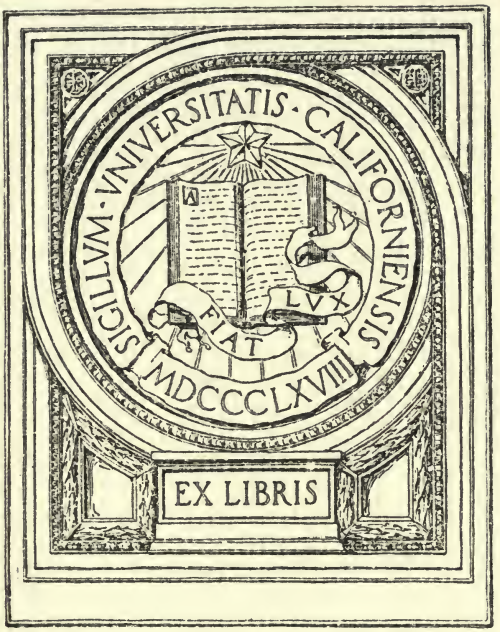
On the Coast of France

Joseph Husband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ON THE COAST OF FRANCE

Vice-Admiral Henry B. Wilson, U. S. N.
Commander United States Naval Forces in France

On the Coast of France

The Story of the United States Naval Forces in French Waters

BY

JOSEPH HUSBAND

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WITH "PREFACE" BY

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Assistant Secretary of the Navy

ILLUSTRATIONS FROM PHOTOGRAPHS

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To

VICE-ADMIRAL H. B. WILSON, U. S. N.

By whose fine professional ability a great work was splendidly accomplished, and by whose rare personality the bond between two sister republics was the more firmly established

—JOSEPH HUSBAND

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INTRODUCTION

NEVER in the history of the world has sea power played so vital a part in the winning of a war; and never, in proportion to the magnitude of the forces and operations involved, has the Navy played a part in which its proverbial silence has been as marked as in the activities which terminated on November 11, 1918, with the armistice between the Allied and the Central Powers.

The war in its naval aspects, has been a war of negative action; a series of checkmates, by which the Allied navies secured the seas from the interference of the grand fleets and raiding squadrons of the enemy. But in this war the submarine, a new weapon of offensive warfare, imposed new conditions. Relatively secure in its operations from the larger vessels of the

Allied navies, which themselves were in many instances its ready prey, the submarine directed its activities against the troop and store ships by which alone the men and means to prosecute the war were made possible.

To meet the preying warfare of the submarine, the smaller and faster vessels of our Navy were required in European waters, to assure the safe and uninterrupted passage of our "bridge of ships." It is not the purpose of this narrative to deal with the operations of the United States Naval Forces in English waters or in the Mediterranean. In the north, the concerted action with the British Navy, and in the south the co-operation with the navies of France and Italy developed operations of which it is impossible at this early date to secure even casual data.

Of the activities of the United States Naval Forces in France, it is possible, however, to obtain more definite information, due primarily to the fact that these operations were more sharply defined and more distinctly our own. To keep open the western coast of France was a task of the most vital importance, involving a large and

capable organization and the utmost secrecy of operation.

Due to this necessity for secrecy, little has been known of the work of our Navy on the French coast. To the majority of the American people our men and stores have been transported with a miraculous freedom from disaster, but the means by which this security has been attained have been unknown.

In no sense is this volume offered as a history of the United States Naval Forces in France, for a historic record of those splendid activities would require a study of the complete operations which is at the present time impossible. Rather, it is the present purpose to afford, by a few side lights on these activities of sixteen months, a general view of the field and an impression of the nature of the work involved. By these, our most recent operations in the world's most historic waters, the forces of the Navy not only secured the desired safe passage of our troop and store ships but by their cooperation with the French Naval Forces and their association with the people of the French nation, on land as on the

sea, established a sentiment of mutual affection and esteem more permanent than can be obtained by treaties or the written word.

More than the United States can ever realize, does it owe to those who directed our naval operations in French waters, a gratitude for past performance and for future promise.

Brest, France, December 2, 1918.

PREFACE

By Franklin D. Roosevelt

Assistant Secretary of the Navy

THE Navy was known during the war as the "Silent Service." Little appeared in official dispatches or in the public press regarding the operations of the United States Naval Forces either in Europe or on our own coast. In fact, in only a handful of instances, where a transport was torpedoed or where an enemy submarine was definitely accounted for, was any mention made of our naval work. Generally speaking, the people at home knew only that their Navy was successfully manning the transports and escorting the troops, munitions, and supplies in safety to the shores of France.

How very much more these operations involved is only now coming out. On our entrance into the Great War in the spring of 1917, steps were immediately taken by the Navy Depart-

ment to build up an organization to be based on the French coast, primarily for the purpose of keeping the famous "Neck of the Bottle" as free as possible from German submarines. The distance from Bordeaux to Brest is a comparatively small one, and almost every ship entering the French ports from the United States had, of necessity, to pass through a narrow strip of sea. This small area had proved a famous hunting-ground for enemy submarines, and it became our obvious task to send over every possible means of assistance to work with the French Navy.

The story of what our officers and men did in those early days is the best illustration of the all-round efficiency of the Navy. A large proportion of the officers and men came from civil life, but were quickly and successfully indoctrinated into their naval duties by the regular officers of the service. The tools with which they had to work were, in large part, makeshift. Yachts were hurriedly converted to naval purposes; all kinds of equipment was taken over for possible use in France. From small beginnings

the organization grew until by the summer of 1918 the whole western coast of France was guarded by a string of surface vessels and aircraft.

Not only was the "Neck of the Bottle" made safe for our troop and supply ships, but the operations were extended from the defensive type to the offensive, and the very existence of enemy submarines was rendered extremely unhealthy long before the armistice came.

To the men who took part in this great work too much credit cannot be given. Extraordinary physical endurance was called for, and more than that, imagination and a genius to meet new conditions with untried weapons was essential to success.

During the summer of 1918 I had the pleasure of visiting these French bases and of seeing the work at first hand. No part of our naval activities deserves higher credit than the part they took. They have the satisfaction, at least, of knowing that the Navy and the country are proud of them.

Washington, D. C., April 25, 1919.

On the Coast of France

CHAPTER I

FIRST MONTHS OF THE WAR

WITH the entry of the United States into the war with Germany and the Central Powers, arose the immediate necessity of naval participation and cooperation with the fleets of the Allied nations. Never in the world's history had been furnished an example so complete and so convincing of the vital necessity of adequate sea power to secure the desired victory over the common foe. For three years the great fleets of England had been holding in leash the German Navy, but despite the assurance which England's fleet had given for the protection of the seas from the German High Sea Fleet, other grave dangers were clearly existent. In the Channel, on the west coast of Ireland, along the French

coast and in the Mediterranean, the German and Austrian submarines were waging a successful warfare against the Allied shipping. To hold in port the powerful Navy of Germany, the Grand Fleet of England was chained to its guardianship of the Helgoland gates, and on a similar duty the French fleet watched the harbors and naval bases of Austria in the Mediterranean.

The entry of the United States into the war, created new problems which it alone must solve; problems of transportation of troops and supplies to the practically unprotected ports of western France.

Tied hand and foot were the fleets of the Allies. Not only did it devolve upon us to deliver an army on French soil and the necessary stores required by these hundreds of thousands of fighting men; but it also became necessary for us in large measure, to protect the passage and arrival of the vessels required for troop and store transports.

From Calais the French coast slips in a southwesterly direction, embracing in its rugged coast

line the ports of Boulogne, Le Havre and Cherbourg, to the rocky point of Finistère where in a great sheltered harbor, at its western extremity, rests the city of Brest, greatest of all French seaports from the aspects of naval strategy. From Brest, the coast runs southeasterly to the Spanish line, including, from north to south, the harbors of Lorient, Quiberon Bay, Saint-Nazaire, La Rochelle, Rochefort, the Gironde River and Bordeaux, the Adour River and Bayonne and the little southern fishing port of Saint-Jean de Luz almost in the shadow of the Pyrenees. Of these ports, Brest, Lorient, Saint-Nazaire and the Gironde offered the best facilities for the reception of troops and stores; and it was here that the preliminary steps were taken to prepare for their arrival. But the great work of the Navy was apparently to be not on French soil or on the wide Atlantic, but particularly in the submarine danger zone which naturally centered at those points on the French coast where the greatest number of transatlantic lanes converged; in other words, in the Bay of Biscay at Brest, and in the Channel.

To understand more clearly the nature of the convoy work, it may be divided into two general classes:

First, the escorting into and out of port through the danger zone of the transatlantic convoys; and, second, the escorting of the coastal convoys from port to port. The mission of the United States Naval Forces in France may thus be crystallized into the following sentence: "To safeguard United States troop and store ships and to cooperate with the French naval authorities."

Granted, therefore, the hypothesis that with a limited number of ports of arrival in France the enemy submarines would have only to watch the immediate approaches to these ports, the problem became simplified and the work resolved itself into a system of convoys, both coastal and deep sea, so thorough in its character, that the submarines would be forced from the entrances of the harbors and be compelled to wait for the convoys at a considerable distance off the coast and in the open sea where the chance of meeting was materially reduced and where

the attendant dangers and hardships were greatly increased.

On the entire western coast of France and in the Channel, German submarines were particularly active; it was but logical to calculate that this activity would increase as the volume of American shipping was augmented. To meet this submarine blockade and carry against it a successful warfare, was especially required a type of small and swift vessels capable of mounting guns of intermediate caliber and of being rapidly maneuvered and, at the same time, possessing sufficient seaworthy qualities to withstand the strains of continuous service in waters notoriously tempestuous. For this work the destroyer was unquestionably the ideal type, but as the few destroyers available had been sent to English waters, the yachts were taken over and converted as far as possible to meet the requirements. Later, by the addition of a number of destroyers, it was planned to provide a force of sufficient strength and mobility to offset the submarine activities and assure the safety required to place our troops and stores on French soil. To

cooperate with the United States Naval Forces, the French Navy afforded a number of small destroyers and fast patrol boats, suitably armed and familiar with the waters in which the major operations would necessarily take place. In addition, the French naval establishment possessed adequate and most excellent mine-sweeping facilities and also a limited force of hydroplanes and dirigibles for cooperation with the patrol and escort vessels.

It is appropriate to recall at the beginning of this narrative of our latest naval achievements that it was in these same historic French waters, that our Navy found its birth, and that in Quiberon Bay the Stars and Stripes, flying from the U. S. S. *Ranger* of John Paul Jones, received its first salute from a foreign nation when the guns of the fleet of the French Admiral le Motte, thundered a welcome to this new-born ensign of the new-born nation across the sea.

On June 4, 1917, a small fleet of six yachts left the New York Navy Yard and steamed slowly down the stream. This force, a handful of converted pleasure vessels, bore the official designa-

U. S. S. NOMA

U. S. S. CHRISTABEL

The smallest and oldest ship in foreign service. The white star on the stack means official credit for a submarine

U. S. S. RAMBLER

U. S. S. WANDERER

tion of the U. S. Patrol Squadrons Operating in European Waters and constituted the first American naval participation in the Great War, actually to be established in French waters. The yachts were:

U. S. S. *Kanawha*	U. S. S. *Vedette*
U. S. S. *Noma*	U. S. S. *Christabel*
U. S. S. *Harvard*	U. S. S. *Sultana*

and also included in this force, but temporarily under the orders of Rear-Admiral Gleaves, were the U. S. S. *Corsair* and the U. S. S. *Aphrodite*.

For over a month work had been pushed to the utmost to prepare the yachts for foreign service. Furnishings and decorations of peaceful days were removed and stored in Brooklyn warehouses. White sides and glittering brightwork were hidden under coats of battle gray. Fore and aft, three-inch guns were mounted, and guns of smaller caliber were located on the upper decks. Cutlasses and rifles lined bulkheads of panelled oak or mahogany. Everywhere about the ships improvised quarters, in former smoking-rooms, libraries and sun-parlors, housed

crews expanded by war-time necessity to four or five times the original quota required to operate the yachts in time of peace.

The six yachts anchored until the morning of June 9 off Tompkinsville, S. I., New York, and at 5:30 A.M. stood out to sea at a standard speed of ten knots, enroute to Bermuda. On the twelfth of June, the force arrived at St. George's Bay, coaled; on the sixteenth again got under way and shaped a course for the Azores.

The yachts arrived at Brest, France, on the fourth of July, after a relatively uneventful voyage, where they found the *Corsair* and the *Aphrodite,* which had arrived ahead of them due to their greater size which enabled them to lay a direct transatlantic course. On July 14, 1917, the squadron commander, Captain W. B. Fletcher, U. S. N., with his staff, secured quarters on shore and began the first actual active co-operation with the French Navy against the enemy submarines. It is of historical interest to note that a few hours before entering the harbor, the *Noma* sighted a periscope. A few hours later, the S. S. *Orleans* was torpedoed, probably

by the same submarine which the *Noma* sighted, and her thirty-seven survivors of the crew and the thirteen members of the United States naval armed guard were brought into Brest by the *Sultana.*

During the month of July, the yachts received a strenuous introduction to the patrol duty, which consisted of a constant patrol of defined areas of water, so continuous and so thorough that the submarine activities, hitherto in a large measure undisputed, were materially hampered and the safety of the convoys passing through these waters was proportionately increased. On the afternoon of the twenty-ninth of August, the U. S. S. *Guinevere* and the U. S. S. *Carola* IV, of the Second Squadron of converted yachts, arrived at Brest, and on the thirtieth, Commander F. N. Freeman, U. S. N., with the yachts U. S. S. *Alcedo,* U. S. S. *Wanderer,* U. S. S. *Remlik,* U. S. S. *Corona,* and U. S. S. *Emeline* came into the harbor, delayed by storms and with badly leaking decks.

Due to the unusually fantastic scheme of camouflage which disguised the ships of the Sec-

ond Squadron, these yachts were commonly known as the "Easter Egg Fleet," every conceivable color having been incorporated in a riotous speckled pattern on their sides.[1]

On the fifteenth of August, the *Noma* reported the first actual engagement with any enemy submarine as follows: "At 2:17 P.M. in position Lat. 47° 40′ N. Long. 5° 05′ W. sighted a suspicious object bearing about 245° (per standard compass), distance about 6,000 yards. Object was made out to be a submarine on the surface heading about 320° psc. A discharge was being emitted by the submarine, very much like smoke and was very misleading. Submarine was evidently charging her batteries. At 2:20 P.M. went to "general quarters" and closed in on submarine. At 2:24 P.M. opened fire with port battery, distance about 4,000 yards. Fired ten shots. Submarine fired three shots at this ship,

[1] U.S.S. *Corsair* — Lieut. Com. T. A. Kittinger, U.S.N. U.S.S. *Aphrodite* — Lieut. Com. R. P. Craft, U.S.N. U.S.S. *Noma* — Lieut. Com. L. R. Leahy, U.S.N. U.S.S. *Kanawha* — Lieut. Com. H. D. Cooke, U.S.N. U.S.S. *Vedette* — Lieut. Com. C. L. Hand, U.S.N. U.S.S. *Christabel* — Lieutenant H. B. Riebe, U.S.N. U.S.S. *Harvard* — Lieutenant A. G. Stirling, U.S.N. U.S.S. *Sultana* — Lieutenant E. G. Allen, U.S.N. Captain William B. Fletcher, U.S.N., squadron commander.

one striking about 500 yards ahead of the ship and the other two shots well over and on the quarter. At 2:27 P.M. the submarine submerged. Proceeded to vicinity of submarine, but did not see her again. At 2:35 P.M. resumed our course."

Although the foregoing was the first actual engagement, the *Noma* on August 8, in response to an S. O. S. call, joined the S. S. *Dunraven,* which was badly disabled by gunfire from a submarine. This ship had been shelled from astern by the submarine, one shell having exploded in the after magazine and disabled the steering gear. Soon after, the submarine approached closer to the *Dunraven* and fired a torpedo. The submarine was in this position when the *Noma* came up on the opposite side of the torpedoed vessel. Two depth charges were dropped by the *Noma* on the spot where the submarine submerged, but these being of the early type, failed to detonate.

