THE RETURN OF THE FLEET.

AT FORT MONROE.

"The Stalwart Ships, The Beautiful and Bold Adventurers."

No matter what opinion may have been entertained by some of the people of the country as to the expediency of the cruise of our magnificent fleet around the world, no true American could have looked upon those 16 beautiful white battleships and their escorting sister-ships as they sailed in stately dignity across Hampton Roads to their anchorage Feb. 22, without feeling the heart beat faster and the breast swell with pride. It was indeed a splendid and impressive sight. To be sure nature was in her most unsympathetic mood, caring naught for the hundreds of anxiously awaiting sweethearts and wives who had gathered at Fort Monroe to welcome back their loved ones, and did her best to render the spectacular part of the home-coming a failure. Perhaps, she thot a little water, more or less, mattered naught to navy folk—as for the civilians, why of course they didn't count any way—at all events it was her mood to make the day as disagreeable as possible and she succeeded admirably. The skies were leaden and a cold, penetrating rain fell steadily, much of the time in heavy showers. The heavy fog of the early morning, which threatened to totally obscure the ships, cleared somewhat as the day advanced, tho the mist still hung thickly over there to the left where all eyes were turned. So low were the clouds and so gray was everything that it was almost impossible to tell where water ended and sky began.

For nearly a week before people ha been pouring into Old Point from the trains and boats. Most of these were "navy widows" and young women wearing on their hands the large class ring of the Annapolis Naval Academy graduate which told the story, ages old, yet ever new. To these women the cruise meant but one thing, the cruel separation from husband and gallant sailor boy, and now the joyful reunion after the long 14 months of waiting.

Large numbers of civilians of both sexes had also been gathering to witness the home-coming of the fleet, especially on the 21st and on the mornin' of the 22d, and these with the navy contingent took their stand, on the all-important day, in many cases as early as 9 o'clock, along the sea-wall in front of the fort, or upon the higher ground back, in the rooms and on the balconies of the Chamberlain Hotel. In fact every inch of ground at that part of the Point was black with humanity.

When it was seen that the day was to be rainy those not provided with umbrella and rubbers made a rapid descent upon the one little store in the neighborhood that kept them, and it is said the entire stock was bought out long before you could say Jack Robinson. Many could not be provided with these articles, so exceedingly necessary on such a day, and stood four and five hours with wet feet and drenched clothing, peering thru the heavy mist for the white hull of the Connecticut, which was to lead the procession in.

The water was full of craft of all kinds and descriptions, from the queer little black torpedo boats flying hither and yon to the big heavily laden excursion steamers. Out into the gray mist in the direction of the tail of the Horseshoe Shoals, where the Mayflower lay at anchor, they all steamed, private yachts gaily decorated, and vessels strung with signal flags which it was said carried the message "Welcome Home Once More." As far as the eye of the watcher could see the bay was filled with these boats, big and small, decorated and otherwise, their decks, when they had them, black with humanity and all going in the same direction. It was a scene of great activity and excitement and it was well that there was something to relieve the strain of watching, to interest and amuse that immense crowd of spectators as they stood in the wet sand or grass, under their dripping umbrellas waiting for the appearance of the fleet.

Finally, a little after noon, far off to the left, the hazy atmosphere took on a blacker and heavier aspect and the cry "They are coming" rang thru the crowd. Gradually the blackness took shape, and slowly there emerged from the vail of mist first a white hull, then a buff superstructure with three smokestacks, and in a few more seconds the Connecticut, the flagship of the White Squadron, stood fully revealed. A flash of flame from her sides showed that she was firing her guns, tho the report could hardly be heard at that distance. The joy of the feminine part of the navy contingent manifested itself in happy cries of delight. The fleet was actually in sight, actually before their very eyes which they had been straining for so many hours, and what mattered wet feet or ruined hat! Things were beginning to get interesting.

