

Uncle Sam's Gunners Showed Skill That Raised Hope of World's Record

A Landlubber Who Went with the Atlantic Fleet to the Southern Manoeuvre Ground Tells Here, from His "Log," of Remarkable and Picturesque Feats That Startled Onlookers.

By George Griswold Hill.
Washington, April 15.—Through the courtesy of the Secretary of the Navy, I was given to a little hand of newspaper correspondence and a statement of the practice of the Atlantic fleet, held last week on the southern manoeuvre ground, east and a little south of the Virginia capes. It was a wonderful sight. The gunnery of the American gun pointer almost defies description, and any veracious account of its accuracy must sorely strain the credulity of the incredulous.

AN IMPRESSIVE CEREMONY.

On Board the Dolphin, Potomac River, off Piney Point, Sunday Evening.—Seven men, chiefly knights of the pen, were lolling comfortably in steamer chairs on the poopdeck of the little dispatch boat Dolphin. The sun was just setting and the Western sky was brilliant with the glory of the dying day. The peculiar peace of a Sunday afternoon in the country reigned over the broad bosom of the Potomac, broken, but hardly disturbed, by the rhythmic pulsations of the Dolphin's engines, which seemed to be gently modulated to the tranquillity of the day and scene.

Suddenly the clear tones of a bugle call broke the silence, followed by the tramp of many feet, and there assembled on the starboard side of the poopdeck a guard of marines and the band, while the ship's quartermaster, coming apparently from nowhere, stood on the fantail, holding the lanyards which hold the flag to the mast-top. At a word of command from the sergeant of marines the guard presented arms, the marine band played the "Star Spangled Banner," and the seven men were on their feet and uncovered, and as they glanced down the deck they noted that every man in sight, officers, marines and tars, stood at attention.

The Dolphin was passing Mount Vernon, the beautiful home of the Father of His Country, where stands to-day, as it did in his lifetime, the simple but stately home of Washington, and on whose grassy slope nestles the modest tomb which holds all that remains of the nation's greatest hero and first President. As the band completed the air the quartermaster dipped the flag, and then the bugler sounded "Taps."

To the landlubber the Dolphin appears to have been making excellent time ever since she slipped her moorings at the Washington navy yard, but officers and men assert that she has been "merely limping along" because, scarce a mile ahead is the Mayflower, bearing the Secretary of the Navy and a group of "experts" who are going still further to reform the business methods of the fleet afloat, and the Mayflower is dependent on the old Scotch boilers installed when, in 1888, she was launched as the Goslet yacht. Of course if this were a sailor's instead of a landlubber's log, it would contain extensive details regarding latitude and longitude, points of the compass, knots per hour, etc., but not being a technical log at all and not subject to inspection by a superior officer, I will merely say that there is a wonderful sense of security in sailing that a faithful captain, a not less faithful navigator and a devoted and highly important watch officer, who looks little removed from infancy, but whose young head is crammed with marine lore enough to stagger an ordinary lubber, are all on the bridge and will remain there throughout the night, so I will proceed to sleep.

ON THE BROAD ATLANTIC.

On the Dolphin, in the Middle of the Atlantic, Monday.—Of course, this is not the middle of the Atlantic, but it looks like it. Technically, it is longitude 75 degrees 15 minutes W., latitude 37 degrees 15 minutes N., and is the rendezvous of the second division of the Atlantic fleet. For the benefit of the uninitiated it may be well to add that it is about sixty miles east of Cape Henry and a little south of a line running due east therefrom. The Dolphin is at anchor—but do not be deceived—her anchor does not mean at rest.

We got our first glimpse of target practice this morning. Glimpse is the correct word, for until men are gifted with a far-sightedness beyond all present ken they will get little more than glimpses of target practice by the big battleships. At 9 a. m. all officers and scribes were summoned to the bridge to observe the firing of the second division. Down from the north bore the division of four great battleships, looking remarkably sombre and businesslike in their coat of slate-colored service paint. The Dolphin fell in behind them, and after following their course at a remarkably safe distance for some time, it was possible to glimpse at the horizon two little groups of three masts each. They looked like three fingers on a man's hand, except that they were parallel. But they appeared no bigger. As a matter of fact, they were the targets, 60 feet long by 27 feet high. One was covered with canvas and the other with wire netting, and the "three fingers" were the masts which supported the "screens."