The next squadron of the patrol force, Captain T. P. Magruder, U. S. N., in command, reached Brest on the afternoon of September 18, and con-

sisted of the yacht U. S. S. *Wakiva,* the supply ship U. S. S. *Bath,* and the trawlers U. S. S. *Anderton,* U. S. S. *Lewes,* U. S. S. *Courtney,* U. S. S. *McNeal,* U. S. S. *Cahill,* U. S. S. *James,* U. S. S. *Rehoboth,* U. S. S. *Douglas,* U. S. S. *Hinton,* and U. S. S. *Bauman.* With these also arrived six 110-foot patrol vessels, under the French flag. Due to the construction of the trawlers, which was soon proved to be entirely unsuited for the hard sea service required, they were withdrawn after a few weeks from escort duty and fitted for mine-sweeping.

It was during this period that the United States armed transport *Antilles* in convoy with a group of three transports and store ships and escorted by the *Corsair, Alcedo,* and *Kanawha,* was torpedoed and sunk, on the seventeenth of October, outside of Quiberon Bay. No sign of a submarine was seen. The total number of persons on board the *Antilles* was 237, of whom 167 were rescued by the escorting yachts.

During the month of October, 1917, the coal-burning destroyers U. S. S. *Smith,* U. S. S. *Preston,* U. S. S. *Lamson,* U. S. S. *Flusser,* and

U. S. S. *Reid,* arrived from Queenstown where they had been receiving training. They were accompanied by the U. S. S. *Panther,* a supply ship, which had acquired historical interest as a transport in 1898 during the war with Spain. The addition of this small destroyer flotilla was of inestimable value, for the yachts, until this time, had been required to perform the entire patrol and escort duty, including the deep-sea troop convoys for which they were structurally wholly unsuited and inadequate.

It is interesting to imagine the hopes and fears of those early days of our participation. In the ancient port of Brest but a few remnants of the French fleet remained. The streets of the gray town were deserted. Gone were the seamen that for centuries had given it its glory; gone too were the young men, now fighting and dying on the northern lines of France. Small indeed must have seemed these first contributions from the great ally beyond the Atlantic. A few converted yachts, a few destroyers; that was all. And yet, within the brief span of a year this almost deserted harbor was to become dense with

shipping. Great transports were to swing at moorings beyond the breakwater. Wasplike destroyers were to ride at their buoys in the inner harbor in rapidly increasing numbers. Khaki-clad soldiers by the hundred thousand were to look upon the gray town and pass on to their duty in the north. And from nothing, the establishment of the United States Naval Forces in France was to expand, with characteristic American enterprise, into a vast coherent organization, embracing in its manifold ramifications the complete machinery for the successful accomplishment of the tremendous work in hand.

The first six months of our activities on the French coast were in a large part a period of experiment. The force was entirely inadequate; the ships soon proved unsuited for the work required and the officers and men of the reserve force were new to the work. There has been little glory credited to the work that was performed, for it was at no time a kind of work with which glory associates most freely. Here was drudgery and danger; a silent service

BREST
The old *château* and a bit of the inner harbor

The landing at Brest

secretly to be performed. It was work for which a destroyer flotilla of the largest and fastest vessels would have been none too good. But such vessels were not available. The yachts were sent. As months passed by came slowly the coal-burning destroyers. Later came the great oil burners, and the yachts disappeared into the obscurity of hazardous coastal convoys and the deep-sea convoys of merchantmen in the rough waters of Biscay.

On October 21, 1917, Captain Fletcher was detached, and shortly after, Rear-Admiral Henry B. Wilson arrived to take up the command. To Captain Fletcher should be given the credit for the inception and early organization of our naval forces on the French coast, credit which alone can offset the trials and disappointments of those early days. With the arrival of Rear-Admiral Wilson began the second and final period; a period of constant organization and amplification. Fortunately endowed in generous measure with those executive qualities characteristic of an American naval officer, Admiral Wilson was still further happy in the

possession of a diplomatic nature and keen sympathy with the French people. With the limited tools available, he planned and executed a program which proved itself in its attainment of the desired end. And, as the means for prosecuting his purpose were increased, he developed his plans the further to assure their more perfect accomplishment.

On November 27, 1917, the destroyers U. S. S. *Roe* and U. S. S. *Monaghan* arrived at Brest from Saint-Nazaire. Utilized previously for deep-sea escort duty from the United States they had never before touched at a French port, turning always in mid-Atlantic and returning to the United States. On this occasion, however, they had been assigned to escort the U. S. S. *San Diego,* on which Secretary of War Baker made passage to France, and arriving at Saint-Nazaire, found it necessary to proceed north to Brest for coal. As this duty was unforeseen, they were without coastal charts and proceeded to explore their way through the perilous mine and submarine zones with a large ocean chart as their only guide. Ignorant of the coast, they

first explored the Bay of Douarnenez, but finding no city there, they kept on up the coast. Inasmuch as their ocean chart did not show the channel of Raz de Sein, they did not find it, and passed around it into the Iroise. A message was sent to them to avoid the Iroise, but as that also was not shown on their chart, they were forced to ignore the warning. Happily, they finally reached Brest without accident, where they were later permanently joined to the destroyer force there. The destroyer U. S. S. *Warrington* joined the Brest forces at about the same time.

In the middle of December, the torpedo boats U. S. S. *Truxton* and U. S. S. *Whipple* reached Brest, and shortly after, arrived the U. S. S. *Wadsworth*, the first thousand-ton destroyer to be assigned to the French waters.

In the forepart of 1918, the *Stewart* and *Worden,* two of our oldest torpedo boats, made a hazardous but successful transatlantic passage in the extreme weather of midwinter. On February 18, 1918, the repair ship *Prometheus,* the torpedo boat *Macdonough* and the converted yacht *Isabel* moored in the harbor, and with the

passing months the fleet was further augmented by the arrival of the destroyers *Porter, Wainwrite, Jarvis, O'Brien, Benham, Winslow, Drayton, Cushing, Tucker, Burrows, Cummings, Ericsson, Fanning,* and *McDougal.* These were followed later by the first of the new flush-deck destroyers: *Little, Sigourney,* and *Conner;* and about a month before the signing of the armistice these were followed by the *Taylor, Stringham, Bell, Murray,* and *Fairfax.* A fourth flotilla of yachts arrived during February, under the command of Commander David F. Boyd, U. S. N., and included the U. S. S. *Nokomis,* U. S. S. *Rambler,* and U. S. S. *Utowana* and the tug *Gypsum Queen.* Another yacht, the U. S. S. *May,* was also added to the force, having proceeded to Brest from Portugal, where she had left a number of submarine chasers which she had escorted across the Atlantic. In addition to these vessels were also added during the forepart of the year, the tugs *Barnegat* and *Concord* and the repair ship *Bridgeport.* On the eleventh of November, 1918, when hostilities were suspended by the armistice, the United States

Naval Forces in France comprised a total of thirty-five destroyers, five torpedo boats, eighteen yachts, eight tugs, nine mine-sweepers, three repair ships and one barracks ship, three tenders, and one salvage vessel.

Much has appeared in magazines and newspapers of the actual debarkation of American troops on French soil. Of those landing in England, or the ports of other countries, we are not here concerned. It is the purpose of this narrative to deal solely with the activities of the American Naval Forces in France, and accordingly only with those troop ships and store ships which sailed from American ports directly to ports in France. The first American troops reached Saint-Nazaire on June 26, 1917. Perhaps never in the world's history, has the deeper and finer sentiment of a nation been so thoroughly aroused as on that famous day when the first few thousands of khaki-clad soldiers touched foot on the soil of France. A nation by nature of the deepest sentiment, the people of this seaport town, realized in this slender vanguard the vivid expression of a friendship begun

in our own struggle for national freedom and sustained for a century and a half with almost unbroken continuity.

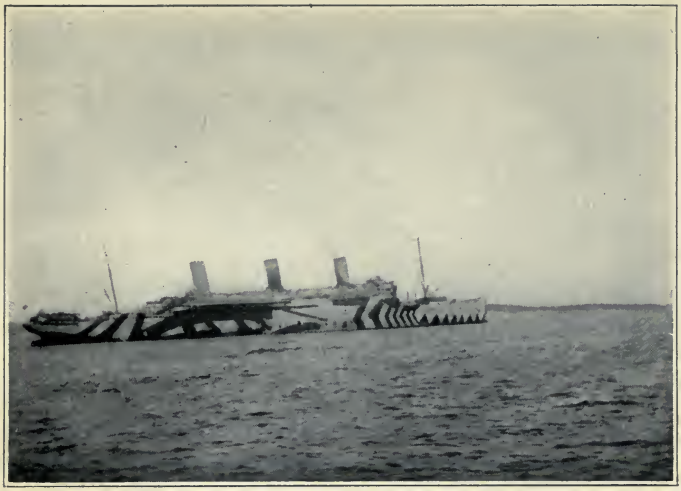
During the second half of 1917, a constantly increasing flood of American soldiers were transported in safety to the shores of France. With the new year, a greater volume began to arrive and in the month of January, 25,280 men were landed. February showed a slight loss, with a total of 17,483, which was offset by the total of 53,043 in March and 62,615 in April. In May, the full flood began with a total of 119,110. In June, 104,249 were landed, a number which increased in July to 133,993. There was a sudden drop in August to 93,376, but the September quota of 143,253, established a new record, closely followed by a total of 107,547 in October. The grand total for the ten months of 1918 was 859,949.

There is no more inspiring sight than the arrival of a troop convoy and the description of a single instance may illustrate, as characteristic, any of the one hundred and two troop convoys which arrived during these ten months of

1918. At dawn the convoy of eight troop ships which had been proceeding in a double line of four ships each, formed single column, with three destroyers on either flank. The sea was calm and the sun rose in a soft-blue, cloudless sky. On the eastern horizon a white lighthouse lifted sharply from the thin line of the coast. The great troop ships, famous liners of other days, rose and fell heavily on the low swells, their high sides stripped and blocked in a strange dress of blue, gray, white and black camouflage, their decks brown with a solid mass of soldiers straining their eyes to catch a first glimpse of France. High overhead, two great yellow French dirigibles moved with smooth rapidity. From four gray hydroplanes, soaring in wide circles, came the distant reverberation of motors. On either hand the destroyers, lean, lithe sea-whippets, shook their dipping bows and rolled in the swells with a quick jerking motion. Over the water came the sound of music; an Army band was playing on board the nearest transport. The convoy passed into the channel. On the south, great brown rocks lifted from the sea,

and on either side of the entrance to the harbor, the black cliffs of Finistère, like twin Gibraltars, marked the approach. The convoy, steaming slowly, moved up the channel. The broad blue harbor of Brest unfolded, crowded with shipping. In the outer harbor great steamers swung at their moorings, and behind the breakwater the water was gay with camouflaged vessels, clusters of destroyers and the gray hulls of two great repair ships. Beyond the harbor swung the circle of the green hills of Finistère, and on the left the gray and ancient city of Brest rose sharply from the historic fortress at the water's edge. Quietly the destroyers slipped into the inner harbor and the transports anchored outside the breakwater. They were "over;" delivered safely through the danger zone by the United States Naval Forces in France.

Such, in general, was the work of the Navy in French waters during the sixteen months of its activity. It was a labor unenlivened by those inspiring engagements between ships of a class which marked our naval activities in these waters a century and a half before. Rather, it



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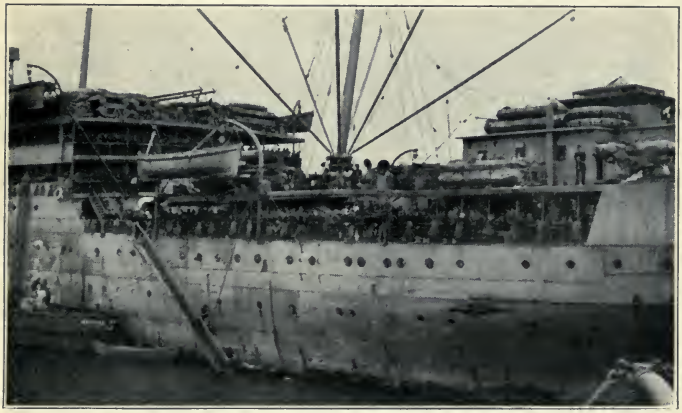


TROOP SHIP AT BREST

A FRENCH DIRIGIBLE

GERMAN SEA MINES

was a struggle with a force secretive, elusive, and mysterious. There were thrusts in the dark from an unseen enemy; there were engagements fought and won between ships invisible to each other. Never could there be a moment of relaxation; never did an empty ocean, blue under a summer sky or gleaming in the moonlight, assure the absence of the enemy. Great vessels under escort were torpedoed, vessels of coastwise convoys and vessels of the deep-sea traffic were sunk, but small was the percentage of loss compared with the numbers of the mighty argosies that in safety sailed the sea and of greatest significance stands the fact that not one loaded transport was destroyed or the life of a single passenger lost. Few were the absolute confirmations of the destruction of submarines, but later events have disclosed a mortality that does compliment to Yankee perseverance and the depth charge, that frightful enemy of the submarine, which took lavish toll of the sea-wolves of the underseas.

CHAPTER II

BUILDING THE MACHINE

THE arrival of Rear-Admiral Henry B. Wilson at Brest on Thursday, November 1, 1917, and the hoisting of his flag on the U. S. S. *Panther,* marked the beginning of the second and final period of our naval activities in French waters. On the staff of the Admiral were Commander John Halligan, Jr., U. S. N. Chief of Staff, Lieutenant Mahlon S. Tisdale, U. S. N., and Lieutenant J. G. F. Reynolds, U. S. N. R. F., who had accompanied Admiral Wilson from Gibraltar. Admiral Fletcher's staff was assimilated and this small nucleus grew to some seventy officers before the armistice was signed.

It is impossible adequately to chronicle the development of these months of organization and accomplishment. From the first establishment of Captain Fletcher, the organization was con-

sistently developed to meet new requirements constantly arising, requirements necessitating the occupation of quarters on shore which finally extended to the complete equipment which existed at the final suspension of hostilities. Offices were acquired and new space was constantly added. Quarters for men on shore duty were provided. Offices for the pay department were secured; a department that at the close of the war was in itself a complete organization, handling a volume of business undreamed of by any of our own Navy Yards, with the probable exception of the Brooklyn Navy Yard, in the former days of peace. To maintain good order throughout the city, a naval patrol was established. A great post office, which in one day received fifteen thousand sacks of mail, was created. Coal, oil, and water facilities for the ships were planned and arranged for. Communication systems were instituted. And in all these various activities, a cooperation was maintained with the French authorities, both maritime and civil, unbroken in the consistent spirit of enthusiastic friendliness.

The rapidly increasing importance of the United States Naval Forces in France required a coherent and yet flexible organization under single leadership, and on the twelfth of January, 1918, after calling Admiral Wilson to London for conference the first definite amplification of the organization of the United States Naval Forces in France was outlined by Vice-Admiral Sims, Commander United States Naval Forces operating in Europe, to Rear-Admiral Wilson. Under this new organization, Admiral Wilson received the title of "Commander United States Naval Forces in France" and took command of all United States naval vessels operating in French waters. As a result of this comprehensive command, the organization was naturally divided into two parts: the naval forces afloat, including all ships assigned to duty in the Channel and the Atlantic coasts of France, and the Port Organization and Administration, comprising the three districts of Brest, Lorient, and Rochefort, with an officer of captain's rank in command of each of these districts.

Aviation, under the command of Captain H.

I. Cone, was also included under the command of Rear-Admiral Wilson, but due to the many problems in this new branch of naval activities, a free hand was given to Captain Cone in the building up and perfecting of the naval aviation service and it may be considered practically a distinct organization during the phase of construction and until the stations began to operate against the submarines.

Commander W. R. Sayles, U. S. N. (naval *attaché* in Paris) was placed in command of the Intelligence Service, and Captain R. H. Jackson, U. S. N., became an officer on Admiral Wilson's staff, to act primarily as liaison officer between the Admiral and the French authorities, although the right naturally remained to Admiral Wilson to deal directly with the French Ministry of Marine if he should so desire. As an addition to the Intelligence Service, a counter espionage service was organized under the command of Commander Sayles, and in order to clarify the work, the various activities were separated into six principal fields:

Naval Forces Afloat; Port Organization and

Administration; Aviation; Intelligence; Communication; Supplies and Disbursements.