Soon another white nose poked itself out of the mist and the Kansas appeared, following, in what seemed to be a perfectly straight line, after the Connecticut, and just 400 yards behind her. In this way, one after another, the 16 beautiful battleships of the fleet took shape and sailed out into the open, all flying the long, graceful homeward pennant, and all keeping in the same straight line and the same distance apart as they slowly and majestically followed their peerless leader, the Connecticut, to their anchorage.

Immediately behind the 16 white battleships, these ships which were now returning from their picturesque triumphant cruise around the world, honored and feted by all the great nations which they had visited, came the fleet of escorting ships, nine in number, four new battleships, and five big cruisers. These leviathans of the deep, garbed in the new gray which is to be the regulation color of our navy henceforth, really showed up better against the somber surroundings than did the white ships, tho for beauty of appearance there is no comparison between them. On two of the new battleships, the Mississippi and Idaho, were the queer-looking fire control masts, which someone remarked looked more like the framework built over oil wells than anything else. As no one in the crowd had ever seen anything of this sort the comparison was not questioned. This mast is an American invention, and our Navy is the first to adopt it, tho England and Germany are about to do so. It will not fall unless cut completely thru, which is certainly something greatly in its favor, since on its top it is intended to put an officer in time of battle to control the ship's fire. From his point of vantage the officer can see if the guns are aimed too high, and indicate the same to the gunners.

Stepping neither to the right nor left, but keeping in perfect line with their sisters in white, these nine big, powerful, Quaker-toned ships followed after them, preserving to a nicety the same distance apart of 400 yards, and in less than an hour the three squadrons had passed before the eyes of the spectators and lay at anchor in double rows. The cruise was over and the fleet was in.

At the Tail of the Horseshoe.

It is said that the officers of the fleet wanted as little fuss and ceremony as possible about their homecoming, having had all they cared for of that sort of thing during the cruise, and certain it is that all the navy contingent desired was to get the men back safe and sound and as quickly as possible. But one woman standing in the crowd of watchers was greatly disappointed that there was so little demonstration as the ships passed. There was some little firing of guns—a salute in honor of Washington's birthday—but no shouting or cheering by the crowd, no waving of handkerchiefs (tho to be sure they could not have been seen by the men on the ships) no bands playing, no boat whistles shrieking, nothing whatever. With the exception of the fire of the guns, most of which was so far away that it could scarcely be heard, it was as quiet as Sunday morning in the country, and this particular woman has not yet recovered from her disappointment. She had made up her mind that as soon as the Connecticut appeared everyone would go mad with delight; that bands would begin to play, people would wave has and handkerchiefs and cheer till their throats were sore, boat whistles shriek, and the guns on Fort Monroe belch forth their thunder in noisy welcoming. But nothing of the sort happened.

However, if there was no particular noise or demonstration at the Fort when the fleet came in, there was plenty at the tail of the Horseshoe Shoals, where President Roosevelt reviewed it. On account of the fog and the number of boats going out to meet the ships the Mayflower had a rather risky journey down the lower Potomac the night before, but she now lay safely anchored in about the same position she occupied when she said good-by to the officers and men 14 months ago. She was there now to welcome them back home, and the President and his guests were on deck bright and early so as to miss nothing. The Chief Executive wore a frock coat and silk hat, as did also the Secretary and Assistant Secretary of the Navy, while Admiral Sims was in the uniform proper to the occasion. These stood on the bridge of the Mayflower. A party of handsomely-gowned women, men in civilian dress, and officers were grouped on the quarter deck.

It is seldom, if ever, that a great event like the return of the fleet has come off so exactly on schedule time as it did. Weeks before Admiral Sperry submitted his program, which he carried out to the letter. Just as he said it would, the fleet reached the Southern drill grounds, 50 miles off the Virginia Capes, early on the 21st, and at 5 o'clock the next morning, the 22d, was off for the tail of the Horseshoe and the review by the President. It was just one minute of the time set by Admiral Sperry for the arrival of the fleet at this point, 11 o'clock, and when the Connecticut was two miles from the Mayflower, but near enough to see the insignia and stars on the President's flag, that the fun began. Leading off, the Connecticut began her salute of 21 guns to Old Glory, which was immediately taken up by the Kansas, then by the Minnesota, and so on all down the long line. By the time the Connecticut was abreast of the Mayflower she had finished her 21 guns, but armorclads off in the distance were still keeping it up, and the spectators on the Mayflower and the great excursion and other boats could see the flashing and puffing when the sound which reached their ears was scarcely louder than the grumbling of remote thunder.

