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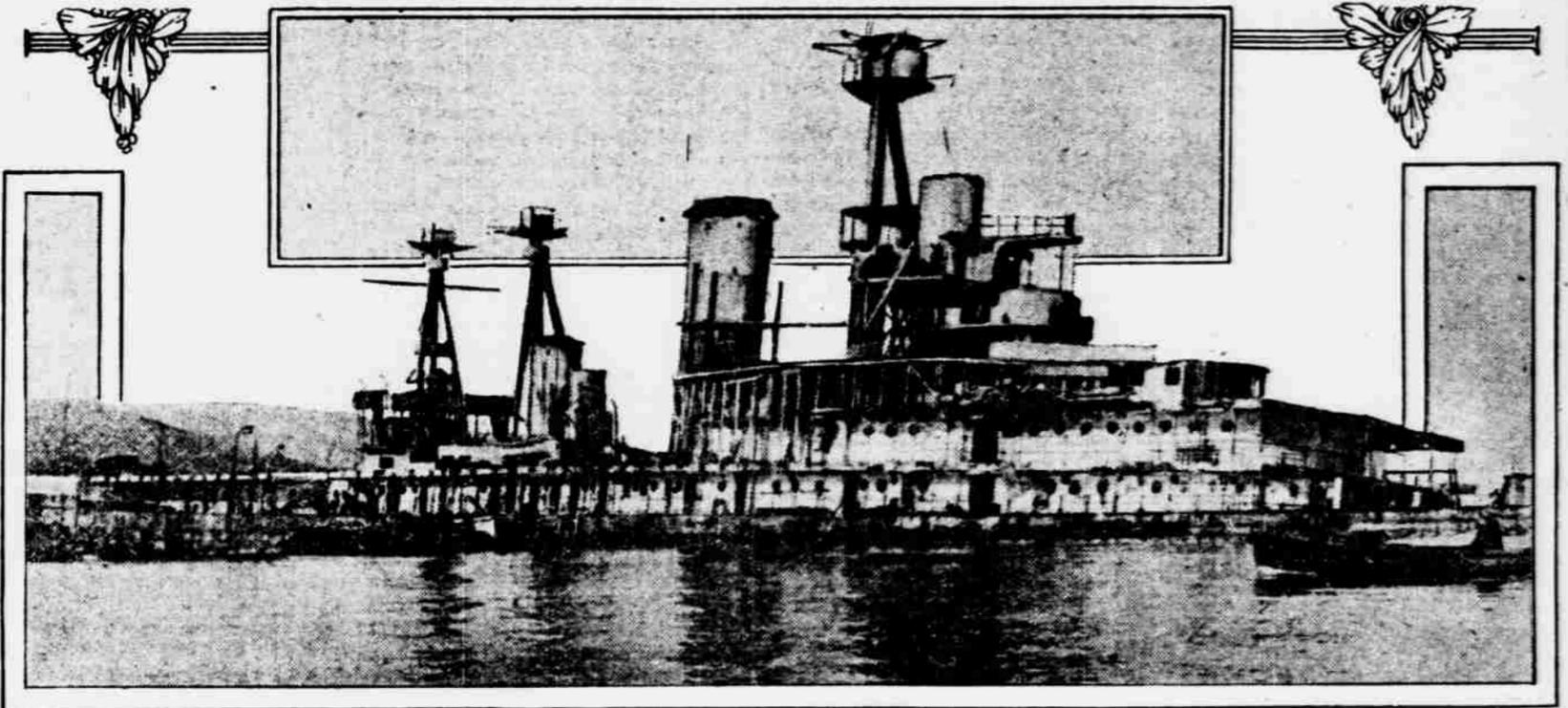
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SECTION
FIVE

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From the Bottom of the Sea

The Remarkable Adventures of Ships That Wouldn't Stay Sunk and a New Side to the Story of Beating the U-Boats



Former Atlantic liner which was turned into a dummy dreadnought and later filled with concrete and sunk to serve as a breakwater. By an extraordinary feat of salvaging she has been refloated.

By RALPH E. CROPLEY.

OF the ships sunk by the Germans in British waters between January, 1915, and May, 1918, 407 have been salvaged. Of these 147 were refloated during the first five months of 1918, the increase being due to improved methods rather than to greater activity of the U-boats. While they lay in the repair basin awaiting their turn I have been fortunate enough to see some of these ships vanquished by the fortunes of war. With their gaping wounds, deck houses shot away, shreds of rigging dangling from broken masts like devastated cobwebs, stackless, paintless, streaked with rust and caked with barnacles, they spoke of distant lands, of strange horizons, of storm and tempest, of deeds well done.