In regard to the control of shipping, it was determined that all troop and cargo transports and other vessels flying the American flag should be escorted to their wharf, anchorage or buoy by the Navy, and that thereafter, their subsequent movements, until they should be ready to leave port, should be controlled by the Army or Navy, according to whom their cargo belonged, and that, upon leaving port, they would again revert to naval control.

In accordance with this outline, Admiral Wilson designated the three districts as follows:

Brest to include the territory extending from Bréhat to Penmarch, including Ushant; Lorient, the territory from Penmarch to Fromentine, including Belle-Ile, and Rochefort, the territory extending from Fromentine to the Spanish line and including the outlying islands.

The district commander in charge of each of these districts received immediate control of operations of all vessels placed under his command and was further charged with the re-

sponsibility of repairing and supplying of vessels assigned to his district; the development and maintenance of adequate naval port facilities; the establishment and maintenance of all communication with the Commander United States Naval Forces in France, the *prefet maritime,* the naval port officer of the district, and the other district commanders and the supervision of American shipping and of United States naval personnel on merchant ships.

Naval port officers at all of the principal ports, were established, reporting immediately to their respective district commanders. The duties of these port officers were primarily to facilitate the berthing, discharging, and sailing of United States troop and store ships, a duty which included all of the arduous details which constantly present themselves whenever shipping in any quantity is present. Among the many duties assigned to port officers, the following were perhaps of major importance:

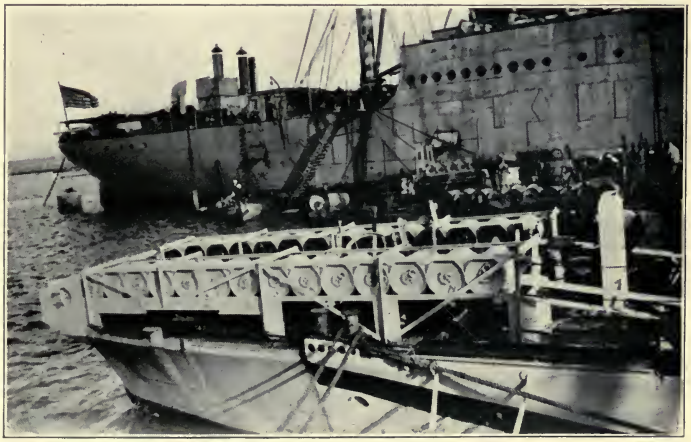
To cooperate with the United States Army and the French authorities in the despatch of vessels; to keep the Commander United States

Naval Forces in France and the district commander promptly informed of the arrival and the departure of all United States vessels; to obtain from the commanding officers or masters of these vessels upon their arrival, all interesting information regarding the incidents of their voyage and their particular needs; to inspect the United States naval armed guard and radio men on all United States vessels, other than those regularly commissioned in the United States Navy and report on their efficiency; to assist in supplying these vessels with necessary fuel and supplies; to pay the armed guard and furnish them with clothing and small stores; to investigate offences committed by United States naval personnel on vessels other than those regularly commissioned United States naval vessels; to investigate and take action on all admiralty cases involving United States Navy; to keep the Commander United States Naval Forces in France informed of the readiness of all vessels and of the speed which they were capable to maintain through the danger zone; to familiarize the masters of ships with the precautions

A sea plane makes a bad dive. Destroyers to the rescue

The destroyer *Monaghan*

The hammer-head bow of a destroyer



Depth charges on the stern of a destroyer

and the prescribed convoy scheme to be followed within the danger zone; to furnish each convoy and its escort commander, prior to sailing, with the latest information regarding submarine and mine activities and to keep the commander in France constantly informed as to the amount of Navy coal on hand, expended and received.

It has been ever a part of the Navy's duty to stand ready to assume responsibility for the fulfillment of whatever work might be required to prosper the best interests of the Nation, for which the Navy has been and must continue to be its outward manifestation throughout the world. To create an organization, such as conditions in France required, sufficient not only to meet temporary needs, but also future requirements and at the same time to carry on an active warfare with a powerful enemy, was a commission of the most grave responsibility, for it required not only the abilities of trained men of business, endowed with native American energy and promptness of decision, but there were also required those traits which are presumed to attach solely to trained diplomats. For in all

this tremendous operation and creation, it was necessary to maintain the utmost harmony and cordiality with a people speaking a different tongue and accustomed to those more composed and conservative methods of accomplishment generally characteristic of an older nation.

Throughout the entire history of our naval co-operation with the French nation, a spirit of cordiality and cooperation was consistently maintained. Nor were these relations broken by a single incident to mar the perfect accord. The following telegram was received by Admiral Wilson on July 1, 1918, from the French Vice-Admiral Schwerer and seems particularly felicitous in the exact expression of the spirit existing between the two nations:

On July 4, 1917, there arrived in our waters the first eight ships of war sent to France by the United States to fight with us against the enemy's piracy. These vessels were the yachts *Harvard, Vedette, Kanawha, Sultana, Christabel, Noma, Corsair* and *Aphrodite.* Since that period these vessels have constantly collaborated with us in the protection of convoys and we have all been witnesses of the ardor and the devotion brought by their personnel to the difficult and sometimes ungrateful tasks of the patrols.

This squadron was the vanguard of a flotilla of ships, each day more numerous and more powerful, which arrived from the other shore of the ocean to take part in the fight.

At the moment when the anniversary of the arrival in Brest of this vanguard approaches, I am sure that I am the interpreter

of all the officers, petty officers, and enlisted men of the divisions of Bretagne, in addressing to our American comrades the expression of our fraternal esteem and of our warm admiration of your great nation which has not hesitated to throw itself into the most terrible of wars for the defense of Right, of Liberty, and of Civilization.

(Signed) VICE-ADMIRAL SCHWERER,

Commandant Supérieur des Divisions de Bretagne.

Brest, July 1, 1918.

On July 4, 1918, the following telegram was received by the Commander United States Naval Forces in France, from the Minister of Marine:

At the moment when the magnificent battalions of the American Army are marching in Paris past the statues of our cities unjustly occupied by the enemy, thus affirming the high ideals of justice which lead them to fight by the side of our soldiers, I am particularly happy to address to you my most cordial regards in recognition of the perfect and devoted cooperation which our naval forces in Brittany have not ceased to find with the American naval forces placed under your high direction and the systematic harmony of views and sentiments which has not ceased to reign between us.

Rear-Admiral Wilson replied:

To the Minister of Marine:

It is a great honor and satisfaction to receive the cordial good wishes expressed in your message of today. The American Navy is proud of its privilege of working with the French Navy, a service for which we have the highest admiration. Our personal association with the flag officers of your Navy has been an inspiration to me.

(Signed) H. B. WILSON.

On September 25, 1918, Rear-Admiral Henry B. Wilson, U. S. N., Commander United States Naval Forces in France was promoted to the rank of vice-admiral, U. S. N., and his flag was hoisted on the flagship *Prometheus.*

There are times when only statistics can give a definite conception, and a few figures selected from the mass of data relating to these impressive operations may indicate in some measure the scope of the accomplishment. From nothing, on July 1, 1917, the United States Naval Forces in France had grown by October 1, 1918, to an establishment of 22,111 officers and men; of these 1,422 were officers. Afloat, the personnel numbered 601 officers and 7,480 men. Of the shore forces, 160 officers and 2,187 men were distributed among the three base organizations; 71 officers and 207 men among the port offices, 578 officers and 9,789 men among the 16 naval air stations; 24 officers and 488 men with the naval railway battery; 18 officers and 556 men with the high power radio detachment and 27 officers and 58 men on detached staff service.

During the first nine months of 1918 an ap-

proximate total of 752,402 troops was convoyed safely through the danger zone and landed at French ports. On one day alone sixteen ships containing over forty thousand men were brought in safety into a single port. Two hundred and sixty convoys, comprising 1,499 vessels, were convoyed, during the same period through the zone, proceeding either to French ports or homeward bound. And this was accomplished by a fleet, all told, which reached eighty odd vessels only a few weeks before the armistice was signed, and was manned by approximately eight thousand officers and men.

During the closing months of the war, the activities of the base at Brest assumed proportions far in excess of the anticipation of any of those who contributed to the early days of its establishment. Repairs to escort vessels, transports, merchant ships, and vessels wrecked by storm or collision, or torn by torpedoes, necessitated operations similar to those required by the most modern Navy Yards in the United States. Repair shops afloat and on shore were working in shifts, in order that the vast volume of work

might be accomplished. The administrative force had been constantly increased to keep pace with these developments and a continuously growing number of enlisted men had required additional barracks on shore.

CHAPTER III

IN THE PATH OF THE SUBMARINE

IN THE many engagements between Allied vessels and German submarines in French waters the fortitude of the officers and crews of the smaller merchantmen and particularly of the French fishing vessels afforded many dramatic instances. Due to the limited number of French and American patrol vessels it was but natural that many of the smaller vessels took a "long chance" and endeavored to make their way unescorted along the coast. Many of these vessels were attacked and a large number were destroyed; but out of the total number of engagements there are several which particularly illustrate the temper of the French seaman in the face of almost overwhelming odds.

At about eleven o'clock of the morning of December 4, 1917, the *St. Antoine de Padoue,*

a three-masted sailing vessel left Britton Ferry for Fécamp. She was making about three or four knots in a S. S. E. direction when a shell fell about two hundred meters off the starboard bow and a violent explosion was heard astern. The pilot who was standing on the poop deck with the captain saw the submarine which was headed N. E. at a distance of four thousand meters on the port quarter. "General quarters" was immediately sounded; the captain ordered a zigzag course to be followed in order to confuse the aim of the submarine, and opened fire with his own guns. After seventeen shots had been fired by the *St. Antoine,* the submarine submerged and disappeared. The engagement had lasted fifteen minutes and no damage was done to the sailing vessel. But fifteen minutes later the submarine reappeared and resumed firing at a slightly increased distance. The first shell fell short on the starboard side. The captain promptly responded with his stern gun and resumed his zigzag, but within a few minutes the sighting piece of the gun was shot away and damage to the breech put the gun temporarily

Destroyers waiting for an incoming convoy

Troop ship escorted by a destroyer and two sea planes

Observation balloon on a destroyer

The balloon going up

out of action. Undaunted, the captain maneuvered to bring his forward gun into action, but a shot from the submarine struck the port side of the sailing ship, inflicting severe damage. In spite of the heavy fire which continued, the men stuck to their posts and continued what seemed to be a hopeless struggle. At the darkest moment, however, a British hydroplane made its appearance and caused the submarine to submerge. This was the third time that the *St. Antoine* had escaped after having been attacked by German submarines and the captain had already been cited as a result of these engagements.

On another occasion, the *St. Antoine de Padoue* was engaged in fishing off Fécamp. While the crew were attending to their nets, a small boat with two leg-o-mutton sails appeared on the horizon at a distance of two or three miles. In waters frequented by fishing boats the appearance of a craft of this nature would not normally attract attention, but in this particular instance the vessel sighted seemed to be pursuing a course parallel to the course of the *St. Antoine,* at a

rate of speed in excess of that justified by the small size of her sails. The suspicions of the captain were promptly aroused and he sent his crew to battle stations. Gradually the courses of the two ships converged and the *St. Antoine* fired a shot, hoping that the suspicious vessel would show a signal. No signal, however, appeared and a few minutes later the sails were hauled down and a conning tower was clearly seen in silhouette against the horizon. For some reason unknown, no attack was offered, probably due to the apparent readiness which the captain of the *St. Antoine* showed for battle; and shortly after the submarine disappeared and the *St. Antoine* proceeded on her course.

Another interesting attack was reported as having occurred on the ninth of January, 1917, against the French steamer *Barsac,* bound from Brest to Le Havre. The *Barsac,* entirely darkened, was proceeding at a speed of about ten knots, when at 6:35 P.M. a torpedo suddenly exploded against the side, opposite No. 3 hatch, promptly filling the engine-room with water. The ship filled rapidly by the stern and sank in

three minutes. No one on board saw either the submarine or the torpedo.

With the utmost calmness the crew manned the boats, the captain alone remaining aboard the stricken vessel. When the ship went down the captain was dragged after her by the suction, but coming to the surface was rescued about twenty minutes later by one of the ship's boats. The surviving members of the crew were finally picked up by a patrol boat, but eighteen men were lost.

On December 21, at a little after one o'clock in the morning the Portuguese steamer *Boa Vista* in convoy with five other ships escorted by two French patrol boats, the *Albatros* and the *Sauterelle,* were proceeding north, enroute for Quiberon. The sea was calm and the night clear and brilliant although there was no moon. No sign of submarine activities appeared on the still water. Suddenly, the *Boa Vista* was struck by a torpedo on the starboard side a little forward of the bridge. For half an hour the ship sank slowly by the bow. The patrol boats "stood by," rescuing the crew and endeavoring to take in tow

the lifeboats which she had launched. Suddenly the conning tower of the submarine appeared at a distance of five thousand meters and fired a second torpedo at the *Boa Vista* which sank rapidly and disappeared five minutes later.

Early in January, the steam trawler *St. Mathieu* left Brest on her way to the fishing grounds about one hundred miles S. S. W. of Raz de Sein. In the morning of the sixth, when seventy-seven miles S. W. of Belle-Ile, the lookout sighted a boat on the horizon and a few seconds afterward a shell passed over the *St. Mathieu.* The captain promptly hauled in his nets, sent his crew to battle stations and heading for the enemy, opened fire with his bow gun. A few minutes later, a shell from the submarine shattered the upper part of the bridge, wounding the man at the wheel and another near the bow. Encouraging his crew, the captain of the trawler continued his action until another shell from the submarine mortally wounded three of the guns' crew, but undaunted, the only survivor continued to fire until the ammunition was exhausted. The submarine was now relatively

near the trawler and her fire was extremely accurate. By this time, out of a total crew of thirteen on board the trawler, four were killed, four badly wounded, and all of the remaining were suffering from minor injuries.

It was now necessary to abandon ship and the captain with the survivors put off in a small boat. A few minutes later the submarine sank the *St. Mathieu* by gunfire and promptly submerged. Then followed thirty hours of great suffering on the part of the crew of the trawler, all of whom were more or less wounded. A heavy sea was running and navigation was difficult. The night was very dark. Toward morning a patrol vessel heard the cries of the sailors, but in her attempt to effect a rescue, ran into the lifeboat and capsized it, with the result that four of the crew were drowned. The survivors of the *St. Mathieu* were landed at La Palice on the morning of the eighth of January and later the captain was awarded the Military Medal and all of the members of the crew were cited in orders.

At about noon on the tenth of October, 1917, the captain of the French ship *Transporteur,*

was exchanging semaphore signals with the *Afrique* II, a French patrol boat, when he noticed in the sunlight, at a distance of about three hundred meters, the wake of a torpedo coming toward him, a little forward of the beam. He immediately steamed "hard-right," reversed his engine and warned his escort by whistle. Unfortunately his action, although prompt, proved unable to avoid the path of the torpedo, which, striking the ship at the water line, caused a terrific explosion and brought down the forward mast. The ship listed and forty seconds later the water was almost even with the forecastle. For a brief period the vessel remained standing almost perpendicular, its propeller continuing to turn rapidly in the air; then perpendicularly and like an arrow shot from a great height, it dived into the sea. Of the twenty-four men comprising the crew, twenty-one survivors were rescued by the *Afrique* II, while swimming in the wreckage.

The engagement of the French steamer *La Ronce* with an enemy submarine, is another example of French fortitude. Sighting a torpedo

on the port beam headed in a direction which would undoubtedly bring it up opposite the engine-room, the officer of the deck put his rudder "hard-left" with the result that the torpedo exploded by No. 4 hatch, tearing a large hole in the side of the vessel. The stern gun being destroyed, the captain manned his forward gun, but could not locate the submarine. Little by little, the ship settled by the stern and the after part of the deck being submerged, the water began to enter the engine-room through the hatchways. Seeing that it was impossible to keep his vessel afloat much longer, the captain ordered her to be abandoned and the crew embarked in boats in a heavy sea. As several of the boats had been destroyed by the explosion, those that were launched were overloaded and when the order was given by the captain to "push off," he realized their crowded condition and remained on board the sinking ship with the engineer officer and radio officer and with them went down with the ship.