As the Connecticut passed the Mayflower she presented a superb sight in spite of gray skies and falling rain. Admiral Sperry and the other officers stood on the forward bridge, each with a white-gloved hand raised to the brim of his chapeau. Along the starboard side, facing the President's yacht, stood the enlisted men in long lines, "manning the rail" as they call it. The Mayflower dropped her colors, President Roosevelt, smiling and happy, took off his hat, and the Connecticut's red-uniformed band struck up "The Star Spangled Banner." The bands on the excursion boats took up the air, which by this time had been taken up by the Kansas, then by the Minnesota, and so on, and the scene can be better imagined than described. Each ship as it passed the Mayflower presented the same appearance, with the officers at "attention," the men in blue at the rails, and the bands playing the "Star Spangled Banner" as they passed.

It was great. All the excitement, the lack of noisy demonstration which the scene lacked as the ships passed Fort Monroe, was here displayed. President Roosevelt was in one of his happiest moods and looked as pleased as Punch. When the Connecticut was clear of the Mayflower her 8-pounders again began to bang, this time in honor of the President himself. The Kansas followed, and soon the din became again terrific. Twenty-one guns each from 25 ships makes 525 separate reports, and a powerful lot of noise.

When the last cruiser of the escorting fleet had passed the President's yacht the Mayflower got up steam herself and followed after, and tagging behind her came the big flotilla of all kinds of water craft which had collected there to witness the review. Never before had Hampton Roads held such a big lot of unofficial boats. There were steamers and yachts from Norfolk, steamers from Baltimore and Richmond, the steamer Brandon from New York crowded with members of the Navy League and their families. A steamer from Washington brot down 300 Senators and Representatives with their families and friends. All of them, gay with signal flags and bunting, were loaded down with people, most of whom carried flags, and gave convincing proof of an excellent pair of lungs. If old Sol had only been in a better humor, and had smiled down upon the scene in the genial way he can when he wants to, the effect of all this color, this great gathering of ships and people, with the music of the bands and the booming of the guns would have been magnificent. As it was it was a spectacle not soon to be forgotten by those fortunate enough to witness it.

When the fleet was anchored at Old Point the Mayflower took her position in the center, and at 2 o'clock the flag and commanding officers of the different ships went on board the President's yacht to pay their respects. The Chief Executive's well-known smile was very much in evidence as he grasped each by the hand, even throwing his arms about those he knew particularly well after the first formalities were over. He was full of questions and words of praise, and every little while would lead Admiral Sperry off by the arm for a confidential chat. Later the President, accompanied by Admiral Sperry, visited the divisional flagships, the Connecticut, Louisiana, Georgia, and Wisconsin, amid the playing of bands and the booming of cannon, and on the Connecticut, where were gathered detachments of bluejackets from the other ships of that division, he climbed up on the steel foundation of the after turret, slipping as he did so and had not some one caught hold of him might have been badly hurt, and addressed the crew. He praised the gunnery work of the men, but told them that so far they had only shown what they could do in smooth water, and as in time of war they could not choose their water it was very necessary that they have plenty of target practice where the water was rough. There was great cheering by the bluejackets and clapping of the white-gloved hands of the officers when the President finished, and as he was "piped over the side," preparatory to leaving the Connecticut, the men gave him a rousing three cheers and a "tiger," which pleased the Nation's Chief Executive mightily.

On Shore at Last.

