

# ONCE A MAN OF WAR NOW A PLAGUE SHIP.

Once a warship; now a plague-ship. That is the past and the present position of the United States steamship Omaha. For some months the old vessel has been lying in the bay just off California City and doing noble work toward keeping plagues out of our country.

As the still handsome craft rides at anchor on the smooth surface of the water her appearance is greatly at variance with the purpose for which she was built. But after all she is fulfilling her mission. She was built for a fighting ship, and she is fighting. It is true that her builders molded her to fight battles on the seas.

Instead she is fighting plagues—killing microbes and saving men instead of killing men and breeding microbes. And now she rides peacefully at anchor in a beautiful bay instead of being battered around the world.

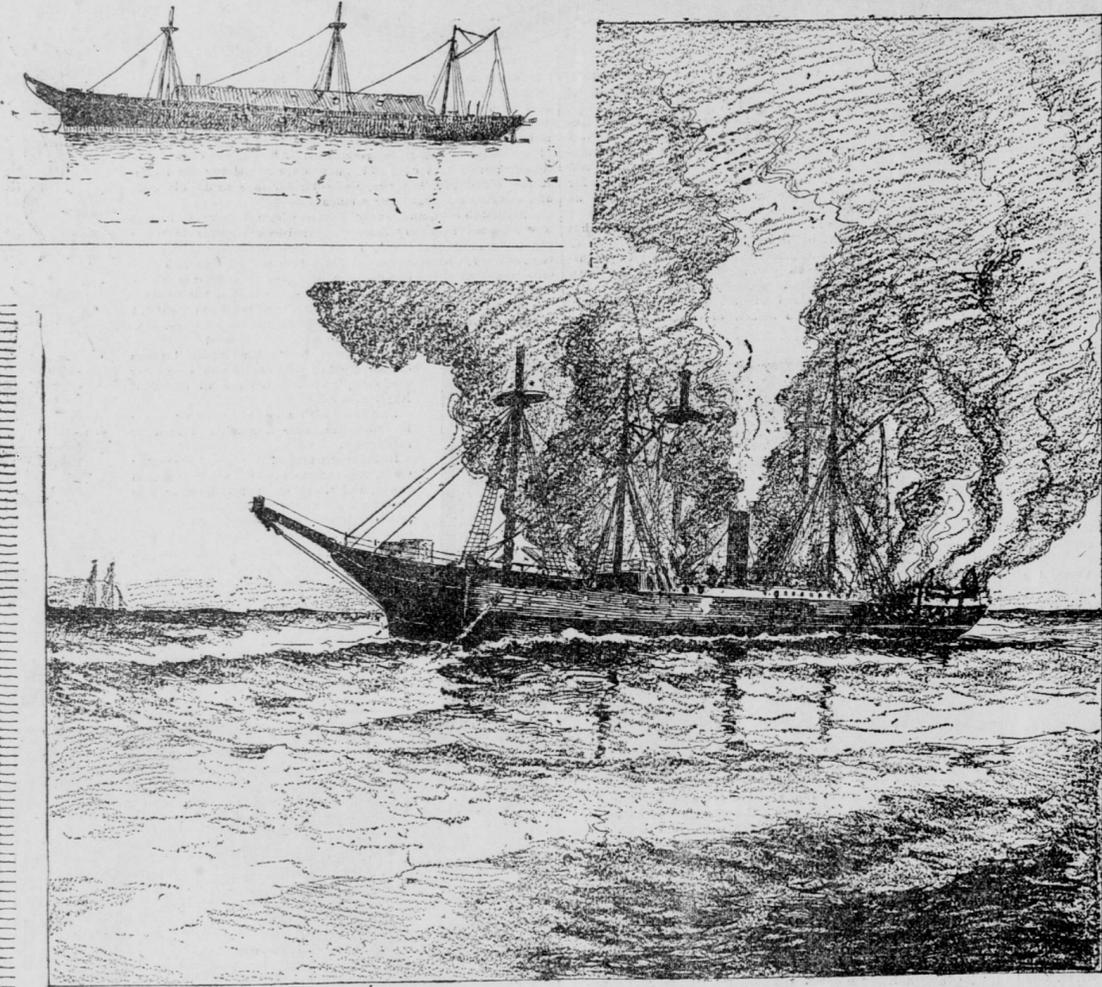
Briefly speaking, the man-of-war Omaha is now a plague-ship, and also a floating disinfecting plant. She is the only floating disinfecting plant belonging to the United States, and the only instance on record where an old warship was made to do this work.

It has been known for some time that this work was being done by the Omaha, but just how it was done has never been made public. Through the courtesy of Dr. Rosenau a representative of THE CALL visited the vessel last week and saw all the complicated machinery necessary to make disinfection perfect and absolute. The way the vessel has been fitted up for the comfort of such passengers as might be detained upon her is most interesting.