The *Voltaire* II was bound for Nantes. Sailing from Gibraltar on the eighth of December,

1917, the captain opened his secret instructions, issued in the event of his leaving the convoy, and proceeded about one hundred and forty miles in a new direction. The night was very dark and the ship was without lights. At twenty minutes to four a torpedo struck the ship near the stern, tearing loose the mainmast and throwing it on the bridge. The wireless antenna was carried away by the falling mast and the water rose so rapidly that it became impossible to use the auxiliary antenna. Due also to the rapidly rising water, the boats were jammed against the davit-heads and with the exception of the port whaleboat, which was launched with four men, none of them could be lowered. The ship disappeared in three minutes, taking with her the captain and the greater part of the crew. About twenty-four sailors were rescued by the whaleboat. Sail was made and the boat was headed for Belle-Ile, in a heavy sea. It was cold and the boat was so overloaded that it was difficult to keep it afloat. The men for the most part, were about half dressed and became rapidly exhausted. During the evening of the twelfth, the

The British mystery ship *Dunraven,* under fire from a submarine. The white smoke at the stern is from an exploding shell

The *Dunraven* sinking

The *Philomel* (British) sinking after being torpedoed

The last of the *Philomel*

light of Penmarch was seen, but soon after the mast broke and it became necessary to continue with the oars. A few hours after, they passed a convoy and later a single ship, but their signals of distress were unnoticed. Finally, at noon they were sighted by the French trawler which rescued the men and took them to Lorient. Two died from the cold and exposure. At no time before or after the torpedoing did anyone see the submarine or its periscope.

On her way from St. Malo, to join a convoy of sailing vessels, the French schooner *Jermaine* was attacked by a submarine which opened with four shells and followed with a volley of fire, meanwhile circling the sailing vessel. The *Jermaine* was ably commanded by a former sergeant of colonial infantry who promptly organized the crew and prepared to defend the ship at all hazards. The sea was running so high that it was impossible to see the submarine except at rare intervals. Climbing into the rigging, in order personally to watch the shots which were fired by the *Jermaine* whenever the enemy became visible between the troughs of

the sea, the captain tacked to run with the wind in order to make use of his two guns. So accurate was the fire of the sailing ship that at the fourth shot from the *Jermaine,* the submarine abandoned the struggle and rapidly changed its course.

The British ship *Austradale* left Milford Haven on the sixteenth of October, 1917, in a convoy of twenty-five ships, proceeding in columns of eight. Her position was No. 1 in the left column. About three days out, the *Austradale* sighted at a distance of approximately three miles, an object which appeared to be a capsized fishing boat. The captain gave the signal "Suspicious object sighted" and now believes it was put there by the submarine in order to divert his attention from the subsequent attack which came from the opposite side. At all events, while watching the object, the ship was suddenly torpedoed on the port side, on a line with the engine-room, and sank in three minutes. The forty-five surviving members of the crew embarked in a whaleboat and two dinghies. The boats were well provided with food and as

danger was imminent, the convoy proceeded and the small boats were soon lost in the night. For seven days, the crew navigated their small craft in heavy seas, covering a distance of 330 miles. During this period, one man became insane and jumped into the sea. Leaks developed which required constant baling and reduced the survivors to a state of almost complete exhaustion. Two of the dinghies reached Port Kerrel, but one of the men later died of exhaustion. The whaleboat, containing twenty-four men, was never heard from.

On September 16, 1918, the *Rambler* rescued forty-one survivors from the British S. S. *Philomel* and carried them into Lorient. The *Philomel* was the leading ship of the right column of a south-bound convoy from Brest to La Palice and the *Rambler* was one of the escorting vessels. No submarine or torpedo was seen at any time, nor was the submarine detected by the listening devices. The *Philomel* was struck on the starboard side, under the bridge, and, following the explosion, she swung to starboard out of the column and was immediately abandoned. At

6:14 P.M., about thirty minutes after being struck, the *Philomel* began to sink by the bow, taking a very sharp angle until her bow seemed to rest on the bottom. A minute later she disappeared from sight, with steam escaping and her whistle blowing.

Relatively few were the disasters which befell American troop and store ships. And of those sinkings which occurred, the large majority were among the empty vessels homeward bound. Perhaps the slightly inferior escorts which took out the returning ships may have been the reason, but it is more probable to suppose that the enemy found a resistance on the part of the eastward-bound convoys which would have been unmeasurably intensified by the knowledge, on the part of the officers and crews of both escort and convoy that American lives other than their own and property necessary for the prosecution of the war were resting in their protection below the vessels' decks.

Particularly to the credit of all concerned, was the salvaging of the ships *West Bridge, Westward Ho,* and *Mount Vernon.* Only

through the indomitable perseverance of the officers and men were these wounded vessels brought into port. The story of their rescue is one of the silent epics of the war.

The torpedoing and rescue of the *Westward Ho* has been told in a previous chapter but the incidents attendant on the attacks on the *West Bridge* and *Mount Vernon* deserve mention in this narrative.

There was unusual activity of enemy submarines to the west of the Bay of Biscay during the early part of August, 1918, and three vessels, the U. S. S. A. C. T. *Montanan* of 6,659 tons gross, the U. S. S. A. C. T. *West Bridge* of 8,800 tons gross, and the U. S. S. A. C. T. *Cubore* of 7,300 tons gross were torpedoed.

The *Montanan* was struck when proceeding in convoy at about 7 P.M. on August 15 and sank at 3 P.M. on the following day. The yacht *Noma,* acting in the escort, took aboard eighty-one survivors and reported that five of the personnel were missing.

The U. S. S. A. C. T. *Montanan* reported that three torpedoes were fired. Of these she suc-

ceeded in dodging two, but was hit by the third torpedo abreast of the after end of the engine-room. The explosion smashed a boat and put the radio completely out of commission. The ship settled rapidly and it was in abandoning ship that the two members of the armed guard were drowned.

At one o'clock in the morning on August 16, the *West Bridge* was torpedoed within a few miles of the spot where the *Montanan* was sunk. She was proceeding in the same convoy, but had fallen back due to engine trouble and for some hours prior to her attack her engines had stopped entirely. While lying in this extremely vulnerable position, she was struck by two torpedoes in quick succession, the second torpedo being visible at the moment when the first torpedo went home. The *Concord, Smith,* and *Barnegat* were despatched to her assistance, but the destroyers *Drayton* and *Fanning* which were standing by her, were required to leave her on the afternoon of August 16 to join a convoy. One officer and three men were missing, probably killed by the explosion in the engine-room. The

ninety-nine survivors were taken into Brest by the U. S. S. *Burrows.*

At the time of the arrival of the *West Bridge* in Brest, it was calculated that only one per cent of the normal buoyancy of the hull before loading, remained. The calculated buoyancy having been reduced from ten thousand tons to one hundred tons.

The *Cubore* was struck on August 15 at ten o'clock in the evening and sank an hour later. Fifty survivors including the captain and the armed guard were taken off by the French gunboat *Etourde.*

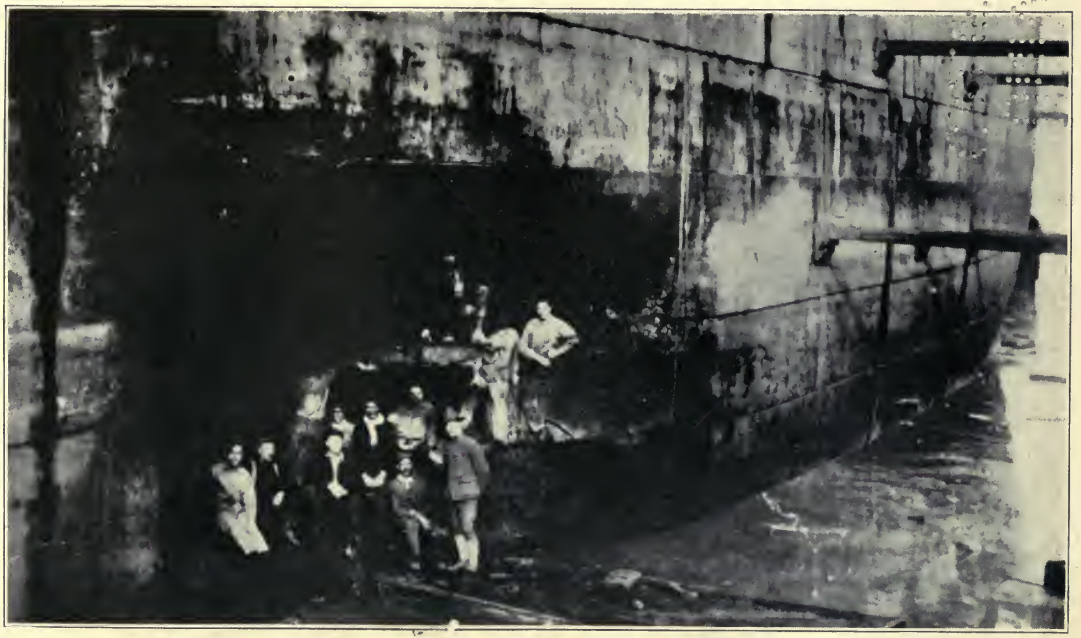
The *Westover* of the Naval Overseas Transportation Service was torpedoed on the morning of the eleventh of July, 1918, and sank forty minutes later. The vessel left New York in convoy, but it had been forced to drop behind because of engine troubles; due primarily to the inexperience of her engineer force with turbine machinery. These troubles were later overcome and at the time she was torpedoed, the *Westover* was making her speed and endeavoring to overtake the convoy. She was struck by two tor-

pedoes. The first struck on the starboard side, abaft No. 3 hatch and the second aft on the port side. Her cargo contained 1,000 tons of steel, 2,000 tons of flour, 10 locomotives and 14 motor trucks, a deck load of 400 piles and 250 tons of second-class mail.

The *Warrington* arrived on the scene within a few hours of the time of the sinking of the vessel. Five boats containing the survivors made the French coast in the vicinity of Brest; but three officers and eight enlisted men were lost.

On September 5, 1918, the U. S. S. *Mount Vernon,* westward bound from Brest for the United States was proceeding in company with the U. S. S. *Agamemnon.* At a little before eight in the morning, her watch sighted a submarine forward of the beam, in a position between the *Mount Vernon* and the *Agamemnon.* The *Mount Vernon* immediately dropped five depth charges and fired one shell in the direction of the periscope. Ten seconds later the ship received the torpedo amidships on the starboard side, between fire-rooms three and four, killing thirty-five of the engine- and fire-room force and

The bow of the *von Steuben* after collision with the *Agamemnon*



The *Mount Vernon* in dry-dock, showing the hole torn in her side by a torpedo

wounding twelve. The *Mount Vernon* accompanied by three destroyers started to return to Brest at a speed of six knots, which was later increased to fourteen knots, arriving at Brest about midnight; the *Agamemnon* continued her voyage westward.

On receipt of the news of the disaster, the *Sigourney,* with two other destroyers and the U. S. S. *Barnegat* and *Anderton* were sent out from Brest to assist in escorting the *Mount Vernon* into port. At the time of her departure from Brest, the *Mount Vernon* was drawing twenty-nine feet aft. On her return she was drawing thirty-nine feet, five inches aft and thirty-three feet forward; four of her fire-rooms being completely flooded. She was also listing 10° to port. From the time the torpedo struck the ship until its arrival in dock, in Brest, all of the officers and men worked untiringly on pumps, handy-billies, and buckets, putting additional shores on the bulkheads and reinforcing hatches and doors. The *Mount Vernon* docked at Brest, repaired and later was again put into commission.

The U. S. S. *Buenaventura,* an American cargo transport of 8,200 tons, sailed from Le Verdon in convoy on the fourteenth of September, 1918, and was struck by two torpedoes and sank in six minutes, shortly after the convoy had been dispersed and the escort had left on its way to the rendezvous of the incoming convoy. So sudden was the attack and the final plunge of the vessel that only three boats were able to get away. All reports indicate that the behavior of the officers and crew was excellent; the captain devoted his entire efforts to save his crew, declining to the very last to make any effort to leave the sinking ship. A motor sailer and another boat which succeeded in getting away were picked up by the French destroyer *Temeraire,* and brought into Brest, and a third boat, containing the commanding officer, the executive officer, and twenty-seven men reached Corunna, Spain, after a number of days at sea.

One of the last cargo carriers to meet destruction by a submarine was the U. S. S. A. C. T. *Joseph Cudahy,* which was struck by two torpedoes on the seventeenth of August, 1918. The

first torpedo struck the *Cudahy* in the fuel tank; the second in the engine-room. Two submarines took part in the action. After abandoning ship, the captain of the *Cudahy* was taken on board one of the submarines and questioned concerning the destination and whereabouts of the convoy. Sixty-two members of the crew were lost.

A study of the circumstances, surrounding the torpedoing of the *Justicia, President Lincoln, Covington, Tuscania, Antilles,* and *Tippecanoe,* as well as a number of other vessels, shows that all of these were sunk by quartering shots. This indicates that the probable procedure of the submarine was to submerge in advance of the convoy and at right angles to its course, having estimated from previous bearings the convoy's general direction and the probable nature of the zigzag, emerging when its hydrophones indicated that the convoy had passed. From such a position, the danger to the submarine would be materially reduced, inasmuch as the convoy would be soon in advance of the position occupied by the submarine; provided, of course, that no escort was occupying a position astern of the

convoy. High speed on the part of the vessels attacked, would naturally, from this supposition, prove a great asset of safety.

Large as were the dangers due to the submarine, it is to the credit of the yachts and destroyers on the French coast that the record of the American debarkation in France was achieved, and also, that of the ships which were lost, the great majority were homeward bound and hence empty of troops or cargo.

CHAPTER IV

THE CONVERTED YACHTS

IT IS fair to presume that in the years to come the part which the United States Navy played in the Great War will be in a large part judged by the safe conduct of troop and store ships to and from the coast of France. As the territory stretching from Switzerland to the Belgian coast formed the front line of our land forces, so the fighting front of the United States Navy may be considered, in the large part, the western coast of France.

During the long months of submarine warfare bodies of troops were safely transported across the Atlantic, escorted through the submarine danger zone and landed on foreign soil, in numbers never exceeded by any similar instance in the history of the world. Not only was an army thus convoyed in safety, but, and of equal im-

portance, were the vast quantities of stores necessary for its subsistence and for the prosecution of the war carried safely through an area infested with enemy submarines. To meet the enemy two classes of vessels were assigned to the work. Of these the destroyers were by their construction best fitted for the duty required and their service for this reason was in many ways of paramount value, but credit must not be slighted to the yachts, which although manned in a large measure by relatively inexperienced reserve officers, and themselves being by construction entirely unfitted for the service, performed a duty the value of which can never be adequately estimated.

In the preceding chapters has been briefly sketched the story of the arrival of the fleet of converted yachts and the general nature of the duties they were required to perform. To the average conception a yacht is primarily a graceful pleasure craft, immaculate with white paint and gleaming brightwork, with snowy decks and awnings and pillowed wicker chairs on the after deck. The yacht is by birth and breeding a

member of a wealthy aristocracy; a frequenter of social gatherings. She is a vessel found only on summer seas, in sparkling harbors gay with flags; at regattas and in those places where wealth and fashion meet.