Suddenly from the side of one of the battleships there came a burst of fire and a flame, which suggested to the uninitiated nothing less than the explosion of a magazine or the sad fate of the Maine. Fifteen or more seconds later there followed a terrific concussion and a report louder than any thunder.

"The first trial shot," commented Captain Laws, "just a trifle short," he added as there arose a geyser of water apparently as high as the Metropolitan tower.

Then followed another, and this time the target was lost to view behind the great wall of water which was lifted heavenward. Then the shooting began in real earnest, and the surface of the sea in the vicinity of the targets suggested a Central Park lake under a hailstorm, masts and rigging of the battleships were visible several thousand diameters. From the Dolphin it was impossible to tell whether or not the target was being hit, although it was quite obvious that nothing the size of a battleship could have withstood that rain of steel. The second division was practicing with its great 12-inch guns. Every projectile fired weighed 570 pounds and every shot cost for powder and projectile \$25.

One terrific explosion followed another until there was suggested the remark of the newly arrived Irishman who, looking out of the window and seeing a steam engine responding to an alarm, excitedly exclaimed, "Patrick, come here quick! They're moving hell, and one load's gone by already."

It was impossible for the Dolphin to keep track of the number of shots fired or to note the effect, but when the signal "Cease firing" broke from the flagship the little dispatch boat made tracks for the targets and found them in a sadly riddled state. These targets, he it remembered, are 60 feet long. The modern battleship will average perhaps 300 feet in length, and this target, not more than one-eighth the length of a battleship, was riddled with shots fired at ranges varying from 14,000 to 9,000 yards. There are 1,700 yards to a mile, so that the range at which the battleships practiced was from 8.7 miles to about 5 miles. It was estimated by near experts that not less than 90 per cent of hits were made.

This means that four battleships lying off the Battery could select a building of 60 feet frontage on 15th street and fairly riddle it with holes in twenty minutes. Or to put it another way, a division of four battleships, selecting the Singer Building as their target, could begin firing off Fort Tompkins and before they reached the Narrows could reduce it to powder. It was a marvellous demonstration of the accuracy of modern gunnery, so marvellous that the bald assertion will probably tax the credulity of many people who will have to attend a little practice and see for themselves before they will realize the terrible efficiency of the American navy. Also, he it recollected, the target, towed by a battleship, was in constant motion on an unknown and varying course, and the battleships from which the firing was done were moving at high speed and were compelled to determine the range for themselves and without any knowledge of the distance save that after steaming for thirty-two minutes away from the targets they were to turn and steam slightly toward them and to fire whenever the word of command was given.

SPECTACULAR SEAMANSHIP.

Before 11 a. m. the second division had completed its work, the targets had been inspected and the screens removed. The sea was running high, as all the lubbers on the Dolphin had reason to know, but that fact afforded them an exhibition of seamanship of far more than ordinary interest. The skill with which the whale-boats, containing the repair crews, were dropped over the sides of the battleships, the efficiency with which the tugs, towing their screens and boats, instead of fanning the air like a green ball player confronted by one of Mathewson's curves—the dexterity with which they boarded the tossing and pitching raft which supported the target, and the nimbleness with which, despite the rapid and fantastic gyrations of the raft, they climbed the masts and removed the screen, all served to constitute a symmetrical exhibition well worth the price of admission, even though that price was sea sickness.

Just off the starboard beam of the Dolphin steamed the Mayflower, with the Secretary of the Navy aboard. The Mayflower did fewer stunts, fell a few more degrees short of attaining alternate perpendiculars, but in strictest conformance with the present Secretary of the Navy is not a good sailor, and no sooner had the word been signalled from the flagship that it was too rough for further target practice today—not because they could not shoot