There is only one way of getting on board of the Omaha, and that is to be taken out to her on the quarantine launch Bacillus. People going to her side in a rowboat would not be allowed aboard. The Omaha is lying just four miles from the ferry landing at Tiburon.

On approaching the Omaha the most impressive fact is her great size. She rises out of the water as high as a two-story house.

A casual examination of the Omaha shows her to still be in a fairly seaworthy condition. Worse vessels make the passage around Cape Horn every month in the year. Down in the hold there is not a drop of water to be seen. The bilge is almost as dry as the cabin. She has not been entirely dismantled. Her lofty spars were all pulled down long ago, but little change has been made in her hold. The engines and boilers that took her around the world are still in position and only need a little cleaning and the application of fire to make them once more throbb with life.



Down below everything is much as it used to be. The rooms of those of the crew that were located here are almost as they were when the ship was abandoned. On the 'tween decks, though, there is a big change and a most interesting one. It is still the same and yet different. It is like "a banquet hall deserted." The wardrobe and the admiral's cabin are silent now, and spiders are spinning their webs in the corners that once echoed with the voices of many men. The chartroom is now only a closet, but still retains a certain musty odor, a relic of its former great importance.

But in the captain's room there is a great change. It is still inhabited—not by the captain's ghost, as many may suppose, but by the keeper of the vessel, an old seaman. In this room he eats, drinks and sleeps.

It is on the gun deck, though, that the greatest change has taken place. One of the old crew coming aboard would never recognize it. No more can he look up at the lofty spars and hear the wind piping through the rigging, for there is a roof overhead, and the general effect is that of a large hall.

Here the disinfecting plant is located. The disinfective machinery is at the bow. It consists principally of a sulphur-burning furnace and a formaline gas apparatus.

This furnace is first heated red hot. An airpump is then started. Sulphur is then shoveled into the red hot furnace, and the airpump exhausts the fumes and forces them through pipes to where they are wanted.

When a steamer is to be disinfected she is first relieved of all her passengers and bedding at the quarantine station and then towed to the side of the Omaha. By closing portholes, hatches, windows, companion-ways, etc., the vessel is made as airtight as possible.

Pipes from the sulphur furnace are then connected at convenient places and the work proceeds. The sulphur fumes from the furnace are literally forced into the ship, so that every nook and cranny is reached. This is kept up for over an hour and the sight is a pretty one. Although the ship is closed as tightly as possible she cannot be made airtight and, as a consequence, fumes rise from hundreds of places and climb skyward in graceful streams. These fumes are almost a yellowish gray in color and have much the same appearance as the smoke from a smelter. Whoever happens to be within half a mile of the locality puts in his time coughing.

Should the ship be particularly suspicious the disinfecting operation is practically repeated with formaldehyde gas. This is so powerful that it will kill germs on the inside of a bale of hemp. Dr. Rosenau has tried this and knows that it can be done. All germs must and do die.

When a ship leaves the side of the Omaha after a four-hour siege, there is not the slightest possibility that she is contaminated. She can then proceed to dock without spreading an Oriental plague.

The gun deck of the Omaha is a "nest-house" and can be used in case the quar-

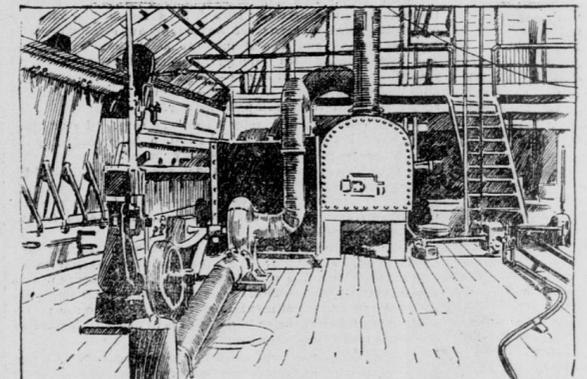
ters at Angel Island become overcrowded. Along both sides of the deck amidships there are rows of staterooms. In the afterpart there is a bathroom and laundry. The old galley is still in condition for duty and only needs a cook and something to cook to provide food for the hungry.

The old Omaha is doing more fighting now than she ever did in all her career. She was built in Philadelphia in 1869 and put in most of the years of her service on the China station. She has been in nearly every port on the Pacific side of two continents, and on many occasions her presence has proved a powerful persuader. The tonnage of the Omaha is 2600. She is built of wood, copper-bottomed, is fitted with the finest material obtainable and cost over \$1,000,000.