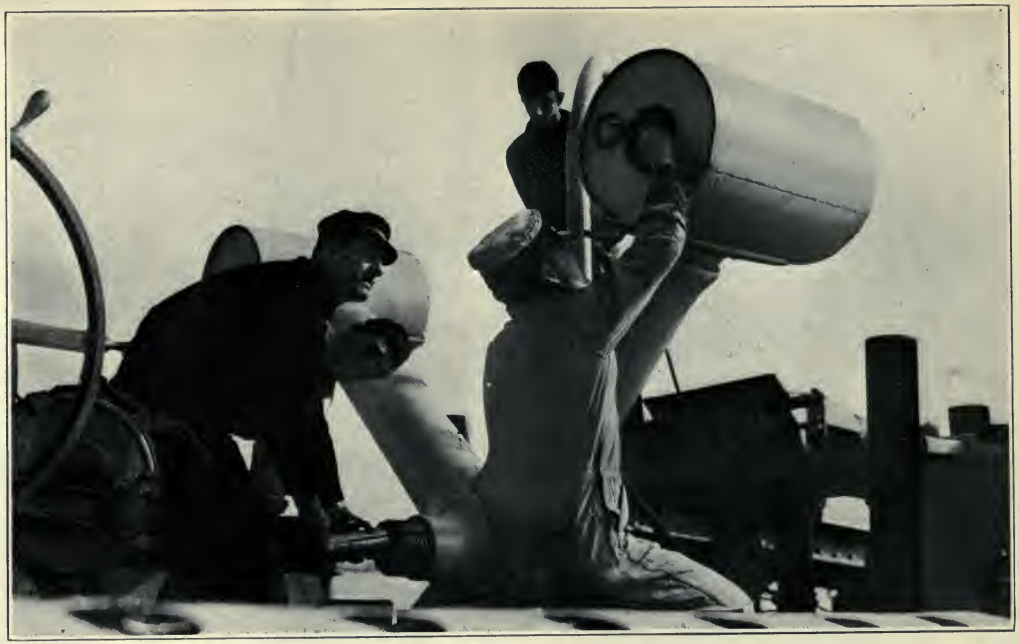
Of the fleet that sailed originally from the United States, three may be erased from the list of active participants, for the *Guinevere* lies broken on a reef and the *Alcedo* and *Wakiva* rest somewhere beneath the restless surface of the Bay of Biscay, the former torpedoed by the enemy, the latter rammed by night by a ship of her convoy. As the months passed there was soon a noticeable change of aspect, soft white decks became torn and dented by hob-nailed boots and the heavy gear which was hauled over them. Long rows of depth charges, ash-canlike cylinders charged each with three hundred pounds of high explosive filled the graceful curve of their fantails. Squat "Y" guns, heavy mortars to discharge simultaneously two depth charges, one on either side of the vessel, crowded the hand steering gear on the after deck. Saloon windows repeatedly shattered by heavy seas or

the detonation of the guns and depth charge were boarded up. Below decks similar changes appeared in worn and battered furnishings repeatedly stained by sea water straining through leaking decks.

A few months after her arrival the graceful bowsprit of the *Noma* was removed and an accident later carried away the head of the golden figure-head on her bow. But like She of Samothrace, the headless goddess, in a coat of battle gray, braved to the end each wave that crashed over her dipping bow.

Down in the wide roadstead of the Gironde six of the yachts were finally gathered, as one by one the destroyers took over the troop ship convoys into the northern ports. But if the safeguarding of human lives was denied them, their new duty of the safe delivery of the ever increasing fleet of store ships was of almost equal importance. Manned for the most part by the same crews but officered largely by newcomers to the force their arduous, monotonous, and dangerous work went steadily on.

Behind the white tower of the lighthouse at the



"Y" GUN

The man on the left is loading the "Y" gun; the man on the right is setting a depth charge

Dropping a depth charge

The detonation of a depth charge

entrance to the Gironde a great arm of the land holds back the sea from the sheltered roadstead before Le Verdon. To the north of the entrance the old seaport town of Royan fills a hollow of the shore, and on the cliff that sweeps seaward rise the high white villas of a fashionable summer colony. Two hours run up the muddy river are the wharves of Trompeloup, where the great naval air station was established, and where from hog-backed colliers swinging hard to ebb or flood in the swift stream, the yachts drew their coal at the end of every run. Two or three hours farther up the river were the great docks of Bassin where the stout freighters discharged their cargoes and where miles of American tracks and hundreds of American cars assembled by American mechanics in an American shop at La Rochelle, received stores innumerable.

Still beyond, within sight of Bassin, lies Bordeaux, fan-shaped, its broad base against the stone docks along the south bank of the river. There were other ports from which and to which the yachts escorted the merchant convoys; but in the latter days of the war the bulk of their con-

voy work centered in the Gironde. Fifty and a hundred freighters at a single time rode at anchor before Le Verdon. Coal-burners and oil-burners; ships of the lake type, built in states far inland and launched in fresh water; ships of standard design in which all sense of elegance or line was subordinated to the grim necessities of utility, tramp steamers, fruit steamers, and passenger vessels that once touched southern ports. Here were ships from all the Allied world; from the South American republics; from Italy, Spain, Portugal, Japan, France, England, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Russia. Here were ships flying the tricolor of France, and most numerous of all were the ships that flew the flag of the UNITED STATES.

Gray, battered, and still grimy with coal dust, the yachts dropped down the river from a wearisome night of coaling at Trompeloup. Like gray shadows, they passed among the freighters which, painted in a wild nightmare of camouflage, seemed like honest and stolid citizens too consciously arrayed for some fancy carnival.

Slowly, with steam-wreathed bows, the heavy

anchors of the store ships were lifted from the muddy bottom of the river and they stood down the channel to the sea, hoists of signal flags flung from diminutive masts and semaphore signalmen waving madly from the bridges. Like sheep dogs, the yachts and the small French patrol boats herded the convoy consisting usually of from ten to thirty freighters, "in ballast," to the open sea. Overhead the seaplanes soared like strange gray flying fish, too high above their native element, motors snarling and throbbing on the wind.

There were bright days when the harbor seemed a gay picture, and there were all too frequent days of low gray clouds and a heavy green sea beyond the bar. Then followed long days and longer nights of uneventful monotony. By day the convoys followed the zigzag course prescribed by the escort commander; by night the darkened ships held a straight course unless a moon and a calm sea required a continuation of the zigzag.

Clinging to an open bridge in seas so heavy that they were constantly drenched with bucket-

fuls of spray the officers of the escorting yachts watched their plunging charges wallow in the sliding seas, now lost to sight behind a cresting wave, now pitched high against the sky, half-bared propellers churning the sea. There were interminable nights of anxiety when the convoy scattered in the blackness and four thousand-ton freighters were running wild in a wilder sea; invisible, ungovernable leviathans, careening far out of their courses, liable without warning to loom out of the darkness high above the bridge of a yacht reeling on the flank or in the rear of the convoy. There too were nights and days of fog and rain; opaque days and nights when the convoy became a nightmare. And there were starlit nights and days of blue skies and bluer seas. But the days and nights of fog and darkness held the never-to-be-forgotten hours of hardship.

All day and night, unremittingly, the eyes of the watchers strained for a tell-tale sign of lurking submarine, a slick of oil along the surface of the sea, a trail of bubbles, a cloud of birds hovering above cast-up refuse or the fleeting

periscope caught for a second and then lost among the waves.

Two or three days out at sea the signals were given and the yachts and French destroyers abandoned the convoy to the comparative safety of the open sea and stood off to the rendezvous where they would intercept the incoming laden convoy. Then at some hour of night or day the contact would be made, and several days later the shores of France would again rise on the eastern horizon and another convoy with its almost priceless cargoes would be carried in safety to the shelter of the harbor.

But better than a description in general terms of the service performed by the yachts in the long months of the war may be a brief recounting of a few instances of the service which they performed in maintaining intact "the bridge to France." Spectacular as some of these adventures may seem, they formed but incidents in a dreary routine, and it is not exceeding truthful statement to remark that these engagements and disasters served to relieve a hardship which otherwise would have been almost insufferable

At about two o'clock on the morning of November 5, 1917, the converted yacht *Alcedo,* while proceeding on the starboard flank of a convoy, bound from Brest to Saint-Nazaire, approximately seventy miles west of Belle-Ile, sighted a submarine on the surface at a distance of about three hundred yards on the port bow. The *Alcedo* turned with full right-rudder, but was struck by the torpedo on the port bow and sank almost immediately. One officer and twenty men were killed or drowned in the disaster. Due to the suddenness of the attack and the darkness of the night, the other escorting vessels were for a time ignorant of the *Alcedo's* fate and proceeded with the convoy. Putting off from the sinking ship in two dories, three officers and twenty-five men were picked up by fishermen and towed to the vicinity of Pte. de Penmarch. The remaining survivors in a whaleboat and two dories pulled toward Penmarch, and thirteen hours later were picked up by the French torpedo boat No. 275 and were taken into Brest.

The reports from all concerned indicate that

the action of the officers and crew of the *Alcedo,* upheld the finest traditions of the service. The following letter was received by Rear-Admiral Wilson, from Vice-Admiral Schwerer, *Commandant Supérieur des Petrouilles de L'Ocean de la Manche Centrale:*

In the name of the entire personnel of the patrol squadrons of the Channel, I seek to express to you the regret which we feel on account of the loss of that good patrol ship the *Alcedo* and our brave comrades who have disappeared with that ship.

They have joined in the struggle which we are waging together for the victory of right and humanity and their deaths will go far toward drawing closer the bonds which unite our two naval forces.

We shall cherish their memory and shall strive to avenge them.

Please accept my dear Admiral, my sympathy and my most cordial good wishes.

On the twenty-eighth of November, 1917, the yachts *Kanawha, Noma,* and *Wakiva* were proceeding with a convoy consisting of the S. S. *Koln* and S. S. *Medina.* The convoy had sailed from Quiberon in the afternoon and were following the prescribed zigzag and formation. At 6:20 P.M. the lookout on the *Kanawha* reported a periscope on the port beam, very close and headed for the *Medina.* The *Kanawha* made the necessary signals, went full speed ahead and turned left-rudder in the direction of the

submarine. Immediately the submarine submerged, search by all three vessels of the escort failed to locate it and signals were accordingly made for the convoy to reform and proceed. At 6:50 P.M. the *Noma* sighted a periscope on her starboard beam, apparently steaming to the northward. She immediately made signal and swung with right-rudder, at the same time releasing two depth charges. Twelve minutes later the *Wakiva* again sighted a periscope, this time at a distance of not more than a hundred yards. The submarine drew rapidly aft and was apparently steaming toward the convoy, but quickly appeared to swing in order to bring to bear a bow tube on the *Wakiva*. The *Wakiva* turned promptly with left-rudder, forcing the submarine to cross her wake, and at the same time fired three shots from the port aft gun, the third shot apparently striking the periscope. Shortly after she also released two depth charges, both of which functioned. A minute later the conning-tower of the submarine emerged and the *Wakiva* opened fire with her starboard forward gun, the second shot detonating. The

conning tower immediately sank, and as the *Wakiva* passed over the spot a large number of air bubbles were seen coming to the surface, and a quantity of wreckage also appeared. The *Wakiva* promptly let go two more depth charges on the spot, and, turning, again passed near the spot, when her commanding officer thought he saw the shapes of three men clinging to a piece of wreckage and hailed them but received no answer. On passing near the place a fourth time the men had disappeared.

Meanwhile the *Noma* continued her search and at midnight, sighting a periscope on her starboard bow, turned toward it and passing over it, let go a number of depth charges but with no results.

From the evidence, it appears that two submarines were preparing to attack the convoy and that one of these was destroyed by the *Wakiva*. This is further confirmed by the fact that about 8:45 P.M. the radio operator on the *Noma* heard a vessel sending in German code with low power and apparently in the immediate vicinity. The vessel called three times,

sending the same message each time without waiting for a reply. The sea was smooth throughout the action and the moon was shining dimly through a slightly overcast sky.

On the twenty-third of December, 1917, the Norwegian S. S. *Spro,* of about 1,500 tons gross, loaded with coal, was proceeding from Cardiff to La Palice. At Brest, she joined a south-bound convoy which was proceeding to Quiberon.

This convoy consisted of five vessels, the *Spro* being No. 4. The last ship, a small French steamer, was well in the rear. The yachts *Sultana* and *Emeline* formed the escort and were proceeding on either flank of the convoy.

The sea was comparatively smooth and the moon had risen about one point on the starboard quarter in a slightly clouded sky. Suddenly the officer of the deck of the *Emeline* felt a pronounced jar passing through the ship, similar to that caused when a gun is fired from the deck. At the same instant a black column of water and debris rose high above the masts of the *Spro.* In less than a minute the stern of the *Spro* sank

beneath the surface of the sea, and in another minute and a half the vessel entirely disappeared, leaving a mass of wreckage floating in a heavy oil slick. At the same time, a dark object was observed about a hundred yards beyond the *Emeline,* to port of the column and to windward, and a pronounced odor of exhaust gases was perceptible on the breeze. The *Emeline* headed directly for the object but it quickly disappeared. A boat was then launched in answer to the cries of the men swimming in the water, and the *Emeline* circled about the spot where the *Spro* had gone down. Eight men cleared the ship, one of whom was not recovered.

On the fifth of January, 1918, a convoy of fifteen ships left Brest for Quiberon, escorted by two American yachts, the *Wanderer* and the *Kanawha.* The convoy was formed in two parts, the S. S. *Luckenbach* being No. 1 in the right column. The S. S. *Le Cour,* S. S. *Dagny* and S. S. *Kanaris* being Nos. 1, 4, and 7 respectively in the left column. At about 11:30 A.M. when approximately eight miles west of Pen-

march, the lookout at the port cathead of the *Le Cour* saw a torpedo jump out of the water. A second later the torpedo struck the ship abreast No. 4 hatch and the *Le Cour* sank in forty-five seconds. Half an hour later, a torpedo struck the *Luckenbach,* the force of the explosion throwing several men into the sea. The *Wanderer* which was nearest by saved twenty-five members of the crew and remained in the vicinity for several hours, but no trace of the submarine could be found. At a quarter past one in the morning the captain of the *Dagny* sighted a submarine to the starboard. He immediately began to zigzag, blew his whistle and fired two lights to attract attention. Ten minutes later the ship was struck on the starboard side and sank in about two minutes. At two o'clock the guns' crew on watch on the stern gun of the *Kanaris* saw the wake of a torpedo about 45° to starboard. The *Kanaris* was struck on the starboard bow and sank rapidly.

The following letter was received by Lieutenant-Commander P. L. Wilson, commanding officer of the *Wanderer:*

From: Commander U. S. Naval Forces in France.

To: Commanding Officer, U. S. S. *Wanderer.*

SUBJECT: Officers and men U. S. S. *Wanderer,* manner of performance.

1. The Commander U. S. Naval Forces in France congratulates the Commanding Officer U. S. S. *Wanderer* for the able manner in which the officers and men under his command performed their duty under very trying circumstances in the presence of the enemy, upon the occasion of the sinking of the S. S. *Harry Luckenbach,* sunk by enemy submarines on the night of January 5-6, 1918.

(Signed) H. B. Wilson.

About a mile east of Pte. du Talut is a low-lying reef which offers a constant danger to navigation. On the twenty-seventh of January, 1918, a dense fog covered the water. The *Guinevere* was returning from Quiberon, and was proceeding at a speed of about nine knots, with the commanding officer and a French pilot on the bridge, when she suddenly struck the reef tearing her bottom so badly that within two hours her deck was under water and the high swells were causing her to pound heavily on the reef, threatening her complete destruction. The ship was accordingly abandoned, as it was seen that the case was hopeless, and later investigation proved the impossibility of salvaging her. Today a torn hull lies in French waters, a mute reminder of

the activities of an American pleasure yacht in her strange mission of war.

On May 21, 1918, the *Christabel* sighted a periscope on the starboard beam at a distance of about three hundred yards. The crew immediately went to "general quarters" and a number of depth charges were dropped, set at a depth of seventy feet. Following the explosion of the second charge there was a violent third explosion which sent up an enormous quantity of water. This explosion was distinct from the usual double shock felt when the explosive force of a depth charge reaches the surface. Immediately afterward the *Christabel* crossed over the spot and found the surface for an area of a hundred feet in diameter covered with large air bubbles, much heavy black oil and quantities of splintered pieces of wood, evidence of the destruction of another enemy submarine.

The third of the yachts to meet her fate was the *Wakiva*. On May 22, 1918, she was proceeding with a Le Verdon convoy. A heavy fog covered the sea, and due to a confusion of signals resulting from the poor visibility, the S. S.

Picking up a lifeboat in the Bay of Biscay

Picking up a lifeboat from a torpedoed ship—four dead men were in the partly swamped boat

The *Westward Ho* being towed into Brest with only one per cent floatability

Wabash made an unexpected change in course and rammed the *Wakiva.* The yacht sank rapidly and the *Wakiva's* officers and crew were picked up by the *Wabash,* which vessel returned with them under escort of the *Isabel* to Quiberon.

