

LIFE ON THE WAR VESSELS OF OUR ATLANTIC FLEET, WHICH IS NOW HARD AT WORK AT GUN PRACTICE

MEALS \$300 A MOUTHFUL.
But These Dinners Are for Big Guns on Warships.

All the pleasures of war and none of its rigors, except unshaven chins and tuneless pianos, are now being experienced by the brave lads of this nation's fleet at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. The chins are unshaven because mirrors cannot stand the shock of a twelve-inch gun's discharge and the naval barbers refuse to be responsible for accidents; the pianos sound like Tophet, because their strings have been jarred unmercifully and maybe their sounding boards cracked by the explosion of tons of smokeless powder. The up-to-date sailor loves his smooth face and his ragtime music, but he is well disciplined and can forego them when it is necessary. There are, indeed, scissors and safety razors, and it is possible to whistle "Take Me Back to New York Town."

Off the tropical, palm-fringed coast, sixteen slaty monsters, of a hue connecting sea and sky, are now rolling in the sun-smitten swell. Their military masts of truss work give the effect of a city arisen from Neptune's domain. Long, gray tubes project from circular boxes near each extremity of the battleships. At some distance away float white canvas squares with black, square bull's-eyes. The quiet, balmy air is broken by a bugle call to battle quarters. Aboard ship officers and men run in all directions. A button pressed on the bridge closes the watertight steel doors below decks. Engines throb, machinery clanks. Telephone bells ring and speaking tubes whistle. The round boxes, which are turrets of the big guns, swing

toward the targets. Men inside, stripped to the waist, nimbly operate the electric hoist and feed into the gun breech enormous provender of steel and powder.

The meal of the gun costs \$300 a mouthful, and the insatiable yet refined devourer, like the ancient and gorged Roman gourmand, rejects a meal immediately after swallowing it. The range finders in the military tops telephone their results to the bridge, the conning tower and the turrets.

"Fire when you're ready," comes the order. "Old Bill was ready three minutes ago," mutters a turret man, referring to the steel Lucullus on the port side. "Bess ain't ready yet—just like a woman."

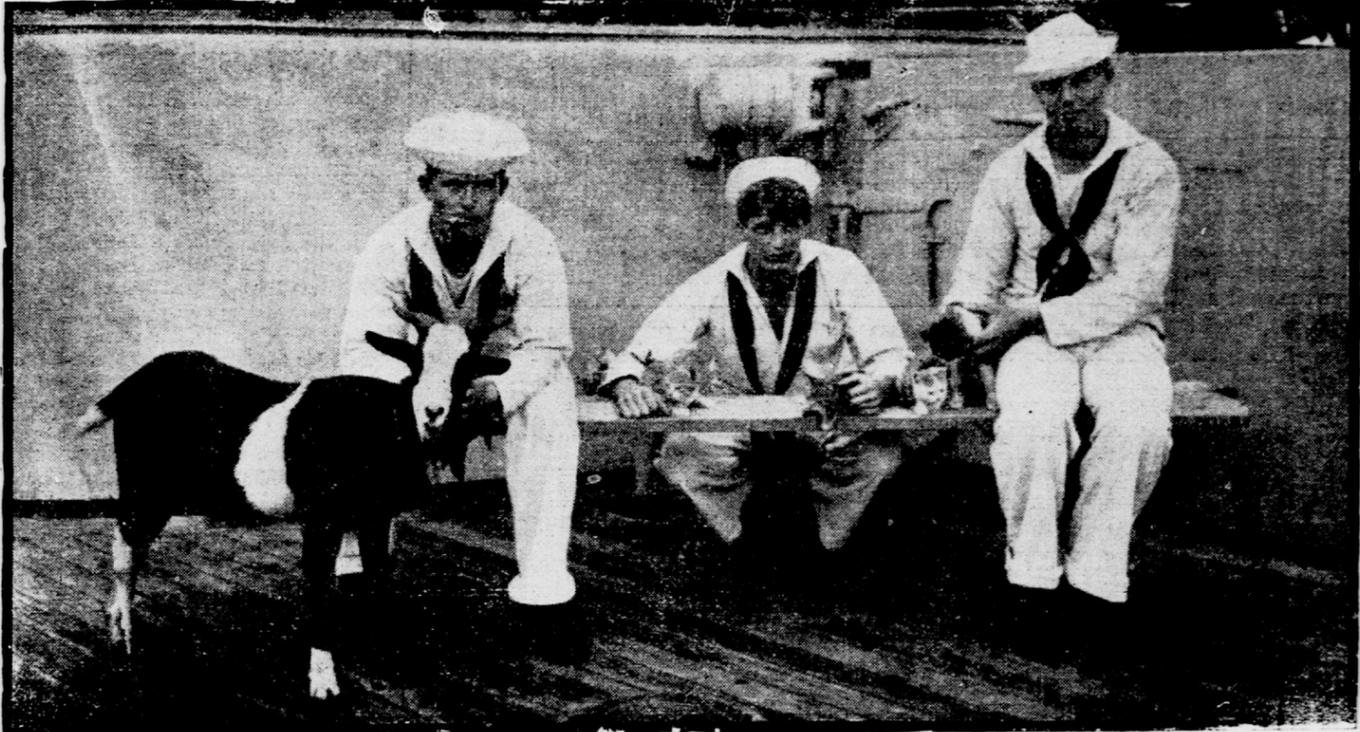
The insult to Bess cannot be immediately resented by her crew, if indeed it is heard through the cotton ear plugs, for the men are awaiting the explosion with open mouths and crouching positions. If they did not plug their ears, open their mouths and stand lightly on their toes the shock would have a disastrous effect. Suddenly the big guns roar, the quick-firers rattle. The great battleship trembles from keel to top, and this vibration raises a milky spume on the sea for many yards around. Volcanoes of water and foam rise near the targets where the half-ton projectiles vanish. The height of the volcanoes is 173 feet. They linger a long time in the air before collapsing thunderously. A seven-inch shell heaves up a waterspout 102 feet in height. The spectator may well believe that the big missiles would travel a dozen miles through air without stopping and would deliver a blow sufficient to jolt a New York skyscraper out of place.