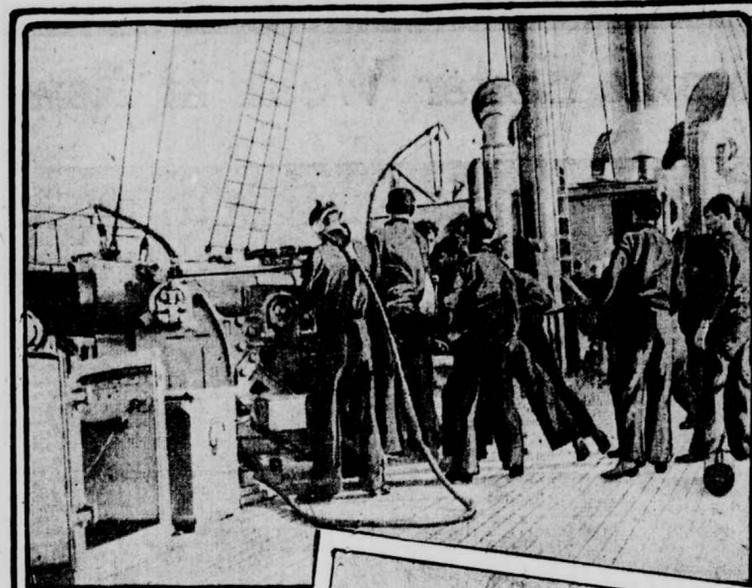
an excellent opportunity for observation, and there is no cooler place on earth—or sea—than the wardrobe of the Dolphin. Here one has an opportunity to observe the type of young men who serve Uncle Sam as officers of his floating defences, the young men to whom so much of the navy's progress is due. They are clean cut, bright faced young fellows, and their most noticeable trait is enthusiasm. "See the bullicies come," remarked one of them as the four great battleships steamed toward us yesterday, and his face fairly shone with pleasure at the impregnable appearance of the great floating forts.

High seas and a deck as stable as the walking beam of a river steamer in no way diminish their energy. Some are studying for the all important "examinations for promotion." Others will, if you but lend a willing ear, explain the determined efforts of the engine room to save a few pounds of coal to make a few more pounds of steam to give an amount of fuel, or elaborate upon the frightful waste of fresh water involved in the use of boilers which are not of the most modern type. The conversation is almost exclusively technical—"shop," if you like, but most interesting shop—and there is abundant evidence of the beneficial effects of Secretary Meyer's policy of re-organization based solely on the promotion of efficiency of his fleet afloat.

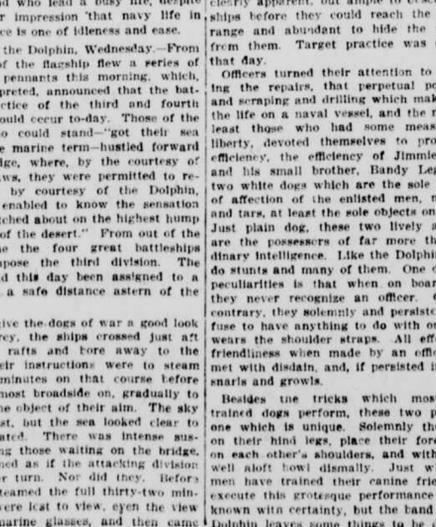
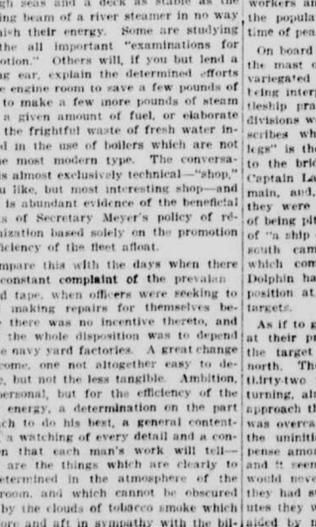
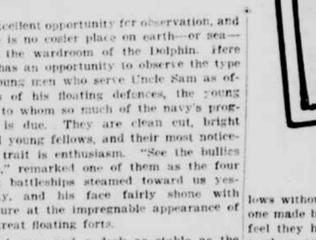
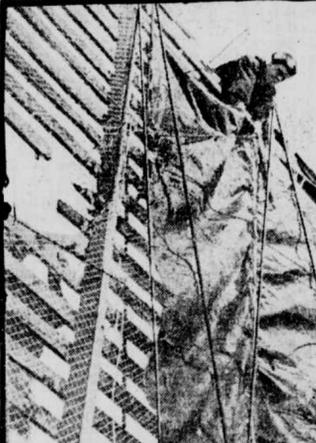
Compare this with the days when there was constant complaint of the prevalence of red tape, when officers were seeking to avoid making repairs for themselves because there was no incentive thereto, and when the whole disposition was to depend on the navy yard factories. A great change has come, one not altogether easy to describe, but not less tangible. Ambition, not personal, but for the efficiency of the fleet; energy, a determination on the part of each to do his best, a general contentment, a watching of every detail and a compulsion that each man's work will tell—these are the things which are clearly to be determined in the atmosphere of the wardrobe, and which cannot be obscured even by the clouds of tobacco smoke which roll fore and aft in sympathy with the bil-