On the same day while escorting a northbound coastal convoy, the *Christabel* detected a wake about three hundred yards from the convoy and running parallel to it. The *Christabel* promptly steamed across the wake dropping a number of depth charges. About three hours later a submarine appeared near the convoy and the *Christabel* again steamed toward it, and as the submarine promptly submerged, crossed over the spot and dropped two more depth charges, both charges functioning. The first charge brought up only clear water, but the second brought up heavy oil bubbles and parts of heavy wood and debris. Following the second depth charge, an explosion was detected beneath the surface, which was doubtlessly a mine or torpedo in the submarine detonated by the concussion of the second depth charge.

The U. S. S. A. C. T. *Westward Ho,* when

about three hundred miles off the French coast on the eighth of August, was torpedoed. Replying promptly to an "Allo" the destroyers *Conner, Roe,* and *Ericsson*, started to the rescue and reaching her in a few hours, took off surviving members of the crew. The *Westward Ho* was apparently in a sinking condition and as the destroyers had to proceed on their duties as convoy escorts she was abandoned. The *Westward Ho,* however, remained afloat during the night and at four o'clock the following morning was discovered by the yacht *Noma.* After investigating her condition the *Noma* put a salvage crew on board, and a little later the yacht *May* and the French torpedo boat *Cassioppee* having come up, the *Westward Ho* was taken in tow. Due to the fact that she was apparently sinking by the head she was taken in tow stern first by the two yachts and the torpedo boat and a start was made for the French coast. At about 2 P.M. the British tugs *Epic* and *Woonda* joined up and relieved the yachts and torpedo boats. Due primarily to the efforts and ingenuity of the engineer officer of the *Noma,*

steam was started in the boilers of the *Westward Ho,* and at 4 P.M. with reversed engines she was started backing at good speed. At six o'clock on the morning of August 10, the *Concord* and the French torpedo boat *Glaive* joined up and the *Concord* passed a third tow line. In this manner the convoy proceeded to Brest where they arrived at six o'clock on the evening of August 11, a distance of 315 miles. The cargo of the *Westward Ho* was extremely valuable and of an important character, and her salvage under these most extraordinary conditions reflected great credit on all of the rescuing ships concerned. The cargo consisted chiefly of aeroplanes, field artillery parts, rifles, machine guns, ammunition, and large quantities of grain and hay.

In forwarding the officers' reports concerning the salvage of the *Westward Ho,* the Commander United States Naval Forces in France commented in part as follows:

> No criticism is made of the master of the *Westward Ho* for having abandoned his vessel, inasmuch as her condition was believed to be desperate and the destroyers which rescued her crew were required for duty with troop transports and could not remain in the vicinity.
>
> The salvage of the vessel was a splendid feat of seamanship.

The party from the U. S. S. *May* and U. S. S. *Noma,* under the direction of Lieutenant Thomas Blau, U. S. N. R. F., boarded the vessel, raised steam, pumped compartments adjacent to No. 1 hold and started the ship's propelling plant. The vessel was taken in tow by the U. S. S. *May* and *Cassioppee* and subsequently by tugs which had been dispatched from Scilly Islands and from Brest. With the assistance of her engines she was towed stern first for a distance of 315 miles.

It is recommended that the Navy Department address letters of commendation to the following officers, who participated in this enterprise:

Lieutenant-Commander C. C. Windsor, U. S. N., commanding U. S. S. *May,* (Senior officer present);
Lieutenant H. H. J. Benson, U. S. N. commanding U. S. S. *Noma;*
Lieutenant Thomas Blau, U. S. N. R. F., and
Lieutenant (j. g.) W. R. Knight, U. S. N. R. F., who took charge of the machinery part of the vessel.

Another aspect of the hardships encountered by the yachts in their convoy service may be taken from the log of a single trip of the *Noma.* While proceeding to a rendezvous she encountered a severe northerly blow and the seas which were unusually short made it difficult for the yacht to take them with ease. She proceeded to the rendezvous, however, when she slowed down, and soon after, a heavy sea on her bow smashed in the forward skylight, causing a considerable amount of water to leak through to the lower deck. The same sea also caused the forward deck houses to work considerably. An hour

later while running with the sea abeam, at a speed of about five knots in search for the convoy another heavy sea struck the starboard side denting it and bending four frames; the same sea carried away a davit and part of the gunwale. Returning to port, having met the convoy, the *Noma* began to roll deeply, the sea being abaft the port beam, and the second lifeboat's strongback was carried away. By this time the entire main deck had begun to work and the deck below the main deck was wet from stem to stern, officers' rooms and the crew's living quarters were thoroughly drenched and all of the bedding was wet.

It was hard work; long were the hours and brief the respite. Little has been told of the merchant convoys, for theirs was a work that required secrecy of movements, and secrecy shrouded the wearisome voyages. Only at rare intervals was the story of some sinking told by the crowded press. But for the most part the incidents of their story were incidents of negative action rather than of active deed. Armed with the dreaded depth charges the yachts reduced

the submarine warfare against our merchant shipping to a degree that rendered its effect negligible in comparison with the vast operations which were carried through. In the coastwise convoys there were more frequent losses, but here a smaller individual tonnage offset the losses incurred. Without exaggeration it may be truly said that had it not been for the yachts and the few destroyers which aided them in the escort duty of the store ships, the German scheme of submarine warfare would have succeeded to a degree that would have rendered impossible the maintenance for a single week of our Army on the soil of France. And at the same time it must be added, that without the destroyers, and in the earlier days of the war the yachts as well, the activities of the German submarines would have rendered wholly impossible the transportation of our Army across the sea.

CHAPTER V

THE DESTROYERS

IN THE first days of the United States naval activities in French waters, it will be recalled that the duty of escorting both troop and store ships fell to the converted yachts. With the advent of the destroyers, the system was altered; and, as the number of destroyers was increased, the yachts were gradually withdrawn from the troop convoys and detailed to the more southern ports to act as escorts to coastwise convoys and to the great transatlantic convoys of store ships which centered at the Gironde River. Later, as the destroyer fleet was materially augmented, a number of smaller coal-burning torpedo boats were assigned to duty with the yachts, considerably strengthening their force and compensating for the yachts which had been lost or from their months of hard service had so deterio-

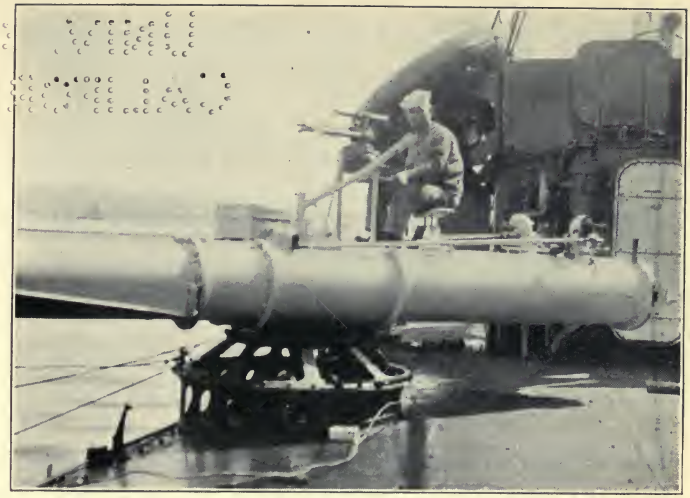
rated that their usefulness was seriously impaired.

The destroyers were ideally suited for the important work of escorting the troop convoys. Possessing the invaluable qualities of high speed, practical armament, and seaworthiness, they were able to cope with every emergency and meet the submarine on a basis on which the result was certain to terminate, in the large majority of instances, in their favor.

Within the breakwater, which shelters the inner harbor of Brest, the destroyers swung from buoys, moored together in clusters, great rafts of slender steel hulls above which lifted a tangle of slim masts and wireless antenna. Painted in fantastic camouflage and swarming with crews which averaged more than a hundred men, the destroyer flotilla that was based in the busy harbor afforded a constant picture of absorbing interest and vitality.

A convoy is to leave at 2 P.M. and the *Benham* casts off from the destroyers lying on either side of her and backs swiftly out into the open water. Sensitive and alert, she turns sharply, as her en-

Rough weather on the destroyer *Benham*



Torpedo tubes on destroyer *Benham*

Four-inch gun crew on destroyer *Benham*

gines shoot her ahead, and with a white curve of water, knifed up on either side of her chisel bow, she steams rapidly through the narrow entrance. In the wide reaches of the outer harbor, a convoy of camouflaged liners are lifting their anchors, homeward bound. Slowly they stand down the channel between the cliffs, the *Benham* and the other destroyers of the escort loafing leisurely beside them. Outside, standard speed is set and the convoy heads for the open sea.

There is no motion on land or sea comparable to that of a destroyer. Rolling often in five-second jerks at an angle sometimes over 50°, there is combined with the roll, a quick and violent pitching which produces a sensation without parallel on any other type of vessel. To those familiar with the great buildings in our larger cities, this pitching movement of a destroyer may be compared with the abrupt starting and stopping of an elevator operating at high speed; a sudden sinking, in which the deck seems to drop away beneath the feet and then an abrupt upheaving motion, almost before equilibrium can be regained.

Like maddened switchback cars, the destroyers gyrate in the slightest sea. Grimy with soot of fuel oil, reeking with oil gasses, they reel and plunge at express-train speed. The officers and men on the bridge, half choked with frequent back drafts of gaseous oil smoke, and the reek from the "Charley Noble" (galley smokestack), peer ahead through a blizzard of flying spray. In the wardroom, the colored mess attendants balance like acrobats and with the expertness of long experience, perform almost impossible feats of juggling with plates and glasses. Few are the days when meals can be served even with racks on the tables. It is a hand to mouth existence, a catch-as-catch-can game in which the galley challenges the sea and the sea usually holds the cards. Even personal cleanliness becomes impossible in an unstable world, where water will invariably find its level when the wash bowl slants at 45° or 50°. Chairs are lashed to the bulkheads, and by night or day, when opportunity offers, officers and men roll into troubled bunks fully dressed, ready at a moment's notice to appear on deck.

Within the three-eighths-inch steel hull, the great turbines, with the horsepower of a battleship, throb and spin, driving the whirling screws. There is not a foot of wasted space. In a swinging and bucking world, crammed like a watch case with a maze of machinery, the engineering crew moves like magicians in a world of steel and steam. Everything is steel. Everywhere is the smell of oil; the ship is greased with it. And day and night, rolling, pitching, slamming over, through or under the heavy seas, the destroyers brought in the convoys, meeting them on some square mile of Atlantic, in the reek of fog or the blackness of night, with unerring mathematical precision.

There was a strange emotion that came to more than a few of our sea-borne soldiers when from some high deck on a stormy morning, they first saw the destroyer escort shaking the great green seas in clouds of spray from their swaying bows. On these sea-whippets lived men in dungarees and rubber boots who met the sea and mastered it; men who lived in oil and spray, continuously balanced in a mad unstable world,

and of greatest importance in the eyes of the men who watched from the transport's decks, was the protective part in the great game of war that the destroyer stood ready day and night to play.

To cast loose the depth charges, to man the guns, to ram the submarine if possible; these were the ultimate purposes of the destroyer escort. And so thoroughly did they perform their untiring service that our army was carried in its vast entirety to its mission beyond the seas and landed safely on the soil of France. In this anti-submarine warfare the depth charges proved to be the most efficient deterrent to submarine activity. In appearance a cylinder about two feet in diameter and about three feet in height, each charge contained three hundred pounds of high explosive and a hydrostatic apparatus by which the explosive was detonated which could be set for any depth from 50 to 250 feet, the force of the explosion over an area of 140 feet in diameter being sufficient to destroy the submarine or force it, injured, to come to the surface. On sighting a submarine, or locating it by any of the tell-tale indications of its pres-

ence, such as oil slicks, or a wake of bubbles, the practice was immediately to drop a buoy, marking the spot and then to proceed on a widening circle from this point, dropping a barrage of depth charges in rapid succession covering the entire area ahead, behind and on either side of the submarine, thus anticipating its movements of escape in any direction.

But there is no general description of the work of the destroyers that can briefly convey an impression of their labors so well as a few specific incidents of the anti-submarine warfare waged by them in the historic waters of the French coast during the long months of war. It is impossible to recount all the engagements which occurred; it is even more impossible to describe the long periods when no break relieved the grind of routine duty at sea. Day and night, month after month, they kept their flags flying. Their whole story, which may some day be told, is a narrative of arduous duty conscientiously performed.

On August 9, 1918, the *Tucker,* while leading a column of ten destroyers, sighted a periscope

on her port bow at a distance of eight hundred yards and gave chase. The submarine dived and the *Tucker,* going ahead at full speed, dropped two depth charges about two hundred yards beyond the point of submergence. She then dropped fourteen charges in a circle, when the bow of the submarine broached and the *Tucker* opened fire with four blunt-nosed shells, two of which scored hits. The submarine then submerged and the *Tucker* passed directly over the spot, sighting her at a depth of twenty feet and dropped two charges directly on her. A few minutes later oil appeared on the surface of the water and it was believed, with reason, that the submarine was destroyed.

On the twenty-fourth of April, 1918, a southbound coastal convoy was proceeding slowly off Penmarch with the *Stewart* acting as escort. About two miles to seaward of the convoy's position, two American naval avions were seen dropping bombs. The *Stewart* immediately left the escort and proceeded at full speed to the spot indicated by the avions, where she was joined by a French destroyer coming from the northward.

One avion heading directly toward the *Stewart,* dropped a buoy and the observer pointed with his arm in the direction of the submarine. The sea was smooth, with a slight swell and a clear and distinct wake could be seen, with an object just breaking the surface at the end of the wake. The *Stewart* headed directly for the object and followed it to seaward, but the wake suddenly changed its direction as the object turned at right-angles to its original course. One of the avions promptly circled and dropped a smoke bomb near the new position of the object which had now submerged but was still visible in the clear water from the bridge of the *Stewart.* The *Stewart* passed within fifty feet and dropped two depth charges in rapid succession each one bringing up a column of water darkened with a heavy oil which spread rapidly over the surface. For a time after the explosion, the water in the vicinity was streaked with a thick red substance, the nature of which could not be determined. The depth charges were dropped so close to the submarine, one on each side and within fifty feet of it and the force of the ex-

plosion was so great that it seems impossible that the submarine could have survived.

One of the many instances of timely interference of an American destroyer, which by its presence undoubtedly saved an attacked ship, occurred on the nineteenth of October, 1917. The American steamer *J. L. Luckenbach* was about two hundred miles west of Brest when the lookout sighted a suspicious ship about five miles on the port beam and the captain immediately changed his course to put the supposed enemy astern. At a distance of about eleven hundred meters the ship, which soon proved to be a submarine, opened fire, keeping, however, well out of reach of the *Luckenbach's* guns. For a considerable period heavy firing was maintained by both vessels, the submarine endeavoring by her fire to keep the *Luckenbach* at a distance and to maneuver herself into a position from which she might fire a torpedo. Meanwhile the *Luckenbach* attempted to prevent the submarine taking this action. About two hundred shells were fired by each ship, seven of the enemy's striking the *Luckenbach*. At the beginning of the encounter,

the *Luckenbach* sent an "Allo" by radio which was picked up by the American destroyer *Nicholson* (then attached to the United States squadron based at Queenstown), who responded that she was on her way. About the middle of the engagement, the *Nicholson* sent a new signal saying, "I am coming; make all possible smoke to make yourself visible." Shortly after, a shell struck the mount of the after gun of the *Luckenbach* forcing the captain to turn the ship to the left in order to use his forward gun. At the end of two hours' engagement, a shell from the submarine struck the *Luckenbach,* damaging the engines, cutting the smokestack and forcing the vessel to stop. But an hour later, the *Nicholson* appeared over the horizon and as she neared, fired four shots at the submarine which submerged and disappeared. After temporary repairs, the *Luckenbach* continued her way and reached Le Havre, leaking badly and with a fire in the crew's quarters.