In the meanwhile the subordinate officers stood around chaffing at every moment's delay which kept them from going ashore, and on land in the big Chamberlain Hotel, crowded to overflowing, and in the smaller Sherwood Inn, hundreds of impatient women were denouncing as "horrid" and "heartless" all this pomp and ceremony which kept their loved ones from them. But on board the officers were compelled to remain until the Mayflower had left the last ship which the President visited, and had steamed for Washington. Then, and not till then, did the swift little launches begin to run from the battleships to the Old Point Comfort pier, and out of them the officers tumbled in their haste to land, nearly every one carrying a grip in which were beautiful embroidered komonas, exquisite crepes, rolls of pongee, Eastern scarfs, necklaces of Australian opals, and the thousand and one lovely things which had been picked up during the cruise for the "girl I left behind me."

In the corridors and parlors of the hotels and in their own rooms, for many felt that the meeting was too sacred to be viewed by outside eyes, the women waited for husband or lover. Among them were also many bright-eyed, rosy-cheeked young matrons with the baby born after the fleet sailed, and again others with the handsome little boy or girl, now just at that interesting age when a child begins to talk, who were in long clothes when "papa" tore himself from "mama's" restraining arms and sobbed farewell, 14 months before.

The scene in the crowded corridor of the Chamberlain was probably without parallel. Of course the women all wore their most becoming gowns and had done everything known to the sex to make themselves as irresistible as possible. And beautiful indeed did some of them look, with their flushed cheeks and the happy light of love shining in their eyes. Scenes and incidents of the unrestrained affection between husband and wife long separated (the engaged couples were more circumspect) occurred with a frequency and openness which only the time and place excused. Women threw themselves in the arms of their husbands and upon their shoulders. Shouts and cries, laughter and tears were heard on all sides. Men and women embraced and kissed each other unconscious of or indifferent to the crowd around them. The place was so jammed that it was well-nigh impossible to move around at all, but wherever one went it was to see the same throng of excited, exhuberant men and women, laughing, lovemaking, with happiness, spelled with a very large H, shining from every face. After the first rapturous greeting the woman and the officer with his grip would disappear up the broad staircase, or step into the car of the elevator, and away from the eyes of the crowd the calmer and more sacred reunion of husband and wife would take place.

It was rather amusing to the outside observer to watch the women as they came into dinner that night. Nothing had been talked of for days in advance but the charms and virtues of husband or lover, and the outsider naturally felt considerable curiosity to see what these perfect creatures really would look like. In most cases they measured up remarkably well to the description of them, tho the palm had to be given to those who wore their uniform ashore. Just why an officer shakes his becoming brass buttons the minute he strikes dry land, and gets into his unbecoming "citz," is something the feminine mind cannot grasp, but such is the case, and the officers of the home-coming fleet were no exception to the rule. The majority, however, knowing how the wife or sweetheart felt on the subject, did have the decency to put their own feelings aside on this occasion and wear their uniforms ashore.

One thing about the women that night which particularly amused and interested the outsider was the fact that nearly every one of them wore over her pretty bare shoulders the Egyptian scarf studded with gold or silver which is so expensive when purchased in this country. The fact was amusing because it showed how one officer had followed the lead of another in doing his shopping. When it comes to a question of buying things most men, whether naval or not, are at sea, and they eagerly seize upon any suggestion. On every ship there are always a few men who take more or less kindly to this pleasant duty of picking up pretty things to take home, and generally the majority of their fellow-officers buy exactly the same things for their women-kind. It is pretty safe to say that every woman with son, husband, brother, or lover on the fleet who had not already a silver or gold Egyptian scarf, is the happy possessor of the same today. The fleet visited Cairo.

Odds and Ends.

And so the fleet came in and the cruise which had been so successful was over. That night all the ships, which lay in two long lines, anchored by squadrons, were brilliantly illuminated, electric bulbs outlining hull, mast, and towering funnel. There was a grand dinner given to Admiral Sperry at the Chamberlain, and a ball, and there was also a wedding, one of the officers being married some three hours after he landed to the girl he had become engaged to just before he sailed. But the majority of the women preferred to remain in some quiet place and talk, talk, talk to the man they had just welcomed back, and who, in most cases, they had not seen for 14 long months.