low without. It is a pleasant atmosphere, one made by men who love their work, who feel they have their chance—men who are workers and who lead a busy life, despite the popular impression that navy life in time of peace is one of idleness and ease.

On board the Dolphin, Wednesday.—From the mast of the flagship flew a series of variegated pennants this morning, which, being interpreted, announced that the battleship practice of the third and fourth divisions would occur to-day. Those of the scribers who could stand—"got their sea legs"—is the marine term—hustled forward to the bridge, where, by the courtesy of Captain Laws, they were permitted to remain, and, by courtesy of the Dolphin, they were enabled to know the sensation of being pitched about on the highest hump of "a ship of the desert." From out of the south came the four great battleships which compose the third division. The Dolphin had this day been assigned to a position at a safe distance astern of the targets.



GUN CREW FIRING 5 IN RIFLE AT WORD OF COMMAND GIVEN BY TELEPHONE



Correspondents Tossed About on the Little Dolphin Saw Targets Hardly Discernible to the Naked Eye Shattered with Ease and Dispatch by the Expert Marksmen Behind the Big Guns.

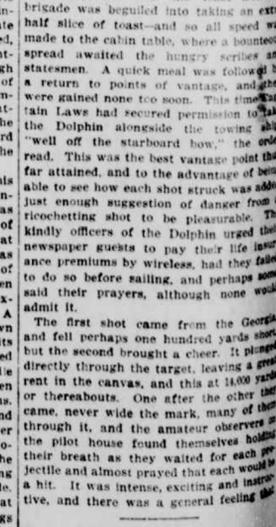
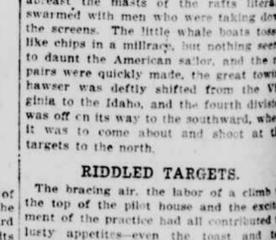
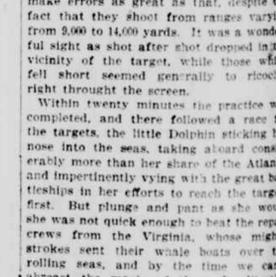
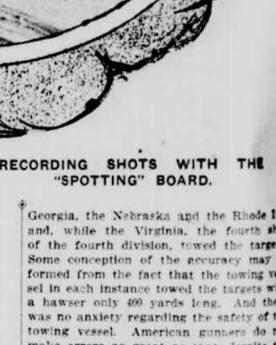
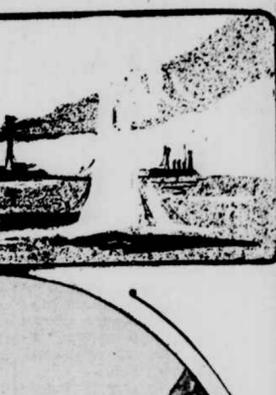
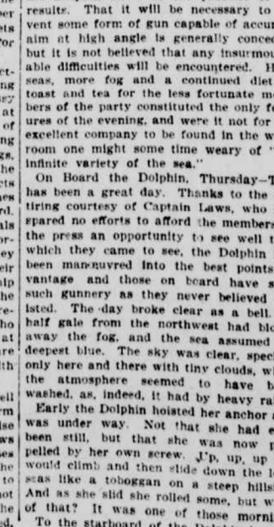
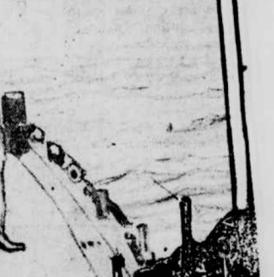
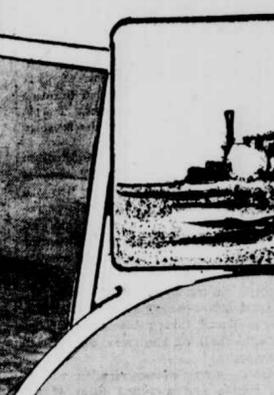
and there is a suspicion that some day, when they have acquired complete efficiency and the hand has not, they will be instructed thus to convey to the laboring musicians the estimation in which their musical efforts are held by their fellows of the crew. If that time comes the officers may have to take a hand to protect the band from such obloquy; but in the mean time, the men are happy in the efforts to perfect the dogs in this comical manoeuvre.