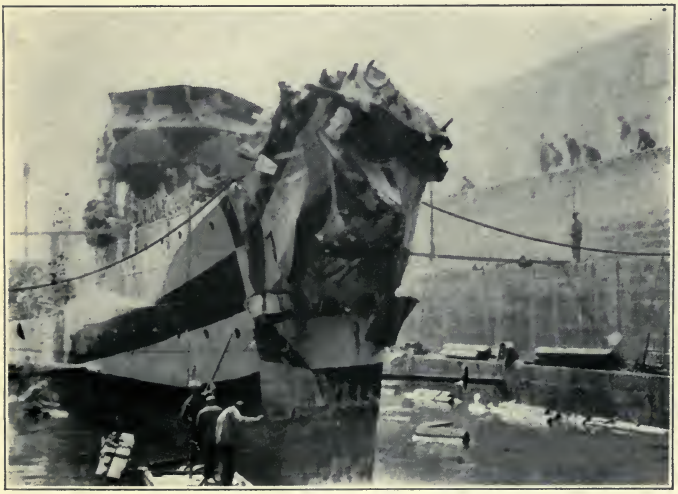
At 9:45 A.M. on the thirty-first of May, 1918, the U. S. S. *President Lincoln* was torpedoed and sunk. On the first intimation of disaster,

calls were sent out to the destroyers who proceeded promptly to the rescue of the survivors, the *Warrington* being the first one to arrive, reaching the spot at 11:05 A.M. Shortly after, the *Smith* appeared above the horizon and joined the *Warrington*. There were twelve boat loads of survivors and a number of life rafts.

A moderate swell was running but no difficulty was experienced in effecting the rescue. The officers and men of both the *Warrington* and *Smith* showed great devotion to duty and initiative in handling a very difficult and unusual situation, particularly in rescuing the men off the life rafts and received a letter of commendation from the Commander United States Naval Forces in France. In all, 685 Navy and Army officers and enlisted men were rescued. Four naval officers and twenty-three naval enlisted men were counted missing. Of these, one officer, Lieutenant E. V. M. Isaacs, U. S. N., was taken on board the submarine and later escaped from a German prison camp.

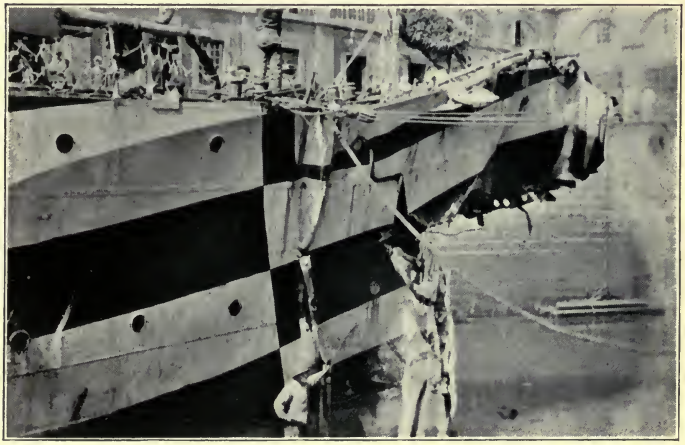
On the first of July, 1918, at a quarter after nine in the evening, the U. S. S. *Covington*

Where the destroyer *Jarvis* rammed the destroyer *Benham*



The bow of the *Jarvis* after her collision with the *Benham*

The side of the *Benham* after being rammed by the *Jarvis*



Bow of the destroyer *Jarvis* after collision with the *Benham*

which had left Brest for the United States on the morning of the same day, was torpedoed in latitude 47° 24′ N. longitude 7° 44′ W., by a submarine which was not seen before or after the attack. Prior to the explosion, however, the wake of a torpedo was seen by the executive officer, close to the ship. When struck, the *Covington* was zigzagging in the front line of an eight-ship convoy, escorted by seven destroyers. The blow was a quartering shot, just forward of the engine-room bulkhead, in No. 5 bunker on the port side. The bulkhead was damaged and the engine-rooms and fire-rooms were rapidly flooded. The ship took a strong list to port, but stayed afloat until 3:32 P.M. of July 2, 1918, when she sank very rapidly in the final plunge.

Immediately after the torpedo struck, the U. S. S. *Smith* opened a depth-charge barrage and circled the *Covington*. Meanwhile, as the torpedoed ship was helpless and liable to be hit again, she was abandoned by the officers and crew in excellent order and all the known survivors were taken on board the *Smith*. At daylight the captain and officers and twenty-two

men, together with one officer and eight men of the U. S. S. *Reid,* which had arrived on the scene, returned to the *Covington* to supervise salvage operations. The *Smith* was later joined by the *Wadsworth, Shaw,* and *Nicholson* and the French gunboats *Conquerante* and *Engageante.* At five in the morning of July 2, 1918, the *Covington* was taken in tow by the U. S. S. tug *Concord* and the British tugs *Revenger* and *Woonda,* but the gradual sinking of the ship finally made progress impossible and after towing her approximately twenty-five miles, the ship was abandoned by her salvage crew and sank in twenty minutes after the last man was taken off. The *Smith,* with 743 survivors, proceeded to Brest; and the *Nicholson* with the captain of the *Covington* and the salvage crew, arrived at the same port a few hours later. Of the entire crew of the *Covington,* only three were unaccounted for and three were drowned. The discipline and courage of all of the officers and crew of the *Covington* were excellent and crews of the fire-room and engine-room on watch at the time, showed particular fortitude.

Illustrative of the dangers of navigation, when navigating without lights and in crowded waters, was the collision of the destroyers *Benham* and *Jarvis*. The night was very dark and there was a heavy fog. Both vessels were making high speed. Suddenly the rudder of the *Jarvis* jammed, she sheered quickly toward the *Benham* and overrode her abreast of the bridge, tearing a great hole in her side extending half way through the wardroom. The force of the blow tore away the bow of the *Jarvis* almost completely. Fortunately, the injuries to the *Benham* were largely above wind and water and the collision bulkhead of the *Jarvis* held sufficiently to permit her to follow the *Benham* to Brest.

Many were the instances of engagements between destroyers and submarines in which the final outcome remains unknown. In a large number of instances, however, it is highly probable to presume that the submarine made a successful escape; but there were also many times when the prompt action of the destroyers must have proved fatal to the submarine, although no tangible evidence of its fate appeared.

In a smooth sea, with the sky partly overcast and a new moon low in the sky, the destroyer *Cummings* sighted what appeared to be the wake of a torpedo crossing about fifty yards ahead of her bow. The rudder was put "hard-left;" the crew sent to "general quarters" and the *Cummings* shot forward at full speed and followed the wake which was very straight and unbroken, and marked with a wake of bubbles when first sighted. As the *Cummings* advanced, dense smears of oil were perceived on the surface, terminating at a distance of three hundred yards in a large slick. A barrage of twenty depth charges at ten-second intervals was dropped and the destroyer circled in the vicinity for half an hour, but no evidence of the submarine appeared.

Another instance comes from the *Benham*. On the morning of July 9, the junior officer of the deck sighted a periscope on the starboard bow of one of the ships of the convoy. Steaming at full speed, depth charges were dropped several hundred yards before the spot was reached, in order to check the submarine and prevent her firing her torpedoes. The destroyer then circled

and dropped a barrage of depth charges, but no wake, oil slick, or other disturbances were seen on the water.

Another story of a submarine comes from the *Reid,* which was proceeding with a west-bound convoy on July 17. The *Nicholson,* which also was with the escort, was seen shelling an object to the northward and the *Reid* promptly proceeded toward the point of fire, where what appeared to be the wash of a moving periscope was visible. When about a mile from the point and fifteen hundred yards from the *Nicholson,* the *Reid* saw an object break water on her port bow with a perceptible white wash and splash and a minute later the officers on the bridge saw a torpedo headed in her direction and toward the convoy. The *Reid* immediately began to drop depth charges to deflect, or if possible, destroy the torpedo, which was proceeding, at times broaching bright in the sunlight, at a high speed. After about ten minutes, a wake was sighted and a number of depth charges were dropped. The depth charge next to the last one appeared to counter-mine and exploded what

was thought at the time, to be another charge which might have been let go at approximately the same time. This second explosion was near the surface and caused a heavy dull shock and concussion over a wide area. Later, it was found that two charges had not been let go simultaneously and it was therefore presumed that the dull shock was caused by an explosion within the submarine.

The two words, "suspicious object," appeared frequently in the reports of the destroyers, for whenever a suspicious object was sighted, action by the destroyers invariably followed. During one of the summer months of 1918, the *McDougal* sighted a dark slate-colored object like a low mound, at a distance of about seven miles. She proceeded immediately at a speed of about thirty knots toward the object, which began to move in a northwesterly direction. The crew were sent to "general quarters," manning the guns and torpedo tubes, depth-charge throwers and releases. By this time the object showed a second low hump about sixty feet to the left, but no periscope, gun, or deck line was visible,

and a few minutes later the object disappeared. Heading for the spot, two depth charges were dropped on a slight oil slick which appeared, but there were no other indications of the presence of a submarine.

At about sunrise on the morning of the fifth of October, while standing into the harbor at Brest, a torpedo was sighted by the *Bridgeport* about one hundred and twenty-five yards from the ship, running so close to the surface that its whole outline could be seen. It was at first thought that the torpedo would strike the ship in the vicinity of the mainmast, but it finally passed clear of the rudder and so close, that it was seen by a number of people looking over the fantail. Upon sighting the torpedo, the speed of the *Bridgeport* was increased and the rudder swung "hard-left," which prompt action undoubtedly saved the ship.

The *Fanning* which was escorting the *Bridgeport,* immediately dashed through the convoy at a speed of twenty-two knots and headed in the direction from which the torpedo was fired, searching for traces of oil. A small patch of

oil was finally discovered and six depth charges were dropped at ten-second intervals. On sighting some more oil ahead, the *Fanning* dropped a number of additional depth charges, and then perceiving a heavy oil wake about a thousand yards ahead, followed it at full speed. Approaching the slick, a clearly marked zigzag was perceptible, as if the submarine were going deeper and slowing down. The oil was heavy and a strong oily smell was noticeable. More depth charges were dropped and the search was continued for a number of hours but no further indications of the presence of a submarine appeared.

It is now believed that the submarine which attacked the *Bridgeport* was later sunk by a French patrol boat with a three-hundred pound American depth charge in a position about seven miles north of Ile de Sein, in about thirty fathoms of water. The patrol boat sighted the periscope of the submarine at a considerable distance on the bow and passing over the spot where the submarine submerged, dropped depth charges. The listening apparatus established the

The explosion of the *Florence H.* A midnight snapshot. The white spots to the left and right are burning cases of explosives

Thornycroft depth-charge thrower

fact that the submarine remained on the bottom and additional depth charges which were released produced a heavy persistent oil patch. The patrol boat remained in the vicinity all night and the submarine was not heard to move.

There is another story in the following extract from the diary of the flotilla, a simple statement ungarnished by details, of a trip that is probably not yet forgotten by those who participated in its stormy adventures:

> The *Roe, Monaghan,* and *Warrington* returned from danger zone escort duty with troop and store ships, having weathered the gale of the past few days. The *Monaghan* lost her foremast and the *Roe* her mainmast. Both vessels lost boats. The *Warrington* lost her liferafts.

Such was the weather off Finistère on the nineteenth of December, 1917.

The story of American naval activities in French waters is relatively free from those disasters which seem an almost certain part of any great activity, and the single grave disaster, the burning of the *Florence H.* gives emphasis to our great good fortune in this respect, in spite of the constant dangers, other than those of the submarine, to which our ships were constantly

subjected while in port; dangers due primarily to the vast quantities of high explosives and inflammable stores with which they were loaded. The *Florence H.* was anchored in convoy at Quiberon Bay on the seventeenth of April, 1918. At a quarter to eleven in the evening, a violent explosion on board wrecked the vessel. The cause has never been determined, but as she was loaded with powder and there is little likelihood that a submarine could have penetrated into Quiberon Bay it seems plausible that the explosion was internal.

The *Florence H.* had been at anchor about half an hour when the explosion occurred. At the moment of the disaster the destroyer *Stewart* was passing at high speed. From the description later made by the *Stewart's* commanding officer, the *Florence H.* burst suddenly into flame, like a flare of flashlight powder. At intervals the flame died down sufficiently to permit the outline of the ship to be clearly visible, then suddenly, the incandescent glare increased again until nothing could be seen but a mass of flame rising from the water. In about five minutes the

forward part of the ship began to break up and at rapid intervals loud explosions of ammunition occurred. Then the sides of the vessel fell outward and the surrounding water was strewn with burning boxes of powder. The *Stewart* turned from her course and headed in toward the after section of the *Florence H.* which had still held together, with the hope of rescuing the survivors of the crew. In addition to the *Stewart,* the destroyers *Whipple* and *Truxton* and the yachts *Wanderer, Christabel, Sultana, Emeline, Corona,* and *Rambler,* aided in the rescue; and gallant work was performed by the rescuing parties who proceeded in small boats from the various ships as close as possible to the burning ship. Of seventy-five people on board the *Florence H.* at the time, thirty-four were rescued, although many of the survivors were severely burned.

In a very few minutes after the fire had broken out, great masses of burning wreckage spread over the sea to the leeward and burst into sudden flame as the ammunition and powder cases exploded, shooting long tongues of fire and

bursts of gasses into the air with a roar which rose above the sound of the burning ship. But the rescue parties from the various ships pushed fearlessly into the burning mass of wreckage, ignoring the powder cases which were constantly exploding around them, and by their prompt work were responsible for the saving of the survivors.

On May 3, Vice-Admiral Moreau, *prefet maritime* of Brest, boarded the U. S. S. *Stewart* and with the crew drawn up for muster pinned on Lieutenant H. S. Haislip, the commanding officer of the *Stewart* the *croix de guerre* for his splendid work in rescuing the survivors of the S. S. *Florence H.* under very dangerous circumstances at the time of her destruction. Admiral Moreau then addressed the ship's company and complimented them in the warmest terms on the fine work which they had accomplished.

And on September 26, 1918, a second interesting ceremony took place on board the *Stewart,* in the harbor of Brest, when Frank Upton, quartermaster, third class, U. S. N. and Jesse W. Covington, ships cook, third class, U. S. N., were

decorated with the Congressional Medal of Honor for their heroic action in jumping overboard and saving the wounded from the *Florence H.* at the time of her explosion and destruction by fire. In presenting these medals, the Commander United States Naval Forces in France, said in part:

> While the department has designated these two men, the honors were not limited to these; for the whole ship's company, with their ship, have all consistently distinguished themselves.

CHAPTER VI

OTHER ACTIVITIES

THE chief work of the Navy in France was naturally to patrol the sea and to wage an anti-submarine warfare; but there were also other activities of the naval forces which should be included in an account of its work abroad during the war. Books could, and doubtless will be written covering fully these activities, and it is with reluctance that only such brief mention can be given here. But at least this slight narrative may give some intimation of the constant dangers and hardships in which the officers and enlisted men of our naval forces in France participated.

For centuries the surface of the sea has alone afforded the setting for naval activities; but with the entrance of the hydroplane and the dirigible balloon into modern warfare strange tales of new

adventures and achievements in another element have been written into the annals of the sea.

But as the purpose of this narrative is to deal primarily with the activities of the men who went down to the sea in ships, and as by the close of the war the naval air establishment had reached a size and scope which would require an entire volume adequately to describe, it seems advisable to give here only a brief *résumé* of this important work and a few graphic instances of naval cooperation on the sea and in the air.

The aviation forces of the United States Navy in France made its first establishment on the French coast under the general command of the Commander United States Naval Forces in France, with Captain Hutch I. Cone in immediate command. Organized originally to comprise three air stations situated at Dunkirk and at the entrances to the rivers Loire and Gironde, the number was constantly increased until at the close of the war a continuous fringe of United States and French naval air stations for hydroplanes and dirigibles lined the coast from Dunkirk to the Spanish boundary. Due to the fact

that the French aviators and planes were in a large measure withdrawn from the coastal work in the earlier months of the war for land service on the German lines, the arrival of the American forces afforded an invaluable and greatly to be desired assistance at a time when the immeasurably increased coastal and deep-sea traffic due to the entrance of the United States into the war created a proportionate increase of submarine activity.

