew a knife would find himself an outcast. On the forecabin the ring is built, with seats around it for the officers, and Jack crowding behind them upon the deck and the turrets. Cheers are allowed, but no cat-calls, and one groan over a decision means that all the rest of the contests that evening are called off. Some of the best amateur bouts I have ever seen have been between American bluejackets. They never fail to "go in" for all their worth, as the honor of their ships and the temper of the audience demand. Care is always taken that men who are in the same class as sparring for their weight are pitted against each other. The name of the new champion heavyweight of the battleship fleet is suggestive of how completely the sport of the British and their American descendants is engrained in the American, whatever his ancestry. It is Schlossberg, of German origin, while Altieri, the old champion, is of Italian origin, and both American born, of course.

Reviewing the above, the Times says: We printed yesterday the second of two very interesting articles in which a correspondent has presented to our readers some of the

A CORRESPONDENT of the London Times contributes the following instructive timely study of the United States navy, its officers and men.

In the character of both commissioned and enlisted personnel the United States navy is radically different from any navy, although its customs are founded on British customs and its heritage is British. A glance through the register shows that most of the officers' names are of English, Irish, or Scotch origin, with a sprinkling of German. The second and third generations of the large influx of continental blood have not yet found their way to any extent into the wardroom. It is the British naval spirit of meeting your enemy off his own shores, of the eternal aggressive, which is implanted in the American service. A saying of Farragut's, "The best protection from an enemy's fire is a well-directed fire of your own," which is only a version of an old idea, probably best expresses American naval ideals. It accounts, too, for what many naval critics have considered in the past the overgunning of the ships at the expense of protection. In the Spanish war, while the American public was emotional over Lieut. Hobson's deed in sinking the Merrimac, the service was most delighted with Lieut. Com. Wainwright's dash in a converted yacht to an encounter with the two Spanish destroyers. Professionally, the merit of Dewey's victory in Manila Bay was the unhesitating promptness with which he proceeded to his objective. That three months' campaign against Spain left the American navy with no illusions. The relative strength of the two forces it had perfectly in mind. In no wise elated by success, it faced the problem of the rebuilding of a first-class navy as a serious task that required untiring industry.

The two schools, West Point and Annapolis, which graduate the officers for the army and the navy, have much the same course; but there the likeness between army and navy ends. The line of the navy is a unit, with all the influences at its command, to keep politics out of the service at any sacrifice. It was suggestive of naval spirit that when the recent pay bill was before congress it was not unusual to hear naval officers say, "Keep the pay, but give us four battleships and more colliers." Yet most of them seriously needed the increase. The American navy is the only service in the world where some income is not practically a requirement for the young officer. An officer with a private income is rare. Many are the sons of poor professional men. The sons of the rich have not yet sought admission. The Annapolis system is the purest example of democracy. It is open to all. All that a boy needs is money enough to bring him to the school. Examinations are first held in the congressional districts for the appointment of a principal and an alternate. If the principal fails, the alternate gets his place. Once he is admitted he enters the service of the United States on pay equivalent to all his living expenses. The son of a day laborer may graduate at the head of his class if he has the academic ability. Adm. Sampson, the commander-in-chief at Santiago, was one. Annapolis, too, has in mind that other qualification aside from sheer efficiency which is expressed in the second noun of the phrase "officer and gentleman." It is the school's boast that no one may graduate without the mark of a distinguishing quality which will last him for life. It receives many and graduates few. Its course is hard and rigid, mentally and physically, with no cessation in the two years' midshipman's cruise before the commission is granted. Here the elimination process ends. A man's place in the service is fixed for life.

In the civil war days officers rose to command before they were 30. By 1880 men of 45 were not yet commanders and men of 40 were

watch officers. The ships were civil war relics. The nation, engrossed in civil affairs and home development, had no thought of conflict. Then, late in the eighties, with the building of the new navy interest was again developed, and with the Spanish war youthful imagination responded everywhere and the number of cadets was doubled. The admirals and captains of the present day received their education and formed their habits in the dead period after the civil war, before the new navy came into being. The average age of reaching captain's rank is over 55. Captains have come into command of battleships without ever having served in one. With the exception of the ambitious and earnest ones, they are not familiar with the complex mechanics of a battleship. They have all the passion of the old American navy, a relic of American clipper days, for fresh paint, white sides, and spotless decks, and they cannot forget the "flyspecking," habits of yesterday, when from the poop the captain could overlook everything that happened in his little world. The seamen of his youthful days were mature men—"hard" best describes them—of many nationalities, severely disciplined, and probably took more interest in the formalities than in the guns. For more than ten years this older strata will be in the saddle. They are fond of rank, for which they waited long. It is often their inclination to choose the easier way out of a dilemma or emergency. To be honorably retired as an admiral and never to run your ship aground fulfils the ambition of many, though not all. The able and conspicuous ones have to wait their turn on the incompetent. No one, according to the critics, will be admiral long enough properly to master the work of high command.

The younger strata are restless, not to say discontented, as any young men in a service will be when it is suffering from this old-service malady which Bonaparte so promptly cured in the French army. They like and understand the new type of sailors, young and American born. Any drill which is not for battle is a waste of time. The "sea habit" to their mind, should be consigned to the dark ages along with "Prepare to board." They prefer farmers' sons from the heart of the land, who never saw salt water, to the youth of the wharves in seaport towns. Boat drill interests little except as a sport, for it has nothing to do with hitting the target. "Abandon ship" drill is a heresy. It suggests to the man that such a thing as abandoning a ship really entered an officer's mind. "Less of the cheerful 'Aye, aye, Sir,' and functions, and more hard, intelligent work," as one of the watch officers put it. One cannot live with these younger officers without feeling that the sudden growth of the navy or some other cause has given them an extraordinary military spirit such as you meet with only in epochs of a nation's life. They would make a battleship a factory of ceaseless industry, and what they are really longing for is an autocrat who will apply the survival-of-the-fittest rule to promotion, and make a fleet an unsentimental business institution, never wasting time on any unnecessary formalities and with no by-products to its output except preparation for war. Moreover, Annapolis men get the habit of hard work at the academy. They are passionate for high scores for their divisions and ships at target practice. Morning and afternoon they drill the men until the men are stale and then they find more work in studying. Some critics say that they overdo it; that they are in danger of getting stale themselves. Mostly they associate little with the people of civil life. They live in a world of itself, a self-absorbed, professional world where they are compelled, according to the American custom, to know every branch of the service. And they hold steadfastly to the idea that the naval is not a leisurely, gentlemanly occupation, but the most exacting of professions in the application required.

ship today and you will find the names of