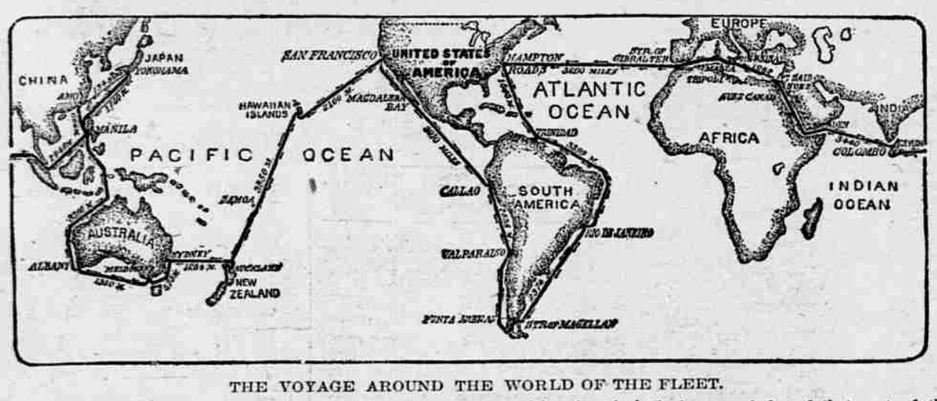
One of the young officers told the outsider some rather interesting things concerning the cruise. Among all those 15,000 men only 16 died from disease during the 14 months, which is certainly a very small number. In the fleet of 20 battleships and five cruisers—the original "White Squadron" and the escorting fleet—valued at $250,000,000, there were 25,000 men, all under the command of Admiral Sperry, whose salary is $8,000 a year, and who celebrated his 61st birthday when the fleet was at Melbourne. Each engine on the 16 battleships made over 21,000,000 revolutions during the cruise. In steaming from Gibraltar to Fortress Monroe, which took the fleet 16 days, they were out of sight of land for a longer time than any other during the 14 months. In coming in for review on the 22d there were five and one-half miles between the Connecticut, which headed the procession, and the cruiser which tailed it.

The fleet left Dec. 16, 1907, and returned Feb. 22, 1909. It was away just 434 days, cruised 45,000 miles, and spent 342 days in various ports. Had it not been for these social visits, the cruise could have been made in 200 days. Much time was saved by having the repair ship Panther along. It has now been proved that ships can be mended at sea. Many repairs before thot impossible on shipboard were made during the cruise. The Panther has really been the guardian angel of the fleet, in spite of its name, and has been ready at all times to make the necessary repairs. Fitted out with forges and all the paraphernalia of a machine shop, she has added tremendously to the success of the cruise. There was only one ship in the fleet that did not require the good services of the Panther.

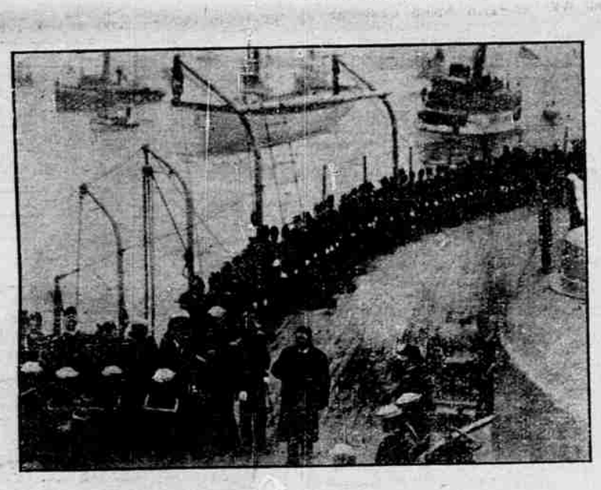
The little Yankton, too, deserves much praise. She was the Admiral's tender and no one worked half as hard as she did. No matter what the weather, the plucky little yacht, hardly bigger than an ocean-going tug, has been dispatched hither and yon, on this errand and that. She has been sent into twice the number of ports visited by the fleet, and ditho she has been tossed about like thistledown by a summer breeze, yet she landed on her feet every time, as the saying goes. She has had a sure enough hard experience of it, has done splendidly, and deserved much praise.