Before the arrival of Jimmie Legs and his brother Randy, the Dolphin rejoiced in the possession of the Haytian Kid—no relation to the Tertium Quid, by the way—but a curious specimen of goat picked up in Hayti, which afforded much amusement, but finally produced more than ordinary consternation by her unaccounted familiarity with certain cabin guests, especially of the feminine gender, who were being entertained on board by the family of the President.

There was some practice at firing at kites to-day, firing with small calibre guns, the kites, held to simulate airships, being blown from the mast tops. Occasionally a

when every one is glad to be alive—that is, every one save those of the toast and tea brigade, and even they emerged from their bunks and tried to give an imitation of looking cheerful.

The Dolphin took her position well at the targets. The scribers took their stop the pilot—at least those who had strength enough to make the ascent—and down to the third division, the Minnesota, the Vermont, the Mississippi and the Idaho. They are small ships compared with the 26,000 and 27,000 ton vessels now building, but they took very formidable part the same, and certainly their gunners can point their guns. Away they raced to the north, making their 17 knots. Then they turned and a few minutes later came a burst of flame. Again it took fifteen seconds for the sound to reach us, but it made up in intensity anything it may have lacked in speed. Again and again came the bursts of flame, while the sea spouted in angry geyser all about the targets, and some shots could be seen to penetrate the screens and occasionally the splinters would fly from the rafts which bore them.



REMOVING FROM TARGET CANVAS SCREEN THAT PRESERVES RECORD

SHOTS HITTING THE TOWED TARGETS.

RECORDING SHOTS WITH THE "SPOTTING" BOARD.

FIRING AT KITES TO BE READY FOR AEROPLANES.

RIDDLED TARGETS.

Georgia, the Nebraska and the Rhode Island, and while the Virginia, the fourth ship of the fourth division, towed the targets. Some conception of the accuracy may be formed from the fact that the towing vessel in each instance towed the targets with a hawser only 600 yards long. And there was no anxiety regarding the safety of the towing vessel. American gunners do not make errors as great as that, despite the fact that they shoot from ranges varying from 9,000 to 14,000 yards. It was a wonderful sight as shot after shot dropped in the vicinity of the target, while those which fell short seemed generally to ricochet right through the screen.

Within twenty minutes the practice was completed, and there followed a race for the targets, the little Dolphin sticking her nose into the seas, taking aboard considerably more than her share of the Atlantic and impudently vying with the great battleships in her efforts to reach the target first. But plunges and pants as she would she was not quick enough to beat the repair crews from the Virginia, whose mighty strokes sent their whale boats over the rolling seas, and by the time we came abreast the masts of the rafts literally swarmed with men who were taking down the screens. The little whale boats tossed like chips in a millrace, but nothing seemed to daunt the American sailor, and the repairs were quickly made, the great towing hawser was deftly shifted from the Virginia to the Idaho, and the fourth division was off on its way to the southward, where it was to come about and shoot at the targets to the north.

The day broke clear as a bell. A half gale from the northwest had blown away the fog, and the sea assumed its deepest blue. The sky was clear, speckled only here and there with tiny clouds, while the atmosphere seemed to have been washed, as indeed it had by heavy rains.

Early the Dolphin hoisted her anchor and was under way. Not that she had ever been still, but that she was now propelled by her own screw. J'p, up, up she would climb and then slide down the long seas like a toboggan on a steep hillside. And as she slid she rolled some, but what of that? It was one of those mornings when every one is glad to be alive—that is, every one save those of the toast and tea brigade, and even they emerged from their bunks and tried to give an imitation of looking cheerful.

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