The hardships and personal sacrifices experienced in salvaging them are worthy of place beside the glorious records of the men who navigate the Danger Zone or go over the top into No Man's Land. For the sea, which sometimes has suddenly destroyed the work of weeks and swept men to their death in the twinkling of an eye, has not been the only enemy to combat, as U-boats have frequently brought destruction to the lives and hopes of the salvagers. Yet in spite of all, the necessity of making the world a safe and decent place to live in has caused men to stick to it and retrieve from the bottom of the sea ships which one never would have thought could be made seaworthy again.

Struck Mine in Arctic Ocean.

Among the tales of ingenuity and daring there is none more praiseworthy than that of the Liverpool. The name is necessarily fictitious. She's a ship which in times of peace is well known to the traveling public. While making a hurried trip to Archangel before the ice should close that port she ran afoul of a mine field which German submarines had studiously laid in the Arctic Ocean.

"I suppose they kissed themselves good-by," I remarked to the naval officer who was telling me about it.

"Darn near had to," he replied, taking an extra pull at his pipe as if in the way of emphasis. "Except that the old man had grit, a good head on his shoulders and a well built ship to back him up I don't think any of them would have been saved. It was a devil of a fix to be in up there among the ice floes, winter coming on rapidly, a

hole as big as a house abreast your No. 2 hatch and no port of refuge under three hundred miles, and that only reached through ice fields.

"Fortunately the bulkhead aft of No. 2 held, even though the Liverpool settled by the nose and took a bad list. How long it would hold of course was a problem. The old man dared not steam ahead, as the ice would finish her in short order and she never could have lasted long enough to back her three hundred miles to port even if her rudder didn't get smashed by the ice.

Captain Has Inspiration.

"Something had to be done and that quickly, for if she sank and her crew of 500 had taken to the boats it was almost a certainty that not one of them would live to tell the tale. Why? Well, not a boat could have reached open water before the Arctic froze solid, and no rescuing ship could have got to them under six months. Six months on the ice, with only lifeboats as shelter, which any moment might be crushed, was an impossible situation, to say nothing about the question of food.

"As no ship could reach him before the ice blocked the sea the old man backed her a hundred miles to the nearest land and shoved her ashore. She would at least be a shelter during the six months, the worst thing happening to her being that the drift of the ice would cause her to grind her bottom to bits.

"Suddenly the old man developed a brain wave which turned out to be an inspiration. The Liverpool had a large cargo of munitions—no explosives, just empty shells, &c. This the crew were speedily set to dumping overboard on the side from which would come the drift of the ice. Being ashore the water wasn't very deep alongside and the cargo was enough to form a breakwater to protect her, if she could be got afloat, from having the bottom ground out of her.

"As the cargo came out she floated except at the bow. The old man soon saw that he couldn't float her there even if he put a temporary patch over the hole. So there was nothing to do but to part the Liverpool from her bow, and this was done dynamite, as has been done in cases of other ships whose noses got too familiar with some rocks. And during the six months she lay behind her cargo breakwater her sunken bow also functioned as a part of that ingenious contrivance.

"I tell you it was some achievement, to do in a week's time, with no assistance of any kind except what marine engineers were able to tell the old man via wireless.

"The old man said he nearly got nervous prostration trying to think up schemes to keep his crew fit during those days when there was no daylight at all. Mind you, he had just 500. He gave them military drills on the ice, organized cricket games, had iceboats built and had races, and blessed some genius for devising a way to manufacture home made skates. Then he made his crew go to school, the text books being novels from the ship's library.

"The wireless gave them the news of the world and even solved problems which stumped the temporary schoolmasters. They found in the library some of Sheridan's plays and had a go at them. When the salvage ship arrived at the end of six months, as soon as she could push her way through the ice, thanks to the old man's genius she found the Liverpool's crew in a pretty fit condition."

New Bow Put On.

The fitting of a new bow to the Liverpool as she floated in not too calm a sea was a feat in itself. Equipping new bows to ships which have left their old ones on the rocks is a delicate task even in a dry dock, for the two parts have to be brought to a dead line in every particular. Yet the marine engineers who figured on the Liverpool's plight, as advised by wireless, overcame the difficulties of fitting a bow to a floating ship by equipping the Liverpool's new bow with a socket which would fit into the other section of her hull and form a blow-out patch over the joint.

Of course, above water the two parts could have been held together by stringers if necessary. It was the bent and twisted plates under water which gave most difficulty. And as we Americans used electric welding for joining together, as they floated, the halves of the bows brought through the Welland Canal, so was it used on the Liverpool. And under her own steam she came back to civilization, a monument to what man can do when he has to. Not the least remarkable part of the case was the building and launching of the new bow and towing the unwieldy structure twelve hundred miles over waters infested by mines and U-boats." Another one of my naval friends has told me of an experience which a cruiser had while chasing