During a lull in the firing the imaginary wounded are sent to the sick bay for treatment,

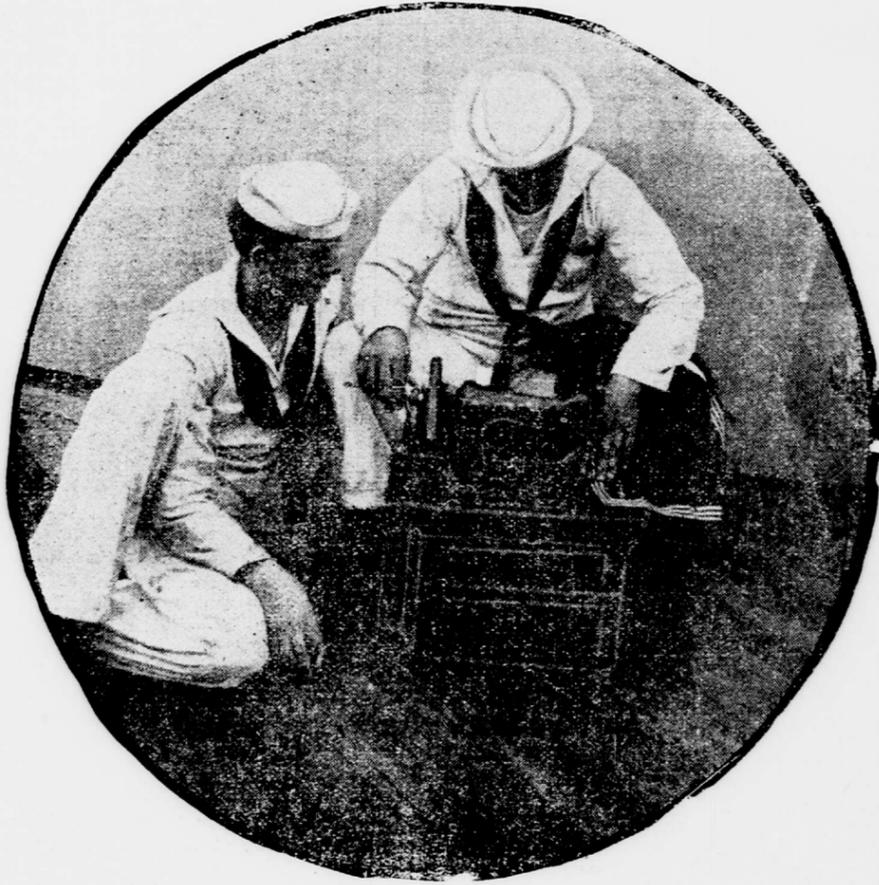
and if some one opens the door of the compartment way below, where the ship's mascots have been confined for their own safety, there is heard a chorus of yowls, whines, squeals and squawks from the frightened animals. There are many wise mascots, goats that chew tobacco with the air of A. B.'s; kangaroos that drink beer, young bears that panhandle the officers' quarters for gumdrops and amuse themselves at night by pulling the blankets off sailors sleeping in their hammocks. But no mascot has yet been educated to open his mouth and stand on his toes when the guns are being fired. Therefore, it is necessary to shut them up down below.

There is a story of an enlisted monkey who stole an officer's patent ear muffs and donned them not as a protection against target practice but in order to get square with his enemy, the bandmaster, the simian aforesaid wearing the muffs at a ship's concert. As Mark Twain said of the report of his death, this anecdote is probably grossly exaggerated; or, as a blue-jacket remarked, a monkey like that ought to have a commission.