The hospital ship, Relief, has been left at Manila, pronounced N. G. by officers and men. She was a terribly rolly, pitchy thing, and it was utterly out of the question to make a sick person comfortable on her. A large amount of money was spent in fitting her out for the cruise, yet the ships got along all right without her. An ideal hospital ship might be a very good thing to have with a fleet, but such a one as the Relief was almost worse than none at all.

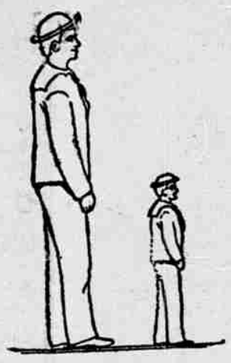
The fleet now at Hampton Roads will soon break up and the different ships go to their home yards. Some two or three will be put out of commission. There is talk of Admiral Schroeder or Admiral Wainwright succeeding Admiral Sperry, whose time for retirement is close at hand. Either would make an excellent commander. The officers of the fleet will soon be scattered all over the country enjoying the leave of absence to which they have been so eagerly looking forward.



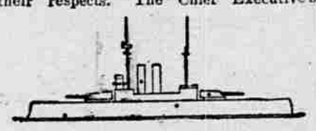
THE VOYAGE AROUND THE WORLD OF THE FLEET.



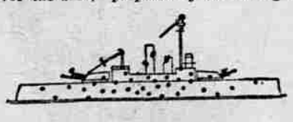
PRESIDENT ROOSEVELT ABOARD THE CONNECTICUT.



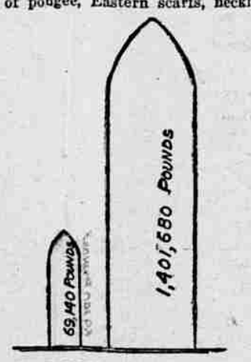
COMPARISON OF ENLISTED MEN: 1908, 10,237; 1898, 2,276.



SANTIAGO FLEET: 1898, Five Per Cent of Shots Fired Made Hits.



ATLANTIC FLEET: 1908, 40 Per Cent of Shots Fired Under Probable Battle Conditions Would Make Hits.



COMPARISON OF METAL Thrown in Five Minutes' Firing, Santiago and Atlantic Fleets.

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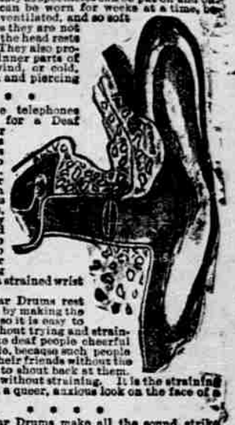

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Wilson's Ear Drums make all the sound strike hard on the center of the human ear drum, instead of spreading it weakly all over the surface. It thus makes the center of the human ear drum vibrate ten times as much as if the same sound struck the whole drum head. It is this vibration of the ear drum that carries the sound to the hearing Nerves. When we make the drum vibrate ten times as much we make the sound ten times as loud and ten times as easy to understand.

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The 9th Wis.

Editor National Tribune: Please give me a short history of the 9th Wis., and the names of all the soldiers belonging to Co. B.—Peter Immel, Box 271, Chewelah, Wis.

The 9th Wis. was organized at Milwaukee from October to November, 1861, the original members mustered out Dec. 3, 1864, and the veterans and recruits colsolidated into a battalion of four companies and retained in service until Jan. 30, 1866. It was commanded by Col. Frederick Salomon, who was promoted to Brigadier-General July 16, 1862, succeeded by Col. Chas. E. Salomon, mustered out Dec. 3, 1864, upon the expiration of his term of service. Lieut.-Col. Arthur Jacobi then took command. It took part in the battles of Newtonia, Spoonville and the two which were fought at Jenkins's Ferry. It belonged to Salomon's Division, Seventh Corps, and lost 77 killed and 114 from disease, etc.

We cannot give the names you desire, as we have no data relating to company histories.—Editor National Tribune.

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