### Every Watch a Compass.

"Several weeks ago in London," said an English tourist at the Holland House, "I was standing beside an American acquaintance, when I expressed a wish to know which point was the north. He pulled out his watch, looked at it and at once pointed in the right direction. I asked him whether he had a compass attached to his watch. 'All watches are compasses,' he replied. Then he explained to me how this was. Point the hour hand to the sun, and the south is exactly half way between the hour and the figure XII on the dial. For instance, suppose it is 4 o'clock. Point the hand indicating 4 to the sun, and 12 on the watch is exactly south. Suppose, again, that it is 8 o'clock. Point the hand indicating 8 to the sun and the figure X on the dial is due south."

"My American friend seemed surprised that I did not know this, and not wanting to be left alone in my ignorance, I asked Henry M. Stanley, whom I met the following day, whether he knew of this simple means of taking the points of the compass. My self-esteem rose when that famous traveler told me he had never heard of it. So, perhaps there may be plenty of folks in your country who still remain in my original state of ignorance. I don't know what place my American friend hails from, but somewhere in your great West."—New York Herald.



SULPHUR BURNING FURNACE ON THE OMAHA.

## QUEER FREAK OF A HERMIT.

He Lives in an Old Quarry Magazine and Sleeps on a Keg of Blasting Powder.

THINK of using a keg of blasting powder for a pillow! and not only using it for a pillow, but keeping it around your house all the time. Of course you would not think of doing such a thing, but there is a man who lives in the Contra Costa hills back of Oakland who does just that.

He is Ralph Peterson and he is known as a hermit. His home is about two miles almost due east from Mills Seminary. It is easy to reach this place if you can climb hills. But you might as well know beforehand that when you do get to the place the old man will not be glad to see you. He objects to visitors.

By following the eastern fence of Mills Seminary to the base of the hill, and then commencing to climb, a quarter of an hour's work will take you to the top of the ridge. From here old Peterson's home can be seen. It does not look like a human habitation. On the other side of a valley there can be distinguished a large gray spot on the mountain. This is the

mark left by the workmen of an abandoned quarry.

Climb up to this place, and on the side of the hill, about 100 feet from where the work was carried on, there is a small hut with an iron door. This was the magazine when the quarry was in working order. Here all sorts of explosives were stored, and the iron door was to keep out people who might be tempted to investigate.

This place is now old Peterson's home. The quarry was abandoned long ago and by some hook or crook a large keg of blasting powder was left behind when all tools were removed. For a long time this invitation to immediate death kept people away from the locality. None could tell at what moment the explosives would go off.

This, however, had no terrors for Peterson. Just when he came is not a matter of record. He says he has been there for a long time. And he expects to remain for a long time yet.

Take a peep into the old fellow's den.

Most likely he is asleep. But whether he is or not he is sure to be lying down, with the keg of powder under his head for a pillow. If he is awake he is sure to be puffing at a large pipe regardless of the danger.

It takes a little nerve to remain around at such a time, for what if the keg should explode? Console yourself with the fact that you would know nothing of it. You would be dead before you knew what had happened.

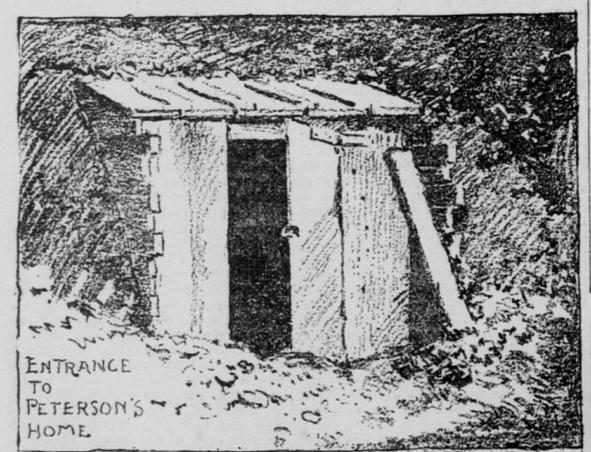
Some might think that the old man is only playing a game, and that the terrible-looking keg is empty or at least contains something else besides powder. But you are at liberty to investigate. Old Peterson will not object.

A careful examination will disclose the fact that the keg is full of something, and as the leaden seals of the powder-mill have never been broken the evidence will be satisfactory for any nervous person.

Old Peterson looks upon the keg as his most useful piece of furniture. What would he do for a pillow if he did not have it?

In the dismal old magazine, with hardly enough room to turn around, the old man spends most of his time. A short distance around the hill he has rigged up a sort of outdoor stove where he cooks—that is when he has anything to cook. The old man says that he lives on a pension of \$15 every three months which he gets for past services in the German army. A brother of his collects it and sends it to him addressed to San Francisco, where he collects.

"No, I am not afraid of the can of powder," the old man said. "It cannot hurt me unless it is my time to die; and if it is my time to die I will die, anyhow, even if the powder was not within a thousand miles of me."



ENTRANCE TO PETERSON'S HOME.