Eight bells is a welcome sound in the fleet. It means dinner. The bugler hustles around blowing mess calls, and all hands tumble below to the swinging tables, loaded with excellent food. There is better eating in the navy to-day than ever before, because the bluejackets demand good rations and won't stay in the service unless they have them. The refrigerators of the battleships are filled with tons of fresh beef, fresh eggs (as fresh as the average civilian egg) and other provisions. Vegetables and fruits are obtained from shore. Moreover, the meal is served not on tin, as it used to be a few years ago, but on real china or earthen-

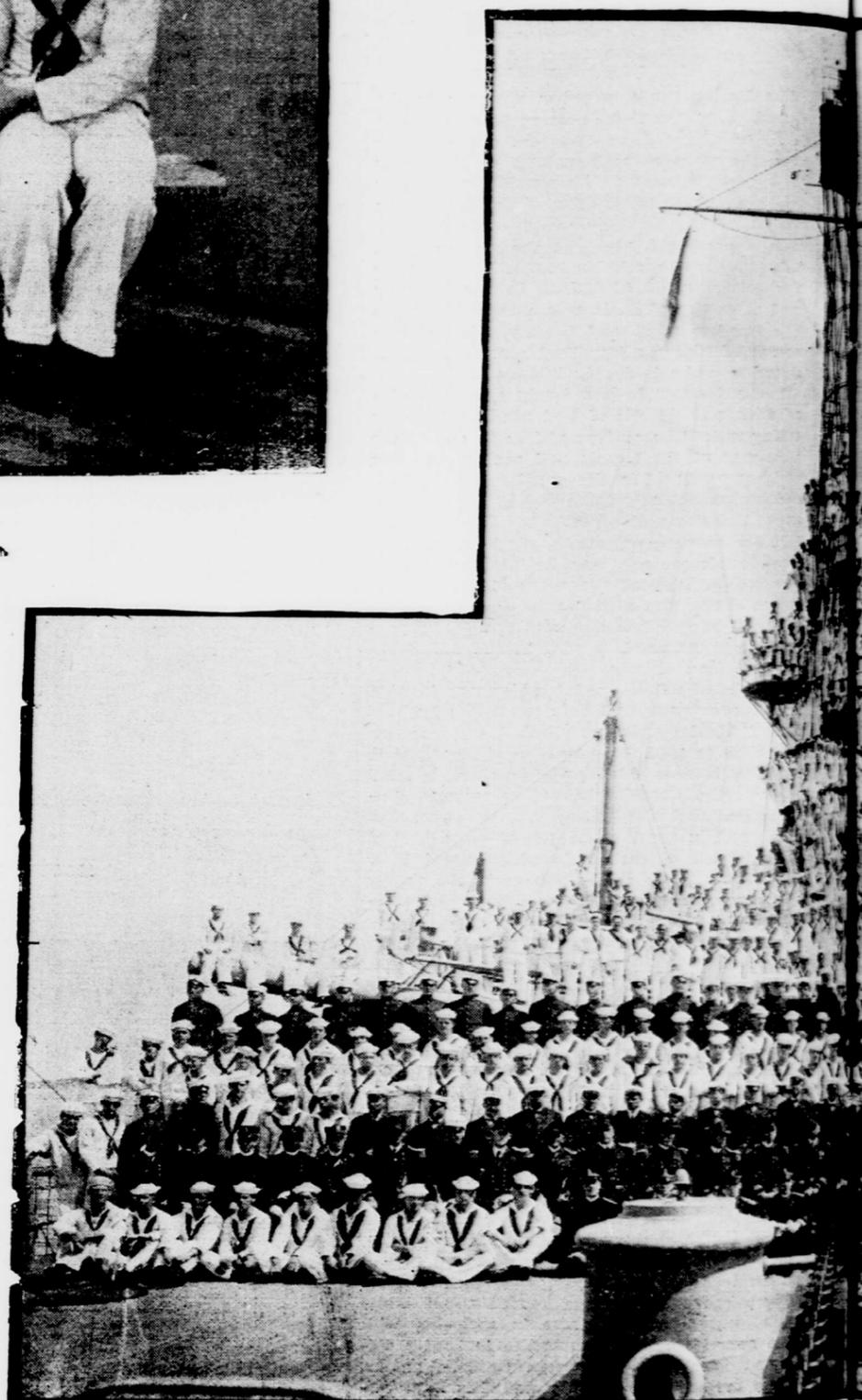


NAVY MASCOTS OF THE KANSAS.
 Vary intelligent, but they won't wear ear muffs during target practice.



THE HUM OF THE SEWING MACHINE.
 It is heard on battleships, as well as the roar of big guns and rattle of quickfirers.

BLUEJACKETS
 They enjoy canned music and many other ware dishes and with silver-plated knives and spoons. Jack eats like a gentleman and livens the meal with bon mots like this: waiter, a fellow tar:



FIGHTING MEN AND OFFICERS
 Note the military mast, unique among world navies.