By the close of the war the entire coast was included in a comparatively complete system of air patrols, and plans were nearing completion for a series of fifty American and French stations to control intensively the entire seacoast.

At the beginning, the work of the American forces was purely of reconnaissance, and the convoy patrols were carried on entirely by the French avions from their bases at the larger ports. Later, a proportion of the convoy work was undertaken by the American aviators and three kite-balloon stations were established at Brest, Lorient, and La Trinite.

The value of the hydroplane and the dirigible

Destroyers alongside the *Bridgeport* at Brest

Another view of the destroyers showing camouflage

Looking forward on a "flush deck" destroyer

Looking aft on a "flush deck" destroyer

in naval warfare cannot be overestimated. Possessing a high speed, a wide range of operation, a relative safety from attack and operating at an altitude from which observation over a vast area is possible, the aviator is now able to direct the movements of fleets and guide their operations against an enemy invisible from the level of the sea. As the swift frigate was to Nelson and the cruiser to Togo, so to the admirals of the present war the hydroplane has made possible a knowledge of enemy operations far in advance of the actual contact, and as sea power in past ages has been the key to national security, so in the future years must sea power be assured by air supremacy.

As an enemy of the submarine the sky frigates have, in the war immediately past, proved of the greatest value, for from the plane of their operations it was possible to scan a wide tract of sea, and even in the depths of the water to detect the presence of the submerged submarine. Armed with bombs and machine guns they were not limited to the work of scouting, but under varied circumstances in a large number of in-

stances gave battle to the enemy and rendered an invaluable service.

The comprehensive operations of the United States Naval Air Force in France required an amount of construction which had only reached completion shortly before the termination of hostilities. Had the war continued for even a few months longer this branch of the service would have played an enormously greater part in the conflict with the submarine. As it was, the service rendered was of a vital nature and the entire organization is entitled to much commendation for the work actually done and the comprehensive plan which was brought so nearly into full operation.

The following instances have been selected as characteristic of the work performed by the aviation forces in conjunction with the Navy on the French coast.

On the twenty-ninth of October, 1917, a hydroplane on patrol duty with a convoy departing from La Palice, sighted the American steamship *Alma* proceeding along in the direction of Rochebonne. Flying over the ship, the aviators

saw at a considerable distance the wake of a submarine approaching the *Alma*. Passing over the wake, the aviators dropped two bombs, which fell near the wake, and a third which apparently struck in close proximity to the submarine. The submarine realizing the danger of its situation promptly dived and disappeared.

On another day of the same month two hydroplanes left Camaret on a scouting trip. Shortly after passing Ouessant, about twenty-five miles from Ile Verge, they picked up the wake of a submarine. Heading for it, they perceived the outline of the submarine below the surface, apparently headed in the general direction of several sailing ships. The afternoon was late, it was growing dark and a strong breeze was blowing. The two hydroplanes passed over the submarine and as they saw the periscope each dropped a bomb. The first bomb fell near the mark and the second struck the superstructure of the submarine. Passing over the mark again, each hydroplane dropped a second bomb. The submarine now disappeared giving off quantities of oil that rapidly spread over the surface of the

sea. Then the periscope suddenly shot forth and again disappeared and a heavy list was discernible in the submarine. Seeing that their work was accomplished, the hydroplanes warned the patrols escorting the convoy and returned to their base.

The dangers and hardships of the air service find a good example in the experience of two hydroplanes which put out from Tréguier for patrol duty off Ile de Batz. Late in the afternoon motor trouble developed in one of the hydroplanes and it was forced to light about eight miles west of Tréguier. The other machine descended slowly and threw a message buoy to a fishing boat which was standing in the vicinity. The buoy was picked up but the message had become detached. The first hydroplane then released its carrier pigeons, but it was found later that these for some reason failed to arrive at their coop. The other machine then returned to Tréguier for help, and several patrol boats went out and searched all night and during the following morning for the missing hydroplane. Finally at the end of twenty-six hours the

two occupants of the hydroplane were picked up by the French destroyer *Durandol,* floating helplessly in a rough sea. The machine was taken in tow but the line parted and it sank before a new line could be passed.

The following report of an attack on a submarine is characteristic of a number of similar engagements, and is quoted in the aviator's own words from his report.

On Tuesday morning, April 23, 1918, at 10:33, hydroavions No. 25 with Pilot R. H. Harrell and Observer H. W. Studer and No. 22 with Pilot-Ensign K. R. Smith and Observer G. E. Williams, left station Ile Tudy for the purpose of convoying and to search for hydroavion No. 26 which was forced to land on account of motor trouble, the incident of No. 26 having been reported on return of No. 23, which two had been out on previous patrol and convoy.

Leaving station, steered zigzag course toward Pte. de Penmarch. At 10:58 A.M. sighted No. 26, three miles west of Pte. de Penmarch tied astern of two-mast fishing smack. We circled over them to ascertain if all was well. On finding them resting comfortably, steered a course to the south along the shore to inform the motor-boat crew which was sent out from station to tow them in. Upon reaching the boat, dropped them a correspondence buoy, giving them the location of No. 26 and informing them to follow us to her position. Resuming course toward Pte. de Penmarch, circled over No. 26 and signaled all was well.

Made contact with south-bound convoy of twenty ships at 11:30 A.M. six miles northwest of Pte. de Penmarch. Continued flight towards northwest off starboard side of convoy, arriving at position off end of last ship, circled to the southwest, remaining on starboard side of ships.

At 11:43 A.M. observed an object on the surface of water, bearing 280° off Pte. de Penmarch light and about eight miles

from shore. Made signals to my pilot to steer for that point and arriving over the object made a closer observation. Observed water disturbance, bubbles, oily surface and small wash of sea growth. Ensign K. R. Smith, my pilot, instructed me to arm the bombs and bomb the spot. We then made a short circle over the position, raising from seventy-five meters to two hundred. The bombs were armed and everything made ready for bombing, and upon coming over the location again observed a dark object and apparently more oil.

The first bomb was dropped at 11:50 A.M. The results were highly satisfactory, both in placing the shot and the bomb's effectiveness — hitting the exact spot of disturbance and color. We then circled for another shot which was dropped at 11:52 and hitting ten feet farther westward than the previous shot.

During the bombing period No. 25 was circling the same position and guarding our movements. The observer in plane No. 25 showed his presence of mind in dropping a phosphorus buoy marker, thereby marking the exact location and giving notice of position to an American destroyer, which was steaming to our position at full steam.

We flew towards the American destroyer dropping a correspondence buoy of our action. The destroyer steamed ahead to the bombing position and upon arriving over the spot let go three depth charges. At this juncture a French gunboat arrived at scene of encounter, standing with all guns manned and searching for what would appear of an enemy submarine.

We continued circling our position over spot, observing the results of the bombs, seeing nothing but small particles of what appeared to be cork, much sea growth, and oil. Left scene of action at 12:30 P.M. and continued a course to the south.

At 12:35 again made contact with convoy which had arrived twelve miles southwest of Pte. de Penmarch and were passing a second convoy of sixteen ships bound north.

At 12:36 hydroavion No. 25 flew signal of motor trouble and both headed for station, arriving at 12:48. The conditions were: Weather, hazy; sea, heavy ground swells; visibility of air, poor; visibility of water, good. The duration of flight was two hours and fifteen minutes.

The use of kite balloons for observation purposes proved of great practical value in con-

junction with the destroyers, but this means of observation was not adopted until the closing months of the war. Early in August, 1918, a trial trip with a kite balloon was made by the *Cushing*. Extremely rough weather, a number of minor defects (partly due to the new apparatus), the inexperience of the crew, and the seasickness of the balloon personnel, rendered the experiment in some respects unsatisfactory. The balloon behaved perfectly, however, except at one time when it became considerably deflated, and, due to its violent plunging in the high wind, could not be gassed. On this occasion the observer was obliged to dive overboard out of the basket as the only possible way by which he could reach the destroyer.

The report of operations with a kite balloon on the *Ericsson* the latter part of August gives the information that the smoke of an approaching convoy was detected at a distance of forty miles and again, at the same distance, a passing convoy was detected. The flying height was from 640 to 660 feet.

Although the bluejacket is naturally asso-

ciated primarily with the sea, almost every war has contained memorable instances of the action of seamen in land operations, and in our naval operations in France the brief but important work of the United States naval railway batteries proved that even in modern warfare the amphibious nature of the Navy has not declined.

Early in 1918 it was determined to provide a number of guns of large caliber mounted on railway carriages to work in conjunction with our land forces. The long familiarity of the Navy with guns of this nature resulted in the prompt decision to operate the batteries, officered by naval officers and manned by bluejackets, as naval units.

Each battery consisted of one fourteen-inch fifty-caliber naval gun weighing approximately 178,000 pounds, mounted on a railway carriage and accompanied by a complete train for its operation and supply, consisting of a locomotive, tender, fourteen-inch ammunition car, anti-aircraft car, anti-aircraft ammunition car, battery headquarters kitchen car, staff headquarters and dispensing car, berthing car, staff radio car, fuel

car and staff quarters car. The expedition was also accompanied by a construction car with a heavy crane, a wrecking car, a staff officers car, a spare parts car and a number of freight and flat cars. The command of the expedition was placed with Captain (later Rear-Admiral) C. P. Plunkett, U. S. N., and Commander G. L. Schuyler, U. S. N., second in command and gunnery officer.

The construction of the trains was undertaken by the Baldwin Locomotive Works at Philadelphia, and a number of specially trained mechanics from this plant were enlisted in the Navy and accompanied the expedition.

Early in August the guns and equipment began to arrive at Saint-Nazaire, and on the eighteenth of the month the first complete one-gun battery was ready to leave for the Front. No. 2 battery was assembled and ready a short time later, and by the latter part of September batteries Nos. 3, 4, and 5 were ready for the field.

There had been considerable speculation regarding the possible effect on the railroad tracks and bridges due to the enormous weight of the

trains but no damage occurred, and the trains proceeding at a reasonable speed arrived at their destination without incident.

The honor of the first shot came to battery No. 2 which opened on a large enemy ammunition dump near Fontenoy on September 14. For a number of weeks, batteries 1 and 2, operating under the control of the commanding general of the first French Army, were employed in the vicinity of Soissons and fired chiefly on Laon, and at Mortiers near Saint-Quentin. The range of these guns being approximately fifty thousand yards, it was possible to spread destruction far inside the enemy lines, and to increase their effectiveness they were at all times placed in very advanced positions which brought them under more or less continuous fire.

The reports of battery No. 1 mention that on one occasion a six-inch German shell exploded within twelve feet of the gun, but slight damage was done, and the matter was officially dismissed with the remark that the enemy shell "peppered" the battery. In reply to this "hit" the battery shortly after dropped a shell into a Ger-

THE FLAG THAT FLEW

Left to right—Vice-Admiral Moreau, French Navy; Assistant Secretary of Navy, Roosevelt; Vice-Admiral Schwerer, French Navy; Rear-Admiral Benoit, French Navy, and Vice-Admiral Wilson, United States Navy, at Brest

man troop cinema creating over one hundred casualties.

Early in October Nos. 3, 4, and 5 took up a position at Thierville, in the Verdun Sector, and they were later joined in the same general vicinity by Nos. 1 and 2, where fire was maintained on Montmédy, Mengiennes, Benestroff and Sarrebourg.

On October 27 an enemy shell exploded in the vicinity of battery No. 5, wounding five men, one of whom later died of his wounds. Due to their advanced position which brought them under constant fire of both the long-range and smaller caliber guns of the enemy, it is remarkable that the casualties were relatively few, and especially as the night firing exposed the men constantly to the enemy's observation.

A most valuable service was given by the batteries, and had the war continued they were destined for a part which would have been of the utmost importance. All the *matériel* withstood the constant firing effectively and the highest commendation was received by the officers and men for their skill in operating the guns.

Mine-sweeping is perhaps one of the most important and at the same time one of the dangerous and most disagreeable services rendered by the naval forces in modern warfare. The experiences of the little group of United States mine-sweepers at Lorient was no exception. It will be recalled that the fleet of United States mine-sweepers in French waters consisted of nine small vessels which were originally sent over for patrol service, but being speedily condemned for this work, due to their unsuitable construction, were later converted for mine-sweeping.

In this department the French Naval Forces were particularly active, the Tossizza scissors apparatus, a French invention by which mines caught by the sweeping gear were released and allowed to rise to the surface where they might be destroyed by gunfire, having proved highly effective. So valuable, in fact, was this contribution to anti-mine work that it was adopted by the British Navy for their own extensive operations.

The United States mine-sweepers concentrated

their operations at Lorient, and there worked in conjunction with the French in keeping free the channels and in destroying enemy mine fields in the vicinity reported by ships or hydroplanes.

The German mines were laid, by necessity, entirely by submarines, and only the constant, untiring, daily sweeping of the channels could assure the safety of the shipping passing through them. These mines, of various types as the war progressed, were in the large part anchored at a depth of about fifteen feet, on high tide, beneath the surface, to be exploded by the sides of the passing vessel which, coming in contact with the protruding horns detonated the mine.

The French mine-sweepers were built for this particular duty and were a light-draft type of vessel capable of proceeding with relative safety over an existing mine field without striking the submerged mines. The American sweepers, on the other hand, were a converted craft and of a draft which permitted their use for only a couple of hours on the flood tide. At these times they could pass safely over the mines, but at lower water there would have been considerable dan-

ger of striking and detonating the mines encountered. In this work a number of sweepers worked together advancing over a supposed field dragging their sweeping gear astern. As the wire cables which comprised the sweeps caught on the anchoring cable of a mine, the scissors either cut loose the mine or the mine was torn loose from its anchorage and rose to the surface, when it was promptly exploded by gunfire.

In the earlier years of the war a type of mine was employed by the German mine layers which could be "dehorned," and after being thus rendered innocuous, could be examined. Later, however, the mines were so constructed that an attempt to dehorn them resulted in their explosion and the annihilation of several detachments of enterprising French sailors.

The hazardous nature of this work, its monotony and the discomforts of the vessels made the duties of the mine-sweepers far from enviable and much credit should be given to the men who uncomplainingly gave themselves to this branch of the service.

The value of this service is indicated by the

following letter from the *prefet maritime* of the third arrondissement, Vice-Admiral Aubrey, to the district commander at Lorient.

The C. D. P. L. has recently informed me how much he appreciates the services of the United States mine-sweepers in the daily sweep and the destruction of enemy mines. He has spoken in particular, of the zeal which these sweepers showed the second week of July, when in conjunction with the French, they cleared the mine field Guérande shoal. This successful operation was carried out in bad weather under very arduous and dangerous conditions.

I wish to express to you my sincere gratitude and will ask that you kindly convey my thanks and appreciation to the officers and crews of the *Hinton* and *Cahill* and most particularly to the *James*, which alone sank four mines.

On a gray afternoon early in November the sound of cheering greeted the destroyer *Roe* as she slid out from her moorings and turned slowly toward the opening in the breakwater. From her slender mainmasts a hundred-foot pennant, a single row of stars in its blue field and two long stripes of red and white beyond, curved and floated in the breeze. It was " homeward bound." As the *Roe* stood out of the harbor cheers from every vessel gave her a Godspeed as she passed. From destroyer decks groups of men with home longing in their eyes watched her steam on toward the outgoing convoy. A destroyer signaled

"Give our regards to Broadway," and "Good Luck, may you follow soon" came back from the fluttering semaphore on her signal bridge. She was the first to leave from France, and although the armistice was declared but a week later, there were few who watched her departure on that gloomy afternoon, who dared to hope that the end of actual hostilities was so near at hand.

A week later the harbor was glittering in sunshine. It was noon and the crews of the hundred-odd vessels in the great harbor of Brest were knocking off their work for dinner. Suddenly from the shore battery beside the ancient fortress a puff of white smoke was followed by the dull boom of a gun; another followed, another, and then another. The heavy voices of the guns were augmented by a high-pitched whistle from a great French cruiser, and an enormous tricolor broke out suddenly against the blue of the sky. Other guns took up the challenge; deep-voiced whistles and wailing, shrieking sirens. The armistice was signed! On every ship men crowded the decks and cheered madly. Great flags, the

unconquered emblem of America, broke out on the breeze. The hostilities were ended. It was over, "Over There."