"You may not think this is so, but I do, because I have been all through the wars and seen men killed by the thousands. One man will get killed by a stray bullet the first day he comes into the ranks. Another will stand in front of a Gatling gun and be uninjured. It is one man's time and not the other's."

"It is just that way with me. If the keg of powder is going to explode within five minutes and my time has come it will kill me. If not, I won't be here or will escape by a miracle."

"See! It is safe to handle this as I wish. Now, watch, I will knock some fire out of my pipe on to the side of the keg."

But if the old man did as he said no one besides himself saw the act, for he was alone.

The Enchanted Mountain.

In the western part of New Mexico lies the Mesa Encantada, recently mentioned in news columns, a famous rock of mighty dimensions rising hundreds of feet above the level of the surrounding plain and apparently inaccessible to man. For many years the scientists of the country have disagreed as to whether the summit of the mesa was inhabited by prehistoric Indians or not, and a few months ago Professor Libbey of Princeton University scaled it with much difficulty and reported that he had found no signs thereon that led him to believe it had ever been occupied.

Professor Hodge has just gone over the ground covered by Professor Libbey, and more, too; for he returns, as already reported, with the statement that he has found numerous arrow-heads, pieces of ancient pottery and stone axes on the summit, all of which lead him to suppose that the plateau was for a time the home of the Indians. In this supposition he is supported by Charles F. Lummis, the well-known writer and traveler, who has lived for years among the Indians of that neighborhood and who states that their legends all point to its former occupation.

According to Professor Davidson, however, who is as well acquainted with such matters as any of the other gentlemen, the mere discovery of a few potsherds and such things means nothing at all.

"The mesa," he said, "has probably been used as an outlook place in times when warfare existed among the neighboring tribes. In the early history of the country the villages of the Indians were scattered all through the plains, and in case of trouble the first thing they would do would be to send their scouts to some point whence they could view the surrounding district for miles and signal the approach or close proximity of an enemy. The Indian climbs high mountains when he is out hunting for the purpose of spotting his game, and it is even possible that these relics were left there by a peaceful hunting party."

"Such places are not so difficult to scale as you would imagine. An Indian goes up them in his bare feet as easily as you would climb stairs. A little niche is enough for him if he just gets his fingers and toes into it, and if he wishes to he can place sticks in the holes and draw them out as he ascends. That is probably how this mesa was climbed, and had people lived on it permanently, we should certainly find some traces of their steps."

"All along the line of the Atlantic and Pacific Railroad you will see just such formations, and if any of them were ever inhabited ruins are to be found on them still. They cannot be entirely effaced."

"As I said before, I think that the legends of the Indians and the late finds to the contrary, the mesa was never inhabited. And further investigation would probably prove my supposition to be correct."

## A BIG PROBLEM FOR WHEELMEN.



Will the bicycle skate force the bicycle itself into second place? Thousands of wheelmen in and about New York are wondering if the race between Earl Reynolds and his skates and Charles J. Fox on his bicycle is indicative of a new era for the wheel.

People who ought to know say that the chances are we will go back to first principles to a certain extent—that is, skating will assume its old-time popularity. The new era seems to be that of a new combination roller and bicycle skate. One thing seems to be settled beyond question, and that is, all things being equal, it is possible to make greater speed on a bicycle skate than on an ordinary wheel. Experiments of this sort in Europe have demonstrated this. H. S. Siefke, European expert in the art of bicycle skating, is now visiting in this country with a view of possible engagements.

Reynolds unquestionably holds the world's bicycle-skate record. He made it in a quarter-mile race, paced by a professional tandem, on Fifth avenue in New York a short time ago. Mr. Reynolds writes:

"I have been convinced for a long while that the bicycle skate is the coming motor for speed, so far as manpower is concerned. Each skate weighs two pounds and consists of a thin bar of brass with a fork at either end in which the wheels, six inches in diameter, are set. The rims are of steel and the tires of cushion rubber."

"The pneumatic tire, it is conceded, is out of the question, as the pressure upon the skate is largely lateral. The skate is equipped with straps for ordinary road use, but I do not use them, preferring instead the ordinary racing shoe fixed to the skate plates by means of rivets. The upward curve at each end of the skate serves the double purpose of accommodating a larger wheel and bringing the foot nearer to the ground, thus facilitating locomotion on the same principle as the lowering of the crank hanger on a bicycle."

"We have all heard a great deal, particularly those of us who have made a study of the wheel, of the beauty of the ball bearings. It does not seem to me that I ever saw anything about the bicycle as perfectly adjusted as the ball-bearings of the skate. One of the little wheels of the skate when once set free will spin until further notice. I don't mind telling you that I am having a pair of improved skates made which will only weigh three pounds." Reynolds has taken part in 120 roller-skating contests and won 112.